

THIS GUIDE IS TO BE READ IN CONJUNCTION WITH QUICK GUIDE TO ENGINEERING PROJECT MEETINGS

Pedagogical Advantages

The ability to capture decisions and track progress for projects is essential in professional practice. The skills needed to draft agendas and write up minutes are also applicable to note taking and summarising required throughout an undergraduate degree – identifying key and relevant points, expressing them concisely and clearly in written form. In the undergraduate learning environment students are often called on to work in groups and teams to complete tasks, modelling the work of project teams.

Skills required for planning and conducting team/group meetings, which are akin to preparation of agendas and minutes, include: being able to identify what is important in the discussions, negotiations and arguments, keep a focus on the purpose of the meeting, and use of respectful and professional language.

The capability to conduct, and record the decisions of, project meetings exercises and develops students' study skills as well as their interpersonal and communication skills. This activity also develops time management and personal organisational skills as team members must identify who will do what by when, then take responsibility for completing agreed actions, within agreed timeframes.

Assessment

The skills for conducting and minuting Project Meetings are best assessed as an element of a project which is to be completed over time, e.g. several weeks/lessons, so students can have at least two meetings – one for planning the project and one for tracking progress of the project, i.e. following up on agreed actions and decisions.

Note that the Assessment is both a learning activity and a means of evaluating progress and performance.

Marking can be limited to confirming whether decisions, actions and progress were recorded appropriately using a rubric. Teacher time can then be used to design robust design task that also assess technical knowledge and competencies, and to provide informal feedback on how plans relate to practice as students conduct project meetings.

Implementation

Project Meeting Minutes can be assessed after at least two meetings, e.g. any two of the following - at the beginning of a project, partway through project, or at the end of the project. Assessment tasks that require meetings at all three points in the project life are preferable. Where practicable the teacher should observe at least one project meeting to enable informal feedback on the conduct of the meeting: that is, how the agenda and minutes are reflected in the way the meeting is conducted. The formal assessment of the Meeting Minutes should emphasise the clarity and conciseness of expression and the completeness of the document, i.e. is all the required information present.

It should be noted that if the agreed actions have not been completed in the agreed timeframes, this should not impact on the assessment of the Project Meeting Minutes provided this non-completion is recorded appropriately. Non-completion of agreed actions may be addressed in another aspect of the assessment of the project as a whole.

Sample instructions

As a team, organise a time for the initial meeting. Meetings may be face to face or virtual (e.g. via phone, online platform e.g. Facebook or Wiki or discussion space on MyUni, Facetime, Skype or similar). At the initial meeting:

- organise times and mode of communication for subsequent mid-point and final meetings
- for this and subsequent meetings, appoint a person to chair/convenor, a minute taker, and a person to distribute the minutes
- ideally each team member should have an opportunity to take a different role for each meeting
- either the minute taker or the chair/convenor can write up agendas for subsequent meetings
- prepare an agenda for the initial meeting, based on the provided template
- develop an action plan for your project.

Include teacher in distribution of all agendas and minutes.

Submit all agendas and minutes with other documents related to this project. If there are attachments to the minutes or agendas, also submit these.

Agendas and minutes must be in an approved format – either the provided template or an approved template. The format of the agenda and minutes must be action focussed – recording actions and decisions rather than the details of who said what. The agendas must be structured so standing items can be tracked from meeting to meeting. The minutes must reflect the purpose of each meeting.

Indicative Rubric

	<i>Not Satisfactory</i>	<i>Satisfactory</i>	<i>Very Good - meets Satisfactory criteria plus...</i>
Agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Not provided for each meeting <input type="checkbox"/> Incomplete <input type="checkbox"/> Format inappropriate for purpose <input type="checkbox"/> Template not adjusted to reflect project team membership or project focus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Provided for each meeting <input type="checkbox"/> Complete <input type="checkbox"/> Format appropriate for purpose <input type="checkbox"/> Template adjusted to reflect project team membership and project focus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Effectively helps Chair/convenor manage the conduct of the meeting
Minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Not provided for each meeting <input type="checkbox"/> Incomplete <input type="checkbox"/> Format inappropriate for purpose <input type="checkbox"/> Template not adjusted to reflect project team membership or project focus <input type="checkbox"/> Actions not recorded or don't include who is responsible for completion of the action or the date by which it must be completed <input type="checkbox"/> Decisions not recorded <input type="checkbox"/> Summary of key points of discussion that lead to decisions not recorded <input type="checkbox"/> Details of who said what; not included 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Provided for each meeting <input type="checkbox"/> Complete – all required information recorded <input type="checkbox"/> Format appropriate for purpose <input type="checkbox"/> Template adjusted to reflect project team membership or project focus <input type="checkbox"/> Actions recorded and include who is responsible for completion of the action or the date by which it must be completed <input type="checkbox"/> Decisions recorded <input type="checkbox"/> Summary of key points of discussion that lead to decisions recorded 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Meet industry standard for clarity and conciseness of expression <input type="checkbox"/> Complement and support Action Plan and other project documentation <input type="checkbox"/> Effectively informs discussion and decision making at subsequent meetings
Meeting observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> No clear designation of responsibilities <input type="checkbox"/> Inappropriate behaviour, e.g. bullying, disrespectful language used, abusive language used, individuals not given opportunity to express views or contribute appropriately to discussion <input type="checkbox"/> Discussions don't conclude with decisions <input type="checkbox"/> No actions agreed on <input type="checkbox"/> No agreed person allocated responsibility for actions <input type="checkbox"/> No time frames for actions agreed on 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Clear allocation of responsibilities across the group for Chair/convenor, minute taker and distributor of documents <input type="checkbox"/> Chair/convenor ensures meeting keeps to time and agenda is followed <input type="checkbox"/> Chair/convenor ensure respectful discussion and fair opportunity for all voices to be heard and all members to contribute to discussions and decision-making <input type="checkbox"/> All participants behave professionally and respectfully in their interactions and communications 	<p>Conduct of meeting meets industry standard in terms of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Time allocation and time management <input type="checkbox"/> Professional and respectful communications

Frequently asked questions

1. Which are better - face to face or virtual meetings?

Face to face is recommended for the initial meeting as there are many decisions to make. Face to face meetings, which may include the use of technology such as Facetime or Skype, allow for more effective observation of reactions and non-verbal cues which, in turn, make communication more effective. In face to face meetings, it is also commonly easier to 'get to know' the other members of the project team, which also helps effective communication. Use of technology, though is commonly used in industry to manage access and time. Trying to find a time and place for a physical face to face meeting is very challenging and can be expensive. The common practice of not having everyone in the same room at the same time means that having effective documentation, including Agendas and Minutes, becomes even more important.

2. What is meant by "industry standards" for agendas, minutes and the conduct of meetings?

Each organisation will have its own processes and tools. However, most are influenced by models used in Project Management and business management training courses (see Further reading and references). As outlined in the Quick Guide and Implementation Guide the focus is on capturing decisions and actions. A summary of discussions should only be included if necessary to provide essential background to decisions. With experience, project managers and project team members develop the 'right' balance between sufficient and too much detail to track project implementation and to inform the implementation of actions. Meetings should only be all long as they need to be, i.e. focus on the specified purpose and agenda. That isn't to say debate and negotiation are shut down, but rather they are allowed to run only as long as they are focussed and relevant. If a matter needs more discussion it is scheduled for another time or context. So, purposefulness, focus, relevance and effectively concise and clear expression of discussions, decisions and actions are the key features to look for.

3. When should it be conducted in the assessment cycle?

It is best that the preparation and conduct of project meetings is an integral element of a project. Therefore, the assessment should be a discrete element of the larger project assessment. Ideally, students will have the opportunity to practise meeting preparation and conduct in a situation where they can receive informal/formative feedback before preparing, conducting and submitting minutes and agendas for a series of meetings that will contribute to final marks.

4. How much guidance should be given to students upfront?

Ideally, in addition to providing and explaining the use of appropriate templates and explanations of expectations, students will be able to see how they are used in the context of project meetings. This might be by the teacher or might be a video resource.

5. What if students can't organise meetings, make decisions, take minutes or follow the agenda?

If practicable, observing meetings or speaking with teams between meetings is desirable. This gives the teacher the opportunity to provide constructive feedback informally and to suggest strategies to help the team meet the standard. Ideally, students will have previously learnt about how to work effectively together. If not, time may need to be taken to address this set of competencies, particularly if there are widespread significant problems in teams working together

Frequently asked questions

6. Does this make a difference to students?

Preparing for, and conducting meetings effectively, are essential skills for practising engineers. Doing so in an educational setting allows guidance to be provided to develop the interpersonal and communication skills needed to work collaboratively and cooperatively with others (Association for Project Management). Problem/Project-Based Learning (an example of a “Just-in-time” approach) reflects the natural model of lifelong learning professionals will apply throughout their careers to maintain currency of knowledge and competency (Biggs & Tang 2007). It also develops skills in expressing ideas concisely and effectively in summary.

7. What adjustments can I make for students with a variety of capabilities and challenges that impact on their learning?

All teachers should assume all students are individuals who bring with them a range of experiences, characteristics, motivations, capabilities, strengths and challenges. However, over and above these, some students will have specific categories of challenges which need particular attention. These include students who have vision, hearing or mobility challenges, or who have specific information processing challenges, or who are not yet proficient English language readers, speakers or writers. For these students the principals of ‘reasonable adjustment’ can be applied: that is, within practical limits of the available resources, including time and money, relevant adjustments can be made to the presentation of information, to the manner in which students interact and communicate with each other and you, and to the format used for them to present evidence of learning. As the focus of this module is communication and interpersonal skills, the following examples of potential adjustments may be considered:

- students who are not proficient readers of English, particularly academic or technical English, may have additional time to review written material to allow time for translation
- students with a vision impairment can have an audio version of written materials and may be able to present their contributions orally
- students with a hearing impairment may be allowed to record discussions using auto-transcription or voice-to-text technology
- students who have been identified on the autism spectrum may require specific strategies for managing discussions where conflicting ideas are presented or exchanges are rapid

Setting up reasonable adjustment is best done in consultation with the student and, where required and appropriate, other team members.

Further Reading & References

Australian Institute of Project Management (AIPM). Retrieved from <https://www.aipm.com.au/home>
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