Basic Introduction to

Student Group Meeting Procedures

Meeting Procedures

Why have a meeting?

Meetings are convened to conduct the business of a working group or unit in a collaborative setting. Those who attend a meeting as participants or members of a committee receive information and participate in the process of making collective decisions.

Depending on its purpose, structure and ‘culture’, some organisations run their meetings very formally. Others are less formal, but still disciplined. Each agenda item is introduced by the chairperson and followed by discussion based on a motion (recommendation for action) before it is put to a vote. The aim is for meetings to run smoothly, keeping the discussion on track whilst still allowing all options to be explored and all views to be heard. For the board to ‘speak with one voice’, it is important that your meeting procedure allows for diverse points of view to be expressed prior to reaching an agreed position.

(Reynolds, 1999)

**Meeting Flow Chart**

1. **Drafting the Minutes of the Previous Meeting**  
   The Minutes from the previous meeting are drafted.
2. **Writing the Agenda**

The agenda is drawn up for the next meeting. It includes the time, place and content of the meeting. The agenda provides the frame work for the meeting.

1. **Minutes and agenda are circulated**

The agenda and the draft minutes of the previous meeting are circulated to members, normally a week prior to the set meeting date.

1. **The Meeting is opened**

At the appointed place and the appointed time, the chairperson (usually the president) opens the meeting by stating the name of the committee and declaring the meeting open.

1. **Apologies**

The chairperson names those members who have indicated that they are unable to attend.

1. **The Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The chairperson reminds members that they have received a copy of the draft minutes of the previous meeting and moves that they be accepted or adopted. Debate may then ensue about certain parts of the minutes. If changes are to be made, these changes should be noted by the meeting secretary and the resolution carried by the meeting with the alterations.

1. **Business Arising from the Minutes**

If there are any issues arising from the minutes of the previous meeting, they are debated, and a vote is taken on the appropriate action to be taken.

1. **Correspondence**

If any correspondence has been sent to the meeting (usually through the chairperson or the meeting secretary), they are tabled and debated, if the meeting wishes to do so.

1. **Reports**

If there are any reports written for the meeting, they are tabled and debated, if the meeting wishes to do so.

1. **General Business**

Items listed in the agenda under this heading are debated. The debate usually begins with the chairperson calling on someone to move a motion. Often a seconder is required before the debate can begin. Amendments can be made to the original (substantive) motion and, when the chairperson feels that the debate has lasted long enough, they will call for the motion to be put to a vote. The chairperson then calls on someone to move a motion relating to the next part of that area of discussion or relating to the next item on the agenda.

1. **Any Other Business**

When all the items on the agenda have been debated, the chairperson calls for those who wish to discuss or debate issues that have not been included in the original list of items under the heading 'General Business'. If issues of significance are raised at this time, they must be held over to the next meeting so that everyone has a fair chance to consider them. Such issues form the basis of the list of items under the heading 'General Business' in the next agenda.

1. **The Meeting is Closed**

When discussion and debate on the minor issues allowed under the heading 'Any Other Business' is complete, the chairperson usually thanks everyone and states the expected time and place of the next meeting.

When all the items on the agenda have been debated, the chairperson calls for those who wish to discuss or debate issues that have not been included in the original list of items under the heading 'General Business'. If issues of significance are raised at this time, they must be held over to the next meeting so that everyone has a fair chance to consider them. Such issues form the basis of the list of items under the heading 'General Business' in the next agenda.

Activity

* Name two outcomes that meetings in general are hoping to achieve.
* What is the purpose of the meeting’s agenda?
* What are two things you should do prior to the meeting in order to be prepared?

Motions

There are two types of motions; substantive and procedural.

* *Substantive motions* are motions which focus on the business of the organisation, they are statements which, when carried, commit the organisation to a course of action.
  + ‘I move we adopt the 2012 Strategic Plan as presented.’
  + ‘I move that we purchase 30 new chairs for the meeting room.’
* *Procedural motions* are about the procedures used during the meeting. They help you to decide how to make decision. Procedural motions (sometimes called formal motions) are not usually discussed and take precedence over substantive motions.
  + ‘I move that debate be adjourned until the next meeting.’

A motion is only a recommendation until it is carried (passed). Once carried, it is a resolution, an agreed upon decision.

A rescission motion is a motion to formally rescind, or reverse, a previous decision before action on the previous decision has been taken.

An amendment to a motion is designed to make a motion clearer, not to significantly alter the intent of the original motion.

A motion may look something the following:

1. Motion moved
2. Chair calls for Seconder. If no Seconder Chair calls ‘motion lapsed for want of a Seconder’. Meeting proceeds.
3. Name of mover and name of seconder and wording of Motion recorded in Minutes
4. Motion Debated (For/Against called for by chair)
   1. Amendment Moved.
   2. Chair calls for seconder. If no seconder Amendment Lost. Results recorded in minutes. Debate continues original motion from 4.
   3. Name of Mover and Seconder and wording of Amendment recorded in Minutes.
   4. Amendment Debated (For/Against called for by Chair.
   5. Mover offered Right of Reply by Chair.
   6. Amendment put to Vote by Chair.
   7. Results of Vote called by Chair and recorded in Minutes. If Amendment Lost, debate continues original motion. If won Amended Motion becomes the Motion. Proceed as usual.
5. Mover offered Right of Reply by Chair
6. Motion put to vote by Chairperson
7. Results of Vote called by Chairperson and recorded in Minutes.

Another way of dealing with changes to an original motion is to ‘through the chair’ (speaking to the chairperson in acknowledgement of their role in the meeting), suggest that ‘with permission of the mover and seconder’, different working be incorporated into the original motion. If your suggested working is clear and sensible and generally reflects what appears to be the wishes of the meeting, this usually a simpler way to improve a substantive motion and is much kinder to the person taking minutes.

Point of Order

A ‘Point of Order’ is made to draw the meetings attention to a breach in rules, an irregularity in procedure, the breaching of established practices, a contradiction of a previous decision or to highlight the irrelevance or offensiveness of a speaker’s comments or their continued repetition. You cannot use a point of order just because you disagree with another committee member or you do not like their suggestions.

Standing Orders

Standing Orders is the name given to the meeting rules adopted by an organisation. Standing Orders can be written in a plain English summary of the way the organisation wants their meetings to be conducted. These should be review yearly and should be included in the induction of new members.

(Reynolds, 1999)

Terms of Reference

Terms of reference describe the purpose and structure of a committee, meeting or any similar collection of people who have agreed to work together to accomplish a shared goal. Terms of reference show how the scope will be defined, developed, and verified. They should also provide a documented basis for making future decisions and for confirming or developing a common understanding of the scope among stakeholders. In order to meet these criteria, success factors/risks and restraints should be fundamental keys.

Creating detailed terms of reference is critical, as they define the:

* Vision, objectives, scope and deliverables (i.e. what must be achieved)
* Stakeholders, roles and responsibilities (i.e. who will take part in it)
* Resource, financial and quality plans (i.e. how it will be achieved)
* Work breakdown structure and schedule (i.e. when it will be achieved)
* They should include: Success factors/risks and restraints.

The terms of reference set out a road map. They give a clear path for the progression, by stating what needs to be achieved, by whom and when. There must then be a suite of deliverables which conform to the requirements, scope and constraints set out in this document.

**Effective Meeting – Tips**

The following are some tips to help you make your next meeting successful, effective and maybe even fun.

Before the Meeting

1. Define the purpose of the meeting.
2. Develop an agenda in cooperation with key participants. See a sample agenda.
3. Distribute the agenda and circulate background material, lengthy documents or articles prior to the meeting so members will be prepared and feel involved and up-to-date.
4. Choose an appropriate meeting time. Set a time limit and stick to it, if possible. Remember, members have other commitments. They will be more likely to attend meetings if you make them productive, predictable and as short as possible.
5. If possible, arrange the room so that members face each other, i.e., a circle or semi-circle. For large groups, try U-shaped rows.
6. Choose a location suitable to your group's size. Small rooms with too many people get stuffy and create tension. A larger room is more comfortable and encourages individual expression.
7. Use visual aids for interest (e.g., posters, diagrams, etc.). Post a large agenda up front to which members can refer.
8. Vary meeting places if possible, to accommodate different members. Be sure everyone knows where and when the next meeting will be held.

During the Meeting

1. Greet members and make them feel welcome, even late members when appropriate.
2. If possible, serve light refreshments; they are good icebreakers and make your members feel special and comfortable.
3. Start on time. End on time.
4. Review the agenda and set priorities for the meeting.
5. Stick to the agenda.
6. Encourage group discussion to get all points of view and ideas. You will have better quality decisions as well as highly motivated members; they will feel that attending meetings is worth their while.
7. Encourage feedback. Ideas, activities and commitment to the organization improve when members see their impact on the decision-making process.
8. Keep conversation focused on the topic. Feel free to ask for only constructive and non- repetitive comments. Tactfully end discussions when they are getting nowhere or becoming destructive or unproductive.
9. Keep minutes of the meeting for future reference in case a question or problem arises.
10. As a leader, be a role model by listening, showing interest, appreciation and confidence in members. Admit mistakes.
11. Summarize agreements reached and end the meeting on a unifying or positive note. For example, have members volunteer thoughts of things they feel have been good or successful or reiterate the organization's mission.
12. Set a date, time and place for the next meeting.

After the Meeting

1. Write up and distribute minutes within 3 or 4 days. Quick action reinforces importance of meeting and reduces errors of memory.
2. Discuss any problems during the meeting with other officers; come up with ways improvements can be made.
3. Follow-up on delegation decisions. See that all members understand and carry-out their responsibilities.
4. Give recognition and appreciation to excellent and timely progress.
5. Put unfinished business on the agenda for the next meeting.
6. Conduct a periodic evaluation of the meetings. Note any areas that can be analysed and improved for more productive meetings. See a sample meeting evaluation.

And remember, effective meetings will keep them coming back!

**Speaking and Listening**

For some people speaking at a meeting can be frighting experience. It is important that you are comfortable in meetings to ensure your point of view is considering. A meeting’s objectives are more likely to be met if there is a productive atmosphere in which ideas and points of view are freely exchanged without ill feeling**.**

Be Prepared

If you have trouble speaking in a meeting, then prepare yourself. You may have to try several different techniques in order to find the one that works for you. One of these is to write down the main points you wish to say. You could note these in the meeting if an issue has just been raised you wish to discuss. For long speeches or presentation, you could write out the main points, developing a short introduction in which you mention what you are speaking about and how you want to deal with it. Some people write an entire speech, then write the key phrases in large print and highlight the key words. They keep this as their speaking notes. Whatever strategy you try, you still may want to practice what you will be saying to help ease your fear. Anxiety can be reduced by ensuring that you are well prepared. You may more easily develop the confidence to speak about a subject after you have thoroughly researched the issues and spent time writing your speech. For some speakers, simply breathing deeply or performing light physical exercise such as walking is enough to reduce levels of anxiety.

Listening Skills

Hearing is a passive process. Listening, on the other hand, relates to hearing in combination with other things. The ‘other things’ are paying attention and comprehending the message.

Listening Checklist

* Constantly ask yourself what the speaker means.
* Continually agree or disagree in your own mind with what the speaker says.
* Disassociate yourself from your own emotional reactions to what the speaker says.
* Evaluate the message only when you have heard it all.
* Remember that people think approximately four times faster than they speak.
* Focus your energies on concentrating, analysing, paraphrasing and summarising.

Activity

Think about the last time you did a presentation or had to talk to a group of people. How did it go? If it went badly, what could you do to improve? If it went smoothly, what do you think you did to have this occur?

**Behaviour in Meetings**

Some people can adopt a character which will help them win the day in the meeting they attend. The very best of them can even change character during a single meeting. The second rate simply sticks to one role and play it for all it is worth. Recognise them for what they are and then work out tactics to neutralise their behaviour.

Here is a selection of roles that tacticians play. Each role can be and is played by members of either sex.

**The Born Leader-**This is the one who makes long speeches about any topic she chooses. She usually litters the monologue with complaints and attacks on others and she often speak for the group she claims to represent. She is an unelected leader, and probably an unwanted one.

**The Cheery Soul-** The booming voice, the loud laughter, the sarcasm-how he does things is more important than what he does. He dominates, he oppresses, he bores.

**The Conqueror-** She is busy, often happy. She sometimes leaves sentences unfinished because surely you know what she means. Of course, you are left floundering in this impressive and impregnable world. All these silly little meetings, and even sillier little arguments that others come up with. It's best if the meeting were closed so the hero can get on with her real job. Of course, her real job, taking up vast amounts of energy, is convincing you that you are less important than she is.

**The Critic-** He never says anything at a meeting. He listens critically, often with a sneer, and then tells you what should have been discussed or says, 'if anyone had any brains.' He does this after the meeting is over. Whose side is he on?

**The Deadly Listener-** This person is sly. She is a brilliant listener who sits back throughout most meetings and may only occasionally interrupt for clarification or explanation. Sometimes it seems that she is not going to contribute at all. But then she strikes. She will attempt to demolish every argument put forward, often on the most trivial of technicalities. The question is, does she really have something of substance to contribute after she has performed her trick?

**The Democrat -** This person believes that everyone must be informed. He wants everyone involved in discussing the issue so that everyone else is assured that they are very well informed. When this has occurred, all possible perspectives must be included so that no-one is put out or influenced unduly by the proposal. You'll find that the person who serves morning tea will end up making the final decision on the introduction of a new mainframe computer and Federal Parliament will have to be recalled over its summer break to endorse the inclusion of chocolate biscuits with morning tea nibbles.

**The Emotional Blackmailer-** This is a person who turns purple with rage or whose eyes glisten with tears when accused (always falsely, of course). She exaggerates her emotions and hopes that others in the meeting will be so anxious that they will give in to the blackmail.

**The Encourager-**In meetings he encourages others to speak. He is friendly and open and a valuable member. He praises good ideas and good work and he doesn't criticise failures too much. He is a team person who searches for solutions to collective or individual problems. He is great for morale.

**The Frown-** She frowns and says, 'That's an interesting idea, but what if [insert a disaster here] happens?' She is the classic devil's advocate. Sometimes she attacks resolutely anything that is not her own.

**The Furious**- He is quick to anger and easily upset. People are always on edge around him. No-one wants to participate with him and often he gets his way. He can ruin a meeting, ruin a productive mood, mess up progress and interrupt the free flow of discussion.

**The Gossip-** A meddler, she knows a lot about the latest scandal, but she probably has no control over what and to whom she broadcasts her hot news.

**The Incompetent-** 'I really don't think I can do that...'; 'I am too shy to talk, or to think of a solution or to offer an opinion'; 'I am sorry about this, but I don't think I should be here'. He is hopeless-a dead weight. Remove him from the meeting because everything he says is correct.

**The Know-All-** She seems to know everything. She dominates with her memory and her constant flow of clever words. She assesses what you don't know and confidently fills the meeting with details drawn from her comprehensive knowledge. She doesn't necessarily have the skill to put it all into practice but that will not be apparent in the meeting. In fact, she will probably be able to hide anything that she doesn't know about. Even if you expose the gaps in her knowledge, she will suggest that these matters are irrelevant anyway.

**The Limelighter-** This person loves being in the limelight but hates having to do any work. Any problem is always someone else's fault. He is never responsible. He is never wrong. He has a million well-practised excuses to create a smokescreen. He is more trouble than he is worth.

**The One-Trick Pony-** She has a single set of issues that concern her. She has a chip on her shoulder and in every meeting her issues are revisited.

**The One-Minute Enthusiast-** He jumps on the bandwagon. He is excited by some new issue or project under discussion. He promises advice and assistance and when the meeting is over, he forgets everything he has said.

**The Perfectionist-** Like those who play other negative games, she looks for the perfect situation before she can fully agree to any proposal. She would love to support the motion for a general meeting but first all the photocopiers in the organisation should be overhauled or replaced because photocopying all the agendas would be a hassle for the poor meeting secretary who must do it. If only someone would invent a reliable photocopier. Maybe a taskforce could be set up to find and purchase the very best photocopiers.

**The Pessimist-** His lifetime of hard knocks and bad experiences has taught him that practically nothing can be achieved. He knows all the reasons why the proposal won't work. Once he is won over to a proposal, convincing the others is easy.

**The Powerless-** This is the character who says that she has not been given the power to take responsibility for the decisions taken in the meeting. In any case, she would argue, the decisions taken will be ignored. The meeting is futile from this perspective, and so is any work relating to the meeting-like taking minutes, writing agendas, distributing reports and the rest.

**The Quiet Controller-** He has a soft voice, quite calming but somewhat sibilant-hint of a hiss. He speaks quietly to the chairperson so that their conversation becomes one-to-one and no-one else can gain from the interchange. Often, he knows lots. Knowledge is power and he is protecting what he knows.

**The Truth Teller-**This person is scrupulously honest, to the point of exposing her weaknesses and of confusing the matter under discussion. She often does not give appropriate weight to positives and negatives and she usually finds it impossible to decide.

**The Voice-** Often a person of little substance, he loves to hear the room-filling resonance of his own voice. He is an egotist who can slow a meeting to a crawl and drain any motivation.