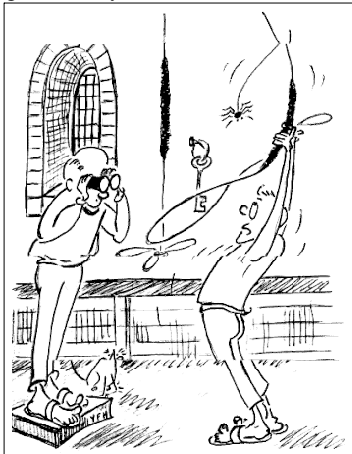




Observation

Much has been written about correcting faults, but before cure must come diagnosis. That requires careful observation, a useful skill that all ringing teachers should try to develop. This month we suggest ways you can look a little deeper than 'what' goes wrong to try to see 'why', with examples from three stages of development: learning to ring rounds, learning to hunt and learning elementary methods.



Straight and level

This aviation phrase is a good description of rounds. Some people develop the knack quite quickly, but many don't. It is easy to see (and hear) the poor striking, but what symptoms are there that might give clues about the causes? Here are just a few to start you thinking.

- **Tenseness** - This makes smooth ringing very hard. It affects the whole body. You might see it in the facial expression or in tight muscles (neck as well as arms) or even not breathing! Apprehension about something new is normal, but not if it persists. It might be fear of the rope, fear of breaking a stay, or something else.

- **Sloppiness** - This too is an all-over thing, in many ways the opposite extreme to tenseness. Again the symptoms affect the whole body, and not just the arms. One should be relaxed when ringing, but if the posture is not properly balanced and poised, then it is hardly surprising if bell control is jerky and erratic.

- **Rope too short** - When ringing your own bell, you can feel the need for an inch more or less rope, but inexperienced ringers have yet to learn that, so you need to be able to detect it and give advice. Signs of extreme shortness include overstretched arms, shoulders jerked, heels lifted off the floor, and a continual fight to keep the bell up. Less extreme cases won't lift people off the floor, but you can still see the overstretch. The most sensitive indicator is the movement at the very top of the stroke. With the length correct the rope comes smoothly to rest before coming down again, but with an over tight rope, it suddenly reverses direction (as it jerks the arms) like a ball

bouncing off a wall.

- **Pulling too soon** - this causes the bell to drop, and can easily be confused with the rope being too short. Once again, the clues are there in the body if you look for them. The arm muscles tighten and the arms bend slightly before they come to full stretch. This is quite different from the effect of a short rope, where the rope stretches the arms.

- **Gear changes** - Beginners often oscillate between being too slow and too quick. They fail to appreciate this as a speed problem and spend their time trying to correct being too wide or too close. What causes the switch? Watch carefully, and you will see some small move that changes the speed - the rope might slip a couple of inches or the arm action might change. Helping your pupil to understand when this happens might be enough to overcome it.

Did you know that when an engine does this - continually alternating between going a bit too fast and a bit too slow - it is called hunting?

Manoeuvring

Sticking with the transport metaphor, once you can move in straight lines, you learn to turn corners. Hunting is about speed change rather than physical direction, but it looks like turning corners on paper. What matters is changing by the right amount at the right time. Turning left at a T junction does not work if your direction only changes by 45 degrees. Nor does it work if you turn before or after the junction.

Here too, it is easy to see when it is not working, but the clues as to why need closer scrutiny. At this stage, too, there are more symptoms of understanding problems as well as physical problems of execution.

- **Not changing speed** - The importance of speed change does not always sink in when people think in terms of which bells to follow. The main symptom is not moving far enough - never getting right to the back or to the front. Also, what movement there is will be catching up, ie being too late when hunting down and too early when hunting up. Movement is only triggered by being in the wrong place, ie behind the game. Look at your pupil. Is effort only applied after getting in the wrong place? Is (s)he looking blissfully unaware that the bell is not moving as it should?

- **Unable to change speed** - The result may be similar to the one above, but the cause is very different. This pupil puts in a lot of effort at the right times, with distinct signs of frustration at the (lack of) result. This points to handling problems, whereas the one above was more about perception.

- **Wrong rope length** - Rope length is even more critical when hunting, and often catches people out. The symptom is almost always that hunting in one direction is much worse than in the other, depending on whether the rope is long or short. The solution of course is to teach people to adjust the length as they ring, but not everyone does it. Pupils need quite a lot of encouragement to summon up the courage to do so, rather than clinging to the same bit of rope.

- **Overshooting** - This is another common problem with (at least) two possible causes. If you see obvious handling difficulty at the speed changes, the cause is likely to be physical. If your pupil is handling tidily and confidently, and shows no sign of action until the bell has overshot, then it is probably a conceptual problem - not realising

that it takes time to change the speed of the bell by starting the adjustment the blow beforehand.

Navigating

When you can manoeuvre accurately, you can set off on a journey, but you need to know where to go. Ringing a method is a journey. You must memorise the map, and do your own navigation while 'driving'. The first maps we give people are very simple compared with many things people use in their lives, so why do so many people have problems?

If the manoeuvring skills are sound, the residual problems must be in the head not the hands. You need to tap into what your pupil is thinking, not just what (s)he is doing. Much is reflected in the face, so look there for clues.

- **Looking in the 'wrong direction'** - If your pupil's head swings vigorously, to look determinedly at individual ropes, looks at those that should not be followed and heaves the bell to try to do so, then the concept of moving smoothly from place to place is being subverted by the desire, conscious or otherwise, to follow ropes. Whatever the cause, you need to find out why, if your advice about how to cure the problem is to have much effect.

- **Panic searches** - If periodically your pupil's head thrashes wildly looking for someone to follow, and at the same time the bell stops in its tracks, or even holds up when hunting down, then your pupil's desire to see a bell to follow is so strong that it subverts the ability even to let the bell keep going at the right speed. If the facial expression points to lack of confidence, then this might be the best place to start, rather than lots of technical advice.

- **Wrong-stroke moves** - Trying to dodge under at hand instead of over, or vice versa is quite common. It could be a genuine attempt to dodge with the wrong bell, but if repeated, is more likely to indicate some misguided subconscious expectation about what dodges feel like, detached from an awareness of where the bell actually is. A puzzled expression and random searching for anything that will fit are pretty strong indicators of the latter. Some people fail to do two blows behind when hunting. Again, looking at the face should tell you whether this is wrong bell following or a (wrong) in-built feel about what happens at which stroke.

- **Staring ahead** - Many proficient ringers do this, taking in the whole scene, listening and relying on a strong sense of rhythm, so don't discourage it if things are going well. If they are not going well, then perhaps your pupil is under exploiting what can be seen, and needs help to spot clues about what is happening.

Finally

We cannot provide live video clips in *The Ringing World*, so after reading the descriptions you must find your own opportunities to practise. Problems inside your pupil's head make it harder, but there are clues if you look for them.

Don't pounce on every slip though. We all make mistakes, and most of them are best left to self correction, so don't let the odd one worry you or your pupil. Try to spot any consistent patterns that can give clues about underlying causes, where your advice might help.

We have only been able to scratch the surface, but perhaps it will encourage you to look more carefully for the less obvious clues, and to learn how to interpret them.

Tail End