Eastside Toastmasters Concise Club Guide

**how to tell if we're doing a good job or not**

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Dr. Wischmeyer has been a Toastmaster for over 20 years, and was a Charter Member of the SRI Organons. He was their second elected President, and their second member to complete the CTM. He was with TGIF Management Toastmasters for 16 years, and was their 35th President. In addition, he has served in most all other officer positions. He has been Educational Vice President for each club, and wrote a computer program to equitably schedule members for all tasks, including pre-requisites for each position. He has competed in speech, humorous, and evaluation contests, and has won about a hundred ribbons, evenly split between Best Speaker, Best Evaluator, and Best Table Topics. He has also given any number of technical presentations and several after dinner presentations.

**Introduction**

“There's lots of ways to skin a cat,” the saying goes, and there are lots of different styles of doing Toastmasters assignments. Different styles will have different strengths and weaknesses, of course. Much of the educational benefit of Toastmasters comes from examining the different styles and trading off the fine points. There is much less benefit to following a standard, any standard, “just because.”

The style advocated below has multiple worthwhile goals:

- to prepare Toastmasters for opportunities outside the club, based on the premise that mastery of Toastmasters skills is not in and of itself the primary goal, but rather a means to accomplishing far more significant goals in the “real world.”
- to focus on the audience as a customer, and to hide, and not emphasize, the mechanics of the meeting
- to provide the self-satisfaction of genuine accomplishment, not just the empty rattle of ritualistic applause
- to be artificially formal, so that formality is mastered and not feared
- to provide an environment in which sound, honest criticism can be respectfully given and gratefully received
- to help members become discerning critics of the meeting process, so that they can tailor meetings to be appropriate to the circumstances
- to provide an environment which is rewarding, worth attending, and worth supporting because the communications are based upon genuine human interaction. This generates a community, an environment worth attending, even in the absence of goal quests.
Concise Club Guide - the details

**Every meeting participant**
- Smile, have fun, share the fun
- Start by addressing the one who called on or introduced you, then “Fellow Toastmasters, welcome guests.” (I think that the phrase “most honored guests” is highfalootin and inflated.)
- Finish by repeating the title of the one who introduced you or called on you, such as “Mr. Toastmaster” or “Madam Tabletopics Master.”
- Don't take away the leader's opportunity to learn by “helping” start applause
- Stand to be recognized as you would in a formal meeting, don't wave a hand like you would in school
- When mistakes occur, don't point them out brashly and immediately. Figure out a way for the mistake to be corrected in a way so nobody will notice that any mistake occurred.

**All meeting leaders and people at the lectern**
- Never draw attention to mistakes, just work through them.
- Don't apologize!
- Always lead the applause.
- In introductions, speaker's name always comes last so the audience knows when to applaud. Holding the speaker's name till last is a simple way to strengthen an introduction. Moving the name up earlier is a simple way to weaken an introduction.
- Anybody using the lectern should have a complete introduction. (This style implies that tabletopics respondents and speech evaluators should not be at the lectern. Besides, there's real world value in learning to speak from within an audience.)
- Person coming to the lectern goes in front, person leaving the lectern goes behind. (We usually do this backwards...)
- Shake hands at the lectern, not off to the side. Make sure the lectern stays occupied.
- Give really good introductions so that the next person doesn't have to talk about themselves. If they have to do a monologue, that's commonly a sign that the introduction was inadequate.

**Toastmaster - satisfy the audience!**
- set the emotional tone for the meeting - upbeat, smile, etc., as appropriate
- focus the attention on the meeting participants, not on the Toastmaster (no monologues)
- have all meeting participants (including President and Sergeant at Arms):
  - be there on time
  - know how to excel at their job (get the General Evaluator to make sure those folks are up to speed.)
  - seek smooth meeting flow
  - hide the mechanics of the meeting (don't ask the Timer for 60 seconds for comments, for example. Do that in advance!)
  - cover over any mistakes

**Toastmaster Details**
- A speech introduction is a benefit both to the speaker and to the audience, helping to bring them together by setting the audience expectations (anticipation) and by reassuring them that those expectations will be met. In the club context, it is also a great way for members to get to
know more about each other, especially with personal details. Our traditional club introductions do not perform these functions, nor are they in line with the formats recommended in the Toastmaster manuals. Our traditional club introductions tell how to evaluate the speech but do not introduce the speaker.

- **Introductions should include these points**
  - here is a topic of interest to you, the audience
  - the speaker is qualified to talk on this topic because... (extra credit for making this personal, for talking about how you know the speaker)
  - here are the details of the speech, including the title
    - make speech introductions interesting - publish speech objectives, don't read them in detail
    - don't summarize the speech in the introduction!
  - You don't absolutely have to use the theme of the day in the introduction, but if you choose to, do it gracefully and unobtrusively. Weak introduction: “When I asked the speaker about tonight's theme, she said that she likes roses because they remind her of spending extra time in the summer with her mother.” Stronger: “Roses remind her of spending extra time in the summer with her mother.” Try, in the whole meeting, to never say the phrase “tonight's theme.” Use it gracefully and unobtrusively.
  - speaker's name is the climax of the introduction, and *always comes last so the audience knows when to applaud*

- observe the audience for time they need for writing comments, not a fixed time from the timer
- focus on (pay attention to) the speaker when sitting
- here's a challenge - give introductions without notes
- have meeting principals sit near the front so there is no dead time waiting for folks to walk up to the front
- don't give “enthusiasm” awards for those who are filling in at the last minute, give them for enthusiasm, or don't give any. Filling in at the last moment is almost never a challenge for the one filling in. Rather, it is an admission that we as a club failed to find substitutes. There is no reason to give an “enthusiasm” award every week, just because.
- you should introduce participants, never permit self-introductions. (Such as calling on evaluation team members and asking them to introduce themselves by talking about the theme of the day and also describing their duties.) Why put people in the awkward position of talking about themselves, when, if you do it as part of the introduction, it can be fun and exciting?
- make sure that all members get a chance to participate in the meeting
- “please welcome” means welcome to the lectern. Don't welcome somebody who will be talking from their seat, such as an evaluation team member describing their duties.

**Table Topics Master**

- focus attention on respondents, not on self with a long introductory monologue
- call on all members who do not have assignments. Speakers and evaluators should not volunteer for table topics. Feel free to decline their volunteering!
- ask questions that help us get to know the speaker - how they feel, what they think, what they've done. Intellectual questions tell the least about the respondent and are usually generate the least interesting responses.
- keep it moving so the audience does not have to endure dead time!!
  - don't slow down the whole meeting waiting for somebody to volunteer
– don't slow down the whole meeting by giving people papers to read or things from which to choose. Remember that during that time you are forcing the audience to sit around doing nothing. This lets the audience's attention wander, performing a disservice to the Table Topics speaker.
– there are lots of times that people in the real world appropriately speak from their seats, and that's one of the skills we really should practice. There's really no reason to have everybody come up front for table topics. Besides, anybody taking over the lectern really should have a full introduction.
– applauding for people when they are coming up to speak is not appropriate for table topics. First, speaking at table topics is really not a big deal, and after you've done it once or twice, you don't need that “support.” Secondly, applause is used for the audience to show its assent to the one introduced and taking the lectern, and in table topics, the speakers are not formally introduced.

• call for a report from the Timer at the conclusion of Table Topics.
• when you ask the audience to vote, tell them how to fill out the ballot and what to do with it (you should coordinate this with the Tallymaster).
• don't ask for each speaker to stand and repeat what they said to aid the voting. The audience will remember the strong speakers, and does not need the weaker presentations rehashed
• Eastside specializes in gimmicky Tabletopics where that gimmickry takes center stage and the points of excellence (above) are largely hidden. Challenge: do a plain vanilla table topics, call on people to speak from their seats, and make it flow. We overuse gimmicks because we have to, because we really don't seem to know how to do a fundamentally sound Tabletopics.

Sergeant-at-Arms
• Invocation / inspiration precedes pledge (many clubs rotate the Invocator position, so that all learn how to do it, and so that the introduction reflects the styles and beliefs of all the members.)
• Invocation / inspiration should flow into the meeting, not stand alone. Inspirations generally do not work at the start of a meeting, although they can be quite interesting as a quote at the end of the meeting.
• Invite the audience to join you in the pledge of allegiance, then start it
• Introduce the President formally, just as a speaker would be introduced. This is a good time to use the theme of the day, but don't announce what the theme is, just use it.
• Handle lectern area as required for all speakers

General Evaluator
• make sure that the whole evaluation team (below) know their duties, how to do them well, and will be on time. (done in many clubs, but not in Eastside. In Eastside, nobody takes formal responsibility for making sure that people know how to do their jobs, and this is a major weakness. The result is that we condition ourselves to weak performances. We'd rather embarrass ourselves as a club with low standards than hold each other accountable.)
• introduce team at the start of the meeting (done in many other clubs, but not Eastside)
• run the evaluation section, using objectives above
• comment on all aspects of the meeting
• do not give speaker's names early in the meeting
• do not re-recite speech objectives

**Tallymaster**
• explain how to fill out the ballots. We never do this!
• explain the collection process, and make sure the Toastmaster knows, too. Frequently, one says one thing, the other another.
• never interrupt the meeting to collect paper or to pass baskets!
• stand to be recognized if you need the Toastmaster to remember to tell the audience to pass ballots / baskets

**Ah Counter**
• explain counting in appropriate detail — not too much, not too little.
• get a helper if required so fewer ahs are missed. A meeting typically has 50 - 80 ahs and interruptions. Sometimes only a dozen are observed.
• the purpose of counting Ahs is to help individuals improve, so give specific results by name.

**Grammarian**
• record good and bad uses of grammar and words. Most grammatical mistakes are missed. Subject / verb disagreements average 10 per night, and are not commented upon.
• report on well phased sentences. As a club, our word pictures are few and weak. Encourage them!

**Wordmaster (separate job doubled up in Eastside)**
• select a word with multiple uses, not just one cliche usage
• verbs are strongest, adjectives are weakest
• choose a word that you use, but not a common word.
• The wordmaster position provides two challenges — (1) to expand vocabularies with a new and useful word and (2) to think on the fly to use the word, and to use it correctly!

**Timer**
• don't get carried away with giving too much detail when introducing job
• correctly state meanings of light colors (green light is not minimum eligible time!)
• give reports on eligibility, plus times of speeches.
• timer is final authority on eligibility

**Evaluators**
• give opinions as to what they liked. If you make absolute statements about the speech being good or bad, that's judgemental and you are placing yourself in a position of superiority above the speaker. If you express your ideas as opinions, they will be much more palatable to the speaker. When you say, “here are some tips,” you are placing yourself in a position of being a teacher and a superior. Positions of superiority threaten interpersonal communication and make it easy to take an evaluation as a personal affront.
• opine what they would have liked to have seen
• evaluate delivery, not just content
• don't repeat the speech, don't tutor - evaluate. Too many Eastside evaluations are 50% rehash, or more. Weak: “You talked about growing up in Kansas.” Stronger: “I liked [opinion, not judgement] how you strengthened your speech [evaluation] by using growing up in Kansas as a point of contrast to your later career.”
• use gestures, vocal variety, etc. in the evaluation
• thank the speaker only at evaluation contests! They are not giving speeches so that you can practice evaluating.
• Inappropriate: “Here are some tips [I know more than you]”. Better: “Here are some things that I like / I've learned / were taught to me [we're all learners, I just happened to have a head start. Here's how to catch up and overtake]”.

Pet Peeves and Challenges
• Eastside has an epidemic of lip smacks that are audible distractions, and never remarked upon
• Too many senior members cruise along at 5 ahs per meeting with no improvement. Challenge: CTM or better, average no more than 1 ah per meeting. ATM-x or better, no more than one ah per month.
• Weak phrase — “I would like to...” Well, go ahead! “I would like to” is a trite vocalism that substantially weakens your presentation, and should only be used deliberately for effect. We should practice strong speaking practice, not idly ignore speech-weakening cliches.
• Gestures — in the same way that we practice vocal variety, we should practice gesture variety. The Eastside tradition is for arms continuously in motion, which is tiring to watch and weakens the speech presentation.
• Challenge — all members should become connoisseurs of the meeting process, not just of the speaking process. All should comment on meeting effectiveness.
• Overtime meetings — when a meeting has four speakers, flab should be squeezed out of the rest of the meeting, and announcements should be brief, like announcements, not like commercials. In our culture, we have become accustomed to wasting each other's time by scheduling meetings in hour long blocks, whether that time is needed or not. At Toastmasters, if we can finish early, let's do it! (We also over schedule our meetings with 5 speakers).
• Coming back from break — we need a gong or a chime to provide a 60 second warning.
• Lectern — much too low, and, being on a table, effectively much too wide.
• Parliamentary procedures — Another valuable part of Toastmasters that Eastside completely neglects.
• “Best club in the district” — An idle vanity. When we as a club improve the completeness of our ah counting and grammarian reports, make common use of word pictures in speeches, make sure that participants know in advance how to do their duties, improve our introductions, give meatier evaluations with less rehash, and regularly and proficiently use Parliamentary procedures, then we'll have reason to be satisfied with progress to date while seeking new challenges. For us to use the phrase “best in the district” only perpetuates a smugness of mediocrity and stifles improvement. We should select and set our own standards, not let weak clubs set the standard of comparison for us. And, when we measure ourselves by the bottom, we'll never explore excellence.
• Choosing your own evaluator is an excellent way to make sure you only hear what you want to hear. Ask for an informal evaluation from a friend if you like, but never select or reject your own evaluator. Be open to learning new things and to growing. (A beginning club member / evaluator once missed the point of my speech entirely, and I learned more from that than I
would have from somebody who caught on to what I was doing.) Moreover, evaluations are not given only for the benefit of the speaker. The evaluations help members become more observant by having a speech's strengths and weaknesses pointed out, so that all may learn from the speech. If the evaluations were for the benefit of the speaker only, they would be done in secret.