

How to Write Resolutions

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This article is going to describe what everyone should know about writing resolutions. First though, a little history about what a resolution is based on the world's best authority, *Robert's Rules of Order*. According to the 1915 version of *Robert's Rules of Order*, a resolution is a proposal that a particular assembled group take certain action or actions; or that the group express itself as holding certain points of view. When a person says, "I move that..." it is equivalent to saying, "I propose that..." These statements are then generally followed with the details of the action that is being proposed. This phrasing is consistent with presenting simple main motions or proposals.

A main motion that is of significance to a particular group may be proposed orally or with supporting documentation in order for everyone to be clear about the logical order of the motion. When the main motion is complex and more involved than a simple main motion, it is usually placed in the form of a resolution. Because of its complexity, every resolution should be put into writing, according to *Robert's Rules*. When *Robert's Rules* were first written, the groups considering motions and propositions tended to be formal governmental entities. Therefore, the procedure for presenting ideas became a very formal one. Thus, a resolution begins with the phrasing, ***Resolved, That***. The word resolved is usually underlined or italicized and is followed by a comma, and the word that is begun with a capital T. Remember: the resolution describes the action or belief statement that the group is proposing.

A resolution is always a main motion. As you will recall, most of the resolutions considered by the TNA House of Delegates begin with a group of statements, each beginning with the word "***Whereas***." These statements are not necessarily required. However, as a group, TNA members generally want the recipients of our resolutions to know the logical reasons for our position or for our actions. These preliminary statements are known as a preamble. According to *Robert's Rules*, when the reasons for a resolution are desired, then a preamble is used. Each clause of the preamble constitutes a paragraph that begins with "***Whereas***." If there are amendments in the deliberation process, the preamble is always amended last because any changes in the resolution may require changes to the preamble. In moving the adoption of the resolution, the preamble is not generally referenced because it is included in the resolution. That is—it is the reason or background foundation for the resolution.

According to *Robert's Rules*, the preamble should never contain a period, but each paragraph (clause) should close with a comma or semicolon, followed by “*and*,” except for the last paragraph which should close with the word “*therefore*” or the phrase “*therefore be it*.” *Robert's* also indicates that the resolution itself should avoid periods where practicable. When periods are necessary, *Robert's* suggests that it is better to separate each action statement into separate resolution statements. If these become large in number, then numbering the “*Resolved, That*” items is considered to be a practical solution to keeping track of the action items. However, I strongly suggest that the resolution section be kept to a minimal number of action items. The more items that are included in a single document, the more diluted each item becomes in terms of perception of importance.

So, when you are drafting a resolution, think about the main motion first. What is it that you want the TNA House of Delegates to do? Is this action within the power or authority of the group? Any resolution that is presented to the TNA House of Delegates for deliberation and consideration for adoption has to be an action the group is empowered to take, or an action to delineate a set of beliefs the group can hold. For example, we cannot draft a resolution telling the Governor what to do. We can, however, draft a resolution telling the Governor what we (TNA members) believe and the actions we can take as a body to influence others to our way of thinking or actually perform.

Before drafting a resolution, review the TNA Health Policy Statement and legislative platform. This information was developed from resolutions passed over time. These statements broadly describe the TNA House of Delegates' positions on various issues related to health care and specifically to nursing.

Is the resolution you are proposing a new position or a refinement on an old one? Is there a new action that the group needs to take based on previously stated beliefs? If the answer to either of these questions is yes, then proceed.

Write out the action that you want the TNA House of Delegates to take. Review the statement of action. Is it clear? Is the idea you are proposing a simple one or more complex? If it is a simple one, a motion to do something may be more appropriate than a resolution.

Does this proposed main motion make sense alone or does it require supporting rationale before the group might be willing to support this action? In other words, does the resolution require a preamble to lay the foundation for the desired action sought? If a preamble is required, **do your homework!** That is, get the facts from verifiable sources to build your case. Use a belief

statement to begin the first clause from existing position statements whenever possible. The reason for this is that you are trying to motivate the group to commit to the desired action, and establishing that the action proposed is within established beliefs is important for the successful consideration of the proposal. Follow the belief statement(s) of precedent with the case history data that supports the reason this proposed action should be taken by the TNA House of Delegates.

Review what you have written. Consider alternative approaches or actions to your main proposal. What alternatives are acceptable to you? What kind of opposition do you expect? Based on the answer to these questions, consider the phrasing of your preamble very carefully to address these concerns and/or your willingness to accept a friendly amendment to your proposal. Make sure that the logic flows reasonably from one clause to the next.

When in doubt, have someone who is not a member of TNA and who is not a nurse read it. Listen to the questions they may have and modify the resolution if you need to do so.

Resolutions are usually drafted and considered by the TNA House of Delegates over issues of passionate concern to our nurse activists. By activists, I mean all of us who are practicing, professional nurses who belong to TNA and keep up with the issues and changes in our society that impact the health and well-being of the citizens of Tennessee and of the profession of nursing. However, in our passion, we want to be sure we are articulating exactly what we believe and what actions we are proposing clearly and concisely.

We also want to be certain that the actions we are proposing to take are within our scope of power. This paragraph simply means re-read the resolution you have drafted to be sure it says what you think it does.

The Reference Committee members and I look forward to seeing what you have written at the upcoming 2008 TNA Annual Convention October 24 – 26, at the Franklin Marriott Cool Springs, Franklin, Tenn.