

COACHING GUIDE: RESOURCE 13

How to Run a Public Speaking Practice

Running a public speaking practice requires a careful balance between freedom and structure.

Students need enough structure to be able to focus their work and be as productive as possible, but have enough freedom to be able to practice independently and work through their own specific needs. Too much guidance can take away from the important time students need to work with one another and problem-solve on their own, while too little guidance means that practice time can devolve into socializing or being overwhelmed and not knowing where to start. A good pattern can be to set students up with enough structure at the beginning to be able to work independently for about 30 minutes (20 for younger students), which is then followed up with a check-in to provide additional options so that students can refocus their remaining work. It is okay for practices to not be 100 percent productive all the time -- socializing and down time is important to building team culture and helping students reset before getting focused again.

Structuring Practice Time

Common elements of practice time include: (time estimates are flexible, based on a 1hr practice, and depends on whether the focus is on debate or prepared speeches)

Group discussion, check-in, share out,
or group storytelling
(5 min)

Icebreaker, warm-up, or practice drill
(7 min)

Review the goals and plan for practice
(2 min) – (if debate, announce the topic)

Open practice or preparation time
(25 min)

If longer practice: Check-in and refocus
and then continue open practice

Present out progress, perform selections
for the group, or start debate
(15 min)

Reflect on what got done and
what improved
(5 min)

Cheer or ritual
(1 min)

Setting an Objective for Practice

When identifying objectives, think about what people should learn and accomplish, not about the activities in the schedule. Objectives result in more intentional planning for practice time, rather than resorting to running through speeches or debates without a clear focus for what students should get out of it. Ideally, a 1 hour practice shouldn't have more than 2 objectives -- too many means they won't get done. Objectives also change depending on the timing of the particular practice in the bigger picture -- some example objectives for different times include:

- Beginning: Develop strong relationships on the team; Become familiar with a new style of public speaking or debate.
- Beginning: Identify topics that students are passionate about; Map out the flow or structure of speeches and cut extraneous material; Work on outlining skills.
- Middle: Make decisions about delivery, "characters", and speaking style; Take a deeper dive to improve specific parts of a debate or speech.
- End: Run-through material and receive peer feedback; Apply more sophisticated performance or debate techniques; Accomplish individual speaking goals.

Preparation Checklist:

- A set of objectives or goals about a specific style of speaking
- Warm-up activities and/or drills
- Practice time checklist (if practicing prepared speeches)
- List of topics (if doing a debate or impromptu-style speaking)
- Chart paper or whiteboard for writing out format and times (if doing a debate)
- Pens and paper
- Timer

