

PREVIEW— ONE STEP IN THE SELECTION PROCESS

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It would be wonderful if one had time to preview each of the thousands of media titles which are produced each year and are vying for our attention. However, this is hardly possible now, and will become even more difficult as the media proliferate. The November 15, 1974 Epiegram reported that numbers of commercially available instructional materials had spiraled from a total of 19,000-26,000 in the 1950s to over 300,000 in 1974. The \$5.00 filmstrip of the '50s has become a sound filmstrip set, and may cost from \$50 to \$100. The media professional must consider and scrutinize every purchase decision. Media specialists can no longer afford "white elephants" (expensive materials or equipment now collecting dust in the media center).

For years, media specialists have had to build quality collections of books with limited funds, from a market bulging with titles. How have they coped? In the book world there is a massive effort made each year to channel most of the books published through a review journal. Long ago, however, those in the field realized that this process, however important, leaves something to be desired: Just because a reviewer praises a book does not mean that it should be a prime candidate for purchase (it is not uncommon to find a book praised by one reviewer and panned by another). Also, reviewers have biases which are often connected to the editorial philosophy of the journal in which their reviews appear. The lag time between the date of publication and the appearance of the review in print presents further problems. Yet, media specialists continue the time-consuming process of checking review sources.

Book selection and selection of audiovisual materials share some common requirements:

1. Constant reading, listening, or viewing to develop critical ability and a knowledge of content.
2. An in-depth knowledge of user needs.
3. A knowledge of the existing collection.
4. Constant reading of the review media.
5. Screening title output in relation to reviewer's evaluation, user needs, gaps in the existing collection, and the subject knowledge of the media professional.
6. Rare purchase of a book title that has not been reviewed in a review journal. Less frequent pur-

chase of a media title that has not been reviewed in a review journal.

7. Substitution of less expensive formats or titles when quality can be maintained at a high level (e.g., buying the same book title in paperback or buying a sound filmstrip instead of a 16mm film when motion is not a prime requisite).

An additional step may be required to minimize adding white elephants to the media collection—in-house previewing before a final purchase decision is made. Note that the authors have said that previewing is an *additional* step—not the *only* step preceding purchase. That is, consultation of reviews and previewing are partner tools.

To be successful, a program for previewing potential purchases must be thoroughly organized, particularly when a constant stream of materials may be flowing between producers and your center. Poorly kept files and casual policies can be disastrous to the center and can endanger any producer's willingness to continue to send materials for preview. The flow-chart outlines suggested view procedures. Those items which are lettered will be explained more fully.

A. Requests for new materials are submitted by patrons, and may be for an actual title or for materials in a subject area. Requests must be checked against the media center holdings to determine if the title is in the collection, or if other materials are available in that subject area. (An accurate record of materials presently owned should be kept to avoid unnecessary and unwanted duplication. When items are purchased which are parts of sets or series, the catalog or list should cross-reference the set title and the individual item title.) If it is determined that the subject is insufficiently covered, or that the requested title is not in the collection, materials can be selected for potential purchase, and will therefore need to be previewed.

B. It is essential that well-organized files be maintained of materials in the center for preview. This will assure the smooth flow of materials from the preview source to the previewers, and back to the source. A simple form should be used for the preview acquisition files. The form (in two copies) should contain the following essential items: title, date ordered, date arrived, who has the material in-house, date due back at center, and return date to

producer. One copy of the preview form should remain in the central office and be clipped to all correspondence pertaining to the preview item. The second copy should accompany the material to and from the previewers. One simple form records the complete process for efficiency and time saving. All information should be filed so that return dates are carefully watched.

C. Sources for preview include the individual publishers of audiovisual media; other public schools within a system; other school systems; other media centers in public libraries, junior colleges, universities, and other educational institutions; regional preview centers; and conventions and workshops.

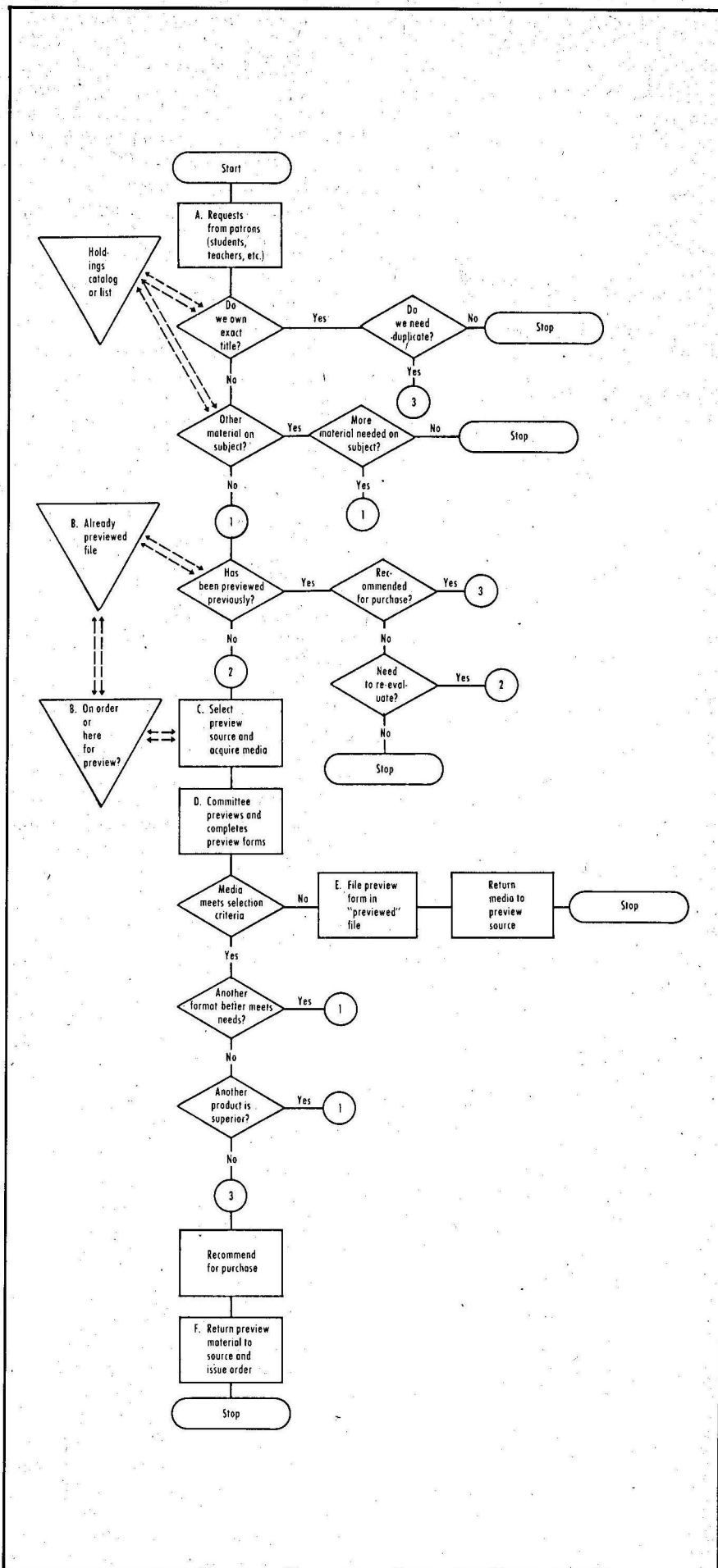
In the past, publishers and producers have been happy to allow materials to be previewed. There are some rules of ethics which need to be observed, however:

1. Expedite preview materials so that they are returned to the company promptly.
2. Return the material in "mint" condition.
3. Do not copy, photograph, or record the materials. This is not just unethical, it is illegal.
4. Be appreciative of the preview service and patronize cooperative firms when possible.

If you are in a public school system, other schools in the district which own materials which might be suitable for your school may lend their copies for preview. Time spent communicating with colleagues and sharing ideas about materials might lead to inter-library loan. Other school districts with extensive media collections could be willing to allow previewers access to their materials.

Distances between junior colleges, universities, and other educational institutions may be great, but communication between media specialists and knowledge of existing media collections may lead to cooperation in lending. Communication with the local public library may stop unnecessary duplication of materials in two local collections.

D. The person in charge of preview of materials may have to choose between preview by a designated committee, patrons, a group of teachers, individual teachers, students, the media staff, or by a combination of all of the above. Previewers should possess some subject area expertise. The media specialist can, through in-service



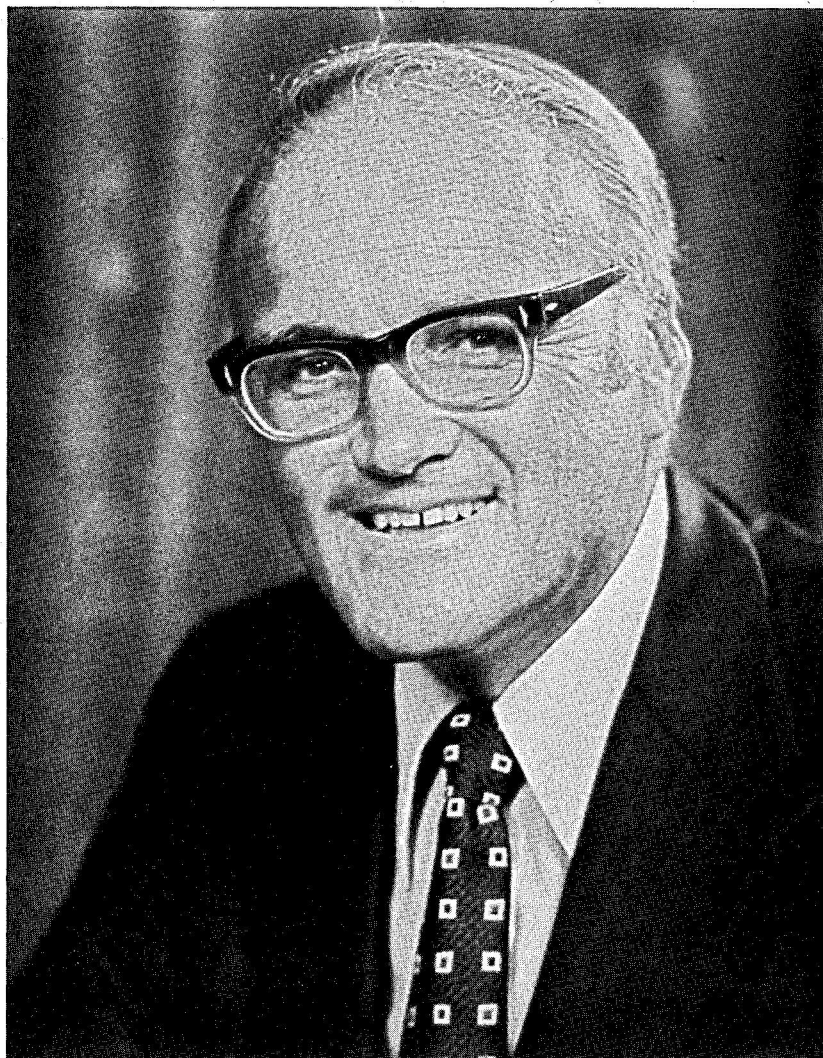
training, help previewers to become excellent reviewers.

E. However preview is accomplished, it is preferable to provide a single evaluation format for all types of media. The findings and comments of previewers can be recorded in a card file or loose leaf notebook for easy reference to all materials which have been previewed. It is essential that information from preview sessions be preserved so that materials are not unknowingly requested for preview a second time. Requesting materials unwittingly can be costly, and may cause a review committee annoyance when they realize they have seen the material at another time.

F. Once material has been previewed it must be returned promptly to the preview source, and care must be taken to see that material is returned within any time constraints placed by the preview source. Others may be waiting to preview the material.

Preview of materials can have several very positive results. It may create an awareness of the availability of audiovisual materials; it may increase patron use of such materials; and it may increase the use of media center materials in general. It will decrease the chances of purchasing white elephants.

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Convention Speaker Announced

James G. O'Hara, who since 1958 has represented Michigan's 12th district in the United States House of Representatives, will address the First General Session of the Dallas Convention on Monday, April 14, at 5:00 p.m.

O'Hara is considered to be the House's leading authority on higher education, and serves as chairperson of the Committee on Education and Labor's Subcommittee on Postsecondary Education. This subcommittee will be considering new higher education legislation to replace the current Higher Education Act which expires in FY 76.

O'Hara has introduced two higher education bills this session—one to rewrite, amend, and extend the federal student financial aid programs; and the other to extend all the other programs contained in the present Higher Education Act.

The student aid bill would give the federal government more leverage in higher education policy making and would discourage continued raising of tuition in the public sector: O'Hara described his bill, which he hopes to get to the House floor before summer, as "a step toward ending the escalation of present tuition levels," in keeping with his personal long-term goal of making "two or more years of tuition-free education available beyond high school to every qualified American."

In addition, O'Hara served for several years on the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, including its subcommittees on Environment, National Parks, and Recreation. He left that committee in 1974 to become a member of the newly-formed Budget Committee, which has the responsibility for setting the federal spending priorities for the Nation.