



North American Invitational Model United Nations

RESEARCH GUIDE

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INTRODUCTORY INFORMATION

Research is one of the most important components of preparing for a Model UN committee— delegates should dive deeply into the educational component of the committee simulation, learning about their position and the situation they have been tasked with solving collaboratively and diplomatically.

While conducting research, remember that your primary goal is to represent your country or position as realistically as possible. Keep in mind that you will be representing your position's views and opinions and not your own! Even if you find yourself personally disagreeing with your country or character's policies, it is your responsibility as a delegate to portray them as faithfully as possible. Through your research, you should build a strong base of knowledge about your position, the topics at hand, and the committee setting where these will be discussed. This involves investigating the ideas presented in the Background Guide, but also examining further related, tangential, and underlying situations and causes that are relevant to a holistic and comprehensive understanding of the topics. In committee, your goal is to develop effective solutions— your research should equip you with a deep enough understanding to craft innovative, creative, and all-encompassing solutions.

We hope this guide will provide introductory yet detailed research guidelines that you can apply to your NAIMUN committees and beyond. We look forward to welcoming you to Washington D.C. in February, and wish you the best of luck in your committee preparations.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION,
contact the Secretary-General of
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STEP 1: UNDERSTANDING THE COMMITTEE SETTING

Understanding the committee setting is essential because the committee exists in the background of your debate about the topics at hand. What does your committee— the organization, institution, cabinet, council, board, or legislature— do in practice? Investigate its foundation, mission and values, primary functions, responsibilities, members, accomplishments and failures, authority, and jurisdiction, charter or foundational document, and anything else you find that helps you understand the nature of the committee itself. Understand the UN system, because the functional rules and regulations governing a certain committee affect the measures it can take. This should inform the type of solutions you ultimately propose. For example, cabinets may pass directives that outline specific domestic strategies in cooperation with regional government leaders that sit on the cabinet itself. In a larger UN-based committee, the organization may pass regulations and guidelines for member states to adapt into domestic frameworks. The General Assembly cannot mandate any international action; it can only make recommendations to the Security Council in the form of resolutions. The Security Council, however, can enact and enforce its rulings. These distinctions are critical as you consider feasibility and implementation with your positions and solutions. Remember to also look into the structure of your committee.

STEP 2: UNDERSTANDING YOUR POSITION ASSIGNMENT

COUNTRY ASSIGNMENTS

For UN-based committees, begin by researching the basic information about your country. The CIA Factbook offers information on the history, people, government, economy, geography, communications, transportation, military, and transnational issues for most countries and dependencies. Think about how factors such as gross domestic product (GDP), demographics, and geography influence your country's foreign policy. Use the Factbook and other such sites to consider the economic, political, social, religious, or ideological motivations that influence your country's foreign policy as a whole and particularly its position on the topics at hand.

COUNTRY ASSIGNMENTS

For crisis and other non-UN committees, make sure you understand your character's position.

- Do they represent a political party, nation, or group of people?
- What job does this person have, and what work have they done in the past?
- What is the function of their job? What type of resources do they have access to? What are their areas of expertise?
- Who are this person's main connections, and what resources, goals, and strategies would they prioritize?

It's extremely important to look at the Background Guides in order to understand your position's portfolio powers, or what it is that you have control over in the context of your committee.

RELATING YOUR POSITION TO THE TOPICS

While these questions are framed for positions that are country assignments, they can be easily adapted for character positions as well. Delegates must not only consider their position's attributes in isolation but also in relation to the committee topics and crisis presented. Further discussion of how to research for specific topics is outlined below.

- If my delegation is presently involved with the crisis, what actions is it taking and for what objectives?
- Has my delegation taken any direct or indirect action in the situation previously?
- How does my delegation evaluate responsibility and blame for harm caused in this situation?
- Is there a power asymmetry my delegation believes affects how solutions should be handled?
- Has my delegation experienced any situation similar? How did the national government respond?
- How does this crisis affect my delegation and my delegation's national and regional interests?

STEP 3: START WITH THE TOPIC ABSTRACT & BACKGROUND GUIDE

Before Background Guides are published, the Topic Abstract should serve as your starting point for research. Read the description of the committee and the background provided on each topic, using the “Questions to Consider” for each of these sections carefully as you begin your research.

Once published, carefully read your committee’s Background Guide! The information in the Background Guide will provide a helpful rubric to guide you through the rest of your research process. Take into account the “Questions to Consider” at the end of the Background Guide, which will highlight important issues that will likely be raised in debate. Having a copy of your background guide to reference in committee is a must.

Your committee’s Background Guide will include headings and subheadings for organizational clarity. Utilize these headings and subheadings to guide key concepts you will explore within your topic. To be successful in committee, you must understand your position’s stance regarding subtopics related to the presenting or current situation as outlined in the Background Guide. The specific details in the Background Guide offer further avenues of exploration and inspiration.

STEP 4: CONDUCTING GENERAL RESEARCH

BLOCS & ALLIANCES

As you read the Background Guide, take note of key points of contention and lines of division explained. Your committee will represent a variety of stances, one of them your own. You must be able to place your stance within the larger picture or opposing and potentially conflicting policy stances. Knowing your friends and your adversaries is extremely useful. Though alliances may shift, form, and break in committee, knowing what other states have a similar perspective can be useful.

Alliances are complex, interconnected, and overlapping. Here is a hypothetical web of alliances. Countries often form alliances— working together for mutual benefit— based on historic or recent agreements, ideological similarities, geographic proximity, mutual enemies, or a number of other factors. Considering which of these factors is most relevant to the topic at hand will reveal which alliances within a web of interconnected and overlapping ties will be most influential in determining blocs. For non-UN committees, which positions have similar political, economic, and/or social background? Which positions work in jobs with similar functions or complementary functions?

Depending on which point of division is being isolated, alliance structures will look different— allies can become adversaries. Points of division are often the same attributes that create alliances. It becomes a point of division, however, when countries differ on a given factor or disagree on a given principle, and this creates a barrier to cooperation. For any one crisis there are many hypothetical points of division, but usually one or two will be most influential in dividing countries into coalitions with like minded goals. Delegates must identify this.

Bloc formation always requires acute attention to the positions of the most relevant actors and most influential actors. In which blocs do these actors fall and where is your delegation positioned relative to them? Countries often form alliances— working together for mutual benefit— based on historic or recent agreements, ideological similarities, geographic proximity, mutual enemies, or a number of other factors. Considering which of these factors is most relevant to the topic at hand will reveal which alliances within a web of interconnected and overlapping ties will be most influential in determining blocs. What nations has your country collaborated with in the past, and what nations, if any, would you refuse to cooperate with? Looking at news headlines, trading partners, and special multilateral agreements and arrangements are good ways to begin.

PREVIOUS ACTION

Has your country previously been a sponsor or signatory to any UN resolutions concerning the topics at hand? (The United Nations' website provides archives on previous resolutions.) What other action, if any, has your country or position taken with respect to the problem? These resolutions could be very useful to reference in council, or to use to garner support for your idea.

SUMMARIZING THE GUIDING GENERAL QUESTIONS

All Model UN topics can be approached with the same basic, overarching set of questions that consider the most important elements and implications of the international crisis at hand. While every topic will require more specific research, the following questions are an excellent starting point for your considerations. Even crises that seemingly center on problems within a singular nation are addressed at the multinational level because of the regional and international consequences and strategic interests that impact crises on a domestic level.

- What is happening presently with this crisis?
- What situational context is necessary to fully understand the causes of this crisis?
- Which international actors are directly or indirectly involved in this crisis?
- How do alliances and relationships within the international system play a role in this crisis?
- What solutions have been tried, and why have these succeeded or failed?
- What does this crisis reveal about larger issues in the international community, and how can these solutions be adapted to work more broadly?
- What national programs have been successfully implemented for facets of this topic? How can they be replicated and scaled? How should failed programs be revised?

STEP 5: CONDUCTING SPECIFIC RESEARCH

Below you will find five categories— Understanding the Issue, Historical Narrative, Political Authority and Legitimacy, Culture and Demographics, and Economic Prosperity. Questions to prompt your research within each specific category are outlined below. These questions can be applied to a topic generally, a specific country, or even adapted to non-state actors important to the committee.

UNDERSTANDING THE ISSUE

- Who are the main actors/parties involved in this situation?
- Which actors are most directly affected by this situation?
- Whose needs are not currently being met? What are these needs?
- Who are the main actors/parties involved in this situation?
- Which actors are most directly affected by this situation?
- Whose needs are not currently being met? What are these needs?
- What are the most important recent developments in this situation?
- What are the short, medium, and long term consequences of this situation for the actors directly involved?
- What are the short, medium, and long term consequences for the region and international community at large?

UNDERSTANDING THE ISSUE

What historical information about the actors involved in this situation helps explain the current situation? Consider regime changes, regime type changes, post-colonial statehood, military coups, foreign intervention or invasion, intrastate (within) or interstate (between) war, and treaties and agreements.

Note: This is not an exhaustive list of factors to investigate, but rather a starting point of necessary considerations. Understanding the legacy of these historical developments in the current situation reflects high levels of critical thinking.

POLITICAL AUTHORITY & LEGITIMACY

- What type of political authority is involved in this situation?
- Is this a democratic or anti-democratic regime?
- When was the most recent free and fair election?
- Is political discourse encouraged or suppressed?
- Is the population satisfied with the national government?
- How strong and effective are political institutions?
- What diplomatic and political relationships are involved in this situation?

Note: Delegates must consider political elements for individual countries involved in the crisis and consider political relationships and developments between countries involved in the crisis. The latter of these illustrates higher levels of critical thinking.

CULTURE & DEMOGRAPHICS

- Are ethnic tensions exacerbating or directly creating context?
- What relevant history is there for these ethnic groups?
- Is there a geographic component to ethnic division?
- Where are populations concentrated?
- What resources do these populations have access to?
- Is the political authority representative of the population demographically?
- Is there a minoritized population affected by this situation, or minoritized populations more generally in the country?
- Is there a predominant religious affiliation in the country?
- What, if any, role does religion play in political life?
- What, if any, role does religion play in collective morals, responsibilities, and social norms?

ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

- What industries contribute most to GDP? Are these industries at risk for any important reason(s)?
- Are major industries nationalized?
- How is wealth distributed across the country's population?
- Is there a divide between rural and urban populations in terms of economic access?
- Do women and marginalized communities have access to leadership roles, high paying jobs, and financial institutions?
- How does this economy compare to other economies in the region?
- Is this economy integrated into the regional/global market economy?
- Does the country have a market economy?
- A rent-seeking economy?

Note: These questions are framed as if we are isolating an individual country, but even for a country specific topic, there are usually a few different countries that require this type of analysis. Understanding regional economic context and positioning in the global economy is as important as domestic economic context.

WHERE SHOULD I RESEARCH?

For committees set in the present, keep up-to-date with current events, by following outlets such as CNN, BCC, or The New York Times, among others. Many NAIMUN committees tackle issues that are ever evolving, so a situation may change drastically between the time the background guide was written and the time of the conference.

Although it is helpful to start with traditional sources, branch out to unexpected research material. Check the Economist, Foreign Policy, and Foreign Affairs as well as other periodicals and journals. It can also be useful to seek out material originating in the country you are representing. The governments of most countries have an official website, which can be a valuable repository for news, draft policies, or press releases. You can even contact their respective embassy via email or by phone to get very valuable and exclusive information!

EXAMPLE

The following example will walk you through a committee premise and topic and key considerations gathered based on the categories and their questions outlined above.

COMMITTEE: The Nile Basin Initiative **POSITION:** Rwanda
TOPIC: The Construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam

Topic Abstract: Carving a lush, riparian gash through Earth's largest desert, the Nile represents an environmental focal point both in the context of the political union of African states but also in the history of cultural and economic development throughout northern and eastern Africa. Critical in these histories has been the ecological health, prosperity, and influence of the Nile Basin. This topic centers on issues of wetland biodiversity and conservation, groundwater effects, and most broadly, climate change and environmental diplomacy in the region. The 2011 breaking of ground on the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) in the Blue Nile, a construction project meant to meet energy needs through hydroelectricity, poses the latest challenge the African Union must face: mediating the opposing interests of upstream nations like Ethiopia and Sudan with downstream states like Egypt. Delegates of this committee have the responsibility to address these conflicts directly, shape the political institutions that will govern the Nile River Basin in the future, and set precedents for cooperative environmental action on the continent.

UNDERSTANDING THE ABSTRACT

Finding the most important pieces of information within the abstract is an incredibly helpful first step. Utilize your abstracts!

Carving a lush, riparian gash through Earth's largest desert, the Nile represents an environmental focal point both in the context of the political union of African states but also in the history of **cultural and economic development throughout northern and eastern Africa**. Critical in these histories has been the ecological health, prosperity, and influence of the Nile Basin. This topic centers on issues of **wetland biodiversity and conservation, groundwater effects, and most broadly, climate change and environmental diplomacy in the region**. The 2011 breaking of ground on the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) in the **Blue Nile**, a construction project meant to meet energy needs through hydroelectricity, poses the latest challenge the African Union must face: mediating the opposing interests of upstream nations like **Ethiopia and Sudan with downstream states like Egypt**. Delegates of this committee have the responsibility to address these conflicts directly, shape the **political institutions that will govern the Nile River Basin** in the future, and **set precedents for cooperative environmental action** on the continent.

UNDERSTANDING THE ISSUE

- Consider Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan's positioning in relation to the Nile River and general positioning in the Nile Basin.
- Consider how these states' governments manage water resources and distribute them to the population. How does water security intersect with economic activity?
- Consider poverty, scarcity, and inequality within the context of the Nile's water and hydropower resources for these populations.
- Consider the political, environmental, social, and economic dimensions of GERD.
- Consider recent environmental changes relating to degradation and climate change. How is climate disrupting and displacing populations on the Nile Basin?
- Consider how other states in North Africa have responded to disputes on the Nile. Consider regional stability and instability given strained climate and water resources.

POLITICAL AUTHORITY & LEGITIMACY

- Consider what the process of democratization looked like across Nile Basin states, particularly in Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan.
- Consider discrepancies between national policy and general public opinion. Assess citizen satisfaction with the government and citizen participation in political processes.
- Consider political organization and local government involvement and effectiveness.

CULTURE & DEMOGRAPHICS

- Consider ethnic divisions and the history of ethnic conflict in states. Consider how resources are allocated to ethnic subpopulation and the socioeconomic positions of each. Note discrepancies.
- Consider where population is concentrated in relation to access to Nile resources.

ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

- Consider how hydropower from the Nile currently contributes to growth and the potential for growth with new sustainable energy-capture systems.
- Consider average income levels and living standards for rural and urban populations across the Nile Basin.
- Compare Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan's economic policies toward water extraction and trade.

RELATING YOUR POSITION TO THE TOPICS

- **NBI and Diplomatic Relations:** Consider Rwanda's position as a member of the Nile Basin Initiative, a regional governmental body overseeing policy for the Basin. Consider Rwandan economic and military treaties signed with other African states, particularly Egypt, positioning Rwanda within blocs.
- **Environment:** Consider Rwanda's own experiences with deforestation, erosion, the proliferation of the water hyacinth, positioning Rwanda's policies regarding environmental cooperation. Consider Rwanda's dependence on agriculture, which in turn relies on water resources.
- **Water Resource Management:** Consider Rwanda's investment projects in the creation of scientific tools and institutional and technical capacity building for waters within the Nile Basin, focusing specifically on transboundary water resources management and development.

CLOSING REMARKS

We hope that this guide will help you in your preparation from committees at NAIMUN and beyond. With well-crafted solutions and thorough research, come prepared for lively debate, collaboration and cooperation, diplomatic negotiation, and fun in the committee's simulated world at NAIMUN. We look forward to welcoming you to Washington D.C. in February!

**THE CONTENT OF THIS CRISIS
PROCEDURES DOCUMENT WAS
UPDATED BY THE
SECRETARY-GENERAL &
DIRECTOR-GENERAL
OF NAIMUN LX.**



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