



Suggestions for Coaching Current Issues & Events

Sponsoring / coaching UIL academic contests is both challenging and rewarding. Here are some suggestions that have proven successful for coaches of the Current Issues & Events contest.

Forming a Team

One of the initial objectives is to **recruit team members** for your activity. Although you are limited to a 4 entries in district competition, recruit 5, 6 or more team members for several reasons.

- It is inevitable that someone will get too busy, lose interest or not show up the day of the meet. It is important to have back ups that can fill in.
- Healthy competition for positions on the team is normally a good thing. Use competition to encourage each student to push harder to earn a spot on the team.

In terms of locating team members, there are several strategies. First, meet with your campus UIL academic coordinator to get names of past team members who might still be interested. Inquire about what students may have participated in UIL events in elementary, middle or junior high school.

Next, it is always a good idea to ask history and government teachers on your campus for the names of students who appear to have interest in current events. Look for such students in your own classes as well. Sometimes a simple acknowledgement or showing interest in a student's talent will light a spark that will make that student feel special and become interested in the contest.

Finally, school wide announcements will get the message to students who otherwise might not be aware of what the contest entails or who to get in touch with about their interest in participating.



Preparing for the Contest

With respect to preparation, there are several activities you might want to consider that tend to work well.



Regular **practice sessions** are a good idea. It is important to keep in mind the fact that many students, who might have an interest in your activity, are already committed to other activities as well. Flexibility in scheduling is suggested. If too many of your potential participants have after-school activities then you might want to arrange practice sessions before school or during other appropriate times, such as activity periods or during the school day. Some coaches even hold duplicate sessions at differing times, in order to meet with all of their team members.

When **conducting practice sessions**, try to always have a well-organized agenda for students in order to effectively and efficiently use the time allowed. The time you have with them will be limited so make the best use possible

Refer to the **UIL website** for contest information to understand the basis for the competition. Review the contest rules, download sample test, review the rubric for grading the essay, and find recommended sites and sources.

Review suggested resources. The team should be scouring newspapers, magazines and websites for potential test questions.

Generate a **list of major events** on a weekly basis for students to review using credible print resources such as The Economist, The Week, Time, the Associated Press, and at least one major newspaper: The New York Times, Washington Post, USA Today, etc. Suggested broadcast and online resources are listed on the UIL web page.



Break topics up into **basic categories of information**: international, domestic (U.S.), and Texas. Within each category, you might divide topics into: Conflict-War-Terror / Economy / Business / Elections-Resignations / Foreign Relations / Legislation / Environment / Politics / Prominent Deaths / Health / Science-Medicine / Education / Natural Disasters / Scandal / Supreme Court / Social Media-Networking / Random-Assorted.

Flash cards are a great way to prepare. Give students a flash-card assignment and then, keeping in the team spirit, request that they compare them with other team members to make sure multiple issues are covered.

Write **practice test questions** for students and require students to bring their own questions to practice sessions to share with teammates. Construct practice

tests with these questions that will resemble actual competition tests when possible



Preparing the Essay Question

The essay question is an important part of the contest. Review the rubric for grading the essay. Familiarize students with techniques and strategies for writing expository essays. Require students to submit possible practice essay topics.

Study Materials

These items may be ordered from the UIL office for most of the high school contests. The UIL high school study packets contain the tests and answer keys from the previous contest year. *The CI&E Contest Manual* is an invaluable guide that is written by a former state contest director.

Subscribe to one or more **additional resources** that provide sets of practice material listed on the UIL website. The companion companies listed provide resources and study materials for a variety of UIL academic contests. The UIL does not review nor endorse any supplemental resources. This list is for informational purposes only.

Additional Info

Invitational meets and scrimmage practice tournaments are great ways for students to experience the contest setting prior to the district meet.

Keep a **timeline for questions** in mind so that students are preparing based on events that will be covered by contest materials. Most tests will be written 3-4 weeks in advance of a contest.

