

An Introduction to Extemporaneous Debate



Event Description

Extemporaneous Debate is a supplemental event at the National Speech & Debate Tournament. Students compete in a one-on-one format with limited prep time to prepare for the topic they are to debate. Students present arguments and engage in rebuttals, however, unlike other common debate events, students debate a number of topics, as opposed to a single topic for the entire tournament. Each round students are presented a unique resolution. They are given a minimum of thirty minutes to prepare for the round. The use of evidence is permitted, but not a focal point due to the limited time available to prepare a case for the round.

Considerations for Extemporaneous Debate

Students who are interested in doing Extemporaneous Debate should be well versed in various topics since the resolutions for the debate change round to round. Students should be able to think quickly on their feet and work under time restrictions. Any student who does debate or extemp is naturally drawn to Extemporaneous Debate. However, the event is not something that other public speakers or interpers should shy away from. Students who are knowledgeable, thoughtful, and able to process ideas quickly to formulate positions would find the event to be challenging and rewarding.


Traits of Successful Extemp Debaters

When considering what event to choose, or which direction to point a student selecting an event, here are some traits of successful Extemp Debate students to keep in mind:

- Analytical
- Broad knowledge base
- Confident
- Persuasive speaker
- Quick thinker
- Independent
- Logical thinker

Examples of Past Extemp Debate Topics

- Resolved that the Affordable Care Act should be repealed.
- Resolved that marijuana use should be decriminalized.
- Resolved that the US should execute its planned troop withdrawal from Afghanistan.
- Resolved that Congress should have the right to limit freedom of expression by corporations, associations, and unions.
- Resolved that the implementation of the Common Core will improve public education in the US.
- Resolved that the deal to free Bowe Bergdahl was unjustified.
- Resolved that Congress should include a “pathway to citizenship” as part of immigration reform.
- Resolved that American businesses should have the right to deny workers the right to unionize.
- Resolved that the US federal government should increase regulations on GMOs.
- Resolved that the US federal government should stop providing loans for college tuition.

Learn More! The National Speech & Debate Association is the leading provider of competitive & educational resources to aid students and coaches as they explore our competitive events. The Association provides webinars and final round recordings specific to Extemporaneous Debate. 

Find Your Voice

Extemp debate imparted onto me, the importance of having to be well read, and open minded about a wide variety of topics. The event also helped me work on my word economy and efficiency when discussing important points in every day conversation. Finally, the compressed format, and scope of the topics also gave me an opportunity to engage in really enjoyable debate on topics that I would never have been able to without it.”

— James Stage, Association Alum

Middle School Competition Events – At A Glance

Extemporaneous Debate



Basic Understandings

Extemporaneous Debate is a one-on-one format that is unique from other events offered by the National Speech & Debate Association. During this limited prep debate event, students are only guaranteed thirty minutes to prepare for their round once the topic is released. There are instances when debaters may get more than thirty minutes, but never less. Debaters are either in favor of the resolution or against the resolution and will be assigned to a particular side by a computer. The debater affirming the topic is known as the proposition debater, where the debater negating the topic is known as the opposition debater. Debaters present their positions on the topic and engage in cross-examination and rebuttals.

Research

Since students have limited time to prepare for a topic, it is important that they are efficient with any research they wish to conduct prior to the round beginning. Students should keep copies of any of the research they use in rounds and be sure to have proper citations with the evidence used. While debaters may look at journals or peer reviewed studies, a limited prep event would make that type of research more difficult. Newspaper articles, think tanks, or credible websites may be the most efficient means of conducting your research. Since time is limited it would make sense that the focus would be less on research and more on brainstorming and generating ideas. Students may consider filing some research in advance, similar to an extemper, so that they would already have reputable research on hand for various topics that could be addressed. Students are expected to act in accordance with the Association's LD, PF, and Policy rules on evidence in debate if they elect to use authoritative sources in the round.

Structural Components

All speeches are two minutes in length and all speech times are protected (a speaker may not be interrupted by the other speaker or by the judge). The proposition debater must affirm the resolution by presenting and defending a sufficient case for the resolution. The opposition debater must oppose the resolution and/

or the proposition debater's case. The round will have constructives, rebuttals, cross examination, and built in prep time.

Speech	Time Limit	Responsibility of Debater
Proposition Constructive	2 min	The debater in favor of the resolution presents his or her case/position in support of the topic.
Cross Examination of Proposition	1 min	The opposition debater asks the proposition questions.
Opposition Constructive	2 min	The debater against the resolution or the proposition's case presents his or her case/position.
Cross Examination of Opposition	1 min	The proposition debater asks the opposition questions.
Mandatory Prep Time	1 min	Both debaters have one minute to prepare their rebuttals.
Proposition Rebuttal	2 min	The proposition debater refutes the main idea of the opposition and supports their main ideas.
Opposition Rebuttal	2 min	The opposition debater refutes the main idea of the proposition and supports their main ideas.
Mandatory Prep Time	1 min	Both debaters have one minute to prepare their rebuttals.
Proposition Rebuttal	2 min	In this final speech the proposition crystallizes the round for the judge and tries to establish sufficient reason for a vote in favor of the resolution.
Opposition Rebuttal	2 min	In this final speech the opposition crystallizes the round for the judge and tries to establish sufficient reason for a vote against the proposition's case and/or the resolution.

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Organizing

Argumentation

First, a debater must clearly establish their claim. This is generally a declarative statement that establishes the point they are setting out to justify. Next, a debater must clearly establish why their argument is valid. This is known as the warrant for an argument. Debaters need to go beyond asserting their claims by backing them up with analysis explaining why the argument is true. The warrant can come in many forms, but is necessary for the development of the argument. It is important to note that having an author simply make an assertion about a topic is not a warrant. Finally, a debater must provide an impact for their argument. This means the debater establishes why the argument is significant in the round.

Casing

After students brainstorm arguments, it is time to construct cases. Many students in extemporaneous debate will outline a position, as opposed to writing out a case verbatim. Since the case being read is only two minutes it is important for the debater to efficiently develop their ideas. A thesis statement may be appropriate at the start of a case with well structured and signposted arguments that directly link back to said thesis. Similar to contentions in other debate events or main points in extemp, each main point in the case should be clearly indicated and organized.

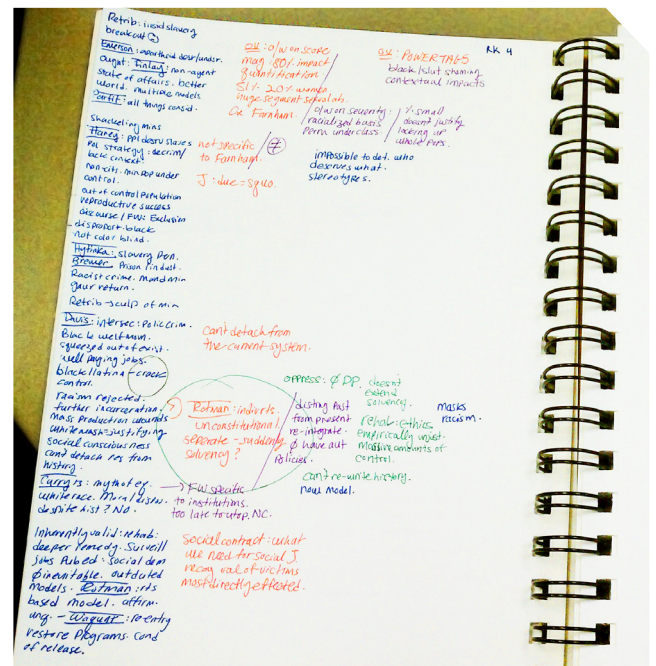
Refutations

Extemporaneous debate is more than just cases! Debaters engage in refuting each other's arguments. Students may

refute cases by denying the validity of the argument, which is most common. Additional strategies include, but are not limited to, asserting the reverse of the argument, showing the opponent's arguments do not carry as much weight as their arguments, or taking out the link between the opponent's argument and the thesis they presented.

Flowing

It is important for debaters to learn how to keep track of arguments in the round. Typically debaters “flow” the debate round - making note of the arguments that are presented and refuted in the round. This note-taking approach requires students to abbreviate terms, phrases, and ideas so that they can get as much of the debate written down as possible. Here are some tips:



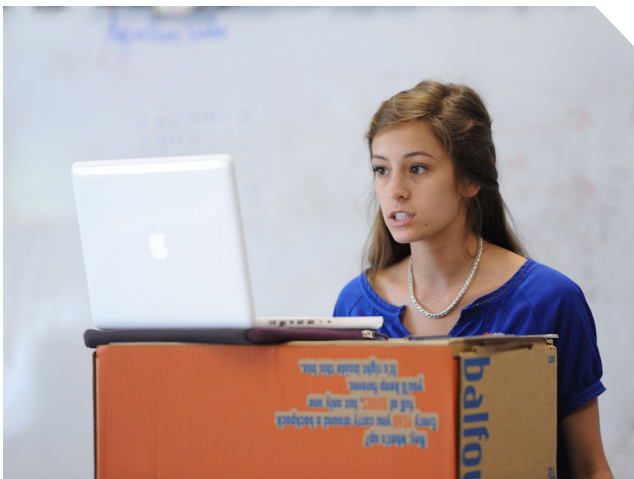
- Two sheets of paper. One page will be for anything said about the proposition, the other for anything said about the opposition. Each speech in the round will receive its own column on these pages.
- At least one pen, but we recommend two, in different colors, one for each side.

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Extemporaneous Debate



- If your opponent is speaking, you should be writing (initially, do not try and determine what is or isn't important - just get as much down as possible)
- Label the top of each column on the proposition flow with the names of the speeches, in chronological order from left to right.
- Label the top of each column on the opposition flow with the names of the speeches, in chronological order from left to right.



Standing it Up/Practicing

It is a great idea to do practice rounds before going to your first tournament. As these are such short speeches, it might appear at first that there will not be enough time to develop arguments. You will discover that you can be very efficient and focused with your language to make every second count. This is a skill that must be practiced to be fully developed. The first round could be a stop and go round where a coach or observer stops you when there's a missed opportunity for a strong argument or confusion about what you are saying. During these rounds, you may re-give speeches until you or the observer/coach are satisfied with the speech that is delivered. This is a great time to work on language choices and time management. Additionally, since the tournament only guarantees thirty minutes of prep time, students should practice under those conditions. A student should work on vocal emphasis, eye contact, and fluidity.



Performance Tips

It is important to remember that you are communicating to your judge. The decision rests solely in the hands of the judge! You must focus on persuading them, which means that you should be directing your speeches and cross-examination questions and answers to the judge, and not to your opponent.

Take feedback from judges as opportunities to improve. If judges provide oral feedback, take notes on what they share to review with your coach. Finally, do not fixate on the outcome of a round - focusing on wins and losses won't lead to greater success!

Resources

Many resources can be found on your dashboard at www.speechanddebate.org. For Extemporaneous Debate we have webinars and final round performances. As a debate event many of the resources for LD, PF, Policy, or Congress would also apply. Textbooks for the various events go through argumentation practices that would be effective in Extemporaneous Debate. The topic analysis that is provided on current events or debate topics would be worthwhile as well for Extemporaneous Debate. Take advantage of the myriad of resources available through the Association.