

Wordmaster/ Ah Counter/ Grammarian

I am giving a very general idea of how I see the WordMaster, Ah Counter, Grammarian task. I hope this will be useful in improving our speaking, in being the Wordmaster and in evaluating a Wordmaster's performance.

This task is often given to new members but it is not actually as easy as it seems. It is something that they can work into - starting simply and becoming more creative as time goes on. It is really three tasks and in some clubs, it is handled by more than one member.

Remember that what is said below is only my opinion. When you have this task, you will do it the way you want to see it done. When you are evaluating someone's performance of the task, you should use your own reactions and opinions.

This task is part of the evaluation of the meeting, but the General Evaluator, usually says something about the word and its introduction at the beginning of the meeting.

The word

The main point of the 'word game' is to increase our working vocabularies. Other possible reasons are to enlarge our meanings for words, especially metaphorical meanings, improve our conscious control of the words we use, improve our pronunciation, sharpen listening skills and I am sure others reasons may occur to you.

Picking a word can be a problem. It is more fun if it is in keeping with the meeting's theme. Ideally it would be only just outside or on the edge of our working oral vocabulary: a familiar word, one we would find useful, one our listeners will understand, but one that we rarely or never use or use with a very restricted range of meaning. We all differ in our vocabularies and so what is well inside one person's, may not far outside another's. Therefore we need variation in the difficulty of the target word. If you think they have

been too easy lately, pick a harder one; and if they have been too hard, pick an easier one. For example, suppose the theme is Exercise. A good easy word might be 'exertion' - it is in everyone's vocabulary but not a word we use that often. A word like 'sport' is useless because we all use it fairly often. 'Travail' would be a word that is a little on the difficult side but still a useful one. But 'palestric' is probably too far out of range to be useful. Words with a number of meanings or a wide scope of meaning are easier to work into people's speech, so a word like 'weightlifting' might be easy in one sense but very difficult to actually use in what you are saying at the time. A dictionary is essential and a thesaurus is useful in finding just the right word.

In order to help with vocabulary building, members need an introduction to the word, its pronunciation and spelling, its meanings, its normal parts of speech. Other grammatical forms, etymology, and especially examples help. This introduction to the word is given orally but it is helpful if it is given in writing someplace where members can refer to it (on a white board, poster or individual handout). For example:

STRENUOUS (adjective)

Requiring or using great effort

Energetic or not relaxing

Strenuously (adverb) Strenuousness (noun)

'Lifting the heavy box was strenuous.', 'The strenuous running had tired him.'

In the evaluation part of the meeting, the Word master reports on who has used or not used the word. A fine can be levied if wanted, although in our club it rarely is. It is helpful to have a list of people present at the meeting and tick them off as they use the word. In the introduction, you can ask the members to signal (by tapping the table) when the word is heard, if you want. If someone uses the word with the wrong meaning, pronunciation or grammar, this should be mentioned in the report. The word introduction and the word part of the report should take about a minute in total. Other elements of the report may take longer.

When you can, try to be a little creative with the word. Here are some variations that might start you thinking:

- Restrict a common word to an uncommon meaning
- Give a pair of words, often confused
- Use the opposite of the theme rather than the theme
- Say something interesting about the word (like etymology, oddities of usage, quotation etc.)
- Ask that people use it in two different meanings
- Give a mention of who used it most often
- Set a non-monetary fine or prize.

It is not always easy to use the word. First we have to remember to try. Then we want to use it correctly. Finally it should be natural in our speaking rather than appearing to have had a sentence made just for it.

Vocabulary

In the Word master's report you may take extra time and comment on the use of words during the meeting. Other clubs do this more than we do.

The task is to pick out what you consider extremely good use of words, the word or phrase that just sings. It is encouragement for us all to use words more effectively, if an evaluator notices and gives a compliment.

If you choose, you may also report on how clearly members enunciate their words, how loud or soft people speak, whether they use pet phrases (like 'really, really') too often, or any other pet peeve you may have. Pointing out mispronunciations is useful to other members.

Ah Counter

The task here is to help members eliminate the little ahs, ums, OKs, ands, sos, doubled words etc. The problem with these meaningless utterances is that we do not usually know we are making them and therefore find it difficult to stop. They are

more frequent when people are nervous or unsure of what to say. It is an advantage, therefore, for public speakers to hear and be able to control these little utterances and sound less like they are floundering.

The Ah Counter's job is to provide feedback to help members learn to control the ahs and run-ons. At the same time the Ah Counter is learning to hear the ahs. This takes concentration. The more often we concentrate on hearing the ahs of others, the easier it is to hear our own. A simple count is of some use to many members and that is a minimum report. But we can do more:

- Use the bell or the squeaky piggy to give immediate feedback (This is quite disruptive and even annoying but extremely effective - never disrupt an actual speech with this type of noise). If someone objects, do not use the bell or piggy on them.
- Concentrate on one type of utterance to make the counting easier. For example, listen only for extra 'ands' or listen only for double words.
- Give speakers clues to when during the meeting their ahs were particularly frequent. For example, a member may have been OK except for their table topics and they need to know that.
- Give an overall indication of whether the group is improving or becoming more slack.

The other side of the coin is how to control the ahs, run-ons and false starts when we are speaking. The first thing, of course, is to learn to hear them. Then we need to convince ourselves that they are not necessary - no one will interrupt us if we pause and if they do, we can handle it. And finally, we need to train ourselves to hear some silence, no matter how short, at the end of each phrase. It is also useful to train ourselves not to speak faster than the speed at which our thoughts are flowing.

Grammarian

This role is difficult. Most of us have so-so grammar when we speak and, to be honest, we don't care. If we were corrected on these 'mistakes' we would say 'how picky' 'that is the way I want to speak' or 'that is not really a mistake'. However, there are grammar mistakes that people notice and which will grate in their ears. These are the ones we want to know about. The last thing a speaker wants is to get on his audience's nerves or sound ignorant/uneducated.

So if you hear what you feel is a mistake than that is exactly what the speaker wants to know. Report it. For me, my fellow Toastmasters are actually the type of people whose standards of grammar I want to honour in my own speech.

Sometimes a grammar mistake causes discussion. The Grammarian may say that a particular usage sounded wrong but not know why, or not be familiar with the particular rule. If it sounded wrong, that is enough to open it up for discussion, even if you are unsure why.

The Toast - Tasks at a TM meeting (2) - Janet Kwasniak

Toastmasters takes its name from giving a toast.

You may want to refer to an article in Prairie Horizons Spring 2002 by Cathy Peters. It gives history, directions for the Loyal Toast, and directions.

I am going to give some advice, especially for new members on how to do the 'Toast' task. Remember that what is said below is only my opinion. When you have this task, you will do it the way you want to see it done. When you are evaluating someone's performance of the task, you should use your own reactions and opinions.

Why give a toast? It seems to me that there are two things being practiced:

- We are learning the mechanics of getting people to act and to act in unison as well as listen. Often we are not prepared to get people to sit down, move to another room, look at a particular thing and the like. Orchestrating a mass movement is a valuable public speaking skill.
- We are learning how to praise, honour or salute a person. Often we find this embarrassing and therefore do it badly. When it is done badly it belittles, rather than honours, the person. There are many occasions where being able to make personal remarks in an eloquent way are useful: toasts (including the wedding toasts), eulogies, thank-you's, verbal bouquets (such as those at retirement parties etc.), speaker introductions. And to be able to parody the style is useful for roasts.

Subject

At toastmasters meetings, the subject can be:

- anybody related to the theme of the meeting. So for example, if the theme is Mother's Day, you might toast mothers, grandmothers, foster parents, our families, pediatricians or a host of similar subjects.
- anybody being honoured with a day or week. So if it is Secretaries week, then secretaries is an appropriate subject.
- Anybody who has been prominent in the news that day or the previous day. Examples, a prominent person who has just died, a person who did a heroic deed, a grand prize winner.

Remember that if you pick a subject other than 'on theme', you should make clear why you feel this is a somewhat exceptional case. The default is the theme, but it would feel odd to rise and toast someone of general interest when everyone is 'buzzing' about something very important.

The subject should be human or quasi-human: a person, a group of people, an organization, a type of person, a profession. This can be stretched to animals (say pets), fictitious people (Mickey Mouse), personified attributes (Courage with a capital C). My rule of thumb is, can I, at least metaphorically, look the subject in the eye and see its personality? If you are stretching the envelope, you should make clear why you feel this is a 'human-like' subject.

The subject should be worthy of praise!

The Intro

This is a mini speech (opening, body, conclusion) in which you do some or all of:

- Relate the subject to the theme (or their 'day' or the news)
- Give information about the subject
- State why the subject should be honoured
- Give a personal connection to the subject (or a group connection or emotional response)

The praise should be genuine and unreserved, so overcome any embarrassment you may feel at giving straightforward bouquets. The audience should know, at the end of the toast, why they are standing to honour the subject.

Aim for about a minute and a half. You may just speak seriously about your subject, but, depending on the subject, you may also use humour, play-acting, quotes, pictures or the like.

If you are asked to do a toast in special circumstances such as give a Royal Toast or a toast at some military dinners etc., you should ask about the protocol. There are do's and don't's in these special toasts and they vary from country to country. Rather than be wrong, ask someone responsible for protocol in the situation.

The Sip

If you are going to get everyone to rise together, say the 'to' phrase in unison, take a sip (real or imaginary), and sit down together, you have to give people the appropriate clues. When you want the group to stand, say something like "Please stand and...", "Rise with me and ...", "Stand and...". The next thing is to give the phrase to be used in the toast: "...drink to mothers", "...raise your glasses to mothers", "...let us toast mothers", "... to mothers".

The important thing is to give clear instructions with good timing so that you and the group can all stand together, hold out their glasses and say the phrase. They will be looking to you for the lead so be deliberate in your movements and speak loudly. What could be heard easily in a quiet room is difficult when everyone is pushing back chairs and standing up.

Another important thing is to keep the phrase (the toast), clear, short, easy to pronounce, easy to remember. Suppose you have been talking about mothers who help with activities at school and you have mentioned chaperoning on trips, cooking for fund raisers and a number of other activities. If you ask people to toast "mothers who chaperone, bake, and generally help at school", people will make a hash of the toast. You can tell when this is happening by the pause, the nervous looks for who is going to be brave and start, the low volume, the trailing off at the end, etc. If you ask people to toast "mothers that help" or "volunteer parents", there will not be the same problems. Do not ask people to toast names that are unfamiliar, long or difficult to pronounce. Instead you can substitute something like "the winning goalie", "the Poet Laureate", "the President of Tanzania".

Do not add anything after the toast, just sit down with everyone else.

Timing - Tasks at a TM meeting (3) - Janet Kwasniak

I am going to give some advice, especially for new members on how to do the 'Timing' task. Remember that what is said below is only my opinion. When you have this task, you will do it the way you want to see it done.

Why do we time our meetings? Estimating time is another public speaking skill. Every conference planner is afraid of the person who was asked to make a 20 minute presentation and is still speaking after 45 minutes. When planning a speech, you will need to know how much material to assemble for 7 minutes. Having a good idea of how long it will take to say a particular thing is a skill that can be learned just like other aspects of communication. But it does take frequent feedback and that is the timer's job.

The timing report is part of the evaluation part of the meeting and it is practically never evaluated itself. So new members have heard very little guidance on how to do this task well.

Timing

It is a good idea to test the lights and stop watch before the meeting starts. Have a pen, paper and agenda. Note the start time.

The most important timing is of formal speeches. You will receive directions for when to show the green, amber and red lights during the speaker's introduction. If you do not get instructions, then interrupt before the speech starts and ask when the lights are required. You will also get instructions from the Table Topics Master on how to show the lights for the speakers. You may also be asked to stop a Table Topics speaker at some time point by beginning to clap. This forced end to a Table Topic speech is the only time that a speaker is interrupted in the normal course of meetings. These speakers, formal and table topics, will want to know their times to the second.

The rest of the meeting can be timed to the second, but this may be difficult and unnecessary. If the time is longer than 4 or 5 minutes and the item is not a formal speech, rounding to the nearest 10 seconds has ample accuracy. This is especially true for the Toastmaster and General Evaluator. They have many stops and starts so that they cannot actually be timed accurately, to the second, in any case. It is easier at the end of the meeting if the bits of time have been added as you go along. Otherwise, there will be a rush to add up the totals. If you wish to time the Toastmaster with accuracy, it is probably better to separate categories of speaking and time them separately (introduction of theme, intro of speaker, bridging etc.).

Unless you feel that some improvement is required, the grand total is all that is needed for the round table. You are free to time each speaker if you wish and feel you want to comment on the times.

Anything that happens after your report is given does not need to be timed.

Reporting

Simply report the starting time and the time taken for each item.

Some comments on the timing can be helpful to the group. The list of times is limited material and can be somewhat boring to deliver. You can enliven the report with small remarks. Note down any ideas during the meeting. You are part of the evaluating team and therefore it is perfectly in order to comment. For example:

- Praise near perfect timing of a format speech or table topics presentation.
- Complain about late starts.
- Comment on tasks done way too quickly or too slowly.
- Assess how well the Toastmaster managed the time.

Each meeting is different in its time requirements. If there is no format speech and few members in attendance, the Toastmaster will encourage speakers to take their time. If a long speech is scheduled and a slot for a business discussion is going to happen at the end of the meeting, the Toastmaster will hurry the meeting along. In general, the smaller tasks (toast, inspiration, joke, word) should use 1.5 minutes on average. About .5 minutes is normal for each person in the round table. 2-3 minutes is needed for a speech evaluation. The Toastmaster should hand over to the General Evaluator with at least 15 minutes left to the meeting for just evaluation. These 'rules of thumb' should not be taken literally; it will depend on the meeting. If the meeting starts and ends on time, gets all its business done, never seems to be hurried or dragging - then it has been perfectly timed.

The Inspiration - Tasks at a TM meeting (4) - Janet Kwasniak

I am going to give some advice, especially for new members on how to do the 'Inspiration' task. Remember that what is said below is only my opinion. When you have this task, you will do it the way you want to see it done.

Why give an inspiration at meetings? We are practicing the ability to speak seriously. Toastmaster meetings used to have a prayer, benediction or grace but more recently most clubs have dropped a formal prayer because it can make some members feel excluded. None the less, in other contexts, we may want to lead a prayer or simply say something that is touching, inspiring or deep. Some people find speaking seriously to be an embarrassment and they learn to be able to do this task without resorting to humour or other ways of lightening the sombre nature of the inspiration. Evaluate an inspiration on its relation to the theme, its beauty, and the mood generated by its message and delivery.

Finding material

This is not always easy. It should be related to the meeting theme.

A good way to solve this problem is to use a quote. In fact the task is often called, the inspirational quotation. These can be found in books of quotes, indexed by subject. There are a number of books of small uplifting stores such as the Chicken Soup series, books of poetry, collections of tales with a moral, publications like the Readers Digest and countless other sources of quotes. You are aiming at 1-2 mins and your quote is unlikely to be exactly that length. An introduction that relates the quote to the theme or explains your personal connection to the quote will help round out the little speech. The quote can be abridged if it is too long.

Alternatively, you may formulate your own short speech without a quote. This is not 'second best' if done well.

The speech

The aim is to be eloquent and say something of weight. The beauty of the language is part of the inspiring nature of the mini speech. This item is often read even when it is not literally a quote. Care is needed to read without stumbling or losing the eloquence of the words.

It is effective to ask people to envision a situation, to remember a person, to sit in silence with their eyes closed meditating, to view a picture shown to the group, to make a resolution. These devices, and others like them, add to the uplifting nature of the presentation.

A good voice with volume and pace adds to the eloquence.

Not only do we usually not chap after an inspiration, if it is really inspiring, we probably would not want to chap. You simply sit down when finished.

The Toastmaster & Chairman - Tasks at a TM meeting (5) - Janet Kwasniak

I am going to give some advice, especially for new members on how to do the 'Toastmaster' task. Remember that what is said below is only my opinion. When you have this task, you will do it the way you want to see it done.

In our club because of the shortness of the meeting, we do not have both a Chairperson and a Toastmaster/mistress. This is common with smaller clubs. In some other clubs the meeting is divided into 3 sections: the Chairman introduces various duties and the theme, the Toastmaster introduces the formal speeches and Table Topics, the General Evaluator introduces the evaluation team and does a general evaluation. When duties are combined there are only 2 sections.

The learning experiences in being Toastmaster are many: planning a meeting, creating an agenda, conducting a meeting, controlling time, introducing others, bridging between items, lead clapping, dealing with unforeseen disruptions, setting the mood and theme of a meeting, insuring that the needs of others are considered. If you are Toastmaster then quite simply - it is your meeting and you are responsible for it going well.

Evaluating the Toastmaster is difficult. You will probably have to limit your remarks to: a description of the overall mood and success of the meeting, a word of advice on a single aspect that could have been better, and a word of praise on a single aspect that was very well done. For many new members this is not enough feedback and so there mentor and other experienced Toastmasters should offer to make private evaluations in more depth.

Preparation

You will have to do the following:

- Make sure that you have people able to attend and to do each task. This can usually be done with e-mails. When you have manned all the tasks prepare an agenda. Copy the agenda at the last moment for distribution at the meeting. You may have to make alternative arrangements if people are unsure of attending, which will come into effect only if there is a no-show.
- Gather information on the theme. You may change the theme if you want but give others plenty of notice because they are also gathering information. I usually start with twice the information I think I need and collect information that I think the others will not. You do not want to steal someone's thunder by saying exactly what they intended to say. You want extra material in case you have to fill in time or fill in for one of the tasks at the last minute. If you want you can use quotes and pictures on your agenda, and also, you may decorate the room with objects and pictures. You may bring food or activities related to the theme. Use the information you have gathered to plan your introductions and where possible prepare for bridging remarks. Try to have fresh, interesting and entertaining information - lot of little bits of it.
- Get details of any speech: title, timing, manual #, speaker's instructions on introducing the speech and the speaker's bio.
- Look at the timing of the meeting. If you have no speakers (and therefore no intro or speech evaluation), you can have a leisurely meeting. If you have a long speech or two speeches, you will need to hurry the meeting along or even leave out something. Let people know what you need for timing.
- Do not be late for the meeting. Distribute the agenda and make any arrangements you want to the room. Notice before the meeting starts if there is an unexpected visitor that may need time to speak (such as an Area Governor). Find out if there is a long business session needed at the end of the meeting. Communicate with the Sergeant at Arms on when you are ready to start.

The Theme

You will welcome people, make any corrections to the agenda and then introduce the theme. Occasionally people get a bit boring when introducing the theme - this is not a class lecture. Relate it to personal experience, relate it to current events, talk about different meaning/aspects. The length depends on the meeting but even if you have time, you may want to split up your talking and have part of it later in the meeting. I have seen people dress up, sing, do a show and tell, as well as just talk.

Use the theme to set the question for the Round Table. The question should be easy for people with very different starting points and experience to speak on. Try to use the theme in your introductions and bridging as well as simply introducing it.

Agenda Items

The order of items is up to you and you may add and subtract items. What is usual in our club is the following items in this order: S-at-A opening, Theme intro, Word, Round Table, Toast, Inspiration, Joke, Formal Speech, Table Topics, General Evaluator (to do evaluation, Speech Evaluation, Word Report, Timing Report), Remarks by guests if they wish, Business Meeting if needed (including review of next meeting), Gavel to end. You may add items if you like. Some that have been used in our club are: a quiz, an educational presentation, a second Round Table, a polling of members on a question. The meeting should start at 12:05 and end at 1:00.

Bridging is simply moving smoothly from one thing to the next. So the idea is to say something related to the previous item, say something related to the theme and connected to the first remark, say something related to the next item and connected to the middle remark. If the theme was Driving then an example might be: " Thanks for that toast, Beverley, to Professional Drivers, and racing right along in our driving tour today, lets think about where we would be without cars --- probably on horse back. Lets see what aspect of driving our Jokemaster, James, has found to entertain us with." A bridge can take a sentence or a minute. Thank-yous, Intros and bridges should flow one into another without appearing abrupt or forced. If there are guests or new members you may want to add into the bridging mix, a short what-why-how of the task to be done. This helps orientate new people to what is happening. However, this can be a bore, if it is always done with approximately the same words so find way to vary it, and make it interesting, and work it smoothly into the bridging. Although you can prepare for it ahead, much of the speaking that is done by the

Toastmaster is off-the-cuff; it is extemporaneous speaking to fit everything together and deal with the unexpected.

You need also to lead in the clapping before and after each item. The exceptions are that we usually do not clap after the Inspiration or after each and every Round Table mini speech. The Timer or Table Topics Master will lead the clapping for Table Topics participants

Formal Speech Introductions

Formal speeches are not expected to be on theme. Do not use the theme to bridge them unless it is extremely natural. The speech needs: the name of the speaker, info on the speaker, the manual and #, objectives of the speech (usually the speech evaluator is invited to read them), timing instructions to the Timer for green, amber and red lights, any information that the audience needs as a context of the speech (such as “you are reporters at a press conference”), the title of the speech, a welcome and clapping until the speaker is at the podium, a hand shake and sitting down.

When the speech is over, you need to lead clapping, shake the speakers hand and take back the podium. You should thank the speaker. Avoid making remarks that might be made by an evaluator. “I really enjoyed that speech” is OK, but “I really enjoyed how well you used your voice” may interfere with what the evaluator wants to say.

The Podium

The podium should not be left empty (or shared for any length of time either). If it is, the meeting suddenly appears directionless. It is customary in Toastmasters to shake hands when the podium is passed from one person to another. The Toastmaster has the option of having people speak with where they are around the table or come to the podium. In our club it is usual for only the S-at-A, Toastmaster, General Evaluator, formal Speakers and Table Topics Master to use the podium. It is handy to have somewhere to sit, nearby, when others are at the podium. Try not to hover and if you have to stand near, use body language to make clear that you do not think you are ‘at the podium’.

It is the person at the podium that should handle disruptions unless it is obvious that someone else is taking care of it.

To set the tone of the meeting, the Toastmaster, at the podium, can use their smiles, enthusiasm, politeness, naturalness, helpfulness etc. This can have a great effect on the attendees, especially guests. The Toastmaster has to stay flexible and on top of events throughout the meeting.

The Joke - Tasks at a TM meeting (6) - Janet Kwasniak

I am going to give some advice, especially for new members on how to do the 'Inspiration' task. Remember that what is said below is only my opinion. When you have this task, you will do it the way you want to see it done.

It is pleasant to have a stock of funny stories - ones that are really funny and acceptable in any company. It is valuable to be able to make people laugh to put them at their ease.

It is fairly easy to evaluate a humorous presentation - was it on theme, was it in good taste, and most importantly, was it funny?

Finding material

Besides remembering jokes you hear, there are many sites on the Web that have jokes and other humorous material indexed by subject. It is often possible to find a number of good jokes but none that are on the theme of the meeting. In this case it is necessary to find a way to stretch the joke and the theme to overlap. For example, if the theme is vacations and you have a joke about driving, you could use the idea of traveling to a camp site as the context for the joke. Changing the joke a bit can also allow you to recycle an old joke. Besides actual jokes, the Web often has lists and other humorous ideas. Some people feel more comfortable starting with a funny list they can read out rather than a joke.

Groups that are not threatened can take jokes about them, groups that are nervous about their safety tell jokes about themselves among themselves but are hurt by outsiders telling the same jokes, groups that are currently threatened do not find jokes about them funny at all. You will probably want to think about whether your joke will hurt or shock others before telling it.

Delivery

If at all possible, never read a joke! The same joke can be hilarious when told and unfunny when read. If you have problem with the delivery without reading then use material that is meant to be read (humorous material that is not an actual joke) or use very short jokes - one-liners. The more you use your voice, speaking in a funny way or extra loud; the more you move and wave your arms around, the better the joke will work. A dead pan delivery is effective but much more difficult than an active one. If there are little smiles or tiny laughs on the way to the punch line (including you yourself looking or sounding somewhat ridiculous) then the final laugh will be stronger. The punch line must be loud enough to be clearly heard. If someone misses it, they have missed the whole joke and there is no way to repair the damage. The timing of the punch line is also important but I have never heard a good description of how to time a joke. It is something you learn if you practice and watch the audience. People often read humorous material or tell a joke too quickly. Give the audience time to get it. Hopefully, you will be able to sit down during the laughter.

The Table Topics Master - Tasks at a TM meeting (7) - Janet Kwasniak

I am going to give some advice, especially for new members on how to do the 'Table Topics' task. Remember that what is said below is only my opinion. When you have this task, you will do it the way you want to see it done.

Table Topics develops the ability to speak without preparation, on any subject. It allows us to practice dealing with disruptions and estimating short periods of time. Setting the topics is an outlet for experimentation and creative innovation. Table topics master gives new members time at the podium before they are Toastmaster or General Evaluator. It gives more experienced members scope for variation and fun.

The Table Topics Master can be evaluated on their directions, how much their topics produced good mini speeches, and their creativity.

Topics

A topic can be any question, situation or direction that gives the speaker a framework for a mini speech. It can be humorous or serious, trivial or important, real or imaginary. It is easier for the participant if the topic is not too vague and open-ended on the one hand, or too restrictive on the other. The topics need to be related to the meeting theme and it is nice to have them form a set, related to one another. Often the Table Topic Master invents or adapts a type of parlour game and this can result in a very entertaining session. Examples are:

- Participants asked to describe a picture or object that the audience cannot see.
- Participants asked to direct audience to draw or do a particular thing using only words - hands behind back
- Stage a debate
- Create a story with each speaker adding some of the story
- Play a true or false game where all but one speaker is to lie
- Give participants characters and have them do play acting

Topics may be given in a number of ways. The way it is done in competitions and most clubs is that the participant is invited to the podium, the question is read to them and they are expected to begin speaking after a deep breath. A more difficult way is to give the question to the audience and then name the participant to stand and begin speaking immediately. A less difficult way is to type the question on a slip of paper and allow the participant peek at it a minute or so before they must speak.

The Session

The Table Topics Master needs to:

- Explain Table Topics. This is one task that is usually introduced with a short explanation of the what-why-how of Table Topics. Depending on how many new members or guests are present, all tasks may be explained. But even when this is not the case, Table Topics is used as an opportunity to practice this skill.
- Give timing directions to the Timer. This is usually green, amber and red light times and a time to begin clapping whether the speaker has finished or not. The time is usually between 1 and 3 minutes depending on the meeting.
- Say whether heckling is allowed. It is well to mention the type of heckling that you are encouraging.
- Remind speakers that a mini speech still is meant to have an opening, body and conclusion.
- Give the participants directions on when to open their question or look in their bag/envelop etc. If you are staging a complicated game, these directions can be quite complex and need to be carefully done. It is best to distribute objects and paper before the session starts.
- Start off each participant; lead clapping after each and thank them.

The General Evaluator - Tasks at a TM meeting (8) - Janet Kwasniak

I am going to give some advice, especially for new members on how to do the 'General Evaluator' task. Remember that what is said below is only my opinion. When you have this task, you will do it the way you want to see it done.

The General Evaluator conducts a portion of the meeting, introduces the other members in the evaluation team (speech evaluators, word master, timer, and quiz master if there is one), evaluates the meeting as a whole and the Toastmaster's performance, evaluates the smaller tasks (word, toast, inspiration, joke, table topics and table topic speeches).

Nature of Evaluation

Everyone who speaks at a meeting needs to know how their performance was heard and received. The logic applies to formal speeches and to other contributions: in order to improve members dare to behave in new ways - understanding how the new behaviour has worked gives the member confidence to further modify their behaviour - they dare again and so one performance at a time they develop their skills. Thus evaluation is key to advancing communication and leadership skills. The evaluation must be given in a way that strengthens the member's self-esteem and confidence because this is essential for daring to experiment with behaviour. It must also be useful and honest. For example, give tips on how to improve rather than just a remark that some aspect could be improved - be useful rather than critical - positive rather than negative. Leave the person with a feeling that they succeeded this time and that they can do better in specific ways next time, so that they look forward to the next time. An evaluation is your opinion and that should be clear in the language you use. "I like it when ..." rather than "the correct way is..." for example. It's just your opinion but it is your chance to give your opinion and your opportunity to help others.

In the time available, it is not possible to comment on everything you may have seen and heard during the meeting. I have found that a good method is to have a form or series of questions and to make notes during the meeting on the form. Underline or circle the notes that seem the most important for each participant. Have the form in front of you when you do your report. If you have a number of things you could say about a particular task, pick the aspect for which you have the most useful suggestion for improvement or the aspect that you can most usefully identify as a model for the other members to copy. Remember that everyone learns from an evaluation, not just the person being evaluated, so where possible make your remarks valid and useful to others too.

The Evaluation Part of the Meeting

This part of the meeting consists of your report and the reports of the other people on the evaluation team. The following items are usual.

- The general impression of the meeting. "This was a very educational meeting", "Well, we had fun today".
- Evaluation the room setup, greeting, attendance, starting time, Toastmaster introduction, agenda, name tags or an other logistical aspects of the meeting.
- Evaluation of the Toastmaster, in some detail, concentrating on the handling of the meeting. The meeting, up to that point, has been the Toastmaster's responsibility so what you say about the meeting as a whole is part of the evaluation of the Toastmaster but the Toastmaster also needs feedback on their presentation of the theme, introductions, bridging and the like. Note if the Toastmaster handled disruptions and unusual circumstances well.
- Evaluation of the word and introduction of the Wordmaster to give his report.
- Evaluation of the Toast, Inspiration and Joke.
- Introduction of the Speech Evaluator (do not steal his thunder by commenting on the speech before the Speech Evaluator). After the speech evaluation you may or may not comment on the speech or the evaluation. You may want to make some occasion of a milestone achieved by the speaker with the speech.
- Evaluation of the Toast Topics Masters performance and the mini speeches of each of the participants. Briefly evaluate any speech that did not have a Speech Evaluator assigned to it such as an educational presentation.
- If there is a quiz, this would be the place to introduce the Quiz Master.
- Introduction the Timer for his report. If you want to make observation about timing, do it after the Timer report in case the Timer wants to say something in the same vein.
- Return to your original remarks about the meeting as a whole.
- Make any appeals to the members for a change in the way the meeting is done. For example "Let try and wear our name tags" or "Let try and be as brief with our round table next time as we were today". This is your chance to have input on how the meetings will be run in future. If you have time and if it would be useful, you may want to lead a short discussion on a particular point.
- Return the meeting to the Toastmaster.

The total report is usually about 15 minutes long, but be prepared to take longer or shorter depending on when you are called. There is likely to be some business after your report so it is important not to use all the time left. If an Area Governor or someone else is present and they want to speak to the group, leave time for them as well. They should not be evaluated even if they speak before your report.