

2017 Oratory Contest Rules and Information

Contest Rules

1. Eligibility: To compete in the state and local contests, contestants must be in grades 9-12 as of February 1, 2017. To compete in the national contest, students must be a junior or senior. If the state's first place winner is in grade 9 or 10, he/she will win the first place prize, and the highest scoring student in grade 11 or 12 will advance to the national contest. In case of non-traditional students or home-school students, the school must recognize the student as in the equivalent grade or the year the student will enter college will be used to determine eligibility.
2. Students can only compete in one local affiliate contest in a contest year.
3. Contestants are to research, write and present an original prolife speech on the issue of abortion, infanticide, euthanasia, or embryonic stem cell research (including human cloning if desired). The speech should address one of these topics directly, using other topics only as support. Copyrighted speeches are not allowed. Contestants must use entirely new speeches if they compete in multiple years. Speeches must be typed in full and submitted with the contestant's application.
4. Because the speech is to be an oration, appropriate gestures are allowed. The style and speech type should be appropriate to the message, but the speech must not be a dramatic presentation (e.g. portrayal of a baby in the womb, short story, poem). Quotes are fine but should not dominate the speech and must be appropriately attributed. Props are not permitted.
5. The speech should appeal to a broad audience.
6. Speeches are to be 5 to 7 minutes in length. Penalizing speeches outside the 5 to 7 minute range is left to judges' discretion. Speeches under 4 or over 8 minutes will be disqualified.
7. When using facts and statistics, contestants should use current information available from reputable sources. Contestants may be penalized by judges for using inaccurate information.
8. Judges score speakers on a 10-point scale in each of these five criteria: introduction, content, presentation, conclusion and the judges' overall opinion.
9. Speech content may not be significantly changed as a contestant advances, though fine-tuning for minor corrections, timing, etc. is allowed and encouraged. A copy of the winner's speech is forwarded to the state and national levels to ensure that no major changes have been made.
10. Memorization is not required and it is acceptable for contestants to use notes or refer to their written speeches if necessary. Though not required at the national level, most speeches are memorized.
11. Contestants will have the option to use a podium and a microphone at the state contest if available. Microphones are generally not allowed at the national contest.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: When are the local and state contests?

- A: 1. Affiliates set their local date. Affiliates should submit the local contest sponsorship form by Friday, January 27. Local contests are usually held in late February or March. All local contests should be finished before the Friday, April 7 due date for submitting local results.
2. The state contest will be on Saturday, May 6, 2017 in Holt, Michigan.

Q: When and where is the national contest?

- A: The national contest will be held on Saturday, July 1, 2017 during the National Right to Life Convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Q: What are the prizes?

- A: 1. Local prizes are left to the discretion of affiliates, though suggested prizes are \$100, \$50 and \$25 for the top three winners. In addition to cash prizes, groups might offer framed certificates, roses, precious feet pins, t-shirts, tickets to affiliate events and other items to all contestants.
2. State prizes include a small gift for all participants, monetary awards of \$500, \$300 and \$200 and medals for the top three winners, and an expenses-paid trip to the national contest for our national contest entrant and a parent/guardian.
3. National prizes are \$1,000, \$750, \$500 and \$250 for the top four winners. In addition, the first place winner will receive tickets to the National Right to Life Convention banquet the night of the contest and will be asked to give his/her speech at the banquet.

Q: Where can students obtain resource materials for their chosen topics?

- A: Newspapers, libraries and the Internet are great sources of information. Right to Life of Michigan's website www.RTL.org is an excellent resource. Right to Life of Michigan Educational Resource Centers also have resources available. Ambitious students might also contact staff at local crisis pregnancy centers or hospices for an inside perspective on life issues. Contestants should avoid using research that would not be acceptable in a paper assigned for a class (e.g. Wikipedia).

Q: What if our local contest winner can't attend the state contest?

- A: The runner-up in the local contest may compete in the state contest should the winner be unable to attend. The deadline for local contest coordinators to notify the state oratory coordinator of the runner-up's substitution and to submit the runner-up's speech is Monday, April 17.

Q: Can last year's contest winner participate in next year's contest?

- A: Local and state contest winners are not excluded from participating. Students winning first place in the national contest as juniors are not allowed to compete again nationally their senior year, but are welcome to participate in the state contest.

Q: Why are freshman and sophomores not allowed to compete nationally?

- A: National Right to Life sets the rules for the national contest and has decided against allowing them to participate.

Key Dates and Planning Points for Affiliates

Contest Dates and Deadlines:

- Send your local contest sponsorship form to the RLM State Office by Friday, January 27, 2017
- After your contest, the local coordinator should send copies of all contestant application forms and the first place winner's speech to the RLM State Office. Materials are due by Friday, April 7, 2017.
- All local contests should be finished before the Friday, April 7, 2017 due date for submitting local contest information.
- If the local 1st place winner is unable to attend the state contest, the deadline for submitting the runner-up's information and speech to the RLM State Office is Monday, April 17, 2017.
- The state contest is Saturday, May 6, 2017 in Holt, Mich. State contest packets and information will be sent to local winners and coordinators on April 11 after all local contests are finished.

Planning Points:

1. Determine contest date, time and location. Design a program, arrange for refreshments, and make sure you have materials for a literature table at the event.
2. Promote your contest! Call churches, youth groups, teachers, home school associations, local radio stations, newspapers and utilize social networking. Send a letter/e-mail to those you spoke with about the contest, including the publicity poster, contest rules and the application form along with your contact information. Follow up with them and ask if you can announce your contest during class or an event/meeting. Inquire with speech or debate teachers who require students to participate in similar events. Utilize your local prolife teens and college students to spread the word to other teens, siblings and their teachers. If you have social networking pages or e-mail lists promote the contest there as well.
3. Make sure students, parents and judges are aware of deadlines, all contest rules, and the date and location of your contest. **You are welcome to provide contestants with copies of the 2017 Oratory Contest Rules and Information page contained in your contest packet.** Your contest coordinator should be available to answer any questions.
4. Recruit judges and a timekeeper. Provide each with the judge instructions, contest rules and a sample ballot in advance. Timekeepers can be staff or affiliate members, or the contest coordinator can do this. You are encouraged to have the timekeeper hold up warnings cards to notify contestants that they are approaching the seven-minute mark during their speech. Judges should be independent however, please see the following instructions for judges.
5. The day of the contest, thank all students and urge them to stay involved with your affiliate. **Let them know about volunteer opportunities with your affiliate.** Invite teens and their friends to help with your annual events: dinners, auctions, marches, rallies, helping in the office, etc. If there is no active Students for Life group in your area, help them get started or call Natalie Collins at 616-532-2300 for more advice.
6. After the contest, send all of your student applications and the winner's speech to the state office by the due date.

Instructions for Judges

These instructions, adapted from National Right to Life Committee guidelines, serve as a general overview for oratory judges serving at the local and state levels:

- Three judges typically are required for the contest. Each judge will be informed of the contestant speaking order. Ballots and the contestants' speeches will be provided.
- Judges are free to write comments on the speaker's ballot both during and after speeches. The ballots are returned to speakers to provide them feedback. Therefore, we ask judges to sign each ballot and write pertinent comments. Comments may be largely positive and encouraging, but should reflect the reasoning behind the score given. Comments should be brief and relate primarily to the speech criteria listed at the bottom of each ballot. Be honest with students and let their ballots be teaching tools to help them become better prolife speakers.
- At the end of each speech the timekeeper announces the time of that speech for the judges to record on the ballot. Subtracting points for speeches which are not within the 5 to 7 minute time frame is left to the judges' discretion. Speeches under 4 or over 8 minutes will be disqualified by the contest director in the final overall tallying, but judges should still fill out ballots for the benefit of the speaker.
- Judges will have time after each speech to complete scoring and comments. After all judges are finished the moderator will call the next contestant up to speak.
- At the conclusion of all presentations, judges will pass ballots to the moderator or tallying individual, who with the judges will tabulate ballot scores to determine winners (please double check all ballot scores). Any tie-breakers will be determined by the judges.

Guidelines for Recruiting Judges:

Oratory contest judges serve as constructive critics of the presentations and use a predetermined scoring system. It is imperative that individuals chosen as judges are qualified to serve in this role. An ideal oratory judge:

- Is sympathetic to the prolife cause and feels a special appreciation for prolife youth and the importance of this contest in helping youth develop talents to be future prolife leaders.
- Possesses knowledge of oration and the nature of this contest.
- Is a respected member of the community as determined by the local affiliate.
- Should be at least 21 years of age.
- Must not be an immediate relative of any contestant or an officer, board member or staff member of Right to Life of Michigan or our affiliates.

**Any questions about guidelines should be directed to:
State Oratory Coordinator Natalie Collins at 616-532-2300 or ncollins@rtl.org**

