

Effective Minute Taking

Whether you are Secretary of a committee or Company Secretary to the Board, preparing minutes of a meeting is one of your key responsibilities.

In preparing minutes, you do not need a record of a meeting minute by minute. What is important is that you capture the essence of the meeting; the essential information. Having a well-constructed Agenda, which is easy to follow, is very helpful.

When preparing and writing effective meeting minutes, you need to record:

- who was present
- who gave apologies
- time the meeting started and finished
- who was “In Attendance” (this refers to people outside of the committee or board such as the CEO, staff, auditor, accountant, solicitor, consultant etc) and what time they left
- that a quorum was present to make it a legal / legitimate meeting
- acceptance or corrections/amendments to previous minutes
- the proposals put forward; who proposed and seconded them, and the votes taken for and against (not the names of the people unless an individual wants it specifically recorded that he / she objected to a proposal)
- the key decisions made and how they were made
- action plans and who has been assigned responsibility
- matters held over to the next meeting
- date and time for next meeting

Minutes are a tangible record for those present and a source of information for those who were unable to attend. In some cases, meeting minutes can act as a reference point, for example:

- when a meeting’s outcomes impact other activities or projects within the organisation e.g. decisions made by a sub-committee
- minutes can serve to notify or remind individuals of actions assigned to them and the associated timelines

When you prepare minutes of a meeting, consider the following:

- You need to pre-plan and have any information that you need to assist with the recording of the minutes such as minutes of the last meeting and copies of any handouts for the current meeting (e.g. CEO Report, Finance Report etc). These act as reference guides
- Develop your own template for recording the minutes
- If the Chair and the Secretary or minute-taker work together to ensure the agenda and meeting are well thought out, it makes minute taking much easier
- Devise a format that is acceptable to the committee or the board and use that on a consistent basis
- Try to match the order on the Agenda with that of the minutes
- Listen to what is being said, asked or agreed and ensure that it is clear to you. If in doubt, ask for clarification

- Handouts that are circulated at the meeting should be kept with the minutes for future reference
- Ensure your notes are clear that you be able to follow your notes after the meeting has ended. Are your notes in long form or short bullets? Whatever manner you use, you must be able to follow them

Note: If you type the minutes of the meeting from your handwritten notes; ensure that your handwritten notes are destroyed after the minutes are approved at the subsequent meeting as there can only be one record and one set of minutes which are the minutes approved at the meeting.

The Minutes Writing Process

Once the meeting is over, it's time to pull together your notes and write the minutes. Here are some tips that might help:

- try to write the minutes as soon after the meeting as possible while everything is fresh in your mind
- check your notes to ensure all decisions, actions and motions are clearly noted
- include a short statement of each action taken by the committee or the board and a brief explanation of the reason(s) for the decision
- when there is detailed discussion on a topic, ensure you have summarised the main arguments. If necessary, read them back to the meeting for confirmation
- only use people's names for motions or seconds
- Avoid any inflammatory or personal remarks / observations
- If you need to refer to other documents in the minutes, record them as appendices to the minutes
- Once you have a draft completed, edit as necessary and send to the Chairperson for their review.
- If the Chairperson is satisfied that the minutes are an accurate record of the meeting, the minutes can then be circulated to the committee members or board "as having been approved by the Chairperson for circulation and comment"
- Ensure that the minutes are stored securely and easily retrieved

Summary

Work to a system which will evolve over time and remember to remain objective and impartial.