

Impromptu Speaking Explained: Formats and Structure Templates.

Impromptu gives you a prompt and almost no time. Learn how the event works, how leagues differ, and five structure templates you can memorize and use for any prompt.

What impromptu is

In Impromptu, a speaker is given prompts and speaks with very little preparation. Prompts vary: a quotation, a single word, an object, a proverb, a famous person, or an abstract idea, and the tone can be serious or light. The goal is not to know facts but to build a clear, interesting speech on the spot.

RULE	NSDA DESCRIPTION	OTHER LEAGUES
Prompts	Draw three from an envelope, choose one. Prompts in a round share a theme	Varies by league and tournament
Time	Seven minutes total for choosing, prepping, and speaking, divided however the speaker likes	Many leagues use their own fixed prep and speech times. Check your event description
Grace period	30 seconds. A speaker who goes past 7:30 cannot place first in the round	Varies
Notes	No notes during the speech	Varies
Materials	Published books, magazines, newspapers, and articles may be brought to prep if unmarked. No outlines or pre-written speeches	Varies

Because rules **vary by league and tournament**, check the event description for your competition. In NSDA-style rounds only one speaker is in the room at a time, because every speaker draws from the same prompts, and the clock may start as soon as you take the prompts out of the envelope, so do not stall.

Budgeting your time

NSDA gives two sample splits of its seven minutes: about 3 minutes of brainstorming and a 4-minute speech, or 1 minute of brainstorming and a 6-minute speech. There is no minimum for either part. As a **coach's suggestion** for beginners, try **1 to 2 minutes of prep and 5 to 6 minutes of speaking**. A short, clear plan beats a long, tangled one, and a longer speech is not better unless the ideas are well developed.

MOMENT (SUGGESTED)	DO THIS
First 20 seconds	Read the prompts, pick the one you can say the most about
Next 40 to 60 seconds	Decide what it means to you, choose a structure, jot 3 key words
Final 20 seconds	Rehearse only the first sentence
Speech	Hit your template, glance at your time

Five structure templates

NSDA describes the basic shape as an introduction (give the prompt, its meaning, and a thesis), a body of two or three examples that support the meaning, and a short conclusion that returns to the prompt. The five templates below are our suggestions for filling that shape; they are not official.

NAME (COACH TEMPLATE)	PARTS	BEST FOR
PREP	Point, Reason, Example, Point again	Any prompt, quick and clean
Past, Present, Future	How it was, how it is, where it is heading	Ideas about change
Three Reasons	Thesis then 3 supports	Opinion prompts
Story, Lesson, Link	Personal story, what it taught, tie to prompt	Quotes and proverbs
Problem, Cause, Solution	What is wrong, why, what to do	Serious topics

Example with PREP

Prompt: "Practice makes progress." Point: Progress, not perfection, is the goal. Reason: Small repeated effort builds skill. Example: A student improving a free throw by shooting 20 a day. Point again: That is why practice makes progress.

Opening and closing moves

- ♦ **Interpret first.** Say what the prompt means to you before arguing.
 - ♦ **Open with the prompt.** Repeat it, then give your idea.
 - ♦ **Close by returning to your opening.** A circle shape sounds finished.
 - ♦ **Have a stock story or two.** A memory from school, sports, family, or nature can fit many prompts; practice bending it.
- ☐ Used one clear structure.
 - ☐ Spoke to the prompt, not about something else.
 - ☐ Included at least one concrete example.
 - ☐ Finished with a closing sentence, not a trail-off.
 - ☐ Stayed within the time limit.

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 Impromptu Starter Kit · NSDA Competition Events Guide: Impromptu. 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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