

# A Handbook for New Toastmasters

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Tips and Suggestions for  
Getting Off to a Great Start

Ilene Wolfman, ACG  
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# Preface:

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This handbook was written to complete the requirements for a Toastmasters High Performance Leadership Project. Ensuring that new club members are successfully oriented is an ongoing commitment for every club striving to be a Distinguished Club. It is my hope that this handbook will contribute toward easing that process.

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Ilene Wolfman  
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# A Handbook for New Toastmasters

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## I've just joined Toastmasters. Now what?

### What can I expect as a brand new Toastmaster?

Congratulations on your decision to join a Toastmasters club. This is a fabulous international organization that provides an incredible opportunity to learn, enhance and practice speaking and leadership skills. If you embrace the program, there will be an enormous value to the skills you gain for an amazingly modest price.

Soon after your club submits your application to Toastmasters International, you will receive a copy of the Competent Communicator (CC) and Competent Leadership (CL) Manuals. Both manuals provide excellent information and are your roadmap to building your skills and success as a club member.

### What can I learn from the Competent Communication and Competent Leadership Manuals?

Both manuals are well written and easy to follow. Together they provide a road map to successful growth and development as a Toastmaster. For example, at the back of the Competent Leadership Manual there is an Appendix that briefly describes some of the tasks you can complete for each of the 10 projects. You'll also find links to many other tools on the Toastmasters International website, [www.toastmasters.org](http://www.toastmasters.org).

The Competent Communication Manual provides a wealth of information including guidelines for your first ten basic speeches. For example, at the back of the manual you'll find information about the Toastmasters Education Program and the Leadership and Communication Tracks. You'll also find an outline of key responsibilities for each role during your club's regular meeting and responsibilities for club officers. Your manual may also include several pages titled "Your Toastmasters Survival Guide" with great suggestions. The suggestions in this handbook answer a few more common questions that may arise as you begin to explore the different roles.

### Do I have to be good at speaking to speak?

Of course not! People join Toastmasters at all levels of speaking ability. It's not important how good you are as a speaker when you get started. It only matters how much better you become with time and practice.

People join for different reasons. While one person may panic at the thought of speaking in front of a room full of people, another person may freeze at the thought of speaking extemporaneously without time to prepare. Still another member may want to learn how to better manage a meeting, give a toast for a special occasion, or hone their overall speaking skills.

### **How soon do I have to be ready to speak?**

You always move at your own pace in Toastmasters. Some new members attend for several weeks before taking a role or signing up to give their first speech. Some clubs will help you get your first speech scheduled after just a few weeks. For many people, it is better to take that first step and 'get it over with' than to put it off with dread and fear. New members will get encouragement and support from other club members every time they make an effort to participate and this encouragement helps us move forward.

### **How will I learn to be a better speaker?**

Learning happens in many different ways and varies from person to person. While most people learn by taking roles and giving speeches, they also learn by watching and listening to other club members. You'll see and hear things you'd like to try and you'll also see and hear things you'd like to avoid. Sometimes we're not aware of how much progress we're making. By attending meetings on a regular basis, you will learn to be a better speaker from the very first time you attend a meeting.

### **Do I have to attend every meeting?**

No, you do not have to attend every meeting. There will certainly be circumstances that interfere with perfect attendance and that is understandable. It is with regular attendance, however, that new members find they learn most quickly, build their skills, and develop the most rewarding relationships with other members.

For many tenured Toastmasters, it is the joy of seeing colleagues on a regular basis at most meetings that encourages them to return. You know you can be an important part in a successful meeting and you'll get to see and mingle with others who share your interest in developing both speaking and leadership skills. Fellowship with other members helps to make the Toastmaster experience so rewarding.

### **What if English isn't my first language?**

Toastmasters is an ideal opportunity for practicing English, especially when it is not a person's first language. This is an opportunity to expand your vocabulary, hear words pronounced correctly (hopefully), and even get feedback from mentors and evaluators on correct pronunciation.

### **How do I get a mentor to help me?**

Every club has a different way of handling a request for a mentor. Check with your club's VP of Education or one of the other club officers to learn about getting a mentor to help you with your first few speeches.

Even if your club does not have a formal mentor program, you can always ask a more experienced member to help you get started. At times, even experienced speakers seek a mentor to help them advance and some mentoring relationships last a long time. Don't let anything stand in your way of getting the guidance you need to develop and improve.

## Why do certain things happen at a meeting?

### Why is there so much applauding?

Applause is a very old practice originally designed to show appreciation. It is customary to applaud after a performance, and every speaking opportunity at a Toastmasters meeting is a small performance – a performance to practice your speaking skills.

You'll notice that we also use applause to encourage a speaker while he or she approaches the lectern before speaking. This lets the speaker know we're excited and eager to hear what they have to say.

### It seems the applause lasts for a long time. Why is that?

We try to never leave the stage unattended. There's a general rule that you 'never leave the stage empty.' It should always be clear that there is someone standing up in charge of the meeting. In practice, we applaud from the time the Toastmaster or General Evaluator calls the next person to speak. Once that person arrives at the lectern, the two people transfer 'ownership' of the stage. That's when they generally greet each other by shaking hands and the host prepares to step down as the new speaker begins to speak. Once the speaker is done, we show our appreciation by applauding while the stage is transitioned back to the host and the speaker returns to his or her seat. Ideally, the stage is never left unattended.

### Why are there so many handshakes?

Handshakes, like applause, have been around for a long time. The handshake is a common form of greeting, parting, and congratulating a person or expressing gratitude. It conveys trust, respect, and equality. One suggestion is that, "If you shake on the way in, then shake on the way out." With that in mind, remember to shake hands with the person who introduces you at the start and end of your speaking role.

### Why is timing the roles done so seriously?

A well-run meeting takes work and practice. It is important to set a realistic agenda, start on time, and end when expected. To do this, the club needs to keep track of the time and plan accordingly.

Each speaker learns to communicate thoughts in a clear and succinct manner. Unnecessary rambling, disconnected thoughts, and poorly constructed content are avoided as we learn to express ourselves in a specified length of time. Whether speaking for 1 or 2 minutes, 5 to 7 minutes, or 15 minutes for some

advanced speeches, the speaker learns to fit content into the prescribed timeframe. This requires every speaker to review and edit the content and then practice the speech to meet the recommended timeframes.

### **Are “ahs” and “ums” really counted?**

Yes, the Grammarian or the Ah Counter really counts unnecessary filler words such as “ah” and “um”. They are also listening for any other unneeded filler words such as ‘you know,’ ‘like,’ ‘and’ and ‘so.’ These simple words, when used unnecessarily, distract from the impact of the message and detract from the speaker’s professionalism.

These common fillers may occur at the start, middle or end of a sentence. We use them to fill the momentary silence that happens while we think of our next word or thought. In almost every instance, the silence would be far preferable to the unneeded filler word, but silence makes us uncomfortable until we actually embrace it. Silence gives you the moment you need to think and it similarly gives a moment to the listeners who also need to think.

Whether you’re talking to friends or family, at work or at home, listen for other people’s unnecessary fillers. The more you begin to notice them, the easier it will become to conscientiously eliminate them from your own speech.

## **I'm taking a meeting role. How can I do it well?**

### **How can I learn to handle the different roles at a meeting?**

One of the most outstanding aspects of the Toastmasters International organization is the excellent material they provide. You'll find information about every meeting role at the back of your Competent Communication Manual. You'll want to review this material as you take on different roles. Don't feel that you need to memorize anything, but rather focus on the key responsibilities.

You'll learn a great deal by observing other members perform their roles. Don't hesitate to ask them questions as you prepare to take a role yourself. You may feel more comfortable starting with the role for Timer, Grammarian or Ah Counter before stepping up to Evaluator, General Evaluator and Toastmaster.

### **Why do many speakers begin with a greeting like, "Mr. Toastmaster, Fellow Toastmasters and Welcome Guests...."?**

This opening is a more formal way of saying "Hello." It is a gracious way to include everyone in the room. It reminds me of other familiar greetings such as, "Friends, Romans, Countrymen lend me your ears" and "Good evening, ladies and gentlemen."

### **What's the difference between being the Ah Counter and the Grammarian if my club has both roles?**

There are several roles that are common to most Toastmaster clubs. The current Competent Communication Manual provides a simple and clear explanation of these two roles.

"Being a grammarian is truly an exercise in expanding your listening skills. You have two basic responsibilities: First to introduce new words to members, and second, to comment on the use of English during the course of the meeting." (CC Manual p. 74)

"The purpose of the Ah-Counter is to note words and sounds used as a crutch or pause filler by anyone who speaks during the meeting." (CC Manual p. 75).

### **What are some tips for doing a good job as the Timer?**

The Timer records the length of time each person speaks and keeps track of the overall meeting time to ensure that all sections of the meeting are completed. Each club is likely to have their own set of colored timing cards that you will use. Here are a few pointers for doing the job well:

- Get to the meeting a bit early so you can be sure to sit in a spot where it is easy for the speakers to see you and the timing cards.
- Be sure you know how to use the timing device whether it is a stop watch or on your phone.
- Confirm the length of time for each speaker prior to starting the meeting.
- Hold up a green card when the speaker reaches the minimum of their allowed time. Keep it up until you show the yellow card at the mid point of the prescribed time. Then, raise the yellow card and keep that up and visible until you raise the red card at the maximum of the prescribed speaking time.
- Make sure the signs remain up and visible. It's easy to hold the colored sign up for a moment or two and then put it down assuming the speaker has seen it. But as a speaker, it is easy to miss the sign when you're concentrating on a speech and therefore it is important that the colored signs remain visible the entire time they are speaking.

### **What makes a good choice for Word of the Day and how do I increase its usage during the meeting?**

The word of the day should be a familiar word that can be easily used although it may not be frequently used in common speech. You might do an internet search for 'the word of the day' and try to pick a word that can be readily incorporated into everyone's speech.

All too often, the Grammarian or Word of the Day Master picks a word that no one has ever heard and they're disappointed it is hardly used. Words that have more than one meaning may be easiest to use. As an example, consider the word 'appreciate.' There were four common uses. Because the word has such broad application, it will likely be used more often than many other word choices.

Print your word in large type. Include its part of speech (noun, verb, adjective, adverb etc.), the definition, and an example of the word used in a sentence. Share all of this information when you are called up to present the Word of the Day.

When you are speaking, consider using the Word of the Day at the start of your comments. That often avoids the possibility of forgetting to use it as you speak.

### **What's the best way to lead a Table Topics segment?**

Here are several suggestions for serving as Table Topics Master, also called the Topics Master, at your club:

- Explain the purpose of Table Topics. The goal is to encourage speakers to talk extemporaneously for 1-2 minutes in a coherent manner. It is an opportunity to invite people to speak who may not have another role. Explain

that the speaker can choose to answer the question or redirect the topic to something they can discuss. Remember the goal is to speak coherently and extemporaneously for 1-2 minutes!

- As Table Topics Master, read a question or present a picture or a prop, and ask for a volunteer to respond. If no one volunteers, you can call on someone including a guest. Then, pass the lectern to that speaker who will pass the lectern back to the Table Topics Master when they're done.
- Toastmasters International recommends that you ask your question and then call upon someone. Use a different question for each person. The benefit of this approach is that everyone needs to think about the question and how to answer if they're selected.
- A variation is to choose the speaker and have that person randomly pick a prepared topic from a list or out of a hat. The topics are prepared in advance by the by the Table Topics Master.
- If there is a theme for the meeting, the Table Topic questions might relate to that theme. For example, if the theme of your meeting is Winter, prepare questions about this season.
- Check the agenda so that you can plan to call on members who do not have another speaking role.
- Remember, this is the part of the meeting where Guests can participate. Be sure to invite them to give it a try. Some clubs will ask their Guests if it is okay to call on them at the start of the meeting. That's a great way to avoid embarrassing anyone who is visiting and not yet ready to speak in front of the club.
- Keep your comments short. Your job is to use your time to call on others – not take time to be a participant yourself.
- Keep your eye on the Timer to know when your Table Topics section of the meeting is nearing its end of time.

### How can I be a good Speech Evaluator?

Most people join Toastmasters in an effort to improve as speakers. The role of Speech Evaluator is a key part of that journey. Consider these three questions as a Speech Evaluator:

- Based on where the Speaker is on the learning curve (their first speech or tenth), what did they do well?
- What opportunity is there for them to improve?
- What will motivate them to continue speaking? It is through ongoing practice that progress will occur.

The acronym PIE may be another helpful way to remember the key elements of an evaluation.

- The P is for Praise. What elements of the speech can be praised?

- The I is for Improve. What gift or suggestion can I offer that will help them improve?
- The E is for Encourage. What can I say that will encourage them to continue?

Once you know who you are evaluating, be sure to get their manual so that you can become familiar with the objectives of the speech. If this is their first speech, did you learn about the person? If the speech objective is to use body language, did they incorporate movement, gestures and varied facial expression? Applying the different objectives for each speech is an important part of the program.

With only two or three minutes to present an evaluation, it is important for the Evaluator to be organized and concise. Do not use up your time repeating the content of the speech and always consider the speech objectives and structure. Was there an effective opening that caught your attention? Was there a memorable closing? Was the content well organized, interesting and appropriate?

The Speech Evaluator should share his or her feedback and observations with the whole club and not just the Speaker. The Speech Evaluator can accomplish this by speaking in the third person. For example, "Mary's speech was an excellent example of getting to the point with well chosen words and tight organization." This differs from speaking only to the Speaker which might sound like, "Mary, your speech was an excellent example of getting to the point."

The evaluation represents one person's point of view. It may not represent the thought of everyone in the room. That's ok. The Speaker can accept the ideas that they believe will help them build their skills.

### **What do I do as the General Evaluator?**

The latter half of the Club Meeting is used to evaluate the speakers and this portion of the meeting is lead by the General Evaluator who essentially becomes the host for this part of the meeting rather than the Toastmaster. The General Evaluator will call upon each Speech Evaluator and other Evaluation team members including the Grammarian, Timer and Ah-Counter to give their reports.

The General Evaluator can share their view of the meeting including aspects that went well or might be improved. They may do this at the start or end of the evaluation portion of the meeting. They might even provide feedback immediately after each member of the evaluation team speaks. While the General Evaluator should allow the Speech Evaluators to focus on the details of the Speakers, the General Evaluator can share feedback on the effectiveness of each Evaluator. This is a great way to help other members become more aware of the many elements that can be included in a successful speech evaluation.

Finally, the General Evaluator should remain conscious of the time. Since they are speaking at, or near, the end of the meeting, they should be focused and concise in order to ensure that the meeting ends on time.

### **Being Toastmaster seems like a huge step for a new member. How can I best prepare for this role in order to run the meeting smoothly?**

The role of Toastmaster is key to the overall success of the meeting. It is like being the host of a party in your home. When the Toastmaster is ready and prepared, the meeting will run smoothly. Here are some suggestions:

- In some clubs it is customary for the Toastmaster to prepare an introduction for the President. The President reads this brief introduction verbatim as the Toastmaster prepares to walk to the lectern. This is a brief statement of who you are and why you're credible to take the role of Toastmaster. It might be as short as this: "Let me introduce our Toastmaster today, Jane Doe. Jane has been a member of our club for six months and she is excited to take this role for the first time. Please join me in welcoming Jane."
- Club culture and procedures vary so check with your club on the following: Does the Toastmaster help fill open roles prior to the meeting? Does the Toastmaster bring copies of the Agenda to the meeting? How does the Toastmaster get copies of introductions for each Speaker? How does your club fill roles for upcoming meetings?
- The Toastmaster should be savvy about moving the meeting forward and aware of the need to stay on schedule. They can adapt their transitions from one speaker to another depending on the time available.

## I'm the Speaker. What should I consider?

### How do I select a topic for my speech?

Sometimes picking a topic may seem like the most challenging part of the Toastmasters experience. You may not have anything in mind or you're overwhelmed with too many ideas. Topics can be found everywhere. It can be easiest to start with topics that you are familiar with or are of interest to you.

Your own life experience is filled with stories to share and your first speech, the Ice Breaker, is intended to help the club get to know you while you take that giant step forward in developing your skills. Give thought to what you'd like to share about yourself and the next few speeches may continue to build upon your life experience. For example, if your Ice Breaker talks about growing up in China, your second speech might focus on the experience of moving to America. The third speech might explore the most difficult adjustments you had to make once you settled in this country.

### What should I include in the Introduction for my speech?

When you are the Speaker, you want to prepare an introduction for your speech that you give to the Toastmaster. The Toastmaster should read your introduction verbatim. It can be brief and it might tell what speech you're giving, how long you have to speak, and the objectives for that speech. Ideally, a well written introduction will enable you to interest the audience in your speech even before you begin.

### Is there anything in particular I should say when accepting the handoff to speak from the Toastmaster?

As mentioned in an earlier section, it is polite to greet the Toastmaster, shake hands, and thank the Toastmaster for his or her introduction of you. It is then ideal to greet the audience. You might do this right at the beginning of your speech and launch directly into the content. For example, "Mr. Toastmaster, Fellow Toastmasters and Welcome Guests, let me tell you a story about..."

You may also choose to begin your speech and then officially greet the audience after the first few sentences. This can add a bit of drama to your presentation. For example: "Have you ever flown in a hot air balloon? It looks like it would be so quiet and peaceful. Right? Well, Mr. Toastmaster, Fellow Toastmasters and Welcome Guests, let me tell you what you don't see."

## Are there any suggestions for organizing my speech as a new Toastmaster?

Once you've picked your topic, the following template may help you to craft the entire speech. It follows these steps:

- First, plan your opening. This may be a couple of sentences that engage your audience.
- Next, plan the closing. This will help you to decide what to include in the body of the speech. Consider where you want to leave your listeners and how you want to link back to the opening of your speech.
- Outline the two or three topics you'll cover and a few details for each topic. All of these points should easily follow from the opening and you can briefly summarize these points as you draw to your conclusion.

The template might flow like this:

- Opening Sentence: Winter is my favorite season of the year.
- Closing: So you can see, winter fulfills my need for outdoor activity, travel to wonderful places, and holidays with friends and family.
- Body of the Speech: Sports I enjoy (skiing and ice skating); Winter vacations (in Vermont and Utah); Winter holidays (Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Years).

## Are there any suggestions for opening and closing a speech with impact?

There is no one specific way to start a speech other than this: try to open with something that catches people's attention. This might be a question, an interesting statement, or a comment delivered in a very loud or very soft voice. Give thought to your opening and consider memorizing the first few sentences of your speech so that you command the stage and have maximum eye contact with your audience.

Similarly, you want to close your speech with impact. Those last few sentences may link back to your opening sentence and tie the entire content together. Again, it is generally good advice to memorize the last few sentences so that you end with as much impact as possible.

## Does every speech need to be a new topic?

Definitely not! You can build on a topic you've already given or you can edit and 'tweak' a speech to meet other objectives. For example, you might deliver a speech emphasizing body language by demonstrating how to bake brownies. Your body movements and motions can show how to gather the ingredients, beat them together, pour them into the pan, peek at them through the oven door while baking, and then enjoy eating them. You might 'tweak' this speech and use it again for a project to incorporate visual aids. In this speech, you can bring the

ingredients and bowls for an actual demonstration, or you could use a PowerPoint presentation with illustrations of the baking process.

### **What do you say at the end of your speech? Should I say Thank you?**

It is customary for the audience to applaud at the end of your speech as a way of saying, “Thank you for your work and your talk.” It is also common to hear the speaker say “Thank you” to the audience. If you’re the Speaker, instead of saying ‘thank you,’ turn the stage back to the Toastmaster by saying, “Mr. Toastmaster” or “Madame Toastmaster.” It is likely that they will shake your hand and thank you for the speech as you return to your seat amidst the applause.

### **Do I need to do the speeches exactly in the order they appear in the manual?**

No, the speeches do not need to be given in order. You might have a topic that really lends itself well to vocal variety and so you may choose to do that speech sooner than recommended. Keep in mind, though, that there is sound reasoning in the order of the speeches. The skills build on one another in terms of their difficulty and complexity. The content of the first six speeches is largely informational and the speeches focus on developing organization and delivery skills.

The final four speeches are considerably more difficult. While you want to demonstrate the ability to organize and deliver your content, you will also be learning to research a topic, effectively utilize visual aides, and persuade or inspire your audience. There’s good reason these four speeches come later in the manual as most people find these assignments more challenging.

### **Should I memorize my speech word for word?**

This varies with each person and may even vary from one speech to another. In general, it is recommended that you memorize a few sentences at the start of your talk. This will help you make a good impression by maximizing your chance to connect with the audience by looking at them rather than any notes. Similarly, it is often suggested that you memorize the last sentence or two in order to be sure you deliver a well crafted, memorable ending.

A new speaker can generally use notes, ideally written in outline form, to deliver the middle or body of the speech. If the speech is well organized, the ideas flow readily from one point to the next. This makes it easier to learn and deliver the speech with minimal dependence on notes. On or about the third speech, you’re trying to significantly reduce or totally eliminate any notes. This is easier to do if

you know your topic, have the speech well organized, and keep to just a few key points.

There are some situations, like a Toastmasters contest, in which you might want to memorize your speech word for word. Every detail, description and gesture may be linked to a particular word or phrase that you'll want to deliver flawlessly. Your decision to memorize your speech, or to share it in a more conversational and relaxed style, will depend on your level of experience, your comfort with the topic, and the extent to which you have practiced.

### **What are some suggestions for practicing to deliver a speech?**

People learn by listening, watching, and doing. The more you can integrate all three of these methods into your practice, the better you'll do at learning your speech. For example, you may start by reading your notes or the fully written speech. Seeing the words and ideas provides some of the visual reinforcement to learning.

Next, you might practice by speaking out loud with support from your notes. Hearing the words provides the auditory reinforcement that helps you learn by listening. Some people record their speech so that they can listen to it themselves.

After several readings, you can practice by standing up and actually delivering the speech (even if you still use your notes). You might speak in front of a mirror for additional ideas on how to incorporate gestures and facial expression. Finally, you might practice out loud in the car as you drive to the meeting and/or review your notes just prior to the start of the meeting.

One important aspect of practice is timing your speech. For one person it can be a challenge to speak for as long as five minutes. For another person it can be difficult to write and deliver a speech that does not ramble along far beyond the specified time. In either case, it is important to learn to organize and edit your speech so that it fits into the specified time limits. Practicing out loud and timing your speech as you practice is a valuable way to ensure you've got a good handle on the speech's length and time.

Find what works best for you personally. The method and amount of practice you need will differ from person to person and even from speech to speech. The important thing is to prepare enough so that you can do a good job and be proud of your effort. Taking time to prepare your speech and practice the delivery is also a sign of respect for the other members and guests of your club. Since you're taking their time to deliver, you want to do the best you can for them as well as for yourself.

## How do I get rid of my “ahs” and “ums”?

The first step in overcoming these habits is to become aware and conscious of them. Many people aren't even aware of using unnecessary fillers until someone, like the Ah Counter, points it out. This is one of the greatest benefits of Toastmasters. Breaking a bad habit takes some work and practice. Here are a few tips:

- Make a concerted effort to become more aware of your own speech habits. Notice when and where the fillers occur: at the start, middle or end of a sentence. Being silent for a brief second will give you the time you need to continue.
- Accept the fact that it is OK to stop and think without making a sound – any sound. Your listener needs to think, too, so the silence helps them as well.
- Ask the Ah Counter to specifically pay attention to any of the filler words you tend to use most.
- Take pride in the progress you're making and practice eliminating these words any time you're speaking (even on the phone) and not just at meetings.
- Recognize that you may slip back into your bad habits over time and will have to renew your effort to improve again. It's OK. We're all human.

## What can I do once I finish the basic speeches?

### What are the advantages of working on the Advanced Manuals?

The advanced manuals are a great way to continue building your skills after completing the basic speaking and/or leadership assignments. You get to choose the type of speaking you'd like to develop and whether you're working on storytelling, persuasive speaking, or humorously speaking, you'll learn new skills that can be readily applied. When it comes to leadership, the advanced work enables you to participate in new roles and opportunities that may even extend beyond your own club.

### How can contests help to develop my speaking skills?

Contests are a great way to expand your skills and step beyond your normal comfort zone. For many Toastmasters, it is a chance to let your competitive nature shine as you try to do the very best you can whether or not you win. You may choose to share a speech you've already given and that you now update to make even better. You are likely to practice more than you would for a regular meeting. You will experience the excitement of knowing you're being timed and evaluated and you'll be able to consider how your speech compared to the other contestants.

New Toastmasters are welcome to compete in upcoming contests. The only membership requirement is that you need to have completed a minimum of six speech projects in the Competent Communication Manual to participate in the spring International Contest. (The only exception to this rule is if you are a charter member of a club chartered less than one year before the club contest.)

One final advantage of contests is the opportunity to meet other Toastmasters. As the contest advances from Club to Area to Division and District levels, you'll meet Toastmasters from other clubs. Even if you are not a competitor, consider attending as part of the evaluation team or the audience. You'll be amazed how impressed you'll be with the level of speaking at each successive level. Talk to your club officers if your club does not currently participate in contests and encourage them to give it a try.

### What are the advantages of becoming a club officer?

You'll develop many valuable leadership skills by becoming a club officer. Regardless of the office you hold, you'll learn skills that will serve you well in your personal and professional life. Clubs are often eager to have new ideas and active participation from new members. While it is helpful to be a member for a while to see how the club operates, there is no time requirement to become an officer – just the willingness to participate and serve the club. This is an excellent

way to become involved and help shape your club for the coming year. If this is of interest to you, speak to one of the current officers to learn more about the positions and the nomination and election process.

### **Why is becoming an Advanced Toastmaster, even a Distinguished Toastmaster, important?**

Let's compare Toastmasters to learning to read as a child. First you learn to recognize words and read picture books. You advance to books with multiple chapters as you become more adept. As you progress further, your vocabulary grows and you become more aware of the subtleties of plot and character. With time, you may begin to enjoy the pleasure of reading and sharing your ideas with others. You do not master reading just because you can initially recognize words and you certainly wouldn't want to stop learning at that point.

In Toastmasters, you take the initial steps toward better speaking in the Competent Communication Manual and begin to learn significant skills in leadership by working through the Competent Leadership Manual. You advance to more complicated and focused speeches in the advanced manuals and you expand your leadership skills by becoming active as a team member of your club or within your area and district. With time, like learning to read, you may begin to enjoy the pleasure of speaking and sharing your leadership skills with others. This progress can be demonstrated by moving through the Toastmasters Education Program on your way to becoming a Distinguished Toastmaster. Not everyone may aspire to this esteemed level, but the rewards of becoming an Advanced Toastmaster are innumerable.

### **How can I help my club achieve Distinguished Club status?**

Becoming a Distinguished Club provides the foundation for sustaining a quality club experience on a continuous basis. Members are moving through the basic manuals and beyond to more advanced levels of speaking and participation. The officers are attending training and submitting dues and other reports in a timely manner. Finally, Distinguished Clubs demonstrate an ongoing commitment to recruiting and maintaining a strong and active community of members. A Distinguished Club is well run and it is likely to remain a quality club on a sustained basis.

If you're going to take the time to join and participate in a Toastmasters Club, help ensure that it is a well run and successful club by striving to achieve and maintain Distinguished Club status.