

HUMOROUS SPEECH CONTEST RULES

These rules apply to all Humorous Speech Contests, which are conducted in English only. These rules may not be supplanted or modified, and no exceptions may be made.

1. PURPOSE

A. To provide an opportunity for speakers to improve their speaking abilities and to recognise the best as encouragement to all.

B. To provide an opportunity to learn by observing the more proficient speakers who have benefited from their Toastmasters training.

C. To recognise the value of humour in speaking.

2. SELECTION SEQUENCE

A. Each Club in good standing may select a contestant to compete in the Area contest. An alternate should also be selected. The Area speech contest winner then proceeds to the Division contest (if applicable). The Division winner then proceeds to the District contest. Should an Area or Division contest winner be unable to participate in the next contest level, the highest placed available contestant will advance to that level.

B. In those Areas with four assigned Clubs or less, Districts have the option to allow the two highest placed available contestants from each Club to compete in the Area contest. In those Divisions with four assigned Areas or less, Districts have the option to allow the two highest placed available contestants from each Area to compete. In Districts with four assigned Divisions or less, Districts have the option to allow the two highest placed available contestants from each Division to participate in the District contest.

3. ELIGIBILITY

A. All Toastmasters who are members in good standing, in a Club in good standing, are eligible to compete. New, dual, or reinstated members must have dues current with Toastmasters International.

B. The following are ineligible to compete in any contest: incumbent International Officers and Directors; District Officers (Governor, any Lieutenant Governor, Division Governor, Area Governor, Secretary, Treasurer, or Public Relations Officer) whose terms expire June 30; International Officer and Director candidates; Immediate Past District Governors; District Officers or announced candidates for the term beginning the upcoming July 1. The immediate past winner of the Regional Humorous Speech Contest is not eligible to compete at any level in the current year's Humorous Speech Contest.

C. Toastmasters who are members in more than one Club and who meet all other eligibility requirements may compete in each Club Humorous Speech Contest in which membership in good standing is held. However, should they win more than one Club Humorous Speech Contest, they can represent only one of the Clubs at the Area level. No contestant can compete in more than one Area Humorous Speech Contest, even if the two Areas are in different Divisions or different Districts. A contestant must be a member in good standing of the Club, Area, Division, or District being represented when competing in a speech contest at the next level. Each contestant must complete the Speaker's Certification of Eligibility and Originality (form 1183) and submit it to the chief judge prior to the contest.

4. SPEECH PREPARATION

A. The subject for the humorous speech shall be selected by the contestant. The speaker should avoid potentially objectionable language, anecdotes, and material.

B. Contestants must prepare their own five- to seven-minute speech, which must be substantially original and certified as such in writing to the chief judge by the contestants prior to the presentation of the speeches (on form 1183, Speaker's Certification of Eligibility and Originality). Any quoted material must be so identified during the speech presentation.

C. The speech must be thematic in nature (opening, body, and close) and not be an act or monologue (series of one-liners).

5. GENERAL PROCEDURE

A. A contest chairman, chief judge, at least five judges, two counters, and two timers are appointed. These appointments will be as far as is practical at Club levels, but required for Area through to District and Regional levels of this contest.

B. Before the contest, contestants are briefed on the rules by the contest chairman. Judges, counters, and timers are briefed on their duties by the chief judge. Contestants will then draw for their speaking position with the contest chairman.

C. If a contestant is absent from the briefing, the alternate speaker; if present, may be included in place of the primary contestant. When the contest Toastmaster is introduced, if not present, the primary contestant is disqualified and the alternate officially becomes the contestant. Where the primary contestant arrives and makes this known to the contest chairman and has all required paperwork in good order prior to the introduction, and missed the briefing, disqualification shall not occur and the primary contestant may speak in the drawn order, but waives the opportunity of a briefing.

D. All contestants will speak from the same platform or area designated by the contest chairman with prior knowledge of all the judges and all the contestants. The contestants may speak from any position within the designated area and are not limited to standing at the lectern/podium.

1. A lectern/podium will be available. However, the use of the lectern/podium is optional.
2. If amplification is necessary, a lectern/podium fixed-mounted microphone and a portable microphone should be made available, if possible. It is suggested that the fixed-mounted microphone be nondirectional. The selection and use of a microphone is optional for each contestant.
3. All equipment will be available for contestants to practice prior to the contest. Contestants are responsible for arranging their preferred setup of the lectern/podium microphone and other equipment in a quiet manner before being introduced by the Toastmaster.

E. Introduce each contestant by announcing the contestant's name, speech title, speech title, and contestant's name.

F. There will be one minute of silence between contestants, during which the judges will mark their ballots.

G. Contestants may remain throughout the duration of the contest, in the same room.

H: Announcement of contest winners is final.

6. TIMING

A. Speeches shall be from five to seven minutes. Contestants who speak less than four minutes 30 seconds or more than seven minutes 30 seconds will be disqualified.

B. Time will begin with the first word uttered by the contestant. However, should the contestant engage in definite verbal or nonverbal communication with the audience (including the playing of music or other sound effects, a staged act by another person, etc.) prior to reaching the speaking position and uttering the first word of the speech, the timer shall activate the timing device at that point. If this results in the contestant going overtime, the contestant will be disqualified. The green light will be turned on at five minutes and remain on for one minute. The amber light will be turned on at six minutes and remain on for one minute. The red light will be turned on at seven minutes and remain on until the speech is concluded. No audible device, such as a buzzer, shall be used for the over-time period.

C. Any sightless contestant may request and must be granted a form of warning signal of his or her own choosing, which may be an audible device. The contestant must provide any special device required for such signal.

D. In the event of technical failure of the signal, a speaker is allowed 30 seconds extra overtime before being disqualified.

E. Disqualifications for reason of time may be announced, at the discretion of the contest chairman, although it is not recommended.

7. PROTESTS

A. Protests will be limited to judges and contestants. Any protest will be lodged with the chief judge and/or contest chairman prior to the announcement of the winner and alternate(s). The contest chairman shall notify the contestant of a disqualification regarding originality or eligibility prior to that announcement before the meeting at which the contest took place is adjourned.

B. Before a contestant can be disqualified on the basis of originality, a majority of the judges must concur in the decision. The contest chairman can disqualify a contestant on the basis of eligibility.

C. All decisions of the judges are final.

8. WINNERS

In contests with five or more participants, a third place winner (if wanted), second place winner, and first place winner will be announced. In contests with four participants, a second place winner and first place winner will be announced. In contests with three or fewer participants, only the first place winner will be announced.

9. CONTEST SCHEDULE

Districts conducting Humorous Speech Contests should announce the date of the District contest and establish dates by which the Division, Area, and Club contests must be completed.

HUMOROUS SPEECH CONTEST JUDGING CRITERIA

CONTENT (55%)

Speech Development (15%) is the way that the speaker puts ideas together so the audience can understand them. The speech should be structured around a purpose, and this structure should include an opening, body and conclusion. A good speech immediately engages the audience's attention. The key to success is effectiveness and humour, but it must have a story line, i.e. be thematic, and not be a series of one-liners. It should contain various examples and illustrations to support the speaker's implied premise, and should exhibit humour throughout, through a series of totally unexpected, or at times very predictable, twists. The speech may be anecdotal - based on personal experience; vicarious - based on the experience of another; or manufactured - a figment of your imagination; or be a blend of these to make the framework of the speech. It should compel the audience to believe that this was the best way to develop and deliver the particular speech, but it need not follow any of the recognised models for a speech. Material that has been 'Borrowed' MUST be recognised during the speech and appropriate credit given.

Effectiveness (15%) Good humour is built around the speaker's ability to transmit a clear visual picture to the listener using an economy of words. The timing of the delivery and the use of pauses is a vital component of the humorous effect. The best written lines can be ruined with intemperate timing. Could you determine the speaker's purpose? Did the speech achieve that purpose? Was the audience's interest held by the speaker? Was the subject appropriate for this particular audience? Don't be quick to damn a speech, especially at higher levels of the contest as speakers should have been advised of changes necessary because the speech at lower levels tended towards the unseemly.

Speech Value (15%) justifies the act of speaking. The Speaker should say something meaningful and original to the audience. It may be a Humorous Speech, but what is said must still be worth saying. The listener should feel that the speaker has made a contribution to their thinking - even if it is just the reaction "there but for the grace of God, go I" . In other words it must not just be humour for humour's sake. Such speeches tend to be a series of one-liners and this is not allowed. The speech may be a story, but should not be just a skit. Some of the best humorous speeches have been those which parody the frailty, contrariness or irrationality of human nature; either from personal experience - a lesson well learned at one's own expense - or a personification that the audience can relate to. If it is from personal experience Speakers are advised to use the third person, the word 'I' should occur extremely rarely, if at all.

Audience Response (10%) You really should note the type of audience reaction. If they are just laughing at the jokes and don't pay attention to the speech itself, you should have already penalised the Speaker under Speech Development and Speech Value, but if the topic has a theme and humour, then you should award marks for its reception. Provided that speeches meet the above criteria then and only then, the funniest speech should win. A speech should not win which does not get laughs.

DELIVERY (30%)

Physical (10%) presentation of a speech plays an important part in effective communication, particularly in a humorous speech, as it is used to set the mood of the speech. Points in the speech should be reinforced through gestures, facial expressions, body positioning, and appropriate movement. Similarly the clothing worn should also reflect the speech. More formal wear may be entirely inappropriate, or by contrast very appropriate.

Voice (10%) is the sound that carries the message, but it may also be used to help set the scene - tiredness, happiness, sadness, drunkenness etc. It should be suitably flexible, moving from one pitch level to another for emphasis, have variety on the soft - loud range, and have a varied rate of delivery. A good voice can be clearly heard and the words easily understood.

Manner (10%) is the indirect revelation of the speaker's real self as the speech is delivered. The speaker should always be aware of the audience and interpret their reactions well.

LANGUAGE (15%)

Appropriateness (10%) of language refers to the choice of words that relate to the speech purpose and to the particular audience hearing the speech. Language should promote clear understanding of thoughts and fit the occasion precisely.

Correctness (5%) More freedom should be allowed in a humorous speech than in an International Speech. In fact often the humour is dependent on imprecise use of language, but it should be appropriate: it may be suggestive, but should not be overtly vulgar. Contestants are reminded of the advice given so often in Toastmasters to avoid subjects that are sexual, political, religious or racial and if they are a part of their speech to handle them very sensitively.

WHAT IS MEANT BY A ONE-LINER JOKE AND HOW SHOULD THEY BE HANDLED?

A one-liner in terms of the Humorous Contest is a joke, funny event or funny story used by the Contestant that has no relevance in the context of the story. These are commonly used by comedians doing an act, - they can 'ad-lib' in a few one-liners if their act is not being received well, but the funny parts of a humorous speech should be in the context of the speech.

As a judge you should not be listening for the humour of the funny lines, the audience will tell you whether they are funny or not. Your task is to assess if they are relevant to the story, either directly or as a relevant aside. If they are not relevant to the story, then the speaker should receive no credit for that laughter; if the majority of the humour depends on one-liners, then the Contestant should not win the Contest.

It is relevant for any Judge, or the Chief Judge, to raise the issue in the Judging room after the Contest - the Counters should be excluded from this discussion – or for one Contestant to protest about another's Speech in this regard to the Contest Chairman immediately after the Contest. The Contest Chairman will deliver such a protest to the Chief Judge immediately.

SUMMARY

A Humorous Speech must have a story line.

A Humorous Speech should not be a series of jokes or have too many one-Liners.

The funny lines should be directly related to the story, or at worst, a loosely connected aside to the story.

Laughs alone are not the measure of a Humorous Speech Contest winning speech, unless the above criteria are satisfied.

