Judging Speech Events:

The Basics



Randolph High School Forensics 2015-16

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**Frequently Asked Questions**

* **What exactly is speech?**
  + Speech is a subset of the larger activity of speech and debate. Speech events, also sometimes called Individual Events (IE), consist of many similar competition events across the realm of public speaking. These events generally fall into three categories: interpretation (acting), public address (speeches), and limited preparation (extemporaneous and improvised speaking). Students can often double-enter.
* **Why should I judge?**
  + There are several great reasons to judge. First, you get an opportunity to see up close the activity your son or daughter has chosen to compete in. Often, students can’t or don’t show their parents what they do – judging other students will give you an idea of what they spend so much time working on. Parents also earn judging credits for their child – for every three tournaments a student competes in, they must provide for one judge. Finally, judging is often it’s own reward! Sure, you get a decent breakfast and lunch provided to you, but trusts us when we say that you will enjoy judging. It is awe-inspiring to see the sheer talent on display at every tournament, and overall parents who judge agree it is an extremely enriching experience.
* **When and where are tournaments?**
  + Most tournaments throughout the year are local to the Northern or Central New Jersey area. Typically, students report on Saturday mornings between 7-8am, with tournaments normally beginning at 9am. Judges typically report around 8:30am, though times vary week to week. Judges may drive separately to tournaments, but are always welcome on the bus with students.
* **What happens at a tournament?**
  + Tournaments for speech generally include three preliminary rounds and one final round. Preliminary rounds have one judge, and final rounds have three. You may judge all four rounds, or only some, depending on the needs of the tournament. Rounds typically have 5-7 competitors. Judges typically have their own lounge or congregation room with refreshments and information. Typically, there are judge instruction meetings at the start of a tournament, and “judge calls” before each round where you pick up your assignments.
* **How do I sign up to judge?**
  + Go to rhsforensics.org, and in the parents’ section, there is a form where you can sign up to judge for various tournaments.
* **Should I bring anything with me when I judge?**
  + Speech judges should their favorite writing utensils, spare paper (just in case), and a device to keep time (cell phones are acceptable). Judges often find they have downtime throughout the day, so bringing work, reading material, etc. is recommended.
* **Is there any etiquette I should observe as a judge?**
  + Be on time, be respectful and attentive to competitors, give constructive feedback, and be flexible if possible. Judges should also silence or turn off their phones in-round.
* **Are there differences between tournaments that are relevant to judges?**
  + We compete in two major circuits – the NJSDL and the CFL. The CFL generally offers fewer events, with some events combined, and slight logistics differences. CFLs also tend to run shorter, do not allow double-entering, and have an ironclad judging requirement.

**General Instructions and Suggestions for Speech Judges**

* Always give contestants your undivided attention. Please turn off your electronic devices and encourage all audience members (if any) to do the same.
* Ballots must be filled out legibly, complete with your signature and school affiliation, with helpful, constructive and critical feedback.
* You will rank each competitor in the round from first (1) to last in descending order. The speaker you feel performed the best should receive the rank of 1, the next best 2, and so on. No two contestants should ever receive the same rank.
* Avoid extraneous conversation with competitors. Please don’t ask them for their school affiliations; don’t announce your inexperience with the event; and don’t discuss previous tournaments, rounds, or results. If you have questions, please consult tournament staff before the round.
* Each event has a time limit with a thirty second grace period. Time violations mean that a competitor cannot be ranked first in the round, but no other penalty is applied. The rest is up to the judge’s discretion.
* Dress should not be a consideration in determining rank unless the competitor’s choice of clothing can be considered a costume, prop, or distraction.
* Props are not allowed in any event. A prop is defined for these purposes as any object NOT considered a part of the student’s physical body. Hair, arms, fingers, etc. are not props. Clothing, jewelry, and eyeglasses are examples of props.
* Crying, singing, and movement are permitted in any event without limitation. However, judges are free to critique their implementation.
* Do not give oral critiques or reveal your decision to contestants after the round.
* If requested by competitors, provide time signals to students in all events. Students should not be penalized for requesting time signals. Time signals MUST be given in Extemporaneous Speaking, Impromptu Speaking, and Improvisational Acting.
* If you have a concern regarding a competitor’s choice of literature or language, please consult tournament staff or a league officer before completing your ballots and ranking.
* If you have questions about any rule or possible infraction, direct them to tournament staff immediately after the round. Such issues cannot be resolved after the results are tabulated.

**Some Useful Words/Phrases for Completing Ballots**

* Well-controlled performance
* Pleasant vocal qualities
* Articulate
* Well-placed emphasis
* Excellent phrasing
* Good vocal inflection
* Expressive face/physicality
* Positive use of gestures
* Meaningful phrases
* Convincing performance
* Emotional effect
* Distracting speech pattern
* Variety in vocal tone
* Clean enunciation
* Bringing the material to life
* Creating a sense of the environment
* Lack of intensity
* Variety of pitch
* Good use of eye contact
* Good piece/literature selection
* Great character differentiation
* Cohesive plot/cutting, or well-organized
* Interesting or unique theme/message/argument
* Binder use/balance of reading (OI)
* Balance between performers (partner events)
* Appropriate use/division of time
* Impactful performance
* Personal performance or choice

**Responsibilities of Speech Judges**

*Adapted from Mark Hickman, West Chester University*

**THE BASICS**

There are a few places you should be aware of at each tournament. **Registration** is where the coach and/or team registers for competition. Some tournaments will have a separate **judge check-in**; try to find out if this is the case. Otherwise, just make sure your coach knows you are present. The **tabulation (tab) room** is the hub for the tournament staff. To keep things running smoothly, do not disturb the tab room unless you have a pressing or urgent issue. The **judge’s lounge** is usually the area for judges to congregate, and often the area where breakfast and lunch are served and where judge call occurs. The **ballot table** is where you will return your ballots after each round for double-checking; sometimes, the table is located outside or near the tab room.

Once you pick up your ballots for a given round of competition, you should try to arrive at the round a few minutes early. This will give you an opportunity to fill out basic information on the ballot like event, round, section, contestant name and code, your name and affiliation. You will have a master ballot, which will go to the tab room for tabulation, along with individual ballots, which will go to each competitor. The typical round of competition will have 5-7 contestants and will be allotted between 60-80 minutes for completion.

Your role is to manage the round so the competition runs smoothly and on time and that competitors comport themselves in a way that is courteous and ethical. You are expected to provide an objective evaluation of each performance and rank/rate performances without bias or undue influence. Contestants should not be asked to identify their school affiliation or any other information that is not pertinent to judging the content of their performances. You should feel free to write ballot comments and penalize contestants who exhibit any unsportsmanlike conduct, such as being a bad audience member or acting in a discourteous or disruptive manner.

**BEGINNING THE ROUND**

In prepared events, contestants are asked to sign in before the round is scheduled to begin if possible. They will sign in on the whiteboard with their contestant code and their name, along with their piece and author. Your master ballot indicates a speaker order; however, this DOES NOT mean that they will perform in that order. Often, several contestants will be entered in other events that are scheduled at the same time. Contestants who are entered in other events will either arrive late or leave after their performance. Please allow them priority when they have another event to go to. They will indicate they are double entered on the whiteboard.

To become familiar with signing in, an exampleis provided and explained below:

AB4 – Johansson (DE WR)

“The Fault In Our Stars” by John Green

This individual’s code is AB4 – each school gets a different letter assignment, and each student gets a number as well. The student has written his last name, along with the abbreviation “DE WR”. This stands for “double entered, will return” – he will speak first in his other event, and then return to this event to speak near the end. If the abbreviation only has “DE”, then that student will ask to speak near the top of the order, and then leave for his other round. The student here has also written the name of the piece he is performing and its author.

Be sure to call each contestant aloud by code and name when you are ready to hear them to make sure that the code and name on the board and the code and name on your ballot match the person whose performance you are getting ready to judge.

In all individual events, it is customary and expected that you will write your ballot comments mainly during the contestants’ performances, not in between performances. This helps keep the tournament running on time. In preliminary round competition at regular season tournaments, you will be the sole judge. In final round competition, three judges are typically assigned to the round.

**TIMEKEEPING**

Judges are expected to keep accurate records of the length of all speeches and performances in rounds. Each event has a time limit; time violations should result in significant penalties for the competitor.

Prepared individual (Public Address & Interpretation) events are 10 minutes maximum. ~ The Extemporaneous Speaking event is 5-7 minutes.  In Impromptu and Improv, contestants have a total of 7 minutes to divide between preparation and speaking; they must speak for at least 3 minutes.

As a judge, you may find using time as a criterion for evaluation difficult since there is no set penalty. Feel free to exercise your right as a judge to enforce the rules. Some of the best performances may go over time. The rules for each event specify the time maximums. Violators should be punished. However, the individual judge must determine how severely to punish those who violate time limits and other guidelines.

In limited preparation events, you must provide time signals to let the speaker know how much time they have remaining to speak. After a contestant has spoken for two minutes, hold up five fingers (make sure they see it) to let them know they have five minutes remaining. Once you are sure they have seen the time signal you may put your hand down. Count downward each subsequent minute displaying one finger for each minute remaining down to one minute (one finger) remaining, then thirty seconds (a “c” with thumb and index finger, and finally a balled fist. You may find that students in other events will ask for similar time signals. Accommodate their wishes to the best of your ability. If a student requests time signals and you fail to provide some or all of them, you must NOT penalize them for time violations.

In Impromptu/Improv roundsyou must provide time signals to let the speaker know how much time they have used in preparation for the speech as well as how much time they have remaining to speak. Once a speaker sees the topic, you start timing them. Call out the amount of **preparation time used** aloud in 30-second intervals (“30 seconds used . . . one minute . . . one thirty . . . etc.) until the speaker starts to speak. Note the amount of prep time used on the ballot, but keep the time running. At this point you continue to signal the **time remaining to speak** out of their seven total minutes using the time signals described above.

**BALLOTS**

Judges comments are extremely important. Judges (experienced and new) must feel comfortable with providing written constructive criticism. No performance is perfect. Every contestant deserves to know what you, the judge, think about the message and performance. Thus, judges are required to provide written feedback that justifies and explains the rank. Judges are NEVER wrong, but must feel empowered to provide comments that will assist the contestant with future performances. Students are accustomed to judges writing these comments while the student is performing; do not wait to write comments after the performance as you may forget key suggestions and the round will run very late making the tournament run on time.

Judges are asked to, **at** **minimum**:

* Complete the requested information on the front of the ballot (i.e. contestant name, code, event, round, section, etc.)
* Use the ballot to provide at least three positive comments and three comments that
  + Provide constructive criticism
  + Question the choices the contestant has made
  + Provide suggestions for improvement
* After all contestants have performed, **rank contestants 1(best) to 6 (worst)**.

Once the round of competition is finished and you have ranked and rated all contestants, you must return your ballots to the ballot table for verification. Verification of the ballots is to assure that no more than one of each rank are given. Do not delay returning your ballots; this will delay the whole tournament.