

RESEARCH

All of MUN begins with research; a process that is truly impossible to perfect. In fact, almost everything you will do in the future will involve research to some degree or another. In this sense, research might at first seem a vast and overwhelming enterprise, but it is in no way out of reach. By giving yourself enough time and the proper resources, you will be able to formulate a solid understanding of your country, the United Nations, and the issues in question. With many aspects involved, however, it is best to focus upon one at a time. After a bit of research, you will begin to see how each area relates to others within a coherent whole.

THE TOPIC SYNOPSIS

The most obvious part of research is often overlooked: reading the topic synopsis! Your Chair has specifically designed the synopsis to provide a baseline understanding of your topics and to streamline the discussions you will be having in committee. Reading the topic synopsis will give you a push in the right direction for the rest of your work. In particular the questions at the end of the topic synopsis will summarize what you ought to be researching in a clear and succinct manner.

YOUR COMMITTEE

Especially if you are just beginning as a delegate, it is essential to understand the United Nations organ itself. Before you can truly take part in MUN, you must have a firm grasp of the body you will be working within. Get to know the UN's structure, its major goals, members, areas of involvement, etc. Once you've developed a cursory understanding of the UN, you can narrow in on your specific committee. It is important that you understand how your committee fits into the UN framework. You should be aware of realistic and unrealistic actions that your specific committee can propose. You should know the extent of your country's power, including what you can and cannot recommend or reasonably demand. In an attempt to model the real UN, you should pass resolutions knowing what is and is not in jurisdiction of your committee.

YOUR COUNTRY

Once you've read the topic synopsis proceed by researching your country's history, policies, and statistics. Knowing basic facts—such as population, resources, the capital, leader, Gross National Product (GNP), trade data (imports and exports), ethnic and religious minorities, and type of government—is fundamental to your research.

Although past history may seem ancient and unnecessary in resolving today and tomorrow's problems, a country's

background and birth is very relative. Be sure to research how exactly your country achieved sovereignty, whether it be peaceful or violent.

But, what if you have trouble finding research on your country? Indeed, sometimes you may be assigned a country, which may not be very politically or economically visible on an international scale. If this describes your assigned country, your best option is to research other countries with similar policies and worldviews—that is, other countries in the same regional bloc. To do this, make use of the classroom globe and find which countries surround your country. Next find which of these neighboring countries share cultural or political perspectives. Voting behaviors of regional organizations of which your nation is a member will also give clarity into the views of your nation. Such knowledge will also come in handy when resolution signing and voting come into play.

YOUR TOPIC

Once a foundation of both your country's and the United Nation's background is established, the next logical step is to examine the topics on the committee agenda. While you may want to jump right into UN documents or newspaper articles, the best place to go is back to the topic synopsis. Again, the topic synopsis will provide you with perhaps your most valuable tools. Not only will it condense and explain the issue, but it will also furnish you with key references. The sources listed in the topic synopsis should become the cornerstone of your research. In a sense, your Chair has already begun your research for you. In fact, you may also want to keep track of your committee blogs to get more information on current news articles on the topic.

Have no fear - you will get to do some researching of your own. The Chair's resources are only the beginning. The next step is to begin checking into recent articles about your topic. Magazines, newspapers, or UN publications will be helpful in providing different perspectives on the issues. It's a good idea to keep a 3x5 index card for each source.

It's also helpful to keep a list of important treaties, key events, civil wars, etc. surrounding your topic. In addition to reading up on the current events involving your topic and country, be sure to follow up on past UN resolutions that have been passed dealing with your topic. Resolutions are wonderful quick references to see what has already been accomplished. Chairs like to see original ideas, not ideas copied off of a resolution, therefore it is helpful to find out what has already been put into action and what still needs to be done.

POLICY

Now that you're becoming more familiar with the topics and your country, it's time to start formulating your country's policy. This is where all of your collected information will start to come together into one whole.

Start by narrowing your search of articles to those involving only your country's or its bloc's area of interest. Try to find connections with the way your country dealt with past events. At this point articles may become repetitive, a good sign of thorough research. Since you are now a well-versed delegate regarding your assigned area, you should be able to begin brainstorming different solutions your country would propose. Here are some questions that will help guide you to a better understanding of your country's policy:

- What past actions has your country taken concerning the issue at hand?
 - If your country is actively involved, are there any improvements on past actions that your country can implement?
 - If your country is not heavily involved, what solutions or ideas does your country have to deal with the issue?
 - Has your Head of State, or similar official from your nation, made a public speech or press release about your topic?
- What goals or initiatives does your country want the committee to work towards?
 - To what extent do your country's goals conflict with the sovereignty and policy of other nation-states?
 - How might these differences be reconciled?
 - What compromises can be offered to get others to support your position?
- To what extent are your country's goals realistic- that is, economically or politically feasible? (If it seems that you might have a difficult time establishing the feasibility of your goals, explain in more detail the steps that can be taken to reach the objective.)
- What role does your country propose other nation-states and international actors play in attempting to deal with the issue?
 - Which specific international actors, that is- countries, transnational corporations, international bodies, NGOs—ought to get involved?
 - Will incentives or penalties be needed to encourage their participation?
- How should the UN (or the organ you are working within) respond and what actions should it take?

NOTEBOOK

With an idea of what and how you should be researching, the next question is how you should organize the newspaper articles, book sources, UN documents, etc. that you have compiled through the course of your researching. The easiest thing to do is to get a three ring binder and make a research notebook that is organized into different categories of information.

SAMPLE NOTEBOOK CONTENT

- Your Nation's CIA World Factbook Page
- General Facts and Commentary
 - Newspaper/ Magazine Articles
 - Book photocopies
 - Website print outs
 - Factsheets and Statistics
- Past UN Actions:
 - UN resolutions
 - UN reports / press releases
 - Website print outs
- Country Past Actions and Solutions
 - Newspaper/Magazine Articles
 - Policy Statements
 - Book photocopies
 - Website print outs

Organizing your research in this way will not only prepare you to write your position paper, it will also enable you to carry all of your work to the conference in a neat and tidy binder, just in case you have to prove something in a hurry to a skeptical delegate.

RESOURCES

The following is a brief list of resources that most MUN delegates use as a starting point in their research. As you become a more experienced delegate you will discover many more valuable sources of information.

WEBSITES

- www.un.org

The official site of the United Nations where past UN resolutions, embassy contact info, general information on UN committees, and much more can be found.

- www.scholar.google.com

If you are exceptionally ambitious, read up on your topics on this website. These articles will be peer-reviewed and published by leading scholars, professors, and researchers who have devoted their lives to studying your topic. Their insights will be invaluable to developing expertise around the nuances surrounding your topic.

- www.pinr.com

An excellent source for information on current select international issues. Topics discussed include economics, disarmament, politics, technology, and law from a realistic perspective.

- www.unog.ch

United Nations sister site in Geneva. This site compliments and goes beyond much of the information found on the official UN site.

- www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook

An excellent source of information on any country's economic, political, and social constitution.

- <http://www.state.gov/index.htm>

The United States' Department of State website. Here you can find professional background information on virtually every policy issue and every nation-state.

- www.embassy.org

Access to contact information and profiles of all nation-states with a mission in Washington, D. C.

PERIODICALS

- UN Chronicle
- The Economist
- The Nation
- The Christian Science Monitor
- The Wall Street Journal
- The New York Times
- The Los Angeles Times
- The San Francisco Chronicle
- Heritage Foundation
- Brookings Institute
- CATO Institute
- Online news sources such as:
 - www.cnn.com
 - news.google.com
 - www.aljazeera.com

BOOKS

- "A Global Agenda: Issues Before the UN General Assembly" (Published annually)
- *Dilemmas of World Politics: International Issues in a Changing World*, edited by John Baylis and N.J. Rengger
- *The United Nations and Changing World Politics*, by David P. Forsythe.
- *Conflict After the Cold War*, edited by Richard K. Bettis

OTHER RESOURCES

- Local University Libraries
- Your Chair via e-mail