

High School Speech and Debate Judging Basics and Event Descriptions

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General IE Judging Guidelines

When judging a competitor in individual or speaking events, there are some general things to keep in mind. An experienced competitor should understand these concepts and demonstrate them throughout the delivery of his piece or speech.

Here's what to look for from the competitors:

EYE CONTACT

- In **Original Oratory** or **Impromptu**, the competitor should keep good eye contact with his audience. In an oratory, it is especially important that the competitor be convincing. Without eye contact, this effect is diminished.
- In **Oral Interpretation**, even when the competitor is reading, judges should look to see the story come to life through facial expressions and reaction. Likewise, in OI, even though the piece should not be completely memorized, expect the competitor to generally look at the audience, not the script.
- In **Dramatic Interpretation** or **Humorous Interpretation** monologues, the competitor will generally keep solid audience eye contact.
- When rendering characters in **Dramatic Interpretation**, **Humorous Interpretation**, **Duo** or **Oral Interpretation** pieces, the competitor will employ the use of focal points for the characters. What is a focal point? See the next section.
- In **Duo**, other than during the introduction, contestants may not make eye contact with each other. Offstage focus must be maintained at all times.

FOCAL POINTS

- A focal point, or place in space, should be established for characters. For example, if a piece contains a narrator, a girl named Jane and a boy named Johnny, the competitor might place Jane to his left, right above the audience's heads. Johnny might be to his right. The narrator would generally look ahead at the audience. Focal points also establish location. Is Jane talking to Johnny? The competitor must convince the audience that Jane really sees Johnny. Is Jane 7 and Johnny 20? Then Johnny is likely taller, so Jane would look "up" to him in the dialog. This is often called "**off-stage focus**" on a ballot.
- These focal points should be consistent throughout the piece; they help create characterizations.
- The switching of focal points also involves the switching of body, look, attitude and voice. Simply looking at a different point will not create the "reality" of a distinct character.

CHARACTERIZATIONS

- **Physical characterizations** help build believability through physical attributes. While props are not allowed, a character can lean over and become "feeble" to represent an old person, or stand tall and proud to represent a giant.
- **Vocal characterizations** help build believability through vocal inflections, accents and pacing (more on that next). For example, an old-time Southern accent might be employed to represent a farmer, or a foreign accent might be employed to help differentiate another character. The key is that voices be used, as appropriate, to create differentiation.

PACING

- **Pacing** has nothing to do with walking around. When someone refers to pacing in forensics, it refers to the pacing (pace, speed or rate) of the delivery.
- Saying that pacing is simply **fast or slow** is an oversimplification. Simply put, pacing is the way the competitor uses pauses and inflection to create characters or make points. Think of pacing much like this long dash — it made you pause for a moment — and how it makes you read this sentence a bit differently.
- **Overly consistent pacing** generally leads to an overly flat delivery. Variety in pacing builds contrast; contrast builds **emphasis** and **subordination**. Now the piece is interesting!

THE END

- A good ending should really hammer home the point of an oratory or end cleanly and directly in a interp piece. Competitors should end, pause and sit down. There's really no need to say "Thank you!" or anything else for that matter. Competitors shouldn't rush to sit down after finishing. Finish, pause, sit down. It leaves a stronger impression of the piece for the judge. Hammer the ending home.
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BINDERS (READING EVENTS)

- It is customary in **Oral Interpretation, children's literature** and other storytelling events for performers to use binders. Small, black binders are best. Binders are closed during the introduction, and open during the performance and teaser.

Here's what the competitors should expect from the judge:

COOL AND UNDER CONTROL

- You, as the judge, are in charge of the round. If you are nervous, feel inexperienced or think you are not qualified to judge, do not share this with the competitors. To them, you are the person in charge of the round. Relax, don't worry and use your best judgment.

ROOM BASICS

- Sit in the middle of the room when possible, toward the front. It is best not to be too close to competitors; they should scatter to the sides. This will allow you more freedom to write ballot comments without observation.
- You may choose to allow **guests** (parents or *non-competing* students) to remain in the room during the round. However, all competitors (except those double-entered) and guests should remain the entire time. Movement is distracting and unfair to competitors. Once the round begins, the room is effectively "closed" except to a double-entered competitor.
- Remind everyone: Cell phones off. No recording devices. No texting.
- **Timing:** Judges should have a stopwatch-like device for timing. A good app (SimpleTimer) is available for the iPhone and iPod; it works well. Place your phone on silent and turn off any timer warnings before the round begins. Airplane Mode is suggested.

BALLOT BASICS

- Fill in the basics — **round** and **section** — on each ballot before the round starts. Yes, this is important! Really! And it is critical, sometimes, to the tab room. Many judges do a quick fill-in of this information while still in the judges lounge.
- Fill in your **name** and **school**, and **contestant names** and **codes**, before the round starts. Again, some judges do this in the judges lounge.
- Fill in the **name of the piece** once the contestant arrives. Common practice is for each contestant to write his last name, code and piece title on the whiteboard. If none is available, you may ask each contestant his piece name.
- Ballots should be "ready" before the round begins.

BALLOT COMMENTS

- Be nice, but offer constructive comments. A ballot scored 1st / 30 that says “superb” might be OK, but one that is scored 3rd / 26 should offer useful feedback to the competitor.
- What is the competitor doing **well**? Always nice to offer feedback here.
- What could the competitor address? Characterizations? Focal points? Pacing? Movement?
- Try to write comments as you go — you will *not* have time to write many comments after the round is complete. Competitors expect you to write during their performances. It is OK!

BALLOT RANKS and RATINGS (OR POINTS)

- What’s the difference? We will offer a fairly simple explanation here. But do understand, other judges may have different opinions on this topic. Our simple definition is as follows.
- **RANK** is how a competitor compares to the other competitors *in that particular round*. NO TWO COMPETITORS can ever have the same rank. Rank weighs the most in scoring.
- **RATING (or points)** is how the competitor’s performance would be compared to an ideal performance. Rating typically has less impact on overall outcomes, but it does give feedback to the competitors.
- Think of it like this: In a round of two competitors, one must always be better than the other. Rank reflects that. But they both may be excellent, or they both could be mediocre. Rating reflects that. Generally, as the year progresses, the rating should become a more accurate representation of a competitor’s real performance quality.
- If a round contains a number of excellent performances, your ballots may look like this:
 - **1st / 30 points (this would be superb performance)**
 - **2nd / 29 points (almost as good)**
 - **3rd / 27 points**
 - **4th / 26 points**
 - **5th / 25 points**
- If a round contains a number of mediocre performances, you may have low point rankings:
 - **1st / 26 points**
 - **2nd / 25 points**
 - **3rd / 24 points**
 - **4th / 23 points**
 - **5th / 22 points**
- If a round contains two or three solid performers and two weak performers, you may have:
 - **1st / 30 points**
 - **2nd / 29 points**
 - **3rd / 28 points**
 - **4th / 23 points**
 - **5th / 22 points**

SAMPLE BALLOT

- A sample ballot is included with this packet for discussion. Not all ballots will look like this; in fact, most will not. However, the scoring will generally be the same on all South Carolina ballots.

Basic Event Guidelines

Included here are general guidelines for the individual interpretation events most likely encountered in high school competitions. This document does not explore debate events (PFD, for example).

These are *overviews* of the events; much more could be said about what constitutes a “good” piece. The goal here was to provide a general look at the basics of each event.

The time limit for most events (except Impromptu and Extemp) is 10 minutes. There is a 30-second grace period. If a competitor exceeds 10:30, that competitor should not receive first place. It is up to the judge or timer to make sure time is recorded accurately.

There is no minimum specified time for any event.

Original Oratory — 00

Maximum time: 10 minutes

OVERVIEW

Original Oratory (often shortened to “00”) is a competitive event in the National Forensic League in which competitors deliver an original speech on a subject of their choosing, though the speech must be factual. Since orations have been written by the contestants delivering them, the judges should consider thought, composition and delivery. However, since this is a contest in speech rather than in essay writing, the emphasis should be placed on the speech phase.

No more than 150 words may be quoted directly.

Thought and composition should be considered primarily in the way they are employed to make effective speaking possible. The orator should not be expected to solve any of the great problems of the day. Any appropriate subject may be chosen, but the orator must be truthful. Any non-factual reference, especially a personal one, must be so identified.

Although many orations deal with a current problem and propose a solution, the judge is expressly reminded that this is not the only acceptable form of oratory. The oration may simply alert the audience to a threatening danger, strengthen its devotion to an accepted cause, or eulogize a person. The orator should be given free choice of subject and judged solely on the effectiveness of its development and presentation. Oratory speeches can be informative (explain or instruct), persuasive (convince or motivate) or evocative (inspire or commemorate).

The composition should be considered carefully for its rhetoric and diction. The use of appropriate figures of speech, similes and metaphors, balanced sentences, allusions, and other rhetorical devices to make the oration more effective should be noted especially. Use of American English should be more than correct; it should reveal a discriminating choice of words and altogether fine literary qualities. It should be especially adapted to oral presentation. Delivery should be judged for mastery of the usual mechanics of speech — poise, quality and use of voice, bodily expressiveness, and for the qualities of directness and sincerity which impress the oration upon the minds of the audience.

No particular style of delivery is to be set up as the one correct style to which all contestants must conform. Rather, each contestant is to be judged upon the effectiveness of his/her delivery, free to choose or develop whatever style will best give him that effectiveness with his particular oration.

JUDGING

After all of the competitors have performed, the judge (or judges) in the round will rank them from best to worst, and assign each of them a score. Judges should comment on the presentation, noting strengths, weaknesses, opportunities for improvement and reasons for a decision.

Original Oratory

A Sample Outline

A sample outline of an original oratory follows, though this outline does *not* necessarily need to be followed exactly, and, as in everything else, there are many different and acceptable approaches. It does, however, show a format of what could make a sensible, organized speech:

I. Introduction

- A. Attention-getting device — often a personal story
- B. Significance — why the audience should relate or care; give examples
- C. Thesis Statement — the “nut” of the speech
- D. Preview — an overview of where the speaker will go with the speech
- E. Transition into first main point

II. Body

- A. First main point
 - i. First sub-point and supporting material (give sourcing!)
 - ii. Transition closing off main point one and opening main point two
- B. Second main point
 - i. First sub-point of this section and supporting material
 - ii. Second sub-point and supporting material
 - iii. Transition closing off main point two and opening main point three
- C. Third main point
 - i. First sub-point of this section and supporting material
 - ii. Transition into closing

III. Conclusion

- A. Review of main points
- B. Final statement — should also link back to introduction; should leave impact

Dramatic Interpretation — DI

Maximum time: 10 minutes

OVERVIEW

Dramatic Interpretation (often shortened to “Dramatic Interp” or “DI”) is an individual event in National Forensic League forensics competitions.

In a typical round of DI, five to seven performers will each perform a “cutting” (excerpt) from a published-printed play, novel, poetry or short story. A limited number (up to about 150) of words may be added to the selection for introductory and transitional purposes. As the name suggests, the cuttings are from non-comedic works. Some performers select monologues, while others may adopt the roles of several characters, changing their tone of voice, manner of speaking and bodily position to indicate a change in character.

Presentations must be memorized, and presented without props or costumes. Actors will utilize stationary blocking to enhance the interpretation. The goal of the interpretive events is to develop a selection from a work of literature into a uniquely original performance that communicates both the oral and physical dimensions of the piece. The use of a teaser (a part of the piece) before the introduction is commonly employed.

The time limit is 10 minutes, which includes an introduction. The introduction must include title and author, and should provide some insight into the piece. The competitor presents the introduction as himself, not as a character.

From the National Ballot: The art of interpretation is regarded as recreating characters in the story presented and making them seem living and real to the audience. A selection for interpretation must be a cutting from a single literary work: one novel, or one short story, or one play, or one or more poems (from the same published volume). Monologues are acceptable. The selection should be judged for its appropriateness as contest material and its suitability to the particular contestant(s) using it.

The use of good literature should be noted favorably and a selection devoid of literary merit graded lowest. Narrative, if included, should be vivid and animated so as to be an interesting and integral part of the story rather than just “filler” between portions of dialogue. Contestants are evaluated on poise, quality and use of voice, inflections, emphasis, pronunciation, enunciation, physical expression, and especially the ability to interpret characters correctly and consistently.

The final test of good interpretation is the ability to use all these factors so successfully and unobtrusively that the hearer forgets that this is a contest and in a created atmosphere is carried away to the time and place of the story being unfolded.

JUDGING

After all of the competitors have performed, the judge (or judges) in the round will rank them from best to worst, and assign each of them a score. Comment on the presentation, noting strengths, weaknesses, opportunities for improvement and reasons for a decision. Use the above event description as your guide.

Humorous Interpretation — HI

Maximum time: 10 minutes

OVERVIEW

Humorous Interpretation (often shortened to “Humorous Interp” or “HI”) is an individual event in National Forensic League forensics competitions.

In a typical round of HI, five to seven performers will each perform a “cutting” (excerpt) from a published-printed play, novel, poetry or short story. A limited number (up to about 150) of words may be added to the selection for introductory and transitional purposes. Some performers select monologues, while others may adopt the roles of several characters, changing their tone of voice, manner of speaking and bodily position to indicate a change in character.

Presentations must be memorized, and presented without props or costumes. Actors will utilize stationary blocking to enhance the interpretation. The goal of the interpretive events is to develop a selection from a work of literature into a uniquely original performance that communicates both the oral and physical dimensions of the piece.

The time limit is 10 minutes, which includes an introduction. The introduction must include title and author, and should provide some insight into the piece. The competitor presents the introduction as himself, not as a character. The use of a teaser (a part of the piece) before the introduction is commonly employed.

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JUDGING

After all of the competitors have performed, the judge (or judges) in the round will rank them from best to worst, and assign each of them a score. Comment on the presentation, noting strengths, weaknesses, opportunities for improvement and reasons for a decision. Use the above event description as your guide.

Duo Interpretation — DUO

Maximum time: 10 minutes

OVERVIEW

This is a two-person category in which the selection may be either humorous or dramatic in nature. Each of the two performers may play one or more characters, so long as performance responsibility in the cutting remains as balanced as possible. If the selection is prose or poetry and contains narration, either or both of the performers may present the narration. Focus may be direct during the introduction (the performers may look at each other) but must be indirect (offstage) during the performance itself. Performers may not touch.

All other rules are the same as Dramatic Interpretation.

Impromptu Speaking — IMP

Maximum time: 5 minutes; up to 2 minutes of which may be used for prep

OVERVIEW

A contestant draws three prompts designed around a general topic, selects one, then has up to two minutes to prepare a speech on the topic. Time count starts immediately on draw of prompt. The Impromptu speech should be regarded as an original interpretation by the speaker of the designated topic as supported by varied materials and gives a contestant opportunity to be creative and imaginative. An Impromptu speech should reveal the student's ability to organize his thoughts in a logical manner.

While the format is simple, it takes time to construct a speech in that time and talk on your feet. Mastery of this event is difficult, but many enjoy it, because one does not have to prepare for the event beforehand. Although similar in theory to extemporaneous speaking, unlike that category, impromptu speeches need not be factual and are indeed encouraged to be humorous.

JUDGING

After all of the competitors have performed, the judge (or judges) in the round will rank them from best to worst, and assign each of them a score. Comment on the presentation, noting strengths, weaknesses, opportunities for improvement and reasons for a decision. Use the above event description as your guide.

Oral Interpretation — OI

Maximum time: 10 minutes

OVERVIEW

Oral Interpretation (often shortened to “Oral Interp” or “OI”) is an individual event performed at many middle school and high school forensics tournaments.

In this event, the competitor reads from a manuscript a selection of prose or poetry. The selection should not be memorized, but the competitor should demonstrate clear familiarity with the piece.

Upper-body movement is allowed, and the speaker may depict characters in the work. However, emphasis should be placed on vocal performance and the effective use of narration. Excellent posture, evocative hand gestures, good eye contact and the graceful handling of the manuscript are to be rewarded.

The introduction must include title and author, and should provide some insight into the piece. The competitor presents the introduction as himself, not as a character. The use of a teaser (a part of the piece) before the introduction is commonly employed.

JUDGING

After all of the competitors have performed, the judge (or judges) in the round will rank them from best to worst, and assign each of them a score. Comment on the presentation, noting strengths, weaknesses, opportunities for improvement and reasons for a decision. Use the above event description as your guide.

Children’s Literature — CL

Maximum time: 10 minutes

OVERVIEW

This event follows all the rules of oral interpretation. The material, however, must be suitable for and enjoyable by an audience of children as well as adults.

Although CL pieces are aimed at a younger group than the target audience for prose and poetry, competitors should still select works complex enough for multiple interpretations and varied enough so that the presenter can change mood, tone, and intensity. The emphasis is still on atmosphere and storytelling.

Novice Reading — NR

Maximum time: 10 minutes

OVERVIEW

This event follows all the rules of oral interpretation. Acceptable contest material includes anything acceptable in oral interpretation or children’s literature; plays and scripts are not allowed. This event is open *only* to novices.

Extemporaneous Speaking — EXT

Maximum time: 7 minutes

OVERVIEW

In Extemporaneous Speaking (often called Extemp) a contestant draws three questions on a topic, selects one, then has 30 minutes to prepare an answer to the question. The contestant uses a set of files that he or she has built as a resource for answering the question. Only published materials may be used as resources (books, magazines, newspapers and online resources). The contestants enter the room, one at a time, in the order of their draws. Each contestant may speak for up to 7 minutes. Judge on how well they make their cases, not whether you agree with the sides chosen.

From the National Ballot: The extempore speech should not be regarded as a memory test of the material contained in any one magazine article, but rather as an original synthesis by the speaker of the current fact and opinion on the designated topic as presented by numerous sources. The contestant therefore should be held accountable for strict adherence to the precise statement of the topic drawn and discounted severely for shifting to some other phase of the topic on which he or she might prefer to speak.

The information presented should be well chosen, pertinent, and sufficient to support the central thought of the topic. 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, bodily expressiveness — and should be effective in enlisting and holding the interest of the audience.

The best extemporaneous speech combines clear thinking, good speaking, and interesting presentation to establish a definite thought with respect to the subject chosen. Judges should not require contestants speaking on a controversial subject to take a personal stand on that issue. They may do so, or they may elect to present both sides of the controversy as currently set forth in the public press.

JUDGING

After all of the competitors have performed — one at a time in the room, typically — the judge (or judges) in the round will rank them from best to worst, and assign each of them a score. Comment on the presentation, noting strengths, weaknesses, opportunities for improvement and reasons for a decision. Use the above event description as your guide.