For fifteen years I have been a teacher of a course entitled General Semantics in Journalism. Professor Wendell Johnson at the University of Iowa gave me my first training in general semantics in the department of psychology there. Later, in 1945, I studied under the founder of the discipline, Alfred Korzybski, at his seminar in Chicago.

A panel like this presents a difficult undertaking. While the subject has to do with the use of general semantics in journalism education, which would seem to embrace a consideration of methodology, it is probably impossible to approach an assignment of this kind without setting forth some of the principles and formulations themselves. To set forth these principles that relate to journalism teaching, however, would require, in my opinion, at least the remainder of the time of this convention and perhaps a few days more. I say this because, while I can't speak for others on the panel, I believe we should alert those who came to hear all this that they probably will not gather a complete account of what general semantics has to offer journalism education.

The rather long period of time I have worked with general semantics as a course giving journalism credit has not led me to believe that herein lies the possibility of a major break-through in the learning barriers that confront the journalism teacher and his students. I believe my students will support me in this!

On the other hand, this discipline has, in my opinion, so much to offer that almost any journalism student will benefit from the experience of a semester of carefully planned study. Perhaps a semester is not enough, but we are all aware of the pressure to include other important courses in the programs of study, and if general semantics bears the journalism label, it, too, must come within the increasing stricture of the 25 percent rule.

In the ten minutes I have been allotted here, I can do little more than list some of the important semantic-journalism relationships that seem to me to offer important assistance in preparing our students. General semantics has the advantage of serving to unify and to make more meaningful a student's newly acquired knowledge, an important consideration for a journalist. It may contribute also to a student's understanding of the methodology of science, certainly of the philosophy of science. A course in general semantics may very well stimulate interest in philosophy, as well as logic, of both the traditional and non-aristotelian variety. Students have been known to derive new insights into the basic principles on which systems have been developed in mathematics and in languages.

It was in his attempt to unify knowledge through cutting across departmental barriers that Korzybski probably encountered his greatest criticism. His interpretations and generalizations of diverse areas of knowledge perhaps left something to be desired by mathematicians, colloid chemists, psychologists and others whose work he abstracted to fashion what he called a general theory of evaluation. It is probably because of the diversity of subject matter which he brought into the system and the failure to fully satisfy the experts in their areas of specialization that the semantics of Korzybski is almost invariably without a 'home' under the departmental organization of our colleges and universities.

The most useful korzybskian formulations for the journalism student include, of course, the three basic principles: 1. non-identity 2. non-allness 3. self-reflexiveness. Here we consider the map-territory relationships and the important 'is' of identity. Equally important for the journalism student, it seems to me, but representing the work of Bertrand Russell, Ernst Mach, Rudolph Carnap, P.W. Bridgman, and others, are 1. the propositional function 2. the operational definition 3. the predicative value as a criterion of truth and 4. the theory of types.

Time does not permit the detailing of Korzybski's formulations which seem to be of particular significance. I should like to mention a few, however, that seem to have special importance in our work:

The nature of abstracting as depicted through use of the Structural Differential can lead to an almost immediate improving effect, I have found, for example, on editorial writers. Professor Howard Jacobson of this panel has published some interesting applications of its use in handling news events.

Consideration of extensional and intensional definition and the nature of over/under defined terms provides an important experience. If I were to analyze in great detail the characteristics of the ideal person we hope to send into the field of journalism as a result of good journalism training, we should
have, I believe, a kind of inventory of an extensionally oriented person. To be oriented extensionally is to put great emphasis on 'facts [observations] first—then words.' The writer or editor with such an orientation will make every effort to bring his reader, listener, or viewer as close to the non-verbal level of the activity under observation as the ubiquitous barriers to communication will permit.

When great effort to extensionalize is made, for example, by a writer-editor, we are very likely to see appropriate use made of pictures, charts, diagrams, quotations, etc. Some of the technical 'journalistic rules' we have learned to follow may be bypassed in our effort to assist the reader in attending more closely to his own direct experience. I believe it is possible to modify intensionally oriented habits found in our students in the direction of extensionally oriented ones through study and exercise of material already existing in the literature of general semantics.

Advertising psychologists are now paying much attention to a formulation which Korzybski called silent or unconscious assumptions. His paradigm depicting the procedure for the revision of assumptions leading to more desirable behavior now constitutes approved advertising methodology. In this regard it may be pertinent to note here that some of the most successful advertising men today are very close students of general semantics.

If I were attempting to rank the korzybskian formulations carrying important implications for journalism students in the order of importance, I should place the semantic constructs leading to an awareness of individual responsibility in communicating high on the list. 'Responsibility' applied to journalism is in semantic terms an over/under defined word that assumes top importance whenever the performance of a particular publication or media organization is up for evaluation. We encounter some difficulty, however, when we attempt to reach generalized agreement as to the limits of responsibility. Responsible to whom? General semantics attempts to provide the structure for examining and understanding the physiological-psychological effect that printed or spoken words have on both user and receiver. Responsibility involves what the writer or speaker does for the reader or listener in terms of providing him with a 'picture of reality'—a picture valid enough to aid him in predicting from time to time what the future may have in store for him.

To continue this over-simplification—a language that induces a distorted picture of reality may lead to difficulty: semantic shock, difficulty in making adjustments, damage to the nervous system, etc. The student does not need to look very far to find such distorted pictures in our media—much of it in the name of entertainment and advertising, but occasionally in the accounts of news events. He does not need to look far to see the effect of false knowledge on his fellowmen. It follows that language habits of a student can be improved in ways other than by warnings and threats on the need for being responsible. Korzybski's big point in formulating general semantics as a system of evaluation was that the structure of language affects the functioning of our nervous systems. Certainly the journalist, perhaps more than anyone else, should be aware of how language structure affects not only himself but his readers and listeners. The point I am attempting to make is that the responsible writer is very much more likely to be one with this knowledge than without it.

In recent years I have taken the opportunity to test the effectiveness of many principles of general semantics on journalism students through a practical reporting assignment. Each member of the class is asked to attend 11 of 13 two-hour sessions of our annual Journalism Week held near the end of the semester during which the course is offered. The assignment is to write evaluation statements on the 25 to 30 speakers from the point of view of language-fact relationships while considering the general effectiveness of audience communication.

Students are quite often pleasantly surprised to find that they can make delineating use of their newly acquired formulations. Once the application of the principles of general semantics has been observed and practiced in evaluating particular events in an exercise of this kind, the technical language may be bypassed. The original extensionally-directed considerations remain, however, to be treated in any variety of ways dependent on the ingenuity of the writer.

Some day, even at our present rate of progress, we may have developed at least one theory of communication on which working principles may be structured. Such a theory certainly should include many of the problems with which general semantics is concerned. In the meantime, it would seem that journalism education should consider carefully the work of any discipline that attempts to deal with language problems, particularly where the survival of man is the over-all basic concern.