

Taking Meeting Minutes

Minutes of meetings form a historical record of a group's work. They serve as a record of decisions and details when people's memories fail or when they disagree. They remind people of assignments they've taken on and deadlines they need to meet. They inform those not present of what happened at the meeting. They give future members of the organization a way to build on past successes and avoid reinventing the wheel.

Some groups designate one person to take the minutes at every meeting; others rotate the job. Do what works best for your group, as long as the information gets recorded and preserved somewhere.

The minutes of a meeting should include the following (if they apply to your particular group and your meetings):

- date, time and place of meeting
- list of people attending, and any members who were absent
- time the meeting was called to order
- approval of the previous meeting's minutes, and any amendments
- summary of reports, announcements, and other information shared
- proposals, resolutions, motions, amendments, a summary of the discussion, and final disposition (if you are using formal parliamentary procedure, record who made the motion and who seconded it)
- time of adjournment
- next meeting date, time and location
- name of person taking the minutes.

Motions and resolutions should be recorded verbatim and should be read back during the meeting to make sure they have been accurately transcribed.

Summarize the discussion, capturing key points and decisions reached. When someone takes on an assignment, a deadline is set, or other important agreements are reached, make sure to record them. This will serve as a reminder when the minutes are read later on.

Separate fact from opinion. Facts are objective and indisputable; opinions are personal views. Take this sentence: "The low turnout for the event could be due to poor advertising." Whose idea is this? Attribute opinions to their source (e.g. "Jane suggested that..." or "The group concluded that...")

Sometimes, it can be helpful to distribute the minutes before the next meeting. This gives people a reminder of assignments and deadlines, as well as when and where the next meeting is.

Distribute copies and read the minutes near the beginning of the next meeting. Any corrections or additions should be recorded in the minutes of that meeting. The group should then approve the minutes, meaning that they agree that they are accurate and complete, either as read or as amended.

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Sources:

- Antleader Guidelines #C6: Minutes and Record Keeping, published by the Student Activities Office at the University of California, Irvine
- Ten Tips on Organizing and Writing Meeting Minutes, published by The Communication Workshop, New York, NY