

# MYTHS AND MYSTERIES OF TAKING MINUTES

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Minute taking has changed over the years. The requirements and expectations of the 21st century are very different from the expectations even 10, but certainly 20 and 30 years ago. Here are some points for you to consider about minutes and taking minutes.

Minutes are written for people who were at the meeting, not for people who were not! They are not designed to be a story to tell everyone who was not at the meeting, what went on. It may be smart to publish the key decisions but that is all.

Around 60% - 70% of the minute taker's work is done before the meeting begins. Most but not all of this work is in the preparation of the agenda. The agenda is essentially the draft minutes! Most experienced minute takers know this.

If the minute taker is to do the job properly, then he or she must be involved in physically preparing the agenda. The Agenda is your secret weapon!

Shorthand is not a necessary skill for a good minute taker. People who take minutes using shorthand sometimes take very poor minutes. The reason is that they are trained to take verbatim minutes and taking verbatim minutes rarely makes good business sense in today's world of work. Remember, meetings are not a court of law.

Modern minute takers take the minutes directly onto a laptop computer, edit as they go, and then email them to the participants (often from the meeting room) so that the minutes are "at the participants' desks" often before they arrive themselves. Research shows that between 50% and 60% of experienced minute takers now take the minutes directly onto a computer.

The last type of paper to take into a meeting for the minutes is an A4 pad or a shorthand notebook. You need to taking in pre-prepared blank "forms" which you complete as the meeting progresses.

With a very small number of exceptions, recording the names of who said what and the details of the discussion which takes place is no longer required in minutes. Generally, no-one is interested in who said what, they are interested in the outcome. Often it is the ego centred people or the manipulative people who want their name recorded in the minutes no-one else cares! There are obviously some legal situations where the names are required, but for the majority of meetings, they are not required.

Modern minutes are action oriented, and record issues and decisions and action only, not discussion.

Many modern minutes are taken in a table format like a spreadsheet. Contact the author for examples if you are not sure how these work.

Using a tape recorder is counter-productive and creates far more work rather than saving work as well as some Freedom of Information complications. Smart minute takers never tape their meetings. It creates far more work and frequently leads to unnecessary conflict when people say "I didn't say that" and the tape clearly captures them saying it.

Modern minute takers spend very little time "transcribing" their notes the minutes are virtually finished as the meeting finishes because they take them efficiently as the meeting progresses.

In every type of meeting, the minute taker has a crucial role to play and therefore needs to be an active, although perhaps relatively silent, participant. There will be times when you must speak. To do this you must sit next to the person in the chair. (A chairperson who understands their own role and yours, will not let you sit anywhere else!)

Taking minutes is a job which few people enjoy but it is usually because they think that taking the minutes involves them capturing every word that is said. Once you change your mindset to one that understands that the purpose of minutes is to capture the issues, the decisions and the major reasons, and then the action that is required, taking minutes becomes a lot easier almost enjoyable.