

Key to Table Topics  
by Gabriela R., ATM-B (June 2001)

The table topics master (TTM) plays a crucial role, and can make the difference between a successful meeting and a mediocre one. The most important duty of the TTM is to ensure that every member without an assigned speaking role and each guest has the opportunity to answer a question. The TTM plays a crucial part in keeping the meeting on schedule. And of course, another responsibility is to explain the timing, lights, and encourage use of the word of the day.

In past years, table topics masters made the following egregious errors:

1. Having too few questions prepared (I made this mistake myself the first time I was table topics master).
2. Failing to put questions to everyone without a speaking role.
3. Asking questions of people who have speaking roles, when there is not enough time for those extra questions.
4. Preparing questions for particular individuals, even though those individuals may already have a role or may be absent.

But let's leave the past behind, and look now to our current successful situation. Through extra effort and education, we have solved the problems that were threatening the well-being of our Club. We have worked hard to establish the following guidelines for TTMs.

1. Prepare plenty of questions – 20 to 25 are not too many.
2. During the early part of the meeting, prepare a list of everyone present who does not have a speaking role, and be sure to ask everyone on this list a question.
3. Have an additional list of those with speaking roles, in order of priority. If time permits more questions, those with small speaking roles should have priority for questions – e.g., the tallymaster, timer, and opener. Speech evaluators are busy preparing their evaluations during table topics, and should be the last to be selected for table topics. Also, whoever is presiding always has an important and fairly large speaking role at every meeting, even if not assigned any other role.
4. Coordinate with the Toastmaster of the meeting regarding when to end the table topics session, with the proviso that it cannot end before everyone without a speaking role has been asked a question.

As an additional safeguard, some members have become increasingly proactive in helping TTMs during the course of the meeting. Occasionally keeping lists of those without speaking roles to ensure that the TTM asks questions of them all. In summary, the role of the table topics master is critical to a meeting's success. Whether everyone without a role gets the chance to speak and whether the meeting ends on time can depend on the TTM. So, congratulations to all of you on the great progress we've made as a Club in the TTM role. Let's keep up the good work, and build on our success!