

This Is a Recording

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AT TIMES SUGGESTIONS have been offered that we agricultural scribes could be replaced by machines, computers, or some other innovation of this technological age. Who knows? Nevertheless, a lot of new communications developments have put greater scope and punch into our offerings. Sometime ago in an AAACE publication we noticed an article regarding use of portable battery-powered cassette recorders.

Replace The Secretary?

Though I have teased her, a cassette tape recorder will not really replace a competent secretary for proof reading—but I have found great application of the recorder in my work as publications editor. One of the ideas in its purchase was for proof reading.

After reading about the tape recorder, I began to consider the idea a bit more seriously while on a long motor trip. Away from the phones and the general clamor of any office, I discovered I could really think out a number of things which we all do when unfettered. Problem is that one may think of a good idea, but it could slip away with the passing of a truck. Naturally it isn't feasible to write things down while driving because one might find himself with a snootful of earth.

I figured if I had a portable battery-powered recorder, I could hang the microphone around my neck and talk to myself to my heart's content. After nine months, I have had a number of experiences, plus learning experiences, which I wish to pass on to the cause.

Tapes

One of the things I learned in a hurry was not to buy cheap tapes, and more particularly the cheap two-hour tapes. I saw them on sale when I first obtained my recorder and have since been told by my colleagues and learned by experience that 120-minute cassettes have too much tape for the batteries to drive the tape properly. I've also been told the C120's are too thin to be practical. The result has been that I have lost some hours of work because the tape wraps itself around the reel so badly that I have had to discard some of them. Besides that, the recorder goes off speed.

It's Proof!

I read proof with the recorder by reading manuscript copy into the tape recorder. That completed, I then take another tape and read the type which has been set into the recorder. I wasn't a bit happy on one occasion when I discovered my two hours of reading was cut off at the reel before I learned the potential troubles of the C120. I have always found it very difficult to rewrite a story if the original gets lost so I always keep a carbon. I find the same true with a tape recorder. If I have read it in once, then repeating the reading sort of runs into a mental block.

More than two years ago, I borrowed a cassette recorder and purchased a number of 3M tapes that had Phillips head screws which allowed one to disassemble the cassette and realign the tape if necessary. Those tapes, however, perform quite well and so pen knife or screwdriver surgery was unnecessary. But of recent, I have searched store after store and have been unable to find any more 3M screw-assembled tapes. So, I suspect, such has been discontinued.

Detailing a bit of the two-hour "bargain" tape jumping the track, I cut the cassette apart but all to no avail for neither glue nor tape would make the tape work again. Then I discovered one of our radio stores carries Mexican-assembled cassettes which are joined with five flathead screws and I saved the recording by a transplant into the Mexican cassette. Some adjustment was made to get the cassette to accept the tape, but I was able to continue proof reading with the original tape. I will save the cassette and discard the tape when the bulletin is published. Since then I have been using better grade C60 and C90 tapes which

perform quite satisfactorily and so far I have had no further difficulty.

Secretary Not Replaced

Nothing can take the place of a good secretary for proof reading, but I have saved considerable time and sped up jobs when help is engaged in other responsibilities. Once I have read the material into the tape recorder as noted, then I listen to the tape I read from the manuscript and read along with the type set copy. Then I switch and listen to the recording I made of the type set and compare it to the manuscript.

Then there are times when I err in reading and rather than having a misleading paragraph, I always say correction and re-read the paragraph, sentence, table, or whatever, without having to go back and find where I was on the tape before I made the recording error. This avoids the trouble of running the recorder back to the place before I made the error because it can get pretty difficult to jockey the tape back and forth to position the tape where it was before I erred.

When stopping for a day or any period of some length, I always mark the manuscript or galley with the date and time. This is in preference to just making a mark because if the phone rings several times or one is called out, it is difficult to readily find just which mark I meant. This is not too much trouble on the first reading because all my marks are original, but on the second time around or more, one can accumulate a lot of marks.

Another advantage of the tape recorder is its convenience for checking continuity when you have a publication about ready for the press. This is one more time to make sure that what's on page six **does** follow directly after where we left off on page five. Also, this gives one more whack at those nefarious little typos that remain hidden until the publication is printed and circulated. I caught a good one lately. Sodic in a heading was not only misspelled, but it was garbled. That could have hurt much of the publication's value by the sloppiness of the garbled word alone.

As for secretarial time, I have found the recorder convenient when I have just a few lines or a paragraph or two to check closely. I do that myself because I don't consider it appropriate to interrupt her work when I can accomplish the checking in rather short time on my own.

Equipment

I am not qualified to make recommendations as to type of tape recorder and accessories for I know little of electronics. I will, however, indicate my selection and why. In the first place, I needed the recorder for personal use.

I purchased a Wollensak with five 1.5-volt batteries. I examined some other makes and models that had four batteries, but since I have been recording music and sound effects, I am quite interested in recordings of reasonably good quality. I felt one additional battery would give it more oomph and so far I have not been disappointed. I use the heavy duty alkaline batteries which I consider worth the extra expense.

Of the overall recorder, I have been surprised at the quality of recordings it produces—including music. So it seems incredible that a mere half of a one-eighth-inch tape can produce tones of such excellent quality at $1\frac{7}{8}$ ips. Our on-the-spot recordings of music clearly distinguish the different voices and types of instruments. We found this out while recording native songs and dances in the South Pacific and we recorded in buildings that were hardly designed for acoustical qualities.

Transformer

I bought the accessory transformer for the recorder and always use that when 120 AC is available. Anyone who uses a battery tape recorder is well aware that recording rapidly depletes the batteries. My transformer has a built-in feature of supposing to recharge the batteries, but cautions against recharging them for a period longer than what the batteries were used. My colleagues tell me that one is better advised to forget about recharging the batteries. So I measure the batteries periodically with a voltmeter and if they have dropped below 1.5 volts, out they go. Most of the time I am able to use the transformer anyway. In my view, I was making a long-term investment and I think I have more recorder working for me if space is not taken out for a transformer.

Step On It

To complete the ensemble, I also purchased a remote controlled foot pedal which again has been worth the investment.

This keeps both hands free and one can type or listen and be totally able to write remarks and not lose his place on the tape because all one has to do is lift his foot. A disadvantage is that if one is using both the foot control and the microphone, he can not turn the recorder off with the microphone switch on my particular model. My microphone has two jacks and one cannot install the on-off switch because that terminal is needed for the foot control input. But then that is not a formidable situation because the foot switch will handle that.

Meticulous

In addition to reading copy I think one of the most beneficial aspects of the tape recorder is its usability when checking such things as financial statements, formulas, or other critical information. The last thing I want is an error in a financial statement which goes to the public. One can check and recheck with a tape recorder.

Dead Batteries

I learned something the hard way regarding batteries. Two days before I left for the Experiment Station workshop in Washington, D.C., in January 1971, I purchased five 80-cent, heavy-duty, alkaline batteries and merrily ran the recorder while attending what I considered a good session.

When I came home and connected the recorder to the transformer, I was shocked to see my tapes were so badly off speed as to be useless. I took a close look at the batteries and noticed a small ring of corrosion around the bottom of one of them. Since they appeared okay on the Saturday I purchased them for use the following Tuesday, I did not even think of corrosion.

I carried a spare set but I had thought today's batteries are built well enough that they won't corrode. You can figure what's coming next: inspect your batteries daily!

Well, this is about it from this battery-powered editor. Should anyone have something to add to this, I would enjoy hearing from you.

By the way, as I revised this, I read it into the tape recorder to hear how it sounds.