

Introduction to Impromptu

Event Rules and Basics

In an impromptu round, you'll receive a prompt (usually a quotation) on a notecard/slip of paper. Once you flip it over to see the words, your judge will start the timer. You will then have 7 minutes to both prepare and give a speech on that prompt. Your job is to convince the judge that you have accurately and adequately analyzed the prompt. Because impromptu is a limited preparation event, time signals are typically given by judges to keep you on track. You should always ask how time signals will be given - never assume standardization or that you will receive them. Generally, time signals will look something like this: verbal time signals in 30 second increments during prep, visual five minutes left, four, three, two, one, thirty seconds left, fifteen seconds, and the last five until stop.

Preparation

Time management is the most important part of prep. Typically, you don't want to spend more than one minute and thirty seconds preparing; the more time you spend prepping, the less time you have speaking. But if you're just getting into impromptu, don't be scared! Take a little more time. But eventually you want to aim for around 1:30. Staying on-task in prep is key, and using a notecard helps tremendously. A little three-by-five card keeps your thoughts organized and centralized. On it, you can write how you interpret the prompt, your supporting examples, or whatever else you might need during the performance. To keep that prep time low, consider using shorthand so you don't have to write excessively. But how do you know what to write?

Examples

Impromptu speakers use real-life examples to back up their arguments. An example is any story with a message or a theme. You're probably thinking "y'all, that's a super broad definition"; that's kind of the point! There is an infinite number of examples you can pick. That said, some examples are better than others. Without a clear moral/theme/message, it's difficult to extend a story to make it an example. Your examples should also interest *you*. My interests are not your interests, and your interests are not your competitors' interests. Find examples that fascinate you! A bored speaker makes for a boring speech.

Types of Quotations/Interpretations

The most common prompt is a quotation, and they are typically one of two types: prescriptive and descriptive. Prescriptive quotations are calls to action; they *prescribe* a solution to the reader. For instance:

You don't always have to be doing something. You can just be, and that's plenty. -Alice Walker.

Here, Walker is clearly telling us to relax, calling upon us to do something... or in this case, nothing.

Descriptive quotations make statements; they *describe* the world, like this one"

In all things of nature there is something of the marvelous.

-Aristotle

Aristotle isn't telling us to take action or change anything. He's just telling us that nature is pretty dope. The difference isn't always straightforward; sometimes, you have to make the tough decision of whether a quotation is descriptive or prescriptive, and that's ultimately up to you. Just know that because prescriptive and descriptive quotations have different aims, your speeches will, too. We'll get into that more in the structure lecture.

Interpreting quotations requires figuring out how to rephrase the text and put it into your own words. Prompts are often written in flowery language and maybe I only speak for myself, but I don't talk like a Shakespeare play. Find the quotation's key words and tell us what they mean to you. If the quotation involves metaphors, explain those to us; you can never be TOO clear! Other factors that may help you interpret quotations could be historical context and author information. If you don't know those factors, that's totally cool! They can help but aren't necessary.