

## ***Popular Misconceptions – Speech Contests***

As the International Speech Contest cycle in your district gets under way, I want to make sure you are aware of the eligibility rules for participation. Every year several contestants are disqualified for violating eligibility requirements, some even at the district level. Last year a district winner was disqualified from the regional contest. We don't want this to happen in your district, so I'd like to review a few points with you that seem to cause problems each year.

**Misconception:** To be eligible to compete, a person must have paid their April-September 2005 dues.

**Reality:** Eligibility is determined by whether the club paid its October 2004-March 2005 dues. Although April-September 2005 dues are due by April 1, 2005, clubs have a two-month "grace period" during which they can pay their dues to World Headquarters. If the club does not pay dues by May 31, 2005, the club is no longer in good standing on June 1. Until that time, the club and its members are considered in good standing and may compete in speech contests provided World Headquarters received their October 2004-March 2005 dues.

**Misconception:** New, dual and reinstated members can compete if they give their dues to the club on the day of the contest.

**Reality:** For a new, dual or reinstated member to be eligible to compete in the club contest, World Headquarters must have received their dues and membership applications before the contest is held.

**Misconception:** I've expressed interest in serving as a district officer next year but I haven't made a decision yet, so I can still compete in the contest.

**Reality:** Anyone who has expressed interest in serving as district governor, any lieutenant governor, secretary, treasurer, public relations officer, division governor or area governor, or who has agreed to serve in one of these positions, is a candidate and is not eligible to compete. As your district seeks members to fill officer positions for the 2005-06 year, it should ask every member whether they are participating in, or plan to participate in, the contest, as their candidacy would disqualify them from the contest.

**Misconception:** I'm a contestant in my club's contest and have agreed to be a judge in another area's contest. This is okay, because I'll be judging a different area's contest.

**Reality:** You could possibly be competing against the other area's winner at some point in the contest cycle. No contestant may help select his or her own competition. A member cannot be a judge at any level for a contest in which they are still competing. If you do so, you will be disqualified from the contest.

**Misconception:** Even though I've agreed to present an educational session at my district's conference in May, I can still compete in the speech contest.

**Reality:** Allowing a speech contestant who will be competing at an event during the District conference to also give a presentation at the conference compromises the

integrity of the contest by giving the contestant more exposure to the audience than other contestants who did not have this same opportunity. This exposure possibly could positively or negatively influence the audience and judges. When soliciting presenters for your district conference, first ask each person if they are planning to compete or are already competing in the speech contest, as their agreement to present at the conference will disqualify them from the contest.

**Misconception:** My club didn't send our contestant's October-March dues to World Headquarters until April, after he already won the area contest. This is okay, though, because he did pay the club on time and we just forgot to send it. He still can compete.  
**Reality:** The member's October-March dues had to be at World Headquarters before the club contest was held. The member was not in good standing at the time of the club contest and must be disqualified, even though the club made the mistake. A member must maintain eligibility at all levels of any contest. If at any level it is discovered that a contestant was ineligible to compete at any previous level, the contestant must be disqualified even if the ineligibility is not discovered until a later level and has been corrected.

We encourage your district to check all contestants' eligibility at every contest level. To confirm someone's membership, or if you have questions about eligibility requirements, please contact the Education and Club Operations Department at World Headquarters or send an e-mail to [dyosha@toastmasters.org](mailto:dyosha@toastmasters.org).

### **A Note About Judging**

Every year World Headquarters receives complaints from members about poor judging. Has this happened in your district? You can help your clubs' contests be the best possible by conducting Toastmasters International's Speech Contest Judges Training Program. The program offers practical tips for selecting a winner and addresses judging pitfalls that can stifle objectivity. Conduct the program during officer training or your conference to help your judges be the best possible. [Click here](#) to order your program through the "Online store."