

About the Oratorical Contest

“A constitutional speech contest”

The American Legion Oratorical Contest develops deeper knowledge and appreciation of the U.S. Constitution among high school students. Since 1938, the program has presented participants with an academic speaking challenge that teaches important leadership qualities, the history of our nation’s laws, the ability to think and speak clearly, and an understanding of the duties, responsibilities, rights, and privileges of American citizenship. The program has prepared young people for citizenship through critical thinking and public speaking, and has produced notable alumni such as former Vice President Mike Pence, commentator Lou Dobbs, and presidential candidate Alan Keyes.

Young orators earn some of the most generous college scholarships available to high school students. The contest awards over \$203,500 in scholarships each year. The overall national contest winner receives a \$25,000 scholarship. Second place receives \$22,500, and third place receives \$20,000. Each department (state) winner who is certified into and participates in the national contest’s first round receives a \$2,000 scholarship. Those who advance beyond the first round receive an additional \$2,000 scholarship. The American Legion’s National Organization awards scholarships that can be used at any college or university in the United States.

High school students under age 20 are eligible. Competition begins at the post level and advances to a state competition. Legion department representatives certify one winner per state to the national contest, where department winners compete against each other in two speaking rounds. The contest concludes with a final round that determines the three top finishers.

Speaking subjects must address some aspect of the U.S. Constitution, with emphasis on citizens' duties and obligations to our government. Speeches are eight to 10 minutes long; three- to five-minute speeches on an assigned topic also are part of the contest.

Rules and Regulations

Eligibility

Eligible participants must be citizens of or lawful permanent residents of 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 home school). The school's curriculum must be high school level, beginning with grade 9 and ending 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. Contestants must either be legally domiciled within or attend an educational institution within the department in which they enter competition. Contestants can enter the competition through only one department.

High school students who 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.

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

Regulations

The official in charge of the contest conducts a drawing to determine the order in which contestants will appear. The contest chairman introduces each contestant, then announces the title of the contestant's prepared oration. The audience must refrain from applause until the judges finish deciding.

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

Contestants and audience members may not use any form of electronic/digital data gathering, receiving, and/or transmitting equipment.

Contestants must deliver their prepared oration in no fewer than eight minutes and no more than 10 minutes. The assigned topic runs no fewer than three minutes and no more than five minutes.

The contest chairman appoints an official timer who keeps an accurate record of each contestant's time. The timer is stationed on the main floor in full view of the contestants and begins timing each contestant at the start of the prepared oration. The timer should have a stopwatch and time cards displaying the numbers 8, 9, and 10 for the prepared oration. When eight minutes have passed, the time warning card with the number 8 is placed in full view of the speaker, followed by 9 and 10 accordingly. The same procedure is used during the assigned topic discourse with cards bearing 3, 4, and 5. The contest chairman will announce each contestant's time for the prepared oration and the assigned topic immediately after each contestant speaks in front of the judges.

Until their turn to speak, contestants must remain in a private room where other speakers' discourses cannot be heard. The contest chairman will appoint an individual to supervise each contestant. As the contestants conclude their prepared orations, they must return to a soundproof waiting room. Speakers who conclude their assigned topic discourse may not associate with contestants who have not finished speaking.

Approximately five minutes before the start of the assigned-topic discourse, the first contestant will be informed of the topic. He or she retires to a private area under the direction of an individual appointed by the contest chairman; this individual must ensure the contestant doesn't consult any text, material, or notes related to the subject. Contestants may only reference the actual words of the topic provided on the card drawn.

Each succeeding contestant will be called upon in the order that he or she previously appeared. He or she will also, in turn, be informed of the assigned discourse topic and shall then be escorted to the same privacy afforded to the first contestant.

Contestants must give their prepared oration and the assigned topic discourse to receive the scholarship monies to which they are entitled.

What to wear

Uniforms are not permitted. Appropriate business attire is required for all contestants. Contestants may not wear awards and medals from previous competitions.

The Prepared Oration

The oration must be on some aspect of the Constitution, with emphasis on a citizen's duties and obligations to our government. The same subject and oration used in the department contest must be used in the national contest.

Contestants may have a copy of their prepared oration while waiting in the first holding room. They may consult the copy until they exit to begin the contest. They must then surrender the copy to the contest official monitoring the first holding room.

Quotations must always 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.

It is acceptable to utilize or incorporate short phrases in a foreign language to develop the argument, establish a point, etc. It should be understood that the vast majority of the prepared oration and/or assigned topic must still be delivered in English. Singing is not permitted and will result in immediate disqualification. The contestant may, however, quote a verse(s) of a song(s) provided proper attribution is made.

The Assigned Topics

The assigned topic discourse must not consume less than three (3) minutes or more than five (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 delivering his or her prepared oration, and will be made known to the audience and each contestant approximately five (5) minutes prior to the time of delivery. The topic will be a phase of the U.S. Constitution, selected from the Articles and Sections listed under the assigned topics for the current year's contest in this brochure.

Assigned Topics for 2027 Oratorical Contest

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 defense, 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.