

How To Judge Declamation | National Speech & Debate Association

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Basic Understanding

Declamation requires students to select a speech that was delivered in public and perform an excerpt of that speech to an audience. Speeches are up to 10 minutes in length. As a result, students typically shorten the text of the speech to meet time requirements. The event is not designed for students to mimic the original author of the speech. Instead, speakers are to develop an oration that delivers the message of the author in an original and engaging manner.

Structure

There are a couple of key structural components of DEC: First, the cutting. A performer's cutting is the 10-minute selection they perform. This is how they've arranged the performance, and what aspects of the speech they've decided to tell. It is okay for the student to move sections of text around in a different order than the author to help make the 10-minute version they're delivering flow best. Second, the introduction. Students will construct a short introduction that gives context to their performance. At a minimum, the introduction should establish the title of the speech, the author, and when it was delivered. Typically students will do a short portion of the speech before delivering their intro, sometimes called a **teaser**. Some students do the introduction and then go into the speech. There is no preferred method; simply evaluate whether or not the introduction gave you a solid foundation to evaluate the speech, and fit within the flow of the speech!

The Declamation could follow this general structure:

- **Teaser** – 30 to 45 seconds – student delivers a small portion of the speech to establish the mood and general theme
- **Introduction** – 20 to 30 seconds – student delivers the introduction
- **Main Body of Speech** – 7 to 8 minutes – student delivers the main points of the speech

Evaluating the Round

There are three key areas to consider when evaluating Declamation.

First, **cutting**. Do you understand what is happening? Does the speech flow effectively? Does the sequence of ideas contained in the speech make sense?

Second, **delivery**. Is the speech, as performed, appropriate for the situation? Does the student use voice, posture, and gestures to enhance the message?

Third, **context**. Does the performer engage with the audience? Does the performance appropriately capture the context of the speech?

Filling Out the Ballot

Performers are ranked compared to the other students in their room with the best performance receiving the one ranking. The judge may also assign speaker points, typically in a range from 90 to 100, with 100 being outstanding. The judge writes on the ballot how the speaker can improve (e.g., eye contact, clarity, emotion, etc.) and what the student did well. This is an educational activity and all feedback is welcome. Please make sure the feedback is constructive and not merely critical.