



# Harvard Model Congress

## Europe 2024

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# HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE CONFERENCE

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### *How to Research Before the Conference*

#### Researching the Topic

Before the conference, you'll receive briefings from HMCE with topics relevant to your assigned committee. Each of these documents will serve as a primer for one of the debate topics you'll address. They provide you with a brief overview of the issue at hand, discuss what actions relevant stakeholders have taken, and explain possible approaches to the issue and how different people feel about those approaches.

It is important to note that these briefings should be a starting point for your preparation for the conference rather than the entirety of your preparation. In addition to practicing the skills listed below, you also want to make sure you know your topic inside and out. This section will explain what you should look for when you research, how to research, and what resources you may wish to use.

First, you'll want to gain a better understanding of the issue you'll be addressing beyond the description provided in the briefing. A great starting point is the bibliography of the briefing. There, you'll be able to find the sources the author used when writing the briefing, which can provide you with great information relevant to committee. Beyond the bibliography, you may wish to conduct independent research into the issue area. Depending on the issue, the news can be a great source of information. The Economist, the Wall Street Journal, Axios, the Financial Times, Pew Research, and Foreign Affairs are all great sources (though some may use a paywall – your local library may be able to help with that!).

Additionally, there are a number of other great resources to use, depending on the issue area and type of committee you are assigned. Law journals are great resources, and LexisNexis is a database full of journal articles that you can search. Additionally, HeinOnline and SSRN are both research paper databases that have tremendous breadth. Law journal articles, in particular, are great resources for you to use because these authors often identify issues in society and/or the law and then propose solutions, which you may wish to advocate for yourself. Coming into committee with a unique policy proposal that you can defend is something that will wow your chairs and make your experience all the better!

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Another great resource is the Congressional Research Service, or CRS for short. This nonpartisan research agency is a part of Congress and is one of the most commonly used resources by staffers on Capitol Hill. You can find it at [crsreports.congress.gov](https://crsreports.congress.gov). You may also wish to look at materials universities and other journals are producing. For example, many large state universities run studies within their states and publish results and recommendations that may be helpful to you. Additionally, schools like Harvard Business School have their own journals that publish important research.

## Researching your Role

In addition to understanding the issue you'll be discussing, you'll also want to make sure you have a good sense of how you will act on it in committee as you fulfill the role you are assigned. This aspect of the research is typically a little more difficult because there is rarely information readily available on what your assigned person believes about the various dimensions of an issue. That being said, there are a few handy tricks you can use to understand your assigned perspective.

At a macro level, if you are a member of a US political party, you can start off by understanding what the party stance is on a particular issue. Each briefing will dedicate time to explaining what the conservative and liberal viewpoints are on an issue, which you should see as a rough starting point for understanding your own view. It is important to recognize when this view will or won't apply – for example, if you have been assigned a “Blue Dog Democrat” (the most moderate group in the Democratic Party), you may not agree with the liberal view on an issue.

While understanding ideology is a decent starting point, you then want to understand what your specific official believes. For those in Congress, you will want to visit your assigned role's Congressional Website and Campaign Website, which may have some information on their beliefs. However, this information will likely be limited at best, so you'll want to dig deeper. Press releases are a good source of information (search for your assigned role's name, the words “press release,” and keywords relating to the briefing topic). Additionally, the briefing you were given may mention specific bills that pertain to the issue – you should go to [congress.gov](https://congress.gov) and search to see how your assigned person voted on those bills (and if they co-sponsored them).

Finally, you may find it helpful to read the local news sources from the state or district your assigned person represents. These sources may provide valuable insight into how people in the state feel about specific issues and the problems they face, which should influence how you as a member of Congress approach the issue.

If you are a member of one of our international or domestic, non-congressional committees, the above advice on researching your role may or may not apply. However, you can also often access the webpages for the governmental bodies you are joining in order to find information about what these bodies are doing.

Here is a comprehensive list of some of the most useful sources to visit when researching:

## GOVERNMENT LINKS

[The Declaration of Independence](#)

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[Constitution of the United States](#)  
[U.S. House of Representatives](#)  
[U.S. Senate](#)  
[Library of Congress](#)  
[THOMAS: Legislative Information on the Internet](#)  
[U.S. Federal Courts](#)  
[The White House](#)

## NON-GOVERNMENT LINKS

[FindLaw Law Services](#)  
[The New York Times](#)  
[U.S. News Online](#)  
[The Economist](#)  
[CNN Interactive](#)  
[The Washington Post](#)  
[The Wall Street Journal](#)  
[C-Span](#)  
[Google](#)

## POLICY ISSUE LINKS

[About.com](#)  
[Almanac of Policy Issues](#)  
[Speakout.com](#)  
[National Center for Policy Analysis](#)  
[Public Agenda Online](#)  
[CNN AllPolitics](#)  
[Public Policy Clearinghouse](#)  
[Politics1 Issues](#)  
[State Department Policy Page](#)  
[Center on Congress](#)  
[Congress.org](#)

## *Success in Committee*

### What Good Debate Looks Like

We've already gone over what the content of a speech should be and how you should give it; now, we'll briefly cover what good debate looks like in a committee. As with all your interactions and behavior at HMC, being respectful is paramount. No matter your disagreements with others, you must remain courteous in all you say and do in committee. This means speeches should be professional and on topic.

When you're speaking, you should be sure to tailor your speech to what is occurring in committee. To this end, listening can be even more important than

speaking. We aim to create a conversation as we debate, rather than a series of individual speeches. Rather than simply state your views on a topic, you should endeavor to make arguments for or against the specific issues under consideration at the moment you are on the lectern. Focusing on the topic and responding to your peers in a respectful way will ensure you excel in committee and is exactly what your chairs will be looking for.

## What Smart Engagement Looks Like

While public speaking is an important part of committee, much of the work you will accomplish will occur when nobody is giving speeches. Much like in real governmental institutions such as Congress, progress on legislation is achieved in HMC through personal relationships and coordination between key legislators. When members of your committee arrange an unmoderated caucus, you will have the opportunity to speak amongst yourselves. During this time, you will work to make deals, establish relationships, and author legislation that you will then submit for debate. Your success in this aspect of committee depends entirely on your ability to work well with others. This means you should endeavor to become friends with as many of your peers as possible and embody the aspects of teamwork.

## *Games and Lessons You Can Use to Prepare*

### This or That

This or That is a game you can use to practice your public speaking and argumentation. In this game, you'll be speaking extemporaneously arguing in favor of one thing – this – over the other – that. You need two people, but the game can accommodate as many as you like. For each round, somebody will propose a topic that gives the speakers a choice between two options. For example, a topic could be cats or dogs. Then, the speakers give a speech (typically a minute, but feel free to change the time for whatever works best for your group) on why their side is better than the other.

This game will help you practice thinking of arguments on your feet and then making them in a persuasive manner. It will also get you to practice weighing different options, which is an important skill for committee – good speeches will explain why a specific action isn't just good, but also better than the alternative.

A variant of this game is a tournament. When you have more people (ideally 8+), you can play this version. Rather than coming up with a dichotomy like cats or dogs, you come up with a host of topics to argue over. Then, place these topics in a hat to draw from or randomly assign them, mock up a bracket, and then have the class vote on each debate to determine who advances. You can pick topics that relate to one another – for example, candy bars or genres of music – or pick completely unrelated topics if you really want to test yourself.

30 Seconds Filler-Free

30 Seconds Filler-Free is a drill that works on eliminating the filler words we often use in our speech – the “like,” “you know,” and “um” that make us sound like we’re searching for what to say. Excessive use of these words is often associated with a lack of authority and is more difficult to listen to as an audience.

In order to practice eliminating filler words in your speech, record yourself giving a talk for 30 seconds on any topic of your choice while really focusing on eliminating filler words in your speech. Every time that you use a filler word, restart the timer and try again. Do this exercise until you have been able to successfully talk for 30 seconds without filler words 10 separate times

## Love What You Don’t

At the HMC conference, you may be assigned the role of a senator, representative, or delegate whose political perspectives you do not personally agree with. However, it is important while you are speaking to do so with enthusiasm and in a manner that is convincing that you *do* indeed agree with your assigned role’s viewpoint.

In order to practice this, choose something you either aren’t particularly fond of or that you are indifferent to – say brussels sprouts or even a shoelace. Then set a timer for one minute and explain out loud how much you love that item and why. Focus on using inflection in your voice, displaying your enthusiasm, and using body language that seems natural and adds to what you’re saying.

## Make a Commercial

At HMC, and in much of life, it is crucial to be able to sell your ideas to others. In this exercise, you will practice your salesmanship and persuasive abilities by creating a commercial for an everyday item around your home.

Choose an item you see lying around – it can literally be anything. Set a timer for one minute and record the most convincing commercial you can think of, incorporating strategies such as ethos, logos, and pathos (all discussed above). Consider talking about what makes the item special, how it affects our daily lives, why everyone needs the item, or even the functionality of it.

**Don’t worry if you weren’t able to read this entire guide! HMC Europe will be an incredibly rewarding, exciting experience regardless of your preparation level. Your chairs will make sure you feel comfortable in committee and are equipped with the information and tools you need to thrive at the conference.**