

46th Annual Sacramento County
Academic Decathlon



Speech Judge Handbook

**Sacramento County
Office of Education**

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**January 24, 2026
Christian Brothers HS
Sacramento, CA**



Welcome

Thank you for volunteering as a Speech Judge for the 46th Annual Sacramento County Academic Decathlon on Saturday, January 24, 2026, at:

Christian Brothers High School
4315 Martin Luther King Jr Blvd
Sacramento, CA 95820

At the decathlon, approximately 200 of the best and brightest Sacramento County high school students from 20 schools will compete in a series of written tests, speeches, interviews, and the always exciting Super Quiz relay. Your participation is critical to the success of the event.

This handbook contains important information explaining your responsibilities as a Speech Judge. Please read it before the Decathlon.

Please report to the **Learning Commons between 8:30 - 8:40 a.m** to register and check-in. A continental breakfast will be provided, and you will have an opportunity to meet other participants. The Speech Judge Orientation will begin at **8:45 a.m. in the Learning Commons**. Your service as a Speech Judge will be completed at approximately 2:50 p.m.

Again, our thanks for your willingness to volunteer. We look forward to seeing you and spending an exciting day for the benefit of our students.

If you have any questions about your responsibilities as a Speech Judge, please don't hesitate to contact me. Also, if you have any last minute conflicts, please call David Berryman at (916) 228-2203 or me at (916) 803-5682 (cell phone).

See you at the Decathlon!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Craig Irish". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Craig" being more prominent than the last name "Irish".

Craig Irish, Academic Decathlon Coordinator
Sacramento County Office of Education
916-228-2660; cirish@scoe.net



ACADEMIC DECATHLON SCHEDULE

During the Academic Decathlon competition, each decathlete will be assigned to a testing “section” in the test arena room (Field House). The decathlete will take all written tests (Art, Economics, Language and Literature, Mathematics, Music, Science, and Social Science) in that section. During one of the testing periods, the decathlete will report to a different room for the Interview event and another room for the Speech event.

Below is a sample competition day schedule. A more complete schedule showing Interview and Speech event times and locations, by homeroom and decathlete identification number, will be provided on competition day.

Sample Schedule

<u>Time</u>	<u>Activity</u>
8:30 a.m. – 8:50 a.m.	Team Registration
8:50 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.	Decathletes report to Field House
9:00 a.m. – 9:10 a.m.	Welcome Ceremony
9:10 a.m. – 9:50 a.m.	Testing Period 1: Music Test
9:50 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.	Testing Period 2*
10:30 a.m. – 11:10 a.m.	Testing Period 3
11:10 a.m. – 11:50 p.m.	Testing Period 4
11:50 a.m. – 12:50 p.m.	LUNCH (provided in the Learning Commons for Volunteers and in the Cafeteria for decathletes and coaches)
12:50 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.	TEAM PHOTOS (Field House) Testing Period 5
1:30 p.m. – 2:10 p.m.	Testing Period 6
2:10 p.m. – 2:50 p.m.	Testing Period 7
2:50 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.	Testing Period 8: Math Test
3:30 p.m. – 3:35 p.m.	Decathletes dismissed

* **NOTE:** The Interview and Speech events will take place by test section during testing periods 2-7. Each decathlete will complete those two events during a single testing period. A more detailed schedule will be provided on competition day.



OVERVIEW OF SPEECH JUDGE RESPONSIBILITIES

As a Speech Judge, you will listen to and evaluate decathlete speeches. Each decathlete will deliver a 3½ - 4 minute prepared speech and then a 1½ - 2 minute impromptu speech to a panel of (usually) three judges, one of whom will be the Lead Judge. A timer with a stopwatch will be assigned to each Speech room.

Speeches will take place from approximately 10:00 a.m. to 2:50 p.m. with lunch and team photos from 11:50-12:50.

A Speech Judge orientation will be provided in the morning. All materials needed for the Speech event will be provided to you.

Decathletes will come to your Speech room according to the schedule for the day. ***It is very important that you keep on schedule.***

WHAT TO BRING AND WEAR

Please bring this handbook with you to the Decathlon. Please wear casual business attire. You may want to wear layered clothing because of room temperature fluctuations.

You are not allowed to have any food in the Speech room, but you may have a beverage.

If you carry a **cell phone** make sure it is turned OFF during the speech scoring sessions.

BEFORE SPEECHES BEGIN

Speech Judge Registration (8:30 - 8:40 a.m.) and Orientation (8:45 a.m.)

Report to the Learning Commons between 8:30-8:40 a.m. to register and check-in. A continental breakfast will be provided, and you will have an opportunity to meet other participants.

The Speech Judge Orientation will begin at 8:45 a.m. in the the Learning Commons. A review of the Speech event procedures and scoring criteria will be provided. You will be able to ask questions and get advice from experienced judges. You will meet the other judges and the timer with whom you will work, learn who the Lead Judge on your panel will be, receive all Speech materials, and synchronize your watch with those of the other volunteers. You will also meet the Head Speech Judge and learn how he or she will support you.

Following the Speech Judge Orientation, go to your assigned room and prepare for the speeches as described below.

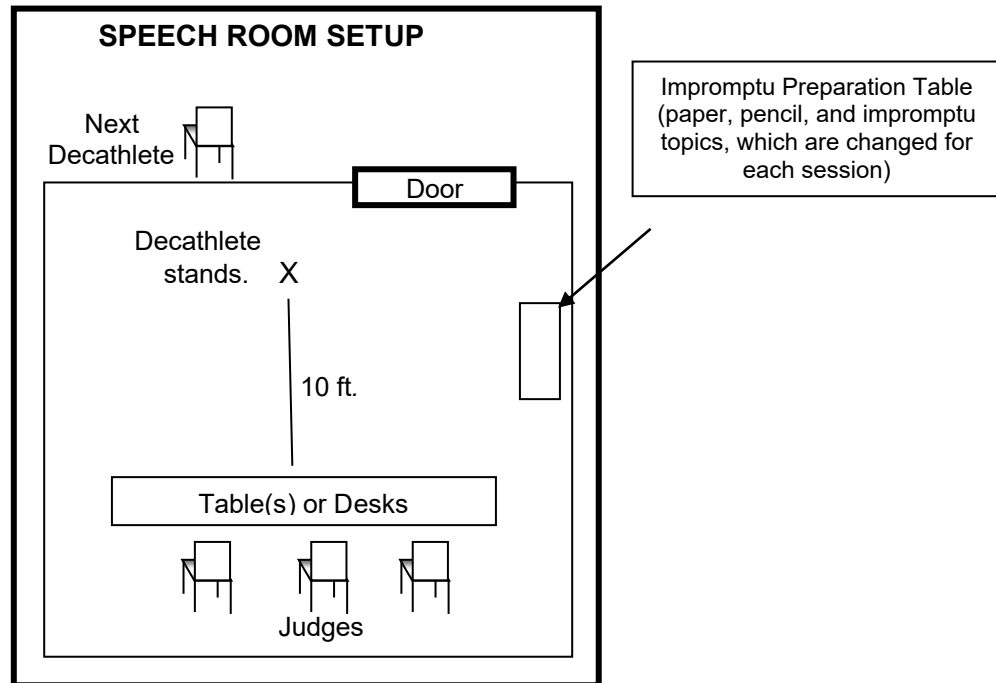
PREPARATION FOR SPEECHES completed by 9:40 a.m.

Report to your assigned room as soon as possible following the Speech Judge Orientation. You need to make the following preparations before the first decathlete arrives at 10:00 a.m.

- Verify that the room is unlocked and that there is enough furniture in the room to set up an area for the speeches as shown in the figure below. If this is not the case, notify the Head Speech Judge as soon as possible.



SPEECH ROOM SETUP



- Set up a speech area as shown in the figure above. There should be approximately ten feet between the student and the judges' table(s).
- DO NOT have student facing a window that could distract them.
- On a separate table, place the impromptu speech topics, face down, blank note cards, and a few pencils. (Impromptu speech topics are changed for each 30-minute session.)
- Post one copy of the decathlete roster and the "PLEASE WAIT HERE" sign just outside the door, near the outside chair. As decathletes arrive for their speeches, they are to wait outside until invited into the Speech room. This will avoid interruptions during speeches.
- Hang the large envelope labeled "Completed Scantrons" on the outside of the door. The Lead Judge will place the completed *Speech Evaluation Forms* in this envelope after each 30-minute session.
- The Lead Judge should write the first names of the other judges and the timer on the *Script for Lead Judge and Directions for Timer* on page 9, and assign a number (1, 2, or 3) to each judge.
- The Lead Judge should review the procedures, timing, and room schedule with the other judges and the timer.
- Judges can write their name in the spaces provided on the *Speech Evaluation Forms*. A sample form is provided on page 8.



SCHEDULE AND TIMING

Speeches are scheduled in 30-minute sessions, with 10 minutes between sessions to finalize scoring and prepare for the next session. In each session, three decathletes will deliver their speeches, scheduled at 10-minute intervals. For example, the first session is scheduled as follows:

- 10:00: First decathlete
- 10:10: Second decathlete
- 10:20: Third decathlete
- 10:30: Complete scoring, prepare for next session.

Students are given 10 minutes for travel between homerooms and speech Rooms.

There will be four sessions before lunch. Lunch will be from 11:50 to 12:50. There will be two more sessions after lunch. The final decathlete is scheduled to begin at 2:40.

At the scheduled time, each decathlete will report to a designated Speech room. The decathlete is to wait outside until invited in by a judge. Ten minutes are scheduled for each decathlete, which includes 2-3 minutes at the conclusion of the impromptu speech for scoring.

SPEECH TIMING

(approximate time for each decathlete)

Introductions and review of procedures	1 minute
Prepared speech	3½-4 minutes
Select topic and prepare impromptu speech	1 minute
(judges can begin scoring prepared speech)	
Impromptu speech	1½-2 minutes
(decathlete dismissed)	
Complete scoring	2 minutes
<hr/>	
Total Time	9-10 minutes

Keeping on schedule is very important. If you get behind schedule, attempt to make it up by admitting the next decathlete immediately and completing the scoring at the end of the session.

If a decathlete arrives late, make every attempt to adjust the schedule so that the decathlete has the opportunity to deliver his or her speeches. For a decathlete who does not appear, write "No Show" on that decathlete's *Speech Evaluation Form* next to the decathlete's name and turn it in at the end of the session with the other forms.

THE PREPARED SPEECH

Before each decathlete begins his or her speeches, make sure that you have a **Speech Evaluation Form** that has the decathlete's first name and identification number preprinted. A sample form is provided on page 8. Write your name in the space provided.

When the decathlete is in the room, the Lead Judge will read Part 1 of the *Script for Lead Judge and Directions for Timer* on page 9.

Check to make sure that the decathlete's identification number matches the number preprinted on the *Speech Evaluation form*.

There is no required speech topic for the prepared speech. Move on to the impromptu speech as described in the script.

THE IMPROMPTU SPEECH

At the conclusion of the prepared speech, the Lead Judge will read Part 2 of the *Script for Lead Judge and Directions for Timer* on page 10. The decathlete will go over to the impromptu table, turn over the impromptu speech topics, and have one minute (timed by the timer) to prepare his or her impromptu speech. The decathlete can use the note cards provided at the impromptu table to make notes.



Judges may begin scoring the prepared speech while the decathlete is preparing the impromptu speech.

When one minute is up, the decathlete is to read the topic he or she has chosen to the judges and then begin the speech.

At the end of the impromptu speech, thank the decathlete and indicate that he or she is to go to the next event based on the schedule. It is important that the decathlete leave promptly.

GENERAL RULES:

- Judges should give each student their full attention while speeches are being delivered.
- NOTE CARDS may be used, but the speech should not be read.
- GESTURES are acceptable, but PROPS are not allowed.
- Speech must be given STANDING, unless a condition prevents this.
- Speech must be researched, written and delivered by the decathlete.
- Under no circumstances may a judge ask a decathlete what school or area he/she is from. There is no penalty if a decathlete reveals where they live or their school.
- If a judge knows a decathlete, the judge should dismiss him/herself from scoring the student. Note this on the top of the scan form and return it with the other forms.
- Judges may discuss a decathlete's performance after they have completed their *Evaluation* form and the decathlete has left the room, but each judge must take responsibility for making her/his own mind. No one judge should be responsible for the other judges' scoring decisions. Teams of speech judges are not to reach consensus regarding a decathlete's performance. Each judge must score the decathlete's performance independently of the other judges' feedback.

- Judges are NOT to applaud or provide any written or verbal praise or recommendations to a decathlete's speech.
- Speeches are not to be RANK ORDERED with other speeches. That is, each prepared and/or impromptu speech is to be evaluated independently based on its own merits using the rubric on the *Evaluation* form.

AT THE END OF EACH 30-MINUTE SESSION

(i.e., three decathletes):

- Be sure to have completed a *Speech Evaluation Form* for each decathlete.
- Lead Judge will collect all *Speech Evaluation Forms* and place them in the envelope labeled "Completed Scantrons" hanging on the outside of the door for pickup by a runner.
- Put a NEW list of impromptu speech topics scheduled for the next session face down on the impromptu table and remove the previous list.

AFTER THE FINAL SPEECH SESSION

- Please put the room back the way it was when you arrived.
- Be sure to bring in the chair that is outside.
- Do not leave any Decathlon materials in the room when you leave.
- The Lead Judge should (a) place the last set of *Speech Evaluation Forms* in the "Completed Scantrons" envelope that has been hanging on the outside of the door and (b) return all other materials to **the Learning Commons** promptly.
- Boxes will be set up inside the Learning Commons to collect the materials.



SCORING CATEGORIES

PREPARED SPEECH

Speech Development is the way the speaker puts ideas together so the audience can understand them. The speech is structured around a purpose, and this structure must include an opening, body, and conclusion. A good speech immediately engages the audience's attention and then moves forward toward a significant conclusion. This development of the speech structure is supported by relevant examples, illustrations, facts, and figures delivered with such smoothness that they blend into the framework of the speech to present the audience with a unified whole.

Effectiveness is measured in part by the audience's reception of the speech, but a large part is your subjective judgment of how the speech came across. Ask yourself: Was I able to determine the speaker's purpose? Did the speech relate directly to that purpose? Was the audience's interest held by the speaker? Was the subject of the speech appropriate for this particular audience?

Correctness of language insures that attention will be directed toward what the speaker says, not how it is said. Proper use of grammar and correct pronunciation will show that the speaker is the master of words being used.

Appropriateness of language refers to the choice of words in relation to the purpose of the speech and the particular audience. Language should promote clear understanding of thoughts and should fit the occasion precisely.

Speech Value justifies the act of speaking. The speaker has a responsibility to say something meaningful and original to the audience. The listeners should feel the speaker has made a contribution to their thinking. The ideas should be important ones, although this does not preclude a humorous presentation of them.

Voice is the sound that carries the message. It should be flexible, moving from one pitch level to another for emphasis, and should have a variety of rate and volume. A good voice can be clearly heard and the words easily understood.

Non-verbal behavior is the indirect revelation of the speaker's real self as the speech is delivered. The speaker should speak with enthusiasm and assurance, showing interest in the audience and confidence in their reactions. The speaker's appearance should reinforce the speech, whether profound, sad, humorous, or instructional. Body language should support points through gestures, expressions, and body positioning.

IMPROMPTU SPEECH

Content of the impromptu speech is reflected in the quality of the ideas expressed and how the ideas were organized. Did the ideas show some original thought? Were they organized in a logical way that was easy to understand?

Delivery is the way the speaker presents the ideas. It includes the use of appropriate movement and gestures. Does body language support the ideas being presented?

Overall Effectiveness is determined by how well the speaker achieved the purpose of the presentation. Were words (verbal communication) and the physical (non-verbal communication) used effectively in presenting the message?

TIMING VIOLATIONS

The penalty for the prepared speech (less than 3½ or longer than 4 minutes) is -7, and the penalty for the impromptu speech (less than 1½ or longer than 2 minutes) is -3. If both speeches are not within the specified times, the total penalty is -10. If the decathlete had no penalties, mark "0" (no penalty) on the *Speech Evaluation Form*. **All judges must assign the same penalty (or no penalty) to a decathlete.**



Academic Decathlon

Speech Evaluation Form

Decathlete's Information:

1. Decathlete name will be preprinted.
2. Room number will be preprinted.
3. Student I.D. number will be preprinted.
4. Judge number will be preprinted

Student ID Number:

1 0 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
2 0 1 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
4 0 1 2 3 5 6 7 8 9

Decathlete Name: Scott

Room: C207

Judge's Name:

Judge 1 2 3 4 5 6

Judge's Information:

1. Print your first name.

Prepared Speech		Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
SPEECH DEVELOPMENT	• ORGANIZATION	10 9	8 7	6 5	4 3	2 1 0
	• BODY					
	• OPENING/CLOSING					
EFFECTIVENESS	• ACHIEVEMENT OF PURPOSE	10 9	8 7	6 5	4 3	2 1 0
	• INTEREST					
	• RECEPTION					
CORRECTNESS	• GRAMMAR	10 9	8 7	6 5	4 3	2 1 0
	• PRONUNCIATION					
	• WORD SELECTION					
APPROPRIATENESS	• WORD SELECTION AND STYLE APPROPRIATE TO THE AUDIENCE	10 9	8 7	6 5	4 3	2 1 0
SPEECH VALUE	• IDEAS	10 9	8 7	6 5	4 3	2 1 0
	• LOGIC					
	• ORIGINALITY					
VOICE	• FLEXIBILITY	10 9	8 7	6 5	4 3	2 1 0
	• VOLUME					
	• VARIETY					
NON-VERBAL	• APPEARANCE	10 9	8 7	6 5	4 3	2 1 0
	• MOVEMENT					
	• ASSURANCE					

Mark only one score per category (e.g., Speech Development, Effectiveness).

Use a pencil or Pen to make **dark** marks that completely fill the space. See examples above.

Impromptu Speech		Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
CONTENT	• ORIGINALITY	10 9	8 7	6 5	4 3	2 1 0
	• IDEAS					
	• ORGANIZATION					
DELIVERY	• MOVEMENT/GESTURE	10 9	8 7	6 5	4 3	2 1 0
	• BODY LANGUAGE					
	• VOICE					
OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS	• ACHIEVEMENT OF PURPOSE	10 9	8 7	6 5	4 3	2 1 0
	• VERBAL COMMUNICATION					
	• NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION					

Both Speeches

Prepared Only

Impromptu Only

No Penalty

TIMING VIOLATION

Speech timing violations must be completed the same way by all judges. Fill "0" if no penalties were applied.



SCRIPT FOR LEAD JUDGE AND DIRECTIONS FOR TIMER

PART 1: INTRODUCTIONS AND PREPARED SPEECH

As the decathlete is entering the room, the Lead Judge should read the following **bold** text aloud to the decathlete.

Welcome to the Speech room. My name is _____.
[your first name]

I would like you to meet your other judges. This is

_____ **and this is** _____
[judge's first name] [judge's first name]

_____ **will serve as timer.**
[Timer's first name]

Please tell us your first name and your identification number.

Do NOT ask what school the decathlete is from.

You'll be speaking from this area [point to the area in front of the judges]. You will give two speeches: first a 3½ - 4 minute prepared speech, and then a 1½ - 2 minute impromptu speech, for which you will have 1 minute to prepare.

- **During your prepared speech, the timer will hold up a blue "1 MINUTE LEFT" card [show card to decathlete] when you have 1 minute remaining,**
- **A pink "30 SECONDS LEFT" card [show card] when you have 30 seconds remaining, and**
- **when 4 minutes have transpired the timer will hold up a white "TIME" card [show card].**

If you have not stopped your speech by 4 minutes and 10 seconds, the timer will instruct you to stop.

You will receive a penalty if your speech is under 3 ½ minutes or over 4 minutes in length so finish the speech before the white "TIME" card is shown.

Are you ready? You may begin your speech.

Timer: Start the stopwatch when the decathlete begins speaking. If the decathlete doesn't begin promptly, ask him or her to start.

- Raise the blue "1 MINUTE LEFT" card at 3 minutes
- the pink "30 SECONDS LEFT" card at 3½ minutes, and
- if the decathlete is still speaking, the white "TIME" card at 4 minutes.
- Stop the decathlete if he or she continues past 4 minutes and 10 seconds by saying "Stop."

Do NOT tell the judges the time on the prepared speech until after the decathlete has left the room.

The script for the impromptu speech is on the next page.



PART 2: IMPROMPTU SPEECH

Thank you. I will give a few instructions before we begin the Impromptu Speech. Once I finish giving the instructions, go over to the table [point to table] where you will find a sheet that includes three impromptu speech topics. You will turn over the sheet, and select one of the topics. Once you turn the sheet over, you will have one minute to select your topic and prepare. Note cards and pencils are provided at the table for your use. After you've prepared your speech, but before you begin it, please read us the topic you have chosen. Your time will start after you have identified your topic and begin your speech.

During your speech, the timer will hold up a blue "1 MINUTE LEFT" card when you have 1 minute remaining and a pink "30 SECONDS LEFT" card when you have 30 seconds remaining. When 2 minutes have transpired, [the timer] will hold up the white "TIME" card.

If you have not stopped your speech by 2 minutes and 10 seconds, [the timer] will instruct you to stop.

You will receive a penalty if your speech is under 1 ½ minutes or over 2 minutes in length so finish your speech before the white "TIME" card is shown.

Now, please go to the table and turn over the sheet with the three topics. You have one minute to prepare.

Timer: Start the stopwatch when the decathlete turns the impromptu topics sheet over. At the end of 1 minute, say "time."

Before beginning your speech, please read us the topic you selected. [Decathlete reads the topic.]

Thank you. You may begin your speech.

Timer: Start the stopwatch when the decathlete begins the speech. If the decathlete doesn't begin promptly, ask him or her to start.

- Raise the blue "1 MINUTE LEFT" card at 1 minute,
- The pink "30 SECONDS LEFT" card at 1½ minutes, and,
- if the decathlete is still speaking, the white "TIME" card at 2 minutes.
- Stop the decathlete if he or she continues past 2 minutes and 10 seconds by saying "Stop." Tell the judges how much time the decathlete used for his or her speech.

When the speech is over, the Lead Judge should say:

Thank you. You may now go to your next assignment. Good luck and enjoy the rest of your day.

It is important that the decathlete leave promptly so judges will have the remaining time to complete the their Forms. *Evaluation Forms* must be completed promptly and placed in the envelope for pick up.

Timer should let judges know the time of the prepared and impromptu speeches.



ABOUT THE ACADEMIC DECATHLON

Founded in 1981, the United States Academic Decathlon (USAD) is the most prestigious high school academic team competition in the United States. Its purpose is to promote learning and academic excellence through teamwork among students of all achievement levels. Each year, high school students compete as school teams and as individuals in a series of scholastic events.

At the Academic Decathlon, student decathletes participate in ten individual events and one team event (not necessarily in this order):

1. Art (multiple-choice test)
2. Economics (multiple-choice test)
3. Language/Literature (multiple-choice test)
4. Mathematics (multiple-choice test)
5. Music (multiple-choice test)
6. Essay (one essay, 50 minutes writing time)
7. Interview (6-7 minutes)
8. Speech (one 3½-4 minute prepared speech and one 1½-2 minute impromptu speech)
9. Science (multiple-choice test)
10. Social Science (multiple-choice test)

The **Super Quiz** relay is the final activity of the competition and takes place in front of an audience of friends and family. It consists of 12 test questions from Art, Economics, Language and Literature, Science and Social Science. A facilitator reads aloud multiple-choice questions, decathletes select their answers, and volunteers display unofficial team scores to the audience after each question.

Academic Decathlon Teams

In Sacramento, high schools can field one primary team and up to two secondary teams. Each team consists of 9 students with three students in each of the following categories:

Honor:	3.90-4.00 GPA
Scholastic:	3.40-3.89 GPA
Varsity:	0.00-3.39 GPA

A decathlete may compete in a higher category than warranted by his or her GPA but not in a lower category.

The primary team may also have up to three alternate decathletes, one in each of the three academic categories defined above, who could compete on the primary team if needed. Each primary-team member will compete, and is eligible for individual awards, in all ten events of the Decathlon. Only six primary-team members' scores, however, will contribute to team scores: the top two Honor decathletes' scores, the top two Scholastic decathletes' scores, and the top two Varsity decathletes' scores. If a school has five or fewer members on its primary team, the team will not be eligible for team awards, but the decathletes will be eligible for individual awards.

A school may also submit one or two secondary teams with up to nine participants each. Secondary teams will not be eligible for team awards. Secondary-team participants can compete in all events except the Super Quiz relay, but are not eligible for individual awards.

2025-2026 Curricular Theme: The Roaring Twenties

The USAD curriculum is an interdisciplinary curriculum in which an annual theme is integrated across six subject areas: art, economics, language & literature, music, science, and social science. The theme for the 2026 Academic Decathlon curriculum is **The Roaring Twenties**. In most subjects, the majority of the topics relate to the overall curricular theme. Some topics that cover fundamentals may also be included to encourage a thorough understanding of the subject area as a whole. The Academic Decathlon mathematics curriculum is unrelated to the theme and focuses on standard high school math topics. The Interview and Speech events are also unrelated to the theme.

