MSS Resolution Writing Guide: Turning Ideas into Policy

1. What are resolutions for?
   A. Resolutions are 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.”)

2. Your idea: is there already existing policy?
   A. The first step is to identify if there already is existing policy AMA or AMA-MSS policy related to your 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 websites:
      i. AMA-MSS Digest of Policy Actions: this PDF document contains all of the policy that the MSS has adopted. You can search (Ctrl+F) for a keyword or use the tabs on the side.
      ii. AMA Policy Finder: All existing AMA policy is AMA-MSS policy, unless we have specifically taken a different stance. Therefore, it is important to search AMA policy as well
   B. If there is no existing policy and you have determined that a resolution is the best way to get your idea enacted (see below), or if you feel current policy needs to be changed, start writing!

3. Your idea: is a resolution the most effective strategy?

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<tr>
<th>No AMA or MSS policy exists</th>
<th>State issue</th>
<th>National issue</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Resolution for state medical societies</td>
<td>Consider a resolution for the AMA-MSS or AMA</td>
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<tr>
<th>AMA and/or MSS policy exists but there hasn’t been progress</th>
<th>State issue</th>
<th>National issue</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Work through state societies</td>
<td>GC-action item</td>
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<td>Other advocacy organizations (ACOG, ACEP)</td>
<td>Work through trustee</td>
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A. 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:

   i. Submitting a request to the AMA-MSS Governing Council.

   1. If policy already exists, you can submit a **GC-action item** requesting follow-up action on existing policy.
   2. Students should provide the background information about the issue, the specific policy that covers action on the issue, and the proposed action that should be taken.
   3. Such actions 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…
   4. Researching work being done by other medical societies or health care groups.
   5. Working with State and county medical societies.
   6. Working with the MSS Standing Committees.
   7. Working with the administration or other leaders at your medical school.

B. The [MSS Web site](#) lists situations where alternative strategies may be more appropriate and/or effective.

C. As you are deciding whether to write a resolution, it is important to consider where if it is within the scope of the AMA. For example, asking the AMA to come up with guidelines regarding prostate cancer screening is probably better left for the Society of Urologic Oncology.

4. **Your idea: what are the data?**

   A. Before you decide to write a resolution, you need to thoroughly research 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.

   i. For journal publications, try using Ovid, PubMed, UpToDate, etc…

   ii. For health policy publications, the [RAND Corporation](#), the [Kaiser Family Foundation](#), and the [Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services](#) (CMS) all have useful data available.

   iii. Use sources from within the past 5 years.

   iv. Please note: References are required to be included at the end of the resolution and are used for documentation of Whereas clauses.
5. Formulating your resolution writing plan

A. Scope of the resolution:
   i. The next 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). Internal resolutions are very useful, and allow us to take a stance on the issue when it is addressed in the HOD.
   ii. On the other hand, some resolutions need to need the full support of the AMA and should be forwarded to the 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.

B. Immediate forwarding to the AMA HOD:
   i. As mentioned above, resolutions that ask the AMA to take action will be forwarded to the AMA HOD at the next 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-14”).
   ii. Immediate forwarding should be used very judiciously, as immediate forwarding of a resolution gives the MSS Delegates an extremely small window to discuss the resolution with state and specialty caucuses. There may not be enough time to garner support for the resolution, or discuss possible changes with opponents of the resolution. Unfortunately, because of these obstacles, immediate forwarding is rarely successful.
   iii. If you believe a resolution requires immediate forwarding to the HOD, you need to contact the MSS Delegate, Alternate Delegate, and HCC as soon as possible to coordinate strategy.

6. Writing your resolution: you are finally ready to begin writing!

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

ii. 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 are the subject of debate on the Assembly floor. If a resolution is adopted by the Assembly, only the Resolved clause become policy. In other words, this is the most important part!

1. 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, the AMA-MSS, or both. 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 for…,” “develop a program to…,” “support/not support legislation …,” etc.

2. Resolved clauses should address specific issue, but should be general enough so that the AMA-MSS or AMA can apply these policies to dynamic situations. For example, a resolution asking the AMA to, “lobby for the repeal of SGR,” is more effective than a policy asking the AMA to, “support H.R. 4015.”

B. Using appropriate language - You will want your resolution to be clear, concise, but still meaningful. It is key to avoid inflammatory language and redundancy. Again, a good way to test for these is to have other people 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.

7. 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 treated as a late resolution. 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 form must be completed and submitted with the resolution. 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
   i. All resolutions must be discussed with your chapter Delegate, State chair or Region chair.
   ii. A rough draft of your resolution (including “Whereas” and “Resolved” clauses) must be sent to the MSS staff 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. 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 must be submitted to the Department of Medical Student Services by the date posted on the MSS resolutions website.

8. Virtual Reference Committee
   A. This is where your resolution will first be debated. Resolutions are posted to an online forum that allows all MSS members to offer commentary and testimony on the proposals. Authors should use this opportunity to offer written support of their ideas, as well as to consider the perspective of their peers regarding their resolutions.
   B. The testimony provided in this forum is used by the MSS Reference Committee to issue a final report which lists the Reference Committee recommendations for each item of business. These reports are based on the testimony submitted and the overall consensus from the Virtual Reference Committee.
      i. The Reference Committee will recommend that a resolution be adopted, adopted with amendments, referred for decision, referred for report, or not-adopted. The Reference Committee report will be made available one week in advance of the MSS General Assembly. Authors should be certain to read this report prior to the on-site meeting, considering the informed opinion of the MSS Reference Committee, and determining whether the report recommendation adequately addresses their concerns.

9. Writing testimony
   A. 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. 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:
i. Keep it short - Conciseness is much more effective than long drawn out posts full of endless amounts of background information. The MSS Assembly can have a short attention span, especially after the first few resolutions.

B. Sample testimony template - Here is a format in writing 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):

   i. “Joe Student, speaking on behalf of <myself/school/state> as author of this resolution.”
   
   ii. Brief summary of the issue.
   
   iii. List arguments for support to the resolution – limit to 3 separate arguments.
   
   iv. 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.”
   
   v. 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.

10. Supporting 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 reaffirm items in the MSS Digest of Policy Actions and “reset the clock” on the expiration of those policies.
   
   i. 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). Pursuant to MSS policy 645.031, removing an item from the reaffirmation calendar requires a 1/3 vote of the MSS Assembly. Removing all other items from the consent calendar require only the vote of a
single Delegate. If an item is not extracted before the Assembly adopts the calendar, it cannot be extracted later.

B. General Assembly

i. As mentioned above, the hearing will begin with a basic extraction calendar to determine which items of business are discussed during the hearing. In order for an item to be discussed further (beyond the testimony posted to the virtual forum), it must be extracted. If an author disagrees with the position of the Reference Committee on their resolution, they have the opportunity to extract the item for further discussion. Authors should NOT extract a resolution if they are in agreement with the recommendation of the reference committee report.

1. If a resolution is extracted, the Speaker will call the item for further discussion, at which time all Assembly members will be allowed to speak on the matter. 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.

ii. Giving testimony

1. When you approach a microphone to speak, be sure to acknowledge the Speaker and to introduce yourself properly. A typical introduction is: “Thank you Mr. (Madam) Speaker. 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, as a support statement coming from a Region holds a lot more weight than a support statement coming from one individual.

2. Dress professionally.

3. Write it down - You can fall into two traps when giving oral 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.

4. Do not speak until explicitly recognized. Also, speakers will only be given a certain amount of time to speak. Keep track of your time and stop when your time has elapsed!

5. Have a seat after your statement. 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 open to the thoughts and perspectives of your peers. Most importantly, authors should remain professional throughout the hearing.

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

For any questions, please feel free to contact your Regional Delegates/Alternate Delegates, the MSS Delegate/Alternate Delegate, or any member of HCC www.ama-assn.org/go/hcc.