What is Impromptu?
Impromptu speaking is one of the toughest events in forensic competition.
Although rules for the event differ from region to region and level to level, the National Forensic League allows each student five minutes of preparation and five minutes of speaking time. In some areas of the country, preparation time and speaking time are mixed together. For example, at the college level, the American Forensic Association allows a total of seven minutes for both preparation and speaking.

Impromptu is a limited preparation event which requires the student to prepare a speech based upon the examination of a quotation, object, or anecdote. Usually, quotations are the subject of impromptu speeches.

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has gone down as the best real estate deal in history. France needed the money for its war effort. Had he waited, the purchase probably would have cost us quite a bit more, and it might not have happened at all. By creating a new stitch, and using all of the authority he could muster to buy Louisiana, Jefferson not only saved many more stitches, he saved a lot of money."

This example is a pretty basic one. You would need to develop it more, provide some more specific information, and give us a better sense of the historical significance of the support. Notice though, that the example not only provides narrative about the situation, it brings the quotation back into the example to make it CLEARLY contextualized to the quotation.

Supports: Diverse, Developed, Clear, and Contextualized. Great!! What next?

Move on to the next support. Transition time. Then develop the support.

"Not only did Thomas Jefferson capitalize on an ingenious short-cut, but the character Ariel in Disney's modern classic 'The Little Mermaid' managed to save some time and get what she wanted."

"Walt Disney's 'The Little Mermaid', adapted with an optimistic twist from a Hans-Christian Andersen story, introduces us to Ariel, a teenage mermaid with a crush on a landlocked prince. Rebelling against her father, she seeks the help of an evil sea witch, who transforms Ariel into a human in exchange for her voice. But, there's a catch. Ariel must make the prince fall in love with her, and kiss her, within three days. The story goes through several twists, including music orchestrated by a hermit crab named Sebastian, and in the end, the prince kills the sea witch and they live happily ever after.

Ariel manages to fulfill her wish, marrying the prince, by taking a short-cut, just as Thomas Jefferson did purchasing the Louisiana, and in the process she also resolves the conflict with her father and helps to kill off the sea witch.

But just as Jefferson and Ariel in 'The Little Mermaid' used short-cuts to save some stitches in time..."

And so on to the third support.

Recap

Read the quotation, define it, justify it (so what?), and then give us some specific, diverse examples which show the relationship inherent in the quotation clearly.

That's how we define and support a quotation. That's what impromptu is all about.

Preparing for Impromptu

Even though impromptu is a limited preparation event, there are some things that you can do to ready yourself for the event.

To begin with READ!!! Start reading stuff. Start thinking like an impromptuer. Start cataloguing. Start applying. Start contextualizing.

Supports for impromptu can come from just about anywhere. Remember, though, that examples probably SHOULD NOT be drawn from current events. Why? Because judges want to hear something new, they want to learn. We have a different event for current events and that is extemporaneous speaking.

When you read stories or poems, think about what they say about people. What is the rhetoric in the story? What is it telling us to do or what not to do? Stories have agendas -- think about what they are and under what circumstances you might refer to them.

The same is true of poems, of paintings, of songs, of dramas.

History is also rhetorical. We learn from our past. As Henry Fairlie says, "We all carry our landscapes with us." Take what you learn into the round with you (via your brain) and make it accessible to you (via forethought).


Start reading quotations. Practice defining and justifying them. Practice coming up with supports for them.

Develop DIVERSITY. Pick a genre of support material and start beefing up on it.

If you don't know much about history, start reading it. If you don't know Diddley, find out about him. If you have an interest in something, start getting some depth. For instance, do you like Peter Gabriel? What is his history? What things does he say about himself? What does he have to say about the human condition? What do his songs have to say?

(Martin "Randy" Cox is the Co-director of Forensics at Milton Academy in Milton, MA and former Co-director of the National Champion speech program at The University of Texas. He was the recipient of the 1991 AFA national championship in Impromptu Speaking.)