

TABLE TOPICS MASTER

TOPICSMASTER TOP TIPS:

- ▶ **KEEP IT SIMPLE!**
- ▶ Sit at the front of the room
- ▶ Choose members who haven't spoken or done a role first
- ▶ Remember to explain the importance of improvisation skills
- ▶ Open the session with an experienced speaker
- ▶ Prepare up to 10 topics

"There's always some room for improvisation"

Satyajit Ray – Indian filmmaker

Table topics are an important part of the Toastmasters educational programme as they help club members and guests sharpen their impromptu speaking skills.

As table topics master you'll be in charge of facilitating the table topic part of the meeting. You'll introduce table topics speakers in turn to the stage, ask them a question to

answer, or give them a subject to speak on. In many ways, the table topics master role is "Toastmaster lite" and should be prepared adequately in advance to ensure maximum success.

WHAT WILL I LEARN?

The table topics master role will enable you to gain and practice facilitation skills. You'll additionally gain valuable stage experience that will boost your confidence in other roles or when doing speeches. As the role requires some amount of prior planning, it has similarities with the Toastmaster role and is a nice stepping stone towards doing this role at a future date.

The skills learnt in this role are useful in work situations if you're tasked with organising a meeting with multiple speakers or a workshop of some kind.

BEFORE THE MEETING

You should pick-up a theme for your table topics session a few days in advance of the meetings. Themes can be anything from holidays, to food, to family to pets. The list is endless. If you can use the same theme as the Toastmaster of the meeting picked, it's even better!

When writing table topics questions bear in mind the following:

- ▶ **Keep it short** – "What's your favourite holiday destination?" is better than "What would you think if you went on holidays to the Bahamas tomorrow?"
- ▶ **Open-ended topics are best** – Avoid questions with straight "yes" or "no" answers.
- ▶ **Keep it simple** – "Can you please repeat the question" wastes times and is a sign that speakers haven't understood it.
- ▶ **Be creative** – A little bit of randomness "image you could fly?" can make for a very energetic table topics session.

You do not have to base your table topics session on questions; some equally entertaining alternatives can lead to an amazing table topics session. They include:

- ▶ **Bag of tricks** – Fill a bag with random objects, ask speakers to pick one and make a speech about the object.
- ▶ **Place/Object/Person** – Create a list of objects, places and persons. Speakers select one of each at random and make a speech about that person, this object and this place. This can lead to very random but fun combinations like "The Prime Minister – Dover – A smartphone"

- ▶ **Coins pot** – Fill a pot with coins and each speaker has to speak about the date in which the coin was minted.
- ▶ **Random images** – Speakers pick a random image from a pack and make a speech about it.

DURING THE MEETING

Once you arrive at the meeting, start familiarising yourself with the agenda of the meeting to identify club members present who are neither speaking nor doing a role. Sit at the front as you'll be standing up from your chair a lot when the table topics session formally starts. You don't want to be walking the full length of the board room in between each topic.

Approach guests during the break & ask if they are interested in doing a table topic. If they decline, do not then direct a TT to them once the meeting recommences. There is a protocol to follow when deciding who to invite to speak. The order is:

1. Club members who aren't already on the programme – **Every member present at a meeting must speak if possible.**
2. Guests who have indicated that they're happy to do a table topics.
3. Club members that are already on the programme.

Your explanation of your role and of table topics should last no more than 2 minutes and contain some key points:

- ▶ Highlight the importance of impromptu speaking skills when in job interviews, meetings or even in day to day conversation. Table topics are about developing a sharp mind.
- ▶ Explain how the session will be run (including the timings) and mention the theme of your table topics session if applicable.
- ▶ Every speaker will be evaluated on his/her performance on stage even the guests!

Lead the applause before someone shakes your hand to take-over the stage and when speakers are finished with their topic. Introduce the table topics speakers along these lines "If you're bored of London, are you really bored of life? Michael Lynch"

Open the session with an experienced member to start it on a high note and give guests and less experienced members an idea of how to approach things.

When a speaker is delivering their topic, review your notes, thoroughly familiarise yourself with the next topic, so that you can stand on stage without notes. It makes a massive difference in how you appear on stage and when handing over from one speaker to the next. Your handovers from one speaker to the next should be as prompt as possible. Comments such as "I agree with this because ..." are a sure way to waste time.

Keep an eye on time! Typically, there'll be between 6 and 8 TT speakers in a meeting. If a meeting runs late, the number of table topics speakers might be limited to 4/5. You should under no circumstances, decide to increase the number of table topic speakers beyond 8 without prior consultation with the Toastmaster of the meeting, club President or VPE.

Once the session is over congratulate all the speakers that have taken part and hand the stage back to the Toastmaster.