

No Secrets, Just Strategy: Busted Myths from FBLA's Competitive Events Experts

Every year, FBLA competitors want to know the same burning question: 'How do I win?' Also, every year, rumors circulate about the secrets to winning competitive events. The truth is that there is no secret handshake, no hidden process, or cheat code to win competitive events. What remains true of all winning competitors are strategy, preparation, and a deep understanding of the guidelines that explain how these events really work.

Jen Staley, Lacy Beanland-Kirk, and Kent Storm, the National Center experts behind FBLA's Competitive Events, have heard it all. From confusion with the Format Guide to testing myths, they are here to share what really matters about winning competitive events. This article dives into some of the most common myths surrounding competitive events and reveals the truth behind them to help you navigate the normal challenges of competing with confidence.

Myth: "There's a secret to winning—only certain chapters know it."

The Truth: There is no secret formula to winning. Success comes from understanding the event guidelines, using the rating sheet as your roadmap, and putting in the time to study and practice.

Myth: "Scores should be the same at every conference if they're not, something's off."

The Truth: Judging isn't a one size fits all. Just like a job interview, results can vary. Tests, questions, and judges are different at every conference. Focus on growth, not comparison.

Myth: "You can't change your presentation or report after districts or state."

The Truth: Yes, you can—and you should! Every time you present and practice is a chance to improve, whether it's at a conference or in front of friends or other adults. Don't leave points on the table.

Myth: "The Format Guide rules apply to every event."

The Truth: Not anymore. In 2025, the Format Guide was renamed the Production Test Reference Guide which applies only to production events. This encourages creativity elsewhere, while still staying within the specific event guidelines.

Myth: "Judges always know your content area."

The Truth: Not necessarily, but that's not a bad thing. Just like in the real world, it is your job to communicate clearly and persuasively in a way that professionals from all backgrounds can understand your logic. This includes both verbal and non-verbal communication.

Myth: "It only matters if you win!"

The Truth: Competitive events are an opportunity to showcase your knowledge and skills gained over the year. Of course, it's fun to hear your name being called on the stage; however, everyone should celebrate their own personal growth and development journey within competitive events!

Advice from the Experts

Lacy Beanland-Kirk, the FBLA Competitive Events Manager, encourages competitors to focus on what they can control: understanding the guidelines, practicing with purpose, and clearly communicating their ideas. Her biggest piece of advice is to use the rating sheet as your checklist; if you can clearly show judges where you've met each criterion, you're already ahead of most competitors.

With the digital world of information at our fingertips, it is easy to get sucked into the idea of quick and easy success. A true cornerstone of success is strategy, and strategy takes a combination of time, dedication, and creativity. Kent Storm, Sr. Director of Membership Support & Operations and former FBLA member and Iowa State Leader, shares the story of a student that placed in the top 10 after reading the first three articles that populated after googling each individual item in the objective test study guide.

Jen Staley, Sr. Director of Education & Learning, reminds first-time competitors, "everyone is just as nervous as you, even the judges." She urges that if there is one truth to remember from the experts from behind FBLA's Competitive Events, it's that the guidelines are your best friend! Above all, believe in yourself and what you bring to the table. The real secret to success isn't hidden knowledge or shortcuts, but the unique combination of drive, determination, and belief in your own potential.