

# Online Speech Contest Best Practices

2021-2022 Toastmasters Contest Cycle





**TOASTMASTERS INTERNATIONAL**  
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# Table of Contents

<b>Online contest requirement .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Overview .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Preparation and Technology .....</b>	<b>2</b>
Choose your platform and settings (contest chair) .....	2
Establish processes (contest chair and chief judge) .....	2
Conduct a judge's briefing (chief judge) .....	3
Meet with timers (contest chair) .....	4
Conduct a contestant's briefing (contest chair) .....	5
Set cameras and speaking area (contest chair) .....	6
<b>During your contest .....</b>	<b>7</b>
Share expectations (contest chair) .....	8
Have clear cues and transitions (contest chair) .....	8
Collect and count ballots (chief judge) .....	9
Conduct interviews and give awards (contest chair) .....	9
<b>After the contest .....</b>	<b>10</b>
Finish paperwork (chief judge and contest chair) .....	10
<b>Evaluation and Table Topics Speech Contests .....</b>	<b>10</b>

# Missions, Values, and Promises

## **Toastmasters International Mission**

We empower individuals to become more effective communicators and leaders.

## **District Mission**

We build new clubs and support all clubs in achieving excellence.

## **Club Mission**

We provide a supportive and positive learning experience in which members are empowered to develop communication and leadership skills, resulting in greater self-confidence and personal growth.

## **Toastmasters International Core Values**

- ▶ Integrity
- ▶ Respect
- ▶ Service
- ▶ Excellence

## **Toastmasters International Brand Promise**

Empowering individuals through personal and professional development.

This is the promise Toastmasters International makes to club members. Once we have reached this goal consistently, through all clubs across the globe, we will have achieved club excellence.

## **A Toastmaster's Promise**

As a member of Toastmasters International and my club, I promise

- ▶ To attend club meetings regularly
- ▶ To prepare all of my projects to the best of my ability, basing them on the Toastmasters education program
- ▶ To prepare for and fulfill meeting assignments
- ▶ To provide fellow members with helpful, constructive evaluations
- ▶ To help the club maintain the positive, friendly environment necessary for all members to learn and grow
- ▶ To serve my club as an officer when called upon to do so
- ▶ To treat my fellow club members and our guests with respect and courtesy
- ▶ To bring guests to club meetings so they can see the benefits Toastmasters membership offers
- ▶ To adhere to the guidelines and rules for all Toastmasters education and recognition programs
- ▶ To act within Toastmasters' core values of integrity, respect, service, and excellence during the conduct of all Toastmasters activities



# Online Contest Requirement



For the 2021-2022 speech contest cycle, the decision of the Board of Directors was that each District Executive Committee (DEC) may choose a format of either in-person or online. Each District was required to communicate their selected format to Toastmasters World Headquarters by July 31, 2021. The selected format applies to all Area, Division, and District contests.

Online contests are an exception to General Rules for all Toastmasters Speech Contests, 2. Eligibility, C., 11. which states, "Each contestant must be physically present to compete beyond the club level. Participation by audio, video, or other remote technology is not permitted beyond the club level." Other than this exception, the ***Speech Contest Rulebook*** must be followed as far as it is applicable.



## Overview

The best practices and tips outlined here will help you prepare for and conduct a successful online speech contest. While using this guide to help plan your online contest, it is critical that you also review and follow all rules outlined in the **Speech Contest Rulebook**.

If you are conducting your District-level International Speech Contest, remember that the contest must be recorded. In addition to the International Speech Contest Rules in the Speech Contest Rulebook, make sure to also review the **Video Recording Guidelines for Online Speech Contests**.



# Preparation and Technology

## Choose your platform and settings (contest chair)

- ▶ Determine how you would like to run and organize your contest, and select a platform and settings that will meet your needs.
  - For example, if you are conducting your contest via Zoom or a similar platform, you may have the choice to organize your contest as either a meeting or a webinar.
    - A meeting will allow you to create separate breakout rooms but will also mean that audience members can unmute themselves and turn on their cameras at any time.
    - A webinar does not allow for breakout rooms but will automatically keep all audience members muted with cameras off.
  - Consider the needs of your contest when selecting your platform and settings.
    - For example, breakout rooms may be helpful for a Table Topics or Evaluation Contest. However, if you have a large audience, it may be more important to ensure no one can accidentally unmute themselves during a contestant's speech.
- ▶ Test your platform and settings well in advance of your contest. You may want to set up a test call with some of your contest officials in advance. This will allow you to ensure you know what settings are available to you and can determine the best way to use each one.
  - For example, if your platform includes a chat feature, you will want to test it. Find out if the platform will let you turn chat off, and decide how and if you want to use it during your contest.
    - If you are leaving a chat feature on during the contest, ensure you know who will receive chats and that messages won't be inadvertently sent to contestant's while they are speaking.
    - If you use breakout rooms during your contest (for ballot counting, protests, or as holding

rooms), make sure that the platform keeps the communications in the breakout rooms confidential.

## Establish processes (contest chair and chief judge)

- ▶ Prior to the briefings and the contest, share tutorials for the platform with contestants, contest officials, and attendees.
- ▶ Encourage all participants to download and familiarize themselves with the platform ahead of time.
- ▶ Create a meeting moderator or technical expert position. This person is responsible for setting up the meeting and handling all of the technology. This could be your Sergeant at Arms, or you could assign someone else entirely, but make sure the person assigned to this role is comfortable with the platform you are using.
  - If you are recording your contest, ensure the meeting moderator has the capability to record and understands how recording works on your selected platform.
  - You may also consider appointing a second meeting moderator whose sole responsibility is recording the contest.
- ▶ If you choose to leave the chat function on during the contest, you may want to designate a team member to moderate that chat.
- ▶ Decide in advance what, if anything, you will show during the minute of silence. Ensure you do not include audio so as to fully respect the minute of silence.
- ▶ Consider appointing backup contest officials (judges and ballot counters) who can step in should one of your officials lose connection partway through the contest.
- ▶ Determine a process for protests in advance and be ready to share this with judges and contestants during your briefings.

- Remember that if there is a protest, you will want a way for the judges to join the counting room to confer.
- ▶ Decide how you plan to respond should a technology issue cause a contestant or official to lose connection during the contest. It is recommended that the chief judge pause the contest to provide opportunity for the contestant or official to regain connection.
  - The chief judge decides how long the contest should be paused for in the event of a technical issue.
    - The chief judge must communicate this decision to all contestants and contest officials prior to the start of the contest.
  - The chief judge is responsible for pausing the contest. Determine ahead of time how the decision to pause will be communicated.
    - It is recommended that all contest officials have a means of communicating with the chief judge. If a contest official cannot hear or see a contestant, they should contact the chief judge immediately.
  - If a contestant loses connection during the contest but is able to regain connection, they should pick up their speech at the point where they left off. The contest chair can indicate the last word or sentence that was heard so they know where they lost connection.
  - If a contest official loses connection and you have a backup official to take their place, confirm the process for communicating with the backup official that they are needed.
- ▶ Inform judges of the process for submitting the ballot.
  - All contests must use the official Judge's Guide and Ballot specific to the contest type.
    - As much as possible, maintain the standard process for speech contest results submissions.
    - Avoid using external voting systems.
- ▶ It is recommended that you hold your briefing using the same platform and settings you plan to use for your contest so that judges can ensure they are comfortable with the technology.
  - Provide some time for them to ask questions about the platform and let them know if there is anything specific they should be aware of related to settings or other features.
- ▶ In addition to the information shared in a standard judges briefing, also include the following:
  - The judging criteria remains the same; judges should adhere to the items outlined in the Judge's Guide and Ballot, just as they would in an on-premise contest.
  - For the sake of an online contest, looking at the camera is considered eye contact.
  - Judge's should not take into consideration a contestant's audio or video quality
  - Should technology issues occur to a degree that hinders the contest, the chief judge can make the decision to stop the contest and resume when the issues are resolved.
    - Let judges know the plan for responding to technology issues.
  - Tell judges how the speaking area was or will be defined during your contestant's briefing.
    - Remind judges that the limitations of the online setting mean they will likely not be able to see contestants' entire bodies and that contestants will be speaking from a limited space. Ensure they are aware that these limitations should not be counted against contestants. Judges should focus on how each contestant used the speaking area as it was defined to them.
  - Provide guidelines for how protests will be handled.

## **Conduct a judge's briefing (chief judge)**

- ▶ The judges must be briefed using a live audio and video conferencing tool via an online platform.
- ▶ Ensure contest officials receive all necessary forms in advance of the contest. Fillable versions of all speech contest forms are available on the Toastmasters International website.
  - Have judges sign and submit the Judge's Certification of Eligibility and Code of Ethics ahead of your contest. Digital signatures are accepted, and the fillable version of this form includes a digital signature field.

- ▶ Ensure judges know how to rename themselves on your selected platform and are aware of how they should rename themselves.
  - The chief judge, contest chair, timers, and contestants should rename as: role + name.
  - Judges and ballot counters should remain anonymous and will want to name themselves based on their role only. You may want to assign them a number to distinguish between officials (e.g. Judge 1, Judge 2, etc.).
  - If your platform allows participants to upload a photo, ensure all judges and ballot counters have removed their photo or replaced it with a generic image.
- ▶ Share information about how judges can communicate with the chief judge, contest chair, or meeting moderator during the contest.
  - If possible, use an instant messaging service as the primary form of communication, so that your conversations take place outside of the contest platform.
  - Ensure you have a method to share files (such as completed ballots and timing sheets) and answer questions.
  - Confirm that all contest officials and contestants have an account for whatever service you're using.
- ▶ It is recommended that you set up multiple chats on your selected messaging service:
  - Ensure that all contestants have the chief judge's information.
  - Ensure that all contest officials have the chief judge's information.
  - Create a timer chat containing both timers.
  - Ensure the timers have the chief judge's information for submitting timing sheets.
  - Ensure that all judges have the information of the ballot counters to be able to submit their ballot.
  - Create a ballot-counting chat, containing the chief judge and all ballot counters.
  - Ensure the tiebreaking judge only has contact with chief judge and remains anonymous.
  - Be prepared to create a protest chat, containing the chief judge and all voting judges, should a protest be lodged. You could also set up a

breakout room in the online meeting platform you are using. However, you will want to ensure that it can only be accessed by invitation from the meeting moderator.

## Meet with timers (contest chair)

- ▶ The timers must be briefed using a live audio and video conferencing tool via an online platform.
- ▶ Determine the method you plan to use for signaling timing during your contest.
  - If your platform allows virtual backgrounds, your signaling timer could use green, yellow, and red backgrounds to signal time.
    - **Virtual timing backgrounds** are available to download from the Toastmasters International website.
    - If using virtual backgrounds, you may want to consider having your timer cover their camera lens. This will ensure that only their background shows and their facial expressions do not become a distraction to contestants.
  - If your platform does not allow virtual backgrounds, another option is to have the timer hold up green, yellow, and red cards or paper in front of their camera at the appropriate times.
- ▶ Conduct a timer's training or similar meeting to share details of how you plan to conduct timing and signaling.
  - Ensure timers have the opportunity to practice with your selected signaling method.
  - Agree on and practice a method of communication for indicating when each minute of silence has concluded.





- ▶ Review timing procedure and have each timer select their role:
  - Timer 1 uses a stopwatch to time each speaker and is considered the official timekeeper of the contest. They report speech times on the **Time Record Sheet** and deliver this to the chief judge.
  - Timer 2 uses a stopwatch to time each speech in order to operate the signaling device. Timer 2 does not submit a Time Record Sheet.
  - If either the signaling device OR the stopwatch fails, this means the contestant receives 30 seconds extra overtime before being disqualified.
  - If either timer loses connection partway through the contest, this also means the affected contestant receives an extra 30 seconds.
- ▶ Ensure that timer 2, with the signaling device, is clearly visible to the contestants at all times.
- ▶ Review the **cues and transitions** section of this document and decide if you plan to allow an audio test for each contestants. If you plan to include an
  - ▶ audio test, let timers know and ensure they are aware of when time should begin.
- Have contestants sign and submit the **Speaker's Certification of Eligibility and Originality** ahead of your contest. Digital signatures are accepted, and the fillable version of this form includes a digital signature field.
- Run a separate eligibility check on each contestant to confirm that they are eligible to compete.
- If you are planning to record your contest, ensure contestants also sign the **Video Release Form**.
- If you are recording your District contest for region quarterfinals, also ensure all contestants sign the **Region Quarterfinals Video Release Form**.
- ▶ Cover the process for communicating with the chief judge in case they lose connection with the contest or need to lodge a protest.
- ▶ Confirm speech titles with contestants in advance of the contest.
  - Ensure contestants know how to notify the contest chair if their speech title changes before the contest.
  - Practice name and speech title pronunciation with contestants as necessary.
- ▶ Remind contestants that they will be shown on camera during the contest and should consider this in their attire and location.
  - Contestants will want to avoid busy patterns, distracting jewelry or hats, or colors that may wash them out or blend in with their background. (The contest chair will be on camera and will want to keep these guidelines in mind as well.)
- ▶ Talk through contest logistics. Review the **cues and transitions** section of this document and talk through the contest flow with contestants.
  - Ensure contestants know how to control their audio and video and are aware of cues for when to turn these on and off.
    - When the contestant is speaking, all other participants should mute their microphone and turn off their camera, except for the current speaker and the timer.
    - If you plan to allow an audio test for each contestant, make sure they are aware of this and understand when their time will start.

## Conduct a contestant's briefing (contest chair)

- ▶ Contestants must be briefed using a live audio and video conferencing tool via an online platform.
- ▶ Ahead of the briefing, ensure you are aware of any accommodations that need to be made for contestants who have a disability; speak with them privately about accommodations for things like timing signals etc.; ensure they will have the opportunity to practice with any alternate signaling methods.
- ▶ Determine a way to draw for speaking order that promotes fairness, and ensure contestants know how speaking order will be determined.
  - One option for speaking order is to use an online randomization tool.
- ▶ Ensure contests receive all necessary forms in advance of the contest. Fillable versions of all speech contest forms are available on the Toastmasters International website.

- ▶ Ensure contestants know what will be used for timing signals and how timers will be briefed.
  - Provide each contestant with an opportunity to practice with the timing signals. Ensure they can see all signals and know how to keep the timer in view.
    - For example, some platforms will allow contestants to pin the timer's video so that it remains the primary video on their screen.

## **Set cameras and speaking area (contest chair)**

During the contestant briefing, you will need to set a standard speaking area and help contestants adjust their technology. While all contestants will be speaking in their own space, using their own technology, the speaking area should be set to roughly the same size for each contestant. When setting speaking area, the goal is to maximize the view of the contestants without sacrificing audio quality.

### **To set the speaking area:**

- ▶ Have each contestant stand roughly the same distance from their camera. For example, you may want to have everyone start 3 to 5 feet from their camera.
- ▶ Have each contestant check their audio and ensure that their microphone is clearly picking up their voice from where they are standing.
  - If a contest has a limitation that prevents them from standing as far back as you direct (such as wired headphones), have all contestants step forward until everyone is roughly the same distance from their camera. This will be the main center point of their speaking area.
- ▶ Work with each contestant to ensure they know how far they can go to each side (as well as forward and back) without stepping out of frame.
  - Contestants should carefully mark their entire speaking area. You will want them to come to the contest with these marks in place, ready to speak.

If recording your District International Speech Contest, keep in mind that you will need to submit video for

region quarterfinals, and review the Video Recording Guidelines for Online Speech Contests, available [here](#).

For all online speech contests, provide each contestant with an opportunity to practice with their equipment at the contestant's briefing and work with them on any necessary adjustments.

Work with each contestant to adjust their technology, using the following guidelines:

- ▶ Camera equipment
  - Place the camera equipment eye level with the speaker, if possible.
    - For the sake of an online contest, looking at the camera is considered eye contact. (This note should be shared with all contestants.)
  - Ensure that the camera is mounted or secured to prevent movement during the speech.
    - Contestants should avoid having someone hold the camera, as this can cause unwanted movement.
- ▶ Lighting
  - Have the main source of light be from behind the webcam, if at all possible, so as to illuminate the speaker's face and body.
  - If relying on natural light, practice at the same time of day as contest will be held.
  - If the contestant's face is shadowed, have them fix a light in front of them and behind the camera, even if this means someone outside of camera view holds a cell phone with flashlight on.
  - Ensure that no light sources are pointing directly at the camera.
- ▶ Gestures/Movement
  - Have each contestant practice planned movement and gestures to ensure they will remain in frame.
- ▶ Sound
  - Have contestants set up their technology in a space that reduces echo and background noise as much as possible.
  - Test any microphone or audio options on the platform you will be using and select the one that allows for the clearest sound.

- ▶ Device
  - Recommend that contestants avoid using a mobile device, if possible.
    - If a contestant will be using a mobile device, have them practice to ensure their device is set up to capture the best possible image and that they are able to see the timer.
- ▶ Background and props
  - It is recommended that contestants do not use virtual backgrounds for an online contest.
    - Virtual backgrounds can become easily distorted, particularly when using gestures or movement, and this distortion could distract from a contestant's speech.
- If a contestant chooses to use a virtual background, this is considered to be a prop; ensure that they tell you in advance and practice with it during your briefing.
- Rather than using virtual backgrounds, it is recommended that contestants set their speaking area in front of a neutral background with limited distractions such as a blank wall. Alternatively, a sheet could be hung to eliminate distractions in the background.
- ▶ Once contestants have set their speaking area, technology, and lighting, it is recommended that they leave everything in place until after the contest.

## During Your Contest

### Share expectations (contest chair)

- ▶ Ask all participants, including audience members, to arrive early so they can set up and ensure they can see and hear the contest.
  - Your meeting moderator, contest officials, and contestants may want to arrive 45 minutes to an hour in advance to allow time for technology setup and troubleshooting.
    - Depending on the settings you are using for your contest, you may ask judges to arrive earlier than contestants so you can ensure they are re-named and fully anonymous before contestant's arrive.
    - While contestants should come with the technology setup as it was during the briefing, you will want to allow time for a quick test to ensure everyone's audio is working as expected.
  - Audience members may want to arrive 15 to 30 minutes in advance.
- ▶ Recommend that your contest officials and contestants have a primary device and a backup device, if possible.
  - For example, a hot spot on a cell phone could be used as a backup source of internet.
  - A tablet or iPad camera could be used as a backup computer and/or camera should the primary computer or camera fail.



- ▶ At the beginning of the contest, provide guidance to everyone attending on how to use the platform; be sure to point out any features that they may need to be aware of in advance.
- ▶ If you are using a meeting feature, or another setup that allows participants to unmute and turn on cameras:
  - Ensure that judges are aware their webcams need to remain off during the entire contest in order to maintain anonymity.
  - Tell audience members that they must keep their webcams turned off and microphones muted at all times.
    - Webcams can slow down internet bandwidth and distract from a clear view of contestants.
    - While verbal reactions (laughter, etc.) from audience members are often welcome in a speech contest, microphones in an online speech contest setting will also pick up distracting background noise.
    - Many platforms limit the number of participants who can speak at once and audio from an audience member's microphone could completely cut off the speaker's audio
- ▶ Ensure that the meeting moderator or another individual is able to mute attendees; place this person in charge of monitoring audience members to ensure no one unmutes during the contest.
- ▶ If you have meeting chat turned on, set expectations for how you would like this to be used. For example, you may ask that audience members only use chat to indicate technical issues and that contestants only send chats directly to the meeting moderator or chief judge.
- ▶ Before the contest begins, have the moderator ensure that all contestants and contest officials are present.

Because your contest is being held on an online platform, you will need to read the online speech contest statement at the start of your contest or include it in writing in a location that will be visible to all attendees and participants.

## Online speech contest statement

By attending this remote Area, Division, or District speech contest, you agree to the privacy policy of Toastmasters International as well as the unassociated remote hosting service. Some of your personal information, such as name, image, and any shared messages may be shared with other meeting participants and will be recorded by Toastmasters International who may use the recording in the future as it sees fit. Your remote attendance hereby discharges Toastmasters International from all claims, demands, rights, promises, damages and liabilities arising out of or in connection with the use or distribution of said video recordings, including but not limited to any claims for invasion of privacy, appropriation of likeness or defamation.

## Have clear cues and transitions (contest chair)

Your online contest can be conducted very similar to an on-premise contest. However, you will want to expect the logistics and transitions of your online contest to take longer than in an on-premise contest.

- ▶ Consider how you will transition from the contest chair to each speaker. Provide each contestant with a cue so they know when to turn on their microphone and video.
  - While contestants' technology will have been tested before the contest, you may want to consider adding a brief test for them to confirm they are unmuted and their audio is working just before their speech.
  - If you plan to include this opportunity, let the audience know what to expect.
- ▶ Introduce each contestant at the appropriate time. It is the contestant's responsibility to show up for the contest in time to compete. If a contestant does not show up for the contest, allow a reasonable amount of time for them to begin. If they do not begin, introduce the next contestant.
- ▶ After the contest chair introduces the contestant,



the contestant should enable their microphone and camera, then say, “ready,” indicating that the equipment is working.

- This does not count as the start of their time.
- The contest chair should verify the identity of the contestant, based on attendance at the contestant’s briefing.
- The contest chair can confirm that they can hear and see the contestant. The timers should be briefed that the first word or gesture following this audio check starts the contestant’s official speech time.

## **Collect and count ballots (chief judge)**

- ▶ Each judge should be ready to submit their ballot digitally via the agreed upon communication method.
  - Judges and timers should email their completed ballot to the chief judge and counters directly, or submit their ballot using an external messaging platform that allows file sharing.
  - Ensure judges know at what point in the contest they should submit their ballot.
- ▶ The official Judge’s Guide and Ballot should be used and can be submitted in two ways:
  - Complete the entire ballot, then screenshot and crop the bottom section of the ballot and only send the screenshot.
  - Complete the bottom section of the ballot and leave the scoring section blank and submit the entire file.
  - Either way, judges should keep in mind that the scores they gave each contestant should not be submitted.
- ▶ Ensure that each submitted ballot includes the judge’s signature.
  - They may use a digital signature on a fillable version of the ballot.
  - They may use a stylus on their device to sign the ballot.
  - They may sign the form and then email a legible photo of the signed form.

- They may take a photo of their signature and enter it on the ballot.
- ▶ Have all counters meet together with the chief judge to tabulate results. The chief judge can determine the method that should be used for counting.
  - You could set up a meeting separate from your contest to allow counting to take place or, if allowed by your platform, use a breakout room within the platform. Ensure that no one can enter the separate meeting room or breakout room without the approval of the meeting moderator or chief judge.

## **Conduct interviews and give awards (contest chair)**

- ▶ Contestant interviews can be conducted as they would in an on-premise contest.
  - Decide in advance if all contestants should turn their cameras on at once, or if they should do this one at a time when it is their turn to be interviewed.
- ▶ When announcing results and presenting awards, you can determine the method that works best for your contest. For example, you could:
  - Deliver first, second, and third place awards at the end of the contest.
    - You could have the meeting moderator screenshare certificates with the winning contestants’ names entered. If you choose this method, be prepared to fill time while the results are being tabulated.
  - Pause the contest and end the online meeting after the final contestant interview. Then restart the meeting and reconvene when results have been determined.

# After the contest

## Finish paperwork (chief judge and contest chair)

- ▶ Ensure that all contest officials delete digital files that include information about scoring, contest results, or judging notes.
- ▶ File any paperwork that you need to hold onto (such as contestant forms).

- ▶ For your District-level International Speech Contest, submit video including only first-place winner and their introduction to World Headquarters within one week of completing the contest.
- ▶ If you have digital certificates or other types of awards, ensure these are provided to contestants.

# Evaluation and Table Topics Speech Contests

If you are conducting an Evaluation or Table Topics contest, arrange a method for contestants to leave the main meeting to an online location where they can be monitored until it is their turn to speak.

Some online platforms will allow you to set up breakout rooms. In this instance, all contestants could be moved from the main meeting room to a breakout room. Alternatively, you could set up a separate meeting link for contestants to join; contestants would sign out of the main meeting, join the secondary meeting, and then re-join the main meeting when invited to do so. In either instance, the Sergeant at Arms should be present in the contestant room and main meeting to monitor contestants and ensure they know when to return.

- ▶ Table Topics and Evaluation Contests:
  - When contestants are invited back, they should enable their microphone and camera, then say “ready,” indicating that the equipment is working. This does not count as the start of their time.
- ▶ Make sure the contestant’s hands are visible in the frame of the camera. This will allow you to confirm that they are not using a device

- ▶ Evaluation Speech Contest:
  - Make the test speaker’s name on the platform “Test Speaker” and have them keep their camera off until they are announced by the contest chair.
- ▶ Table Topics Contest
  - Audio lag could cause the topic to be missed by the contestant, so it is recommended that it is typed privately in chat directly to the contestant, as well as read out loud.





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