



PRESS COUNCIL

OPMUN 2019

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NEWS
CENTRE

STUDY GUIDE

Press Corps at OPMUN 2019

CHAIR BIOGRAPHIES

Get to know the dais of the Press Corps

PRESS CORPS CHAIR: RAELEE TOH HSUAN HUI

Raelee is a JC1 student at Hwa Chong Institution taking the rather unusual combination of Physics, Math, Economics and History. While most of her time is spent staying up to the late hours of the morning contemplating her life decisions, OPMUN 2019 is one she will not regret. She can also be found writing articles or strumming her guitar. Raelee hopes that delegates will be able to have an enriching time at OPMUN 2019 and looks forward to meeting them.



PRESS CORPS CHAIR: MARK THENG

Mark is a year 5 student at ACS (Independent). Despite taking the non-humanities combination of Physics, Chemistry and Maths at the higher level, he finds himself constantly dragged back to conference after conference, perhaps to compensate for his lack of a humanities outlet as dictated by his subject combination. Outside of MUN, he is also a member of the ACS(I) tennis team and interact club. Mark hopes that delegates will enjoy approaching MUN from the very unique lens of a delegate of the press corps, and that they will enjoy this experience and learn much from it.





Introduction to Press

By Press Corp Chairs

Before diving further, the first thing we must consider is the purpose of journalistic writing. In general, journalists seek to report a story to educate citizens. They make use of a mass-communication platform to reach out to and inform the masses, and to allow them to better understand the world around them, and thus react to this knowledge accordingly as best as they can, based on the knowledge they have gleaned. The news - which now comes in various media forms - serves as a crucial platform in which the world accesses knowledge. As stated by the American Press Institute, the press seeks to achieve the following: "The purpose of journalism is thus to provide citizens with the information they need to make the best possible decisions about their lives, their communities, their societies, and their governments." As such, newspaper articles must all be written with these things in mind. Written to engage the layman to allow them to glean crucial knowledge of even complex topics which would typically be inaccessible or difficult to understand - such as the gamut of topics featured in OPMUN. Additionally, the article must draw readers to it such that they initially bother to read the article and see it as relevant or interesting, or otherwise the article has zero impact.

The foundational bottom line is the importance of conveying the original messages and details as accurately and faithfully to the source as possible. The Realities of Journalism However, the reality of our world is that press agencies are never able to provide all facts, all perspectives, all with perfect accuracy - after all, agencies have limited resources and manpower. Agencies will often have thematic or regional specialisations, reflecting the palates of both viewership and ownership. Beyond specialisations, press agencies have their own biases that span various spectrums (eg. religious, environmental, racial). Articles could reflect the biases of publishers, individual authors, or corporate owners, via a number of linguistic and content choices (more details below). While not a new concept, political biases have ballooned in prominence as inflammatory remarks and "fake news" become more common, more impactful, and drive more traffic due to the rise of new media. The ease of information delivery to the common man means that any article, exposé, or tweet can impact the psyche of swathes before further discourse can commence. There exist various media watchdog groups that attempt to identify biases and fact-check claims, but it is ultimately impossible to be truly wholly objective.

PRESS CORPS AT OPMUN 2019



OPMUN 2019's Press Corps consists of four news agencies - the Straits Times, Channel News Asia, MothershipSG, and The Online Citizen. Each delegate will be assigned a specific press agency and has the job of holding committee delegates accountable through their various press functions. Apart from writing articles and capturing photographs, press delegates at OPMUN 2019 will get to directly question committee delegates in Press Conferences, submit their opinions as Working Papers, and lobby to build their own network of insider sources - all part of a suite of tools that can be used to challenge committees on their current progress, hold delegates to their stances, and influence decisions throughout the conference towards their goals. Each news agency, despite the common purposes as delineated above, has a distinct make-up. As such, delegates are to be well acquainted with their respective news agencies to understand how they are able to adopt the tone, style and bias of their assigned agency.

All journalistic products, albeit diverse in their formats, are common in their role in relaying information to the public. Within each news agency there are correspondents with deeper subject matter knowledge of various fields. As such, they would be assigned to report on and write analyses and commentaries in these fields. In the context of OPMUN, each news agency will have a few correspondents who will be allocated as various subjects' correspondents each.

At OPMUN, your Press Chairs doubly serve as your Coordinators/Dispatchers and Editors. They are responsible for the work allocation/movement of press delegates during the conference. They will also act as the editors for any articles that will be published. When any information is requested by the chairs, all delegates should report their activities and motivations (even when clandestine) as accurately and completely as possible to allow for better judgement of all delegates' performances.



MEDIA OUTPUT



ARTICLES

Articles are expected to be the main form of deliverable for most delegates. These can come in various forms - more traditional news articles, opinion editorials, or even informal styles like listicles. Articles are to be aligned with the respective stances of delegates' assigned agencies. All articles should be written in Times New Roman, font size 12 and line spacing 1.5. All submitted articles should contain at least one picture. Delegates are allowed to include other pictures or any other form of visual aid, if beneficial, in the article.

Any form of media used should be captured by the delegate, or appropriately attributed. Delegates should seek consent from individual parties before publishing. In addition to the article content itself, article submissions should include a title and a tagline. Articles, once vetted, will be uploaded to a conference-wide blog accessible to all delegates. They may be screened to committee delegates by committee chairs if deemed relevant/important.

INSTAGRAM POSTS

Instagram posts are designed to be a more direct, easily accessible, and easily digestible way to convey information to the masses. They are usually less formal and break the writing conventions of news articles, and can serve to summarise stories or as a way to attract viewers to read their articles. Importantly, the speed at which such a social media post can be published and shared means that the Instagram page serves as an especially powerful tool for delegates with huge scoops or time-sensitive information that they wish to release before a proper article can be released. Being the first news agency to release important information can serve as a major driver of traffic and popularity by virtue of attribution from other agencies.

EXPECTATIONS

Delegates will be assigned minimum coverage (committee-/theme-based) and deliverable quotas for the conference by the Press Chairs acting as agency heads. These will be in line with the specialisations of each agency and each correspondent. Delegates should be prepared to output at least 1 Article and 1 Instagram post each day.

PRESS MECHANICS

OBSERVING COMMITTEE DEBATE

The most straightforward way of obtaining information is to observe committees in session. Delegates are allowed to attend committee sessions (with the exception for committees with mechanics on press restrictions) and sit quietly at the back of the room during formal debate. During unmoderated caucuses, press delegates may move freely to observe caucusing, or attempt to conduct interviews with committee delegates. Otherwise, communication with delegates during formal debate must be restricted to notepaper.

Press delegates should note to be as undistruptive as possible, especially when entering or exiting a committee room. Furthermore, press delegates should be respectful of committee delegates' requests and avoid being overly aggressive or pushy. Finally, press delegates should note that chairs are not to be interviewed in any case - an overview/summary of council proceedings can be obtained from willing committee delegates.

PRESS CONFERENCES

Press conferences will be held at stipulated timings at the end of selected committee sessions. Each press conference will see all committee delegates and participating press delegates gathered, serving as an opportunity for press delegates to quickly gather information, clarify stances, and challenge concerned parties.

Each press conference will have a maximum time stipulated by the Press Chairs. An attending Press Chair will moderate the session, selecting the order in which press delegates may rise to ask their questions. Follow-ups will be granted as per the Press Chairs' discretion, but only if there is excess time remaining and few remaining questions. Questions may be posed to specific committee delegates or groups of delegates (eg. a bloc, the people who voted for a motion, the whole committee, etc.). In the case of the latter, members of the group may raise their placards to volunteer to answer the question on behalf of the group, and the press delegate may choose which delegate shall answer the question.

Press delegates should similarly remain respectful of committee delegates, and avoid repetitively attacking committee delegates for no reason. Furthermore, delegates are advised to keep their questions short and succinct - the Press Chairs may request a question to be reworded in the case of excessive convolution. Press delegates are ultimately advised to use these limited press conferences wisely - perhaps you wish to quickly get an understanding of a bloc's voting decision on a pivotal amendment, or you are hunting for a controversial soundbite from a delegate whose opinions you wildly oppose. In any case, a press delegates should attempt to obtain a baseline understanding of the committee's progress before heading into a press conference in order to utilise it to the maximum.



JOURNALISM TIPS

What is the process of journalism?

It may seem daunting to have to produce publications that reflect standards and intricacies of real press agencies. However, with some careful consideration and thought, it is in reality much more doable than one might initially think. To ease delegates into the process of journalism, we have compiled some key tips to help delegates along.

Stylistic Features and Nuances

Each news agency's articles have different unique stylistic features. This manifests in areas such as paragraphing and lexical choice. For instance, the Straits Times paragraphs according to each sentence, while on the other hand, The Online Citizen tends to have longer paragraphs. As such, it is crucial to understand these nuances and stylistic features of these newspaper agencies. There are several ways to do this. The most obvious and best way to accomplish this is through reading several articles from the respective agencies and carefully reading to pick out their nuances. Another way is through reading the "style guides" of the various news agencies. These guides serve to provide guidelines to these stylistic features and writing styles. For example, The Economist's style guide mostly rests on six rules given by George Orwell on how to write well, while The New York Times has strict rules on courtesy titles, acronyms, and hyphens. While local newspapers are unlikely to have these codified style guides, they still have fairly distinct writing styles and formats.

Structure

The following are some ideas for structuring an article: Firstly, it is key to consider how a reader would go about reading an article. With the highly short attention spans of human beings, it is key to maximise audience retention. This is first achieved with the heading and introduction, which should aim to capture the audience's attention. Given that the same information is available in various different publications from different agencies, one should start with the main point of the article, which should be the key, the most interesting takeaway of the article. This would allow the article to compete for readership of articles, given the many articles reporting the same events. As far as paragraphing is concerned, a general guideline would be just a few sentences per paragraph, which would be 3-4 lines in each paragraph. Each sentence should be informative yet not too saturated, avoiding putting too many points in one sentence, which can be achieved by avoiding run-on sentences. Typically, articles are written in past tense.

Bias

To some extent, every press agency has a bias, in terms of having stances with regards to certain issues, and much like a traditional Model UN committee, this should be best reflected in the writing of articles such that delegates represent said bias. For instance, when analysing existing economic policies, some press agencies are likely to be more supportive, while others are more likely to criticise the same policy heavily to accentuate its flaws. More can be found in the additional documents on the various agencies. Bias can manifest in a multitude of ways (including in style and structure). For example, cherry-picking quotes or misinterpreting evidence is a common tactic in skewing the way information is perceived, though press delegates attempting to do so must take care to not step across the fine line of libel/fake news. Linguistically, lexical choice in reporting verbs are a clear way to show the writers' perception of individuals/ideas, and the fronting of participants/careful wielding of transitivity can accord agency and responsibility to certain parties.

JOURNALISM TIPS (cont.)

ANGLING

From long sessions of observation of committee sessions and many interview sessions with delegates, press delegates would have a large amount of information to sieve through. However, given the relatively short length of newspaper articles in general, it is pivotal to sieve through the information appropriately in order to find key points that would allow for the maximum value addedness of the article, such as by considering solutions proposed by delegates that would be pertinent to the lives of the average citizen. An example of angling would be to narrow in on a few pertinent solutions proposed by delegates on how the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act (MRHA) is being modified while excluding peripherals which may be of little relevance, such as including additional checks on the president's power while excluding technical minor changes to the type of restraining order the MRHA permits to be implemented. However, it is crucial to note that especially for reports, there is a general expectation that there should be no interpretation of the information for the reader. Rather, journalistic ethics suggests that the reader should read the facts to draw their own conclusions, minimising influence from the reporter. How much a press agency adheres to these principles, however, is variable.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Language should be kept simple, avoiding bombastic words and convoluted phrases, consistently keeping in mind that the intention is for maximising the reader's understanding of the subject matter while retaining the reader's attention. Journalism is about conveying a message to the general public. As such, journalists must generally ensure that the content that is written is toned down to a level that is comprehensible to all. For instance, this would mean removing highly technical information of the changes to the Employment Act and explaining the crucial information that would matter to them such as increased number of paid leave days for people making below a stipulated amount of money. Additionally, considering the reader's perspective, especially for more foreign concepts. This would enhance the reader's understanding of the concept by making the situation more relatable to readers, such as by making use of imaginary yardsticks (the size of a place in reference to football fields, swimming pools, etc).

FURTHER RESEARCH

Beyond this study guide and the write-up on your correspondent, delegates should conduct further research to better prepare themselves for the conference. With regards to content, delegates could do preliminary research on the various committees and issues to acclimatise themselves so they can more quickly form opinions. Furthermore, delegates should prepare themselves to write like a journalist from their assigned agency, and can read up on utilising functional grammar to subtly portray their biases and influence readers.

