

Research

Research is possibly the most intimidating yet most important part of preparing for any Model United Nations conference. Without proper preparation, not only are representatives unable to accurately represent their country's position in a global scenario but they also restrict themselves from gaining the most out of the memorable MUN learning experience.

A delegate's aim at a MUN conference is to most faithfully represent their country's stand on a certain issue being debated, and to do this, thorough research is needed. It goes beyond retelling speeches of national leaders and requires a genuine understanding of national policy, as only this can provide the basic foundation of role-playing at the MUN.

Here you will learn methods and tips for researching, understanding your country's perspective and policies and writing your position paper using critical information.

The Three Levels of Research:

For any Model United Nations conference, your research should focus on a top-down approach on three levels which goes from the general to the specific, although the areas will naturally overlap on several occasions. The idea is to research each area thoroughly in order to develop a proper understanding of your country and the issues that will be discussed.

The three levels are:

- 1) The UN System;
- 2) Country Information and;
- 3) The Assigned Agenda.

1. The United Nations System

It is interesting that this is an area which is often overlooked when researching for a MUN conference. MUNs aim to recreate the United Nations and so it is absolutely imperative that to do so, you know what the UN is, what it does and how it functions. Successful and proactive participation in the simulation requires a level of understanding of the United Nations organization itself, regarding structures, functions and protocols. The more conferences you attend, the less time you will find yourself spending on this aspect, since the only new research required is if you are going to a committee you've never been in before.

It is important for delegates to familiarise themselves with:

- The United Nations Charter: <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/>
- The history of the United Nations.
- The main bodies and committees of the UN:
<http://www.un.org/en/aboutun/structure/index.shtml>
- The functioning of the various bodies and committees, particularly your own.
- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>



- The current Secretary-General and what he or she advocates: <http://www.un.org/sg/>
- Your country's history within the UN, its role and reputation. Information on this can be found on the websites of the permanent mission of the UN to your country.
- Recent UN actions pertaining to your country or the agenda – including statements, press releases, publications, resolutions etc.: <http://www.un.org/en/documents/index.shtml> or <http://research.un.org/en/docs/>

Although there are countless publications and documents on the United Nations, the best source to studying about the United Nations is the UN itself. Below are a further collection of useful links:

- www.un.org
- <http://www.un.org/en/members/index.shtml>
- www.un.org/Pubs/chronicle/online.html
- <http://www.icj-cij.org/>
- <http://treaties.un.org/Home.aspx>

2. Country Information

Build a knowledge base of your country - delegates must be aware of their assigned country's historical, geographical, political, economic, social and environmental aspects. Build a country profile on your government – what systems, ideologies, political parties and leaders represent your country? What is your country's foreign policy and how is this affected by important historical and domestic aspects? Who are your allies and your adversaries? What other bilateral, regional and international organizations is your country a part of?

After building a basic profile, you must study your country's broad stand on global issues, particularly at the UN. Develop a basic understanding of your country's voting pattern, its involvement in the UN – speeches given by leaders and delegates of your country at the UN and resolutions/treaties it has been a part of.

- <http://www.countryreports.org/>
- <http://www.un.org/esa/national.htm>
- <http://countrystudies.us/>
- www.un.org/popin/data.html
- www.unausa.org
- <http://www.un.org/en/members/>
- <http://www.gksoft.com/govt/en/>

You may also wish to visit the national embassy of your country as it is the best source of information and research for sources that are not as readily available. It is the best way to get first-hand information on your country and where it stands on various issues. It could also give you the opportunity to interact with a real diplomat from the country you're representing, and pick up tips on how they carry themselves and respond to questions.



Country Information Worksheet

Government	Official country name:	
	Type of governmental system:	
	Head of state, major political	
	Official language(s):	
	Region:	
	Allies or blocks:	
Economy	Economic system:	
	GDP and growth rate:	
	Status of infrastructure:	
	Major trading partners:	
	Trading blocs, associations:	
	Major imports/exports:	
	Balance of payments/trade:	
	IMF/World Bank position	
	Natural resources:	
	Source of energy:	
Development	Development status:	
	Status on MDGs: (Millennium	
People	Population and growth rate:	
	Major religions or culture:	
	Standard of living:	
Military	Military organisation:	
	% of GDP spent on defense:	
	Major weapons, nuclear	
	Weapons/arms treaties:	
Conflict/ Issues	Major historical conflicts:	
	Ethnic/cultural issues:	
	Environmental	
	Refugee problems:	
	Present conflict(s):	
United Nations	Date admitted into UN:	
	Membership in UN bodies:	
	UN dues payment status:	
	Past UN	
	UN intervention in country?	
	Contribution to UN	
	Human rights violations? Why?	
	Respect for international norms:	



3. The Assigned Agenda

This will form the bulk of your research – it will be what is used directly in committee sessions. You will be informed of the agenda of issues to be discussed at the MUN by your organisers before the conference. A thorough study of the tabled topic for debate and discussion with respect to your country, UN and the world as a whole will aid you to properly represent your country and actively participate in the simulation. You will be provided a study guide for your assigned agenda by your MUN committee, which you should use as your starting point.

Within your agenda topic, the three areas that must be covered are:

- a) A background and overview of the agenda topic and your country's policy on it
- b) Detailed information on important aspects of the topic
- c) Broad information on where other main countries and blocs stand

a. Background

After the background guide, news articles relating to your topic can be a good place to find a brief overview of the most recent developments. While only verified news agencies such as Reuters and Al-Jazeera are accepted in committee, news and op-ed articles can provide an entry point into deeper issues. However, you must be careful to look for writers' biases on the Internet in particular.

The next step is to look for resolutions and treaties that are relevant to the topic – the most recent resolution from the UN Documentation Centre should refer to the documents most central to your agenda. You must then look into your country's voting history on the matter, for indications on action, inaction, presence and absence, looking for changing policies and exploring their causal factors. Statements explaining votes can be found in records on the UN website.

b. Details

Once your background research is done, you need to dive deep into the topic to understand the primary aspects, and try to logically 'frame' the agenda into main sub-headings of sorts, under which all the important points can be organized. This can help you break down complex agendas into neatly manageable chunks, and score brownie points if your frame is accepted by the committee. It's important to make a clear distinction between facts, arguments based on those facts and opinions, particularly when reading on the Internet.

At this stage, sometimes as you're framing the problems, you're also coming up with innovative solutions to put in the proposal. Looking up implementation of past resolutions is a helpful starting point, but op-eds, blog posts, local and international NGO reports, think tank papers and academic papers will likely be more useful in shaping your ideas. Remember to focus on solutions that are politically, economically and sustainably feasible.



c. Other Arguments

One of the most important lessons from MUNs is learning to accommodate difference – it is important to be aware of the arguments and facts used by those holding the opposite stand to yours. While as a delegate you are bound to espouse the views of your country, individually your opinions can be shaped through the push and pull of opposing ideas. Also, this research will help you logically counter the arguments put forth by radically opposed delegations, and bring the committee around to your point of view.

In some conferences, delegates research countries other than their own in order to surprise other delegates with allegations and throw them on the back foot. Needless to say, this is not only undiplomatic but also entirely counter-productive to the cooperative purpose of the conference. While it is important to be aware of the policies of other countries, antagonistic behaviour can only harm the atmosphere of the committee and hamper consensus-building, and thus is discouraged.

The most important part of research is being able to synthesize the data you've found in an organized way and identify the key pieces of information, including facts and figures, which you can use to illustrate and defend your position. If your country plays a central role in the agenda topic, it becomes all the more important to be able to explain your actions. Finally, all your research comes down to being able to justify your position, explain your ideas and convince the other delegates that these are the most valuable approaches to solving the problem.

