

Constitution Writing

by Lynn Singer

Constitutions set the expectations for excellence and behavior for a team. When writing a set of rules your team will live by, take these things into consideration:

Governing Regulations

The framework of your constitution should fit within guidelines set forth by any group that has jurisdiction over yours. Examples include your school, school district, state or national associations that legally have a say in your team activities.

Dance teams and auxiliary groups are classified differently from state to state. Some teams fall within fine arts, music or marching band departments while others are considered a part of the athletic department. Some state activity associations set regulations for the hours per week a team may practice, months for holding/not holding practice and attending camp, and guidelines for conducting team tryouts. Other states have self governing dance team associations that publish safety rulebooks, particularly for competitions. Start with your school principal for guidance.

Team Image

Your constitution puts in writing what you (and hopefully the team members) consider an appropriate and/or inappropriate image for your group. By adhering to these rules, your team members portray the best of what your team can be. Think carefully in the areas that are important to you, and be specific as to the rewards and/or consequences for meeting or not meeting expectations. Some areas to consider:

Sportsmanship
Illegal activity (drugs, alcohol, etc.)
Teamwork
Grades
Behavior while in uniform
Behavior while not at school or school activity
Attendance
Participation in team performances, fund raisers, etc.
Mandatory activities (summer camp, practices, etc.)
School citizenship
Community service

Think of other areas that reflect your team's image

Student/Parent Input

The best way to get the support of your students and their parents in this effort is to make them a part of the process. Find out what's important to them - and how they view the team's image. Here are some suggestions for getting their input:

- 1) Create a questionnaire. Send a form home with your students asking that both they and their parents complete it. Ask for their opinions on everything from a merit/demerit system to policies on drinking and drugs. You can compile the results and apply the suggestions accordingly.
- 2) Make a 'Suggestion Box.' Much like the questionnaire, the suggestion box allows team members and parents to submit their ideas. But the suggestion box doesn't ask for responses to specific questions. Whatever is most important to each individual is what he or she submits. Again, compile the results.
- 3) Hold a 'Frame Our Constitution' meeting. (If your team is very large, you may elect to hold this meeting just with officers and parents, or officers, seniors and parents.) Before the meeting, make an outline of just the 'big picture' sections of the constitution, such as 'merit/demerit system', 'illegal activity', 'mandatory activities', etc.

At the meeting, allow parents and students to form voluntary committees to write each of the sections. Allow an hour or so for the committees to set the guidelines they deem appropriate. You may want to provide a template for them to follow to keep the writing format consistent. Have each committee present its idea, allow discussion for suggestions, and hold an entire group vote to approve or disapprove. It will be important to have an administrator present to represent any school and district regulations. Finally, have everyone present sign the newly framed constitution as a commitment to upholding its standards!

Constitution Exerpts

Finances and Fund-Raising

1. All financial obligations for camp and clothing must be concluded prior to attendance at camp or receipt of clothing. A deposit of \$100 is due at the first team meeting. Receipt of full payment will depend upon the spring/summer schedule. Notification of deadlines will be given in advance.
2. Activity Account: Each member will be required to earn the amount of profit designated by the director to offset the expenses incurred by the team during the school year. The amount may vary from year to year and must be re-earned each year of membership. The



dispensing of the monies is at the discretion of the director.

3. Individual Account: Each member will have the opportunity to earn 30-40% of all profits earned by a fund-raising event after they have met their quota to the team. Profits may be used for any individual expenses incurred while a member of the organization. All monies earned will be deposited in the 'General Fund' and will be designated to that member's personal account.

4. If a member resigns, is dismissed or graduates prior to the utilization of funds earned through fund-raising, s/he will forfeit the profit money and it will become a part of the group activity account. Individual refunds from fund-raising profits will not be made; however, overpayment made by an individual will be refunded.

5. Turning in Money:

All money shall be turned into the director's mailbox before practice has begun each day. Money/checks shall be placed in an envelope with the name of the member and the purpose of the money written on the outside of the envelope.

Checks should be made out to the high school unless otherwise instructed.

Each check should have the member's name and reason for payment listed.

Returned checks will be handled in one of two ways:

- (1) only a cashier's check will be accepted for future payments after the receipt of a returned check, or
- (2) if it is a fund-raising event, it is the member's responsibility to collect the funds due or the amount due will be deducted from his/her personal profits. The team member then assumes responsibility for any bank charges for NSF checks.

The organization will not assume the responsibility of unattended money.

General Conduct

1. Certain standards are necessary for the integrity and reputation of any organization. Each member should be a leader within the school and should set a good example at all times. Members are expected to have and maintain a character above reproach. Personal appearance, habits and actions of which there can be no criticism, are required as each member represents our school district before the public at all times.

2. Team members must display appropriate behavior both in and while out of school. Suspension or dismissal may result from any of the following reasons:

- Smoking
- Use of alcohol and/or illegal drugs
- Improper language or obscenities
- Poor sportsmanship
- Failure to follow school rules and policies
- Improper conduct/attitude

Lack of respect toward director, other team members, faculty, school personnel or school property

Stealing/Shoplifting

Chronic misconduct

Chronic absences

Hazing

Truancy

Forging notes or passes

Saturday school

Cheating

3. School district rules will be strictly applied whenever the team is officially representing the district, attending a school sponsored activity or while on a school sponsored trip. Each member must be aware that his/her conduct off-campus reflects on the team image and that any member who is guilty of engaging in any illegal activity will be subject to dismissal.

4. If an incident occurs during school or while on a team trip, during a competition or exhibition, a member should expect disciplinary action from the school as well as from the organization.

Disciplinary System

1. Demerits may be given to all members by the director at any rehearsal or function.

2. A total of 20 will terminate membership.

Demerits will be calculated during the following times:

- (1) immediately following tryouts to the beginning of school,
- (2) the beginning of school until the end of the first semester, and
- (3) the beginning of the second semester until tryouts. Demerits will start over for each calculating period.

3. A member will be suspended for one week when the 10th demerit is received.

4. Demerits regarding attendance of practice, performance or scheduled activities:

Not calling the director's office for reporting an absence from any rehearsal, performance, work session or meeting

Being tardy to a rehearsal, work session or meeting

Not dressed for the appropriate function or incomplete uniform

Leaving practice, performance or an activity early without permission

Unexcused absence from any required activity

5. Demerits regarding rehearsal sessions/performance activities:

Chewing gum

Wearing any form of jewelry

Rips in rehearsal attire

Leaving rehearsal or any function early without the director's prior approval

Messy hair, hair in eyes, hair worn incorrectly at rehearsal or performance

Wearing colored nail polish with performing uniform/costume



6. Demerits regarding uniforms and/or equipment:
 - Not being in complete uniform, having soiled uniform or a uniform in poor condition upon inspection
 - Eating food or drinking beverages in any part of a designated uniform without permission
 - Losing or leaving equipment, clothing parts, uniform parts or props during rehearsal or at other events
 - Failure to label all personal equipment
 - Wearing jewelry at a performance
 - Dirty or ripped performance shoes
 - Missing parts of the uniform or wearing the wrong clothing
 - Failure to return uniforms by designated date

7. Demerits regarding insubordination:
 - Showing disrespect toward other team members, the director, school facilities or school personnel
 - Talking during rehearsal after one specific warning
 - Unnecessary talking from the time the team leaves an area as a group to the time of return
 - Using obscenities at any time
 - Display of poor sportsmanship
 - Public display of affection with boyfriend/girlfriend at school, in public or in uniform
 - Unladylike, ungentlemanly, poor or dangerous conduct
 - Not participating in spirit yells or spirit activities
 - Disobeying an officer's command
 - Failure to turn in grade reports at the three, six and nine week reporting periods.

8. Demerits may be issued for other reasons as circumstances arise.

9. Use of merits:
 - Two merits may be used to erase one demerit as determined by the director

Changes and Additions

1. Rule changes may be submitted to an officer or to the director. Additions requested by members must be submitted in writing to the director for consideration. The recommended change or changes may or may not be acted upon.
2. The constitution is subject to change at any time due to rule changes by the state education agency, the principal or with approval from the director and the principal.

Rehearsal Sessions

1. Before, after school and summer practices may be required. Time specifications will be established as camp dates and other school schedules become available. All practices are mandatory for all members. Saturday and extra practices may be held throughout the year.

2. Students will practice in organized practice a maximum of eight hours outside of the school day each week. The school week begins at 12:01am on Monday and ends after the last class on Friday.

3. Members must arrive on time to rehearsal sessions, wear specific practice attire and stay until dismissed by the director.

4. Street shoes will not be allowed in the gym facility and a cover-up must be worn coming and leaving rehearsal. A cover-up may be worn during rehearsal if it is unbearably cold.

5. Gum, food and jewelry is not allowed in practice sessions.

6. All tutorials, make-up tests, etc. should not be scheduled during a rehearsal session.

7. A physical must be completed on each new member prior to June 1 of each year.

8. Inability to practice or perform:

The member absent from practice and suffering from illness will be excused from workout/performance only by receipt of a written note from the parent/guardian. The note is due immediately upon return to practice.

Any member suffering from injury will be excused from workouts/performance upon receipt of notice from the school trainer or a physician.

A written statement from the school trainer or attending physician will be required for reinstatement.

Any member suspended due to disciplinary or academic reasons will dress in appropriate workout attire during the designated class period and assume all responsibilities related to rehearsals during that time period.

Any member placed on 'reserve' status must participate in all rehearsals/performances and/or other activities of the organization.

A member who is injured or suspended will assume all normal responsibilities during the time period of injury or suspension.

9. Squad Practices: An officer may choose to schedule a squad practice at her discretion. Squad practices will not be required but are highly recommended. Squad practices are not school sponsored and are limited to two hours per week.

