

Kentucky Youth Assembly: Bill Drafting Workshop

(to be facilitated by an adult advisor or a veteran delegate. Text in italics should be read aloud.)

Drafting a Bill for KYA: (25–30 minutes)

At KYA you will fill the role a member of the state legislature in the House or the Senate. You will be debating, voting on, and/or presenting bills that are being considered before the Kentucky General Assembly. If a bill passes both chambers, it will go to the student Governor or Lt. Governor for review. In high school conferences, the Governor can either sign or veto the bill. Each delegation will select bill sponsors who will present a number of bills to the conference, based on the size of your delegation.

Bill Drafting is its own kind of writing...

As students, you do a lot of writing for different classes, so you know that there are actually many different types of writing. What are some of the different types of writing pieces?

(Expect students to mention: on-demand; essays, articles, letters, poetry, short stories, persuasive pieces, etc.).

Bill-drafting is its own kind of writing that is very different from the types you may know. Bill drafting is a form of technical writing, meant to inform. Bills state, in simple and straightforward language, exactly what the proposed law will be. This makes a bill very different from, say, a poem, which often can be interpreted in various ways by different people. Why would it be a problem for a bill to have the potential to be interpreted in different ways?

Look for answers like:

*The law should be clear and understood the same way by all citizens.

*Unclear or confusing language in a law could lead to misunderstandings and legal complications.

A bill is the proposed text for a new law for the Commonwealth of Kentucky and must include only straightforward language that explains what the law will be. Any testimonials, stories, anecdotes, facts, statistics, evidence that might support why the bill is important should be included in the opening and closing statements of the bill sponsors. All bills, both at KYA and in the actual General Assembly, have a title that starts the same way:

“An ACT relating to..._____”.

The title should identify a single subject, which is broad enough to include all the provisions of the bill but specific enough to focus on a given topic.

After the title will come what is called the ‘enacting clause.’ This is included automatically in the KYA bill template. It is the official notice that the bill will become the law of the land.

“Be it enacted by the Youth Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky.”

Immediately following the enacting clause will be the specific language that you intend to make the law. The first step, in any standard bill, will be to identify where your bill fits into the body of law that governs Kentucky.

Display on a screen and/or direct students with computers to the following website: <http://www.lrc.ky.gov/Statutes/index.aspx>

This is the Kentucky Revised Statutes (often called KRS)- the collective body of law that governs our state. As bill sponsors you have to identify the specific chapter within the KRS where your bill will be included. There are over 500 chapters in the KRS...we have a lot of laws...but there are title and chapter headings, like a table of contents, and it is pretty easy to pinpoint where any given topic should be included. Let’s consider a sample bill idea...

(Facilitator can write or just announce the sample bill title)

“An Act relating to graduation requirements in Kentucky schools.”

So let’s start looking through the KRS and see if we can find where a bill on graduation requirements would go...

Scroll through the website, noting that the title headings and chapter titles clearly identify the topics of those laws. Anticipate students to stop or call out when you reach "KRS Title XIII, Education."

Yes, this topic is related to education. Can you identify the chapter where it best fits?

(Allow some discussion but steer students towards "KRS Chapter 158: Conduct of Schools.")

At this point, display and/or distribute copies of sample bill itself. Ask a student to read the bill aloud, then lead discussion as follows:

What does this bill strive to do?

(Allow the students to discuss until they hit it- should be pretty quick)

Correct! Notice that the bill just says that attending KYA will be a graduation requirement. What if the bill sponsors wanted to describe what a great experience KYA is or offer a personal testimonial on how much they enjoyed KYA- where should that go?

(Testimonials, statistics, evidence, etc. should be included in opening and closing speeches, NOT in the text of the bill!)

Let's look at Section 2 about the effective date. Most bills in Kentucky don't even mention an effective date because the state Constitution stipulates that ALL passed legislation goes into effect 90 days after the end of the session in which it is passed. Bill sponsors only need to reference an effective date if they want a bill to go into effect either BEFORE the ninety-day mark or AFTER it. Why might someone want a bill to go into effect before ninety days have gone by?

(Because of an emergency situation)

Right. If a bill has an emergency effective date, it must include "and declaring an emergency" in the title, and the final section has to describe the emergency and tell the effective date. Our graduation requirement bill has an effective date AFTER the ninety-day mark. Why would any bill be set to take effect much later than the standard ninety days?

(To give citizens and institutions time to prepare for the requirements of the law)

Right! Waiting until the start of the 2020 school year will give everyone a chance to get ready and make the preparations they need to attend a conference...like maybe writing a bill!"

Brainstorming and KRS Chapter Practice: (10 minutes)

For the last part of the workshop, get students to brainstorm some possible bill ideas. Have students work in pairs or small groups to discuss issues important to their school, community, or the state as a whole. Ask students to create a title for a bill that clearly identifies the purpose of the proposed law. Time and technology permitting, students can then practice reviewing the KRS to identify the appropriate chapter for their bill. Workshop can end with a whip-around of each group sharing at least one possible bill title and its chapter for placement.

The workshop will help identify which students are interested in serving as bill sponsors to actually draft and present bills for their delegation at KYA.