

What are the basic rules for writing a resolution?

- Rule #1** Every resolution must have a title, "whereas" clause(s) and "resolved" clause(s) and carry the author's name(s). The title should be clear and concise and convey the general idea of the topic of the resolution. The "whereas" clauses should explain the rationale for the resolution -- identify a problem or need for action, address its timeliness or urgency, its effects on residents, medical students, AAFP and/or the public at large, and indicate whether the proposed policy or action will alter current AAFP policy. The "resolved" clause(s) are the meat of the resolution. These clauses should also be clear and concise and positively state the action or policy called for by the resolution.
- Rule #2** Give special attention to the following: 1) Limit the number of "whereas" clauses to the minimum required to provide reasonable support for the "resolved" clause(s). 2) Carefully check the facts and verify the data used. 3) Limit the use of adjectives or qualifying adverbs which are considered "editorial opinion" and focus on the essentials.
- Rule #3** If a resolution is adopted, the only part that remains is the "resolved" clause(s). Consequently, the "resolved" clause(s) must be written to stand alone. This means that you should be able to read these statements separately and have them make sense. Avoid using acronyms. There should be no pronouns used (e.g., it, they, we, etc.) that refer to other resolved statements or the "whereas" clause(s). Each "resolved" clause should be perfectly clear without the rest of the document present.
- Rule #4** Less is more – if "resolved" clauses become too long or involved, the intent may be lost. It is better to split an idea into two "resolved" statements than to create a single clause that doesn't cause confusion.
- Rule #5** Only one topic/issue should be addressed in each resolution. If multiple "resolved" clauses are included in a resolution, each "resolved" clause should be related to the central subject of the resolution. Call for only one action in each "resolved" clause. If there are two or three related actions being proposed, write a separate "resolved" clause for each. If multiple "resolved" clauses are included in a resolution, each "resolved" clause should be related to the central subject of the resolution.

Guidelines for Resolution Writing

Writing resolutions is a specialized skill. The resolution is one very long sentence directing the organization to take a stand or engage in some action. It can also commend or take exception to actions of other entities. It must not provide direct instructions to any group other than the NFB or its president and board of directors. The actions or other recommendations are contained in the resolves at the close of the resolution. The argument for taking the action is laid out in a series of whereases. Ideally each argument and only one argument should be placed in a single whereas. These should be arranged in the most logical order possible.

The most efficient way to write a resolution is to make a simple outline or list of premises which you will turn into the WHEREAS clauses and a similar simple list of phrases for the RESOLVED clauses. In fact, you should begin by determining what your RESOLVED clauses are; that is, how many there should be and what their basic thrust is. You will know how many by the number of entities we need to address or the number of problems we need to fix. After you decide specifically how you want the problem fixed, determine the smallest number of concepts you need to explain to a person unfamiliar with the problem that there is a problem. The best resolutions can be picked up by a person unfamiliar with the issue and hold that person's attention (in other words, are as short as possible) while still actually explaining the problem and the solution or solutions. This method, deciding the ending first and then crafting the arguments to reach it, will result in the simplest and clearest resolution. Then, when you actually write the formal resolution, you can focus on the writing and the style, having already done the thinking part.

Here are the punctuation and layout rules for writing resolutions:

1. Each argument begins with the word WHEREAS, indented and all caps. BE IT RESOLVED and BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, which introduce the resolve sections, are also indented and written in caps. Note that WHEREAS is followed by a comma, but the two versions of be it RESOLVED are not.

2. Each WHEREAS before the final one ends with a semicolon and the word "and." This is true of the RESOLVES as well.

3. The final WHEREAS ends with a colon, the words "Now, therefore," and a hard return. Please note that Now is capitalized.

4. The final RESOLVE ends with a period. This reflects the fact that the entire resolution is a single sentence. Sometimes one is taxed to refrain from writing sentences within WHEREASes, but inserting a complete sentence is not playing the game fairly.

5. A blank line separates the elements of the resolution.

6. In the beginning of the first RESOLVE surround the year and the state with commas. The formula looks like this:

BE IT RESOLVED that the National Federation of the Blind in convention assembled this eighth day of July, 2000, in the City of Atlanta, Georgia, ... Note also

that the C in City is capitalized.

The rather strained form of the resolution makes it sound unnatural and formal. Do not attempt to add to this effect by indulging in jargon and verbosity. Even though resolutions are frequently long, brevity is a virtue. Each argument should be made concisely but clearly. Jargon never helps this process. Substituting “utilize” for the short, vigorous word “use” and always referring to people as persons or individuals are good examples of counterproductive inflation of the pomposity quotient. On the other hand, because resolutions are formal statements of a policy position, you should avoid slang or informal words like “exams” instead of “examinations” or “quotes” for “quotations.” Verb forms like “hunker down” or “get going” are also a bit too casual for use in resolutions.

You will remember that the NFB is on record as opposing people-first language, except as it happens for some reason to sound euphonious. Despite this fact, we are increasingly saddled with awkward people-first language in our resolutions that serves no function but to lengthen the argument, sound pompous, and contradict our own policy. Remember that there is nothing wrong with the terms “blind people” or “blindness field.” Yet increasingly our resolutions are cluttered with “persons who are blind” or “persons with blindness or visual impairment.”

Capitalization should be consistent. Do not capitalize words for emphasis. Quotation marks should not be used for this purpose either. “Federal” is not capitalized unless it is part of an actual title or is the first word of a sentence. Since WHEREASes do not begin with capital letters, federal is almost never capitalized in resolutions. “Congress,” on the other hand, is, as are “House of Representatives” and “Senate.” Names of departments and organizations are capitalized, but terms like “departments of education” or “vocational rehabilitation agencies” should not be.

Resolutions often pile up nouns as adjectives. When this happens, the terms should be hyphenated: Web-site creators, access-program producers.

Bill numbers are written H.R. 0000 or S. 0000.