

Useful Tips

Memorizing

Your speech should be memorized. That said, the judge will not have a copy of your transcript. If you make a mistake, skip a sentence (or even an entire paragraph), do not stop. Keep going. You will most likely be the only person who is aware of the error. A helpful strategy for memorizing your speech is to record it and listen to it frequently (like a favorite song). Listen to it on the bus, while taking a shower, getting ready for bed, etc. Talk along with it. Don't forget to re-record it as your inflection and speaking style improves.

Eye Contact

Eye contact is perhaps the orator's most useful tool. When speaking in a small group (at most tournaments there will be less than 10 people in your room), make eye contact with each person individually. Deliver parts of your speech to each person. Engage them. If your speech has a phrase like "I know you won't believe this but..." then deliver that to a single person. Vary the people you speak to. While you should make eye contact with the judge when appropriate, keep in mind that the judges will be writing comments and scoring you. They won't be looking at you the entire time. The other people in the room will be. Engage them.

Movement/Gestures

Gestures are almost as important as your words. Hands should stay by your sides UNLESS you are using them to illustrate a point. Putting a hand on the hip to illustrate annoyance or holding a hand up to say "Me too" are both fine. Talking with your hands or gesturing for every sentence (or like my Italian grandmother, for every word), is NOT OK. If the gesture does not add anything to the point, then don't use it.

Walking/Posture

Posture is very important. Shoulders back, stand up straight. People who have good posture are seen as more confident and more knowledgeable. Walk between points. This will tell your audience that you are transitioning from one idea to the next. It doesn't need to be any more than four or five steps, but it should be natural. DO NOT pace. Walk deliberately to signal a change of ideas. Any other walking is just distracting and should not be done.

Speed

Normal speech is delivered at between 130-150 words per minute. If you're going faster than that, you're going too fast. You should endeavor to speak slowly. The exception to this is modulating your speed to capture your audience's interest. Just as speaking in a monotone will lose your audience, so will speaking at a single speed. Vary your speed between key points to make something stand out. Slow down to drive a point home or let a joke sink in.

Volume

While it is important to speak clearly and audibly, varying your volume will naturally help to grab attention. Using a stage whisper to confide a secret or raising your voice to show annoyance or anger will go a long way towards keeping interest.