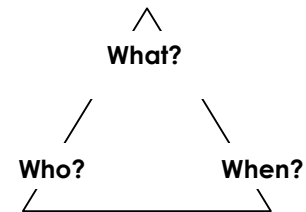


## Quick Guide: Writing Understandable Minutes

Most people do not read minutes particularly carefully. They were either at the meeting so only need a quick reminder of the discussions and action points, or they were not there and therefore just need an overview and once again action points. So, it is essential that the minutes can be skim-read and understood at first reading. Here are the **top ten tips** to make your minutes understandable:

**1. Follow the order of the agenda** using the same headings and subheadings for items. To save time, when you produce the agenda you could make a template of headings for the minutes filling in the missing parts from your notes, after the meeting.

**2. Use the Action Triangle** for recording actions to ensure you have covered all three parts: what is going to be done, who is responsible and when it is to be completed by.



You may wish to use an Action Column or type the actions in bold so they stand out.

**3. Be precise with numbers, quantities and dates.** So 'They will introduce six new products by 31 Dec 08' not 'They will introduce a few new products in the next couple of months'.

**4. Avoid 'attributive' minutes**, where you say who said what; this would make your minutes unnecessarily wordy and dull to read. Plus, it is often difficult to decide who said something if there is a discussion about a topic. Only state names if somebody states a strong opinion or if you are asked to attribute a specific point.

**5.** Although you should write the minutes in plain English (points 6 to 10 below), **sometimes using the same word repeatedly can make the minutes boring to read.** One such word is 'said' so change this to other words: **stated, reported, suggested, confirmed, declared.** Be careful not to change words just for the sake of it though.

**6.** Maintain an average sentence length of **15 – 20 words.** Use **bullet points** to break up large chunks of text making it easier on the eye and easier to understand.

**7. Avoid wordy phrases** – not 'come to a decision' but 'decided'.

**8. Write in the positive** – not 'The scheme is unsuitable for staff aged 60 or over' but 'The scheme is suitable for staff under 60'.

**9. Use the active voice** – not 'It was agreed by the partners that ...' but 'The partners agreed that ...' or if it's obvious it's the partners agreeing, then 'They agreed that ...'.

**10. Use the third person** so 'he'. 'she', 'it' or 'they'.

**Compiled by Judith Di-Castri**