

Win It by Winging It

Table Topics for the Tentatively Timorous

Table Topics – when your turn comes, how will you go? The thought strikes fear into the heart of many. It needn't though if you follow some basic rules and take every opportunity to practice. Confidence in impromptu speaking will help you gain confidence in all areas of public speaking.

These notes are prepared with the Table Topics Contest in mind, but are relevant to Table Topics in club meetings and impromptu speaking generally.

Begin with the End in Mind (Stephen Covey)

To win this competition you are going to need to win the most points without getting yourself disqualified. The contest judges (there are three) use judging forms, a copy of which is attached to these notes. Read these and understand what the judges are going to look for, because that's what you need to deliver. Note the overall allocation of points;

Content 55%
Delivery 30%
Language 15%

As a general rule of thumb, if you don't have to struggle to deliver the content, you will feel more comfortable and thus give a better delivery.

Thumbnail of the Rules and General Lay of the Land

The Contest Chairman will bring along a **topic**. Each speaker is given the same topic. Competitors who have not spoken will be out of the room until their turn to speak comes round. This is similar to the Evaluation Contest procedure. Usually the topics are a selection from current affairs, motivational topics or generalities. Random examples from previous competitions;

- My biggest disappointment
- There is plenty of room at the top
- "There's nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so....." Shakespeare
- Mothers Day is thinly disguised commercialism.
- I know that I have succeeded when.....
- See:-

http://www.northrise-toastmasters.org/members/resourcenotes/50_Ideas_TT.htm

The topic will not be one that requires detailed knowledge but will be one that makes it possible for you to express an opinion or draw a conclusion.

The speech length is two minutes with lights at 1 minute (green) one and a half minutes (yellow) and a final light (red) at two minutes. Speeches for than a minute or more than 2 minutes 30 seconds will be disqualified. Interjections aren't mentioned in the rules.

What on Earth Will I talk About?

Until the contest comes, nobody knows. But there are some ground rules that make it easier.

“Politics is perhaps the only profession for which no **preparation** is thought necessary”.
Robert Louis Stephenson

Starting today it would be useful if you did some of the following;

- read the papers and watched/heard some news.
- developed a resource base of attitudes on current affairs
- read some motivational material
- listen to talk back radio
- revisit some of the areas of life where you do have expertise

The fear of the unknown can slow you down and confidence in yourself and your mastery of some subjects is a great confidence builder.

If you are not in the habit of using **Affirmations, Visualisation and stress relief techniques**, today would be a good time to start.

“Luck is what happens when **preparation** meets opportunity” Seneca

Basic Speech Strategies

There are many approaches you can adopt or adapt to your purposes. Study them thoroughly before hand so that you are aware of them all and thus have all your options open. They include;

- Who, what, why, when & how
- I'm glad to be given this subject because
- Isolate on word from or segment of the topic and focus primarily on that
- Role-plays - how you think it might have happened or should have happened or will happen.
- Past ,Present, Future
- Take a strong stand – come out strongly on your soapbox – truth isn't a requisite.
- This subject is overrated or people have this all out of perspective because.....
- Use stories and anecdotes from your experience, they are not only good illustrations but also personal experience is usually a comfortable place to speak from.

How Do I Keep Going Without Drying Up?

Try using tactics such as;

- Lateral thinking – Word association, opposite, subordinate, extreme, provocative, leapfrog.
- Borrow from an earlier speaker's material and argue for or against (not relevant to contests of course).
- Use pausation to think, what seems like a year to you is a nanosecond to your audience.
- Creative Statistics including credit to the source (also invented)
- Tell an outrageous lie and then show why it is outrageous.
- **ADVANCE & EXPAND** technique. Advance your storyline, pause and elaborate/expand on the point you've arrived at by describing it more fully, then resume advancing to the next expansion point.

Only if you are desperate would you ask your audience to participate as they might well take over your speech for you. It happens.

It usually takes more than three weeks to prepare a good impromptu speech - Mark Twain

Do I Have To Be Funny?

Not at all. Sometimes it helps but if you have selected a dead serious subject then humour would not help your cause probably. If you choose to use humour it obviously must fit the context of your speech content.

Do I Have To Stick To The Subject?

In a club meeting almost anything goes. The name of the game is to merely survive on your feet for a couple of minutes. Table Topic contests differ in that more attention is paid to relevance to the subject. However, **if your speech is entertaining and a little off topic your chances are still good**. If you review the Judge's Guide you will see that speaking to the subject is not specifically mentioned. However, it is usually implied.

If you chose to speak about your first school dance and discuss entertainingly, the preparations for the dance, the ride to the dance, the ride home, your parents' reaction to your late return etc. etc., then you will likely be acceptably close to relevant. Yet this sort of flexibility is sufficiently lateral to give you tons of scope.

Back to Basics

Don't forget that the impromptu speech has to follow all the usual basic guidelines concerning body language/gestures, eye contact, vocal variety and volume, pitch, pace and structure. And if this your first impromptu then your chances of

remembering all that aren't that great. Don't worry about it, just give it your best shot.

Structure of all of those items, is the only really useful one for new speakers. Remember to have a **strong opening and close**

A bold firm start will help give you confidence and will tell your audience where you are taking them. A good ending will wrap up your speech tidily, perhaps tie back to your opening, and perhaps summarise. It also means you don't shuffle off with a whimper, rather than a bang..

Have Faith!

Preparation helps dispel doubt and fear of the unknown. Walking onto the contest floor cold is not the easiest approach to take, but each to his or her own.

Have faith that if you have a resource of information, your subconscious can access this when needed. Have faith that your affirmations and visualisations will work for you when you put them to the test.

FEAR is <u>not</u>	Forget Everything And Run.
FEAR is <u>s</u>	False Evidence Appearing Real

Always Be Evaluating (ABE)

One way to improve your performance is to model the techniques of successful speakers. The Toastmaster approach to evaluating most things is a useful habit to adopt even when you aren't scheduled to give a formal evaluation. Assess every delivery you see and work out what's good and what's bad, what you like and don't like and see what you can usefully take on board to develop your own delivery skills.