



Unit 1 The Role of a Minute Taker

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Recognize the importance of minute-taking and understand how OneNote can make the process more efficient, organized, and reliable.
- ✓ Develop key minute-taking skills, including listening skills, critical thinking, and organization and be able to apply these during and after meetings to produce excellent meeting minutes with OneNote and other tools.

Unit 1

The Role of a Minute Taker

What is a Minute-Taker?

Being a Minute-Taker can:

- Give you access to other members of the group.
- Keep you up to date on what is going on in the organization.
- Enable you to help the chair accomplish the goals of the organization.
- Keep you more focused on what is being said, so your comments are relevant and your interpretation of what happened is accurate.

Sometimes we feel like accepting the role of Minute-Taker in a meeting has just relegated us to the back seat, and in a boring role. In actuality, the Minute-Taker plays a vital role within the meeting and can choose to use his or her responsibilities wisely (or not). Keep in mind that minutes are legal documents so you must take extra care to be as accurate as possible. The Minute-Taker has legitimate, easy access to other members of the meeting, including those in key positions.

However, there are still people who avoid taking minutes if at all possible and who are intimidated by the idea of taking minutes because they are unsure of how to do this, and fearful of missing important details. But with Microsoft OneNote it is easier than ever to make sure you don't miss a beat during the meeting.

OneNote 2007 (a part of the Office 2007 suite of programs) is a very useful tool you can use to help you with your minute-taking duties. It makes it possible to take notes as fast as one can write in a conventional notebook, but the immediate result is well-formatted, searchable, and easily shareable without transcribing. OneNote also has the ability to record audio directly into the notebook, ensuring that the Minute-Taker has the information correct every time. OneNote also seamlessly integrates with Microsoft Outlook and Word so it is very easy to distribute, print, and archive meeting minutes.

Using OneNote is very similar to using Microsoft Word except you can write a note anywhere, just like a paper notebook. Also, you can manage pages and sections like a paper notebook except you also have the ability to link pages and sections, other documents, add images, and search the document easily. OneNote combines the ease of taking notes in a paper notebook with the ease of searching, organizing, and editing notes in a Microsoft Word document.

In many meetings, the chair may act as recorder but this is not recommended because it prevents the chair from devoting his/her full attention to the discussion and may result in incomplete minutes. The same holds true to a lesser extent for meeting participants so many

organizations will use a dedicated Minute-Taker at their meeting. This position may also be called: recording secretary, secretary, note taker, recorder, or another appropriate name. Regardless of what other roles the Minute-Taker has in the meeting or what the Minute-Taker is called, OneNote can help them.

According to Robert's Rules of Order, if the chair is absent and there is no vice-chair, the secretary should call the meeting to order and preside over it until the meeting elects a chair pro tem (for the time being).

Minutes should be written to provide all the members with the following information:

- How issues were discussed and finally resolved.
- The names of those individuals who were assigned specific tasks and the dates these tasks are to be completed.
- Minutes are considered legal documents.
- Motions should be recorded word for word.

Because of the level of detail you will be required to record, using a digital voice recorder or the audio recording functionality included with OneNote gives you piece of mind if you fall behind the flow of the meeting. Your recording will be there as a backup.

What is the purpose of minutes?

- *A clear summary of proceedings, a means of conveying information, a reminder for future actions and a historical background on decisions of the group.*

What is your role as the Minute-Taker?

What are the tasks you are expected to perform?

What are some of the common problems you or others have experienced as a Minute-Taker?

If you were asked to record the minutes for a meeting, what equipment and information do you need to know? (Think of as many things as you can.)

Problems and Solutions

Here are some problems that a minute-taker might encounter. What solutions can you think of for the following problems?

A weak chair who can't keep participants on track.

Speakers who mumble, ramble, or speak too fast.

Speakers who are disorganized.

Chairs and speakers who give vague directions.

Speakers who ask the Minute-Taker to create motions around their comments.

Too many people talking at once.

Distractions.

Not following the agenda.

An impossibly long agenda.

Motions made at top speed.

Speakers not identifying themselves.

Negative people.

Power hungry people.

Unprepared members.

Not being allowed to have a break when members have one.

Being sent out of the meeting to make coffee or photocopies.

Can you think of any other problems?

The Skills of a Minute-Taker

Key Skills

To function properly as a Minute-Taker, you must also be alert, highly organized, and focused on the group discussion, in order to restate the positions and the discussions of others accurately and objectively. Not everyone is suited to this job.

A Minute-Taker must be:

- A good listener
- A sound critical thinker
- An excellent organizer

Appearances count for 55% of others' impression of you. This includes your body language as well as your clothes. Here are some tips to help you convey confidence about yourself and your abilities:

- Learn to develop a poker face during the meeting itself, so as to show no emotion about motions or member comments. Remember, your job is to be impartial and record the events of the meeting.
- Learn to relax and enjoy your role.
- Dress like everyone else in the group but stay on the conservative side.
- Greet members as they come in and say a cheerful goodbye when the meeting is over.
- Always shake hands, as it is the universal opening ritual of any business transaction. Your grip should be firm but not overpowering, and remember to make eye contact.

Are there any other things you can recommend to help improve your confidence?

Listening Skills (A Good Listener)

Research has shown that you spend most of your day communicating. Of that communication time, half is spent listening. Research also shows that you only understand 50 percent of what you hear, and that your active forgetting process removes much of that within a day. This lack of understanding is extremely costly.

The cost of not listening is staggering, but the truth is, we can all learn to listen better, if we follow some key guidelines.

A successful Minute-Taker should always have a backup: a primary minute-taking method, such as OneNote, that includes partial or full audio backup is highly recommended. We don't always hear as much as we would like to think! After all, the recording of specific details is what makes useful, accurate minutes.

An audio recording can be made using the built in recording functionality of OneNote or by using a specialized digital recorder. While not all organizations will want to use audio recording tools, those that do will find that they are perfect for creating an invaluable archive of resource material. Digital audio recordings are very easy to reproduce and will benefit both the Minute-Taker and for anyone in the organization who could not attend the meeting.

Listening for Answers

The ability to really listen is an important skill for anyone to have. Listening allows you to understand where the other person is coming from, and shows you're interested in what he/she has to say.

Unfortunately, we all experience common listening problems.

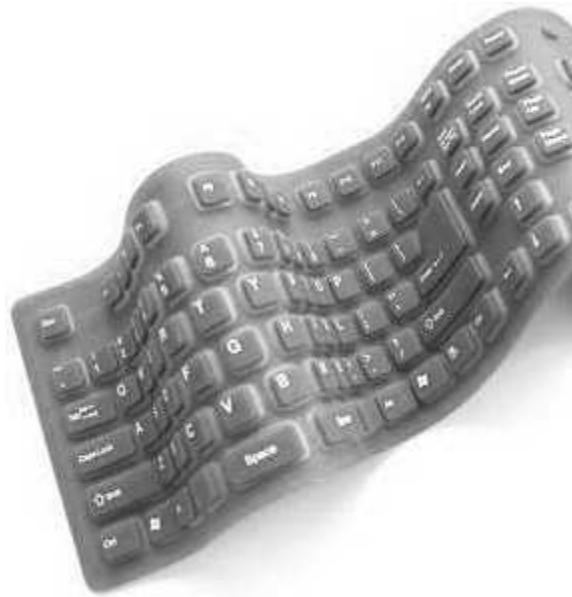
- We let our attention wander.
- We miss the real point.
- We let our emotions interfere.
- We step on the statements of others.
- We think ahead and miss what's being said right now.

To improve your listening skills, use the three steps of active listening.

- **Non-verbal messages:** Eye contact, an alert expression, head nodding, and a forward lean to the body expresses listening.
- **Cues or invitations:** These are the phrases like "uh-huh, O.K., Yes, go on, etc. that signal our attention and invite an individual to continue talking.
- **Clarification of what has been said:** We can do this in one of several ways: by asking questions, summarizing what has been said, or paraphrasing the message in your own words.

There are a number of articles on the Internet that talk about "proper protocol" for using laptops and recording equipment during a meeting. In order to maintain civility, participants should be as unobtrusive and courteous as possible. No one wants to be in a meeting where someone clatters away on their keyboard. But what about the Minute-Taker?

If you are the Minute-Taker you are expected to make a bit of noise; to assume you will remain silent is not being respectful of the job you are assigned to do. We recommend you try using one of those squishy roll-up keyboards, which are inexpensive and available from most computer retailers. They do take a bit of getting used to, but if you practice you can actually hit the keys quite hard and barely make a sound. They are also easy to keep clean as they are waterproof right up their plug: just wash them carefully in the sink!



Some people can type faster than they can write, unless they are fluent with their own shorthand. Also, many organizations make use of a meeting template. If you are responsible for recording minutes, using template will save you a lot of time. We will discuss using written and OneNote templates later on. We have also included a number of OneNote notebooks with this course that make use of these templates.

Critical Thinking (A Sound Critical Thinker)

To take accurate minutes, you must be able to think critically and quickly. Minutes should be a record of the facts of the meeting; they must not be tainted by biases or judgments.

We could spend a whole day talking about critical thinking, but the basics are similar to Edward DeBono's white hat thinking.

Imagine a computer that gives or records the facts and figures for which it is asked. The computer is neutral and objective. It does not offer interpretations or opinions. When wearing the white thinking hat, the thinker imitates a computer.

The person requesting the information should use focusing questions in order to obtain information or information gaps.

In practice there is a two-tiered system of information. The first tier contains checked and proven facts: first-class facts. The second tier contains facts that are believed to be true, but have not yet been fully checked: second-class facts.

There is a spectrum of likelihood ranging from always true to never true. In between, there are usable levels such as by and large, sometimes, and occasional. Information of this sort can be put out under the white hat, provided the appropriate frame is used to indicate the likelihood.

White hat thinking provides discipline and direction. The thinker strives to be more neutral and more objective in the presentation of information.

The white (absence of color) also indicates neutrality.

Organization Skills (An Excellent Organizer)

There are many different ways to organize your minute notes. Whatever method you choose, it must work for you, and it must be consistent and help you create accurate notes.

One method is to develop a template beforehand, depending on the style of the meeting and the minutes you will be preparing. We will look at some different styles later on this morning, but here's a sample template. (You would, of course, need more white space than is provided here – this is just a sample.)

As you can see, the templates are very basic and to the point. All you need is the facts!

Meeting Date	Meeting Location
Attendees	Regrets
Topics Discussed	
Decisions Reached	
Action Items	

Another method is to color-code your notes, or to use the margins of a page to note what part of the meeting you're recording.

Typing notes during the meeting will save you a lot of time later, and it will make organizing things a snap.

Meeting Agreements

Meeting agreements or guidelines can make a Minute-Taker's job much easier, particularly if the chair or several members of the meeting team are new and not aware of their responsibilities within the group. The forms are similar to a contract in that each player or member has the opportunity to see, in print, what is expected of him or her, and by signing it, agrees to carry out certain tasks. The agreements included here are designed as basic forms that can be easily customized to meet the specific needs of your organization.

The Chair

To ensure that the ABC Committee conducts its business in an efficient manner, I, _____, the chair of the committee, hereby promise to do the following:

- Give all meeting participants adequate warning of an upcoming meeting.
- Prepare a detailed agenda.
- Allow all sides of an argument to be heard.
- Encourage all members to participate in a discussion.
- Restate all motions before a vote is taken and then state the outcome.
- Insist that complicated motions and resolutions be submitted in writing.
- Avoid sending the Minute-Taker out of the room during the meeting to run errands.
- Permit the Minute-Taker to take a break when the group does.
- Be familiar with the parliamentary procedures used to govern the assembly.

Chair

The Recording Secretary

To ensure that the ABC Committee conducts its business in an efficient manner, I, _____, the recording secretary, hereby promise to do the following:

- Notify the chair of any unfinished business, motions, or reports that are due at the upcoming meeting.
- Send out all agendas and accompanying material promptly.
- Make arrangements for any necessary equipment or refreshments.
- Arrive at the meeting at least 20 minutes early.
- Be prepared and organized and have any required photocopying completed.
- Alert the chair when a quorum is present.
- Provide the organization with objective, accurate minutes.
- Be familiar with the parliamentary procedures used to govern the assembly.

Recording Secretary

The Meeting Participant

To ensure that the ABC Committee conducts its business in an efficient manner, I, _____, hereby promise to do the following:

- Read the agenda and all accompanying material, including the previous minutes, before the meeting.
- Bring all necessary reports and information to the meeting.
- Be prepared to discuss the items on the agenda.
- Avoid emotional and tactless remarks.
- Address all remarks through the chair.
- Put all complicated motions and resolutions in writing.
- Listen to the remarks of others with an open mind.
- Give everyone an equal chance to speak.
- Avoid asking the recording secretary to run errands for me during the meeting.
- Be familiar with the parliamentary procedures used to govern the assembly.

Meeting Participant

Further Reading:

- ✓ 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>
- ✓ Mina's Guide to Minute Taking, Eli Mina Consulting Vancouver, BC, Canada
- ✓ Minutes for meetings ,Second edition published in 2019 Printed on recycled paper by Footprint Workers Co-operative