

# **HOW TO WRITE QUALITY MINUTES AND REPORTS**

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# HOW TO WRITE QUALITY MINUTES AND REPORTS

BY

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

I feel highly elated to be chosen by the Centre for Human Resources and Development to contribute my humble quota in "Driving the Culture of Excellence" of our dear Vice-Chancellor through grooming of younger Administrators. I appreciate his efforts and the Centre in the training and retraining of staff even in the face of paucity of funds.

I welcome all of us here today to discuss how to write quality **Minutes** and **Reports** which is one of the core duties of Administrators who serve as Secretaries to all Committees and Panels in the University system.

We are aware that everybody who knows how to read and write makes attempt at writing minutes. That is why we find all types of minutes of Social, Religious and Community Associations. To a layman, they are minutes but to an Administrator, most of them lack basic skills and competences, hence the need to note the differences.

## 2.0 DEFINITION OF TERMS

In order to properly understand the topic, it is necessary to define the key words which are "Write", "Quality", "Minutes" and "Report".

### i. Write

Webster's New World College Dictionary describes the word "write" as to form or inscribe words on a surface using a pen or pencil.

### ii. Quality

It is an adjective that is defined as the degree of excellence which a thing possesses.

### iii. Minutes

(a) It is an official record of what was said

and done at a meeting or convention.

(b) It is the summary or record of what was said and decided at a meeting especially of a society or committee.

### iv. Report

(a) Oxford Dictionary defines it as a formal statement of the results of an investigation on which definite information is required by some persons or body instructed to do so.

(b) It is a formal statement or official account of the results of investigation etc.

(c) To present or return (something referred for study, action etc) with conclusions reached or recommendations.

## 3.0 LAYOUT OF MINUTES WRITING

We know that the quality of any minutes or report lies in the body and language. Before we proceed to the essentials of minutes writing, it is expedient that we refresh our minds on the acceptable body or layout of minutes.

### I. Title

Contents of the Title should include:

- (a) Name/Title of Forum and purpose of the Committee
- (b) The Number of meeting and type of Committee
- (c) Date and venue of the meeting

### ii. Reference Number

This captures the abbreviation of the Committee, the number of the individual meeting, the current academic session and numbering of minutes.

For example,  
APSAPC/2016/M.95/13.00.25.00. If another meeting is held from October 2017, the reference number should change and the minute numbering



reverts to 1.00, for example:  
APSAPC/2017/M.96/1.00-12.00.

### iii. **Membership**

This shows up - to - date list of members of the Committee indicating their titles, designation/post in order of seniority.

The categories should include:

- 1.00 Membership
- 1.01 Present
- 1.02 Absent
- 1.03 In-Attendance.

Another method is to list all the members under ATTENDANCE and use acronyms to identify those who are absent, with or without permission. Then explain the acronyms in the footnote. (See example as Appendix 1)

### iv. **Opening**

The opening paragraph should record the exact time the meeting started, who said the opening prayer and any relevant opening remarks by the Chairman of the Committee

### v. **Adoption of the Minutes**

Where there have been previous meetings, the correct titles, initials, and names of the persons who moved the adoption and seconder should be recorded. Minutes are not valid until they have been adopted.

### vi. **Matters Arising from the Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The Secretary reads the "Matters Arising" in the order in which the matters arose during the proceedings of the previous meeting. The Committee should know whether or not the decisions, resolution, recommendations made at the last meeting have been communicated to and implemented by members or bodies concerned.

### vii. **Numbering of Minutes**

Minutes are numbered according to the items on the agenda but where lengthy discussions were held, or where more topic were discussed, within an item, title(s) or sub-headings, and number(s) are required, for example:

#### 4.0 **2015/2016 APPRAISAL OF SENIOR NON-TEACHING STAFF IN THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES**

4.01 Medical Officers Cadre

4.02 Nurses Cadre

4.03 Medical Laboratory Technologist Cadre etc.

Please note that side-numbering of minutes is always encouraged for ease of reference.

### viii. **Adjournment**

The exact time the meeting ended should be indicated and the correct titles, initials and names of the mover of the motion and the seconder should be recorded as well as who said the closing prayer.

Finally, when the Minutes of the meeting are produced, provision should be made for the Chairman's and Secretary's signatures

As I pointed out earlier, the layout of the **Minutes** or **Report** alone does not make/categorize them as being quality in nature. It is the language and skill that distinguish them as "quality".

#### 5.00 **TECHNICAL SKILLS IN MINUTES AND REPORT WRITING**

The Handbook of Administrative Procedures (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, 2016) section 3.5.2 outlines the technical content and



structure of Minutes of Committees as follows:

- i. When dealing with the **Minutes** on each item in the agenda, first consider how the conclusions should be stated, as briefly as possible but making clear exactly what was decided or noted.
- ii. Then add only as much before the conclusions as is necessary to put them in context. Usually it is necessary to indicate how a discussion began, either with or without a paper circulated. If a subject was introduced without a paper, then an indication of how it was raised and some brief summary of what the points at issue were should be given. This may apply especially to points raised under Matters Arising or Other Business.
- iii. Between the introduction and the conclusion, it is not generally necessary to record the course of discussion at all, unless:
  - (a.) New Matter relevant to the conclusions was raised especially, if the Committee changed recommendations made to it.
  - (b) Principles were newly stated and agreed to, which should be on record for future reference.
  - (c) There were significant disagreements needing recording, especially if there was a vote at the end.
  - (d) Some other cases where a record of discussions may be useful in future.
- iv. If discussions is to be recorded, it should be on the basis of "The main points made in the discussion were . . . . . Or those supporting the proposal said . . . . . and those against said

. . . . ., not "A member said these another member said that, etc.

- v. Generally, Minutes should not identify individual speakers, except as a person introducing a subject, or moving, seconding or formally opposing a motion.
    - (a) A person making a point in an "official" capacity e.g. The Chairman, the Secretary etc.,
    - (b) Where it is necessary to identify a speaker to make some part of the discussion intelligible.
    - (c) Where a speaker specifically requests that his observation (usually of dissent from decision) be recorded.
  - vi. Minutes contain recorded speech, and should be written in the past tenses.
  - vii. It is always necessary to proof read Minutes and eliminate typing errors before submitting to the Chairman for final vetting.
  - viii. Always ensure that Secretariat of the Committee/Panel circulates copies of minutes to all members, not only those who were present at the meeting. This is a reason for listing some members of the Committee who could not attend the meeting as "absent" in the Minutes.
- The above guide from HAP should be internalized by every administrator. The ability to master this guide alone does not make a quality **Minutes** or **Reports**. This then takes us to the Language of Minutes

## 6.0 LANGUAGE OF MINUTES

First, as listed in (vi) above,



**Minutes** contain recorded speech and should be written in past tense. A good command of English language is required and is a good mark of quality minutes writing. According to a former Registrar Orje Ishegh-Nor, **"Good writing should be grammatically correct, accurate, simple, logical and direct to the point"**. The use of high sounding words and very long sentences lead to ambiguity in minutes.

Secondly, there are some commonly used words in the writing of minutes. These words are used because they convey the required information very well. Example of such words and their usage include:

- i. Directed – used when a smaller body or subordinate is to take action.
- ii. resolved) These words denote decisions reached decided ) at the meeting. Agreed )
- iii. recommended - used when a rather lower body suggested something to a higher body e.g. in appraisal exercise, the Departmental Appraisal Committee recommends to School Appraisal Committee.
- iv. Noted ) When an information is given in a meeting. Aware of)
- v. Ratify - Used when the Committee approves and action taken by another body/Chairman on its behalf.
- vi. Inform – When a member or a body gives out information to the Committee.
- vii. Presented) Documents are presented and received. Received )
- viii. Considered – Documents or Reports are considered before decisions are taken.

## 7.0 REPORT WRITING

- According to Oxford Dictionary, Report is a formal statement of the results of an investigation on which definite information is required by

some persons or body instructed or required to do so.

- It is also a formal statement or official account of the results of an investigation.
- A Report should be the summary or end product of a work done be it research or investigation and it usually takes time to be put together.

The above definitions of report have few similarities which include:

- Conveys information
- Communicates findings
- Makes recommendations

Let us also look at the importance of report writing. Reports are written for various reasons such as:

- i. To help solve a problem when such Reports are written to address specific issues/problems. These type of Reports are based on given Terms of Reference. e.g Report of the Panel on the destruction of the school gate.
- ii. To provide a record of decisions taken and evidence that the issues have been analyzed. eg. Report of the Committee on the send-forth of the Registrar.
- iii. To explain specific events eg. Report of the 2016 Convocation.
- iv. To assist in decision making eg. Report of the financial implication of building a Tennis Court.

## 8.0 TYPES OF REPORT WRITING

There are two types of Report namely:

- Academic Reports: Dissertations, Theses, Research Projects, Term Papers etc.
- Administrative Report: Annual Reports, Quarterly Reports, Committee or Panel Reports, Audit reports, Progress reports etc.

The basic difference between the two types of Report is whereas Academic reports tend to state the purpose and objectives using experiments and



research. Administrative reports try to reach agreement on the terms of reference.

## 9.0 STRUCTURE OF REPORT WRITING

### a. Academic Reports

The structure of Academic Report is as follows:

- Title page
- Acknowledgement
- Table of Contents
- Number of meetings held
- Visits to places
- Interactions with people
- Documents consulted
- Abstract
- Literature Review
- Data Collection
- Data Analysis
- Recommendation
- Conclusion
- Bibliography/References
- Appendix (ces)

### b. Administrative Report

For the purpose of this lecture, we are concentrating on what we are familiar with, which is the Committee/Panel Report.

#### 1 - Title

This captures the purpose of the Committee or Panel and must be in initial caps. eg. "Report of the Panel on the Stealing of the Projector in Department of Biology

#### 2 - Introduction/Preamble

- \* It explains the reason or what led to the report
- \* It states the membership
- \* Terms of Reference
- \* Time frame within which the report is to be submitted

#### 3 - Modalities

This section states all the procedures involved in arriving at

the recommendations.

- Number of meetings held
- Visits to places
- Interactions with people
- Documents consulted

#### 4. Findings/Observations

These are treated in relation to the terms of Reference

#### 5. Recommendations

#### 6. Conclusion

#### 7. Signature Page to be signed by all the members and the Secretary (Any member who refuses to endorse the report should be advised to write a minority report).

### How then do we write Quality Report

As stated earlier, reports are written after series of meetings. Generally good or quality Report must have meaningful beginning which explains the reason for the report and introduces the reader to the subject. It must equally end by summarizing how the report has achieved its objectives.

## 10.0 CHARACTERISTICS OF QUALITY REPORTS

Clear - The report should be easily understood by the reader. This is achieved by using simple and direct language comprising short sentences.

- Avoid verbose, unnecessary jargon and flowery language which does not contribute any meaning to the report
- Ensure a logical presentation whereby each point leads naturally on to the next.
- All necessary information are included
- The recommendations should be in line with the extant rules.
- The report should not go outside its terms of Reference.
- The majority of the members should be

- present during the vetting of the report.
- Timely submission of the report is necessary.

According to the Revised Federal Civil Service Handbook, the essentials of Minutes-Taking which when imbibed will help to achieve quality Minutes and Reports include the following:

- i. Ability to understand the trends of discussion which involves:
  - Understanding of English Language and the subject matter.
  - Good hearing and listening skills
  - Having a seat in an appropriate place
  - Concentration
- ii. Deciding what should be recorded and what should be left out
  - Know objective of the meeting
  - Maturity and good judgement
  - Understanding the environment
  - Know when to seek clarification
- iii. Recording the Minutes
  - Basic grammatical competence

- Comprehension and précis skill
- Sequencing and restructuring skill
- Ability to write fast and listen at the same time
- Time Management skill

## 11.0 CONCLUSION

Writing quality minutes and reports is a product of hard work and continuous practice on the art. It is therefore necessary and advisable to expose ourselves to the art of writing minutes and reports in order to create room for improvement.

It is also pertinent to read good books and previous minutes of meetings to improve ourselves. I implore all of us to also mentor our subordinates on the acceptable standards in order to leave worthy Administrators we should be proud of.

I do hope that my humble contribution would impact positively on our job.

**Thank you for listening.**

