

Topics Master

ELDER GATE TOASTMASTERS CLUB

MEETING GUIDELINES

FUNCTION: **The Topics Master is responsible for running the “table topics” session that has two objectives:**

- **It enables us to develop the skills of impromptu speaking**
- **It provides a speaking opportunity for anybody who is not otherwise included in the meeting programme.**

PREPARATION:

Prepare sufficient topics to accommodate the number of topics speakers agreed with the Toastmaster, plus a couple spare. Our planning is based on 1.5 minute topics which take approximately 2.5 minutes each including the introductions, etc. Any variation in format or timing should be agreed with the Toastmaster/EVP who will adjust the programme accordingly.

An effective table topics session is composed of questions that are answerable by all, yet present a challenge to develop an appropriate response. Ideally, they can be answered in a multitude of ways and are open to creativity, yet not too vague. A Table Topics Master doesn't (and shouldn't) necessarily stick to the traditional "ask a question, receive a reply" format. Flexibility is provided to ensure table topics sessions don't become bland, although if an important meeting or competition is at hand; the questions should be more traditional.

Questions can be relevant to issues, politics (but be careful not to offend) and current affairs; or be more personal in nature with stories, what-happens-next and dialogues. You can theme all the questions if you like, in fact some Table Topics Masters go as far as having each respondent follow on from the previous answer. For instance, a story could be built by the respondents and guided by the Table Topics Master.

When introducing table topics, the first step is to explain what table topics is for (to teach Toastmasters how to speak on their feet and give speeches without advance warning.) **you have 2 minutes for your introduction** (3 if there are guests). From there, you might want to suggest to guests that their involvement is certainly welcome however you understand perfectly if they just wish to observe. Asking them to fold their arms will help you recognise those who don't wish to partake. Timing and lighting should also be addressed, (if there are Guests; demonstrating when each warning light will switch on) and how long you would like each table topics respondent to speak for. Ideally 1.5 minutes; 1-2 minutes to qualify.

Next, to prevent confusion it is best to describe exactly how you are going to style your questions and how you would prefer Toastmasters answer them.

It is highly recommended you devise a list of people whom you wish to call on to answer questions, and place the names beside questions you feel are best suited to them. Ensure all Toastmasters who don't have a role are asked first as well as willing guests, then if you need to fill more time; move on to Toastmasters with minor roles (Grammarians, Timekeeper, etc.) and if an emergency, call on evaluators, Toastmaster of the Evening, etc. Most importantly is to avoid the Table Topics & General Evaluator, and try to leave speakers alone as they are probably busy rehearsing their speeches.

The presentation of your table topics questions is essential to avoid any confusion or doubt over the questions you are asking.

Plan where you will sit or stand when not speaking.

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AT THE MEETING:

Arrive a few minutes early and update your list of people who wish to participate in the topics session, give priority to those with no other function, then those with a minor role.

Plan where you will sit when you are not speaking.

- 1) After your introduction by the Toastmaster, make a brief “scene setting” address that should mention the purpose of topics, explain the timing and lights if there are any guests.**

Introduce the general theme of your session: maximum 2 mins, 3 if there are guests.

- 2) Call upon the topics speakers, as follows:**

**A couple of experienced speakers first
Members with no other speaking role
Willing guests (do not pressure anybody to speak)
Anybody else who wants to participate**

WARNING: Do not exceed the planned number of speakers unless time permits.

- 3) For each topics speaker:**

Be sure to read the questions loudly and clearly, paced slowly enough so your audience can ingest everything. For added anticipation, it is recommended you delegate a respondent after you have asked the question rather than at the beginning. This ensures everyone is on their toes whilst you are reading the question.

Describe the assignment (30 seconds maximum)

Call the speaker by name.

Greet the speaker - repeat their name and the Topic title

Thank the speaker on completion of their topic

- 4) On completion of the session, ask for times, summarise the speakers and their subjects and call for a vote. Thank all participants and pass control of the meeting back to the Toastmaster and return to your seat.**

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NOTES AND TIPS

- **Contrary to popular belief, Table topics is not intended as an opportunity for EVERYBODY to speak.**

In a typical club meeting, most of the attending members are already participating in the programme (12 Speaking roles, and 7 minor roles) so lack of speaking opportunities is rarely a problem.

Timing is important in a Toastmaster club and the best way to control timing in a topics session is to control the number of speakers, discuss this with the Toastmaster.

- **Subject matter is entirely the responsibility of the Topics Master but experience shows that a good overall performance is achieved in the following circumstances:**
 - i) The topic is one allowing the speakers to speak from their own experience.**
 - ii) The topics session follows a common theme allowing the less-experienced speakers some preparation time.**

Of course, some Topics Masters prefer to set “challenging” topics which generally result in excellent performances from a few speakers and dismal performances from the rest - the choice is yours.

- **“How to take the fear out of table topics” has been the subject of extensive discussion. Possibly the best way is not to choose people who don’t want to do it. There are plenty of people who enjoy table topics and it should not be seen as something to be imposed upon a reluctant speaker.**
- **When choosing speakers, DO NOT pick on the Topics Evaluator, the main Speakers, or if possible the General Evaluator.**
- **Always greet each topics speaker with a handshake and lead the applause - do the same on completion of the speech.**