

write

Managing Minutes and Email Tips

A presentation for PACE
February 2017

The golden rule of good communication is to focus on your audience (listeners or readers).



Plain English helps all writing

The One-Read test

Something is written in plain English when the intended reader can read, understand, and act on a document after just one reading.

Plain English focuses on the reader.

Plain English includes all aspects of planning, writing, and reviewing.

Managing Minutes

Minutes include notes from meetings
and action points

Who reads your minutes and why?

People read minutes to:

- remember the action that needs to be taken
- see decisions that were made (and maybe why they were made)
- know what to discuss at the next meeting
- note progress
- clarify any future disputes about what was agreed.

7-step process

1. Decide which type of minutes you need
2. Get to know the agenda
3. Take notes during the meeting
4. Write up the minutes
5. Check for accuracy, consistency, and tense
6. Edit using the principles of plain English
7. Proofread the minutes

1. Decide which type of minutes you need

The Chair and the minute-taker should create a template that suits their readers.

You usually don't need:

- every word that was said
- 'who said what'
- details of discussion (instead just key points).

1. Decide which type of minutes you need

Tables make decisions and actions clear.

| Item | Presenter | Key points | Decision | Action needed | Who takes action | When action needed |
|------|-----------|------------|----------|---------------|------------------|--------------------|
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |

2. Get to know the agenda

How will this help you to take better notes?

1. You can structure your notes template to follow the agenda.
2. You can understand what will be discussed, so you will know what to listen for.
3. You can familiarise yourself with technical terms, names of people, and places.
4. You can read attachments to deepen your knowledge.

3. Take notes during the meeting

The notes are just for you, so don't worry about spelling, neatness, or writing every word.

- You can record your meetings as a backstop.
- You can use a laptop or handwrite.
- Develop your own shorthand.
- Use highlighters and symbols for key points, decision, and action.

4. Write up the minutes

Write up your minutes as soon after the meeting as possible.

- Use plain English (usually simplifying what people said is ok — unless it's a resolution).
- Use names, positions, and terms consistently.
- Use verb tenses consistently.

| Before the meeting | During the meeting | After the meeting |
|---|--|--|
| Past past Sue <i>had talked</i> to the client. | Simple past The board <i>accepted</i> the proposal. | A future verb form The manager <i>will start</i> recruitment. |

After you've written the minutes

5. Check for accuracy, consistency, and tense

Check numbers, money, and names particularly.

6. Edit using the principles of plain English

- Have you missed anything?
- Have you included unnecessary detail?
- Have you grouped content well?
- Is it easy to read?

7. Proofread the minutes

Check spelling, grammar, and punctuation. You might find it easier to proofread hard copy rather than electronic. Have a break between editing and proofreading.

Minute takers use lots of skills



Illustration from *The Cat in the Hat* by
Dr Seuss

Tips for time management

- Block out time in your diary before and after a meeting.
- Set expectations for when the minutes will be ready.
- Agree with your chairperson if they will check your draft before it's circulated to participants.
- Formal minutes aren't confirmed until the next meeting; until then they are draft.
- What are your tips?

Tips for listening

- Sit near the chairperson so you can talk to them easily if you need to.
- Ask for clarification in the meeting: ‘How would you like me to minute that?’ ‘Can I check my wording on that point?’ and so on.
- Listen for the main ideas (knowing the agenda helps).
- Stay focused — watch the speaker, don’t get emotionally involved, drink water, move, be rested.
- What are your tips?

Email tips

What one thing bugs you most about emails?

Do you have a solution for it?

Five email tips

1. Target your email well

- Think carefully about who you should write the email ‘to’ and who should be copied (cc).
- Do not expect people who are only ‘copied’ to read the email.

2. Use plain English writing style

- Ensure your email looks good. Break up blocks of text and use sub-headings. Remember, first impressions count.
- Use bullet points if appropriate.
- Write complete sentences, not just notes. This will help your messages to flow.

Five email tips

3. Put main messages first and detail later

- Give your email as meaningful a subject line as possible.
- Write any action or answers you need very clearly and concisely.
- If you become involved in an email chain that changes topics somewhere in the chain, edit the subject line to make the new topic clear.
- Put anything essential into the email itself so there's no risk of it being missed (an attachment or link is a barrier).
- Sometimes an attachment or link is appropriate — for example, if a document's particular format is important.

Five email tips

4. Be professional

- Proofread before sending. Mistakes make it harder for people to trust what you say and take you seriously.
- If you want to include someone new in an email chain, introduce them to it by saying why you are including them, what you expect them to do, and summarising what's been said in the chain so far.
- Use an appropriate greeting and sign-off. What is appropriate will depend on your organisation's style and your relationship with the person you are emailing. If you are unsure what style is appropriate for a reader, match the style that they use with you, as long as it is still professional.

Five email tips

5. Use email carefully

- Put the recipient's address in last to avoid sending it too early or to the wrong person.
- If you are writing an email while you are angry, take some time out before you send it. Then re-read and edit it carefully.

Tips for writing anything

Make the verbs work

The committee *made the decision* to proceed.

The committee *decided* to proceed.

Tips for writing anything

Cut out wordy phrases and use simple words

For the purposes of establishing your requirements, we'll send you a survey.

We'll send you a survey for the purposes of establishing your requirements.

We'll send you a survey to establish your requirements.

We'll send you a survey to find out what you need.

Tips for writing anything

Remove false subjects #1

There are four main benefits with this plan.

This plan has four main benefits.

Tips for writing anything

Remove false subjects #2

It is understood that the project requires...

The committee understand that the project requires...

or

The project requires...

Tips for writing anything

Keep sentences short and simple.

Before:

The meeting heard that the option cannot be taken further, mainly because the two parties are unable to agree on the specific means of evaluation; however, there are several alternative options that can be investigated.

After:

The meeting heard the option cannot be progressed, mainly because the two parties disagree on evaluation methods. However, other options are available.

**Come to a Write
workshop, or we
can come to you.**

www.write.co.nz

Follow our blog: write.co.nz/blog