

STF Minute-Taking Training Guide

For an example of a meeting minutes document, see the [Sample Minute-Taking Template](#).

As an STF leader, you will record meeting discussions and decisions each week as meeting minutes (aka notes). Although you may be used to taking notes in class, taking meeting minutes is a different skillset. Instead of taking notes for your personal use, your meeting minutes will serve as a reference for your teacher advisor, any members who missed the meeting and the STF Team. This will help ensure anyone who isn't at the meeting knows what you talked about. This skill will not only be useful for your time in STF, but also throughout college and your professional life.

Tips for a Successful Minute-Taker

1. Prepare before your meeting
 - a. Ensure your minute-taking document is formatted with the agenda items determined at your leadership meeting.
 - b. Consider breaking up agenda items into two rows, or add subheadings as needed.
2. Context, Context, CONTEXT!
 - a. While your minutes will be a helpful reference for members who attended your meeting, they will most importantly provide information for those who were **not** in attendance (like your STF team member!).
 - b. When finalizing your minutes, ask yourself, "Would someone who didn't hear this entire conversation understand what my minutes mean?" If your answer is no, provide some context to show your reader how you ended up at this part of the conversation.
 - c. See [example of minutes lacking context vs. having enough context](#)
3. Highlight Key Information
 - a. If there is especially important information (e.g., due dates, instructions, questions, assigned tasks, etc.), **highlight**, underline, or **bold** that information so it's easy to locate later on.
 - i. Using STF's note-taking template, the "**Action Items**" column will serve as an area to compile important decisions and next steps that will stand out from the rest of your minutes.
4. Review and reformat after the meeting
 - a. Chapter meetings tend to move quickly and may not follow the agenda exactly; this will likely mean that your minutes might look like a jumbled mess by the end of the meeting. Dedicate a few minutes after your meeting to clean up your minutes and organize them by topic (NOT chronologically). Even if your conversation jumps around from one topic to another and back to the original one, it'll be easiest to understand if you keep related information together.
 - b. Double-check your [checklist](#) before sending!

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Contextualizing Minutes

Example 1: Too little Context

Date	9.12.2023	
In Attendance	12 students, TA	
Agenda Item	Notes	Action Items
Club Logistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Form - Susie<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Ms. Smith	
Tent Event - Decide Date/Location, Start scheduling STFers and inviting teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Block schedule or regular?<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Lincoln - block might be disruptive● Date nov 3● Use gym instead?● Is it available? Dance?● Where's the schedule? Maya found it● Which classes should we invite?<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Amaya, Smith, Park?○ Alex will ask Amaya next period	
Announcements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Fall leadership workshop<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Samantha, Jonathan, Maya○ Alex?	

What went wrong?

1. **Lacks Context:** Can you piece together what was discussed at this meeting? Although we may be able to tell what was *supposed* to be discussed from the "Agenda Items" column, the "Notes" column does not provide readers with much context as to what was discussed by members.
 - a. Row 1: Who is Ms. Smith and why do we care about her? What form are they referring to? When is this form due and how should it be submitted?
 - b. Row 2: Is November 3rd the final date selected? Is it a block schedule or regular? Did anyone decide on a location? Did they decide to invite those three classes, or was this just a brainstorm? We have no idea what the outcome of this discussion was.
 - c. Row 3: Why are these names listed? What does "Alex?" mean? When is the workshop?
2. **Fails to use formatting for organization:** In the Tent Event section, there are two different topics to be discussed in this section (Deciding Date/Location, Scheduling STFers/Teacher Invites), yet, all we see in the "notes" section is a list of bullet points with no separation.
 - a. Easy fix: Break these points up with headings or splitting the agenda item into two rows (see Example 2 below).

3. **Fails to use “Action Items” column:** This column is meant for important, actionable decisions made during the meeting. It is a useful way to make sure that important next steps are not missed by those reviewing your minutes.
- a. Easy fix: If you have not decided on any next steps, make that clear by adding an “N/A” or other symbol to show that this is the case. If you *have* decided, add those action items to the column (See Example 2 below).

Example 2: Enough Context

Date	9.12.2023	
In Attendance	Maya, Lincoln, Sophie, Sydney, Samantha, Eric, Aaron, Patrick, Susie, Leela, Jonathan, Ryan, Mr. Brookes	
Agenda Item	Notes	Action Items
Club Logistics	<p>Any requirements for being an official club on campus?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Yes, Susie will complete the club form by next meeting (9/8) and email it to Ms. Smith 	Susie: Complete the Club Form and email it to Ms. Smith by 9/8
Tent Event - Deciding Date and Location	<p>Event date</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Should we do a block schedule day or regular? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lincoln: If we do a block schedule, we would invite 4 teachers per 2-hour block. Some teachers might not want to interrupt their classes in the middle and then go back to class. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Susie and Mr. Brookes think teachers won't mind breaking up their classes. ● Block Schedules are every Friday, which Friday works best? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ October 27: There is a field trip for all juniors this weekend, not ideal ○ November 3: Patrick has to leave early for baseball ○ November 10: Spirit Week ○ November 17: Might be too close to break. Can't invite people to the following week's meeting because it's Thanksgiving. ● Friday, November 3 works best. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Back-up date: November 17th <p>Decide on Location</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Leela: We should use the gym. It was so hot on the field. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Susie: I'm in dance so I'll ask tomorrow if we can use the gym even with 3rd period dance and text the group chat. ● If the gym is available, Susie will submit the reservation form to the assistant principal via email. 	<p>Decision: Tent Event on Friday, November 3. Back-up date is November 17.</p> <p>Susie: Check if the gym is available by tomorrow (9/13) and update the group text.</p> <p>Susie: If gym is available, email reservation form to assistant principal by this Friday (9/15)</p>
Tent Event - Scheduling STFers, Teacher Invites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Where's the schedule? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Maya: STF's event toolkit has the schedule ○ Lincoln: I will edit and send the link in the group chat. Sign up for classes you'll be able to miss. 	Lincoln: Send the link to the schedule in the group chat.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Mr. Brookes: You must ask your teacher if you can miss class. We'll submit a list of excused absences to the office after the event, but you need to notify your teachers ahead of time. ● Which classes should we invite? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Alex: In the past we've invited Ms. Amaya (9th grade history), Ms. Smith (10th grade ethnic studies), and Mr. Park (9th grade social studies seminar). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ryan can ask Ms. Amaya next period ■ Alex: I can ask Ms. Smith tomorrow, she's my homeroom teacher ■ Aaron: I can talk to Mr. Park today during last period ■ Mr. Brookes: I can bring my classes if you need one more class to fill each period. 	<p>All: Ask your teachers about missing class on Friday 11/3 and sign up on the schedule.</p> <p>Ryan: Invite Ms. Amaya to tent event and update group chat with response.</p> <p>Alex: Invite Ms. Smith to tent event and update group chat with response.</p> <p>Aaron: Invite Mr. Park to tent event and update group chat with response.</p>
Announcements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● STF Fall Leadership Workshop - 9/9 at 11am at HRW office and on Zoom <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ RSVPs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ In person: Samantha, Jonathan ■ Zoom: Maya ○ TBD: Alex 	<p>Samantha, Jonathan, and Maya: Email stf@hrw.org and say whether you're in-person or virtual</p> <p>Alex: Tell Maya if available</p>

Checklist for Strong Meeting Minutes:

- The correct date is listed at the top of my minutes
- Attendance list is complete with list of leaders, general members and teacher advisor who were at the meeting
- Agenda items are listed clearly to show what topics were discussed
- Concise notes summarize what was said during the meeting for each agenda item, providing enough context for someone who was not at the meeting
- All action items are assigned to a member(s) (e.g., "Susie will..." or "All members will...")
- I have double-checked my spelling, grammar, punctuation, formatting, bullet point type/alignment, etc. for consistency
- Minutes are emailed to all chapter members, teacher advisor and STF team member within 24 hours or as otherwise agreed