



Writing Congressional Debate Legislation

Most legislation should have a national/domestic focus that the U.S. Congress would have *jurisdiction* over, taking the form of a **bill**. A bill establishes details behind how a particular law must work, including when it takes effect, how much tax levy would be appropriated (if applicable), how infractions/violations will be dealt with, etc. A bill may answer the who, what, when, where – and most specifically how – but it will never answer “why.” Legislators explain rationale behind bills in their speeches, and how a bill implements its solution can spark deeper, more meaningful debate.

Since bills attempt to solve problems faced by our country, brainstorming those areas is a great place to start. Students should be mindful of how controversial an issue is; for example, is it likely that students would argue against a bill to assist starving infants? Frequently, arguments over bills stem from the amount of funding. Since there are countless problems needing solutions, funding projects often comes down to whether one item should be prioritized over another.

Next, students should think about exactly what the U.S. Congress has jurisdiction over. Since the Executive Branch runs most of the agencies that enforce federal laws, understanding those helps; for more information, visit www.usa.gov/Agencies/Federal/Executive.shtml. While foreign affairs often fall under the jurisdiction of the Executive Branch, funding efforts such as USAID can have an impact on the success or failure of United States involvement in other countries, and therefore, can be framed as a bill. Inspiration for legislative ideas can be found at: thomas.loc.gov.

Writing an effective bill involves more time and research than researching one written by someone else. A student must ask her/himself what the legislation does, who is involved (government agencies), where it happens, when it is feasible to take place and how much time is needed for implementation, and how it should be carried out (a plan of action). All of these questions must be answered in writing the sections of the bill, with thoughtful consideration as to how thoroughly each section explains its plank of implementing the overall bill’s plan of action.

Resolutions are simply position statements on issues Congress does not have jurisdiction over (such as a foreign issue, although a bill can suggest foreign aid), or further action (such as amending the Constitution). Resolutions lack the force of law, and never establish enforcement.

Topics & Format

Appropriate topics exhibit seriousness of purpose. The action proposed should be feasible, and such that the actual United States Congress might debate it. Topics should be debatable, meaning substantive argumentation exists on both sides. Legislation should be typed and double-spaced with line numbers, **not exceeding one page**. Capitalizing the words “WHEREAS” and “RESOLVED” in resolutions, and “SECTION” in bills, as well as inverse-indenting each clause or section helps to distinguish between ideas and concepts.

The samples above show proper formatting. In the resolution, note the semicolon, and how it precedes the word “and” at the end of each “whereas” clause, and the phrase “now, therefore, be it” at the end of the last “whereas” clause.

Templates for bills, resolutions, and resolutions to amend the Constitution are available at www.nflonline.org, under About the League > League Forms & Manuals.

A Bill to Establish a Specific Policy

BE IT ENACTED BY THIS CONGRESS THAT:

1. **SECTION 1.** State the new policy in a brief declarative sentence, or in as few sentences as possible.
- 2.
- 3.
4. **SECTION 2.** Define any ambiguous terms inherent in the first section.
- 5.
6. **SECTION 3.** Name the government agency that will oversee the enforcement of the bill along with the specific enforcement mechanism.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
10. **SECTION 4.** Indicate the implementation date/timeframe.
- 11.
12. **SECTION 5.** State that all other laws that are in conflict with this new policy shall hereby be declared null and void.
- 13.
- 14.

Introduced by Name of School

A Resolution to Urge Further Action on a Specific Issue

1. **WHEREAS,** State the current problem (this needs to be accomplished in one brief sentence); and
- 2.
- 3.
4. **WHEREAS,** Describe the scope of the problem cited in the first whereas clause (this clause needs to flow logically from the first); and
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
8. **WHEREAS,** Explain the impact and harms allowed by the current problem (once again, the clause needs to flow in a logical sequence); now, therefore, be it
- 9.
- 10.
- 11.
12. **RESOLVED,** By this Congress that: state your recommendation for dealing with the problem (the resolution should be a clear call for action); and, be it
- 13.
- 14.
- 15.
16. **FURTHER RESOLVED,** That (an *optional* additional recommendation; if not used, end the previous clause with a period).
- 17.
- 18.

Introduced by Name of School



NFL National Congressional Debate Legislation

Legislation must be submitted to the national office no later than April 1. If a District Congress is held after that date, or within close proximity of that date, the district committee must determine how to select legislation ahead of April 1. Following are guidelines governing selection of legislation for the National Congress.

1. Each district is encouraged to submit one or two items of legislation, preferably one bill and one resolution. The district is encouraged to involve students in the process, but must submit its final legislation by April 1.
2. Staff will review submitted legislation to ensure it meets established NFL guidelines. Legislation not meeting those standards will be returned with feedback to the District Chair, **who may resubmit the legislation no later than April 8**. Therefore, districts are encouraged to submit legislation well ahead of the April 1 deadline.
3. The National Office will review the legislation and select one item to be considered by a national committee of coaches.
4. District identity will be kept blind from the committee, but legislation will be grouped in six geographic regions of a balanced number of NFL districts to ensure geographic diversity.
5. The committee will rate each bill and resolution, and rank within each geographic region. The top six ranked legislation, plus the next highest rated legislation overall will advance to a docket of 37 items, to be ranked again by the committee.
6. The top 12 items ranked by the committee will comprise the semifinal docket for the National Tournament.
7. The next 25-ranked items will comprise the docket for preliminary sessions.
8. The National Office will add another four items of legislation as “reserve” items for the final preliminary session; these will be selected to avoid duplication of topics already selected, and from the next-highest rated items, as well as from a variety of geographic regions.
9. Legislation for the final session will be written by bipartisan fellows from the Stennis Center for Public Service, in consultation with the National Office to avoid duplication of topics and a balance of debatable issues.

Districts whose Congress falls after April 1 may – in advance of the April 1 deadline – ask coaches to have their students vote for their preferred legislation in the district docket, or have students do so at an earlier invitational Congress.

Important factors for districts to consider when submitting legislation:

- ❖ Legislation should **only** be written as a resolution if the national/federal government lacks direct jurisdiction over an issue. Many foreign policy issues can even have a domestic twist if a certain amount of funding allocation is tied to Congressional action, which can be outlined in a bill.
- ❖ Please follow the formatting guidelines and/or use the templates provided at nflonline.org → Forms and Manuals.

Legislation will be assessed on the following factors:

- Demonstrates research and recommends reasonable, timely and feasible action.
- Exhibits seriousness of purpose, uses proper conventions of written language, and meets needs and desires of a significant population.

For bills:

- Has a national scope with domestic enforcement mechanisms, and is Constitutional.
- Enumerates specific details for implementation and action.

For resolutions:

- Addresses an issue outside of Congressional jurisdiction for further action (i.e., Supreme Court, international treaty, amending the Constitution).
- If applicable, Whereas clauses argue rationale well; or if a Constitutional amendment, enumerates specific details.