

# Guidance for Judging Speech Tournaments



## Instructions for all events

- When you receive your round assignment in Tabroom, review the event information on the [WACFL website](#). At the bottom of each event description, you will find criteria for judging.
- At WACFL preliminary tournaments, you will be the only judge in the room. Only at MetroFinals and the NCFL National tournament will there be multiple judges.
- Students should not be in the classroom without an adult present. When you arrive, they should be in the hallway and depart before you leave the classroom.
- As students arrive, confirm their name and school to be sure they (and you!) are in the right room. The + symbol in Tabroom next to a student entry indicates that they are double-entered. This means they might do their other event first and then arrive at your round, OR they might come to your round first. Any double-entered students who come to your round first should be allowed to speak prior to the single-entered students. After they have performed, they will leave the room so they can attend their other event.
- Students should speak in the order they are listed in Tabroom, but it's not a rigid sequence. Particularly for double-entered students, the order can be flexible.
- Maintain an atmosphere in the room which is conducive to fair competition. Please be sure that you and all the students silence their cell phones.
- Push the **Start Round** button in Tabroom.com when you are in your competition classroom and students have arrived. Pushing this button will activate your ballot.
- Do not postpone starting a round if a student is missing. If most students are in the room, it's OK to begin. In Extemp, students are time-released from their prep room and will arrive one at a time.
- For all events (except Impromptu and Extemp), ask students the title of their speech prior to them starting. Some students may write titles on the board. In Impromptu, you will be able to see the topic they pick. In Extemp, they will hand you their topic. In the Tabroom ballot, there is a spot to write the title of the speech.
- While students are speaking, listen attentively, but it's OK to write comments during the presentation. You can type directly into the Tabroom ballot or handwrite notes on a pad and transfer the comments to Tabroom later. This is entirely your choice.
- At the end of the round, do not provide verbal feedback. It's fine to thank the students and tell them that you enjoyed hearing them. But they should not know how you are ranking them.
- Wait in the room until you have heard all the students. If you have waited a significant amount of time (15 minutes) after the last present student has spoken, and the student you are waiting for is still not there, contact tournament managers at email: [tabroom@wacfl.org](mailto:tabroom@wacfl.org) or text **703-239-4576**.
- If chairs or desks are moved, after each round, help students straighten up the classroom. We are guests at the host school. Before you leave the classroom, please ask students to help you arrange chairs and get the room back to its original configuration. On Monday morning, teachers should find desks and chairs where they left them on Friday.

**Once you have finalized ranks and speaker points, submit your ballot. Please do this within 5-10 minutes of the end of the round. Comments can be entered all day and will not close until the end of the awards ceremony.**

## Providing Time Signals

For all events, judges should keep time. Please discuss time signals with the speakers prior to them performing. Tabroom has a built-in timer or you can use your cell phone to keep time. Students should not be penalized for asking for time signals or using the 30 second grace period. If a student goes over time, they cannot receive first place in the round.

- For all events, except Extemp and Impromptu: Students have ten minutes with a 30 second grace period. There is no penalty unless the speaker exceeds 10 minutes and 30 seconds.
- For Extemp and Impromptu only: Students have seven minutes with a 30 second grace period. No penalty unless the speaker exceeds 7 minutes and 30 seconds.

Generally, you will show the time remaining. Holding up four fingers informs the speaker that four minutes remain. The signal for 30 seconds remaining is a cupped hand in the shape of a C. Once they have hit time, hold up a closed fist. This means they are now in their grace period. No further time signals are given at this point. The student is responsible for finishing by the end of the grace period. Note: In Impromptu, time signals are given verbally while the student preps. When they stand to give their speech you then switch to hand time signals.

## How to Assign Ranks and Speaker Points

Ranks are 1 through the number of speakers in the room, with 1 awarded to the best speaker. There are no ties on ranks. Suggestion: Tentatively rank the students as they perform. After the first speaker, that person is 1. After the second speaker goes, rank the first two against one another. Who is 1? Who is 2? After the third speaker, rank those three. Repeat this practice after each subsequent speaker. This will help you save time at the conclusion of the round.

Speaker points range from 70 (a very ineffective performance) to 100 (a perfect performance). Most students earn between 80 and 99 speaker points. The speaker ranked first must receive the greatest number of speaker points. Higher ranked students must receive more speaker points than the next lower ranked student. There are no ties in speaker points and you must use whole numbers only.

### Speaker Points Guide:

100 You are one of the best speakers I have ever heard! Like wow, you should be a professional.

95-99 Amazing job! You were nearly flawless in your delivery and your preparation is evident.

90-94 Very effective performance with some minor areas for improvement.

85-89 Solid job overall, but there are some areas for improvement.

80-84 Decent effort, but there are some more significant areas for improvement.

70s Something is seriously wrong. Possible reasons to give points in the 70s:

- A speaker reads or consults a script in a memorized event.
- A speaker is unfamiliar with their material, forgets what comes next or is otherwise unprepared to compete.
- A speaker is unable to complete their presentation.

**Do not discuss ranks or basis for decision with students. They and their coaches will receive your ballots at the conclusion of the tournament.**

## Specific Guidance for Judging Each Event

### Oral Interpretation:

- 10 minutes with a 30 second grace period.
- Tabroom will notify you if this is a PROSE or a POETRY round. Be sure to confirm this before starting. Speakers must have BOTH a prose piece AND a poetry piece.
- Poetry does not have to rhyme and can be narrative.
- The use of a binder as a prop is allowed.
- Singing is allowed, but per the rules “should not be excessive or dominate the piece.”
- Only the performer’s feet should touch the floor.

### Original Oratory:

- 10 minutes with a 30 second grace period.
- The speech must be memorized.
- Positions other than standing should not be excessive in length or dominate the performance.

### Declamation:

- 10 minutes with a 30 second grace period.
- The speech must be memorized.
- This is an oratorical event, not an interpretive event. The competitors should be speaking as themselves, not taking on the character of the original author/orator.
- Positions other than standing should not be excessive in length or dominate the performance.

### Dramatic Performance and Duo Interpretation:

- 10 minutes with a 30 second grace period.
- The performance must be memorized.
- Singing is allowed, but “should not be excessive or dominate the piece.”
- Positions other than standing should not be excessive in length or dominate the performance.
- For Duo only: students must not intentionally touch or make direct eye contact with one another during the actual performance. Students can touch during their Introduction.

### Extemporaneous Speaking:

- 7 minutes with a 30 second grace period.
- A note card is permitted at all regular season tournaments. Note cards are NOT permitted at MetroFinals.
- Positions other than standing should not be excessive in length or dominate the performance.
- Students are time-released from their prep room and will arrive one at a time. After presenting, students may remain in the room to watch successive speakers.

### Impromptu:

- 7 minutes with a 30 second grace period.
- Use of a note card is permitted.
- Positions other than standing should not be excessive in length or dominate the performance.

## **Guidance for Writing Comments**

Tabroom provides space for judges to write two types of comments. In the block labeled RFD (Reason for Decision) your comments will go to every student in the room and their coach(es). These comments should be generic and positive. (“Each of you was terrific!” “I enjoyed listening to you and was impressed by your preparation.” “I hope you continue in this amazing activity.” Things like that.)

More importantly, you can also write comments that go just to each individual competitor and their coach(es). Students read these closely to understand what they did well and how they can improve. Please be as specific as possible. If they did a great job, tell them precisely what you liked. But also give them suggestions for improvement.

The most frustrating ballot is a blank one. Be sure you write a few sentences to each student in the round. It’s not impolite to write comments as the student is speaking. The second most frustrating ballot is the one where the speaker is ranked near the bottom and the only comment is “Great job. Loved watching you.” If you rank the student low in the round, tell them why. Find something good to say to each student, but don’t be afraid to be critical in a kind and constructive way..

For new judges: Choose three or four of the judging criteria from the [WACFL website](#) and tell the competitor what you liked in each of those areas, and conversely, what you think they could improve on in those areas.

Need additional help with ballot comments? On the following pages are some sample ballots provided by Ridge High School Forensics Team in New Jersey:

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Most people find judging rewarding and inspiring. The students you hear at WACFL tournaments will become our future leaders. Judging for the first time can seem daunting, but you will be surrounded by experienced judges and coaches. Feel free to ask them questions! At each successive tournament, you will feel more confident in your capability.

**Thank you for judging! We could not hold tournaments without you.**

## ORAL INTERPRETATION FEEDBACK EXAMPLES (POETRY)

### RFD (Reason for Decision) generic room comment:

Really lovely work from everyone in this round. What my rankings ultimately came down to was the facility with the poetry/language and overall flow of the piece. Was each beat distinct in its rhythm (varied levels of volume and pace/use of sounds played into this)? What kind of rhetoric was used or ignored?

### Individual Commentary #1

- Great introduction-- clear thematic setup.
- Strong pathos in vocal quality.
- Nice clarity in speech-- I understood every word.
- Chewed consonants, lovely-- careful that it doesn't create blanket emphasis on every word. Which words need to be more elevated to tell the story/emphasize the theme?
- "Eyes buried alive" "to pray for peace"— great play with similar sounds in lines to lift the poetry off the page.
- The interruptions of flow into a new one was clear. I wonder if you might play around with further distinguishing the rhythm of each beat from the other. There was a general, slow, heavy rhythm of speech, with a few subtle accelerations.
- "I believe" repetition, nice build! Effective!
- Selections were cohesive, and I encourage you to play with greater distinctions in each selection's flow/rhythm.

### Individual Commentary #2

A lovely introduction, effective antithesis of relationship to body to set us up for this piece.

You have such a low, soothing voice with great resonance. At times it was too soft for me to hear the words. At other times it gave such wonderful groundedness.

Keep playing with the distinctions of flow with each beat. You had some great builds that you could have leaned into. Pacing/rhythm was generally the same. You seemed to have some great impulses to accelerate or add weight to emphasize-- don't sit on those impulses. They are spot on!

Theme was so clear, present with each moment. Great, cohesive selections.

"...cycle of circles spiraling...", those sounds are so juicy, you can lean into those alliterations even more to lift the poetry off the page.

"Thick, thicker", words you can really chew with the intention behind using those specific words. The plosive 'k' could be fun to play with in that regard.

## EXTEMPORANEOUS SPEAKING SAMPLE FEEDBACK

### RFD

Congrats to all of you. Being able to speak so fluidly about complex topics is an incredibly impressive talent. So amazed by the skills demonstrated here. It was a game of inches since you are all terrific. For me it came down to the nuances of the delivery because all of you presented such excellent supporting evidence.

I particularly appreciate transparency, meaning who you are before you start performing seems to match who you are when you're performing. Also, pacing, dynamics and variation played a role.

Best of luck to all of you. Great start to the season!

#### Individual Commentary #1

Presentation: Your presentation was good and you did well with hand gestures and transitions. Try working through the vocal fillers at time to enhance your overall fluency and pacing.

Content: Nice little joke to start off your speech, flowed well into introducing your topic. Good umbrella answer of resilience. Your first point of water infrastructure was analyzed well even though you could have dived more into how your umbrella statement of resilience is connected to this point. Your second point of nature seemed a little short and seemed to have not enough analysis to really give it depth. Your third point was unique and I think that you did a good job of analyzing it but again it was a little short so make sure you spend an equal amount of time on all your points. Other than that you did a great job!

#### Individual Commentary #2

Presentation: Your presentation such as your hand gestures, transitions, and fluency were great.

Content/Analysis: Your analysis was very thorough on your first point about how Garland supports Trump so well done on that. Your first point did seem a little long which also made your second point seemed a little too short so make sure you are allocating equal amounts of time to dive into your analysis for all points. Also, your avoidance of transparency was similar to your first as it was based on how Garland still supports Trump. Your third point was good but again because it was shorter than your first so you didn't have time to develop the analysis and seemed very rushed. Other than that you did a great job with your sources!

### **ORIGINAL ORATORY SAMPLE COMMENTARY**

#### RFD

In Original Oratory, I am looking for a well-defined thesis, structural analysis, strong examples, and a persuasive argument. Think: the triangle of rhetoric: ethos, logos, and pathos. This speech should be delivered fluently and with controlled passion. I need to know you care, so that I can care about what you see as a legitimate concern. Thank you for sharing your thoughts. Bravo!

This was a very impressive round given that we are just starting off this season. My comments will be terse because we are in crunch time at the end of the tournament. There were minor differences regarding the top and bottom half of the room, based almost entirely upon fluency and presentation. Empathy appears to be the word o

#### INDIVIDUAL COMMENTARY #1

Like I said in my opening note, although what you said resonates, use the power of your words in your performance. Take more control of the room. I know that is beyond difficult in the virtual world, but I think it comes down to embracing your words, and committing to them. The friends through speech and debate part was randomly awkward. Let your punchlines land. You have a message...give it a bit more passion and punch.

#### INDIVIDUAL COMMENTARY #2

You exhibit a great deal of charisma. Love the detective motif. It is cleverly woven throughout. I totally get the "fake it 'til you make it" or what they call "razzle-dazzle" in Chicago conundrum we face as a society. We do not value silence enough. There was a momentary slip when talking about how we not only value charisma but glorify it. Honestly minor, but noteworthy given how close this decision became.

### **HUMOROUS INTERPRETATION SAMPLE COMMENTARY**

## RFD

As you saw, competition was very tight in this round. You all absolutely deserved to be here, which inevitably means that "1-worthy" pieces ended up without a 1. Know that your work was very strong, and I look forward to seeing how each of your performances grows throughout the season.

### INDIVIDUAL SPEAKER #1

Pieces with big casts like this depend on super sharp character differentiation. You nail that. One word of caution is that if the audience sees \*too\* many wacky characters in a short time, they stop caring about any of them and it loses some humor. Try playing with cutting one or two characters from the teaser and see if you can still keep your momentum up.

Nobody brushes their teeth like that but I still laughed. If you can afford an extra half-beat for your discoveries (e.g. checking down your pants, "Zoltar," etc), it'll help those jokes land more cleanly. The audience needs just a hair more time to process how hilarious your jokes are. It will also help your discoveries seem more genuine, and that kind of humanity is funny in itself.

Keep toying with your gunfight choreo. Right now it's a little unfocused, which makes it seem superfluous. It'll help to either cut out a few seconds or sharpen those movements more.

Your pace and energy are very fun to watch and they carry us through the piece. Now see if you can establish your character's big Want or Arc earlier in the piece. For a while it feels like we're watching you do goofy stuff (which you do very well) without knowing why it matters to the story. Your bits are funny, but bits that fit into the audience's understanding of character arc are even funnier.

Overall, keep working on how you can up the ethos in your piece. The more we care about Josh and want him to succeed, the funnier all this will be.

### INDIVIDUAL SPEAKER #2

Love your characterizations. Clearly differentiated from one another, but still all easy to understand. What a hilarious premise for a story.

The chain-connection intro is a really funny device, but I'd say trim one or two links out of it. Don't give the audience time to get tired of the bit.

The beatboxing feat of strength has nice physicality, but it's hard to contextualize within the story. See if you can use movements that more clearly communicate you're doing something that would make them want you on their football team.

Play around with signposting throughout the story. An extra beat on moments like "I've never had friends" (bad paraphrase from the dinner scene, sorry) will help keep the audience grounded in your character's arc. That's particularly useful in a breakneck-fast piece like this.

There were several points where I almost lost track of the story. I always managed to keep up, but sometimes only barely. Keep playing with the transition. It's not quite as sharp/effective as the rest of your physicality.

Your ability to jump right back into your piece is a testament to the hard work you have put into this piece. That's top-level stuff.

## **IMPROMPTU SPEAKING SAMPLE COMMENTARY**

### INDIVIDUAL STUDENT #1

Your topic areas were concise and easy to follow, and your speaking style was just as good. I don't have much to offer in the way of advice. The tie breaker for me between you and the 1 was proximity to the topic and fleshed out arguments. Not that you did a poor job of either of these--you did do well. But when it's even on speaking style, then those are two of my next decision making factors. I did like the first part, that was funny/creative.. I think you did everything right speaking wise: good using of pacing, good volume, good inflection, good use of space/hand gestures, etc. Overall, very good work.

### INDIVIDUAL STUDENT #2

Tough room. Any other room and this deserved at least a 2. This wasn't an easy choice. Overall, you did well. I think you had three interesting points that you were able to tie back into the topic effectively. Part of why I gave you the three instead of the two was for two things. You had just a few minor style issues that were functionally the tie breaker. A few times getting tripped up/rushing to get back to where you wanted to be, mostly. Again, not like bad, but just cleaning up those minor problems will be the difference next time. And the other tie breaker was how long you lingered on point two. I think the others did well to split their time evenly and devote enough time to explaining their argument. Your arguments were well supported/founded, but I think spending more time on either the first or third point might have helped to even out how much weight each point was supposed to carry.