

Table Topics Checklist

Contest Chair

About this checklist:

Taking on the production and delivery of a Table Topics speech contest is challenging and exhilarating! Even for an experienced **Contest Chair**. However, the myriad of details that go into ensuring a fair, fun and well run contest can be managed by keeping track of what needs to be done and when. Hence this checklist.

Why put all this effort into a contest? Because everyone gains! You become even better at managing and motivating a team and organizing and delivering an event with lots of moving parts. Contestants gain valuable – and long lasting – knowledge and experience practicing and competing in Table Topics and seeing how they do relative to the other contestants. Audience members enjoy the experience of listening to some very erudite Table Topic answers and may decide to enter future competitions.

The primary audience for this 'Contest Chair – Table Topics Checklist' is Club, Area and Division level contests where - sometimes – there is little or no experience producing and delivering fair, fun and well run contests. District Contest Chairs may also find this checklist helpful.

Note: This checklist conforms to the latest TI **Speech Contest Rule Book** but is NOT a replacement for it. The TI **Speech Contest Rule Book** must be your primary reference guide.

Rodney G. Denno, DTM

Rodney is an avid writer and sharer of his Toastmasters leadership and communication experiences. You can find more writings by him at <https://www.rodnydenno.com/toastmasters.php>



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Created by Rodney G. Denno, DTM and friends
in District 96 (British Columbia, Canada)

**This checklist deals only with the production and delivery of
a fair and well run Table Topics contest.**

However, it is typical at many Toastmaster contest events to hold two back-to-back contests at the same event and include light refreshments and possibly a motivational speaker or education session prior to the contests.

**Whatever you and your team choose to include in the event,
the most important part of the event should always be
the delivery of a fair and well run Table Topics contest.**

Venue Selection, Date and Time:

Club level - most likely venue, date and time will be the club meeting location, date and time.

Area and Division level - the Area or Division Director will most likely be the Contest Chair.

However, sometimes the Area or Division Director will ask an experienced Toastmaster to take on the role of Contest Chair. If this is the case then you – as Contest Chair – will work with the Area or Division Director to find a suitable venue, date and time and determine the contest budget and audience attendance fee.

Find a suitably large Venue! - I've attended (more than a few) contests where the room was too small. The contestants did not have enough stage space to properly stage/deliver their performance. A suitable venue should be able to accommodate a stage area and seating area that gives the contestants, judges, contest officials and attendees the room to perform, judge, officiate and enjoy in comfort – AND – at least one other room for briefing judges, ballot counting and for the Sergeant-at-Arms to sequester the Table topics contestants.

Venue Insurance:

Sometimes a venue will require proof of insurance. Toastmasters International has a blanket policy for events. To find out more about getting insurance coverage for your event click here

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<https://www.toastmasters.org/leadership-central/general-finance/liability-insurance> (Note: It will take a few days to set up the insurance coverage.)

Contest Budget: (Contest income and expenses should break even)

Expenses – Can include venue rental, First Place Award {plaque, trophy – typically only at the Division and District level), Printing contest materials, Refreshments (if you plan on having some), ...}

Income – audience attendance fee should be based on anticipated expenses and the number of attendees expected. In District 96 (British Columbia, Canada) the fees range between \$2 and \$5 Canadian Dollars.

Payment - Ensure that all bills pertaining to the contest are paid promptly!

Attendee Registration, Signage, Etc:

At the Area and Division level contests there is value in having a Registration process. First, It ensures that you will be able to collect the fee – if any – from all attendees (not contestants) so there is sufficient funds to pay contest expenses. Second, by collecting the names and email address's of the attendees you can communicate to those who attended. If there are non-Toastmasters in attendance you can communicate/promote the value of the Toastmasters program for their personal and professional development. For the Toastmasters in attendance you can promote the value of joining an advanced club, getting advanced Education awards or their DTM, promoting the next contest level, ..., as long as it is for the betterment of the Toastmaster brand and Toastmaster members.

Sign in Sheet - for recording attendance

Cash Float for Registration – provide change for attendees that do not have the exact amount.

Name Badge Stickers and Marker – so each person has a name badge for easier networking.

Signage (Registration desk, Inside and outside signs to guide attendees to the contest room, ...)

Painter or Masking Tape – for taping signs to walls (easier to remove than regular tape)

Table Topics Contest Ballots for Attendees – you may want to provide a Table Topics Contest Ballot to each attendee so they can experience the judging process during the contest.

Build Your Contest Chair Team:

Chief Judge (A key person. responsible for ensuring fair judging and accurate ballot processing and reporting the results back to you on the Results Form)

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Mentor/Coach (A Toastmaster who has already performed the Contest Chair role and is willing to mentor/coach you.)

Contestant Interviewer (A Toastmaster with good interviewing skills to interview the contestants. This person will use information provided by the contestants on the Contestant Profile form. The contestant interviews are usually done during the time the Chief Judge and Ballot Counters are processing the ballots and tabulating the results.)

Sergeant at Arms (Ensures that no one – except for an emergency – enters or leaves the contest room when a contestant is competing.)

Calligrapher (A Toastmaster who has quality writing skills to write the appropriate names on the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place certificates under the guidance of the Chief Judge) (The calligrapher may also be asked to write the names on the Certificates of Participation if they have not already been printed with the names on them.)

Other Team Members (if you have planned for a registration desk, food, speaker(s) prior to the start of the contest, ...)

Contestant Eligibility:

Ensure that each speaker is eligible under the contest rules before the contest, and notify contestants of disqualification if necessary. *This is very important! A few years ago a contestant in my district reached (and won) the district level contest for “International Speech” only to find out after she won that she was disqualified because she was not a member in good standing (her club dues had not been paid) at the time she competed in the Club contest. Toastmasters International is very consistent and clear about this rule! Call World Headquarters for assistance in verifying membership.*

See the eligibility requirements listed in the Speech Contest Rulebook.

Contestant eligibility must be verified before each contest in which the contestant competes.

Club level contest – check with the club Treasurer to ensure that all contestants are paid members of the club at the time of the contest.

Club, Area, Division and District level contests – TI has created an easy-to-use eligibility checker <https://www.toastmasters.org/speech-contest-eligibility-checker> (You will need to 'Login' as a Club or District officer to use the checker)

Contest Planning and Preparation:

Select a Toastmaster willing and capable of performing the **Chief Judge** role. The Contest Chair and Chief Judge roles are the two most important leadership roles. The Chief Judge and

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team (Contest Judges, Timers, Ballot Counters) are responsible for ensuring that the judging, timing and processing and tabulation of completed Judge ballots is performed fairly and accurately.

Get the 'Chief Judge - Contest Checklist' here <https://www.rodneydenno.com/toastmasters.php>

- Mentor/Coach
- Contestant Interviewer
- Sergeant at Arms
- Calligrapher
- Create Contest Agenda

To help you calculate the amount of time the Table Topics contest will take, allow.....

1 – about 5 minutes for introductory remarks and explanation of how the contest will be run.

2 – about 4 minutes for each contestant (30 seconds to introduce contestant + 2 minutes and 30 seconds for each contest speech + 1 minute for judges to score their ballot)

3 – about 2 minutes for each contestant interview.

4 – about 5 minutes for presentation of 3rd, 2nd and 1st place certificates and to express appreciation to all the people who made the contest a success (contest officials, volunteers and especially the contestants).

Download the Table Topics Contest Kit here <https://www.toastmasters.org> (type 'Table Topics Contest Kit' into the search box)

The Kit contains:

For Use By Contest Chair	For Use By Chief Judge
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Speech Contest Rulebook● Speaker's Certification of Eligibility and Originality● Contestant Profile● Speech Contest Certificate Participant● Speech Contest Certificate 1st Place● Speech Contest Certificate 2nd Place● Speech Contest Certificate 3rd Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Speech Contest Rulebook● Judge's Certification of Eligibility● Table Topics Contest Ballot● Table Topics Contest Tie Breaking Ballot● Time Record Sheet● Counters Tally Sheet● Results Form● Notification of Winners

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NOTE: As contest chair you are responsible for ensuring that the contest is a success (fair and well run). Below I've listed only the forms and certificates that you will personally use during the contest. In the 'Chief Judge – Contest Checklist' (you can find it here <https://www.rodneydenno.com/toastmasters.php>) I've listed the forms that the Chief Judge, Contest Judges, Timers and Ballot Counters will use in the administration of their duties. The Chief Judge should be responsible for printing these forms. However, you as the Contest Chair are responsible for ensuring that the Chief Judge has printed all the forms necessary to administer the Chief Judge role.

Print Contest Agenda, Forms and Certificates for your Contest Chair role.

Print Certificates of Eligibility and Originality (1 for each contestant)

Print & Sign Certificates of Participation (1 for each contestant)

Print & Sign First, Second and Third place certificates

NOTE: Use a thicker grade/bond of paper so the Certificates of Participation and the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Place certificates have a quality look and feel to them. The contestants have spent a lot of time practicing Table Topics speeches and deserve – at a minimum – a high quality certificate! As you print the Certificates of Participation you may also want to use a high quality font and insert each of the participants names as you print the Certificates of Participation.

Print Contestant Profile (1 for each contestant)

Print Contest Agenda (1 for each attendee)

Contest Promotion & Communication:

As Contest Chair you are also responsible for promoting the contest to potential contestants and guests (if it is a club level contest) or to other Toastmasters and guests (if it is an Area, Division or District level contest)

Post contest promotional material to the Club or District social media assets (websites, Facebook pages, Twitter accounts, etc.) and appropriate email lists.

Keep all contest officials (chief judge, contestant interviewer, timers, etc.) informed of the time and place of the contest. A final email to all contest officials and volunteers should be sent a day or two before the contest date – as a reminder.

Keep the contestants notified of the time and place of the contest and the time of the contestant briefing. Email the contestants the - current Speech Contest Rulebook, Contestant Rodney is an avid writer and sharer of his Toastmasters leadership and communication experiences. You can find more writings by him at <https://www.rodneydenno.com/toastmasters.php>



Profile, Speaker's Certification of Eligibility and Originality – and ask them to review the Table Topics portion of the Speech Contest Rulebook and print, fill in and bring the Contestant Profile and Speaker's Certification of Eligibility and Originality forms to the contest.

Contestant Briefing:

- Verify the presence of all contestants and pronunciation of their names.
- Verify that all speakers have provided you with a signed Speaker's Certification of Eligibility and Originality and Contestant Profile forms.
- Random draw for speaking order (this can be done in a number of ways - using small pieces of paper with the numbers 1, 2, 3, up to the number of participating contestants, using playing cards Ace, 2, 3, ...up to the number of participating contestants,)
- Review the Table Topics Speech Contest Rules with the contestants (see the Table Topics section of the Speech Contest Rulebook)
- Review allowable speaking area and position of timing lights, etc. If lapel or head-set microphones will be used - all contestants should have the opportunity to test the equipment before the contest.

Lights, Camera, Action – Deliver a Fair and Well Run Contest!

The 'Contest Chair – Table Topics Script' <https://www.rodneydenno.com/toastmasters.php> has all the essentials you will need to say and do from the moment you open the contest until your final thank you's (to contest officials, contestant interviewer, volunteers and contestants) as you close the contest.

Contest Wrap-up:

- Ensure that the Chief Judge has completed the Notification of Contest Winners form and sent it to the next contest level...
- Club Contest – send to Area Director
Area Contest – send to Division Director
Division Contest – send to District Chief Judge

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Rodney G. Denno, DTM



Since late 2006 I've spent a lot of time in the laboratory that is Toastmasters! It's a wonderful place to develop new skills and hone existing ones.

Through the years I've served in most of the club officer roles multiple times and as Area and Division Director, District 21 Public Relations Officer and District 21 Communications & Technology Officer.

In 2008 I led the effort to create and deliver the first Online Club Officer Training program in the Toastmaster world.

While I was busy learning, enjoying myself and giving back to Toastmasters I received the highest Toastmasters honors in District 21 and 96 (the province of British Columbia, Canada) - the **2009 District 21 Rookie of the Year Award** and the **2010 District 21 Toastmaster of the Year Award** and **2018 District 96 Toastmaster of the Year Award**.

I believe that in order for a society to grow and prosper we must give back more than we take. Over the years I've volunteered whatever time I could to various non-profit organizations. Since 2006 my volunteer efforts have been focused, through Toastmasters, on the development of leadership and communications skills in the almost 6,000 Toastmasters throughout British Columbia.

I write about what I'm involved with in Toastmasters so I can share it with other Toastmasters and hopefully make their Toastmasters journey more enjoyable and valuable to them and to the Toastmasters organization worldwide.

You can find more Toastmaster writings by me at <https://www.rodneydenno.com/toastmasters.php>

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