



Oratorical Contest

2025-2026

District Chair Planning Guide

Topic:

Topic “The Moment I Realized I Belonged —My Definition of Community”

Section III - Qualifications for Contestants

A contestant is eligible to enter/compete in only one Optimist Oratorical contest during a contest year (October 1 to September 30). Once a contestant wins first place at the Regional level of the Optimist International Oratorical World Championships, they are ineligible to compete in the Optimist International Oratorical Contest at any level again.

Purpose

Since its start in 1928, the Optimist Oratorical Contest has become the longest-running program sponsored by Optimist International. The contest is designed for youth to gain experience in public speaking, perfect self-expression, gain self-assurance, improve communication skills, and provide them with the opportunity to compete for a college scholarship.

Funding

The Optimist Oratorical Scholarships are funded by member donations to the Optimist International Foundation and Canadian Children’s Optimist Foundation. It is important that all Members understand the significance of supporting the Foundations in order to continue the funding for the contest. Please make sure to recognize the Foundations and any member that donates funds to the scholarships. Without them, there are no scholarships!

District Contests

Districts and Clubs hold combined gender contests. Each winner of the District level contest will receive a scholarship for use at a college, university or trade school only. There will be three winners awarded scholarships of **\$2,500, \$1,500, and \$1,000** respectively for first, second and third place. All Club submissions should be run through a plagiarism checker before being forwarded to the next level.

The World Championship Optimist Oratorical Contest

Districts may enter one contestant into the World Regional/World Championships Contests held **July 17-18, 2026** at Saint Louis University in St. Louis, Missouri. Please start now to encourage your District Clubs and Members to help fund your District Winner and chaperone to attend the Optimist International World Championships in St. Louis – perhaps Clubs that do not hold contests would be willing to help fund your District’s contestant’s travel.

All District winners are strongly encouraged to compete at the World Oratorical Championships in person at the designated locations.

How to Enter

Interested youth should prepare a 4 to 5 minute speech on the assigned topic to be presented at their local Optimist Club’s contest. The speeches are judged at the Club level, Zone level, District Regional level (if needed) and then at the District level prior to the Optimist International Oratorical World Championships. Clubs and Districts may choose to allow contestants to compete via online streaming.

Eligibility Criteria

The contest is open to contestants under the age of **19** as of October 1st of the current Optimist International contest year (October 1 – September 30) **and who have not yet completed secondary school or its equivalent, including CEGEP students in Québec, Canada.** There is no minimum age.

Minimum Number of Participants

There is no minimum required number of participants for Club Contests. Zone, Regional and District Contests must have no fewer than three participants.

In cases where the minimum number of 3 contestants at the Zone or District Regional contest cannot be met, there are two options:

- A. Send winners directly to the next level of the contest.
- B. Combine Zone or District Regional level contests.

Contest Deadlines

Club contest dates are set by the Club Chair once the Zone and District dates have been obtained. Zone contest dates are set by the District Oratorical Chair with the Lieutenant Governors to occur prior to the District contest date.

The District contest date is set by the District Oratorical Chair. **The deadline to submit District winners to Optimist International is May 15, 2026.**

District winners will be notified by a letter from Optimist International between May 30th and June 15th. Districts should notify the Programs Department if they would like winner notification to be delayed.

Districts may enter one contestant to participate in the World Regional / World Championships Contest held at Saint. Louis University. The Entry Form for the Regional / World Championships Planning Guide must be received by Optimist International no later than May 15, 2026.

Prizes

Scholarships are awarded to contestants in the United States and the Caribbean in US dollars and in Canadian dollars for Canadian contestants.

Club Level - medallion

Clubs are allowed to give up to \$500 in monetary/cash* awards for the Oratorical contest in addition to the official medallions. The Club level awards may be given in the form of a scholarship, savings bond or cash prize but are completely discretionary. Please contact the Optimist International Foundation or Canadian Children's Optimist Foundation for setting up a Club scholarship.

* Disclaimer - Clubs planning to present cash or savings bond awards to contestant winners should first consult the association for their state or province that coordinates scholastic activities and competitions to determine if such payments would result in the recipient's forfeiture of amateur status. If a contestant loses their amateur status, they may be unable to compete in collegiate athletics and activities.

Zone and District Regional Level – plaque
Certificates may be created by the Zone or District and templates are available on www.optimist.org.

District Level - plaque and a college scholarship
Districts should order plaques directly from Shumsky in the U.S. and Caribbean or Ansell in Canada.

Districts award scholarships in the amount of \$2,500, \$1,500 and \$1,000.

Districts choosing to increase funding for the scholarships or fund additional scholarships will need to manage those funds through other resources. Optimist International will not handle the awarding of any scholarships not funded by the Optimist International Foundations. The

responsibility for record-keeping and awarding of additional funds or scholarships will be the District's. Districts may choose to hold the additional funds in District accounts or contribute those funds to the Optimist International Foundations.

The Foundations will process requests from the Districts to have scholarship funds returned to them. Requests must be in writing and specify the type of scholarship and the amount. The Foundations will not award the scholarships or write checks to the individual scholarship recipients or their schools.

World Regional / World Championships –

Scholarships are awarded to each World Regional winner in United States dollars in the US, Caribbean, and the Global Region winners and in Canadian dollars to winners in Canada in the amount of at least \$5000. In addition, scholarships in the amounts of \$15,000, \$10,000, \$5,000 will be given to the first, second, and third place World Champions, respectively. An additional scholarship may be awarded to participants by Saint Louis University at its discretion.

Each World Regional winner and World Champion will receive a certificate of participation. The first place World Champion will have his/her speech presented to the delegates of the Optimist International Convention (if possible).

Interested in Providing a Club Scholarship to Your Winner(s)?

Setting up a Club Campaign Fund through the Optimist International Foundation is an excellent way to establish a scholarship program from your individual club. It is a great

vehicle to all tax-deductible gifts from members and non-members. For more information, contact OIF at info@oifoundation.org

Judges' Criteria and Duties

Select three qualified judges who are not acquainted with the contestants. At the Club level, the judges may be Optimist Members. At all other levels of the competition, judges must be non-Optimists. Judges should have expertise in the field of public speaking. Consider using past Oratorical Contestants, current or retired debate, speech, or drama teachers, and community business leaders.

Always have a back-up judge, in case of an emergency. Judges are also potential new Members, so don't forget to recruit them!

The Oratorical Contest Chair should supply each judge with a copy of the rules and the judging forms and review them with each judge prior to the day of the contest. Judges should never discuss or compare their impressions of the speakers or their scores. Each judge must score independently from other judges and Optimists. No one is permitted to view the scores except the Oratorical Contest Chair.

Timekeepers

One timekeeper should be appointed. This person can be an Optimist Club Member (but it is suggested that you do not use an Optimist member, if possible). The timekeeper is responsible for recording the official length of each speech and assessing penalties if needed, noting failure to announce the topic in the first sentence, verbal identification of non-original material as noted in the printed copy of the speech and totaling all penalties on the timekeeper's score sheet. The timekeeper will need the official form, pen, stopwatch and a copy of each participant's speech. The completed timekeeper's score sheet is turned in to the Contest Chair to be included in the master scores of each speaker.

Handling Protests

A Sergeant-at-Arms should be the contact for protests and given index cards and pens/pencils to distribute when necessary. Anyone who wishes to protest should raise their hand at the completion of the contestant's speech before the next speaker begins. The Sergeant-at-Arms gives the person protesting an index card and pen/pencil. The protest must be written on the card. The Sergeant-at-Arms collects the card as soon as it is completed.

This process is repeated for any person who wishes to make a protest. The Contest Chair collects the protest cards before leaving the room to compile scores. Protests are addressed at that time by the Chair and decided. Any adjustments judges need to be aware of will be made at that time. This procedure allows the contestants to compete without interruption or embarrassment, allows for an accurate description of the protest to be reviewed, and should prevent any disturbance or public discussion.

Videotaping Guidelines

All Oratorical contests must be conducted live, not judged on videotape. However, you may allow for the use of one video camera at a contest to give participants a take-home copy of their speech. Each contestant shall have the option of having the camera off during his/her presentation. An Optimist Club Member should run the camera. A tape supplied by the Club or contestant is put into the camcorder at each break between speakers. The tape should be labeled with the speaker's order designation. When the speaker is finished, the tape is removed and a new one is inserted. This process is repeated for each child who wants a copy of their speech. A master copy could also be recorded of all speakers, then copied for contestants. This gives everyone the chance to have a copy of their speech and allows the contestants to make their speech with minimal interference.

Photography

Be sure the Application Form includes the Parent or Guardian Release statement for the use of photographs.

The District Oratorical Contest Chair is responsible for all phases of the Oratorical Contests in the District. All District competitions must be conducted by Optimists only, and this responsibility must not be delegated to outside groups.

Each Club should submit for each of their winners:

_____ Zone/District Regional/District Entry Form
 _____ Copy of Contestant's Application Form
 _____ Copy of speech
 _____ Copy of birth certificate or passport or ID
 _____ Entry fee (if applicable)

Zone Contests

Zone contests will be held at times and places determined by the District. The Chairperson of the Zone contests will be determined by the District and supervised by the District Oratorical Contest Chair.

In cases where the minimum number of 3 contestants at the Zone contest cannot be met, there are two options:

- A. Send winners directly to the next level of the contest.
- B. Combine Zone or Regional level contests.

All Zone contests must comply with the official rules and only the Zone winners shall be eligible to compete at the District Regional or District Contest. Each Club is allowed to send two contestants to the next level.

After the Zone Contest

The Zone Chair should:

1. Announce the winners to the audience and present their winner plaques.

2. **Submit for each winner to the Regional (if applicable) or District Oratorical Chair:**

_____ Completed Zone/Regional/District Entry Form
 _____ Copy of Contestant's Application
 _____ Copy of birth certificate or passport or ID
 _____ Copy of speech
 _____ Entry fee (if applicable)

District Regional Contest

This is an optional level for Districts with 11 or more Zones. This level is designed to reduce the contestant pool to 20 contestants.

The District Regional Chair should:

1. Announce the winners to the audience and present their winner plaques.

2. **Submit for each winner to the District Oratorical Chair:**

_____ Completed Zone/District Regional/District Entry Form
 _____ Copy of Contestant's Application
 _____ Copy of birth certificate, passport, or ID
 _____ Copy of speech
 _____ Copy of Contestant Club Contest Evaluation
 _____ Entry fee (if applicable)

Prior to District Contest:

The District administration shall determine the date and location of the District Contest. If District preliminary contests or regionals are necessary, they may be held as determined by the District administration, at locations other than at the site of the District Contest.

- _____ Review packet of information received from Optimist International.
- _____ Be prepared to respond to inquiries of where to compete within the District. Optimist International will forward a list of all District Chairs to each inquiry. You may have to advise an individual to contact another District Chair. Optimist International will provide a list of all District Chairs so that you can forward any inquiry that does pertain to your District.
- _____ Advise Optimist International if District winner will compete onsite or remotely for the Regional/World Championships.
- _____ Contact ALL Clubs in the Districts with information about the Oratorical Contest. Encourage Clubs that do not hold a contest to support another Club's efforts either financially or with volunteer help.
- _____ Determine which Clubs hold Oratorical Contests and encourage them to contact Optimist International for package program information. Advise them of any rule(s) or program revisions, if any. Advise them of District Contest dates – also advise Lieutenant Governors of District Contest dates.
- _____ Determine which Clubs do not currently hold an Oratorical Contest but are interested.
- _____ Advise Optimist International of those Clubs that are interested and ask for help and materials to promote the project.
- _____ Secure three non-Optimist judges and ensure that they and timekeepers and others are apprised of dates of District Contest.
- _____ Determine funding available for sending winning contestant to St. Louis for the Regional/World Championships in St. Louis.
- _____ If funding is not available to send contestant to St. Louis, begin making plans immediately for where the District contestant will give speech remotely for the Regional/World Championships.
- _____ Prepare a presentation for the First Quarter

District Conference.

_____ Order District winner plaque(s) from Shumsky or Ansell's. Prepare all certificates as required.

District Contest Day Checklist

Get to the contest location early and make sure:

- _____ Seating is sufficient
- _____ Podium/lectern is present (with portable steps is suggested)
- _____ Microphone is working
- _____ Awards for winners are present
- _____ Recognition Certificates or Plaques are present to any District sponsor or donor to the program. **Be sure to recognize Sponsors and donors!**
- _____ Certificates are signed and present
- _____ Video camera (optional) is set up in an appropriate place
- _____ Assistants are aware of their responsibilities
- _____ Sergeant-At-Arms are aware of their responsibilities in recording protests (see guidelines)
- _____ Contestants' briefing is held
- _____ Judges' briefing is held
- _____ Contestants draw letters for speaking order
- _____ The emcee begins the contest on time

Once All Speakers have Finished:

- _____ Judges and timekeepers total their individual scores for each contestant, sign their score sheets, and give them to the Contest Chair
- _____ Contest Chair leaves the room to review and rule on protests, and to complete scoring procedures
- _____ Announce the winners
- _____ Present each winner with their award and give the date and location of the Regional/World Championships
- _____ Introduce the judges and timekeeper
- _____ Take lots of pictures to use with post-event press releases
- _____ Have the first-place winners sign any required forms for the Regional level before they leave

After the District Contest

The District Chair should:

1. Announce the winners to the audience and present their winner plaques.
2. Have the winners provide proper Identification
3. Have the District Governor sign each Winner's Information Form.
4. Communicate with Optimist International regarding your contestant competing in the World Championships onsite.
5. **Submit for each winner:**
 - _____ **District Winner's Information Form**
 - _____ **Regional/World Championship Contestant's Information Form**
 - _____ **Zone/District Regional/District Entry Form**
 - _____ **Copy of Contestant's Application**
 - _____ **Copy of birth certificate, passport, or ID**
 - _____ **Copy of speech to:**

Optimist International Programs Department
email: programs@optimist.org

Please Note: Scholarships will not be processed until all paperwork has been completed in its entirety and received by Optimist International.

Official Rules

Section I — Contest Organization

1. All Optimist Oratorical contests must be sponsored in their entirety by an Optimist Club, Zone or District.
2. Zone and District contests should be conducted by the District administration.
3. An Optimist Club must be in good standing in its District and with Optimist International to be eligible to sponsor participants in the Zone or District Oratorical contests.
4. The contest will begin at the Club level, proceed to the Zone level, then the District Regional level (if needed) and end with a contest at the World Championships level.
5. Club Contests
 - A. A Club may be represented by no more than two qualified contestants and will be a combined gender contest.
6. Zone contests
 - A. Zone contests will be held at times and places determined by the District. The Chairperson of the Zone contests will be determined by the District and supervised by the District Oratorical Chair.
 - B. All Zone contests must comply with the official rules and only the Zone winners shall be eligible to compete at the District contest.
 - C. Each Zone is allowed to send up to two contestants to the next level and will be a combined gender contest.
 - D. Zone level contests shall have no fewer than 3 or more than 20 contestants participating.
 - E. In cases where the minimum number of 3 contestants at the Zone or Regional contest cannot be met, there are two options:
 1. Send winners directly to the next level of the contest.
 2. Combine Zone or District Regional level contests.
7. District Contest
 - A. The District administration shall determine the date and location of the District contest.
 - B. If District preliminary contests or Regionals are necessary, they may be held as determined by the District administration, at locations other than at the site of the District contest.
 - C. The District Oratorical Chair is responsible for all phases of the Oratorical contest in the District. All

District competitions must be conducted by Optimists only, and this responsibility must not be delegated to outside groups.

- D. The District will hold a combined gender contest.
- E. District level contests shall have no fewer than 3 or more than 20 contestants participating.

Section II- General Rules

1. Contestants must enter through a local Optimist Club.
2. The official application must be completed by each contestant and submitted to the sponsoring Club's Contest Chair.
3. No Zone, District Regional or District-level contest shall have fewer than 3 or more than 20 contestants competing. In cases where the minimum number of 3 contestants at the Zone or District Regional contest cannot be met, there are two options:
 - A. Send winners directly to the next level of the contest.
 - B. Combine Zone or Regional level contests.
4. Optimist International has the right to edit, publish and record any speech used in any contest without payment to the author.
5. In keeping with the prestige of the Oratorical contest and Optimist International, alcoholic beverages shall not be sold, consumed or possessed at any Optimist Oratorical contest.
6. Any award bearing the words "Optimist Oratorical Contest," "Optimist International," "Friend of Youth" and/or the emblem of Optimist International must be obtained from Shumsky in the U.S. and Caribbean or Ansell Awards in Canada. These marks are owned by Optimist International and may not be manufactured without the permission of the Optimist International Board of Directors.

Section III - Qualifications for Contestants

1. The contest is open to contestants under the age of 19 as of October 1st of the current Optimist International contest year (October 1 – September 30) and who have not yet completed secondary school or its equivalent, including CEGEP students in Québec, Canada. There is no minimum age.
2. A contestant is eligible to enter/compete in only one Optimist Oratorical contest during a contest year (October 1 to September 30). Once a contestant wins first place at the Regional level of the Optimist International Oratorical World Championships, they

are ineligible to compete in the Optimist International Oratorical Contest at any level again.

3. Each contestant shall prepare his or her own speech and submit a written copy. The contestant may receive advice in the preparation of the speech and may make minor changes or improvements in the speech at any time.
4. All contestants at each level of the contest must furnish a copy of their birth certificate or passport or ID with their entry before competing.
5. Each contestant entered in the Zone or District contest must present one typewritten copy of their speech, double-spaced and identified with the contestant's name and sponsoring Optimist Club. This copy must be attached to the official entry form with the contestant's birth certificate or passport or ID before competing in the contest. The contestant must sign the entry form.

Section IV - Contest Rules

1. All contestants must receive a copy of the official rules and be instructed to thoroughly familiarize themselves with the rules.
2. The Contest Chair, prior to the beginning of the contest, shall conduct a drawing with all the contestants present for the speaking order. All contestants will then be introduced as "Speaker A," "Speaker B," etc.
3. All contestants must speak on the official topic in the first sentence of the speech.
4. A speech may be delivered in English or French.
5. Timing will begin with the first spoken word. A 3-point penalty is automatically assessed by the timekeeper for failure to state the official topic in the first sentence.
6. Any quotation or copyrighted material used in the speech must be identified verbally during the presentation and in the written copy of the speech with the original author's name. The contestant shall be fully responsible for the use of any quoted material and Optimist International shall assume no responsibility. Failure to identify non-original material will result in up to 10 penalty points.
7. The use of props, special costumes or clothing, not be permitted. The penalty will result in 10 penalty points.
8. Notes and lecterns can be used if the contestant desires.
9. The time allowed will be not under 4 minutes or over 5 minutes. Contestants going over or under will not be cautioned, and will be penalized one point for each 15 seconds or fraction of over or under the allotted time. These penalties will be determined by the official timekeeper.
8. Timing will begin at the first spoken word. Timing will stop when the contestant finishes.
9. No reference can be made that identifies the contestant, parents, school, community, sponsoring Optimist Club or District. This will result in a deduction of up to 5 points.
10. An interval of at least one minute shall be allowed between contestants.
11. At all District final contests, a wireless and lectern microphone will be available for contestant's use, if desired.
12. No spectator may enter or leave the audience while a contestant is speaking. The audience must be alerted to these rules before the competition begins, and at various intervals, by the Contest Chair. A Sergeant-at-Arms should be appointed to enforce these rules.
13. Contestants shall not be identified by name or sponsoring Clubs until after the last oration has been presented and the judges and timekeeper have started deliberations.
14. No contest shall have more than 20 contestants competing. When a contest has more than 20 contestants, preliminary contests, in turn, shall have no more than 20 contestants. In the event that a first-place winner in a Club or Zone contest cannot compete in a subsequent contest for any reason, the second-place winner shall be declared as an alternate contestant.
15. Any protest in the conduct at any level of this contest must be made immediately after the condition is noted. Protests received after the next contestant has been introduced, or in the case of the last contestant, after the judges leave to total the scores, will not be accepted under any circumstances.
16. The Contest Chairperson will decide all protests in accordance with the official rules. The decision of the Contest Chair is final, and no higher appeals will be recognized. In the case of Club contests, the Club Contest Chair has this authority. In the case of Zone and District contests, the final authority is vested in the District Contest Chair. The Zone Chair has the authority to handle protests that may arise during the Zone competition with the District Chair having the final authority.

Section V — Judging and Timing

1. Each contest shall have three qualified judges and one timekeeper. At the Club level, judges may be Optimist Members. At all other levels of the competition, judges must be non-Optimists. Judges must not be acquainted with the contestants.
2. The judges and the timekeepers cannot be identified at the time of the contest or by advance publicity, but only after the last oration has been presented.
3. Judges and the timekeeper must use the official score sheets provided in this guide.
4. During the contest, the judges and timekeeper shall each be in different locations within the room.
5. The timekeeper shall be provided with a stopwatch or equivalent timing device.
6. Each judge must render a final decision on all contestants without consultation with other judges or any other person. Each judge and timekeeper must sign his/her official score sheet.
7. The result of a judge's decision must be kept confidential. No one shall attempt to discuss a contestant's score with a judge.
8. After the judges have totaled their scores for each contestant, deducted penalty points and ranked each contestant, the judges shall sign their score sheets and give them to the Contest Chair. Each judge's score and rank for each contestant shall then be entered and tabulated on the Official Contest Report Form. From this form, the winner will be determined.
9. In all Club and Zone contests, the first, second and third runner-up contestants shall be determined and announced. However, if preliminary contests are held, then only the first-place winner will be announced; or if desired, the top two or three contestants, without reference to their actual position in the contest.
10. There will be three winners awarded scholarships of \$2,500, \$1,500 and \$1,000 respectively for first, second and third place.
11. No judge may serve at more than one level of competition in the contest, i.e. Club, Zone, Regional or District.

Section VI - Scoring

Scoring in all Club, Zone, District Regional and District contests will conform to the following criteria:

- Poise – appearance and personality: 10 points
- Content of Speech – subject adherence, theme,

content, logic and color: 40 points

Delivery & Presentation – voice, volume, pronunciation, gestures, eye contact, sincerity and emphasis: 35 points

Overall Effectiveness – appeal, impression, attitude and effect: 15 points

Section VII – Penalties

1. Failure to announce the official topic in the first sentence - 3 points
2. Failure to identify non-original material - up to 10 points
3. Use of props, costume, etc. – 10 points
4. Time penalties – 1 point for each 15 seconds or fraction of over or under the allotted time
5. Self-identification – up to 5 points
6. Failure to complete speech – disqualification
7. Use of audience prompters - disqualification

Section VIII - Awards

The following are the only awards to be given in the Optimist International Oratorical Contest at all Club, Zone, District Regional and District contests. These official Optimist International awards are available from Shumsky in the U.S. or Caribbean or Ansell in Canada. Awards will not be ordered or sent automatically.

1. Club Level – The official Optimist International medallions must be awarded. They may be awarded as first, second and third, or as first, second and runner-up. Any combination of medallions may be presented at the option of the Club. Clubs are allowed to give monetary awards of up to \$500 per winner in addition to the official medallions. The Club level awards may be given in the form of a scholarship, savings bond or cash prize but are completely discretionary.
2. Zone Level – Zone winner plaques and Certificates of Participation
3. District Regional Level – District Regional winner plaques and Certificates of Participation
4. District Level – District winner plaques
 - A. Each winner of the District level contest will receive a scholarship for use at a college, university or trade school only. There will be three winners awarded scholarships of \$2,500, \$1,500 and \$1,000 respectively for first, second and third place.
 - B. Scholarships are paid through the Optimist International Foundation in the United States and Caribbean and the Canadian Children's Optimist

Foundation in Canada.

- C. All scholarships will be administered by Optimist International.
 - D. All scholarships will be payable to the educational institution of the recipient's choice, subject to the approval of Optimist International.
 - E. Winners of an Optimist International scholarship must claim their scholarship by the age of 25.
 - F. If a District chooses to raise the amount of a scholarship funded by either of the Optimist International Foundations or award additional scholarships, the District will be responsible for the management and awarding of those funds.
5. Regionals Championships -
- A. Each winner of the Optimist Regional level contest will receive a scholarship of \$5000 for use at a college, university or trade school only.
 - B. Scholarships are paid through the Optimist International Foundation in the United States and Caribbean and the Canadian Children's Optimist Foundation in Canada.
 - C. All scholarships will be administered by Optimist International.
 - D. All scholarships will be payable to the educational institution of the recipient's choice, subject to the approval of Optimist International.
 - E. Winners of an Optimist International scholarship must claim their scholarship by the age of 25.
6. The World Championship Optimist Oratorical Contest
- A. Each winner of the Optimist Regional level contest will be eligible to compete in the World Championship Optimist Oratorical Contest. Contestants will be comprised of each Optimist Regional winner and the Saint Louis University Global Regional winner. Scholarships will be awarded for first, second, and third place in the amounts of \$15,000, \$10,000, and \$5,000 respectively for use at a college, university or trade school only.
 - B. Scholarships are paid through the Optimist International Foundation in the United States and Caribbean, the Canadian Children's Optimist Foundation in Canada.
 - C. All scholarships will be administered by Optimist International or Saint Louis University.
- D. All scholarships will be payable to the educational institution of the recipient's choice, subject to the approval of Optimist International.
 - E. Winners of The World Championship Optimist Oratorical scholarship must claim their scholarship by the age of 25.

Visitor Sign-In Sheet

Name: _____ Home phone: _____
Business phone: _____ Cell phone: _____
Address: _____
City: _____ State/Country: _____ Zip Code: _____
Notes: _____

Name: _____ Home phone: _____
Business phone: _____ Cell phone: _____
Address: _____
City: _____ State/Country: _____ Zip Code: _____
Notes: _____

Name: _____ Home phone: _____
Business phone: _____ Cell phone: _____
Address: _____
City: _____ State/Country: _____ Zip Code: _____
Notes: _____

Name: _____ Home phone: _____
Business phone: _____ Cell phone: _____
Address: _____
City: _____ State/Country: _____ Zip Code: _____
Notes: _____

Bringing Out the Best in Kids. . .Join Today!
www.optimist.org

Instructions to Judges

*The contest scoring has been divided into four phases.
The general intent of each phase is as follows:*

1. Poise 10 points

2. Content of Speech40 points

(Subject Adherence, Theme, Logic, Content, Color)

In this category just the material and its organization as presented by the contestant should be judged. A judge should consider the importance of adherence to the subject of the speech, the proper introduction and the logic and coherent development of the theme which brings about a successful and adequate conclusion. Figures of speech, similes, metaphors, colorful choice of words and zestful, descriptive phrases are important qualities.

3. Delivery and Presentation35 points

(Voice, Pronunciation, Enunciation, Gestures, Emphasis)

Delivery and presentation shall be judged on several factors. Voice quality should be recognized in tone, pitch and volume. Delivery should be continuous without hesitation or halting. Enunciation and pronunciation are most important. Gestures should be appraised for frequency, nature and effectiveness. Desire to be convincing should be obvious and emphasis should be well placed and dynamic.

4. Overall Effectiveness15 points

(Appeal, Impression, Attitude, Effect)

In this category the overall impression created by the speaker and the speech should be rated. In this phase of scoring, the general overall impression is given actual point values. While it must not be used as such, it is in making this particular score that a judge would most closely approach a conclusion that would actually rank the contestants in his or her own opinion.

Penalty Explanations

- A. Use of props, costumes, etc.** - The use of props, special costumes or clothing **will result in a 10 point penalty.** Notes and lecterns may be used if the speaker desires to do so.
- B. Use of audience prompters will not be permitted and will result in disqualification.**
- C. Self-identification** - To eliminate any potential bias or prejudice, no reference can be made that identifies the contestant, parents, school, community, sponsoring Optimist Club or District. This will result in a deduction of **up to 5 points.**
- D. Time penalties** - The time limit for speeches is not less than 4 minutes or over 5 minutes in length. Contestants going over or under the time limit will not be cautioned, but will be penalized one point for each 15 seconds or portion thereof over or under the limits. These penalties will be determined by the timekeeper. Timing will begin at the first word spoken.
- E. Failure to announce the official topic in the first sentence of the speech** - All contestants must express the official topic in the first sentence of the speech. A 3-point penalty must be assessed by the timekeeper for failure to state the official topic.
- F. Failure to complete the speech.** Each contestant must complete the entire speech. The penalty is disqualification.
- G. Failure to identify non-original material.** Any quotation or copyrighted material used must be identified verbally. The failure to do so will result in a **penalty of up to 10 points.**

Make 6 copies

Official Oratorical Contest Judge's Score Sheet

SPEAKERS' ORDER	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Judging Criteria										
<i>Poise</i> 10 points (<i>Appearance, Personality</i>)										
<i>Content of Speech</i> 40 points (<i>Subject Adherence, Theme, Logic, Content, Color</i>)										
<i>Delivery & Presentation</i> 35 points (<i>Voice, Volume, Pronunciation, Gestures, Eye Contact, Sincerity, Emphasis</i>)										
<i>Overall Effectiveness</i> 15 points (<i>Appeal, Impression, Attitude, Effect</i>)										
Total Judge's Points										
<i>Each judge shall assess the following penalties against a contestant as infractions of the rules occur.</i>										
Contestant	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Use of props, costume (10 points)										
Self-Identification (up to 5 points)										
<i>The timekeeper will assess the following penalties only after a judge has totaled the speech score for each contestant.</i>										
Time Penalties (1 point each 15 seconds or portion over or under official limits)										
Failure to announce the official topic in the first sentence of the speech (3 points)										
Use of audience prompts Disqualification										
Failure to complete speech (Disqualification)										
Failure to identify non-original material verbally (up to 10 points)										
Total Penalty Points										
Net scores of points (no ties permitted)										
Contestant's rank										

Signature _____ Date _____ / _____ / _____

Judge's Name

Official Timekeeper’s Score Sheet

make 2 copies

For all Zone, District Regional and District contests
The official timekeeper shall use a regulation stopwatch or equivalent timing device which will be supplied by the Contest Chairperson.

Time Penalties
The time limit for speeches will be not under 4 minutes or over 5 minutes in length. Contestants going over or under the time limits will not be cautioned, but will be penalized one point for each 15 seconds or fraction over or under the time limit. These penalties will be determined by the official timekeeper.
Timing will begin immediately after the first word spoken. Timing will stop when the contestant finishes the speech.

Use of Audience Prompters
Use of audience prompters will not be permitted and will result in disqualification

Failure to Announce the Official Topic in the First Sentence of the Speech
All contestants must express the official topic in the first sentence of the speech, or a 3-point penalty is automatically assessed by the timekeeper.

Failure to Identify Non-original Material Verbally
Any non-original material in the speech must be noted verbally and in the written copy of the speech. If a contestant fails to identify non-original material, the result will be up to 10 penalty points. The printed copy of the speech is to be followed to verify the verbal identification. The penalty is assessed by the timekeeper.

Speakers in order of appearance	Time minutes/sections	Over/Under time-point penalties	Use of Audience Prompter	Failure to announce topic at the beginning of the oration	Verbal ID of non-original material

Signature_____Date_____/_____/_____

Timekeeper’s Name

Make 2 copies

Official Report Form

For all Zone, District Regional and District Contests

The Oratorical Contest Chair should check the math for each contestant's score. Enter the final point grades and ranks on this report form. The Contest Chair should announce the results from this form. For preliminary contests, the Chair will name by letter the two or three best contestants without announcing first, second or third place. For final contests, the Chair will name by letter the third, second, then first place winner.

Contestant's Speaking Order	First Judge		Second Judge		Third Judge		Total of Point Grades	Total of Rank	Place
	Point Grades	Rank	Point Grades	Rank	Point Grades	Rank			
A									
B									
C									
D									
E									
F									
G									
H									
I									
J									

To determine rank in Zone, District Regional and District each judge ranks the speakers as 1, 2, 3, etc., according to their scores. Ties are not permitted. At the end of the contest, the Chair collects the judges' score sheets and checks the math. The point grade and position of rank for each contestant is entered on this form. The winning contestant is then determined as follows:

1. If any contestant is ranked first by a majority of the judges, he or she is automatically declared the winner.
2. All other contestants are ranked by the "total of rank" system. This means that the rank, not the points each judge has given each contestant, is added and this figure is placed in the Total of Rank column. First place is determined by this means also, if no one qualifies under the method explained in #1 above. The lowest total wins first place, the next lowest wins second place and so on.

3. If a two-way tie results for any place, it is broken by a preferential vote. Using the rankings given on the ballots, a tabulation is made on the number of judges who placed one of the tied contestants higher than the other. Example: Two contestants, speakers D and H, are tied for third place and each has received a rank of nine.

Speaker H would be declared the third-place winner as two judges (#2 and 3) ranked H higher than speaker D, who would be ranked fourth in the contest.

4. If a three-way tie results by the total of rank system, then and only then, are the point grades for each contestant totaled to break the three-way tie.

Caution: Scores and rankings should be checked by a second person to ensure accuracy, but remember this information is confidential! Announcing winners incorrectly can be disastrous!

Make 2 copies

2025-2026 Zone/District Regional/District Contest Worksheet

Zone _____ Facility _____

District _____ Date _____

City _____ Time _____

It is the responsibility of the sponsoring Club to provide the Zone/District Regional/District Entry Form, copy of the birth certificate, passport, or ID and the speech to the Zone Contest Chair. It is the responsibility of the Zone Contest Chair to provide this information to the District Chair.

Speaking Order	Contestant's Name, Sponsoring Club Name & Number	Entry Form Received	Birth Certificate Passport or ID Confirmed	Copy of Speech Received	Copy of Contestant Club Contest Evaluation	Place in Contest

This form and its contents should be viewed by contest officials only.

Make 2 copies

2025-2026 Official Zone/District Regional/District Entry Form

Be sure that your contestants are fully qualified to compete by filling in each line of this entry form. Your Club should complete all requirements including signatures. Attach the speech and a copy of the birth certificate, passport, or ID and submit them to the Chair of the next level at least two weeks prior to the contest date.

Contestant's Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State/Country _____ Zip Code _____

Date of birth _____ / _____ / _____ E-mail Address: _____
month/day/year

Phone (_____) _____

"As a contestant, I received a copy of the official rules for the Optimist International Oratorical Contest and fully understand them. I agree to be bound by all requirements. I have prepared my own speech with limited assistance on the topic, and have given due credit in writing and verbally in my speech. I understand that any omission or violation of the rules on my part will mean immediate disqualification."

Contestant's signature _____ Date _____ / _____ / _____

To Club and District Officers:

The following contest information should be completed by the appropriate level's Chair as the paperwork progresses with the winner.

Number of Clubs in District Participating in the Oratorical Contest: _____

Number of youth in **Club** contest _____

Was Zone contest held? ☐ yes ☐ no

Number of youth in **Zone** contest _____

Number of youth in **Regional** contest _____

Name(s) of District Donors to the Contest: _____

For Club, Zone, District Regional Chairs' signatures

"We, the undersigned, in full compliance with the Optimist International Oratorical Contest rules, enter this contestant in the Zone/District Regional/District Contest. We understand that this form, the speech and proof of the birth certificate, passport ,or ID must be submitted to the Contest Chair before this contestant competes in the next level of the contest."

Optimist Club of _____ District Name_

_____ Club Number _____

Club President's Signature_

Club Contest Chair's Signature _____ Phone: _____

Email: _____ Zone Chair's Signature (to enter District Regional or District level) _

Regional Chair's Signature (to enter District level) _

Please keep in mind that District level scholarships cannot be funded if the required minimums at the Zone, District Regional and District contests are not met.

Contests

- There must be a minimum of 3 contestants participating

If the minimum number of participants cannot be met, winners should be sent on to the next level of competition or Zone or District Regional contests should be combined. There are no exceptions.

1st Place _____
2nd Place _____
3rd Place _____

Make 3 copies

2025-2026 District Oratorical Winner's Information Form

To Be Completed by the District Oratorical Chair Only

Please print or type

Name of District Winner _____

Address _____

City _____ State/Country _____ Zip Code _____

Date of birth _____ / _____ / _____
month/day/year

Phone (_____) _____

Plan to attend _____

Sponsored by the Optimist Club of _____

District Name & Number _____

Number of contestants in **District** contest: _____

Number of Clubs participating in the District Oratorical Contest: _____

Number of Contestants participating in all Club Contests in your District: _____

Number of Contestants in Winner's Club Contest: _____

We certify that the above named contestant is the winner of the _____
District

Oratorical Contest conducted on _____ / _____ / _____
month/day/year

Signed _____
District Governor

Signed _____ Phone (_____) _____
District Oratorical Chair

E-mail Address _____

To be received no later than May 15, 2026!

2025-2026 Optimist Regional World Contest Entry Form

To be Completed by the District Oratorical Chair Only

Please print or type

Name of Regional Contestant _____

Address _____

City _____ State/Country _____ Zip Code _____

Date of birth _____/_____/_____

month/day/year

Phone (_____) _____ Email: _____

We certify that the above named contestant is the official Regional Contestant of the _____ in the

District

_____ Region Scholarship Contest to be held in St. Louis, Missouri.

Region Name

The contestant will be traveling to Saint Louis University in St. Louis, Missouri to attend the World Championships at Saint

Louis University: Yes No

Is podium needed: Yes No

Name and relationship of chaperone: _____

Phone Number to be reached at all times: _____

Signed _____

District Governor

Signed _____ Phone (_____) _____

District Oratorical Chair

Email Address _____

Submit this form (with all required signatures) along with the following no later than May 15, 2026:

_____ Official Zone/District Regional/District Entry Form

_____ Copy of Contestant's Application Form

_____ District Oratorical Winner's Information Form

_____ Copy of Birth Certificate, Passport, or ID

_____ Copy of Speech

To : Optimist International Programs Department

email to: programs@optimist.org



In order for District scholarships to be processed, District Chairs must submit the following for each winner:

_____ **Winner's Information Form**

- **Must have District Chair and District Governor's signatures**
- **Must have number of contestants that competed in the District contest**

_____ **Contestant's Application Form for 2025-2026 Oratorical Contest**

_____ **Zone/District Regional/District Entry Form**

- **Must have number of contestants that participated in each level of the contest**
- **Must have appropriate signatures, including the contestant's**

_____ **Optimist Regional Information Form**

_____ **Copy of Birth Certificate, Passport, or ID**

_____ **Printed copy of speech**

To be received no later than May 15, 2026!