

GUIDANCE NOTES FOR CHAIRING TOPICS

Section C1 of the ASC Manual gives a good deal of guidance as regards how to give a topic, chairing the topics session and variations in the topic format.

The topics section plays an important part along with speeches and readings. The topics chairman can go a long way in relieving anxiety to take part. Though the topics should be designed to be within the scope of the speaker, there is no harm in sometimes trying to stretch the ability of the members.

Before the topics session, the chairman needs to be prepared with the subjects to be spoken on. It will become apparent to the chairman how much time he has and how many people he can ask to speak. An important point to remember is to include people who have not spoken so far in the meeting. This gives a chance for everybody to take some part in the whole evening.

When introducing the topics session the chairman must remember to explain the lights. Usually topics run for two minutes but the chairman can decide that on a particular occasion he might allow three minutes. This needs to be made clear at the outset. The chairman then needs to explain what the topics is about and what he is looking for. He might even actually give an example. He should make an attempt to be clear and friendly in his approach so that the audience feel relaxed and looking forward to taking part.

No one should be coerced to give a topic and particular care has to be taken with newer members who are still feeling their feet. If there are any doubts about a person's acceptance, the chairman should ask him beforehand (say in the interval). Nothing could be more off putting than to announce someone to speak and for them to refuse to come up to the lectern.

It may be advisable to ask a more experienced member of the club to speak first to get things off to a confident start. Once the topics are under way the chairman will need to link between each topic. This ensures a smooth flow of the session. The link need not be too long – it is better if it is not – but will reflect on the previous topic taker.

Once the topics have ended the chairman needs to sum up the whole session and thank everybody for taking part.