

Japan Forensic Association: A Proposal for a National Speech Organization

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1 Introduction

Forensics is a word that is not familiar to most people. Many who are familiar with the word connect it to detective and police work, or to medicine. However, for some people, and for the purpose of this paper, *forensics* is a word connected to language education. What is forensics? According to the World Book dictionary, forensics is “the art or study of public argumentation or debate.” The author grew up in the state of Wisconsin, home to several state-wide forensic organizations (Wisconsin High School Forensics Association and Wisconsin High School Forensics Coaches Association, and one national organization (National Forensics League).

Forensics plays an important part in Wisconsin high school life, with local tournaments, and elimination tournaments starting with District Tournaments and going on to the State Tournament.

It is interesting that in a nation like Japan that values competition and organized events, that there are few, if any, local, prefectural, regional, or national networks of forensic competition. This is true, despite the fact that there are intra-school speech contests at individual junior high schools, high schools, and universities, with very few intra-school competitions, the notable exceptions being the few competitions sponsored in the Chubu area by Nanzan Junior College for high school and college/university students and the English Speaking Society for college/university students.

The forensics model of the United States, specifically of Wisconsin can serve as a model for Japan, with a few modifications. This paper first describes the Japanese forensics situation, then explains the American high school forensics situation, and finally proposes modifications to the American system for application in Japan.

2 Japanese Situation

In Japan, in the intra-school speech competitions in junior high and high schools there are basically two types of competitions: original speeches and oral interpretation. In the original speech contests students write a short speech, memorize it, and perform it. Oral interpretation usually means taking a story from

the students' English textbook and reading it. Nanzan Junior College sponsors a high school oral interpretation contest that is closer to the university style described below.

Japanese universities also have the two types of speech competitions: speech contests and oral interpretation contests. The speech contests are like the high school speech contests: students write speeches and read them. The oral interpretation contests are a potpourri. Selections can be prose or poetry and, in some cases, even drama. This causes the judges, usually three, problems judging the contest because they have to compare apples to oranges and come up with a reasonable slate of winners. There are other problems with this system. The performers only have one chance to perform their piece in the contest. Because of a lack of a full competition schedule, the students take so much time to prepare and practice their piece, and then have no venue to repeat performances of their piece.

In all the speech contests, the judges receive no training, and often no previous speech or oral interpretation judging experience is necessary.

3 American Situation

It is difficult to describe the forensics situation in America as each state and region has its own system. In the state of Wisconsin there are three state level forensic organizations: the Wisconsin High School Forensic Association (WHSFA), the oldest forensic organization in the United States, founded in 1895, and providing forensic competition for junior high school and high school students (WHSFA, WHSFA ML, 2010), the Wisconsin Forensics Coaches Association (WFCA), founded in 1970 and providing competition for high school students (WFCA, 2010). The Middle Level Forensics Association of Wisconsin (MLFAWisconsin) broke away from the WFCA in 2002 and provides competitions for junior high school students (MLFAWisconsin, 2010). At the university level there is a system similar to the high school system.

3.1 Performance Categories

Each of the three organizations offers competition in a wide variety of categories. Table 1 shows the categories of the WHSFA and MLFAWisconsin for junior high school levels of the WHSFA and WFCA for high school levels (WHSFA, 2009; WFCA, 2010; MLFAWisconsin, 2010).

3.2 Levels

In the American system there are various levels of competition: local, regional, state, and national.

3.2.1 Local Level. Individual institutions organize competitions or festivals during a forensics season. Students can perform the same piece at these events, or can change pieces when they and their coaches decide. This is a free competition level, meaning there is no elimination at this level. All students can participate in all competitions if they chose.

3.2.2 Regional Level. Each state is divided into regions, called districts. The state of Wisconsin is

WHSFA Junior High (14 categories)	MLFAWisconsin Junior High (16 categories)	WHSFA High School (15 categories)	WFCA High School (19 categories)
• Demonstration	• Demonstration Speech	• Demonstration Speaking	• Demonstration Speaking
• Interpretation of Poetry	• Poetry	• Poetry Reading	• Interpretation of Poetry
• Interpretation of Prose	• Prose	• Prose Reading	• Interpretation of Prose
• Moments in History	• Moments In History	• Moments in History	• Moments in History
• Non-Original Oratory	• Non-Original Oratory	• Oratory	• Oratory
• Play Acting	• Group Acting	• Play Acting	• Play Acting
• Readers Theatre	• Group Interpretation	• Group Interpretive	• Group Interpretation • Duo Interpretation
• Solo Acting	• Humorous Solo Acting • Serious Solo Acting	• Solo Acting	• Solo Acting
• Special Occasion Speech	• Special Events Presentation	• Special Occasion Speech	• Special Occasion
• Storytelling	• Storytelling	• Storytelling	
• Eight Minute Persuasive	• Persuasive Speaking		
• Four Minute Informative	• Informative Speech	• Four Minute Speaking	• Four Minute Speaking
• News Reporting	• News Reporting • Infomercial	• Radio Speaking • Public Address	• Radio Announcing • Public Address
• Extemporaneous Speaking		• Extemporaneous Speaking	• Extemporaneous Speaking
	• Impromptu Speaking		• Impromptu
		• Farrago	• Farrago
			• Oral Interpretation of Literature • Group Discussion • Student Congress

Table 1 Categories for Junior High School and High School Levels

divided into 14 districts. Elimination begins at this level. Only winners or participants who receive a top score can go on to the next level.

3.2.3 State Level. Winners at the regional/district level go on to compete against each other at the state level.

3.2.4 National Level. Winners at the state level go on to the national level. There are three major forensics organizations that manage forensics at the national level for high schools: the National Forensics League (NFL), the National Catholic Forensic League (NCFL), and the National Christian Forensic and Communications Association (WCFA). The categories for each organization are listed below in table 2 (NFL, 2010; NCFL, 2010; NCFCA, 2010).

4 Description of Forensics Categories

To give a clearer idea of the American forensic system, many of the categories listed in the above section are described below:

National Forensics League (NFL) High School (16 categories)	National Catholic Forensic League (NCFL) High School (10 categories)	National Christian Forensic and Communications Association (NCFCA) High School (9 categories)
Debate/Discussion • Policy Debate, • Lincoln Douglas Debate • Congressional Debate • Public Forum (Ted Turner) • Debate	Debate/Discussion * Policy Debate * Lincoln-Douglas Debate * Student Congress * Public Forum Debate	Debate/Discussion (none)
Standard Speech • Original Oratory • Expository Speaking	Standard Speech * Oratorical Declamation * Original Oratory	Standard Speech Illustrated Oratory Original Oratory Persuasive Speaking
Limited Preparation Speech • United States Extemporaneous Speaking • International Extemporaneous Speaking • Impromptu Speaking	Limited Preparation Speech • Extemporaneous Speaking	Limited Preparation Speech Extemporaneous Speaking Apologetics, Impromptu Speaking
Interpretation • Dramatic Interpretation, • Humorous Interpretation • Duo Interpretation • Commentary • Prose Reading • Poetry Reading • Storytelling	Interpretation * Dramatic Performance * Duo Interpretation of Literature * Oral Interpretation of Literature	Interpretation Dramatic Interpretation Duo Interpretation Humorous Interpretation

Table 2 National Forensic Organization Categories

4.1 Demonstration Speaking

A demonstration speech is a ten-minute speech that “explains how to do something or how something works” (WCFA handbook, 2009). The speech can be done solo or duo (WHSFA Middle Level handbook, 2008-2009).

4.2 Interpretation of Poetry

In Interpretation of Poetry, students select “a poem or a group of poems centering on a specific theme or emotion” and interpret the selection through body and voice. It should not be acted out. (WCFA handbook, 2009) Some organizations divide poetry into humorous and dramatic categories.

4.3 Interpretation of Prose

In Interpretation of Prose, students select from prose literature, which includes “short stories, cutting from novels, monologues and soliloquies, essays, or other non-fiction work centering on a specific theme or emotion,” and interpret the selection with body and voice. Again, like the Poetry category, acting is not allowed. (WCFA handbook, 2009) Some organizations divide Prose into humorous and dramatic categories.

4.4 Moments in History

In Moments of History, students select a particular time in history, and using “archival records, diaries, personal interviews, letters, newspapers, etc.” they create an original informative speech about that time period (WCFA, 2009, p. 48).

4.5 Oratory

In Oratory, students write “a persuasive speech on a topic of significance to general society” (WCFA handbook, 2009, p.52) and then perform the speech.

4.6 Play Acting

Play Acting is “a group presentation of a memorized scene or cutting from a play without costume, make-up, lights, or properties other than an available table (or desk as a substitute) and chairs, if required” (WCFA, 2009, p.54).

4.7 Group Interpretation

In Group Interpretation, students “present a literary script in such manner that the audience imagines action being described rather than witnessing it being performed.” That is to say, Group Interpretation is oral interpretation and not acting. (WCFA, 2009, p.46)

4.8 Duo Interpretation

Duo Interpretation is Group Interpretation with only two people. In Duo Interpretation, “lines are spoken from memory using offstage focus,” which means this is not an acting category. (WCFA handbook, 2009, p.35)

4.9 Solo Acting (Humorous and Dramatic)

In Solo Acting, using “vocal and physical skills to develop a complete humorous performance” or “a complete dramatic performance,” a student acts out a scene from a play. In some organizations, this category is split into the two separate categories of humorous solo acting and dramatic solo acting. (WCFA, 2009, pp.64, 66)

4.10 Special Occasion

In Special Occasion, students write and deliver a speech that “responds to the constraints of the occasion, including the probable audience” that has “more than one of the standard general purposes of informing, persuading, and entertaining.” Special Occasion speeches may be wedding speeches, toasts, or roasts. (WCFA, 2009, p.68)

4.11 Four Minute Speaking

In Four Minute Speaking, students write a speech that is four minutes long and that has “the primary

intent of informing, although persuasive elements may be present.” The speech can include “quotations, statistics, examples, comparisons, and analogies.” (WCFA, 2009, p.41)

4.12 Radio Announcing

In Radio Announcing, students take approximately 15-20 minutes of source material and create a 5-minute newscast (WCFA, 2009, p.62).

4.13 Public Address

For Public Address the student writes an informative speech using supporting information regarding a question about a contemporary topic of social interest (WCFA, 2009, p.60).

4.14 Extemporaneous Speaking

In Extemporaneous Speaking, the student delivers “a speech answering one of the three questions on current events drawn unseen by the speaker from a number of topics prepared by the contest staff.” Some organizations have a national current events category and an international current events category. The speeches must be supported by evidence and logic. (WCFA, 2009, p.37)

4.15 Impromptu

In Impromptu speaking, the student draws a topic and must “quickly create and effectively deliver an original, well-organized and imaginative interpretation” of the topic within the time limit (WCFA, 2009, p.72).

4.16 Farrago

The Farrago speaker selects “material from a variety of literary genres (poetry, short stories, speeches, essays, drama, novels), which addresses a central specific theme or emotion,” and then interprets the selection through oral interpretation. This is an interpretive and not an acting event. (WCFA, 2009, p.39)

4.17 Oral Interpretation of Literature

The presenter of Oral Interpretation of Literature “prepares a literary program in poetry and a program in prose (short stories, cuttings from novels, monologues and soliloquies, essays, or other non-fiction work)—each centering on a theme or emotion—for oral interpretation in alternating rounds of competition.” That is, in one contest, the presenter in the first round performs a prose program, and in the second round performs a poetry program, and so on. (WCFA, 2009, p.50)

4.18 Group Discussion

The focus of Group Discussion is “individual contribution to a discussion as opposed to debate, using John Dewey’s Problem-Solving Sequence in order to promote group achievement.” Both cooperation with the group and individual contribution are judged. (WCFA, 2009, p.43)

4.19 Student Congress

“Student Congress is a mock legislative assembly for which students draft legislation, which they later debate and vote to pass into law.” In effect, though it takes as its model a legislative body, in practice it is like a large group debate. (WCFA, 2009, p.74)

4.20 Persuasive Speaking (or Oratory)

The Persuasive Speech or Oratory is “a thoroughly prepared, well composed, well expressed speech of exhortation on a significant topic” (WHSFA, 2009, p.39).

4.21 Informative Speech

In Informative Speech, the student writes a speech to inform the audience, which should include “quotations, statistics, examples, comparisons, and analogies” (WHSFA, 2009, p.31).

4.22 News Reporting

For News Reporting, one to three students “prepare and present a news program including news, weather, sports and an editorial” (WHSFAML, 2008, p.33).

4.23 Policy Debate

In Policy Debate, students, working in pairs, argue either for or against the school year’s topic selected by the organization (NFL, 2010).

4.24 Lincoln Douglas Debate

In Lincoln Douglas Debate, two students argue each side of a question of value on “what ought to be instead of what is” (NFL, 2010).

4.25 Congressional Debate

Congressional Debate is “individual debate in a large group setting.” It is like Student Government, but students bring up topics that “they feel will better the society in which we live.” (NFL, 2010)

4.26 Public Forum (Ted Turner) Debate

In Public Forum Debate, two pairs of students debate controversial topics taken from newspapers (NFL, 2010).

4.27 Original Oratory

In Original Oratory, speakers are expected to “research and speak intelligently, with a degree of originality, in an interesting manner, and with some profit to the audience, about a topic of significance” (NFL, 2010).

4.28 *Dramatic Interpretation*

Dramatic Interpretation is an individual category in which the selections are dramatic in nature. Selections shall be cuttings from published-printed novels, short stories, plays, poetry, or any other printed-published materials.” (NFL, 2010)

4.29 *Humorous Interpretation*

Humorous Interpretation is an individual category in which the selections are humorous in nature. All other rules are the same as Dramatic Interpretation. (NFL, 2010)

4.30 *Duo Interpretation*

Duo Interpretation is a two-person category in which the selection may be either humorous or dramatic in nature. All other rules are the same as Dramatic Interpretation. (NFL, 2010)

4.31 *Storytelling*

In Storytelling, students tell a story “ in a coherent, unified, clear, and interesting manner” using “vocal variation and physical movement from a seated position” (WCFA, 2009, p.70).

5 **Judge Training and Qualification**

Judges are an important part of the forensics scene in America. All organizations require judges to be competent, trained judges. They provide guidelines for selecting judges, training judges, and give clear guidelines for each activity the judges must judge. As the handbook for the Wisconsin Forensic Coaches Association states, “The positive, friendly, constructive evaluation of performances by knowledgeable, committed and enthusiastic judges is a great source of pride for the Wisconsin Forensic Coaches Association.” (WFCA Handbook, 2009, p.85)

6 **Proposal for Japan**

The characteristics of the American forensic system that would be suitable for the Japanese situation are:

1. A national forensic association
2. The two-part season
3. The four-tiered system (local/free, district, prefectural, national)
4. The multiple category festivals
5. The multiple repeated performance system
6. The multiple contest system
7. The judge training and qualification system
8. A national organizing body

These suggestions are explained in the following sections.

6.1 *A National Forensics Association*

A national forensic association would codify the rules for each category, codify the procedures for a competition, and codify the training and qualifications of judges. It would also serve as a place for discussion and decision for changes.

6.2 *The Two-part Season*

The Japanese situation would benefit from having a two-part season. The first part would be a series of local festival competitions which would give the students multiple chances to practice their category or even change categories until they find one that they excel in and like. The second part would be a series of elimination rounds that start at the local level, and progress from the prefectural level level, to the regional level, and finally to the national level, as described below.

6.3 *The Four-tiered System (Local, Prefectural, Regional, National)*

The American system could be modified in the Japanese case to be local (based in large cities), prefectural (each prefecture), regional (Hokkaido, Tohoku, Kanto, Chubu, Kansai, Chugoku, Shikoku, Okinawa, and Kyushu or some combinations), and national.

6.4 *The Multiple Category Festivals*

As it is now, there are, at most, two categories in oral interpretation contests: Solo Oral Interpretation and Group Oral Interpretation. The proposal is to add more categories to each festival. How many additional categories and which ones should be up to the member schools and executive body of the national forensic association. Perhaps at the beginning, only a few more categories would be added; for example, Original Oratory and Extemporaneous or Impromptu speeches.

6.5 *The Multiple Repeated Performance System*

In each competition in Japan now, competitors only get one chance to perform. Under the American system, each competitor gets three chances to perform once in each of three rounds, in front of three different judges, one judge each round. This gives the competitors several chances to give their best performance.

6.6 *The Multiple Contest System*

In each contest in Japan now, competitors practice one piece for one chance to perform it at a speech contest. The contests are few and scheduled far apart. Students, if they participate in several contests, prepare a different piece for each contest. Under the American system, there is a season of regularly scheduled competitions. After a contest, the student can benefit from the advice of the judges, practice more, and try again. This gives the competitors several chances to give their best performance.

6.7 *The Judge Training and Qualification System*

In Japan now, judges are given little or no explanation of the rules for the competition. What instructions they are given is usually given orally just before the contest begins. In addition, in many cases, the judge is new to the competition, having no previous judging training or experience. In the American system, judges are given written instructions regarding the competition and the categories of the competition.

6.8 *A National Governing Body*

A national organizing body would be helpful for setting standards for categories and judges, giving uniform guidelines for the running the competitions, and arranging the elimination competitions at the various levels.

7 Conclusion

For Japanese college/university level speech and oral interpretation, a system like the American high school forensics system would give students more opportunities to perform their selections, and would provide potentially fairer judging results. It would certainly give students a more complete speaking experience, and would extend the benefits of forensics that students now experience.

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