

Lessons Learnt from Participating in Speech Contests

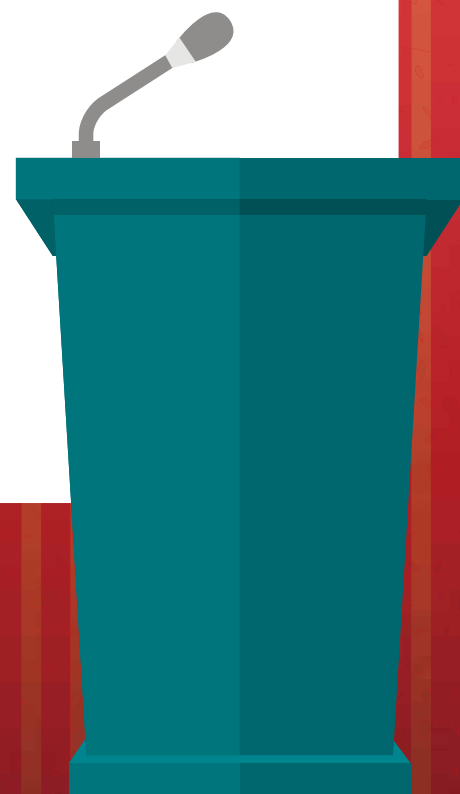
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It is indisputable that there is no shortcut to mastering a foreign language. In terms of learning English, one cannot escape from the tedious yet essential process of memorizing the spellings of vocabulary, as well as getting familiar with the complicated usage of grammar. For Macau students, on the path of pursuing competent English skills, additional time and effort is needed because of the lack of a language environment. In such a case, providing students with an incentive to learn apart from equipping them with exam skills is of utmost significance. Personally, participating in speech contests was my biggest motivation in my secondary school life. It helped me discover my inadequacy, thus serving as a strong incentive for me to strive for improvement.



My enthusiasm for delivering a speech was triggered by an online video, in which a 12-year-old Canadian girl gave a powerful speech on climate change in a UN conference. I was captivated by how powerful and inspiring words could be, thus becoming eager to taste the feeling of conveying my opinion in front of a large audience. Therefore, I was thrilled when my English teachers in secondary school offered me the chance to take part in either inter-class speech contests or Macau-wide speech contests, and I cherished each and every opportunity by practising diligently, as well as urging myself to make good use of online resources such as televised TED talks and other videos on speech delivery. In retrospect, my hard work undoubtedly pays off, as I find the experience beneficial in the following two aspects.

Firstly, the whole process from the preparation period to the actual speech delivery has equipped me with diverse knowledge, especially about social affairs. In a speech contest, the contestants are not only required to deliver a prepared speech on a given topic, but also have to answer on the spot a question or two related to the content.





The topics often cover a wide range of issues such as education, leadership and Macau's development. Therefore, the participants have to do research in depth so as to get a full understanding of the topics. Moreover, in some competitions, there is an additional session of impromptu speech presentations, for which contestants cannot prepare a script in advance and have to come up with an organized speech within the given time. In order to cultivate the ability to improvise and speak logically, one has to read extensively and pay attention to the current affairs. As a result, not only have I gained a wide variety of knowledge, I have also learned to express my opinion in English. This, I can gladly say, is killing two birds with one stone.

Secondly, the experience has improved my public speaking skills and helped me conquer my stage fright. An inspiring speech tends to centre on a powerful core value. In order to make it persuasive, instead of merely reciting the script, the speaker has to make good use of his or her intonation, speed, volume to enable the audience to absorb the take-home message. This skill is indeed very difficult to acquire, and one must learn from previous experiences and try to seek improvement. I can recall how I struggled to adjust my oral performance under my teacher's guidance while listening to my own recordings. The best method is to constantly remind myself to slow down and imagine that I am having actual communication with one of the audience. Such practice also soothes me and calms me down. The public speaking skills I acquired then still prove to be very useful for my presentations in university now.



To wrap it up, the experience of participating in various speech contests has given me a precious lesson. I am very grateful for the opportunities offered to me by the school, and my gratitude goes particularly to my teachers who always encouraged me and gave me the most useful advice. Besides, it makes me realize that there is no fixed path to success in English learning. Most importantly, one has to find an approach he feels passionate about and recognize English as an essential tool.