

## Table Topics and International Speech Timeline and Contest Script For Area and Division Contests

Have you ever attended a Toastmasters Area or Division contest where you walked in the door to find only 10 or 12 people in attendance with maybe 1 or 2 contestants on the agenda...if there is an agenda at all?

And, before you even find a seat, someone is asking you “Would you be our Sergeant-at-Arms tonight”? or “We need counters and timers. Which one would you like to be?”

Worse yet is when you get that phone call the night before the contest, which goes something like this: “Would you be willing to be our Toastmaster for our contest tomorrow? You don’t have to do anything. Just show up.”

Conversely, have you ever walked into an Area or Division contest with over 50 people in the audience, with 5 contestants in each category, and the program flows with precision as if every detail had been planned for weeks? Excitement and anticipation fills the room and the participants are nervous, nervous, nervous!!!

Holding a successful Toastmasters contest is a privilege and valuable learning experience for everyone who attends or competes. This document has been designed as a step-by-step checklist to help you through every step of planning and conducting the Table Topics and International speech contest at the Area or Division level.

The pages that follow are a culmination of dozens of ideas and suggestions from many well respected Toastmasters members as well as a few of my own ideas that I picked up by attending, hosting, organizing, participating and competing in many Toastmasters contest over the years.

May this document help you organize and conduct your Area or Division contest smoothly and efficiently so that your contestants and audience may receive the unique gift of experience that only a successful contest can provide.

Sincerely,  
Marty Dickinson  
Metro Division Governor  
7/1/01-6/30/02

The successful Area or Division Table Topics and International Speech contest process begins long before actual contest day:

At least 5 weeks prior to contest day, the Area or Division Governor should have recruited a person called the Contest Chair. Occasionally, a member will volunteer; but normally the officer will need to recruit the Contest Chair. This person should have experience conducting Toastmasters contests at the club level.

## At least 4 weeks prior to contest day...

The Contest Chair needs to:

- Receive the scheduled contest date from the Area or Division Governor
- Assign a Toastmaster and Chief Judge and instruct them of their roles although the Contest Chair may elect to serve as one of these roles
- Recruit someone or a couple of people to submit a Table Topic for the contest. Only one will be used but I've found it beneficial to have a few submitted so that the Toastmaster can choose one that is most appropriate for the evening.
- Recruit a Backup Toastmaster and Chief Judge just in case something comes up
- Get someone to be in charge of food and drinks
- Create and distribute promotion flyers to participating clubs, all Area and Division Governors, the District Public Relations Officer, local libraries, companies near the location and other promotional avenues

## At least 3 weeks prior to contest day...

The Toastmaster needs to:

- Acquire the names, phone numbers and E-mail addresses for the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> place winners from the previous level.
- Contact the 1<sup>st</sup> place winners to congratulate them of their win at the previous level and make sure they know when and where to be on contest day/night. Also, instruct them to show up 45 minutes before the contest start time to complete bio sheets and be present for briefing and drawing for speaking order. Encourage contestants to take advantage of this opportunity and that it will be worth their while to make the effort to compete. Often because people new to contests do not know what rewarding experience awaits them, they're quick to skip the opportunity. It's up to YOU to sell them on going to the next level.
- Attempt to get bio and eligibility forms from Contest Chair from previous level
- Recruit Sergeant-at-Arms and provide outline of responsibilities similar to the Appendix of this document.

The Chief Judge needs to:

- Recruit 2 timers
- Recruit 2 judges from each club for an Area contest or 2 judges from each Area for a Division contest
- Recruit 1 tie-breaker judge that you trust will be unbiased
- Recruit a Chief Counter
- Recruit at least 1 additional vote counter
- Instructs all volunteers where to be and when to be there (Judges, timers, and counters are usually briefed 30 minutes or so before the contest begins)
- Attains original judging forms and contestant sheets and makes appropriate number of photocopies for distribution at contest night.

Forms include:

- Judges Ballots for International Speech contest
- Judges Ballots for Table Topics contest
- Tie-Breaker's Ballots for both contests
- Timer's sheets
- Certificates of originality and eligibility
- Bio sheets
- Counter's sheets
- Advancement form

## At least one day before the contest...

The Contest Chair needs to:

- Verify all points and positions with Toastmaster and Chief Judge
- Communicate with Area or Division Governor that everything is in place

The Toastmaster needs to:

- Prepare a one-page agenda showing contestant names without speech titles.  
Volunteers need not be listed on the agenda
- Make enough copies of agenda so that unexpected visitors can have one too
- Contacts contestants one additional time by E-mail or by phone as a reminder  
of the contest, when to be there and that you'll be looking forward to their  
competition
- Prepare Certificates of Achievement for contestants
- Gather a dozen or so pens for contestants to use for completing of forms

## At the contest but before the show starts...

### The Chief Judge needs to:

- Arrive at least 1 hour before contest start time
- Check off volunteers as they arrive
- Brief all judges and timers beginning 30-45 minutes before start time
- Brief all Table Topics contest participants beginning 20-30 minutes before start time and have them draw for speaking order
- Brief all Speech contest participants beginning 15-20 minutes before start time and have them draw for speaking order
- Deliver speaking order of all contest participants to Toastmaster

### The Toastmaster needs to:

- Arrive 1 hour before contest start time
- Choose a seat near the front of the room on the side that offers easy access to the front of the room and back to your seat. You're going to be getting up and sitting down quite a bit!
- Check off contestants as they arrive
- Have contestants complete Eligibility and Bio forms if you have not received them from the previous level contest
- Point out who the Chief Judge is and when the briefings will begin
- Look for District Officers who have shown up for the contest. You'll be introducing them at the beginning, so take the time now, while your Chief Judge is giving briefings, to introduce yourself, discover what the officer's position is within Toastmasters and write down the correct pronunciation of their names in order of rank
- Find your Sergeant-at-Arms and coordinate the kick-off of the contest. It works great to have the SAA sound the gavel to get everyone's attention and then introduce the Area Governor for an Area contest or the Division Governor for the Division contest
- Acquire the speaking order from the Chief Judge and provide the list to the timers

## The Contest Begins!!

### The Sergeant-at-Arms...

- Sounds the gavel
- Welcomes everyone
- Introduces Area Governor if an Area contest and Division Governor for Division contest

### The Area or Division Governor...

- Welcomes the group, gives any introductory remarks and introduces the Toastmaster for the contest

### The Toastmaster...

- Welcome the group
- Provide an upbeat introduction and overview of what the audience will see during this contest
- Introduce the concept of contests such as why public speaking contests are important, that the contestants have chosen to challenge themselves to “step beyond their comfort zone” and gain experience beyond the club
- Mention the first place winners of this event will go on to the Division contest to be held on xyz date (if you’re at the Area) or District conference to be held on xyz date (if you’re at the Division)
- Introduce only the district officers who have shown up to your contest by simply stating their names and having them stand in the following order:
  - District Governor
  - Lieutenant Governor, Education and Training
  - Lieutenant Governor, Marketing
  - Public Relations Officer
  - District Secretary
  - District Treasurer
  - Immediate Past District Governor
  - Any Division Governors
  - Any Area Governors
  - Others
- Introduce the Chief Judge

The Chief Judge informs the audience about the following items:

- Contestants, judges, timers and counters have been briefed (You may elect to list the contestants in the order of which they'll be presenting)
- Contestants have drawn for speaking order
- Judges will not consider timing as this is accounted for separately
- Request that the audience take a few seconds to check their pagers, cell phones and other devices with alarms and turn them off for the duration of the contest
- Be firm that no one should leave or enter the room while a contestant is speaking
- State that it is very important to provide an "equal platform" for each contestant and by adhering to these requests, they'll have one.
- Announce that the contest may now begin! And, return control to the TM

The Toastmaster:

- Make a smooth transition between Chief Judge comments and the actual start of the contest by...
- Reiterating how very important it is for each contestant to have an equal platform from which to compete. This is the only way a contest can be fair. This means no leaving the room, no doors slamming, no dropping change on the floor, etc. I always like to say "If someone's cell phone goes off during a speech, we'll have to recruit someone to activate his cell phone for every speech!" That always draws a chuckle.
- To begin the first event, consider this verbiage:

"We will start this evening with the Table Topics contest. At this time, I would like to ask the Sergeant-at-Arms to escort all of our contestants to the secured location outside the room and I would like to ask the first contestant to remain just inside the door until the Sergeant-at-Arms gives the signal that the other contestants are secure."

The Sergeant-at-Arms:

- Escorts all of the Table Topics contestants outside the room to a separate enclosed room where they cannot hear the other participants. Once secure, the SAA returns to the contest room and signals the Toastmaster.
- There are a few different ways to do this step. Sometimes the first contestant is asked to stay in the room just inside the door until the SAA escorts the others to their “holding area.” Then the 1<sup>st</sup> contestant is introduced. Lately, I’ve been taking the first contestant with me too. That prevents the Toastmaster from getting anxious and introducing the table topic to the 1<sup>st</sup> contestant while I’m walking the others down the hallway and can hear everything that contestant #1 is saying. Then, when the other contestants are secure, I’ll escort the 1<sup>st</sup> contestant into the room. Use whichever works best for you. Just make sure that the 1<sup>st</sup> contestant at least goes to the door and stands inside of it by the time they’re introduced.
- After the first contestant speaks, the judges will have 1 minute to mark their ballots. This is your time to go get the next contestant so that when the minute is up, you will have the next contestant standing inside the door already. Again, make sure the following contestants do not just walk right up to the Toastmaster until the introduction has been made

The Toastmaster:

- After the SAA gives the signal, the first contestant is introduced in this fashion: “Our first contestant is John Joe. Please help me welcome John Doe.”
- When the first contestant approaches you, make sure to not make a motion or say any words that invite the contestant to say anything back to you or the timer might start the clock!! Just shake the contestant’s hand and say “Please respond to the following question...” and then walk away. Do not shake the person’s hand a second time until the contestant has completed the response.  
  
(Note: You must say this same line for every contestant, again to provide an equal platform.)
- After a contestant has completed the Table Topic, offer the second handshake and say: “May we please have one minute of silence while the judges mark their ballots?”

The Sergeant-at-Arms:

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- Again, as soon as the first contestant completes the response, this is your time to go get the next contestant so that when the minute is up, you will have the next contestant standing inside the door already.

Make sure to instruct each contestant as you're walking him or her to the contest room that "the judges are currently marking their ballots so there may be some silence until you are introduced. Until you are formally introduced, please stand just inside the door."

It is a good idea to stand next to the contestant inside the door to make sure that person does not walk up to the front of the room until the introduction has been made.

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- Be ready to leave the room to go get the next contestant as soon as this one has finished.
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The Toastmaster:

- When you feel a minute might be approaching, announce to the judges to finish up so that we can move on to the next contestant.
  - When the timer signals that 1 minute has arrived, move right into introducing the next contestant by saying: “Judges, please prepare for our next presenter.”
  - Introduce the next Table Topics participant:  
“Our next Table Topics contestant is: Person’s Name. Please help me welcome Person’s name.”
  - After the final contestant has presented, request 1 minute of silence for the judges just like the judges received for all of the contestants. When the minute is up, say: “Now we request continued silence until all judges have cast their official votes for best table topics participant. Judges, please raise your ballot in the air when you have completed your votes and our Chief Judge and counters will collect the ballots.”
  - After all ballots have been collected, say:  
“Let’s give all of the contestants another round of applause!!”
  - Announce that the contest will very shortly take a 10-minute break but before the break “let’s meet our Table Topics contestants!! I’d like to at this time ask all of our Table Topics contestants to come to the front of the room please.”
  - Start with the first contestant by having him say the name of his club and what city or town that club is in. Ask how long he has been in Toastmasters and ask one question to expand upon. Most Toastmasters will look at the bio sheets to arrive at specific questions for each contestant.
- NOTE: Be very careful to limit these responses to 20 seconds or so. You don’t want another speech from this person, just a little more content to add to the event. (This is a good thing to point out when briefing contestants at the beginning)
- After the first contestant completes the interview, thank him for participating, present him with a Certificate of Appreciation and ask for one more round of applause for that person. Then move on to the rest of the contestants one at a time in the order that they presented.
  - When all contestants have been interviewed, ask for one more round of applause as they are asked to return to their seats.
  - ANNOUNCE A 10-MINUTE BREAK AT THIS TIME

## The Contest Resumes

### Sergeant-at-Arms

- When the timer signals that 10 minutes is up, start gathering people that have gone outside the contest room and ask that they quickly make their way back to their seats.
- Go to the front of the room and re-sound the gavel to get everyone's attention and in a firm voice request people to return to their seats.
- Re-introduce the Toastmaster

### Toastmaster

- Here's the trickiest part of the whole contest! You need to provide a smooth transition between people who are still not sitting down and the first contestant. This can take some last minute improvisation!! It's best to have something planned like maybe something funny that happened to you at a contest or as a Toastmasters member. You want to talk about something for about 60-120 seconds so that people stop thinking about the conversation they were just having with their long lost friend from another district and get them ready to listen to the upcoming speeches. This is also a good time to thank everyone for helping to provide an equal platform for the table topics contestants and that you ask their same level of effort for the speech contestants. You DON'T want 3 or 4 people talking through the first 30 seconds of the first presenter!
- Announce: "And now for the International Speech Contest!"
- Say: "Our first contestant is: First name, Last name, Speech Title, Speech Title, First Name, Last Name"
- Receive the contestant by offering a handshake. Try to avoid saying anything to the contestant because if the person responds with any words, the timer will start.
- When the speaker has finished, ask for one minute of silence while the judges mark their ballots.
- At 45 seconds, say: "Judges, please complete your balloting in preparation for the next speaker."
- When the timer signals, say: "Our next contestant is First Name, Last Name, Speech Title, Speech Title, First Name, Last Name."
- After the last contestant, ask for the same minute of silence but when you get to 45 seconds or so, say: "We will now remain silent until all judges have completed their ballots and the ballots have been collected by our counters." (There is no time limit for judges to complete tallying ballots)
- After ballots have all been collected, say: "Let's give all of the speech contestants another round of applause for their well done speeches!" and then invite all of the contestants to the front of the room for their interviews

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- Start with the first contestant by having him say the name of his club and what city or town that club is in. Ask how long he has been in Toastmasters and ask one question to expand upon. Most Toastmasters will look at the bio sheets to arrive at specific questions for each contestant.

NOTE: Be very careful to limit these responses to 20 seconds or so. You don't want another speech from this person, just a little more content to add to the event.

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- After the first contestant completes the interview, thank him for participating, present him with a Certificate of Appreciation and ask for one more round of applause for that person. Then move on to the rest of the contestants one at a time in the order that they presented.

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  - When all contestants have been interviewed, ask for one more round of applause as they are asked to return to their seats.

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  - Congratulations! You've made it through the tough parts. Now, there are a couple of formalities that have to happen before you can present the awards. Actually, you need a few minutes taken up anyway while the votes are being counted. This is the time when you need to invite visiting District Officers to make any announcements to the audience. There are usually 2 visiting district officers at every Area contest and 5-8 that will want to speak at the Division contest. A good way to introduce this is:  
"While we're waiting for the votes to be tallied, we're going to minimize the suspense a bit by allowing our visiting District Officers to fill the time. Please help me welcome..."

*Here is the order of introductions:*

Any past District Governors  
Area Governors  
Division Governors  
Immediate Past District Governors  
District Treasurer  
District Secretary  
Public Relations Officer  
Lieutenant Governor, Marketing  
Lieutenant Governor, Education and Training  
District Governor

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## The Awards Ceremony and Conclusion

### The Toastmaster:

- Be prepared with some “filler” if votes are not completed by the time the district officers are finished.
- Receive votes from Chief Judge
- Conduct the Awards Ceremony by announcing winners for whom there are trophies. At the Area, there is only a first place trophy supplied by the district for each event. At the Division, there is typically a 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> place trophy. Announce 2<sup>nd</sup> place first, then 1<sup>st</sup> place at the area. At the division contest, announce 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, then 1<sup>st</sup>. Present awards in starting with the Table Topics contest and then the winners of the Speech contest.
- Ask the 1<sup>st</sup> place finishers if they would like to share any remarks
- Present thank-you’s to key participants like the Chief Judge, Timers, Judges
- Present any special gifts
- Give ending comments and announce the date and location for the next event and encourage attendance
- Return control of the event to the Area or Division Governor to close the contest

### Area or Division Governor:

- Congratulate Toastmaster and Chief Judge for a job well done
- If the Contest Chair is other than the TM or CJ, have that person stand for recognition
- Pay particular thanks to whatever club or person was responsible for arranging use of the facility for the contest and the food committee
- Again, mention the date and location of the next level contest
- Request those with trophies in there hands to remain for pictures
- Thank audience for attending
- Close the event

### Toastmaster:

- Gather bios and eligibility forms of winners
- Complete Notification of Winners form
- Deliver forms to Contest Chairperson for the next level contest or to your Area or Division Governor

**Go Home and Relax!!**

## Contest Appendix A

How to explain to the Sergeant-at-Arms what he is supposed to do:

- Show up an hour before the contest start time in order to welcome guests and be on hand to point people to bathrooms and food areas
- Locate a room away from the contest room where Table Topics contestants will be taken so that they cannot hear or see the other participants
- At the beginning of the contest, welcome the audience and introduce the Area Governor (if at an Area Contest) or the Division Governor (if at Division Contest)
- Escort contestants to secured location when requested by Toastmaster
- Direct the first contestant to stand just inside the door.
- After the first contestant speaks, the judges will have 1 minute to mark their ballots. This is your time to go get the next contestant so that when the minute is up, you will have the next contestant standing inside the door already.

NOTE: Make sure to prevent the contestant from walking right up to the Toastmaster when you open the door of the contest room. You want that person to receive a formal introduction and then benefit from a welcoming round of applause as he or she approaches the Toastmaster

## Contest Appendix B

### How to brief the timers

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- Provide both timers with two Timer's Forms as they'll need one for each contest

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  - Instruct both timers to time each event. Only one needs to operate the lights

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  - Instruct both timers to write each contestants name on their forms and the duration of the participants' performance

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  - Instruct them to begin their stop watches only after the 1<sup>st</sup> word is uttered or the first gesture is given

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  - Instruct them when the lights come on for each event...
    - For the Table Topics Contest:
      - Green light comes on at 1minutes
      - Yellow light comes on at 1 minute, 30 seconds
      - Red light comes on at 2 minutes
      - The red light STAYS ON until the participant has finished
    - For the Speech Contest:
      - Green light comes on at 5 minutes
      - Yellow light comes on at 6 minutes
      - Red light comes on at 7 minutes
      - The red light STAYS ON until the participant has finished

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  - Instruct Timers to deliver their Forms to the Chief Judge when each event is completed

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## Contest Appendix C

### Briefing the Judges

- Call all judges to the front of the room for briefing, including the secret person you've chosen to be the tie-breaker judge.
  - Thank each judge for showing up. Explain the importance of this event. Things to include might be that "the contestants have all worked very hard to get to this point and everyone really wants to win. Please be attentive and unbiased in your judging."
  - Present 1 Table Topics Ballot and 1 International Speech ballot to each judge
  - Ask if there are any judges present that have never judged at this level before
  - If any raise their hands, take a few moments to review the ballot and make sure they know how the ballot should be completed. Remember, they can use the grading system provided in any way they want or not at all. The only thing you need from them is the actual ballot at the bottom, torn off and signed.
- NOTE: If a judge does not sign a ballot, that vote is void so make sure it is made clear to sign all submitted ballots
- Explain that the Table Topics contest will occur first and then, after the break, the International Speech contest will begin
  - Explain that the judges should not even pay attention to the lights. If someone goes over or under, they will be automatically disqualified.
  - Explain that judges will have 1 minute to mark their ballots after each presentation and then will have as much time as they need of each event to tally their votes and complete their final ballot
  - When a judge makes a decision, the ballot at the bottom should be completed, signed and torn off from the rest of the form
  - Have the judges hold their ballots in the air and the counters will pick them up

## Contest Appendix D

### Briefing the Table Topics Contestants:

- Congratulate contestants for their achievement of making it to this level of competition and thank them for showing up
- Assure that the judges have been briefed and that it has been made clear to each judge that this is an important contest and that they need to be unbiased in their selection
- Explain that the Table Topics contest will occur first
- Explain that they will be escorted out of the room to a secured location so that they cannot hear the topic or the responses and that they will be escorted to the room when it is their time.
- MAKE SURE TO SAY THE FOLLOWING: “When you are escorted into the contest room by the SAA, stand just inside the door until you are formally introduced. After you are introduced, approach the Toastmaster and shake his hand but DON’T say any words or the Timers will start. Just shake the hand, listen for the table topic, and when you’re ready, begin your topic response and that’s when the Timers will start.”
- Show where the lights are and turn them on so the contestants can see what they look like
- Cover the timing rules for the Table Topics contest:
  - Green light comes on at 1 minute
  - Yellow light comes on at 1 minute, 30 seconds
  - Red light comes on at 2 minutes
  - The red light STAYS ON until the participant has finished
  - You MUST speak no less than 1 minute and no more than 2 minutes, 30 seconds or you will be disqualified
- Ask if there are any questions
- Draw for speaking order by placing numbers in a hat and having the contestants blindly draw for speaking position
- Write the names and speaking position on a piece of paper for delivery to the contest Toastmaster

## Contest Appendix E

### Briefing the International Speech Contestants:

- Call out among the audience that you would like to have all International Speech Contestants report to the front of the room for briefing
- Congratulate contestants for their achievement of making it to this level of competition and thank them for showing up
- Assure that the judges have been briefed and that it has been made clear to each judge that this is an important contest and that they need to be unbiased in their selection
- Explain that the Speech contest will occur second...after the break
- Explain that they will be introduced only by Name, Speech Title, Speech Title, Name
- Show where the lights are and turn them on so the contestants can see what they look like
- Cover the timing rules for the Speech contest:
  - Green light comes on at 5 minutes
  - Yellow light comes on at 6 minutes
  - Red light comes on at 7 minutes
  - The red light STAYS ON until the participant has finished
  - You MUST speak no less than 4 minutes, 30 seconds but no more than 7 minutes, 30 seconds or you will be disqualified
- Ask if there are any questions
- Draw for speaking order by placing numbers in a hat and having the contestants blindly draw for speaking position
- Write the names and speaking position on a piece of paper for delivery to the contest Toastmaster

## Contest Appendix F

### Briefing the Vote Counters and Chief Vote Counter

- Have them identify a table outside the contest room where they will take the votes for counting
- It is up to them to disqualify a contestant if they have not met the timing requirements
- The Tie-Breaker vote is ONLY used if there is a tie.