

IOWA HIGH SCHOOL SPEECH ASSOCIATION



JUDGES MANUAL

REVISED AUGUST 2025

PREFACE

This handbook has been developed to give judges a general overview of the total judging procedure to be followed at IHSSA events. This booklet is not intended to replace the Constitution and By-Laws, which deal with much greater specifics and detail. The purpose of this publication is to emphasize the overwhelming importance and responsibility that judges have in evaluating and critiquing the performance of our high school youth. The preparation time that students and staff have devoted to these performances deserves your very best efforts.

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It is the policy of the Iowa High School Speech Association not to discriminate on the basis of race, national origin, religion, creed, sex, marital status, identity, age, or disability in its educational programs, activities, or employment practices.

2025

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IHSSA

STATEMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

The Iowa Interscholastic Speech Association was organized in November, 1943. It was an outgrowth of a desire on the part of many school people to enlarge and expand the very splendid work the Iowa High School Declamatory Association had done since 1887. This organization is so designed that, as time goes on and the need is felt for other types of speech activities, they may be added. While the visible work of the Association is carried on through a series of contests, the fundamental philosophy of the Association has a much deeper basis. The philosophy is built upon the belief that no form of activity is more important than that of learning to speak effectively. All true Americans believe in an educational enlightenment, but the effectiveness of such enlightenment may be lost through the inability of our people to express to others their ideals and beliefs. The perpetuation of the American way of life rests to no small extent in the hands of the American school. If it can teach the ideals of true democracy and if it can teach its students to express and defend that democracy, we need have no fear for the future of our country.

JUDGES PHILOSOPHY

The philosophy of the Iowa High School Speech Association always embraces the encouragement of young people toward speech participation and subsequent refined human communication. Since assigned judges are the intended testing guide, students' future activities are determined by the decision of judges. Contestants should not be served by judges on a professional or highly restrictive basis, but rather with an open mindedness that recognizes the high school range of ability and training. The judge is to be (1) knowledgeable in a current perspective for the assigned category; (2) receptive with a constructive and promotional attitude; (3) prepared to present the student with a tactful justification for any rating given; (4) willing to recognize that unfamiliar material may qualify as acceptable subject matter; and (5) informed of current trends in literary writing.

JUDGES CERTIFICATION PROCESS

Number and Naming of Judges. There will be a single judge for each event center in all district contests.* There will be three judges used for each event center in all contests at the state level. The judges used for these contests will be selected from an approved list of judges provided by the state office and contest manager.

Qualifications. A judge will have speech knowledge and will have secured certification by attendance at one of the Association-sponsored judge certification meetings and will have passed an initial test as designed by the state office. As of 1991, certification will be good for a three-year period as long as the judge pays the annual renewal fee.

1. To maintain certification a judge is required to attend a further training session to begin at a designated time the morning of the contest.
2. Each judge will fill out a card containing information pertinent to his/her judging assignment. This card will be forwarded to the state office for maintaining a current list of active judges.
3. No coach will judge his/her own students in any one contest. Substitute judges must judge the entire section.

RATING SYSTEM

1. **Rating the Contestants.** Each judge will indicate a rating for each contestant on the official ballot and critique sheet at each district and state contest. The ratings are as follows:

Division 1 - Excellent

Division 2 - Good

Division 3 - Fair

Division 4 - Disqualification because of constitutional violation

CO- Comments only, must have permission from the State Office

2. **District Contests.** In the district contest the single critic judge will offer brief oral comments to the speaker(s) following each presentation.*

*The exception to this would be in the area of One-Act Play where a three judge panel will only give written comments.

The judge will also provide appropriate written comments on the comment sheet. It is critical that these comments, both written and oral, justify the rating given.

3. **State Contests.** Three judges will be used for the state competition. Each judge will provide appropriate written comments for each presentation. At the conclusion of his/her contest day, each judge will be responsible for returning his/her "outstanding" nomination ballot; these nominations must be ranked at large group state contest.

4. **Violations.** The judge at district or the chairperson judge at a state contest will report violations of the constitution to the contest manager who, in turn, must ask the district officers or designated representative for a ruling. These violations are to be reported immediately. Other than a constitutional violation, judges will not be permitted to confer with each other or any unauthorized person.

JUDGING ETHICS

The professional ethics connected with judging warrants the common sense approach; for example, if students are expected to dress appropriately for contest appearances, we should expect judges to set an example by being appropriately dressed.

A judge should always be attentive and interested in all students as they compete for ratings. This means he/she should display a friendly smile and show he/she is a caring person. A judge should exhibit a desire to assist the student in becoming a better person through the speech experience.

A judge must show patience while in a contest situation. There is no reason for a judge to show apparent disgust toward a student appearing late or out of order since generally it is not the student's preference, but rather a necessity, that precipitated the change.

The general rule of ethics is to make all students feel as comfortable as possible when they are competing. The judges who attain that goal are the ones most respected by the students and their speech coaches.

A judge may not judge an immediate family member, close relative, or any student with which they have a close personal relationship. If substitute judges are used they will judge an entire section.

ASSIGNMENT OF JUDGES

The primary purpose of highly qualified judges at speech contest is to provide the best possible evaluation of student performances. Inexperienced judges also need an opportunity to gain experience and training, so an established format is being used to provide experienced critiques, yet provide the novice judge an opportunity to learn.

All judges will be classified as either Novice, Intermediate, or Experienced with a respective numerical equivalent of 1, 2, or 3. A judge will be considered a novice during their first active contest season following certification. A judge retains the intermediate status during their second, third, and fourth active contest seasons. Following satisfactory completion of the fourth active season, a judge will be considered experienced. A first time certified coach will be considered a novice during his/her first judging season. After that year, they will be promoted to the experienced status.

At state contests where three judges are assigned to each performance center, the minimum numerical total for all three judges must add up to a total of four. Possible combinations eligible to judge in each center are as follows:

- | | | | | | |
|----|-----------|-----|----|-----------|-----|
| a. | 3 - 3 - 3 | (9) | d. | 3 - 2 - 1 | (6) |
| b. | 3 - 3 - 2 | (8) | e. | 3 - 1 - 1 | (5) |
| c. | 3 - 3 - 1 | (7) | f. | 2 - 1 - 1 | (4) |

No emergency exceptions will be permitted to allow less experience in a center. On-site certification will not be permitted. If there is an inadequate number of certified judges, the contest day will need to be extended rather than allowing uncertified personnel to judge. Any exceptions to the above must receive prior approval from an Executive Committee Member.

At district contests only judges that are intermediate or experienced judges may be used. We encourage judges not to judge the same event at State as they did at District.

The judges' assignment policy is established to maintain consistency within contests throughout the state and to provide each student a fair, complete, and unbiased critique of their presentation.

SPECIFIC SPEECH CATEGORIES

As mentioned at the beginning of this document, this manual is not intended to replace the Constitution. It is the purpose of the following guidelines simply to aid judges in focusing on elements that are of prime importance to each specific category.

Note: It is essential that judges review the Constitution for rules before judging any category.

In addition to the criteria in this manual, each individual judge will certainly want to comment on the uniqueness of each individual performance.

INDIVIDUAL EVENTS

PUBLIC ADDRESS

DEFINITION

Public Address is a presentation of another author's material.

RATIONALE

Public Address encourages effective public speaking techniques.

JUDGING GUIDELINES

Successful Public Address should reflect suitable and appropriate choice of material with evidence of complete analysis.

The material should be of such quality that it has and will continue to pass the test of time.

The presentation should display projection of thought and emotion, using appropriate bodily activity and proper vocal techniques. Limited notes may be used.

ACTING

DEFINITION

Acting is a memorized presentation of a scene(s) with primarily a serious tone, humorous tone, or any combination of the two.

RATIONALE

Acting encourages students to analyze and develop believable characterization(s).

JUDGING GUIDELINES

Successful Acting is presented so that character(s) is portrayed through appropriate physical and verbal choices.

Some students will choose to portray one character; others, two or more. The significant factor is not how many characters a student portrays but how well he/she develops the character(s) he/she has chosen to portray.

Note: This is an acting area, not a speaking area.

INTERPRETIVE READING - POETRY

DEFINITION

Poetry is the oral interpretation of a selection(s) of poetic material chosen by the contestant.

RATIONALE

Interpretation of Poetry encourages comprehension, appreciation, and analysis of poetry, demonstrating the ability to evoke an audience reaction primarily through vocal interpretation.

JUDGING GUIDELINES

Successful Poetry Interpretation involves the choice of material suitable for the student, along with his/her development of interpretive techniques which reflect the tone, intent, and style/form of the selection.

The presentation should display effective vocal techniques along with facial expression(s) and bodily reactions to the text.

INTERPRETIVE READING - PROSE

DEFINITION

Prose is the oral interpretation of a selection(s) of prose material chosen by the contestant.

RATIONALE

Interpretation of Prose encourages comprehension, appreciation, and analysis of prose, demonstrating the ability to evoke an audience reaction primarily through vocal interpretation.

JUDGING GUIDELINES

Successful Prose Interpretation involves the choice of material suitable for the student, along with his/her development of interpretive techniques which reflect the tone and intent of the selection.

The presentation should display effective vocal techniques along with facial expression(s) and bodily reactions to the text.

LITERARY PROGRAM

DEFINITION

Literary Program must consist of a poem(s) and prose which develop a common theme (message).

RATIONALE

Literary Program encourages comprehension, appreciation, and analysis of poetry and prose, demonstrating the ability to evoke an audience reaction through interpretation. This category also encourages thematic development through choice of material and transitions.

JUDGING GUIDELINES

Successful Literary Program Interpretation involves the choice of material suitable for the student, along with his/her development of interpretive techniques which reflect the tone, intent, and style/form of the selections.

The presentation should display effective vocal techniques along with facial expression(s) and bodily reactions to the text.

Note: Literary Program should produce a sense of balance between prose and poetry, along with an apparent and credible theme.

ORIGINAL ORATORY

DEFINITION

Original Oratory is written by the speaker. The speech must be inspirational or persuasive, as opposed to solely informative.

RATIONALE

Original Oratory encourages research and logical thinking in the development of a persuasive or inspirational speech. Original Oratory also encourages effective public speaking techniques.

JUDGING GUIDELINES

Content and delivery are to be considered as equally important.

The subject chosen should be one that has contemporary value for in-depth consideration.

If the speech is persuasive, it should be analyzed thoroughly, presenting a problem and reaching possible solutions.

Appropriate bodily activity that enhances the presentation is encouraged; vocal delivery should combine informative and persuasive qualities.

SPONTANEOUS SPEAKING

DEFINITION

Spontaneous Speaking involves a position speech prepared in a limited period of time at the contest site.

RATIONALE

Spontaneous Speaking encourages the skills of analysis, organization, and effective delivery of information on a given topic.

JUDGING GUIDELINES

Spontaneous Speaking requires a student to demonstrate knowledge in the selected topic area by taking a position. The use of relevant remarks should reflect this analysis and position.

The student should develop his/her material in a structured manner and use an effective style of delivery.

RADIO NEWS ANNOUNCING

DEFINITION

Radio News is the art of presenting a four to five minute news program after selecting and organizing news copy within a limited preparation time.

RATIONALE

Radio News encourages selecting, editing, and delivering news material.

JUDGING GUIDELINES

The newscast should reflect the student's ability to select newsworthy items from the copy provided.

Structure of the news presentation should reflect thoughtful planning which incorporates a smooth flow from one item to another.

The newscaster's speech should show vocal variety utilizing a conversational style marked by clear articulation and correct pronunciation.

EXPOSITORY ADDRESS

DEFINITION

Expository Address is an original informative speech that may be enhanced by the use of audio and/or visual aids.

RATIONALE

Expository Address encourages the student to develop skills in organization, language choice, and delivery techniques in an informative speech.

JUDGING GUIDELINES

An expository address must be informative, but may include qualities of persuasion and entertainment.

Audio visual aids may be used to enhance the speech. Costuming is allowed. However, the content of an expository speech should be able to stand alone without audio and/or visual aids.

STORYTELLING

DEFINITION

Storytelling is the art of sharing an original or published narrative with a listener.

RATIONALE

Storytelling encourages the student to effectively share the story with an audience.

JUDGING GUIDELINES

The storyline should be the main focus of the presentation. At the completion of a successful storytelling, the audience should remember the story more than the performance.

The storyteller must retell the story, radiating an energy that reflects an enjoyment of the sharing of his/her story.

A competent storyteller should use appropriate facial expressions and bodily tension, always being aware that this is an interpretation area rather than an acting one.

IMPROVISATION

DEFINITION

Improvisation is the art of creating and presenting a story using a situation and two separate characters.

RATIONALE

Improvisation encourages students to create interesting believable characters and to deliver a story in a creative manner.

JUDGING GUIDELINES

Using spontaneous bodily activity, the improvisation actor must effectively incorporate the situation and the two characters into a definite storyline.

Evidence of the student's creativity is essential in this category.

REVIEWING

DEFINITION

Reviewing is an informative speech in which the presenter shares his/her viewpoint of a chosen piece of literature, movie, drama work, concert, movie made for television, music selection and/or any other form of media.

RATIONALE

Reviewing encourages analysis of a text, logical organization of ideas, and a conversational style of delivery.

JUDGING GUIDELINES

The quality of communication is vital, but emphasis is placed on what the speaker says.

Evaluation is based on the insights into plot, characterization, style, theme, directional style, editing, acting, historical importance, comparison with other genre and/or thought.

Constructive criticism should be given in regard to development and support for opinion.

AFTER DINNER SPEAKING

DEFINITION

An After Dinner Speech is an original speech directed toward a specified listening group.

RATIONALE

After Dinner Speaking encourages the student to create an effective, entertaining speech with a theme.

JUDGING GUIDELINES

The speech may be informative, impressive, inspiring, or entertaining.

The speaker must adhere to a theme within a simulated audience situation. Notes or a manuscript may be used.

SOLO MUSICAL THEATRE

DEFINITION

Solo Musical Theatre is a theatrical performance where the individual utilizes music in the form of song and acting.

RATIONALE

Solo Musical Theatre encourages the performer to effectively develop performance skills through the use of music and acting.

JUDGING GUIDELINES

Judging will be based on effective acting and singing. The judge will consider the performer's ability to convey the selected song for musical presentation.

LARGE GROUP EVENTS

ONE-ACT PLAYS

DEFINITION

One-Act Play is a theatrical performance of a play (or play cutting).

RATIONALE

One-Act Play encourages students to develop performance skills through ensemble playing.

JUDGING GUIDELINES

The performer(s) develop(s) a character(s) through the use of controlled sustained emotion with both vocal delivery and bodily actions.

An effective One- Act depends on blending effective staging with effective acting.

This category offers a wide variety of theatre options; effective utilization of the chosen style is a judging consideration.

READERS THEATRE

DEFINITION

Readers Theatre focuses on the use of interpretative skills to present prose, poetry, and/or drama.

RATIONALE

Readers Theatre encourages the students to create a scripted ensemble performance which showcases their interpretive skills without the aid of costumes, make-up, set or props.

JUDGING GUIDELINES

Successful Readers Theatre performances should be based primarily on vocal interpretation and character development and may include a narrator(s).

The use of facial expression and bodily tension are essential. Movement and blocking may also be used.

Focus may be on-stage, off-stage, or a combination of both.

The audience should better understand the literature for having seen the performance.

Note: The major difference between Readers Theatre and Choral Reading is that Readers Theatre emphasizes character development and Choral Reading emphasizes ensemble blend.

ENSEMBLE ACTING

DEFINITION

Ensemble Acting is a theatrical performance by two to six persons.

RATIONALE

Ensemble Acting encourages the actors to analyze and develop characters and to interact with other actors.

JUDGING GUIDELINES

The performance will exhibit good characterization, blocking, and ensemble playing.

The group should convey the intent of the chosen selection.

CHORAL READING

DEFINITION

Choral Reading involves group interpretation of a text using a variety of solo and ensemble speaking.

RATIONALE

Choral Reading encourages a student to become a significant part of an ensemble performance.

This category develops listening, speaking, and performance skills. It also teaches a sense of ensemble blend.

JUDGING GUIDELINES

Choral Reading emphasizes a blend of voices conveying the message of the selection(s).

Successful Choral Reading should primarily demonstrate effective oral interpretation. Appropriate use of space and props may also be a judging consideration.

Note: The major difference between Choral Reading and Readers Theatre is that Choral Reading emphasizes ensemble blend and Readers Theatre emphasizes character development.

GROUP MIME

DEFINITION

Group pantomime is an ensemble of students creating a story or expressing a message without the use of words.

RATIONALE

Group Mime encourages creativity, concentration, facial expression, and controlled bodily activity by all those involved.

JUDGING GUIDELINES

Successful Group Mime performances convey an intended message/story through group interaction and reaction, precise movement and timing, and effective facial and bodily expression.

A major consideration of this category should be creativity or originality.

The mime should be blocked to direct the attention of the audience to the important action of the moment.

SOLO MIME

DEFINITION

Pantomime is the art of creating a story or expressing a message without the use of words.

RATIONALE

Solo Mime encourages concentration, creativity, facial expression, and controlled bodily activity.

JUDGING GUIDELINES

Successful Solo Mime performances should convey an intended message/story by demonstrating precise movement and timing and effective facial and bodily expression.

A major consideration of this category should be creativity or originality.

The mime should be blocked to direct the attention of the audience to the important action of the moment.

TELEVISION NEWSCASTING

DEFINITION

Television Newscasting is a recorded presentation/broadcast based on actual news.

RATIONALE

Television Newscasting encourages individuals to work on and combine all elements into a program. Students develop a sense of continuity and a greater understanding of the television medium.

JUDGING GUIDELINES

In Television Newscasting, effective transitions (from one team member to another) and an organized effective format for the presentation are essential.

The news teams are to be judged on content and delivery. Content is to be judged on the selection, revising, and arrangement of material for effective communication. Delivery is to be judged on both oral and

physical presentational skills, including voice quality, vocal rate, emphasis, pronunciation, vitality of presentation, facial expression, camera presence, poise and unity of performance and production.

GROUP IMPROVISATION

DEFINITION

Group Improvisation is creating and presenting a story motivated by drawn criteria within a limited preparation time.

RATIONALE

Group Improvisation encourages a team of students to cooperatively work as an ensemble to create, develop, and spontaneously act out an interesting and logical story.

JUDGING GUIDELINES

The Group Improvisation team should creatively tie together characters, plot, and action, utilizing logic, concentration, imagination, characterization, effective team work, commitment, fluency, and timing as defined in the case book questions.

Ensemble playing and spontaneity are essential for a successful Group Improvisation.

MUSICAL THEATRE

DEFINITION

Musical Theatre is a theatrical performance where individuals utilize music in the form of song and/or dance.

RATIONALE

Musical Theatre encourages the performers to effectively develop performance skills through the use of music and acting.

JUDGING GUIDELINES

Judging will be based on effective acting and singing, and/or dancing techniques and on the ability of the group to convey material written for or adapted for presentation as a musical or musical cutting.

RADIO BROADCASTING

DEFINITION

Radio Broadcasting is an audio recorded news program.

RATIONALE

Radio Broadcasting encourages individuals to work on specific tasks and then combine all elements into a program. Students develop a sense of continuity and a greater understanding of the radio medium.

JUDGING GUIDELINES

In Radio Broadcasting, effective organization of the news copy and interaction between the news team are essential.

The news team will be judged on voice quality, style, flow of content, clarity, organization and unity of the news team performance.

SHORT FILM

DEFINITION

Short Film is a presentation of a recorded visual performance.

RATIONALE

Short film encourages student to develop technical and performing skills using the medium of film.

JUDGING GUIDELINES

Judging will be based on effective storyline, technical aspects, acting, and overall presentation.

VIDEOCASTING: EXPERIMENTAL IE 2026

DEFINITION

Videocasting is a presentation of a recorded visual performance emphasizing clear discovery of material.

RATIONALE

Videocasting encourages the student to develop technical and performing skills using the medium of film.

JUDGING GUIDELINES

Judging will be based on engaging delivery, content and organization, technical aspects, and overall presentation.

THE CHALLENGE TO EXCEL



BEFORE CONTEST

1. Attend a certification meeting at least once every three years.
2. Pay the annual \$10 fee and give correct address to State Office.
3. Review the constitution on a yearly basis. Highlight all of the latest changes, and bring your constitution with you to the contest.
4. Attend the Annual Summer Judges Workshop in August.

MORNING OF CONTEST

1. Review the constitution and the judges manual in the areas that you will be judging.
2. Dress as a professional. You are representing a state organization.
3. Come to contest prepared. Bring extra pencils and pens along with your constitution and rules for the areas.
4. Arrive early the day of contest.
5. Attend the pre-contest judges' meeting and complete the pretest of the areas you will be judging.
6. Find your room so you will have time to check the room out before the day begins.
7. Introduce yourself to the Timer and Roomchair. Explain procedures so that your contest center will run professionally.
8. Explain the timing procedures to the Timer for each category and have them sit in the front row. Make sure time cards are visible at all times.
9. Prepare the room environment for the events to be held in that room.
10. Be aware of the room environment when changes occur.

DURING THE CONTEST

1. Be consistent, fair, and friendly with all students and coaches.
2. Keep a positive attitude.
3. Justify rating given.
4. Be cautious of what you say between presentations, at lunch, and after the contest. Avoid comments like, "Finally the last one" or "I haven't seen any wonderful performances yet today/or this season".
5. Act as you would want to be treated if you were the performer.
6. Keep personal preference of material from influencing ratings that you give.
7. Be professional with your paperwork.
8. Offer verbal critique with care and insight. We expect you as a judge to offer critical feedback to the students. YOU should be the individual talking during or comments.

REMEMBER:

Our STUDENTS DESERVE your BEST CARE and WORK on behalf of the IHSSA!

SPEECH JUDGES'

BILL OF RIGHTS and RESPONSIBILITIES

As a speech judge, I have the RIGHT to expect:

1. Timely and informative communications from the Contest Manager
2. Acceptable accommodations (temperature control, desk, chair, etc.) and equipment for the assigned category
3. A manageable number of entries to be judged
4. Support from the Contest Manager and the IHSSA if confronted by hostile adults and/or students
5. Reasonable remuneration for a job done to the best of my ability
6. That students will know the rules of their category and be prepared for their performance
7. That students will be dressed appropriately
8. That students will be respectful and responsible (polite, pleasant, punctual, etc.)
9. Appropriate, non-offensive material to be judged
10. A "break/lunch room" free from contestants and/or non-judging coaches

As a speech judge, I have the RESPONSIBILITY to:

1. Adhere to the IHSSA rules and philosophy
2. Fulfill my commitment to judge (except for an EXTREME emergency) and be respectful of and responsibly supervise use of the host school's equipment and facilities
3. Be punctual for the Judges' Meeting and each session of my judging assignment
4. Set an example for students in terms of wearing appropriate apparel, demonstrating positive behavior, and using appropriate language
5. Treat students in a friendly, respectful, kind manner
6. Know and enforce the rules of the category being judged
7. Be alert and attentive throughout each performance and respond in an appropriate manner emotionally
8. Be free from prejudice and preconceived notions in regards to students, material being used, style of delivery, etc.
9. Praise the students' strengths, tactfully point out areas needing improvement, and give all students the ratings they have earned
10. Encourage all participants to continue speech works as a means of developing lifelong public speaking skills.

Submitted by Hall of Fame Coach and Judge Jerry Laffey

2009 Judges/Coaches Summer Workshop

Endorsed by the IHSSA and Judge Certification Committee/Fall 2009