



# EXTEMP COMMENTARY

## STARTER KIT



An Extemp Commentary resource that explores:

- Event Rules
- Sample Prompts
- Finding and Memorizing Sources
- Planning Your Delivery
- Notable Examples for Analysis

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**National Speech & Debate Association***

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## WHAT IS COMMENTARY?

In general, a Commentary speech is an opinionated analysis of an issue or idea. Within speech and debate, there are two types of Commentary: Extemporaneous and Prepared. This guide will focus on Extemporaneous Commentary.

Commentary combines the speaking skills and personality of Original Oratory with the knowledge base and limited preparation of Extemporaneous Speaking. Because of this, there is no one way to succeed in Extemporaneous Commentary.

Think of Commentary as a podcast: a speaker sits at a table or desk while providing a conversational speech about the given prompt. Jokes, personal stories, and statistical evidence can all be incorporated into a speech, though there is no set requirement for how much of any one anecdote should be included.

A Commentary speech can cover a wide range of issues. Because of this, Commentary is an incredibly dynamic event. As rounds delve into all types of issues, a speaker must be able to understand what the tone of the room should be for the speech they are about to present.

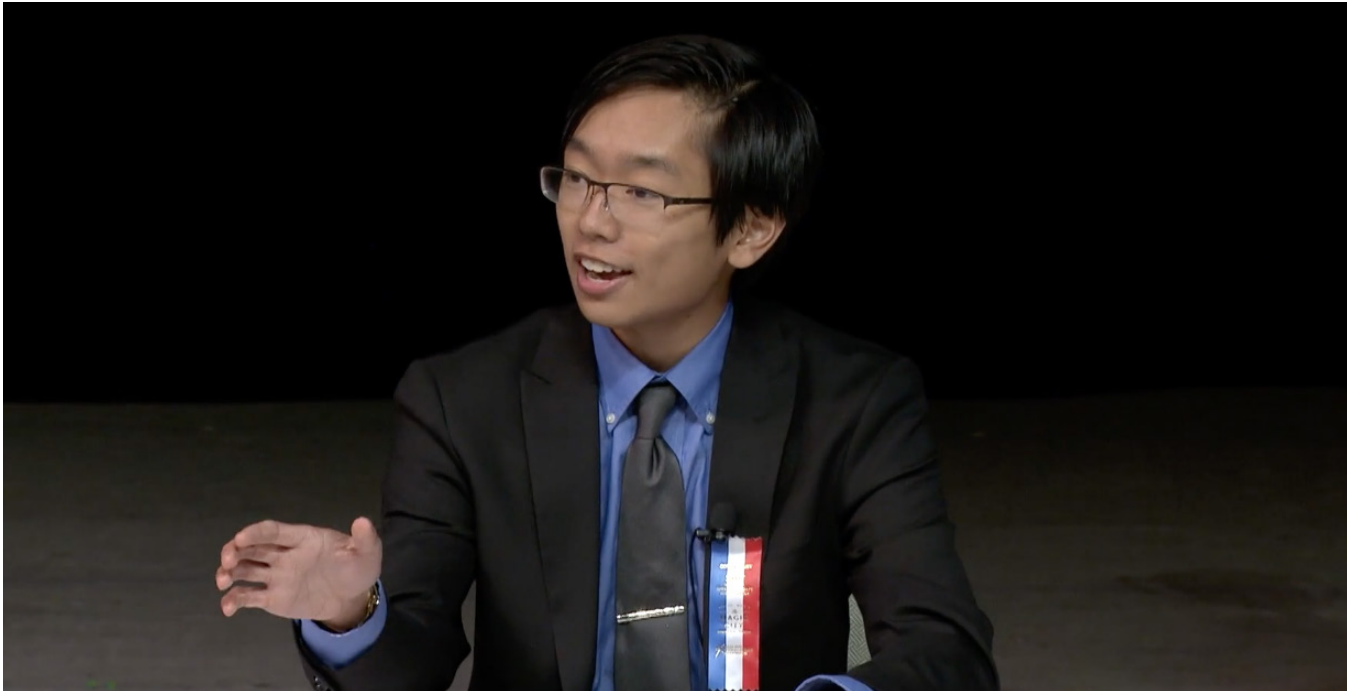
## WHO SHOULD TRY COMMENTARY?

Because Commentary prompts can range from pop culture to politics, students who have knowledge on a little bit of everything will find this event particularly enjoyable. Commentary rounds have less prep time than your average limited prep event, but this shortened prep allows you to develop a speech that's rooted in personal knowledge and storytelling.

Another characteristic of a Commentary competitor is the ability to be flexible. You will be giving speeches on anything from the history of the happy birthday song to the

intersection of water scarcity and poverty. A competitor must be prepared to learn about any topic on a whim.

Most importantly, a willingness to have fun is crucial for Commentary success. Prompts often have witty and creative wording, so developing a speech that leans into the uniqueness of the prompt will make the round more entertaining for both you and your audience.



## ABOUT COMMENTARY

### NSDA RULES

Extemporaneous Commentary is a limited preparation event where students prepare a five minute speech on a drawn topic. Students may consult the internet or unannotated printed articles during prep time but may not use any previously prepared speeches during prep. Keep in mind the following criteria for articles or journals:

- a.** Articles are originals or photocopies of originals.
- b.** Original articles or copies are intact and uncut.
- c.** No written material is on originals or copies.
- d.** Topical indexes without annotation are allowed.

Speakers will draw 20 minutes before their designated speaking time. Each speaker will draw

three topics under a designated round theme and select one to prepare a speech.

Speakers may prep a speech using any form of note-taking, but no notes are allowed to leave the prep area or be used during a round. Only the prompt may leave the room with you. The National Tournament permits the use of internet during Extemporaneous Commentary prep per the Current Guidelines for Use of Internet Enabled Devices in Extemporaneous Speaking. For details, please reference the [Unified Manual](#).

Once dismissed, you may head to your room for your round. Speeches are delivered sitting at a table or desk. Speeches are capped at five minutes with an additional 30-second grace period. If you go over on time, you cannot be ranked first in the round.

### EXAMPLE PROMPTS

- “Dams, Lakes, Rivers, Oh My! Water Sources Drying Up”
- “Global Poverty Rises: So Broke, Can’t Pay Attention”
- “Sesame Street: Big Bird and Friends are Over 50”
- “Fox New Ratings Up, CNN News Ratings Down”
- “The Decision to Admit Women to Yale University”
- “The Tet Offensive”
- “Space Tourism: Will I Need My Passport?”
- “Pardon Me, Have You Seen Any Honey Bees Around?”
- “Model T or Model S?”
- “Vernon Jordan: Civil Rights Mover and Shaker”

### SPEECH STRUCTURE

Your speech should follow a general format:

1. Introduction (1 minute)
2. Main Point #1 (<2 minutes)
  - a. Anecdote or Source #1
  - b. Anecdote or Source #2
3. Main Point #2 (<2 minutes)
  - a. Anecdote or Source #3
  - b. Anecdote or Source #4
4. Conclusion (30 seconds)

Sticking with this format has two main benefits. First, it ensures that you can incorporate evidence in an easy-to-follow format. Secondly, it is similar to the format for preparing an

Extemporaneous Speaking speech, meaning that you won’t have to relearn a format specifically for this event.

Your introduction should start with a generalized attention-getter, such as a story or joke. Finish your intro with stating the prompt and provide a roadmap of your speech. For example, “First, we’ll talk about [Main Point #1] before shifting our focus to [Main Point #2].”

After introducing your speech, transition into your first Main Point. You may transition by telling a joke or providing a reference to your attention-getter (*reference example speeches in the Practice Videos section for transition ideas*). State your anecdote, article, or statistic, citing the source and date as needed. After this, connect your example to the overall idea you are trying to present. Transition and repeat for Main Point #2. You may need to incorporate more sources or a third point depending on your response to a given topic.

Once you’ve completed delivering the body of your speech, restate your prompt and finish your speech with a nod to your introduction. Consider writing out a final sentence to commit to memory so that you can wrap up your speech in a satisfying and clear manner.

A template for writing out a Commentary speech can be found at the end of this section.

### BEFORE THE ROUND

When rounds are posted, be sure to scout out your presentation room before heading to draw. As you approach draw time, make sure all materials are gathered before heading to your round. Bring only the bare minimum materials (*a computer, scratch paper, and pen*) to the round.

#### OVERVIEW OF A COMMENTARY ROUND

Extemporaneous Commentary starts with all competitors together in a shared prep space. Be sure to stay quiet to respect other competitors. You may not consult anyone else for information once the first speaker draws, so don't talk or you risk disqualification.

Here's your average Commentary round:

When you enter the space, ensure that you don't have any prohibited materials with you. Once your speaker position is called (*this will be 20 minutes before your posted speak time*), head to the front table where a tournament worker is located and draw your questions. At the National Tournament, you will draw a single sheet of paper with all three topics listed on it. Report your topic to the tournament worker before returning to your seat to prepare. Time starts from the moment you draw questions, so select your topic efficiently.

Once you are dismissed from prep by the tournament worker, head to your round. Be sure to commit the prompt, areas of analysis, and evidence to memory while heading to your competition space. You will enter the room, sit down, let your judge know your chosen prompt, and begin speaking.

#### PRO TIPS:

- Remember to ask your judge for time signals at the beginning of the round. Though the judge may have a stopwatch, it's helpful to ensure that you'll have indicators of your time before starting your speech.
- Have an idea of where your speaking room is before you start prepping. You won't have time to search for a room once the round begins.
- Don't bring anything except for your prompt into the presentation room with you. Not only does having extraneous materials risk having your phone or other device go off, but it allows you to limit distractions in the round.

NAME:

## SPEECH OUTLINE TEMPLATE

**INTRO:**

**PROMPT:**

**MAIN POINT 1:**

**MAIN POINT 2:**

**ANECDOTE 1:**

**ANECDOTE 3:**

**ANECDOTE 2:**

**ANECDOTE 4:**

**FINAL SENTENCE:**





### PRACTICE TECHNIQUES

Commentary is an extremely dynamic event. Because of this, a range of practice techniques is necessary. You'll find practice suggestions here according to a particular skill you're looking to define.

#### IMPROVING FLUENCY

Like any speech event, the most important skill that a competitor can have is the ability to speak clearly and concisely. Here are some drills to improve your fluency.

##### *Have a Conversation*

Rather than subjecting every speech to the analysis of a coach, present speeches in a conversational tone to friends, pets, or a wall (*while seated, of course*). This accomplishes three things. First, it will help you to understand your personal speaking style while avoiding the “ums” and “ahs” that can sometimes accompany nervous presentations. Second, it

allows you to embrace the conversational style of a Commentary speech. Showcasing your personality is crucial for Commentary success. Finally, it lets you know how much knowledge you actually have about a given topic. If you can explain why climate change matters to your dog, you'll have confidence in your background knowledge when you enter a round.

##### *Make Things Up*

Though this sounds counterintuitive, practicing the skill of presenting while thinking on the spot will drastically increase fluency. Have a friend or parent give you two random words. You have to connect them together with a broader social issue on the spot, with no prep time or sources.

For example: **grill** and **flag**. You can say something like: “Grills have become a staple of American culture, providing a place of connection during events ranging from a

backyard barbecue to a citywide Fourth of July. However, a decline in national pride stemming from myriad social issues threatens this fundamentally necessary connection. As grills turn off and flags come down, it leaves the question: what do we stand to lose when patriotism fizzles?”

This game takes two seemingly unrelated things and pulls them together in an unexpected way, also known as A to C thinking. This game will provide you with the quick thinking skills to craft a speech that is entertainingly unexpected while presenting an analysis that the audience wouldn't consider at first glance.

### FINDING SOURCES

#### *Read the News!*

This may seem obvious, but having a strong grasp on politics and major world and national events will keep you prepared for any topic that is thrown your way. Write down articles that you find particularly interesting. While you won't be able to consult this list during the round, it will be helpful when you are reviewing beforehand.

#### *Follow What's Trending on Twitter*

The best way to have a finger on the pulse of pop culture is to follow what's trending on Twitter or other social media platforms. These posts will be helpful for crafting an arsenal of knowledge for comedic bits or introductions.

#### *Check a Source Credibility Chart*

It is important to read and include sources from a broad range of perspectives. Consulting an online source credibility chart like [AllSides](#) will help you understand the leanings and perspectives of a source.

### MEMORIZING SOURCES

#### *Speed Prep Drills*

Prep a full Commentary speech, but provide yourself with only five or 10 minutes of prep time. This will force you to learn to memorize on the go.

#### *List the Source*

Have a friend list off five sources with dates in a row. Repeat all five in the same order. For more of a challenge, add more sources.

### ADDING PERSONALITY

#### *Practice with a Mirror*

Deliver your speech in front of a mirror to gauge your facial expressions and hand gestures in real time. This allows you to understand the entertaining nonverbals of a speech that help keep an audience engaged while providing you the ability to adjust your nonverbals in real time.

#### *Watch Late Night Shows*

You don't have to be a comedian to succeed at Commentary, but watching some can help. Watching late-night monologues from *The Tonight Show* or similar programs will allow you to understand how talking about current events can be made entertaining.



## DELIVERY

### ENUNCIATION AND SPEED

Speak clearly at a conversational speed. Many prompts are off-the-wall and unexpected, so be sure to be especially clear when stating the prompt. Watching videos of your own practice speeches can help refine this skill.

### GESTURES

Hand gestures are slightly different in Commentary than most speeches because you are sitting. Keep your hands visible on the table for the entire speech while moving them to emphasize different points. Commentary is conversational, so embrace the way you'd naturally gesture if you were explaining a topic you were excited about at the dinner table.

### TONE

Remember that your emotional tone will vary from speech to speech. Take note of your topic

and adjust the way you present it accordingly. The easiest way to lose a round is by using an offensive or inappropriate tone, especially in a setting where comedic anecdotes are encouraged but aren't always appropriate.

### EYE CONTACT

Remember to make eye contact with your judge. If there is only one person in the room, make eye contact as you would during a one-on-one conversation. If there are multiple people watching your round, pan the room. Eye contact is crucial for connecting with the audience with your speech, but if it makes you uncomfortable, stare at the audience's foreheads. They won't be able to tell the difference.

## RESOURCES

### PRACTICE VIDEOS



**James Han – “Brexit—June 23, 2016” – 2017 Nationals**

<https://www.speechanddebate.org/nationals-2017-commentary-finals/>

James’ speech serves as a wonderful example of A to C thinking. They take a topic with historical implications and turn it into a broader modern-day conversation about control. James weaves together comedy, historical context, and smooth hand gestures to create a speech that is engaging and interesting.

#### *Questions to consider:*

- What are other ways that this prompt could have been interpreted?
- What is a benefit and a downfall of James’s unique interpretation?



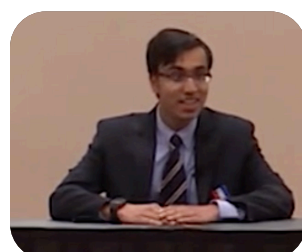
**Akshatha Narasimhan – “More Sanctions on Iran” – 2019 Nationals**

<https://www.speechanddebate.org/nationals-2019-commentary-finals/>

Akshatha does a fantastic job of understanding the tone of the prompt. They provide context on a serious issue before delving into the complexity of the topic that they chose. They close with a fantastic call to action, imploring the audience to more deeply consider the ways in which we are “left in the dark.”

#### *Questions to consider:*

- What does Akshatha’s speech gain from a lack of comedy in the context of this prompt?
- What did you (*as an audience member*) know about this topic before? What did Akshatha teach you, and how did they make it easily understandable?



**Shawn Kant – “I’ll Fly Away, UFO, I’ll Fly Away” – 2016 Nationals**

<https://www.speechanddebate.org/nationals-2016-commentary-finals/>

Shawn has a beautifully organized speech. They lay out a clear roadmap of both of their points at the beginning, tie the wording of their prompt into each transition, and utilize hand gestures to effectively signal when they are transitioning between points.

#### *Questions to consider:*

- What areas could Shawn add more comedy or personality to their speech?
- Are there any areas you would have worded differently? How would you have stated them?



## **ABOUT THE NATIONAL SPEECH & DEBATE ASSOCIATION:**

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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:**

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

## **VISION:**

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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](http://www.speechanddebate.org)