

The Topics Master

The Topics Master is responsible for running the table topics session, the purpose of which is two-fold: to develop the skills of impromptu speaking and to provide 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 shown on the programme (often 6 – 10). This based on up to 2 minutes per speaker.

Any variation in format or timing should be agreed with the EVP and Toastmaster/Chairman who will adjust the programme accordingly.

At the meeting

Arrive 15 minutes before the formal start of the meeting in order to speak to members (and perhaps guests) as they arrive. Prepare a list of people wishing to participate in the topics session, giving priority to those with no other function.

When you are introduced, make a brief 'scene setting' address. If the Chairman / Toastmaster has not already done so, mention the purpose of topics but then introduce the general theme of your session - max 2 minutes.

Call upon people with experience first, before bringing other people into it so they can get the picture of what is required. Involve willing guests but do not pressure anybody to speak

For each topics speaker, introduce the speaker by name and describe the assignment. Greet the speaker, repeat the name and applaud on to the stage.

Thank and applaud the speaker on completion of their topic

Try saving the speaker's name until after describing the assignment – this is good for experienced speakers as it gives them a bigger challenge.

DO NOT exceed the planned number of speakers unless time permits and the Chairman/Toastmaster agrees.

Some Topics Masters prefer to set only 'challenging' topics which may result in excellent performances from a few speakers but frighten less confident speakers and guests so do take care.

Before the meeting, when deciding on the topics, do try to keep your explanations and instructions precise and clear. It is not necessary to announce timings as these are on the programme.

Always greet each topics speaker with a handshake and enthusiastically lead the

applause - do the same on completion of the topic.

DO NOT go over the allotted time - the best way to control timing in a topics session is firstly to keep your instructions and comments as brief and as clear as possible, and secondly to control the number of speakers

This is a creative role that is good for trying different variations on themes and it does give you a good opportunity to take control of part of the meeting.

And finally....

Straight after the meeting, please find out who the topics master will be at the following meeting and talk to them about performing the role.

Finally thank all participants and hand back to the Toastmaster.

Notes and tips

Table Topics is particularly for those who have no other opportunity to speak during the meeting.

DO NOT include the Topics Evaluator(s), but you can substitute late-comers for those on your list who already have speaking roles.

DO arrive early to speak to potential participants. (If possible, try to anticipate before the meeting whom you might encourage to participate).

Table Topics should provide a good way for newer members and less confident speakers to start gaining confidence. DO encourage and help them.

It should also provide opportunities for more experienced speakers to stretch their abilities so DO give them more demanding topics.

DO have a wide selection of topics and adjust them according to the speaker.

DO NOT impose Table Topics on a reluctant speaker

Subject matter is entirely the responsibility of the Topics Master but experience shows that a good overall performance is achieved if the topic allows the speaker to speak from his/her own experience.

The topics session follows a common theme allowing the less experienced speakers to have some preparation time