



Oral Interpretation

2026-2027
Qual ♦ Dist ♦ State

GRADES: 4, 5, 6, 7-8 | ENTRIES: 3 PER SECTION | TIME: 6 MIN (SPEAK)

SECTIONS. Grades 4, 5, and 6 compete separately. Grades 7-8 compete together.

ENTRIES. As many as THREE students from each grade levels may be entered in the Oral Interpretation 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. Each year, the selection category alternates:

- 2026-2027 POETRY
- 2027-2028 PROSE
- 2028-2029 POETRY

Coaches may use these guidelines in preparing for either the Oral Interpretation Contest. Students in the Oral Interpretation Contest select a published poem/prose piece, or group of poems/prose works, prepare an introduction to this literary work(s), and present the work(s) with an introduction in a six-minute time limit at the contest. The introduction may be at the beginning or embedded. The introduction must include the name(s) of the pieces to be performed and the author(s). The introduction must be given with the binder closed, including piece titles and authors. There is no minimum time limit. Better presentations are at least three minutes in length, however. Contestants who exceed the allotted six minutes shall be disqualified. **Works published on the internet as the primary publication (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or other websites) are not acceptable for use without the written permission of the author.**

CHOOSING A SELECTION. Students may select a work, several excerpts from a work, or a group of works, for their presentations. Students should ask these questions:

- 1) **DO I LIKE THE SELECTION?** A student must enjoy a selection if he or she will spend time thinking about it, analyzing

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POETRY

it, and rehearsing it.

2) **IS THE SELECTION APPROPRIATE FOR ME?**

Literary selections written by and for adults offer problems for elementary and middle school students because the levels of experience, understanding, and vocabulary are so very different from their own. Select literary works that present a young person's point of view, situations that you can identify with, and themes that you understand.

3) **DOES THE SELECTION WORK FOR THIS TYPE OF LITERARY INTERPRETATION?**

This judgment must not be made too hastily. Almost all selections become richer and fuller as students work with them; a few selections, despite rehearsal and exploration, simply do not benefit from an oral presentation.

DOCUMENTATION. A requirement of the contest, documentation means **the contestant researches and provides to their coach** information that proves that the work is the literary type specified for this school year.

Documentation EXAMPLES:

- An article from an encyclopedia or anthology of poems/prose works that states the work is of this type;
- A photocopy of the book cover, **along with the table of contents** that lists the title of the work *in reference to its type*;
- A printed internet page that specifies the work to be either prose or poetry (must be reputable source, excludes Wikipedia);
- The actual literary source in which piece is found. (Contestant must point to the specific information in this source that clarifies that the work is either prose or poetry, **noting word descriptors found in this handbook, and a photocopy of this information must be provided.**)

Some works may not have printed sources that indicate specifically that they are poems or prose, and sometimes rhyming works in children's literature are actually classified as prose. Library of Congress references

may provide both prose and poetry references, as well, but these will direct the contestant to a source that will document the genre needed. ***Please be aware that failure to submit documentation will result in disqualification, even if it seems obvious that the work is a poem or a prose work.*** Consider documentation an opportunity to find out more about the work you are presenting.

Documentation will be submitted online using the Digital Documentation. Meets are no longer allowed to use print documentation.

THE INTRODUCTION. The **required original** introduction should prepare the audience to hear the literary work. It may be dramatic; it may or may not say something about the writer, but must include the titles of the pieces to be performed and the authors; it may describe the setting of the work; and/or it may introduce other aspects of the literature. **It is important to remember that the introduction MUST be given from memory with the binder closed, that it MUST NOT include the student's name or school,** and that it should be fairly short because the presentation, including the introduction, must not exceed six minutes. The introduction may be traditional or *embedded*, where the speaker begins the piece of work with the binder open, gives an introduction with binder closed, and then opens the binder and continues with the piece. Although PSIA does not have a required time frame where the introduction must occur, it is recommended that it appear earlier than later in the presentation. **Speaker should use a 5.5" × 8.5" black, mini-binder (no loose-leaf pages, no tablets, phones, or the like).**

The Introduction **MUST** include the name of the author and the title of the piece. Disqualification follows for failure to include the author and title. If the author is unknown, the contestant should state such or that it was written anonymously. If the piece is untitled, the contestant should mention this during the introduction.

Clarification: The name of the piece(s) and author(s) must be given in the Introduction with the binder closed. Contestants are not allowed to cite the title of the piece(s) and author(s) with the binder open. The contestant will be disqualified if the title of the piece(s) and author(s) are not given or if they are given in the wrong section of their presentation.

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.

Although the literary work may be presented from memory, contestants are required to hold a transcript open during the reading. "Artful" glances at the transcript are recommended. The transcript may be placed in a small, dark colored folder or notebook that does not detract from the presentation. Holding a transcript can prevent the overuse of gestures and prevent the contestant from performing a dramatic monologue. Remember that voice inflection and interpretation of the different characters and the scene are the most important components of a great poetry or prose interpretation. The voice, not the body, should convey the meaning and feeling in the literary work. Walking around the room, instead of confining oneself to a smaller area of appropriate outgrowth movement, should be cause for a JUDGE to make note of such over-gesturing and thus rank the contestant lower than he or she might have been ranked otherwise.

APPROPRIATE ATTIRE. Although contestants are not required to wear a suit and tie or dresses, appearance can be a factor in the judges' overall impression of the presentation. Contestants shall not wear logo clothing (other than the PSIA State Meet T-shirt), especially if the logo is of the school or symbols of the school attended. Clothing that appears to be a costume representing your literary piece is not appropriate. If a contestant wears one of these unacceptable pieces of clothing, the contest director may have the student turn his/her shirt wrong-side out, or otherwise change clothes. Although dress is not a disqualifier, it is a rationale for deductions in ranking by the judge.

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.**); 3) The Contest Director will **check the contestant's documentation on the sheet provided when he/she speaks. The two items to check are (a) the contestant has an approved documentation status and (b) the contestant actually performs the piece(s) they are approved to present. Even if the contestant's documentation is insufficient and will result in a disqualification, the contestant is still allowed to present their piece and receive their evaluation sheets. Disqualifications are NOT revealed during the contest. The Contest Director may consult with the Assistant Director(s) discreetly concerning a potential disqualification after the contest concludes.** 4) The contest director/timekeeper will **announce speaker A;** 5) the contestant will hold that letter up, then give the card back to the director. Timing begins with the contestant's first words of the presentation. Because the PSIA events are intended to be educational, the contestants **are to** remain in the contest room after their presentations, and **audiences are expected to the capacity of the room. No one may enter or leave the room once the contest has started, unless a note of approved late arrival or early departure has been provided by the meet director.** The contestant will speak before a single **impartial** judge or preferably a panel of three judges. All speech events are judged by an odd number of judges **who independently decide on the ranking of contestants. No collaboration is permitted.** 6) When only 30 seconds are left in the allotted time for a speaker, the contest director, who also serves as the timekeeper, should 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 should take no more than 1-1/2 minutes following the contestant presentation to complete his/her evaluation.**

ENTERING ORAL INTERPRETATION AND A CONTEST IN CONFLICT ON THE REQUIRED SCHEDULE. Student are allowed to be dual entered in this contest and other contests that occur at the same

times. Arrangements for the contestant to speak early or late in both prelim and final rounds must be submitted to the meet director through registration on AMC before the registration deadline is reached. Contestants will NOT be given additional time in dual entry contests.

ADVANCING TO THE FINAL ROUND. If there are more than 9 students in the competition, two sections of the contest (preliminary round) will be held. The top 3 ranked students will advance to the final round from each of two "prelim" sections, and the top 2 will advance if there are three prelim sections. Contestants may read the same literary piece for the final round, as well as at State.

POSTING THE PRELIMINARY ROUND.

Rankings are posted in AMC, and 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 on a designated bulletin board in a random speaking order for the final round.

PERFORMANCE PIECE. Contestants must perform the same piece that was approved with Digital Documentation at District. Contestants may NOT change pieces between District and State.

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 delineated in the "Instructions to the Contestant" and in the "Oral Interpretation Contest Director Checklist" and the "Checklist for Judges." Preparation for the Prose or Poetry Interpretation Contest should include instruction in the curriculum objectives of public speaking. Practice performing before an audience is essential. Invitational meets with other schools provide the most effective practice, as well as boosting enthusiasm for the contestant. You may wish to prepare your students for the excitement of winning as well as the disappointment of losing. All speech activities rely on the subjective opinions of judges. The philosophies and techniques of oral reading differ widely, and your students need to be aware that their work may be evaluated by people with a variety of approaches to the field. If you emphasize the joy of sharing literature rather than the necessity of a first place ranking, all your

students will be winners, especially if they carry their love of literature into adulthood.

the end of the district meet each year.

PERSONNEL NEEDED FOR CONTEST.

1. **Contest Director/Timekeeper.** Must be a language arts or speech teacher OR have two years of experience at directing the Prose or Poetry Contest
2. **Assistant Directors.** Two knowledgeable coaches from different schools other than director's. One Assistant Director serves as Hall Monitor during the speaking part of the contest.
3. **Judge(s).** Three qualified, impartial judges should judge preliminary and final rounds. An odd number of judges is required. One qualified judge is acceptable only if 3 cannot be found. (Same criteria as the contest director/timekeeper)

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.

JUDGING REQUIREMENTS (ADDITIONAL INFORMATION applicable to all speech contests). (See Contestant information) Judges for all PSIA speech contest should:

- 1) Hold a Language Arts, English, or Speech Communication education certification, OR be working on a degree in a speech or language arts field.
 - 2) Have prior judging experience of at least three speech contests. Contests may be invitational or intramural, but preferably, judging experience should be at the district or state level of PSIA competition.
- Persons meeting these qualifications let your campus coordinator and your district director know of your expertise in order that you may fill a much-needed position at your District Meet.

Please let the state office know that you meet these criteria and volunteer to fill one of the many much-needed speech positions at the two state meets. It is our goal to fill these positions (3 judges per section) prior to

Shall and Must List

Contestant **shall** use a 5.5" × 8.5" black mini-binder for their speech.

Result: Judges should take note and lower the ranking of a contestant with an inappropriate binder.

Contestants must do each the following:

- provide an introduction from memory;
- give the title of the piece(s) and author(s) during the introduction;
- give the introduction while the binder is closed;
- have a binder (not a folder);
- not exceed the six-minute time limit;
- refrain from using profanity;
- refrain from stating their name or the name of their school;
- not receive prompting from an audience member from their school (any body movement or gesture that provides information to the contestant during the performance);
- not wear clothing with school logo or other school emblems (PSIA t-shirt exempt);
- provide documentation of the correct type of literary work being presented

Failure to do any of the above items in this list results in *disqualification*.

Prose OR Poetry?: Documenting Your Selection

WORD IDENTIFIERS FOR POETRY: If documenting Poetry, look for these identifiers:

verse poem poetic hymn blank verse couplets pentameter meter epic lyric
haiku ballad sonnet free verse stanza limerick ode rhyming etc.

WORD IDENTIFIERS FOR PROSE: If documenting Prose, the information should contain one or more of these prose identifiers referencing the work's title, or **other possible words** that signify that the work is written in paragraph form:

story novel short story passage fiction fable fairy tale tale folklore
allegory anecdote essay editorial autobiography biography parable (if not written in verse form). places
where paragraph literature may be found, verifying that the selection is prose.

Bibliographic information on specific works, including classification according to the Dewey Decimal System, is available at the Library of Congress Online Catalogue at <https://catalog.loc.gov/>
Follow the simple directions found on this website to locate information about a work, to find works on subject areas, or to do a general search for a title or an author.

Be sure to get a printout of your findings. Hand written or self-typed information can not serve as proof of the work's genre. Also, the numbers in this system do not tell a novice director that a work is prose or poetry. Provide statements or listings that are photocopied.

You may occasionally find a book or anthology that the online card catalog labels as "miscellaneous writings." These books are often collected works of individual authors that are not limited to or chiefly identified with one specific form. You may also encounter a book, published by a small press, which has not been assigned a specific genre category. In such cases, it is necessary to ask the following questions to identify the material's classification.

• **Does the piece contain stage directions?** The presence of stage directions can help you establish a piece as a work of drama. **DRAMA EXCERPTS MAY NOT BE USED IN PSIA ORAL INTERPRETATION CONTEST.** **Dramatic monologues, or any work that is classified as a Dialogue or Monologue, are not acceptable in this contest.**

• **Are there any published articles, reviews, or interviews which clarify the genre of this particular work?** Newspapers and magazines often review or analyze works of literature. Articles found in these periodicals can give you insight into a particular literary work's content and form.

• **Do I have the correct original source?** Many works of literature are published in more than one form. For example, John Irving's *The Cider House Rules* is available as a novel, a play, and a screenplay. A cutting from the novel would be an acceptable prose selection. The other two literary versions of the story could not be used in PSIA competition.

• **Copyright Infringement:** Prose and poetry excerpts and full works are acceptable from the internet, as long as the website and/or author do not indicate a copyright and prohibition to print or use. The pages printed from such websites must provide clarity that permission is granted to print out and use the work.