

MINUTE WRITING

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Introduction

This section provides advice about the purpose of file minutes and guidance concerning the way in which they should be written. For guidance concerning standard instructional minutes see *Implementing Substantive Decisions*. For guidance on preparing consideration minutes see *Considering Asylum Claims*. Guidance on docketing is contained in *File Management*.

The Purpose of File Minuting

File minutes are used to record in writing all aspects of the consideration and decision making process in any individual case.

A file minute will be written in order to:

- Provide information about the background and current status of a case;
- Provide information about an outstanding problem;
- Give instructions;
- Make requests;
- Note action taken; or
- Suggest a course of action.

Two examples of file minutes are given in Examples of File Minutes.

General Principles

Before any action is taken on a case file it is imperative that all minutes recorded on the case file are read through thoroughly. Doing this can prevent confusion and any problems arising.

Effective File Minutes

Minutes should be clear, concise, informative, accurate and legible. To be effective a file minute should:

- Explain concisely what has happened or what the problem is;
- Set out the relevant facts, any policy or rules which apply, (if quoted, rules or law should be recorded "verbatim") and the argument as the author of the minute sees it;
- Have a conclusion based on all the relevant factors considered; and
- Contain a proposal for a course of action or a statement of the action taken.

Equal Opportunities and Disclosure

It is most important to note that the [Immigration Rules](#) require staff to exercise their duties without regard to a person's race, colour or religion and that there is also a general duty to act fairly towards all claimants. Great care should be taken, when writing minutes, not to use terms that could be construed as denigrating or in any way implying that the officer is biased or prejudiced. It is also important to minute only substantiated opinion i.e. an opinion which is supported by evidence such as an APPU process instruction or a law (all of which should be quoted). Staff should always be aware that minute sheets may be brought into the public domain.

Minute Sheets

File minutes should always be added in chronological order to the minute sheets attached to the left-hand side of the file with the uppermost minute sheet being the most recent. New minutes should be written immediately after the preceding minute and any gaps between minutes (e.g. between typed/standard and written minutes) should be crossed through to avoid further minutes being added out of chronological order. Where possible the use of a new minute sheet should be avoided until the previous sheet has been filled. However, when adding a printed minute sheet to preceding hand-written minute sheets with space remaining, the space should be clearly crossed out to indicate to other readers that no further minutes should be added.

Planning a File Minute

File minutes are often brief and/or straightforward and do not need planning. However, a helpful way to plan a minute, when dealing with complex matters or unfamiliar aspects of the Rules, is to note the important points under headings such as:

- The Problem
- Relevant Rules
- Action taken so far
- Relevant Facts
- Arguments (Pros and Cons)
- Conclusions
- Recommendation or action taken

Once the case has been analysed the minute itself can be written, drawing upon the factors emphasised in the plan.

Constructing a File Minute

In order to help the reader to understand, a file minute must be brief and to the point. If it is necessary to do so, relevant documents should be summarised and papers on file should be referred to by using the docket numbers assigned to them. For more information on docketing see File Management.

It is important for the author of the minute to ask himself "Is this what the reader needs to know?" Only essential points should be included. If a minute is likely to take up more than one side of the minute sheet then it may be more appropriate to present some, or all, of the information as a "note for file" which should be docketed to the right hand side of the file. The minute (which will refer the reader to the "note for file") need then only convey the essential points and/or the recommendations made.

Further points that may help staff construct a concise and effective file minute are as follows:

- Clearly mark paragraphs e.g. headings, bullet points, Roman numerals or letters of the alphabet (try not to use numbers as they can be confused with docket numbers and/or "note for file" numbers)
- Ensure that the structure of the minute follows a logical pattern
- Adopt a neutral tone and impersonal style
- Use plain language and short sentences
- Avoid confusion between numbered paragraphs, recommendations and dockets
- Adopt the most effective way of conveying the information (for instance, would a 'table of events' be more effective than a prose summary?)

Presentation of a File Minute

- A file minute should always be directed to a department/unit and, where appropriate, a particular individual. This should be recorded both on the front 'ladder' of the case file and also on the inside of the case file on the minute sheet itself. File minutes can be hand-written or typed.
- Specific proposals should form the last part of a minute and must be clearly marked/highlighted from the rest of the text so it can be easily seen by other readers. Where a minute recommends a written reply, the author should provide a draft letter where appropriate; this should be placed on top of the papers on the right hand side of the file.
- **A file minute should always be properly signed (not simply initialled) and dated by the author, who should also print or stamp their name and display the name of their department/unit and their full contact number (including area-dialling code) under their signature.**
- **The author should ensure that the correct case reference number appears in the top right hand corner of every page of his minute.**

Unclear File Minutes

Staff receiving a file with an unclear or illegible minute, in the first instance, should telephone the author of the minute for clarification and not immediately return the file to its original sender. This will prevent unnecessary delay and repetition of file movement. Once they have clarified the contents of the minute by telephone, staff should ensure that they record the results of the discussion in a further file minute.

If the author of the minute is anonymous, or the handwriting is completely illegible, it is advisable to check where the file came from using the file tracking system. This is to avoid unnecessary delay and repetition of file movement.

If contact cannot be made with the author of the minute, the file should be returned to the author requesting clarification and if the minute is illegible, request that it should be rewritten in block capitals.

Examples of File Minutes

Telephone call

The example minute below records a telephone conversation between a staff member and a representative incorporating the general principles and presentation of minute writing as outlined above. When recording a telephone conversation it is also important to detail:

- Who has called
- Which department/organisation they represent
- Who they are calling on behalf of (if applicable)
- When they called
- Why they called
- How it was agreed that the call should be followed up
- The caller's contact details.

The minute provides an accurate summary of the call and requests the officer dealing with the case to call the representative back.

Mr Smith (AGCMU20)

Miss Williams from Brown & Co. Reps called whilst you were out (at 13:13) regarding Mr A's asylum interview on 08/03/07. Unfortunately Mr A will be unable to attend due to an urgent hospital appointment. Please could you call her back ASAP on 020 7891 0111 to advise on where to send medical certificate and how to rebook interview.

Mrs Jones (AGCMU20) 05/03/07 020 8765 4321

Action/Instructions

The example minute below records action taken by a Senior Case Worker and provides instructions for the caseworker. Note that docket numbers are used instead of full descriptions of each document referred to.

Mr Smith (AG CMU20)

Many thanks for letting me have sight of this file. I have noted the various concerns you raised about Mrs B's case in your minute of 26/02/07 and, having considered the evidence provided in docket numbers (2), (3) and (8), agree with your decision to refuse asylum and grant HP. Please amend the dates on your paperwork as appropriate and have this decision implemented ASAP in order that we can meet the day 61 service target date of 09/03/07.

Miss Bloggs (SCWU) 05/03/07 020 8123 4567

Document Control

Change Record

Version	Authors	Date	Change Reference
1.0	DH	16/02/07	New web style implemented