



Humorous Speech & Table Topics Contest

Contest Chair Guide

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Introduction

When taking on the role of Contest Chair, it is of the utmost importance to be familiar with the Speech Contest Rulebook July 1 2026 - June 30 2027 'Rulebook' and especially the Contest Chair's checklist pages 24-27.

Paul Walsh, DTM

D91 District Chief Judge 2026-27

Humorous Speech and Table Topics Contest - Prior to the contest

1. Get hold of contestant's details as soon as they are available:
 - a. Name, Club, email address, mobile phone number.
2. Set up a Contestant's WhatsApp group.
3. WhatsApp the contestants a week before the contest:

'Dear Contestants,

I am delighted to be your Contest Chair on [DATE] at [CONTESTS] at [LOCATION]

We can access the room at [TIME] and the contests start at [TIME]

Contestants' Briefing for Humorous Speech Contest will be at [TIME]

Please message me directly with your speech title by [TIME] on [DATE]

Table Topics Contestants' Briefing will be during the break, notionally, [TIME].

For all Contestants - Please find attached a the speech contest rulebook and Certificate of Eligibility (C of E)

Can you please print off the C of E, complete and sign it digitally beforehand or bring a signed copy to the Contestants' Briefing.

If you are in both Contests, one C of E will suffice.

Please message me, either direct or on this group with any queries you may have.

Regards

[NAME]

Chase information, as necessary:

'Hi Contestants,

Many Thanks for your speech title, Sheila!

Saket, Mark, Lavinia, Jakub, Maria

Please send me your speech title (direct to me) as soon as you can and no later than [DATE] at [TIME]

Thanks!

Mentioning that a contestant by name has sent you the required information, gets the remainder to respond!

4. Set up WhatsApp group for functionaries, headed up by Chief Judge (CJ) and a WhatsApp Group for Contest Toastmaster (CT), Contest Chair (CC) and CJ.

5. Prepare a contestants table, comprising name, If beyond club level, Area/ Division, Speech title, and a column for C of Es submitted and speaking order
6. Remember, as Contest Chair of Table Topics, you choose the topic! Do this prior to the contest. It must be of a 'General nature'. Write it on an index card and also in your notes.
Ensure the index card is to hand during the Table Topics Contest.

At the Contests

- Leave nothing to chance!
- Arrive well in time.
- Checkout room layout, speaking area, documentation.
- Constantly liaise with CT & CJ.
- Ensure contestants have turned up on time and tick them off on your contestants' table

Humorous Speech Contestant's briefing.

Introduction

- Ideally, this should be 30 minutes before the contest starts and no later than 15 minutes before the contest starts.
- Collect any outstanding C of Es and check all of the contestants are present.
- *Ensure all contestants are present and give a warm welcome*

'This is your formal contestants' briefing and we will draw for your speaking position at the end of the briefing. I am pleased to say we are all present.'

[As X is absent, and there is no alternate speaker, as long as X arrives before I am introduced Contest Chair is introduced, they may participate, provided.]

- *They report to me, Contest Chair upon arrival,*
- *Have all required paperwork in good order (This should be OK)*
- *Waives the opportunity of a briefing]*

Eligibility

'Thank you for completing eligibility forms and we can confirm that all of you are eligible.'

Speech subject and preparation

'You are responsible for creating your own speeches, which must be substantially original. You must avoid potentially objectionable language, anecdotes and material.

Your speech must be thematic (Opening, body and close), not a monologue (Series of one liners).

25% or less of your speech may be devoted to quoting, paraphrasing, or referencing another person's content, which must be so identified during your speech.'

Speaking area

'Are we content as this as the speaking area?'

Contestant introduction

'I will introduce you as [NAME] [SPEECH TITLE] [SPEECH TITLE] [NAME] (5F)

You can remain in the room throughout the contest.'

Timing of speeches

'Your speech will be from 5 – 7 minutes.

You will be disqualified if your speech is less than 4 minutes 30 seconds or more than 7 minutes and 30 seconds

Timers will provide you with the usual signals -

GREEN – At 5 minutes and displayed for 1 minute

YELLOW – At 6 minutes and displayed for 1 minute

RED – at 7 minutes and remain on until the conclusion of your speech 6G

Are you able to see the lights?'

Introduction and commencement of speech

'When I introduce you, please proceed to the speaking position.

*To ensure your microphone is working, as soon as you get to the speaking area, please say, **"Thank you, Contest Chair"**. I will respond, **"You're welcome!"***

Timing will begin with your next verbal / nonverbal communication with the audience'

Protest and disqualifications

'Protests can only be lodged by yourself - contestants – and voting judges.

They are limited to eligibility, originality and reference to another contestant or another contestant's speech.

Any protest must be lodged with the Chief Judge /Contest Chair prior to the contest being adjourned.

If a protest is lodged for originality or referencing, the contestant will have the opportunity to respond to the voting judges. A majority of the judges must concur with a decision to disqualify.'

Use of props and devices

'As per my email, prior notification of the use of props is required, including but not limited to any sort of electronic devices, music, PPT slides, virtual backgrounds.

You need to abide by any venue restrictions, when using props.

Props must be set up and removed in the minute of silence following contestant's speeches.

A contestant may enlist someone to help them, but it is not the responsibility of the Contest Chair or any other contest official to do so.'

Order of speaking

'Finally, let's draw for order of speaking . Please hold onto your card until I have confirmed all of the speaking positions'

As Contest Chair, ensure you have written the speaking order on your contestants' table (Easily forgotten!) and post the speaking order on Judges' WhatsApp Group as soon as drawn.

Body of Humorous Speech Contest.

Divide your opening into a 'Light-hearted beginning', followed by an 'Official' Opening.

Light hearted opening

It will be according to your style and some pointers are:

- Excite the audience with the history of the club/area/division in the history and success in the humorous speech contest.
- Draw upon your own experience of being involved / present at contests.
- Look to put everyone at their ease.
- Engage everyone by talking about how we run a contest and that we need functionaries and contestants.
- 'Functionaries are volunteers, from our club/area/division and from elsewhere - We are very grateful.'
- 'Participating in contests is a great part of the TI experience.'
- Finally, remind the audience of how they have a key role in to-night's contest:
 - By listening and enjoying our contestants' speeches
 - By being 'Quiet as church mice', at the end of contestants' speeches, when judges are marking their ballots
 - And by showing your hearty support for speakers when they take the floor and when they have finished their speech.
- And then ask:

'And how will you show your hearty support for our speakers to-night?'

(Which of course is a warm up)

'Official' introduction

'Let's now look at the contest. The humorous speech is a substantially original speech of between 5 – 7 minutes, which is thematic in nature – It has an opening, body and close – it is not a series of 'One liners'

'A contestant is disqualified if a speech is less than 4 minutes and 30 seconds, or more than 7 minutes and 30 seconds.'

'To give some guidance, one of our timers will display a

Green light at 5 minutes, which remains on for 1 minutes

Yellow light at 6 minutes, which remains on for 1 minute

Red light at 7 minutes, which remains on until the conclusion of the speech.'

'You can sit back and enjoy the contest as protests can only be made by contestants and voting judges, prior to the adjournment of the contest, based on originality, reference to another contestant or speech. We have already confirmed that all contestants are eligible to compete.

The speaking area has been agreed as.....

I can confirm that the contestants have been briefed.

I guess you would like to know the speaking order?

The speaking order is....'

Chief Judge have the functionaries and judges been briefed?'

'I can confirm that judges and functionaries have been briefed.'

'The contest can commence!'

Body of Humorous Speech Contest

The contest now is straightforward:

'Our 1st contestant is [NAME] with a speech entitled [SPEECH TITLE]

With a speech entitled [SPEECH TITLE], [NAME]'

'Thank you, Contest Chair'

'You're welcome!'

- At the end of the speech - Lead applause, no comment on the speech.

'Timer, can we have 1 minute please for judges to consider the speech'

- After 1 minute:
- Repeat the process for following contestants
- Our next contestant is.....until..... Our final contestant is.....
- At the end of the final contestant's speech.....

Lead applause, no comment on the speech.

'Timer, can we have 1 minute please for judges to consider the speech and then a period of silence for judges to complete their ballots and for ballot counters to collect the ballots.'.....

IT IS IMPORTANT TO MAINTAIN SILENCE.

When all of the ballots have been collected.....

'.....It looks like the ballots have now been collected and the ballot counters and Chief Judge will now leave the contest room and collate the ballots.'

'Let's have a round of applause'

- Commend the contestants for the excellent speeches and the audience for behaving themselves! Being silent and raucous in the right places!)

'We will now have an interval and let's reconvene in [TIME], subject to the Chief Judge and ballot counters completing their counting and finalising the results'

Interval

During the Interval,.....

- Have a good long breath and relax for a moment or two!
- Check in with the Contest Host, Contest Toastmaster, Functionaries.
- Check in especially with the Chief Judge. If there is a protest to consider, you will need to tell Contest Host, Contest Toastmaster, Functionaries, Table Topics Contestants that the interval will be extended. There is no need to be specific as to why.

Table Topics Contest

- When the counting and finalising of results is complete, the judge and Table Topics contestants' briefings may commence.
- Some Chief Judges and Contest Chairs will combine their respective briefings, having a Humorous Speech Contest and Table Topic Contest briefing at the beginning of the evening.

- My preference is to have separate briefings. I feel it provides clarity and minimises the risk of confusion.
- The contestants' briefing below is comprehensive and 'Standalone' and I fully accept that it is possible to summarise it, if it follows a Humorous Speech Contest, such as 'Protests and 'Disqualifications, assuming we have the same speakers!

Table Topics Contest Briefing

Introduction

- Collect any outstanding C of Es and check all of the contestants are present.
- Ensure all contestants are present and give a warm welcome

'This is your formal contestants' briefing and we will draw for your speaking position at the end of the briefing. I am pleased to say we are all present.'

[As X is absent, and there is no alternate speaker, as long as X arrives before I am introduced Contest Chair is introduced, they may participate, provided.

- *They report to me, Contest Chair upon arrival,*
- *Have all required paperwork in good order (This should be OK)*
- *Waives the opportunity of a briefing]*

Eligibility

'Thank you for completing eligibility forms and we can confirm that all of you are eligible.'

Table Topics Contest Process

'You all receive the same topic, which I have selected (i.e. Contest Chair)

'The process is as follows:'

'Apart from the first contestant, you are all escorted by the Sergeant at Arms to a room out of earshot of the Contest Room. 'You are not allowed any mobile devices. '

'At the end of the first contestant's speech, the Sergeant at Arms escorts the next contestant to the door of the Contest Room. '

I will beckon the next contestant to enter and stand at the end of the room. I will introduce the next contestant, who gives 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.'

Contestant Introduction

'A contestant stands at the end of the contest room. I will introduce a contestant

[NAME] [TOPIC] [TOPIC] [NAME]

The contestant will walk to the front of the room and to ensure your microphone is working, as soon as you get to the speaking area, please say, 'Thank you, Contest Chair'.

I will respond, 'You're welcome!' and hand the stage to the contestant.

Timing will begin with your next verbal / nonverbal communication with the audience'

Speech timing

'Your speech is 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.

You will be disqualified if a speech is less than 1 minute or more than 2 minutes and 30 seconds.

Are you able to see the lights?'

Speech Content

'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.'

Speaking area

'Are we content with this as the speaking area?'

Protest and disqualifications (Unlikely but possible)

'Protests can only be lodged by yourself - contestants – and voting judges.

They are limited to eligibility, originality and reference to another contestant or another contestant's speech.

Any protest must be lodged with the Chief Judge /Contest Chair prior to the contest being adjourned.

If a protest is lodged for originality or referencing, the contestant will have the opportunity to respond to the voting judges. A majority of the judges must concur with a decision to disqualify.'

Order of speaking

'Finally, let's draw for order of speaking. Please hold onto your card until I have confirmed all of the speaking positions.'

As Contest Chair, ensure you have written the speaking order on your contestants' table (Easily forgotten!) and post the speaking order on Judges' WhatsApp Group as soon as drawn.

Table Topics Contest Opening

Official Opening

As the audience is now engaged in the contests, the Contest Chair can commence with an 'Official Opening'

'Welcome back and it is now time for our Table Topics Contest, when our contestants have the opportunity to flex their 'Impromptu Speaking Muscles!'

'This is how the contest unfolds.....'

'All contestants will speak on the same topic, which I have chosen'

'The process is as follows:'

'All contestants, apart from the first, are escorted by the Sergeant at Arms to a room out of earshot of the Contest Room. '

'At the end of the first contestant's speech, the Sergeant at Arms escorts the next contestant to the door of the Contest Room. '

'They will enter and stand at the end of the room, when I introduce them and tell them the Table Topic. The contestant then comes to the front of the room and delivers their speech.

Once a contestant has given their contest speech, they remain in the contest room.

This process is repeated until all of the contestants have spoken.'

Speech timing

'The 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.

When the Contest Chair has given the floor to the contestant, timing will begin with their next verbal / nonverbal communication with the audience.'

Contest, Protests, Speaking Area

'The rules for speech content, protests and disqualifications and the speaking area are as they were for our first contest.'

Briefing confirmation and speaking order

'I can confirm that the contestants have been briefed '.

I guess you would like to know the speaking order?

'The speaking order is....

'Chief Judge' have the functionaries and judges been briefed?'

'I can confirm that judges and functionaries have been briefed.'

'The contest can commence!'

The Body of the Table Topics Contest

– The contest now is straightforward as per the process outlines in the contestants' briefing

'Our 1st contestant is [NAME] [TOPIC] [TOPIC] [NAME]

'Thank you, Contest Chair'

'You're welcome!'

- At the end of the speech - Lead applause, no comment on the speech.

'Timer, can we have 1 minute please for judges to consider the speech'

- After 1 minute:
- Repeat the process for following contestants
- Our next contestant is.....until..... Our final contestant is.....
- At the end of the final contestant's speech.....
- Lead applause, no comment on the speech.

'Timer, can we have 1 minute please for judges to consider the speech and then a period of silence for judges to complete their ballots and for ballot counters to collect the ballots.'.....

IT IS IMPORTANT TO MAINTAIN SILENCE.

- When all of the ballots have been collected.....

'.....It looks like the ballots have now been collected and the ballot counters and Chief Judge will now leave the contest room and collate the ballots.'

'Let's have a round of applause'

- Commend the contestants for the excellent speeches and the audience once more for behaving themselves! Being silent and raucous in the right places!

Contestant Interview and distribution of certificates of participation

- During the period when the Chief Judge and ballot counters are counting votes, there is an opportunity to distribute interview contestants and give them their certificates of participation.

'Let us now meet our talented contestants' (No particular order)

Content of conversation can be:

- From the contestant profile (Hobbies, Interests, Interesting facts)
- About their club if it is beyond a club contest
- The benefits of being a contestant
- At the end of the conversation, present their certificate of participation.
- Usually, the Chief Judge returns with the results just prior to the end of contestants' interviews but always have something in reserve, such as Table Topics, information on the next contest or conference, notices from area, division, district.

Presentation of Awards

- As soon as you see the Chief Judge enter the contest room, complete interviews and move towards presentation of awards..

'We now have the results!'

Contest Chair and Chief Judge (And a Guest of Honour if present) are the 'Presentation Team.'

'Chief Judge, can you please tell us the results of the Table Topics Contest in reverse order.'

Chief Judge: 'No / X qualifications, Results'...'

- Results are announced and award recipients come up in turn to receive their award and acclaim

'And results for the Humorous Speech Contest'

Chief Judge: 'No / X qualifications, Results'...'

Results are announced and award recipients come up in turn to receive their award and acclaim.

'No / X qualifications, Results'...

- At end of presentation of awards, express thanks, great contest, etc and handover to Contest Host.
- After the contests, please ensure that notification of results is copied/ photographed and passed on by the Chief Judge to the Contest Host for passing onto the next level of contest.

END