



The laboratory

William E. Utterbach

To cite this article: William E. Utterbach (1922) The laboratory, Quarterly Journal of Speech, 8:2, 181-183, DOI: [10.1080/00335632209379381](https://doi.org/10.1080/00335632209379381)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00335632209379381>



Published online: 06 Jun 2009.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 4



View related articles [↗](#)

THE LABORATORY

MEASURING THE REACTION OF THE AUDIENCE TO AN ARGUMENTATIVE SPEECH

WILLIAM E. UTTERBACH

Dartmouth College

FOR the purpose of impressing upon my students of Argumentation the necessity of analysing the audience and, in the light of that analysis, of aiming the speech at the particular audience, I have been in the habit of holding "post-mortems" with the student on his speech. The value of the "post-mortem" is tremendously increased if the student and instructor know with some accuracy just what the actual reaction of the audience to the speech was. Since this knowledge is not usually available I have been experimenting with several devices for registering the reaction of the audience. All are some variation of the following plan: Before the speech each member of the classroom audience records his present state of mind toward the position to be maintained by the speaker by writing on one side of a three by five card, "Strongly favorable," "Slightly favorable," "Neutral," "Slightly opposed" or "Strongly opposed" (to the speaker's position). The hearer is also invited to write down briefly the main reasons, if he has any, for his present state of mind on the question. Immediately after the speech each hearer records in the same manner on the back of the card his "after taking" state of mind together with any reasons in explanation of it which he may care to state. This data, which, when collected and tabulated, is usually very illuminating to the speaker, is made the basis of our "post-mortem." As the hearers are usually very frank in indicating which arguments did and which did not impress them favorably, it becomes possible not only to tell how many hearers were converted, how many were

unmoved, and how many of those already favorable to the speaker were strengthened in their belief, but also to put one's finger on the arguments which were and those which were not effective.

I have used a modified form of this device in judging class debates. Before the debate each member of the audience records his present state of mind on the question to be debated by writing on one side of a card, "Strongly favorable," "Slightly favorable," "Neutral," "Slightly opposed" or "Strongly opposed" (to the affirmative side of the proposition). Immediately after the debate each member of the audience records on the other side of the card his "after taking" state of mind toward the affirmative side of the proposition. The cards are collected and the decision made in the following manner. The five different states of mind toward the affirmative side are represented numerically as follows:

"Strongly favorable" ..	+ 2
"Slightly favorable" ..	+ 1
"Neutral"	0
"Slightly opposed" ..	- 1
"Strongly opposed" ..	- 2

The "before taking" state of mind of each member of the audience is stated numerically according to the above table and the whole added algebraically. This sum represents the audience's state of mind before the debate. Its state of mind after the debate is determined in the same way. The decision is then awarded to the team which, according to this calculation, has succeeded in pulling the audience in the direction of its goal. For example, if the state of mind of the audience was -16 before and -3 after the debate the Affirmative team has won. If the state of mind of the audience has not changed during the debate the decision is a draw. This method of rendering decisions seems to work well with small class-room audiences. It would, of course, be out of the question with large audiences, as at an intercollegiate debate, for instance—unless the decisions were based on the reactions of a jury of representative hearers scattered through the audience. The members chosen for the jury, which might number two dozen or so, would be neither experts in weighing evidence nor in debating nor would they necessarily be "prominent citizens." An attempt would be made to make them simply representative of the

audience. They would be instructed to consider not the skill shown in debating, but only what they consider to be the merits of the question. It would, of course, be important that the reaction of the jurymen be uninfluenced by personal sympathy for either team of debaters. This might necessitate holding the debate in neutral territory. As a method of judging intercollegiate debates this device has several obvious practical disadvantages. I throw it out merely as a casual suggestion for the consideration of those interested in the "judging" problem.

TEST FOR DETECTING CONSONANTS INCORRECTLY OR INDISTINCTLY PRONOUNCED BY A SPEAKER

It has been observed that much of the unintelligibility of student speech is due to the fact that the speaker pronounces certain consonants incorrectly or indistinctly. If the instructor knew in the case of each student which were the troublesome consonants he might easily devise a set of drill exercises in pronunciation for overcoming the difficulty, but it is usually a rather difficult and tedious task to determine which consonants are causing the trouble. In an effort to devise a test for use as an aid in this diagnosis I have been experimenting with the following: The speaker, seated with his back to the audience, reads slowly a list of nonsense syllables which contains all of the consonants, each appearing an equal number of times. Each member of the audience writes down the syllables as he hears them, spelling phonetically. The written lists are collected, corrected and the results tabulated. The data thus obtained indicates very clearly which consonants were misunderstood, and, therefore, incorrectly or indistinctly pronounced.

WILLIAM E. UTTERBACK.