



UNIT 12

Organising Meetings

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

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Meetings

Anatomy of a Meeting

Whether we like it or not, meetings are a regular and time-consuming part of business life. Because meetings require planning, coordination, and documentation, they are a major job responsibility for most administrative assistants.

The assistant's job includes sending invitations to in-house meetings, finding time in the schedules of meeting attendees, and selecting meeting times and locations. A thoughtful administrative assistant is careful to avoid scheduling meetings for early Monday morning or late Friday afternoon.

Some executive meetings are scheduled weekly. Despite their being routine, the administrative assistant must still schedule the meetings, send invitations, and send reminders. Work on routine meetings also involves creating meeting agendas that include the names of everyone attending the meeting; the date, time, and meeting location; and any advanced preparation required of the attendees.

Sometimes a meeting will be called with only a moment's notice. When this happens, the assistant will need to coordinate the meeting by calling the attendees on the phone, seeing them in person, or using an email scheduling program such as Microsoft Outlook.

Types of Corporate Meetings

Every corporation holds an annual meeting of stockholders for the election of directors. During the year, it may also hold other meetings when the stockholders' consent is required for some proposed action, such as an increase or decrease in capital stock, an amendment of the corporate charter, or a merger.

Annual stockholder meetings have special legal requirements for when meeting notices must be sent. Printed notices are sent along with proxy voting forms and a return-address, postage-paid envelope.

As an administrative assistant, your duties include preparing notices of the meeting as well as a proxy form to be used in case a stockholder cannot attend.

This proxy gives another person the right to vote for the stockholder. Notices and proxy forms must be sent to everyone concerned in accordance with the bylaws of the group. In most cases, these notices must be sent out three to four weeks in advance.

You must arrange for a meeting place and confirm that it will be ready for use at the time specified. You'll also type and distribute the agenda. On the day of the meeting, you should place all pertinent papers in a folder with the corporate seal on the conference table at the chairperson's seat.

If you act as the recorder of the meeting, sit beside the chairperson in order to hear every word distinctly. If you have difficulty in hearing, signal the chairperson, who will then ask for a repetition of what has been said. Before the meeting, read all resolutions and reports to be presented so you are familiar with them. In addition, obtain the list of the persons attending (which you should have from distributing the agenda) and check the absentees ahead of time rather than write down names while the roll is being called. The greater your knowledge is of the meeting's purpose and the attendees, the easier recording will be.

Corporate director meetings are specified by the corporate bylaws. Most companies have quarterly or yearly director meetings. A written notice of these meetings is not required by law. An administrative assistant may be asked to contact directors via phone, letter, or email to inform them of an upcoming meeting. The assistant will also be asked to track who is coming to the meeting and who has declined. A list of those attending the meeting should be created and made available at the meeting.

Other corporate meetings that are not regular events should be scheduled two weeks in advance. You should send out an invitation, agenda, and a follow-up reminder. The date, time, location, and subject should be clear in the invitation.

Outside meetings and conferences usually require printed invitations sent out as a mass mailing. Double-check all the information on a proof of the invitation before it is printed. Confirm the date, week, day, time, room, location, and names of all the speakers. No one should have to telephone the sponsor to get information that was inadvertently omitted from the invitation.

Scheduling Meetings

Scheduling meetings is one of the most common tasks for administrative assistants. In the past, scheduling a meeting was a time-consuming task that involved hard-copy invitations sent as interoffice memos. The telephone was usually the preferred method of confirming invitations. Today, with computer technology and groupware software such as Microsoft Outlook or IBM Lotus Notes, the task of scheduling a meeting requires only a few mouse clicks.

Despite the advances in technology, scheduling a meeting is not as simple as it looks. There is a lot of judgment involved. Anytime you bring together a group of people, there are many factors to consider. For example, you have to consider pecking order. Some members of the group are more important, so others must change their schedules to accommodate. Decisions about where a meeting is held can be important as well. Is the meeting room large enough and supplied with the right equipment? Can it be reserved for the entire meeting?

Common Problems When Scheduling Meetings

The following are common problems that occur when scheduling a meeting:

- The meeting is scheduled and after everyone has been invited, you discover that some important participants can't attend. Another date has to be found. This can lead to a cycle of invitations and revisions.
- You ask the participants about their availability for a meeting, but the available dates and times are so limited that no common date and time can be found.
- A meeting location is specified, and then it is later changed in a subsequent meeting notice. Some of the attendees follow the original meeting notice and end up in the wrong room.
- Repeated meeting notices and revisions are sent out, so that everyone is confused about meeting.
- You use an Internet-based meeting scheduling tool, but outside participants don't have the same software.
- A work team uses an Internet system to schedule meetings, but eventually the team members get lazy about updating their schedules and begin to miss meetings.
- A meeting is scheduled and confirmed, but the location is already booked.
- No one sends a meeting reminder, and several attendees forget about the meeting.
- People are invited to a meeting but the meeting organizer didn't say what it is about, so they show up unprepared.

Meeting Agendas

The meeting agenda is like a roadmap for the meeting. It tells the participants what the plan is for the meeting, providing a sense of direction and purpose. A meeting agenda should include:

- Meeting start time
- Meeting end time
- Meeting location
- Topic headings
- Topic detail for each heading
- How much time each topic discussion is expected to last
- Which meeting participants will facilitate the discussion of a particular topic

Meeting Minutes

Meeting minutes are a record of what took place during a meeting. The minutes allow the meeting attendees to review the meeting later to look for outstanding issues and action items. In some cases, such as stockholder and board of directors meetings, the minutes are required by law and are included in the corporate minute book.

While attending a meeting, you can make handwritten notes, type on a computer if the sound of the typing does not distract the meeting attendees, or use a recording device and transcribe the meeting later. Regardless of which method you use, make sure that all of the essential elements of the meeting are noted: type of meeting, company name, date and time, facilitator, main topics, and time of adjournment.

Make a list of the expected attendees, or review the meeting agenda. As each person enters the room, you can check him or her off the list. Optionally, you can pass around an attendance sheet for everyone to sign as the meeting begins. If necessary, map out a seating arrangement for the meeting and be prepared to introduce any unfamiliar people.

If you prepare an outline in advance based on the agenda, you will already have the main topics written down and you can keep your notes organized. When you transcribe the minutes, you should write them up in formal language according to the following outline:

- Name of organization
- Name of body conducting meeting
- Date, hour, and location of meeting
- List of those present and those absent
- Reading of previous minutes and their approval or amendment
- Unfinished business
- New business
- Date of next meeting
- Time of adjournment
- Signature of recorder

Avoid the mistake of recording every single comment. Instead, concentrate on getting the essence of the discussion by taking enough notes to summarize it later. Remember, minutes are a record of what happened at a meeting, not a record of every-thing that was said.

Always prepare ahead for meetings where you will take minutes. It's important that you understand the discussion without asking a lot of questions. Following the meeting, don't wait too long to write up the minutes. Always have a draft of the minutes approved by the meeting organizer or facilitator before distributing them to the attendees. Figure 5-5 is an example of minutes for an organization.

Corporate Minutes

All corporations must document the minutes of shareholder and board of directors meetings. In fact, in many states, the absence of proper meeting minutes may be a liability for the corporation, especially in situations where the shareholders are also on the board of directors or where there are close relationships among board members. All corporations in the United States are required to hold annual shareholders' meetings to elect directors. In addition, the bylaws of most corporations require the board of directors to have annual meetings. At these corporate meetings, the following actions will normally be approved by the board of directors:

- Election of officers of the corporation
- New business policies and plans
- Creation of committees and assignments
- Issuing and selling stock
- Approval of the sale, transfer, lease, or exchange of any corporate property or assets
- Approval of mergers and reorganizations

Minutes of Meeting of
The Historical Society of the University of Texas
Hotel Driscoll, Austin, Texas
May 1, 2013

At the meeting of the Historical Society of the University of Texas at Austin, some 100 charter members being present, the Society was called to order at 1:05 p.m. by Mr. John R. Combs, Chairperson, who requested Mr. Warren T. Scaggs to serve as Temporary Secretary.

Mr. Combs dispensed with the reading of the minutes of the last meeting because a copy had been previously distributed to all members.

A communication from the National Historical Society, read and accepted by the Society, dealt with the planting of redbud trees throughout America.

A communication from Miss Harriet Allen of New York City asked that the Society refrain from its normal pattern of conducting spring tours throughout the State of Texas. Several members, after the reading, expressed disagreement with the views given by Miss Allen.

There was no unfinished business.

New business was the election of officers for the remaining current year. The following nominations were announced by Mr. Warren T. Scaggs, Chairperson of the Nominating Committee:

President	Mrs. Rutherford Tinsdale
Secretary	Mr. Joseph Mapes
Treasurer	Mrs. Theodore R. Tollivar

Members of the Council Ms. Louise Allen
 Mrs. Philip W. Crossman
 Mr. John Stobaugh
 Mrs. John C. McCann

After an unanswered call for nominations from the floor, it was moved by Mrs. William R. Metcalfe that the Secretary cast one ballot for officers nominated. The motion was seconded and carried, and the officers were declared elected.

The next meeting of the Historical Society of the University of Texas at Austin will be held on June 11 at the Hotel Driscoll in Austin, Texas, at 1:00 P.M.

After congratulations to the newly elected officers by the Chairperson, the Society adjourned at 3:25 p.m.

Warren T. Scaggs
Temporary Secretary

- Adoption of a pension, profit-sharing, or other employee benefit plans and stock-option plans
- Approval of corporate borrowing and loans
- Entering into joint ventures
- Designating corporate bank accounts and authorized signatures
- Changing an officer's compensation
- Entering into major contractual agreements

Small corporations have informal meetings where these matters are discussed. Large corporations have formal meetings. In both cases, the board of directors must pass a resolution to approve the action. Therefore, the meeting minutes are a record of the board's consent and the discussion surrounding the decision.

Resolutions

Formal resolutions may be made in one of these forms:

WHEREAS it is necessary to . . . ; and

WHEREAS conditions are such that . . . ; and

Therefore be it

RESOLVED, That . . . ; and be it

RESOLVED further, That . . .

Note that the word whereas is in caps with no comma following it; the first word after it is not capitalized unless it is a proper name. The word resolved is also set in caps but is followed by a comma and a capital letter. In formal resolutions, the facts are stated simply:

. . . and the following resolution was unanimously adopted: RESOLVED, That . . .

Office Meetings

Your boss may ask you to record into written form a meeting of various office personnel, perhaps department heads. Elaborate minutes are not required as long as the group is not a governing body within the company, such as the board of directors. Figure 5-6 is a sample report of an office meeting.

Conferences

Sometimes an administrative assistant will be asked to assist in the planning and coordinating of conferences for the company. This involves preparing for the event, carrying out your responsibilities during the conference, and follow-up activities after it's over.

Planning for the Conference

The planning for a conference involves consideration of items related to the conference facilities and the speakers.

As you plan for a conference, keep in mind the following:

- Booking the conference site
- Blocking reservations for hotel rooms, selection of room sizes, and price range January 12, 2014

Attendance:

A meeting of the department managers was held in the office of John Smith, Executive Vice President, at 9 a.m. on January 12, 2014. Mr. Smith presided. Present were Martha Johnson, Philip Smith, Martin Allen, Raymond Martinez, Eloise Randolph, Anthony Guerrero, and Patricia Reese. James Augustine was absent.

Items Covered:

1. How the company can participate fully in the United Way campaign. Raymond Martinez reviewed last year's company goals and how these goals were reached. Anthony Guerrero suggested our goal for the present year be increased by 10 percent. Recommendations were made by each person present.
2. These suggestions and recommendations will be discussed and voted upon at the February 2 meeting of the committee.

Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 10 a.m.

Martha Johnson, Recorder

Confirming auditorium sizes and breakout rooms

- Scheduling catering and beverage service
- Confirming smoking locations

- Inspecting facilities you haven't seen before
- Sending letters of invitations to speakers
- Following up with confirmation letters to the speakers and conference site
- Obtaining background information, photos, and resumes of the speakers

Preparing Conference Materials

As the conference time approaches, you will need to confirm all necessary supporting materials: table and chair rentals, reports, financial statements, advertisements, meeting agendas, itineraries, and executive travel folders.

If it is your responsibility, you will need to make arrangements for printing packets, maps, tickets, and awards. You may also need to make arrangements for local tours and special outside events to entertain the speakers, attendees, and their spouses. Many times family members accompany their spouses when attending a conference, and any thoughtful conference organizer has made arrangements for shopping trips, outside restaurant gatherings, tickets to sporting events, museum tours, and other local attractions.

You will need to coordinate with the conference site to plan meals, refreshments, coffee breaks, and banquets. This should involve evaluating menus in advance and planning what will be served.

You may also be involved in preregistration and registration. This requires organizing a filing system for those attendees who preregister and having badges made. During the registration on the first day of the conference, you may be involved in staffing the registration desk. You should organize registration materials alphabetically. All conference materials should be assembled in packets with programs, brochures, reports, name tags, meal tickets, and so forth.

Confirm with the conference site any audiovisual equipment or meeting supplies you may need. Breakout rooms will need chalkboards or whiteboards, easels with large pads of paper, and marker pens or chalk. Conference rooms may need lecterns, microphones, overhead projectors, video players, video projectors, projection screens, television monitors, and a public address system. Usually this involves filling out a reservation request form with the conference facility. Also make sure you order extra projector bulbs and extension cords.

If your conference involves international guests, you may need to make arrangements for a translation service.

Two weeks before the conference, you should mail all pre-work to attendees. You should also ship any supplies and conference materials to the conference site around two weeks in advance.

If it is appropriate, you may need to arrange for press coverage by contacting media outlets, arranging for a photographer to take photos during the conference, and sending out press releases.

Finally, you'll need to coordinate any security concerns with the conference location or security service. You may also need to coordinate parking with the conference location's parking attendants.

You will need to provide both groups with a formal agenda with event times, additional security protection needed, and parking requirements.

During the Conference

While the conference is under way, your duties may include checking meeting rooms and making sure all necessary materials are available. Confirm that the lighting and heating are functioning, refreshments are available, audiovisual equipment is available and functioning, and that the room is clean.

As conference guests arrive, you should greet and welcome them to the conference. Be a host and introduce people, escort people who need directions, and be helpful where you can.

If you are asked to work the registration desk, you may need to provide statistics on who will attend the various events. Prepare lists of participants with names and addresses.

You may be asked to attend some meetings and take minutes, handle correspondence requests, or route incoming express shipments. You may write and distribute a conference newsletter, coordinate messages among participants, or meet with media representatives and photographers.

After the Conference

Each day after the conference, remove any surplus literature and conference packets from the meeting rooms. Inform the conference site staff regarding any catering items left in the meeting rooms. Make sure any audiovisual equipment is properly secured. Also move and secure any other rental equipment. Any lost and found items should be taken to the conference site receptionist.

When you return to the office, you may need to complete follow-up reports or other conference-related mailings. You may need to send thank you letters to speakers or distribute meeting minutes.

Finally, you will need to calculate expenses and fill out expense reports. As a last step, update the meeting file with your notes. With everything fresh in your mind, write down what went well and what challenges you faced. If you have ideas on how to make improvements, put them down on paper in the file.

Conference Notes

If your employer asks you to report on all that is said in a conference, make place cards for the members of the group who are expected to meet. As they enter the room, direct them to sit where they have been assigned. In front of your own seat, arrange tabs showing the names of the members in the same order as they are seated around the table so that you will know who is speaking at each given moment. This will enable you to take your notes in the form of a dramatic dialogue. Preface one remark with “Hansen” if the man whose name is Hansen has spoken; preface the next remark with “Rosen” if the next voice has come from the seat you assigned to Mrs. Rosen; and so forth.

When you transcribe your notes, you can show the discussion in this dialogue form, if that’s acceptable to your employer. Alternatively, you can insert a full stage direction such as “Mr. Hansen

replied:” or “The next speaker was Mrs. Rosen, who said . . .” In either case, open your transcription with a list of those present, giving the full name or initials and office held, if any, for each. A recording device is usually used, but you should be ready if it’s not available. It may be wise to take notes even when a recording device is used because, unless the meeting is held under strict discipline, there may be a jumble of voices. Your notes will help you decipher the recording.

Further Reading: