

What is Model United Nations?

Model United Nations (MUN) is a learning experience in which students simulate the works of the United Nations. Participants like you become delegates of the 193 Member States of the United Nations (UN) and they **debate** pre-set topics. In their roles as delegates, students represent the countries' policies realistically. Effective Model UN delegates **“stay in character”**. In other words, delegates do not present their personal opinions, beliefs, and ideas. For this reason, delegates do not use “I statements” in their papers and speeches. In fact, these personal statements are –using the committee’s language - out of order in the debates. Typically, well prepared delegates do extensive research before they participate in Model UN conferences, so they can play their roles not as individuals but as representatives of their assigned countries.



Think about Model United Nations as a very serious play in which you, depending on the committee that you will be part of, have been given the role of an ambassador, cultural attaché, special envoy, negotiator or environmental expert from a country like Ghana, Italy or Mexico. Your script is **based on the political realities of the government** you represent, and the **international commitments that your country must honor**; your “lines” should reflect at all times the international **conventions, treaties, declarations, and protocols** that your country has signed and **ratified**. If you want to be a Model UN star, **you must act consistent with the international laws that your country has accepted**.

Each actress and actor in this very special Model UN production must **remain true** to her or his country's script. Since each delegate has to **stay in character**, you are probably asking yourself what happens when the different actors whose countries have opposing points of view have to reach agreements and find collective solutions after a discussion. Well, they have a challenge: they need to stick to their scripts while they compromise with other delegates to address the issues under discussion. Directed by the **committee chair** or **dais**, the performance includes opportunities for the delegates to give short and formal speeches. These short speeches are part of the **formal debate**. The delegates can vote to suspend the formal debate to have smaller group interactions. In these suspensions, delegates can work together without the dais' supervision. These suspensions of the collective and formal debate are called **unmoderated caucuses**.



You might be wondering why MUM will be an interesting experience for you. That is an important question. Most of us asked ourselves that question when we participated in our first conference. **Why should you participate in a MUN conference?** We encourage you to participate in MUN because it is an excellent **experiential learning** opportunity: you will **learn by doing** the very same things that diplomats, foreign service representatives, and peacekeepers do in and for the United Nations.

"A nation's greatness is measured by how it treats its weakest members" (Mahatma Gandhi)

You will grapple with world issues and work toward real solutions through **resolutions** that address the **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals** adopted by world leaders in 2015.



In your specific committee, you will learn about such issues as poverty, gender equality, world hunger, human rights, and environmental sustainability, but also you will have the opportunity to:

1. Become an **expert** on a topic
2. Strengthen your **public speaking, writing, and leadership skills**
3. Hone your **critical thinking skills** (perspective taking, problem solving)
4. Work in **culturally diverse teams**
5. Learn about the world and **broaden** your **perspective**



What happens before a Model UN Conference?

No prior experience is necessary for a MUN conference, but preparation is a must. Will you have access to materials before the conference so you can prepare for it? Yes, you can read a document called **Background Guide**, which can be defined as a **study guide** with detailed explanations, guiding questions, and key ideas about the issues that will be under discussion in the different committees. The Background Guide will also provide you a very complete **description** of your committee. In the background guide, you will find the specific **mandate** (functions or responsibilities of it), composition of it, its **voting rules** and the **key documents** (conventions, treaties, protocols, and resolutions) associated with the UN body that is mimicked in the committee.

In addition to the knowledge that you get from reading the Background Guide, before the day of the conference, you must, first, become knowledgeable about the country that you will represent. Second, you should have a clear understanding of the committee topics. To understand both the country and its issues, as a proactive delegate, you should do research. This means that you should get a clear idea of the **official opinion** of the government of your assigned country **about** the **committee topics**. You should also be able to locate your country (and its neighbors) in the world map, describe its type of government, cite key population facts, mention its key issues and proposed solutions to address them. You should also do research about the relationship of your countries with other nations.

Is it enough just to read the Background Guide? No! Should you do more research before you attend the conference? Absolutely! You should do more! Read the conference materials carefully, **watch the news daily**, visit official websites regularly, visit the library eventually, and talk to knowledgeable people strategically as you learn as much as you can about the country that you have been assigned.

Can you think of other things that you can do to prepare for MUN? If your answer is **YES**, write in the space provided bellow:

Did you mention creating a research binder or dossier in your list? If not, don't worry. This is our recommendation: **collect key documents (resolutions, conventions, maps, fact sheets, and other useful materials. Organize them in a binder.** It is totally acceptable to bring these support materials to the conference. You can check them during the unmoderated caucuses. You can share these documents with the other delegates too.



More strategically, all of this information will help you to write your position paper. A **position paper** is a summary of your research on your assigned country. While you are getting ready for the conference, it is essential to classify and to determine the most important pieces of information that you should bring with you. This is an excellent opportunity to learn to evaluate the quality and importance of different pieces of information. It can also be helpful to use a strategy proposed by the *National High School Model United Nations (NHSMUN)** called **GREET** to do your research.

Government

What type of **political system** does your country have? Is it a **monarchy**? Is it a **dictatorship**? Is it a **theocracy**? Is it a **democracy** (presidential or parliamentary)? What is the **size** of the government? How is **power distributed**? (federations, confederations, different levels (**state, federal, county** or **municipal** governments)). Is the **power concentrated** in one the **government branches**? The answers to these questions will give you a clear idea of the **power** that the country's **government** has over **its citizens** in its territory and abroad.

Does the government give freedom to its citizens? Does it restrain them? What kind of foreign policy (relationship with other countries) does it promote?

Governments comprise the legal and political mechanisms that regulate the relationships of the society. They also have the authority to make decisions and create policies to achieve collective goals and to maintain the order and peace. In addition, depending on their nature, governments reinforce certain ideas and goals through civic education, official programs, ceremonies, and traditions.

Finally, do religious leaders participate in the government? Does the country separate religion and politics? Does the government include the participation of tribal representatives or the contributions of different ethnic groups?

Religion

Did you notice that one of the types of government mentioned in the previous section is a **theocracy**? **Theocratic governments** are political systems in which the authority resides in **officials** who are considered **divinely guided**. In a theocratic system, government leaders are members of religious communities or groups. If you want to learn more about this, you can do research about **Iran, Saudi Arabia**, and **the Vatican**. Unlike theocratic governments, other countries have **secular governments**. In secular systems, leaders believe that religion should not be part of the state affairs. In secular societies, there is a separation of church and state.

Environment

The **geography** and the **natural resources** of a country can have a big influence of its social development, economic growth, and stability. Ecological disasters can, for instance, affect the lives of peoples and communities. Human groups can be pushed to flee from challenging **environments**. By contrast, the availability of natural resources can encourage individuals to settle in a territory. **How does geography impact your country?** Is it covered with mountains? Is it a desert? Does it have special ecosystems? Does it have access to water sources? Is it a mediterranean country? Is it constantly threatened by hurricanes or other climatic phenomena?

Ethnicity

The diversity of different groups also influences the policies of a country. As you conduct research, ask yourself: Does my country have different **ethnic groups** in its

territory? Do these groups have different traditions, religions, and cultural practices? Do they speak **different languages** and **dialects**? **Are these ethnically diverse groups recognized or excluded**? Does the government provide specific services according to the diverse needs that these different groups have? How does the country treat **migrants**? What is your country policy in regard to **refugees** and **asylum seekers**?

Trade

Does your country **export** merchandises and services? **Is it a wealthy country**? Does the country **import** most of its **products** and **services**? Does the country support free trade zones? Has the country signed **multilateral commercial agreements**? Does the country have **valuable resources** in the **global economic market** (skilled labor, oil, water, renewable energies, and arable soils)? Does the country isolate itself commercially? **Does it have a strong currency**? Does the country rely on some specific industries (tourism, telecommunications)? Does the country support or oppose to **monopolies**? Does the country have **commercial partners** and **international trade allies**?

What happens during a Model UN conference?



MUN provides you a global classroom. Critical thinking, investigation, diplomacy, and leadership are some of the skills that you will develop during a MUN conference. What will happen during the conference is that **groups of delegates will go to specific rooms assigned to their specific committees; they will select an issue from those listed in the Background Guide and examine it from multiple perspectives**, drawing upon such resources as their respective countries' laws, international treaties, regional conventions, and global protocols.



The debate will be done according to some norms that have been defined for Models UN called **Rules of Procedure**. The ultimate goal of the debates is to write **resolutions**. A resolution is a document with the recommended actions to address the issues discussed. It contains the motivations and supporting laws for the proposed solutions. **Resolutions are written with the contributions of different delegates.**

What will happen during the conference? For example, if you represent Equatorial Guinea specifically in the Security Council, you will go to a room and meet other 14 delegates (**the Security Council has 5 permanent members and 10 elected members**).

Can you label these flags?

(all of these countries are members of the Security Council)



Then, you will take a seat. The chair or dais will proceed to do a **roll call** (call the names of the represented countries) to verify the presence of the different member States, determine if the required number (quorum) of participants has been met, and record the **voting statuses**. The roll call is done in **alphabetical order**. There are two different options to vote: **present** or **present and voting**. The difference of these **voting options** will be discussed later. The chair will open the discussion.

The first question that you will probably hear is: **Are there any points or motions on the floor?** This means that the chair will accept motion (requests) from the delegates to start with the work of the committee. **The first task will be to set the agenda**. Setting the agenda means to define the topic that will be discussed first and which one will be discussed later. The chair will also open the **speakers' list** (record the names of the countries willing to address the committee to share their ideas).

Do these qualities describe the kind of person you are or would like to become? MUN cultivates this type of person:

Prepared	Risk-taker	Thoughtful	Caring
Open-minded	Inquirer	Reflective	Leader
Knowledgeable	Communicative	Proactive	Curious