

Practical Polygraph: X Onset and XX Ending Announcements



by Raymond Nelson

Test data acquisition and recording occur after the completion of the pretest interview phase of the polygraph test, following an explanation of the recording sensors, after a review of all test stimulus questions, and after attaching the sensor to the examinee. Prior to the presentation of the test stimulus questions, every polygraph recording begins with an announcement that the test is beginning. This is often referred to as the X announcement of test onset. This announcement is given every time the recording is started. Completion of recording is also announced, and this is commonly referred to as the XX announcement of completion. Skillful and thought-

ful use of the X and XX announcements can improve the quality of the recorded data and may improve the effectiveness of the polygraph test for some examinees.

The X announcement of recording onset will provide both information and instruction to the examinee. All of the information and instructions are also provided during the pretest phase of the polygraph test, while explaining the instrumentation and testing procedures. That information will include an advisement of the importance of remaining seated and still during the testing process (i.e., the recording of responses to test stimuli), a reminder



about the need to answer *yes* or *no* without other talking during the test, an instruction to look straight ahead and listen carefully to each test question and an advisement to avoid moving during the test.

It is important that this information is provided in a clear and professional manner that will convey both the importance of these instructions and the intent of the polygraph professional to assist the examinee to obtain test data of optimal quality for analysis and interpretation. For a variety of reasons, polygraph examinees may not fully appreciate the importance of the information and instruction, and some examinees may forget the instructions. For this reason, it is important for examiners to repeat the information and instructions at the onset of every recording. Following is a list of the recommended information and instructions for a complete X announcement.

- An advisement that the test is beginning.
- An instruction to sit still.
- An instruction to look straight ahead.
- An instruction to listen carefully to each question.
- An instruction to answer *yes* or *no* only.
- An instruction to refrain from other talking during the test.
- An instruction to refrain from moving during testing.

Some of these instructions may seem a bit redundant. For example, the instruction to sit still may seem to overlap with the instruction to look straight ahead or to refrain from moving. In this case the repetition and emphasis are intended, so as to emphasize and clarify the requirements for cooperation. Many polygraph examinees do not know how to sit still. Recall that for some children in school moving one's head and move slightly while remaining seated may have been a perfectly acceptable. At the polygraph test, moving one's head, hands or feet, even while remaining seated, will not be an effective form of sitting still. For this reason, it is important that examiners provide complete and adequate information about what is required for a successful test.

An examinee who understands and adheres to these instructions will more easily produce test data of satisfactory interpretable quality that is free of artifacts and with observable changes in physiology that are timely with the test stimuli. Examinees who do not understand or do not adhere to these instructions may be more likely to engage in movement, talking or other activity that result in data artifacts or changes in physiological activity that is not timely with the test stimuli. The following is an example of one way to conduct the X announcement and it is taken from an actual field examination involving a probable lie compari-



son (PLC) test format:

- *This test is about to begin. Please sit still, and look straight ahead. Listen carefully to each test question. Answer 'yes' or 'no' only. No other talking, and do not move during the test.*

A slight modification can be observed in the following X announcement taken from an example of an actual field examination involving a directed lie comparison (DLC) test format:

- *This test is about to begin. Please sit still, and look straight ahead. Listen carefully to each test question. Answer 'yes' or 'no' only, and remember the questions that I have instructed you to answer 'no'. No other talking, and do not move during the test.*

In the X announcement for the DLC exam an addition statement is included to remind the examinee of the instruction to answer 'no' in response to the DLC questions. This additional instruction is not used for the X announcement for the PLC format. Although not strictly necessary, both of these X announcements include the use of the word 'please.' Although some field practitioners maybe uncomfortable with an X announcement that may appear to take the form of pleading, or may convey that the cooperation is somehow optional, use of the word 'please' in this context does

little or nothing in reality to reduce the authority of the examiner in the testing context. Use of the word 'please' is merely a social convention intended to convey an attitude of dignity and respect, and acknowledge the reality that cooperation during test is ultimately the choice of the examinee. It is not recommended to use the word 'please' more than one time during the X announcement.

Following are the minimal recommended requirements for the XX announcement of the end of recording:

- An announcement that the test is complete.
- An instruction to remain still until the pressure is released from the cardio sensor.

Here is an example of an XX announcement from an actual field polygraph test.

- *This test is complete. Please sit still until I release the pressure in the cardio sensor.*

Again, use of the word 'please' is not necessary, but conveys an attitude of dignity and respect towards the examinee while acknowledging that cooperation during testing is ultimately a choice.

Some examiners may prefer to memorize the X and XX announcements. Others may prefer to write the com-



plete announcement into the list of test stimulus questions. An advantage of including the X and XX announcements in the question list is that the details of the X announcement will be permanently included in the test data.

It may be important at times to ascertain that the adequacy of the instructions and X announcement before a conclusion can be reached that an examinee's observed failure to cooperate is indicative of malintention. In the event that movement, non-cooperation, or disruptive behavior is observed during the test it will be easier to determine if the examinee has received adequate and complete instruction about how to cooperate successfully during the test if the X and XX announcements are included in the question list. It will be more difficult to conclude malintent when the X announcement is incomplete or inadequate – even when adequate instruction and information was given during the pretest interview.

Provision of a complete and adequate X announcement of test onset will more easily support correct conclusions about the meaning of observed problem behavior during testing. Inclusion of a complete X and XX announcements in every question list can help to simplify the task-load of professionals faced with the responsibility to review the adequacy of test administration and interpretation of the meaning of observed problems

during testing. Inclusion of a complete X and XX announcements in the question list can reduce the need for a reviewer, supervisor, or quality control professional to rely on the audio/video recording to determine the adequacy of the instructions when an examinee is observed to be confused or uncooperative.

Examiners who are prepared to deliver a clear and professional X and XX announcements are more likely to impress on the examinee the importance of these instructions and therefore more likely to achieve the cooperation of the examinee. Of course, some examinees are intent on not cooperating or appearing confused during the test, and it is possible that little can be done to rectify some situations. For those circumstances, the post-test and other investigative activities may be a more effective solution towards the resolution of the observed inconsistencies.

