

***Think
Fast!***



Table Topics Handbook

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Table Topics

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or AmEx number ready.*

Have you ever been called upon in a meeting to give your opinion about something, only to have your mind go blank? Or even given your opinion, but it was so disorganized that the point you were trying to make was lost?

The ability to “think and speak on your feet” is an important skill that could determine how successful you are in your life. That’s why the “Table Topics” portion of the Toastmasters club meeting was developed. Table Topics provides you with the opportunity to practice thinking and speaking on your feet. Through Table Topics you learn how to present your thoughts in a clear, organized manner with a minimum of preparation. You also learn to listen constructively, and to think flexibly.

How It Works

The Table Topics portion of the club’s program takes place early in the meeting, after the business session and before the formal program. The Topicsmaster presides over the program, which usually lasts 20 or 30 minutes. The Topicsmaster announces a topic and calls on several members, one at a time, who give impromptu one- to two-minute talks on the topic. Or the Topicsmaster may assign subjects individually.

By participating in Table Topics, you become more fluent. You learn to listen carefully and to relate your remarks to what previous speakers have said. You also draw on your own experiences or knowledge on the topic in relation to the needs and interests of those present.

When You’re Topicsmaster

A Table Topics period should not take more than 30 minutes. Avoid lengthy introductions of speakers and remarks on what they say. Your task is to introduce topics and guide the discussion. Give all possible time to the members for their comments.

When planning your Table Topics program, avoid mundane subjects such as “My Most Embarrassing Moment” or “My Most Enjoyable Vacation.” Introduce stimulating, realistic, and useful topics that will generate discussion among the members participating. Take a stand on

community, national, or international issues. Be sure to coordinate your Table Topics theme with the Toastmaster of the meeting.

Plan your introduction to the Table Topics session to take less than one minute. The purpose of Table Topics is to give all members not already scheduled on the program a chance to speak, not for you to deliver a speech.

Be creative when planning your Table Topics program. Prepare for it several days before the meeting.

Provide each speaker with a topic that he or she knows something about. Try not to embarrass the speaker. Only call on guests if they agreed earlier to participate.

When the program is concluded, you may summarize the main points that have been presented, or you may evaluate the total discussion. Avoid individual evaluation. When your summation has been completed (between one and two minutes), return control of the meeting to the Toastmaster.

Set a time limit of one minute, a minute and a half, or two minutes per speaker, depending on the available time in your meeting. Be sure to enforce the time limit.

Planning the Program

Be creative when planning your Table Topics program. Prepare for it several days before the meeting; don't wait until the last minute. Following are some suggestions for programs that provide variety in many kinds of impromptu speaking, debate, and discussion.

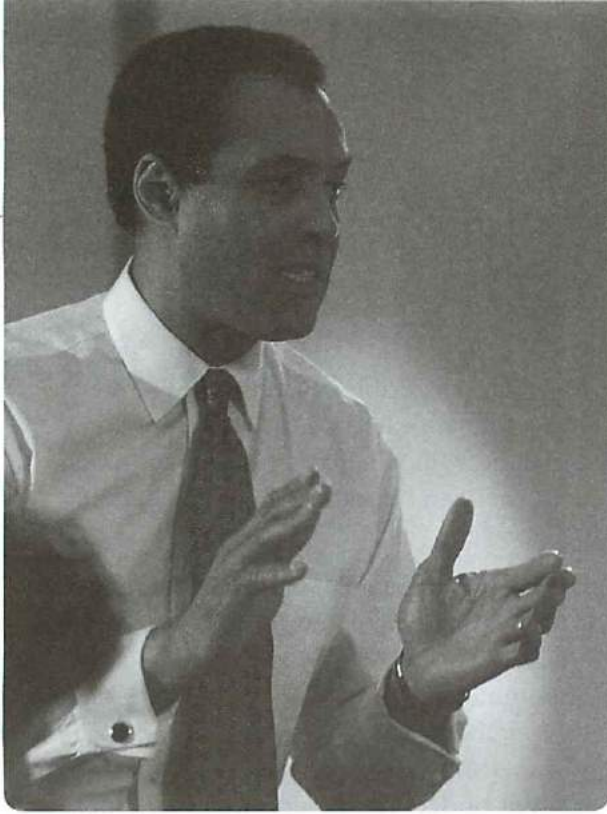
- Announce that the Table Topics discussion will be about the drive for the new hospital or local traffic control or another problem of community concern. Ask for volunteers to describe the problem, or do it yourself. After the problem has been explained, ask for possible solutions.

When all reasonable solutions are before the group, invite evaluative discussion of them. Conclude with summary remarks indicating what the membership seems to feel about the problem.

- Draw upon members' personal experience. In business and community affairs, people often are called upon to offer a few remarks without opportunity to prepare, almost always on a subject about which they are well informed. Whether the subject is taxation, or bidding a hand at bridge, the group turns to the person who knows about it because of experience.

Before the meeting, make up a list of topics suitable for those who will participate, making sure there is an appropriate topic for each speaker. Then introduce each speaker by saying something like, "We have a problem of discoloration in our city water system, and we have someone who knows more about this problem than any of us. So I'm going to call on _____ to tell us about the problem."





- Ask members to discuss items in the daily news. The news is a frequent subject of conversation and a great place to find subjects for Table Topics talks. Jot down a list of stories from the local newspaper (some of them may be humorous). Then call upon members to discuss them: "I know many of you have been reading about the automobile accident on Fourth Street. Who can tell us how it happened and perhaps suggest ways of avoiding such tragedies?"
- Hold a debate. Ask members to count off in groups of three, then declare a debate in which all the "ones" will be on the affirmative, all the "twos" on the negative, with the "threes" evaluating the quality of the debate presentations by the ones and twos with which they are grouped. You could debate topics such as, "Strikes should be outlawed" or "Drivers licenses should be automatically revoked for those convicted of drunk driving." You could make the topic different for every pair of speakers. A good discussion will develop after the debates end if you invite comments on and responses to arguments that have been presented.
- Ask participants to resolve or discuss some everyday problems people encounter, such as:
 - A competing firm has offered my assistant a modest increase in salary which I am not prepared to match. What other inducements can I offer to keep him in his job?
 - We want to build a swimming pool but we don't want neighborhood children to be using it nor do we want to offend the neighbors by refusing its use. Any suggestions?
 - My boss has just used a memorandum I prepared for him to win a big salary increase for himself. What should I do about it?
 - Our fifteen-year-old daughter wants to "go steady" because that's what all the other girls and boys her age are doing. Any solutions?
- Encourage creativity by asking members to react to imaginary situations, such as:
 - Ask members to describe a job, entirely different from their own, which they might like to have. Then have them tell why the job is appealing to them.
 - Ask members to assume that they are someone of national or international fame – preferably someone they don't like – then speak in the guise of that person to try to win friends and favor.
 - Ask members, "If you only have one year to live, what would you do?"
 - Ask, "If you were running for governor, why should people vote for you?"
 - Ask members, "If poverty were suddenly eliminated from the world, what would be the results?"
- Pair members for each of the following speech events:
 - One presents a gift with appropriate remarks, the other receives it and responds. The gift may be something like a pen or a watch, or it might be something fantastic, like Aladdin's Lamp or an honorary doctorate.
 - One bids farewell to another who is supposedly moving to a distant community, the other responds.
 - One tries to sell an object, the other raises reasonable objections.
- Build a narrative that stops abruptly, then ask each participant to continue the story. For example, you could begin, "The door of the flying saucer opened, and out of it stepped the strangest creature I had ever seen..."

When called upon to speak, keep your remarks brief and to the point.

- Conduct a general discussion of the prepared speeches. Members shouldn't try to "second guess" or evaluate the speaker, but should react to the speakers' ideas or suggest their own thoughts. Members also could suggest topics for future talks which they would like to hear.
- Bring a bowl of fortune cookies to the meeting. Have each participant select one, open it, read the fortune aloud, then discuss it.
- Ask each participant to review a movie or television show he or she has recently seen. Or ask each participant to create a television show or movie of his/her own, describing the plot and characters.

When You're the Speaker

When you're called upon to speak during the Table Topics portion of your club's program, you'll do well if you keep your remarks brief and to the point. Make sure they are appropriate to the trend of the general discussion. Try to present sensible, worthwhile ideas that add to the knowledge of others. You're welcome to refute or elaborate on ideas and information already presented by other participants.

You'll be able to talk comfortably on virtually any subject – even those about which you know little – if you have several mental outlines to follow. When you're given your topic, simply select the outline most appropriate and develop your talk. Following are some outlines you may want to remember.

1. Give your opinion, then justify it with two or three specific reasons. "The quality of education in our schools has declined in recent years. Studies show that a majority of high school

graduates read only at a sixth grade level and cannot write complete sentences or spell simple words..."

2. State a problem and show its causes. "Last year 15 people were killed in automobile accidents on a five-mile segment of Highway 25. This segment has long been dangerous because of its sharp curves and steep hills. Now new housing developments have increased traffic on the road..."
3. Offer a viewpoint – yours or someone else's – and elaborate on it. "Last week our City Council voted to prohibit smoking in all city government offices for health and productivity reasons. This action is part of a growing trend in our country..."
4. State a goal or problem, and tell what must be done to achieve that goal or solve that problem. "Our club's goal for this year will be to induct ten new members. Here's what each of us can do to help the club achieve this goal..."
5. Describe a process. "What happens when you tele-phone the volunteer fire department to report a fire? First, the fireman answering the telephone records the information..."
6. Break a problem, situation, or object into its components and discuss them. "Our national government is divided into three branches: legislative, judicial, and executive. The legislative branch consists of..."

Your Opportunity

Table Topics is your opportunity to enhance your speaking skills – to learn to meet the challenges you encounter in your everyday life. By using the ideas presented in this pamphlet, you and your club's members will obtain maximum benefits from Table Topics, and you'll have a lively, stimulating program of which the club can be proud.