

# Table Topics Strategies – use your head to speak on your feet

by Dave Wheeler

## Toastmasters TableTopics Contest Judging Guidelines:

- Speech Development
  - Opening
  - Body
  - Close
  - Organization
  - Smoothness ✓
- Effectiveness
  - Logic
  - Directness ✓
  - Enthusiasm ✓
  - Achievement of Purpose
  - Audience Response
- Physical
  - Appearance ✓
  - Body Language ✓
- Voice
  - Flexibility ✓
  - Volume ✓
- Language
  - Appropriate to Speech Purpose and Audience
  - Good Grammar
  - Pronunciation
  - Word Selection

## C.O.D. Speech Building Guidelines: Content

- Add color and descriptions (if more content is needed).
- Opening(s). Have some openings that you have tried out and are comfortable using.
- Body
- Close
- THE POINT must be clear to the audience!

## Organization

- pre-organize. Have a format or formats that you can use.
  - Past, Present, Future
  - Point, 3 reasons, Point
  - For, Against, Summary
  - Point, reason, example/experience, outcome
  - Worst /best case, actual case, solution
- Organization must be clear to the audience.

## Delivery ✓ (related to items in left column)

- With Energy !!!!!
- Gestures
- Interaction with the audience
- Vocal Variety
- Silence is golden. A pause gives added weight to the preceding point.

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## General Strategies & Tips for Successful TableTopics:

- PREPARE for the unknown !
  - Keep up on the news. Many tabletopics questions are related to the news.
  - Know your position on issues and, if possible, good stories that are related or interesting.
- Find a Prop that supports your TableTopic. Look around the room before the meeting!
- The magic of 3
- Run through the Pros & Cons
- Dissect the question and pick it apart.
  - What do **you** think about the news? (versus how would other people think)
  - What do you **think** about the news? (versus gut reaction or emotionally)
  - What do you think about the **news**? (as opposed to the other things going on)
- Tell a relevant story.
  - Keep your point in mind as you lay out the story.
  - Keep your time limit in sight and don't include parts that do not support your point.
- Use Humor. See the funny side of the situation.
- Smile. Enjoy the process. This is not life or death. It is a learning experience and most tabletopic speakers get through it without too much pain!
- Repeat the question. (if needed)
  - assures a clear understanding of the question.
  - possible to restate it in a way that would make it easier to answer
  - Don't restate just to stall for time. Do something with the restatement. (Make fun of it. Probe the underlying reason for the question.)
- Politician's Approach
  - Relate the question to the point that you really want to talk about.
- Non-answer answers
  - OK at club level, but not usually satisfying for audience.
- The Question behind the Question
  - Focus on WHY this is an important question.
  - You can go multiple levels of WHY to get to the root cause.

From:

<http://www.indoindians.com/tips/survival.htm>

## **Survival Guide to Table Topics**

1. When you first hear the topic - smile, it will make you feel good and look confident
2. Immediately decide if you strongly like or dislike the topic. Go in that direction; your emotion will fuel your thoughts.
3. Begin by stating, "There are 3 things that come to mind about this topic" - even if you can't think of 3 things when you start. As you speak you will search for 3 key ideas and thus give your response apparent structure.
4. Try the pro / Con method. State the pros, then state the cons. Then clarify your position, by supporting one side more than the other.
5. When your mind goes blank and you don't know what to say next, smile, look at the audience and pause (breathe). The audience will review your last words & reflect on how profound they were. This will give you time to plan your next words.
6. If the pause & smile don't get you going, repeat the topic or your last point in a different way.
7. Look for a lesson in the word; relate it to a book you've read, a TV show, daily news, your work or your hobby.
8. Bring your family into the topic. It is a universal way to relate to people. When you talk of family, be sure to use their names, it creates a stronger emotional picture for the audience.
9. Use the topic as a channel to your main message. Politicians do this all the time, make the transition smooth and the audience will go with you.
10. Use humor. When the audience laughs with you, they relax and so do you.

By G.Torok, CTM, Skyway Club, Canada

Additional ideas on the following page:

From: [http://njdottoastmasters.tripod.com/table\\_topic\\_strategies.htm](http://njdottoastmasters.tripod.com/table_topic_strategies.htm)

# Impromptu Speaking or Table Topics Strategies

**When giving an impromptu talk:** The next time you are faced with an extemporaneous challenge, remember the following formula.

**Listen:** Resist the impulse to interject your own ideas before the other person is finished; focus instead on what is being said.

**Respect:** People are most likely to listen to your ideas when you listen to them.

**Ready-made dialogue:** You'll be able to incorporate some of what you've heard.

**On-target responses:** Careful listening improves your chances of commenting directly on what you've heard

**Pause:** Take a few moments to pause before speaking will allow you to refresh your thoughts and formulate an answer, so "look before you leap" ... remember also to "pause before you speak"

**Confirm:** Confirming the question will help you prepare a response. Repeat the question out loud gives your brain cells a better opportunity to absorb the concept and verify the topic.

**Tell:** Now that you have everyone's attention, dazzle them with your reply! At this point, your challenge is to tell only the essentials - but sound as if you know a lot more than you are telling.

**End!** Don't belabour the point, bring your comments to a close: emphasize your main point, smile while making that final audience eye contact... then, sit down.

## Strategies:

**Express an opinion:** Begin by stating an opinion with a supporting statement  
One item of support should be offered if answering a question Offer reasons why you agree and/or disagree with the topic

**Address cause/effect:** Begin by stating the situation, discuss its causes & then consequences

**Break the topic into components:** Three areas of concern, then to begin with...

**Discuss the Past, Present, and Future:** organize the your subject in a timeline fashion

## Whatever you do...

**Don't Apologize:** Taking time to apologize or make excuses is downright annoying.

**Don't Ramble:** When you are forced to think on your feet, it's easy to resort to rambling.  
One of the most logical ways to wrap up a talk is to come full circle and restate your original points.

**Don't Invent:** Toastmasters know that to bluff one's way through a speech is risky at best.  
Strive for sincerity rather than inventiveness. If you don't know how to respond, say so... then indicate your interest by asking a few questions in return.

Being able to think on your feet is an excellent mental habit to cultivate. Like other good habits, it takes time and effort to establish. Once you understand and practice the basic concepts, you will find yourself more than ready to accept the challenge of impromptu speaking.