

MERCED COUNTY

Speech Festival

2026

IMPORTANT DATES

- Intent to Participate Form: Due March 6, 2026
- Names & Registration Fees: Due March 20, 2026
Elementary School/Middle School Competition – April 13, - April 22, 2026, 8:30-Daily
- AWARDS CEREMONY – Thursday, April 29, 2026 – 6:00pm



MERCED COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION 2026 SPEECH CONTEST RULES

THE CONTEST

1. The contest is open to students in grades 4, 5, 6, 7 & 8. A fee of \$50 will be charged for each Festival competition. (Elementary and Middle School – max \$100)
2. The 2026 Speeches can be based on any topic using one of the approved categories.
3. Approved categories are Persuasive, Tall Tale, Legend, Fable or TED- Style Talk. Please note that informational is no longer a category.
4. Students are to write their responses as part of the classroom-writing program. The responses must be the original work of the student contestants.
5. The written responses will be presented orally, as a speech.
6. Students will know the judging criteria and will use the criteria as guidelines for preparation and practice of their speeches. (See the Judging Score Sheet)
7. Each school will be responsible for classroom judging and winner selection. School competition winners will be eligible to compete at the county level.
8. First, second and third place school winners will be selected at the school site for each grade level of the competition. Each school may send **3 students from each grade level** to each competition Elementary and Middle School.
9. School competition and county competition will use judges from the Merced County Office of Education and the community.
10. All speeches will be given in English.

Speech Awards Ceremony
Thursday, April 29, 2026
MCOE Downtown Center 6:00 p.m.

For Questions or Issues:
Stacie Arancibia Events and Community Engagement Merced County Office of Education
209-381-5910 or sarancibia@mcoe.org

2026- Speech Topics Grades 4, 5, 6, 7, & 8

Speech Format

- Students may give a speech about **any subject** using one of the categories listed below along with the speech guidelines included in the Speech Packet.
- Formats for speech categories are outlined on the attached pages.
- The speech formats are based on some of the Writing Festival Categories for grades TK-12.

1. **Persuasive Speech**
2. **Tall Tale Speech**
3. **Legend Speech**
4. **Fable Speech**
5. **TED-Style Talk**

Speech Formats next pages...



2026 Speech Category Formats

1. Persuasive Speech

The Persuasive Speech Format:

A Persuasive Speech is given in language that attempts to convince the audience to accept a point of view. These speeches have excellent arguments to support their point of view, but for our purposes, persuasion will be given a narrow definition. This category will include speeches with a point of view and makes a deliberate attempt to persuade the audience to agree.

In order to give a speech persuasively, the speaker must be able to:

- State a clear position on a proposition or proposal.
- Recognize and state the pros and cons of the argument.
- Support the stated position with relevant information, evidence, illustrations, anecdotes, or opinions of authorities.
- Anticipate and address audiences' concerns and counterarguments.
- Use language that will convince the listeners to agree with the proposal.

Possible Organization:

Beginning

- State the issue and your intention in speaking about it.
- Clearly state your position.
- Identify yourself and the audience you are addressing.
- State your opinion.

Middle

- Support your position with relevant evidence and valid reasons, using examples and details.
- State the position(s) an opponent may take and give evidence and reasons an opponent may use.
- Counter the opposing position(s) with facts and ideas that support your position.

End

- Restate the issue and your position.
- Summarize how your evidence and reasons support your position.
- Conclude with a summary of your opinion.

2. Speech about a Tall Tale

The Tall Tale Speech Format:

A story about people with amazing powers. Oral tradition usually had a series of stories about the same amazing person. Person usually has tools, belongings, or pets with equally amazing powers. Other characters are included in speeches to make amazing things possible. Powerful person often associated with a particular kind of work. May or may not be based on a historical person. Contains hyperboles (intentionally exaggerated figures of speech).

Suggestions for Writing the Speech

- The tall tale is the truth stretched and stretched and stretched.
- Make a list of 20 things that most people do every day.
- Invent a person who has superpowers to do some of those things better, faster or in unusual ways.
- Write a description of the person. Include examples of how he or she does the things on the list. Compare how the super person does things with how most people do them.
- Think about how you play a favorite game or do something like clean your room. Think about clothing, places, and objects you use. Tell how the super person does or does not need different objects.

3. **Speech about a Legend**

The Legend Speech Format:

A speech about the idealized history of a culture based on historical truth. Characters are heroes and heroines who are powerful, and sometimes, superhuman. A combination of role models and wish fulfillment for people of the culture. Helps audience overcome feeling of personal insignificance.

4. **Speech about a Fable**

The Fable Speech Format:

A short tale that teaches a moral, usually with animals, and inanimate objects as characters. The plot generally involves wise or foolish actions by the characters and a strong focus is given on the point to be made. Moral is stated specifically at the end.

Suggestions for Writing the Speech

Read and discuss many fables. Brainstorm and list the common attributes of a fable, such as animal characters with human qualities, foolish and wise characters and actions, a moral stated at the end.

After reading a fable, brainstorm other ways to show the same moral. Choose one of the suggestions and write new fable.

Decide on the moral of a proverb. Write a fable to show the moral.

Decide what the moral is for stories in reading books, newspapers, etc. State the moral clearly. Write fables for the moral. Give a list of morals. Have students each choose one and write a fable illustrating the moral.

5. **TED-Style Talk**

The TED-Style Talk Format:

Start planning for a TED-style talk by focusing on the differences that matter:

- Choose a topic you're personally passionate about.
- Play with different ways to narrate (take us on) your journey of discovery around that topic.
- Stay focused on your most important point; and
- Understand what makes all of this important to your audience.

TED-style talks **are personal**. The only reason to *give* a TED talk is that you feel passionately about something, and your sense of purpose creates an energy boost for both you and your audience.

TED talks often **take us on a journey**. As the speaker shares his transition from ignorance to understanding of some important truth, we follow along in his footsteps. Where business speeches generally focus on a desired outcome, TED talks are also about *the process* of realizing *how you're going to get there*.

TED talks are **concise**. Because their times are short, TED speakers have generally done the hard work of cutting out any extraneous ideas. Ideally, every word of a TED talk counts — and that's very different from the public speaking most of us are used to! TED-style talks **feel important**.

Almost every speech presents an "ah-hah!" moment (the TED organization uses that phrase), and recounts with great intensity *what it feels like to break through a problem in your mind*. The problems themselves are often weighty — but even when they're not, hearing about a breakthrough moment makes you feel that something big is at stake.

Speech Guidelines

THE SPEECH

1. Each participant may choose a way to deliver the speech: reading the written response notes, or not using notes.
2. Small props are optional and will not count in scoring. (Props may include eyeglasses, hat, cane, etc.). An easel will be available for poster display. No digital displays are available.
3. The oral delivery of each speech should be 2–8 minutes in length.
4. Each speech will be judged on Development – 40 points; Effectiveness – 30 points; and Delivery – 50 points for a total of 120 points possible. See the Judging Score Sheet for specific criteria.

JUDGING

1. Classroom judging may be done by teacher or other school personnel.
2. Choose two to five judges for school competition (County Competition typically uses three). Community members who have been active in school or other youth activities are good potential judges as well as other teachers or school administration.
3. Give judges time to become familiar with judging forms and criteria.
4. Allow enough time after each presentation for judges to confer and make decisions.
5. A Sample Judging Score Sheet is included for your information and use.

THE PRIZES

1. All schools will be emailed notice of the county winners by dismissal of school on Friday, April 24, 2026.
2. Each contestant at the county level will receive a participation certificate the day of the contest.
3. First, second and third place trophies will be awarded at each grade level (15 trophies total)
4. At each grade level, Honorable Mention certificates will be given for fourth through eighth places. Certificates will not be identified by place, only as an Honorable Mention.

JUDGING SCORE SHEET
 MERCED COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION
 2026 SPEECH CONTEST

STUDENT IDENTIFICATION

TOPIC _____

PTS.

PTS.

CRITERIA FOR JUDGING

POSSIBLE

EARNED

SPEECH DEVELOPMENT (40 points possible)

Is the speech organized? 10 _____

Does the body of the speech support and enhance topic? 10 _____

Does the speech have an appropriate opening? 10 _____

Does the speech have an appropriate closing? 10 _____

EFFECTIVENESS (30 points possible)

Does the speech achieve its purpose? 10 _____

Is the speech interesting? 10 _____

Does the speech stay on topic? 10 _____

DELIVERY (50 points possible)

Composure - Demonstrates poise and self-confidence. 10 _____

Body control - Uses gestures and facial expressions to engage the audience and enhance meaning. 10 _____

Rapport - Makes eye contact with audience. 10 _____

Voice - Uses volume, pitch, modulation and intonation, to express ideas clearly and enhance meaning. 10 _____

Language control - Uses clarity of speech and effective phrasing, pacing and tone. 10 _____

TOTAL POINTS:

120 Total Points Possible

EARNED:

GRADE LEVEL: _____ JUDGE'S INITIAL: _____

NOTES: