



## MSS Resolution Writing Guide

### You have an idea. Now what?

#### A. What are resolutions for?

1. Resolutions are essentially proposals for a policy position that you think the AMA-Medical Student Section (AMA-MSS) and/or the AMA House of Delegates (HOD) should support. Resolutions can range from broad to very specific (i.e. RESOLVED that our AMA-MSS support covering the uninsured or RESOLVED that our AMA-MSS support a ban on smoking on airplanes.)

#### B. Your brilliant idea: is a resolution the most effective strategy?

1. Sometimes it may not be necessary or appropriate to submit a resolution to the AMA-MSS Assembly for consideration. Neither the AMA-MSS nor the AMA-HOD has unlimited financial and time resources, so it may not always be possible to follow up with every policy request. When deciding on the most effective way to create change, it is always essential to consider alternative strategies, such as:
  - a. Submitting a request to the AMA-MSS Governing Council.
    - i. If policy already exists, you can write a letter to the MSS Chair requesting follow-up action on existing policy. Students should provide the Chair with background information about the issue, the specific policy that covers action on the issue, and the proposed action that should be taken. Such action may include writing a letter in support of a specific piece of legislation, disseminating existing information to chapter leaders, publicizing the issue through MSS Action Briefs, etc...
  - b. Researching work being done by other medical societies or health care groups.
  - c. Working with state and county medical societies.
  - d. Working with the MSS Standing Committees.
  - e. Working with the administration or other leaders at your medical school.
  - f. Co-authoring a resolution that someone else is submitting.
2. The following Web site lists situations where alternative strategies may be more appropriate and/or effective: <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/12945.html>.
3. As you are deciding whether to write a resolution, it is important to consider where it will fit into the broad scheme of the AMA. Specifically: Is your issue something that is within the scope of the AMA to do? For example, asking the AMA to come up with guidelines regarding prostate cancer screening is probably better left for the Society of Urologic Oncology.

#### C. Your brilliant idea: is there already existing policy?

1. If there is a policy position you think the AMA should take, the first step is to identify if there already is existing policy on that particular issue. For example, if you want the AMA to support covering the uninsured, you would want to make sure that similar policy has not already been passed. You can search for existing policy by looking at these two Web sites:

- a. AMA-MSS Digest of Policy Actions: [http://www.ama-assn.org/ama1/pub/upload/mm/15/digest\\_of\\_actions.pdf](http://www.ama-assn.org/ama1/pub/upload/mm/15/digest_of_actions.pdf) - this document summarizes all the policy actions that the MSS has adopted. You can search (Ctrl+F) for a keyword or use the tabs on the side.
  - b. AMA Policy Finder: <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/noindex/category/11760.html> - this is very straightforward. Type the search words and go!
2. If there is no existing policy and you have determined that a resolution is the best way to get your idea enacted, start writing! If there is current policy but you feel it needs to be changed, start writing! If there is existing policy but it is several years old and you think it needs to be re-emphasized, you can write a resolution asking for the relevant policy to be reaffirmed.

#### **D. Your brilliant idea: what is the data?**

1. Before you decide to write a resolution, you need to know a lot about your topic. You will use this information as you write the resolution as part of your “Whereas” clauses to convince others to support your resolution. The most important pieces of data include relevant statistics, percentages and current research and publications that support your position.
  - a. For journal publications, try using Ovid, PubMed, UpToDate, etc...
  - b. For health policy publications, the RAND Corporation ([http://www.rand.org/research\\_areas/health/](http://www.rand.org/research_areas/health/)), the Kaiser Family Foundation (<http://www.kff.org>) and the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) (<http://www.cms.hhs.gov/>) all have useful data available.
  - c. Please note: References are required to be included at the end of the resolution and are used for documentation of Whereas clauses. All reference materials must be submitted with your resolution. Articles that are especially relevant will be provided for review to the Reference Committee.

### **Formulating your resolution writing plan:**

#### **A. Scope of the resolution:**

1. The first step is deciding whether this issue is something the AMA-MSS can accomplish or whether it needs to be forwarded to the AMA HOD. Resolutions that are limited to the MSS are considered “internal” resolutions and can have a variety of goals, including policy statements, requests for action, requests for study, etc...(i.e. RESOLVED that our AMA-MSS encourage healthy eating in public schools).
2. On the other hand, some resolutions need to be forwarded to the AMA HOD (i.e. RESOLVED that our AMA support covering the uninsured). These resolutions must pass the AMA-MSS Assembly and will then be forwarded to the AMA HOD at the next meeting for consideration. Because the HOD only hears resolutions related to Advocacy at the Interim meeting, some resolutions passed the AMA-MSS Annual meeting will not be considered at the AMA HOD until the following Annual meeting.

#### **B. Immediate forwarding to the AMA HOD:**

1. As mentioned above, resolutions that ask the AMA to take action will be forwarded to the AMA-HOD at the next meeting (with the exception of non-advocacy resolutions that are not considered at the Interim meeting). In rare cases, the issue is extremely time-sensitive and needs to be forwarded to the AMA HOD at the same meeting. In that case, the RESOLVED clause needs to call for immediate forwarding to the AMA HOD (i.e.

RESOLVED that this resolution be forwarded immediately to the House of Delegates at A-08).

2. Immediate forwarding should be used very judiciously, as immediate forwarding of a resolution gives the MSS Delegates to the HOD only one day to come up with a strategy plan to get the resolution passed. Additionally, this results in extremely limited time to discuss the resolution with state and specialty caucuses. There may not be enough time to discuss possible amendments and changes with opponents of the resolution and this may result in the resolution ultimately not being passed.
3. If you do wish to forward a resolution immediately to the HOD, you need to be prepared to work with the MSS Delegate, Alternate Delegate, and HCC to prepare testimony prior to the meeting.

## **Writing your resolution: you are finally ready to begin writing!**

### **A. Breakdown of resolution structure:** Below the title/authors, first begin with:

1. Whereas clauses – This is where you include all of your relevant background information to the resolution. Be able to cite concrete examples, statistics, articles, and studies in the Whereas clauses to firmly support your resolution. It is not enough to simply state that a problem is happening or that something needs to be done unless you are able to back it up with strong, sound evidence. However, be careful not to put all of your background material into the resolution because you will need to save a major point or two for testimony (discussed below). Also remember that you can have as many Whereas clauses as you want but as they are primarily background material, there is no need to be exhaustive. Concise (yet complete) Whereas clauses are the most effective.
2. RESOLVED clause(s): These are written immediately below the last Whereas clause. The RESOLVED clause(s) make up the main content of your resolution and this is the part that is open to debate on the assembly floor. In other words, this is the most important part! Each new idea should have its own RESOLVED clause. Write each of your RESOLVED clauses so that they are concise, specific, and action-oriented. To make an action-oriented RESOLVED clause, you will want to include some sort of “call to action” for the AMA HOD or AMA-MSS or both. Starter phrases for a call to action include, but are not limited to, resolving that the AMA HOD or AMA-MSS “ask for...,” “work with... to...,” “increase/decrease...,” “promote...,” “examine...,” “study the impact/effects of...,” “determine whether/if...by...,” “create materials to...,” “develop a program to...,” “support/not support legislation ...,” etc... Along with being action-oriented, you need to be specific about what you want the AMA HOD or AMA-MSS to do, but not so specific that you involve excessive details where they are unnecessary.

**B. Good basic writing skills** - You need to avoid any spelling or grammatical errors in your final draft of the resolution. This includes misuse of words, punctuation errors, syntax errors, etc... If necessary, have a few other people peer-review your resolution just for these elements. The HCC liaison is a great person to start with when you want to run a check for these errors.

**C. Using appropriate language** - You will want your resolution to be clear, concise, but still meaningful. It is key to avoid extreme and confusing language and redundancy. Again, a good way to test for these is to have a few other people (and/or your HCC liaison) peer-review your resolution and point out areas that are repetitive, confusing, or easily misinterpreted. Finally, make sure you use the K.I.S.S. method: Keep It Short and Simple as

you write both your Whereas and RESOLVED clauses; this will make for easier reading for the MSS Assembly.

## **Submitting your resolution:**

- A. Be aware of all AMA resolution deadlines:** If you are unable to submit your resolution and background materials and complete all required tasks on this checklist by the deadline, your resolution will be considered late and will be treated as a late resolution. If the resolution is urgent, it may be submitted after the deadline; however, it will then be up to the Rules Committee and a vote of approval by 2/3 of the MSS Assembly to determine whether your resolution is truly urgent and deserving of immediate consideration. The Rules Committee considers two factors in deciding whether a late resolution deserves MSS Assembly consideration: why the resolution is late and whether the issue is pressing enough to merit immediate concern. Plan ahead and make sure that you are able to meet all of the requirements of the resolution submission process by the published deadlines.
- B. MSS resolution checklist:** this must be completed and submitted with the resolution. A Web-based form that should be directly submitted can be found at <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/12943.html>. The basic idea of the resolution checklist is to ensure that you have considered other alternatives for accomplishing your goal, have searched for existing policy, and have determined that your goal can be best accomplished through a resolution. Furthermore, for resolutions asking for forwarding to the AMA-HOD, the resolution checklist asks you to contact your state HOD delegation, the appropriate specialty society, and the MSS Delegate/Alternate Delegate to receive feedback.
- C. Resolution peer review -**
1. All resolutions must be discussed with your chapter delegate, state chair or region chair.
  2. A rough draft of your resolution (including “Whereas” and “Resolved” clauses) must be posted to the MSS Health Policy and News Listserv (<http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/7275.html>) at least two weeks prior to the final deadline for submission. The purpose of this is to (1) solicit feedback from MSS members on the strength and relevance of your resolution and (2) solicit co-authors for your resolution. Posting deadlines can be found on the MSS resolution checklist at <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/12943.html>. The posting deadline is final, and resolutions not posted to the listserv by that date will be considered as late resolutions.
- D. Final Submission –** A final copy of your resolution and all references, including AMA and AMA-MSS policy citations, needs to be submitted to the Department of Medical Student Services by the date posted on the MSS resolution checklist found at <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/12943.html>. These should be sent to:

American Medical Association  
Attn: Dept of Medical Student Services  
515 N. State St.  
Chicago, IL 60654  
Fax: (312) 464-5845  
E-mail: [mss@ama-assn.org](mailto:mss@ama-assn.org)

## Writing and delivering testimony

- A. Think sales** - You want to sell the Reference Committee and the entire MSS Assembly with your position. Think about what be most likely to draw someone’s opinion over to your side. Vague statements (“Sharing this vaccine with the public is a good step for public health”) are not nearly as effective as powerful research findings (“According to a study by the University of Michigan Law Review, panels of physicians are actually more likely to rule against physicians in malpractice cases than panels collected from the general population”) and personal examples (“My nephew is a 6-year old boy with autism in the Washington, D.C., area. Their idea of ‘adequate special education’ is to put him in a daycare program with 17 other children and two adults who have no specialized training in mental health or special needs”). With that in mind, the most important items to consider are:
1. Keep it short - Reference committee members generally have very short attention spans, especially after the first few resolutions. Conciseness is much more effective than long drawn out speeches full of endless amounts of background information.
  2. Write it down - You can fall into two traps when giving testimony – testimony may become rambling and unfocused or you may freeze up in the middle of giving testimony and forget what you want to say. To avoid these traps, write down what you want to say and simply read it aloud at the reference committee hearing. Always remember to rehearse your testimony before giving it out to make sure it sounds just as effective when spoken as it does on paper.
- B. Give pertinent background info** - Reference Committee members are not “experts” on the issues being discussed in their reference committee, and in general, you should assume they know as much about any given issue being discussed as the average medical student at your school. Thus, oral testimony should start out with a few brief but pointed sentences summarizing this issue.
- C. Consider providing written testimony** - In general, the Reference Committee will spend many hours after the hearing putting together its final report, and the members won’t have time to read a large amount of written information. However, on resolutions that are particularly complicated or confusing, it may be a good idea to submit a 1-2 page “fact sheet” with pertinent background information. This fact sheet should contain a summary of the issue and a bulleted list of arguments (referenced to impressive sources like JAMA articles, etc…) in support of our position. Written testimony should not contain a stack of journal articles supporting your viewpoint, as the Reference Committee will never have a chance to read through those. Copies of the written testimony should be submitted to the staff members sitting next to the Committee at the time that that particular item of business is taken up. Whoever is giving initial oral testimony on that resolution should remark that written testimony is also being submitted.
- D. Sample testimony template** - Here is a format in giving oral testimony. It is very important that these points are included in the initial oral testimony that you give (rebuttal testimony can take other forms, but should still be concise, well organized and written down):
1. “Thank you Mr./Madam Chair.”
  2. “Joe Student, speaking on behalf of <myself/school/state> as author of this resolution.”
  3. Brief summary of the issue.
  4. List arguments for support to the resolution – limit to 3 separate arguments.

5. Finish with concluding sentence.

- E. Conclude well** - The conclusion of a statement is often overlooked but can have great impact. It affects the taste people have of your resolution. If, for example, you spend your statement disparaging alternative healthcare, but end it with something like “We want to emphasize that we are not against use of alternative healthcare as part of the complete care of a patient. However, it is inappropriate for patients to rely solely on alternative healthcare without the opportunity to know and understand all of their options”, you can convert someone from thinking “I like alternative healthcare; therefore I disagree” to “OK, that makes sense.”
- F. Anticipate counterarguments** - It is important to anticipate counterarguments and prepare effective rebuttals ahead of time. When responding to counterarguments, it is essential to maintain a level of professionalism. A mistake a lot of students make is considering the counterargument a personal attack against them or their resolution; in those cases, a rebuttal ends up being poorly delivered and doesn’t address the counterargument as efficiently and successfully as it needs to.

### **Defending your resolution at the meeting:**

- A. Reaffirmation consent calendar** – The MSS Rules Committee reviews all resolutions prior to the meeting to determine whether similar policy already exists for any of the resolutions. Resolutions for which policy already exists are placed on the reaffirmation consent calendar, the purpose of which is to save time for the MSS by eliminating consideration of resolutions that duplicate existing policy. Resolutions placed on the reaffirmation calendar are archived as reaffirmation calendar items in the MSS Digest of Policy Actions and essentially reaffirm MSS support for the policy in question.

Items placed on the reaffirmation calendar are not considered individually by the MSS Assembly unless an author chooses to extract his or her resolution for regular consideration. Items must be extracted from the reaffirmation calendar when the calendar is under consideration by the MSS Assembly (usually the first item of business on Friday morning). Because the reaffirmation calendar is a consent calendar, it takes a motion by just a single delegate to remove an item from the calendar. **If an item is not extracted before the Assembly adopts the calendar, it can not be extracted later.**

- B. Reference Committee hearing** - This is where your resolution will first be debated; the author (or proxy if the author will not be present) gives the opening statement and then the floor is open for all students to voice their concerns, ask questions, etc... (Please see above section on writing and presenting testimony). Your opening testimony should not be longer than a minute in length; practice beforehand so that you are comfortable with your statement. During this time, the Reference Committee will be taking notes on everything that is being said so they can come to an appropriate recommendation later.
1. When you approach a microphone to speak, be sure to acknowledge the Reference Committee Chair and to introduce yourself properly. A typical introduction is: “Thank you Mr. (Madam) Chair. I am Joe Student from the University of America. I am speaking on behalf of myself as author of this resolution.” It is very important to say who you are speaking on behalf of (if your resolution has been endorsed by your school, state, or region, then please make sure to state that). The Reference

Committee makes its recommendation based on the support/opposition they hear, and a support statement coming from a Region holds a lot more weight than a support statement coming from one individual.

- a. Be dressed nicely
  - b. Do not speak until explicitly recognized, and do not violate the instructions of the Committee. Also, if the Reference Committee makes a motion that you have X minutes left, you are speaking for way too long.
  - c. Look directly at the Reference Committee, ideally into the eyes of the Chair. This conveys to the Reference Committee that you are speaking to them directly and are recognizing their authority. Additionally, it allows you to read them, and to see if they are finding your personal example interesting or boring.
2. Have a seat after your opening statement, but sit close to a microphone. If clarification is needed or you would like to make a counterpoint, feel free to do so, but use your time at the microphone judiciously. It is essential to not become overly defensive but rather to remain professional throughout the hearing.

**C. General Assembly** - The Reference Committee reports will be available the next morning. These reports list the Reference Committee recommendations for each item of business that was considered at the hearing; in general, these reports are based on the testimony heard and the overall consensus from the Reference Committee hearings. The Reference Committee will recommend that a resolution be adopted, adopted with amendments, referred for decision, referred for report, or not-adopted.

1. If someone does not agree with the Reference Committee recommendation, the resolution can be extracted and discussed on the floor of the MSS Assembly. After the discussion, the MSS Assembly will then vote on the resolution. Because voting will take place on particular amendments, particular RESOLVED clauses, etc..., things move very quickly so make sure that you are paying attention.
2. If a resolution is not extracted, the action recommended by the Reference Committee will be adopted. Policies that are adopted become official MSS policy.

**This can be a long and difficult but very rewarding process as you have the opportunity to significantly contribute to the policy of the AMA. Good luck!!**

This resolution writing guide was compiled by the 2007-2008 MSS HOD Coordinating Committee:

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**For any questions, please feel free to contact any member of HCC ([www.ama-assn.org/go/hcc](http://www.ama-assn.org/go/hcc)).**