



“A Guide to Minute Taking”
*Principles, Standards and Practical
Tools*

**Roles and Responsibilities of the
SGMP Chapter Secretary**

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“A GUIDE TO MINUTE TAKING”

Principles, Standards and Practical Tools

WHAT MINUTES ARE

In a formal sense, minutes are the historical record of an officially convened meeting of an organized decision-making body, such as a board of directors, municipal council or executive committee. Informally, the term “*minutes*” can extend to mean a summary of a meeting of a group that is not formally organized, and may or may not have collective decision-making powers. Minutes should generally focus on decisions and actions taken by the group and may also capture the thought process that led to decisions.

WHY MINUTES ARE IMPORTANT

- Minutes enable an organization to meet its obligation to conduct business in a transparent and accountable manner. They keep the organization’s membership, stakeholders or the general public informed on the evolution of decisions that affect them.
- Minutes constitute the history of the organization’s decision-making process.
- Well-organized filing and electronic archiving systems make it possible to use minutes to track past decisions. They can also help prevent repetition of past mistakes or making decisions that conflict with established policies.
- Minutes are a follow-up tool. They serve to remind individuals who attended a meeting and those who missed it of decisions made and follow-up commitments.
- Minutes can help generate the next meeting agenda.
 - For example, issues that were not concluded at a meeting are recorded in the minutes, and then scheduled as “*unfinished business*” at a subsequent meeting.

Taking minutes can be intimidating without the required skills or without any knowledge of the group and its work.

It is advised that minutes be transcribed within a week of the Board meeting, while everything is fresh on the mind, but no later than two weeks following the meeting.

TEN KEY PRINCIPLES FOR MINUTE TAKING

1. **Accuracy and completeness.** Minutes should be an accurate and complete record of what took place at a meeting. With the exception of closed meetings or very formal meetings, they should cover both the decisions made and the thought process that led to them. Years later, readers should be able to understand what a decision was and why it was made.

It is inappropriate to alter the minutes before circulating them to the group, except for the sake of accuracy. For example, if a minute taker missed the meaning of a technical point, or did not capture a decision correctly, the group’s leader may correct the minutes. However, editing minutes to change an inconvenient decision is not appropriate. Minutes must reflect what actually was done, not what someone wishes had been done.

2. **A focus on key points and decisions.** Except when verbatim (*word-for-word*) minutes are required for legal or other reasons, minutes should focus on key points and decisions, not on every word said. Individuals rarely express themselves perfectly. Recording their exact words usually provides little or no value and may increase tension and discomfort.
3. **A focus on the business at hand.** Minutes should focus on the business aspects of the meeting and exclude any gossip or extracurricular exchange of information. Simply follow the agenda and record the progress.
4. **A collective focus.** Minutes should focus primarily on the group as a whole, and not on what each individual said or did. Under this principle, minutes would usually not attribute comments to individuals and would not include names of movers and seconders of motions. Individual votes would not be recorded unless, by law or policy, members are entitled to request that their dissent or abstention be recorded, or unless a roll-call vote was taken.
5. **Objectivity.** Minutes should be free of offensive or inappropriate language, even if such language was used at a meeting. They should not include subjective interpretations of the mood of the meeting or the tone in which comments were made. Phrases like, “*There was a heated discussion,*” “*The presentation was very motivational,*” or “*Mr. Davenport was emphatic*” do not belong in the minutes. The document should be clean and objective.
6. **Consistency.** Minutes across the same organization should share the same general look and style, and should comply with content and format standards. Such standards should be approved as a policy of the organization.
7. **Professionalism.** Minutes should be reviewed thoroughly and be free of typographical, grammatical or technical errors. A knowledgeable person should proofread technical terms for clarity before draft minutes are circulated to members.
8. **Readability.** Minutes should be clearly laid out, visually appealing and easy to read. Long paragraphs should be replaced by concise point-form summaries. Word processing features (bolding, underlining, etc.) should be used to highlight key points and decisions.
9. **A logical flow.** Minutes should be logically organized, even if the meeting itself was fragmented and confusing. If the group addresses an agenda item sporadically throughout the meeting, all events that relate to the same item should be grouped in one place.
10. **Archivability.** Minutes should be easy to archive and retrieve electronically. Standardized names of computer files should be used across the organization. Consistent word strings should be used, wherever possible, for ease of electronic searches. The naming of electronic files should make it easy to link minutes, agendas and reports. The coding of decisions and motions should make it easy to track their history.

STANDARDS FOR THE LAYOUT OF MINUTES

A standardized layout of the minutes provides a consistent look across the organization. Word processing features should be used to make the standard layout readable and visually appealing. Here are a few suggestions:

Header

A running header, indicating the nature of the document and its status on every page should be considered. Having the same information at the top of every page will ensure that, if pages separate, readers will be able to re-assemble them easily. A running header should indicate:

- Name of the group/chapter
- Type of meeting
- Date
- Page number

Other Layout-Related Tips

- Establish font styles and sizes (which may be increased when highlighting decisions or motions), desired length of paragraphs (try for no more than five lines each) and how much white space is needed to make minutes readable and visually appealing.
 - The font style you should use is Times Roman 12 pt.
- Use word processing features for clear identification of consensus, decisions, action items and motions.
 - Consider **bolding**, underlining, *italicizing*, etc.
- Use Line Numbering throughout your document for ease in correcting the minutes.

MINUTES OF FORMAL MEETINGS

OPENING SEGMENT

The opening segment of the minutes of a formal meeting should describe the context of the meeting. Specific details to be recorded are:

- Meeting type
 - Regular, Special, Closed (in Executive Session), Continued or Annual
- Name of Group
 - Board, Council, Committee, General Membership, Shareholders, etc.
- Name of organization
- Day, date and location of the meeting (an actual address may be needed)
- Attendance
 - For a Board meeting, record the names of those who attended and those who were excused/unexcused, along with their officer positions.
 - List the guests present
- Quorum
 - State that a quorum was present
- Who called the meeting to order
 - Not always the president)
- Time the meeting was called to order

A few tips on the importance of recording attendance:

- It is important to record who is present/excused/unexcused at your Board meetings, as this is documentation in case a member were ever asked to resign from the Board (*per your chapter bylaws*).
- It is not usually necessary to record the names of individuals who arrived late or departed early. An exception is if the total number of members present is very close to a quorum. In this case, the minutes should show whether or not a quorum of the group was present when voting took place. Decisions made in the absence of a quorum are technically invalid.
- Some organizations record names of members who were absent during certain votes. While this is not required, it may be prudent to do so in a political setting.
- If a member declares a conflict of interest and leaves the meeting, the minutes should show the member's declaration and indicate that he/she was absent from the meeting while the group discussed and voted on the issue.
- It is not usually necessary to distinguish between members who gave notice of their absence (regrets) and those who did not (absent without notice), except in the case where an extended absence from meetings may warrant suspension or dismissal.

BODY OF THE MINUTES

The body of the minutes of a formal meeting should include motions, procedures and voting outcomes.

- Clearly identify each item on the agenda as it is reported. Initially, state the first and last name of the person reporting them. Then identify that person by first or last name only with subsequent reporting.
 - **Example:** *Program Committee. John Doe reported the schedule of speakers for the next six meetings. Doe also provided a list of topics and expected expenses for the speakers (attached).*
- Although you will not want to record every word, thought or suggestion when discussing the subject, it is important to record the major issues that are brought to the table.

RECORDING MOTIONS

- Identify motions in a separate paragraph and whether adopted or defeated.
- ALWAYS highlight your motions in bold print.
- Always use, "...**moved to...**" NEVER, NEVER use, "...made a motion to..."
- **The chair/president NEVER makes a motion or votes**
 - *With the exception of a tie*

Formal Decisions

A motion is a formal proposal for the decision-making body to take action.

“MOTION: Melinda Fonda moved to pay the registration fee of \$285 each for John Doe, Mary James and Jane Smith to attend the National SGMP Annual Conference.” The motion was seconded by Mary Jones, and a unanimous vote carried the motion.”

The approval of the minutes should be recorded as:

“MOTION: John Jones moved to accept the January 1, 2004, Board of Director’s meeting minutes as submitted. Jenny Jones seconded the motion, and a unanimous vote carried the motion.

Or, if there were **corrections**, it would read,

“MOTION: John Jones moved to accept the January 1, 2004, Board of Director’s meeting minutes as corrected. The following changes to the minutes were made: _____. Jenny Jones seconded the motion, and a unanimous vote carried the motion.

TREASURER’S REPORT

The Treasurer’s report is filed as presented.

- You do not need to make a motion to approve the report.
- You do, however, need to have a motion to pay the bills (*anytime money is spent*).

CLOSING SEGMENT

The closing segment of the minutes of a formal meeting include:

- Date of the next meeting
- Closing time (adjournment)
- Name of the Recorder and title
 - “*Respectfully Submitted*” is **never** used

MINIMIZING ERRORS IN THE MINUTES

Taking time during a meeting to make minor corrections to minutes can be annoying. Every effort must be made to record the minutes as accurately and as professionally as possible.

There are two types of errors to watch out for:

- **Housekeeping:** spelling errors, poor grammar and incorrect technical terminology
 - Be sure to spell names correctly
- **Substantive:** incorrectly recorded decisions, motions or discussion summaries

Minimizing Housekeeping Errors

- Minutes should be run through a spellchecker and grammar checker and changes made where needed. Please note: the spellchecker and grammar checker are not always right; you need to physically proof your work. In addition, a misspelled word may not trigger the spellchecker.
 - *For example, both “united” and “untied” are correct words.*
- The minutes must be reviewed thoroughly and carefully several times to eliminate awkward sentences or spelling mistakes and ensure that the document reads well.
- The minute taker should learn the technical terminology used by the group and not hope that members will capture errors in terminology. Silence does not mean agreement that the minutes are correct. Errors that no one caught can be embarrassing or even risky.

- During the meeting, it should be acceptable for the minute taker to ask about the meaning of a technical term or abbreviation. Alternatively, questions can be addressed to the Chair/President or knowledgeable members after the meeting.

Minimizing Substantive Errors

- The minute taker must listen carefully to the discussion and stay focused.
- The Chair/President should routinely confirm the consensus or repeat motions before moving on.
- It may be helpful to use a recorder during the meeting to ensure everything is captured correctly and allowing all parties to take part in the meeting.

APPROVING THE MINUTES

Approving the minutes means confirming that they accurately reflect what took place at a previous meeting.

- If draft minutes are circulated shortly after the meeting, members will be more likely to remember what took place and better able to help in creating accurate minutes. Members will also be reminded in a timely manner of any follow up duties they agreed to perform.

POST MEETING ACTIVITIES - TASK LIST

Prepare a Task List (*separate from the minutes*). The Chair/President can use it to check whether or not members completed follow-up duties that were assigned to them. (*attached*)

1 **SAMPLE**
2 **CHAPTER BOARD MEETING MINUTES**

3
4 **SOCIETY OF GOVERNMENT MEETING PROFESSIONALS**
5 **ROCKY MOUNTAIN CHAPTER**
6 **BOARD OF DIRECTORS' MEETING**

7
8 **February 18, 2003**

9
10 **DoubleTree Denver North**
11 **8773 Yates Drive**
12 **Westminster, CO**

13
14 **PRESENT**

15 Kay Bothwell, CMP President
16 Shannon DeBus 2nd Vice President
17 Colleen Banks Treasurer
18 Paula Robinson, CMP Director
19 Christine Huffington, CHSP, CMP Director
20 Claudette Ferris CPS Immediate Past President

21
22 **EXCUSED**

23 Linda Schmitt 1st Vice President
24 Sydney Hoskins Director

25
26 **UNEXCUSED**

27 Joanne Kanost Secretary

28
29 **GUESTS IN ATTENDANCE**

30 Sonja Hernandez Catalyst Meetings and Conferences

31
32 **CALL TO ORDER**

33 President Bothwell called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m. A quorum was present. The agenda
34 was reviewed.

35
36 **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

37 **MOTION: Shannon DeBus moved to accept the January 28, 2003, Board of Director's**
38 **meeting minutes as submitted. Paula Robinson seconded the motion, and a unanimous**
39 **vote carried the motion.**

40
41 *(or if you have corrections, you would state:*

42
43 **MOTION: Shannon DeBus moved to accept the January 28, 2003, Board of**
44 **Director's meeting minutes as corrected. The following changes to the minutes**
45 **were made:**

- 50
51 ➤ Line 3: capitalize "c" in "Chapter."
52 ➤ Line 52: correct "Kandance" to "Kandace."
53 ➤ Line 150: correct "recieve" to "receive."
54

55 **Colleen Banks seconded the motion, and a unanimous vote carried the motion.**

56
57 **TREASURER'S REPORT**

58 The Treasurer's Report indicated a balance of \$2,048.99 as of March 9, 2003.

59
60 **The Treasurer's Report will be filed as presented.**

61
62 Ms. Banks presented the following bills for payment:

- | | | | |
|----|--------------------|---------|--|
| 63 | • Claudette Ferris | \$38.16 | Federal Express Program of the Year submission |
| 64 | • Postmaster | \$50.86 | Stamps |
| 65 | • Telephony | \$ 7.40 | Fax |

66
67 **MOTION: Ms. Banks moved to approve the pending bills; Ms. Huffington seconded the**
68 **motion, and a unanimous vote carried the motion.**

69
70
71 **NATIONAL CONFERENCE SCHOLARSHIPS**

72 Three applications for scholarships were received from Claudette Ferris, Terry Trevino and
73 Barbara Guest.

74
75 **MOTION: Ms. DeBus moved to approve the three applications. Colleen Banks seconded**
76 **the motion, and a unanimous vote carried the motion. Each candidate will receive \$285 to**
77 **cover his or her registration fee to the National Conference.**

78
79 Ms. Robinson reported that no applications had been received for the CMP scholarship.

80
81 **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

82 **Fundraising.** The special committee reported on its activities and indicated that more than
83 \$1,000 has been raised this year through fundraising activities.

84
85 **Nominations and Elections.** The committee will meet tomorrow to review the nominations that
86 were received. Bios will be due from each candidate by March 10, and each candidate will have
87 a standard set of questions to answer.

88
89 **NEW BUSINESS**

90 President Bothwell received a request from the Ft. Collins CVB for a complete set of Chapter
91 membership labels.

93 *SGMP Rocky Mountain Chapter*
94 *Board of Director's Meeting Minutes*
95 *February 18, 2003*
96 *Page 3*

97
98

99 **MOTION: Ms. DeBus moved to approve the request, with the understanding that the**
100 **labels would be used for the CVB and not non-supplier hotels. Paula Robinson seconded**
101 **the motion; a unanimous vote carried the motion.**
102 *(Note: Ms. Huffington was not present for voting.)*

103

104 **NEXT BOARD MEETING**

105 The next meeting of the Board of Directors will be Tuesday, March 25, 2003, at the Radisson
106 Hotel Denver SE, I/225 & Parker Road, Aurora, from 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

107

108 The meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

109

110 *Claudette M. Ferris CPS*

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112 Claudette M. Ferris CPS

113 Immediate Past President

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115

CHAPTER BOARD “TO DO” LIST

Date: _____

BOARD MEMBER	TASK	COMMENTS
	<u>DUE BY JULY 1, 2006</u>	
Board member	Assignment	Comments regarding the assignment
Communications chair	Send a press release to local newspapers announcing next chapter meeting	
	<u>DUE BY SEPTEMBER 1, 2006</u>	
Member	Task	
Membership chair	Send membership survey to chapter members	Return deadline: September 15, 2006
	<u>ONGOING</u>	
Board	These are “parking lot” issues	<i>There may be certain issues with no deadlines, but something that you want to make sure you do...</i>
Board		

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