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## A Slugfest of Speaking Skills: Toastmasters declare Obama winner of debate

**RANCHO SANTA MARGARITA, CALIF. (February 27, 2008) –**

Representing a unique combination of the TV shows *Survivor* and *American Idol*, presidential candidates Hilary Clinton and Barack Obama duked it out in a Democratic debate that revealed the speaking skills of each. According to Toastmasters experts, “Obama won by a nose” and scored points with silence and verbal pacing.

Monday night’s debate for their party’s nomination was fought not with marked policy differences but with roundhouse punches in the form of filler words, like “ahs” and “ums” and “you knows,” and with silence wielded like a weapon. Toastmasters International asked three veteran members and public speaking experts to analyze the presentation skills of Clinton and Obama. Here’s what they found:

Ann Hastings, a past International Director of Toastmasters International, found both candidates to be “concise, well-versed and passionate.” Yet the nonpartisan trio agreed Senator Obama edged out Clinton. They cited a few key reasons:

- **Acting is reacting.** The Toastmasters agreed that Clinton appeared more defensive. Hastings says, “When challenged about their campaign criticisms of each other, Clinton, through facial expressions and tone of voice, appeared peeved and angry.” Hastings adds that Obama “appeared mature and matter of fact, defending his criticisms of Clinton by remaining calm and deliberate.”
- **It’s not what you say but what the listeners see.** Hastings says the candidates’ reaction shots—what they were doing when the other was speaking—showed Obama listening “intently and courteously.” David Brooks, Toastmasters’ 1990 World Champion of Public Speaking, says, “When Obama was speaking, Clinton appeared to glare at him with apparent disdain.”
- **Silence is golden.** Brooks says that Clinton lost big on the second question when she began her response complaining that she’s always seemed to get the first question in this series of debates. “It made her look as if she were

whining,” he explains. He adds, “Obama wisely refrained from addressing the ‘who goes first’ issue and the *Saturday Night Live* sketch [performed two nights earlier, which many people in the country hadn’t seen]. In a debate, sometimes you score points with silence.”

While Lance Miller, Toastmasters’ 2005 World Champion of Public Speaking, believes Obama won the debate based on his use of gestures and pacing of words, he offers positive points about each candidate.

“Both Senator Clinton and Senator Obama were polished, prepared and professional in their appearance and knowledge,” Miller says. “They are both excellent at handling questions in a manner that does not dwell on the answer as much as it forwards their position and message.”

“This is as much an art form as a science,” he adds, “and a necessary skill for any successful contender in the political arena.”

For information on Toastmasters International, its programs and locations, visit **[www.toastmasters.org](http://www.toastmasters.org)**.

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