



Westfield State Model Congress
Student Guide

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Westfield State Model Congress simulates the law-making process in US House of Representatives and US Senate. Although we seek to follow the procedures in US Congress closely, we make some modifications out of necessity and for the sake of practicality. Committee names, for example, do not reflect those of standing committees in US House and Senate. Moreover, some major steps, such as legislative hearings and compromising between the two chambers on a bill, are skipped. Day One of Westfield State Model Congress focuses on the law-making process in committees, while Day Two features major legislative activities in the House and Senate.

I. Preparing for the Model Congress Conference

Each delegation is required to submit at least one legislative proposal (ideally one bill per four to five delegates). Delegates may work on a “freestanding” bill or an “amendatory” bill – i.e., an amendment to an existing law. Any issues US Congress can take up for legislation may be considered as topics. However, students may not represent particular interests of states or districts. They write their own bills, based on their own convictions and beliefs. Delegates will be assigned to committees, in accordance with their bills and interests.

Westfield State Model Congress has six committees, and depending on bills submitted some committees may be combined with others:

Committee on Agriculture, Natural Resources, Energy, Banking and Commerce

Committee on National Security and Foreign Affairs

Committee on Education, Labor, Immigration, Health, Veterans’ Affairs, Science and Technology

Committee on Housing, Transportation and Infrastructure

Committee on Appropriations, Budget and Taxation

Committee on Ethics and Judiciary

a. Bill Writing

Bills are expected to have a title, a preamble/summary (rationale and justification for legislation), and a body – definition of terms, key provisions, penalties for violation, and effective date.

Please see below for samples of legislation adopted in recent years in US House of Representatives:

<https://www.congress.gov/114/bills/hr4323/BILLS-114hr4323ih.pdf>

<https://www.congress.gov/114/bills/hr1197/BILLS-114hr1197ih.pdf>

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/1845/text?r=33&s=1>

Students may choose any topics of their interests to write bills. Any bills may be considered within the boundaries allowed by the US Constitution.

The first step in bill writing is identifying problems to be addressed. What issues concern you most or should your community tackle now? They can be climate change, risks and

dangers of artificial intelligence, free speech, immigration, minimum wage, etc. In the bill you articulate measures to address the problem identified – what government agencies do what and how without overreaching their powers. The bill should also clarify how the implementation of measures will be financed, what penalties will be imposed for violation, and when the law will take effect, among others.

Please refer to the source below for details about bill writing (especially pp. 5 – 9):
https://legcounsel.house.gov/sites/legcounsel.house.gov/files/documents/intro_to_drafting_1.pdf

House Legislative Counsel's Manual on Drafting Style may be useful as well (pp. 4 – 9):
https://legcounsel.house.gov/sites/legcounsel.house.gov/files/documents/ManualDraftStyle_2022.pdf

American Legion of Montana well summarizes things to consider when writing bills:
http://mtlegion.org/assets/files/How-toWriteaBill_withtemplate.pdf

b. Bill Template and Submission

Bill template is available in the link below:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/19gWT46unOFW_Rc6JwAEfSdrtrC0i27QHuePtk8DoyM/edit

Please submit bills as *Word Document attachments* by going to the link below (“Westfield State Model Congress 2026” ➔ “Delegates” ➔ “Bill Submission”):

<https://www.westfield.ma.edu/academics/political-science-department/westfield-state-model-congress>

II. At the Conference

a. Dress Code

Delegates are required to wear “western business attire.” Business attire for men includes dark suit jackets, collared, button-down shirts, dress pants and loafers/dress shoes. Women should dress in a blazer with a button-up, collared shirt, dress skirt/pants, and dress shoes. Jeans, sneakers, or sandals are not allowed, and jewelry and makeup should not be excessive.

b. Tobacco, Drug, and Alcohol Policies

Westfield State University enforces a smoke free/tobacco & marijuana free policy on its campus. Use of tobacco products in any form is not allowed on university property. The possession and use of marijuana, along with alcohol, is strictly prohibited. Advisors are asked to enforce the dress code as well as the tobacco, drug and alcohol policies. Committee and plenary session chairs reserve the right to suspend students for violating the rules and policies.

c. Use of Electronic Device and Coaching

Any meaningful Model Congress experience requires delegates to do thorough research and acquire knowledge about the subject prior to the conference. Westfield State Model Congress allows limited use of laptops and other electronic devices by delegates for research during committee and plenary sessions. Delegates, however, may not use them to communicate with each other or advisors in sessions. Advisors may not communicate with delegates in any way or form during committee and plenary sessions.

d. Attendance and Code of Conduct

All delegates are required to attend the opening ceremony, committee sessions, House/Senate sessions, and the closing ceremony. Students may not leave before or during the opening ceremony until they are dismissed to their sessions. Any students and schools that fail to follow this policy will not be considered for awards.

Participating students are required to respect fellow delegates, advisors, and Model Congress staff. Delegates must remain silent when others are delivering a point, motion, or speech. While not in session, delegates need to respect decorum and demonstrate a high level of discipline. Observation of these rules will be considered in selecting awards.

III. Westfield State Model Congress Parliamentary Procedure

a. Committee Rules of Procedure

At Westfield State Model Congress, delegates are expected to follow the rules of procedure described here and work on bills in committees. They are assigned to respective committees based on bills they submitted. They debate, amend bills, and vote on them to discuss in the plenary session in the House and Senate

Committee and plenary sessions are presided over by chairs, Westfield State students who volunteer their time to guide delegates through the process. Committee and plenary session chairs enforce rules, recognizing speakers and keeping time.

The committee chair (or the presiding officer of each body) has the power to: declare the opening and closing of each session; recognize all speakers; decide all points of order and procedural questions; conduct votes with the help of a time keeper and announce their results; and preserve order and decorum. Once recognized by committee chair, the delegate identifies oneself by delegate number, name, and school each time before speaking.

Once a session is called to order by the committee chair, delegates are given the opportunity to debate bills on the agenda. Delegates follow what's called "structured/primary debate," "general debate," and the amendment process. Due to time constraints, Westfield State Model Congress enforces time limits on debating bills in committees, the House, and the Senate (Please see the table on p. 6).

The committee chair asks if the sponsor of the first bill is present and subsequently recognizes to start off structured debate. Structured debate consists of four speeches delivered in alternating pro-con order. The first primary speech, "authorship speech," is usually given by the author/sponsor of the bill. The sponsor reads the bill and speaks in favor of the bill for the given time. This "pro-speech" pertains to what the bill is about (major provisions) and why it should be enacted (purpose and rationale). The second primary speech is given by an opponent of the bill, after which two more speeches are delivered in favor and then in opposition to the main motion.

In structured debate speakers may yield their remaining time to the chair or to questions. Speakers who do not use up the allocated time may say "I yield my time to the chair" or "I yield the remainder of my time to questions." A delegate recognized during structured debate is to advocate a particular viewpoint. Moreover, speeches given during structured debate may not be used for the introduction of amendments.

Summary of Time Limits on Debating Bills in Committees, House, and Senate

	Bills in Committees	Consent Calendar Bills¹ in the House & Senate	Policy Calendar Bills² in the House & Senate
Debate Time of Each Bill	50 minutes	19 minutes	25 minutes
Structured/ Primary Debate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - First primary speech ("authorship speech") by sponsor: 8 min. - First con-speech: 6 min. - Second pro-speech: 8 min - Second con-speech: 6 min. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Four speeches total delivered in alternating pro-con order - Two pro-speeches allotted 3 minutes total, addressing up to 5 questions each - Two con-speeches given 1 minute total, addressing up to 3 questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Four speeches total delivered in alternating pro-con order - Two pro-speeches given 5 minutes total, addressing up to 5 questions each - Two con-speeches allotted 2 minutes total, addressing up to 4 questions
General Debate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Each speaker given 3 minutes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Each speaker given 1 minute, addressing up to 3 questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Each speaker given 2 minutes, addressing up to 3 questions
Amendments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Speakers (one-pro & one-con) given 2 minutes each in structured debate - Speakers given 1 minute each in general debate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Speakers (one-pro & one-con) given 2 minutes each, addressing up to 5 questions in structured debate - Speakers given 1 minute each, addressing up to 3 questions in general debate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Speakers (one-pro & one-con) given 2 minutes each, addressing up to 5 questions in structured debate - Speakers given 1 minute each, addressing up to 3 questions in general debate

¹ Bills passed in committees with more than a two-thirds vote

² Bills passed in committees with a simple majority

After structured debate ends, general debate follows. The committee chair calls for general debate, recognizing any member seeking the floor to speak about the legislation. General debate speeches may not last longer than three minutes each in committee sessions (see the table above). Also they are not restricted to any particular viewpoint and may be used to introduce amendments. Delegates raise their placard stating, “seek the floor” and yield the floor stating, “I yield the floor.” Delegates may yield their time to the chair or to questions as in structured debate; however, delegate may also yield their remaining time to another delegate in general debate. A delegate speaking on yielded time may speak until time elapses.

There are two different kinds of amendments. A primary amendment is a change (or addition) to the bill (i.e., main motion) under discussion. A secondary amendment is a change (or addition) to a primary amendment.

If a motion to amend is recognized, the bill’s author determines whether the amendment is “friendly” or “unfriendly.” If the amendment is deemed “unfriendly,” the committee chair calls for a vote to decide whether to debate. With simple majority vote, the committee debates to amend the bill; if a simple majority is not obtained, the committee discards the amendment and resumes general debate on the bill.

The amendment process entails structured debate and general debate (see also “Motion to Amend” on p. 10). Structured debate on an amendment consists of two speeches, one pro-speech given by the delegate proposing the amendment and one con-speech given usually by the author of the original bill in opposition to the amendment. During general debate on an amendment, any speaker with any viewpoint may be recognized for the allotted time.

The total time for considering a bill is 50 minutes in committees. After this time passes, the chair puts the bill (the main motion) to a vote. Debate may be closed, extended, or limited by a two thirds majority vote. Debate may be extended for no more than 10 minutes at a time. Or, general debate may end if a motion for the previous question is adopted with two-thirds majority support even before 50 minutes time is up.

b. Parliamentary Points and their Precedence

The points and motions in the following precedence shall be in effect for the committees of the Westfield State Model Congress. Please note that the points are listed in order of precedence, which indicates which one will get priority if several are made at the same time. *Please also note that certain points – Points of Personal Privilege, Order, and Parliamentary Inquiry – may be introduced and may interrupt the speaker at any time. Points of Inquiry and Query, on the other hand, may be requested when the speaker is open to all points.* The delegate may raise the placard and hold it still to be recognized by the committee chair. If a speaker wants to close oneself to points of inquiry and query (wants to disallow any questions), the speaker may state, “I close myself to all points at this time.” To reverse this process, one may simply state, “At this time I open myself to all points.”

1. Point of Personal Privilege

Delegates may rise to a point of personal privilege if something prevents their participation in the proceedings (i.e. lack of decorum, sound problems, etc.). The point of personal privilege may interrupt a speaker only if the conditions prevent the delegate from following the proceedings.

[Speaker giving an authorship speech on the floor.]

Delegate B: "Point of privilege!"

Chair: "On Privilege, Delegate B."

Delegate B: "Delegate B, Beth Kay of Mountain Regional High School. Through the chair, I cannot hear the speaker."

2. Point of Order

During the discussion of any matter other than a pending point of order, even when another delegate is speaking, one may raise a point of order. This procedure notes a violation of parliamentary rule, and may be used to call attention to a procedural rule that has been violated. The Chair, pursuant to the rules of procedure, shall immediately decide upon a point of order.

[Speaker started giving a con-speech on the floor.]

Delegate B: "Point of Order!"

Chair: "On order, Delegate B."

Delegate B: "Delegate B, Beth Kay of Mountain Regional High School. Through the Chair, the speaker never stated his delegate number."

3. Point of Parliamentary Inquiry

During the consideration of any matter, except the address of another delegate, one may raise a point of parliamentary inquiry. This motion enables delegates to request information on committee/parliamentary procedures (points, motions, and rules) or the proper course of a parliamentary point or motion. The Chair shall answer inquiries in accordance with the rules of procedure.

Delegate B: "Point of Parliamentary Inquiry!"

Chair: "On Parliamentary Inquiry, Delegate B."

Delegate: "Delegate B, Beth Kay of Mountain Regional High School. Through the Chair, how much time do I get for my authorship speech?"

4. Point of Information

A delegate may rise to a point of information in order to ask a factual question regarding the matter under discussion. The point is made when no one has the floor or during the

question period of a speech. The question is addressed to the Chair, who may refer it to a delegate, if necessary, but this point usually cannot be used to obtain formation from a delegate. A point of information may not relate to procedure or express an opinion, and it may not interrupt a speaker.

Delegate B: "Point of Information!"

Chair: "On Information, Delegate B."

Delegate B: "Delegate B, Beth Kay of Mountain Regional High School. Through the Chair, what percentage of the federal budget is allocated to defense in 2025?"

5. Point of Inquiry

After a speaker has yielded to questions, delegates recognized by the Chair may present a point of inquiry, a question for the speaker about anything regarding the topic of discussion. This procedure may be used to address a single question to the speaker on the floor. Through points of inquiry, delegates can solicit the speaker's opinion on some aspect of the discussion; these points also help to spark lively debate.

The Chair may rule any point of inquiry dilatory. Also, delegates should remember to remain courteous and respectful of other delegates when questioning them. Delegates may use the third person in order to maintain this procedure's proper focus on the issues and limit personal attacks. Delegates should phrase all points of inquiry to the delegate through the Chair.

Speaker: "At this time, I open myself to all points."

Delegate B: "Point of Inquiry!"

Chair: "On Inquiry, Delegate B."

Delegate B: "Delegate B, Beth Kay of Mountain Regional High School. Through the Chair, how does the speaker feel about the current situation in the Middle East?"

6. Point of Query

This procedure may be used to ask up to three related questions to the speaker on the floor. It may be introduced when the speaker is open to all points, who may or may not answer.

Speaker: "At this time, I open myself to all points."

Delegate B: "Point of Query!"

Chair: "On Query, Delegate B."

Delegate B: "Delegate B, Beth Kay of Mountain Regional High School. Through the Chair, how does the speaker think the war in the Middle East would affect US foreign policy toward Iran; and how does the speaker think the crisis in the Red Sea would undercut US import of oil from the region?"

c. Parliamentary Motions

Motion is a proposal by a delegate to initiate certain actions. Motion may require a second and often a vote by the delegates in the committee. The delegate must raise and hold the placard while requesting the motion to carry out.

Motions recognized in committees, House and Senate

1. Motion to Adjourn

Motion to adjourn is called to conclude a session after conducting all business. This motion requires a second and a majority vote.

2. Motion to Amend

Motion to Amend is used to modify a bill (resolution) or primary amendment in a manner consistent with the preamble – by addition, deletion, or substitution. This motion may be introduced only in general debate; motion to amend also requires a second and a majority vote.

There are two types of amendments. Primary Amendments make changes to bills under consideration. Secondary Amendments make changes to a primary amendment that has been adopted.

The following procedure shall be followed for a motion to amend.

- i. A delegate will write an amendment on paper and give the written amendment to the Chair.
- ii. When the Chair asks for motions, the delegate makes a motion to amend.
- iii. The Chair reads the proposed amendment aloud. The Chair asks the bill's author if the amendment is friendly or unfriendly. If friendly, it becomes part of the bill and general debate continues.
- iv. If unfriendly, the Chair asks for a second and, providing there is one, calls for a vote to decide whether to debate the amendment. With support from a majority, the amendment process begins and the committee moves into structured debate. Failing to win a majority, the amendment is rejected and general debate is resumed.
- v. The author of the amendment shall obtain the floor and offer the first two-minute pro speech; and the author of the bill will be offered the first two-minute con speech.
- vi. General debate on the amendment begins. General debate sometimes involves multiple speeches of one minute each.

All speeches and questions during debate on an amendment must pertain to the amendment only and not the main motion in general. A delegate may not introduce a secondary amendment (an amendment to an amendment).

As in general debate, debate of an amendment concludes with a Motion for the Previous Question on the amendment – this motion ends debate on a topic and, if passed, is immediately followed by a vote on issue at hand. If passed, the committee then votes on the amendment only. After a vote on the amendment, the committee returns to general debate on the main motion.

3. Motion to Limit Debate

Motion to Limit Debate is called to limit how much debate is allowed – number and length of speeches and total time of debate. This motion may be introduced during general debate and specify whether the limit is just for the pending bill or for each bill thereafter.

Chair: "The speaker's time has elapsed, and the speaker is thanked. Are there any points or motions on the floor?"

Delegate B: "Motion to limit debate!"

Chair: "On what terms?"

Delegate B: "To limit debate to two more speakers with two questions each." [Chair may accept the motion and ask for a second to vote or reject it.]

4. Motion to Extend Debate

This motion is also used to modify the rules of debate. Delegate introduces a motion to extend debate in order to increase a time-period and the number of questions and/or speakers.

Debate on any matter may be extended four times. In House and Senate, the maximum time for each extension is three minutes for bills on the Consent Calendar and five minutes for bills on the Policy Calendar. Number of questions may be extended by an additional three questions per speaker, following the rules of general debate. In committee sessions, Chair may decide on time and question extensions.

The vote on a motion to extend debate shall be conducted via a voice vote and a show of hands.

Chair: "The speaker's time has elapsed, and the speaker is thanked. Are there any points or motions at this time?" [Seeing Delegate B raise placard] "Yes, Delegate B."

Delegate B: "Motion to extend debate!"

Chair: "On what terms?"

Delegate B: "To extend debates to three more speakers with two questions each."

Chair: "We have a motion to extend debates to three more speakers with two questions each. Is there a second?"

Delegate D: "Second!"

Chair: "We'll now vote on whether to extend debates to three more speakers with two questions each. All those in favor of moving to extend debates, please say Aye and raise hand. All those opposed?"

5. Motion to Move to the Previous Question

The Motion for the Previous Question requires a second and one delegate may speak against the motion. This motion is introduced to end debate on the given topic and trigger an immediate vote – on the bill or the amendment. First, a two-thirds majority is required to terminate debate; second, a simple majority is needed to pass the bill or amendment.

Delegate B: "Motion to move the previous question!"

Chair: "We have a motion for the previous question, and this motion requires a second. Is there a second?"

Delegate C: "Second!"

Chair: "We'll now vote on moving to the previous question on the bill. The first vote is not a vote on the bill itself; this is a vote to decide whether or not to terminate debate and it requires a two-thirds majority. All those in favor of moving to the previous question, please raise and hold your placard high?" [Vote is taken.] By a vote of 17 and 6, the previous question is so moved. We'll now vote on the bill. All those in favor, please raise your placards.

6. Motion to Recess

The Motion to Recess is introduced to suspend proceedings until the next session as stated in the conference schedule. This motion requires a second and a majority vote, and should state a desired length of recess.

Chair: "By a vote of 14 to 7, this bill is adopted. Are there any points or motions at this time?" [Seeing Delegate B raise placard] "Yes, Delegate B."

Delegate B: "Motion to recess!"

Chair: "For what length of time?"

Delegate B: "For 15 minutes."

Chair: "Is there a second?"

Delegate A: "Second."

Chair: "With a second, we now vote on a motion to recess for 15 minutes." [Vote is taken.] By a vote of 15 to 4, this motion is passed and the committee will return to session after 15 minutes."

7. Motion to Revote

This motion is introduced when voting procedure was out of order and must specify the reason. This motion also requires a second and a majority vote.

Delegate B: "Motion to revote!"

Chair: "On what grounds?"

Delegate B: "Delegate H voted twice, and the number of aye votes is counted incorrectly."

Motions recognized only in committees

1. Motion to Suspend the Rules

The Motion to Suspend a Rule signals a member's desire to temporarily change a rule of procedure. It requires a two-thirds majority to decide if the committee wants to vote to suspend the rule. A three-fourths vote is needed to overturn a decision by Chair. For example, a delegate may move to suspend the rules in order to extend another delegate's speaking time, and support from a three-quarters majority is required to do so.

Chair: "The speakers' time has elapsed, and the speaker is thanked. The rule allows one more pro- and one more con-speech. The floor is open to a pro-speech, and who'd like to speak in favor of the bill? [Seeing Delegate A raise placard] "Yes, Delegate A!"

Delegate A: "Motion to limit debate!"

Chair: "On what terms?"

Delegate A: "To limit debates to one pro- and one con-speech each."

Chair: "The motion is not recognized." [Seeing Delegate B raise placard] "Delegate B."

Delegate B: "Motion to suspend the rules!"

Chair: "On what grounds?"

Delegate B: "That the chair recognizes the motion to limit debate."

Chair: "This motion requires a two-thirds majority to decide if the committee wants to vote on the motion to suspend the rule. All those in favor of voting on this procedure, please raise placard. All those opposed, please raise placard. By a vote of 15 to 4, the committee has support of more than a two-thirds majority and now moves to vote on the motion to suspend the rule. All those in favor of suspending the rule and limiting debate, please raise placard. All those opposed, please raise placard. By a vote of 12 to 6, the motion fails to get a three fourths majority and is not adopted."

2. Motion to Caucus

This motion calls for a short time period (not to exceed five minutes) to informally discuss the issue at hand amongst other members of the committee. The delegate must state the desired amount of time and the purpose of the unmoderated caucus. Chairs have full discretion to allow such motions, which require a second and a majority to pass.

Delegate B: "Motion for an unmoderated caucus!"

Chair: "On what grounds?"

Delegate B: "To discuss possible amendments for five minutes."

Chair: "Is there a second?"

Delegate D: "Second."

Chair: "This motion requires a vote. All those in favor, please raise placard. All those opposed, please raise placard."

Motions recognized only in the House and Senate

1. Motion to Appeal to the Parliamentarian

This motion is often used when a delegate questions/challenges the chair's ruling and asks the parliamentarian to recognize a certain point or motion. This motion is called to overturn the chair's decision by asking for a second and final ruling. For this motion to pass, a two-thirds vote is required.

Chair: "The speaker's time has elapsed and the speaker is thanked. Which concludes general debate on the main motion. Are there any points or motions at this time?"
[Seeing Delegate A raise placard] Yes Delegate A."

Delegate A: "Motion to extend debate!"

Chair: Due to time constraints, the motion is not recognized. Are there any points or motions at this time?" [Seeing Delegate B raise placard] Yes, Delegate B."

Delegate B: "Motion to appeal to the parliamentarian!"

Chair: "On what grounds?"

Delegate B: "That the chair recognizes the motion to extend debate."

Delegate C: "Second."

Chair: "With a second, the moves to vote on the motion to extend debate. Those in favor, please raise placard. Those opposed? By a vote of 14 to 5, the committee moves to extend debate."