

The English-Speaking Union is an educational charity and international membership organisation providing oracy, debate, public speaking and cultural exchange programmes help young people to engage with the world, to speak more confidently and to listen to and understand different points of view.

We believe every child should be able to make their voice heard. The ability to progress and to thrive in life relies on oracy – speaking and listening – skills, which are not currently a prominent part of the school curriculum. These skills improve young people's attainment, emotional intelligence and social skills, helping them to live their lives to the fullest.

The English-Speaking Union evaluates oracy across four key skill sets: Reasoning & Evidence, Expression & Delivery; Organisation & Prioritisation; and where oracy is interactive [Listening](#) & [Response](#). These skill sets translate speech and debate into targeted and tangible learning journeys. The skill sets make it simple to imagine, plan, teach, track and assess speaking and listening by breaking oracy down at each ability level. We explain how our activities promote such skills; we offer a language that teachers AND learners can use to describe oracy.

The ESU in collaboration with the ISA have used our skill sets to create rubrics for the 2025-26 public speaking competitions.

For poetry – (KS2)

Expression and Delivery focus on the clarity of communication of a speaker, as well as their ability to obtain and sustain the interest of the audience through their manner of speech and use of language.

Expression and delivery should be suitable for the content of the poem. This means that there is no single 'correct' way to deliver a poem, just like there is no 'right' accent to deploy. The mark scheme rewards demonstrating a variety of techniques, and so the selection of a poem to perform should allow the speaker to show off such a variety.

Stance, gesture, & eye contact (20)

How they hold themselves (posture, stance etc)

Use of gestures and other body language to support the text

Speakers should make suitable eye contact with their audience and/or camera. Poems can be delivered from memory or from a copy of the text, but in the latter case they should not be so dependent on the written text that it impedes their ability to make eye contact or use physicality fluidly.

Pace, volume, pauses (15)

The speaker should seek to make the text come alive. They may choose to vary their pitch, tone of voice, volume and where appropriate the pace of delivery.

If the poem has been written in a particular metre, or if deploying a certain rhythm adds to the clarity of performance, this should be deployed. If, however, an over-emphasis on rhythm detracts from the audience's ability to understand the content of the poem, this is to be avoided.

Emotional content & emphasis (15)

Speakers should make an emotional connection with the text and to communicate this through their body language, vocal variation or overall performance.

For Prepared Speeches – (KS3-5)

Reasoning and Evidence (15)

Features; Relevancy of arguments, relevant evidence to support ideas, analysis of arguments from premise to conclusions

Reasoning and evidence place the focus upon the ability of the participant to construct ideas and arguments, supported by logical chains of reasoning, and supporting evidence. Speakers' key focus should be on providing analysis explaining why what they are saying is true, and why it supports the overall thesis of their speech. Speakers should try to avoid making unsupported assertions, and each statement of fact or opinion should follow logically from the previous one.

Analysis and argumentation should be reinforced by evidence and analogies. This evidence can come in many forms, whether it is statistics from academic reports, newspaper or website articles, and quotations from academics or well-known figures. The focus should be on using relevant information that supports their overall thesis and should not be example led. Adjudicators are not expected to be able to absorb large amounts of statistics, large excerpts from reports etc.

Particular credit should be given to speakers who take into account alternative approaches and evidence and provide sufficient responses or take on board legitimate criticisms of their own point of view.

Expression and Delivery (15)

Features; eye contact, hand gestures, stance, emotive language, rhetorical devices and questions, pacing

Expression and Delivery focus on the clarity of communication of a speaker, as well as their ability to obtain and sustain the interest of the audience through their manner of speech and use of language. Speakers are expected to bear in mind the four principle aims of public speaking; to persuade, inform, inspire and entertain the audience and adjudicators. This is not an English language exam, and speakers should not be penalised for grammatical errors or mispronunciations.

Speakers should make a strong first impression, grabbing the attention of the audience and judges. This can be done by means such as humour, shock or emotive language. They should then seek to maintain the attention of the audience through verbal and non-verbal skills.

Speakers should remember the importance of clarity and variation in order to successfully convey the message of their speech in an interesting and intriguing way. Speakers may choose to vary their pitch, tone of voice, and where appropriate the pace of their speech.

Much of a speaker's communication is non-verbal. Speakers must be conscious of their body language, facial expressions, eye contact, and movement. Speakers should try and make use of tools such as open body language and hand gestures. Speakers should not be overly dependent upon notes, although speeches should not feel learnt or recited, and should be rewarded for the appearance of spontaneity.

Features; clearly demarcated arguments, internal structure, ranking of most relevant ideas, preference best ideas.

The ESU runs competitions in debating, public speaking and performance which give students from all backgrounds the chance to have their voice heard. From debating the key topics of the day, or presenting a theme they are passionate about, to showcasing their Shakespearean talents, our challenges offer a new way to achieve. Not only do our competitions complement history, politics, English literature, PSHE and drama lessons, they provide a framework for high-quality extra- and co-curricular activities for students of all ages and abilities.

