

## HOW TO WRITE A CONSTITUTION

The purpose of a constitution and by-laws is to facilitate the will of the majority with a maximum of efficiency and a minimum of misunderstanding. Every organization should have basic principles and rules of procedure and the constitution merely states these in writing. A constitution has particular value for most student organizations because of the rapid turnover of student officers; the constitution serves as one form of continuity for the organization.

The fundamental requirements of all constitutions are as follows:

### Constitution

PREAMBLE States the purposes and aims of the group

ARTICLE I. NAME States the name of the organization.

ARTICLE II. MEMBERSHIP States the requirements and size limitation, if any. Active membership in a student organization registered by Cornell University must be limited to persons officially connected with the University or to spouses of such persons.

ARTICLE III. OFFICERS Contains the list of officers, qualifications for office, method and time of election, and their term of office. Provision for vacancies of officers or other Executive members may be included in a section under this article.

ARTICLE IV. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE States the make-up of the Executive Committee (Board or Council), the method of their selection, and their term of office. Provision for vacancies of officers or other Executive members may be included in a section under this article.

ARTICLE V. MEETINGS States the regular meeting time and provisions for calling special meetings. If meetings cannot be held regularly, authority to call meetings may be stated here.

ARTICLE VI. FINANCES States fact that the organization's funds will be handled in a responsible manner. Also makes provision for membership dues (if no by-laws) and states procedure for disbursement of funds in the event of dissolution of the organization.

ARTICLE VII. AMENDMENT Requires previous notification, also a two-thirds or three-fourths affirmative vote of those present and voting or those present for its adoption. (The constitution should be relatively difficult to amend in order to provide stability. Dates of revisions through amendment should be inserted in the section amended.)

ARTICLE VIII. FACULTY ADVISOR All student organizations must have a faculty advisor. The procedure for naming him should be included here.

ARTICLE IX. RATIFICATION May or may not be necessary. If more than a majority of those present is desired for ratification, a special article should be included.

## By-Laws

### SECTIONS OF THE BY-LAWS DEAL WITH THE FOLLOWING:

1. Detailed material concerning members. That is, rights, duties, resignation and expulsion procedures.
2. Provision for initiation fee, if any. Dues and assessments should be covered here, and details regarding delinquencies.
3. Details of date and method of electing officers and duties of the officers.
4. Duties, authority, and the responsibilities of an executive committee.
5. Names of the standing committees and the method of choosing chairmen and committee members. Duties of the committees should also be stated.
6. Provision for some accepted rules of order or parliamentary manual such as Robert's Rules of Order, Revised.
7. The number constituting a quorum.
8. Provision for honorary members or honorary officers, if the group so desires.
9. A method to amend the by-laws, usually a majority vote. Amending the constitution should not be too simple a process for the sake of stability; it should be possible to amend the by-laws with greater ease. The constitution should always carry the date it was last revised.
10. Definition of majority: more than one-half of total membership, or legal votes cast, or those present.

### QUORUMS AND RESOLUTIONS

A majority of the enrolled membership constitutes a quorum, which is the minimum number legally necessary to carry on business in an organization. If at the beginning of the meeting a quorum is not present, the group present may set a designated time for another meeting and then disband.

Frequently quorums are present for the early part of a meeting, but during the meeting enough members leave so that a quorum is no longer present. Unless there is objection, those members remaining may continue discussion but may not elect, vote or nominate. If the group has need for immediate action and there is not a quorum present, the group may act informally, subject to official adoption of a motion at the next meeting which has a quorum present. These informal actions must receive general consent. If all members are notified of all meetings and the meetings are held at convenient times and places, the provision for a quorum may legitimately be as small as 50 members.

#### Resolutions

When a main motion is long or of special importance, it is written in the form of a resolution. It begins with the words "Be It Resolved. That." The word "Resolved" is underscored or in italics and followed by a comma, and the word "That" begins with a capital "T." A resolution is always a main motion.

A resolution may have a preamble stating the reasons for the resolution. Each clause of the preamble constitutes a paragraph beginning with "Whereas." The preamble is always amended last. It does not contain a period, but each paragraph closes with a comma or semicolon, followed by "and" except the last paragraph which closes with the word "Therefore." Here is a sample resolution:

Whereas, We consider a library an important part of the community life, and,  
Whereas, There is no library in this community at the present time; therefore,  
Be It Resolved, That the citizens' league believes a library should be built,  
Be It Resolved, That the citizens' league study the possibility of securing a library and present its recommendations to the city authorities.