

Committee Meeting Minutes Tips

Minutes are the official permanent record of your organization and its committees. As the committee chair or vice-chair, it is your job to make sure they are accurate yet concise. Minutes are intended to document the outcome of business decisions (i.e., motions), not every word of discussion leading up to the decision. Minutes also help future leaders understand how the committee has operated in the past.

It is appropriate to take minutes at every formal meeting of your assigned committee. A suggested format for your minutes are:

- Your logo
- Name of the Committee
- Date of meeting
- Time of meeting
- Place of meeting
- Name of presiding officer (“meeting was called to order by Chair Amy Johnson at 1:05 p.m.”)
- Members in attendance and whether a quorum was reached
- Names of any guests in attendance
- Time of adjournment
- Name of person who prepared the minutes (you)

To Make It Easier

- If you take your notes during the meeting, start with a preprinted page with the heading already filled out.
- Prepare a template file on your computer with the standard headings and major section titles already inserted. Use this blank file to start each new set of minutes.
- Do format your notes to follow the agenda .
- Use a laptop or your iPad to take notes during the meeting only if you are comfortable and quick on the computer. You don’t want to miss anything important because you are struggling with the keyboard.
- Don’t be afraid to interrupt the meeting to ask for the proper spelling of names. It is far more awkward for a member to see her name butchered in last month’s minutes than it is for you to ask her to spell it correctly while you are taking notes.

Content of Minutes

Following Robert’s Rules of Order, the business of any meeting is conducted by proposing, discussing, and voting on motions. Under this format, the minutes of a meeting focus on the content and outcome of the motions. With motions, there’s a clear “yea” or “nay” vote that makes it obvious to all whether a proposal has been approved or denied. On matters where there is no formal motion, keep in mind these basic rules:

- Be concise.
- Be accurate.
- Give a brief summary of the discussion. Don’t summarize who said what.

- Document major decisions and action items and ensure that the participants agree with your understanding of the decision. If you're in doubt, speak up to clarify whether a decision has been made.
- Finalize the minutes in a timely fashion.

For each motion, list the complete wording of the motion and the outcome of the motion (approved, defeated, amended, etc.).

- **Do not include** the name of the members who make or second the motion. Do not summarize the discussion of the motion. Do not attribute discussion or comments to individuals. Do not include editorial comments about the nature of the discussion. Just indicate whether the motion passed or not. Note motions this way:
 - **MOTION: Motion made, seconded and carried OR failed**
 - If there is a large amount of documentation attached to a motion, you may consider putting the supporting document on an attachment (i.e. M/M/S/C to approve the following policy related to programs – See Attachment A)
- **Do include** the name of any speaker that presents a report at your meeting, along with a very brief (two – three sentences) summary of the report. Attach a copy of any formal report as part of the permanent record of this meeting.
- **Do include** the name and title of any guest speaker at your meeting, along with the topic of the speaker's presentation. Do not try to summarize the speaker's presentation in your minutes. Attach any handout from the speaker as part of the permanent record of the meeting.

After the Meeting

- Finalize your minutes quickly, preferably within 2 – 3 days of the meeting. The faster you return to your notes, the easier they will be to decipher.
- Send a copy of your draft minutes to the chair and vice chair for preliminary approval. They should be on the lookout for errors or omissions.
- File an electronic copy in a folder on your computer reserved just for the committee. Identify new sets of minutes by naming the file with the type of meeting and the date of meeting (e.g., "Nominations Minutes 051512"). Save the files in a folder on your computer reserved just for minutes.
- Include a copy of the minutes with your BOD Department report (if appropriate).
- Distribute the minutes to the committee after the meeting using email. Bring a copy to the next meeting for review and approval. NOTE: Technically, the minutes are not finalized until the membership votes to approve them at the next meeting.
- If you need to make corrections after you have finalized the minutes, be sure to update the copy in your permanent file, too.
- Save a copy of any handouts or reports presented by committees or guest speakers at your meeting. Include those documents with the corresponding meeting minutes in your permanent files.

General Tips for Minutes

1. **Do** keep minutes of all general, board and committee meetings. If your group is incorporated, this is one way to maintain the legal protection the corporate shield gives to your officers.
2. **Do** keep minutes at any meeting where people vote. At committee meetings where there is no voting, you might choose to keep minutes for your records. But minutes are not required for legal purposes.

3. **Do** list where the meeting takes place, along with the time and date it starts.
4. **Do** list the number of attendees (approximate if the group is large) and whether a quorum is present.
5. **Do** format your notes to follow the agenda. If you don't normally create an agenda, you should. It makes the meeting more orderly, lets attendees know what to expect at the meeting, and makes taking minutes significantly easier.
6. **Do** record all motions and the outcome of votes.
7. **Do** be concise. It's not necessary to go on at length in the minutes. Just record specific motions and votes, and key business.
8. **Don't** list the names of people who make and second motions. You might put individuals on the spot in case of a lawsuit. (And yes, it does happen.)
9. **Don't** detail the debate over an issue. In your formal notes, you just need the facts. Minutes should record what is *done* at meetings, not what is *said*.
10. **Don't** list the vote count. Outcome is enough.
11. **Don't** be shy about asking for clarification during the meeting to get a point straight in your notes.
12. **Don't** wait to type up the minutes from your notes. Do it the same day or the next day, while you still remember what occurred.
13. As on all matters of meeting procedure, Robert's Rules of Order offers information on taking proper minutes. A good reference that's easier to follow than simply reading Robert's Rules is Webster's New World Robert's Rules of Order, Simplified and Applied.