

Table Topicsmaster

The Table Topicsmaster gives members who aren't assigned a speaking role the opportunity to speak during the meeting. The Topicsmaster challenges each member with a subject, and the speaker responds with a one- to two-minute impromptu talk.

Table Topics provides members with an opportunity to practice thinking on their feet and improve their communication skills. Respondents need to quickly organize and express their thoughts in a structured manner, but have plenty of scope to use their imagination in how to interpret and respond to the topic.

Preparation is the key to leading a successful Table Topics session:

- Several days before the meeting, check with the Toastmaster to find out if a theme meeting is scheduled. If so, prepare topics reflecting that theme.
- Confirm who the prepared speakers, evaluators and general evaluator will be so you can call on other members at the meeting to respond first. You can call on program participants (speakers last) at the end of the topics session if time allows.
- Select subjects and questions that allow speakers to offer opinions. Don't make the questions too long or complicated and make sure they don't require specialized knowledge.
- Phrase questions so the speakers clearly understand what you want them to talk about.
- If your club has two Table Topics evaluators, prepare a sheet for each evaluator before the meeting, one listing the questions for the odd numbered speakers, the other the questions for the even numbered speakers, leaving space for them to write their evaluations between each question. (If only one evaluator, list all the questions on 1-2 pages).

Remember, too, that your job is to give others a chance to speak, so keep your own comments short.

Table Topics usually begins after the prepared speech presentations, but there are variations from club to club. Ask the Toastmaster or Vice President Education if you're unsure of when your portion of the meeting begins.

When the Toastmaster introduces you, walk to the lectern and assume control of the meeting:

- Briefly state the purpose of Table Topics and mention any theme.
- If your club has a word of the day, encourage speakers to use that word in their response.

- Be certain everyone understands the maximum time they have for their response and how the timing device works (if the timer hasn't already done so).

Then begin the program:

- Give each evaluator their list of questions.
- Give each speaker a different topic or question and call on speakers at random.
- Avoid going around the room in the order in which people are sitting.
- Don't ask two people the same thing unless you specify that each must give opposing viewpoints.
- State the question briefly – then call on a respondent.
- You may wish to invite visitors and guests to participate after they have seen one or two members' responses. But let visitors know they are free to decline if they feel uncomfortable.

Watch your total time. You may need to adjust the number of questions so your segment ends on time. Even if your portion started late, try to end on time to avoid the total meeting running overtime.

After the final question:

- Invite the evaluator of the odd numbered table topics to come to the lectern and give his/her evaluation.
- Invite the evaluator of the even numbered table topics to do the same.

After the evaluations:

- Ask members to vote for best Table Topics speaker and pass their votes to the Sergeant at Arms.
- Read out the topics again and who responded to each topic as a reminder.
- Hand control of the meeting back to the Toastmaster.