

Common Core Standards

Meeting Common Core State Standards through Debating and Speaking Activities

The National Forensic League promotes speaking and debating education across the nation. This happens primarily by supporting educators, and recognizing middle and high school interscholastic participation.

Educators guide students in the development of content and practice of delivery for oral presentations through an individualized coaching model. This happens either as part of a curricular course offering, or as a co-curricular after school, academic sport, where the precepts of conditioning, practice, and motivation through competition are all present. Contests are often held on weekends and/or evenings, offering experiential learning and feedback in a “multi-institutional setting,” as so eloquently stated by Professor Brendan Kelly, Ph.D. of the University of West Florida and collegiate National Forensic Association.

Forensic competition events fall into two classifications for the purpose of analyzing how they meet Common Core State Standards:

- **Debate and Public Speaking:** includes debate events, oratorical, informative, and extemporaneous speaking; requires students to construct thoughtful advocacies about timely issues and challenges.
- **Interpretive Performance of Literature:** requires students to synthesize passages from literary selections, and perform their own unique interpretation of the characterization and story to convey a particular theme or message.

The benefits of speech and debate education are well documented by decades of research. To access this research, see our white pages about speech and debate education, available online at [Advocate Speech & Debate](#). These resources demonstrate how speech and debate education provides powerful instructional and assessment tools for advancing goals required by such measures as No Child Left Behind.

While several reforms in education have come and gone, the movement toward standards and outcomes endures, and has received enhanced attention through the grassroots state-level initiated Common Core movement. The Common Core State Standards emphasize development and mastery of skills over content knowledge, which tends to be more arbitrary and contextual. Skills in public speaking and debating are as critical as reading and writing, and perhaps even more in the 21st century, where the Internet has become more than just static text-based websites and emails. Audio and video communication has plunged literacy in critical listening and effective speaking back to the forefront of needed skills, and to thrive as a nation in the new global knowledge economy, we must foster students who are proficient with these necessary skills.

This document specifically explores how speaking and debating activities meet the Common Core State Standards in the following areas:

- Reading Standards for Informational Text (RI)
- Reading Standards for History/Social Studies (RH)
- Writing Standards (W)
- Speaking and Listening Standards (SL)
- Language Standards (L)

Standards Met: Debate, Oratorical & Extemporaneous Speaking

| Skills and Activities | Standards Met |
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| <p>Students participating in debating and public speaking activities must research extensively to bolster their credibility. When writing speeches, students must construct arguments that explain or persuade, proving those arguments with substantive evidence. Research does not happen fleetingly. It is a persistent process, and students must constantly revise their speeches and debate cases with new, and relevant information.</p> | <p>W.12.7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.</p> <p>W.12.8. Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.</p> <p>W.12.9. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.</p> <p>RI.12.7. Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.</p> <p>RI.12.10. Read and comprehend literary nonfiction at the high end of the grades 11–CCR text complexity band independently and proficiently.</p> <p>RH.12.7. Integrate and evaluate multiple</p> |

| Skills and Activities | Standards Met |
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| | <p>sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.</p> <p>RH.12.10. By the end of grade 12, read and comprehend history/social studies texts in the grades 11–CCR text complexity band independently and proficiently.</p> |
| <p>Debaters and speakers analyze research found for its application to arguments constructed. Students also should show sensitivity to diverse views and cultures, as well as historical factors that influence perspective is key in building a credible speech or debate case. Finally, they must understand the ethical importance of honesty, citing sources they have consulted.</p> | <p>RI.12.1. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.</p> <p>RI.12.2. Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.</p> <p>RI.12.3. Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.</p> <p>RH.12.1. Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.</p> |
| <p>Building a working vocabulary pertaining to an issue is important in any act of communication, and particularly when trying to sway an audience – or judge in speaking or debating competition. Often, conflict with an issue arises through semantics alone, and being able to frame an issue through a well-reasoned interpretation of meaning is an important skill.</p> | <p>RI.12.4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines faction in Federalist No. 10).</p> <p>RH.12.4. Determine the meaning of words and</p> |

| Skills and Activities | Standards Met |
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| | <p>phrases as they are used in a text, including analyzing how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines faction in Federalist No. 10).</p> |
| <p>Public speaking, and especially debating, examines issues of importance in a civil society. Students use myriad political and legal nonfiction works to explicate matters of public policy, explaining geopolitical and economic factors that influence the inherent forces at work with a particular speech or debate topic. Where applicable, weigh interdependence of foreign policies as they relate to peace, human rights, trade and global ecology.</p> | <p>W.12.9b. Apply grades 11–12 Reading standards to literary nonfiction (e.g., “Delineate and evaluate the reasoning in seminal U.S. texts, including the application of constitutional principles and use of legal reasoning [e.g., in U.S. Supreme Court Case majority opinions and dissents] and the premises, purposes, and arguments in works of public advocacy [e.g., The Federalist, presidential addresses]”).</p> <p>RH.12.2. Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.</p> <p>RH.12.5. Analyze in detail how a complex primary source is structured, including how key sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text contribute to the whole.</p> <p>RI.12.8. Delineate and evaluate the reasoning in seminal U.S. texts, including the application of constitutional principles and use of legal reasoning (e.g., in U.S. Supreme Court majority opinions and dissents) and the premises, purposes, and arguments in works of public advocacy (e.g., The Federalist, presidential addresses).</p> <p>RI.12.9. Analyze seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century foundational U.S. documents of historical and literary significance (including The Declaration of Independence, the Preamble to the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and Lincoln’s</p> |

| Skills and Activities | Standards Met |
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| | Second Inaugural Address) for their themes, purposes, and rhetorical features. |
| <p>One of the most important skills public speaking and debating teaches students is to select and excerpt relevant information to support their ideas. This requires a careful evaluation of the validity of sources, any inherent biases, and corroborating information. Debaters also must be prepared to challenge the credibility of their opponents' evidence.</p> | <p>RI.12.5. Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.</p> <p>RI.12.6. Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text.</p> <p>RH.12.3. Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.</p> <p>RH.12.6. Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.</p> <p>RH.12.8. Evaluate an author's premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.</p> <p>RH.12.9. Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.</p> |
| <p>Stephen Toulmin's approach to reasoning in argumentation forms the foundation for points debaters make, for persuading an audience, or for offering a specific position on a given question. In this, students must formulate a specific claim, offer evidence to back that claim, analyze the issue through the lens of the evidence, and explain the overarching impact</p> | <p>W.12.1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.</p> <p>W.12.1a. Introduce precise, knowledgeable claim(s), establish the significance of the claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from</p> |

| Skills and Activities | Standards Met |
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| <p>that argument has on the issue at hand. Students must be aware of counterarguments, particularly in debate, where they must defend against them.</p> | <p>alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that logically sequences claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.</p> <p>W.12.1b. Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly and thoroughly, supplying the most relevant evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience’s knowledge level, concerns, values, and possible biases.</p> |
| <p>While public speaking and debating activities seem inherently focused on listening and speaking literacies, effective writing skills to produce coherent ideas that are shared orally are critical. Care must be taken when outlining a speech or debate case to consider the overall coherence and cohesion of ideas, so that an audience can follow the speaker’s lines of reasoning. Speakers who truly want their words to be memorable employ a variety of stylistic devices to figuratively illustrate their ideas. Finally, since every speaking and debating event has its own particular set of rules and audience focus, students must customize their written notes or manuscript to specific demands and/or judging paradigms.</p> | <p>W.12.1d. Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.</p> <p>W.12.1c. Use words, phrases, and clauses as well as varied syntax to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims.</p> <p>W.12.1e. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.</p> <p>W.12.2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.</p> <p>W.12.2a. Introduce a topic; organize complex ideas, concepts, and information so that each new element builds on that which precedes it to create a unified whole.</p> <p>W.12.2b. Develop the topic thoroughly by selecting the most significant and relevant facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples</p> |

| Skills and Activities | Standards Met |
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| | <p>appropriate to the audience’s knowledge of the topic.</p> <p>W.12.2c. Use appropriate and varied transitions and syntax to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships among complex ideas and concepts.</p> <p>W.12.2d. Use precise language, domain-specific vocabulary, and techniques such as metaphor, simile, and analogy to manage the complexity of the topic.</p> <p>W.12.2e. Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.</p> <p>W.12.2f. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented (e.g., articulating implications or the significance of the topic).</p> <p>W.12.4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.</p> |
| <p>Writing and preparing to speak is an ongoing, organic process of brainstorming, drafting, and revising. Students constantly react to feedback they receive from their judges and coaches. Public speaking and debating activities rely heavily on the use of technology to develop and revise speeches and debate cases, to collaborate with peers, particularly as students call up digitally stored research, and old drafts of speeches and debate cases, which they revise.</p> | <p>W.12.5. Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1–3 up to and including grades 11–12 on page 54.)</p> <p>W.12.6. Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new</p> |

| Skills and Activities | Standards Met |
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| | <p>arguments or information.</p> <p>W.12.10. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.</p> |
| <p>All speaking and debating activities involve the exchange of ideas, which happens as a result of the presenter engaging with audiences while speaking, influencing viewpoints of judges and other contestants. Participants take notes during debates, cross-examine one another, and focus attention to arguments made and the credibility evidence used. In interscholastic competition, all of this happens in a “multi-institutional setting” (Brendan Kelly, Ph.D.), maximizing reach of the exchange of perspectives. In a classroom or practice setting, instructors encourage students to evaluate their peers’ ideas, and offer feedback, bolstering the engagement in speaking and listening.</p> | <p>SL.12.1. Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.</p> <p>SL.12.1a. Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.</p> <p>SL.12.1b. Work with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision-making, set clear goals and deadlines, and establish individual roles as needed.</p> <p>SL.12.1c. Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.</p> <p>SL.12.1d. Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.</p> <p>SL.12.2. Integrate multiple sources of</p> |

| Skills and Activities | Standards Met |
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| | <p>information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.</p> <p>SL.12.3. Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used.</p> <p>SL.12.4. Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.</p> |
| <p>Some speaking and debating events allow students to use visual supporting material to augment audience understanding of content. Even where the rules do not allow for this, students can use textual tactics to illustrate their ideas.</p> | <p>SL.12.5. Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.</p> |
| <p>Debaters and public speakers must use language effectively, and with a formal register, to communicate their ideas. This impacts their credibility in the eyes of the judges who evaluate them, as well as their peers who listen and learn from one another. Figurative language can help students carry a greater impact with their words, making their message resonate better in the minds of their judges and peers. When writing debate cases or speech manuscripts, students use correct conventions of written language.</p> | <p>SL.12.6. Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating a command of formal English when indicated or appropriate. (See grades 11–12 Language standards 1 and 3 for specific expectations.)</p> <p>L.12.1. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.</p> <p>L.12.1a. Apply the understanding that usage is a matter of convention, can change over time, and is sometimes contested.</p> |

| Skills and Activities | Standards Met |
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| | <p>L.12.1b. Resolve issues of complex or contested usage, consulting references (e.g., Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary of English Usage, Garner’s Modern American Usage) as needed.</p> <p>L.12.2. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.</p> <p>L.12.2a. Observe hyphenation conventions.</p> <p>L.12.2.b. Spell correctly.</p> <p>L.12.3. Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.</p> <p>L.12.3a. Vary syntax for effect, consulting references (e.g., Tufte’s Artful Sentences) for guidance as needed; apply an understanding of syntax to the study of complex texts when reading.</p> <p>L.12.4. Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grades 11–12 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.</p> <p>L.12.4a. Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence, paragraph, or text; a word’s position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.</p> <p>L.12.4b. Identify and correctly use patterns of word changes that indicate different meanings or parts of speech (e.g., conceive, conception, conceivable).</p> <p>L.12.4c. Consult general and specialized reference materials (e.g., dictionaries,</p> |

| Skills and Activities | Standards Met |
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| | <p>glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning, its part of speech, its etymology, or its standard usage.</p> <p>L.12.4d. Verify the preliminary determination of the meaning of a word or phrase (e.g., by checking the inferred meaning in context or in a dictionary).</p> <p>L.12.5. Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.</p> <p>L.12.5a. Interpret figures of speech (e.g., hyperbole, paradox) in context and analyze their role in the text.</p> <p>L.12.5b. Analyze nuances in the meaning of words with similar denotations.</p> <p>L.12.6. Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.</p> |

Standards Met: Literary Interpretive Performance

| Skills and Activities | Standards Met |
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| <p>When students choose a literary text to perform, they must consider the themes, characterizations, setting and author’s overall message. They then draw upon this information to select passages to form a “cutting” appropriate to the time</p> | <p>RI.12.1. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves</p> |

| Skills and Activities | Standards Met |
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| <p>constraints of competition, delving into the themes and meanings to create meaningful performances that explore various facets of the human condition, bringing the author’s intent to life. The performer must select the most poignant passages to perform, to drive expression of their central thematic concept, and to show character progression and/or progression of ideas. Performers do not write the text they interpret, but they do craft and arrange their cutting in such a way that demands the same critical thinking skills employed in writing. The narrative and/or dialogue should acknowledge human motivations and conflicts.</p> | <p>matters uncertain.</p> <p>RI.12.2. Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.</p> <p>RI.12.3. Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.</p> <p>W.12.3c. Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole and build toward a particular tone and outcome (e.g., a sense of mystery, suspense, growth, or resolution).</p> <p>W.12.3e. Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.</p> <p>RI.12.6. Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text.</p> <p>SL.12.4. Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.</p> <p>W.12.5. Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose</p> |

| Skills and Activities | Standards Met |
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| | and audience. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1–3 up to and including grades 11–12 on page 54.) |
| <p>The performer derives themes from literature to craft an original introduction that prepares an audience to understand tone and purpose of the interpretive performance. When preparing to interpret texts, performers reflect on impressions gained from those texts, to convey those ideas.</p> | <p>RI.12.4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text.</p> <p>RI.12.5. Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.</p> <p>W.12.3a. Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation and its significance, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.</p> |
| <p>Writing and preparing performance is an ongoing, organic process of thematic analysis, cutting, practicing, and adjusting. Students constantly react to feedback they receive from their judges and coaches. Performers rely heavily on the use of technology to develop and revise cuttings, to collaborate with peers, particularly as students call up old drafts of cuttings, which they revise. Competition motivates students to incorporate tactics and ideas they encounter from listening to their peers perform, to improve their own performance.</p> | <p>W.12.6. Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information.</p> <p>W.12.10. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.</p> <p>SL.12.1. Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one- on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.</p> |

| Skills and Activities | Standards Met |
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| | <p>SL.12.1a. Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.</p> <p>SL.12.1b. Work with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision- making, set clear goals and deadlines, and establish individual roles as needed.</p> <p>SL.12.1c. Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.</p> <p>SL.12.1d. Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.</p> <p>SL.12.2. Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.</p> <p>SL.12.3. Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used.</p> |