ACTAA Best Practices

Virtual Speech & Debate
General Information

Why does this guide matter?

As we enter the 2020-2021 online competition season, our format for tournaments has transitioned to a virtual format utilizing NSDA Campus. This is a new frontier for all coaches in ACTAA and this guide provides best practices for coaching students online. There are alternative resources produced by the National TOC and the NSDA, however this guide is in the context of best supporting students and coaches with the regional tournament format. This document will be updated as the season progresses based on first hand experiences from students and coaches.

Here are those alternative resources-


NTOC - [https://www.digitalspeechanddebate.com/bestpractices](https://www.digitalspeechanddebate.com/bestpractices)

ACTAA wants to make sure that all students have the ability to compete in the online competition format. If you have any concerns about access to reliable internet, technology, or other concerns, please consult your coach. We want to support students as much as possible

How to prepare for online competitions?

As previously mentioned, virtual tournaments are new and best practices are only recently established. The best preparation is making sure to try and practice using the platform. If you are an NSDA member, you will have access to NSDA Campus Rooms on your account. If you aren’t an NSDA member, you can still test similar platforms like Google Meets and Zoom. Testing video conferencing platforms is critical to making sure all students microphones and cameras work appropriately. It’s better to know of any issues prior to the competition so they can be resolved. It’s not guaranteed these issues will be able to be troubleshooting during the competition.

Another preparation technique for online competitions is watching rounds from online competitions that have already happened. There are a number of rounds recorded from the National Tournament that are online as guides to demonstrate best methods of
recording. These include both pre-recorded videoed rounds with speech and live rounds in debate/congress.

It’s also important to make sure you have reliable internet for online competitions. This is not always an easy ask. It might require students to go to a different location if possible to have a secure connection. If you want to test the speed of your internet, you can go to https://www.speedtest.net/

There will be a section in this guide that discusses technology tips and tricks for competitors in all events.
Equipment for Online Competition

1. Internet

The most important equipment that students need with online competition is access to reliable and consistent internet. This is important whether it be for recording and uploading a video for speech, showing up for synchronous speech elims, or being in live congressional/debate rounds. Test the speed of your internet... If you are having issues, here are some potential troubleshooted solutions–

- Try changing locations (if possible)
- Utilize a ethernet cable to connect directly to the router
- Move closer to the router
- Close unneeded tabs on the browser
- Limit the number of individuals using the internet (or specifically streaming or downloading on the internet)
- Restart the router
- Change browsers (Google Chrome is preferred)
- Change devices (Laptop or Phone or iPad)

These options may not be possible for every student, but they are a collective list of options to try to best have strong internet for these competitions. The earlier you test your internet, the more time you’ll have to work out a solution to your internet needs.

2. Electronic Device

In order to compete in online competitions, students will need an electronic device of some form. This can be a school issued computer/laptop, personal computer/laptop, iPad, tablet, cell phone (with audio and camera functions). Access to this electronic device is needed in order to compete in live rounds or to record videos.

For Live Events – You will need to have access to the electronic device for the duration of your time in the competition. For ACTAA Regionals, this is Friday Afternoon – Sunday Afternoon. There are breaks in the schedule so you won’t need the electronic device for the entire day, but will need it
during the set rounds. You will login to Tabroom to get to your virtual room and compete.

For Recorded Events- You will need to have access to the electronic device in order to record the video and either a) upload the video online and send the ‘link shared’ link to a coach or b) email/message the video to a coach so they can upload

3. Audio/Visual Equipment

Audio:

As discussed above, having an electronic device with a built in microphone is ideal (especially for recorded events) If you are in a recorded event and don’t have a microphone on your device, you will need to purchase an external microphone. This can look like the following images-

If you are in a live event and don’t have a built in microphone (or want to have better audio) purchasing headphones is recommended. You might already have headphones that you use, but if you are looking for the best quality, gaming headphones are the consensus for coaches around the nation. Here are some recommendations for headphones-
Video:

Having access to a camera on your device is important for both recorded and live events. It’s important to remember you are prohibited from editing your videos at a number of tournaments (including all ACTAA regionals) Please take this into account when choosing your equipment for online competitions. Not allowing editing creates the most fair and equitable competition.

Recorded Events – You will need to be able to record your video using a camera, either built in or external, for your performance. Some individuals have found more success with an external camera because it gives them something to focus on clearly (similar to focusing on a judge) Here are some options for external cameras-

You might not have someone who is able to record you so having access to a tri-pod will be something that will help to best ‘frame’ your performance. This is of course not a required piece of equipment but just something extra that was recommended post NSDA Nationals. The second external camera option above shows the option of getting an external camera that comes with a built in tri-pod that you can move to best accommodate what you will do in your piece/performance. If you are using a phone, iPad, or tablet, you can purchase a tri-pod like the pictured.
For tablets, iPads, and iPhones, it’s recommended to record your performance horizontally.

It’s important to again to remember that these videos can’t be edited and will be recorded and uploaded. There is creative license to move the camera as needed for emphasis or effect, but no filters, edits, etc. If you have a question about what is considered ‘editing’ it’s important to ask rather than get disqualified.

Live Events – You will need to able to be on video for live rounds. Out of state tournaments will have live speech and all tournaments will have live debate. If you are doing live speech, the equipment discussed above also applies. If you are doing live debate, the external camera recommendations above apply. There isn’t as much a need for a tri-pod as competitors are seated during online competition. You simply at minimum need a reliable camera that can be turned on and used during debate rounds.
Recorded Events

Environment

In a world of online competition, especially in recorded events, your video is the only impression on the judge. Coaches in ACTAA post judging at the TOC and NSDA Nationals expressed that the environment of one’s video is an important component that needs to be considered when competing in online competitions. Here are some recommendations for best practices for the recording environment-

- When possible, having a neutral or blank background is ideal. If you have a blank wall, that’s ideal. If you don’t have a blank wall, hanging up a sheet tightly on a wall will create the same neutral environment. If this isn’t possible, trying to find an environment where you can be seen head to toe is ideal as it best models what a judge would see at an in person competition.
- It’s important to be aware of what is in the shot of the camera when recording. You should only have things on show that you would want individuals to see.
- Be sure to turn off any fans or background noise if possible. These can create a lag in the video while recording.

Video Framing

Framing your performance is important based on the event you are doing. You should test taking photos with the camera prior to videoing to see what the best lighting/background is. The NSDA provides a guide with images to show best practices for videoing performances.
Uploading Video (YouTube for ACTAA Regionals)

Checking your video after recording will help see if there are any concerns with audio, camera, or the performance. It’s important to check that you are within the time limit and aren’t breaking any tournament/event rules. These steps are specific for ACTAA Regionals. Any video performances that do will face consequences from the tournament. Remember each video can only be used ONCE. There is a password required to be held up at the start of the video. If you don’t hold up the password, you will be ineligible from breaking.

The following steps about uploading a video will be completed based on the decision of the program. Either the individual student will upload the video and share the link share with the coach or the Coach will upload the video after it’s sent to them.

Step 1- Go to www.youtube.com

Step 2- Login to Google Account on YouTube

Step 3- Click on the Video Camera with the Plus Sign – Click the Dropdown for Upload Video (shown in the image to the side)

Step 4- Upload the video file from your computer. (Be aware that certain school districts might not allow students to upload videos)

Step 5- Include the details for the Title for the Video. It’s recommended to include the tournament, event, and name of the performer in the title for the performance.
Step 6 – It’s important that you set the video as ‘unlisted’ for ACTAA regional competitions. That way coaches can upload the video on Tabroom and it only be accessible with that set link.

Choose when to publish and who can see your video

- **Save or publish**
  - Make your video public, unlisted, or private
  - **Private**
    - Only you and people you choose can watch your video
  - **Unlisted**
    - Anyone with the video link can watch your video
  - **Public**
    - Everyone can watch your video
  - Set as instant Premiere

ACTAA Regional 1 - Informative Speaking - R Mauchline
Video link: https://youtu.be/pqG6PUnmF8

Step 7 – You might need to wait some time for the video to publish. You will get the notification as demonstrated to the right that your video is published. You will need to copy the link.

Step 8 – You will need to copy and paste the link on Tabroom for that specific entry. You will then also include the piece/author information.

*Competitor*  
Cara Rosales

**Link to performance video**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CMhTF-wfgg

**Piece/title information**

- **Piece/speech title**
- **Piece author**

You must fill out either the Print or Digital publication information:

**Print Publications**
- Publisher
- Publication Year
- ISBN Number

**Digital (Online) Publication**
- Date the web page was printed
- URL/Address
- Script first page if multi-page

**Video published**
ACTAA Regional 1 - Informative Speaking - R Mauchline
Uploaded Aug 16, 2020
33:44

**Share a link**

- Embed
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Blogger
- reddit
- Tumblr

Video link:
https://youtu.be/pqG6PUnmF8

CLOSE
**Live Events**

**Environment**

Due to the nature of live events, you will be on screen for the duration of the round. This section will speak mostly to live debate as those are the only live events for ACTAA Regionals. Similar to recorded events, it’s important to have little distractions with the background including fans and moving objects. Debaters need to be seated at an environment with good lighting, either natural or with lamps, in order to be seen by the judge clearly.

**Partner Communication**

Communication with partners is something that is hard in the world of online competitions where you can’t just sit by your partner and talk. There are a number of options that individuals have beta tested and tried for partner events or team events. Here are some options-

- Phone Call (Direct to Partner)
- Group Phone Call (Team Debate)
- Google Hangouts Call (Team Debate or Partner)
- Discord
- Facetime
- Google Document Writing Notes

It’s important to remember to mute during prep time so the other team/judge(s) aren’t able to hear you. Instead of calling for each prep time, teams at the TOC and NSDA stayed on the call for the duration of the round and simply muted the call at all times that they weren’t prepping to avoid an echo and save time from calling multiple times during different segments of prep time.

**Mute Etiquette**

Be sure to remain muted on the NSDA Campus call when not speaking. This helps avoid echoes and makes it easier to hear the individual speaking. This is especially true in regards to congressional debate and direct questioning etc.
Tech Time

Certain tournaments, including ACTAA regionals, will have a form of tech time set aside for each team in the event there are technical issues that arise. No student should prep during this time but simply be a time for the disconnected student to rejoin the call.

If a judge drops out during the debate, it’s important to pause and wait for them to reconnect. If they don’t return, email the tournament helpline for assistance.

Online Coin Flips

Out of state tournaments will have virtually carried out coin flips on Tabroom for prelims of PF and elims of all debate events minus congress.

After pairings are sent out for the round, both teams and their coaches will receive a blast stating the random team that won the coin flip. That team will have 5 minutes to select their side (or position in PF) They do this by clicking on the link in the email or logging into Tabroom. Either the coaches or team can do the coin flip selection. After that time, the other team will have the ability to choose in PF (or will be notified what side they are in other forms).

If the team that won the coin flip doesn’t complete in the set time, the decision goes to the other team. If neither team selects in the time limit, the sides/positions will be randomly selected by tabroom software.
Concluding Thoughts

This year is a new experience for everyone. Students, coaches, judges, alumni, tabulation staff, tournament hosts. We are all learning this together. This will be a document that is updated throughout the season as we get a better picture of what is needed for successful online tournaments.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your coach. If you are a coach reading this document with questions, please contact rachelmauchline@gmail.com

Good luck this season!!