



JPPF Registry Resources: Minute taking - strategies for taking full minutes

Introduction:

In any court system, keeping court records and recording evidence is an integral part of the role of a court-taker, whether minutes are taken by hand or recorded electronically.

After talking to Pacific registry staff who take court minutes and court takers in New Zealand, we have put together the following list of some strategies that will help you record everything needed.

If there is something that you do that you can share and add to the list, please contact JPPF and let us know.

Minute taking strategies

- Try to write minutes in a book so no loose-leaf pages can go missing. Try to record all minutes in the same book so it's easy to locate the records in one place.
- Ensure the minute books are properly secured and put away after you have finished.
- Rule off the page between different cases.
- Red pens are a quick and easy way to see separations between cases and days of hearings.
- Make sure you have enough space in your minute book and have extra ready.
- Always have an extra pen handy just in case yours runs out of ink.
- Save time and write up as much as possible in advance with the date, case details, parties and lawyers, judicial officer and the application/claim or charges to be heard.
- Use the same format each time so you get used to capturing the same information and can quickly identify the beginning of a new case.
- If you put the full name of the parties in the heading, you can then refer to them in the following minutes by their initials.
- Set up and establish your own glossary and use common abbreviations.
- Make sure before court starts that everybody knows your role is to record the minutes, if they would speak slowly and clearly.
- Experienced minute takers will know who talks quickly – find out who they are so you can anticipate this and be prepared.
- Ensure when any witness is being sworn in, that they are told their evidence is being taken down, to speak slowly and clearly.

- If parties start to talk too quickly or over the top of each other or you are having trouble keeping up, alert your judicial officer immediately.
- Remember to record when there are non-verbal responses e.g. nods head.
- If something is being read to the court, note the name of document in your minutes and obtain a copy instead of recording something that is already written down.
- If permitted, sometimes it is enough for the minute taker to raise their hand in court and say 'Pause' to allow you time to catch up. Make sure that you discuss this with your manager and the judicial officer first.
- If there have been previous cases where the minutes are incomplete, ask whether your manager has had a conversation with the judicial officer to make them aware of the difficulty and to seek their support to control the speed of the proceedings.
- Write up and complete as much of the minutes contemporaneously as possible.
- Check with your manager about what access you have to a digital recording device. A mobile phone has the capacity to record for a limited amount of time and would serve as a quick stop gap measure.
- Leave gaps in the minute book to transcribe back the recording and ensure it's transcribed immediately after court.
- If you are a proficient touch typist and have access to a laptop, you can type the minutes directly.
- Learn how to use Word auto correct to create glossary abbreviations and quick templates.