

Mars Hill Overview

This is not an extension of the event rules; rather, it is information for competitors to consider.

Purpose – Mars Hill is a speech event which trains students to connect culture and Christianity. The name of this event is taken from the Apostle Paul’s Mars Hill speech in Acts 17. Before the speech, Paul engaged with the Epicureans and the Stoic philosophers of the day. It is this group of people who led him into the Areopagus, where he launched into his famous sermon. From one worldview to the next, Paul responded to the voices of his culture, never failing to speak truth to them. On Mars Hill, Paul explains and uses Greek cultural ideas to find common ground, build a connection, and point to Christ. The goal is to have students recognize that God’s truth is not divorced from culture; rather, God’s truth undergirds all of culture because God is the maker and sustainer of all things. In addition, the intention is that students will begin to see shared cultural experiences as a way to draw unbelievers into a conversation which points to Christ in a natural and compassionate way.

Categories of Topics/Titles – All Mars Hill topics/titles will be published on the Stoa website each competition year. Topics will be divided into six categories: Current Film & Television, Current Music, Classic Media, Literature, The Arts, and Cultural Voices. All topics in a given round (e.g. 1, 2, 3, Semis, Finals) must be from a single category on the published Stoa Mars Hill list and not a combination of categories.

Binder – Each competitor may bring a binder into the room with them, which may include summaries of the topics, historical notes, character descriptions, etc. No pre-written cards or speeches may be brought in with the binder. Each speech should be an original presentation based on the selected topic and prepared during the prep time. The competitor may not share a binder with any other competitor.

Research - As they conduct their research, competitors should remember that this event aims to share the hope of the gospel with a world that is often hostile to God. Their presentation should demonstrate both a thorough understanding of the prompt and a researched biblical response by:

- Describing the chosen piece and its context or purpose
- Identifying a culturally relevant issue related to the piece and explaining its significance
- Showing how the God of the Bible offers a better solution to humanity’s problems than any human answer
- Concluding with a connection which points the listeners to Christ

Competition – After the competitor enters the competition room, the competitor will draw three topics and select one topic for their speech. Preparation time begins as soon as the competitor draws the first topic. The competitor will have four (4) minutes to prepare an original six (6) minute speech.

Presentation – Just as Paul demonstrated in Acts 17, Mars Hill speeches should be delivered in a compassionate, winsome, and conversational manner while going deeply into the truth of the Bible and the greatness of God. Paul understood that his audience did not hold a Biblical worldview so likewise, the competitor should explain any biblical stories, illustrations, or terminology for those without prior knowledge of the Bible. Finally, the speech should be presented in such a way that it would leave someone who did not embrace the true claims of Christianity open to hearing more.