

JOURNALISM COMMITTEE

BACKGROUND GUIDE

I. LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

Dear Journalists,

Welcome to the Journalism Committee.

This committee will work differently from most committees at the conference. There is no agenda for the Journalism Committee itself, and there will be no substantive debate within it. Your work will take place inside the other committee rooms.

Each journalist will be assigned a committee to cover. From the beginning of committee proceedings, you will observe its debate, follow negotiations, speak to delegates, attend press conferences and produce written coverage of what takes place. Your role is not to participate in the debate or represent a country. You are there to report on it.

That requires more than taking down speeches.

A good journalist should be able to tell the difference between a routine statement and an important development. A bloc changing its position may matter more than a dramatic speech. A delegate quietly abandoning a demand during negotiations may be more consequential than several minutes of formal rhetoric. A contradiction between what a delegation says publicly and what it supports in a draft document may itself become the story.

Sometimes the most important question will be what happened. At other times, it will be why it happened, whether a claim is true, or what a complicated development actually means.

You are therefore expected to approach your assigned committee with curiosity and judgment. Listen carefully, notice shifts in the room, ask questions when you get the opportunity, and decide what deserves to be communicated to a reader outside it.

This guide explains how the committee will function and the principal forms of journalism you may produce during the conference. It is intended to orient your work, not dictate every story you should write. The best journalism will still depend on what you notice once committee begins.

We look forward to reading your work.

II. INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE

Unlike conventional MUN committees, Journalism does not have an agenda of its own.

Journalists will instead be assigned to other committees at the conference. Your assigned committee is where you will spend most of your committee time. You are expected to follow its proceedings from the beginning rather than arrive only when a major development has already occurred.

This distinction matters. A journalist who enters committee midway through a disagreement may hear two delegates accusing one another without understanding what produced the dispute. Someone who has followed proceedings from the beginning will understand the earlier speeches, failed negotiations and shifting alliances that give those statements meaning.

You should therefore familiarise yourself with the background guide and agenda of the committee you have been assigned before the conference begins. You do not need the level of country-specific preparation expected from a delegate, but you should understand the issue well enough to recognise when an argument is important, questionable or inconsistent with what has already happened.

Journalists remain observers.

You may not intervene in formal debate, participate in caucusing as though you were a delegate, assist blocs with draft resolutions or other committee documents, or influence negotiations on behalf of a particular side. You may, however, approach delegates for comments or interviews when committee procedure permits.

Your relationship with delegates should also remain professional. A journalist will naturally spend more time speaking to certain delegates than others, particularly those who are central to negotiations. Access, however, should not become allegiance. Your job is not to help a bloc communicate its message more effectively or to reward delegates who give you interviews with favourable coverage.

Your coverage should reflect what actually happens in the room.

Statements made by delegates should be attributed to them. Allegations should not be rewritten as established fact simply because they were made confidently in committee. Quotes should remain faithful to what was said. Analysis should be distinguished from reporting, and opinion should be clearly presented as opinion.

The purpose is simple: by the end of the conference, someone who was not present in the room should be able to understand what happened by reading your work.

III. COVERING YOUR ASSIGNED COMMITTEE

You are not expected to document every speech.

Trying to produce a transcript of committee will usually leave you with pages of notes and very little journalism. Formal debate can involve dozens of interventions over the same subject. Your task is to identify which of those interventions actually change the story.

Pay attention to developments that alter the direction of debate, reveal something about the people and blocs involved, or expose a disagreement that was not previously visible.

This may include the creation or collapse of a major bloc, an unexpected change in a delegation's position, competing draft resolutions, important amendments, unusually consequential speeches, factual disputes, disagreements within an apparent alliance, crisis updates, failed negotiations, procedural manoeuvres or statements that delegates later struggle to defend.

The significance of a development may also depend on context. A country supporting a proposal is not necessarily surprising. The same country supporting that proposal after publicly rejecting it two hours earlier may be.

For that reason, your notes should allow you to reconstruct the progression of debate rather than simply list isolated quotations.

Record names and delegations when a statement may later be quoted. Note when major developments occur. Keep track of the positions of important blocs and how those positions change. If a delegate makes a factual claim that seems central to their argument, write it down precisely enough that you can later verify it.

You should also speak to delegates.

Committee speeches tell you what a delegate wants the entire room to hear. An interview can tell you why they adopted a position, what compromises they may accept, what they think of an opposing proposal, or how they respond to criticism.

Good reporting will usually combine both.

Do not hesitate to ask delegates to clarify what they mean. If two countries describe the same negotiation completely differently, speak to both. If a delegate announces a dramatic policy but cannot explain how it would work, that is relevant. If a bloc claims broad support, determine whether the supposed supporters actually agree.

Your role is not merely to record the narrative committee produces about itself. It is to examine that narrative.

IV. FORMS OF DOCUMENTATION

Journalists may work across five principal formats during the conference. Each serves a different purpose and tests a different part of journalistic work.

The Executive Board may assign particular formats, establish submission requirements, or approve pitches depending on what is happening in your committee. Not every development belongs in the same form. A breaking diplomatic shift may suit a news article. A repeated factual claim may deserve a fact-check. A complicated legal concept may be better served by an explainer.

Knowing what form a story should take is itself part of the work.

1. News Article

The news article is the standard form of committee reporting.

It should be built around a specific development rather than a summary of the entire session. Before you begin writing, you should be able to answer a simple question: what is the story?

Your opening should tell the reader what happened and why it deserves attention. The rest of the article should provide the context necessary to understand the development, include relevant statements from delegates, and explain its implications for the direction of committee.

A strong article might cover the emergence of a new coalition, the failure of negotiations, a controversial amendment, an unexpected policy reversal, the release of a major working paper, a decisive vote or a confrontation between important delegations.

The order in which events occurred is not always the best order in which to write them. Begin with what matters most.

A weak report may read:

“Committee began with a moderated caucus. France spoke first. China then spoke. The United States responded. After this, another moderated caucus took place.”

A news article should instead ask what changed because of those exchanges.

Use quotations selectively. A quote should reveal something important, memorable or distinctive. There is little value in quoting a delegate merely to repeat information you have already paraphrased.

Above all, write it as journalism, not as minutes of proceedings.

2. Interview

An interview allows you to examine a delegate's position in greater depth than formal committee usually permits.

Choose your subject for a reason. They may lead an important bloc, have introduced a controversial proposal, represent a state central to the agenda, be at the centre of a dispute or simply have made an argument worth examining further.

Prepare before approaching them.

Your questions should come from what you have observed rather than from a generic list that could be asked of any delegate. If they supported a proposal after previously opposing it, ask what changed. If their bloc rejected another draft, ask which provision was unacceptable. If they make a broad allegation, ask what evidence supports it.

Avoid questions that simply allow delegates to repeat their opening speeches.

Questions such as "What is your country's position on this agenda?" may sometimes be useful as a starting point, but they rarely produce the most interesting material. Questions about choices, contradictions, negotiations and consequences usually do.

Listen carefully to the answer. Interviews are conversations, not questionnaires. If a delegate says something unexpected, pursue it. A good follow-up question may produce more useful material than everything you prepared beforehand.

The final submission may take the form of an edited question-and-answer transcript. Minor repetition or verbal clutter may be removed for clarity, but the substance and meaning of the delegate's answer must remain intact.

Never invent, strengthen or rewrite a response merely because the edited version sounds better.

3. Fact-Check

MUN committees produce a large number of factual claims. Some deserve checking.

A fact-check should identify one specific and consequential claim made during debate, establish exactly what was claimed, examine reliable evidence and reach a clear conclusion about whether the claim holds up.

The purpose is not to catch delegates making minor mistakes or turn the format into a collection of technicalities. Choose claims that matter to the argument being made.

If a delegation bases a policy proposal on a statistic, treaty provision, historical event, legal obligation or allegation about another state, that may be worth examining.

The wording of the original claim matters. There is an important difference between checking what a delegate actually said and checking a stronger version of their argument that is easier to disprove.

A simple structure works well:

The Claim: What exactly was said, and by whom?

The Evidence: What do reliable sources establish?

The Verdict: Is the claim accurate, misleading, unsupported or false?

The Context: Is there additional information the reader needs in order to understand why the issue matters?

A good fact-check does not begin with the intention of proving someone wrong. Begin with the claim and follow the evidence where it leads.

4. Explainer

An explainer helps a reader understand something that keeps appearing in committee.

MUN debate frequently assumes a level of background knowledge that an ordinary reader may not have. Delegates may refer casually to treaty provisions, military doctrines, institutions, legal principles or historical disputes that are central to understanding the conversation but never fully explained in committee.

That is where the explainer becomes useful.

Depending on the committee, this could mean explaining how a Security Council veto works, what non-refoulement requires, why two states dispute a particular territory, what a treaty actually permits, how sanctions operate, why a specific organisation matters, or why a technical term has become central to negotiations.

An explainer should do more than define a term.

If your entire piece can be replaced by a dictionary entry, it probably does not explain enough. Give the reader the background, the mechanism and the reason the issue matters to what is happening in committee.

You may use examples from committee to make the issue clearer, but the focus should remain on understanding the subject rather than evaluating one delegate.

A strong explainer allows someone with no prior knowledge of the agenda to return to the debate and understand it better.

5. Editorial / Opinion Piece

An editorial is the one principal format in which the writer may openly argue a position.

You may assess the direction of the committee, criticise a proposal, defend an approach, examine the conduct of a bloc or make a broader argument based on what you have observed.

Opinion does not mean evidence becomes optional.

A strong editorial should still draw on developments in committee, relevant research and clear reasoning. The difference is that the writer is now permitted to reach and defend a judgment rather than simply report competing positions.

An editorial might argue that a committee is avoiding the most important part of its agenda, that a proposed resolution solves the wrong problem, that a particular bloc has successfully reshaped negotiations, or that delegates are relying on a false assumption that deserves greater scrutiny.

The strongest editorials usually emerge from something specific that happened in committee.

Avoid beginning with a broad opinion about the agenda that you could have written before the conference even started. Your position should respond to the committee you have actually watched.

It should also be clearly distinguishable from straight reporting. Do not insert personal judgments into a news article and later describe them as reporting. If you are making an argument, own it and make the case properly.

V. PRESS CONFERENCES

Press conferences are where journalists have the opportunity to question delegates directly before a wider audience.

They should not be treated as opportunities to ask random difficult questions simply to place a delegate under pressure.

Prepare from your notes.

A good press conference question should come from something the delegate or bloc has actually done or said. You may ask them to explain an inconsistency, defend a proposal, clarify an allegation, justify a compromise or state what they intend to do next.

Specific questions are generally stronger than broad ones.

Instead of asking, “Why does your country support this resolution?”, you may be able to ask why the delegation supported a particular clause despite rejecting a similar proposal earlier. Instead of asking whether a bloc believes its plan is realistic, ask how it intends to implement the provision that has attracted criticism from other delegates.

Questions may be difficult when the facts justify difficult questions. They should not be difficult merely for spectacle.

Listen to the answer.

If a delegate avoids the substance of the question, a follow-up may be more useful than immediately moving on to something unrelated. If their answer introduces a new factual claim, note it. If they contradict an earlier statement, that may itself become relevant to later coverage.

Press conferences are therefore not separate from your journalism. They are another reporting opportunity.

An answer may clarify an existing story, weaken it, contradict something said earlier in committee or produce an entirely new one.

VI. WHAT THE CONFERENCE SHOULD LOOK LIKE FOR YOU

For most of the conference, Journalism will not operate as a room full of delegates waiting for its own moderated caucus.

You will begin with your assigned committee and follow it as its debate develops. You will take notes, observe negotiations where permitted, speak to delegates when appropriate, identify stories and work on your documentation.

At designated points, journalists may return to the Journalism Executive Board for submissions, editorial discussions, assignments, feedback or preparation for press conferences.

Use the Executive Board as editors, not as people who must discover every story for you.

You are encouraged to pitch ideas when you notice something worth covering. If an unexpected disagreement has emerged, tell us. If you think a delegate's claim deserves checking, propose a fact-check. If committee repeatedly refers to a concept nobody seems to be explaining clearly, that may be your explainer.

You do not need to wait for the Executive Board to tell you that an important story is happening in front of you.

At the same time, not every dramatic moment deserves documentation. Part of journalism is selection. You will have limited time. Choose the stories that best explain what is happening in the committee you have been assigned to cover.

The objective is not to produce the greatest possible number of submissions.

It is to produce work worth reading.

By the end of the conference, your journalism should leave behind more than a record of who spoke and what documents passed. It should show how the debate developed, what arguments mattered, what claims survived scrutiny, where delegates disagreed, and why the decisions made in those rooms were significant.

Someone who never entered your assigned committee should be able to read your work and understand its story.

That is the job.