



DECLAMATION

STARTER KIT



A Declamation Resource that explores:

- Event Rules
- Choosing a Piece
- Cutting a Piece
- Resources
- Planning Your Delivery
- Notable Examples



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WHAT IS DECLAMATION?

The name Declamation comes from the word declaim, which is to utter or deliver words or a speech in a rhetorical or impassioned way. The speech community has taken this term and turned it into an event that is designed to showcase the impassioned ideas of formidable thinkers. Declamation is the performance of a speech someone else has written and performed at some point. It combines the public speaking aspect of Oratory and the interpretation aspect of black book events. The art of Declamation is at its heart about speaking passionately.

The topics discussed in Declamation run the entire gamut. Declamation is designed to have speakers take a topic they're passionate about and share with and persuade others. The goal is to convey a message with clarity, emotion, and persuasiveness. What's so amazing about Declamation is that you as a beginning speaker get to take a speech about something you really care about that has been written by someone who perhaps has more research and time committed, which gives them more expertise or experience with the topic, and share it with the whole speech community!

RULES

Speeches are 10 minutes with a 30-second grace period in case timing or performance are off just slightly during any given performance. The speech being performed must have

been given publicly and available to print in transcript form and the performance must have an introduction that states the title of the speech and the author.



HOW TO PICK A PIECE

With so many vast opportunities for topics, not to mention styles, it can be daunting to pick a piece. Your purpose is to share someone's story, so start by finding a story to which you relate. Watch as much as possible from different perspectives. This is your chance to share your voice through a story that speaks to your experiences! As you review the material, ask yourself if this piece of work is meaningful to you. If the answer is no, then you need to keep searching until you find something you relate to on a personal level. The best pieces come together when the performer and author can bring the story to life through performance.

Find material that has an overarching story arc. You're looking for a message to share or a lesson to teach. If you're not sure where to start, consider themes. **Theme** is the lesson or message the author is trying to convey. The theme will be referenced to and built upon

throughout the whole speech. It's not always explicit, but it is the dominant message of the speech. If you know you're connected to certain themes or characteristics, let that guide your search. Talk to your coach or a librarian—or go online and search for material that incorporates what interests you.



GREAT RESOURCES

So where do you even begin to look for inspiration or potential pieces? There are some amazing resources out there! When you begin your hunt, it might be helpful to have an idea of specific criteria you're searching for. This is especially helpful when you're doing a general search on something like Google or YouTube, but if you aren't sure what you're looking for, [TED.com](https://www.ted.com) is a great place to start. The amazing thing about TED.com is that there are thousands of videos about any topic you could imagine.

Plus, every official TED video comes with a transcript! Watch as many as you can until you find something with which you connect. Cast a wide net—you never know where inspiration might strike. Start with a search for keywords if you have a theme in mind. If you're not sure where to begin, check out this sampling of TED Talks to get you started with the format. Choose one that sounds interesting to you, and use the recommended Watch Next videos to explore related topics.

- *Rita Pierson: Every kid needs a champion | TED Talk*
- *Austin Eubanks: What surviving the Columbine shooting taught me about pain | TED Talk*
- *Michael Botticelli: Addiction is a disease. We should treat it like one | TED Talk*
- *R. Alan Brooks: When the world is burning, is art a waste of time? | TED Talk*
- *Sasha Sarago: The (de)colonizing of beauty | TED Talk*
- *Cecilia Aragon: The creativity and community behind fanfiction | TED Talk*

- *Deepa Narayan: 7 beliefs that can silence women – and how to unlearn them | TED Talk*
- *Jen Gunter: Why can't we talk about periods? | TED Talk*
- *Stuart Duncan: How I use Minecraft to help kids with autism | TED Talk*
- *Leslie Herod: What if mental health workers responded to emergency calls? | TED Talk*
- *Alice Goffman: How we're priming some kids for college – and others for prison | TED Talk*
- *Teresa Njoroge: What I learned serving time for a crime I didn't commit | TED Talk*
- *Jasmine Crowe: What we're getting wrong in the fight to end hunger | TED Talk*
- *Walter Hood: How urban spaces can preserve history and build community | TED Talk*
- *Eldra Jackson: How I unlearned dangerous lessons about masculinity | TED Talk*
- *Zak Ebrahim: I am the son of a terrorist. Here's how I chose peace | TED Talk*



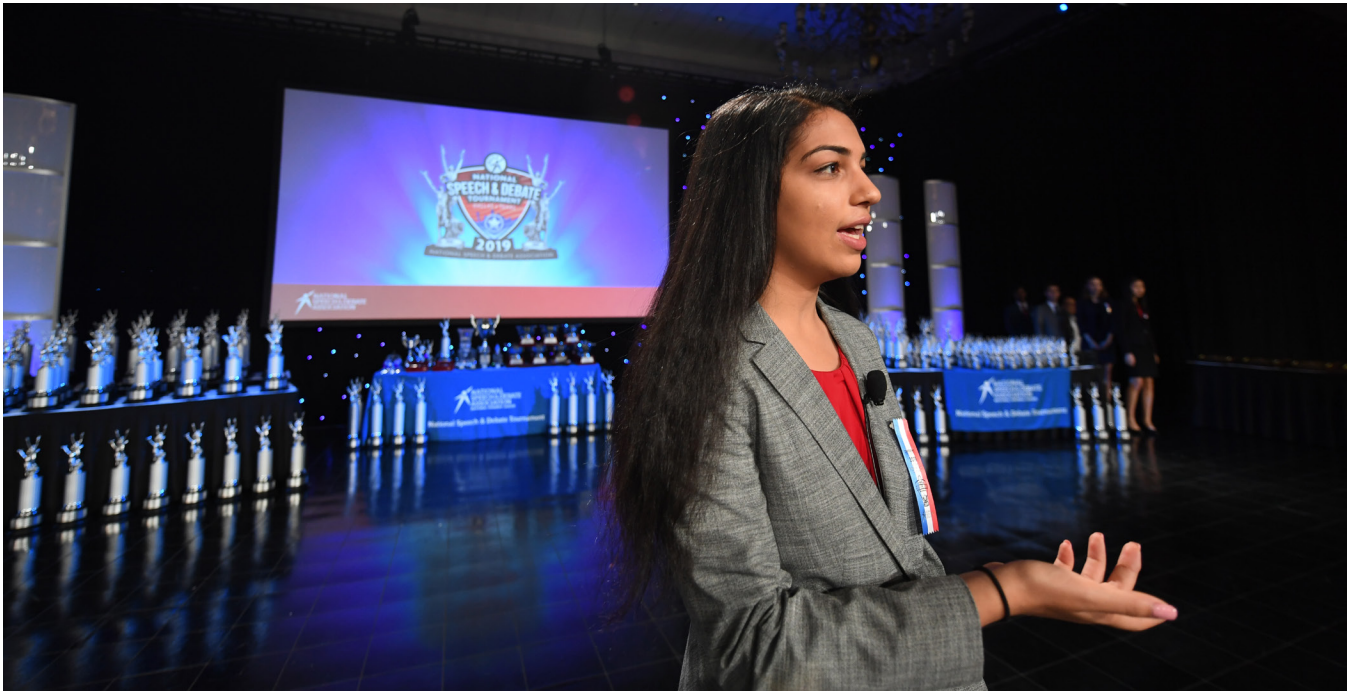
CUTTING

It's likely that your piece will have to be trimmed down at least a little to be within the 10-minute time limit. Here are some guidelines to help cut your piece down once you've selected your material.

1. When deciding what to keep and what to get rid of, keep in mind the message you are trying to share.
2. Use a physical copy to start cutting out paragraphs that you aren't going to use with an X.
3. Next, time the piece. It shouldn't be too far outside of the time limit, but you need to know how much more to cut.
4. Time again. You should be very close to 10 minutes. If not, cut and time again.
5. Once you're in the 10-ish minute range, start cutting line by line things you don't

need. Remember to keep everything that is essential to the message you're trying to tell and eliminate things that are more of embellishment. This could mean cutting entire lines or even words here and there that aren't necessary.

6. Time again.
7. Type the piece into a Word or Google Doc. Continue to time and cut until you reach the 10-minute mark.
8. Finalize the order of the piece. It's best to keep the speech in the original order it was given to maintain meaning and delivery effect, but it is not required.



PLANNING DELIVERY

Like all speaking events, delivery is just as important as content. When practicing delivery there are several factors to keep in mind.

PERSONALIZATION

Declamation is not about copying the performance of the original speaker. You are taking a message someone has given and deciding how it connects to you and performing it in a way that conveys its importance and significance to you and society as a whole. This means finding your own unique ways to perform the speech. This could be the way you gesture and use body language. This also means using your own personal style when it comes to the way you speak, including what you choose to put emphasis on and even what you keep in the actual cutting of the speech. Declamation is about sharing a message you feel is important, so it's critical you make the message relatable

through your unique performance. No two people are the same, which means no two performers should ever perform a speech the exact same way.

FLOW

When it comes to flow, Declamation can easily become rigid, robotic, and formulaic. While you're not responsible for writing the speech, you do need to keep in mind how it sounds when performed. Declamations range in topic, so there is no one way to make a speech flow, but a general rule is that speeches with anecdotes in them will sound more natural than speeches that rely heavily on statistical research. The best speeches have a combination of the two.

ENUNCIATION

In Declamation, enunciation is key because you are trying to provide information in the clearest and most understanding form possible, without having been the person to write it. Every word you deliver should come across loud and clear to the audience. The enunciation is what makes a speech sound clean and crisp. It could mean the difference between a speech sounding well prepared or sounding uncomfortable and unconfident.

Enunciation is often overlooked because very few people realize when they're not enunciating. We start to talk so fast that our words slur or jumble together and our entire sentence becomes incoherent. There are several ways to practice. There are of course the generic tongue twisters—"Sally sells seashells down by the seashore." But you can also practice your speeches while over-enunciating. This can be done two ways: either by over-extending each letter/word so that each syllable is very clearly said or using pen drills, where you hold a pen or pencil in your mouth so that the back teeth are biting down on it and it is running horizontally through your mouth. The front teeth should have a pencil sized gap between the top and bottom, and the pen should be far enough back in your mouth to interrupt normal speech patterns. With the pen in your mouth, you should deliver your speech, taking extra care to enunciate each and every word so the audience can understand you despite the pen.

PACING AND INTONATION

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of Declamation is the pacing and intonation of the speech. If your speech is too fast paced, your audience won't catch a word you say. And if it's monotonous, your audience won't recall a word



you said, even if they were listening. Pacing is often controlled by the syntax of the speech and can be hard to adjust when we didn't write it. But by mastering inflection, intonation, and dramatic pausing, we can adjust the pace just enough that it matches our own interpretation more closely.

The best way to practice pacing and intonation is through listening. Record yourself and listen. If you can hear yourself after the fact, you can attempt to pinpoint the areas for improvement. Are you too fast in some places or too slow in others? Are you too forceful or too casual? Record your speeches and play them back. Tap a friend or family member to think through the same questions if you're too close to the material to fairly judge. Try to decide how you would rank just the pace and tone of the speech, leaving all other aspects alone.



EXPRESSIONS AND GESTURES

Expressions in Declamation are just as important as they are in any Interp event. You have to use facial expressions to show you are interested and sometimes passionate about the topic to convince the audience to care. Faces do just as much convincing as words do, and like all other parts of your body, faces sometimes need training by repeating expressions in front of a mirror. When in doubt, a confident smile can go a long way in convincing a judge.

As in other events, students use gestures to emphasize points, but because Declamation is a speaking event, the gestures hold even more emphasis and importance. They can feel rigid and planned, especially if you don't naturally talk with your hands. The goal is to make

them feel more natural and come as easily as possible. However, if you aren't a natural hand talker, or you're the type of person who talks emphatically with your hands, you can often over-gesture. Your job is to determine when it is necessary to gesture and when it's okay to leave it be. Gestures should all happen organically and help emphasize the points of the argument.

Here are a few tips for gesturing:

- Gestures should be an extension of your body. Always gesture in the center of your body, or the "gesture zone." Gesturing above your head or below your waist is distracting because it requires the audience to look away from your face. This actually creates a disconnection between you and your words. You can find your gesture zone by first placing your hands at your sides. Next, turn your wrists up and lift your arms until the elbow and arm create a 90-degree angle, or an "L" at your elbow. With palms down, move your hands back and forth to get a feel for where the low end of your gestures should be located. Most likely, judges and audience members won't see movements below this level. Next, turn your wrists so that both palms face inward. Lift and lower your hands to feel the sides of the gesture zone. To determine the width of each gesture, move your arms back and forth while holding your forearms parallel to the ground. Pay particular attention to how far your arms extend. This is where your longest gesture should reach during a performance. Finally, place your arms at chest level; this is the top of the gesture zone. Gestures above this area have a tendency to appear over the top or exaggerated.



EYE CONTACT

Your goal is to convince an audience of something, and eye contact is an excellent tool in your toolbox. A good tip is to always move your line of sight with your line of thinking. When you conclude one thought, you conclude your time with whichever person you've been maintaining eye contact. If there is only one person in your audience, then you would maintain eye contact with them throughout the speech. In theory, that sounds like staring, but there is a difference. You don't want to lock eyes with your audience member. Remember, this is a conversation. Their eyes just happen to be where yours are settled for the speech. If eye contact makes you nervous or you default to looking away, practice delivering speeches in the mirror or with parents or friends and restart every time you look away.

- To find natural movement, use the string test. Students take a piece of string, hold the ends out, bring them together, tie it, and put it around their neck. Next, they will slip an arm through the hanging end. Now practice gesturing to the side. Notice that when the hand moves, the head moves with it. This is the way we naturally gesture and the way we should move in performances.
- Record a performance and critique the gestures. Students should analyze if they are over-gesturing and, if so, they should practice giving speeches while sitting on their hands, then using only one hand, then eventually working their way back to using both hands while speaking.



NOTABLE EXAMPLES

It's hard to start an event, even when you have some helpful tips, if you have never checked it in action. Take in these two examples from the Middle School Speech Challenge and examine how the speakers approach their performances. honing in on the choices they made and what about them works.



Why We All Need to Practice Emotional First Aid
performed by Irene Sheen (2020)

<https://tinyurl.com/ycxe7rm7>

Irene performs a speech written by a psychologist and discusses the importance of treating mental wounds just like you would physical ones. Irene uses both hand gestures and tone to create a performance that captures your attention and challenges your thinking.

Consider:

- What emotions does Irene invoke throughout the piece? List them out. How do they convey those emotions through their tone, gestures, and pacing? Do they slow down or speed through the line? Do they move fluidly from gesture to gesture or hold a movement through the conclusion

of a thought? Do they overuse any gestures or facial expressions, devaluing their impact or do all movements feel natural?

- What are the moments where their delivery is most powerful? How do pacing, gestures, expressions, and story contribute?
 - A strong Declamation will connect to the audience. Did you feel a connection? How did the performance affect your mood?
-



The Game That Can Give You 10 Extra Years of Life
performed by Emily Wang (2021)

<https://tinyurl.com/37bbux7e>

Emily's performance focuses on this idea of solitude and loneliness. Emily uses inflection to emphasize the importance of the development of connections. Emily uses body language and hand gestures to add emphasis in particular parts that are especially important.

As you watch Emily's performance, answer these questions:

- Take in the performance, then check out the original TED Talk. What do you think of the cutting? A Declamation should deliver the message of the author in an original and engaging manner. Did this performer succeed? Did they capture the crux of the story? Are there moments you would have included that didn't make the cut? How would they have changed the picture?
- How does the performer's body language impact the feelings you have about the content?
- What did you think of the performer's decision to add different voices for the impersonations they did throughout stories? Did it draw you into the story or distract you? Why?
- Did your opinion on the subject matter change after the speech? What made it change?



ABOUT THE NATIONAL SPEECH & DEBATE ASSOCIATION:

The National Speech & Debate Association was created in 1925 to provide recognition and support for students participating in speech and debate activities. While our organization has evolved over the decades, our mission is more relevant today than ever before. We connect, support, and inspire a diverse community committed to empowering students through competitive speech and debate.

As the national authority on public speaking and debate, the National Speech & Debate Association provides the infrastructure for speech and debate competitions around the world. We create a platform for youth voices to be heard and celebrated, which culminates with an annual National Tournament, the pinnacle of public speaking.

Speech and debate changes lives. NSDA membership builds confidence, boosts classroom performance, improves communication, and increases critical thinking skills to prepare students for college. Our activity provides life skills vital to a young person's success in the future.

MISSION:

The National Speech & Debate Association connects, supports, and inspires a diverse community committed to empowering students through speech and debate.

VISION:

We envision a world in which every school provides speech and debate programs to foster each student's communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creative skills.

Learn more at www.speechanddebate.org