

Overview of the TopicsMaster Role

The (Table) Topics Master (TTM) helps create a fun and lively atmosphere where everyone can practice speaking on the spot and responding to random questions.

It is a broad role which the TTM can inject their own style and personality in presenting the session.

By choosing interesting and varied topics, the Table Topics Master gets everyone involved, boosting their confidence and speaking skills.

This position not only helps people think quickly and express themselves better but also builds a sense of community and support among members, making it a key part of the Toastmasters experience.

It is often the only part of the meeting that guests can be included in so a well-run table-topics session can influence whether guests will return or join.

The Table Topicsmaster role is not about giving you an opportunity to speak; it is about you giving others the opportunity to speak.

Preparation

01) Claim The Role

Any member is welcome to assign themselves to the role of Table Topics using easy-speak.

If this is your first time taking the role, please submit your questions to the VP of Education (Pam Hardman) in advance to confirm you're on the right track.

02) Choose the Table-Topics Theme

It is suggested that you connect with the Toastmaster of the meeting to learn what the theme is going to be. You don't need to make the Table-Topics Theme the same as the meeting theme but it shows a courtesy to the Toastmaster if these are related. You can interpret the meeting theme creatively.

03) Consider Your Delivery

The most common deliveries of a table-topics session are:

1. **Question-First** To read out a question to the audience and to then invite a speaker to come forward to answer.

In doing this, all of the audience is brought into the question and the suspense builds until the speaker is invited to answer. This gives the speaker a little more time to consider their answer too as they get up and walk to the stage.

2. **Speaker-First** To invite the speaker to the stage first and then to read the question.

Consider novel ways to present the questions too. These could include: having the speaker pick a question out of a hat, turning over a question-card, a pass-the-parcel game etc.

04) Add Your Own Creativity (Optional)

We've had TTM's bring in props, fancy dress costumes and purpose-built slideshows to ensure their Table-Topics sessions are varied, memorable and fun.

If you'd like to be creative with your table-topics session then here are some ideas that you can take inspiration from.

- A Courtroom-theme session where the TTM dressed as a judge and called speakers up to defend themselves against a crime
- A Political-themed session with the TTM dressed as a US president inviting members of his cabinet to present their post-election policies
- A US Talk Show with the TTM dressed up as the presenter, the speakers posing as experts who field pre-written life problems from the audience

Writing Your Questions

Consider Your Audience

It's essential that you're mindful of your audience as you write these questions.

Bear the following considerations in mind:

- There may be some guests who are terrified of public speaking and some questions must be simple enough for a beginner to be able to answer.
- You'll probably know the experienced Toastmasters who enjoy being challenged and relish the opportunity to be creative. Consider adding a few questions to appeal to them.
- We have members from different countries and backgrounds so be mindful to limit any cultural references which may not be known. Don't assume that everybody is familiar with popular movies, TV shows or celebrities.
- Don't ask questions that could embarrass somebody. This might include having them respond to general knowledge questions which they might not understand.
- Don't force the speaker to respond with something personal that could make them uncomfortable. Avoid compelling them to talk about their regrets, relationships, religious beliefs or embarrassing situations. If you want to ask such a question, ensure it is phrased in a way that the speaker doesn't need to give a personal answer if they choose not to.
- Don't put speakers on the spot to invent something witty. This can add unnecessary pressure to the speaker. Instead, ask questions where a speaker can choose to add humor if they wish to.
- Avoid long complicated questions, idioms, complex philosophies or difficult words.

Ask Open-Ended Questions

Ensure your questions are open-ended so that the speaker will not be tempted to give a one-word answer.

The most common open-ended questions begin with:

What... How... Why... Describe... Explain... Tell me about ... In what ways...

Topicsmaster Guidelines

Last Updated 15th January 2025

Types of Questions

It helps to have a variety of questions to keep the audience engaged.

Questions types can include: *Serious, Easy, Emotional, Personal, Humorous* and *Silly* but you can include other types too.

Here are some examples:

Serious: *What does true hospitality mean to you, and how can it impact relationships?*

Easy: *Can you share a memorable experience you had as a guest in someone's home?*

Emotional: *Describe a time when someone showed you unexpected kindness or hospitality.*

Personal: *What is your favourite dish to serve guests, and why do you enjoy making it?*

Humorous: *If you could invite any three fictional characters to your dinner party, who would they be and what would you serve them?*

Silly: *Imagine you are hosting an alien from another planet. What would you do to make them feel welcome?*

Question-Writing Tips

- Table-Topics is scheduled to last about 30 minutes so write at least 15 questions. It may be best to write 20 questions - this will likely be more than you'll need but it gives you some flexibility on the day to choose the most appropriate questions for the speakers. It is also great to have extra questions in case the meeting is short of prepared speeches and table-topics can be extended to fill more time.
- Review each question to ensure they are short and simple to understand
- If your questions are too difficult, experienced speakers will likely ignore your question and will speak about something they'd prefer to speak about so be mindful that this could happen.
- Review each question and consider if you would also be able to answer these questions yourself within the 1-2 minute timeframe
- An easy question is usually one in which the speaker can answer from their own personal experience.

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A Warning About Using AI!!

AI services are a credible resource for creating Table-Topics Questions but it must be used with caution.

DISADVANTAGES

- Whilst AI appears to create a variety of questions, they do follow a pattern and it becomes quite obvious after a few weeks that these questions have been generated.
- TTM's who save time by using AI rarely pay attention to the specific questions that are generated and may discover too late that they aren't especially well-written
- It allows TTM's to generate questions in just a few seconds which are not well-considered and don't develop any sincere questioning skills
- It lacks a personal touch
- It will generate some low-quality questions
- It may lack the creativity of the TTM
- May not include current world data

IF YOU MUST USE AI

Here is a prompt that does a pretty good job of generating questions. Again this is not recommended but can be valuable in an emergency or to provide inspiration.

I am presenting a toastmasters table-topics competition in the UK with the theme [THEME] ... please create 20 questions to ask the participants based on this theme. Ensure that these questions are all varied with a mix of; serious, easy, emotional, personal, humorous and silly. Each competitor will need to speak about their question for 30 seconds to 2 minutes without preparation. Some members may not be native English speakers so use accessible language and avoid niche cultural references.

Before Your Table-Topics Session

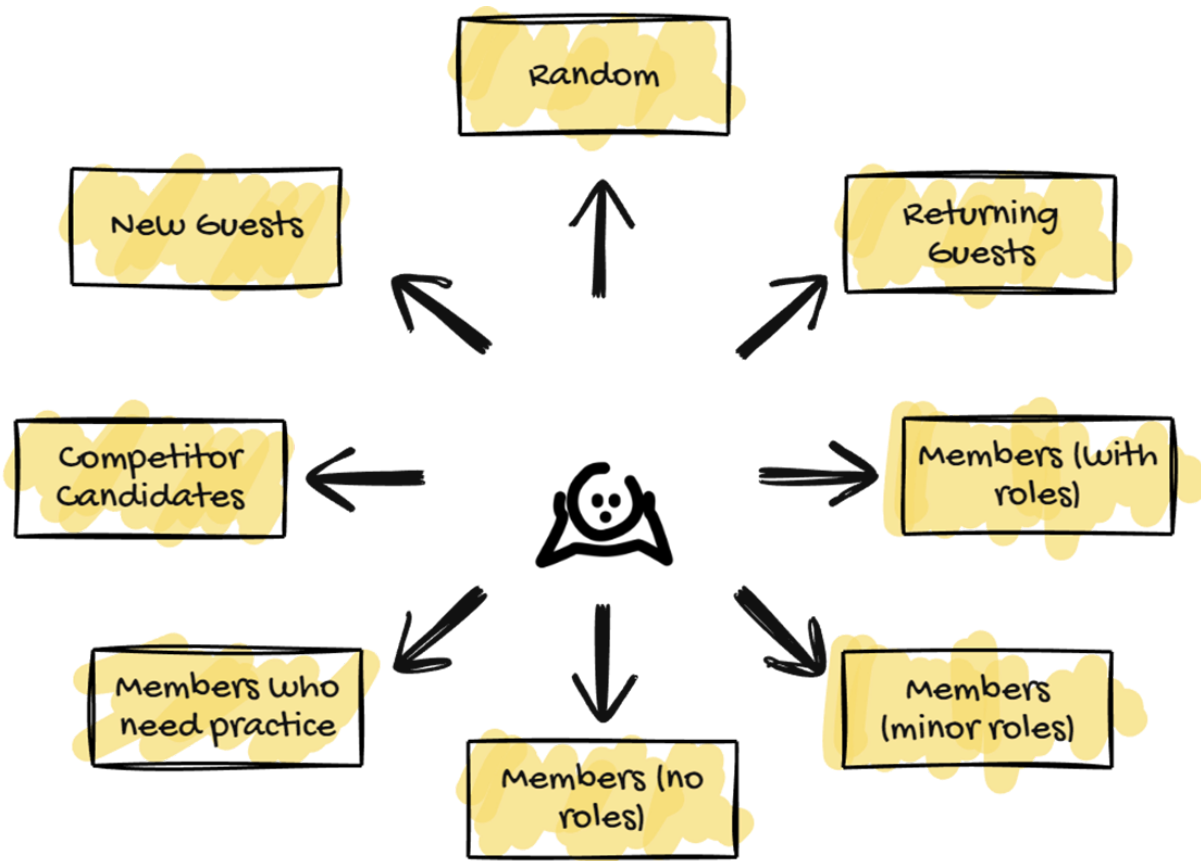
Choosing your speakers (before the meeting & during the break)

There are multiple things to consider and the TTM can use their discretion to choose who they'd like to speak.

- Write down a list of people who are happy to take a speaking role.
- It may not be possible to give everybody an opportunity to speak.

Some Toastmasters like to give guests an experience with Table-topics because it can create a great first impression of our club and it feels inclusive and welcoming. Other Toastmasters want to reward existing members for their loyalty to the club.

Make your own decision as to which speakers you wish to prioritise and ensure there's a balance between the following groups. You could also select speakers at random.



- Some people, especially new guests may be nervous about participating in table-topics. It helps to speak with them during the break to explain what table-topics is and ask if they're happy to be included. Be encouraging and reassuring but respect a guest's decision if they'd prefer to just watch.
- If a guest is reluctant to participate you can always have them watch the first few speakers and then ask them during the table-topics session if they'd like to come up.

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Share Your Questions with the Table-Topics Evaluator

Provide a printed question list to the Table Topics Evaluator. This may be helpful to them when making notes. If practical, it may also help them to have the names of each speaker in advance too.

Running Your Session

Remember that table-topics may be completely new for guests and it is necessary to explain how it runs. The word table-topics is very ambiguous so it's unlikely that guests will be able to guess how it's run.

1. Introduce Yourself, Explain the purpose of Table-Topics and the rules.

The script is based on the official Toastmasters resource and you are welcome to modify it ...

"Greetings Mr./Madam Toastmaster, fellow Toastmasters, and guests. The purpose of the Topicsmaster is to facilitate Table Topics®, where guests and members will have the opportunity to practice their impromptu speaking. I will introduce a topic and call on speakers, who will be given between 30 seconds and 2 minutes 30 to speak on the subject. When called, please come forward and, after you're asked a question, respond to the audience and not to me"

2. Call up the speaker. It's a good idea to start the session by calling up some experienced members so that guests can see an example of how to answer.
3. After asking your question, move out of the way - either behind the speaker or back with the audience. This will encourage the speaker to address the audience.
4. Thank each speaker briefly before calling on the next.
5. Once all speakers have spoken, thank them all for participating and return the stage to the toastmaster.