

Analysis: The forgotten key to extemp Success

by Shawn Augsburger

As an occasional judge for high school speech tournaments in southern California I can say that I am frequently bothered whenever I judge extemp by many mistakes that people make. Some are trivial, but others are not. One mistake that seems to pervade some competitors is that they become so enthralled with citing sources that they conclude that if they get enough quoted text that after an intro, conclusion, and some transitions that they need to say little more. To begin with, extemp is not an exercise in merely remembering citations, but rather an event that attempts to use evidence to defend a logical conclusion to a prompt on an important event or problem of our time. What seems to be missing in these speeches is useful analysis to guide the judge to your conclusion. Particularly if your judge does not necessarily agree with your conclusion, it is critical that you attempt to not skip steps in reaching a conclusion. One can have 7-11 citations and impress the judge with your short term memory recall, but if one can't weave the facts with your own opinion of what the answer to the question ought to be together into a cohesive speech you will have what comes off as a laundry list of citations without any connection. Too often most of the non-cited material is either unimportant, mini-intros for subsections of the speech, or simply re-stating the citation with different words. Non-cited material in the body of your speech should attempt to connect why the citation is relevant, and how it is related to the other citations. If the speaker isn't "painting" a picture of how all these facts, expert opinions, etc. give us your answer than you are likely to confuse judges and confused judges give low ranks. While some may think that the confused judge is unlikely, I would retort that some judges may be so ignorant on your topic that you may get surprisingly close approximation to a true *tabula rasa* judge.

A theoretical example of how we could analyze some citations could be to take statistical data from two different periods to regions in an almanac. Say if one were to cite that unemployment in California in say 1994 was about 7.4 percent that may not mean much to the judge particularly if they never pay attention to statewide unemployment or perhaps they simply didn't even live in California at the time. On the other hand were you to also point out the current unemployment rates in California and contrast them with current unemployment rates one could come to the conclusion that Governor Schwarzenegger does not have quite as difficult of a challenge as say one his predecessors, Pete Wilson, had in an earlier recession whereas unemployment was concerned. Merely because you don't have a source on hand for that conclusion doesn't mean you can't make that conclusion, but sometimes independent thought and connecting two facts together shows more comprehension of the context of the current crisis than merely regurgitating what "experts" cite. I am not trying to trivialize the opinions of what may seem like experts in the media, but even the experts sometimes make mistakes in their reasoning. While a yes-no question only offers two options, the open-ended question offers an interesting option. Open-ended questions on the other hand allow you to create an amalgam of ideas from different sources to create an answer that can stand on the shoulders of the advocates of various political ideologies to make a claim that is more likely to convince the judge who is skeptical of your position.

Combining modest length citations with intelligent commentary in the body of the

speech will not only make skeptical judges more likely to give higher ranks, but also result in less confusion.