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ESSENTIALS OF MINUTES AND REPORT WRITING



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INTRODUCTION

As we continue to explore the multifaceted role of administrators in our great institution, we are building on previous discussion; “The Administrator as a Manager of Resources”. A concise and accurate report is one of the key tools administrators provide for the organization to use in tracking progress of a task, making informed decisions and ensuring accountability. The current edition of our newsletter delves into **Essentials of Minutes and Report Writing**, exploring strategies for writing minutes and reports that are informative, well-structured and impactful.

The history of minutes and report writing reflect the evolution of formalized communication, particularly within organizations, governments, and institutions. Both have roots in the need for documentation, record-keeping, and the systematic transfer of knowledge over time. They have evolved into complex, structured documents used across various fields - from business and government to academic and science and have become essential tools for transparent, and effective communication within organizations and society.

The University operates on three pillars: Teaching, Research and Community service. To facilitate its set objectives, the committee system is often adopted in ensuring clarity, accountability, and informed decision-making. Two vital tools that facilitate this communication are minutes and report writing.

DEFINITIONS OF MINUTES AND REPORT

Minutes are the official written record of the discussions, decisions, actions taken and all other consequential events during a meeting or formal gathering. It serves as a summary of what occurred, who was present, and what was agreed upon, ensuring that all participants and stakeholders are informed of the outcomes.

Cambridge dictionary defines minutes as the written record of what was said at a meeting, and an official record of the proceedings of a meeting, conference, convention by Collins English Dictionary.

A report is a structured, detailed document that presents information, findings, analysis, or recommendations on a specific subject or issue. It is a written presentation of factual information based on an investigation or research. Reports form the basis for solving problems or making decisions.

It is typically used to communicate results, evaluate performance, or provide insights in a clear, organized manner. Reports are often used in business, academic, scientific, or governmental settings to inform decision-making, support research, or document progress.

Collins English Dictionary defines a report as an account prepared for the benefit of others, especially one that provides information obtained through investigation while it is an account given of a particular matter, especially in the form of an official document, after thorough investigation or consideration by an appointed person or body by Oxford languages.com

TYPES OF REPORT

Financial, Informational, Analytical, Progress, Research, Marketing & Audit, Business, Inventory, Survey, Fact-Finding/Investigative Panel, Administrative Panel, Disciplinary Panel, Technical and Board Report.

FUNCTIONS OF A MINUTES AND REPORT

Functions of Minutes

Minutes serve several important functions within an organization or meeting context; it ensures that the outcomes of discussions are documented and

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communicated effectively. Its functions include but not limited to the following:

- i. **Record Keeping** - Provides a permanent written record of what transpired during a meeting, capturing key discussions, decisions, and actions for future reference.
- ii. **Accountability** - Through the documentation of decisions and action items as well as responsibilities assigned to members, minutes helps members to understand their commitment and responsibilities to the set objectives, while ensuring that tasks are completed on time.
- iii. **Reference and Continuity** - Provides a reference point for future meetings or discussions, allowing members to track progress and be abreast of ongoing issues and ensuring continuity in decision-making.
- iv. **Communication** - Helps to communicate decisions, actions, and key points to members who were not present at the meeting, ensuring that everyone is informed and aligned.
- v. **Legal or Official Record** - In formal settings (e.g., Statutory Committees/Boards), minutes serve as an official, legal record of decisions, which can be used for compliance, audits, or resolving disputes.

Functions of Reports

Reports serve several essential functions, particularly in conveying information, analysis, and recommendations in an organized manner:

- i. **Documentation** - It serves as a formal documentation of processes, results, or progress, which can be referenced later for historical records, audits or decision making and future action.
- ii. **Information Sharing** - It communicates important information, such as research findings, project updates, or performance assessments, recommendations to decision/policymakers or relevant authority.
- iii. **Evaluation and Analysis** - These provide detailed analysis, evaluations, investigation and insights about a particular issue or situation, and helps to make relevant decisions in line with established laws to organizations or individuals for appropriate action.
- iv. **Decision-Making** - It provides the necessary information, analysis, and recommendations to help the Chief Executive Officer (i.e. Vice Chancellor), leaders and managers make informed decisions about strategies, policies, disciplinary actions, or any other action for the development of an organisation.
- v. **Persuasion or Advocacy** - Some reports, such as business proposals or research papers, persuade or advocate for a particular course of action by presenting evidence and reasoning to support a claim or recommendation.

- vi. **Communication and Accountability** - Reports ensure that key stakeholders, such as management, shareholders, or the public, are informed about developments, outcomes, or the status of specific projects, helping to keep everyone on the same page and promoting transparency.
- vii. **Planning and Strategy** - Reports often play a key role in shaping strategic planning by presenting data, forecasts, and trends that guide future decisions and actions.

Both **minutes** and **reports** are vital tools for communication, record-keeping, and decision-making within organizations. Minutes capture the essence of meetings while reports provide in-depth analysis and documentation to inform decision-making and strategic planning.

SKILLS IN WRITING MINUTES AND REPORT

There are essential skills needed to write minutes and reports as both are necessary for accurate and clear documentation of meetings, presenting detailed information, analysis, and conclusions in a structured and objective manner.

These are:

- i. **Listening and Comprehension** - You need to actively listen and understand the key points being discussed in the meeting. Focus on important decisions, action items, and outcomes rather than recording everything verbatim.
- ii. **Summarization** - Minutes should be concise and to the point. Being able to summarize lengthy discussions into clear, readable content is crucial.
- iii. **Attention to Details** - Pay attention to specifics, such as the names of those present, decisions made, and any deadline or action assigned.
- iv. **Clarity and Simplicity** - The language should be simple, clear, and free of jargon. Aim for a neutral and objective tone, avoid any personal opinions or interpretations. Information should be presented in a structured manner. Avoid unnecessary complexity and ensure that each section of the report serves its purpose without being overly detailed or vague.
- v. **Writing Style and Tone** - Reports should maintain a professional, formal tone. The language should be objective and free from bias, with a focus on facts and analysis rather than personal opinions.
- vi. **Organizational Skills** - Organizing the minutes logically (e.g., by agenda items) and structuring them in a readable format is essential. Using bullet points, numbered lists, and clear headings can help.

- vii. **Time Management** - Be quick in noting down key points during the meeting, while also ensuring that the minutes are accurate and complete.
- viii. **Familiarity with Format and Terminology** - Different types of meetings may have specific formats for minutes. Understanding the appropriate style and terminology for the specific setting (e.g., board meetings, team meetings, or committee discussions) is important.
- ix. **Editing and Proofreading** - After writing the minutes, it is important to review them for grammar, punctuation, and clarity. Ensure that they accurately reflect the meeting's key points and decisions.
- x. **Use of Visual Aids** - Depending on the type of report, incorporating charts, graphs, or tables can be helpful for presenting data

COMPONENTS OF MINUTES AND REPORTS

Essentials of Minutes Writing

To produce a successful minute, the following are essential:

- i. **Preparation before the Meeting** - know the Agenda: Familiarize yourself with the meeting agenda to know what topics would be discussed. Understand the meeting objectives: Understand the purpose of the meeting to know what outcomes to focus on. Gather and sift information, i.e. documents required for the meetings – rules and regulations, other relevant documents.
- ii. **Formatting the Minutes** -Header: Include details like the meeting date, time, location, and the names of the attendees (and absentees). Body - start with the topic of discussion, key points should be summarized, not written verbatim. Actions should be recorded clearly, specifying who is responsible and deadlines if any. Decisions - highlight decisions made, agreements reached, or voting results, and Next meeting - If applicable, include the date of the next meeting.
- iii. **During the Meeting:** Focus on key discussions, outcomes, and decisions, rather than trying to capture everything word-for-word, be concise and avoid unnecessary details. Note any action or task assigned to specific individuals or teams. Submit the papers presented, oral and written testimonies, contributions by members. Place the findings and observations deduced during the meetings.
- iv. **After the Meeting:** Review your notes and organize them logically, ensure that the minutes reflect an accurate record of what happened during the meeting. Distribute the minutes promptly after the meeting.

Essentials of Report Writing

Reports are structured documents that convey information, findings, and recommendations. The essentials for writing reports include:

- I. **Clear Purpose** - Define the purpose of the report at the beginning.
- ii. **Structure:** The Outline of a report is as stated below:
 - Cover page – University logo, title of report, date of submission.
 - Table of Contents - List of section / heading.
 - Title – The subject matter of the report.
 - Executive Summary – A concise overview or abridged outlook.
 - Preamble/Introduction – A description of the constitution and purpose.
 - Membership – State members
 - Terms of Reference (TOR) – State as indicated in the letter constituting the Committee.
 - Committee meeting – State total number of meetings.
 - Modus operandi – State the method used, and actions taken to achieve set objectives.
 - Documents and evidence – List the evidence obtained (can be written / oral)
 - Invitations – List the invitees.
 - Findings/Observations – Enumerate the facts established and the observations deduced.
 - Summary of findings for each TOR - Enumerate the specific facts established.
 - General Recommendations – Make recommendations on the next line of action in line with enabling laws/rules & regulations/policies, etc.
 - Recommendations for each TOR - Make recommendations for each TOR on the next line of action in line with enabling laws/rules & regulations/policies, etc.
 - Conclusion
 - Signature page
 - Appendix

iii. Clear and Concise Language, Objectivity and Accuracy, Proofreading and Editing.

Report structure: Reports follow a standardised format. This allows the reader to find the information easily and focus on specific areas.

- The recommendations must be drawn from the findings/observations.
- Reports must be signed.
- Any member who declines to sign a report can write a minority report.

CONCLUSION

Minutes and Reports are vital tools for communication, record-keeping, and decision-making in an organization. Minutes capture the essence of meetings, collate information and decisions for future use, while reports provide in-depth analysis of the subject matter, review, evaluate documents, and offer informed decision-making and strategic planning for an organisation/body.