

CREATIVE EVENTS/ORIGINAL EVENTS

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PERCEIVED ATTITUDES TOWARD THE USE OF ORIGINAL
MATERIAL IN FORENSICS ORAL INTERPRETATION:
A SURVEY

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JUSTIFICATION

The issue of the use of original material in interpretation events has been informally debated by the Forensics community for years. Anyone who has taken part in these discussions is aware of both the diversity and intensity of questions held by Forensics coaches, judges, and students. The great scarcity of tournament policies toward the use of original material, the nearly total lack of previous research in this area, and the apparent increase in the use of original material all highlight a growing need for the Forensics community to familiarize itself with the complexities of this issue. The importance of consistency in judging and coaching philosophies is obvious. Whether we choose to condemn or condone the use of original material, our decision must be an informed one. However, before policies can be set we need a forum for the expression of those affected by the policy. This survey attempts to provide that forum.

The argument over original material often begins with an attempt to define the nature of the beast. The term conjures slightly different images for all. For the purposes of this paper, original material is defined as "any work of prose, poetry or dramatic literature written by a student competitor or for a student competitor specifically for use in competition." We do not present this as the consummate definition. Rather, it is offered as a concrete starting point to guide our handling of this issue. Indeed, in a broader sense, this survey is intended to offer a concrete starting point for discussion by offering tournament directors, national organizations, and the Forensics community at large an idea of how most feel about this issue.

METHODOLOGY

There appears to be a need to determine both perceptions of frequency of

use of original material and attitudes toward that perceived use. The survey (Appendix A), then, was tailored to meet these criteria. In addition to team demographics, each responding school was asked to address a number of general areas. Most items used a 5 point Likert scale with 1=strongly agree and 5=strongly disagree. First, coaches were asked whether they approved or disapproved of the use of original material in specific interpretation events (or, in fact, could even recognize original material). The second general area attempted to determine the perception of a need for specific policies and what those policies should be. Respondents were then asked how often they perceived original material is being used in each category by other teams and their students. Finally respondents were given an open-ended opportunity to elaborate their positions.

Mailing lists were obtained from the American Forensics Association, National Forensics Association, and Phi Rho Pi. From the 574 schools on the lists, 289 were randomly selected to receive the survey. Return rate was 87, or 30%, of surveys mailed. Raw numbers from the survey were computed for the entire sample as well as for specific demographic segments (team size, national organization affiliation, etc.). From the raw numbers simple averages and percentages of each item were computed for the 27 demographic variables. Since the purpose of the survey was to describe in a general sense current uses and attitudes, inferential statistical analysis was not warranted.

RESULTS

Overall response is capsulized in Table 1. This table reflects raw numbers for items 1, 2, and 21, and averages for the remaining items. Responses are categorized by national organization affiliation in Table 2. Other demographic variables are not presented due to limited number of responses within each demographic factor. This fluctuation of responses by category significantly weakened the quality of comparison.

Content analysis was performed on the answers to the open-ended questions. They were categorized according to nine general themes which emerged. Three of the themes were amplification of reasons supporting the use of original material; three themes were amplification of reasons opposing the use of original material. Another common theme centered on the need for a consistent policy to be established. The need for a separate original material category emerged as an additional theme. Finally, in a significantly weaker theme, some voiced the opinion that indeed, the existence of the controversy was questionable. These results will be further explained in the discussion section of this paper.

TABLE 1
Overall Results

N = 87

	Yes	No	Undecided
1. The students I coach may use original material.	33	47	7
2. I encourage my students to use original material.	7	76	4
SA = Strongly Agree	1		
A = Agree	2		
N = No Opinion	3		
D = Disagree	4		
SD = Strongly Disagree	5		
<u>Average</u>			
3. Original material should be allowed in any of the forensic interpretation categories.			3.218
4. Original material is acceptable in prose interpretation.			3.230
5. Original material is acceptable in poetry interpretation.			3.138
6. Original material is acceptable in the interpretation of dramatic literature.			3.069
7. Original material is acceptable in dramatic duo.			3.333
8. Original material is acceptable in reader's theatre.			2.540
9. If original material is being used (and is not identified as such), I can recognize it as original material.			3.287
10. A student using original material has a competitive advantage.			3.770
11. If you know a student is using original material, that knowledge gives the student an advantage.			4.184
12. It is more difficult to judge original material than other interpretation material.			3.425
13. Original material should be officially sanctioned by a national forensics organization.			3.253
14. Original material should be officially banned by a national forensics organization.			3.011
15. None of the national forensics organizations should make a policy either sanctioning or banning the use of original material.			3.540
16. I perceive that approximately (%) of forensic coaches favor the use of original material.			22.747
17. I perceive that approximately (%) of forensic coaches have no preference on whether or not original material is acceptable.			22.747
18. I perceive that approximately (%) do not favor the use of original material.			42.483
19. For each of the following interpretation events, what percentage			

(0-100%) of the material being used do you perceive as being original material?

Poetry - 10.782
Prose - 7.368
Dramatic Literature - 5.046

Dramatic Duo - 6.770
Reader's Theatre - 19.805

20. For each of the following interpretation events, what percentage (0-100%) of the material your students are using do you perceive to be original material?

Poetry - 2.356 Dramatic Duo - .654 Prose - 1.299 Reader's Theatre - 8.759
Dramatic Literature - 2.356

21. The phrase that best describes my feelings is:

- | | |
|--|----|
| a. Original material should be officially banned from all current oral interpretation events with disciplinary measures or those found to be using original materials. | 12 |
| b. Original material should be officially banned from all current oral interpretation events. | 12 |
| c. The use of original material should be discouraged, but no official policies are needed. | 14 |
| d. The use of original material should be allowed, but am personally against it. | 18 |
| e. I have no strong feelings on this question either for or against the use of original material. | 9 |
| f. The use of original material should be allowed and I am in favor of its use. | 9 |
| g. The use of original material should be encouraged, but no official policy is needed. | 2 |
| h. Original material should be officially accepted. | 10 |
| j. Other: | 8 |

Average

22. I would like to see tournaments offer a separate category specifically for the interpretation of original material. 2.414

TABLE 2
NATIONAL ORGANIZATION AFFILIATION

	N=55	N=37	N=11	N=31	N=26
	AFA	NFA	DSR/TKA	Pi Kappa Delta	Phi Rho Pi
1. Yes	20	15	6	8	10
No	30	20	4	19	14
Undec.	5	2	1	4	2
2. Yes	5	3	0	4	2
No	49	34	11	28	21
Undec.	1	0	0	0	3

3.	3.073	2.784	3.091	3.267	3.500
4.	3.123	2.865	3.091	3.333	3.462
5.	2.927	2.730	2.909	3.267	3.385
6.	3.218	2.946	3.091	3.367	3.577
7.	3.272	2.973	3.091	3.600	3.615
8.	2.455	2.676	2.454	2.767	2.538
9.	3.309	3.306	3.727	3.419	3.423
10.	3.727	3.694	3.727	3.871	3.808
11.	4.109	4.167	4.182	4.258	4.154
12.	3.364	3.811	3.909	3.548	3.385
13.	3.273	3.216	3.000	3.452	3.538
14.	3.127	3.081	3.455	3.065	2.885
15.	3.667	4.014	3.818	3.855	3.269
16.	22.449	23.667	23.000	23.654	21.739
17.	33.673	33.929	37.000	26.154	39.524
18.	40.851	43.103	39.000	44.800	40.435
19.					
Poetry	11.300	13.433	10.818	12.240	9.348
Prose	8.280	10.286	5.727	9.440	6.250
Dramatic Lit.	5.863	6.414	4.000	6.962	4.042
Dramatic Duo	6.686	8.138	5.182	8.500	4.083
Reader's Theatre	21.460	21.778	16.091	22.870	20.729
20.					
Poetry	2.481	2.714	3.636	1.643	2.000
Prose	1.442	1.216	1.364	1.607	.952
Dramatic Lit.	.692	.714	0	.893	.476
Dramatic Duo	.885	1.000	0	1.250	.476
Reader's Theatre	11.538	11.290	7.222	7.292	11.429
21.					
a.	8	9	1	4	2
b.	7	3	1	4	3
c.	7	1	3	7	5
d.	3	3	0	3	3
e.	7	4	1	3	4
f.	6	5	1	2	0
g.	2	0	0	0	0
h.	7	6	1	5	4
j.	7	5	3	3	2
22.	2.455	2.108	2.182	2.821	2.600

DISCUSSION

As we suspected, the results of this survey reflect a diversity of attitudes. Additionally, many of those attitudes (especially as reflected in open-ended re-

sponses) indicated very strong feelings on both sides of this issue. Through a specific analysis of close-ended questions a number of conclusions can be drawn. For the purpose of analysis, the individual survey items were grouped thematically.

Responses to items one and to reflect a difference between what coaches allow and what they encourage regarding the use of original material. A slight majority of coaches do not allow their students to use original material. A strong minority (38%) do allow this practice. However, over 90% of respondents do not encourage their students to use original material. While the difference between those who do and do not allow original material to be used is not great, there is a very small minority who actually encourage the use of original material.

An event by event breakdown echoes this finding. In all events, with the exception of Reader's Theatre, there is a tendency to disagree that original material is acceptable. The exception of Reader's Theatre to these views may be attributed to two reasons. First, due to the nature of the event, it is extremely difficult to find published material which fits the conventional format. Second, as an extension of this constraint, a "program on a theme" format is commonplace. This format dictates a need for original work to bridge the gaps left by compilation of various sources.

The third general area focused on judging concerns regarding the use of original material. Two conclusions can be drawn from the results: one, there does not appear to be, in eyes of judges, a competitive advantage for students using original material; two, judges do not perceive original material to be more difficult to evaluate than non-original material. However, the responses to the open-ended questions demonstrated a contradiction to this idea. Those comments will be discussed in detail later in this section.

The role of the national Forensics organizations in this controversy was addressed in the fourth general area. Consistent with earlier findings, there was a slight tendency toward condemning rather than condoning the use of original material. More importantly, regardless of disposition toward its use, strong feeling was noted that the national Forensic governing bodies should establish formal policies, if not already established.

One of the more interesting findings centered on the disparity between perceived and reported uses of original material. Respondents reported that they perceived Reader's Theatre as having the most original material (20%). The other event with perceived use exceeding 10% was Poetry (11%). However, the use of original material as reported by the respondents fell far short of perceptions. While the use of original material in Reader's Theatre was the most common (9%), it was nowhere near the level of perceived use (20%). Additionally, in the other events, the level of actual reported use never exceeded 3%. This disparity may indicate a core of the original material controversy.

Coaches perceive a vastly larger amount of original material in competition than anyone is admitting to using. Thus, the controversy may be, in large part, a matter of misperception.

One last issue addressed by the close-ended questions of the survey was the option of a separate interpretation event for the use of original material. In contrast to the variety of attitudes held toward original material there was a clear preference for the presence of a separate original material interpretation category. This result is consistent with both pro and con positions. Proponents of the use of original material may view a separate category as a way of legitimizing their position. Opponents, on the other hand, may view a separate category as a way of protecting the integrity of the current interpretation events.

A content analysis of the written responses provides for the amplification of attitudes expressed in the Likert scale items, as well as a glimpse of the intensity of reactions to this issue. Those in favor of the use of original material argued their position using three overall themes. By far the most common theme of the proponents was that the use of original material has pedagogical benefits by allowing students an additional forum for artistic expression. Some representative comments of this viewpoint were:

It allows the students to express themselves in a new and exciting way. To not allow this activity would greatly inhibit our educational foundation.

It allows a creative, original "dramatic" [sic] literary outlet for students not promoted in any other event.

The second argument is that student material may be worthy of competition: Much original material is as good or better than non-original material.

... if a student is talented enough to write a piece that is worthy ... then we should not discourage such work.

A final argument is that it recognizes the status quo, that of original material being used: ... due recognition [should be] given to the reader (interper) [sic] for his work.

Three general items also emerged as arguments against the use of original material. One of the major positions was that the quality of original material is sub par. For example:

... usually lower quality material ... BAN! BAN! BAN! By insuring that the work has been published, you insure some degree of quality.

A second major argument is that the use of original material is pedagogically unsound. Many comments were based on a perception of the purpose of oral interpretation which would exclude original material:]

Oral interpretation involves analysis of literature through performance. Use of original material significantly diminishes the analysis task ...

Oral interpretation should be just that: the interpretation [sic] of some other author's written material.

The third argument centered on the judging difficulties created by original material. The core seemed to revolve around a question of the function of the judge and whether he or she can be asked to judge both oral and written communication. For example:

When you have one of each [original and non-original material] in a round, the criteria for each is different, thus making it unfair for both competitors.

In addition to these six arguments for or against original material, there were three other positions advanced. First, there was expressed the need for a separate category:

If it is done it should be done as a separate event which will then compare apples and apples rather than apples and oranges.

Second, the need for establishing a policy was clearly expressed in several comments:

Whichever way this issue goes I would prefer an official policy either for or against ... How do we justify penalizing a student for using original material if there is no rule against it? Students should have a clear cut policy to follow - it shouldn't be left to the whims of the judges.

... I do very strongly [sic] favor the national organizations who govern our activity to make a definite yes/no ruling on it. This would eliminate the questions. We coaches need a specific guideline.

A final position (admittedly weaker than the others) was that no controversy exists:

I just haven't heard coaches talk about this.

Much ado about nothing, to coin a phrase.

Although demographic variables washed out, there was a noticeable difference in attitudes grouped by national organization affiliation (Table 2). The primary disparity of attitudes between organizational memberships was in the acceptability of the use of original material. Members of NFA were more favorably disposed to the use of original material in all interpretation events. The membership of the other national organizations had attitudes more consistent with the overall results as presented in Table 1.

CONCLUSION

The results of this survey on attitudes toward the use of original material in Forensics have revealed that while the Forensics community is split on this issue, a number of consistent attitudes emerge. Of these, we feel that two have emerged as the strongest concerns of coaches. First, it is readily apparent that individual tournament directors should explore the possibility of offering a separate category for the use of original material in an attempt to appease both

proponents and opponents of its use. The second major concern is the expressed need for policy where none exists. Such a policy would aid in coaching and judging consistency. No policy will satisfy all elements on both sides of this issue. The next step seems to call for action from the policymakers in our activity.
