

Table Topics Torture Tips!
District 55 Fall 2013 Conference Education Session
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For the Table Topics Speaker:

Before a potential impromptu talk, including when you have no other roles at a TM meeting, relax and open your mind! Pay attention to your surroundings. BEFORE THE TOPIC IS GIVEN, you can contemplate how to integrate your contextual surroundings into the talk (i.e., the Word of the Day, a further play on the Joke of the Day, a particularly dirty floor, piggybacking on your environment, a previous prepared speech or preceding topic.) Adding current context to your topic shows “cognitive complexity” and is a sure winner!

During your topic talk, ENJOY the attention and opportunity to get creative! Years ago, when I got my scuba certification, I had a great attitude and enjoyed the process. I saw a woman in another class buck and kick with her gear on in 3 feet of water out of sheer fear. Her perception of the process was looking into the claustrophobic untrusting confines of her facemask. My perspective of scuba diving was (and is) an exciting, world-opening opportunity! When speaking extemporaneously, think and look “outside” to your audience, what they want and need to hear, how you can entertain them. If you only look “within”, you are more likely to become paranoid, self-conscious, and less likely to really connect with your audience. Remember, they want you to succeed too, they are your friends!!!

During your talk, get vivid and describe! Paint a colorful picture (adjectives kid!) to your audience- the scenery, smells, noises, characters quirks and plot twists. Just have fun playing with creatively flowing thoughts and powerfully placed words! Oh yeah, alliteration and onomatopoeia (bees buzzing) always add a fun kick too.

At the end of your topic talk, do not thank your audience. They will thank you with their applause.

Three types of questions asked- Current events, personal or “twisted”.

Three ways to answer-

- Oreo method- Use the same prepared opening/closing with your creative answer in the middle. “Madam Topic Master, I’m so very glad you asked me that question; I was actually pondering it yesterday in a boring staff meeting...”
- Double Stuffed- Open with a question, give a few examples and close by repeating the question.
- 3-Way Stop- Use the time tested, simple structure of an opening, body and conclusion. But have a goal with your table topic and your conclusion: just like prepared speeches, your goal should be to entertain, inform, persuade or motivate us!

Four styles of answers-

- Direct Hit- you know the answer and can peg it!
- By-pass- you don’t know much about the topic, but can transition or compare it to a related story.
- Word Association- Purposefully mis-understand the topicmaster by using a malaprop, a sound-alike word to transition to an unrelated topic.

- **Sharp Right Turn-** If you don't have a clue how to answer the question, you can change the subject. For example, in a business meeting, your boss asks your opinion on the outcome of the local mayor's race on your company. If you are clueless, you can state "I am not that familiar with the nuances of the candidates platforms, but I would like to share another concern threatening the profitability of our company..."

For the Table Topics Master:

State the topic first, for all Toastmasters to hear, THEN call on someone. That gives them a bit of time to begin to formulate their thoughts.

Keep the actual topic questions to twelve words or less. Table topics is about the impromptu speeches, not a 3-5 minute impromptu speech from you!

Choose members who do not otherwise have meeting roles that day, or who have minor roles such as "Ah Beller", "Invocation/Pledge Master". Table topics is the primary speaking opportunity to involve everyone in attendance!

Creative Topic ideas are as limitless as your imagination! Here are a few:

Recipes- Wear a chef's cap or apron, spread out a variety of ingredients and utensils at the front (some familiar, and some peculiar). Challenge each participant to pick a few ingredients and utensils, then describe what they're preparing, when and where to serve it, and how it tastes!

Newscast- Welcome to Toastmasters News! As anchorperson, ask your "correspondents" to report on stories such as the falling Tower of Babel, Esperanto chosen as the world's official international language, or a new class at the local high school's speech department on how to filibuster!

Time and Portal Travel- Have your participants go forward or back in time to describe how it's different, how it's the same. How about sending them to a unique local to vividly describe it, how about 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea?

Pssst!- Can you whisper loud enough for your audience to hear? Have your speakers share a secret they've never shared before, or perhaps the consequences for one they have already divulged.

Yogi Berra-isms- Offer up some nonsensical sayings and ask what they REALLY mean! Yogi, Casey Stengel and others are reknowned for their malapropisms:

- "If people don't want to come out to the park, nobody's gonna' stop 'em"
- "Nobody goes there anymore... it's too crowded"
- "You can observe a lot by watching"
- It's déjà vu all over again!"

Trial Topics- Your Sergeant-at-Arms bellows “Here comes the judge!” and you strut in with a black robe. With a rap of your gavel, “Toastmasters Court” is in session! Officially state that each member has been charged with an infraction. They have 1-2 minutes to plead their case:

For your club jokester, the charge is “Excessive Use of Farce”.

For the talker during meeting time, the charge is “Disorderly Conduct”.

For the speaker who regularly runs over time, the charge is “Failure to Yield”.

For the club grouch, charge him or her with “Public Sullenness”.

Other charges: “Illegal Use of Ands”, “Carrying a Concealed Smile”. Remember, these are gentle infractions rather than offenses or crimes, so it’s important to not be heavy handed.

Press Conference- Call up club members as official spokespersons of some organization to give a 1-2 minute platform speech. How about from the NRA, Commissioner of Baseball, Secretary of Defense, Executive Director of the Food Bank. Whenever offering controversial topics, encourage your clubmembers to make every effort to not offend others in the audience. Don’t necessarily shy away from controversial topics, the goal is to learn to be more sensitive and attentive to their audiences potential reactions to difficult issues.

Fable Topics- How about a 21st Century ending to a traditional fable?

- Cinderella goes to Detox
- Pinocchio has plastic surgery
- Snow White issuing paternity tests for dwarfs
- Rapunzel gets split ends!

Timely Topics- It’s always fun to base topics on events or holidays during that time of year...

- Mid-April- “What one new deduction would you allow?”
- April Fools Day- “Tell use a good lie!”
- Halloween- “Tall Tales”
- Veteran’s Day- topics on celebrating our freedoms.

Thanks to Linda O. Stiles (1994 D56 Education Session) and Craig A. Harrison “*Creative Table Topics*” for their various contributions above.