

Best Practices for Effective Minute Taking

This guide provides some best practices for minute taking while considering privacy issues.

A. Tips for Taking Minutes

Why keep minutes?

Minutes are an important aspect to the operations of the University. Minutes normally contain enough information to:

1. Maintain an accurate historical account of a meeting held
2. Allow for a clear understanding of the business that was conducted for those present and not present

What is important to include in your minutes?

As a guideline, your minutes should contain the following pieces of information:

1. Name of body, associated office, department or organization
2. Date, time and location of the meeting
3. The list of attendees, guests and regrets (including chair, and recording secretary)
4. A record of all motions that were presented
5. A clear distinction between open and closed sections of the meeting
6. Time of adjournment
7. Consecutively numbered pages (e.g. use a header with meeting name, date, and page number)
8. Include the full title, and date, of committee reports presented during the meeting

What are some guiding principles for effective minute-taking?

BEFORE the meeting:

1. Understand what is expected to be included in the meeting minutes and with rules of procedure
2. If possible, meet with the Chair to set the agenda
3. Use the agenda to formulate an outline for recording purposes
4. Make sure your recording “tool” (laptop, paper, pens, recorder) is in working order and bring a back-up
5. Make an extra copy of the agenda and/or materials to bring with you
6. Read and review all meeting materials
7. Prepare an attendance sheet (know who is expected to attend / who sent regrets)

DURING the meeting:

1. When possible, sit next to the meeting Chair
2. Follow the sequence of the meeting using your agenda template
3. Listen “actively”
4. Focus on documenting the main ideas, processes and outcomes (many follow the guideline that minutes should contain a record of what was done, not what was said)
5. Record all motions and results (if not clear on the wording, ask for the motion to be repeated)

AFTER the meeting... composing the minutes:

1. If needed, ask the Chair for clarification on any issues discussed
2. Draft the minutes as soon as possible while everything is still fresh in your mind
3. If possible, include only factual and concise statements about each issue discussed, omitting unnecessary details
4. Include clear identifiers as to the nature of each document presented
5. Record in the past tense and in the third person
6. Proofread, then proofread again
7. It is the assembly’s responsibility to approve and amend the minutes, if required, at the next meeting

B. Minute Taking with Privacy in Mind:

How does the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA) affect meeting minutes?

1. Minutes of meetings may be accessed by the public
2. Keep personal information out of minutes, when possible, as this helps to protect personal privacy

What is the definition of Personal Information?

Personal Information means recorded information about an identifiable individual, including, but is not limited to such basic details as name, home address, telephone numbers, gender, age and marital or family status, race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religious or political affiliations, employee history, employee number, student number, health information, educational history, disabilities, blood type, financial history, criminal history, other persons’ opinions about an individual, an individual’s private views or opinions, and name, address and phone number of parent, guardian, spouse or next of kin. Personal information does not include the name, title, business address, and business contact numbers of an employee.

Source: Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA), s.2.

For more information please visit www.brocku.ca/secretariat/ or contact the Freedom of Information and Privacy Coordinator at 905-688-5550, ext. 5380, or by emailing mhansen@brocku.ca.