



UNITED STATES ACADEMIC DECATHLON®

COACH HANDBOOK

**United States Academic Decathlon®
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FOREWORD

A Letter from the USAD Executive Director

The United States Academic Decathlon® is the sponsoring organization of the competition and as such provides the topics for study and the study materials which are used to prepare for the tests. The United States Academic Decathlon, as the premier academic competition in the nation, is successful because of dedicated coaches working with students engaged in achieving an identified goal. The coach, as the catalyst of the team, acts to prepare the students academically, motivates the students to excel at their highest potential, and molds them into a team striving toward a goal. It is a challenging, time-consuming endeavor, but it is one of the most rewarding experiences a professional educator can encounter.

This handbook has been prepared to help coaches establish and maintain a successful Academic Decathlon® program in their schools.

Included in this handbook are the following areas of concern that all coaches need to address:

- Recruitment and selection of a team
- Preparation of a team: Resources, strategies, suggested calendar
- Potential funding support
- Competition events
- Scoring

We hope that this information will prove to be valuable to all coaches, veterans and new alike, and that through the coaches' efforts, the Academic Decathlon® program will continue to grow and flourish in the nation.

Should you have additional questions or need further information regarding your coaching responsibilities, please contact your local competition manager, your state director, or the USAD office. We are here to help you with your coaching responsibilities.

Les Martisko, Ph.D.
Executive Director

COACHING ACADEMIC DECATHLON®

Coaching Academic Decathlon is a richly rewarding and challenging endeavor. Participation in USAD provides a plethora of experiences for both academic and personal enrichment for students and coaches alike. USAD is a perfect forum for pursuing academic excellence, building team interaction, developing cooperative interpersonal relationships, and realizing personal potential.

The coach is an integral component in the USAD program. Coaches organize teams, nurture academic skills, provide opportunities for research and study, and foster individual writing, speaking, and listening skills. In sponsoring a high school Decathlon team, coaches have an unparalleled opportunity to study and integrate academic disciplines and to inspire bright young students to excel in a variety of academic challenges.

ABOUT USAD

In 1968 Dr. Robert Peterson, former Superintendent of Schools in Orange County, California, created the Academic Decathlon®. He believed that everyone's learning potential could be maximized through competitive challenge, and the success of the Academic Decathlon® has proven him correct. Today the Academic Decathlon® is considered the premier high school team academic competition in the United States, and it allows outstanding student achievement to be showcased nationwide.

The United States Academic Decathlon®, a nonprofit association with a corporate Board of Directors, was founded in 1981 in Orange County, California. Following is the mission statement of USAD:

The purpose of the United States Academic Decathlon® is to develop and provide academic competitions, curriculum, and assessment to promote learning and academic excellence through teamwork among students of all achievement levels.

The Academic Decathlon® is unique among academic competitions because it involves students at the "A," "B," and "C" academic levels working together as a team to achieve a specific goal. The impact of Decathlon participation on the "C" students is particularly significant, and many "C" students have improved their personal academic achievement after participating in the Decathlon. In addition, the Decathlon includes students from grades nine through twelve, giving the younger students a chance to become involved in an academic competition early in their high school careers.

The purposes of the Academic Decathlon are to

- develop a greater respect for knowledge
- promote wholesome competition in academic areas of study and interest
- stimulate intellectual growth and achievement
- encourage public interest in and awareness of academic excellence in American schools

Currently, there are Academic Decathlon programs in 38 states. USAD would like to see the program expanded to all fifty states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico, and efforts are being directed toward this goal.

USAD VISION STATEMENT

USAD provides students of all learning levels the opportunity to excel academically through team competition.

UNITED STATES ACADEMIC DECATHLON® MISSION STATEMENT

The purpose of the United States Academic Decathlon is to develop and provide academic competitions, curriculum, and assessment to promote learning and academic excellence through teamwork among students of all achievement levels.

UNITED STATES ACADEMIC DECATHLON CORE VALUES

As a premier national scholastic competition for high school students, United States Academic Decathlon believes in:

- The academic growth of students; Challenging multidisciplinary learning;
- Teamwork as a means to achieve self-knowledge and life-skills development;
- Providing equal opportunities for students of varying achievement levels;
- High standards of honesty and integrity;
- Transparency in our relations and interactions with all of our stakeholders;
- Excellence in our programs, services and activities; and,
- Respect for diverse points of view.

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THE ACADEMIC DECATHLON® TEAM

Honor: 3.80 – 4.00

Scholastic: 3.20 – 3.799

Varsity: 3.199 and below

A team consists of nine full-time students from the ninth through twelfth grades of the same high school. Each team is made up of three Honor students, three Scholastic students, and three Varsity students in accordance with the above grade point average definitions. Contestants may compete in a higher division than their own grade point average category but not in a lower division.

Each team member competes in all ten events of the Decathlon and is eligible for individual medals in all ten events. Only six scores count for the final team standing in the competition—the top two Honor scores, the top two Scholastic scores, and the top two Varsity scores. A school may therefore enter with fewer than nine members and still be eligible for team awards as long as there are at least two Honor, two Scholastic, and two Varsity members.

The specific guidelines for calculating GPA to place students in one of the three divisions are discussed later in this manual.

Building a Team

Team Dynamics

One of the most important components of success in Academic Decathlon is having clear-cut goals. These goals must be set not only by the coach, but also by team members. Team members must feel that they are a part of the process—planning, researching, peer-teaching, or motivating. The more involved students become in the process, the more excited they become about the products they produce and the scores they ultimately earn.

Team Philosophy

Building a successful team is a collaborative effort. Coaches and team members work best together when everyone understands the team goals and feels a part of the decision-making process. Developing a team philosophy at the beginning of the competition season is a great way to develop an effective environment.

Both coaches and students must collaborate in the development of a team philosophy. It is imperative that the students feel that they are involved in goal setting and team planning. Each team member must have both personal goals and team goals.

One way to begin an Academic Decathlon season is by deciding what the coach and the team want from the Decathlon experience and how these goals can best be met. Sometimes it helps to look at last year's team and the performance of team members. Returning members may want to establish both individual and team goals based on previous competition seasons. Team members should think about all ten events and, based on a realistic analysis of the present level of mastery of each event, set goals for upcoming competitions. Setting goals for practice competitions, mock competitions, and scrimmages with other schools will help individual members reach their potential.

About a month before the first official meet, it is a good idea to revisit the individual goals and establish revised objectives for overall team performance. Having a plan for success is a great way to focus students and coaches on the task ahead. Success may be winning a competition, qualifying for the next meet, or just raising individual or team scores in one or more events.

Recruiting Academic Decathletes

One of the most important jobs of a coach is team recruiting. Ultimately, nothing will matter as much as the students who participate in the program. Finding students who enjoy Decathlon and become involved and committed is well worth the time and energy a coach will spend on recruiting. As coaches search for potential Decathletes, remember that this program is developing life-long learners and that coaches have the potential to change lives.

Here are just a few recruiting strategies that might work for your team:

1. Advertise in the school paper and in course selection packets handed out to students in the spring when they are making selections for the next school year. Use this time to introduce the Academic Decathlon® Program to students during class assemblies and homerooms, or advisory periods.
2. Contact teachers of honors and gifted and talented students and ask them to tell their students about the program. They can advertise a preliminary meeting for those who express interest—and they can keep a special eye out for varsity candidates, who tend to be hard to recruit.
3. Use the Decathletes who are already committed to the Academic Decathlon® program to help find other students (friends, siblings, neighbors) who are potential recruits. The best people to locate Decathletes are almost always other Decathletes.
4. Review students' academic records, especially SAT, ACT, PSAT/NMSQT score reports.
5. Announce meetings on the school marquee; over the school's public address system; in posters, banners, and signs; at parent and community meetings (PTSA, Boosters' Club, etc.); in special school bulletins; in the school newspaper; and in newsletters to parents.
6. Have after-school meetings to introduce the program. Plan these meetings and always include food with instruction or information. Don't forget to have fun.
7. Send Decathletes to homerooms or advisory periods to tell students about the program. Invite them to attend scheduled meetings.
8. Conduct special recruitment meetings for students and for parents.
9. Conduct special activities to showcase the Academic Decathlon® such as Mock Super Quiz (Decathletes versus faculty; former Decathletes versus current Decathletes).
10. Display awards (especially newspaper Articles and pictures) won in previous Decathlon competitions.

The Profile of a Decathlete

All good Decathletes love learning—both the learning process and knowledge itself. Those who love learning for the sake of learning will be intrigued with studying new and diverse subjects in Decathlon. Remember that each student in each category must compete in all ten events and that their scores for all subjects count. Specialization is not an option.

General Category Profiles

- **Honor Students** should be disciplined, focused on team goals, and committed to working with varsity students. Because these students are generally quite ambitious, they may be involved in a variety of activities. They are usually well-organized and able to cope well with busy schedules. An eclectic honor student with diversified skills often serves as a great resource for the team.
- **Scholastic Students** are often the brightest students on the team, but they may also be a bit unmotivated (perhaps not to the same extent as varsity students). They are usually as capable as honor students, but less interested in grades. In order to attain their highest potential, they should be “pitted” against honor students in practice events and encouraged to elevate their performance to that level.
- **Varsity Students** are an eclectic group. Many are simply underachievers who, for one reason or another, are not motivated to make higher grades in the traditional classroom. Others simply struggle in one subject that brings down their GPA. Some of the best varsities, however, may have had little success academically. Many do not really feel the need for affirmation (they never have had it) and tend not to be “teacher pleasers.” Their grades simply do not reflect their innate abilities. These students, although posing special challenges for coaches, are often times the key to team success. Once these students begin to buy into the concept of working and being rewarded, they can become the most motivated team members. They also add variety and much needed humor to study sessions.

Advanced Placement, Gifted and Talented, and International Baccalaureate programs are always good places to look for Decathletes. It is important, however, also to consider students who, for one reason or another, are not involved in advanced academic classes. Be creative in your search for Decathletes; limiting team membership to specialized or advanced classes sometimes overlooks students with superb potential. Because USAD tests a variety of skill sets, it may be that the perfect team member is just “flying under the radar” in his or her scholastic career and is waiting for a challenge to present itself.

During the recruitment process, coaches must constantly be mindful of the categories in which students will compete. Some coaches conduct an informal assessment by asking students to complete a grade calculation sheet. This early assessment allows coaches to maintain a balance of Honor, Scholastic, and Varsity students.

Recruiting Varsity Students

Because of the nature of these students, Varsity students generally do not just walk up to the Academic Decathlon® Coach and say “Hi, I am interested in your program, and by the way, I’m a Varsity student.” Coaches will probably spend as much time, or more, recruiting one or two good Varsity students as they spend finding twenty other Scholastic and Honor students.

Locating potential Varsity students can be expedited by soliciting advice from teachers who have the training to recognize these students and see their potential despite the lack of academic success they may have in the classroom. Teachers of gifted and talented or challenge programs, enrichment, college preparatory and International Baccalaureate are generally trained to identify these students. Coaches should ask these teachers to help encourage these students to participate. Coaches may also want to prepare a checklist that can be used to identify and access these students.

Characteristics of Successful Decathletes

Decathletes, merely by their participation in the USAD program, sometimes demonstrate a profile that makes them unique in the school community. Although individuals vary, successful Decathletes generally demonstrate some of the following general characteristics:

- They enjoy learning—and being able to shape their own learning.
- They are often intrigued by new innovations, electronics, and games.
- They often read a great deal on their own, sometimes preferring non-traditional books and magazines.
- They enjoy timely one-on-one adult conversations and interactions.
- They may show keen powers of observation or have an eye for important details.
- They often have a “sense of the significant” and enjoy philosophical musings and ethical debates.
- They often take great pleasure in intellectual activity and enjoy intellectual banter and gamesmanship.
- They may have well-developed powers of abstraction, conceptualization, and synthesis; these Decathletes tend to be successful writers.
- They readily see cause-effect relationships and can make interdisciplinary connections.
- They often display a questioning attitude and seek information for its own sake as much as for its usefulness.
- They are often skeptical, critical, and evaluative—sometimes even a bit cynical. They are quick to spot inconsistencies.
- Their social and intellectual lives often merge as their social groups are shaped by their hobbies and extracurricular involvement.
- They often have a large storehouse of information about a variety of topics (sometimes quite diverse and trivia-based) and rather quick recall of that information.
- They often have a disdain for memorization, but can memorize quite effectively when so inclined.
- They readily grasp underlying principles and can often make valid generalizations about events, people, or objects.
- They may prioritize the abstract over the concrete—for example, preferring overarching concepts and ideas to organizational matters or timeliness.

- They quickly perceive similarities, differences, and anomalies.
- They tend to value uniqueness or individuality.
- They sometimes access complicated material by separating it into components and analyzing it systematically.

The Value of the Academic Decathlon® Program

The Decathlon experience is invaluable to students. No other program has the multi-dimensionality of the Decathlon program, thus reinforcing the competition “as the premier scholastic competition for high school students.”

For coaches and students alike, Academic Decathlon provides a unique forum for the development of academic skills in an interdisciplinary format. While the seven academic disciplines (Art, Music, Economics, Literature, Science, Math, and Social Science) and their fundamentals remain the same from year to year, the specific topical and thematic content changes significantly. This allows students who participate in Decathlon throughout high school to become immersed not only in the fundamentals of important academic disciplines, but to revisit them in fresh and challenging ways.

The USAD staff endeavors to provide curriculum and materials that serve to enrich the high school experience with a thoughtful in-depth exploration of content. From a yearly focus on the study of Flight (1988), Biotechnology (1995), Information Revolution (1997) to the study of the Documents of Freedom (1994), the American Civil War (2008) India (2016), to Water (2022), the Academic Decathlon® curriculum offers a unique experience for academic growth by interrelating the seven disciplines through topical and thematic study.

Perhaps the most rewarding part of the Academic Decathlon experience involves the student’s participation in the three subjective events (Essay, Interview, and Speech). These events provide Decathletes with practical, real-life experiences with written and oral communication, and equip them with skills that will be essential in their adult lives. Also of great value is the cooperative experience of team-building and working toward common goals with their peers. The Decathlon experience brings together academic and communication skills in a competitive framework that reinvigorates learning and develops essential interpersonal skills. Because each Decathlete participates in all ten Decathlon events, students participating in the program enjoy a well-rounded scholastic experience that enables them to develop their strengths and overcome weaknesses.

Competition Events

Before analyzing the specifics of team selection and team preparation, coaches must first consider the distinctive challenges presented by each of the ten events of the competition. Understanding the testing events and competition format will provide information important for preparation, and study and ultimately for the final team selection.

The Academic Decathlon consists of ten events: seven subject-area tests; a written essay; speeches—one prepared, one impromptu (in most competitions); an interview; and the Super Quiz™. The following is a brief explanation of each of these events:

Subject-area Tests

- Each test is thirty working minutes.
 - The questions for each test are based on the subject outline that appears in the Study Guide.
 - Scantron answer sheets are typically used.
 - Students are not penalized for guessing.
- **Specific Tests** (*Below are the amount of questions that are typical for the 2022-23 local, regional, and state competition tests. The tests at the National Finals may include additional questions or an adjustment of test time.*)
- Art: Fifty-item test(Ten questions based on art images)
 - Economics: Fifty-item test
 - Literature: Fifty-item test
 - Mathematics: Thirty-five-item test. Calculators allowed for this test only. See Exhibit B for a copy of the USAD Calculator Policy, which also can be found on the USAD web site.
 - Music: Fifty-item test (Twelve questions based on an auditory analysis)
 - Science: Fifty-item test
 - Social Science: Fifty-item test
 - Super Quiz [™] : Thirty-nine provided* (*Some competitions may use a different amount of items, however.)

See the USAD Practice Test Booklet for examples of the competition tests.

All test questions for the above tests will be based on the subject outlines including the stated percentages in the Study Guide. See the Preparing a Team section for a detailed listing of all study material.

Essay

- Fifty (working minutes)
- Students will be given three prompts from which to choose. The essay prompts may focus on any of the following subject areas: art, economics, literature, music, science, or social science. Each student selects one prompt on which to write.
- Trained essay readers use a published rubric to score the essays. See Exhibit D for a sample copy of the USAD Essay Scoring Rubric, which is used at the National Competition as well as many state and local competitions. Usually the readers will read holistically.

See the USAD Practice Test Booklet for sample prompts and a sample rubric.

Speech

General Information

- Judging - Students will usually be evaluated by three judges using an established rubric that appears on the Scantron scoring sheet. See Exhibit E.
- A timer, who may, or may not, be one of the judges—will also, be in the room.
- Students will stand to deliver their speeches.

Prepared Speech

- Topic: Must be the original work of the student, and it cannot have been used for any other competition other than the Academic Decathlon®. Note: Students who compete in the Decathlon for more than one year must prepare an original speech for each year. Coaches should work closely with their students in selecting an appropriate topic for their prepared speeches. It is best to avoid topics that are controversial, especially dealing with politics or religion, and adolescent issues.
- Length: 3½ to 4 minutes.
- Time signals will be used.
- Note cards may be used, but the speech must not be read.
- Props may not be used.

Impromptu Speech (included in most competitions)

- Topic: Students select a topic from a list of three impromptu topics.
- Length: 1½ to 2 minutes.
- Preparation time: One minute will be allowed for mental preparation.
- Time signals will be used.
- Notes that students make on their note cards may be used.
- Props may not be used.

The impromptu event can be stressful for Decathletes. Coaches will want to allow lots of practice time for their students, first with their teammates, then possibly in some of their classes, and finally with a panel of judges (teachers, counselors, etc.) in simulated competitions. The more practice the students get, the more comfortable they will be on the competition day. Coaches must not ignore this event.

Well in advance of the local competition, coaches should check with the competition manager regarding the format and rules for the local competition. These events will vary from competition to competition.

See the Academic Decathlon Study Guide for additional information regarding the speech event.

Interview

- Judging: Students will usually be judged by a panel of two or three judges who will use an established rubric that appears on the official Scantron scoring sheet. See Exhibit F. One of the judges will serve as timer. The judges and the student will be seated during the interview.
- Time: 4 to 7 minutes
- Guidelines for the judges regarding questions and conversations will generally be limited to the following: high school studies and activities, career and college plans, preparation and experiences in the Decathlon, travel, role models, and influential persons. In many competitions, students are asked to complete Student Activities Sheets or Resumes that list school and community activities, and these sheets are then given to the judges prior to the interview for their use in formulating appropriate questions.

This event can also be stressful for the students, and coaches should not neglect preparing their students for it. Provide many opportunities for mock interviews. As the event gets closer, simulate the actual interview process by providing adult interview teams to work with the students. The more practice the students receive, the better prepared they are going to be for the actual competition.

If a local competition requires a Student Activities Form, or résumé (See Exhibit G), coaches should work with their students on preparing these forms. Students should be told not to list any activities or events that they are not prepared to discuss. Also since this form is the first impression the judges receive of a student, it is recommended that the forms be typed or printed neatly. Watch grammar and spelling.

Well in advance of the local competition, coaches should check with the local competition manager about the format and rules for the local competition.

See the Academic Decathlon Study Guide for additional information about the interview event.

Super Quiz™

The Super Quiz™ is a stand alone event and scores will NOT be added to individual or team scores. The Super Quiz™ will include questions from the subjects of art, economics, literature, music, mathematics, science, and social science.

At the National Finals, the Super Quiz™ will use a responder pad system. This system will display the questions on a large screen for the audience as they are read aloud for the decathletes. Cumulative team scores will be displayed at the end of each relay round with the exception of the last round.

Relay order for the Super Quiz™ is: Varsities, Scholastics and Honors. For the National Finals, students will be coming to the stage area as a group in their respective GPA category. A total of 18 multiple-choice questions will be given for each relay round with five possible answer choices. Students will have 10 seconds to respond to each question with the exception of two mathematics questions in each round, which will have 20 seconds. Once the last answer choice has been read, team members can verbally communicate with each other (only non-verbal communication is allowed before the 10 second timer begins). Students should remember that you want only the team members at your station to hear your conversation.

During the Super Quiz™, students are expected to press the appropriate button on an electronic keypad. The electronic keypad system will be used to calculate the team scores for all rounds of the Super Quiz™ only. Students should designate one student in the group to enter the answer on the key pad.

All Varsity students will be tested with the first eighteen questions, followed by the Scholastic students answering the next eighteen questions, then the final eighteen questions of the competition will be for the Honors students.

Questions and subjects are randomized so that each group's questions will not be in the same order as the previous groups. Questions are worth one point each for a total of 54 points per team. The Super Quiz™ awards will be based on the keypad results for all rounds.

Coaches should check with the local competition manager well in advance of the actual competition to determine the format that will be used for the Super Quiz™ as well as to ascertain the number of questions used in this event at their state. The students need to be prepared for this event. Because it is a public event, it can cause anxiety for students.

GRADE POINT AVERAGE COMPUTATION

As mentioned earlier in this manual, the Academic Decathlon® program is unique in its division of teams into three categories: Honor, Scholastic, and Varsity, according to GPA. This allows members of each category to compete for awards and scholarships only against those competitors in their respective group.

Coaches must be acutely aware of structuring and preparing a team based on these GPA requirements established by USAD. A successful team must have competitors in all three categories. Coaches therefore should classify students early according to their categories. Initially, this can be done by having the students prepare an accurate accounting of coursework and their grades and by having them calculate their "Academic Decathlon® GPA" (not the same as their school GPA, as noted below).

In the formal registration process, however, coaches must verify grades through official transcripts. It is helpful to complete this verification process early in the year to make certain that the preliminary placement of team members in their respective categories is accurate. The official USAD guidelines are as follows:

The focus semesters for GPA computation go back two years prior to the present grade level of the student. In calculating GPAs, the following time periods are to be used

Twelfth Grade Students:	All of tenth grade, all of eleventh grade, plus summer sessions between tenth and eleventh and between eleventh and twelfth
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Eleventh Grade Students:	All of ninth grade, all of tenth grade, plus summer sessions between ninth and tenth and between tenth and eleventh
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Tenth Grade Students:	All of eighth grade, all of ninth grade, plus summer sessions between eighth and ninth and between ninth and tenth
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Ninth Grade Students:	All of eighth grade, plus summer sessions between eighth and ninth grade.
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Courses to Include/Exclude

GPA calculations for ninth-grade students include only their grades earned while in the eighth grade and in the summer session between eighth and ninth grade. The “focus semesters” for GPA computation for tenth, eleventh-, and twelfth-grade students go back two years prior to the present grade level of the contestant. If the contestant is a twelfth grader in September of the competition year, then the semesters that are used for GPA computation are all of the tenth grade, all of the eleventh grade, and the summer sessions between tenth and eleventh grades and between eleventh and twelfth grades. Likewise, if the contestant is in eleventh grade in the fall, the focus period for GPA computations includes the entire ninth grade, the entire tenth grade, and the summer sessions between ninth and tenth grades and between tenth and eleventh grades. If the contestant is in tenth grade in the fall, the focus period for GPA computations includes the entire eighth grade, all of the ninth grade, and the summer sessions between eighth and ninth grades and between ninth and tenth grades. Regardless of the system used to determine a GPA locally, these criteria must be followed to ensure uniformity and equity among all participants in the United States Academic Decathlon.

Grades for courses shall be used in GPA computations for United States Academic Decathlon competition purposes if the courses focus more than 50% of the time on understanding ideas, concepts, and theories of a specific discipline and the assessments are objective in nature. Grades for courses that directly deal with the theoretical content covered in the United States Academic Decathlon curriculum and competitive events should be included in GPA computations. However, a grade for a course focused specifically on the United States Academic Decathlon should NOT be included in GPA computations.

For example, only grades earned in the following academic subjects (Grades 7-11) are to be used in computing the GPA:

- Art: art appreciation, art history
- Business (non-skill classes)
- Computer science
- English/language arts (including humanities, journalism, and speech)
- Foreign language
- Mathematics: algebra, geometry, trigonometry, calculus, etc.
- Music: theory, appreciation, history
- Science
- Social Science (including economics, humanities)

Grades for courses shall NOT be used in GPA computations for Academic Decathlon competition purposes if they are hands-on, performance-based, skills type, non-book, lab-based, or more than 50% of course time is spent in service learning or internship. The skills that are developed in these courses tend to be more technical/vocational, and the majority of a student’s grade in these courses is subjective in nature.

For example, grades earned in the following subjects are **not** to be used in computing the GPA:

- Academic Decathlon class or equivalent class used to prepare a Decathlon team

- Physical Education or authorized substitute class
- Service, tutoring, peer counseling
- Skills classes in business, homemaking, industrial education
- Crafts
- Health

Inquiries regarding borderline courses should be referred to the State Director, who will make the determination based on the academic nature of the course, and who will then implement the decision uniformly throughout the state. The decision of the State Academic Decathlon[®] organization and/or the State Director with regard to which course grades are applied to the Academic Decathlon GPA tabulation is final. Questions regarding specific courses at a school should be directed to the local Academic Decathlon Competition Manager and/or the State Director.

Computation Guidelines

For alpha grades, the following scale is to be used:

A = 4

B = 3

C = 2

D = 1

Fail = 0

- All courses whether they are advanced placement, honors, regular, or remedial count the same in the GPA calculation. There is no weighting of grades for Decathlon computation of GPA even if weighting is the local district policy.
- Numerical grades appearing on transcripts in place of alpha grades must be converted to alpha grades according to the official conversion scale that appears on the school's official transcript or in the school's official profile.
- A Fail grade received during the focus semesters in a course that is not repeated is to be included in the GPA.
- For repeated courses, both grades, if they both occur during the focus semesters, are to be used in computing the GPA. If the original grade appears prior to the focus semesters, only the repeated mark is counted.
- Incomplete or pass/fail marks are not counted in computing the GPA unless the student received a fail, which appears on the transcript. Once a grade is given to remove an Incomplete, that grade must be included in the Decathlon GPA. If a school only assigns pass/fail grades, the State Director, in consultation with the USAD Administrator, will determine an evaluation scale.
- College courses (academic subjects only) are included in the GPA only if high school credit is given and the grades are recorded on a student's official high school transcript.

Special Student Classifications

- Home-schooled Students: Eligible to participate if a school allows a home-schooled student to participate in other extracurricular activities. Authorization needs to be secured from the State Director to allow a home-schooled student to participate in the Decathlon at the school he/she would attend if not home-schooled. The academic category for competition for a home-schooled student would automatically be Honor.

- Foreign Students: Eligible to participate. A foreign student who does not possess a valid transcript would participate as an Honor student. Any exceptions to this classification would need to be addressed by the State Director in consultation with the USAD Administrator.

Verification of Eligibility

To verify eligibility of team members, generally official copies of students' transcripts will be requested by the local Academic Decathlon[®] Competition Manager. For participation in any state or national competition, official student records will be required.



SAMPLE GPA COMPUTATION

United States Academic Decathlon[®] GPA Calculation Worksheet

School	Sample High School				Grade	12
Student's Name	Jones		Hayden		TOTAL POINTS = Points x Credit Hours	
	Last Name		First Name			
COURSES			GRADE	POINTS*	CREDIT HOURS	TOTAL POINTS
FALL	Year:	2023				
English 10			A	4.00	0.5	2.00
Geometry			B	3.00	0.5	1.50
World History 1			B+	3.00	0.5	1.50
Honors Chemistry			A-	4.00	0.5	2.00
SPRING	Year:	2024				
English 10			A	4.00	0.5	2.00
Geometry			A-	4.00	0.5	2.00
World History 2			B+	3.00	0.5	1.50
Honors Chemistry			A	4.00	0.5	2.00
FALL	Year:	2024				
English 11			A	4.00	0.5	2.00
Pre-Calculus			B+	3.00	0.5	1.50
American History			B	3.00	0.5	1.50
Honors Physics			B+	3.00	0.5	1.50
SPRING	Year:	2025				
English			A	4.00	0.5	2.00
Pre-Calculus			B	3.00	0.5	1.50
American History			B	3.00	0.5	1.50
Honors Physics			B	3.00	0.5	1.50
SUMMER	Year:					
TOTALS =				55.00	8.00	27.5
Calculated GPA =					3.43	
Academic Decathlon Level =			HONOR	NO	CALCULATED GPA = Total Points/Total Hours	
			SCHOLASTIC	YES		
			VARSITY	NO		

***POINTS:** A+, A, A- = 4.00 B+, B, B- = 3.00 C+, C, C- = 2.00 D+, D, D- = 1.00 F = 0.00
Courses graded numerically, should be converted to alpha grades based on the school's official conversion policy.

EXPLANATION OF SCORING

- The Academic Decathlon® has ten events: each event evenly counts 1000 points per competitor. A team could possibly accumulate a total amount of 90,000 points. However, only six scores are counted for the team ranking; therefore, the highest possible team score is a 60,000 points. Winning scores at the National Finals are usually in the 48,000 – 52,000 range.
- Five of the objective tests have fifty items; the raw score is converted to a 1000-point basis by the computer, with each item worth twenty points (e.g., 37 = 740). The Mathematics test has thirty-five items. Each item is therefore worth approximately 28.5 points. The amount of questions per subject test at the National Finals may be different and therefore the points per item will be calculated accordingly. This will be included in the Nationals Explanation of Scoring document.
- USAD uses an established rubric to score the essays. Two readers independently read an essay. If there is a divergence of more than 200 points in the two scores, the essay is read and scored by a third reader, often the Chairperson. The third score then replaces the divergent score. The two scores are averaged for the final score.
- The speech and interview events are performed before a panel of judges (preferably three). The judges complete the Scantron scoring sheets. The Scantron sheets are scanned directly into the computer, which converts the average from the judges to a 1000-point basis.
- The Super Quiz™ will include questions from the subjects of art, economics, literature, mathematics, music, science, and social science. In the Super Quiz™ all three students from each GPA category will be asked to come to the stage. All Varsity students will be tested with the first eighteen questions, followed by the Scholastic students answering the next 18 questions, then the final eighteen questions of the competition for the Honors students. Questions are worth one point each for a total of 54 points per team. The Super Quiz™ is a standalone event and scores will NOT be added to individual or team scores.
- Individual Decathletes have the opportunity to receive gold, silver, and bronze medals in each event and each category. Academic Decathlon® competitions award all ties.
- The top two scores in each category count to determine the team overall ranking, i.e. the top two Honor scores, the top two Scholastic scores, and the top two Varsity scores.
- The top two scores in each category count to determine the Super Quiz™ score. NOTE: It is not necessary that the six students whose scores count for the Super Quiz™ be the same six students whose scores count toward the overall ranking.
- At the awards ceremony held after your local competition, the competition manager releases a Winner's List that indicates the gold, silver, and bronze medal winners in each event. The list also includes the top Super Quiz™ team, the top-scoring individual winners in each category, and the overall team winners.
- Your state may have special awards for the Academic Decathlon®. You will want to consult your local State Director for the specifics of the award distribution.

LOCAL, REGIONAL, AND STATE DECATHLON ORGANIZATIONS

In most participating states, the State Director presides over the Decathlon program. If a state does not have a designated State Director, USAD provides a contact person to administer competitions and to answer coaches' questions. A list of state directors can be found on the USAD website at <http://www.usad.org/About/State-Directors.aspx> . It is very important that coaches keep in touch with the contact persons in their specific locale. In many states, contest directors at the district, regional, and/or state level also serve as the contact persons during a given competition year.

Although USAD establishes the fundamental rules of competition; states have some leeway in determining contest dates, sites, and other administrative matters. The registration for each Decathlon team is submitted to the respective State Director or to a duly authorized representative. The deadlines and procedures for this registration vary from state to state, but most states require some or all of the following:

- a team registration form with names of coaches and students
 - grade point average calculation sheet
 - official transcripts
 - team conduct forms
 - medical release forms
 - registration fee
 - banquet or award program information
-
- Many states have district, regional, and state level competitions.
 - Some states have online district, regional, and state level competition which allows decathletes to access the competition tests from any Internet-connected computer.

USAD produces five levels of tests:

- a set of practice tests (which coaches can purchase from USAD),
- three sets of official tests (emailed only to an authorized contest director) which many states use for district , regional, and state competitions
- a set of national tests used at the National Competition held in April.

States also differ in their scheduling of competitions, awards programs or banquets, and in their distribution of scholarship money to winning Decathletes. Depending on the location of a specific school, coaches also need to arrange for travel for team members.

Coaches should always consult personnel at the local, regional, and state level and follow all published guidelines.

TEAM SELECTION AND PREPARATION

Team Selection

Selecting a team is crucial for success—and the methods for team selection are often as varied as the students who participate in the program. The first task, of course, is to encourage students to participate in Academic Decathlon® and to regularly attend study sessions. Once this initial group (including students who meet Honor, Scholastic and Varsity guidelines) is in place, the coach's job is to select the best nine-member team from this group.

The timing for the final team selection varies across the state. Some coaches prefer to work with a small core of students in preparing for the competition. The advantage of early team selection is that teams have ample time to work together to develop camaraderie and to master content. Some coaches just let the team evolve naturally, as stronger and more competitive students emerge and working relationships develop. Other coaches postpone team selection until a month or two before the official competitions begin. The advantage of this method is that having several potential Decathletes compete for positions on the team sometimes provides a great incentive for student study. It also allows as many students as possible to benefit from the Academic Decathlon® program.

As a coach you need to have a clear idea of the categories in which students compete. Coaches may do an informal assessment by asking students to complete a grade calculation sheet. Coaches need to balance the group with students in all categories. If prospective teams do not have an adequate number of students in each category, coaches may need to do more recruiting.

Flexibility is a must! Coaches often have to reassess their potential team members and search for other students to fill gaps in the team makeup. Unexpected circumstances can always pose challenges for your team. The primary rule of thumb is to keep students in each of the three categories (Honors, Scholastics, and Varsities). Some coaches like to work with only three or four students in each category; others enjoy working with fifteen or more potential team members. The size of your student body and the degree of student interest in your program will generally indicate a direction for your program.

The criteria for team selection must be described in detail and preferably be available in written form for not only students, but also for parents and administrators. As much as possible, objective and quantifiable criteria should be applied to students "trying out" for a team position. This will not only eliminate bias and other improper criteria, but also provide legitimacy to the finalized team. This process is important for all and fundamental to program building.

Possible Criteria for Team Selection:

- Performance on incremental tests
- Daily and weekly performance
- Attendance at study sessions
- Performance at mock competitions
- Attitude, energy and desire
- Untapped potential
- Potential contribution to team goals

Team Preparation

After a group of potential Decathletes has been recruited and their placement in categories assessed, it is time to begin working to master the content. Academic Decathlon® is principally a team event; that is, teams represent their respective schools and qualify as a group to advance to the next competition. Within this overarching team structure, however, each individual team member competes not only as a member of the team but also for individual success and recognition.

Coaches should continually foster a successful team as well as nurture individual abilities and talents. In Decathlon, as in the larger world, individuals shape the dynamics of the group. It is important to maximize the talents of each member of the group; some will be facile speakers or writers, others will excel in a particular content area, for example, Math or Science or Literature.

Materials

Teams should prepare as much of their own study material as possible. Student-generated flashcards are invaluable. Preparing flashcards requires that students first read, analyze and process information, and then review the content.

Scheduling Team Study Sessions

Academic Decathlon® team preparation arrangements will vary from school to school. Coaches should decide on a plan that works for them and their team. It doesn't matter whether a team meets immediately after school, in the evenings, on Saturdays, or weekends—what matters is that it is a time that is convenient for all team members. Coaches may want to cover a variety of content during a given week, touching on perhaps three or four of the content areas in an alternating pattern. Or coaches may want to devote a large amount of time to one specific area and become immersed in that content until the team has exhausted it. The areas that most often require ongoing continuous work are math and Super Quiz™. Teams should take frequent math tests within the required time period. Teams should also practice Super Quiz™ using the seven-second relay rule in a simulated environment whenever possible.

The following are study session options that a coach may use:

- Formal class for school credit that meets daily for a semester or a year
- Before or after school “extra” class
- Independent study by students combined with regularly scheduled team meetings
- Lunchtime meetings daily or weekly

Preparation Strategies

- Identify a specific study location—utilize bulletin boards to establish ownership of location and to enhance team preparation.
- Develop and distribute a calendar of key activity dates (scrimmage date, competition date, awards ceremony date, etc.) and study session dates.
- Secure commitment from students to team preparation.
- Arrange team social activities to assist in building team spirit and camaraderie.
- Set realistic goals for team (review previous year's individual school performance report and previous year's state competition report).

- Recruit assistance from teachers with specific strengths in the subject areas to be studied.
- Schedule visits to art museum(s) and attendance at music concerts that highlight areas of study.
- Establish study notebooks for students to use for notes, handouts, resource material, etc. In addition, study boxes can be valuable for students for storage of all study materials in one location.
- Distribute workload through peer tutoring. Utilize the strengths of team members in the various subject areas. Allow them to teach the subjects.
- Develop a regular schedule that includes practice testing (tests prepared by the coach, students, or professionals), essay writing, delivering speeches, and participating in mock interviews. Post scores of students (excellent motivational technique).
- Meet with parents to explain the program, to describe the time commitment expected of their children, and to secure their support for the program. Involve them in the preparation process.
- Encourage the school community to support and recognize the students for their participation in this rigorous academic program.

Team Building

Coaches cannot overlook the process of building strong camaraderie among the members of the team. It is imperative that each and every member of the team supports and encourages each of the other team members. There is no time or place for dissention among the members of a team. It is too distracting and takes valuable time and energy from study time. Team building is everyone's responsibility.

Take time to enjoy team time together. Teams that have fun will build strong relationships and share a stronger bond with one another. Ultimately the team members who enjoy being together will spend more time together—studying and helping each other with speeches and content, etc.

A Winning Strategy for Successful Coaching

Team members will emulate coaches. If the coach sets an example with a good work ethic, is always prepared, is focused on the task at hand and shows respect to the team, they will find that their team will work hard to do the same.

Success is a product of hard work and nothing else.

Team Study Materials

The USAD Competition involves seven written tests and an oral relay event specifically based on printed material available from USAD. Each year, USAD publishes Resource Guides from which test questions are derived. USAD also provides Student Exercise Books, Notebook Dividers, practice tests, flashcards, power point tests, and other materials that are available to coaches. Resource and study materials are available from USAD in specially priced packages and as individual units. A complete downloadable brochure and price list of available materials is available on the USAD website.

It is essential that coaches focus the study of their team on materials specially provided by USAD. This material is the primary source for “all things Decathlon” and is crucial to team success. All guides, tests, and study material are developed by USAD writers to facilitate the learning experience.

Listed below is a complete list of materials available from USAD.

USAD Materials

The following materials are developed by the United States Academic Decathlon® to provide coaches with comprehensive information about the academic subjects to be studied and the subjective events included in a specific year's Decathlon. All of these materials are available as PDFs for electronic download

- **STUDY GUIDE**

Official published listing of curriculum for a competition year. Detailed study outlines are provided in the following subjects: Art, Economics, Literature, Mathematics, Music, Social Science and Science. Information regarding essay, speech, and interview components is also provided.

- **RESOURCE GUIDES -**

Resource Guides will be provided in Art, Economics, Literature, Mathematics, Music, Science, and Social Science. These Resource Guides will provide teams with a thorough review and academic treatment of all the topics noted in the subject area outlines for these subjects. The Resource Guides offer an essential resource that will assist students in their mastery of the topics and aid in their preparation for the competition tests.

- **ART REPRODUCTIONS BOOKLET**

As a companion to the Art Resource Guide, the Art Reproductions Booklet contains full color reproductions of the selected artworks for the year's art curriculum. In addition to images of the selected works, this booklet includes the title, artist, date, and dimensions (if applicable) of each work.

- **MUSIC LISTENING FILES**

Supplementary Study Materials

The following supplemental materials are available from USAD for use by coaches in preparing their teams for the Decathlon competition.

Student Exercise Books – provide a student-friendly synthesis of the material presented in the *USAD Resource Guides* and offer students a chance to test and reinforce their knowledge of the curriculum through a variety of exercises and activities; provided in each of the following subjects: Art, Economics, Literature, Mathematics, Music, Science, and Social Science.

Subject Area Flash Cards – 600 questions each in art, music, literature, social science, science, and economics; 400 in mathematics. Questions and answers are referenced directly to the Resource Guides to reinforce learning and strengthen fast answer skills.

Notebook Dividers – Packet of ten

One notebook divider for each of the following subjects: Art, Economics, Literature, Mathematics, Music, Science, and Social Science.

One notebook divider with information about the Essay, Speech, and Interview events.

One notebook divider with information about Higher-Order Thinking Skills

One notebook divider with information about USAD.

The Notebook Dividers are written by the test writers. They provide a summary of essential information about the topics listed in the subject area outlines in the Study Guide, but are not a direct source for test questions.

Literature – Copies of the novel, play, or other major work featured in the Literature Study Guide outline.

Practice Test Materials

The following materials have been developed by USAD for coaches to use to help them evaluate the progress of their students toward mastery of the Decathlon subjects.

PRACTICE SPECIALTY TESTS

- Two 100-item tests in art, music, literature, social science, and science which focus in depth on a specific portion of the subject outlines. Tests consist of a variety of question styles for students to gain knowledge on focused topics.

PRACTICE TEST BOOKLET

- A compilation of tests for each Decathlon subject that are examples of the official competition tests. An Art PowerPoint Test, Music mp3 file, and Super Quiz PowerPoint Test are included. Information is provided about Essay, Interview, and Speech.

SECTION-BY-SECTION TESTS

- Enhance mastery of the curriculum with Section-by-Section Tests, featuring 2,100 test items designed for targeted review. Each subject area includes 300 multiple-choice questions, focusing on specific sections of the Study Guide outlines to reinforce key concepts and improve retention.

PRACTICE COMBO QUIZZES

- Contains four quizzes with a total of 200 items in each subject area. Quizzes will focus on topics in sequential order of the subject outlines. Quizzes will include a combination of fill-in-the-blank items, short-question and answer format, multiple choice items, and matching to help students to master the curriculum with a variety of question styles

PRACTICE LEVEL TESTS

- Includes a series of three tests made up of 150 questions in each subject area. Tests are developed to be used consecutively as a study tool since tests are constructed at easy, medium, and hard difficulty level is for gradual mastery of the curriculum..

MUSIC LISTENING QUIZZES

- Includes 10 quizzes with multiple choice items that focus on a 30-second musical excerpt from the USAD Music Selections.

SUPER QUIZ™ POWER POINT TESTS

- Twelve tests that are displayed in a Power Point slide show format similar to the competition format.

NOVEL CHAPTER QUIZZES

- Chapter quizzes will include a combination of fill-in-the-blank items, short question and answer format, multiple-choice items, and matching to help students to master the chapters in the selected text.

EXAM ESSAY BOOKLET

- Twenty essay tests with a total of sixty essay prompts, which focus on all subject areas except for mathematics.

IMPROMPTU TOPIC BOOKLET

- A set of one hundred-fifty impromptu speech topics comparable to those encountered in an Academic Decathlon® competition.

The official competition test writers write for the Practice Test booklet.

USAD Test Questions and Higher-Order Thinking Skills

Ten to twenty percent of the questions on each test will require higher-order thinking skills, which are generally considered to be those at the top three levels of Bloom's taxonomy, i.e., evaluation, synthesis, and analysis.

The following is the guide provided to test writers for writing these questions:

Bloom's Taxonomy

Evaluation
Synthesis
Analysis
Application
Comprehension
Knowledge

Key words used in questions

Judge, Infer, Compare/Contrast, Criticize, Value, Formulate, Solve, Propose, Create, Develop, Identify, Distinguish, Conclude, Function, Predict, Select, Explain, Result, Choose, Classify, Show, Summarize, Represent, Indicate, Match, Omit, Define, Describe, Recognize

Activities for Study Sessions

Coaches around the U.S. employ a variety of strategies to coach their teams successfully. Some strategies work best at the beginning of the study year—even before your final team is selected; others work best in mid-season or near contest time. Many of the following strategies, however, can be used again and again to prepare your team for competition.

Mastering the Resource Guides:

1. Assign pages in a given guide for individual reading.
2. Divide the team into study groups for group study—especially for difficult concepts, such as in Economics and Science.
3. Have certain individuals and groups focus on certain passages or events and share their findings with the group. They may want to prepare a handout or a presentation for the team, or they may want to distribute information online to team members.
4. Follow up in study sessions to review the assigned pages. This might include some of the following:
 - Question and answer sessions to check for comprehension and retention of facts.
 - Taking practice tests—either individually or in groups (for example, one Varsity, one Scholastic, and one Honor) and then score and discuss as a team.
 - Taking practice tests—and then posting scores for all team members. Keep a running tally of scores for a given period of time.
5. Look at art images projected on a large screen. Have students share their understanding of the fundamentals of art: line, color, perspective, value, etc. Point out examples of each of these fundamentals for each selection. Include a discussion of the relevant years in the artist's life, his particular style in the work, and the influences in his/her life that are reflected in the work.
6. Listen to the music both individually and in a group. Have students share their understanding of the fundamentals of music (harmony, pitch, rhythm, etc.) in each

- selection. Include a discussion of the context of the selection in history and in the composer's career. Have student's prepare individual music listening tests for team practice.
7. Divide the novel or plays into separate reading assignments and study each in detail. Look at characterization, setting, plot events, narrative techniques, and literary devices. Select important passages for close reading analysis—including diction, imagery, and figurative language.
 8. Study the short reading or poetry passages in detail. Analyze the passages for specific content, historical context, thematic relevance, and tone. Also analyze passages for diction, imagery, and figurative language.
 9. Have community members and guest lecturers come in to present information to the group.
 10. Have each student prepare specific content to present and share with the team.
 11. Practice taking non-timed and timed tests. Timed testing is particularly useful in math.
 12. Practice the Super Quiz TM event using questions on Power Point or transparencies.
 13. Use team sessions to prepare flash cards, charts, maps, or timelines to clarify and organize content.
 14. Take ten minutes at the end of each team session for a few team members to perform an impromptu. Do both informal critiques and formal evaluations using the USAD rubric.
 15. Set up appointments for team members to give their speeches and be interviewed by teachers, librarians, and/or administrators at your school.
 16. Organize panels of adult community members or parents to critique students' speeches and conduct an interview. Always use the USAD rubric.
 17. Put desks or tables in a circle to have an interview practice session with each of the students both asking questions and answering the questions of their team members.
 18. Practice writing essays frequently. Have students analyze their own essays according to the USAD rubric and participate in peer and group evaluations. Some essays should also be evaluated by coaches, teachers, and adult evaluators, according to the USAD rubric.

SUGGESTED PREPARATION TIMELINE

Spring Semester (prior to competition year)

March General information on the curriculum will be available from State Directors and on the USAD web site. This information will include the Literature selection(s) and the major topic(s) to be covered in each of the subject areas. Coaches will receive forms for ordering materials.

May All USAD study materials are available.

During this semester, coaches can be working with students on essay writing, writing and practicing their speeches, mastering interviews, and studying the basics of math, Economics, and Art.

Summer (prior to competition year)

During the summer, students may be working independently on their preparation or taking classes to strengthen their backgrounds in a particular subject or to lighten their academic class schedules for the fall semester.

Fall Semester (competition year)

September - Complete selection of team; establish and implement study schedule.
December

October - Attend workshop for coaches if one is presented by the local competition
November manager and/or State Director.

November - Scrimmages
December

January - Local Competitions
February

Spring Semester (competition year)

March State Competitions

April National Competition

Scrimmages and Practice Tournaments

- Mock Competition
- Dress up for competition.
- Use judges that are unfamiliar to the students.
- Simulate a competition setting.

Practice Competitions

Compete in simulated contests as often as possible. Just as scrimmages are important in preparation for athletic competitions, they also build confidence and composure for Decathletes.

A student may compete in a higher academic category than his/her grade point average, but not in a lower category (i.e., a Scholastic student can compete as an Honor student, but **not** as a Varsity student). Each team member competes in all ten events. Should a school not be able to identify a full nine-member team, a minimum of two students in each academic category will still allow a school to have a competitive team. A team's score for the competition is based on the top two students' scores in each of the three categories. Most schools will begin with a practice team, which is composed of all students interested in participating in the Academic Decathlon®. From this team, the nine competitive team members are selected.

Competition Day

The actual competition day(s) will vary from local competition to local competition and from state to state. Some competitions are still conducted on one day with all ten events completed on that day. Other competitions are going to be two-day events with some activities, usually essay, speech, and interview, conducted on one day, and the subject-area tests and the Super Quiz TM conducted on another. Maybe only one event, essay, will be held before the official competition day. Because there are a variety of competition schedules being followed, it is important for a coach to know what the arrangements are for his/her local competitions, and this information will come from the local competition manager.

A coach needs to review carefully all of the informational material received from the local competition manager, and he/she needs to maintain a file of all materials received. One thing a coach does not want to be is unprepared, and neither do his/her students. A good coach will keep the students well informed of all competition procedures so that there will be no surprises on the day(s) of the event.

The following are some tips that may be helpful to a coach on competition day:

- Arrive early at the site. This will give the students an opportunity to locate testing rooms, restrooms, the food service area, etc.
- Have the students prepared. Be sure that they have the information and materials (pen(s) and pencils, calculator, glasses) they will need for the competition. Make sure that they are dressed appropriately for the day's activities, especially for speech and interview.
- Know the day's time schedule of activities. Be sure all students have a copy of the schedule. Usually a day's activities are tightly planned, and missed activities cannot be made up.
- Have medical release forms for students. One never knows what may happen, and you need authorization to be able to assist a student, and you should also know how to contact a parent.
- Identify a meeting location for the team to use during breaks.
- Bring reading and/or work that you may want to do while the students are testing. Testing time is also an excellent time to network with other coaches.

Countdown to Competition

Prepared Speech

View former Decathletes' (recorded) speeches.
Brainstorm speech ideas as a team.
Study the scoring rubric.
Conference privately with students.
Bring in a speech expert.
Revise and edit speeches in teams.
Read final copies for time.
Read speech clearly and slowly for audiotape.
Complete the final revision.
Memorize the speech.
Work on gestures, movement, pauses, and smiling.

Use the USAD rubric to score speeches.
Record speeches, critique, and playback.
Practice with time signals.
Seek out audiences.

Impromptu Speech

Practice impromptus daily.
Practice individually and in small groups of three or four.
Have students write impromptu topics.
Brainstorm impromptu topics together.

Interview

Study the rubric.
Study the interview questions.
Have students write out answers to questions.
Conference with students privately.
Have interview groups (small and round table).
Judge interviews with rubrics.
Videotape interviews and critique playback.

Essay

Brainstorm overarching themes in essay.
Study the essay rubric.
Generate original essay prompts and write often.
Conference with students privately.
Write comments on essays.
Judge essays with rubrics.

Sample Schedules

Sample One-Day Competition Schedule

7:30 a.m. - 8:00 a.m.	Team Registration
8:15 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.	Subject-area testing, essay writing, speech, interview
3:30 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.	Super Quiz TM (public event)

Students (twenty to twenty-five) may be assigned to traditional classrooms designated as “homerooms” for the subject-area testing and essay writing. An alternate testing arrangement to individual classrooms is a large “arena” where all students are assigned to one location. In either of these physical arrangements, students, in all likelihood, will have assigned seats. At designated times during the hours of testing, the students will report to special rooms/locations to present their speeches and participate in an interview.

Sample Two-Day Competition Schedule

Day 1 (Speech, Interview, and Essay)

9:00 a.m. - 9:30 a.m.	2:15 p.m. - 4:15 p.m.
10:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon	Team Registration
12:30 p.m. - 2:00 p.m.	Speech, Interview competitions

Essay Writing

Speech, Interview competitions (if needed)

Day 2 (Subject-area Testing, Oral Super Quiz TM)

7:30 a.m - 8:00 a.m	Team Registration
8:30 a.m - 2:30 p.m.	Testing
3:30 p.m - 5:30 p.m.	Super Quiz TM (public event)

The above schedules are just general suggestions for a competition day(s). Schedules will vary from local competition to local competition and from state to state. A coach needs to check early in the competition year for the schedule that his/her local competition will be following, and then share the information with the students.

After a competition, enjoy the students' accomplishments with them, and encourage the local school to recognize the students for what they have done. You as a coach will find the Academic Decathlon[®] one of the most challenging experiences ever encountered in your educational career, but one of the most rewarding. We hope that you enjoy the experience!

Paperwork and Budgeting

REGISTRATION

1. Check and recheck the students' transcripts to see which courses count for GPA calculation and category placement for Decathlon. These are often listed on the state Academic Decathlon[®] site and in the Coordinator's manual. Check the USAD site for content updates and clarification.
2. Send in your team registration forms to the state office and request a check from your district business office for registration dues.
3. Attend the regional meeting for coaches held at your contest site.
4. Send in your team registration and transcript validation to your contest Regional Coordinators.

Budgeting

1. Purchase all USAD materials as early as possible.
2. Check to see what your school library has and then consider purchasing items which you will use year after year (music encyclopedia and music dictionaries, art encyclopedia and art dictionaries, economic textbooks and workbooks, math textbooks and workbooks, almanacs, atlases and gazetteers).
3. Set aside some money to buy extra calculators, pencils, pens, bluebooks, erasers, etc.

Funding Support

An Academic Decathlon[®] coach is going to need financial support from his/her school and/or community to provide the access needed for the materials and resources necessary to prepare a team for competition and to get the team to the competition. Early in a competition year the coach should discuss the needs of the team with a school administrator, and ascertain how the school/community can help. Most schools provide financial support for extra/co curricular activities on their campuses.

The following are some suggestions as to where support may be available:

- * Accounts for purchasing textbooks and other instructional materials
- * Instructional department (English, Science, Math, etc.) accounts
- * Specially funded program accounts (Gifted/Talented, School Improvement, etc.)
- * School-wide fund-raising activities
- * Student Body Funds (usually available for supporting student activities)
- * Grants
- * School Booster Clubs (parents and community representatives)

In addition to funding the resources needed for the Academic Decathlon[®] team, some schools/school districts provide stipends, similar to those given athletic coaches, for the Academic Decathlon[®] coach. A Decathlon coach should discuss this matter with his/her school administrator.

As the Academic Decathlon[®] coach, you are there to create the environment for a quality experience, to motivate the students to perform at their best, and to guide them through the preparation process. A successful coach always displays enthusiasm for the program, skillfully nurtures his/her group of individuals into a cohesive team, and holds high expectations for the team to excel. It is a big job, but a rewarding one; one that should bring you great satisfaction.

THE ACADEMIC DECATHLON® SUBJECTIVE EVENTS

Decathlon competition contains three subjective events: Speech, Interview, and Essay. Each event is evaluated separately by a panel of judges who score the event by completing rubrics supplied by USAD. The scores of the judges are then averaged, and the student receives a score based on a scale of 1000. The three subjective events often take place on one day, with the other seven events following on the next day.

Speech Guidelines

The speech event is composed of two separate speeches: prepared and impromptu. Each student enters the judging room, confirms his/her identification number with the judges, and then begins his/her prepared speech.

THE PREPARED SPEECH should last from 3½ to 4 minutes and may be on any topic that the student chooses. A speech must be the original work of the student performing the speech and may be used during only one year of participation in Decathlon. A penalty is assessed for speeches that are too short or too long. Students may use a note card for their prepared speech, but it should contain only an outline—not the text of the speech. Students are **not** allowed to read their speeches. No other papers or props may be used. Students always speak from a free-standing position, without a lectern. The student should begin his/her speech when he/she receives appropriate notification from the timekeeper and/or judges. Judges will score the speech on the rubric during and immediately after the speech.

THE IMPROMPTU SPEECH is a 1½ - 2 minute speech given on a speech topic supplied by either the contest directors or the state office. A student has three topics from which to choose. The speaker has one minute to choose *one* of the three topics and to prepare his or her impromptu. The student may jot down notes to use during his or her one-minute preparation time, but he or she may bring no prepared impromptu notes into the judging room. The student should begin speaking when the timekeeper says “Begin.” Impromptu topics are changed periodically throughout the speech event to ensure fairness. Topics vary each year, but sample topics include:

- If you became ruler of the world, what would you do?
- If you could go back in time, when or where would you go?
- If you could add an amendment to the Constitution, what would it be?
- What is a winner?
- What is the average teenager?
- What is the highest political office you would like to hold and why?
- What advice would you give to an upcoming freshman about surviving high school?
- What makes a person an individual, or is there such a thing as a true individual?
- Is there too much pressure put on teenagers to succeed?
- If you could travel anywhere in the world, where would you go and why?
- If you could interview anyone, whom would you choose and why?
- What quality do you look for in a friend and why?

TIMING AND PENALTIES

There is a timekeeper in each room who uses a stopwatch to time both the prepared speech and impromptu. The timekeeper gives the student 1 minute, 30 seconds, and 0 time signals by holding up the appropriate card showing the time remaining. Should the speaker exceed the allotted time for either speech, a time penalty is assessed for the prepared speech and/or the impromptu.

OBJECTIVES

The judges listening to the speeches mark their Scantron in the appropriate space to deduct points or mark timing penalties. The timekeeper records the violation, and the contest chairperson makes the final decision in the official scoring room.

The student objectives of the speech event and the criteria on which the speech is scored include:

- organizing ideas in a clear and logical pattern that is appropriate to the speaker's purpose and is convincing to the audience.
- using effective vocabulary and the structures of English appropriate to formal usage in expressing ideas.
- presenting a physical image that aids the audience in the acceptance of the spoken ideas.
- using voice (pitch, volume, and flexibility) to maintain maximum attention.
- producing a product with interesting ideas, originality of thought, persuasive reasoning, and a sense of purpose.
- presenting an effective overall impression.

For success in the speech event, the student must prepare early and practice often. The more times a speaker gives his or her speech, the more comfortable and confident he or she will feel on contest day!

Topic Selection

Topic selection is an important first step in preparing for the speech event. Students have considerable leeway in picking a topic for the prepared speech; the only USAD restriction on content requires that the topic be appropriate for high school students. Although no other requirements on tone or content exist, it is important for students and coaches to remember that the speech will be delivered to a panel of adult judges—often school administrators, community leaders, and those with particular interest in forensics.

Speeches directed toward the interest level of a generally knowledgeable audience are typically the most successful. Speeches tending to be highly technical or esoteric are often difficult to manage in such a short time span. It is also wise to temper negativism and cynicism with positive observations.

Most important of all, students should select a topic that intrigues or inspires them. Working with a speech takes considerable time and energy. If a student has genuine interest in the content of his or her speech, it is much easier to revise, polish, and deliver (over and over again) during the long competition season. Being interested in and comfortable with the content of a speech also makes the delivery more natural and sincere—a quality that is often rewarded by the judges.

The Speech Rubric

As with each of the three subjective events, it is important to study the speech rubric before writing and preparing your speech. Judges score the speeches based on a standardized rubric provided by USAD.

Of the 1000 possible points awarded for the speech event, 700 are based on the prepared speech and 300 on the impromptu speech.

Both the prepared and the impromptu are scored according to criteria indicators, each of which is worth 100 points. The criteria for the prepared speech include:

- SPEECH DEVELOPMENT
- EFFECTIVENESS
- CORRECTNESS
- APPROPRIATENESS
- SPEECH VALUE
- VOICE
- NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

The criteria for the impromptu speech include:

- CONTENT
- DELIVERY
- OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Thinking about each one of these categories and evaluating both the prepared and impromptu according to the criteria for each will improve the quality and delivery of the speech.

A Detailed Analysis of the Speech Rubric

Rubric for the Prepared Speech

- **SPEECH DEVELOPMENT** refers to the general organization of the prepared speech. A speech should have an interesting introduction that presents the topic in a clear, but interesting way. The body of the speech should be organized into sections, each of which develops the ideas presented in the introduction. The conclusions should sum up the ideas presented in the speech and leave the listener with a sense of closure. A general rule of thumb is that the opening and closing should take less than one minute, and the body of the speech about three minutes.
- **EFFECTIVENESS** measures the overall quality of a speech. This includes the degree to which a speaker is able to interest and engage the audience in his or her presentation of ideas. Each speaker has an idea of what he or she wants to accomplish with the speech, and this category measures the degree to which the purpose is achieved. (The purpose of a speech may be to inform, to convince, to entertain, etc.) Effectiveness is a measure of the judges' reception of the speech content and its presentation and their assessment of the degree to which the speaker achieves his or her purpose.
- **CORRECTNESS** assesses the efficacy of the speaker's word choice and its appropriateness for the given topic and audience. This category also evaluates the correctness of grammar and syntax. Maybe most important of all, correctness includes appropriate pronunciation and enunciation. Judges should be able to hear and clearly

understand each word of the speech. This means that the speech must be delivered with the requisite speed and intonation appropriate for the content.

- **APPROPRIATENESS** assesses the overall speech and the effectiveness of the speaker's use of language. Appropriateness also measures the speaker's ability to present ideas that are consistent with the content and suitable for the audience. Highly charged language, politically incorrect language, and profanity are always inappropriate.
- **SPEECH VALUE** measures the originality, internal logic, and ideas that support the premise of your speech and contribute to your purpose. Speeches dealing with relevant topics, expressing unique personal experiences, or containing a universal message typically receive high scores in this category.
- **VOICE** deals with the auditory qualities of the speech. This involves a speaker's ability to vary the speed, volume, and emphasis of the delivery in a way that is consistent with the overall presentation of ideas. Precise articulation of ideas and enthusiasm for one's message are keys to securing effective voice.
- **NON-VERBAL** measures the student's appearance and demeanor, as well as his or her movements and gestures during the delivery of the speech. Gestures and movements must be measured and must be consistent with the content of the speech.

Rubric for the Impromptu Speech

The indicators on the impromptu rubric treat the same concepts covered for the prepared speech but in a more condensed way.

- **CONTENT** measures the overall quality of the ideas presented (speech development and speech value in the prepared speech). Especially important are the originality of the impromptu content and the effective organization of ideas. Impromptus often earn organization points if a clear-cut introduction and conclusion frame the speech. A good rule of thumb for the impromptu is a 15-second intro, a minute or so for the body of the speech, and a 15-second conclusion. An impromptu must always specifically respond to the topic provided by the contest directors.
- **DELIVERY** measures the degree to which the speaker's intonation, movement, gestures, body language, enunciation, and overall demeanor contribute to the presentation of the ideas of the speech.
- **OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS** assesses the quality of the speech and measures its verbal and nonverbal components. This category also evaluates the speaker's ability to communicate effectively in an impromptu and gives an overall assessment of the speech as a whole.

Hints on Speech and Impromptu

- **Dealing with the Judges** It is always a good idea to discuss how you want the speakers on your team to present themselves to the judges. Some students enjoy shaking hands; some just nod and smile; others simply introduce themselves. Discuss what the general practices are in your state and make each student's entry into the speech room as natural and as cordial as possible.
- **Judging the Judges** Coaches need to remind their team to avoid being distracted by a judge's attention or lack of attention. Some judges smile; others remain staid. Some judges will maintain constant eye contact, while others will take notes, complete the scoring grid, or even look away during the delivery. The best strategy is for the student to continue to deliver a speech, keeping steady eye contact with each of the judges, regardless of their expression or behavior. They should also not be too encouraged or discouraged by any remarks they might hear the judges make. Sometimes these comments are not reflected on the scoring sheets.
- **Maintaining Composure** Although speech judges and timers make every effort to be as accurate as possible, human error is always a possibility. If students know their speeches and the timing of their speech well, they will minimize their frustration even if any irregularity occurs. Students should do their best to ignore noises from outside the room (car horn, siren, etc.) or the ringing of a school bell or cell phone. Being confident and in control, even in the midst of an irregularity, may even work to the student's advantage.
- **Choosing the Best Impromptu Topic** Students may find that some impromptu topics lend themselves better to scoring according to the rubric than others. While some of the topics are entertaining and interesting, they may be more difficult to organize and therefore more difficult to judge. Students will also find that they are more proficient at some topics and communicate better (some students are better at current events, some are better with humor, etc.). While Decathletes should practice all types of topics during the season, they may want to choose competition topics with some deliberation.
- **Practicing the Impromptu Speech** While the mantra "practice makes perfect" applies in many instances, it is an imperative for impromptu speaking. Because a full impromptu practice can be done in 2-3 minutes, including evaluation and critiques, they can be practiced everyday. There is inevitably a few minutes in every practice that can be used for impromptus. Impromptu practice can even be a team-building time.
- **Videotaping and Critiquing** It is almost impossible to correct some behaviors that occurs inadvertently during speech, interview and especially impromptu without visual feedback. When students view themselves, they see their particular idiosyncrasies that detract from their delivery. The only way to advise and work on these is through viewing and discussing performances with students.
- **Practicing before Panels of Judges** Just as objective events are measured by performance in scrimmage testing, subjective events must also have some type of scrimmage. This occurs when "live" panels of judges provide not only rubric-based evaluation, but also constructive criticisms and positive feedback directly after the subject event. This is a good way to practice under more pressure than in a routine study or practice session.

Interview Guidelines

In the Decathlon interview, a panel of three judges, usually seated in classroom desks or at tables, interview a student seated in a chair. The interview lasts seven minutes and is structured according to the typical questioning pattern of business interviews—with both standard and follow-up questioning patterns.

Interview questions for Decathlon contests are usually, but not always, limited to

- the student's high school classes and academic interests
- high school activities
- career and college plans
- preparation and experiences in Decathlon
- travel
- role models
- influential persons

The student is scored on a rubric and is evaluated on listening and answering skills, language use, and overall effectiveness. Practicing with the rubric is a great strategy for improving the interview score. Videotaped self-evaluations and peer evaluation are also helpful.

Scoring follows the same guidelines as in speech; scores are based on 1000 points. The best strategy for being a good interviewee is for students to practice talking to adults about a variety of subjects. This will increase their poise with an adult audience and will make their responses more interesting and appropriate.

General Interview Questions

1. Selecting a college or university

How are you selecting a college or university to attend?

Which universities are you currently considering and why?

2. Selecting a field of study in college or identifying a career employment goal

What field(s) are you interested in?

How did you become interested in that field?

What are your ultimate goals?

How would you define success?

3. Individual preparation for Decathlon

How did you first become interested in Decathlon?

What event(s) do you like the most in Decathlon?

What event do you find the most difficult?

How do you prepare for Decathlon?

4. Activities

Which activity has been the most meaningful to you?

How did you become interested in _____?

What would you do if you had more spare time?

5. Values

Which qualities do you think are important for a person to possess?
What are your most admirable qualities?
Which characteristics of yourself would you like to change?
What qualities do you look for in a friend?

6. Influential person

Who has been the most influential person in your life?
If you could be anyone in the world, who would that be and why?
Whom would you like to interview? Why?

7. Other

What question would you have liked for us to ask you?
What would you like for us to know about you?

The Interview Rubric

As with each of the three subjective events, it is important to study the interview rubric in detail. Judges score the student interview based on a standardized rubric provided by USAD. The interview accounts for 1000 of the possible 10,000 points a competitor can earn at competition.

The interview is scored according to the following ten indicators, each of which is worth 100 points. The criteria for the interview include:

- VOICE
- LANGUAGE USAGE
- INTERPERSONAL SKILLS
- NON-VERBAL LANGUAGE
- MANNER
- LISTENING SKILLS
- ANSWERING SKILLS
- RESPONSES
- OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS
- APPEARANCE

Thinking about each one of these categories and evaluating the interview according to the criteria for each will dramatically improve a student's interview score.

A Detailed Analysis of the Interview Rubric

- **VOICE** deals with the auditory qualities of the interview. This involves a student's ability to vary the speed and volume of his or her responses in a way that is consistent with the overall presentation of ideas. Precise articulation of ideas and enthusiasm in responding to the interviewer's questions are keys to ensuring effective voice.
- **LANGUAGE USAGE** assesses the efficacy of the student's word choice and its appropriateness for the given audience. This category also evaluates the correctness of grammar and syntax. Maybe most important of all, correctness includes appropriate pronunciation and enunciation. Judges should be able to hear and clearly understand each word of the response. This means that each response must be delivered with the requisite speed and intonation appropriate for responding to the interviewer's question.
- **INTERPERSONAL SKILLS** measures an interviewee's ability to relate on a personal level to the interviewer. It is important for each student to develop a rapport with the questioner that facilitates the exchange of ideas. A student should be totally engaged in the interview process and thus demonstrate either his or her connection to the speaker and his or her enthusiasm for the verbal interplay.
- **NON-VERBAL LANGUAGE** measures the student's posture and demeanor, as well as his or her movements and gestures during the interview. Gestures and movements must be consistent with and appropriate to the exchange of ideas.
- **MANNER** assesses the student's comfort level and assurance in the interviewing process. This certainly demands thoughtful and direct responses. The degree to which the student's answers demonstrate composure and confidence will impact how he or she will score on this criterion.
- **LISTENING SKILLS** measures not only a student's attentiveness to the interviewer's questions, but also his or her ability to assess and to respond to "the question behind the question." The best interviewee not only hears the question, but also observes the intent and purpose of the question by being in tune with the interviewer's intent.
- **ANSWERING SKILLS** assesses a student's directness and completeness in responding to a given question. Answers must be clear and complete, without being wordy or self-indulgent. The interviewee must also have a keen sense of appropriateness and decorum in responding to an adult interviewer. Also included is the appropriateness of the responses for the given audience. Highly charged language, politically incorrect language, and profanity are always inappropriate.
- **RESPONSES** measure the quality of the content of the responses. The best responses are thoughtful, genuine, informative, and insightful.
- **OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS** measures the overall quality of an interview. This includes the degree to which a student is able to interest and engage the audience in his or her presentation of ideas. Each student must have an idea of how to best communicate with the listeners and understand what he or she wants to accomplish in the interview. This category measures the degree to which the student's vision is communicated and the purpose is achieved. Effectiveness is an overall measure of the judges' interest in and appreciation of the student's responses.
- **APPEARANCE** measures the dress and demeanor of the student in the context of a business or professional interview.

The Essay Rubric

As with each of the three subjective events, it is important to study the essay rubric in detail. Judges score the essay based on a standardized rubric provided by USAD. The essay accounts for 1000 of the possible 10,000 points a competitor can earn at competition.

Components 1-7 of the Scoring Form address the content/development of the essay

Point value	Component with description
0-4	Introduction / Thesis ☐ Original, insightful, and/or interesting ☐ Not merely restating the prompt
0-4	Response To Prompt* ☐ Conveys understanding of the prompt and tasks ☐ Clearly addresses all aspects of prompt
0-4	Evidence* ☐ Specific and accurate examples ☐ Supports thesis and main ideas
0-4	Analysis / Commentary ☐ Ideas explained thoroughly ☐ Points argued effectively
0-4	Cohesion ☐ Articulate and clearly focused ☐ Assertions equivalently developed
0-4	Organization ☐ Paragraphs have topic sentences ☐ Transitions are thoughtful
0-4	Closing ☐ Intentional finish ☐ Not repetitive or merely summarizing

** USAD publishes essay scoring guidelines for essay readers/judges, which include details student writers may include in response to each prompt*

Components 8-10 of the Scoring Form address writing skills applied to the essay

Points avail.	Component with description
1-4	Word Choice / Diction / Voice ☐ Diction appropriate to topic ☐ Student knows/owns the words used
1-4	Spelling / Punctuation ☐ Accurate spelling ☐ Proper punctuation
1-4	Grammar / Sentence Structure ☐ Subject/verb agreement ☐ Varied sentence structure

Further details about scoring form:

- Some components have a scale of 0-4 and others 1-4. This is intentional. A writer could receive a “zero” for Introduction/Thesis, for instance, for having no visible or articulated introduction and/or thesis, but a writer could not receive a “zero” for “Spelling/Punctuation,” as at least some of the words must be spelled correctly and some appropriate punctuation used, warranting a “one” to be the lowest possible score in that category.

- Consider these point descriptors:

4 = excellent, superior
3 = acceptable, effective

2 = attempted, fair
1 = barely, minimal

0 = insufficient

- Essay judges are directed to give a clear and complete “zero” score to any essay that is “off prompt” or “non-scoreable.”
 - An “off-prompt” essay does not respond to the prompt selected.
 - A “non-scoreable” essay is either insufficient or illegible (typically true only of handwritten essays) or too brief.

Discussion of the ten scoring components for students:

Introduction/Thesis – Most writers know that a good introduction is necessary for a great essay. The introduction creates for the reader the important first impression of its author and what to expect of the essay that follows. Whatever you decide to do at the start of your essay to engage your audience right away—create an insightful comparison, highlight interesting details, ask a question, or something else—do not merely parrot the prompt. Be original. And also be certain that your essay includes, and very near its start, a clear thesis in which you state your essay’s primary assertion, the essence of your essay’s primary point and purpose, what you will “prove” with the rest of your essay.

Response to Prompt – It is very important that you respond specifically and completely to the prompt. One of the biggest challenges students encounter with essay writing deals with response to the prompt. Be certain, first, that you completely understand what the prompt is asking you to do, and second, that you completely answer the question(s) asked by the prompt. This may sound ridiculous, but without first reading the prompt very carefully and looking for keywords, there is great risk in writing an essay that does not meet the requirements of the prompt.

Evidence – Providing evidence is your opportunity to show how well you have prepared for the competition by reading and studying the USAD materials. Develop the assertions that support your thesis by providing specific examples—evidence from the U.S. Academic Decathlon resource guides or the literary work—as the prompt directs. Your essay’s readers/judges will know which details to expect you to include, and your essay will score very low in this component if you either do not include evidence or include evidence that is either not supported by or contradictory to the USAD resources. Seize this opportunity to synthesize what you have learned from your studies into your own written ideas; transfer that understanding into your confident voice in the essay.

Analysis/Commentary – For each piece of evidence you use to support your main ideas, you will need to analyze and then explain and provide commentary on how it provides support for your thoughtful response. This typically takes two to three sentences per idea, following and supporting a topic sentence; it should not merely state the evidence but provide support for why and how this evidence is the most valuable to include in your essay.

Cohesion – Cohesion is the flow of the essay or how the words, sentences, and paragraphs—as well as the individual ideas—“cohere” or fit and stick together. Consider the shift from one sentence to the next and the transitional words used between paragraphs. (There are examples of transitional words and phrases for improving cohesion toward the end of this guide.) Purposefully construct each of your assertions—each one related to and developing your thesis—to be equivalently and valuably developed.

Organization – Every essay you write should be constructed in a manner that aids its reader in following your thinking. The best essays proceed logically, are organized into paragraphs, and include transitions that also provide a sensible chronology for the essay as a response to the prompt or task. It makes great sense for each body paragraph’s topic sentence to be an assertion that “proves” as well as supports the essay’s thesis. (There are some resources in the appendix section of this resource guide to help you improve your organization. Also, in the next section of this guide, we will explore structure and how to develop an outline. These activities will help you stay organized as you write.)

Closing – Consider the closing paragraph your last chance to make a favorable impression on the reader. Do not simply summarize what you have already written. Consider how you can leave the reader pondering an aspect of the essay that was not absolutely resolved, questioning something that could be an inference from something in the essay, or feeling the need to look into the topic further. Whatever you do, bring your essay to an intentional finish with your closing statements.

Word Choice/Diction/Voice – Selecting your words carefully and using a vocabulary most appropriate for the subject is a skill used by proficient writers. Get to know the vocabulary for the content you are studying. It can be difficult to use the “right” or “best” words for a particular discussion if those words are not your own and your use of them “clunky” at best. However, word choice is a very important aspect of your voice in writing and how confidently you “speak” about any subject. (There is an activity coming up to help you build your personal vocabulary.)

Spelling/Punctuation – While we know this particular type of essay—especially due to its being timed—can feel more like a “rough” than “final” draft, it still needs to be your “best” draft, and the spelling and punctuation errors should not distract the reader from the details of the essay. The best advice is this: leave yourself at least a few minutes to review what you have written. You will be surprised what mistakes may be caught and fixed when you reread your own work.

Grammar/Sentence Structure – This category examines how well you put your sentences together and that you have mastered subject/verb agreement. It improves your essay to understand how to and then vary sentence structure to aid your argument, at times building your point through an intricate weaving of ideas, and at other times poetically dropping the mic with a very simple statement. In other words, this is where your essay can lose points if something in your writing does not follow the accepted rules of English or you submit a very choppy essay full, solely, of simple sentences.

Using the Scoring Form to Guide Your Writing

The first thing to consider is that even if you are not an eloquent writer, you can still score well overall if you know your content and how to organize it. Remember that the first seven scoring components have to do primarily with the composition of your ideas AND that they are supported with evidence from the text being addressed. Communicating clearly and writing well, as the final three scoring components indicate, is definitely important, as well, if you want a score that will win you a medal in this event.

All student writers should consider working through some of the activities in this resource guide. Are you ready to begin with the end in mind?

CONTENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Component Descriptors	4 Excellent/Superior	3 Effective/Acceptable	2 Attempted/Fair	1 Barely/minimal	0 None
Introduction	Engages the reader. Well - organized, going from general to specific. Provides background information that the reader needs to know. All sentences point to a clearly worded thesis that demonstrates a strong understanding of the prompt.	An interesting opening that leads to background information needed to understand the thesis. The thesis demonstrates a good understanding of the prompt.	Opening, and some background information seems indirectly related to the thesis. The thesis is poorly worded and shows only a partial understanding of the prompt.	Offers little or no development. The thesis is simply a restatement of the prompt.	There is no clear introduction.
Response to Prompt	Responds to all aspects of the prompt. Demonstrates an outstanding understanding of the task.	Addresses the prompt in an effective manner. Responds to several aspects of the prompt.	Addresses the prompt in an adequate manner, focusing on a minor aspect of the prompt.	Addresses the prompt in a limited manner. Provides superficial evidence.	Fails to address the prompt. Absence of relevant content.
Evidence	All evidence is reliable and relevant and uses facts, quotations, and/or specific examples from the USAD Resource Guides or the literary work(s). All of the evidence purposefully supports the thesis and main ideas.	Most evidence is reliable and relevant and uses facts, quotations, and or specific examples from the USAD Resource Guides or the literary work(s). Most of the evidence purposefully supports the thesis and main ideas.	Some of the evidence is reliable and relevant and uses facts, quotations, and or specific examples from the USAD Resource Guides or the literary work(s). Some of the evidence purposefully support the thesis and main ideas.	Evidence is weak and/or does not support the thesis and main ideas.	No evidence from the USAD Resource Guides or the literary work(s) to support the thesis or main ideas.

CONTENT AND DEVELOPMENT

COMPONENT DESCRIPTORS	4 Excellent/ Superior	3 Effective/Acceptable	2 Attempted/Fair	1 Minimal/Barely	0 None
Analysis / Commentary	The writer provides thorough and specific explanations of the relationship between each piece of evidence and the main idea and/or thesis.	The writer provides clear explanations of the relationship between each piece of evidence and the main idea and/or thesis.	The writer provides basic explanations of the relationship between each piece of evidence and the main idea and/or thesis.	The writer provides weak explanations of the relationship between each piece of evidence and the main idea/thesis.	The writer provides no explanation that is relevant to the evidence offered.
Cohesion	Ideas are articulate and clearly focused. Assertions are equivalently developed.	Ideas are articulate and clearly focused. Assertions are developed but not equivalently developed.	Ideas are somewhat focused and articulate. Some assertions are not fully developed.	Ideas are loosely focused. Assertions are not fully developed.	Ideas are not focused and somewhat inarticulate.
Organization	Topic sentences give the essay a strong unifying purpose. Paragraphs are arranged in a sophisticated way that enhances the essay. Transitions are crafted seamlessly to connect sections.	Topic sentences give the essay an effective unifying purpose. Transitions not only link paragraphs, but clarify the connections among them.	Topic sentences support the thesis and are arranged in a logical way but fail to give the essay a unifying purpose. Transitions link paragraphs.	Topic sentences are arranged in a way that is hard to follow or does not make sense. Minimal use of transitions.	Topic sentences are not related to the thesis. There are no transitions.
Closing	A well-organized, intentional conclusion that offers an interesting perspective and leaves the reader satisfied.	A well-organized, intentional conclusion that is complete and engaging.	The conclusion follows from and supports the information or assertion presented.	The conclusion is incomplete and minimally developed.	There is no intentional conclusion.

WRITING SKILLS

COMPONENT DESCRIPTORS	4 Outstanding	3 Effective	2 Fair	1 Minimal
Word Choice/ Diction	The use of language demonstrates an elevated vocabulary which engages the reader. Word choice is sophisticated and precise.	Word choice is precise and appropriate for the subject. All words are used correctly.	Word choice is appropriate for the subject. Most words are used correctly. Some needless repetition of words and phrases.	Word choice is unclear, simplistic, or informal. Some words are not used correctly. Needless repetition of words and phrases.
Spelling/Punctuation	A few minor errors in spelling and punctuation but they do not impede understanding.	A few minor errors in spelling and punctuation that distract the reader from the content.	Several errors in spelling and grammar that impede understanding.	Many errors in spelling and grammar that impede understanding.
Grammar/Sentence Structure	Sentences are skillfully crafted, and highly varied in length and type to make it engaging and readable. One or two minor errors in grammar.	Varied syntax is used throughout the piece to make it engaging and readable. Very few errors in grammar.	Some varied syntax that communicates clearly. However, some sentence structures are awkward and detract from meaning.	Sentences are generally short and choppy or are structured so poorly they detract from meaning.

EXHIBIT A

RESOURCE PERSONNEL

Need help—contact one of the following people.

LOCAL CONTACTS

Competition Manager

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

Fax _____

E-mail _____

Coach

Name _____

School _____

Telephone _____

Fax _____

E-mail _____

STATE CONTACT

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

Fax _____

E-mail _____

EXHIBIT B

The United States Academic Decathlon® Calculator Policy for Curriculum Year*

**This policy applies for the United States Academic Decathlon® National Competition. Please contact your state director regarding the calculator policy that will apply at your local, regional, and state competitions.*

The United States Academic Decathlon® Calculator Policy

The United States Academic Decathlon® has always endeavored to reflect current high school curriculum and instruction in our competitions. Recent surveys of calculator use in high schools nationwide indicate that calculators are now used in the vast majority of high school mathematics courses across the country, and our decision to allow calculators is consistent with this practice in math instruction.

After reviewing the policies of the major testing institutions and consulting state directors, the United States Academic Decathlon® has adapted MOST of the American College Testing (ACT) and College Board (SAT program) guidelines for calculator use as stated below.

I. Competitors May Use Calculators for the Mathematics Test

If competitors wish to use calculators on the United States Academic Decathlon® Mathematics Test, they are responsible for bringing them to the test. Calculators will not be provided for students who do not bring their own. Calculator use is permitted only for Mathematics; competitors will not be allowed to use calculators on any other test.

II. Permissible Calculators

If a competitor wishes to use a calculator, it can be a basic, four-function, scientific, or graphing calculator, provided it has none of the features listed in Section III below.

Calculator models with alphanumeric keys (such as the TI-Nspire and TI-84 plus) are acceptable, however the TI-Nspire CAS model is not.

During the mathematics test, competitors are not permitted to refer to information that was stored in their graphing calculator memory prior to the test. Students wishing to utilize their graphing calculator's memory function during the mathematics test will be required to have the memory erased prior to entering the testing room and at the completion of the mathematics test.

III. Prohibited Calculators

Calculators with any of the following features are **NOT** allowed in the United States Academic Decathlon® competitions:

- pocket organizers
- hand-held or laptop computers
- electronic writing pads or pen-input devices
- models with QWERTY (keyboard-like) keypad, e.g. TI-92 or HP-95
- models with paper tape
- models that make noise
- models that can engage in wireless communication (transfer data or information with other calculators)
- models that require a power cord

- models with CAS (computer algebra systems), e.g. TI-89

Because companies are continuously introducing new products, it would be impossible for the United States Academic Decathlon® to maintain an up-to-date list of specific model numbers that possess these features. If a competitor is uncertain whether a particular calculator will be allowed, the student should bring a backup that does not possess any of the features in question. No backup calculator will be provided for any competitor whose calculator is disallowed.

IV. Competing without a Calculator

Competitors may opt to take the Mathematics Test without a calculator, however, the United States Academic Decathlon® is suggesting competitors use a basic, scientific, or graphing calculator for solving the mathematics test items.

V. Calculator Failure During a Test

If a competitor's calculator stops working during a test, the student should continue taking the test without a calculator. No additional calculator will be provided, and the competitor will not be allowed to take the test again later. However, as noted in Section III above, a competitor may bring a backup calculator and/or spare batteries to the test.

A Self-Analysis Essay Checklist

Introduction

- Number of prompt in corner
- Title on the top line
- Put a yellow square around your introductory idea or framing device.
- Highlight in yellow the sentence that links the framing device to the prompt.
- Circle the **exact words** from the prompt that you quote in your introductory link to the prompt.
- Highlight your thesis in blue. Number the supporting points that you enumerate in your supporting thesis.

Body Paragraph #1

- Highlight in blue the words from your thesis that you use to introduce your first point.
- Number the major points that you use to support the topic sentence of your first paragraph.
- Circle specific facts, statistics, and proper names in pencil
- Highlight in blue the words from your thesis that you use to conclude your first point.

Body Paragraph #2

- Highlight in pink transitions from the first body paragraph to the second body paragraph.
- Highlight in blue the words from your thesis that you use to introduce your second point.
- Number the major points that you use to support the topic sentence of your second paragraph.
- Circle specific facts, statistics, proper names in pencil
- Highlight in blue the words from your thesis that you use to conclude your second point.

Body Paragraph #3 (optional)

- Highlight in pink transitions from the second body paragraph to the third body paragraph.
- Highlight in blue the words from your thesis that you use to introduce your third point.
- Number the major points that you use to support the topic sentence of your third paragraph.
- Circle specific facts, statistics, proper names in pencil
- Highlight in blue the words from your thesis that you use to conclude your third point.

Conclusion.

- Circle the **exact words** from the prompt that you quote in your concluding reference to the prompt.
- Highlight links to your thesis and your major supporting points in blue
- Highlight in yellow the sentences that bring your framing device to a satisfying conclusion.

EXHIBIT D

Point Value		ESSAY EVALUATION FORM	
0 1 2 3 4		Unofficial Document	
		Introduction / Thesis [0 – 4 value] • Original, insightful, and/or interesting • Not merely restating the prompt	
		Response to Prompt* [0 – 4 value] • Conveys understanding of the prompt and tasks • Clearly addresses all aspects of the prompt	
		Evidence* [0 – 4 value] • Specific and accurate examples • Supports thesis and main ideas	
		Analysis/Commentary [0 – 4 value] • Ideas explained thoroughly • Points argued effectively	
		Cohesion [0 – 4 value] • Articulate and clearly focused • Assertions equivalently developed	
		Organization [0 – 4 value] • Paragraphs have topic sentences • Paragraphs have thoughtful transitions	
		Closing [0 – 4 value] • Intentional finish • Not repetitive or merely summarizing	
		Word Choice / Diction / Voice [1 – 4 value] • Diction appropriate to topic • Student knows/owns the words used	
		Spelling / Punctuation [1 – 4 value] • Accurate spelling • Proper punctuation	
		Grammar / Sentence Structure [1 – 4 value] • Subject/verb agreement • Varied sentence structure	

Total Points x 25 =

Off Prompt (OP) = Zero Score
☒ Prompt is not addressed

☐

Nonscorable (NS) = Zero Score ☒
 Essay is: illegible, insufficient, a blank paper

☐

* USAD publishes essay scoring guidelines for Essay Judges, which include details student writers may include in response to each prompt

USA U.S. ACADEMIC DECATHLON		SPEECH EVALUATION FORM		STUDENT ID NUMBER				VOLUNTEER NUMBER					
DIRECTIONS PLEASE - 1. MAKE DARK MARKS 2. ERASE COMPLETELY TO CHANGE 3. ENTER: STUDENT'S NAME AND NUMBER YOUR NAME AND NUMBER ROOM NUMBER 4. MARK 1 STUDENT PER FORM				STUDENT'S NAME _____ JUDGE'S NAME _____ ROOM NUMBER _____		10 0 0 0 0 11 1 1 1 1 12 2 2 2 2 13 3 3 3 3 14 4 4 4 4 15 5 5 5 5 16 6 6 6 6 17 7 7 7 7 18 8 8 8 8 19 9 9 9 9				0 0 0 0 1 1 1 1 2 2 2 2 3 3 3 3 4 4 4 4 5 5 5 5 6 6 6 6 7 7 7 7 8 8 8 8 9 9 9 9			
JUDGE 1 2 3 4 5 6													
PREPARED SPEECH													
				EXCELLENT	VERY GOOD	GOOD	FAIR	POOR					
SPEECH DEVELOPMENT	• ORGANIZATION • BODY • OPENING/CLOSING	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0	
EFFECTIVENESS	• ACHIEVEMENT OF PURPOSE • INTEREST • RECEPTION	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0	
CORRECTNESS	• GRAMMAR • PRONUNCIATION • WORD SELECTION	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0	
APPROPRIATENESS	• WORD SELECTION AND STYLE APPROPRIATE TO THE AUDIENCE	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0	
SPEECH VALUE	• IDEAS • LOGIC • ORIGINALITY	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0	
VOICE	• FLEXIBILITY • VOLUME • VARIETY	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0	
NON-VERBAL	• APPEARANCE • MOVEMENT • ASSURANCE	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0	
IMPROMPTU SPEECH													
				EXCELLENT	VERY GOOD	GOOD	FAIR	POOR					
CONTENT	• ORIGINALITY • IDEAS • ORGANIZATION	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0	
DELIVERY	• MOVEMENT/GESTURE • BODY LANGUAGE • VOICE	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0	
OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS	• ACHIEVEMENT OF PURPOSE • VERBAL COMMUNICATION • NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0	
SPEECH PENALTIES													
TIMING VIOLATION				BOTH SPEECHES PREPARED ONLY				IMPROMPTU ONLY NO PENALTY					
				-10 -7				-3 0					



U.S. ACADEMIC DECATHLON

INTERVIEW EVALUATION FORM

Student ID Number

(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)
(1)	(1)	(1)	(1)
(2)	(2)	(2)	(2)
(3)	(3)	(3)	(3)
(4)	(4)	(4)	(4)
(5)	(5)	(5)	(5)
(6)	(6)	(6)	(6)
(7)	(7)	(7)	(7)
(8)	(8)	(8)	(8)
(9)	(9)	(9)	(9)

Volunteer Number

(0)	(0)	(0)
(1)	(1)	(1)
(2)	(2)	(2)
(3)	(3)	(3)
(4)	(4)	(4)
(5)	(5)	(5)
(6)	(6)	(6)
(7)	(7)	(7)
(8)	(8)	(8)
(9)	(9)	(9)

Judge

(0)
(1)
(2)
(3)
(4)
(5)

Student: _____

Judge: _____ Room: _____

Marking Instructions

USE NO. 2 PENCIL ONLY

- Example (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
- Make **Dark and Complete** Marks
- Erase Completely** to Change
- Make No Stray Marks

	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor	Interview	
—	(10) (9)	(8) (7)	(6) (5)	(4) (3)	(2) (1) (0)	Voice	Volume Flexibility Expressiveness
—	(10) (9)	(8) (7)	(6) (5)	(4) (3)	(2) (1) (0)	Language Usage	Grammar Enunciation Appropriateness
—	(10) (9)	(8) (7)	(6) (5)	(4) (3)	(2) (1) (0)	Interpersonal Skills	Rapport Interaction Involvement
—	(10) (9)	(8) (7)	(6) (5)	(4) (3)	(2) (1) (0)	Non-Verbal Language	Movement Gesture Posture
—	(10) (9)	(8) (7)	(6) (5)	(4) (3)	(2) (1) (0)	Manner	Assurance Enthusiasm Directness
—	(10) (9)	(8) (7)	(6) (5)	(4) (3)	(2) (1) (0)	Listening Skills	Appropriateness of Responses Attentiveness
—	(10) (9)	(8) (7)	(6) (5)	(4) (3)	(2) (1) (0)	Answering Skills	Clear Complete Appropriate
—	(10) (9)	(8) (7)	(6) (5)	(4) (3)	(2) (1) (0)	Responses	Thoughtful Insightful With Conviction
—	(10) (9)	(8) (7)	(6) (5)	(4) (3)	(2) (1) (0)	Overall Effectiveness	Purpose Achieved Interest Reception
—	(10) (9)	(8) (7)	(6) (5)	(4) (3)	(2) (1) (0)	Appearance	Appropriate for an Interview

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INTERVIEW

Constructing a Résumé

In some competitions, Decathletes may be asked to construct a résumé that tells about himself/herself. The résumé will not be judged. However, the content of the résumé will assist the Interview judges in engaging the Decathlete in a successful interview.

A good résumé will go a long way toward helping make a good impression. A bad résumé reflects poorly on the candidate. Everyone has something to offer if (s)he will analyze his/her abilities, talents, interests, and activities and stress his/her strong points. First impressions count.

Content and layout of the résumé can vary widely. However, **keep the résumé simple and to no more than one page.** It has to be read quickly by the judges.

TIPS FOR CONSTRUCTING THE RÉSUMÉ:

1. Your résumé **must** be typed. Use a good quality paper. Save your résumé on a diskette or CD so that you can change it as needed. This gives you an opportunity to add, or delete, as you think about things you would like to include about yourself.
2. The résumé should be neat. Carelessness and misspelled words are inexcusable. Have some knowledgeable persons proofread your résumé and give you tips for improving it.
3. Some things to think about including in your résumé are: extracurricular activities in which you've been engaged in and outside of high school, special interests or hobbies you have, leadership positions you hold or have held, work experience(s), and personal goals.
4. Grades are an important part of "your" picture but not the only part. Note areas of responsibility, recognition or honors that have come your way.
5. A demonstrated social awareness can be in your favor. If you have participated in activities where you were recognized by awards or offices, mention these. Quality leadership is welcome everywhere.

Two sample résumés that follow are different in style. Yet each seeks to highlight strong points in a straightforward fashion. Construct your résumé in the style and type that best suits your interests and emphasizes your strengths.

UNITED STATES ACADEMIC DECATHLON®

SAMPLE RESUME

*John W. Woodson
5485 Jones Street
Hometown, Montana 12345
Phone: 987.654.3210*

OBJECTIVE

My objective is to serve as an intern in the office of the Lieutenant Governor of the state.

EDUCATION

Mountain View High School 2022-2024
Mountain View, MT
Currently a junior with a 3.97 GPA, studying for a college preparatory seal.

AWARDS

Algebra I - Honor Student	Chemistry - Honor Student
Geometry - Highest Average	Physics - Honor Student
Algebra II - Highest Average	Latin I - Silver Medal on National Latin Exam
Trigonometry - Highest Average	Latin II – Magna Cum Laude on the National Latin Exam
Physical Science - Honor Student	Academic Letter
Biology - Highest Average	

INTERESTS AND ACTIVITIES

Athletics: Football, Baseball, Basketball
Computer Hobbyist
Drama: Cast in four school plays – “Doll’s House,” “Titanic,” and “Fame”
Cast in community theater – “It’s a Wonderful Life”

WORK EXPERIENCE

National Institute of Physician Recruitment and Retention Mountain View, MT, Part Time - Management Information Systems	2021-2022
Target Discount Store Mountain View, MT	2022-Present
Part time – Stocking and clerical	

REFERENCES

Available upon request

UNITED STATES ACADEMIC DECATHLON®

SAMPLE RESUME

Jana Smith

610 Samson Street
Chicago, IL 29577
Phone: 444.444.3333

EDUCATION

Main Street High School	2022–Present
Lake Front Community College	2023 - Present

Awards and Honors

Beta Club 9, 10, 11, 12
National Honor Society 11, 12
Academic Letter 10, 11
Governor’s Honors Program Nominee 10, 11
Dean’s List – Lake Front Community College 12
Who’s Who in American High School Students 11, 12
Varsity Letter – Mock Trial 12
Varsity Letter – Cross Country 12

SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS

Exceptional academic achievement:	3.9 GPA at Main Street High 4.0 at Lake Front Community College
Proven leadership ability:	Beta Club officer Junior and Senior Class Secretary Member of Chicago Youth Council County 4-H president 4-H District officer for North Illinois Student County member

High involvement in extracurricular programs:

Mock Trial	Scholars Bowl
Cross Country	Student Council
4-H	Key Club
Junior Classical League	

Expertise in law and government:

Page in state senate
Volunteer in local political campaigns
Mock Trial team member for 3 years

Experience in serving the community:

4-H member for 5 years
Peer Tutor
Community service chair of Student Council
Key Club project chair