

Meeting Minutes Dos and Don'ts



Minutes are a legal document and an important record of your decisions. Guidelines on when to take minutes and what to record.

by Craig Bystrynski

Taking minutes is a key role at any meeting. But it's often a function that's taken for granted. Anyone can take notes, right? Actually, meeting minutes play a key legal function, and it's important to take them correctly. Here are some notable dos and don'ts when it comes to taking minutes.

Do keep minutes at all general meetings and board meetings. If your group is incorporated, this is one way to maintain the legal protection the corporate shield gives to your officers.

Do keep minutes at any meeting where people vote. At committee meetings where there is no voting, you might choose to keep minutes for your records. But minutes are not required for legal purposes.

Do list where the meeting takes place, along with the time and date it starts.

Do list the number of attendees (approximate if the group is large) and whether a quorum is present.

Do format your notes to follow the agenda. If you don't normally create an agenda, you should. It makes the meeting more orderly, lets attendees know what to expect at the meeting, and makes taking minutes significantly easier.

Do record all motions and the outcome of votes.

Do be concise. It's not necessary to go on at length in the minutes. Just record specific motions and votes, and key business.

Don't list the names of people who make and second motions. You might put individuals on the spot in case of a lawsuit. (And yes, it does happen.)

Don't detail the debate over an issue. In your formal notes, you just need the facts. Minutes should record what is *done* at meetings, not what is *said*.

Don't list the vote count. Outcome is enough.

Don't be shy about asking for clarification during the meeting to get a point straight in your notes.

Don't wait to type up the minutes from your notes. Do it the same day or the next day, while you still remember what occurred.

As on all matters of meeting procedure, Robert's Rules of Order offers information on taking proper minutes. A good reference that's easier to follow than simply reading Robert's Rules is Webster's New World Robert's Rules of Order, Simplified and Applied.