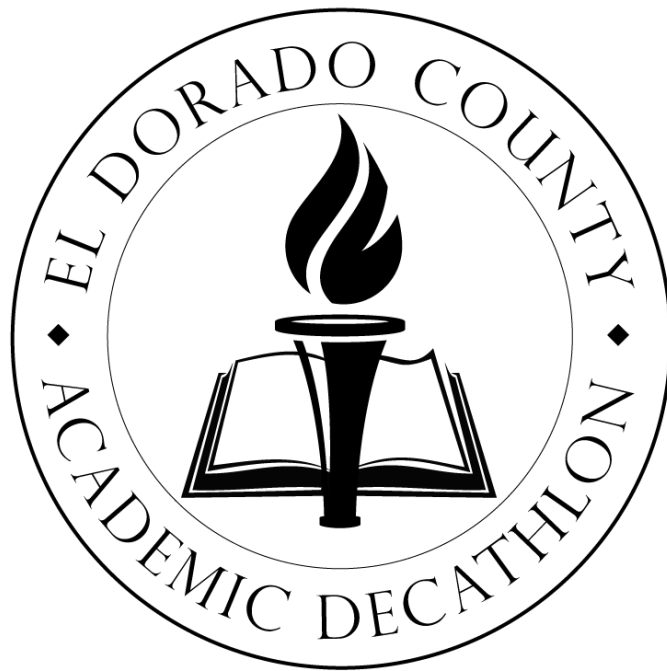


El Dorado County

Academic Decathlon



2026

Interview Judge Handbook

WELCOME!

Thank you for volunteering at the **2026 El Dorado County Academic Decathlon** on: **January 28, 2026**

This event brings together **over 100 outstanding high school students** from local schools to compete in written tests, speeches, interviews, and the always thrilling **Super Quiz**. Your role as a volunteer judge is **essential to the success of this competition**. This handbook provides clear guidance on your responsibilities and expectations.

Your Role as a Judge

You will evaluate students in **arena-style interviews**, where students rotate through judging stations in a gym setting. This format helps prepare them for real-world scenarios like job fairs and state-level competitions.

Stay Connected

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out:

 **Dena Allen, Academic Decathlon Coordinator** – dkallen@edcoe.org, (530) 295-4530

 **For immediate assistance during the event, contact Curtis Wise at (530) 957-9749**

Thank you again for your time and dedication. We look forward to seeing you and working together to create an impactful experience for our students. **See you at the Decathlon!**

Warm regards,

Dena Allen

Academic Decathlon Coordinator

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Wednesday, January 28, 2026

Time	Event	Location
3:15 – 3:45	Interview Judges – Orientation/Refreshments	Cafeteria
3:45 – 4:00	Interview Judges set up arena stations	Small Gym
3:45	Decathletes Arrive at Union Mine High School	Cafeteria
3:45 – 4:00	Decathlete/Coach Check-In	Cafeteria
4:00 – 4:05	Decathletes proceed to stations	Small Gym
4:05 – 5:30	Interview Competition	Small Gym
4:05 – 5:30	Speech Competition	Assigned Classrooms
4:45 – 4:55	10-minute break for judges	
3:45 – 5:30	Team Study/Snacks	Cafeteria
5:30	Pizza	Cafeteria

OVERVIEW OF RESPONSIBILITIES

As an **Interview Judge**, your role is to **conduct and evaluate decathlete interviews** alongside one other judge. Each decathlete will participate in a **6–7-minute interview** with your judging panel. Decathletes will rotate to your interview station, guided by an **arena timer** announcing each session. It's essential to **stay on schedule** to ensure the event runs smoothly.

WHAT TO BRING

- **No food is allowed** in the interview arena. You may bring a **beverage**.
 - **Cell phones must be turned OFF** during interviews.
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BEFORE INTERVIEWS BEGIN

- Review the list of decathlete names to ensure you are not judging a close relative or acquaintance.
 - **Orientation:** Arrive at **3:15 p.m.** for the **Interview Judge Orientation**, which will begin with refreshments.
 - **Training:** Event procedures, **scoring criteria**, and best practices will be reviewed.
 - **Materials:** You'll receive all necessary interview materials and meet your judging partner(s).
 - **Preparation:** After orientation, proceed directly to your **assigned interview station** and prepare as instructed.
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PREPARATION FOR INTERVIEWS

- Head to your **assigned station immediately after orientation** to set up and review your materials.
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SCHEDULE AND TIMING

- Each decathlete will report to their **designated interview station** at the scheduled time.
 - **10 minutes per interview:** This includes the interview itself and brief scoring time afterward.
 - If a decathlete **does not show up**, write "**No Show**" next to their name on the **Interview Evaluation Form** and **submit it to Dina Gentry** in the Cafeteria at the end of the session.
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INTERVIEW JUDGE GUIDELINES

Objective

Conduct an objective interview where each decathlete experiences a consistent and professional interaction. DO NOT ask about what school the student is from. If the student shares the name of their school, there is no penalty.

Interview Questions

Select **5–6 questions** from the list below. Follow-up questions are optional but may be used for clarification or elaboration. **Do not ask questions outside this list.**

- Discuss one way you've made a positive impact in your community.
 - What is one dream you have for your future? What steps are you taking to make it a reality?
 - What is the most valuable use of your time right now? Explain why.
 - What is a hobby you've recently taken up? What do you enjoy about it?
 - How do you see your education shaping your ability to make a difference?
 - What three qualities do you value in a friend, and why?
 - What recent choice are you proud of, and how does it reflect your values?
 - Describe a situation when you recognized a new strength in yourself.
 - What advice would you give incoming freshmen about succeeding in high school?
 - How do you build community on your school campus?
 - What issue do you think is most important for high school students today?
 - How do you seek opportunities for growth outside the classroom?
 - Describe a time you demonstrated resilience after a setback.
 - How do you stay motivated during stressful periods?
 - What do you hope to achieve academically and personally in the next five years?
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Conducting a Successful Interview

Creating the Right Environment

- Establish a **pleasant, relaxed atmosphere** with genuine interest and attentive listening.
- Avoid arguing, interrupting, or asserting authority.
- Maintain **empathy, fairness, and sound judgment**.
- Stay focused on the decathlete's responses and avoid sharing personal opinions.

Managing the Interview

- Keep control while allowing the decathlete to play the **dominant role** in the conversation.
- Pace questions thoughtfully and avoid rushing.
- Guide the conversation naturally without dominating it.
- Conclude gracefully without abruptness.

Handling Silent Gaps

- Summarize key points to transition between questions.
- Ask for specific examples when needed.
- Rephrase questions if clarity is needed.

Active Listening

- Pay attention to both **content and delivery** (e.g., tone, facial expressions, gestures).
- Avoid interrupting responses.
- Show interest through attentive body language.

Scoring Criteria

- **Voice:** Clarity, volume, and tone variety to maintain engagement.
- **Language Usage:** Appropriate vocabulary, grammar, and clear articulation.
- **Interpersonal Skills:** Ability to establish rapport and interact confidently.
- **Non-Verbal Language:** Effective use of gestures, facial expressions, and physical presence.
- **Manner:** Confidence, enthusiasm, and respectful engagement.
- **Listening Skills:** Attention to and comprehension of questions.
- **Answering Skills:** Logical, concise, and organized responses with relevant examples.
- **Responses:** Thoughtful, insightful answers demonstrating personal qualities and goals.
- **Overall Effectiveness:** The overall impression of communication, connection, and response quality.
- **Appearance:** Professional attire (team uniforms are not allowed).
- Excellent 9-10, Very Good 7-8, Good 5-6, Fair 3-4, Poor 0-2.
- It is best-practice to begin at 5 and decrease or increase points to ensure all decathletes are evaluated consistently.
- Watch this video to become more familiar with the scoring rubric: [Interview Training Video](https://tinyurl.com/AcaDecaInterviewTraining)
(<https://tinyurl.com/AcaDecaInterviewTraining>)

Evaluation Form

- Forms will include **Student ID, First Name, Station Number, and Judge Number** pre-filled.

- **Score each category objectively**, starting at **5** on the scale and adjusting up or down.


SCRIPT AND DIRECTIONS FOR INTERVIEW JUDGES

Once the decathlete is seated, **one judge** should read the following script aloud (font size is increased):

Welcome! My name is [Your First Name].

I'd like to introduce you to our other judge: [Judge's First Name].

Please tell us your first name and your identification number.

 *Do not ask which school the decathlete is from.*

This interview will last approximately 6 to 7 minutes. When about **6 minutes** have passed, an **arena timer** will announce that there is **one minute remaining** for a final question.

The interview will conclude when you finish your final response or when **7 minutes have passed**.

Let's begin! Please tell us a little about yourself. (*This should take about 20–30 seconds.*)

During the Interview:

- After the decathlete's introduction, the **assigned judge** should ask the **first question**.
 - If appropriate, reference something the student mentioned in their introduction.
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Closing the Interview:

At the conclusion, say:

Thank you. Good luck, and enjoy the rest of your day!

- The decathlete must **exit promptly** to allow judges time to complete the **Interview Evaluation Form**.
- Complete evaluation forms **immediately** after each interview.
- Submit all completed forms and binders to **Dina Gentry in the cafeteria** at the end of the session.