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# Moderate a Panel Discussion

## Level 5 Project



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# Moderate a Panel Discussion

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## About Moderate a Panel Discussion

In this project, you will learn effective moderation techniques, how to host a panel discussion, and how to prepare yourself and the panelists. You will develop knowledge about what is expected of you as a panel member, proper etiquette for speaking and responding on a panel, and tools for providing the best experience for your audience, yourself, and other panel members. You will learn to adjust for any changes during the panel and how to create a comfortable atmosphere for learning and interaction.

## Resources

The following is a list of resources available in your digital project on Base Camp. Some of these resources, such as evaluations, are also available on the Resources section on Base Camp.

**Project Checklist**

**Evaluation Resource**

**Panelist Basics**

**Project Completion Form**

# Introduction and Assignment

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## Introduction

A panel discussion is a moderated conversation between experts in front of an audience. Discussions of this type provide the opportunity for an audience to hear several speakers discuss and debate their views, beliefs, and expertise on a specific topic. Some panels include questions from the audience to expand the discussion and increase audience engagement.

## Your Assignment

**Purpose:** The purpose of this project is to apply your skills as a public speaker and leader to facilitate a panel discussion.

**Overview:** Plan and moderate a 20- to 40-minute panel discussion. The panel discussion can be on any topic and may take place at a club meeting or outside of Toastmasters with the approval of your Vice President Education. Toastmasters who participate as panelists do not receive credit in Toastmasters Pathways. When you have the opportunity, volunteer to act as a panelist for another member completing this project.

Throughout this project you will see icons in the margins next to the text. These icons indicate additional resources available online.



**Video:** Sign in to Base Camp to watch a video that supports this project.



**Interactive Activity:** Sign in to Base Camp to complete an interactive activity.



**Resource:** Sign in to Base Camp to view this resource online.



**Weblink:** Return to your digital project when you see this icon to link to a website or Base Camp location.

**For all assignment details and requirements, review the Project Checklist.**

# Learning in Moderate a Panel Discussion

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## Assess and Reflect

To assess and track your knowledge, complete the activity below by listing what you already know and what you wonder about both moderating a panel and participating as a panelist today. Add up to five items to each list. After you complete your project, you will have an opportunity to review your answers and add what you have learned.

## Know

**For example:** I know how to direct a group conversation.

## Wonder

**For example:** I wonder what to expect when participating on a panel.

## Competencies

The following is a list of competencies that you will learn and practice in this project.

- Practice effective moderation techniques.
- Identify panel members appropriate to the subject matter.
- Prepare yourself and the participants for a panel.
- Be prepared to answer questions or concerns.
- Learn the correct etiquette for before, during, and after the panel.
- Foster a comfortable environment for learning and interaction.

## Your Responsibilities

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As the moderator of a panel discussion, you are responsible for generating the questions to keep the conversation moving forward. You are also expected to bring a degree of expertise to the panel discussion and provide the audience with a memorable, educational experience.

As a panel participant, your goal is to maintain a clear focus when you speak and contribute to a discussion that informs and maintains audience interest.

## Prepare to Moderate

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Prepare to moderate a panel by knowing and understanding the topic. You may either receive the topic from the hosting organization or create the topic on your own.

### Receiving a Topic

If you have been asked by an organization to moderate a panel, they will provide the topic. Take time to research the subject of your panel discussion; well-rounded knowledge enables you to moderate with confidence and efficiency.

### Choosing a Topic

When selecting your own topic for a panel discussion, focus on your objectives, interests, and knowledge. Establish your personal objectives for the panel and the message you want to express. Consider who may be in your audience and the impact of any potential topic. Look to your own interests and expertise for guidance. Your passion for a particular subject can appeal to an audience and create a more dynamic panel discussion.

Once you have decided upon a topic, take time to research. The more you understand of the subject, the more likely you are to present relevant facts to an audience and guide the panel to provide pertinent information.

# Prepare to Participate on the Panel

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Participating on a panel gives you the opportunity to interact with people of differing opinions.

## Prepare

Knowing how to prepare is helpful, whether you are an experienced panelist or participating for the first time.

## Research

Preliminary research is vital to making the most of any panel discussion. Understand the purpose of the panel and prepare the information necessary to provide appropriate content on your area of expertise. Learn about the context of your panel by speaking to the moderator ahead of time.

## Further Study

Once you are clear on the purpose of the panel, study any news stories, statistics, or other sources that connect your topic with the personal interests of your audience. Having well-rounded knowledge of the topic and how your skill set fits in with other panelists helps fuel the conversation.

## Other Panelists

Research the other panelists and be prepared to defend your position in the face of opposing views. If you discover a panelist with expertise or a point of view that is similar to yours, communicate ahead of time and establish guidelines for who will cover the different facets of the topic. Regardless of similar or differing viewpoints, all interactions with fellow panelists must be thoughtful and respectful.

## Question-and-Answer Session

Many panel discussions include a question-and-answer session with the audience. There is no way to know for sure what an audience member will ask, but you can prepare by creating a list of potential questions and answers that apply to your area of expertise.

## What to Wear

Check with the panel moderator for any special information about the venue, topic, or audience that would impact your choice of attire. Dress appropriately for the occasion; professional attire is usually a safe choice.

Audience members may possess a pre-existing bias or agenda. If you are addressing a formal organization, research its background and history in advance and incorporate that understanding into your responses.

If contention arises with an audience member, acknowledge the individual's main points and thank them for contributing. You may choose to reiterate your point of view or factual information, and then defer to the moderator. Whether you choose to engage with an audience member or not, sustain a calm tone of voice and always maintain your professionalism.

# Invite the Experts

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## Different Viewpoints

Consider the different viewpoints that need to be addressed and find the best representatives for each. Varying points of view give the audience the opportunity to make up their own minds about the topic.

## Choosing Panel Members

Choose a diverse group of panel members who can:

- Be relatable and charismatic.
- Articulate their expertise of the topic.
- Teach the topic to others.
- Answer a variety of questions related to the topic.
- Represent diversity of skills, expertise, and background.
- Embody varying viewpoints to give a robust view of the topic.

Generally, a panel discussion works best with up to four participants, depending on the topic. Keep time constraints in mind. If your time is limited, invite fewer speakers.



The people you choose to help you complete your assignment may not be familiar with best practices for participating on a panel. Distribute the Panelist Basics resource to guide them while they prepare.

# Plan Your Questions

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Once you know your topic and the participating panelists, assemble a list of questions. Keep in mind each speaker's expertise along with the intended message and objective of the event. Create a list of additional questions you anticipate the audience may have for you or the panelists.

Devise open-ended questions to allow for a broader, more interesting discussion. Consider a statement that instructs the speakers on what to address, such as, "Tell me more about your experience in the field." The questions should prompt conversations amongst the panelists.

Open-ended questions require your speakers to answer with more than a "yes" or "no."

## Prepare Panelists

Prepare your panelists with substantial context and the questions beforehand to pave the way for a smooth, successful discussion. Being an expert on a topic does not necessarily mean that all relevant knowledge is at the forefront of one's mind. With enough time to prepare, your panel can alert you to any concerns.

## **Allow Time**

If you have questions involving data or statistics, your speakers may need time to research information to support their answers. There is also the possibility that one of your questions might trigger something negative for a speaker, or perhaps they are not at liberty to discuss a certain subject. If this occurs, discuss the challenge with your panel member and decide if the topic can reasonably be avoided or if the panelist will need to be replaced.

## **Provide a Schedule**

Remember to review practical day-of-the-event information with your panelists as well. Provide a schedule and suggested time limits for responses whenever possible. This will help to avoid confusion or upset when time is more limited or longer than a panelist expects.

# **Make Introductions**

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Use the following strategies to begin your presentation.

### **First**

When your panel event begins, wait for participants to be seated, and introduce the topic to be discussed. Restate what's written in your publicity materials. This serves as a great reminder to the audience of the topic to be discussed.

### **Next**

After introducing the topic, introduce yourself. Your audience will want to know who you are and why you are moderating the panel.

### **Then**

Introduce the panelists or let them introduce themselves, as long as they know in advance so they're prepared. Introductions explain why the panelists were invited to speak on this topic and include their background and expertise. Knowing more about the experts who are speaking may help the audience feel more of a connection to the topic and the panelists.

# Etiquette for Panelists

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## Strategies

Considerate, professional behavior is integral to your participation on a panel. Read over the following strategies to learn more.

### Sharing the Time

As a respectful panel member, you must share speaking time with the other panelists. Track the length of your responses. Observe the body language of other panel members and the audience while speaking. If they are expressing a sense of disinterest, it may be time to conclude your remarks so that another speaker can take over the discussion. By allowing someone else to speak, you show your audience that you are respectful of different points of view.

### Sharing Personal Stories

There are times when a personal example can effectively highlight a point. Consider the relevance and appropriateness of your story. Make a list of personal anecdotes that relate to the panel topic beforehand to ensure an organized, polished presentation.

### Communicating With Respect

All speakers' opinions must be respected. Engaging in a healthy debate during a panel is appropriate and may even be expected. Make sure your remarks never turn into personal attacks.

Respect is shown in your verbal and nonverbal behavior. Be aware of your body language when someone else is speaking. Look at the speaker and listen to what they have to say. The audience will notice if you are not actively engaged.

### Prepare for Questions

Create a list of potential questions the audience might have and be prepared to answer them. When faced with a question for which you don't have an answer, pause to gather your thoughts. You may repeat the question for clarification before giving your response.

### Fielding Unexpected Questions

If you don't have an answer, let the audience member know. You may choose to tell the audience member that you'll look into the issue and respond with an answer if time and circumstance allow. Depending on the type of panel, this may happen through coordinated post-panel feedback or with a personal response at a later date.

### Adapting Your Public Speaking Skills

A panel is not a presentation or a speech. The audience members are there to form their own opinions on a topic based on information from the panelists' various perspectives. Keep your communication style conversational. An open style and tone will encourage other panelists and the audience to listen to your point of view.

Avoid providing too much information at once. Too much information might confuse or overwhelm your audience. Instead, talk about how your expertise relates to the topic and may apply to audience members and their lives.

# Etiquette for Panelists

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Demonstrate your confidence and poise as the moderator through your body language and voice.

## Poise

Poise is your ability to stay calm under pressure, and reassures your audience that you have control of the room.

## Calm

Remain calm even if something unexpected happens or there are difficult audience members who may challenge the panelists' expertise or opinions. You can review how to respond to some types of difficult audience members in the elective project "Managing a Difficult Audience."

## Focus

Your goal as the moderator is to focus on the objective of the panel and keep it at the center of the discussion.

## Timing

Keep track of time during the panel discussion. Make sure that each panelist is given a fair amount of speaking time and that the event ends at the expected hour.

During the discussion, sub-topics may be raised. You may have anticipated some of them in advance and identified some time for them. Don't hesitate to bring discussion to a halt if you feel the topic and sub-topic have been covered.

If a panel member speaks for too long about a particular topic, you may need to respectfully stop the discussion and move on. Even if the information is valuable, you have a responsibility to the other panelists and your audience. If you have to stop a panelist during his response, be conscious of your tone. Wait until he finishes a point, thank him for his contribution, and explain that for the sake of time you have to move on.

# Participating on a Panel

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In the following section, you will be asked to answer questions based on the scenario below. The purpose of the activity is for you to think about and review best practices for responding to questions when you participate on a panel.

## Scenario



You are an excellent panel participant and have been asked to sit on a panel for your Toastmasters District. The panel is discussing the best way to become a successful speaker. In the following pages, choose the best response to each audience question.

### **1. What is the most important thing you need to learn to be a successful public speaker?**

Practice is the most important thing you can do. Speak as often as possible and evaluate other speakers in your club.

Avoid speaking in public until you are completely confident in every word you say.

Memorize every word of your speech. When you memorize, you are less likely to make a mistake.

### **2. How does volunteering to be a leader in Toastmasters help with meeting my goals to be a better public speaker?**

Leaders in Toastmasters have many opportunities to speak and to hear high-quality speakers. It really is true, the more you contribute the more you gain.

When you volunteer, you have less time to speak yourself, but you get to see a lot of other people speak.

Volunteering provides no benefit to your public speaking abilities.

### **3. I would like to compete in next year's International Speech Contest. How do I begin to develop a speech to reach that level?**

You will think of a topic closer to the event. Don't worry about it now.

Ask your mentor to help you.

Start now by choosing a topic that interests you. Enter contests at your club, Area, and District to hone your content and your skill.

Answers: 1. Practice is the most important thing you can do... 2. Leaders in Toastmasters have many opportunities... 3. Start now by choosing a topic that interests you...

# Question and Answer

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After you have concluded the panel discussion, provide the audience with a quick summary of the discussion that took place. Then you can move into the question-and-answer period, if this is planned.

- A question-and-answer period will not be as structured as the panel discussion, but there are procedures to keep it running smoothly.
- To maintain momentum, repeat each audience member's question and identify a specific panelist for an answer.
- Do your best to match the question with the appropriate panelist's expertise. Use more generalized questions as an opportunity to involve more panelists. If the audience doesn't ask questions, you can pose your own pre-determined questions to the panelists for a response.
- During a question-and-answer period, continue to manage overall time as well as the amount of time that each panelist speaks. If one panelist is monopolizing speaking time, thank them for their answer and direct the question to a different individual.

As you approach the scheduled end of your session, let the audience know time allows for only one more question. After this question has been answered, give a brief summary of the presentation.

If planned, let the audience know that they can talk to the panelists in an identified area of the facility. This allows for networking and building new relationships, an excellent benefit of attending the event.

## Express Thanks

Whether you're the moderator or a panelist, be sure to thank the audience and all other participants. Acknowledge that you are privileged to participate and that you too learned from the experience. Be prepared to make yourself available after the panel discussion to meet with attendees and answer any questions.

There are times when a panel discussion does not go as expected. When panelists do not work well together, either because they are at odds or one monopolizes the conversation, it falls to the moderator to adjust the format of the event.

- Direct the conversation away from topics that are overly contentious or divisive.
- Set time limits for each panelist to speak, limiting conversations or arguments between panel members.
- Stop conversations altogether and allow each panel member to give a speech expressing their point of view without interruption.
- End the event. When interventions are ineffective, thank your panel and your audience, and close the discussion.

# Review and Apply

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Before you complete the assignment, take a moment to read through the questions you see here. If you are not able to answer them comfortably, review the project.

- List some effective moderation techniques.
- How will you identify panel members that are appropriate for your subject matter?
- What steps can you take to prepare yourself and your panel members for your panel discussion?
- How can you best prepare to answer questions during your panel discussion?
- What are the most important rules of etiquette for before, during, and after a panel discussion?
- What steps can you take to foster a comfortable environment for learning and interaction?

# Complete Your Assignment

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## Project Checklist

Now that you have read through the project, plan and prepare your speech or report. First, review your assignment.

### This project includes:

- Planning and moderating a 20- to 40-minute panel discussion
- The Panelist Basics resource
- The Project Completion Form

The following list includes tasks for this project. Please remember, your project is unique to you. You can use the checklist here or complete the digital version in your project on Base Camp.

Select a topic for your panel discussion or review the topic you are tasked with covering.

Meet with your club leadership team to schedule your panel discussion or notify your Vice President Education of the time and date of your non-Toastmasters panel.

Invite panelists to your discussion and distribute the Panelist Basics resource.

If appropriate, advertise or send invitations for your panel discussion. If your panel is held outside of Toastmasters, invite your Vice President Education and/or other club members to attend, including your evaluator for the project.

If you are unable to include a Toastmaster to evaluate you as a moderator, share the Evaluation Criteria and Evaluation Form resources with another attendee at your event and collect their feedback.

Moderate your panel discussion.

If you held your panel discussion outside of Toastmasters, submit your signed Project Completion Form to the Vice President Education to receive credit for the completion of the project.

When all components of your assignment are finished, complete your self-reflection by adding what you have learned to the last column of the Know-Wonder-Learned activity.



# Evaluation Criteria



Review the criteria for the evaluation in this project. Your evaluator will use the following scale:

5 – Exemplary 4 – Excels 3 – Accomplished 2 – Emerging 1 – Developing

## Clarity

- 5 – Is an exemplary public speaker who is always understood
- 4 – Excels at communicating using the spoken word
- 3 – Spoken language is clear and is easily understood
- 2 – Spoken language is somewhat unclear or challenging to understand
- 1 – Spoken language is unclear or not easily understood

## Vocal Variety

- 5 – Uses the tools of tone, speed, and volume to perfection
- 4 – Excels at using tone, speed, and volume as tools
- 3 – Uses tone, speed, and volume as tools
- 2 – Use of tone, speed, and volume requires further practice
- 1 – Ineffective use of tone, speed, and volume

## Eye Contact

- 5 – Uses eye contact to convey emotion and elicit response
- 4 – Uses eye contact to gauge audience reaction and response
- 3 – Effectively uses eye contact to engage audience
- 2 – Eye contact with audience needs improvement
- 1 – Makes little or no eye contact with audience

## Gestures

- 5 – Fully integrates physical gestures with content to deliver an exemplary speech
- 4 – Uses physical gestures as a tool to enhance speech
- 3 – Uses physical gestures effectively
- 2 – Uses somewhat distracting or limited gestures
- 1 – Uses very distracting gestures or no gestures

## Audience Awareness

- 5 – Engages audience completely and anticipates audience needs
- 4 – Is fully aware of audience engagement/needs and responds effectively
- 3 – Demonstrates awareness of audience engagement and needs
- 2 – Audience engagement or awareness of audience requires further practice
- 1 – Makes little or no attempt to engage audience or meet audience needs

## Comfort Level

- 5 – Appears completely self-assured with the audience
- 4 – Appears fully at ease with the audience
- 3 – Appears comfortable with the audience
- 2 – Appears uncomfortable with the audience
- 1 – Appears highly uncomfortable with the audience

## Interest

- 5 – Fully engages audience with exemplary, well-constructed content
- 4 – Engages audience with highly compelling, well-constructed content
- 3 – Engages audience with interesting, well-constructed content
- 2 – Content is interesting but not well-constructed or is well-constructed but not interesting
- 1 – Content is neither interesting nor well-constructed

### Moderating

- 5 – Sets an exemplary example of successful panel moderation
- 4 – Sets an excellent example of a well-moderated panel discussion
- 3 – Moderates panel discussion well
- 2 – Moderation skills are present but need improvement
- 1 – Shows little skill or preparation when moderating the panel discussion

### Panel Selection

- 5 – Exemplary selection of panel members for their expertise on the topic
- 4 – Excellent selection of panel members for their expertise on the topic
- 3 – Selected panel members well for their expertise on the topic
- 2 – Selection of some panel members is not reflective of topic or expertise
- 1 – Panel members selected are inappropriate or ineffective for the topic of discussion

## Complete Your Project

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Once you have delivered your speech and received your evaluation, take a minute to review what you recorded under “Know” and “Wonder” in the Assess and Reflect section at the start of this project. Then add what you have learned while working through this project. Add up to five items.

### Learned

**For example:** I learned what is expected of a panel moderator before, during, and after a discussion.

# Before You Move On

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## **Review Your Learning**

Review all the material in this project.

## **Deliver Your Speech**

Plan, practice, and deliver your speech.

## **Receive Your Evaluation**

Receive your evaluation and complete any other tasks required by your club.

## **Assess and Reflect**

When all components of your assignment are finished, complete your self-reflection by adding what you have learned to the last column of the Know-Wonder-Learned activity.

## **Congratulations!**

If you have completed every task, CONGRATULATIONS! You have completed your Moderate a Panel Discussion project and you are ready to move on to your next project.



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