

KSFO NEWS **STYLE BOOK**

By CHET CASSELMAN

Director of KSFO News and Public Affairs



CHET CASSELMAN--News and Public Affairs Director
A twenty-year veteran in radio news, Casselman joined KSFO in 1960, and prior to that was Assistant News Director at KMPC Los Angeles. He has been instrumental in making KSFO News a leader in Bay Area broadcasting. As President of the Northern California Chapter of the Radio-Television News Directors Association, Casselman has taken the lead in developing a set of Riot Coverage Guidelines that have gained nationwide attention and he was asked to address the RTNDA's National Convention on that subject. Under his direction, KSFO News has earned a national as well as local reputation as one of the industry's best.

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Second Printing - April, 1968

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It is our intention

to remain "The World's Greatest" Radio News operation.

We've got the men, the equipment and the mobile units...on the ground, in the air and on the water...that can do the job. But these days it takes something more to be number one: Imagination and Style.

The following guidelines are designed to give KSFO a unique, intelligent and imaginative news style.

The Product:

News, of course, means many things to many people. This is our definition:

"News is an occurrence or about to occur occurrence of interest to at least one other person."

The key word is interest. The more persons likely to be interested in the occurrence, the bigger the news item.

Broadcast news to us is:

"The highly personalized, instantaneous and widespread dissemination of important and/or interesting news items, frequently as those events are occurring."

And our principal goal is the same as any other news media:

"To gather and disseminate as much important information on as many sides of as many important stories and issues as possible within the limitations of the medium's format."

The basic KSFO News style features a prominent accent on significant local news and local angles on national and international news, leading each news broadcast when possible with a strong local news item. . . never, however, at the expense of a late breaking major national or world story.

To the three basic commandments in good radio news writing

BE CLEAR...BE CONCISE...BE CORRECT

we add these:

USE THE PRESENT TENSE...TRIM ALL FAT...
BALANCE CONTROVERSY

The primary rule in writing, editing and rewriting at KSFO is to "SAY IT THE SIMPLE WAY."

Our belief is that any story in the world can be told in 100 words or less, considerably more words than we'll devote to the average story.

Writing, Editing and Rewriting:

The KSFO News style is to cover as many important and interesting news stories as possible in each newscast without sacrificing clarity on any of them.

Editing, whether copy or tape, should enhance a story, making it move smoothly and interestingly. . . easier for the listener to follow and appreciate. Every word must count. An unnecessary word or unimportant fact may provide the momentary distraction that could lose the listener's attention.

Rewriting should result in an entirely new angle being presented at best. . . a complete paraphrasing at the least.

Since we can report events as they happen the present tense is our natural tense. In using the present tense, we automatically give the news an air of immediacy and the listener a sense of participation. The present tense also helps us follow the KSFO News style of reporting what's happening now while working on what happens next.

Fat, to us, consists of unnecessary ages, middle initials, addresses, occupations, unfamiliar or obscure names, precise, involved numbers, incidental information and stories of relatively little interest or importance, stories of minor crimes, small holdups, common shootings, knifings, murders and suicides, incidental fires, remote small plane crashes and isolated auto accidents.

Ages are important to us and our listeners only if they are a material factor in the story such as a 98 year old man enrolling in deep sea diving school or a 7 year old boy winning a tractor driving contest. Age always is an important factor in the death of a well known person.

Middle initials of newsmakers are used only to avoid possible confusion with a well known person with a similar name. Addresses are used only if they are famous addresses such as 450 Sutter, or Number 10 Downing Street.

We put the location of a news event as being on a particular street between two intersecting streets or near one of them, rather than as a specific house, building or structure street address.

A person is identified as a resident of the city or community in which he lives without using his house or apartment address or the name of the street on which his dwelling is located.

Precise, involved numbers are converted to a simplified form to make them easily registered by the listener. . . and unless the number is an essential part of the story, it's dropped. We change a number like 1,572 to "15-hundred". . . a number like 2.6 million to "2 1/2 million". 35.7 percent becomes "nearly 36 percent" or "more than one-third" on our broadcasts.

Numbers of men and pieces of equipment fighting a fire are not used unless they are extraordinarily large or small.

Because exact dates only are rarely important in a story, we use phrases similar to: "last summer". . . "two weeks from tomorrow". . . "early next year". . . "the last week of this month" or whatever will apply sensibly.

Unfamiliar foreign names of relatively obscure persons and places, and any name that is not an essential factor in a story are eliminated since they give little meaning to a radio news story and will not be recognized or remembered by most listeners.

Names of the famous and their relatives are handled carefully to avoid any confusion. For instance, "Ida Cantor is dead in Hollywood at the age of 67. She was the wife of famed comedian Eddie Cantor" is much clearer than - "Ida Cantor, 67, the wife of famed comedian Eddie Cantor, died today in Hollywood".

We avoid the indiscriminate use of personal pronouns, repeating the name of person involved in the story rather than using "he", "she" or "they" if there's the slightest chance the reference may be misunderstood.

Qualifying titles and phrases are used ahead of the person's name.

No adult male, including the President of the United States, is referred to as "Mr.".

Common abbreviations or nicknames are used only in reference to sports and show world personalities, never in the case of civic or governmental leaders at any level. We do not refer to the President or any other world figure by initials alone.

Law enforcement officers are identified by their proper category. . .

"Policemen" Officers, Deputies or Highway Patrolmen", never as "cops".

When one of our newsmen is involved in a story he is credited by name rather than "The Governor tells KSFO News". If the broadcaster is the contact, then it's "The Governor tells me". Our newsmen are referred to by name without any qualifying phrase similar to "KSFO Newsmen".

Only a few standard abbreviations are well enough known to be used on our broadcasts; for example, FBI, US, UN, YMCA and NATO. Most abbreviations generally are avoided in favor of a recognizable title followed up later in the story with a qualifying phrase such as "the teachers association" or "the service group".

We say "this morning", "this afternoon" or "tomorrow morning" rather than a vague "today" or "tomorrow". To be perfectly clear we say "7 o'clock tonight" or "tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock" rather than use the terms AM and PM in reference to time.

Direct quotes are changed from first person to third person to help the listener understand who's saying what. We say "The Mayor says he's going to get to the bottom of the matter" rather than "The Mayor says, quote, 'I'm going to get to the bottom of this', unquote".

We report that a person pleads "innocent" rather than "not guilty" because the latter may be too easily misunderstood as just the opposite.

"Latter", "former" and "respectively" are excellent print words but are not used on KSFO Newscasts because a listener has no way of "listening back".

Contractions are used to provide a smooth flow. We say "it's, they'll and it'll" and when a newsman is talking about himself it's "I", "I'll" or "I'm" instead of "we", "we'll" or "we're".

To be more comprehensive we avoid a number of weak words that are more suitable for print:

We say "looking for", "asking for", or "trying to get" instead of "seek".

We say "run", "leaving", or "racing away" instead of "flee".

We say "he got" or "resulting from" rather than "suffered" when talking about injuries.

We say "fire" or "long-burning" instead of "stubborn" when talking about fires.

We say "kill" or "murder" instead of "slay".

We say "about" or "around" or just use the nearest simple figure instead of "some".

Weather forecasts never include rainfall possibility percentages.

To insure meaning in our phrase "News...up to this very moment" no news item is ever broadcast as a repeated word-for-word story.

Balance

In a story involving controversy, a dispute, the arrest of an individual, a union-management disagreement, a demonstration, charges against an individual or group or a presidential policy declaration, both sides are covered in a KSFO News story. Should concerted effort on our part produce no significant statement for one side or the other, we then include a line similar to "no comment", "opposition spokesmen prefer to withhold comment until---", or "our efforts so far to obtain comment from the group in opposition are unsuccessful".

We cannot be expected to hold back on a story until both viewpoints are in, but we recognize that our first responsibility following the acquisition of one side of a controversial story is to attempt to get the other side for a proper balance.

Tape:

Our basic rule in the use of tape is that a tape or live insert in a KSFO Newscast must add something. . . interest, drama, authority, immediacy, clarity or impact to a story that cannot be matched in copy read by the studio newscaster. A tape or live insert, whether it's a phone beeper, shortwave or studio piece is never included in a KSFO Newscast just to be using a tape or a change of voice.

Our efforts are directed to brief, interesting tape inserts with a maximum length of 20 seconds on an actuality and a maximum of 30 seconds on a voicer in ordinary coverage situations.

We concentrate on contacting story principals, an eye witness or authorities directly concerned with the story, and occasionally on distant stories we'll contact another radio station we know will have reporters and mobile units on the scene for first hand observations to give further depth to an outstanding story.

A prime requirement for a KSFO News tape is clarity. We edit for the listener who may be traveling on a highspeed freeway. In those rare instances when the dramatic properties of a poor quality tape dictate that it should be used despite the lack of quality, we caution the listener that we are about to broadcast a fascinating but sub-broadcast-standard tape and following the insert we paraphrase what was said or recap what occurred on the tape.

With voice reports from sister stations, other radio stations and UPI Audio becoming quite commonplace, the only time we use one now is when a voicer is done by a newsmen on the scene of an exceptionally dramatic story or a voicer of exceptionally good quality from a remote section of the globe to demonstrate occasionally that we really are "everywhere".

Return cues to KSFO News are used only on stories reported from a long distance away, reports from persons of extraordinary importance or when the return cue from a location may be a part of the story.

Incoming tapes and live inserts are monitored for content so a story may be written for use on the air with or without the insert and for further use on later newscasts.

Production:

Timing on regularly scheduled news broadcasts is of utmost importance, despite our being an independent station. Whatever the format calls for in timing is the maximum time allotted to that news broadcast unless there is a story or stories of such commanding importance that extra time must be taken. In these instances the news desk has full authority to extend a news program beyond the prescribed limits just as it has authority to interrupt programming at any time a story or development of major importance or interest occurs.

We feel it is just as important to guard against over-covering a news event as it is to guard against under-covering one so we use only that manpower and equipment needed to assure putting each story we handle in proper perspective, rather than utilize men or units not in a position to add significant ingredients to the story . . . just because they happen to be available by telephone or shortwave and may add a "flashy" quality.

Shortwave and telephonic feeds of tape to the station are kept to the shortest possible length with most editing done in the field.

In general use of shortwave gear all transmissions are kept brief with code numbers replacing as much conversation as possible.

All routine news shortwave communications are businesslike, formal and courteous with absolutely no display of emotion including humor, anger or hysterics.

The commercial in a KSFO News broadcast always is separated from the news with a phrase similar to: "I'll be back with more news in just a moment", "More news in a moment" or a variation which makes it clear the newscaster is moving from news to the commercial message.

Broadcasting:

The KSFO News broadcast style is intensity without hysteria, impact without sensationalism, holding the listener's interest through a close personal identification with the subject matter.

One of the chief distinctions of KSFO Newsmen is that each is a living, breathing, warm human being who cares. . .cares about being the best at what he does. . .cares about giving the listener the most he can deliver. . .cares about everything that makes him anything but a cold, aloof, disinterested news machine.

Salesmanship is one of the KSFO Newsmen's most effective tools, both in covering stories and in broadcasting. The kind of salesmanship that cultivates and nurtures contacts who will voluntarily supply him with leads, facts, and stories. . . the kind of salesmanship that believes every "no" puts him a little closer to a "yes". The KSFO Newsmen sells himself to sources and story principals for information, then sells for all he's worth to the listener during his newscasts.

Outside their regular news broadcasts our newsmen frequently engage in informal on-the-air reports and conversations with the KSFO personalities. In these instances the newsmen broadcasts either from the desk or from the scene of a story, with the personality treating the story with seriousness or lightness as the story content indicates but always considerate of the dignity and authority of the newsmen.

A KSFO News bulletin is reserved for developments of unquestionable interest to every listener in our area. It is introduced very simply as "A bulletin from KSFO", closed with the same phrase, and delivered calmly and clearly. We do not repeat bulletin information. . . since our style calls for a quick follow-up of more information as soon as it can be obtained.

A KSFO News extra is a development of less overall interest than a bulletin, but of sufficient importance to the majority of listeners in our region to merit an interruption of regular programming. The news extra is introduced from the desk using the phrase "This is KSFO News", closed in the same manner and delivered in a measured, steady pace. News extra information is not repeated but is followed up quickly with further available developments.

A Sigalert message is introduced by the personality on duty as "an official Sigalert" and is broadcast as soon as it has been received and checked for proper form. We edit Sigalerts to eliminate phrasing which may duplicate our introduction, repeat information and the time checks usually included.

To keep adding to their necessary storehouse of knowledge, KSFO Newsmen are the most avid radio listeners. . . the most devoted TV viewers and among the most voracious readers of newspapers, magazines and books in all the world.

With KSFO considered the sports station in Northern California, our newsmen keep up to date. . . whether sports enthusiasts or not. . . on all sports developments, particularly with reference to the Giants, 49ers, and University of California athletic activities.

Civil Disobedience Coverage:

It is our conviction that a civil disorder story, particularly one involving racial strife, is different from any other kind of story in that broadcast coverage of it may materially affect its development, intensity, duration and outcome. Because we are such an extremely personal medium, our responsibility to the community in covering civil disorders is enormous. Thus, this kind of story demands and gets exceptional, special treatment within the confines of these guidelines.

Before operating at the scene

1. At the first indication a civil disorder is developing, call the news director.
2. Establish contact with authority responsible for restoring order.
3. Do not over-emphasize any story involving a civil disorder and do not broadcast a report on one until checking it out with proper authorities.
4. At the outset, dispatch newsman to authority command post, not to the scene.
5. Report only authoritative, verified information, emphasizing steps being taken to restore order. Use the term "riot" only after authorities do.
6. Interpretation should come from authorities, not the reporter.
7. Concentrate on reporting the "overall picture" not scattered, isolated, sporadic outbursts which would create a distorted picture.

8. Exact locations, street names and addresses of flareups, heavy damage, or large gatherings of lawbreakers should not be broadcast until authorities report there is adequate manpower on the scene to maintain control.
9. Avoid assuming a shooting, fire, or other nearby development is related to the disorder until authorities say it is.
10. The express permission of the news director is required before any KSFO newsman may go to or be sent to the scene of a civil disorder or potentially explosive scene of community unrest.

Operating from the scene, command post and studio

11. A report from the scene of a civil disorder must underscore the fact that the newsman is reporting only what he can observe and that his observation is only a part of the "overall picture", with a late recap of the "overall picture" or statement from authority in command immediately following any such report from the field.
12. Tapes or other reports containing sounds of fighting, shooting, screaming, raging or violence or interviews with obvious lawbreakers or inciters are not to be used while the disorder is in progress.
13. Check constantly with authorities to determine when the "turning point", where order is being restored, is expected or has been reached.
14. Keep in mind our basic responsibilities: First to gather and disseminate important information. . . and a very close second, to reassure the listener in times of great peril or volatility that everything that can be done is being done to meet and solve the problem.



Personnel and Equipment:

- 7 Full-time newsmen. 1 Part-time newsman.
- 1 Full-time news trainee. 2 Part-time news trainees.
- 2 Lettered news station wagons equipped with short wave mobile two-way radio and adapters for short wave feeds of tape...and 2 11-channel radio-telephones.
- 1 Unmarked news car equipped with short-wave mobile two-way radio and 1 11-channel radio-telephone.
- 5 Private automobiles with mobile telephones.
- 2 Boats equipped with short-wave mobile two-way radio and radio-telephone
- 1 Boat equipped with a removable portable short-wave mobile two-way radio.
- 1 Airplane equipped with removable portable short-wave mobile two-way radio.
- 5 Uher portable tape recorders.
- 3 Mercury portable tape recorders.
- 5 Handie-Talkie two-way short-wave radios:
2 Comco 30-Watt, 3 Motorola 8-Watt.
- 3 Vest-pocket size 2-way short-wave radio transceivers.
- 1 Hand carried mobile telephone.
- 1 Wireless microphone.



Operations:

On the hour, every hour, 24 hours a day a five-minute edition of KSFO News is on the air. Every hour on the half-hour, 18 times a day, there is a two-minute KSFO News broadcast. The full resources of KSFO News include its team of seven full-time newsmen backed by aircraft, mobile units, boats, recorders, telephones, a battery of UPI teletypes coupled with UPI Audio Service and every other useful news device. These are the tools necessary to make an up-to-date news staff.

Still, most major stations in large markets have pretty much the same facilities, so there must be something else to make ONE station's programming stand out from the rest. That something else at KSFO News is newsmen that are dedicated to doing a better job than their counterparts at any other broadcast outlet. Newsmen that are heavily experienced, highly skilled and very professional. Newsmen who CARE. Care about the accuracy and speed in reporting stories. . . care about giving the listener the most he can deliver. They care about people, schools, places like Vietnam and space and the Bay Area.

Each of the 7-man KSFO News staff is a veteran reporter-broadcaster-writer-editor and public relations man who works individually or with a team, depending on the need and urgency of the story.

KSFO News is directed by Chet Casselman. His staff of news experts includes Mike Powell, Jeff Skov, Wally King, Bill Heyward, Aaron Edwards, Herb Kennedy and Lloyd Edwards.

The philosophy of KSFO News is basic: KEEP IN MOTION; EXERCISE CARE WITH EVERY STORY; BE DISTINCTIVE and SELL THE STORY TO THE PUBLIC WITH INTEGRITY. This philosophy combined with the veteran newsmen are two reasons why KSFO News is the world's greatest radio news operation. . . particularly in San Francisco.



On Land

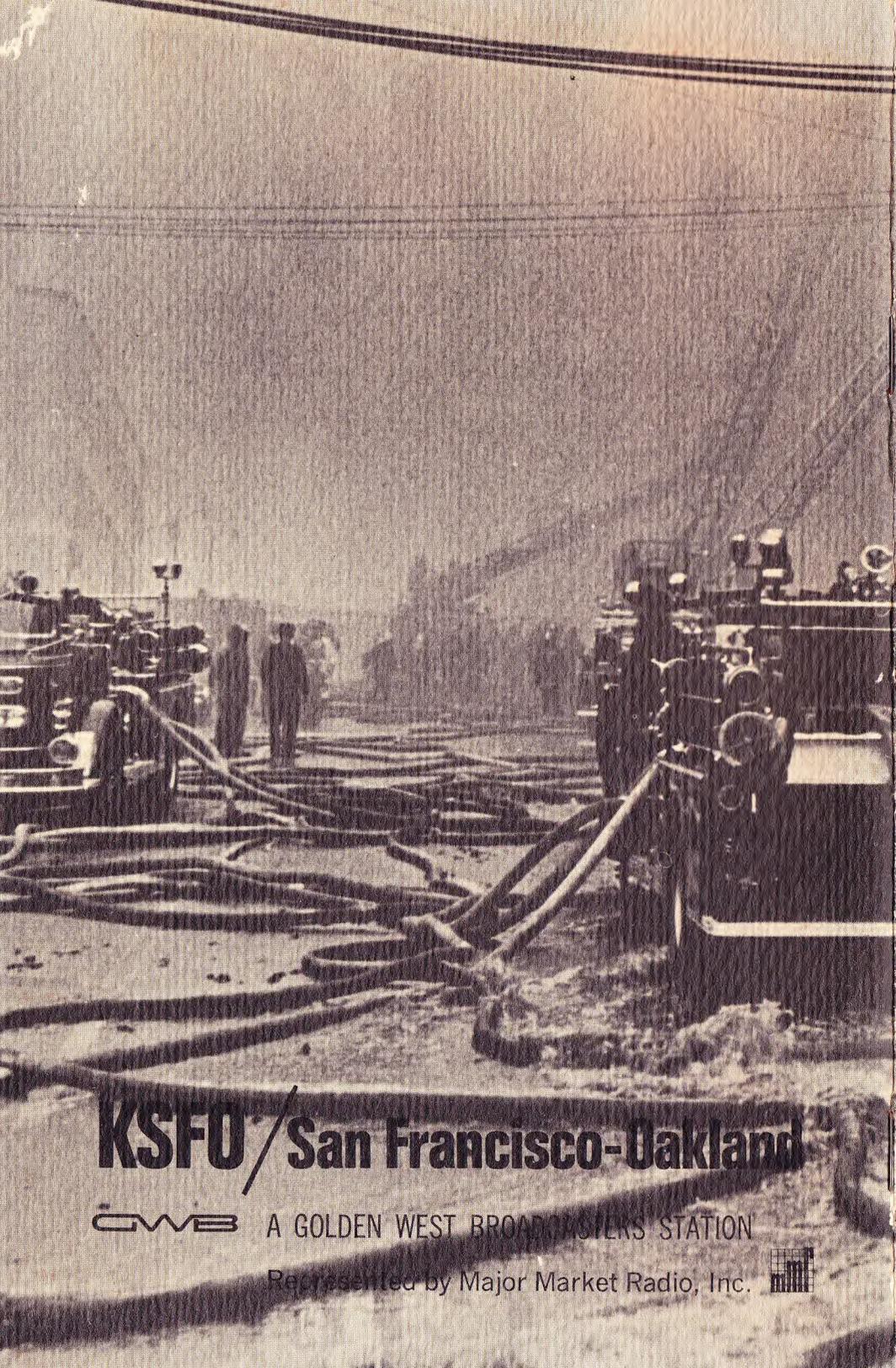
At Sea

(Jerry Thompson)



In the Air

(Warren Bogges)



KSFO / San Francisco-Oakland

CWB

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