



Extemporaneous Speaking Explained: The Event From Draw to Ballot.

For families new to speech and debate. Learn exactly what happens in an extemp round, how United States and International Extemp differ, and what judges are listening for, so nothing about the first tournament is a surprise.

The event in one paragraph

Extemporaneous Speaking ("extemp") is a current-events speech. Shortly before a round, the speaker receives a small set of questions about the news, **chooses one**, and gets **30 minutes** to build a speech that answers it. The speech runs up to **7 minutes**. The speaker has no script: the skill being tested is thinking quickly, organizing clearly, and speaking persuasively about real events.

Why families like it

Extemp rewards curiosity. A student who reads the news a little each day, and learns to explain it clearly, builds skills that carry into school essays, interviews, and leadership roles.

Key facts at a glance

ITEM	NSDA DESCRIPTION	NOTES
Questions drawn	Three	Speaker picks one and returns the other two. Some leagues differ (UIL Texas draws five)
Prep time	30 minutes	Also 30 minutes in UIL and Stoa. Some clocks start at the draw (UIL); Stoa's 30 minutes includes the walk to the room
Speech length	Up to 7 minutes	Grace periods and overtime penalties vary by league. Example: Stoa ranks a speaker one place lower for going 15 seconds or more over
Research	Files gathered before the contest	NSDA descriptions say no internet during prep. Some leagues allow laptops or tablets under their own rules, so check
Notes in speech	Delivered from memory	Many tournaments prohibit notes. Some leagues allow one 3 by 5 inch card (UIL, Stoa). Check your tournament
Two versions	United States and International	See the next section

Always read the rules for the specific league and tournament. Local, state, and homeschool leagues sometimes adjust the number of questions, times, sources, or notes.

United States vs. International Extemp

United States Extemp

Questions focus on events inside the U.S.: government policy, the economy, education, technology, society, and culture. Example style: "Will a new federal program reach its goals?"

International Extemp

Questions focus on events beyond U.S. borders: a country, a region, a global organization, or foreign policy. Example style: "Will a regional trade agreement strengthen member economies?"

Both versions use the same speech skills. Many students try both in their first season before choosing. Some leagues combine them into a single extemp event.

What a round looks like

- 1 Check in.** Arrive at the draw room early. Speakers are called in a set order.
- 2 Draw.** When your code is called, take the questions from the envelope (three in NSDA-style rounds), choose one, return the rest, and note your start time.
- 3 Prep.** Use your files for 30 minutes to build an answer, outline, and introduction (see the minute-by-minute workflow guide).
- 4 Walk to the room.** Most tournaments announce when prep is over. Be ready to start promptly. Never watch the speakers who go before you.
- 5 Speak.** Deliver up to 7 minutes. The judge usually gives time signals.
- 6 Wait for the ballot.** Judges rank speakers and often leave written comments for the next round.

How judges decide

Ballot forms differ, but nearly all ask the same questions. Use them as a self-check:

In many rounds several students speak in the same room and the judge ranks them. Scoring and ranking methods vary by tournament.

In many rounds several students speak in the same room, and the judge ranks them. Rank, not an absolute score, may be what advances a student, though scoring methods vary by tournament.

Parent quick checklist

- ☐ Find the league's current rules for time, notes, and electronic devices.
- ☐ Ask what your student's files look like and whether they are paper or electronic.
- ☐ Practice one timed speech at home each week, even just 5 minutes of prep.
- ☐ Praise specifics: "Your second point was clear," not only "Good job."
- ☐ Keep a folder of ballots to look for patterns over time.

Next step

Want a plan built around your speaker? Book a free consultation with Scholar Coach at the link below.

Built from public guidance: NSDA Competition Events Guide: Extemporaneous Speaking · NSDA United States and International Extemp event descriptions · UIL Texas Extemp Prep Room guide · Stoa Extemporaneous Rules (2024). Rules change by league and tournament, so always confirm against your tournament invitation and current league rules.

Want a plan built around **your** debater?

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