

A Beginner's Guide to MUN

Produced by Oxford University United Nations Association

What is MUN?

MUN (Model United Nations) is a simulation of the United Nations where participants represent countries in various committees in the UN and negotiate solutions to real world issues through debate and diplomacy. It is not necessarily a competition – though you can certainly treat it as one, with “best delegate” awards being presented at the end of each conference. MUN is a great way to build an understanding of complex issues while developing your public speaking and debating abilities: skills that will help you in most any setting!

This guide is intended to familiarise you with the basic rules of procedure of MUN debates. However, first-hand experience will always be the most effective way to get comfortable with the unique format of MUN, so in addition to producing this guide, OUUNA also organises weekly debate simulations which you are encouraged to attend. Don't worry if you have no related experience – these sessions are intended for beginners to gain experience with MUN-style debates, and experienced OUUNA committee members are always willing to help new delegates learn. For more information on our debate sessions, contact debating@ouuna.co.uk.

Before the debate

At the start of every committee session, the Chairs will call on each member of the committee in alphabetical order to determine their attendance. To respond, simply state either “present and voting”, or just “present” if you are representing a non-voting entity such as Palestine, the Holy See, or an NGO.

Since most committees debate multiple topics over the course of the conference, the next step is to set the agenda – in other words, determine which topic the committee will debate first. An example of how this is done is shown below.

Delegate 1: Motion to set the agenda to topic A.

Chair: Are there any other motions on the floor?

Delegate 2: Motion to set the agenda to topic B.

This is an example of a motion. Motions are requests for the committee to carry out a certain action, and are typically used to transition between phases of the committee and guide the flow of debate. To make a motion, raise your placard and wait for the chair to call on you. In the example above, two delegates have each proposed opposing motions, and only one of the two

can pass. The committee would then proceed to discuss whether topic A or topic B should be debated first, and then vote on which motion to pass.

Speaker's List and Moderated Caucuses

Debate has now begun! The chairs will begin by establishing a speaker's list for anyone who wishes to speak on the topic being debated. The speaker's list is for anything related to the agenda, such as explaining your country's position, elaborating on a particular aspect of the issue, or addressing a draft resolution on the floor. To add yourself to the list, send a written note to the chair, or raise your placard whenever the chair asks if anyone wishes to be added to the list. Even if you don't have a speech ready to go, you should add yourself to the speaker's list whenever possible; you can always improvise a speech on the fly, but if you wait until you've prepared a speech to join the speaker's list, you may find that by the time it's your turn to speak, the point you wanted to make has become irrelevant.

When giving a speech, remember to only refer to yourself in the 3rd person. For example, instead of saying "I believe we must work together to achieve x", you can say, "this delegate believes that the committee must work together to achieve x". Also, try and keep your speech concise! You usually have only 60-90 seconds so make your point clearly. You can have the most amazing arguments, but if the chairs have to cut you off for exceeding the time limit at the end, that will be all anyone remembers about your speech. Speeches in MUN deserve an entire guide of their own – however the best way to learn and improve is to give speeches of your own, so don't be afraid to participate every chance you get.

If you have time remaining after your speech, the chairs will ask you how you wish to yield the floor. In this case, you have 3 options:

1. Yield the floor back to the chairs, giving up your excess time.
2. Yield the floor to points of information, meaning other delegates in the room get to ask you questions about your speech. Though this may seem intimidating, opening yourself to points of information shows that your points can stand up to scrutiny, not to mention it will make a good impression on the chairs.
3. Yield the floor to another delegate, giving them your excess time to speak. In some cases, experienced delegates may use this option, giving a joint speech with an allied delegate to make their point more effective. However, in most cases your ally is probably better off waiting for his turn on the speaker's list rather than sharing a single slot with another delegate, so this option is usually not recommended, especially if you're new to MUN.

Sometimes, you may wish to focus the debate onto a specific aspect of the issue, especially if it is particularly relevant to your country. To do this, you can motion for a moderated caucus by specifying the topic you want to debate, a time limit for the caucus, and a time limit for individual speeches: "Motion for a moderated caucus of ___ minutes with an individual speaking time of ___

seconds to discuss ____.” Moderated caucuses are for delegates to speak on a set topic, and encourages more back and forth debate. During a moderated caucus, the speaker’s list is not used – instead the chairs will call on delegates to take the floor, with the delegate who originally motioned for the caucus being the first to speak.

Unmoderated Caucuses and Working Papers

After a few rounds of moderated caucuses, the different country policies and ideas in the room should be clear to you, and you’ll want to have some time to form your blocs and start proposing solutions. This is done during an unmoderated caucus, where you can get out of your seat and lobby with fellow delegates. This time is also for you to start writing working papers, which is typically a precursor to the draft resolution and is an informal document containing proposed solutions to the question being debated. In OUUNA’s weekly debate sessions, we will be skipping over working papers and moving directly into resolution writing in order to save time, but in conferences, working papers are a great way to get feedback on your proposals before you submit a draft resolution. This can be done once the unmoderated caucus is over by submitting your working paper to the chairs and making a motion to introduce it (in the same way that one would motion for a moderated caucus).

Writing Resolutions

Eventually, you’ll be collaborating on a draft resolution, which is a formal document containing what exactly you want the UN to do to resolve the issue. Resolutions have a fixed format with three parts: heading, pre-ambulatory clauses, and operative clauses. Below is an example of a typical resolution heading.

Sponsors: Greece, Jordan, Mexico, Rwanda, Pakistan, Uganda

Signatories: Chad, Czech Republic, DRC, Egypt, Germany, Hungary, Iran, Poland

Topic: Designing a fair and economically feasible refugee resettlement system for global application

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees,

The heading must include four things: a list of sponsors (those who helped to write the resolution), a list of signatories (those who want to see this resolution debated), the topic, and the committee name. Most conferences will require draft resolutions to have a minimum number of signatories and a maximum number of sponsors to encourage healthy debate. Note that being a signatory does not require you to support the resolution – it simply means you want to see it debated by the committee.

The next section contains pre-ambulatory clauses. Pre-ambulatory clauses do not call for any specific actions, but are used to provide context for the solutions you’ll eventually propose in the operative clauses, such as by citing statistics, referring to past actions on the issue, stressing

the significance of the topic, and many more. Pre-ambulatory clauses start with an underlined verb, and should not contain or end in a period. Some examples are shown below:

Reaffirming the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees and the importance of defining the term of refugees and its further protocol of 1969,

Recalling the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in persons and the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air,

Recognising the efforts that the international community has made to solve the issue,

Noting with concern the insufficient protection of human rights as well as the high rate of sexual and physical abuse in refugee camps,

Though pre-ambulatory clauses come before operative clauses in a resolution, many delegates actually write the operative clauses first, before justifying them with pre-ambulatory clauses afterwards. Operative clauses contain the concrete actions that the sponsors of the resolution want the UN to take, and are always the focus of debate. Operative clauses are numbered, and often contain sub-clauses (and in some cases, sub-sub-clauses!) for further elaboration. They should start with an underlined verb and end in a semicolon, except for the last one, which ends in a full stop (as the resolution itself is formatted as a single sentence). An example of an operative clause is shown below.

1. Encourages UNHCR-led initiatives that prioritize the voluntary repatriation of refugees such as but not limited to:
 - a. Implementing sustainable development projects in the refugee's home nations,
 - b. Calling on member states to adopt policies that encourage political stability in refugees' home nations,
 - c. Providing education and skills training for refugee youths in order to enable them to compete in their home countries labor market,
 - d. Adopting any and all means necessary to encourage refugees to voluntarily return to their home countries such as but not limited to:
 - i. Providing safe passage back to their country of origin,
 - ii. Educating refugees on economic opportunities available in their home country,
 - e. Resorting to integration of refugees into the local community only if the above measures fail;

A note of caution: when proposing solutions, it's important to be aware of what your committee is and isn't allowed to do. In most UN committees (with the exception of the Security Council), resolutions are non-binding, which means you cannot force a member state to do something against their will. Your operative clauses are recommendations, not laws, so it's important to use verbs such as "encourages", "recommends" or "calls for" when you want member states to do something. You also cannot authorise a UN peacekeeping mission (or any use of force) as a solution or directly violate national sovereignty (the right of a country to govern itself without

outside intervention), though you can recommend that the question be brought up to the Security Council, which has a different mandate.

Getting used to writing in the strict format of a UN resolution is a difficult skill for a beginner delegate to master, but with enough practice and feedback, you'll quickly get used to translating ideas into pre-ambulatory and operative clauses. Showing your ability to write in proper resolution format is an easy way to establish yourself as the leader of your bloc, especially in beginner committees, which will give you a big advantage at conferences.

Debating the Resolution

We're now moving into the final stages of debate. You've presented your country's position, negotiated your way into an alliance, and written a draft resolution, and now the last step is to get it passed. Debate on a resolution sometimes starts with a Panel of Authors, which is a short period during which delegates in the room can ask the sponsors for further details about their resolution. The panel of authors is meant to clarify the content of the resolution rather than to debate its principles, however, more experienced delegates in the opposition may sometimes use it as a way to identify or point out the weaknesses of the resolution before they argue against it for real. After the panel of authors is over, the committee will move into hearing speeches both in favour of and against the resolution, before moving into voting.

Sometimes you may find that you oppose a resolution mostly due to a single operative clause or a small but significant detail, and that you would be able to support it if only that detail were changed. Rather than rejecting the resolution entirely, you may find it more useful to submit an amendment, which is a proposed change to a resolution. You can use an amendment to strike a clause, amend the wording of a sentence, or add new clauses. An amendment can be friendly or unfriendly, depending on whether it has the support of all sponsors of the draft resolution. To submit an amendment, send it to the chairs (usually through a note) and then motion to introduce an amendment. If it is unfriendly, debate on the draft resolution will be suspended and the committee will proceed to debate and vote on the amendment instead. If it is a friendly amendment, the committee will move straight into voting on the amendment without debating it. You can also amend another delegate's amendment (as long as it is still being debated), though this is uncommon – this is called an amendment to the second degree.

Finally, it's time to move into voting procedures! This section is pretty self-explanatory – voting works in exactly the way one would expect, with three options: for, against, or abstaining. However, there are three motions that can come into play during the voting phase that it might be helpful to know.

1. **Motion to Reorder the Proposal:** If there are multiple draft resolutions on the floor, this motion changes the order in which they are voted on. You can use this strategically – since only one resolution per question can pass, if the first one passes, the second resolution is

automatically discarded, so in some cases you may find it more advantageous to have the committee vote on your resolution first.

2. Motion to Divide the Question: This motion splits the draft resolution into multiple parts to be voted on individually rather than as a whole, so that the committee may end up passing some parts of a resolution and rejecting others. This can be useful if you feel that some operative clauses in a resolution are particularly contentious (and for some reason were not able to amend it).
3. Motion to Divide the House: This motion is made after voting has already occurred. If it passes, the previous result is nullified and the committee votes on the resolution again, this time with no abstentions. The chairs will typically grant this motion if a resolution has failed and the number of abstainees is greater than the difference between the number of votes for and against the resolution, so if the vote doesn't turn out the way you hoped, you can make this motion as a last resort to swing the result in your favour.

This guide only explains the rules of procedure necessary to participate in our weekly debating sessions. However, there are many aspects of MUN that this guide has not covered, such as country research, writing position papers, and pre-conference preparation. Some more advanced committees such as the Security Council, International Court of Justice, and crisis committees even have different rules of procedure. Though it may seem overwhelming at first, building your skills as a delegate is an extremely rewarding process, and you will find that the more MUN debates you participate in, the easier it gets to remember the rules.