MEETING MINUTES HOW TO

Why Meeting Minutes Matter   Don't give up, meeting minutes are important. They capture the essential information of a meeting – decisions and assigned actions. They keep attendees on track by reminding them of their role in a project and clearly define what happened in a group session. How many times have your colleagues been confused or in disagreement about what happened in a meeting? With minutes to refer to, everyone is clear.

What most people don't know is that meeting minutes shouldn't be an exact recording of everything that happened during a session. Minutes are meant to record basic information such as the actions assigned and decisions made. Then, they can be saved and used for reference or background material for future meetings relating to the same topic.

The following instructions will help you take useful and concise meeting minutes.

Before the Meeting - If you are recording the minutes, make sure you aren't a major participant in the meeting. You can't perform both tasks well. Create a template for recording your meeting minutes and make sure you leave some blank space to record your notes. Include the following information:
  ▸Date and time of the meeting
  ▸The purpose of the meeting
  ▸The meeting lead or chair's name
  ▸Assigned action items
  ▸Decisions made

Before the meeting, gather as much information from the host as you can. Ask for a list of attendees, as well as some information on the purpose of the meeting. This way you won't need to scramble to understand what's going on while you're recording notes.

Decide how you want to record your notes. If you aren't comfortable relying on your pen and notepad, try using a tape recorder or, if you're a fast typist, take a laptop to the meeting.

During the Meeting

As people enter the room, check off their names on your attendee list. Ask the meeting lead to introduce you to meeting attendees you aren't familiar with. This will be helpful later when you are recording assigned tasks or decisions.

Don't try to record notes verbatim – it's not necessary. Minutes are meant to give an outline of what happened in the meeting, not a record of who said what. Focus on understanding what's being discussed and on recording what's been assigned or decided on.

Record action items and decisions in your template as they happen – don't wait until after the meeting to pull them out of your notes or you could make a mistake. If you don't understand exactly what decision has been made or what action has been assigned, ask the meeting lead to clarify.

After the Meeting

Review the notes and add additional comments, or clarify what you didn't understand right after the meeting. Do this while the information is fresh in everyone's mind. Type your notes out in the template you created before the meeting – this will make the notes easier for everyone to read and use.

When you're writing out your notes, use some of the following tips from the International Association of Administrative Professionals (IAAP).

▸Number the pages as you go so you aren't confused later. Remember, though, that the minute-taker is responsible for providing good flow. Don't force yourself to write the minutes in the actual chronological order of the discussion - it may not work.

▸Focus on action items, not discussion. The purpose of minutes is to define decisions made and to record what actions are to be taken, by whom and when.

▸Be objective. Write in the same tense throughout and avoid using people's names except for motions or seconds. This is a business document, not about who said what.

▸Avoid inflammatory or personal observations. The fewer adjectives or adverbs you use, the better. Dull writing is the key to appropriate minutes.

▸If you need to refer to other documents, attach them in an appendix or indicate where they may be found. Don't rewrite their intent or try to summarize them.

When you finish typing the minutes, ask the meeting lead to review the document for errors. Send the final copy of the minutes to attendees right away. Keep a copy of the notes (and the template) for yourself in case someone wants to review them later.

Recording meeting minutes ensures that the decisions and actions resulting from a meeting aren't lost or forgotten. By taking the time to record proper meeting notes you'll make sure the time and effort that goes into a meeting isn't wasted.

Before the Meeting

Choose your tool: Decide how you will take notes, i.e. pen and paper, laptop computer, or tape recorder.
- Make sure your tool of choice is in working order and have a backup just in case.
- Use the meeting agenda to formulate an outline.

During the Meeting

- Pass around an attendance sheet.
- Get a list of committee members and make sure you know who is who.
- Note the time the meeting begins.
- Don't try to write down every single comment -- just the main ideas.
- Write down motions, who made them, and the results of votes, if any; no need to write down who seconded a motion.
- Make note of any motions to be voted on at future meetings.
- Note the ending time of the meeting.

After the Meeting

- Type up the minutes as soon as possible after the meeting, while everything is still fresh in your mind.
- Include the name of organization, name of committee, type of meeting (daily, weekly, monthly, annual, or special), and purpose of meeting.
- Include the time the meeting began and ended.
- Proofread the minutes before submitting them.