

# The Silent/Sound Film for Teaching and Training

By CHARLES A. PALMER

**The silent/sound film format provides a new kind of teaching and training instrument, to be used with new methodology. The picture must be a true silent picture, and the soundtrack must be integrated with the visual action. Teaching powers of the silent medium are recapitulated. Four teaching and training group-use routines are described, and the suitability of types of subject material is delineated.**

THE TERM *silent/sound*, which has been given to this film format, seems paradoxical but actually is descriptive. Conventional in its elements, but new in its planned combination, the silent/sound format provides a new kind of teaching and training instrument, to be used with new methodology. On suitable subjects, well done, the impact of the combination may be greater than the sum of its parts.

As the title implies, the format is a silent picture which carries a soundtrack. But the picture must be a *true* silent picture, conceived and constructed so that teachers and trainers can show it silent with full comprehension by the students or trainees. The soundtrack is added *after* the silent picture has been completed, and is integrated with the visual action, so as not to compete with the screen but add to and reinforce the meaning. To do this, the superimposed captions are spoken as they are seen, verbatim and synchronized, the voice then going on under the visuals to amplify, explain, point up, or otherwise contribute to the total understanding.

The true silent film — or more significantly, the “all-visual” film which carries its continuity in the images, with essential verbalizations distilled to short lettered captions, sometimes supplemented with dotted lines, arrows, etc. — has long been neglected, but offers certain unique teaching strengths. There is additional impact and rememberability in a message which reaches the brain primarily in images through the eye. The all-visual lesson is intelligible to all students or trainees, overcoming many educational limitations and language handicaps. The teacher or trainer can “localize” the lessons of the silent

picture into the needs of his own particular group, with his own voice.

Nevertheless, a good soundtrack can reinforce the best silent picture with added values. Where the fundamentals of a subject can be made clear by visuals alone, their shadings and nuances can best be brought out by a narrator’s verbalization. And — seemingly a concession but a practical necessity — the mere presence of the soundtrack will satisfy teachers and students who have grown up with sound and are uncomfortable with “dead air.”

An example of silent/sound format is the 16mm version of a driver education 8-subject package “Schooled in Safety” (produced under a grant from American Oil Co. and distributed to the schools by them). For professional drivers, three of these subjects have been put together, at the instance of the Bell System for their trainers, under the title of “Three for the Road,” and it is with this version that the basic audience-experimentation with silent/sound has been done.

The films have been used in four major training routines.

*First*, they are often screened as pure silent pictures, mostly in noisy locales, such as “tailgate” showings in company garages, continuous-projector runnings in employee locker rooms, and, in a special experimental run, with the projector behind the clerk in a license renewal window at the Motor Vehicle Dept. office in Hollywood, projecting a continually repeated (4½-min) safety message to the people who are waiting in line.

*Second*, a subject is screened silent at the beginning of the training or teaching period; then, after discussion by the group, it is run again silent but with localized ad lib “narration” by the teacher or trainer.

*Third*, the subject is run silent at the beginning of the period; then, after

group discussion, it is run for review with the recorded sound-track. (This pattern has also been used by a teacher on educational television).

*Fourth*, the film is first run silent; then, after the group discussion, it is repeated with the narrator’s soundtrack. Finally, at the end of the period, the subject is run again silent, but with one of the students standing beside the screen and delivering an ad lib narration in his own voice. (In this instance, the teacher has announced at the beginning of the period that one of the students will be called on for this duty, and it is reported that the students seem to pay closer attention to the screenings, and participate more deeply in the interim discussions.)

The format obviously is best suited to short film units in the single-concept philosophy. (In the package cited above, the units were made to permit silent 8mm running in the Technicolor projector instant cartridges.) The format is also suited only to subjects which are intrinsically visual; as with the driver education material above, training in manual skills, aspects of physics and mathematics which can be well expressed by action or animation, and so on. With abstract subjects such as literature and philosophy, where expressions of ideas predominate over action, and hence the words are more important than the visuals, the silent/sound format will usually have little or nothing to contribute. Incidentally, the titles cited above were photographed with very careful planning to permit acceptable projection at either silent or sound speeds.

In conclusion, it should be repeated that the basic picture in this format should be a true silent film, conceived and constructed as though sound recording had not yet been invented. It will not be good enough simply to pull a soundtracked segment out of an existing conventional film and superimpose some lettered captions. But with the silent/sound format honestly and ably developed, some subjects can be presented with a new impact and rememberability.

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