

Minute Taking Guide (Working Guide)

A practical guide for community and voluntary groups

1. What are minutes?

Minutes are not a full record of everything said in a meeting.

They are a clear and simple record of what matters — what was discussed at a high level, what was agreed, and what needs to happen next.

The most important part of any set of minutes is the decisions made and the actions agreed.

Minutes also provide a shared record so that everyone understands what has been agreed and who is responsible. If actions are not clearly recorded, the work of the meeting can easily be lost.

2. How to take minutes

Taking minutes is a straightforward process once you know what to focus on.

Before the meeting, take a few minutes to read the agenda and open your template. It helps to have the previous minutes nearby, as you may need to refer back to earlier actions.

During the meeting, your role is to listen for key points rather than trying to capture everything. Under each agenda item, make a short note of what was discussed, then clearly record any decisions and actions.

It's okay if your notes are messy during the meeting — the aim is to capture enough to write them up clearly afterwards.

If a decision is unclear, it is always okay to ask the facilitator to confirm it before the meeting moves on.

After the meeting, write up your notes while they are still fresh. Keep the language clear and simple, and make sure all actions are easy to understand. Once complete, the minutes should be shared for review and then circulated to members.

3. What to capture during a meeting

Each set of minutes should begin with the basic details of the meeting, including the date, time, location, who attended, and any apologies.

For each agenda item, a short summary is enough — usually just one or two lines to capture the topic discussed. If a decision is made, it should be recorded clearly. Where actions are agreed, these should always state what needs to be done, who is responsible, and when it should happen.

It is important to remember that minutes are not a transcript. You do not need to record every comment, opinion, or back-and-forth discussion. The purpose is to reflect the outcome of the discussion, not the detail of how people got there.

4. What good minutes look like (example)

Item: Community Event Planning

A short discussion took place on plans for a summer event in July. It was agreed that the event would go ahead on 15 July.

John will book the venue by 1 May, and Mary will coordinate volunteers.

5. Writing style

Minutes should be written in plain English and be easy to read. They should be clear, neutral, and focused on facts.

Long paragraphs, jargon, or overly formal language should be avoided. If someone unfamiliar with the meeting can understand what was decided and what needs to happen next, then the minutes are doing their job.

6. After the meeting

Minutes should be written up as soon as possible, ideally on the same day or shortly after. This helps ensure accuracy and reduces the risk of missing key points.

Once drafted, they should be shared with the facilitator or chair for a quick check, and then circulated to members. A final version should be saved in the agreed location so it can be accessed later if needed.

Before sharing your minutes, take a moment to check that decisions are clear, actions are assigned, and the language is easy to understand.

7. Final tips

Minute taking gets easier with practice. The key is not to overthink it. Focus on what matters, keep it clear, and make sure actions are easy to follow.

If you are ever unsure, it is always okay to ask the facilitator to confirm a decision before the meeting moves on.

8. Template (simple structure)

Every set of minutes should follow a consistent structure:

1. Meeting details (date, time, location)
2. Attendance and apologies
3. Minutes of previous meeting
4. Matters arising
5. Agenda items (summary, decisions, actions)
6. Any other business
7. Date of next meeting

Important Reminder

Minutes should focus on what was agreed and what happens next. They do not need to capture everything that was said, and should always be written in clear, simple language.

Meeting Details

Name of Meeting:	
Date:	
Time:	
Location:	

Attendance

List who attended the meeting and who sent apologies in advance. This provides a clear record of participation and helps track engagement over time.

Present:

Apologies:

Minutes of Previous Meeting

Record whether the previous minutes were agreed as an accurate record. If any corrections were made, these should be noted briefly.

Matters Arising

For each agenda item, record a short summary of the discussion, followed by any decisions made and actions agreed. The focus should be on outcomes rather than the detail of the discussion.

Agenda Items

Item 1: [Title]

Summary: Provide a short, high-level overview of what was discussed, usually no more than one or two lines.

Decision (if any): Clearly state what was agreed, using simple and direct language.

Action: Record what needs to be done, who is responsible, and when it should happen, if a timeline is agreed.

Item 2: [Title]

Summary:

Decision (if any):

Action: (What / Who / When)

(repeat as needed)

Any Other Business

Use this section to record any additional items raised that were not on the agenda. Keep entries brief and focus on any outcomes or actions.

Date of Next Meeting

Record the agreed date, time, and location of the next meeting, or note if this will be confirmed later.