

COMPETITIVE SPEECH EVENTS PREP PACK



Original Oratory • Expository • Impromptu

Grades 8–12 | NSDA Competition Ready

Sample Speeches • Coaching Guides • Tournament Protocols

Includes 6 Sample Speech Scripts, 5 Impromptu Frameworks,
Outline Templates, Event Rule Summaries,
Coaching Checklists & Competition-Day Protocols

UM Printables

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"The art of communication is the language of leadership." — James Humes

SECTION I: EVENT RULE SUMMARIES

Understanding the rules of each event is the foundation of competitive success. Below are comprehensive rule summaries for the three NSDA speech events covered in this prep pack. Always verify with your local tournament director, as specific rules may vary by district or state.

Event 1: Original Oratory (OO)

ORIGINAL ORATORY — NSDA Rule Summary	
Event Type	Prepared, memorized speech on a topic of the student's choosing; persuasive or inspirational in nature
Time Limit	10 minutes maximum with a 30-second grace period; no minimum required; going over grace results in a rank penalty
Sources	Minimum 5 published sources required; must be cited orally during the speech (author and publication); sources verified by coaches before competition
Originality	Must be entirely the student's own work; no more than 150 words of direct quotation from any single source; no collaboration on writing
Notes / Aids	No notes, manuscripts, or visual aids permitted during delivery; the speech must be fully memorized
Topic Selection	Any topic of the student's choosing; best topics are narrow, personally resonant, and universally relevant; avoid overly controversial political or religious topics in most circuits
Structure	Typically includes: attention-getter, clear thesis, 2-3 main contentions with evidence and warrants, and a memorable conclusion; transitions between contentions should be smooth and signposted
Judging Criteria	Analysis & Content (40%), Delivery & Presentation (30%), Organization & Structure (20%), Source Quality & Citation (10%)
Common Penalties	Exceeding time limit, insufficient sources, plagiarism or excessive quoting, using notes, lack of clear thesis

COACHING TIP: Choosing an OO Topic

The best OO topics are **narrow, personal, and universal**. Avoid broad topics like "pollution" or "bullying." Instead, find a specific angle: "The danger of perfectionism in student culture" or "Why we need to embrace boredom." A great OO makes the audience think, "I never considered it that way before."

Event 2: Expository Speaking (Expos)

EXPOSITORY SPEAKING — NSDA Rule Summary	
Event Type	Prepared, memorized informative speech using visual aids; the goal is to explain, define, demonstrate, or clarify a concept, process, or idea
Time Limit	10 minutes maximum with a 30-second grace period; no minimum required; setup and teardown of visual aids must happen within the time limit
Visual Aids	Required; may include posters, objects, charts, props, models, or electronic displays; all visual aids must be handled by the speaker during the presentation; no human assistants permitted
Sources	Minimum 5 published sources recommended; cite orally during the speech; source quality strengthens credibility
Originality	Must be the student's own work; limited direct quotations; visual aids must be created by the student (stock images are acceptable)
Notes / Aids	No notes or manuscripts permitted during delivery; visual aids ARE required and must be seamlessly integrated into the speech
Topic Selection	Informative in nature; explain how something works, the history of an idea, a scientific process, a cultural phenomenon; the audience should leave knowing something they did not know before
Structure	Introduction with visual aid preview, 2-3 main points each supported by visual aids, and a conclusion that reinforces the central thesis; transitions should incorporate visual aid reveals
Judging Criteria	Information Quality (35%), Visual Aid Effectiveness (25%), Delivery & Presentation (20%), Organization & Structure (20%)
Common Penalties	Exceeding time limit, visual aids that are too text-heavy, failing to integrate aids with spoken content, aids that distract rather than support, technical malfunctions (no penalty but hurts score)

COACHING TIP: Visual Aids That Win

The #1 mistake in Expos is treating visual aids as 'posters with words.' The best Expos visual aids are **simple, surprising, and interactive**. Use bold images, physical props, or demonstrations. Each visual should take less than 5 seconds for the audience to understand. If they have to read a paragraph on your poster, you have already lost them.

Event 3: Impromptu Speaking

IMPROMPTU SPEAKING — NSDA Rule Summary	
Event Type	Spontaneous speech with limited preparation time; tests a speaker's ability to organize thoughts quickly and deliver a coherent, structured speech

IMPROMPTU SPEAKING — NSDA Rule Summary	
Prep Time	7 minutes total split between preparation and speaking (e.g., 2 min prep + 5 min speech, or 3 min prep + 4 min speech); some tournaments use 5 minutes total; speaker decides the split
Time Limit	5 minutes maximum speaking time with a 30-second grace; no minimum in most circuits, but very short speeches are typically ranked lower
Topics	Drawn randomly from prompts: quotations, abstract words, current events, proverbs, objects, or philosophical questions; speaker typically chooses from 3 options and returns the other 2
Sources	No formal source requirement; personal anecdotes, historical knowledge, and literary references significantly strengthen the speech; cited sources add credibility even though they are not required
Notes / Aids	May use a single note card (3x5 or 4x6 inches) during preparation; card may be consulted during delivery; no visual aids; some tournaments provide the card, others allow students to bring their own
Originality	100% spontaneous; no pre-written speeches or memorized content; using a flexible framework is encouraged (see Section IV), but scripted content is penalized
Structure	Must still have a clear introduction, body, and conclusion despite time pressure; frameworks help (see Section IV); judges look for signposting and logical flow
Judging Criteria	Organization & Structure (30%), Content & Development (30%), Delivery & Presentation (25%), Time Management (15%)
Common Penalties	Exceeding time limit significantly, failing to address the prompt, relying too heavily on notes, lack of structure, rambling without a thesis

COACHING TIP: The Impromptu Mindset

Impromptu is not about being perfect — it is about being **organized and confident under pressure**. The best impromptu speakers do not try to say everything; they pick ONE clear thesis and support it with 2-3 strong examples. A well-structured 3-minute speech will always beat a rambling 5-minute speech. Practice with the 5 frameworks in Section IV to build automatic structure.

Key Differences at a Glance

Feature	Original Oratory	Expository	Impromptu
Purpose	Persuade or inspire	Inform or explain	Demonstrate quick thinking
Prep Time	Weeks/months	Weeks/months	2-3 minutes
Visual Aids	Not allowed	Required	Not allowed

Feature	Original Oratory	Expository	Impromptu
Notes Allowed	No	No	1 note card
Time Limit	10 min max	10 min max	5 min max
Sources Required	5+ published	5+ recommended	Not required
Memorization	Full	Full	None (spontaneous)
Topic Choice	Student chooses	Student chooses	Random draw
Key Skill	Writing & rhetoric	Research & visual design	Thinking on your feet

Use this comparison to help students choose the event that best matches their strengths. Many successful competitors participate in multiple events.

Best For:

Prompts with two sides, choices, or paradoxes (e.g., 'Is it better to be loved or feared?'). Words with dual meanings.

Introduction (30 sec):

Present the two sides of the prompt. State your thesis: which side is more important, or how they are interconnected.

Body 1 — Side A (1.5 min):

Explore the first concept. Give an example of its value or its danger. Be specific.

Body 2 — Side B (1.5 min):

Explore the opposing concept. Give a contrasting example. Highlight how it differs from Side A.

Body 3 — The Synthesis (1 min):

How do these two concepts interact? Can they coexist? Is one a prerequisite for the other? This is where original thinking shines.

Conclusion (30 sec):

Summarize the synthesis. Leave the audience with a definitive statement about how to navigate the balance between the two.

SECTION V: COACHING CHECKLIST

Use this comprehensive checklist to ensure students are fully prepared for competition day. It covers writing, delivery, event-specific requirements, and logistics. Check off each item as it is completed during the preparation process.

Category	Checklist Item	☐
WRITING & CONTENT	Speech has a clear, compelling thesis statement	☐
	Introduction hooks the audience within the first 15 seconds	☐
	Main points are distinct, logically organized, and well-supported	☐
	Transitions are smooth and clearly signposted	☐
	Conclusion provides a memorable close and strong final thought	☐
	Speech stays within the time limit (practice timed)	☐
ORIGINAL ORATORY	Minimum 5 published sources are cited orally	☐
	Sources are credible (no Wikipedia or biased outlets)	☐
	Direct quotes are limited to 150 words per source	☐
	Speech is 100% the student's original work	☐
EXPOSITORY	Visual aids are large, bold, and easily visible from 20+ feet	☐
	Visual aids are integrated into the speech (not just shown)	☐
	Visual aid transitions are smooth and practiced	☐
	Setup and teardown of aids fit within the time limit	☐
	Speech is informative, not persuasive	☐
IMPROMPTU	Student has memorized the 5 frameworks from this guide	☐
	Student can choose a framework and thesis in under 60 seconds	☐
	Note card contains only keywords/thesis (no full sentences)	☐
	Student practices with random prompts daily	☐

Category	Checklist Item	☐
DELIVERY & PRESENTATION	Speech is fully memorized (for OO and Expos)	☐
	Eye contact is sustained (80%+ of the time)	☐
	Vocal variety: pace, pitch, and volume are dynamic	☐
	Physical presence: posture is confident, gestures are purposeful	☐
	Nervous habits (fidgeting, swaying) are minimized	☐
	Speech sounds conversational, not robotic or recited	☐
TOURNAMENT LOGISTICS	All sources are printed on a bibliography sheet (for judge)	☐
	Visual aids are packed safely and transported securely	☐
	Spare note cards and pens are packed for Impromptu	☐
	Professional attire is prepared (no jeans, no sneakers)	☐
	Student knows their room assignments and round times	☐

- If you make a mistake, do not apologize or stop. Keep going. The judge only knows you made an error if you show it.
- When you finish, hold eye contact with the judge for 2 seconds, then say 'Thank you' and sit down confidently.
- Be an excellent audience member for other speakers. Judges notice poor sportsmanship.

BETWEEN ROUNDS

- Leave the round quickly and quietly. Do not discuss the round or the judge in the hallways.
- Check postings for your next round immediately.
- Drink water. Eat a light snack (almonds, granola bar) to keep energy up.
- Reset mentally. Every round is a clean slate. Do not dwell on mistakes from the previous round.
- If you have a visual aid, check it for damage and repair/adjust as needed.

AFTER THE TOURNAMENT

- Congratulate your teammates. Support each other regardless of results.
- Debrief with your coach: What went well? What is one specific thing to improve for next time?
- Write down ballot feedback while it is fresh in your mind. Judges often give the best advice.
- Rest. Tournaments are mentally and physically exhausting. Take the evening off.
- Get back to practice within 48 hours. The best competitors use feedback immediately.

COACHING TIP: The 24-Hour Rule

After a tournament, emotions run high. Implement the '24-Hour Rule' with your team: no discussing rankings or results for 24 hours after the tournament ends. Focus only on the performance and the feedback. This prevents post-tournament drama and keeps the focus on growth, not just trophies.

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