



Oratorical Contest Student Manual 2025-2026

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INTRODUCTION: “A Constitutional Speech Contest”

The American Legion Oratorical Contest exists to develop deeper knowledge and appreciation for the U.S. Constitution among high school students. Since 1938, the program has presented participants with an academic speaking challenge that teaches important leadership qualities, the history of our nation’s laws, the ability to think and speak clearly, and an understanding of the duties, responsibilities, rights and privileges of American citizenship.

Young orators earn some of the most generous college scholarships available to high school students. Over \$188,000 in scholarships can be awarded each year. The overall national contest winner gets an \$25,000 scholarship. Second place takes home \$22,500, and third gets \$20,000. Each department (state) winner who is certified into and participates in the national contest’s first round receives a \$2,000 scholarship. Those who advance past the first round receive an additional \$2,000 scholarship. The American Legion’s National Organization awards the scholarships, which can be used at any college or university in the United States.

High school students under age 20 are eligible. **Competition begins at the post level and advances to a state competition.** Legion department representatives certify one winner per state to the national contest, where department winners compete against each other in two speaking rounds. The contest caps off with a final round that decides the three top finishers.

Speaking subjects must be on some aspect of the U.S. Constitution, with some emphasis on the duties and obligations of citizens to our government.

2025-2026 ORATORICAL CHAIRS

Oratorical Committee

Department Chair	Doug Hockenberry	Oratorical@legionmail.org	727-514-3742
Central Area	Bob Bober	dvcbob_bober@yahoo.com	727-572-1725
Eastern Area	Ron Beasley	rab5234@yahoo.com	321-217-1380
Northern Area	Huey Fourquet	huey@flpost38.org	757-879-1655
Southern Area	George Bograkos	Southern@legionmail.org	954-868-2990
Southwestern Area	Laurene Allen-Flower	District13@legionmail.org	845-238-4723
Western Area			
1st District	Corlene Ziegler	corlene_z@yahoo.com	850-687-1819
2nd District	Roxann Dressel	District2@legionmail.org	850-491-5625
3rd District			
4th District	Doug Hockenberry	Oratorical@legionmail.org	727-514-3742
5th District	Leah Fogle	kidzof03@gmail.com	904-476-6412
6th District			
7th District	Kalvin Thompson	District7@legionmail.org	727-297-7364
8th District	Misty Brehm	mistylynn83@gmail.com	567-801-8606
9th District			
11th District	Stan Brown	District11@legionmail.org	561-781-4701
12th District	Karl Burtzloff	247.armyvet@gmail.com	321-408-8910
13th District	Eric Loyd	Southwestern@legionmail.org	603-903-7707
14th District			
15th District			
16th District			
17th District	Jim Bowers	District17@legionmail.org	407-484-6020

BEGINNING YOUR ORATORICAL JOURNEY

The American Legion National Oratorical Contest is a multilevel contest. In order to get to Florida's State Oratorical Contest, you must participate in:

1st Level – Florida American Legion Post Contest:

Reach out to your local American Legion Post to see when they are holding their contest. If you are the winner of the Post Level Contest, you will move on to the District Contest.

2nd Level – District Contest:

There are 16 Districts in the State of Florida and each District will host an Oratorical Contest. The winner of the District contest will go onto the Area Contest (check out page 5 to see what District your county is in).

3rd Level – Area Contest:

The state of Florida is broken up into 6 Areas. The District the Post is in will determine which Area contest the District winner will be a part of. The winner of the Area contest will go on to the State Contest. (check out page 5 to see what Area your District is in).

4th Level – State Level:

6 contestants – one from each Area – will travel to Orlando, FL to compete for the State Oratorical Title. The first-place winner will go on to compete in the National Oratorical Contest.

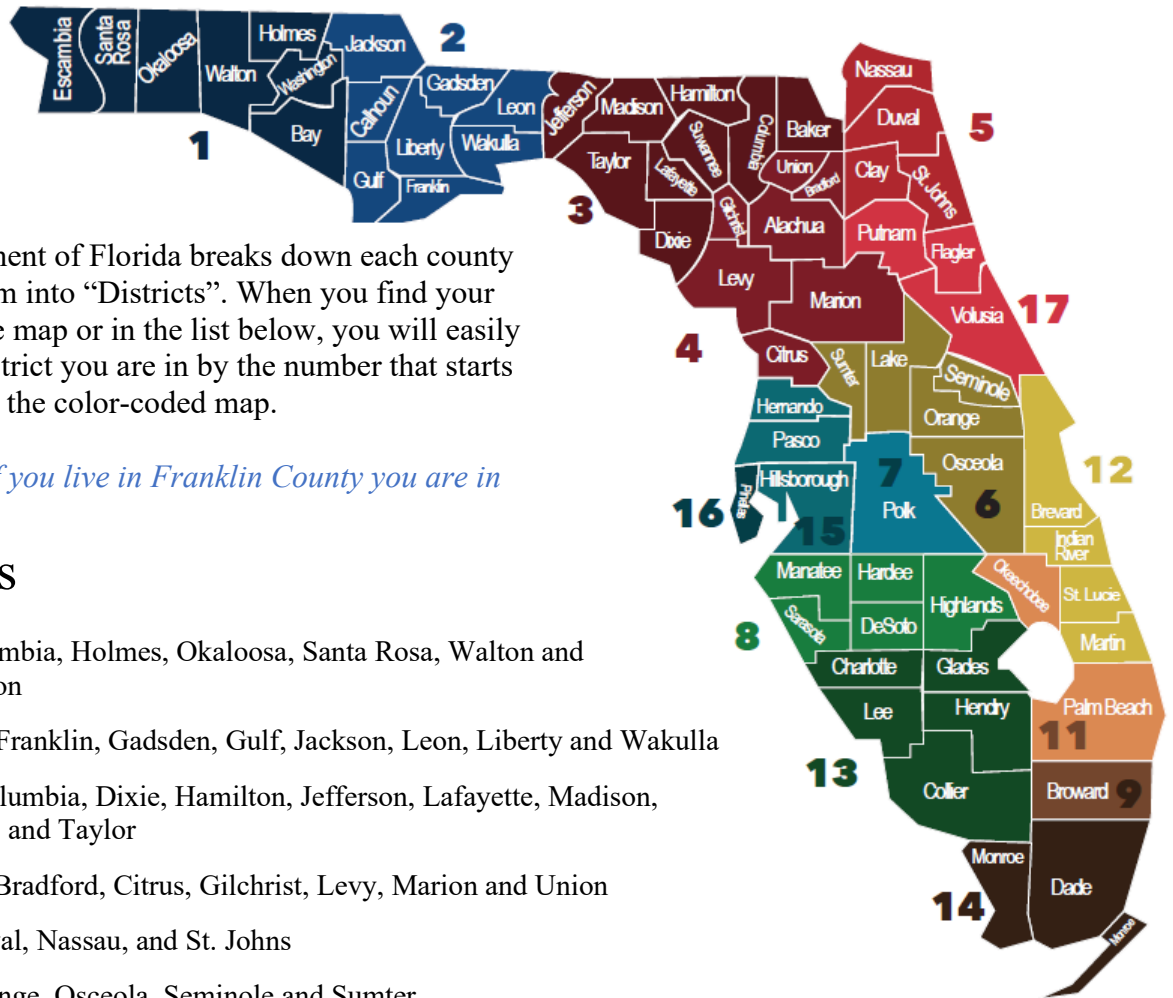
5th Level – National Contest:

The National Oratorical Contest is a three-day event where the winners from each state come together to compete in Hillsdale, MI.

Note:

- If you have any questions about the Oratorical Contest in your area you can contact the appropriate District, Area, and Department Chairs. They are here to assist you!
- The next page has a map of how the Districts and Areas are broken up so you can determine who the contact is for your local area.
- If you need any assistance with getting in touch with a chair or have any questions you can also contact American Legion, Department of Florida at 800-393-3378.

DISTRICT ORGANIZATION MAP



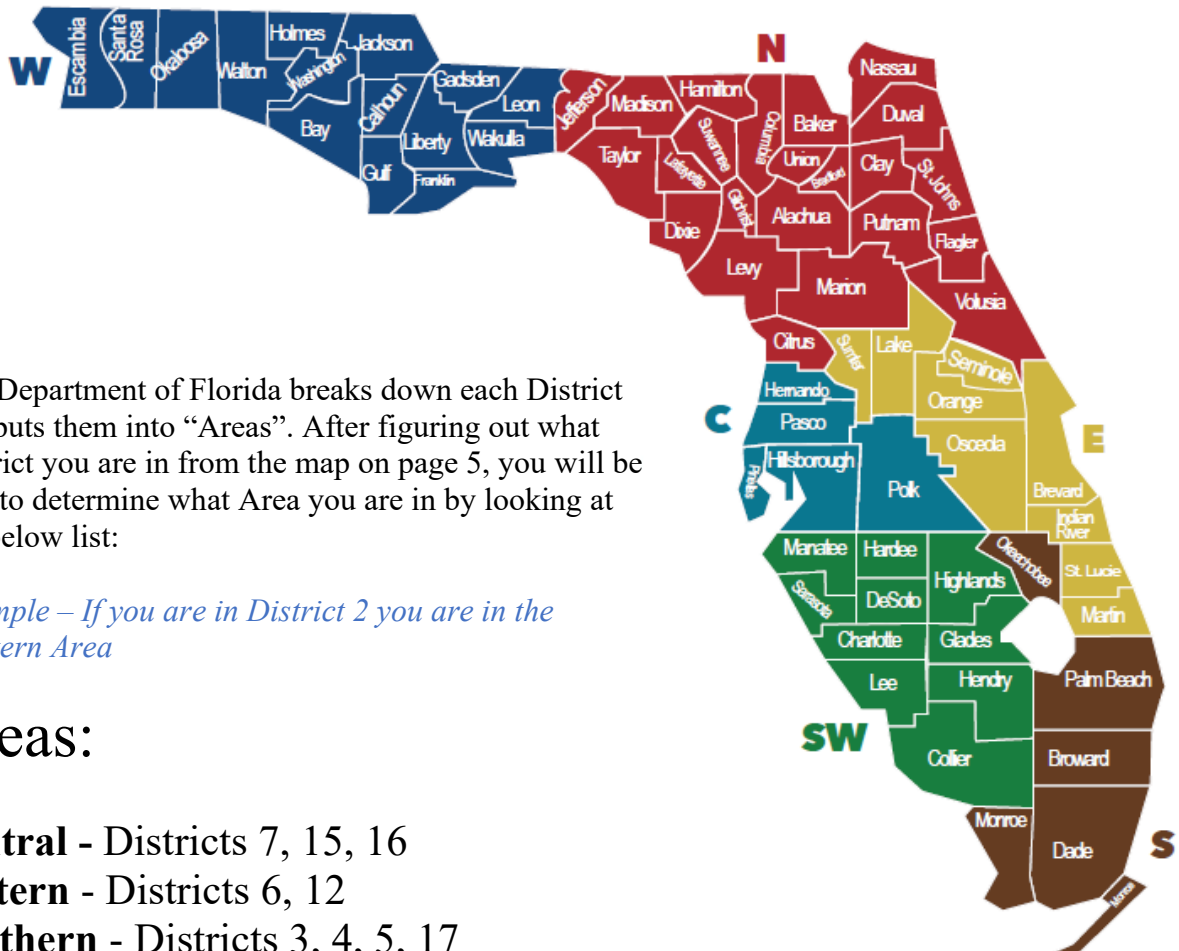
The Department of Florida breaks down each county and puts them into “Districts”. When you find your county in the map or in the list below, you will easily see what District you are in by the number that starts the list or by the color-coded map.

Example – If you live in Franklin County you are in District 2

Districts

- 1 – Bay, Escambia, Holmes, Okaloosa, Santa Rosa, Walton and Washington
- 2 – Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Jackson, Leon, Liberty and Wakulla
- 3 – Baker, Columbia, Dixie, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lafayette, Madison, Suwannee and Taylor
- 4 – Alachua, Bradford, Citrus, Gilchrist, Levy, Marion and Union
- 5 – Clay, Duval, Nassau, and St. Johns
- 6 – Lake, Orange, Osceola, Seminole and Sumter
- 7 – Polk County and that portion of Pasco County East of Interstate Hwy 75 (The American Legion Highway)
- 8 – Sarasota, Manatee, Highlands, DeSoto and Hardee, and to include Post 113 Rotonda West
- 9 – Broward County
- 11 – Palm Beach, Okeechobee and Clewiston from Hendry County, Indiantown from Martin County and that part of Martin County south of the St. Lucie River
- 12 – Brevard, Indian River, Martin (except Indiantown and that part of Martin County south of the St. Lucie River) and St. Lucie
- 13 – Charlotte, Collier, Glades, Hendry (except Clewiston) and Lee, except Post 113 Rotonda West
- 14 – Dade and Monroe
- 15 – Hillsborough County, that portion of Pasco County, except New Port Richey, Hudson, Holiday and Seven Springs West of Interstate 75, (The American Legion Highway), and all of Hernando County
- 16 – Pinellas County and New Port Richey, Hudson, Holiday and Seven Springs from West Pasco County
- 17 – Flagler, Putnam, and Volusia

AREA ORGANIZATION MAP



The Department of Florida breaks down each District and puts them into “Areas”. After figuring out what District you are in from the map on page 5, you will be able to determine what Area you are in by looking at the below list:

Example – If you are in District 2 you are in the Western Area

Areas:

Central - Districts 7, 15, 16

Eastern - Districts 6, 12

Northern - Districts 3, 4, 5, 17

Southern - Districts 9, 11, 14

Southwestern - Districts 8, 13

Western - District 1, 2

ORATORICAL CONTEST DATES AND AWARDS

DEPARTMENT CONTEST DATES

	All contests must occur during this time frame
Post Level	December 1, 2025 - January 18, 2026
District Level	January 19, 2026- February 8, 2026
Area Level	February 9, 2026 – February 22, 2026
Department Finals	March 14, 2026

DEPARTMENT CONTEST AWARDS

The awards listed below will be made at the Department level and awarded to the winners respectively. Travel and hotel accommodations will be paid by the Department of Florida for the contestants and chaperons to attend the Department Finals.

First Place	\$2,500.00
Second Place	\$1,500.00
Third Place	\$1,000.00
Fourth Place	\$500
Fifth Place	\$500
Sixth Place	\$500

Each Area contestant who participates in first round but does not advance to the Department Finals will receive a \$100.00 scholarship from the American Legion, Department of Florida. It is the Area Chair's responsibility to send the runner-up contestant information to Department, so the participant can receive the \$100.00 scholarship. Department does not issue a prize check to the Area winner.

POST/DISTRICT/AREA CONTEST DATES

Post contest completed by January 18, 2026
District contest completed by February 08, 2026
Area contest completed by February 22, 2026

RECOMMENDED POST, DISTRICT, AND AREA AWARDS

We strongly recommend that cash scholarship prizes are presented to the contestants at each contest level since these students put in a lot of time and effort into preparing speeches and participating in this contest. Here are our recommended scholarship prizes:

	1st Place	2nd Place	3rd Place
Post Level	\$75.00	\$50.00	\$25.00
District Level	\$100.00	\$75.00	\$50.00
Area Level	\$125.00	\$100.00	\$75.00

NATIONAL CONTEST DATES

The 2026 National Finals will be May 15-17th in Hillsdale, MI at Hillsdale, MI. Quarterfinals and semifinal contests are scheduled for Saturday, May 16th, with the finals scheduled for Sunday, May 17th.

Quarter-Final Round	May 16, 2026
Semi-Final Round	May 16, 2026
National Finals	May 17, 2026

All contestants and chaperones will arrive the Friday of the contest weekend. All contestants and chaperones will stay at the official contest hotel.

A mandatory pre-contest orientation session for all contestants will take place Friday evening of the contest weekend. A banquet honoring all contestants will be Sunday afternoon, following the National Championship contest. All contestants and chaperones will depart for home later that afternoon.

Travel and hotel accommodations will be paid by the National Organization for each contestant and one chaperone to attend the National Contest. More detailed information can be found at www.legion.org/oratorical.

NATIONAL CONTEST AWARDS

First Place	\$25,000.00
Second Place	\$22,500.00
Third Place	\$20,000.00

Contestants who participate in the National Quarter-Final round competition receive \$2,000.00. Contestants who participate in the National Semi-Final round competition receive an additional \$2,000.00, except the winner who advances to the National Finals.

WHAT DO THE CONTESTANTS PREPARE?

The Prepared Oration

The prepared oration must be on some **aspect of the Constitution of the United States with emphasis on the duties and obligations of a citizen to our government.** The same subject and oration used in the Department contest must be used in the National contest. The prepared oration must be the original effort of each contestant and must not take up less than eight minutes or more than 10 minutes for delivery. This aspect of the Constitution is the choice of the contestant but should have a strong emphasis on the obligations of a citizen to their government.

The Prepared Oration must be delivered in the English language. Contestants may have a hard copy of their oration in the first holding room to study but must give the copy to the escort when exiting the room to give their Prepared Oration. Cell phones or tablets are not allowed. In the prepared oration, as well as in the assigned topic discourse, quotations must be indicated as such.

Where quotations are more than 10 words in length, the author's name must be given in the manuscript and cited orally. Signing is not allowed and will result in immediate disqualification. The contestant may, however, quote a verse(s) of a song, provided proper attribution is made.

A hard copy of the Prepared Oration should be given to your Oratorical Chair on the day of the contest. The Prepared Oration you give should remain largely the same at each level of the contest though minor changes are allowed.

The Assigned Topics

The assigned topic discourse may last between three and five minutes for delivery. The purpose of the assigned topic discourse is to test the speaker's knowledge of the subject, the extent of his or her research, and the ability to discuss the topic as related to the basic principles of government under the Constitution. The assigned topic shall be drawn by the contest official in full view of the audience immediately before the last speaker begins delivery of his/her prepared oration and will be made known to the audience and each contestant approximately five minutes prior to the time of delivery. The topic will be on some aspect of the Constitution of the United States as listed under assigned topics at www.legion.org/oratorical/topics.

All contestants at each contest level are required to speak in the English language on the same assigned topic. It is acceptable to utilize or incorporate short phrases of a foreign language into the prepared oration and/or assigned topic in order to develop the argument, establish a point, etc. It is to be understood that the vast majority of the prepared oration and/or assigned topic must still be delivered in the English language.

ASSIGNED TOPICS FOR 2024-2025 ORATORICAL CONTEST

Amendment 4

The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.

Article 3, Section 3

Treason against the United States, shall consist only in levying war against them, or in adhering to their enemies, giving them aid and comfort. No person shall be convicted of treason unless on the testimony of two witnesses to the same overt act, or on confession in open court.

The Congress shall have the power to declare the punishment of treason, but no attainder of treason shall work corruption of blood, or forfeiture except during the life of the person attained.

Article 4, Section 4

The United States shall guarantee to every State in this union a republican form of government, and shall protect each of them against invasion; and on application of the legislature, or of the executive (when the legislature cannot be convened) against domestic violence.

Article 6, Clause 3

The Senators and Representatives before mentioned, and the members of the several state legislatures, and all executive and judicial officers, both of the United States and of the several states, shall be bound by oath or affirmation, to support this Constitution; but no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.

CONTESTANT ELIGIBILITY

Eligible participants in The American Legion National High School Oratorical Contest shall be citizens or lawful permanent residents of the United States.

All contestants must be bona fide students herein described as any student under the age of twenty (20) years on the date of the National Contest who is presently enrolled in a high school or junior high school (public, parochial, military, private or state accredited home school), in which the curriculum is considered to be of high school level, commencing with grade nine (9) and terminated with grade twelve (12). Students must be enrolled in high school or junior high school during the time of participation at any level of The American Legion National High School Oratorical Contest. Further, to participate in the Florida Contest, students must be residents of the State of Florida. Students whose parents are legal residents of another state must participate in that state.

CONTEST ATTIRE

- Appropriate business attire is required for all contestants.
- Uniforms are NOT permitted.
- Contestants cannot wear awards, medals or ribbons from previous competitions or from other clubs or organizations.

SAMPLE COVER SHEET FOR ORATION

**THE AMERICAN LEGION
2025-2026 NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL
ORATORICAL CONTEST**

"Title of your Prepared Oration"

Your full name, complete street address to include
city, state and zip code.

Participants will need to bring a hard copy of their Prepared Oration to each
contest they participate in.

ORATORICAL FORMS

Application:

There is no application that needs to be filled out to participate in the National Oratorical Contest. If you are interested in participating in this contest you will have to get in touch with your local American Legion Post and tell them that you would like to sign-up for their Post Level Contest.

You can contact the American Legion, Department of Florida for assistance with finding out who your local American Legion Post Chair is. Please contact:

Bekki Boarman, Programs Director
Phone #: 800-393-3378 ext.235
E-mail: programs@floridalegion.org

2025-2026 Certification Form:

Once you have signed up to participate in a Post Level Oratorical Contest you will need to have your school principal complete the top portion of the 2023-2024 Certification Form which can be found on pages 14-15. *If you are home schooled, then your instructor and/or parent can fill out the top portion of the Certification Form.*

This form must be complete and brought with you to the Post Level Contest so that the Post Oratorical Chair can complete the their section of the page. If you are the winner of the Post Level Contest, this form will be forwarded to your District Oratorical Chair, so that they are aware of you participating in the District Level Oratorical Contest. This procedure is carried out for the Area and State Contests.

DEPARTMENT OF FLORIDA

**HIGH SCHOOL ORATORICAL CONTEST
2025-2026 CERTIFICATION FORM**

ALL OTHER FORMS ARE OBSOLETE AND WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED

**THIS SECTION TO BE COMPLETED BY HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL
OTHER SECTIONS TO BE COMPLETED BY THEIR RESPECTIVE
AMERICAN LEGION ORATORICAL CHAIRS**

This is to certify that (contestant full name)_____ is
a student at _____ (name of school)
located in (name of city) _____ and is
not undergoing post-graduate work, is not deficient in any school work for the
current year, and was enrolled in this school as of December 31, 2025.

Contestant's Full Printed Name	
Contestants Physical Street Address	
Contestant's City and Zip Code	
Contestant's Phone Number	
Contestant's Email	
Parent or Guardian Printed Full Name	
Parent or Guardian Phone Number	
Parent or Guardian Email	
Principal Full Name Printed	
Principal Signature & Date	

THIS SECTION TO BE COMPLETED BY
POST CHAIR
AND MAILED TO DISTRICT CHAIR

I, _____, Oratorical Chair of Post # _____ of The American Legion Department of Florida, do hereby certify that _____ was declared by the Judges to be the winner of this 2025-2026 District Contest, and is eligible to represent this Post in the District Contest.

ATTEST:

SIGNED:

Post Commander

Post Chair

THIS SECTION TO BE COMPLETED BY
DISTRICT CHAIR
AND MAILED TO AREA CHAIR

I, _____, Oratorical Chair of District # _____ of The American Legion Department of Florida, do hereby certify that _____ was declared by the Judges to be the winner of this 2025-2026 District Contest, and is eligible to represent this District in the Area Contest.

ATTEST:

SIGNED:

District Commander

District Chair

THIS SECTION TO BE COMPLETED BY
AREA CHAIR
AND MAILED TO DEPARTMENT PROGRAMS DIRECTOR

I, _____, Oratorical Chair of Area # _____ of The American Legion Department of Florida, do hereby certify that _____ was declared by the Judges to be the winner of this 2025-2026 Area Contest, and is eligible to represent this Area in the Department Contest.

ATTEST:

SIGNED:

Area Commander

Area Chair

MEDIA RELEASE

TO BE COMPLETED BY PARENT OR GUARDIAN:

I/We understand that as part of our child's participation in The American Legion, Department of Florida Oratorical Contest, photos, videos, and quotations may be taken for use in publications and reports about the program. We further understand that members of the news media invited to cover the program may take photos, videos and quotations. We grant permission to use such materials for the promotion of the program.

I/We grant permission to The American Legion, Department of Florida and its subordinates, to use names and/or photographs for use in The American Legion publications such as recruiting brochures, newsletters, and magazines, and to use names and/or photographs on display boards, and to use names and/or photographs in electronic versions of the same publications or on The American Legion, Department of Florida web site or other electronic forms or media.

I/We hereby agree to release, defend, and hold harmless The American Legion Department of Florida and subordinates, including any firm publishing and/or distributing the finished product in whole or in part, whether on paper or via electronic media, from and against any claims, damages or liability arising from or related to the use of the photographs, including, but not limited to, any misuse, distortion, blurring, alteration, optical illusion or use in composite form, either intentionally or otherwise, that may occur or be produced in taking, processing, reduction or production of the finished product, its publication or distribution.

I/We (print full name(s) _____) am/are the parent or legal guardian of the child named below. I/We have read this release before signing below, and fully understand the contents, meaning and impact of this release.

Printed full name of contestant	
Signature of parent or guardian & date	
Email of Parent or Guardian	
Phone number of Parent or Guardian	

CONTEST OFFICIALS

JUDGES

One of the most important tasks in staging a successful Oratorical Contest is the appointment of qualified contest officials.

The judges are an integral part of the Oratorical Contest. Their qualifications should be considered carefully, as the decision of the judges is final and must be reached without bias. Impartial judging in all contests is the key to fairness and the success of the program.

Post, District, and Area Contests are required to have three (3) judges at the contest. The Department Finals requires five (5) judges.

No publicity shall be given to the names of the judges in advance of the contest. During the contest, the judges will be seated in different locations in the auditorium, and each judge will render his final decision without consultation with other judges or any other person. Official score cards, which the Chair shall provide, are available for use by the judges.

The contest chair should meet with the judges prior to the contest to ensure that the judges have a thorough understanding of their responsibility and have the necessary materials for the contest.

TABULATORS

Each contest should have **at least two (2) tabulators**; whose job it will be to make certain that the judges have fully tabulated and signed their scorecards before submitting them for final tabulation. Individuals appointed as tabulators should be well versed and experienced in working with numbers. They should be acquainted with the method of deciding a winner when two or more contestants receive the same placement point score total.

TIMERS

Each contest should **have two (2) timers**, whose job is to time each oration. They should have knowledge of reading a stopwatch. Equipment needed is stopwatches and timecards.

POLICY STATEMENTS

1. The following policies are set forth by the Oratorical Committee. These policies are in effect and shall be adhered to for all contests held in the state of Florida.
2. The National High School Oratorical Contest rules prevail unless stated differently in the Department of Florida policy statement.
3. Any qualified student who is a permanent resident of the state of Florida may enter the Oratorical Contest provided that he or she is **sponsored by a Legion Post**.
4. Contests can have no more than 6 contestants. If your contest has more than 6 contestants, you will need to divide your contest into two days to accommodate all of the contestants.
5. **Certification of winners** must be processed and forwarded to the next higher level immediately following the respective Contest.
6. *Once a contestant enters the contest at the Post level, he/she may **not** participate in any other Post contest. For Example: If Suzie is sponsored by Post 1 and does not win the Post Contest, she is ineligible to participate in another Post contest.*
7. *A **representative of the Post** sponsoring a contestant **will accompany the contestant** at each level of competition.*
8. At all levels, the contest time shall be given consideration in relationship to the distance the contestants must travel.
9. There shall be **three judges** for any level contest below the state finals.
10. Discretion shall be used when selecting Judges. People in education, forensics or debate, lawyers, judges, Toastmasters, and others familiar with speaking and the Constitution are excellent choices. For further clarification, contact Department Chair.
11. It is recommended that Legionnaires **not** be used as judges. However, if it is necessary to use a Legionnaire as a judge, he or she shall not be in uniform.
12. Prompting by parents, judges, or audience members will be considered disqualification of a contestant.
13. Props of any kind will not be allowed.
14. No contest below the State level will be held in a hotel/motel. All contests should be held in local Posts, high schools, or other appropriate facilities.
15. **The script shall be followed exactly as written** so that each contestant will have experienced the contest, as it will be conducted at both the State Finals and National levels. **DO NOT DEVIATE.**
16. Contests with only one contestant shall be conducted under regular contest conditions and rules. Judging is not required but may be performed at the chair's discretion.

17. At no time shall a volunteer, Legionnaire or Oratorical committee member be alone with a student. This is particularly important for escorts in the holding rooms or escorting students to the restrooms. Also, at no time shall a Legionnaire touch a student, except to shake hands. There should be no hugging or putting an arm around a student's shoulder or waist before, during or after the contest, including photographs. We expect our Legion members to be above reproach when dealing with students who are typically minors or very young adults.
18. A Post is not required to hold an Oratorical Contest. Many Posts don't have a Chair and have other obstacles to holding a contest, such as lack of participants. However, it's conceivable that the National office could send a qualified lead to an area where there will simply be no Post Contest. Department will try to find a Post in the same District that can sponsor the contestant. The contestant should have an opportunity to give their oration in a setting similar to a regular contest setting.

Inspiration and Resources for Students

One of the best ways to learn more about the Oratorical Contest is to watch videos of past winners. Because we are in Florida, I usually start with past National winners from Florida. The National website has some videos of past winners but it's just as easy to see videos on Youtube.

Here is Co'Relous Bryant, the 2007 National winner from Jacksonville, FL:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tSZqomRviwY&list=TLchp4qMKasug>.

And Geeta Minocha, the 2015 National winner from Ocala:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7bSi3ofDpgY>.

Podcasts

Presidential. A Podcast by Lillian Cunningham. In 44 episodes, notable historians and journalists explore the character, leadership and legacy of each of the American Presidents.

Constitutional. A Podcast by Lillian Cunningham. This series explores the Constitution and the people who framed it and reframed it—revolutionaries, abolitionists, suffragists, teetotalers, protesters, justices, presidents—in the ongoing struggle to form a more perfect union.

More Perfect. A Podcast by Radio Lab. Season 3 is all about the 27 Amendments and how the Supreme Court got so supreme. Seasons 1 and 2 are just as interesting.

We The People. A weekly show of constitutional debate hosted by National Constitution Center President and CEO Jeffrey Rosen where listeners can hear the best arguments on all sides of the constitutional issues at the center of American life.

Websites Apps & Organizations

www.Constitutioncenter.org

www.ConstitutionFacts.com

National Archives Charters of Freedom: <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs>

The Avalon Project: The American Constitution. A Documentary Record:
http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/constpap.asp

www.USHistory.org

C Span US Constitution Page: <https://www.c-span.org/classroom/>

Bill of Rights Institute: <https://billofrightsinstitute.org/>

Bill of Rights in Action: <http://www.crf-usa.org/bill-of-rights-in-action/>

Annenberg Classroom: <http://www.annenbergclassroom.org/>

LikeSo App. Say It media, Inc. was created to improve communication skills through practice with mobile apps that helps users train against verbal habits, to motivate and track and measure their speech fitness. Only available for iPhone and iPad.

The Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation & Institute Great Communicator Debate Series: <https://www.reaganfoundation.org/education/scholarship-programs/great-communicator-debate-series/>

Calvin Coolidge Presidential Foundation: They host some of the best student debaters in the country at the Coolidge Cup tournament. Their virtual library has speeches, press conferences, primary sources, essays, videos and other artifacts relevant to great oratory.
<https://www.coolidgefoundation.org/>