

Minute Taking Training Course

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1 - Meetings

Meetings are a crucial part of any company's day-to-day operation and are vital for management and communication.

Meeting purposes can include:

- Information giving
- Training
- Planning
- Getting Feedback
- Problem-solving
- Crisis Management
- Task setting and delegation
- Inter-departmental
- Guest Speakers
- Weekly operational update
- Brainstorming

Meetings are more effective than e-mails and memo's, because the written word only carries 7% of the true meaning and feeling. They are better than telephone conferences because only 38% of the meaning and feeling is carried in the way that things are said. Meetings are useful because 55% of meaning and feeling is carried through facial expression and non-verbal signals.

However, meetings are a common cause of frustration in many organisations. Time spent in meetings is often seen as time which could be spent *doing* rather than *talking* about doing.

Meetings are often criticised for:

- Having no real purpose.
- Making straightforward issues complicated.
- Lasting too long.
- Providing a platform for the talkative.
- Delaying decisions and actions.



But these criticisms need not apply to all meetings. Meetings can be successful if:

- The purpose of the meeting is made clear beforehand.
- Participants come to the meeting prepared.
- The agenda items and time budgeted for each item, are not seen as a 'moveable feast'.
- Contributions are limited to those which are useful and relevant.
- Attendance is restricted to people affected by the issues being discussed.
- Where appropriate, decisions are made and actions initiated.

Meetings can, therefore, be an effective means of:

- Communicating to a group.
- Improving the quality of decisions.
- Providing a forum for structured discussion.
- Contribution towards team-building.



2 - Basic Rules of Meetings

1. Plan
2. Circulate Agenda in advance
3. Run the meeting - keep control, agree actions and outcomes, responsibilities, take minutes
4. Write and circulate minutes
5. Follow-up agreed actions

Your Role

Your role in meetings is a supportive role, which is crucial to the success of organisational day-to-day activities. The organiser and minute-taker has to be prepared, be able to actively listen and take constructive notes. Preparation is the key to the success of any meeting and your role is to ensure that everything is in place.

In groups, complete the **Meeting Planner Checklist**.

Meeting Planner Checklist

Item	Done	Comments	Date/ref



3 - Preparing an Agenda

The key to an effective meeting is a clear agenda. The agenda is a tool which can be used to control the meeting. Without an agenda meetings quickly go out of control and degenerate.

The agenda should be approved by the person who is chairing the meeting, prior to circulation. All relevant information should be included on an agenda and it should be circulated well in advance of the meeting. When the agenda is circulated it is essential to ask for additional items to be considered. This will ensure that time wasting is kept to a minimum during the meeting.

Most organisations will have 'fixed' items on every agenda, such as:

- **Approval of Agenda**
 - This checks that what is on the agenda is sufficient. This is the last opportunity for attendee's to highlight other matters for discussion.
- **Apologies for absence**
 - Confirm who is attending the meeting and those who have sent apologies for non-attendance.
- **Approval of previous meeting minutes**
 - The previous meeting minutes should be circulated in advance of meeting and this part of the meeting allows for corrections to minutes and not to re-open any debates. The group should agree the minutes before moving on.
- **Matters arising from last meeting**
 - This allows for further reporting on new developments or matters which need to be discussed from previous meetings.
- **Correspondence**
 - Official correspondence received can be brought to light at this point of the meeting, such as tenders, receipts etc... They should be recorded.



- **Substantive Matters**
 - These are the discussions to take place during this meeting.

- **Any other business**
 - This is for urgent or unforeseen items to be discussed. These items should have been raised at the beginning of the meeting.

- **Time, date and place of next meeting**
 - It is effective to agree the next meeting at the end of a meeting so that diaries can be synchronised.

Clear and realistic timings are an essential part of any Agenda. All agendas should have a start and finish time, meeting location, topic headings.

Sample Agenda		
Item	Responsible	Time
Approval of Agenda	Chair	5 mins
Apologies for absence	Minute Taker	2 mins
Approval of minutes	Chair	10 mins
Matters arising from last meeting	Chair	5 mins
1. Membership Report	Chair	10 mins
2. Financial Update	Finance Director	15 mins
3. New Product Launch	Chair / Marketing Director	30 mins
Any other business	Chair	10 mins
Next Meeting	Minute Taker	5 mins



4 - Minute Taking

The minute taker is a support for the Chair of the meeting. Minutes are an essential part of effective meetings as they manage actions and outcomes. Minutes also clarify situations and agreements. Actions which are not recorded will be forgotten.

A published record of a meeting, supports the importance of a meeting and the importance of following up on actions.

The person taking the minutes should:

- Know the groups purpose
- Know the participants
- Know the agenda
- Listen and make notes
- Be prepared to ask for clarification

Preparation is 90% of the success of the minutes produced. If you have been responsible for setting the Agenda for the meeting then you are already familiar with the topics which will arise.

Unless this is an informal meeting it is important to remember that the Chair is in charge of the meeting and not the minute taker.

Key points to note for minutes of a meeting are:

- Essential items are recorded, such as:
Type of meeting, name of organisation, date and time, venue, name of chair, main topics, and time of close. Approval of previous minutes and resolutions should also be included.
- The outline of minutes should be formed around the agenda. These should be prepared in advance, leaving plenty of space for note taking. This allows for quicker note-taking.



- Prepare a list of expected attendee's and tick off the names as people arrive. Alternatively, you could pass an attendance sheet around for large meetings.
- If you are unfamiliar with any people in the room, ask to be introduced. This allows for the accurate recording of who said what.
- Do not fall into the trap of writing every word down. It is important to summarise what is being said and 'read between the lines'. Look at issues discussed, major points raised and decisions taken.
- Minutes of meetings should be prepared as soon after the meeting as possible. The meeting is still fresh in your mind.
- Always get the Chair of the meeting to approve the minutes before circulation.
- Attach any reports or papers as necessary
- Use the minutes as the basis for the next agenda.



5 - Listening Skills

Listening is an active process that has three basic steps.

1. Hearing. Hearing just means listening enough to catch what the speaker is saying.
2. Understanding. The next part of listening happens when you take what you have heard and understand it in your own way.
3. Judging. After you are sure you understand what the speaker has said, think about whether it makes sense. Do you believe what you have heard?

Barriers to Listening

- ✓ Hearing difficulties and seating position
- ✓ Speed of thought, being ahead of the speaker
- ✓ Speaker's apparent experience (or lack of it)
- ✓ Different views from speaker's
- ✓ Difficulties of language and jargon
- ✓ Undefined reaction against speaker
- ✓ Internal environmental distractions
- ✓ External distractions
- ✓ Incongruent verbal and nonverbal behavior
- ✓ Heard it all before
- ✓ Not interested in subject (and determined not to be)
- ✓ Wanting to hear only what you want to hear
- ✓ Assuming what is being said
- ✓ Daydreaming
- ✓ Other things on your mind
- ✓ Tiredness



Tips for being a good listener

- Give your full attention on the person who is speaking.
- Make sure your mind is focused. If you feel your mind wandering, change the position of your body and try to concentrate on the speaker's words.
- Let yourself finish listening before you begin to speak! You can't really listen if you are busy thinking about what you want say next
- Listen for main ideas. The main ideas are the most important points the speaker wants to get across. Pay special attention to statements that begin with phrases such as "My point is..." or "The thing to remember is..."
- Ask questions. If you are not sure you understand what the speaker has said, just ask.
- Remember, you listen with your face as well as your ears!



6 - Sample Template of Minutes of a Meeting

Name of Organisation

Name of Meeting
Date, Time & Location

Present: A list of those attending. Indicate in brackets the chair of the meeting and the minute taker.

Apologies for Absence: List of people who have said they cannot attend

1. Minutes of Last Meeting
2. Matters arising
3. Item 1 on Agenda
4. Item 2 on Agenda
5. Item 3 on Agenda
6. Any other business
7. Date of next meeting



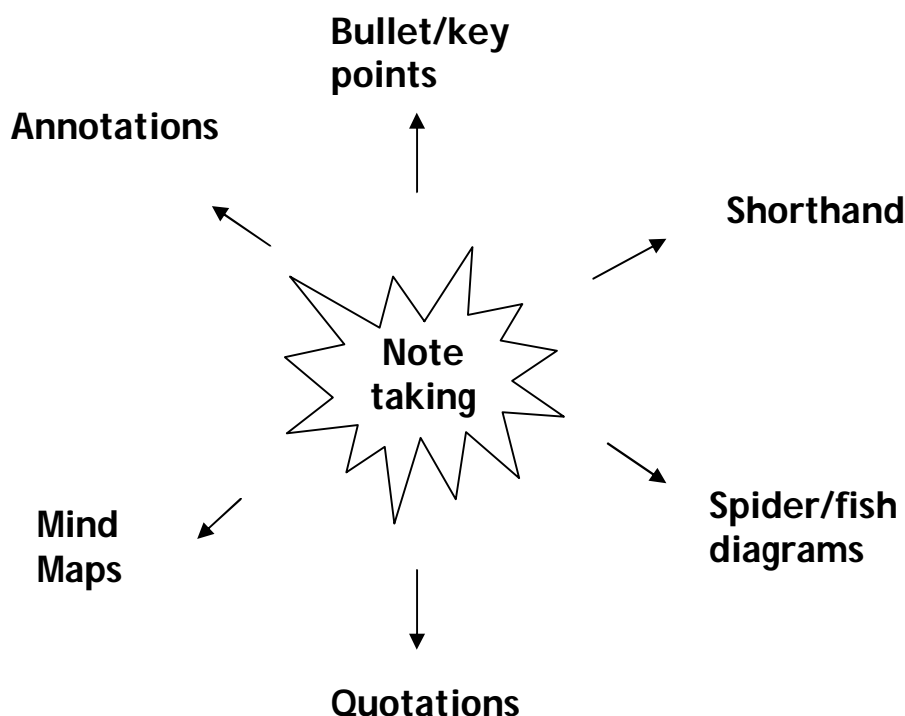
7 - Note Taking Techniques

Note-taking is a way of summarizing information. In our daily lives we all take notes. Notes can take the form of a pencilled reminder on your diary. Although we are experienced note-takers, taking notes with the purpose of summarizing documents to help us in our day-to-day operation is different.

When you are taking notes you need to make sure that you can refer later to your notes and understand them. There is no point in writing notes in such a coded form that when you look at them after the meeting and you cannot remember a thing and your scribbles are meaningless. To avoid this problem your notes have to have certain characteristics.

Your notes have to be:

- legible (write clearly, maybe in block form)
- the ideas/main themes/concepts have to be expressed clearly
- the notes should mean something to you
- make your notes in a format that suits you.



Bullet/key points

Taking notes using a bullet-point method is very common, especially with tools available on software packages to make the process easier. Using bullet points allows you to condense information into short sentences made up of the key elements of the information that you need to record. For example, in order to set up a website the following issues would need to be considered:

1. Costs
 - hardware
 - software
 - connection
 - call charges
 - ISP charges
 - maintenance and service charges

2. Security
 - passwords
 - firewall
 - hackers
 - unauthorized users

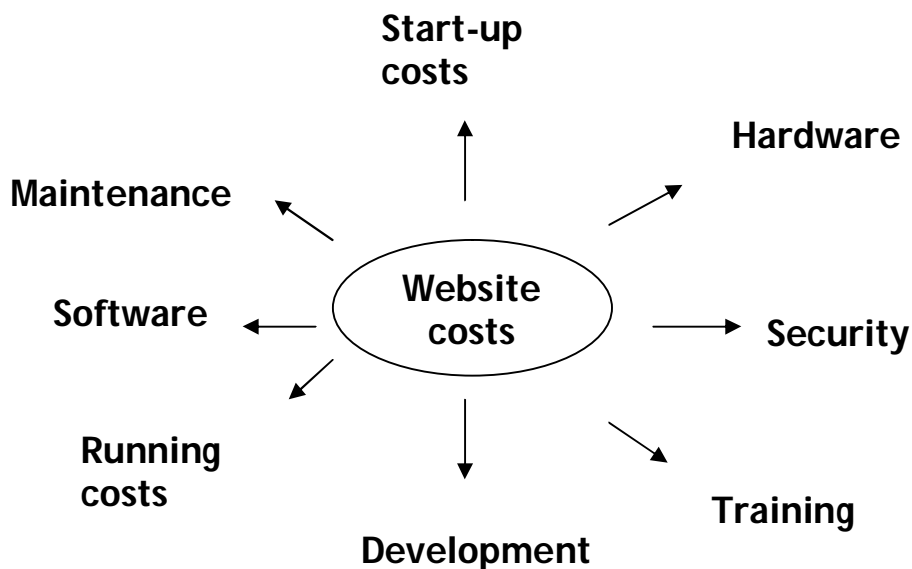
Shorthand

Shorthand is a unique style of scribing complete words into short symbols to enable faster note taking. Shorthand is frequently used when documents are being dictated.



Spider or fish diagrams

Taking notes visually by using a spider, fish or other diagram is a very easy way of jotting down key points and relating them to a specific subject or set of criteria. In the example used, it is clear to see that the cost of setting up a website is the subject area, with each cost being identified around the body of the subject.



Mind maps

Tony Buzan (1989) developed a style of transferring notes into a diagrammatic format known as 'mind maps' or 'brain patterns'. In these, you start in the centre of a page with a word or phrase that represents the main theme, and from this branches extend outwards to incorporate links to that theme, and then again to sub-themes.

Annotations

Annotations are used to provide further expansion to thoughts and ideas. Annotations may be graphical or textual.



8 - Key Tips for Minutes:

- Omit unnecessary detail or repetition. Record the main points discussed.
- It is not good practice to report what individuals say: this is long-winded; several people may say similar things; it may not matter who said it. Summarise the main point, using the 'third person' (e.g. "It is important for all group members to meet the agreed deadlines.")
- Note any papers which were 'tabled', i.e. given out at the meeting rather than sent out beforehand.
- Note decisions taken, actions agreed, who will take the action and deadlines.

Remember people may:

- Not like what they said being inaccurately reported.
- Not want what they said to be noted (e.g. criticisms or conflict).
- Have hidden agendas, vested interests (e.g. may want others not present to know what was said).
- Want to acknowledge somebody's (or their own) contribution.
- People may say what they want (e.g. "Please can you not minute that.") but they may not.

You could if in doubt:

- Ask the chairperson for advice.
- Look at other minutes of similar groups to see how they were written.

