
Reports and Minutes Writing Skills for MMDAs

FOAT/DDF
Training Manual

By ILGS

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CSOs-	Civil Society Organisation(s)
DAs-	District Assemblies
DCE-	District Chief Executive
DPs-	Development Partner(s)
DPCU-	District Planning Coordinating Unit
ILGS-	Institute of Local Government Studies
LGS-	Local Government Service
LGSS-	Local Government Service Secretariat
LGs-	Local Governments
LI-	Legislative Instrument
MDA-	Ministries, Departments and Agencies
MLGRD-	Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development
MMDA-	Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies
NGOs-	Non-Governmental Organisations
PM-	Presiding Member
RCC-	Regional Coordinating Council

General Introduction to Manual

Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) under the current system of local government in Ghana have been assigned a wide range of responsibilities, including the provision of basic social services and infrastructure. Although over the years, there has been a gradual increase in the volume of fiscal transfers to local governments, this increase has not always been in line with the growing demand for services. At the same time, the potential for internally generated funds (IGF) as a source to finance service delivery has also not been fully exploited. MMDAs are thus faced with a financing gap that hampers their overall performance and the implementation of their development plans in particular. The situation also poses increasing concerns about the financial management capacity of MMDAs and the judicious and efficient use of resources at the district level. These concerns have affected the granting of greater budget autonomy to local governments.

In order to bridge the financing gap and to improve the performance of the MMDAs, the Government in collaboration with key development partners have introduced a performance based grant (the District Development Funding (DDF) modality) where access to additional discretionary development funds is linked to regular performance assessment under the Functional and Organisational Assessment Tool (FOAT). Under this system, good performance gets rewarded with additional financial resources, while weak performance is responded to by tailor-made capacity building support.

The FOAT exercise has been on-going since 2007 and the results have revealed performance gaps especially in the area of documentation, reports and minutes writing. It was evident that MMDAs could do better in the assessment when their capacities to write reports and minutes are improved. These records provide proof of having conducted the mandated businesses of the assembly.

Therefore, MMDA staff must not only focus on the actions and results in the discharge of their responsibilities but also pay considerable attention to providing records and proper documentation of these activities. This manual focuses on the requisite procedures, practices and tools that will be needed to ensure that Assembly staffs responsible for the writing of reports and minutes are able to perform their roles in a more efficient manner.

MODULE 1: REPORTS WRITING

Introduction

Reports could be described as structured presentations (written or verbal) given to interested persons in response to specific purpose, request or demand. Reports of MMDAs will among others include Progress Reports on their Medium Term Development Plans, Annual Action Plans, Financial Reports, Workshop Reports, Public Hearing and Stakeholder Consultation Reports as well as Performance Appraisal Reports and Training Needs Assessment Reports.

Reports are therefore important management tools for influencing future actions. Through reports, information can be shared and consequently lessons learned. However, good report writing is not easy and it is very time consuming. In addition, if a report is not easy to read, it probably will not be read at all.

This module asks the questions: "Why?" should reports be written, "to Whom?" do they go, and "What?" should be included, then goes on to discuss the "How?" they can be written well, to be useful.

Module Objectives

By the end of the module participants will be able to:

1. Explain the meaning and importance of reports in the functioning of assemblies
2. Determine the qualities and characteristics of good reports
3. Demonstrate and apply effective report writing skills
4. Adopt best practices in managing reports for improved performance.

Content

- Why Write Reports?
 - Purpose; who Benefits and how do they Benefit?
- Who Should Receive Reports?
 - Audience or Target; why do they need them? Distribution and for whom?
- How to Write Reports?
 - What Contents? What Topics? Emphasis? (Activities and Results)
 - Writing Better Reports: Skills; Tips on organization and style

Time: 3.5 Hours

Methods: Lecture, discussions, role play, case study and experience sharing

Materials: Flip charts, markers, LCD Projector and colour cards

1.1 Definition and Importance of Reports

Opening Reflection Questions/ Statements:

- What are reports?
- Why are reports needed for your respective MMDAs?
- What factors hinders the production of effective reports in the MMDAs? How can these challenges be addressed to ensure the overall performance of MMDA responsibilities?
- Have you ever felt annoyed or discouraged because you must write a report? Is writing just a boring and tedious duty that seems you have to do because of some bureaucratic regulation?
- Would you prefer writing reports or doing the "real" work of organizing meetings, leading community members to make their own decisions, training people and watching them learn new skills, or guiding a community through constructing its own project?

- Writing reports can be challenging, interesting and even fun.
- Report writing is not something separate from the "real" work. It is a necessary and integral part of the work; it is just as "real" as the rest.
- Report writing is useful and valuable (especially when it is done right).

A report is a very formal document that is written for a variety of purposes. Generally, findings pertaining to a given or specific task are written up into a report. It should be noted that reports are considered to be legal documents in the workplace and, thus, they need to be precise, accurate and difficult to misinterpret. For the purposes of this manual, the working definition will be given as follows:

A report is a structured presentation (written or verbal) given interested persons in response to specific purpose, request or demand.

Reports are not essays. Reports are organised into separate sections according to the specific requirements of the given task. While it is important that paragraphs are structured and there is unity, coherence and logical development to the report, it is not a continuous piece of writing like an essay. Each type of report serves a very specific purpose and is aimed at a very particular audience.

Report writing may seem repetitive to us, but this is because reports are not usually read from cover-to-cover by one person. For example, a manager may read only the synopsis or abstract and act on the advice it contains while a technical officer may read only the section that explains how things work. On the other hand, a personnel officer may look at only the conclusions and recommendations that directly affect his or her working area.

1.2 Purpose of Writings Reports

The Local Government Act of 1993, Act 462, provides that Assemblies have responsibilities for planning, budgeting, executing, legislating and taxing powers. Assemblies are also assigned 88 statutory functions including preventive and environmental health, water and sanitation, public works, trade and industry, finance, physical planning, food and agriculture, disaster prevention, administration, social welfare and community development. The performance of these responsibilities must be properly documented and monitored. The imperatives for report writing in the performance of these responsibilities are therefore critical.

Reports have many useful purposes in every discipline (medicine, business, engineering, etc). When effectively used, reports constitute an integral part of the Assemblies' business. Among others, reports enable us:

- Keep records
- Inform stakeholders about progress (E.g. Donors about how funds are being utilized)
- Tell others and ourselves about successes, failures, etc
- Be assessed or evaluated (account for the use of resources and performance)
- Determine further action
- Receive feed back
- Create a platform for learning by others
- Meet legal or government requirements

The above list is not exhaustive and therefore it is worth pointing out that reports have many useful purposes and also play an integral part in success of any work arrangement. Reports must not only be written, it should be read and actions must results from every report.

1.3 Types of Reports

In the assembly system reports can range from short memos to lengthy reports such as feasibility studies; proposals; plans of MMDAs and sub structures; research and field reports; financial reports; situation and progress reports; service delivery charters; workshop and training reports; public hearing reports; environmental health and safety reports; performance appraisal reports; training needs assessment reports as well as procurement plans, technical and monitoring reports.

Reports can also be categorised into the periods (annual, quarterly, monthly, progress, routine reports) or objectives (feasibility, plan, financial, workshop reports) for which they are prepared or required. For the purposes of this manual the following reports will be discussed:

Progress Report. A progress report is different from a situation report. While a situation report **states what has happened** and what was done about it, a progress report **relates activities to objectives**.

It is important to distinguish between activities (input) and the results of those activities (outputs) or effects on target group. A progress report must go beyond descriptive activity reporting and analyse the results/impacts of those reported activities. The analysis should answer the question; How far have the project objectives been reached? Such reports could be tied to key project timelines or targets. These include inception reports, phase reports, draft reports and final reports.

Field Trip Report. This can be useful for field officers. A field trip report must contain technical details. For instance, dates, locations of the travel, persons met (their titles, agencies' names, time of meeting and venue). The report should emphasize results of the trip. Answer questions such as; did you achieve your purpose, to what extent? Why? What are the unexpected observations you have made and indicators of any results of previous projected activities? Should any project objectives be modified from what you have observed? Did you identify any new problems? Did you come to any new conclusions alone or in discussion with some persons you met or meetings you attended? You may consider making a check list.

Monitoring Reports. Monitoring is an essential aspect of a job in progress. Monitoring results must be recorded and communicated to target audiences in the form of reports. The report indicates:

- the degree to which objectives have been met,
- reasons why
- assessment of factors and recommendations

To this end, monitoring reports should compare what was wanted with what was achieved, analyse the reasons and make recommendations.

1.4 Recipients of Reports and their Interests

The authors and recipients of reports have varying benefits and interests. Reports provide information; assist in the conduct of assessments; and give encouragement for better performance. The broad spectrum of beneficiaries of reports includes:

- District political and administrative personalities, and planning personnel
- Traditional authorities: chiefs, queen-mothers, sub-chiefs, community heads, etc.
- NGOs, private industrial enterprise groups, business associations and other civil society organizations
- Government agencies, departments, corporations etc
- Recognized religious bodies, voluntary and youth associations, women's groups and cultural organizations, and political party-representatives etc.
- Opinion leaders, influential individuals, interested persons, etc.
- Development partners and donors

It is also important when writing reports to have thorough understanding of who will read the reports. The table below describes some recipients of reports and how they benefit from the production of reports. This table indicates that many different actors benefit from well written reports. Readers of reports must be kept in mind when writing reports.

Table 1: Recipients of Reports

Who Benefits?	How Do they Benefit from Reports?
The author(s) of the report	Through writing, the author(s) learn skills (how to organize ideas, how to write), identify weaknesses, identify failures and successes, and identify strengths (many hidden until written). Writing (itself) improves assessment abilities.
The community engaged in the project	A community is able to assess how well progress is being made through monitoring and reporting. Results (reaching desired objectives) make community members feel happy and encouraged to do more (especially verbal reports).
Any other community	By learning or hearing about a community's progress, people in any other community get their awareness raised; they learn that such things are possible. When they read or hear about the community's achievements, they are also encouraged to undertake their own community projects.
Assessors/ Researchers/ Investigators	This interest group will consider reports their preliminary source of data and information.
Development partners and Donors	These stakeholders can learn from reports how their funds allocated, labour, land, or donations in kind are being used.
Government: Central, Regional, District, and Sub District	Reports are vital for providing information that is needed for informed and effective planning, budgeting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. As in the other cases above, reports are also a source of encouragement.

1.5 Effective Report Writing Skills

1.5.1 Characteristics of Effective Reports

- Let us say, you are a chief executive or head of a department, what characteristics of a report will invite you to read it and Why?
 - Attractive?
 - Honest, no deception?
 - Interesting illustrations?
 - Neat and readable?
 - Simple English?
 - Well spaced?
 - Has titles and sub-titles?
 - Brief, short?
- What contents? What topics? What emphasis? (Activities and Results)
- What better report writing skills; what tips do you have on organization and style?

An effective report is one that is read (not filed, unread, thrown away, etc); and that stimulates some sort of an action as a result of being read. The following are a few tips on making better reports.

- Short but complete (concise)
- Logical
- Contain accurate, relevant and interesting information
- Simple and written in good straight forward language (writing skills)
- Having no repetition, lecturing
- Well-structured and organized (clear section headings, designs, illustrations, colours, etc)
- Neat and tidy (typed or well written/printed)

You must know who your intended reader is (target audience) why the reader would like to read the report, what your reader needs and wants to know from your reports.

Use straightforward and simple language, correct grammar and easy to recognize words. It is important that you must be prepared to re-write even the final draft. It is always good to re-write for say three times - 1st draft, 2nd draft and final draft before submission. Do not hesitate to let others proof-read for their comments, suggestions, etc.

1.5.2 Stages of Report Preparation

Preparation for report writing

Subject: Decide which kind of information needs to be in the report. Be as precise as possible. For most stakeholders, four types of information are usually needed:

1. What the results are so far of the implementation of the project (impact development information)
2. Which activities have been implemented so far? Is this according to the project proposal? (Activity implementation information)
3. How was the money spent? (finance/budget information)
4. Information about the project staff.

Purpose: Determine what the purpose of the report is. Is it to inform others so that they become interested in the project? Or is it a presentation of the results of the project to e.g. your sponsors or assessors?

Layout: Check whether the report needs to be written in a compulsory layout (e.g. type of paper, headings footings, standardized form, etc.)

Target group: Determine who the readers of the report will be. The contents of the report need to be adjusted to the people who will read it. E.g. how much information do they already have about the project?

In a progress report with the purpose to keep readers informed, only the latest information is needed. If you want to present the project to a potential donor, or you want to inform other outsiders, you need to be more elaborate in explaining where the project is all about. The target group will also determine the level of language you need to use.

Structure: Check how the contents of the report need to be arranged.

Length: Determine the maximum number of pages in consultation with whoever commissioned the report.

Time span: Check out when the report needs to be ready. Then make a time plan for your-selves for writing the report (date for completing the first draft, date for having it checked by a senior colleague etc).

The Actual Writing of Report

Collect the information needed. Important sources are: reports, notes which have been written earlier, books, information from your monitoring system, interviews with staff/target groups etc.

Arrange your information in a logical way and take care the structure is well balanced. The way the report is divided determines the structure. Make use of chapters, paragraphs, sub-paragraphs. Chapters need to be roughly the same length. Paragraphs should be a logical subdivision of the chapters. Keep each short and make sure that one sub-paragraph covers one subject.

Write the language of your reader. Not childish or over-sophisticated. Avoid long and complicated sentences (not longer than 15 -20 words). Take care that the report is easy readable without reference to other literature. If needed, use footnotes to explain certain concepts/ideas.

Try not to make any spelling mistakes. If you are writing on a computer, use the spell-check.

Make sure the layout is well organised. The reader will give up quickly if it takes too much effort to follow the line of your argument. Make sure that there is enough space between the lines, paragraphs etc.

Check the result by asking the following.

1. Does the report answer the questions raised by whoever commissioned it?
2. Is the structure logical and well balanced? Is the order of the topics correct?
3. Have the pages been numbered and is this according to the Index?
4. Has somebody else read the report and asked for feedback, before you sent it to the person who commissioned it.

1.5.3 Structure of Reports

An effective report presents complex information in a simple, readable style. Its purpose is clear; it guides the reader through the issues and options towards clear conclusions and recommendations.

The Different Parts of a Report

Depending on the purpose of the report, you can choose different ways of arranging the content. The following division is the most common:

Transmittal Letter/ Memo

It is a separate document that accompanies reports and it is usually brief. By sending a transmittal letter you let your recipient know you are sending a report and will also give him/her an idea about what is being sent.

The cover: (preferably of a heavier quality of paper than the rest of the report). On the cover it should mention:

- The title of the report;
- The sub-title (if appropriate);
- The name of the author(s);
- The date of the presentation of the report.

Depending on whether your report is for internal or external use, you can mention your own organisation and/or the organisation for which the report is written, e.g. the donor organisation.

The title page: This is not always necessary. Usually the information of the cover page is repeated. If applicable, information on copyrights, distribution etc. could be mentioned here.

The Index: This should be a separate page on which the chapters and paragraphs are listed and are next to the appropriate page number. Only the first page number of each chapter is listed. Also referred to as the Table of Content and may include List of Tables and Figures.

The foreword: This is not always needed; again it depends on the type of report. In the foreword issues are mentioned which are not essential to the contents of the report, like: words of thanks, for whom the report was written, by whom and why etc. This is also sometimes categorise as Acknowledgements.

The executive summary: The executive summary is very important because not everybody has time to read the whole report. In the executive summary, the most important points are presented:

- the reason why the report was written;
- the questions which are to be raised (problem statement);
- the solutions;
- the arguments used for the solutions;
- important conclusions and advice.

The main text of the report (Body): This is the discussion part of the report. It describes analyses, interprets and evaluates the procedures, data, findings, relationships, material, methodology and results. The body should be well organized in a logical manner. The main text is most commonly divided into the following chapters:

Introduction: This indicates the structure of the report. In the introduction often issues are described which are obvious to the writer of the report, but not to the reader. By reading the introduction, the reader should understand what would be considered in the report and why the report was written (background to the report); what the purpose and objectives of the report are (e.g. is the report written to present information, to advise, to evaluate?); what exactly the report is all about; which topics are included, which are not and why; and how the information was obtained (scope of the report).

Make sure you understand the purpose of the report very well and do not begin your introduction with too broad sentences. The style and order of thinking, or logical arrangement, in the Introduction should be consistent with those in the main body of the report. Be specific. The Introduction may vary in style quite widely within certain bounds. The limits imposed are that the language must be clear, direct, and accurate. Within these limits you are free to exercise your art. Indeed you must exercise it if the needs of your readers are to be fulfilled.

One outstanding rule for the style of the Introduction is to construct the first, or theme, sentence so that attention is deftly, decisively, and immediately focused on the precise subject to be treated and, if possible, on the method of approach. Again, keep your readers' viewpoint uppermost in mind. The ease of writing this sentence is in direct proportion to the clarity of the subject being presented. Where you have a clean-cut, definite accomplishment to report, the theme can be stated easily. But if the work has wavered and wobbled and wandered and there is scarcely a definite piece of information to be gleaned from it, the theme can be stated only with great difficulty, if at all. These remarks about the ease or difficulty of **writing a striking first sentence apply to the entire Introduction and even to the entire report.** Keep that in mind as you plan and write your report.

Many find the Introduction difficult to write. All these requirements may seem to make it even more difficult. The best way to write it is to become familiar with the report matter, plan what to put in the Introduction, and then start writing. Try to explain the story to be told in the report: what it is about, why it is being told, and how it will be told. Seclude yourself from interruptions and write continuously – go with the creative flow. Then criticize and revise your work. You may need to rewrite the Introduction and the theme sentence several times.

About 200 to 300 words is the usual length of an Introduction – a page, more or less. The length really depends on how much background information must be given, and that depends on the kind of report. In major papers on new ideas the Introduction may be several pages long. If considerable amounts of background information must be included for your readers, try moving it from the Introduction to a separate section of the report (e.g., entitled "Literature Review").

Clarification of the problem statement: This chapter explains why the information is needed, which information is needed and how the information obtained will be used. (Or what the problem is, why the problem needs to be solved and which information is needed to be able to solve the problem). It is most appropriate for studies for which conclusions must be drawn from findings.

Methodology: A short description of how the information was obtained (methodology). The results, with an interpretation and description of the information obtained. Also appropriate for any form of studies.

The body should be well organized in a logical manner.

- The body must show clearly progress made – which is the essence of the report.
- It is important to look at changes in the action environment.
- Create a sub-section and list each objective or desired result with its own sub-title.
- Describe briefly what actions and activities were undertaken and/or completed in meeting the objectives or desired result.
- Indicate the degree to which the objectives or desired results were achieved
- Indicate the reasons for the level of success (contributing factors)
- Indicate the hindrances, constraints, reasons why a 100% was not reached?

Conclusions of the results

Conclusion

Conclusions are drawn from evidence, analysis, interpretation and evaluation presented in the discussion. It gives brief overview, major events, and headlines during the reporting period or since the previous report. The conclusion should follow logically from the discussion.

Recommendations

Based on the foregone, make recommendations (eg continue, change, if so then how, why) make sure you identify to whom you make the recommendations. It should be definite, easy to understand, imaginative, reasonable and sensible. It is better to make recommendations for each conclusion or group of conclusions.

Appendices

Also referred to as Annexes. Any information or explanations which take up a lot of space and attention are in the text then they can make the report difficult to read. This type of information is often put in the Annexes. Include any information that supplements the main report, especially details list of meetings, number and names of participants, minutes of meetings, maps, statistics, pictures and any other supporting evidence. Others may include Reference List (references to literature used in the report), detailed explanations, drawings, maps, list of abbreviations etc. Annexes should be numbered and should have a title. In the main report, references should be made to the annexes when needed. Annexes are also listed in the Index.

1.5.3 Numbering Systems in Reports

1. Page Numbering

Table of Content

Acknowledgment	i
List of Illustrations (Figures, Tables)	ii
Executive Summary	iii
Introduction	1
Body	3
Conclusion	5
Recommendations	6
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2. Text Numbering

Decimal system

- 1 MAIN HEADING
- 1.1 Secondary Heading
- 1.1.1 Sub-heading
- 1.1.2 Sub-heading
- 1.2 Secondary Heading
- 1.2.1 Sub-heading
- 1.2.2 Sub-heading
- 1.2.2.1 Sub-subheading

Alpha-Numeric systems

- A MAIN HEADING
- 1 Secondary Heading
- a) Sub-heading
- i) Sub-sub-heading

Other systems

Government Reports - each consecutive paragraph is given an ordinal number, though there are also separate chapter divisions.

1 MAIN HEADING

a) Secondary Heading

i) Sub-heading

Open University

Course Units - each paragraph is numbered, but using a decimal system, so that paragraphs in chapter 1 run 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 etc.

1.6 Tips for Writing the Report

Look at the following plan for writing a report.

1. Identify the story you wish to tell. Often this can be simply done by deciding which diagrams and graphs of data you wish to include.
2. Draw up a plan of what you want to say and how this fits around the diagrams/graphs you want to use.
3. Extend your plan to an outline that includes all the section headings you will need.
4. Check through the outline to see that sequence is sensible and that nothing vital has been ignored.
5. Check your outline through with someone else e.g. fellow student, advisor or supervisor.
6. Write a first full draft of the report. In the process be talented; be neat (typed/double spacing); be self-critical; remove every extraneous word; know the markets; and write to entertain.
7. Check the first draft through for consistency, obvious errors and omissions (e.g. figure captions missing? References still to do?) If you can get a friend to read through it critically so much the better.
8. Revise the draft and re-check until satisfied.
9. Observe all rules for submission and submit report.

MODULE 2: MINUTES WRITING

Introduction

It is common to get most people groan whenever issues around "meetings" are discussed or announced. People think: "Too many meetings," - "Boring meetings," - "Time wasting meetings," - "Useless meetings." Too often, they are right. We waste too much unproductive time on meetings, and yet we are reluctant to do anything about that. As part of the MMDA mandate of service delivery for its local constituents, meetings are held on various platforms (planning, budgeting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation) to ensure participation in organizational decision making. Such meetings are intended to facilitate the decision-making and policy formulation and implementation processes of the assemblies. MMDAs could be more effective when minutes of meetings are written and made available for follow-up actions.

The manual has been prepared primarily for the use of persons working in the capacities of recorders of meetings formally constituted by assemblies. However, the generally accepted principles included can be applied at every level of meeting. The recorder or secretary to meetings plays a key role in this process by, undertaking thorough research on a topic for discussion; preparing carefully written and documented agenda items; writing succinct, informative and unambiguous minutes and resolutions; and ensuring all action arising from the meeting are completed. This manual therefore explores the importance of meetings in the assembly system as well as prepares MMDA functionaries to discard assumptions about how to conduct and record proceedings of meetings.

Module Objectives

By the end of the module participants will be able to:

1. Explain the meaning and importance of minutes in the functioning of assemblies
2. Determine the qualities and characteristics of good minutes
3. Demonstrate and apply effective minutes writing skills
4. Adopt best practices in managing minutes for improved organisational performance.

Content

- Features of Minutes
- Role of Recorders and Secretaries
- Arranging Meetings
- The Agenda
- Meeting Processes and Management
- Minutes Writing Skills

Time: 3.5 Hours

Methods: Lecture, discussions, role play, case study and experience sharing

Materials: Flip charts, markers, LCD Projector and colour cards

2.1 Definition of Minutes

Opening Reflection Questions/ Key Statements:

- What are minutes?
- Why are minutes needed for your respective MMDAs?
- What factors hinders the production of effective minutes in the MMDAs? How can these challenges be addressed to ensure the overall performance of MMDA responsibilities?
- Have you ever felt annoyed or discouraged because you must write a minute? Is writing just a boring and tedious duty that seems you have to do because of some bureaucratic regulation?

A minute –

- includes the essential and relevant background to the topic under discussion
- provides a succinct summary of the discussion
- clearly leads to the resolution

Well-written minutes will have the following key characteristics -

- brief and informative
- factual, accurate, relevant
- objective and impartial
- logically presented
- record recommendations/ decisions clearly and decisively

Minutes are public documents, which become part of the historical record of the MMDA. Individual speakers are not usually referred to by name, unless they have spoken in an expert or official capacity.

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, district assemblies, 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.

Minutes provide an accurate, concise record of the meeting; provide clear and unambiguous statements of recommendations /decisions and action required. They also include a brief historical record. Keeping proper records of meeting recommendations and decisions is also an essential component of the **corporate memory**. An effective recorder or secretary will appreciate and understand the link between the body's (committee) activities and records management.

2.2 Features of Minutes

2.2.1 Purpose of Minutes

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. Generally, minutes should also be taken in the following settings (even if not specifically required):

- Informal staff meetings. Here, minutes are summaries of discussions, consensus, and follow-up actions. Such summaries enable the group to monitor and track progress of initiatives or projects.
- Planning, teambuilding and problem-solving sessions. Here, minutes are summaries of discussions and consensus. Without concise and complete summaries, the benefits of such sessions and the opportunity for organized follow-up activities are diminished.
- Negotiations or bargaining sessions. Here, agreements reached should be recorded, but it is not usually necessary to record discussion details.

Minutes are not needed in settings where they are not required and would provide no value. For example:

- An informal gathering of colleagues
- An ad-hoc staff meeting for the sole purpose of presenting an update (unless there is a need to inform absent members of what was reported)

To this end, no meeting should be held if it does not have a purpose.

Examine carefully the meetings you attend at your respective MMDAs. Ask what the purpose of each might be?

Unfortunately, it looks as if the purpose of some meetings is:

1. to let the boss hear him/her self talk,
2. to let someone else hear him/her self talk,
3. to act out a series of empty rituals,
4. to keep staff members away from their regular work,
5. to hear news about events we have already heard,
6. to listen to verbal reports by people who should have written them, or
7. to make it appear that some decisions are being made

The essence of management is to make decisions. Meetings can be a very effective mechanism to do so. For that to happen, one must decide that the purpose of management meetings is to make decisions. It should have no other purpose. If the purpose of a management meeting is to make decisions, then it must be designed to that effect. If you have other legitimate purposes, such as to raise awareness or to ensure that specific information is distributed to staff members, then do that in different fora, not in a management meeting e.g staff durbars, seminars and workshops.

The current system of local government administration tasks MMDAs to be responsible for the overall development of their jurisdictions. Decision making processes including meetings to effect changes in the life of the constituents must be recorded and communicated through among others the minutes of such meetings. These meetings with membership well-constituted include:

- General Assembly Meetings as stipulated by Act 462 and the Model Standing Orders
- Meetings to approve plans and budgets at the district and sub-district level
- Technical Meetings of the District Planning Coordinating Units (DPCUs), Budget Committee, Public Relations and Complaints Committee, etc
- Working Meetings of the District Tender Committee; Evaluation Panel; Review Board; and the District Security Committee
- Management Meetings of the Executive Committee, Sub-Committees, Management (Heads of Departments and Core Staff)
- Project Meetings including Site Meetings, Stakeholder and Review Meetings

2.2.2 Managing Time at Meetings

A meeting should only last long enough to make decisions. Any time above that is wasted time. When someone arrives late, s/he wastes the time of all who arrived on time. If six persons wait ten minutes for a seventh person, then not ten minutes are wasted but six times ten minutes; one hour. If you are tolerant of people arriving late, then you are tolerant of wasting the time of all who arrive on time.

Some people waste time:

- repeating what has already been stated,
- adding information that is not relevant to the decision at hand,
- using unnecessarily flowery and redundant phrasing,
- correcting unimportant errors that do not affect the decision at hand,
- making speeches (grand standing), and/or
- making time-consuming use of protocol.

These challenges must be addressed to ensure meeting takes place at the right timeframe. Effective meetings are influenced by three things:

1. They achieve the objective(s) of the meeting.
2. They take up a minimum amount of time.
3. They leave participants feeling that a sensible process has been followed.

2.2.3 Formalities

Meetings for other purposes usually have a strict procedure. The agenda starts with reading and accepting the previous minutes, and moves on to business arising from those minutes. Then the agenda is discussed in detail, and decisions are made by someone making a motion, it is seconded, and then all vote on it. Such meetings are useful where the deliberations are highly political or contested, and where the participants represent different and competing organisations. For a management meeting, such formality is dysfunctional and could be eliminated.

2.2.4 Speaking

Some people just love to hear themselves speak in a meeting. It does not matter to them that everyone already knows what they believe, and have heard the arguments before. The meeting coordinator should make it clear that such speeches are anti-productive and not invited to the meeting.

What is invited, and encouraged, is for the decision and its alternatives to clearly and briefly stated, for reasons why it should be made one way or another made, and for the decision made and recorded.

2.2.5 Chairing

The word "chairman" comes to us from the middle ages (around 1200 ad) when the feudal king and his council would meet. Only the king had a chair, and "chairman" was a euphemism for the king who had complete control over the meeting. The others, who sat on the ground, on stools or carpets, always agreed with what the king said, if they wanted to keep their heads. Nowadays some people try to keep the word, but want to appear to be gender balanced so use "chair" or "chairperson" for the position, especially if it is held by a women (often reverting to "chairman" when it is held by a man). In the MMDAs we do have Chairpersons of Sub-Committees and so on. Their roles are to serve as "meeting coordinators." The meeting coordinator keeps the meeting co-ordinated, ensures that time is not wasted and that it is used only for making executive decisions.

2.3 Meeting Processes and Management

2.3.1 Role of Secretaries and Recorders

The secretary provides administrative support to the committee or body and –

- organises the dates, times and venues for meetings (and catering if required);
- liaises effectively with and acts as a resource person for the chairperson and members;
- facilitates discussion by finding, analysing and organising material for the agenda;
- provides, where appropriate, policy advice in the areas covered by the committee's terms of reference;
- drafts accurate and succinct records of the meeting; and
- facilitates and, where appropriate, initiates action arising from meetings.

In order to do this, the secretary –

- develops an effective working relationship with the chairperson and members;
- knows and understands the terms of reference of the committee;
- knows and understands the terms of reference of related committees and understands the differences;
- understands the work of the committee and knows its role in a wider context;
- understands how the committee fits into the MMDA's decision-making structure;
- understands and is sensitive to the issues coming before the committee;
- knows the composition of the committee and understands how members are appointed;
- is familiar with standing orders/meeting procedures; and
- maintains confidentiality and discretion with regard to issues considered by the committee.

2.3.2 Arranging Meetings

Setting Meeting Dates and Arranging Venues

- The secretary drafts a proposed schedule of meetings for consideration by the chairperson. The date and time should be convenient for the majority of members.
- The schedule is generally made available to members well in advance. Forward planning ensures that meeting rooms are available and booked in advance and ensures that the flow of business through the stages of the various decision-making processes is appropriate and timely.
- The secretary should be aware of MMDA schedules and public holidays and the availability of committee members.

Catering

It is the responsibility of the secretary to arrange for any catering that may be required for morning/afternoon teas or luncheons.

Notice of Meetings

When arrangements for the meeting have been finalised, the secretary notifies committee members. This notice gives the date, time and place of the meeting, and if necessary, such information as accommodation and transport arrangements for external members. For regularly scheduled meetings, it is good practice for the agenda to include an item reminding members of the date and time of the next meeting. It is also good practice to confirm the room booking prior to circulating the agenda.

2.3.3 The Agenda

What is an Agenda?

The agenda is the statement of the business, including supporting documentation, for consideration and worth noting at the meeting. The secretary drafts the agenda and the chairperson amends/approves the agenda. Once the agenda is approved by the chair, it is circulated to members and other interested parties.

Order of the Agenda

The agenda includes a cover sheet, which states –

- the date, time and place of the meeting,
- name of the committee the meeting number for the year (e.g. Agenda 1/07)
- the list of the items

Thoughtful ordering of items on the agenda helps to ensure that urgent and important matters are listed first. The chairperson may choose not to follow the order of agenda as set out on the cover sheet.

Generally, the order of the agenda is as follows –

- *Apologies*: A phone number and/or email address is provided so that members who cannot attend the meeting can easily contact the secretary.
- *Confirmation of the minutes*: This heading refers to confirmation of the minutes of the previous meeting. This includes the date of the minutes to be confirmed and indicates whether they are enclosed with the agenda or have been previously circulated.
- *Business arising out of the minutes*: This heading refers to brief follow-up reports on matters that were discussed at the previous meeting. Note that matters which have significant new information, require further detailed discussion and/or action are listed as separate items in the agenda.

- *Matters for consideration*: This section lists those matters which the committee needs to discuss in detail and which require some action or decision together with the page(s) where the item is listed.
- *Matters for noting*: This section lists items for information only together with the page(s) where the item is listed.
- *Other business*: This heading is used to enable members to raise issues at the meeting. Note that the minutes should never have a heading "Other Business" as the items must be categorized.

Writing an Agenda Item

Each agenda item has a clear and concise heading that accurately describes the item. Consistency in the use of headings makes it easier to trace the history of discussion/decision-making for a particular topic and allows the topic to be filed in the correct file (this facilitates later retrieval of the information).

Each item has a recommendation for the committee to consider. The recommendation may be directional (e.g. it is recommended that members approve...) or non-directional (e.g. it is recommended that members consider...)

An agenda item also includes relevant background information and carefully written supporting documentation which are found in central files, previous minutes of the committee or minutes of other committees. Before writing an item, secretaries should always check relevant files, past minutes, current policies and rules for pertinent information. Sufficient, relevant information should be provided to allow the committee to give careful consideration to an item. The secretary uses good judgment to determine the amount of supporting documentation to be provided with an item of business. Supporting material of a few pages is included with the item in the agenda papers. This is referred to as an attachment and the agenda item text includes reference to this material.

Lengthy supporting documentation is included with the agenda papers as a separate document with independent pagination. This is referred to as an enclosure. The enclosure is identified on the cover sheet and the agenda item text refers to the enclosure (and at times, specific pages in the enclosure). Often it is necessary to summarize numerous or lengthy submissions to expedite consideration at the meeting.

In summary, the *agendum* –

- is a clear and succinct statement of the issue to be discussed;
- provides *essential* background and supporting documentation; and
- sets out the options available to the committee, where appropriate, recommends a course of action.

Circulation of the Agenda

The secretary drafts the agenda and provides it to the chair for approval. Agendas are sent to members no later than one week prior the meeting and for Ordinary Assembly Meetings, two weeks prior notice is required. This gives members sufficient time to read the agenda, consult the area they represent and prepare for discussion.

Second or subsequent circulations of the agenda, if needed, should reach members no later than 48 hours before the meeting. Unless absolutely necessary, it is advisable to avoid distributing (tabling) other items at the meeting.

If the chairperson approves, the agenda may also be sent to individuals who are not members of the committee because their role requires knowledge of the business of the committee.

Tabled documents are sent to members who were not present at the meeting and to others who receive a copy of the agenda. A copy of each tabled document is filed with other agenda papers for the meeting to complete the record. The secretary should ensure that the file copy includes the notation that the document was tabled at the meeting (with the committee name and meeting date).

2.3.4 Prior to the Meeting

Careful preparation before the meeting enables the secretary to provide the highest standard of support to the committee. The secretary must be thoroughly familiar with the agenda and the issues to be discussed by the committee. The secretary should re-read the agenda prior to the meeting and arrange for a briefing session with the chair person prior to the meeting.

The following is taken to the meeting –

- A minute book with the last page of the previous minutes flagged for the chairperson's signature.
- A meeting file including –
 - a list of current members (to enable attendance and apologies to be recorded);
 - the current agenda, a copy of any documents that are to be tabled (if applicable);
 - a list of apologies for the chairperson;
 - spare copies of the agenda and any enclosures;
 - terms of reference/standing orders of the committee;
 - background files or other material relating to agenda items; and
 - any briefing material for the chairperson.

Business file

The secretary maintains a business file for the committee. The file contains –

- previous agendas
- items deferred from previous meetings
- matters awaiting the receipt of additional information
- summary of recurring items which need to be dealt with at specific times during the year (e.g. budget matters, appointment of representatives to other committees, election of chairperson)
- matters referred from other bodies for consideration or noting by the committee at its next meeting
- other new items received for consideration or noting by the committee at its next meeting
- action taken from the previous meeting; and
- terms of reference and details of the membership of the committee.

2.3.5 During the Meeting

Quorum

The quorum is the number of members who must be present so that decisions reached at the meeting are valid. If a quorum for a committee has not been determined, the committee should decide what the quorum for its meetings should be.

Note taking

A verbatim record of the meeting is not required. However, the secretary should take sufficient notes to enable accurate minutes to be written. Relevant information from the agenda is extracted later for incorporation in the minutes.

Experienced secretaries often take fewer notes because they more readily identify points of relevance and general trends in discussion. Secretaries new to the committee usually take more detailed notes and discard irrelevant material when reviewing the notes in order to write the minutes.

Special care should be taken to record recommendations and decisions accurately. The chairperson should be asked to provide clarification if the intention is not clear. When taking notes at a meeting, it is useful to place a mark in the margin as a reminder that action is required or a recommendation/decision has been made.

Conduct

The secretary sits beside the chairperson. When required, the secretary provides information during the course of the meeting to help facilitate the conduct of business. This information is normally about past decisions, policy advice, the process to follow once a recommendation is made, etc. The secretary should use good judgment when interjecting and should ask the chairperson if it is permissible to speak.

Once in the meeting, there are several things you should keep in mind to ensure maximum satisfaction for everyone:

- If certain people are dominating the conversation, make a point of asking others for their ideas.
- At the end of each agenda item, quickly summarize what was said, and ask people to confirm that that's a fair summary. Then make notes regarding follow-up.
- Note items that require further discussion.
- Watch body language and make adjustments as necessary. Maybe you need a break, or you need to stop someone from speaking too much.
- Ensure the meeting stays on topic.
- List all tasks that are generated at the meeting. Make a note of who is assigned to do what, and by when.
- At the close of the meeting, quickly summarize next steps and inform everyone that you will be sending out a meeting summary.

After the deliberation is over, take some time to debrief, and determine what went well and what could have been done better. Evaluate the meeting's effectiveness based on how well you met the objective. This will help you continue to improve your process of running effective meetings.

2.4 Order of Minutes

Each page of the minutes has a header which contains the following information –

- committee name
- meeting number
- meeting date
- security level of the minutes (e.g. Confidential)

The following are included in 'the minutes' –

- **Present:** The title and name of each of those who attended the meeting, beginning with the chairperson followed by an **alphabetical** list of other members. The secretariat and regular observers are listed after the members. A full stop separates the list of members from the secretariat. Some larger committees list only the chairperson and secretary by name, and the total number of members present.
- **Invited:** A separate list of those who might be attended by invitation for all or part of the meeting.
- **Apologies:** An alphabetical list of those members from whom apologies were received.
- **Minutes:** A statement that the committee confirmed the minutes of the previous meeting. If an amendment is required, details of the amendment, including the item and page references in the previous minutes are recorded. The previous minutes are not corrected.

- ***Business arising out of the minutes:*** A brief update only on matters in progress, deferred or completed. If there is further detailed discussion at the meeting or a resolution was made, the matter should be recorded as a separate item in the minutes.
- ***Minutes:*** Each item is given a clear, concise heading, which mirrors the heading in the agenda papers/past minutes and describes the issue and resolutions/action items. The order of items in the minutes need not follow the order of the agenda or the order in which items were discussed at the meeting.

2.5 Guidelines for Minutes Writing

The following guidelines may be of assistance and Figure 1 and 2 below depicts the checklist for the pre and post meeting activities.

2.5.1 Consider the resolution

- Before writing a minute, consider the final outcome of the discussion. Was an agreement or a decision reached? What was it?
- This process helps identify what aspects of the discussion are relevant for inclusion in the minute.

2.5.2 Summarize the Background

- Include a brief statement of the issue or proposal under consideration and its source. If the source is a document, such as a letter or report, precise reference details for the document are given (e.g. memorandum from the Presiding Member to the Chief Executive dated 15/12/2009).
- Use good judgment as to how much background from the agenda papers is required. If the matter has been discussed at earlier meetings it is not necessary to repeat any details, which have been included in earlier minutes – a brief reference to earlier discussion is sufficient.

2.5.3 Summarize the Discussions

- Be clear and succinct.
- The sequence of the speakers is not important. The aim is to record the essential sense of the meeting and to summarize and interpret comments, not to record individual views.
- Subheadings are useful to summarize complex debate or discussion.

2.5.4 Resolutions

The ability of a committee to make a decision or a recommendation is determined by the –

- terms of reference of the committee;
- reporting lines of the committee; and
- decision-making structure and approval delegations of the MMDA.

Resolutions that are within the remit of the committee to decide commence with the words "It was resolved –".

Resolutions that involve referral to a higher authority are recommendations only and commence with the words "It was resolved to recommend –".

Resolutions must:

- specify the outcome of discussion
- identify action required
- include timelines for implementation

In order to draft a resolution that clearly identifies the appropriate outcomes, it is necessary to think through the consequences of the decision/recommendation and proposed action. It is necessary to carefully consider the resolution so that all consequences are understood, and all issues and implications have been addressed.

The following general principles apply –

- each resolution records a single decision or recommendation.
- resolutions are usually placed at the end of a minute
- a single resolution may consist of several subsections, each of which records an aspect of that particular decision/recommendation or its implementation
- resolutions clearly express the intention of the recommendation

The secretary is responsible for initiating action on all resolutions. Further action may be necessary when approval has been given for the committee's recommendation (e.g. initiating action for implementation of an approved policy).

2.5.5 Attachments to Minutes

When the committee has approved or recommended the approval of an important policy or procedural statement or a major report, it may be 'attached' to the minutes. Where an attachment is referred to in the minutes, the annotation '*Att*' appears in the margin of the minutes. The cover page of the attachment is annotated to indicate the name of the committee, the date of the meeting and the item in the minutes to which the document forms an attachment. The attachment is filed with the minutes.

2.5.6 Referral to a Higher Authority

The secretary is also responsible for preparing and submitting for the chairperson's signature, reports and letters to a higher committee or senior officers.

2.5.7 Finalising the Minutes

The secretary submits draft minutes to the chairperson of the committee for approval. The meeting file is submitted with the draft so that the chairperson has all the papers relevant to the meeting readily available when considering the draft minutes. Draft minutes should be sent to the chairperson within one week of the meeting.

2.5.8 Printing and Distributing the Minutes

Printed minutes (or if the chairperson approves, electronic copies) are sent to members, to the secretary and to others as appropriate. Minutes are usually distributed immediately after they are finalized or held for distribution with the agenda for the next meeting. A copy of the minutes is held in the appropriate file. Confidential items could be photocopied on coloured papers.

Figure 1: Pre-Meeting Check List

ASPECT	NOTES
Set meeting date	
Determine availability of chairperson	
Determine availability of members	
Book a meeting room	
Send notice of meeting(date/time/venue)	
Send invitation to visitors if applicable	
PREPARE THE AGENDA	
Read minutes of previous meeting	
Follow up action from previous meeting	
Locate and assemble background information	
Check for annual items	
Check for reports from other committees /office	
Check with chairpersons/ members for new business, business arising	
Establish the order of the agenda	
Provide the draft agenda to the chairperson	
DISTRIBUTE AGENDA	
Distribute agenda to members no later than one week before meeting	
File a copy of the agenda	
Arrange for special equipment such as audiovisual	
Arrange for refreshment /catering	
PREPARE MEETING ROOM	
Arrange seating to facilitate interaction among members Secretary sits at right of chairperson	
Provide water /glass after refreshments	
Set up equipment if applicable	
PREPARE YOURSELF	
Prepare your meeting papers.(collecting files/minute book/ spare agendas)	
Check for apologies	
Re-read agenda	
Assemble reference documents /files as required	
Arrive a few minutes early	

Figure 2: Post-Meeting Check List

AT THE END OF THE MEETING	NOTES
Check that all urgent items have been dealt with / clarify any business to the deferred to the next meeting	
Check with Chairperson to clarify unclear issues/ outcomes	
Return borrowed equipments	
Send tabled papers to members who were not at the meeting	
DRAFT THE MINUTES	
Read your notes	
Write formal item first (Present / Apologies, Confirmation of minutes, Matters arising)	
Write a minute for each item of business which is for noting / consideration	
Check that all matters discussed have been minuted	
Check that house style format has been followed if applicable	
Prepare attachments to minutes with reference notation on first page showing committee, meeting date and item number	
Send minutes and meeting file to chairperson for approval	
WHEN DRAFT MINUTES ARE APPROVED	
Ensure the meeting file is intact and stored in an agreed location	
Prepare an action sheet	
Take necessary action including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write/ draft letters for signature of chairperson conveying decisions / information from the meeting • Write letters to initiate action • Follow up unresolved issues 	
Prepare reports	
Note action as appropriate on action sheet	
Send original documents for filing	
Start collecting items for the next agenda	

2.6 Actions Arising from the Meeting

The secretary is responsible for initiating and following up on all action arising from the meeting. Secretaries -

- prepare correspondence arising from the meeting including conveying recommendations to relevant senior officers
- formally advise others of:
 - action they have been requested to take
 - items to note
 - implementation required
- prepare reports from the committee to other committees or senior officers
- ensure originals of all correspondence and documents relating to the meeting are held in the appropriate file.

The secretary may find it useful to prepare an **action sheet** from the minutes. An action sheet sets out by item the action to be taken, and notes when the action has been taken and by whom. This ensures that no necessary action is overlooked and reminds the secretary to follow-up matters that require further attention. Action notes also assist the secretary to prepare *Matters arising* items for the next meeting. When all action is complete, the action sheet is filed on the meeting file for future reference.

2.7 Writing Skills

2.7.1 Write with Necessary Caution

When writing, be mindful of the fact that once something is in written form, it cannot be taken back. Communicating in this way is more concrete than verbal communications, with less room for error and even less room for mistakes. This presents written communicators with new challenges, including spelling, grammar, punctuation, even writing style and actual wording.

Thankfully, today's technology makes memo, letter and proposal writing much easier by providing reliable tools that check and even correct misspelled words and incorrect grammar use. Unfortunately, these tools are not fail proof and will require your support, making your knowledge in this area important.

2.7.2 The Importance of Style

Some of the most basic tips to remember when writing include:

- Avoid the use of slang words
- Try not to use abbreviations (unless appropriately defined)
- Steer away from the use of symbols (such as ampersands [&])
- Clichés should be avoided, or at the very least, used with caution
- Brackets are used to play down words or phrases
- Dashes are generally used for emphasis
- Great care should ALWAYS be taken to spell the names of people and companies correctly
- Numbers should be expressed as words when the number is less than 10 or is used to start a sentence (example: Ten years ago, my brother and I...). The number 10, or anything greater than 10, should be expressed as a figure (example: My brother has 13 Matchbox cars.)
- Quotation marks should be placed around any directly quoted speech or text and around titles of publications.
- Keep sentences short

While the above tips cover the most common mistakes made when writing letters, memos and reports, they in no way cover everything you need to know to ensure your written communications are accurate and understood.

2.7.3 The Importance of Careful Proofing

Perhaps the most important thing to remember when writing minutes is to check it thoroughly when it is completed. Even when you think it is exactly what you want, read it one more time. This “unwritten” rule holds true for everything you write – memos, minutes, letters, proposals, and so on.

Use both the grammar and spell check on your computer, paying very, very close attention to every word highlighted. Do not place total faith on your computer here. Instead, you should have both a printed dictionary and thesaurus nearby to double-check everything your computers editing tools highlight, as these tools are certainly not always reliable, for a variety of reasons.

When checking your written communications make sure the document is clear and concise. Is there anything in the written communication that could be misinterpreted? Does it raise unanswered questions or fail to make the point you need to get across?

Can you cut down on the number of words used? For instance, don’t use 20 words when you can use 10. While you do not want to be curt or abrupt, you do not want to waste the reader’s time with unnecessary words or phrases.

Is your written communication well organized? Does each idea proceed logically to the next? Make sure your written communications are easy to read and contain the necessary information, using facts where needed and avoiding information that is not relevant. Again, outline the course of action you expect, such as a return call or visit.

Close appropriately, making sure to include your contact information. While this may seem obvious, it is sometimes overlooked and can make your written communications look amateurish. This can diminish your chances of meeting your written communication’s goals.

Figure 3 below, depicts minutes writing tips.

Figure 3: Minutes Writing Tips

STEP 1. Consider the outcome - what was decided

- The outcome is the point to which your written record of the background and discussion at the meeting should lead
- Check with the chairperson if you are unsure of the outcome.

STEP 2. Summarize the background- be brief and relevant

- Identify clearly the issue under discussion
- How did the issue arise?
- Has the issue been discussed before?
- Can you include background text from the agenda?
- What additional background information arose at meeting?
- Give sufficient information and references to enable the reader to understand how issue arose.

STEP 3. Summarize the discussion- be clear and succinct

- Don not record the discussion word for word
- Summarize and interpret comments- don on t record individual views
- Use dot points or subheadings to summaries complex discussions
- Describe briefly how the outcome was reached.

STEP 4. Record the outcome/decision - be decisive and unambiguous

- Was the outcome a decision or a recommendation?
- To which officer/ committee should the recommendation be made?
- Is the decision or recommendation clear and self explanatory?
- Is it clear what action is to be taken and by whom?
- Is there a time frame for the action?
- Who needs to know about the recommendation decision?

STEP 5. Check the style- be rigorous

- Use consistent styles
- Write in the past tense
- Use appropriate language, avoid the use of slang, colloquialism
- Avoid acronyms on first use
- Check that titles, nomenclature etc. are correct
- Check that grammar, spelling and punctuations are correct.

STEP 6. Review your draft minute- be objective

- Will the minute you have drafted be informative and intelligible to those readers who did not attend the meeting and /or who do not have access to the agenda (e.g. when reading the minute on a file)?
- Does the heading you have given the item describe accurately the issue considered?
- Is the minute brief and informative?

3.0 CONCLUSION

Reporting and Minute Taking can be complex, tricky and challenging. Minute takers are often expected to produce concise and coherent summaries out of chaotic and disorganized meetings. Many are directed to take minutes without documented guidelines on what to record and what to leave out, and without a prior explanation of issues and technical terms used at a meeting. Sometimes they require a rare combination of diplomacy and fortitude, to deal effectively with demands to record inappropriate details in the minutes.

This manual has offered the principles, standards and practical tools to help reduce anxiety about reports and minutes writing and establish clarity on what to record. It also explains how minute takers and reporters can build rapport with their groups and generate respect for their work.

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