

An ABC of minute taking

Good minutes are:

Accurate. Record proposals and final decisions word for word and read them back to ensure accuracy. Separate fact from opinion. Facts are objective and indisputable; opinions are personal views.

Agreed. Avoid misrepresenting anyone's contribution by asking everyone to agree the minutes. If the minutes are going further afield than those present at the meeting, get agreement before circulating them.

Accessible. Use accessible language: avoid jargon, in jokes and personal shorthand. Is email OK for everyone? If not use post and phone as well. Will everyone be able to open an electronic document in the format you usually use? Do you need large print copies for visually impaired participants?

Alllocated. Make sure action points have at least a **who** and a **by when** element to them. If they lack either you may need to approach people and clarify the action point. If someone was volunteered to do a task in their absence, check with them before they read it in the minutes! If they can't do it, find someone who can.

Brief but informative.

Clear. Write the minutes so that someone who wasn't at the meeting would be able to understand them. That way they'll be clear and comprehensible.

Complete. Ensure any documents mentioned are either attached or referenced, so people can find them (e.g. provide links to a website).

Circulated. The job doesn't stop with typing them up!

For more briefings and training workshops see:
www.seedsforchange.org.uk



Taking Minutes at Meetings

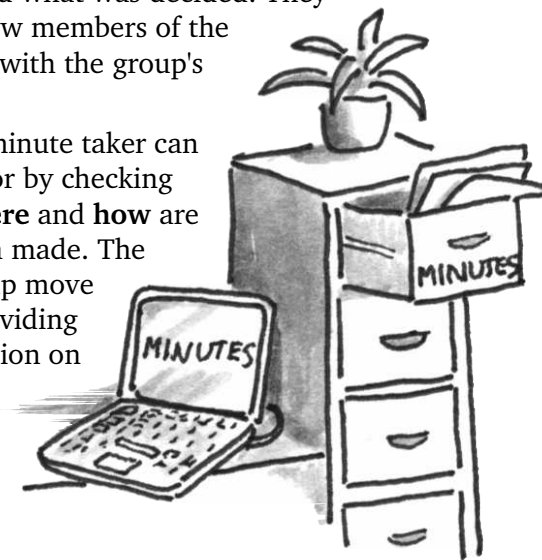
short guide



Minutes are a written account of the meeting, covering the main points of discussion, the decisions reached and actions to be taken. This guide explains how to take minutes, and why taking minutes can be a good idea.

Keeping and *reading* minutes is helpful in several ways:

- ✓ Minutes remind people of what they said they'd do and by when.
- ✓ They provide an accurate record of decisions for the future when people's memories fail or when they disagree about what's been decided. This also helps avoid having to go over the same ground again and again.
- ✓ They inform people who were absent from the meeting about what happened and what was decided. They also provide a way for new members of the group to get up to speed with the group's actions and decisions.
- ✓ During the meeting the minute taker can also support the facilitator by checking that the **what, who, where** and **how** are covered for each decision made. The minute taker can also help move the meeting along by providing a summary of the discussion on the basis of his or her notes.



How to write minutes

Traditionally minutes are a blow by blow account of the meeting, covering the major points that were made, the flow of the argument, and the decisions reached. However for most meetings a much shorter version is adequate, covering decisions made and action points to be carried out.

Check with everyone how detailed they want the minutes to be. Sometimes a more detailed account can help those absent from the meeting understand why particular decisions were made, avoiding having to explain everything in the next meeting.

At the beginning of each meeting go through the minutes from the previous one. Record any corrections or additions and ask for the group's approval.

Minutes usually include the following:

- name of the group;
- date, time and place of the meeting;
- list of people present and absent;
- amendments or approval of the minutes from the previous meeting;
- For each agenda item:
 - summary of the issue and information shared;
 - summary of the discussion, capturing key points, proposals and decisions, including action points (who, what, where, when);
- next meeting – date, time, location, proposed agenda items;
- name of person taking the minutes;
- any attachments such as relevant reports, budgets etc.



Top Tips

- ★ Clearly mark decisions and action points so that they are easy to spot.
- ★ If the minutes are long, provide a brief summary of key decisions and action points at the top of the minutes.
- ★ You could even sort the action points per person so everyone can see at a glance what they need to do.

Distributing minutes

Once you've written the minutes up, make sure they get distributed to everyone who needs a copy as soon as possible. Not only does this encourage a culture of getting things done, but also many people will wait until they see the minutes before they take action. If for some reason you are unable to send out the minutes on time, don't be afraid to ask for help.

Decide during the meeting how the minutes will be distributed. Who needs a copy? How widely do you want to circulate them? Will it be on paper, via email or on the group's website or wiki?

You also need to work out a way of storing them in the long-term that is safe and easily accessible – this could be a folder of paper copies or on a web-based archive.

Privacy and security

Minutes provide lots of details about your group and individual members. Some of this info may well be sensitive and should stay within the group (e.g. if you're a campaigning group you may not wish to reveal your plans to the developer you're fighting.) Corporations and newspapers have all been known to get hold of internal documents and use them to their advantage.

As a group, work out how secure you need to be and what levels of privacy members expect. Agree how openly accessible the minutes will be: internal on paper only, on email-list or published on your group's website for all to see? Think about what details really need to be written down. Should all action points have names written next to them? You could also prepare a set of detailed internal minutes and a briefer version for the public with sensitive info removed.

(If you are concerned about computer security then have a look at our *Computer Security Postcard Guide* available from our website.)