

Speech Contest Judging

When you undertake to judge a speech contest, you accept several obligations.

To the contestants

Contestants expect fairness and impartiality plus a dedicated performance from each judge.

To Toastmasters International

The reputation of Toastmasters, our District and our officers depends on excellence in the conduct of speech contests. Bad judging creates animosity and tarnishes our reputation.

To the audience

Audiences deserve a good speech contest with fair and unbiased judging. Without that they may also be discouraged from attending or participating in future contests.

To yourself

As a Toastmaster dedicated to your own self-improvement, you need to do your best to make the correct decisions when judging.

To pick a winner

This means making a confidential decision that is not discussed with contestants or anyone else. Judges are not there to evaluate or help speakers and must not try to explain or justify their decisions.

Qualities of a Judge

There are five qualities that good judges must display and use if they are to make a wise and informed decision in a Speech Contest.

Judges need to be:

Accurate

Good judges are dedicated to making a correct decision. They fill out the judging form correctly and total points carefully.

Fair

Good judges are totally impartial. Good judges don't allow friendship, affiliation, age, sex, race, creed, national origin, profession or disapproval of speech topics to interfere with their decision.

Trustworthy

Good judges realise those contestants, contest officials and the audience have entrusted them with the responsibility of selecting the best speaker as the winner. They live up to that trust. Unfortunately, there have been cases where judges have marked down better speakers so a favoured speaker could place. Good judges would never dream of doing such a thing.

Knowledgeable

Good judges know the current contest rules. They study the rules before each contest and they make no exceptions to the rules. They are familiar with the judging form and they know how to judge properly.

Good Listeners

Good judges listen carefully to each speaker. They don't daydream or become distracted.

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Barriers to Objectivity

Judging is a subjective process that we as judges must try to make objective. Each one of us has likes and dislikes which can unconsciously affect our decisions. Additionally, being aware of some of the barriers we are up against can help us to understand and use the judging process more effectively and fairly.

Barriers to objectivity in judging include:

First or Last Speaker Is Best

We tend to remember first and last speakers best so they have an advantage over other speakers. The first speaker because he or she becomes a reference point and the last because they are more easily remembered. As a judge we need to be equally attentive to the middle speakers.

Let's Help the Underdog

Do we need to give a break to the new Toastmaster? Resist the temptation to mark highly because a speaker deserves a win. Use the judging form scrupulously.

Halo Effect

A speaker with a **reputation** should be judged using the same criteria as we employ to judge other speakers. Resist giving high marks because the speaker dresses well or has a dynamic delivery but rather give high marks because the speaker is **good**.

Reverse Halo Effect

This is the association of one unfavourable trait with another unrelated trait. For example a speech which exhibits poor grammar does not necessarily mean the speech will be badly organised. Resist the temptation to downgrade a score in one area because you are not happy with the performance in another area.

Second Time Around

Even if you have heard the speech previously, it must be judged as if it were a new speech. Always judge as if this were the first time you have heard the speech and the speaker.

Give Someone Else a Chance

Even if a speaker has won a contest in previous years, that speaker is entitled to the same judging as other speakers. Past performance should never influence current performance.

Not the Norm

Outside the Speech Contest Rules, there is no norm for speakers. As a judge, consider what is usually the norm for a good speech. Ask yourself if you expect everyone to fit into that norm. If so you may be out of step.

Prejudices and Personal Preferences

Tastes, beliefs, preferences, and prejudices are the most prevalent barriers to unbiased judging. Try to remember to judge not what the speaker **is** but what the speaker is saying.

The Unknown Judging Form

As a judge you need to be familiar with the judging form. If this is not so, you may spend time analysing and understanding the form instead of listening to the speakers. Study the form prior to the contest.

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Judging a Speech Contest

The purpose of Speech Contest Judging is to **select a winner**, making a selection compatible with that of other experienced judges officiating in many other contests around the world at the same level.

This is best achieved by use of the standard Toastmasters International Judge's Guide, reviewing a speaker's total performance in the **three key areas** of effective speaking.

Content Delivery Language

After making our assessment, it is **good practice to sub-total each of the three areas** to help in the comparative process before then making a final total and comparison.

The Judge's Guide provides **prompts** to assist us in making our assessment. These prompts give clues to the types of questions we should ask ourselves about a speaker's performance as shown below.

1. Content

The substance/purpose of a speaker's message

SPEECH DEVELOPMENT

Structure, Organisation, Support Material

- How was the speech structured?
- Did it have a clearly defined **Opening, Body** and **Conclusion**?
- How was the speech organised? Was it easy to follow? Did it have a logical sequence?
- Were there natural transitions?
- Was the **Purpose** clear and well defined?
- What support material was there?
- Were facts, examples, illustrations or humour used to enhance the message?
- Was there too much material, overwhelming the audience with facts for example?

EFFECTIVENESS

Achievement of Purpose, Interest, Reception

- What was the purpose? (Inform, Persuade, Inspire, Entertain)
- Was the purpose accomplished?
- Was it of interest to the audience?
- Was it relevant to the audience? Something they should know or could do?
- How did the audience respond? Did they understand the goal?
- Was the nature of the audience/occasion considered in the speech preparation?

SPEECH VALUE

Ideas, Logic, Original Thought

- What ideas were presented?
- Was there a clearly defined message?
- Did the message develop logically? Did it lead to a conclusion?
- Were the ideas original or a re-hash of other material?
- If it was a time worn subject, was it treated in a new way with flair/imagination?
- Was it in good taste?
- Did the message contribute to the listeners' knowledge, their growth, and stimulate their thinking processes?

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2. Delivery

The mechanics of presenting the message

PHYSICAL

Appearance, Body Language

- How did the speaker look? Neat? Professional? Compatible with purpose, adding credibility to message?
- Did the clothes/accessories/colours enhance or detract from the effectiveness?
- How was the stance? Alert, erect, lifeless, swaying?
- How was the stage area and lectern used?
- Did the body language contradict or reinforce the message?
- Were the gestures effective/meaningless/stilted?
- Did the eye contact cover and hold the audience?
- Were the facial expressions friendly, revealing the emotional side of the speech?

VOICE

Flexibility, Volume

- Did the voice convey the correct feelings/attitude for the message?
- Thus was it **firm** to show strength, **assured** to show confidence, **warm** to convey friendliness, or **pleasing** to win the audience for example?
- Did it have variations of rate and emphasis?
- Was the volume adequate and varied and was the microphone used effectively?

MANNER

Directness, Assurance, Enthusiasm

- Did the speaker appear sincere, concerned for the audience?
- Did the speaker appear confident?
- Did the audience **believe** the message?
- Did the style, pace and demeanour build a link with the audience?
- Were some aspects of the presentation distracting, artificial or stilted?
- Did the speaker show **enthusiasm** for the message?

3. Language

The choice of words and grammatical skill

APPROPRIATENESS

To Speech Purpose and Audience

- Was the language used compatible with the speech?
- Was it compatible with the audience? That is, did it clarify or confuse?
- Did the word pictures **sell** the speaker's ideas?

CORRECTNESS

Grammar, Pronunciation and Word Selection

- Did the speaker use correct grammar?
- If slang or misused grammar was present, did it make a point?
- Was it intentional or a mistake?
- Was the pronunciation correct and was the enunciation clear?
- Were the words chosen appropriate to the message?
- Were they appropriate to the audience?

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