

Forensics Information Packet

Do not lose this packet. It contains important information that you will need throughout the year.

Like any other team, the SBA forensics team requires a great deal of commitment from the team members and the team members' parents. This packet explains the format and requirements of SBA's forensics program.

A forensics overview...

SBA's forensics program strives to provide students with opportunities to improve self-esteem and communication skills through public speaking and dramatic expression.

SBA participates in the Nashville Catholic Middle Schools Forensic League, which determines the categories, rules, and tournament arrangements for each school year.

The SBA forensics team is composed of 5th-8th level students who choose which category they'd like to participate in, and select their pieces according to the rules of their category. After preparing (which includes writing and memorizing an introduction for their pieces) and practicing their pieces—to their satisfaction and that of the coaches—students are eligible to attend the tournaments that are held at various Catholic middle schools throughout the year.

Forensics practice sessions...

We will meet every Monday – unless it's a holiday. If I feel we need to meet another day because of a holiday, I will send an email.

- Snacks may be eaten in the library before the practice session, BUT ALL MESSES MUST BE CLEANED UP.
- **Students must bring their pieces to every practice session.** If the practice is the Wednesday immediately following a tournament, students should bring the critique sheets they received at the tournament.
- During practices the students will be selecting, editing, rehearsing, and critiquing their forensics pieces. Students will be expected to perform their pieces both in small

group settings and for the entire team. Coaches and team members will strive to provide positive feedback and helpful comments on each student's performance.

- To succeed at tournaments, a student must have practiced, practiced, practiced. Wednesday sessions are meant to help refine performances but by no means should they be the only time a student practices. I recommend you record a performance of your piece on video and watch yourself! You will see better than anyone what you want to improve.

Appropriate student behavior is expected at forensics practices. Students misbehaving will be sent to Aftercare.

The format of the practice sessions will be as follows:

Students must check in at 3:15 with Ms. Bruer in the library. Practices will begin at 3:15, and will have one of the following formats:

Either the whole team will meet first in the library for general announcements and the whole team will remain in the library for practice, or the whole team will begin in the library and then break into small groups with each group meeting in a different teacher's room.

- **Parents, please pick up students from the parking lot drive at 4:30 p.m. Pull down to the Kindergarten door (same as lower school morning drop-off) and we will watch for you out the library windows. If students aren't picked up by 4:30, they will be sent to the SBA Aftercare Program.** Please contact the Aftercare directors, Jordan Harkey (jharkey@stbernard.org) for details concerning your possible needs.

Forensics tournaments...

- Will be held on Saturdays at various Catholic middle schools throughout the year. Registration is usually 8:00-8:30 a.m., and will be half-day tournaments. The tournaments will end after the tabulations for the first two rounds are completed. First Round is 9:-10:00 (ish) and Second Round is 10:30-11:30 (ish). Following the 2nd round, judges are provided lunch in the lounge and kids may purchase lunch from the host school (and usually involves pizza). Awards are after lunch and can be anywhere from 1:00 to 3:00 (worst case). Students do NOT have to stay for awards and may leave as soon as they have finished their second round.
- Do NOT plan on attending a tournament unless you can stay for both rounds.
- New team members will perform one piece in one category for the duration of the year. Advanced forensics students may prepare a second piece in a different category (called "doubling").
- Students participating in certain categories (prose, poetry, duo interpretation) will need a small, 5.5x8.5 **black** binder to hold their pieces (like [this](#)). These binders can be purchased at most local office supply stores or Amazon.
- Each tournament will require a separate signed permission slip. **A one-time fee of \$70.00 is required to join Forensics. This will cover the \$10.00 entry fee for each tournament and help support our own tournament. Anyone doubling will have to pay extra.**
- Parents must provide on-time transportation to and from the tournaments.

- Forensics students are expected to be on their best “representing SBA” behavior at all times during tournaments.
- Student attire at tournaments – Girls should wear a skirt and a top or a dress or nice pants. They should dress conservatively (no super high heels, really short skirts, etc.). Boys should wear nice pants, nice, clean shoes, and a shirt and tie. Sport coats are optional. All-black outfits are permitted for Pantomime entries.
- Half-day tournaments have two rounds of competitions, no final round, and the winners are announced after lunch (which will be for sale at the host school).

Tournament eligibility – student spaces

- There are usually two factors that limit students’ ability to attend tournaments: the number of student spaces available in categories, and the number of adults available to judge for SBA.

Tournament eligibility – judges

- Our league schools hosting tournaments require one judge for every three student entries. (A duo counts as one entry.) Volunteer judges are vital to the success of the Forensics team. If one parent or other adult (over 17) associated with each student volunteers for one tournament, we should have enough for the year.

Judging is really pretty easy, especially since you’re already a forensics parent. You’re used to listening to your child’s piece, and offering praise and suggestions. Judging at a meet is basically the same thing—you’re just evaluating more kids (although never ones from SBA), and writing down your comments, based on the rules for the category you’re judging.

Please don’t be intimidated by judging—we really need you! Most of the judges at tournaments are parents. Also, if you know that your schedule won’t permit you to judge at tournaments, remember that the “sponsor” can be an older sibling (if at least 17 years old), a grandparent, aunt or uncle, etc.

Thank you so much for your cooperation and support of SBA’s forensics team. We’re looking forward to another great year!

Jennifer Bruer – jbruer@stbernard.org
Annalee McConnell amcconnell@stbernard.org

Parent forensics permission slip

Please sign the following statement of consent and release of liability.

I consent to allow my child, _____, to participate on SBA's forensics team for the 2024-25 school year.

I understand that I or another adult will be required to judge at least two tournaments throughout the season.

Parent/guardian signature: _____

Student forensics permission slip

Forensics isn't just a fun after school activity. Being a member of the forensics team requires work and commitment, including practicing pieces outside of forensics meetings. Also, students wishing to participate in forensics must maintain an S (Satisfactory) or 70 average in all academic subjects.

As a forensics team member, I promise that I will:

- attend every forensics practice session (if an emergency occurs, I will notify one of the coaches that I will not be attending practice)
- select pieces promptly
- practice, practice, practice my piece
- memorize or partly memorize my piece, depending on my category
- attend each tournament that I have agreed to attend (if an emergency occurs, I will notify one of the coaches that I will not be attending the tournament.)
- be committed
- be serious
- be dependable
- behave appropriately at both practices and tournaments

I understand that if I fail to accomplish any of these objectives, the coaches have the right to ask me to leave the forensics team.

My homeroom teacher's name: _____

The category I think I'd like to be in is: _____

If it's a duo category, my partner's name is _____

My signature of commitment: _____

Please return this entire page.

Thanks!

Tips on picking forensics pieces

Children's books, plays, and magazines are great places to find forensics pieces. Remember, your piece does have to come from a published work, so using the internet or television skits doesn't work.

You should definitely choose a piece that you really like – you will be using the piece all year. Also, you usually perform a piece that you like much better than you do one that you don't like. And yes, if you choose a piece at the beginning of the year that doesn't work for you, you can select another piece. We don't want you unhappy with your piece. It's just easier for you if the first piece you select is the one you stay with throughout the year. You (and your competitors) really will be **perfecting** your piece all year long.

So (if you're in the market for a prose, storytelling, acting, interpretation-type piece – really any category except poetry), think about your favorite childhood stories. Glance through some interesting looking titles on a bookshelf. You'll want a story with lots of action, strong characters, and good dialogue. This isn't the time for beautiful, descriptive passages.

Remember that you can and should cut and paste (edit) your piece. Once you find a book that you like, time yourself reading it aloud (unless it's Harry Potter!). Likely, you've gone over the time limit for your category, and you've found yourself reading some descriptive parts. Now is the time to begin editing. Copy your piece or type it into a computer, and begin cutting out the descriptive/extra parts. Keep the best dialogue, plot-moving parts. Those should be the meat of the story, and will definitely sound the best in a forensics performance. Think of how screenwriters have to change books to make them work as movies. Yes, the books are almost always better than the movies, but the descriptive parts don't work on the big screen. You are a screenwriter as you design your forensics piece! It's really pretty cool!

After you've designed your piece, and you're getting close to your time limit, remember to write an introduction for your piece. Now you'll need to time yourself saying your piece with your introduction - **very slowly** (a lot of forensics students tend to rush - BIG mistake), and to allow time for your **gestures, pauses, and facial expressions** (*very* important). You may need to go back to the drawing board (or computer) and cut your piece a little more to allow yourself some extra time for these crucial parts. Know that many judges use stopwatches to time you, so that staying under your time limit is really important. It's better to cut an extra sentence or two from your piece than to rush or to leave out your round-winning gesture or eyebrow raise.

If you choose poetry, you still need to read the above suggestions about editing, introductions, speaking slowly, and using gestures. You just get to keep the beautiful, descriptive passages in your pieces. Remember that you can choose either one long poem (like eight minutes long) or several short poems. If you go the short poem route (which is absolutely fine and great – lots of people do that), you'll need your poems to revolve around a theme. For example (except please don't use this one, because it's so cute that it's been overdone), many students have chosen several funny Shel Silverstein poems about being in school. Going with several poems and a theme is a great idea - Just make sure you choose a theme and a mood (funny, pensive, etc.) that suits you.

I hope you all have fun choosing your pieces and working with them. I hope your pieces feel special to you. I look forward to hearing the pieces you choose because they help me learn more about you and what special people you are. I am excited to be the new coach this year and hope to learn as much as you do.



Ms. Bruer

More tips!

Remember, to be really good at forensics, you have to practice your piece constantly, not just at forensics meetings. Here are some tips for preparing your piece for competition:

1. Select an appropriate piece that meets the rules for your category.
2. Type/print your piece, so you can add performance notes (gestures, expressions), highlight sentences, etc.
3. Write and memorize (regardless of your category) a brief introduction for your piece.
4. You need to memorize or partly memorize your piece, based on your category. You'll achieve this, and proficiency with your piece, by reciting it over and over again, to yourself, and to practically everyone you know (It's a really good sign when your parents and your coaches have your piece memorized!).
5. **Use lots of vocal and facial expressions. Use hand gestures and either above the waist movements or full body movements (moving around the "stage" etc.), based on your category. Speak very slowly and very loudly, so that everyone in the audience can hear you. Imagine you're telling a very entertaining story to the audience – the more entertaining you are, the better! Perform your piece in front of a mirror. This might feel strange at first, but it's the best way to perfect your piece. And anyway, the goofier and more entertaining you are, the better. If you let yourself feel so embarrassed at a tournament that you speak quietly, rush, or don't go "all out" with your gestures, expressions, and enthusiasm, you won't win! Very sad, but true.**

The categories that require memorization and full body movements are storytelling, duet acting, and dramatic and humorous interpretation. For prose, poetry, and duo interpretation, you're not required to memorize your piece, but you need to know it very well. In these categories, you may only move from the waist up, which includes hand gestures. You'll also need to have your piece in a small black binder to refer to occasionally during your performance.

Finally:

Overcoming nervousness at forensics tournaments...

- Practice your piece a lot so that you know it really well and feel really comfortable with it.
- Wear clothes that you feel comfortable and confident in.
- Do some slow stretches.
- Talk to people (although not after the judge has entered the room you're competing in). Chat with your team members, and try to make some new friends from other schools.
- Check out your surroundings. Glance around the room you're in, look at your fellow competitors and the judge when he/she enters. This will help put you a little more at ease when it's your turn to stand at the front of the room to deliver your piece.
- Remember that the other competitors are just as nervous as you are, if not more so. Often, even the judges are a little nervous!
- Breathe slowly and deeply.
- Don't play mind games with yourself.
 - Don't think that the judge has already made up his/her mind.
 - Don't be intimidated by the audience. Sometimes other competitors' parents will be in the room. Don't let their presence rattle you. Of course, your parents are welcome to come, too!
 - Don't require yourself to be perfect. If you make a mistake (and you likely will), you'll probably be the only one who knows it. **Just keep going with your piece!** Since making mistakes is so common, many judges score you on how well you handle them.
- Envision what you'll do when the tournament is over. Treat yourself to something fun!