

There are two types of speeches: substantive and procedural. Substantive speeches talk about the issues that the UN is considering—terrorism, narcotics trafficking, child soldiers, budgetary issues, etc. Procedural speeches look at how the

committee is going about its business—creating speaker lists, voting on resolutions, and the like.

When a committee session starts, the Chair will give various welcoming remarks, then hand out the placards for each delegation. After that, the Chair will call **roll**, to determine how many delegations are necessary for a quorum. Although there are 193 countries with formal voting rights in the UN General Assembly, and a few other countries and organizations that have observer status, it is very unlikely that all of these entities will be represented at most of the conferences that you will be attending. So the Chair will call the roll, tally how many countries are in that committee, and determine what the quorums are for discussion and for voting. (Some rules make this distinction. Usually quorums for discussion are smaller than quorums for voting.) Be sure to speak up, and just say “present.” Do not say “present and voting,” which in strict parliamentary terms means that you may not abstain from a vote. There is no upside to doing this.

After that, the opportunities for you to speak begin, starting with **substantive speeches**.

The first opportunity is called **General Debate**. You might have seen this in news media coverage of the UN General Assembly’s autumn opening ceremonies, when heads of state from around the world flock to New York City to give their views on global issues. This is your opportunity to give what will probably be the longest speech at the conference—three minutes, if you are lucky. You can cover any of the topics that are on the agenda for your committee, so use your research well, and try to at least touch on all of the topics, focusing on those that are critical to your country.

General Debate begins with the Chair opening the Speakers’ List. The Chair asks the delegates who want to speak. Those who do raise their placards, and the Chair begins a long list (this can run into sixty to seventy names, if not more, at the larger conferences) of what countries will speak, in the order in which he/she calls them. This list is usually shown on a white/blackboard or projected on a screen. Delegates may add their names to the end of the Speakers’ List by sending a note to the dais. Even if you have already spoken, you can usually get added to the end of the Speakers’ List.

At some point, those who are at the end of the Speakers’ List, or those who are not on the list at all, will give up hope of getting a chance to speak, and will move to **set the agenda**. This means that the delegate proposes a specific sequence in which the main topics—usually two or three for each committee—will be discussed. You want to make sure that the topics come in an order that is most beneficial to you as a delegate, as well as to your country. Although there may be an issue that is especially unwelcome to your country, you might want it to be addressed first, so that you can demonstrate your skills at playing defense. You will

get more chances to speak if everyone is inveighing against your policies. But you do *not* want to say “bring it on” by moving to bring that specific issue to the fore.

A motion to set the agenda is usually debatable, although often limited to two speakers in favor and two opposed. Make sure you are one of those four speakers.

After the agenda has been set, the committee moves into a discussion of the first topic. The Chair retires the General Debate Speakers’ List, and opens a new one on that topic. Get on this new Speakers’ List. Things move along in the same fashion as in the General Debate, with the Chair going seriatim through the Speakers’ List.

There are a few new wrinkles in the system once you get to the topics debate. You can move to switch to a **moderated caucus**. This means that the Speakers’ List—and much of the rest of the rules of procedure—is suspended, usually for five to ten minutes, and the Chair calls upon delegates at random, independent of the Speakers’ List. This allows for more back-and-forth between delegates, and usually for livelier debate. Again, get your placard up early and often, and get called upon.

You can also move to an **unmoderated caucus**, in which the committee goes into a recess—usually ten or so minutes—allowing delegates to get a snack, go to the restroom, and more importantly, to discuss privately the possibilities of writing resolutions with like-minded delegates. Usually, the motions for moderated and unmoderated caucuses are subject to limited debate. If your delegates are making a motion for an unmoderated caucus, they should be prepared to give a reason—for example, to allow delegates to confer on a working paper.

Resolutions will be introduced at some point during the topic’s debate. The initial draft of a resolution is called a **working paper**. There are two phases of the resolution discussion that permit several speaking options. During the **Introduction of the Resolution**, sponsors read aloud the resolution—at least the operative paragraphs, and sometimes the preambular clauses. Make sure that you get to read at least one paragraph; do not let the principal drafter read everything. Once the resolution has had its reading, the Chair will open the floor to questions. There are two question periods. One is for checking typos, infelicitous language, spelling errors, and other nonsubstantive issues. If you’re in the audience and spot something, raise it. The second period allows for substantive questions. This gives both the audience and the resolution’s sponsors great opportunities to get in speeches. As a member of the audience, no matter what the topic, you should try to get in some question. These questions often are counted in the tally as much as speeches. In turn, if you’re not the primary sponsor, you should nonetheless attempt to answer virtually every question, even if it has been adequately covered by another sponsor. We’ll have a separate practice session devoted to **Q&As**.

Once the introductory phase has finished, the resolution then comes up for its own debate. A separate Speakers' List for speeches regarding the resolution's merits is opened, and things move along much the same way as you have already seen with general and topic debate.

Amendments might be introduced during the debate on the resolution. If they show up, the Speakers' List for the resolution temporarily closes, and a new Speakers' List is formed. There are two types of amendments: **friendly** and **unfriendly**. An amendment is deemed friendly if all of the sponsors say that it's fine by them to include the amendment in the text of the resolution. In that case, it's adopted without debate, and debate continues on the resolution. However, if even one sponsor balks, the amendment is considered unfriendly, and thus becomes open to debate and voting.

Procedural speeches are the second main class of speeches. They are much shorter than the substantive speeches, and are focused on how the committee is conducting its business. If you sneak in a substantive point without the Chair calling you to order, fine, but in general, you want to speak to the topic at hand—the conduct of the meeting.

Procedural speeches can include speaking for or against certain parliamentary motions, such as opening and closing the Speakers' List, changing the time limits on speeches, and changing the number of questions that can be asked of a speaker.

One can also get short amounts of time through **yields** from other delegates. While a speaker can yield time back to the Chair, you should never do this—it's just a waste of the time you were given. More effective is getting and giving yields to **like-minded speakers**. Again, the time will be short, but at least you're getting credit for speeches. If a delegate yields to **questions**, make sure to get your placard up quickly. In some conferences, the Chair permits **comments** regarding the previous speech. Again, this is worth your time. The rules usually say that the comments have to be directly relevant to the previous speech, but Chairs usually give you wide latitude to speak about the overall topic.

Finally there are some opportunities for speaking during **voting** procedures. Most votes will be by simple placard count, but there are occasions in which a roll-call vote will be taken on substantive resolutions, and perhaps even amendments. Delegates are permitted to request an explanation of vote following the announcement of the vote tally. You get on this Speakers' List by saying "Yes, with right of explanation," or "No, with right of explanation," when your country's name is called during the roll call. The rules usually state that these explanations are to be used to explain the reason why you voted "out of character" (sometimes known as "out of policy") on a vote, e.g., voting "yes" on something that you would normally oppose.

However, Chairs again usually look the other way and give you wide latitude during these speeches.

In our next session, we'll practice writing and delivering some of these specialized speeches.

OUTLINE OF OPPORTUNITIES TO SPEAK: PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

Substantive Speeches

- Following Opening Remarks, Hand out of Placards, and Roll Call
- General Debate
- Set Agenda
- Topics
- Speakers' List
- Moderated Caucus
- Unmoderated Caucus
- Resolutions
- Introduction of the Resolution, Q&As
- Speeches
- Amendments
- Friendly
- Unfriendly

Procedural Speeches

- Motions
- Open Speaker' List
- Close Speakers' List
- Change Time of Speeches, Number of questions
- Questions
- Yields
- Chair
- Another Speaker
- Comments
- Voting
- Placard
- Roll Call
- Explanation of Vote