

A

Before the meeting



Hilary Rhodes is a management consultant who specializes in meeting skills:

‘A good **chairperson** has to be a good **organizer**. What they do before the meeting is as important as the meeting itself. They should make sure the **agenda** (the list of things to be discussed) is complete by asking those involved what should be on it and then **circulating** (distributing) it to everyone concerned. They should check the **venue**, making sure the room will be free, without interruptions, until the end of the meeting.’

B

During the meeting

The chairperson should be a good **timekeeper**. They should start the meeting on time, without waiting for **latecomers**.

They should appoint a **minute-taker** to **take the minutes**, making sure that opinions and **action points** (where participants agree to do something) are noted.

They should make sure each point on the agenda is **allocated** the **time** it deserves and should keep to the **timetable**. When the time allocated to one point is up, the chair should make sure that discussion **moves on to the next point**, even if the issue has not been completely covered or **resolved** (decided).

The chair should make sure that each participant has the chance to **make their point**, and should deal **tactfully** with disagreements, making sure that each side feels their point of view has been noted. They should also try to **avoid digressions**, where people get off the point.

Finally, they should ensure the meeting **finishes on time**, or early.

C

Follow-up

After some meetings, it's necessary for the minutes to be circulated, especially if there are **action points** that particular people are responsible for.

At the next meeting, the chair should ask for the minutes to be read out and see if all agree that it is an **accurate record** of what happened, and see if there are any **matters arising** (any points from the last meeting that need to be discussed). And they should check what progress has been **made** on the **action points** from the previous meeting.

- 55.1 Replace the underlined phrases in this article with the correct expressions from A and B opposite.

I don't know how to chair a meeting!

I've been asked to chair a meeting about the Christmas office party, but I'm incredibly nervous as I've never chaired one before. Is there a secret for success?

You may never have chaired a meeting but as you've probably been to lots you'll have seen it done well and badly. Think about the things that please and annoy you and build on them. (1) Make sure everyone has the agenda well in advance, and check that you know enough about the participants and issues to be discussed. Arrange for the (2) room to be cool rather than warm; people will be less likely to go to sleep.

See yourself as a referee whose job it is to ensure fair play through careful watching and listening. You must ensure that the timid have a chance to (3) say what they want; deal (4) in a diplomatic way with the argumentative and to be kind to the (5) person you have asked to take notes. Getting that individual on your side is essential if you want the record to reflect your desired outcomes. It's normal to suggest

what should be left out of the minutes and how any difficult bits should be phrased. Make sure you stick to the (6) time you have allowed for each point and keep things moving by not letting people (7) wander off the subject. Get decisions made and recorded, even if it's only to postpone matters until the next meeting. If someone is being difficult, defuse things by offering to continue the discussion personally at a more appropriate time.

If the meeting is likely to be more than a couple of hours long, try to include a break at the mid-point; it acts as a marker and stops people getting restless.

Aim to leave everyone feeling they have had a chance to say what they wanted to say and gain lasting and well-deserved popularity by finishing (8) when you said the meeting would finish. ■

- 55.2 Look at A, B and C opposite. Match the verbs (1–7) with the nouns (a–g) that they go with.

- | | |
|-------------|---------------------|
| 1 take | a a minute-taker |
| 2 appoint | b the minutes |
| 3 circulate | c time |
| 4 allocate | d the agenda |
| 5 move on | e to the next point |
| 6 avoid | f on time |
| 7 finish | g digressions |

Over to you

What do you think are the most important skills for someone chairing a meeting?