

MUN Terms and Concepts

delegate – You are a delegate. You are the representative of a particular country, and it is your job to discuss the issue with your country's stance in mind. Thus, it is unlikely that North Korea and South Korea would ever get buddy-buddy and declare friendship in a conference, etc.

committee – a committee is a committee, or sub-group, of the United Nations: for example, UNICEF, Security Council, Special Political and Decolonization, etc. Each committee will focus on different issues. For example, Special Political and Decolonization topics might cover humanitarian violations, third-world country transitions; IAEA would discuss nukes, etc.

briefs—the conference organizers will provide a short brief, about 1-2 pages, for each issue that is discussed. Usually one committee will have two issues/topics. This is a helpful starting guide to your research.

position papers – before you go to a conference, you will choose a committee and a country. Then you will read the brief, and research your country's stance on the issue at hand—for example, how Russia feels about going green. You will then write a position paper, following a specific format (Intro, past UN Actions, your country's actions, your own ideas—we will go into position papers into great detail later), and submit it before the conference. There is usually a deadline a few weeks or days before the actual conference starts.

chair—chairs are people who run your committee. They sit in the front of the room facing the delegates and the Head Chair will have a gavel (the hammer thing) to bang on the table to announce time and whatnot.

placard – the big sign that has your country name on it, and you raise it (don't raise your hand!) to make motions, be called on by the chair, etc.

motion—a proposal of some sort, to initiate any actions in a conference. A delegate will make a motion and the chair will either consider it or “rule it dilatory”, meaning that it would be a waste of time. Motions include opening debate, closing debate, etc.

“present” – when calling attendance in the beginning the delegate can say “present”. This does not cause the delegate to have an obligation to vote in the end.

“present and voting” – if the delegate says “present and voting” they MUST vote in voting bloc (see below, “voting bloc”).

open debate – A motion to open debate opens, well, debate, discussion, etc. “Motion to open debate.”

close debate – a motion to close debate basically ends the conference, or at least, the discussion part of it. After debate is closed there will generally be voting.

adjourn – the conference is closed, so delegates can leave for lunch, or go home, etc.

general debate— a form of discussion where all the delegates go up and talk in general terms. They do not go into their country's policies or their own ideas for the issue but only talk about the general issue, its history etc. At some conferences there is no need for general debate and we move straight into substantive.

substantive debate—Substantive debate is when the delegates actually talk about their policies. The motion would go something like “Motion to enter substantive debate”.

speaker's list—There would be a motion to open the speaker's list. After this, countries sign up for the list by raising their placards; the list is the order in which delegates make speeches.

caucus – the part where the delegates are talking and making speeches; there are various types.

-informal—informal caucus is when people get up from their seats and move around, talk to the other delegates informally, and also when they have the time to form their groups and start formally writing their resolutions.

-formal—formal caucus: speech making, comments, etc

-moderated – a moderated caucus would be similar to a formal caucus in that the delegates are all seated. Sometimes a moderated caucus is called so that the speaker list can be quickly finished if time is running out. In a moderated caucus delegates make speeches—shorter than in formal—and usually there are no comments, or else one, very brief comment.

caucus group—the group that you “hang out with” during informal caucus; the group that shares interests similar to yours, and with whom you talk about policies with, and with whom you write resolution with.

crisis-- sometimes there will be a crisis mid-conference. For example, one conference I went to, I was in a committee discussing the global warming crisis and suddenly we were shown a (badly and obviously dubbed) news report that the Greenland ice caps would all melt and that everything except South and North America would be flooded, what do we do about all the people?! In a crisis, the resolutions you've been working to need to be amended to accommodate the crisis.

resolutions—resolutions are to be typed IN CONFERENCE—usually handwritten first and then typed up and turned in via a USB drive. Each caucus group presents one resolution that all the members of the group has contributed to; each resolution will detail the various solutions and policies that group has come up with and will be voted on. There is a very specific format for resolutions, which we will teach.

signatories—delegates that are not part of your caucus group, but who add their name as a “signatory” meaning they approve of the resolution. A certain amount of signatories is required for a resolution to be considered valid and to pass.

presenting resolutions—only a small group within the large caucus group will actually go up and present the resolution. The resolution will usually be projected via the chair's computer onto a large screen so that the words are blown up. The large caucus group has, say, 15 members, and then maybe 3-5 members would go up to present. Ask the committee chair what fraction of the caucus group is allowed to go up and present.

voting bloc—in voting bloc, no one is allowed to enter or leave the room. Delegates vote on the resolutions (this is after they have been presented). When you vote, you can vote against a resolution, vote for, or abstain from voting—in which case you don't vote at all.

speeches after voting bloc – people who make speeches to argue for and against moving out of voting bloc. The number is two to four delegates, this varies from what I've seen. So, one conference might only have one delegate speak for and one for against, but another might have two delegates for and two delegates against.

comments – comments are important. Delegates settle upon a specific amount of time and how many comments there can be after a speech. After one delegate has made a speech other delegates will comment on that speech, pointing out flaws, or agreeing, or bringing up questions, etc.

questions—after resolutions are presented, delegates can ask questions about the resolution; either to poke holes in it or to clarify before they vote.

decorum – the chair will bang the gavel and say “Decorum, delegates” if, during informal caucus, they are being too rowdy.

notes –during moderated or formal caucus, people can pass notes to other delegates to continue discussing issues not resolved in informal caucus, or to ask them to join their caucus group, or anything (that is related to the topic) really.

page – the page is the person in the committee that handles your notes. Sometimes there is no page and you will have to pass the note yourself, by handing it to another person who will give it to another person, etc.

types of awards – There are a few types of awards an MUN delegate can get at the end of a conference. The Research Award is for delegates who have submitted particularly excellent position papers. Usually, a position paper has to be turned in by a certain deadline to get this award. The Commendation is an award that is given to a few delegates who have done well in being consistent to their country, showing leadership, etc. (I used to think it was a pity award called “Accommodation”). Outstanding is a step above a commendation and is given to fewer delegates. Best Delegate is given to one delegate per committee (they get a gavel!) for being the, well, BEST.

national sovereignty—this is one of those terms that comes up a lot in policies, speeches, etc. It means that each nation has a right to govern themselves without so called “assistance” or intrusion from other nations; countries have to respect each other's right to national sovereignty.

points- you can get points for speeches, your position paper, comments, how you comport yourself in informal caucus, etc. You get more points for a good speech than for a bad speech, and so on. Those delegates with the most points will win awards like “Commendation” , but the Research Award is dependent only on the position paper, though, not on what happens in the conference.