FACILITATING DISCUSSION

TOASTMASTERS INTERNATIONAL

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TOASTMASTERS INTERNATIONAL

WHERE LEADERS ARE MADE

CONTENTS

HOW TO USE THIS SERIES

Each of the advanced manuals in this series assumes you already know the basics of speech – organization, voice, gestures, etc. – but not necessarily that your skills are fully developed. Refer to your **Competent Communication** manual if you need to review some of the principles of speech.

These advanced manuals are designed around four principles:

▶ The projects increase in difficulty within each manual, beginning with an overview of the subject and then becoming more specialized as you progress.

▶ Each subject incorporates what you have learned from the preceding ones, and it is assumed you will use these techniques whether or not they are specifically referred to in that section.

▶ The projects supply more information than you need to complete each particular assignment. This will give you ideas for future talks.

▶ It is the speech preparation and delivery that teach you, not just reading the project in the manual.

BE SURE TO

▶ Read each project at least twice for full understanding.

▶ Make notes in the margin as you read.

▶ Underline key passages.

▶ Repeat projects as necessary until you are satisfied with your mastery of a subject.

▶ Ask for an evaluation discussion or panel whenever you wish, especially if few of your club members have completed the *Competent Communication* manual.

▶ Credit up to two speeches per manual given outside a Toastmasters club if:

1) your vice president education agrees in advance

2) a Toastmasters evaluator is present, completes the written project evaluation, gives a verbal evaluation

3) you meet all project objectives.

▶ Have your vice president education sign the Project Completion Record in this manual after you complete each project.

▶ Apply for Advanced Communicator Bronze, Advanced Communicator Silver, or Advanced Communicator Gold recognition when you have completed the appropriate manuals and met the other requirements listed in the back of this manual.

INTRODUCTION

Most of the projects in Toastmasters International's *Advanced Communication Series* require you to stand up and give a speech. The presentations you will give from this manual are different. They are not speeches. In these projects you lead groups of people in discussions.

People meet every day to discuss issues and problems. Discussions are held at professional conferences and symposiums, on talk shows, in businesses and the community. Perhaps the local chamber of commerce is hosting a forum on the economic future of your town, with a panel of local business people and government officials offering their views. Or the school board is meeting to discuss budget cuts. Maybe your church planning committee will meet to consider whether to build onto the existing church or relocate.

All such meetings require a leader – someone who organizes them, communicates the issues or problems being considered, and keeps the discussions focused on these issues and problems. In some situations, the meeting leader or facilitator simply sees that the issue or problem is discussed. In others, the leader or facilitator ensures the group makes a decision.

Discussion leaders require special skills. They must know how to clearly and concisely present a problem or issue for discussion, encourage participation in the discussion, control the discussion so everyone has the opportunity to participate, handle challenging situations, help the group arrive at a decision, and remain neutral throughout the entire process.

The projects in this manual will help you learn how to lead different types of discussions. You'll learn how to moderate a panel discussion and serve as facilitator for brainstorming and problem-solving discussions. You'll also learn different methods to help a group make a decision.

These assignments are challenging, but they will provide you with valuable experience in leading discussions.

The projects in this manual require more time than most other manual projects, for several reasons. They require club members to contribute their ideas and opinions on various topics, and sometimes they require the group to discuss a problem and reach a solution. In most businesses and organizations, such discussions often take hours or even days.

Your club most likely is not able to accommodate such lengthy discussions, but to adequately learn the facilitation techniques in these projects you will need more time. Please talk with your vice president education to determine how much time is available to you. Each project provides a recommended time (the ideal amount needed to do the project during the meeting) and the optional time (the minimum amount of time needed to do the project during the meeting). We encourage clubs to be as flexible as possible for members working in this manual. Because each project gives all club members the opportunity to speak, the club could eliminate Table Topics™ at the meeting to provide the speaker more time.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

A panel discussion is an excellent method for presenting different perspectives of an issue, event, or decision. Much like the Toastmaster at a club meeting, the panel moderator facilitates the discussion, introduces the panelists, moderates the question-and-answer session after the presentations, and keeps the discussion focused and on track.

OBJECTIVES:

► Select a topic for a panel discussion.
► Identify differing viewpoints to be addressed by panelists.
► Organize and moderate a panel discussion.

Recommended Time: 28 to 30 minutes
Optional Time: 22 to 26 minutes

THE PANEL MODERATOR

Panel discussions are common at professional conferences and symposiums and on political talk shows. In a panel discussion, three or more people discuss their perspectives on a specific issue, event, or decision. The discussion is coordinated by a moderator who functions like the Toastmaster of the group. He or she explains the topic under discussion to the audience, introduces the speakers, and controls the discussion time and the question-and-answer session (if held).

The purpose of the panel is to present different viewpoints of the topic. Each panelist is selected based on his or her perspective or expertise on the subject. Suppose the topic is whether a large retail chain should be permitted to build a store in your community. You would want panelists to address such aspects of the topic as economic effect, traffic flow and environmental impact, and you would select panelists who are experts in these areas..

CHOOSING THE TOPIC

Often the organizers of a professional conference or symposium select the general subject for a panel discussion, then ask someone to be the moderator. This person is responsible for selecting appropriate panelists and organizing the event. In other situations, you may be in charge of selecting the topic as well as everything else. Whichever situation you encounter, when you are asked to serve as a moderator, you should:

1. **Narrow the panel's purpose.** The subject must be specific enough that you can adequately cover its points in the allotted time. For example, the topic "Educating Our Children" would be too broad for a panel discussion. "The Effects of the New Tax Law on Our School District" would be more manageable.

2. **Identify the points you want the panel to address.** Your goal is to provide as much information from as many perspectives as possible. If the subject of a national political talk show is the country's decision to go to war, you would want panelists representing the country's various political parties or liberal and conservative views of the decision.

SELECTING THE PANELISTS

Who your panelists are have a great impact on the panel's success. Invite panelists based on their:

1. **Knowledge of the topic.** They must be familiar with the specific topic you have chosen and have expertise in it..

2. **Position in the organization or industry.** Panelists should be credible and respected by their peers.

3. **Perspective.** Their views of the topic must complement those of the other panelists. In the example above concerning the large retail chain, having all panel members talk about the tax benefits for the community has no purpose and would be boring.

4. **Speaking skills.** Panelists must be able to communicate their views clearly.

PREPARING THE SPEAKERS

To help the discussion move smoothly and to maintain the audience's interest, panelists will want to know what is expected of them well before the event. Discuss with each the points they will cover as well as the perspective the other panelists will be presenting. This reduces the chance that some of the speakers will cover the same information. Also review the speaking order, flow of the discussion, and presentation length. To ensure that panelists keep within their allotted speaking times, you may want to agree on nonverbal signals you will give to let them know their time is expiring.

If you plan a question-and-answer session after all panelists have spoken, advise the panelists about it and tell them how long the session will last. Encourage panelists to keep their answers brief. You may want to discuss with each panelist possible questions that may be asked so they can be prepared to answer them.

Finally, ask each panelist to provide his or her introduction for you, or gather information from the panelist so you can create your own. Be sure it emphasizes why the person is a credible source of information and how their expertise relates to the subject being discussed.

MODERATING THE DISCUSSION

Your panelists are prepared. Now it's the day of the panel. Make sure all panelists are seated where the audience can see them. Usually panel members are seated at the front of the room at one or more tables, and name cards are appropriately placed on the table in front so the audience can readily identify each panelist. If tables are not available, the panel should be seated in a slight semicircle in front of the audience. As moderator, you may speak from a lectern or seat placed to the right or left end of the table(s).

The following steps will keep the discussion on track:

1. **Warmly welcome panelists and the audience.** Make everyone feel comfortable.

2. **Explain the panel's purpose.** Tell why the subject is important and needs to be addressed at this time.

3. **Briefly introduce each panelist, giving their name, title, and affiliation, if any.** (You will give more detailed introductions before each one speaks. If you give lengthy introductions all at once, the audience will forget most of what you told them by the time the second panelist speaks.)

> Discuss with each the points they will cover as well as the perspective the other panelists will be presenting. This reduces the chance that some of the speakers will cover the same information.

4. **Explain the program's format.** Each panelist will speak for an allotted amount of time.

5. **State that there will be an opportunity to ask questions of the panelists after all have spoken.**

Then proceed to the detailed introduction for the first speaker. After the first speaker has spoken, introduce the second speaker, and so forth.

THE Q & A SESSION

After all panelists have spoken, briefly summarize the points discussed and any conclusions that can be drawn. Then solicit questions from the audience. Encourage the audience to direct their question to one panel member rather than ask all panel members to answer the question.

Handling questions can be the most challenging part of a panel discussion. Your responsibility as moderator is to keep the discussion focused. You may have to cut off questioners or panelists if they digress. ("That's an interesting thought and could be the topic for another discussion. But returning to our topic…") If one panelist tries to dominate the discussion, gently direct the discussion to another. ("Arthur has provided some astonishing statistics. Sasha, what are your thoughts on this?") If one audience member asks numerous questions or wants to argue with panelists, you may interrupt, explain that others are waiting for the opportunity to ask questions and call on someone else. If at first no one has any questions, be prepared with a few of your own to ask.

> **Your responsibility as moderator is to keep the discussion focused. You may have to cut off questioners or panelists if they digress.**

One minute before the scheduled end, announce that panelists will answer one more question before you conclude the session. Then end the session with a few comments and lead the applause for both the panelists and the audience for their contributions.

YOUR ASSIGNMENT

You will conduct a panel discussion. Choose a problem or issue to be discussed and, because of time limits, only three panelists to participate. Make sure the panelists are knowledgeable about the topic and offer differing viewpoints. The panelists may be club members. Moderate the panel as described above. Be sure the Toastmaster of the meeting explains to the group the purpose of your project and that everyone is encouraged to participate in the question-and-answer session.

Well before the meeting discuss with your vice president education how much time will be available to you for this project. (Remember, because all members have the opportunity to participate in this project, the club has the option to eliminate Table Topics™ to provide more time for you.)

Recommended time is 28 to 30 minutes, with the following suggestions:

▸ 1-1½ minutes to introduce the topic and its relevance

▸ 1 minute for each panelist's introduction

▸ 4 minutes for each panelist's presentation

▸ 10 minutes for questions and answers from the audience

▸ 1 to 1½ minutes to summarize the points discussed and any conclusions that can be drawn

▸ 1 to 2 minutes to conclude the session and thank the panelists and the audience

Optional time is 22 to 26 minutes, with the following suggestions:

▸ 1 minute to introduce the topic and its relevance

▸ 1 minute for each panelist's introduction

▸ 3 minutes for each panelist's presentation

▸ 8 minutes for questions and answers

▸ 1 minute to summarize the points discussed and any conclusions that can be drawn

▸ 1 minute to conclude the session and thank the panelists and the audience

Refer to The Facilitator's Checklist in the Appendix as you prepare for this assignment.

EVALUATION GUIDE FOR **THE PANEL MODERATOR**

Title _____

Evaluator _____ Date _____

Note to the Evaluator: The purpose of this project was for the moderator to select a topic for a panel discussion, select panelists, and moderate the discussion. Each panelist covers a different aspect or viewpoint of the subject so no material overlaps. After all panelists have spoken the moderator facilitates a question-and-answer session. In addition to your verbal evaluation, please write answers to the questions below.

▶ Was the topic selected appropriate for a panel discussion?

▶ In opening the panel discussion, how well did the moderator explain the topic and its purpose?

▶ How well did the moderator introduce each panelist and their presentation topics?

▶ How effectively did the moderator control the panel's time?

▶ How effectively did the moderator manage the question-and-answer session?

▶ How could the moderator have been more effective?

▶ What did the moderator do well?

THE BRAINSTORMING SESSION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Brainstorming is a useful tool for solving problems. The group is asked to quickly generate a list of possible solutions or ideas without considering merit or practicality. The facilitator oversees the process and strives to generate maximum involvement and participation from the group. Once a list is generated, the facilitator may ask the group to discuss the ideas and reduce it until the best few remain.

OBJECTIVES:

- Select a problem for a brainstorming session for which you serve as facilitator.
- Conduct a brainstorming session.
- Have participants reduce the list of ideas to the three best.

Recommended Time: 31-33 minutes
Optional Time: 20-22 minutes

The purpose of many discussions is to find one or more possible solutions to a problem. Brainstorming can be a useful problem-solving tool. In brainstorming, a group is asked to quickly identify any and all possible solutions or ideas concerning a problem or issue without considering merit or practicality. No idea is rejected.

Suppose your company is looking for inexpensive ways to boost employee morale. Your brainstorming session would generate a list of ideas for consideration. Or maybe your Toastmasters club is losing membership. A brainstorming session could generate a list of ideas to help the club attract more members.

In some brainstorming sessions, the purpose is simply to generate a list of ideas. Then you or someone else reviews the list later to determine the best solution. In other brainstorming sessions, the participants themselves whittle down the list they generated and either decide on one of them or identify several that may be feasible and warrant further study.

THE ROLE OF A FACILITATOR

Every brainstorming session needs a facilitator. A facilitator oversees the meeting process or structure and strives to get maximum participation and involvement from group members. As facilitator, you:

1. **Make sure the room set-up is appropriate and that participants are comfortable.** All participants should be able to see one another and the facilitator. If visual aids are being used, all participants should be able to view them.

2. **Keep the group focused on the issue.** When participants digress, the facilitator interrupts and reminds everyone of the issue being discussed.

3. **Keep the discussion orderly.** When participants try to speak at once or one dominates the discussion, the facilitator maintains order and allows everyone the opportunity to speak.

4. **Ensure that everyone participates.** The facilitator sees to it that even reticent participants have the opportunity to contribute.

5. **Monitor time.** The facilitator tracks the discussion length and strives to conclude the discussion by the designated time.

Facilitators serve in a neutral capacity. You don't participate in the discussion, offer opinions, or otherwise try to influence the discussion's outcome. You want to stimulate, not stifle, contributions. Be friendly but businesslike

> **Facilitators serve in a neutral capacity. You don't participate in the discussion, offer opinions or otherwise try to influence the discussion's outcome. You want to stimulate, not stifle, contributions.**

and avoid sending verbal and nonverbal signals to participants that may have a negative impact. Laughing at someone's suggestion, tapping your foot, or standing with your arms crossed and a frown on your face send signals to others about your thoughts and may affect their contributions to the discussion. Even saying, "That's a good idea," compromises your neutrality.

BASIC BRAINSTORMING PRINCIPLES

A brainstorming session is based on the following principles:

1. **Quantity, not quality counts.** The group's goal is to generate as many ideas as possible in a short time.

2. **No idea is rejected.** Every idea is accepted, no matter how wild it may be. Often what appears to be a crazy idea may contain the kernel of a solution.

3. **All ideas are listed and displayed where everyone can see them.**

4. **Participants may build on one another's ideas.** Sometimes one person's idea sparks an idea in someone else.

5. **Discussion and analysis are prohibited.** The purpose is to generate as many ideas as possible, regardless of their merit.

THE BRAINSTORMING SESSION

Prepare the meeting room beforehand. You will need something on which to write down and display the ideas generated. A flipchart usually works best. After you fill up a page, you can tear it off the pad and stick it to the wall with tape. A large whiteboard may work too, or perhaps a laptop computer with a projector and screen. Whichever method you choose, the list should be visible to participants throughout the session.

Select someone to serve as the recorder, who writes down each idea. Like you, the recorder must be neutral. The recorder doesn't offer opinions or send verbal or nonverbal signals that may influence participants.

Start the session by welcoming everyone. Then clearly state the objective or problem to be solved. Be sure the objective is not too broad. Review the brainstorming principles with the group, then ask for ideas. For example, if the topic is how to attract new members to your club, possible ideas could be to have a Toastmasters booth at the local fair, list the club with the chamber of commerce, and ask local businesses to give flyers about the club to their employees.

Be encouraging, recognize all suggestions and supervise the recorder to ensure that all ideas are written down. If someone's idea is not clear, ask the participant to explain it and make sure the recorder understands it. Call on those who seem reluctant to speak.

If there is a lull after a few minutes, be patient. Ask the group to review the posted list. Most likely people will think of several more ideas. Continue to solicit ideas until you believe the group has exhausted all possibilities.

> **Be encouraging, recognize all suggestions. If someone's idea is not clear, ask the participant to explain it. Call on those who seem reluctant to speak.**

ANALYSIS

As mentioned earlier, in some brainstorming sessions the purpose is simply to generate a list of ideas. In others, the participants themselves whittle down the list they generated and either decide on one of them or identify several that may be feasible and warrant further study.

If the group is to determine the best solution(s), open the discussion by asking them for their comments on the first idea on the list. How practical is it? Is the expense or time involved reasonable? Will it really solve the problem? Based on their comments, you can strike the idea or retain it. Repeat this procedure for each item on the list. If, after all ideas have been discussed, more are retained than necessary, repeat the process with the remaining ideas until you have the quantity you want. (To keep the discussion within a reasonable time, all audience members need not comment on every idea.)

Remember, as facilitator you are neutral and are not to influence the discussion in any manner. You also must strive to keep the discussion to the problem at hand

YOUR ASSIGNMENT

Select a problem for a brainstorming session for which you serve as facilitator. Be sure the subject is focused, or the ideas generated will be too diverse to be useful. Follow the process described above. Use a flipchart or white board to write down and display the ideas generated, making sure the letters are large enough for everyone to read. (You may assign another member to record the ideas.) Once the list of ideas is generated, have the group reduce it to the three best or practical ideas. (Note: You will discuss these three ideas in more depth in Project 3, so you need not discuss them in great detail here.) Be sure the Toastmaster of the meeting explains to the group the purpose of your project and that everyone is encouraged to contribute their ideas and thoughts.

Well before the meeting discuss with your vice president education how much time will be available to you for this project. (Remember, because all members have the opportunity to participate in this project, the club has the option to eliminate Table Topics™ to provide more time for you.)

Recommended time is 31-33 minutes, with the following suggestions:

▸ 1 to 2 minutes for introducing the problem

▸ 10 minutes for brainstorming ideas

▸ 20 minutes to discuss each idea and select three best

Optional time is 20 to 22 minutes, with the following suggestions:

▸ 1 minutes for introducing the problem

▸ 5 minutes to brainstorm ideas

▸ 15 minutes to discuss each idea and select the three best

Refer to The Facilitator's Checklist in the Appendix as you prepare for this assignment..

EVALUATION GUIDE FOR **THE BRAINSTORMING SESSION**

Title _____

Evaluator _____ Date _____

Note to the Evaluator: For this project, the speaker serves as a facilitator for a brainstorming session. The session's purpose is to find one or more solutions to a problem. The facilitator serves in a neutral capacity, encouraging participation and keeping the group focused. Once a list is generated, the facilitator helps the group identify the three best or most practical ideas. In addition to your verbal evaluation, please write answers to the questions below.

▶ Was the topic narrow enough and appropriately worded that the group could accomplish its objective within the allotted time?

▶ How well did the facilitator encourage participants to contribute ideas?

▶ What could the facilitator have done differently to help the group generate ideas?

▶ How effectively did the facilitator guide the group in reducing the list of ideas to the three best or most practical ones?

▶ In what way(s) could the facilitator have been more helpful to the group in making their decisions?

▶ How well did the facilitator remain neutral during the discussion?

▶ What did the facilitator do well?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Bringing people together to discuss and resolve a problem is common. The facilitator leads the discussion, keeping it orderly and focused so the group can discuss the issues and reach a decision quickly and efficiently. Three ways to reach a final decision are majority vote, multivoting, and nominal group technique.

OBJECTIVES:

► Discuss the three ideas generated in Project 2.

► Determine which one best resolves the problem.

Recommended Time: 26 to 31 minutes
Optional Time: 19 to 23 minutes

THE PROBLEM-SOLVING DISCUSSION

Many meetings are called to discuss and solve problems. Every day in businesses, government, and community organizations, people gather to find ways to do something better. When the knowledge, wisdom, and experience of attendees are pooled, the best solutions can be found.

Problem-solving meetings require facilitators – people who bring the group together, present the topic to be discussed, then keep the discussion orderly and focused. The facilitator is like a traffic officer, controlling the flow of conversation so everyone has the opportunity to be heard in an orderly fashion. Through the facilitator's efforts, the group can generate ideas and identify solutions to the problem efficiently and in a minimum amount of time. As in Project 2, the facilitator is a neutral entity, withholding opinions and judgments and functioning only to stimulate participation by others.

THE PROBLEM-SOLVING PROCESS

Most problem-solving discussions follow a four-step pattern:

1. **Clarify discussion objectives.** The first step in solving any problem is defining it accurately. A discussion's success or failure is determined by its purpose and accomplishment of that purpose. If the purpose isn't clearly stated and understood by everyone, the discussion will be too diverse and disjointed. Identify the specific actions or decisions you wish to result from the discussion. "How can we reduce our order error rate by 95 percent?" State your purpose to meeting participants in terms of action verbs.

   Provide sufficient advance notice of the subject and purpose of the discussion to allow adequate preparation time for all participants. How many times have you been invited to attend a meeting but weren't told its purpose? Or perhaps the purpose is vague: "We'll be talking about inventory." What about inventory? Is there a discrepancy? Is it time to take inventory? Are we planning to change our inventory management system? Without more information, participants can't adequately prepare for the discussion.

   During the discussion itself, reiterate the meeting's purpose. You want everyone to have a clear understanding of the reasons for the discussion, so spend enough time making sure they do. "Twenty percent of our orders are filled incorrectly. In correcting our mistakes we spend $10,000 annually on additional shipping charges." Allow participants to ask questions and even contribute to your explanation.

2. **Identify major causes.** During this phase of the discussion, participants analyze the causes of the problem. You may want to have someone write a list of the possible causes and post it where all participants can see it.

   Participants sometimes digress during this part, relating stories about specific incidents that may or may not be indications of a widespread problem. Keep the group focused on facts. "Currently no system is in place to check an order for accuracy before it is shipped." "Often the person taking the order transposes stock numbers."

   Don't let the discussion degenerate into blame-placing. Sometimes too much time is spent talking about what happened in the past and who was responsible. You want to focus the group on identifying causes and finding solutions so it won't happen again.

3. **Identify potential solutions.** In this step, participants generate possible solutions to the problem. This is the creative part of the problem-solving process, and every participant should contribute. The more ideas generated, the more likely that the best solution will be found. Brainstorming, which was discussed in Project 2, often is useful during this phase. Use a flipchart, laptop computer and data projector, or white board to record the ideas, making sure the letters are large enough for everyone to read. (You may assign someone else to record the ideas.)

> **Through the facilitator's efforts, the group can generate ideas and identify solutions to the problem efficiently and in a minimum amount of time.**

   Once the group has developed a list of possible solutions, ask for their comments about the first idea on the list. Based on their comments, you can strike the idea or retain it. Repeat this procedure for each item on the list. If, after all ideas have been discussed, more are retained than necessary, repeat the process with the remaining ideas until you have the quantity you want.

4. **Make a decision**. Your discussion may result in more than one idea for resolving the problem. For example, in a discussion about reducing injuries in the warehouse, the group may have suggested training workers in proper lifting techniques, redesigning the warehouse configurations to reduce the necessity of lifting, and purchasing lifting equipment to use for the heaviest items. If not all suggestions are feasible, the group will have to decide which one is the best.

   The most common way to reach a decision is voting. In voting, the group discusses the options and votes on which one is best. Whichever option receives the majority vote is selected. The advantage of voting is that it is quick and simple. The disadvantage is that it creates winners and losers, and the losers may not be committed to or support the final decision.

   Two variations of voting are **multivoting** and **nominal group technique**.

   In **multivoting,** the group lists its options and discusses each one. Each option is then numbered. Every participant writes down the numbers of the items they like, with each person allowed to choose at least one-third of the total number of options. For example, if the group has generated six possible solutions to a problem, each group member writes on a slip of paper the two solutions they like best. The facilitator or someone else in the group collects and tallies the votes and the solutions with the fewest votes are eliminated. The process continues until the group chooses the best option.

   In **nominal group technique**, after discussing alternatives, participants rate each on a numerical scale. For example, if the group has generated five solutions, each group member writes the options on a piece of paper and rates each one, assigning "5" to the one he likes best, and "1" to the solution he likes least. The facilitator or someone else in the group collects and tallies the ratings, and those solutions with the lowest total ratings are dropped. The process is repeated until a single choice remains.

STIMULATING DISCUSSION

A discussion's success depends on participation. Your goal as facilitator is to generate as much participation as possible. Occasionally group members are reluctant to speak, so you will need to make special efforts to draw them out. You can get greater participation by asking several types of questions of group members:

1. **Open-ended Questions.** These questions cannot be answered with a single word. "How do you feel about that?" and "What do you think causes this?" are two examples of this type of question.

2. **Redirected Questions.** When a participant asks questions of the facilitator, redirect it to another participant by saying, "What do the rest of you think?" or "Ricardo, you have experience in that area. What are your thoughts?"

3. **Paraphrased Questions.** Restate what someone said, then ask another participant to comment on it. "Jason just explained the reason for the delays. Dorothea, what can you add to that?"

4. **Clarifying Questions.** These questions call for more information from a participant. "Antoine, would you please describe the manufacturing process for us?" and "How will that data affect the results?"

Avoid asking questions that display bias, could embarrass someone or put a participant on the defensive, such as, "Sean, why do most of the problems appear in your area?" or "Why don't you understand what Carmelita said?" Questions such as "Was that explained clearly?" and "Why are there problems in the shipping area?" are better.

YOUR ASSIGNMENT

In Project 2, the group brainstormed ideas to solve a problem and selected the three best possible solutions. In this project, you will facilitate a discussion of these three solutions and help the group select the best one. (Keep in mind it is possible that, after discussing each possible solution, the group may discover another better solution.) Ensure each participant understands the problem and has the opportunity to contribute. Your role is neutral, serving only to draw out and focus the group's thoughts. You should bring the group to a decision using one of the three voting techniques. You may want to use a flipchart, whiteboard or laptop computer, data projector and screen to record and display ideas. Be sure the Toastmaster of the meeting explains to the group the purpose of your project and that everyone is encouraged to contribute their ideas and thoughts.

> A discussion's success or failure is determined by its purpose and accomplishment of that purpose. Provide sufficient advance notice of the subject and purpose of the discussion to allow adequate preparation.

Well before the meeting discuss with your vice president education how much time will be available to you for this project. (Remember, because all members have the opportunity to participate in this project, the club has the option to eliminate Table Topics™ to provide more time for you.)

Recommended time is 26 to 31 minutes, with the following suggestions:

- ▶ 1-1½ minutes for introducing the problem
- ▶ 4 minutes to review the list of possible solutions (from Project 2)
- ▶ 20 minutes to discuss each possible solution
- ▶ 1-5 minutes to make a decision using one of the three voting methods

Optional time is 19 to 23 minutes, with the following suggestions:

▸ 1 minute for introducing the problem

▸ 2 minutes to review the list of possible solutions (from Project 2)

▸ 15 minutes to discuss each possible solution

▸ 1-5 minutes to make a decision using one of the three voting methods

Refer to The Facilitator's Checklist in the Appendix as you prepare for this assignment.

EVALUATION GUIDE FOR **THE PROBLEM-SOLVING DISCUSSION**

Title _____

Evaluator _____ Date _____

Note to the Evaluator: This assignment requires the speaker to serve as a facilitator, leading the group in discussing possible solutions to a problem and selecting the best one by using one of three voting methods. The facilitator ensures each participant has the opportunity to contribute. The facilitator is neutral, functioning only to draw out and focus the group's thoughts. The facilitator should bring the group to a decision. In addition to your verbal evaluation, please write answers to the questions below.

▸ Was the topic narrow enough and worded appropriately that the group could reach a decision within the allotted time?

▸ How well did the facilitator use different types of questions to encourage participants to contribute ideas, opinions, and suggestions?

▸ Was the facilitator able to remain neutral during the discussion?

▸ In what way(s) could the facilitator have been more helpful to the group as it tried to reach a decision?

▸ How did the facilitator control the flow of discussion so everyone had the opportunity to be heard?

▸ What did the facilitator do well?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Often some people involved in discussions display behaviors that disrupt the group's efforts. One of the facilitator's responsibilities is to minimize these disruptions by using recommended techniques. He or she should avoid embarrassing anyone or being overbearing.

OBJECTIVES:

▸ Select a problem and ask club members to discuss and resolve it by either a majority vote or by compromise.

▸ Serve as facilitator for the discussion.

▸ Effectively handle any member's behavioral problems that may interfere with the discussion.

Recommended Time: 22 to 32 minutes
Optional Time: 12-21 minutes

HANDLING CHALLENGING SITUATIONS

Whenever groups of people assemble, different personalities are present. The variety has several benefits:

1. differing opinions and ideas, which in turn lead to

2. creative solutions and decisions, and

3. a more lively and interesting discussion.

The variety has a downside: differing personalities may mean conflict and disruption.

During the discussions in the previous projects, most likely you observed how people interacted with one another and noted some behaviors that affected the discussions. Perhaps one person seemed to dominate the talks, always eager to offer opinions. Maybe someone frequently disagreed with everything that was said. Another may have appeared bored by the whole event and was doing other work. Several others seemed reluctant to participate.

Such people can frustrate and annoy other group members, distracting and disrupting the group's efforts. The facilitator's responsibilities are to keep the discussion on track, get maximum involvement from everyone and minimize disruptions and distractions, so ignoring such people is not an option. Following are some behaviors typically encountered in discussions and suggestions for handling them:

THE TALKER

This participant comments too often and for too long. Because your job is to be sure all participants speak, don't delay in addressing the problem. You may find these suggestions helpful:

1. Target questions to other participants by name. "Michael, what do you think about the plan?"

2. Avoid making eye contact with the talker after asking a question. Instead, look at another section of the room.

3. When the talker pauses, immediately say, "Thanks for your comments, Joshua. Now let's hear Elvira's views."

4. If the talker has digressed, say, "Thanks, Joshua, but we need to get back to the issue…"

THE INTERRUPTER

This person has something to contribute, but only when someone else is talking. The interrupter breaks in to agree, disagree, or make another point. Respond to the

interrupter by saying, "Let's let Show Ming finish her comments. I've found that when people are interrupted, they stop contributing, which makes it harder for us to resolve the issue." Remind the group that everyone deserves an equal opportunity to express themselves.

THE CHATTERER

The chatterer engages in side conversations with a neighbor, perhaps commenting on something being discussed or maybe talking about an entirely unrelated subject. You can:

1. Invite the chatterer to share with everyone what is being said.

2. Stop talking and look at the offender until the offender is quiet.

3. Restate the point under discussion and ask the chatterer for an opinion.

4. Casually walk near the chatterer and remain standing close by until the he or she is quiet.

THE ARGUER

The arguer may be a know-it-all, someone with incorrect information or someone who delights in being disagreeable or correcting others. The arguer also may have difficulty stating suggestions constructively. Avoid getting into arguments with this person. Instead,

1. Acknowledge the arguer's main points and thank him or her for contributing.

2. Invite the group to comment on his opinions.

3. Find merit in one of her comments, express your agreement, then move on.

4. Paraphrase the arguer's comments in objective terms. "As I understand it, you are suggesting this idea may be impractical." You could then ask him to explain the reason or ask someone else for a comment.

THE SILENT TYPE

Some participants never say anything. Shy or reserved people rarely offer any comments in response to questions because of insecurity, indifference, or uncertainty. Draw out the silent type by:

1. Asking a question you are confident the silent type can easily answer.

2. Asking a question, then suggesting all participants take a turn sharing their opinion.

3. Responding positively when the silent type does participate.

When dealing with inappropriate behaviors, approach the situation tactfully. You don't want to embarrass the offender or the rest of the group or be overbearing.

MANAGING CONFLICT

Occasionally two or more participants have personality conflicts or strongly disagree with one another, and a disturbance ensues. If this happens, quickly step in. Don't take sides, but concentrate on points of agreement. Emphasize the importance of ideas rather than personalities. Remind them of the group's objective and encourage them to focus on it.

ARRIVE AT A DECISION

In Project 3 you learned about three methods to reach a decision: **majority** vote, **multivoting**, and **nominal group technique**. In **voting**, the group discusses the options and votes on which one is best. Whichever option receives the majority vote is selected. In **multivoting**, the group lists its

options, numbers each, and each group member writes down the numbers of the items they like, with each person allowed to choose at least one-third of the total number of options. The votes are tallied and the solutions with the fewest votes are eliminated. The process continues until the group chooses the best option.

In **nominal group technique**, participants rate each solution on a numerical scale. The ratings are tallied and those solutions with the lowest total ratings are dropped. The process is repeated until a single choice remains.

YOUR ASSIGNMENT

This project involves a role-play, in which some members of the discussion group assume the roles of people who disrupt the discussion for which you are serving as facilitator.

Photocopy page 27 of this manual, cut it on the dotted lines and give the six pieces to the vice president education. Each piece is a specific role for a club member to play.

Instruct the vice president education to select any four of the six pieces and assign each piece to a club member. These members' identities and their roles will be unknown to you. When the vice president education selects the four members, he or she should give each member one of the slips of paper. Each member will play the role on the slip – the talker, the interrupter, the chatterer, the arguer, the silent type, or someone who doesn't like another member.

Select a problem that can be solved in the allotted time. Define the problem for the club and ask club members to discuss and resolve it. Serve as facilitator for the discussion, keeping the group focused and ensuring everyone participates. Should any group member disrupt the discussion or seem unwilling to participate, use the methods described to keep the discussion on track. You may want to use a flip chart, whiteboard, or laptop computer, data projector and screen to display ideas during the discussion.

To give you more experience in leading the group to a decision, have the group make a final decision by one of the two voting techniques you did not use in Project 3. Be sure the Toastmaster of the meeting explains to the group the purpose of your project and that everyone is encouraged to contribute ideas and thoughts.

Well before the meeting discuss with your vice president education how much time will be available to you for this project. (Remember, because all members have the opportunity to participate in this project, the club has the option to eliminate Table Topics™ to provide more time for you.)

Recommended time is 22 to 32 minutes, with the following suggestions:

▶ 1-11/2 minutes for introducing the problem

▶ 20 to 25 minutes to discuss the problem and generate three or four possible solutions

▶ 1-5 minutes to make a decision using one of the two voting methods you did not use in Project 3

Optional time is 12 to 21 minutes, with the following suggestions:

▶ 1 minute for introducing the problem

▶ 10 –15 minutes to discuss the problem and generate three or four possible solutions

▶ 1-5 minutes to make a decision using one of the two voting methods you did not use in Project 3

Refer to The Facilitator's Checklist in the Appendix as you prepare for this assignment.

EVALUATION GUIDE FOR **HANDLING CHALLENGING SITUATIONS**

Title _____

Evaluator _____ Date _____

Note to the Evaluator: This project involves a role-play, in which some members of the discussion group assume the roles of people who disrupt the discussion for which the speaker is serving as facilitator. The speaker is to select a problem that can be solved in the allotted time and ask club members to discuss and resolve it. Then, use one of the two voting methods the speaker did not use in Project 3 to make a final decision. Should any group members disrupt the discussion or seem unwilling to participate, the speaker is to use some of the suggested methods to keep the discussion focused. In addition to your verbal evaluation, please write your answers to the questions below.

▶ Was the topic narrow enough and worded appropriately that the group could reach a decision within the allotted time?

▶ How well did the facilitator encourage participants to contribute ideas, opinions and suggestions?

▶ How well did the facilitator remain neutral during the discussion?

▶ How effectively did the facilitator handle those people with behavioral problems?

▶ What could the facilitator do differently that may be more effective in handling the behavioral problems?

▶ What did the facilitator do well?

▶ In what way(s) could the facilitator be more helpful to the group as it tried to reach a decision?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Many consider consensus decision-making the best of all decision-making options because the results are often acceptable to every participant, although they may not be everyone's preference. The process to reach a consensus requires more time than other options and requires a facilitator who is good at listening, probing, clarifying, and managing disagreements.

OBJECTIVES:

▶ To select a problem for the group to discuss and resolve.

▶ As facilitator, help the group reach a consensus.

Recommended time: 31 to 37 minutes
Optional time: 20 to 26 minutes

REACHING A CONSENSUS

Group decision-making can be challenging. Participants always have different concerns and opinions. The challenge of any problem-solving discussion is making sure everyone has the opportunity to voice their concerns and opinions yet make a decision that the group will support.

In previous projects you learned about making decisions by voting, multivoting, and the nominal group technique. Many consider consensus decision-making the best of all options. This method has several benefits:

1. **Better decisions.** All group members' ideas are considered, which means decisions will be of a higher quality.

2. **Better teamwork.** Participants must work together.

3. **Better support.** Because participants had the opportunity to voice their opinions and are confident that others understood their position, they are more likely to accept and support the consensus.

A decision made by consensus is acceptable to every participant although it does not mean that it's everyone's preference. It simply is the best decision that the group could produce and is one with which no one has any strong disagreement.

Consensus often is confused with compromise because they both initially require people to accept an outcome other than the one they originally wanted. However, in a compromise, those who give up something feel they give up something valuable. In consensus, people feel the solution sufficiently addresses their concerns or is better than any other proposal.

Consensus decision-making requires more time than other decision-making processes. It also requires a skilled facilitator who is good at listening, probing, clarifying, and managing disagreements.

The facilitator is responsible for ensuring that everyone is heard, that all ideas are incorporated and that the final decision is agreed upon by the group. The facilitator is neutral, functioning only to draw out and focus the group's thoughts. The facilitator does not offer opinions or try to influence the decision made.

BUILDING CONSENSUS

The facilitator begins the consensus process by:

1. Identifying the issue. The facilitator presents the problem, proposal, or issue to the group, and participants have the opportunity to ask questions about it.

2. Reviewing the process the group will follow to arrive at a consensus.

3. Opening discussion. The facilitator invites participants to share their opinions, ideas, and suggestions.

4. Identifying priorities. The discussion may address a number of points, some of which may not be important. The group should prioritize the points and focus first on the most important ones.

5. Identifying areas of agreement. Find aspects everyone appears to concur on.

6. Identifying areas of concern. Ask participants for their objections.

7. Asking for alternatives or modifications to the problem, proposal, or issue.

8. Discussing alternatives or modifications, again identifying areas of agreement and concern. Repeat this step as needed.

9. When it appears that most of the concerns have been resolved, calling for a consensus. If no one expresses any more objections or concerns, the group has reached a consensus.

As you facilitate the discussion, remember these points:

1. The group must have adequate time to work through the problem, issue, or proposal.

2. Differences of opinion are natural and can help the group arrive at a better decision.

3. Conflict is inevitable. Don't become discouraged if a disagreement seems irresolvable. Encourage the group to work through it.

4. Group members should not change their minds just to avoid conflict.

At the end of the discussion, group members should be able to state honestly that:

▸ They had the opportunity to voice their opinions

▸ They believe the group understood their opinions

▸ They can support the group's decision

YOUR ASSIGNMENT

Select a problem for your club to discuss and resolve by consensus in the time allotted. You will serve as facilitator for the discussion following the process described above. Be sure the Toastmaster of the meeting explains to the group the purpose of your project and that everyone is encouraged to contribute their ideas and thoughts. You may want to use a flipchart, whiteboard, or laptop computer, data projector and screen to record and display ideas during the discussion.

Well before the meeting discuss with your vice president education how much time will be available to you for this project. (Remember, because all members have the opportunity to participate in this project, the club has the option to eliminate Table Topics™ to provide more time for you.)

Recommended time is 31 to 37 minutes, with the following suggestions:

▸ 1-1½ minutes for introducing the problem

▸ 15-20 minutes to discuss the proposal, problem or issue, identifying priorities and concerns

▸ 15 minutes to discuss the possible solution and arrive at a consensus

Optional time is 20 to 26 minutes, with the following suggestions:

▸ 1 minute for introducing the problem

▸ 10 minutes to discuss the problem, proposal, or issue, identifying priorities and concerns

▸ 9 to 15 minutes to discuss the possible solution and arrive at a consensus

Refer to The Facilitator's Checklist in the Appendix as you prepare for this assignment.

EVALUATION GUIDE FOR **REACHING A CONSENSUS**

Title _____

Evaluator _____ Date _____

Note to the Evaluator: This assignment requires the speaker to serve as a facilitator, selecting a problem for the club to discuss and resolve by consensus. The facilitator ensures each participant has the opportunity to contribute and that the final decision is agreed upon by the group. The facilitator is neutral, functioning only to draw out and focus the group's thoughts. The facilitator should bring the group to consensus within the allotted time. In addition to your verbal evaluation, please write answers to the questions below.

▸ Was the topic narrow enough and worded appropriately that the group could reach consensus within the allotted time?

▸ How well did the facilitator encourage participants to contribute ideas, opinions, and suggestions?

▸ Did the facilitator help the group identify areas of agreement and disagreement?

▸ How effectively did the facilitator help the group explore alternatives?

▸ How well did the facilitator remain neutral during the discussion?

▸ In what way(s) could the facilitator have been more helpful to the group as it tried to reach consensus?

▸ What did the facilitator do well?

THE FACILITATOR'S CHECKLIST

The following list will help you prepare for your role as facilitator and ensure your discussions are successful.

1. **Room arrangement.** How a room is arranged affects how participants interact. A horseshoe arrangement, where participants face one another and the facilitator stands in front, promotes discussion, but it won't work if the group is large. Classroom style is also acceptable and works for larger groups as well.

Horseshoe Arrangement

Classroom Arrangement
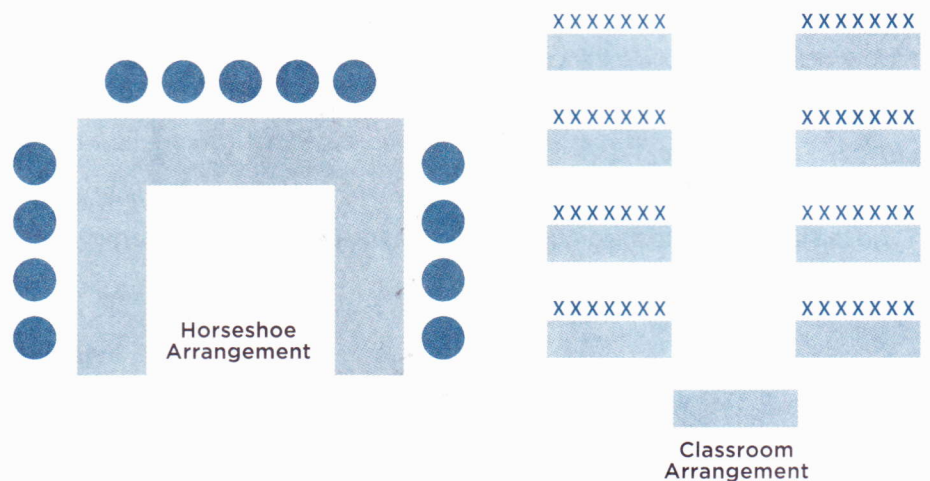
2. **Lectern or table for you to use.**

3. **Paper and pencils for participants to make notes or to use for voting purposes.**

4. **Flipchart or whiteboard for recording and displaying ideas.** These should be placed at the front of the room and be visible to everyone. You may also want to assign someone to be the recorder.

5. **Marking pens for the flipchart or whiteboard.**

6. **Data projector, laptop computer, and screen, if you plan to use slides during the discussion.**

7. **Timing device.** Although the assigned timer will be timing your overall presentation, you will want to keep on track with the various parts of the discussion. For example, during the panel discussion you will want to make sure each panelist's presentation doesn't exceed three minutes, so you may want to use a watch to monitor the time, or you could ask another member to give you hand signals.

ROLE PLAY ASSIGNMENTS FOR PROJECT 4

Photocopy this page and cut it on the dotted lines. Give the pieces to your vice president education. Instruct the vice president education to select any four of the six pieces and assign each piece to a club member. These members' identities and their roles will be unknown to you. When the vice president education selects the four members, he or she should give each member one of the slips of paper and explain its purpose. During the discussion each member will play the role on the slip – the talker, the interrupter, the chatterer, the arguer, the silent type, or someone who doesn't like another member.

- -

THE TALKER

You like to talk. You offer your opinions and comments on everything anyone says, even when you have nothing substantive to contribute.

- -

THE INTERRUPTER

You have something to contribute to the discussion, but prefer to do it only when someone else is already talking. You break in to agree, disagree, or make another point.

- -

THE CHATTERER

You like to make side comments to your neighbor, perhaps commenting on something being discussed or maybe talking about an entirely unrelated subject.

- -

THE ARGUER

You know it all and feel obligated to share this extensive knowledge with others. You cannot understand when others don't agree with you and like to engage them in arguments to prove yourself right.

- -

THE SILENT TYPE

You are shy and avoid participating in group discussions for fear others will ridicule your ideas or you will embarrass yourself.

- -

THE PERSONALITY CONFLICT

You intensely dislike another person in the group. His or her personality, mannerisms, and voice annoy you, and you find his or her ideas ridiculous. You seize every opportunity to demean this person.

PROJECT COMPLETION RECORD **FACILITATING DISCUSSION**

PROJECT	SPEECH TITLE	DATE	VICE PRESIDENT EDUCATION'S INITIALS
1. The Panel Moderator			
2. The Brainstorming Session			
3. The Problem-Solving Discussion			
4. Handling Challenging Situations			
5. Reaching a Consensus			

Save this page to verify your completion of the projects in this manual. Submit the Project Completion Record form from the appropriate manuals when applying for the Advanced Communicator Bronze, Advanced Communicator Silver, or Advanced Communicator Gold awards.