



Humorous Speech and Table Topics Contests

Chief Judge Guide

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Introduction

When taking on the role of Chief Judge, it is of the utmost importance to be familiar with the Speech Contest Rulebook July 1 2026 - June 30 2027 'Rulebook' and especially the Chief Judge's checklist pages 27-29.

Paul Walsh, DTM

D91 District Chief Judge 2026-27

Prior to the contest

It is suggested that a Judge's WhatsApp Group is set up, which is really useful not only for communication beforehand, especially a 'Pre-Contest briefing' but also on the night, ensuring Judges have arrived or are on the way.

WhatsApp pre contest briefing

Here is suggested copy:

'Dear Fellow Judges,

I am delighted to introduce myself, [NAME] as your Chief Judge for [CONTEST] on [DATE] at the [VENUE]

*The contests commence at [TIME] and please be well in time for Judge's Briefing at [TIME]***

We will give out judge ballots on the evening.

Please find attached.

1. Judge Certificate of Eligibility – Can you please download it and sign it (Digitally is OK) and send it to me by Sunday evening
2. Speech Contest Rulebook

I have also sent you a couple of links to excellent speech contest tutorials on Judging, from Toastmasters International website.

[When you're the judge](#)

[The judge's guide and ballot](#)

I very much look forward to having you on our Judging team on [DAY] and please do not hesitate to ask any questions beforehand.

[Chief Judge Name]

**** Judges' Briefing should ideally be 30 minutes before and no less than 15 minutes before the start of the contest**

At the Contests

Punctuality and arrival

- Arrive well in time
- Liaise with Contest Chair, Contest Organiser and President

- Have a list of the judges and mark them as present, as they arrive.

Tie-Breaking judge

- Advise the judge chosen as the Tie Breaking (T/B) judge as soon as they arrive. Give them their T/B judge ballot and emphasise that they place every speaker, from first to last. They do not attend the judges' briefing.

Humorous Speech Contest

Briefings -

At least 15 minutes before the contest starts.

1. Judges' briefing

Documentation

- Give a judge ballot, with guide on the reverse to each judge. Emphasise that this is a guide to assist them **when they complete 1st, 2nd, 3rd speaker and sign their ballot.**
- Collect any remaining certificates of judge eligibility.

Brief them on Humorous Speech Contest as follows:

- It is a speech of between 5 – 7 minutes, on a subject determined by the contestant.
- **GREEN** signal is displayed at 5 minutes, **YELLOW** signal at 6 minutes, **RED** signal displayed at 7 minutes and remains on until the completion of the speech.
- A contestant is disqualified if a speech is less than 4 minutes and 30 seconds or more than 7 minutes and 30 seconds.
- The speaker should avoid potentially objectionable language, anecdotes and material.
- The speech must be thematic in nature, with an opening, body and close and not be a monologue (a series of one liners)
- It must be created by the contestant and substantially original – 25% or less of the speech may be devoted to quoting, paraphrasing or referencing another person's content. Any quoted, paraphrased or referenced content must be identified during the speech presentation.
- Contestants must not reference another contestant, or a speech presented by another contestant.
- The designated platform area for speaking is [Confirm with Contest Chair beforehand]

Protests and disqualifications

- Protests are limited to eligibility, originality and reference to another contestant or another contestant's speech. Only judges and contestants can lodge a protest with the Chief Judge or Contest Chair, which must be done before the adjournment of the contest.
- Protests from audience members must not be considered.
- In the event of a protest, the contestant will be given an opportunity to respond to the voting judges. A majority of the voting judges must concur with a decision to disqualify.

Time disqualification

- Judges need not be concerned over time – This is managed by the Ballot Counters and Chief Judge

Speaking order

- Give the speaking order to judges (From the Contest Chair) and ensure they put it on their ballots.

Sitting in the audience

- Suggest to judges that they sit in the audience towards the end of rows, so that ballot counters can collect their ballots.
- Finally, emphasise once more the importance of ranking speakers 1st, 2nd, 3rd and signing their ballot.

2. Functionaries' briefing

2.1 Timers

- There are 2 timers. Give them the Speech Contest Time Record Sheet and instructions for timers.
- One timer should focus on the timing and completing the time record sheet and the other should focus on displaying **GREEN**, **YELLOW**, **RED** signals, which are in full view of the contestants.
- Contestants' presentation times are recorded on the timer sheet and time disqualifications are highlighted.
- Timing begins with the first definite verbal or non-verbal communication with the audience.

For Humorous Speech Contest, it is a speech of 5 to 7 minutes.

- **GREEN** signal is displayed at 5 minutes, **YELLOW** signal at 6 minutes, **RED** signal displayed at 7 minutes and remains on until the completion of the speech.
- A contestant is disqualified if a speech is less than 4 minutes and 30 seconds or more than 7 minutes and 30 seconds.
- Any speech that is less than 4 minutes 30 seconds or more than 7 minutes and 30 seconds should be highlighted on the Speech Contest Time Record Sheet.

2.2 Ballot Counters

- They will collect the judges' ballots at the end of the contest, ***apart from the Tie breaking Judge ballot which you collect.*** Remind ballot counters to check that a judge has signed their ballot and that all ballots are collected!

2.3 Sergeant at Arms

- For the Humorous Speech Contest, the role is straightforward - to ensure that the room is secure during the contest.
- Latecomers can enter and audience members can leave the contest room between speeches.

Briefings complete

- There will be 10 – 15 minutes before the contest commences. Be calm and be aware!
- Where necessary, give assurance to functionaries, keep an eye on judges, and liaise with the Contest Chair and Contest Toastmaster as required.

The body of the Humorous Speech Contest

- Sit back and enjoy!
- At the end of the contest, it's time for action!
- Once the last speaker has spoken, there is silence while judges mark the last speaker and complete AND sign their ballot.
- Collect the Tie-Breaking Judge ballot yourself and the Speech Contest Time Record Sheet from the Timers.
- When all of the signed ballots have been collected by the ballot counters, they accompany you to a place where you can count the ballots.

Protests

Whilst a protest may be made either by a contestant or a voting judge any time prior to the 'Adjournment' of a contest, it is most likely to be made soon after the speeches have been delivered and either just prior or during ballot counting.

In the event of a protest, please refer to the Rulebook, 'General Rules for All Toastmasters Speech Contests' 7. Protests and Disqualifications page 17.

Ballot Counting

Never feel rushed, take your time

Suggested process for counting:

(Counter's Tally Sheet is ideally completed with the names of judges and contestants before counting begins.)

- As Chief Judge, you oversee the counting and check:
 1. All ballots are signed.
 2. For any time disqualifications.
- One ballot counter reads out the results and the other completes the ballot sheet.
- At the end of the ballot count, you check the arithmetic.
- If there is a tie, from first to last, refer to the T/B Judge ballot to break the tie.
- Complete the
 - Notification of Contest Winner form, first to last
 - 1st, 2nd, 3rd place certificates.
- Hold onto the 1st, 2nd, 3rd placed certificates and return to the Contest Room, which is a signal for the Contest Chair that preparations for the Table Topics Contest can commence.

END

Table Topics Contest

Briefings

1. Judges' Briefing

NB Some chief judges will combine the briefings. My preference is to have a briefing for each contest. The briefings below are presented as 'Standalone' but if it comes after a Humorous Speech Contest, there will be opportunity for some brevity, such as 'Protests and disqualifications.'

Documentation

- Give a judge ballot, with guide on the reverse to each judge. Emphasise that this is a guide to assist them **when they complete 1st, 2nd, 3rd speaker and sign their ballot.**
- Collect any remaining certificates of judge eligibility.

Brief them on the Table Topics Contest as follows:

- It is a speech of between 1 – 2 minutes.
- **GREEN** signal is displayed at 1-minute, **YELLOW** signal at 1 minute 30 seconds, **RED** signal displayed at 2 minutes and remains on until the completion of the speech.
- A contestant is disqualified if a speech is less than 1 minute or more than 2 minutes and 30 seconds.
- All contestants receive the same topic, selected by the Contest Chair.
- As for all contest speeches, it must be created by the contestant and substantially original – 25% or less of the speech may be devoted to quoting, paraphrasing or referencing another person's content. Any quoted, paraphrased or referenced content must be identified during the speech presentation.
- Contestants must not reference another contestant, or a speech presented by another contestant.
- The designated platform area for speaking is [Confirm with Contest Chair beforehand]
- All contestants except the first, are escorted by the Sergeant at Arms to a room out of earshot of the Contest Room.
- They are not allowed any mobile devices.
- At the end of the 1st contestant's speech, the next contestant is escorted to the door of the Contest Room.
- Once a contestant has given their contest speech, they remain in the contest room.

Protests and disqualifications

- Protests are limited to eligibility, originality and reference to another contestant or another contestant's speech. Only judges and contestants can lodge a protest with the Chief Judge or Contest Chair, which must be done before the adjournment of the contest.
- Protests from audience members must not be considered.
- In the event of a protest, the contestant will be given an opportunity to respond to the voting judges. A majority of the voting judges must concur with a decision to disqualify.

Time disqualification

- Judges need not be concerned over time – This is managed by the Ballot Counters and Chief Judge

Speaking order

- Give the speaking order to judges (From the Contest Chair) and ensure they put it in their ballots.

Sitting in the audience

- Suggest to judges that they sit in the audience towards the end of rows, so that ballot counters can collect their ballots.
- Finally, emphasise once more the importance of ranking speakers 1st, 2nd, 3rd and signing their ballot.

2. Functionaries' briefing

2.1 Timers

- There are 2 timers. Give them the Speech Contest Time Record Sheet and instructions for timers.
- One timer should focus on the timing and completing the time record sheet and the other should focus on displaying **GREEN**, **YELLOW**, **RED** signals, which are in full view of the contestants.
- Contestants' presentation times are recorded on the timer sheet and time disqualifications are highlighted.
- Timing begins with the first definite verbal or non-verbal communication with the audience.
- For Table Topics Contest, it is a speech of 1 to 2 minutes.
- **GREEN** signal is displayed at 1-minute, **YELLOW** signal at 1 minute 30 seconds, **RED** signal displayed at 2 minutes and remains on until the completion of the speech.
- A contestant is disqualified if a speech is less than 1 minute or more than 2 minutes and 30 seconds.

2.2 Ballot Counters

- They will collect the judges' ballots at the end of the contest, ***apart from the Tie breaking Judge ballot which you collect.*** Remind ballot counters to check that a judge has signed their ballot and that all ballots are collected!

2.3 Sergeant at Arms

For Table Topics Contest, explain the process:

- All contestants except the first, are escorted by the Sergeant at Arms to a room out of earshot of the Contest Room.
- They are not allowed any mobile devices.
- At the end of the 1st contestant's speech, the next contestant is escorted to the door of the Contest Room.
- Upon the Contest Chair's beckoning, the contestant enters the room to be told the topic and deliver their speech.
- This process is repeated until all of the contestants have spoken.
- Once a contestant has given their contest speech, they remain in the contest room.

Briefings complete.

- The contest commences as soon as practicable after the briefings.

The body of the Table Topics Speech Contest

- Sit back and enjoy!
- At the end of the contest, it's time for action!
- Once the last speaker has spoken, there is silence while judges mark the last speaker and complete AND sign their ballot.
- Collect the Tie-Breaking Judge ballot yourself and the Speech Contest Time Record Sheet from the Timers.
- When all of the signed ballots have been collected by the ballot counters, they accompany you to a place where you can count the ballots.

Protests

Whilst a protest may be made either by a contestant or a voting judge any time prior to the 'Adjournment' of a contest, it is most likely to be made soon after the speeches have been delivered and either just prior or during ballot counting.

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(Counter's Tally Sheet is ideally completed with the names of judges and contestants before counting begins.)

- As Chief Judge, you oversee the counting and check:
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 4. For any time disqualifications.
- One ballot counter reads out the results and the other completes the ballot sheet.
- At the end of the ballot count, you check the arithmetic.
- If there is a tie for any place, from first to last, refer to the T/B Judge ballot to break the tie.
- Complete the
 - Notification of Contest Winner form, first to last
 - 1st, 2nd, 3rd place certificates.
- Once complete, hold onto the 1st, 2nd, 3rd placed certificates and return to the Contest Room, which is a signal for the Contest Chair that the results for both contests have been determined.

Results announcement

- When beckoned by the Contest Chair, go to the front of the room with the results and certificates.
- Advise whether there were any time disqualifications.
- Announce Table Topics results in reverse order.

- Announce Humorous Speech Contest results in reverse order.
- End of results announcement
- Table Topics contest is adjourned.

Adjournment

When the contests are adjourned, give Notification of Contest Winner form for both contests to the Contest Host / Contest Toastmaster.

Thank judges and functionaries.

END