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Fresh Look at Communications

How to make the most
of words and pictures

ARE YOU a business home economist, a home economics teacher, a home economics student, or a worker in some other phase of home economics education or promotion?

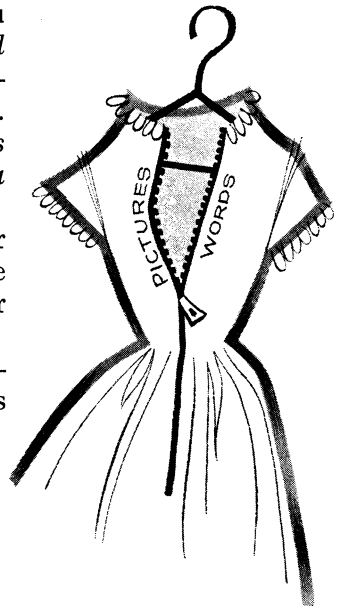
If you are any one of these, you are working in the field of communications. You are communicating your knowledge and skills to homemakers or future homemakers. Or you are learning to do so.

In order to put your ideas across effectively you must recognize one fact right from the start: *all forms of home economics communications involve not merely words but words-and-pictures. The two fit together as neatly and interlock as closely as the two sides of a slide-fastener in a dress!*

This means that every picture you prepare or use must say something. And the words you write or speak must create pictures in the minds of your readers or listeners.

Always keep in mind that everywhere the homemaker or student looks there are pictures. Pictures

*In modern communications,
words and pictures interlock as
closely as the two sides of a slide-fastener.*



Writing is a form of communication between two persons — one writer and one reader. It's as simple as that!

in newspapers, magazines, and books, on packages and billboards. Living pictures in store displays; lifelike scenes and situations projected on television. Many of these pictures are in direct competition with the messages you hope to put across. The only way you can meet such competition — and thus attract the homemaker or student to your ideas — is to develop picture-mindedness yourself.

This is how it works out.

At times you will be thinking primarily about actual pictures. That is, you will concentrate on a photograph or diagram or display or demonstration or other visual to convey your ideas. But that visual will not be enough. You will still need words to emphasize or expand the idea that is suggested by the visual.

At other times — especially when there are no photographs or other visuals to help you project your idea — you must depend on pictorial words and phrases to create mental pictures.

What do we mean by “pictorial words”? Just this:

When you say that a room is “interesting,” you have said nothing. The word “interesting” is meaningless here, because it tells only your personal or subjective reaction to the room. But when you speak of a sun-filled room, or a gay room with living colors, or a cool, quiet room, or an all-family room, you have suggested a picture, and can then fill in with specific details. In such descriptions you have depended on pictorial adjectives.

In other instances you will depend largely on verbs and nouns to inject that pictorial quality. That is, you may say: “Paint the walls with sunshine, using warm yellow paint. Choose open-textured curtains that blend into the sunny-colored walls. Avoid heavy draperies. Use bold-leaved plants for accent.”

If you are teaching the fundamentals of room

Use these marginal areas for your own notes and quotes.

planning, you will probably stress nouns together with the adverbs "why" and "because." As: "These open-textured curtains are a good choice because they filter and soften the light."

If you use a black and white photograph to help in describing the room, you will undoubtedly utilize the caption space to specify colors and tones. If your illustration is in color, the caption space may, instead, call attention to accessories and furniture groupings because the color combination is obvious.

But whether you depend on nouns or adjectives, verbs or adverbs, photographs or no photographs, the ability to substitute pictorial words and phrases for meaningless ones is the trademark of vital communications.

All of us need to work for more of that definitive quality in our writing. Instead of searching for the precise picture-making word to convey our meaning, we are so likely to settle for some worn-out cliché as that word "place." It is one thing to say: "Place the carving knife at the edge of the roast." But when we say: "Place 2 cups of milk or a can of soup in a saucepan," we are being rather ridiculous. What we do is "measure 2 cups of milk," or "empty the can of soup" into the saucepan. More — much more — about words in the chapters that follow.

Another Side of Pictorial Writing

When your copy must run fairly long, as is often the case when writing on practical subjects, work to give those pages pictorial appeal through skillful typographical arrangements. Fiction writers break up pages of solid type by using plenty of short, crisp conversation. You can do it by avoiding long, involved sentences and lengthy paragraphs, and by dropping in well-worded, well-spaced subheads.

WORD TO PONDER

"Empathy" has been defined as the power to move into the life of another person and see with his eyes; feel with his emotions. Although the word is usually associated with fiction writing, it can apply to writing on home subjects, too — family relations, for one example.

Yes, a picture can be worth a thousand words. But it isn't necessary to use a thousand words to project a mental picture. It can be done in a single sentence, sometimes in a single word.

RECIPE WORDS

What recipe words have most appeal for home-makers? One survey shows these topping the list: New; easy; instant; gourmet; protein-packed; low-calorie; family favorites.

The Art in This Book

In reading this book, look sharply at the artwork which introduces each chapter. Note that each illustration, together with caption, points up a thought in a way that makes it easy to remember.

BEWARE THE WEEDS

No homemaker proud of her garden allows it to become choked with weeds. By the same reasoning, no professionally-proud writer permits "weedy," empty words to smother her ideas.

But more of all this later on. For the present, establish that picture of the slide-fastener in your mind. Tuck into your Unconscious the thought that words *can* create pictures in the minds of those who see or hear them; that every photograph *can* be a talking picture, saying something worthwhile or interesting. Once you reason in this way, you will find it easier to approach all forms of Home Economics Communications — whether written, spoken, or pictorial.

Now to narrow down your thinking more sharply, and consider that fundamental and frustrating problem — how to get under way.

"COMMUNICATE" OR "INTERPRET?"

Authors' Note: In this book you will find frequent reference to "Home Economics Communications." Let's look at that phrase.

To "communicate" means not merely to tell, not merely to pass along information and ideas. It involves a two-way process: The giving out of information; and the receiving and understanding of that message.

This means that both sender and receiver must talk and think in the same language. Which, applied to Home Economics Communications, means that the home economist must translate what she has to say into words that will mean something to her particular audience.

Certainly the aim of every home economist is not to stop with the mere feeding of facts, but, rather, to make those facts interesting and digestible. But that aim cannot be attained without an understanding of the principles involved in writing, speaking, and picture-making. This book has to do with those principles.

When, then, you come across the word "communications" in these pages, think of the word not only in its accepted sense, but in its deeper meaning of *interpreting* what you know to those you hope to reach. R/C.