An Introduction to Program Oral Interpretation (POI)

NATIONAL SPEECH & DEBATE ASSOCIATION
NATIONAL FORENSIC LEAGUE

photo: Sur la Lune Photography

Event Description

Using a combination of Prose, Poetry and Drama, students construct a program up to ten minutes in length using at least two out of the three genres. With a spotlight on argumentation and performative range, Program Oral Interpretation focuses on a student's ability to combine multiple genres of literature centered around a single theme. Competitors are expected to portray multiple characters. No props or costumes may be used except for the manuscript. Performances also include an introduction written by the student to contextualize the performance and state the titles and authors used in the program.

Considerations for Selecting POI Literature

Students who do POI are expected to bring together a wide variety of literature for their program. Students should select pieces that are appropriate for them and that create a well-balanced program which may incorporate humor and drama. Considerations for selecting a POI topic should include the student's age, maturity, and school/team/coach standards.

Traits of Successful POI Performers

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 POI performers to keep in mind:

- Ability to characterize multiple perspectives
- Strong argumentation skills
- Controlled performance
- Depth/breadth of emotion
- Knowledge of poetic, prosaic and dramatic convention

Sample literature for a POI:

TOPIC: *Magical Realism*
DRAMA:

- *Lily Plants a Garden* by Jose Cruz Gonzalez
- *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* by August Wilson

POETRY:

- *The Rusted Door* by Stephan Delbos
- *Write about an Empty Birdcage* by Elaina M. Ellis
- *The Giant Golden Boy of Biology* by Anis Mojgani

PROSE:

- *The People of Paper* by Salvador Plascencia
- *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez
- *The Great Divorce* by Kelly Link

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 Program Oral Interpretation, we are developing a number of helpful resources—including live and recorded webinars designed to introduce foundational and advanced concepts in Interp; an interpretation textbook for Resource Package subscribers; videos from champion coaches; and much more more! Take advantage of the amazing benefits of being a member by using our resources to help advance yourself in competitive speech and debate activities. Visit www.speechanddebate.org for more information.

Find Your Voice

> " POI challenged me to construct my own unique message in a creative yet purposeful way. Piecing together multiple genres of literature not only exposed me to the different styles in which we can voice our ideas, but to the importance of amplifying and unifying these voices fighting for a collective cause"
>
> **— Kenny Lau, Association Alum**

Program Oral Interpretation

NATIONAL SPEECH & DEBATE ASSOCIATION
NATIONAL FORENSIC LEAGUE

Basic Understandings

Program Oral Interpretation relies on the performer's ability to portray a wide range of characters and literature all held together under a common theme. Each program must contain at least two of the three genres and students are encouraged to include all three. There is a set time limit of ten minutes, with a thirty second grace period. Students who choose to compete in POI should focus on making an interesting argument that is supported in different ways by each piece of literature they select.

Research

When looking for a Program Oral Interpretation topic, it's important to know your limitations, and your strengths. Students with a background in Humorous Interpretation may find they have a greater ability to portray multiple characters within the program and choose to include more literature than a student who has a background in Dramatic Interpretation. Conversely, a student with a background in DI may choose to devote more time in the program to a select few pieces of literature, developing each character with greater depth.

What makes POI unique is the performer's ability to choose what kinds of stories they want to tell and the way those stories are told. When deciding on a topic, think about what motivates you. What do you want to change about the world? Whom do you want to lend your voice to? By answering questions like this performers are given a strong sense of potential topics.

Searching for literature in POI can seem intimidating, since you have more scripts to find than the other interpretation events. However, keep in mind that POI allows for the most freedom when searching for literature. As long as it follows the publishing guidelines of the National Speech and Debate Association, and it meets team and coach standards for appropriateness, you can use it!

To start, think about why you wanted to speak about your topic. Then, think about any books, plays or poetry you have encountered that relate to the topic. Find that literature and include it in your POI.

Then, broaden your search. Start researching online, at local libraries and bookstores, and begin piecing together enough literature for a program.

Not only will you be finding different genres of literature, you will also encounter different tones, perspectives and length. Good POI's will include longer narratives for the audience to relate to, short snippets packed with information and literature that lets the audience laugh. Finding a diverse set of literature enables a more dynamic performance.

photo: Sur la Lune Photography

Structural Components

Structure of an Interp (taken from *Interpretation of Literature, Bringing Words to Life*).

TEASER • 0:00 – 1:30
Previews the topic and mood of the selection

INTRO • 1:30 – 3:00
Explains the purpose of the performance

EXPOSITION • 3:00 – 3:30
Introduces characters and setting

INCITING INCIDENT • 3:30 – 4:00
Sends the conflict into motion

RISING ACTION • 4:00 – 7:30
Complicates the conflict

CLIMAX • 7:30 – 8:30
Emotional peak of the performance

FALLING ACTION • 8:30 – 9:30
Resolves the conflict

Program Oral Interpretation

There are a few key structural components of every POI:

Programming is the process of cutting your literature and threading it together throughout the performance. That does not mean that your POI will consist of performing a poem in full, then reading a short story and closing with a monologue from a play. Instead, break your literature down into pages and build a program that follows the structure of interp. For example, introduce the compelling character from your Prose in the intro, and then dedicate time later on in the performance to that same character.

Each selection of literature should be distinct in your performance. Perhaps the non-fiction book you use is performed by characterizing the literature as a lecturer, whereas a poem is performed with a great attention to vocal meter, rhythm and pace. In short, each piece of literature in your POI should have a distinct feel to it.

Blocking or tech, is how the character(s) moves in the space you've created for him/her/them. In POI, the manuscript may be used as a prop as long as you stay in control of it throughout the entirety of the performance. For example, if you are using a black binder for a manuscript it would be appropriate to mimic using a laptop with your binder.

Introduction. An introduction explains the purpose of the performance. Typically, after the teaser, a performer will give a brief explanation of the program's relevance, then give the title and author of each piece used during the performance.

photo: Sur la Lune Photography

Organizing

Each POI will be organized in a unique way. However, there are some guidelines that create a memorable performance.

Pay attention to balance among genres in the program. Eight minutes from the same play with a little time devoted to a poem at the end is not the recipe for a strong program. Instead, try to devote time to each genre. It is not necessary to carve out exactly three minutes for each, but make sure that each genre is present throughout the program.

Look for thread pieces to help you along. A thread is a piece of literature that tells a complete story throughout the program. This is generally a character that the audience can relate to which helps contextualize your argument in the program. Include a page that introduces the character, another that outlines the conflict, a climax page and resolution. There can be more than one thread piece in a program,(there is no one right answer for how to organize POI), but, make sure the audience has a character they can connect to.

Not all pieces of literature have to be prominently featured in the program. There will likely be pieces that only have one page dedicated to them. Whether it be a funny punchline, an emotionally powerful stanza from a poem, or a short excerpt from a non-fiction book, don't be afraid to include a piece that is short if it adds to your program's theme or argument

Standing it Up/Practicing

After you have finished cutting and organizing your program, it's time to start constructing your performance. The first thing you need to do is put together the manuscript you will be using. The most common manuscript is a small black binder with page protectors (often referred to as slicks), which can be found in our online store and most office supply stores. Type up your cutting, format it into two columns and print the document. Then, simply cut out each specific page and place it in your page slicks. Some people like to put black cardstock in each page slick and glue or tape the cutting to the cardstock. Your cutting should read like a book,

NATIONAL SPEECH & DEBATE ASSOCIATION
NATIONAL FORENSIC LEAGUE

meaning, a peer or coach could pick up your manuscript and read your program from beginning to end.

Once you have put the manuscript together, it's time to start creating distinct characters for each piece of literature. Think about different mannerisms, voices and postures each character might have. What kind of environment are they in? Do you have some characters that need to have a lot of blocking? Find a way to make each piece distinct.

Don't be afraid to use your manuscript as a tool in the performance. As a general rule, make sure that all of the words from each section (or scene) of your cutting fit onto one page. In this way, each time you turn the page, the audience knows that you are transitioning between pieces of literature. Think of each page turn as a pop in and out of the different parts of your program.

Performance Tips

It may sound cliche, but confidence is key! If you've put the legwork in, you should feel confident in the product you've created. Walk into that round with your head held high ready to show the world what you've got! Trust what you and your coach created. Do what you practiced, and if you feel compelled to "try something new," review it with your coach beforehand. Consistency is key. It's hard to evaluate what to change in practice if your performance in the round is completely different than what you've been working on.

Pay attention to other performers. Smile. Be a warm, inviting audience member. There is nothing worse than getting up to perform and having an audience that either stone faces you or won't look you in the eye. Think of it this way: each round is about 60 minutes. Ten of those involve you performing, the other 50 are for you to listen, learn, and support your competitors.

Keep a notebook for between rounds. Sometimes, another person's performance will inspire you, and it's a good idea to have a notebook handy to write down new ideas. It's also nice to know who you competed against in each round. This way, you have a better understanding of who your competition is. When you review your ballots after the tournament, you can go back through your notebook and compare your ballots to your notes.

Between rounds, figure out what room you will be performing in next. Congratulate your competitors on a good performance after the round ends, and make friends during downtime. Be gracious, and keep criticisms of other performers to yourself, even if someone else tries to start a negative conversation.

photo: Sur la Lune Photography

Resources

A great source is *Interpretation of Literature—Bringing Words to Life* by Travis Kiger and Ganer Newman. They cover cutting, characterization, blocking, and the structure of a story. Additionally, pay special attention to how others in your community are doing POI. Keep your eyes peeled for effective cutting, characterization, and blocking. Ask yourself, how can I apply similar techniques to my performance? How can I build off of what that POI is doing? The best way to learn POI, outside of actively doing it, is by watching and learning from other performers.

Once you join the Association and register on our website, you can access the textbook, final rounds, and more at www.speechanddebate.org/resources. Use the filter function on the left hand side of the page to find resources specific to Interp and Program Oral Interp.