
7. GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

Meeting Skills

(Adapted from the Website of Education and Training Unit: Community Organisers Toolbox)

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(a) *What do we use meetings for?*

Meetings are very important for the work of any school. Well run meetings are important for collective decision-making, planning and follow-up, accountability, democracy, and other practices that will contribute towards the functioning of the school. Meetings should be aimed at democratic decision making and constructive participation and involvement of staff members.

However, like all organising tools, meetings can be managed poorly and not serve the purpose that they are supposed to. Meetings sometimes become unnecessarily long, with the same matters being discussed over and over again without any progress. Meetings can also be used by individuals to generate conflict and be obstructive. Some people can also see attending meetings as additional school work instead of seeing them as a tool for getting work done.

(b) *Important things to know about meetings*

- General remarks on Executive Portfolios
 - Important things to know about executives
- Most organisations (big or small) have what is usually called the "top five ". This refers to five people elected into executive leadership of that organisation who are:
- The chairperson
 - The secretary (who might be assisted by support staff: the team is then referred to as the secretariat)
 - The treasurer
 - The Deputy chairperson
 - The Deputy / vice secretary.

The above are complimented by additional members who are given other portfolios in terms of the organisation's constitution. In the case of a school these portfolios may be:

- Personnel officer
- Legal adviser
- Media officer

- Project officer
- Fund-Raising co-ordinator
- Physical facilities
- Sport – and cultural activities
- Marketing
- Etc.

□ The role of the executive

The executive as a collective group has three main roles:

- To provide leadership and direction

Leaders are elected because members trust them to lead the way. Leaders can have many qualities and any one person will not have all of them. A good leader may be experienced, committed, inspiring, energetic, authoritative or easy to talk to. A leader of a community organisation army will need different qualities from a leader in the army.

Community leaders should try to lead in a way that makes members feel more powerful. People should feel that they themselves have achieved something when the organisation succeeds. Leaders should inspire and empower members, and should never dominate and dictate.

Leaders also have to behave better than anyone else and set an example to members. Here are some simple rules that will help you become a better leader:

- ~ Always uphold the public image of your organisation and know your organisation's policies
- ~ Treat all people with warmth and respect and listen to their views
- ~ Encourage participation and praise or thank people for the work they do
- ~ Be honest, behave with integrity and fight against all corruption
- ~ Always account properly for any of the organisation's money
- ~ Be accountable to your members and act with the mandate they give you - you should represent their views, not be their prophet who tells them what they think
- ~ Discourage gossip, rumours and destructive behaviour
- ~ Avoid getting involved in factions, cliques and conflicts
- ~ Be punctual and reliable and do not make any false promises - if you are unable to attend an event or fulfil a task, apologise and explain
- ~ Respect the people who lead your executive, but do not be afraid to question leaders
- ~ Never take for granted the support you have from members or from the public
- ~ When faced with a difficult decision, always put the interests of the community first, then the interests of your organisation and only then the interests of an individual leader or member.

To provide direction and leadership to an organisation, the executive should be very clear about their goals and strategies and the work the organisation needs to do. They should make sure that members understand the strategies and are involved in work. Some of the things they should do are:

- ~ Analyse the environment they work in on an ongoing basis
- ~ Do proper strategic planning at least once a year [see planning guide]
- ~ Have regular reviews of how the organisation is doing in terms of its plan
- ~ Monitor and manage the work of the organisation to make sure there is progress and problems are dealt with
- ~ Motivate members to become more active and to participate in activities as well as discussion and debate
- ~ Make sure members have information on relevant issues affecting the organisation.
- ~ Structure meetings in such a way that members can openly and frankly debate and decide on various issues related to the organisation. [see meeting guide]
- ~ Give opinions without stifling debates. Opinions from leadership should not suppress other member's views.

- To represent the organisation in public and elsewhere

Members of the executive are usually the ones who will publically represent the organisation. The organisation should be very clear about who represents them where and with what mandate. Leaders should not speak on behalf of the organisation if the organisation has not agreed on broad policies or positions on an issue.

Before representing your organisation in public, try to find out what will be expected of you and what your organisation's position is on any relevant issues. Executive members will be asked to represent their organisations in the following types of situations:

- ~ Addressing the public on an issue
 - ~ Negotiating with authorities
 - ~ Representing the organisation at meetings with other organisation.
 - ~ Representing the organisation on joint committees.
 - ~ Representation at formal occasions e.g. lunches, functions etc.
 - ~ Speaking on behalf of the organisation at functions/meetings the organisation is invited to.
 - ~ Representing the organisation when dealing with the media.
- To manage the work and administer the affairs of the organisation
- A large part of the work of any executive is administrative and managerial. You are responsible for the smooth running of the organisation. If you employ people or deal with lots of money, this can get quite complicated. In organisations that employ people, some of the work of the elected secretary is usually done by an employed administrator. The elected treasurer is sometimes assisted by a bookkeeper.

For small organisations with no staff, the following administrative work has to be done:

- ~ Setting up and maintaining a filing system
- ~ Typing
- ~ Answering the telephone
- ~ Dealing with correspondence
- ~ Writing and processing reports
- ~ Communicating with your regional or national office or other organisations
- ~ Keeping membership records
- ~ Keeping a mailing list
- ~ Keeping the minutes of meetings of the executive and the general membership
- ~ Put up notices of the meetings and issue out invitations
- ~ Keeping good financial records

- Role and tasks of the Chairperson
- The role of the chairperson is to chair meetings and act as the public leader of the organisation. In most organisations the chairperson performs the following tasks:
- Convenes and chairs meetings of the Executive Committee.
 - Chairs the general meetings of the membership.
 - Speaks at other meetings and events on behalf of the organisation.
 - Represents the organisation on other structures and with other organisations, authorities, funders and the public.
 - Deals with the media in liaison with media or publicity officer [if you have one]
 - Deals with disciplinary issues and problems members may have with the organisation.
 - Spends time on strategising and planning as well as monitoring progress of the organisation.
 - The deputy chair has the same role and plays it when the chair is not available. It is good to give the deputy chair some specific responsibilities so that person remains active and stimulated. The deputy chair could for example be responsible for sub-committees on projects, or could represent the organisation on the development forum.
- The role and tasks of the secretary/secretariat
- In many organisations the role of the secretary is to act as an administrator. In some bigger organisations like unions and political parties, the secretary acts more like a manager than an administrator. In terms of administering an organisation the secretary is usually responsible for the following tasks:
- Letting people know about meetings
 - Drawing up agendas for meetings.
 - Taking minutes of the Executive meetings and of the general meetings.
 - Following up all tasks and decisions that come out of meetings to make sure they are implemented
 - Writing organisational reports

- Keeping membership records.
 - Receiving and responding to correspondence
 - Keeping all records and a good filing system.
 - Dealing with incoming calls (telephones) and placing adverts in newspapers.
 - Manage the office if you have one
- The deputy secretary will assist the secretary and take over any functions as needed.

- **Treasurer**
The treasurer is responsible for managing the money of the organisation. S/he has to account for all funds raised and spent on a monthly and annual basis. In bigger organisations the treasurer is sometimes assisted by a bookkeeper. The tasks of the treasurer include:
 - Opening bank accounts
 - Keeping the cheque book
 - Drawing up a budget
 - Keeping record of incoming and outgoing finances.
 - Issuing receipts for money received.
 - Paying all the bills for the organisation within the budget
 - Keeping both the Executive and membership up to date about the financial status of the organisation.
 - Making sure that the organisation is audited and the annual financial reports are done and presented to the AGM

- **The purpose of meetings**
Most people do not like attending meetings – especially if they are not sure what the purpose of the meeting is, or if it goes on too long and achieves too little. Meetings must not be too frequent or held just for the sake of it. There must be a need for a meeting. There should be decisions about the different types of meetings needed. For example, some meetings could be intended for the discussion and formulation of policy and others to discuss aspects concerning the functioning of the school (practical work). Wherever possible staff members must know what type of meeting they are to attend and what the meeting is for – in other words, the **PURPOSE** of the meeting. Sometimes a school might call a special or extraordinary meeting.

- **Different types of meetings**
Most schools will hold the following types of meetings:
The School Governing Body meeting
The School Management Team meeting (SMT meeting)
Staff meeting
Subject- and other meetings

- **The general School Governing Body (SGB) meeting:**
This is the most common meeting, which usually happens once a month or twice a quarter. The general SGB meeting should be the place where members are informed of developments, involved in decision making and given education and information that will help them to become more active in the school. General meetings are usually used for chairpersons of committees and sub-committees to submit and present progress reports on their work. Other meetings of the SGB are:
 - **Special meetings:**
These can be called to discuss specific issues, for example preparing for an Annual General Meeting (AGM) or strategic planning for the year. Any members who are interested should be invited to attend special meetings. They should not be run like general meetings (with minutes, reports etc) but should only focus on the specific issues which they were called for.
 - **Executive meetings:**
The executive should meet more regularly than the general members, and executive meetings should have a more business-like focus. The executive has to plan implementation for the school, monitor the work that has been done and deal with problems. They should discuss correspondence in detail and address problems as they come up. Every executive meeting should have an item on the agenda that plans for the next SGB meeting.
 - **Financial Committee Meeting**
The Financial Committee should meet before every SGB meeting to prepare the financial report. The Financial Committee should also keep an eye on the finances of the school and monitor income and expenditure.

- **Annual General Meeting:**
All SGB's must have an Annual General Meeting laid down in their constitution. The AGM is the place where the SGB accounts to all parents about the activities of the year as well as the finances of the school. Most AGM's need at least the following two detailed reports to the parents:
 - ~ The chairperson's report that lists plans of the school, the actual activities that took place that year, the achievements of the year, and the problems experienced.
 - ~ The treasurer's report which is a detailed financial report that lists all income from school fees, grants, donations, fundraising; and all expenditure. This report should also clearly state what the balance is and where that balance is held. It is important to have a written financial report at your AGM but very often parents find financial reports difficult to understand and you should try and make it simpler by putting the main headings on screen and in newsletters and explaining it to people in less financial language.

▫ **Staff meetings**

Staff meetings can be the most important and productive professional development opportunities of the school year; on the other hand, they can be the most dreaded and squandered time a teacher will spend. So, what makes the difference between wonderful and wasteful meetings?

Successful staff meetings are a function of the purpose, the planning, and the pace of those meetings.

Comments of some experienced principals on ways to ensure successful staff meetings:

- "For me, the best staff meetings are those in which there is active participation, a lot of give and take, and a consensus".
- "I love staff meetings because I try to go into each staff meeting as a student -- a student of administration and leadership".
- "The best staff meeting is always the first staff meeting of the new school year," said a veteran principal. "The first staff meeting sets the tone for the whole school year. It is a time to share and be social. It is a time to establish the goals for the year."

(c) *Planning a meeting*

Planning should improve participation by ensuring that discussion is on a single topic and that the members are well prepared for the meeting. This is the responsibility of the Chairperson, Secretary and Executive. Planning does not mean controlling and directing the meeting in such a way that it restricts participation.

Planning should include the following:

- **Notification:** It is the executive's responsibility to ensure that everyone has been notified of the date, time and venue of the meeting, as well as the main issues to be discussed. For many schools it is a useful practice to always have their meetings on the same day at the same time in the same place – for example on the first Monday of every month in the staffroom.

Preparing the agenda: The agenda is a list of the most important issues for the members to discuss. It is drawn from the Matters Arising from the previous meeting and from previous discussions.

The agenda is the responsibility of the Chairperson and the Secretary. The chairperson should read the minutes of the previous meeting to familiarise him/her with the issues. This will form the basis of a list of matter arising from these minutes.

Matters arising include:

- Tasks – a report back must be given
- Matters for which further information was required for discussion
- Matters that were deferred to this meeting

There are standard items for any agenda. These items should be arranged in order of priority and time should be allocated for each discussion. Where possible, try to familiarise yourself with each area of discussion.

An agenda should include a last item known as General or Any Other Business to allow individuals to raise short items not included on the agenda. Members should be allowed to propose or request agenda items with proper motivation except in the case of special meetings.

Template for a general meeting (SMT-, Staff-, Subject meeting, etc.)

1. Opening

2. Welcome.
3. Attendees/Absentees (apologies)
4. Finalising the agenda (with reference to (10.) below)
5. Personal Matters
6. Minutes of previous meeting held on ...date / location, - *review and accept* (**previously circulated!**).
7. Matters arising from previous meeting and discussions.
 - Detail of action 1 and who was responsible
 - Detail of action 2 and who was responsible
8. Reports of work carried out since last meeting. *List those responsible*
9. Discussion of committee specific aspects and setting of objectives for next period of work. *List those responsible, detailing separate actions*
10. Any other business (AOB)
 - a. (e.g.) Correspondence
 - b. _____
11. Date / time of next meeting
12. Closing the meeting

(d) *How to run a meeting*

- The agenda
 - Open the meeting and welcome everyone. Then go through the agenda step by step.
 - Those present and apologies: The apologies of those members not able to attend the meeting are recorded as part of the minutes. Circulate an attendance register if there are too many people to just record presence and absences in the minutes. Ask if there are any apologies from people who are not there.
 - Minutes: Minutes are accurate recordings of what is discussed and decided on at meetings. Make sure that the minutes of the previous meeting are circulated to everyone or at least read at the beginning of the meeting. Minutes must be adopted at the beginning of a meeting. Give people a chance to read the minutes or read them out aloud. Ideally minutes should be distributed to members at least 7 days before the SGB meeting. Everyone must agree that they are an accurate record of the last meeting. Members must be given the chance to add where item/points might have been left out or to propose corrections to the minutes with the consensus of the members who attended the specific meeting. Changes to the minutes should be acknowledged with the initials of the chairperson and secretary.
 - Matters arising from the minutes: This covers points that were discussed at the last meeting, when perhaps someone was asked to do some work or there have been subsequent developments, which now need discussion. A list of these points is drawn from the previous meeting's minutes.
 - Correspondence: This means all the correspondence that has been received by the school since the last meeting. They can be dealt with in different ways. If the SGB has not received many letters, they could be read out and then discussed. Another way is for the secretary to list them with a brief explanation. The chairperson then goes through the list and suggests action. If the issue raised in the letter needs decisive action it can be more fully discussed.
 - Other items on the agenda: Someone must introduce each item on the agenda. The item introduced could be either a discussion or a report.
 - If it is a discussion someone is given the job of leading the discussion and making proposals on that particular item.
 - If it is a report, the person who is reporting should comment on the following:

- ~ Was it a task that was completed, what were the problems and what still needs to be done? (issue, facts, options, proposal)
- ~ Discussion should be to examine a problem or discuss an issue in more detail – get everyone's ideas and points of view on it, arrive at a decision, delegate responsibility for the completion of the task, and follow-up to ensure that it is completed.

■ Meeting Procedures

All members should know meeting procedures. There are a number of points that people use in meetings to ensure that the meetings run smoothly. Often members use these points to assist the chairperson.

The following are procedural points most used in meetings:

- **Point of Order:**
It should be used when a member feels that the meeting procedure is not being stuck to and s/he wants the meeting to return to the correct procedure or order. For example, when an individual is speaking totally off the point, another member might ask on a point of order for the speaker to stick to the agenda.
- **Point of Information:**
A member may raise their hand and ask to make point of information (or request information) when it is not his or her turn to speak. This can enable a member to speak (by putting up his/her hand and asking to speak) when it is not his/her turn to request more information on the matter being discussed, or to give more information on a point being discussed.
- **Out of Order:**
When an individual is not sticking to meeting procedure, being rude, interjecting or misbehaving in some way, the chairperson might rule him/her out of order.
- **Protection:**
A speaker who is being harassed when he/she is speaking can ask for the protection of the Chairperson.
- **Quorums:**
This is the minimum number of people who must be present for the meeting to conduct business and take decisions. This minimum number is stated in the schools constitution. The meeting cannot start until there is a quorum. Always ensure that you have this minimum number of people at a meeting, especially when decisions must be taken. If you do not, and decisions are taken, members who were not present can request that it is re-discussed, meaning that time was wasted.
- **Declarations of interest/Conflict of interest**
Any member should declare a conflict of interest, especially if it is of a financial nature. Essentially, a conflict of interest means a reference to the existence or **perception** of divided loyalties. A conflict of interest exists when it is likely that a staff member or director could be influenced, or could be **perceived** to be influenced, by a personal interest in carrying out their duties as a staff member or director.

All these points are called meeting rules or procedures, which are meant to make meetings more efficient and effective. They should not be over-used just for the sake of it.

■ How to take decisions in meetings

- Decisions are reached in mainly two ways:
 - Consensus
This means reaching decisions by discussion and general agreement.
 - Voting
People vote for a particular proposal. Usually one person will put forward a proposal, someone else will second it and then people will vote. If the majority of people accept the proposal, it then becomes binding on the school. There can of course be more than one proposal.

Voting can either be done by a show of hands or secret ballot.

- Show of hand
The Chairperson would call for a show of hand when there is a difference of opinion amongst members when a decision needs to be reached. S/he will call on members to raise their hands to show their support for or against a proposal. These votes are then counted – majority would then ensure that the proposal stands or is rejected.
- Secret ballot
Each person would be given a piece of paper on which s/he would indicate whether s/he supports a particular proposal or not. The votes would be counted and the majority would ensure that the

proposal stands or falls away. The secret ballot method is used when there are sensitivities involved, e.g. the election of persons for specific positions.

It is usually better to reach consensus than to vote. Reaching consensus often means that there are compromises from everyone but it ensures that most people feel part of the decision. Sometimes a vote does need to be taken, for example in elections or when the meeting cannot reach a decision through consensus.

□ Resolutions

These are formal proposals put forward to the meeting, for people to agree or disagree with. If some disagree, they are voted on. If passed, they become resolutions and therefore policy of the school. There should be a proposer and seconder of each proposed resolution.

Resolutions are a clear way to set out the policies and decisions of a school. Usually a resolution has three parts to it:

We start the resolution by saying that, eg: "*The AGM of the Natalspruit Girl's School, meeting on (give date) notes that:* then list the main issues of concern, for example:

Noting:

1. *the rapid increase in crime in this area,*
2. *the devastating effects it has on the lives of people in this area,*
3. *etc.*

The second part of the resolution will then list the points that show the *proposer's* interpretation of the issue and its causes, for example:

Believing:

1. *that the increase in crime is due to the failure of police to effectively service our community*
2. *that the high unemployment rate is forcing many of our young people to take up crime as a way of life*
3. *etc*

The third part lists exactly what the school has decided to do or what its policy should be on the issue, for example:

Therefore resolves:

1. *to actively participate in the community police forum*
2. *to use all means possible to pressurise the police to perform their duty*
3. *to work with the local council to ensure that facilities and clubs are supplied to keep our youth off the street*
4. *etc*

Amendments may need to be made to resolutions, and these should be accepted by everyone present. If there is not total agreement on an amendment, a vote should be held and the chairperson should record the votes of those for, and those against the amendment, as well as those abstaining. If the majority support the amendment it stands and the original section of the resolution falls away.

The Chairperson and members must study the constitution of the school to make sure they know and understand all these procedures.

■ How to chair the meeting

The role of the chairperson in a meeting is of exceptional importance. He or she will set the pace for the meeting, make sure that people stick to the topics, ensure participation and democratic decisions making, and that everyone is on board with these decisions. Chairing is a great skill and it is important to teach members to chair meetings and rotate the job where possible so that more people can practise this skill. However, it is always good to have an experienced chairperson for important meetings.

A good chairperson is an active chairperson; it is not the chairperson's job to simply keep a list of speakers and to let them speak one after the other. The chairperson should introduce the topic clearly and guide the discussion especially when people start repeating points. When a discussion generates opposing views, the chairperson should also try to summarise the different positions and where possible, propose a way forward. The way forward can involve taking a vote on an issue, having a further discussion at another date, or making a compromise that most people may agree with. The chairperson should ask for agreement from the meeting on the way forward, and apologise to those who still wanted to speak.

Here are the basic steps for chairing a meeting:

- The Chairperson opens the meeting and presents the agenda.
- S/he should start a meeting by setting a cut-off time when everyone agrees that the meeting should end. This helps to encourage people to be brief.

- Check who is present or absent, present apologies where applicable
 - Present the agenda, allow additions
 - Report personal matters (illnesses, achievements etc)
 - Present the minutes of the previous meeting: allow members to point out inaccuracies by working through the minutes page by page.
 - Ask for someone to propose that the minutes be accepted as an accurate reflection of the previous meeting, and for someone to second the proposal.
 - Sign the minutes. If there were amendments, suggest that you sign once these have been affected.
 - Call on individuals to introduce or lead the discussion of points on the agenda and give everyone a chance to speak.
 - Ensure that no one dominates the discussions and that everyone feels free to participate.
 - Try to summarise the discussion, clearly restating ideas and proposals put forward and making sure that the person taking the minutes knows exactly what to record. However, there is no need to repeat everything that has been said.
 - Try to obtain agreement on every matter under discussion, ensure that everyone understands the decision, specify who is to carry out the decision, ensure that the person given the responsibility knows what s/he has to do and when it should be done and reported on. In some cases it might be wise or appropriate to minute a minority view.
 - S/he ensures that everyone takes part in the discussions and decision-making.
 - S/he ensures that the date for the next meeting is always set at the meeting.
- How to write minutes in the meeting
 - It is essential that minutes are recorded accurately. This not only serves as a reminder of issues that need to be followed up but also prevents disputes about previous decisions. Minutes are also a guide for the secretary and chairperson when drawing up the agenda for the next meeting. Minutes help the school to learn from its past failures and successes. This is done when the secretary reflects on the minutes of the past year when drawing up an annual report. There are four aspects to taking good minutes:
 - Be prepared. One way is to load the agenda onto a laptop and to do the minuting under the respective headings.
 - Listening
This is a very important skill to develop. You must not only listen to what is being said but you have to ensure that you understand as well.
 - Taking notes
Write down only the main points and the decisions taken. It is impossible to write down everything that is being said.
 - Always try to identify the main points
What is the main aim of the discussion?
What information is important?

Use your own words. If you do this you will find that your minutes are more accurate and complete than if you try to jot down everything a speaker says.

 - Pay special attention to decisions. If necessary, ask for the decisions to be repeated.
 - Ask for clarification. Do not hesitate to stop the meeting if you are not clear about any decisions or issues being discussed.
 - Quick and easy guide to taking minutes
 - Minutes are simply notes taken during the meeting to remind you what was discussed and agreed. They don't need to be long or complicated, in fancy language or perfect grammar. They do need to record clearly and simply what decisions were made at the meeting and who is going to carry them out.
 - It is the Secretary's job to take minutes.
 - What tasks are involved in taking minutes?
The basic tasks for the minute-taker are:
 - Taking rough notes during your meetings.
 - Writing/typing up these notes neatly.
 - Copying and distributing them to relevant people.
 - Keeping all minutes together in a file for future reference.

- What should you write/type down?
One of the most difficult things about taking minutes is knowing what to write/type down and what to leave out. Keep these three central points in mind:-
 - Don't try to write/type everything down – it's impossible and not useful.
 - Concentrate on WHAT has been decided and WHO is going to do it. These are the most important things to have records of.
 - Don't worry about producing the perfect minutes – it's not a test or a competition.

- Sort out the basics
 - Make sure you have a copy of the agenda to follow. If the agenda is produced in advance of the meeting, read it carefully and if possible go over it with the Chair.
 - Get a decent pad of paper and some good pens.
 - Make up an attendance sheet in advance, and pass this around for people to sign.
 - Have the file of past minutes with you, in case any questions come up about decisions from previous meetings.

Writing/typing rough notes

The rough notes you take at the meeting need to be clear enough for you to make sense of them when you come to write/type them up! The following things can help: -

- Start the page with the name of your group, date and place of meeting.
- Always put an underlined heading for each separate item.
- Leave a few lines space between one item and the next, so you have room to add other points if the discussion comes back to it later in the meeting.
- Underline or highlight decisions and who has agreed to do what.
- Try dividing the page so you have a narrow column down one side for recording who has agreed to do what.
- Remember that the minutes need to be understood by someone who wasn't at the meeting, so you need to give a bit of background. For example, put 'the people in Pretoria were disgusted by the rubbish in the street' rather than 'they all thought it was disgusting'.
- The most important thing is to write/type the minutes up quickly. Don't put the job off for weeks - it makes a huge difference if the meeting is still fresh in your mind.

- Some common problems
There are some things that make every minute-taker's life difficult.
Here are some of the most common problems: -
 - It is difficult to know exactly what *has* been agreed. No one is sticking to the point and lots of different suggestions are being made about what to do.
 - The discussion jumps from one item to another before any of them are finished.
 - Everyone is talking at once, and you can't follow the discussion.
 - There is a long, confusing discussion and you don't know which bits are important to get down.
 - You have been very involved in a particular issue and want to say things, but can't minute at the same time.
 - You are nervous about getting it right.

- Some solutions for (g)
 - If a meeting is well run it makes taking minutes much easier. It's the Chair's job to keep the meeting in order – but they can only do this with the co-operation of everyone at the meeting.
 - One idea is to discuss and agree together some guidelines by which you'll run your meetings - for example not interrupting, putting your hand up if you want to talk, and keeping to the agenda item under discussion.
 - Feel free to point out that is impossible to take minutes if everyone is talking at once and not following the agenda.
 - If it's not clear what decision has been made, ask the Chair to clarify this.
 - If there is a particularly important or controversial decision it can be useful to check what you are writing/typing down with the meeting.
For example; 'so the meeting wants it minuted that we have agreed to boycott all Council meetings until they meet our demands.'

- If you are concentrating on taking minutes it does limit how much you can join in the meeting – it goes with the job. If there is an item where you have been centrally involved and have a lot to say, think about asking someone else to take minutes just for that item. You can also make use of a tape recorder for the period when you feel you want to actively take part in the discussion. This can also be done during complicated or very technical discussions.
 - If there is a long discussion, try to pick out the main points and just list them. For example; 'There was a long discussion about rubbish collections and the following points were made...'
 - Discuss the agenda with the Chair before the meeting – the clearer you are about the content of the meeting, the easier it is to minute it.
 - Go through your minutes with the Chair after the meeting. It can be helpful to check through what you've written with someone else.
 - Don't worry if your minutes aren't perfect – this won't really matter, and like everything it gets easier the more you do it.
- Golden Rules
- The main things to remember when you are taking minutes are:
- Listen carefully to the discussion
 - Don't try to write/type everything down.
 - Concentrate on writing/typing down *what* has been decided and *who* is going to do it.
 - Give each item a separate heading.
 - Write/type your rough notes up *soon* after the meeting.