

Competition Events – At A Glance

An Introduction to Original Oratory (OO)



Event Description

Students deliver a self-written, ten-minute speech on a topic of their choosing. Limited in their ability to quote words directly, Original Oratory competitors craft an argument using evidence, logic, and emotional appeals. Topics range widely, and may be informative or persuasive in nature. The speech is delivered from memory.

Considerations for Selecting an OO Topic

Students who write orations should think seriously about a topic that is of personal interest and significance to them. Given the number of weeks students may be doing Oratory, they will want to find a topic that they can keep fresh and engaging for extended periods of time. Additionally, orators should consider topics that are current and relatable to audience members. Oratory 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 you will enthusiastically explore and reflect upon during the season.

Traits of Successful OO Performers

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

- Creative
- Unique
- Well-spoken
- Personable
- Enthusiastic
- Process-oriented

Examples of Past OO Topics

- Body Image
- Cultural Norms
- Distractions
- Face-to-Face Communication
- Motivation
- Negative Attention
- Over Commitment
- Sarcasm
- Self-confidence
- White Lies

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 Original Oratory, we provide a number of helpful resources—including live and recorded webinars designed to introduce foundational and advanced concepts in Oratory; access to OO final round videos; an Oratory textbook for Resource Package subscribers; 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

The skills that I acquired from Oratory are skills most fundamental to the human condition. Oratory allowed me to advocate for what I believed in, in my words. It gave me the ability to tell my story from the stories and experiences of others. I learned the importance of organization, fact checking, word economy, along with innumerable other skills that form the foundation of great writing. Competing in Oratory gave me a unique opportunity to venture into elements of other events. Storytelling, humor, drama, spontaneity, argumentation, and research are all elements that are actively applied in Oratory. It's an event for anyone and everyone."

— **Avi Jaggi, Association Alum**

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Basic Understandings

Original Oratory is a speech written by the student with the intent to inform or persuade the audience on a topic of significance. Oratory gives students the unique opportunity to showcase their voice and passion for their topic.

An Oratory is not simply an essay about the topic—it is a well researched and organized presentation with evidence, logic, emotional appeals, and sometimes humor to convey a message. Topics may be of a value orientation and affect people at a personal level, such as avoiding peer pressure, or they can be more of a policy orientation and ask an audience to enact particular policies or solve societal problems. As the types of structure vary widely across the country, it may be wise to ask coaches in your region what is common.



While content is very important, Oratory requires students to balance that content with delivery and style. Oratory 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 Oratory to determine what types of style, delivery, and content might work best for them.

The Oratory speaker must also consider the audience as a vital component of the speech. What does the student want the audience to think, feel, believe, or be motivated to accomplish? Some students want the judges and fellow students to change attitudes. Others may simply want the audience to think about ideas through a different lens by challenging norms. 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

Oratory research is as diverse as the topics students select. Oratory 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 a powerful Oratory is to start with the message the student wants to deliver. Students will look to more personal and emotional styles to motivate the audience in a values based Oratory. Policy oratories may do more research related to government and policy, as well as organizational and community perspectives.

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 Oratory, indicate direct quotations from sources using both quotation marks and some other marking such as highlighting or underlining. Remember: only 150 directly quoted words may be used. Choose your quoted text wisely. Once all the research is gathered, the sources should all be compiled into a works cited page.

Structural Components

After research has been conducted, the student can develop the composition of the speech. Let's go back to the idea of a message 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 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.

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This is known as the warrant for an argument. This means that Oratory 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. Oratory 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, compel the audience to make a personal change, 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? Which point most persuasively calls the audience to action? 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.

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

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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 Oratory, 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 Oratory, 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.

Oratory 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 your 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. The textbook *The Art & Science of Original Oratory* is a fantastic resource for beginning orators and veterans alike. Oratory specific activities for topic selection, delivery and humor help to develop students' skills. Also, the Association provides members with access to past national finals rounds as well as top notch webinars to provide coaches and students alike with ideas and tips on how to make their orations the best they can be.

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 Original Oratory. 