



# Timekeeper

## The Short and Simple Way to be an Effective Timekeeper

Read this summary if you do not want to read the whole of this document

1. Read the agenda and understand what the timings for the speaking slots mean
2. Introduce your role to the club, the importance of time, times on the programme and a demonstration of the lights
3. Give a short and very specific report (feedback) on the speech length of participants

This role is not just about standing up to speak in the guest slot. It is about making the guests feel welcome and answering their questions. Ensure the guests understand that they have to introduce themselves to the club. This role is formative to the experience of guests so is very very important to get right.

Congratulations on choosing to be the Timekeeper; it is a role that is key to the meeting running smoothly.

The average agenda can include contributions from 20 people so the control of timing is important. The Timekeeper's function is to provide timing signals to participants and to report specifically on the timing performance of topics speakers, prepared speakers and evaluators.



# The Timekeeper in Detail

## The Mechanics of the Role

- When you arrive introduce yourself to the toastmaster of the evening. The Toastmaster and Timekeeper is a partnership to ensure the meeting runs to time.
- Read the agenda and understand what the timings for the speaking slots mean.
- Check you have and understand the timing equipment. These are timer (either use your phone or the supplied stopwatch), timer lights and bell.
- Introduce your role to the club, the importance of time, times on the programme and a demonstration of the lights
- Give timing feedback (based on the agenda) to people while they are speaking using the timer lights.
- Let people know if they run over time by ringing the bell
- Record times of all speakers (plus names) on a piece of paper
- Give a short and very specific report (feedback) on the speech length of participants.

## Good Practice

The Timekeeper works in close cooperation with the toastmaster of the evening. The Toastmaster has little idea of the passage of time in the meeting as their focus is on transitions between roles and speakers. They will rely on the timekeeper to ensure that the meeting runs to time and signal when the toastmasters has to proceed to the next part of the agenda.

It is important for the timekeeper to arrive 15 minutes before the meeting starts so that agenda can be read and any changes to it accounted for. It also gives the opportunity to discuss any issues if the agenda is different from usual, such as for debate or competition night.

The traffic light system is used to show people how they are doing with time. **Green** is the minimum time that people are encouraged to reach. **Amber** is halfway through. **Red** is the point that people should consider closing their speech. Speakers have 30 seconds after the red time is reached to finish speaking, whatever role they are doing in the meeting.

This is really really important for all timekeepers. **Do not be afraid to ring the bell.** Because the Timekeeper role often attracts kind people who want to be kind, it is easy to forget that ringing the bell is not personal. You are fulfilling your responsibility to signal when the agenda is not being kept to time. It is not your responsibility to end speaker time on stage if they are overrunning – that is the toastmaster's responsibility as facilitator of the meeting. It is also the responsibility of speakers to keep to time. Be tough.

The main problem encountered are small time overruns in the first half of the meeting that snowball down throughout the evening. The sections that usually give timekeepers the most problems are Table Topics and Sergeant and Arms guest introduction.



The table topics section is 15 minutes long. The minimum time that people speak for is 1 minute which is **Green**. **Amber** is 1.30 minutes and **Red** is 2 minutes. Again speakers have 30 seconds to wrap up. The optimum number for 15 minutes is 6 people (6 x 2 = 12 minutes). The table topics master will look to you to indicate if there is enough time for more speakers. Again be tough if there is not enough time

The sergeant at arms section can be a massive contribution to snowballing the agenda. It is uncontrollable element of the evening because its length depends on the number of guests that arrive. It is the responsibility of the sergeant-at-arms to ensure that the section does not overrun. It is important to emphasise the **Amber** time point when halfway is reached. And again be prepared to ring the bell if the section overruns.

Keep networking time to 10 minutes preferably and ring the bell to let people know when the networking break ends.

Although it is necessary to record times of all speakers, the most important times to record are the table topics speakers, prepared speakers and the evaluators. When giving the time report keep it brief and specific. It is essential that the time keeper needs to tell the prepared speakers how long they spoke for. There are not many of them. Giving times is a feedback experience for prepared speakers and part of their learning experience for them. Let people know if they seriously overrun.

When giving the report take the opportunity to be a bit creative and say what you enjoyed. Although it is acceptable to just say the names and the times, giving a one line reminder of what the topic of the speech was or about the use of time helps the slot stay lively for the audience.

## The Benefit to You

There are three main benefits to you personally:

The most important lesson learned is **time management**. It is massively relevant to the real world because people get bored and irritated if speakers go on for too long and events overrun.

The timekeeping role is a **fun role**. It is a good choice especially for new people where it is often the first slot taken up. It is an easy way into public speaking as its requirements are straightforward and defined. Remember it is a valuable speaking opportunity and what you get out of speaking depends on what you put in. It can be a challenge to bring originality to it so think of it as an opportunity to **be creative and fun**.

Time keeping is about balancing the agenda so it is an opportunity to **practice judgment**. Although the agenda has fixed time slots it is the interaction that goes on in meeting, especially in-between the slots that makes timekeeping fluid. A large part of the control of the evening will rely on your judgement about how long we have.

Further details on the role are in the manuals and on [toastmasterclub.org](http://toastmasterclub.org). The role in the meeting agenda is also a hyperlink that will take you through to a description.

**Thank you once again for choosing to be Timekeeper.**