

Toastmaster Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What is Toastmasters?

A. Toastmasters International was founded in 1924 as a non-profit organization dedicated to helping people develop and improve their public speaking skills.

Q. Why would I want to improve my public speaking skills?

A. The ability to speak in public is a critical component to being a leader in any field. All good managers and leaders have the ability to communicate with confidence to groups of people or one-on-one. In addition, people have found that becoming comfortable with speaking to a group makes their day-to-day interactions much more effective and pleasurable, even if they aren't required to speak in public.

Q. How will Toastmasters help improve my speaking skills?

A. Through practice. The meetings are designed so that everyone, or almost everyone, gets to speak during each meeting. Over time, your apprehensions about public speaking diminish, and your confidence increases. The value of Toastmasters is that you get to practice in front of a group that won't criticize you, even if you're really bad (I know that from experience). Improvement is dramatic with a consistent weekly effort.

Q. What kind of speeches are given? What kind of speaking will I do?

A. Every meeting has a several roles that are filled by members. Each one of these roles has some speaking involved - basically giving a short report. Also, each meeting has one or more prepared speeches, along with an evaluator for each prepared speaker. Finally, during table topics most remaining attendees are asked to give an impromptu talk for two minutes on a given topic. Impromptu speaking on a topic can be scary, but it's a valuable learning tool. Topics range from technical subjects to humorous; all subjects are fair game.

The Toastmasters basic speech workbook, the Competent Communicator Manual, guides you through ten basic speeches. Each one concentrates on a particular aspect of speaking, such as using voice, gestures, or organization in your speech. The topic for each of your speeches is entirely up to you. Subjects that interest you strongly make good speeches. In addition, Toastmasters has a Competent Leadership Manual structured similarly beginning with a basic Competent Leadership Manual. Each educational program also has advanced levels of communication and leadership.

Q. What kinds of people are in the club?

A. Actually, the group is very diverse. It includes people from all walks of life, including professionals, retired employees, men and women, unemployed individuals, young and old, entrepreneurs, as well as stay-at-home moms. The only common attribute among members is a desire to improve public speaking, and even then the reasons for doing so are different for everybody. Some would like to advance in a career that requires speaking ability, others seem to enjoy speaking, and some just like to improve themselves.

Q. How do I get involved?

A. The first step is to visit a meeting. You can see the group in action, and see for yourself how it works. You may visit as many meetings as you like, and as many different clubs as you like with no obligation or pressure to join the club. Remember, Toastmasters is a non-profit organization. Contact Toastmasters International or the Vice President of Membership at any club for answers to more of your questions.

Q. Will I be asked to speak if I visit a meeting?

A. Guests are asked if they would like to participate in the meeting's table-topics session, but there is no pressure to participate.

Q. Without criticism, how can I improve? Don't I need feedback?

A. Every prepared speech you give will be evaluated by an evaluator, providing verbal and written comments on your areas of strength as a speaker and provides 1-2 suggestions for improvement about your speaking abilities. You may also ask other members for their feedback. Our club mission says it best: *"The mission of a Toastmasters club is to provide a mutually supportive and positive learning environment in which every individual has the opportunity to develop oral communication and leadership skills, which in turn foster self-confidence and personal growth."* So, while criticism is not part of the Toastmasters experience, identifying your strengths and suggesting areas to further develop, provides an environment that encourages self-improvement.