

Extemp Introductions: The Evil of Canned Intros

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Speeches are like essays. They have an introduction, a body, and a conclusion but the introduction is perhaps the most important of the three. The introduction is of course the part of the speech where the judge and your audience first hear your ideas and see how you answer the question. While great introductions don't win rounds, bad introductions can lose rounds rather quickly. So how does one come up with a good introduction? There is unfortunately no one surefire way, but there are plenty of wrong things to do. First we look at the bane of extemp judges everywhere: the canned introduction.

Canned introductions tend to be quite bad and it shows! Why are they bad? One extemper whose identity I wouldn't reveal for their ignorance claimed that they used the same canned introduction for every extemp. Why is this bad? If the judge sees the same speaker give the same introduction more than once it makes the speaker appear to be unoriginal. Extemporaneous doesn't imply canned. In fact the definition implies quite the opposite. If you love oratory, do oratory, but extemp is not an oratory contest. Hence many judges myself included tend to frown upon obvious canned introductions. Part of the beauty of extemp in my opinion is the off the cuff nature. This is not to say that one shouldn't memorize anything. Quite the contrary. One can use a quotation to begin your speech which you could have known ahead of time or simply found in a quotation book while in prep, but most quotations require some context to introduce your topic to the judge.

Good introductions contrast from bad ones in that they tend to be unique to the topic and they tend to ideally offer the opportunity to create an automatic conclusion because you can return to your introduction at the end and close off the loose ends. They are unique because they directly relate to the topic unlike the vast majority of canned introductions. This is why simple stories like those contained in Aesop's fables can make decent introductions.

While introductions may be a small part of your speech their importance is certainly not small.