**A short guide to taking minutes**

**What are minutes?**

Minutes are notes taken during a meeting (and become ‘minutes’ once they have been agreed). They are a record of:

* Name of group/organisation, date and location of meeting (including the year – this is often missed out and so records on file can become confusing!)
* Who attended (a list, with roles if relevant, ideally with full names)
* Apologies
* Agree last minutes
* What was discussed and agreed
* Date of next meeting, incl. location

*What was discussed*: this does not need to be detailed (in fact, the art of minute-taking is to select, summarise and capture all actions). Minutes should give an indication of the nature of the discussion (long or short discussion? Key points? Areas of disagreement or consensus?).

For example: ‘Following detailed discussion, it was agreed that…’

Or: ‘P. and M. raised the matter of venue for the next event. Whilst the majority agreed that the same venue should be used as last year, W. expressed a concern given the poor feedback from participants due to poor parking. S. reported that a parking solution had now been found.’

They should make sense for future readers: for example, avoid: ‘when Jo spoke yesterday…’. If it is important, record: ‘when Jo spoke to org. x about y at the z network event on date.month.year’. If ‘Jo’ is not listed at start of minutes, give a full name and the person’s role.

*Actions agreed:* this is the most important content of any minutes. They should also record *who is going to carry out any action*.

**Why are minutes important?**

There are two good reasons:

(1) People can attend a meeting and hear very different things, so agreeing a written record of the meeting is important and builds consensus.

(2) It is a record for people who could not attend – it keeps everyone informed and up to date.

**Who takes minutes – and who is responsible for them?**

A group can have a secretary or choose someone to take minutes. It is crucial that any meeting has a strong person to chair the meeting: the minutes are a team effort.

It is important to decide who distributes the minutes and who stores them for future reference.

**What makes a good minute taker?**

Inexperienced minute takers may feel that they have to get everything written down - but this is not true. Good minutes have summaries of key points and all actions/decisions.

So a good minute-taker

* listens carefully and, over time,
* gains experience in noting key decisions.

If someone is new to taking the minutes, especially if they are also new to the group, it is best to have someone sit next to them to help. Participants who know each other well may make assumptions which makes it hard for a new person to understand the thread of a discussion for example.

Some minute-takers audio-record a meeting to check for accuracy later, but a good minute taker types up minutes soon after the meeting, while the contents are still fresh. A good chairperson also checks the minutes for accuracy, and during the meeting helps the minute-taker, by, for example, pausing the discussion or summarising: e.g.: “and so for the minutes, we have agreed…”

It can be useful to type during a meeting, although that does not suit everyone, as notifications, on-screen typos etc. may become a distraction on laptops and tablets. But good minute takers find their best style and work to that strength.

**The agenda of a meeting**

Having an agenda is helpful for all, and a good chairman keeps order. If a discussion occurs that is not under the relevant agenda item, it is best to record it under the right item anyway, as it makes better sense for a reader later.

Spaces between agenda item notes make it easier to add in something later in the meeting.

**What a minute taker brings to a meeting**

In addition to any equipment for writing or typing the minutes, a file of past minutes is useful, in case a participant (esp. chairman) wants information from a previous meeting.

If writing the notes for minutes, A4 grid paper can be useful, or at least paper with side margins, as a minute-taker can then note the agenda item number on the left side, and names/actions in a right-hand column.

If typing at the meeting, prepare a document with the format of the minutes (e.g. taken from previous meetings), and with agenda item headings. That way the layout is already there, and the content be inserted.