**Tips for Excellent Minute Taking**

**Understand the meeting.**

* Meeting minutes have no value if they are not accurate.
* Names and terms, especially the organisation’s own jargon, must be spelled correctly.
* You need to get it right the first time in your notes: It’s very difficult to take accurate notes if you are unfamiliar with what you’re hearing. A good minute taker will prepare themselves ahead of the meeting.
* Make sure you understand the agenda and review related documents, such as minutes from previous meetings, related hearings or interviews. Based on these documents, build a glossary of names and terms. A good glossary makes minute taking easier, faster and more accurate.

**Make the time**

* Leave ample time for preparation, for the meeting itself, and for writing up the minutes after the meeting.
* Arrive at the meeting with plenty to time to set up properly.
* After the meeting, you will need to clear up any questions as quickly as possible.
* Ideally the Secretary and the Chair, should speak immediately after the meeting to clarify any new names and terms.
* Write up your notes while the meeting itself is still fresh in your mind. The best Secretaries generally write up their meeting notes in the hours immediately following the meeting, and certainly within 48 hours after the end of the meeting.
* A delay in circulating meeting minutes usually means a delay in taking action. Prompt meeting minutes are likely to be not only more accurate, but more effective.
* Some people underestimate how long it will take them to create the final minutes – leading to a final document that is difficult to read, inaccurate, or badly delayed.

**Set up for success.**

* For the meeting itself, make sure you know where you’ll need to go.
* There is nothing worse than rushing into the meeting at the last minute or even late.
* At the meeting, sit where you can see and hear proceedings clearly.
* Prepare your materials for the meeting: your laptop or notepad, your audio recording device (if you are using one), your agenda.

**Total neutrality.**

* Your meetings will consist of students and senior members of staff. Some students will have lots of ideas and points they wish to raise. Some of these points may contentious and be calling the University into question.
* Make sure you keep your minutes neutral and objective.
* So make sure you don’t take sides – either in the meeting itself or in your minutes. At a purely practical level, the minute-taker should not be participating in the debate. It’s terribly difficult to scribble or type and talk at the same time. Perhaps even more important, the minute taker must be seen by the other participants as being objective. Ideally, the person taking minutes should have no personal interest in the outcome of the meeting.

**Be a good gardener: know when to prune.**

* A hallmark of good meeting minutes is the right balance between in-depth coverage of complex topics, and concise summary and paraphrase of repetition.
* A good minute taker also knows when not to type or write. In these moments, the minute taker will probably be pausing, listening, rephrasing and mentally summarising. It’s also important that the minute taker can express the information clearly.

**Use a consistent template.**

* The layout of meeting minutes doesn’t need to be fancy. But it does need to be well-designed for its purpose.
* The concept of a template also includes the style of writing, such as the level of formality of the writing and “house styles” for names and abbreviations. If a number of individuals will share the minute taking responsibility, make sure they’re all using same template, the same glossary, the same understanding of how much information to record, and the same style of writing.

**Four eyes are better than two.**

* So you’re the Secretary. You’ve typed the final full stop and proofread your own work. Is the document done? No. At this stage you are no longer the best person to review the minutes – no matter how skilled you are. You need an editor.
* Working in partnership with Secretaries, editors give feedback to help minute takers improve both an individual set of meeting minutes and their minute taking work in general. When you’re taking meeting minutes, choose an editor who has good writing skills, an eye for detail, and the time to review your minutes while they are still fresh in your mind.
* The editor needs to assess whether the minutes are clear, easy to read, free of typos, in line with the agreed template. They also need to check that spellings of names and terms agree with the glossary.
* Contrary to what you might think, the editor does not need to have attended the meeting. In fact, someone who hasn’t attended will bring a fresh point of view to whether or not the minutes make sense. If your minutes make sense to an outside reader, you are well on your way to taking good minutes.