

Guidelines for Taking Meeting Minutes

Minutes should be taken using a standard format, using numbered sections and paragraphs coinciding with those of the meeting agenda. It may be helpful to prepare ahead of time a "minutes skeleton" from the agenda. This "skeleton" contains the actual outline of your finished minutes leaving space for the secretary to fill in the information that will be presented at the meeting. The agenda should be divided into two sections, one for information (discussion) items and one for action items. You may also wish to add a third section for consent items, if you use a consent agenda to accept written reports. Items on the consent section of the agenda should be informational and self-explanatory when read. They should not require any discussion or action, if they do, the items must be moved to the appropriate area (discussion or action) of the agenda. Consent agendas allow written reports to be reviewed before the meeting and accepted by consent at the beginning of the meeting so that meeting time does not need to be spent reviewing written reports.

Meeting minutes serve to record what was done (the actions) at a meeting, not what was said at the meeting. Minutes serve as the legal record of what was decided at a meeting. During a lawsuit they will be among the first documents that all parties will request and will be given more weight than what any particular individual recalls happening at a meeting. Robert's Rules recommends that minutes contain the following items:

- Type of meeting
- Name of organization
- Date, time and place of meeting
- Names of presiding officer and recorder of minutes
- Members present (members absent is optional)
- Establishment of a quorum
- Record of action taken on the minutes of the previous meeting
- Exact wording of each main motion as it was voted on with name of the maker of the motion and whether the motion passed or failed
- If the vote on the motion was counted, the count should be included.
- Dissenting votes should be included only if a member requests that they go on record with their dissenting vote.
- Any notices given at the meeting, especially for items that require that previous notice be given.
- Points of order and appeals
- Reports should include the name of the committee/team/panel/liason and the reporting member. If written reports are provided, it should be attached to the minutes and the minute should note that it is attached.

Robert's Rules recommends that the following should ***not*** be included in minutes:

- Opinions or interpretations of the recording secretary
- Judgmental phrases like "heated debate" or "valuable comment"
- Discussion (Remember, minutes are a record of what was done, not what was said)
- Motions that are withdrawn
- Name of the person who seconded a motion
- Flowery language
- Detailed reports
- Transcripts of the meeting (minutes should not be taken down verbatim)

Remember that it is not necessary, nor is it wise, to include who said what about a particular matter. Such comments are generally not informative later as they rarely reflect the consensus view and are more often likely to reflect the minority view. It is only necessary to reflect the result of the vote on each motion, which is then the true reflection of the majority view.

The minutes are official only after they have been approved, which generally happens at the next meeting. If the minutes need to be referenced between meetings, a draft unapproved version may be sent out, but should be clearly labeled "draft" or "unapproved".

After the minutes have been corrected and approved, they should be signed by the secretary. The word "approved" and the date of approval should be added.

The official copy of the minutes should be placed on file in a minutes binder at the headquarters office. The official copy should have attached to it the original signed copies of the following:

- Committee reports
- Officers' reports
- Written motions
- Correspondence

When copies of the minutes are distributed, it isn't necessary to include the attachments. The minutes should reference the attachments and indicate that they are on file. Copies of attachments may be requested if anyone wishes to reference them.

References

Halsall, M. (2002). Art of minute taking. *OfficePro*, 62(2), 24-25.

Howe, J.T. (2002). Robert's rules still rule: How to follow parliamentary procedure when taking minutes for a meeting. *Meetings & Conventions*, 37(4), 36.

Jacobs, J. (1999). Preparing proper minutes of association meetings. *Association Management*, 51(1), 131-132.

Sylester, N. (2004). Just a minutes. *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Robert's Rules* (pp. 203-211). Indianapolis, IN: Alpha Books.