

46th Annual Sacramento County

Academic Decathlon



Interview 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 an Interview 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, and Placer 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 an Interview 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 Interview Judge Orientation will begin at **8:45 a.m. in the Learning Commons**. Your service as an Interview 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 an Interview 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".

Craig Irish, Academic Decathlon Coordinator
Sacramento County Office of Education
916-803-5682; acadeca@scoe.net



ACADEMIC DECAATHLON 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 INTERVIEW JUDGE RESPONSIBILITIES

As an Interview Judge, you will conduct decathlete interviews and evaluate the decathletes' performance. Each decathlete will participate in one 6–7 minute interview with a panel of (usually) three judges, one of whom will be the Lead Judge.

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

Interview Judge orientation will be provided in the morning. All materials needed to conduct the interviews will be provided to you.

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

WHAT TO BRING AND WEAR

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 Interview room, but you may have a beverage.

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

BEFORE INTERVIEWS BEGIN

Interview 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 Interview Judge Orientation will begin at 8:45 a.m. in the Learning Commons. A review of the Interview 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 with whom you will work, learn who the Lead Judge on your panel will be, receive all Interview materials, and synchronize your watch with those of the other volunteers. You will also meet the Head Interview Judges and learn how they will support you.

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

PREPARATION FOR INTERVIEWS

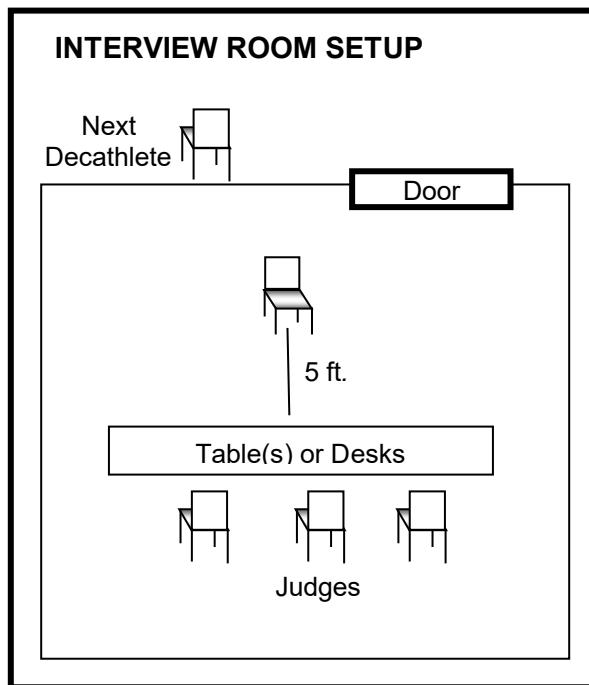
completed by 9:40 a.m.

Report to your assigned room as soon as possible following the Interview Judge Orientation. You need to make the following preparations before the first interview at 10:00.

- Verify that the room is unlocked and that there is enough furniture in the room to set up an interview area as shown in the figure on the next page. If this is not the case, notify the Head Interview Judge as soon as possible.



INTERVIEW ROOM SETUP



- Set up an interview area as shown in the figure above. There should be approximately five feet between the interviewee's chair and the judges' table(s) or desks. Make sure that the decathletes will not face a window or door that could distract them during the interviews.
- 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 interviews, they are to wait outside until invited into the Interview room. This will avoid interruptions during interviews.
- Hang the large envelope labeled "Completed Scantrons" on the outside of the door. The Lead Judge will place the completed *Interview Evaluation Forms* in this envelope after each 30-minute session (i.e., three interviews).
- The Lead Judge should write the first names of the other judges on the *Script for Lead Judge and Directions for Timer* on page 11, assign a number (1, 2, or 3) to each judge, and determine which judge will be the timer.
- The Lead Judge should review the procedures, timing, room schedule, and *Conducting a Successful Interview* on page 8 with the other judges.
- Judges can write their name in the spaces provided on the *Interview Evaluation Forms*. A sample form is provided on page 10.



SCHEDULE AND TIMING

Interviews 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 be interviewed, scheduled at 10-minute intervals. For example, the first session is scheduled as follows:

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

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

There will be three sessions before lunch. Lunch will be from 11:50 to 12:50. There will be three more sessions after lunch. The final interview of the day is scheduled to begin at 2:40.

At the scheduled time, each decathlete will report to a designated Interview room. The decathlete is to wait outside until invited in by a judge. Ten minutes are scheduled for each interview, which includes 2-3 minutes at the conclusion of the interview for scoring. One of the three judges will serve as the timer, using a their watch, in addition to participating in the

INTERVIEW TIMING (approximate time for each decathlete)

Introductions and review of procedures	½ minute
Interview	6-7 minutes
(decathlete dismissed)	
Complete scoring	2½ minutes
<hr/>	
Total Time	9-10 minutes

interview.

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 be interviewed. For a decathlete who does not appear, write "No Show" next to his/her name on that decathlete's *Interview Evaluation Form* and turn it in at the end of the session with the other forms.

THE INTERVIEW

- Please review the tips for conducting a successful interview on page 8.
- Before each interview, make sure that you have an *Interview Evaluation Form* that has the decathlete's identification number and name preprinted. A sample form is provided on page 10. Write your name in the space provided.
- When the decathlete is in the room, the Lead Judge will read the *Script for Lead Judge and Directions for Timer* on page 11. By reading the script, the Lead Judge will welcome the decathlete, introduce the other judges, ask for the decathlete's first name and identification number, and describe the timing of the interview. **(DO NOT ask for the decathlete's school)**
- Check to make sure that the decathlete's identification number matches the number preprinted on the *Interview Evaluation form*.
- Begin the interview. Allow 6–7 minutes per decathlete.
- When about 6 minutes have passed, without interrupting the decathlete, the timer



will announce that there is one minute left, time for one final question.

- When the decathlete completes his or her response to the final question, or when 7 minutes have passed, the timer should say "time."
- At the end of the interview, 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 so you will have the remaining time to complete the *Interview Evaluation Form*. (Scoring of interviews is discussed on page 9.)

AT THE END OF EACH 30-MINUTE SESSION

(i.e., three decathletes):

- At the end of each session (i.e., three interviews), be sure that you have completed an Interview Evaluation Form for each interviewee.
- The Lead Judge will collect all Interview Evaluation Forms and place them in the envelope labeled "Completed Scantrons" hanging on the outside of the door for pickup by a runner.

AFTER FINAL INTERVIEW 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 *Interview 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 in the Learning Commons to collect the materials.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Students will be asked to start the interview by telling the judges a little about themselves. This is a **short introduction** that should be approximately 20-30 seconds. If possible, ask a question(s) related to the information shared by the student. The specific questions asked of a decathlete will vary based on the information provided by the decathlete during the decathlete's self-introduction and the natural progression of the interview.

Prior to each interview, have at least a tentative plan about what questions will be asked and by whom. Each judge should ask at least one question. A list of acceptable interview questions will be provided at the training.

In planning and asking interview questions, keep the following in mind:

- Ask **OPEN-ENDED** questions; that is, questions that cannot be answered by a simple "yes" or "no."
- **DO NOT** ask any questions regarding race, religion, creed, ethnic groups, national origin, ancestry, political beliefs or affiliations, dating habits, parental relationships, or any questions that might be too personal or controversial. Any responses that contain content of this nature should not be held against the decathlete.
- **DO NOT** ask a decathlete what school he or she attends or what area he or she lives in. To assure fairness, the decathletes should be as anonymous as possible to you. The only personal information you should have about a decathlete is his or her first name. **If a decathlete reveals their school there is no penalty.**



SAMPLE - INTERVIEW TOPICS AND QUESTIONS

DO NOT USE THESE AT THE COMPETITION

These questions are provided to give judges, coaches, and decathletes an idea of the types of questions that may be asked.

A list of questions to be used will be provided to judges at the orientation.

School Activities

- What do you enjoy most about school?
- Describe your biggest challenge at school.
- How has participation in _____ affected you personally?

Community Interests and Activities

- How do you like to spend your time after school?
- What meaningful experiences did you have as a _____?
- In what other activities would you like to have participated? How would they help you in the future?

Achievements

- Tell us about [something mentioned in their opening].

Participation in the Decathlon

- How did you become interested and/or involved in the Academic Decathlon?
- What has been the most difficult content or event for you in the Decathlon? Why?

Influence and Values

- Who do you consider to be the most influential person in your life?
- How has this person influenced your personal growth?
- What values do you consider to have most strongly influenced your life?

Plan for the Future

- What are some of your dreams for the future?
- If you could travel anywhere, where would you go and why?

DO NOT ASK A DECAHLETE WHAT SCHOOL THEY ATTEND OR AREA THEY REPRESENT. ALSO, AVOID ANY QUESTIONS THAT PROBE RELIGIOUS BELIEFS, DATING HABITS, PARENTAL RELATIONSHIPS, ETC.



CONDUCTING A SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEW

Creating an Appropriate Environment

- Your manner, attitude, and tone of voice are important in creating the proper interviewing climate. In the short time available, establish a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in which the decathlete is assured of your sincere interest and attention.
- Ensure privacy without interruptions. Keep the door closed.
- Maintain an attitude of pleasant receptiveness, quiet confidence, and intelligent objectivity.
- Establish rapport and put the decathlete at ease.
- Avoid controversy in the interview. Arguing, interrupting, or asserting authority will put the decathlete on the defensive.
- Encourage the decathlete to talk openly and freely. Do not talk about yourself.
- Be alert to help decathletes relax and talk if you sense any apprehension.
- Empathy, fairness, and good judgment are working tools for a good interview.

Managing the Interview

- The judges are in charge of the interview process. Control, direct, and guide the interview.
- Keep the initiative, but be responsive.
- Pace questions so that the decathlete can give adequate replies without dwelling on irrelevant information.
- Try to cover several topics but don't rush.
- Give decathletes the time they need to think of examples and answer the questions.

- Conduct the interview so the decathlete plays the dominant role.
- Steer the conversation without intruding on it. Refrain from expressing your personal opinion or values. Be objective.
- Indicate when the interview is coming to a conclusion.
- At the appropriate time, bring the interview to an end gracefully and naturally without rushing to a close.

Silent Gaps

- Summarize points made by the decathlete and lead into the next question.
- Ask for specific examples.
- Give encouragement by rephrasing the question.

Listening Intelligently

- Be an "active listener." Listen attentively. Show interest.
- Don't just listen to what is being said; observe how it is said (e.g., tone of voice, vocabulary, facial expression, gestures).
- Allow the decathlete to complete remarks without interruption.



SCORING CATEGORIES

INTERVIEW

Voice – is the way a speaker controls volume, clarity, and distinctness of voice to gain greater audibility. Voice should have a variety of rate, volume, and pitch to engage interest, hold attention, and convey self-assurance.

Language Usage – refers to the appropriate choice of words, proper use of grammar, and correct enunciation. Language should promote clear understanding of thoughts and be appropriate for the occasion.

Interpersonal Skills – refer to the decathlete's ability to establish rapport with the interviewers. The decathlete's response should correspond to and interact with the interviewers' questions, and the decathlete should stimulate an involvement with the interviewers.

Non-verbal Language – refers to the manner in which the decathlete uses gestures, facial expressions, and physical involvement for effective communication. It is the indirect revelation of the decathlete's real self while speaking. The candidate should speak with enthusiasm and assurance, showing interest in the interviewers and confidence in his/her responses.

Manner – refers to the decathlete's ability to speak with enthusiasm and assurance while showing interest in the interviewers and confidence in their reactions. The decathlete should be direct in his/her response.

Listening Skills – refers to the ability to analyze and interpret what is being asked. To answer skillfully and address the issue being considered, the decathlete must listen carefully and attentively. The decathlete's responses to the questions will give an indication of his/her level of attention and ability to identify, sort, and process the information being requested.

Answering Skills – refer to the ability to (a) address the issue being considered, (b) present information in a clear and concise manner, (c) organize information in a logical and sequential order, (d) adjust response appropriately to a variety of audiences, and (e) pace conversation to convey necessary information and achieve purpose. Order, logic, imagination, intelligence, and other personal qualities are reflected in the way answers are given. A well thought-out answer engages the interviewers' attention and gives insight into the decathlete's personal qualities, skills, goals, and experiences. Relevant examples and illustrations support the answers. All information presented should be relevant to the question being asked.

Responses – refer to the quality of the answers given. The decathlete should reflect on the questions to provide thoughtful and insightful responses. A well thought-out answer engages the interviewers' attention and gives insight into the decathlete's personal qualities, skills, goals, and experiences. The answers are supported by relevant examples and illustrations. All information presented should be relevant to the question being asked. The candidate should speak with certainty and conviction.

Overall Effectiveness – measures the (a) nature of information provided, (b) manner in which it was communicated, (c) overall impression it created, and (d) rapport established between the interviewers and decathlete. For example: Did the decathlete provide the information requested in a skillful manner? Was the information relevant and meaningful? Was the decathlete able to achieve a positive impression of his/her skills, experiences, and personal qualities?

Appearance – the decathlete is appropriately dressed for the interview. Team uniforms are not allowed.



Academic Decathlon

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

Interview	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
VOICE <ul style="list-style-type: none">• VOLUME• FLEXIBILITY• EXPRESSIVENESS	10 9	8 7	6 5	4 3	2 1 0
LANGUAGE USAGE <ul style="list-style-type: none">• GRAMMAR• ENUNCIATION• APPROPRIATENESS	10 9	8 7	6 5	4 3	2 1 0
INTERPERSONAL SKILLS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• RAPPORT• INTERACTION• INVOLVEMENT	10 9	8 7			
NON-VERBAL LANGUAGE <ul style="list-style-type: none">• MOVEMENT• GESTURE• POSTURE	10 9	8 7			
MANNER <ul style="list-style-type: none">• ASSURANCE• ENTHUSIASM• DIRECTNESS	10 9	8 7	6 5	4 3	2 1 0
LISTENING SKILLS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• APPROPRIATENESS of RESPONSES• ATTENTIVENESS	10 9	8 7	6 5	4 3	2 1 0
ANSWERING SKILLS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• CLEAR• COMPLETE• APPROPRIATE	10 9	8 7	6 5	4 3	2 1 0
RESPONSES <ul style="list-style-type: none">• THOUGHTFUL• INSIGHTFUL• WITH CONVICTION	10 9	8 7	6 5	4 3	2 1 0
OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• PURPOSE ACHIEVED• INTEREST• RECEPTION	10 9	8 7	6 5	4 3	2 1 0
APPEARANCE <ul style="list-style-type: none">• APPROPRIATE FOR AN INTERVIEW	10 9	8 7	6 5	4 3	2 1 0

Mark only one score per category
(e.g., Voice, Language Usage).

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



SCRIPT FOR LEAD JUDGE AND DIRECTIONS FOR TIMER

Once the decathlete has entered the room, the Lead Judge should read the following **bold** text aloud to the decathlete.

Welcome to the Interview 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]

Please tell us your *first* name and your identification number.

Do NOT ask what school the decathlete is from.

Please have a seat. The interview will last approximately 6 to 7 minutes.

When about 6 minutes have passed, we will let you know that there is one minute left, time for one final question.

When you complete your response to the final question, or when 7 minutes have passed, the interview will end.

Let's begin. Please tell us a little about yourself.

(This should take approximately 20-30 seconds.)

Timer: Begin keeping time when the decathlete begins speaking.

When the decathlete has finished his or her self-introduction, the judge assigned to ask the first question should begin. If possible ask a question related to the information the student just shared.

Timer: Allow 6–7 minutes per decathlete. When about 6 minutes have passed, without interrupting the decathlete, announce that there is one minute left, time for one final question. When the decathlete completes his or her response to the final question, or when 7 minutes have passed, say “time.”

When the interview is completed, 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 *Interview Evaluation Form*. *Evaluation Forms* must be completed promptly and placed in the envelope for pick up. It is imperative that you keep on schedule.



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.

