
UNIT 7 TAKING NOTES & PREPARING MINUTES

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7.0 OBJECTIVES

Our objectives in this unit are that after you have worked through it you should be able to

- take notes at meetings where the subject matter is familiar to you, using active listening and correct note-taking techniques
- convert the notes into minutes, using the format, language and style proper to formal minutes

7.1 WARM UP

Get hold of two minutes of meetings, either from your own office or someone else's office. Read them carefully and

- a) write your impressions of the minutes in terms of format, coverage, language and style.
- b) make corrections wherever necessary.

It would be a good idea to work with a partner – either a friend or a colleague at the Study Centre.

7.2 INTRODUCTION

All formal Meetings require that a written record of the meetings – of the discussions held and decisions reached – be prepared and kept on record. This is obviously necessary since if no such record is available disputes can later arise about what exactly was said or decided at the meeting. It, therefore, does not come as a surprise that certain meetings, like Annual General Meetings and meetings of Board of Directors of companies, are required by law to keep the minutes of their

proceedings. Even non-formal meetings, like a face-to-face meeting of two officials of a company, may find it necessary to keep at least an informal record of their decisions in the form of a memo. There are several good reasons for this. For example, failure to keep a record of a verbal warning to a subordinate may stall any future disciplinary action against him/her; failure to record which person was decided upon to take which action may make it impossible to fix responsibility in case of a future foul-up. Apart from such considerations, records of meetings also help other people, who need to know but are not required to be present at the meeting, to find out what went on at the meeting.

For these aims to be achieved, it is necessary that the report of the meeting be correct and factual not only in recording the decisions taken, resolutions passed, votes cast in favour or against a resolution, etc. but also in reporting the discussion wherever this is required. In fact, the reporter is less likely to get the factual data wrong than the emphases and biases manifested during the discussion, since there is more scope for disagreement in reporting the latter. To ensure that no inaccuracies in reporting go undetected, the minutes are always presented before the committee at its next meeting for its approval.

The person who records the minutes, therefore, has a serious responsibility. S/he is usually the secretary of the organization, but at informal meetings the Chairperson can request any member to record the minutes. Whoever records the minutes needs to possess the skill of note taking, for all that s/he can do at the meeting itself is to jot down notes on the proceedings. Later, s/he will convert these notes into proper minutes. This means expanding the notes into the language of minutes and putting the whole thing in the minute format. Both stages are equally important. If the notes are incorrect or inadequate, this will be reflected in the minutes, if the format or the language is faulty, again the minutes will be unacceptable.

That is why we have divided this unit into two parts: Note-taking and Preparing Minutes. We will take up note-taking first.

7.3 TAKING NOTES

When you are reading a textbook, or a reference book, especially when you are preparing for an exam, or are planning to write a paper, you make notes. You make notes because you later want to be able to recover the information without having to go back to the book again. The notes are in your own handwriting, and often in a coded form for your own use, and it is difficult for anyone else to recover the information from your notes. You use the code to jot down the important points in an abbreviated and compressed form to save time in copying the entire text. You also use coded symbols, like arrows of different sorts, numbers and letters, trees and rough diagrams, etc. to capture the information.

You have to do something similar when you are listening to various speakers at a meeting. The only difference is that here you make notes from something spoken, rather than from something written. This difference is often expressed by contrasting **note-taking** with **note-making**. You **make notes** from written texts (books, journals, etc.), but you **take notes** from a spoken text (like a speech). In recording the proceedings of a meeting, the skill we need is accordingly that of note-taking.

7.3.1 The Note-taking Skill: The Essential Components

The first essential sub component of the note-taking skill is the listening ability. Just as you cannot **make notes** unless you have the reading ability, you cannot **take notes** unless you have the listening ability. By listening ability we do not simply mean the ability to listen, just as by reading ability we do not mean simply the ability to read. A fifth class student can read, and a kindergarten child can listen, but, even with excellent writing skills, they cannot make or take notes. This is because for making or taking notes you need to be able not only to **understand** but also to **interpret** what you read/hear. You must not only read and listen **attentively** to understand everything, you must also read and listen **actively** to be able to interpret it. By **active reading** and **active listening**, we mean the ability to grasp the points, to distinguish the main points from the supporting points, to make the implicit points explicit in your understanding and to place each point at its correct place in the entire structure of argument/discussion.

There is a difference between listening attentively and listening actively. Attentive listening is mostly passive. You simply imbibe the information you hear e.g., when you are listening to the news on the radio or TV as an average citizen. You tuck away the information in separate chunks in different corners of your mind, and piece them together in a master design only when you are required to do so, or not at all. In active listening, your brain is making a constant effort to see the overall design, to light up the connections between the disparate points, and to see the deeper implications of the things said. Obviously, an active listener also needs to be attentive, but s/he needs to be more than attentive: s/he needs to be thinking actively on what s/he is hearing. It is for this reason that a note-taker should not be burdened with any other duty at the meeting. At some meetings, the Chairperson decides to record the minutes him/herself. This should be avoided.

An important question that each note-taker at a meeting faces is **when** to start noting down what the speaker is saying. Different speakers have different styles. Some speakers start with an introduction and progress slowly to their main point; others start by demolishing the arguments of the previous speakers before coming to their own; for some others, speaking is a process of thinking aloud, and so on. If you wait till the main argument of a speaker becomes clear before you start taking down notes, you may find that you have waited too long and there isn't enough time to complete your notes as the speaker has concluded and another one has already started speaking. If you start taking down early what a speaker is saying, you might later discover that was just an introduction (and therefore not important), or that the speaker was only describing a position which s/he later went on to change. This is the essential difference between making and taking notes. When making notes from a book, you have the entire text before you: you can go back and forth at a leisurely pace, decide what the writer's main argument is, and then start making your notes. But when you are taking notes from a speech, the speech unfolds before you linearly in time, and what has been spoken is no longer available to you (except in your memory), so how do you make sure that you aren't too early or too late?

There are two ways in which this problem can be tackled, though eventually every note-taker has to find his/her own strategies to deal with it. First, the note-taker must, from the very start, listen for the speaker's main point. This is usually a well-formed position, or viewpoint, related to the problem at hand. So long as the speaker does not start making positive observations about the issue in a confident and assured manner, it is too early to start taking down anything: she may only be describing other people's positions, or thinking aloud. Once s/he starts making positive observations confidently, it means s/he has formulated her/his position, or argument. It would be recognizable as different from any other positions already taken, and as soon as this realization occurs, the note-taker can start jotting down the point. Sometimes the speaker also makes it clear that she is now going to state her/his position. After this point, it would still take the speaker

some time to complete her/his presentation and the note-taker will have enough time to take full notes. But if s/he waits for the speaker to complete her/his presentation, and round off her/his position in its totality, the note-taker will find herself/himself caught between two speakers.

The second technique, which must supplement the first one, is the use of codes when jotting down the point. Trying to take down everything in longhand would simply take too long. So, use abbreviations, shortened and syncopated words, pictographs, symbols, arrows and the like to capture the sense as quickly as possible. (We shall illustrate some of these below.) This will help you to keep pace with the speaker. But return to the notes as quickly as possible after the meeting for decoding, or you might forget what the codes stand for.

The second essential of the note-taking skill is that the note-taker should enjoy **thorough familiarity with the subject matter** under discussion. S/he should understand what is being talked about. Both the context and the content of the debates should be known to her/him fully. Only then can s/he take notes of the subject matter comfortably and intelligibly.

Finally, a note-taker needs to be able to jot down the points s/he decides are important in precise and compressed forms. This is essentially a question about **the ability to select key words and phrases to represent the meaning and to use coded symbols to represent relationships**.

Let us now try to illustrate the points we have made above with the help of an example so that you can understand how these principles work in practice. We must of course work within the limitation that the example cannot be a live meeting but must be a transcript of a meeting. While this does affect the utility of the example to some extent, you should at least be able to see what is meant and how to extend the principles to a live meeting when you face one. We have provided you with a tape script and it is better if you listen first and then read the extract of the meeting.

7.3.2 The Note-Taking Skill: An Example

Given below is an extract from a meeting. The item under discussion relates to a proposal to increase the efficiency of the company by revamping its budgetary control system. We would like to see how the components of the note-taking skill we have described above will help us in taking notes of this extract. And to make sure that we 'take' notes and not 'make' notes, we will treat the extract as a linear one and will be guided only by the clues as they are produced and not all of them together. (Do listen to the tape which contains the extract) To do this task satisfactorily, we should be able to answer these questions.

1. What would active listening yield in this extract which mere attentive listening would not?
2. At what point should the note-taker start taking notes?
3. What advantage would someone who is familiar with the subject matter have over one who isn't?
4. What should be the language of the notes? What kind of codes or symbols could be used?

THE EXTRACT

CHAIRPERSON : The next item on the agenda is a proposal from the Finance Manager regarding budgetary control. Would you please introduce the item and tell us what it is all about, Mr. Malhotra?

FM : Yes, Mr. Chairperson. As the Board is aware, the Company had last year commissioned a study of our financial management by

Financial Consultants Ltd. They submitted a report which was put before the Board earlier this year. The Board had then asked me to prepare a proposal based on its suggestions about budgetary control, while the other aspects of the report would be taken up for implementation later. The detailed proposal is already with you, and I shall only highlight its main features. What the proposal essentially suggests is that we should do the Company's accounts more frequently.

- MEMBER 1** : But we are already doing the accounts every quarter, aren't we?
- FM** : Yes, but quarterly accounts don't allow us to keep a close enough control. Should the company suddenly make a heavy loss we ought to be able to act quickly. If we don't, say the consultants, we will not be able to prevent the loss from getting larger still.
- Member 1** : But if the accounts show that we are making a loss, we immediately reduce inventory, that is, we cut down purchases, and, if possible, we reduce personnel.
- Chair** : I think it would be a good idea if we first let Mr. Malhotra complete his presentation. Members can then make their points.
- FM** : Thank you, Mr. Chairperson. What Mr. Shukla says is true, but in order to do the things he suggests, we need the information faster than we are getting it at the moment. If profitability goes downthat is profits in relation to capital employed...it may be necessary to raise prices, cut costs and so on. But the right information must be quickly available.
- Chair** : Let's have the proposal, Mr. Malhotra.
- FM** : What the proposal suggests is that we break down the activities of the company into Cost Centres. Each Cost Centre would have its own finance manager of the rank of an assistant Finance manager. Each AFM would be required to forecast, well in advance, the income and expenditure of his centre. We would then put the budgets from all the centres together. After they have been approved, they become the annual budget of the company. If the actual income or expenditure of a Cost Centre varies a lot from the budgeted figure, then the AFM of that Centre would be responsible and would have to explain why his actual figures differed from his forecast, and take appropriate action. Each AFM would prepare monthly accounts and keep track of the income and the expenses. These would be monitored by the Central Finance Office (CFO). In case a decline in sales is noticed, the CFO would then be in a position to set the alarm bells ringing, and the counter measures could be initiated straightaway. In outline, this is the proposal. The details are given in the file that is already with you. Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

Chair : Thank you, Mr. Malhotra. The members can now make their comments. Yes, Mr. Shukla.....?

Let us now try to answer the questions that we posed above:

1. Active listening consists mainly in being able to establish links between the different points that the speaker has made and to figure out the structure of main and subordinate points in the argument. It would be clear to the note-taker at the very start that the main point in the item is the proposal and the minutes must record the main features of the FM's proposal, s/he would be able to see the initial comments of the FM as providing the justification for the proposal, thus establishing a link between the two. There is a certain drawback in the existing system of budgetary control ("too slow") which the proposed system seeks to remedy. When the note-taker records the main features of the proposal, s/he would also try to record how this drawback is sought to be removed in the proposed system ("monthly accounting"). This means that s/he will already have understood the relationship between quicker accounting and a faster response to a heavy loss situation: quicker accounting will provide the company with faster feedback and it will be able to respond to the situation with quicker counter-measures. This and similar connections between the points made will reveal to the minute-reader that the minute-taker has listened actively and not just attentively.
2. Since the note-taker will have identified the FM's proposal as the main point of the item, his/her pen would start moving really fast only when the FM starts describing the proposal, that is, when the FM speaks for the last time. But s/he will already have noted down the reasons for change, which we have mentioned above. S/he will also have noted down already the item under discussion (FM's proposal on Budgetary Control) and the fact that the FM was only going to present the main features of the proposal. But s/he will get his/her clue that s/he must now start moving quickly when the Chairperson asks the FM to skip the preliminaries and get down to the proposal. That's when s/he must start writing furiously so that s/he can also finish writing when the FM stops speaking. Using code language, this should not be too difficult.
3. It should be obvious that a person who is familiar with the background to the matter under discussion would be in a better position to decide what is to be included in the minutes and what can be safely excluded. For example, a note-taker who knows that the members are aware of the present frequency of accounting would not have to be told about it in the minutes, even though it is mentioned at the meeting by a member. To take another kind of example, a person who didn't know what budgetary control was, or had no idea of what inventory reduction was, would remain in doubt whether s/he was right in omitting one or the other from the minutes.
4. As we have said earlier, the language of the notes should be abbreviated, compressed and coded. The reason is simply that, unless one knows shorthand, trying to take notes in full language forms will only mean that you are unable to cover everything you want to cover. The following devices can be used:
 - i. Standard abbreviations (Jan., Feb., Co., etc.)
 - ii. Non-standard abbreviations: (prop. = proposal; CC: Cost Centre); b. = budget; inc. = income, etc.)

- iii. Standard symbols, e.g., = : 'is equal to', < = 'less than', > = 'greater than', ∴ = 'since', ∴ = 'therefore', etc.
- iv. Non-standard symbols e.g., → = 'cause of', ← = 'result of', ↓ = 'falls, declines', ↑ = 'rises, grows'.
- v. Syncopated words: y'ly – 'yearly', m'ly = 'monthly', edu'nl = 'educational'
- vi. Sentence fragments: e.g., 'more frequent accounting', 'CFO to monitor', etc.

We give below one possible set of notes which show how the symbols and abbreviations etc. could be used:

Item: *FM's prop on budg. Control*

FM: *Main features only*

Ess: *more frequent accounting*

qtrly acc. Not quick enough to start prev. meas. ICO heavy loss. Faster f.b.ess.

PROP.

Divide co. into CCs

Each CC under an AFM

AFM to forecast inc. & expend. of CC

Aggreg. Of CC budgets = Co. budget

AFM resp. ICO sharp variation from budg. Est.

AFM to prepare m'ly acc.

CFO to monitor

This notetaker makes use of some abbreviations which possibly s/he alone can interpret, but this is no problem because normally no one else would be required to decode them, at least not without help from him/her. In fact, anyone who was present at the meeting would not have a serious problem interpreting them. Nevertheless, here are the explanations.

<i>ess.</i>	:	<i>essential</i>
<i>qtr'ly.</i>	:	<i>quarterly</i>
<i>acc.</i>	:	<i>accounting, accounts</i>
<i>f.b.</i>	:	<i>feedback</i>
<i>CC</i>	:	<i>Cost Centre</i>
<i>inc.</i>	:	<i>income</i>
<i>expend</i>	:	<i>expenditure</i>
<i>aggreg.</i>	:	<i>aggregate</i>
<i>ICO</i>	:	<i>in case of</i>
<i>resp.</i>	:	<i>responsible</i>
<i>m'ly</i>	:	<i>monthly</i>
<i>prev.meas.</i>	:	<i>preventive measures</i>
<i>budg.</i>	:	<i>budget, budgetary</i>
<i>est.</i>	:	<i>estimate</i>

That the note-taker has listened actively is reflected in the notes. For example, his/her summary of the justification '*Quarterly accounting not quick enough to start preventive measures in case*

of heavy loss' shows that s/he has understood the point well enough to express it in his/her own words. The use of the word '*feedback*' further confirms the point.

Check Your Progress - 1

1. Answer the following questions briefly:

i) Why is it necessary to keep minutes of meetings? Give at least three reasons.

.....
.....
.....

ii) Who normally records the minutes?

.....
.....

iii) What are the two stages in the preparation of minutes?

.....
.....

iv) How is note-taking different from note-making?

.....
.....

v) What are the components of the note-taking skill?

.....
.....
.....

2. Read the following extract from the transcript of a meeting. Imagine that you are attending the meeting as its Secretary. Take notes of the meeting. Listen carefully to the cassette.

Chair : Attention, Ladies and Gentlemen! It's 10 am and everyone is here. Let's begun with the first item – the confirmation of the previous minutes. We have received no written comments, but if anyone has anything to say now, they are most welcome..

ALL : No. They are fine.

Chair : OK. In that case let's move on to the next item – exports to South East Asian markets. Mr. Mahajan, Manager, Export Sales will introduce the item. Mr. Mahajan?

Mahajan : Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have already circulated my report to the members. I hope the members have had the time to go through it because I am really looking forward to their suggestions for improvement in what is at present a rather depressing picture. As the report says on the very first page, our exports to South East Asia have declined for the third year

running. We have identified the reasons for this decline but are at the moment rather helpless, as the reasons seem to be beyond our control. We think there are three reasons for the decline: first, of course, is the growing competition from the local manufacturers. Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia have all in recent years set up, or are in the process of setting up, their own polyester plants. If we have still been able to sell them our product for so long it is because of the price advantage we have enjoyed so far, and of course because these countries have open economies. However, the price advantage we have so far enjoyed is now being progressively eroded by the inflation at home and the constant rise in wages. That is the second reason. But it is the third reason which has proved to be the most crippling in recent years, and it is the steep rise in the domestic tax rates. Manufacturers of polyester yarn have been representing to the government without much success. Recently the finance minister has given an indication that the tax rate may be reduced in the next year's budget. If that happens, we can look forward to some relief, though I cannot promise that that alone would be sufficient to achieve a turnaround in our sales to South East Asia.

Bagchi : Can we afford to wait that long? The next budget is still five months away. Moreover, the quantum of relief may not be much. Mr. Chairman, I'd like to know how serious the situation is and whether we have thought of any counter measures to prevent the situation from getting worse.

Mahajan : Mr. Chairman, I quite agree with Mr. Bagchi. We cannot just sit and wait for February 29 for the Minister to announce a tax cut. Irrespective of what the government does, we have to take measures to arrest the declining trend in exports to these countries and to do that we must somehow or the other maintain our price advantage. The question is how to do it. Our technology is the best in the world, therefore there is not much we can hope to do there. The advantage provided by lower wages is being progressively neutralized, though we do still retain some advantage, as the comparative table on p.5 of the report shows. Then there are the high transportation costs. When the transportation costs are added to our wage costs, the wage-cost advantage is completely neutralized. Please see the chart on p.6. – the 80% tax comes on top of this. Compare this with the 15-25% tax in these countries. Is it surprising that we are losing our markets in these countries to the local manufacturers? In fact, if things continue to go the way they have been going, it is only a matter of time before we will have to withdraw from these markets completely. It may well happen three years from now by which time six more manufacturing plants will be going on stream in these countries. That is how serious the situation is, Mr. Chairman, and unless we take some urgent and drastic measures.....

Rahman : Yes, but what can we do? As you said, all the factors responsible for this situation seem to be beyond our control.

Mahajan : But neither can we just sit and watch our South East Asian markets being snatched away from us. They are our bread and butter. You know we don't export much to the west.

Chair : Well, gentlemen, you have heard the Export Manager. Are there any suggestions?

Bagchi : Mr. Chairman, I agree with the Export manager that none of the factors responsible for the present situation in the South East Asian markets is amenable to our control. In fact, I foresee a steep rise in inflationary pressures, and a further decline in the value of the rupee, both contributing to a rise in costs. Even if the tax rate is cut by the minister, it will never come down to anywhere near the low tax rates in these countries. In such a situation no half-hearted measures will show any results. We have to think bold, and be prepared to take risks, if we are going to survive.

Chair : What do you have in mind, Mr Bagchi?

Bagchi : We must be prepared to take full advantage of the competitive situation now obtaining in the South East Asian countries, of their open policies and the low tax rates. With our experience in this field, and our technology, I am sure we can do far better than the new units coming up in these countries, if, and it's a big 'if', we move one of our plants to Thailand or Singapore. I know the initial cost will be high, but it will still be less than what the new local plants cost, imported as they all are from the US. Moreover, the higher rated capacity of our plant will mean quicker recovery of the cost. I think we ought to give a lot of urgent thought to this idea, since it seems to be our only road to survival.

Chair : It certainly is a bold proposal, Mr Bagchi. Let's hear what other members have to say about it.....

7.4 PREPARING MINUTES

In the second stage, the notes taken at the meeting are converted into proper minutes. The minutes are prepared in a definite format, therefore it would not do simply to write out the notes in full sentences to arrive at proper minutes. The secretary, or whoever is to prepare the minutes, ought to be familiar with the format, and s/he should have a copy of the agenda before her/him. This is because the minutes follow the agenda closely. Secondly, s/he should be familiar with the language used in the minutes, since there are certain conventions of language that formal minutes follow which are not followed in informal reports of meetings (e.g., newspaper reports of meetings). We shall discuss these two aspects of minute-writing: the **format of the minutes** and the **style and language** used in writing them.

7.4.1 The Format of Minutes

When the minutes are put in their final form the following information appears first and constitutes the **HEADING** of the minutes:

1. Name of the body; nature of the meeting; day, date, time and place of the meeting.

This information can occur in either of the following forms:

**Minutes of the First Meeting of the Board of Directors of PASHUPATI EXPORTS held on
12 January, 2004 at 5.00 pm in the Board Room**

OR

**INTERDEPARTMENTAL COMMITTEE ON FLEXTIME
Minutes of meeting held on May 16, 2003 at 3.00 pm in Committee Room No.2**

The piece of information that is given next is the names of the people present with a specific mention of who chaired the meeting. This information is given in the following manner:

- 2. PRESENT :** Pashupati Shah (MD, Chairperson)
Ram Malhotra (Manager. Exports)
Govind Gaitonde (Manager, QC)
Shalini Pande (Manager, Finance)
Malavika Chauhan (Manager, Marketing)
Bharat Mukherji (Manager, Domestic Sales)

In informal meetings, names alone suffice: designations can be dropped. But minutes of formal meetings, particularly those which have to be sent to other organizations and agencies, must include the designations.

Information about people present is not complete without a separate mention of those who are not regular members of the committee but are present in a special capacity, e.g., the secretary, or those who have been specially invited to the meeting to assist the committee by virtue of their special expertise, e.g., an architect, an auditor, or a solicitor. This information is presented as follows:

- 3. In Attendance :** Rajguru Gopal (Secretary)
or
Special Invitees Mohan Bagga (Architect)
Reshma Bajaj (Computer Consultant)

From this point onwards, the minutes will follow the agenda closely. The agenda has the following structure:

Title, date and place of Meeting
Apologies for Absence
Minutes of Previous Meeting
Matters Arising
Items for Discussion
Any Other Business with permission of the Chair
Date, Time and Place of the Next Meeting

The minutes pick up the agenda from the second item: Apologies for Absence, the first item having been already incorporated in the heading. Under this item the minute-taker reports any apologies for absence read out/announced at the meeting. The report takes the following form:

4. **Apologies for Absence:** Apologies were received from the following:

S. Bhatia
P. Ahluwalia

The next item in the minutes is **Minutes of Previous Meeting**, which are formally presented for confirmation at the meeting. In actuality, they are often circulated in advance so that members can read them and point out any discrepancies they notice at the meeting. If no discrepancies are pointed out at the meeting, the minutes are approved and signed by the Chairperson. In this case, the minutes record the item as follows:

5. **Confirmation of Minutes:** The minutes of the last meeting held on.....were confirmed and signed.

But if any amendments to the minutes are suggested and accepted, they are recorded as follows:

5a. **Confirmation of Minutes:** It was pointed out that Item 3 should read “.....a tax rate of 80%.....” in place of “.....a tax rate of 30%.....”

with this amendment the minutes were confirmed and signed.

The next item, **Matters Arising**, refers to any discussion, announcement, etc. that may have taken place at the meeting on a matter arising from the minutes of the previous meeting. The item is sometimes also utilized for reporting action on decisions taken at the previous meeting. The minutes record the matter in the following style:

6. **Matters Arising:**

- (i) Manager (Domestic Sales) reported that the sales figures for the first quarter had been delayed due to computer breakdown but would be made available within a week.
- (ii) Manager (Marketing) informed the members that M/s Media Advertisers had agreed to send a revised plan for the launch of the new line of polyproducts.

The matters so far covered by the minutes are format-related, though that does not reduce their importance. But the really important matters begin only when **Items for Discussion** are taken up. In our specification of the agenda, this represents a cover item, i.e. in an actual agenda, it may cover several different agenda items, each following the other with a different item number. The minutes for each item would appear separately following the order in which they appear in the agenda. For example, for the agenda of the meeting of the Board of Directors of PASHUPATI SCOOTERS which appears in 7.4.2, there will be four different items (Nos. 4,5,6,7) each to be minuted separately, as follows:

- 7. **(Item 4) Invitation from the Ministry of Industry for participation in the rescue bid for SCOOTERS INDIA LTD.**
(Minutes)
- 8. **(Item 5) Proposal from Marketing for participation in AUTO EXPO 99 to be held in Milan in Jan.99.**
(Minutes)
- 9. **(Item 6) Report of the subcommittee on exports to South East Asia**
(Minutes)

10. (Item 7) Review of product prices
(Minutes)

Discussion of some of the items at the meeting may end with some action being assigned to a particular member, or with a subcommittee being set up to do something. For example, in case of Item No.4, the meeting may decide to set up a subcommittee to draw up a set of conditions on which the company will join the rescue bid, or in case of Item No.5, it may assign to the Marketing manager the duty of inviting bids from some European marketing concerns for setting up a display of the company's products at the EXPO 99. *Whenever such an action is decided on with respect to a particular item, the minutes of the item end with a separate para highlighting the action to be taken.* Thus the entire minutes for Item No.4 may read as follows:

(Item 4) Invitation from the Ministry of Industry for participation in the rescue bid for SCOOTERS INDIA LTD.

The MD informed the Board that the Ministry of Industry, GOI, was interested in preparing a rescue bid for saving the public sector concern, SCOOTERS INDIA Ltd., and had invited the company to join the bid and submit its terms. The MD felt that though company policy had been against getting involved in such matters, the invitation might also offer an opportunity to acquire a large facility which could be converted into another production base for two and three wheelers with substantial production capacity, provided favourable terms could be negotiated.

After some discussion, the Board decided to accept the Ministry's invitation in principle, but the acceptance would be confirmed only after the terms of participation had been approved by the Board.

Action: A subcommittee consisting of MD (Convener), Manager (Finance), Manager (Production), Manager (QC), Mr. Rohit Desai and Ms. Prema Nath will prepare the terms of participation and submit them for the Board's consideration by 30th September. The subcommittee can employ the services of such experts as it deems fit.

We should however note the **ACTION** is added only when a specific action is recommended by the committee. Otherwise, a paragraph summarizing the discussion is sufficient. The summary of the discussion is of course based on the notes taken at the meeting and includes only the important points. If any proposals are presented at the meeting, their highlights are also included. Names of only those speakers are included who make important suggestions or contributions. But in the **ACTION** part, names of persons responsible for the action, along with the dates by which the action is to be completed, should be stated clearly.

11. AOB (Any Other Business).

If any item is discussed under this heading, it is minuted in the usual way. The **ACTION** para is also added, if required.

In the case of those committees which meet at regular intervals, the last item is

12. Date of the next meeting.

The minutes record the decision of the meeting in this regard.

7.4.2 Language and Style of Minutes

When converting notes into minutes, it is necessary not only to conform to the format of the minutes, but also to use the specific language in which minutes, specially minutes of formal meetings, are written. This language tends to be rather formalized and may remind you of the language of law, though actually it is not as formalized. But it does use certain types of grammatical constructions more frequently than others and shows preference for certain expressions and vocabulary items, which gives to it its special character. In this section, we will describe these special features of the language of the minutes.

Let us first look at some examples of the language of minutes. By looking at these examples closely, we will be able to discover the special features of which we have spoken above.

- a) Manager (Exports) reported that sales to South East Asia had fallen for the third year running and there was urgent need to initiate measures to arrest this trend.
- b) The problem of office security was raised by Mr. Dayal. He suggested that all important papers should be kept in a locked filing cabinet. It was agreed that only three people would have the key: Mr Dayal, Ms. Rohatagi and Mr. Jairam.
- c) It was resolved that a subcommittee be set up to look into the causes of the decline in exports to S.E. Asia.
- d) The minutes of the last meeting were read, confirmed and signed.
- e) It is resolved that the Secretary be authorized to draw up the terms of participation in the joint bid.
- f) The chairman referred to the sad demise of Mr. Sushobhan Sengupta and spoke of his services to the Company during its formative years.
- g) The updating of promotional literature to include the new models, PL 40 and PLS 30, was suggested by Mr. Jairam. He point out that many small changes had also been made to other models and these needed to be included in the promotional literature.
- h) **Action:** Mr. Jairam to update the promotional literature and to submit the drafts at he next meeting.

Before we discuss these examples, let us first state **what is required of the language of the minutes:**

- A. The minutes represent a reliable record of the important things said, the decisions taken and the things done at the meeting.; the effort therefore should be to make the language **simple, transparent, free from ambiguity, and precise** so that everyone can understand the contents easily and in the same way.
- B. At meetings, the individual is less important than the collectivity. The decisions taken at meetings are collective decisions. Therefore **the language used should be such that it does not assign decisions to individuals.** Important suggestions and proposals can be ascribed to individual members, but the final decisions are always the collective responsibility.

- C. The minutes record the proceedings as briefly as possible. The language should therefore be **concise**.
- D. Finally, the minutes, being the official record of the meeting, are likely to be consulted and referred to by other agencies and institutions including the law courts in case of disputes. Their language therefore should conform to the standards of **formality and impersonality** that publicly used language generally requires.

Let us now see how the example quoted above, (a-h), show the qualities that are required by the language of minutes.

- i. You will notice that the language used in all the samples above is simple and transparent in the sense that it can be easily understood. It does not use a literary or philosophical style, high-flown words, or poetic flourishes. The words used are common ones (except 'demise') and one doesn't have to look up a dictionary to find out the meanings of any words. There are no double-meaning constructions or words, and the meaning comes through quite clearly. If there are some words that you don't know (like 'promotional'), that is an indication that some words common in the world of business are not yet known to you and you must learn them.
- ii. You must have noticed the frequency of verbs in the passive voice in the examples: **was raised, was agreed, was resolved, was suggested, were read**, and so on. As you may know, the passive form of the verb is used when we wish to avoid reference to the agent, either because the agent is not known, is indefinite, or simply because the individual agent is not important. The use of the passive form allows us to eliminate the agent. In writing the minutes, as we said above, reference to individual agents is minimized, since the responsibility is collective. The collective agent ('committee') does not need to be mentioned because it is so obvious. You will also notice that where the passive voice is used with an individual agent (as in 'was suggested by Mr Jairam') it would make no difference, in fact may even help to simplify the language, if the passive voice is replaced by the active.

The use of the passive voice without the agent also helps the writer to make the minutes impersonal and objective as required in **D** above.

- iii. The examples above show some constructions which are not very common outside the language of minutes. For example:

- a) **It was resolved that a committee be set up to look into.....**
b) **Resolved that the Secretary is authorized to draw up the terms.....**
c) **Mr. Jairam to update the promotional literature and to.....**

The use of constructions such as these, which are not in common use at all but are specific to the language of the minutes, gives to the minutes their formal flavour. This formal flavour is further supported and intensified by the use of more 'dignified' and literary equivalents of words in day-to-day use like 'demise' for 'death'. However, in keeping with the first requirement we placed on the language of the minutes, viz. that of simplicity, the current trend is against the use of such words and is in favour of using the day-to-day idiom as far as possible. But simplicity, it should be noted, does not conflict with the use of formalized constructions like the ones we have discussed above to report the proceedings in a precise and concise manner.

- iv. Conciseness in minutes is achieved mainly by including only the major points and leaving out everything else. What is recorded in the minutes is
- the main points of the discussion
 - resolutions moved, names of the proposer and seconder
 - recommendations made and decisions reached
 - results of voting
 - tasks assigned to individuals, subcommittees, etc.

This information is then presented using a style and a language in which no unnecessary words or ornamentation are used. Consider, for example, the following version of (g) above:

(G) *Mr Jairam said that the promotional pamphlets, posters and brochures of the company had become out of date as they did not make any reference to the new models the company had brought out since 19..., viz PL 40 and PLS 30. The older models had also undergone modifications and changes which did not find a place in the pamphlets and brochures. Thus while the company was spending lot of energy and expense in updating its products, it was failing to communicate its achievements to the public. As a result, the increased research and development effort was not getting translated into increased sales of our products.*

The main point of this argument is that the promotional literature of the company needs to be updated to incorporate the new products and changes to the old ones, and this is stated quite concisely in (g). (G) states the same thing in a very elaborate manner, which is quite inappropriate to the style of minutes.

Conciseness in minutes is also achieved at times by abbreviating a structure, as we saw above. Thus, in resolutions, ‘**It is resolved that.....**’ is abbreviated to ‘**Resolved that**’ and, in the **Action** para, ‘**Mr. Jairam is (requested) to update the promotional literature.....**’ is abbreviated to ‘**Mr Jairam to update.....**’, so on.

Finally, minutes can also be made to **look** precise and well-organized by using some well known layout devices. Some of these which are applicable to minutes are the following:

- Each section of the minutes (**Heading, Present, In Attendance, Minutes of Previous Meeting**, etc.) is presented as a separate paragraph and separated by blank double line space; section headings, including the headings of the agenda items to be given in bold letters.
- In each section which has more than one item (e.g. **Matters Arising** may have three separate items), number the items and present each one as a separate paragraph.
- Wherever there is an **ACTION** item, put it as a separate paragraph at the end of the relevant item with the heading **ACTION**.
- In summarizing a discussion, try to itemise the contents. This helps to make the argument clear to you, while also helping the reader to see precisely what the points of the argument were. It also gives a systemized look to your minutes.

Check Your Progress 2

- Explain what information is to be provided in the following sections of the minutes:
 - Matters Arising

- b) In Attendance
 - c) Apologies for Absence
 - d) AOB
2. Convert into minutes your notes of the (extract of the) meeting which appears in Ex. 2 of **Check Your Progress 1**. Use the following information to give a formal start to your minutes. Your minutes will of course remain incomplete, as the notes cover only one item of the agenda:

Name of Company: PASHUPATI EXPORTS CORPORATION

Body meeting: Board of Directors

Nature of meeting: First meeting for the year 96-97

Day, date, time: Monday, July 15, 11.00 am

Place: Board Room at the Registered Headquarters at Nehru place, New Delhi

Present: S. Bhogle (Chairperson)/R. Mahajan (manager, Exports)/S. Bagchi, V.Rahman, Shefali Ghosh, G.Ketkar, R. Prahlad (all directors)

In attendance: You as Secretary

Apologies: R. Mehta (Director)

3. Draft resolutions on the following subjects to be placed before a committee:
- a) to appoint a subcommittee to suggest measures to reduce the air and water pollution by the Company's manufacturing plant at Renughat
 - b) to appoint Dr. Lekh Raj and Mrs S. Lamba to the Board of Directors of Mahima Plastics Ltd.
 - c) To authorize the Secretary to conduct negotiations with the Secretary of the workers union to withdraw the strike notice issued by it.
4. Given below are verbatim (exactly as spoken) extracts from some meetings. Write summaries of these discussion extracts, as they would appear in the minutes of these meetings:

a) Mrs Narain : I think the main reason why our sales have been going down in the north is that our agents in U.P., Rajasthan, Punjab and Bihar are ineffective. We need new agents there and I suggest our Sales Department find some quickly. We need to give top priority to this job.

Manager (Sales) : I'm afraid I can't agree with Ms. Narain. It would be very, very unwise to change our agents at this point of time. Our competitors are on a sharp lookout for established and experienced agents, and they'd immediately grab our agents. On the other hand, we would be very hard placed to find new agents, because good agents are hard to come by. Even in normal times changing agents is very risky. It disturbs the market. Finding new agents takes time, and even if you succeed in finding new agents, you can never be sure they'll be better than the old ones.

- b) Chair : We must do something about our markets in the north. We are in danger of losing them completely.
- Manager : I assure the Board that I am aware of the problem. We are right now in the process of reorganising our sales network in the northern states. Where this process has been completed, the results are already beginning to show. In Punjab and H.P., for example, our sales are showing a rise this year. I am quite confident that U.P., Bihar and Rajasthan will also follow suit as soon as we have revived our sales network there.
- c) Two companies are negotiating a takeover. HL is the representative of the company which is to be taken over, OL of the company which wants to take over HL's company.)
- HL: Before we can give our final consent to the takeover, we'd like to make sure of one more thing.
- OL: And what is that?
- HL: The interests of our loyal workers.
- OL: Though we cannot commit ourselves at this moment, we can assure you we value the services of loyal workers very highly.
- HL: Thank you for the assurance, Mr. Lal, but we'd like a more specific assurance. In short, we want a guarantee that no employee will lose his/her job as result of the takeover.
- OL: I'm afraid it's impossible to give such a specific assurance, Mr. Lalvani. We are planning to reorganise and modernize the manufacturing units extensively, and it is quite likely that some staff will become redundant as a result.
- HL: That, I'm afraid, jeopardizes the whole deal we have worked out. If the workers challenge the takeover in the court, we will be stuck for years.
- OL: You needn't worry, Mr. Lal. We will work out a reasonable deal for the employees who are made redundant.

7.5 GRAMMAR: USING THE PASSIVE VOICE

Read the following sentences.

1. In case a decline in sales is noticed
2. The details are given in the file that is already with you.
3. Sales targets are set every year.....

As you can see from the examples, we use the passive in English if we don't want to draw attention to the person who is responsible for a particular action or process. In fact, the passive is

very useful when you want to emphasize the object to which the action or process is happening rather than the person carrying out the action. So the passive is **used to focus on the action**.

Check Your Progress 3

Rewrite each sentence in the passive.

- i. We sent the goods last week, so you should receive them soon.
The goods **were sent** last week, so you should receive them soon.
- ii. We would reduce costs if the workers come on time.
- iii. We can master the new software easily in a couple of days
- iv. The customer should receive the consignment by Monday.
- v. According to a recent report the group is making similar investments in the USA.
- vi. We enclose the payment together with our order.
- vii. We will produce the body of the car at our Rampur factory.
- viii. The space now seems adequate; they have enlarged the premises since my last visit.
- ix. Large companies dominate the economies in many countries.
- x. Using better-trained staff can increase productivity.

7.6 SUMMARY

The main points of this unit are as follows:

- Minutes are written records of the proceedings of a meeting. They are useful as records of decisions, major discussion points, assignment of responsibilities, and for general informative purposes.
- To ensure correctness of minutes, they are taken on record only after approved by the body at its next meeting.
- Minutes are prepared from notes taken at the meeting. Hence note-taking is an important skill for the minute writer.
- Note-taking is different from note-making.
- The first important component of the note-taking skill is active listening. Active listening consists in being able to figure out the structure of main and subordinate points in a speaker's presentation and to establish connections between the different points the speaker makes.
- Note-taking is confined only to major points. A good note-taker knows when to start taking notes so that s/he does not miss anything important and does not end up with a collection of only inessential points.
- A good note-taker makes use of abbreviations, symbols and coded language to keep pace with the speaker.

- Only a person thoroughly familiar with the subject matter of the discussions can make a good note-taker.
- In converting the notes into minutes the minute-taker has to keep in mind (a) the format of the minutes and (b) the language and style of the minutes.
- The format of the minutes includes: Heading; Member Present; Chairperson; In Attendance; Apologies for Absence; Confirmation of Previous Minutes; Matters Arising; Items for discussion; Action Para; Any Other Business; Date of Next Meeting.
- The language of minutes is precise and free from ambiguity; it mostly uses constructions suitable for expression of collective rather than individual responsibility; it makes points in a concise fashion. The style is formal and impersonal.
- Among the grammatical features, which characterize the language of minutes, are the simple past tense, the passive voice and the subjunctive mood.
- The vocabulary of minutes tends to be formal, but now there is a general trend towards informality.
- Layout is also important in minutes. Itemizing and paragraphing increases the readability of minutes.

7.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Hodgson, P. & Hodgson, J. (1993) *Effective Meetings*, London: Century Business.
2. Mack, A. (1970/1989) *The Language of Business*, London: BBC.
3. Rai, U. & Rai, S.M. (1989/1992) *Business Communication*, Bombay: Himalaya Publishing House.

7.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress - 1

1. i. (a) In case of any future dispute about the decisions of the committee we can refer to the minutes.
- (b) If there arises any doubt about which action was assigned to whom, we can remove the doubt by referring to the minutes.
- (c) People who were not present at the meeting (including non-members) who need to know what went on at the meeting can refer to the minutes.

- ii. The secretary of the organization
 - iii. The two stages are (1) Note-taking at the meeting and (2) Conversion of the notes into minutes afterwards.
 - iv. We take notes of a speech; we make notes from a written text.
 - v. There are three components: the active listening ability; familiarity with the subject matter; the ability to select key words and phrases and use informal codes and abbreviations.
2. The following notes are only suggestive. Since notes are personal to the note-taker, your notes may differ from these, but the minutes should not.

Minutes confirmed

*Item 1: Expts. To SE Asia
M: fall 3rd Yr running
Reasons beyond control: Loss of price adv. Due to*

- 1. Growing local comp.*
- 2. Rising wages at home*
- 3. Steep tax rate (may be cut in next budg.)*

Urgent c-measures ne'ssary to retain price adv. (Re. Bagchi) vis-à-vis local units.

- better tech.? No. Already the best.*
- Lower wage adv.? Neutral. By transpt. costs*
- Tax rate: 80% vs. 15-25% in SEA*
- 6 new units starting in SEA in 3 yrs*

∴ expts. To SEA may stop then.

B: Relief at home not likely. ∴ Think bold

Take adv of

- SEA open policy*
- SEA low tax rate*

SHIFT ONE PLANT TO SEA

- initial cost comp. (local plants US imported)*
- higher rated capacity ∴ quicker rec. of cost*

Check Your Progress 2

1. a. **Matters Arising:** This section, which occurs after the section on **Confirmation of the Minutes of the Last Meeting**, provides information about any important comments,

announcements or decisions made relating to matters contained in the minutes of the last meeting.

- b. **In Attendance:** In this section, names of those persons attending the meeting are recorded who are not regular members of the body but who are present by invitation to give the body specialist assistance.
- c. **Apologies for Absence:** In this section are recorded names of those members who were unable to attend the meeting and had sent in their apologies to the Secretary.
- d. **AOB (Any other Business):** In this section, we record the minutes of any matter(s) discussed under the item of the same title in the agenda. Under this item of the agenda, the Chairperson can permit discussion on any matter not included in the agenda.

2. Only the minutes of the main item are given below:

Item 1. Exports to South East Asia

Mr. Mahajan reported that sales to S.E. Asia had declined for the third year running. He identified three reasons for this decline:

- 1. Growing competition from local manufacturers
- 2. Rising wages at home
- 3. The high tax rate at home

Because of the last two factors the price advantage enjoyed by the company so far had been seriously eroded. All the three factors were beyond the company's control. Some relief could be expected in the next budget when the government is expected to cut the tax rate. Mr. Mahajan however agreed with Mr. Bagchi that the company could not wait for the budget and must initiate counter-measures urgently to retain the price advantage vis-à-vis local manufacturers. No measures were immediately apparent, as

- 1. there was no scope for improvement in technology since the best technology was already being used
- 2. the limited advantage of lower wages was neutralized by transportation costs
- 3. the home tax rate was 80% as against 15-25% local rate

Mr. Mahajan pointed out that six new plants were going to be commissioned in S.E. Asia in the next 3 years. When ready, our exports may stop completely.

Mr. Bagchi warned the Board not to expect any relief at home and think bold. He was in favour of taking advantage of the open policies and low tax rates of the South East Asian countries and shifting one of our plants there. He pointed out that the initial cost would be less than the US-imported local plants, and, because of the higher rated capacity of our plants, would be recovered more quickly.

3. (a) **Resolved** that a subcommittee be appointed to suggest measures.....
- (b) **Resolved** that Dr. Lekh Raj and Mrs. S. Lamba be appointed members of the Board of Directors of Mahima Plastics Ltd.

- (c) **Resolved** that the Secretary be authorized to conduct negotiations with.....
4. (a) Ms. Narain attributed the fall in sales in the northern states to ineffective agents and wanted them to be changed immediately. Manager (Sales) however disagreed and argued that
- i. established agents were very hard to find
 - ii. changing agents disturbs the market
 - iii. there can be no guarantee that the new agents would be any better
- (b) The Chairperson stressed the need for urgent action in the north. The Manager pointed out that he was trying to re-organise the sales network in the north and expected good results when the reorganization work had been completed. In Punjab and H.P. This work had been completed and sales had already improved.
- (c) Before giving his final consent to the takeover, HL wanted a guarantee that no worker would be dismissed. OL said that such a guarantee could not be given as, following modernization of manufacturing, redundancies were bound to arise. On this, HL expressed the fear that court action by workers could stall the takeover, but OL assured that a reasonable deal would be worked out for workers who are made redundant.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) The costs **would be reduced** if the workers come on time.
- ii) The new software can be mastered easily in a couple of days.
- iii) The consignment is likely to be received by the customer by Monday.
- iv) Similar investments are being made in the USA according to a recent report.
- v) The payment along with our order is enclosed.
- vi) The body of our car will be produced at our Rampur factory.
- vii) The space now seems adequate since the premises have been enlarged since my last visit.
- viii) The economies are dominated by large companies in my countries.
- ix) Productivity can be increased by using better trained staff.