

Speech Evaluator

Evaluation is the cornerstone of the Toastmasters educational program. We join Toastmasters to develop our speaking skills. This happens through the evaluation process.

Effective evaluation benefits everyone. It benefits:

- The **speaker**, who is shown how to improve the weaker aspects of his speaking skills and how to build on existing strengths.
- The **evaluator**, who has to use attentive listening, focused thinking and has an opportunity to improve her own speaking skills.
- The **Club** as a whole by providing learning experiences for each person present and by promoting teamwork as well as individual growth.

Preparing To Evaluate

When you are scheduled to evaluate, begin by reviewing the objectives and purpose of the speech. Next, read the criteria in the evaluation guide in the speech manual. Also, look back in the manual at previous evaluations, to gather the speaker's strengths and weaknesses. Finally, determine from the speaker any specific goal or needs she may want to achieve in this particular assignment.

Listening To The Speech

Attentive listening involves using all your senses to hear, see and feel the speaker's message. Pay close attention to the speaker's use of intangible factors such as enthusiasm, energy and emotion to help carry the message.

Make notes on a pad, however you should be selective. You already know what the objectives of the speech are and what the speaker wants to achieve, so you can choose only information that will help the speaker improve and enhance those skills already developed.

Formatting The Evaluation

One format that will allow you to quickly organise your impressions and focus on a few key items is the "sandwich approach." This method is also called P-I-P (Praise - Improvement - Praise) or C-R-C (Commend - Recommend - Commend). This means positive comments then suggestions for improvement, followed by words of encouragement.

Look for the positive. There is always something positive to be said, there is always something of value even in the most flawed speech and there is always an encouraging way to say it.

Being positive doesn't mean "whitewashing" your evaluation. Being positive means stressing the good points and supplying an answer to the question: What is right about the content and presentation of this speech.

When evaluating an experienced speaker, don't overlook the person's strengths. Experienced speakers need encouragement too. Remember the words of **Dale Carnegie**: *Abilities wither under criticism; they blossom under encouragement.*

When you consider the various areas needing improvement, identify only one or two. Pointing to a large number of flaws will only discourage the speaker and fail to achieve any desired results. The points for improvement should be relevant to the speaker's level of expertise. For instance if the speaker is on speech number two, do not comment on gestures (speech number 4), unless, of course, they are excellent.

To finish your evaluation summarise the good points, the recommendations for improvement and finish with some words of encouragement.

Watch Your Language

Because the evaluator is addressing the speaker, the word "you" is frequently used. Saying "you should," "you did" or "you could" too many times can make the speaker defensive. To avoid sounding accusatory it is important to phrase your comments tactfully and carefully. You want the speaker to feel relaxed and attentive.

Say things like this:

- My reaction was ...
- It appeared to me ...
- From my point of view ...
- I suggest ...
- I think your next speech will have a stronger impact on me if you ...
- A technique that I have found useful is ...

Instead of things like this:

- You should have ...
- You failed to ...
- Your opening was ...
- Don't...
- You must ...
- Good speakers do it by ...

Demonstrate What You Mean

It is relatively easy to identify a shortcoming, but another matter entirely to demonstrate how it can be overcome. Make suggestions such as:

- You could experiment with it like this ...
- Words such as (...) might more graphically illustrate your point.
- I feel it would have had more impact with a meaningful gesture such as

Remember

A good evaluation motivates the speaker, it is empowering, encouraging and honest and benefits everyone involved.