

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) about MIFA Individual Events (IE)

IE FAQ, 2013-2014

Throughout the individual events season, questions often arise about interpretations of rules. The Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document is an attempt to address some of the more common inquiries.

If you have concerns or questions that should be addressed in subsequent versions of the FAQ publication, please contact your Individual Events Representative for an initial clarification of your concern and to submit a reference for inclusion in a future document. Recommendations for annual changes to the FAQ document will occur usually in June of each year to provide for a formal adoption of the document by the Forensic Council in August.

The material is organized by the traditional sections of the individual events section of MIFA publications with general principles initially, followed by questions regarding interpretation events, and finally inquiries on public address events. Numbers in parentheses refer to page references in the current version of **Speech Activities**.

The answers to the questions represent rule interpretations by the Individual Events Committee. **Speech Activities** remains the authoritative resource for the rule interpretation. Please refer to the links to the appropriate page in the Individual Events section of **Speech Activities**, which are in parentheses in the response.

The format provides for an answer to a question plus examples to illustrate the response. The examples attempt to demonstrate the principle; thus, the examples are not inclusive.

GENERAL POLICY GUIDELINES

GP1. Must a judge penalize a contestant for not meeting the time limits?

No. The rule states: "All MIFA events have suggested time limits. Presentations which do not conform to the suggested time parameters may be penalized at the discretion of the judge. Penalties are not mandatory for timing irregularities" (4, 5; "Time Guidelines Violations," 6).

Example. An informative speaker uses nine minutes for her presentation. Even though this speaker does not conform to time parameters, it is the discretion of the judge to penalize. The judge may or may not give this speaker first place.

GP2. What should a judge do if he or she believes someone has violated a rule or a procedure?

Because many of the violations lack a specific sanction, a judge should consult the **Speech Activities** Section, "General Sanctions" (5 - 6), which indicates that the judge should confer with the tournament

director. A judge should never make a decision to invoke a penalty that may result in disqualification without the concurrence of the tournament director.

GP3. What is the fifteen-minute rule and how should it be applied?

The fifteen-minute rule ("Fifteen Minute Rule Violation," 6) is a policy designed to keep the tournament running on time. In a round of competition, if a contestant is not available for the draw at the scheduled beginning of the round, he or she will be assigned a speaking position, following a draw for position by all contestants present. If the absent contestant is placed in the first or second presentation position, contestants who are in attendance will advance in his or her place to begin the competition. If the absent contestant appears within fifteen minutes following the draw, he or she may compete; however, if the absent contestant does not appear within the fifteen minutes following the draw, he or she will not be allowed to compete and will receive a 4/00 from the judge(s). The contestant may compete in subsequent preliminary rounds and will be considered for elimination rounds; however, if the contestant does not appear for a second time within the fifteen-minute time period, he or she is eliminated.

If the contestant is in extemp or broadcasting and is unavailable for the beginning draw, he or she will be assigned a speaking order. In these categories, other speakers will not be advanced in order. The absent contestant will lose prep time, if the contestant appears within the fifteen-minute time limit and he or she has drawn the first or second position.

In oration, duo, or multiple, events that last ten or more minutes, if a contestant(s) has not appeared for the draw and he or she has been assigned first position, the second person will advance to present first. If the missing contestant is still unavailable after the first presentation, the judge must wait until the remaining time in the fifteen minute cycle has elapsed before the second presentation begins.

The time for the start of a particular round is critical for the application of the fifteen minute rule. The "scheduled" beginning of a round is sometimes altered when sections run overtime, judges are late, etc.

GP4. When should the judge begin the official timing of a presentation?

The rule states: "Timing will begin when the performance begins" ("Timing," 5). With the exception of impromptu, which has a unique timing procedure (see the impromptu ballot), performance is defined as any spoken word, humming, singing, sound effect, physical movement, or pantomime initiated by the performer(s).

GP5. Must sources be cited using MLA (Modern Language Association) style?

No. Other standardized formats for documentation are acceptable. The source(s) for the content ideas and for visual representations used in the presentation should be indicated in the endnotes.

The MLA style, as it appears in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (Sixth Edition) <http://www.mla.org/store/> by Joseph Gibaldi, is a reference (or see www.mla.org, the web site of the organization) or a Purdue University site, http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_mla.html), but the key requirement is that the resources must be clearly cited to enable ready location of the material. Additional MLA references include, for example,

<http://www.docstyles.com/mlacrib.htm>
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>

GP6. Are timers required to use cards and how should the cards be displayed?

"At all levels of competition, timing of all events is mandatory" ("Timing," 5). The judge is responsible for using an appropriate timekeeping device to time contestants and to display time cards that are clearly visible to the contestant throughout the presentation, unless the contestant does not desire a visual display of time.

The number showing on the card indicates the amount of time remaining. For example, in an eight minute event, the eight minute card will be displayed for the entire first minute. The seven minute card is displayed for the full second minute . . . and so on.

Please note that any dispute over time must be addressed in the round immediately. Judges are always responsible for timing procedures, no matter who displays the time. Time must be announced.

GP7. Can inappropriate audience behavior on the part of a contestant affect his or her performance score?

Yes. All contestants are expected to be courteous and attentive listeners. Inappropriate/disrespectful behavior, such as talking, gulping water, making faces, etc. is unacceptable and may negatively impact the contestant's performance score at the discretion of the judge. ("Code of Conduct," 1).

All Individual Events participants must understand that their behavior is a reflection of the entire activity and can have a strong effect on performances. Individuals, including all audience members, are encouraged to be attentive and respectful throughout the competition. Individuals must refrain from inappropriate and rude behavior. Unsportsmanlike like behavior will not be tolerated.

Photography, cell phones, and pagers are strictly prohibited. Copyright laws may prohibit any form of recording as well.

Inappropriate behavior could result in sanctions against the competitor and/or the participating school.

The Code of Conduct should be read at the opening assembly. The use of cell phones, pagers, and, according to copyright law, cameras and video recording equipment, is strictly prohibited. Audience members not conducting themselves in an acceptable manner may be asked to leave.

GP8. What happens when a contestant switches his or her code with another contestant?

It is important for a contestant to use the code assigned by the tournament director. At the Regional and State levels, a contestant who uses the wrong code and competes in the wrong section will receive a score of 4/0 for a first infraction and be disqualified for any subsequent infraction the remainder of the tournament. Inadvertently entering the wrong code but competing in the correct section will result in no sanction.

GP9. What is the procedure for filing a protest?

Protests at MIFA Individual Events tournaments can only be filed by the head coach or the official designated head coach (i.e., the head coach is not in attendance at the tournament) or the individuals judging the round. Protests should be filed with tabulation room personnel as soon as possible. (“Concept of an Event, or Standards for an Event Violation,” (5-6).

GP10. What should the scripts or speeches that final round contestants turn in look like?

Contestants must establish the authenticity of each interpretation selection by demonstrating that the selection conforms to the characteristics of the literary genre in which it is being performed and that it is not the original work of the contestant (unless an event sanctions original material). All directors will submit evidence of the publication of their students’ material within 72 hours of the conclusion of the Regional tournament. Submission must be made through the online process at <http://themifa.org/Script> . Any changes of material should be submitted not less than 72 hours prior to the State Tournament. Failure can result in the disqualification of the student. (6-7).

Contestants participating in oratory, sales speaking, and informative speaking must have manuscripts or outlines in their possession in all rounds. The manuscript must be provided to the judge upon request. All directors will submit evidence of the originality of their students’ material within 72 hours of the conclusion of the Regional tournament. Submission must be made through the online process at <http://themifa.org/Script> . Any changes of material should be submitted not less than 72 hours prior to the State Tournament. Failure can result in the disqualification of the student. (6).

INTERPRETATION EVENTS

IE1. Must a contestant use published selections?

No. Although a contestant may use published material, the rule states: "All selections performed in oral interpretation events, except for the original interpretation contest, shall not be the writing of the contestant." Published material is no longer mandatory.

Some guidelines for materials remain. The selection should:

- reflect a reasonable standard for good quality literature;
- be appropriate as contest material;
- represent the correct genre;
- be appropriate for secondary school audiences.

Either the primary script or a photocopy of the appropriate pages from the primary source must be taken by the contestant to all rounds of competition, and the documents must be available for a judge to view at each MIFA tournament level (Note to Coaches: it might be wise to keep a backup copy of all contestant selections.).

IE2. Can you do the same piece in a different genre/event the following year?

No. A participant in oral interpretation may not use a selection from the same piece of literature that he or she has used in any previous year (including in Middle Level competitions). A cutting from other literature written by the same author may be used. Selections used at the Michigan Speech Coaches, Incorporated, spring tournament in the previous year may be presented without sanction during the current individual events season. Modifications in material can occur during or between invitational tournaments, during or between all levels of competition. (8).

IE3. If a judge is unsure whether or not a particular selection fits a given genre, what should he or she do?

Some selections may qualify as more than one genre — e.g., a novel written in poetry form may be categorized as either prose or poetry. The presenter may use either category, but the burden of proof to establish the appropriate genre rests with the contestant(s). If examination of the script does not provide the appropriate proof, some other documentation must be available at the request of the judge (see General Policy FAQ #2 for a discussion of the sanction procedure).

IE4. Must contestants have written copies of movie scripts or can they watch the movie and write it down word for word?

Contestants must have a written copy but they may not transcribe it themselves. A contestant must carry a copy of the script or photocopy of the script to each round that clearly indicates the contestant did not write the selection. The burden of proof is on the contestant/coach.

IE5. May contestants use material found on internet source pages like YouTube and SchoolTube?

Yes. It should be noted, however, that Forensic Council recently passed a resolution that says: “The imitation of vocal and physical characterization from video presentations is strongly discouraged.” That should be taken to mean contestants may use the material but it should be rendered in a new and original manner. The selections should be judged for their appropriateness as contest material and their suitability to the particular contestant(s) using them.

IE5. May an interpreter change the gender of a character?

The rule states: "Editing is permitted, but the author's intent must be preserved. For example, the rewriting of a selection to change the gender of the primary characters is inconsistent with the author intent and, thus, is not permitted" (8).

While editing is definitely allowable (e.g., eliminating "he said" or "she said") to facilitate the flow of dialogue or meet time constraints, a contestant may not change the gender of a character.

Example. A female portrays the character of Pip in Great Expectations. *This does not break the rule as long as she does not change the character from male to female by changing the author's language.*

IE6. What constitutes a costume?

The rule reads: "Street attire that suggests mood and character is permissible. Costumes that are unique to the stage, such as period dress or robes, are prohibited" (7).

Street attire is anything that is acceptably worn on the street. Keep in mind the diversity of contemporary fashion in which many styles of clothing are acceptable. Street attire does not refer only to school clothes.

Costumes unique to the stage, such as period dress or robes, refer to attire that would not typically be worn on the street, such as Greek togas, colonial dresses with hoop skirts, or cut-away coats.

Creative costuming is permissible and may reflect character and mood. Both groups and individuals can achieve a coordinated look by using similar or identical clothing or accessories.

IE7. What is a hand prop?

The rule reads: "No hand props . . . are permitted" (see "Platform Conduct," 7).

In general, the concept of a hand prop follows a fairly traditional definition, but creative interpretations can challenge a judge. Can a contestant's body become a prop?

Examples. A storyteller grabs her hair and holds it like two pigtails while hopping around the performance space interpreting the part of a rabbit. *Her pigtails are not props because they really aren't ears.*

A seated student portraying the part of a paraplegic character picks up her leg to move it in an attempt to stand. *Her leg is not a prop because she is symbolically portraying a character.*

A student touches her blouse when saying the line, "Our clothes were full of holes." *Her blouse is not a prop because it is not full of holes.*

In a prose piece the speaker picks up her necklace while saying, "How do you like my necklace?" *The necklace is a prop because she is using the necklace literally.*

IE8. When does a chair or stool become a prop?

The rule states: "NO hand props, decorative scripts, lighting, scenery, readers' stands, benches, platforms, or risers are permitted. Any physical manipulation using a chair/stool/cube during a round is allowable and permissible. The contestant may sit and/or stand."

Examples. A student straddles and rocks a chair as if riding a horse and later touches the leg of the chair as if it is the leg of a horse. *This does not violate the rule because there is no restriction on how a chair may be used.*

A storyteller slides his chair forward as he says, "I slid my chair closer to the table." *This does not violate the rule because there is no restriction on how a chair may be used.*

IE9. How many stools can be used in presentation?

The rule states: "No hand props, decorative scripts, lighting, scenery, readers' stands, platforms, or risers are permitted. ONLY chairs, stools, and cubes are permitted. The contestant may sit and/or stand" (7).

The current rule does not recommend nor limit the number of stools that can be used. This decision is left up to the performers.

Example. A multiple consisting of eight individuals could use fewer than eight or more than eight stools.

IE10. Can you paint a cube to depict a scene?

No. Scenery is not allowed in interpretation events; the following is the dictionary definition of scenery:

1. general appearance of a place; the aggregate of features that give character to a landscape.
2. hangings, draperies, structures, etc. used on a stage to represent the locale or furnish decorative background.

IE11. In Duo Interpretation can an individual play more than one role?

The rule states: "In Duo Interpretation each of the two performers may play one or more characters, so long as performance responsibility in the cutting remains as balanced as possible. Either or both of the performers may also present narration." (9).

Examples. A duo uses A Few Good Men. In order to enhance the ending, the student portraying Lt. Kaffey speaks one line of another character. *This does not violate the rule because each performer may portray more than one character.*

While performing scenes from Sybil, one character performs the psychiatrist and another performs the multiple personalities of Sybil. *This does not violate the rules because the multiple personalities merely reveal the several dimensions of one persona.*

A competitor, while performing scenes in a duo from Huckleberry Finn includes narration that features thoughts of Jim, description of the scenery, an analysis of the situation, etc. *This does not violate the rule because a performer may portray both a character and a narrator.*

IE12. Can individuals combine genres in Duo Interpretation?

The rule states: "Duo Interpretation is the interpretation by two participants of humorous or serious literature from any genre or a selection that combines genre (e.g., drama and prose)" (9).

Example. A duo presents scenes from the novel, the play, and the screenplay of To Kill a Mockingbird. One person consistently portrays Scout, and another portrays Jem, in addition to supplemental narration from the novel. *This creative blending of genres does not break the rule.*

IE13. Is the use of monologue acceptable in dramatic interpretation?

The rule states: "Dramatic interpretation is the presentation of a single serious or humorous selection from a play written for either the stage or the electronic media. Adaptations of other genres (adaptations of poems, novels, or short stories) that are written for performance on the stage or in an electronic medium (radio, film, television) are permitted. In dramatic interpretation, a character developed in depth in a monologue is equally acceptable to a multiple character performance."

The last line of the rule replaces an earlier line that encouraged multiple character selections (June 2001). The emphasis is on the quality of the material, and excellent monologues, as well as multiple character scenes, are available for dramatic interpretation.

Example. *Tradition 1-A*, *Burns*, and *Confessions of a Nightingale* are all monologues that allow character development.

IE14. Which genres may be used in Multiple?

Multiple material will alternate on an annual basis. For 2013-14 it may be of any genre, excluding musical theater/musical film. For 2014-2015 it may consist of any genre including musical theater/musical film.

IE15. What material may be used in Storytelling?

Storytelling is the delivery of a humorous or serious children's story. The piece can be either a single selection or a compilation of stories. Any material for children will be accepted, including contemporary literature, myths, legends, fairytales and folktales. Acceptable selections for storytelling must come from children's literature for any age. Storytelling will no longer alternate genres from year to year. (10)

PUBLIC ADDRESS

PA1. What rules govern the use of audiovisual material in public address events?

Various interpretation rules limit the contestants to sounds produced by the voice and the body of the performer. But, the rules for the preparation events in public address suggest the "speaker may wish to incorporate the use of . . . audiovisual projections" in a speech (Ballots).

MIFA rules explicitly permit "audiovisual projections" (21), a term, which includes reproducing sound or voice recordings. The rules do not forbid the performer to operate devices, but merely makes it clear that such items may be displayed and operated - or not - as the performer deems appropriate.

Example: One student presenting an informative speech about ragtime music has a tape recorder softly playing the works of Scott Joplin throughout his or her speech. Another student presenting a speech on ragtime music uses a portable keyboard to give examples of syncopation. These examples of audio supplements in the speeches are within the rules.

The contestant who plans to use an audio supplement in his or her speech should be alerted to two potential concerns. First, the rules for sales and informative speaking, the events most receptive to audio, both stress that such supplements should not be the major focus of the speech. A judge could easily justify a low score, if a contestant excessively uses audio materials. Second, the director of the tournament has no obligation to provide equipment or to guarantee the availability of electricity for contestants in public address events. A student should not expect that every classroom would come equipped with a VCR; in fact, it is conceivable that a student may face situations where it is not possible to run an extension cord into a performance area.

PA2. Can a contestant use a stopwatch to keep track of his or her time?

Yes. There is no rule that prohibits the use of a stopwatch by the contestant. Therefore, self-timing by the broadcaster is permitted, however, the judge's time is the official time.

PA3. Can a student in Extemp or Broadcasting take a computer into the prep room and go on-line during the course of prep time?

The rule states: "With regard to electronic materials, contestants may use personal technology to access resources to acquire information, but using technology to confer with external sources is unacceptable." A student may also be dismissed from the prep room "if the use of personal electronic technology is disruptive." (Ballots).

A student may access his personal database of information. He or she may go on-line to use the internet and like resources, but is forbidden to confer with other people. Actions, such as using e-mail, chat rooms, or instant messaging, are among behaviors that would be construed as conferring with other people. Use of search engines is generally acceptable.

Because the tournament director and prep room proctor have an obligation to ensure no conferring occurs between contestants and other people, contestants using computers in these events implicitly give permission for their use of the computer to be monitored by tournament personnel.

Contestants may not use electronic retrieval devices to consult their previous presentations.

PA4. What do the rules mean when they say that contestants in broadcasting or extemporaneous speaking can not use the internet to contact an "outside source?"

Tournament directors are not required to provide internet access. If internet access is available, contestants may use the internet to research their topics (e.g., news sites); however, contestants may not use it to consult or communicate with other individuals (e.g., message boards, e-mail, or chat rooms). (Ballots).

PA5. What types of topics are appropriate for Oratory?

The rule states: "The oration may eulogize a person, alert the audience to a threatening danger, strengthen the audience's devotion to an accepted cause, or present a solution to a problem" (11).

There seems to be a heavy emphasis in this category on speeches that pose a problem and offer a solution; however, the rule allows several other options.

Examples. An orator eulogizes the life of President John F. Kennedy. *This does not break the rules, but eulogy is not often used.*

Another orator promotes the theme of strengthening patriotism. *This thematic approach does not break the rules and is often emphasized in national competition.*

A third orator alerts the audience to the dangers of gambling and solutions to the problem. *This does not break the rules and is the most commonly used approach.*

PA6. Must a contestant use MLA for “proper documentation?”

No. The Modern Language Association of America has, for many years, promoted a uniform system of guidelines for research papers but any generally accepted academic style is appropriate. The key requirement is that the resources be clearly cited to enable ready location of the material.

PA7. Should a contestant in Extemp use notes in making his or her speech?

The rule states that the contestant "may choose to refer to notes while delivering the speech," but that "the use of notes is not mandatory. If a student wishes to speak without the use of notes, it is permissible" (Ballot).

Some other speech organizations sponsor extempore competition in which the contestants are required to not speak from notes in their presentations. That is not the case with the MIFA; speeches with or without notes are equally within the rules.

However, judges (and coaches) disagree as to whether the use of notes is desirable. Some judges believe that making the speech without notes allows the contestant freedom in making natural, communicative gestures. In contrast, some other judges prefer that the student use notes to ensure that direct quotations are delivered accurately. An awareness of the preferences of individual judges may allow the contestant to adapt to the prevailing style in a particular area.

PA8. Are visual aids permitted in Oratory?

The rules give quite detailed examples for the use of visual aids, demonstrations, and audiovisual productions for the preparation events in public address (Ballot). There is no preclusion of visual aids in the rules for the preparation events at the high school level in public address events. There is a preclusion on the use of visual aids in oratory in the rules for the middle level tournaments.

Because there is no explicit rule at the high school level forbidding the use of visual aids, contestants in oratory may choose to incorporate them into their speeches. The use of visual aids is extremely uncommon in oratory, however. Few orations that incorporate visual aids have been successful.

PA9. May a contestant in sales or informative speaking wear a costume?

The rules banning the use of stage costumes refer specifically to interpretation events (Ballots). Because there is no rule explicitly forbidding the use of costumes, competitors in public address events may wear any clothing that is suitable for public performance and that enhances their presentations.

PA10. What is a disclaimer in broadcasting?

A disclaimer is a very brief statement that identifies the editorial as the original opinions of the broadcaster and not the station. Although disclaimers are not required, they are frequently used, however, it is an optional transition and not editorial content. It should not be timed as part of the editorial.

PA11. In limited prep events, must a speaker have a specific number of main points in his or her speech?

No. Emphasis in the speech should be on the explanation, development, and support of each point.