

DC 132  
Handout 6

**Factors Affecting the Validity of Pretests**

Subjects sampled	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ random sample of the potential audience</li><li>▪ persons different from the intended audience</li></ul>
Setting for pretest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ the same setting as the one in which the audience will see the final production persons different from the intended audience</li><li>▪ restricted undisturbed setting</li></ul>
Manipulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ present the finished production as it will ultimately be presented</li><li>▪ present a facsimile or mock-up of the communication</li></ul>
Measurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ intended effect of the production</li><li>▪ some criterion other than the intended effect</li></ul>

**Theoretical approaches to the process of pretesting**

1. Holistic Approach

- Founded in the theories of Gestalt psychology which views behavior in the total context of a situation.
- The individual reacts to the total situation rather than to single elements of it. Thus, an individual might react to a violent story differently if that story occurs within the context of a regular religious service than if it is presented to him at a dinner table.
- It would be impossible to predict an individual's reaction to a stimulus outside a laboratory, if we only knew how he had reacted to that stimulus within a laboratory situation.
- One should pretest in a setting which is as close as possible to the one in which the audience will finally experience the communication.

2. Atomistic Approach

- Most closely linked to the work of the behaviorists.
- Individuals recognize and react to particular elements in the environment. Each element in the environment has stimulus value for the individual.
- It is possible to measure the effect of any stimulus on an individual.

- Pretest results obtained in the restricted setting of the laboratory or other "artificial situations" can be valid and can be used to predict the audience's reaction to the communication.

### **Should the pretest be administered to individuals or groups?**

1. *Group interview* can be useful if:

- One is pretesting concepts or ideas for a communication program rather than almost finished productions; useful in providing feedback early in the creative process.
- If there are known circumstances that will make individual pretesting difficult, e.g., in pretesting a short film on child care, it would be much easier to show the movie to a group of women in a central place than to give an individual showing to each one since there may be no electricity in the homes.

2. *One-to-one* allows the pretester to obtain a number of independent opinions regarding the message or material being tested.

### **Should the questionnaires be self-administered or should an interviewer be used?**

*Self-administered* questionnaires are not recommended in developing countries since:

1. Results will have little validity if the target audience had difficulty reading and writing.
2. Respondents will tend to skip over items which leaves the pretester with incomplete data.
3. Respondents may go back and change their answers to earlier questions after reading other items on the questionnaire.

By contrast, the interviewer is able to obtain *spontaneous* reactions that are not biased by questions which appear later on the form.

### **Methods of obtaining information from pretest subjects**

1. **Direct Questioning**

- Effectiveness of direct questioning in pretesting depends heavily upon the *skill of the interviewer* and *the characteristics of the subject*.

*Advantages of direct questioning method*

- subject does not have to be deceived about the purposes for which the questions are being asked.
- interviewer can probe for information about the material or the setting which were particularly important for the subject.

## 2. Interpersonal Simulation

- Psychiatrists argue that individuals often attribute emotions, motives, and intentions to others which they themselves hold.
- In principle then, individuals can express more easily their own feelings and ideas when they attribute them to others than when they present those ideas as their own.
- The experimenter asks the subject specific questions about what one of the subject's friends would do if the friend were to participate in the experiment. The subject is free to express an opinion about what other individuals would do in the experiment. The experimenter then asks the subject why the other person (friend, peer or neighbor) would behave in such a way.

### *Advantages*

- yields information which corresponds to information gained through other valid procedures.
- since subjects are given all the information about the procedure, they are not later embarrassed by having been fooled.
- offers the pretester an opportunity to obtain information which could not be obtained using direct questioning or unobtrusive methods.

## 3. Unobtrusive Measures

- Attempt to discover from the actions of others interests, beliefs, and attitudes without asking direct questions of the subjects  
Example: A poster at which the most people routinely stop is considered most interesting for the audience.
- Can help the pretester to avoid the major difficulties of the direct questioning and interpersonal simulation methods.

## References

- Bertrand, Jane T. (1978). *Communications pretesting*. Chicago: University of Chicago Community and Family Study Center.
- Reed, Fred W. (1974). *Pretesting communications: A manual of procedures*. Communication Laboratory, University of Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A.