
SPEECH & DEBATE TEAM STARTER KIT

A Comprehensive Resource for Coaches & Advisors

- Team Handbook (20+ pages)
- 36 Meeting Agenda Templates
- Event Calendar Planner
- 20 Practice Drills
- Student Recruitment Flyer
- Budget Request Template
- Tournament Preparation Checklist
- Judging Training Guide

UM Printables

Premium Educational Resources

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This resource is designed to be customized. Replace bracketed placeholders with your school-specific information before distributing to students and families.

TEAM HANDBOOK

Your Comprehensive Guide to a Successful Season

1.1 Welcome & Introduction

Welcome to the [School Name] Speech & Debate Team! Whether you are a returning member or joining for the first time, you are now part of a tradition that develops confident communicators, critical thinkers, and engaged citizens. Speech and debate is one of the most transformative activities available to high school students, and we are thrilled that you have chosen to invest your time and talent in this program.

This handbook is your guide to everything you need to know about how our team operates. It covers expectations, policies, events, resources, and the support systems in place to help you succeed. Please read it carefully, share it with your parents or guardians, and refer to it throughout the season.

A Note from the Coach

Speech and debate changed my life as a student, and I have seen it change the lives of hundreds of young people since. You will learn to research efficiently, argue persuasively, speak with poise under pressure, and listen critically. These skills will serve you in college, in your career, and in your community. I am here to support you every step of the way. Let us have a great season! — [Coach Name]

What Speech & Debate Offers You

- Public speaking confidence and stage presence
- Critical thinking and logical reasoning skills
- Research and evidence evaluation abilities
- Persuasive writing and argumentation techniques
- Active listening and refutation skills

- Time management and self-discipline
- Collaboration and teamwork experience
- College readiness and scholarship opportunities
- Lifelong friendships and a national community of peers

1.2 Mission & Philosophy

The [School Name] Speech & Debate Team empowers students to become articulate, ethical, and effective communicators. Through rigorous practice, competitive performance, and collaborative learning, we cultivate the skills that prepare students for academic excellence, professional success, and informed civic participation.

Core Values

Value	Definition
Integrity	We compete honestly, cite sources accurately, and uphold the highest ethical standards in research and performance.
Growth	We embrace challenges as opportunities. Every round, every practice, and every piece of feedback makes us better.
Community	We support one another as teammates, respect our competitors, and contribute positively to the speech and debate community.
Excellence	We pursue our personal best in preparation, performance, and sportsmanship, knowing that excellence is a habit, not an accident.

Our philosophy is rooted in the belief that competitive speech and debate is an educational activity first and a competitive activity second. While we strive to win, we measure our true success by the growth of each student. A student who gives the best performance of their life but does not advance to finals has still achieved something remarkable.

1.3 Code of Conduct

Every member of the [School Name] Speech & Debate Team is expected to uphold the highest standards of conduct at all times — in practice, in competition, in travel, and online. Our reputation is built one interaction at a time, and every team member is an ambassador for our program.

Respect & Sportsmanship

- Treat all competitors, judges, coaches, and tournament staff with courtesy and respect.
- Win with grace and lose with dignity. Congratulate opponents sincerely.
- Never disrupt, mock, or intimidate another speaker during a round.
- Address judges as "Judge" or "Sir/Ma'am" and thank them for their time.

- Respect the physical spaces we use for practice and competition.

Academic Integrity

- All sources must be cited accurately and completely in every speech and debate round.
- Fabricating, distorting, or misrepresenting evidence is a serious ethical violation.
- Plagiarism of any kind — in original oratory, interpretation selections, or debate cases — is grounds for immediate dismissal from the team.
- Students must complete all work themselves unless specifically authorized to collaborate.

Honesty in Competition

- Do not exchange information about round assignments, judge preferences, or opponent strategies with students from other schools during a tournament.
- Report any rules violations you observe to your coach rather than confronting the individual directly.
- Do not use electronic devices during rounds unless permitted by tournament rules and your coach.

Anti-Harassment Policy

The [School Name] Speech & Debate Team is committed to providing a safe and inclusive environment free from harassment, bullying, and discrimination of any kind. This includes but is not limited to harassment based on race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, disability, or socioeconomic status. Any reported incidents will be investigated promptly and may result in removal from the team.

Consequences for Violations

Violations of the Code of Conduct will be addressed through the following progressive process:

- First offense: Private conference with the coach and written reflection.
- Second offense: Parent/guardian notification and one-tournament suspension.
- Third offense: Indefinite suspension from the team pending a conference with the student, parent/guardian, and school administration.
- Severe violations (e.g., plagiarism, harassment) may result in immediate dismissal regardless of prior record.

1.4 Speech Events Overview

The National Speech & Debate Association (NSDA) offers a wide range of speech events that develop distinct but complementary skills. Below is a summary of each event to help you find the right fit for your interests and strengths.

Event	Abr.	Format	Time	Description
Original Oratory	OO	Individual	10 min	An original, memorized persuasive speech on a topic of the student's choosing. Students select a meaningful issue, develop a clear thesis, and support it with research, logic, and rhetoric.
Informative Speaking	INFO	Individual	10 min	An original, memorized expository speech designed to educate the audience on a topic. May incorporate visual aids. Students explain complex subjects clearly and engagingly.
U.S. Extemporaneous	USX	Individual	7 min	Students draw three domestic policy questions, select one, and have 30 minutes to prepare a speech using published sources they have collected. Tests current events knowledge and analytical ability.
International Extemp	IX	Individual	7 min	Same format as USX but questions focus on international affairs, foreign policy, and global issues. Students must stay informed about world events.
Dramatic Interpretation	DI	Individual	10 min	A memorized performance of a serious selection from a published work of literature, drama, or film. The student conveys emotion and meaning through vocal and physical expression.
Humorous Interpretation	HI	Individual	10 min	A memorized performance of a comedic selection from a published work. Students use exaggerated characters, timing, and physicality to entertain the audience.
Duo Interpretation	DUO	Pair	10 min	A two-person memorized performance from a published work. Partners may not make eye contact or touch. Both performers must remain in the scene throughout.
Program Oral Interpretation	POI	Individual	10 min	A program using at least two genres of literature (prose, poetry, drama) around a central theme. Performed with a manuscript in a small black binder. Students create thematic throughlines.

Choosing Your Speech Event

Consider your natural strengths: Do you enjoy writing original content (OO, INFO) or performing published works (DI, HI, DUO)? Are you comfortable speaking from notes (USX, IX) or do you prefer memorization? Do you work best alone or with a partner? Your coach can help you explore events and find the best match for your skills.

1.5 Debate Events Overview

Debate events challenge students to construct, defend, and refute arguments under time pressure. Each format develops a different set of analytical and rhetorical skills. The following table summarizes the major debate formats recognized by the NSDA.

Event	Abr.	Format	Time Limit	Description
Policy Debate	CX	2-person team	8-4-8-4-8-4 (varies)	Evidence-intensive debate on an annual policy resolution. Teams research one topic all year in depth, developing extensive case and negative strategies. Emphasizes speed, technical argumentation, and deep research.
Lincoln-Douglas	LD	Individual	6-7-4-6-3 (varies)	One-on-one value debate on a bi-monthly resolution. Focuses on philosophical principles, moral reasoning, and ethical frameworks. Students argue whether a given action or policy is morally justified.
Public Forum	PF	2-person team	4-4-3-4-3-2-2-2-2-2	Accessible debate on current events with a monthly resolution. Designed to be understood by a lay judge. Emphasizes clear communication, real-world impacts, and persuasive narrative.
Congressional Debate	Cong	Individual	3-min speeches	Students act as senators or representatives debating legislation in a chamber setting. Uses parliamentary procedure. Tests extemporaneous speaking, knowledge of issues, and ability to build on others' arguments.
World Schools	WSD	3-person team	8-8-8-8-4-4	A blend of prepared and impromptu debate on broad motions. Three-person teams debate using a combination of content and style. Emphasizes rhetorical skill, logical structure, and teamwork.

Choosing Your Debate Event

Policy debate rewards deep research and technical skill; it is the most evidence-intensive format. Lincoln-Douglas appeals to students who enjoy philosophy and ethics. Public Forum is ideal for students who want to debate current events in a style accessible to any audience. Congressional Debate suits those who enjoy extemporaneous speaking and parliamentary procedure. World Schools combines prepared and impromptu elements with an emphasis on rhetorical style.

1.6 Team Structure & Leadership

Our team operates with a clear structure that distributes responsibilities and empowers student leaders. Understanding this structure helps every member know where to turn for support and how to grow into

leadership roles.

Coaching Staff

- **Head Coach:** Oversees all aspects of the program including practice planning, tournament registration, team policies, and communication with families. [Coach Name]
- **Assistant Coach(es):** Support specific events or divisions. May lead practice sessions, judge at tournaments, and provide one-on-one coaching. [Coach Name(s)]

Student Leadership

- **Team Captain(s):** Serve as the primary student leaders. Responsibilities include leading warm-ups, mentoring new members, coordinating team-building activities, and serving as a liaison between team members and the coaching staff.
- **Event Captains:** Experienced competitors in each event who help peers with piece selection, cutting, and practice. They may lead small-group sessions during practice.
- **Team Historian:** Documents the season through photos, social media (with coach approval), and the end-of-year scrapbook or video.
- **Outreach Coordinator:** Assists with recruitment efforts, organizes demonstrations for feeder schools, and manages the team bulletin board or display case.

Leadership Selection

Student leadership positions are filled through an application and interview process at the end of each season for the following year. Candidates must demonstrate commitment to the team, maturity, strong communication skills, and a willingness to serve others. The coaching staff makes all final leadership appointments.

1.7 Practice & Meeting Schedule

Consistent attendance and active participation at practice are essential to your growth as a competitor and the overall success of our team. Below is our standard weekly schedule. Adjustments may be made for tournament weeks, school holidays, or other circumstances.

Day	Time	Activity	Notes
Monday	3:30 - 5:00 PM	Full Team Meeting & Warm-Up	Attendance required for all members
Tuesday	3:30 - 5:30 PM	Debate Practice & Work Sessions	Debate events focus; speech members may use for individual practice
Wednesday	3:30 - 5:00 PM	Speech Practice & Piece Work	Speech events focus; debate members may use for case writing
Thursday	3:30 - 5:30 PM	Interp Lab / Extemp Prep	Rotation: Week A = Interp; Week B = Extemp

Friday	By arrangement	Individual Coaching Sessions	Sign up for 20-minute slots with a coach
Select Saturdays	8:00 AM - 4:00 PM	Tournaments	See tournament schedule for dates

Note: Practice times and days may vary based on school schedules, room availability, and coaching schedules. Always check the team calendar for the most current information.

1.8 Attendance & Commitment Policy

Speech and debate is a team activity that depends on the commitment of every member. Your teammates depend on you for practice rounds, partner preparation, and team morale. The following policy outlines our expectations for attendance and participation.

Attendance Requirements

- All members are expected to attend the Monday full-team meeting each week.
- Members must attend at least two additional practice sessions per week relevant to their event(s).
- Tournament attendance is required for all varsity members and strongly encouraged for novices.
- Members must log a minimum of 10 hours of practice per month to remain in good standing.

Absences

- **Excused Absences:** Illness, family emergency, school-sponsored academic or arts events, religious observances, and college visits (seniors only, limit 3 per season). Notify the coach at least 24 hours in advance when possible.
- **Unexcused Absences:** Any absence not listed above, or failure to notify the coach in advance. Three unexcused absences may result in loss of tournament participation privileges.

Commitment Expectations

- Attend all practices you have committed to. If you sign up for a time slot, show up.
- Complete assigned preparation work (research, writing, memorization) outside of practice time.
- Communicate proactively with your partner (for partner events) about scheduling and preparation.
- Represent the team with professionalism at all times.

Why Attendance Matters

When you miss practice, you are not just missing your own development — you are also affecting your practice partners, your event group, and the overall energy of the team. Every member's contribution matters. If you are struggling to attend, talk to your coach so we can find a solution together.

1.9 Academic Eligibility

EVENT CALENDAR PLANNER

Plan Your Season for Maximum Success

A well-planned season is the foundation of a successful speech and debate program. The following pages provide a season overview, a monthly planning template, and a tournament date tracker. Use these tools to map out your year, set milestones, and ensure that no deadline is missed.

Season Overview Calendar

The typical speech and debate season spans from late summer through late spring. Use this overview to identify major phases of the year and plan accordingly.

Month	Phase	Key Activities & Milestones
August	Pre-Season	Coach planning; recruitment (see Section 5); schedule team meetings; order supplies; submit budget requests.
September	Kickoff	First team meeting; handbook distribution; event selection; piece selection begins; NSDA membership registration.
October	Early Season	Case writing and piece cutting; first local tournaments; establish practice routines; parent meeting.
November	Building	Regular tournament competition; extemp filing; first debate resolutions; mid-season goal check.
December	Mid-Season	Winter break independent practice; tournament redos; refine pieces and cases; holiday fundraiser.
January	Push	Second semester recruitment; intensive preparation; district tournament qualifying begins; congress regionals.

February	Championship Prep	District speech and debate tournaments; state series begins; final piece polishing; advanced strategy.
March	Post-Season	State tournaments; national qualifying tournaments; senior recognition planning.
April	Culmination	National tournament prep; team banquet; leadership elections; end-of-year reflections.
May/June	Nationals	NSDA National Tournament; summer camp planning; off-season training resources distributed.

Monthly Planning Template

Use this two-page spread each month to plan practices, track tournament dates, and set team goals. Photocopy or print as needed for each month of your season.

Month _____ / _____	Year: _____	Theme: _____
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Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

Monthly Goals	Action Items	Deadlines
1. _____ _____	_____ _____	_____ _____

PRACTICE DRILL LIBRARY

20 Essential Drills for Speech & Debate Skills

Drills are the building blocks of skill development. Just as athletes run conditioning drills to improve speed and agility, speech and debate competitors use targeted exercises to sharpen their delivery, argumentation, and performance skills. The following 20 drills cover vocal delivery, physical performance, debate strategy, and extemporaneous speaking.

How to Use This Library

Incorporate 2–3 drills into every practice session. Select drills that align with the week's meeting agenda focus (see Section 2). Start with fundamental drills early in the season and progress to advanced drills as competition approaches. Many drills include variations to increase or decrease difficulty.

Drill 1: The One-Breath Presentation

Objective	To improve breath control, pacing, and vocal efficiency while speaking.
Time	5 minutes
Materials	A short paragraph of text (speech introduction or debate card).

Instructions

1. Take a deep breath and begin reading the paragraph aloud.
2. Try to reach the end of the paragraph on a single breath without rushing unnaturally.
3. If you run out of air, mark the spot where you stopped.
4. Repeat 3–5 times, adjusting your pace and volume to extend your breath.
5. Focus on controlling your exhale and eliminating unnecessary pauses.

Coach's Pro-Tip

Record yourself. Notice where you naturally pause and whether those pauses align with the content's natural breaks. Eliminate filler breaths.

[SCHOOL NAME] SPEECH & DEBATE TEAM

**FIND YOUR VOICE.
CHANGE THE WORLD.**

SPEAK

Original Oratory
Informative Speaking
Extemporaneous
Impromptu

DEBATE

Public Forum
Lincoln-Douglas
Policy
Congressional

PERFORM

Dramatic Interp
Humorous Interp
Duo Interp
Program Oral Interp

WHY JOIN?

- ✓ Build unshakable confidence
- ✓ Master college-level research
- ✓ Improve your GPA
- ✓ Earn scholarships
- ✓ Make lifelong friends

INTERESTED?

Attend our Information Meeting!

Date: [Date] **Time:** [Time] **Location:** [Room #]

No experience necessary! All are welcome!

Contact Coach [Name] at [Email] with questions!

BUDGET REQUEST TEMPLATE

Secure the Funding Your Team Needs

A well-prepared budget request demonstrates professionalism and helps administrators understand the financial needs of your program. The following template provides a line-item budget and a justification narrative guide. Customize the dollar amounts based on your school's specific tournament schedule, travel costs, and district policies.

Budget Request Summary

Program Name:	[School Name] Speech & Debate Team
Academic Year:	[20XX - 20XX]
Head Coach / Advisor:	[Coach Name]
Estimated Student Roster:	[Number] students
Total Budget Requested:	\$[Total from Line Items Below]

Line-Item Budget

Category	Item / Description	Qty	Unit Cost	Total
Association Memberships	NSDA Student Memberships	20	\$20.00	\$400.00
	State/Local League Dues	1	\$150.00	\$150.00

8.5 Speaker Points Guide

Most debate tournaments use a 1–30 point scale for speaker points. Speaker points reward the quality of delivery, organization, and professionalism, separate from who won the debate. Use this guide to assign points consistently.

Points	Rating	Description
30	Outstanding	Flawless delivery, exceptional argumentation, masterful use of time. Among the best speeches you have ever seen at this level.
28–29	Excellent	Strong delivery, well-organized, persuasive. Minor errors or missed opportunities. A highly competitive performance.
25–27	Good / Average	Competent but unspectacular. Clear structure but lacks persuasive punch, or delivery is adequate but not engaging. This is the baseline for a competent debater.
22–24	Below Average	Significant organizational issues, unclear speaking, failure to address key arguments, or poor time management. Needs substantial improvement.
20–21	Poor	Incoherent, highly unprepared, or severely lacking in basic debate skills. Rarely awarded.
Below 20	Unacceptable	Reserved for egregious conduct violations (rudeness, offensive language, forfeiting a speech). Award only after consulting with the tournament director.

8.6 Ballot Writing Workshop

The ballot is your primary communication tool with the student. A well-written ballot educates; a poorly written ballot confuses. Use the following guidelines to write ballots that are clear, constructive, and actionable.

The Feedback Sandwich

Structure your feedback using the classic "Sandwich" method:

- **Top Bun (Positive):** Start with something the student did well. Be specific. ("Your introduction grabbed my attention with that powerful statistic.")
- **Meat (Constructive Criticism):** Provide 1–2 specific areas for improvement. Explain what went wrong and how to fix it. ("Your second and third points blended together. Use clearer signposting: 'Moving to my second point...'"")
- **Bottom Bun (Positive/Encouragement):** End with encouragement or another strength. ("Your vocal variety in the conclusion was excellent. Keep working on transitions and you will be very competitive.")

Ballot Do's and Don'ts

DO	DON'T
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Be specific: 'Your evidence on the economy was outdated.'	Be vague: 'Work on your arguments.'
Explain your reasoning: 'I voted Neg because the Aff didn't prove solvency.'	Simply state a conclusion: 'Neg won.'
Comment on delivery AND content.	Comment only on one or the other.
Write legibly (if on paper) or type clearly.	Write a single word or leave the comment section blank.
Acknowledge what the student did right.	List only flaws and mistakes.
Use the terminology of the event (signposting, warrants, impacts).	Use overly harsh or discouraging language.
Provide an actionable suggestion: 'Slow down during your taglines.'	Criticize the student's appearance, clothing, or personal traits.

8.7 Practice Scoring Exercises

The best way to become a confident judge is to practice. Below are two exercises — one for speech and one for debate — designed to help new judges apply the criteria and practice writing feedback.

Exercise 1: Speech Round Scenario

Scenario

You are judging a round of Original Oratory with three competitors:

Student A speaks on the dangers of social media addiction. The speech is impeccably researched with 12 sources. However, the student reads from their script for 60% of the speech, rarely making eye contact. Their vocal delivery is flat, though the content is logically structured.

Student B speaks on overcoming the fear of failure. The speech has only 3 sources, but the personal anecdotes are deeply moving. The student is fully memorized, makes consistent eye contact, and uses dynamic vocal variety. The structure is somewhat loose in the middle.

Student C speaks on the importance of volunteering. The speech has 6 sources and a clear structure. The student is mostly memorized but glances at notes twice. Delivery is pleasant but not highly dynamic. The conclusion is strong.

Discussion Questions for Exercise 1

- How would you rank these three students (1st, 2nd, 3rd) and why?
- Which matters more in OO: depth of research or quality of delivery? Can one compensate for the other?
- What specific feedback would you write on Student A's ballot to help them improve?
- How would you advise Student B to strengthen their content without losing their emotional connection?

Exercise 2: Debate Round Scenario

Scenario

standards of academic rigor and professional presentation.

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