

How to write action minutes?

In some business contexts it is still necessary to write detailed and formal minutes. However, there is an increasing trend towards a more streamlined meeting. These meetings are more focused on tracking actions. In the park close by my home in Luxembourg, I often see companies conducting '*standing meetings*' designed to encourage decision making and action over gentle discussion.

Notes and actions need to clearly outline '*who, what, when*'. What techniques can be used to write effective notes and actions? We recommend a combination of the active and passive voice. The passive voice, if overused, can create long and complex sentences. It can appear too cold in tone. However, it remains important, as it is often the process, system, project or development that needs to be highlighted. In this article we provide a brief explanation of how to use the passive in writing notes and actions.

The passive voice revisited:

We regularly deliver workshops on contributing effectively to meetings. We find that participants can struggle with making transitions between the active and passive voice. Participants typically understand that the passive is formed by the verb 'to be' + past participle. However, they often struggle with putting the past or present perfect and future form into the passive voice.

Example: Peter has successfully delivered the project (active) to the project has been successfully delivered (passive).

We help students by asking them to break this transition into three steps.

Step 1: Move the object (the project in the example above) to the beginning of the sentence.

Step 2: Identify the main verb in the active sentence and put this into the past participle form at the end of the sentence in the passive voice. Remember the past participle is the third column thinking back to your school days! What can confuse participants is that the main verb remains '*locked down*' in the past participle form irrespective of the tense of the sentence in the passive voice.

Step 3: The final and trickiest step is to ensure that the verb 'to be' in the passive voice reflects the tense of the main verb in the active sentence. See the example below.

*He **had evaluated** the damage before he **submitted** the report.*

*The damage **had been** evaluated before the report **was** submitted.*

Please see some examples of how the passive voice can be used in summarizing discussions and decisions against different agenda items in a meeting.

Example: *The report has been sent for sign off to the SMT (Senior Management Team).*

Example: *It was agreed that €100,000 would be allocated to project xxx.*

Example: *10 new clients have been identified as the focus of the Q2 marketing campaign.*

The passive voice gives you the opportunity to identify the team or individual if considered important.

Example: *The recruitment strategy was approved by the SMT.*

Example: *The quality review was successfully completed to time and on budget by the QA (Quality Assurance) team.*

The passive voice can be a useful tool in highlighting actions. A good convention is to state the action in the passive voice + by (the timeline) with the initials of the action owner in brackets. The passive voice in the future form is very useful in outlining actions.

Example: *A new sales strategy will be developed by the 30 July 2019. (TH)*

Example: *Training will be conducted in support of the SAP roll out by the end of Q3 2019. (LP)*

Example: *10 new clients will be contacted by the end of week 30. (PS)*

Remember active sentences (subject + verb + object) are still useful in producing meeting notes and actions, in particular by highlighting key contributions.

Example: *Peter recommended reviewing our compliance with DPA legislation.*

Example: *Sarah suggested organizing a road show to promote the product portfolio across southern Luxembourg.*