



## Minutes - taking notes and preparing minutes\*

### 1. What are minutes?

Minutes are a summary of the following facts:

- time and date of a meeting and where it is held
- names and affiliation (i.e. employer or worker representative, alternate) of everyone present, and apologies for those who are not able to be there
- all items discussed, whether on the agenda or not
- all actions agreed upon, and the names of the people responsible for doing them
- all recommendations, and
- date for completion of tasks and actions.

### 2. Taking notes at a meeting - some starting points

This is a very useful skill that can be used in many activities, including committee meetings. But how do you take good notes that can be turned into minutes?

Basically, intense listening is often better than furious note-taking, which can result in:

- not being able to read the notes (the writing is illegible)
- not being able to understand the notes (you got everything the speaker said, but don't know what it means)
- failure to see the speaker's body language
- ignoring the voice inflections used to emphasize points, and
- not getting the deep meaning of what is said.

To overcome these problems:

- use active listening - focus on what the speaker is really trying to say
- ask the person to clarify what you don't quite understand
- look at the speaker to observe his/her body language
- take notes about key concepts and ideas
- note names of people to whom the speaker often refers
- make notes about the inflections used at certain points
- take notes in a way that makes sense to you - it doesn't have to make sense to anyone else - and develop your own style
- some people find diagrams are easier to use than words and use word pictures as memory aids, and
- don't be concerned if you miss something you think is important as you can ask the speaker for clarification later, if need be.

A good way to learn to take minutes is to be mentored. Talk with the person who usually takes minutes now. If need be, find someone else in the organisation who does it for other groups. Sit next to the minute-taker at several meetings, so you can observe what they do and work with them. Gradually take over the role as you gain skills and confidence.

If you are asked to take minutes when you don't feel ready, be assertive. Say you are prepared to take notes, but only after you have learned the skills required.



### 3. Taking notes - before the meeting

- if taking notes by hand, make sure that you have plenty of paper or a notepad, along with two or three pens
- if using a laptop computer, make sure it's fully charged and that you have an electrical adaptor and extension cord, in case of emergency
- set up your paper or computer file with headings for the basic information you need to record: who's attending, agenda items, next meeting, times for starting and ending the meeting, etc.
- get to the site early so you can sit where you are able to hear everybody clearly, but are not 'in the middle of it all'
- as committee members arrive, record their names under the heading you have for those attending the meeting, and
- discuss with the chairperson the need for her/him to summarise things for you (and other committee members), and give you time to write.

### 4. Taking notes - during the meeting

- don't try to write a verbatim (word-for-word) record of what people say, as you won't be able to keep up
- focus on writing the **facts or ideas** so that you understand what is said
- don't get involved with the discussion but if you have to say something, be sure someone else is taking notes while you speak
- if you can't hear or understand someone, ask the person to repeat or clarify what they said
- read out decisions and recommendations so that there can be no disagreement later about the accuracy
- if somebody asks that their minority view or concerns be "noted in the minutes", take notes about what they say and read it aloud so that all present can agree that it is what the person is saying
- make sure that anything to be done before the next meeting has deadlines, and that there is no confusion about what is to be done, by whom, and by when, and
- record:
  - the names of everyone at the meeting
  - late arrivals and early departures
  - the names of those proposing and seconding formal motions
  - too much rather than too little
  - what happens, even if it is not in the order listed on the agenda, and
  - record the time the meeting begins and ends (and breaks, if that's relevant).

(continued)



### 5. Taking notes - after the meeting

- as soon as possible after the meeting, start to write up the minutes
- use the Committee Minute Form (CP. 13-B) or the template your committee has for submitting minutes to the Workplace Safety and Health Division
- fill it in as best you can from your notes
- write up recommendations using the Recommendation Form (CP.15)
- follow-up with those who were to prepare or supply a cover letter and/or background information to support individual recommendations
- get clarification from individuals if necessary
- present the draft minutes and recommendations to the co-chairs
- ask them to review the documents and get back to you within a short agreed-upon time
- make appropriate changes based on the feedback, and get the co-chairs to sign the relevant documents
- if you're responsible for sending out minutes, get a copy to the WSHD and all committee members in no later than 7 days, and post a copy on the committee bulletin board, and
- if someone else is responsible to do this, send them the documents.

\* Adapted from *The Kit: A guide to the advocacy we choose to do. A resource kit for consumers of mental health services and family carers*. Prepared by SPICE Consulting for the Australian Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services. Available on the web at: <http://www.mhca.org.au/Resources/CommunityDevelopment/index.html#TheKit>.

