

Tips on Being a Contest Master

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Cardinal Rules

- I. All contest rules must be obeyed.**
- II. You are not the star. The contestants are the stars. Your job is to facilitate.**
- III. Respect everyone's time. Keep the contest moving in a timely fashion.**

Before the Contest Day:

Prepare your materials

- a. Individual contestant info (3 x 5 index cards or preprinted sheet)
- b. Something to use to draw numbers for speaking order (playing cards, preprinted numbers, index cards as in sample at end of this handout)
- c. It's a good idea to bring extra contest forms, although usually this is the responsibility of the chief judge (CJ)
- d. Reconfirm time, dates, anything else with the contest host (club VPE, Area or Division Governor)
- e. For Table Topic contests, ask who will prepare the question. Share several questions with the chief judge before the contest if possible.
- f. Exchange cell phone numbers / email addresses for last-minute contact
- g. Ask for a copy of the contest program / agenda to help in catching possible errors before printing
- h. Familiarize yourself with the rules. READ the Rulebook.
- i. Prepare opening comments (short and sweet)

Contest Night:

Come early!

- a. You want to feel calm, cool and collected. One of your duties is to relax the contestants. This is harder to do if you are anxious about time.
- b. Grab yourself a seat near the front of the room. For Evaluation Contests, save a seat in the front and center of the room for the test speaker.
- c. Familiarize yourself with the room. Discuss and agree with the chief judge about the definition of the speaking area. Also discuss if the CJ prefers you keep the contestants in the room after the first contest, until all of the ballots are counted.
- d. Check in with contest host.
 - i. Look over the program.
 - ii. Note any changes.
 - iii. Ask any questions you have about it, including when and how long the break should be, what time s/he expects the contest to end.
 - iv. For Evaluation Contests, ask if the contest host wants you to thank the test speaker (with a gift?) or if the contest host wants to do this at the end of the contest.
 - v. For Table Topic contests, finalize the question with the CJ or contest host.
 - vi. Verify that the Contest Host knows how to pronounce your name.

- vii. Provide introductory information for you to be introduced by the contest host.
- e. Realize you might be too short on time to eat at the contest. Eat beforehand or grab something very quickly, or better yet, refrain from eating until you are done with your duties. Spilled food or spinach in your teeth can be unsightly.
- f. You can give the eligibility form to the contestants before the briefing to fill out and sign.

Briefing the Contestants

1. Set them at ease. At no time should you show any preference or favoritism towards a contestant, even if he/she is a good friend or is from your club.
2. Verify that they have met the eligibility criteria:
 - a. paid their dues
 - b. club paid its dues
 - c. are not a District (or International) officer, or informed anyone of their intent to be a district officer next year. (District officers are Area, Division, Lt. Gov., District Governors; District Secretary, District Treasurer, District Public Relations Officer.)
 - d. have not served as a judge for the same contest in which they are competing
 - e. have not competed in the same contest in a different area, division or district
 - f. for International Speech contest, have completed six projects of the Competent Communication manual
3. Make sure they know the logistics of how the contest is going to run:
 - a. Where the other room is for the TT and evaluation contests
 - b. Where they should stand when they come back into the room, or when they are waiting for you to call them.
4. Draw for speaking order. If any contestant is not present for the briefing, draw for them. If s/he does not arrive before you are introduced, he/she is disqualified and the other contestants move up in the speaking order. If you draw for speaking order early in the briefing, you can provide it to the chief judge before the contest starts.
5. If a contestant is not yet present, check with the contest host to see if the order of the contests will be switched. This is a courtesy, and should be done for any or all contestants without any bias or favoritism.
6. Get the exact pronunciation of their name. Write it phonetically if necessary. Practice it a few times out loud. (see card)
7. Get their speech titles. Practice saying their name / speech title exactly as you will during the contest. Do this towards the beginning of the briefing and then one last time at the very end. (see card)
8. Go over the timing. Stress the importance of the timing. You can give them tips about it; however if you give one contestant a tip, you must give all of them the same tip.
9. Go over the speaking area. You may need to go over it again once you go back inside the contest room (if the briefing is done away from the contest room).
10. Ask if they want the lectern or where it should be placed. (see card)
11. Ask if they will need any help setting up props. The contest sergeant-at-arms can do this. The contestant is to arrange any needed help. (see card)
12. If you have an opening joke or warm-up material, let the contestants know what it is. Your opening material might take away a surprise opening or deflate the climactic moment of a speech.
13. Collect the eligibility forms. The forms will have the speech titles written on them. The eligibility forms are to be given to the chief judge before the contest starts.

14. One method is to create an index card for each contestant. Ahead of time, you put their names on it. At the briefing you add:
 - a. Phonetic spelling of their name, if necessary
 - b. Speech title
 - c. Speaking order (then rearrange the cards into the correct speaking order)
 - d. Whether they have any props to be set up
 - e. Whether they want to use the lectern
 - f. During the speech you can make notes on the card for the contest interviews
15. Practice saying their name / speech title / speech title / name one more time.

During the Contest

The programs can vary, but a common order is:

1. Contest Host or Area Governor
2. YOU
3. Chief Judge
4. YOU AGAIN
5. Contestants
6. Contestant interviews (sometimes this is all done at the end)
7. BREAK – you conduct the briefings for the second contest
8. YOU again (second contest)
9. Chief Judge again
10. Contestants for 2nd contest
11. Contestant interviews
12. YOU say THANK YOU and call on the contest host to continue

In detail:

1. **Contest Host** Provide introductory material for the contest host, verify they know how to say your name
2. **YOU**
This is where you have responsibility to set the mood and tone of the contest, and put the audience and the contestants at ease. If it's the humorous speech contest, you may want to try to be funny. If it's the international speech contest, you may try to be motivational or encouraging. Either way, you **must be** brief. "Brief" can be a little longer for a nighttime contest with a few contestants than it should be for a lunchtime contest with lots of contestants. Know your contest, but also know that no matter what, contests tend to drag and people will always rather have them shorter than longer.
3. **Chief Judge** Make sure you know how to introduce the chief judge, pronounce his/her name, etc. Also, clear up ahead of time who is going to explain the speaking area. Sometimes the contest master does, sometimes the chief judge does, but either way they need to be the same. JP prefers that the contest master does it, and then the contestants will be sure to hear the same speaking area twice, instead of potentially hearing two different things.

4. **You again** If it hasn't been covered, make sure people turn off cell phones, beepers, etc. This is when you give the contestant order. If this is the Evaluation Contest, BLM prefers to give the speaking order during the 5 minutes when the contestants are out of the room. Tell the audience that you are going to do it this way. Make sure there are no more questions. Wait for the room to quiet down, then begin the contest!
5. **Contestants.** The most important things to say are:
Name / speech title / speech title / name and **NOTHING ELSE!!**
 - a. Sometimes people say "our first contestant, our next contestant, speaker number one, etc." That is probably OK, but JP has even stopped doing that. By all means you should not put in any type of filler comment. NONE.
 - b. It can be awkward as to when the audience is going to clap. Sometimes they clap as soon as you say the person's name, sometimes after the 2nd time, sometimes both. JP plays it by ear, and she makes sure she doesn't talk over the clapping. If you talk over the clapping, the audience may miss the speech title. BLM says that you can tell the audience to wait until you say the contestant's name a second time. Whatever you do, be consistent with all contestants.
 - c. After the contestant finishes, announce the minute of silence will begin and the timers to provide a signal when it is completed. BLM says to speak in a normal tone and not in a booming or disruptive tone. JP says: Lead by example and do not talk during it. It's a little awkward standing up there not talking. You can smile. But don't talk. During this time, you or the SAA should change the lectern or help contestants set up / take down props. BLM says to watch for the timers' indication when the minute is over. If audience members start to chat or whisper, 'shush' them quietly.
6. **Contestant interviews** How long or short you make these depends on several things:
 - a. How much time you have. Is this a lunchtime contest with very tight time requirements?
 - b. Whether the chief judge has come back into the room or not. Depending on the room setup, sometimes we should not break while the chief judge is counting the ballots. Check with CJ and contest host ahead of time.
 - c. Go with the flow. If the contestants and audience are having a good time, then let everyone enjoy it.
 - d. A nice, but not necessary, thing to do is to ask a question about the speech.
 - e. If one of the contestants is in both contests, they cannot be interviewed. You can explain that to the audience (without a long explanation) but do not ask them any questions. Do not let them speak. Sometimes all interviews are done at the end of the second contest, for this reason.
 - f. There is a questionnaire that you can give them to fill out ahead of time. JP does not use it.
7. **Break.** Check ahead of time how long the break should be. If you briefed for only the first contest, you need to brief for the second contest during the break. Which means that you will not really have a break.

8. **You again.** These comments should be even shorter than the first time, but go ahead and warm up the audience again, especially if the second contest is either the humorous or international speech contests.
9. **Chief Judge again.** Make it brief.
10. **Contestants for 2nd contest** Same rules apply. Make sure you know all the special rules for Table Topics and Evaluation.
11. **Contestant Interviews** Same comments.
13. **You are done!** YOU say THANK YOU and call on the contest host to continue.
Congratulations!

After the Contest

JP likes to speak to each of the contestants. She also likes to get an evaluation of how she did (positives and things to improve). BLM says to remain professional and courteous to contestants, judges, audience members and the contest host. Be encouraging in your comments if the contestants ask for feedback, yet don't state that you don't know why they didn't win. Refrain from making disparaging comments about someone's speech, evaluation, or table topic answer.

Special notes for the Evaluation Contest:

1. Make sure you treat the test speaker exactly the same as how the contestants are to be introduced. No other introduction than name and title. No background or TM educational level designations.
2. JP feels you have to try to entertain the audience for the five minutes that the evaluators are out of the room. She does not like to turn over control to someone else, like the District Governor, because you have no control over how long they will take. Prepare a funny little story, a speech on the district theme, or do some impromptu stay-at-your-seat table topics. Be prepared to cut it short as soon as the SAA walks in with the first contestant.
3. Often, the test speaker is interviewed during the five minutes while the evaluation contestants are out of the room. The test speaker might have to leave immediately after the last contestant gives their evaluation so the thank you gift or certificate needs to be presented during this time. BLM feels that other than a short and brief thank you, the test speaker should not be interviewed. She has seen an evaluation contest where the test speaker said something during the interview about his/her speech, an evaluation contestant said something that inadvertently relates to what was said during the interview, the audience reacted and disrupted the composure of the evaluation contestant.

Special notes for the Table Topic Contest:

1. Make sure you read the question twice with the same pauses and voice inflections for all contestants.

Sample 3 x 5 index card:

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Jaci Pasley (Jackie Pass-lee)

Title: “A Perfect Summer Day”

Props – none

Lectern – NO

Notes: Ask about next year’s summer vacation