

# The rules of the Originality Test

## (for speech contests)

In a Toastmaster Speech Contest it is a requirement that the speech is substantially original to the contestant. That means that the contestant has not used a speech produced by someone else. It means the contestant “substantially” created the speech.

These comments refer to all contests up to but NOT including an International Contest, where the rules change slightly, and are the personal view of the writer.

Comments and references here refer to Humorous Speech Contest - but these are substantially the same for all speeches. I quote/ extract from the 2010 Speech Contest Rulebook. The rulebook is available here: <http://www.toastmasters.org/rulebook>

There are several mentions of the word "original" within the rules, but I extract here those regarding what appears helpful as a definition. Other references (in the Rule book) deal with the Certificate of Originality.

To begin this investigation and to assist us in our complete understanding of the test of originality I refer to two sections of the Contest Rule Book and quote ....

*4B.*

*Contestants must prepare their own five- to seven-minute speech, which must be substantially original and certified as such in writing to the chief judge by the contestants prior to the presentation of the speeches (on Item 1183, Speaker's Certification of Eligibility and Originality). Any quoted material must be so identified during the speech presentation.*

*4C.*

*The speech must be thematic in nature (opening, body, and close), not a monologue (series of one-liners).*

### *7. Protests and Disqualifications*

*A.*

*Protests will be limited to judges and contestants. Any protest will be lodged with the chief judge and/or contest chairman prior to the announcement of the winner, and alternate(s). The contest chairman shall notify the contestant of a disqualification regarding originality or eligibility prior to that announcement before the meeting at which the contest took place is adjourned.*

*B.*

*Before a contestant can be disqualified on the basis of originality, the contestant must be given an opportunity to respond to the judges. A majority of the judges must concur in the decision to disqualify. The contest chairman can disqualify a contestant on the basis of eligibility*

Only the judges or contestant may challenge originality.

That is not to say that everyone should not understand the rules - but it is for judges and contestants ONLY to make and decide the outcome of an originality challenge, according to the rules.

## FAQs

### **Question:**

- If a contestant plays a piece of recorded music and/or sings (something created originally by someone else) during their speech, is this a breach of the originality requirement?

### **Answer:**

- No. If a piece of music or any “any other” quoted (and therefore not original to the contestant) material is used within a speech, rule 4B deals with this. The rule says, "Any quoted material must be so identified ". I would interpret that as meaning if the speaker used someone else’s material then the speaker should clearly state to the audience that s/he used "quoted material". That is what the rule says. It does NOT say - for example, if you use a "Beatles" quote that is was a “Beatles” quote - only that another person’s material was used.
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### **Question:**

- Does it make a difference if the contestant states that it was created/composed by whoever?

### **Answer:**

- No. My view, on reading the rules, is that to quote the actual composer/creator is not necessary.
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### **Question:**

- Can the Contest chair (with or without reference to the judges) disqualify a contestant on the Grounds of originality?

### **Answer:**

- No. The Rule Book says at 8B ... quote ... “The contest chairman can disqualify a contestant on the basis of eligibility”. It does not say on the basis of originality – and these two issues (eligibility and originality) are dealt with separately in the rules. Eligibility deals with issues that must be in order before the contestant delivers a speech, originality deals with issues that can only be determined after the speech is delivered.
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### **Question:**

- If there is an originality challenge – how is the decision made?

### **Answer:**

- By a majority vote of the judges. The answer lays in rule 8.B ... quote ... “A majority of the judges must concur in the decision to disqualify”.
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## And finally ...

On a wider point – it is my view the essence of the rules on originality deal with the question - was the speech original to the speaker? Did the speaker originally create it?

When reading rulebooks it is dangerous (although very tempting) to try to define the reasoning behind a rule - that can lead into all sorts of problems. What we should be clear on is what the words are and what they mean.

If there is an originality challenge - the challenged speaker has the right of response - which is not the case if guilty of over time or monologue.

And finally - this is an instance of where the Chief Judge does not have the final say. A majority of judges have the final say.

If you are a contestant – give a speech that was created and crafted by you and not someone else. If you use quotes, tell the audience it is a quote – and you should not fall foul of the originality test.

Enjoy your contests – they are a superb way to practice and to hear some of the very best in public speaking.

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Gordon Piggott 22 June 2010 Division H Governor