

2.

Basic Problem: Where to Start

The R/C recipe
for getting under way

YOU HAVE ACCEPTED the fact that, as a home economist, you must communicate ideas. You know that you will do this in photographs and art, in written and spoken words. You realize the importance of getting home-centered ideas across effectively. But the question is and always has been, *where and how does one start?*

How does one get under way in writing a recipe release for a newspaper foods page? Planning a demonstration of pie-making for a group of homemakers or students? Setting up a table of foods to be photographed? Preparing slides that show certain techniques in sewing? Figuring a fresh way to put across the principles of good nutrition or good family relations? Or following through on any of the other tasks that come under the broad term, Home Economics Communications?

There is no such thing as "instant writing." Every piece of worth-reading copy must be planned and replanned, organized and reorganized, written and rewritten, checked and rechecked, if it is to measure up to the standards of accuracy,

Writing is like cooking; it's easier when you have a recipe to follow. For the R/C "Recipe," see page 8.



brevity, clarity, and visibility. You will find, however, that the fundamentals of Home Economics Communications are simple. They boil down into this easy-to-remember recipe:

THE R/C* RECIPE FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS

- Step 1. *Visualize* your audience. Visualize also the space and the format in which your material is to appear.
- Step 2. *Analyze* your problems. Figure out how to solve them, or to work around them.
- Step 3. *Organize* your thinking. Study out the order in which your points should be presented.
- Step 4. *Dramatize* your presentation. But do it in a way that is appropriate and timely.
- Step 5. *Synchronize* all of these. Then synchronize your ideas with the ideas of others.

VISUALIZE Your Audience

Ask any successful editor, writer, or public speaker. He will tell you that the big thing in writing or speaking is to "get through" to his audience. He will say that the way to do this is to think of any audience — listening or reading — not as a huge group, but as individuals, with individual problems, aims, and desires. In other words, visualize people — as persons!

Let's face it. Home economics information invariably suggests work-to-be-done. Few women

*Richardson-Callahan. The original R/C formula consisted of only the first four of these steps — Visualize, Analyze, Organize, Dramatize. The fifth step, "Synchronize," has been added to make the formula more applicable to new problems in communications.

Be a
Question Asker

You can scarcely hope to visualize and understand homemakers unless you talk with them. Asking some simple question, as "How do you like your new dryer?" can get a conversation rolling; help you to build background; help you to be a more understanding writer.

or girls will deliberately read or listen to a discussion of work, except as each sees in it something that benefits herself or her family, directly or indirectly. Your first job is to examine your ideas and information to make sure they are both sound and suitable for the group; then tempt (if not decoy) your audience into wanting to learn what you have to say. To do this you must have a mental picture of typical members of that audience firmly in your mind.

To visualize an audience of today's homemakers is not easy. When Home Economics was very young, Mrs. Homemaker was, in general, a woman who stayed at home, looked after her family, did her own cooking and sewing, and rather frowned on those who did not follow this accepted pattern. Today's homemaker may be any one of many types.

She may be a career wife who hires a part-time housekeeper to look after the children. She may be a young — or older — business girl, living alone in a studio apartment. She may be a woman-on-the-go who depends entirely on housekeeping shortcuts and convenience foods. She may be a very young mother with little money. She may be a Senior Citizen doing lonely cooking and having little interest in it. She may live in a city flat or in a suburban split-level; in a tract house or a trailer.

But one thing is certain. All real homemakers have one thing in common — a desire to benefit their families and/or themselves.

Having satisfied yourself, then, that your idea offers some genuine benefit to a good proportion of those diverse homemakers, you can forget that you are writing to great numbers of them. Instead, mentally visualize some one person and write directly to her. Surprisingly, when you do this, many another homemaker will feel that you are writing especially to and for her.

REMEMBER . . .

"In writing, be positive — not negative. Think in terms of readers rather than subject matter. Think in terms of tomorrow — not of yesterday. Build your castles high in the air, then put foundations under them."

"Understand the facts. If you don't understand them, neither will the reader. Don't show off. Don't pose as knowing more than you really do."

"Writers must do all of the work; readers none. Do not write down to readers, do not write up to them; write alongside of them."

"Strive for phrase-making. But don't overdo it. A punch line in every sentence leaves readers groggy."

"Tact means to be in touch with people; to be able to foresee the effect our words and actions will have upon them."

VISUALIZE Copy In Its Finished Format

There is more to visualizing than just picturing the individuals who make up your audience. You need a mental picture, too, of how your copy is going to look in its finished form. When you go about preparing a booklet, think of it — see it! — as an actual booklet, not as just so many recipes or typewritten pages. When you write a recipe for a label on a can or carton, think of how your copy will look in type in that too-tiny block of space. This ability to “see” what you are writing translated into type and layout is one of the big secrets in writing. When you learn to do this, you will find it infinitely easier to write copy that fits the space allowed for it.

EYE WITNESS

To be a writer you need three eyes. Use your two natural ones to observe all that goes on around you, and your third or mind's eye to visualize what you are writing. The more you develop that third eye, the better able you will be to write in your mind — to work out articles or ideas mentally before you take pencil in hand.

ANALYZE Your Problems

Whatever the task to be done, there are always problems, always limitations. Certainly this is true of those on-the-job planning and writing tasks that confront most home economists.

Your problem of the moment may be limitation of space (too small a booklet to cover the subject matter adequately); limitation of time (not enough of it — you think! — to present your lesson plans); limitation of budget (not enough money for color photographs or top-quality art work). Whatever the problems, accept them, then work around them with an objective, uncomplaining point of view.

If you learn that the involved recipe you want to use must be shortened to six lines, shorten it. (Better yet, discard it and substitute a short recipe.) If there is no budget for photography or art, break up the pages with interesting type arrangements — subheads, occasional variations in styles and sizes of type, and the like. If you must give a cooking school without an assistant, get the

audience into the act. There is always a way to work out any problem. And the result usually turns out to be fresher and more interesting because you have been forced to take a new approach.

Certainly there is not enough time on any job to waste any of it in complaining about obstacles. Strong home economics writing is done with a positive pen, never a negative one!

ORGANIZE Your Thinking

What makes one piece of copy easy to read and a joy to follow, while other copy is hazy and confusing? The answer lies in how clearly the writer thinks, and how hard she is willing to work to organize her thoughts. It's as simple as that. For without clear thinking and logical organization, writing is inclined to be tentative and "little-girl-ish," rather than positive and professional.

And where do you start in that thinking and organizing? First, figure out the big idea that you want to put across. You are writing, let's say, about the new way to clean an oven. The big thought you want to put across is that oven-cleaning is easy when your method is used. Keep that thought uppermost in your mind.

Next, line up your facts and decide the order in which they should be presented. Decide on your point of view. Will you write in the first person (that is, say, in effect, "This is how I do it")? Or will you write in the second person, saying, "Do this, do that"? Or in the third person, impersonal, saying that ovens can be cleaned by doing this or that? Make sure you keep the same point of view throughout your story.

Sort out your best attention-catcher. Use it as a lead to get your story off to a quick start. Then write what you have to say in logical sequence, using simple words, sentences of varying length, and no over-long paragraphs.

CLEAR WRITING

Clear writing is the direct result of clear thinking. Until you learn to think, you cannot possibly produce clear, easy-to-follow copy.

MORE ABOUT POINT OF VIEW

In all writing, establish a specific point of view and keep to it. If you find it advisable to switch point of view, make it obvious that you are doing so intentionally. If, for example, you wish to interpolate a bit of personal experience in a signed article written in the second person, set the interpolation apart by means of dashes or parentheses.

Try following this pattern. See if your copy doesn't march along as all good copy should.

Yes, it takes self-discipline to work with scattered thoughts until you have them under control. But such self-imposed discipline is the girdle that gives shape and form to ideas. Without such a girdle your writing will be shapeless, bulging with adjectives and loose sentences. And it will rarely be followed with any degree of interest!

IT'S A FACT

In all forms of communications, there is no substitute for simple clarity.

DRAMATIZE Your Presentation

Every piece of copy, every program plan, every type of home economics communications needs to be dramatized. This doesn't mean fancy writing, or superficial acting, or over-dressed photographic settings. The true meaning of the word "dramatize" is to "bring to life." And dramatization is most effective when done simply.

Take your cue from the successful playwright. One reason he turns out truly dramatic productions is because he understands people. He knows how they respond to various emotions, how they react under certain circumstances. He creates an atmosphere by establishing a mood — through costumes and stage settings as well as through the actors' lines. Most of all he is able to achieve drama because he actually "lives" his characters as he writes about them.

DRAMATIC THOUGHT

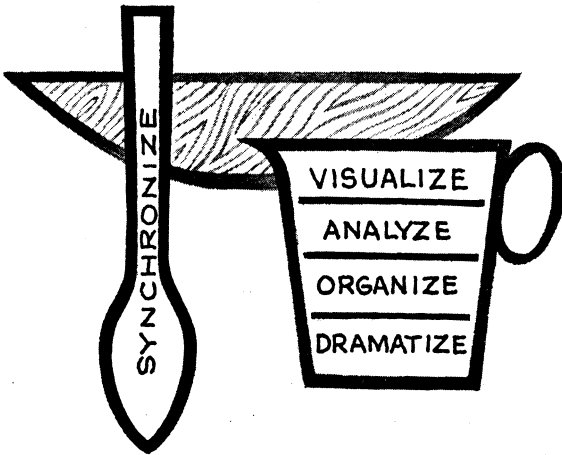
Whatever you use in a decorative way, give it importance! That rule — preached and practiced by all designers — applies equally in dramatizing ideas. Make important facts stand out importantly. When you do, your copy will stand up and stand out.

Photographs, art work, charts, and other visuals all help to put life into home-centered facts. So do lively pictorial words and expressions. But most of all, dramatization starts with being alive yourself, full of enthusiasm for what you are doing and for the people you are hoping to interest. It is never enough merely to spark an idea. You must make it sparkle all the way. That means you must keep a sparkle in yourself, as well as in what you write or say.

SYNCHRONIZE Everything!

When you have mentally visualized, analyzed, organized, and dramatized your material, you have the ingredients assembled for a clear-cut presentation of the idea. But as in any good recipe, those ingredients must be blended together. In other words, *synchronized*. Although the original interpretation of "synchronize" had to do with timing, the word now also means a merging or meshing together of various elements. That is the meaning here.

One way to explain the term and to tie it into the other parts of the writing formula is with this simple visual. (The "spoon" blends together the four "basic ingredients!")



There is more to synchronization than this blending. It is equally important to synchronize your ideas with the ideas of your associates.

For whatever you do in home economics — teaching, business, research, or whatever — you do not work alone. There are always others to be considered. In business, the promotion department, sales department, production department,

PARAGRAPHS

Changes in length of paragraphs make a piece of copy easy to read. For variety, some should be short, some long.

SENTENCES

In providing a change of pace, sentences also should vary in length. A good *average* is about 17 words. Sentences in books can be somewhat longer than those used in newspapers.

VERBS

One of the best ways to spark up copy is to use plenty of action verbs. Study the sports section of a newspaper. See how the verbs pop out; how they make the copy move.

the art director, the photographer, the salesman, and, yes, the other home economists in the organization will have an interest in your plans. If you are a teacher, your program will be influenced by the superintendent, principal, students, parents, curriculum restrictions, and community reactions. Every magazine has a publisher, editor-in-chief, department editors, art directors, rewrite editors, and copy readers — all with ideas as definite as your own. Any phase of government work involves countless agencies making a chain of regulations and recommendations that reach from the seat of government to the top of your own desk. And in every organization (including home economics groups) there are dozens or hundreds of persons, all with strong ideas and convictions.

The important thing to remember is that in this age of interdependence and teamwork, greater goals are achieved when you synchronize (that is, merge) your thinking with that of others concerned with the same basic problems. Never let yourself be an *island*. Be a *peninsula*, projecting your ideas and ingenuity without detaching them from the mainland thinking of others with whom you work.

Visualize, Analyze, Organize, Dramatize, Synchronize — the R/C Recipe for communicating ideas effectively. In the pages that follow, this recipe will be expanded, restated, and fitted to cover the various subjects that will help you communicate ideas.

Authors' Note: Since lists of reference books and supplementary aids have a way of going out of date quickly, we have omitted such material from this revised edition of "How to Write for Homemakers." Our reasoning is that most of you who will read and use this book are thoughtful readers of the *Journal of Home Economics* and other professional home economics magazines. Through the editorial and advertising columns of such publications you are kept informed as to the latest in worthwhile books, booklets, filmstrips, and other teaching aids. We urge you to follow them closely.

Most fiction writers work harder than do most factual writers. When the factual writer, like the fiction writer, puts all of her creative ability and writing skill into a piece of copy, factual writing hits a new high.

NOTEBOOK NOTES

One famous foods writer says, "Keep a notebook. In it jot down interesting notes about things you see and hear and eat; themes in store windows; menus; table decorations — all such things. You'll find these unorganized scribbles frequently provide an idea when one is needed."