

HMDC Presents... Debating Diplomatically

HMDC Presents... Debating Diplomatically at Harvard MUN Online

This guide shows how we disagree with other delegates while keeping their trust. In Model UN, the delegate who wins is usually the one other countries want to work with, so the way we speak matters as much as what we say.

WHY DIPLOMACY WINS AWARDS

A debate round rewards the speaker who defeats the other side, but a Model UN committee rewards the delegate who brings people together. Harvard judges delegates on the same criteria online as in person (Harvard Model United Nations, HMUN Online, Last Accessed: October 2026), and chairs notice who leads a bloc, who listens and who helps the committee pass a strong resolution.

1. **Remembering who we represent:** We speak for a government, not for ourselves. When we disagree, we say "our delegation" or the name of our country, never "I think you are incorrect."
2. **Attacking ideas, never people:** We name the idea we disagree with, not the delegate who said it. Harvard grants a Right of Reply only when a delegate's personal integrity has been attacked (Harvard Model United Nations, Guide to Delegate Preparation, Last Accessed: October 2026), and we never want to be the delegate who caused it.
3. **Keeping our voice calm:** On Zoom, a raised voice sounds louder than it does in a room. We speak slowly and evenly, because a calm voice sounds confident.

WORDS WE USE TO DISAGREE POLITELY

These sentence starters let us disagree without closing the door. We practise them aloud until they feel natural.

1. **Thanking before disagreeing:** "We thank the delegate of Brazil for that idea, and we would like to build on it by..."
2. **Finding the shared goal first:** "Our delegation agrees that every child deserves a meal at school. Where we differ is how the programme is paid for."
3. **Naming the concern, not the fault:** "Our delegation is concerned that this plan could limit the sovereignty of smaller states."
4. **Offering a better path:** "Instead, we propose that the programme remain voluntary, so that more countries can join."
5. **Inviting partnership:** "We invite every delegation that shares this concern to join us in the next unmoderated caucus."

DIPLOMACY IN THE CAUCUS

Most real work happens in unmoderated caucus and in Zoom breakout rooms. This is where other delegates decide whether they trust us.

1. **Listening before talking:** We let each country in the group share its main goal before we share ours. When we repeat their goal back to them, they know we listened.
2. **Including quiet delegates:** We ask a quiet delegate, "What does your country need in this paper?" A delegate who feels included often becomes a loyal sponsor.
3. **Trading, not demanding:** When another country wants a clause we dislike, we offer a trade: we accept a softer version of their clause if they accept one of ours.
4. **Sharing credit:** We let other sponsors present parts of the paper. Chairs notice the delegate who makes other delegates stronger.
5. **Keeping our promises:** If we tell a bloc that we will sign or vote for their paper, we do it. In a two-day conference, a broken promise follows us into every caucus.

WHEN ANOTHER DELEGATE IS RUDE

Sometimes another delegate interrupts, takes credit for our work or speaks unkindly. We stay professional, because the chair is watching how we respond.

1. **Staying calm in the moment:** We do not argue in the chat or interrupt back. We wait for our turn and speak about the idea.
2. **Using the chair when needed:** If a delegate breaks the rules, we can raise a point of order about procedure, or send a short, polite note to the chair through the method the dais sets. We never complain about a person in a public speech.
3. **Moving forward together:** After a disagreement, we look for one point where we agree and start from there. Many of the strongest resolutions are merges between two blocs that once disagreed.

PRACTISING AT HOME

Diplomacy is a skill we build with practice, just like a speech. These short drills help us before December 5.

1. **Practising the three-sentence reply:** One partner states a position; the other answers with thanks, a concern and a better idea, in three sentences.
2. **Practising the trade:** Two partners each write one clause, then trade until both clauses can stay in the same paper.
3. **Practising on camera:** We record a one-minute reply on Zoom and watch it back, checking our tone, our face and our speed.