



Top Tip & Talking Point #5: Minutiae of the role of the Chairperson

There are four quick areas to examine building on Top Tip #2 (Role of the Chairperson), but above it all, the Chairperson needs to remember that they are chairing a public meeting. It is their responsibility to ensure that everything goes smoothly and everyone has a really positive experience. The Chairperson is the glue that holds everything together; everyone else takes their lead from the Chair. The Chair needs to be encouraging and friendly, but must take charge.

Little things also matter: that you make the Questioner feel welcome, that you ensure that the Speaker and Questioner are sitting at the right places on the table, that you invite the Speaker to sit down when it comes to your summary at the end of questions, that they have water if there is some, that the three of you move on and off the stage/away from the table together, and that you lead the applause when it is due. But let's look at the four key tasks of the Chair's role.

- ✓ **The Chair's introduction** sets the tone of the whole event. Don't spend too long talking about yourself (you are not the star); also only welcome the Questioner briefly, but positively. Your first job is to introduce the reason for everyone being there: to hear the main Speaker. Avoid in-jokes about your school friend and there is no need to tell us which GCSEs everyone is doing! Rather explain the importance of the topic and why the Speaker is speaking about it. Build up the Speaker in a sensible way so that we all want to hear their presentation.
- ✓ **Running the question period** is very important. It may be that the Questioner is not that clear or asks a somewhat lengthy or convoluted question. You may have to rephrase it for the Speaker's benefit (so listen carefully) or you may need to ask the Questioner to repeat it. You need to control the timings: help the Speaker and Questioner end their time neatly; towards the end of the question period you may want to warn both that there is time for one more question, or that an answer should be short, for example. After 4 minutes, thank the Questioner and then invite the audience to ask questions. You select them one by one; try to take other students before adults and do not take questions from the Speaker's school or supporters! After 2 minutes, you need to end the question time politely and thank everyone for their contributions.
- ✓ **The Summing-up** is what comes next - along with the Vote of Thanks - and you only have 2 minutes if you have controlled the other timings efficiently, otherwise adjust to the time remaining. You should have been preparing for this summary throughout the presentation, taking notes about the key points in the speech and the interesting questions and answers during the questioning periods. Yet, you need to be visibly listening to all that is said. Not easy to do both! Be positive and enthusiastic about the questions and the Speaker's responses. Your summary should draw together the key themes of the speech and highlight the extra depth and issues that the questioning brought out.
- ✓ **The Vote of Thanks** is going to have to be brief. You will thank the Speaker and the Questioner in your summation and it is then good manners to round everything up by thanking the teachers, other students, the judges and organisers for making it all happen. Hopefully, you will have enjoyed the event (now that it is nearly over), so it will be easy task which comes from the heart!

If you have any questions, then I would ask teachers to get in touch with me. Equally, if there are areas of the competition and the different student roles which you would like covered, then do let me know!

Best wishes.

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