Constitution Guidelines for Student Clubs

# What is a Constitution?

A *constitution* contains the fundamental principles that outline the purpose, structure, and limits of an organization. Essentially, the constitution provides a foundation upon which an organization operates.

The key to a good constitution is to keep the language clear and concise and don’t box yourself in by over regulating your club. Some actions and activities can be addressed without creating a written rule or procedure in your constitution.

Creating a constitution for a new organization may at first seem overwhelming, but when done well, it will be the greatest resource to ensure the future success of an organization.

In addition to a constitution, your club may also have by-laws, standing rules, and parliamentary procedure. All are explained below.

*By-laws* are the policies and procedures that are the basic rules of the club, but aren’t appropriate for the constitution. If your club changes a policy frequently, it should not be included in the constitution. The by-laws provide an easier way to update operations, but the purpose and philosophy in your constitution should be quite permanent.

*Standing rules* relates to the details of the administration of the club (for example, general member meetings will be held Mondays at 5 pm). Standing rules can be suspended by a majority vote for the duration of one session.

*Parliamentary procedure* is a set of rules for conducting meetings. It allows for everyone to be heard and to make decisions without confusion. Today, *Robert’s Rules of Order*, *Newly Revised* is the basic handbook of operation for most clubs, organizations, and other groups. Robert’s Rules can be found with a quick google search.

# Why do I need a Constitution?

Every club at the University of Washington Bothell is required to file a current copy of their constitution and bylaws with Club Council each year at recognition. An updated copy should be filed promptly should the document change during the year. Your constitution serves an important purpose for your organization. **The process of writing a constitution should help to:**

* Clarify your purpose
* Outline your basic structure
* Provide the cornerstone for building an effective group
* Allow members and potential members to have a better understanding of what the organization is all about and how it functions.

If you keep in mind the value of having a written document that clearly describes the basic framework of your organization, the drafting of a constitution will be a much easier and more rewarding experience.

# How to Write a Constitution

A constitution should provide the structure for an organization or club, describe its purpose, and define the duties and responsibilities of the officers and members. The objective is to draft a document that covers these topics in a simple, clear, and concise manner. See page 2 for a general outline of a constitution.

## General Outline for a Constitution

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| **Article I: Name** | State the complete, official name of the organization. If appropriate specify any other variation of the official name that the organization might use in its contacts with the public. You may not use “University of Washington” at the beginning of your name or “of the University of Washington” at the end of your name. You may use “At the University of Washington Bothell” or “UWB Chapter” at the end of your club’s name. |
| **Article II: Purpose** | State the purpose and mission of the organization. |
| **Article III: Affiliations** | If applicable, note affiliation with national, regional, other groups and specify what the relationship is between local UW group and other groups. |
| **Article IV: Membership** | List the requirements, rights duties and all other conditions for membership in the organization. If desired include benefits and privileges of membership. Specify how membership may be resigned or terminated. (Note that all clubs must be open to all students except in instances specified in the Club Handbook). |
| **Article V: Meetings** | State frequency of general and special meetings; who may call a meeting, agenda/minutes quorum requirements; a meeting in order to conduct the organization’s business, i.e., QUORUM (This number is usually a simple majority.) |
| **Article VI: Officers and Advisors** | List the officers, the terms of office, and their general duties and responsibilities. A provision for removing officers and filling vacancies should also be included in a section under this article. |
| **Article VII: Amendments** | Include information about how the constitution can be amended, including the length of time amendments must be reviewed and the size of the majority vote needed to pass the amendment. |

**OTHER POSSIBLE TOPICS TO INCLUDE:**

* Club Dues/Fees
* Committees
* Service Component
* Parliamentary Procedure
* Dissolution

**Getting Started**

Not sure how to get started? Try using the sample constitution as a foundation to create one for your club.