

The self-census also avoids any embarrassment some people might feel when answering personal questions -- such as those relating to age, income and employment -- in the presence of a census representative.

Women in particular seem to be bashful about birthdays. And, despite reassurances about the complete secrecy of all census information, some men are reluctant to answer the question about income.

In 1961 a man phoned the census office in Vancouver to confess that he had made a false statement about his income. He explained that he had said his salary was smaller than it really was, because his wife had been listening.

Trying It on for Size

The extent of the planning that goes into the taking of a census almost defies description.

Football coaches plan for days or weeks before a championship game. Generals may spend months on the plans for a battle. But the census requires years of preparation. Even before one census has been completed, planning for the next one is under way.

There is more to the census than agreeing on the questions to be asked, although this takes much consideration. There are also decisions to be made on the techniques to be used, such as self-enumeration.

The new procedures for the 1971 census had to be worked out in detail, tested "in the field", reworked, and tested again.

A first small field test for the 1971 census was held in Ottawa in December 1966. Then London, Ontario, had a complete test of self-enumeration in September 1967. This was followed by a test of 6,000 households in Toronto in June 1968, and another in four rural localities in October 1968.

The census officials were trying to discover which plans worked best under the actual conditions to be faced. Was it better to post questionnaires to each household and pick them up later or have the enumerator call with the questionnaires and have them mailed back?

And how should a particular question be phrased? Would it be better understood if it was worded one way or another? How to find out? Try both to test the results.

Based on the outcome of the earlier trials, "dress rehearsals" were held in September 1969, in Sherbrooke, Quebec, St. Catharines, Ontario, and Souris, Manitoba. These provided the experience from which the final plans were made.