

# VARIETY IN TABLE TOPICS

Compiled by Sherrin Ross Ingram

## The Keys to Having Table Topics that are Fun and Educational are:

1. **Creativity** (use the suggestions below and put "a little twist on them")
2. **Planning** (you can do a little or go "all out"), and
3. **Education** (teach members techniques to respond so they really grow as speakers).

The following are 50 topics compiled from my own ideas, the Internet and personal interviews with many Toastmasters. If known, the names\* of the person or club submitting the idea are given at the end of the list. Some of the ideas I found were duplicates and the origin unknown.

## Topics That Require Some Advance Planning

1. Jeopardy! Come up with six question categories and then make five questions for each category. Take a poster board and make pockets for each question. Label the categories at the top of each column and have the speaker select from a category. You get the idea.
2. Give the speaker a strange and unheard word from the dictionary and ask them tell everyone what they think this word means. At the end, give the real definition.
3. Have a series of acronyms USDA, IRS, NBC, NASA etc. Ask for new meanings.
4. A courtroom scene -- Member "A" has been accused of stealing a pig from Member "B's" front yard. Member "C" -- Act as a character witness for "A." Member "D" -- having had pork chops at A's home what can you add to the evidence. etc.
5. Have each speaker pick from a bowl full of Chinese fortune cookies and have them read their fortune and interpret it to means to them. Note: Make sure everyone gets a cookie whether they speak or not.
6. Obtain a list of all of the cabinet ministers asked the speaker to explain what they would do if they were a particular Minister, i.e., "*What would you do if you were the Minister of Transportation?*"
7. Have each speaker open a small box or bag with an item in it and describe what is in the box without telling everyone what is in the box, i.e., a mirror.
8. Have an object in a bag that the speaker has to feel and describe to the club. The club then guesses what was described. Alternatively, the respondent may look at the object before describing it.
9. Give the speaker an unusual object and describe what it is and how it is used. As an alternate, ask the speaker to sell the object to the club.
10. Give the speaker a title to a book that they have just authored and are promoting tour and them explain to the members why we should all rush out and buy wonderful book.
11. Make personalized license plates, hand one to a person and ask "What type of vehicle are you and who owns you?" Some examples: 'ERNDIT' 'SLO4X4' 'RWIDO' 'MYCAR' 'TRAVLN'.
12. Hand out small plastic containers with cotton wool soaked in a scent, such as perfume, and asked the speaker what memories the scent evokes.



13. Take the first line from a song and have the speaker explain what inspired them to begin this song with this phrase.
14. Bring in a bag of pennies and have each speaker talk about something that happened or something they were doing in the year that is stamped on the penny.
15. Give each speaker a sheet of paper with weird pictures drawn by a child (or you) and have the speaker be an art critic discussing the significance (or lack thereof) of the work.
16. Each person would be given one line and would have to weave a story from it. Here are a dozen different story lines to use: "The Impromptu Murders"
  - It was a dark and stormy night as lightning flashed through the window pane ...
  - When the guests heard the noise they stumbled down the hallway only to discover....
  - The police arrived and asked everyone to....
  - Fearing for my own safety I told the Police, "I couldn't have done it because I ... "
  - Seeing that now was the right time, the butler stepped forward and declared ...
  - Old Mrs. Marple didn't think anyone knew about her relationship with the deceased. I then stood up and told the group ...
  - Gasping for breath and holding her throat, the maid stumbled into the drawing room....
  - It was then that the front door burst open and who should step in but....
  - "No!", I cried. "It was I who did it, for you see the dead man was my ..."
  - Surprising everyone, the dead man picked himself up off of the floor, looked around at the gathering and said ...
  - Just when all had felt the mystery solved, the light went out ...
  - The policeman then stepped forward and announced to the guests, with a big smile on his face....
17. Collect some products off the grocery shelf or hardware store. Each TT speaker selects one of the items out of a bag and has to do a TV commercial on that product.
18. Write down different "accomplishments" (best underwater basketweaver, best nuclear power plant designer, best TV remote control switcher, etc.) on pieces of paper. A speaker selects the award and must "award" it to another member. That member must get up and "accept" the award.
19. Put everyday stuff into a bag and let each speaker select an item to discuss. However, the year is 2525 and the speaker is an archeologist. They will explain their opinion as to what the item was back in the 20th. Century and how it was used.
20. Everyone writes down a secret about himself or herself that no one in the club knows about. Each speaker takes one of the notes, reads it, and states who they think wrote the note and why.
21. Spend a minute or so reviewing basic introductions. Then bring up each speaker and have him or her pull an object out of a bag, and then introduce what they have extracted. (Vegetables work well...."It's MR. CARROT!!!! Please introduce Mr. Carrot as our next speaker." Not only do people get practice with introductions, but they get to take home a part of a salad.)



22. Write words on small pieces of paper or index cards. Have each speaker pick four pieces of paper or cards and make up a story using all 4 words. (You can also require using the "word of the day".) Variations of the word are ok (If the word is "microscope", then "microscopic" may be used in the story).
23. Read a paragraph from different letters to the editor of your local paper and have the members respond with their opinions.
24. Give each speaker a "Dear Abby" question and have them give their advice. These could be made up by the Table Topics Master or real ones clipped from the

advice columns.

25. Cut pictures (no captions) from the newspaper or magazine. Have the speaker pick one and tell the club what is happening in the picture.
26. On small slips of paper write out some unusual or very descriptive colors (day-glo orange, pea green, flamingo pink etc), make a list of questions along the lines of:
  - Tell us why you plan to paint your house this color
  - Explain why all your clothes this summer will be in this color
  - Tell the person to your right why he/she should buy a car in this color.Ask the speaker to pick a slip and ask them the next question on the list. You never know what you'll get.
27. Give the speaker a quotation to interpret.
28. The speaker picks a white elephant wrapped gift and explains why it is the most wonderful gift in the world.
29. Give each speaker a simple situation to speak on, e.g., "Your day at the beach" or "Your day at the zoo." While they are speaker, yell out a single irrelevant word that the speaker must try to include in his/her topic. (About six words per speaker - depending on their experience). For example, the speaker may say "I was walking along the sand and admiring the blue sky," and then the topic master yells out "tiger". This word must be included in the topic. The speaker may then say, "I met someone who thought I looked great in my tiger colored bathing suit."
30. Think of 4 or 5 unusual situations that would normally be considered bad news. Challenge your speakers to make them good news instead. Some ideas: (1) You're the mayor of New York, and Godzilla just trashed the downtown area. Explain why that's good for New Yorkers. (2) Aliens just vaporized the White House. You're the Vice President. Make the first speech afterwards about why this is good news. (3) You just put your car through the garage door. Tell your spouse or significant other why this is good news.

## Topics That Present Thought Provoking/Humorous Questions or Situations

31. Ask each speaker to describe his/her life if he/she was an object, i.e., a mirror, a table, a chair, a briefcase, a door, etc.
32. Ask the speaker to talk about the bumper sticker, real or imagined, on their car. They can include "Sky diving - A Natural High" and "Protected by Smith & Wesson" and many others.
33. If you could go back in time and talk to yourself at the age of ten, what advice would you give yourself?
34. There's a saying that the difference between involvement and commitment is like that of a chicken or a pig to breakfast. The chicken is involved, and the pig is committed. When it comes to life, which are you, a chicken or a pig?
35. Sometimes when you look at a big task, it's important to approach it just like you would eat an elephant: one bite at a time. Which end would you start at and why?
36. Sometimes making change is like teaching a pig to sing, it only frustrates you and annoys the pig. When was the last time you "taught a pig how to sing?"
37. At five years old, we all dream to be a teacher or a fireman. At fifteen years old, we all dream to play or sing with a rock'n roll band. But, tell us why your dream would be to be a shoe (or some other object)?



38. What would you do if you arrived at the airport barely on time after dodging bad traffic and realized that you forgot your tickets?
39. You are a fly on the tail fin of a Boeing 747 that has fallen asleep. You awaken and the plane is going 400 miles per hour! How do you feel?
40. Some people say a little white lie is sometimes okay. What do you think?
41. If there are people in your club born in different areas (and/or different countries), try this: "What do people think they know about your birthplace that isn't true?"
42. Have the speaker discuss a weird place to live and defend the place as a nice place to live, such as:
  - Next to a nuclear power plant.
  - In a swamp.
  - Bottom of the Grand Canyon.
  - Top of the Matterhorn.
43. Have each speaker discuss a time (real or imagined, but preferably real) when they saw or met a celebrity.
44. If you could fly in a hot-air balloon over any city in the world, what city would you choose?
45. What annually televised sporting event is an absolute must-see for you?
46. If you could travel back in time to meet anyone in your family's history, whom would you most want to meet?
47. What sound, other than ringing, would you want your telephone to make?
48. If you could be any age again for one week, what age and why?
49. If you had to wear a button with a maximum of five words what would it be and why?
50. What national attraction or tourist site should every American see at least once?

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\* Dick Storer, Joe Caruso, Trinity Square Toastmasters, Christopher Smyth, Trillium Toastmasters, Ruth Schnell, Leduc Energizers Toastmaster Club, Leduc, Alberta, Sylvie Limoges, Dan Coe, David Purve, Sean Street, Australia, Sandy Scott, Vincent Li, John Fleming, CTM, Chris Copeland, ATM, Norma Whetzel, EPA and Galloping Governors Toastmasters, Dan Goodman, Doug Woodall, Don Cogan, Clear Lake Toastmasters, Dave Schneider.