Reporting on Discussions at Meetings   APPENDIX 4

The purpose of this note is to assist minute takers with the correct use of tenses and timeframes when drafting the minutes of a meeting. This can be very confusing at times for a minute writer, and the purpose of this note is to provide some practical advice, if not an explanation about the reason for the way it is.

This note is intended for those who never learned any grammar, as well as for those who have forgotten what they once knew.

If you want to know more about active and passive voices; indicative, subjunctive, conditional and imperative moods; infinitives, participles, and gerunds, Chambers English Grammar is a slim treasure to consult.

Direct and Indirect Speech

Saying exactly what someone has said is called direct speech, and it appears within quotation marks ("...") word for word.

For example:

The Chair said, "This <u>is</u> the most interesting report that I <u>have</u> ever read."

However, we don't tend to use direct speech in minutes, or report what people have said *verbatim*, although it can sometimes be useful to make a note of this in your own handwritten notes.

Indirect or reported speech doesn't use quotation marks to enclose what the person said, and it doesn't have to be reported word for word. When reporting speech the tense usually changes. This is because when we use reported speech, we are usually talking about a time in the past. The verbs therefore usually have to be in the past too.

Using the previous example:

The Chair said that the report <u>was</u> the most interesting report she <u>had</u> ever read.

As a rule, when you report something someone has said <u>you should go back a tense</u>. Here are some examples of this in action:

Direct speech	*Indirect speech*
She said, "I object to the proposal." **(present tense – simple)**	She said she <u>objected</u> to the proposal **(past tense – simple)**
He asked, "Why are you objecting to the proposal?" **(present tense – continuous)**	He asked why she <u>was objecting</u> to the proposal. **(past tense – continuous)**
She said, "I made my view clear when I objected to the proposal at the Committee." **(present perfect – simple)**	She said she <u>had made</u> her view clear when she had objected to the proposal at the Committee. **(past perfect – simple)**
She added, "I have been objecting to the proposal for six years." **(present perfect – continuous)**	She added that she <u>had been objecting</u> to the proposal for six years. **(past perfect – continuous)**
She also said, "I objected to it at the Board meeting as well."	She also said she <u>had objected</u> to it at the Board meeting as well.

(past simple)	(past perfect)
She said, "I was teaching earlier."	She said she had been teaching earlier
(past continuous)	**(past perfect continuous)**
There are no changes if someone says she or he "had" done or "had been" doing something, e.g: he said "I had been daydreaming at the meeting."	He said he had been day dreaming at the meeting

Here are some special verbs:

Direct speech	*Indirect speech*
Will - he said, "I will write the minutes tomorrow."	He said he <u>would</u> write the minutes tomorrow
Can – she said, "I can attend the meeting."	She said she <u>could</u> attend the meeting.
Must – he said, "I must borrow a computer to work at home."	He said he <u>had</u> to borrow a computer to work at home.
Shall – she said, "Who shall I ask to chair the meeting."	She said who <u>should</u> she ask to chair the meeting.
May – he said, "I may resign if the proposal is agreed."	He said he <u>might</u> resign if the proposal was agreed.
Could, would, should, might and ought to – do not change	She said she would / ought to / might write a book on university management

<u>Changes of Time and Place</u>

If a reported sentence contains a reference to time, you must change it to fit in with the time of reporting. The following list should help you:

Direct speech (today)	*Indirect speech (historical)*
Today	Yesterday
This evening	That evening
These days / years	Those days / years
Now	Then
A week ago / a month ago	A week before / a month before
Last weekend	The weekend before last / the previous weekend
Here	There
Next week / month	The following week / month
Tomorrow	The next day / the following day