

How to Write a Resolution

Resolutions adopted by your membership represent a formal expression of the official opinion or will of the Post; therefore extreme care should be devoted to both their preparation and content.

The following guidelines and suggestions relate primarily to the *form* your Post's resolutions should take, rather than their content. However, when considering resolutions, keep in mind that any proposal transmitted beyond your Post and within the organization of the Legion must be 'germane' – that is, closely related to the purpose for which The American Legion exists. Resolutions requiring District or Department consideration must be prepared and forwarded in accordance with their respective regulations and By Laws.

A well written resolution stands a better chance of getting favorable consideration than a resolution which is vaguely worded and carelessly formulated. From the standpoint of the policies and practices of The American Legion as a whole, resolutions are all-important. The National Organization cannot act on a given problem in the absence of a controlling resolution; and, conversely, it must act on a matter when mandated to do so by a resolution which has been properly adopted by the National Convention or National Executive Committee. If your Post seeks to be a leader in the policies and practices of The American Legion, it can do so only through the resolution method.

Post Procedures May Vary

In some Posts, the member who moves the adoption of a resolution must present it in writing at the time the motion is offered. Other Posts follow the practice of assigning one member, or special committee, the task of drafting or editing those resolutions to be sent forward for convention consideration. However, it remains the responsibility of the Post Commander to make sure each resolution truly reflects the sense of the action taken by the Post and is presented in the best possible form.

Except for certain details (noted in the discussion of resolving clauses below) the National Organization has not established an official style guide for the preparation of American Legion resolutions. However, the National Executive Committee has expressed (Res. No. 20 and 21, May 1960) certain general considerations are applicable to all resolutions being forwarded for action by the National Organization as follows:

1. A resolution should contain supporting documents and its intent should be clearly defined
2. A resolution should be free of errors of fact and law.
3. A resolution should have material relevant to the purposes and programs of The American Legion.

A resolution should deal with only one subject. Those which attempt to treat more than one subject are unwieldy to process at conventions, especially if they involve matters which do not fall within the jurisdiction of a single committee of the convention. They are generally rejected or amended to delete reference to more than one subject.

Resolutions have two major parts, a preamble and a resolving section. Each consist of one or more clauses (sometimes called paragraphs) and the whole is read in its entirety, beginning with the preamble, as one continuous, complex sentence. The preamble sets forth the reasons for the resolutions: the resolving section sets forth the intent of the resolution.

Prepare Preamble Last

Although it precedes the resolving section in appearance, the preamble of a resolution should be prepared after the resolving section has been put into final form. Once the intent of the resolution has been clearly stated, it is much easier to decide what statements need to be in the preamble to make clear the reasons for the resolution. Also, during committee or floor debate, a preamble is always amended last because changes in the resolution may require changes in the preamble. The resolving section of a resolution begins with the word “RESOLVED,” usually printed in capital letters and followed by a comma. Between this opening word and the statement of the resolution’s intent there should be inserted the following information:

1. Identification of resolving authority
2. The circumstance and place of the action.
3. The date of the action.

The first word after this information would be “That” with a capital “T”. Example:

“RESOLVED, by Post No. _____, The American Legion, Department of Florida, in regular (or special) meeting assembled in _____ (place and date) _____, That...”

The clause, referred to as the “resolving clause” (similar to the “enacting clause” of a law), should be uniform for every resolution. For National convention and National Executive Committee resolutions, the resolving clauses have been standardized as follows:

“RESOLVED, by The American Legion in National Convention assembled in _____ (city and state) _____, _____ (Date) _____, That....”

The word “That” immediately following the resolving clause introduces the clause which is the object of the verb “RESOLVED,”. It aids the reader to find the point at which the meat of the resolution begins; it aids the drafter of the resolution to launch a strong and unmistakable statement of intent. Examples:

“RESOLVED, That The American Legion shall sponsor and support legislation to”

“RESOLVED, That The American Legion is opposed to the repeal or weakening of ...”

Although each resolution should deal with only one subject, it is often necessary or desirable to attach additional clauses (or paragraphs) to a resolution’s resolving section in order to cover matters that are closely related to the main intent. This device is especially useful for spelling out the details of how and by whom the intent of the resolution is to be carried out or accomplished. Example:

“RESOLVED, by ..., That..., and be it “FURTHER RESOLVED, That ..., and be it (add FURTHER RESOLVED paragraphs as required)...., and be it “FINALLY RESOLVED, That...”

As shown here, the identifying information is stated *only once*, in the first paragraph of the resolving section of a resolution, and is not repeated in the subsequent paragraphs. A period is used only once at the close of the last paragraph of the resolving section.

Construction of Resolution Preamble

The preamble of a resolution is made up of one or more clauses (or paragraphs), each of which begins with “WHEREAS, “. Two or more of these clauses are joined together by a semicolon followed by “and”. Example:

“WHEREAS, The American Legion is an organization of war veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of the community, state and nation; and

“WHEREAS, This service is performed through The American Legion’s basic programs; and (etc.)”

Each clause in the preamble should contain a statement of fact which is logically related to the intent of the resolution and explains and justifies the need for the resolution. Note that each clause would stand alone as a complete sentence if the “WHEREAS” were removed and a period were used in place of the semicolon at the end.

The final clause of the preamble is joined to the resolving section of the resolution by a semicolon (or colon), followed usually by the phrase “now, therefore, be it ...” (acceptable variations in common usage are “therefore be it”; or simply “be it”). Examples:

“WHEREAS, ... (etc.) ...; and

“WHEREAS, ... (etc.) ...; and

“WHEREAS, ... (etc.) ...; now, therefore, be it

“RESOLVED, by ... (etc.)..., That... (etc.)...”

(Note: the “WHEREAS: may be set out in capital letters, italics, underscored, etc., depending preference. When capitalized it is usually followed by a comma, and then the first letter of the following word is capitalized.)

There is no formula for deciding how many “WHEREAS” clauses a resolution should have. In general the fewer the better provided the reason or reasons for the resolution are adequately stated. Most of the good reasons for a resolution will have been stated during the debate for its adoption. Use them. It is not necessary, however, to refer in the preamble to every fact or circumstance that has a bearing of the intent or the resolution.

Study the resolving section and get the exact purpose of the resolution firmly in mind. Then start writing down statements of fact which relate to this purpose. Organize them into a logical sequence (throwing out the weak or unnecessary ones), and then put a “WHEREAS,” in front of each, a semicolon at the end of each, plus the appropriate connecting word (“and”) or words (“now, therefore, be it”) for joining them to each other and the resolving section. Do not use a period in the preamble. Resolutions are important business to The American Legion. Write them with thought and care.