COMPETITOR TIPS

We are excited for you to participate in one of the online National Speech & Debate events. This document includes various tips to help each participant maximize their performance. Different tips will be useful for different events or performances within each event. Please read and take into account whatever you think is appropriate for your individual participation. We hope these tips help you provide the best performance you can in the current conditions.

GENERAL TECH TIPS

The first thing to be aware of about technology and online competition is that you need to practice with your existing electronic device (desktop, laptop, tablet, cell phone, etc.) to establish a baseline. In early testing, what comes built into a laptop (in terms of webcam, audio, and microphone) is sufficient. The main thing that will impact your video and audio is your internet connection, not your hardware.

- **Practice makes perfect** - You should experiment before the tournament with different setups for your camera, audio, background, etc. What position works best? Can other people hear you? Do you have any internet issues? You can use Zoom for free to try out the video platform, and there will be dedicated training time available on the competition site, **competition.speechanddebate.org**.

- **Test your technology** - It never hurts to test your technology more than once. In fact, problems can arise because of mistakes such as forgetting to plug in your computer the night before. Test everything; if there is an issue that occurs right before the round, it is best to have it resolved early. If you have backup technology, you may also want to test that. If your computer dies, but you know how to use your phone and you have printed a copy of your case, you may be able to keep going in a pinch.

INTERNET TIPS

- **Use the Google Chrome Browser** - We have found that Chrome has a more stable connection while utilizing Zoom and the Zoom app. It is highly recommended that you utilize Chrome over other web browsers that will not work with the platform.

- **Be close to the router** - If you have to use a wireless connection, try to be as close as possible to the physical router. Experiment with different locations to see if some work better than others.

- **Reboot the router** - If you've experienced connectivity issues, try rebooting your router.

- **Test your internet speed** - The internet speed test measures the speed of your internet connection. Your connection speed includes things like download speed and upload speed. You can test your internet download and upload speed here. An optimal internet download speed is anywhere from 12 to 25 Mbps. If your wireless speed is slow, try to move closer to the physical router. Experiment with different locations to see if some work better than others.

- **Minimize multitasking** - Don't open too many browser tabs or run other programs while using video, as it can make your computer run slowly and degrade the quality of your connection. You may also want to deactivate auto-updates from your electronic devices.

- **Minimize other internet use** - If possible, ask others on your wifi to refrain from using your internet connection unnecessarily during rounds. For example, if another computer in the house is using Netflix, it will eat up a lot of available bandwidth. Try to minimize simultaneous connections to your router to improve video quality.

- **Minimize interference** - Avoid putting concrete structures, high-energy appliances (washing machines, microwaves, etc.), and other solid objects between your device and the router. If you're communicating from a mobile device, hold it near the bottom, as most mobile wireless antennas are situated near the top of the device. If your phone's camera is off to a side, chances are that the antenna is on the opposite side. Keep this in mind when holding your phone in a landscape (horizontal) position.

RECORDED SPEECH EVENTS

Equipment Options to Record Your Performance:

Electronic device (Laptop, Desktop, Tablet, or Cell Phone)

- Students will record their performances within the NSDA recording site, which prevents the videos from being edited and requires that all video is stationary. Students may not record and upload their own video outside of this recording site (except in Duo). The recording site will open up to National Tournament competitors on May 26 and Senior Open competitors on May 18.

- To record and upload your performance, you will need a device that has a stable connection to your local/home wifi or ethernet network. The device must be able to film and record video and audio or connect to an external webcam or microphone.

- The recording system will be set to automatically stop all recordings at a preset time limit of 10 minutes and 30 seconds.

Electronic device (Laptop, Desktop, Tablet, or Cell Phone) - cont.

- Please be aware that if you use an apple phone or ipad, Apple operating systems will prevent recording beyond the set time limit of 10 minutes. Competitors should test and use the systems that best fit the length of their performance while providing sufficient audio and visual quality.

Camera if not built in to your electronic device

- If your electronic device has a built in camera, it will likely be high enough quality to record your performance. If your electronic device does not have a webcam or if you choose to use an external webcam, you can acquire one like the examples below. Please be aware that this may produce higher quality and may prolong your upload time. A few photos of external webcams below:

Equipment Options to Record Your Performance:

- **Camera stand/tripod** - The camera must remain stationary throughout your performance - if using a phone or laptop, try propping it up against something, using a small stand/tripod if available, or getting creative (such as using a coffee cup) to find a way to keep the camera in one spot. Having an observer hold the camera should be a last resort. A few photos of examples are provided below:


- **Ethernet Cable** - Where possible, use a wired (ethernet) connection. Some models of laptops have an ethernet port, or you can purchase an adaptor to allow you to connect an ethernet cable to your laptop via a USB port or a USB-C port. This will be substantially faster and more stable than using wireless internet.

An example is provided below of the ethernet cable (left), ethernet to USB Adapter (middle), and USB-C port (right).

The ethernet cable can be connected into the back of the modem. Below is a picture of what a modem can look like, and most modems will have ethernet ports accessible.
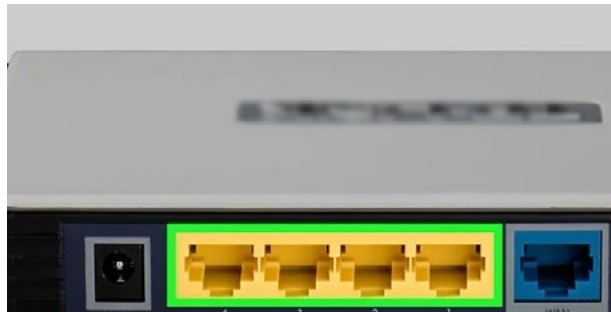
Recording Tips for Recorded Speech Events

Competitors may determine the distance between themselves and their camera in order to maximize both verbal and nonverbal communication. If possible, it is recommended that students and judges remove items that may be distracting in the background.

- **Review video** - It cannot be stressed enough that you are accountable for the video you submit, and as such, it is strongly recommended that you review your video prior to submission to ensure that audio and video represents what you would like to submit. Be sure to check the end of your video, noting that the recording system will cut you off at 10:30, or at 10 minutes if you use an Apple iPhone or tablet.

- **Video size** - If you use a recording device that records in 1080p or higher resolution, it will take a significant amount of time for your file to upload, and it may not upload at all. If you see that the "submit" button is spinning for a very long time (e.g. 5+ minutes), your file upload size is likely too big. We recommend recording in a lower resolution.

- **Neutral background** - Where possible, position yourself in front of a neutral background. Green screens, virtual backdrops or professional equipment are not allowed, but a blank wall works great, or you can affix a sheet to the wall behind you. If you are using a sheet, make sure it's well-secured to avoid movements in the background. The less visual distraction, the better. This may require some advance preparation to reorganize your space, if possible. This may include rearranging furniture, closing doorways, etc.

- **Lighting** - create as much light as you can. Professional lighting equipment is not allowed, but try opening the blinds, or moving a lamp or two closer to you. Angling lamps with no shades for instance could improve the lighting for the videos.

If you are using window light, face the windows when presenting, and position the camera in front of the window to record. Do not stand in front of the window because you will be back-lit, making it difficult to see you (see the photo below).

If you adjust and put your window to the side or behind where you're filming, with the light coming towards your face, the picture shows up as more balanced and the window is able to light your face and body, as seen below.
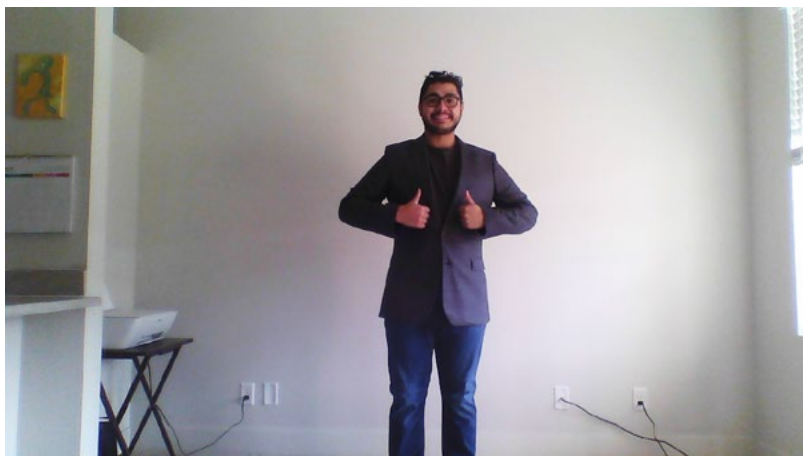
- **Video framing** - While there is no "good" or "bad" framing, competitors should test and use the systems that best fit the length of their performance and audio and visual quality. Please consider your event when deciding what may be the best framing to ensure you allow the viewer to see all elements of your performance. If you're recording on a tablet or phone, please note that the way you position the phone changes the orientation of the recording. For many events, horizontal filming may be preferable over vertical.

Ensure you're visible at least from the torso up, hopefully with some space above your head to the top of the frame.

Some examples of effective framing:
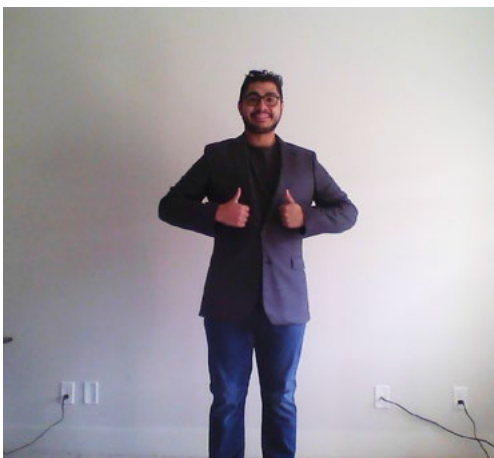
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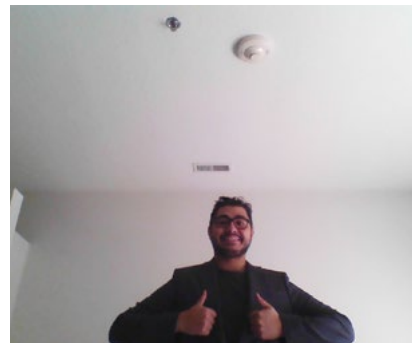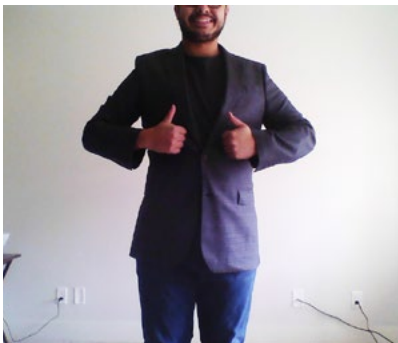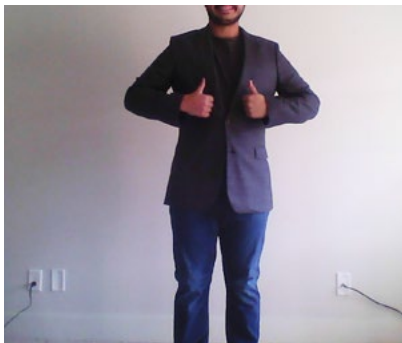
- **Silence notifications** - Make sure to turn off notifications for texts, emails, social media, etc. and silence your cell phone. The less distractions during your speech or recording, the better. Click here for instructions for Windows 10, here for instructions for a Mac, and here for a Chromebook.

- **Audio** - Attempt to put yourself in a quiet environment so that the microphone that you are using (computer or external) minimizes extraneous noises. If possible, rooms with carpets and rugs help to minimize feedback in videos. We also recommend that students use external microphones such as a lavalier microphone, airpods or other bluetooth headphones, as they will have higher audio quality. (If you do use an external microphone, be sure to test your equipment and make sure you can be heard in the video.)

LIVE EVENTS (DEBATE AND EXTEMP)

Equipment Options to Record Your Performance:

Electronic device (Laptop, Desktop, Tablet, or Cell Phone)

• Students will need a device that has a stable connection to your local/home wifi network. The electronic device must be able to transmit video and audio.

External Microphone/Headsets

• If you have access to an external microphone (such as a headset mic, bluetooth, or even a karaoke machine mic), try to use them, as they're typically much higher audio quality than the built-in microphone and will also reduce feedback. A few examples are provided below:


Ethernet Cable

• Where possible, use a wired (ethernet) connection. Some models of laptops have an ethernet port, or you can purchase an adaptor to allow you to connect an ethernet cable to your laptop via a USB port or a USB-C port. This will be substantially faster and more stable than using wireless internet.

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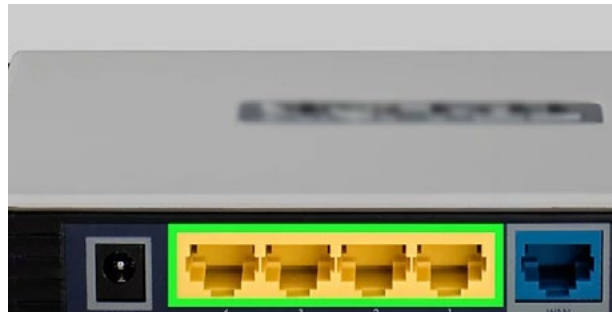
PRACTICING ONLINE DEBATE

Getting Zoom for free

- Your school might have a pre-existing or developing relationship with Zoom that will grant you access to unlimited time zoom. Alternatively, you can go here to signup for a free account with a 40 minute session maximum.

How to host a practice debate

Assuming no pre-existing relationship with Zoom at your schoool:

1. Sign up for an account at: https://zoom.us/ent?zcid=2582
2. Host a Meeting in the upper right. Click "with Video on."
3. Click Invite button in the lower middle.
4. Click copy URL. Send that to those who you want to participate.
5. The participants connect, and you can hold a debate. With a Basic Zoom account, you will have to start a new meeting after 40 minutes (unless they waived that for your school). With a Pro zoom account there is no time limit.

IMPORTANT NOTES

- **Use Google Chrome Browser** - we have found that Chrome has a more stable connection while utilizing Zoom or its app. It is highly recommended that you utilize Chrome over other web browsers.
- **Zoom App** - In live events, use the Zoom App wherever possible after connecting to the room inside the browser. The Zoom App has many optimizations that help with video and audio quality. You will be able to access the Zoom app through the competition room. Have the Zoom app downloaded on your electronic device prior to competition. Please note that the zoom app is only usable by debate competitors. Speech competitors must use zoom through a web browser.
- **Timing** - There is a timer built into the competition.speechanddebate.org browser that students can see in their competition room if they stay in their browser. If you are using the Zoom app, you will not be able to see the timer and should plan to time yourself.
- **Stay muted** - Make sure you stay muted at all times unless you're the one speaking - this helps eliminate echoes/feedback, etc. and makes it easier to hear the speaker.
- **Partner to Partner Communication** - Students debating in partner events should prepare for the possibility that they will not be in the same physical location as their partner during the National Tournament if CDC recommendations do not change. Debaters should establish and test a means of messaging their partner during the round. This may be through instant messaging, a phone conversation, or whatever debaters deem prudent.
- **Team to Team Communication** - Debaters must send original sources via PDF or Word document; no links directly to online articles may be shared due to paywalls, subscription restrictions, and the inability to highlight the sections read or paraphrased. Evidence must be shared as a PDF or Word document through a link in the virtual room chat box or through an email chain. Students who plan to use the email option are recommended not to use their personal email address, and instead, to create a Nationals-only account to use. The email chain must be created in the 30 minutes prior to the debate in order to be used. Judges should be added to the email chain if they so request.