Organizing an Online Speech Contest
- February 2021 -

Online speech contests are similar to traditional contests in many ways; however, because they occur in a virtual environment the contest materials, processes, and procedures must be converted to work online. Today organizers and participants need additional technical skills and an awareness of the latest online best practices.

This guide explains not only contest roles and responsibilities, but also provides guidelines for planning and organizing online speech contests from start to finish—a supplement to the *Speech Contest Rulebook* we rely on for general contest guidelines and rules.

When to Start Planning

o At the start of the year, clubs are scheduling their speech contests to be held in February. These may occur during regular club meetings or at other designated dates and times. The **Club Contest Chair** (this may be your **VPE**) announces the contest dates, encourages members to sign up as contestants and reminds them of the benefits of competing, and plans and organizes the contests.

o Area Contests are held in March, Division Contests in April, and District Contests are held in May at the annual conference. Area, division, and district contests are posted on the d101tm.org website, including dates, times, descriptions, and registration forms.

o It is recommended that division and district **Contest Chairs** and **Chief Judges** first try out these roles at the club or area level, where they will gain the experience and lessons learned applicable to creating better and more successful events.

Contest Chair

The **Contest Chair** is ideally someone with prior contest experience, responsible for organizing the contest team and overseeing the contests from start to finish. Responsibilities include:

o Identify the **Toastmaster**, **Chief Judge**, and **Sergeant at Arms** for each contest. It is possible to have a different **Toastmaster** and **Chief Judge** for each contest, or the same officials for both contests.

- Recruit a **Tech Team** of 2-3 individuals experienced with running Toastmaster meetings and events. Their responsibilities may include setting up the online meeting, invitation, and breakout rooms; assigning co-host permissions; assisting with screen shares or any tech issues during the event; and whatever is discussed beforehand.

- Set up a committee to help with online contest tasks, if desired. It is, however, the **Contest Chair's** responsibility to ensure that they are completed.

- Maintain a spreadsheet with contestants' names and clubs, speech titles, officials' and functionaries' names, tech team names, email addresses, and backup phone numbers.

- Communicate with **contestants** early on in the process.

  - Send an eligibility form to each contestant to confirm eligibility based on the contest rules; notify contestants of any disqualifications as soon as possible.

  - Inform **contestants** there will be a pre-contest briefing 1-2 days prior to the contest, with the exact date and time to be announced.

  - If known, tell them the name of the **Toastmaster** for their contest.

  - Provide an information packet to each contestant.

    - Speech Contest Rulebook (Item 1171)
    - Speech Contestant Profile (Item 1189)
    - Speaker's Certification of Eligibility and Originality (Item 1183)

- Coordinate the recruiting of judges or other functionaries with the **Chief Judge**.

- Stay informed of the specific online judging, timing, and ballot counting processes and communications the **Chief Judge** chooses to follow.

- Review the contest scripts and program with the **Toastmaster** and **Chief Judge**. Depending upon how many contestants you have, an area or division contest may run 3 hours, including both contests.

- Verify that the timing light process, communications, and other backup plans are in place by the day of the contest.

- Email contest materials to the **Chief Judge** and **Toastmaster** to pass on to the others: contest scripts, templates for participants' and winners' certificates, judging ballots, timing forms, or other documents useful to an online contest. The contest team may choose to convert these to the digital format they deem best for their online contests.

- Deciding beforehand who will prepare the *Certificates of Participation* (which can be done in advance), *Winners' Certificates*, and *Notification of Contest Winner* for contest

day. The award certificates can be assembled and displayed by the **Contest Chair** or **Tech Team**, whatever makes the most sense for your contest.

Contest Officials

o The **Toastmaster** facilitates the contest. The **Contest Chair** may choose to take on this role, or delegate it to another.

o The **Chief Judge** recruits and works with the **contest functionaries**—timers, ballot counters, voting judges, and secret tiebreaker judges—according to guidelines in the contest rulebook.

o The **Sergeant at Arms** is responsible for calling the contest to order; introducing the **Contest Chair** (or in some cases the **Toastmaster** or **District Leader**); providing logistical information including video-off and audio-muted for most attendees, no recordings or snapshots without authorization, and cell phones and other noisy devices turned off; and monitoring contestants in the breakout rooms.

o The **Tech Team** consists of an experienced Zoom Tech Host responsible for technical setup of the pre-content briefings, contests, breakout rooms, and event links; plus one or two co-hosts to assist and assume other functions as needed. (Note: The district will not be providing the Zoom link or tech team for club, area, or division contests.)

o **Functionaries** (voting judges, tiebreaker judges, ballot counters, and timers) take their lead from the **Chief Judge**.

o **Judges** use a ballot to privately score each speaker on several categories. After tallying the scores, the judge then complete the bottom of the form which will be submitted to the **Chief Judge**. Each speaker is ranked by First Place, Second Place, and so on. It is mandatory that the judge sign and print their name in order for their votes to count. (See the rulebook for the minimum number of judges required, and other criteria.)

o Two **timers** are appointed, each a backup for the other. Prior to the contest, both should upload and test the white/green/yellow/red virtual background screens (or the *Toastmaster Timer* from the app store, or whatever timing process is chosen) and test their stopwatch or timing devices. The **timer** with the stopwatch records each speaker's time in writing, and then delivers them to the **Chief Judge** after the last speech is given; separate timing forms will be required for each contest.

o **Ballot counters** use a Tally Sheet to record the judges' votes and to compile the final results along with the Chief Judge.

o **Tiebreaker judges** are briefed offline and known only to the **Chief Judge**. Their votes will be requested only by the **Chief Judge** and used only in case of a tie.

- o Official contest roles are further defined and explained in Toastmaster International's annual *Speech Contest Rulebook*.

Contest Materials

- o Toastmasters International provides non-digital speech contest materials that are available for free download at d101tm.org/contest-resources or www.toastmasters.org.
    - Speaker's Certification of Eligibility and Originality (Item 1183)
    - Speech Contest Time Record Sheet and Instructions for Timers (Item 1175)
    - Judge's Guide and Ballot
    - Judge's Certification of Eligibility and Code of Ethics (Item 1170)
    - Counter's Tally Sheet (Item 1176)
    - Tiebreaking Judge's Guide and Ballot
    - Speech Contestant Profile (Item 1189)
    - Results Form (Item 1168)

- o Contest scripts provide guidelines to ensure the contest rules, speaker introductions, and timing are adhered to for each contest. They may be modified as long as procedures outlined in the current *Speech Contest Rulebook* are followed. Everyone involved in contest operations should be sent the scripts.

- o The contest program should be prepared in a digital form by the **Contest Chair** and/or **Toastmaster**.

Tech Tips

- o Everyone participating in the contest should have reliable internet service and practice with use of Zoom. It's best to log in from a desktop computer with a mouse, as phones and ipads are limited in functionality. Upload the latest version of Zoom to best use all the features available to you.

- o Test your connectivity beforehand, then again prior to the contest.

- o **Contestants** should have experience and practice with Zoom speaker and gallery views, finding and pinning the timer, muting and unmuting, screen sharing (if needed), and turning video on or off. The **Tech Team** assigns the speaker co-host permissions when delivering their speech and at the interview. At that time, all of these functions will be operational. At the dry run, each speaker should test out the *actual* audio and video that they will be using when presenting to ensure they are functioning properly prior to start of the contest.

- o **Techs** are responsible for setting up any breakout rooms needed during pre-contest briefings, prior to and during the actual contest. If you plan to allow participants to select the breakout room themselves, ask them to upgrade to the latest version of Zoom.

- o Report any Zoom bombing, unpleasant disruptions, or abusive behavior to the district at admin@d101tm.org and to Zoom.

Pre-Contest Briefings (Dry Runs)

- o   The **Contest Chair** is involved in the briefings, however may choose for the **Toastmaster** and **Chief Judge** to coordinate those dates and times with their individual teams and the **Tech Team**.

- o   The **Toastmaster** conducts the pre-contest **Contestant Briefing** to cover the following: contest order, rules, eligibility, protests and disqualifications, speaking area and props, timing protocol, audio and video directions, guidelines in case of tech failures, correct pronunciation of their names, and drawing for speaking positions. (See the *Toastmaster Contestant Briefing Checklist* for more details.)

- o   While briefings for onsite contests occur immediately before the event, the dry runs or briefings for online contests should be planned to occur earlier, even 1 to 2 weeks prior to the contest. Send out a doodle/survey with a variety of dates and times, encouraging everyone to be as flexible as possible. An early dry run gives everyone involved a picture of the contest flow and what they need to do to prepare beforehand. Then if additional preparatory meetings or mini dry runs are necessary after this, there is enough time to do so.

- o   The **Toastmaster** may choose to draw for speaking order and address last-minute questions closer to contest date, or 1 to 2 days before. One option for drawing speaking order is https://www.random.org/lists/.

- o   **Contestants** should know the rules applying to their contest; practice within the Zoom platform beforehand; test their audio and video; use lighting for best effect; understand pinning, and whether they want that option; and know how to use the rename function on contest day to update their screen name (contest, contestant number, name; eg., TT1 - Name).

- o   At the pre-contest **Chief Judge's Briefing**, voting judges, ballot counters, timers, and Sergeant at Arms are briefed on their duties, methods for communication, and the appropriate forms. (See the *Chief Judge Briefing Checklist* for more details.)

- o   The **Chief Judge** will define how completed forms (fillable pdfs, web, or handwritten forms) should be digitally forwarded at the end of the contest (email, text, web, Whatsapp) to the Chief Judge.

- o   The **Sergeant at Arms** may be briefed by both the **Toastmaster** or **Contest Chair**, and the **Chief Judge**.

o Decide in advance who is responsible for any screen shares during the contest, and coordinate efforts with the Tech host or co-host. Also have a discussion about when contestant interviews will be signaled to end.

Contest Day

o **Contest officials** and **contestants** should log in 30 to 45 minutes before the contest starts to check the audio/video setups, go through final checks, and rename themselves according to the agreed-upon naming convention (eg., IN #1 – Name).

o The **Tech Team** administers the online contests. It assists with monitoring the participants; assigning permissions; creating and triggering breakout rooms; tech glitches, screen sharing, or any other tech-related needs or issues that may come up during the contest.

o There are two contests separated by a break of 5-10 minutes. District announcements may be given during the contest or posted before the contest and at the break, and during their program segment at the Division Contest.

o The contest program and script define the flow of the contest from start to end. A link to the program should be posted in the chat window at the start of each contest.

o The **Sergeant at Arms** opens the contest and introduces the **Contest Chair**, who gives a brief open and introduces the **Toastmaster**.

o The **Toastmaster** introduces current and past dignitaries who are in attendance. For club contests, this could include your current **Area Director** or **Division Director**. District contests draw a wider attendance so may include current International, District, Division, or Area Leaders; Immediate-Past or Past District Directors; Past International or Regional Directors; or Past District Directors from D101 or elsewhere. The list is best gathered from registrations or with advice from district officers or experienced Toastmasters at the contest.

   • Please note: If a contestant is a current or past dignitary, to avoid bias, do not announce their name or position during these introductions. This may be revealed later during the contestant interview.

o The **Toastmaster** is responsible for informing the audience that the rules have been reviewed with the **Chief Judge** and contestants, and that contestants are aware of the timing lights and how to find them on their displays. (See the *Contestant Briefing Checklist* for additional rules and details.)

o The **Toastmaster**'s role includes: introducing each contestant in the proper format; asking judges to complete their ballots; monitoring the required silence between

speakers; interviewing contestants while the ballots are being counted; presenting certificates of participation (prepared in advance); addressing whether there were any protests prior to announcing the winners; and thanking everyone for making the contest a success.

o The **Chief Judge**'s role includes: ensuring the minimum number of functionaries (judges, secret tiebreaking judges, timers, and ballot counters) are on hand; collecting and tabulating ballots with the counters; handling and resolving any protests. (See the appropriate *Chief Judge Checklist* for additional rules and details.)

o **Judges** will be given the list of contestants and their speaking order at the start of each contest.

o Before speaking, all speakers will be reminded to unmute their audio and turn on their video immediately prior to speaking.

o While **contestants** are giving speeches or being interviewed, the Tech Host will give them co-host permissions to allow for unmuting, turning video on, and screen sharing.

o After **contestants** complete their speeches, the **timer** will notify the **Toastmaster** *via green timing lights* when the **Chief Judge** and **functionaries** are in the breakout room counting ballots, thus signaling the start of the contestant interviews. Decide beforehand how long contestant interviews will last and how to notify the **Toastmaster** when results are in.

o The **Toastmaster** interviews each contestant while the votes are being tallied. Typical questions asked may include the name of their home club, how long they've been in Toastmasters, something about their speech or a question related to their bio (profile sheet).

o A *Certificate of Participation* may be prepared for each contestant by the **Contest Chair** or **Toastmaster**, then sent to the contestants following the contest.

o Winners' 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place winner's certificates are prepared during the contest by the **Contest Chair**, **Chief Judge**, **Tech Team**, or most available official.

o At the end of both contests, each winner's certificate or name are displayed when winners are announced by the **Contest Chair**. Oftentimes the area, division, or district leader may be asked to announce the winners.

o After the contest, the **Contest Chair** provides the *Notification of Contest Winner* form (Item 1182) to the **Contest Chair** of the next contest level, or to World Headquarters in the case of the International Speech Contest and the District level.

[Area # or Division]
Table Topics Speech Contest &
International Speech Contest

[Day, Date]

[Start Time – End Time]

Table Topics Contest

Call to order, Sergeant-at-Arms **[Name]**

Opening Remarks, Contest Chair **[Name]**

Contest Introduction, Toastmaster **[Name]**

Speaking Order
1 –
2 –
3 –
4 –
5 –
6 –

Contest rules, Chief Judge **[Name]**

Escort contestants to the breakout room, Sergeant-at-Arms **[Name]**

- o *The Toastmaster introduces contestants, who are brought back into the main room to speak one at a time in the speaking order drawn.*
- o *Each speech is 1-2 minutes.*
- o *There is one minute of silence between speeches.*
- o *After the last speech, remain silent until all ballots are collected.*

Contestant interviews, Toastmaster **[Name]**

- o *Once the ballot counting is completed, interviews may be concluded.*

[Division Contest] **District announcements,** D101 team **[Name]**

- 5 MINUTE BREAK –

International Speech Contest

Contest Introduction, Toastmaster   **[Name]**

        Speaking Order
        1 –
        2 –
        3 –
        4 –
        5 –
        6 –

Contest rules, Chief Judge   **[Name]**

- *The Toastmaster introduces contestants to speak one at a time in the speaking order drawn.*
- *Each speech is 5-7 minutes.*
- *There is one minute of silence between speeches.*
- *After the last speech, remain silent until all ballots are collected.*

Contestant interviews, Toastmaster   **[Name]**

- *Once the ballot counting is completed, interviews may be concluded.*

Contest announcements, Contest Chair   **[Name]**

Announce winners of each contest, Contest Chair   **[Name]**

- CONTEST ADJOURNS -