

===== **101 Ideas for Great Table Topics** =====

Compiled by Mark LaVergne, DTM, Past International Director of Toastmasters International

Phone: 718-457-8390; Email: MarkLaVergne@aol.com

Address: 38-11 Ditmars Boulevard, Astoria, NY 11105

Updated: May 2006 – Background and Acknowledgements on Page 14

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #1 -----

Holiday Themes: We are blessed with a wonderful set of holidays in this society. When looking for Table Topic theme ideas, begin by looking at these holidays as sources for theme-based questions. Please find below a partial list of possible themes, sorted roughly by calendar order (January-to-December):

- New Year's Day
- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday
- Chinese New Year (*date varies by year, depending on Chinese Lunar calendar*)
- Ramadan (*date varies by year, depending on religious calendar*)
- African American History Month
- Valentine's Day
- U.S. President's Day
- St. Patrick's Day (March 17)
- Women's History Month
- Passover (*date varies by year, depending on religious calendar*)
- Easter (*date varies by year, depending on religious calendar*)
- Spring is Here (*March 21*)
- April Fools
- Tax Burden Day – April 15th
- Earth Day
- Cinco de Mayo
- Mother's Day
- Memorial Day
- Flag Day
- Father's Day
- Summer is Here (*June 21*)
- Independence Day
- "Dog Days" of August
- Labor Day
- 9/11 Commemoration (*not a "holiday" by any imagination, but a day to remember*)
- Autumn Is Here (*September 21*)
- Columbus Day
- Halloween
- Election Day
- Veterans Day (*originally known as Armistice Day*)
- Thanksgiving
- Diwali (*date varies by year, depending on religious calendar*)
- Winter Is Here (*December 21*)
- Hanukkah (*date varies by year, depending on religious calendar*)
- Christmas

[NOTE: The above list is neither exhaustive nor exclusive, but is meant only as a starting point. Add any holidays not mentioned here to your own list.]

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #2 -----

Add-the-Caption: Interesting pictures are selected from magazines, and the Table Topics Master removes captions or any other descriptive text. Each speaker picks one at random and discusses what is going on in the picture, e.g., a man is sitting at a desk reading, while another person is looking out the window.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #3 -----

Grab Bag: Bring a lunch bag to the meeting containing various objects such as a paper clip, a staple remover, a button, a bookmark, a charge card, a pocket knife, a thimble, etc. Each speaker reaches into the bag and selects an object without seeing it. They then speak for two minutes about the object. You could also ask the speaker to sell the item to the group.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #4 -----

Reverse Meetings: Let me suggest the Table Topics style I have seen at "Reverse Toastmaster" meetings (or "Fun Nights") where the Table Topics respondents first provides an answer and then the Table topics Master has to come up with the question!!! [Similarly, throughout the meeting, everything else is done in "reverse" style: the Evaluators deliver the evaluations before the speech are delivered; etc., etc.]

-- Contributed by Dennis Fokas, DTM, former Area Governor and
Division Speech Contest Champion (District 46)

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #5 -----

"Out of this World" News: Take interesting articles from the weekly tabloids (Weekly World News or National Enquirer are especially good). Each speaker is required to discuss and/or defend and/or explain the amazing things reported (Man finds green glob in closet...and it eats his dog)!

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #6 -----

"The Side of Me Nobody Knows": Everyone writes down a secret about themselves that no one knows about. Each speaker takes one of the notes, reads it, and states who they think wrote the note and why.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #7 -----

Flicks That Flunk: The speaker picks a really bad movie they have seen. They then must persuade the audience to see it.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #8 -----

Words of Wisdom: My club is a corporate club that struggles through rounds and rounds of layoffs, and that means sometimes we are without a Table Topics Master at our Club meetings. To remedy that problem, I keep handy a book of sayings/proverbs in case I have to serve as last-minute Table Topics Master. I ask Table Topics respondents to randomly pick a page number and I read one of the sayings and ask them to speak on that saying.

-- Contributed by Radhi Spear, DTM, Division I Governor (District 46)

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #9 -----

This Day In History: This Table Topics theme requires a bit of research on the part of the Table Topics Master, who creates questions based on historical events that occurred on the day of the Toastmasters meeting. Each event in history can serve as a basis for a question. Table Topics Masters can go on the internet and use any number of popular search engines to get information on past events that occurred on "This Day in History."

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #10 -----

"Make Yourself a Table Topic Resource:" One of the best way to always be prepared for Table Topics questions at Toastmasters meetings – or for the unexpected questions you receive in everyday life – is to "Make Yourself a Table Topic Resource." I would urge fellow Toastmasters to read, watch, and listen to things that happen in the news everyday to keep ourselves up to date on potential questions. We who share our ideas with others should always be aware of how we are relating to the facts that constantly come up in the course of our lives.

-- Contributed by Mona Valore, ATMS, active Toastmaster and Club
officer on Staten Island, New York

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #11 -----

Color Your World: On slips of paper write out some unusual colors (e.g., "day-glo orange," "pea green," "flamingo pink," etc.). Then make a list of questions along these lines: 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; etc.

– Recommended by Chris Copeland, ATM, Tarheel Toastmasters Club (North Carolina)

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #12 -----

Pictures In the News: Cut pictures from the newspaper of the day (be sure to remove the captions). Have each respondent choose a picture (out of a hat) and explain to the Club what is happening in the picture.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #13 -----

“Whatchamacallit”: Table Topics respondents are given an unusual object and asked to tell everyone what it is and how it is used. You can use unusual objects you were planning to clean out of your attic or basement :-). This theme can be used as part of a “Spring Cleaning” theme meeting.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #14 -----

“Special Occasion Speeches:” Recently, I did a short training on the projects in the Special Occasion Speeches” Advanced Manual and for Table Topics, members were asked to make believe they were giving a toast at a wedding, introducing a guest at a TM meeting, thanking a guest speaker for a special presentation and saying farewell at a retirement party. I prefer that members practice and be prepared for real life situations. That was just one idea I thought worthy of mention.

-- Contributed by Yvonne Clarke, President, Omni Toastmasters Club, Brooklyn, New York

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #15 -----

“Whatchamacallit” #2 – Sell It: Table Topics respondents are given an unusual object and asked to sell the object to the club, with proceeds of any sale going to the Club treasury. Your Club Treasurer will particularly favor this approach.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #16 -----

“Whatchamacallit” #3 – Trust Your Feelings: Table Topics respondents are given an opportunity reach into a bag of assorted objects and pick an object to feel. The respondent leaves the object in the bag and describes it merely by feel.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #17 -----

The Yellow Pages: Bring several pages from the Telephone Book Yellow Pages, and select a business from each page. The speaker has two minutes to sell the product or service.

-- Contributed by André Brooks, DTM, Past International Director (Virginia)

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #18 -----

Advice Columnist: Give each respondent a question from a "Dear Abby" column or other advice column and ask them to respond to the question as if they were an advice columnist. The questions can be made up by the Table Topics Master or taken from actual columns.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #19 -----

Book Swap: Have a book swap. Have members bring a book that they "sell" to the rest of the club by telling them why they like the book. Each member bargains for the book that her or she liked best from the explanation. Everyone gets a chance to speak -- and to get a new book in the process!.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #20 -----

Birthplace Believe-It-Or-Nots: 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?"

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #21 -----

Internet Newsgroups: One time as Table Topics Master, I used some threads from a few newsgroups [the clean ones, of course :-)]. For each Table Topics respondent, I read a posted message followed by the response post. Then I asked the hapless speaker to assume the role of the first person and answer the response. I don't remember the exact topics, but I recall that one was about censoring the Internet. The ".activism" groups offer a wealth of interesting discussions. Maybe the recent discussion here on alt.org.toastmasters regarding DTM requirements would prove to be stimulating.

-- Contributed by Jane Jude, Hilton Head Island, SC

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #22 -----

Being 10 Years-old Again: Suppose you could go back in time and talk to yourself at the age of ten. What advice would you give yourself?"

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #23 -----

Getting Published: The Table Topics Master comes prepared with only one key question, which relates to the theme of "preparing and publishing a book," but is ready to ask follow-up questions based on the same theme. The answer to the first question becomes the basis for formulating a question to a second respondent; and, the answer to the second question becomes the basis for formulating a question to a third respondent; and, so on and so forth. In the example of the "preparing and publishing a book" theme, depending on the answer to the previous question, the questions that follow might be: "What should this book be about", "What should the title be," "How will be go about and do the research," "How can we promote the book", etc. Each respondent must take into account the answers of previous respondents.

-- Contributed by Harry Aneziris, DTM, former Area Governor and District 46 Humorous Speech Contest Champion

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #24 -----

Starting a New Business: As with the previous concept ("Getting Published"), the theme can revolve around starting a new business. Follow-up questions could involve "What service or product will you choose", "How will you promote the business", "How will you get it financed", "Will you quit your job to start the business or will you keep your job and work the new business on the side", etc. Each respondent must take into account the answers of previous respondents.

-- Also contributed by Harry Aneziris, DTM, former Area Governor and District 46 Humorous Speech Contest Champion

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #25 -----

Letter to the Editor: Read one paragraph from different letters to the editor of your local paper, and then respondents offer their opinions.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #26 -----

Walking Dictionary: The Table Topics Master provides each participant with a very obscure (but actual) word from the dictionary, and the respondent comes up with a convincing definition of that word.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #27 -----

No-Show: At one meeting, the Table Topics Master was a "no-show." So we created a group story: We started at one end of the room, and gave each participant 1-to-2 minutes to develop the story before passing it on to the next participant. It was a lot of fun -- and it is worth a try if your scheduled Table Topics Master is a "no-show."

-- Suggested by Ned Graham, CTM (Atlanta, Georgia)

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #28 -----

Word Association: Write different words on about 30 small pieces of paper, and put them into a hat. Have each respondent choose four pieces of paper, and ask them to create a story from the four words chosen. Alternatively, they can discuss what the four words have in common or how their meanings are inter-related. (Note: Variations of the word are ok. For example, if the word is "telescope," then "telescopic" may be used in the story).

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #29 -----

Table Topics Training: At one meeting, we tied the Table Topic session to the educational program. The educational program was about how to answer Table Topics by either rewording the question, not answering the question but asking your own, or taking the opposite side than you were asked. Each person who did Table Topics after this portion had to do one of the above. It was a great learning experience for everyone, and opened our eyes to new ways of answering Table Topics.

-- Suggested by "Sharon," member of Last Word Toastmasters Club

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #30 -----

FOOD Questions: Most memorable meal; Favorite food; Least favorite food; Strangest food ever eaten; Worst meal; Strangest place ever eaten.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #31 -----

Introductions: Spend a minute or so reviewing basic introductions. Then bring up each speaker and have them pull an object out of a bag, and have them 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.) -- Contributed by Dave Schneider

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #32 -----

Talk and Gesture: The Table Topics Master calls upon participants in pairs. One person speaks to the topic and the other participant stands next to the first person and performs all the associated gestures. For this routine, ideal topics include: Working on street repair; The joy of dancing; Wrestling a bear at the State Fair; Demonstrating Tupperware; Rock Climbing; etc.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #33 -----

"What Did the President Know, And When Did He Know It?" We had an interesting Table Topics session that simulated the White House daily press briefing. Table Topics respondents were asked to take on the role of the President's Press Secretary, and the members of the audience served as the White House press corps. Each respondent took on a question from the audience. Talk about thinking on your feet!

-- Contributed by Andrea Turner, VPE, Mile Square Toastmasters Club,
Hoboken, New Jersey

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #34 -----

"Home Is Where The Heart Is": Discuss an unusual or inconvenient place to live and defend the place as a nice place to live. Examples: Next to a nuclear power plant; In a swamp; Bottom of the Grand Canyon; Top of the Matterhorn; Beside a Landfill.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #35 -----

Alphabet Soup: Respondents have to start each sentence with a word that begins with a specific letter (first "a", then "b", etc.), then the next person creates a sentence beginning with the next letter. For example: Apples are my favorite fruit. Bananas are better. Can you believe what we are talking about? Don't you think it would be better if we spoke about politics?

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #36 -----

Back To the Future (Or, "Paging Dr. Margaret Mead"): Put everyday items into a bag and let each speaker select an item to discuss. However, the year is 2525 and the speaker is an archeologist. From that perspective, explain what the item was used for in the year 2005.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #37 -----

"The Day I Met Elvis": Each speaker tells about a time (real or imagined, but preferably real) when they ran into a celebrity.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #38 -----

TV Talk Show: Check the TV listings to see what the topics are on OPRAH, Dr. PHIL, MAURY, MONTEL, JERRY SPRINGER, etc. Each speaker discusses a topic.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #39 -----

Round Robin: Use a round-robin approach for table topics. Going around the room, every willing Toastmaster or guest continues a story from the last word uttered by the person preceding them. Each person must speak for a set amount of time, and a bell is rung when that time is up indicating the person must stop speaking mid-sentence. Normally a story is introduced by the Table Topics Master, and each respondent adds to the story ensuring continuity between responses.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #40 -----

Capture Their Attention: The concept I tried to convey in a recent Table Topics session was that it is very important to capture and secure the attention of your audiences at the very beginning of any presentation. What I did was have the Table Topics respondents do just the introductions for various topics I gave them with the focus on being dramatic, unusual, humorous or different. We also do storytelling, or pulling a word out of a bag and commenting on it and things of that nature.

-- Contributed by Yvonne Clarke, President, Omni Toastmasters Club,
Brooklyn, New York

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #41 -----

Celebrity Impersonation: Names of celebrities, politicians or other figures are used as questions and respondents must use gestures as emphatically as possible to convince the audience they are in fact the person in question.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #42 -----

Dressing Up: Give the respondent an article of clothing, and ask them to describe the situation they last wore it in.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #43 -----

TV News Reporter: Ask each respondent to describe a scene as a news reporter, and note the difficulty people have with switching roles to an area they're probably not familiar with.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #44 -----

Toasting: Select an appropriate setting for each Table Topics respondent, then ask them to make an appropriate toast for the occasion. Examples: (1) You're at your high school reunion. Toast your favorite teacher who is now deceased; (2) You're at a political meeting, and a visiting US Senator whom you admire is at the meeting and you are asked to toast the Senator; (3) Your neighbors are celebrating their 25th Wedding Anniversary, and you're asked to make toast them. To give meeting attendees an idea of how to properly roast a person, this Table Topics session might follow the Project Speeches, where one of the speakers completed Project #1 ("Mastering The Toast") in the "Special Occasion Speeches" Advanced Manual.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #45 -----

Before They Were Famous: Celebrity magazines or popular internet sites often run photos of celebrities before they became famous (e.g., from high school yearbooks, or even police mug shots!). Bring a set of these photos to the Club meeting. Table Topics respondents will try to explain who they think the famous person in the photo is and why, and also share what they know or think about the famous person.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #46 -----

Baby Pictures: Everyone has a baby picture ... stored somewhere. For this Table Topics session, Club members are asked to bring in their baby pictures or photos of themselves from early childhood. Table Topics respondents are given a photo to peruse, and then tell the audience who they think the person in the photo is and, more importantly, why. An alternative approach – and one that requires less effort and less cooperation from Club members – is to bring a set of Baby Pictures of famous celebrities and give each Table Topic respondent a chance to peruse the photo and to explain who the famous celebrity is and why (Celebrity baby photos are published in a lot of popular internet sites or in celebrity magazines).

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #47 -----

Shakespeare: We recently had a member who, when they served as Table Topics Master, used quotations from a variety of Shakespeare plays as the basis for Table Topics questions. It was unique and everyone got involved.

-- Contributed by Andrea Turner, VPE, Mile Square Toastmasters Club,
Hoboken, New Jersey

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #48 -----

Celebrity Fashion Hits or Misses: Celebrity magazines, fashion magazines and popular internet sites often run photos of celebrities (who are usually appearing on a red carpet) who have dressed-up special for some awards show. Bring a set of these photos to the Club meeting. Table Topics respondents will try to explain whether the celebrity was a “fashion hit” or a “fashion miss.” Some of these celebrities often go “over the top” with their fashion choices, so this Table Topics theme can generate a lot of laughs.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #49 -----

Roasting: Have each Toastmaster roast the person next to them for an accomplishment specified by the Table Topics Master. To give meeting attendees an idea of how to properly roast a person, this Table Topics session might follow the Project Speeches, where one of the speakers completed Project #3 (“The Roast”) in the “Special Occasion Speeches” Advanced Manual.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #50 -----

Borrow From Your Favorites: One of the Table Topics themes that worked really well in my club was the one when I asked my fellow Toastmasters to talk about their favorite entertainers and what techniques they can adopt to their own speeches that would mimic the entertainers they admire.

-- Contributed by Inna Bedny, ATMB, member of Speak UPS Toastmasters
(Club #5169) in New Jersey

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #51 -----

Million-Dollar Word: Give each Toastmaster a word or phrase and ask them to speak on it WITHOUT using the word or its variations, WITHOUT grunting with ums or uhs, or repeating themselves. If the speaker does any of these, the audience must scream out for them to sit down immediately.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #52 -----

Complete This Thought: Provide an interesting opening line to a story, and ask Toastmasters to finish it.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #53 -----

Murder Mystery: Each respondent is given one line and asked to weave a story from it. Here are several story lines to use:

- 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....
- 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, and said....
- It was a cold and rainy night. I had just settled down with a book by the fire when suddenly I heard a noise in the garage...

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #54 -----

“... It Was A Very Good Year”: Bring a bag of pennies or other coins. Each respondent pulls a coin from the bag and talks about the mint year stamped on the coin. It could be something in history, or something that happened to the respondent, during that year.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #55 -----

Noah's Ark: Noah is about to embark on his ark and there is room for only one more pair of animals. Each speaker selects a piece of paper. On it is printed the name of an animal. The speaker then 'becomes' that animal and makes a case for why s/he and his/her mate should be selected for that last vacancy. They are NOT to give the name of their animal. Some ideas are peacock, hippopotamus, rattlesnake, kangaroo, mouse, and alligator. The pair of speakers who are voted "Best Table Topics Speakers" get to sail on the Ark!

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #56 -----

Mirror in a Box: Have a small box with an item in it. Have each Toastmaster open the box and describe what is in the box without telling everyone what is in the box. What is in the box? A mirror.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #57 -----

Life As An Object : Ask the participant to describe his/her life if he/she was an object, i.e., a mirror, a table, a chair, a briefcase, a door, etc

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #58 -----

“Bright Lights, Big City”: Pretend you are new to the city or town where your Club meets, and ask the Table Topics respondent, “I'm new to [this City], and even then don't have a lot of time to find my way around. Could you please help me by sharing your favorite local restaurants and other fun spots.”

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #59 -----

“Favorite Places” Theme: Table Topics questions are created which revolve around this interrogatory phrase, “Which is your favorite?” Possibilities for “favorite places” include: Restaurant, Bar, Night Club, Sporting venue; Way of traveling; Book store; Park; Place to spend a leisurely Sunday afternoon; Place to unwind on a Friday night; Place to take a visitor

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #60 -----

Vacations: The Table Topics Master comes prepared with only one key question, which relates to the theme of “vacations,” but is ready to ask follow-up questions based on the same theme. The answer to the first question becomes the basis for formulating a question to a second respondent; and, the answer to the second question becomes the basis for formulating a question to a third respondent; and, so on and so forth. In the example of the “vacations” theme, depending on the answer to the previous question, the questions that follow might be: "How do we go", "How long do we stay", "How do we spend the time there", "How do we pay for that", etc. Each respondent must take into account the answers of previous respondents.

-- Contributed by Harry Aneziris, DTM, former Area Governor and
District 46 Humorous Speech Contest Champion

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #61 -----

Debates: Pose a question, ask one person to support the view, another to rebut it. You may like to alternate for several pairs, or pick a different topic for each pair. Suggested topics could come from the local press or the national press. Remember if you use debates, you are seeking both sides of the story - emphasize this in your introductory remarks.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #62 -----

Beach Party: The theme at one meeting of our Club was "beach party." We had name tags made out of paper in the shape and artwork of watermelon; Beach Boys music being played before and after the meeting; and beach paraphernalia ranging from beach towels, balls and water guns spread across the whole room. For the Table Topics, the Table Topics Master used the beach materials in the room as well as sea shells with subject labels ranging from surfing to nude beach colonies.

– Recommended by James Ellisor of TechOrators Toastmasters, Columbia, SC

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #63 -----

Yesterday: The Table Topics Master says, "I guess as we get older the past seems to be more exciting just because there is more of it, but there are some things that can only happen once, and I would like you to recall some of the firsts in your life. Do you remember:

- *Your first day at work*
- *Your first car*
- *The first time you used a computer*
- *Your first date*
- *Your last day at school*

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #64 -----

Excuses & Explanations: From time to time, we need to think creatively to get out of a tight spot. If you found yourself in this situation, how would you respond?:

- *Why didn't you do your homework?*
- *What are you doing in there? (your parents asked / your children asked)*
- *Where have you been?*
- *Do you like it?*
- *Would you like to see a movie?*
- *You've forgotten my name, haven't you?*

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #65 -----

The Socratic Method of Storytelling: Use questions only while telling a story. Examples of story to be told in this manner include: *Describe your first job interview. Your best vacation. The three little pigs. Goldilocks and the three bears. Washington crossing the Delaware.* The only rule for Table Topics respondents is that they must tell these stories by using strings of questions.

– Contributed by Dave Schneider

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #66 -----

Postcards #1: Have a collection of picture postcards available for this group. Then ask Table Topics respondents various questions that involve postcards. Examples include:

- *Tell us about a postcard that you have sent*
- *What makes a great postcard?*
- *Tell us about a postcard that you have received*
- *Tell us about the time that you forgot to send a postcard*

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #67 -----

Postcards #2: Now provide each Table Topics respondent with a picture post card and ask her why she would like to visit that place. (Do this several times with a variety of cards.)

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #68 -----

Postcards #3: Other applications for picture post cards (ask the same question to each participant, just change the card):

- *What do you know about this place?*
- *What you write if you were sending this card?*
- *To whom would you send a card from here?*

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #69 -----

"Stand Up and Speak": One time when I was the Table Topics Master I used the "Stand Up and Speak" Table Topics Game cards I purchased at last year's District 46 Fall Conference Resource Center. These cards are created and produced by Toastmasters International (TI) and can also be purchased from them directly either through the TI website (www.toastmasters.org) or through the TI Supply Catalog. With the pack that I purchased, the cards consist of pictures only. I had each Table Topics respondent select their own card (instead of me choosing the card) and they had to speak about the picture that was portrayed on the card they selected.

-- Contributed by Deidre Bourne, CTM, VPE, Harlem Toastmasters Club,
Harlem, New York

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #70 -----

“Scruples”: Another time when I was the Table Topics Master I used the questions to a game I have had buried in my closet. The name of the game is called "Scruples." The questions consisted of scenarios and the person would have to answer “Yes” or “No,” and provide the reason why.

-- Also contributed by Deidre Bourne, CTM, VPE, Harlem Toastmasters Club, Harlem, New York

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #71 -----

“Did You Know That I Once ... ?”: Each speaker is required to tell an amazing story about themselves. The members then vote for each speaker as having told the truth or not. The speaker who fooled the most people either way, wins the ribbon for Best Table Topics.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #72 -----

Ambushed By A Reporter: Bring a camcorder to the meeting and pick members at random. Have each stand up, and, under the glare of the camera lights, grill the member about the "terrible" thing he or she did. Interview each member for 1 minute, then play back the tape.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #73 -----

“Take My Job, Please!”: Have each member write down, on a piece of paper, the job that they would consider the best job in the world for them. Then pass the papers to the person on the left. Call on members to stand and explain why the job on the paper in front of them is the best job in the world.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #74 -----

Random Number: Recently, the Table Topics Master was absent from my Club meeting and the suggestion was made that the Table Topics respondents would be provided a number at random and asked to speak about that number. The member that won “Best Table Topics” that night spoke about the number "eight." He shared a complete story from his time in college ... and ended his Table Topic response by telling us that his Mathematics professor, who had a heavy European accent, told him that his eights looked like they had "Crashed into the wall." We all thought that was pretty hilarious.

-- Contributed by Mary Wong, Summit Toastmasters Club, Summit, New Jersey

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #75 -----

Back-To-School: List a number of educational classes on a board. Each speaker picks one of the classes and explains why that class is the most important class to take to round out an education. Once used, the class is "removed" from the board.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #76 -----

Awards Night: Make a list of "accomplishments" (best underwater basketweaver, best nuclear power plant designer, best TV remote control switcher, etc.) and print them on pieces of paper. For each “award” listed on the piece of paper, the Table Topics Master calls on two respondents to come forward. The first respondent reads the “award” printed on the slip of paper and then for 1-2 minutes “presents the award” to the second respondent. Then, the second respondent is asked to deliver a 1-2 minute speech where he or she “accepts” the award. To give meeting attendees an idea of how to present or accept an award, this Table Topics session might follow the Project Speeches, where two speakers, working in tandem, completed Project #4 (“Presenting an Award”) and Project #5 (“Accepting An Award”) in the “Special Occasion Speeches” Advanced Manual.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #77 -----

“Dealing With It”: Tie your Table topics to the evening's theme. Our Club had a meeting with this theme: "Dealing with it." I pasted situations on the back of playing cards which ended with the phrase "Deal with it." For example: You enter a room and reach in to turn on the light switch. Suddenly your arm is grabbed by a six fingered furry hand which you realize isn't human. Deal with it.

– Suggested by Toastmaster David Schneider

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #78 -----

TV Show Plot Themes: One Club tied its Table Topics session around the popular TV show, "X Files." Table Topics respondents had to discuss various scenarios which were "bizarre." For example: God has an infomercial on channel one.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #79 -----

90 Second Art Critic: Each respondent receives a sheet of paper on which children had drawn weird pictures. The papers might be borrowed from a friend who teaches elementary school art. Respondents are asked to be "90 second art critics" and to discuss the significance of the work.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #80 -----

"That Aroma Reminds Me Of ...": A recent Table Topic at our club was one of the best we have ever seen. Our member handed out small plastic containers with cotton wool soaked in a scent (dettol, perfume, etc.) and asked the participants what memories this scent evoked. One member said the dettol reminded him of boot camp! A really worthwhile Table Topics and well worth a try.

– Recommended by Sandy Scott of District 74

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #81 -----

Valentine's Day Theme Idea #1 ("Antony and Cleopatra"): At the meeting closest to Valentines Day, the Topics Master brings red carnations. Pairs of people were asked to participate instead of individuals. The first man was asked to play the role of "Antony" and give the carnation to his "Cleopatra" along with a suitable declaration of love. "Cleopatra" then had to reciprocate and present a carnation to him.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #82 -----

Valentine's Day Theme Idea #2 ("Puppy Love"): The structure and setup was the same for this theme as it was for Valentine's Day Theme Idea #1. However the theme here was NOT Antony and Cleopatra. Rather the theme was 3rd graders who are constantly tormenting each other, but secretly like each other.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #83 -----

Valentine's Day Theme Idea #3 ("Together Forever"): The structure and setup was the same for this theme as it was for Valentine's Day Theme Idea #1. However the theme here was NOT Antony and Cleopatra. Rather the theme was a couple just celebrating their 50th Valentines Day together.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #84 -----

Valentine's Day Theme Idea #4 ("Daddy's Little Girl"): The structure and setup was the same for this theme as it was for Valentine's Day Theme Idea #1. However the theme here was NOT Antony and Cleopatra. Rather the theme was a father to his very young daughter. .

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #85 -----

Testimony From One Very Brave and Motivated Newer Member: "Let's use swimming as an analogy for Table Topics. A person can always read about the techniques of swimming or read from a Toastmasters manual about the strategies in dealing with Table Topics questions. But until a person tries the first stroke in the water or stands up at the podium to utter the first word, no progress may be made towards the final goal of self-improvement. Since I joined Toastmasters, I have visited about 50+ Toastmasters clubs mostly in the NYC area that include the Bronx, Manhattan, Staten Island, Brooklyn, and Queens. In most of the clubs that I have visited, I was given the chance to speak at Table Topics and considering that I have visited over 50 clubs, that means speaking spontaneously at least 40 times in a matter of two months. It took a lot of stamina and courage because the audiences were often new people whom I have never met before, but I started getting used to a lot of strange stares and looks. The experience strengthened me as a Toastmaster to stand and speak in front of strangers, which is normally the case when a person is asked to give a keynote speech in front of a new audience."

-- Contributed by Dr. Victoria Ying, active member of several Toastmasters Clubs and Test Speaker, 2005 District 46 Speech Evaluation Contest

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #86 -----

Campfire Stories: The Topics Master asks everyone to sit on the floor in the center of the room, or on chairs brought to the center. All the lights are turned off and a flashlight is used to simulate a campfire. The Topics Master give the titles and participants tell campfire stories.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #87 -----

Openings That Get Their Attention: Presumably to get practice on how to effectively open a speech, participants are asked to give the opening of a speech, with the speech topic briefly described by the Topics Master.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #88 -----

Closings That Win Them Over: Presumably to get practice on how to effectively close a speech, participants are asked to give the closing of a speech, with the speech topic briefly described by the Topics Master.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #89 -----

Hometown Olympics: At one Club meeting, held the week when the Olympic torch was to past through our city, our Table Topics Master created a paper/cardboard Olympic torch. In place of the flames, paper "flames" were made containing different subjects about the Olympics. These ranged from the economic impact the Games would have on our city to why frog jumping should be an Olympic sport.

-- Recommended by James Ellisor of TechOrators Toastmasters, Columbia, SC

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #90 -----

"And Now For A Message From Our Sponsor": 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.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #91 -----

Transit Talk: Your Club might use the local transit system (LIRR, MetroNorth, NJ Transit, PAT, NYCTA, etcl) as a Table Topics theme. All Table Topic questions would relate to the public transportation system, i.e., a typical question might be 'What would you do to improve the Sunday bus service?'

-- Recommended by John Fleming, CTM (Edmonton Alberta, Canada)

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #92 -----

"Take This Job and Shove It!": Have each member write down on a piece of paper, the job that they would consider the worst job in the world for them. Then pass the papers to the person on the left. Call on members to stand and explain why the job on the paper in front of them is the worst job in the world.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #93 -----

Help From Headquarters: Toastmasters International makes available for sale through its Supply Catalog a variety of Table Topics Question materials in the catalog, including 2 sets of questions/materials for table topics. You might want to check it out.

-- Suggested by Norma Whetzel (District 45)

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #94 -----

White Elephant: Hold an auction. Each member brings a "white elephant" from home to sell ... or come prepared to offer a service. Each member then auctions off his or her item/service. It makes for a fun session. In addition, if you belong to a community Club in need of money, it is also a great fund-raiser.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #95 -----

"It Just Ain't So": 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?"

-- Suggested by Dan Goodman

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #96 -----

Zen Master: The Topics Master at our last meeting introduced some Zen-like topics, i.e.

What is the difference between a stream, a creek and a river?

Why is the deer on the deer-crossing sign along the highway always facing left?

(And the all-time favorite) What is the significance of life?

Why are we here?

Our club had great fun with these.

– Suggested by “sillamint@aol.com”

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #97 -----

A Second Chance: "Suppose you could go back in time and talk to yourself at the age of ten. What advice would you give yourself?"

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #98 -----

“Salespeople for Hire”: One of our newer members came up with a really fun idea. She started by telling us she was in charge of Marketing at a new corporation, and was hiring sales people. She asked everyone called upon to demonstrate their sales techniques, and 'sell' the produce to the audience. She then handed them an envelope with an item in it. A few of the items were a pocket knife, a needle threader, and a 'Great Job' pin.

– Suggested by “Sharon,” member of Last Word Toastmasters

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #99 -----

Holiday or Christmas Party Gift Exchange: In December, your Club might decide to have a Christmas or Holiday theme meeting with a gift exchange. During Table Topics, each respondent picks a wrapped gift from under the "tree" and explains why he (she) thinks this is the most wonderful gift in the world.

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #100 -----

“Win, Lose, or Draw”: One Table Topic approach I like is a variation of “Win, Lose, or Draw.” Write a down a thing, idea, phrase, or whatever for each of your table topics questions. Call up one person, show them the concept and give them one minute (or less) to try to draw something that represents that thing or concept. Then call a second person to speak for 1 to 2 minutes on what was drawn (they don't know what the thing you wrote down was). If you wish you can have the audience guess what the thing was. This is a fun way to add a twist on to Table Topics.

-- Contributed by Victor Peters, Terrapin Toastmasters, Maryland

==> TABLE TOPIC IDEA #101 -----

Fortune Cookie: It is appropriate to end this list of *101 Ideas for Great Table Topics* with perhaps one of the most reliably effective Table Topics theme around. Before the meeting, the Table-Topics Master purchases a bag of Chinese fortune cookies from a specialty grocery store. During the Table Topics session, each respondent picks a fortune cookie from the bag and uses the "fortune" or message inside as the topic to talk about. This theme can be used at any time of the year, or even at a Chinese New Year theme meeting. Some say the best feature of this concept is that afterwards the respondent gets to eat their fortune cookie ☺

===== ***101 Ideas for Great Table Topics*** =====

Updated: May 2006

Background and Acknowledgements

At the Fall 2005 District 46 Conferences, one of the workshops was entitled, “*Table Topics – Fear It No More.*” I was given the opportunity to lead that workshop, which allowed participants to hear and share ideas for success in handling Table Topics questions in Toastmasters and impromptu speaking situations in life and work. The “7 Re” formula for facing down a tough inquisitor was presented to the audience: 1-Relax, 2-Reflect, 3-Register, 4-Relate, 5-Reinforce, 6-Recommend and 7-Recap. Table Topics is often seen by some as merely an interesting sideline of the Toastmasters meeting. In reality, success in Table Topics can translate to more confidence at work and in social situations. The workshop was intended to help attendees obtain strategies for avoiding “dry mouth” and “blank brain” when called on for Table Topics – or when faced with unsettling questions from a boss, a significant other, or even an IRS auditor! I am grateful to the attendees for making the workshop a positive, learning experience ... and to the District 46 Fall 2005 Conference Committee for putting on a great event and for making room for the workshop.

Aside from the problem of anxiety for Table Topics respondents, Table Topics presents an equally vexing challenge for Table Topics Masters and meeting planners: *What questions to ask?* This modest little document grew out of the Fall 2005 District 46 Conference workshop, and is intended to help Table Topics Masters and other Club officers with themes and topics for questions. The ideas are drawn from my files and from other sources, including from Toastmasters around the world.

However, I am very much indebted to the Toastmasters from District 46 listed below who contributed their ideas to this list of ***101 Ideas for Great Table Topics***. These ten Toastmasters attended the Fall 2005 District 46 Conference workshop on Table Topics and later sent me great themes and topics for inclusion:

Harry Aneziris
Inna Bedny
Deidre Bourne
Yvonne Clarke
Dennis Fokas
Radhi Spear
Andrea Turner
Mona Valore
Mary Wong
Victoria Ying

This list will continue be updated. Please don't hesitate to send me your contributions. Who knows, but with a little help from friends, that someday a second list, ***101 MORE Ideas for Great Table Topics***, might not be issued? Looking forward to hearing from you!

-- Mark LaVergne, 718-457-8390, MarkLaVergne@aol.com