

Welcome to the second issue of **Admin Link** for 2009. Independent Schools Queensland publishes this newsletter quarterly, providing office staff with information relevant to their position. ISQ welcomes input from school staff about the type of information that they would like to see addressed in the newsletter.

This issue looks at Writing Meeting Minutes.

FOCUS

Writing 'Good' Meeting Minutes

Is it part of your role to write and distribute Minutes of meetings? If it is something you haven't done before, or haven't done very often in the past, then the task can seem quite daunting. However, there are lots of strategies that will assist you to do this competently and stress-free.

Minutes are purely a record of what was said at the meeting. They should cover four things:

- where and when the meeting took place;
- who was there and who was not;
- what has been decided; and
- who has agreed to do what.

In the past, 'Minute takers' were all highly skilled shorthand writers whose job it was to take down Minutes in a speedy and accurate fashion. However, shorthand is not a skill that is much in demand these days because many managers are typing in their own text and data, rather than dictating it to their secretary as they did in years gone past.

Today, some people learn speed writing or learn some form of abbreviated note taking skills. Many people quickly develop their own symbols for often-used words and phrases, or write the beginning and ending of a word and fill in the gaps later. This is a system that often works well for an individual, but it is almost impossible for any one else to decipher the work of another individual should that become necessary!

So what other strategies can you utilise for good minute taking. IAAP shorthand (www.iaap-hq.org) recommends the following:

- Tape record the entire meeting. This way if you have any questions on your notes or the discussion, you will have a record you can refer back to. However, you shouldn't try to type the complete set of Minutes from the tape, just use it as a back-up if necessary.
- Prepare some papers prior to going into the meeting which show the items to be discussed and with some information already filled in that you can add to. This works well with standard agenda items such as 'present' (list all the attendees then just simply cross out those who are an apology for the meeting), the moving of the 'Minutes of the previous meeting' or 'financial accounts' and so on.
- Focus on action items, not the general discussion. Who said what is not usually included in the Minutes. You should always keep in mind that the purpose of the Minutes is to define decisions made and what actions are to be taken, by whom, and when. List the business transacted, not the talk!

- You could take this a step further and have pre-printed motion sheets on which you can record the motion, and note who moved and seconded it. If possible, read back the motion to the members before it is voted on. This will ensure that you get the wording exactly as the person proposed it. You could also have sheets typed up with headings such as 'Matters arising'; Chairman's report, and so on, with a column for action on the right-hand side. If you bullet-point the actions, you won't have to read through pages of notes to see who agreed to do what.
- If you need to refer to other documents in your Minutes, refer to them as Attachment A (or Attachment 1) and so on. Don't re-type all the information.
- Be objective. Write in the same tense throughout and avoid using people's names except when they 'Move' and 'Second' a motion.
- Avoid any personal observations or words that might imply emotions or conjecture. 'Dull' writing is the key to appropriate Minutes!
- Ask someone who was at the meeting to check your Minutes for you before they are distributed to the whole group.



The main tip is to try and write up the Minutes as soon as possible after the meeting. The fresher the meeting is in your mind, the easier you will be able to write an accurate account of what went on.

Good Minutes should:

- record discussions accurately and fairly;
- be short and to the point;
- show decisions clearly marked as agreed to by the committee members; and
- follow the Agenda headings so that they are easily understood.

So, why do we need to record Minutes?

Well, without Minutes:

- nobody can be exactly sure what was decided at the meeting;
- nobody can be exactly sure who followed through on actions decided at previous meetings;
- nobody can be sure what who did or did not attend meetings; and
- in extreme cases the group can be vulnerable to take-over by a member or members of the group who want to take it over.

References:

www.iaap-hq.org
www.elvon.org.uk
www.flippingheck.com

NOTES OF MEETING

Whilst the above points usually refer to more formal meetings, such as Board Meetings, sometimes you may need to make a record of an informal meeting such as a staff social club which just summarises what plans were made and who will be responsible for following up.

You should still record the main points discussed and actions decided upon, but you may like to type them up in a less formal format, and simply call them 'Notes of the meeting held', or 'Summary of the meeting held', rather than the more formal 'Minutes of the Meeting held'.

FOUR TIPS ON HOW TO TAKE MEETING MINUTES

1. **Informal or formal?**

Before you type up Minutes for the first term for the school, committee or group, check previous Minutes to see if there is a pre-determined way of recording and communicating them.

2. **Agree with the meeting owner what your role is**

Ask if you are meant to just sit quietly taking notes, or are you expected to participate in the meeting as well? Meetings usually run more smoothly if the owner, facilitator and note-taker are three different people.

3. **Always take a back-up pen and paper**

No matter what your weapon – laptop, voice recorder, electronic whiteboard, etc, batteries can go flat, especially if the meeting lasts longer than expected!

4. **Remember who said what**

Draw a quick seating plan at the start of the meeting when people introduce themselves, and refer to it when necessary.

Reference:

www.mftrou.com/



Date Claimer



Twilight Seminar for School Admin Staff

Topic will be advised shortly

Tuesday 8 September
2009

5.00 - 7.00pm

(Afternoon tea from 4.30pm)

The ISQ Centre,
Brisbane



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for

PAs, Secretaries, Receptionists,
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Clerks, and other Admin Staff

For more information, please contact Carole Williamson at ISQ
on 3228 1515 or email: cwilliamson@aisq.qld.edu.au

**Program and Registration Form
coming to your school soon**

ANOTHER TIP

**Don't forget to put the date of the meeting
at the beginning of your notes - this will make
it easier to check on an agenda item should
you need to go back to your original notes.**

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