

# KEYS TO EXTEMP

Speaking from your heart with the knowledge in your head

Cody Herche

  
Monument Publishing

*Keys to Extemp*

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# FOREWORD

## By Hugh Hewitt

What you have in your hands is a key. Read closely and follow thoroughly—this book will unlock a door that allows you into a thousand rooms.

The first room is, of course, the world of extemp, and that is itself well worth the effort to read and study. It is a fascinating subculture, full of some of the brightest, most energetic and achievement-oriented students in the world. Don't ask me why such folks are drawn to extemp. They just are. They are born with a need to communicate.

All the other rooms after that are rooms in which you have been asked to enter because you can speak.

Because you can gain and hold the attention of the audience.

Because you can communicate.

There are many, many leaders who have risen to their positions of influence and authority without the ability to speak.

But there are hundreds of thousands more who are in their leadership roles because they could focus and inspire an audience on a shared vision and convey a way forward.

Every day in a hundred different settings, people are trying to gain and keep your attention. There is advertising, of course, and there are family members who want your help or attention.

There are politicians seeking your vote, employers seeking your productivity, teachers seeking the acknowledgement that you understand them.

Some of them get through to you. Most don't. The ones who do have skills the others lack.

In the course of every day you too are trying to communicate with people for a host of reasons. Sometimes it works. Sometimes it doesn't. You

ought to be hoping to connect more often than you do. No one comes close to being the perfect communicator. All of us ought to aim to do so more often.

I am a law professor and a broadcast journalist. I talk for a living, in front of a classroom or over a radio network that carries my three-hour daily show into more than a hundred cities every weekday. If I couldn't communicate, I'd have a very different life, and I certainly wouldn't be as fulfilled as I am doing what I love.

I learned to do this in a hundred high school classrooms over three years as an extemp speaker for speech and debate tournaments. I didn't know it at the time, but those rooms and those judges and those topics drawn out of a bag were affectively shaping me for a life in the public square.

I thought I was having fun. In fact I was learning how to have influence in a nation of 300 million citizens.

On the weekend before I wrote this foreword, I participated in the "roundtable" segment of the ABC News Sunday morning show, "This Week with George Stephanopoulos."

My three other roundtable colleagues and George had notes in front of them. I don't use notes on television unless I am conducting a lengthy interview. Instead, before an appearance, I settle on the three points I hope to be able to make in the course of the conversation and fashion what I hope are some memorable phrases with which to communicate them. Then I remind myself to listen carefully to what everyone is saying and not be afraid to respond with brevity or humor as the circumstances warrant.

Just like an extemper.

The appearance went very well, or so my correspondents told me. My arguments in the debate that morning were strengthened by specific appeals to known facts and by references to events that had occurred that week and even that morning. My approach was the same approach you will learn in Extemp competition: Prepare. Identify your strongest argument. Present the strongest argument. Repeat the strongest argument at least once. Enjoy the moment.

In hundreds and hundreds of media appearances over the past two decades I have always followed that formula: Prepare. Identify your

strongest argument. Present the strongest argument. Repeat the strongest argument at least once. Enjoy the moment.

It is on this last point that I will close with emphasis: *extemp is a blast*. It is like learning to play a musical instrument—hard at first but increasingly a source of joy and fulfillment. Every single speech is an opportunity to shine and rise to the occasion. Every stumble and mumbled jumble is an opportunity to get off the floor and try again.

Along the way you are going to meet extraordinary coaches, judges and fellow participants. Each one of them is driven by the same deep desire to communicate. Most of you will be called to lives of significance and service, lives of purpose that will be greatly enhanced by your ability to command attention and respect and to deliver facts and analysis in a form that will be heard and retained.

There will be moments when you are tired of the preparation or frustrated by the results. You will be tempted to throw the note cards overboard or yell at your coach, and you will certainly look at your judges as those they could not possibly have been in the same room you were. When that happens keep in mind that you are in training for events still far off, moments of incredible importance. All the time invested in learning how to be heard and understood will be called upon to great and lasting effect.

It is worth the time and the trouble. You will be thankful for this book and for the extemp experience. Enjoy every day of the journey and keep in mind Hebrews 12:15 instructs us, “See to it that no one misses the grace of God.” Your ability to fulfill that high calling will be greatly enhanced by your ability to master the arts taught in this book.





# Introduction

The 1996 Presidential election cycle was pivotal for America's pro-life movement. Of the two major national parties, only the Republican Party platform had a clause pledging protection for the unborn. But the pro-life movement was losing steam within the GOP. Prominent Republican Senators Arlen Specter, Olympia Snow and Susan Collins urged party leaders to drop the pro-life plank or moderate it severely to be more "inclusive" to pro-choice voters. Equivocations like these would have made the plank useless. Few presidential candidates iterated a clear position on the controversial issue and a handful of evangelical opinion leaders were starting to give up hope.

But the fight was not over. In New Hampshire, a key primary state, a little known conservative advocate named Alan Keyes, a former UN Ambassador under the Reagan administration and a Harvard Ph.D., took the stage on February 19, 1995, at a Republican candidates' dinner. Keyes spoke after Lynn Martin, a former Senator and Secretary of Labor, and Arlen Specter, a moderate Republican from Pennsylvania, both of whom advocated moderating the party's pro-life position.

Alan Keyes' high school forensics career had prepared him well for this moment. An extemporaneous speaking and debate champion, Keyes was comfortable speaking under pressure and in front of large audiences. The activities of his youth made him ready to defend the truth and speak, no matter what the situation.

Because of his training, when Alan Keyes took center stage that evening in New Hampshire, he gave an impassioned and powerful defense of the pro-life position. His speech was relatively short, lasting only eight minutes, but it challenged conservatives to stand by their principles, to not abandon the ideas articulated in the Declaration of Independence and to focus on moral concerns before financial problems.<sup>1</sup> Keyes' presentation was so powerful that it was aired three days later on Dr. James Dobson's national radio program. And, following an outpouring of listener response and requests, Dobson aired the speech an

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<sup>1</sup> You can listen to this speech at [http://media.renewamerica.us/archives/mp3/95\\_02\\_19focusfamily.mp3](http://media.renewamerica.us/archives/mp3/95_02_19focusfamily.mp3)

unprecedented second time, giving Keyes' words even more of an audience.

Today, the speech by this little known Presidential candidate remains one of the strongest and most profound articulations of the pro-life position. And, although Keyes did not win the nomination, he succeeded in turning the tide of pro-abortion sentiment and preserving the GOP platform. Despite these accomplishments and the amazing impact of Keyes' speaking, the truly remarkable aspect of that New Hampshire presentation is that *it was delivered extemporaneously*.

When Alan Keyes stood up to give what might have been the most important address of his life, he had no notes, no lifeline, and no pre-scripted material. He had nothing but his own passion. In fact, Keyes is known to avoid the use of notes. When he served as ambassador to Zimbabwe in the late 1970s, he was persistently asked by local officials to submit his prepared remarks before giving any speech or presentation. They insisted on reviewing Keyes' words ahead of time in order to censor text they deemed inappropriate. In response, Keyes put his extemporaneous training to good use and started speaking without written notes, a practice he continues to this day.

Through his extemporaneous presentation, Keyes spoke from the heart and tailored his words to answer the assertions of those who had gone before. While Keyes never prepared for the speech specifically, extemporaneous speakers spend their life getting ready for speeches and are always prepared to defend their views. In the case of that New Hampshire candidates' dinner, the off-the-cuff remarks were as dynamic as any pre-tooled comments. In fact, they were all the more powerful and effective.

When I first met Alan Keyes at the tender age of seven years old, I had no idea that my high school forensics career would somewhat mirror his. My parents, largely inspired by the New Hampshire speech, were Keyes' grassroots campaign organizers for our area. They helped set up a speaking engagement for him at a local university and rode with Keyes to a studio where he recorded a radio address (also delivered extemporaneously).

Ten years later, I was the NCFCA extemporaneous speaking champion and the next year captained an extemp team that qualified seven of eight members to the national tournament. But the road to success was not a

smooth one. When I first participated in extemp in the fall of 2002, competitors had very little direction. Boxes were motley collections of clipped articles, organized with little rhyme or reason, and speeches had no established structure. That is not to say that the period did not have its legends, its respected greats who “did it right” and were rewarded by frequent victories, but the norm was unimpressive.

And who could complain? Extemp in the NCFCA was only a couple of years old; judges and coaches had yet to develop a paradigm for the event, students were experimenting constantly and the league did not yet have an extemp culture. It was only reasonable to expect some less-than-optimal preparation.

Today, all that has changed. Participation in extemp has expanded rapidly, competitors have started to specialize in the event and extempers from five different states have won the national title. Extemp has become a respected event in its own right; it has come of age.

But why extemp?

Extemp requires an understanding of current events and world affairs that is unparalleled in any academic activity. Sure, research papers or other school assignments may demand a depth of knowledge in a particular area, but nothing comes close to the breadth of comprehension demanded by extemp. Further, extemp creates a competitive environment for the study and communication of current events functioning as a powerful motivator.

When I was competing, my mother would often have to hold me back from research (a prohibition I found frustrating and unnecessary at the time but now regard as a wise protection from my own enthusiasm) so that I would complete my schoolwork before reading the news. The drive to be the best pushed me harder than any grade ever would have.

An extemper’s understanding of news events is acquired through copious research and trained analysis. Extempers learn how to find, read and analyze news articles. They learn how to cut through journalistic fluff to the core of an article and quickly cipher facts from newswires. Extempers learn what common news terms mean, become familiar with significant figures in government, economics and entertainment, and are aware of numerous issues.

Because of all this background, extempers make great conversationalists. I remember an elderly gentleman I met one morning who was complaining loudly about the stock market. He held a copy of *USA Today* open to the Money page and was reading sections of a bearish article to no one in particular. I jumped right into conversation saying, “Maybe Bernanke’s decision of yesterday morning to cut the interest rate by a quarter of a percent is to blame for the stock market fall because it signals the Fed’s slipping confidence in the market. Regardless, the marginal impact of the loss is not very significant when considered as a percentage of the market and it really should not be a matter of too much concern.” What followed was a 20-minute conversation that led to a variety of topics, from Google to the sanctity of marriage. On each issue I was comfortable, poised, and relaxed in a general knowledge that was sufficient to support my views. In the end, we exchanged contact information and the gentleman extended an open invitation to drop by his office. We continue to have regular conversations today.

Whether you need an icebreaker for a party, want to start a conversation in a waiting room or feel the need to respond to an assertion you know to be blatantly false, knowledge of current events will always come in handy. You will never find yourself frustrated by all the “useless” knowledge you have accumulated. You will instead find common ground with people of all ages. World events affect all of us and therefore always make an interesting topic of conversation.

An extemper is an historian, a news presenter and a color analyst. Through his preparation, the extemper will learn the histories of key news events and be able to explain the path that has brought us to the present. Because their analyses must also be germane and cogent, extempers quickly learn how to compare, contrast and give an opinion on important issues.

A friend of mine (and former National Extemp Champion) was delivering an oral argument before a panel of judges at Yale Law School. I would wager a pretty penny that oral argumentation is a trying and difficult activity. While speaking, my friend instantly felt himself slip into “extemp mode.” Almost by instinct, he developed responses to tough questions and critically analyzed counter-arguments. Instead of freezing up or (worse) making untenable assertions, he was able to stay focused. My friend attributes this “instinct” to his training in extemp and credits

his years of research, speaking and practice for his current ability to analyze and present with minimal amounts of preparation.

My friend was also showcasing an important extemp skill as he slipped into “extemp mode.” Competitive speakers show a radical improvement in delivery and fluidity over their untrained counterparts. Anyone can learn how to speak and work on drills that assist in that goal, but staying smooth under pressure is an important part of delivery. Later in life, speakers will need to hold their own in tense business meetings, important conversations, job interviews or, like my friend, presentations in front of a panel of intimidating Yale law professors. No pressure situation simulates that stress more completely for a high school student than extemp.

More than cataloguing the accumulation of knowledge, extemp requires its participants to deliver complex information in an easy-to-follow format. Speakers do not have hours to present their material and must truncate the data they wish to communicate down to a short, seven-minute speech. Extempers learn to summarize information and explain hard concepts quickly and succinctly, such that a judge who has only a cursory understanding of Southeast Asian politics can follow a speech on Myanmar’s national elections.

Do not write off the ability to summarize as a useless skill. I worked with a student who participated in a simulation sponsored by the American Legion in which hundreds of smart and ambitious girls (the best and brightest in their respective states) are invited to take part in a weeklong immersion in politics and civics education. My student, who was the only home-schooled student in the group of 700, was running for “lieutenant governor” in an election against six other girls. Each candidate had three minutes to explain her qualifications. While the other candidates spent the time tooting their own horn and trying to justify their candidacy, my student (who won the ballot) presented three issues in the witty acronym FED up (Fake leaders, Erratic education and Dismal development, arguing for transparency, improved education standards and more entrepreneurial opportunity). She explained to me later, “Extemp prepared me by not giving me glib phrases but forcing me to understand the events and interactions in the world around me. I didn’t win because I was the most posh or glamorous. It was because I knew my stuff.”

More than just an exercise in knowledge accumulation, extemp can be loads of fun. The friends you meet through competition are the cream of the crop and you will forge lasting relationships over the extemp box. I have had more than a few students tentatively tip-toe into extemp, not knowing what to expect or how the event would feel, only to become overwhelmed with passion for the activity.

One of my students, a highly successful platform speaker, decided to try extemp in her senior year. She was scared. She thought of extempers as highly successful speakers who used their innate abilities to miraculously turn current events into speech material. Because she did not have the keys to extemp, the event was intimidating. After a crash course in the basics, she went off to her first tournament. I expected the worst and, indeed, her competitive results were not spectacular. *But she was hooked.* Before her second tournament, she sought every moment of instruction she could and threw her heart into preparation. And, much to my surprise, she actually enjoyed herself. Sure, she was still tentative and the wide world of extemp still seemed a little scary for want of exploration, but the experience added a lot of joy to her final year of high school.

Given the amount of time that forensics requires at the highest levels, it may come as a surprise that extempers make better students than those who have never competed. It's true. Studies consistently show that participating in forensics – and extemp in particular – is correlated with higher grades and better scores on standardized tests. It may be argued that extemp attracts smarter students, but I believe the activity itself provides first-rate instruction in research, preparation and writing. In other words, *extemp creates smarter students.*

Of all the skills fostered by a career in extemp, the most important is the ability to give a reason for the hope that lies within you.<sup>2</sup> Extemp prepares you to answer tough questions and to do so with confidence, as well as with gentleness and respect. Extemp is a most cogent tool for evangelism. In most situations, you will have no time to prepare a scripted presentation outlining the path to salvation. You have no chance to create PowerPoint slides, consult a concordance or reread that book by Josh McDowell. You need to speak from the heart with the knowledge in your head and be able to express your views persuasively without notes.

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<sup>2</sup> Taken from 1 Peter 3:15, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."

In fact, that is the root of the term “extemporaneous.” It is derived from the Latin *ex tempore*, meaning without *tempore*, the ablative of *tempus*, time. Just like many of life’s situations, the extemporaneous speaker has no time to prepare. When someone asks the most difficult questions about the Christian faith—if a Christian should ever go to war, what it means when the Bible says that “the man is the head of the woman,” or whether Christianity is the only “true” religion—we need to give an answer. We cannot call time-out, run to the library and research the answer. An answer is required without time, *ex tempore*.

Extemp trains the mind to think quickly, irrespective of the pressures of the environment or subject matter. One of my fellow students in a political science class during my sophomore year in college was a frat boy named Nate. We met quite by accident early in the semester when I needed notes after a missed class. Nate was a nice enough guy and we chatted regularly before and after class. One day, I found out he was a regular drinker (he did not use the term “alcoholic,” despite the fact that he admitted to “getting plastered” about twice a week) and that his lack of self-control was condoned and encouraged by his fraternity brothers. He tempered his comments by saying that he never drank on school nights and that he only drank “socially.” I have never formally studied the effects of excessive alcohol, nor do I have many friends who have struggled with the temptations of the bottle, but I knew that silence would be interpreted as support. *So I spoke*. I told Nate that I do not drink because of the way alcohol impairs judgment. I said I could not imagine the horror of uncontrollable dizziness and memory loss and that a billion-dollar medication industry was built around the need to alleviate those symptoms. Finally, I cautioned that the draw of alcohol could take over his life if he did not rein in his habit.

Rather than push me away, Nate embraced the advice. He knew I was a Christian and regularly asked me tough questions about my faith. Everytime he posed a question, I had a “no-time” answer ready. Nate told me at the end of the semester that he was not drinking as much as he had at the start and that my comments on impaired judgment had had a big impact.

But more than a voice of moderation regarding substance abuse, I was an ambassador for my faith. As the only Christian Nate knew, I was his contact with my beliefs and may have expressed the only Christian

viewpoint he had heard on important life issues. I hope and pray that my extemporaneous answers helped to plant a seed in his mind and make him think about his life assumptions. Because of my preparation in extemp, I will be ready for his questions again next semester.

My experience with Nate has proved to be the rule rather the exception in my collegiate career. No matter what social group I engage (track team, intermural Frisbee, debate club, political science club, or various study groups), tough questions surface. My answers, given with no little or no prep time, are miles better than they would have been had I not been trained by years of extemp competition.

Like it or not, today's culture demands quick answers. Correspondence is sent instantly via email or fax, blogs let the world know about a current event before the newswires can even dream of publishing it, and text messages tie friends together constantly. The hourglass has been abolished, replaced by popup screens and instant replies. Today's speaker has to be able to land on his feet and start presenting, no matter how much time he has to prepare. In the perspective of today's audience or observer, taking too much time is the same as lying or, worse, appearing as if you do not know what you are talking about.

My oldest brother Ryan is a second-year Ph.D. candidate in Plant Pathology at the University of California at Davis and a former national extemp champion. In progressing through his Doctoral program, he has been surprised to discover that the further he advances, the more he is asked to call upon his extemp training. One semester, he delivered a 10-minute interview, three oral progress reports and two half-hour presentations followed by cross-examination. Ryan's coursework will culminate in a grueling three-hour oral exam with no written component. Ryan credits his training and his ability to integrate written materials into coherent oral arguments as the single most valuable skill he brought to graduate school. And he says that extemporaneous speaking is the best preparation he received for communication in the real world.

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**To be relevant in today's world you need to be *extempore*; you need to be without time.**

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*Keys to Extemp* provides a comprehensive introduction to extemp speaking. In the next few pages, we will walk through the fundamentals



of extemp, examining the event at a glance. Then we will turn to specific elements of preparation, from researching before a tournament to writing a speech under the pressure of a time limit. We will start with the basics and discuss the fundamentals of evidence, source citation and news analysis. We will also dig into more advanced strategies, such as how to give a speech with impact, how to speak without notes and how to employ generics that can be used for the most out-of-the-ordinary extemp questions. *Keys to Extemp* also lays out a path for success, with chapters on drilling, organizing a club and generating motivation so that you can win a tournament before you ever start speaking.

Alan Keyes did not wake up one morning, notice the Zimbabwean censors, snap his fingers, and start speaking extemporaneously. Rather, his ability was the copiously honed and rigorously trained result of an approach that began in high school with extemp speaking. He equipped himself at a young age with the skills he knew he might need later in life. As a result, Keyes is one of the most powerful post-*Roe* pro-life advocates.

Looking out at extemp right now is probably very intimidating. You are in an empty hallway looking at a locked door and scratching your head, wondering how you will be able to make it through. The walls are blank and hold no clues. You know that behind the door is a treasure trove of improved speaking, better conversation skills, superior research ability and greater knowledge of history and current events. You also realize that behind the door, a lot of fun awaits. So take heart; the keys are in front of you. They are in your hands. The lock may be engaged now, but this book contains the solutions that will allow you to open the door.



# CHAPTER 1

## Why Do Extemp?

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Every high school student who has the opportunity should try extemp. I consider myself extremely fortunate to have had the chance to compete and learn some great skills along the way. Extempers need quick wit, diligent preparation and careful analysis to succeed in a timed—yet sufficiently lengthy—event that starts with a solid understanding of current events.

Extempers are sometimes viewed as nerds, social dweebs who can parley for hours on the condition of regions like Kashmir, but later fail to hold a standard conversation about “normal” things. While it is true that successful extempers often spend hours preparing, they are generally amicable, and nerds are few and far between. If anything, extemp serves to round out a high school education by introducing speakers to important and weighty issues.

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**Extemp serves to round out a high school education.**

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Some of the skills you will learn through participation include more fluid speaking, improved analysis, stronger memory and recall capacity, and enhanced ability to concentrate under pressure. You will be better informed about current events and more comfortable when discussing issues about which you presently know little. Extemp will prepare you for the challenges you will face throughout your life.

Prepare yourself: You are about to learn the keys to champion extemp speaking. After applying the measures described in this book, you will be able to speak on virtually any current event without the aid of notes. It may seem like a daunting task to you now, but it will become increasingly easier to meet the extemp challenge.

## How to Use This Book

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In the following pages, we will examine some fundamentals of extemp as well as some advanced techniques to improve your presentations. Whether you are just beginning or have done extemp for a few years, there should be something for you to learn.

Please read all the chapters sequentially, even if you feel you already know what they teach. Some of the contents of this book may be different from what you have previously heard, and each chapter builds on material presented in the one before.

Students: As you read these pages, make the strategies they contain *your own*. Do not just think, “I’ll do it that way because that’s what Cody said.” Try to understand the reasons behind the advice. Also, do not feel that you need to do exactly what I suggest. If you have a better idea, take initiative, experiment and try to implement your own methods and means.

Parents and coaches: Use the strategies in this book to coach your students. Whether coaching a club or teaching a speech class, continuity within the various bits of advice will galvanize your students. Use this book as your textbook for all your extempers.

The tips provided in the following pages are designed with competitive goals in mind. That means that nothing in this book is intended exclusively to make a student a better person, just a better extemper. Taking part in extemp will inherently improve your speaking, critical analysis and presentation skills, whether or not you use my strategies. The points we will discuss will help improve your competitive ability in this event and in turn enhance your overall educational opportunities and success.

Note also that I am a Christian, and unapologetically so. In fact, I hope I reflect the image of God with my extemp skills whenever I speak and

witness to others. However, my faith does not disqualify those who do not share it from my advice and I do not intend this book to be an exclusively Christian guide.

Furthermore, I speak largely to the league in which I mostly competed, the National Christian Forensics and Communications Association (NCFCA), the third largest high school forensics league in the nation, serving home schooled students exclusively. The NCFCA encourages a conversational style that some other leagues may eschew and the strategies contained herein are tailored to the experiences of the home school student. Students from other leagues, however, can certainly benefit from the study of this book and are welcome to use its keys as they compete in different venues.

## Ethical Extemping

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Extemporaneous speaking is, like most competitive events, rife with temptation for cheating. A cheater can falsify sources and concoct phony statistics or facts. Competitors are not allowed to have their complete articles with them when they speak and they are encouraged to use articles from a recent reading that they may not have filed away, so it is often hard to investigate an extemper's sources to enforce accuracy. Speakers sometimes address topics about which their judges know little, where inserting a misleading statistic is certainly tempting. Competitors work in the quiet privacy of a prep room, often with little accountability, so that it can be very difficult to uncover a cheater.

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**"A man without ethics is a wild beast loosed upon  
this world." ~Albert Camus**

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The temptation to cheat is ever-present. The darker side of human nature prompts an extemper to fudge on facts or falsify evidence in the face of unresearched or difficult topics. A competitor who forgets the population of a country or an economic statistic might be ensnared by the temptation to make up the number. Cheating also offers an "easy fix" for missing polling data or old evidence.

In other words cheating is, at first blush, a relatively attractive and risk-free enterprise.

Coaches are not immune to the temptation, either. A couple of years ago, I watched the different styles of extemp competition at a tournament sanctioned by a non-NCFCA league. While there, I had the opportunity to talk with the assistant coach of a prominent West Coast high school about ethics in forensics competition. As our conversation reached falsifying extemp sources, I was shocked to hear his assumptive comment that “of course they make up sources,” referring to some of his own students in the very round we had been watching! Why would a coach knowingly allow students to engage in such a destructive and unethical practice?

As a competitor, you may face the temptation to make up a statistic that sounds believable, to stretch the truth a tad to make your point more resounding, or even to flat out falsify a news source to add to your “quote tally” or to increase the appearance of credibility.

To combat these temptations, you must first recognize that cheating is simply wrong. Proverbs 19:22 says, “Better to be poor than a liar”. In speech competition, we could paraphrase this, “Better to be last than a cheater.” Your name may not be called when breaks are announced, but you can retire that night with a pure heart and clear conscience, knowing that you have done your best, learned much, and honored your family, your club, and most importantly all, your Creator.

Is there ever a reason to cheat? I am convinced that there is no good reason to start the bad habit of cheating at extemp. Consider the following.

### ***1. There Is No Competitive Advantage to Cheating***

Judges evaluate your performance based on your overall presentation, not on your mere ability to recall arcane facts and figures, so that adding a falsified source really would not play to your advantage. You would also run a major risk of getting caught. Judges are often quite knowledgeable about world events and may realize that a “funny” fact has just been uttered. Get caught once, and you may find that your coach will be much stricter than the one I interviewed.

## ***2. Cheating Can Turn into a Crutch***

If you falsify a source in one round just to “fill in” an evidence gap, you will have to do the same in the following speech just to make par. Your standards for evidence will become bloated. Every speaker runs into a tough topic sometimes. It is much better to do your best with what you have than to allow your standards to become corrupt and your extemp performance to grow to become a sham.

## ***3. Cheating Teaches You Nothing***

Falsifying data will work against you. Just as a math student will struggle when he or she looks to the back of the book for the answers, so the extemper will be hurt if he makes things up. The best analysis occurs when the facts do not conveniently change (which is why economists are so bad at analysis). You will grow the most in extemp if you do not fudge your facts.

## ***4. Cheating Poisons the Game of Extemp***

Extemp is a game. It is an academic, carefully regulated, highly competitive game, but it is nonetheless a game. When an extemper cheats, the game loses its intellectual and educational value. Why have the façade of current-event analysis if extemp is just a platform for a speaker’s imagination? Cheating destroys trust, the very fiber of human communication, in both the extemper and the extemp activity.

## ***5. Cheating Poisons the Extemp***

Bottom line, the extemper is damaged when a speaker falsifies data. In academia as in life, integrity is oftentimes the most valuable attribute a person can possess. If that is lost, your respect in the forensics community will be lost as well.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Paragraph adapted from The Meadows School, Speech & Debate Team Policy Handbook, 2005-2006, URL: <http://www.tmsdebate.org/main/forensics/guidelines.htm#04Ethics>

## **When You Suspect Cheating**

Sometimes the most upright competitors will have ethical lapses and attempt to bring down those who are known for their integrity. If you suspect cheating, resist the impetus to make a public accusation. The odds are that you are mistaken, and a hasty denunciation or gratuitous display of indignant firepower can quickly ruin reputations, spark resentment, stir up gossip, and ruin friendships. Start by privately consulting your parent or coach about what you saw. Explain in detail what you found incriminating and honestly answer the questions your parent and coach will have about the situation. Once you have apprised them of the facts and explained your concern, you can relax and let them worry about it.

Remember that gossip about a charge is often just as destructive to relationships and reputations as a public accusation during an awards ceremony, and that it is better to stay silent about a rumor than to pass it along. After the accusation has been laid to rest, do not bring it up again. How would you feel if you were wrongly accused of cheating and had to combat a whisper war to clear your name?

Coaches and parents: If you feel the accusation has merit, consult the parent or coach of the offending student. Relay the information your student passed on and ask to speak with the suspected cheater about the evidence. Again, discretion is important. This conversation should be private and its contents confidential.

## **How to Answer a Charge**

If you have been wrongfully accused of cheating, be as transparent as possible. Try not to feel threatened by or defensive about the accusation, but be helpful to the coaches involved as they attempt to sort it out. Volunteer your note card or speech notes and any file involved in the speech for examination. Be honest and try to not be indignant. The calmer and more helpful you are, the faster this unpleasant issue will be resolved.

If you did cheat, come clean as quickly and completely as possible. Lies have a way of festering and growing and a simple denial can quickly turn into a tree of deceit. The protected environment of a speech tournament is a much better place to learn your lesson than the “real world.” Admit



your error, accept the consequences and determine to change your ways. You will become a better person for it, will gain self-respect and, likely, will gain the respect of others in the process.

Remember, how you act – whether in an extemp round, when walking your dog or getting a haircut – represents not only you, but also your family, club, league and faith. Your behavior defines who you are and how you are perceived. If you cheat, the reputation of all with whom you associate will be tarnished.

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**Our integrity sells for little, but it is worth a lot. Do not let yourself go for cheap.**

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If you act in a manner that you would never be ashamed to own up to and acknowledge, you will have nothing to worry about. Now, let's get busy mastering the strategies that will make you a champion extemper!



# CHAPTER 2

## The Rules

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*“Play by the rules, but be ferocious.” ~Phil Knight, founder of Nike*

*Extemporaneous* means “carried out or performed with little or no preparation” or “prepared in advance but delivered without notes or text.” In league competition, extemporaneous speaking “is a limited preparation event where the speaker is given a limited amount of time to prepare a speech on a current event topic.”<sup>4</sup>

The National Christian Forensics and Communications Association (NCFCA) began offering extemp as a competitive event in 2001 and laid out a strict set of rules that all league-sanctioned tournaments must follow. These rules are subject to change, but are generally revised every two years. The rules listed below (in bold) were released October 2007. Each rule is followed with my clarification or explanation:

**The speech must be an original work prepared during the designated prep time.**

While the actual speech must be constructed during the preparation period, speakers may bring quotation books, dictionaries and just about any non-electronic item with them.

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<sup>4</sup> Dictionary definition of Extemporaneous; The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition Copyright © 2004, 2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Published by Houghton Mifflin Company. All rights reserved. URL: <http://www.answers.com/Extemporaneous&r=67>. Accessed 1/9/08.

**Speakers will report to the Extemp Prep room at their designated time to choose their topic. Students have 30 minutes from their assigned prep time until their scheduled speaking time.**

Each preparation and speaking period is referred to as a “round.” Speakers are listed in order of speaking and are not allowed to alter their position in line. An extemp proctor hands out the topics and ensures appropriate conduct in the prep room. Time starts every 10 minutes from the beginning of the round to allow judges time to fill out their ballots (the speeches are only 7 minutes long). If a speaker is not present when his draw is scheduled to occur, the time starts or continues without him.

Each speaker receives a list of 3 topics. No two speakers in the same room should receive the same topics. The same speaker (e.g., speaker #3) in *each* extemp room is to receive the same set of topic choices.<sup>5</sup>

**Speakers may refer to published books, magazines, newspaper articles, and other written sources during prep time. They may make notes on a 3x5 card to insure they have accurate information to use in citing sources they will use in their speech.**

Magazine articles may be cut out and filed for ease in retrieval. A 3 x 5 card is allowed, but is not necessary or mandatory. Strategies discussed later in the book will be given to master control of the speech with or without the 3x5 card. Whether a note card is used or not, speakers should write all sources down to maintain credibility.

**Computers may not be used during prep time. Speakers may not bring prepared speech outlines into the prep room nor ask for prep help or advice from anyone.**

Computers are prohibited in the prep room. It may be tempting—especially if some of your clubmates are in the prep room with you—to ask for help or advice. Such fraternizing is not allowed and could be cause for disqualification. Your prep time is *your* prep time, not anyone else’s.

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<sup>5</sup> NCFCA Extemporaneous Rules, revised 10/04, URL:  
[http://exp.etelos.com/ruf/RU1\\_F072505154523\\_Ext\\_Docs\\_03-05.pdf](http://exp.etelos.com/ruf/RU1_F072505154523_Ext_Docs_03-05.pdf), Accessed 6/21/06

**Extemporaneous speakers may not come and go to and from the Extemp Prep room.**

The proctor calls off the times, telling speakers when they have 20, 10 and 5 minutes left. As prep time nears its conclusion, speakers are allowed to leave for their rooms.

**All individual and club boxes must be labeled. Speakers are not allowed to use another club or individual's box without the written permission of the coach of that club or the parent of the individual involved.**

This is very important. Club boxes are just that. Unless a club wishes to share with another and the parents and coaches of all involved students agree in writing, file sharing cannot occur. If written consent is obtained, be sure to bring proof of it with you to the Extemp Prep room and be able to show the sharing agreement to the proctor or tournament director if asked.

**Topics are posed as questions which refer to events that have occurred during the past 90 days. Topics are categorized as either foreign or domestic and rounds should alternate between these two categories. Tournaments may add a separate, discretionary category to include all economic questions.**

With the exception of some outrounds (semi-finals and finals), all the questions in a particular round are domestic (dealing exclusively with the United States), foreign (dealing exclusively with international topics) or economic (dealing exclusively with economic issues, foreign and domestic). The third or semi-final round in a tournament is usually an economic round.

**A clock or other timepiece is to be visible to the speaker during prep time.**

This rule is more for the proctor than for the competitor. While the prep room proctor has jurisdiction over the timepiece, he or she should have it out and ticking away during the prep time.

**Unused preparation time may not be added to the speaking time.**

Extempers may think that finishing early will gain them speaking time. This is not the case. Later in the book you will learn how to maximize the 30 minutes of preparation time you are allotted. Experienced extempers know that this half-hour is short, and getting done early is more a sign of an antsy beginner than a polished pro.

**Speakers must adhere to and answer the question posed in the topic they have chosen and must state the posed question for the judge's benefit early in their speech. Failure to do so will result in a penalty drop of 1 rank.**

You are allowed to take your question from the prep room to the competition room. To avoid a one-rank penalty, either read or recite the question to your judges toward the beginning of your speech.

**Props, audiovisuals, or gratuitous vulgarity are not allowed.**

As with all speaking events other than Expository, no visual stimulus other than what the speaker wears on his person is allowed. The extemp speech is made up on the spot, but vulgarity is stepping over the line into indecency and rudeness and will not be tolerated.

**Speakers may not listen to other Extemporaneous speakers before speaking themselves. They may remain in the room after giving their speech.**

Extempers are not allowed to enter the room early and listen to the other competitors. However, they are allowed to watch competitors following their own speech. If speakers are not entered in another speech event, I recommend they take advantage of the opportunity to view other extempers at the tournament. You will likely learn a thing or two to make you a better competitor.

**The head judge in each room is to have the list of topics being used in the round.**

The judges know all the topics that are available to the speakers. If a speaker picks the easiest one available, judges will be aware of that information.

**Students may express opinions, which are contrary to those of the judge. Each speech should be evaluated on the quality of the analysis and presentation, not the opinions presented.**

This rule (a new rule released for the 2007-2008 competitive year) is important for competitors to recognize. Judges are encouraged to leave their personal biases aside when they judge a round. The result is not that extempers are free to alienate the judge (doing so would definitely be a losing strategy); they are instead encouraged to step into challenging and controversial viewpoints. The judge should not penalize for ideas that are off the beaten path, as long as they are not vulgar and are presented in a respectful manner.

**Time limits: 30-minute preparation time; 7-minute maximum speaking time. There is no minimum time.**





# The Extemp Lifestyle

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The well-performed extemporaneous speech takes much longer to prepare than the thirty minutes allowed in the rules. While this half-hour represents the time actually spent writing a speech, it is token in comparison to the preparation necessary to gather the needed background knowledge and gain a comfortable familiarity with current events.

Extemp rules stipulate that questions are based on current events from the previous 90 days. But

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**News always has a much earlier foundation than the three-month window.**

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The No Child Left Behind Act, it could be argued, was a current event back in 2001 and early 2002, but questions posed for the next decade will require an understanding of educational accountability programs and a fluency about the landmark federal law. The No Child Left Behind Act may not be a "current event" anymore but, as schools try to meet the law's standards and its effectiveness is weighed against additional legislation, President Bush's education reforms remain integral to informing savvy analysis.

No one wants to spend hours reading dry history reports about obscure corners of the earth or digging through news archives to find a piece on minute and narrow topics. So how does the extemper find insightful and

relevant information without devoting weeks to the pursuit of fruitless and frustrating leads?

There are three keys to the extemp lifestyle...

## 1. Read Regularly

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We must face the facts. Some news can be boring. When George Bernanke tells Bloomberg News about a one-third of one percent increase in the interest rate, the average high school student doesn't give a Yahoo! When Turkey engages in yet another round of talks with the European Union seeking inclusion, many yawn.

Other news stories will grasp and hold your interest. Whether it is the sports page that captivates you, the entertainment stories that keep you up at night or the politics section that best holds your gaze, you, like everyone else, are curious about something.

### **Extemp Reading Should Be an Expansion of Your Current News Reading Habits**

If you open the paper once a week to check the football scores, flip to the front page first to catch an article or two. If you read a humor blog, bookmark a respected politics page and keep tabs on it, too. An extemper should, on a regular basis, draw an article or two from every major area of current affairs: Political, Economic, Security, Technology, Health, Education, Society and Foreign.

### **Do Not Avoid the “Boring” Stories**

Uninteresting information is often couched in readily digestible form. The only challenge is locating it. Editorials usually do a rapid review of relevant information before presenting an opinion. For example, a dry report about the Federal Reserve's responses to market conditions and recent changes to monetary policy is made interesting and digestible by economic opinion editorials that give perspective and depth to the Fed's dry numbers. This pre-chewed and easily absorbable news format is a great way to settle into regular news reading and avoid the boredom of raw data.

The Wall Street Journal has an excellent opinion editorial section, although most articles are made available for a fee. Less expensive alternatives are the editorial sections of The Economist, Forbes Magazine and Bloomberg News, all of which are available online and regularly offer superb analysis.

## **Be Reading Regularly at Least 90 Days Prior to the Tournament**

If your first extemp meet is in early December, be sure to begin your reading regimen by early September. This increases the probability that you will have at least heard of the questions you are asked in competition.

### ***Keep a News Diary***

One of the methods I found helpful when trying to keep up with the news is to keep a news journal or diary. Journal entries consist of simple thoughts about whatever is happening in the world, from a prediction to an interesting fact or a unique sounding name. The purpose of the diary is to help the extemper remember key news events and give some perspective to world affairs. Just as a diary about life allows the writer to go back and read thoughts that would otherwise be obscured by time, a news journal allows the extemper to see what he was thinking back when the news first broke.

At different points in my career I used a dedicated spiral bound notebook or a manila envelope containing poorly organized scraps of paper. The point is to have a hard copy of thoughts in an easy-to-jot-down format.

If you are interested in keeping a news diary, create an entry every couple of days with your thoughts on whatever news you have read recently. Your entries do not need to be news broadcasts with the day's affairs summarized in journal form, but they should incorporate anything *you* thought interesting or memorable. Do not worry about writing down the closing NASDAQ listing or other objective facts, but if you are worried about the stock market and think it might be headed for rocky ground in the future, tell your journal. These subjective elements are contained only in your mind and are terribly fleeting.

Use your diary before tournaments and club meetings to refresh your memory on all your brilliant analysis so you can share it with judges and friends.

### ***Use an RSS Feed***

Really Simple Syndication (RSS) is a great tool in the hands of an extemper. News comes at you quickly and it can take a lot of work to keep up on world affairs, especially with a schedule that leaves little time for idle news surfing. Into this tepid environment come RSS feeds, a godsend technological advance that allows computer users to set up regular feeds from their favorite news sources.

Most websites, especially those with regularly updated content like a news page, will have a “Subscribe Here” button. To set up your feeds, get an aggregator like Google Desktop Search or sign up with a website like Bloglines.com or Google Reader (reader.google.com). Aggregators tend to be very user friendly and will walk you through any difficulties.

Whenever you want to read the news, you can check your aggregator and read all the new content.

## **There Is No Optimum News Reading Schedule**

Extemp is a lifestyle, and we all have our own unique approach to preparation. No prep strategy is universally superior and you should experiment to find what works best for you. When I was competing, I tried to read the news for at least one hour 4-6 days a week. That was a minimum, but it did offer a sound foundation and enough general information to “cover the bases” without a great deal of pain.

## **2. Read for Relevance**

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While opening the newspaper and skimming the headlines may be fun and, if conducted in a moving car, can induce feelings of queasiness, it generally is not productive. How should the successful extemper read the news? *Strategically!*

The goal of extemp reading is comprehension and recall.

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**News tidbits should go into the eyes or ears—and stay in the head a while—before exiting the mouth.**

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In order to accomplish this, the eyes and ears need to focus on the most important parts of the article and skim through the unimportant parts. Is that easy to say but hard to do? How can you find relevant information?

Most journalists today (about 70% of wire reporters) craft their news articles in what is called the inverted pyramid format. The inverted pyramid is a phrase used to describe how information is organized within an article. The main facts of the story are delivered in the first sentence in a clear and unvarnished style called a “lead.” Less important facts come next, with the least important and expendable facts at the end. Generally, the first three paragraphs of a news article deliver all the relevant details while the analysis, superfluous data and color information are added further down.

Take, for instance, the following Reuters News article describing a decision by Getty Images to put itself up for sale dated January 21, 2008:

NEW YORK (Reuters) - Getty Images Inc, the world's biggest supplier of pictures and video to media and advertising companies, has put itself on the auction block and could fetch more than \$1.5 billion, The New York Times reported on Monday.

The firm hired Goldman Sachs Group Inc. to advise it on a potential sale, according to the report, which cited people briefed on the situation.

The company has attracted interest from several buyers, mostly private equity firms, including Kohlberg Kravis Roberts, Bain Capital and others, and final bids are due by the end of the month, the Times said.<sup>6</sup>

The first three paragraphs answer all the journalists' questions (“who,” “when,” “where,” “what,” “why” and “how”) and give the reader all the relevant information. The rest of the article offers interesting details, but is really unnecessary if all you want to get out of the piece is its gist: Getty Images is up for purchase.

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<sup>6</sup> Reuters, Getty Images could fetch more than \$1.5 billion: report, January 21, 2008, URL: <http://www.reuters.com/article/businessNews/idUSN2131638420080121>, ACCESSED: January 21, 2008

In the above example, the writer goes on to explain that Getty is a publicly traded company, shares closed at just under \$22 before the weekend, and the company has a market capitalization of about \$1.3 billion. He then names key competitors, but there is nothing especially relevant to the fact that Getty Images is for sale.

This format is repeated regularly in most wire reports, such that the prepared extemper does not need to spend his time reading information that either has little application or will distract from the real “meat” of the article.

Try this yourself. Grab a newspaper or wire story online and see if the gist of the story is not given out in the first few paragraphs.

The inverted pyramid is not always adhered to in freer-flowing formats like weblogs, editorials, or investigative reports. While the last paragraph may occasionally contain relevant information, recognize that reading it usually will slow down your research, providing little substantive advantage.

## **Learn to Discern Important Data from Unimportant Data**

The more you read, the more you will separate the important from the unimportant. Important parts of articles typically include headlines, names, dates, statistics, memorable quips and quotations from relevant figures. Unimportant parts include analysis and quotations from analysts.

That is not to say that analysis does not have a place. Editorials and news blogs can be very insightful and are, at times, helpful in preparing for extemp. But as a speaker, it is *your* job to analyze, to interpret the available information and come to coherent conclusions on your own. It is difficult to recall statistics (i.e. the size of the federal budget deficit) if an AP writer’s journalistic analysis on the impact of tax cut proposals is echoing in your head instead of the cold numbers.

When you understand the way a news article is put together, you can read wisely.

## Develop Your Own Analysis

Think about the news you read. Do you think it accurately reflects what is happening in the world? Is there something you can learn from it? How should the world's leaders respond to the latest developments? Will the trends we see today continue or drop off in the near future?

As you read, try to answer these questions that can help you pull off a coherent analysis of a current event. Do not rely on commentators to analyze stories for you; consider the stories for yourself and develop your own opinions.

The simple fact that the person writing the analysis is an expert does not make the opinion gold. During the 2008 Presidential Election cycle, the conventional wisdom held that Barack Obama would win the New Hampshire primary. Obama had edged out Hillary Clinton in the Iowa caucuses and was polling extremely well leading into the Democratic Party's second major electoral showdown. Analysis of polling data from many qualified pundits created an expectation of success for the junior senator from Illinois, but when the results were announced, the junior senator from New York was the winner instead.

Sports columnists regularly miss the mark with their predictions, and economic analysts routinely issue forecasts that are not weighed out by later events. Why should the rest of the news world be any different?

As an extemper, run any analysis you read *through your own filters*. This is critical thinking. Consider the factual circumstances that drive the commentary and decide for yourself if the perspective is accurate. Even if you agree with the analyst, think the issues through for yourself.

## Remember to Enjoy the Process

One of the best ways extempers overcome the monotony of reading hundreds of articles is to become engrossed in the stories of the news. World events can be gripping tales of human success and misfortune. News articles often give captivating accounts of life-changing and earth-shattering events. It is difficult to read a piece on the AIDS epidemic, the immigration crisis or the War on Terror without getting drawn in.

All people care, to some extent, about what is going on in their world. When beginning a conversation with a stranger, we often gravitate to

common icebreakers such as the weather, movies and entertainment news items. These are all current events.

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**News waxes conversation's moustache.**

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As you read, remember you are not studying for a science exam. There will not be a test on the number of casualties in the Iraq war or the cost of the latest proposal from the President's desk. Just relax, read, think, and analyze.

### **3. Read Quality News**

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Where do you find quality news? The answer to this question is sought by both novices and experts. Beginning extempers are in the early stages of developing a reading list, and advanced competitors seek to improve their existing selections. Extempers are always on the lookout for the best news sources.

Of the myriad news formats, you will decide which work best for you. Some readers can easily digest newspaper and magazine articles while others prefer the in-depth analysis of think tanks and law reviews. The Internet is full of current-event discussion, but some individuals choose the accessibility and visual magnetism of TV news. Fortunately, news sources are as varied as the preferences of the extempers they must satisfy.

Below is a list of eleven news sources with a brief analysis on the quality of news from each one (the views presented by the sources below do not necessarily reflect those of the author):

#### **Newspapers and Periodicals**

Since the days of Benjamin Franklin, newspapers have been America's news source. From black and white newsprint to color copy, the medium has evolved and its readership grown older, but the newspaper survives to this day.

The newspaper is one of the simplest forms of news. Its close relative, the news magazine, is fairly similar but published less frequently, often



including as much entertainment as news. Both are well-respected media and their long American tradition makes them perfect extemp sources.

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**Most newspapers allow free access to unarchived stories via the Internet. Some require payment, others free membership.**

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*Beware the local newspaper*, whose content is dominated by items of local import (community projects, the county fair, high-school sports, etc.) that will never become the topics of an extemp question. Some papers from large metropolitan districts such as Los Angeles, Chicago or New York do prominently feature national news items, but you must usually be ready to filter out the local news. Tournaments will not have questions on local issues.

There are many different periodicals to choose from, but a few examples include Christian Science Monitor, Los Angeles Times, National Review, New York Times, Newsmax, Newsweek, Time magazine, US News and World Report, USA Today, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, Washington Times, Weekly Standard, and World Magazine.

#### **Newspaper & Periodical Websites**

[www.csmonitor.com](http://www.csmonitor.com)  
[www.latimes.com](http://www.latimes.com)  
[www.nationalreview.com](http://www.nationalreview.com)  
[www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)  
[www.newsmax.com](http://www.newsmax.com)  
[www.msnbc.msn.com/id/3032542/site/newsweek](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/3032542/site/newsweek)  
[www.time.com](http://www.time.com)  
[www.usnews.com/usnews/home.htm](http://www.usnews.com/usnews/home.htm)  
[www.usatoday.com](http://www.usatoday.com)  
[online.wsj.com/public/us](http://online.wsj.com/public/us)  
[www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com)  
[www.washtimes.com](http://www.washtimes.com)  
[www.weeklystandard.com](http://www.weeklystandard.com)  
[www.worldmag.com](http://www.worldmag.com)

## **Online News Aggregators**

With all the online news sources available, Web portals like Google and Yahoo! have online aggregators that rate news based on the popularity of a headline. They scour the Internet for news articles about particular news items and select the most popular articles to bring to the front. Google News ([news.google.com](http://news.google.com)), for instance, browses over 4,500 news sources

#### **News Aggregators**

[news.google.com](http://news.google.com)  
[news.yahoo.com](http://news.yahoo.com)  
[www.thenewsroom.com](http://www.thenewsroom.com)  
[www.newsknowledge.com](http://www.newsknowledge.com)  
[www.newsonfeeds.com](http://www.newsonfeeds.com)

continuously to deliver a passel of fully searchable, up-to-the-minute headlines. Free to users is the ability to subscribe to Google E-News where you can receive a list of news articles published daily on a particular topic.

Google's diversity is stunning. Just about any news source that keeps its articles online is available through this aggregator. Some local newspapers even find their way onto the page. Yahoo! Newsindex ([news.yahoo.com](http://news.yahoo.com)) is somewhat more limited.

Most aggregated articles (like Yahoo! and Google) are available for free; some require a paid or free membership.

## Think Tanks and Public Policy Institutes

Though chiefly known for their policy advising, think tanks often provide expert analysis on current events. While they can be tedious – education does not always breed brevity – they put forth opinions that are well-qualified and well-received by extempers. Most relevant publications are available online, through periodical dispatches and reviews. Refrain from purchasing books of policy analysis for, while their content is often significant, it is rarely current enough for extemp.

### Think Tanks and Public Policy

The Brookings Institution

([www.brookings.edu](http://www.brookings.edu))

Heritage Foundation ([www.heritage.org](http://www.heritage.org))

The Cato Institute ([www.cato.org](http://www.cato.org))

National Center for Policy Analysis

([www.ncpa.org](http://www.ncpa.org)).

## Academic Sources

Perhaps the most credible, yet most technical news sources come from university publications. Law reviews and academic journals can lend in-depth analysis to just about any issue and are widely respected. Drafted by academics with graduate-level degrees and by degree candidates, these publications shed light on obscure studies and give an extemp speaker an edge in the evidence department.

Subscription services and free indexes offer searchable databases of current articles. While the free indexes are, of course, free, they are typically more limited than the larger databases. Academic sources can be found in the sidebar. Though they are usually limited to their specific

university or academic field, they still have a wealth of research material for extempers.

If you have access to Lexis Nexis, you can also utilize this subscription service's news search function to download advertisement-free articles from all major print publications. Most collegiate teams print from Lexis Nexis exclusively, but the service is generally too cost prohibitive for use at the high school level. If you are fortunate enough to have this resource, use it before tournaments to print articles as discussed in the next chapter.

## Public Policy Advocates

Some non-periodical, published materials make excellent extemp resources. Public policy advocates generally publish nonfiction work detailing changes they wish to see implemented or building up an aspect of politics, law, culture or philosophy. In doing so, authors often refer to current affairs.

Books published by public policy advocates are a poor choice for analysis of the most recent world events because they can only comment on events that took place months or years before your next tournament, but they give easy-to-read, in-depth, and comprehensive views and analysis of a particular subject that may prove invaluable to an extemper.

Due to the polarized nature of some public-policy advocates, use caution when citing them in the round. While some of these advocates are definitely profitable to read, they can often alienate a judge who otherwise could be persuaded to the same point of view using less biased sources. For example, I personally enjoyed the bestselling nonfiction by David Limbaugh *Persecution: How Liberals War Against Christians* and felt Ann Coulter's *Treason* a compelling read. However, I would think twice before quoting either of these authors in a speech because of how some people are turned off by opinions they view as polarizing. Consider how

### Subscription Services

ProQuest ([www.proquest.com](http://www.proquest.com))  
LexisNexis ([www.lexisnexis.com](http://www.lexisnexis.com))  
JSTOR ([www.jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org))

### Free Indexes and Academic Sources

Google Scholar ([scholar.google.com](http://scholar.google.com))  
American University Journal of Gender,  
Social Policy & the Law  
([www.wcl.american.edu/journal/genderlaw](http://www.wcl.american.edu/journal/genderlaw))  
Columbia Law Review  
([www.columbia-lawreview.org](http://www.columbia-lawreview.org))  
The New York University Journal of  
International Law and Politics  
([www.law.nyu.edu/journals/jilp](http://www.law.nyu.edu/journals/jilp))  
The New England Journal of Medicine  
([content.nejm.org](http://content.nejm.org))

conservative audiences would react to James Carville or Michael Moore; liberal audiences would react similarly to Limbaugh or Coulter. Extempers must always be aware of the sensibilities of their audience before incorporating ideas from individuals whose names engender negative reactions.

## Blogs

Web logs – or “blogs” for short – are regularly updated online journals about a myriad of subjects. They can be maintained by one or several contributors and can have a faithful readership. Most blogs allow for public comment and encourage discussion around posted articles.

Several blog search engines exist that allow an extemper to locate articles about a specific subject. Google Blog Search ([blogsearch.google.com](http://blogsearch.google.com)) and Technorati ([www.technorati.com](http://www.technorati.com)) are good places to start.

Blogs are excellent to read because of their speedy reporting and original analysis. No matter what you care about, there is a blog for you. Blogs are also free and readily accessible. Beware, however, that a blog is only as good as the writer who publishes it. Watch out for obscene or crude commentary and unchecked inaccuracies.

While blogs have gained much ground with credibility in the past couple of years, some judges will be wary of blogs. The reality still remains: *anyone* can write a blog. It is wise for extempers to explain the author’s credentials to justify the quotation.

At this early stage in the history and development of blogging news, it would also be unwise to base a speech exclusively on blog sources. Some mainstream news sources are needed as anchors.

### Popular Current Event Blogs

DailyKos ([www.dailykos.com](http://www.dailykos.com))  
 Democratic Underground  
     ([www.democraticunderground.com](http://www.democraticunderground.com))  
 Drudge Report ([www.drudgereport.com](http://www.drudgereport.com))  
 JURIST ([jurist.law.pitt.edu/paperchase](http://jurist.law.pitt.edu/paperchase))  
 Little Green Footballs  
     ([www.littlegreenfootballs.com/weblog/weblog.php](http://www.littlegreenfootballs.com/weblog/weblog.php))  
 Michelle Malkin ([michellemalkin.com](http://michellemalkin.com))  
 Powerline ([powerlineblog.com](http://powerlineblog.com))  
 SCOTUSblog  
     ([www.scotusblog.com/movabletype](http://www.scotusblog.com/movabletype))  
 The Smoking Gun  
     ([www.thesmokinggun.com](http://www.thesmokinggun.com))  
 Thought Mechanics  
     ([www.thoughtmechanics.com](http://www.thoughtmechanics.com))  
 Volokh Conspiracy ([volokh.com](http://volokh.com))

## TV News

Like local newspapers, local television has about zero value to an extemper. National television news is little better. It is one of the least-efficient ways of absorbing news. Speakers have better things to do than slumber through fifteen minutes of advertisements, and most TV news has little that cannot be found elsewhere.

The main utility of this format is news heard the day of a tournament. Some extempers like to watch a news program in the morning while they eat breakfast or dress. While it serves a function in this limited role, TV news is at best a short-term fix, not a sustainable strategy.

As a quoted source, TV news has more credibility among the elderly population and is weighed similarly to a newspaper.

### TV News Websites

ABC News ([absnews.go.com](http://absnews.go.com))  
 CBS News ([cbsnews.com](http://cbsnews.com))  
 CNN Headline News ([www.cnn.com/hln](http://www.cnn.com/hln))  
 Fox News ([foxnews.com](http://foxnews.com))  
 MSNBC ([msnbc.msn.com](http://msnbc.msn.com))

## Newsires

Newsires or wire reports are independently constructed news stories that are sold to newspapers for republication. Journalists from these organizations are generally some of the first to report on an incident and are dependable (with some recent, scandalous exceptions) for their accurate, fact-filled accounts.

As a building block of modern news, wire stories are usually available through newspapers, although some (like US Newswire) can be found through their webpage ([releases.usnewswire.com](http://releases.usnewswire.com)).

Newsires are neither risky nor outstanding extemp sources. Judges are aware of them and few have reason to doubt their veracity.

### Newsires

Agence France Press  
 ([www.afp.com/english/home](http://www.afp.com/english/home))  
 Associated Press ([www.ap.org](http://www.ap.org))  
 Reuters ([www.reuters.com](http://www.reuters.com))  
 United Press International ([www.upi.com](http://www.upi.com))  
 US Newswire ([releases.usnewswire.com](http://releases.usnewswire.com))

## Congressional Quarterly

This is a news publication that deserves a category all its own. Congressional Quarterly is the nation's leading source for information from Capitol Hill. All the information anyone could desire about House and Senate Bills, transcripts of Congressional debates, and any relevant news about politics in the nation's capitol are found in this extemp goldmine.

Most judges are familiar with this source and many will boost the evidence marks of extempers who cite it.

Congressional Quarterly is a subscription-only publication and rates for the entire CQ service can be exorbitant. CQ does, however, break down its product line into several valuable publications. Some are available online, others through a periodic magazine.

### Congressional Quarterly ([www.cq.com](http://www.cq.com))

#### Product Line:

- CQ Weekly
- CQ Today
- CQ House Action Reports
- CQ Green Sheets
- CQ Homeland Security
- CQ Budget Tracker
- CQ Health Beat

## Radio Commentary

*Read can mean listen.* The radio dial is full of current events analysis in the form of talk radio. Commentators usually maintain a caller-dependent news show that analyzes and criticizes news items. Listening to talk radio is a great way to challenge your views and find support for what you already believe. Radio is also nice because it's easy to multi-task over it, and radio programs can sometimes be heard online.

Also included in this category are podcasts, or audio clips produced and distributed over the Internet. Think tanks such as the Cato Institute publish respected analysis and current events discussion in easily downloadable .mp3 format. Many software programs can be instructed to

### Radio Commentators

- Al Franken ([airamericaradio.com](http://airamericaradio.com))
- Glenn Beck ([glennbeck.com](http://glennbeck.com))
- Hugh Hewitt ([hughhewitt.com](http://hughhewitt.com))
- Laura Ingraham ([lauraingraham.com](http://lauraingraham.com))
- Michael Savage ([michaelsavage.com](http://michaelsavage.com))
- Rush Limbaugh ([rushlimbaugh.com](http://rushlimbaugh.com))
- Rusty Humphreys ([talktorusty.com](http://talktorusty.com))
- Tammy Bruce ([tammybruce.com](http://tammybruce.com))
- Sean Hannity ([hannity.com](http://hannity.com))

put these periodic sound clips into a podcast folder or your personal music player. Make a habit of catching a regular news podcast to help stay up with current events.

A word of caution: some radio personalities are bombastic and their caustic approach turns some listeners away. Just because you like a spittle flying analyst doesn't mean your judge will. Feel free to repeat the substance of what you hear on the radio, if it has merit, but avoid citing commentators by name when you speak, especially if the personality is controversial.

## Current-Event Humorists

Humor is a great way to influence an audience. Because of the way they sum up an issue and subtly make a point, jokes are a very powerful medium for self-expression and persuasion. A good joke can tear down tension or highlight a point. It is always nice to have a good humorous quip on hand.

While they can become crude in their enthusiasm to be funny, current-event humorists often hilariously sum up world events with repeatable and witty quips. Staying up late to watch these jokers is not necessary; the Newsmax webpage has a collection of recent jokes and makes them available for free. The sidebar has this and other current events humorists' websites. ([newsmax.com/liners.shtml](http://newsmax.com/liners.shtml)).

Some caution is warranted when reading any humorist, including current-event comedians. The standard for what is funny is slowly eroding to the lowest common denominator. Approach this news source with prudence and discernment, and make sure you abide ethically.

### Current Events Humorists

Newsmax One-liners

([newsmax.com/liners.shtml](http://newsmax.com/liners.shtml))

David Letterman

([www.cbs.com/latenight/lateshow](http://www.cbs.com/latenight/lateshow))

Jay Leno

([www.nbc.com/The\\_Tonight\\_Show\\_with\\_Jay\\_Leno](http://www.nbc.com/The_Tonight_Show_with_Jay_Leno))

Jon Stewart

([www.comedycentral.com/shows/the\\_daily\\_show/index.jhtml](http://www.comedycentral.com/shows/the_daily_show/index.jhtml))

## Conclusion

No matter what the competitive venue is, your lifestyle should reflect a commitment to excellence through preparation.

My former track coach tells the story of his first high school track meet as a freshman, before he had learned the value of preparation and established a lifestyle that denied procrastination. The competition had been scheduled months in advance and was heavily anticipated by a man who had a natural penchant for moving quickly and running strategically. My coach visited the gym occasionally and ran some at his local track, but he never trained very seriously nor patterned a lifestyle conducive to athletic success. When the week of the meet arrived, my coach was still doing little to prepare. It was not until the day before the competition that he went out to the track and started running for athletic conditioning. That afternoon he ran for tempo and distance and put in a workout several times more difficult than anything he had endured during his previous lax "training."

The next day my coach was so sore he could barely get out of bed, and he fared little better on the track. His times were, by his own admission, awful. He completely failed to meet his competitive goals. From that day forward, my coach vowed to always strive to make his lifestyle reflect his desire to win.

I can still remember the warm spring afternoon after practice when coach recounted this story to his collegiate athletes. He advised that good preparation starts with the "eye of the tiger," or will to win, that puts its sights on the prize and does everything possible to get into position for victory. For him the eye of the tiger was reflected in coming to practice on time every time and to treat every practice as a meet.

---

**For the extemper, the eye of the tiger is  
demonstrated by living a lifestyle that contributes  
to preparation and success.**

---

Even if you are endowed with an understanding of current events that is superior to that of your competition, you will have to work to stay informed about world affairs. A microchip with the day's news has yet to be developed and even if it were commercially available, I would not



advise using one. *Sans silicon*, a lifestyle is the only way to accumulate an understanding of the news.

Others may wait until the last possible 30 minutes to prepare their speeches, but you can begin right now by turning to your favorite news source. Extempers, to your marks, get set, go!

# Training and Reinforcement

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## Exercises

1. Make a list of three current events news sources that you are willing to read regularly. Vary the sources when possible. Pick a newspaper, a news magazine and a blog or another variety-filled combination. Commit to reading two articles from each source every day.
2. Make a prediction. Write down a current event you see as inevitable given your experience. Who will win the Presidential election? What will happen to the stock market in the next month? Will the FTAA be signed in the next year? Your prediction can be something outlandish and crazy or it can be a forecast shared by experts. Just be sure you are able to defend it. For fun, compare predictions with your fellow extempers.

## Key Concepts

1. Understand the foundation of news events.
2. Extemp reading should be an expansion of your current experience with current events.
3. Do not shy away from “boring” articles.
4. Read news articles for the gist, not the fluff.

## Questions

1. What kind of news source generally offers quality analysis, but is of suspect reputation with many judges?
2. Which of the news sources listed in this chapter are used predominantly by the Baby Boomer generation? What about the WW2 generation? Do these differences impact how we communicate about current events? If so, how?
3. How can you integrate more news into your daily routine?
4. Which news source provides the best political commentary? Economic analysis? Foreign affairs discourse?

5. Are newswire reporters successful at keeping opinion and agenda out of their writing?



# CHAPTER 4

## The Extemp's Research

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*"Somewhere he is researching, while you are not, and when you meet, he will win."*  
~Unknown

In the last chapter we examined how to read the news on a regular basis, how to absorb current events, and how to live the extemp lifestyle. We will now look at how to find, print, and file articles before an extemp tournament.

Unlike the reading needed to develop a background understanding of world affairs, extemp research is more a job for your printer than your grey matter. Essential requirements include developing a list of topics to investigate, locating several articles per subject area, and storing those articles in an easily retrievable format or fashion.

There are three keys...

### 1. Prepare a Topic List

---

Whatever quaint image you may have had of an extemper lovingly scissor snipping articles from print periodicals and stowing away these unwieldy scraps in a tenderly organized box must now be put aside. Those bits of recycled newsprint that our scissors turn into ugly origami are unmanageable, useless, and a waste of precious time. Paper cuts and ink stains were for extempers twenty years ago; today we use computers and printers.

---

**Before turning the Library of Congress to hard copy, develop a plan.**

---

You should know every topic area you want to print before you ever press Ctrl + P (Command + P on a Mac) and begin the tree carnage. To do this, you need to decide which current event questions will most likely be asked at the tournament. You need to predict what questions will be asked so you can have the necessary articles to give a well-reasoned and evidenced speech. Sound hard?

Like most tasks,

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**Creating topic lists is easiest when broken down into separate and smaller tasks.**

---

One week before the tournament, write down every current event you can name. No need to do it systematically, just think of something and write it down. If you read an article a week earlier about a new senate proposal, scribble a notation on your list. If you heard about a foreign crisis, add that as well. Jot down a couple of words per topic (i.e. the border fence could be written as “Immigration – Fence” and steroid use in Major League Baseball could be written as “MLB – Steroids” in shorthand) and do not worry about how much you know about a particular issue or whether you are accurately describing it. Just write.

Your list might look something like this:

- GOP – 2008
- Stock Market
- Lethal injection
- Search Engines
- Obesity
- College Tuition
- NBA playoffs
- Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
- Israel/Palestine
- Putin – Iran
- Sudan – Darfur
- Kyoto Protocol

Now go online. Using an Internet news page, fill in your list with any headlines you missed. There are many news pages that can help you with this leg of Topic-List preparation, but my favorite is Google News ([news.google.com](http://news.google.com)).

As already mentioned, Google News organizes topics by the number of articles published. A story that has 5,000 articles will be listed above one with only 3,000. Because of this ingrained rating system, topics listed by Google will have a great chance of being chosen for questions by the tournament topic writer.

When your list is complete, you should have at least five topics per category in the following groupings:

- Domestic – Security
- Domestic – Education
- Domestic – Health
- Domestic – Society
- Foreign – Europe
- Foreign – Africa
- Foreign – South America
- Foreign – Global Issues.

You should have at least ten topics per category in the following groups:

- Domestic – Politics
- Domestic – Economy
- Domestic – Technology
- Foreign – Asia
- Foreign – Middle East.

This standard is rough and no tournament is stereotypical; some meets will be dominated by domestic security news while others will never feature a question in that category. You will have to develop your own sense for what topics are common. It is, however, very rare to not have at least as many topics as listed above.

---

**The important thing is to write down every area of news you can call to mind...and then some.**

---

When you feel you have exhausted the Internet's news sources, return to brainstorming. When that runs dry, check the web again. There will be a powerful temptation to give up early and decide that whatever list you put together is "good enough." Please keep working until you have a sufficient list.

When you are finished you should have a file that looks something like this:

**DOMESTIC – POLITICS**

Upcoming National Elections – Fundraising  
 Upcoming National Elections – GOP  
 Upcoming National Elections – Democratic Party  
 Hillary Clinton  
 Political Ethics  
 Current President – Approval Ratings  
 Former President – Legacy  
 Electoral College  
 Tax Reform  
 Court Appointments – Federal  
 Court Appointments – State  
 Catastrophe Preparedness

**DOMESTIC – ECONOMY**

Consumer Spending  
 Consumer Confidence  
 Trade Deficit  
 Job Gain/Loss  
 Interest Rates  
 Mortgage Rates  
 Real Estate Bubble/Cooling Housing Market  
 The Fed  
 Spending Deficit  
 Hybrid Cars/Car Sales  
 Oil Prices/Gasoline Prices/Price Fixing  
 Car Sales  
 Social Security  
 Stock Market



**DOMESTIC – SECURITY**

Airport Security  
Geneva Convention  
Military Recruitment Numbers  
Don't Ask Don't Tell  
Patriot Act  
Lethal Injection/Death Penalty  
Overseas Deployment

**DOMESTIC – TECHNOLOGY**

Search Engines – Innovation  
Search Engines – Censorship  
Wikipedia  
Microsoft – Windows Vista  
Microsoft – Antitrust Suits  
Open Source  
Domain names/ICANN  
Nintendo wii  
Xbox v. PS3  
NASA  
Google

**DOMESTIC – HEALTH**

Canadian Drugs  
Tort Reform  
Stem Cell Research  
Health Care – Insurance Premiums  
Health Care – Seniors  
Second Hand Smoke  
Obesity  
Cancer  
Smoking

**DOMESTIC – EDUCATION**

No Child Left Behind  
College Tuition  
Student Loans  
Home Schooling  
Test Scores

**DOMESTIC – SOCIETY**

Immigration  
Homosexual Marriage  
Illegal Music Downloading  
Death Penalty  
War on Drugs  
MPAA Movie Ratings  
MPAA Movie Ratings – latest blockbuster  
Sports Playoffs (NBA, MLB, NFL)

**FOREIGN – ASIA**

China – Economy  
China – Freedom  
India – Economy  
Dollar v. Yuan  
Dollar v. Yen  
Japan-- Economy  
North Korea – Proliferation  
North Korea – Sanctions  
North Korea - Relations with Russia, China, Japan, USA  
South Korea – Hwang Wu Suk  
Thailand – IMF Aid  
Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

**FOREIGN – MIDEAST**

ME Democracy  
Israel/Palestine  
Kashmir  
Iran – Proliferation  
Iran – Israel  
Syria / Hezbollah  
Afghanistan  
Pakistan

**FOREIGN – EUROPE**

Serbia and Montenegro  
Euro vs. Dollar  
European Union  
France – President

EU – Invitations  
EU – Constitution  
Putin – The West  
Germany  
Belarus  
Britain – Minimum Wage  
Pope Benedict XVI

**FOREIGN – AFRICA**

Zimbabwe – Unrest  
Sudan, Darfur  
African Debt  
South Africa – Oil for Food  
South Africa – Elections  
South Africa – Economy  
Uganda – Elections / AIDS  
Tanzania – Child Hunger

**FOREIGN – SOUTH AMERICA**

Argentina – Debt / IMF  
Argentina – Foot and Mouth  
Venezuela – Oil  
Bolivia / United States Relations  
Mexico  
Brazil

**"GLOBAL ISSUES"**

United Nations  
Kyoto Protocol  
Globalization  
WTO  
International Criminal Court  
Global Warming  
HIV / AIDS  
Debt Relief  
Nuclear Power  
NATO

When writing the second edition of this book, I revised this list to remove topics that were no longer newsworthy. Topics will come and go from this list and by the time you read this it is likely that many of the above issues will have been resolved or become obsolete. This is the nature of extemp. You will have an approximately 3-month window of time to build your inventory of news items. After three months, your current event articles will likely be old news. Still, this list is a good starting point for your own research and a model from which to begin your own Topic List.

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**Creating a Topic List is as much an art as a science  
and you will need to practice to get a knack for it.**

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When you attend a tournament, save the questions you are asked and compare them to your research list. Did you accurately predict the questions? Did you miss an area or feel you inadequately covered a particular aspect? What would you do differently?

Try to use the same format for your Topic List from tournament to tournament, adjusting only the news items that are listed. This list may look daunting right now, but after you begin your work and start listing topics, it will become much easier. If recycled, your list will grow as the year goes on. At the first tournament, you may only have 60-80 topics, but as the season progresses, that number will continue to expand.

## **Common Topics**

Extempers quickly discover two things that make the academic event extremely challenging. First, there is really no way to know *for sure* what topics will appear at a tournament. Extempers must simply read diligently, build up their boxes, and enter into competition with the confidence that they have done the best they could. Second, as already mentioned, there is only a 3-month window of time when most news items remain current. A key for champion extempers is to find topic areas that will almost always be fair game. This is because of another reality of extemp:

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**As much as current events change, some tend to  
stay the same. Extempers must master these.**

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The following current events have regularly been in the news in the recent past and can be expected to remain prominent in the newspapers in the coming decades:

- Federal Spending / Taxation
- Consumer Confidence / Saving / Spending
- Trade Deficit
- Job Gain / Loss
- Interest Rates
- Stock Market
- College Tuition
- Obesity
- Health Care Costs
- Immigration
- Microsoft
- Google / Search Engines
- Israel / Palestine
- Kashmir
- United Nations
- Kyoto Protocol / Global Warming
- European Union
- HIV / AIDS
- Debt Relief

Almost every tournament will draw from the twenty topic areas above (6 Economic, 7 Domestic and 7 Foreign). Fully half of all questions will focus on one of these twenty areas, so make sure you are not neglecting them.

## 2. Print Recent Resources

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Rules stipulate that extemp topics must be culled from events of the last 90 days. In reality, though, tournament directors (or at least the person assigned to developing extemp questions) will do so within two weeks of the tournament date. Realizing this reveals a little secret that helps competitors better prepare for their upcoming tournament:

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**Most topic writers pick two or three publications from the last week from which to write their questions.**

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Some extemp leagues even announce that all topics are pulled from the latest issue of TIME, Newsweek and US News and World Report. While many consider that these publications give a balanced treatment of the latest news, they represent the last couple weeks, not the last 90 days.

Recent printing also ensures you can use your work. Remember that *judges appreciate recent evidence*. Citing articles from the week prior to the tournament is a good way to separate yourself from the rest on the field. It shows you were keeping up with the news all the way to the tournament.

Only print what you intend to use in a prep room in the near future. Do not spend months filling paper with old news. Countless trees made the ultimate sacrifice to help you prepare for your extemp rounds. Make sure your work counts for something and their sacrifice is not in vain.

[Note: An extemper would never be asked about an issue that has been resolved prior to the tournament. For example, a December tournament would never ask for predictions on a November vote even though the election was a current event that happened in the last 90 days.]

Begin printing as late as possible. Some speakers can begin printing a week prior to the tournament; others need two weeks to produce their lists. Be sure to give yourself enough time to finish, but when you cut your schedule, plan to secure the most recent articles possible.

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**Extemp is the one event where procrastination pays.**

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With your Topic List in shape and a subservient Internet connection, set to work turning online news articles into printed pages. Go down your Topic List in chronological order at whatever speed you can manage. If you want to spend two hours a day printing, you will need to plan on at least one week. If you want to turn printing into a full-time occupation, you may be able to accomplish all of the work in a couple of astounding days. Beware that this second option has unsolicited side effects.

To find news articles, use a news search engine like Google News, Lexis Nexis News search or Find Articles. You can also use a blog search engine such as Google Blog Search or Technorati. Type in your search query and, if possible, limit results to the most recent articles.

You may also want to visit specific news sites for articles. Refer to the previous chapter for these Web addresses.

As you research, develop a target goal of articles per topic area. This goal should reflect the number of sources you intend to quote per speech. A more advanced competitor should print 8-10 articles per topic; a beginning extemper might want to shoot for 5-7. Give some thought to this number as the difference between five and ten can add half again to the cost of your printing.

*Adhere to your target goal.* Once you have your eye set on a specific number, do not stop short because locating an article becomes difficult. By the same token, do not overshoot. As empowering as it feels to squirt out 40+ articles about an important current event, you will not use more than 8-10 articles in the prep room. Just as too few will leave you behind, too many will overwhelm.

## **Print Cheaply**

If you compete in a publicly funded league, you likely print off copies from your school's computer lab without having to think about costs. I competed in the NCFCA where my parents needed to pay for my own printing supplies. So, let me take some time to share with you some cost-saving techniques that will keep your expenses under control.

### ***Purchase in Bulk***

The "more-for-less" doctrine is alive and well in the paper industry. Office supply stores usually allow customers to buy several reams for more reasonable prices than the cost of smaller orders. The large box may be heavy, but the weight you lose lifting it will be more than offset by your pocketbook's gains.

***Get Recycled Products***

When choosing paper grade, find the lowest quality possible. You are not printing an heirloom and most of your printed articles will only be used for a week or so anyway. Recycled paper can be as much as 20% less expensive than its new counterparts. Standard paperweight is 20 lbs., but 16 lbs. is often cheaper. Besides, your boxes will be 20 percent lighter in the end.

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**Truth be known, paper is cheap. It is the ink on the paper that drains the pocketbook.**

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Recycled ink cartridges are available as well. Refilled cartridges do not store as well and are more prone to leaks, but their lower cost more than offsets these disadvantages. Many office supply stores have cartridge rebate programs whereby empty ink cartridges are returned to the store for cash back or discounts on future ink purchases. See if you can get involved in one of these to further reduce printing costs.

***Black and White***

It probably goes without mentioning, but extempers sometimes do not get it: *be sure to print in grayscale*. Color ink is much more expensive and there is no reason to waste resources on graphics. No judge will ever see your articles!

Since the quantity of printouts will put much more strain on your family average, investing in a laser printer may be a wise financial move. Most inkjet printers cost 7-10 cents per copy in ink alone. An inexpensive black/white laser printer may cost between \$200 and \$500 (color is much more), and compared to a cheap \$59 inkjet printer, this may seem like a lot. On closer inspection, though, laser printers print at 1-3 cents per copy and are usually faster and more reliable.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> For a deeper analysis of the price, see Drew Dobbs article from Small Business Accounting “Inkjet vs. Laser Printers” at the following link:  
<http://www.smallbusinesscomputing.com/testdrive/article.php/3521141>



### ***Printer-friendly Format***

Many online news pages provide a link to a “print version” or “printer-friendly format” of their articles. These formats remove advertisements and internal hyperlinks from the article and allow an extemper to just print the news.

When a webpage does not give you the print option, just open a word processing document, paste in the article content, and then return to the online article to copy the source information and date so you can add them to the top of the pasted content. If multiple sources provided the article (i.e. Associated Press and Dallas Morning News), separate the sources with a comma.

The printers themselves may have internal adjustments that will reduce the amount of ink in the printing. Opening printer preferences on your computer will show what level of quality you are currently using. Most printers default to “normal” or even “better quality.” I have found “draft quality” to work just fine when printing text articles. You will also see a significant increase in speed with draft quality printing.

In my experience, applying these simple measures can save up to a third on printing costs.

## **3. File Away!**

---

The extemper is now faced with a daunting pile of economically printed articles. They represent many hours of thought, concentration, hard work and, most importantly, the last 90 days in news. But sitting, as they are, in an unruly stack on the kitchen table or bedroom floor, they will do no one much good. You need to find a way to turn a few reams of printed paper into a retrievable database of current events.

That's where the extemp box comes in.

An extemp box is a large filing tub with grooves for housing hanging files and manila folders. They come in many sizes and colors, but are wide enough to store paper laid length-wise (landscape) and are readily available from most office supply stores. A good extemp box is at least sixteen inches long and of sturdy construction. The color really does not matter, but pink is underrated.

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**You will need at least two boxes; one to store your domestic files and the other to house the foreign articles.**

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To organize articles within the box, use a combination of hanging files and manila folders. Make one hanging file for each general area of news on your Topic List such as politics or economics and use the manila folders for the sub-categories (Texas redistricting, elections, and so on). Use legible handwriting on the labels so you and others can use the files.

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**If you would not use it in a round, do not bother putting it into your extemp box.**

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Everything in your extemp box should be directly related to the events in the prep room. Knick-knacks, food and beverages, hair-care products and other items that might serve personal needs or interests while not helping with extemp do not belong in the box.

## **Use Labels**

Another cost-saving technique is on the filing side: instead of purchasing new manila folders for every tournament, use adhesive labels to cover over the earlier file name. Recycling folders from tournament to tournament is a great way to reduce the financial burden of extemp.

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**The key to filing is not filing; it is retrieval.**

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In a timed preparation environment, the student who finds files quickly and efficiently will have a noticeable advantage over the competitor who is less organized. Articles in the box are of no use if they cannot be located. An extemper should be able to find any file within 30 seconds.

Even advanced students can improve their filing skills. The sight of frantic extempers thumbing through their file boxes in search of the needed topic is as common as it is unfortunate. Their time is ticking but, because of poor filing habits, little preparation work is getting done. Avoid the stress and needless setbacks of inadequate organization by

checking your box before the tournament and reviewing the filing tabs for accuracy and orderliness.

Organization is a team effort. Make sure that all those who use your box, either as club members or as part of a sharing agreement, put their files back in their correct place as soon as they complete their preparation.

## **Conclusion**

So now you have read the news regularly and efficiently, prepared a Topic List, set goals for your printing, filed away hundreds of articles and generally become acquainted with current events. You are ready for a tournament. The next chapter will look at the prep room and examine the process by which extempers write their extemp speeches.

# Training and Reinforcement

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## Exercises

1. Grab a blank sheet of paper and a pen and jot down every big news area you can think of. Jot down anything you think is important enough to be asked at tournament. Check your list against a news aggregator.
2. Create a news timeline with old extemp articles following the progress of a news event (or visit <http://news.google.com/archivesearch>). Make a list of early indicators and see if you can apply them to another current event. Can you make a prediction based on this information?

## Key Concepts

1. Prepare a topic list of likely current events topic areas. List every area of news you can call to mind and then some.
2. Use a news aggregator to find out what topic areas are "big."
3. Print recent news.
4. Adhere to your list when you go to print; don't get sidetracked by tempting topic areas.
5. Use two boxes: one to store domestic files and the other to house foreign topic areas.
6. If you would not use it in a round, it does not go into the box.

## Questions

1. What are the common extemp topics? Is the list in this chapter missing any common topics? What topics would you add that are perpetually newsworthy?
2. How would you present a news article that is six months old? Two years old? Ten years old? How would you explain to the judge that your material is still relevant?
3. How can you save money on printing?

# Writing Your Speech

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Writing an extemp speech is like writing poetry while spinning down a whirlpool. Every competitor has the same 30 minutes in the prep room to pull his or her hard work from the extemp boxes and prepare a 7-minute speech. It is a high-pressure, high-performance activity that demands a great deal of concentration and rarely results in Pulitzer-worthy prose. Though often overlooked,

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**Speech writing is one of the most daunting aspects of extemp and probably the most difficult—but most important—to master.**

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Extempers at all levels struggle to refine the writing of their speeches, and no wonder: the writing is the complex foundation from which all other parts flow. The keys in this chapter are likely the most important for extempers to master.

## Choosing Your Topic

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Extemp rules only allow thirty minutes for each speaker to choose a topic, write the speech and practice it for fluidity. That is not much time, so each competitor must make the most of every second of preparation. The best way to take advantage of limited prep time is to have all necessary paper, writing implements and extemp boxes laid out beforehand.

It may seem obvious, but you would be amazed at the number of speakers who scramble to locate a pen or a 3 x 5 card after their time starts. At least 5 minutes before your scheduled draw, be sure you are ready to go with the following list of items:

1. Writing implement
2. Water bottle
3. Writing medium (3 x 5 card, 8.5 x 11 paper, pink post-it, etc)
4. Quotation book or list of introduction “openers”
5. Open and organized extemp box

Speech writing begins the moment you draw your topic. As soon as your eyes fall on the three topic choices, your mind will begin to think about the speech you are about to write.

There are four keys listed in order of importance:

## **1. Pick the Topic You Love**

If you receive a slip of paper on which two of the three listed questions refer to current events that seem more boring to you than a soon-to-be-swept television show, pick the more exciting one. Truth be known, judges will more often be swayed by your enthusiasm for a topic than by most other factors. Even if you have more evidence on the uninspiring questions your enthusiasm will cover for your lack of preparation. In other words,

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**The energy of your passion often substitutes for  
head knowledge.**

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Even though I rate this as most important, do not waste time gauging your enthusiasm. Just scan the questions quickly and choose the one that stands out. Chances are still good that your favorite topic will *not* be one of the three, but if it is, jump on it.

## **2. Pick the Topic You Know Best**

If all the questions seem equally exciting and none strike you as particularly desirable, go for the topic that you know best.

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**If you cannot find a topic you *want* to talk about,  
pick the one you *know* you can talk about.**

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If you participate in academic debate, you should take the topic that coincides with your debate resolution. Choosing the topic you already know much about will save you time during prep. You may not need to look up the minute details of a particular topic (like pronunciations of world leaders), for instance. In fact, choosing the topic you know best often gives you impromptu agility; random facts that eluded you during your prep may come back to you while you speak.

### **3. Pick the Topic for Which You Have Evidence**

Energetic passion and background knowledge cannot be counterfeited, but they can be spawned by a well-endowed extemp box. Let's say you draw the following three questions:

1. "MySpace: Is it safe?"
2. "Should ICANN submit to international authority?"
3. "Will Google stock continue to rise?"

If you filed a small forest's worth of articles about Google's financial future and neglected securing more than a couple of articles for the other two questions, you should opt for the last topic.

Even if you have a really fat file on one of your questions, you should always try to meet the other criteria first. A five-source speech delivered knowledgeably and with passion will always beat the eight-source speech delivered à la William Hung.

### **4. Pick the Obscure Topic**

When all factors are equal and you are equally passionate, knowledgeable and prepared for every choice, you should choose the most obscure question. This fourth option may surprise you, but understanding its impact in the realm of competition makes a lot of sense. You see,

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**Judges generally find the most common topics boring.**

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Many topic writers typically assign every speaker one question from the same predictable topic area and two more arcane ones. The questions are not exactly the same, but they basically require the same knowledge base. Take the following example from a foreign round:

**Speaker 1**

"Is the European Union an economic threat to the United States?"

"Sudan: Should we intervene?"

"Is Cuba still a threat?"

**Speaker 2**

"What can we learn from the Canadian healthcare system?"

"How can the United States improve its image abroad?"

"Should the European Union accept a new member?"

**Speaker 3**

"Is the United Nations too marred by scandal to be effective?"

"Does the European Union have moral ground to condemn genocide?"

"FTAA: Should we ratify?"

Every speaker has the choice here to talk about the European Union or address one of the more difficult questions. If a judge panel saw three speeches in a row on the European Union, you can imagine how bored they could be. A few years ago when the Iraq war was the center of news attention, I once watched a preliminary round at a national qualifier where five of the six speakers in the panel discussed the Iraq war. After the first two, no new information was presented. But some speakers had different statistics for the number of troops and casualties. It was terrible.

The speaker who did not talk about Iraq really stood out from the crowd. He went on to win both that panel and the entire tournament.

In the example above, Speaker 3 has no idea what topics her competitors chose. Her information is limited to the three questions on her own slip of paper, but the obscure question is still obvious. No question writer in his right mind would give every speaker in a panel a question about the Free



Trade Area of the Americas, and the United Nations is rarely a big enough news item to warrant such attention.

When topics appear to be overused in tournaments, avoid the obvious.

## Writing the Speech

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There are many different schools of thought on what makes a “champion” speech format. Some competitors believe their edge comes from the way they structure their points or the emphasis they put on the conclusion. Others are strict rule adherents and feel a fundamentally perfect speech with clearly regimented points and sub-points will get the highest marks. Still others care very little for the nuances of speech theory and prefer to stick loosely to an ambiguous paradigm or improvise.

I wish I could definitively say which style is the most appropriate. It would make coaching so much easier! But the fact is that there is no universally perfect format and the successful speaker should be able to adapt his paradigm to meet the interest and abilities of his audience.

Some rules of speech writing remain constant across approaches, independent of the speaker’s tactical changes. In this section we will look at how to develop a thesis statement, roadmap and structured analysis, skills that are important to master no matter how you intend to deliver your speech.

### Develop a Thesis Statement

The first thing to do after selecting your topic is develop a thesis statement. If you have ever written a paper for school, you will be familiar with this process.

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**A thesis statement boils down the exact goal of your presentation into a concise sentence.**

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The thesis statement is the heart of your speech. It is the anchoring concept around which all of your analysis and argument will revolve. Your thesis should be short – no longer than one sentence – and clearly state your answer to the question along with your biggest reason for answering that way. The thesis statement gives your audience a chance to

see how you will interpret the question and what to expect from the rest of the speech. It prepares your judges for imminent analysis by stating an assertion that will later be substantiated.

You will not persuade anyone with your thesis statement, nor will your audience perceive the sentence as especially interesting (unless you take an unexpectedly radical position on an issue), but your thesis will nonetheless act as a core for the remainder of your presentation.

Develop your thesis statement soon after you draw your topic. Writers are often advised to conduct background research before developing a position for a school paper, but as an extemper you have already done your research. Your lifestyle has prepared you to develop clear positions on a multitude of current events. In fact, you should have at least an inkling of an opinion on most issues by the time you arrive at the tournament.

Let us say for instance that you draw the following topic: "Should universal healthcare be provided by the United States federal government?"

An acceptable thesis statement may be something like this:

"Government funded universal healthcare would substantially hurt the quality of health services in the United States and none of the plans currently proposed should be implemented."

or

"Healthcare is a basic human right and should be guaranteed by the government."

Unacceptable thesis statements are:

"No."

"Yes."

"Maybe."

"Would you repeat the question?"

The thesis is your friend. You will incorporate it heavily into your speech as a way to show the judge that you are on topic, as well as a crutch when you lose your place or simply as a transition. Make sure you are comfortable with it; the thesis statement is the foundation from which the

entire speech is built. If you ever get stuck while speaking, you can always return to the thesis statement. It is home for you.

## Roadmap

A roadmap is a short sentence describing the flow of the upcoming speech. It should follow your thesis statement and briefly outline your next seven minutes of speaking.

Let us say you draw the following topic: “Should Internet search engines hand private user data over to law enforcement agencies?”

Your thesis statement is: “Search engines have no right to resist a properly served subpoena and should therefore hand search data to the FBI when pressed with a warrant.”

Your roadmap should look something like this: “To demonstrate this we will first briefly examine the background of Internet subpoenas by looking at the history of Yahoo! and Altavista. In our second point we will discuss the dangers of too much Internet privacy, and finally we will discuss ways that you, as an Internet user, can protect yourself from invasive subpoenas.”

## Analysis: an Overview

While analysis will not be the next element of your actual speech, it is the next step in extemp speechwriting. Analysis is the biggest time chunk of your speech. It essentially paints a picture for your audience by deconstructing the question and rephrasing it in the way you want the judge to perceive it. It is in your analysis that you will set the table for your argument and present your reasons for interpreting the question the way you do. Support for your conclusions will be peppered throughout your analysis.

Extempers are naturally confined to delivering a 7-minute speech, so choosing the number of points you will make is a key factor in your speech writing. How many points should extempers deliver? I strongly suggest the number three. Three points are usually a sufficient framework to cover the question. Extemp speeches with two points appear too simple; likewise, speeches with four or more points appear too rushed and never delve deep enough into the thesis to warrant a high

placing. “Three is the magic number,” as Schoolhouse Rock put it. Besides, Aristotle liked it, so it certainly has its philosophical validity.<sup>8</sup>

There are many different ways for the extemper to settle on the three points. Using a formula is strongly recommended. It is much easier to digest news information during the 30-minute prep period if the competitor already has a structure in mind. There are, of course, a myriad ways to organize analysis, but most extemp speakers follow one of the following three formulas.

### ***Past / Present / Future***

In the example on Internet search engines, a speaker could discuss past conflicts between privacy and technology, look at the current dilemma of the conflict with Internet search engines and individuals’ private data, and conclude with speculation on the government’s authority in the matter. The following is a sample list of Past / Present / Future:

1. The conflict between privacy and technology is nothing new. (Past)
2. Internet search engines currently shelter criminal and terrorist activity. (Present)
3. Internet search engines should relinquish personal information with the appropriate court-ordered subpoena. (Future)

### ***Point / Counterpoint / Reconciliation***

Let us imagine that the speaker writes the first thesis statement (that government funded healthcare would substantially reduce the quality of healthcare). The speaker might discuss current healthcare costs and availability in point one, look at the example of foreign countries in point two, and in point three examine alternatives to federal funding such as charity, hospice care and local government.

1. Perspective 1
2. Perspective 2

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<sup>8</sup> Much can be learned from Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*. Aristotle relies so much on the number three that the very essay on *Rhetoric* consists of three books. You can find more about Aristotle and his work at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-rhetoric>.

### 3. Answer/Reconciliation

This is a formula designed to show “both sides” of a question. It might handle the healthcare topic by citing statistics about lower and middle class families seeking inexpensive medical care in point one and turn to an opposite perspective (like an economic efficiency argument) in point two. Point three would then reconcile the discrepancies between the first two points and form a conclusion that clearly answers the question. Point three takes you back to your thesis.

### ***Background / Answer the Question / Where to From Here?***

This is my personal favorite formula because it is so versatile. Point one gives a brief history of healthcare policy, point two answers the question by briefly examining the main arguments for a particular side (counter opinions may be mentioned but are not elaborated), and point three extends the logic of the question into the future.

As you organize your analysis between your three points, try to put any information you have (relevant facts surrounding the question, names of elected officials, etc.) near the beginning so you can reference them later.

Does it sound complicated? We will look at some diagrams later on that should help clarify it for you. If you are still lost after studying the diagrams, please reread the material covered in the last few chapters.

Within the three main points of your speech there is another layer of organization that further refines your presentation. We will look at it in the next section.

## **Sub-pointing**

After completing the three-part analysis described above, further develop your speech by adding sub-points within each of the three major points. I call this extemp strategy *sub-pointing*. Your sub-points can be explicitly stated or just included as oratorical elements of your presentation, but they must be present to make your analysis complete.

Sub-points divide your main arguments into easily digestible morsels. Most people eat pasta by chewing it first (and those who don’t generally have problems further down the line). By breaking down your

presentation with easy-to-understand sub-points, your judges will find it clearer and easier to follow.

One strategy to help develop your sub-points is to put a piece of evidence under each one. Later we will discuss how evidence can be organized in your speech, but at this point you should think about including one source per sub-point. This strategy is called the 3-3 system, which looks something like this:

1. Brief History of American Medical Care
  - a. Rising costs of healthcare
    - i. Source
  - b. Recent attempts at nationalizing
    - i. Source
  - c. Strategies to get “capitalist” healthcare in the hands of poor sick
    - i. Source
2. Federally Run Healthcare is Low Quality Healthcare
  - a. Comparisons between Canadian healthcare system and Hillary Clinton’s plan
    - i. Source
  - b. Incentives produce better medical service
    - i. Source
  - c. Estimated impact of nationalized healthcare on current economy
    - i. Source
3. Future of American Healthcare
  - a. Comparative quality has foreigners seeking US care
    - i. Source
  - b. Physician’s perspective
    - i. Source
  - c. Other places to put cost of healthcare
    - i. Source

Each one of the articles quoted above discusses much more than the specific tag under which it is listed. When you speak, you will only refer to the part of the article that deals with the sub-point it supports.

The 3-3 system (three points and three sub-points) gives the speaker a strong range and depth of analysis. An extemper who uses 3-3 will have a

minimum of nine sources in every speech, which is well above average. This method also allows a speaker comfortable room for background analysis as part of answering the question.

The 3-3 formula for outlining sub-points can be modified to adjust to the topic you choose and the amount of evidence you have. While I advocate 3-3, there have been national finalists who used 2-2 or 4-2. As a novice extemper, try your hardest to apply the 3-3 system, but as you grow you will likely experiment with this outline to find the one that works best for you and fits the topic you choose in the round.

## Inserting Evidence

News articles play a key role in the development of your speech, and that's why we spent a whole chapter on how to read the news!

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**Champion extempers will know their evidence  
because they actually *read and understand* their  
evidence.**

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Some competitors view their extemp boxes merely as stuff holders of article upon article, and when the round hands them a question, they start writing an outline of their opinions without fully understanding the issues the question proposes. Without knowledge and understanding, extempers run the risk of coming up with bad points and sub-points and end up wasting time trying to find support for them. That said, your news articles should not asphyxiate your own original thought. If you have an original idea that is not contradicted by your sources, feel free to incorporate it. If you have led an extemp lifestyle, your perspective will add to the conversation.

When extempers understand the question at hand and write their outline, they are able to draw from the evidence they know exists in their extemp box. Your news articles provide credibility to your presentation. Keep as true to your points as possible, but allow articles to provide direction in crafting your analysis.

When noting the content of a potential source, jot down a few words or phrases that will remind you of the gist of the article. A common question extempers have is how loyal to the article does your recitation need to be?

Do you need to recite the quotation word-for-word? What do judges expect of you?

The answer to this question lies within the intention of the extemper. I believe that

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**As long as you are faithful to the meaning of the source, you do not need to worry about delivering the quotation word-for-word.**

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Extempers must still strive to deliver the quotation as correctly as possible, and sometimes reading it off the 3x5 card is necessary. However, I have found that there is a reasonable amount of flexibility allowed for capturing the meaning of the quotation while holding together the approximate wording. In some cases, summarizing the main point of an article without actually quoting it is good enough for delivering a solid speech.

There is one notable exception: when citing a famous quotation. Getting it wrong will diminish your impact. For example, most people recognize the famous saying, "Rome wasn't built in a day." An extemper who said, "Rome took a long time to build," would probably lose the judge. Famous sayings or quotations usually appear in introductions and conclusions, and extempers will not want to get them wrong.

## **Introduction...**

---

The introduction consists of the first official words the judges hear from the extemp speaker. It should grab their attention and lay the groundwork for the rest of the presentation. Unfortunately, some of the best analysis in extemp is shrouded between a poor introduction and an inadequate conclusion, leaving a great speech difficult to absorb.

The introduction to this book makes reference to one of my favorite speeches of the twentieth century, Alan Keyes' address to the New Hampshire Republicans. Mr. Keyes' introduction needed to sway an entire audience away from the preceding speakers' views that attempted to remove the pro-life position from the Republican platform. He wasted little time building a strong, compassionate and timely introduction that drew its audience to its feet.



"I am actually from the great state of Maryland, where my ancestors have lived for the last 200 years, sometimes as free men and women and sometimes as slaves.

"And I realized as I was listening to the speakers who came before me that I come at an important juncture in this program. Because I think that the great alternatives have been laid before you tonight. And we Republicans are going to have to decide again, as we have had to decide in the past, whether we shall only speak of justice and speak of principle or whether we shall stand and fight for them! Whether we shall quote from the words of the Declaration of Independence with real conviction or whether we shall take that document and throw it on the ash heap of history as we adopt the message of those who say that we can stand silent in the face of injustice!

"When it comes to deciding whether we shall stand by the great principle that declares that all human beings are created equal and endowed by their Creator with the right to life, there is no choice for silence! THERE IS NO CHOICE FOR SILENCE!"

When you think about it, Mr. Keyes' introduction is profound and succinct. He opens by tying the two great moral issues of America's history together—slavery and abortion—and reminds his audience of his personal relation to the subject. He quickly compares his opponents to those demanding to "stand silent in the face of injustice," and leaves the audience with no other choice but to be appalled by the idea. By the time the listeners get to the end of the introduction, they are resolved to keep the right to life in the Republican platform.

The odds that you will receive Keyes-like inspiration as you craft your introduction, however, are slim and you should not be wasting precious prep time trying to force wit. How then can you assure, time after time, that your introductions will be successful?

One of the best ways to consistently have relevant and interesting introductions is to use good quotations or quips from famous people! Quotations are relatively easy to find with the Internet or you can purchase a reference book like Bartlett's or Readers Digest to aid your research.

To find quotations that might be useful, look for a quote with a message; something you can rally around as you speak or that will anchor your presentation. Also find quotations about a particular issue (taxation, government spending, education, etc.). Consider these examples, all taken from <http://en.thinkexist.com>:

1. A famous inventor's remark on the similarity of death and taxes:  
"In this world, nothing is certain but death and taxes" (Benjamin Franklin).
2. A former president's comment on the nature of government spending: "Government is like a baby. An alimentary canal with a big appetite at one end and no sense of responsibility at the other" (Ronald Reagan).
3. A philosopher's observation on the impact of good teachers:  
"Why not whip the teacher when the pupil misbehaves?"  
(Diogenes of Sinope)

As you gather these quotations, place them under topic-specific headings like "change," "tradition," "economy" and "politics." Decide under which categories your quotations fall and organize them in a word processor document for easy organization and printing.

After compiling your collection of quotations, think of tie-ins.

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**A tie-in is a way to connect the famous quip with  
your extemp topic.**

---

The tie-in will not be exhaustive – there are always more ways to use a quotation than the ones you think of in the tranquility of your home – but try to come up with some broad ones anyway. Mentally go through all of your quotations and tag each one with potential topic areas.

Consider, for example, the following opening quotations and tie-ins I used the year I won Nationals (2005) in extemp:

**Quotation: "What a lot of things there are a man can do without."**  
~Socrates

Tie-in: Reduction in federal spending or taxation, reduction in foreign aid and assistance, illegal immigration or, humorously, obesity.

**Quotation: “If you're not confused you're not paying attention.” ~Tom Peters**

Tie-in: Any topic that requires a complicated explanation such as Kashmir, emerging global markets, domestic economy and health policy.

**Quotation: “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.” ~Martin Luther King Jr.**

Tie-in: Any local, domestic or foreign politics situation that requires leadership.

**Quotation: “Do what we can, summer will have its flies.” ~Ralph Waldo Emerson**

Tie-in: A very versatile quotation that applies to time-of-year topics like hurricanes, Christmas shopping and heat waves, and speeches that center on side effects like environmental and economic regulations.

**Quotation: “One machine can do the work of fifty ordinary men. No machine can do the work of one extraordinary man.” ~Elbert Hubbard**

Tie-in: Any speech that praises or centers on the work of an individual (Tony Blair, Felipe Calderon, Steve Irwin, Gerald Ford, etc.) or promotes quality over quantity (Search engine comparison, the Olympics).

**Quotation: “Every step of progress the world has made has been from scaffold to scaffold, and from stake to stake.” ~Wendell Phillips**

Tie-in: Risk topics like economics, international diplomacy, Iraq war, Kate Moss’ latest high-profile relationship, nuclear proliferation and the release of a Microsoft Windows operating system.

**Quotation: “What we call progress is the exchange of one nuisance for another.” ~Havelock Ellis**

Tie-in: Great for a speech that argues against change like Katie Couric at CBS, the revamping of the NASA shuttle program, shifts in the operation of Guantanamo Bay and the nomination of a Supreme Court judge.

Having a large library of quotations is not necessary; just get one or two quips per concept and you’ll be ready to go. Go ahead and use the list above, but try to revamp your quotation stockpile after every tournament

(add new quotations and remove ones that did not make the grade or that you do not wish to use again) to ensure varied openings.

While many extemp resources are shared within a club, do not distribute opening quotations. Keep these quotations close to your chest. There are two reasons to be selfish about your opening quotations. First, if two teammates in the same panel use identical opening quotations, judges may have a hard time distinguishing between them. Second, some quotations will fit better with your style than others. Find those quotations and incorporate them into *your* presentations.

After citing your choice quotation, use a phrase like “in other words” or “that is” to paraphrase your introductory excerpt and make it broad enough to apply to your subject. Because a raw, non-interpreted quip will rarely tie in exactly to your topic, you should focus the lens for your judge and explain how the reference applies.

When used in an actual speech, your opening should sound something like this:

Ralph Waldo Emerson, an American author and poet, once said, “Do what we can, summer will have its flies.” That is, some things in life are inevitably accompanied by hardship and difficulty. Sometimes that accompaniment is a nuisance as in Emerson’s flies, but often it is a deadly menace that is as inevitable as summer’s heat.

My question today is “Should the United States federal government do more to help with worldwide disaster relief?” My answer to this question is no. Sadly, like the fly swatter that the homemaker keeps hanging by the refrigerator, federal funding is an ineffective tool and should therefore not be expanded to help with disaster relief outside its own boundaries.

To demonstrate this, we will examine a brief background on worldwide emergency relief, look at the dangers of expanded federal assistance with countries that suffer disasters, and discuss other social responses to major disasters that have proven much more effective than government funding.

Here the speaker has captured his audience’s attention with a somewhat well known quotation from a famous author. He has presented his

question and given his answer along with a thesis statement. He has added a roadmap and launched into his first analysis point.

Did you catch all that? Did you see how the quotation was tied in? Did you note how quickly each aspect of the speech was delivered? Could you decipher the three points given in the roadmap? Bravo!

## ...and Conclusion

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If the introduction is important, the conclusion is critical. To draw another analogy between extemp and an athletic sport, picture an Olympic gymnast competing on the vault apparatus. She starts at a full sprint, running on the cushioned pad with a determined expression, until she reaches the spring that pushes her gracefully into the air over the brown vault pad. She does enough flips and twirls to sicken the untrained before landing gracefully within the lines on the other cushioned pad. After saluting the judges she returns to the sidelines, through the roars of an adoring crowd, to the cheers of an enthusiastic and affectionate coach.

The next competitor steps up to the starting line, and we are informed by Dorothy Hamill that the next vault will be much more difficult, due to an extra twirl and two more flips. The audience holds its breath as this second gymnast reaches to full speed and launches off the vault. Then the crowd groans and Scott Hamilton does his trademark encouraging grunts as the athlete does three whole steps outside the white lines to regain her balance. That Gold Medal will have to wait four more years.

Despite the fact that the second vault was technically more difficult, the first gymnast was able to *stick the landing* and will therefore receive higher marks.

---

**An aptly spoken conclusion rings true to  
Shakespeare's immortal words: "All's well that  
ends well."**

---

The conclusion is the last thing the judges hear from an extemp speaker. It contains the final words of analysis that will reverberate with the audience until the next speaker enters the room.

So how should an extemper conclude her speech? *The same way she began it.*

A good conclusion brings back the original opening quotation, showing once again how the speech relates to the opening words, summarizes the analysis, perhaps throws in a tangentially related food-for-thought item, and then closes with the two best words in the English language: “Thank you!”

To return to our disaster relief, a good conclusion could look something like this:

“I opened today by quoting Ralph Waldo Emerson when he said ‘Do what we can, summer will have its flies.’ Isn’t that true? We can try to stop the pests, we can throw money at India or Africa, we can entrust taxpayer dollars to dictatorship governments, we can make political statements about disaster relief and lend financial gestures to the displaced, but federal assistance can never beat the disaster. Not really.

“These facts have led me to believe that the United States federal government should not do more to help with international disaster relief.

“The path to effective relief is through the hearts of generous people who open their homes to the homeless, donate to charity, and give their time to the cleanup efforts. Anything less is a token nod; a flyswatter against a swarm. Thank you.”

## **Time Management and Practice**

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It should take you anywhere from ten to twenty minutes to gather your sources and create an outline. If you are having trouble cutting down your writing time to below twenty minutes, practice at home with real topics (like the ones in the Appendix) to make the process more fluid. If you decide to go off card (covered in the next chapter) you will find time management to be even more important.

No matter what, you should leave some time on the table to practice your speech and get all the kinks out of your presentation. This process takes at least seven minutes, but it can take longer depending on your natural speaking ability and level of comfort with extemporaneous delivery.

When you have finished your speech outline, go through the entire presentation from beginning to end, just as you would in the presence of your judges. This first run through should take between five and six minutes. If you have seven minutes of material on your maiden run, you have too much to say and you should find something to cut out. Remember,

---

**Your speech will generally be longer in the competition room than in practice.**

---

After this rough test run, find parts of the speech that need extra boosting. Maybe you stumbled over the transition between points two and three, perhaps you had trouble recalling your point-one statistics or pronouncing the name of Iran's leader. Go over any "trouble spots" a second time. Repeat the difficult ones as many times as needed.

In order to practice effectively, it is imperative that you actually *speak your planned words*. Sometimes extempers stare blankly at a wall for several minutes while mentally reciting their speeches. This custom probably contributes to the nerd reputation of extempers. Mental recitation probably helps some, but it is not as effective as actually giving the speech. Let your mouth get used to the words and experiment with different ways of saying things. Do not just think your words, assuming your verbal expression will be equally profound.

One of the problems with verbal recitation is that prep rooms are supposed to be quiet. Besides watching the time and handing out topics, keeping the prepping speakers from getting too loud is the main objective of extemp proctors. And even the good proctors have engendered some animosity: rogue extempers use pejorative terms like "Charles Taylor" and "Janjaweed" to refer to these silence enforcers. To get around the candy-throwing arm of everyone's favorite proctor, whisper your practice words or step out of the prep room early and deliver in the hall.

When your prep time has expired, practice your speech once more while making your way to the competition room. If you run into friends, politely excuse yourself from any conversation and stay focused through the round.

# Training and Reinforcement

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## Exercises

1. Find some quotations that would work as introductory quips and develop tie-ins for them. Think of creative ways to connect the ideas in the quotation with the topic you will be presenting in your speech.
2. Grab an extemp topic from the Appendix and write a 3-3 sub-pointed outline without any sources. Improvise a roadmap for your outline.
3. Browse through the Appendix and choose which topic you would select from the three offered to each speaker. Do not forget the guidelines about passion, knowledge, preparedness and obscurity.
4. Put yourself in your judge's shoes as you read through the topics in the Appendix. Which questions are the hardest? Put yourself in your competitor's shoes. Which topics will your arch opponent pick? Which topics are the "easiest?" Is there a deceptively hard question?

## Key Concepts

1. Pick the topic (1) for which you have a passionate first impression, (2) that you know the best, (3) for which you know you have evidence and (4) which is most obscure.
2. A thesis statement is boiling down the exact goal of your presentation into one concise sentence.
3. Incorporate the thesis statement often into your speech.
4. Use the 3-3 format for the best time allotment, analysis and source count potential.
5. A good introduction is short, captures the audience's attention and is on point.
6. A good conclusion mirrors the introduction and "sticks the landing."



7. Your speech will be longer in competition than practice.

## Questions

1. What are some possible ways of organizing a sub-pointed extemp speech other than the 3-3 format? What are the strengths of this alternative? What are the weaknesses?
2. Can you learn to prepare faster than the guidelines listed for time management? If so, what can you do with that extra time?
3. What can you do in the prep room to differentiate yourself from your competition?
4. What is the most important part of an extemp speech? Is this different from other kinds of speeches? How?
5. How can you work with a club to develop introduction strategies without sharing quotations?



## CHAPTER 6

# What a Finished Speech Should Look Like

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In the last chapter we learned some effective keys for crafting a speech. We walked through the process of prepping for an extemp presentation and examined some tips for timed speechwriting. In this chapter we will put together all the essential elements of an extemp speech and study a template for a finished speech.

When writing speeches, an extemper only has 30 minutes of preparation. Because of this, extempers use a different order when writing their speeches than they use when delivering. While the chief goal of preparation is efficiency, delivery can focus on any number of qualities from fluidity and dynamics to analysis and depth.

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**First utilize prep time efficiently and then tackle delivery.**

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## Putting the Pieces Together

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One of the most common mistakes novice extempers make is trying to write the introduction first. Actually, this should be one of the last things written in prep. As explained in the previous chapter, extempers should focus first-and-foremost on the thesis statement. This ensures that all of

the content is single-minded and their speaking builds toward the same conclusion. Likewise, the conclusion is the last element to write and, if necessary, can be delivered impromptu.

Your actual speech, when delivered, should be roughly aligned with the following outline:

- I. Introduction (30-45 Seconds)
  - a. Hook
  - b. Thesis
  - c. Roadmap
- II. Analysis (5:00-5:30)
  - a. Point 1 (1:00-2:00)
    - i. Sub-point a) (20-40 Seconds)
      - 1. Evidence
      - 2. Analysis
    - ii. Sub-point b) (20-40 Seconds)
      - 1. Evidence
      - 2. Analysis
    - iii. Sub-point c) (20-40 Seconds)
      - 1. Evidence
      - 2. Analysis
  - b. Point 2 (1:00-2:00)
    - i. Sub-point a) (20-40 Seconds)
      - 1. Evidence
      - 2. Analysis
    - ii. Sub-point b) (20-40 Seconds)
      - 1. Evidence
      - 2. Analysis
    - iii. Sub-point c) (20-40 Seconds)
      - 1. Evidence
      - 2. Analysis
  - c. Point 3 (1:00-2:00)
    - i. Sub-point a) (20-40 Seconds)
      - 1. Evidence
      - 2. Analysis
    - ii. Sub-point b) (20-40 Seconds)
      - 1. Evidence
      - 2. Analysis
    - iii. Sub-point c) (20-40 Seconds)

1. Evidence
  2. Analysis
- III. Conclusion (:45-1:00)
- a. Summary (30 Seconds)
  - b. Tie-in (15-30 Seconds)

Don't be intimidated by this outline; it looks much more difficult than it actually is. The biggest thing you should draw from it for now is the equal division of time between all your points. Every point should get roughly the same amount of coverage. If you try to move through your material quickly and avoid getting bogged down on one particular point, you will be fine.

Your sub-points should develop your analysis sequentially, each one building on the one before, so that your speech will not be as choppy as it looks in outline form. For instance, a speech on NATO's involvement in Afghanistan might have the following points:

- I. NATO is effective and united in Afghanistan
  - a. Troop Plea Snubbed
    - i. United Press International, September 13<sup>th</sup>, 2006<sup>9</sup>
    - ii. Despite NATO's willingness to take over Afghan operations, the treaty organization has rejected a request from a general to have more support.
  - b. Additional troops weren't really needed.
    - i. Voice of America News, September 13, 2006<sup>10</sup>
    - ii. NATO united behind the conference decision not to increase troop numbers.
  - c. NATO is currently effective against the Taliban
    - i. Associated Press OR Forbes, September 13<sup>th</sup>, 2006<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> "NATO Afghan troop plea snubbed." *United Press International*. September 13, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas, Gary. "NATO: Additional Troops Not Needed in Afghanistan." *Voice of America News*. September 13, 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Khan, Noor. "NATO Forces Recapture Afghan Territory." *Associated Press*. Also published in *Forbes*. September 13, 2006.

- ii. NATO has completed an offensive in Afghanistan with its current troop structure.

The basic point that is made above is fairly simple, but an extemp speaker will use several sources to demonstrate his or her opinion. This entire point can be delivered fairly quickly, as long as the analysis does not bog down the speaker. Take notice, also, of the footnotes. The citations in the outline above are taken from real articles about NATO.

Though there is ample information in your extemp box giving credibility to the claims in your speech, there is also quite a bit of data that you will want to omit from your presentation. There is no good reason to include all this information when presenting your source, as we will further detail in the next section.

## Presenting a Source

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So how *do* you introduce a source into your extemp speech? This is a question many students ask, especially those with experience writing research papers or debating. The fact is that the extemp citation is much easier than you might think. All you need do is use a lead-in phrase like “according to” or “the [source] reports.” Doing anything more elaborate than this is spending too much time on citation specifics than is needed. In the end,

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**Judges are much more concerned about the content  
of your speech than they are the details of your  
citation.**

---

When giving a source, do not try to present the full citation the way you would in a footnote. Do not waste time defending the credentials of your article, unless your source demands explanation on credibility (i.e. a context specific expert or survey with complicated methodology). A news article usually has enough inherent credibility to save you from having to mention publication details. Just name the publication and state the day it was published.

For instance, an International Herald Tribune article on the September 13<sup>th</sup> Montreal shootings<sup>12</sup> could be cited:

“According to the International Herald Tribune on September 14<sup>th</sup>...”

Most citations will be this simple, but there are some exceptions. Whenever the content of your speech is threatened by a simple source introduction, or if further explanation would enhance your thesis, go ahead and add more to it. Sources that demand more elaborate introduction include direct quotations from elected officials, blog citations, and exceptionally old articles. If you are quoting a survey or study, it may be necessary to provide some methodology and the credentials of the source.

For example, a survey on video game use conducted by PopCap Games<sup>13</sup> can be introduced like this:

“According to a study conducted by PopCap Games, the leading developer and publisher of casual games, in a survey involving more than 2,100 respondents...”

If you are quoting an old piece of evidence for context or background on a topic, add the year of publication when you cite. Any article that is more than a year old should be cited with its publication year.

## Double Sources

Some years ago newspapers started using wire services to get information more quickly from the field to the newsroom. This practice was designed to make the business of news writing easier, but it had the unintended effect of really helping you as an extemper.

A double source is any news article that is published by two news outlets. For instance, the International Herald Tribune article cited above could be

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<sup>12</sup> “Blog entries of suspect depict rage.” The Associated Press, Republished by the International Herald Tribune, Published: September 14, 2006.

<sup>13</sup> “Study: Casual Gamers Play for Stress Relief, Mental Exercise.” *GameDaily Biz*, September 13, 2006.

referenced as both the Associated Press and IHT. As you read the news, you will find that many articles have this “double source” distinction.

If you find an article in a local newspaper, look for the paper’s crediting of a newswire like US Newswire, Associated Press, United Press International, Agence France Presse or Reuters in the dateline or header. Instead of navigating to the same article in Reuters and the Boston Globe and wasting paper on the endeavor, *simply cite both*. Remember that some extemp judges, generally coaches or experienced extempers, will not count a second source if they suspect it. Most judges, however, are perfectly amenable to this strategy and it is a legitimate way of increasing your citation tally.

Because of how common newswires are in today’s newspapers, there are very few extempers who do not quote a newswire at some point during their presentations. Syndicated news is well respected and you really cannot go wrong by citing AP.

## Verbal Transitions

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No one likes listening to Microsoft Sam stumble through his arduous, monotone rendition of a printed document. Why this widespread dislike? Microsoft Sam’s inflexions are off, his intonation is faulty, his pauses come at the wrong time, and he moves through paragraphs like a hurdler. In short, *he does not transition well*.

The extemper’s equivalent of a computerized voice is represented by poor movement between the various segments in the internal substructure of a speech.

---

**A speech is not the mere delivery of a verbal outline, but an oratorical rendition of rough notes.**

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Therefore a good speech should never feature phrases such as “sub-point A” or “let’s move to Roman three” in reference to its internal structure.

The introduction of a new point should smoothly fit into the logical flow of the speech. The fact that you are discussing point 2 instead of point 1 should *make sense* to your judges, but it should not be shoved in their faces.



To make smooth but noticeable transitions, try to incorporate bridge phrases and questions into the last part of one point and the first part of the next.

You may ask a question and then recite the title of the next point, which is the answer:

“So how much will California’s minimum wage law actually hurt businesses? [PAUSE] My third point is ‘Quantifying the Impact.’ According to... [Lead in to source one]”

You may present the next point as an extension of the first:

“Now that I have shown how Arnold’s minimum wage increase will hurt local business, let’s see if we can quantify that impact for you in my third point. [Lead in to source one]”

Or you can simply announce the next point:

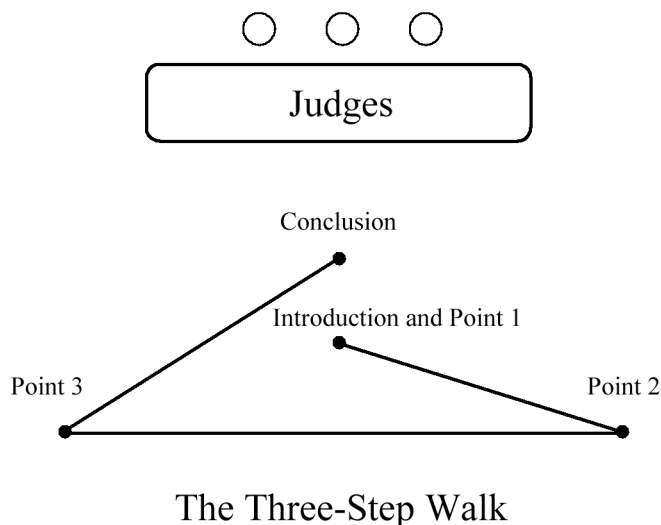
“So an increase in the minimum wage may end up actually hurting businesses while doing nothing for the low-income workers it is trying to help. Point 3 is ‘Quantifying the Impact;’ or what, exactly, is the bill for Arnold’s extravagance? [Lead in to source one]”

However you switch points verbally, it should be easy to follow and fit your transition within the flow of your speech.

## **Physical Transitions and the Three-Step Walk**

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The second way to signal to your audience that you are moving to another point is through your physical motions. Take a look at the following diagram:



Depending on the room setup and your individual voice volume, you should begin your speech about 10 – 15 feet away from your judges. Deliver your introduction and first point from your starting location (Introduction and Point 1). As you transition to Point 2, turn to your right and walk diagonally to the second point on the triangle. Take two or three steps, enough to physically distance yourself from Point 1, but not enough to become a distraction. As you move, keep your head facing the spectators, maintain eye contact with at least one of the judges, and continue using your transition language to signal the inauguration of Point 2. You will transition both physically and verbally as you move and speak at the same time.

When delivering your points, move as little as possible. Aimless pacing is unbecoming of a champion extemp. Hand motions should be your only movements during the points. Likewise, do not move for sub-points; you will be mowing through them every thirty seconds or so and they are not significant enough to warrant even one step.

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**A sure flag to a judge that you are a novice extemper is jittery pacing and nervous swaying. Make a habit of planting your feet in the floor when delivering your points and sub-points.**

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Deliver Point 2. When you speak from the corner of a triangle, try to project toward your judges. Instead of looking to the back of the room, angle your body in such a way as to face the judges' table. After concluding your evidence and analysis under each of your sub-points for Point 2, walk to Point 3. If you want, you can incorporate the term "move" into your transition to highlight the fact that your speech is moving forward both contextually and physically. When you have finished delivering Point 3, walk to the Conclusion.

Your concluding stance should be about three feet in front of where you started your speech (depending on the size of the room). This reduction in distance gives the illusion that you have gotten bigger during the course of your speech and makes you more personable. A judge may not be comfortable with you speaking less than 10 feet away at the beginning of your presentation, but will probably be more receptive to closer proximity after hearing you speak.

The three-step walk is common among extemp speakers because of its tried-and-true reputation as a polished and professional manner of handling the non-verbal part of a speech. Some judges may like it for the simple reason that it gives them a chance to rest their heads at a different angle. While it may seem awkward at first, you should grow to appreciate it as you become acclimated to the movement and make it more natural. As you use both the verbal and physical elements of transitions through the three-step walk, you will become more confident and your judges will come to expect the movement.

# Training and Reinforcement

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## Questions

1. Why should the thesis statement be written first?
2. What are double sources and how can they be used to your advantage in an extemp speech?
3. How can you make transitions obvious yet subtle?
4. What is the visual impact of the three-step walk?

## Key Concepts

1. Every point in your speech should get roughly the same amount of time.
2. Do not try to present the full citation for a news article.
3. Summarize, do not quote verbatim.
4. A speech is not merely a verbal outline, but an oratory.
5. Accent verbal change with physical movement.

## Exercises

1. Practice introducing a news source by vocally introducing articles you read in the newspaper or a news magazine. Use lead-in phrases like "according to" and "[source] reports" or develop lead-ins of your own.
2. Practice "stage walking" so you can learn to step from one point to the next in your three-step walk without turning your back on your audience.

## CHAPTER 7

# Going “Off Card”

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*Winners don't do different things. They do things differently.*

Have you ever noticed the power of laundry detergent marketing? Visit a supermarket and view the myriad of brands: All, Biz, Bold, Cheer, Clorox, Downy, Gain, Mr. Clean, Purex, Rinso, Solo, Sun, Surf, Tide, Ultra, Wisk and Xtra. The names jump off the shelves along with their brightly colored packaging and form a plethora confusing to even the initiated detergent shopper. Though marketers painfully attempt to show the shopper how different their brand is from the rest, the reality is *they are all the same*.<sup>14</sup>

In an extemp round, a panel of judges watches six to nine consecutive speakers with little room between for evaluation. Almost as soon as one extemper is finished speaking, the next one enters the room and is ready to begin. Like brands of detergent, each speaker puts on his best face and tries to get the judge to “buy,” but in the end, the cynic says, *they are all the same*.

As an extemper, it is your job to differentiate yourself from your fellow competitors. You can add different kinds of surfactant (most detergents use anionic surfactants, so trying a cationic solution might be in order) or a tempting hypoallergenic scent. Whatever you do, you need to have

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<sup>14</sup> I must credit my economics professor, Dr. Peter J. Meyer of the University of the Pacific, with this comparison. Meyer tells his microeconomic students of his first time doing laundry: as an undergraduate at Harvard. A supermarket attendant who aided the confused economist provided the conclusion that “they are all the same”.

something that none of your competitors have and that separates you from the rest of the field. Your presentation must stick in your judge's memory through the course of the round.

The earlier you go in your panel, the more you should be willing to take risks to be different. If you are the first speaker, you will need to "survive" the presentations of an entire panel. Therefore, your material should be memorable enough to stay at the front of your judge's mind for the next hour of speakers. Mid-panel, you can be lost in the wave and you need to be unique to place high. More often than not, the most recent speaker ranks higher. If none of the competitors in a panel differentiate themselves, the last extempers to speak will place the highest.

In marketing, differentiation is the king. In order to sell a product, a company needs to create a pitch that separates its good from the rest of the pack. Consumers have no reason to purchase Dasani water from Coca-Cola over Aquafina from PepsiCo, two competing bottled waters in the market. However, their marketing has forced us to think twice. "Water that makes your mouth water" (Dasani) and "Drink Up" (Aquafina) have helped us along.

Dasani and Aquafina teach us another important lesson about differentiation: you want to make sure that your efforts at setting yourself apart do not push you too far away from the pack. Regardless of how it is positioned, Dasani is still a plastic bottle full of H<sub>2</sub>O. Surf may use a different surfactant and Gain may add a perfume, but at heart they are still detergents. You may go off card or add some funny lines, but in the end you should still be an extemper. Distancing yourself from competition does not mean abrogating the event of extemp and "breaking all the rules" to be different; rather it implies a few subtle differences.

If you feel comfortable with one or more of the strategies outlined in this chapter, feel free to deploy them no matter where the tab room puts you in the round. Differentiation can never hurt. You will for sure find yourself at the beginning or middle of a panel at an upcoming tournament. Therefore, *it is imperative that you find a way to separate yourself from your competition.*

The next two chapters address ways of differentiating yourself from "the pack," but the smart competitor will be cognizant of the fact that hundreds of other extempers will have read these pages as well. While these tools will set you apart, you will need to be innovative in order to

keep a step ahead of your opponents. Going off card makes you different only if you are the only one. When others try the same strategy, you will have to build on your abilities to add additional elements that set you apart.

## Going Off-card

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Extemp speakers are allowed to bring a 3 x 5 index card with them when they speak. This small note card serves as a receptacle for all of a speaker's brilliant prep-room thoughts. Everything is written down in handwriting tiny enough to fit into the small space and yet legibly enough to jog the author's memory when he actually delivers the presentation.

*But why insist on using a 3 x 5 card?* Sometimes holding a stiff piece of paper while you speak is paramount to walking with a crutch. You can only gesture from one side of your body; you must constantly lean over your card to decipher small print; and, worse still, you may at times appear to a judge as if delivering from cold notes instead of from your heart. In short,

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**Using a note card makes a speech easier to deliver while rendering it less appealing to your audience.**

---

Most extempers use a note card for the following four reasons:

1. To list the points and sub-points of a speech
2. To list sources
3. To jog memory on key analysis
4. To cover a nasty stain on their tie or blouse.

While a good speech should feature each of the first three elements, a note-card crutch is not always necessary.

Before you skip to the next chapter or write off this strategy as "too advanced" or "too hard," consider going "off card." Doing so looks very impressive to your audience even though the actual tactics involved boil down to a collection of illusions that take some work to develop, but are certainly doable. Even if you never intend to go off-card, you should

probably read this chapter, because it explains some important things about speech development. And who knows? You may some day give it a try.

Before going any further, you should know that this strategy requires a great deal of practice both prior to and during an extemp tournament. *Very few* speakers have successfully delivered “off-card” speeches on their first tries. It will take you several attempts in the security and privacy of your house to learn how to do this for yourself. At a tournament, proper preparation will require much from you: It will call for focus and a willingness to sacrifice and deny yourself social comforts. If you are willing to work hard, this is the strategy for you. If not, stick to the 3 x 5.

### **Key #1: Complete Writing in 10 Minutes**

An off-card speech does nothing fundamentally different than a 3 x 5 supported presentation. You will still use the 3-3 format and find a piece of evidence for every one of your sub-points.

There are, however, two things you should change from normal prep. First, you will need to complete the writing portion as fast as possible. Whereas you might take up to twenty minutes to write a speech when sources need not be memorized, you should now try to finish the actual writing in less than ten minutes. This means that you should complete the speech outline, have sources listed and be ready to practice the presentation *within 10 minutes of drawing your topic*.

If this sounds daunting to you, you are not alone. Before deciding that this chapter is really out to lunch and moving to the next in the manner discouraged above, try writing a speech in ten minutes yourself. Put this chapter aside, grab a topic from the Appendix and write a structured speech in the 3-3 format. If you have an internet connection handy, see if you can find some quick articles that would fill in your presentation and do not forget to add an introduction and conclusion. Prepare the speech quickly – as if you were under tournament stress – and use a stopwatch to see how long it takes you to write the outline.

I am serious! Grab your pen and paper and get scribbling. This chapter will still be here when you return.



If you are able to accomplish this feat in less than fifteen minutes, all the Spirits of Extemp Past will bow before you. You may be able to do it in a half hour if you have extemp experience. If you are just beginning, you may require over forty-five minutes to complete the assignment.

However long it takes, your time will become a benchmark for improvement. Write down how long it took you to prepare and keep track of your times when you work on future speeches.

With practice, and by keeping the clock in mind, you should be able to whittle down your time to under ten minutes. As you prepare, think of anything you are doing that is unnecessary. Are you reading through entire articles to find points? Do you over-think the question? Do you begin prep with a pen and paper ready? You can try going off card with a speech-writing time of over 10 minutes, but it is difficult.

If, after reasonable practice, you are still having trouble keeping your preparation under ten minutes, try shrinking the content you are endeavoring to incorporate. Instead of using a 3-3 format, remove a couple of sources to lighten the speech. This 3-2 format will cause you to lose substance (up to three sources, if you cut down all your points) and your analysis will not be as deep, but it may be necessary to begin going off card. With practice, you can bring the content back up.

## **Key #2: Change Speechwriting Media**

The second aspect of speechwriting you should change concerns the very medium you use to write. When preparing a speech for 3 x 5 card-assisted delivery, you should probably transcribe your thoughts directly onto the note card. When preparing for an off-card presentation, however, you should cut the 3 x 5 card entirely out of the equation. Write your speech on whatever you wish.

If pink paper suits your fancy, use it. If polka dots help you concentrate, that's your ticket. If heart-shaped post-it notes are your inspiration, go with them. If unimaginative 8½ x 11 sheets of white paper are your thing, nothing stands in your way. Freeing yourself from the confining 3 x 5 card gives you the freedom to expand your thoughts and, more importantly, make a visual that will help you recall the speech. Ultimately,

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**You will be carrying your notes in your head, so it matters little how you transcribe your thoughts.**

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One advantage of not using a 3 x 5 card for your notes is that it eliminates any path of retreat. If you draw a blank mid-way through the round, you cannot reach into your pocket and pull out some polka dot post-its to find your place. Going off card destroys your safety net. For this reason, you should practice extensively at home prior to attending a tournament. We will discuss that a bit further down.

### **Key #3: Take Note of Your Sources and Points**

Go over your notes and isolate all points and sources. A point is any subdivision within your speech and a source is the publication and date of anything you cite. Break down each point into a separate column like this:

*Question  
Idea*

<u><i>Point 1</i></u>	<u><i>Point 2</i></u>	<u><i>Point 3</i></u>
<i>Subpoint a)</i> <i>evidence</i> <i>analysis</i>	<i>Subpoint a)</i> <i>evidence</i> <i>analysis</i>	<i>Subpoint a)</i> <i>evidence</i> <i>analysis</i>
<i>Subpoint b)</i> <i>evidence</i> <i>analysis</i>	<i>Subpoint b)</i> <i>evidence</i> <i>analysis</i>	<i>Subpoint b)</i> <i>evidence</i> <i>analysis</i>
<i>Subpoint c)</i> <i>evidence</i> <i>analysis</i>	<i>Subpoint c)</i> <i>evidence</i> <i>analysis</i>	<i>Subpoint c)</i> <i>evidence</i> <i>analysis</i>

An off-card speech outline for the topic "Will Iran submit to the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) nuclear demands?" should look something like this:

*Will Iran submit to IAEA demands?*  
*"Nuclear deterrence doesn't work outside of the Russian-U.S. context; Saddam Hussein showed that."*  
*-Gen. Charles Homer<sup>(1)</sup>*

- |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <p>1. A brief history of Iran's nuclear antics</p> <p>a. CNN, Sept. 19<sup>(2)</sup></p> <p>USA suspect Iran is making nuclear weapons</p> <p>b. ABC News, Sept. 19<sup>(3)</sup></p> <p>Bush has threatened "consequences"</p> <p>c. Toronto Star, Sept. 19<sup>(4)</sup></p> <p>France has split with USA's hard-line policy on Iran</p> | <p>2. IAEA and Iran</p> <p>a. Associated Press, Sept. 14<sup>(5)</sup></p> <p>IAEA calls US intelligence report "outrageous"</p> <p>b. Voice of America News, Aug. 31<sup>(6)</sup></p> <p>Iran has ignored the IAEA</p> <p>c. Reuters, Sept. 14<sup>(7)</sup></p> <p>IAEA has loosened its Iran standards</p> | <p>3. IAEA will fail intrinsically</p> <p>a. The Hindu, Sept. 15<sup>(8)</sup></p> <p>IAEA's failure in North Korea, Kashmir and now Iran.</p> <p>b. Agence France Presse, Oct 7, 2005<sup>(9)</sup></p> <p>IAEA didn't deserve Nobel prize; failure to stop proliferation</p> <p>c. The Heritage Foundation, March 8<sup>(10)</sup></p> <p>Pressure must be kept on Iran.</p> |
|--|--|--|

Now comes the fun part. Break down your speech into an acronym and date tree. Write down your sources for each point in a column and add the date (or a number that will help you easily recall the date). An acronym and date tree for the diagram on the previous note card should look like this:

CNN - 19  
 ABC - 19  
 Toronto Star - 19

AP - 14  
 VOA - Aug 31  
 Reuters - 14

Hindu - 15  
 AFP - Oct 7, '05

## Heritage – Mar 8

Prepare your tree quickly, either by circling sources on your pre-existing notes or by writing it out separately.

For academic sake, know that the above card cites real sources from an extemp box. Peruse the following bibliography to your liking.

1. [http://thinkexist.com/quotation/nuclear\\_deterrence\\_doesn\\_t\\_work\\_outside\\_of\\_the/207864.html](http://thinkexist.com/quotation/nuclear_deterrence_doesn_t_work_outside_of_the/207864.html).
2. U.N. official: Bush, Iranian leader will avoid each other, CNN.com, September 19, 2006, URL: <http://edition.cnn.com/2006/POLITICS/09/18/bush.un/>, Accessed: March 3, 2008.
3. Pickler, Nedra. "Bush Says Stable Mideast was a Mirage." ABC News. September 19th, 2006.
4. Harper, Tim. "Together — and apart — at the UN, Leaders of U.S., Iran to address assembly today; Presidents unlikely to speak to each other." Toronto Star. September 19th, 2006.
5. "IAEA: Iran Nuclear Report 'Outrageous', U.N. Blasts House Committee Claims On Tehran's Weapon-Making Capability." CBS News. September 14th, 2006. URL: <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/09/14/world/main2012368.shtml>, Accessed: March 3, 2008.
6. Heinlein, Peter. "IAEA: Iran Violating Security Council Order." VOA. August 13, 2006. URL: <http://www.voanews.com/english/2006-08-31-voa65.cfm>. Accessed: March 3, 2008.
7. Heinrich, Mark. "IAEA protests 'erroneous' U.S. report on Iran." Reuters News. September 14th, 2006.
8. Aneia, Atul. "Will Iran go the North Korea way?" The Hindu. September 15, 2006. URL: <http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/2003/09/16/stories/2003091601931400.htm>. Accessed: September 19, 2006
9. IAEA Rewarded for Failure: Critics, Agence France Presse, October 7th, 2005, Republished in the Common Dreams News Center, URL <http://www.commondreams.org/headlines05/1007-07.htm>, Accessed: March 3, 2008.

10. Phillips, James and Schaefer, Brett. "Nuclear Diplomacy: Keep the Pressure on Iran." Heritage Foundation. March 8, 2006. URL: <http://www.heritage.org/Research/MiddleEast/wm1010.cfm>, Accessed: March 3, 2008.

## Take Each Point One at a Time

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Begin on your first point and see if you can find any association between the sources. Is there something that makes them easy to remember? In the case of point one, the first letters of all the sources form a common three-letter word (C-A-T) and all the dates are the same (September 19). If you associate the right letters with the appropriate source, all you need to remember is CAT -19 and you will not forget point one.

Before getting excited about how easy it is to go off card, remember that each one of our sub-points has two parts: evidence and analysis. *It is imperative that you mentally connect sources and analysis.* "C" cannot just mean "CNN," it must also mean "USA suspects Iran is making nuclear weapons." As you memorize, associate every source with the analysis that follows it.

C19 – USA: Iran is making nuclear weapons

A19 – Bush: "there will be consequences"

T19 – France has split with USA

To reinforce each source further, *use simple finger gestures to signal 1-2-3 as you move through your sources.* By visualizing your points on paper, repeating them out loud and gesturing, you are bombarding your brain with three different forms of stimuli (visual, auditory and kinesthetic). After about a minute of repeating your sources and analysis, try to do the same without looking at your notes. This is an important step to going off card because you must not become so dependent on your acronym-and-date trees that you end up writing them on your 3 x 5 instead of truly severing the ties between you, the trees, and the written remarks they represent. If you are to leave your notes behind, you must quickly wean yourself off the written stimuli.

Once you feel comfortable with point 1, move on to point 2.

Another important tool in your memorization toolbox is the pre-set point. A pre-set point is any point for which the sources are already chosen

prior to the beginning of preparation. In the Iran example, point 2 is a pre-set point, with articles from the Associated Press, Voice of America and Reuters. To develop a pre-set point, just make sure when you are printing your articles that for every topic area you include at least one article from each of your pre-set sources. This is usually done with wire services because they are so prevalent, but you can pre-set any common news source.

If you do this, you will only have to remember dates. In this case: 14 – Aug 31 – 14.

With pre-set points, as with your acronym tree, remember to *associate sources with analysis*. As you verbally recite your sources and commit them to memory, do not lose track of what the sources say!

14 – IAEA: US Intel is outrageous  
Aug. 31 – Iran ignores IAEA  
14 – IAEA has loosened standards

After practicing a few times without looking at your notes and when you feel comfortable with point 2, go back to point 1 and try to move through it quickly. See if you can successfully deliver all the sources and analysis without any mistakes. Work through the entire point and transition to the second point without glancing down at your notes.

If you need to stand, move around, or drink a favorite beverage to help keep your mind active, feel free to do so, but make sure you do not disrupt the other extempers.

Continuing with the above example, Point 3 is by far the most difficult because it lacks a memorable three-letter acronym and all the dates are from *different months*. Unfortunately, you cannot avoid such thorny points, engineer as you may to make the speech more digestible.

To memorize the third point, commit H-A-H to memory. Hah! Maybe the point is happy because it tricked you and is now saying “hah!” After saying the names of the sources a few times, associate each letter with its accompanying date. Only the first source can be listed with a simple 15, the other two must be written with their month and the second source should also include the year since it is so old. Repeat sources and dates a few times and then add the connected analysis. If you write as you memorize, your point should look like this:

H15 – IAEA failed in Iran, NK  
A Oct 7, '05 – IAEA didn't deserve accolade  
H Mar 8 – USA needs to keep pressure on Iran

Just like that, all the little points joined to make a previously inedible speech readily digestible. Practice your points together while glancing as little as you can at your acronym tree and notes. Remember to include verbal transitions between points and repeat analysis tags next to every source.

After memorizing your three points, turn to your opening quotation. Believe it or not, this is the hardest part of an extemp speech to memorize. For some reason, grasping a short one-sentence quotation is much more difficult than remembering nine esoteric sources. Is it because the opening needs to be recited word-for-word or because committing phrases to memory uses a different part of our brains? Openings are usually the trickiest.

Some quotations are well known, giving an extemper an easy break, but many quotations will be new.

To memorize an opening, begin with the last word of the quotation. In our example, the last word is: "that." Add the next word to the left and create a repeatable phrase: "showed that." Now add a few more words: "Saddam Hussein showed that." Repeat each phrase a few times and then slowly build up backwards, adding more words until you have the entire phrase down.

In the unlikely event that you are unable to memorize the opening, simply write it down for support until you are able to fully abandon notes. It is natural to look at your topic at the beginning and end of your speech and, if you memorize everything else in your presentation, you can still almost go off card by only jotting down your opening statement. Beware that this strategy can easily become a crutch and a fully off-card extemp speech is optimum. When all else fails, however, it is perfectly reasonable to use a card for opening assistance.

When going off card, you will combine the memorization and practice-for-smoothness aspects of preparation. You will not need additional practice time because you will be ironing your presentation as you commit sources and analysis to memory. It is therefore fine to use the

entire twenty minutes of remaining preparation to get your memory and tongue in order.

Although mentioned earlier, the following fact bears repeating...

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**There is a single key to successful off-card extemping: *practice*.**

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Your dry run should be in front of a mirror. Your second and third attempts should be delivered for the benefit of a similarly inanimate audience. Subsequent efforts can take place before loving parents or siblings. In practice, you are not competing and could, perhaps, use more than thirty minutes of prep time. Over time you will bring your memorization and timing to satisfaction.

In the prep room, the same rule applies. When finished outlining your speech, stand up in a corner and quietly practice your speech. Don't be disruptive, but don't worry about other extempers or the room's monitor either. The prep room is designed for preparation and, as long as you are neither loud nor intrusive, others will be impressed by how focused and dedicated you are to preparing for your extemp speech. Be steady and focus as the preparation clock ticks down. When your number is called, head off to face your judges—*without any aids*.

## **Delivering the Off-card Speech**

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If you have worked hard in prep, delivering the off-card speech will *not* be very different than giving a 3 x 5 presentation. You will still smile when you enter the room and wait patiently for the judges to fill out their ballots. You will still employ sharp analysis as you answer the question. Most judges will never catch your acronyms or pre-set points, but the fact that you do not have a card with you will be a footnote on the ballot (sometimes accompanied by an exclamation point).

You will need to focus on a few points as you prepare to deliver the off-card masterpiece.

First, *do not forget your sources*. Mentally repeat your acronyms up to the very point when you begin speaking. If your judges take a while to fill out their ballots, sit down quietly and practice. If you need to jog your



memory, feel free to pull out your notes and take a quick refresher glance. You probably want to review your opening especially often, since a memory stumble in the introduction would look bad. Do everything in your power to keep the sources in your mind before you speak.

Second, *be transparent*. Judges are sometimes suspicious of cheating when competitors do not refer to a 3 x 5 card during their speech. Have your notes available for review by anyone: another speaker, parent, friend, extemp-room proctor or judge. If someone is curious about how you memorized your material, feel free to mention this book.

Third, *be confident*. This is vital whenever you speak – it is important just about everywhere in life – but is especially relevant when you lose the moorings of paper notes. Your 3 x 5 card was your safety net. If you forget a source or a date you will have one less evidence item on your tally, but you will still appear knowledgeable.

When you draw a blank – and it will happen, memory lapses strike everyone – keep the speech moving. If you forget what the “T” in C-A-T stands for, move on. If you cannot remember a publication date, deliver the source without the date and hope that the judges will not rank you down for it. Many judges will catch it, but if you maintain a confident composure, some will not notice or penalize you. If you are summing up your opening and forget the exact phrasing of your quotation, paraphrase. If you remember a source that you had forgotten earlier, incorporate it if it is convenient. If not, do not worry; just move on.

When you finish an off-card extemp speech, your body will be full of adrenaline. The focus that is required to regurgitate your sources and the relief at doing okay at so difficult an endeavor will make you weak in the knees. Your endorphins will only be urged on by the applause of an appreciative audience. Soak it in. You have earned it.

# Training and Reinforcement

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## Questions

1. Who should worry more about differentiation, a speaker at the beginning of the panel or the end? Why?
2. What are the advantages of going off card? Could going off card hurt you more than it helps?
3. Does a card add credibility to a presentation?
4. Are you ready to try extemp without the safety net of a 3x5 card?

## Key Concepts

1. Subtle differentiation is key to extemp success.
2. Going off card is much easier than it looks, but requires some work.
3. An off card speech follows the same organization as a carded speech.
4. Taking less time to write your speech allows for memorization.
5. Build an acronym out of your sources and link analysis to evidence.
6. Prepare a pre-set point to ease memorization.
7. Memorize opening quotations with reverse build-up.

## Exercises

1. Work your mind by memorizing tracts of literature or scripture.
2. How fast can you write a speech outline? Try to set a personal best with a stopwatch for record keeping. Do not leave anything out but see how quickly you can finish it without cutting corners.

# Adding Humor

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*"Humor is a serious thing. I like to think of it as one of our greatest natural resources, which must be preserved at all cost." ~ James Thurber*

When he was my Team-Policy debate partner, my brother Travis was delivering a debate speech in a high pressure outround and things were not going well. Our opponents had surprised us with their affirmative case and our arguments had been sub-par throughout the round. Travis was giving his rebuttal and, two minutes in, had been unable to generate much traction. The round in the next room finished and the accompanying applause was heard clearly through the thin walls in our round. Instead of ignoring the noise as a distraction, Travis paused, bowed and said "Thank you, very much, thank you," until the clapping ceased. This small gesture of humor brought our judges to laughter and showed that Travis was completely in control of the stage. It almost looked as if he had expected the interruption.

My brother Travis is an amazing humorist, able to turn any uncomfortable moment into a memorable hilarity. He is the most naturally funny man I know. That moment of mirth completely changed the tenor of the round. From then on, our arguments seemed to resound with the audience, we were more relaxed and, I like to think as a consequence of my brother's wit, we won the round.

Humor is an excellent way of helping an audience relax. Laughter releases tension and shows those watching that you are comfortable enough to think about cracking a joke. Humor is also relatively rare in current events discussion, although late-night humorists like Leno and Letterman might have a thing or two to say about that. Finding a way to

weave just a few seconds of hilarity into your presentation can give it an edge over pieces that stay dry for seven long minutes.

There are many different kinds of humor and volumes have been published on developing and delivering jokes so that mirth is effectively communicated. This section focuses on two specific kinds of humor—situational and universal—and will conclude with a discussion of delivery and recovery.

## Situational Humor

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Travis was showcasing one of the cornerstones of effective speech humor called *situational humor*: the ability to handle unexpected happenstance with relaxed wit. This kind of humor is the hardest to prepare for and requires the most practice. It is used as a response to adverse circumstances like a dropped index card, forgotten source, cell phone ringing or external noise. I have found myself in the middle of a speech at a point when good situational humor would have proved a healthy addition to my remarks, but several minutes ticked by before I could think of a suitable joke. The line was useless for the moment it was conceived to address, but can be summoned if the circumstances ever align themselves in the future.

At times it is best to let these situations pass without comment. That is definitely my advice regarding cell phone interruptions, for reasons we shall consider below. But a unique circumstance is just that—*unique*. It is something that happens only to you. No one else in the panel will get to face the hindrance that lies in your way. If you make the most of it, it can be a memorable point in your favor.

Situational humor should be self-deprecating, but not self-effacing. Your humor should put yourself down in a way that says you are comfortable with who you are, not apologetic or retreating. It should be at your expense, not that of another person in the room or, heaven forbid, the embarrassed individual responsible for causing the disturbance. In the example I gave of my brother, Travis was mocking himself with the fake bow. He was acting too big for his britches and with a false dignity that is almost always funny. The people applauding in the next room over could not have known of his theatrics and there was no way anyone could malign them for their actions.

In *The Great Debaters*, a movie about race relations in Texas between the two world wars, Denzel Washington plays a debate coach at Wiley College. When discussing effective humor with his forensics students, Washington advises that jokes should always be made at the expense of one's opponents. There is a nugget of truth to this perspective. Humor should end up making you look comfortable, not making your audience flinch.

It is very difficult to prepare for situational humor; you cannot plan it out carefully, write out the quip and predict where your audience will start laughing. The best thing you can do is be flexible and ready to be funny when the situation arises. It takes a natural feeling for humor and an attitude that embraces situational mishaps as opportunities for a laugh. When a witty response comes to you, do not suppress it, but rather foster its development and allow it to smoothly transition into your speech.

All humor should be accompanied by courtesy. Yours should be a polite quip free of vulgarity, obscenity or objectionable content. You have no control over who will hear your words or how often they will be repeated, so you should use the utmost caution to avoid saying things you will later regret. As a public speaker, make sure you would not be ashamed of your words in front of any audience and you will be fine.

## Universal Humor

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When comedians visit the Laugh Factory in Hollywood, they usually have very little in common with their audience. While the comedian is often a starving entertainer (or, conversely, a superstar) the crowd is made up of middle class singles and young couples, many of whom share few life experiences with the performer. But the comedian needs to find something to joke about. An account of waiting in line for Black Friday sales, playing a very first round of golf or surviving embarrassingly candid comments from a four year-old are only amusing if the audience has been there or can, through conjecture and extension, relate to the circumstances that make the story comical.

Students in extemp face a similar potential void. In most rounds, an earlier generation is judging another, and it only takes one Jack Lemmon film to realize how much the standards for humor have changed in the last 50 years. In other rounds, the age group of the judging pool is mixed

and alumni join parent, coach and community judges on the panel, further complicating the already difficult proposition of delivering a good joke. A line about mood rings will get a blank stare from most people under 35 while many baby boomers have no idea what a wiki, avatar or podcast is.

When faced with a varied audience, the Laugh Factory comedian retreats to “universal humor,” or comedic expression that almost everyone will find funny. Unfortunately, universal does not necessarily mean good, and some of the jokes are objectionable. Yes, bathroom jokes are universal and commonplace in popular movies and children’s media. Even children can identify, and everyone can understand the universality of these jokes. While their crass nature disqualifies them from extemp rounds, we can isolate the concept that makes such humor popular and apply it to the development of more refined quips that are universally funny and in good taste.

The goal of humor for a public speaker should be to include as many of the audience members as possible in the laughs. An experience that only one audience member (even a judge) can relate to makes good fodder for a joke only if it is infamous and others will still be able to follow. I was judging a round once where a competitor who knew me referenced my status as an economics student in a joke about the difficulty of explaining market issues (his topic was the housing bubble). His humor was funny for the other judges because they knew my background. The speaker treaded on dangerous ground, since many frown upon familiarity with a judge during a round, but this particular competitor was able to maintain appropriate decorum and create a positive impression on the audience.

One brand of humor that is appreciated by many is making references to pop culture and celebrity personalities. Celebrity means any person who is well known by your audience. Among some groups, Hulk Hogan’s name would draw blank stares, while in other audiences his name produces a very specific (and strong) image. You need to know your audience in order to use humor effectively. A panel of Baby Boomer judges will understand a reference to the British Invasion of the 1960s or appreciate a joke from Johnny Carson and Bob Hope, but will not necessarily know who Jon Stewart, Conan O’Brien and Steven Colbert are.

Celebrity jokes are based on a commonly accepted stereotype of the individual, organization or people group they satirize. While the stereotype may not be accurate or fair, it certainly can be funny. For instance, President George Bush has a low threshold for international invasion, President Clinton has a weak marriage, Barry Bonds juices and Tom Cruise jumps on couches.

Jay Leno gives a couple of excellent examples of stereotype-based humor in his January 8, 2008 “The Late Show” broadcast:

“A scary incident in the Strait of Hormuz. Iranian boats threatened our Navy. President Bush said today that he has no plans to attack Iran. Oh he's still going to attack, he just has no plans.”

“Former President Bill Clinton says he's more worried about his wife's campaign than he's ever been about his own election. Well, sure — he knows if she loses they have to go home together.”

The great thing about celebrity humor is that it can be prepared in advance. By printing off appropriate current events jokes before a tournament or thinking of funny and fitting ways to incorporate a celebrity into a joke, you can be ready to help your audience relax with universal humor.

If you do prepare your jokes in advance, keep a close tab on your audience's reactions and scrap the jokes that fall flat. Sometimes “canned” humor seems like too much in a speech that has already been injected with a little mirth. Other times it feels obtuse and contrived. While there is no way of knowing for sure what is “too much,” you can avoid the risk by keeping tabs on your judges. Extemp remains a discussion of current events, humorous quips notwithstanding, and you should keep that reality at the forefront of your thinking as you prepare humor.

Another excellent way to incorporate celebrity humor is in the off-hand remark. Your joke doesn't need to be set up or have a buildup sequence in order to be funny. Some universal lines can grab laughs even without explanation.

If you think of a possible off-hand remark in prep, file it away for use in a speech. If it comes to you in a round and the quip fits in with your presentation, feel free to insert it.

During a semi-final speech about the bond market at one tournament, I noticed that my audience was looking duller than the Chairman of the Federal Reserve announcing a change in the interest rate. In an effort to liven up an admittedly dry economics presentation, I told those listening that if my prediction of a soft landing held true, investors might “make like Tom Cruise and start jumping on coaches.” In retrospect, my line really wasn’t that funny. But it did not have to be. A fellow extemper watched the entire round and told me afterward that I was the only speaker who even made an attempt at humor. The laughs differentiated me from the pack and helped me to a high ranking.

## **Pause**

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Jack Benny, one of the greatest comedians of the World War II generation and a personal favorite for his hilarious radio routines, once said, “It’s not so much knowing when to speak, but when to pause.” One of Benny’s most famous jokes involved a thug who cornered Benny and said, “Your money or your life.” Benny did not answer and his pause was attributed to fear. The thug then repeated his question saying, “Look, bud, your money or your life!” Benny paused again only to deliver the punch line, “I’m thinking it over.”

Like many of the gags that made Benny’s distinguished career, a pause was central to the mugger routine. Without it, the audience would not have known when to laugh and when to focus on the content. The pause draws the audience’s attention where the humorist wants it. Many an attempt at humor falls flat because of improper presentation and not giving the audience enough time to appreciate the wit behind the quip.

The best thing to do leading into a joke is to slow down your delivery. More than when you are reciting polling data or recounting the recent history of a foreign country, your audience needs to clearly understand what you say before the punch line. Even if you are a naturally fast speaker and are able to enunciate well at a rapid clip, you must make yourself slow down if you want your audience to catch what you are about to say.



Immediately after a joke, the temptation is to keep talking. You have just risked your credibility on a line and you have no idea how the audience will respond. You are terribly uncomfortable waiting for some kind of reaction, and getting your speech back on track is your highest priority. But if you rush over your audience, your joke will go unnoticed or, worse, be interpreted as a mistake.

Put everything on hold for a second or two and simply pause. Use a smile to hint that you just cracked a joke, but do not laugh. Laughing is a sign of appreciation and might be interpreted as self-promotion.

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**Nobody appreciates a humorist who laughs at his own jokes.**

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When you have given your joke its due with a silent tribute, you may continue with your speech.

## Hearing Crickets

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Even the most accomplished extemper may use humor that falls flat. Despite the best efforts of a speaker to elicit a smile, some unfortunate element can get in the way of success. It could be poor delivery, regrettable content, bad timing, or inaccurate audience evaluation. The technical term for humor that falls flat is “hearing crickets” because the noise these insects make as they rub their legs together can be clearly heard over the silence of an audience who is not amused.

When I first started incorporating humor into my speeches, hearing crickets really scared me. I remember one alumni judge looking at me and shaking his head slightly after I used a dumb pun that hardly stirred my audience. *Ouch!* I needed *aloe vera* for *that* burn.

There are two acceptable ways to recover in front of an unresponsive audience after a quip that falls short. Whichever one you choose, you should have it settled in your mind before making an attempt at humor. The first recovery strategy is to ignore the joke. Pretend it never happened and keep plowing along in your speech. You were intending to get back to content after the pause anyway, so why should the audience change your plans? Many judges are impressed by competitors who can

land on their feet after getting a collective cold shoulder, and the simple act of moving on can be an effective way of differentiating yourself.

The “move on” recovery requires that you never refer back to the joke later in the speech, as such a reference can be interpreted as insecurity about the attempt at humor. You should feel free to return to humor in general later in the presentation, but leave that specific joke behind for the rest of your speech.

The second approach goes for all the marbles. You went into the joke intending to amuse your audience and get them to laugh a little and one failed attempt is not going to dissuade you. In an effort to “salvage” the joke, you can use any of several recovery lines, which stand-up comedians and professional speakers use as a way to save face after a bad joke.

Recovery lines can be impromptu, but it is often a good idea to prepare them in advance. Think of a way to put down your failed joke in a way that is funny, makes everyone more comfortable and is self-deprecating without being self-destructive. The statement should be witty enough to get a few laughs, but does not need to be a gut buster.

Some lines that served me well in extemp include:

“Hey Jack, I thought you said that joke was funny.” (Called toward the back of the room at no one in particular or someone you know in the audience who would not mind the attention.)

“Well, my mom liked it.” (Low risk. Sure to get a smile from most judges.)

“Well, your mom liked it.” (Said to a young male in the audience. Risky, but can get some great laughs in the right audience. Works well with young judges.)

“I know, that was painful. But it probably hurt me more than it hurt you.” (Low risk with smiles practically guaranteed)

Whatever you do for a recovery, be sure to get your speech back to content quickly. You do not want to keep salvaging your speech from the jaws of a failed joke. At some point it’s time to hang up the shovel; say your joke, recover and keep going.

With practice, humor can be deployed strategically to relax your audience and demonstrate your confidence. You will not always be Jack Benny, but

if you practice a recovery strategy and understand the purpose of a good joke, you should not hurt yourself either. A little bit of comedy goes a long way toward differentiating yourself from your competition. Embrace the opportunity that a good joke represents and it will not be long before you are setting yourself apart from the pack.

# Training and Reinforcement

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## Questions

1. What is the purpose of humor?
2. Can humor be taken too far?
3. What makes a joke “universally” funny?
4. When a joke falls flat is it better to let it go or try to salvage? Why?

## Key Concepts

1. Humor makes the humorist look comfortable and relaxed and has the same effect on the audience.
2. Situational humor is an excellent way to distance oneself from the competition.
3. Jokes should be tailored to suit the audience.
4. Humor should always be courteous and devoid of vulgar, obscene or inappropriate content.
5. Deliver makes the joke.
6. After humor, the speech must go on.

## Exercises

1. Make a list of things you see done regularly in extemp. Are all of them necessary? Could a speaker survive without them? Are there crutches that could be eliminated? Try to incorporate a change into your next practice extemp.

# Generics

## (Handling the “weird” question)

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*“Always be prepared.” ~Boy Scout motto.*

No matter how much extempers agonize over prep, they soon discover that not every extemp question fits in nicely with their preparation. In fact, it is common practice for tournaments to insert a topic or two for which extempers have no specific articles. Topic writers do this to test speakers’ ability to discuss important issues based solely on their principles or foundation of basic knowledge. Beginners may rejoice at easy questions, but polished speakers are able to turn difficult topics into opportunities. Good extempers who pick so-called “weird” topics can showcase their general knowledge of current events and demonstrate their keen understanding of the world. This chapter goes into how extempers can develop a strategy for preparation to ultimately prepare for a variety of questions at the tournament.

### Generic Topics

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To be prepared for the unexpected, you need to have “generic” or broad analysis that can pertain to a large number of topic areas. This analysis can be on anything from the flaws of government intervention to the benefits of expanded international relations. Most generics will stem from the realms of economics, history, law, philosophy and the arts, but every area of life is theoretically open to inquiry. You may draw from specific

examples to highlight your analysis, but you should be able to speak exclusively about your generic in the absence of any real-world support.

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**A generic is not a speech outline, but a tool designed to be applied in narrow instances and in limited parts of speeches.**

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The generic is not printed or memorized material, but a mental instrument. To use it effectively you must depend on your grey matter, background knowledge and prior training. Use the generic, but use it sparingly.

The generic is not designed to be used in every round, but should be deployed when good-faith preparation falls short. Extempers should never plan on using a generic; they should resort to the generic when planning fails. Most of the generics listed below take more time to set up than an average speech can afford. Please do not change the speech structure discussed earlier just to fit in a generic unless that is the only way you can handle your question. You always take a risk when you use prepared material that treats the question in an abstract way. If this risk is understood and you have no other option, make up the generic and go with it.

## **Economics**

Of all generics, *economics* is the most commonly employed. Think about it: you make economic decisions every day, from purchasing a meal at lunch (supply and demand) to getting up in the morning (opportunity-cost analysis). So do the movers and shakers in current events. Three-round extemp tournaments often devote their third round to exclusive discussion of economic issues, making it that much more integral for extempers to be conversant in the subject.

The so-called dismal science transcends languages, cultures and every other sort of distinction. It is universally useful in evaluating human behavior. When weighing everyday decisions, economic principles are so fundamental that many arguments can be boiled back down to them.

Economics is the study of human action in response to scarcity. If something is scarce, economists have something to say about it.

Unfortunately, they tend not to say the same things. One critic complained, “If you laid all the economists end-to-end, they still wouldn't reach a conclusion.” And President Harry Truman asked for a one-armed economist to advise him, hoping to put a stop to “on the one hand... and on the other hand...” economic advice.

When politicians talk about what they will do for their constituents, they take great pains to discuss the *economic* ramifications of their decisions. They do not always follow through with sound policy, but at least allow economics to play a role. In extemp, economics is vital when evaluating foreign and domestic policy. Even decisions that are not “economic” in nature can be better understood if viewed through the lens of an economist.

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**For the extemper, a rudimentary knowledge of economics, an understanding of the workings of fiscal policy, and a grasp of the basic economic structures of a nation are critical to answering a wide variety of questions.**

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Earlier we went through an “Extemper's Reading List” that detailed current events publications that you should consider reading regularly. Here are a few more recommended books, some of which helped me in my extemp career. They provide an excellent introduction to economics and are full of wonderful applications that beg for extempers to turn them into generics.

Mises, Ludwig von, *Liberalism; The Classic Tradition*, 4<sup>th</sup> English ed., Foundation for Economic Education, 1996

Rehmke and Hovey, Gregory and Craig, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Global Economics*, Alpha, 2008

Gwartney and Stroup, James D. and Richard L. *What Everyone Should Know About Economics and Prosperity*, James Madison Institute, 2003

Gwartney and Stroup, James D. and Richard L., Lee, Dwight R., *Common Sense Economics: What Everyone Should Know About Economics and Prosperity*, 2005, (See also the companion website: [www.commonseconomics.com](http://www.commonseconomics.com)).

Osterfeld, David, *Prosperity Versus Planning; How Government Stifles Economic Growth*, Oxford University Press, 1992

Hazlitt, Henry, *Economics in One Lesson: The Shortest and Surest Way to Understand Basic Economics*, Three Rivers Press, 1988

In Gwartney and Stroup's *What Everyone Should Know About Economics and Prosperity*, fundamental truths like the incentive structure and the virtues of private ownership are explained with enough depth to be useful and enough simplicity to be readable. As an extemper, you will need to be able to regurgitate economic information (such as interest rates and unemployment numbers) and to understand them sufficiently to provide an explanation for your judges.

I cannot highlight this enough: economics is more than a generic, it is your lifeline. Be prepared to talk about it!

## History

George Santayana once said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." To paraphrase Santayana's famous quotation, we extempers might say that "those who cannot remember the past cannot talk about it." It is essential for you to know and understand the historical context for the current events you are studying. You must comprehend the history of Pakistan/India disputes in order to explain today's Kashmir conflict. You need to know why the FBI and CIA were not allowed to share intelligence in order to comment on recent consolidations. You should be aware of Russia's history to discuss the country's current policies.

As far as a generic is concerned, history works well in two ways. First, you can develop a "case example" from the past or a comparison between something that is happening today and a historical event. You can discuss the evolution of Greek and Roman cultures in a speech about homosexual marriage. You can compare the Rwandan genocide with the devastation in Darfur. This sort of comparative analysis will help your audience better understand the tenor of your arguments.

The second way you can turn history into a generic is by presenting a lengthy historical context for your specific question. This often takes a greater understanding of history since you will need to read with a topic in mind. Many experienced extempers who have been reading the news and giving current-event speeches for two or more years have the advantage over newcomers simply because they *know* what happened in



the recent past. If you are just beginning extemp and want to be able to discuss what happened before you began paying close attention to the news, check out the Google News Archive search (<http://news.google.com/archivesearch>).

## Law

The law is incredibly relevant to current events as Supreme Court decisions directly address conflicts of the present day. Not only are legal issues often central to current events, but a successful extemper should have enough legal understanding to present the context for court decisions and high profile cases.

Take foreign topics, for example. Just about every foreign topic deals with one very important legal issue that an extemper can practically guarantee will surface in a round. It is a problem so fundamental that it has been around since the beginning of nationhood and so complex that scholars, politicians and ambassadors alike all struggle with it. Have you guessed it yet? The subject I am talking about is that of *international treaties*.

Since the days of Ramses and Hattusili, nations have made agreements across their borders. The problem of resolving national interest and sovereignty issues with a written document that was often signed decades before a difficulty was ever conceived will remain with us for the foreseeable future. A rudimentary knowledge of treaties will help you immensely as you tackle foreign topics.

If you know about the World Trade Organization (WTO) and its requirements, you will be able to better evaluate trade questions. If you are familiar with any number of United Nations treaties (like the Rome Statute or the UN Charter) you will be able to more easily handle difficult human rights questions.

Even domestic questions center on legal issues. Abortion, the death penalty, homosexual unions, racial profiling or free speech are obvious examples, but among others are minimum wage (*Atkins v. Children's Hospital*, 1923), environmental protection (*Massachusetts v. EPA*, 2005) and music downloading (*Grokster v. MGM*, 2005). If you read these cases, you will have background knowledge and understanding to help you deal with the issue. Simply put, if you know the legal context of your question, you will have a strong head start.

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**Like economics, law has a ubiquitous quality that lends it a constant relevance.**

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Law cases are a current-event category in and of themselves. A court's decision is news, period. Try to keep up with the latest developments of major United States courts and be fluent in recent decisions, especially those that impact current events, even if you never make a law generic.

## **Philosophy**

It takes a great deal of reading to pull off a philosophical generic. Despite the work involved, a philosophical treatment of current events is often well received. A few prepared generics can serve several contexts.

Philosophy is the *study of man's ideas*. Philosophers devote their lives to thinking through life's biggest problems. They are people like Pascal and Plato, Socrates and Shepard who have tried to answer questions, large and small, and have recorded their thoughts for posterity. If you have ever taken a philosophy class, you know how far reaching the conclusions of the great thinkers are. As you present, you can extend these fundamental thoughts into the world of extemp.

The philosophical generic looks at the thinking that goes into a particular current event. The critical analysis of fundamental human beliefs is important in most areas of life, but is particularly beneficial when evaluating events that impact millions of people, as will most extemp questions. Sometimes you will have the time to present a complex philosophy and apply it to your topic; at other times you will only reference your philosopher (i.e. Plato's concept of justice is clearly abrogated in Kim Jong Il's decision to test nuclear weapons...).

Whatever you do, it is always a good insurance policy to have a few philosophical generics in your back pocket.

## **Art**

I have seen nothing empirical on the issue, but my experience has been that a majority of "weird" questions deal with art. Extempers who train tirelessly to talk about "important" world events often overlook popular culture topics and art.

Art is very broadly defined to include many pop culture and entertainment concepts that many extempers would not consider worthy of the title. Such frivolous pursuits as professional sports, movies, celebrity news, fashionable music, and popular books are all fodder for extemp questions.

Anyone who asserts “they’d never ask about something like that!” has not long competed in extemp. Tough questions appear at tournaments and the hardest topics are likely to be overlooked. As a competitor, you should be ready to handle art questions or at least have a few generics ready to cover your lack of preparation.

Before going any further, I must issue a disclaimer and present a clarification. Please do not run down to the supermarket and pick up a celebrity rag, thinking “Cody wants us to read tabloids!” The accounts of most celebrity lives are not worth the paper they waste and it would be foolhardy for you to sacrifice your time for an often-debased culture. Rather, you should read quality cultural analysis and leave the really absurd topics to generics.

It is possible that you will get a question about Britney Spear's latest antics or have to discuss Brad Pitt's complicated love life. Maybe the question will be about playoffs in a sport you do not follow or a movie you find morally objectionable. If you get some such question, take a step back. Mentally remove yourself from the extemp round and think through the topic in light of all the other current events. Ignoring Pitt's mega-million movie deals, ask yourself how his high-profile romantic life reflects on our culture in general? Why does the news media use so much ink to cover sporting events when terrorism is still alive in the world? By divorcing yourself from the round, you can turn a tough topic into a social critique. Just do not forget that you must also answer the question!

That is really the only generic you need to prepare in order to conquer art questions.

## **Getting a Square Nut to Fit into a Round Hole: Incorporating Generics in Extemp**

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There are several strategies you can use with an unorthodox question to fit meaningful analysis into your presentation. Some are more useful than others, but all will allow you to tie in your generic.

### **Background**

Background points make for an excellent opportunity to incorporate a generic. I earlier explained that the background is where you set the historical context for your topic. If you were discussing the War in Iraq, you might spend your first point explaining how the war got started and the recent controversy surrounding the invasion. Does that sound like a lead-in for a history generic? You could also talk about the philosophy of war (Sun Tzu, scorched earth, etc.) or the legal ramifications of the invasion. You could even apply the universal generic of economics by explaining the financial impact of the invasion.

The background observation is the best place to put a generic because introductory points are often broader than the question whose answer they set up. Judges expect a little deviation right off the bat, so capitalize on the leeway and throw your generic in early.

### **Tangential**

Most tangents fall in the meat of your speech (late point 1 or point 2). They lead away from intended content and are put in a speech either to make a statement or fill time.

Tangents are frowned upon and should only be used as a last resort. If anything, a generic is a way to recover from an unintended tangent and bring a speech back to the plan. Please do not rely on a tangent to incorporate your generic.

### **Concluding Thought**

Even the best extempers can end up speaking faster during a round than they do in prep. The environment in a round is not conducive to calm nerves and some competitors find rapid communication to be a side effect

of pressure. If you find yourself leaving a minute or ninety seconds on the table when you finish, you may want to consider keeping a concluding thought or closing generic ready in case you have more time. If you feel the air coming out of your balloon a little early, just draw on the generic and maintain altitude a while longer.

The concluding thought can be from any area, but it must be memorable. For instance, a speech on amnesty for illegal immigrants might use a concluding thought on the economic consequences of providing free education and health care to people who do not pay taxes, while a speech on the Free Trade Area of the Americas might weigh the philosophical advantages of free trade or look historically at ancient Rome's trade practices. When you present your generic this way, your judges will often interpret it as the message of your speech, even if you spent the bulk of it on another matter. This is not necessarily bad, but make sure you use a strong concluding thought.

## Commentary

Commentary is any analysis that is inserted before your main points. It is used to set the terms of a presentation or help interpret a vague question. For instance a question like "Is Ban Ki-moon good for the world?" would require a commentary explaining that Ban Ki-moon is Kofi Annan's successor as Secretary General of the United Nations. While most questions require some explanation, commentaries are normally so short that they hardly deserve notice. The short span of time before you begin delivering your *bona fide* "answer to the question" is, however, a handy place to insert a generic.

If you want the judge to keep something in mind as you speak or are concerned that your speech might be assumed off topic, you can insert a generic before reaching the meat of your content to set the record straight.

Generics are an important tool in the extemper's arsenal. Few are the questions that can be answered without any reference to a foundational truth or universal paradox and you will find your presentations to be much improved when you draw examples from economics, history, law, philosophy or the arts. It may take some experimentation to incorporate a generic smoothly, but with practice you will be able to overcome even the oddest questions.

# Training and Reinforcement

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## Questions

1. Why might a speaker speak more quickly in a round than practice? Why might a speaker talk more slowly?
2. How can the generic be overused? Are students who use generics at a disadvantage to those who do not?
3. What economic principles could be applied to the military conflicts in which America is involved today?

## Exercises

As you read news articles, try to apply a principle from a class you have taken or a book you have read. Consider how the current event compares to parallel historical events. See how many different generics you can use to interpret the news event.

# CHAPTER 10

## Winning

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*“Winning isn’t everything, but the will to win is everything.” ~ Vince Lombardi*

Boxing legend and world heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali used to make headlines before bouts by publicly “predicting” a victory. Ali was good, and made good on his promises. His outspokenness earned him nicknames like “The Mouth” and “Louisville Lip” and fans loved to hate his audacious quotations.

Three days before the 1969 super bowl, after being heckled by an unruly fan, Hall of Fame quarterback Joe Namath said, “We’ll win the game. I guarantee you.” The line was dismissed as “just talk” before the teams met, but became famous after the young Namath led his underdog Jets to a stunning and decisive win over the Green Bay Packers. *Guaranteed indeed.*

Also notorious for his “guarantees” of success is professional basketball’s Rasheed Wallace. His lengthy (but not necessarily accurate) record of predicting success has earned him the nickname *Guaransheed*. And Michael Jordan, arguably basketball’s greatest ever, was known to josh opponents after the completion of his signature moves.

These are just a few examples of high profile predictions of success; many professional athletes use talk to pump themselves up and put themselves in the right mindset for victory, a practice that is sometimes marginalized as “trash talk.” Players make statements to the media, argue with opponents on the field and even get into fights with teammates over language that is designed to inspire self.

So why do it? Are not predictions just as much of a motivator for your opponent as for you?

There are certainly examples of where predictions have turned against the predictor. During the New England Patriots' record setting 2007 season, in which the Patriots became football's first team in 35 years with an undefeated regular season and several key players set outstanding individual marks, a relatively unknown defensive player from the Pittsburgh Steelers "guaranteed" a victory against the class of the NFL. As was later revealed, the statement was taken dramatically out of context (Anthony Smith was not nearly as confident as the soundbite made him out to be), but that did not keep the Patriots from using the pledge as motivation for crushing the Steelers on game day. After a particularly sweet pass play, Patriots quarterback Tom Brady (himself the model of a motivated competitor) took Smith aside for some NFL-sized trash talk. Although the exact words shared were never published, we can assume that they were less than pristine.

In the case of the Patriots, the louder team ended up winning in the end. In the 2008 Super Bowl, Plaxico Burress, the New York Giants' standout wide receiver, predicted his team would win by a final margin of "23-17." This time the statement was not taken out of context and Burress was simply expressing a deep confidence in his team's defensive abilities. In a stunning victory, Burress' team backed up his words when they upset a much quieter Patriot team. The defensive unit that inspired Burress' gutsy prediction held New England's record setting offense to a season-low 14-points.

What matters most to athletes is how they perform beneath the bright lights, not necessarily what they say to the press. The reality, however, is that in pre-game interviews they often make comments that appear arrogant and overly confident. While this may make good press and sell more papers, there is a deeper and more consistent reason athletes make such haughty guarantees. *They are expressing in words what they are convinced in their hearts to be true.* In other words,

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**Winning is already established in their minds.  
Losing is not an option.**

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Victory is inevitable, so why not tell the world about it? To be competitive at the highest levels of professional sports, athletes need to have an unbreakable confidence in their own abilities. Their will to win must be so strong that victory is a fact at heart before it is a truth in the box score.

In this chapter we will examine ways for a speaker to win extemp before ever going to a tournament. We will talk about generating motivation, setting goals, ignoring intimidation, creating and sticking to a game plan and meeting challenges as they arise. This chapter contains approaches to extemp that have applications throughout life, from test taking and academic goals to losing weight and becoming more disciplined. The strategies outlined in this chapter have proven successful for many competitive speakers and are fundamental aspects of any competitive activity.

One important note on this: I do not advocate a “win-at-all-costs” strategy. Preparing for success and setting demanding goals are steps toward victory, but winning should never be the *ultimate* goal of a competitor. The final outcome is material, but being on top should not be the only priority. Those who make winning their top motivation typically end up frustrated at their losses (even if they are few) and upsetting opponents who could have been their friends and allies later in life.

Jesus said in Matthew 6:22,

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**“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light.”**

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In the first chapter we discussed ethics and the principles contained therein should inform any attempt to improve competitive outcome. Before tournaments, my club’s coaches encouraged us to glorify God, do our best, encourage others, and have fun. I took these words to heart, because I felt that only what is done in God’s name will last, and I must trust Him for the outcome of any endeavor. I also understood that nothing of value can come out of selfishness and arrogance.

This does not mean you shouldn’t do your part. Part of the joy of competition is winning. Before setting out for your next tournament, you must prepare to win or lose, and decide how to act whichever the result may be.

Losing means someone else gets to win. You can learn to handle loss with confidence and a gracious spirit. Accept your loss or lower placement and congratulate your opponent. Many lasting friendships have started that way.

Real winners know how to lose, if only because all competitors experience loss. Real winners also know how to win.

I have always been happy for the winning extemper, even when it wasn't me, because a loss at a tournament can mean a win in life. Achieve your goals with charity, but keep in mind that your final goal is not to win at the tournament, but to take the opportunities the win offers beyond the tournament and into your life. Vince Lombardi, coach of the notorious Green Bay Packers during their first two Super Bowl victories, expressed it most accurately: "The spirit, the will to win, and the will to excel are the things that endure. These qualities are so much more important than the events that occur."

That said, let's start unlocking the keys to winning *before* going to the tournament.

## **Victorious Mindset**

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There are certainly some things about elite athletes that are not worth emulating, but a winning mindset should never be taken for granted. In any competitive enterprise, whether the venue be athletics, business or forensics, the right mindset is imperative to success.

A mindset is not necessarily preset, although it can be. The way we think about the world is a product of our surroundings, life experiences and values. These factors combine to create a mindset that can either be assertive, active and preparing for success or defensive, passive and preparing for failure.

Competitive mindsets tend to run in families. Although I know no one from the Kennedy, Bush or Manning families personally, I can readily assume that circumstances in their upbringing combined to create a powerful competitive drive that is expressed in their success.

Mindsets can be conditioned through training. Just because you do not feel like a winner right now does not mean you cannot develop a point of view.

## Perspective

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To condition a successful competitive mindset, prepare for success. You can start by imagining yourself in front of a hundred people in the final round at nationals, talking about your passion. What are you saying? What points are you making? Are you trying to send a message with your speech? Now think of what follows. How will you walk across the stage to collect your trophy, to the cheers of thousands in the auditorium. How big is your grin? Are you waving? What does your mother's face look like?

There is no spiritual dimension to this visualization. You are not trying to make winning happen by concentrating on it. I am not suggesting you burn incense, chant strange incantations, or create your "own reality."

I use the term *visualization* with care, because of the connotations it sometimes has in our culture. Let me be clear: this is not a religious experience, but part of your training. The purpose of this visualization is two fold. It will help you learn how to act when you win and it will increase the enthusiasm, energy and resilience that will make a win more likely.

As you visualize, take everything in. Try to draw a complex mental picture of the most outrageous success imaginable. Before a tournament, try to imagine what the final round will feel like, what you will do when your name is announced for breaks and how quickly you will write your speech in prep. What color is your extemp box? How many people do you recognize in your audience? How big is the room for the final?

Does visualizing this scenario feel a little loopy? At first it might, but visualizing your success is essential to your success. I like to analogize this behavior to a young boy playing in his driveway with a basketball. He is taking jump shots in a disorganized fashion and, if that young boy was like me, he is counting down the seconds until the imaginary buzzer sounds and the game is over. He is making the game-winning shot for his team. He is elated in front of the cheering fans of his imagination and his heart. No matter what the skill of this boy, he is already on the right track to winning.

You may not be a preteen anymore, but the mental conditioning you did in your front yard with a hoop and orange ball is the same kind of conditioning you need to prepare yourself for extemp success.

As you imagine yourself performing in the echelons of extemp competition, do not allow yourself to think of the scenario as a hypothetical.

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**The question is not *if* you make finals, but *when*.**

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You are at the national tournament and you are speaking very smoothly. The audience, judges and timer are present and attentive. The visualization needs to be realistic; it needs to be more than just a misty dream.

## Get Amped

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Before some tournaments I watched video footage of successful sports stars. The off-field activities of many sports stars are not worthy of emulation, but their strength and competitive spirit under the bright lights can be very encouraging.

My favorite clips were of clutch players like Michael Jordan, LeBron James, Kobe Bryant, John Elway and Tom Brady, which are widely available for download from sites like YouTube. Basketball and football are my favorite sports, but any athlete that operates well under pressure or is notable for last second plays that save victory from the jaws of defeat will work. Pick players like Pelé and Zidane or Alex Rodriguez. Pick players who inspire with their athletic feats.

Watch these elite competitors as they strive toward their goals. Jordan looks like he has more determination than the entire opposing team, Bryant is a cat delicately feeling his way toward prey and LeBron has the resolve of a caged animal. After performing their last-second heroics, watch the pure joy stream over the faces of these paladins. Players pump their fists, look skyward and enjoy the moment with every ounce of their being. And why not? They just carried their team to an outstanding conclusion; they competed at the highest level of their sport and were more than just successful. They were outstanding.

I am especially fond of Jordan's "The Shot" over Craig Ehlo as time expired in the 1989 playoffs.<sup>15</sup> Jordan's Chicago Bulls were down by one with just over three seconds left. Jordan drove into the lane and hit an impossible pull up jump shot over an excellent Cleveland Cavaliers defender to stun the home team. The real story behind the fame of "The Shot" is Jordan's wild and emphatic celebration: number 23 leaped into the air, fist pumping, shouting his loudest, as Ehlo crumpled to the ground in agony a short distance away. Victor and conquered were captured on one highlight reel.

Another, more time intensive way of finding media-based inspiration is to watch motivational movies. Although there are very few films made about competitive forensics (and none for which I would give a blanket recommendation) many movies have been made which showcase and encourage the kind of mindset that is necessary for success in extemp. I am thinking of movies like *Remember the Titans*, *Facing the Giants*, *Miracle* and *Glory Road*. Also look at the old Cartoon Network show "Samurai Jack," a Herche brother favorite for its humorous portrayal of prototypical unwavering confidence. These make excellent films for viewing in the days leading up to a tournament.

Put yourself in the shoes of the star. Imagine that you are His Airness, doing what you do best. Instead of basketball, you are playing extemp. Try to save the image in the archival footage as a personal trough of mental carbohydrates. Clutch performances are your secret store of strength.

## Setting Tournament Goals

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Okay, enough with the machismo. The research involved in preparing for a tournament is extensive and brutal, speaking in front of large groups of people is not common Saturday morning recreation and the competition in extemp is intimidating. The people who do well in extemp are a tightly knit, small and predictable group; any conception of joining them is a misplaced fantasy that is just asking to get shot down. When going to a tournament for the first time (or even the fiftieth time) it is absurd to

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<sup>15</sup> You can see a rendition of this famous game-ending shot on YouTube.com by doing a search for "Michael Jordan's Final Shot 98." The short clip has received nearly 1 million views.

expect any success, much less high achievement. So how does one muster any confidence?

The key is to set goals. Goals are your own personal keys to success. They are the promise key to all competitive doors and should be the yellow lines in the middle of the road toward victory.

What are your tournament goals? If you are like most competitors, “do my best” or “finish feeling good about myself” are among them. These are noble ends that should become second nature, but they are not sufficient goals.

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**A competitive goal needs to be objectively measurable.**

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It needs to be an outcome-based measure of achievement, not a happy ending on Lifetime. It must be something that others can observe and judge. You and you alone will know when you have done your best, but someone outside your head can tell if you have won the tournament.

This is why “win the tournament” is the most commonly set goal. Students have no idea how to create a baby step toward success and set their sights on the big cheese from the beginning. This is not to say that winning the tournament is not an appropriate goal in some circumstances, but it provides very little motivation for the average competitor.

Goals need to be something that motivates you to success. They must be achievable, but not so eminently possible that they are not a challenge. Do not set the bar so low that you can walk over it. Make sure you actually need to jump.

Ask these questions to see if your goal is reasonable: Is your goal pleasing to God? Would you be proud to call your grandparents or best friend after the tournament and say that you met your goals? Would you be genuinely disappointed if you do not achieve your goal? Can you envision yourself achieving the goal?

Common competitive goals for my students include “earn one first ranking,” “advance to outrounds,” “place higher than a particular competitor,” “place in the top three in every preliminary round,” “use an

average of eight sources per round,” “go off-card the entire tournament” or “place in the top five at the tournament.”

I generally encourage my students to set two goals (one competitive, one non-competitive), but you can set as many as you would like. Keep in mind that the more goals you set, the more confusing sorting them out afterward can be. It is wise to put a lot of thought into a couple of goals and throw your entire self into their accomplishment.

Try to build on your goals as you go through the competitive season. If your goal at the first tournament was to get a first place ranking in prelims, and you achieved that goal, set your next goal as something more difficult, like advancing to semi-finals. If your goals are stagnant they will not provide much motivation. You should always be looking forward to the next challenge and be ready to fortuitously embrace the next goal.

Once you have set your goals, write them down. Open up a word processor document on your computer or use some blank stationary to record your goals. Share them with a coach or parent so that you have someone to hold you accountable.

Once you have established goals for a tournament, mentally think through everything you need to do to meet them. Will you have to depart from your normal approach in some way in order to accomplish them? What kind of mindset is necessary to achieve your goals? What do you need to do from this point until the tournament begins to be prepared to meet your goals?

Create a list of everything you need to do to meet your goals. Write down everything from print articles and read current events to speech drills and opening quotation research. Read through the list the afternoon before the tournament and make sure you have done everything you possibly could to set yourself up for tournament success. Do not let yourself be sidetracked by the inadequacies of a teammate. You need to be on your game, even if someone in your club did not pull his load. Mentally block out any drama by viewing extemp as a vending machine: Work put in by you will yield results. Allow yourself to become confident in your preparation and take pride in the work you have done to get this far. On tournament night, review your list once more before bedtime.

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**If every preparatory goal has been met, nobody  
stands between you and competitive success.  
*Nobody.***

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## Setting Long-term Goals

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In the summer of 2004, after finishing second place at the 2004 NCFA Championship, I pondered my approach as a competitor. I had *just missed* the title. While 2004 had been a great competitive year, I set some goals for the next year that would put me in a good position mentally to improve on that performance. I needed a finish line to motivate a strategy that would lead to more competitive success.

After several long conversations with my coaches, I set out three goals for the season. First, compete in extemp at a level beyond anything I had ever done before. I wanted to strive for excellence in every speech. Second, place in the top three at every tournament I entered. Finally, win the national championship.

The purpose of these goals was to influence tournament and short-term goals. I was not going to be terribly disappointed if I did not place in the top three at one tournament or if I had a sub-par round. What mattered was that every smaller goal be a stepping-stone toward my long-term goals.

Because your long-term goals are meant to influence short-term goals, they do not need to be objectively measurable. It is nice to set goals that you can reflect on at the conclusion of the season and easily determine success. There is nothing keeping you from setting objective goals for the season. Personal improvement goals do have a place in the long term, however.

Set your long-term goals early on in the competitive season. Set at least two goals and write them down and share them with your coach.

Long-term goals do not always have to be competitive, but it is a good idea to have at least one success-based goal that can serve as motivation for preparation and practice. Make sure you are not picking goals that can easily be accomplished in the first month of the season; choose something that will continue to push you to the finish.



Common long-term goals include “qualify for nationals,” “win two tournaments,” “get a first rank at every tournament,” “become a major or better contributor to the club extemp box,” “improve current-event analysis,” and “become a better speaker.”

When you set tournament goals, consider how they contribute to your long-term desires. Ask yourself what you can do during the tournament to bring yourself a step closer toward achieving your long-term goals.

While my first goal for the 2005 season was not objectively measurable (although I like to think I achieved it), I ended up meeting the last two. Throughout the season, those three goals informed my decision-making and they formed a bright light on which I focused as I competed. Because I knew where I wanted to be, I could work on getting there.

## Setting Short-term Goals

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On the evening of June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2006, the night before the start of the national tournament in Purcellville, VA, my team debate partner and I sat down to set some final goals. Most of our goals for the year had been short term (advance to outrounds as a team, win a speaker award), but this was our last chance to lay a foundation before the final music played.

My partner and I pulled up chairs at a small table at our team’s hotel and I put a blank sheet of paper down between us. This would be our ledger, a record of goals for future comparisons and objective accountability. On the paper, I wrote down numbers one through eleven in a vertical column. Each one represented a round (six preliminary and five outrounds), but I placed no distinctive mark before the outrounds, because I did not want to add additional weight to the already very tense elimination rounds.

My partner and I talked about these eleven numbers and determined three things. First, we would set no competitive goal for the entire tournament; our success would be based round-by-round. Second, we resolved to not look beyond the present round and discount our current competition. Third, we pledged to not feel intimidated by outrounds because, we reasoned, the only difference between round six and double octafinals is one number. Each round would be met with full and equal effort and the next round would be greeted in its time with expectation,

not hesitance. Outrounds were the same as prelims; they were all just one more round. In short, we took each round one at a time and refused to get caught up in the pressure of Nationals.

To objectify our goals, my partner and I promised to hold each other accountable to staying “in the moment.” We would not entertain thoughts of future rounds and our conversation would be focused exclusively on the current competition. After rounds, we would talk of our next opponent.

Competition can sometimes be too intense and intimidating. Expectations build based on prior performance and friends, family and even mere acquaintances may inadvertently apply pressure to perform. Others add more heat by assuming an outcome and the competitive soul may start feeling as if it is operating under duress. At times it may be wise for you to divorce yourself from the competitive aspects of forensics and simply set a non-competitive goal.

When you start biting off more than you can chew, the best thing to do is take smaller bites. When a goal for the entire tournament is too much, a non-competitive or more “baby step” goal is an excellent way to narrow focus. Instead of saying “I will do X this tournament,” lay out a goal whose achievement can be measured in a relatively short period of time.

As with tournament goals, make sure your short-term goals can be objectively measured while reasonably challenging you to succeed. Be sure to talk to your coach about your goals, even if they will come to fruition within a day or even a few short hours. Accountability is also important in the short term.

Common short-term goals include “place first in ‘this’ round” (where “this” is the next round), “deliver seven sources in the next round,” “go off-card in the next round,” “have time in prep to practice the speech one time through before delivering it in round” or “make a judge laugh.”

Think of a short-term goal as enabling your tournament goals. It is an increment on the path to achieving tournament success. It is not necessarily something you will write your friends about or that you will remember as a highlight of your career, but it will make competition less intimidating and allow you to enjoy the benefits of goals without suffering through their competitive pressure.

## Coach-set Goals

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Mark Eaton was a car mechanic from southern California. Every workday he would find himself beneath the greasy axles of vehicles in various states of disrepair. He was not completely content with his lot, but he was not overly motivated to try another career path either. But something was different about Mark: at seven feet, four inches tall, Mark dwarfed everyone else in the repair shop and eventually caught the eye of a NBA talent scout, a man who became Mark's personal coach.

Mark's coach gave him simple, attainable objectives. He encouraged Mark to visit the gym and get into shape. He set small goals for him to improve conditioning and aerobic capacity as well as jumping ability. Mark's dream was to be an NBA player, but he could not do it on his own; he needed a coach to show him the way.

Eventually, Mark went to UCLA and was drafted by the Utah Jazz. He played in Salt Lake City for twelve years and was twice named NBA Defensive Player of the Year and selected for the All Defensive Team seven times. Mark still holds the NBA record for most blocked shots in a single season with 456 or 5.56 per game set during the 1984-85 season. Mark's jersey number 53 has been retired by the Jazz in memory of Eaton's exceptional basketball career.

But when Mark tells the story, he gives his coach credit for providing the motivation, the vision and the tools to achieve competitive success. I have had the privilege of meeting Mark Eaton and standing by him. His huge imposing frame towers above mine and defies challenge. Mark looks like the kind of person who needs no outside motivation or coach. But more than any other factor, a coach was integral in Mark's success.

Similarly, the coaches in my extemp career, unnamed wells of encouragement and guidance, deserve much of the credit for my competitive accolades. Coaches see a side of competitors that no judge or audience member ever observes: they see the preparation and the final product. They witness the hardships that define mindset and ability. They have a front-row seat for the trials that inevitably befall all competitors. They have experience that can serve as a predictive barometer of the future and they have an understanding of competition that transcends competitors. In short, coaches often know their students better than their students know themselves.

Given the invaluable resource that a good coach represents, how can a competitor ensure that a coach's full potential be realized?

When it comes to goals, Mark's lesson is germane. If your coach does not currently set goals for you, ask him or her to do so. Your coach's goals may very well be the same ones you set for yourself, but with a coach you have the added confidence of knowing that someone believes in you. Someone other than you knows that you have what it takes to achieve your competitive desires. This is a great feeling and can be very motivating.

Once you have a coach-set goal, embrace it as your own. Consider setting a short-term or tournament goal of making your coach happy and try to the best of your abilities to accomplish what he or she sets out for you.

Coaches, set focus-based goals for your students. You know your students and their current needs. Think about one, two or even three things you want your students to be thinking about when they speak and set goals that will accent those items. If you have a student who is really wrapped up in the competitive aspect of the event and is having a hard time relaxing, tell him to focus on having fun in the next round, to make all three judges laugh and to present some analysis from *The Onion*. If a speaker is overwhelmed, set goals that look only to the next round and try to narrow your student's focus to analysis, speaking or memorization so that the big picture takes a less central role. Throughout the tournament, keep in touch with your students and be ready to step in for encouragement or admonishment as the situation demands.

Competitors, listen to your coaches and do your best to focus on the individual goals they set with and for you. Those small steps may take you far.

## **Game Plan**

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You have an upcoming final examination in a difficult class. You have attended class regularly all semester, prepared the readings, done the essay and performed well on the mid-term examination. You joined a study group early in the year and met periodically to review study materials for class. You think you know the material, but finals can be

scary and you want to be sure of your preparedness before you sit down for three hours of grueling essay responses.

So what do you do? If you are a good student, you prepare a list of possible topic areas for questions and start studying, you reread significant portions of the assignments and review lecture notes. Some teachers hand out copies of final exams from previous years or review questions that assist in your preparation. You use all the tools at your disposal to prepare yourself.

But your preparation is not chaotic. A good student is organized and meticulous as he reads and studies. He sets up a game plan for the weeks building up to the final test. The same is true for any serious athlete. Runners plan their training weeks or even months in advance of a big race and members of sports teams plan practices that best prepare the individual for a role within the team.

We have already talked about preparing for prep time through creating lists of topics for research and outlining a time frame for printing. Now it is time to create a game plan for the tournament.

A marathoner does not just run 26-plus miles in three hours without prior thought; he plans caloric and hydration intakes for particular miles, he prepares a time target for each mile and talks with his coach about who to keep up with, who the rabbits will be and when to start the final kick. Three months of excellent preparation are wasted if a runner pushes himself too much in the first mile. Sprinting too late means the effort of conditioning will not be fully reflected in the outcome. A game plan is necessary for success.

Extempers do not need to worry about mile times and hydration, so what impact should a game plan have on tournament behavior?

An extemper's game plan is the *modus operandi* that defines his outlook on competition. It is different from a mindset, in that it may not relate directly to competition or winning. But it is a strategy for success, a foundation from which you build your entire performance. You can choose to take an aggressive, take-no-prisoners, give-no-quarter, spare-no-effort, blood-seeking approach. You can decide to relax, have fun and let the competition come to you. You can look at the tournament as two parts, the preliminary rounds and the outbounds, and put all your focus into the later part of the tournament. You can try to be funny every round

or make a point you feel passionate about in every speech. Or you can take each round as it comes and not think ahead. All of these are appropriate game plans that are applied by successful extempers.

There are many different approaches you can take to tournaments and no one is necessarily better than the others. The wisdom of a game plan lies in the person for whom it is made. If you are naturally competitive, your approach should probably not fuel the fires of your killer instinct; a more prosaic game plan is advisable. If you have a hard time mustering the desire to be on top, develop an approach that fuels your competitive fire. If you are overwhelmed by competition, choose a game plan that takes one step at a time.

Your game plan might very well change from tournament to tournament, but it should not change mid-tournament. Once you have consulted your coach and have a plan for the tournament, do not let circumstances derail you. Remember that you will be much more level headed at home before the competition starts than when you are standing in front of the postings.

I coached a young student who had a hard time slowing down in his speeches. He would get so excited about his topic and his energy level would rise to such fervor that he would motor through material. I do not think he was especially nervous, but he often came across that way because of his speed. After a conversation about the upcoming tournament, we decided the best game plan would be to speak slowly. No matter how much he felt a topic deserved more speed or that lent delivery would bore his audience, his game plan prohibited speed.

My pupil was gung ho about the game plan. He had taken ownership of it and I was convinced he would follow through. But when I watched him at the second round of the tournament, he was speaking a mile a minute, mowing through material in his old overly energetic way. Our conversation afterward was revealing. Apparently, my student had looked at the postings and noticed that his room had another notoriously slow speaker. Having heard repeatedly that differentiation is the key to winning a panel, he abandoned the game plan in favor of his old ways.

While I cannot guarantee that my student would have broken to outounds had he stood by his game plan, I imagine his speaking would have been more effective. It can be difficult to avoid changing your approach, especially when the competition looks strong. Your game plan

starts to look like a relic of uninformed decision-making and less of a key to success. The best way to resolve this is actually found in advice given me by my collegiate track coach.

When I was running the mile, my coach warned me that several of my opponents were rabbits (that is, they would run too quickly from the gun and not be able to keep up a steady pace through to the finish) and that I should not worry about keeping up with them. He told me some target lap times that I should focus on instead. He said I should ignore my opponents until the final sprint, and that whatever they did I should stick to my plan.

During warm-ups, I watched the other runners in my heat stretching and sprinting out starts in a way that can only be described as intimidating. These guys were the class of Northern California athletics and, despite what my coach said, I doubted I could beat them. Their pre-race histrionics supported my perceptions. But still, I stuck by my game plan.

I ran the first two laps right at my coach's target pace, but was chagrined at the fact that I was in dead last place. The rabbits, it seemed, were going to maintain their pace through the finish. The third lap came and went as I stayed on pace, but gained only a little on the runner ahead of me. Then, as I rounded the second to last turn, I heard my coach's signal to start sprinting and began pumping my legs. I was happy to note that my legs still had a lot of energy and that the other runners were fading.

I ended up passing three runners in that final sprint and placing a conference qualifying time. And my coach had a big hug waiting for me at the finish, which is pretty special when you consider that he is a former Navy Seal.

Ignoring these rabbits on the track field was tough, and an extemp round can be similarly difficult. Especially when you advance to outbounds, seeing your name on the postings with other heavy hitters in the extemp community can be unsettling and lead to hasty decisions that will knock you off track. This is when it is incredibly important to stay on task, keep your focus, and stick to your game plan.

In fact, don't even read the other names in your panel before speaking. Refrain from talking with your opponents about how their speeches went or what the judges' reactions were. I'm thoroughly convinced that

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**The best way to ignore your competition is to *not* study it.**

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After speaking, you may feel free to do whatever you wish. Winners will make sure they keep their head in the game as long as they are competing.

## Hindsight

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“Cody! Cody! My speech last round was awful,” my student was almost shouting in his desperation. He’d had a bad round. That much was obvious by his flushed face, frantic expression and the crumpled note card in his hand.

After calming him down, I asked what had gone wrong. My student then proceeded to lay out a litany of perceived problems with his presentation. He had forgotten a source, his analysis had fallen flat, a national finalist was in the room with him, one judge had not smiled during his opening joke, and the box had only five articles for his topic. My student’s eyes were wide; he felt in his heart that he could no longer meet his goals and the tournament would not be a competitive success.

I sympathized with him. His attitude was usually exemplary and his work ethic enviable. A prepared speaker and smart kid, he had all the tools for success going into the tournament, but one bad round had derailed him. If my student continued to look backward, his next round would be worse than the one that so upset him.

There is a time for hindsight, but mid-tournament is not that time. Retrospection is necessary for improvement but should take place in the comfort of one’s home or with a coach after the tournament. As long as competition continues, a speaker must keep his head in the game.

All those clichés are true. A runner runs much faster looking forward. Don’t cry over spilled milk. A bad round is water under the bridge. The night is darkest before the sunrise.

As soon as you say “thank you,” your speech is in the books. It cannot be changed no matter how many drops of blood you sweat. The judge’s perceptions have been logged, the ballots have been marked and the words have been spoken. Time has passed and, at this point, we have no



realistic way of traveling back and changing things. In light of this reality, the only attitude a competitor should have about past speeches is of confidence and victory.

You should leave rounds thinking about what you did well, reviewing the strong points of your speech and considering the next round. Minor adjustments between rounds are fine (just as short-term goals are useful between rounds), but do not change your horse midstream. The worst thing you can do between rounds is dwell on what you did poorly but aren't able to fix before the next round. These thoughts are nothing but destructive and will end up dragging you down.

Consider what judges perceive between the moment you finish your speech and the time you exit the room. Should they see concern, doubt and frustration or confidence, poise and self-assurance? If, as you are leaving, you are already thinking about your verbal *faux pas* from the third minute and wondering if you adequately summarized at the end, your hesitance will show through. If you are confident, you can differentiate yourself from opponents who make faces, roll their eyes or sigh after they speak. Show the judges you are pleased with the speech, even if there is room for improvement.

It is said that hindsight is 20/20, that looking back enables people to see clearly. For extemp, we should amend this colloquialism to say that long-term hindsight is 20/20 but in short-term hindsight is tainted by emotion and circumstantial bias. You cannot objectively evaluate your own performance immediately after delivering your speech. Any attempt to do so produces a skewed image that does not realistically portray the assessment of other, more objective observers. Do not be short sighted. Wait until after the tournament to start looking back.

My student was able to recover his poise and continued though the tournament with much more confidence than he had betrayed in that moment of post-round weakness. When he got his ballots back he noticed something that made him call me immediately: Of all his rounds, the one he thought was terrible was where he had achieved his best competitive success. Two of the judges had placed him first and the third critic had put him third in the panel for an overall top rank (probably, my student hypothesized, the one who hadn't laughed at his joke). Whether that round was indeed sub-par and the competition bungled or my student

just panicked after a good round is inconsequential; his perception of the round immediately afterward was flawed.

My student does not trust his short-term hindsight anymore. Sometimes I walk up to him after a round to ask how he did. In response, he smiles and predicts success, a forecast that is becoming increasingly accurate.

## Extemp Is a Sport

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I would like to answer one common objection raised by new inductees to the art of mental preparation. Some question whether forensics—or extemp in particular—is as competitive as athletics. Isn't it just an academic exercise? I would object to this viewpoint because it fails to realize the truly beneficial aspects of the rigorousness of the activity. Compare it to the myriad of life's competitions. The business world, academics and military strategy all require sharpness and insight. Extemp competition builds just as much mental acuity—in fact, *more*—than its athletic counterparts.

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**The athlete prepares his body and soul for  
competition while the extemper prepares his mind  
and soul.**

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The good news is that if you are able to learn to think competitively for extemp, you will be ready to assume a competitive mindset in the real world. If you learn how to set goals for a tournament now, you will be more adept at doing the same thing for a school examination or in the corporate world. You will also be a better athlete.

The keys are in front of you. The lock may be engaged now, but your job is to find the solution and open that door. Do you think you can do that? Can you win a tournament before it even starts? I believe you can.

# Training and Reinforcement

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## Exercises

1. Write a list of three sports athletes you admire and research their achievements. How have they expressed their competitive drives? Do they set reasonable yet challenging goals? Do they have a game plan?
2. Make a list of all the areas in your life that involve competition. Write down the elements of your approach to each area. How do you treat competitive behavior differently from noncompetitive behavior?

## Key Concepts

1. The right mindset is imperative to success.
2. Successful competitive mindsets start with visualization of success.
3. Find a personal trough of mental carbohydrates.
4. Goals are the promise key to all competitive doors.
5. Vocalize your goals.
6. Make your goals reasonable yet challenging.
7. Set short-term, long-term and tournament specific goals.
8. Have a game plan and stick to it.

## Questions

1. Is it arrogant or prideful to set aggressive goals?
2. Are there ways to express a competitive drive without resorting to trash talking?
3. What defines a noble goal? Is there anything in our relationship with God that suggests what our goals should be?
4. How can visualization be an effective tool outside competitive forensics?

5. What is the best game plan for you?
6. What were your goals at the last tournament? Did you state them explicitly before the tournament?

# The Extemp Club

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Extemp participants who are serious about competition should join a club. Extemp clubs have no league sanction; they are simply collections of extempers who together prepare for tournaments and share research. There are many NCFCA extemp clubs across the nation that should be willing to take on additional competitors.

Clubs that combine extemp with other individual events may not specifically advertise extemp. Just ask the coach of your club if there is a pre-existing extemp organization. If there is not and you want to start one, or if you are part of one and are looking for ways to improve it, this chapter has much to offer you.

Extemp is always easier when done with aid and encouragement from a team. The preparation gets easier each time an additional researcher is added to the roster; a twenty-topic, 200-article printing burden looks much more reasonable when divided among several willing extempers.

You can certainly compete alone – some successful extempers rose to prominence on the sweat of their own brow – but preparing for extemp is a little like hiking. It is best done with a buddy. Tackling current events with friends, discussing the fruits of your research on a regular basis, and bonding with fellow extempers under the stress of deadlines are just a few of the fun advantages of “extemping” with a club.

## What a Club Does Not Mean

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Before assuming a totally rosy view of an extemp club, readers must understand what a club does not guarantee.

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### **A club does *not* mean tournament protection.**

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While round-robins and practices early in the season may keep clubmates from meeting in competition, NCFCA-sanctioned tournaments do not “protect” based on club affiliation. “Protect” is a technical term meaning that the tabulation room keeps members of the same club from competing against each other. Do not expect that to happen at your next tournament. Two friends may have contributed to the same box, shared analysis and perspective on current events, and become close over the same news story, but that will not keep them from being placed back-to-back in their next extemp panel. Whether in a prelim or outround, your clubmate could very well be your competition.

I know, snuffle-snuffle, boo-hoo. It may be tough to compete against your friends, but find comfort in the fact that they, too, face the same struggle. All extempers should come to recognize that when the tournament starts, everyone’s main responsibility is to do one’s best. Your results are yours, not your friends’.

When preparing with a clubmate, do not neglect personal preparation like opening quotations and individualized speaking strategy. Develop your own format and do not feel you are being selfish when you keep some of your prep to yourself. These things will set you apart from the rest of the field, including your own extemp club.

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### **A club does *not* mean writing for others.**

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When at a tournament, extemp is an *individual* event. This means club members cannot assist one another in the prep room beyond pointing to files in the extemp box. If your teammate has a panic attack because she forgets the capital of Canada, needs help thinking of a third point or cannot find a suitable source to say that nuclear proliferation by rogue nations is beneficial to American security, she is on her own.

Most prep rooms enforce a strict whisper-only policy. Some tournaments go further and allow no interaction between club members. Wherever the line is, do not cross it, even if it is to help out a teammate. The best policy is complete silence.

## What a Club Does Mean

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A club offers distinct advantages that make it a strong option for competitors.

### Distributed Costs

All extempers must face the fact: paper is expensive; ink is expensive; manila and hanging folders are expensive; boxes are expensive; everything in bulk can really drain a student's budget. In the 2003-2004 extemp year, I was in charge of printing and maintaining our club's domestic box. That responsibility alone cost about \$100 per tournament. Our club's total printing costs for every extemp competition were somewhere in the \$175- \$200 range. We attended seven tournaments that year! Yes, ouch.

If the thought of printing a few reams of paper *before every tournament* gives your pocketbook hypertension, an extemp club is the place for you.

Organizing with others means sharing costs. Extempers who would ordinarily have to shoulder an entire printing, organizing and filing load by themselves can now rely on others to carry a portion of that burden.

### Collective Knowledge

No one knows *everything*. One person's knowledge is but a tiny percentage of that available in the universe. A good way to expand our understanding is to communicate with others who have bits of information we lack. Your extemp analysis will improve dramatically if you can find other people with whom to discuss current events.

An extemp club functions as a sort of political forum where thinkers gather to discuss important global events. With all the news they read, extempers should find an outlet of like-minded communicators *invaluable*.

Join a club to collect information and perspectives from others and add some of your own to the dialogue.

## Organizing an Extemp Club

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In order to facilitate a successful club, there should be structure. Problems will inevitably arise—they always do when human beings are involved—and only by operating in a predetermined framework can a club thrive.

### Adult Leadership (Coach)

Adult leadership is essential. Parents have natural authority and should be respected. Having parental leadership provides an ultimate decision-maker (it is wise to have one parent as such) and keeps the club from bickering disagreements. That ultimate decision maker (“coach”) must be a mature adult who can handle complex issues.

I am familiar with a club that imploded after giving 100% control to its students. The parents involved disengaged entirely and left all coaching and club decisions to their children. While the high schoolers who were given authority were intelligent and capable, they lacked the experience to deal with the inevitable problems of group organization. Decisions with important ethical implications were handled with a *naiveté* that invited unnecessary questions and disputes were resolved poorly or not at all. Concerns from other coaches were addressed to students instead of adults and the disparity in age and experience engendered bad feelings and was not conducive to proper dispute resolution.

When parents tried to regain control and halt the downward spiral of the club, the student leadership felt slighted and betrayed. It took years for proper authority to return and the students who had control were cheated out of valuable lessons.

### Student Leadership (Captain)

A student-run club is a disaster waiting to happen, but a club with no delegated authority is also bound for failure. There are responsibilities within a club that no parent would ever want to assume, and students need an opportunity to learn or practice leadership skills. Some tasks should be delegated to a student leader.



The leader can be called whatever you like, from “Chief Boo-Hoo” to “Great Esteemed Leader.” *Captain* has a nice ring to it—it was the title my club used—and I’ll be using it as the moniker for student leader from this point forward. The word may be used in the plural when referring to the captains of different extemp clubs, but each club should only have one captain.

Captains operate under the auspices and control of their parents and coaches, but they do have authority over the other extempers. Captains should be responsible young people with good organizational skills who are able to make a first-rate topic list. They act as air traffic controllers at student meetings, issue assignments prior to tournaments, and hold fellow-students accountable for the quality and timeliness of their work.

It is very important for a club to designate a captain early in the year because it sometimes takes a month or so to get settled into the flow of news and develop a comprehensive assignment list. Your first few tournaments with a new captain will probably have topics you are not prepared to address. A captain should be appointed by the coach as opposed to voted in by student members. Volunteers should let their parents and coach know they are interested in the position and trust the wisdom of their decision. Students should never be forced into this or any other position of leadership against their or their parents’ will. A captain should always be accountable to the coach.

A captain should try to be reasonably available. When students have problems understanding assignments, their captain should be willing to help. If a student is unable to find articles for a particular topic despite a good-faith effort, the captain should be willing to step in and assist. A captain should normally have extemp experience. Because of that seniority, those extempers who are just beginning, or even those who have been competing for a while, can look to the captain for guidance.

Parents and coaches should back up the authority of their student leader. A captain must sometimes issue penalties for late research or take other measures to enforce important edicts. Parents should be willing to go along with the captain’s instructions, unless they find them unfair or unreasonable. If such is ever the case or other problems arise, parents and students can appeal to the coach.

## Rules

As with any club, an extemp club should operate with clearly defined rules or bylaws. By laying out the guidelines before a difficulty arises, a club can respond to common problems swiftly and easily.

Some of the questions that should be answered in a simple, short document are:

1. What are the club standards for evidence in the extemp box?
2. What sources should or should not be used?
3. How many articles should be printed per topic?
4. What should an extemper do with evidence in a prep room after writing a speech?
5. How close to a tournament should articles be printed?
6. Should individual club members supply their own manila folders and other filing materials?
7. Should students provide articles and folders separately, or should articles come pre-filed (already in their labeled manila folder) to the club box?
8. May the club's extemp boxes be shared with other clubs?
9. How will the club respond if one of the above standards is violated?

Examples of possible answers include, but are by no means limited to, the following. (Think this through for yourself.)

1. Any news article is acceptable if it lists its publication date. (The club should determine Standards for appropriate articles. For instance, is *National Enquirer* a valid news source? Should comments from late-night comedians be filed in the box? What role should blogs play, if any?)
2. Each extemper should print 6-8 articles per topic.
3. An extemper should return all evidence to the extemp boxes immediately upon finishing the writing of a speech.
4. Articles should be printed within 3 weeks, preferably one week, of a tournament.

5. All research should be submitted in a labeled manila folder with accompanying hanging folder (also labeled). Extemp boxes will be provided by the club and stored and organized by the captain.
6. Extemp boxes can be shared with another club only after receiving prior written approval signed by both the extemp captain and the coach.
7. A mandatory public apology and an increased load on the next assignment will punish late evidence. Delivering evidence without accompanying folders will result in a charge for the cost of obtaining replacement folders. All violations will be reported to the coach.
8. The coach will determine punishment for excessive violations or infractions not listed above.

This document should be prepared by the captain and coach, approved by the parents, and acknowledged by the students.

Captains, be creative with your motivation. Use both a carrot and a stick. Rules should be known upfront and there should be no compromises or deals. Be very cautious about favoritism as it can destroy the cohesiveness of a club. You want this to be a learning experience, so design penalties that promote education and a “better job next time” mentality. Reward good performance with verbal praise, small treats, or anything you can think of that will make an extemper happy (a 10-week subscription to the Wall Street Journal, for instance).

Students, don’t violate the standards. There are good reasons for rules and your captain and coach are working very hard for your benefit. Do your best to turn in your evidence on time and to respect club, tournament and league policies, standards, leadership and members. If you do not know whether a particular activity is permissible, err on the side of caution. Check with your coach or captain.

Coaches and parents, be ready to step in if things get out of hand. It rarely happens, but sometimes a captain is unable to contain the demands of the students and the rules of the club begin to erode. This may happen if the captain is not assertive enough or if the bylaws are not clearly defined. If a new captain is needed, be ready to appoint another. If the captain needs assistance in enforcing the rules, be willing to provide it.

## **Assignments**

Assignments are at the heart of every extemp club. They occupy the most time and are the biggest reason a student would travel for miles to join a top-tier group of extempers. Complete assignments covering most of the current events from the past 90 days give a club a good platform for research and can propel its extempers to success. By the same token, deficient assignments that leave gaps in research are a fast track to embarrassment.

Assignments are the responsibility of the club captain. They are prepared a week or more before a tournament is scheduled. All members of a club are given research responsibilities and are charged by the captain to have a certain number of articles per listed topic.

The captain needs to decide the number of topics to assign and the division of assignments. Ideally all the news articles in the world could be filed away, but realistically only topics that the captain determines are likely to become questions should be assigned. The division is generally made by topic area, although you can choose any system that works for you.

## **Bring Knowledge Back to the Club**

Evidence squirreled away in a file box is not the same as head knowledge. It is important to have materials on file, but knowing what those articles say is vital to a good speech. Well-designed assignments allow a club to bring knowledge back to the group.

To facilitate this, it is good to set time aside for current-event discussions. Schedule informal sessions for detailing fun goings-on in the news or notable tidbits that may have escaped your club's notice. After the completion of assignments, take an hour or two before a tournament to have club members explain the most significant events in their areas of research.

Make sure that most of the talking is done by students. A parent or coach can act as facilitator, get the ball rolling by asking a few questions if the extempers are having trouble on their own, and put in the brakes if the session degenerates into something that is less than productive. This time is for condensing information and it is important that all the club members get a crack at explaining their research.

Also see to it that the discussion does not get “stuck” on a particular controversial issue for too long. A death-penalty ruling from the Judiciary and the latest events in the Middle East may come to the fore, but questions on American interest rates and Tanzanian debt are important and need addressing.

If possible, schedule this “knowledge period” just prior to a tournament so all the research will have been completed and the students will be ready to condense knowledge.

## Handling Problems

Even the most well thought-out plan will encounter difficulties. Because of the nature of human beings, no club can be run without encountering problems. Club captains will need to be prepared to handle disputes, violations of the bylaws and other controversies.

In any controversy, respect the wishes of the boss (either the captain or the coach). If the hierarchy of authority lists the captain as the arbitrator of research disputes, the captain—and the captain alone—should be in charge of making things right. If the bylaws stipulate that a parent or coach will judge disagreements, students should respect the adult’s decision.

One of the most common problems to arise in an extemp club concerns the sharing of evidence boxes across club lines. Because a broad article base is desirable, some extempers agree to share their work with other clubs in order to benefit from the collective depth of the group’s research. While there is no inherent problem with box sharing, the number of people who are involved and the difficulty of ascertaining every party’s consent often make for controversy.

To avoid box sharing “issues” a club needs a clear policy. If your club chooses to not share boxes with other clubs, it should provide a simple statement that can be firmly stated upon inquiry. Think carefully before making such a policy, because any exception would invalidate it and it will take some backbone to maintain it when faced with weeping friends from other clubs.

Whatever your policy, it should be approved by your club’s adult leadership. The opinion of all student members should be considered, and the views of senior extempers should carry special weight, but adults

should make the final call. The policy should be in writing and signed by the coaches of each extemp club involved.

If clubs A and B agree to share boxes, they should each have a copy of the policy signed by both coaches, and a signed copy of the consent form should also be on file in each shared extemp box. That may seem like invasive bureaucratic nonsense, but it will spare all involved from future grief and headache. Establish some short guidelines for the sharing; draft mini-bylaws detailing anything from how evidence should be returned to the box to how articles may or may not be used (sharing with Club B does not automatically mean sharing with Club C, even though Clubs B and C have a similar sharing agreement). Put in writing anything that may be a matter of conflict at a later date, both to help avoid problems and resolve them if they arise. Finally, before seeking out another club to request a sharing arrangement, be sure that your *entire* club is behind you.

Captain: make sure to handle problems in a diplomatic fashion. First, determine who should resolve the difficulty at hand. If it falls outside your job description as student captain, gratefully hand the reigns to your coach or other responsible adult leaders. If the entire responsibility for an issue rests on your shoulders, seek advice from your coach as needed and do your best to reach as just a conclusion as possible. Do not be quick to condemn, but do not be so lenient as to encourage rules violations. Try to hear both sides of a dispute and make equitable rulings, without letting self-interest weigh into your decision. Do not be hasty; you must be able to stand by your judgment. Be decisive and do not change your mind after the fact because you have thought better of your earlier ruling.

Running any organization will necessarily involve conflict and there will be times when human nature will show its ugly head. You may sometimes wish you could avoid people forever and live in a secluded utopian island (and I wouldn't mind visiting on occasion). The best-run club may experience conflicts, but you should not let that reality discourage you. Extemp is about tackling challenges, whether oratorical or organizational in nature.

Please do not let this chapter scare you! Extemp clubs are the best place for an extemper to be. You will grow more, have more fun and get the most out of extemporaneous speaking when you work with other people. Finding or creating the right club has its unique challenges, but an extemp club will be well worth your time.

# Training and Reinforcement

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## Key Concepts

1. Clubs are an excellent way to find support, share costs and prepare for extemp.
2. While clubs have limitations, they are an excellent venue for mutual improvement.
3. Clubs distribute costs and allow for the sharing of knowledge and experience.
4. Adult leadership within a club is paramount, but a student captain delegates authority beneath the auspices of parental authority.
5. Rules should be spelled out clearly before disputes arise.
6. Captains should use the carrot and the stick.

## Questions

1. Is there a competitive advantage to sharing boxes?
2. What are the advantages to working in a club? What are the disadvantages?
3. Should club members be protected from one another?
4. Why is adult leadership so important?





# CHAPTER 12

## Drills

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*“People who write about spring training not being necessary have never tried to throw a baseball.” ~ Sandy Koufax, the youngest baseball player ever inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame*

Like many things in life, presenting and speaking becomes habitual as the process is repeated. Speakers develop a groove, a comfort zone of delivery that, while not perfect, is decent and consistent. This groove is the floor from which speakers improve. Practice allows a speaker to develop outside the confines of an extemp round. If the only time an extemper practiced her skills were at a tournament, development would be punctuated by long periods of inactivity and stagnancy. To generate a comfortable cadence, vocabulary and fluency, mature speakers practice and conduct drills regularly.

Ed Macauley said, “When you are not practicing, remember, someone somewhere is practicing, and when you meet him he will win.” When I was competing, I printed this quotation out in block letters and put it above my bed. It served as an encouragement because every time I tired of doing yet another verbal pause drill, I would envision my most daunting competition—my biggest rival extemper—and keep going.

The competitive drive, an assertive desire to do your very best and win squarely at the end of the tournament, has to motivate your practice.

I am reminded of a sprinter named Albert who trained with me on my Junior College’s track team. Albert was far and away the most talented athlete on our squad. At the beginning of the semester, he blew the rest of us away with his speed. Our coach confided in us that he felt Albert

might be state champion material. And, to be honest, I agreed. Albert made the difficult sport of competitive running look effortless and fun. He was the clear favorite in the 400 meters, his best distance.

At the first couple of practice meets, Albert placed well. He was living up to his potential. His times weren't excellent, but they were fast for this early in the season. Coach was encouraged.

But Albert had one flaw: he hated to practice. The spring heat got to him quickly as we ran interval sets. It was not uncommon to see him sitting on the side of the track watching as the rest of the team completed the assigned drills. Sometimes Albert would start out with his signature speed only to back off substantially after fifty meters, letting us fly past him and ignoring our encouraging entreaties for him to keep going. Nobody ran faster than Albert, but nobody ran less.

Over the course of an 18-week track season, everyone improved. We practiced three hours a day, five days a week, running six to ten miles per practice and learned to be disciplined mentally as well as physically. It was grueling, but it was effective. While we were improving, Albert was stagnating. If anything his times fell slightly because he never challenged himself. By season's end, the fastest preseason runner was the team's slowest.

Albert had all the keys in front of him. He had been gifted with exceptional natural ability and blessed to be placed in a solid California track program. He had a great coach, clear opportunity and plenty of direction. But Albert turned his back on practice and ended up forsaking his competitive goals.

As in track, the work in extemp must be completed before the tournament begins. You need to be ready to go before the gun sounds. You prepare articles, organize a box, develop opening quotations and consider various brands of analysis. Should you not practice speaking as well?

By working on the drills detailed below, you can establish a foundation for your delivery. Read through the drills and consider which ones best meet your weaknesses. If you are part of a club, tackle the drills as a group, with each person taking turns speaking. If you are not part of a club, ask a friend or family member to watch some of your drills to provide feedback. Do not feel pressured to complete all of the drills

before your first tournament, but use them after you have diagnosed an area for improvement.

## Two Minute Drills

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I feel as if I am advertising a 30-minute abdominal workout. “Just two minutes and you’ll get that fine delivery you always wanted. You will talk like a high schooler again.” If this were an infomercial for the two-minute drill, the fine print would say that you need to do these drills often and regularly. There are quite a few of them, so you should always have something new to try. Some of them address more fundamental aspects of speaking, while others will help you fine-tune your style. Wherever you are speaking, put some elbow grease into these and you will improve.

Two minutes represent an excellent length of time for a speaking drill. It is short enough to let speakers focus on a specific aspect of their delivery and long enough to develop an argument or topic. One does not need a great deal of content to speak for two minutes. Some people I know do not even need a topic. Two minutes also works well in club environments where several students can participate consecutively, while leaving time for individual criticism and evaluation.

Because of these advantages, you will see that I use two minutes as a foundation for most of my speaking drills. I am not saying that the concepts cannot be applied to longer or shorter time venues, but in my experience, two minutes is the ideal length.

The point of the two-minute drill is to pick something to work on and focus on it exclusively. A speaker may be working on any number of issues at one time, but only one can be addressed at a time.

A distance runner training for a rigorous 10-kilometer race has a number of challenging elements to tackle. A good runner develops his fast twitch muscle tissue to earn a closing anaerobic sprint. He works on his cardiovascular capacity to strengthen his heart and lung muscles and keep them strong throughout the race. He also runs long distances to acclimate his body to the pain. But no one can sprint while running several miles; workouts need to handle each issue in turn. All of these

elements are important to a complete runner, but each one has to be isolated for the athlete to be competitive.

So in extemporaneous,

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**It is unrealistic to expect competitors to spotlight and improve every speaking element at the same time.**

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To prepare for the two-minute drill, write a list of topics that all the extempers involved can tackle. Topics can be current events but should not be limited to the news. Current events tend to be difficult to address in two minutes, because of both their complexity and the mental energy required to handle them. They make a good exercise for more advanced speakers, but can be intimidating for those starting out.

For your two-minute drill topics, you can pick anything from interesting adjectives (transparent, obese) and Disney Princess movies (Cinderella, Beauty and the Beast) to famous historical figures (Confucius, John Muir) and quotations (“he who laughs last laughs best”). You can also select a never ending story, or tale that one speaker starts and that the other competitors add on to during their two minutes of fame.

Many of these exercises will feel strange or unnatural. This is expected. Inhibitions are a perfectly normal part of taking on a new approach and alien feelings will only be an impediment if you let them slow you down. Plow forward with the exercise as best you can. Remember that you are preparing for public speaking, an endeavor that will always feel a tad awkward even when you are at the top of your game. With more practice, the drills should begin to feel more normative and your sense of awkwardness should dissipate.

If you have ever done impromptu speaking, think of this as a short impromptu with less than ten seconds of preparation. Read your topic and start talking.

## **Verbal Pauses**

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Of all the habits speakers struggle to eradicate, verbal pauses are the most common and pervasive. Verbal pauses are the little “non words” that

speakers insert into their delivery to cover for a silent pause. Students hate working on them, coaches feel uncomfortable pointing them out, and audiences find them grating.

As human beings, we are trained psychologically from a young age to anticipate a cadence to our speaking. When we are young, lying in our cribs and listening to our parent's voices, our mind is like a piece of paper receiving ink from a rubber stamp. We learn from this tender age that sentences should answer a beat as we pick up on our parent's cadence. We know, because our parents knew, that voices go up at the end of a question and that words follow a defined pattern.

As fluent speakers, we have an incessant urge to maintain that rhythm. And why not? It is the tempo we have known since infancy. It is fundamental to our understanding of the way language works. When the time comes to make a sound, we make a sound, whether a comprehensible word is available or not.

Our minds are not always fast enough to keep up with the linguistic cadence. We sometimes cannot think of a word to fill the beat. Our brains, however, push some nonsense forward to fill the gap. The result is an incomprehensible sound like "uh," "um," "er," "you know" or "like."

These sounds may be as habitual in daily speech as the inflections that punctuate our native language, but unlike prosody, they do not serve a purpose. They are at best a crutch. Ultimately, they serve as a way for judges to differentiate between speakers. An otherwise solid presentation can be brought down a notch or two by the simple presence of verbal pauses.

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**The key is simple: *avoid vocalizing pauses.***

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When you feel a verbal pause coming on, simply give way to a silent pause. If you cannot swiftly think of your next word, do not broadcast that fact by highlighting your dilatory mental acuity with a verbal accent. Far from detracting from your speaking, the silent pause will actually give you more credibility and help you appear more in control of your speaking.

The two-minute drill is an excellent exercise to mitigate verbal pauses, if not eradicate them altogether. When speakers understand the root cause

of verbal pauses and can pinpoint the mental pressure that drives the insertion of nonsensical syllables, they are ready to tackle two-minute drills. Novice speakers should be introduced to the following activities with gentleness and sensitivity. Watching more experienced competitors attempt the drills is a good way for them to gather the courage they will need when their turn comes.

Pick a particular verbal pause to work on, preferably the one that appears most commonly in your delivery. If “like” is, like, something you say often, then work on that. The most common crutch is “um,” providing sure-fire reasons for judges to knock down your rank. Do two-minute drills to banish unattractive crutches from your vocabulary.

This exercise can be monitored in two ways. The first is the “shout back” mechanism. With the shout back, every time a speaker utters a prohibited verbal pause, the audience (or club members) can echo back the offending sound. The result is a chorus of “uhs” or other amusing sounds every time the speaker slips up. While this can be intimidating, the shout back is effective at drawing awareness to the pause and can typically, in a very short time, liberate speakers from their bad habits.

A second, more brutal policing tool is “sudden death.” Speakers take turns performing the two-minute drill described earlier. When they utter a verbal pause they are asked to sit down and let the next person speak. Saying “uh” has the same impact as time expiring. A speaker with no mishaps can use the entire two minutes, while one who struggles with the issue must leave the speech unfinished. I like to use this technique after the first is well rehearsed.

If speakers are becoming frustrated with lack of speaking length, try instituting a “three strikes” rule. Competitors will get two “grace” verbal pauses before sudden death is enforced.

## **Comfort Phrases**

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A variant on the verbal-pause exercise is comfort-phrases eradication. Few things grate the ears of a listener more than repetitious crutch phrases that provide no meaning or content. Comfort phrases are used to give the speaker a chance to take a mental break.

Comfort phrases manifest themselves in a number of ways, but a few common ones include: “you know what I am saying?” “let me tell you,” “see?” or “do you see what I mean?” One I struggle with is “right?” asked as a question following a line of reasoning I feel is particularly profound. I still have bad memories of my club shouting “right!” during a shout-back two-minute drill.

It can be difficult for speakers to identify their own comfort phrases. Because comfort phrases are such an inherent part of an individual’s delivery they can be camouflaged behind clauses that do belong in a speech. If possible, ask a parent, friend or coach to point them out for you and then eradicate them with the drill outlined for verbal pauses. The shout-back policing mechanism is particularly effective with comfort phrases, as my experience can attest, but sudden death works too.

## Repetition

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In a recent speech about Nigerian corruption I heard the following:

“Nigerian President Yar’Adua, who was elected in a disputed Presidential election in April of 2007, looks to be powerless to halt the corruption. Despite the fact that he is the President, and has been since April, 2007, Yar’Adua’s political grip is lax when it comes to enforcing international standards of transparency. Corruption even surrounded his Presidential election in April of 2007.”

Was that as painful for you to read as it was for me to hear? Repetition is important as a rhetorical tool when you recap your speech and give a summary of your analysis. It can also serve to highlight a major point or bring your audience’s attention back to something you feel is important. But,

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**Unintentional repetition is something our mouths  
do when they go faster than our minds.**

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Think of facts as acquaintances you introduce to friends at a party. You would not introduce the foreign exchange student to your best friend only to turn around thirty seconds later and repeat the process. Once you connect people, your role in the conversation is only to add interesting

tidbits or questions (“Where did you go on your last visit to the States?” or “I have never been to Greece before”).

The key to resolving repetition is first to slow down and then to think about putting forth new information in every sentence. Once data is introduced in a speech, you should feel free to move on and never bring it up again. It has been said and does not need to be repeated.

For the repetition drill, pick a current event topic and give a two-minute “background” for an imaginary extemp speech. Pick a topic you can address without prep (maybe an extemp speech you gave at the last tournament or one you tried in practice). Try to deliver the entire two minutes without ever presenting new data.

If you find yourself giving the same information twice, go back to the beginning and try again. Draw a mental outline of your speech by each sentence and consider how each phrase builds upon the one before it. Remember that your audience is waiting on your every word. They want to hear something new and interesting from you. Satisfy that desire by cutting out the repetition.

The speech I mentioned earlier could have been better. Here is what the brief snippet might look like after the two-minute repetition drill:

“Nigerian President Yar’Adua, who was elected in a disputed Presidential election in April of 2007, looks to be powerless to halt the corruption. Yar’Adua’s political grip is lax when it comes to enforcing international standards of transparency, a fact that is painfully obvious in the wake of the Nigerian parliamentary scandal. The speaker of that august body absconded with some \$5 million dollars and allegedly spent the funds to purchase 12 vehicles and renovate a couple of mansions. As long as unscrupulous officials in Africa’s most populous nation demand bribe money for political favors, Nigeria will struggle for legitimacy.”

Eloquence is making each sentence new and original. If you can keep a speech hopping for two minutes, you can keep it moving for seven.

## **Pause Insertion**

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I have already made brief mention of the silent pause, but it deserves its own section and, yes, its own drill.



Silent pausing is a sound way to prevent a verbal pause; it is also an excellent rhetorical tool. You may wish to highlight a point, give your listeners a chance to catch their breath or simply recover your train of thought. Not saying anything for a short (1-3 second) period of time is a great way to accomplish all three of those objectives.

Another, less lauded aspect of pausing is that it gives you the appearance of complete authority over your surroundings. Pausing makes you look like the Alpha dog in the room. Speakers who are out of their depth easily struggle with silence. Like panicked drowning victims, they flail about verbally, talking a mile a minute and desperately trying to fill the air with words. Their subconscious reasoning is that as long as they keep talking, as long as they keep kicking, they will not drown.

To some extent the survival mentality is accurate. Speakers who maintain machine-gun style delivery for seven minutes can be impressive and will usually “survive.” They may even win some accolades. However,

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**To take your speaking to the next level and  
command your audience’s undivided attention, you  
need to master the pause.**

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As we discussed earlier, a pause is not something that comes naturally. Your brain will fight with every neuron to force you to keep your cadence. The ability to deliver a powerful oral presentation is not an innate skill and speakers need training it to embrace and master the use of silence.

I like to start students with the never-ending story game as a group exercise to develop the silent pause. The first person begins a tale in the allotted two minutes. The next person in line continues the plot and so on.

Try to incorporate dramatic pauses first. When Papa Bear discovers that his picture frame was broken during the giant hurricane, he should pause before asking, “Who did this?” When the gunfire starts at the Alamo, Davy Crocket should pause after surveying Santa Ana’s army and stating, “War is a terrible thing.”

Pausing for dramatic effect will help you understand the value of silence. The second step is to incorporate a pause in an otherwise meaningless

location to accent a sentence's meaning. "He is the President of the United States" becomes "He is [PAUSE] the President [PAUSE] of the United States."

When you pause, you leave an open place in your audience's hearing. The sound waves flat line for a brief moment and your next words achieve a more substantial impact. The result is that whatever words you place immediately after a pause will be remembered by your audience. By placing a pause before anything you really want to accent, you can leave your audience with the impression you desire.

Once you feel comfortable conducting the pause drill with a never-ending story, feel free to try it with current events topics as well. Present the "background" to an extemp speech while pausing before any point you want your audience to remember.

When you pause, you are licking a stamp. The next thing the stamp touches binds with the stamp with a stiff adhesion. If the letter is addressed correctly, your message will be mailed right where you want it to go.

## Speed Variation

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Meet Todd. On paper, Todd is the greatest extemporaneous speaker to ever live. His words, though unrehearsed, flow from him like ticks from a clock. His fluency is astounding and his eloquence beyond belief. Todd uses big words like "acquiesce" and "superfluous," and he uses them correctly. His grasp of current events equals that of the best nationally televised analysts. Sadly, Todd will never achieve a high level of success in extemp.

Todd's shortcoming? He never varies his delivery. His pitch sometimes falls before he takes a breath, but most of the time his style can best be described with the prefix "mono." Monotone, monopitch and, importantly, *one speed*. Todd's voice could be packaged and sold as a sleep aid, but it is not a good medium for conveying current events analysis.

The greatest drawback of droning delivery is its impact on your audience. Speaking at a steady clip may be comfortable and feel right, but you will need to vary your speed to keep your listeners' attention. A rapid pace is

fine as long as you let your audience catch up with periods of slower speech. A slower pace is okay too, if you keep your listeners engaged with some bursts of faster speed.

Slowing down makes your content easier to understand and improves your audience's retention. Words spoken slowly are important ones so choose something essential to highlight with your slower presentation. Deliberate speaking also fosters more audience thought. Whereas a *non sequitur* may fly when you are talking a mile a minute, it may quickly wreck your credibility when you adopt a more understandable pace. Carefully consider your phraseology and expect your audience to catch on to any mistake.

Fast speaking is a good way of expressing passion, energy or excitement about a topic. It can also imply nervousness, so be sure to mix in a few slow phrases to maintain the appearance of confidence. Use speed to move through less interesting aspects of the speech, to bridge between slower accented lines or, yes, to get through large amounts of material faster.

When I talk about speed, I do not mean motor mouth (as many words a minute as possible speed). What I mean by speaking at a steady speed is slightly faster than normal cadence. It must still be intelligible and easy to follow. It might be a 20-40% increase in speed, but not a 100% jump. Your breathing should remain normal and you should not look frantic or panicked. It should be faster than normal, but still natural.

Most speakers do not need to consciously speed up their delivery. A faster cadence typically sneaks up on you and few need prodding to get through their material more quickly. You may need to think about slowing down.

Slow your delivery at the start and conclusion of your speech. A fast start almost always appears unplanned and is perceived as a show of nerves. Similarly, a rushed finish can seem like poor time management and detract from your "landing."

The two-minute drill is an excellent way to work on speed variance. Choose a topic from any of the areas listed above and start speaking. Use a timepiece or have someone time you and call out every twenty seconds. Start slowly and, at each 20-second mark, shift to a different speed. You can try a binary shift (slow, fast, slow, fast, etc.) or make it more

complicated with a tertiary scale (slow, medium, fast, slow, medium, fast). More levels of complexity will help you understand the impact of variation.

As you vary your speed, make sure you do not sacrifice other aspects of speech such as fluency, pronunciation and verbal pauses. Just because you are going fast does not mean you can become incomprehensible. Your audience needs to be able to make out the individual words you are saying. Also avoid the temptation to punctuate your speed with more verbal pauses. A faster cadence does not justify more “uhs.” When you speak slowly, think about slowing down your gestures, accenting your facial expressions and making longer eye contact. Take advantage of the absence of words to connect with your audience.

At first, do not worry about making sense out of the speed changes. Just go faster when the clock tells you to. As you get more comfortable with the 20-second clock, try varying your speed according to your content. Slow down over points you want to accent and speed up when you feel a faster cadence is justified.

Nobody wants to listen to an unchanging Todd who plods through material at a never-changing pace. In the end, such speaking bores an audience and a judging panel. If you practice varying your speed, you will not be Todd when you take center stage to deliver your extemp speech.

## **Pathos Variation**

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Pathos is one of Aristotle’s three modes of persuasion in rhetoric or, as I like to call them, keys to rhetoric. Pathos is appealing to an audience’s emotion. Pathos is passion. It is not logical or reasoned. Rather it is the strong feeling and sentiment that seems to pour out unintentionally.

Many students, when I introduce to them the concept of passion as an element of extemp speaking, express the view that I must be mistaking extemp for some kind of persuasive activity, like debate. “Surely,” they reason, “emotion has no place in a speech on current events.” Our purpose is analysis, not emotional appeal, right?

Nothing could be further from the truth. To prove my point, consider successful extemp speakers, most who incorporate elements of pathos

into their delivery. And it makes sense, too. Passion is one of three elements of a well-rounded speaker. If your audience does not know you care about your topic, they will not care either. Passion shows your listeners that you are human and that you care about the material you are presenting.

The fact of the matter is that *every speech is persuasive*. Even a purely informative speech must have an element of persuasion in order to make it interesting to the listener. Consider the audience's perspective. Let's say two speakers address the current status of Russian affairs. The first rattles off events like a chess game broadcaster, and the second stirs things up by raising engaging doubts about Medvedev, the successor to Vladimir Putin, and his vision for the future of Russia. The first speaker is Hal in *2001: A Space Odyssey* or a dry piece of toast without any butter or jam, while the second is dynamic and appealing.

Pathos can be especially powerful in handling "drier" subject matter, like economic questions. If you show emotion while discussing the Federal Reserve's interest rate reduction or look excited when talking about why Google should split its stock, you will win over many a judge.

Passion in an extemp speech is usually expressed with volume and tone variation. Volume can get louder to express excitement, anger or simply to make an impression. Softer volume forces the audience to strain to hear and can be like telling your listeners a secret. Sympathetic delivery usually entails a softer tone, as does concern. Anger and indignation are communicated through volume. Whatever emotional interactions you witness on the interpersonal level will be mirrored in speaking. Accent the passion and exaggerate it just enough to show it off to your audience.

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**The key to drawing your listener's attention to your emotion is variation.**

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Louder passion is an excellent way to express disgust at atrocities, angst at domestic policy or even a stalwart statement of principle. You can increase your volume to deplore the genocide in Sudan, warn against a presidential candidate's taxation history or defend the merits of a pro-life political perspective. Passion, whether expressed through soft tones or abrasive volume, will set you apart from other speakers who do not infuse their delivery with similar pathos.

Be sure your facial expressions and gestures mirror the emotion in your voice. You should not be smiling while speaking gruffly about the dangers of totalitarianism in the third world, and a frown is inappropriate when recounting positive economic numbers.

To work on injecting your speeches with more passion, first pick a topic for your two-minute drill. Just as you did in the speed variation drill, have a watch handy to mark every twenty seconds. At each mark, change passion gears. Go from normal to sympathetic to angry to concerned to excited to worried. Make a list of common descriptive adjectives and try to incorporate each concept into your two-minute drill every twenty seconds.

When you have mastered shifting gears under the direction of the clock, try to let your content drive the emotion. You are disappointed that your political candidate's polling numbers are down in a key state. You are happy that a new transit line opened up in Kashmir. You are appalled that few responded quickly after the major earthquake in Southeast Asia.

At first you may feel like a goldfish exposed on the Sahara sands, but you will gradually become used to the variation. Emotion in extemp is, after all, only a stronger expression of emotion in real life.

## **Gestures**

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We have already established that non-verbal aspects of delivery are very important. More communication happens through what you do with your hands and facial features than through the explicit words that are formed with your mouth. Some experts even write that as many as 90% of messages are communicated nonverbally.<sup>16</sup> This means that the bulk of your communication with your audience does not involve words.

The good news is that you can learn to master nonverbal communication and effectively manipulate that 90% for your own success. The bad news is that many speakers have no clue where to begin improving their nonverbal communication.

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<sup>16</sup> Wertheim, Edward, G., Ph.D., "The Importance of Effective Communication," Northeastern College of Business Administration, Northeastern University, 2005.

Whole books have been written on the subject of gestures and body language in general. If this is something you struggle with or are just curious about improving, consider purchasing Ralph Hillman's *Delivering Dynamic Presentations* (Allyn and Bacon, 1999). This book is not written for the forensics competitor, but contains some excellent analysis on non-verbal communication including external factors and mindset, both of which are beyond the purview of this publication.

To add or improve gestures to an otherwise nonverbally barren speech, develop three basic hand motions you can use in an extemp presentation. Work on them as a group with other members of your club. The gestures should be simple movements, such as raising an open palm upward or moving a stiff hand up and down laterally.

Once you have developed your gestures, deliver a two-minute drill incorporating all three of them. Speak slowly and try to think ahead of where you are in your presentation to come up with a good place to insert movement. Have a club member watch your delivery for feedback or practice in front of a mirror.

Gestures need to appear natural. Passion and speed can be forced into submission and pauses can be contrived, but body language is such an integral part of who you are as a speaker that it is vital that gestures be believable.

Because of this fact, it is important that you be relaxed when you work on gestures. If you feel stressed or flustered by the exercise, take a break. Grab a glass of water and do a few pushups. Drill with a different focus for a quarter of an hour before returning to your gestures.

As much as coaches work on improving student gestures, sometimes a laissez faire approach garners the best results. When speakers are not thinking about their movements, their overall delivery comes across as less labored.

## Elaboration

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In the final round of the California state championships, I was speaking about the future of India-Brazil trade. Though I thought I had enough material for seven minutes, I was falling woefully short. The timekeeper raised her hand to show three minutes left and I was already halfway

done with my final point. My short speech would not hold a candle to the stiff competition in the panel. I needed to come up with new material *fast*.

The trouble was my topic. The economic balance between these two nations is not exactly common dinner table conversation. Besides, when I drew my topic I was only vaguely aware that India and Brazil were major trading partners. Every fact I could possibly discover during prep had already been inserted into the early portions of my speech. I knew better than to repeat my previous material, but what other option did that leave?

You may have guessed it. I pulled out my magic 3 x 5 card and waived it in front of the judges. The card had nothing written on it. They were so blinded by the brightly white card that they could not help but write positive reviews. Actually, I had forgotten my magic 3 x 5 card at home and was forced into something much more pedestrian and, it turns out, very effective.

Elaboration is the skill of taking a small amount of material and expanding it with the addition of life experiences, analogies, philosophy, historical perspective, parallel examples or additional facts. Elaboration is mixing elements of life, current events and literature into your speech as a way to “fill time.” The chapter on Generics provides some direction for creating planned elaboration, but sometimes speakers need to elaborate on the fly.

Many speakers look at unplanned speech time as a dangerous black hole: the edge of the world that returns few who venture near it. As commonplace as this fear is, it is unjustified. The literal meaning of extemporaneous is without preparation. It is taking center stage with the lights on and eyes staring and having something to say, having something to add. Extemporaneous means taking the same comfort you would bring to a conversation to a public speaking environment.

Still scared? The solution to your fear is the two-minute drill. It is an excellent way to develop comfort at elaboration as well as perfecting the skill. Pick a current events topic and take ten seconds to prepare. Then start elaborating. The only rule regarding content is that you may not present any fact that relates directly to your topic. Think of things to say that are only tangentially related to your topic.



If your topic is an element of the next federal election, consider elaborating with a discussion of a past election, a comment on the importance of political consistency, a Socratic analysis on the degradation of democracy or an anecdote describing your experience in politics. If your topic is illegal immigration, elaborate by talking about Mexico's economy, the movement of people groups around the world, causes of historical immigration, or what it means to be an American.

Two minutes will never seem so long again. This is because,

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**Great extempers will seize the opportunity to fill in  
the empty spaces with elaborate analysis.**

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Always end your elaboration with something meaningful that your audience can hang onto. Give your ramblings a point by driving home a conclusion the judges feel is lasting and substantial.

A successful elaboration takes time, but it can make you look more personable and well rounded. You are not just a current events freak (that's a compliment), but you also understand how events work together and can contribute to a cohesive discussion of the principles behind the circumstances. If done correctly, this elaboration may even give you a competitive edge.

At the California Championship, I ended up filling those final three minutes of my India-Brazil speech. My last points included an economic analysis of the value of open trade, a discussion of India's struggle with Pakistan over Kashmir, a look at Brazil's corruption scandal (which later bloomed into the "Mensalão" fiasco) and a prediction that close economic ties would also lead to a military alliance. At no time during my preparation did I sit down and think of a way to insert discussion of Brazil's corruption or try to make a prediction about the future of India-Brazil non-economic relations; I just talked about what I knew and hoped it would make up for my lack of prepared material.

Despite the fact that I had no sources in my final two and half minutes, four of the five judges on the panel mentioned some part of my elaboration as a justification for their ranking. It was unimportant to the audience that I knew India was running a small trade deficit to Brazil. They did care that I felt trade would have an impact on the Kashmir

situation and that I knew what Frederick Bastiat wrote about free exchange.

## Free Association

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Have you ever seen a pre-game warm-up before a basketball game? Players stretch, run through dribbling, shooting and passing drills and run suicides. To the untrained eye, it looks as if the athletes were tiring themselves out for no good reason. Why tucker yourself out just before the big game?

The answer lies in the fact that muscles need time to warm up. Players may hurt themselves and certainly will not perform their best if their first chance to exert themselves is during the actual game. Coaches design drills that will simulate play so that the athlete's muscles can become acclimated to the rigors of the hardwood.

Why do extempers not do the same?

One of the most common complaints I hear from students is that their first round is their worst. For some reason which they cannot quite place, round one is cursed to be sub-par. Analysis at the beginning of the day is just as sharp as it is later, but their speaking is not as fluent. Words do not jump to mind as easily and the brain is full of sleepy cobwebs. It's okay, some students reason, because everyone else does just as poorly and judges are simply faced with sub-par rounds in the morning.

I cringe at such a mindset. Eye the first round as an opportunity to gain an early edge. If everyone else does poorly in round one, but you find a way to hit a home run, you will picket fence<sup>17</sup> the round. This is a good thing. If a speaker can somehow execute the "bad round" before delivering the actual first speech, the "curse" will effectively be eliminated. The difficulty is finding forty-five minutes in the early morning darkness before a tournament to conduct an extemp round.

As usual, the two-minute drill comes riding to the rescue. Any one of the drills listed in this chapter would make a great warm-up, but one exercise stands out as a perfect, before-tournament drill. Called "free association,"

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<sup>17</sup> A "picket fence" score occurs when all the judges rank one competitor at first place (all "1's").

this drill stems from the flowing exercises of speech pathologists and is designed to help the speaker develop a cadence or speech rhythm.

While most competitive extempers do not suffer from a speech impediment, the free association drill is a great way to wake up your speaking in the morning. It will feel weird and your friends will look at you strangely as you perform the drill, but if you can find a private place, you can warm up without losing face.

To do the free association exercise, start by saying anything that comes to mind. You may want to describe your visual perceptions (“I see a tree blowing in the wind beneath a pale white sky and a plane’s contrail”) or your feelings (“This tournament is really scaring me and I wonder why in the world I have to do this crazed drill”). Try to string together two or three concepts per sentence and speak at a normal pace. Speak for the entire two minutes.

To make the drill more difficult, force yourself to think of new concepts for every new word. Do not speak in coherent sentences, but freely associate words to the rhythm of your natural cadence. Use adjectives and nouns only as you say the words that come to mind. The advanced free association exercise might sound something like this:

“Tree, wind, falling leaves, covered ground, mulch, fertilizer, growth, plant, fruit, sucrose, carbohydrate, diet, weight gain, obesity, heart disease, doctor, hospital, white gown, medicine, antibiotics, civil war...”

If you are feeling particularly brave, you can warm up with a partner. Start by throwing out a term, phrase or concept and take turns building on one another over the course of the two minutes. Then reset the timer and repeat until you feel comfortable with your speaking.

Just as players on a basketball team need to spend a few minutes getting ready for the hardwood, so the extemper should start his preparation before he even draws a topic. The free association exercise is a good way to get ready and will help keep you from having a cold first round.

## The Day Before the Tournament

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Something must be said about the night before your competition, a night much more important than you might think. You’ve put in mammoth amounts of work already (months of reading, analysis, printing, filing,

stressing), and it will all come to a head over the next couple of days. To make the most of this whirlwind, you must capitalize on the day before the tournament and reflect on the following. Let's consider the prudent steps of preparation the day before.

First, *read, read and read*. This is the most valuable thing you can do with your time the night before a tournament. Filing recent evidence is nice and speech drills are helpful, but human beings are built with excellent short-term memory (why do you think students cram for quizzes?). Besides, you can capitalize on being the most current by reading the news extensively the day before a competition.

Second, *have everything ready the night before*. Do not tell yourself that you will "just wake up earlier" to file away the last of your articles or copy down your opening quotations. Complete all tasks before going to bed. Do not bog yourself down with additional work that will distract you from your speaking.

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**On tournament day, competing should be your only concern.**

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Third, *get a good night's rest*. While it probably seems obvious that you should get your eight hours prior to any major intellectual exercise, some competitors like to stay up late to finish off the last of their research or engage in an eleventh-hour "prep operation." Burning the midnight oil only means you did not budget your time adequately in the weeks before the tournament. Do not go a tournament looking like Dracula on Ambien. Make rest a top priority and be ready to compete when the tournament starts.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, *be confident that there is nothing more you could have done to be better prepared*. When we work hard toward a goal, we often find ourselves beset by doubt as we approach the finish line. We start to distrust our knowledge and level of preparedness. An insidious, nagging question detracts from the joy of fruition: "Could I have done better?" Shelve such inquiries until *after* the tournament.

## Concluding Thoughts

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This chapter has introduced ten drills that have proven effective in assisting extemporaneous speakers. The ball is now in your court. Create drills of your own to exercise the mind and mouth. Use the two-minute concept as a platform and develop a system to address your specific needs and challenges. Personalize these exercises with your own “house rules.” No two families play Monopoly the same way; why should two clubs feel obligated to conduct identical exercises? The goal is to develop drills that will make your speeches conversational, analytical, and exciting.

Whatever changes you make through an exercise, your presentation needs to look natural at the end of the day. Even if you force yourself into a pause or a gesture that is not “you” for the sake of practice, you need to own every part of your delivery in the end. Your speaking needs to be personalized and not contrived.

If you practice and work hard at bringing your delivery to the next level, you will improve, no matter what kind of natural ability you have. Innate talent is great to start off a season, but competitors who lack the motivation to push through the discomfort of drills will not advance far.

Remember, your competition is somewhere practicing, with *beating you* in mind. If you do not step up and prepare, you will be defeated when you meet. If you practice diligently, you will walk away victorious in all the ways that count.

# Training and Reinforcement

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## Key Concepts

1. Practice does not make perfect, but it does make better.
2. Success requires more than just natural talent.
3. Two minutes equal an excellent length for speaking drills.
4. Verbal pauses are mental substitutes for words that fill in for gaps in our speaking cadence.
5. Comfort phrases are crutches that need to be eradicated.
6. Once you have said something, it has been said and does not need to be repeated.
7. Pauses make speakers look like they are in control.
8. By varying speed and passion, a speaker can hold an audience's attention.
9. Nonverbal communication accounts for 90% of all messages sent in interpersonal dialogue.
10. Elaboration sequences help fill in gaps in preparation.
11. Warm up before your first extemp round.

## Questions

After every competition, take the time to write out answers to each of the following questions. Make these your training points to improve as the year unfolds.

1. How can I give my current gestures more impact?
2. Where can I add pauses to my extemp speeches?
3. What can I include in an elaboration sequence that would apply to world events today?
4. What literature should I be prepared to reference for an elaboration sequence?
5. How can I appropriately display passion in an extemp speech?

6. What are some topics that justify emotional displays?
7. Am I overly repetitive?
8. What drills can I practice now to improve for the next tournament?
9. If I want something, am I willing to work for it?





# Appendix

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The following topics are organized by subject area and speaker, as might be done at a real tournament. They have been designed for their lasting prominence (in the opinion of the author, they will continue to be current events topics for several years) and are therefore somewhat broad. Actual questions at a tournament may be more focused and will refer to elected leaders by name.

Please use these topics to familiarize yourself with the format assumed by most tournaments and to prepare practice speeches in the manner outlined in earlier pages.

## Round 1 (Domestic)

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### Speaker 1

Is the brainchild of Larry Paige and Sergey Brin too big?

Would a guest worker program allow immigrant labor to contribute to the United States economy?

Are schools' lax approaches toward dietary health to blame for childhood obesity?

### Speaker 2

How has obesity changed the way public health programs are administered?

Does the Democratic Party have the political capital necessary to make gains in the next national election?

Can Microsoft survive Open Source?

### **Speaker 3**

United States: Is a porous southern border a security risk?

Can Major League Baseball survive steroids?

What is the biggest case in the Supreme Court's next term?

### **Speaker 4**

Standardized Test Scores: What federal reforms are needed to increase primary school performance?

Do recent healthcare reforms put seniors at risk?

How will the GOP governors fare in the next off-year election?

### **Speaker 5**

Does the Department of Homeland Security pay enough attention to privacy complaints?

Supreme Court: What is next for our nation's highest judiciary body?

Should the FDA tighten its drug approval process to keep imitation drugs out?

### **Speaker 6**

What measures can the USDA deploy to improve food safety standards?

Should the FCC regulate content on satellite radio?

Wikipedia: Is the Internet encyclopedia credible?

### **Speaker 7**

Should the federal government pass a traditional marriage amendment?

Big Tobacco: Is the tort system the appropriate mechanism for accountability?

Is music safe from the pirates?

## Round 2 (International)

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### Speaker 1

Is Illegal Immigration a threat to European stability?

Are development efforts in Africa producing results?

Is debt relief the solution to third-world problems?

### Speaker 2

Is Kashmir destined to be a permanent war zone?

Does Global Warming's threat justify economically dangerous policy decisions?

Is the Catholic Church too political?

### Speaker 3

Hollywood: Does exported entertainment engender hatred?

Is AIDS the biggest threat to sub-Saharan Africa?

Forecast the next Israeli elections.

### Speaker 4

Should the costs of the International Space Station be distributed more evenly between participating nations?

Are Japan and China mending fences?

Without a constitution, will Europe ever be considered one country?

### Speaker 5

War on Terror: Where do Russia's alliances lie?

Should the United States ratify the Kyoto Protocol?

What should recording artists do to reduce piracy in India and China?

### **Speaker 6**

Does the United Nations succeed in promoting international peace?

Will Iran yield to the IAEA's inspection demands?

How should France respond to Islamic violence?

### **Speaker 7**

Is the International Criminal Court an appropriate mechanism to promote worldwide justice?

Is the World Trade Organization a good arbiter of global commerce disputes?

Should Western Europe's labor policy be a model for the United States?

## **Round 3 (Economic)**

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### **Speaker 1**

Can deficit spending be curtailed with today's powerful political lobby?

Does a low consumer savings rate promise an economic downturn?

Should Amtrak be privatized?

### **Speaker 2**

What does a weak dollar mean for American exports?

Is it still the time to buy gold?

Should flagging consumer confidence worry the Fed?

### **Speaker 3**

Alaska's North Slope: Would drilling reduce our dependence on Saudi oil?

Should Congress do more to mandate corporate ethics?

Can American automakers compete with Japan?

### **Speaker 4**

Internet advertising: Is the revenue sustainable?  
Bond market: Where will yields be in one year?  
Should the Strategic Petroleum Reserve be expanded?

### **Speaker 5**

Can an established Google keep its image?  
What's up with the real estate market?  
Can today's student afford college?

### **Speaker 6**

Does Wal-Mart treat its employees fairly?  
Is privatization the solution for Social Security?  
Style: Is the Hybrid car the new BMW?

### **Speaker 7**

Should job market fluctuations concern Wall Street?  
Medicare: Can Congress fix the "doughnut hole?"  
Is Open Source the future of personal computing?



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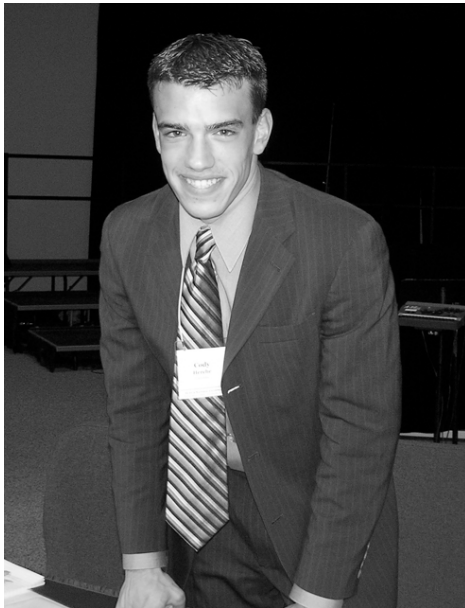
To my friends, who lend an ear and give valued encouragement while making it really easy to play hard.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

# Cody Herche

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Cody, pictured here in 2006 preparing for the final team-debate round at NCFCA Nationals, is from the sunny central valley of Northern California. He was the second place extemporaneous speaker at the National Christian Forensics and Communications Association (NCFCA) National Tournament in 2004, and National Champion in 2005. As captain of the Envoy Extemp Club in the 2006 season, Herche captained the club to two sweeps (1-2-3 finishes) at national qualifying tournaments and took the helm on a season that qualified seven of eight club members to Nationals.

Since graduating from High School, Herche has continued to coach Envoy Extemp, working with the second place speaker at the 2007 National tournament. Herche is a Bachelor of the Arts candidate in Economics and French at the University of the Pacific. In his spare time, Herche runs cross country and track, plays basketball and Ultimate Frisbee, swims and argues with friends.