



Confidence in Extemp

Jana Schodzinski - Jan. 2026

Why is Confidence Important?

How does self-love relate to forensics?

In speech, **confidence is a cornerstone of becoming the best, most competitive version of yourself.** Though confidence is a key part of other events, it is especially important in extemp due to the overall nature of the event. In extemp, judges rank you based on believability, fluency, and creativity, among other factors. None of these traits are possible without confidence, which can be hard to come by – especially for novices.

Unlike other speech and debate events, extemp does not give competitors the option of round-vision (unless you count pre-planned topic areas). You can study current events and become as well-read as possible, but these efforts will be futile without the confidence necessary to trust yourself to prepare your speech and speak off the cuff. **“Crashing out” will not help you succeed in a round** – nor will other forms of self-deprecation.

What is Confidence?

It may not be as self-explanatory as meets the eye!

No, the concept of confidence is not a new topic. However, it may be extemp's best-kept secret. Competitors can study as many current extemp trends as they want, be it substructure, humor vs. narratives, on-tops, or powerlines, but all of these are futile without having faith in *yourself* to execute these factors effectively in-round. The common denominator in successful nat-circ competitors is not any of these trends, nor access to more financial resources (though these obviously are major factors). All nat-circ competitors bear uniquely high levels of confidence. **Confidence allows competitors to exercise their own strengths, as well as profit from the use of other trends, such as those aforementioned.** Developing a personal "style" of extemp is crucial to see success on the nat-circ, or even locally. Confidence brings this naturally, and gives spectators and judges alike a thoroughly enjoyable round.

How Can *I* Be Confident?

In Prep:

- **Research**
- **Inferences**
- **Frameworks**
- **Verbal preparedness**

In Round:

- **Gestures**
- **Eye contact**
- **Recovery from errors**
- **Walk-ups**

In Mind:

- **Avoid self-deprecation**
- **Allow room for error**
- **Set small goals**
- **Take care of yourself**



Disclaimer:

To be transparent, on a personal level, **confidence has been my biggest hurdle by far in transforming from a good to a great competitor.** Unlike other criticisms, confidence can not be fixed by simple self-awareness or technical change. Confidence comes from months to years of self-work, which can not be given to you by someone else. Confidence comes from the inside – the sooner you allow yourself to improve, the sooner you will see these improvements. No matter how confident you are initially, positive change is always possible, regardless of the circumstances. The metric of change doesn't have to be drastic to be helpful; **even the transition from hating yourself to hating yourself less can lead to exponential growth as a competitor and person.**

Live footage of me in the prep room my novice season >>>



Exemplifying (Extemplifying?) Confidence in the Prep Room

Big rooms lead to big feelings. The prep room by design can cause immense anxiety and dread – however, your actions in the prep room are crucial to your success in-round. Instead of drowning in your own thoughts, try to maximize your use of prep-time.

Four factors to consider in efforts to maximize confidence levels in your prep-time are (see right):

- 1. Research**
- 2. Inferences**
- 3. Frameworks**
- 4. Verbal preparedness**

Research & Inferences

A terrible question doesn't have to mean a terrible speech!

- If you're unfamiliar with a concept in your question, ideally, you don't draw that question. However, if worse comes to worse, **use the first few minutes of your prep-time familiarizing yourself with new concepts instead of panicking.**
- Of course, you can also avoid this to the best of your ability by avidly digesting news and learning new concepts. Of course, it is impossible to educate yourself on every possible question – especially in IX. However, doing your best to stay informed will surely boost your confidence.

- However, it is also impossible to have a deep understanding of every question you come across, no matter how well-informed you are. Every extemper will face a question they know little about at some point in their career. **Making thoughtful inferences prevents utter failure and maximizes confidence and believability.**
- For instance, if you don't know a certain politician, what do you know about their party? If you don't know much about a certain country or state, what do you know about the general region? Making meaningful inferences saves you time to focus on more important aspects of your prep.

Frameworks & Verbal Preparedness

How else can I use my prep time to maximize in-round confidence?

- If you are an extemper with a debate background, you are familiar with the concept of using frameworks to guide your judges through your arguments. **A framework is essentially the set of standards that communicated to your judge how to evaluate arguments and detail which impacts matter most.**
- For instance, if you get a question evaluating democracy in Vietnam and how to improve it, first evaluate general characteristics of democracy. Then, research which of these characteristics Vietnam underperforms in.
- Though your written draft is a key part in the organization and structure of your speech, verbal preparedness is perhaps an even more crucial part of your prep-time. During your prep- be sure to **give yourself enough time to fully perform your speech *at least once on your own.***
- If it is impossible to run your speech entirely during your prep, be sure to **familiarize yourself with important powerlines and statistics.** Furthermore, try setting down your material (notebook, laptop, etc) while verbally preparing in order to rehearse some possible gestures.

Exemplifying Confidence in the Round

Even if your prep-time went as well as possible, it is easy to let your nerves get the best of you when entering your room, especially if it's a break round with a large audience. No matter how confident you felt during your prep-time, **confidence in-round is the only way to truly leave an impact on your judges.**

Four factors to consider in efforts to maximize confidence levels in your round are (see right):

- 1. Gestures**
- 2. Eye Contact**
- 3. Recovery from Errors**
- 4. Walk-Ups**

Gestures & Eye Contact

If I sound confident, do I still have to look the part?

- **93% of communication is non-verbal**, with 55% relying in body language and 38% relying in your tone of voice. No matter how great your rhetoric is, body language can make or break a round.
- To ensure confidence in your tone of voice, simply stay zoned-in during your speech. Though it can be easy to get distracted, **vocal variety is necessary to entertain and inform your judges**. Stay aware of not just what you're saying, but *how* you're saying it.
- Be sure to make meaningful gestures without being too repetitive or distracting. To practice this outside of rounds, try speaking in front of a mirror or with weights in your hands.
- **Do not bring your prep into your round, as this tells your judges that you don't feel prepared.**

- **Eye contact** is another crucial part of confidence in round. Your judges should be your main priority, but making meaningful eye contact with the whole room can signify to your judges that you are able to maintain control of the room.
- Try not to look up or to the side when remembering a citation, as this signals to your audience that you aren't prepared. Furthermore, maintain eye contact with an individual for the entirety of a sentence. **Don't switch eye contact in the middle of claims.**
- Do your best not to look at the floor during your speech, either. The eyes are one of the most important factors of human connection, so don't let them be the deciding factor in docking you points or ranks.

Recovery from Errors & Walk-Ups

What else should I know about in-round confidence?

- Fluency breaks are all but inevitable in extemp. There is no way to redact them entirely other than daily practice and drills. However, in-round, there are ways to minimize the aura-loss faced by fluency breaks.
- **Try not to correct yourself or apologize after making fluency breaks.** Simply go on with your point as if nothing happened, smile without calling attention to you or your error, and move on.
- If you happen to make a mistake major enough to pose factual inaccuracies or otherwise major disruption, **calmly correct yourself using phrases such as “or, rather.”**
- As the winner of the Equality in Forensics’ “The Toughest Walkups” superlative, I know my way around an effective walk-up. Jokes aside, walk-ups are your opportunity as a competitor to give your audience a good first-impression of your attitude and charisma.
- Unlike congress walk-ups, extemp walk-ups don’t give much room for uniqueness. However, be sure to have a clear idea of what you’re going to say and how you’re going to say it. **Have a brief plan of what order you’ll announce your name/speaker code, question, time signals, etc.**

Exemplifying Confidence in Your Own Mind

However, it is near impossible to exemplify confidence in the extemp community without wielding confidence on a personal level. Though self-confidence can be a major feat, it is important to ensure that your personal well being comes before your competitive abilities.

Four factors to consider in efforts to maximize inner confidence levels are (see right):

- 1. Avoid Self-Deprecation**
- 2. Allow Room for Error**
- 3. Set Small Goals**
- 4. Take Care of Yourself**

Avoiding Self-Deprecation & Leaving Room for Error

How do I avoid negative self-talk?

- Contrary to popular belief, **self-deprecation does not make others feel better** – instead, it leaves all parties involved feeling uncomfortable. Not only does self-deprecation make others uncomfortable, but it also subconsciously plants the idea of inferiority in your mind.
- Instead of perpetuating self-deprecating ideals on yourself, **compliment others and note which of their traits you desire**. As ‘corny’ as it may sound, building up others instead of tearing down yourself benefits all parties involved and lets your negative thoughts serve a purpose other than perpetuating imposter syndrome.

- **No extemper is perfect**. No matter how many nat-circs they’ve finalized, how high they rank on the NSDA website, or how long they’ve been in the activity. Everyone starts somewhere, and everyone makes mistakes, no matter how much they’ve achieved.
- Instead of giving up halfway through a prep because you don’t feel confident enough to deliver a ‘good’ speech, allow yourself to give a performance that isn’t your best. **Normalizing mistakes** is crucial in building confidence and growing as a performer.

Setting Small Goals & Taking Care of Myself

What other steps can I take to grow in confidence and self-worth?

- Going hand-in-hand with avoiding self-deprecation and leaving room for error, **setting small goals instead of focusing on past mistakes allows you to benefit from you past rather than let it hold you back.**
- For instance, instead of envying your favorite nat-circ winner, set a goal to break to semi-finals at your next local tournament. Instead of hyper-fixating on the number of fluency breaks you had in your last round, set a goal to recover from stumbles more gracefully.

- Extemp is an intellectual activity. You can't succeed in it without giving your body and mind the care it needs to thrive rather than lapse.
- If you feel too tired to do a full 30-minute prep, **use those 37 minutes to get some much needed rest and give a better speech tomorrow.** If you want to run a prep but have an important exam tomorrow, run an extra prep tomorrow after acing that exam.

Other Tips

Extemp is Hard.

A common theme in the speech and debate community is to push yourself until you lose all passion for the activity you once loved. **Give yourself grace and don't overexert yourself, as the risk is greater than the reward.**

If you find yourself losing confidence or regressing to a state of self-hatred, **don't be afraid to take a break.** Focusing on life outside of speech will allow you to return with a new outlook and a refreshed concept of reality. **No matter how great it may feel to win, your competitive goals should not outweigh your overall wellbeing.**

Put things into perspective. You have no reason to live in a state of inferiority. **Speech and debate is a safe haven for thousands of students, and everyone deserves a seat at the table.** No matter how small your team is, how many times you've prelim-dropped, or how many nat-circs you've attended, you deserve this platform and the success that comes with it as much as every other competitor.



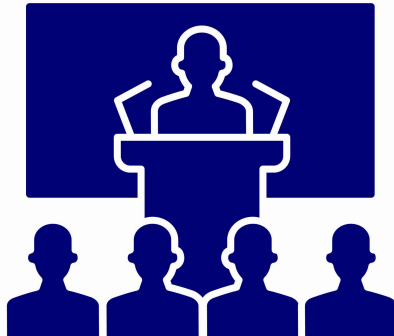
Key Takeaways:

Fake it 'til you make it. Nobody is born with inherent self-confidence. Similarly, nobody is born with the ability to flawlessly deliver a 7 minute speech after 30 minutes of preparation. However, everyone is born with the ability to pretend they were. **The longer you pretend to have faith in yourself, the sooner you won't have to pretend anymore.**

You Are Enough.

No competitor is inherently better or worse than another. You open doors for yourself – others don't shut them on your behalf. **Give yourself grace, and you'll go far.**

Instead of baselessly panicking during your prep-time, take the actions needed to maximize your preparedness once your prep-time is up. **Instead of letting your nerves get the best of you in-round, be self-aware of what you can do to convince your audience that you *do* deserve the 1.** Instead of falling back into a self-deprecating attitude at home, actively prove yourself wrong. After taking these steps, you will become the best version of yourself you can be.



**Thank You, and
Don't Be Afraid of
Your Own
Greatness!**