# Keeping Organized Meeting Minutes

By taking organized meeting minutes, you maximize the effectiveness of the meeting. After all, what would be the point of discussing items and making decisions if no one could remember exactly what was discussed? Since meetings are a fact of life in business, school, and your community activities it's even more important to create organized meeting minutes. How do you keep track of all the information given out? It's actually not as hard as it seems – if you have a system…

## The Basics

The basic elements of organized meeting minutes are the date, the name of the organization, the purpose of the meeting (annual review, budget planning session, nomination of new members, etc.) and the people attending (just send around a sign-in sheet to save time).

## Taking Efficient Notes

The first rule for taking organized meeting notes is to be selective – you don't need to write down every word that is said! As a new topic is introduced, start a new header on your page – otherwise, you may become confused later as one topic merges into another. Write down only salient points. These include motions, votes, actions taken – as well as valuable suggestions made that may be acted upon later, important facts worth noting, and dissenting views. It's also wise to make a note of who offered that idea.

## Avoid Shorthand Woes

Unless you are a trained stenographer, shorthand can be a mixed blessing. Most people's shorthand consists of strange abbreviations that make sense at the time of the meeting, but are indecipherable when reviewing the minutes later. Unless it's a standard abbreviation that anyone would recognize (re:, &, incl., etc.), save yourself a headache and just write it out!

## The Electronic Option

Sometimes, taking notes during a meeting is distracting and it keeps you from fully engaging in the discussion or absorbing the information that is shared. An easy solution to this problem is to use a small audio recorder to tape the proceedings – then transcribe the important points to paper later.

## Organizing Other Meeting Materials

Meeting-goers know that you tend to collect a lot of paper in addition to minutes – memos, rosters, information about special events, budget reports, etc. The easiest way to organize these is in an expanding accordion file. This allows you to set up a section for each category of paper – or for each organization. And if you get a file with a lid and handle, it's portable, so you can take it with you to and from meetings.

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If you attend meetings regularly or serve as secretary, you will probably accumulate a profusion of meeting minutes. Organize these in chronological order in either a 3-ring binder or a pressboard folder with prongs. Simply hole-punch the latest set of notes (or write directly onto hole-punched paper) and place these on top of the older meeting minutes. Voila – you have an ongoing chronological reference of organized meeting minutes. It only takes a few quick steps and you too can take organized meeting notes.

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