Fundamentals of Program Evaluation
Course 380.611

Communication Pretesting,
Needs Assessment (U.S.)
Topics to cover

- Pretesting of communications
  - Purpose
  - Variables measured
  - Methodology, sources of data
  - Example from Peru

- Break

- Needs assessment in the U.S. (Dr. Donna Stobino)
Pretesting Communications: A type of formative research

PURPOSE:

To measure the reaction of members of the intended audience to the concepts and messages of materials, before final production.
Confusion over term “pretesting”

3 Meanings:

- Pretest – of a questionnaire before implementation
- Pretest-posttest – before/after measure
- Pretest – of communications materials
What does pretesting measure?

Is the message:
- Appealing?
- Understandable?
- Culturally acceptable?
- Credible?
- Sense of identification?
Why pretest?

- Identify problems with the materials before producing them
- Identify ways to improve them
- Select between alternative versions
- Avoid expense, ineffective materials, and public embarrassment
3 groups to consider in pretesting

- Intended audience
- Technical team
- “Gate keepers”
Questions in a pretest

- **COMPREHENSION**
  - Tell me in your own words what this ___ (spot, poster) says.
  - What is this poster about?

- **ACTION TO TAKE**
  - Does this message ask you to do something in particular? What?
Questions in a pretest

- **CREDIBILITY**
  - Does this message say anything that is not true?

- **SELF-IDENTIFICATION**
  - Do you think this message is intended for someone like yourself? Someone different? Who?
Questions in a pretest

- OFFENSIVE IMAGES OR LANGUAGE

- Is there anything about this spot (poster) that people in this community would find offensive?
Questions in a pretest

- **APPEAL / ATTRACTION**
  - In comparison to other messages that you see these days, how attractive do you find this message?

- **ALTERNATIVE VERSIONS:**
  - Of the two versions you see here, which do you like better? Why?
Questions in a pretest

- RECOMMENDATIONS?
  - What is missing in this message? What could we do to improve on it?

- DEMOGRAPHIC DATA
  - Sex, age, education, urban/rural residence
  - Factors specific to the topic (e.g., uses contraception)
Data collection

- Quantitative
  - Survey among intended audience
  - Often uses quota samples

- Qualitative
  - Focus groups
  - In-depth interviews
Advantages of individual interviews

- Can go in-depth into topic
- Confidential responses
- Useful if sensitive topics
- Unbiased by responses of others
Advantages of group interviews

- More spontaneous
- Synergy from group dynamics
- More time to pursue specific points in depth
Sample size: depends on the instrument (suggestions)

- **Interviews:** 20 or more per target group
  - (Men/women, urban/rural, young/older adult)

- **Focus groups**
  - Two groups per “category” of intended audience

- **In-depth interviews**
  - 5 per subgroup

- **Common advice:**
  - Continue until you begin to hear the same in each group (no new information)
Length of the pretest

- Surveys: 15-30 minutes
- In-depth interviews: >30 min.
- Focus groups: 60 to 90 minutes
Data processing and reporting

Quantitative
- Code the data
- Tabulate the data
- Analyze and present the results
- Computerized vs. manual
Data processing and reporting

QUALITATIVE

- If possible, tape the sessions
- Transcribe tapes or use notes
- Identify main themes of interest
- Match comments to themes
- Identify trends
Use of pretesting results

- Choose between alternative versions of the material

- Identify aspects to further improve, even in the preferred version
Two final steps in pretesting

- Modify the text, music, artwork, etc., based on the results

- Retest the messages, if the changes are numerous
Examples from the field of communication pretesting

- Pretesting a youth website
- Objective: to assess the graphic design concept of a Peruvian youth website home page for Peruvian youth.
Details of the Pretest

- Conducted by IMACEN (marketing research firm based in Lima) in 2003
- On behalf of APROPO (local NGO) and JHU/CCP
- Took place in a special facility with one way mirror/glass
- Graphic designers were behind the mirror, listening to the reactions of the focus groups
- Data collection/report completed in two weeks
Methodology

- Focus group discussions:
  - 4 groups (2 male, 2 female)
  - Divided between low SES and middle SES
  - Aged 13-17 (all from Lima)
Issues explored

- Graphic design, navigation, interactivity
- Name of the website (the Home Page: la pagina Web); different buttons (sections)
- Themes:
  - 5 basic areas: sexuality, life skills, democratic values, environmental health production, pop trends
Issues explored (cont.)

- Tried to learn:
  - Were these the most important topics for this group?
  - Was the amount of info right (not too much)?
  - Was the treatment of these topics appropriate?
    - Language used?
    - Way of presenting information?
    - Tone?
Pretest of the website

- Testing the “look”
  - Colors
  - Visual composition
  - Attention-getting
  - Pictures and illustrations, animations
  - Use of different fonts and letters
Tested the concept of an online counseling service

- Wanted to learn:
  - Was the concept attractive?
  - Would you use it?
  - How much info could the program ask of the person using the service, to maintain confidentiality and not alienate them?
Findings from testing the concept of the online counselor

- Concept was very attractive to learn about contraceptives, sexuality, and domestic violence
- Youth didn’t mind providing information about themselves since they could use a false name
- Advantage of asking sensitive questions online (that they wouldn’t dare ask face-to-face)
- Preferred online to phone (hotline); no one could recognize their voice.
The four alternative designs
The first time I saw it, I said, "________!"
Findings from the pretest

- **Color**
  - They didn’t like black (which the designers had thought was “trendy”)

- **Animation and pop-ups:**
  - Very important

- Liked combo of illustrations and real photos

- Liked utilization of the full space (horror al vacío)
Findings from the pretest (cont.)

- Balance
  - Visual composition related to ease of use
- Preferred “3 columns approach”
  - not exactly innovative, but similar to other websites
- Language: clear, “horizontal”, modern
- Font: big letters, simple
4th design was the favorite

Changes made to the favorite:

- Cleaned up the background (distracting flashes of yellow)
- Added a lot of animation
- Established key characters on home page
- Each character champions a section of the website
More changes in the preferred version

- They wanted to see the REAL person who was the counselor
  - Added her picture.

- Made each of the subsections more distinct (separate colors, clearly identified)

- Final version:
  - Link to the NGO responsible for promoting this website: www.nosedesexo.org