



RESEARCH

CHAPTER A4

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Introduction

This topic will cover the details on how to conduct research as preparation for your Model UN conferences. Research is a crucial skill prior to a conference, as it will directly impact the quality of your speeches and influence. Research is not something foreign to delegates, even in regards to beginner delegates - however, only experienced delegates are able to maximise the efficiency of their research and use it during the conference. This chapter will introduce you to basic research methods in an Model UN context, equipping you with the skills for both research prior to a conference and during a conference.

This chapter is insufficient for your research process for your Model UN conference. It is recommended that you look at Chapter A5 on how to formulate your country stance with the research methods you have learnt from this chapter.

Research Folder

When preparing for your Model UN conference, it is good to have what is otherwise known as a research folder. This could be either a digital online folder, or an actual physical folder with printed materials – it doesn't matter. What matters is that you have consolidated your files and resources in one place for you to use. Your research folder should contain at least two things – country profile, and links and summaries. You could include items like the research report, your position paper etc. But these are your priority, and you should be developing them as you go.

Country Profile

A job of a country profile is simple, and you can understand more about its creation in the country section or Chapter A5 on stances. However, it should contain details of the country you are representing, some statistics, and understanding of what your country wants. There are different formats you can use in creating a country profile. An example is shown here.

[Country Name]

Population:

Geographical Location:

Direct Neighbours: [countries that are connected by land, you should state the relationships with those nations if possible too]

Social standards: [write a short paragraph for this, perhaps include some relevant statistics to the topic]

Economic standards: [write a short paragraph for this, perhaps include some relevant statistics to the topic, look for major exports and imports, biggest trade partners]



Political situation: [write a short paragraph for this]

Regional organisations: [any regional organisations that your country is part of]

Allies: [do not waste time listing all your allies, find the notable ones]

Enemies: [do not waste time listing all your enemies, find the notable ones]

Actions taken on the topic:

- Use a bullet point method for this
- Just include anything in your research that you found into this list

Stance:

Interesting Facts: [are there any major issues that your nation is currently facing? An actual interesting fact can also be used for ice breaking]

In HMUN councils, you might be requested to write a position paper, which would feel oddly similar to writing a country profile. However, it is still advantageous to write your own country profile as it allows you to see your country's statistics in a way that is simple and understandable to you.

You can always include more sections in your country profile, but always try to ensure relevance. Many schools tend to advise their students in adding statistics like racial distribution or official languages. Though it might be relevant in certain councils and topics, it is not necessary for most of them. Hence, be selective of what you want to include in your research folder.

Links and Summaries

Believe me - this is important. As you give a speech in the conference and list down a niche statistic or a fact, some delegates will struggle to trust you. You insist you are not making up the fact, and that you read it from a trustable source, but they can't seem to take your word for it. At that point in time, you would wish you had saved the link of the article you read. And because you read the MYADP textbook, you did.

But there are a plethora of uses for this. You might need to refer back to certain documents as you debate in the conference, and you cannot afford to spend your council time surfing through the net to find the exact link again. Keeping a record of the links you have read and a small summary of what it said helps you find the link easily again when you need to refer back to it.

However, there should be at least some structure to its organisation. You could just have a huge list of links like a bibliography if that is your preference. However, it is better to sort it into categories such as - statistics, commentaries, academic journals and articles, official documents etc.

Sources of Information

Many that are new to research will first struggle to know what they should be reading. This part will introduce you to the different type of sources that you will find online, and teach you how you can best interpret and utilise those resources.

Research Report

It is an expectation for the chairs in a Model UN conference to produce a research report that is to be published latest two weeks before the conference (larger conferences might publish it even 2 months earlier). The research report is the best starting point for research as it helps you understand the “spirit” of the council.

The Spirit

The spirit is the reason why a council topic is chosen. Many conferences will have broad topics that contain multiple issues, and although it is debatable on which issues are more important, when the council topics were decided by the chairs and/or the secretariat, there was an intent to have a specific discussion. For example - the topic of “rights of protesters” can lead to a political philosophy discussion on the right to dissent and its limitation, a legal debate pertaining to the freedom of assembly, or an economic conversation about the loss of economic activity due to protesters. All these are valid issues - but the research report could be written specifically about the social aspect of the marginalisation of racial groups - and the dissolution of protests is a form of enforcing systemic racism. You can therefore expect the council discussion and the chair to favour discussions around those issues, even though other issues would be equally valid.

You could also identify the spirit of a topic through current affairs. Secretariats and chairs more often than not decide a topic with the intention to educate people on important current affairs. The same topic - “the rights of protesters”, can have a different discussion depending if you were to debate it in a time when the Hong Kong protests were rampant, or when the Black Lives Matter movement was gaining traction. Being able to identify the current affairs and the targeted discussion areas help you focus your research efforts on these aspects.

Basic Understanding

Then there is the simple matter of just reading through the research report. The research report is a chairs’ attempt in simplifying the issue for you. Therefore, it grants delegates an amazing



opportunity to understand the basic knowledge required to get through the council. Read through it.

Branching off

But being able to understand the research report only achieves the bare minimum. The question is therefore - how do we branch off to our own research. Fortunately, there is a standard in most Model UN conferences in how research reports are written.

The most valuable part of a research report is the “key issues” section. Some chairs might use a different label, but most research reports will contain a section as such. The key issues section are the problems that the chair sees that arise from the issue. Therefore, a more nuanced understanding of each specific issue will allow a better understanding on what problems are at hand, and what solutions you need to seek out in your research. If your chairs have added a further reading section, it is also beneficial for you to go through the links and read through them.

News Article

A news article tends to be a delegate’s favourite source of information - but the benefit of it is marginal. News articles report on what occurs in a certain region, and rarely provides any in-depth analysis onto the issue itself. This is not to say that a news article is useless - but that it can only help you understand the problem, but it would not provide much insight into what ideas you can suggest in the council.

Commentaries/Editorials/Opinions

These tend to be part of the same journalism websites. CNN, BBC, SouthChina Morning Post, all have sections for commentaries. Some news websites are more focused on these analytical reports, such as ForeignPolicy, The Economist, The Washington Post etc. These tend to include opinions of experts on a certain issue and their ideas on how to resolve it.

Reading these sources of information poses a challenge and risk. They provide perspective, ideas and arguments. However, if you are unfamiliar with your country’s stance, blindly reading this can have negative effects. Expert opinions do not necessarily reflect a country’s stance on the issue, and their ideas might not necessarily be useful to you. However, it is worth considering the various arguments and perspectives that might be argued during the conference.

Reports

Reports tend to be published by a government or a credible institution. Reports tend to give you primary data and information about a certain topic. Many news articles tend to already filter out complex information, so reports can give you a more thorough understanding of the issue.



Some reports, specifically UN reports, tend to give recommendations on what can be done on the issue. This can be valuable to the ideas you would want to propose in the council.

Some reports might be even more specifically targeted to provide solutions. These are usually called white papers, which aim to inform about an issue and explain the method to resolving it.

Mass Reading

The problem with many MUNers starting off their independent research is their lack of direction when it comes to it. Although we are often told that we need to use credible and nuanced sources for our research, it's more important to first develop a holistic understanding of what we are researching. The first thing to do is to read generally.

Note: Regardless of Model UN conference or not, it should be a habit for you to read generally about these issues. Those who wish to participate in international Model UN conferences and do well should look to be doing at least 30 minutes of reading every day.

Country

Reading up about your country is a simple yet often overlooked part in research. The best way to do a quick research on your country is to create what is known as a country profile. There are certain things you should be keeping an eye out for when reading about your country.

First, the social political context of the nation. Is your nation more conservative or liberal? Are there any strong religious influences in the nation? Look at recent policies and actions on the government, or perhaps read articles specific to how the government of your nation is. Being able to understand your nation's level of social acceptance helps in evaluating what solutions would later on be deemed acceptable by your nation.

Second, the economic situation. In MUN, terms like Less Economically Developing Countries (LEDCs) are thrown around, which are good indicators of your nation's economic situation, but you would need more than that, depending on the topic you have. Some useful indicators might be your country's technological capabilities, what type of jobs the majority of your labour force do, major imports and exports.

Third, the political stability of the nation. Domestic political conflicts in a nation helps identify the controversial issues. It might be that your country is an authoritarian state, and that comes with its own issues. But beyond that, is the international relations your nation has. You need to look out for regional bodies that your country may be part of, any strong allies or enemies, as this will be extremely helpful in the council, and assist in adhering to your foreign policy.



One of the best places to read up on your country as a starting point is by searching up BBC Country Profile [Country Name]. The official website has some outdated links so it's easier to just google it directly. It will give you a brief understanding of your country. An alternate resource that you should use for research on your country is the YouTube channel [Caspian Report](#). It breaks down important geopolitical relationships in different regions, so watch the videos that are relevant to your nation. Another possible source, but has an obvious American bias, is the [World Factbook](#) by the CIA.

Council

There is a clear distinction between a good delegate and an average delegate based on their knowledge of their council and the UN. An understanding of the mandate of the council allows you to understand what actions can be taken by the council, what resources does the council have, and therefore what solutions are practical.

Usually, the research report provides a rather simple explanation of the mandate of the council you are part of. You can find a better explanation on your own specific UN council website. Read through the website, look at their structures, their initiatives, their program of work etc. You should take note of those that you feel that are relevant, as these could possibly contribute to the solutions you propose in writing your resolution.

Beyond your council, it is also worth researching other relevant organisations that might relate to your topic. You would return to this as you research your topic, as you might find relevant regional bodies or UN organisations that could play a role.

Topic

Reading up on the topic is a difficult one - specifically when it comes to reading generally. I would suggest allocating one or two days in which you just google up your topic and read up any relevant articles and links that capture your interest. The goal here is not nuanced research but to build up a general understanding of what this topic encompasses. This is a reasonable time for you to use resources like Britannica or Wikipedia, or perhaps some Al Jazeera or Vox video.

After a general understanding, you should be starting to develop an idea of what key events and documents exist. Begin by extending your research to those precedencies. You should develop a more holistic opinion on what these precedencies are, either by reading about them in greater detail or the official documents itself.

Breaking Down a Topic to Issues

This is where we start swaying away from mass topical research to a specialised area of study. At this point, you should have developed a general understanding to begin breaking down the topic into specific issues, the same way your research report did, by having key issues.

How do we identify these key issues? There are three methods - problem-based identification, cause-based identification, and solution-based identification. Examples are shown in relation to climate change.

Problem-based	Cause-based	Solution-based
What are the problems that arise from the topic?	What are the causes of the main issue?	What are the solutions to the main issue?
The rising sea levels is a problem that arise from climate change	Excessive CO2 release from factories causes climate change and can become an issue for discussion	The use of a carbon tax would be a solution for climate change

Problem-Based Issue

Identifying a problem-based issue is beneficial for early stages of debate and also research, since this is what most media outlets will be reporting about. It is likely that you would be able to easily list down a multitude of problems from the get-go.

From then on, you would need to look at specific solutions in regards to these issues. You will be looking at more nuanced solutions, and it's recommended that you begin using more academic resources. At a high school level, it might be difficult to read academically complex language, but you should attempt to discern the critique and arguments they use regarding their policies.

But a more frequent problem comes at the front of paywalls, as many students are unable to access journal articles because it requires a payment from websites that most institutions would not have a subscription to. In this scenario, a method to bypass this is through copying the DOI number and using SciHub, with simple tutorials on YouTube on how to do so. However, MYADP does not endorse illegal methods of obtaining academic information.

When looking for journal articles, websites that you could possibly use are Jstor, Springer, or ScienceDirect. Most of these websites contain a sufficient amount of information for effective research.



Cause-Based Issue

Cause-based issues are difficult to discuss. At the fundamental level, it is probably the most important thing that should be talked about, since its resolution would lead to the solution of the problem. However, it is also the most complex to be solved.

In a rather counter-intuitive method, the first thing you should do when researching cause-based issues is to look at the areas of contention. These will be the most important part of the debate in the council. Hence, you need to identify why we have not been able to solve the cause in the real world, and what are the arguments from both sides. For example - the cause of economic recession is due to a deflating economy. The reason why we cannot inflate our economy is because there is an ideological clash between whether we should use a neoclassical approach or a Keynesian approach.

When researching these in detail, it is probably worth considering which country would likely oppose your ideas too. Look into the arguments that will be made during the discussion and plan ahead for it.

Solution-Based Issue

A solution-based issue tends to come hand-in-hand with a problem-based issue. However, it looks into more details of the policy such as how to implement it. The effectiveness of your solution-based issue depends on your knowledge of the council and the past actions that have been taken on the specific topic.

A method of researching solution-based issues is to actually first understand what solutions currently exist. Model UN is more or less about improving upon the policies that currently exist, rather than establishing new ones. Hence, you should read up on resolutions that have been implemented on this topic, conventions that might have been signed, or relevant treaties.

Research in a Conference

Clearly, it is impossible to research everything in a topic, and there will come certain instances that someone might bring up a treaty you are unfamiliar with, or an issue you never thought about. This is fine, and is expected in a Model UN conference.

At this point, you have a limited time to understand the issue, which means you do not have time to be reading complicated academic articles about it or discerning the original treaty text. You should be looking for political commentary that is in line with your country's stance. A political commentary summarises the basic arguments and issues for your side, providing you with an opportunity to give a short speech about it. Political commentaries can be found from media outlets like ForeignPolicy, NYTimes, or The Economist.