

# Script Taping: An Essential Supervisory Tool

Quickly and accurately recording classroom observations doesn't have to involve expensive or elaborate devices.

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The fundamental purpose of all supervision is to accelerate the growth of those who are supervised. Essential to this growth is the identification of three types of behaviors—those that (1) contribute to productive performance; (2) consume precious time, energy, and materials, but contribute little to productive performance; and (3) actually interfere with productive performance. Once these behaviors are identified, they can be strengthened, eliminated, or remediated.

The easiest way to identify specific behaviors is by observing them. Final scores, whether in sports or tests, indicate whether you have a winner or a loser, but only observation can yield the information necessary to change a loser to a winner. To be useful, observation must be valid, objective, and recorded. A recorded observation enables observer and performer to "play back" the performance so that salient cause-effect relationships can be identified.

Video and audiotaping would seem to be ideal for recording observations. They obviously eliminate any observer bias, and they can be played back over and over again. On the other hand, cameras are too unwieldy to move around in a classroom; sound can be lost if an individual turns away from the microphone; and the cause-and-effect sequence can be lost if, for instance, the mike or camera focuses only on the teacher and not on students on the other side of the room. Electronic taping equipment is also expensive and requires locking up when not in use.

Script-taping is an easy and efficient alternative to electronic taping. It is the process of capturing with pen and pad what happened in an observed segment of teaching so that cause-effect relationships can later be examined.

## Developing the Skill of Script-Taping

Learning the skill of script-taping is remarkably easy and can be accomplished with about two hours of practice. The following is a sample of a script-tape as recorded by an observer:

*Opn p. 43 I'm ask ver hd—use mark to find ans whn frnd sho me w/ sig who has lots of pets Every had mark on rt ans Who can't see Mr. Sleeper (wrong ans) that rt if askd who sees but can't see. Now just rt.*

From this script the recorder can play back:

*Open your book to page 43. I'm going to ask some very hard questions. Use your marker to find the answer. When you have found the answer, show me with the signal (thumbs up). Who has lots of pets? Everyone had the marker on the right answer. Who can't see Mr. Sleeper? (A girl gave a wrong answer.) That would be right if I asked who sees Mr. Sleeper, but I asked who can't see Mr. Sleeper? (Same child responds correctly.) Now you're just right!*

From this script-tape, the observer can verify that the teacher had every student answering every question with a marker and that the teacher was monitoring each student's information location skills. Also, the teacher is to be commended for dignifying the student's incorrect answer ("That would be right if I asked who sees Mr. Sleeper") and giving a prompt ("I asked who can't see Mr. Sleeper) to help the student answer correctly, thereby giving the student a success experience rather than a feeling of being "wrong."

Using the script-tape, the observer plans an instructional conference. Skimming the anecdotal notes, the observer can pick up specific examples from actual performance to give meaning to the discussion: "When you said 'Be ready to give an example of \_\_\_\_\_,' and then waited, all students were alerted to the possibility of being called on but were given time to formulate and refine their answers." This eliminates vague statements such as "You gave students enough thinking time." Regardless of what type of instructional conference is used, data that bring validity to the interchange are easily available from the script-tape.

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## Advantages

Script-taping is the least expensive tool of the supervisor, and it effectively produces growth-evoking records because:

1. It requires only paper and pencil.
2. It has extraordinary flexibility. The writer can focus quickly and monitor two or more areas simultaneously. Quick sweeps of the observer's eyes can pick up activities and responses from all over the room.

3. It provides easily accessible, temporal accounts of events from which cause-effect relationships can be inferred.

4. It is unbiased when carried out correctly. Created by an inexperienced or unsophisticated observer, script-tapes can be biased if the records show only what the observer thought was important or worth recording.

5. It can be "played back" anywhere because, from the written record, the observer becomes the playback instrument. The fidelity of the reproduction, as with all recording, depends on the sensitivity of the recording instrument and the reproduction capacity of the playback instrument. A trained observer can produce a high-quality performance in both recording and playback.

6. The optical scanning of the human eye and the dexterity of the hand in turning a page are the only time consumed in locating the needed part of the teaching episode. Skilled observers mark salient parts when recording them, making their location obvious. All parts of the lesson are almost immediately accessible.

7. The cost of storage is only the price of a folder and file space. Frequently, only summary notes and recommendations are kept.

The only real problem is that beginners find it hard to believe that the process can be learned with just a little practice.

Script-taping should become a required proficiency for any educator who has responsibility for improving the performance of another. It is a necessary element in supervisory and administrative preservice training and a constant element in effective supervisory performance. □

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