

Competition Events – At A Glance

An Introduction to Extemporaneous Speaking



Event Description

In Extemporaneous Speaking, students are presented with a choice of three questions related to current events and, in 30 minutes, prepare a seven-minute speech answering the selected question. Students may consult articles and evidence they gather prior to the contest, but may not use the Internet during preparation. Topics range from political matters to economic concerns to foreign policy to international crisis. Students are given questions that range from domestic issues within the United States to international issues. The speech is delivered from memory.

Considerations for Extemp

Students who do Extemp are typically very curious about matters of domestic and international interest. Students should be well read and understand current events. To learn more about these issues, students should spend time reading from a variety of news sources. Recommended reading lists include, but are not limited to: *New York Times*, *Economist*, *The Guardian*, *Congressional Research Committee*, *Council on Foreign Relations*, *Asia Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Foreign Affairs*, and more.


Traits of Successful Extemp Speakers

When considering what event you should choose, or in which direction to point a student when selecting an event, below are some general traits of successful Extempers to keep in mind:

- Enjoys reading
- Naturally curious or inquisitive
- Passionate about domestic issues
- Determined
- Reflective
- Recognizes interconnected concepts and events

List of Past Extemp Questions

- What will be President Obama's legacy?
- What would it take for China to become more democratic?
- What should be America's role in promoting democracy abroad?
- Are charter schools the answer to our educational woes?
- Does North Korea pose a legitimate threat to its southern neighbor?
- Is OPEC losing its influence as a global oil supplier?
- Will Hillary Clinton win the 2016 presidential election?
- What can the government do to promote job growth?
- Should illegal immigrants be offered amnesty as part of a reform package?
- Is the Affordable Care Act working?

Learn More! The National Speech & Debate Association is the leading provider of competitive and educational resources to aid students and coaches as they explore our competitive events. For Extemporaneous Speaking, we provide a number of helpful resources—including live and recorded webinars designed to introduce foundational and advanced concepts in Extemp; access to Extemp final round videos; an Extemp textbook for Resource Package subscribers; practice questions; topic analysis; and much more! Take advantage of the amazing benefits of being a member by using our resources to help you advance yourself in competitive speech and debate activities. Visit www.speechanddebate.org for more information. 

Find Your Voice

The fast-paced nature of Extemp quickly cultivated my speaking skills, while the never-ending subject matter of current events provided an outlet for my intense curiosity. On its most fundamental level, Extemp gave me a microphone to address the world, imbued eloquence into my voice and ideas, and taught me to make concise arguments."

— Dylan Adelman, Association Alum

Middle School Competition Events – At A Glance

Extemporaneous Speaking



Basic Understandings

Extemporaneous Speaking, typically called extemp, is a speech on current events with limited preparation time. A student's understanding of important political, economic, and cultural issues is assessed along with critical thinking and analytical skills. Students report to a draw room (often referred to as extemp prep) where all of the extempers gather at tables, set out their files, and await their turn to draw topics. A staff member in the prep room calls out student codes based upon a pre-assigned speaker order. When a student's code is called, the student will approach the draw table and take three questions from an envelope. The student will then select one of those questions and return the other two to the envelope, and prepare for thirty minutes to deliver a speech answering the chosen topic. When prep time is up, the student reports to the competition room to deliver a 7 minute speech.

Students may access research brought with them to the tournament during the 30-minute preparation period. We refer to these resources as files. Teams may bring their files in paper form, often print-outs of articles organized in hanging file folders by topic area in large plastic bins or totes, or electronic format on laptops or other portable devices such as tablets (for more information, see Research).

During preparation time, students review their files on the topic selected and outline arguments that will be made throughout the speech. Some students outline with notecards; others use legal pads. Students should document the source of their research on their notes so that they can cite the materials while they speak. Students have a lot to do in 30 minutes—they must select a question, review research, outline arguments with supporting materials, and practice at least part of the speech before time expires. Many tournaments prohibit the consultation of notes during the speech in which case speech structure and evidence need to be memorized during prep time as well.

After the 30-minute preparation time, students report to their competition rooms to deliver their speeches. Students must never watch the speakers before them, although students may watch those who speak after

them. Judges should give time signals to the competitors while they speak to indicate how much time remains of their 7 minutes.



Research

Students who compete in Extemp must keep up with current events. Students who do International Extemp must read articles concerning events of world-wide importance as they may draw questions regarding conflict among various countries, economic challenges experienced by third world countries, or new leadership in nations across the globe. US Extemp participants must understand political, social, and economic policies of the US and how the US relates to the rest of the world. Reading articles is a vital practice for keeping students informed on topics frequently asked at tournaments. It is also important because students may want to frame their analysis with historical context.

Students should read widely, both on topics of personal interest as well as on issues that they struggle to understand. Because the topics are so diverse and can change rapidly, students should keep up with current events by reading print or online versions of various newspapers, magazines, and journals. Students may want to file at least one US-oriented source and one international source to broaden their exposure to varied ideas and perspectives.

There are various methods to organizing team extemp files depending upon the format chosen. Students should file articles from reputable newspapers, magazines, and

Middle School Competition Events – At A Glance

Extemporaneous Speaking



electronic resources. Students may not access the Internet while they are in extemp prep; thus, all articles must be printed or stored on a laptop prior to entering the room. If a service such as Dropbox is used for digital files, all of the online files must be synced with the downloaded versions prior to the start of the tournament.

Students need to cite sources during their speeches. Typically, the name of the source and date are a minimal requirement, although sometimes speakers need to provide additional source credibility. For example, “As reported in the *New York Times* of September 4, 2014...” or, “Janet Yellen, chair of the Federal Reserve, is quoted in *The Economist* of September 6, 2014...”

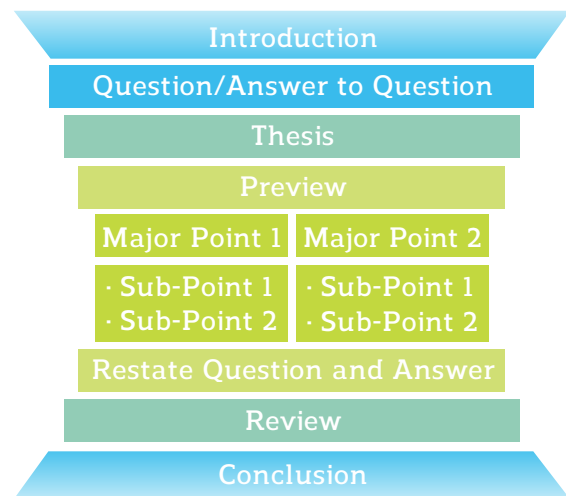
Structural Components

Overall, an excellent extemporaneous speech is one that provides critical thinking and perspective on an issue of contemporary significance. Extempers must address the question as worded on the draw slip and support their positions with analysis and evidence. Extempers who can provide a clear explanation of what is taking place, and why, will be particularly favored by judges. This is important for those judges who have limited experience with extemp or who are not as well versed in current events. Students must remember that they sometimes know more about certain parts of the world or specific aspects of our economy than a number of their judges or the observers in the round. Clarity is vitally important. Extempers should not use specialized terms or phrases unless they are placed in context. For example, an International Extemp might discuss a recent development in the currency valuation of a specific country by referencing the name of the currency. A US extemp might analyze the impact of Super PACs (Political Action Committees) by explaining what a PAC is, how Super PACs differ from historical notions of PACs, and how federal and Supreme Court decisions changed the political landscape. It is possible that the judge or observers in the round may not know the value of another nation’s currency, or how corporations can donate to political campaigns, unless the extemp provides that information.

Organizing

Most speeches feature an introduction that gains the audience’s attention, sets up the speech, and transitions to recitation of the question and the student’s answer to the question. This is followed by a thesis statement for the speech as a whole. Extemp speeches typically have a preview statement after the introduction that summarizes the key points the student will make in the body of the speech. Students then organize the body of the speech with major points and sub-points. Students might choose three major points of analysis, for example, or perhaps two major points with two sub-points under each. Speeches also typically feature a review of the major points, a restatement of the question and student response to the question, and a conclusion. Students should practice with a stopwatch to determine how long they should speak on each section. Each major point should be roughly equal to another to keep the speech balanced.

Here is a sample outline:



Standing it Up/Practicing

Extempers need to start with the basics. Beginning extempers should spend considerable time reading credible news sources on a range of topics. Beginners should receive practice questions and take the time to review them, talk through answers to the questions, and focus on creating excellent thesis statements. Beginners

Middle School Competition Events – At A Glance

Extemporaneous Speaking



could start practices with a notecard and perhaps focus on one major point of analysis instead of two or three. A great beginning strategy for extempers is to deliver their first speech with unlimited prep time. Following this performance, gradually reduce the amount of prep time used until the speaker reaches 30 minutes. It is easy for students to be intimidated by extemp. As with any skill, practicing will take some of the anxiety out of approaching the event. Students should not wait to stand it up —if the student knows a lot about a particular topic of interest, stand-up practices can take place right away. Students do not have to know everything about every country, world leader, or U.S. policy in order to practice. After a number of extemp practices, students can spend time working on language selection, smoothing out the verbal and physical delivery, and filling in the gaps of their knowledge base.



Performance Tips

Due to the nature of Extemp, competitors will find that each round is unique. Some questions are incredibly challenging, either due to the specific wording or lack of background knowledge of the topic for the extemper, and others seem incredibly easy. Every Extemp competitor will encounter a round where there simply are no files on a given topic. Extempers need to accept that some rounds are excellent and others are not and to learn from every speech. There are ways extempers can better prepare for Extemp and put their best foot forward every time. Some advice for students:

Ask questions. If you don't understand an economic principle or can't explain why a particular country's actions are significant, be sure to ask coaches, teachers, and teammates.

Take notes. If your files are missing something important, make a note of it and either fill the gaps or talk to your teammates so that everyone is on the same page.

Practice language. Extempers often use the same types of language for transitional material. Practice with this language so that you aren't struggling to come up with something fresh in every speech. As you gain experience, you can mix it up, but at the outset, just get comfortable with the format of the speech and the language to get you from point A to point B.

Line-by-line. Save your notes from your speeches and revisit them. Give sections of speeches, or entire speeches, over and over again to improve argument quality and language considerations. If you struggle with vocalized pauses and fillers, such as uhms and likes, you can redo lines of your speech repeatedly.

Resources

Keeping up with the news, while very rewarding, can also feel very overwhelming. Students can take advantage of a number of free electronic resources to keep up-to-date. For example, students might use an RSS reader (which is a news aggregator, bringing news to the student in one website on a continual basis), such as Feedly, to keep up with news. Students can choose to follow particular types of news or specific news outlets. Students can also keep up with current events by following news organizations or analysts on Twitter. Flipboard is a service that brings students the news in a visually appealing format, similar to flipping through the pages of a magazine. Students can also have news updates pushed to them through individual emails or news digests offered by services such as Google News or Yahoo!

The National Speech & Debate Association has many resources specific to Extemporaneous Speaking, including sample Extemp questions, videos of Extemp speeches, a textbook, helpful webinars, and more! Once you join the Association and register on our website, you can access these through your "dashboard." From there you can click on "Speech Resources" followed by "Public Speaking."