

What to Expect at Your First Toastmasters Meeting

Visiting a club for the first time? Get ready to connect, communicate, and clap.



So you've decided to attend a Toastmasters meeting. Maybe a friend or colleague invited you, or maybe your boss, ahem, *suggested* that you improve your presentation skills. Maybe you're job searching and want to brush up some skills. Maybe you're launching your own business and have realized that being able to influence and persuade will win you even more clients. Whatever the reason—congratulations! You're taking the first step to improving your communication and leadership skills.

But first steps can be scary. In fact, the toughest part of the Toastmasters journey for most of us was literally that first step into the conference room, community college, or restaurant, or that first time logging on to a virtual meeting with faces you don't recognize that you know you might eventually have to speak to, publicly. The thought alone is enough to get your heart pounding, your palms sweating, and your mind racing. To free up a bit of brainpower so you can keep your fight-or-flight reflexes under control, here's a little glimpse of what you can expect.

There will be clapping. Lots of clapping. We Toastmasters applaud *everything*, whether in person or online. When a speaker is introduced, we welcome them to the lectern. When they are finished, we thank them for their contribution. We also applaud Table Topics®, evaluations, and just about anything else that happens. The good news is, even though your hands may hurt by the end of the night, some of the applause will be for you.

That's because there will be an opportunity—even on your first visit—to participate. We won't send you directly into the spotlight (we'll let you settle in first), but you'll get at least two chances to speak.

The first opportunity will come right at the beginning. The Club President will open the meeting and ask you and any other guests in attendance to introduce themselves. It doesn't have to be much—maybe 30 seconds' worth. State your name, why you decided to check out Toastmasters, and how you happened to find that particular club. Done! And then we'll clap.

The Club President will make announcements and then hand the meeting over to the Toastmaster of the Day, who will lead the rest of the session. He or she will explain the agenda, introduce the speakers and evaluators, and make sure things run smoothly.

Then, the meat of the meeting. Several club members, some experienced, some just starting out, will deliver speeches they've prepared. You'll hear all sorts of different topics, from *My Summer Vacation* to *Mindfulness in Marketing*, but each speech will be crafted to fulfill specific learning objectives as laid out in Toastmasters' education program—the Pathways learning experience.

Projects start out small, and then add in new skills, little by little, until you're communicating like a professional (or maybe you *are* a professional). In Pathways, you can choose from 11 different paths, depending on your particular goals, but each one starts with the Ice Breaker, a short speech

in which you tell your new clubmates a bit about yourself. Main objective: Stand in front of the audience for four to six minutes and survive.

You will finish speaking, half-mortified, half-ecstatically proud, hopefully high on the buzz of having given your first miniature public speech.

Back to the meeting. Each speech will be evaluated; the speech evaluator will offer constructive feedback on what the speaker did well (*Your speech was incredibly well structured*) and what they could improve upon (*Add variety by brainstorming transitions that don't start with: Fifthly, I'd like to point out...*). The rest of the evaluation team will offer feedback on every speaker—how many *ums* and *ahs* and filler words were used, how well each participant followed time limits, etc.

Perhaps the most exciting part of the session is Table Topics; this is the part that hones impromptu speaking skills, and this is where you'll get your second opportunity to participate. (You *can*, of course, opt out, but we highly recommend that you give it a try.) The Table Topicsmaster will introduce the overarching theme, and then call on people—usually, randomly—band give each participant a specific prompt.

You'll witness varying degrees of eloquence, and then it will be your turn. You will say whatever comes into your mind for at least one but not more than two minutes. And then you will finish speaking, half-mortified, half-ecstatically proud, hopefully high on the buzz of *having given your first miniature public speech*. And then we'll clap.

At the end of the meeting, you may be asked for your thoughts. Hopefully, you'll have been so impressed by the clockwork agenda, the brilliant members, and the inspirational atmosphere that you'll be ready to sign up on the spot. Great! The Vice President Membership will hook you up.

If you're not ready, though, don't worry—and don't give up. There are nearly 17,000 Toastmasters clubs around the world; if this one doesn't fit your groove, try another one in your area. Each club has its own unique vibe, so you'll find the one that's right for you.

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Once you do, you'll settle in, deliver your Ice Breaker, and start progressing through the Pathways program. You'll ascend your chosen path, gaining confidence, eloquence, and style. You'll become an invaluable part of your club, greeting guests, and mentoring new members.

One evening, you'll deliver an artfully crafted, masterful speech, with a grab-your-attention hook and make-you-think arguments. Your body language will be spot-on, and you'll connect with the audience. You'll summarize succinctly, and end with a crisp, memorable close. You'll swell with pride as your final word hangs in the silence, and you'll wonder why on earth you were ever worried about going to that first Toastmasters meeting.

And then ... we'll clap.

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The Toastmasters Club Experience

<https://youtu.be/383gehepo8M>