

Speech Contest - Guidelines and Best Practices

Contest Chair

The chair of a speech contest is responsible for organizing the contest. They are to make sure the following items are covered:

- Contest scheduling
- Filling of all contest roles
- Setting up the contest
- Publicity before and after the contest
- Coordinating with the contest chair of the next contest in the series

Contest Scheduling

- Club contests must occur before the Area Contest.
 - A club has the option not to conduct a contest if only one person is interested in competing.
- Area contests must occur before the Division Contest.
 - Recommend at least one week between the Area and the Division contests.
 - To determine a day of the week for an Area contest, check with the clubs to see which date works best for them.
 - Joint contests can be conducted if it makes sense geographically.
 - Try not to conduct joint contests involving all areas advancing to a Division Contest.
- Division contests must occur before the District Conference.
 - Recommend at least three weeks between the Division and District contests.

Contest Roles

The following roles must be filled at every contest:

- Toastmaster
 - Usually is the Contest Chair, but does not have to be.
- Chief Judge
 - An experienced judge is recommended.
- Judges
 - Make sure they are familiar with the judging criteria.
 - At the Area level and above, judges need to have completed six CC manual speeches.
 - Try to distribute between clubs in attendance.
 - Judges from outside your Area/Division are strongly encouraged.
 - At the Division level and higher, judges can not be in the same club as any contestants.
- Tie-Breaker Judge
 - Recommended that it be your most experienced judge.
 - Make sure the tie-breaker judge knows to rank all contestants.
- Timers (2)
- Vote Counters
 - Phil prefers to give this role to newer members.
- Sgt.-at-Arms

In filling roles, it helps if you specifically ask people if they want to perform a particular role.

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Contestant Eligibility

- All contestants and their respective clubs have to be in good standing. (Dues have to be current.)
- The International Speech Contest has a requirement that a contestant has to have completed six speeches from the CC Manual prior to the contest. No other contests have a speech requirement.
- You can contact World Headquarters if you have a question about a contestant's eligibility.

Location Set-up:

- When you reserve the location, make sure you factor in time for room set-up and clean-up.
- General rule of thumb for contest length:
 - Speech contestants - 10 minutes per contestant.
 - Table Topics/Evaluations - 5 minutes per contestant.
- Contest Materials
 - Gavel
 - Timing materials
 - Stopwatches
 - Timing lights/cards
 - Certificates of participation
 - Framing the certificates is recommended. (You can get frames from Dollar Tree.)
 - Can bring a laptop and a printer to the contest in order to print the certificates on-site.
 - 1st and 2nd Place certificates
 - Only announce 3rd place if you have at least five contestants.
 - Trophies are usually provided by the District Governor at the Area level and above.
 - Forms. (Usually available on-line at toastmasters.org)
 - Up-to-date judging forms
 - Tiebreaker judge forms
 - Speaker bio forms (for contestant interviews)
 - Vote tally sheets
 - Timing sheet
 - Speaker eligibility forms
 - Judge eligibility forms
 - A "contest in progress" sign to post on the door

Pre-Contest:

- Contestants, judges and other helpers should meet at least 30 minutes early
 - Toastmaster briefs the contestants
 - Draw for speaking order
 - Go over speaking area, timing lights, microphone check (if applicable), any other particulars of your location
 - Make sure you know how to pronounce every contestant's name correctly!
 - Mispronouncing a contestant's name can throw the contestant off.
 - If you're not sure, ask!
 - Check for special needs

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- Chief judge briefs the judges
 - Reviews judging criteria
 - Goes over ballot collection procedure
- Chief judge makes sure helpers are in place and know their responsibilities
- Make sure the contest starts on time!

Typical Contest Order:

- Toastmaster introduces the contest, gives a basic background of the contest and leads into the upcoming events.
- Toastmaster covers general ground rules, and introduces the Chief Judge.
- Speaking order is announced.
- First contest is performed.
- Toastmaster can call for a Break while ballots are being counted.
- Second contest is performed.
- Contestant Interviews are conducted while ballots are being counted.
- Open slot for any special presentations. (e.g. next round, upcoming District Conference.)
- Results are announced.

Particulars to Specific Contests:

- Table Topics
 - 1-2 minutes
 - All contestants answer the same question.
 - Contestants must leave the room before it is their turn to speak. After they have spoken, they may remain in the room.
- Evaluation
 - 2-3 minutes
 - All contestants evaluate the same speech: the "Target speech"
 - Judges and evaluators are not allowed to know what the Target speaker's objectives are.
 - The target speech should be a speech none of the Evaluators have previously heard.
 - Contestants must leave the room before it is their turn to speak. After they have spoken, they may remain in the room.
- International Speech Contest
 - Contestants must have completed at least six speeches in the CC Manual prior to the contest.
- Contestants can request to be out of the room while other contestants are speaking.

Best Practices for Toastmaster:

- Try to be as organized as possible. A disorganized contest will make the contestants even more nervous.
- Make sure you pronounce everybody's name correctly!
- All introductions must be the same: Name. Speech Title. Name.
- Material for the Contestant Interviews is usually taken from the Speaker Bio. Try to approach the interview to allow the speaker to be as candid as possible.

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Best Practices for Chief Judge:

- Recommend going over judging criteria with the judges during the pre-contest briefing.
- Always have the most recent copy of the Speech Contest Rulebook with you.
- After the contest – get the entire order of finish and give it to the contest chair.
- Can have a “code word” to signal there is a protest.

Advancing to the Next Round:

- The "Rule of Four" will be enforced this contest season.
 - If an Area has four clubs or less, then two people from each club can advance to the Area Contest.
 - If a Division has four Areas or less, then an Area can send up to two people to the Division contest. (This year, all Divisions have four Areas or less.)
 - If a District has four Divisions or less, then a Division can send up to two people to the District Contest. (This year, the District has four Divisions.)
- If a contestant slated to advance can not make it to the next level Contest, the next-highest placed contestant is allowed to compete. This process continues until each slot is filled, or there are no more contestants.
- Disqualified contestants may not advance.
- Make sure the contest chair at the next level gets the entire order of finish.

Publicity

- Send announcements to the clubs once contest dates and times are finalized. Send a reminder one week in advance.
- Recommend sending pictures of the winners to the local newspaper.

Online Resources

Speech Contest Rulebook:

<http://www.toastmasters.org/1171DCD>

(Note you have to "purchase" the rule book, but the digital copy is free for current members.)

Judge Training Module:

<http://www.toastmasters.org/Members/OfficerResources/eLearning/SpeechContestModule/SCTSession2.aspx>