

# A Handy Guide to Writing a Motion

Updated as of 05-10-2023





## Association étudiante de l'Université McGill

*Située sur les territoires traditionnels des collectivités Haudenosaunee et Anishinaabe.*

### Students' Society of McGill University

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## What is a GA Motion?

- A motion is a resolution or action, and a document explaining the rationale of the resolution or action.
- A Motion acts as an argument for why a position needs to be adopted by the SSMU.
- GA Motions can cover political topics, mandate the Society to take an action, introduce/amend/remove policy, or introduce projects, but cannot establish a Fee or edit one of the SSMU's Governing Documents.
  - Establishing fees, polling students, or editing Government documents is done via a [Referendum](#).

## Writing a Motion

- When writing a motion, you should not do it alone. Motions require a 'seconder' to support the writing process or to act as a "sponsor" of the motion.
- To write a motion, follow these few steps to get started:
  - Think of a topic that needs 'solving'/improvement at SSMU;
  - Conduct consultations and background research;
  - Fill out each section of the Motion template;
  - Ensure the Motion/Resolution for approval is in line with the Constitution and other overarching governing documents
  - Ensure that the resolution is actionable and follows S.M.A.R.T. (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound).
- The motion should be in line with the SSMU Constitution, Internal Regulations and Policies (unless the motion directly alters one of these last two) and concern matters only within the jurisdiction of SSMU.
  - In cases where they are directed towards University policies, motions should call on the SSMU to take a specified stance or action, rather than demanding that the University take specific actions, as McGill is not bound by GA mandates.
- Motions should be as specific as possible and should, where possible, direct the SSMU to take specific, as opposed to ideological or rhetorical, actions.
  - Avoid or clarify any potentially confusing statements, phrases or concepts, so as to avoid conflict, confusion and/or redrafting.
- Motions should be in line with the template below ([Appendix A](#)) and should remain between ½ to 1 pages in length.



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- For more examples, you can [look into](#) the motions submitted at the previous General Assemblies.
- Before writing the motion, make sure that you have done all the necessary background work, including consultations with the relevant stakeholders.
  - All financial matters should follow the advice of the Vice-President (Finance) or the General Manager.
- The Governance team ([pac@ssmu.ca](mailto:pac@ssmu.ca)) is available for any questions about the SSMU government process or for help in drafting motions.

## Submitting a Motion

- Students submitting a motion to a regular General Assembly must submit it to the [Parliamentarian](#) at least two weeks prior to the Assembly.
  - The motion should have accrued the signatures of either 4 Councillors or 100 members of the society, so long as no one school or faculty forms half of the signatories.
- If there is no regularly scheduled General Assembly upcoming or you feel the subject matter is urgent, you can initiate the process to call a [Special General Assembly](#).
  - Special General Assemblies can be requested by 200 members (again, no school or faculty may represent 50% or more of the signatures), or 8 Councillors (with representation of 4 faculties or schools) for a specific issue, but quorum is the same as for Regular GAs.

## “Be it Resolved...” Clauses

- In the final section “Motion or Resolution for Approval,” Be it resolved clauses present the actionable items that SSMU will do if the motion passes.
- If you are asking SSMU to adopt an official document (like a policy), it should be an appendix to the motion.
- If you have more than one clause, subsequent clauses should begin with “Be it further resolved...”
  - Each Be it resolved clause should end with a semicolon “;” except the final Be it resolved clause which should end with a period.



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## Timeline

- Due to the extent of the research and consultations necessary ahead of motion writing, ensure that you are giving yourself adequate time to complete all the steps.
  - If you cannot complete the consultations in time for an assembly or you feel your motion is underdeveloped, the motion should not be submitted and instead should be postponed until it is ready.
- If you feel your motion is being delayed by difficulties in the research or consultation process, contact the Policy and Advocacy Coordinator to get support.

## Timeline for graphic

### 1. Brainstorming.

Think about an issue that affects McGill's student body, then think about how SSMU can make a positive difference for that issue. This could include creating a new policy, project, role, or stance, or amending/improving something that SSMU already has in place. Try to think about both the issues and your solutions from a multitude of perspectives, not just your personal experiences.

### 2. Find a Secunder

A 'secunder' will be the individual working with you, the 'mover', who is responsible for the motion writing process. They share your responsibility for making sure the motion follows SSMU standards and includes all of the relevant information for it to be fairly voted on. Depending on the circumstances, the 'secunder' may be someone you originally considered as a consultant, or it may be someone who shares your passion for a particular issue affecting the student body.

### 2. Research.

Conduct research into the issue, as well as the solutions that either SSMU or external groups have implemented to address the issue. Research might include understanding current events, reading articles or journals on the topic, reviewing SSMU documents, identifying equivalents at other institutions, and more.

### 3. Governance team contacted ([pac@ssmu.ca](mailto:pac@ssmu.ca)).

When you contact the governance team, they will provide you with some preliminary feedback on your work so far and suggest next steps for you. This includes checking your knowledge of



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SSMU governance, of the consultation process, of any relevant documents, and of SSMU's previous actions related to the issue. The governance team will essentially act as a guide to make sure that you stay on track and follow SSMU's standards.

### 4. Consultations.

Now that you have received some guidance and suggestions from the Governance team, you can initiate your consultations. Consultations help to broaden your perspective and make sure the issue is being addressed in a way that aligns with SSMU values and the needs of students. Use SSMU's Consultation Policy as a foundation for your consultations, including who you consult and how you consult them. Many groups or individuals will need advanced notice, so take this into consideration and try to initiate consultations well in advance to ensure the person/group's availability.

### 5. Motion writing.

Based on the initial brainstorming, the research conducted, the consultations, and any other relevant information, begin to write a draft of the motion based on the template and SSMU's standards. At the same time that the motion is being drafted, you should also begin creating any other documentation that should be included with the motion in the Appendix.

### 6. Consultations follow up.

Once the motion has been drafted, send it to all the consultants for a chance to give more feedback. This would also be the step where you would negotiate with the individual (if applicable) on their level of involvement or responsibility for any projects that would follow from the motion's approval.

### 7. Motion finalized.

Now that consultants have provided feedback or approved of the motion, it is time to do one last review to make sure the motion meets SSMU standards. This includes implementing any changes that consultants may have suggested, proofreading, and verifying the structure matches the SSMU template. This is also when you ensure that any corresponding documents are completed and affixed to the Appendix.

### 8. Submit motion to Parliamentarian (2 weeks before).

Once the motion has been submitted, the Parliamentarian will review it to ensure it is in line with SSMU standards. If it is approved, it will be added to the agenda for the next upcoming meeting (either the Legislative Council or the General Assembly).



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## **9. Motion is voted on.**

At the next General Assembly (student motions) or Legislative Council (Officer motions), the motion will be presented, discussed, and voted on. If it passes, then the motion's actionable items will be approved. If it fails to pass, then the motion will be rejected and no next steps will be taken.



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# Appendix A: MOTION ON [xxxx]

**NOTE:** The parts of the text that are highlighted are sections that you should not modify. These will be taken care of by the parliamentarian.

Submitted for: DD-MM-YYYY

**Submitted to:** [xxx]

**Document no.:** GA-PUB-MOT-IDYY-MM-DD-SIN  
(to be assigned by Steering)

**Moved by:** FIRST LAST NAME  
ROLE

**Current Status:**  FOR APPROVAL  
 APPROVED

**Seconded by:** FIRST LAST NAME  
ROLE

POSTPONED  
 COMMITTED  
 NOT APPROVED

## Issue

Brief discussion of the issue at hand and summary of what the motion will be addressing.

(max. 4 sentences)

## Background and Rationale

This section presents the 5 Ws + H (who, what, where, when, why, how) of the issue. Include a summary of key points required in support of discussion and/or a decision. Include information about when the issue was last discussed (as relevant) the reference numbers of previous documents, and/or approvals by Council/Board (as relevant).

Include the rationale for why this issue requires this motion and why the SSMU should adopt this position or take this action over alternatives.

(max. 300 words)



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## Alignment with Mission

Briefly explain how the proposed motion aligns with the SSMU Mission (Service, Representation, Leadership) or other relevant Policies (e.g., Equity Policy, Indigenous Solidarity Policy, etc.).

*(max. 2 sentences)*

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## Consultations Completed

Before a motion is presented, its writers are expected to complete adequate consultations to ensure they have an in-depth understanding of the issue at hand. Mandatory consultations typically include the relevant Commissioner(s)/Committee(s)/Officer(s), while others are at the discretion of the motion's writers.

This section should also briefly explain the consultation and the information that was obtained from it.

For more information on Consultations, see [SSMU's Consultation Policy](#) and [Appendix B](#) for more information.

*(max. 150 words)*

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## Risk Factors and Resource Implications

Provide a description of the risk factors associated with this motion and its passing to SSMU, the student body, and beyond, and how the motion will attempt to mitigate these risks.

Specifically consider human resource, finance, or other resource implications as well as communications/optics issues.

*(max. 5 sentences)*

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## Sustainability Considerations

Have sustainability implications been taken into consideration in the development of this proposal and, if pertinent, what impacts (social, economic, environmental) will proposed actions have on SSMU's sustainability efforts?

*(max. 4 sentences)*

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## Impact of Decision and Next Steps

What will happen if the motion is passed? Who is responsible for the next steps? What is the timeline? The action that will be taken if the proposed resolution or recommendation is approved. If required, provide a communications strategy, including details as to when this matter can be made public or if it is to remain confidential.

Specifically note which Commissioner/Committee/Officer is being assigned a mandate and the timelines for that mandate (if applicable).

*(max. 200 words)*

## Motion or Resolution for Approval

Be it resolved that *[xxx]*, as outlined in Appendix A, be adopted as a Policy of the Students' Society of McGill University.

Be it further resolved, that this Policy will remain in effect for a period of *[xx]* years, from *[date]*, until *[date]* (inclusive).

OR

Be it resolved that *[relevant VP]* is tasked with creating *[project]* for the purpose of *[explicit goal]*.

OR

Be it resolved that the amendments to *[SSMU document]* as outlined in Appendix A are approved.

## Results of the Vote

In favour ()

Opposed ()

Abstain ()



## Appendix B: Motion Checklist

- I have thought of an issue that specifically affects SSMU's student body.
- I have a seconder to assist me in writing/submitting the motion.
- I have reviewed any SSMU documents, policies, plans, etc. that may address the issue or concern.
- I have conducted background research on the topic/issue, considering multiple perspectives.
- I have reviewed the Consultation Policy and conducted the relevant consultations. This includes;
  - Identifying mandatory and relevant stakeholders based on the Consultation Policy.
  - Contacting them to provide them with the opportunity to meet, discuss or provide feedback on the motion.
  - Following any edits, providing the stakeholders with another opportunity to review the motion.
  - Writing the 'Consultations Completed' section based on these consultations.
  - Contacting the stakeholders again once the motion has been voted on to inform them of the results and thank them for their contributions.
- I have filled out each section of the motion template based on my research, the consultations, and the guidelines provided.
- I have finalized and attached any additional documents as Appendix A-Z.
- I have verified that the motion does not conflict with SSMU's Constitution, Internal Regulations, or any existing policies (unless it intends to change the latter two).
- I have checked that the motion follows S.M.A.R.T. (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound).
- I have contacted the Policy and Advocacy Coordinator or another member of the Governance Team to provide feedback, review the motion, or assist in its drafting.
- I have submitted the motion to the Parliamentarian at least two weeks before the General Assembly.



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# Appendix C: Timeline Graphic (English)

[Link to the Drive \(request permission\)](#)

## MOTIONS WRITING GUIDE



### 1. BRAINSTORMING

Think about an issue that affects McGill's student body, then think about how SSMU can make a positive difference in that issue.

💡 This could include creating a new policy, project, role, or stance, or improving something that SSMU.

### 2. FIND A SECONDER

A 'second' will be the individual working with you, the 'mover', who is responsible for the motion writing process.

💡 The 'mover' makes sure the motion is fairly voted on.

### 3. RESEARCH

Conduct research into the issue and possible solutions that either SSMU or external groups have implemented to address the issue.

💡 Current events, articles, SSMU documents, equivalents at other institutions, and more.

### 4. CONTACT THE GOVERNANCE TEAM

The SSMU Governance team will provide you with some preliminary feedback and will guide you to stay on track and follow SSMU's standards.

💡 Email the Policy & Advocacy Coordinator at [pac@ssmu.ca](mailto:pac@ssmu.ca)

### 5. CONSULTATIONS

Broad your perspective. Use **SSMU's Consultation Policy** as a guide.

💡 Initiate consultations in advance to ensure the person/group's availability.

### 6. MOTION WRITING

Write a draft of the motion based on the template and SSMU's standards.

💡 Any other documentation that should be included with the motion in the Appendix.

### 6. CONSULTATIONS FOLLOW UP

Send the motion to all the consultants for feedback.

💡 Negotiations with the individual(s) (if applicable) on their level of involvement or responsibility for any projects.

### 7. MOTION FINALIZED

Last review to make sure the motion meets SSMU standards.

💡 Include feedback from consultants, and proofreading, and that follows the **SSMU template**.

### 8. SUBMIT MOTION TO PARLIAMENTARIAN FOR REVISION

[parliamentarian@ssmu.ca](mailto:parliamentarian@ssmu.ca)

The Parliamentarian will ensure it is in line with SSMU standards. If it is approved, it will be added to the agenda for the next upcoming meeting.

💡 Submit it **2 weeks before** the corresponding meeting:  
**Legislative Council** (Officer motions)  
**General Assembly** (Student motions)



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**9. MOTION IS VOTED ON**

The motion will be presented, discussed, and voted on.

Legislative Council (Officer motions)  
General Assembly (Student motions)

✔ **If it passes, then the motion's actionable items will be approved.**

✘ **If it fails to pass, then the motion will be rejected and no next steps will be taken.**



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# Appendix D: Timeline Graphic (Francaise)

## GUIDE POUR L'ÉCRITURE D'UNE MOTION



### 1. REMUE-MÉNINGES

Pensez à un problème qui affecte le corps étudiant de McGill, puis à comment l'AEUM peut avoir un impact positif sur la situation.

💡 Ceci peut inclure la création d'une nouvelle politique, un projet, un rôle, une prise de position, ou l'amélioration d'une situation à l'AEUM.

### 2. TROUVEZ LA PERSONNE QUI VA VOUS SECONDER

Vous êtes la personne motionnaire, celle qui écrit la motion, tandis que la personne qui vous seconde travaille avec vous.

💡 La personne motionnaire s'assure qu'on vote sur la motion de manière juste.

### 3. LA RECHERCHE

Faites de la recherche au sujet d'un enjeu et des solutions possibles que l'AEUM ou des groupes externes ont mis en place.

💡 Des événements actuels, des articles, des documents de l'AEUM, des équivalents d'autres institutions, et plus.

### 4. CONTACTEZ L'ÉQUIPE DE GOUVERNANCE

L'équipe de gouvernance vous fera de premiers commentaires et vous aidera à demeurer dans les critères de l'AEUM

💡 Envoyez un courriel à la coordination des politiques et du plaidoyer à [pac@ssmu.ca](mailto:pac@ssmu.ca)

### 5. CONSULTATIONS

Élargissez votre perspective. Servez-vous de la **Politique de consultation de l'AEUM** en tant que guide.

💡 Entrenez des consultations à l'avance pour vous assurer de la disponibilité d'une personne ou d'un groupe.

### 6. ÉCRIRE LA MOTION

Écrivez un brouillon de la motion en vous basant sur le gabarit et les standards de l'AEUM

💡 Dans l'Appendix, ajoutez tout autre document inclut dans la motion.

### 6. SUITE DES CONSULTATIONS

La motion doit être envoyée pour être consultée et pour recevoir des retours.

💡 Des négociations avec le(s) individu(s) (le cas échéant) selon leur niveau d'implication ou de responsabilité pour n'importe quel projet.

### 7. FINALISEZ LA MOTION

Dernière révision pour vous assurer que la motion rencontre les standards de l'AEUM.

💡 Inclure des commentaires des personnes consultantes, réviser, et suivre le **gabarit de l'AEUM**

### 8. SOUMETTEZ LA MOTION À LA PERSONNE PARLEMENTAIRE POUR LA RÉVISION

[parliamentarian@ssmu.ca](mailto:parliamentarian@ssmu.ca)

La personne parlementaire va s'assurer que la motion suit les standards de l'AEUM. Si elle est approuvée, elle sera ajoutée à l'agenda pour la réunion suivante.

💡 Soumettez la motion **deux semaines avant** les réunions correspondantes :  
**Conseil législatif** (motions des membres officiers)  
**Assemblée générale** (motions de la communauté étudiante)



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## 9. VOTE



La motion est présentée, il y aura une discussion et un vote.

Conseil législatif (motions des membres officiels)  
Assemblée générale (motions de la communauté étudiante)

- ✔ **Si elle passe, les items d'actions de la motion seront approuvés**
- ✘ **Si elle ne passe pas, la motion sera rejetée et on ne prendra pas d'autres étapes.**