AMERICAN LEGION | Oratorical Contest

Official Rules

2027



legion.org/oratorical

General information

The purpose of The American Legion High School Oratorical Scholarship Program "A Constitutional Speech Contest" is to develop a deeper knowledge and appreciation of the Constitution of the United States among high school students. Other objectives of the contest include the development of leadership qualities, the ability to think and speak clearly and intelligently, and the preparation for acceptance of the duties and responsibilities, rights and privileges of American citizenship.

Scholarships

Scholarship awards are presented to the three finalists in the final round of the national contest as follows: 1st place: $25,000; 2nd place: $22,500; 3rd place: $20,000. Each department (state) winner who is certified and participates in the first round of the national contest will receive a $2,000 scholarship. Each first round winner who advances to and participates in the second round, but does not advance to the final round, will receive an additional $2,000 scholarship to pursue education beyond high school.

The national organization of The American Legion will award scholarships to the three finalists, department winners, and first round winners who are eliminated during the second round of competition. These scholarships may be used to attend any college, trade school or university in the United States.

A contestant must give both his or her prepared oration and the assigned topic discourse to receive the scholarship.

In addition to the scholarships awarded by the national organization, there are several hundred scholarships awarded at the discretion of intermediate organizations, to participants at post, district or county, and department levels of competition.

Department contests

Arrangements for contests leading to the department finals shall be the responsibility of each department (state) of The American Legion. For those levels of competition prior to the department finals, the rules and regulations set forth in this brochure are not mandatory — they are offered as a guideline. However, all department finals contests shall conform with national contest procedures, rules and regulations, if the department wishes its finalist to compete in the national finals.

A winner certified to the National Americanism Division of The American Legion by a department which did not conduct its final competition in conformity with the rules and regulations as set forth herein may, in the judgment of the chairman of the Americanism Commission or the chairman's representative, be disqualified from competition in the national contest.

Each department may certify one contestant into the national contest. If for any reason the department winner is unable to compete in the national contest, the department first runner-up may be substituted following approval by The American Legion's National Americanism Commission. A department first runner-up accepted into national competition will be entitled to all national awards, entitlements and compensation that the department winner would have received had she/he participated at that level.

Department contest winners MUST BE certified to the National Americanism Division, **NO LATER THAN April 5, 2027 by 5:00 p.m. EDT.**

Failure to meet this deadline WILL result in disqualification of the contestant.

For information about the Oratorical Contest in your state, contact your American Legion post or department headquarters.

Eligibility

Eligible participants in the contest shall be a legal United States citizen or possess legal residency or visitor status to be in the United States.

All contestants must be bona fide students herein described as any student under the age of 20 years on the date of the national contest who is presently enrolled in a high school or junior high school (public, parochial, military, private or state accredited home school) in which the curriculum of said high school is considered to be of high school level, commencing with grade nine and terminating with grade 12. Students must be enrolled in high school or junior high school during the time of participation at any level of The American Legion National High School Oratorical Contest.

High school students that graduate early during the school year are eligible to compete if they are not enrolled in a college, university, trade school or other institution of higher learning at the time of the department finals contest.

Contestants must be either legally domiciled within or attend an educational institution within the department (state) where they enter the competition. Contestants can enter a competition in only one department.

The three finalists of the national contest will be ineligible for further participation at any level.

Prepared oration

The subject to be used for the prepared oration in the Oratorical Contest must be on some aspect of the Constitution of the United States with emphasis to the attendant duties and obligations of a citizen to our government. The same subject and oration used in the department contest must be used in the national contest.

The prepared oration must be the original effort of each contestant and must not take up less than 8 minutes or more than 10 minutes for delivery.

Contestants may have in their possession a copy of their prepared oration in the first holding room. The copy may be electronic or paper form. They may consult the copy of their prepared oration until they exit the holding room to begin the contest. At that time the copy of the prepared oration will be surrendered to the contest official who is monitoring the first holding room.

In the prepared oration, as well as in the assigned topic discourse, quotations must be indicated as such. Where quotations are more than 10 words in length, the author's name must be given in the manuscript and cited orally.

Assigned topic

The assigned topic discourse must not consume less than 3 minutes or more than 5 minutes for delivery. The purpose of the assigned topic discourse is to test the speaker's knowledge of the subject, the extent of his or her research, and the ability to discuss the topic as related to the basic principles of government under the Constitution.

The assigned topic shall be drawn by the contest official in full view of the audience immediately before the last speaker begins delivery of his/her prepared oration and will be made known to the audience and each contestant approximately five minutes prior to the time of delivery. The topic will be on some phase of the Constitution of the United States selected from Articles and Sections. All contestants will speak on the same assigned topic.

Assigned topics for 2027

The Preamble

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

Article VI Paragraph 2

This Constitution, and the Laws of the United States which shall be made in Pursuance thereof; and all Treaties made, or which shall be made, under the Authority of the United States, shall be the supreme Law of the Land; and the Judges in every State shall be bound thereby, any Thing in the Constitution or Laws of any State to the Contrary notwithstanding.

Amendment XIV Section 3

No person shall be a Senator or Representative in Congress, or elector of President and Vice-President, or hold any office, civil or military, under the United States, or under any State, who, having previously taken an oath, as a member of Congress, or as an officer of the United States, or as a member of any State legislature, or as an executive or judicial officer of any State, to support the Constitution of the United States, shall have engaged in insurrection or rebellion against the same, or given aid or comfort to the enemies thereof. But Congress may by a vote of two-thirds of each House, remove such disability.

Amendment XXII Section 1

No person shall be elected to the office of the President more than twice, and no person who has held the office of President, or acted as President, for more than two years of a term to which some other person was elected President shall be elected to the office of the President more than once. But this Article shall not apply to any person holding the office of President when this Article was proposed by the Congress, and shall not prevent any person who may be holding the office of President, or acting as President, during the term within which this Article becomes operative from holding the office of President or acting as President during the remainder of such term.

Foreign languages or songs

All contestants at each contest level are required to speak in the English language on both the prepared and the assigned topic.

It is acceptable to utilize or incorporate short phrases of a foreign language into the prepared oration and/or assigned topic to develop the argument, establish a point, etc. The vast majority of the prepared oration and/or assigned topic must be delivered in the English language.

Also, the singing of a song in any language is not permitted and will result in the immediate disqualification of the contestant. The contestant may, however, quote a verse(s) of a song provided proper attribution is made.

What to wear

Uniforms are not permitted. Appropriate business attire is required by all contestants. Contestants are not permitted to wear awards and medals from previous competition.

Contest regulations

A drawing shall be held by the official in charge of the contest to determine the order in which the contestants will appear. The contest chairman shall announce the title of the contestant's prepared oration immediately after introducing him/her as contestant No. 1, contestant No. 2, etc. The chairman will request the audience to refrain from applause until the judges have made their decision.

A raised platform is not compulsory; however, it is strongly recommended. The use of notes, amplification, lectern or speaker's stand by contestants or prompting in any manner is not permitted. Props are not permitted.

The use of any type of electronic/digital data gathering, receiving and/or transmitting equipment in any form by contestants or members of the audience is prohibited.

The time allotted for each contestant to deliver their prepared oration shall not be less than 8 or more than 10 minutes, and for the assigned topic, not less than 3 or more than 5 minutes.

An official timer shall be named by the contest chairman whose duty it shall be to keep an accurate time record of each contestant, and he/she shall be located on the main floor in full view of the contestants. The timekeeper shall begin timing each contestant at the start of the prepared oration. The timer should be equipped with a stopwatch and time cards for the prepared oration carrying the figures 8, 9 and 10. When eight minutes have been used, the time warning card with the figure 8 thereon shall be placed in full view of the speaker, following with 9 and 10 as the speaker progresses. The same procedure shall be used with cards bearing 3, 4 and 5 during the assigned topic discourse. The contest chairman shall announce the time consumed by each contestant for the prepared oration and the assigned topic immediately after each contestant speaks for the benefit of the judges.

Contestants are required to remain in a private room, where the discourse of the other speakers cannot be heard, until it is their turn to speak (contestants will be under the supervision of an individual appointed by the contest chairman). As the contestants conclude their prepared orations, they must return to a sound-proof holding room. As each speaker concludes his or her assigned topic discourse, they shall not be allowed to associate with contestants who have not fulfilled the assigned topic requirement.

Approximately five minutes prior to the time of the delivery of the assigned topic discourse, contestant No. 1 will be informed of the topic drawn for the assigned topic and shall be permitted to retire to privacy under the direction of an individual appointed by the contest chairman, whose duty it shall be to see that no contestant is permitted to consult any text matter or notes having any connection with the subject matter upon which he/she is to speak, other than the actual words of the topic provided on the card drawn.

Each succeeding contestant will be called upon in the order in which he/she previously appeared. He/she shall also, in turn, be informed of the topic of the assigned topic discourse and shall then be escorted to privacy in the manner as provided for contestant No. 1.

Judges

The judges are an integral part of the Oratorical Contest. Their qualifications are considered carefully as the decision of the judges is final and must be reached without bias. Impartial judging in all contests is the key to fairness and success of the program which results in the selection of a national champion.

All department finals and the national contest must use five judges. No publicity shall be given to the names of the judges in advance of the contest. **During the contest, the judges will be seated in different locations in the auditorium and each judge shall render his or her final decision without consultation with other judges or any other person.**

Judges will be advised that a lack of emphasis in the prepared oration and the assigned topic discourse on the duties and obligations of a citizen must result in their downgrading the contestant. Judges are permitted to downgrade a contestant up to a maximum of 10 points for failure to speak about the Constitution. The contest chairman will announce any violation of time for each contestant. A penalty of one point for each minute, or fraction thereof, shall be assessed against the contestant's total score.

The judges, timekeepers, tabulators and the contest chairman, following the last assigned topic discourse, may proceed to a private room for final review and tabulation. **The decision of the judges is final.**

Tabulators

The contest chairman will appoint no less than three tabulators for the department finals contest. It will be their responsibility to review the judges' scorecards to be certain they are fully tabulated and signed before they are submitted for final tabulation.

Judges' scorecards for department finals and the national contest will not be divulged to anyone at the site of the contest. All national contest judges' scorecards become the property of The American Legion National Headquarters.

National finals contest for 2027

- The national finals contest will be held at Hillsdale College on May 14-16, 2027, in Hillsdale, Michigan. Quarterfinal and semifinal rounds are scheduled to be held on Saturday, May 15. The championship is scheduled for Sunday, May 16.
- All contestants and chaperones will arrive on Friday, May 14. All contestants and chaperones will be lodged in a dormitory on the Hillsdale College campus.
- A mandatory pre-contest orientation session for all contestants will be held the evening of Friday, May 14.
- A banquet honoring all contestants will be held the afternoon of Sunday, May 16.
- All contestants and chaperones will depart for home after the banquet on Sunday.

Travel expenses

The national organization of The American Legion will pay the travel expenses of department winners and one chaperone to the national contest. **All contestants must be accompanied by a chaperone over 21 years of age, preferably a parent of the contestant.**

The national organization of The American Legion shall not assume liability for personal injury, property damage or loss sustained by any contestant or chaperone en route to or from the contest; however, The American Legion does carry a nominal group accident insurance policy on contestants certified into the national competition.

Contestants will travel by an air carrier selected by the national organization of The American Legion or personal automobile if previously approved by the national organization of The American Legion.

TV and radio

Live television and radio broadcasts are permitted in all contests as well as filming or other types of media for later showing, provided: 1) the lighting and other site conditions are the same for all contestants; 2) the filming or broadcasts shall in no way distract the contestants or interfere with the announced scheduled time of the contest; 3) the normal speaking voice of the contestant is not interfered with or amplified within the auditorium; and 4) The American Legion is in no way financially obligated for anything without its prior approval.

Rules and Policy Authority

In accordance with Resolution No. 7 of the National Executive Committee of the American Legion, May 2021, The American Legion reserves the right to temporarily amend, delay or suspend any established rule or policy of its national youth programs when a program is subject to the occurrence of a circumstance whose cause is beyond the control of The American Legion, thereby making it impossible, illegal, impracticable or inadvisable for The American Legion to conduct a youth program in accordance with established rules or policies. You may read Resolution No. 7 in its entirety by accessing it from The American Legion Digital Archive at archive.legion.org.

For more information

Individuals interested in learning more about The American Legion National High School Oratorical Contest should contact:

- For dates, sites and deadline information concerning **local, district and state level competition, contact your local American Legion post** or the **state headquarters office of The American Legion**.
- For information concerning the national contest, contact the Americanism Division, The American Legion, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206-1055; telephone (317) 630-1204; or email americanism@legion.org.

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JUDGE'S SCORECARD

NAME OF JUDGE: _____

			CONTESTANTS					
A. CONTENT			**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
1. Was the speech original, fresh, and direct, applying the contestant's knowledge?	Prepared Oration	12 points						
	Assigned Topic	4 points						
2. Did the contestant skillfully select examples, descriptions, analogies, and specific data?	Prepared Oration	12 points						
	Assigned Topic	4 points						
3. Was the speech logical, well organized, and developed?	Prepared Oration	12 points						
	Assigned Topic	4 points						
4. Did the contestant show a comprehensiveness of knowledge of the subject matter?	Prepared Oration	16 points						
	Assigned Topic	6 points						
B. SPEAKING SKILLS			**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
1. Did the contestant use volume, rate, pitch, and diction effectively?	Prepared Oration	6 points						
	Assigned Topic	4 points						
2. Rate the contestant's style: language use, word arrangement and selection, and transitions.	Prepared Oration	6 points						
	Assigned Topic	4 points						
3. Were body actions -- poise, eye contact, posture, gestures, facial expressions -- appropriate?	Prepared Oration	6 points						
	Assigned Topic	4 points						
SUB-TOTAL			**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
PENALTIES: 1 point for each minute or fraction thereof over or under allotted time	Prepared Oration							
	Assigned Topic							
1-10 points for failure to speak on the Constitution								
FINAL TOTAL POINTS			**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
Position Number - 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 (Highest Points = 1st place, second highest points = 2nd place, etc.)								

Score all contestants - NO TIES PERMITTED

JUDGE'S SIGNATURE _____

AMERICAN LEGION

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