Explanation of Parliamentary Procedure

While this is no way a comprehensive guide to parliamentary procedure and all conferences use slightly different guides, written by a former team member, this is a great starting place. And it’s entertaining too!

a. General- The general thing to remember is that Parliamentary Procedure, or Parli-Pro is more “guidelines” than actual rules, but everyone thinks that they are rules and that their own version is the version that is absolutely correct… In general, just go with what your chair (the person running the debate) says. Usually they will explain everything pretty well as you go, especially in Vegas.

b. Opening debate

   i. Quorum-In order to open debate, the Quorum must be met. “Quorum” is really just a portion of the body that must be present in the room for debate to take place. It is different for different bodies, but generally somewhere between $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ of the council must be present.

   ii. Role call- The chair will go through the list of countries to see who is present.

      1. Be on time!!! Never, ever, ever be late to debate; it is the best way to make yourself and your school look bad to the chair, who is also the judge of the competition. If by some freak chance you are late, send a note up to the chair that reads something like “the delegate from Saudi Arabia is present” to let them know that you are here, otherwise you get marked as skipping debate and you can kiss your chances at an award goodbye.

      2. The appropriate response during role call- There are several ways to respond when your name is called. The first is a simple “here.” Some people prefer “present.” Obviously one is much more formal than the other. Really, you won’t hear “here” often because it is so informal. What I highly recommend doing is standing up (always stand when addressing the chair) and saying “The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is Present.” I know it sounds cheesy, but really, if forces the chair to look at you and associate your face with your country. Anything like this that gets the judge to pay attention to your exceptionally intelligent and well prepared self is a good thing.

      3. “Present and voting” is a term you might hear thrown around during role call. What it means is that whoever responds that way will not be abstaining on any substantive vote, like a resolution or an amendment. You’ll see it used basically 2 ways- properly and improperly. The proper way to use it is when you are representing a country that is 1) powerful and 2) kind of arrogant. This is because it’s like saying “I’m going to take a hard-line stance on this no matter what the rest of you think.” You’ll see
a lot of it in security councils where the vote of a country like the US is a veto power and very important to the council.

iii. Opening debate and setting the speakers’ list

1. Motion to open debate- “Saudi Arabia moves to open the debate”

2. Motion to open a speakers’ list on a given topic. In this case you’d be discussing the topic in general or the appropriate way to set the Agenda (the order in which you discuss the topics)- “Saudi Arabia moves to open a speaker’s list to discuss possible Agendas.”

3. Chair will ask who would like to be placed on the agenda. You should immediately raise your placard for this, whether or not you have anything to say. If you don’t actually have anything to say and you get put at the top of the list, I’d be coming up with some ideas quickly. You can send a note to the chair asking to be removed from the speakers’ list, or dropped to the bottom of the list, but it makes you look unprepared, so please don’t do it unless there’s a really good reason you think you need to.

4. Setting the speaking time- this a really popular motion because it requires two speakers for a set time and two speakers against, and people like to get a chance to speak. Generally, you’ll have at least a couple of people make different motions for different times, so this motion tends to get really old. Really, you can only hear so many speeches about how 2 minutes is not nearly enough time to fully discuss the matter and 3 is far more appropriate and blah blah blah… Anyhow, this is a good opportunity to speak, but do be careful not to abuse the power- it’ll really annoy the chair and the other delegates after a while.

5. After you speak, you are erased from the speakers’ list, but you can send the note to the dais to be added to the bottom of the list. The crafty way to do this is to have the note with you and ready when you go up to do your speech and just place it on the dais as you walk up to the podium.

6. Yielding time to other delegates- Yielding your time to another delegate means that you are going to give them the remainder of your speaking time to them. When considering this, remember your speaking time is not the only opportunity you have to show your chair how awesome you are, but it the best. For a couple of minutes, you have the undivided attention of your chair and council. So my philosophy is that that’s really not worth giving up by yielding your time to someone else, and it makes it look like you don’t know how to express your opinion correctly and you need someone else to do it. Generally I don’t like doing it. But if you can do it the other way around- have someone else yield to you, it’s an excellent idea. The more you can manipulate other delegates for your personal gain,
the better. Not that I’m, you know, competitive, or anything.

7. You continue with the speaker’s list as long as there are no other points or motions on the floor.

8. You can move to close the speakers’ list, which means that no one can be added on to the end. Once the speakers’ list is exhausted (ie, no more speakers left) you vote on whatever issue the list discussed.

iv. Setting the agenda

1. There are a couple of methods for discussing the order of the topics, and you definitely want to discuss so you have the best chance at getting your favorite agenda set. One method is to open a speakers list on the agenda. Another is to open an unmoderated caucus, which is explained below. Generally you’ll end up doing both before you come to any kind of decision.

2. Move to set the agenda. The chair will accept several of these motions specifying different orders: 1,2,3 (also called natural order) 2,3,1; 3,2,1, etc. Odds are you’ll have 6 of these- every possible combination. And you get to vote on each one individually in the order the motions were received. Aren’t you lucky? This is one of the more tedious processes the UN has to offer.

3. You can’t really alter the agenda once it has been set. The only thing you can do is adjourn debate on a topic, which means that you don’t debate it anymore, and you’ll progress to the next topic. Some conferences will allow you a chance to reopen debate once the other topics are completed.

c. Continuing Debate: Once the agenda is set, you will need to set the speakers time and then spend your time writing resolutions, you can:

i. Set speaker’s list on topic- works exactly the same way as opening the speakers’ list on the agenda as described above.

ii. Possible motions- what you do when you’re not doing speakers’ list speeches:

1. Moderated caucus

   a. A moderated caucus is where one delegate picks others to give quick speeches on their positions. Usually the speeches are in the vicinity of 30 seconds to a minute.

   b. Why call for it? If it is allowed, it is a good opportunity to get
yourself heard if you are not coming up on the speakers’ list. It is also a good way to hear a lot of opinions in a short amount of time.

c. What you say: “Saudi Arabia moves for a 10 minute moderated caucus with 30 speaking times to be moderated by the delegate from Yemen, to discuss possible resolutions on the topic” So you are specifying the duration of the caucus, the speaking times of each speech, the moderator (who calls on people to give speeches), and the purpose of the caucus.

d. What do you want to be doing during this time?

   i. Speaking and listening. This can be a very good way to find out what others are doing that you might not have seen.

   ii. Who moderates? Pick someone who is going to call on the people that you want to speak.

2. Unmoderated caucus/suspension of the meeting (the correct term is suspension of the meeting, but you might hear both term used)

   a. Why call for it?

      i. It gives you time to write resolutions

      ii. It gives you time to work with your allies to develop a bloc and push your goals

      iii. It gives you time to write a speech if you are coming up on the speakers’ list and are really not sure what you are going to say.

   b. “Saudi Arabia moves for a 20 minute suspension of the meeting to discuss possible resolutions” Specify the duration and the purpose.

   c. What should you be doing?

      i. Never sit still, never be in your chair. You should always be active or working on something.

      ii. Building coalitions, working on resolutions, seeing what others are doing (be careful not to get too caught up in what you are doing without taking stock of the rest of the room. It’s easy to fall out of the loop this way)
3. The interrupters:

   a. Point of Inquiry- I have a question

   b. Point of Procedure- Chair screwed up on the rules (perhaps not abiding by the order of precedence, which means voting on motions in the wrong order) or you have a question

   c. Point of Personal Privilege- I have a problem with the facilities (can’t hear or whatever)

   d. When is it appropriate to “interrupt?”- When it’s not going to be rude to do so. Avoid interrupting speeches and the like.

   d. Introducing a Resolution

      i. Resolutions in general are basically just statements of what you want to do as a council to address the topic. They have a very specific format that we will discuss later.

      ii. Signatories (authors) and Sponsors (those that think the resolution is worth being debated) need to sign. You need 1/5 of the body signed on as one of those two things.

      iii. Submit the resolution to the chair, and do what they say in order to get it to the point where they will allow you to present it to the body. This usually means lot and lots of revisions.

      iv. Introduce your resolution to the body- “Algeria moves to introduce its resolution.” This may or may not be allowed at conferences depending.

      v. Sometimes the Chair will allow you a few minutes to present your resolution to the body. Make sure you use this time to really sell the resolution to the council.

      vi. Open a speaker’s list on the resolution, generally this is not allowed.

      vii. Vote when speaker’s list is exhausted or a closure of debate.

   e. Introduce an amendment- In general, an amendment is a change that you’d like to see made to a resolution that has been presented.

      i. There are two kinds of amendments

         1. Friendly- proposed by the sponsors, friendly amendments are automatically adopted into the resolution.
2. Unfriendly- proposed without the authorization of the sponsors, and
unfriendly amendment is debated much the same way you would debate a
resolution.

f. End- when you don’t feel like talking any more

   i. Suspend the meeting- a suspension of the meeting means you are taking a break,
   for lunch or whatever, and are planning on resuming at a later time.

   ii. Adjourn the meeting- you only do this at the very end of the caucus. It means that
   you’re totally done.

   iii. Adjourn discussion on an topic- you’re done talking about this topic, and it just
goes away, sad, abandoned and unresolved. Poor topic.

   iv. Close debate on a topic- vote on all the resolutions that have been presented on
that topic and then move on to the next topic.

g. Voting

   i. Close all doors, no notes, no entering or exiting room except in emergencies.

   ii. Roll call voting can be requested but is not always just because it can be kind
of tedious to call each person and hear their vote

   iii. Dividing the question can also be requested. That means that you take parts of
the resolution and vote on all the parts individually. This is rarely used but will
definitely be covered by the officers.

   iv. You get to stay in that room until all the voting is completed, which can
literally take hours in some of the big councils. Aren’t you excited?

v. Possible responses
   1. yes
   2. no
   3. abstain (refrain from voting)
   4. Yes/no/abstain- with rights. Some conferences will allow you to vote
yes with rights, no with rights, or abstain with rights, which means that
after the vote you are allowed a quick few seconds to explain why you
voted the way you did. Generally you’ll see this if something forced you
to alter your opinion on the resolution. For example, you may have written
a resolution, but could not support it in the end because there was an
amendment that you couldn’t support. Generally the w/rights speeches are
only for if you have to vote strangely and need a chance to explain your
vote. Don’t abuse the power- it’s very obnoxious.
f. oddball motions

i. Right of Reply- someone insulted you or your country, or made false accusations or did something like that, and you feel you need to defend yourself, you can send a note to the chair asking for a right of reply speech. In the note you need to write verbatim (more or less) what was said that was offensive, and what you plan to say in your speech. The chair may or may not grant you the right of reply; usually they are pretty strict about it. It needs to be a really good insult to get you a speech. But if you think you might get it, it can be worth it.

ii. Appealing the decision of the Chair- Don’t do it, and if someone else does it, don’t support them. What this says is “chair- I think you did something stupid and I’m going to embarrass you by attempting to force you to eat your words in front of the entire council.” And given that your chair is also your judge, it’s just a bad idea. Not to mention it is entirely up to the discretion of the chair whether or not they entertain the motion in the first place. If you are having a big problem with the chair, talk to them privately, send them a note, or talk to me or one of the officers. There’s really not a good reason that I’ve ever seen to appeal the decision.

iii. Removing voting/speaking rights- This would only happen in very rare circumstances. What it does is makes it so that a delegate can’t speak or vote in council. You only want to do this under two (really rare) circumstances:

   a. For some reason that delegate no longer seems to be in a position to represent the government of his country. For example, I was in a security council where they had come up with a story called an emergency situation where the people running the conference give you briefings on some (fictional) major development that is going on in the world. In this particular situation, there had been a coup in France, and the government was overthrown. Since the delegate was a representative of the old government, and not the one that took over, she was no longer in a position where she could speak for the country, so she had her speaking rights removed. In six years, I’ve seen this maybe twice. It doesn’t happen very often.

   b. Sometimes people will be so seriously detrimental to the council through inappropriate behavior that they basically just need to be shut up. In this case, it is generally the chair that chooses to do this because it is a pretty severe penalty. To respect the chair’s authority and others in the conference, please don’t move to remove someone’s speaking rights during debate. Go and address the chair privately when you can. Also some people are of the opinion that you can remove speaking rights whenever you don’t want to hear what someone has to say. This is not the case, and chairs almost never support it, which makes the delegates that proposed it look really bad. And no, you can’t take someone’s speaking
rights away just because they are annoying, much as you may be tempted.

c. Be careful when you use these!!!

g. Behavior/etiquette/phrasing/my pet peeves
   1. Imperial we- in stead of saying “I believe…” or “I move to …” say “The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia believes/moves…

   2. Move vs. motion- You make a motion, but move to do something. Motion is the noun and move is the verb. I know that it sounds minor, but it gets irritating when you hear the same mistakes being made over and over. It tends to make the chairs think you don’t know Parli-pro, which is bad.

   3. Standing vs. sitting- stand whenever you address the chair or the body, so every time you speak.

   4. Behavior near the dais- Remember, the chair is your judge, and the person running your council. Always treat them with respect, and be aware that they are always judging you, so make sure that whatever you are doing near the dais, or anywhere in the conference for that matter, reflects what you want the chair to associate with you and CU

   5. Raising placards during speeches- wait until speakers are completely finished before raising your placard. It’s really just rude, and hard to concentrate if you are the speaker and you see all these papers flying around.

   6. Decorum is the term used to describe the behavior of the delegates. If people are talking out of turn or being obnoxious, the chair will bang the gavel and yell about decorum. It’s a lot like a judge saying “order” when his court gets out of hand.

h. Questions for officers- during these conferences, we (the officers) circulate through councils to check up on people. Grab us if you have questions or problems or just generally don’t know what is going on. It makes us feel loved and needed when people ask us questions.