

WISCONSIN ACADEMIC DECATHLON

Tips for Coaching the Speech Events

THE PREPARED SPEECH

Competitors often report more apprehension about the speaking contest than all others. They feel that they have more control over mental recall than they do over the stage fright that so often accompanies their speech.

Stress to your students that their speech must be original, sources cited, and not plagiarized. Inform them that you may seek an originality report online to confirm the uniqueness of their speech.

Help the students develop self-confidence by encouraging them to prepare the speech early, rehearse it thoroughly, and give it to a variety of audiences before the competition. Only by repetitive performance does one learn to control nervousness and to channel the energy into a vibrant delivery style.

- Urge the student to seek feedback from the audiences and to remain flexible until near the contest date. Too often the students compose the speech, and then resist changes suggested by others because of an attachment to the original content.
- Advise them to positively address criticism from different listeners. The chances are good that the judging panel may have the same observations.
- Advise them, too, that alterations in the content are not bad; minor adjustments will help prevent the speech from becoming stale.

TOPIC SELECTION

In choosing a speech topic, the student should consider audience analysis. A panel of adult professionals will be judging the speech; therefore, the contestant is well advised to reject topics that primarily appeal to adolescents. This is not to suggest that the student avoid topics that concern a young person. Certainly, the best speech topics will spring from the student's strong feelings about a subject of interest. The ideas simply should be presented in a manner appropriate to an adult audience.

**The topic should be one marked by originality.
If a universal theme, it should be unique in analysis and approach.**

CONTENT

Because organization is an important criterion in the evaluation of the speeches, students are advised to build their speeches around outlines. Each speech should have:

1. An **introduction** that captures the attention of the audience and that identifies the **purpose** of the speech.
2. A **body** with identifiable main ideas, a logical progression of thought, and good support materials.
3. A **conclusion** that gives the speech a tone of finality.

Language of the speech should be free of colloquialism and should be precise, interesting and appropriate to an adult audience. All words must be pronounced correctly, and the speech must be grammatically sound.

APPEARANCE – Present the “Best You” that You Possibly Can

- This is not the time to experiment with a new exciting hair-do.
- Iron out the wrinkles. People can see if you've made the attempt to pull yourself together.
- **Remember, you are speaking before professional, conservative judges.**
- Borrow something from a friend if necessary.
- Relate – Be Comfortable – Be Yourself.

Think positively and realistically. Use positive self-talk to psych yourself up.

- Use deep breathing and visualization to calm nerves.
- Keep things in perspective – it's only a speech and your best attempt is all anyone can ask.

REHEARSAL

For Verbal Effectiveness:

Practice sessions should result in improvement in vocal effectiveness. Time each speech with the 30-second and 1-minute time cards and a stopwatch.

- Note **rate** of speech to make certain that the student is not speaking too rapidly and that there are adequate pauses for effect and for listener understanding.
- Note **volume**, making certain that the speech is loud enough for clear audibility in any size room.
- Note **articulation**, making sure that all words and phrases are understandable. Help the student develop **variety** in pitch, volume, and rate -- avoid monotone.

For Nonverbal Effectiveness:

Train the student to move into the room with an air of confidence and directness.

First impressions matter!

Help the speaker establish direct eye contact with the judges and project facial expressions appropriate to the verbal message being sent. Posture and gesturing should reflect energy, assurance and directness. They should appear spontaneous, rather than rehearsed.

IMPROMPTU

Impromptu speaking develops abilities to "think on your feet".

Preparation involves continual practice.

Provides the students with numerous opportunities to speak spontaneously on a wide variety of topics.

Issue lists of topics for the student as practice.

Repeated practice will result in mastery of impromptu delivery.

