

10 COMMON BARRIERS TO TAKING GREAT MINUTES AND HOW TO SOLVE THEM



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Welcome!

Taking notes at meetings and producing a set of minutes is usually viewed as a chore. What's more, most people are missing out on the tips and tricks that make it all so much easier. The good news is that this short Eguide reveals what the most common problems



and pitfalls are, and even more importantly, how to overcome them. So invest a few minutes in reading on, practice the top tips that I'm sharing here and you will soon see the difference. So will the people that read your minutes.

Remember, minutes are an important aspect of meetings; some have to be kept for years for audit or legal reasons and the point of most sets of minutes is to prompt action.

Without a good set of minutes you can easily fall into the very common problem of having meetings about the previous meeting, because nothing will have been progressed. If that's the case, what a waste of time and effort it all is!

By the way, we also have an excellent, comprehensive free guide for you to download on meetings: "Secrets Of Successful Meetings". It's one of our most popular free resources. After you have read and actioned this one, why not check it out at

<http://leadinglightlearning.com/ebooks/>

For now though let's look at the 10 most popular barriers to taking great minutes.

- 1. You are having to use two difficult skills simultaneously: listening and writing**
- 2. You lack the key tools for the job**
- 3. You don't have the right type of agenda**
- 4. You don't know which of the four types of minutes you should be producing**
- 5. You are sitting in the wrong seat**



- 6. You haven't done the right type of preparation**
- 7. You write too much or too little**
- 8. You can't read back some of your key words**
- 9. You overuse abbreviations**
- 10. You really can't make sense of your notes!**

It can all be so frustrating, can't it?

Interestingly, running courses on minute and note-taking were the very first training events I became involved in at the beginning of my people development career, following a job at the Pitman organisation.

Many people assume that shorthand (the core business of Pitmans at that time) is helpful for taking notes. In actual fact it isn't because a shorthand writer is trained to take down everything that is said, and with most types of minutes that is NOT required.

So that's good news. Some of the tips though that I am going to share with you have their origins from my Pitman days because they really work to help you take notes at meetings – whether you are writing on paper or using a laptop or mobile device.

By the way, I find that most people get better results from taking handwritten notes at meetings. It still seems technology just doesn't help so much with this task.

So here are the tried and tested top tips that I've trained 1000s of people in over the years, so I know they will help you overcome the problems with taking minutes too.

1. You are having to use two difficult skills simultaneously: listening and writing

Preparation will help your focus. Concentrate on what is being said. Suspend your own views and judgment. Have the right tools to make your job easier – see below – and don't try to write everything down. Make sure you can see and hear everyone and follow the other 9 sections below.

2. You lack the key tools for the job

Here's what you need as a minimum:

A supply of sharpened pencils (pencils are faster to write with than pens). If you really must use a pen, a lightweight, quality biro works best

Smooth, good quality paper – now is not the time for recycled

An A5 hardcover, spiral bound pad works better than an A4 one

Have tent cards and/or a seating plan

Have the previous set of minutes and the current agenda

3. You don't have the right type of agenda

This is not necessarily down to you but you can encourage your chairperson to adopt it: An action centred agenda is crucial to meeting success. Sent out at least a week before the meeting, it is well structured, fits realistically into the timeframe of the meeting and



uses some basic psychological principles about how people behave at meetings regarding running order, time slots, precise objectives for each item, who is leading on which item and pointers on any background papers. Most importantly, it makes the action required from each agenda item crystal clear

4. You don't know which of the four types of minutes you should be producing

You have 4 options and you need to know beforehand. Usually a meeting will stick with the same type of minutes each time. Checking previous minutes, as long as they are well written, will show you which type you are required to produce. The options are:

Verbatim (rare)

Narrative (commonly used)

Resolution (often used in local government and other public bodies)

Action (preferable for many types of meetings these days)

The structure, layout and level of recording is different for each of these.

5. You are sitting in the wrong seat

This is an easy one. Your place if you are taking the minutes is by the chairperson – to the left or the right.

6. You haven't done the right type of preparation



You know what they say: To fail to prepare is to prepare to fail and nowhere is this more true than with minutes.

You need to allocate time beforehand – several weeks before the meeting if you are new to this. Look back over 6 months of previous minutes of your particular meeting. It will prove invaluable. It will show you:

- Level of recording
- How much detail
- The story so far
- Clues about the problem solving and decision making methods used
- The people involved
- The major contributors
- And lots more little insights that will really help you.

It's all about investing time up front for a better end result!

7. You write too much or too little

Once you have done your preparation, you will have an idea of the level of detail required for the type of minutes you should produce.

Generally speaking, you need to note key points only and decisions and actions. In some types of meeting



the wording of decisions has to be precise. It all depends so you need to do that upfront preparation first.

If your Chair is approachable, they will be able to give you lots of pointers. Again, the previous minutes will help you decide the level of recording.

Practice will help you get the balance right. If you try and get too much down, you will get left behind in the discussion, your writing will become illegible and you will have a nightmare of a time transcribing it all back into something concise, accurate and meaningful when you get back to work

8. You can't read back some of your key words

This point goes hand in glove with the above. If you get left behind, always have the courage to check with the Chair for clarification. Never scribble in panic.

9. You overuse abbreviations

Work out in advance any abbreviations you are going to use. Don't use off the cuff symbols, as you won't remember what they are supposed to mean. Consistency and clarity are key.

10. You really can't make sense of your notes!

As you can see, one problem rolls into another and you could be heading for disaster. I know, as I have been there in the dim and distant past! Avoid the problem by listening attentively, taking down clear, key points only,



use margins so you write in a restricted space, and jot reminders to yourself in those margins.

Use times when the meeting members are waffling on or having a break to tidy up your notes while it's all fresh in your mind. Remember, too, that your chairperson should be your ally. That's why you are sitting next to them, so it is easy to check points etc during the meeting.

Follow these tips and apply them so you are changing your habits of how you take notes and you will see a difference. Of course, there is more to it and you also need to learn how to write back the notes into a good set of minutes that read well, encourage action and do your reputation some good too!

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To get the most benefit though, a day's practical training with lots more tips and techniques, meeting simulations to allow you to practice both the note-taking and the writing back of the minutes will really make a difference. You'll have an expert on tap all day too.

If you are interested in improving your minute and note-taking skills – for yourself or others in your organisation then get in touch with us. enquiries@leadinglightlearning.com



We'll come and deliver an impressive workshop that is completely tailored to your goals and your needs. Delegates will be able to

develop the must have skills and practise these, so you'll see a rapid return on your investment.

For more information about this development you can even get in touch with me personally and we can have a chat to explore alternatives.

Call me on 0845 165 6269 or email: alison@leadinglightlearning.com

Kind regards

Alison

