

EFFECTIVE MINUTE-TAKING: TIPS TO IMPROVE YOUR MEETING-RECORDING SKILLS

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Effective Minute-Taking

Tips to Improve Your Meeting-Recording Skills

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Why do organizations always need good minute-takers? Because minutes are considered the official documented record of a meeting, invaluable as a reference, and that's too great a responsibility to turn it over to just anyone.

Many types of meetings could use a solid set of minutes, including:

- Board or staff meetings
- Commission or committee meetings
- Strategic planning sessions
- Professional business meetings

Minutes are especially key during formal meetings, where issues are decided by a series of motions and votes, as opposed to informal meetings, where a general consensus is reached on one or more topics.

Meetings that use a strict parliamentary procedure often employ Robert's Rules of Order. A diverse range of organizations—including church groups, county commissions, homeowners associations, nonprofit associations, professional societies, school boards, and trade unions—have adopted it as their parliamentary authority. Check out www.parliamentarians.org for more information about parliamentary procedure.

For standard minute-taking templates, make <https://templates.office.com/en-us/Minutes> your first destination.

Whether you take your minutes by hand, computer, through recording audio or by use of shorthand, it's important to know that any documented method is considered a public record under the laws of most states. Accuracy is the critical part, and accuracy is all that will likely ever be debated.

Preparation

People talking a mile a minute, not staying on topic, moving on to the next issue when action items are still clearly hanging ... these things are just plain going to happen when you're a minute-taker. But you can't exert a whole lot of control over the unruly group in that conference room. What you *can* control is the structure you've set up well in advance to handle any meeting.

Before you even begin your role as minute-taker, prepare a set of standards for board members/attendees to review. This would include notes on what you believe should be transcribed and retained, and what you think should be left out.

For example:

- Minutes will reflect what was done by the group, not what was merely said by members.
- Names will be omitted from the minutes where they are not significant to the discussion.
- Minutes will include all actions to be taken and by whom, with deadlines indicated when necessary.
- Discussions will be summarized in one or two sentences.
- Declarations of conflict of interest will be recorded.
- Each business item listed on the agenda will be included in the minutes.
- Minutes will record all motions, passed and defeated, the results of those motions and the expected actions.

Ideally, you will provide them with a simple visual example of a set of ideal minutes—it should take someone only moments to scan and comment on.

Once the board members approve the standards, you can then tell adamant attendees, “I understand that you want the minutes recorded this way, but I’m operating under the board’s policy on minutes. The policy states here that minutes are not to be recorded as you suggest. I have to follow our policy.”

Start a master minutes book to file, in chronological order, all the minutes you take. Remember that this may need to be accessed at any time by any concerned party and should be treated like a public document. The book should include all handouts as well. Including an index and/or a table of contents is vital.

When the time comes for a meeting, get the agenda in your hands in advance. Read all the possible topics, understand the subject matter as best you can, be familiar with the names of the attendees (and the pronunciation of those names). If anyone's got a special presentation or handout, find a copy.

Keep an eye open for the key moments in the agenda. Zero in on the decisions that seem to need to be made by the group; these are the "hot spots" to pay special attention to, as opposed to the general list of topics to be covered.

Finally, make sure you have at least a casual understanding of the terms and concepts that will be discussed. This will aid your memory and cover difficult spots when you don't quite hear something correctly. The better your understanding of the subject matter, the less you'll have to ask for clarifications. Your goal should be to never have to request one—a lofty goal indeed, but when it comes to taking meeting minutes, advance knowledge is power.

You should arrive as early as possible to the meeting, arriving with sticky notes, highlighters, tested pens, note pads for yourself as well as others, and all your necessary notes. You might want to draw a simple seating chart for your own reference. As each person arrives, add them to the chart; you never want to spend a single second trying to figure out who's who. Name placards can be a huge help. Try to sit as close as possible to the chairperson or meeting leader. This opens up the possibility of receiving quiet, casual comments such as "Make sure you get that" or "That's spelled this way..."

What an Operational Agenda Looks Like

An example:

**SampleCo Products of Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Senior Leadership Team
March 22, 2018 - Conference Room C**

Attendees:

Regrets (Excused):

Absent:

Guests:

Recorder:

1. **Adoption of the Agenda**
2. **Adoption of Previous Meeting Minutes**
3. **Review of Business**
4. **New Business**

- a)
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
- b)
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
- c)
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.

5. **Setting of Next Meeting**
6. **Adjournment**

Additional Recurring Agenda Items

- Review of business plan
- Review of quarterly results
- Review of financial statements
- CEO's report

1. Adoption of the Agenda: Attendees will agree on the agenda; if anything is added, place these items under "New Business." The agenda should then be adopted as "amended."

2. Adoption of Previous Meeting Minutes: The minutes from the previous meeting should be accepted by the attendees as final and official.

3. Review of Business: This is a general review including updates on items covered in previous minutes.

Additional Recurring Agenda Items: Some items will likely be covered each time a group meets; these are just examples.

A Pre-Meeting Checklist

Item	Check when complete
Meeting room booked	
Audio/visual components assembled and tested	
All cords and cables present	
Call-in numbers and call-in instructions distributed	
Table set up, name placards made	
Refreshments or meals ordered	
Recording implements: laptop/notebook	
Extra pens, highlighters, sticky notes, papers, folders, etc.	
Blank motion or action sheets	
Attendance sheet	
Meeting by-laws, terms of reference or rulebook for minute-taker and the chairperson	
Copies of all materials for attendees if not already sent	

The Meeting

With so much back and forth discussion that will ensue, it can be difficult to know just what you should record. What matters most is the final decision or action that emerges from it all. As a reference tool, minutes should not be loaded with lots of conversational detail. Similar comments or suggestions can be encapsulated within a single bullet point. It helps to ask yourself, “If I were looking at these minutes three months from now, what would I really want to know?” Almost always the answer is: What was decided, when that course of action was to be implemented, and by whom. Opinions and debates matter far less.

Be very careful when summarizing, though, to make sure you’re being accurate. There shouldn’t be too much room for interpretation of what someone meant. Do not inject personal comments, and in the event a side conversation starts, determine immediately if it’s something you should be jotting down. This may involve interrupting people, which can feel awkward. This is one of the reasons you should introduce yourself to the attendees before the meeting, so that you feel comfortable in speaking up. Arrange with the chairperson in advance what your signal might be to ask a question or ask for a clarification.

If everyone in the room knows your role, you’ve already gone a long way in being free to interrupt; they’re as aware of the importance of good minutes as you are! Everyone also knows how difficult it is to take minutes, and the sight of you performing this task will reinforce its challenges to them.

Always use the past tense, and be liberal when breaking items out into subheadings; too many is better than too few.

Double-space your minutes for easy correcting later. You don’t want to have to deal with a jumble.

Keeping a separate action registry can be helpful in tracking action items. Here’s a sample:

These items were produced from the meeting of: __/__/____			
Action item	Person responsible	Due date	Check when complete
Assemble document concerning best practices for social media	J. Finch	5/1/2018	
Distribute tentative 2019 strategic plan for accounts receivable	M. Marlow	7/31/2018	
Arrange for hotel accommodations for staff for 2019 conference in San Antonio	B. Eberle	8/9/2018	

You might also want to keep a separate motions sheet to append to your finished notes, looking something like this:

<p>Motion # _____</p> <p>Motion: _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Made by: _____</p> <p>Seconded by: _____</p>

Your motion numbering system should be agreed to by the chairperson. Generally, it's a good idea to work the date in for easy reference, though any system will do as long as it's consistent. *(Example: The 3rd motion introduced on April 12, 2017 might be called MOTION #041217 - C.)*

The Lingo

As you read through sample meeting minutes, take careful note of the terminology used again and again. These words will soon become your best friends! Nicky Christmas, writing for the Practically Perfect PA blog, offers a good list of verbs “that you can slot into the minutes as and when you need them”:

- acknowledged/agreed on
- agreed to
- arranged
- asked for
- asserted
- assured
- believed
- brought up
- complained
- confirmed
- decided
- declared
- described
- detailed
- displayed
- emphasized
- explained
- expressed
- guaranteed
- identified
- implemented
- informed
- maintained
- mentioned
- noted
- observed
- perceived
- predicted
- presented
- promised
- proposed
- recommended
- reported
- requested
- reviewing
- settled
- showed
- specified
- suggested
- understood
- worked on

Minute-taking expert Christy Crump offers these as well:

- added
- announced
- appealed
- apprised the Commission
- asked
- briefly described
- briefly outlined
- brought to the attention of
- called attention to
- cautioned
- clarified
- commented
- conveyed
- declared
- defined the position of
- departed from the agenda
- directed attention to
- discussed
- elaborated
- emphasized
- heartily endorsed
- implied
- impressed upon
- itemized

- listed
- opposed
- outlined
- pointed out
- presented
- queried
- questioned
- recited
- related
- remarked
- replied
- responded
- said
- stated
- stressed
- summarized
- supported
- thanked
- told the Commission
- upon _____'s inquiry
- voiced his opinion
- welcomed
- went on to say

After the Meeting

After you've pulled together all your notes from the meeting and all reports or other documents that were distributed, try to create a draft of your notes as soon as you can, because each moment your memory will become a little less reliable!

Send your draft to the chairperson or meeting leader before you send the minutes out to the attendees. You'll likely receive clarifications and further details.

When you have the minutes back, it's time to reformat them into a visually simple and clear document. Be consistent with your headings and fonts, or things might get a little confusing for someone reviewing the minutes.

Keep hard copies of minutes in a binder and store them electronically as well; one or the other is not really enough. If it's one thing admins know, it's that there will *always* come a time when someone needs a document you *just* disposed of...

Meeting Minutes Sample 1

**Westglen Design Board Meeting
Senior Leadership Team
March 22, 2018, 11 a.m. EST - Grant Street Office,
Conference Room C**

PRESENT:

T. Oakes, Chairperson
R. Montague
H. Davis
L. Chung

STAFF:

O. Arley – Chief Financial Officer
L. Embetz –Executive Assistant (Recorder)

REGRETS:

J. Mulliniks

The meeting was convened at 11:05 a.m.

1. Approval of Agenda

MOTION #032218 - A

To accept the day's agenda, as presented.

Moved: T. Oakes Seconded: H. Davis

MOTION CARRIED

2. Approval of Minutes

MOTION #032218 - B

To approve the minutes of March 7, 2018

Moved: T. Oakes Seconded: H. Davis

MOTION CARRIED

3. New construction

It was noted that construction on a new distribution facility will begin in spring of 2019. A builder has yet to be contracted.

The Committee discussed contractors and the financial challenges which might limit amenities in the phase one of the project.

ACTION

To begin the search for a contractor and have a signed contract by the beginning of Q1 2019. Assigned to K. Isaacson.

4. Restructuring of the committee

It was suggested by R. Montague that committee membership be expanded to seven members in keeping with the growth of the company. Discussion tabled for future review.

5. Branding initiative

The results of the 2017 company branding initiative were discussed. O. Arley's suggestion to not repeat it was accepted due to the lack of reliable metrics.

6. Other Business

No further items were discussed.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:36 p.m.

MINUTES APPROVED BY: _____
T. Oakes, Chairperson

Meeting Minutes Sample 2

MINUTES OF THE LIBRARY BOARD'S MEETING

February 2, 2018

Present:

Mr. Erik Brann (Chair),
Mr. Amos Garrett (Vice Chair)

Ms. Merry Clayton
Mr. Eric Woolfson
Ms. Maureen Tucker

Mr. Patrick Moraz (Recording Secretary)

Absent: Mr. Overend Watts

Staff Members in attendance:

Artimus Pyle
Fred Turner

Guest in attendance: Signe Anderson

I. Call to Order and Recognition of Guest

Mr. Brann called the meeting to order at 11:00 a.m. The meeting was held in Suite 200 of the Brill building at 1619 Broadway.

II. Review of Mission Statement

"To preserve American music history in all formats for future generations."

III. Minutes of the meeting from January 28, 2018

The following amendments were made to the January 28 minutes: VI. Old Business, Item D., second bullet, change "\$320,000" to "240,000."

Mr. Garrett made a motion to approve the minutes of January 28 with the above change. Seconded by Ms. Tucker.

MOTION CARRIED

IV. Announcements

There will be a meeting with the county zoning board on March 15 to decide where the memorial to Paul Kantner will be moved. Suggestions include:

- 33rd Street Transit Center
- Metropolitan Archive of Modern Rock
- Staten Island City Hall Annex

V. Executive Session

Mr. Brann called the meeting into Executive Session. The 2019 strategic plan was discussed, with general agreement that a special session in May should involve the public.

VI. Old Business

Ms. Tucker gave an update on the progress of contracting hosts for the annual gala.

VII. New Business

A. Conversion of vinyl albums to digital files

A proposal has been made to the city to temporarily house the effort to convert the private record collection of Syd Barrett to digital files. The budget has been capped at \$200,000 for the effort.

Comments from the Board:

- Budget figures may be inaccurate, as the size and scope of the collection have yet to be defined
- Legal department has yet to weigh in on how best to set rates for and pay for the temporary workers

Ms. Clayton made a motion to move 50% of the proceeds from December's L.A. fundraising dinner to the effort, totaling \$30,000.

MOTION CARRIED

B. Requests for Membership

It was noted that requests for membership rose 18% in 2018. Praise was given to Mr. Woolfson for his effort.

VIII. Open Discussion

Topics of discussion included:

- Improving security at the Red hook facility
- Possibility of hiring new fundraisers
- Possible archiving of the Michigan State University cassette collection

IX. Business from Guests

None at this time.

X. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 11:57 a.m.

Meeting Minutes Sample 3

SEMI-ANNUAL MEETING, BOARD OF BENEVOLENT ALIEN OVERLORDS

March 18, 3046 at 2 p.m. EST

By teleconference

1-888-555-1456 login: 471

PRESENT:

Ploki Robotik, Chairperson

General Yorg, Vice Chairperson

Eyeless Zanzibar

Geephus, Lord of the Low Minions

STAFF IN ATTENDANCE:

Grizzit Furnoggin, Chief Financial Officer

Mystic Mongrove, Administrative Assistant, Recording Secretary

DID NOT ATTEND:

Darkus Corruptus, Sr.

GUESTS:

Yon the Strange

Melon Man of Saturn

The meeting was convened at 2:05 p.m. in Room 404 of the Sagittarius Building, East 17th Street, Mars.

1. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

MOTION: That the Board accept the agenda for the meeting as presented.

MOVED: General Yorg

SECONDED: E. Zanzibar

CARRIED 5-2

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION: That the Board accept the minutes of the meeting of March 1, 3046, as presented, with these exceptions: Under item 6, correct the term "death ray" to "termination wave"; under item 14, correct the term "prison

planet" to "holding resort"; under item 19, rephrase Mr. Geephus's question to read "Should we or should we not decorate Jupiter's outer moons this year for Easter?"

MOVED: General Yorg

SECONDED: E. Zanzibar

CARRIED 6-0

3. ANNOUNCEMENTS

- The Board's treasury was announced as holding steady at 1.85 million Imperial Zotz.
- A small memorial will be held for the sun on March 20 provided there is enough interest; baked goods are welcome. Construction on a new sun will begin when a budget is finalized.

4. RESCHEDULING OF FUTURE MEETING

It was noted by Ms. Zanzibar that the next Board meeting falls on the same day as the Intergalactic Laserball Championship. The present Board members discussed possible alternatives.

ACTION

To plan the meeting as scheduled but take a six-hour break in the middle to watch the game, with refreshments being brought in from Jang's Saturn-Style Pizza.

(M. Mongrove)

5. NEW BUSINESS

All old business being finalized, Mr. Robotik called the meeting into Executive Session.

A. Request for destruction of Clavius-8

A request has been submitted by Queen Phantasma Rex that the Board consider the immediate destruction of the planet Clavius-9, as its populace has become too "uppity" in its resistance to being harvested for food. Her submission meets current guidelines and has been forwarded to Epic Demolition Solutions for formal review.

Concerns/Comments from the Board:

- This could set a precedent that would reduce food production by up to 5% (D. Corruptus, Sr.)

- Ms. Rex has been known to flood the Board with similar requests to destroy Clavius-9; it is believed that she may want it gone just to get a better view of Colonius Pi. (G. Furnoggin)

Ms. Zanzibar made a motion to begin to charge an administrative fee of 15 Zotz for each destruction request submitted. Seconded by General Yorg.

MOTION CARRIED 7-0

B. Year 3047 Funding

- Overall funding is 27 million Imperial Zotz
- Bonuses have been approved for all Board members in the form of Starbucks gift cards
- There will be no further investments made in planets that do not seem to have a valid email address

Concerns/Comments from the Board:

- If the Board had control of just 10 million more Zotz, it would be listed as a Fortune 500 company. This was deemed something to shoot for in order to elevate its stature (D. Corruptus)
- The ultimate fate of the Board's secret Doomsday Machine may be in jeopardy if funding is not increased; at the very least, if funding is not increased by a minimum of 12%, the Doomsday Machine will only ever be available in one color, goldenrod. (P. Robotik)

Mr. Furnoggin made a motion to invest more heavily in Apple stock prior to its release of the iPhone 113, and accepted the duty of making all transactions. Mr. Robotik objected to the motion. Motion seconded by Ms. Zanzibar.

MOTION CARRIED 4-3

C. Negative perceptions of the board on social media

It was brought to the attention of the Board by Mr. Robotik that the Dark Overlords are consistently being portrayed as "evil" by many on Facebook and Twitter, possibly due to the Board's policy of destroying anyone and anything that stands between it and its sinister plan to control the galaxy. Each present member offered a possible solution.

Mr. Geephus made a motion to post more pictures of cute animals on social media in order to sway public opinion. Seconded by Ms. Zanzibar.

6. OPEN DISCUSSION

- The inadequate size of the conference table was discussed, with complaints made that since the board consist of only 8 members, it doesn't need to be 400 feet long. No decision was made on its future.
- Congratulations were expressed to Yon the Strange on his 252nd birthday.

7. BUSINESS FROM GUESTS

Nothing at this time.

8. ADJOURN

Adjournment was at 2:47 p.m.

MINUTES APPROVED BY: _____
P. Robotik, Chairperson

Meeting Minutes Q & A

The chairperson tended to talk really fast and sometimes I had trouble keeping up with him. What if I had really lost track of what he was saying?

It's totally appropriate to put up your hand and ask the person to repeat what was just said. It will be helpful to lead off with "For the minutes...", which is a subtle way to remind attendees that the proceedings are being transcribed and may have to sometimes move at a slightly slower pace.

Someone used an unusual term during the meeting, and I think it may have been important, but I don't even know what this means! What should I have done?

If you don't feel comfortable interrupting to ask for clarification, you might make a quick note to yourself to follow up with someone in your organization to see if you can get it.

What's the longest I should wait after a meeting to turn my notes into the chairperson?

24 hours is a good rule—beyond that, you have to rely too much on memory for accuracy.

Is a numbering format required for motions?

You should have some sort of numbering format so a motion pops out in the text, and so you can refer someone quickly to it should they have a question about when it occurred or what its substance was.

What exactly qualifies as a motion?

Anything that requires an agreement by those in attendance is considered a motion. These are usually a product of more formal meetings.

At one point two attendees really started going at each other about a contentious issue. It got pretty heated! Is there any way to document arguments in meeting minutes?

You should just write "There was discussion" or "discussion ensued."

Why do I want to avoid using terms like *we*, *you*, *they*, *them* or *their* as much as possible?

Minutes are not personal, but are a reporting of what happened. You want to achieve a detached voice, as if you are an outside reporter.

What's the difference between marking someone as absent, excused and sending regrets?

If someone alerts the group that they will not be in attendance, that tends to be a "sent regrets" situation; if they simply weren't heard from, they should be marked as "absent" or "did not attend."

In the middle of the meeting, someone corrected another’s calculation of some figures. Should I have made a note?

Generally, no, it’s not a good idea or especially useful to note when an attendee corrects another.

When a speaker is detailing steps of a plan, do you list each one?

Preferably, yes. The same is true when attendees are brainstorming—you want to get all the good ideas down. (In the case of group brainstorming, remember it’s not important to list who said what specifically; it’s considered a unified discussion.)

I really just didn’t understand the subject matter of the meeting, and that made it tough to follow. Any advice for the future?

Always read the meeting package ahead of time, and try to look at the past minutes of a similar meeting. This will go a long way toward making you feel like this isn’t the first time you’re encountering the subject matter.

After the ACTION item, I put my name in parentheses to remind myself that this action item was my responsibility. Should I keep that in?

Yes, that was the right thing to do!

Someone had to leave the meeting. Should I have made a note of it for the record?

If someone leaves the meeting permanently when there is still meeting business to be achieved, or is absent during an important vote, yes, it’s good to note that. Temporary departures, though, don’t really need to be noted.

What is ‘quorum’?

For more formal situations, quorum is the number of attendees required to make it an ‘official’ meeting. For example, your organization might have a rule that quorum is 50% of board members +1. If quorum is lost during a meeting because of early departures, make a note and alert the Chairperson.

How is voting done?

Voting is done with a simple vocal Aye or Nay. You may even receive votes in advance by those who cannot participate; make sure to specifically note these. Keep an eagle eye out when it comes time for people to vote, as they tend to do it very quickly and you’ll often have to scramble to make sure you noted the votes correctly. This is where a seating chart is helpful yet again: You can quickly make a checkmark next to the voters’ names to refer to later.

What is “tabling”?

Often, the attendees will wish to bypass an issue in the agenda, or simply agree to suspend discussion at some point. This is called “tabling” and should be agreed to, or voted on in the case of a more formal meeting. You might refer to this as “F. Ryerson moved to table the issue” in your notes. Traditionally, attendees must vote to reintroduce a “tabled” issue.

What if an action had been assigned to someone who wasn't at the meeting and wouldn't see the minutes?

Even if an action will ultimately be completed by someone else, it should really be assigned to a meeting attendee, who would then ask the other person to complete the task.

If a whole other matter came up when a different agenda item was being discussed, how would I have noted that?

Make it a subsection under the scheduled agenda item. This puts it in the proper context.

What if someone gives a presentation?

This is common. Summarize in a long paragraph the presentation's essence and some details.

I can't just write "Supervisor Jones said..." again and again; it'll start to seem ridiculous, right? When can I start to use initials or some other informal method of referring to people?

Take some time to establish what sort of formality your organization is going for before you think about abbreviating too much, and remember that your minutes may be reviewed by people unfamiliar with the group. But at some point, if you know for a fact that a person's initials won't be confused with anyone else, it's likely fine to go with those after a few full-name references at the beginning of your notes establish definitively who you're referring to. Keep in mind, though, that at an organization that has a lot of formal meetings, there's likely been a long-standing expectation of accurate procedure over style.

How long should I retain the minutes?

That's really up to the organization. Formal meetings in general call for longer preservation times, but in the digital age, there's no reason to dispose of much of anything if you have a good electronic record. Be sure to establish a difference between paper files and electronic ones when setting disposal times, and make a note as to when and where this was agreed upon. It couldn't hurt to include a note in front of each year's, or even each month's, binder.

Should other participants have the chance to edit minutes after the chairperson?

Minutes usually end with the chairperson's approval unless someone has something they'd like to review or clarify; otherwise the process of finalizing the minutes tends to take too long.

The approval of minutes isn't always cut and dried; corrections may be called for. Here's what that might look like for the record:

Approval of minutes of June 8, 2017

Ms. Romero stated that page 3 of the June 1 meeting minutes should have a clarification. "Contract was signed" should be changed to "Contract was presented for review."
G. Dell moved, seconded by N. Norris, to approve the June 8 meeting minutes as corrected. The motion carried 5-0.

Notes

Notes

Notes

Notes