

Quick Guide: Taking Notes at Meetings

Last month the Quick Guide gave you tips on how to prepare to take minutes at a meeting. This month, we will focus on how to take notes at a meeting, whether it be a formal meeting with an agenda or an informal team meeting. So, after you have prepared, here are the **top ten tips** to help you take notes at meetings:

- 1. Get to the meeting early.** Claim your seat next to the chair so you can see as well as hear who is talking. As people arrive put a name to each face and draw a small table plan showing where everybody is sitting. This is useful to refer to when your head is down writing notes.
- 2. Listen and concentrate** carefully throughout. Always ask if you don't understand, or if you are unsure about what they have decided.
- 3. Use 3 column format** for taking minutes. Rule a 2.5 cm margin on left and right of page, use first column for initials of person speaking, make notes of discussions in large middle column and use third column for actions and any notes to yourself.
- 4. Note only main points.** Pick out key phrases by listening for the following: agreed, decided, approval/ed, proposal/e, increase, decrease, dates/figures, urgent, deadline, immediate, in conclusion, noted etc.
- 5. Write in bullet points** or note format, not sentences. For example, you don't need to write 'John Brown, the Sales Director, introduced the new format for recording sales' when you can put his initials in the left column, no title because you know who he is, and your bullet would say 'new format for rec sales'.
- 6. Always keep up with the meeting.** If you miss a point made, leave a line and keep going. The chances are it be repeated later. If not, ask at a convenient point or after the meeting. By keeping up, you will have missed only one point. If you try to write the point you missed you will miss the next two or three as well.
- 7. Develop short forms** for regularly used words. Use abbreviations and acronyms. Use symbols instead of whole words.
- 8. Write only the beginning of long words.** For example, 'beg' for beginning, 'con' for confirm or conclusion. Although 'con' has been used for two words when you read your notes in context it will make sense, as long as you read your notes within 24 – 48 hours!
- 9. Leave out the vowels** in words so you have less to write. For example, 'wrksht' for worksheet, 'mtgs' for meetings.
- 10. After the meeting** read through your notes, reflect on what was said during the meeting and then tidy up your notes so that they make sense for typing up. Check unclear points with the chairperson or relevant person and type up your notes within 24 – 48 hours.

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