Presenting Information With 2 by 2 Slides¹

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Most agronomists have used a slide-projector-screen combination as a means of presenting data. Few agronomists, however, use this technique with maximum effectiveness.

How consistently have you made certain that the projected images from your slides would be visible to all members of the audience? How critically have you examined each projected image from the point of view of a listener?

SLIDE COPY VS. MANUSCRIPT COPY

The usual starting point for a prospective speaker is a manuscript prepared for publication. Figure 1, a full size detail of the original copy, is a record of data in a form considered proper for a typed manuscript. Then, usually without further consideration, the author submits a copy of this table to a photographer, and a slide is prepared. That slide is then used to project an image on a screen before an audience.

Consider that image as it would appear under the conditions encountered at A.S.A. meetings, where the rooms are usually underscreened. Could the words and figures be read? To estimate this use the approximation:

Long dimension of copy × 8 = Viewing distance.

Allowing about 0.5-inch margins, the viewing distance is 8 inches × 8. That is, what you see from a distance of 64 inches approximates what would appear on the screen if it were viewed from one of the back rows.³ It should be apparent why persons sitting there are not likely to stay for your discussion, unless they are able to move closer to the screen. Or, if they do stay, they will be talking, not listening.

But there would be some persons in the front half of the room, who would be able to read what is on the screen. To what extent would the projected material be an aid to their understanding the speaker? Consider figure 1 further:

1. A table number on a slide is meaningless.
2. The title is too long to read at a glance.
3. There are too many footnotes.
4. At least one-half of the columns of numbers are not likely to be used by the speaker.
5. The lettering is too small.
6. The width of the curves gives them insufficient emphasis in relation to the grid lines.
7. Vertical labels should be avoided.
8. The ratio of the shorter to the longer dimension (0.8) should be reduced to 0.7 to conform with the opening in the standard 2 by 2 inch slide mask.
9. The title is wordy.
10. The form is essentially that employed by Allstetter⁴ for publication. It is suitable for such use, but would have disadvantages as slide copy:

One must conclude that manuscript copy is not slide copy.

The usual audience at a scientific meeting has neither the time nor the inclination to study a table in detail. If a slide is to be effective it must make its one point by impact.

For the revision of this table, a typewriter with Pica Gothic characters was employed to prepare the slide copy which is reproduced full size in figure 2. Measure its width (with margins, 4.5 inches) and calculate the viewing distance (36 inches). Observe that at this distance visibility is perfect. Note also that in this version there are no distracting elements. A speaker could present and clarify the data in no more than one minute. An audience could follow the discussion with little effort. If the speaker wishes to present other aspects of the data in figure 1 he should prepare additional simple slides.

But should one be satisfied that this table is the best possible slide copy? Why not graph the data? In figure 3 is a graphical presentation drawn from the data of figure 1. The form is essentially that employed by Allstetter for publication. It is suitable for such use, but would have disadvantages as slide copy:

1. A vertical dimension longer than the horizontal dimension is suitable only if a square screen is available. (Frequently it is not).
2. The ratio of the shorter to the longer dimension (0.8) should be reduced to 0.7 to conform with the opening in the standard 2 by 2 inch slide mask.
3. The title is wordy.
4. Vertical labels should be avoided.
5. The lettering is too small.
6. The width of the curves gives them insufficient emphasis in relation to the grid lines.

Again, manuscript copy is not slide copy.

A modified version of this chart, more suitable for slide copy, is in figure 4. Observe that the deficiencies of figure 3 have been corrected.

MECHANICS OF COPY PREPARATION⁵

Assemble the data in the usual manner, as if they were to be part of a manuscript. If tabular presentation is necessary for your slide, consider the following suggestions:

2. For a detailed treatment of this and related subjects see Chapter 7 in Information Processing Equipment, M. P. Doss, Editor, Reinhold Publishing Corporation, New York City, 1955. The chapter has citations to 23 papers.

¹ Invitational paper presented before the general meeting, American Society of Agronomy, Cincinnati, Ohio, Nov. 14, 1956.
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³ The assumption is that the room length is 8 times the screen width. This approximates conditions found in most hotel meeting rooms. A more desirable room length/screen width ratio is 6/1.