

Proposal to Allow a Less Restrictive Use of Notes in Speech Categories

Submitted by Paul Miller

Proposal: Change the language of the “notes” rule in Demonstration, Informative, Moments in History, and Special Occasion

Replace current wording: “Notes are permitted but limited to both sides of one 4" x 6" card. Use of a note card is subject to critique.”

With new wording: “The use of notes is permitted, but is subject to critique.”

Please Note: This is not actually a “new” idea, but instead will return us back to the pre-2020 rules.

Rationale:

1. Students who use notes *effectively* should not be disqualified or automatically ranked last.
2. Using notes makes speech categories more accessible to more students. I have had students in the past (and present) with various cognitive impairments who are either unable to memorize or who take longer than others to memorize. These students are more reluctant to try speech categories even though they often have unique perspectives and valuable messages to share.
3. The current rule is essentially a memorization mandate. A single note card is not *actually* all that helpful. To be competitive in our activity, speakers need to choose their words and phrases very carefully. A single note card is only helpful for students who are speaking extemporaneously (from an outline). Few competitors, if any, are successful with that less formal delivery style.
4. Using notes also allows students to compete while they are still writing or practicing their speech. We all have that kid who wants to try a new category halfway through the season. If we force them to memorize before they are allowed to compete, then they will miss opportunities as the weeks tick by, perhaps never getting the chance to compete.
5. Memorization is always an option. Any student who wants to memorize their speech will always be allowed to do so.
6. Memorization should be encouraged, but not required. I coach my students to memorize their speeches. I acknowledge that memorization enhances delivery in many ways (not the least of which are improved eye contact and freeing of hands for gesturing). As a judge, I often give preference for speeches that are memorized, not because of the lack of notes, but because of the secondary benefits of memorization. Memorized students will always have the advantage. However, I do not feel that note-card-users should be excluded or automatically ranked last.
7. When the ‘one note card’ rule was originally rolled out, it was argued that “the rules only *REALLY* apply at the State tournament,” and “Shouldn’t we expect students to have their speeches memorized for State?” Yes, but of course the rules get applied at the weekly tournaments as well. Rogue judges continue to give note-card-users automatic 5s even when the tournament states that multiple cards are allowed. Most students *WILL* be memorized by state anyway. By the time State rolls around, the rule is no longer necessary. We should get rid of it.
8. We want *MORE* students competing in more categories. We want to encourage participation. Allowing less restrictive notes is an easy way to encourage beginners and help students try something new while still allowing our more experienced speakers to present their memorized speeches as usual.

But...

... <i>Memorized speeches are better</i>	I agree. Let’s encourage memorization <u>while they compete</u> rather than making them wait until they reach the goal of memorization.
... <i>We should hold our speakers to a high standard</i>	I agree. Any kid with note cards should hear about it from every judge. But they should receive a fair score based on where they are at, not an automatic 5.
... <i>Memorization is required in other categories, why not these categories as well?</i>	Yes, you must memorize your solo-acting script, but you don’t have to write it first. Writing takes time. Memorizing takes time. Let’s get more kids competing at the tournaments sooner.
... <i>One note card should be enough</i>	I disagree. One note card is only useful for a few reminders to a mostly memorized speech. It is not useful for a student who is just getting started.
... <i>A speaker should never read their speech word-for-word from a manuscript</i>	Nearly all of our speakers write a full word-for-word manuscript of their speech which they practice (word-for-word) and present using the same words each time. They SHOULD be allowed to read it until they memorize it.
... <i>If a student hasn’t memorized their speech, they don’t deserve to compete yet</i>	I couldn’t disagree more.