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SOAPBOX challenge

2027
manual





Soapbox Challenge

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1. The Soapbox Challenge

The Soapbox Challenge is a national public speaking competition for lower year (onderbouw) students from bilingual schools across the Netherlands.

Soapbox format

There are **three rounds** of which one is a prepared speech (**long-prep**) 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**. More information can be found in this manual.

Changes?

There are no changes to the Soapbox Challenge compared to 2026, except the explicit mention that since there is no National Debate League, there will also be no NDL mentor students.



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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 17th 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.

Deadline & cancellation

The deadline for signing up is Friday **February 12th, 2027**. 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.



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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.

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. This is only for participants and teachers.

Schedule

The schedule will be shared with the participating schools once it is finalized. The event is expected to run from approximately 9:30 to 17:00.



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4. What should the speech look like?

Students will deliver **multiple speeches** on the competition day. 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.





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- Bringing a **dictionary** is allowed.
- Participants are not permitted to use **PowerPoint** or any other presentation software.

Long-prep speeches

- 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.

The theme will be published on the website before the 1st of November.

Past themes have included: "Dear Prime Minister..." and "The Most Underestimated Problem I know".





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Short-prep speeches

- Students will have **30 minutes to prepare** a 3-minute speech.
- Help during preparation is NOT permitted.
- Use of the internet is NOT permitted.
- Students will receive a specific speech assignment on the day of the competition. With limited preparation time, the focus is on public speaking skills rather than research and writing.
- Before the event, we publish practice list of topics to prepare with at home. On the day itself, they will receive a different list of topics to choose from. The assignment stays the same, only the topics change.

The two assignments will be published on the website before the 1st of November.

Past assignments have included: "Unusual Dream Job", "Skills for Life" and "Time to Roast".



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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



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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





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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





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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.



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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.





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7. About us

For the Soapbox Challenge, NUFFIC has partnered with two organisations specialising in debate, critical thinking, and public speaking.



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.



The Oracy Institute, is a Rotterdam-based educational organization specialized in debate, critical thinking, and public speaking. Run by international debate champions, the institute empowers both students and educators through interactive training and competitive events. Their programs are designed to build confidence, sharpen analytical skills, and help the next generation effectively express their ideas.



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.



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8. FAQs

How to prepare for the short-prep round?

The best way to practice is to use the practice assignment on the website. Set a 30-minute timer and write a speech without any help or internet access, just like on the day itself. The more you practice under time pressure, the more natural it feels. It's less scary than it sounds, we promise!

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

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