

How to Cut articles for an Extemp Box

by Shawn Augsburger

This is a special skill which isn't as easy as it sounds. To begin with before you can cut anything out one needs to have read the article. Someone who wasn't very good at extemp once asked me whether I read the articles before I cut them. My answer: "of course." In reality if one doesn't read the articles one can be deceived into cutting out not so useful articles or missing very good one's. For example I can remember several articles that for various reasons would be a waste of time. Here are some that I've seen:

Deng close to death. (He died soon after and the article was too brief to be noteworthy. Actually unless someone is a current world leader most peoples death's probably aren't going to be the topic of any extemp topics.)

Report: Concorde doesn't have cracks (The next day the Concorde crashed in France.)

Clinton Impeached (Yes, believe or not this was not worth cutting out. There are two reasons: 1. Great collectors item. 2. Beyond who voted for what the article didn't provide any commentary.)

If you are cutting an article out of a newspaper you often face the problem of picking articles. Due to the fact that newspapers are double sided one is often pitted to decide when there are two articles that could be useful for extemp. This requires the person either have a second copy of the same newspaper (doubling your costs!) or it forces you to decide which is the better to cut out. A third option is to print out a copy of the article off of their website, but this assumes that they provide text of their articles online for free (this isn't always the case) and that the article hasn't been deleted yet (most sites only provide archives for a few days before it becomes unavailable for free). For our purposes we assume that losing an article is the only option. The skill of knowing which article is more useful to you is one which is useful even if you have the money for two copies of the same publication. Why you may ask? The answer is simple. If the person is completely unfamiliar with their extemp box one might essentially cut out the same article twice from two different publications. Since most of the news media takes their news off of the various news wires often one will find that most articles on the front page will be fairly similar or verbatim to the newswire because their source is the same. The only difference is how the staff writer edited the article. Another reality is not all articles that are related to national or international news are worth putting in an extemp box. If the article isn't at least 20-25 lines it probably isn't worth cutting out. If the article doesn't report anything noteworthy(ie. recounts in Florida continue) than the article won't help you a whole lot. Commentary articles which are typically found in the editorial page (although not always...) are often more valuable sources than the actual news stories. The front page tends to be filled with more simplified information whereas the editorial page is where the words of

depth tend to lie.

After you have looked on both sides of the page and finally decided what to cut out you should immediately add the date, and the source. If you have multiple newspapers it becomes easy to not know where something came from unless you were the one who cut out that article. Also remember that you are allowed to highlight in only ONE color. At NFL tournaments one can be defaulted for breaking the highlighting color rule. You might as well follow the NFL rules if you ever want to use that article at an NFL tournament. Personally I never highlight any article because as anyone who has ever bought a used book that was highlighted knows the highlighting is only ever meaningful to the person who did the highlighting.

As one can see the art of cutting articles out for an extemp box requires time and isn't something that ought to be rushed for otherwise you will end up with a box full of haphazardly cut articles of sometimes dubious value.