

The Role of Grammarian

Many Clubs combine the role of Wordmaster and Grammarian.

Before the meeting, select the word or words of the day, try and relate words to the theme of the meeting. Choose words that members will be able to use properly in sentences. Write the word and its meaning on the board. Prepare at least one sentence as an example of how to use the word. All members should endeavour to use the word nominated as word of the evening. The other words may be allocated to specific members or the group as a whole. Throughout the meeting listen and record the members using the words AND whether they were used properly.

The role of Grammarian is not to fault-find or nit-pick. The Grammarian of the meeting helps us with one of the basic goals of Toastmasters: to express ourselves clearly and concisely. The Grammarian can be a coach to better mastery of the language.

Listen carefully for errors and good examples of grammar, pronunciation and word usage. Ask yourself:

Was the speaker's message clear and concise?

Was the language plain or elaborate?

Did the speaker use clichés or trite phrases?

Did the speaker use jargon, tautologies¹, malapropisms², spoonerisms³ or uncommon acronyms.

Learn to listen for such things. Take note of anything that strikes you as particularly clear, catchy, annoying or confusing. In particular, make note of nice turns of phrase and phrases or words that paint vivid images in the audience minds.

When called upon by the Toastmaster:

- Briefly explain the purpose of the Grammarian's role;
- Report on the instances of good, and not so good grammar, why the good was good and how the poor can be improved;
- Report the frequency and appropriateness of the use of the assigned words by members;
- Report on good choice / usage of words;
- Deliver report with humour, honesty and tact;
- Make corrections gently and offer suggestions for improvement;
- Commend as well as recommend;
- Timing of report is 2 minutes.

Note: Always be constructive and tactful since grammatical faults are often lifetime habits. If possible explain why the correct form is preferred. For example: "John, finding other ways to link your ideas will avoid the repetition of too many 'ands.' Stronger linking words will give your speaking more variety, cleaner organisation and better style'.

Perhaps you can't recognise even the most glaring of errors. Rather than avoiding the job or giving a 'whitewashed' report, take responsibility for your own learning and growth. You could ask another Toastmaster to explain some common errors to watch for. Or you could go to the library and borrow a book on grammar. Being grammarian is easy when you learn to spot some of the most common speaking errors, correct them and avoid them yourself (one hopes!)

Consider supplying the origins of the word

¹ Tautology is defined as the use of words that merely repeat elements of the meaning already conveyed, as in the sentence 'Will these supplies be adequate enough?' in place of 'Will these supplies be adequate?'

² A Malapropism is the unintentional misuse of a word by confusion with one of similar sound, especially when creating a ridiculous effect, as in 'I am not under the affluence of alcohol'

³ A Spoonerism is the switching of the initial consonants or constant clusters of a pair of words, often resulting in an amusing ambiguity of meaning, such as 'hush my brat for brush my hat'