



Build Your Extemp Files: A Daily Reading System.

How to collect, organize, and refresh the articles you bring to a tournament, plus a simple daily reading routine. Written for beginners and for parents helping set up the system.

What "files" means

Extemp speakers prepare ahead by collecting articles about current events and sorting them by topic. These collections are called **files**. In prep, a speaker pulls articles from the right folder, picks one or two strong facts, and builds a speech around them. Files may be paper or stored on a laptop or tablet. NSDA event descriptions say students may use articles and evidence gathered before the contest but may not use the internet during preparation, so everything must be printed or saved ahead of time. **Whether electronic files or internet access are allowed in the prep room varies by league and tournament**, so confirm before you decide on a format.

Remember

Files do not give you your speech. They give you facts to use. The thinking still happens in your 30 minutes.

Choose a filing structure

LEVEL	EXAMPLE	WHY IT HELPS
Big category	United States / International	Matches the two extemp events
Subject	Economy, Education, Technology, Health, Environment	Quick to find during draw
Region or issue	Europe, Latin America, Asia, Africa, Middle East	For International files
Date order	Newest on top	Facts must be current

Start with 8 to 10 broad folders. Too many tiny folders slow you down. Split a folder only when it gets thick.

Types of sources to read

A balanced diet of sources protects you from one-sided speeches and helps you answer questions from several angles. Choose reputable outlets from each category and compare how they report the same story.

CATEGORY	GOOD FOR	EXAMPLES OF THE TYPE
Wire services	Fast, factual summaries	National and international news agencies
Major newspapers	Detail and background	Large national and regional papers
Weekly magazines	Analysis and trends	News and policy magazines
Public broadcasters	Audio and video explainers	Public radio and television news
Policy research groups	Data and expert reports	Think tanks across viewpoints, read with care
Government data	Official numbers	Statistics agencies and international organizations

Do not rely on a single outlet. Note whether a piece is **news** (reports events) or **opinion** (argues a view), and label opinion pieces as opinion when you cite them.

The 20-minute daily routine

- 1 **Skim (5 min).** Read headlines from two or three outlets. Pick the 2 or 3 stories that matter most.
- 2 **Read deeply (10 min).** Read one story fully. Ask: who is involved, what changed, why now, what happens next?
- 3 **File it (3 min).** Print or save the article and write only citation details on it (outlet, date, and for printouts the web address). Keep your own summary in a separate study notebook at home, not on the file you bring. Place it in the right folder.
- 4 **Say it aloud (2 min).** Explain the story to a parent or to the mirror in 30 seconds. If you cannot, read it again.

Study-notebook template (keep this at home)

Many leagues allow only citation information written on articles and bar commentary, outlines, or analysis packets in the prep room (UIL and NSDA piloted rules both say so). So keep this template in a separate notebook for studying, and do not bring it into prep unless your league allows it. For each article, record:

- ◆ Outlet and date
 - ◆ Topic folder
 - ◆ Key fact (with number if there is one)
 - ◆ Who might be cited: "according to ..."
 - ◆ Possible question it could answer
- ☐ Refresh files weekly: remove stories older than a few months unless they give lasting background.
 - ☐ Mix at least three outlets in every major folder.
 - ☐ Keep 3 or 4 "evergreen" explainers for each region or subject.
 - ☐ Do not bring pre-written speeches, outlines, or other students' analysis into the prep room. NSDA, UIL, and Stoa rules all bar them.
 - ☐ Check marking rules. Some leagues allow highlighting in one color only and no handwriting other than citations (UIL, NSDA piloted rules).
 - ☐ Practice pulling a folder in under 30 seconds.

Coaching note

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 2019-20 Pilot Internet Rules (Extemp) · 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.

NOTES

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

Book a free consultation. The short intake takes about a minute and opens right away.

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