MINUTE TAKING HANDBOOK

GRADUATE STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Preparation

Review previous minutes

Before you start, it's a good idea to review the minutes from previous meetings. Notice the organization of the minutes – the amount of detail, phraseology and other characteristics. Make note of all action items and ensure the action item list has been updated.

Obtain the meeting agenda and other pertinent materials

The agenda should list the time and location of the meeting, events or activities scheduled to take place, and speakers and/or presentations.. Make sure you get a copy of the agenda from the Chair beforehand, especially if you are not the person who helped prepare it.

Agendas are important because they show the time frames for each segment of the meeting. They also make you aware of what you can expect from the discussion.

Other materials you might want are minutes of past meetings, handouts and glossaries of relevant subjects.

Ask the meeting chair or facilitator to copy you on all materials sent prior to the meeting and to send you an advance copy of any materials being handed out at the meeting. Make note of any materials handed out in the meeting package

Speak with the chairperson before the meeting

Go through the agenda together to establish the main topics and the group's goals.

During the conversation, also decide upon a signal for when you may need clarification. For example, say you are in the meeting and all of a sudden people are talking all at once, or you don't quite understand the person who is speaking. How are you going to signal the meeting leader in a way that's appropriate and doesn't distract the group? Decide what the signal is going to be so he or she will know how to help you during the meeting.

Arrive early to check equipment and materials

Of course, you'll want to check your audio or video equipment in advance. Make sure you have enough batteries and extension cords. If you bring a laptop, make sure you have every accessory that goes with it.

Make sure you have a copy of the agenda – and bring extra copies just in case the chair forgets to bring them.

Determine your position at the table

Ideally, you want to set next to the Speaker or Chair. That way you can more easily signal the chair if you need clarification. The chairperson is likely to appreciate the strategic positioning as well. It's easier for the chairperson to say quietly something like, "Oh, did you capture that? That was really important what Bill just said."

If you can't do that, then position yourself at the table where you can see the meeting leader can see you.

Introduce yourself

If you don't know some of the attendees, extend your hand for a handshake and introduce yourself and your role at the meeting. Remember to smile and be confident. It's good for people to get to know you.

Create an outline

Having an outline (or template) based on the agenda makes it easy for you to simply jot down notes, decisions, etc. under each item as you go along. If you are taking notes by hand, consider including space below each item on your outline for your hand-written notes, then print these out and use this to capture minutes.

Check-off attendees as they enter the room

If you know the meeting attendees, you can check them off as they arrive, if not have folks introduce themselves at the start of the meeting or circulate an attendance list they can check-off themselves. (This does not apply in GRC)

During the Meeting

Key information to capture

Depending on whether you're taking minutes for a daily huddle or a formal board meeting, the extent of what to record may change. But here's the mid-range of important information you should collect:

- Date and time of the meeting
- Names of the meeting participants and those unable to attend (e.g., "regrets")
- Acceptance or corrections/amendments to previous meeting minutes
- Decisions made about each agenda item, for example:
    - Actions taken or agreed to be taken
    - Next steps
    - Voting outcomes – e.g., (if necessary, details regarding who made motions; who seconded and approved or via show of hands, etc.)
    - Motions taken or rejected (see #4 in section What to Record)
    - Items to be held over
    - New business
    - Next meeting date and time
- Record the time of adjournment

What to Record

1. Ask yourself, as you're taking notes, "will this matter in two days, two weeks, two months, two years, etc.? If yes, include it. Focus on action items, not discussion. The purpose of minutes is to define decisions made and to record what actions are to be taken, by whom and when.

2. Summarize. Don't record conversations word for word.

3. If you need to refer to other documents, attach them in an appendix or indicate where they may be found. Don't rewrite their intent or try to summarize them.

4. Do record motions word for word, and indent them for easy scanning.
Example: GRC motions to approve the 2016-2017 budget
    MOTION CARRIED
5. Use keywords vs. sentences.

6. Keep emotions out of the minutes – yours and those of attendees. Be objective. Write in the same tense throughout and avoid using people's names except for motions or seconds. This is a business document, not about who said what.

7. Be an active listener. If someone makes a motion and you didn't hear it clearly, interrupt the meeting and ask. If you don't understand something being discussed and you can't interrupt, make a note to ask about it later.

8. Reflect accurately the order of the discussion, even if it doesn't follow the agenda. These are legal, historical documents.

9. Create bulleted lists when recording a list of comments, suggestions or concerns.

Tips that might help your note taking

Record decisions or notes on action items

Record them in your outline as soon as they occur to be sure they are recorded accurately. Make sure they stand out in the minutes by highlighting them.

Ask for clarification if necessary

For example, if the group moves on without making a decision or an obvious conclusion, ask for clarification of the decision and/or next steps involved.

Don't try to capture it all

You can't keep up if you try to write down the conversation verbatim, so be sure to simply (and clearly) write (or type) just the decisions, assignments, action steps, etc.

Record it

Literally, if you are concerned about being able to keep up with note taking, consider recording the meeting (e.g., on your smart phone, iPad, recording device, etc.) but be sure to let participants know they are being recording. While you don't want to use the recording to create a word-for-word transcript of the meeting, the recording can come in handy if you need clarification.

After the Meeting

Review the minutes

Re-read the minutes and check for errors and clarity. Read from an outsider's perspective and make sure what is written would make sense to someone outside of the organization or someone who did not attend the meeting.

Edit for spelling, grammar, and punctuation

Review formatting

Make sure the formatting and overall look of the minutes are clean and consistent

Sources:

Effective Minute-Taking: Tips to Improve Your Meeting-Recording Skills by Joan Burge

http://www.wildapricot.com/articles/how-to-write-effective-meeting-minutes

http://www.effectivemeetings.com/meetingbasics/minutes.asp