

Outline or Structure of a Constitution

An organization's constitution and bylaws provide its structure and help members:

- Stay focused on the goals and purposes
- Understand their role in the organization
- Determine the parliamentary authority used to rule the organization.

The typical order and type of contents are as follows:

Name of the organization—The formal name of the group.

Stated reason for the organization—The mission statement or statement of purpose on which the group is focused.

Members/Membership—Information defining membership qualifications, rights, dues (if any), attendance requirements, and categories/types of membership (full, associate, honorary, etc.). It also contains member responsibilities and implied responsibilities based on the purpose of the organization. Some of these are knowing what is contained in the constitution and bylaws, the issues of the group, and how meetings and elections are done properly.

Officers—The officer position descriptions, start and length of term, duties, nomination process, voting, and election procedures.

Meetings—Outline of when or how often regular meetings are held and procedures for special meetings, conferences, and quorums.

Executive Board or Board of Directors—Bylaws may state that an organization must have boards and committees entrusted with specific responsibilities. Large organizations have boards elected to represent specific populations. Smaller organizations are administered by executive boards/committees/councils/cabinets. Both function in a similar manner with their makeup, authority, and quorum clearly defined.

Committees—The bylaws identify the designated standing/permanent committees whose members are appointed/elected each year, for the year. The name, makeup, selection, attendance, and duties are outlined here. Special, temporary committees are not listed in the bylaws for their short-term tasks. Limits of committee size and number of committees may also be stated in this section with one person authorized to chair only one committee.

Parliamentary Authority—The rules of order must be stated. The most common is *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* but other well-known guides are *Sturgis Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure* and *Demeter's Manual of Parliamentary Law and Procedure*.

Amendment of Bylaws—This section clearly outlines the requirements and procedures to amend the bylaws.

Source: Nat'l Assoc. of Student
Councils -Officer Guides
NASSP, 2006

QUESTIONS CONCERNING YOUR CONSTITUTION

1. Does the preamble express the philosophy of the school and the spirit of the constitution? _____

Suggestions: _____

2. Do you think the purposes are broad enough? _____ Do you think the purposes are limited enough? _____ Do you think the purposes are practical and real? _____ Suggestions: _____

3. Is the membership representative enough? _____ Should there be more members? _____ Fewer members? _____ Does the membership represent all phases of student life? _____

Suggestions: _____

4. Are the requirements for office too rigid? _____ Not rigid enough? _____ Acceptable? _____ Should there be other requirements for office or membership? _____ Suggestions: _____

5. Should there be eligibility requirements for voters? _____ Are these eligibility requirements acceptable? _____ Suggestions: _____

Should the faculty and administrative personnel be entitled to vote? _____

6. Are the term-of-office lengths acceptable for officers? _____ For representatives? _____ For auxiliary members? _____ Suggestions: _____

Should we limit the number of times an individual can be a school officer? _____ How often? _____ Are the limiting requirements set forth in the constitution sufficient? _____

7. Are the nomination requirements acceptable? _____ Should other requirements be included? _____ What others? _____

How could we increase interest and participation in running for office? _____

Do you approve of asking the faculty to submit nominations? _____

8. Are the duties realistic? _____ If not, suggestions: _____

9. Are impeachment procedures too involved? _____ Suggestions: _____

10. Are there too many committees? _____ Which should be eliminated, if any? _____

11. Would a better order of presentation be possible? _____ Suggested order: _____

Are the duties too restrictive? _____ Too broad? _____ Suggestions: _____

Have you any suggestions for one or all of the committees so far as duties, membership, frequency of meeting, time of meeting, organization, etc. are concerned? _____

12. Are meetings held too often? _____ Too seldom? _____ Suggestions: _____

13. Are the powers of the organization too broad? _____ Too limited? _____ Are powers well enough defined? _____ Suggestions: _____

14. Is amendment too easy? _____ Too difficult? _____ Should the entire student body be involved? _____ Should club chartering be a duty of the student council? _____

GENERAL INFORMATION: Do you have any suggestions, additions, or ideas for this constitution?

Is this constitution too broad? _____ Too limited? _____ Could you cite specific instances?

Is there any section of the constitution which is out of place? _____ Is the order of the constitution acceptable? _____ Suggestions: _____

The Constitution and Bylaws

Now that you understand the philosophy and function of student activities in your school and how they relate to the total school program, you should look more closely at the specific activity you are advising. To gain a better understanding of the activity take time to examine the constitution, bylaws, and previous minutes and reports if you are fortunate enough to have them available.

The constitution and bylaws should give you a good idea about the purpose of the activity/organization and how it is governed. If there is no constitution (or if it is outdated), this would be one of the first tasks to undertake with your students. You may wish to look at those of other organizations in your school, write to neighboring schools for a copy, write to the NASSP Office of Student Activities for samples and guidelines, or develop one of your own from scratch.

A constitution is a written set of laws or governing principles of an organized political body. The constitution defines the limits of authority of the group and gives it a sense of organization and purpose.

A constitution should be stated in terms easily understood by all. It should be constructed to include only necessary items, and should be developed cooperatively with the school staff and student body. Amendment should be easy. A constitution must be studied and adjusted regularly to be vital, meaningful, and real.

A suggested form for a constitution:

- Article I Statement of the name of the organization for which the constitution functions.
- Article II The general purposes of the organization.
- Article III Powers vested in the organization; including the right of veto by the principal.
- Article IV Definition of the membership of the organization.
- Article V Establishment of the time, methods, and procedures of nomination and election.

- Article VI Frequency of meetings and provision for special sessions (this may be omitted in the body of the constitution if included in the bylaws).
- Article VII The duties and responsibilities of the organization as delegated by the principal; the officers' and members' responsibilities; committees, if not in the bylaws.
- Article VIII Method and procedure for ratification of the constitution.
- Article IX Provisions by which the constitution may be amended.

Bylaws are a series of laws or regulations made by an organized group for the purpose of managing its internal affairs and standardizing its meeting procedures.

A suggested form for bylaws:

- Article I Description of the number of members needed to constitute a quorum.
- Article II Establishment of standing committees and provision for the formation of special committees as needs arise.
- Article III Regulations for conducting school and class elections, if not included in the constitution itself.
- Article IV Procedure for filling an office which has been vacated during the school year.
- Article V Procedure for amending the bylaws.
- Article VI Definition of the rules of order used in conducting business.

A well-developed constitution and bylaws will certainly facilitate the organization and management of the activity and provide needed continuity.

Source: A Handbook for the Student Activity Adviser,
NASSP, 1979

SAMPLE CONSTITUTION

CONSTITUTION OF THE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT ASSOCIATION

PREAMBLE

We, the students of _____ High School, in order to develop democratic ideals; to teach respect for law and order; to maintain high standards of cooperation, loyalty, and school spirit; to prepare for adult life and citizenship; to encourage all worthwhile activities in the school; and to help students prepare for their careers, do form this constitution for the Student Association of _____ High School.

Article I—Student Organization

- Section 1 An organization known as the student association of _____ High School is hereby formed. This organization shall hereby be referred to as the student association.
- Section 2 The membership of the student association of _____ High School shall consist of all the students enrolled in _____ High School.

Article II—Student Council Legislative Powers

- Section 1 The legislative powers of the student association shall be vested in an executive body which shall be called the student council.
- Section 2 The student council shall consist of thirteen (13) voting members and the principal who will act as an adviser.

Article III—Membership and Election

- Section 1 The council membership shall include nine (9) elected representatives: one from each of the nine homerooms in the school.
- Section 2 The grade representatives shall be elected by their respective homerooms before October 15 of each year, and will serve until their successors are elected.
- Section 3 Homeroom representatives can be recalled by a petition signed by three-fourths of the electing body and three-fourths vote of the student council.
- Section 4 Vacancies among homeroom representatives shall be filled at a special election called by the student council.

Article IV—Officers and Duties

- Section 1 The student council membership shall include the four officers of the student association: president, vice-president, secretary, and treasurer.
- Section 2 The president shall be a senior. The vice-president, secretary, and treasurer shall be juniors or seniors. All officers must rank in the upper three-fourths of their class scholastically at the time of the election.
- Section 3 Any student of _____ High School meeting the qualifications set forth in Article IV, Section 2, above, may file for office in the _____ High School Student Association. There shall be at least three candidates for each office to be voted on by the electing body in May of each year. Persons of the electing body may write in the candidate of their choice on the official ballot of either the primary or general election described below. A primary election will be held in May of each year to determine not more than three candidates for each office. A general election will be held following the primary election to determine the officers for each office. A majority vote is necessary for election. The term of office for each elected officer is from June 1 of the year of the election to May 31 of the following year. Dates for filing and for the elections will be determined and announced each year by the officers of the _____ High School Student Association.

- Section 4 Officers can be recalled by a petition signed by three-fourths of the student association and by three-fourths vote of the student council.
- Section 5 The principal of the school, or any person designated by the principal, shall serve as faculty sponsor to the council. The faculty sponsor shall be a non-voting member. All members of the student council are active until replaced.
- Section 6 Vacancies among officers shall be filled by appointment by the student council.

Article V – Meetings

- Section 1 The council shall hold a minimum of one meeting during each week of school from September through May.
- Section 2 The president shall call special meetings whenever necessary.
- Section 3 Eight (8) members of the student council and the faculty sponsor shall constitute a quorum.

Article VI – Powers and Duties

- Section 1 The powers and duties of the student council shall be:
- a. To act as a barometer of student opinion.
 - b. To grant audiences to any club or individual at any time.
 - c. To promote general social life in the school, including the sponsoring of parties.
 - d. To sponsor assembly programs, including honors assemblies.
 - e. To stimulate student interest in activities.
 - f. To authorize special days.
 - g. To charter clubs and, if necessary, revoke them.
 - h. To approve or sponsor concessions.
 - i. To create, supervise, and coordinate committees for a special service or activity.
 - j. To organize and promote general and special elections.
 - k. To exercise general supervision of chartered buses for special events.
 - l. To promote respect for school and private property.
 - m. To authorize and sponsor drives and campaigns.
 - n. To pass on social calendar events.
 - o. To have the power to develop policies, set standards, and suggest any rules necessary for the betterment of the school.
 - p. To pass on any necessary legislation to carry out any of the foregoing powers.

Article VII – Veto Power

Because the powers of the student council are delegated to it by the principal, he shall have the right to veto any measure the student council may pass. The principal, however, must explain the reason for the veto.

Article VIII – Amendments

- Section 1 Amendments shall be made to this constitution whenever necessary.
- Section 2 Amendments shall be initiated by a petition signed by 10 percent of the student association, and become a part of the constitution when approved by three-fourths vote of the student council and passed by a two-thirds majority of the student association in a special election.

CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS

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A constitution is a written set of rules for a group. It defines on paper what the group is organized for and how it will operate. As time goes by, the constitution is amended and bylaws are adopted and amended by the group for successful management of its meetings or affairs.

A usable constitution should be stated in simple, easily understood terms. It should include only essential items. Amendments should be simple and direct. The constitution must be observed and updated as needed to be vital meaningful and real.

FORM FOR A STUDENT ORGANIZATION CONSTITUTION

Article I	Statement of the name of the organization
Article II	The general purpose of the group
Article III	Powers vested in the organization
Article IV	Definition of membership for the group
Article V	Establishment of the time, methods, and procedures for nomination and election of members, officers, and advisors
Article VI	Frequency of meetings defined and outlined
Article VII	The duties and responsibilities of the organization, the officers, the members, and the advisor
Article VIII	Method and procedure for ratification of the constitution
Article IX	Provisions for amending the constitution

FORM FOR A STUDENT ORGANIZATION BY-LAWS

Article I	The number of members needed to constitute a quorum
Article II	Rules for conducting elections
Article III	Procedure for filling an office that has been vacated

Article IV	Procedure for amending the by-laws
Article V	Definition of the rules of order for conducting business
Article VI	Procedure for dealing with delinquent members and officers
Article VII	Method of spending funds

STEPS TO FORM A CONSTITUTION

1. Gather ideas and information from group members and staff. Obtain copies of past constitutions and constitutions from other schools.
2. Review the gathered information and compile it into a single package.
3. Decide the basics of the constitution.
4. Outline the basics of each part of the constitution.
5. Revise the rough outline of the constitution into sentence form.
6. Edit for clarity.
7. Vote to adopt the constitution. Ratify each part separately.
8. Distribute copies to all interested parties and maintain a copy in an accessible spot.

Taken from *NASSP NLC Leadership Curriculum Guide*, 1994 edition, pp. 60—62.
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Source: CASAA Leadership
Handbook,
CASAA, 2001