

Pre-testing pictorial material

What one person takes for granted can be surprising to the next, which means it can prove costly to leave things to chance when using media. This is why it is **imperative to pre-test** picture material. In most cases it can be done relatively easily with just a few basic test procedures.

A "free test" on a small number of individuals is often sufficient. Each individual is shown the whole picture and asked: "What can you see?" We can learn a lot from the order of what they say, what they omit to say, and also from following their gaze and observing their facial expression. If they have no further comments to make, we can ask: "Can you see anything else?" Finally we ask: "What is the whole picture trying to say?"

Sometimes, especially when a large number of copies or expensive pictures are planned, it pays to go further than this necessary routine check and to test more intensively. We now give details of how to tackle more thorough testing of pictures.

Even **before the first drafts** of pictures have been created and sample photographs taken, some basic questions have to be asked. They must be answered conclusively not later than the preliminary testing stage:

- Who is the message trying to reach (client groups)?
- What message is to be communicated (content)?
- What is the message trying to achieve (aims)? Is it supposed to inform, train, create problem awareness, indicate solutions, or induce a change in behavior?
- Are pictures the best method, and what kind of pictures should we choose (⇒ II.F3)?
- Are the client groups familiar with the medium, what are the conventions regarding pictorial illustration, what color preferences exist, etc.? Are there any local artists, how do they work, what do children's drawings look like, etc.?
- How is the message received by the client group? Is the situation depicted realistically for them, do they agree with any value judgments, are the proposals considered meaningful?

Discussions with colleagues, experts and representatives of the client groups can provide much useful information on these issues. The artist or photographer should take part in discussions as early as possible.

Then an "**aide mémoire**" should be drawn up that **describes the use of pictures as a teaching aid**; aims, content, method, medium, sequence, combination of picture and text or pictures and the spoken word, etc.

Following these guidelines (very much like a script), the first **sample pictures** are made and have to be tested. If the pictures contain many details, it is sometimes helpful to test in **two phases**:

1. Are the **elements** of the picture **recognized** and is their significance understood? For this kind of testing, the rest of the picture is covered and the same question asked about each individual element: "What is that and what does it mean?" Responses should not be cor-

rected and no explanation given, because that would interfere with the second part of the test.

2. Has the **total picture** been **understood**? Now the subject's interpretation of the whole might enable him or her to correct wrong interpretations of the parts. Conversely, he or she may have interpreted the parts correctly but nevertheless still cannot understand what the total picture is saying.

If a series of pictures or elements are shown, we have to check whether they have been understood. In the case of single pictures, we asked, for example: "What is going on here?" or "What does this picture tell us?" Now we ask: "What is happening in these pictures, what does the whole series tell us?"

A small and, where possible, mixed group is best for initial testing. The test subjects can then help each other to interpret the pictures. The next step is to show the pictures to individuals representing the categories in the client group (for example young women, old men, illiterates, farmers, craftsmen, etc.). It is easier to undertake this test with people who are accustomed to pictures - it is obviously more difficult if they are not familiar with the kinds of pictures being tested.

Representative samples and quantitative results of testing are a waste of time and money. It is not helpful to know what percentage of the test subjects have misunderstood. As far as possible we should simply remove from pictures anything that could lead to misunderstanding. It is better to keep on modifying the picture and then testing it again.

Who should test pictures?

It is not advisable to let outsiders carry out this vital work. We should avoid using interviewers, as well. On the other hand, it is most important that the artist or photographer and those responsible for the technical content are present in all cases. Thus they can learn from their own mistakes and have another chance of making direct contact with their client groups. If they take part in the test, they are more likely to accept the need to modify their own work.

A series of pictures should, if possible, still be amended even if it has been reproduced in large quantities. If a participatory approach is used, we get a good deal of feedback about the pictures and they can therefore be improved.

If the tester is still unsure how to ask his/her questions, it is possible to write down a few guidelines. Such guidelines are particularly helpful in group discussions to ensure that the tester does not lose the thread. We now give an example of relatively detailed discussion guidelines.

Example of discussion guidelines for use in picture testing

The pictures should be hung up one at a time. Only one element of each picture should be shown and the following questions asked:

1. What can you see here? What does it mean?

The same question is asked for every detail of the picture. No comment is to be made on the intended message of the picture.

After dealing with the picture detail by detail, the whole picture is shown and the following questions are asked:

2. What can you see, what does the picture mean, what message does it have for us?
3. Is the picture telling us to do a particular thing? If so, what?
4. Can you express the message of this picture in your own words?
5. Are there people in this picture who remind you of friends or who look quite different from your friends? If they are different, what are the major differences?
6. Does this (a detail in the picture) look like yours or is it different? If it is, what are the differences?
7. Is there anything in the picture that disturbs or annoys you or that could offend friends and neighbors? If so, what and why?
8. Is there anything about this picture that you particularly like? If so, what and why?
9. Is there anything in this picture that is not clear? If so, what?
10. Have we forgotten anything important in this picture? If so, what and why?
11. Is there any message in this picture that you find hard to believe? If so, what is wrong?
12. Are there any particularly pleasing colors in this picture? If so, which colors?
13. Are there any colors in this picture that you do not like? If so, which colors?
14. What could we do to improve the picture?

With group discussion, a note should be made at the end of the test of how many people and what categories have taken part. If the pictures were shown to individuals, we should keep a record of the test subjects' age, sex, religion, language and level of reading ability.

These features will have to be recorded for the various categories within the client group.

We have naturally given only a very general example of discussion guidelines. They can be shortened, amended or supplemented according to the aims, content, client group and situation.

Sources:

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