

Taking Minutes

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<http://www.lisaspangenberg.com/writing-resources/writing-at-work/minutes-in-90-minutes/>

1. What are Minutes

Definitions:

- **AHD 6.** A note or summary covering points to be remembered; a memorandum.
 - 7. **minutes** An official record of the proceedings of a meeting.
- The minutes of a meeting are a record of what happened at a meeting, what was decided, and what actions or tasks are to be completed.

Purpose

- A record of what happened, and what actions were decided upon. Minutes are often regarded as legal documents, particularly for meetings involving finances.
- Minutes often serve secondary purposes as well, in that they are reminders to the meeting attendees of duties or tasks assigned to them. Often these tasks are meant to be completed by the next meeting.

Audience

- The minutes must make sense to people beside the person taking the minutes, and they often must make sense to people who are not present.

- Minutes are a matter of public record; often "outsiders" will be reading them.
- Determine the level of formality, and the style, of minutes, based on the formality of the meeting, and the audience for the minutes.

Kinds of Meetings

Informal

- Informal meeting often lack an agenda, but they generally have a central topic.
- Even in an informal meeting, agreements or consensus are reached, and decisions are made. Keep track of those.

Formal

- Formal meetings are usually set up in advance of the meeting day, with a list of attendees and an agenda.
- The formal meeting may adhere, strictly or loosely to "Parliamentary procedure," or be conducted according to *Roberts Rules of Order*

Examples

Formal Minutes

Informal Minutes

Anatomy of Minutes

2. What to do Before the Meeting

Assemble materials

- If the agenda indicates that discussion will be highly technical, or will focus on a subject that you are not familiar with, do your homework. Determine what the acronyms or names of things are in advance. Look at the previous minutes to see if earlier discussion is pertinent. Talk to the meeting organizer if you need background information.
- Supplies—Make sure you have everything you need to take minutes. Paper and pens, (bring at least three), a tape recorder if you are recording the minutes for later transcription, with sufficient batteries and an extra tape, an extension cord if it will be needed. If you are using a laptop, again, make sure you have an extension cord if you will need one, or extra batteries.
- Documents and References—Bring any documents, including the agenda, that might be needed. This usually includes copies of the minutes from the previous meeting. Bring any documents you yourself may need—perhaps a list of names, **a list of abbreviations, and acronyms, or a calendar.**
- Prepare a list of names and contact data for attendees
- The minutes will include a list of attendees, and well as those who were expected but were absent at the meeting. Sometimes this list can be prepared in advance.

- Often the memo or email announcing the date and time for the meeting will provide a list of names of attendees.
- If you can't obtain a list of attendees from the memo, contact the meeting organizer in advance for a list.
- Your list should include the full name (Jane Doe, not Jane) and title (Dr. Jane Doe, John Doe, Manuscript Curator).
- It is often a courtesy to include contact information (phone number and or email addresses) for the attendees. You may have privacy concerns to deal with if the memos are public.
- You can use the list to check off the names of people attending the meeting as they enter.
- Prepare a sign in sheet, or ask if you can borrow or copy the sign-in sheet provided by the meeting organizer.
- Since you may not know everyone at the meeting, and to make sure you get correct spellings of names and current contact information, you might want to create a sign in sheet for attendees to sign as they arrive. The sheet should have a column for their name, title and affiliation, and possibly, contact information, like a phone number or email address.
- You may want to create a seating chart as well, to assist in correctly identifying

speakers. You can number the seats, and refer to them by number in your notes, then later fill in the names based on the seating chart and sign in sheet.

Creating a template or form

Often you know enough about a meeting format, based on minutes of prior meetings, on attending similar meetings, and through discussions with others, and from looking at the meeting agenda, to create a blank template or form that you can use to guide your note taking at the meeting, and the formal minutes.

The specific format will depend on local needs; your meetings may be different from those of your colleagues, or those at other institutions. The minutes format is a guideline to be adapted to suit your needs. Use previous minutes for your organization or meeting as a guide.

See: Typical Parts of Minutes

- I have a number of different templates you may use as examples in creating your own template.

3. How to Take Minutes

Brief versus detailed transcript

- With rare exceptions (certain legal meetings, or stockholder meetings), minutes are *not* word-for-word transcripts of what everyone

says. Instead minutes are summaries of the discussion. For each agenda item, record the main points, briefly, of discussion, and the action taken.

- For each agenda item, list the main points of discussion, then specifically indicate what decisions were made. If individuals are assigned or volunteer to accomplish a task, be sure to record that information.

Things to Avoid

- Minutes are impartial statements of fact. Do not editorialize or add personal opinion.
- Don't try to record every single comment; your goal is to record the gist of the discussion, and to accurately record any decisions made.

What to do at the meeting

- Check off each attendee from your list as they arrive using your sign in sheet.
- Make sure that you learn the name of anyone you do not know.
- Summarize the essential points of the discussion, not the specific details (unless they relate to action items).
- Record issues that are raised, major points, and decisions.
- Record the numbers of votes for yea (yes), no, or those who abstain and do not vote.

- If it is a formal meeting, with a vote, you may be expected to record *how* each person voted, as well as *numbers* of yeas, noes, and abstentions.

Tips and shortcuts

- If the meeting has a formal agenda, use it as the basis for your note taking.
- You may want to create a word processor file with the agenda items, and blank space between them, for your notes during the meeting. Alternatively, using a pad of paper, use a separate sheet of paper for each agenda item. Use the margin to make note of the sub-sections for each Agenda item,(describe it briefly) the Discussion any Action.
- Consider using a tape recorder or other audio recording device to supplement your note-taking.

Using a Laptop to Take Minutes

- Many people are more comfortable with a keyboard than a pen.
- You can use a word processor template or copy of the agenda.
- Use a template to take your notes, as well as for final formatting. There are a number of template styles to choose from.

6. After the Meeting

Format and organize minutes

- As soon as possible after the meeting, you need to edit and format your rough notes into proper minutes.
- Choose an appropriate minute format; you might want to base your format on previous minutes for a particular series of meetings or for the organizational unit sponsoring the meeting.

Fact Checking

- Check all the factual statements in the minutes, making sure names, dates, times are all accurate.
- Make sure that your summaries are accurate without being too detailed.
- Check with your chair, supervisor or other attendees if you have questions.
- Document check If there are related documents, including the agenda as well as any handouts that were distributed, make sure you have clean copies to accompany the minutes.
- Coordinate document collection with the proper people, to make sure you have the correct document versions, and that the documents may be distributed.

Proofing

- In addition to using spell check and the dictionary, double check names.
- Proof from hard copy, not just the screen.
- If possible, after you finish formatting the minutes, set them aside for an hour or a day, then give them a final proof reading.
- Ask someone else to proof as well.

7. Final Steps

- Pass the minutes by the chair or meeting organizer.
- Double-check facts, names, dates, spelling, and formatting.
- Make the minutes available
 1. Many organizations provide the minutes on their internal web site.
 2. Many circulate them in hard copy.