

Making the most of the contest experience.

Club Contests Enrich Everyone

Health, wealth and unlimited success! That's what club contests can bring to Toastmasters.

Let's look at those claims one at a time. A club contest delivers a healthy club. How? Because members feel greater loyalty to a club that has a tradition of strong contests. And when guests visit during a contest, they're attracted to the energy of your club's vibrant, well-spoken membership.

How does a club contest promise wealth? When members deliver an important message in a well-crafted 5- to 7-minute speech,

the audience is treated to a wealth of inspiration and information.

But there's only one winner – so how can you claim “unlimited” success? Because success isn't measured by selecting a winner. Out of thousands of contestants in the Toastmasters International Speech Contest each year, only one walks away as the World Champion. But the true success of the contest system is shown as each speaker commits to write a speech, hones it, gets feedback to improve their content and delivery, practices the speech and finally delivers it.

Every person who delivers a message in a club contest speech has grown as a speaker and a person – and that's success!

Pushing Through Your Fears

Susan Barrera was a classic terror-stricken speaker when she first joined Toastmasters. After she gave her first four speeches, her club encouraged her to enter an evaluation contest in order to get her more involved. She expected to suffer through the contest and then retreat back into her shell. Instead, she surprised herself by soaking up the experience. “They ‘forced’ me to enter that first contest,”

Got Questions? WHQ has Answers!

Every year, World Headquarters' staff receives hundreds of questions on the topic of the Speech Contest Rulebook and the proper conduct of Toastmasters speech contests. If you have questions, feel free to call or send an e-mail. We're happy to help!

If, on the other hand, you'd like to try to answer your speech contest questions on your own, we encourage you to do so. Here are some resources and suggestions that may help:

- **Speech Contest Rulebook** (Item 1171). This is your best resource for answering speech contest questions. It is the only official document that controls all rules-related decisions regarding speech contests. A free copy of this manual is available (for viewing, but not for printing) on the Toastmasters Web site at www.toastmasters.org/speechcontestrules.
- **Speech Contest Manual** (Item 1173). This document provides guidance for running a successful speech contest, but does not provide any rules that must be followed.
- **Frequently Asked Questions** (FAQ). Check the Toastmasters Web site for frequently asked questions about speech contests at www.toastmasters.org/speechcontestfaq.
- **The voice of experience.** Many Toastmasters veterans and club, area, division and district leaders have extensive experience conducting (and competing in) speech contests, which makes them excellent resources for speech contest rules, protocols, and best practices.

If you still have unanswered questions, call World Headquarters, or send an e-mail to speechcontests@toastmasters.org. And remember: the rules apply to all Toastmasters speech contests – they may not be supplanted or modified, and no exceptions may be made.



she admits, “and I learned so much that now I tell anybody to ‘just do it,’ whether they feel ready or not.”

When the club winner wasn’t able to advance, Barrera found herself representing the club at the area contest, where she gained more confidence. She now frequently competes in advanced contests and has some district level trophies in her collection.

Mark Brown, the 1995 Toastmasters World Champion of Public Speaking, is another former club contestant. And he, too, remembers the importance of participating in that first event. “The club speech contest is a great way to stretch yourself,” says Brown. “Participation almost forces you to be better than you have ever been, and it’s a wonderful opportunity to put into practice the techniques you have learned in the Toastmasters program.

“In one 5-to-7-minute speech, you strive to evoke many emotions, give the audience something to think about, and leave them with a message that can affect their lives. That is the *true* value of the speech contest.”

To make your club contest a wealthy experience, here are some good investments:

- **Participate in every contest your district holds.** Besides the International Speech Contest, the contests for humorous speeches, Table Topics and evaluations are all skill builders and help prepare you for the International Speech Contest.
- **Ask every club member to participate** – if not as a contestant, then in another contest function.
- **Set the dates far in advance** – six months is not too early – and keep mentioning them on every newsletter and meeting agenda in the months leading up to the contest.
- **Appoint the contest chairman when the date is set** so he or she can work with club officers to build interest in the contest.
- **Don’t be casual** about the club contest. It’s a bigger event when taken

seriously. Follow all guidelines and formalities so that everybody sees what a contest is like at every level.

- **Make it a special event** – invite family members, colleagues, prospective members, past members – not just to build the audience, but to let everyone enjoy the excitement of communication in a supportive club environment.
- **Make it an educational opportunity.** Offer a presentation prior to the event on developing a contest speech. Invite a strong speaker from another club who won’t be competing in your contest.

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Club Contests

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- **Get a mentor.** Mentors aren't only for new members. Every contestant can benefit from having a mentor in the weeks before the event. The more thought put into a contest speech, the better the speaker becomes.

- When somebody gives a good speech during the year, point it out and **encourage that speaker to develop it for the next club contest.**

- **Provide visible rewards,** such as a certificate of participation for each contestant and ribbons or trophies for winners.

- **Celebrate every participant** – emphasize that the most important result of the club contest is not advancing to the area contest but advancing to the next skill level.

- **Make certain that every contestant gets feedback** – assign an evaluator for each speaker, who will provide helpful suggestions independent of the contest results.

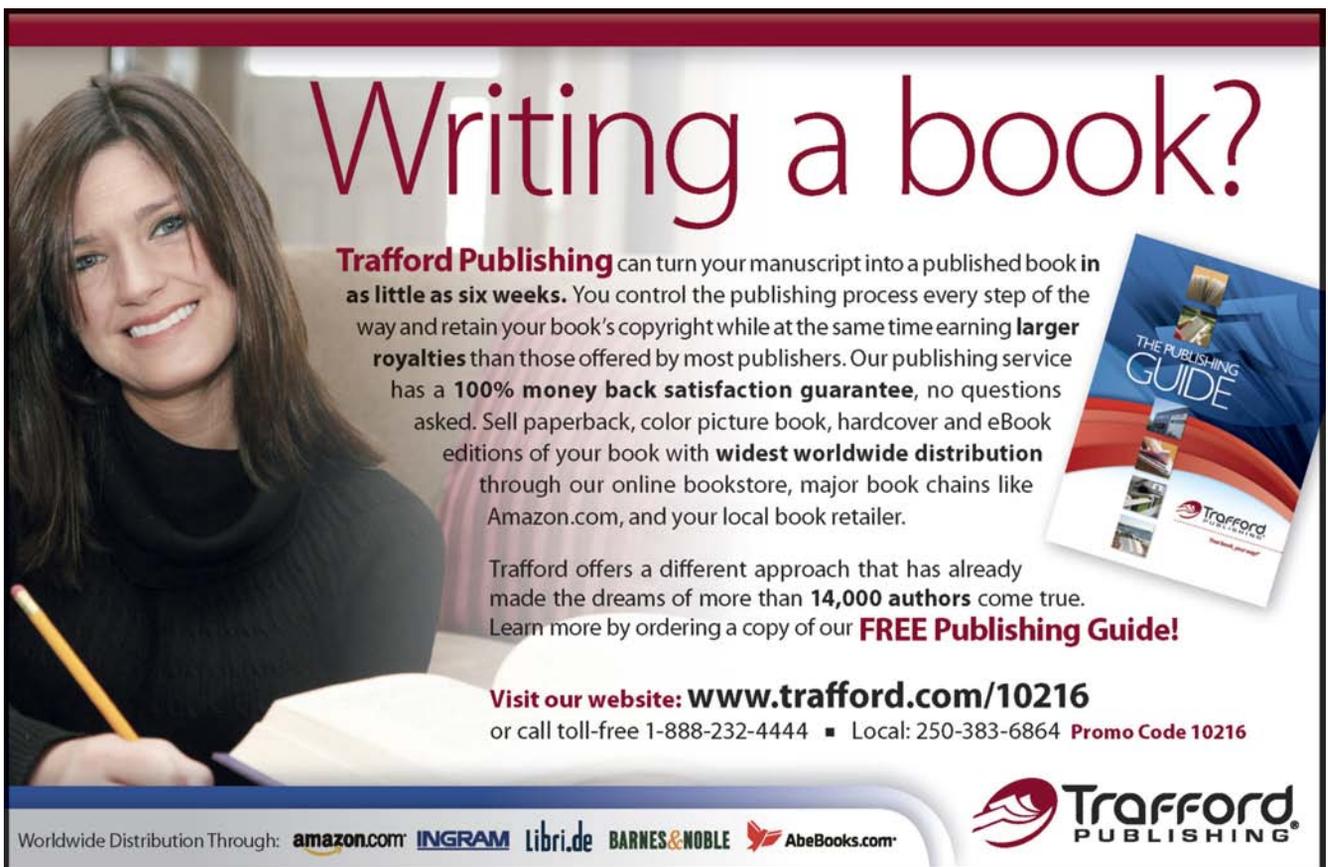
- **Issue a press release about your contest.** Even if the bigger newspapers overlook it, there are likely some local publications – such as neighborhood “shoppers” – that will be pleased to have information about local activities. If you're in a corporate club, make sure the press release goes to the company newsletters of everybody who enters.

- **Encourage clubwide participation in the area, division and district contests.** Club members in attendance at those events will support their winners as they advance to the next level, and club members serving as

helpers at those contests become better informed and more competent participants in future events.

Club level contests are an important aspect of your Toastmasters membership. They provide valuable experience, build skills and raise the bar for other presentations. They showcase progress and get members involved in a shared activity. Finally, they help determine your club's representatives to area contests – and those members will perform better at that level if they've shared the experience of speaking in a strong club contest. ■

Gregory Lay, ATMS, is a member of Challenge and Leadership 23 Toastmasters club in Albuquerque, New Mexico.



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