

Extemporaneous Speaking

The Rules

Contestants draw at 7-minute intervals. You will draw 3 questions at NFL tournaments, however regulations vary from state to state; for instance, in Oklahoma, you should draw 5. Contestants have 30 minutes to prepare their speech. The preparation time begins when the student draws his questions, not when he selects his question and begins to prepare his speech.

In most states, extemp is divided into two categories: foreign (dealing with other nations, duh) and domestic (deals with the United States.)

Each team typically brings one file for foreign topics and one for domestic. Materials in the file must be published in magazines, books, newspapers, or on the Internet. Handbooks, handwritten, or student-produced items are forbidden with the exception of magazine indexes. Photocopied articles are acceptable. Each article must have the date of publication and the magazine's name printed somewhere on it. Highlighting is allowed if it is done in only one color. Folders in your boxes may not be color-coded.

Consultation with other team members or coaches is prohibited during preparation time.

If any judge questions the existence or validity of a source quoted in a speech, he may file a protest. The contestant is required to back up the claims made in his speech with the copy of the article from which he quoted.

Choosing a Question

Obviously, you should look for questions which you know a lot about or which you immediately know how to answer or analyze.

Piece of obvious advice #2: never ever take a question with words, names, cities, countries, or programs which you have never heard of.

Familiarize yourself with the content of your file. Select questions which you will have adequate resources to answer.

Although this is a subjective opinion, I advise against taking questions about economics.

Economics is very complicated, and hence difficult to comprehend in the 14-21 minutes you spend writing and difficult to explain in the 7 minutes you spend speaking, and it's pretty boring for the judge to listen a speech about economics.

In theory, questions are supposed to be phrased so that they have a yes or no answer, however, this often does not happen. For novices, I suggest avoiding questions that start with who, what, when, where, why, or how. These questions give you many more possible answers; instead of choosing just "yes" or "no," you must select one of many possible outcomes and also find the evidence to justify it.

When choosing between equally desirable questions, you may want to pick the more difficult question or the one which it is least likely that the judge has already heard a speech over. A difficult or unique question that is well-answered looks better than an easy or mundane question that is equally well answered.

By the same token, don't take a hard question just to take a hard question. If you can't give a good speech about it, the fact that it's a hard question won't help your ranking any.

Finally, these are only guidelines. When choosing your question, always exercise good judgment. Don't take a question like "Does Norway have adequate airline security?" to avoid taking an open-ended question, etc.

Using Preparation Time

Be aware that you may be dismissed from the draw 2-5 minutes early to give you ample time to reach your room.

Use no more than 21 minutes of preparation time to write your speech. If you use any more than that, you will not have time to recite your speech once and reach your room in time.

Taking 14 minutes to write your speech is optimal. This will give you time to say your speech twice before leaving the draw.

Always say your speech at least once before giving it in competition. This will help your fluency in the round and ensure that your speech goes where you want it to go.

You are required to state your question in verbatim in the introduction of your speech. Say it 20 times as soon as you get it to ensure that you have it memorized.

Use the time before you draw constructively. If the questions have been centered around a topic area, read your files to familiarize yourself with the area. If you have an oratory, quietly perform it to yourself. The delivery style is similar to extemp and it will warm you up for your round.

Look at a teammates question and plan what you would say if it were your question. This will also warm you up. Try to keep your mind diverted during the draw so that you do not get nervous.

Building a File

Even if your state does not divide extemp into foreign and domestic extemp, build a separate file for foreign and domestic issues.

Divide your domestic file into broad areas such as social issues, political issues, and economic issues. Subdivide these into smaller folders and alphabetize within areas. For instance, in your political issues file, you might have "Clinton-Lewinsky Scandal," "Democratic Primary," "Dole, Liddy" "Republican Primary," etc.

Divide your foreign file alphabetically by country. For a country that is often in the news, you may wish to create separate files for general information, political issues, and economic issues. If any particular issue is very pressing, for instance, a recent election or scandal, create a separate file for it as well.

Keep subscriptions to "Economist" and "World Press Review" (the latter is only for fax). Neither of these can be obtained over the internet in their entirety for free. The "Economist" is extremely thorough and contains articles over obscure subjects. "World Press Review" focuses on one major issue each month as well as 2-3 other issues. Its articles come from magazines and newspapers all around the world which you can cite in your speeches. Cancel the rest of your subscriptions; everything else comes free through the internet.

Keep your file up-to-date. You should be cutting, indexing, and filing often.

Weed out-dated material out of your file on a regular basis, however, use common sense. If you have a file with very few articles, it is better that you quote 3-year-old sources than have nothing at all. Also, select a few good articles to keep even if they are old. You can consult these for background information even if you do not cite them. Also, sometimes it is very effective to pair an old quotation with a new one like so: On July 2nd of 1997, "Economist" told us that Mongolia's economy was in a shambles; inflation was rising 12% annually and 54% of the people were unemployed," but today, we can clearly see that the new president has made a difference, because according to an August 12, 1999 New York Times, "Mongolia's gross national product has risen 23% this year, inflation is down to 2% a year, and unemployment has decreased to 20%"

Work for diversity of sources. Include foreign publications (available from the internet) in your file as well as well-known domestic newspapers and magazines.

The Introduction

Your introduction is the judge's first impression of you; make it a good one. Also, if your introduction is boring, you will lose the judge's attention.

Introductions, obviously, lead into your question in an interesting way. Good introductions include analogies (but make sure they are not over-used. For instance, analogies about puzzles are really trite), political cartoons (if they are easy to explain), jokes, or movies, books, and stories relating to the situation.

Good introductions are difficult to think of. Write them in advance for common topics to save yourself time and stress during the draw.

As I said earlier, you must state your question word-for-word in your introduction.

Don't assume that the relationship of your introduction to your question is obvious. Always use a transitory sentence or 2 to connect your the subject of your introduction to your question.

After stating your question, state clearly what your answer will be. Next, preview your points by offering one sentence (like a tagline for a contention in an LD case) that describes their content.

For instance, for a question like "Can Afghanistan rival India and Pakistan for dominance of the Middle East?," if your answer were no, your tags could be "Afghanistan lacks adequate armament" and "Afghanistan lacks the political and economic allies to grow more powerful."

Your introduction should be at least 1 minute long but never more than 2 minutes long.

The Body: Your Areas of Analysis

Extemp speeches are organized very much like LD debate cases, for those of you who debate. In your introduction, you have taken a stance on your topic. Now, you will support that answer in your body with 2-3 areas of analysis similar to contentions. Only 1 area of analysis is inadequate. If you have any more than 3, you will not have time to explain them in as much detail as necessary.

Never assume that your judges know anything. Explain all the relevant facts about the topic that contributed to your answer and analysis. Provide background information.

Make sure you justify your conclusions. Presenting quotations is not enough. Neither is making direct statements. Explain exactly how all the facts you have presented lead to the conclusion that you have drawn.

Organization is the key to a winning speech. Good organization makes your speech easy to flow (take notes over) and understand.

Group similar points together so that your analysis is not repetitious. I usually had 3 broad points like politics, society, and economy under which I grouped relevant subpoints. Other common styles of organization are foreign issues and domestic issues; past, present, future; or when dealing with a conflict, viewpoint of group 1, viewpoint of group 2, possible resolution.

Make sure that you have transitions between your points. Don't cut off abruptly and move to a new area. Walk on transitions only. Add a little humor or a few proverbs to your speech to keep it interesting.

Practice time management and word economy to ensure that you have time to discuss everything you need to in your speech. Give each point an approximately equal amount of time in your speech.

Using Evidence

You must always have at least 1 citation under each point. Ideally, you should have 7-10 cites per speech. I tried to have 1 quotation under each subpoint.

Try to use sources from the last 6 months. Keep in mind that old evidence is better than no evidence at all. Also, see my section on building a file for an example of how to use very old quotes in conjunction with a new quote to make you sound intelligent.

When giving a quotation, tell the judge the name of the publication and the month, day, and year of its publication.

Use diverse sources. For foreign extempers, try to quote sources from the country you're speaking about. If you cite a newspaper that isn't very well-known in the US, include its country of origin when you give the cite.

On the day of the tournament, swing by your local bookstore or convenience store to pick up a copy of that day's New York Times or Dallas Morning News. If you cite it in your speech, call it "today's New York Times." If it's a very important tournament like your national qualifying tournament, you may want to get up early and print articles from that day's newspapers from the internet.

The Conclusion

Your conclusions should sum up all the major points of your speech without repeating it in the same words. It should give your speech a finished feeling.

Your conclusion should tie into your introduction somehow. For instance, if you used an analogy in your intro, bring it up in your conclusion.

The ideal length of a conclusion is about 1 minute.