

## Short-Form Model United Nations

So, you want to try an MUN discussion group in your school or college but don't have time to learn all the rules of the classic version? This should help.

### Ingredients

- ✓ Some interested pupils
- ✓ Information about a global issue that interests your pupils
- ✓ Some scrap paper
- ✓ 30 minutes

### Recipe for success

1. Appoint a chair – this will ideally be a more confident pupil. A co-chair (see below) is useful, too. Appoint a secretary to ensure that clause and amendments are visible to all.
2. Choose a topic which interests the pupils, and is accessible, and put it up on the board/screen eg The Issue of the Amazon Rainforest or The Issue of the Right to Protest. Popular MUN committees cover Disarmament, the Economy, Human Rights, Politics and much more – the key is to find a topic which is of interest *and* allows a good range of views.
3. Pupils select their countries and write their country name clearly on a piece of paper – in my school we fold these into triangles to sit on desks and call them 'Toblerones'! Adding a flag is optional. These help the chair identify speakers and help with voting.
4. The chair invites clauses which will address the problem. **Allow time for research/reading/reflection.**

Let's say the issue is the right to protest, and pupils have selected a range of countries likely to have quite different views on this including China, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, the USA, Nigeria and Sweden. The chair selects Sweden's clause:

*The UN recognises the right of all people to protest against their government if they choose to do so. This is contained in their Declaration of Human Rights. Following recent protests in Hong Kong against China's plans to extradite criminals to the mainland, Sweden urges all countries to agree to let their peoples have freedom of expression.*

So, 2-3 sentences will suffice, containing the gist of a solution to the problem. The Secretary puts this on the board/screen so that all can see it throughout the debate. Notice that for Short-Form MUN I'm deliberately avoiding the quite strict terminology protocols common to 'classic' MUN which can be initially off-putting to pupils; these can readily be incorporated as confidence grows.

5. The chair invites the delegate from Sweden to make a short speech in **support** of their clause.
6. At the end of the speech, the chair invites **Points of Information** from the floor. 'Are there any delegates wishing to raise points of information to the speaker? If so, please raise your hands now.' Pupils put up hands/Toblerones and the chair chooses a pupil: he/she stands up (and remains standing for Sweden's reply) and either eg:
  - ✓ Asks for clarification about a point, perhaps reflecting support for Sweden's position or

- ✓ Challenges Sweden – perhaps China argues that there is no explicit ‘right to protest’ as such in the Declaration of Human Rights and objects to being singled out for United Nations interference in its sovereign powers.
7. After a range of Points of Information have been raised, the chair invites delegates wishing to **oppose** the clause to raise their hands and chooses one of their number to make a short speech outlining their opposition. Then Points of Information are raised as above.
  8. At the end of any speech or Point of Information, any delegate can raise a **Point of Order** with the chair. This happens when a delegate feels that some offence has been caused to their country, or when information quoted by a speaker is open to challenge. *‘Point of Order. Is it in order for the delegate from China to refer to Sweden as a third-rate power which has only ever produced Abba?’* The chair will then adjudicate: in this case, she judges that this is not in order and requests that China withdraws its remarks. Notice that it is the custom for delegates always to refer to themselves in the third person. This soon becomes a habit.
  9. At any point the chair can ask for **amendments** to the clause under consideration. Remember that the aim is to secure a clause which countries can agree on: success at MUN lies in getting a clause or a resolution passed. The procedure for an amendment is identical to the above. Let’s say that the South Africa delegate, mindful of China’s objections, proposes: *‘Strike the first sentence and replace with: ‘The UN recognises everyone’s rights to freedom of opinion and expression.’* Again there is a quick speech by South Africa in support, and any delegate wishing to oppose the amendment as worthless or for any reason can speak against. A vote is taken **JUST ON THIS AMENDMENT**. Delegates **MUST** vote in favour or against an amendment – they cannot abstain (choose not to express a preference). If the amendment passes it is added to the clause; if not, the clause proceeds to be voted on in its unchanged state.
  10. Voting takes place **ON THE RESOLUTION AS A WHOLE**: delegates raise their hands/Toblerones to vote in favour, or against – or they **MAY** abstain in a vote on a clause or resolution. The co-chair and secretary will be useful in helping to count votes/ensure fair voting! To reiterate, success in MUN is by passing the strongest and most informed clause with the most support possible. Easier said than done...

A few other relevant points of interest:

- a) Bigger countries have no advantage in MUN. The P5 Permanent Members (China, USA, Britain, France and Russia) have veto powers in the Security Council and usually comprise strong delegations of more experienced delegates in school MUN assemblies, but in practice within a school’s typical MUN lunchtime or after school sessions pupils gain a lot from representing a range of countries with very different political and economic circumstances.

- b) Knowledge really is power in MUN. Bluster and a scant regard for facts may characterise all too many of our current politicians but in school MUN knowing a lot about a country and researching as thoroughly, and above all as empathetically as possible its position on key issues is essential. Clearly there is not much time for this within Short-Form MUN but as familiarity with procedures grows the process speeds up. Your school will have its own policy on what can be accessed and how, whether via iPads, laptops, mobile phones or a newspaper article or two.
  
- c) Notice what you are doing as a teacher throughout the session. Having helped to set up the first one or two, your role is to sit at the back of the room and offer a few words of encouragement or support as and when – at the invitation of the chair. MUN is a pupil-led activity. *You don't run it.* In a 'real' MUN two or three sixth formers chair a session which can comprise several hundred students, with teachers listening at the back or even, shock horror, reading the paper or checking email.
  
- d) Pupils can of course gain experience in chair/co-chair/secretary roles and rotate these positions. Likewise random country selection will encourage a range of experiences and outlooks.
  
- e) Ideally you would build in time for **lobbying**, too, between Points 4 and 5 above. Sweden needs to persuade let's say Nigeria and the USA to support its clause and scribbles changes as it discusses points in the face of what it can see as stiff competition from Saudi Arabia, which already has China onside with its rival clause to be submitted to the chair. In Short-Form MUN I've ditched specific lobbying time and use the speeches in favour and against as effectively doing the lobbying role.

Finally – **this does all actually work.** We do this two lunchtimes a week in my school with pupils from Year 7-U6, one session for more experienced and one for less experienced pupils, but the great thing about activities such as debating or MUN is that they are great levellers. As abilities and confidence grows and knowledge of MUN develops it is by no means always the older students and the big world powers who 'win'. As I've written about elsewhere, the benefits of MUN are in my view manifold. Pupils take to it quickly – not in every case, but in many. They become dauntingly good at it. And then, who knows?