THE IMPORTANCE OF
PRESENTATION FORMAT

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After the frustrating and exhilarating job of carrying out a research project, social science researchers have typically been concerned with writing up findings in ways that will satisfy the requirements of their funding agency and their peers. Thus, research findings usually end up in thick reports and thin academic journal articles. In both cases, most attention is paid to what the report or paper says, and little or no attention is given to how it looks or reads. The result tends to be a great deal of academic jargon, credit for intellectual debts (lists of names), and statistical tables. Made even less decipherable by small type, these findings are usually squeezed into the shortest possible space, resulting in gray pages of words occasionally broken up by numbers.

Academic social researchers are trained to interpret research presented in this form, and since it has been the norm for so long, most probably do not give it a second thought. However, social researchers who are concerned with application of their findings (such as environment-behavior [E-B] researchers) may be hurting the chances of findings being used by their lack of attention to presentation format. Inappropriate format is certainly not the only barrier

to research utilization, but it is one worthy of attention.

There are a number of reasons why social researchers ignore format issues. In most social science graduate departments no attention is paid to, or training given in, this topic. Thus, the argument is at least implicitly made that the more difficult an article is to read and understand, the more important or worthwhile it must be. The vast majority of journals and books in which most social researchers aspire to publish are not concerned with "good"[1] graphic treatment of research, but rather with fitting in a great deal of information and printing it as inexpensively as possible. In addition to the lack of training and a lack of reinforcement for attention to research presentation, one can hypothesize that most social researchers have not considered that presentation format makes a difference to the exposure and use of their findings.

It can be argued that format, including both visual and verbal factors, does influence awareness and use of research findings, particularly in the E-B field. Researchers in this field deal with architects and other design professionals who have been trained to "read" and understand graphic presentation and often prefer this mode to verbal presentation. Neglecting to recognize this and presenting findings in the traditional academic style may contribute to E-B research being lost on at least one important group of its users.

There is some evidence for this. In a nationwide study of architects' and planners' awareness and use of E-B research, Reizenstein (1975) found that 79% (N = 144) reported that research output was not useful. By this, they meant that it is presented in an academic style unsuited to design and planning decision-making. Merrill (1974) reports similar findings. Goodey and Matthew (1971) also found a demand for better illustration of research information for use by architects, and made suggestions about writing for architectural audiences. However, more empirical evidence is needed to test the proposition that social researchers who more appropriately present findings will

help ensure that attention is paid to these. Information is also needed concerning modes and approaches preferred by information users.

RESEARCH USERS

Dividing those who are exposed to, learn from, and utilize E-B research into four general groups helps in understanding the potential benefits offered by attention to presentation format. *Design professionals* are so familiar with visual information as opposed to verbal information that they may ignore written findings altogether (Ostrander, 1974). Designers have reported that because of the ever-increasing volume of written material facing them and pervasive time pressures, they cannot afford to wade through dense reports. They prefer graphic presentations which emphasize design-relevant information. *Owners, managers, bureaucrats,* and others who have commissioned research, and those who will use its findings for design decision-making, may be comfortable reading reports, but are also under great time constraints. Carefully written and designed documents will enable them to quickly find and easily use performance guidelines or other clear recommendations. Findings from E-B research can be learned from and used by a wide variety of people, including those who use environments as well as those who make decisions regarding their design and management. These interested *laypersons* may tend not to attend to what they perceive to be long boring lectures or gray jargon-filled reports. Use of graphics in verbal presentations and written reports may enable researchers to catch and hold the attention of this group. *Social researchers* are used to making sense of un-illustrated lectures or wordy reports. Even so, it is likely that they will benefit from clearer presentations. Experiencing presentations of this kind may also encourage them to follow suit.

CHOICE OF PRESENTATION MODE

There is a wide variety of presentation modes open to the E-B researcher. Choice among these depends on the research client(s) as well as on time, imagination, and other resources of the researcher.

WRITTEN MODES

Most E-B research findings are presented in a written mode. Probably the most common unpublished mode is the unillustrated report, consisting of a verbal description of study goals, research design and hypotheses, methods, analysis, and conclusions. An improvement on this is an illustrated report similar to the above, with the addition of photographs, line drawings, charts, or tables. An interesting illustrative technique used by Zeisel (1980) and others is the annotated floor plan, where behaviors in a space are indicated on an actual plan of the space. Researchers can write findings or hypotheses right on the plans, with arrows to the relevant design features. This technique can also be used with photographs. If time, talent, and finances permit, another mode is a graphically designed report that takes into consideration such graphic issues as the impact on research users of typeface and layout.

Publishing findings in book or pamphlet form may enable the researcher to have more control over format than in journal articles.[2] This can be done relatively inexpensively using photocopying and spiral binding, or by producing the costlier paperbound or hardcover books. Choice of journal or publisher is another important decision which bears on exposure and use of findings.

Decisions also need to be made concerning details of graphic design. Issues include: typeface, type size, paper size and type, ink colors, layout, headlines and subheads, length, cover design, and type of binding.[3]

NONWRITTEN MODES

Nonwritten modes of presentation seem to be used less frequently by E-B researchers, but should be considered for their utility in communicating a great deal of information quickly and clearly. Film or videotape is useful for showing environments in actual or simulated use. E-B issues such as territoriality or crowding can be quickly demonstrated using these media. Although filming may be too costly for many projects, videotape is relatively inexpensive and access to equipment is available in most universities. Slide presentations are another potential mode. These can be shown formally in synchronized slide-tape shows (Eastman Kodak Company, n.d.) or informally, by narrating slides. Again, E-B concepts can be communicated easily, slides are inexpensive, and projectors are widely available. An additional benefit of showing slides is that the audience's attention may be more focused on the material (due in part to the darkened room) than it would be on an unillustrated lecture in a lighted room. Lectures may be made more palatable by use of graphs, charts, or even an architectural model. A panel discussion by the research team and informal discussion with research clients are alternative modes which can be made more interesting with slides, graphs, charts, or models. Another possibility is a guided tour of the evaluated environment, conducted by the researcher(s) for the purpose of literally pointing out fits and misfits.

Nonwritten presentations should be planned as carefully as written ones. Some issues to consider are mastery and checking of technical equipment, room choice (size, lighting, chair arrangement), presentation length, and anticipated questions.

MULTIPLE PRESENTATION MODES

Often audiences for research findings may differ in background or orientation and the most logical solution is pre-

senting findings in two or more different modes or using the same mode in different places. For example, findings from a post-occupancy evaluation of a hospital could be presented informally to the board of directors and administration using a narrated slide show, and formally in an illustrated report. The same findings could be presented to the research community in an academic journal and to other hospital officials in a hospital administration journal. In addition, findings could be abbreviated, included with floor plans and photographs, and submitted to an architectural journal.

Another approach is to write findings in different ways within one document. For example, in their study of a community for mentally retarded adults, Reizenstein and McBride (1977) used narrative, photographs, floor plans, and detailed charts to describe the appropriateness of each design feature. An alternative is to write findings so that they are understandable by all readers (e.g., defining technical terms and explaining statistics).

PRESENTATION ISSUES

Organization of information is a concern in both written and nonwritten modes. As with other formal issues, decisions about this will depend on research goals, intended audience, and space or time. Some of the decisions which need to be made include placement or mention of research methods, background information, and recommendations. This is another area for empirical study—that is, will design decision makers be more likely to read performance guidelines if these are placed at the front of the report or at the back?

Language style is another important consideration. In written documents, tone and word choice are crucial if the audience's attention is to be held. For oral presentations, all the guidelines of public speaking apply, including volume, speed, enunciation, and word choice. Again, presentations should be geared to a particular audience.

CONCLUSION

Although attention to details of presentation may initially seem costly to the E-B researcher in time and resources, with practice, good written and nonwritten presentations will be easier to accomplish. Benefits of clear, understandable presentations may well include a wider group of E-B research "consumers" and more use of E-B findings. For the individual researcher, benefits may include better classroom performance and an improved reputation leading to research grants, consulting jobs, and even awards.[4] Certainly this area needs more attention and empirical investigation.

NOTES

1. That is, as environmental or graphic designers would probably define the term. For example, compare an architectural journal with a sociological or psychological one.

2. Lack of space prevented this article from being illustrated. Instead, the reader is referred to some documents in which the researchers made an effort to use graphics: Howell et al. (1976), Howell & Epp (1978), Kira (1976), Newman (1973), Zeisel (1976).

3. Information on graphic design is available from a variety of sources ranging from journals such as *Print* to catalogs of presstypes manufacturers (including Chartpak, Letraset, Geotype) and books such as: Ching (1975), Craig (1971, 1974, 1978), Arnheim (1969), Gates (1973), Smith (1977), White (1974), and Zapf (1978).

4. *Progressive Architecture* has given research awards in the last few years to studies which are graphically well designed.

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