

# Winning the Toastmasters Speech Evaluation Contest



## The Evaluation Maven Way

By Rodney Denno

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## About the Evaluation Maven Manifesto

The material in ‘Winning the Toastmasters Speech Evaluation Contest’ is part of a larger work titled ‘The Evaluation Maven Manifesto’. The Manifesto was written because as I came to realize the value of thoughtful, insightful and actionable feedback I looked for – but could not find - a comprehensive manual....so I wrote one. The Evaluation Maven Manifesto is free and can be downloaded at [www.ewolving.com/toastmasters.html](http://www.ewolving.com/toastmasters.html)



## ***How do you go about winning the Toastmasters Speech Evaluation contest?***

The short and not very helpful answer is – “Be the best!”

A somewhat longer and more helpful answer is – “Be the best! – on that day – for that test speech – as determined by the judges in that audience – out of all the speech evaluators at that competition” If you can do that four times (Club, Area, Division, District) you earn the right to call yourself the District Speech Evaluation champion for that year.

No small feat.....and very different from giving a speech evaluation at your club.

This part of the Evaluation Maven Manifesto looks at how to prepare to “Be the best!”

Evaluation Mavens know that a lot has to come together for you in the hour or so that encompasses the delivery of the test speech and the preparation and delivery of the contestant speech evaluations.

As Evaluation Mavens prepare for a Speech Evaluation contest they look for areas where they can improve or become more knowledgeable and they try not to be concerned about things they can't do much about – what I call the “Don't Worry, Be Happy” areas.

### ***The “Don't Worry, Be Happy” Areas***

There are three areas where you have little or no influence – the judging criteria, the selection of judges and your competitors – so “Don't Worry, Be Happy”.

**Judging Criteria** - Are set by Toastmasters International. Evaluation Mavens make sure they know the criteria and factor them in to every evaluation competition.

**Judge Selection** - Speech Evaluation contest officials are instructed to keep the judges names and identities anonymous --- not identify them in any way. Treat every member of the audience as if they are judges – they are indeed judging your performance whether they are official judges or not.

**Competitors** - Unless you are willing to attend each Club, Area and Division contest to assess your competition you will be competing against Toastmasters you probably don't know. The structure of the Speech Evaluation competition does not allow you to see any of your competitor's performances prior to yours so you can't 'position' your performance relative to theirs. All you can do is be the best you can be.

## ***The “Get Knowledgeable” Areas***

### **Know the judging process**

There are many ways that Clubs, Areas, Divisions and Districts try to provide a level playing field for all Speech Evaluation contestants. Here are a few:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Judges training – endeavours to educate potential judges about the judging process and how to recognize – and mitigate – the impact that their own personal biases have on the judging process.</li></ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Every judge is provided with – and should use – the Judges Form that lists the criteria, percentages and points ranges to be applied.</li></ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If possible the Test Speaker should be someone the contestants are not familiar with – invited from outside the Club, Area, Division and even District.</li></ul>   |

However, judging is a very human experience.

A judge may attend judges training and be very diligent in filling out the judging form and tallying the numbers to determine first, second and third place. But, the judge may not agree with the numbers – especially if they are close – and may list first, second and third in a different order than the raw numbers indicated. This is the reality of judging – while judges endeavour to be as objective as possible their 'gut feeling' will get factored into the ranking and potentially overturn what the raw number rankings.

Evaluation Mavens know there are two things they can do to better understand the judging process so they can produce a winning speech evaluation performance:

1 – Get your own copy of the Speech Evaluation Contest Judging Form and rules, study them and when you give or practice speech evaluations try to include a balance of all the listed criteria.

2 – Be a Speech Evaluation contest judge so you can experience the process first hand – inside you - and talk to other judges to hear how they determined their own contestant rankings.

## **Develop a Speech Evaluation Framework**

Have you ever watched an Improv show or participated in an Improv workshop? A well trained Improv actor makes it look so ‘spontaneous’ – but behind all that seeming ‘spontaneity’ is a lot of structure and practice.

One of the keys to winning a Speech Evaluation competition is to stand out by differentiating yourself – in the minds of the judges – from the other competitors.

Evaluation Mavens – like Improv actors – know that great evaluation come from having a speech evaluation framework to place their observations into so they can focus their attention on actively listening to the speech. The more a Maven uses various evaluation techniques the more tools the Maven has available for competition.

The confidence to put on a great ‘spontaneous’ speech evaluation performance comes from knowing that all you have to do is actively listen to the test speech, pick two or three points for improvement and deliver them in a three minute speech that will impress the speaker the audience and the judges.

With only five minutes to prepare your evaluation speech – before all notes are taken away from the contestants by the Sergeant at Arms – an Evaluation Maven will use every second available to determine what specific feedback will go into the evaluation speech and how it will be delivered.

## Competition - Just prior to the Test Speech

Prepare a sheet of paper with two columns and a number of rows – I typically use the FLOW worksheet ([www.ewolving.com/EMM-FLOW.pdf](http://www.ewolving.com/EMM-FLOW.pdf)) because it already has the major segments of the speech/transitions already built into its structure. Have a separate list of the major areas you will be looking to comment on - physical appearance, vocal variety, facial expression, gestures, body language, speech content, language, organization, energy.....and any other aspects you may want to include.

## Competition - During the Test Speech

On the FLOW worksheet, write down two sets of observations you feel are important:

- 1 - Strengths --- why you feel they are strengths.
- 2 - Points-for-Improvement --- how you will demonstrate how to improve.

Enjoy the speech and how it connects to you personally.

## Competition - Immediately after the Test Speech

You now have five minutes to write and rehearse your evaluation speech.

Craft an introduction and conclusion that ties you and the audience to the speech.

Pick two or three strengths and points-for-improvement and weave in humor where appropriate.

For each strength and point-for-improvement decide --- why it was strong and how you will demonstrate each point-for-improvement.

Create a memorable punch line that will get the judges to remember your performance!

Use purposeful language rather than sprinkling in esoteric words that some judges may not understand.

Be careful not to become formulaic in your evaluation. It's easy to get locked into a particular set of observations that will make your evaluation sound mechanical.

Above all – focus on giving the best possible feedback to the speaker.....and may the best contestant win!

## **Competition - Delivering your Speech Evaluation Speech**

Evaluation Mavens know that judges will penalize you for using notes and standing behind a lectern.....boldly step out in front of the audience and deliver a confident, humorous, insightful and 'spontaneous' three minute speech.

Project a pleasant smile. Speak in a solid confident tone of voice. Make direct eye contact with various audience members around the room (no section of the room should be left "unattended" by your eye contact).

Indicate that your speech is over by looking at the contest chair, extending your arm in that person's direction and saying "Contest Chair." Smile!

Don't leave the speaking area until the Contest Chair has shaken your hand – then confidently walk offstage to your seat to await the news that you have won first place.

## **Timing Matters**

Timers have instructions to start timing your performance from the moment you speak or gesture in any way that indicates you are starting. From that moment you have only 3 minutes and 30 seconds. If you speak for 3 minutes 31 seconds, you are disqualified and no matter how great your performance.....it will not count.

The last time signal will be the red light at 3 minutes. If you are planning to push your performance to the wire you had better practice so you 'know in your gut' what 25 seconds feels like.

Practice, Practice, Practice

Need I say more!

Well....here are a few tips.

Make notes on every speech at your club meeting.....later practice giving evaluations for these speeches over and over and over again.

Evaluate everything! It doesn't have to be speeches in club meetings. Evaluate speeches on-line (YouTube, Google Video, etc.), videos of prior contests, newscasts, political speeches, acceptance speeches, documentaries.....just about anything will do.

Look for unique recommendations that others may not notice.....and think of ways to give praise and demonstrate how to improve.

Good Luck!

I hope to meet you in a speech evaluation competition soon.

Rodney Denno