

Conducting Meetings



Decide how you're going to make decisions.

If you are a small group, try deciding by whole-group consensus or by a two-thirds vote. A simple-majority decision may lead to bad feelings and resentment.

Understand everyone's role at the meeting.

At most meetings, people need to fill the following roles, which may change from meeting to meeting:

- The leader or facilitator runs the meeting, follows the agenda item by item, and watches the time allotted for each. The leader helps participants focus on the task and makes sure everyone has a chance to participate.
- Recorder takes minutes, which include date and time of meeting, the persons attending, and notes on each agenda item.
- Group members contribute agenda items, discuss topics, make decisions, and take responsibility for various tasks.
- Adviser is an adult whose role is to give advice, not to run the group.
- Guests may participate in group discussions, but usually do not participate in final decision making.

Have an agenda. This is a list of things to discuss at a meeting. All members should be encouraged to put topics on the agenda. After the recorder reads the minutes of the previous meeting and they are approved, the members approve the agenda. Agenda items are considered in the following order:

- Old business—ongoing and follow-up items.
- New business—anything that has not been brought up before.
- Reports of special projects (such as the treasurer's report on finances).
- Short announcements.

Set times and dates. Start within ten minutes of the arranged time. Don't penalize those who are on time. Set an ending time. Set time limits on each agenda item. These will help push the meeting forward. Also make sure that any person assigned a project has a deadline and prepares a timeline.

Arrange for a good meeting place. It should be comfortable, convenient, and large enough. Leave the room in good order and clean up before you leave.

Prepare materials you need such as handouts, paper and pencils, refreshments, projector and screen, computer, etc.

Notify people about the meeting. Use a phone tree, email, hand-delivered notices, or even regular mail, and always be sure to give everyone an announcement of the meeting with enough time so they can prepare for it. If you want to invite the public, put fliers on bulletin boards.

Make sure people follow up with any assignments.

Have the recorder send a summary of the meeting and decisions to all members so they remember what they are supposed to do. You may have someone in charge of checking up on each member's progress.

Whoever invented the meeting must have had Hollywood in mind. I think they should consider giving Oscars for meetings: Best Meeting of the Year, Best Supporting Meeting, Best Meeting Based on Material from Another Meeting.

—William Goldman (1931–), screenwriter and novelist