

## System for Reporting Symposium Discussions

*Abstract. The system described was effective in obtaining a complete record of the discussions which arose during a week-long symposium with over 300 participants. Each individual wrote a publishable summary of his question or comment on a special numbered card immediately after speaking. This not only provided an accurate report but greatly facilitated preparation for publication.*

An international symposium on the factors determining the behavior of plant pathogens in soils was held at the University of California, Berkeley, 7–13 April 1963. There were over 300 participants and the program was arranged so that approximately 44 percent of the meeting time was available for discussion. Because the symposium papers and ensuing discussion were to be published in book form, it was necessary that discussion, questions, answers, and comments be accurately recorded. The use of tape recorders for this purpose was rejected because of possible reluctance of people to express ideas freely if they knew every word was to be preserved, and because of the tremendous effort required to edit and transcribe the tapes. Therefore, a system based on one used at the 1961 Australian Plant Pathology Conference, sponsored by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization, was adopted and modified to meet our requirements. This system worked remarkably well in handling approximately 13 hours of discussion over a 4½-day period, during which there were about 300 questions from 97 different persons.

The basis of the system was that each person asking a question or making a comment from the floor was given a numbered card immediately after he had finished speaking. We found 5- by 7-inch (12.7- by 17.8-cm) file cards to be satisfactory. On each card at the top were spaces designated for names of both the questioner and the session speaker. The following statement was mimeographed at the bottom of the card: "Please write question or comment at your earliest convenience, the same day if possible, and

return this card to a committee member or to the boxes placed by the main door for this purpose." Also, a space on the card was designated for "key idea" so that the questioner could quickly jot down a few words to help him keep the cards in order in case he asked several questions during a session.

The returned cards were sorted, and each main speaker was given those cards containing questions and comments directed to him. He wrote answers to the questions, usually on the same card, and then put his answers and the question cards in the collection boxes. Thus questioners and session speakers wrote down their questions, answers, and comments before they might begin to forget them, and worded them as they wished them to appear in print.

In order to deliver the appropriate cards to each session speaker, and to arrange the cards to maintain the correct sequence of questions, answers, and comments, record-keeping was necessary, and was done as follows. Microphones were available to people desiring to ask a question. Slightly raised platforms were located in the aisles, each of the two center aisles containing three stations and each side aisle two stations. Anyone wishing to ask a question went to the nearest microphone station and stepped on the platform. This lit a corresponding light at the rostrum and the chairman recognized the questioners in the order in which they arrived at the microphones. Each speaker was asked to give his name before asking a question. One floor worker was responsible for handing out cards in each aisle. To aid in subsequent sorting, the cards for each

aisle were numbered consecutively, and a separate block of numbers was used each day (for example, 1 to 100 for the first day, 101 to 200 for the second, and so forth). When a question was asked, the person responsible for that aisle recorded on a tabular sheet the name of the questioner and the number of the card given to him. The other three floor workers also recorded the name of the questioner and the aisle in which the question was asked. This provided a cross check for arranging the returned cards in the proper sequence.

This procedure worked well in obtaining an accurate record of the discussions, which was then easily typed and edited for publication. All the discussions were taped to check on any cards which were not returned or were lost. It was seldom necessary to refer to the tapes but they did provide a safeguard against lost or undecipherable information. In all, six people were required to operate the system: a chairman, four floor workers (one for each aisle) to hand out cards, and a tape recorder operator.

The typed record was edited to delete duplication of material presented in the published papers, and to eliminate unimportant points of clarification. Some questions were moved from sequence to improve the flow of ideas or for greater relevance. It was necessary to confirm and add references mentioned on the cards. Only in a very few cases was it necessary to refer material to the speakers for clarification.

The success of this system depends upon the willingness of all participants to fill out the cards as requested and return them promptly. We found everyone extremely cooperative and therefore the system was successful, with a card return of 98 percent.

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