

Practice Being a Table Topics Winner

Can you prepare to compete in a Table Topics contest? Absolutely. Based on my experience of attending and judging many Table Topics contests, I believe that I can predict that the next winner will absolutely do **four things** upon hearing the topic. You can do them too!

1. Pause and reflect before speaking.

Instead of wasting precious response time with verbal stall tactics, process your initial responses to the topic in the privacy of your own mind. Do some quick brainstorming to “package” your random ideas. An effective impromptu response is actually a mini-speech that you outline on the fly with the appearance of an opening, body and closing. A good brainstorming strategy will provide a natural organization for your ideas. Here are some mental brainstorming strategies that you can practice -- one at a time.

- Examine the topic/question itself: how do you feel about it? Is it important? Is it common or unusual?
- Does the topic have a cause and effect?
- Does the topic have a past, a present, a future?
- How does the topic smell, feel, look, sound?

2. Open by addressing the Contest Master, Toastmasters, and Guests.

While opening with “My fellow Toastmasters” is not required, it is a tradition and formality that gets the audience’s attention. We hear traditional openings every day: My fellow Americans..., Good Evening, This Is Dan Rather.” Even if

you want to be a non-conformist, you can develop and practice in advance how you will get the audience’s attention

3. Use a BIG voice that everyone can hear.

It does not matter what you say if your audience cannot hear you because of the size of the room or the air conditioning. The contest winner generally speaks with a BIG voice punctuated with dramatic pauses and slow phrases. Just like professional entertainers, you can prepare for performance by doing breathing and vocal exercises before you go on stage.

4. Speak out confidently, boldly and dramatically.

Use broad gestures, dramatic pauses, and meaningful eye contact. Make your point with dramatic flair and you will communicate with confidence. Whether we like it or not, although the tentative answer may be right, we buy the confident answer. If you prefer to be subtle and understated, you can still be dramatic. Consider the minimalist style of Clint Eastwood or John Wayne, masters of dramatic pause and pointed eye expression.

Practice for your impromptu moments like a Table Topics contest and be a winner. Break a leg!

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