**How to Host a Speech Contest**

The best way to host a contest is to be prepared. The contest is the responsibility of the Contest Chair with the goal of great environment for contestants and guests. The key thing to remember is to ask for help. It is always better to have plenty of help because nobody can do it all themselves and maintain their sanity.

Below, the planning process is broken down into a timeline of general steps for specific roles – covering 5 weeks, including the day of the event. There is not enough space here to give the full extent of the steps and suggestions, but here are the highlights.

**Getting Organized – Day 1**

You are the person with the responsibility for conducting the contest – the Contest Chair. Gather your team from club members, Area Council members, and District leadership. The team should include a minimum of 2 other people as Chief Judge & Contest Toastmaster, but more people will ensure a successful contest.

The Contest Chair should first fill the roles of Contest Toastmaster & Chief Judge. It helps if both are highly organized and comfortable in front of a crowd. Ensure that roles and expectations prior to offering the role to candidate. Once selected, set a meeting with both to proceed and confirm checklists for both roles. All three of you should read the contest rulebook before proceeding. There is one more critical task to begin, securing a venue. When securing a **venue**, it must be appropriate to the event, considering size, budget, and availability.

**Everybody Has a Role – Day 8**

Your contest’s **Chief Judge** should have read the contest rules by now and started to fill their team. Current rules can be found at [www.toastmasters.org](http://www.toastmasters.org). The number of judges at each contest level is mandated by Toastmasters rules. All effort should be made to minimize Judge’s bias. It is the test a Chief Judge’s leadership to not only fill the team and minimize bias across the group. The Chief Judge’s ability to stage a fair contest is the foundation of fair competition.

Your **Contest Toastmaster** has 2 main responsibilities. Create/Update the contest script and serve as Master of Ceremonies for the contest. The contest script template must be updated for new information each contest as information becomes available (like people & roles, date, time, and location). This activity is best started when all roles are filled, contestants identified, and contest details are confirmed. This role may be offered to the previous year’s champion as a courtesy.

The **Contest Chair** should be close to finalizing the venue. If you are having difficulty, please ask your district leadership for guidance. In addition to securing the venue, managing the Chief Judge, and the Contest Toastmaster, you are tasked with confirming contestants, filling other roles (like Sgt. At Arms, Timers, Vote Counters, Registrars, Target Speaker) planning refreshments, and creating a promotional flier & a contest program. Looks like you need more help.

At this point it may be helpful to appoint a **Communication Chair,** **Refreshments Chair,** and **Registration Chair** to lighten the workload on yourself.

The **Communication Chair** is responsible for creating contest flyer, program, and signage. Additionally, it is helpful to have the Communication Chair print contestant participation & award certificates. Additionally, they should handle the certificates of appreciation for the entire preparation team.

The **Refreshments Chair** will address the food and beverage plan. Additionally, the Registration Chair will lead the team that warmly welcomes the guests, checks them into the event, and collects the list of dignitaries attending.

(At this point your team would include: Chief Judge, Contest Toastmaster, Communication Chair, Refreshments Chair, and Registration Chair.) Five people certainly can accomplish more than 1.

**Now we are rolling – Day 15**

The **Chief Judge** has read the rules and completed filling all judge positions. It also helps to have 2 alternate judges in attendance to account for any conflicts that may arise. All forms for judges should be printed in advance of the contest including eligibility forms, ballots, other supporting items like envelopes.

The **Contest Toastmaster** has read the rules and reviewed/updated the Contest Script and began to rehearse for the contest.

The **Contest Chair** should have gathered all the contestant documentation that confirms their eligibility and biographies. Once identified, contest participants should be informed of pertinent information in advance of the contest and asked if they will have any specific needs. **Other roles** shouldbe filled by now too… including Sgt. At Arms, Timers, Vote Counters, Registrars, Target Speaker (if needed), and equipment should be procured (gavel, timing devices, timing lights.)

**Just two weeks to go – Day 22**

The **Communication Chair** should have the Contest Flyer completed, presented to the Contest Chair, and distributed to all planning members, contestants, and invited Toastmasters clubs to promote the event. Additionally, remaining information regarding the Contest Program should be finalized and prepared for printing.

The **Refreshments Chair** should confirm the budget with the Contest Chair and confirm a list of items that aligns with the contest budget.

**The Home Stretch – Day 29**

This is the final stage to confirm readiness across the team.

**Contest Chair** should confirm all venue related particulars, other roles are filled, timers are prepared, and registration materials including sign-in sheets and list of dignitaries. **Additionally, confirm all recognition is prepared (contestant & preparation team).**

**Chief Judge** should confirm that all ballots, eligibility forms, and other supporting judging materials are ready.

**Contests Toastmaster** should confirm the script is ready and have it rehearsed.

**Communication Chair** should confirm the program is proofed by the Contest Chair and ready for printing.

**Registration Chair** should confirm signup, dignitary lists, and programs are ready, and secure a cash box for the contest.

**Refreshments Chair** Should confirm setup time, final list of items, and budget. Also, be sure to have supporting items like cups, plates, utensils, and napkins.

**The Day of the Contest – Day 36**

**All team members should arrive early and prepare to help with anything that requires help.**

**Contest Chair**, Setup signage & assist with the registration table. Assist all roles.

**Communication Chair** deliver programs & signage to the registration table and assist as needed.

**Registration Chair,** Setup registration table including the signup & dignitary lists, programs, and cash box.

**Refreshments Chair,** Setup refreshments: cups, plates, utensils, napkins, and refreshments. Maintain table through event.

**Chief Judge** arrange documents in the briefing room and confirm arrival of all Judges. Begin briefing with all roles required including: Judges, Timer, and Ballot Counters.

**Contest Toastmaster** Arrange documents in the briefing room. Be prepared to confirm the arrival of all contestants for the briefing. Post briefing, meet with the Sgt. At Arms & the Contest Chair and be prepared to execute the Contest Script (as Master of Ceremonies) on time.