

PREPARATION FOR CONTEST EXTEMP

by James M. Copeland

Concerns

Before a specific approach to extempore speaking can be formulated some basic concepts must be examined. The first difficulty in extempore speech competition is the absence of specific preparation. Certainly the ambitious high school participant will read widely, compile an index of materials, and concentrate on organization and delivery during practice speeches. The fact remains, however, that specific preparation is limited to the time between the drawing and the contest itself. This condition affects both composition and delivery.

The second general concern is the time limit. In most contests a speaker is penalized or disqualified if he either exceeds or falls short of the allotted time. Thus the choice of materials, as well as their organization (i.e. a specific type of introduction, body, and conclusion) is affected by the time limit.

Redundancy of topics among speakers is the third consideration. Unlike the contestant in oratory, who may choose his subject, the high school extempore speaker is usually proscribed by topics all of which either relate to a general topic area or are chosen from current events. Thus judges may hear different speakers speak about the same topic in different rounds. Originality in both material and organization is therefore highly desirable. These factors are hurdles to good extempore contest performance. In order to overcome them the contestant should stress sound analysis, a variety of materials, balanced organization and vivid preparation in both composition and delivery.

Materials

To maximize the best choice of materials (quotations, statistics, examples) as well as to promote coherent order among them, the speaker should be thoroughly familiar with speech parts and their various forms. The student should select a definite organizational structure from among the various types of introductions, bodies, conclusions, and transitions. Specific materials may then be fitted into the outline.

Composition

The initial element in speech composition is an introduction to the speech. Func-

tions of the introduction are (1) to gain attention, (2) to gain goodwill, (3) to present the speech purpose, and (4) to present the speech theme. For the contest speaker the most important of these are to gain attention, which aids the judges in retention of individual performance and introduction of the theme, which presents an organizational pattern.

Introduction

Professor G. E. Densmore, former chairman of the University of Michigan Department of Speech, lists six types of introductions: (1) the striking statement, (2) the story, (3) the quotation, (4) the reference to attendant circumstances, (5) the rhetorical question, (6) the allusion to an important incident.

In extemp, where time is at a premium, the introduction should take **between thirty seconds and one minute**; thus the story is sometimes an unacceptable device. However, if a brief, vivid story can be found, it may be adapted to the topic. A **reference** to other speakers, the occasion, or other attendant circumstances is occasionally successful in contest speaking of this type. Too often allusions to the room, weather, or audience sound trite. The startling statement, if topical and believable, is an excellent opening. The **rhetorical question** is also a good device to gain attention as well as present the theme. The **quotation** of a famous person, whether a question or a statement, lends the weight of authority. The **allusion to an important event** often provides a good historically based, or personally interesting, introduction to current problems. The speaker should choose one of these types that conforms to his speech purpose and topic analysis.

When choosing his device, the speaker should keep in mind that the introduction must gain attention and must present an implicit or explicit theme. Certain topics lend themselves better to certain types of introductions as well as to certain speakers with differing methods of delivery. *The constant factor, however, is that the introduction will furnish the hook on which the rest of the speech will hang.*

Smooth Transition

After formulating the introduction, the next step should be the formulating of a smooth transition from the introduction to the body of the speech. One good technique is to use the topic statement, or purpose statement, as a transition. Another effective transition is a rhetorical question. Still another method is to present an allusion or metaphor in the introduction and continue it throughout the speech. It is obvious that smooth organization is dependent on transitions.

The speech body must be prepared in two different ways. **(1)** pre-contest preparation should include wide reading of current sources. A filing system which organizes the materials will be necessary. I suggest file folders, labeled by subject and containing key articles. The file system eliminates much waste motion when finding sources, quotations, or other evidence. This leaves additional time for outlining and delivery practice immediately prior to the contest. **(2)** In actual contest preparation, after the topic has been drawn, the student must remember that the organization of the body is dependent on the kind of speech purpose. An informative speech will use narration and explanation. A persuasive topic will include argument and evidence.

Organizational Patterns

Professor Densmore has listed six types of body organizations: **(1) the "String of Beads," (2) the series, (3) the explanation, interpretation, and application, (4) the extended analogy, (5) the repetition of a pattern, and (6) the problem-solution.**

The "String of Beads" approach is generally ill-suited to the extempore contest. This method is a series of illustrations or stories each of which is a complete unit. These anecdotes are hung together around a general theme. Such an organizational structure, more appropriate to the after-dinner speech, sounds too rambling for the extempore speech.

The series of reasons, component parts, or implications is often a good method for extempore speaking. Breaking down a topic or policy to examine its philosophical bases, its different parts, or its implied relationships to other policies generally gains much favor. It is incisive and vivid rather

than general or vague. Using this method the speaker may relate abstract topics to audience interests.

When a speaker defines a statement, presents different interpretations, and suggests applications he is using the third type of organization. This is most effective for legal, religious, or philosophical topics where different value judgments or opinions exist, but is usually not useful for clearly stated questions of fact.

The extended analogy is the most animated organizational pattern. Tracing an idea by developing a parallel theme is interesting and clear. Fables, Biblical allusions, historical events or personal experiences all make good analogies, but the analogy must remain subservient to the topic under analysis and must not become so involved that it obliterates the topic. Above all, it must be relevant to the topic.

The fifth method, repetition of a pattern, develops a theme by means of examining in repetitive order its aspects on different levels. Examples of such patterns include: past, present, future; economic, political, social; Federal, state, local. This device is rather mundane, yet it is clear.

The problem-solution technique is best suited only to controversial topics. Here the speaker states a problem, then offers a proposal or proposals which may solve it. The debate technique of defining the problem, examining a solution, and showing the advantages of the solution is over-used in most extempore contests.

Selecting Materials

After the organizational pattern of the body is decided, the main headings and supporting materials may be selected. The main points should be clearly and vividly stated. The speaker should use the active voice rather than the passive and should avoid complex or compound-complex sentences.

When selecting materials for the speech body the student should try to **provide variety** by using differing kinds of proof. S/he should not use just statistics or only examples but should choose different types of materials and integrate them into the selected organizational framework.

A final warning: In extempore contests most judges encourage incisive development of a few points rather than a broad survey or general sketch of the topic.

Conclusions

The transition between the body and the conclusion is dependent on the type of

conclusion used. If the conclusion is a summary, very little transition is needed other than a brief introductory clause or phrase. If a conclusion of application is chosen the rhetorical question is a smooth, yet elementary way of transition. Unlike the summary which collects and synthesizes the important ideas for restatement, the conclusion of application must promote as its function the explanation of the role the audience should play in its relation to the problem or topic. As Densmore puts it, "a way of translating belief into action."

If the speaker wishes to do more than present the facts (summary) or present the facts and suggest audience action (application) s/he will probably choose the motivational conclusion. Here facts are presented, applications are noted, and finally the speaker appeals to the bases of human behavior to induce the action proposed. As a transition into the motivational conclusion the statement seems most suitable. The transition must be a brief, attention-holding introduction for the motive appeal. The question can also be used to bridge the gap between the body and the appeal.

Whatever type of conclusion is selected one important suggestion is relevant: Attempt to tie in the attention factor presented in the introduction with the conclusion. Whatever joke, startling fact, historical reference or other factor was used at the beginning, echo that image at the end.

Delivery

After the speech is outlined and all materials have been selected, the contestant should then concern himself with speech delivery. In the contest situation the better speakers will not use such artificial barriers to communication as notes, a lectern, a stage, or microphone. The only time such aids are needed is for large crowds in a large auditorium. In the typical contest scene the judge, a few spectators and coaches, and the contestants meet in a small room. In this setting conversational communication, rather than declamatory delivery, will be most successful. An outline is prepared initially and most superior speakers prefer to memorize their outline and use no notes. During practice, the introduction, each transition, and the conclusion should be written out in full text. The wording of these elements is crucial to the speech and must not be muffed. Naturally the more practiced the speaker is the more direct s/he can be in delivery.

Directness is the key factor of deliv-

ery. To promote directness the material must be clear and vivid. The *vocal delivery* should stress vocal variety, eye contact, and fluency. By using a variety of pitches, rates, and volumes, as one does in conversation, the speaker emphasizes the important points, gives vocal clues which aid the judges in following organization, and further wins approval by interesting oral style.

Eye contact is also essential to directness. The contestant should pick out several people in different parts of the audience and look directly at each of them in random order. Such a technique should not be artificial. Rather, the explanation of each point of argument, piece of supporting material, or expository statement should be directed at different individuals. Shifts in content should be accompanied by shifts in eye contact.

The major factor in directness is *fluency*. Fluency gives the impression of poise in the speech situation. Fluency is a direct result of mastery of material. Poor preparation or poor organization leads to halting oral style. Nothing impedes conversation more than halting delivery. Smooth, varied presentation of material makes the difference between average and good extempore speakers. A clear mental picture of the outline, normal rate, and simple sentence structure aid fluent delivery.

These few techniques of direct communication are listed here mainly because excellence in these areas tends to cover the weakness of the extempore speech-- lack of exact word choice. The orator or reader may pre-select language which is rich in associational value or prepare words and phrases to create an exact mood or build imperceptibly to a climax. The extempore speaker, denied the use of polished, exact word choice by the immediacy of his presentation, compensates for this lack by direct communication. Excellent vocal variety, superior fluency, and good eye contact will more than suffice for rehearsed word choice or intricate phraseology.

(James Copeland, NFL Executive Secretary, won the 1957 Michigan State Extempore Championship. Later he coached NFL National Extemp Champions in 1966, 1972 and 1978. This article, from the November 1964 Rostrum, has been updated.)