

Evaluator

The Evaluator's Role

Your purpose as an evaluator is to provide honest feedback in a constructive manner to the person's efforts, using the evaluation guides provided. You are not a judge or an authority on speaking or leadership. When you evaluate, you are simply giving your own reaction to the person's speaking or leadership efforts. An evaluation is an opinion, nothing more. This opinion should mention the effect on you, what the speaker or leader did well, areas where the speaker or leader could improve, and specific recommendations for improvement.

Keep in mind that you cannot change the person's behavior or force the person to accept your ideas and suggested improvements. Nor can you demand that a speaker or leader repeat a project if you believe the person did not accomplish project objectives or otherwise did not perform well. But through your evaluation you can provide information that the speaker or leader may consider for future projects. The decision to accept your suggestions is the speaker or leader's alone.

How to Prepare

The speaker or leader has spent hours – even weeks – preparing a project. He/she deserves the best evaluation possible. The evaluation you provide should be thoughtfully prepared and presented. You will not need hours of preparation time, but you will need at least 15 minutes to do the following:

1. **Read the project.** Every project in the *Competent Communication, Advanced Communication Series*, and *Competent Leadership* manuals has a different purpose and different objectives. You will have difficulty evaluating if you are not familiar with the project and objectives. Before the club meeting, obtain the manual from the person and carefully read the project description and objectives.
2. **Read the evaluation guide for the project.** The guide explains what you should be looking for as you evaluate. It lists specific questions about the speaker or leader and provides a space in which you may write comments. This is the written evaluation you will give to the speaker or leader after the meeting. You will also use this guide as a basis for your verbal evaluation. Your evaluation need not be limited to these points, however. If you want to comment on other aspects of the person's efforts, you are welcome to do so.
3. **Talk with the speaker or leader.** This is an important yet sometimes neglected step. Your evaluation will be most helpful if you are aware of the person's general goals and of specific areas in which the person would like help and feedback. If the leader tells you, for example, that she is working on strengthening her organization skills, you may want to specifically address this in your evaluation, even though the evaluation guide does not mention it.

Your Evaluation

1. Before the club meeting begins, get the manual from the speaker or leader and familiarise yourself with the appropriate evaluation guide.
2. During the speech/presentation, listen carefully and watch closely. Don't let your mind wander or become distracted. Make notes on the evaluation guide if you want to.
3. After the speaker or leader has finished, begin preparing your evaluation. Complete the evaluation guide, but remember that you need not comment on every question. Then prepare your verbal presentation. You won't have time to cover everything. Instead, simply select two or three points which you feel are most important and elaborate on them. Be honest. If you did not like some aspect of the person's performance, do not say that you did. Mention something the person did well in addition to something which could be improved.
4. If you're giving a verbal evaluation, stand and speak when introduced. Though you may have written lengthy responses to manual evaluation questions, don't read the questions or your responses. Your verbal evaluation time is limited. Don't try to cover too much in your talk; two or three points is plenty.
5. Begin and end your evaluation with a note of encouragement or praise. Commend a successful speech or leadership assignment and describe specifically how it was successful. Don't allow the speaker or leader to remain unaware of a valuable asset such as a smile or a sense of humor. Likewise, don't permit the speaker or leader to remain ignorant of a serious fault: if it is personal, write it but don't mention it aloud. Give the speaker or leader deserved praise and tactful suggestions in the manner you would like to receive them.
6. Be specific. If the speech organization was confusing at one point, say so but clearly address what confused you and offer a suggestion for improvement. "When you were talking about the truck, I wasn't sure if you were referring to the new one or to the old one. Giving each truck an appropriate nickname and using it throughout the speech may have worked better. That would have made the references clearer to me and maybe even have added more humor." Or, "I found the evaluation helpful. But I believe that limiting the number of helpful suggestions to three instead of five would have been more manageable and less overwhelming for the speaker." If you were impressed, for example, with the speaker's description of an object, say so. "When you described that fudge cake, my mouth watered."

7. Most Toastmasters use the “sandwich” approach, where a suggestion for improvement is sandwiched between two positive comments. Make sure you open with positive comments, suggest only two or three points for improvement, followed by more positive comments, and evaluate only areas that the speaker or leader has the power to change.

8. Remember your evaluation is like a mini speech and needs a summary!

9. After the meeting, return the manual to the speaker or leader. Add another word of encouragement and answer any questions the member may have.

By giving feedback, you are personally contributing to your fellow members' improvement. Preparing and presenting evaluations is also an opportunity for you to practice your listening, critical thinking, feedback and motivation skills. And when the time comes to *receive* feedback, you'll have a better understanding of the process.