

TABLE TOPICS UNLIMITED

Handout #1

Introduction

The use of variety in table topics programs is the key to ensuring Club meetings begin in a sparkling fashion. Table topics need to be stimulating, interesting, provocative, pleasurable and different.

The two key points a Topic Master should aim to achieve are realism and variety. The Topic Master should seek realistically for topics that will bring out the best of thinking and speaking by the members. He or she should also seek out fresh approaches and new ideas that will make the table topics session exciting and challenging.

Wherever possible the table topics session should have an overall theme, a cohesive objective or a uniformity of style. This will make the session an entity in which members can readily perceive their own possible participation. This then leads to better performance.

Here are many such types of table topics sessions. All of them are different to the standard question and answer routine on items such as current affairs. Instead, each is intended as a theme that can be built into a complete topics session.

1. Following Instructions

Place a card on the lectern with a simple picture or word on it. The speaker has to describe the object, without using gestures or naming it, for everyone to draw on a piece of paper.

2. Reading Aloud

Speakers are asked to read a selection in an impromptu manner. The session can use selections from instructional material, poems, books, magazines and newspapers.

3. Telephone Topics

Use a telephone handset or mobile phone.

- a. Speakers to be asked to carry on a conversation with an imaginary person to explain a situation, sell a product, etc.
- b. Using two telephones, conversations can be arranged between two speakers.

4. "Man-In-The-Street" Interviews

Use a portable cassette/video recorder to conduct "man in the street" interviews. The interviews can be played back after the meeting. Alternatively, conduct interviews as members arrive at the meeting and play them back during topic session.

5. Ceremonial Occasions

Use pairs of speakers for events, e.g. one speaker presents a gift and then a second responds or one says goodbye to a member moving interstate who then responds.

6. Noah's Ark

Noah's Ark is about to embark and there is room for only one more pair of animals. Each speaker is given the name of an animal on paper and has to make a case for why that animal should take up the last spot without mentioning the name of the animal. The audience is to guess the animal.

7. Improvisation Skits

Use pairs of speakers. One speaker plays the role of a particular person. The second speaker has another role and is given a piece of paper defining the task that he has. The audience and first speaker do not know the task. e.g. First speaker is Editor of a local paper. The second speaker must persuade him to publish an article about Toastmasters.

8. TV Talk-Show Interviews

Use pairs of speakers sitting in chairs at front of the room. One speaker is the Host of a TV show. The other speaker is introduced in a role and has to be interviewed. The session is best when all interviews have a common theme, e.g. Use "Guinness Book of Records" and introduce each "guest" as the holder of a particular world record.

9. Wedding

Nominate participants such as mother of the bride, father of the bridegroom, best friend of both, teacher, grandmother, next door neighbour, brother, sister, bride, groom and former boyfriend.

10. Impromptu Murders

Each speaker is given one line and has to weave a story from it. e.g. "Gasping for breath and holding her throat, the maid stumbled into the drawing room ...". A useful website for ideas is <http://www.thestorystarter.com/>

11. Weird Words

The speaker has to explain what a weird word from the dictionary might mean. A useful website is <http://phrontistery.info/k.html>

12. Miming Topics

Use pairs of speakers. One speaker is asked to pretend he has lost his voice. He is given a piece of paper with a note asking him to convey a message or obtain information from the 2nd speaker.

13. Scents

Small plastic containers containing cotton wool soaked in a scent are given to each speaker who has to say what memories the scent evokes. e.g. antiseptic, coffee, brandy.

14. Court Room Trial

The Three Bears V Goldilocks, who is accused of breaking and entering, wanton destruction of property and thievery (porridge).

15. Dear Abby

Give speakers a "Dear Abby" question to answer. e.g. "Dear Abby, I need your help. My husband who is very good to me will not take his turn cooking a meal. I am sick and tired of always cooking the evening meal. How can I persuade him to take a turn occasionally?" . A useful website is <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/linkset/2005/03/25/LI2005032502583.html> Other examples can be found in the "Ask a Guru" page of the Saturday SMH "Good Weekend".

16. Mystery

Announce that one of the members has had jewellery stolen from the second floor bedroom of their mansion. Ask each to defend themselves by nominating roles to play e.g. the gardener.

17. Soap Box Oratory

Two people talk at once on opposite sides of the room for the pros and cons of a topic, the object being to get the audience to listen to them. Match pairs of similar vocal strength.

18. Miming Activity

Put 4 people in a line at the front of the room, all facing away from you. Ask the first to turn and show them an action written on a card (showing the card to the audience too). The first person then demonstrates it to the next in line, etc until the 4th person who must guess what the action is. e.g. "Dig a hole and plant a rose bush".

19. Valentines Day Theme

Select pairs of people who may or may not be in love. Each lover to make a declaration of love as they present a red rose to their partner, e.g. Couple celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary.

20. How To

One member explains "how to" do something, another provides the gestures, e.g. How to change a baby's nappy.

21. Yellow Pages

Have each speaker choose an ad at random from the Yellow Pages and convince everyone that they must buy something from them or use their service.

Further Ideas

See "Think Fast", the TI Table Topics publication (Code 1315) and the Table Topics section of "Patterns in Programming" (Code 1314) for many other different ideas for presenting Table Topics. In Toastmasters, ingenuity in developing new Table Topics ideas is encouraged. There are also many websites with good material for topics which can be found by searching through Google on "table topics".

Websites with good material for topics include:

www.d70toastmasters.org

www.cu-talkin.com

<http://members.iinet.net.au/~astech/ttopics.html>

<http://www.johnsleigh.com.au/tabletopics2.htm>