

Countdown to Contest Day

The following tips will help you do your best at the contest:

The day before

- Get to bed early. You'll feel more prepared if you're well-rested.
- Don't overexercise or participate in too many activities the day before – you won't speak well if you're achy or worn out.
- Protect your voice the day before the contest – don't shout or talk too much.
- Don't get a new hairstyle or brand-new clothes for the contest – you want to feel comfortable, not self-conscious. Get your bangs trimmed if they're too long.

Looking good!

- Wash and wear your hair in a style that will stay put – no annoying strands falling down.
- Wear something you like, something that looks nice and makes you feel good. Don't wear anything that makes noise or could be distracting to you or your audience – no big or jangling jewelry; new, tight or noisy shoes; or flashy outfits.
- Make sure zippers are zipped, buttons are buttoned, shoes are tied, etc.
 - Remember, costumes are not allowed at any level of the speech contest.



Eating and drinking

- Drink water the day of the contest. Milk – and all dairy products – can cause congestion in your throat, and if you're already nervous, drinking anything with caffeine could make it worse.
- Eat lightly before the contest. Nerves can make your stomach a little unsettled.
- If possible, have a cup of water available. If your mouth starts to dry out, you can take a sip. Dry-mouth can make speaking difficult and distract you.

Right before your speech

- Practice the beginning and ending of your speech if you don't have much time left. If you do, practice all of it.

Nervous?

- Join the club! It's natural to be nervous. Remember, most of your fellow speakers are as or more nervous than you.
- Loosen up in a remote area: Swing your arms up in the air, then down by your sides. Shake your legs out. Do head and shoulder rolls. To relax the muscles in your face, make funny faces – pretend you're chewing a huge wad of bubble gum.
- Do deep breathing exercises: Breathe in to a count of 4, hold for a count of 4. Breathe out to a count of 8, pause for a count of 4, then repeat.

(continued on next page)

(continued from previous page)

Right before your speech

- Get a positive mental picture: You're giving your speech ... the audience is smiling and enjoying what you have to say. As you finish, they begin clapping, giving you a standing ovation!

They've called your name!

- Before you get out of your chair, take a few slow deep breaths.
- Walk to the stage or podium with confidence – as if you're excited to be given this opportunity to speak. This is important, even if you're not confident and are in fact very nervous. When you give a positive first impression, the audience will be "yours" and will help you give a good speech.
- Before you begin, wait for the audience to settle down and give you their full attention. Then look at them, smile, and start your speech.

While speaking, remember

- Take your time and speak clearly. Imagine you're talking to your friends.
- Speak as loudly as necessary to ensure the person sitting furthest from you can hear your speech.
- Move about. It will help keep the audience's attention, and you will feel more in control. It's better to move too little than too much, however.

- Don't worry about little mistakes – no one will ever know about them anyway. If you stop to go back and correct them, you may get distracted and interrupt the flow of the speech.

When you're done

- Maintain eye contact with the audience for a few seconds, smile, and wait for their applause. Then walk back to your place.
- Relax. No matter how you do in the contest, you're a success! You've learned a lot about your topic, and your style has definitely improved since the first time you practiced.
- Take note of what worked well and what didn't. It may be the first, but it's probably not the last time you'll speak to an audience. Work on your weaknesses so you'll do better next time.
- Now that you know first-hand how it feels being in the spotlight, cheer on your fellow contestants.

