



Minutes and Record Keeping

Being a secretary for your organization is not a job to take lightly. This responsibility should not be assigned/delegated to just anyone. Think about these responsibilities when you are considering who will fulfill this role:

- Is this person reliable; does he/she keep appointments?
- Is this person well organized; does he/she complete tasks in a timely way?
- Is this person on top of what is going on; is he/she able to appropriately weed out the trivial information and record the important facts for the record?

As you can see, the role of a secretary is more than "just making minutes." The secretary is responsible for complete, objective record keeping; he/she is, in effect, the historian.

What the secretary records will be referred to by current members as a reminder of finished and unfinished business, what actions were taken, and what needs follow-up. It will also be kept for future members to read to gain an understanding of where the organization has been and why.

Many organizations make it the secretary's responsibility to notify the membership about upcoming meetings -- time, date, location -- as well as any important items to be discussed.

It is critical that the secretary attend all meetings. If your organization has a structure that includes committees -- be they ad hoc or standing -- there always needs to be a secretary present to accurately record what has transpired. It is not necessary to take down everything unless members request that their remarks be entered for the record. It is necessary, however, to take complete notes. Motions and resolutions do need to be taken verbatim and should be read back during the meeting to make sure they have been accurately recorded. (More information on minute taking is included in the second half of this handout.)

It is the secretary's responsibility to signal the chair and ask questions regarding the subject being discussed for purposes of clarification. A secretary should not wait until the meeting has been adjourned to clear up any confusion; individuals can lose their perspective, issues can become less important, and one's memory can alter what actually occurred.

Immediately after the meeting, the secretary must go over his/her notes while everything is still fresh for the following information:

- Type of meeting (executive, standing committee, etc.)
- Date, time and place
- Time of call to order
- Approval and/or amendments to previous meeting minutes
- Record of reports from standing and special committees
- General matters
- Record of proposals, resolutions, motions, seconding and final disposition, a summary of the discussion, record of vote.
- Time of adjournment
- Nomination of submission and transcriber's name.

Once the minutes have been transcribed into draft form, they should be submitted to the chair for review and/or correction. Once they are returned they need to be prepared in a formal form -- preferably agreed upon beforehand -- for final approval at the next meeting.

These minutes should be sent out to all members within 3 or 4 days of the meeting. This allows members time to read the minutes for accuracy before the next meeting and while the previous meeting is still fresh in their minds.

Some helpful hints on format and final preparation are as follows:

- Use good quality paper of standard size
- If you plan on typing on both sides of the paper, be sure it is heavy and durable; otherwise the type will show through.
- Use a standard format:
 - capitalize and center the heading designating the meeting
 - indent paragraphs five spaces
 - list names of those in attendance and those absent
 - double space the text
 - double space between paragraphs and triple space between items in order
 - of business
 - if you use captions, put them in the margins in capitals
 - when recording sums of money write them first in words and then put the
 - figures in ()
 - number each page at center bottom

MINUTE TAKING

It is often helpful for the secretary to prepare himself/herself before each meeting. He/She should be sure to read the minutes of previous meetings, paying attention to style and format and reviewing the agenda and any attached documents. If the organization has agreed upon a standard format for minutes, he/she can use a standardized form and fill in preliminary rough draft information before the meeting so that the discussion may be added as it occurs.

The secretary should be present at all meetings. If he/she is unable to attend, a substitute, preferably with the characteristics defined earlier, needs to be appointed. If a substitute is taking minutes, the following hints will make the job easier:

- Identify yourself before speaking
- Speak slowly
- Present motions in writing to the secretary (this is a good practice even when the regular secretary is present)
- Raise hands high during vote counting
- Summarize discussions

There are several ways to take minutes and each organization needs to choose the most appropriate method for them. Minutes can be recorded in writing or on tape. If you choose to tape the minutes, you can record the entire proceedings and later listen to them, pulling out the pertinent information following the guidelines related earlier. Taping an entire meeting is an extreme form of minute taking and can be very time consuming; it is akin to sitting through the same meeting twice!

A second, more practical option is to record a summary of debates, agreements and disagreements with a sufficient explanation of the character of each.

The third method is to tape action minutes whereby the very essence of decisions reached and responsibilities assigned is recorded. In any of these cases make note of the following:

- The names of people proposing any action, stating an opinion or making a motion
- Any motions, resolutions, amendments, decisions or conclusions (take down word-for-word)
- Who seconded the motion
- Whether or not a motion was withdrawn and what assignments were made and to whom

It is often helpful for both minute taking and for those attending the meeting to have either the chair or the secretary summarize decisions that are reached. The summarizer should be most careful in clarifying those points of greatest controversy.

Source:

The National Order of Omega <http://www.orderofomega.org/pdf/orgn.pdf> which had given credit to the Student Organization Development Center at the University of Michigan.