

THE TABLE TOPICS MASTER

The Toastmasters program has a tradition – every member speaks at a meeting. The table topics session is that portion of the meeting which insures this tradition. The purpose of this period is to have members “think on their feet” and speak for a minute or so. The topics master prepares and issues the topics; originality is desirable as much as possible. Each speaker may be given an individual subject or a choice of subjects may be presented from which the members can draw at random.

PRIOR TO THE MEETING

- Check with the Toastmaster to find out if a theme meeting is scheduled. If so, prepare topics that carry out that theme. If no theme is scheduled, choose a wide selection of topics. Review The Toastmaster magazine and other publications for ideas. Do not repeat the previous week’s table topics ideas or items.
- Find out who the prepared speakers, evaluators, general evaluator, and Toastmaster are so you can call on the other members first. Only if time permits at the end of the table topics session should you call on program participants (speakers *last*).
- When choosing your specific questions: Select ones that will inspire the speakers to expound on them, give their opinions, etc. Don’t make the questions too long or complicated. Phrase them in such a way that the speaker clearly will know what you want them to talk about.
- Keep your comments short. Your job is to give others a chance to speak, not to give a series of mini-talks yourself.
- Remember, table topics has a twofold purpose: First, to give everyone in the room an opportunity to speak – especially those who are not on the program – and, second, to get people to learn to “think and speak on their feet.”

DURING THE MEETING

- When introduced, briefly state the purpose of the table topics session.
- Set the stage for your topics program. Keep your remarks brief but enthusiastic. If the club has a “Word of the Day,” encourage speakers to use the word in their response.
- Keep the program rolling; be certain everyone understands the maximum time they have for their response and how the timing lights work (if the timer hasn’t already done so).
- State the question briefly – then call on a respondent. This serves two purposes: First, it holds everyone’s attention – each one is thinking of a response should he or she be called on to speak; and second, it adds to the value of the impromptu element by giving everyone an opportunity to improve his or her “better listening and thinking” skills.
- Call on speakers at random. Avoid going around the room in the order in which people are sitting. Give each participant a different question. Don’t ask two people the same thing unless you ask each specifically to give the “pro” or “con” side.
- Watch your total time! Check the printed agenda for the total time allotted to table topics and adjust the number of questions to end your segment on time. Even if your portion started late, try to end on time to avoid the total meeting running overtime.
- If your club presents a “Best Table Topics Speaker” award, at the end of the table topics session ask the timer to report those eligible for the award. Then ask members to vote, and pass their votes to the Sergeant at Arms or vote counter. If the club has a table topics evaluator, ask for his or her report and then return control of the meeting to the Toastmaster.

AFTER THE MEETING

- Return the stopwatch and timing signal device to the Sergeant at Arms.
- Give the completed timer’s report to the Secretary for recording speech times in the minutes if this is done in your club.