

Understanding the Speech Rubric

Criteria	What to Look For
<p>Speech Development is the way the speaker puts ideas together so the audience can understand them. The speech is structured around a purpose and this structure must include an opening, body, and conclusion. A good speech immediately engages the audience’s attention and then moves forward toward a significant conclusion. This development of speech is supported by relevant examples and illustrations, facts, and figures delivered with such smoothness that they blend into the framework of the speech to present the audience with a unified whole.</p>	<p>An introduction that contains a clear enough topic sentence so that the listener knows what the speech is going to be about. The speaker provides several “roadmap clues” so that the judge is not constantly asking, “Where are they going with this speech?” The body of the speech is developed thoroughly using examples, anecdotes, and/or quotes, etc. The speech culminates with a memorable conclusion that ties all the parts of the speech together.</p>
<p>Effectiveness is measured in part by the audience’s reception of the speech, but a large part is your subjective judgment of how the speech came across. You should ask yourself such questions as “Was I able to determine the speaker’s purpose?” “Did the speech relate directly to that purpose?” “Was the speaker able to hold the interest of the audience?” “Was the speech subject appropriate for this particular audience?”</p>	<p>The judge must determine the purpose of the speech—to inform, entertain, analyze, persuade, etc. Then they determine if the speaker achieved this purpose. Both interest and reception are matters of personal taste. Students are encouraged to avoid really controversial topics; however, the rules do not specify a speech topic. Sometimes a universal message will create interest and other times it may be the unusual or different that evokes interest. Annoying gestures, faulty logic, and/or confusing organization will affect both interest and reception.</p>
<p>Correctness of language insures that attention will be directed toward what the speaker says, not how it is said. Proper use of grammar and correct punctuation will show that the speaker is the master of words being used.</p>	<p>Speech rules call for “an effective vocabulary and the structures of the English language appropriate to formal usage.” Students are encouraged to avoid slang and too many colloquialisms. However, the judge should not forget to judge the speech according to its type. Perhaps pronunciation and/or certain “catch phrases” are appropriate to a speaker’s purpose.</p>
<p>Appropriateness of language refers to the choice of words that relate to the speech purpose and to the particular audience hearing the speech. Language should promote clear understanding of thoughts and should fit the occasion precisely.</p>	<p>Does the language “fit” the purpose of the speech? Does the student repeat words often or do they look for meaningful synonyms to create interest? Perhaps you feel that the speaker has not really searched for the exact word and that they should heighten their language to a more formal, precise level. It is hard to imagine a speech where profanity is appropriate.</p>
<p>Speech Value justifies the act of speaking. The speaker has a responsibility to say something meaningful and original to the audience. The listeners should feel the speaker has contributed to their thinking. The ideas should be important ones although this does not preclude a humorous presentation of them.</p>	<p>Sometimes in a speech, no logical pattern is necessitated. In other speeches, clear logic is vital. In either case, the speech should contain lots of ideas with examples that demonstrate a student’s point of view. Original, fresh ideas are so much more appealing than regurgitated fact or opinions with nothing to give them substance. Looking at something in a different or creative way makes a speech exciting.</p>
<p>Voice is the sound that carries the message. It should be flexible, moving from one pitch to another for emphasis, and should have a variety of rate and volume. A good voice can be clearly heard and the words easily understood.</p>	<p>Judges should not have to strain to hear yet varying both the volume and tone can be effective. The expressiveness a speaker uses can help him clearly articulate and express ideas. Enthusiasm can certainly be detected in the voice. Students in Academic Decathlon are taught to practice voice control.</p>
<p>Non-verbal presentation of a speech carries part of the responsibility for effective communication. The speaker’s appearance should reinforce the speech, whether profound, sad, humorous, or instructional. Body language should support points through gestures, expressions, and body positioning. The speaker’s manner should indicate an interest in the audience and confidence in their reactions.</p>	<p>The student should be clean, neat, and well-groomed. Gestures should be natural and appropriate as opposed to contrived and mechanical. They should be used to emphasize points. Movements should not be fidgety, and demeanor should indicate that the student is engaged. A smiling, attentive, confident student can establish a relationship with judges before they begin the actual speech. They can maintain rapport with good eye contact and inspired content.</p>