

Can Do's and Don'ts

(A discussion on canned intros in Extemp)

By OMAR QURESHI¹ & HUNTER KENDRICK²

OMAR: First of all, I believe that discussion of introductions in extemp will continue until the end of time. They call on ideological differences in the school of thought on extemp so it will never be easily resolved. That being said I recall a conversation I had with NFL National Champion Spencer Rockwell, where we came to the agreement that it doesn't matter where and when someone comes up with an introduction so long as it pertains directly to the topic. Whether that be a minute before the round or at home three months before.

HUNTER: Thus far, I agree with my friend. However, once we delve deeper into the issue, he and I come to some serious disagreements about what is kosher and what is not in terms of how far developed the idea should be before a tournament.

OMAR: When it comes to the event of extemp, I believe that everything must be intrinsically rooted to the topic. A good speaker should read a substantial amount of material before tournament time and think about particular areas of analysis from his/her reading. Just like preparation should be used with evidence and analysis I think good preparation includes introductions. This isn't to say I advocate a "canned" intro. Rather, I am in favor of developing the concept of an intro and perhaps even giving it in the practice speech setting if it has a clear and direct link to the topic at hand. I think it is important I clarify what I mean by a link to the topic. A link to the topic means that the subject of the introduction is explicitly

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the topic area. For example a funny story about Yulia Tymoshenko that a speaker read about a month before the round and made into an intro could be used perfectly in a Ukraine speech because it is tied directly to the topic. I think that is a mark of a well prepared extemper.

HUNTER: Well, Omar and I got to the disagreements before I estimated we would. As I said earlier, I am not against "coming up with" and intro before a tournament. To me, though, that means something entirely different than what Omar was hinting at.

To me, the development of an intro should stop entirely after the initial brainstorming. Going back to the Tymoshenko example, if a speaker read said article and thought, "Hm... that could be a funny intro..." I have no problem with that. However, if that speaker read the article and then began to plan what they would say/how they would say it and then began to practice it, that is where I would take offense. To me, the practice of the intro, or the development thereof beyond the brainstorming, perverts the event and turns it into more of an oration and less of a limited prep event.

OMAR: Allow me to apologize for not smoothly delving into our disagreements. Hunter is far more subtle than I am, and I feel it is his punishment for allowing me to begin the conversation. I believe that the nature of extemporaneous speaking is dynamic- that is to say it changes with every speech every day- and it requires a dedicated focus of preparation. While I do agree that extemp must be a limited preparation event, I strongly believe that extemp tournaments are won outside of the tournament itself. I think that coming up with an intro beforehand that pertains to a topic actually enhances the event. It places a focus on preparation. Instead of perverting the event, as Hunter noted, I believe it shows the most prepared speakers. Just like quality analysis shows the most prepared speakers in the gathering and reading of evidence. I feel like an introduction is an extension of the preparation before the limited preparation. Despite sounding redundant, I strongly believe that this event is bent upon preparation as I am sure Hunter agrees. I don't see a problem with fully developing an introduction and practicing it. It will change with every speech and become better. Showing a true mastery of the event itself, not a butchery of it. I mean eventually the introduction will be fully thought out- why not earlier than later?

HUNTER: Why not? Because that is a violation of the spirit of the event. Omar likes to make the comparison with analysis, however, analysis is a completely different topic unto itself. The difference is quite evident, but, nonetheless, I will explain in a bit more detail. Omar's line of reasoning is that, if you don't fault an extemper for using a line of analysis more than once (and thus, intrinsically practicing it), then why would you fault him for practicing the intro. For my response, let me use a personal example. In February of 2008 I got a question at the Harvard invitational about oil prices. I had a very similar question about a month later at my state championships. I used a very similar line of analysis both times. Was I canning? No, and here's why: the economic theory behind the analysis didn't change. So, it is not like I really had the ability to use a different

take on the same argument. Besides, I had not practiced saying that analysis aloud between the speeches - so it wasn't truly practiced - I wasn't repeating it word for word. I was merely reciting the ideas and beliefs behind it. When it comes to "canned" intros, though, there is a big difference. The point of an intro, as Omar points out, is to seem more prepared. After all, the first 60 secs or so are the most crucial in any speech, because that is when the audience forms their first opinion. So, yes, feel free to spend plenty of your prep time before the round developing the intro. But, by no means would I condone practicing an intro before the tournament even begins because that is not extemp, that is oration.

And, yes, my subtlety was a punishment for Omar being a snakin' bastard Who took the opening statement (for those who don't know us, this is how we joke – we don't actually hate each other).

OMAR: After Hunter's last comments I think it is important to address another underlying issue here. This issue being the very nature practice in extemp. I believe strongly that practice is essential to a good extemper. I believe that it builds fluency and makes you more prepared for a limited preparation event. Naturally, I believe that what happens in practice is absolutely fair game come tournament time. To return to the original example of the Tymoshenko introduction- If I was to practice a speech on Ukraine's economy and then draw a topic on the political stability of the ruling coalition in Ukraine I think it is fair game to use some of my economic sources that were previously used in my practice speech. While I understand that analysis changes everytime a speaker delivers it, I must say that it is an unfair burden for an extemper to be crippled because he/she used a funny, topic specific introduction earlier. It devalues the purpose of practice and weakens the overall quality of the event to prohibit a speaker from using a previously developed introduction. The very nature of the event requires outside consideration. There is no prewritten speech with the speaker, the introduction is not plagiarized, and it is coming explicitly from the speaker's head. My defense of this type of topic specific introduction is used as a tool to emphasize practice in extemp. Additionally, I have a problem with Hunter's argument of how far one can develop an introduction in one's own head.

After all what happens in a speaker's head stays in a speaker's head- except at tournament time.

That horrible attempt at humor is further punishment to Hunter for allowing me to speak first...

HUNTER: Two thoughts came to me after reading Omar's last post, 1.) He must have a huge crush on the admittedly-cute blond who leads Ukraine, and 2.) There may be some mis-communication between the two of us (as often tends to happen when extempers who dabble in LD have theory discussions). I do not mean to imply that a speaker cannot practice a speech, that truly would be a ridiculous request to make of any speaker with any claims to success. However, I stand by my assessment about developing an intro to far. If I got out and rent the movie *Charlie Wilson's War* and say to myself, "Hm... That could work for an Afghanistan

speech," who's to blame me. On the same token, using the same intro idea in a round that you use in practice does not rub me the wrong way either, as long as it is not a cookie-cutter intro or self-plagiarism.

OMAR: It seems that my good friend Hunter and I have come to a clear agreement. I absolutely believe that something used in practice is fair game for a speech. Unfortunately, I don't quite understand the delineating factor between the two of us. If Hunter could explain his definition of a cookie cutter intro then I think I can continue.

Yulia Tymoshenko is a very attractive world leader.

I feel like I need to put that out there.

HUNTER: You're so needy.

A cookie-cutter intro would be an intro that could literally be applied to almost anything.

Hey, she's no Ségolène Royal - I wish she had won the French election just so the Economist would have kept printing pictures of her.

OMAR: Well by that logic, my original position still stands. The criteria that I set up for predeveloping an introduction was that it must be exclusively topic specific. If I am not mistaken it seems that Hunter and I have come into predominant agreement. Developing an introduction beforehand is fair game so long as it is not a "cookie-cutter" introduction.

Also, it seems that Hunter prefers brunnettes.

HUNTER: Hunter does prefer brunnettes. Of course, if the old saying is true, props to you, Omar, because "gentlemen prefer blonds."

Omar assumes that we are in agreement, however, I still feel as though he is glossing over my point of view. Let me add this caveat again: brainstorming is fine, practice to the point of memorization (or just shy of it) should be avoided at all times.

OMAR: Well, I don't believe anyone should do anything in extemp to the point of memorization. In my own personal experience I have never practiced one particular part of a speech- instead the speech as a whole. That being said, I suppose I don't see the difference in independently practicing an introduction and doing it within the context of the speech. I feel like adding the necessary criteria of practicing the entire speech for it to be kosher is not a burden that should be placed on an extemper- though it would probably be a wise decision to practice a whole speech.

HUNTER: But, Omar, how could practicing an intro independently not be considered canning?

- OMAR: As opposed to practicing it within a speech?
- HUNTER: If someone is just sitting at home in front of a mirror saying an intro over and over ad nauseum, that is far too much preparation.
- OMAR: Once again, I must stress that it is a very bad habit to practice independent parts of a speech. A speaker should always practice a whole speech. That being said let's say it is a very turbulent year for Ukraine and a speaker gives 5 Ukraine speeches all with the Tymoshenko introduction, I would say that it is okay to give that intro at a tournament. Similarly, I would say that practicing the introduction independently in the mirror 5 times isn't wise either. Are you saying that one is kosher and the other isn't? If so I must stress that in my opinion what an extemper does in practice is his/her own business. I see no reason to delineate one as not okay and the other as okay.
- HUNTER: Well, I have trouble believing that one Tymoshenko intro could be wide enough to be applicable to five entirely different questions about Ukraine. But, again, over practicing a speech is like overcooking grits - it just doesn't taste right in the end. Not only is there the ethical dilemma of canned vs. fresh (it kind of sounds like we're having a debate at the Future Farmers of America convention), but it is also dangerous for the performer.
- I have found, as an orator as well as an extemper, that there is a point where something has become too performed. If it is no longer fresh to the performer then, sometimes, it is difficult for even the best actors to deliver the line with feeling. The more practiced it is for a speaker, the more boring it becomes to repeat. And, if it is boring for the speaker, imagine for a moment how much the audience will hate it. Thus, it may not be such a good idea practically or ethically to keep using that Tymoshenko (or any other) intro... No matter how attractive the person in the anecdote may be.
- OMAR: Alas, for the third time we agree. Unfortunately, for the hundredth time we disagree. Allow me to begin by saying that grits taste bad regardless. I agree that there is an enormous practical dilemma of giving something over and over again. It always sounds bad and not entertaining. Where I disagree is the ethical dilemma. Earlier we came to the agreement that using a topic specific introduction in practice and then at a tournament was ethical. So I don't necessarily see how practicing an introduction is unethical (though I could never do this because I can't ever stick to a script-hence why I extemp). In other words I don't believe that there is any ethical dilemma- simply a practical one.
- HUNTER: There is an ethical dilemma because the act of "canning" occurs when an individual prepares an intro not for practice, but, rather, for the sole intent of passing it off as something they developed off-the-cuff at a tournament. Which, if you take the traditional definition of extemp, violates the spirit of the event.

OMAR: What if a speaker prepared an introduction for practice, because he/she knew it could be used at a tournament?

HUNTER: Is that intro attached to an entire speech that the speaker gave in full at practice?

OMAR: Yes.

HUNTER: Then no, the delivery of the full speech would prevent the abusive development.

OMAR: Well, I suppose I don't see what the difference between delivering it in the context of the speech is and delivering it independently. I see the difference only in the practical arena because quality extempers practice whole speeches not just parts, but not in the ethical arena. Why is it abusive development as opposed to within a speech where it isn't?

HUNTER: Here's the difference: when in the context of a full speech, there is not abusive development of an intro because, after all, how likely is it that a speaker will have a question in practice and in a round that are similar enough where they could pull off using the same intro? But, even if they could do so, because they are giving the full speech they are inherently preventing themselves from merely regurgitating the same words in the same way. It will ultimately be a different intro - an extemporaneous intro - and not a pre-developed intro.

Just because the ideological foundation of an intro is the same, does not mean it is the same intro.

OMAR: Well, I understand your point, but that comes down to the slight split in extemp ideology we brought up earlier in the discussion. This brings me to a crucial question- Would Hunter Kendrick hold an intro he thought was canned against an extemper even if it was topic specific?

HUNTER: Let me make sure I understand where you're coming from. In your scenario, I'm judging a round. One of the competitors, as far as I can tell, has canned an intro. Would I punish that competitor? Is that the question?

OMAR: Yes, but the intro is topic specific.

HUNTER: If the competitor was clearly better than the rest of the round in every other area, I would not let my ethical suspicions - because, after all, I could never know for sure unless I confronted the speaker - alone sink the competitor. However, if it is a close round and could truly go either way between that competitor and another one... Well, then it may play into my decision some, if my suspicion was great.

OMAR: Well I certainly think that is fair. I, on the other hand, would only punish if the introduction was not good or didn't apply specifically to the topic.

HUNTER: Well, that is because you are a liberal... And, therefore, weak on crime ☺