

Organizing a Contest:

Rules, Tips and Secrets



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Introduction

Congratulations! You get to run an area contest!

If you haven't done it before, you'll find it to be challenging, frustrating, and scary ... and fun, exciting and you'll feel great after it's done!

This document will cover a few of the things that someone forgot to tell you. We'll look at the rules, the protocol, and just some advice that will make it go more smoothly.

Other than what's in the Rule Book, what's said in this document is not carved in stone. It's just advice collected from the experiences of those who've been there and done that. Although keep in mind there are reasons why some things are done a certain way, and these guidelines can help protect the integrity of your contest and make sure contestants are treated fairly, and can protect you from unknowingly ruffling feathers.

Always remember – you're not in this alone. Put together a team that will support you, and lean on your Division Governor and others you trust for guidance and advice.

RULE BOOK HIGHLIGHTS

Read the Rule Book to be fully prepared.

Selection of Contestants

- A club can select which member will represent it at the Area contest any way it wishes, whether club contest or appointment.
- If your area has four or fewer clubs, the District has the option of letting each club send TWO contestants during a given Toastmasters year. The decision is made at the beginning of each Toastmasters year by the District Executive Committee. If uncertain, contact your Division Governor or the District Lt. Governor of Education and Training.
- If you have just one contestant for a contest, you must still conduct the contest. There is still the possibility the contestant could disqualify on time. To give the lone contestant a "pass" wouldn't be fair to the other Area winners who had to meet a time limit. It does make the ballot counters' job easier, though.

Contestant Eligibility

- A contestant must be a member in good standing (dues paid up) of a club in good standing.
- To compete in the International Speech Contest, the contestant must have completed six assignments from the CC manual.
- There are no requirements for other contests other than being a member in good standing. However...
- District officers (Area Governors on up) are not eligible to compete.
- A contestant can only compete in ONE area, even if he or she has won more than one club contest.
- A contestant in one Area Contest cannot serve as a judge or chief judge in another Area.
- A contestant cannot have another major role at the same contest.

Judges

- At an area contest, there must be either equal representation (one judge from each club in the area (regardless of whether they have a contestant participating), or at least five judges, "unless impractical."
- Judges at an area contest have to be a member in good standing, have been a member for the past six months, and completed at least six CC projects.
- The identity of judges should remain anonymous as much as practical.
- At Division contests only, judges and the chief judge can't be in the same club as one of the contestants.

If a Contestant Is Late

- If at the time of the contestants' briefing a contestant has not shown up (at an Area Contest), an alternate speaker from that speaker's club may attend the briefing.
- The contestant must show up by the time the person conducting the contest (usually the Chair) is introduced to the audience. If not, the speaker is disqualified and the alternate can compete. However, the primary contestant has to first report to the Contest Chair, and must waive their right to the briefing.

If There is a Protest

- Contestants and judges can protest a speech based on originality if they believe a speech is less than 75% original. A protest can be presented to either you as Contest Chair or to the Chief Judge.
- If there is a protest – and they happen very rarely – start by calling a "time out" at the contest, ask people to take a short break while you consult with the Chief Judge. Do not explain to the audience why.
- The Chief Judge will then assemble the judges, talk to the contestant, and then the judges vote on whether to disqualify the contestant. You'll just have to fill time as best you can (District announcements, an impromptu educational session, etc.).
- Once you have announced the winners of the contest, results are final and cannot be protested. In the case of eligibility, a contestant is disqualified immediately, even if it happens after the contest.

TIMELINE

FOUR TO SIX WEEKS BEFORE THE CONTEST

Read the Rule Book!

It will answer many of your questions, including ones you didn't think to ask. Even if you think you now the rule book, read it. There are changes every year.

Choose a Sergeant at Arms and a Chief Judge (and maybe a Wrangler).

These are your partners. Look for experience if you have little. Work with them to divide duties.

Find a location, date, and time.

- In choosing the **time**, be careful not to make it too early (if it's a weekday, give them a reasonable chance to make it there after work). And set and promote two times... a "registration time" by which you want all contest personnel there so they can be briefed, and an actual contest start time (at least 30 minutes after the registration time).
- In choosing a **location**, check with the previous Area Governor. You are free to change tradition, but sometimes it's easier to keep using the same venue. Your predecessor should have contact information for you at the venue. If you are not familiar with it, visit the venue.
- Setting a **date** sounds easy, but you should consider:
 - Club contest dates
 - Division contest date
 - Dates of other area contests (You don't want to compete with your fellow Area Governors for volunteers, plus the AGs should try to attend and assist their fellow Area Governors' contests.)
 - Facility availability
 - Once you have chosen your Date, Time and Location, notify:
 - Your Division Governor
 - Your fellow Area Governors
 - The District Public Relations Officer (PRO) so it can be added to the District Calendar.

Decide what your contest is going to be like. Consider (there will be more info on each of these later under "Other Good Advice"):

- Theme?
- Educational Session?
- Refreshments?
- Trophies or Awards?
- Charge admission fee?

Download Contest Kit from Toastmasters.com

Although some of the files will duplicate what you have already been provided with, it's good to have electronic backups.

Roles

Make a list of the roles to be filled.

- The earlier you start the easier it is.
- The more people you have filling roles, the more people you have in the audience.
- You'll get better results if you don't ask generically... "I need someone from your club..." Ask individuals: "Jim, would you be my Chief Timer?"

Prepare Trophies/Prizes

If buying trophies locally, contact local trophy shops; ask about lead time for ordering trophies, cost, etc. (and add to this schedule below where appropriate). If ordering from TI, place order. 1st and 2nd place Evaluation Contest, 1st and 2nd place Humorous Speech Contest and Toastmaster of the Year trophy/plaque. If NOT, remember you CAN'T use the TM logo or even the name Toastmasters. You can say "Speech Contest" or "Evaluation Contest." It's up to the DEC to determine each year how much financial help the District will provide for trophies. More trophy information is listed later under "Other Good Advice."

THREE TO FOUR WEEKS BEFORE THE CONTEST

Find a Test Speaker

If it's a fall contest, find a volunteer to give the test speech that will be used for the evaluation contest contestants. It should be someone with 6-10 speeches completed in the CC. The speaker should be

someone not familiar to the contestants, and preferably from a different Area. This could be one of your most challenging tasks, so start early. And consider who could be a backup in case your first recruit backs out.

Start Promoting

As soon as you have reserved the location, date and time, send the details to the Club Presidents and Vice Presidents of Education so they can schedule their club contests if they haven't already done so. Include a reminder about Toastmaster of the Year Contest, with the Toastmaster of the Year form. Promote TMOTY contest within the message.

Create a Flyer.

Send flyers to Club Presidents and VPEs – include a list of roles, asking for volunteers and promote TMOTY contest.

Check Contest Forms and Certificates.

Should be provided by the Lt. Gov. Education & Training. Do you have the number needed for each contest? If not, contact LGET for more forms or print from the online kit you have downloaded from the Toastmasters International website.

Start preparing your contest script.

TWO TO THREE WEEKS BEFORE THE CONTEST

Check on facility reservation. Make sure you're on the calendar.

Work with your refreshment chair. Are you on the same page?

Work with Wrangler to collect contestant bio and eligibility forms.

Start preparing paperwork folders:

Judges and Tie-Breaking Judge (each should include:)

One ballot for each contest

One judge's eligibility form for each contest

"Barriers to Objectivity" document

Timers

Chief Timer's statement

One time-keeping form for each contest for each timer

Ballot Counters

Six tally sheets – one for each contest for each ballot counter.

ONE TO TWO WEEKS BEFORE THE CONTEST

Send reminder emails to volunteers.

Confirm your test speaker. Recruit a backup just in case.

Check list of contestants

Have you received names and eligibility and bio forms for all contestants? If not, contact club presidents.

Talk to your Chief Judge.

Check list of judges. Do you have equal representation from all clubs/areas? Everyone qualified?

Is the tie-breaking judge lined up?

Have the judges been sent copies of the ballots and rules to study in advance?

Finalize Contest Chair script.

Begin work on Contest Agenda/Program

Check List of Supplies/Equipment, including:

Timing Equipment

- Timing light
- Backup red-yellow-green cards
- 2 stopwatches.

Registration Table

- Sign-in Sheets
- Pens
- Name Tags
- Markers/Sharpies
- Money Bag/Envelope, Change – If registration fee collected
- Copies of next level conference flyers/registration forms

Refreshments:

- Snacks – sweet, salty, healthy
- Coffee and coffee maker – extension cord
- Beverages – Pop, bottled water, etc.
- Ice
- Cups – for coffee and beverages
- Sugar, artificial sweetener, creamer, stirrers

- Plates, napkins, eating utensils (depending on snacks)
-

ONE WEEK BEFORE

Send reminder messages to volunteers, contestants and dignitaries.

Check on facility reservation.

Check with next level Conference Chair – Are they attending and will they bring flyers/registration forms for their contest? If not, ask for one to copy and have available at the Registration Table.

Do you have?

- Trophies – 1st and 2nd (*and maybe 3rd) place for each contest (Table Topics and International Speech in the spring; Evaluation and Humorous Speech in the fall).
- Certificates of Participation for each contestant
- 1st Place Certificates for both contests
- 2nd Place Certificates for both contests
- 3rd Place Certificates for both contests (if needed)
- Bio Sheet for each contestant
- Certification of Eligibility for each contestant
- Notification of Winners form
- Judges' Packets
- Ballot Counters' Packets
- Timers' Packets
- Check with Sgt. at Arms and review plans and supplies
 - Draw for Speaking order system – suggestions: draw numbers on slips of paper, use playing cards, etc.
 - Room set-up

TWO TO THREE DAYS BEFORE

Review everything above. What did you forget?

Select a Table Topics question (if it's a spring conference)

Print two copies: one for you to read the question from and the other to hand to the contestant.

Confirm again with your test speaker (if it's a fall conference)

Review agenda/program: Still accurate?

Pack supplies/equipment

Assemble your Chief Judge's packet (if CJ hasn't done it):

- Judges' folders

- Tie-Breaking Judge's folder
- Folders for Ballot Counters and Timers
- Chief Judge's statement
- Briefing information for Judge's briefing
- Briefing information for timers and ballot counters
- A copy of the Rule Book

ONE DAY/NIGHT BEFORE

Double check lists

Complete Participation Certificates (wait until the last minute in case there are any changes)

Finalize agenda and make copies

Review your script

Review contestant bio forms to prepare for post-contest interviews

Get a good night's sleep

Everything will go smoothly, and if not... well, it's a learning experience. Your Division Governor and other seasoned Toastmasters will be there; ask for their help.

AT THE CONFERENCE

- **Be the first one there!**
- **Meet a final time with Sgt. at Arms and Chief Judge to confirm duties and preparation.**
 - Give the Chief Judge the Judges', Ballot Counters' and Timers' Packets.
 - Give the SAA the timing devices and timing cards, plus drawing order system and form.
 - Make sure CJ and SAA work together to define the speaking area before the contestants' and judges' briefing take place.
- **Meet with Paper Wrangler**
 - Review when you want to be handed participation and bio forms and in what order.
 - Make sure the Wrangler has provided speech titles and they're in your script.
- **Meet with the highest ranking District officer attending.** Does he or she want to do District announcements (promoting the next contest and anything else they want)?

- Give registration table supplies to Registration team.
- Give refreshments to Refreshment team or check that supplies have arrived and are set up.
- Show SAA the room where Table Topics or Evaluation Contestants will be sequestered.
- Make sure you have a chair set up for yourself in front but off to the side of the stage.

ROLES

Required

Contest Chair
 Chief Judge
 Sgt. at Arms
 Test Speaker (fall only)
 5-7 Judges (Either equal representation or 5 or more for Area, 7 or more for Division)
 1 Tie-breaking judge (identity known only to Chief Judge)
 3 Ballot Counters
 2 Timers
 Contestants (of course)

Optional

Paper Wrangler
 Refreshment Chair
 Refreshment Assistants
 Registration Desk Chair
 Registration Desk Assistant
 Education Session Leader
 Thought of the Day or Humorist
 Publicity Chair
 Photographer
 Greeter
 Protocol Director
 Assistant Sgt. at Arms

**Set-up / Clean-up Committee
Calligrapher**

OTHER GOOD ADVICE

It's All About the Contestants

The contest is not about the Area Governor, and not about the Contest Chair. You are merely there to facilitate the contest as effectively as possible. However...

But It is ALSO About You

This is also a learning opportunity for you... learning to lead, to organize, and to delegate. And it's an opportunity for an unusual speaking experience. Enjoy your time in the spotlight (without overshadowing the contestants).

Do You *Have to Be* the Chair?

No. Honestly, you can delegate the whole kit & caboodle. But if you do, you're really missing out on one of the great learning opportunities that goes with being an Area Governor. Just do it.

Choosing Your Chief Judge, SAA and Wrangler

If you've never run a contest before, make sure you have someone very experienced for either Chief Judge or Sergeant at Arms, or both. It also helps to have an experienced Wrangler, although that is also a prime learning position for someone who might succeed you some day. Your call.

Note that according to the rule book, your Chief Judge at the Area level and up **MUST** meet the same eligibility requirements as the judges: At least six CC manual projects completed, and can't be a member of the same club as one of the contestants.

Choosing Judges

You owe it to the contestants to put together the best judging team you can. While the Chief Judge will advise you or handle the recruiting, know the rules and offer what help you can, including recruiting. You know your area best. Technically, at the Area level you can have "equal representation" or at least five judges. Aim for both; fewer than five judges isn't fair to the contestants. Ideally, recruit a judge from each club in your area, and add a couple of good experienced judges from outside your area.

Your judges are going to have to fill out an eligibility form that verifies they are qualified. To be eligible to judge at the area and division level, a member must have at least six CC projects completed and not be a member of the same club as one of the contestants.

The Tie-Breaking Judge

Technically, only the Chief Judge should know the identity of the tie-breaking judge. Because the TB Judge should NOT attend the judges' briefing, choose someone who is experienced. The same eligibility requirements apply to the TB Judge.

Attendance

You can't oversell the contest to clubs. It will be harder than you think to get people to attend. Assign as many roles as you can. Visit clubs personally to invite.

Publicity

If you don't have a lot of areas close to you geographically (i.e., outside of Des Moines-Ames and Cedar Rapids), promote the event to the community.

Charging Admission?

Toastmasters allows you to charge a small admission (perhaps \$1 or \$2) to cover your costs (mostly food and trophies). It's up to you whether you want to or you're willing to pick up the cost or do everything low-budget.

Educational Sessions

Not required, but if there's time (could depend on venue), it's an opportunity for the area to bond, share goals and build membership. And, of course, to educate.

Dignitary Introductions

- Recommended order:
 - Current TRIO (by name, according to rank)
 - Past District Governors (by name)
 - Other District officers, including:
 - PRO
 - Secretary
 - Treasurer

- District Chief Judge
 - District Librarian
 - District Historian
 - District Web Site Director
 - District Social Media Director
 - Etc.
 - Current Division Governor (by name)
 - Past Division Governors (by name)
 - Current Area Governors (by name)
 - Optional (Just stand up; no name recognition necessary):
 - Past Area Governors
 - Current Club presidents
 - Past Club presidents
 - DTMs
- Of course, skip over any officer if he or she is not attending your contest.
 - Recognize dignitaries at the start of the event, **UNLESS** one of the contestants is a dignitary. Then hold the introductions until the end.
 - Define for the audience what makes up a District, Division and Area to help teach the TM structure.
 - Why is this protocol important?
 - It helps the members recognize who their leaders are.
 - It illustrates what district offices may be available to them.
 - It recognizes the volunteer work and hours put in by the district officers.
 - Consider having a veteran Toastmaster who "knows the faces" serve as protocol officer and create a dignitary list for you as people arrive.

When You Introduce Contestants...

- It's in the Rule Book.

For Table Topics or Evaluation contests, it's simply:

"Contestant number 1: <Speaker's name>. <Speaker's Name>, Contestant number 1."

For International Speech and Humorous Speech, it's;
"Mark Latta, "<Title of Speech>. <Title of Speech>, Mark Latta."

- The goal is to make sure *every contestant is treated equally* and gets no more attention than any other contestant. It is not the time for the contest chair to ad-lib or joke.

Sitting Down

- After you introduce the contestant, go to your chair and stand in front of it. Remain standing until the contestant says, "Madam/Mr. Contest Chair." *Then* sit.
- If the contestant forgets to acknowledge you, give it some time to make sure, and then go ahead and sit. Some contest chairs will remain standing, but doing so draws attention away from the speaker, and remember, contests are all about the speaker.
- If you forget and sit immediately upon arriving at your chair, don't stand up again. Again, it draws attention to you. Just remain seated, and nod at the contestant when he or she acknowledges you.

Contestant Interviews

- Prepare in advance – have your questions ready (but be ready to ad-lib follow-up questions)
- Remember, it's about the contestant, not about you. Don't steal the show by adding your own stories.
- Be prepared for a long interview with the Evaluation Contest Test Speaker – you have five minutes to fill.

Your Table Topics Question (spring contest only)

- Keep it fairly short! Remember, you're going to have to read it twice to every contestant.
- The question can be more challenging than in a club Table Topics session, but still the objective is not to stump the contestant. Give the contestant the opportunity to be creative.

Agendas

- You can make it as fancy or plain as you like.
 - If plain, at the very least list the names of the contest chair, Chief Judge, Sgt. at Arms, and especially the contestants, in alphabetical order, with a blank line in front so people can mark down the speaking order when you announce it.
 - If fancy, you can add the names of all volunteers ... *except judges!* Their identities are to be kept as secret as possible. (For the same reason, when you thank your volunteers for their help, do not identify the judges by name. Just say thank you to them as a group.)
- Either way, have someone else proof the agenda before you print it, especially for the correct spelling of names.

Verbal Details

- Know how to pronounce all names, especially contestants, BEFORE the contest starts. Keep a pre-contest checklist:
 - Names of contestants
 - Speech titles
 - pronunciations

Trophies

- You are not required to have trophies. You can substitute plaques, or even gift cards or books or anything you like.
- You can purchase your trophies from a local shop, but you **cannot** use the Toastmasters logo or name in the engraving. You **can** have the trophy say "Speech Contest" or "Evaluation Contest" or "Area 32 Contest."
- If ordering from TI, be sure to get the appropriate number of trophies. First and Second place for each contest if you have four or fewer contestants. Add a Third Place if you'll have five or more.
- District 19 might partially reimburse you for the cost of trophies. It's up to the DEC to determine each year.

- NOTE: At Division Contests and higher, trophies are purchased for you by District 19.

Attire

You're in charge. Look like it. Dress to impress in a business-like manner. Dress as if you were interviewing for a job you really really want.

District Announcements

The highest ranking District officer present should be given the opportunity to speak to the audience about upcoming events, including promoting the next level contest. It typically is at the end of contest right before the winners are announced. It can also be used earlier in an emergency if you need to fill time.

Announcing the Winners

- If you have fewer than four contestants for a contest, announce ONLY the first and second place winners (not a third place winner). When possible, avoid letting the audience know who finished last. If you have three contestants, still announce first and second place.
- If you have five or more contestants, announced first, second and third.
- Do NOT call all the contestants forward at the same time. That only shines an embarrassing spotlight on those that did not do well. Only call forward the top 2 or 3 individually as you present the awards.
- If there is a disqualification because of a time violation, announce only that a disqualification on time has occurred. Do NOT identify which speaker that was.
- Enlist help of a current District Officer – either Division Governor or higher District official – to hand out the trophies and certificates.

Saying Thank You to Volunteers

The last thing done should be a thank you to the people who helped organize and present the contest. Again, the exception is the judges, who should not be identified by individual name.

Photography

- If you have arranged for a photographer, invite the winners to come forward after you have concluded for photos.

- Use the photo to send out a news release to local media announcing the contest results.
- Provide the winners' home clubs with copies of the photo so they can promote their clubs.

After the Contest

- Meet and greet; warmly accept the well-deserved accolades.
- Meet with the Wrangler and Chief Judge to make sure all paperwork is ready to send on to the next level, including contestant eligibility forms, bios, and a the Toastmasters form listing the order of the speakers (all speakers, not just the announced winners).
- Manage the clean-up and make sure the room is restored to the way you found it.

If You Need Help

Throughout the contest process, don't be afraid to ask questions of:

- Your Division Governor
- Your predecessor as Area Governor
- Other past Area and Division Governors
- Lt. Governor of Education & Training