

## Research in Brief



MASON E. MILLER, *editor*

### FASTER SPEECH?

How fast should you talk in giving a presentation? Extension workers face this problem as they prepare to appear on TV or radio, and before meetings. Research by Foulke indicates that you have considerable latitude. You may be able to speak very rapidly and still find your listeners will know what you are saying.

#### *The Study in Brief*

Three hundred sixty male and female students drawn from psychology and education classes at the University of Louisville served as subjects. The listening selection was a 2925-word reading of appropriate interest and difficulty for the subjects. It was recorded as read by a professional reader. Through the use of electro-mechanical equipment, the rate of the recorded reading was varied without distorting the vocal pitch. The selection was then tape-recorded in 12 different speeds, from 125 words per minute through 400 wpm, in steps of 25 wpm. Each tape was heard by 30 subjects through individual head sets, so the listening environment was similar for all subjects.

After listening to the recording, each subject completed a 50-item, four-alternative, multiple choice test for comprehension. Following the test, researchers determined the relationship between word rate and the mean test score for each speed.

#### *The Findings*

From 125 wpm through 250 wpm, comprehension was affected very

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little. As word rate was increased beyond 250 wpm, comprehension declines at an increasing rate. At 400 wpm, the subjects comprehended only about two-fifths as much as they did at the 125 wpm rate.

Foulke suggests an explanation: Time is required for the perception of words. As word rate is increased beyond a certain point, the perception time available for the listener becomes inadequate and listening comprehension declines rapidly.

#### *Some Implications for Extension*

Speech experts have given us the guideline of about 125 wpm as the "normal" speaking rate. Foulke's research suggests that often we may be able to speak much more rapidly than that and still have our audience understand us. Try reading aloud a 250-word passage in a minute. That will give you some idea of the top good comprehension rate. Most people find it an uncomfortable rate. So most of us probably are not going to talk too fast—as long as we articulate clearly.

We would suspect that the nature of the topic, the educational level of the audience, the conditions in the room where you're speaking, previous audience exposure to your subject, and many other things may influence how well listeners understand you. So we're not advocating, from this research, that you strive for 250 wpm for all audiences. Probably the "ideal" rate would vary depending on many of these other factors.

Extension workers could have a situation that is similar to this experiment—for example, where an agricultural agent is providing a periodic tape service directly to farmers on the latest farming information. In this case, the farmer is already motivated, will listen intently, and be able to control the place where he listens so that listening conditions are acceptable. In this situation, then, Foulke's research would suggest that much more could be packed on a 12-minute tape cartridge, for example, than we've thought.

Test your own reading rate. Could it be increased? Are the groups to whom you speak good enough listeners and motivated enough so you can move right along in speaking? Or do you need to give them more time simply to run your words through their own perceptual processes?

Emerson Foulke, "Listening Comprehension as a Function of Word Rate," *The Journal of Communication*, XVIII (September, 1968), 198-206. Prepared by: Ketty Mangaard, Edwin H. Amend, and Mason E. Miller.

#### THE YOUNG SINGLE CAREER WOMAN AS AN AUDIENCE

More is known about young married women and their homemaking practices than about the "singles." This Wisconsin study involved interviews with 15 unmarried graduates of one- or two-year vocational or technical courses. These recent graduates of the practical nursing and business education courses were extremely mobile and difficult to locate! Twelve shared apartments with other young women. Three lived at home. In some instances, homemaking tasks were rotated; in others, the tasks were performed by "whoever felt like doing them."

All 15 had some savings. All but one had hospital insurance; all but two, life insurance. Several had taken over life insurance policies their parents had started for them. About half had charge accounts. At least nine had bought something on the installment plan—mainly kitchenware, china, crystal, silver, and cutlery. These were bought from salesmen who called on the girls where they lived. The girls said they had done no comparison shopping, nor did they know what the interest charges were. These items were not being used, but the girls expressed considerable satisfaction with their purchases.

Although the girls said they thought their nutrition was adequate, almost half said they didn't eat breakfast, and diets for weight control were mentioned as a recurring problem by six. Finding clothes that fit well was also a problem. None could estimate her expenditures for clothing.

They knew little about educational services or non-commercial consumer information services available. They also were unfamiliar with the offerings of educational radio and TV.

Margaret R. Nelson, "Possible Contributions of Home Economics to the General Education of Women Enrolled in One- and Two-year Post High School Occupational Programs in Wisconsin Schools of Vocational and Adult Education," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1965. Adapted from abstract by Sara M. Steele.

#### A LOOK AT 4-H'S CARROT-ON-A-STICK

How important are 4-H awards? That question quickly generates more heat than light in many Extension bull-sessions. This research attempted to find out what leaders and members in two Missouri counties thought. The study was a replication of one done earlier in Wisconsin.

Conclusion: awards have some importance to members. But at no time are they the primary factor for a group of members joining, staying in, or planning to stay in 4-H. Members indicated the primary reason they *joined* 4-H was to learn. They listed fun second, friends third, awards fourth, and parents fifth.

When they ranked these five factors as to why they *stayed in* 4-H, the order remained the same as for why they joined except that awards ranked third and friends fourth. Their *future expectations* for 4-H still ranked learning first, but put friends second, fun third, and awards fourth.

Leaders said they mainly thought members discontinued 4-H because of other activities; "failure to win awards" was ranked last as a reason. Forty-three per cent of the leaders believed members would strive to complete their projects if there were no awards. Leaders also believed that individual awards provided more incentive than did group awards. Ninety per cent of the leaders thought competition was emphasized about right in the 4-H program, while the others thought it was emphasized too little. None considered competition to be emphasized too much.

Freddie G. Mailes, "Member and Leader Perceptions of 4-H Awards in Jasper and Newton Counties," Department of Extension Education, University of Missouri, October, 1968. Adapted from author abstract.

## AN AGRICULTURAL PROGRAM PLANNING SURVEY

Competition for the farmer's time has been a stimulus to sharpen the focus of Extension's educational programs. This study looked at farmer desires for educational programs in selected areas of subject matter. It also looked at their "preferred methods" for receiving this information.

Results are based on 46 usable interview reports. The interviews were done by members of the County Extension Association executive committee. In dairy, beef, poultry, and hogs, the majority of respondents indicated they wanted information for each of these on feeding, herd or flock health, and marketing. For vegetables and field crops, a majority wanted information about insect, weed, and disease control. Marketing information seemed unimportant for this group, compared with the livestock and poultry group, because: (1) most of the crop production is for use on the farm rather than to be sold, and (2) vegetable production is largely on contract, so marketing information isn't needed so much.

Most respondents wanted farm management information on income tax, wills, and record-keeping. Farm business analysis was only moderately desired.

Evening meetings—in the winter rather than the fall—seemed most favored. They were willing to hold joint meetings with neighboring counties and to drive to nearby towns for meetings. While less than 20 per cent positively supported the idea of meetings planned for both husbands and wives, nearly 50 per cent were undecided. This large "undecided" group is interpreted by the author as indicating that joint meetings, carefully planned, may be a good vehicle for reaching a rather large Extension audience. The vast majority indicated that having a baby-sitting service available would *not* increase their probability of attendance.

Preferred information methods were: newsletters, 40 per cent; radio, 25 per cent; newspapers, 25 per cent. Ten per cent indicated a preference for group meetings. The author points out that meetings still are important, particularly because they offer the possibility of feedback from the agent's clientele. But he also emphasized the need for better meeting management and planning if meetings are to remain a useful Extension tool.

Daryl K. Heasley, "Program Planning Survey of Selected Agricultural Items for Montour County, Pennsylvania," Extension Studies 34, The Pennsylvania State University, January, 1966.

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Basically the five major requisites of every executive are: (1) Adjustment to a complex social environment of several, or many units, (2) ability to influence and guide his subordinates, (3) emotional and intellectual maturity as preparation for leadership, (4) ability to think through and make decisions and to translate decisions into effective action, and (5) capacity to see beyond the immediate or surface indications and, with experience, to acquire perspective.

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