

RPA Toastmasters meeting roles explained

These explanations are taken from the Competent Communicator manual appendix and adapted to better describe the RPA Toastmasters meetings.

Chair

The chair is the meeting's director and host. You won't usually be assigned this role until you are thoroughly familiar with the club and its procedures. When it's time to start the program, the Sergeant-at-Arms calls the meeting to order, and then the chair takes control of the meeting.

As Chair: Introduce the theme and lead the introductions around the room. Introduce yourself last.

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. If time allows, you can make some brief remarks about Toastmasters' educational program for the benefit of guests and new members before you move forward with the agenda.

Following the agenda, invite all speakers to the front, including the Topicsmaster, Toastmaster and Overall Evaluator. Lead applause for each.

During the business session, follow the business session script provided.

At the end, while votes (for best speaker, evaluator, table topics speaker, and other assignment) are being tallied, invite comments from guests). Invite the president to provide closing remarks, and then end the meeting.

Toastmaster

As the Toastmaster, you'll introduce each prepared speaker. You'll need to make sure the stage is set for a successful meeting. You and the speakers will need quick and easy access to the lectern. Speakers may also need help setting up digital presentations.

Some speakers write their own introductions. Otherwise, you can put one together from the following information, which speakers will provide to you at the meeting.

- Speech topic and title
- Manual and project title
- Assignment objectives
- Delivery time

You need all of these elements to create your introductions. You can ask the evaluator for each speaker to read the assignment objectives during your introduction. Remember to keep the introductions brief.

Invite the evaluators for their evaluations in turn, and then return control of the meeting to the Chair.

Table Topics Master (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-minute impromptu talk.

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

- Prepare topics reflecting the meeting theme (listed on the agenda).
- 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.

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

- Briefly state the purpose of Table Topics and mention any theme.
- Be certain everyone understands the maximum time they have for their response and how the timing device works.

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.
- Invite the Table Topics evaluators for their evaluations in turn, and then return control of the meeting to the Chair.

Listening Post

The Listening Post role encourages all members to actively listen throughout the meeting. When you are in this role, keep notes throughout the meeting on a few interesting or key points. When invited to the front by the Chair, ask members if they can remember certain factors, figures or other interesting points from the meeting, or ask who said a specific phrase. Five to six points is usually more than enough.

Combining this with the grammarian role (in the leadership manual), you can also correct grammar usage and point out creative use of language.

Timer

The timer keeps the speaker and the meeting running on time. The timer uses a stopwatch to monitor speaker progress, and using the timing lights (green, amber, red) to indicate to speakers how far along they are in their assignment. The timer also notes the length of each speaker and segment and briefly presents these details at the end when invited to the front by the Chair.

Um/Ah Counter

The purpose of the Um/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 Um/Ah-Counter role is an excellent opportunity to practice your listening skills.

At the start of the meeting, make a list of everyone in attendance. 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 chair during the evaluation segment, provide a brief explanation of the duties of the Um/Ah-Counter for the benefit of guests, then give your report.

Speech 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.

Talk with the speaker you’ve been assigned to evaluate and find out which manual project they will present. Review the project goals and what the speaker or leader hopes to achieve.

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.

During the speech, 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.

When giving a verbal evaluation, stand and speak when introduced. Though you may have written lengthy responses to manual evaluation questions, don't read the questions or your responses. Your verbal evaluation time is limited. Don't try to cover too much in your talk; two or three points are 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. Give the speaker or leader deserved praise and tactful suggestions in the manner you would like to receive them.

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.

Overall/General Evaluator

If you think of a club meeting as a project, then you can see the overall evaluator as a kind of project manager. Your responsibilities include evaluating everything that takes place during the club meeting.

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

At the end of the meeting, when you're introduced by the chair:

- Move to the front to deliver the explanation you prepared.
- 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