

TOASTMASTERS

2026–2027

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO

TOASTMASTERS SPEECH CONTESTS

Frequently Asked Questions

Clear, practical answers for contestants, judges, contest chairs and club leaders.

PLAIN-LANGUAGE REFERENCE GUIDE

DISTRICT 127

Our Vision

One Nation, One District, One Vision

**SPEAK
LEAD
INSPIRE**

Contest-ready • Print-friendly • Easy to navigate

FAQ GUIDE

Toastmasters Speech Contest FAQ

Based on 1171-Speech-Contest-Rulebook 2026-27

How to use this guide

- Use it as a pre-contest briefing handout, a club newsletter insert, or a quick reference for contest teams.
- For formal decisions, always refer to the official Toastmasters rulebook and the relevant contest forms.
- The answers below are simplified for easy understanding; they do not replace the official rules.

At-a-Glance Timing Guide

Contest	Target	Signal	Disqualify if
International / Humorous / Online	5-7 min	Green 5:00 Yellow 6:00 Red 7:00	< 4:30 or > 7:30
Table Topics	1-2 min	Green 1:00 Yellow 1:30 Red 2:00	< 1:00 or > 2:30
Evaluation	2-3 min	Green 2:00 Yellow 2:30 Red 3:00	< 1:30 or > 3:30
Tall Tales	3-5 min	Green 3:00 Yellow 4:00 Red 5:00	< 2:30 or > 5:30

Eligibility

01

MEMBERS: Who can compete in a Toastmasters speech contest?

A paid Toastmasters member of a club in good standing can compete, if the member meets the eligibility rules for that contest.

02

MEMBERS: Does my club also need to be in good standing?

Yes. The contestant must be a paid member, and the club must also be in good standing.

03

MEMBERS: Can a new, dual, or reinstated member compete?

Yes, if their dues and membership application are current with World Headquarters.

04

INTERNATIONAL: What extra requirement applies to the International Speech Contest?

The contestant must have completed Levels 1 and 2 of any Pathways path or have earned the Distinguished Toastmaster award.

05

INTERNATIONAL: Are there any exceptions for very new clubs?

Yes. Charter members of a club chartered less than one year before the club contest may compete without the Levels 1 and 2 requirements, provided the club chartered before the Area contest.

06

CHECK: Can District leaders compete?

Some District leaders and candidates are not eligible to compete. Always check the role-based eligibility list before confirming contestants.

07

MEMBERS: Can I compete if I belong to more than one club?

Yes. If you are a paid member in more than one club and meet eligibility requirements, you may compete in each club contest.

08

IMPORTANT: Can I compete in more than one Area contest of the same type?

No. A contestant cannot compete in more than one Area contest of the same contest type.

09

IMPORTANT: Can I compete beyond club level online?

For most contests beyond club level, contestants must be physically present. Exceptions apply for International Speech Contest Quarterfinals and the Online Speech Contest.

10

LANGUAGE CONTESTS: Do I need to be a member of a language-specific club to participate in the corresponding language contest?

Yes. Under the latest District decision, you must be a member of a Toastmasters club that conducts its meetings in the relevant language to participate in that language contest. For example, to participate in the Arabic Speech Contest, you must be a member of an Arabic-language Toastmasters club.

Contest Types and Progression

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CONTESTS: Which official speech contests are recognized?

The official contests are International, Evaluation, Humorous, Table Topics, Tall Tales, and Online Speech Contest.

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INTERNATIONAL: Is the International Speech Contest conducted in English only?

Yes. The International Speech Contest must be conducted in English only.

13

INTERNATIONAL: Which contest goes beyond District level?

Only the International Speech Contest proceeds beyond District level to quarterfinals, semifinals, and the World Championship of Public Speaking.

14

FLOW: What is the normal level-by-level progression?

Contests begin at club level and proceed to Area, Division, and District. International then continues to quarterfinals, semifinals, and finals.

15

MISUNDERSTOOD: Can a contest have only one contestant?

Yes. The contest must still be held, and the contestant must still meet timing, originality, and eligibility rules.

16

ADVANCEMENT: Can two contestants advance from a club?

Sometimes. Districts may allow two contestants to advance in small Areas or other qualifying situations, but the decision must be made and communicated before the contest cycle begins.

Speech Content and Originality

17

CONTENT: Who chooses the speech topic?

For International, Humorous, Tall Tales, and Online contests, the contestant chooses the topic.

18

TABLE TOPICS: Who chooses the Table Topics topic?

The Contest Chair selects the Table Topics topic. All contestants receive the same topic.

19

EVALUATION: What is an Evaluation Contest speech about?

It is an oral evaluation of the test speaker's speech.

20

ORIGINALITY: How original must my speech be?

Your speech must be substantially original. No more than 25% may be quoted, paraphrased, or referenced from someone else's content.

21

ORIGINALITY: Do I need to identify quoted or referenced material?

Yes. Any quoted, paraphrased, or referenced content must be identified during the speech.

22

FORM: Do contestants sign an originality form?

Yes. Contestants certify eligibility and originality in writing using the Speaker's Certification of Eligibility and Originality form.

23

IMPORTANT: Can I refer to another contestant's speech?

No. A contestant must not reference another contestant or another contestant's speech during the same contest.

24

PRACTICAL: Can I use content supported by AI?

Be careful. The rulebook requires the speech to be created by the contestant and substantially original. If you use any outside help, ensure the final speech is truly yours and complies with originality rules.

Timing Made Simple

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TIME: What is the time for International, Humorous, and Online contest speeches?

The speech should be 5 to 7 minutes. Disqualification applies below 4:30 or above 7:30.

26

TIME: What is the time for Table Topics?

The speech should be 1 to 2 minutes. Disqualification applies below 1:00 or above 2:30.

27	TIME: What is the time for Evaluation speeches? The evaluation should be 2 to 3 minutes. Disqualification applies below 1:30 or above 3:30.
28	TIME: What is the time for Tall Tales? The speech should be 3 to 5 minutes. Disqualification applies below 2:30 or above 5:30.
29	TIME: What do green, yellow, and red signals mean? Green means you have reached the minimum target. Yellow means you are approaching the end. Red means it is time to conclude.
30	TIME: Is the timing device visible to contestants? Yes. The timing signal must be in full view of each contestant.
31	ACCESSIBILITY: Can visually impaired contestants request another signal? Yes. They may request another form of warning signal, such as a buzzer, bell, or spoken time announcements.
32	CONFIDENTIAL: Are time disqualifications announced by name? No. Before results, the chair announces the number of timing disqualifications, but not the names.

Contest Day Procedure

33	BRIEFING: What happens at the contestants' briefing? Contestants review key rules, timing protocol, speaking area, required forms, and speaking order.
34	BRIEFING: How is speaking order decided?

	Contestants draw for speaking position. For Online Speech Contest, a randomization tool may be screen shared.
35	IMPORTANT: What if the primary contestant is absent at the start? If the primary contestant declares their inability to attend the contest before the speaking order is finalized through the drawing of lots, the primary contestant may be replaced by the alternate contestant. Once the speaking order has been finalized, no replacement is permitted, and the contest proceeds with the remaining contestants
36	INTRODUCTION: How is a contestant introduced? For International, Humorous, Tall Tales, and Online contests: name, speech title, speech title, name.
37	INTRODUCTION: How is a Table Topics contestant introduced? Name, topic, topic, name.
38	INTRODUCTION: How is an Evaluation contestant introduced? The contestant's name is announced twice. Evaluation speeches do not have titles. Hence order of announcement will be Contestant # contestant name, contestant name and contestant #)
39	PROCEDURE: Can contestants stay in the room during the contest? For International, Humorous, Tall Tales, and Online contests, yes. Evaluation and Table Topics have special room-control rules.
40	PROCEDURE: Is there silence between speeches?

Yes. There is one minute of silence between contestant speeches for judges to mark ballots and for setup/removal where applicable.

Props and Technology

41

PROPS: Can I use props?

Yes, but you must notify the Contest Chair before the contest.

42

PROPS: Can I use PowerPoint, music, electronic devices, or virtual backgrounds?

Yes, these are considered props or electronic devices. They must be notified in advance and must follow venue or platform restrictions.

43

PROPS: When do I set up props?

Set up props during the one minute of silence before your speech and remove them during the one minute after your speech.

44

PROPS: Can someone help me with props?

Yes, you may arrange help, but contest officials are not responsible for setting up or removing your props.

45

IMPORTANT: What if I cannot set up or remove props within the allowed time?

If you cannot demonstrate that props can be set up and removed in the allotted time, the props cannot be used.

Judging, Ballots, and Results

46

JUDGING: Are judges anonymous?

Yes, voting judges remain anonymous whenever practical.

46A

JUDGING: Who can judge a Toastmasters speech contest?

Club Contest: The judge must be a paid member in good standing of a club in good standing. Where practical, preference should be given to members who have completed at least two speech projects and have delivered at least one club-level speech evaluation.

Area, Division, and District Contests: The judge must have been a paid member for at least six months and must have completed at least six speech projects in the Competent Communication manual or Levels 1 and 2 of any Pathways path. The judge must be physically present at the contest, except where an approved online format applies.

International Speech Contest Quarterfinals, Semifinals, and World Championship: The judge must have been a paid member for at least six months in a club in good standing; must hold an Advanced Toastmaster Bronze or Advanced Communicator Bronze award, have completed one full Pathways path, or hold the Distinguished Toastmaster award; and must have previous judging experience at the Area, Division, District, or semifinal level.

47

JUDGING: Does the Chief Judge judge contestants?

No. The Chief Judge oversees the process but does not judge the contestants.

48

JUDGING: How do judges rank contestants?

Judges record first, second, and third place choices on their ballot.

49

SCORING: How are points calculated?

First place receives 3 points, second place receives 2 points, and third place receives 1 point.

50

SCORING: What happens if there is a tie?

The Chief Judge uses the secret tiebreaking judge's ballot to resolve the tie.

51

RESULTS: When are winners announced?

After contestant interviews and after results are tabulated and verified. Winners must be announced before the end of the event.

52

RESULTS: In what order are winners announced?

Winners are announced in reverse order, usually third place, second place, then first place.

53

RESULTS: Are results final?

Yes. The announcement is final unless the winner list is announced incorrectly and is corrected immediately.

54

CONFIDENTIAL: What happens to ballots after the contest?

After winners are announced, the Chief Judge destroys ballots, time records, and tally sheets.

Protests and Disqualifications

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PROTEST: Who can lodge a protest?

Only contestants and voting judges may lodge a protest.

56

PROTEST: Can audience members protest?

No. Protests from audience members are not considered.

57

PROTEST: What can a protest be about?

Protests are limited to eligibility, originality, or referring to another contestant or another contestant's speech.

58

PROTEST: When must a protest be lodged?

Before the contest is adjourned.

59

FAIRNESS: Can a contestant respond to an originality protest?

Yes. Before disqualification for originality or for referring to another contestant's speech, the contestant must be given an opportunity to respond to voting judges.

60

ELIGIBILITY: Who can disqualify a contestant for eligibility?

The Contest Chair can disqualify a contestant on the basis of eligibility.

Evaluation, Table Topics, Humorous, Tall Tales, and Online

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EVALUATION: How long is the Evaluation Contest test speech?

The test speech is 5 to 7 minutes.

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EVALUATION: How much preparation time do Evaluation contestants receive?

They receive 5 minutes after the test speech.

63

EVALUATION: Can Evaluation contestants use digital devices during preparation?

No. They must not use digital or other devices to gain an unfair advantage.

64

TABLE TOPICS: Do Table Topics contestants know the topic in advance?

No. They receive the topic only when introduced.

65

TABLE TOPICS: What kind of Table Topics topic should be used?

It should be general, reasonable in length, not require detailed knowledge, and lead to an opinion or conclusion.

66	HUMOUR: Can Humorous speeches be only jokes? No. The speech must have a theme with an opening, body, and close. It cannot be only a series of one-liners.
67	HUMOUR: What should humorous speakers avoid? They should avoid potentially objectionable language, anecdotes, and material.
68	TALL TALES: What is a Tall Tales speech? It is a highly exaggerated, improbable speech with a theme or plot. Humor and props may be used.
69	ONLINE: What is special about the Online Speech Contest? All contestants and officials participate live online from physically distant locations using their own equipment.
70	ONLINE: What happens if an Online contestant has serious technical difficulties? The contest may be paused. The contestant may be given up to 10 minutes to re-establish a secure connection.
71	ONLINE: Can external voting systems be used in Online Speech Contests? No. External voting systems are prohibited.

Contest Roles, Eligibility & Conflicts of Interest

Most Frequently Misunderstood Toastmasters Contest Rules

72	ELIGIBILITY I: plan to run for a District leadership position next year. Can I compete in speech contests? Yes—until you become a candidate as defined by Toastmasters policy. Once you are nominated by the District
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	Leadership Committee or declare your intent to run, you are no longer eligible to compete.
73	CONFLICT: Can a candidate for District leadership serve as a contest official? No. Candidates elected for District office must not serve as a contest official at any level.
74	CONFLICT: If I only intend to run but have not officially declared myself a candidate, can I still serve as a contest official? Yes, provided you have not been nominated or publicly declared your intent to run and no other conflict of interest exists.
75	ROLES: Can a Club Contest winner take a role at another Area or Division Contest? Yes, if the role is in a different contest and creates no conflict with the contestant's own advancement or participation.
76	ROLES: Can a contestant be a Timer, Ballot Counter, or Sergeant-at-Arms in another contest? Yes, in a different contest, provided the role does not create a conflict of interest or interfere with the contestant's participation.
77	JUDGING: Can a contestant serve as a judge in another club's contest? Yes, if eligible to judge and the other contest does not affect the contestant's own contest path or create a conflict.
78	JUDGING: Can an area contestant judge another Area Contest? No. A contestant should not judge another Area Contest of the same contest type during the same contest cycle because the results may affect progression.

79

JUDGING: Can a division contestant judge an Area Contest?

A Division contestant should not judge an Area Contest that feeds into the same Division contest. They may judge an unrelated contest only if no conflict exists and all eligibility requirements are met.

80

JUDGING: Can I judge a contest in which I am competing?

No. A contestant cannot serve as a voting judge, Chief Judge, or tiebreaking judge in the same contest.

81

ROLES: Can I serve in multiple contest official roles during the same contest?

Where practical, roles should be assigned to different people. A person must not combine roles that compromise independence, confidentiality, or proper checks and balances.

82

CONFLICT: Can my spouse, mentor, coach, or club officer judge me?

They should not judge if the relationship could reasonably affect impartiality. Any potential conflict must be disclosed to the Chief Judge before accepting the assignment.

83

ELIGIBILITY: Can an Area Director compete in speech contests?

No. Area Directors are among the District leaders who are not eligible to compete during their term of office.

84

JUDGING: Can a Chief Judge also be a voting judge?

No. The Chief Judge administers the contest and does not vote on the contestants.

85

CONFLICT: Can a Contest Chair also be a contestant?

No. A contestant cannot serve as Contest Chair or Contest Toastmaster in the same contest.

86

CONFLICT: Can a Chief Judge be a contestant in another contest at the same level?

Only when the contests are separate and unrelated and the assignment creates no actual or perceived conflict of interest.

87

JUDGING: Can a Contest Chair appoint judges from the same club as a contestant?

At Club and Area level, this may be unavoidable, but impartial judges should be selected. At Division and District contests, the Chief Judge, voting judges, and tiebreaking judge must not belong to a club represented by a contestant.

88

COACHING: Can a contestant coach another contestant in the same contest?

The rulebook does not prohibit contestants from supporting one another before the contest. However, no assistance may be given during the contest, and each speech must remain the contestant's own original work.

89

EVALUATION: Can an active contestant act as a test speaker for an Evaluation Contest?

A test speaker should not be a contestant in that Evaluation Contest. To avoid conflicts, the test speaker should also not be competing in a contest directly connected to the evaluators' progression.

90

JUDGING: Can a club officer serve as a judge in Area or Division contests?

Yes, if the officer meets the judging eligibility requirements and has no conflict of interest.

91

ROLES: If I advance to the next level, can I still serve as a contest official at other contests?

	Yes, only where the other contest is independent of your own progression and the assignment creates no conflict of interest.
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92	CONFLICT: What constitutes a conflict of interest in a Toastmasters speech contest? Any relationship, role, personal interest, or prior involvement that could reasonably affect—or appear to affect—fairness, impartiality, or confidentiality may constitute a conflict.
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93	GUIDANCE: When in doubt about eligibility or contest roles, whom should I consult before accepting the role? Consult the Contest Chair and Chief Judge. For unresolved eligibility or policy questions, escalate to the District Program Quality Director or the District leadership team before the contest.
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Additional Frequently Misunderstood Rules

94	ORIGINALITY: Can I use AI to write my speech? The speech must be created by the contestant and be substantially original. If any tool is used for ideas or editing, the final speech must remain your own work and all quoted, paraphrased, or referenced material must comply with the originality rules.
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95	CONTENT: Can I use a speech I delivered before? Yes. A previously delivered speech may be used if it is your own substantially original work and complies with all current contest rules.
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96	CONTENT: Can I mention another contestant's speech during my speech? No. A contestant must not refer to another contestant or another contestant's speech during the same contest.
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97	FEES: Can contestants be charged an entry fee? No. Contestants must not be charged an entry fee to participate in a Toastmasters speech contest.
98	PROCEDURE: If there is only one contestant, must the contest still be held? Yes. The contest must still be conducted, and the contestant must meet the eligibility, originality, and timing requirements to advance.
99	PROTEST: Can audience members file a protest? No. Only contestants and voting judges may lodge a protest.
100	PROTEST: Who can file a protest? Only a contestant or a voting judge may submit a protest, and it must be lodged before the contest is adjourned.
101	PROTEST: What types of protests are allowed? Protests are limited to contestant eligibility, speech originality, or a contestant referring to another contestant or another contestant's speech.
102	RESULTS: Are judges' decisions final? Yes. Judges' decisions are final. The announced result may be corrected only if the winner list was read incorrectly.
103	ELIGIBILITY: Can I compete in more than one club contest? Yes. A paid member of multiple clubs may compete in each club's contest, provided all eligibility requirements are met.
104	ELIGIBILITY: Can I compete in two Area Contests of the same type?

	No. A contestant cannot compete in more than one Area Contest of the same contest type, even when the Areas are in different Divisions or Districts.
105	PROPS: Can I use props, PowerPoint, music, videos, or virtual backgrounds in my speech? Yes. These may be used as props or electronic aids if the Contest Chair is notified in advance and venue or online-platform restrictions are followed.
106	BRIEFING: What happens if I arrive late for the contestants' briefing? Report immediately to the Contest Chair. If the speaking order has already been finalized, late arrival may affect participation or replacement by an alternate. The Contest Chair should apply the rulebook consistently.
107	TIME: What happens if I exceed the time limit by a few seconds? The defined grace period applies. If your time exceeds the maximum permitted limit after the grace period, you are disqualified.
108	TIME: Are timing disqualifications announced publicly? Only the number of timing disqualifications is announced. Contestant names are not disclosed.
109	TABLE TOPICS: Can contestants hear other contestants in the Table Topics Contest? The first contestant may remain in the room after speaking. All remaining contestants must stay in a separate area where they cannot hear the topic or earlier speeches until called.
110	EVALUATION: Can Evaluation contestants use mobile phones or tablets during preparation time?

No. Evaluation contestants must not use digital or other devices during the five-minute preparation period to gain an unfair advantage.

111

RECORDING: Can photographs or videos be taken during speeches?

Recording or photography must follow Toastmasters policy, venue rules, and any required contestant permissions. It must not disrupt the contest or give any contestant an unfair advantage.

Quick Role Checklist

Keep this final page handy on contest day. It summarizes the practical responsibilities of the main roles.

Role	Remember to...
Contest Chair	• Confirm contestant eligibility • Conduct contestant briefing • Confirm speaking area and timing lights • Introduce contestants correctly • Announce number of time disqualifications only • Announce winners before the event ends

Chief Judge	• Brief judges, counters, and timers • Select secret tiebreaking judge • Collect time records and tiebreaking ballot • Oversee ballot counting • Resolve eligible protests • Destroy confidential contest documents after results
Contestant	• Attend briefing • Submit required forms • Notify chair of props • Set up/remove props within one minute • Watch timing signals • Keep speech substantially original