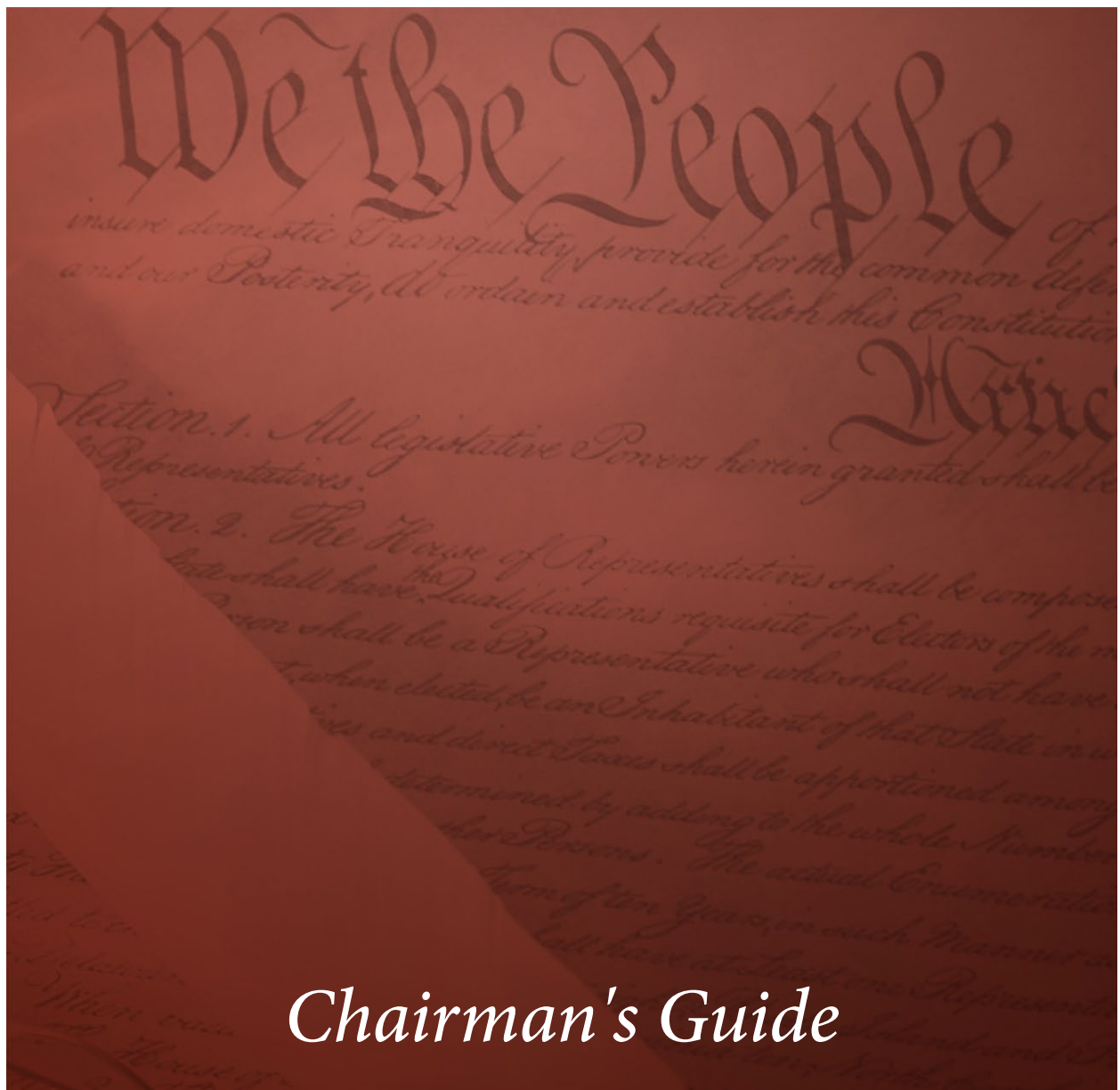




THE AMERICAN LEGION

HIGH SCHOOL ORATORICAL SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

A Constitutional Speech Contest



Chairman's Guide

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Introduction

This guide has been developed to assist Oratorical program chairmen at all levels in organizing and conducting a successful contest. It is intended only as an aid and should not be used as a promotional piece, distributed to schools or given to prospective participants. To improve this revision of the *Chairman's Guide*, we have incorporated material previously included in the *Oratorical Contest Guidelines Manual*.

Arrangements for contests leading to the department finals are the responsibility of each department. In some states, rules and regulations below the department finals level may vary from those used in the national contest; contest chairmen at the post and district levels should be familiar with their respective department's rules.

When preparing for and conducting an Oratorical contest, remember that you are serving young men and women. They are the ones most affected by mistakes, so be thoroughly prepared and familiar with the rules.

The American Legion wants every high school to provide an opportunity for its students to participate in this citizenship education program. However, it is up to local American Legion posts to make the program work.

Chapter 1

Contest history and purpose

History

William A. Kitchen, a past department commander of Missouri, is credited with founding The American Legion's National High School Oratorical Contest. He experimented with the contest in a few high schools in and around Kansas City, Mo., during the 1934-1935 school year. He went on to become the first Department of Missouri Oratorical chairman and conducted a statewide Oratorical program in 1935 and 1936.

Kitchen encouraged The American Legion to adopt the Missouri Oratorical Contest plan as a national program. The first national contests were held in 1938, with 11 departments and 4,000 participants competing. At the national finals in Norman, Okla., John Janson of Phoenix won first place. The national finals returned to Missouri for its 50th anniversary in 1987, hosted by Lee Summit Senior High School in Lee Summit.

In 1997, the week-long regional, sectional and national finals format was changed to a weekend competition of quarterfinal, semifinal and national final contests in The American Legion's headquarters city of Indianapolis. In 2007, the contest's official name became the American Legion High School Oratorical Scholarship Program – A Constitutional Speech Contest.

Since its beginning, the contest has awarded more than \$3 million in scholarships to participants at the national level of competition. It currently awards \$203,500 annually to department winners competing at the national level. Thousands more are awarded in scholarships to winners at the department, district and post levels.

Purpose

The Oratorical program was developed primarily to instill a deeper knowledge and appreciation of the U.S. Constitution in high school students. Participants also grow in leadership ability, their capacity to think and speak clearly and intelligently, and understanding of the rights, responsibilities, obligations and privileges of U.S. citizens.

The program also assists students in affording a college education, with the first-place winner receiving \$25,000 and the next two finishers taking home \$22,500 and \$20,000, respectively. First-round participants in the national contest receive a \$2,000 scholarship. Second-round participants who do not advance to the final round receive an additional \$2,000 scholarship.

Past national champions

For a complete list of past national champions, visit legion.org/oratorical/champions.

Chapter Two

Promoting your contest

Working with the National Speech and Debate Association

The American Legion has a corporate relationship with the National Speech & Debate Association (NSDA). Your department chairman has contact information for your local NSDA representative, usually a high school teacher or speech and debate coach. This is an opportunity to promote the Oratorical program to local students who already participate in speech competitions. Students earn double NSDA points when they compete in an American Legion Oratorical contest.

Working with your schools

To effectively promote the Oratorical program in your school and community, post chairmen and others involved with the contest must be in contact with school officials.

During the first visit with school staff, determine the best methods of informing students about the Oratorical program. Consider addressing them directly through assemblies, classes or other gatherings if the school allows it. You can also try school bulletin boards, the school newspaper and social media. Use any and every opportunity to tell students about the Oratorical program.

The more you spread the word in your community and promote participation, the better chance you'll have of gaining participants. Ask other post members, your Auxiliary unit and your Sons of The American Legion squadron to help get the word out.

Another way to build interest is invite a youth audience to your contest, with a goal of attracting future participants. If the contest is conducted during school hours, it may be possible to schedule it at a high school.

Also, get local elementary students studying the Constitution by sponsoring essay and speech contests with less stringent requirements than the Oratorical contest. Involvement at an early age could attract youth once they become eligible.

Do not overlook parents when seeking support for the Oratorical program. Contact the PTA or a similar organization to explain the contest and request its support during a meeting.

Suggested talking points

When addressing an audience, your mission is to persuade those in attendance that the Oratorical program is worth their time to participate or promote. Here are some suggested talking points for school assemblies and civic groups. Adapt them to fit your needs.

- Ladies and gentlemen, this opportunity to appear before you is an honor and privilege for me as an American Legion member.

- We Legionnaires are proud of our organization, and we are particularly proud of our youth activities, which do so much for the development of our nation's young people. Few organizations can match in size and scope the youth service program carried on by The American Legion under the direction of its Americanism Commission.
- This occasion is an opportunity for you as well as for me, as I explain an American Legion program that can benefit high school students educationally and financially.
- Established in 1938, the American Legion High School Oratorical Scholarship Program is designed to instill in high school students a greater knowledge and appreciation of the U.S. Constitution. Participants also grow in leadership ability, their capacity to think and speak clearly and intelligently, and understanding of the rights, responsibilities, obligations and privileges of U.S. citizens.
- Each contestant must give a prepared oration on some phase of the Constitution, emphasizing a citizen's duties and obligations to our government.
- Some states require the "assigned topic" portion at local levels. Refer to your respective state rules.
- Include remarks on how and where to register and the dates and locations for the contest.
- To date, The American Legion has awarded more than \$3 million in scholarships to Oratorical contestants at the national level. The three national finalists receive \$25,000, \$22,500, and \$20,000 respectively. In addition, contestants who win their state finals contest and represent their states at the national contest receive no less than \$2,000.
- Awards offered by Post _____ include _____.
_____. Other awards offered in the state of _____ include _____.
_____.
- America's future depends on the success of today's youth. Knowledge of the Constitution will help prepare them to meet the challenges of tomorrow's world.
- Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for your kind attention.

Chapter Three

Rules and regulations

Department contests

Arrangements for contests leading to the department finals shall be the responsibility of each department (state) organization of The American Legion. For levels of competition prior to the department finals, the rules and regulations set forth in this guide are not mandatory; they are offered as a guideline. However, all department finals contests shall conform with national contest procedures, rules and regulations if the department wishes its finalist to compete in the national finals.

A winner certified to The American Legion's National Americanism Division by a department that did not conduct its final competition in conformity with the rules and regulations may, in the judgment of the Americanism Division's director or the director's representative, be disqualified from the national contest.

Each department may certify one contestant for the national contest. If the department winner is unable to compete for any reason, the department's first runner-up may be substituted following approval by The American Legion's Americanism Commission. A department first runner-up accepted into the national contest is entitled to all national awards and compensation that the department winner would have received had he or she participated.

Department chairmen are required to review all scorecards from the department final within 48 hours to ensure that the appropriate winner was certified based on official rules, regulations, scoring and tiebreaking procedures. If a mistake is found within 48 hours, the chairman will contact National Headquarters at (317) 630-1204 for further instruction. Exactly 48 hours after department final results are announced, those results become official and cannot be changed.

Department winners must be certified to the Americanism Division by the certification date listed in the current year's Official Rules brochure, which is updated annually and online at **legion.org/oratorical/resources**. Department Oratorical chairmen and department adjutants will receive a link via email to certify their department winners.

Scholarships

Scholarship awards are presented to the three finalists in the national contest's final round as follows: first place \$25,000, second place \$22,500, third place \$20,000. Each department winner who is certified for and participates in the first round of the national contest will receive a \$2,000 scholarship. Each first-round winner who participates in the second round but does not advance to the final round will receive an additional \$2,000 scholarship to pursue education beyond high school.

Scholarships awarded by The American Legion to the three national finalists, department winners and first-round winners eliminated during the second round of competition may be used to attend any U.S. college or university.

Contestants must give both their prepared oration and assigned topic discourse to receive the scholarship.

In addition to scholarships awarded by the national organization, several hundred scholarships are awarded to Oratorical participants at post, district/county and department levels.

Eligibility

Eligible participants in The American Legion's High School Oratorical Scholarship Program shall be citizens of or lawful permanent residents of the United States.

Contestants must be bona fide students, described as any student younger than 20 on the date of the national contest who is presently enrolled in a high school or junior high school (public, parochial, military, private or homeschool), commencing with grade 9 and terminating with grade 12. Students must be enrolled in high school or junior high school when participating at any level of the program.

High school students who graduate early during the school year are eligible to compete if they are not enrolled in a college, university, trade school or other institution of higher learning at the time of the department finals contest.

Contestants must be legally domiciled within or attend an educational institution within the department (state) where they enter competition. Contestants can enter competition in only one department.

The three national finalists will be ineligible to participate again.

The prepared oration

The prepared oration must be on some aspect of the U.S. Constitution, with emphasis on citizens' duties and obligations to our government. The same subject and oration used in the department contest must be used in the national contest.

The prepared oration must be the original effort of each contestant and not take up less than eight minutes or more than 10 minutes for delivery. It must be delivered in English.

Contestants may have in their possession a copy of their prepared oration in the first holding room, electronic or hard copy. They may consult the copy until they exit the first holding room to begin the contest, at which time it will be surrendered to the contest official monitoring the first holding room.

Quotations must be indicated as such. Where quotations are more than 10 words in length, the author's name must be given in the manuscript and cited orally.

Assigned topic discourse

The assigned topic discourse must not be less than three minutes or more than five minutes for delivery. The purpose of the assigned topic discourse is to test the speaker's knowledge of the subject, the extent of his or her research, and the ability to discuss the topic as related to the basic principles of government under the U.S. Constitution.

The assigned topic shall be drawn by the contest official in full view of the audience immediately before delivery of the last speaker's prepared oration and will be made known to the audience and each contestant approximately five minutes prior to the time of delivery. Generally, the assigned topic is a constitutional amendment; it could be the entire amendment or specific articles. Each year, the list of assigned topics is made available prior to the contest and posted online at legion.org/oratorical/topics.

Contestants may have in their possession their assigned topic notes in the first holding room, electronic or hard copy. They may consult these notes until they exit the first holding room to begin the contest. At that time any notes will be surrendered to the official monitoring the first holding room.

Quotations must be indicated as such. Where quotations are more than 10 words in length, the author's name must be given in the manuscript and cited orally.

No foreign languages or songs

All contestants at each contest level are required to speak in the English language.

It is acceptable to utilize or incorporate short phrases of a foreign language into the prepared oration and/or assigned topic to develop the argument, establish a point, etc. However, the vast majority of the prepared oration and/or assigned topic must be delivered in English.

Singing a song in any language is not permitted and will result in immediate disqualification. The contestant may, however, quote a verse(s) of a song provided proper attribution is made.

Dress

Uniforms of any kind are not permitted. Appropriate business attire is required. Contestants are not permitted to wear awards and medals from previous competition.

Contest regulations

A drawing shall be held by the official in charge of the contest to determine the order in which the contestants will appear. The contest chairman shall announce the title of the contestant's

prepared oration immediately after introducing him or her as contestant No. 1, contestant No. 2, etc. The chairman will request the audience refrain from applause until the judges have made their decision.

A raised platform is not compulsory but strongly recommended. The use of notes, amplification, lectern or speaker's stand by contestants or prompting in any manner is not permitted. Props are not permitted.

The use of any type of electronic/digital data gathering, receiving and/or transmitting equipment in any form by contestants or members of the audience is prohibited.

The time allotted for contestants to deliver their prepared oration shall be between eight and 10 minutes, and between three and five minutes for the assigned topic.

The contest chairman will name an official timer who will keep an accurate time record of each contestant. The timekeeper will be on the main floor in full view of the contestants. The timekeeper shall begin timing each contestant at the start of the prepared oration. The timer should be equipped with a stopwatch and time cards for the prepared oration with the figures 8, 9 and 10. When eight minutes have been used, the time warning card with the figure 8 shall be placed in full view of the speaker, following with 9 and 10 as the speaker progresses. The same procedure shall be used with cards bearing 3, 4 and 5 during the assigned topic discourse. The contest chairman shall announce the time used by each contestant for the prepared oration and the assigned topic immediately after each contestant speaks.

Contestants will remain in a private room where the discourse of other speakers cannot be heard until it is their turn to speak; they will be under the supervision of a person appointed by the contest chairman. As the contestants conclude their prepared orations, they will return to a soundproof waiting room. As speakers conclude their assigned topic discourse, they shall not be allowed to associate with contestants who have not fulfilled the assigned topic requirement.

About five minutes prior to the time of the delivery of the assigned topic discourse, contestant No. 1 will be informed of the topic drawn for the assigned topic and shall retire to privacy under the direction of a person appointed by the contest chairman, whose duty it shall be to see that no contestant is permitted to consult any text or notes having any connection with the subject matter upon which he or she is to speak, other than the actual words of the topic on the card drawn.

Succeeding contestants will be called on in the order in which they previously appeared. They shall also, in turn, be informed of the topic of the assigned topic discourse and escorted to privacy in the manner provided for contestant No. 1.

The contest chairman will be expected to introduce each contestant by name immediately before announcing the judges' decision.

Judges

Judges are an integral part of an Oratorical contest. Their qualifications are considered carefully, as the decision of the judges is final and must be reached without bias. Impartial judging in all contests is the key to fairness and success of the program, which results in the selection of a national champion.

All department finals and the national contest must utilize five judges. No publicity shall be given to the names of judges in advance of the contest. During the contest, judges will be seated in different locations and render their final decision without consultation with other judges or any other person.

Judges will be advised that a lack of emphasis in the prepared oration and assigned topic discourse must result in their downgrading the contestant. Judges are permitted to downgrade a contestant up to a maximum of 10 points for failure to speak on the U.S. Constitution. The contest chairman will announce any violation of time for each contestant. A penalty of one point for each minute, or fraction thereof, shall be assessed against the contestant's total score.

Following the last assigned topic discourse, the judges, timekeepers, tabulators and contest chairman may proceed to a private room for final review and tabulation.

Tabulators

The contest chairman will appoint no less than three tabulators for the department finals. It is their responsibility to review the judges' scorecards to be certain they are fully tabulated and signed before they are submitted for final tabulation.

Tabulation procedures

Judges' scorecards will be numbered 1 through 5 in the upper right hand corner. Utilizing the tabulation card, the tabulators will enter the judges' position number for each contestant (by speaking order). When this is accomplished for all five judges' scorecards, the contestants' scores are totaled. When totaling the tabulation card, the contestant receiving the low score will be declared the winner. (**Example:** If one contestant receives two firsts, two seconds and a third on the judges' scorecards and tabulation card, his or her total position number points will be nine; if the second contestant receives two firsts, two seconds, and a fourth, his or her total position number points will be 10. Even though the second contestant receives two firsts, his or her total position number point score of 10 will place them second.

Tiebreaking procedures


If, after tabulation of the judges' position number, two or more contestants receive the same placement point score (not total points) total, the tie shall be broken by comparing the position number of scores of the five judges for the tied contestants. One of the contestants will be the

winner over the other by a majority of the judges' position number when only the placement of the tied contestants is considered.

In the examples on below and on the following page, the highest rank in record of choice (one being the highest) for each judge is circled. The contestant that receives the majority of the judges' record of choice will be declared the winner.

TWO-WAY TIEBREAKING EXAMPLE


Contestants - Record of Choice					
Judges	1	2	3	4	5
1	①	2	3	4	5
2	3	②	5	1	4
3	5	④	1	3	2
4	2	①	3	4	5
5	①	3	2	5	4
Totals	12	12	14	17	20


WINNER

In the two way example, Contestant No. 2 is the winner since that contestant received the highest ranking in the majority of the judges' record of choice.

THREE-WAY TIEBREAKING EXAMPLE

Contestants - Record of Choice					
Judges	1	2	3	4	5
1	3	2	①	5	4
2	①	3	4	2	5
3	4	3	②	1	5
4	2	3	①	4	5
5	2	①	4	3	5
Totals	12	12	12	15	24


WINNER

In the three way example, Contestant No. 3 is the winner since that contestant received the highest ranking in the majority of the judges' record of choice.

The decision of the judges shall be final.

Judges' scorecards for department finals and the national contest will not be divulged to anyone at the site of the contest. All national contest judges' scorecards become the property of The American Legion National Headquarters.

National finals contest

For information regarding the national finals, visit legion.org/oratorical/finals.

Travel expenses

The national organization of The American Legion will pay the travel and lodging expenses of department winners and one chaperone to the national contest. All contestants **younger than 18** must be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian. The preference for those **older than 18** is that they be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian as well.

The national organization of The American Legion will not assume liability for personal injury, property damage or loss sustained by any contestant or chaperone en route to or from the contest; however, The American Legion does carry a nominal group accident insurance policy on contestants certified into the national contest.

National finals contestants will travel by an air carrier selected by The American Legion or personal automobile if previously approved by the national organization of The American Legion.

TV and radio

Live television and radio broadcasts are permitted in all contests as well as recording or other types of media for later showing, provided: 1) the lighting and other site conditions are the same for all contestants; 2) the recording or broadcasts shall in no way distract the contestants or interfere with the pre-announced scheduled time of the contest; 3) the normal speaking voice of the contestant is not interfered with or amplified within the auditorium; and 4) The American Legion is in no way financially obligated without its prior approval.

Chapter Four

Suggested contest script

Opening remarks

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the (contest level) of The American Legion High School Oratorical Scholarship Program.

Before we begin the contest, I ask that Legionnaires uncover and everyone please rise for the invocation given by _____.

INVOCATION

Please join _____ in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

PLEDGE

You may re-cover.

Audience briefing

This is the _____ annual American Legion High School Oratorical Scholarship Program Contest, and this morning you will be hearing _____ speakers. I have several introductions, but I will save them until after the conclusion of the contest. You will notice that the contestants are not in the auditorium at this time. Throughout the competition portion, they will appear on stage only to deliver their respective orations.

In fairness to all contestants, I ask that you do not applaud until the contest is completed. I would also remind you that there will be no photos or video during these proceedings. It would be a good idea to put your cameras and phones away until the end of the contest. There will be an opportunity to take photos at the end of this round. In addition, if anyone in the audience is carrying a phone or any other electronic device, please make sure that it is turned off. I would also ask that anyone wearing an alarm type watch deactivate it.

Our speakers will be introduced by number only. Prompting in any manner is not permitted. Doing so may result in the disqualification of the speaker. Each speaker is about to deliver an eight -to 10-minute prepared oration on some phase of the Constitution of the United States. The contestants are not allowed to use notes, a podium or a sound system.

The contestants will be shown a time card at the _____th, _____th, and _____th minute mark of their oration. If there is a violation of the time requirement, a penalty of one point for each minute, or fraction thereof, shall be assessed against the contestant's total score.

Prepared oration

There will be a short pause between contestants to allow the judges time to mark their score cards. Before introducing the last speaker, I will ask a member of the audience to draw an assigned topic from the four provided. When the last contestant has spoken for seven minutes on the prepared oration, contestant No. 1 will be taken to a private room and given the topic card and allowed five minutes to prepare his or her assigned topic presentation. I will read the assigned topic to you before contestant No. 1 is introduced. All contestants then speak for three to five minutes on the same subject.

If everyone is ready, I will call for contestant No. 1. The title of his/her oration is _____.

(ORATION IS GIVEN)

The time for contestant No. 1 is ____ minutes and ____ seconds.

There is (no) time penalty.

(PAUSE)

(Follow the same procedure for the remaining contestants.)

Assigned topic discourse

For the past five minutes, contestant No. 1 has been in a private room preparing for the assigned topic presentation. The topic the contestants will address during this portion of the contest is (read the topic).

Now, if everyone is ready (pause and look around), I will call for contestant No. 1.

(ASSIGNED TOPIC IS GIVEN)

The time for contestant No. 1 is ____ minutes and ____ seconds. There is (no) time penalty.

(Follow the same procedure for the remaining contestants.)

Introductions and winner announcements

This concludes the contest. Will the judges and tabulators please go directly to the tabulation room for determination of the contest results?

After the contest is completed, introduce judges and contestants by name, city and state. Make any other introductions at this time.

Announce the winners and present awards.

The contest may be closed with a benediction prayer if desired.

Chapter Five

Contest briefings

Overview

To conduct a successful contest, everyone involved – contestants, judges, tabulators, timers, escorts, ushers, assigned topic preparation room monitors and audience members – must know what is expected of them. For many, it may be their first Oratorical contest.

The contest must be conducted by officials who thoroughly understand their jobs. We owe it to all to conduct the contest in as professional a manner as possible using well-informed, capable people. We do that by taking the time to thoroughly brief everyone associated with the contest.

Contestants

Contestants should have an opportunity to visit the contest site and familiarize themselves with the facility and contest procedures. Along with their coaches and/or parents, they should be given time alone to test the contest room's acoustics. This often-overlooked practice helps reduce a contestant's fear of speaking in an unfamiliar place.

Take every opportunity to put contestants at ease while still keeping the contest on schedule.

The chairman or their designated representative should meet contestants as they arrive and welcome them to the contest. At a designated time, the contestants, their parents and coaches should meet as a group for the briefing.

Explain the contest operation to them. Don't assume they know the basics. Advise them they will have from eight to 10 minutes to deliver their prepared oration, that the drawing for the assigned topic will be just prior to the last speaker, and that each contestant will have five minutes to prepare for their three-to-five minute assigned topic presentation. If contestants are competing in their first contest, spend more time to make sure they thoroughly understand how it operates.

At times, distractions arise that are beyond the control of the contest officials. For example, determine what to do if a fire alarm should sound and advise contestants what will happen. Point out other possible distractions, like uncontrollable noise that might come from an adjoining room or even from the auditorium.

Advise contestants where the timekeepers will be seated and at what point they will raise the numbered timecards. It is standard procedure for the timers to raise the cards on the minute, not 15 seconds before or after the minute.

Advise contestants that the judges will be scattered throughout the audience, but under no circumstances should they be told their exact locations.

The chairman should give a thorough briefing, providing adequate time to answer any questions contestants might have and to make them comfortable in what may be a stressful environment.

Just prior to the start of the contest, the chairman should have contestants draw for speaking order. The best method is to have numbers written on small pieces of paper and have each of the contestants come forward, one at a time, and draw a number.

Throughout the briefing and prior to the actual contest, there should be no contact between the judges and the contestants. Always keep the two groups separated, preferably in different rooms.

Briefing contestants and others involved is important. Take the time to do it right.

Judges

The general responsibilities of contest judges were covered earlier in Chapter Three. However, it is important they receive a thorough orientation prior to the contest.

Judges should be instructed to report to a private room away from the contestants and others attending the event at least 45 minutes prior to the contest so that adequate time is available for the briefing. The room in which the briefing is held should be off-limits to everyone except the judges and contest chairman (or the chairman's designated representative).

The chairman should welcome the judges, thank them for serving, and distribute the official scorecards, scratch tally sheets, pencils and clipboards. The chairman should cover all aspects of the contest, especially how it will be conducted and the procedures for arriving at a winner.

Scorecard and scoring system

Judges should carefully study and understand the scorecard and scoring system. As a guideline, judges are encouraged to award their top choice (speaker) approximately 90 points with others proportionally lower. (This is particularly important in the event of a tie.)

Lack of emphasis in the prepared oration and the assigned topic on the duties and obligations of a citizen to our government must result in the judges downgrading the contestant involved. Judges may downgrade a contestant up to a total of 10 points for failure to speak on the Constitution.

Each judge shall insert the total number of points credited to the contestant and also insert in the placement column the placement for each contestant in accordance with the highest total point scores. If a tie exists in the total point scores on a judge's scorecard, the judge must adjust the scoring of the tied contestants so that no two contestants have the same total point score. This will enable the judge to rank one contestant above the other in the placement column.

Judges shall refrain from discussing any phase of the contest or their judging methods with anyone but the contest chairman following the contest.

Note: Judges should be provided study materials prior to the contest including the national rules brochure and a copy of the U.S. Constitution. But before that, the chairman should have given much thought to the selection of judges. Appointments should be based on ability and not on political or personal favor. Select them with care, then make sure they know their responsibilities.

Timekeepers

There must be two timekeepers for the contest seated on the main floor and in full view of the contestants as they deliver their orations.

A chairman often takes for granted that a timer knows how to operate a stopwatch. There are several types of stopwatches, so the chairman should meet with the timekeepers to discuss their responsibilities and practice using the stopwatches.

The chairman also should ensure timers have the materials needed to fulfill their responsibilities, including two stopwatches, a timekeeper record card, time cards numbered 8, 9, and 10 for the prepared oration, and time cards numbered 3, 4, and 5 for the assigned topic discourse.

Timers must understand they are to begin timing when a contestant begins to speak and stop when the contestant ceases to speak. The timers will enter the exact time consumed on the timekeeper record card.

Tabulators

The tabulation of judges' scorecards is crucial to avoid a scoring problem. The tabulators should have a thorough knowledge of the scoring process, be adept with a calculator (to check judges' addition totals), and be familiar with the tie-breaking procedures (discussed in Chapter Three). The tabulation process should be thorough and not expedited or abbreviated by time restraints. Before the results are announced, all tabulators and the contest chairman should be certain that the proper procedures were followed and the correct winner identified.

Ushers

The number of ushers required for a contest must be determined by the contest chairman based on the number of doors affording entrance to the contest room or auditorium. The contest chairman should meet with ushers prior to the contest and advise them of their responsibilities, which are to assist in seating the audience and to distribute programs. They will control the entrance to the auditorium while a contestant is speaking and ensure there is no interruption.

Escorts

Contest chairmen must determine the number of escorts needed for the contest. Some appoint one escort for each contestant; escorts remain with their designated contestants throughout the contest, except when they are giving their prepared oration or assigned topic presentation.

Other chairmen appoint one or two escorts to assist in moving contestants from the holding room to the auditorium stage. Either method is permitted and the layout of the contest facility or the availability of help will dictate which method will work best.

Ushers and escorts are often overlooked by chairmen when they give instructions. This should not happen, as every official's role is critical to the contest's overall operation.

Assigned topic preparation room monitor

The assigned preparation room monitor's responsibility is to make sure that the contestant understands the five-minute preparation time and that no outside notes have been brought into the room. The contestant can use a blank sheet of paper to assemble thoughts, if desired. The contestant must return the scratch paper to the monitor following the preparation time. The door to the room should remain open, and the monitor will ensure that any noise in the area is kept to a minimum.

Chapter Six

Key points to remember

1. Make certain all contest officials understand their duties and responsibilities. Provide thorough instructions to the judges, making certain each understands the scoring system and timing/penalty requirement.
2. Instruct contestants regarding contest rules. Allow them time to inspect the contest site prior to the contest, including holding and assigned topic preparation rooms.
3. Announce that there will be no applause or photography during the contest, and that the audience must remain seated and quiet during a contestant's presentation.
4. Have contestants draw for speaking order and remain in a soundproof room until called on to speak. Contestants will be introduced by number and must return to the waiting room after their presentation.
5. Introduce contestants by name, city and state only after final tabulation, but prior to announcing the results. Judges and contest officials may also be introduced at this time.
6. Select an American Legion official to award prizes to the winners.
7. Provide instructions to the contest winner regarding their next level of competition.

Contest floorplan



Chapter Eight

Chairman's checklist

Facilities required

- ☐ Name of school or other facility
- ☐ Name of auditorium
- ☐ Seating capacity
- ☐ Stage or raised platform
- ☐ U.S. flag
- ☐ Acoustics (quality)
- ☐ Waiting room(s) with at least 10 chairs
- ☐ Soundproof, close to auditorium
- ☐ Waiting room(s) for assigned topic preparation
- ☐ Class bells disconnected
- ☐ Parking facilities available

Materials required

- ☐ Clipboards for judges
- ☐ Stopwatches (2)
- ☐ Pencils
- ☐ Calculator or adding machine
- ☐ Judges' instructions/scorecards
- ☐ Judges' scratch tally sheets
- ☐ Tabulator instructions/tabulation card
- ☐ Timekeeper instructions/timekeeper record card
- ☐ Numbered time cards
- ☐ Assigned topic cards
- ☐ Printed programs
- ☐ National rules brochures
- ☐ Certificates of appreciation for contest workers

Appointments

- ☐ Judges (5)
- ☐ Tabulators (3)
- ☐ Timekeepers (2)
- ☐ Escorts
- ☐ Ushers
- ☐ Assigned topic preparation room monitors
- ☐ Publicity chairman
- ☐ Transportation chairman

Audience

- ☐ Local high schools
- ☐ Speech teachers
- ☐ Civic leaders
- ☐ American Legion, Auxiliary and SAL officials

Publicity arrangements

- ☐ Invite local news media
- ☐ Photographer

Entertainment (contingent on contest arrangements)

- ☐ Banquet/luncheon

Acknowledgments

- ☐ Thank-you notes, certificates of appreciation, etc., for all contest personnel

Chapter Nine

Contest follow-up

1. Notify the contest chairman at the next level of competition who won your contest. If the name of the contact at the next level is not known, notify your department adjutant.
2. Show your appreciation to judges by presenting them with certificates of appreciation or plaques. It may also be proper to honor contestant coaches with some form of recognition.
3. Provide a post-contest press release to the media. Go to **legion.org/oratorical/resources** to download an example.
4. Write thank-you notes or letters to all contest personnel.
5. Schedule contest winners to present their oration before other school and/or civic groups.
6. Follow your contest winner through future levels of competition.

Chapter Ten

Contest forms and materials

The following contest forms are examples. They may be reproduced locally for your use, or you may contact your department headquarters for additional copies.

- Judge's scorecard
- Tabulation card
- Timekeeper record card
- Judge scratch tally sheet (prepared oration)
- Judge scratch tally sheet (assigned topic)

Additional materials for use in preparation for an Oratorical contest include the following items:

- Contest promotional brochure
- Contest files are available for download at **legion.org/oratorical/resources**, including:
 - » National rules brochure. Current year's rules.
 - » *How to Conduct the National High School Oratorical Contest* video series
 - » National finals video. Video of the most recent National Oratorical Contest.
 - » Sample news releases to send to local media to promote the contest. One promotes the upcoming event and the other names the winner.
 - » Sample PSAs to send to local broadcast media to promote the contest
 - » Contest PSA video
 - » Excel judge's scorecard and tabulation card spreadsheet
 - » Judge scratch tally sheet (prepared oration)
 - » Judge scratch tally sheet (assigned topic)
- Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution. The text of both documents. Stock No. 755.206. Consult Emblem Sales catalog for pricing. Available at **emblem.legion.org**.

For current contest information on The American Legion's High School Oratorical Scholarship Program, go to **legion.org/oratorical**.



THE AMERICAN LEGION

HIGH SCHOOL ORATORICAL SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM - "A CONSTITUTIONAL SPEECH CONTEST"



JUDGE'S SCORECARD

NAME OF JUDGE: _____

A. CONTENT		Contestants					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Was the speech original, fresh, and direct, applying the contestant's knowledge?	Prepared Oration						
	Assigned Topic						
2. Did the contestant skillfully select examples, descriptions, analogies, and specific data?	Prepared Oration						
	Assigned Topic						
3. Was the speech logical, well organized, and developed?	Prepared Oration						
	Assigned Topic						
4. Did the contestant show a comprehensiveness of knowledge of the subject matter?	Prepared Oration						
	Assigned Topic						
B. SPEAKING SKILLS		1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Did the contestant use volume, rate, pitch, and diction effectively?	Prepared Oration						
	Assigned Topic						
2. Rate the contestant's style: language use, word arrangement and selection, and transitions.	Prepared Oration						
	Assigned Topic						
3. Were body actions -- poise, eye contact, posture, gestures, facial expressions -- appropriate?	Prepared Oration						
	Assigned Topic						
SUB-TOTAL							
PENALTIES: 1 point for each minute or fraction thereof over or under allotted time	Prepared Oration						
	Assigned Topic						
1-10 points for failure to speak on the Constitution							
Final Total Points							
Position Number - 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 (Highest Points = 1st place, second highest points = 2nd place, etc.)							

Score all contestants - NO TIES PERMITTED

Judge's Signature: _____



THE AMERICAN LEGION

High School Oratorical Scholarship Program



TABULATION CARD

JUDGES	CONTESTANTS RECORD OF CHOICE						CONTESTANTS – FINAL TOTAL POINTS *(for 3-way tiebreaker only!)*					
	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
1												
2												
3												
4												
5												
TOTALS												

NOTE: all TABULATOR'S signatures are required below.



THE AMERICAN LEGION

High School Oratorical Scholarship Program

TIMEKEEPER RECORD CARD



CONTESTANT	Time Consumed PREPARED ORATION		Time Consumed ASSIGNED TOPIC	
	Minutes	Seconds	Minutes	Seconds
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				

NOTE: both TIMEKEEPER'S signatures are required below.

SCRATCH TALLY SHEET FOR JUDGES

PREPARED ORATION

QUARTER FINAL / SEMI FINAL / FINALS (CIRCLE ONE)

NO. _____

CONTESTANT

NO. _____

DOES THE CONTESTANT'S ORATION RELATE TO SOME ASPECT OF THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES WITH EMPHASIS ON THE DUTIES AND OBLIGATIONS OF A CITIZEN TO OUR GOVERNMENT?

_____ Yes _____ No

SCORE	A. CONTENT	REMARKS OR NOTES
(12)	1. Was the speech original, fresh and direct, applying the contestant's knowledge?	
(12)	2. Did the contestant skillfully select examples, descriptions, analogies and specific data?	
(12)	3. Was the speech logical, well organized and developed?	
(16)	4. Did the contestant show a comprehensiveness of knowledge of the subject matter?	
SUBTOTAL		

	B. SPEAKING SKILLS	REMARKS OR NOTES
(6)	1. Did the contestant use volume, rate, pitch and diction effectively?	
(6)	2. Rate the contestant’s style: language use, word arrangement and selection; transitions	
(6)	3. Were body actions — poise, eye contact, posture, gestures, facial expressions— appropriate?	
SUBTOTAL	ADDITIONAL NOTES OR COMMENTS	
PENTALTY PTS		
TOTAL	FOR JUDGES USE ONLY FOR ADDITIONAL SCORING	

SCRATCH TALLY SHEET FOR JUDGES

ASSIGNED TOPIC

QUARTER FINAL / SEMI FINAL / FINALS (CIRCLE ONE)

NO. _____

CONTESTANT

NO. _____

DID THE CONTESTANT SPEAK ON THE SUBJECT OF THE ASSIGNED TOPIC?

_____ Yes _____ No

SCORE	A. CONTENT	REMARKS OR NOTES
(4)	1. Was the speech original, fresh and direct, applying the contestant's knowledge?	
(4)	2. Did the contestant skillfully select examples, descriptions, analogies and specific data?	
(4)	3. Was the speech logical, well organized and developed?	
(6)	4. Did the contestant show a comprehensiveness of knowledge of the subject matter?	
SUBTOTAL		

	B. SPEAKING SKILLS	REMARKS OR NOTES
(4)	1. Did the contestant use volume, rate, pitch and diction effectively?	
(4)	2. Rate the contestant's style: language use, word arrangement and selection; transitions	
(4)	3. Were body actions — poise, eye contact, posture, gestures, facial expressions— appropriate?	
SUBTOTAL	ADDITIONAL NOTES OR COMMENTS	
PENALTY PTS		
TOTAL	FOR JUDGES USE ONLY FOR ADDITIONAL SCORING	




THE AMERICAN LEGION

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THE AMERICAN LEGION

Judges Briefing

***The American Legion
High School Oratorical
Scholarship Program***



Contest Purpose

- The contest was developed primarily to instill a better knowledge and appreciation of the Constitution of the United States among high school students
- Other objectives include the development of:
 - Leadership qualities
 - The ability to think and speak clearly
 - The preparation for acceptance of the duties, responsibilities and privileges of American citizenship



Contestants

Each contestant will appear two times and will be introduced by number only.

- **Prepared Oration**
- **Assigned Topic**
 - Each speaker will speak on the same assigned topic, which will be drawn just before the last contestant delivers the prepared oration.



Contestants

- The two appearances permit an opportunity to re-evaluate and reconsider first impressions and compare the contestants.
- Pencils with erasers are provided so adjustments can be made as speeches unfold and for proper scoring.
- This allows judges to evaluate their impressions of each speaker and to compare speakers.



Timing

- Each contestant will speak 8 - 10 minutes on their prepared oration.
- Each contestant will speak 3 - 5 minutes on the assigned topic selected randomly for their contest.



Timing

- A **penalty** of **ONE POINT** is given to any contestant who speaks over or under the prescribed time for each minute or fraction thereof.
- This penalty is determined by timers with stop watches.
- Judges will be told if there is any penalty and the number of points.



Prepared Oration

- The Prepared Oration must be on some aspect of the Constitution of the United States with emphasis on the duties and obligations of a citizen to our government.
- Lack of emphasis in the prepared oration and the assigned topic on the duties and obligations of a citizen to our government **must result in the judges downgrading the contestant involved.**
- A **penalty** of **1 to 10 points** for failure to speak on the Constitution may be given by a judge if the judge feels the contestant did not speak on the Constitution.



Props

- Props are not permitted
- **Discussion:** Is saluting the flag a prop?



Scratch Tally Sheets

There are two scratch tally sheets for each contestant.

Prepared Oration contains two parts:

- A - Content - four items
- B - Speaking skills - three items
- **Total 70 points**

Scratch Tally Sheet for Judges		
No.1	Prepared Oration	
A. Content	SCORE	
1. Originality	(12)	
2. Skill in data, examples	(12)	
3. Logic	(12)	
4. Knowledge	(16)	
	TOTAL 52	
A. Speaking Skills	SCORE	
1. Voice	(6)	
2. Style, language	(6)	
3. Body action	(6)	
	TOTAL 18	



Scratch Tally Sheets

There are two scratch tally sheets for each contestant.

Assigned Topic contains two parts:

- A - Content - four items
- B - Speaking skills - three items
- **Total 30 points**

Scratch Tally Sheet for Judges		
No.1	Assigned Topic	
A. Content	SCORE	
1. Originality	(4)	
2. Skill in data, examples	(4)	
3. Logic	(4)	
4. Knowledge	(6)	
	TOTAL 18	
B. Speaking Skills	SCORE	
1. Voice	(4)	
2. Style, language	(4)	
3. Body action	(4)	
	TOTAL 12	



Scoring System

Prepared Oration

PART A – CONTENT

- Four items
- **Highest possible score: 52 points**

Scratch Tally Sheet for Judges	
No.1	Prepared Oration
A. Content	SCORE
1. Was the speech original, fresh and direct, applying the contestant's knowledge?	(12)
2. Did the contestant skillfully select examples, descriptions, analogies and specific data?	(12)
3. Was the speech logical, well organized and developed?	(12)
4. Did the contestant show a comprehensiveness of knowledge of the subject matter?	(16)



Scoring System

Assigned Topic

PART A – CONTENT

- Four items
- **Highest possible score:
18 points**

Scratch Tally Sheet for Judges	
No.1	Assigned Topic
A. Content	SCORE
1. Was the speech original, fresh and direct, applying the contestant's knowledge?	(4)
2. Did the contestant skillfully select examples, descriptions, analogies and specific data?	(4)
3. Was the speech logical, well organized and developed?	(4)
4. Did the contestant show a comprehensiveness of knowledge of the subject matter?	(6)



Content Item 1

- 12 points Prepared Oration
- 4 points Assigned Topic
 - Originality
 - Freshness
 - Directness
 - Application of knowledge on topic



Content Item 2

- 12 points Prepared Oration
- 4 points Assigned Topic
 - Skill in Selecting
 - Examples
 - Description
 - Analogies
 - Specific data



Content Item 3

- 12 points Prepared Oration
- 4 points Assigned Topic
 - Logic – correctness of inference



Content Item 4

- 16 points Prepared Oration
- 6 points Assigned Topic
 - Comprehensiveness of knowledge
 - The contestant knows the subject matter



Scoring System

- Judge should rate first speaker at 9 or 10 points max.
- Other speakers will be better or worse - the first speaker sets a standard for the rest.

EXAMPLE		
A. Content	SCORE	
1. Originality, knowledge of topic	(12)	
	9	Quotation - no author given



Scoring System

- All quotations are to be indicated as such and if the quotation is more than 10 words, the author's name must be given.
- It is acceptable to utilize or incorporate short phrases of a foreign language into the Prepared Oration and/or Assigned Topic in order to develop the argument, establish a point, etc.

EXAMPLE OF A SCORE ON A SCRATCH TALLY SHEET		
A. Content	SCORE	
1. Originality, knowledge of topic	(12)	
	8	Quotation - no author given



Scoring System

Prepared Oration

PART B – SPEAKING SKILLS

- Three items
- **Highest possible score:
18 points**

Scratch Tally Sheet for Judges	
No.1	Prepared Oration
B. Speaking Skills	SCORE
1. Did the contestant use volume, rate, pitch and diction effectively?	(6)
2. Rate the contestant's style: language use, word arrangement and selection, transitions	(6)
3. Were body actions — poise, eye contact, posture, gestures, facial expressions — appropriate?	(6)



Scoring System

Assigned Topic

PART B: SPEAKING SKILLS

- Three items
- **Highest possible score:
12 points**

Scratch Tally Sheet for Judges	
No.1	Assigned Topic
B. Speaking Skills	SCORE
1. Did the contestant use volume, rate, pitch and diction effectively?	(4)
2. Rate the contestant's style: language use, word arrangement and selection, transitions	(4)
3. Were body actions — poise, eye contact, posture, gestures, facial expressions — appropriate?	(4)



Speaking Skills Item 1

- 6 points Prepared Oration
- 4 points Assigned Topic
 - Voice and diction – pronunciation, enunciation, articulation, delivery, projection



Speaking Skills Item 2

- 6 points Prepared Oration
- 4 points Assigned Topic

Style – language use, word arrangement, transition, word selection



Speaking Skills Item 3

- 6 points Prepared Oration
- 4 points Assigned Topic
 - Body actions – poise, eye contact, posture, gestures



Assigned Topic

The purpose of the Assigned Topic discourse is to test

- The contestant's knowledge of the subject
- The extent of the contestant's research
- The ability to discuss the topic as related to the basic principles of government under the Constitution



Scratch Tally Sheets

Prepared Oration Scratch Tally Sheet:

- A - Content - four items
- B - Speaking skills - three items
- **Total 70 points**

Scratch Tally Sheet for Judges		
No.1	Prepared Oration	
A. Content	SCORE	
1. Originality	(12)	
2. Skill in data, examples	(12)	
3. Logic	(12)	
4. Knowledge	(16)	
	TOTAL 52	
A. Speaking Skills	SCORE	
1. Voice	(6)	
2. Style, language	(6)	
3. Body action	(6)	
	TOTAL 18	



Scratch Tally Sheets

Assigned Topic Scratch Tally Sheet

- A - Content - four items
- B - Speaking skills - three items
- **Total 30 points**

Scratch Tally Sheet for Judges		
No.1	Assigned Topic	
A. Content	SCORE	
1. Originality	(4)	
2. Skill in data, examples	(4)	
3. Logic	(4)	
4. Knowledge	(6)	
	TOTAL 18	
B. Speaking Skills	SCORE	
1. Voice	(4)	
2. Style, language	(4)	
3. Body action	(4)	
	TOTAL 12	



THE AMERICAN LEGION

Scratch Tally Sheets

SCRATCH TALLY SHEET FOR JUDGES

PREPARED ORATION

QUARTER FINAL / SEMI FINAL / FINALS (CIRCLE ONE)
NO. _____
CONTESTANT
NO. _____

DOES THE CONTESTANT'S ORATION RELATE TO SOME ASPECT OF THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES WITH EMPHASIS ON THE DUTIES AND OBLIGATIONS OF A CITIZEN TO OUR GOVERNMENT?
_____ Yes _____ No

SCORE	A. CONTENT	REMARKS OR NOTES
(12)	1. Was the speech original, fresh and direct, applying the contestant's knowledge?	
(12)	2. Did the contestant skillfully select examples, descriptions, analogies and specific data?	
(12)	3. Was the speech logical, well organized and developed?	
(16)	4. Did the contestant show a comprehensiveness of knowledge of the subject matter?	
SUBTOTAL		
	B. SPEAKING SKILLS	REMARKS OR NOTES
(6)	1. Did the contestant use volume, rate, pitch and diction effectively?	
(6)	2. Rate the contestant's style: language use, word arrangement and selection; transitions	
(6)	3. Were body actions — poise, eye contact, posture, gestures, facial expressions— appropriate?	
SUBTOTAL	ADDITIONAL NOTES OR COMMENTS	
PENALTY PTS		
TOTAL	FOR JUDGES USE ONLY FOR ADDITIONAL SCORING	

SCRATCH TALLY SHEET FOR JUDGES

ASSIGNED TOPIC

QUARTER FINAL / SEMI FINAL / FINALS (CIRCLE ONE)
NO. _____
CONTESTANT
NO. _____

DID THE CONTESTANT SPEAK ON THE SUBJECT OF THE ASSIGNED TOPIC?
_____ Yes _____ No

SCORE	A. CONTENT	REMARKS OR NOTES
(4)	1. Was the speech original, fresh and direct, applying the contestant's knowledge?	
(4)	2. Did the contestant skillfully select examples, descriptions, analogies and specific data?	
(4)	3. Was the speech logical, well organized and developed?	
(6)	4. Did the contestant show a comprehensiveness of knowledge of the subject matter?	
SUBTOTAL		
	B. SPEAKING SKILLS	REMARKS OR NOTES
(4)	1. Did the contestant use volume, rate, pitch and diction effectively?	
(4)	2. Rate the contestant's style: language use, word arrangement and selection; transitions	
(4)	3. Were body actions — poise, eye contact, posture, gestures, facial expressions— appropriate?	
SUBTOTAL	ADDITIONAL NOTES OR COMMENTS	
PENALTY PTS		
TOTAL	FOR JUDGES USE ONLY FOR ADDITIONAL SCORING	



Judging

- It is suggested a judge use the first two or three minutes of the contestant's speech to rate speaking skills.
- This allows the remainder of the time to listen for content.



Scoring Method

- Second Column
 - Shows the maximum points for each category
- Empty box
 - For the judge's handwritten score

Scratch Tally Sheet for Judges	
No.1	Assigned Topic
B. Speaking Skills	SCORE
1. Did the contestant use volume, rate, pitch and diction effectively?	(4)
	2
2. Rate the contestant's style: language use, word arrangement and selection, transitions	(4)
	3
3. Were body actions — poise, eye contact, posture, gestures, facial expressions — appropriate?	(4)
	5



Judging

- To remember the individual speakers, judges should note for each contestant a color of clothing and/or gender of the contestant in order to recall the individual speaker when tallying the scores.



Scoring System Review

- How many scratch tally sheets are there for each contestant?
- Two scratch tally sheets per contestant
 - One for Prepared Oration
 - One for Assigned Topic

Scratch Tally Sheet for Judges		
No.1	Prepared Oration	
A. Content	SCORE	
1. Originality	(12)	
2. Skill in data, examples	(12)	
3. Logic	(12)	
4. Knowledge	(16)	
	TOTAL 52	
A. Speaking Skills	SCORE	
1. Voice	(6)	
2. Style, language	(6)	
3. Body action	(6)	
	TOTAL 18	



Scoring System Review

- How many points can be given for the **Prepared Oration?**
- Content
 - Four items
 - Possible 52 Points
- Speaking Skills
 - Three items
 - Possible 18 Points
- **Total 70 Points**

Scratch Tally Sheet for Judges		
No.1	Prepared Oration	
A. Content	SCORE	
1. Originality	(12)	
2. Skill in data, examples	(12)	
3. Logic	(12)	
4. Knowledge	(16)	
	TOTAL 52	
A. Speaking Skills	SCORE	
1. Voice	(6)	
2. Style, language	(6)	
3. Body action	(6)	
	TOTAL 18	



Scoring System Review

- How many points can be given for the **Assigned Topic?**
- Content
 - Four items
 - Possible 18 Points
- Speaking Skills
 - Three items
 - Possible 12 Points
- **Total 30 Points**

Scratch Tally Sheet for Judges		
No.1	Assigned Topic	
A. Content	SCORE	
1. Originality	(4)	
2. Skill in data, examples	(4)	
3. Logic	(4)	
4. Knowledge	(6)	
	TOTAL 18	
A. Speaking Skills	SCORE	
1. Voice	(4)	
2. Style, language	(4)	
3. Body action	(4)	
	TOTAL 12	



Judging

What happens if a contestant fails to directly address the assigned topic?

- Penalty of 1 – 10 points for failure to speak on the Constitution
- Downgrade the content in all four areas:
 - Originality
 - Skill
 - Logic
 - Knowledge



Scoring Tabulation

- After the last speaker, judges will return here and transfer the data from the scratch tally sheets to their Tabroom account.
- Then tabulate the data for each contestant.
- The scratch tally sheets should be used for tabulation; however, they are not mandatory.
- If you are comfortable entering the raw scores directly into the Tabroom, this is permissible.



Scoring System Example

Scratch Tally Sheet for Judges		
No.1 Prepared Oration		
A. Content	SCORE	REMARKS
1. Originality	(12)	
	10	
2. Skill in data, examples	(12)	
	8	
3. Logic	(12)	
	9	
4. Knowledge	(16)	
	14	
TOTAL 41		

B. Speaking Skills	SCORE	REMARKS
1. Voice	(6)	
	5	
2. Style, language	(6)	
	4	
3. Body action	(6)	
	5	
TOTAL 14		

Prepared Oration Score 55



Scoring Tabulation

- Transfer any penalty points announced by the moderator to appropriate line.
- **There can be no ties!**
Judges are encouraged to review the overall scoring and adjust accordingly to break the tie.

Contestant			
	1	2	3
A. Content	41	40	45
B. Speaking Skills	14	16	18
Penalty Point Time		-1	
1-10 pts. Failure to speak on the Constitution	5	0	0



Scoring Tabulation

- Make sure the tallied points are what you think they should be!
- The highest score will determine the record of choice – 1st place and so on.
- Be sure to sign your name and date it.
- A tabulator will check your figures. Initial any errors and correct the figure.

Contestant			
	1	2	3
Final Points	88	81	83
Record of choice	1	3	2



Scoring Tabulation

- Do not leave the room until the moderator or chief tabulator dismisses you.
- The decision of the judge will be their own without consultation of others.
- Judges shall refrain from discussing any phase of the contest or their judging methods with other judges, contestants, coaches, chaperones or parents.



Contestant Feedback

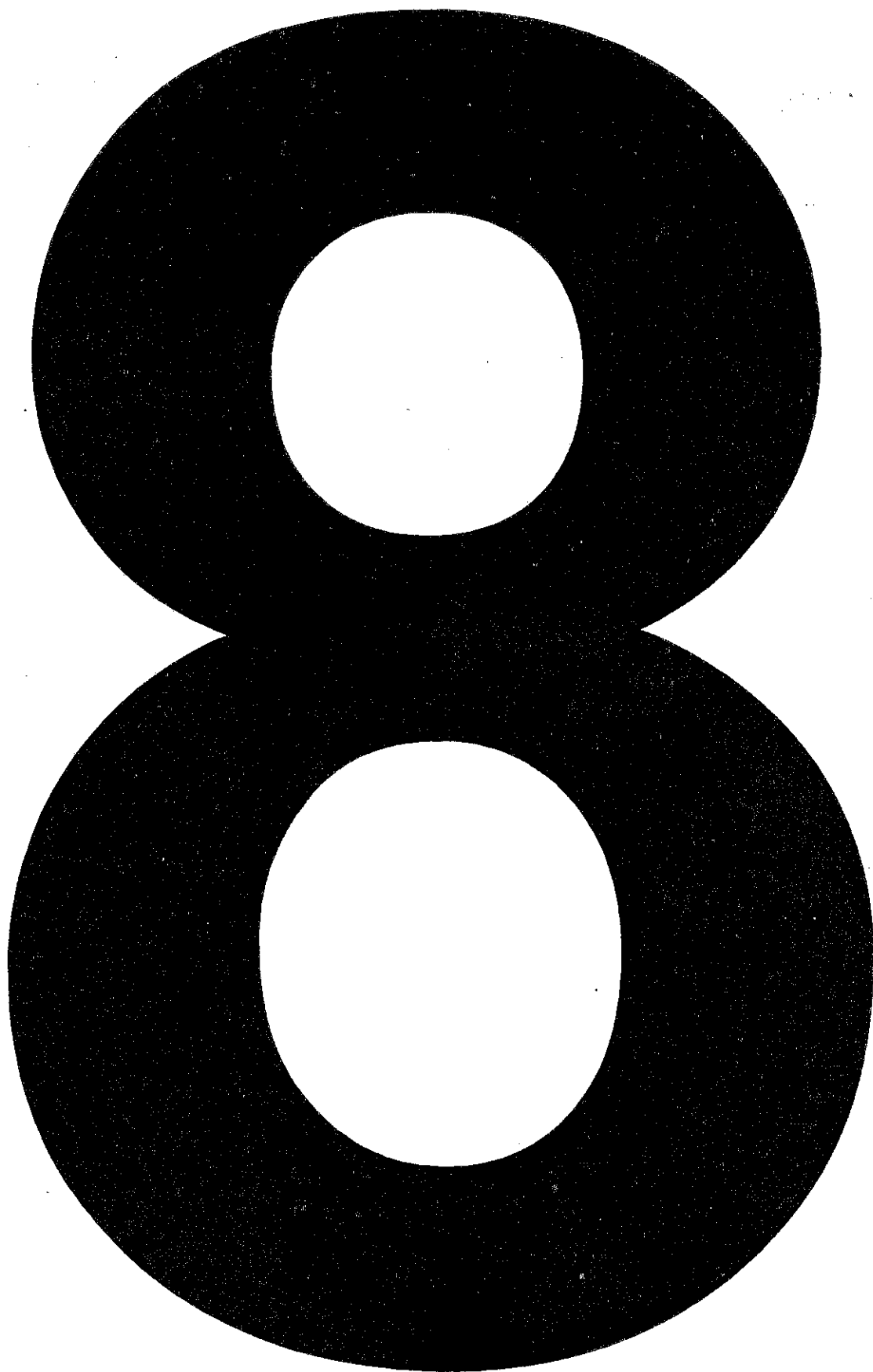
- The contestants have been briefed that if they desire any feedback about their speech, that information will be provided to them after the weekend is over upon request.
- The names of the contest judges will not be released with the feedback.



THE AMERICAN LEGION

***The American Legion
High School Oratorical
Scholarship Program***

Questions?





10



4

5

SCRATCH TALLY SHEET FOR JUDGES

ASSIGNED TOPIC

QUARTER FINAL / SEMI FINAL / FINALS (CIRCLE ONE)

NO. _____

CONTESTANT

NO. _____

DID THE CONTESTANT SPEAK ON THE SUBJECT OF THE ASSIGNED TOPIC?

_____ Yes _____ No

SCORE	A. CONTENT	REMARKS OR NOTES
(4)	1. Was the speech original, fresh and direct, applying the contestant's knowledge?	
(4)	2. Did the contestant skillfully select examples, descriptions, analogies and specific data?	
(4)	3. Was the speech logical, well organized and developed?	
(6)	4. Did the contestant show a comprehensiveness of knowledge of the subject matter?	
SUBTOTAL		

	B. SPEAKING SKILLS	REMARKS OR NOTES
(4)	1. Did the contestant use volume, rate, pitch and diction effectively?	
(4)	2. Rate the contestant's style: language use, word arrangement and selection; transitions	
(4)	3. Were body actions — poise, eye contact, posture, gestures, facial expressions— appropriate?	
SUBTOTAL	ADDITIONAL NOTES OR COMMENTS	
PENALTY PTS		
TOTAL	FOR JUDGES USE ONLY FOR ADDITIONAL SCORING	



THE AMERICAN LEGION

HIGH SCHOOL ORATORICAL SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM - "A CONSTITUTIONAL SPEECH CONTEST"

JUDGE'S SCORECARD



NAME OF JUDGE: _____

A. CONTENT		Contestants					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Was the speech original, fresh, and direct, applying the contestant's knowledge?	Prepared Oration 12 points						
	Assigned Topic 4 points						
2. Did the contestant skillfully select examples, descriptions, analogies, and specific data?	Prepared Oration 12 points						
	Assigned Topic 4 points						
3. Was the speech logical, well organized, and developed?	Prepared Oration 12 points						
	Assigned Topic 4 points						
4. Did the contestant show a comprehensiveness of knowledge of the subject matter?	Prepared Oration 16 points						
	Assigned Topic 6 points						
B. SPEAKING SKILLS		1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Did the contestant use volume, rate, pitch, and diction effectively?	Prepared Oration 6 points						
	Assigned Topic 4 points						
2. Rate the contestant's style: language use, word arrangement and selection, and transitions.	Prepared Oration 6 points						
	Assigned Topic 4 points						
3. Were body actions -- poise, eye contact, posture, gestures, facial expressions -- appropriate?	Prepared Oration 6 points						
	Assigned Topic 4 points						
SUB-TOTAL							
PENALTIES: 1 point for each minute or fraction thereof over or under allotted time	Prepared Oration						
	Assigned Topic						
1-10 points for failure to speak on the Constitution							
Final Total Points							
Position Number - 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 (Highest Points = 1st place, second highest points = 2nd place, etc.)							

Score all contestants - NO TIES PERMITTED

Judge's Signature: _____

SCRATCH TALLY SHEET FOR JUDGES

PREPARED ORATION

QUARTER FINAL / SEMI FINAL / FINALS (CIRCLE ONE)

NO. _____

CONTESTANT

NO. _____

DOES THE CONTESTANT'S ORATION RELATE TO SOME ASPECT OF THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES WITH EMPHASIS ON THE DUTIES AND OBLIGATIONS OF A CITIZEN TO OUR GOVERNMENT?

_____ Yes _____ No

SCORE	A. CONTENT	REMARKS OR NOTES
(12)	1. Was the speech original, fresh and direct, applying the contestant's knowledge?	
(12)	2. Did the contestant skillfully select examples, descriptions, analogies and specific data?	
(12)	3. Was the speech logical, well organized and developed?	
(16)	4. Did the contestant show a comprehensiveness of knowledge of the subject matter?	
SUBTOTAL		

	B. SPEAKING SKILLS	REMARKS OR NOTES
(6)	1. Did the contestant use volume, rate, pitch and diction effectively?	
(6)	2. Rate the contestant’s style: language use, word arrangement and selection; transitions	
(6)	3. Were body actions — poise, eye contact, posture, gestures, facial expressions— appropriate?	
SUBTOTAL	ADDITIONAL NOTES OR COMMENTS	
PENTALTY PTS		
TOTAL	FOR JUDGES USE ONLY FOR ADDITIONAL SCORING	

ASSIGNED TOPIC PREPARATION ROOM MONITOR

(All Contests)

Assigned Topic Preparation Room Monitors will be seated at the beginning of the Quarter Finals in their respective contest room. Monitors will be issued a stop watch from the Contest Moderator prior to the contest starting.

At the designated time during the prepared oration phase of the contest, the Contest Moderator will call upon the Assigned Topic Preparation Room Monitor to assist in the random drawing of the assigned topic.

The Contest Moderator will have four envelopes, each envelope will have three copies of an assigned copy in it, of which one of the four envelopes will be selected. The Contest Moderator will take one copy from the envelope selected and the Assigned Topic Preparation Room Monitor will then take the envelope with the remaining copies and leave the contest room.

Approximately three minutes later proceed to Holding Room Two (**Room TBD**) to get the contestant number one for their respective contest and their escort; then proceed to their respective contest Assigned Topic Preparation Room.

The contestant escort is to accompany the contestant and the Prep Room Monitor into the Assigned Topic Preparation Room during the instruction process. Door to Assigned Topic Prep Room will remain open.

Place the copy of the assigned topic face down on the table and instruct the contestant that once they have picked up the copy of the assigned topic their time will begin. (remember to start the stopwatch) The contestant will have five minutes preparation time. Unless asked by the contestant, do not give any indication of time remaining, simply notify them that their five minutes has expired. The contestant will be given one piece of blank paper in which to use in order to construct their thoughts, notes, etc. if so desired. Do not allow them to write on the copy of the assigned topic. The contestant must return the scratch paper to the Assigned Topic Preparation Room Monitor upon completion of the preparation time.

Once the contestant has been given these instructions the Assigned Topic Prep Room Monitor and the Escort will remain outside the room. Door to room will remain open and the Assigned Topic Prep Room Monitor will be responsible for monitoring the contestant and ensure that noise in the hallway is kept to a minimum.

Once the five minutes are up, the Escort will take the contestant to the contest room. The Assigned Topic Prep Room Monitor will go immediately to get the next contestant and follow the same procedures as outlined above. Continue this process until all contestants assigned to your contest room have completed the assigned topic preparation phase of the contest. Once your last contestant has left proceed to the Contest Office (**Room TBD**) to return the stopwatch, the copies of the assigned topic and any scratch paper.

ESCORT INSTRUCTIONS

(All Contests)

During the Quarter and Semi Final Contests, each escort will be assigned to three contestants Escort 1-Contestants 1, 3 and 5; Escort 2-Contestants 2, 4, and 6. Each Escort will need some type of a mobile device that has a capability of having a stop watch.

Familiarize yourself with the locations of the bathrooms in order to find them quickly in the event a contestant needs to go to the bathroom during the contest. There is no need for the escort to accompany the contestant into the bathroom. If a female contestant desires for a female escort to take her to the bathroom, please obtain the services of a female escort.

The contestants will begin the contest in Holding Room One (**Room TBD**). Contestant number one (1) will be escorted to their contest room three (3) minutes after the scheduled start of the Quarter Final to be in front of the contest door. This will allow the Moderator to give the contest room any instructions. Contestant number two (2) will be escorted to their contest room approx. eight (8) minutes after Contestant number one (1) departs the holding room. Each Contestant thereafter will follow in the same time pattern until the Contestants for that Quarter Final has completed their prepared oration. Escorts will remain in the contest room to escort the Contestant to Holding Room Two. (**Room TBD**)

Upon completion of the prepared oration phase of the contest, the contestant will be escorted to Holding Room Two (**Room TBD**). The escort will return to Holding Room One (**Room TBD**) to escort the their next contestant through the prepared oration phase of the contest.

Upon completion of their prepared orations, the contestants will remain in Holding Room Two (**Room TBD**) until called upon by the Assigned Topic Preparation Room monitor.

When called upon by the Assigned Topic Preparation Room Monitor the contestant and escort will proceed to their respective assigned topic preparation room. The escort will remain outside of the assigned topic preparation room while the contestant completes their five-minute preparation. Upon completion of the preparation time, the contestant and escort will proceed to their respective contest room to begin the assigned topic phase of the contest.

Upon completion of the assigned topic phase of the contest, the contestant will be escorted to Holding Room One (**Room TBD**). The escort will return to Holding Room Two (**Room TBD**) to escort the next contestant through the assigned topic phase of the contest.

After each contestant's assigned topic presentation the contestant will be escorted to Holding Room One (**Room TBD**) where all will remain until the contest usher returns to take the contestants back to their respective contest rooms for introduction of the contestants by the Contest Moderators. (**Escorts do not need to go with the contestants; the escorts' are dismissed.**)

Holding Room Monitor Instructions

All Contests

The Holding Room monitors are responsible to maintain order and proper decorum in the Holding Rooms.

Only the contestants, escorts, assigned topic preparation room monitors, and Contest Moderators will be allowed in the Holding Rooms.

The contestants will remain seated at their respective contest tables in order to maintain order and eliminate any possible confusion.

Judges Instructions

(All Contests)

FOR JUDGING AT NATIONAL FINALS, ALL JUDGES MUST HAVE SOME TYPE OF ELECTRONIC DEVICE (LAPTOP / NOTEPAD, ETC) WITH THEM FOR THE TABULATION PROCESS. TABULATION WILL BE DONE ELECTRONICALLY THRU NATIONAL SPEECH AND DEBATE TAB ROOM PROCESS. INSTRUCTIONS ON THE ELECTRONIC TABULATION PROCESS WILL BE PROVIDED PRIOR TO THE CONTEST.

ETHICAL JUDGING: Impartial judging in all contests is the key to fairness and the success of the Oratorical Contest program; which the end result is the selection of a National Champion.

JUDGES POOL: Each contest shall have five judges who shall reach a combined decision, with each judge having equal involvement in determining contest placing. Judges will be seated in different locations (areas) in the contest room and each judge shall render his/her decision **without consultation with other judges or individuals.**

EXPERTISE: While someone certainly does not need to be a constitutional scholar to serve as an American Legion oratorical judge, basic foundational knowledge of the duties, responsibilities, rights and privileges of American citizenship is necessary.

JUDGING STANDARDS: Contestants are judged upon the content of their oration (e.g., application of knowledge on the subject, logic, originality, etc.) and speaking skills (e.g., voice and diction, style, poise, etc.).

During the contest, Judges should consider when judging each contestant the following –

Knowledge of our nation's laws, duties, responsibilities, rights and privileges of American citizenship.
Knowledge of the United States Constitution
Gives credit where credit is due and/or cites the sources of specific information
Topic relevance to the Constitution

During the contest, Judges should consider when scoring each contestant the following

Content

1. Was the speech original, fresh, and direct, applying the student's knowledge?
2. Did the student skillfully select examples, descriptions, analogies and specific data?
3. Was the speech logical, well organized and developed?
4. Did the student show a comprehensiveness of knowledge of the subject matter?

Speaking skills

1. Did the student use volume, rate, pitch and diction effectively? Speakers style – language, word use, transitions effectively?
2. Rate the speaker's style: language use, word arrangement and selection; transitions.
3. Were body actions – poise, eye contact, posture, gestures, facial expressions – appropriate?

Time – adheres to the time for the prepared and assigned topic oratory

CONTEST FORMAT: The contest is conducted in two phases. The contestants will all appear the first time to present their **Prepared Orations** and then appear a second time for their **Assigned Topic Discourse**. This allows the judges an opportunity to re-evaluate and reconsider "first impressions" and compare each speaker against all other speakers.

Judges should carefully study and possess a thorough understanding of the scorecard and scoring system. This is to include all areas under, and including (A) **Content**, and (B) **Speaking Skills**, on the scorecard. A

judge having any questions concerning the scoring system should consult with the contest briefer prior to the contest.

As a guideline, judges are encouraged to award their top choice (speaker) **approximately 90 points** with all others proportionally lower. This is particularly important should a tie exist in the record-of-choice totals.

Lack of emphasis in the prepared oration and the assigned topic on the attendant duties and obligations of a citizen must result in the judges downgrading the contestant involved. Judges may downgrade a contestant up to a total of ten points for failure to speak on the Constitution of the United States. The individual conducting the contest will announce any violation of time for each contestant. A penalty of one point for each minute, or fraction thereof, shall be assessed against the contestant's total score.

The judges when directed by the contest chairman/moderator shall proceed to the tabulation room for final review of the scorecards and the tabulation process.

FINAL SCORING SUBMISSION: Each judge shall insert the total number of points credited to the contestant and also insert in the record-of-choice column, his/her choice of placement for each contestant in accordance with the highest total point scores. If a tie exists in the total point scores on a judge's scorecard, the judge **must make adjustments** in his/her scoring of the tied contestants so that **no two contestants have the same total point score**. This will enable the judge to rank one contestant above the other in the record-of-choice column.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Judges shall refrain from discussing any phase of the contest or their judging methods with contestants, coaches, or others following the contest. Exception would be Contest Moderator and Chief Tabulator. Moderators and tabulators are not permitted to divulge the judge's scorecard at the site of the contest. Contest scores are not released. Persons interested in the comments may, upon written request at a later date, be provided copies of the comments with any personal reference to the Judges that the Judges may have placed omitted.

TABULATION INSTRUCTIONS

Quarter Final and Semi Final Contests

There will be nine tabulation teams for the quarter final contests and three tabulation teams for the semi final contests. Each team will have the responsibility of reviewing the judges' scorecards in order to determine a winner in each of quarter-final and semi-final round contests.

Each of the team members will have an **important role** to play in the overall tabulation process. To differentiate those roles, we have labeled the team members as Chair 1 (**CONTEST MODERATOR - Quarter Final Contest Only**), Chair 2, and Chair 3 (Assistant Chief Tabulator). Please carefully review the following chronology and instructions so as to fully understand your responsibilities.

The contest is completed. The judges have returned to the judges'/tabulation room (Quarter Final Contest – Hall of Champions 3; Semi Final Contest – Fortune Square D) where they are completing their scorecards. NOTE: Each judge will be given a pocket calculator as a contest gratuity. The Contest Moderator should strongly suggest that they use them!

For the quarter final contests Chair 1 and Chair 2 will sit at the same table with the judges for that particular contest with a laptop computer. For the semi final contests Chair 1 and Chair 2 will sit at a separate table near the judges with a laptop computer. The laptop computer will have the Excel contest scoring spreadsheet installed for their particular contest. Once a judge has completed his/her scorecard they will submit the scorecard to Chair 1 to begin the tabulation process.

Upon accepting a card, follow these instructions in chronological order:

- Chair 1 will review the Timekeeper's Record Card to determine if any penalties are to be assessed. Following this review, Chair 1 passes the Timekeeper's Record Card to Chair 2 for review. Any penalty points assessed are entered into the Excel contest scoring spreadsheet for the applicable contestant(s).
- Chair 1 will assign a number (one through five) to each judge's scorecard, writing it in the upper right-hand corner with a circle around it. **NOTE: Chair 1 and Chair 2 will be provided the names of the "alternate" judges. Write the letter "A" in the upper right-hand corner with a circle around it and lay the scorecard aside.**
- Chair 1 will proceed to **clearly and slowly** read to Chair 2 the raw score data from the judge's scorecard for each contestant.
- Chair 2 is responsible for the data entry of each judge's scorecard into the Excel contest scoring spreadsheet. Upon completion of entering each contestant's scores, Chair 2 will **clearly and slowly** read back to Chair 1 the data to verify correct data entry into the Excel contest scoring spreadsheet. If Chair 1 or Chair 2 has any questions about the scoring, to include errors in addition, legibility or if a tie situation exists, the scorecard will be returned

to the judge for his or her clarification/correction.

- This process will continue until all contestants' raw score data from the judge's scorecard has been entered into the Excel contest scoring spreadsheet.
- Chair 1 and Chair 2 will verify from the Excel contest scoring spreadsheet scores that the judge's tally is the same as the figure they arrive at. Once again, if there is a discrepancy, to include errors in addition, legibility or a tie situation exists, the scorecard will be returned to the judge for his or her clarification/correction.
- The Excel contest scoring spreadsheet will **automatically assign** the ranking (placement) of each contestant for each particular primary judge and will **automatically transfer** the ranking (placement) and final total points of each contestant to the contest tabulation sheet (**SUMMARY TAB in the Excel contest scoring spreadsheet**). The ranking (placement) from the judge's scorecard should be the same as that of the Excel contest scoring spreadsheet.
- Upon completion of entering the raw score data from the five primary judge's scorecards, print the contest tabulation sheet (**SUMMARY TAB in the Excel contest scoring spreadsheet**).
- Submit the judge's scorecards (five primary and any alternates) and the printed contest tabulation sheet to Chair 3.
- Gather the scratch tally sheets from the judge (if used) and submit to Chief Tabulator.

(At this point the respective judge can be excused if so needed.)

Chair 3's responsibilities will include verification of the transfer of the ranking (placement) and final total points of each contestant from the judge's scorecard to the printed contest tabulation sheet. The method of operation should follow this chronology:

- Upon receipt of the judge's scorecards and the printed contest tabulation sheet, Chair 3 will review to determine if all appears to be correct.
- Chair 3 will determine a winner by the approved method. Should a tie exist, Chair 3 will immediately draw it to the attention of the Chief Tabulator and together, they shall break the tie by the approved method to determine the winner.
- Following tabulation of the respective contests, Chair 3 will present the judges scorecards, Timekeepers Record Card, and the printed contest tabulation sheet to the Chief Tabulator who will deliver them to the Contest Coordinator for posting.

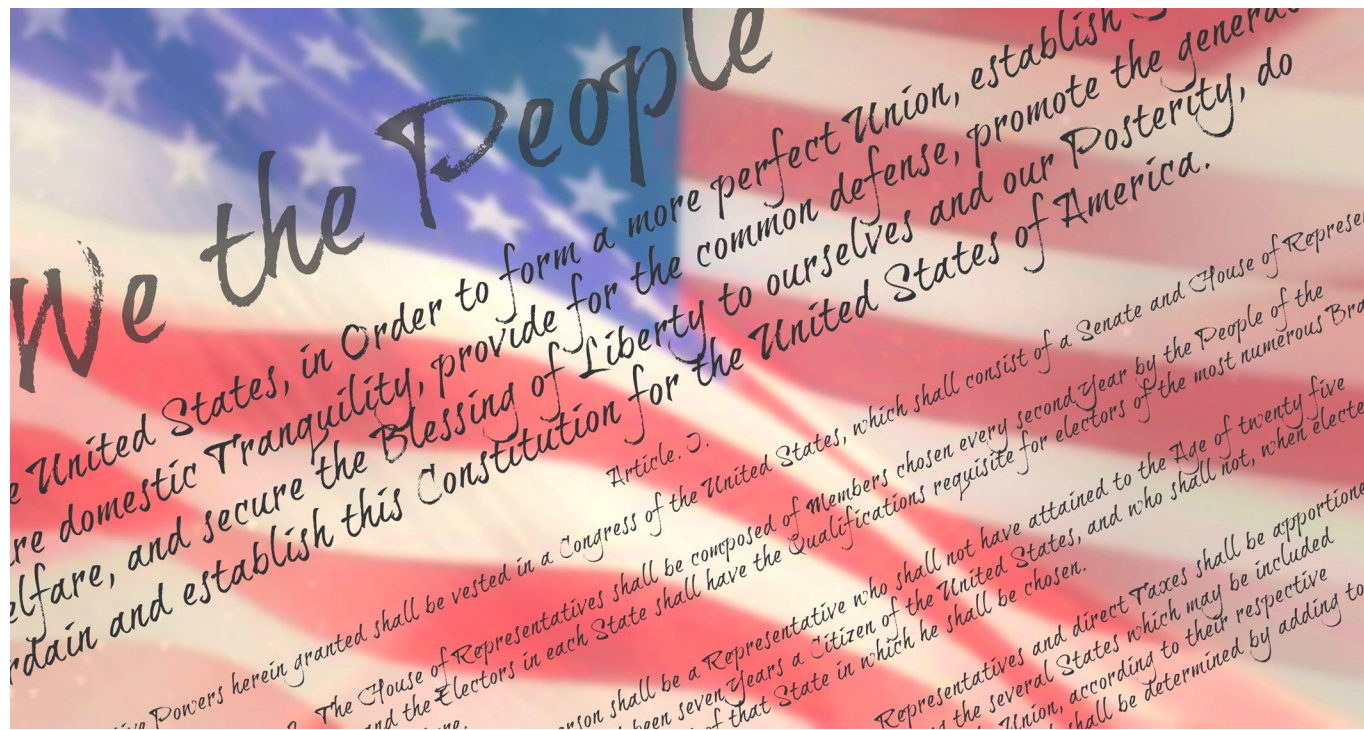
Contest Dates and Locations

Each post, district and county sets their own competition dates. Most will be held sometime in November, December or January to accommodate the State and Regional Competition. District winners advance to the Regional and State Contest.

The 89th Annual High School Oratorical Regional and Final Contests are scheduled for Saturday, March 28, 2026 at Ripon College.



The Wisconsin Competition winner will then advance to The American Legion National level of competition at the Hillsdale College in Hillsdale, Michigan, May 15 to May 17, 2026.



For more information, visit the Oratorical page on our website wilegion.org.

Or contact Department Headquarters:

The American Legion
Department of Wisconsin
2930 American Legion Drive
PO Box 388
Portage, WI 53901
608-745-1090

Oratorical Scholarship Program

The American Legion High School Oratorical Scholarship Program is "A Constitutional Speech Contest" which presents participants with an academic speaking challenge that teaches important leadership qualities, the history of our nation's laws, the ability to think and speak clearly, and an understanding of the duties, responsibilities, rights and privileges of American citizenship.

The Oratorical Program is open to all area high school students. Each participant must be sponsored by a local Legion Post.

The contests begin at the local or post level, with the opportunity for participants to advance to the county, district, regional, state and, ultimately, the national level.

Each contestant delivers two orations, the first being a prepared eight to 10 minute oration about some phase of the Constitution of the United States, emphasizing the duties and responsibilities of U.S. citizens.

The second oration consists of a three to five minute speech on a randomly assigned constitutional topic. There are four assigned topics and, because they are randomly selected by the Oratorical Chairman at each competition, students must be prepared to speak on all of them.

The use of notes, props, a lectern, prompting of any type, and amplification devices are not allowed during the actual oratorical presentations.

Participants are ranked by a panel of qualified judges whose decision is final. Specific rules for breaking possible ties are strictly adhered to.

Scholarship Opportunities:

* District winners qualify for Regional Competition

Participants eliminated at the Regional level receive \$600

Three Regional Winners receive \$1000 and compete for the State title

The State 2nd runner up receives an additional \$1000

The State 1st runner up receives an additional \$1500

The Department Winner receives an additional \$2000

* Additional scholarship awards are presented to participants speaking at the National level

Assigned Topics 2025-2026

Amendment IV

The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.

Article III

Section 3. Treason against the United States, shall consist only in levying War against them, or in adhering to their Enemies, giving them Aid and Comfort. No Person shall be convicted of Treason unless on the Testimony of two Witnesses to the same overt Act, or on Confession in open Court.

The Congress shall have Power to declare the Punishment of Treason, but no Attainder of Treason shall work Corruption of Blood, or Forfeiture except during the Life of the Person attainted.

Article IV

Section 4. The United States shall guarantee to every State in this Union a Republican Form of Government, and shall protect each of them against Invasion; and on Application of the Legislature, or of the Executive (when the Legislature cannot be convened) against domestic Violence.

Article VI

Clause 3. The Senators and Representatives before mentioned, and the Members of the several State Legislatures, and all executive and judicial Officers, both of the United States and of the several States, shall be bound by Oath or Affirmation, to support this Constitution; but no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States.

Assigned Topics for 2026 Oratorical Contest

Amendment IV

The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.

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Oratorical Contest

Official Rules

2026



General information

The purpose of The American Legion High School Oratorical Scholarship Program “A Constitutional Speech Contest” is to develop a deeper knowledge and appreciation of the Constitution of the United States among high school students. Other objectives of the contest include the development of leadership qualities, the ability to think and speak clearly and intelligently, and the preparation for acceptance of the duties and responsibilities, rights, and privileges of American citizenship.

Scholarships

Scholarship awards are presented to the three finalists in the final round of the national contest as follows: 1st place: \$25,000; 2nd place: \$22,500; 3rd place: \$20,000. Each department (state) winner who is certified and participates in the first round of the national contest will receive a \$2,000 scholarship. Each first round winner who advances to and participates in the second round, but does not advance to the final round, will receive an additional \$2,000 scholarship to pursue education beyond high school.

The national organization of The American Legion will award scholarships to the three finalists, department winners, and first round winners who are eliminated during the second round of competition. These scholarships may be used to attend any college, trade school, or university in the United States.

A contestant must give both his or her prepared oration and the assigned topic discourse to receive the scholarship.

In addition to the scholarships awarded by the national organization, there are several hundred scholarships awarded at the discretion of intermediate organizations, to participants at post, district or county, and department levels of competition.

Department contests

Arrangements for contests leading to the department finals shall be the responsibility of each department (state) organization of The American Legion. For those levels of competition prior to the department finals, the rules and regulations set forth in this brochure are not mandatory — they are offered as a guideline. However, all department finals contests shall conform with national contest procedures, rules and regulations, if the department wishes its finalist to compete in the national finals.

A winner certified to the National Americanism Division of The American Legion by a department which did not conduct its final competition in conformity with the rules and regulations as set forth herein may, in the judgment of the Chairman of the Americanism Commission or the Chairman's representative, be disqualified from competition in the national contest.

Each department may certify one contestant into the national contest. If for any reason the department winner is unable to compete in the national contest, the department first runner-up may be substituted following approval by The American Legion's National Americanism Commission. A department first runner-up accepted into national competition will be entitled to all national awards, entitlements and compensation that the department winner would have received had she/he participated at that level.

Department contest winners MUST BE certified to the National Americanism Division, NO LATER THAN April 6, 2026 by 5:00 p.m. EDT.

Failure to meet this deadline WILL result in disqualification of the contestant.

For information about the Oratorical Contest in your state, contact your American Legion post or department headquarters.

Eligibility

Eligible participants in the contest shall be a legal United States citizen or possess legal residency or visitor status to be in the United States.

All contestants must be bona fide students herein described as any student under the age of 20 years on the date of the national contest who is presently enrolled in a high school or junior high school (public, parochial, military, private or state accredited home school) in which the curriculum of said high school is considered to be of high school level, commencing with grade nine and terminating with grade 12. Students must be enrolled in high school or junior high school during the time of participation at any level of The American Legion National High School Oratorical Contest.

High school students that graduate early during the school year are eligible to compete if they are not enrolled in a college, university, trade school or other institution of higher learning at the time of the department finals contest.

Contestants must be either legally domiciled within or attend an educational institution within the department (state) where they enter the competition. Contestants can enter a competition in only one department.

The three finalists of the national contest will be ineligible for further participation at any level.

Prepared oration

The subject to be used for the prepared oration in the Oratorical Contest must be on some aspect of the Constitution of the United States with emphasis to the attendant duties and obligations of a citizen to our government. The same subject and oration used in the department contest must be used in the national contest.

The prepared oration must be the original effort of each contestant and must not take up less than 8 minutes or more than 10 minutes for delivery.

Contestants may have in their possession a copy of their prepared oration in the first holding room. The copy may be electronic or paper form. They may consult the copy of their prepared oration until they exit the holding room to begin the contest. At that time the copy of the prepared oration will be surrendered to the contest official who is monitoring the first holding room.

In the prepared oration, as well as in the assigned topic discourse, quotations must be indicated as such. Where quotations are more than 10 words in length, the author's name must be given in the manuscript and cited orally.

Assigned topic

The assigned topic discourse must not consume less than 3 minutes or more than 5 minutes for delivery. The purpose of the assigned topic discourse is to test the speaker's knowledge of the subject, the extent of his or her research, and the ability to discuss the topic as related to the basic principles of government under the Constitution.

The assigned topic shall be drawn by the contest official in full view of the audience immediately before the last speaker begins delivery of his/her prepared oration and will be made known to the audience and each contestant approximately five minutes prior to the time of delivery. The topic will be on some phase of the Constitution of the United States selected from Articles and Sections. All contestants will speak on the same assigned topic. Below are the assigned topics for 2025.

Assigned topics for 2026

Amendment IV

The right of the people to be sure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against reasonable searches and seizures,

shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.

Article III, Section 3

Treason against the United States, shall consist only in levying war against them, or in adhering to their Enemies, giving them Aid and Comfort. No person shall be convicted of Treason unless on the Testimony of two Witnesses to the same overt Act, or on Confession in open Court.

The Congress shall have power to declare the punishment of Treason, but no attainder of Treason shall work corruption of blood, or forfeiture except during the life of the person attained.

Article IV, Section 4

The United States shall guarantee to every State in this Union a Republican form of government and shall protect each of them against invasion; and on application of the legislature, or of the executive (when the Legislature cannot be convened) against domestic violence.

Article VI, Clause 3

The Senators and Representatives before mentioned, and the members of the several state legislatures, and all executive and judicial officers, both of the United States and of the several states, shall be bound by oath or affirmation, to support this constitution; but no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.

Foreign languages or songs

All contestants at each contest level are required to speak in the English language on both the prepared and the assigned topic.

It is acceptable to utilize or incorporate short phrases of a foreign language into the prepared oration and/or assigned topic to develop the argument, establish a point, etc. The vast majority of the prepared oration and/or assigned topic must be delivered in the English language.

Also, the singing of a song in any language is not permitted and will result in the immediate disqualification of the contestant. The contestant may, however, quote a verse(s) of a song provided proper attribution is made.

What to wear

Uniforms are not permitted. Appropriate business attire is required by all contestants. Contestants are not permitted to wear awards and medals from previous competition.

Contest regulations

A drawing shall be held by the official in charge of the contest to determine the order in which the contestants will appear. The contest chairman shall announce the title of the contestant's prepared oration immediately after introducing him/her as contestant No. 1, contestant No. 2, etc. The chairman will request the audience to refrain from applause until the judges have made their decision.

A raised platform is not compulsory; however, it is strongly recommended. The use of notes, amplification, lectern or speaker's stand by contestants or prompting in any manner is not permitted. Props are not permitted.

The use of any type of electronic/digital data gathering, receiving and/or transmitting equipment in any form by contestants or members of the audience is prohibited.

The time allotted for each contestant to deliver their prepared oration shall not be less than 8 or more than 10 minutes, and for the assigned topic, not less than 3 or more than 5 minutes.

An official timer shall be named by the contest chairman whose duty it shall be to keep an accurate time record of each contestant, and she/he shall be located on the main floor in full view of the contestants. The timekeeper shall begin timing each contestant at the start of the prepared oration. The timer should be equipped with a stopwatch and time cards for the prepared oration carrying the figures 8, 9 and 10. When eight minutes have been used, the time warning card with the figure 8 thereon shall be placed in full view of the speaker, following with 9 and 10 as the speaker progresses. The same procedure shall be used with cards bearing 3, 4 and 5 during the assigned topic discourse. The contest chairman shall announce the time consumed by each contestant for the prepared oration and the assigned topic immediately after each contestant speaks for the benefit of the judges.

Contestants are required to remain in a private room, where the discourse of the other speakers cannot be heard, until it is their turn to speak (contestants will be under the supervision of an individual appointed by the contest chairman). As the contestants conclude their prepared orations, they must return to a sound-proof holding room. As each speaker

concludes his or her assigned topic discourse, they shall not be allowed to associate with contestants who have not fulfilled the assigned topic requirement.

Approximately five minutes prior to the time of the delivery of the assigned topic discourse, contestant No. 1 will be informed of the topic drawn for the assigned topic and shall be permitted to retire to privacy under the direction of an individual appointed by the contest chairman, whose duty it shall be to see that no contestant is permitted to consult any text matter or notes having any connection with the subject matter upon which he/she is to speak, other than the actual words of the topic provided on the card drawn.

Each succeeding contestant will be called upon in the order in which he/she previously appeared. He/she shall also, in turn, be informed of the topic of the assigned topic discourse and shall then be escorted to privacy in the manner as provided for contestant No. 1.

Judges

The judges are an integral part of the Oratorical Contest. Their qualifications are considered carefully as the decision of the judges is final and must be reached without bias. Impartial judging in all contests is the key to fairness and success of the program which results in the selection of a national champion.

All department finals and the national contest must use five judges. No publicity shall be given to the names of the judges in advance of the contest. **During the contest, the judges will be seated in different locations in the auditorium and each judge shall render his or her final decision without consultation with other judges or any other person.**

Judges will be advised that a lack of emphasis in the prepared oration and the assigned topic discourse on the duties and obligations of a citizen must result in their downgrading the contestant. Judges are permitted to downgrade a contestant up to a maximum of 10 points for failure to speak about the Constitution. The contest chairman will announce any violation of time for each contestant. A penalty of one point for each minute, or fraction thereof, shall be assessed against the contestant's total score.

The judges, timekeepers, tabulators and the contest chairman, following the last assigned topic discourse, may proceed to a private room for final review and tabulation. **The decision of the judges is final.**

Tabulators

The contest chairman will appoint no less than three tabulators for the department finals contest. It will be their

responsibility to review the judges' scorecards to be certain they are fully tabulated and signed before they are submitted for final tabulation.

Judges' scorecards for department finals and the national contest will not be divulged to anyone at the site of the contest. All national contest judges' scorecards become the property of The American Legion National Headquarters.

National finals contest

- The national finals contest will be held at Hillsdale College on May 15-17 in Hillsdale, Michigan. Quarterfinal and semifinal rounds are scheduled to be held on Saturday, May 16. The championship is scheduled for Sunday, May 17.
- All contestants and chaperones will arrive on Friday, May 15. All contestants and chaperones will be lodged in a dormitory on the Hillsdale College campus.
- A mandatory pre-contest orientation session for all contestants will be held the evening of Friday, May 15.
- A banquet honoring all contestants will be held the afternoon of Sunday, May 17.
- All contestants and chaperones will depart for home after the banquet on Sunday.

Travel expenses

The national organization of The American Legion will pay the travel expenses of department winners and one chaperone to the national contest. **All contestants must be accompanied by a chaperone over 21 years of age, preferably a parent of the contestant.**

The national organization of The American Legion shall not assume liability for personal injury, property damage or loss

sustained by any contestant or chaperone en route to or from the contest; however, The American Legion does carry a nominal group accident insurance policy on contestants certified into the national competition.

Contestants will travel by an air carrier selected by the national organization of The American Legion or personal automobile if previously approved by the national organization of The American Legion.

TV and radio

Live television and radio broadcasts are permitted in all contests as well as filming or other types of media for later showing, provided: 1) the lighting and other site conditions are the same for all contestants; 2) the filming or broadcasts shall in no way distract the contestants or interfere with the announced scheduled time of the contest; 3) the normal speaking voice of the contestant is not interfered with or amplified within the auditorium; and 4) The American Legion is in no way financially obligated for anything without its prior approval.

Rules and Policy Authority

In accordance with Resolution No. 7 of the National Executive Committee of the American Legion, May 2021, The American Legion reserves the right to temporarily amend, delay or suspend any established rule or policy of its national youth programs when a program is subject to the occurrence of a circumstance whose cause is beyond the control of The American Legion, thereby making it impossible, illegal, impracticable, or inadvisable for The American Legion to conduct a youth program in accordance with established rules or policies. You may read Resolution No. 7 in its entirety by clicking [here](#) or by accessing it from The American Legion Digital Archive at legion.org/archive.

For more information

Individuals interested in learning more about The American Legion National High School Oratorical Contest should contact:

- For dates, sites and deadline information concerning **local, district and state level competition**, contact your **local American Legion post** or the **state headquarters office of The American Legion**.
- For information concerning the national contest, contact the Americanism Division, The American Legion, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206-1055; telephone (317) 630-1204; or email americanism@legion.org.

JUDGE'S SCORECARD

NAME OF JUDGE:

		CONTESTANTS					
A. CONTENT		1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Was the speech original, fresh, and direct, applying the contestant's knowledge?	Prepared Oration	12 points					
	Assigned Topic	4 points					
2. Did the contestant skillfully select examples, descriptions, analogies, and specific data?	Prepared Oration	12 points					
	Assigned Topic	4 points					
3. Was the speech logical, well organized, and developed?	Prepared Oration	12 points					
	Assigned Topic	4 points					
4. Did the contestant show a comprehensiveness of knowledge of the subject matter?	Prepared Oration	16 points					
	Assigned Topic	6 points					
B. SPEAKING SKILLS		1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Did the contestant use volume, rate, pitch, and diction effectively?	Prepared Oration	6 points					
	Assigned Topic	4 points					
2. Rate the contestant's style: language use, word arrangement and selection, and transitions.	Prepared Oration	6 points					
	Assigned Topic	4 points					
3. Were body actions -- poise, eye contact, posture, gestures, facial expressions -- appropriate?	Prepared Oration	6 points					
	Assigned Topic	4 points					
SUB-TOTAL		1	2	3	4	5	6
PENALTIES: 1 point for each minute or fraction thereof over or under allotted time	Prepared Oration						
	Assigned Topic						
1-10 points for failure to speak on the Constitution							
FINAL TOTAL POINTS		1	2	3	4	5	6
Position Number - 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 (Highest Points = 1st place, second highest points = 2nd place, etc.)							

Score all contestants - NO TIES PERMITTED

JUDGE'S SIGNATURE



P.O. Box 1055
Indianapolis, IN 46206
1-800-433-3318

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