

## Do You Criticize or Evaluate?

When was the last time you accepted constructive criticism without resentment? Most people see constructive criticism in a negative light, and for good reason. All too often, such criticism is delivered with little foresight or is down right vengeful. Even where criticism is well meant, it can be perceived as a personal attack and the outcome is resentment. This approach is virtually always unsuccessful, lacks empathy and is not to be confused with **effective evaluation**.

*Criticism comes easier than craftsmanship. Zeuxis 400 BC*

Since Ralph C. Smedley founded Toastmasters International in 1924, Toastmasters worldwide have practiced and shared their evaluation skills and techniques. This sharing has resulted in Toastmasters becoming the architects and practitioners of effective evaluation skills. **The outcome is that Toastmasters developed the challenging art of delivering empathic and effective speech evaluations, in a supportive club environment, with the sincere intention of helping every Toastmaster grow.**

How do Toastmasters develop effective evaluation skills?

### Improving Evaluations with Growth Points

Start with changing two words. Change good and bad to strengths and growth points.

First let's focus on novice toastmasters. The Icebreaker and subsequent few speeches are where novice toastmasters lack experience and are most fragile. During this period it's best to focus on positive aspects of speech presentations and provide lots of encouragement while staying focused on speech objectives. As the speaker develops, the evaluations should reflect a higher standard and the speaker should be expected to meet this challenge. However, when evaluating the novice toastmaster, if you feel compelled to comment, remember to refer to "growth points". i.e. "*May I suggest one growth point to make a good speech even better....*"

- **Refer to strengths and growth points**
- **Provide lots of encouragement**

This language shift signals a more positive approach, provides encouragement and will make the speaker more receptive to your overall evaluation.

### Listening

Effective listening skills are vastly different from simply hearing. Listening is essential for you, the evaluator, to capture the essence of the speaker's message. As you listen, note how well the speaker crafted the speech opening, body and conclusion, commensurate with their experience. Listen for clues that allow you to refer to growth points that can help the speaker improve future speeches.

- **Listening is more than simply hearing**
- **Capture the essence of the speech**
- **How well crafted was the speech opening, body and conclusion?**
- **Refer to growth points that will assist the speaker**

Remember to evaluate the speaker commensurate with their experience and avoid commenting on future speech objectives. i.e. when the speaker is presenting the Icebreaker speech, avoid referring to future speech objectives such as non-verbal language/gestures, vocal variety etc.

Encourage all speakers to focus on meeting or repeating CTM speech objectives. Meeting or repeating all 10 CTM speech objectives can make a dramatic difference. **The difference between becoming a fair to good speaker or a great speaker.**

Now that we have asked the question “how well crafted was the speech opening, body and conclusion” let’s examine what to look for from the speaker, the speech and the evaluator.

### Speech Opening

The speaker should never assume that the simple act of being introduced, and making her/his way successfully to the lectern or platform, will guarantee immediate audience attention. Audience distraction is common and could be caused by any number of events i.e. the speaker’s introduction, the audience is still completing written evaluations from the previous speaker, room temperature, noise etc.

The alert speaker can and should overcome this prior to uttering their first word. The speaker should approach the lectern with confidence and control. Pause prior to addressing the Toastmaster and the audience. Pause appropriately during his/her opening comments. Pausing allows the audience to catch up. To be effective, the speech opening should include:

**A clear thought-provoking statement.**

Or

**A clear intriguing question.**

The speaker’s objective with both these speech openings is to gain immediate audience attention and make the speech opening memorable.

The speaker may choose an alternate approach to gaining audience attention.

When the speaker presents an effective speech opening the prospects of the rest of the message being heard are enhanced significantly.

### Evaluating the Speech Opening

Even prior to the speaker uttering his/her first word, look for and comment on how the speaker approached and controlled the speaking area after being introduced. How well did the speaker address the Toastmaster, the audience, and take command of the platform? Did the speaker pace the speech opening and was it audible? Did she/he pause prior to and during the opening comments? Were props set up for immediate or future use?

Open your evaluation comments with enthusiasm and energy and utilize your CTM basic skills and techniques. **Remember your evaluation is a mini speech** and should have a clear opening, body and conclusion i.e. the opening “*Mr./Madam Toastmaster, welcome guests, fellow toastmasters. Susan’s opening question immediately gained our attention when she... This excellent speech opening is to be commended for it’s...*”

Should the speaker fall short with the speech opening, your response might be along the following lines. i.e. “*Mr./Madam Toastmaster, welcome guests, fellow toastmasters. Susan’s opening statement was delivered with lots of energy and she is to be commended for that. May I suggest one growth point to make a good speech opening even better...*”

- **What did you observe when the speaker approach the lectern?**
- **Were props set up for immediate or future use?**
- **Did she/he pause prior to and during the opening comments?**
- **Did the speaker open with a provocative statement or ask an intriguing question?**
- **Did the speaker’s opening comments get immediate audience attention?**
- **Was the speech opening enthusiastic, energetic?**

### Transition between the Opening and Body

The transition between the speech opening and body should be subtle and at the same time it should be clear we have now moved into the body of the speech. Look for and comment on words, phrases or actions the speaker used to create an effective bridge from the opening to the body of the speech.

- **Was there an effective transition from the opening to the body?**

## Body

During the presentation of the body of the speech, look for how well the speaker identified the main points and spoke to those points. Ask yourself, were there too many or too few main points? Typically a 5-7 minute speech will have 3 main points. The evaluator should comment on how the points contained in the body of the speech supported the speaker's overall objective.

One technique used to make this segment of the speech memorable is the use of repetition. i.e. repeating the speech title, quote or previous line from the opening.

- **What were the main points contained in the body of the speech?**
- **Did the main points support the speakers overall objective(s)?**
- **Were the main points dramatic or unexpected? Were they memorable?**

## Transition between the Body and Conclusion

It is a real challenge for the speaker to make an effective transition between the body and conclusion of the speech and it requires **very focused listening skills** on the part of the evaluator. It is equally challenging for the evaluator to focus sufficiently to hear and/or observe this subtle transition coming.

A smooth transition can be elusive and is sometimes denoted by a pause, change of tone, change of pace, props, non-verbal language or a combination of skillful techniques.

- **Was the transition from body to conclusion evident? If yes, how?**

## Speech Conclusion

Look for a speech conclusion that will be remembered and that elicited warm, extended applause. A speech that encouraged the audience to visualize the outcome through imagery. A speech conclusion that had a clear call to action or asks for the order.

The evaluator should expect the speaker to bring it all together by restating words/phrases referred to previously or some other effective technique. The speaker should continue to demonstrate high levels of energy.

By the conclusion of the speech, it should be apparent that the speaker retained audience attention throughout the entire speech.

The speaker should always strive to meet or exceed the speech objectives.

## Evaluating the Speech Conclusion

The evaluator should make their closing comment succinct and energetic. Once again **remember your evaluation is a mini speech** and should have a clear Opening, Body and Conclusion

i.e. the conclusion *“Mr./Madam Toastmaster, welcome guests, fellow toastmasters. Susan’s transition into the close of her speech was inspired. Inspired by her saying.... This led to a conclusion that held this audience spellbound. We commend her for her creativity, preparation and delivery, and on behalf of this audience, I thank Susan for sharing this message with us this evening. Mr./Madam. Toastmaster.*

The speaker should always conclude by addressing the Toastmaster i.e. Mr./Madam Toastmaster.

- **Was the speech conclusion memorable?**
- **Did the speech have a call to action?**
- **Did the speaker bring it all together?**
- **Did the speech have an effective Opening, Body and Conclusion?**
- **Did the speaker conclude appropriately/professionally? i.e. “Mr./Madam? Toastmaster”**
- **Did the speaker meet or exceed the speech objectives?**

## Advance Preparation

While preparing notes in advance of hearing the speaker is impractical, you can prepare an outline or framework. This outline or framework is used as a tool to assist the evaluator and is essential considering the **brief time** the evaluator has to write his/her notes and prepare to deliver them.

Copy (or prepare your own outline/framework) the following outline/framework:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Speaker Name:<br>Speech Timing:<br>Speech Objective(s)                          | Speech Title:                                       |
| Other Information<br><b>Speech Opening</b>                                      |   |
| Look for Transition from Opening to Body<br><b>Speech Body</b><br>(Main Points) |   |
| -   |   |
| -   |   |
| -   |   |
| Look for Transition from Body to Conclusion<br><b>Speech Conclusion</b>         |   |
| Present the top 2 or 3 Strengths  | Present only 1 or 2 growth points                   |
| -   | -   |
| -   | -   |
| -   |   |
| Discuss other strengths with the speaker later.                                 | Discuss other growth points with the speaker later. |

“You observe a lot by watching” *Yogi Berra*

Now you are prepared to record your speaker notes.

Make copies of your outline/framework and please consider the following:

At your next Toastmaster meeting, **listen to one of the prepared speakers as if you were the evaluator.**

Using your outline/framework complete your notes on that prepared speaker.

(When listening to that speaker's evaluator, take separate notes if you think they would be useful)

Sometime in the next 48 hours, using your completed outline/framework, practice your 2-minute evaluation on your own. If you are a novice toastmaster, repeat this exercise at subsequent toastmaster meetings for a month or two. Over time, this exercise will build familiarity with the process of using the 8 1/2 X 11-paper outline/framework and the practice sessions will build confidence for your next or first formal evaluation.

### **Evaluation Workshops**

Conducting regular club evaluation workshops will help novice toastmasters prepare for their first formal evaluation and enhance the skills of the more experienced members. Some clubs are able to draw from within their club for the Evaluation Workshop Facilitator. Other clubs should ask their Area, Division or District Governors to assist them in locating a toastmaster who can help develop their members' evaluation skills.

All clubs should look towards their District Conferences and attend one or more of the high caliber workshops offered by Toastmasters International.

### **A Work in Process**

Many thanks to the individual toastmasters and the authors of Toastmaster International Magazine articles that have contributed to the development of my evaluation skills. These skills continue to be a work in process.

Like many of you, I feel that Toastmasters has given me much more than I have given it.

So my "Call to Action" is that all toastmasters continue develop and practice the challenging art of delivering empathic and effective speech evaluations, in a supportive club environment, with the sincere intention of helping every Toastmaster grow.

---

Gord Wilson, ATM,

A long time member of Toastmasters International and:  
Member of the Top of Toronto Select Speakers Club and Podium Club