

How to be the Best Secretary...

Role of the Secretary

The basic function of the Secretary is to keep the records of the organization (apart from financial records) and to deal with correspondence.

This includes:

- Keeping records of members including on the Committee in order to show who is entitled to vote and to receive votes
- Calling and giving notice of meetings as required by the Constitution
- Ensuring that any papers required are prepared and circulated prior to the meeting
- Taking responsibilities for seeing that letters are written and replied to and that correspondence is available for inspection.
- Preparing agendas if required. This is sometimes a function carried out by the Chairperson and Secretary.
- Ensuring that adequate written records and written or oral reports are available for the incoming secretary so that they can maintain proper continuity.

Minutes

Provide a history of the organization. They are a written reminder of the decisions reached. They are an important tool which can be used for planning, decision making, conflict resolution and training. By having such a record it is easy to keep track of what was actually decided.

They are a record of the meeting and the decisions that were made as per the agenda.

They include:

- Who met
- Where and when the meeting was held
- What was discussed
- What was decided
- Who agreed to do what

It is best to write up the minutes as soon as possible while the process is still clear in your mind and send them to the members quickly so that those people responsible for following up on items have a record of this. If you are taking the minutes during a meeting and get behind, don't be afraid to ask the President/Chair to hold up the proceedings until you have noted the information.

What is included in the minutes:

- Information as per the agenda with the same numbering
- An indication of the type of meeting
- Date, place and time of the meeting start and finish time
- Those present (though if a large meeting, the number present can be reported and the name of the chair must be included)
- Reference to previous minutes. It should be noted that they are correct and note any amendments or business arising from them.
- All motions, the maker (seconding party is optional), and the disposition of a motion.
- When a report is presented, it should be noted.

Minutes are a legal document, recognized in a court of law. They are a form of contract between the participants at the meeting. Therefore a sufficient number of the participants of the meeting must see and agree that the minutes are a true and accurate record of events, and a representative of the meeting must sign in front of a witness testifying that it is a true record.

Storage of Minutes - the minutes must be:

- Stored securely in a way that ensures that they are difficult to lose, remove or replace
- Stored only with other minutes of the same type of meetings
- Filed consecutively
- Indexed so that particular meetings can be easily located
- Indexed so that all decisions relating to a particular issue are easily located including policy and procedure changes

Motion Slips – either the secretary or parliamentarian should provide motion slips and see that they are completed for the secretary (and any other parties as called for in your group).

Meeting Report Form – it may be helpful to provide a form so that members can write up a report ahead of time to turn in to the secretary for her minutes.

Critiquing Your Minutes

Thank you for sending me your chapter minutes. Your chapter is involved in many activities and projects. Keeping accurate information is a vital link to the history of your chapter. I will review and return your minutes with some comments.

The following items should be included in your chapter minutes:

- Name of your organization, date, time and place of meeting is listed first
- Type of meeting (ie membership, board, committee, etc)
- Members in attendance and guests – to record this in an easy manner, have a checklist or pass around a sign-in sheet. For larger meeting you can report the number of chapters or members in attendance.
- Establishment of a quorum – list the number of attendees present and the number of members (ie 14 out of 15; quorum established)
- Record the names of people leading the creeds and Pledge of Allegiance
- Approval of previous meeting's minutes – a statement that the minutes were approved either with or without corrections – if corrections, they should be state in the minutes.
- Officer Reports including their name and title.
- Treasurer's Report should include the beginning balance, receipts, disbursements and the ending balance.
- Programming and Project reports – note only highlights, specific plans or accomplishments. If projects are fun, be sure to inclure the date of the project, the number of participants, number of service hours and budgetary considerations.
- Include all Parliamentary action:
 - ✓ Motion Abbreviations
 - M/S/P Denise Smith/Jane Smith to hold a candle sale in November.

A/S/P to donate the proceeds to a women's shelter.

M=moved, S=seconded, P=passed, A-amended, D=defeated

- ✓ Motions that are withdrawn should NOT be recorded.
- ✓ Include the number of ayes and nays when there is a counted vote. (It is not necessary to record abstain votes – they are a null (blank) vote and do not count toward a decision.)
- Clear and Concise – minutes should record decisions made and actions taken, not what was said.
- Minutes should be kept in short paragraph form with headings and marginal divisions.
- Hour of convening and Adjournment – meetings should be adjourned either by motion or when all items on the agenda are completed. If the latter is the case, simply state in the minutes “there be no further business, the meeting was adjourned at _____AM/PM.”
- Complete the minutes with your name and title (secretary). When approved, you could note the date next to the name/title.

Written reports

An excellent way to assure that you are getting everything down correctly is to require written reports from everyone. “Easier said than done,” you say? Here are a few ideas you can try that may increase the use of written reports.

- 1) Have blank report forms available at each meeting. Hand them out to anyone that doesn't give you one when they are reporting and ask them to fill it in.
- 2) Ask whoever prepares your agenda to include a space for service house, number of members, \$ donated on each line that will have a report so that as the person is giving the report, members can just fill in the information.
- 3) Give incentives to everyone that turns in a written report to you or have a drawing for those who do.
- 4) Put them in your shoes and show them how difficult it is to listen closely and hear all the details. Do a listening activity like the one I've outlined on the back side, and then test them on it! This will help them see why you require reports to be written down.

Listening Activity: (enlist a volunteer to listen as you read the following)

“Please listen carefully because I have to go to the hospital right away. I just called the police from the gas station on the corner. I just witnessed a robbery. You must wait here and make the report to the police. I was walking into Johnson's Liquor Store, and this guy came running out and almost knocked me over. He was carrying a white bag, and it looked like he had a gun in his left hand. He was wearing a Levi jacket with the sleeves cut out and a green and blue paid shirt and blue jeans with a hole in the right knee. He had skinny legs and a big stomach. He wore wire rim glasses and high top red Converse tennis. He was bald and had a brown mustache and was about six and a half feet tall, probably in this mid-thirties.”

After you have finished reading the message, ask your volunteer to repeat as many details as she can remember. Average listeners will miss many important details, and even make up some to fill in the gaps. This activity demonstrates the importance of turning in written reports so that the information can be accurately recorded.

The Minutes are a Permanent Record

Now that those minutes are all typed up, what should you do with them? Every chapter member should receive a copy. You can either have copies available at your next meeting or they can be distributed with your newsletter. Remember, the newsletter copy of the minutes is NOT the permanent record. One copy should go in a binder marked “permanent records” or “official minutes.” Using page dividers to mark each month is wise. Your handwritten notes can be discarded after the minutes have been approved by the membership. Copies of motion slips should be attached to the minutes. It is a good idea to bring copies of the minutes for the current year and the last year to each meeting, in case someone has a question on what happened previously. Older records may be kept in either the secretary or president files.

Common Rules for Using Correct Capitalization and Punctuation

Capitalization

- Always capitalize the name of the organization at any level. It is a proper noun. (i.e. Minnesota Women of Today, MN Women of Today, Anytown Women of Today)
- When a title or position is used with a person’s name, the title and the name is capitalized. (i.e. President Mary, President Mary Smith, District 16 Director Ivy Doe)
- When a position is used in place of a name or when you are writing about the position in general it is not capitalized. (i.e. chapter president, district director)
- When abbreviating, use capital letters with no punctuation.

MNWT	Minnesota Women of Today
USWT	United States Women of Today
SPM	state Program Manager
DPM	district Program Manager
LPM	local program manager
DD	district director
CIP	chapter information packet

Punctuation

- When referring to a group or more than one, do not use an apostrophe or periods.

Correct
All DDs are meeting at 10 a.m.
The CIPs will be stuffed in the Blue Room.
All LPMs will be asked to speak.
All the past presidents were honored.

Incorrect
All DD’s are meeting at 10 a.m.
The C.I.P. will be stuffed in the Blue Room.
All LPM’s will be asked to speak.
All the past president’s were honored.

- An apostrophe is used when you intend to show ownership or possession.
The LPM’s report was turned in to the secretary.
The DPM’s training session was very informative.
The outgoing treasurer’s files were transferred to the new treasurer.

Tips & Tricks of the Trade

As the secretary you are a key officer of your chapter!

An Effective Secretary is:

Methodical - Get a file cabinet or special box! Buy a box of manila folders – one for each project/topic. It will be money well spent.

Impartial – If you're committed to serving the members you won't get involved in cliques, internal power plays or politics.

Constitutionally Alert – Like all members, you must be thoroughly alert to the legal and constitutional requirements of your organization. You should have a copy of the bylaws and polices always on hand to ensure that your chapter is always acting appropriately.

Duties for Meetings

Notice of meetings must be sent in accordance with the group's polices and bylaws. If no rules exist, your notification must ensure that all members know about the meeting. If all those entitled to be at the meeting aren't given proper notice, there's a risk that the decisions of a meeting could be invalid. Even those who say they are not able to attend should receive official notice. The notice should mention; Time, Date, Place of the Intended Meeting, Nature of Business, and Type of Meeting.

The Agenda – The president and secretary should be familiar with the agenda. They could plan it together.

The Minutes – It is essential to have a correct record of the proceedings of a meeting which is why minutes are kept. These serve a varied role – they are both a general record, an attendance record and, in case of later doubt or dispute, they're a legally acceptable reference and guide. Make sure minutes answer who, what, where, when and why.

Minutes should state whether a quorum is present; refer to your bylaws for what constitutes a quorum in your chapter.

Side margins on minutes and agenda should be wide enough to allow room for notes, corrections and comments.

Style – It's essential when writing minutes that the secretary use clear, simple language accurately and without ambiguity. The minutes should be dictated or written up quickly before the memory fades. Just in case, keep notes made at the time until the minutes have been confirmed at the next meeting. Use the past tense when writing minutes and define points of agreement and disagreement. Try to reflect logical sequence when reporting the series of events which might have surrounded discussion on a topic or led up to a motion about it.

Motions include the names of both mover and seconder (M/S/P or M/S/D Jane H/Sally D). Avoid recording expressions of a general nature that will bind future meetings; and ensure when recording motions, particularly difficult ones, that you understand them fully. If you don't

understand a motion, quickly ask the president to have the motion repeated. Motion slips really help to get the motion recorded correctly.

Approving minutes where possible, the minutes should be circulated before the meeting. Try to avoid reading the minutes in full – it kills the meeting right at the start! The president or secretary should ask if there are any corrections or additions to the minutes of ____ (date of the meeting). If there are any corrections or additions they should be made in ink in the margins of the official copy of the minutes. It is not necessary to make a motion to accept the minutes. Minutes are approved by the membership either as written or with noted revisions. The members must not reopen discussion on the decisions taken at the previous meeting. They are voting only on the accuracy of the record.

Reports – Many members complain about “wasted time”. If you want to reduce this then try (and keep trying) to get members to present written report – with suggestions, proposals or firm recommendations. It doesn’t matter if they’re only hand written but it’s a guaranteed way of remaining business-like and saving time.

Helpful Hints to having “Colorful” and useful minutes

- Make sure your minutes answer who, what, where, when and why
- Minutes should state whether a quorum is present. You can refer to your bylaws for what constitutes a quorum.
- Side margins should be wide enough to allow room for corrections.
- When changes are made to the minutes, they are recorded in the margins next to the incorrect item.
- It is not necessary to make a motion to accept the minutes. Minutes are approved by the membership, either as written or with noted corrections/additions.
- Minutes should contain:
 1. Name, date, place and type of meeting
 2. Time convened and adjourned
 3. Attendance list
 4. Treasurer’s report of account balances
 5. Action taken on items of business
- If the membership does not want something in the minutes, there are two ways to do this:
 1. A member can move “to enter into a committee of the whole” until the particular item is through being discussed
 2. A member can move “to strike from the minutes an item that was already discussed.”
- Remember minutes are factual recordings of any action taken. Be certain that you listen closely and are clear on what was discussed.

Storage of Minutes

Permanent record of minutes is a very important part of chapter records and as secretaries; it is our job to do it correctly. Below are suggestions on permanent record keeping:

1. Use a three ring binder or duo-tang folder. If you use a binder, several years of minutes can be stored.
2. Use dividers to file board and general meeting minutes by month.
3. Attach motion slips, treasurer reports committee reports, etc. to the permanent copy of the minutes.
4. Any changes to minutes should be written on the permanent copy.
5. Minutes printed in a chapter newsletter are **NOT** considered a permanent copy. Permanent records should be kept separately by the secretary.
6. Pass on your binder to next year's secretary as soon as you are done typing the last board and/or general meeting minutes. You may want to share what you have learned this year and encourage her to continue this process of storing your chapter minutes.

Minutes and Motions

There is no area in the minutes where accuracy is more important than in the recording of motions. Motions should always be recorded in their exact wording. (use motions slips to assist you in this.)

It is not necessary to record discussions that took place prior to the passing or defeat of a motion. Get into the habit of bringing up new projects or business in the form of a motion. Once the motion has been seconded, THEN it can be discussed. In your minutes you simply state the motion, second and whether it passed or was defeated.

EXAMPLES:

M/S/P (Smith/Doe) "I move that the Anytown Women of Today sponsor a candidates debate."

(This motion was made by Ms Smith, seconded by Ms Doe and passed by the membership)

M/S/D (Smith/Doe) "I move that the Anytown Women of Today sponsor a wet t-shirt contest."

(This motion was made by Ms Smith, seconded by Ms Doe and defeated by the membership)

M/S/A/P (Smith/Doe) "I move that the Anytown Women of Today hold a fundraiser" amended "with proceeds going to the March of Dimes Foundation."

(This motion was made by Ms Smith, seconded by Ms Doe, amended and passed by the membership)

M/S/A/D (Smith/Doe) "I move that the Anytown Women of Today host a comedy show" amended "at Comedy Central".

(This motion was made by Ms Smith, seconded by Ms Doe and defeated by the membership)

There could be rare instances where the efforts at thoroughness could work against you in the recording of motions. A good rule is to only move the basic facts and leave the details to the committee. For example:

M/S/P (Smith/Doe) "I move to hold a car wash for Kidney Disease on Saturday, November 13".

If in this case the committee was unable to find a location to hold the car wash on the date mentioned, some further parliamentary action would be required at subsequent meetings since the date was included in the original motion.