2026-27 Judging Overview

How to Judge Speech Events for New Judges

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1 - Brand New Judges

So, you have volunteered to judge at a Speech and Debate Tournament and you have no idea what you're doing - WELCOME! It's alright; we were all new at one time. One of the first things you need is a tabroom account. Please work with your team's coach to get linked to your team once you've made your account.

This guide is to help you understand and judge the Speech portion of a tournament. Just think of speech events as competitive acting.

There are 12 different speech events that we will be going over later on in this guide:

1. Extemporaneous
2. Original Oratory
3. Oral Interpretation
4. Program Oral Interpretation
5. Humorous Interpretation
6. Dramatic Interpretation
7. Duo Interpretation
8. Oratorical Declamation
9. Impromptu
10. Sight Reading
11. Sales Pitch
12. Storytelling

At some tournaments, Humorous Interpretation (HI) and Dramatic Interpretation (DI) compete together under the event Dramatic Performance (DP)

2 - How the Round Works

Virtual Tournaments: You will need a tabroom account. Please work with your team coach to get that set up and working.

In-Person Tournaments: You will need a tabroom account. Please work with your team coach to get that set up and working.

There are typically 3 rounds of competition at a tournament and a round of Finals if needed. At the beginning of a round, the tournament facilitators will use Tabroom to make the first round of competition "live" for judges and competitors. This will provide important information for the round, such as: Event, Room Number, Judge Code (your school coach should have given you this code), and Competitor Codes. This is where you find out what event you are going to be judging, what room you'll need to be in, and what students you should have in that room.

Once you get to the room, the students may have started writing their information on the white/chalkboard, if available. They typically put down their code, their name, the title of their piece, the author, and whether they are double entered (DE). You then type that information at the top of the ballot in the provided space on Tabroom.

When the students are ready to begin. Make sure you have all the correct students from your posting. Some students may be double-entered, meaning that they are doing two events during the round. If you have double-entered competitors, please allow them to perform first, and then they can leave to go do their next event. If a double-entered competitor went to do their other event first, you may allow others to go before them while they are not in the room. Once they show up to your room, they may go next or allow another student to go ahead of them.

If you are missing a student, wait for a little while (15-20 minutes), if they do not show up, let the tab room know. If you have a student in the room that should not be there, send that student to the tab room so they can sort it out. If you judge a student who is not supposed to be there and you don't realize it until after they perform, they must be ranked last. It is the student's responsibility to show up in the correct room.

Once the round is finished, submit your rankings 1 first into tabroom. It will ask you to confirm your choices. You can go back and add feedback throughout the tournament day (tournament officials will give you a cut-off time). There is a space to provide general feedback to the entire group and individual feedback to each competitor. Try to work with the idea of at least one positive and one negative thing for them to work on.

3 - Time Signals

It's all about timing, so please have some sort of watch or stopwatch to time the performance; there is one built right into most smartphones these days. All speech events, except XTMP and Impromptu, have a **10-minute maximum** time limit. Extemporaneous speaking has a **7-minute maximum**. All events have a 30-second grace period, meaning they may go over the maximum by 30 seconds without penalty. **If someone goes over the 30-second grace period, they CANNOT be ranked first in the round**. If they go way over, for example, 12 minutes, please politely stop the speaker and tell them they are over time.

Ask the competitor if they would like time signals to show the passage of time. They may say no, or they may ask for some different options. Do your best to provide the signals as requested.

All but XTMP - Typically, students ask for "2 down", meaning they would like:

At 8 minutes = hold up 2 fingers
At 9 minutes = hold up 1 finger
At 9:30 = hold up a "C" shape with your hand
At 10 minutes = hold up a fist

XTMP - May ask for "5 Down", meaning:

2:00 = hold up 5 fingers
3:00 = hold up 4 fingers
4:00 = hold up 3 fingers
5:00 = hold up 2 fingers

6:00 = hold up 1 finger
6:30 = hold up a “C” shape with your hand
7:00 = hold up a fist

Varsity XTMP students generally like 5-down, but not all may like that many. Just ask before they begin their speech. Keep an eye on your stopwatch while they speak so you know when to start giving time signals. It is customary and helpful to the student to inform them of their time when they are finished.

4 - Judging Speech Events

1. **Extemporaneous Speaking (XTMP)**
    a. 7 minutes maximum time limit with 30-second grace period
    b. XTMP Prep - before the round begins, all of the students go to prep; this is where they draw a topic and have 20 minutes to research the topic and create a 7 minute speech about it.
    c. Students will come in the room and perform their speech one at a time. Make sure to ask for their name, code, speech topic, and whether they would like time signals or not. Do not be concerned if you are waiting for a few minutes and no students show up, they are sent to the room at a very specific time one by one.
    d. Varsity XTMP must be memorized and are not allowed any sort of note card or paper to read from.
    e. Junior Varsity and Junior High XTMP speakers are allowed ONE index card sized (3X5) piece of paper to read from during their performance. Make a note on the ballot whether a note card was used. (If JV and V are combined, tabroom will help you sort this out.)
    f. The material should be organized according to some logical plan to produce a complete speech within the time allowed. Delivery should be free from marked defects in the mechanics of speech—poise, quality and use of voice, enunciation, fluency, facial and bodily expressiveness—and should be effective in enlisting and holding the interest of the audience.
    g. The best extemporaneous speech combines clear thinking, good speaking, and interesting presentation to establish a definite thought with respect to the subject chosen for the occasion.

2. **Original Oratory (OO)**
    a. 10-minute maximum with a 30 second grace period
    b. Students prepare an original speech, usually persuasive or informative on a current topic. Any topic is permissible and any form of oration is permitted.
    c. The speeches should be organized, well thought out, and deliver the message effectively.
    d. The speech should be memorized.

e. While singing is allowed, it should not be excessive or dominate the speech.
f. There should not be excessive or distracting movements throughout the piece (such as pacing or walking across the room), but speakers are allowed to shift around as they transition from one thought or mood to the next.
g. Pay attention to: enunciation, rhythm, eye contact, facial expressions, hand gestures, phrasing, and tone.

3. Oral Interpretation (OI)

a. 10-minute maximum with a 30-second grace period
b. Students present selections in two categories -- prose and poetry. The students alternate between rounds of prose and rounds of poetry, which will be determined at the beginning of each tournament.
    i. Example: Round 1 = Poetry, Round 2 = Prose, Round 3 = Poetry
c. The student must hold a manuscript and appear to be reading, so the performance does not need to be completely memorized, BUT the speaker should have a good balance between reading and not reading from their manuscript. They cannot just simply read it to you, it's a performance, not a book reading.
d. The competitor should not be moving their feet very much; think of them as if they are standing in a small square on the floor - in a box. The student should be judged on poise, quality, and use of voice - inflection, pronunciation, emphasis, and the ability to fully interpret the characters within their piece, bringing them to life.
e. At some point during the piece, most likely in the introduction, the speaker must state the title of the piece and the author.
f. While singing is allowed, it should not be excessive or dominate the speech.

4. Program Oral Interpretation (POI)

a. 10-minute maximum with a 30-second grace period
b. Speakers will create a program of prose, poetry, drama, and non-fiction using at least 2 of these genres.
c. The program should focus on a specific theme.
d. Selections may be memorized, but there should be some interaction with "reading" from a manuscript. The manuscript may be used as a prop.
e. Unlike Oral Interpretation, speakers may move as in a stage performance.
f. POI is a bit like a combination of dramatic performance with OI. It mixes and blends different pieces of poetry and prose around a central theme.

5. Humorous Interpretation (HI)

If combined with DI, it will run as Dramatic Performance of (DP)

a. 10-minute maximum with a 30-second grace period
b. Students present selections from published plays, screenplays, or fictional or non-fictional work that is humorous in nature.

c. Needs to be memorized. No props, including the speaker's body, are allowed.
    i. Example: If a student with long hair wants to simulate running their hands through their hair, they must pantomime it because physically touching their hair is using a prop.
d. Although this is primarily a display of vocal ability, body language will play a part in the overall performance, and since it is a drama, more vocal and physical suggestions may be required in order to portray characters, conflict, and story. However, no physical action should be performed that will distract the listeners' attention from the drama being presented. The performance should display another world outside the performance setting.
e. Positions other than standing should not be excessive in length or dominate the performance.
f. If the piece has more than one character, the speaker should distinguish between the characters by using different voices, mannerisms, and stances. And these should be consistent throughout the performance
    i. Example: If a character has a British accent, the accent should be there every time that character speaks.
g. The speaker is freer to move around to bring these characters to life: pantomime, gestures, and moving around the space are all acceptable.

6. Dramatic Interpretation (DI)

If combined with DI, it will run as Dramatic Performance of (DP)

a. 10-minute maximum with a 30-second grace period
b. Students present selections from published plays, screenplays, fictional or non-fictional work that is dramatic in nature.
c. Exactly the same as HI, but dramatic. That doesn't mean that there may not be a couple of jokes in there, but the piece is dramatic overall.

7. DUO Interpretation (DUO)

a. 10-minute maximum with a 30-second grace period
b. Two students, as a <u>team</u>, are to present a memorized scene. Each speaker may portray more than one character in addition to taking part in the narration, if there is any.
c. Needs to be memorized. No props, including the speaker's body, are allowed.
    i. Example: If a student with long hair wants to simulate running their hands through their hair, they must pantomime it because physically touching their hair is using a prop.
d. In this event, the two students are <u>not</u> allowed to touch or make eye contact. They may ONLY make eye contact during the introduction.
    i. Side note: some students are REALLY good at looking in the direction of their partner, but not actually making eye contact. If you're unsure, just make a note on the ballot similar to:
        1. "Careful, it looked like you made eye contact at this point…."

e. Movement and gestures, while permitted, should be suitable for an interpretation rather than a stage performance. Speakers may pivot to indicate entrances and exits from the scene, as well as other limited movements.
f. Positions other than standing should not be excessive in length or dominate the performance.

8. Oratorical Declamation (DEC)

a. 10 Minutes maximum with a 30-second grace period
b. A selection used in Oratorical Declamation must have been originally delivered as a public speech by its author, a person other than the present contestant.
c. As part of the presentation, the contestant shall include an introduction that states the name of the person who originally delivered the speech, the title of the work, and a brief statement about the circumstances under which it was originally presented.
d. Must be memorized and no props are allowed
    i. Example: If a student with long hair wants to simulate running their hands through their hair, they must pantomime it because physically touching their hair is using a prop.
e. Pay attention to the delivery of the speech: poise, rhythm, pronunciation, variety, and enunciation. How well do they give this speech?
f. There should not be excessive or distracting movements throughout the piece (such as pacing or walking across the room), but speakers are allowed to shift around as they transition from one thought or mood to the next.

9. Impromptu (IMP)

a. **<u>3 minutes maximum with a 30-second grace period</u>**
b. Impromptu is a fun event to judge! Students come into the room and perform one at a time, similar to XTEMP. When you pick up your ballots, you will also be given (or you may have to get it from the tab room), an envelope with pieces of paper with topics on them. When the student comes in, have them pick a piece of paper at random and write that down on the ballot. Now, they have 2 minutes to come up with a 3-minute speech about the topic.
c. The speech should be organized, make sense, and flow like a speech or story.
d. The speech must be memorized.
e. Very similar to HI and DI, the students may pantomime and move around to bring their story to life.
f. If there are different characters, you should be able to tell the difference between the characters, either through different voices, mannerisms, and stances.
g. Still ask if the student would like time signals for their speech. Typically:

1:00 = hold 2 fingers up
2:00 = hold 1 finger up
2:30 = hold up a “C” shape with your hand
3:00 = hold up a fist

5 - Other Rules That May Not Have Been Mentioned

1. Junior High Students are grades 6 to 8. There is NO PENALTY for being on-book in any junior high event.
2. If a high school level student is on-book for and off-book event, then they cannot be awarded first place, unless all students are on-book. After 12/15, if an off-book event has all on-book students, then NO HALF BIDS will be awarded.
3. Judges must ask the student if they would like time signals to indicate the passage of time during the performance.
    a. If a student requests time signals and a judge forgets to indicate the time to the student and they go over the grace period, they cannot be penalized.
4. Students MUST be ranked and there cannot be any ties.
5. If one student is reading their piece while the others are memorized, even if that one student performed better, he or she cannot be placed first in the round. Unless it is a Junior High event or OI - OI is a read event.
6. Do **NOT** give an oral critique to the speaker. Write it down on the ballot.
    a. Please give some positive feedback, it takes guts to stand up there and perform but also please give some things to improve upon for the kids.

7. If you are unsure of whether a student used a prop or did something against the rules, speak with the **tabroom staff** when you turn in your ballot and see if they can clear it up for you.
    a. Please do not speak with the student directly about it because they may not have done something wrong and the tabroom staff will handle any rule-breaking.

Sources

NYSFL Tournament Speech Handbook :
http://nysfl.org/nysfldocs.org/tournamenthandbook/handb2.pdf

NCFL Website - Various Critique Sheets
http://www.ncfl.org/competition-events

NSDA Website - Critique Sheets & Event Details
https://www.speechanddebate.org/resources/