

# A GUIDE FOR CLUB SECRETARIES

**A resource to help incoming Secretaries understand their responsibilities and for existing Secretaries to review their role in the club.**

**As the Secretary you are a key officer of your club. The smooth running of the club depends on the efficiency with which you handle the records, correspondence and other communications.**

Experienced secretaries will tell you that their duties often expand beyond what is normally expected of the Secretary.

You may be a new Secretary and “feeling your way” or an experienced Secretary and want to review your role.

Secretarial jobs differ but there are many common aspects. This brochure lists many of the duties expected of a club Secretary.

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## CLUB ADMINISTRATION

### **CORRESPONDENCE**

You should read and reply to correspondence promptly even if only to acknowledge receiving the letter and pass it onto the relevant person in your club. File carefully, preferably in categories to which you can refer easily.

As well as this file, some secretaries maintain a register of correspondence “in” and “out”. Whatever system you use, you should try to achieve two things:

- answer letters quickly; and
- be on top of all correspondence.

Failure to answer letters punctually and not knowing where to find letters in a file are two of the major mistakes made by inexperienced secretaries. In some cases these mistakes can cost your club money.

### **REPORTS**

Write the annual report and other reports as required. Encourage subcommittees to present brief, written reports at meetings and file these.

Written reports save time at meetings and make your job easier.

### **RECORDS**

Maintain a register of members, life members, sponsors (if required); maintain all legal documents such as constitutions, leases and titles. This means recording changes and alerting the committee when renewals fall due or when a legal deadline must be met.

### **EXTERNAL LIAISON**

These are some duties you may be called on to carry out:

- With other agencies :
  - act as the public officer of your club or in the absence of a formal public relations officer,
  - project a favourable image and seek support from the public, business circles and the media;
  - liaise with officials, coaches, clubs, affiliated bodies, government agencies and committees.
- With SA Rugby :
  - process transfer applications;
  - enter teams in competitions;
  - represent your club at SA Rugby meetings;
  - communicate information between SA Rugby, ARU and club members.
- General affairs:
  - keep a register of members’ names and addresses;
  - handle bookings and entries; supervise uniforms;
  - respond to general duties as directed by the Executive Committee;
  - maintain a register of sponsors and external stakeholders

### **PLANNER**

Secretaries use various methods for planning their “administrative year”.

One method involves the Secretary and President (and committee) developing an annual planner which lists the key events and tasks that require action. This planner will help the committee “get on top” of a lot of administration, lighten the Secretary’s load and keep your members happy.

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## CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE SECRETARY

**An effective Secretary will be:**

### **- METHODICAL**

- Get a filing cabinet, chest of drawers or special box! Buy a box of manilla folders – one for every project/topic. It’ll be money well spent!
- Draw up an annual calendar/chart and mark in all key dates: meetings; carnivals; SA Rugby deadlines; holidays. This will give you an overview of what is coming up.

### **- PERSISTENT**

- The good Secretary is a bit like a sheep dog. You have to keep rounding up those who’ve been given jobs to do! And, like a sheep dog, in some cases you may just have to point the way; in others, you have to “snap at their heels”!
- By the way, at meetings, look for the chance to delegate tasks

### **- IMPARTIAL**

- If you’re committed to serving the members you won’t get involved in cliques, internal power plays or politics.

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## - CONSTITUTIONALLY ALERT

Like all committee members, you must be thoroughly alert to the legal and constitutional requirements of your club.

- You should have your copy of the constitution and rules always on hand to ensure that your committee is always acting appropriately.
- It's also important to have your annual chart drawn up. It will help you to identify legal and/or constitutional deadlines and ensure that your committee meets its legal obligations.

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## DUTIES FOR MEETINGS

Notice of meetings must be sent in accordance with rules. If no rules exist, your notification must ensure that all members know about the meeting.

If all those entitled to be at the meeting aren't given proper notice, there's a risk that the decisions of a meeting could be invalid.

Even those who say they are not able to attend should receive official notice.

The notice must mention:

- TIME
- DATE
- PLACE OF INTENDED MEETING
- NATURE OF BUSINESS
- WHETHER IT IS AN ORDINARY OR EXTRAORDINARY MEETING

Rules may prescribe that notices sent out by the Secretary contain notice of certain resolutions.

The Secretary must observe the length of time governing the sending out of notices.

If there is not a club rule on length of notice, then reasonable notice must be given. And, if you're sending out notices by post, it is your responsibility

to allow for time taken in the mail so that the required notice is given to members.

The Secretary should also check whether rules oblige the club to advertise meetings in advance in the newspaper.

The Secretary should arrange the meeting place and admission to the meeting, prepare an agenda, record minutes and keep the chair-person informed of any matter which may assist or invalidate proceedings.

## THE AGENDA

The Chairperson and Secretary should be familiar with the agenda. In fact, they should plan it together.

## THE MINUTES

It is essential to have a correct record of the proceedings of a meeting which is why minutes are kept. These serve a varied role – they are both a general record and an attendance record and, in case of later doubt or dispute, they're a legally acceptable reference and guide.

## THE MINUTE BOOK

The minute book is a legal record of a committee's decisions. You must maintain the minutes written (or pasted) in the book which should have serially numbered pages.

## STYLE

It's essential when writing minutes that the Secretary use clear, simple language accurately and without ambiguity. The minutes should be dictated or written up quickly before the memory fades.

Just in case, keep notes made at the time until the minutes have been confirmed at the next meeting. Use the past tense when writing minutes and define points of agreement and disagreement.

Try to reflect a logical sequence when reporting the series of events which might have surrounded discussion on a topic or led up to a motion about it.

## MOTIONS

With important motions include the names of both mover and seconder. For minor motions, use a simple statement such as:

“It was resolved that...”,  
“It was agreed that...”,  
“The Committee resolved to...”.

Avoid recording expressions of a general nature that will bind future meetings and ensure when recording motions, particularly difficult ones, that you understand them fully.

If you don't understand a motion, quickly ask the chairperson to have the motion repeated.

## ACTIONS

It is essential that your minutes have an “action column” which lists the names of those responsible for following up the committee's decision. The Secretary should also write letters as the meeting has instructed they should be written.

You, as Secretary, may have to push this point at meetings – otherwise you may be expected to do everything! But don't let decisions pass without linking them to a person.

## NUMBERING

Some secretaries number resolutions and maintain a “Register of Resolutions”. This is an effective way of ensuring that the committee keeps on top of its decisions and is seen to be efficient and reliable.

## CIRCULATING THE MINUTES

Where possible, the minutes should be circulated before the meeting.

Try to avoid reading the minutes in full – it kills the meeting right at the start!

If you can't circulate the minutes beforehand, read only the essential parts (i.e. the decisions), unless the members request they be read in full.

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## CONFIRMING THE MINUTES

If you have circulated the minutes before the meeting, the members vote: "That the minutes as circulated be taken as read and confirmed as a true record".

This gives the members the chance to discuss the accuracy of the minutes as a record. If they are not satisfied, they can agree to amend them and the change should be clearly written in.

The members must not, at this time, reopen discussion on the decisions taken at the previous meeting. They are voting only on the accuracy of the record. If the decisions taken were inappropriate (even silly!), they have to stay on record and be rescinded, or amended, at the proper time in the meeting.

The Secretary should enlist the help of the chairperson to prevent the "meeting nitpicker" from wasting time looking for trivialities in the minutes.

## REPORTS

Many Secretaries (and committee members) complain about "wasted time", "waffle", "going round in circles".

If you want to reduce this then try (and keep trying!) to get members to present written reports – with suggestions, proposals or firm recommendations.

It doesn't matter if they're only hand-written but it's a guaranteed way of being business-like and saving time. In this respect, you and the President may have to lead from the front.

## The 10 Secretarial Commandments

1. Prepare an agenda, with your chairperson, for every meeting.
2. Make sure committee members are aware of the time and place of the meeting and ensure the chairperson starts on time.

3. Do not read the minutes of the last meeting in full (unless members require it).
4. Do not attempt to take detailed notes of discussions.
5. Record all resolutions taken exactly as passed by the members and ask the chairperson to repeat the words of the motion if you are unsure.
6. Ensure that you record the names of the people responsible for following up a resolution, since failure to do so will result in you, the Secretary, doing everything!
7. Do not volunteer. Nominate committee members to assist. That's what they're there for.
8. Do not become too involved in debated discussion. If you feel you want to have close involvement in a topic, ask for someone else to take the minutes for that item.
9. Encourage members to put in written (even hand-written) reports to cut the waffle and help you in your duties.
10. Remember that all committee members, especially the Secretary, must help the chairperson run a friendly, fair and effective meeting.

## PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

The speed and quantity of information that zips around the world is increasing by the minute. Secretaries are bombarded with information and material every day. Not all of it is relevant, but much of it can be of vital importance.

With everything else on a Secretary's plate, it is often all too time consuming to sift through the post, the emails and the website updates and disseminate the right information to the relevant people on time and in an appropriate fashion.

Clubs need to appoint a Communications coordinator to ease the burden from the Secretary, manage relevant databases and coordinate the receipt and distribution of information to club members and contacts.

The Communications coordinator should act as an assistant to the Secretary with the view of one day, taking over the reigns of that role without a huge void of knowledge being left to overcome.

Succession planning is critical to the development and stability of any organisation and secretaries must make every effort to pass on their knowledge to potential successors without fear of losing authority or their special place in the club.

Every executive position needs a succession plan and every executive committee member should see the education of an assistant not as a threat, but as an opportunity to grow their club's success and prosperity.