

MINUTE AND REPORT WRITING



Further that Nigeria must move with the global trend in scientific research, discovery and inventions in order to survive as a nation. Nigeria is bright scientifically. With a teeming population, Nigeria must embrace science and technology. The political will rather than lip service would move Nigeria out of the woods and compete with advanced countries like USA, China, India, etc. The Senate President supports potentials and ability of Nigerians. It is time we ceased to be a copycat. We must have our own approach. We must have a clear vision and direction. We must be motivated to work hard. The committee should initiate the relevant agencies in the orbit. He emphasizes that the government should support to impact positive change. The committee should accommodate multi-sectoral involvement for national development. Concluding, the Senate President expresses his respects for a harmonious working relationship for the benefit of Nigeria.

A How-to Guide



MINUTE AND REPORT WRITING

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Basics of Minute Writing



What are Minutes?

Minutes are a summarised record of the proceedings at a meeting. Minutes serve as an accurate record of decisions taken at Committee Meetings and an important tool in ensuring transparency and accountability in decision-making.¹ They are important because they are the only surviving record of what was said and done at a meeting.

Why keep Minutes?

Minutes are a vital aspect to the operations of institutions and should contain enough information to:

- Ensure that meetings are carried out in a transparent and accountable manner;
- Maintain an accurate historical record;
- A clear, objective summary of activities;
- Convey information to people unable to attend the meeting;
- Show future expected actions; and
- Allow for a clear understanding of the business that was conducted and why.²

1 Eastern Region Alliance, “Minutes Takers Handbook for Local Government.” 2014

2 Carlton University, “Minute Taking Tips: How to keep your Minutes FIPPA friendly”

What is the Role of the Minute taker?

The minute taker plays a vital role in a meeting setup and serves to:

- Keep you up to date on what is going on in the organization; and
- Assist the Chair accomplish the goals of the meeting.

What are the key skills of a Minute Taker?

To be an effective minute taker, you must be alert, highly organized, and focused on the ensuing discussion, in order to restate the positions and the discussions accurately and objectively. These are learned skills. ³

A minute taker must be:

- A good listener;
- A sound critical thinker; and
- An excellent organizer ;

What are the techniques for Preparing Minutes?

The job of the Minute taker is to present an accurate account of what transpired at a meeting; this is regardless of the type of meeting (formal or informal) and their respective formats of presentation.

To be a good minute taker, you should:

- Understand the jargon/ language of the institution;
- Have a background knowledge of the topics being discussed;
- Be familiar with the spelling of participants' names ;
- Be familiar with past minutes ; and

3 Human Resources/ Learning and Development, "The Minute Taker's Guide" University of Victoria: 2010, p.7

- Have good communication skills .

Key Pointers and Questions for Minute Takers

Before the Meeting

- Who is taking the Minutes?
- Have the previous Minutes been circulated, if any?
- What is the purpose of the meeting?
- Are there any other functions besides taking notes?
- Is there any information needed for the meeting?
- Are you familiar with the Standing Rules?
- Has an agenda been circulated to all the participants?
- Has a reminder notice been sent?
- Is the venue of the meeting ready?



After the Meeting

- Re-read your notes immediately after the meeting in order to ensure they adequately cover what transpired at the meeting.
- Prepare the Minutes as soon as possible. Memory studies conducted by University of Minnesota show that, “immediately after you listen to somebody else talk you can only recall 50% of what was heard. After a week, this percentage drops to about 10%. As a minute taker, you cannot afford to depend on your memory to recall important decisions.”⁴

What form should Minutes take?

The form of Minutes is dependent on the organization or in this case the committee. Minutes can be written in different styles: formal, informal,

4 Ibid n.3 Minute Taker’s Guide p.9-10

semi-formal, or action. The choice of style is based on the nature of the meetings and the rules governing the meetings.⁵ “Formal minutes support a meeting, governed by a Chair according to a parliamentary code or procedure. There are a number of reference guides to parliamentary procedure, such as Robert’s Rules of Order or Procedures for Meetings and Organizations.”⁶

The following guidelines and best practices are recommended to ensure that the Minutes are well presented and easy to read:

- Every page of the minutes is to be consecutively numbered;
- The order of the items in the minutes should reflect and be numbered the same way as the corresponding items in the agenda for the meeting;
- Adopt a system for numbering each motion to assist in easily referencing decisions of the meeting. The numbering system can incorporate a reference to the type of meeting and the meeting number;
- The original hardcopy version of the minutes of meetings must be collated and securely stored (i.e. in fire rated storage)
- The past tense should be used when recording what happened at a meeting;
- Clear headings should be used to separate business items; and
- Where applicable, the title of the minutes should identify whether the minutes relate to an ordinary or special meeting. The date of the meeting should also be included in the title.⁷

5 Ibid n.3 Minute Taker’s Guide p.12

6 Ibid n.3 Minute Taker’s Guide p.12

7 Ibid n.1 Minute Taker’s Handbook p.17

What should be included in your Minutes?⁸

As a minimum standard, the Minutes should contain the following pieces of information:

First part

- The nature of the meeting – regular or special (if special, state the purpose);
- The name of the assembly – department, committee or organization holding the meeting;
- Date, time and location of the meeting;
- The list of those invited - attendees and apologies;
- Names of the meeting Chair and Secretary, or in their absence substitutes; and
- Whether the minutes of the previous meeting were read and approved, or approved as corrected, and the date of the meeting if other than a regular business meeting

Second Part

- The main business of the day;
- All main motions (except ones that are withdrawn), along with the name of the member making the motion (but not the name of the person who seconded the motion);
- The fact that an assembly went into quasi-committee or committee of the whole, and the committee's report;
- Points of order and appeals, and reasons the chair gives for the ruling;
- The full text of any report that the assembly orders to be entered

8 C. Alan Jennings, *Meeting Minutes According to Robert's Rules* in *Robert's Rules for Dummies*, (2nd Edition, Wiley, 2004)

into the minutes. This situation may not happen often because a reference to a written report is usually sufficient for the record; and

- Any of the disorderly words that a member has said that get him “named” by the Chair for being disorderly.

Last part

- Record of motion to adjourn;
- Time of adjournment; and
- Signature of the Chairman and Secretary

What should be excluded from your Minutes?

- Exclude direct speech or quotes except formal motions (Remember, minutes are a record of what was done, not what was said);
- Avoid discussions and comments which do not directly pertain to the meeting;
- Avoid detailed chronicles of lengthy discussions that reach no conclusion;
- Avoid emotional or intemperate language⁹ such as “heated discussion” or “valuable statement”;
- Flowery language; and
- Detailed reports;



Tips On Minute Writing

- Prepare a “minutes skeleton” from the agenda to the information in the relevant section;
- The official copy of the minutes should be placed on file in a designated folder. Attached should include original copies of reports, written motions, correspondence;
- Understand what transpired at the meeting and the issues discussed;
- Know the agenda;
- Listen carefully in order to sort information appropriately;
- Commence writing your minutes by the day following the meeting;
- Use the right tenses;
- Write resolutions from the Meeting using the subjunctive form of the verb;
- The content of the Minutes should mirror the agenda of the corresponding meeting;
- Have a preferred and effective note taking style;¹⁰
- Ensure the rule against verbatim is followed;
- Mark the Minutes with “Approved” once approved; and
- Ensure discussions are captured objectively.

Report Writing



Reports are an administrative necessity and the most official form of communicating the work of a Committee. It is a documented work created for the main purpose of transmitting information or narrating certain events in a broadly presentable form. It provides reliable data, which can be used in the planning and decision making process. A report “sets out and analyses a situation or problem, often making recommendations for future action”.¹¹ A report on legislation will give details on the committee’s, actions, understandings, and conclusions about the legislation;¹² whereas an oversight report will detail the set of facts which necessitated the oversight visit, findings and recommendations.

Parts of a Report¹³

First Part- Introduction

- Cover page- date of report and subject;
- Table of Contents; and
- Executive Summary- The purpose of the executive summary is to enable the reader of the report grasp the key issues raised such as the objective of the report, decisions, recommendations and action points.

11 Ibe Ifeakandu, “Effective Legislative Report Writing”, PLAC Training for Staff of Committees, House of Representatives, August 7, 2017.

12 Julia Taylor, “ Legislative History Research: A guide to Resources for Congressional Staff”, Congressional Research Service, 16 August 2013 p.6

13 Staff Development, “Guidance for Writing Reports”, University of Leicester, 2014

Second Part- Body

- **Introduction**-This should have 4 sections namely- Purpose, Background, Method and Scope:
 - Purpose- This section should provide a concise statement of what the report is setting out to achieve. It is written in the present tense;
 - Background- "This section should provide a short succinct summary of what the report is about and why, or from where, the report has arisen. It should also confirm whether any of the matters addressed in the report have been the subject of previous discussions or decisions. It is written in both the present and past tense.";
 - Method- this section should show the sources consulted and how the information was collated and analysed; and
 - Scope- this section should show the limits of the report.
- **Findings/ Key issues**- This presents the discoveries of particular issues. This section forms the core of the report and its purpose is to explain in more detail the key issues that the committee considered.
- **Conclusions** – This section should provide a brief recap of issues raised in the report and the logical deductions which arise.
- **Recommendations**- This section should raise suggestions as to the way forward. They should flow from the conclusions reached in the report. They should be clear, precise and practicable.

Third Part- End

- Bibliography/ References; and
- Appendices

Basic Features of an Effective Report

Legislative reports do not necessarily differ much from other report. An effective report should include the following:

- **Adequate Information:** the report should include information relevant to the task;
- **Use of Sections:** The report should be broken down using sections and sub-headings, each with its own section heading;
- **Short, Simple Sentences:** The sentences should contain average 15 - 20 words;
- **Use of Headings:** The headings should be relevant to the content;
- **Illustrations:** Charts and diagrams are a creative means of presenting information. They can be used to aid the understanding of the report or emphasise a key point;
- **Make the Report Concise;**
- **Use a Cover Sheet;**
- **Language:** Use plain English and avoid jargon; and
- **Use an Appendix:** This should include information that is not required for the main body of the report but which may help with comprehending the issues raised in the report

Committee Reports

Committee reports are one set of documents among the variety of document types produced by House and Senate committees that address legislative and other policy issues, investigations, and internal committee matters. Committee reports usually are one of these types: (1) reports that accompany a bill when it is reported for chamber action; (2) reports resulting from oversight or investigative activities; (3) reports

of conference committees; and (4) committee activity reports.¹⁴

Committee reports are uniquely identified by a standardized citation that includes the National Assembly, chamber (House or Senate), and report number.¹⁵

Common Problems with Committee Report¹⁶

The presentation of a report and the layout of its content can have an impact on its readability, ultimate value and effectiveness. Common problems include:

- The purpose is not clearly presented and explained;
- The necessary background to the report is not provided;
- The implications of the recommendations have not been fully considered; and
- Mistakes are evident due to lack of proof reading.

General Tips when writing Reports¹⁷

1. Write in the active voice;
2. Use action verbs;
3. Draft in the singular;
4. Use the present tense;

14 US Congress, “Legislative Glossary”, US Congress website

15 US Congress, “About Congressional Reports”, US Congress website

16 Ibid n.13 “Guidance for Writing Reports”

17 Ngozi Udombana, “Dimensions of Effective Report Writing”, PLAC Training for Assistant Clerks of House of Representatives, August 2-3 2017; Xavier Institute of Management, “Basics of Writing Reports”, Xavier University.

5. Be consistent in the use of words;
6. Use simple words;
7. Conciseness of sentences;
8. Use of affirmative and not the negative;
9. Avoid the use of double negatives;
10. Minimize cross referencing;
11. Utilise gender neutral language; and
12. Punctuate appropriately.
13. Write the body first;
14. Plan carefully before you start writing. Use an outline or a mind map so that you know exactly what you'll be writing about;
15. Organise your report into sections;
16. Avoid jargon and legalistic words, and explain any technical terms you have to use;
17. Keep your sentence length down to an average of 15 to 20 words. Try to stick to one main idea in a sentence; and
18. And always check that your report is accurate, clear, concise and readable.

Sources



- Carlton University, "Minute Taking Tips: How to keep your Minutes FIPPA friendly" .
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- Human Resources/ Learning and Development, "The Minute Taker's Guide", University of Victoria: 2010.
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- US Congress, "About Congressional Reports", US Congress website <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-reports/about>.
- US Congress, "Legislative Glossary", US Congress website <https://www.congress.gov/help/legislative-glossary>
- Xavier Institute of Management, "Basics of Writing Reports", Xavier University.

Appendices



Appendix I- Sample Minutes

INSTITUTE OF APPLIED ENGINEERING (IAE), NIGERIA CHAPTER MINUTES OF 2ND GENERAL MEETING WHICH HELD ON MONDAY 28TH JULY 2014 AT MOONSHINE HOTEL, AKURE

1.0) Opening:

The meeting commenced at 2:45pm.

2.0) Attendance:

A total of thirty one (31) members were present. Two (2) members took apologies (see attached page)

3.0) Introduction:

The Nigerian Chapter Chair, Engr. Akin Obi, gave a history of IAE in Nigeria, and the need for new executives to continue with the policies of the previous administration.

4.0) By-Election of New Assistant Secretary and Treasurer:

The following were elected in the bye-election to join the current executive members in piloting the affairs of the IAE Nigeria Chapter:

- i) Assistant Secretary: Engr. Patience Bello, works for Oil base limited in Lagos State.
- ii) Treasurer: Engr. Edward Paltry, who works for AEDC and is based in Abuja.

5.0) Address by immediate past IAE Chairman:

The immediate past IAE Chairman, Engr. Tasil Allweather thanked the new Exco and informed the house that:

- i) IAE , Nigeria is the largest chapter in Africa.
- ii) Our immediate challenge shall be to raise funds for key projects to be delivered by IAE.
- iii) Work towards hosting IAE global conference in the nearest future.

6.0) Member Communications:

- i) All members introduced themselves.
- ii) It was decided that all members will be subscribed to the group chat on Whatsapp.
- iii) Engr. Bello, who is based in Lagos was nominated as the Group Chat Administrator.

7.0) Fundraising Activities:

It was decided that IAE would undertake fundraising activities regularly in areas of its interest, and a beneficiaries of the fundraising efforts were chosen as follows:

- **Scholarship fund for under-privileged persons to study Engineering;**
- **Seek for areas of collaboration between IAE and COREN; and**
- **Any other areas members may suggest.**

8.0) Topical Paper Presentations:

1. Alternative Engineering Strategies by Engr. Goodfaith Akande; and
2. Engineering Best Practices by Engr. Elmina Wright.

9.0) AOB

In response to a member's question, Engr. Pelem informed the Meeting that IAE and COREN have a memorandum of understanding, which can be explored to maximum benefits.

10.0) Closing:

The meeting closed by 4:34 pm

Signed:

Engr. Kenny Pelem

Chairman

Engr. Elmina Wright

Secretary

NB: All names contained herein are fictional.

Appendix II- Sample Report

REPORT OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE ON THE VIABILITY OF YAM AS AN EXPORT PRODUCT FOR NIGERIA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Towards the increase and diversification of the Nation's revenue base, the Committee on Agriculture of the House of Representatives was mandated to consider the viability of yam as an export product for Nigeria following a motion raised and adopted by Hon. Mimi Appleface on August 1, 2017. This report is presented by the 7 member committee who requested and received from the Federal Ministry of Agriculture a Position paper, a Case note from the Yam Producer's Association and Statistics on Yam Production from the National Bureau of Statistics. The Committee's critical review of the documents showed that there is sufficient production and supply of yam to sustain export and there is a corresponding demand from Japan and Australia. Accordingly, it is the Committee's position that yam is a viable export product for Nigeria and recommends that:

The Ministry of Agriculture develop a working paper showing the modalities for the commencement of export of yam to Japan and Australia and a timescale for the commencement of yam export.

The Ministry of Agriculture set up an exploratory committee to look into other agricultural produce that can be exported.

The Ministry of Agriculture working in collaboration with the Central Bank of Nigeria work on revenue projections from the export of yam.

BACKGROUND

The House of Representatives plenary on August 1, 2017 referred to the Committee on Agriculture the issue of the viability of yam as an export product for Nigeria. Prior reports and deliberations of the committee have been on the issue of mechanisms for increasing production of

yam. This report is limited to assessing the viability of yam as an export product for Nigeria.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE

Alpha Baaba	Chair
Miranda Cokebottle	Vice Chairman
Ayotunde Wall-Bracket	Member
Miracle Okoro	Member
Michael Gnap	Member
Beatrice Breadwater	Member

METHODOLOGY

The Committee requested and received from the Minister of Agriculture the following documents on the viability of yam as an export product for Nigeria:

- Federal Ministry of Agriculture Position paper
- Case note from the Yam Producer's Association
- Statistics on Yam Production from the National Bureau of Statistics

The Honourable Minister was also invited to make submissions and defend the position paper of his Ministry.

VIABILITY ASSESSMENT

The Committee met on August 4, 2017, August 5, 2017 and August 6, 2017 to deliberate on the documents submitted by the Minister of Agriculture. At these sessions, the Minister of Agriculture was present to address questions of Committee members.

FINDINGS

1. Consistent Supply of Yam

As a result of the successful implementation of the Government's policy to increase the production of yam in Nigeria, the stockpiles of yam have grown from 1 Million metric tonnes to 3 Million metric tonnes. By the Ministry of Agriculture's position paper and the submissions by the Honourable Minister, the number of silos built due to the increased production have grown from 500 to 1000 across the Nation. Going by the figures as provided by the National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria is currently producing more than is required to feed its citizens.

2. High Demand for Yam produce in Japan and Australia

The Minister of Agriculture in his submissions and in defence of his Ministry's position paper stated that he had welcomed delegations from Japanese and Australian business industry. These delegations expressed their willingness to go into bilateral relations with the Nigerian government for the export of yam to their respective countries.

CONCLUSION

Having reviewed the documents submitted for the Committee's consideration and listened to the Honourable Minister of Agriculture, this Committee can conclude that the export of yam is viable revenue source for Nigeria. In this time when the Nation is looking to diversify its revenue base, this is a welcome development and would have a ripple effect of different levels of the supply chain.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee hereby recommends the following:

- The Ministry of Agriculture develop a working paper showing the modalities for the commencement of export of yam to Japan and Australia and a timescale for the commencement of yam export.

- The Ministry of Agriculture set up an exploratory committee to look into other agricultural produce that can be exported.
- The Ministry of Agriculture working in collaboration with the Central Bank of Nigeria work on revenue projections from the export of yam.

EXAMPLE

Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC) is a non-governmental organization committed to strengthening democratic governance and citizens' participation in Nigeria. PLAC works to enhance citizens' engagement with state institutions, and to promote transparency and accountability in policy and decision-making processes.

The main focus of PLAC's intervention in the democratic governance process is on building the capacity of the legislature and reforming the electoral process. Since its establishment, PLAC has grown into a leading institution with capacity to deliver cutting-edge research, policy analysis and advocacy. PLAC receives funding support from donors and other philanthropic sources.