## Quick Tips

### Constitution vs. By-Laws

What’s the Difference?

#### Constitution
- Concise
- Clarifies the group’s purpose
- Explains the fundamental principles of a group
- Provides the basic framework for the group’s processes
- Provides historical perspective
- Rarely revised, and when they are, it requires considerable effort and time

#### By-Laws
- Outlines specific procedures for the group’s functioning
- Helps the group conduct business in an orderly manner
- Provides further definition to the Constitution
- Revised regularly as procedures change

## Leading Bits

### Topics
- Advising Groups
- Agendas
- Assertiveness
- Brainstorming
- Communication
- Community Service
- Conflict Management
- Constitution/By-Laws
- Co-Sponsorship with Other Groups
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- Difficult Members
- Elections
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- Recognition
- Recruiting Volunteers
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- Starting an Organization
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- Team Building
- Time Management
- University Events

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We the people of the United States in order to form a more perfect Union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty, to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

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`Leading Bits` is a publication of the Office of Student Activities at LeTourneau University.

Copies are available from the O|SA in MSC-1 or by calling extension 3127.

The O|SA staff offers programs and consultation in these and other areas of personal and organizational leadership.

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What should be covered by a constitution?

Constitutions should be concise, yet contain the important framework of an organization that should be passed on from year to year. They should be about two to six pages in length, leaving the detailed procedures of a group’s daily functions to the by-laws. Below is an outline of the kinds of information that should be included in a constitution:

Article I: Name of the Organization
Article II: Affiliation with Other Groups (local, state, national, international)
Article III: Purpose of the Organization
Article IV: Membership Requirements and Limitations
Article V: Officers (titles, terms of office, how and when elected)
Article VI: Advisor (term, how and when selected)
Article VII: Meetings (frequency, special meetings, and how called)
Article VIII: Quorum (number of members required to conduct business—fraction 2/3)
Article IX: Referendum and Recall (procedures for legislation and recalling officers)
Article X: Amendments (proposal form, notice required, voting procedures)
Article XI: Ratification (voting requirements for approval of this document)

What should be included in the By-Laws?

By-Laws are the daily working procedures of an organization. They contain the detailed processes of a group. They are usually easier to change, requiring only a simple majority, rather than constitutions which require 2/3 vote of membership. Below is an outline of the kinds of information that are normally covered in by-laws:

A. Membership (selection requirements, resignations, expulsion, rights, and duties)
B. Dues (amount and collection procedures, special fee, when payable)
C. Executive Board (structure, members, powers, duties)
D. Duties of Officers (powers, responsibilities, specific job descriptions)
E. Committees (standing, special, how formed, chairpersons, meetings, powers, duties)
F. Duties of Advisor (powers, responsibilities, specific job descriptions)
G. Elections (time of year, winning vote margin, voter eligibility, procedures for filling unexpired or unfilled terms of office, removal from office, appeal process)
H. Order of Business (standard agenda for conducting meetings)
I. Parliamentary Authority (provisions for rules of order—President’s rules, or Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised)
J. Amendments (proposal form, notice required, voting procedures)
K. Other Specific Policies and Procedures unique to your organization

Miscellaneous Notes

- All but the most informal of groups should put their purpose and procedures in writing
- Review the documents regularly to keep them up-to-date to reflect the current functions of the group
- Give everyone in your group a copy and expect them to read it
- Check out the Constitution Notebook in the Office of Student Activities for samples of group Constitutions and By-Laws

Adapted from the University of Michigan and Greenville College Student Organization manuals.