

Topic: Competitive Events Advice

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School: Western Heights High School, Oklahoma

One of Melinda Porterfield's basic techniques is to **let a student's written event grow out of the job station whenever possible**. Businesses provide basic insights for co-op students and have a lot of information to share, such as established customer service policies and demographic statistics. Melinda keeps a file of all information provided by the businesses she works with to help her students in subsequent years.

Last year one of her students had great success with a project stemming from his work placement. While employed at the Lyric Theater, Joey Salah developed a marketing plan for the business. Winning first place in hospitality and recreation marketing at CDC wasn't enough. He also shared his project with the theater. They not only adopted Joey's marketing plan, they also hired him into their marketing division. Currently his college studies include both music and marketing, providing an example of how one of DECA's competitive events can help integrate a student's interests around his or her marketing studies.

When helping a student get moving on a **written competitive event**, Melinda looks for ways to make the task look both interesting and manageable. Sometimes a student's work placement situation suggests an idea that the student can identify with. Once the student has an idea, in your first meeting **break the work down into sections**, and then start with the easiest sections first. For example, Melinda says factual background work on the business (demographics, for example) can be a good place to start. Once the student has done these parts, he or she will have a sense of accomplishment and will see that a significant portion of the work is done. This gives the student momentum for facing the more analytical parts of the project.

Melinda faces questions about **typing and computer skills** with each student from the start. They will need to know basic word processing and graphing or spreadsheet programs, or they will need a resource person who can help them with these techniques. "Above all," she says, "make sure they know how to **SAVE** their work so that they won't lose it." And set the final due date about a week early to allow for unforeseen problems.

As for enthusiasm, **Melinda tries to strike a balance between giving students confidence and helping them respect their work and their effort even if they don't win**. She explains that there are a lot of variables in competition and good projects don't always win. "The more you do written events, the easier it becomes. I do written events with my students because it gives them a wonderful sense of accomplishment and they learn a lot."