

The Idiot-Proof Guide to MUN



By Amy Wong

INTRODUCTION

Hello delegates! This is roughly what the schedule of one normal, local conference will look like for you, as well as some terms you'll be hearing and using in committee. You can always reach out to me with questions and comments at 714-501-0347 or amywong347@gmail.com or Facebook. This is a TON of information to take in, so don't feel like this needs to be memorized. This is just a reference for your actual conference. Think of it as a guide of sorts! Bolded words are just some helpful vocabulary that's good to know. Hope it helps!

The **United Nations** is a group founded after WWII composed of many of the world's countries, which work together to solve global problems. Some of the issues that the UN looks into and works to fix are nuclear warfare, global security, poverty, famine, disease, and human rights violations, among many more. The U.N. is divided into **committees**, or groups, based on what types of problems they solve. For example, the **Security Council** works to solve matters of international security, the **FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization)** works with problems related to food and agriculture, and **UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Fund)** works to solve problems that are faced by children around the world.

POSITION PAPERS

The first step in any MUN conference is working on your **position paper**. This is the first way to earn points in a conference, and it is usually submitted two weeks before the actual conference. Most conferences require a position paper, but some don't. I highly recommend that you write a paper, even if you don't need to, because it forces you to do good research and helps you prep for future conferences. Position papers are papers that detail your specific country's stance on an issue. They usually have three parts: a background, past U.N. action, and your country's solutions to the problem.

Your **background** should provide a concise, but thorough, explanation of what the problem is, why it's a problem, its origins, what it's developed into, and how it impacts the international community. The **past U.N. action** section should be a summary about as long as your background about what the U.N. has done to solve the crisis: have any resolutions or treaties been signed? Have peacekeepers been sent in? Has the Security Council imposed sanctions? These are some of the questions you might want to keep in mind to help guide you in writing. Finally, your **country solutions** should be explicit, clear ways of solving the problem. This is the most important part of your paper. What has your country done to solve the problem? How can those preexisting solutions be furthered, extended, or otherwise amended for efficiency and success? What can you add onto these solutions to improve them, if anything? Your solutions should be practical, realistic, creative, and unique, building off of preexisting solutions or coming directly from you (if it aligns with your policy). They will be what you argue for in committee.

You will submit these papers to your chair when you're finished with them, usually through email. The chairs will have links on their websites as to where you can email them. You can also talk to them if you have questions about your policy or the conference itself! Your paper will be graded and returned to you the day of the conference.

SPEECHES

Let's get into speeches now. In order to be able to speak, you must be on the **speaker's list**, which is exactly what it sounds like. Someone will **motion to open the speaker's list**, and you'll raise your placard to be added. Throughout the process of going through speeches, debate will be broken up by **caucusing**, which we'll talk about later.

You should prepare two speeches before the conference, about a minute and thirty seconds in length. Each speech should introduce your country's policy on the topic and give a brief overview of any solutions they have, as well as how to enact those solutions successfully. Remember to stand up straight and project when you give these speeches; if you're not confident, fake it till you make it. There really is no true "remedy" to being better at public speaking other than just practice, practice, practice. The more exposure you get to it and the more opportunities you take to speak, the better you will become. It's just one of those things in life. That being said, as someone who was once a hilariously poor public speaker, I've found that it helps to simply address the wall just above somebody's head. As you get better, you'll want to shift your gaze around the committee to address everyone.

At the end of all (speaker's list) speeches, there will be an opportunity to give a comment on the speech. Your comment should agree or disagree with the content of the previous delegate's speech, and you should take the opportunity to strengthen the solutions mentioned in it or point out flaws and weaknesses in it if your country policies are not in alignment. Comments are usually thirty seconds each. Think of them as mini thirty second speeches in which you can talk about your own solutions (if they're relevant to the speech you're commenting on). These are basically free points, so use them to your advantage. If you can't think of anything to say, remember to compliment the speech and say something from your solutions that is related to the content. "China agrees with America's policy of XYZ, and would like to supplement it with ABC..."

CONFERENCE

The first thing that happens is **opening ceremonies**. We'll stick together as a group and go into a building, usually the gym, and wait for a few speeches about the program and the school to be given. Then, your chairs will call out your committee, and you'll follow them to a room. You'll be debating here for the rest of the conference.

The first thing that happens is **role call**. Your dais (head chair, vice chairs, legals) will call your country name. You can answer **present** or **present and voting**. Answering present and voting means that you **MUST** vote on a resolution at the end of committee, meaning you **CANNOT** abstain from voting. Some times that you want to abstain on voting are when you know that your country has a somewhat blurry stance on a certain issue, and you don't know whether you want to pass or deny the resolution. You will not be able to reverse this vote later in the committee. Once they call your country name, you'll go up to the table and pick up your **placard** and **credentials**. Credentials are what signify your country; pin this to your shirt/dress/suit. Your placard is a folded piece of paper with your country on it. You'll raise this to get the chair's attention and to make motions and points.

MOTIONS

Let's move onto **motions**. Motions are when you want the committee to do something: common ones are motions to open debate, hold an unmoderated caucus, hold a moderated caucus, move into voting bloc, move out of voting bloc, suspend debate, and adjourn debate. We'll get into this in just a bit. **Points** are when you need something answered. Some points include: point of inquiry (ask a question), point of order (ask about how things are done), and point of personal privilege ('is there an outlet?' 'can I go to the bathroom?'). Both points and motions will either be considered by the chair and voted on by the committee or ruled dilatory (time wasting) or simply rejected.

LIST OF MOTIONS (most common)

Motion to open debate: self explanatory. You motion for this at the beginning of the conference so you can get started. Phrasing: "Motion to open debate."

Motion to open the speakers' list: this motion almost always follows the motion to open debate. The speakers' list is a list of delegates who wish to speak about the problem at hand; you should ALWAYS be on this list at all times. You want to talk about your problem and solutions as often as possible! This motion allows the speakers' list to be active. Once you've spoken, it's a good idea to send a post it note up to the dais asking to be re-added. Phrasing: "Motion to open the speakers' list."

Motion for an unmoderated caucus: unmoderated caucuses are periods of time when you can roam around the room and talk to other delegates. This is a chance to assert your position and talk about solutions, which will eventually be incorporated into a resolution. You should motion for one of these every four to five speeches or so. You need to say how long the unmoderated caucus should last, and sometimes why you want one. Phrasing: "Motion for a ten minute unmoderated caucus (to form resolution groups)."

Motion for a moderated caucus: a moderated caucus is a set period of time when delegates speak for a certain time on a certain topic. This is used when someone wants to shift focus to a particular aspect of your topic. If you feel that the committee should focus on some specific part of your topic, that would be a good time to motion for a moderated caucus. If the chair approves of your motion, you must give a. total duration of the caucus, b. topic you want the committee to discuss, and c. the speech time each delegate gets. By the way, there are NO comments during moderated caucus. Phrasing: "Motion for a *ten minute* moderated caucus on the topic of *no-fly zones* in Syria, *one minute* speaking time."

Motion to move into formal debate: formal debate means the presentation of resolutions. You should motion for this once everyone has finished writing their resolutions and is ready to talk about them. Phrasing: "Motion to move into formal debate."

Motion to move into voting bloc: voting bloc is when everyone votes on which resolution to pass. Vote according to your country policy, and don't just vote for your own because you wrote it. Phrasing: "Motion to move into voting bloc."

Motion to suspend/adjourn debate: this is when your committee is taking a break. It's pretty much procedural and it isn't crazy important. The only difference is that suspension of debate means you will resume debate later, and adjourning debate means that the conference is over. You would suspend debate for lunch, but adjourn it at the end of the day. Phrasing: "Motion to suspend/adjourn debate."

CAUCUSING

Caucusing is a big facet of MUN, so let's go into a little more detail about strategy. When you form your caucus group, you want the members to be on the same page as you, policy wise. For example, Sweden and Syria may join together because of their policies on refugees. On the flip side, it is unlikely that Israel and Palestine will be willing to work with one another due to political tensions.

But how do you get people to join? Pass notes! During the conference, feel free to pass notes on Post-Its to other delegates. It's not super polite to pass notes while someone else is speaking, so try and wait until the speaker is done before you pass notes. That being said, if it is urgent and necessary to pass notes during that time, do so discreetly. I generally try not to do it at all while someone is speaking.

When you are actually in the caucus group, everyone is going to want to talk about their policy, and it can get extraordinarily chaotic without a strong leader—that leader should be you. A good caucus group leader is confident, knowledgeable, and diplomatic. Know what you're talking about and how it might relate to other countries. Remember to try and give everyone equal opportunities to speak; this means calling on quieter, shyer delegates and inviting them to give solutions. Make them feel important! Nobody likes a snake. You should be calm and in control of the situation, but not bossy, because that's not diplomatic. Make sure to not talk over anybody or leave anyone out.

This is all very content heavy, so let's look at another important aspect: physical positioning. Seriously, as a short person, trust me when I say it's actually pretty important. Caucus groups will usually form in a circle; try to be in the center of the circle, and don't let yourself get edged out. You can also choose to sit or stand for the caucus; sitting while everyone is standing or vice versa is a GREAT power move, as it focuses everyone's attention on you. Caucusing in a corner is also a favorite move of delegates, but the downside is that your caucus group may ignore you if you're stuck in the corner. And make sure you're not caucusing in a physically awkward area; for example, don't caucus in a narrow aisle that requires three minutes of maneuvering to get through. It's inefficient and doesn't make you look good.

What happens when you deal with someone you really dislike, though? How do you diplomatically remove a snake from your caucus group? This is where most delegates struggle with diplomacy, and this is where the fine line between being assertive and being bossy is drawn. If you encounter someone who is rude, undiplomatic, power hungry, and excessively talkative, wait for them to finish their sentence and then jump to a different delegate.

A, the gavel hunter: Blah blah blah blah blah blah.

You, the diplomatic speaker: Thank you for your solutions. Delegate X has been wanting to say something for a while now, and I want to hear what he/she has to say.

By doing this, you've effectively broken the flow of the power delegate's spiel, and thus taken away their power. This does quite a few things: it cripples the gavel hunter's alpha complex, establishes your position as the leader, makes you more empathetic to other delegates, and makes you diplomatic. However, be sincere. Fake diplomacy is painfully obvious.

RESOLUTIONS

Speaking and caucusing will take up the vast majority of the conference, as we pretty much alternate between going down the speaker's list or engaging in caucus. But now we're going to move into the final stage of a conference: resolutions.

What is a resolution, anyway? A **resolution** is a paper comprised of a caucus group's solution to the topic at hand. It is almost always typed, so remember to bring your laptops/tablets. This is what you'll be working towards for the entire conference. The ultimate goal of an MUN conference is to come to a compromise that incorporates everybody's wants and solutions. Here's the format your resolution should follow (from a sample UN resolution): <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N00/720/18/PDF/N0072018.pdf?OpenElement>

After you finish writing your resolutions, you will decide on a group of people to go and present the resolution to the committee. You should be part of this group! It demonstrates that you know the solutions well and you have a good grasp of the topic. You'll get major brownie points (and competition points) with your dais. You'll then go up to talk about what's in your resolution and then answer questions from the audience.

When all resolutions have been presented, the committee will move into **voting bloc** to vote on which resolutions to pass. Like I said, don't pass or reject a resolution purely because you did or didn't write it; vote according to your country policy. For example, the United States would not vote in favor of a resolution allowing North Korea to continue proliferating nuclear weapons. Once you have moved into voting bloc and voted, you will then move out of voting bloc and can finally relax after 8 hours of debate.

And that brings us to **closing ceremonies!** Our delegation will meet up and wait for the awards to be announced, and then take pictures for the emails. Take this opportunity to relax, chill out, talk with your friends, and get to know the people in the club, because we really are some of the best people in the school. It's also a nice time to reflect on what you did well in committee and what you can improve on. In general, closing ceremonies is just a nice time to unwind after a conference.

MISCELLANEOUS

- Conference essentials:
 - Laptop/tablet (if allowed! Check your committee policy)
 - Legal pad or other lined paper
 - Post-Its
 - Pen/pencil
 - DEODORANT
 - Copy of your position paper! Very helpful if you want to show it to other people or just need it as a reference.
 - Any helpful articles in your research
 - Your wallet (lots of conferences have food for sale and some have candy grams, which are super cute and can be sent to your friends in other committees)
 - Mints. I do not recommend gum even though I like gum more than mints because chewing it is considered impolite in committee
 - Band-aids, because formal shoes suck

- Remember to eat a healthy breakfast! Seriously, at the risk of sounding like a cheesy doctor, it really is the most important meal of the day. It sets precedence for your mood starting out. Also, from personal experience, it's ~~kind of~~ very embarrassing when your stomach growls in committee.
- ASK YOUR CHAIRS FOR FEEDBACK. So, so, so important. They will tell you how you're doing and how you can improve, so you can be better during the next session. Ask during the break and lunch! If your chairs were unclear, your mentors and student advisors are also always here to help.
- Get enough sleep the night before. Again, sounds cheesy, but it's actually so important since you'll be debating for a third of the day.
- Wear comfortable clothes! Especially applicable to ladies wearing high heels. I'm a huge proponent of wearing heels (I haven't done a single conference in flats), but please take care of yourselves! They can get really uncomfortable really fast and it's definitely going to impact your performance. Again, speaking from personal experience, I will all but forbid you from wearing new shoes to a conference. Not the time to break them in at all.
- Scope out the room for good seats! If you sit in the back, the chairs may not see you and thus may not call on you as often. Make sure to sit near an open area, as it's ideal for caucusing with your fellow delegates.
- I'm very guilty of this, but unless your chair says it's okay, try not to eat in committee. It loses you diplomacy points.
- Remember that it isn't the end of the world if you don't get an award. As someone who staunchly believed in this ideology for almost four years, let me tell you that it is not the end at all. It wasn't a waste of time or money, because you learned something from the conference, and that knowledge cannot be quantified into something that defines you.

That covers about everything! If anything was unclear or confusing, please text/email/talk to me and I will 100% do my best to clarify and help. Happy delegating!