

# Best Practices

## My list, after three years and more than 200 Toastmasters Online Club Meetings

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### Which Online Meeting Platform?

- **Corporate Clubs** Use the online meeting platform preferred by your corporation. Most corporations do not permit third party software downloaded to their computers.
- **Community Clubs** Use a tool that at least one member is familiar with and capable of teaching to others. After club members are comfortable, consider exploring different platforms during special events and bonus meetings to give members a broader online experience.
- **My Favorite** is Zoom. In three years of Toastmasters online meetings, I've never experienced any problems with security or zoom-bombing. Microsoft Teams is doable but not feature-rich and is not as intuitive to use. Google Hangouts is acceptable.

**NOTE:** It's very do-able for two or three clubs to share one Zoom account and split the fees.

### Equipment

- Each attendee will need access to a computer, tablet or smartphone with a camera. Tablets and smartphones should be turned to landscape during the meeting, to fill the frame. Turning it vertical results in a tall, skinny photo that does not fill the frame.
- Helping members sound good: An alternate mic (one on headphone/earbuds is fine) will improve audio quality if delivering a speech while standing more than 3' from the built in mic. Remember to adjust setting on your platform account to register the external mic.
- Helping members look good: Proper lighting and reducing glare is challenging and will require experimenting with your environment.
- If using music or applause type soundtracks, remember to adjust settings on your platform account to improve music.
- Add participant interaction with, free, online aps for during-meeting survey, voting, and timing.

### The Meeting Experience

- The meeting experience begins by adding your online meeting information and how to join your meeting to all social media. Put it on the home page of your website and the Toastmasters Find-A-Club page. Don't make guests work to visit you. It should be as easy to join your meeting online as it is in person.
- If your club meeting looks and feels like another work meeting, you are doomed to fail. Your attendees will be playing games or surfing the web on another browser instead of being engaged in your meeting. Keep the pace peppy but not rushed. Keep it entertaining; with a lot of laughter and camaraderie.
- Consider meeting themes that have a more visual impact. Something like "My Favorite Hat" would be a visual meeting theme.

### Before, During and After the Meeting

- Invite members early and often, else reminders will get lost in spam. If your club consents, add your meeting to their personal calendar. Guests and new members might benefit from a text reminder the morning of the meeting.
- Remind speakers to email forms to their evaluator before the meeting starts. Remind evaluators to return evaluations within the club's specified time.
- Open the meeting 20 to 30 minutes early and advertise that fact.
- Encourage members to come early for questions and camaraderie. Welcome each participant with a warm hello just as you would in person. This also serves as a mic check. During this time, mention to members if they are positioned properly in the frame or what improvements could be used to look their best.
- After the meeting, keep the doors open for about 10 minutes in case anyone has questions or discussion items.

## Roleholder's Duties Online:

The SAA plays a key role in a successful online club meeting.

- Encourage members to RENAME themselves with their Role and First Name. This will help everyone to recall who is doing, what.
- Give a (1 to 2 minute) briefing to inform everyone about your club's meeting etiquette. Include items such as muting mics when not speaking, having video on unless necessary to turn it off, use of recordings, use of chat, silencing distractions, applause vs the use of "jazz" hands, availability of private breakouts, etc. A PowerPoint can be shared for this.
- Be prepared to open a breakout room for guests/VPM, mentors/protégés or for anyone with a private concern.
- Share the agenda via share screen or copy-and-paste role holder's names into chat.
- If your club reads the mission statement, be prepared to copy-and-paste into chat so a member can read it. Not everyone has it memorized.
- Be prepared to copy-and-paste TCUT and HARDR, if your club encourages them, as reminders for members.

NOTE: Encourage the audience to mute their mics when a new speaker is speaking. However, once the club and members become comfortable with the online environment, leaving mics open will enhance engagement and participation for both speaker and audience. Interruptions are normal and creates a real-world environment.

The Toastmaster, TopicsMaster, General Evaluator and President should strive to lead as normal a meeting as possible but a few hints will help:

- Until members become experienced, remind them to unmute by saying something like "Tom, please unmute yourself and read our mission statement." It's kinder than correcting them after they forget.
- Clearly explain any action. For example, "Please cast your vote for best speaker by putting the name of your speaker in a private chat to our timer who will count the votes." or "Please leave your feedback for the speaker in a private chat."
- General Evaluator: provide feedback to the club on video, sound and technical aspect of the meeting in addition to normal club roles and flow.
- President's should provide a clear break between the meeting and social time. Don't handle official business after the meeting is closed.

## VPE

- If time on your agenda allows, consider adding a 1 to 2 minute Tipmaster role to help teach club members about using meeting platform tools.

- Remind members they can hardwire an internet connection with an Ethernet cable. This will avoid possible issues with weak or unstable wifi, which affect audio and video quality.
- Practice video conferencing use your own Zoom account (free). To practice speeches, screensharing, whiteboards and other features. Use the record function and play it back to learn how others see and hear you online.

## VPM

- Consider designing a virtual Guest packet that can be easily emailed to guests. In the online environment, dual memberships are often encouraged. Having a separate guest packet for current Toastmasters will allow you to feature the unique aspects of your club.
- Be assertive about collecting the names and contact information from guests so that you can follow-up properly.
- Don't forget about the phone. In the online environment, a personal phone call adds some much needed humanity into the technology.

Do you have more best practices? Send them to [Arlynn@aerotech.net](mailto:Arlynn@aerotech.net) and I'll try to keep this updated.