

Judge Demographics and Criteria for Extemp and Impromptu at N.F.A. Nationals

EDWARD J. HARRIS, JR.*

In every forensic competition, the judge is crucial not only to the competitive outcome but also to the educational experience of the competitors. Despite the importance of the judge in a forensic setting, as a community we have done relatively little to explicate the criteria for decision making or even determine the criteria which are operative for most judges in a given event. Indeed, individual events has done very little in terms of developing a bare profile of the attitudes, philosophies, or preferences of individual judges or groups of judges.

The purpose of this study is twofold. First, to determine the relative importance of decision-making criteria employed by judges in extemporaneous and impromptu speaking. Second, to develop a knowledge of general judge demographics for National Forensic Association National Tournament judges.

Methodology

Surveys were gathered at the N.F.A. National Championship Tournament at Western Kentucky University in 1981. Based on N.F.A. judge assignment practices (judges are assigned to an event for the first three rounds of competition or for the fourth round of the tournament) surveys were enclosed in each judge ballot for rounds three and four of the tournament. In extemporaneous speaking, 99 surveys were returned from a pool of 126 potential judges for a 78.57% rate of return. In impromptu speaking, the rate of return was 75% or 114 respondents from a pool of 152 potential judges.

The extemporaneous speaking survey contained twenty-six items which respondents rated on a scale of one to five. (See Exhibit 1) A rating of one indicated the item was *not* important to evaluating the speech. By contrast, a rating of five indicated the item was very important in evaluating the speech. The impromptu speaking

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EDWARD J. HARRIS, JR. is Director of Forensics and Chair in Communications and Theatre at Suffolk University, Boston 02114.

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EXHIBIT 1

If you have already filled out this questionnaire at this tournament, please return this blank form with your ballot. Thanks.

ROUND _____ SECTION _____ EXTEMP

Please indicate the importance you attach to each of the criteria below by rating them according to the following scale:

- 1 = not important in evaluating the speech
- 2 = slightly important in evaluating the speech
- 3 = only moderately important in evaluating the speech
- 4 = rather important in evaluating the speech
- 5 = very important in evaluating the speech; one of the first things I look for

Please rate all items.

11	410	The speaker's language should be concise and accurate.
5	430	The speaker should avoid broad generalizations. His/her language should be as concrete and specific as possible.
14	375	The speaker should use evidence to support his/her statements.
21	331	The speaker's approach to the question should be creative.
17	363	The speech should have an introduction which contains a strong attention device.
3	434	The speech should have an introduction which contains a strong attention device.
12	408	The organization of the speech should be explicitly previewed.
2	453	The speech should have strong, clearly defined internal organization or substructure.
24	243	The speech should be entertaining.
4	433	Evidence should be used for all important points
10	413	Sources for evidence should be given (i.e., "Time magazine, February 23. . .")
23	300	The speaker's gestures should be effective.
19	356	The speaker should use his/her voice effectively, with adequate variation of pitch, pace and volume.
22	323	The speaker should be fluent, without pausing or stumbling over words.
13	407	The speech should not attempt to cover too much material in the time available.
6	426	The speech should only discuss matters which directly contribute to an answer to the question.

1	457	The speaker should answer the question directly.
9	418	The speaker should apportion his/her speaking time effectively.
25	231	The speaker should not rely on notes.
18	362	The speaker should have good eye contact.
8	425	The speaker should have an effective conclusion.
15	375	The speaker should not go more than ten or fifteen seconds overtime.
20	351	The speaker should state his question, word for word, within the speech.
26	152	The speaker should state his question, word for word, before beginning his speech.
16	370	The speech should be supported by evidence from a variety of sources.
7	426	The speech should be the product of original analysis, rather than a rehash of magazine articles.

PERSONAL INFORMATION

How many years have you — been involved in competitive forensics? ___
 participated as a contestant? _____
 done active coaching? _____

Are you now an active college individual events coach?

What state are you from? _____

In what state did you receive your graduate training?

In what state did you receive your undergraduate training?

What is your highest earned degree? _____ In what field?

How many tournaments have you judged at in 1980-81? _____

Do you — particularly like to judge extemp -
 can endure judging extemp _____
 would rather not judge extemp _

Do you consider yourself — a good judge of extemp
 an adequate extemp judge _____
 a not particularly good extemp judge

Is your team —very good at extemp ___ .
 adequate at extemp _____
 not very good at extemp

Thanks very much for your help.

Ed Harris
 Suffolk University

EXHIBIT 2

ROUND _____ SECTION IMPROMPTU

Please indicate the importance you attach to each of the criteria below by rating them according to the following scale:

- 1 = not important in evaluating the speech
- 2 = slightly important in evaluating the speech
- 3 = only moderately important in evaluating the speech
- 4 = rather important in evaluating the speech
- 5 = very important in evaluating the speech; one of the first things I look for

Please rate all items.

7	468	The speaker's language should be concise and accurate.
14	430	The speaker should avoid broad generalizations. His/her language should be as concrete and specific as possible.
5	477	The speaker should use appropriate examples to illustrate his/her statements.
4	482	The speaker should take a position on the topic.
9	453	The speaker's approach to the question should be creative.
22	337	The speaker should use examples and quotations from history and philosophy.
11	445	The speech should have an introduction which contains a strong attention device.
3	494	The speech should have an introduction which communicates the "thesis" of the speech.
12	442	The organization of the speech should be explicitly previewed.
1	518	The relation of the speech to the topic should be made clear; the judge should not have to draw inferences or do other work to discern the relationship.
24	269	The speech should be entertaining.
8	457	The relation of the speech to the topic should be stated explicitly early in the speech.
18	400	The speech should discuss only matters which are directly related to the topic.
6	474	The speech should not attempt to discuss too many ideas in the time available.
15	419	The speaker should be fluent, without pausing or stumbling over words.
20	388	The speaker's gestures should be effective.

13	438	The speaker should use his/her voice effectively, with adequate variation of pitch, rate, and volume.
2	499	The speaker should have an effective conclusion.
21	262	The speaker should not go more than a few seconds overtime.
16	411	The speaker should have good eye contact.
10	451	The speaker should state the topic, word for word, within the speech.
25	242	The speaker should not rely on notes.
19	391	The speaker should apportion his/her time effectively between preparation and speaking.
17	406	The speaker should apportion his/her speaking time effectively.
23	310	The speaker should offer his/her personal opinion on the truth of the topic.

PERSONAL INFORMATION

How many years have you — been involved in competitive forensics? _
 participated as a contestant? _____
 done active coaching? _____

Are you now an active college individual events coach?

What state are you from? _____

In what state did you receive your graduate training?

In what state did you receive your undergraduate training?

What is your highest earned degree? _____ In what field?

How many tournaments have you judged at in 1980-81? _____

Do you — particularly like to judge impromptu _____
 can endure judging impromptu _____
 would rather not judge impromptu . _____

Do you consider yourself — a good judge of impromptu _____
 an adequate judge of impromptu _____
 a not particularly good judge of impromptu _____

Is your team —very good at impromptu _
 adequate at impromptu __
 not very good at impromptu

Thanks very much for your help.

Ed Harris
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survey contained twenty-five items rated on the same scale. (See Exhibit 2) Each survey also contained personal information questions including the number of years involved in forensic coaching, number of years as a contestant, the respondent's home state, the site of their undergraduate training, and the site of their graduate education. Questions also sought information about the academic degree status of judges and the field in which degrees were earned. Respondents were asked about the number of tournaments they attend each forensic season, their willingness to judge the event to which they were assigned, a self-appraisal of their ability to judge that event, and an appraisal of the respondent's team in terms of their performance in the event.

Each item in the survey was designed to indicate a judge's conception of importance for one to four major factors in judging an event: Content, Delivery, Organization, or Conventions of the Event. Items were developed by the author and were reviewed by three members of the Suffolk University forensic coaching staff. Items which were judged to be vague, redundant, or inappropriate were deleted. Despite this precaution, the included items reflect the bias of the author regarding the events in question. For example, in impromptu, a content item would be: "A speaker should use examples to illustrate statements," a delivery item would be: "The speaker's gestures should be effective," an organization item would be: "The organization of the speech should be explicitly previewed," a convention item would be: "The relation of the speech to the topic should be stated explicitly early in the speech."

Each team was scored by adding the total of the ratings assigned to it by respondents. Each item was then rank ordered and the average score per item was used to compile an index of the category rating. The assignment of a given item to a category (Content, Delivery, Organization, or Convention) was done by consensus of four independent scorers. A copy of the two survey instruments employed with total responses indicated are reproduced after the conclusion of the study.

Results

The results are as follows. In impromptu speaking, the three highest rated items were: The relation of the speech to the topic should be made clear, the judges should not have to draw inferences or do other work to discern the relationship (rating 518); the speaker should have an effective conclusion (rating 499); and the speech should have an introduction which communicates the thesis of the speech (rating 494).

Based on our survey, the three lowest rated items were: the speaker should offer his/her personal opinion on the truth of the topic (rating 310); the speech should be entertaining (rating 269); and the speaker should not rely on notes (rating 242).

In extemporaneous speaking, the three highest rated items were: the speaker should answer the question directly (rating 457); the speech should have strong, clearly defined internal organization or substructure (rating 453); and the speech should have an introduction which communicates what the speech will do or contain (rating 434).

The three lowest rated items in the extemporaneous speaking survey were: the speech should be entertaining (rating 242); the speaker should not rely on notes (rating 231); and the speaker should state the question word for word before beginning the speech (rating 152).

Based on the ranking of items, the overall importance of categories in impromptu speaking was:

1. Organization
2. Delivery
3. Convention
4. Content

The category ratings for extemporaneous speaking were:

1. Organization
2. Content
3. Delivery
4. Convention

Judge Demographics Results

This study has also sought to make a preliminary effort to develop a judge profile for the typical forensic tournament judge. This study does not claim to actually develop a judge profile, rather it is a first step in the quest to gain greater insight into judge demographics. Clearly, the individual events community must begin to do the research to develop reliable judge profile data. If we are to avoid plastic, all-purpose presentations devoid of substantive content then we should give our students a means of adjusting their speeches to meet audience demands and expectations. If we are to reach an understanding of how to judge various events, we should discover the diversity of opinion on questions of judging criteria. If we are to train new forensic coaches, we should show them the breadth of opinion within our community and let them develop their own philosophies of forensics rather than relying on parochial habit and tradition. If we are to have an equitable national forensic competition, then we should have a means of insuring that all

competitors have first-hand information about all their potential judges.

In terms of judge experience, we found that 90.5% of the judges in impromptu speaking and 91.9% of those in extemporaneous speaking were active forensic coaches. Presumably the remainder were hired judges or non-coaches who accompanied competing schools. The average judge in extemporaneous speaking had judged in 10.25 regular season tournaments. Five per cent of the judges had been involved in 20 or more regular season tournaments, forty per cent were in 10 to 20 tournaments, thirty-four per cent were in five to 10 tournaments and twenty per cent judged in fewer than 5 tournaments. In impromptu speaking the figures are much the same. The average impromptu speaking judge had participated in 9.7 tournaments during the season. Of these judges, thirteen per cent had less than five tournaments, thirty-three per cent had five to 10 tournaments, fifty per cent had 10 to 20 tournaments, and four per cent had 20 or more tournaments of judging experience.

Judges' self-ratings reveal some interesting data. In impromptu speaking, sixty-four per cent of the judges like to judge that event. But twenty-eight per cent said they could only endure impromptu speaking and eight per cent didn't like judging the event. In extemporaneous speaking fifty-nine per cent like judging the event, but eleven per cent didn't like judging the event and thirty per cent can at best endure it. Despite this apparent displeasure with judge assignments, sixty-four per cent of the judges consider themselves good impromptu speaking judges and sixty-two per cent of the extemporaneous speaking respondents consider themselves good extemp judges. Thirty-seven per cent of each event pool considered themselves poor judges of the event to which they were assigned.

We also studied degree status among judges. In extemporaneous speaking, twenty-four per cent held a BA, fifty-nine per cent held an MA, and seventeen per cent held a Doctoral or post-Masters degree. The percentages in impromptu speaking were exactly the same. Eighty-five per cent of the extemp judges and eighty per cent of the impromptu judges held degrees in Speech/Communication.

Judge Origins

Judge origin data were also compiled in the survey. (See Tables 1 and 2) The Middle West dominated the judging pool at Western Kentucky University Nationals in 1981. That is not surprising, but the extent of the domination is noteworthy. Sixty-three per cent of the judges claim to be from the Mid-West. At least the judges claimed to be from states the author categorized as Mid-West. Many

TABLE 1

STATE	REGION	FROM	TRAINING	
			UNDERGRAD	GRAD
Alabama	S	4	1	2
Arizona	W	0	1	0
Arkansas	S	0	1	0
California	W	2	6	5
Colorado	W	1	1	0
Connecticut	NE	0	1	0
Florida	S	1	2	1
Georgia	S	1	1	0
Illinois	MW	8	6	10
Indiana	MW	3	7	6
Iowa	MW	2	0	3
Kentucky	S	8	5	8
Louisiana	S	0	0	2
Massachusetts	NE	0	2	0
Michigan	MW	14	12	16
Minnesota	MW	4	3	3
Mississippi	S	0	2	0
Missouri	MW	1	0	2
New Jersey	NE	1	0	1
New York	NE	2	3	1
North Carolina	S	3	0	1
North Dakota	W	1	1	1
Ohio	MW	22	14	26
Oklahoma	S	0	1	0
Pennsylvania	NE	3	7	2
Rhode Island	NE	1	0	0
South Dakota	W	0	1	0
Tennessee	S	2	2	1
Texas	S	4	3	4
Virginia	S	0	1	2
Washington	W	1	0	0
West Virginia	MW	5	7	5
Wisconsin	MW	3	6	5
Wyoming	W	1	0	0

of these states consider themselves Mid-East, a category not employed in this study. Fifty-seven percent of the judges received their undergraduate degrees in the Mid-West and 68 percent received their graduate training in that part of the country. Twenty-four percent of the judges at WKU Nationals were from the South. Twenty percent received their undergraduate training there and 22 percent received their graduate training in twelve Southern states. Seven percent of the judges are from the Northeast with 13

TABLE 2

IMPROMPTU SPEAKING — DEMOGRAPHICS				
STATE	REGION	TRAINING		
		FROM	UNDERGRAD	GRAD
Alabama	S	0	1	1
Arizona	W	0	0	1
Arkansas	S	0	1	0
California	W	9	10	8
Colorado	W	1	0	3
Connecticut	NE	2	2	0
Delaware	NE	0	0	2
Florida	S	2	2	0
Georgia	S	2	2	0
Illinois	MW	13	8	14
Indiana	MW	5	7	8
Iowa	MW	2	1	4
Kansas	MW	4	2	2
Kentucky	S	14	8	10
Louisiana	S	0	0	1
Maine	NE	1	1	0
Maryland	NE	0	0	1
Massachusetts	NE	4	5	2
Michigan	MW	12	15	15
Minnesota	MW	6	3	3
Mississippi	S	0	2	0
Missouri	MW	2	0	0
Montana	W	0	0	1
Nebraska	MW	3	0	2
New Jersey	NE	1	0	2
New Mexico	W	0	0	1
New York	NE	7	6	1
North Carolina	S	4	4	1
North Dakota	W	1	1	1
Ohio	MW	15	16	24
Oklahoma	S	1	1	1
Oregon	W	0	0	1
Pennsylvania	NE	8	8	2
Rhode Island	NE	1	0	0
South Carolina	S	0	1	1
South Dakota	W	0	1	0
Tennessee	S	2	3	2
Texas	S	0	6	8
Virginia	S	3	2	2
Washington	W	0	1	1
West Virginia	MW	3	3	2
Wisconsin	MW	3	8	3
Wyoming	W	0	0	1

percent receiving their undergraduate training in the region and four percent receiving their graduate training. Six to seven percent of the judges are from the Western states. The West provides undergraduate training to 10 percent of the judges and 6 percent of the graduate training.

Conclusions

The demographic data reported here raises a number of questions for further research. First, the issue of judge assignment at national tournaments should be reevaluated. When 10% or more of the judges, at a national championship tournament, are judging events they don't like, then it seems appropriate to consider a different mechanism for judge assignment. One possible solution would be for judges to rank the events they prefer to judge rather than the current practice of listing those events they refuse to judge. A system of preference ranking would help insure that those judges who are eager to judge an event are able to do so for the maximum number of rounds possible under tournament management guidelines. By a relatively simple adjustment in tournament administration, it may be possible to significantly increase judge satisfaction with the competition. Since forensic competitions make the implicit assumption that contestants will be provided with the "best judging" available, an increase in judge satisfaction could yield competitive and educational benefits for contestants.

A second issue of concern is the enormous concentration of degree holders in speech serving as forensic judges. Other segments of the forensic community have been criticized because the judging requirements for a competition have become so restrictive that a person from the "real world" is unable to comprehend the activity. Many in NDT (National Debate Tournament) debate have argued that an open judging system would minimize undesirable behaviors in delivery and misuse of evidence. While individual events has not deteriorated in terms of delivery the concentration of speech communication specialists may over time produce other detrimental behavior. At the very least, such a concentration of speech specialists tends to isolate forensics in the academic community and may exclude or undermine support for the activity in non-academic circles. If we begin to feel that only speech professionals are qualified judges we may take a dangerous step toward insulting and isolating our activity. This certainly does not argue for allowing just anyone to judge at the national championships but given the number of forensic competitors drawn to the study of law it seems unusual that less than ten percent of the judges at a

competition would have law degrees. Clearly, research should be conducted to determine what if any unique outcomes are associated with speech trained judges as opposed to other potential judging groups for a forensic competition. Comparative data should also be sought to establish if the judge pool analyzed here is typical of other N.F.A. national competitions or even of local forensic tournaments.

A third area for investigation suggested by this data is the question of style versus substance in competitive forensics. If we assume that contestants will adapt their presentation to the expectations of the judge in a competition then the signal being sent by judges in this sample is clearly one where substance is of little concern. Charges of sophism usually produce a defensive attitude in forensic coaches. We claim to teach sound methods of developing, supporting, and organizing claims not just delivering them. Yet the data presented here seem to indicate that the basis for our competitive decisions are most likely to be based on organization and are more likely to be influenced by delivery than content. Perhaps these results are an aberration or perhaps a concern for style and structure does not undermine a concern for substance but it is also possible that in our desire to promote high quality presentational skills we are paying less attention to the quality of the arguments being offered in that presentation. It is also possible that despite a concern for the content of a message we are signaling to competitors through our comments and rankings a greater concern for delivery and organization. In any case, further research might focus on the substance versus style issue to determine where our priorities are being placed and what implications those priorities will have on forensic activity.

A fourth concern is the overwhelming dominance of Mid-Western judges at national competitions. If we assume that audience adaptation is a significant aspect of forensic competition then Mid-Western contestants may have a distinct advantage over contestants from other geographic regions. Research might focus on Mid-Western judges to determine if they mirror other judges in terms of decision making, philosophy etc. Perhaps the N.F.A. should consider some means of balancing these regional variations by encouraging hired judges from non-Mid-Western regions of the country.

A more controversial question in terms of this research is whether judges should be required to make public their preferences and expectations on various event conventions, stylistic practices, organizational schemes or content features. The National Debate Tournament has in recent years required judges to submit a

judging philosophy form which is distributed to contestants. Although the merits of this practice are hotly debated by members of the NDT community perhaps individual events should consider some alternative means of providing similar information. If we expect students to adapt their presentation to an audience then don't we have an obligation to give students more than anecdotal information regarding the expectations of that audience. Just the act of compelling the various philosophies of judges might indicate ways to improve forensic activity.

In summary, the need for research on judge demographics and judge philosophy is critical. So long as the outcome of our activity is linked to the decision of a person with a ballot, we should endeavor to understand how that person makes decisions, applies standards and imposes their expectations upon contestants.