



# Effective Meetings

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## Effective Meetings

### Definition of a meeting for this free information

A 'meeting' is defined as a group of three or more individuals arranged for a specific time, place and purpose. It does not cover meetings between two individuals, or purely accidental encounters, important as both these events may be!

### Advantages of meetings

Meetings may not always be necessary or efficient. It is important to ensure that they are justified before committing the time, effort and other costs involved.

In the right situation, effective meetings can:

- provide swift and effective communication between a number of people
- be an effective decision making instrument
- enhance the motivation and commitment of a team.

### Disadvantages of meetings

Some of the least effective meetings are those that are held regularly, such as every week or every month. Whether regular or not, ineffective or unnecessary meetings can:

- waste time and money
- exacerbate divisions and bad feeling
- produce poor decisions.

### Meetings checklist

To be fully effective, appropriate action will be necessary before, at and after a meeting. Responsibility for success rests not only on the organiser and Chair, but on all participants.

### Before the meeting

1. Ask "Do I really need a meeting?" Consider what the purpose of the meeting is: to exchange information; to monitor progress on performance; to deal with specific problems; to brainstorm an issue; or to develop future plans. Only when you have done so can you decide the best timing, attendance and format of the meeting.
2. Set clear, precise objectives (not the agenda) for the meeting.
3. Decide who should be present; neither too many nor too few.
4. Choose the date, starting and finishing time, and place. Few meetings need to last longer than two hours at most.
5. Set the agenda. For each item clarify the objective and who will lead the discussion. Construct a timetable so that important items do not get squeezed out and lesser items do not absorb disproportionate time.
6. Make administrative arrangements, including:

- choose and book a suitable room
  - ensure necessary equipment and supplies will be available
  - arrange catering.
7. Notify all involved as early as possible. The notification should include:
- full details of date, time and place
  - list of invitees
  - the agenda
  - reports and other supporting papers.
8. Arrange for secretarial help at the meeting.
9. Complete personal research, reading and other preparation.
10. Consider meeting objectives and strategy.
11. Consider whether to make appropriate advance contact with any participants whose contributions may be critical to the success of the meeting.

### **At the meeting the Chair/leader should**

1. Arrive in good time.
2. Check that all arrangements, including equipment, seating and refreshments, are in order.
3. Welcome participants on arrival (especially newcomers).
4. Undertake any pre-meeting contacts necessary with key participants, but do not appear to fix things beforehand.
5. Start promptly.
6. Deal with administrative items:
  - introductions of newcomers, congratulations, thanks, good wishes, condolences, apologies etc
  - message-taking, car parking, smoking, catering etc
  - timing of breaks, end of meeting.
7. Despatch routine items.
8. Introduce each agenda item effectively, with emphasis on the objectives.
9. Shape and control the discussion:
  - encourage the shy
  - restrain the verbose and opinionated
  - allow only one discussion at a time
  - separate different subjects
  - 'hold' on subjects that are not exhausted
  - balance contributions on contentious subjects
  - keep control of time
  - use visual aids where they can help to make your point
  - don't express an opinion unless needed at the end
  - summarise at intervals
  - seek clear decisions at the appropriate point
  - express appreciation for members' contributions.
10. Conclude firmly and tidily, emphasising action points agreed.
11. Keep creative and analytical discussion separate. Creative meetings need a more relaxed timetable and atmosphere. It is hard to switch from the routine to the creative and vice versa.

### **After the meeting**

1. Write down immediately the decisions taken, the actions agreed with the persons responsible for action and the dates by which action should be achieved.
2. Distribute the note to all participants and to others whom it may concern.
3. Monitor the progress of subsequent action.

### **Do's and don'ts for effective meetings**

#### **Do**

- Consider other ways in which the objectives of a proposed meeting can be achieved.
- Prepare thoroughly - well in advance.
- Arrive in good time.
- Consider participants' comfort and convenience (eg smoking, ventilation, acoustics and noise levels, breaks etc).
- Use visual aids where useful.
- Focus on the objectives for each item.
- Ensure all contribute what they can to the discussion.
- Maintain good but not oppressive discipline.
- Aim for consensus whenever possible.

#### **Don't**

- Take notes if you are also the leader or a key contributor.
- Lose your temper.
- Get involved in purely personal disagreements.
- Talk too much or for too long.
- Insist on having the last word.
- Talk first, except to introduce a topic.
- Let the meeting run on and on.

### **How to assess meeting effectiveness**

As with other activities, assessment of effectiveness will depend on having set clear objectives in advance, for the whole meeting and for individual items. Common measures of effectiveness include:

- Did all present contribute positively, according to their roles?
- Was the discussion lively but good-tempered throughout?
- Were all relevant aspects of the subjects properly explored?
- Was consensus reached on all major decisions?
- Did the meeting cover the subjects within the time allotted?
- Did all leave with clear knowledge of what had been achieved, and their own responsibilities for future action?
- Ask participants to complete a brief evaluation; they perceive their own weaknesses and do better next time.

**Evaluation form**

To what extent...	Poor ----- Good				
Were the objectives clear?	1	2	3	4	5
Was it well-prepared?	1	2	3	4	5
Did it stick to the point?	1	2	3	4	5
Were vital matters covered?	1	2	3	4	5
Were clear decisions made?	1	2	3	4	5
Was people's knowledge used?	1	2	3	4	5
Did people speak freely?	1	2	3	4	5
Did you feel involved?	1	2	3	4	5
Did you contribute?	1	2	3	4	5
Did the Chair control the meeting?	1	2	3	4	5