

ESSENTIAL WRITING SKILLS FOR ADMINISTRATORS

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What is it to communicate?

- To transfer or convey information in the form of ideas, thoughts, feelings etc. from one party to another

Mediums of General Communication

- Visual i.e by sight – This includes the written word, film etc
- Audio i.e through hearing e.g through speech and phones
- Tactile i.e by touch

Evidence of effective communication

- The recipient of the information interprets it correctly or as intended by the sender
- The receiver quickly gets the message
- The information is vivid; it is easily remembered

Effective Written Communication

- Clarity – Aim at Simplicity
 - In the sentence
 - In the paragraph
 - In the entire text

Ineffective Communication – The causes

- **The temptation to impress -**
“Esteemed benefactor, you may find it worthy of assisting in rendering a most important service which should drive the imbibing instincts in the student of the nation’s sports in understanding the historical antecedents of the formative years of Ghana sports”

Ineffective Communication – The causes

- **Ambiguity** i.e lack of adequate precision – “The Bishop ofhas called on chiefs to be neutral and non-partisan in politics.”
 - “The following corrections were made in the minutes of the last meeting.”

Ineffective Communication – The causes

- **When the parties are not on the same wavelength.** Consider the level of the one or people you wish to communicate with - “Diaphragmatic breathing is a distinct aid to the peristaltic action of the intestines and a boon to health”

Making communication complete

- Written communication is complete only if it provides answers to everything one might want to know about the issue. These are the **5Ws**.

Making communication complete (Continued)

- These are the:
 - what
 - who
 - why
 - where
 - when, as related to it.
- Think of users in all generations and across the ages

LETTER WRITING

Classification – Personal Letters

- Business Letters/Official
Letters

Purpose – To achieve an end

Objective - To communicate information

The features of the letter

- Address
 - Date
 - Reference Number
 - Salutation
 - Heading
 - Body of the letter
 - Complimentary closing (or close)

It must make sense broadly

Structure of the first letter

- Purpose/The relief sought
- Self-introduction
- The main issue, with background information and making the case for a favourable consideration
- Conclusion, again reflecting the relief

The body of subsequent letters

- Reference to first letter e.g Please refer toletter No.... dated....on the subject above.
- Link up the issue – mention where the issue reached in the previous correspondence then continue.

Editing

Whatever issues from an organisation carries with it the image and reputation of the organisation. It is, therefore, important that it is in the best shape possible. This calls for some editing by a competent officer.

Style

- The need to be aware of the different styles of self-expression.
- The need to avoid being dogmatic about style
- The need to tow the line of the boss, if necessary, if he/she is dogmatic about his/her style.

MEMORANDUM WRITING

- What is a memorandum? One of two main forms of internal communication in an organisation. Occasionally, the memo may be between organisations e.g in a cabinet memo.
- When is a memo necessary – when an issue that is fairly complex must be analysed.

The features of a memo

- To:
- From:
- Date:
- Subject:
- Introduction of the case
 - In progressive order
 - In the right perspective

- Summary of objectives of the case
- Observations
- Conclusion
- Recommendations

CABINET MEMORANDUM

When it is necessary – When the issue is beyond the authority of the sector Minister. (For list of specific issues, please see page 37 of EWS). The list notwithstanding, the Secretary to Cabinet should be consulted if in doubt.

- Types of CM – Executive or action-oriented
 - Legislative
 - Informative
 - Position paper

CABINET MEMORANDUM

- Features – It must be under the signature of the Minister(s) sponsoring it and forwarded to the CS with a letter signed by the Chief Director.
 - Where contractual or international agreements are involved, the originals should be submitted to the AG and Minister of Justice with a copy to the Secretary to Cabinet.
 - 55 copies of the CM, double-sized, must be submitted to the CS at least 15 working days before a Cabinet Meeting.
 - The CM must be submitted to the CS as one stapled document.

CABINET MEMORANDUM

- Guidelines - As much as possible it should be in a “layman’s language.” A more comprehensive and technical exposition is then attached as an appendix.
- Format - Paper – A4 white paper (not the Ministry’s letterhead)
 - Font type – Times New Roman
 - Font – 12 point font size
 - Font case – Section titles must be Upper Case, bold and 14 point size font
 - Margins – One inch at the top, bottom and the sides

CABINET MEMORANDUM

- Spacing – Single spacing
- Secrecy - The word SECRET be at the head of each page.
- Numbering – The bottom of each page must indicate the page number out of the total number of pages,
thus: Page 3 of 15, where 3 is the page number and 15 the total number of pages.

CABINET MEMORANDUM

- Content – The following helps to make the content readable:
 - Use plain everyday language.
 - Avoid long, complicated sentences.
 - Be concise and build arguments logically, step by step
 - Avoid technical terms and acronyms.
 - Keep the Executive Summary short, simple and concise. Anything that is not critical should be moved to the Analysis Section.

CABINET MEMORANDUM

- Cover page – The cover page of a CM must conform to the following template
 - SECRET
 - CABINET MEMORANDUM
 - MINISTER: Name and designation(s) of the
Ministers sponsoring the CM
 - TITLE (of the CM)
 - DATE

CABINET MEMORANDUM

- Structure: A CM must conform to the following structure
 - (a) An invitation to Cabinet to consider and approve:
 - (b) Itemization of the main proposal, recommendations or request for which consideration is being sought
 - (c) Background information e.g the memo is a resubmission, it has antecedents; it relates to another memo; it responds to a particular request; it is a stage in progress; it has been occasioned by a certain specific situation; or it links up to a future situation and so on.

CABINET MEMORANDUM

- (d) Justification for each of the points itemized in (b) above.
- (e) Clearance conducted with respect to each proposal, request etc for example, financial or with other sectors where the subject-matter is inter-sectoral.
- (f) A list of other consequential issues embedded in the memo which call for collective response.
- (g) Concluding reference to paragraphs containing points requiring approval or support.
- (h) Date and signature.

Components of the Cabinet Memo

- Executive Summary – This is effectively the section of the CM providing the Minister's views, opinion and overview of the issue, the recommendations along with their costs and the main supporting arguments. The key information is presented in a concise and readable format to make it easy for Cabinet Ministers to make a decision. It should not exceed 5 pages.
- Analysis Document – In contrast to the brevity of the Executive Summary, this contains the full background information relating to the issue under consideration, including the factors involved in arriving at the options presented and the benefits of implementing each option. The maximum length of the Analysis Document should normally be 15 pages, but this may be exceeded depending on the complexity of the issue.
- Communication Plan – It describes how the recommended decision is positioned within the context of the government's overall objectives and then outlines how the government decision is to be communicated to different stakeholders and the general public.

MINUTES WRITING

Why some people are challenged in writing minutes.

The dictionary definition.

Acceptable minutes, by the standards of the Ghana Civil Service. Definition: A brief record of what was decided by the meeting and a summary of what happened.

Some Common Mistakes In Writing Minutes

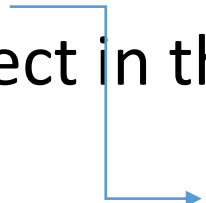
- Wrong words. The following words often used in minutes are plural, but some people mistake them for singular:
 - Minutes
 - Devotions
 - Apologies
- Vagueness is not allowed
- Guessing is forbidden

MINUTES WRITING

Purpose of Minutes – To inform any necessary action to be taken by a group or organisation.

- To inform interested persons in later generations

Objective – Like all records, the minutes must communicate information. The “why, who, where and who” of the matter at hand (the “what”) must reflect in the minutes, where appropriate.



MINUTES WRITING

Tenses – Minutes are a form of report. The following may guide anyone writing minutes:

- Issues or events which happened in the course of the meeting – past tense.
- Events which happened before, and reported at the meeting – past participle.
- Events or assignments directed by the meeting, and which are yet to happen - future tense.

MINUTES WRITING

Font

All headings should be in bold font. Additionally, the following must be noted:

- Main items – Upper Case
- Sub-items - Lower Case

MINUTES WRITING

Structure/Features of Minutes

The following are the main and sub-items:

- THE HEADING. This states the type/nature of the meeting, the date and the venue
- ATTENDANCE. This has the following sub-items:
 - Present
 - Apologies
 - Absent
 - In Attendance

MINUTES WRITING

- OPENING
- CONFIRMATION AND ADOPTION OF MINUTES. Under this comes any corrections in the previous minutes as well as the motion (and secondment) for confirmation and adoption of the minutes, but these are normally not separate items.
- MATTERS ARISING. Under this comes the items from the previous minutes that are discussed; they come under Lower Case headings.

MINUTES WRITING

- MAIN BUSINESS (Also referred to as New Business). Ideally, each separate item under this should have a heading in Upper Case, but there is nothing wrong with putting them in Lower Case.
- NEXT MEETING. This may be omitted if it is not relevant.
- CLOSING/ADJOURNMENT. If all the items on the agenda are exhausted at the end of the proceedings, the meeting can be said to have closed. If the meeting could not deal with all the items, it is said to be adjourned.

MINUTES WRITING

The Action Column

The Action Column is provided in a column on the right against the item discussed. This makes it possible to instantly identify who was charged with which assignment by the meeting.

Recording Proceedings/Writing of Minutes

The proceedings of a meeting may be recorded in whichever way suits the recorder, but when it comes to actually writing the minutes the acceptable procedure must be followed.

MINUTES WRITING

The minutes should be impersonal as far as possible. Whatever anyone puts forward in the discussion of any item on the agenda is actually only a suggestion. Once it is accepted, the meeting assumes responsibility for it, not the one who first raised it.

Saving Time

It is possible to avoid coming under pressure in recording the proceedings of a meeting when covering it without the benefit of an electronic recorder.

MINUTES WRITING

There are some items which one knows will come up in the course of the meeting, even before it starts. The following are examples:

- Opening
 - Time:.....
 - By:.....
- Confirmation and Adoption of Minutes
 - Motion by:.....
 - Seconded by:.....

MINUTES WRITING

- For each item on the agenda, the recorder may put down the information to be communicated in the minutes:
 - What (The decision)
 - Why
 - When
 - Where
 - Who
- Closing/Adjournment
 - Motion by:.....
 - Seconded by:.....
 - Time:.....

MINUTES WRITING

Numbering

All main headings should have whole numbers and the sub-items under them decimals. Thus, we have:

1.0 ATTENDANCE

1.1 Present

1.2 Apologies

1.3 Absent

1.4 In Attendance

MINUTES WRITING

Bullets

Bullets help to project important points, issues etc for the benefit of the reader and must be used whenever appropriate.

What Decisions To Record

The Chairman for the meeting should ideally sum up the decision reached for the benefit of the recorder, but most are ignorant of this.

The following will help:

- Whatever the Chairman says which sums up the discussion, provided nobody says anything which contradicts this.

MINUTES WRITING

- Whatever is said by a member of the meeting which appears to conclude the matter, and to which no contrary opinion is expressed. Please note that a number of decisions may be taken on any item discussed, with each successive one cancelling out the last one. The last decision ultimately left standing on the matter is the decision that should go into the minutes.

ANNUAL REPORT

Definition

A report is an oral or written account with the intention of communicating information or recounting events in a presentable form.

Purpose

To provide a clear record of what has taken place within a specific time frame as a basis to improve a situation or promote development.

Objective

To communicate the state of affairs of an entity, the situation after examination, investigation or inquiry for appropriate remedial action.

ANNUAL REPORT

Content of Report

The state of the organisation should, generally, come out in the report. In doing so, the report should communicate how the resources available – personnel, equipment and facilities, financial resources – affect the organisation's performance, within a specific time frame, towards realizing its mission.

The report should reveal the challenges and achievements of the organisation, identify the reasons for both and provide recommendations for addressing the former and consolidating the latter.

Reports which are the result of fact-finding missions have terms of reference which focus on the challenge(s) or what is suspected to be going wrong.

Types of Report

- Periodic Reports – annual, bi-annual, quarterly, monthly.
- Committee Reports following an enquiry or other fact-finding mission
- Reports on visits
- Reports on programmes – conferences, seminars, workshops etc.

Periodic Reports

Among all reports, these are most frequently and regularly called for. Invariably, such reports concern an organisation.

Why the vision and mission of the organisation must be stated.

How to measure the organisation's performance.

The need for a benchmark in the report. The need for comparative outputs on two other periods, at least .

Why the resources available should reflect in the report.

How the resources affect output

- Human Resource – Over time, the same number of human resource should get better at the job and, therefore, cause an increase in output. This should offset any reduction in number or replacement, so that output is not markedly impacted.
- Facilities and equipment – Over time, the efficiency of the equipment may fall, due wear and tear, and would not perform at an optimum. They would have to be replaced at some point.
- Funds – Depending on the rate of increase of inflation, more funds will be required to do the same job.

Committee Reports

These have specific fact-finding missions directed by a higher authority; this is captured in terms of reference.

Features:

- Introduction. This should indicate:
 - the reasons for the assignment or what occasioned it
 - the historical background
 - the terms of reference, and
 - the membership of the Committee. This may consist of one or more persons.

Committee Reports

- Method adopted by the Committee for the assignment
- Findings – This should indicate what was uncovered or discovered, what was noted and the lessons learnt
- Observations – This should indicate any deviations from the norm. to highlight the deviations, it may be necessary to state the prevailing law or regulations, conventions and traditions.
- Conclusions
- Recommendations

HANDING OVER NOTES