

The Extemp Handbook

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Preface and Dedication

Welcome to Extemporaneous Speaking, colloquially known as “Extemp”. Of all the speech categories, Extemp is one of the more clandestine/cultish categories. Here is your guide for navigating the world of Extemp. Somehow, someway, you got roped into this wonderfully complex and convoluted category. Maybe your coach forced you into after a season of debate. Maybe this was your first choice. For whatever reason, fate has placed you here. Having been a novice in this category before, it can be confusing and daunting to be in this category. This book will, hopefully, help you figure out extemp. From one extemper to another, this event has changed the way I think about life, politics, and the world. I started writing this book about a year ago because one major thing the national extemp community lacks is an accessible, free, and student-driven resource for helping extempers of all skill levels improve their craft. I want to offer a disclaimer here: this book is in no way my assertion that I’m an incredible extemper or some speech celebrity. I’m just a kid from Minnesota who’s done extemp for a while now and I figured it might help someone somewhere to have an easy to read guide on extemp. I want to be able to tell you that Extemp is what you put into it. Yet the truth is that Extemp is based on hard work and a lot of luck. Don’t focus on the results but rather on having fun. At the end of the day, Extemp is supposed to be fun; remember that.

Before we dive into the actual content, I want to give out a quick shoutout to some people, the people this book is dedicated to. First up are my two major extemp mentors: Kevin Bi and Alicia Zhang. They really taught me all the ins and outs of extemp from a competitor’s perspective. I look up to them a ton. Next up are my coaches, Katie Scholz and Alex and Katie Carlson. Thank you all so much for supporting me in all my endeavors. I couldn’t have done anything in this activity without your constant coaching and help. Third, I want to shout out to all my friends on the extemp circuit. I don’t have space to name names but you all know who you are. You are what makes this activity great. Penultimately, I want to thank my parents for always supporting me in this activity. And finally, I want to dedicate this book to my good friend Alex Yang for one simple reason: he’s the reason why I stayed in speech. Alex was one of my close friends on my team and he kept me in the event, even when I felt like quitting. Without him, I would not be the extemper or the person I am today.

By now, you’ve finished the preface, which probably means you actually want to read this. Caution: if you keep reading, I guarantee you’re going to fall in love with this event, just like I and so many others have. So sit back, relax, and get ready to learn about the world of Extemporaneous Speaking.

Sam Padmanabhan

What is Extemp?

The gist of Extemp Speaking is simple: you draw 3 questions and have 30 minutes to prepare a 7-minute question answering the question you pick. We'll go over what questions look like and how to answer them in a bit.

Extemp is split into two subgroups: International and Domestic. These are how the questions are organized. It is up to you to pick which group you want to draw questions from.

○ For Domestic (DX or USX)

- Informed and specific knowledge of US politics and information
- Solid understanding of different groups of knowledge in the US (i.e. social, political, environmental, tech news, etc.)
- Good Sources for DX
 - NYT US News (Any major news publication: LAT, WP, etc.)

○ For International (IX or FX)

- Broad knowledge of global patterns and themes
- Good understanding of how countries interact
- Good Sources for IX
 - Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
 - Council on Foreign Relations
 - NYT International News
 - Foreign Policy Magazine
 - Economist

Ultimately, the category you pick won't matter because you will most likely do both during your career in extemp (provided you stay in extemp for a while). However, when approaching either subgroup, it is imperative to know the differences in each category regarding the competition aspect. Most people assume that DX is the easier extemp, but it is equally as hard as IX. Typically, novices or people who are unsure about international politics start off in DX as a transition. More experienced extempers sometimes prefer IX because it looks at problems differently and it is a real opportunity to teach the judge as opposed to in DX, where the judge has a high probability of knowing a lot about your question. Knowing these facts is important when deciding your category. At the end of the day, a good extemper is a good extemper; choosing IX or DX just comes down to preference.

For extemp, you'll need a few basic tools, namely: a laptop, a legal pad, pens, and an extemp software. The legal pad and pens are for writing your outlines and the laptop and extemp software are for research. In our current day and age, having a laptop in Extemp is a must. Beyond that, having an Extemp software such as Prepd or Extemp Genie is also becoming more important. In the 2018-2019, the NSDA allowed the internet to be used during prep for the first time. This has changed extemp a lot but at some tournaments, the internet is still not allowed. Having an extemp software that stores articles offline is crucial and necessary. We'll do a deeper dive into prep software later on.

Questions

Extemp is based around answering a question you draw out of an envelope. You have no prior knowledge of what the questions will be on so the question writers have a lot of freedom when it comes to writing questions. Let's first unpack how questions are structured.

Most rounds will be themed based on a continent usually for IX and a topic area for DX. For IX, a themed round could be Africa and the Americas and for DX, a topic area could be Politics. This means that any and all questions for that round will be related to the topic area.

The anatomy of a question is pretty simple: every question and answer has an actor, an action word, and a subject. Look at the following question: "What should President Donald Trump do to better contain the COVID-19 outbreak in the US?" This is a very basic, straightforward question. The actor is President Trump. Your answer should focus on how his administration should tackle this problem. If your answer or analysis can't be directly linked back to how the Trump Administration (or the actor) can perform the action word, then you haven't answered the question. The action word is "how" meaning you need to come up with three unique ways the Trump Administration can respond to the outbreak. If your reasons overlap or you don't have reasons, you didn't answer the question. Finally, the subject is COVID-19. Your analysis has to be specific to this and not about other topics.

Most questions will look similar and that's because there are two types of questions: prescriptive and descriptive questions. The difference lies in the action words: descriptive questions ask you to describe something and are based around verbs such as "What", "Who", or "Why". These questions force you to identify something. Here are some examples of descriptive questions:

- "Who is the Democratic frontrunner?"
- "Why has peace been so elusive in Syria?"
- "What is the biggest threat to President Trump's reelection efforts?"

Prescriptive questions are more open-ended and harder to answer. These questions ask for you to instruct in your answer. Action words in prescriptive questions are usually "How", "Should", or "What steps". These questions require more robust and nuanced analysis. If you don't use three unique points, you haven't answered the question. Below are some examples:

- "How should the US change the Middle East Peace Plan to ensure its success?"
- "What steps should the international community take to bring peace to Syria?"
- "Should Bernie Sanders be the Democratic nominee?"

Now that we've observed what types of questions exist and how they're structured, let's dive into how to pick questions.

Every round, you will see 3 different questions from which to pick. When selecting a question, keep two things in mind: look for a question in your area of expertise and look for an interesting question.

- **Questions in your area of expertise**

- You will develop an area of expertise or a favorite topic. For me, it's foreign policy. I love a good foreign policy question. If the rounds are not topic-based and I see a foreign policy question, I take it right away. For some people, it's econ questions. Whatever your expertise is, make sure you try and pick questions that fit in there if you can.

- **Questions that are interesting**

- To better understand extemp, think of it from the judge's mindset. You have to sit through at least six speeches and judge them all. Wouldn't it be nice to hear a speech about the gig economy as opposed to another Syria question? This is especially important in final rounds or outrounds. In prelims, try and give a solid speech every round. In outrounds, you have to take risks. The worst thing to do in an outround is pick a safe question and get forgotten.

As much as there are things to look for in question selection, there are things to avoid. We call them landmines. These questions are too socially or politically charged like abortion questions or ones that are simply incorrect like "How can we fix Venezuela?" (I actually had that question once). Pretty much avoiding super charged questions is a good idea. Overall, make smart decisions about questions that can be answered and delivered well. Taking abortion questions or other charged questions is really never a good idea because you always run the very heavy risk of offending a judge. Once you offend a judge, there's no way to recover in that round.

The Extemp Speech

Now let's dive into what you're all here for: analyzing the extemp speech. Before we move on, an important note: new round, new speech. It's always possible that you draw a question similar to something you spoke on in practice, in prelims, or at a different tournament. However, you should never do the same question in a tournament or consult old flows. NEVER. There are no exceptions. Write a new speech for a new question every round. But do not consult old flows. Every round exists in isolation. Push yourself to write a new, more dynamic, more creative speech if you've already seen that or a similar question before. With that, let's get into the speech itself.

Below you will find a skeleton of what a speech should look like along with timing cues.

Intro (AGD to Answer): 1:30s

AGD

Link

Background:

Statement of Significance:

Question:

Answer: _____

1. First Point (1:30-1:45)
 - a. Source
 - b. Source
2. Second Point (1:30-1:45)
 - a. Source
 - b. Source
3. Third Point (1:30-1:45)
 - a. Source
 - b. Source

Conclusion (30s)

Looking at a diagram is sometimes confusing; let's unpack this. There are 3 parts to an extemp speech: the intro (AGD through answer), body (points 1-3), and conclusion. Your goal is to meet the 7 minute time limit (there is a 30 second grace period, but shoot for the 6:45-7:15 range). The time split is usually 1:30 for the intro, 1:30-1:45 for each point, 0:30 for the conclusion. This isn't a rigid time structure but it is highly suggested.

Intro:

First, let's look at the AGD. AGD stands for attention-getting device. This is usually a joke or short anecdote (the whole AGD should only take 20s from start to punchline). The AGD

should relate to your topic easily and the judge should be able to easily see how they connect. Stating the connection, or link, from the AGD to the topic is a must.

After the AGD and the link, you go to the background of your speech, which should be about 2-3 sentences. Here, you explain the recent events or news that prompted your question, talk about the main actors and issues in your question, and define important terms in your question if their definition is not immediately clear. For example, if your question is “Will the US achieve peace in Afghanistan?”, talk about what’s recently been happening in Afghanistan, such as the rise of the Taliban and peace negotiations.

Next, you have the SOS, or statement of significance. The SOS is about a sentence long and tells the judge why they should care about the question. For instance, if your topic is “Will Iran restart nuclear development?”, use your SOS to show the threat that Iranian nuclear weapons pose to each and every one of us.

Finally, you say your question. This question should be VERBATIM, meaning that you can’t change its wording or say something different. It should be memorized and exactly as it is on your topic slip. After this, you say your umbrella answer, a statement that ties together your 3 points, along with the names of each of your points.

Below is an example of a full intro:

As poet, botanist, and rapper Snoop Dogg once said, “Smoke weed every day.” While most people write off the D-O-Double G as too high for his own good, Snoop Doggy Dogg might actually be on to something here. As a Washington Post article from April of 2017 states, marijuana has finally gone mainstream. However, just because the reefer is mainstream, that doesn’t mean that it’s legal. With states like Colorado and California having blazed the trail for its legalization, it is forcing us to ask the burning question: Should marijuana be legalized in the US? And the answer is yes because legalizing is beneficial for public health by first, increasing regulation, providing new medical options, and controlling the opioid epidemic.

Your umbrella answer and three points, aka the thesis, are the base of the speech and you have to follow them. When delivering your points, make sure you keep everything in the order you mentioned in your thesis.

Recall the things we talked about in the chapter about questions. Always remember this acronym: ATFQ. Answer The Full Question. When it comes to thesis-based answers, use it as a way to connect all three points.

Your Points:

After your thesis, you start the argument portion. When moving from intro to point 1, make sure you try and use transitions. For example, continuing with the marijuana question, we could transition like this:

Let's not get too bogged down in the weeds because the first reason why marijuana should be legalized is because legalizing marijuana increases regulation.

After that, you jump into the argument. **Arguments should be structured like this: claim → warrant → impact.**

A claim is the tagline. What is the name of your argument? In our case, it is: Legalizing Marijuana Increases Regulation.

After that, the warrants are next. Warrants build up your argument. This is your evidence and stats. For this argument, it could be an article saying legal marijuana is safer or causes less marijuana-related deaths.

Then comes the impact. So what? Why do I care? This is where you connect this part of your response to the question and the judge. For instance, we could say that legal marijuana will save thousands if not hundreds of thousands of lives.

This structure will repeat for every argument.

After that comes the conclusion. A perfect conclusion should connect to the AGD, reiterate the thesis, and end on a humorous or profound note. An example conclusion below:

So, when returning to the smoking question, "Should marijuana be legalized in the US?" the answer is a resounding yes because legalizing is beneficial for public health by first, increasing regulation, providing new medical options, and controlling the opioid epidemic. So while the D-O-Double G might have been doing the jazz cabbage while it was still an illicit substance, hopefully, society will be able to soon quench its burning desire for legal weed.

Prep Time

By this point, you should know what extemp is, what questions look like, how to answer them, and how to format the speech. This is only half of the necessary knowledge needed to give an extemp speech. Every extemp speech requires a maximum of 30 minutes of prep. This is your time to fully prep the speech. You can use it however you want. The most common prep split is 15-15: 15 minutes to outline and 15 minutes to practice your speech (speak prep). This time split is not rigid at all; do what works best for you. If you need more time with one, go for 20-10. Still make sure you're spending at least 10 minutes on either outlining or practicing your speech. Let's break down what you should be doing in each respective part of prep.

Outline Prep

You need to be laser-focused. Time is limited and if you get distracted you will lose invaluable prep time. Additionally, make sure to time your prep. At most tournaments, no one is monitoring your prep time so you need to keep track. To start prep time research, open up your extemp software and do a broad search for keywords in your question. Just start reading the first article that pops up. Spend around the first 2 minutes familiarizing yourself with the topic and developing your answer. After this time, you should have a full thesis. Spend the rest of your outline prep by filling in the outline template talked about earlier. If developing an AGD is hard for you, don't waste outline prep time struggling to find one. Focus on your points and come back to the AGD. You can also always come up with one en route to the room and during speak prep.

Speak Prep

Now we have the other part of prep, the speaking. Once you finish your outline prep, close your laptop, grab your legal pad and question, and quietly exit the prep room (if you're allowed to leave whenever. This changes at some larger/more competitive tournaments but they'll explain that when you get there). Make your way to your room rehearsing your speech. Start with the AGD and effectively give your speech over and over as many times as you can before your prep is up. Additionally, make sure you have your question memorized (repeating it 5 times usually does the trick), along with your intro (the first impression is the best impression). A good way to try practicing your speech is to practice your intro, your first point, then your THIRD point, and then your second point. This is because judges remember the beginning and end of your speech the most, not the middle. While you're practicing, make sure you're conscientious of others existing in the space around you; everyone hates a loud prepper.

Overall, the above comments are really just suggestions about how you should use your prep time. Almost every aspect of extemp should be customized to fit your style. Find the prep style that works best for you. Yet regardless of what prep style you choose, always remember 2 essential prep rules: focus up and calm down. Any question is answerable if you stay focused and calm.

Sourcing and Researching

With that in mind, let's focus on a pivotal part of extemp: sourcing and researching. Sourcing and researching are two key elements of the activity, for good reason. The questions and topics that we encounter in extemp are complicated and usually beyond surface-level knowledge. The questions you draw are random so you need to be prepared to speak on anything. For example, I've been forced to give speeches on anything ranging from war in the Arctic to the Haitian economic crisis. Don't let this scare you; the key to extemp is simple: know everything about everything. Obviously this is impossible but that is what an extemper should attempt to do. Read voraciously and make sure you are up to date on current events and developing situations. Taking merely 30 minutes a day to read articles will significantly improve your extemp game. Above all, know that the best extempers don't read on the politics of every country but rather the Wikipedia page on politics. You don't have to know the specifics of every country but rather should understand how politics, economics, social policy, healthcare, and other aspects of society function in the abstract. Understanding the relationship between economic success and social stability, for example, gives you a wide breadth of analysis to draw on for any question. So when you're forced to give a speech on a topic you are unfamiliar with, don't panic. Apply what you know about the abstract topics that relate to it. Extemp is all about explaining a complex topic to a judge who likely has no prior knowledge about it. If you're forced to speak on something you're unsure about, then you're probably in the same boat as your judge.

Sourcing in a speech is crucial. Extemp asks high schoolers to answer questions seasoned politicians can't even answer. It's a tall order and that's why we cite sources in extemp. Not only does it increase our knowledge but it adds credibility. That being said, which sources you cite are super important. Look at the list below:

Joke Sources (BLACKLISTED, FOR LAUGHS/Intros)

- The Onion
- The Daily Mash (Some look good, but really good for jokes)
- Reddit News (Yes this is real, search "Reddit News")
- World News Daily Report (again some look okay, but all hoaxes)

Blacklisted (DO NOT CITE)

- WorldNetDaily
- Fox News
- Yahoo News
- Breitbart
- CNN
- Washington Times
- Center for Research on Globalization (it sounds good but is known for conspiracy theories)

Caution (CAREFUL WHEN CITING)

- ThinkProgress - Liberal

- Russia Today (RT) - Biased towards Russia, don't use on Russian issues
- Huffington Post - Some people think it's a joke
- ITAR-TASS - Russian
- DailyMail - Tabloid-esque UK paper
- Any Television Source (CNN, USAT, MSNBC etc.) - Try not to use for analysis, facts is okay
- Heritage Foundation - Conservative
- CATO Foundation - Conservative
- Center for American Progress - Liberal
- Daily Caller - Conservative, cite if making a liberal point
- Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs - Heavy Israeli bias

Best (CITE IF POSSIBLE)

- Brookings Institution - Top think tank
- Council on Foreign Relations - Great foreign policy think tank
- New York Times - Liberal tilt, but highly respected paper
- Vox - Really easy to understand
- LA Times - Highly respected newspaper
- Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
- Christian Science Monitor - Usually takes humanitarian angle
- The Economist - Fantastic analysis, socially liberal, economically conservative
- Financial Times
- Wall Street Journal
- Foreign Policy
- Foreign Affairs
- Center for Strategic and International Studies

Remember that judges are people and people have implicit and explicit biases. There is no way to definitively determine a judge's political affiliations or stance on a specific policy issue. It is always better to avoid citing incredibly controversial sources such as Breitbart, Fox News, CNN, and others. Make sure your analysis and evidence come from reputable sources.

Practicing Makes Better

Once you've started sourcing and researching, it's time to practice. There are 3 ways to practice Extemp: reading, drills, and observing. Each way serves a different purpose and a heavy rotation of all three is a tried and true success method.

Reading

Like we talked about earlier, knowing what is going in the world around you is super important. Extemp questions are based on current events so you need to have a firm grasp on what's in the news. Yet outside of reading daily news briefings or articles, books are an excellent way to give yourself an edge in extemp, and this is for a few reasons. First and foremost, reading is a good habit that everyone should try and establish. Second, books in extemp offer the unique advantage of abstract and broadly applicable analysis. For example, my personal favorite book, *The Dictator's Handbook* by Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair Smith, focuses on the dynamics of power and leadership in democracies and dictatorships. The beauty of books in extemp is that the concepts talked about in this book can be applied to a variety of questions. I can cite this book in questions about electoral analysis, protests, governmental instability, and even economic crises, regardless of what specific event or country the question refers to. Finally, books are usually very good at synthesizing complex topics. An article can do a lot in terms of informing but books are better at explaining. I highly recommend reading books on economics and politics, things extempers have to talk about but may not fully understand. Below is my personal book recommendation list:

- *The Dictator's Handbook* by Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair Smith
- *The Post American World* by Fareed Zakaria
- *World Order* by Henry Kissinger
- *A World in Disarray* by Richard Haass
- *Naked Economics* by Charles Wheelan
- *The Little Book of Economics* by Greg Ip
- *Why Nations Fail* by Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson

This list of books is in no way the be-all, end-all; most books on economics, politics, world affairs, and current events will be useful in extemp. Additionally, make sure that you read literature on history, philosophy, sociology, etc. History is super important because having a working knowledge of world and US history is not only a necessary life skill but also helpful in rounds. Knowing roughly when events such as the Fall of the Berlin Wall or the Tiananmen Square Massacre happened is a must. Understanding philosophy and sociology may seem tangentially related to extemp but the reality is that every actor in an extemp speech is a person or run by people. People are pretty predictable and understanding the motivations behind human behavior can make unpacking and analyzing people's decisions a lot easier. Plus all these topics are interesting and useful for life in general.

Drills

Giving an entire extemp speech start to finish takes at least 40 minutes. It's not every day that giving a full speech is possible. While giving a lot of speeches is one of the best ways to practice (and I highly recommend this for people starting out in extemp), for varsity members, drills are sometimes a better option. There are four major types of drills: general drills, content drills, performance drills, and mindset drills. Below, I'm going to go into detail about a few of my favorite drills in each category.

- Drill Type #1: General Drills

- General drills are the broadest strokes form of drills. They focus on attacking the extemp speech as a whole but with added caveats. Check out the list below:
 - **Stop and Go (you need a teammate or coach for this one):** prep and give a full speech. Have your teammate or coach stop you every time you mess up. Every time they stop you, start the speech over with that mistake in mind. The great thing about this drill is that it forces you to focus on the mistakes you make in real-time.
 - **Limited/Extended Prep:** an extemp speech is always 30 minutes of prep. In almost every single tournament, you will be guaranteed at least 30 minutes of prep (I say almost every because occasionally things get messed up and sometimes you get less prep or more prep). That being said, a really useful drill is forcing yourself to prep with varying times. I personally have played with limited prep more than extended prep. My personal variation of this drill forces me to fully prep a speech in 7 minutes max. You can also give yourself extra prep (say an hour) to really dive into analyzing the question and work down from there.
 - **Record and Critique:** prep a full speech normally and record yourself. Afterward, see what you did well and what you did poorly and regive the speech. This will help you see/hear what is wrong with your speeches
 - **Redos:** Take a flow from a past speech and give yourself 5 minutes to familiarize yourself with it again. Then regive the speech. This will help you correct mistakes from the original giving of the speech and apply any critiques you may have gotten.

- Drill Type #2: Content Drills

- Content and analysis are at the heart of this event. Making sure you actually answer the question and provide solid analysis is the best way to ensure success. Here are some great content drills:
 - **Thirty-Second Theses:** when you draw your questions, you want to make sure you minimize time lost at the prep table. Like we talked about with question selection, you want to spend, at most, 30 seconds picking your question. A really helpful way to speed up your question selection process and thesis writing skills is to make a list of at least 10 questions and provide a thesis based answer as well as three points for every question in under 5 minutes. This kind of drill and practice helps you

gauge not only what you know but also how you're going about answering questions.

- **Speed Outlines:** this drill is similar to the above drill yet this time, you take a question and outline it in under 5 minutes. This means finding evidence and fleshing out all 3 points. This will work on maximizing prep efficiency and helping you develop content.
- **Intro-First Point:** instead of prepping a full speech, take 10 minutes and prep the first point and an intro to a question. This gives you a lot of time to really dive into the content of one point and flesh it out.
- **The Continent Game (easier/more fun with teammates):** the Continent Game is a super fun and easy way to indirectly improve content. It's really useful on plane, car, or bus rides to tournaments. The way the game is played is one person starts by picking a continent and asking another person to name at least two relevant news stories related to that continent. After the person names two events, they pick someone else. The cycle continues until everyone has run out of things to say about that continent and then a new continent is picked. This is one of my personal favorites to do while traveling to away tournaments with my teammates.

- Drill Type #3: Performance Drills

- The other half of extemp is performance. The best way to put it is like this: the extempers with the best content break but the most interesting extemper wins. The best extemper is not only an analysis machine but also an interesting and engaging speaker. Being able to fold in emotion, humor, and confidence into a speech is what will take your extemp game to the next level.
 - **Watch Comedy:** this isn't necessarily a drill in the colloquial sense but it definitely helps. Watching comedy and familiarizing yourself with humor makes making your own jokes a lot easier. Understanding comedic timing is crucial and since most people aren't born with it, it helps to learn from the best. I highly recommend political comedy, stand up specials, and improv comedy. Comedians like Key and Peele, Hasan Minhaj, Stephen Colbert, Trevor Noah, and Jon Stewart are great at political comedy and satire. Shows like *The Office*, *Patriot Act*, or *The Daily Show* are also great watches.
 - **The Emotion/Volume/Speed Meter (you need a teammate or coach for this one):** too often do we extempers forget about the harsh realities of our questions. Society overall has become desensitized to violence, genocide, and inequality among other things. The best extempers are able to convey emotions in what they're talking about. This helps the judge relate better to the topics at hand. On a whiteboard or piece of paper, write out a list of emotions, volumes, and speeds. Prep and give a speech, having someone else pick which emotions and volume levels you should do at any given point. This forces extempers to develop and lengthen their emotional and vocal ranges.

- **Pen Drill:** enunciation, fluency, and clarity while speaking are a major part of extemp. The famed Greek orator Demosthenes had a speech impediment so he practiced speaking with pebbles in his mouth. I co-opted this drill with M&Ms to create a more hygienic way to create the same effect. Simply give a speech with a mouthful of M&Ms. Alternatively, put a pen/pencil in between your teeth sideways. Push the pen back as far as you can and then give your speech. This drill can hurt a little bit but after you take the pen out, you will see dramatic improvements to your fluency. This will also help you slow down if you have a problem with speed.
- **Negative Preps:** sometimes, you won't get enough time to fully practice a speech, but you will still need to have really good fluency. To practice your fluency for any situation, you can choose a practice question and give yourself about a minute to just think. Then, you have to give the full speech for that question, thinking on the spot about your answer, three points, and every part of that speech. This improves your fluency and adaptability for every situation.
- **The Water Bottle Drill (you're gonna need a teammate or coach for this one):** when I was a little freshman, I gave dozens of speeches to my captain, Kevin Bi. When Kevin would listen to speeches, he would throw an empty plastic water bottle at you every time you messed up. At the time I was terrified but now, I look back and recognize its importance. Have someone watch your speech and throw something at you when you mess up. It will force you to avoid your mistakes and it will help you keep going even with abrupt stops to the speech.
- **The Talk At Someone Drill:** extemp is full of distractions. In any given round, there will be a ton of distractions. A great way to help performance is to force yourself to prep and speak in loud or distracting environments. Additionally, for this drill specifically, have a teammate prep a speech as well. Then, give your speeches to each other at the same time. This will force you to focus on what you're saying and not whatever else is going on in the background.

- Drill Type #4: Mindset Drills

- Most rounds are won or lost before you even start speaking. In extemp, we sometimes forget the importance of a strong mental game. These drills will help you keep your mental game sharp for competition.
 - **The VROOMM Drill:** one of the best pieces of advice I ever received about extemp (and life for that matter) is to visualize the best and worst outcomes of a tournament (or any event for that matter). This really helped me during my sophomore slump and it actually helped me come up with an acronym to examine a person's mental process when it comes to doing extemp. As I always say, in order to skrrt to your goals, you must first VROOMM. This drill was designed for extemp but actually comes in handy for life too.

- Visualize. Visualize the best and worst outcomes of a tournament. Make your peace with either outcome.
 - Reflect. Reflect on your process and approach to extemp in the past. How have you prepared up to this point?
 - Observe. Are there any glaring mistakes or issues in your extemp wheelhouse?
 - Objective. Identify why you do extemp and what your goals are.
 - Make a plan. Establish a thorough and effective practice plan (maybe using some of the above drills)
 - Mental Game. Take time to center yourself before tournaments and rounds. Listen to music. Meditate. Do whatever helps you calm down and focus up.
- **The Walk Into the Room Drill:** another one of Kevin Bi's famously rigorous drills was the Walk Into the Room Drill. Basically, Kevin made you walk into the room at least 20 times. This drill has a pretty simple purpose: you need to nail the first impression, for yourself and the judge. Unlike other events, prelims for extemp are almost always just you and the judge. When you walk into the room, you have roughly 7 seconds before the judge has a solid impression of you (here's the Forbes article I stole that from: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/serenitygibbons/2018/06/19/you-have-7-seconds-to-make-a-first-impression-heres-how-to-succeed/#2d85a75e56c2>). 7 seconds is not a lot of time, just about enough time to say "Hi, my code is X3, would you like my question?" Those 10 words are incredibly important but what is almost more important is your posture and body language. Practice walking into the room and just saying that phrase with a coach or teammate. You need to come off as relaxed and confident. You have 7 seconds to nail a first impression and this drill helps with that.

There are a ton more drills that exist in the extemp community. I encourage you to find new and exciting ways to prep. Sometimes the best way to prep is to come up with new drills to use.

Observing

I highly suggest watching extemp final rounds, both at local tournaments and videos online. At locals, it's really great to watch rounds and see some great local competition. Watching rounds not only helps you get better at speaking but also at critiquing. Below are some links to some great final round speeches from NSDA Nationals Final Rounds. These are all on YouTube but if you have an NSDA account, you can find full Final Rounds for any category dating back a long time. One thing before you watch the rounds: all of these speakers are amazing but beyond content and demeanor, don't try and emulate them. That is a major mistake I made as a novice. The best extempers are the unique extempers. Don't try and do something because you saw some other extemper do it. Do you and it will pay off.

Olivia Shoemaker (Lakeville North, MN): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1a-TFQNSujo>

Marshall Webb (St. Mary's Hall, TX): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RYqtWmd3JVg>
Tanner Jones (Edina, MN): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FLSxCk0_XW4
Connor Rothschild (Kickapoo, KS): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IzoUu1fDmWE>
Miles Saffran (Trinity Preparatory, FL): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_7FKq9xry0
Lily Nellans (Des Moines Roosevelt, IA): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lwS9GNCcb_8

Tournaments and Tabulation, and Technology, Oh My!

Extemp is a whole different animal at tournaments. There are a few things you should know before you embark on your first tournament.

At tournaments, you will see a sheet of rounds. These are called postings. On them, find your name or code (you will be given a code, X3 for example, at almost every tournament), room, and draw time. Write that info down or take a picture. Return to the prep table and wait for your draw time. 1 to 2 minutes prior to your draw time, make your way to the draw table and select your desired envelope (envelopes will be sorted as DX or IX. Make sure to grab the correct one for your section). DO NOT OPEN UNTIL GIVEN EXPLICIT INSTRUCTIONS TO DO SO. Once given the go-ahead, your 30 minutes of prep time begins. You select your question and return to the prep table and begin writing your outline.

The tournament environment can be very stressful. You're all dressed up in formal attire and prepping in an almost silent room. You can almost feel the stress. Tournaments are, however, a core part of Extemp so observe the following tips and tricks.

- When your team gets to the tournament location, get to the prep room (usually the library) ASAP. Get a table equidistant to the exit, the draw table, and outlets.
- Don't talk during prep. I repeat: DO NOT TALK DURING PREP. It will upset other competitors and it's super annoying when it happens to you.
- Pay attention to the time before your draw and during prep. Everyone hates the one kid who held up the entire round because they missed a draw or overprepped.
- Make friends with other extempers. Everyone is as weird as you. Trust me, it's going to seem weird. When I was a sophomore, my friend Alex and I competed at the Harvard Speech Tournament. We came back as friends with people who were from Minnesota (our home state). We had to travel across the country to talk to people who we see every weekend.
- Bring a water bottle. You will get parched and nothing is worse than spilling water on your suit because you tried to drink from the water fountains.
- Use G2s and legal pads for prep. Spiral notebooks or any other stationery is inconvenient and G2s are literally a godsend. Don't question a tried and true method.
- A personal tip that I did was listen to music during prep. It calmed me down and focused me. If that doesn't work for you that's A-OK.
- Walk around the schools. You will get a chance to see some cool buildings. Walk around with a friend and just chill.

- When walking to your room and practicing delivering your speech, make sure you maintain a good distance. You should be able to just barely hear the other people. Never walk in front of another extemper so as to not disturb them.
- As a general prep rule, abide by “Do unto others as you wished done unto you”
- If your team doesn’t do team warm-ups, make sure you warm-up. Tongue twisters, stretches, and energizers are super fun and helpful.
- Make friends with the people on your extemp squad. In extemp, you spend almost all of your time with people in your category so make sure you stay friends with them.

Tabulation

My sophomore year of Extemp, at our National Qualifier, I was talking with some of my extemp friends. While we waited for breaks to come out, we started to predict the outcomes. One of my friends decided to start hand tabulating his predicted results of the breaks. Looking back, it was a fun experience but it taught me an important lesson: don’t waste your time on things you can’t control. A lot of times extempers will try and game theorize their way around tournament tabulation and it is a terribly stressful way to approach extemp. Extemp should be fun and trying to figure out everyone’s standings takes away from that. No matter the tournament, focus on making the current speech you’re giving the best speech you can. All anyone can ever ask of you is your best, and that includes yourself.

Technology

I mentioned earlier the importance of technology in Extemp but I want to highlight a few features of the two main software options: Extemp Genie and Prepd.

Extemp Genie

This is the software I used during my junior and senior year of Extemp. Extemp Genie is super helpful because of its auto-file feature. You can customize a list of sources and hit auto-file and select how far back you want the articles to be from. Then, Genie will find those articles and save them to the application. During a tournament, you will now have access to hundreds of thousands of articles that can be searched through using an excellent search function. Here’s the link to the Extemp Genie website for pricing info and further details:

<https://extempgenie.com/>.

Prepd

Prepd is the other major extemp software people use. Prepd also has an auto-filer but it has fewer customization options, hence why I picked Genie. Here’s the link to the Prepd website for more info: <https://prepd.in/>.

Advice

At this point, you have probably realized a pretty open secret: extemp is hard. As a four-year extemper (and now coach) I know more than most how much of a struggle extemp can be. In this section, I want to do two things: first, share my story and second, provide pick-me-up letters for novice extempers and varsity extempers.

My Story

If you don't already know, my name is Sam Padmanabhan. I'm an Indian American extemper from Minnesota. I started doing extemp my freshman year of high school in 2016 but my extemp story starts a little before then. I have an older sister who was on my high school's speech team so in 8th grade, I attended the team's speech showcase. This was the first time I saw Extemp in action. I had done Middle School speech but this was the big leagues. I saw Kevin Bi, an extemper who later became my captain and personal icon, give an extemp speech and my instant reaction was "That. I wanna do that." I joined the debate team during my freshman year and met Kevin for the first time. In debate people constantly talked about extemp like it was a badge of honor to be earned. As a young freshman desperately seeking Kevin's approval, I made it my mission to join extemp. When I auditioned for the speech team in November of my freshman year, I wanted nothing more than to do extemp. I was elated when I saw the team get released and saw my name on the list under "Extemp Speaking". So began my freshman season. I remember giving my first extemp speech on political division in Congress. I ran a little under 5 minutes. My goal for my freshman season was twofold: beat every other freshman and make Kevin proud. I had a lot of fun in extemp but overall, I was stressed out by it. I basically neglected my schoolwork to focus on extemp. I do have to clarify: when I mean "focus on extemp", I mean complain about why I wasn't doing well. After an underwhelming freshman season, I returned to sophomore season with an unquenchable thirst for success. Sophomore season was by far my least favorite speech season for a simple reason: my mentality was nothing short of toxic. I had a friend join extemp as a sophomore and since we were the same age, I made it my mission to beat her every weekend. We ended the season pretty much at the same place: mediocre. This was a crushing defeat in a long line of defeats. I felt like I had hit a wall with speech. I couldn't see what I was doing wrong and why I was doing terrible. During sophomore year, I attended two tournaments that dramatically changed how I saw speech, even though I didn't see it at the time: the Harvard Speech tournament and the National Qualifier. Harvard was my first big national circuit tournament and I wanted to break more than anything. I didn't end up breaking but my teammate and close friend Alex broke to octas. This was Alex's second year in Extemp but he had done speech for a year before he joined Extemp. He was two years older than me so I didn't compare myself to him; I actually looked up to him a lot. I ended up watching Alex's octa round and I saw him keep breaking all the way to finals. The morning of the final round I remember Alex waking me up and asking me to help him file before we left. Even though I wouldn't realize it for a long time, that tournament taught me the importance of taking extemp one question, one flow, one round at a time. One question, one flow, one round at a time. Later in the season, towards the end, I attended the National Qualifier with the sole goal of qualifying in mind. I ended up breaking to Semifinals at Nat Quals but ending my hunt for

Nationals there. I was devastated. I remember finding an empty corner of the school and sobbing. My main goal for that year was to qualify and I felt I had come so close only to be robbed of what was rightfully mine. After Nat Quals and an unimpressive sophomore season, I was at my limit. I was done. I had put in so much effort only to not get out of extemp what I had put in. So I drafted an email to my coaches letting them know that I was quitting the team. Before I sent the email, I talked to Alex. He had been by my side since the beginning and I trusted his advice. When I told Alex about my plan, he stopped me. He told me that quitting speech would be the worst decision I could make. Alex then opened up about why he did speech. He told me that after every tournament, he tries to pick one thing he wants to improve on for the next week. If next week he doesn't see those same comments on his critiques, he views it as a success, regardless of whether or not he placed. After talking with Alex, I took the summer to reflect. I ended up deleting the email I wrote. I figured I might as well stick it out. Going into my junior season I started to act on my other main goal in speech: to become captain of my team. I started focusing on how I could help others on my team and the more I focused on others, the less I focused on myself. Speech became enjoyable and fun for the first time in a long time. I was able to fall back in love with speech and extemp. This new mentality of putting others first and just enjoying extemp made speech so much more rewarding and successful. Looking back on the past four years of speech, I have learned a lot about extemp, life, and myself. I have a lot of regrets and missed opportunities. There are countless things I wish I could've been able to do. Yet at the end of the day, I remember a conversation I had with Kevin during my freshman year. I was talking to him about not breaking and he had said he wasn't really preoccupied with breaking. So I told him, "But Kevin, when you don't break, you look mad." Kevin laughed and said, "That's because I don't get to give another speech." I love extemp. I love the adrenaline, the analysis, the tournaments, the people, and just giving a speech. It makes me so happy and I wouldn't trade my experiences for the world. My single best piece of advice is this: when all is said and done, we won't remember the rounds or trophies or ranks. We'll remember the places we went and the things we did and the times we had with friends around us.

For Novices

Dear young Extemper,

Congratulations on taking the plunge. Extemp is a difficult category. I know exactly how you are feeling. It's that odd mix of fear and intrigue. You aren't terrified of public speaking (you are in speech after all), but extemp is new. The one thing that I would tell my novice self is that everything is about perspective. Very few extemp novices are amazing right out of the gate (unless you are Lily Nellans. If you don't know who that is, look her up.). Every amazing extemper had to start somewhere. The hardest part of extemp is seeing other novices in other categories doing just fine and winning when you are putting in as much work if not more and not winning. If you care a lot about winning, hear these two things: first, with hard work and determination, winning will come. Second, have fun! Make friends. As my mentor and best friend Alex Yang once said, "When this is all over, we won't remember the records or the final rounds. We'll remember the memories and the friends we made along the way." If you don't care that much about winning, then good for you. You are much further along than I was as a novice. Keep that stellar attitude up!.

Overall, extemp is a ride. I think Jim Halpert sums it up the best when he says that he owes everything to his stupid, wonderful, boring, amazing job. Extemp is a stupid, wonderful, boring, amazing category that pretty much every extemper comes out of owing everything to.

I wish you good luck on your adventures!

- Sam

For Varsity Extempers

Dear Varsity Extempers,

Congratulations! You have already beaten a little over half of last year's novices: you stayed in the category. Extemp has a notoriously high turnover rate but you stuck with it. In my high school, we had a very high turnover rate. In the one year before my freshman year, we lost everyone except for two people. Just staying in extemp is a grind. Now that you have stuck with it, it probably means one of two things: you love extemp and can't imagine doing any other category (*looks at sophomore year me*). Or maybe your coach is forcing you to stay here. Whatever your reason, there are a few tips that I have for you. First and foremost is this: compete on the national circuit if you can. My first extemp tournament my sophomore year was on the circuit. I competed at the Paradigm at Dowling Catholic. It was honestly one of the best experiences. Competing on the circuit is amazing. You get to meet new people, go to some cool places, all the while doing extemp. My second piece of advice is by and large my most important piece. Most people quit after their second season in it. The reason? Extemp is difficult. No one wants to stay in a category where some people always win. Extemp is probably the most competitive PA category. (For the kids who think Oratory is PA: please stop. You're wrong). The only way you can stay in extemp is if you see the light at the end of the tunnel. Unless you are a literal god at extemp, winning is not reason enough to stay in extemp. Even though everyone loves a shiny trophy, it will not be enough. If you stay in extemp, it has to be for more than just the trophy. For me, I stayed in extemp because I loved the activity. The event was just so satisfying for me. Motivation like that keeps you in extemp. Even though I strongly believe most if not all extempers could be amazing at any other category, stick with extemp. Don't quit. It will get better. I promise you that. As my mentor and friend, Alex Yang, once said, "Extemp is what you put into it." If you put in a ravenous hunger to win, you will only be returned with an unrelenting desire to win that grows every week. If you put in love for the event, you get love back. It is asinine cheesy, but extempers aren't known for their emotions. I leave you with this: there are two quotes to keep you going through extemp. The first is from Andy Grammer: "You gotta keep your head up." Always look on the bright side. The second is from famed botanist and poet, Calvin Cordozar Broadus Jr., otherwise known as Snoop Dogg, "Smoke weed every day." Never forget to have fun.

Good luck,
Sam

P.S. Don't smoke weed kids.

Starter Sources

Below is an extensive list of excellent sources for USX and IX analysis. Remember, reading is paramount in extemp so keep up to date with a few of these publications. Pro tip: a New York Times and Economist subscription come very much in handy.

United States Expert Analysis

- American Enterprise Institute
- CATO
- Center for American Progress
- The Economist: United States
- Harvard Political Review
- Hoover Institution
- Hudson Institute
- Kaiser Health News
- Brookings Institute
- Lawfare
- The Economist: Business
- The National Interest
- Urban Institute
- The RAND Blog
- Economic Policy Institute
- RealClearPolitics

United States Political News + Statistics

- The Hill
- Politico
- All Gallup Headlines
- FiveThirtyEight
- Pew Research Center

US News

- Wall Street Journal US News
- Christian Science Monitor
- The Guardian US News
- Washington Post
- Vox
- The Atlantic
- SCOTUSblog
- Pacific Standard
- New York Times US News
- Newsweek
- NPR
- New Republic
- Los Angeles Times
- Bloomberg View

- Reuters

International Expert Analysis

- Belfer Center
- Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
- Harvard International Review
- The Soufan Group
- Center for Strategic and International Studies
- The European Council on Foreign Relations
- Council of Foreign Relations
- Small Wars Journal
- Human Rights Watch
- World Policy Institute
- The National Interest
- Global Policy Journal
- Chatham House
- Foreign Policy in Focus
- Global Construction Review
- Hudson Institute
- International Policy Digest
- Wilson Institute
- Brookings Institute
- Council on Foreign Relations
- International Institute for Strategic Studies
- The Cipher Brief
- Atlantic Council
- Yale Global
- World Affairs Journal Blog
- Washington Institute for Near East Studies
- RAND Blog
- International Institute for Environment and Development
- Stratfor Global Intelligence

International News

- Guardian Global
- Foreign Policy
- Foreign Affairs
- Christian Science Monitor
- New York Times
- Vox
- The Economist International News
- Washington Post
- Wall Street Journal
- Al Jazeera