

WORLD WAR I: WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

It is January 1919. The last echoes of history's greatest war have stilled--but the debate over responsibility for the war has just begun! That debate will soon occur at the Cambridge Peace Conference, convened right here at MIT with the purpose of divining the causes of the war and offering recommendations to prevent future wars.

You are the official representative of your country at this Peace Conference. In a five-minute speech to the Conference, please:

1. **Assign responsibility for the war.** What country and/or what factor (for example, what aspect of the general situation) was most responsible?
2. **Explain and defend your own country's actions** leading up to the war.
3. You can also offer suggestions on preventing future wars if you are so moved.

After your speech the representatives of other states will have some time to rebut your arguments. After these comments the next five-minute presentation will be heard.

In your speech you may wish to refer to:

- The international situation (for example, to the balance of power, to alliances, to military strategies and plans, to widespread perceptions about war, etc.)
- The domestic situation in your country or other countries (for example, to nationalism, to civil-military relations, to the goals or abilities or shortcomings of national leaders, to democracy or autocracy, etc.)
- The events of the 1914 July crisis, and the role your country played in these events.

Your job is to advocate a point of view in your speech, not to present the matter from all sides. Your presentation therefore need not be entirely judicious or even-handed. But if you take excessive liberties with the facts you risk public humiliation at the hands of critical questioners who are not fooled by your fancy footwork.

Please provide an outline of your speech to your audience. This outline could be written on a blackboard but a 1-page handout often works better.

A good format for your speech is: sum up your argument quickly at the outset so your audience knows where you are going; then proceed through the body of the argument.

Further advice: keep your argument simple. Make a single point or a very few key points. Don't

make every argument you can--only make the strongest ones. Too many arguments leaves an audience confused.

Please hold your remarks to five minutes. The President of the Conference may cut you off if you run over.

We recommend that you practice your speech a couple of times--to the mirror or, better still, to a friend--before giving it. You can also practice using the facilities of MIT's writing and Communications Center, and can get helpful advice from their staff.

Countries facing judgment at the Conference are: Germany, Britain, France, Russia, Austria-Hungary; and perhaps Serbia and/or the United States.