SCRIPT 2: MINUTES!

**Introduction**

In our previous lesson, we talked about how email etiquette is a way of showing respect to the people your working with, as well as the work that you are doing. In a lot of ways, RESPECT is going to be the theme of the semester, because as we move on to Minutes, we will learn a method of documenting a meeting that tries to respect the time your organization spends together.

Have you had a disagreement with a friend about who said what? Maybe you thought they told you that they wanted to watch Shang-Chi, and now they’re telling you they hate Marvel movies. Or maybe your roommate swore to you that he would take out the garbage, but she is now saying it was your turn to take it out. Your friendships will hopefully survive small discontinuities like these, but when it comes to work, large projects involving multiple people’s time, money, as well as people’s reputations are on the line. An organization may opt to take minutes in order to remove ambiguity about what was said. But that’s not all that minutes do as we will see.

The term “Meeting Minutes” or just “minutes” refers to official notes that are taken to record key elements of a meeting. Many minutes templates can be found online, and they vary to a small degree as to what details they entail. However, the following list of items are usually included:

**Date**:
Don’t underestimate the value of putting a date on documents. While you might not think it is important, and might not think that you will forget, you never know when this information will become useful.

In the case of holding meetings, putting a date on your minutes can help you remember the sequence that agreements were made.

Name of Organization: What is your group called?

Location: As you know we are living in Covid times. This detail is probably not necessary for what you will be doing, but it is traditionally included when a non-recurring meeting takes place.

Attendance:

Everybody attending the meeting is often accounted for by their initials or a shorthand version of their name (if somebody shares initials with somebody else). This shorthand will become useful as you note what was said.

Meeting Start Time:

At some point, the chairperson or other designated official of the meeting will begin. There is usually a space for this, but you may note at this point, that this detail may or may not be useful to you in different situations. Depending on how official the meeting is and the minutes tradition of the group, things like this are often excluded, while for other minutes, the start-time is noted down to the exact minute. This can help a group determine how much time it is taking people o get settled.

**Agenda**:
The chairperson of the meeting should have made a list of items that the group will address over the course of the meeting. Usually these items arose during the last meeting, but for the first meeting, they will have to be planned by the chair, or generated via open-forum.

Here are some examples of agenda items:

Sample Agenda

1. Come up with a group name
2. Divide writing responsibilities
3. Create research team
4. Test prototype

Sample Discussion

1. We brainstormed names and after a vote, we will be called “Blue Origin”
2. The group determined that writing responsibilities required include:
* Writing the Business Proposal
* Editing the Proposal
* Writing the Press Release
1. We took volunteers for the research team
2. We decided to create a committee to create parameters to judge the prototype performance.

As you can see, some of these items can be completed during the meeting, while others call for an individual to take on a task, or a committee to be formed and then take on the task.

**Discussion**: Sometimes points made during a discussion are summarized in a discussion section. Different individuals may be credited for their contributions. Different discussion sections can be created for the different agenda items.

**Action Items:** Think of these as the agreements made during the meeting as to how various tasks are going to be accomplished. The action items section displays the tasks that are going to be performed and by whom.

For example. Say your team is holding a meeting about sending the CEO of your company to space. Your team needs to figure out how much money that you have to build the spacecraft, so somebody will agree to figure out how much money is in the budget to build it. Somebody else will agree to research how much money is required. So you might note:

Sample Action Items

2. CY will discover budget
3. PL will research cost

**Additions**: Anybody in a meeting may want to discuss something during this or a future meeting (depending on the time and energy of the other group members). Use this section to fill up the agenda for next time.

**Announcements**: During announcements, any information pertaining to the whole group should be given, including the next meeting time.

**Adjournment**: When did the meeting end?

Of course, all of this sounds very official, and without a designated secretary, it can be a lot of work. The important thing is that you consider what is right for your group and commit to it (you can change your mind if something is not working, just bring it up during a meeting). Because you are working in small groups, for example, you may not feel the need to note the meeting adjournments. You may even decide that you trust everybody enough to take on their action items without writing them down. Basically, ask yourself, “if I am not using a certain element of the traditional minutes format, how is our group making up for its absence?”

You will find that meetings don’t happen all the time in professional settings, however, they happen often enough that you should be familiar with them and able to use them any time important business needs to be done and nobody wants things to go to chance.

**The SECOND FUNCTION of taking minutes.**

Although minutes can be highly structured, they were invented not to create hierarchy, but to prevent it and encourage participation from all members. Because all items are brought up in a systematic way, the floor is open for any individual to contribute their thoughts to these issues without worrying that somebody will steer the conversation away from the topic. You will typically find that by using Minutes, you will hear from more voices in a meeting, not fewer.

Tabling

Before we go, I would like to bring up a special action that your organization can take during a meeting. If an item on the agenda is not urgent discussed or acted upon, you can move to “table” an issue.

You may also move to have an agenda item postponed for the next meeting. For example, in the example of sending your CEO to space, perhaps the annual sales report is going to be released at a point in the future, and the sales report is going to play a role in what the budget for the CEO SPACE ROCKET will be. In that case, you will want to table the issue, which means that you are postponing the issue for later.