



Judges, Ballots & Forms D5 Contest Training

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Judging

MARK KRAMER, DTM

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As a Judge you'll want to read these!

(also, for Contest Chairs & Contestants)



Visit the D5tm.org website

- Then click Resources > Speech Contest
 - (do not click "Online Contest Training")

Read the "Speech Contest Rulebook 2025-2026"

- As judges, the Contest Chair, or contestants it's important that you understand the rules of the contest.

Read the "Briefings by Chief Judge 2025"

- Read this whether you are a Chief Judge, Judge, or Tiebreaker Judge. Contestants will benefit, too.

Read the "Organizing Area and Division Contests Guidebook"

- Search for "What does a judge do?"





Protests and Disqualifications

According to the Speech Contest Rulebook:

- Protests may only be lodged by the Chief Judge, judges, Contest Chair, and contestants.
 - Audience members and other officials may not protest.
- Protests are limited to eligibility, originality, references to another contestant, or references to another contestant's speech.
- Protests must be lodged with the Chief Judge prior to the contest being adjourned.
- A majority of voting judges (i.e., not Chief Judge or tiebreaking judge) must agree to a disqualification.
- If there is a protest, the contestant must have the opportunity to respond to the judges.
- The Chief Judge can disqualify based on eligibility without the other judges voting.

Sometimes judges may also need to disqualify based on bias and unfairness that are not spelled out in the Speech Contest Rulebook. Ask yourself: Is this fair to all the contestants?



The Judges' Case Book

Nearly all contests run fairly smoothly with no protests and disqualifications.

But on rare occasions there's a hitch.

Reviewing cases from actual District 5 contests will help prepare you for judging.



The Judges Case Book

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3 The Case of The Missing Signature

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Background: The Chief Judge collected the voting judges' ballots following a contest then disqualified one of the ballots.

Why: The voting judge failed to sign the ballot.

Lesson: Sign your ballot as soon as you receive it.



3 The Case of the Blank Votes 3

Background: At a division contest with five contestants, the Tiebreaking Judge submitted a ballot with the names of the contestants for first, second, and third place. The Chief Judge disqualified the ballot.

Why: While voting judges list the top three contestants, **the tiebreaking judge must list every contestant.** Since the two of the contestants were missing, the Chief Judge disqualified the tiebreaking ballot for being incomplete.

Side note: The Tiebreaking Judge's ballot was not needed for the contest, so it had no impact.

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3 The Case of the Blank Votes (continued) 3



Question: What happens if a tiebreaking judge's ballot is disqualified?

Answer: Toastmasters International did not have an answer for this question. They say that they have never heard of a situation where a tiebreaking ballot that was needed for a contest was disqualified.

This is because Chief Judges typically select an experienced judge as the Tiebreaking Judge and, during the Chief Judge's briefing to the Tiebreaking Judge, the Chief Judge should make it clear that the ballot must be signed and that all contestants must be listed.



⌘ The Case of Avoidance ⌘

Background: When a judge realized that the member sitting next to her was a contestant, the judge changed seats.

What Happened: There is no rule that a judge cannot sit next to a contestant, however, many judges feel more comfortable completing their ballots if they are not sitting next to the contestant they are voting on.



3 The Case of The Musical Chairs 3

Background: When two judges realized they were sitting next to each other, one of them relocated.

Why: While [there is no rule that judges cannot sit together](#), some judges believe that each should sit away from the others so that each has a different perspective from which to judge a contestant.

For example, a judge sitting near the front may hear the contestant clearly but a judge in the back may not be able to hear the contestant.

It is helpful if judges and tiebreaking judges sit on the ends of rows. This makes it much easier for the ballot counters and Chief Judge to collect the ballots.



3 The Case of The Barred Contestant

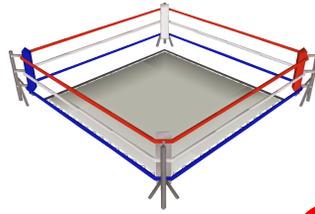


Background: A club contest winner was not allowed to compete at the club's area contest. The Chief Judge disqualified the contestant based on eligibility.

Why: The contestant had served as a judge for another area contest in the same division for the same contest.

If the contestant won his area contest, he would have faced the winner of the area contest he judged. It is possible that the contestant, when serving as a judge, voted for a weaker contestant to give himself a better chance at winning the division contest.

Lesson: It's all about eliminating perceived bias.



3 The Case of Stepping Out of Bounds



Background: Voting judges disqualified a speaker for stepping out the speaking area.

Why: Some Contest Chairs mark the floor with a speaking area. Some Toastmasters point out the speaking area.

What Should Have Happened: The contestant should not have been disqualified. A designated speaking area is a suggested area that contestants should speak from. This may have to do with lighting or line of sight or to stay in front of the camera if the contest is aired or recorded. However, **a contestant cannot be disqualified for stepping out of the suggested area.**

3 The Case of The Misjudged Contestant



Background: Prior to the introduction of the Toastmaster for an area contest, the Chief Judge disqualified one of the contestants.

Why: During the Chief Judge's briefing, one of the voting judges pointed out that **this contestant was also the one who selected them as judges.**

Having hand-selected the judges for the contest, there may have been **perceived bias** by the other contestants.

3 The Case of The Pre-Occupied Contestant 3



Background: The Toastmaster called for all contestants to attend the pre-contest briefing. One contestant was a no-show.

- (side note: Contestants may waive their right to attend the briefing as long as they notify the Toastmaster in advance)

After the Toastmaster was introduced, the Toastmaster announced the speaking order and did not mention the contestant who missed the briefing.

The left-out contestant stood up and asked the Toastmaster when he was speaking.

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3 The Case of The Pre-Occupied Contestant ⋈ (continued)



What Happened: The Chief Judge called the judges out of the room for a conference.

- Side note: Except for the Chief Judge, judges are supposed to be anonymous, as much as possible

What Else Happened: Then, the Chief Judge asked the Contest Chair, Toastmaster, and contestant to join the judges.

What Then Happened: The judges voted to allow the contestant to compete because the contestant said he had arrived well before the contest started, he did not hear the Toastmaster call for contestants, and he had not received pre-contest information from the Contest Chair telling him about the briefing.

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3 The Case of The Pre-Occupied Contestant



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What Finally Happened: All contestants were called out of the room, and a new speaking order was selected, including the contestant who had not reported to the Toastmaster.

What Should Have Happened: Since the contestant failed to report to the Toastmaster prior to the Toastmaster being introduced, the contestant should have been disqualified.

Lessons: The Contest Chair needs to email pre-contest information to all contestants and functionaries, so they are aware of their responsibilities at the contest and know what to expect.

The Toastmaster should send the Sergeants at Arms to search for the missing contestant.

Had the contestant read our resources he would have known there would be a briefing.



3 The Case of The Tied-Up Ballot 3

Background: The Chief Judge disqualified a voting judge's ballot.

What Happened: The judge indicated a tie for 2nd place.

What Should Have Happened: Voting judges should never submit a ballot with a tie. Judges must break the tie on their own.



3 The Case of The Fired Chief Judge 2

Background: The Contest Chair and three Area Directors fired the Chief Judge during the contest planning stages.

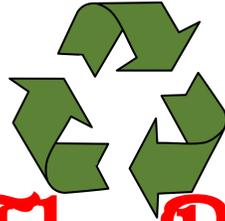
What Happened: The Contest Chair and Area Directors wanted an intertwined multi-area contest because they are more efficient.

- An intertwined contest is where all the contestants from the participating areas compete in the first contest, then compete in the second contest, then all winners are announced.

The Chief Judge would not support an intertwined contest because [he said Toastmasters International does not allow them](#). The Chief Judge said he would support a serial contest where one area goes after the next since Toastmasters allows it even though they strongly discourage it.

So: The Chief Judge was fired and another was found who would support the intertwined contest.

Lesson: [The fired Chief Judge was correct – intertwined contests are not allowed.](#)



3 The Case of The Recycled Joke 3

Background: A contestant included a joke in his speech. Those familiar with the joke would know it was not original. Contest speeches must be substantially original.

What Happened: Nothing. None of the contestants or voting judges protested even though the joke was not original.

Why: The Speech Contest Rulebook requires the speech be “substantially original.” While the rulebook does not define what is meant by “substantially,” Toastmasters International has clarified it:

- *Twenty-five percent or less of the speech may be devoted to quoting, paraphrasing, or referencing another person’s content. Any quoted, paraphrased, or referenced content **must be so identified during the speech presentation.** Each judge must determine if they believe that 25 percent or less of the speech was devoted to quotes, etc.*



3 The Case of Switch-a-rooni 3

Background: A contestant switched clubs a week before the club held its contest. The contestant won the club contest.

More Background: The contestant switched to a club whose club contest was being judged by members of the contestant's old club that she left a week before.

What Happened: Nothing. No one protested that the judges may have been biased towards the contestant. Some of the club members expressed that this was unfair after the contest.

What Should Have Happened: The contestant should have been **disqualified because of the perceived bias of the judges.**



3 The Case of The Missing Notes 3

Background: None of the evaluation contestants used the Evaluation Contestant Notes (form 1177). Each contestant used their own notebooks they had brought to the contest.

What Should Have Happened: The Contest Chair should have provided contestants form 1177 to prevent the possibility that a contestant had written down notes in their notebooks prior to the contest to help them with their evaluations.

What Happened: Contestants were allowed to use their notebooks since the form was not available for them to use. Judges had to show some flexibility because disqualifying all contestants for a form that should have been supplied to them would not be fair.

Lesson: Contest Chairs must make certain to supply all contest forms.

3 The Case of The Disqualified Test Speaker



Background: For an evaluation contest, immediately after the Test Speaker concluded, one of the voting judges pulled the Chief Judge aside to issue a protest.

- In an evaluation contest, all the contestants evaluate the same Test Speaker.

What Happened: The voting judge realized that one of the contestants was from the same club as the Test Speaker.

Why: The voting judges recognized that **the contestant's familiarity with the Test Speaker may give the contestant an edge** because the contestant would know the Test Speaker's traits and may have heard the speech at the club, so they voted to disqualify the contestant.

So: The Contest Chair asked for an audience member to volunteer to be the new Test Speaker.



3 The Case of The Disqualified Evaluator 2

Background: After the last evaluation contestant competed, a voting judge pulled the Chief Judge aside to protest one of the contestants. The Chief Judge disqualified the contestant.

What Happened: During her evaluation, the contestant mentioned that she knew the Test Speaker.

Why The Disqualification: The Chief Judge called the judges together and they voted to disqualify the contestant because it gave her an unfair advantage over other contestants even if she had never heard the speech before.

The End



Takeaways

It's important for all judges, the Contest Chair, and contestants to understand the Speech Contest Rulebook.

It's important that the contest be held fairly for all contestants and that you do your best to remove any possibility of perceived bias.

It's important that, as a judge, Contest Chair, or contestant, if you see something, let the Chief Judge know.

It's important for the Contest Chair to communicate with all contestants and functionaries in the weeks before the contest so they understand their responsibilities and are prepared for the contest.