

# Meeting Roles



The success of a Toastmasters meeting depends on the program participants. There are many roles to fill, and each job is designed to improve the members' public speaking and leadership skills. Program participants must know and understand their duties so they can prepare for them.

## Toastmaster



The Toastmaster is a meeting's director and host. You won't usually be assigned this role until you are thoroughly familiar with the club and its procedures. If your club's customs vary from those described here, ask your mentor or the club vice president education (VPE) for pointers well before the meeting.

Begin preparing for your role several days in advance. You'll need to know who will fill the other meeting roles and if a theme is planned for the meeting. You'll also need an up-to-date meeting agenda. Get this information from your VPE.

As the Toastmaster, you'll introduce each speaker. If a speaker will not write his or her own introduction, you will prepare it. Introductions must be brief and carefully planned. Contact speakers several days before the meeting to ask about:

- Manual and project title
- Assignment objectives – ask the speech evaluator to read them out
- Speech topic and title (maybe additional information about the speech)
- Name of the speaker (maybe additional information about the speaker)

You need all of these elements to create your introductions. Remember to keep the introductions between 30-60 seconds in length.

Of course, you want to avoid awkward interruptions or gaps in meeting flow so your last preparation step before the meeting is to plan remarks you can use to make smooth transitions from one portion of the program to another. You may not need them, but you should be prepared for the possibility of awkward periods of silence.

On meeting day, show up early. You'll need time to make sure the stage is set for a successful meeting. To start, check with each speaker as they arrive to see if they have made any last-minute changes to their speeches – such as changing the title.

You and the speakers will need quick and easy access to the lectern. Direct the speakers to sit near the front of the room and make sure they leave a seat open for you near the front.

When it's time to start the program, the club president calls the meeting to order. Sometimes he or she will make announcements, introduce guests or conduct other club business before introducing you.

When you're introduced, the president will wait until you arrive at the lectern before being seated. (This is why you should sit at the front of the room.)

Pay attention to the time. You are responsible for beginning and ending the meeting on time. You may have to adjust the schedule during the meeting to accomplish this. Make sure each meeting segment adheres to the schedule.

- At the beginning of the session explain the Toastmasters' educational program for the benefit of guests and new members before you move forward with the introductions
- Introduce the Topicsmaster as you would any speaker. Remain standing near the lectern after your introduction until the speaker has assumed control of the lectern, then be seated.
- Introduce the general evaluator as you would any speaker. Remain standing near the lectern after your introduction until the speaker has assumed control of the lectern, then be seated. The general evaluator will introduce the other members of the evaluation team.

After the Table Topics session has concluded, most clubs begin the speaking program. Introduce each speaker in turn.

You will lead the applause before and after the Table Topics session, each speaker and the general evaluator. When each presenter has finished, you return to the lectern so the speaker can be seated and you can begin your next introduction.

Briefly reintroduce the general evaluator.

After the evaluation session is ended, present trophies or ribbons as practiced by your club.

Return control to the club president.

Serving as Toastmaster is an excellent way to practice many valuable skills as you strive to make the meeting one of the club's best. Preparation is key to your success.

## Topicsmaster



With TABLE TOPICS™, the Topicsmaster gives members who aren't assigned a speaking role the opportunity to speak during the meeting. The Topicsmaster challenges each member with a subject, and the speaker responds with a one- to two-minute impromptu talk.

Some people underestimate the Topicsmaster role's importance. Not only does it provide you with an opportunity to practice planning, preparation, organization, time management and facilitation skills; your preparation and topic selection help train members to quickly organize and express their thoughts in an impromptu setting.

Preparation is the key to leading a successful Table Topics session:

- Confirm who the prepared speakers, evaluators and general evaluator will be so you can call on other members at the meeting to respond first.
- Select subjects and questions that allow speakers to offer opinions. Don't make the questions too long or complicated and make sure they don't require specialized knowledge.
- Phrase questions so the speakers clearly understand what you want them to talk about.

Remember, too, that your job is to give others a chance to speak, so keep your own comments short.

Table Topics usually begins after the prepared speech presentations.

When the Toastmaster introduces you, walk to the lectern and assume control of the meeting:

- Briefly state the purpose of Table Topics and mention any theme.
- If your club has a word of the day, encourage speakers to use that word in their response.
- Be certain everyone understands the maximum time they have for their response and how the timing device works (if the timer hasn't already done so).

Then begin the program:

- Give each speaker a different topic or question and call on speakers at random.

- Avoid going around the room in the order in which people are sitting.
- Don't ask two people the same thing unless you specify that each must give opposing viewpoints.
- State the question briefly – then call on a respondent.
- You may wish to invite visitors and guests to participate after they have seen one or two members' responses. But let visitors know they are free to decline if they feel uncomfortable.

Watch your total time. You may need to adjust the number of questions so your segment ends on time. Even if your portion started late, try to end on time to avoid the total meeting running overtime.

If your club presents a best Table Topics speaker award:

- Ask members to vote for best Table Topics speaker and pass their votes to the sergeant at arms or vote counter.

Then return control of the meeting to the Toastmaster.

## General Evaluator



If you think of a club meeting as a project, then you can see the general evaluator as a kind of project manager. As GE, your responsibilities include:

- Ensuring the speech and leadership project evaluators know their responsibilities
- Supervising the timer, grammarian and Ah-Counter
- Evaluating everything that takes place during the club meeting
- Making sure each activity is performed correctly

You should also develop a checklist to follow during the meeting so you don't have to keep all the details in your head.

You'll also need to contact members serving as:

- Timer
- Grammarian
- Ah-Counter
- Individual evaluators

Remind them of their assignments, and brief evaluators on their responsibilities, the members they will evaluate and the evaluation format to use. Make sure the evaluators understand that evaluation is a positive, helping act that enables fellow Toastmasters to develop their skills. Point out that an evaluation should enhance the speaker's self-esteem and encourage evaluators to prepare thoroughly for their role. Recommend that they call the member they've been assigned to evaluate to discuss specific project objectives.

Your final task *before* the meeting is to prepare a brief verbal explanation detailing:

- The purpose, techniques and benefits of evaluation so guests and new members will better understand the function of evaluations.
- How evaluation is a positive experience designed to help people overcome flaws and reinforce good habits in their presentations.

On meeting day:

- Arrive early.
- Make sure all evaluators are present and that they have the appropriate speaker or leader's manual.
- If an evaluator is absent, consult with the vice president education and arrange for a substitute.
- Ask each evaluator if he or she has any questions about the project objectives to be evaluated, verify each speaker's time and notify the timer if there are any changes.

- Take your seat near the back of the room. This will ensure you have a good view of the meeting and all its participants.

During the meeting, use your checklist and take notes on everything that happens (or doesn't, but should). For example: Is the club's property (e.g. trophies, banner, educational material) properly displayed? Were there unnecessary distractions that could have been avoided? Did the meeting, and each segment of it, begin and end on time?

Study each participant on the program, from the person giving the invocation or thought for the day to the last report by the timer. Look for good and less than desirable examples of preparation, organization, delivery, enthusiasm, observation and general performance of duties. When it's time to begin the evaluation portion of the meeting, the Toastmaster will introduce you, again. This time, you'll go to the lectern and introduce each evaluator. After each recitation, thank the evaluator for his or her efforts.

Finally, give your general evaluation of the meeting (time: 2-3 minutes):

- Use your checklist and the notes you took during the meeting.
- Phrase your evaluation so it is helpful, encouraging and motivates club members to implement the suggestions.
- You may wish to comment on the quality of evaluations. Were they positive, upbeat, helpful? Did they point the way to improvement?
- When you've completed your evaluation, return control of the meeting to the Toastmaster.

Being general evaluator is a big responsibility and it is integral to the success of every single club member. People join Toastmasters because they have a goal – they want to learn something. The club is where they learn. If the learning environment isn't focused and fun, members won't learn what they joined to learn. Your observations and suggestions help ensure the club is meeting the goals and needs of each member.

And what do *you* get out of the deal? You get the chance to practice and improve your skills in critical thinking, planning, preparation and organization, time management, motivation and team building!

## Evaluator



People join Toastmasters to improve their **speaking and leadership skills**, and these skills are improved with the help of evaluations. Members complete projects in the **Competent Communication and Competent Leadership manuals** and you may be asked to evaluate their work. At some point, everyone is asked to participate by providing an evaluation. You will provide both **verbal and written evaluations for speakers** using the guide in the manual.

**Evaluation requires careful preparation** if the speaker or leader is to benefit. Study the project objectives as well as the evaluation guide in the manual. Remember, the purpose of evaluation is to **help people develop their speaking or leadership skills in various situations**. By actively listening, providing reinforcement for their strengths and gently offering useful advice, you motivate members to work hard and improve. When you show the way to improvement, you've opened the door to strengthening their ability.

When you arrive at the meeting, retrieve the manual from the speaker or leader and ask one last time if he or she has any specific goals in mind.

Record your impressions in the manual, along with your answers to the evaluation questions. Be as objective as possible. Remember that good evaluations may give new life to discouraged members and poor evaluations may dishearten members who tried their best. Always provide specific methods for improving and present them in a positive manner.

For your verbal evaluation, stand and speak when introduced. Your verbal evaluation time is limited to 2-3 minutes. Don't try to cover too much in your talk; two or three points is plenty.

Begin and end your evaluation with a note of encouragement or praise. Commend a successful speech or leadership assignment and describe specifically how it was successful. Don't allow the speaker or leader to remain unaware of a valuable asset such as a smile or a sense of humor. Likewise, don't permit the speaker or leader to remain ignorant of a serious fault: if it is personal, write it but don't mention it aloud.

After the meeting, return the manual to the speaker or leader. Add another word of encouragement and answer any questions the member may have.

By giving feedback, you are personally contributing to your fellow members' improvement. Preparing and presenting evaluations is also an opportunity for you to practice your listening, critical thinking, feedback and motivation skills. And when the time comes to *receive* feedback, you'll have a better understanding of the process.



## Grammarian



### Before the Meeting

One benefit of Toastmasters is that it helps people improve their grammar and word use. Being grammarian also provides an exercise in expanding listening skills. You have several responsibilities: to introduce new words to members, to comment on language usage during the course of the meeting, and to provide examples of eloquence.

Before the meeting prepare a brief explanation of the duties of the grammarian for the benefit of the guests.

### At the Meeting

Before the meeting begins, get a blank piece of paper and pen ready to make notes.

When introduced Briefly explain the role of the grammarian.

Throughout the meeting, listen to everyone's word usage. Write down any awkward use or misuse of the language (incomplete sentences, sentences that change direction in midstream, incorrect grammar or malapropisms) with a note of who erred. For example, point out if someone used a singular verb with a plural subject. "One in five children wear glasses" should be "one in five children wears glasses." Note when a pronoun is misused. "No one in the choir sings better than her" should be "No one in the choir sings better than she."

When called on by the general evaluator during the evaluation segment:

- Stand by your chair and give your report (time: 3-4 minutes)
- Briefly explain the role of the grammarian
- Try to offer the correct usage in every instance of misuse (instead of merely announcing that something was wrong).
- Report on creative language usage and announce who used the word of the day (or a derivative of it) correctly or incorrectly.

## Timer

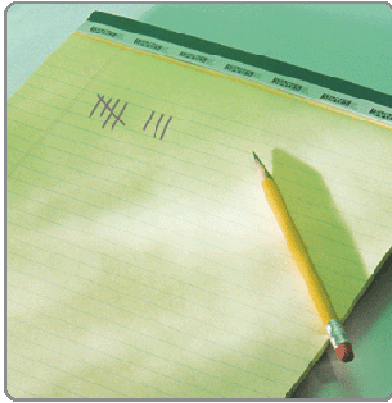


One of the skills Toastmasters practice is expressing a thought within a specific time. As timer you are responsible for monitoring time for each meeting segment and each speaker. You'll also operate the timing signal, indicating to each speaker how long he or she has been talking. Serving as timer is an excellent opportunity to practice giving instructions and time management – something we do every day.

Here's how to succeed as timer:

- At the beginning of the meeting confirm which members are scheduled program participants and make sure you know how much time will be allowed for their speech or report.
- On meeting day, retrieve the timing equipment from the sergeant at arms. Be sure you understand how to operate the stopwatch and signal device, make certain the timing equipment works and sit where the signal device can be seen by all.
- The Toastmaster of the meeting will usually call on you to explain the timing rules and demonstrate the signal device.
- Throughout the meeting, listen carefully to each program participant and signal them. Generally, Table Topics speakers should be +/- 15 seconds of allowed time; prepared speakers must be +/- 30 seconds. However, these times may vary from club to club. In addition, signal the chairman, Toastmaster and Topicsmaster with red when they have reached their allotted or agreed-upon time. Record each participant's name and time used.
- The Toastmaster of the meeting will usually call on you to explain the timing rules and demonstrate the signal device.
- When you're called to report by the Toastmaster or general evaluator, briefly explain the timing rules and announce the speaker's name and the time taken. After the meeting, return the stopwatch and timing signal device to the sergeant at arms (time for your report: 2-3 minutes)
- Take on this role and the new habits formed will serve you well in your private life and your career. People appreciate a speaker, friend or employee who is mindful of time frames and deadlines.

## Ah-Counter



The purpose of the Ah-Counter is to note any word or sound used as a crutch by anyone who speaks during the meeting. Words may be inappropriate interjections, such as *and*, *well*, *but*, *so* and *you know*. Sounds may be *ah*, *um* or *er*. You should also note when a speaker repeats a word or phrase such as “I, I” or “This means, this means.” These words and sounds can be annoying to listeners. The Ah-Counter role is an excellent opportunity to practice your listening skills.

Before the meeting prepare a brief explanation of the duties of the Ah-Counter for the benefit of guests.

When you arrive at the meeting, bring a pen and blank piece of paper for notes. Throughout the meeting, listen to everyone for sounds and long pauses used as fillers and not as a necessary part of sentence structure. Write down how many filler sounds or words each person used during all portions of the meeting.

When you’re called on by the general evaluator during the evaluation segment, stand by your chair, briefly explain the role of the Ah-Counter and give your report (time: 2-3 minutes)