

Your quick guide to:

TAKING MINUTES

As any PA knows, taking minutes is a challenging and essential skill. This guide provides some handy tips on getting it right, every time.

Do your research

Our PAs have suggested that the toughest aspect of taking minutes is understanding what is being discussed – summarising information you don't understand is particularly tough when you're having to summarise it rapidly. As is often the case, the key is doing your research.

Find out as much as you can beforehand, and try to familiarise yourself with the terminology that will be used. And if you haven't got time to prepare, just make sure you capture everything that is said – including all unfamiliar terms and phrases. You can work out what these mean, if necessary, after the meeting.

The first point to make is that all kick-off times come either after, or near to the end of, the average working day. This should help to avoid major disruptions to the productivity of your business.

Remember names

Introduce yourself to the chairperson before the meeting and ask them to introduce you to every committee member. Then, draw a table plan matching each person to each seat.

This might sound overly pedantic, but when it comes to minute taking, there's no such thing!

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Record the actions separately

Although all of the main actions should be recorded in the minutes, it's always beneficial for you and the committee to record the actions in a separate table too. Just make note of who each action is for and whether it's been completed.

Remember the basics

The minutes should focus exclusively on these four things:

- What was decided
- What was achieved
- What was agreed
- Actions to be taken

Keeping everything within this structure will make your life much easier.

Maintain neutrality

Minutes should always be a neutral, factual account of events. So, unless you're told explicitly to do so, avoid making note of irrelevant dialogue, unconventional opinions and arguments. And ensure your tone and vocabulary is neutral and straightforward throughout.

Type up your minutes as soon as possible

If you're busy, it's very tempting to leave typing up your latest set of minutes for another day. But this is rarely a good idea.

After a few days, terms that had been familiar are suddenly less so, and your own handwriting can be mystifying. Make time to type up your latest notes promptly.

Proofread your minutes

When you're writing things down rapidly, it's very easy to make spelling mistakes and miss out words completely. That's normal, and it's worth making these mistakes in order to ensure that you get everything down quickly.

However, you must make sure you thoroughly proof your minutes before sending them on. Minutes are a reflection of your ability, seen by the most senior people associated with your business. Proofing is vital.

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Check everything is working

It might be the most basic of things to remember, but it's no less important – check your pen has ink and your laptop has charge.

As a PA, there is nothing worse than looking disorganised as you rush out of a meeting.

These tips should help you on your way to taking minutes efficiently. But don't underestimate how challenging minute taking can be in a fast-paced corporate environment; you're recording sensitive and significant information, and its accuracy is of paramount importance to your business, and therefore, your reputation.

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