

How to Chair

a Contest



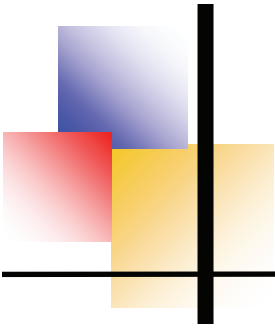
by

Deborah McGrath ACB, CL
Northern Lights Advanced Toastmasters Club # 838539



District 86
www.toastmasters86.org





How to Chair a Contest

Chairing a contest – at any level, requires three skills: advance planning, clear communication and teamwork. Good thing as Toastmasters we have learned these skills and, more importantly, continue to practice them at every Toastmaster meeting!

Regardless at which level you chair a contest, it is a rich and rewarding experience. As Chair you are responsible for setting the “tone and temper” for contestants, judges, timers, counters, fellow Toastmasters, and audience members. In other words, as Chair, it is important to communicate that *everyone* plays a dynamic role in the success of the contest. Whether they are there to compete, support, observe or learn, it is the role of the Chair to ensure *everyone* enjoys the experience.

The success of any contest is greatly dependant on teamwork. The Chair cannot perform his/her role without first creating a dialogue and working relationship with key team members including the Chief Judge, Sergeant-at-Arms (SAA) and the Facilities Chair. Given the geography of this District, quite often that communication occurs mere hours or minutes before a contest begins. Here’s where our Toastmaster communication and leadership skills are put to the ultimate test. When we apply our skills and “play well”, everyone succeeds.

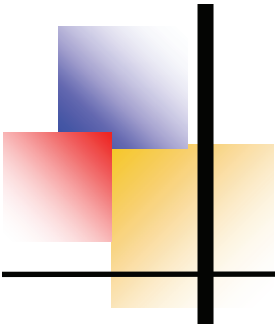
While this booklet has been written as a supportive tool specifically for **Conference** level contests - when used in conjunction with existing Toastmaster International (TI) contest material – it also may be helpful for Club, Area and Division levels. It is based on research gained from reading TI material, speaking with fellow Toastmasters who have performed the role of Contest Chair, and personal experience as both Chair and contestant.

It is my hope this booklet assists you by offering additional insight, information, checklists and quick tips for performing your next (or first) Contest Chair role.

Respectfully submitted by,

Deborah McGrath, ACB, CL

Northern Lights Advanced Toastmasters Club # 838539
District 86 2008 Table Topics Chair
District 60 2008 Table Topics Chair
District 60 2007 Table Topics Contest Winner



The following is a series of checklists helpful to pre-planning and execution of the Contest Chair role. Every attempt was made to present the material in a chronological manner or order of importance.

Advance Preparation Checklist:

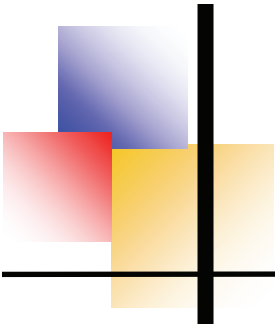


- Read all TI Speech Contest Rulebook material specific to your Contest Chair role.
- Contact Contest Chair from previous year(s).
- Speak with fellow Toastmasters regarding their own Contest Chair experience.
- Communicate with the Conference Contest Chair well in advance of the contest date.
- Send him/her your biography/introduction.
- Obtain and review Contestant Briefing overview. Note distinctions between contests.
- Review the Conference Minute by Minute spreadsheet and address any questions with the Conference Contest Chair.
- Review contestant briefing time and location.
- Prepare your own notes and checklists, in conjunction with the Minute by Minute and related TI material.
- Choose the contest word/theme and ensure it is properly vetted with the Lieutenant Governor Education and Training (LGET). The word must be general in nature, not offensive or controversial.
- Connect with the Chief Judge and Sergeant-at-Arms (SAA) to initiate team dialogue.
- Receive and review speech contestant biographical information from Conference Contest Chair.
- Prepare opening remarks. **(TIP: Support/incorporate the conference theme in your comments.)**
- Formulate contestant interview questions. **(TIP: Keep questions open-ended, brief and allow for 60-120 seconds per contestant. Check timing against Minute by Minute.)**
- Prepare “back-pocket” speech to address potential “overtime” required by the Chief Judge. **(TIP: Keep it short, light and simple.)**

Before Contest Commences:

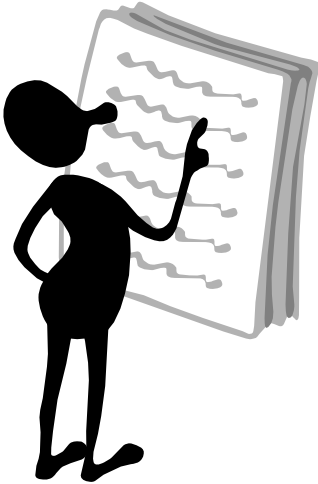
Contest Room Checklist:

- Review room set-up.
- Examine stage and stairs (if applicable) for potential tripping hazards.
- Review placement of timing lights.
- Check room temperature and lighting.
- Ensure water is available for contestants and placed near contest room entrance.



Contestant Briefing:

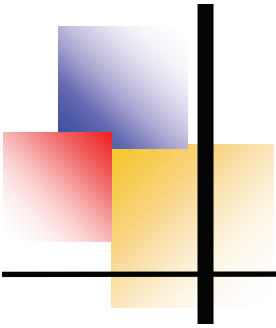
Contest Chair Checklist:



- Arrive early and conduct a final check of the room.
- Meet Chief Judge, SAA and Facilities Chair prior to contestant briefing.
- Deliver the word/phrase to SAA **(TIP: For easier reading, the contest word/phrase should be typed in large font – 36 pt. or higher, on a clean sheet of paper.)**
- Get Chief Judge's introduction.
- Address placement of trophies/plaques with Contest Conference Chair.
- Sign appropriate certificates and return to Chief Judge.

Contestant Briefing:

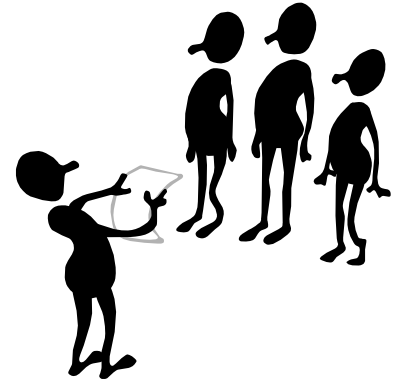
- Confirm all contestants are present for briefing. (Latecomers who miss the briefing and speaking order draw are last, and may not have advance prep time for testing stage area and equipment.)
- Address eligibility documents with Chief Judge.
- Note any contestant additions or deletions with Chief Judge.
- Review each name and ensure correct pronunciation.
- Retain and review contestant biography.
- Review approach and departure from stage. **(TIP: In support of the Facilities Chair role, if the room set up is challenging or awkward, this can be helpful in eliminating confusion and wasted time.)**
- Assign and review speaking area.
- Address use of and position for the lectern.
- Address use of props and review requirements with SAA and team.
- Review timing guidelines.
- Ensure contestants remove all identifying (TI) badges or pins.
- Determine protocol regarding inclusion of seasonal lapel pins such as Remembrance Day poppies. **(TIP: Unless previously addressed by the Conference Committee, this protocol is at the discretion of the Chair.)**
- Ensure each contestant has the opportunity to test lavalier/microphone usage.



Contestant Briefing cont'd:

Contestant Briefing cont'd:

- Review location of area/room where contestants are sequestered.
- Draw for speaking order. **(TIP: A deck of playing cards is a simple way to address this task.)**
- Record in own notes.
- Report speaking order to Chief Judge.
- Advise each contestant to arrive early. **(TIP: To save time, have each contestant “check in” with you prior to start of contest.)**



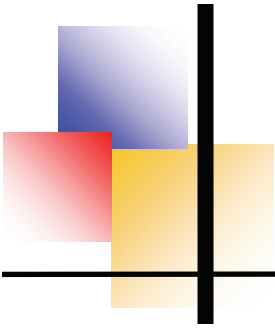
Contest Checklists:

Start of Contest:

- Welcome distinguished guests, fellow Toastmasters, contestants and audience members with brief opening remarks.
- Reinforce SAA's comments regarding use of: cell phones, cameras, beepers and watch alarms.
- Ensure audience is aware photography (including use of camera phones) or other recording devices are strictly prohibited during the contest. **(TIP: Advise audience members of photo opportunity AFTER completion of the contest, usually during contestant interviews.)**
- Introduce Chief Judge to review contest rules.
- Announce speaking order.
- Instruct SAA to escort contestants from the room and kindly secure the door.

During Contest:

- Follow appropriate contest protocol when introducing each speaker. For example, Table Topics Contest script is “speaker name, word/phrase, word/phrase, speaker name.” **(TIP: Ensure the speaker is in the door - and the door is fully closed, before announcing anything!)**
- Welcome each contestant to the stage with a handshake. **(TIP: A smile helps too!)**
- After completion of speech, escort each contestant off the stage with a handshake – and a smile.



Contest Checklists cont'd:

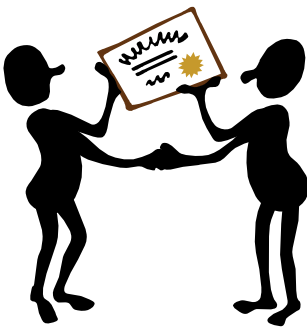
During Contest cont'd:

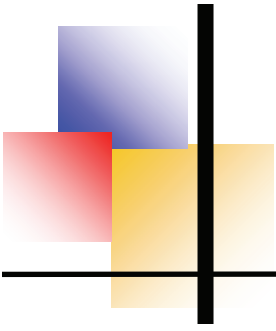
- Call for one minute of silence from the audience. **(TIP: I believe the role of the Contest Chair is also to respect that silence. This is a “non-speaking opportunity” and allows the Judges to complete their critical role in relative quiet.)**
- Do **NOT** ask if Judges need more time!
- After last contestant has left the stage, call for two minutes of silence.
- Ask Judges to hold up their ballots. **(TIP: Remind Judges to sign their competed ballots.)**
- Call for ballots to be collected. **(TIP: Remain in visual contact with Chief Judge and wait for his/her cue that their team is ready to leave the contest room.)**
- Announce their departure.
- Call for a round of applause.



Contest Conclusion:

- Request all the contestants come to the stage. **(TIP: Have them line up in speaking order with the first contestant closest to you.)**
- Conduct contestant interview within designated timeframe. **(TIP: Start each interview by asking for Club name, number. As previously noted, questions should be open-ended, brief and engaging. REALLY HELPFUL TIP: For each contestant, hold the Certificate of Participation in your left hand and shake hands with your right. Keep your biographical notes on the lectern.)**
- Allow sufficient time for photo opportunity.
- Call for another round of applause.
- Thank each contestant and request they return to their seats.
- Address any (judging) time delays with announcements, reminders, agenda changes or housekeeping items.
- Keep ready that “back pocket” speech for any additional delays





Contest Awards:

Announcement and Presentation checklist:

- Invite the District Governor and International Director to the stage to present the awards.
- Congratulate ALL contestants for a job well done!
- Announce disqualifications if any.
- Announce winners in the following order: 3rd, 2nd then 1st place – or as appropriate to the Contest rules.
- Allow 1st place winner time to speak.
- Allow additional photo opportunities.
- Thank Contest Conference Chair, Chief Judge, SAA(s), Judges, Timers, Ballot Counters, audience members and guests. **(TIP: Not in any contest rulebook but an important, often overlooked, acknowledgment.)**
- Adjourn contest.

