



Voices of Liberty National Oratory & Rhetoric Contest

Frederick Douglass Foundation

STUDENT & PARENT GUIDE

Eligibility Requirements:

To participate, students must:

- Be **ages 12-18**
- Be enrolled in:
 - Public school
 - Private/parochial/charter school
 - Military/trade school
 - Homeschool
- Be a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident
- Submit only **one speech** per academic year

National Division: Ages 12-18 (one division)

The Voices of Liberty Competition Path:

The Voices of Liberty National Oratory & Rhetoric Contest is the premiere contest hosted by FDF. Participants advance through a series of competition phases, designed to develop their ideas, strengthen their persuasive communication, and principled leadership, all while competing for scholarships and national recognition.

Competition Path:

Step 1 — Register to Compete

students ages **12–18 to register** to enter the **Voices of Liberty National Oratory & Rhetoric Contest** and begin their journey as a competitor in the national challenge.

Registration unlocks access to the **Digital Round of competition**.

Step 2 — Craft Your Speech

Competitors prepare an **original 3–5 minute speech** inspired by the ideas of **Frederick Douglass, faith, constitutional liberty, and moral responsibility**.

This is where students sharpen their thinking, develop their argument, and prepare to take their place among the next generation of voices defending liberty.

Step 3 — Record Your Oration

Students record their speech in **one continuous take**, demonstrating clarity of thought, strength of conviction, and excellence in delivery.

Each submission represents a student’s first official entry into the national competition.

No editing, cuts, or splicing are permitted.

Videos that do not follow this rule will be **disqualified from the competition**.

Step 4 — Submit Your Digital Round Entry

Students upload their videoed speech during the **Digital Round submission window - March 1 – April 27, 2026**. (VideoAsk)

All submissions are **judged anonymously** to ensure fairness and integrity.

Students who submit a qualifying entry earn the designation: **Voices of Liberty Digital Round Competitor**

Step 5 — Phase 1 Advancement

Judges evaluate all Digital Round submissions and select the competitors who will **advance to the next level of competition**.

Advancing speakers earn the title: **Voices of Liberty District Finalist**

Phase 1 results will be announced May 1, 2026.

Step 6 — Phase 2 District Judging

District judges evaluate the speeches of advancing competitors using their **original Digital Round video submission**. No additional recording is required.

This round determines which competitors will move forward to the **State Finals** and continue their journey in the national contest.

District-level results will be announced May 5, 2026.

Step 7 — State Finals (Phase 3)

Top competitors advance to the **in-person State Finals**, earning the designation: **Voices of Liberty State Finalist**

At the State Finals, the strongest speakers in each state compete for a **state scholarship awards** and the distinction of being recognized among **Top Three Orators** in their state.

State Scholarship Awards:

-  **State Champion** — \$500 Scholarship + Advancement to National Finals
-  **Second Place** — \$375 Scholarship
-  **Third Place** — \$125 Scholarship

The **State Champion** will earn the honor of representing their state at the **Voices of Liberty National Finals**.

State-level results will be nationally announced June 21, 2026

Step 8 — National Finals (Phase 4)

State Champions advance to the **Voices of Liberty National Finals in Washington, D.C.**, earning the designation:

Voices of Liberty National Finalist

At the National Finals, the top young orators from across the country will compete for the title of: **Voices of Liberty National Champion.**

National Finals will be held **July 3, 2026.**

Voices of Liberty National Champion — \$5000 in scholarship

National Runner-Up — \$1776 in scholarship

The National Finals brings together the country's top young orators to battle it out presenting their speeches before distinguished judges in a culminating celebration of **faith, freedom, and constitutional liberty.**

PHASE 1 — Digital Round (VideoAsk)

- Submit a **3-5 minute** video (upload or direct record)
- Single-take recording (no edits)
- Judged anonymously
- Top contestants advance to District Semi-Finals based on scores
- Submission Window: March 1 – April 27, 2026

Phase 1 Results Announced: May 1, 2026

Advancing students move to **District Semi-Finals** round where local judges use the digital submission to advance students to states.

PHASE 2 — District Semi-Finals

- Speeches: **From round 1 used for district semi-finals**
- Top 5 **contestants** advance to State Finals
- Competition Window: April 27 – May 5, 2026

Phase 2 Results Announced: May 5, 2026

PHASE 3 — State Finals (live)

- Top 5 compete
- Speeches 5-7 minutes long

- Top 3 receive state scholarships
- **1 State Winner** advances to Nationals

Phase 3 Results Announced: June 21, 2026

PHASE 4 — National Finals July 3, 2026 (Location TBA)

Events include:

- Welcome banquet
- Rhetoric workshop
- Campus or historical tour
- National competition (livestreamed)
- National awards ceremony

National Champion receives: \$5000 in scholarship

National Runner-Up receives: \$1776 in scholarship

National Finals & Announcement of Winner: July 3, 2026

Speech Topics & Themes:

Students may choose:

1. Frederick Douglass (Original or Adapted)

- Read as written, OR
- Creatively adapt Douglass's themes to modern issues
- Especially welcome themes: America, Liberty, The Constitution
- Modern interpretations of "What to the Slave Is the 4th of July?" welcome

2. Constitutional Liberty & Civic Responsibility

- Equal protection
- Limited government
- Personal responsibility
- Rule of law & constitutional freedoms

3. Biblical Principles of Justice & Moral Responsibility

- Human dignity (Imago Dei)
- Moral law
- Courage, truth, and responsibility

Speech Rules & Requirements:

Length Requirements

- Digital Round: 3–5 minutes
- Live Rounds: 5–7 minutes
- Disqualification: under 3 minutes or over 10 minutes

Notes

- Up to one 3×5 note card allowed
- Full manuscript reading = -3 point deduction
- +1 bonus point for speaking without notes

Quotations

- Over 10 words → must cite in manuscript + verbal attribution
- Biblical and historical references encouraged

Language

- Primarily in English (short foreign phrases allowed)

Props

- No hand-held props
- No multimedia
- Period clothing permitted (not theatrical props)

Printed Copies (Live Rounds)

- Provide **3 printed copies** of speech for judges

Dress Code:

Allowed:

- Business attire
- Semi-formal attire
- Historical/period dress (respectful, not theatrical)

Not Allowed:

- Casual clothing (pajamas, ripped jeans, etc.)
- Revealing attire

- Props
- Political slogans or campaign apparel

Submission Instructions — Digital Round/VideoAsk:

Students must submit:

- Full name
- Age
- Zip Code or Congressional District
- School/homeschool name
- Parent email + phone
- Speech title
- Video upload / record
- Parent consent form uploaded

Required Checkboxes:

- Media Release
- Student Code of Conduct
- Honor Code (Original Work Certification — no AI-generated writing permitted)

Parent receives an automatic confirmation email.

Judging Criteria (100 Points):

- Content & Organization – 30
- Delivery & Presentation – 30
- Persuasion & Impact – 20
- Creativity & Expression – 10
- Theme Alignment – 10

Judges must recuse if they know a contestant personally.

Advancement & Travel Expectations

Local/State Levels

- Families cover their own transportation

State Level Prizes

- 1st Place — scholarship + trip to Nationals

- 2nd Place — scholarship
- 3rd Place — scholarship

National Finals

- Lodging for State Winner + 1 guardian covered
- Coordinated itinerary provided

National Level Prizes

- National Champion — scholarship + Banquet travel
- Recognition, leadership opportunities, and national media visibility
- National Runner-Up - scholarship

National Banquet

- National Champion receives full travel and lodging

Parent Expectations:

Parents agree to:

- Sign required forms
- Ensure student adheres to deadlines
- Encourage professional conduct
- Support dress code
- Allow photography/livestreaming via signed media release

Parents may not influence judges or attempt to access scores.

Student Expectations:

Students must:

- Maintain integrity (no plagiarism or AI-generated writing)
- Follow rules and attire requirements
- Communicate respectfully
- Submit materials on time
- Represent their state with professionalism

Key Reminders:

- Check email (including spam)
- One submission per year
- Must represent only one state

- Judges' decisions are final
- AI writing tools are not permitted

Key Dates:

Contest Opens: March 1, 2026

Digital Round Closes: April 27, 2026

Phase 1 Results: May 1, 2026

Phase 2 Results: May 5, 2026

Phase 3 Results: June 21, 2026

National Finals & Champion Announcement: July 3, 2026