

12 Thoughts on Oral Evaluations by Kathleen O'Rourke, CC

The responsibility of the Evaluator is to make note of areas that the speaker or presenter could improve on and deliver their opinion in a supportive and encouraging manner.

Your task is not to say what was good and bad but WHY it was so and HOW the speaker can improve!

1. Your purpose as an evaluator is to help the speaker improve. Make sure you mention what they did well and avoid being overly critical.
2. "I couldn't find a recommendation for improvement" is not a phrase that should be found in any evaluation. There is always something to be found as a recommendation for improvement – even if you simply challenge the speaker to try something different in their approach. Please see the Evaluation Cheat Sheet for further reference.
3. Before evaluating: consult the speaker. Look at the objectives from the manual they are working from and ask them about their personal goals. Are they working on improving a particular skill such as body language? If so, you should try to focus on that area in your evaluation as much as possible.
4. Preparation is key – especially if it is a speech you're evaluating, read the project beforehand. Familiarise yourself with what the speaker should be doing so that you can easily identify whether or not they are doing it. For example, if the project is 'Organise Your Speech' from the Competent Communicator manual – did the speech feel organised to you?
5. Use personalised language, such as 'I felt', 'In my opinion' – because it is your opinion. Point out problems in a friendly and helpful manner.
6. Suggestions for improvement should be just that – they should point out the area for improvement AS WELL AS providing a way in which the speaker could improve. I prefer to say what I felt needed improvement, stating why I felt this needed to be improved, then stating how it could be improved. For instance: "I recommend that Jane speak a little louder, as it will give her presentations a greater level of audience impact. Jane could try opening her mouth wider and looking up rather than at the floor as this will help direct the sound around the audience more effectively".
7. Don't use the evaluation guide in the Toastmasters manual for the oral evaluation. This is designed only for a written evaluation – reading the evaluation questions then answering them makes for a boring, drawn out evaluation. An oral evaluation is different from a written one and the manual is where you provide an in-depth analysis of the speech.

8. Don't attempt to comment on every category in your oral evaluation. Restrict your comments to areas where the speaker has done especially well, or areas where you can offer specific recommendations for improvement. The evaluation guide is the place to point out weaknesses about which the speaker might be sensitive, rather than in front of the whole group. Sometimes, a recommendation for something simple like "I would have liked to see Tarzan smile when he walked on stage, as it will make him appear more approachable" is sufficient, depending on the situation and the speaker's confidence.
9. Reinforce the speaker's commitment to self-improvement. Be positive and supportive. Make the speaker feel good about their efforts. Do not use 'but' or 'however' – ie, that was good BUT – you simply negate whatever you said before the 'but'.
10. Use the 'CRC' Method – Commend, Recommend, Commend. Or the +/-/-/+ (plus-minus-minus-plus). Both methods encourage you to sandwich the negative between the positive. Starting and finishing on a positive is much more encouraging for whomever you're evaluating.
11. **Avoid the following**
 - a) The Laundry List: "I liked the body language and the vocal variety and I thought the use of the stage was good...etc". Listing things you liked about the speech without analysing the effectiveness of these techniques doesn't help anybody.
 - b) The Whitewash: "Oh you were so good I can't see any room for improvement". There is always room for improvement – I have never seen a perfect speaker and have never met a speaker for whom I couldn't find something to recommend. Perfection doesn't exist and you aren't doing the speaker any favours by avoiding this vital component of evaluations. Before saying that everything was perfect consider this: did the speaker really have perfect body language? Vocal variety? Eye Contact? Speech organisation? Use of pauses? Diction? Pitch? Tone? Pace? Volume? Word Choice? There are more categories than these that you can use to analyse their performance – don't be shy!
 - c) The Evil: "You are a terrible public speaker – don't ever try this again!" Harsh criticism of a speaker will succeed only in destroying the speaker's confidence and deterring them from wanting to subject themselves to ridicule again. You are there to evaluate the speech; not the speaker. You should refrain from being overly harsh in your evaluations and always pitch your evaluation with the confidence levels of the person you are evaluating in mind.
12. Address your evaluation in 3rd person, not 1st. Your evaluation is about discussing the effectiveness of a public speaker and the techniques they used and is of use to the entire group at your Toastmasters event or meeting. Therefore, you should address your entire audience.

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