



Modern Oratory

GRADES: 7-8 | ENTRIES: 3 PER SECTION | TIME: 6 MIN (SPEAK)

2026-2027
Qual ♦ Dist ♦ State

SECTIONS. Grades 7-8 compete together.

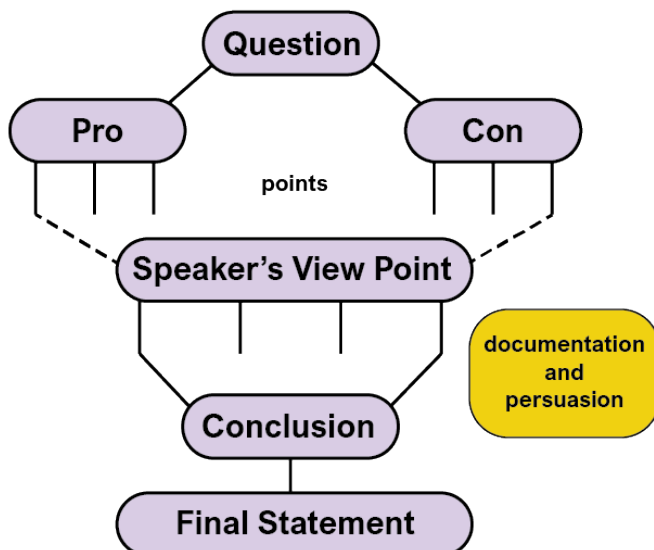
ENTRIES. As many as THREE students from each grade levels may be entered in the Modern Oratory District Contest from each school. Districts may elect to allow up to 3 contestants from each grade level, but all sections must contain a mix of 7th and 8th graders. Only the top 2 speakers will advance to State, regardless of grade level.

ADVANCING TO STATE. First and second place winners will advance to State. Third place winners will be alternates.

NATURE OF THE CONTEST. The Modern Oratory contest provides opportunities for students to explore the use of the voice and body in speaking situations; to organize ideas; to prepare and deliver a researched speech; and to develop self-confidence.

In Modern Oratory, the contestant will **select one of the topics listed for the current year**, determine the critical issues in the topic, and determine and acknowledge both pro and con points, citing support discovered in the research. Students will decide which side they will defend and support that side with additional evidence.

The maximum time limit for each speech is **six (6)** minutes. There is no minimum time limit. Students who exceed the allotted six minutes shall be disqualified.



2026 – 2027 MODERN ORATORY TOPICS

Contestants must select one of the following topics for developing the oration.

1. Does listening to music help focus while studying?
2. Is renewable energy worth the cost?
3. Should the minimum age for social media accounts be raised to age 16?
4. Are AI tools helping students learn more effectively?
5. Should Texas require financial literacy classes for high school students?

Better speeches are at least three minutes in length, however. A “30-seconds left card” should be held up by the director/timekeeper to indicate time left in speech.

The format of the speech should include . . .

- 1) an introduction;
- 2) statement of the question;
- 3) development of both pro and con points accompanied by documentation;
- 4) statement of the position the writer will defend;
- 5) a summary and conclusion with a final statement.

After writing and editing the speech, the oration in its final form **MUST** be delivered from memory without notes or props (items held in hand or touched) before a

APPROPRIATE GESTURES

The Modern Oratory contest rules include the following instructions: Responsive use of the body (i.e., spontaneous changes in posture, gesture, and place-to-place movement) are permissible. This active use of the body should:

- (A) be appropriate to the demands of the speech;
- (B) be a NATURAL outgrowth from the oration;
- (C) not call attention to itself;
- (D) be limited in scope;

One or two steps are acceptable during presentation, but taking additional steps does not result in disqualification. Rather, excessive movement should be considered by the judge in evaluating the contestant's presentation.

THE JUDGE'S DECISION IN THIS MATTER IS FINAL.

live audience. (Audience required)

Along with the skills of analysis, research, note-taking, documentation, evaluation and decision making come those of delivery and the skill of memorization. Because so few situations create a format for the development of the skill of memorization, this contest might provide just that incentive. Study the diagram of the contest development diagram above.

Appropriate Dress: Wear nice clothing that does not appear to be a school uniform. Young men with shirts and ties and young ladies in dresses or pant suits show respect and credibility for your prepared speech.

SECTIONING. Schools should enter their strongest student in the first position when registering for this contest. The meet program separates the strongest contestants into different sections. At District, contestants from the same school will be placed in different sections whenever possible. At State, contestants advancing from the same District will be assigned to different sections whenever possible. Once the speaking order has been set for a tournament, it may not be changed without permission from the District or State Meet Director.

WHAT HAPPENS IN THE CONTEST. 1) The contest director will announce the time and place that contestants and one adult should report for evaluation pick-up and/or awards presentation. 2) As roll is called and substitutes OR alternates are checked in, each contestant will be given a card on which the letter of his/her speaking order is written, in accordance to the Contestant Roster (**Do NOT change speaking order.**); **Contestants will remain in the room both before and after they speak.** 3) The contest director will call speaker A into the room, either from the hall or a holding room. 4) The contestant will present his/her speech before an audience, and either one or three judges. When only 30 seconds are left in the allotted time for a speaker, the contest director, who also serves as the timekeeper, will hold up a “30 seconds left” card in order to assist the contestant in stopping the speech prior to the end of the time limit. **Judges may take up to 90 seconds to complete evaluation.**

ADVANCING TO THE FINAL ROUND. If there are more than 9 students in the competition, two or more sections of the contest (preliminary round) will

be held. The top ranked contestants from each section (top 3 speakers if there are 2 sections / top 2 speakers if there are 3 sections) will advance to the final round. A different set of topics will be used in the final round, but all rules are the same for both rounds.

POSTING THE PRELIMINARY ROUND. After judges have made their decisions in the preliminary rounds, contestants pick up their evaluations at the time and place designated on the schedule. At this time the names of the contestants advancing to the final round will be announced in random order and posted at the designated location in a random speaking order for the final round.

PREPARATION FOR CONTEST. Read and follow all instructions provided in the “Information Pertaining to All Contests” section of the *PSIA Academic Handbook*. Observe and practice with students all rules and procedures for this contest. Preparation for the Modern Oratory contest should include instruction in organizational speech delivery. There are no study materials to purchase.

Teachers, coaches, and parents will find that Modern Oratory provides participants with an opportunity to:

- 1) formulate ideas;
- 2) define problems;
- 3) research the issues;
- 4) express ideas effectively;
- 5) recognize the rights of others to have differing viewpoints;
- 6) formulate opinions based on solid documentation;
- 7) write multiple-paragraph compositions incorporating outside information with documentation;
- 8) write persuasive discourse of a variety of types;
- 9) revise written work for content, organization, topic development, appropriate transition, clarity of language, appropriate word and sentence choice, according to the purpose and audience for which a piece is written.

Teachers, coaches, and parents may assist the student in Modern Oratory BUT SHOULD NOT WRITE THE SPEECH FOR THE STUDENT. Middle school students have amazing talent, but it takes good mentors

to help it all come together. **Students are not allowed to use AI in the creation of their speech.**

DRESS CODE. Contestants should wear nice clothing without school logo or the appearance of a school uniform. (See page 11 for dress code guidelines.)

PERSONNEL NEEDED FOR CONTEST.

- 1. *Contest Director/Timekeeper.* May be a knowledgeable coach of contestants in the contest.
- 2. *Two Assistant Contest Directors/Hall Monitors.* Should be knowledgeable coaches or parents from different schools, other than that of the director.
- 3. *Judge(s).* One or preferably three judges may judge a section of 9 or fewer contestants. Judges should be experienced in speech or language arts studies or other profession who use logic, reasoning, and persuasion in their normal occupation (especially lawyers, doctors, detectives, programmers, etc.) and each should have had experience judging at least three speech contests (in the classroom is minimal) prior to being selected to judge at a district or state tournament.

EVALUATIONS, JUDGES’ BALLOTS, and RANKING PROCEDURES. Coaches and teachers should use official PSIA Modern Oratory Evaluation Sheet and the Judge’s Ballot to assist in preparing contestants for competition. Judges may use the blank sheet of paper found in their packets to jot down notes to help them remember contestants better. The “Ranking Procedure for all Speech Contests” is used for this contest.

Shall and Must List

Contestants **must not** use props, including the audience, during their speech.

Result: Disqualification.

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Contestants **must not** identify themselves or their school during their speech, orally or by wearing or displaying school identifying articles (e.g., school uniforms).

Result: Disqualification.

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Contestants **must not** use notes during the speech.

Result: Disqualification.

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Contestant **must not** go over the 6-minute time limit.

Result: Disqualification.