

# BILL WRITING GUIDE



As a participant in the Legislative Program, your first duty is to write and submit a piece of proposed legislation, called a bill. Bills are intended to help solve problems or resolve issues in society, thereby improving the quality of life. Legislative participants are challenged to write bills which are equitable, preserving the rights and promoting the welfare of all Missourians.

## TYPES OF BILLS

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First you need to decide what type of bill you wish to write. The most common type is an act. Please review the sample bills to assist you in the bill writing process.

1. An **act** is a bill which enacts a completely new law, amends an existing law, or repeals an existing law. An act becomes law when it is approved by the House and Senate, and signed by the Governor.
2. A **joint resolution** is a bill which proposes an amendment to the Missouri Constitution or seeks to ratify a proposed amendment to the Constitution of the United States. A joint resolution must be approved by the House and Senate, and signed by the Governor in order for an amendment to be proposed or ratified.
3. A **concurrent resolution** is a bill which affects the actions or procedures of both legislative houses, such as creating a special joint committee, or expressing commendation or sympathy on behalf of the General Assembly. In reality, a concurrent resolution only requires approval from one of the two houses, but for YIG, it must be approved by both houses and signed by the Governor to become official.

## CO-AUTHORING BILLS

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Some participants may wish to co-author bills. When developing ideas for bills, you should determine if another student in your delegation has similar ideas. Co-authoring a bill can provide you with more time to research and develop a quality bill. Also, both you and your co-author can network at the State Convention, expanding your ability to build support for your bill. Review these guidelines to learn what is permissible for co-authoring.

1. No bill may have more than two authors.
2. Representatives may co-author bills with another representative from the same delegation.

3. Senators may not co-author bills. All legislation submitted by senators must be authored individually.
4. Legislators may only author or co-author one bill. The same bill may not be submitted by more than one legislator in a delegation, or two if co-authoring.

## **DECIDE ON AN IDEA**

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Legislators are not permitted to reiterate existing Missouri law or make the same or similar provisions as a bill signed into YIG law during the previous State Convention. A list of passed bills from last year is provided on the YIG website. With that in mind, the following steps will help guide you.

1. Brainstorm a list of ideas related to these issues that you find interesting. Think of some issues facing society that you find interesting. It may be helpful to discuss some of these issues with friends, family, and community members to gain more perspective on them.
2. Prioritize the list from most important to least important.
3. Combine any ideas that are similar in nature.
4. Determine if the issue is a local, state, or federal issue. Your issue needs to be something that the state government has the authority to address.
5. Carefully consider whether there is a pressing need for government to take action on these issues.
6. Eliminate any ideas that you find insignificant or dull.
7. Research the Missouri Revised Statutes (RSMo) to see if your ideas already exist as Missouri law. You can find the RSMo online at <http://www.moga.mo.gov/statutesearch>.
8. Select an idea.

## **RESEARCH THE IDEA**

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Now that you have selected your idea, it is time to develop it into a bill. It is important that you can make a solid argument for your bill. It is a good idea to develop a research file in which you save information related to your topic. You should collect as much information as possible, for you never know what you might need later in the legislative process.

1. Create a list of the pros and cons related to your idea. Include the reasons why people feel one way or another on this issue.
2. Understand your sources. Many interest groups will present information to support their position. It is best to find direct sources for facts and statistics.

3. Gather the relevant facts, statistics, details, costs, and evidence from credible sources.
4. Research the legal facts surrounding this issue. You should review the Revised Missouri Statutes for existing law, research pending legislation, and research what other states have done to deal with this issue.
5. Collect research for all sides of the issue, so you are prepared to uphold the merits of your bill and refute criticisms.

## **DEVELOP THE BILL STRUCTURE**

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Now that you have your idea and some research, it is time to develop the structure of your bill. Answer the following questions.

1. What are you trying to accomplish with your bill?
2. What are possible solutions to the problem?
3. What is the best solution? Is it the most economical, workable, feasible?
4. Is the solution constitutional?
5. What are some key terms you need to define in your bill?
6. How would this bill be enforced? Who would enforce the bill?
7. Would your bill create any revenue for the state? If so, how much?
8. Does your bill require funding? If so, who would fund it?
9. What results do you expect from your bill being implemented?
10. What date would your bill go into effect?

## **WRITE YOUR BILL**

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You are ready to write your bill. Use the Bill Samples available on the YIG website as a guide. Review the sections below for a better understanding of how to write your bill and meet the requirements of each section.

### **Bill Type**

There are three types of bills, so make sure you know which type to select. If it is an act, you will need to indicate if your bill will amend a current section of the RSMo or create a new section.

### **Title**

Give your bill a general title that briefly summarizes it. Remember that the title can only have one subject, and any amendments to the bill must be related to that subject.

**RSMo**

Identify which section of the RSMo your bill is amending or if creating a new section, identify where this section will be placed in the RSMo.

**Key Terms**

Define key terms in your bill that will help other legislators understand what you are trying to accomplish. Often, definitions for terms already exist in the RSMo section related to your bill topic.

**Proposal for Action**

State your proposal for action in the bill, indicating what you are trying to accomplish by enacting this new policy or law. Be very specific in this section so that it is clear to other legislators what you are trying to enact and how you plan to do this. You should also consider stating which state department or agency will oversee, enforce, and possibly fund this act.

**Effective Date**

State when your bill will take effect. The default effective date in Missouri is August 28. If your bill is an emergency action, the effective date would be immediately upon passage. If you have reason to specify another date, you can do that as well.

**Justification**

Write a brief statement justifying your proposal for action. This could include any statistics or research relevant to your topic. Make sure this section is brief, as you will have an opportunity to build your remarks during debate from here. It is best practice to not have this section be longer than one paragraph.

**Expected Results**

State what will happen if your bill is signed into law. This section should be very specific and if necessary, quantifiable. You should be able to state this in just a few sentences.

**REVIEW YOUR BILL**

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You now have written a bill. Next, you need to review it to make sure it is ready to be filed.

1. Is your bill constitutional?
2. Does your bill fall under the jurisdiction of the state of Missouri? Make sure your bill deals with a state issue, not a federal issue.

3. Does your bill have one overall subject? You need to make sure that it does not have multiple subjects.
4. Does the bill have a concise, but accurate title?
5. Does the bill define any unclear or uncommon terms?
6. Does your bill make sense to others? You should have someone else review your bill to make sure it reads clearly and tries to accomplish what you want.

## **SIX-WEEK BILL WRITING PLAN**

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By following the steps outlined above, you can go from your idea to a completed bill by working approximately three hours per week over six weeks. It may take you even less time if you have your research gathered or have picked an idea already.

**Week 1:           Decide on Idea**

By the end of the week, you should have selected an idea for your bill.

**Week 2:           Research the Idea**

By the end of these two weeks, you should have enough research that you feel comfortable about both sides of the issue and can write a bill. Also, you should have reviewed the RSMo for statutes that relate to the issue.

**Week 3:           Develop the Bill Structure**

By the end of the week, you should have a solution to the problem you are addressing. Also, you should have a rough outline of the bill.

**Weeks 4-5:       Write the Bill**

By the end of these weeks, you should have your bill written in proper format and ready for review.

**Week 6:           Review the Bill**

By the end of the week, you should have had someone review your bill, corrected any mistakes, and be ready to be submit it.