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SOAPBOX challenge

2026
manual





Soapbox Challenge

2026 manual

Table of Contents

1. What's new in SBC 2026 ?	3
2. Participation – students and costs	5
3. What does the day look like?	7
4. What should the speech look like?	9
5. Scoring criteria	10
6. The Soapbox Challenge and its goals	13
7. About us	16
8. FAQs	17





Soapbox Challenge

2026 manual

1. What's new in SBC 2026?

Recap SBC 2025

Last year we introduced the new format, with extensive feedback, the mentoring program and the multiple rounds including “short-prep” rounds during the day.



- We pair each participant with an upper-year student (participating in the National Debate League) who will act as their **mentor**. This mentor is allowed to help during preparation time.



- There are **three rounds** of which one is a prepared speech and two are **short-prep** rounds. Participants will prepare this speech on the day itself, half an hour before the round. Each participant's **lowest round score will be excluded**.

In 2026 only one thing changes:

No regional preliminary round!

This academic year, we are unable to hold multiple regional rounds in addition to a Finals' Day. Our aim is to reinstate this format the following year. For 2026, however, **schools will send their selected students directly to a single, larger Finals' Day**. To accommodate all participants within one event, the Finals' Day will take place on a Saturday.



Soapbox Challenge

2026 manual

2. Participation - students and costs

Each school is responsible for selecting up to three students to participate in the Soapbox Finals' Day. The method of selection is entirely at the school's discretion. Students may be chosen from the same or different year levels, provided they are not above the third grade.

On the Finals' Day on the 28th of March, competition rounds will be mixed across year levels. However, when awarding prizes, results will be differentiated by grade.

Costs

Each participating school pays a fee of **200 euros (excl. 21% VAT)**, regardless of whether they send one, two or three students. However, if a school serves as a host, the registration fee will be waived. Please contact us if you are interested in hosting as a school.

Deadline & cancellation

The deadline for signing up is Friday **February 13th, 2026**. You may cancel without any cost up until this date. Afterward, the participation fee will be charged, and we recommend that the school either sends a participant or finds a replacement.



Soapbox Challenge

2026 manual

3. What does the day look like?

During the Soapbox Challenge Finals' Day, students will participate in **one long-prep and two short-prep rounds**. After these three rounds, the best students advance to a plenary Finals' round. Each student will be matched with a **student mentor**. Mentors will offer tips and help students feel more at ease, fostering a connection between older and younger students.

In each round, students will be assigned to a room with judges and 5 to 7 other competitors. Students will present their speeches in a **random order** from behind a lectern. After each speech, **feedback** will be provided. While scores will not be shared immediately, they will determine the rankings and who advances to the finals. The top 3 speakers in each room will be announced by the jury chair.

Food

We will provide some lunch and snacks.

Schedule

The schedule will be shared with the participating schools once it is finalized. The event is expected to run from approximately 10:00 to 17:00.



Soapbox Challenge

2026 manual

4. What should the speech look like?

Students will deliver **multiple speeches** on the competition day, alternating between short-prep and long-prep speeches. Long-prep assignments will be provided in advance, allowing students to prepare at home. Short-prep rounds require on-the-day preparation. This format reduces the pressure of a single speech and challenges students to demonstrate their quick thinking and public speaking skills.

- Each speech will last **3 minutes**.
- Jury members will indicate the remaining time using hand signals.
- After the 3-minute mark, speakers have 15 seconds to conclude their speech.
- Students may bring **notes**; however, only paper notes are permitted unless a computer or phone is required for visual disabilities. We recommend using keywords instead of writing out the entire speech. Students are allowed to use the timer or stopwatch feature on their phones during their speeches.
- Participants are not permitted to use **PowerPoint** or any other presentation software.





Soapbox Challenge

2026 manual

4. What should the speech look like?

Long-prep round

- Students are allowed to conduct research and seek help during preparation. However, the final speech must be the student's original work.
- Students must use their creativity to take a stance on a theme and use their public speaking skills to effectively communicate their message. Students are required to develop their own topic and perspective.

Theme: 'Dear Prime Minister..'

Dear prime minister, you should know that...

This theme invites you to imagine speaking directly to the leader of your country. What would you say if the Prime Minister had to listen to you? It's a chance to share your ideas, dreams, and frustrations.

Decide a clear purpose for the speech.

- For example: Share a personal story, highlight an overlooked problem that deserves more attention, offer criticism of existing policies or give advice or propose new ideas for the future.
- The speech can be serious, humorous, or imaginative—but it should always make clear why this message matters.





Soapbox Challenge

2026 manual

4. What should the speech look like?

Short-prep round

- Students will have **30 minutes to prepare** a 3-minute speech.
- During preparation, students receive coaching from their mentor, but they must deliver the speech independently.
- Use of the internet is **NOT** permitted during short-prep rounds.
- Students will be given a specific speech assignment on the day of the competition. With limited time, the focus is on public speaking skills rather than developing a stance or topic.

The two short-prep assignments will be:

Assignment #1: "Skills for life"

What's an important life skill you don't learn in school? Choose one skill from the list and explain why it deserves a place in the curriculum. But remember: if you add it, one existing subject has to go. Which one—and why?

Assignment #2: "Unusual dream job"

In this assignment, imagine you're applying for a strange but interesting job, and it's up to you to prove you're the right person for it.





Soapbox Challenge

2026 manual

5. Scoring criteria

- Accent and dress code are not considered in scoring
- Judging is conducted objectively, without linking speeches to personal opinions or values
- We value authenticity and originality
- To help reduce stress, each participant’s lowest round score will be excluded from their final score during the preliminary rounds.

Presentation

The use of intonation, pauses, diction, pronunciation, volume, contact with audience, use of gestures, body language

50	Insufficient Lack of character, dull, overly reliant on reading, awkward, inaudible
60	Poor Minimal audience engagement, stumbling, inconsistent volume, lack of vocal variety or pacing
70	Reasonable Seeks audience contact, uses varied voice and gestures, clear areas for improvement
80	Good Captivating, natural and confident, minimal stuttering, style complements content
90	Excellent Compelling, memorable, and masterful presentation



Soapbox Challenge

2026 manual

5. Scoring criteria

Content and structure

Purpose, relevance, original approach, explanation, analysis, organization, signaling language, use of examples, facts, anecdotes,

50	Insufficient Incoherent, disjointed, no clear structure or points
60	Poor Flawed structure, superficial content with few valid points, lacks illustrative elements
70	Reasonable Coherent with recognizable structure, some variety and illustrations
80	Good Strong, well-structured points with effective use of illustrations and rhetorical devices
90	Excellent Flowing, engaging narrative with tension and surprises, original and inspiring. Points are spot-on





Soapbox Challenge

2026 manual

5. Scoring criteria

Role fulfillment

Aside from good presentation, content and structure, we believe the speech should fit the brief. This is why we use the last criterion, role fulfillment. This criterion only matters if the speech does not fit the brief and will result in points being deducted.

- 10 = Foul play: Did not fulfill the brief, resulting in an unfair advantage
- 5 = Unfulfilled: Did not fulfill the brief but did not result in an advantage
- 0 = Good: Successfully fulfilled the brief

Language proficiency

Points are deducted for lacking proficiency because effective public speaking requires both clear content and articulate use of English. This ensures students train the standards expected in a bilingual setting.

Vocabulary, grammatical correctness, idiomatic range, register, fluency, pronunciation

- 10 = Language significantly hinders the speech's quality
- 5 = Language somewhat hinders the speech's quality
- 0 = Good proficiency in English





Soapbox Challenge

2026 manual

6. The Soapbox Challenge

The Soapbox Challenge (SBC) is organized by **NUFFIC**, **DebatUnie** and **The Oracy Institute** and is designed to enhance TIO students' oracy and public speaking skills by providing a competitive platform that encourages growth and offers constructive feedback. Beyond the competition itself, we aim to inspire both students and teachers to actively improve these skills. To support this, we provide lesson materials, practice assignments, and, upon request, targeted (paid) workshops in collaboration with DebatUnie and The Oracy Institute. If you are interested in a workshop, please send us an email.

Core values SBC

Growth and formative development

While the Soapbox Challenge is inherently competitive, it is primarily a learning experience. Previously, feedback was not as integral to the process, but by conducting speeches in smaller rooms with more judges, we have made constructive feedback a priority.



Soapbox Challenge

2026 manual

Core values SBC

● Level playing field

We recognize that some students have access to more resources, allowing them to practice and receive feedback more frequently. To mitigate this advantage, we provide all participants with feedback, mentors (more about this later) and we introduced the short-prep rounds in 2025.

● Oracy skills

The Soapbox Challenge is a speech contest, not a reading contest. While many great speeches are meticulously crafted, we believe that reading and writing skills are already well-covered in school curricula. The SBC is one of the few opportunities students have to focus solely on oracy, which is why we have introduced short-prep rounds and changed the speech assignments.





Soapbox Challenge

2026 manual

7. About us

For the first time, NUFFIC is partnering with two organizations specializing in teaching debate, critical thinking, and public speaking skills for the Soapbox Challenge.



The DebatUnie is dedicated to enhancing debate and citizenship education throughout the Dutch-speaking region. Our aim is to make debate education accessible to every student at every level and in every school. Among our endeavors is the organization of the Benelux debate competition, the largest Dutch debate competition for high school students. Together with the Oracy Institute, we seek to extend these opportunities to students studying in English.



At the Oracy Institute, we are passionate about empowering students with the skills necessary for success in both academia and life. Drawing from our background in competitive debating, we recognize the profound impact such skills can have.

Additionally we have previously organized the International Schools Debating League, because opportunities for debating in English seemed to be lacking.



NUFFIC's goal with the Soapbox Challenge is to give bilingual education students an extra opportunity to shine. We believe this event actively supports the TTO pillars of personal development, global citizenship, and language proficiency. Participants not only enhance their public speaking skills but also build confidence and engage with global issues in a meaningful way.



Soapbox Challenge

2026 manual

8. FAQs

Who will be the Soapbox mentors?

The mentors will be bovenbouw students that participate in the National Debate League. This is a debate competition organized by the same organizations as the Soapbox Challenge.

How many rounds are there on one day?

On one day, a participant will deliver speeches in three rounds. Two of these speeches will be prepared on the day itself, one will be prepared in advance.

For scoring, what does “fit to brief” mean?

A participant may deliver a speech with strong arguments, a persuasive speaking style, and a clear structure, yet fail to meet the requirements of the assignment. To prevent this, points will be deducted if your speech does not adhere to the guidelines outlined in the assignment.

We understand that you may still have questions. Please feel free to email them to schools@soapboxchallenge.nl

