

AVLP FAQ

What exactly is the A Vous la Parole contest? The A Vous la Parole (AVLP) French speaking contest was created in the 1970's by Carleton French professor Michel Monnot and his wife Janice to showcase secondary students' French speaking skills in addition to giving them an opportunity to visit a college/university campus. The contest has continued annually, bringing 600-1000 students to a local college/university each spring. It is currently held at the University of Minnesota.

What is unique about AVLP? AVLP has been mentioned several times in the National AATF Bulletin as a "one-of-a-kind" contest. Some states don't even have a speaking contest to supplement the written Grand Concours and yet others have ones that look quite different. For example, Ohio has a speaking contest open only to elite students – only one student per high school is allowed to participate. Wisconsin has regional and state contests that resemble ours except that all students from a particular level must present the exact same text. Minnesota's contest allows any student of French in grade 7-12 to participate and allows the student(s) to choose appropriate texts with the help of their teachers. Students compete only against their own level of French - NOT against other students.

What awards do the students receive? All participating students receive a certificate printed with their name and category regardless of rating. Those receiving higher ratings also receive medals with blue, red or white ribbons attached (based on their scores). Results/award packets are available by the end of the morning and are taken home by the respective teacher/group. There is no awards ceremony.

What does the typical AVLP morning look like? Everything takes place under one roof, in Coffman Union on the University of Minnesota campus. In a typical year, the morning begins at 9 am in the Great Hall where there is a short opening ceremony. This allows the teachers, students, and judges to come together to celebrate the study of French and is the only time where all those present will be together in one room. Starting at 9:30, students will go to their various judging rooms and perform for the judges and audiences. All students who participate should realize that the contest is meant to be a time to watch and learn from each other and so all performances are open to viewing. Groups leave as they finish competing and after picking up their awards packets.

Can you better explain the different categories? The AVLP contest appeals to lots of different skills and talents. The prose/poetry category is great for someone who is comfortable having a text for weeks in advance and can perfect it and add their own interpretation. The theater categories are for students who may enjoy working with a group and may even have experience in theater at school. This category invites costumes and props and can be quite creative. The original skit category is for your students who enjoy acting, but who also can create something from scratch. They can get together to write an original script based on the year's theme and then plan how to creatively present it. The song categories are for your musicians who want to combine their French and musical talents. Instruments can be used as well as choreography if appropriate. And finally the extemporaneous categories: reading and conversation. These fit best with students who can do well on the spot. Since there is no required prep in advance, the reading category might be perfect for that student who has wonderful pronunciation skills but doesn't have the time to practice a poem for weeks. They have 5 minutes on site to see the text and perform it for the judges. The conversation category is great for your advanced students who are very social and can converse about anything. They only find out their topic 5 minutes in advance, so they need to think on their feet!

How can I find poems and prose selections, theater selections and songs for all my students? If you decide to participate in this year's contest, I advise that you immediately begin a file folder entitled "AVLP." Once you do assign different pieces to your students, make sure to keep a copy of each for subsequent years. I have a list giving examples of texts for particular levels as compiled by several veteran AVLP teachers from a few years ago, and I can email it to anyone upon request (as an attachment) although it simply provides a few examples for each level. Please send an email to avouslaparole@hotmail.com if you are interested. The Internet has many sites that have French poems, songs or plays that you can print off to use. Your students might even be the best resources in locating these sites for you although the classroom teacher is the best in choosing a particular text to match a student's level.

Who judges the students? The volunteer judges range from native French speakers to current or retired French professors to French teachers on leaves to simply people who can speak French proficiently. They are not paid to judge and are simply there due to their love for French, their support of the contest and to help continue promoting French. Most judging rooms will have two judges, and their scores will be averaged to determine a final rating. Judges make every effort to provide praise and offer suggestions for improvement on judging sheets that the students can keep. Teachers who have students participating in the contest are not allowed to judge.

Why is there a "maximum number of entries" set for each category? Space is limited. At best we have about 14 rooms that can be used for judging purposes between 9:30 and 1:00, and the average room is able to accommodate about 30 time slots. That means that there are a little more than 400 total time slots that can be assigned to all participating students or groups of students. For example, if you were to decide to require all 150 of your French students to participate and wanted each to perform an individual poem or song, you would need 150 time slots and use more than a third of the time slots intended for the entire lot of participants. Therefore, the maximum is set at 4 entries per category per school to help eliminate an unbalance of entries in single categories and to keep things running within the allotted time and space. Groups can be as large as appropriate and are helpful in keeping the contest self-supporting since each member of a group pays the entrance fee.

What does the entrance fee pay for? The entrance fee is necessary to help the contest remain self-supporting. Although we get a 50% discount on the normal University of Minnesota rental fees, the space is expensive. The student awards (medals/ribbons and certificates) also cost a significant amount of money. Add in the expenses for copies, supplies and mailings, and you will see the need for the \$8/student entry fee. Comparing the fee to other fees for students (music contests or field trips or sports), you will find that \$8 is not excessive. Each student in each category and each student in each group pays the \$8 fee.

What are some unique things that teachers do related to A Vous la Parole? You will find that some teachers have been continuously involved in the contest for many years. Students often rave about the day and are anxious to come back the next year. Some teachers actually make AVLP part of their normal curriculum and also have developed rubrics related to it. There have been examples of entire classes that have performed a song together (as a group of 25 or 30 students) and therefore have been able to use class time to practice and plan costumes/choreography. To deal with category maximums, some teachers will assign interested students the same poem and give them a specified amount of time to practice it. They hold a mini-contest at school to see which student earns the right to compete in the contest before the registration information is due. Some schools have connected AVLP to their highest level of French in order to have an incentive for students to continue with French. All members of that level might be required to compete in an individual or group category, and then their teacher will assign them a letter grade. Schools have held their own mini-awards ceremony once they return to their school (or at a restaurant) with their results, and sometimes they will immediately perform for the other French classes to try and encourage contest participation for the following year. If you want more insight into any one of these suggestions, you can be connected to a veteran AVLP teacher who can give you more information.

What are some comments from participating teachers?

"It was an amazing and great experience -- the students seemed motivated and enjoyed it very much. My students and I will come back next year."

"My students ALL want to come back next year. They are so pleased with themselves and are already brainstorming ideas for the next time."

"What a wonderful day! I saw nothing but students and teachers highly engaged in practicing and performing to the best of their abilities. I saw and heard only the best of language and behavior and was proud to be there with our contest. Thanks also to the fabulous judges, who worked tirelessly and made such an effort to be encouraging in their demeanor and judging comments."

"Everything is so well organized and I appreciate all the extra help for us newbies."

"She [a first time student participant] came to see me all excited and looks forward to it next year. She said she had the sweetest judges and everyone was very helpful."

"The orchestration of the event is marvelous. The students felt proud and happy for their competing and they ALL said they would do this again next year. They also insisted on coming to all my classes to perform to encourage everyone else for next year."

"It is a thrill for the students and, although a lot of work, it's a lot of fun."