

Video Provides Essential Feedback For Course in Livestock Judging

Dan E. Eversole

Introduction

Judging livestock is a skill which involves the comparison of differences (Hunsley and Beeson, 1988). If only one animal is evaluated or appraised, one must compare this animal to a standard or an ideal by making a mental picture of the perfect animal. If two or more animals are judged, each animal must first be compared with the ideal and then with others in the livestock class. Livestock judging is a widely practiced art in the livestock industry because success in this business depends on the ability of a producer to select animals that are the correct type and have economic usefulness to both the producer and consumer. Selection criteria are based on the scientific basis of the heritability of traits.

A vital part of livestock judging is the ability to persuasively defend one's decisions through effective oral communications. Giving oral reasons in livestock judging is undoubtedly a very difficult task for the average student. Effective oral reasons requires a large, well-selected vocabulary, detailed accuracy, orderly and logical comparisons, concentration, and practice. The use of video has greatly simplified my teaching the technique of oral reason delivery in livestock judging because videotaping provides students the opportunity for feedback and self-evaluation. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the impact and importance of video for improving oral reason presentations in the training of livestock judging students.

Importance of Oral Communications

Clear communication is an important aspect of any human interaction since 70% of one's day is spent in oral communication with someone (Driscoll, 1988). Moreover, the single factor that hinders job performance of college graduates more than any other is the inability to communicate (Hafer and Hath, 1981; Magill, 1982; Davis et al., 1985; Broder and Houston, 1986). This weakness seems to be fairly general regardless of discipline or geographic region. One of the main concerns identified at a recent teaching retreat for agriculture professors at Iowa State University was the need to teach communication skills within agriculture courses (Gamon, 1988). The improvement of oral communication skills receives much less attention in most curricula than does the improvement of written communication skills (Katz, 1982).

Communication skills in most curricula are largely lim-

ited to writing and speech classes. These types of courses are essential in undergraduate programs but when skill-building in communications is included in subject matter courses, learning and retention of these skills are enhanced (Cox and Martin, 1989).

Training Livestock Judging Students

My philosophy in training livestock judging students is to develop their ability to think, reason, and communicate with others. An interesting study conducted by psychologist Dr. Shanteau (1978) at Kansas State University concluded that the training program used to develop livestock judges had a clear impact on the students and that livestock judges appear to have unusual abilities to make complex judgments. Over the past five years, 72 students have enrolled in my Principles of Livestock Evaluation and Selection course which is required for those students interested in the livestock judging team program. The raw material that I have worked with (students) has been quite variable. Some of my students have no livestock experience while others have training in 4-H and FFA judging programs. On the other hand, some students have spent a lifetime raising livestock or working with commercial and purebred breeders of livestock.

Because of the diverse backgrounds among students, the basic fundamentals and skills of livestock evaluation and selection are established first in the teaching process. Students learn to differentiate between muscle and fat in the red-meat species (beef, swine, and sheep) and are taught to analyze performance data and structural correctness of breeding animals. Once these fundamentals are established in the minds of my students, I proceed in the expansion of their livestock terminology and begin developing their written and oral communication skills in livestock judging.

My students are required at the end of each class period to submit a written copy of their oral reasons for evaluation. My experience suggests that writing incorporates critical learning strategies of reinforcement, feedback, an active and engaged mind, and personal involvement. Emig (1977) has stated that the process of writing not only enhances learning but also extends the learning process (both synthesis and analysis) beyond what is otherwise possible. As soon as students feel comfortable using livestock terminology and the desired format of oral reason delivery, I no longer demand that the oral reasons be written. Most students at this point in the semester are ready and eager for a new challenge in their quest to become more proficient in both livestock judging and oral reasons.

Eversole is an assistant professor in the Department of Animal Science at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA 24061.

Effectiveness of Video

Huff (1986; 1988; 1989) has successfully instructed students to learn and to correctly present oral reasons in horse judging through the use of video and "stick" diagrams. As Cox and Martin (1989) point out, any course in which a paper is assigned can be modified to include a video presentation of the paper. I have several video tapes of former students giving oral reasons in livestock judging. These tapes are played during the class period to emphasize the importance of direct eye contact, controlled body language, voice inflection, facial expression, and the persuasive style of oral reason delivery. These attributes are impossible to evaluate through written communications but are essential ingredients in competitive livestock judging. Students enjoy critiquing oral reason presentations of former class members but are somewhat hesitant about watching themselves on video. This is evident because some students have asked that the oral reasons not be taped. The class is reassured that this teaching technique is not meant to embarrass anyone but will provide a valuable learning experience. If the class members are well-acquainted, these feelings of anxiety are lessened.

I have found that taping presentations of oral reasons is more effective and more comfortable for the student if the presentation is given to me and not to the class. This is in contrast to Cox and Martin (1989) who suggest presentations be given to an audience while the taping is incidental. There are occasions, however, in which I will tape oral reason presentations in front of the class. As a livestock judging coach, I am concerned with how my students speak to me rather than to an audience. This "one-on-one" style is typical for livestock judging students in intercollegiate competition because they are required to give a total of eight sets of oral reasons to an official judge and not to their peers or to an audience.

Learning any skill including communication skills is dependent upon practice, contiguity, and feedback (DeCecco and Crawford, 1974). Communication skills are extremely important in my livestock selection class because the written and oral reasons constitute 40% of the student's grade and, therefore, should give students the incentive to practice. Students are informed of the desired style of oral reason delivery and the factors that will be considered in evaluating their written and oral reason presentations. Therefore, there is contiguity from one class period to the next. Feedback in both the oral and written forms is continually provided to students by me and the graduate teaching assistant but feedback through the use of video has been very effective. It has been my experience that the motivational aspects of feedback (i.e. viewing oneself or your class peers on tape) will greatly affect the amount of effort that a student will invest in practicing the skill of presenting oral reasons. Viewing the video provides a golden opportunity for self-evaluation. Irion (1966) has found that feedback is the single most important variable governing the acquisition of any skill.

Video in my selection class is often used at three different intervals throughout the semester. I have used video extensively at the beginning when oral reasons is initially being

taught. This time is critical for students to become aware of such distractions as head bobbing, poor body posture, trembling knees, poor enunciation, and wandering eyes. Video is again used mid-way through the semester to monitor progress but, more importantly, to shorten the length of oral reasons to 70-90 seconds (the maximum is two minutes) and to emphasize voice inflection and the persuasive style of oral reason delivery. Students are encouraged throughout the semester to take these videos home to view for self-evaluation or possibly for small group discussions. The last time in which video is used in my Principles of Livestock Evaluation and Selection course is at the end of the semester, just prior to our intramural livestock judging contest on campus and the regional intercollegiate livestock judging contest which is rotated among different host institutions in the southeastern region of the United States. The intent of video at this time is to finely tune the oral reason delivery of students and to provide a "thick slice" of compliments as suggested by Gamon (1988).

Conclusion

The inability of college graduates to communicate effectively is recognized by educators and employers as the primary factor that hinders job performance. It has been my experience that livestock judging students are provided opportunities to expand their critical decision-making and communication skills which are necessary for job survival. One educational technique that I have found to be effective in developing advanced interpersonal skills among livestock judging students is the use of video. Videotaping oral reason presentations is a unique learning experience that allows graphic feedback and self-evaluation. Students are able to critique their style of delivery and witness any mannerisms such as indirect eye contact, head bobbing, or poor enunciation which could be distracting. Video is an excellent instructional medium to illustrate the importance of voice inflection and the persuasiveness of oral reason delivery.

References

- Broder, J. M. and Houston, J. E. "Employer Assessments of Graduates." *NACTA Journal* 30-2(1986):18-22.
- Cox, L. J. and Martin, M. V. "Improving Oral Communications Skills Using Video." *NACTA Journal* 33- 1(1989):25-27.
- Davis, J. T., Garkovich, L. E. and Mather, L. L. "Job Placement and Career Advancement of Ag Graduates." *NACTA Journal* 29-4(1985):20-24.
- DeCecco, J. P. and Crawford, W. R. *The Psychology of Learning and Instruction*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ (1974).
- Driscoll, R. M. 1988. "Making Self-Confidence and Communication Skills Work for the Media Specialist." *Tech Trends* 33-3(1988):30-31.
- Emig, J. "Writing as a Mode of Learning." *College Composition and Communication*. May (1977), p. 122-28.
- Gamon, J. "Teaching Communication Skills in the Agriculture Classroom." *NACTA Journal* 32-1(1988):23-26.
- Hafer, J. C. and Hath, C. C. "Job Selection Attributes: Employer Preferences vs. Student Perceptions." *Journal of College Placement*, Winter (1981).
- Huff, A. N. "Teaching Oral Reason Terminology for Horse Judging Teams." Virginia Cooperative Extension Service, Publication 406-86 (1986).
- Huff, A. N. "Oral Reason Terminology for Horse Judging Teams." VHS Video Tape, Virginia Cooperative Extension Service (1988).
- Huff, A. N. "Introduction to Horse Selection." VHS Video Tape, Virginia Cooperative Extension Service (1989).