

Model United Nations Vocabulary

Abstain -

During a vote on a substantive matter, delegates may abstain rather than vote yes or no. This generally signals that a state does not support the resolution being voted on, but does not oppose it enough to vote no.

Adjourn -

All UN or Model UN sessions end with a vote to adjourn. This means that the debate is suspended until the next meeting. This can be a short time (e.g., overnight) or a long time (until next year's conference).

Agenda -

The order in which the issues before a committee will be discussed. The first duty of a committee following the roll call is usually to set the agenda.

Amendment -

A change to a draft resolution on the floor. Can be of two types: a "friendly amendment" is supported by the original draft resolution's sponsors and is passed automatically, while an "unfriendly amendment" is not supported by the original sponsors and must be voted on by the committee as a whole.

Background guide -

A guide to a topic being discussed in a Model UN committee usually written by conference organizers and distributed to delegates before the conference. The starting point for any research before a Model UN conference.

Binding -

Having legal force in UN member states. Security Council resolutions are binding, as are decisions of the International Court of Justice; resolutions of the General Assembly and Economic and Social Council are not.

Bloc -

A group of countries in a similar geographical region or with a similar opinion on a particular topic.

Caucus -

A break in formal debate in which countries can more easily and informally discuss a topic. There are two types: moderated caucus and unmoderated caucus.

Chair -

A member of the dais that moderates debate, keeps time, rules on points and motions, and enforces the rules of procedure.

Decorum -

The order and respect for others that all delegates at a Model UN conference must exhibit. The Chair will call for decorum when he or she feels that the committee is not being respectful of a speaker, of the dais, or of their roles as ambassadors.

Delegate -

A student acting as a representative of a member state or observer in a Model UN committee.

Delegation -

The entire group of people representing a member state or observer in all committees at a particular Model UN conference.

Draft resolution -

A document that seeks to fix the problems addressed by a Model UN committee. If passed by the committee, the draft resolution will become into a resolution.

Faculty Advisor -

The faculty member in charge of a Model UN team, class or club.

Formal debate -

The "standard" type of debate at a Model UN conference, in which delegates speak for a certain time in an order based on a speakers' list.

Member State -

A country that has ratified the Charter of the United Nations and whose application to join has been accepted by the General Assembly and Security Council. Currently, there are 191 member states. The only internationally recognized state that is not a member state is the Holy See.

Moderator –

Assistant to the Chair

Motion -

A request made by a delegate that the committee as a whole do something. Some motions might be to go into a caucus, to adjourn, to introduce a draft resolution, or to move into voting bloc.

Observer -

A state, national organization, regional organization, or non-governmental organization that is not a member of the UN but participates in its debates. Observers can vote on procedural matters but not substantive matters. An example is the Holy See.

On the floor -

At a Model UN conference, when a working paper or draft resolution is first written, it may not be discussed in debate. After it is approved by the Director and introduced by the committee, it is put "on the floor" and may be discussed.

Operative clause -

The part of a resolution which describes how the UN will address a problem. It begins with an action verb (decides, establishes, recommends, etc.).

Page -

A delegate in a Model UN committee that has volunteered to pass notes from one delegate to another, or from a delegate to the dais, for a short period of time.

Placard -

A piece of cardstock with a country's name on it that a delegate raises in the air to signal to the Chair that he or she wishes to speak.

Point -

A request raised by a delegate for information or for an action relating to that delegate. Examples include a point of order, a point of inquiry, and a point of personal privilege. See our Charts of Rules and Motions.

Preambulatory Clause -

The part of a resolution that describes previous actions taken on the topic and reasons why the resolution is necessary. It begins with a participle or adjective (noting, concerned, regretting, aware of, recalling, etc.).

Procedural -

Having to do with the way a committee is run, as opposed to the topic being discussed. All delegates present must vote on procedural matters and may not abstain.

Resolution -

A document that has been passed by an organ of the UN that aims to address a particular problem or issue. The UN equivalent of a law.

Roll Call -

The first order of business in a Model UN committee, during which the Chair reads aloud the names of each member state in the committee. When a delegate's country's name is called, he or she may respond "present" or "present and voting." A delegate responding "present and voting" may not abstain on a substantive vote.

Rules of Procedure -

The rules by which a Model UN committee is run.

Second -

To agree with a motion being proposed. Many motions must be seconded before they can be brought to a vote.

Signatory -

A country that wishes a draft resolution to be put on the floor and signs the draft resolution to accomplish this. A signatory need not support a resolution; it only wants it to be discussed. Usually, Model UN conferences require some minimum number of Sponsors and signatories for a draft resolution to be approved.

Simple majority -

50% plus one of the number of delegates in a committee. The amount needed to pass most votes.

Speakers' List -

A list that determines the order in which delegates will speak. Whenever a new topic is opened for discussion, the Chair will create a speakers' list by asking all delegates wishing to speak to raise their placards and calling on them one at a time.

Sponsor -

One of the writers of a draft resolution. A friendly amendment can only be created if all sponsors agree.

Substantive -

Having to do with the topic being discussed. A substantive vote is a vote on a draft resolution or amendment already on the floor during voting bloc. Only member states (not observer states or non-governmental organizations) may vote on substantive issues.

Vote -

A time at which delegates indicate whether they do or do not support a proposed action for the committee. There are two types: procedural and substantive.