

Encouraging and Educating through Evaluations

As the Evaluator, you are one of the most important people in the meeting. In the words of Toastmasters International, "Evaluation is the heart of the Toastmasters educational program". But don't let that scare you away! With a little bit of preparation and practice, you can be ready and raring to go.

Why are the Evaluators so important? Well, we are all at Toastmasters to improve, in one way or another. For those of us that want to improve our public speaking skills, the most beneficial part of Toastmasters is the feedback we get in a kind, positive, and safe environment. As the Evaluator, you get to encourage the Speaker by telling them exactly what they did well and educate them on how they can improve. Have you ever listened to someone speak and thought "wow that was a great line, I wish they had paused afterwards so I could get the full effect of it"? In this role, you get to do that!

Introducing the Speaker

When you get assigned to be an Evaluator, there will also be a Speaker assigned. This is the person that you will get to evaluate. Prior to the meeting, you should receive an introduction from the Speaker and possibly an Evaluation form. If they do not provide a form, you can use [this generic one](#). If you do not receive an introduction, you can write up a quick one yourself (see below). You will also need to know the Speaker's expected time range. Talk to the Toastmaster if you need help getting any of this information.

During the meeting, right before the Speaker's speech, the Toastmaster will invite you to introduce them. This is where you will either read the given introduction or the one you created.

Here is an example of an introduction that a Speaker might provide: "John Smith is working on Level 1 in his Path Visionary Communication. This current project is to research and present on a topic new to him. The speech will be 5 to 7 minutes. John's favorite food is mashed potatoes. He decided it might be fun to learn about the journey potatoes go through before they make it to his plate. Please welcome John Smith for his speech, From Potatoes To Puree."

Alternatively, here is an example of an introduction you might make up if you didn't get one from the Speaker: "John will be giving a speech that is 5 to 7 minutes. Please welcome John Smith." (In both these cases, you will want to clap/jazz hands/whatever it is your club does to celebrate someone.)

Now, what did those two introductions have in common?

1. They both gave the time the speech is expected to be. This is very important for the Timer so they can do their role properly.
2. They both handed off the "stage" (either physical or virtual/theoretical) to the Speaker. From here, the Speaker can roll right into their speech without having to introduce themselves.

Listening to the speech

Now that was a lot of lead-up to the speech, but you are finally getting to the good part. This is where the bulk of your work comes in. You have to really pay attention to the Speaker and their speech and keep notes of anything that you might want to say in your evaluation later.

Here is a list of 8 speech criteria to try focusing on (taken straight from the Evaluation form itself):

- **Clarity** (*Spoken language is clear and is easily understood*)
- **Vocal Variety** (*Uses tone, speed, and volume as tools*)
- **Eye Contact** (*Effectively uses eye contact to engage audience*)
- **Gestures** (*Uses physical gestures effectively*)
- **Audience Awareness** (*Demonstrates awareness of audience engagement and needs*)
- **Comfort Level** (*Appears comfortable with the audience*)
- **Interest** (*Engages audience with interesting, well-constructed content*)
- **Well Supported** (*Speech content is well-supported and sources are available if requested*)

If you notice something else that doesn't fall into one of these categories, that's fine too! Whatever you notice will be useful. Be sure to keep track of both what is done well and what could be improved on.

While the Speaker talks, scribble your notes down. You want to keep track of your thoughts but also pay attention to the speech, don't jump forward to writing or planning your evaluation right away or you might miss something important in the speech.

Preparing your evaluation

After the Speaker has finished, the Toastmaster will ask for everyone to send them a little note about how they did. You **do not** have to send any notes now, since you will be giving them all your feedback later. Now is the time for you to prepare for the evaluation you will give.

Depending on how much preparation you need to do, this time involves a little bit of multi-tasking. Between now and the time you will be giving your evaluation, there might be another speech and also the Table Topics session. You can use this time to organize your notes and mentally prepare for what you will need to say. But don't be so deep into your preparation that you don't notice the Table Topics Master calling on you! You still need to present in the meeting as well.

Here are some ideas for how to prepare and structure your speech evaluation.

The Feedback Sandwich

The most basic (and very useful!) approach is the Feedback Sandwich. Basically, this means you say a few positive things, followed by a critique or area for improvement, and wrap it up with another positive note. This helps the Speaker to feel proud of the things they did well since the "negative" thing is buffered a bit.

Heard, Felt, Saw

An alternative approach (if you can't decide what areas to focus on) is to choose these three areas: something you heard, something you felt, and something you saw. The benefit of this method is that it also helps you phrase your feedback in a less confrontational manner. For example "I heard your voice quaver in the beginning of the speech" sounds friendlier than "your voice quavered at the start". Using "I heard", "I felt", and "I saw" makes it clear that these are your personal observations, not direct criticisms. You can also combine this with the feedback sandwich method by making two of these statements positive and one negative.

Constructive Criticism

An important part of giving the evaluation is giving the Speaker something concrete to improve upon. Instead of saying "you should have included more gestures", you can point out a specific example: "when you were listing off the counties that grow the most potatoes, you could have raised your hand to count off 1, 2, and 3" (and model the gesture you would have liked them to use). The more examples you can give, the better, as this will give the Speaker specific areas to work on.

Specific Praise

Examples are also important when it comes to the positive praise that you are giving. A lot of speakers tend to "get in the zone" when they are giving their speech and might not remember the details of how it went. If you tell the Speaker they had good vocal variety, they might not know exactly what you mean or in which portion of the speech they did well. A better statement would be: "Your vocal variety was great throughout the speech. I especially enjoyed how you paused after each joke, which really helped the audience have time to appreciate the humor." Phrasing your praise in this way, with a specific example, will help them to both remember when they did that and also feel proud about how they did.

Delivery over Content

You might have already noticed, but in the list of 8 criteria to evaluate on above, the first 6 were all focused on the delivery of the speech and only the last 2 covered the content of the speech. This is a good rule of thumb to follow in your evaluation as well. Giving feedback on the Speaker's delivery is more useful because it is something they can apply to any future speech. Feedback about the content is relevant only to the current speech and isn't as useful unless they plan on giving the same speech again later. Saying "I enjoyed how you started with a joke, which really caught the audience's attention" is more helpful than saying "that joke at the beginning was really funny". The delivery and placement of the joke is more important than the joke itself. This doesn't mean you can't mention the speech content at all, if you think the content was fantastic, by all means say that! Just try to focus on things that would be relevant for future speeches as well.

Giving your evaluation

Now that you have gone through your notes and prepared what to say, it's time to tell the Speaker what you thought. The General Evaluator will call on you to give your evaluation, and this is your time to shine.

- Don't forget to keep an eye on the Timer. You have 2 – 3 minutes to give the evaluation.
- Start the evaluation by thanking the Speaker for their speech.
- Go through your list of notes that you prepared. You only need a handful of things to talk about. If you give an example for each one, you should be able to make your time.
- Make sure your criticism is constructive and relevant.
- Focus more on the delivery and less on the speech content.
- Try to end on a happy note, either by pointing out another great thing or by thanking the Speaker again.
- If you are nervous, remember: this evaluation isn't about you. This is all about giving the Speaker an opportunity to learn and grow. Any feedback you have will be useful to them.

After the meeting is over, send your notes to the Speaker. If you filled out an Evaluation form, great! If not, you can send them whatever notes you had written down.

Wow. We've made it to the end, and this sure seems like a lot. However, a lot of this is just ideas and suggestions for how to give your evaluation. The main concept is simple: tell them what they did well and what they should work on. Keep in mind that the whole point of the evaluation is to encourage and educate the Speaker. Encourage them by using praise and educate them by providing criticism. You can surely do both of those things. Good luck!