

Competition Events – At A Glance

An Introduction to Informative Speaking



Event Description

Students deliver a self-written, ten-minute speech on a topic of their choosing. Limited in their ability to quote words directly, **Informative Speaking** competitors craft a speech using evidence, logic, and optional visual aids. All topics must be informative in nature; the goal is to educate, not to advocate. The speech is delivered from memory.

Considerations for Selecting an Informative Topic

Students who write Informatives should think seriously about a topic that is of personal interest to them. Given students may be doing Informative for the entirety of the school year, they will want to find a topic that they can keep fresh and engaging for extended periods of time. Additionally, Informative speakers should consider topics that are current and relatable to audience members. Informative is an ongoing process! The last speech that is performed will never be a “final” draft. There is always room for revision, so pick a topic that student’s will enthusiastically explore and reflect upon during the season.


Traits of Successful Informative Performers

When considering what topic students should choose, or which direction to point a student when selecting an event, here are some traits of successful Informative speakers to keep in mind:

- Driven
- Well-spoken
- Enthusiastic
- Logical
- Personable
- Curious

Examples of Potential Informative Topics

- Social Security
- Urban Agriculture
- Body Language
- New Medicines/Treatment Plans
- Holographic Technology
- Senses
- Gaslighting
- Exciting New Technologies

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 **Informative Speaking**, we are developing a number of helpful resources—including live and recorded webinars designed to introduce foundational and advanced concepts in public speaking; videos from champion coaches; and much 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

“Informative helped me grow as both a writer and performer. The event allowed me to explore a diverse range of topics that would have never worked in Oratory. You’ll learn how to discern the line between what is and is not persuasive - and focus solely on educating and entertaining the audience!”

— Kevin King, Association Alum

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Basic Understandings

Informative is a speech written by the student with the intent to inform the audience on a topic of significance. Informative gives students the unique opportunity to showcase their personality while educating the audience.

An Informative is not simply an essay about the topic—it is a well researched and organized presentation with evidence, logic and sometimes humor to convey a message. Topics are varied and interesting. Whether it be a new technological advance the audience is unaware of or a new take on a concept that everyone is familiar with, Informative is the students opportunity to teach the audience. Types of topics and structure vary greatly, so talk to your coach and work out what works best for you!

While content is very important, Informative requires students to balance that content with delivery and style. Informative speakers must be articulate, engaging, and smooth with their delivery at both a vocal and physical level. Students will want to watch some rounds of other public speaking events to determine what types of style, delivery, and content might work best for them.

The Informative speaker must also consider the audience as a vital component of the speech. What parts of the speech does the student want to spend the most time developing? Are there parts of the students topic that might take more time to explain? How does humor play a role with regard to the topic? As style and content go hand-in-hand, it's vital that students think carefully about their message, style, and composition of the audience as they construct the speech.



Research

Informative research is as diverse as the topics students select. Informative research might include newspaper and magazine articles, academic journals, non-fiction books, interviews, and credible digital content. Depending upon the topic, it might be possible that a student's own meaningful experiences may be in the speech.

The key to researching an effective Informative is to guide the audience through the topic. Find research that helps broadly define the topic and then begin narrowing the scope. Keep track of the questions that arise while researching; those are likely the same questions the audience will have, and finding those answers can help make the difference.

Source materials need to be incorporated throughout the speech with oral citation. The citation style varies with the type of source. For example, students should provide author and title of books, although some students will also provide the source credibility of the author. The name of the source and date may be sufficient for newspaper articles. It is important to recognize that whether the material is quoted directly from the source, or paraphrased, sources must be cited. When drafting the Informative, indicate direct quotations from sources using both quotation marks and some other marking such as highlighting or underlining in the script. Remember: only 150 directly quoted words may be used. Students, choose quoted text wisely. Once all of the research is gathered, the sources should be compiled into a works cited page.

Structural Components

After research has been conducted, the student can compose the speech. Let's go back to the idea of questions as the guide to the speech. Based upon the research and the student's own thoughts on the topic, the student needs to craft a thesis statement. The student should outline two to four major arguments to support the thesis. Arguments have a unique role in Informative Speaking. Since the speech is not persuasive the goal of the argument is not to advocate for change, instead, the goal is to inform the audience. Thus, arguments are used

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to establish the significance of the topic or to argue that the topic merits discussion.

Arguments are made up of three important components. First, a student must clearly establish a claim. This is a declarative statement that establishes the point the student sets out to justify in the speech. Next, the student must clearly establish why the argument is valid.

This is known as the warrant for an argument. This means that Informative speakers go beyond just asserting their claims to explaining why their claims should be accepted by the audience. Finally, the student must provide an impact for the argument. Why does the argument matter? Who is affected by this argument?

Now let's pull all of this together. Informative speeches consist of an introduction, body (with 2-4 major points), and a conclusion. Students can group their research to support each element of the speech. For example, if the student finds a great personal narrative from a source which might grab the audience's attention, it can be marked for the intro. The process continues until each portion of the speech has evidence that backs up the claim, warrant, and impacts for each argument.

Organizing

Students should start with the body of the speech which features the major arguments and ideas. Students should take their main points with supporting research and decide an order. Major points might inform the audience of an issue, challenge assumptions the audience may have, or encourage the audience to visualize what the world might be like. Some questions to consider: What argument or idea makes the most logical sense to start with? What does the audience need to know or understand before they can accept later arguments? Many students want to start by writing the introduction first, but the student can't introduce a speech without understanding what is in that speech and how the arguments will be organized.

After the body of the speech has been established, the student can outline an introduction and conclusion. The introduction should engage the audience, establish the significance of the topic, transition to a thesis statement,

and preview the major points that will be covered in the speech. After the body of the speech there is a conclusion which involves a restatement of the thesis, a review of the major points, and final thoughts that engage the audience and call them to action.

With a complete outline now developed, the student can write the speech section by section. It is important for the coach to review each part of the speech for consistency of style and approach. Although the speech needs to be conversational, some students will feature more formal language choices, or incorporate some type of humor throughout the speech, or take a more personal or narrative approach. There is no "right" or "wrong" voice but it needs to match the student's thoughts, ideas, and engagement with the audience.



Standing it Up/Practicing

Students don't have to wait until the speech is completely written to stand it up. Students should take sections of the speech, such as the introduction and conclusion, or one of the major points in the speech, and talk it out. An effective writing technique is for students to verbalize their thoughts, record them, and then review those recordings to see how their language sounds to the human ear. This will help the student identify what style might be most appropriate for delivery of the message. Although not all students are comfortable being recorded, their ideas, expressions, and turns of phrase can be captured while experimenting with the content.

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Once the speech is written, many students struggle with memorization. This doesn't have to be the case! One effective practice technique is breaking the speech up by section or paragraph, such as their introduction, and practicing that section until it is solidly memorized. Once that section is memorized, they can move on to the next section and so on. Students can print out the speech in large type, tape it down a hallway, and read their speech aloud, complete with gestures, to reinforce memorization.

Team and family members are also extremely valuable when it comes to practicing the speech after it is memorized. Since the audience is such a vital component of Informative, it is important to perform in front of real and varied groups. Students may seek out community groups, such as a local Rotary club, or community centers, such as a senior living facility, and perform their speeches. Students should perform as often as possible in front of an audience to help them get more comfortable before their first tournament. This also provides an excellent opportunity to see how the speech sounds to an audience and test any humor that they might want to use.



Performance Tips

Students need to recognize that they spend only a small percentage of their time speaking and most of the tournament listening to others. While students watch the other speakers in rounds of Informative, they should take note of what is effective and what needs improvement in other students' speeches. Students can carry a notebook with them and write down thoughts about audience appeals, structure, and language used by other students. What works? What doesn't? They then can share comments with coaches after the tournament is complete

and talk about how adjustments might be made to their own speeches.

Informative students need to make sure that they are excellent audience members. That means students are engaged in the round, taking notes, thinking about the arguments and analysis of others' speeches, and being responsive to the speakers. Students need to keep all of their comments about performances to themselves until after the tournament is complete as it is disrespectful to make comments with other students present, in particular critical comments about specific student performances.

After a period of time, students may become a bit bored with their speeches after delivering them over and over again. That is okay! Once the speech is written the student needs to recognize that it is not carved in stone. Making changes to the manuscript is a natural part of the process of speechwriting. After a tournament the students should take the comments on ballots and reflect upon how those comments can improve the speech content and style. Additionally, students need to be reminded that every performance is important, that there is always someone in the room who has never heard that speech before, and that they need to keep up their energy every round of every tournament. Perhaps the writing can be refreshed a bit or perhaps a section of the speech needs a bit more polish, but that should not deter student's performance for that particular audience. Every speech should be given with the same dedication and enthusiasm as the first.

Resources

The National Speech & Debate Association provides excellent resources for our members including sample ballots, final round videos, and more. Additionally, examining resources that already exist for Oratory and Extemp can give students a good foundation for how to structure a speech, evaluate sources, and create logical arguments.

Once you join the Association and register on our website, you can access these and other materials at www.speechanddebate.org/resources. Use the filter function on the left hand side of the page to find resources specific to Informative Speaking. 