



To give an impromptu speech is to be truly spontaneous. Cultivating this skill prepares students for real life situations thrust upon us all. While Speech students receive prompts at contests, careful preparation and repeated practice ahead of time can yield greater success. Following are some strategies.

**Planning:** Each student should catalog knowledge and experiences in a *commonplace book* or a journal they can review/flip through just before/at a contest before presenting in rounds. *Commonplace books* can be a physical notebook, computer document, or a journaling app on a mobile device. Indexing entries to classifications of knowledge can help students balance types of supporting examples in speeches. Examples of classifications include: history, politics, literature, art, music, philosophies, science/technology concepts, film/television, people/leaders, places, and inspirations/influencers. **Students are not allowed to consult material during a round, but they may consult/refamiliarize themselves with such material before they enter the contest room.**

**Preparation:** The five minutes available to prepare and speak are the student's to divide how they see fit. This could involve brainstorming and outlining ideas for two minutes, then speaking for three; or brainstorming and outlining for one minute and speaking for four minutes. There is no minimum time required for brainstorming and no minimum time for speaking. Therefore, the student should work to develop the best possible structure and reasoning in as short amount of time as possible. Sometimes contestants think it's more impressive to speak longer, but if the ideas aren't clear or well developed, it can diminish overall performance. On the other hand, an over-prepared yet short speech denies a student adequate time to present all of her/his ideas. An Impromptu speech follows a basic structure in which a student presents an introduction, body, and conclusion. Similar to other public speaking events, the introduction should provide adequate context for what is to come in the speech. If a student has illustrated an example, recited the chosen prompt, and provided a thesis statement, s/he has given a solid introduction. The most common approach to the body of a speech is to explore two or three topic areas in greater depth. For example, if

a student's thesis focuses on overcoming obstacles, s/he would likely introduce two effective ways to do so and use examples to illustrate these. The student will conclude by reiterating the prompt, thesis, and summarizing the points.

The most effective Impromptu speeches are well organized, and draw on a number of types of examples (from literature, history, current events, entertainment, pop culture, etc.) to engage the adjudicator and/or audience in a meaningful way.

Considering the limited amount of time during a round in which to prepare a response and to speak, careful consideration must be given to time management: to brainstorm, organize thoughts, and develop a thoughtful response to the prompt selected. Here are some strategies for preparation:

- Break the prompt into elements (key words - nouns and verbs)
- Assess the situation/meaning inherent in the prompt (big picture)
- Think of causes
- Align causes with consequences
- For elements (#1), consider differences, similarities, and relationships
- Determine a means of differentiating main points (cause-effect, past-present, present-future, internal-external, economic-social, etc.)

**Organization:** Consider the *Toastmaster* approach:

P: Point—State your point to the question.

R: Reason—State a reason why you raised your point.

E: Example—Give an illustration which supports your above-mentioned case.

P: Prep—Which leads us to the next point.

**Time Management:** just one example of an approach:

Prep = 1.5-2 min.

Attention-getting intro → beginning 1st pt. = 30-45 sec.

Main Point 1 = 1-1.5 min.

Main Point 2 = 2-1.5 min.

Conclusion (tie back to intro theme) = 15-30 sec.

**Example Prompts:**

See the [Speech > Coaching Resources](#) page on the WHSFA website.