



Informative Speaking: Teach It Clearly.

For students entering Informative or Expository speaking. Learn how it differs from persuasion, how to pick and structure a topic, and how to plan visual aids that follow your league's rules.

Inform, do not persuade

Informative speaking teaches the audience something new. Original Oratory asks listeners to agree; Informative asks them to understand. A good test: could a listener leave saying 'I never knew that' rather than 'I should do that'?

FEATURE	INFORMATIVE	ORIGINAL ORATORY
Goal	Explain and clarify	Persuade and move to action
Typical topics	A process, invention, place, idea, person	A problem and its solution
Visual aids	Optional (NSDA allows them, with limits)	Not permitted (NSDA)
Memorized	Yes (NSDA)	Yes (NSDA)
Time	10 min, 30 sec grace (NSDA)	10 min, 30 sec grace (NSDA)

The rows above reflect NSDA rules; other leagues and local tournaments may differ. Under NSDA rules, no electronic equipment may be used during an informative speech, live animals and additional people are not allowed as aids, and clothing put on or removed to illustrate a point is treated as a costume and is not allowed. Read your tournament's event description before you build anything.

Expository is a related event. At NSDA tournaments it is a 5 minute speech to inform (30 second grace period) with no note cards and no audio or visual aids, and you may not reuse any part of an original oration or informative speech you entered at a district or national tournament.

Picking a topic

- ◆ Choose something you find surprising. Your curiosity shows.
- ◆ Pick a topic with a clear shape: a process (how it works), a history (how it began), or a concept (what it means).
- ◆ Avoid topics the whole room already knows. 'Why sleep matters' is weaker than 'What your brain does during one night of sleep.'
- ◆ Make sure you can find at least four reliable sources: a museum, university, government or reputable news site.
- ◆ Pick something age-appropriate and neutral. Avoid partisan topics.
- ◆ Pick a real topic. NSDA does not allow a fabricated topic, and any non-factual reference, including a personal one, must be identified.
- ◆ Direct quotation is capped at 150 words under NSDA rules, and quotes must be identified aloud and in your printed script.

Sample angles

How a bridge carries weight. The history of a common tool. Why octopuses are good at escaping. How a map is made. Verify every fact before it goes in your speech.

Three ways to organize

PATTERN	BEST FOR	OUTLINE
Topical	Ideas with parts	Part 1, Part 2, Part 3
Chronological	Histories and processes	Then, next, now
Cause and effect	Natural or social events	What happened, why, what followed

Wrap any pattern in the same frame: a hook, a clear statement of what you will teach, two or three main points, and a closing that ties back to the hook. Add a 'so what' near the end so the audience knows why the topic matters.

- 1 Write your topic as a question.** Example: How does a lighthouse lens work?
- 2 Write the answer in one sentence.** This is your thesis.
- 3 Break the answer into two or three parts.** These are your main points.
- 4 Add one example or analogy for each part.** Compare the unfamiliar to something familiar.
- 5 Add transitions.** Short signposts: 'First...', 'That leads to...', 'Finally...'

Visual aids that help

Where aids are allowed, they should make a hard idea simple. If an aid does not help understanding, cut it. Check your league for rules about size, electronics, assistants and what may be shown.

- ☐ Rules checked: aid type, size and electronics are permitted
- ☐ Large enough to read from the back of the room
- ☐ One idea per visual, few words
- ☐ Practiced handling it while speaking
- ☐ Easy to set up and move within seconds
- ☐ Backup plan if the aid breaks or is not allowed
- ☐ Speaker faces the judge, not the board

Mistakes and fixes

MISTAKE	FIX
Facts in a pile	Group into two or three themes
Jargon	Define terms in plain words or use an analogy
Too many aids	Keep to the ones that explain
Reading the visual	Look at the judge; the visual supports you
Flat delivery	Use pauses before big facts and vary pace

Book a free consultation at the link below to map your topic, script and practice plan.

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 →