Virtual Tournament
Best Practices Guide
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“Interpretation is a genre of forensics that performatively renders an author’s work so as to bring out the meaning of that work in an effort to uncover some truth about the human condition. All that essentially means is that we present literature to demonstrate an argument about who we are. Interpretation is further segmented into different categories or events”.¹

“Public speaking is a process, an act, and an art of making a speech before an audience. Your goal should not be limited with informing your audience or expressing your thoughts publicly, but to changing emotions, actions, and attitudes, and to leaving your listeners moved by the words and touched by their meaning.”²
Virtual Tournament Equity Statement

The National Individual Events Tournament of Champions (NIETOC) is a community that is committed to the promotion of diversity, inclusion, and fairness. NIETOC recognizes the issues related to equity that have been identified in the virtual world of competitive speech. We are resolute in our commitment to help mitigate issues of equity in online speech competition. We believe that students deserve the opportunity to enter virtual tournaments with dignity and to compete with video performances that showcase their talents. NIETOC understands that as one institution we will not be able to solve all problems that arise; however, we commit to doing our part in the larger ecosystem of competitive online speech tournaments to support students, coaches, and schools in efforts to address the negative impacts of inequity. It is our hope that all participants find virtual competition to be a positive experience.
**Competition Options**

**What is Asynchronous Competition?**
Asynchronous competition is one that happens offline later through videos. Performances are prepared beforehand and “uploaded” for competition allowing each student to work at their own pace.

**Advantages of Asynchronous Competition:**
One of the most significant advantages of this type of competition is that it allows the students to be independent, permitting them to organize their time their way. Also, the performance video can be done at a time when a performance space or tech needs are available in their home or classroom.

With an asynchronous competitive video platform, the competitive performance will not incur “accidental interactivity” incidents that degrade the live performance, such as:
- Judges and observers not on mute contributing background noise during the presentation
- Hold music taking over the audio stream
- Enter and exit notifications
- Proprietary viewing software confusing or preventing viewers from joining the meeting

**Disadvantages of Asynchronous Competition:**
The only major disadvantage of this model is that there is no real interaction (eye contact, laughter, nonverbal support) between the competitors and their judges, nor between the competitors and their peers.

**What is Synchronous Competition?**
Synchronous competition refers to competition in which the students have the opportunity to compete and interact at the moment (i.e., "live") with their competitors and judges. Specifically, synchronous competition is ideal for extemporaneous speaking, based on the nature of the event.

**Advantages of Synchronous Competition:**
The biggest advantage of the synchronous model is that all parties are connected, there is a real interaction between competitors and judges. This overcomes the disadvantage of the asynchronous model.

**Disadvantages of Synchronous Competition:**
The disadvantage of the synchronous model is that it depends on technology to make it happen, for example, whether or not the competitors and judges have a adequate computer to connect online or access to a stable internet connection,
Virtual Platforms

8x8vc - this is a free videoconferencing baseline option – your online software choice should be able to generate a meeting for every competition section in a tournament and offer links to the video section hosted on 8x8.vc directly to the students and judge(s) of the round. This option should, it seems, be free -- no extra charge beyond paying for tabulation software (if applicable).

   Contact Information: https://8x8.vc/

Zoom - this has been done a few times with online software and works well. It does require some overhead/management -- you need a "proctor" or room manager for each Zoom call you break the tournament into, and they need to move students/judges into their breakout rooms. There are strategies that are effective in speeding this up. With some good coordination and planning, this can really be effective, and people are used to it. The $15/month Zoom account is sufficient to do this, so if you have a tournament that perhaps needs 5 Zoom calls, even if the tournament bought the 5 Zoom accounts for a month for the proctors, that would cost $75 total for video, which seems quite reasonable.

   Contact Information: https://zoom.us/

Yaatly - this is a forensics-oriented video platform. You export a schematic from your online software choice, upload it into Yaatly, and then Yaatly generates all the rooms for you. Students and judges log into Yaatly (they'd need to have accounts) and click the room they want to go into to compete. The system can also offer things like an auditorium for announcements, judges' lounge, etc. The cost you pay is $2 per user per day to use Yaatly. A user is anyone who connects to Yaatly using a unique device.

   Contact Information: https://yaatly.com/

NSDA Campus – this is a platform offered by NSDA- your online software choice should be able to generate a meeting for every competition section in a tournament and offer links to the video section hosted on campus directly to the students and judge(s) of the round. The cost of Campus is $6 per “room” needed per day. No extra charge beyond paying for tabulation software (if applicable).

   Contact Information: https://www.speechanddebate.org/nsda-campus/

Classrooms.cloud - -- this is a platform offered by NSDA- your online software choice should be able to generate a meeting for every competition section in a tournament and offer links to the video section hosted on campus directly to the students and judge(s) of the round. The cost of Classrooms.cloud is $30/room/day. No extra charge beyond paying for tabulation software (if applicable).

   Contact Information: https://classrooms.cloud/
**Recommended Technology**

**Important Note**

The first thing to note about technology is you need to practice with your existing technology. The main thing that will impact your video and audio is your internet connection, not your hardware.

There are some genres of technology that you can invest in that will noticeably improve performance

**Ethernet and adapters**

This is probably the most required piece of technology.

If they don't have an ethernet plug in on their laptop, they need an adapter, this one is $12:

[https://www.amazon.com/UGREEN-Ethernet-Adapter-Nintendo-Chromebook/dp/B00MYT481C/ref=sr_1_5?crid=25V8HSBDTOE88&keywords=usb+ethernet+adapter&qid=1584293085&sprefix=usb+ethernet+%2Caps%2C170&sr=8-5](https://www.amazon.com/UGREEN-Ethernet-Adapter-Nintendo-Chromebook/dp/B00MYT481C/ref=sr_1_5?crid=25V8HSBDTOE88&keywords=usb+ethernet+adapter&qid=1584293085&sprefix=usb+ethernet+%2Caps%2C170&sr=8-5)

For slightly more than $20 you can get an adapter that increases the amount of USB ports a laptop has AND provides ethernet plug in:

[https://www.amazon.com/Anker-Gigabit-Ethernet-Converter-Support/dp/B014ZOJX7W/ref=sxin_2_ac_d_pm?ac_md=2-1-QmV0d2VlbiAkMjUgYW5kICQxMDA%3D-ac_d_pm%&crid=25V8HSBDTOE88&cv_ct_cx=usb+ethernet+adapter&keywords=usb+ethernet+adapter&pd_rd_i=B014ZOJX7W&pd_rd_r=8c212297-a0a2-4804-8e70-903e9f7f051a&pd_rd_w=cBmiT&pd_rd_wg=bRnyL&pf_rd_p=0e223c60-bcf8-4663-98f3-da892fbd4372&pf_rd_r=FNJZWM0DSCNV7J3D8RM0&psc=1&qid=1584293085&sprefix=usb+ethernet+%2Caps%2C170](https://www.amazon.com/Anker-Gigabit-Ethernet-Converter-Support/dp/B014ZOJX7W/ref=sxin_2_ac_d_pm?ac_md=2-1-QmV0d2VlbiAkMjUgYW5kICQxMDA%3D-ac_d_pm%&crid=25V8HSBDTOE88&cv_ct_cx=usb+ethernet+adapter&keywords=usb+ethernet+adapter&pd_rd_i=B014ZOJX7W&pd_rd_r=8c212297-a0a2-4804-8e70-903e9f7f051a&pd_rd_w=cBmiT&pd_rd_wg=bRnyL&pf_rd_p=0e223c60-bcf8-4663-98f3-da892fbd4372&pf_rd_r=FNJZWM0DSCNV7J3D8RM0&psc=1&qid=1584293085&sprefix=usb+ethernet+%2Caps%2C170)

And they need an ethernet cord; how expensive it is depending on length.

**Headphones and Microphone vs Headset**

We found any headphones and a plug-in microphone to be slightly better than a headset.

Most everyone has a pair of headphones and should plan to use them. We make no recommendations here because whatever you have available will be fine to improve performance.

For plug in microphones this one attaches to your computer, produces strong audio and is $30
This microphone worked well for $45: 
https://www.amazon.com/dp/B076ZSRVFQ/?tag=thewire0620&linkCode=xm2&ascsubtag=AwEAAAAAAAZYa

A survey of a large sample size of recommend articles reveals this one as another strong option at $47:

3-Webcams
Practicing joining a zoom meeting will reveal any issues that exist with your webcam. Personally, my laptop webcam has some sort of Windows 10 error with it. I couldn’t resolve it, so I purchased a $20 webcam you plug into a USB port. Works fine. Most webcams for the purposes of debate are interchangeable so default to what is most in line with your budget and that is readily available.

Acquiring Home Internet
Reactions from private companies are dynamic, but the trendline has been they recognize that work and learning are shifting to home environments and are working to increase capacity.

Comcast has announced a program:

As did Spectrum:
https://www.wect.com/2020/03/15/spectrum-offer-free-internet-students-during-coronavirus-outbreak/

Improving Home Internet Capabilities
The best way to improve your home internet is to use an ethernet and plug it into your router. This is better than Wi-Fi and has drastically improved performance in tests done thus far.

For most computers it requires an adapter like this:
https://www.amazon.com/UGREEN-Ethernet-Adapter-Nintendo-Chromebook/dp/B00MYT481C/ref=sr_1_5?crid=25V8HSBDTOE88&keywords=usb+ethernet+adapter&qid=1584293085&sprefix=usb+ethernet+%2Caps%2C170&sr=8-5

And an ethernet cord, price depends on length.

The second-best way to improve your home internet is to ensure you are in the room where your router is and there are no objects between you and the router. This also stabilizes video greatly.

Here are a list of other recommendations from Zoom (https://blog.zoom.us/wordpress/2013/09/19/enhancing-wifi-powered-zoom-meeting/):
1-**Reboot the Router**

If you’ve experienced connectivity issues, you may want to reboot your router before your next video meeting, which flushes its stale connections. Admittedly, rebooting may not be the resolution, but it’s still a good way to prevent problems (especially if the router is on 24/7 for months or years).

2-**Adjust Your Position**

To maximize signal quality, you must do one of two things: move the router or move yourself. The closer you are to your router, the better your signal quality. Just like any other radio device, Wi-Fi routers have a particular range. As you move further from it, you’ll get choppy packet delivery (your video and audio could freeze).

3-**Minimize Interference**

An aspect of Wi-Fi connections is obstruction. Since your packets basically float in mid-air to the router, avoid putting concrete structures, fingers, and other solid objects between your wireless antenna 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.

4-**Don’t Crowd the Router**

Think of your router as a railroad depot. Every connected device is a train that came to park there. Once all the shunts are occupied, the depot shines a red light signaling other trains that it’s full. Your router doesn’t have a red light, but it still gets overwhelmed.

If you connect more devices to it, you put pressure on its hardware and it eventually uses a “first-come, first-serve” packet management model to compensate. This is disastrous for people trying to converse through video. Typical home routers are meant to handle at most 9 or 10 connected wireless devices. They can theoretically handle up to 255, but we must stress the word “theoretically.” For the optimal video experience, a router needs minimal load in terms of both bandwidth and simultaneous connections.

5-**Update Your Router**

Routers don’t just magically come with perfect firmware straight out of the assembly line. Chances are your manufacturer is going to notice some bugs that impede your ability to communicate effectively. Wi-Fi suffers the most from this because its standards are always being revised and a vast number of features exist that are not present in Ethernet. Look through your device manufacturer’s website and ensure that you have the latest firmware for your router.

6-**Enable WME/WMM**

If you bought a router that advertises itself as being optimized for video and VoIP, you’ll likely find an option somewhere within its configuration interface that allows you to enable Wireless Multimedia Extensions (WME) or Wi-Fi Multimedia (WMM). These are two terms used to describe an interoperability feature within some routers that puts a higher priority on media transmissions than on other data. It means that your router will put
aside transmission of other packet data in favor of your video and audio transmissions. For more information, refer to your router’s manual.

**7-Configure Zoom as a Priority Application**

Oftentimes, while you’re configuring WME/WMM on your router, you’ll be able to define which applications have the highest priority. Add Zoom as one. For the port range, tell your router to start at 8801 and end at 8810 (the range your Zoom client application uses).

**8-Use a Less-Crowded Channel**

Wi-Fi networks are like big house parties. When the scene is getting too crowded, it’s time to take a breather at the balcony. In a large network with multiple Wi-Fi access points, your packets might be neglected when sent on a radio channel that’s too occupied. To mitigate this, configure the router to use another channel on the network.

Don’t know if your channel’s busy or not? Unsure of what channel you should use? Wireless network diagnostic tools like MetaGeek’s inSSIDer can help you find this information.

**9-Go Dual-Band**

Dual-band routers operate at two different frequencies: 2.4 GHz band (the more common of the two, which is prone to interference from other devices) and the 5 GHz band. The higher frequency really doesn’t offer many advantages, but it does decrease the likelihood that you’ll experience nasty interference and offers a dedicated SSID (wireless connection) that you can use strictly for VoIP and Zoom meetings. Buying a dual-band router gives you this kind of flexibility. Call the 2.4 GHz network “Web” and the other one “Multimedia.” When joining or hosting a conference, connect to the “Multimedia” band and you’re set!
Practicing Your Recorded Performance

A. Get Familiar with the Online Recording Platform Early
Don’t wait until “showtime” to test the online recording platform. Otherwise, something will go wrong. You will need significantly more time than you think to record your competition performance(s)! Get online and get familiar as early as possible. Figure out the idiosyncrasies, overcome them, and share what you learned with your speech friends! It takes a village!

B. Performance Parameters
Be familiar with your frame and rehearse in the virtual platform to ensure you do not disappear from your audience's view (stay in the box). Use tape to mark your parameters on the floor, if necessary. Also, be sure your gestures are visible, and your blocking remains inside the frame. A good rule of thumb is to be visible from the knees-up.

C. Find Your Light
Natural lighting is best but try your best to present facing good lighting to ensure your expressions are clear to your online audience.

D. Eye Contact
Knowing where to look when there is no one in the room can be awkward and confusing. But for variety’s sake, consider looking out above/around the camera, as well as directly at the camera while speaking. This balance will feel more natural to your individual audience members. Avoid speaking directly into the camera the entire speech. This will likely make your audience feel awkward and uncomfortable just as it would if you stared at one person for an entire speech.

E. Sound Quality
Bluetooth headphones allow your audience to hear you clearly from a distance. If you do not have access to Bluetooth headphones, rehearse and review your speech to ensure you are easily heard in the recording. Remember, trial and error. There will be a lot of errors.

F. Solid Background
You do not want anything busy or distracting in the background. Do you best to ensure your background is solid so the audience can focus on you. Try to fashion a performance space in front of blank wall space or in front of long, solid curtains. You may have to do some remodeling in your house, but your family will forgive you. No green screens or virtual backgrounds. Save those backgrounds for virtual game nights.

G. Turn Off Auto-Lock
Make sure the auto-lock setting is turned off on your recording device. If the device is set to auto-lock (the screen automatically goes to sleep/goes black/locks after a certain amount of time), this will stop the recording. To turn off this feature on an IOS device: Setting→Display & Brightness→Auto-Lock→Never.

H. Remember to Breathe
You will get frustrated. Something (actually, many things) will go wrong. You will want to scream, and you should. If you get overwhelmed, take a break from recording. Take a walk. Play some hype music. Call your coach or teammates and vent. You are not the only one having this experience. You have worked hard to craft your message. So now it’s time to hit record one more time and share that message with the world! Before you hit record, see yourself in that final round, on the stage. Take a deep breath, smile, remember your purpose, remember your team, remember how proud your coach is of you, remember how much you are loved...then hit record and say something worth hearing!
JUDGE OBSERVATIONS

The following are comments submitted by judges at UK-TOC and THE MASQ virtual tournaments held in April & May of 2020.

A. Audio:

-Make sure the space doesn't have much of an echo (like a garage or tile-floored kitchen), as that makes it difficult to hear what a competitor saying.

-Make sure that you can be heard clearly, including on enunciation.

-Some students need to make sure they speak up in case the microphones might not be the best.

-There were times when noise disruptions were more distracting then necessary. Ladies wearing heels while standing on a hard floor surface: the camera really picked that up so that each step was loud and distracting. Since, generally, we are not seeing your feet in the video, we don't need to hear them either. Take them off or wear flats.

-When possible, remind those in the background of your video to stay silent. Grocery bags, conversations, etc. I know that is very difficult to control at times. But do the very best you can, especially if it's the person holding the camera who is making the noise.

-Just as when we are performing live, be aware of the acoustics of the room. Recording in a smaller room can cause things to be louder (especially voices in upper registers).

-Those who were in big rooms echoed a lot, so sound was off and absorbed before it reached the microphone on the computer.

-Be careful to not have sound too high it can pick up heavy breathing that can be distracting. Use tape marks on floor to help the actor stay in frame.

B. Video:

-Please make eye contact with the camera. At minimum, your ENTIRE intro needs to be given to the camera.

-Use the foreground area. Don't be afraid to come up to the camera during certain parts of your speech, even if we lose part of your body. It is much better to see your face & facial expressions than to see your shoes.

-If possible, try to stand in front of a white or light-colored wall.

-Try not to have the camera too far below you; have the camera no lower than your waist so you are not looking down at the audience

-I also would like it if the students showed their entire body and not just a waist-up video. Full range of bodily motion is important in speech because in round we actually see the whole body not just the top half.

-Finding a stable place to put their phone/camera would be great. The handheld ones were harder to watch.
-Utilize the camera shot to your advantage.
-Make sure to submit a video that is largely error free!

-Some videos were recorded with landscape view, which I think is better than the really tight/closed-in view, to permit movement/blocking.

-Some rooms were too dark and performers were too far away from the camera. This was especially true in informative where we also need to see the visual aids.

-I prefer videos with a non-descript background or a solid color wall.

-I would like to see it stressed to show the student's entire body. I want to be able to see feet to comment on technique or ticks.

-The computer/phone/recorder should be placed high enough (like on a counter or high chair) so we're looking straight on, instead of placing it on the floor or low surface to where the video is angled up at the competitor. If it's an interp event, especially HI where there is more creative blocking, it would be helpful to see legs instead of just being chest up.

-Competitors should ensure that they do not ever move outside the view of the camera. Including tech (which is why I think landscape view works better).

-Try to have the camera recording at level commensurate with my eye level. A couple were recorded from a spot that was must have been below waist level and pointed upward, which inhibited my ability to get a good view of facial expressions and overall eye contact.

-Be careful of the camera being below you. It often cuts off the top of you head.

-Make sure the camera is in front of you vs to the side. Again, want to see those facials.

-Seeing your whole body is best. This helps with some of the nuances of characters in the interp events.

-Students should angle phones from the perspective of someone sitting like I would as a judge in the room.

-The camera should be close to eye level. And I prefer less head room at the top so that the contestant isn't only on half of the screen.

C. Lighting:

-Avoid having a light directly behind them. It gives a distracting halo effect, making it hard to see their face.

-Those with the best lighting had cross lighting to avoid the shadow down the face.

-Make sure you are facing a window if possible, that light will give you great natural light.

D. Performance:

-Pause for jokes/ reactions

-Don't take time scanning the room before you start your speech, as there is no audience beyond the camera.
-Starting/Stopping the video -- if there is room, hit record while out of the screen shot so that we just see you walk into the camera range, take a beat and go. When you are done, walk out of camera range and then turn off camera while out of sight. You could also have someone else start/stop the camera for you.

-Take a second to pause before starting.

-Don’t be afraid to go BIG even if you are in a small room.

-Several competitors still scanning room with eye contact, which I think is awkward in this virtual setting. I would suggest keeping eye contact on the camera, with the exception, of course, when characters are involved in dialogue or blocking of scene involves movement away from the camera. The narrator's eye contact should remain on the camera.

-I had a couple of competitors who did such a cool job of walking into their video from the side with such gravitas and poise! Many walked to the phone, hit play/stop and backed into position.

-Students should perform to an audience of one--the camera. Just as it would look weird to look at blank spaces in a room when performing in front of only one judge, it looks weird when students perform to blanks spots for a digital recording.
Cited Sources
