



Original Oratory: A Speech Blueprint.

For students who want to write and deliver a persuasive speech of their own, and for parents who want to know what judges look for. Use it to pick a topic, build the structure and self-score a practice run.

What Original Oratory is

Original Oratory is a persuasive public address event. The student writes the speech, memorizes it, and delivers it to a judge without notes. The goal is to make an audience care about a problem and believe in a solution or a shift in thinking.

The table below shows NSDA rules. Other leagues and tournaments can differ, so always read your own rules and confirm each item.

RULE	NSDA RULE	WHAT TO DO
Time limit	10 minutes with a 30 second grace period	If all judges agree you went past the grace period, you cannot be ranked 1st; no minimum time is required
Memorized	Yes, delivered from memory	Plan to deliver without notes
Visual aids	Not permitted	Plan to deliver with none
Quoted material	No more than 150 words of direct quotation	Identify quotes in your printed script; extensive paraphrasing from other sources is also prohibited
Original work	You compose it, and it cannot be an oration you used in an earlier contest year	Be truthful; any non-factual or personal reference must be identified as such
Script on file	Script marks quoted material, counts quoted words and includes a works cited page; you and your coach attest it is your own work	Keep a clean copy ready in case the speech is challenged

Choosing a topic that works

A strong oratory topic is a problem the student has noticed up close, not a news headline. Judges hear many speeches on the same big issues, so a fresh angle wins.

- 1 List five things that bother you.** Think school, hobbies, family, your town, the internet.
- 2 Ask which one has a cause you can explain.** If you can say why it happens, you can persuade.
- 3 Check the stakes.** Who is affected, and what gets worse if nothing changes?
- 4 Find a solution people can act on.** A listener should know what to think or do afterward.
- 5 Test it on one adult and one friend.** Can they repeat your main point in one sentence?

One-sentence test

Fill in: 'I want my audience to believe ____ because ____.' If you cannot, the topic is still too broad.

A structure you can reuse

Most oratories follow a simple arc: hook, problem, cause, solution, call to action. Here is a plan with approximate time shares for a speech of about 10 minutes. Scale it to your limit.

PART	SHARE OF TIME	JOB
Attention getter	About 10 percent	A short story, vivid image or surprising question
Thesis and preview	About 5 percent	State your claim and name your main points
Point 1: The problem	About 25 percent	Show it is real and who it hurts
Point 2: The cause	About 25 percent	Explain why it keeps happening
Point 3: The solution	About 25 percent	Offer a fix and show it can work
Conclusion	About 10 percent	Return to the opening story, then a call to action

Worked mini-example. Topic: students who stop reading for fun. Hook: a short scene of a child choosing a phone over a book. Problem: reading for pleasure often drops as school workload grows. Cause: assigned reading can feel like a chore. Solution: protected free-choice reading time. Call to action: ask the audience to start a ten-minute daily reading habit tonight. (Check any statistic you add against a source you can name.)

Self-scoring rubric

Ballots vary by league. This is our own practice rubric: score each row 1 (needs work) to 5 (strong) after a recorded run.

CATEGORY	LOOK FOR	SCORE 1 TO 5
Opening	Grabs attention in 20 seconds	
Clarity	One main idea, easy to follow	
Evidence	Specific examples, sources named	
Voice	Varied pace, volume and pauses	
Body language	Purposeful movement, steady eyes	
Memory	Smooth, no lost-place pauses	
Close	Memorable last line and a clear ask	

Common mistakes and fixes

MISTAKE	FIX
Topic too broad	Narrow to one group, place or cause
Facts with no story	Add one person or scene per point
Sing-song delivery	Mark pauses and key words in your script
Over the time limit	Time every run; cut a paragraph, not speed
Weak ending	Echo your opening, then say what listeners should do

Book a free consultation at the link below and we will help shape topic, script and delivery.

Built from public guidance: NSDA High School Unified Manual (speechanddebate.org) · NSDA competition event pages (speechanddebate.org). 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.

BOOK NOW →