

Meeting Minutes

What should be included in minutes:

- Name of organization
- Name of board/committee/district that is meeting
- Date
- Location
- Start time
- Time of adjournment
- Who is present
- Who is absent
- Who is there as an observer
- Time arrived/left of those who are there for part of the meeting
- For each agenda item, at the very least the resolutions considered in their exact wording
- Whoever moved and seconded the resolution
- Whether the resolution was carried or not
- Record any abstention to a vote, especially if it is requested
- Record conflicts of interest that were declared and how they were handled
- Reference to particular reports/presentations received at the meeting
- Signature lines for the secretary and chair so they can sign the minutes on approval
- While verbatim minutes are inappropriate, it is appropriate to include, perhaps in point form, the key issues raised and questions posed during the committee deliberations. Specific comments should not be attributed to individuals. Where possible, related comments and questions can and should be summarized in a single point.

Things to avoid:

- Being cute or humorous; be professional
- Using colourful, entertaining, or expressive language
- Using excessive legalese or jargon
- Naming names – the minutes is a record of what was accomplished at a meeting – not what was said by whom.
- Opinions placing value on the information
- Personal views

Instead:

- Use plain, simple English
- Remain neutral, avoiding any and all judgements
- Be correct, concise, clear, and consistent
- Record names when referencing an action to be taken by a specific person.

6 practical tips for more effective meeting minutes

1. Preparation is everything.

Prepare yourself for the specific meeting you'll be taking notes for. This will guide you to know what will be pertinent to summarize and make the task much easier. Give yourself ample time to review previous meeting minutes as well as the upcoming agenda. Be sure to know the upcoming meeting purpose – is it a regular or special meeting, who's expected to attend, what will be discussed and any documents that will be reviewed or circulated.

2. Aim for concise and precise.

Good minutes are a summary of what happened and was agreed upon, not a record of everything that was said. So, skip the lengthy description and keep minutes a short and succinct summary of facts and actions. For example, "we appointed [this person], to [this role title], for [this term], on [this date]".

Concentrate on getting the gist of the discussion and taking enough notes to summarize it later. Don't record every single comment. Think in terms of issues discussed, major points raised, and decisions taken. Try to paraphrase.

Notice the lack of adjectives, adverbs, emotion or colourful language. Avoid acronyms and jargon – all delegates may not be familiar with your industry terms, legalese, and insider speak. It takes practice and diligent editing for those new to note-taking. Make sure to double-check for:

- use of simple language that's easy to interpret
- proper grammar and punctuation
- correct spelling

3. Use an objective voice.

Meeting minutes need to be brief, fact-based, and unbiased. Follow these guidelines to make sure your minutes are objective:

- Strictly stick to reporting facts and decisions while remaining neutral in tone.
- Keep critiques, personal arguments or disagreements, and politics off the record.
- Leave idle chat, jokes, current events recaps, or personal anecdotes out of your minutes. While chats can help to improve delegate engagement, if they hold no value in governance, do not document.
- Remove anything that would cause undue liability.

4. Keep members accountable.

Meeting minutes serve as a record for actions and resolutions. One of the most important tasks for minute taking is to make it clear what assignments, delegations, and deadlines have come out of the meeting to hold members accountable.

It can be useful to specially format resolutions or follow up actions in a table with bolding or underlining. Each resolution should be easily understood without explanation or context from the rest of the minutes. Take it a step further and summarize the meeting resolutions at the end of the document for easy recall later.

5. Don't be afraid to ask for clarification.

Meetings move fast and cover a lot of ground. If you miss something or things are unclear to you, immediately seek clarification so you can record accurately what was decided or what the next step is. Sometimes legal or industry language may be unfamiliar, so be sure to stop and ask if you aren't sure.

6. Timing is key.

Writing and editing the minutes as soon as you can while the topics are still fresh in your mind will make note-taking easier. It also ensures the meeting minutes are circulated to district delegates for approval in a timely manner when their memories are also fresh and assignments and deadlines are most relevant.

Credit: <https://aprioboardportal.com/news/how-to-take-minutes-at-board-meeting/>.