

Drafting and editing of resolutions at the United Nations

Why is it important for resolutions to be edited?

Resolutions are important international instruments. Once adopted, they belong to the world. Many of them will be cited for years, even decades, to come. For this reason, it is imperative for them to be grammatically and factually correct, consistent and equivalent in all six official languages.

Unfortunately, the time pressure under which resolutions are negotiated and processed increases the chance of mistakes. Furthermore, ambiguous language in the original language version can lead to different interpretations in the other five languages. United Nations editors are highly qualified professionals who are conversant in at least three of the six official languages. They are experts in spotting language that could have different interpretations. They play a key role in carrying out the General Assembly's mandates on multilingualism, ensuring equal treatment for all six languages and delivering equally authentic resolutions in all six languages. In addition, editors play a key role as coordinators, because every time they solve a problem in the original language version, they save five translators from having to solve the same problem independently.

Editing of resolutions at the United Nations Office at Vienna

The Editorial Control Unit edits all draft resolutions for the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, the Conference of the Parties to the Organized Crime Convention and the Conference of the States Parties to the Convention against Corruption to make them clear, accurate, consistent, grammatically correct, in conformity with United Nations editorial standards and translatable into the other five official languages. Revised draft resolutions that are submitted during a session are normally edited, translated, formatted, proofread and reproduced by the Conference Management Service (CMS) within 48 hours. With such a short turnaround time, it is essential for the editor to have the contact information of the consulting officer so that any questions can be cleared up quickly.

When delegates revise a draft resolution during a session, they should use the official version of the draft resolution (available from the Official Document System or the Documents Management Unit of CMS) as the basis for the revised text. This not only saves precious processing time, but also improves accuracy.

Resolutions and decisions are produced in all six languages. This means that the original text should be as clear as possible so as to avoid differences in meaning among the language versions that arise from different interpretations of the text by different translators. The editors recognize that "constructive ambiguity" is sometimes intentionally used to facilitate agreement on a sensitive text. In consultation with the consulting officer, editors can help to ensure that the message is identical in all the languages while preserving the desired level of vagueness. At the stage of editing the final report on a meeting, changes made by delegates at the time of the adoption of the resolution are incorporated into the final text and source references (footnotes) are added or deleted as needed.

Editors will not make changes that alter meaning. Whenever a language issue touches on a substantive matter, the editor will consult the consulting officer. It is helpful for the editors to be informed of any passages that have been closely negotiated.

Structure of resolutions

Paragraphs

Resolutions are essentially one long sentence. There are normally three elements in a resolution: the name of the organ, the preamble and the operative part.

- Preambular paragraphs are not numbered. They serve to present the background to the action part of the resolution. Preambular paragraphs must begin with a verb in the form of a present, past or perfect participle or an adjective in italics. Examples of the types of verbs and adjectives used in preambular paragraphs are provided in the annex to the present document.

- Operative paragraphs are numbered. They express the opinions of Member States and contain the action that they are agreeing to take. Operative paragraphs must begin with an action verb. Examples are provided in the annex.
- When the opening verb of a paragraph is repeated in the following paragraph, the word “also” is used. If the verb is repeated a second time in succession, the word “further” is used. If the verb is repeated a third time, the cycle starts again. “Also” and “further” are placed after the verb in the preamble and before the verb in the operative part. See the following example:

The Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice,

Recalling...

Recalling also...

Recalling further...

Recalling...

1. *Decides...*

2. *Also decides...*

3. *Further decides...*

4. *Decides...*

Subparagraphs

Subparagraphs are lettered (a), (b), (c). Each subparagraph begins with a capital letter. All of the subparagraphs in a paragraph must have a similar syntactical structure. The following example from Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolution 56/11 shows proper subparagraphs:

5. *Requests* the working group to continue addressing evaluation-related matters, and invites the Independent Evaluation Unit to continue:

(a) Providing...

(b) Consulting with...

(c) Promoting...

(d) Working with...

Annexes

Annexes to resolutions should consist only of texts adopted by the body issuing the resolution. Once adopted, such texts, which include declarations and other outcomes, become part of the corpus of legislation of the body in question.

Examples of changes that editors make to draft resolutions

Editors will check and correct titles and facts (such as dates), correct grammar and syntax, correct, add or delete footnotes where necessary and make minor adjustments to style to bring the text into line with United Nations editorial standards and practice and to render the text translatable. The following is a list of common corrections that are made by editors:

- Titles of bodies, meetings, conventions, etc., will be checked and corrected if necessary. The full title will be used at first mention in both the preamble and the operative part. Thereafter a shortened version of the title may be used. The following is an example from Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice resolution 22/3:

Reaffirming the crucial importance of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the three Protocols thereto as the main tools available to the international community to fight transnational organized crime,

Mindful that 29 September 2013 will mark the tenth anniversary of the entry into force of the Organized Crime Convention,

- Acronyms are not used in resolutions and names and titles will be spelled out in full the first time they occur in both the preamble and the operative part. Thereafter, a shortened version of the title may be used.
- Dates (of meetings, adoption of conventions, declarations, etc.) will be checked and corrected if necessary. If an event mentioned in a resolution takes place between the time the draft is submitted and the time the resolution is adopted, the verbs will be adjusted from future to past accordingly.
- Names of countries. In United Nations documents and resolutions, the short form of the names of countries is used. For a list of the official short names of countries, see the United Nations Terminology Database [UNTERM](#) (after launching a search, under “subjects”, select “country names”).
- Names of cities are followed by the country name, unless the city is the capital or the location of a United Nations headquarters duty station (e.g., Geneva).
- Punctuation. Editors are experts in punctuation issues and will apply United Nations style in this regard. If, in an unusual case, a punctuation mark becomes a matter of political sensitivity during negotiations, the editors need to be informed of it.
- Personification. A resolution does not decide/recommend/launch/convene/extend a mandate, etc. Rather, it is the body adopting the resolution that takes the action. The editors will correct personification [Example: “General Assembly resolution 65/14 requested the Secretary-General to report...” will be changed to read “The General Assembly, in its resolution 65/14, requested the Secretary-General to report...”]
- Takes note/notes. In general, “takes note” is used when the object is a report, statement or decision. “Notes” is used in the sense of “observes”, when the object is a fact or an event.
- A body should not take note of or welcome its own past decision. The editor will consult with the author to come up with a more appropriate verb, such as “recalls” or “reaffirms”.
- Reiterates. If a body uses the term “reiterating” or “reiterates” in a preambular or operative paragraph, it means that it is repeating something it has said in a previous resolution. If the editor can find no such previous text, he or she will consult with the consulting officer to come up with a more appropriate verb, such as “affirms”, “stresses” or “emphasizes”.

Furthermore, if the verb “reiterates” is used, it is not enough to simply cite the paragraph number of the previous resolution (as in “*Reiterates* paragraph 8 of its resolution 64/259”); some context must be given. The following example of proper formulation is from General Assembly resolution 67/246, section V, paragraph 6:

Reiterates that accountability is a central pillar of effective and efficient management that requires attention and strong commitment at the highest level of the Secretariat, as defined in paragraph 8 of its resolution 64/259 of 29 March 2010;

If the body does not wish to provide context, the verb “reaffirms” may be used, as in General Assembly resolution 67/246, section V, paragraph 5:

Reaffirms paragraph 37 of its resolution 62/87 and paragraph 2 of its resolution 64/228, and requests the Secretary-General to complete the capital master plan as approved by the General Assembly in various resolutions;

The editor will consult with the author to determine the preferred formulation in such cases.

- Footnotes. Source footnotes may be added if the source is available in all official languages. Similarly, sources not available in all languages may be deleted.
- Seasons. As seasons of the year are different depending on the country, the editor will change a reference to “the summer of 2014”, for example, to “the third quarter of 2014” (in consultation with the consulting officer).
- Including, inter alia. The use of “including” together with “inter alia” is redundant. The editor will delete one of them.

Editorial helpdesk and other resources

Editors are available to offer assistance and advice. Consulting officers are encouraged to contact the Editorial Control Unit if they have an editorial or language question on a draft resolution:

Editorial.Helpline@unvienna.org
ext. 3200

Other resources:

- [United Nations Editorial Manual Online](#)
- [UNTERM](#)
- Official Document System ([ODS](#))

Annex

Common preambular verbs and adjectives

Acknowledging

Affirming

Alarmed

Aware

Bearing in mind

Believing

Cognizant

Commending

Concerned, Gravely concerned, Deeply concerned [about]

Conscious

Convinced

Deploring

Disturbed, Deeply disturbed

Emphasizing

Expressing [alarm, appreciation, concern, gratitude, satisfaction]

Guided

Having considered, Having heard, Having received

Mindful

Noting, Noting with concern, Noting with appreciation, Noting with satisfaction

Reaffirming

Realizing

Recalling

Recognizing

Stressing

Taking into account

Taking note, Taking note with appreciation, Taking note with concern

Thanking

Underlining, Underlining the fact that

Urging

Common operative verbs

Accepts

Adopts

Affirms

Agrees

Appeals

Appreciates

Approves

Authorizes

Calls upon

Commends

Condemns, Strongly condemns

Decides

Declares

Demands

Denounces

Deplores

Discourages

Emphasizes

Endorses

Expresses [alarm, appreciation, concern, gratitude, satisfaction]

Invites

Notes, Notes with concern, Notes with appreciation, Notes with satisfaction

Reaffirms

Recognizes

Recommends

Reiterates

Rejects

Renews, Renews its invitation, Renews its commitment

Requests

Supports

Takes note, Takes note with appreciation

Underlines, Underscores the fact that

Urges

Welcomes