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**How to…**take effective minutes

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# Learning outcomes

* To be able to prepare for the meeting
* To be able to use common phrases to reduce the amount of writing needed
* To be able to structure how you write the minutes
* To know what to do with the minutes after the meeting

# Minutes – why do we take them?

It is very unusual for a branch to have every member attend any meeting and certainly not all of them. For those that missed a meeting, for whatever reason, having taken and distributed the minutes from that meeting keeps members up to date and involved.

It reminds everyone who attended what were the outcomes of the meeting and when they were assigned a task to complete, what it was and when the deadline is.

The minutes from any meeting should give a true and accurate recording of the meeting. This could be used as evidence that someone was informed of a particular thing that happened and what was or is expected to happen.

### What could go wrong?

Everybody worries when they are first asked to take minutes that they:

* may miss something important that was said
* may look foolish because your spelling and punctuation was wrong
* may forget to send the minutes out to anyone/everyone
* may not have time to send them out to the right people, possibly causing a GDPR breach

Don’t worry, all these things can simply be sorted:

* If there is an agenda for the meeting, use that as your guide to writing the minutes for the meeting
* It is important to make it clear to those attending the meeting that it is stated what needs to be recorded in the minutes during the meeting.
* If you work closely with whoever is chairing the meeting, you should be able to keep up and get the necessary points.
* If you have the Chair check the minutes before they are distributed, another pair of eyes should be able to spot most mistakes
* At the end of the meeting agree when the minutes need to be distributed by and who the minutes need to be distributed to.

### What are the important facts that need to be recorded?

All that is required from the minute is try and give a flavour of what was discussed at the meeting. The rest is just the basic facts of what happened. The following facts are required:

* When and where the meeting took place
* Who attended the meeting and in what capacity (chair, investigating officer, guest, observer etc)
* Was the meeting quorum?
* Who didn’t attend (gave apologies)
* What topics were discussed (allegations, grievance, pay deal etc)
* What was agreed (was there a vote to do a particular thing, date of next meeting etc)
* Who is actioning what (the committee as a whole, the manager, the member an individual etc)
* What time limits have been set (to be completed by next meeting, by the end of the month etc)
* What time the meeting ended
* If a further meeting has been agreed, when and where

**It is important to remember that not every word needs to be recorded.**

# What preparation needs to be done?

### Lay the groundwork

Make sure everyone has the relevant paperwork for the upcoming meeting in advance such as minutes from the previous meeting and the agenda for the next meeting.

### Create a minute template

One of the main things that help with writing minutes is to have a structure to write within while the meeting is taking place. It helps you keep the minutes in order and highlight what needs to be included. There is an example at the end of this section. It is always worth looking at the last minutes taken and use that layout as your template.

### In quorum

In most trade union meetings, there is a requirement to have a minimum present for a decision made at that meeting to be considered democratically binding as per the trade union rulebook. This is known as being in quorum and should be recorded in the minutes if the required number has been reached or not.

The default number to be in quorum is equal to one-half of those called (invited) to the meeting. This can be set to a different amount by the branch by using what is known as a byelaw. Normally the branch secretary and the Chair has access to any byelaws the branch has.

### Have an agenda

It is always good practice to have an agenda for any meeting. It is good practice to publish the agenda in advance of the meeting.

The branch secretary normally has the job of inviting members to a meeting and including with that the last set of minutes and the agenda for the upcoming meeting. This is sometimes referred to as sending out a calling notice.

Those that are attending the meeting can prepare for what they want to say or present on an agenda item. This does help people who are not confident at speaking in public feel better about speaking at the meeting.

It gives the opportunity for a person to decide if they want to attend. They may not make the time to attend a meeting that they do not think will affect or interest them. On the other hand, if they see a topic on the agenda, they feel passionate about, they may prioritise the time to attend this meeting over something else because they are passionate about something on the agenda, or it directly affects them.

If you take each agenda item as a heading for when you write the minutes, it helps you to structure your notes during the meeting and easier for those reading the minutes later to skim read.

It is worth discussing with the Chair the order and importance of the items on it. Putting those items of high importance first is good practice.

A large number of agenda items for a meeting or a previous meeting overrunning, may mean a need to use a timed agenda for a future meeting. This allows time to be allotted for every agenda item.

### Personal cases

When preparing for a meeting that relates to a personal case, a disciplinary or grievance for instance, you can prepare a lot of the information that is going to be said already in your meeting notes and leave space to put what the agreed outcome or reply was during the meeting.

In the case of a disciplinary meeting, the accusations the members are being asked to talk about at the meeting. What the member intends to reply to each accusation, should be known by the rep beforehand so could be noted or referred to; the member read a pre-prepared statement for instance.

In the case of a grievance meeting, your notes could use each point the member is unhappy with the employer about as the heading for the notes and space left for the manager’s reply.

The same approach could be used for other types of meeting such as following up an informal meeting where some action or agreement has been reached. Then have as the heading what is to be discussed and space to write what was agreed.

In any personal case it is important that it is recorded what outcome the member wants and if that has been achieved.

### Prepopulating the minute template

There are some things that have already been submitted before the meeting such as a motion to vote on at the meeting. This can be written in the minute template beforehand, and space left to add any amendments and any points raised and the outcome of the vote. There could be a submitted written report that could be referred to as the report was discussed and accepted by the committee for instance. Apologies given prior to the meeting could be written into the template before the meeting.

If you plan on using abbreviations during the meeting, make a key of what they are before you start.

### Liaise with who is chairing the meeting

The person who can help you most in writing the minutes for a meeting is the person who chairs that meeting. They can say what the purpose of the meeting is and what needs to be recorded. Don’t be afraid to ask for clarification so you can accurately record what happened.

# During the meeting

It is always worth arriving in plenty of time before the meeting start time.

The chair can clarify that when something has been said or actioned that it needs to be noted and something that is agreed to be off the record, so not to be put in the minutes. The chair may wait to move on to the next item on the agenda until the minute taker has caught up.

### Attendance sheet

Asking attendees to sign in at the door of the meeting room on entry or sending around the room the attendance sheet at the beginning of the meeting is a good way to capture the names of those attending. At a large meeting this might only need to be recorded as a total number attending. This information helps quantify what is needed to be sure what number is enough to be a majority vote. It is good practice to get the attendee to print their name to make it easier to read later. It might be worth asking for emails so they can be sent the finished minutes. It needs to be stated on the sheet or at the meeting what the emails will be used for and only to be used for that stated use to comply with data collection regulations.

### Seating chart/plan

Making a seating chart or plan helps the minute taker to recognise who is talking at the meeting. It could be just the initials of the person and where they are sat in the room.

### Noting motions

Throughout meetings, it is likely that participants will make motions. The recorder must write down not only what the motion is but also who made it. It is not necessary to write down the name of the person who seconds a motion. Motions made by a committee do not require a second since the committee itself is made up of two or more people already.

In addition to the motions that are made, seconded, discussed, and voted on, there will be occasions when subsidiary motions are made to postpone taking a vote. When voting on a motion is postponed, the recorder needs to indicate this has happened and offer whatever information is available about when a vote might be taken on the motion.

### Off the record

If as part of the meeting it is said this conversation is ‘off the record’ or ‘not for the minutes’ then that is not to be recorded in minutes for that meeting. If it is being recorded, then the recording is paused. What the minute taker needs to know is when the conversation or recording is to be recorded or back ‘on the record.’

### Use common phrases to describe what has happened

Using common phrases through the minutes is a quick way to capture what happened such as ‘after a lengthy discussion in which everyone aired their views’ describes what could be a very lengthy part of the meeting where nothing was necessarily settled.

The below examples can be abbreviated for quickness or could be added in afterwards to bulk out minutes:

* It was reported
* It was discussed
* It was agreed that
* Document was presented/submitted/circulated
* The report was noted
* The matter was deferred until
* Mr…  (or initials, but it needs to correspond with attendee list) proposed that
* This was seconded by Mrs… And agreed unanimously
* The motion was carried by six votes to four, with one abstention
* The Chair asked for their views on
* It was disclosed
* It was revealed
* The project was outlined
* After a lengthy discussion in which everyone aired their views
* There was a frank exchange of views
* The Chair summed up by saying
* In reply to a question by Mrs…. The Secretary intimated that
* The Chair referred to the previously circulated report on
* All the relevant documents were viewed and agreed
* Recommendations from the treasurer were approved in full
* Off the record
* Not for minuting
* There being no further business, the Chair thanked everyone for attending and concluded the meeting at

### Can you make a recording of a meeting?

You would need to seek agreement from all parties before you do so. There are advantages and disadvantages to recording a meeting. A company may have a policy that recording is prohibited.

#### Advantages

* Everyone can participate in the meeting without someone having to worry about taking notes as well.
* Someone who did not attend the meeting can transcribe the minutes later.
* You can replay what was said.
* Can assist members/reps with disabilities.

#### Disadvantages

* Just keeping the minutes as a recording may mean no one will play them as they are too long, and the person listening is unable to skip to the parts want of the recording easily.
* The person listening to the recording may not be able to recognise who is talking/the camera may not be used.
* It can take a very long time to turn the recording into minutes

### Taking minutes for an online meeting

At an online meeting attendees may not put their real name on the screen so a good way to make sure attendance is recorded correctly is to ask everyone to put their name in the chat function.

Have a contingency plan for if the minute taker loses connection, such as designate a second person to be ready to take over if that happens.

General etiquette about raising points and using chat function during discussion should be agreed beforehand.

There is a caption function on both teams/Zoom, it would be useful to see if the transcript could be used to aid the capture minutes.

# After the meeting

### Turn your notes into minutes

Brevity is key to good minutes otherwise very few people will read them. The minutes should have a structure to them, so they are clear. Keep them short but accurate capturing the essential points of the debate and what the outcome was. If there were any actions, make sure they are assigned to the person who agreed to action them. Following the agenda items as subtitles in the minutes gives them focus.

The minutes need to clear to anyone not attending what actually happened. If you are not sure about what happened or what to put always check with the Chair.

### Readable fonts

Some disabilities make it hard to read certain fonts. Use sans serif fonts, such as Arial and Comic Sans, as letters can appear less crowded. Alternatives include Verdana, Tahoma, Century Gothic, Trebuchet, Calibri, Open Sans.

Font size should be 12-14 point or equivalent (e.g. 1-1.2em / 16-19 px). Some dyslexic readers may request a larger font.

Taken from [Dyslexia friendly style guide - British Dyslexia Association (bdadyslexia.org.uk)](https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/advice/employers/creating-a-dyslexia-friendly-workplace/dyslexia-friendly-style-guide#:~:text=Use%20sans%20serif%20fonts%2C%20such,may%20request%20a%20larger%20font.)

### What to do with your minutes?

The minutes need to be circulated as quickly as possible. If possible, they need to be approved by the Chair of the meeting within one or two days of the meeting.

Sometimes it is useful to send a status report with the minutes of the timescales of and when actions must happen.

The minutes should be approved for accuracy at the next meeting.

### Putting what you have learnt in practice

Watch the video in the link below and take minutes using the template on the following page.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-oXHqlKrBbQ>

Password: **education**

The video is the second one listed as ‘Bare Threads Meeting – Training’.

# Bare Threads Clothing

### Agenda for the Senior Management team meeting

Called to the meeting:

* Kathryn Mason, **CEO**
* Jade Jolley, **Head of Information**
* Tracey Windsor, **Administration**
* Rachel Readies, **Head of Finance**
* Martin Chequer-Fax, **Head of Research**

Items on the agenda:

* Staff working from home
* Strategic plan
* Capital expenditure budget
* AOB

### Minute-taking activity template

|  |
| --- |
| **Meeting Title:** |
| **Attending:** |  |
| **Action:**  | **Agenda item:**  |