



## Taking Minutes in a Meeting

The main purpose of the minutes is to record who is at a meeting, decisions taken and action points. This article is intended to help you with your note-taking and drafting and considers four areas: the committee, the meeting, style and content.



### 1. The Committee

Make yourself familiar with the committee and its remit. Engage with the subject matter.

Nurture a good relationship with the convener who can give a steer on how much of the discussion should be recorded. Get to know the members and tune in to the dynamics of the group.

### 2. The Meeting

Sit where you can see and hear everyone present, probably beside the convener. Note most of what is said to avoid missing something important. This can help you remain focussed. Ask the convener to clarify if you are unclear as to what action has been agreed, but avoid interrupting unduly.

### 3. Style

Try to adopt a consistent approach to layout and include clear headings and references, numbering each document, page and item. The General Assembly's Committee on Records checks the minutes of the Church's Unincorporated Councils and Committees each year; you might find its checklist helpful.

Minutes should be written in the past tense and the third person. Positive, rather than emotive, language should be used and colloquialisms avoided. Stick to the facts and be objective. Don't allow your own views to influence the minutes.

Excellent grammar is essential; read up on the topic or find a mentor if you are weak in this area.

### 4. Content of Minutes

Prepare a draft in advance of the meeting, utilising meeting papers to generate content. Most will include a succinct introduction that can be adapted.



Think about the readers' perspective; the Minutes should make sense to the non-attendees too. A well phrased sentence at the beginning of each item can clearly establish the context and point to any papers under discussion.

Be sensitive to the breadth of views within the Church and to the need for confidentiality in certain matters. A record apart can be used where necessary, but it is good to adopt a transparent approach generally.

Work hard to summarise long and complex discussions into a few sentences. Edit your own draft and try to get to the heart of the discussion.

Don't despair if the convener's editing pen is well utilised, but try to learn from the amendments and adjust your approach next time.

Further reading and resources

James L Weatherhead (ed.), *The Constitution and Laws of the Church of Scotland*, (Edinburgh: Board of Practice and Procedure, 1997), 78-81.