

Howard Cosell Here . . .

Tape-Recorded Role Playing To Evaluate Student Knowledge

By

John Behee

Tri-State University

It was three years ago that I hit upon the idea of using the tape recorder to quiz my history of sport class. I had just given a quiz over the first half of our unit on the ancient Olympic games, and the results were dismal. I began wondering where I'd gone wrong. Over coffee with several students I learned that it had been a busy week — other reading assignments, basketball games, dorm meetings — they just couldn't find time to get prepared for this quiz.

At our next class meeting I announced that a second quiz would be given in one week. This time it would be a tape-recorded interview. They would be asked to play the role of a spectator, a pentathlon athlete, a judge, a chariot owner, etc. I would not tell them which role they were to play until they sat down to begin the interview. It was decided that each interview would last four minutes, since our class period was 50 minutes in length and I had 10 students in the class. The grade would be based upon the total number of facts they could present in four minutes of conversation. My role was to keep things moving with brief questions or comments. That meant we would all have to use our imaginations, since I was to play Howard Cosell, a man whose famed vocabulary does not include the word brevity.

On the day of the quiz I set up shop with tape-recorder and stop watch. Our classroom has a divider. I closed it, and called in the first student for her private, four-minute quiz. To my delight the young coed was nervous and well-prepared. Things went very smoothly. In came the next student. Again, there were signs of nervousness and preparation for the quiz. This pattern continued through all ten students.

At our next class meeting I played the tape back. The students kept the tally of each person's points. After each interview the point totals were checked, just to see that we were in agreement upon the grading procedure. The point totals ranged from a high of 50 to a low 25. Over coffee with several students I learned that it had been a busy week again, but they did not want to make fools of themselves in public so they shifted their workload to include preparation for the quiz.

There are some limitations to this testing technique. Four minutes is not enough time for good students to demonstrate the full extent of their knowledge and preparation for the quiz. There is little time for reflection upon questions. As the class enrollment increases, the quiz begins to consume more than one class period, and only a sample of the interviews can be played back to the class.