

3 tips for improving minute-taking skills

Unless you're a trained stenographer, keeping thorough minutes can be a challenge. If you're responsible for taking minutes, here are three tips to help you improve your skills.

Start with an outlined page. Don't begin the meeting with an empty page, says Ilene Marcus, founder of Aligned Workplace, an organizational consultancy. "Pre-populate whatever you can prior to the meeting—the attendees, standing agenda items, items to be voted on and meeting handouts," she says. "Use the outline of the meeting agenda to set up your outline." Also, use headings such as "discussion," "issue" and "actions steps" to describe what's happening in the meeting.

Summarize discussions. Don't try to write verbatim what's said, advises Marcus. If you're frantically trying to fill in every statement that's made, you're going to get lost and miss important details. Listen and make sure you get the essence of the conversation while attributing quotes and ideas to the correct person.

Use an audio recorder. "For safety and fact-checking, record the meeting with either a digital recorder or an app on your smartphone," says Paige Dawson Rodriguez, owner of MPD Ventures, a public relations company that frequently needs to keep meeting minutes. You still need to keep written notes because recorders can fail, but it can be helpful if you need to double-check something. As you're writing minutes, occasionally note the time on the recorder so it will be easier to find a specific moment in the meeting if you need it.