

# BROADCAST NEWS

Radio Journalism and an Introduction to Television

MITCHELL STEPHENS



# BROADCAST NEWS

Radio Journalism and an Introduction to Television

MITCHELL STEPHENS



# **BROADCAST NEWS**

**RADIO JOURNALISM  
AND AN INTRODUCTION  
TO TELEVISION**

**Mitchell Stephens**

New York University

**Holt, Rinehart and Winston**

NEW YORK   CHICAGO   SAN FRANCISCO   ATLANTA   DALLAS  
MONTREAL   TORONTO   LONDON   SYDNEY

*Publisher* Judith L. Rothman  
*Editor* Roth Wilkofsky  
*Managing Editor* Pamela Forcey  
*Production Manager* Nancy Myers  
*Art Director* Louis Scardino  
*Text Design* Dana Kasarsky  
*Cover Design* A. J. D'Agostino  
*Photo Research* Yvonne Freund

The credit for each part title photograph  
appears on the page following it.

**Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data**

Stephens, Mitchell.  
Broadcast news.

Bibliography: p.  
Includes index.

1. Broadcast journalism. I. Title.

PN4784.B75S7 070.1'9 79-23491

**ISBN 0-03-022066-1**

Copyright © 1980 by Holt, Rinehart and Winston  
All rights reserved  
Printed in the United States of America

2 3 4 5 039 9 8 7 6 5 4 3

---

# PREFACE

When a general emergency was declared at the Three Mile Island nuclear plant, nearby residents turned on their radios. Most had first heard about the accident on the radio. Nearly two-thirds reported that radio remained their “most frequent source of news” during the crisis.\*

Even in quieter times, millions use radio to keep informed. And certainly television news is as important. Television is generally conceded to be the nation’s primary news source.

People depend on broadcast news. The goal of this book is to train broadcast journalists who can be depended on.

The book was written with the following thoughts in mind on how broadcast journalists should be trained:

- Reporting and writing skills can and should be taught, not just hinted at. Concepts such as the “feel” of writing or the “smell” of news must be demystified and defined so they can be clearly communicated.
- Radio news is the logical starting point for instruction in broadcast journalism—even for

those who are primarily interested in television news. Most of the skills used in radio news are also applicable to television news. But in radio, without the extra problems presented by visuals, it is possible to concentrate on basic writing and reporting skills. Therefore, although most of the discussions in the first three parts of this book are relevant to both branches of broadcast journalism, specific techniques and examples are drawn from radio news. Part 4 introduces the somewhat more advanced skills specific to television news.

- The basic responsibilities of all broadcast journalists are the same, no matter what the size of their station or audience. This book would be remiss if it ignored the special problems of small-town or big-city journalists, but the book would be deficient if the standards it advocates were not relevant in all broadcast newsrooms.
- Writing and reporting are best taught with frequent, precise and realistic examples. Most of the examples used in the text were used on the air.
- A book that stresses the need for clear and engaging writing should try not to be ponderous and dry.

---

\* Report of the Public's Right to Information Task Force to the President's Commission on the Accident at Three Mile Island.

This book uses many expressions and terms peculiar to broadcast newsrooms. My excuse for spreading jargon is a conviction that skills are easier to master once they have been named and defined, and these are the names readers will encounter if they find themselves in a broadcast newsroom. All unfamiliar terms are defined when they are first used in the text, and the definitions can be located through the index.

Any attempt to provide a comprehensive introduction to a field requires a broad perspective on that field. To insure that the discussions here reflect more than just the practices at the stations with which I am personally familiar, a questionnaire was sent to about 3,000 radio stations. News directors from almost one-tenth of the radio stations in the United States responded. Many of the guidelines and examples that make up this book were drawn from their responses.

In addition, in writing this book I relied on conversations or visits with broadcast journalists at more than 100 radio and television stations.

Many people were kind enough to find the time to talk with me between newscasts. Though it is not possible to name them all, I am particularly appreciative of the contributions made to this book by Dick Petrik and Karen Crow of KOEL; Larry Dodd, John Harding, Constance Ober and David Miller of WRVA; Lou Adler, Mike Callaghan and Liz Shanov of WCBS; James T. Farley, Jr., of NBC; Dallas Townsend of CBS; Peter Flannery and Bill Diehl of ABC; David Ensor of NPR; Mike Eisgrau and Jim Gordon of WNEW; Reg Laite of WOR; Rick Wallace of KABC; Bob Madigan of KNX-FM; Susan Burdick of WEEI; Gael Garbarion of WRIT; Walt Dibble of WTIC; and Tim Lennox of WERC. A few of these people have changed jobs since I interviewed them, but here, and where I mention journalists elsewhere in the book, I have chosen to list the positions they held when they supplied the information used in the book.

A number of people reviewed these chapters and strengthened them with their suggestions:

---

## PREFACE

vi

James T. Farley, Jr., NBC Radio News; Peter E. Mayeux, University of Nebraska, Lincoln; Richard D. Yoakam, Indiana University; Mike Eisgrau, WNEW Radio News; Arthur Engoron, the law firm Olwine, Connelly, Chase, O'Donnell and Weyher; Gerald Lanson, New York University. I am also appreciative of the contributions of: H. Al Anderson, University of Texas, Austin; Ernest F. Andrews, Syracuse University; John Cramer, Arkansas State University; Dan G. Drew, University of Wisconsin; Robert H. Farson, Pennsylvania State University; George A. Mastroianni, California State University, Fullerton; Robert H. Prisuta, University of Colorado; Jayne Rushin, Auburn University; Jay L. Schadler, Miami University.

The book benefited from the advice and encouragement of my colleagues: Eliot Frenkel, Russell Patrick, Joshua Mills and William Burrows of the New York University Department of Journalism; and Herbert Jackson of the Communication Department of the William Paterson

College of New Jersey. Thanks, too, to my teachers: Jerome Jacobs of KABC-TV and Walter Wilcox of the University of California, Los Angeles.

Susan Linfield helped prepare the practice assignments included in the book. Mary Quigley did research for one of these chapters. Stations WSB and KGW and CBS, Inc., were particularly helpful in supplying photographs. And my editors at Holt—Roth Wilkofsky and Pamela Forcey—provided valuable guidance and advice at many stages in the production of this book.

I am also blessed with a family of good editors. My father, Bernard Stephens, read almost every sentence here and helped quite a few of them. My mother, Lillian Stephens, reviewed several of these chapters. And my wife, Esther Davidowitz, spent many an evening editing copy. For this, and more important kindnesses, the book is dedicated to them.

M.S.

---

## PREFACE

vii

Many news directors provided examples for use in this book. Here is a list of the broadcast news organizations that appear in the book.

<b>Networks</b>	<b>Colorado</b>	<b>Indiana</b>	<b>Massachusetts</b>	<b>Nevada</b>
ABC	KOA	WARU	WARA	KENO
AP	KREX	WAZY	WBUR	KLUC
BBC	KVOR	WIFF	WEEI	
CBC	KWBZ	WNAP	WHDH	<b>New Mexico</b>
CBS		WNDE	WIEV	KOB
Mutual		WNTS	WJDA	
NBC	<b>Connecticut</b>		WTEV	<b>New York</b>
NPR	WSUB	<b>Iowa</b>		WABC
UPI	WTIC	KLGA	<b>Michigan</b>	WABC-TV
	WXLS	KOEL	WDEE	WAXC
<b>Alabama</b>		KWSL	WGHN	WBLS
WERC	<b>District of Columbia</b>	KWWL	WKNR	WCBS
WNPT	WMAL		WSJM	WCBS-TV
WVOK		<b>Kansas</b>	WXYZ	WHEN
		KFLA	WZZM-FM	WINS
<b>Arizona</b>	<b>Florida</b>	KLWN		WMCA
KOOL-TV	WHOO	KMAN	<b>Minnesota</b>	WNBC-TV
	WKIS		KCLD	WNEW
<b>Arkansas</b>	WLOD		KCUE	WNEW-TV
KATV	WMEL	<b>Kentucky</b>	KWEB	WOR
	WSPB	WBGH	WCCO	WPLJ
		WBLG		WVOD
<b>California</b>	<b>Georgia</b>	WFMW	<b>Mississippi</b>	WRFM
KABC	WSB	WVLK	WELO	WTLB
KCBS	WSB-TV			WWLE
KFWB		<b>Louisiana</b>		<b>North Carolina</b>
KGO		KWKH	<b>Missouri</b>	WADA
KLOS	<b>Illinois</b>	WSMB	KSIS	WRBX
KMPC	WBBM			<b>North Dakota</b>
KNAC	WBNQ		<b>Montana</b>	KXMB-TV
KNDE	WDAI		KULR-TV	
KNX	WJJD	<b>Maine</b>		<b>Ohio</b>
KNX-FM	WJVM	WRKD		WEBN
KNXT	WLS		<b>Nebraska</b>	WFIN
KRED	WRRR		KODY	WIXY
KSMA	WSOY	<b>Maryland</b>	KYNN	WLEC
KTIM	WVON	WCEM		
KWSO				

**Oklahoma**

KAKC  
KWHW

**Oregon**

KEX  
KGW  
KOIN  
KPNW  
KROW

**Pennsylvania**

KDKA  
KQV

WCAU  
WFLN  
WGCB  
WJET  
WKPA  
WNAE  
WPEN

**South  
Carolina**

WRHI

**Tennessee**

WLAC

WMAK  
WTVF

**Texas**

KBWD  
KENR  
KEYH  
KFJZ  
KLOL  
KNOW  
KRLD  
KWTX

**Utah**

KWMS

**Vermont**

WKVT  
WSYB  
WWSR

**Virginia**

WBRG  
WFFV  
WFIR  
WNOR  
WNOR-FM  
WROV  
WRVA  
WRVQ

**Washington**

KGDN  
KGMI  
KREW

**West Virginia**

WLOG

**Wisconsin**

WHSM  
WIBA  
WSAU

**Wyoming**

KVOC

---

# CONTENTS

Preface v

## INTRODUCTION 1

# 1

---

## WRITING

### Chapter 1 COPY 7

#### Consistency 7

1. Typing 8
2. Margins 9
3. Headings 9
4. Pages 10

#### Readability 10

1. Numbers 10
2. Abbreviations 11
3. Corrections 12
4. Don't Split Words 13
5. Don't Split Sentences 13
6. Emphasis 13
7. Pauses 14
8. Spelling 15
9. Pronunciation 15
10. Timing 16
11. Testing 17

*Practice Assignments* 18

### Chapter 2 WORDS 19

#### Common Language 20

1. Informal 20
2. Simple 21
3. Journales 21
4. Technical Terms 22
5. Slang 23
6. Contractions 24

### Engaging Language 24

1. Personal 25
2. Real 26
3. Active Verbs 26
4. Verb Tenses 27
5. Numbers 29
6. Idiomatic Expressions 31
7. Metaphors 31
8. Clichés 32

*Practice Assignments* 35

### Chapter 3 MEANINGS 36

#### Precision 36

1. Usage 37
2. Dependent Words 38
3. Saying Says 39

#### Objectivity 40

1. Superlatives 40
  2. Opinion 41
  3. Attribution 42
- Practice Assignments* 46

### Chapter 4 SENTENCES 47

#### Clarity 47

1. Simplicity 48
2. Interjections and Clauses 50
3. Names and Titles 51
4. Quotes 53

#### Conciseness 55

1. Pauses 55
  2. The Point 56
  3. Grammar 58
- Practice Assignments* 59

## Chapter 5 LEADS 61

- Intriguing 61**
1. Newsworthiness 62
  2. Details 68
  3. The Ordinary 70
  4. Punch 71

- Preparing 72**
1. Soft 72
  2. The Set-Up 73
  3. The Angle 74

- Types of Leads 74**
1. The Main Point 75
  2. Umbrellas 75
  3. Delays 76
  4. Statements 77
  5. Questions 78
  6. Humor 79
- Practice Assignments 80*

## Chapter 6 STORIES 82

- Efficiency 82**
1. Length 82
  2. Form 84
  3. Supporting the Lead 84
  4. Information Selection 85
  5. Making Sense 89

- Flow 90**
1. Organization 90
  2. Transitions 93
  3. Snappers 94
  4. Rhythm 96
- Practice Assignments 98*

# 2

## REPORTING

## Chapter 7 SOURCES 103

- The Wires 103**
1. Broadcast Wires 104
  2. Print Wires 107
  3. Bulletins 110
  4. Other Wires 111

- Other Sources 113**
1. Audio News Services 113
  2. Feature Services 114
  3. Police Radio 115
  4. Press Releases 115
  5. Tips 117
  6. Newspapers 117
  7. Research Tools 118
- Practice Assignments 119*

## Chapter 8 GATHERING NEWS 121

- Preparation 121**
1. Digging 121
  2. Assignments 122
  3. Background Information 124

- Methods 125**
1. On the Phone 125
  2. On the Scene 126
  3. Questioning 128
  4. Contacts 129
  5. Ground Rules 130
- Practice Assignments 131*

## Chapter 9 ETHICS AND LAW 132

- Standards 132**
1. Accuracy 132
  2. Libel 133
  3. Fairness and the FCC 136
  4. Campaigns and Equal Time 139

- Behavior 140**
1. Conflict of Interest 140
  2. Privacy 140
  3. Disorder 141
  4. Panic 142
  5. Staging 142
  6. Hidden Mikes 142
  7. Protecting Sources 143

- Access 144**
1. Courts 144
  2. Police 145
  3. Hospitals 145
  4. Government Records 146
  5. Government Meetings 147
- Code of Broadcast News Ethics: Radio-Television News Directors Association 147

## CONTENTS

## **Chapter 10 TAPE 149**

### **Types of Tape 149**

1. Actualities 149
2. Q and As 151
3. Voicers 153
4. Wraps 157

### **Techniques 157**

1. Interviewing 157
2. Phoners 160
3. Natural Sound 161
4. Filing 162
5. Editing 164
6. Carts 166

*Practice Assignments* 168

## **Chapter 11 WRITING TO TAPE 171**

### **Lead-Ins 171**

1. Preparing 172
2. Something Different 173
3. Throws 174

### **Write-Outs 177**

1. Renaming 177
2. Concluding 178

### **Tape Copy 179**

1. Cues 179
2. More Than One Cart 180

*Practice Assignments* 181

## **Chapter 12 COVERAGE 182**

### **Tragedies 182**

1. Officials 182
2. Witnesses 183
3. Hospitals 184

### **Crime 185**

1. Police 185
2. Courts 186

### **Politics 190**

1. Meetings 190
2. Speeches 191
3. News Conferences 192
4. Campaigns 193
5. Investigation 194

**Protests 194**

**Features 196**

**Live 197**

*Practice Assignments* 198

# **3**

## **PRODUCING**

## **Chapter 13 NEWSCASTS 201**

### **Ordering 201**

1. Newsworthiness 203
2. Variety 203
3. Geography 203
4. Natural Tie-Ins 204
5. Tape 205
6. Blocks 205
7. Spots 207
8. Kickers 207
9. Timing 208

### **Completing 208**

1. Rewrites 209
2. Tie-Ins 210
3. Headlines 212
4. Weather 213
5. Sports 214
6. Traffic 216
7. Financial and Farm 217
8. The Open and Close 218

*Practice Assignments* 219

## **Chapter 14 RADIO 221**

### **Programming 222**

1. Formats 222
2. Competition 224

### **Structure 224**

1. Markets 224
2. Networks 228

### **Public Affairs 231**

1. Editorials 231
2. Documentaries 234
3. Interview Programs 235

## **CONTENTS**

# 4

---

## TELEVISION

### Chapter 15 VISUALS 239

#### Television Newscasts 239

1. Talking Heads 240
2. Graphics 241
3. Film 242
4. Videotape 243
5. Rundowns 243

#### Television Reporting 244

1. The Crew 246
2. Shooting 246
3. Composition 249
4. Telling the Story 250
5. Sound-Bites 252
6. Cutaways 253
7. Stand-Ups 254
8. Editing 257

*Practice Assignments* 259

### Chapter 16 WRITING TO VISUALS 260

#### Copy 260

1. Tell Stories 261
2. Graphics 262
3. Videotape or Film 263

#### Narration 265

1. Background Graphics 265
2. Writing Away 265
3. Spotting 266
4. Coordinating 267
5. Sound 269

*Practice Assignments* 272

# 5

---

## THE PROFESSION

### Chapter 17 THE PROFESSION 277

#### Newscasting 278

1. Enunciation 278
2. Air 278
3. Emphasis 278
4. Inflection 279
5. Pace 280
6. Reading 280
7. Microphones 280
8. Voices 280
9. On Camera 281

#### Audio Production 281

1. The Audioboard 281
2. Electronics 283

#### Careers 283

1. The Bottom 284
2. Education 285
3. Experience 285
4. Job Searches 286
5. Mechanics 287
6. Rigors 288

Suggested Readings 289

Index 291



# **BROADCAST NEWS**



---

# INTRODUCTION

It's 6:52 in the morning. The phone rings in a room at KOEL in Oelwein, Iowa. News director Dick Petrik leans over to answer it and immediately begins typing notes as he shoots out questions:

"You don't know what stores, do you?"

"Did they have guns?"

"Okay, thanks. If you hear any more, get back to me."

It's a tip from a police dispatcher in a nearby county. The sheriff is out investigating a series of robberies, but the dispatcher doesn't have any details; he doesn't even know what stores were hit.

Petrik dials a couple of restaurants and cafés in the area to see if anyone has heard anything. Someone has: a customer at a café saw the sheriff's car leaving a local gas station. Petrik calls the gas station: "I heard the sheriff was there this morning."

"Did he say anything about any robberies in town?"

"The hardware store? Did they hit anywhere else?"

"Are you sure that was the Railroad Diner?"  
He calls the hardware store: "I heard they got you last night."

"How much did they take?"

"How many were there? Do you know?"

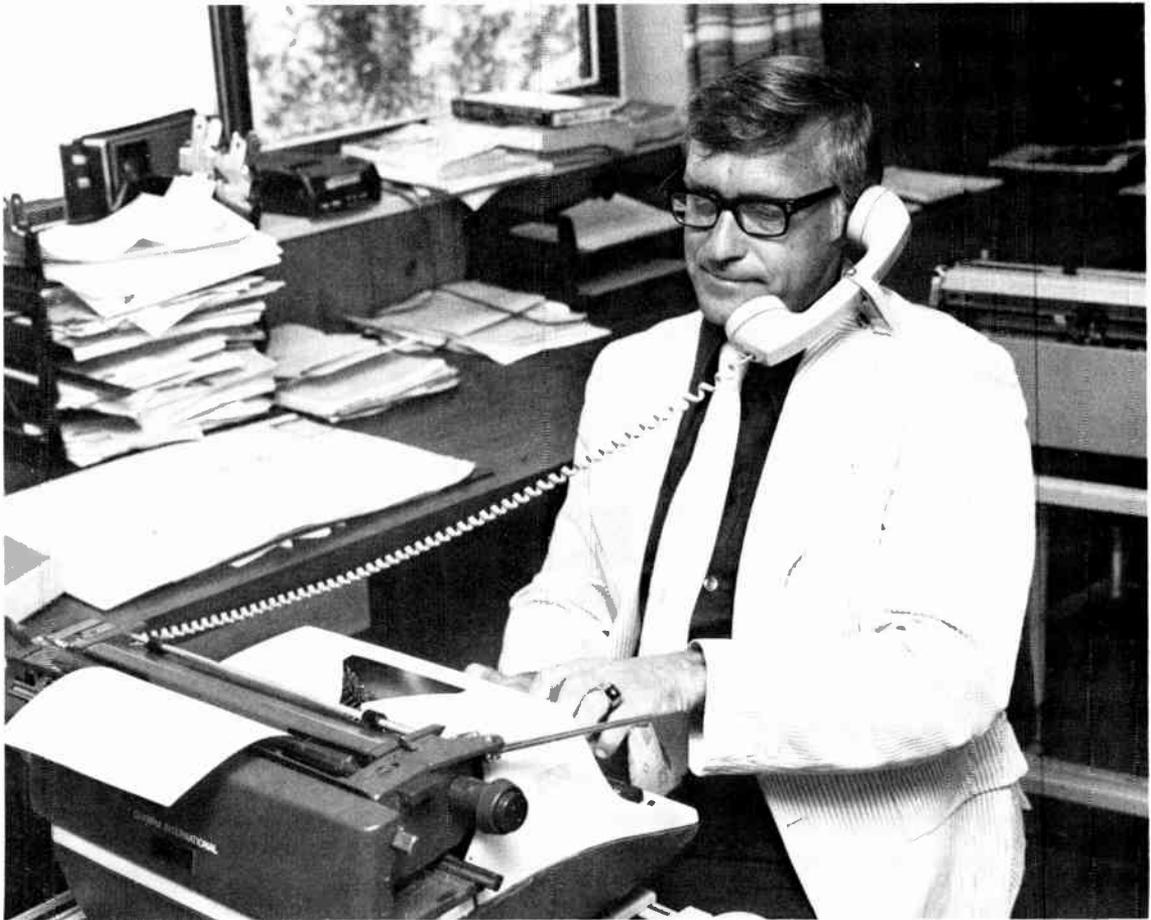
"When did the sheriff leave?"

The Railroad Diner, and another series of questions. Petrik hooks the telephone up to a tape recorder and records the diner owner's indignant description of the mess the robbers made. Then he begins typing the story. It will be on the air by 7:30.

. . .

At 11:39 a.m. in Richmond, Virginia, WRVA reporter Dave Miller calls in on the station's direct line from the State Capitol. The story he's been covering all morning has just fizzled. A legislative subcommittee has found "a gentlemanly Virginian" way of killing a proposal to certify teachers. Miller files a story on the rejection of the plan, but a defeated plan is small news.

After he gets off the phone, Miller wanders



Dick Petrik, KOEL, Iowa.

through the Capitol looking for something hotter.

At 11:46 he stumbles on something: a representative of one of the candidates for governor says his man is going to mount a major attack on the state's power company. Miller writes out a report on the upcoming attack on his pad. By 11:59 he's back on the direct line to the newsroom. His report is recorded; a lead-in is written; and it's aired on the station's 12:05 newscast.

. . .

At 3:13, Liz Shanov sits behind a typewriter at one of eight desks in WCBS's modern

newsroom. She faces a picture window with a view of the East Side of Manhattan. On the walls around her are three clocks, two television sets, two maps, and one poster of King Kong climbing the Empire State Building, with the news director's head pasted over Kong's.

Shanov's fingers are driving her typewriter. On her head are earphones that allow her to audition the tapes of newsmakers and reporters that are stacked on the desk in front of her. Next to the tapes is a pile of wire copy that has been churned out of the station's many small computer printout machines—connected to the Associated Press, United Press International and

---

## INTRODUCTION



Dave Miller, WRVA, Richmond, in a hotel lobby. talks to a sniper holed up in an upper-floor room. Miller got there before the police, called the sniper on a house phone, and the recorded conversations were played over the air almost immediately. Shortly thereafter, the sniper shot himself. (*Amir Pishdad, Richmond Times-Dispatch*)

Reuters. Shanov must turn this collection of wire copy into a series of stories that can be used on the air. She must write copy that integrates those tapes and whatever additional reports her reporters come up with into the newscasts. Shanov is responsible for two hours of all-news radio—from 5 to 7 p.m.

. . .

This book is about newswriters—like Liz Shanov—and reporters—like Dave Miller.

*Newswriters* take information from the wire services, tips, their own research and from the station's reporters, and turn it into copy that is ready to be read on the air.

*Reporters* specialize in gathering information—at news events or on the telephone. They have to get the facts, usually on tape, and turn them into reports that can be included in newscasts.

*Newscasters*—who read copy prepared by

---

## INTRODUCTION

newswriters—and *news directors*—who are responsible for running a station's news operation—also appear frequently in the book.

At major big-city stations different people may fill these positions, but at smaller stations, such as KOEL, the newscaster—Dick Petrik—is also the newswriter, reporter and news director. At some stations that person also has to spin records.

The scene for most of the action in this book is broadcast newsrooms. They can be busy, futuristic rooms—like the newsroom at

WCBS—or quiet little rooms with a few desks, phones and typewriters—like KOEL. Some stations just put a teletype, telephone and typewriter in a small studio and call it a newsroom. But whether a newsroom sits next to a soybean field or in a skyscraper overlooking Manhattan, its occupants have the same job—pulling information in, then turning it into something interesting and intelligible: reporting and writing.

# 1



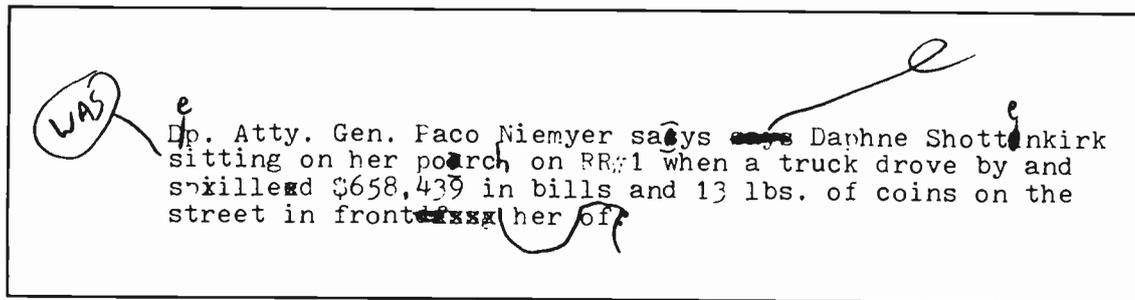
# WRITING

*Preceding page:*

At KGW, Portland, Oregon, the news director types a story at the radio news desk. (*Frankie Jenkins/KGW Radio 62*)

# COPY

Can you read this sentence out loud smoothly and quickly?



The pages that broadcast journalists produce do not just have to be read; they have to be read on the air. Abbreviations, numbers, symbols, confusing corrections, sloppiness or unclear typography—anything that causes the newscaster to hesitate or stumble—impair the newscast.

To protect newscasters and keep everything in order, broadcast newsrooms have developed style rules for their copy. Mastering these rules is the first step in producing broadcast copy; it is also the first step in understanding the special job broadcast copy has to do. This would be a much duller task if broadcast style rules were followed just because that's the way it has always been done. Fortunately, broadcast news is too young to be overgrown with traditions. Nor are these rules concerned with sprucing up the pages to please thousands of readers. Only one person will read the copy—a newscaster. As far as looks go, newscasters demand only that their copy be consistent and easy to read.

Since there are so few traditions determining the layout of the pages, finished copy varies from newsroom to newsroom. The rules discussed

here are not “gospel.” They have been selected because they seem the most effective or adaptable.

## CONSISTENCY

There are all sorts of ways broadcast news copy could be livened up. You might imitate the poet E. E. Cummings and

type  
the  
words in  
e  
voc  
a  
tive  
patterns.

Or place the paper in the typewriter at rakish angles or capitalize every third word. Such “creativity,” however, would not last long in a newsroom. Newscasters want every page of copy to look like the page before it, so that they

know exactly where to look and what to read. Surprises and variations in format upset concentration and cause mistakes.

These first style rules ensure that each page of copy follows the same format. They are designed for consistency.

## 1. Typing

On the air there is no time to figure out whether that loop was meant to be an o or an e. Whatever the quality of penmanship, handwritten copy is out. All broadcast copy must be typed.

No one cares how many fingers a writer uses to work the machine as long as the copy comes out clean, readable—and fast. Broadcast journalists turn out much more copy per day than newspaper reporters; so a typing speed of less than 40 words a minute is a handicap. That 5-minute newscast goes on the air at 9 o'clock sharp. There's no such thing as an extension or an incomplete.

Since typewriters are such important tools in broadcast newsrooms, it is worth taking a moment to look at them. Typewriters produce their characters in three basic sizes. Elite, the smallest, is almost never found in broadcast newsrooms; those small letters are too hard to read out loud. Pica, or standard size, is the most common in schools and broadcast newsrooms. Newsrooms also use a third, less common, typewriter: great

primer or executive size. It has one distinct advantage: it's very easy to read. KNX in Los Angeles uses executive size (see foot of this page).

A question on which broadcast newsrooms are clearly divided is whether to type all-caps or upper/lower case. Some use all capital letters because the letters are larger and, they believe, easier to read. Others use the standard upper/lower case style, with which most of us are familiar, because it gives more visual information. For instance, the distinction between proper names and other words is clearer in upper/lower case:

President Carter begins a news conference with a threat to VETO those bills in Congress which — he says — are pushing federal spending too high.

*Bob Cain, NBC*

Which is best to learn? Although most broadcast journalists probably type all-caps, there is a clear advantage in learning the other style: it's much easier to switch from upper/lower to all-caps—all you have to do is press the lock on the shift of your typewriter. If a writer learns all-caps, however, and switches to a newsroom that uses upper/lower, it will be necessary to regain the habit of capitalizing. Thus upper/lower case typing is more adaptable.

"Lights, camera, action" may soon become familiar commands on the House floor in Washington. A special Congressional committee has recommended that live ~~radio and T-V~~ coverage

One final typing rule: always triple space. It is clearer and leaves room for corrections. (The examples in this book are single-spaced only to save space, of course.)

Incidentally, the typewriter no longer has a secure future in broadcast newsrooms. A few stations, such as KCBS, San Francisco, have begun replacing typewriters with computer-operated video display terminals. These stations use most of the same basic rules for organizing copy but require writers to master a set of computer operations for correcting and then distributing copy.

## 2. Margins

Copy that is spread all over the page is difficult to read. Wide margins are best in broadcast news—they make the copy stand out. Most newswriters leave a one-inch margin on both the left and right side of the page, which allows room for about 55 or 60 characters per line. It's important that the length of lines of copy be consistent so that the time it takes to read a story can be determined by counting the lines.

Most radio news stories are short and should be centered on the page—beginning at least two and a half inches from the top.

Television news copy uses different margins. They are discussed in Chapter 16, "Writing to Visuals."

## 3. Headings

As the stories flow through the newsroom—in and out of typewriters, files and newscasts—the news staff must be able to identify each one at a glance. Therefore, each page of copy must have a heading that tells anyone picking it up a few things about the copy on that page. There is no time to produce an involved summary at the top of each story, but a certain minimal amount of information is necessary:

**1. The slug** The slug is the name or title the writer gives the story. It's the word or words people in the newsroom use to refer to that story

throughout that day and after the story finds its way into the files. A story about the recall of some Chevrolets might be slugged *CHEVY*.

A slug must be short. Writers rarely waste words by using a slug that is longer than one or occasionally two words. A call by Senator William Proxmire for new legislation to prevent bribes abroad by United States companies may be slugged *PROXMIRE*. When the murderer who called himself Son of Sam was terrorizing New York City, *SAM* was an adequate slug—no need for his full name.

A slug must be clear. The slug must clearly identify the story it heads. Don't get cute and slug a story about the city council's failure to act on the proposed highway—*NOTHING*. That may succeed in amusing colleagues, but at the risk of confusing them. Choose a word or two that clearly labels the story, in this case—*COUNCIL* or *HIGHWAY*. And watch out for slugs that might refer to more than one story on the proposed highway—*NOTHING*. *MURDER* is not an acceptable slug in a large city—too many of them. Be more specific—*KNIFING* or *STRANGLER*. Similarly, the name of the president is rarely used as a slug. He is involved in too many different stories. Slug his plan for veterans—*VETS*—or his trip to Europe—*EUROPE TRIP*.

A slug must be all caps—so it stands out from the copy below.

**2. The date** Each story heading should include the date on which the story was written. Exact records are vital in the news business. Sometime in the future, someone may refer back to the *COUNCIL* story and need to know the exact date of that meeting.

**3. The time of the next newscast** News loses its freshness quickly on the radio. The time—"6:30am"—in the heading tells everyone that by 10 a.m. that story is already at least 3½ hours old. That's important.

**4. The writer's initials or last name** Often newscasters or the writers of later shows will have a question about a story. A name or initials on the story tell them whom to ask. This is also the writer's way of taking responsibility for the story. It shows where to direct the praise or blame.

. . .

Some newsrooms omit one or two of these items; some may add an additional item; but these four make up the standard heading. They are typed in the upper-left-hand corner of the page, clearly separate from the body of the story. Stacked:

EUROPE TRIP  
11/11  
10:05am  
mullins

Or across the top of the page:

EUROPE TRIP 11/11 10:05am mullins

Here's a page of copy with a heading for use at 6:15 p.m.:

7-21 shanov HEAT 6:15pm

The record-breaking heat got to 66 youngsters while they were attending the Yeshiva-Flatbush Broad Channel Day Camp this afternoon.

The children started complaining of headaches, weakness and nausea... classic signs of heat exhaustion. Some of them were too weak to walk to the nearby Peninsula Hospital Center...so they had to be carried into the emergency room by camp counselors.

All the campers recovered after resting for a while in the hospital's air-conditioned auditorium.

*Liz Shanov, WCBS, New York City*

#### 4. Pages

One story to a page. Stories may need to be shuffled and rearranged to make them into a coherent newscast. If a few stories are written on the same page, they are fixed in that order; there's no flexibility.

Few radio stories run longer than one page. If one does, a heavy dark arrow is drawn on the bottom of the first page pointing to the right. This advises the newscaster to turn the page for more. Some stations use the newspaper cue for a continuation—(MORE). Then *FIRST ADD* is included in the heading of the second page. Why not simply number the pages 1, 2, 3? Numerals are reserved for numbering the pages of the final newscast script.

How do writers indicate that the story is finished? Many type -0- or -30- or ####, centered, a few lines after the final line of the story. Others do not use any symbol to mark the end of the story. If there is no arrow at the end of a page, it is understood to be the end of that story. But it's best to use one of the symbols to make sure the newscaster understands that it is the end.

#### READABILITY

The rest of the style rules covered here are designed to make the copy as easy as possible to read on the air.

#### 1. Numbers

Read this out loud quickly: \$57,313. If you had to pause for a moment it may have been because the dollar sign, which should be read last, is written first; or perhaps because it takes time to translate the numerals into words. The seconds it takes to convert these symbols into "fifty-seven thousand, three hundred and thirteen dollars" are enough to throw off a newscaster's pacing. Numbers pose difficulties—they must be written in the clearest possible fashion.

Some newsrooms solve the problem by spelling out all numbers. The disadvantage of this approach is that time is wasted typing long trains of words that are confusing in themselves because they are unfamiliar to us—*twenty-nine million, three hundred and seventy-four thousand*.

A few newsrooms try to get by with numerals and take their chances that their newscasters can convert *29,374,000* swiftly. But most broadcast newsrooms follow certain rules for numbers that are designed to make them as easy as possible to read on the air:

1. Spell out all numbers through eleven. Three, six, ten are familiar words, while numerals like 1, 8, 11 can get lost in the copy.
2. Use numerals for all numbers from 12 to 999. They're easy to read, while writing them out—*seven-hundred and ninety-three*—takes more energy and is more confusing.
3. Spell out the words thousand, million and billion, but use numerals for the numbers that modify them—*75-thousand, 3-million, 400-billion*. Never make the newscaster count commas, as in *45,672,000*. Write—*45-million, 672-thousand*. Since the numerals 1 and 11 are so skinny that they tend to get lost or confused, always spell them out—even in combination with thousand, million or billion—*one-million, eleven-thousand*.
4. Years are an exception—practice has made us expert at reading them. Write *1985, 1492*, not *nineteen eighty-five*.
5. Ordinal numbers under 12th can be handled either way. Both *third* and *3rd* are easy to read. From 12th to 999th use numerals with their suffix—*22nd, 456th*. Larger ordinals should be handled with a combination of words and numerals—*13-billionth, 2nd million*.
6. All the symbols and terms that are used with numbers should be spelled out. *Dollar* is the one used most frequently. Write: *3-million dollars, 48 dollars*. Never use the dollar sign (\$). This is true for cents, degrees, pounds, inches, percent, feet, miles, acres, years, min-

utes, seconds, hours and all metric measurements—*50 liters, five kilometers*.

7. Fractions and decimal points should always be spelled out—*three-fourths, one-half, three point two, 7 point 5 million*.
8. Numbers that are being used in the same context should be written in the same way. Don't write a score as *24 to ten*. Write: *24 to 10*. However, numbers that should be read separately can often be best understood when written in different styles: *his score was 60, twelve under par*.

These are rules that make numbers easier to read on the air, but there's one final rule about numbers that is discussed in Chapter 2—they should not be used too often.

## 2. Abbreviations

An abbreviation quiz. What do these letters stand for?

Mo.	Dec.
CST	Alta.
mm	Rep.
bros.	

If you had to hesitate for a moment over any of the answers (Missouri, Central Standard Time, millimeter, brothers, December, the Canadian province Alberta, Representative), you should be able to guess the rule for most abbreviations in broadcast newscopy—don't use them. Newscasters can't afford to hesitate.

Newswriters should write a word as they want it to be read. If they want *Lieutenant Governor*, they should write *Lieutenant Governor*, not *Lt. Gov*. If they want *New Mexico*, they should not write *NM*. However, when the abbreviation should be read by the newscaster as an abbreviation, it should be written that way, with hyphens separating the letters: *C-I-A, A-F-L-C-I-O, Y-M-C-A, I-B-M, F-C-C, p-m, A-S-P-C-A, C-B-S, A and P*. Also, *N double-A-C-P* and *N-C double-A*.

Well-known acronyms such as *NATO, NASA,*

UNICEF and OPEC obviously don't need to be spelled out, nor do they need hyphens between their letters because the individual letters are not meant to be read.

Often in a story a writer introduces an organization by its full name, then refers to it by its initials when it is mentioned again. The first time it is *the National Football League*; afterwards *N-F-L*.

The only exceptions to this rule are titles of personal address—Mr., Ms., Mrs., Miss, Dr. There is no need to spell them out because newscasters can read them without hesitating.

### 3. Corrections

Amidst the clutter of a radio newsroom some delicate work is going on. The copy those pressured men and women are slamming out of their typewriters must be clean enough for a newscaster to read smoothly and surely. When broadcast journalists make a mistake, they cannot use complex deletion marks; they cannot add words by scribbling them in the margins; and they cannot use arrows to show that they want paragraphs flip flopped because the newscaster's eye should not be asked to follow arrows, glance at the margin or decipher symbols.

All corrections in broadcast news copy must be written or typed in the main body of the copy—exactly where they are supposed to be read. They must be clear and easily understood. Often corrections are handwritten—using block printing, never script. In those cases the handwriting must be neat and bold, not dainty. You will never hear a newscaster say, "I think this says. . ."

There are only four copy markings used to correct broadcast copy:

1. Deletion. To cross out a word or two, draw a bold, solid line through the words, a line that is dark enough so that there will be no doubt that everything under the line is out:

The ~~first~~ accident was the second this month.

Most newswriters then draw an arc over the deleted words to direct the newscaster's eye to what comes next:

In both accidents somebody ~~was~~ was seriously injured.

2. Substitution. To switch words, cross out the old one and write the new word or words above it—neatly. Draw little lines to show exactly where the new word belongs:

That corner ~~do not~~ have a traffic light.

Place punctuation marks next to the words they follow so that they are not overlooked.

UNACCEPTABLE:

Both accidents ~~had the same cause~~ -- someone ran a stop sign.

ACCEPTABLE:

Both accidents ~~had the same cause--~~ someone ran a stop sign.

3. Addition. To add one or more words, use a symbol that shows clearly where the additional words go:

community leaders,

A group of has petitioned the city to install a light.

4. Major deletion. To show that the end of a line of copy, or a complete line or more, has been crossed out, put a bold line through the deleted words; then draw a line to guide the newscaster's eye to the words that should be read next:

The Minnesota Pollution ~~Control Agency~~ Control Agency is ~~declaring a moratorium on the building of large cattle and pig feedlots.~~

The Egyptian president will stop next in ~~the rest of the world~~ three western European countries.

These are all the correction symbols that should be used. To change letters in a word, cross out the entire word and retype it or print it neatly above. Never fiddle with the letters.

#### UNACCEPTABLE:

They'll be there to greet the president.

Similarly, to add a whole sentence to the copy, retype the entire page. Never try to squeeze a sentence in between two other lines or connect it with arrows.

All corrections may be correct, but if there are too many of them, the copy will still be difficult to read. Solution? Retype the page. Since there isn't time in a broadcast newsroom for much retyping, most writers learn to produce clean copy the first time through. Again, do not let the newsroom atmosphere fool you. This is a neat business.

#### 4. Don't Split Words

The rules of grammar permit breaking a word between syllables at the end of a line if there is no room to type the complete word. In a term paper or a business report you may write "Eng-" at the end of one line and "lish" at the start of the next. However, broadcast style is stricter. Splitting words by syllables is not allowed because split words are difficult to read aloud without adding an unnatural pause. The newswriter doesn't want the newscaster to say "Eng (pause) lish." The word should be read "English," so that is how it should be written—all syllables together.

If the complete word will not fit at the end of one line, start the whole word on the next. If part of the word has already been typed, and

the rest will not fit, cross it out and start again on the next line.

#### 5. Don't Split Sentences

This is a similar rule. Sentences should not be continued onto a second page in broadcast news because that would cause the newscaster to pause inappropriately in the middle of the sentence while flipping the page.

If the complete sentence will not fit at the end of the first page, change pages and type the whole sentence on the next page. If you find yourself running out of paper in the middle of a sentence, cross out the part of the sentence you have already typed and start it again on the next page.

#### 6. Emphasis

This sentence can have four different meanings:

*Then they deported him.* (They had waited until that time.)

*Then they deported him.* (Officials of two other countries had already deported him.)

*Then they deported him.* (He had already been arrested and held without bail.)

*Then they deported him.* (His wife had been deported a week earlier.)

The meaning of the sentence depends on which of the four words is emphasized.

When words are written to be read out loud, emphasis becomes a semantic tool. Broadcast journalists often use emphasis to clarify or modify the meaning of the words they write:

He was shocked when he found **HIS** name on the indictment.

He was shocked when he found his name on the indictment.

There are two ways to indicate that a word should be emphasized by the newscaster:

1. Underlining. This is the most common method:

The suspect was driving a car similar to the one the witness had described.

The suspect was driving a car similar to the one the witness had described.

2. All-caps. (This device is not available, of course, when the copy itself is typed in all capital letters.)

Officials say ONE MATCH may have started the fire.

Officials say one match MAY have started the fire.

The word *not* deserves special mention. For a small word it has tremendous power—by itself it can completely reverse the meaning of a sentence:

The district attorney said he did do it.

The district attorney said he did not do it.

*Not* has a tendency to get confused with the word *now*. In deference to its power, underlining or typing it all-caps is usually wise. Even with this precaution, prudence dictates that the word *innocent* be used instead of *not guilty*. A libel suit could result from a newscaster omitting the *not* there (see Chapter 9, "Ethics and Law").

## 7. Pauses

Broadcast news is written to be performed. A pause is occasionally called for, and, like a stage cue, the pause should be indicated in the script.

Ensuring that the newscaster pauses a beat between sentences can help separate different thoughts:

The union's leader called the offer unsatisfactory....Talks will continue tomorrow.

A pregnant pause can add a touch of drama to broadcast news:

She said her major enemy is -- herself.

The traditional grammatical indicators of pauses are periods, commas and semicolons. The semicolon is a device for holding together long, rambling sentences. There are no long, rambling sentences in broadcast news. The semicolon is not needed. The comma and period remain valuable tools, but the broadcast journalist often looks for punctuation marks with more visual impact.

Commas and periods don't look like pauses. A dash ( -- ) and an ellipsis (...), on the other hand, are graphic cues for the reader to rest a beat between words. Broadcast journalists use them frequently. For example:

The city council ruled that sidewalks WILL be put in...in all new sub-divisions -- bar none.

*KCUE, Minnesota*

Some notes on pauses:

1. Remember that on a typewriter a dash is: space, hyphen, hyphen, space ( -- ).
2. The ellipsis is an ideal stage cue because the desired length of the pause can be shown by the number of dots in the ellipsis. The usual three dots might mean a one-beat pause. Five or six tell the newscaster to stop for one and a half or two beats:

The city real estate tax rate has been climbing steadily for the past ten years...and today the city tax commission said this year is no exception....The hike will be high...a jump of 65 cents for each 100 dollars of assessed value.

*WMCA, New York City*

3. Remember that these punctuation marks, like the periods and commas they replace, must be used according to the rules of grammar:

**UNACCEPTABLE:**

The town supervisor -- Paul Earl says he doesn't like the plan.

**ACCEPTABLE:**

The town supervisor -- Paul Earl -- says he doesn't like the plan.

4. There is a subtle difference in the function of an ellipsis and a dash. An ellipsis generally is used to tack on an additional thought: "He's going to Washington . . . to finish out his term." The dash is used to qualify or clarify the previous thought: "He's going to Washington -- the city where his problems started."

## 8. Spelling

Listeners will never know whether a writer spelled the name of the chairman of the Chinese Communist Party correctly in broadcast copy. They'll never find out that a newswriter doesn't know how to spell *separate* or confuses *site* with *cite*. So why worry about spelling?

Worry because faulty spelling can damage a reputation in the newsroom; worry because sloppy spelling can lead to sloppy pronunciation, which listeners will hear; most of all, worry because spelling errors can jar a newscaster into an error.

If *decision* is spelled *dicision*, the newscaster can read the word easily enough but, a few words later, may be wondering, "What illiterate wrote this copy?" And that thought might well interfere with the reading of the next line and cause the newscaster to stumble. If nothing else, sloppy spelling is a distraction, and distractions cannot be allowed to creep into copy.

Some people are congenitally bad spellers, but there is a cure for this disease: concentration . . . and a dictionary. Keep a concise dictionary

by your desk and use it a lot (not "alot"). It takes about 25 seconds to look up a word. If a writer has any doubt about how the word is spelled, those 25 seconds are a wise investment.

Broadcast journalists do choose to differ with the dictionary in one area—the use of hyphens. The word *antiaircraft*, for instance, is easier to read with a hyphen: *anti-aircraft*. *Semitropical* reads better as *semi-tropical*. But as the stylebook used at Houston's KEYH warns, newswriters have to be careful not to hyphenate us out of the English language; for example, *master-piece* would distract, not help.

Spelling is not generally considered a creative discipline, but some broadcast journalists have come up with what they consider to be improvements on the language that go well beyond the occasional extra hyphen. They spell *says*, one of the most frequently used words in broadcast news, *sez* or shorten *night* to *nite*. And, when noting the length of a story, *sex*, they find, is a shorter, and perhaps more stimulating, way to write the abbreviation for seconds. Enuf, u get the idea!

Dallas Townsend, who has worked as writer and newscaster for the CBS World News Round-Up for more than two decades, has developed a shorthand for typing his own copy that almost amounts to a code. *The* is *t*, *that* is *tt*, *this* is *ts*, *year* is *yr*, *service* is *svc*, etc. Other writers should wait, however, until they get a decade or two under their belts before they consider experimenting with such shortcuts. In most newsrooms alternative spellings would at the very least disorient those who weren't clued in—especially new employees. They should not be used. Except for an occasional extra hyphen, spell as the dictionary spells.

## 9. Pronunciation

Listeners can't react to spelling, but they surely would let the station manager know their feelings if the pronunciation were wrong. Incorrectly pronouncing a place name may be embarrassing. But, incorrectly pronouncing a person's name can be both embarrassing and insulting.

Pronunciation is a serious problem when writing foreign news, but it is perhaps even more dangerous in local copy, especially in a small town. At a small station a beginning journalist may find it difficult to sound authoritative as the only person in town who doesn't know that Councilman McCaugh's name is pronounced Mac-COY and School Board President Finkelstein insists that it's Finkel-STEEN, not Finkel-STINE. And woe to anyone in the author's hometown who says STEFF-ens. It's pronounced STEE-fens.

There are two ways to guard against errors in pronunciation:

1. Check the pronunciation of all potentially troublesome names by asking. In a local story this must be one of the questions a writer or reporter should ask Mr. Perez: "Is it PER-*ez* or Per-EZ?" If necessary call someone who knows the person, or call Mr. Perez. For out-of-town names, a simple, and free, call to long-distance information can secure the correct pronunciation of a place or a person who may be well known in that area.

Foreign names present a different problem with the same solution: ask. French author Simone de Beauvoir is in the news. If the wire story does not include a pronunciation guide, or if the writer is not working from wire copy, it's time to call a local French teacher. Sometimes, if the unfamiliar name is not crucial to the story, it might be better to consider writing the story without the name—if it means nothing to the journalist, it probably won't mean anything to the average listener.

2. Indicate clearly in the copy the correct pronunciation. The most effective way is to type the phonetic spelling in parentheses directly above the actual spelling:

(See-MONE duh BOH-vwahr)  
French author Simone de Beauvoir

(EEV Sahn Loh-ROHN)  
French designer Yves Saint Laurent

(Mehn-AH-hehm BEH-gihn)  
Israeli Prime Minister Menahem Begin

It's not necessary to master the rules of formal phonetic spelling. Any spelling that conveys the correct pronunciation will do. Just spell it as it sounds. Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko sounds like Grom-EE-co; that's good enough. Put a hyphen between syllables and type the accented syllable all-caps.

But remember that pronunciation is a fact and, as with any fact, *almost* right is still wrong.

## 10. Timing

Newspaper copy is measured in inches. Broadcast copy is measured in seconds. A newspaper story may have to be cut to nine inches to fit the space left on a page. A broadcast story may have to be cut to 20 seconds to fit the time left in a newscast. Too short, and there may be some "dead air"—silence. Too long, and the start of the next program may be cut off. Start thinking time!

How do newswriters calculate how long a broadcast story will run? They read it at the same speed it's going to be read on the air while timing it with a stopwatch. Most newsrooms have stopwatches. You might want to buy your own. The important thing to remember when timing copy is to read it *exactly* as it's going to be read on the air. That means reading it out loud, since we read faster when we read silently. And read the copy at the pace used by the newscaster. If there's time, get the newscaster to read it.

Obviously, timing each story can be a time-consuming procedure, but after some practice a shortcut may be used. Writers learn how many seconds it takes their newscaster to read a line, and then, using simple arithmetic, determine the number of seconds it will take the newscaster to read a story.

On the average, a 55- to 60-character line runs 3½ to 4 seconds. But don't rely on this. The key factor is the pace of the person who will be reading the copy. Once a newswriter has that

down, a whole newscast can be timed just by counting lines. Professional newscasters maintain a consistent pace. This procedure won't work as well with beginners.

The length of the tape (see Chapter 10, "Tape") used in some stories must also be considered when timing newscasts. Some veteran newscasters have reached the point where, if they know how much tape they have, they can glance through the pile of copy, glance at the clock, and *know* how much they will have time to read. This sixth sense takes years to develop. Until then, time each story.

Write the time in seconds at the bottom or top of the story and circle it. Using a colon saves the trouble of writing out "seconds":

:25

## 11. Testing

In a good broadcast newsroom people are talking to themselves. Broadcast copy is written to be read aloud, and the only safe test of how it will sound is to read it out loud. The BBC in Britain used to force their newswriters to dictate copy to secretaries to ensure that they had put their writing through this oral test.

Stories should be read aloud while they're being written—this is called talking to the typewriter—and then again after they are complete. A sentence that looks fine on paper may turn out to be too long to read smoothly or may be a tongue-twister, or may simply sound stiff.

Another problem is sibilant sounds. Certain design defects in human vocal tracts and limitations in microphones must be considered when writing broadcast copy. For example, when people read a few consecutive *s*, *sh*, *z* or soft *c* sounds, they start hissing.

### UNACCEPTABLE:

She said small size businesses are especially susceptible to idiosyncrasies in business cycles.

WAZY in Indiana changed the first to the second to stop the hiss:

No fault car insurance is being considered...

No fault car insurance being considered...

A series of popping *p* or *b* sounds can make little exploding noises in the microphone.

### UNACCEPTABLE:

Poor planning precipitated a basically perpendicular plummet in popular products.

And in a sentence with too many *r* sounds, the words will be drowned out by the rumble.

### UNACCEPTABLE:

Repeated reordering errors require a corrective response.

These tongue twisters shouldn't scare off all attempts at alliteration. Repeating some letters can sometimes give a sentence a pleasing sound. Notice how the repetition of *k* and *b* sounds adds flavor to this line:

She bakes the worms until they're crispy, and then crumbles them into a quiche like bacon bits.

*Dallas Townsend, CBS*

The only sure test of what will work is to read the sentence aloud. The ear is the best critic. Every story should be read aloud.

## SUMMARY

---

A list of the rules:

1. Typing—upper/lower case.
2. Margins—leave an inch on each side of the page; center copy on the page.
3. Headings—slug, date, time of next newscast and writer's initials or last name.
4. Pages—one story per page; an arrow at the bottom if there are more pages; *FIRST ADD*, *SECOND ADD* instead of numbering pages 2, 3.
5. Numbers—  
up to eleven, spell out  
from 12 to 999, use numerals  
one-thousand and up, use combinations of numerals and words  
numerals for years  
spell out all symbols  
spell out fractions and decimal points  
numbers being used the same way, write the same way
6. Abbreviations—write them as they are supposed to be read, except titles of personal address.
7. Corrections—place them in the copy where they are supposed to be read; only four acceptable correction symbols:
  1. Deletion (of word or words)
  2. Substitution (of word or words)
  3. Addition (of word or words)
  4. Major deletion (whole or partial lines)
8. Don't split words onto different lines.
9. Don't split sentences onto different pages.
10. Emphasis—indicate by underlining or typing all-caps.
11. Pauses—dashes and ellipses effective when used properly.
12. Spelling—with the exception of conventions accepted by the entire newsroom, spelling counts.
13. Pronunciation—check; indicate difficult pronunciations in the copy.
14. Timing—time all copy.
15. Test—read all copy aloud.

## PRACTICE ASSIGNMENTS

---

A. Edit these sentences for use in broadcast copy, using proper correction marks.

1. 3/4 of a million bees are being evicted from the park at 12th St. today.
2. Police say there have been twenty-two murders in the city this year . . . 8% more than last year.
3. More than 100,000 people are expected to attend the festival named for Woodstock, NY.
4. Police say 13 lbs. of marijuana were discovered in the home of a Dedham high school student at 8:00 last night.
5. The temperature in Lansing, Mich., dropped to  $-10^{\circ}$  last night . . . a record low.
6. State workers in New Jersey have won a pay hike of \$2.13/hr., up 5.8% from last year.
7. CORE and the NAACP will challenge the Federal Bureau of Investigation in court in Dec.
8. O-P-E-C will announce a \$5/barrel price increase today.

9. County Chairwoman . . . Ellie Mays says she won't support Gov. Flannery.
10. He hopes to sail to Marseilles -- France and then drive to Cannes.
11. If they choose to negotiate separate contracts, it could delay work at the construction sight alot longer.
12. Next he'll visit Wiesbaden, W. Germany -- then he heads home.

B. Type out this story with a heading, using proper copy style:

Two research scientists for the Center for Disease Control are being allowed to return to work after spending 3 weeks in isolation. The two were accidentally exposed to the deadly African virus Lassa Fever, first detected in Zaire 10 years ago. Normally the incubation period for the disease is fourteen days, but medical experts kept the two men under observation for an extra week, just to make sure.

# 2

---

# WORDS

Newspapers, books and magazines are written for the eye. Broadcast news copy is written for the ear. This might seem like a mere anatomical technicality, but it is, perhaps, the key to understanding the nature of broadcast newswriting.

The eye and the ear have different tastes. More of the brain is devoted to the eyes than to any of the other senses. The eye is sharp enough to take its information straight and fast:

The Soviet Embassy in Washington has rejected attorney Edward Bennett Williams's application for a visa that would have permitted him to go to the Soviet Union where he hoped to participate in the trial of imprisoned Soviet dissident Alexander Ginsburg.

A less sophisticated instrument, the ear gets confused, or bored, by unrelieved lists of facts. The ear, the music-loving sense, prefers an easier, more clever presentation of information:

One of the country's best-known trial lawyers, Edward Bennett Williams, has been cold-shouldered by the Soviet Union. Williams wanted to go to Moscow and take part in the trial

of Alexander Ginsburg, but the Soviet Embassy says no.

*Dallas Townsend, CBS*

One effective way of determining whether broadcast writing suits the needs of the ear is to compare it to another form of communication aimed at that sense—conversation. How would a person who has heard of a major fire downtown tell a friend about it? “Four people were killed and nine others injured this morning in a fire which destroyed the Acme Packing Company.” Not likely. The person would probably say, “Hey, a factory burned down this morning and four people were trapped inside and killed.”

That is a more conversational way of relating the information. It works better for the listener's ear than the abrupt, fact-laden newspaper style. And that, without the “hey,” is how broadcast news is written—conversationally.

Not:

The vice president of the New York City branch of the Red Cross stated in a press conference today that many Christmas toys can inflict injury upon unsuspecting youngsters.

That's not conversational. Instead, a broadcast journalist would write:

A Red Cross official warns that many Christmas toys can be dangerous for kids.

A broadcast journalist generally has more to say and less time to say it than people do in conversation; so it won't do to be merely chatty. And broadcast news has too much power to allow guesses and opinions to spice up the copy. This is another area in which it parts company with conversation. But the basic style of broadcast prose is conversational:

Albuquerque could be getting an extra million dollars or so to create jobs for young people...since so many are out of work here.

*KOB, New Mexico*

Geoff Hammond of KYNN in Nebraska puts it this way: "Write like you talk, not like you write."

If you have been trained in newspaper journalism, broadcast news writing is going to require you to make some adjustments. Although newspaper style is changing (in part due to the influence of broadcast news), newspapers still use a harder, less conversational style. For example, the *New York Times*:

Dr. William J. Ronan defended yesterday the expense-paid overseas trips he took with his wife when he was chairman of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, and he told a legislative inquiry that such business travel by commissioners and their spouses should be encouraged.

A broadcast journalist would write:

Former Chairman William Ronan says it wasn't a bad idea for the Port Authority to fly him and his wife around the world. In fact, he says, such all-expense-paid trips should be encouraged.

This chapter and the next four are about writing, starting with the basics—words.

## COMMON LANGUAGE

Broadcast news is not written to impress or uplift. Its job is to communicate information; so it must speak a language that most listeners understand. That means no stately effects, unwieldy words, strange jargon or stiff constructions . . . slang only when it's clear. Ornamentation hinders communication.

Broadcast news must speak the common tongue. These are the rules of writing plain English.

### 1. Informal

How often is the verb *state* used in conversation? "That man *states* that he escaped through the back." And how about the pronoun *one*? "*One* has to make a reservation to eat at that restaurant." These are not the kind of words most of us use when we talk. They sound too formal and pretentious. Therefore, they have no place in broadcast news.

To write conversationally, broadcast journalists use a vocabulary that corresponds to the one used in conversation.

Following is a partial list of words that are generally too formal for broadcast news, with conversational alternatives:

FORMAL	CONVERSATIONAL
male, female	man, woman
beverage	drink
physician	doctor
attorney	lawyer
deceased	dead
passed away	died
terminate	end
commence	begin
prior to	before
subsequent to	after
endeavor	try
utilize	use

reside	live
edifice	building
residence	home
assemblage	audience
consequently	so
transpire	happen
venture	try
cognizant	aware
youth	teenager
laceration	cut
abrasion	scrape
intoxicated	drunk
visage	face
indisposed	ill, sick

Most of the words in the “formal” column have an additional liability. They take longer to say; therefore they waste time. This example of overly formal writing was used on the air:

The route is a revision of the Norfolk–Cincinnati Mountaineer, a two-year experimental route that will be terminated in compliance with a recent directive issued by the secretary of transportation.

This should read:

The new train route will replace the Norfolk–Cincinnati Mountaineer. The secretary of transportation had decided to eliminate this two-year-old experimental route.

## 2. Simple

In some circles an ability to toss around large, obscure words is a measure of intelligence, but not in broadcast news. Using *dissemble* instead of *lie* may impress some, but it is also likely to befuddle others. Small, common words communicate better to a mass audience than their multisyllabic synonyms. On the air this is especially important. Words that we might succeed in deciphering in a newspaper or book are much more difficult to comprehend as they fly by on the radio. For one thing a listener cannot take the

time to puzzle out an obscure word without missing the words that come after.

Here is a list of some words that broadcast journalists have removed from their copy because they are believed to be needlessly obscure, along with acceptable substitutes:

### DIFFICULT

eschew  
oblique  
exacerbate  
pernicious  
peruse  
remunerate  
aperture  
imbibe  
obfuscate  
conflagration  
altercation  
contusion  
purloin  
prodigious  
spurious

### CONVERSATIONAL

avoid  
indirect  
make worse  
dangerous  
read  
pay  
opening  
drink  
confuse  
fire  
argument  
bruise  
steal  
large  
false

Many additional words that can confuse are in the dictionary and thesaurus. Good broadcast journalists leave them there. And don’t despair that your vocabulary will be depleted—rejoice that it will be sharpened.

## 3. Journalese

Over the years journalists have developed their own vocabulary. After they had written a few fire stories, they began searching for other ways to say *fire*. So they discovered dynamic little words that had been hibernating in the dictionary—like *blaze*. From then on, the second time a fire was referred to it was called a *blaze*.

*Blaze* is not an unwieldy word—it weighs in at a trim one syllable. Yet it is not a word that people normally use in conversation. You don’t hear mothers warning their kids not to play with matches because they might start a *blaze*.

The newsroom name for words that are used and overused almost exclusively by journalists is *journalese*. You may ask why journalists

shouldn't be allowed their own language. The problem is that the more journalists sink into an exclusive vocabulary, the less contact their words have with their listeners.

#### UNACCEPTABLE:

The chief executive scored the milk probe, saying a price hike looms in the future.

All the words here are short and informal, but this is not common language.

#### ACCEPTABLE:

The president is predicting that milk prices will be going up. He says a congressional investigation into the price of milk has accomplished nothing.

#### JOURNALESE

hit, flay, rap, blast  
comb  
heist  
slate  
bar  
nab  
mum

#### CONVERSATIONAL

attack  
search  
robbery  
schedule  
prevent  
catch  
quiet

Many of these words have been popularized by newspaper headline writers looking for short, pithy words. Broadcast news must use a more conversational vocabulary.

## 4. Technical Terms

Sometimes events get technical. A vice president pleads *nolo contendere*. A quasar is discovered because of a dramatic *red shift*. A capacitor blows, cutting the sound on a presidential debate. A politician proposes *zero-based budgeting* or changes in the tax law on *capital gains*.

Some of the words that make news derive from the private languages of technical professions such as law, science, electronics and economics. These words are not familiar to most listeners, but broadcast journalists not only must

know what technical terms mean, they must be able to *explain* what they mean.

Preparation for this task should begin in school and continue as a lifetime study of the major developments in human knowledge as reported in books, magazines, newspapers and the broadcast media. People who write news must be well-read. But, if a story employs a term that has escaped that lifetime study, it is necessary to get on the phone and search out the definition and explanation from a local lawyer, scientist, economist or other specialist.

Then, once the meaning of a technical term is clear to the writer, the problem is how to communicate the meaning to listeners. Here there's a hard and fast rule—translate all jargon. For better or worse, radio listeners are not required to be well-read. Again, it is self-defeating for a newswriter to rely on words listeners may not understand. It certainly is possible to educate and explain, but only in common language.

#### UNACCEPTABLE:

Astronomers at a California observatory have discovered a quasar that demonstrates the largest red shift ever recorded.

#### ACCEPTABLE:

Astronomers at a California observatory have discovered what they believe may be the most distant and fastest moving object yet sighted in the universe.

If the obscure term is important enough for listeners to hear, use it *and* explain it:

The vice president pleaded nolo contendere. That means he doesn't contest the charges. For all intents and purposes it's the same as pleading guilty, except he doesn't have to actually admit guilt.

A common excuse for failing to translate professional jargon is, "Well, I didn't understand it myself." Obviously that's no excuse.

## 5. Slang

Slang words are the outlaws of our language. They are best left out of most polite writing because they are too shady to trust with meaning and too disconcerting. Nevertheless, slang words cannot be completely barred from broadcast news. Often they are witty, charming and pleasing to the ear. Certainly slang is welcome in most of our conversations.

Republicans think if they can pull off a couple of wins in Minnesota this fall...it could signal a turn-around for the party nationwide.

*WCCO, Minneapolis*

Slang presents a problem—it is fun but dangerous. Here are some guidelines for its use:

1. Don't sound dumb. There are certain slang constructions that do not sound clever, just unintelligent:

ain't  
can't hardly  
you know (as an interjection)  
done up good

2. Don't offend. Obscene language, curses, derogatory names and ethnic slurs are out. They foul the air.

*Cops* has become so comfortable in our language that it has lost its outlaw bite, but *cop* is still an unflattering way to refer to a policeman. Most stations won't use it. For one thing they are dependent on a close working relationship with local police.

3. Don't ham it up. Some occasions are simply inappropriate for slang.

### UNACCEPTABLE:

The Russian leader doesn't seem to know where the president is at.

Some slang terms are flip substitutes for perfectly good words. They push writing be-

yond the conversational into the realm of the frivolous and affected:

### UNACCEPTABLE:

The feds are looking to chase some local politicians into the slammer.

4. Know your audience. On a rock-and-roll station, slang expressions such as *grass*, *pot* or *ripped off* would be understood and might therefore be acceptable:

The Supreme Court handed down a decision today that will make it harder for police to make drug busts.

*WNDE, Indiana*

You wouldn't use this terminology on a station with older listeners.

In the South, an occasional *you all* might work on a station with an informal programming format. For an extreme example, one country station supplied the following weather forecast:

The back side of you is gonna get kinda wet if you run East tonight cause we is suspecting that some wawa may fall out of the blanket in the sky and bring some of that much needed precip. Don't worry none though -- me and Clem will stay up all night keeping the bugger away so you and your livestock won't get hurt. Tell man to sleep on the couch tonight -- it's gonna be 71 for a low and that's too much temp to mix with funning.

It's hard to imagine an audience for which that would be acceptable.

5. Choose your spot. A slightly unfamiliar slang term can sometimes be used if the meaning of the sentence doesn't hinge on the meaning of the term.

All the "good buddies" out there with a C-B radio are facing a crackdown on violations here in Virginia and across the nation.

WFIR, Virginia

Even if the listener is not really sure what *good buddies* means, this sentence makes sense.

But relatively unfamiliar slang terms cannot be used if the listener's understanding of the sentence might depend on understanding that word.

**UNACCEPTABLE:**

The "bears" were out in force on the highways last night.

Not enough of us know that *bears* is the citizens'-band-radio word for policemen. This would confuse.

- 6. Careful, Daddy-o. Slang is the least stable branch of the language; its fashions change rapidly. For instance, here is a selection from 40 years' worth of slang synonyms for the word *great*:

the cat's pajamas	too much
tops	outta sight
ducky	far out
neat	right on
nifty	heavy
real gone	mellow
way out	outrageous
groovy	bad

So, it's all too easy to use slang words that are either too avant-garde or too dated. Broadcast writing shouldn't be too straight-laced, but when in doubt, don't use slang.

**6. Contractions**

People generally *don't* say "do not," *they're* not likely to say "they are," and they usually *won't* say "will not." Contractions are part of conversation, and they're part of broadcast news.

**WEAK:**

There is a good chance.

**BETTER:**

There's a good chance.

**WEAK:**

It is not likely.

**BETTER:**

It's not likely.

Still there are situations where it's wise to think twice before substituting an apostrophe for one or two letters. Combining words in contractions tends to de-emphasize these words. If a word needs underlining, it's best not to contract it.

**WEAK:**

The president will stay home, but his wife's going.

**BETTER:**

The president will stay home, but his wife is going.

And, since it is often important to emphasize the word *not* in a sentence, it's usually best to keep it out of contractions.

**WEAK:**

The president isn't going.

**BETTER:**

The president is not going.

**ENGAGING LANGUAGE**

A newswriter's subjects are by definition the most interesting events in a community or in the world. A serious accident does not have to be dramatized with adjectives and superlatives to capture listeners.

**UNACCEPTABLE:**

Two fine citizens were horribly burned in a tragic fire and

explosion near the sleepy little community of Green Castle in the wee hours of the morning.

#### ACCEPTABLE:

A house trailer near Green Castle exploded this morning. The Putnam County Sheriff's Department says two people were hospitalized with burns.

*WNDE, Indianapolis*

The news can speak for itself. Yet, when the windshield wipers are flapping, the driver is dodging puddles, the brakes are starting to lose their grip and a newswriter wants to get the riders to lend an ear to a story about a drought, it's wise to make sure the news is speaking in its strongest and most engaging voice.

This sentence might easily have gotten bogged down in the usual descriptions—the sweltering Northeast, the parched Midwest, the water-starved West; instead, it grabs attention with one engaging word:

The heat wave sizzles on today in much of the U-S.

*Dallas Townsend, CBS*

The next eight sections distinguish words that “sizzle” from words that “sag.”

### 1. Personal

Sitting alone in a tiny studio, staring at a microphone and a complicated mass of dials, the newscaster may find it hard to imagine, but there are people out there listening. The news must be written as if it's going to be delivered to people.

If a newscaster were suddenly to mention a listener's name, that listener's attention would obviously be engaged at once. Everyone's name cannot be mentioned, but the next best thing is to personalize the copy to the point where people think the newscaster is indeed talking to them.

A man is working in the basement when he hears on the radio:

The State Power Commission has approved the Carolina Power and Light Company's proposed increase in electric rates.

That might catch his attention, but there's a way of writing this story that could cause him to drop his tools and turn up the radio:

If you are one of Carolina Power and Light Company's South Carolina customers, you can expect a higher bill next month.

*WRHI, South Carolina*

The word *you* is the grabber—you are going to have to pay more money. The use of the second person makes the story sound as if it is being addressed directly to the listener. *Us* and *we* can also do the job:

A Findlay man is using a unique invention to do something that many of us take for granted.

*WFIN, Ohio*

This personalized writing usually works well with consumer stories:

Get ready for a shortage of natural gas again this winter.

*WVOK, Alabama*

Of course it can be overused.

#### UNACCEPTABLE:

Your roads were not that safe last night. There was a four-car accident on Interstate 91.

The secret to personalizing writing is to find stories that can be related naturally to listeners' lives. It is not always necessary to use words like *you*, *us* or *we*:

City University students better get their checkbooks ready for next fall.

*WABC, New York City*

*Checkbooks* is the sort of personal, familiar word that is guaranteed to draw attention.

## 2. Real

You've seen a *car*. Have you ever seen *automotive production*? Unless you're an economist, a car has more reality to you than automotive production. Engaging writing is rooted in familiar terms.

### WEAK:

Automotive production declined last month.

### BETTER:

Fewer cars were produced last month.

### WEAK:

The people who make disposable beverage containers...

### BETTER:

The people who make throwaway bottles and cans...

*WDEE, Detroit*

Whenever possible write about real things rather than abstract concepts. Some examples:

### ABSTRACT

precipitation  
energy  
livestock  
cooking utensils  
garment  
educational institution  
petroleum reserves

### REAL

rain, snow  
gas, electricity  
pigs  
pots and pans  
coat  
school  
oil

Abstraction can make the commonplace unintelligible, as in this story about a plan for improving roads, buildings and services. It was used on the air:

The grant will be used to formulate a part of the county's comprehensive development plan. This plan includes an inventory of existing services and facilities, identification of

future needs and development of a strategy for providing needed improvements.

Make the news real.

### UNACCEPTABLE:

The mayor has introduced a proposal to cover the city's recreational facilities with more vegetation and ground cover.

### ACCEPTABLE:

The mayor wants to plant more trees and grass in the city's parks.

Similarly, it often is more effective to write about the price of milk going up than to write about inflation, or to write about a local man who has been out of work than to write about unemployment.

## 3. Active Verbs

Good broadcast news writing has oomph:

A man burst into a local diner last night, shot the owner, smashed the cash register and escaped with over one-thousand dollars.

Verbs power sentences, give them their drive. They are the backbone of broadcast journalism.

Broadcast news is meat-and-potatoes writing—basic and direct. Adjectives and adverbs can be out of place. They are often too rich and full of empty calories. Too many adverbs and adjectives make writing flabby:

An intimidating man burst into a quiet local diner late last night, brutally smashed the old cash register, senselessly shot the owner and quickly escaped with over one-thousand dollars.

With modifiers this story is almost twice as long and half as powerful. What information do the adjectives and adverbs add? Criminals are gen-

erally *intimidating*. Local diners are usually *quiet*. There is no non*brutal* way to smash a cash register. And how many shootings make sense? How many criminals escape slowly? The descriptive words only get in the way of the story.

There are exceptions. A well-chosen adjective may sometimes be illuminating, especially if it is unexpected:

The glum summit in the 17-year history of the European Economic Community...

*Peter Kalischer, CBS*

*Glum* is an accurate yet surprising description in this context; that makes it effective.

But adjectives and adverbs often are obvious or merely decorative. Good newswriters usually try to avoid them and tell the story with verbs.

WEAK:

The streaking plane went through the building.

BETTER:

The plane tore through the building.

WEAK:

The fast-moving policeman suddenly took the gun away.

BETTER:

The policeman snatched the gun.

Some examples of the effective use of verbs:

The Decatur public transit system has been rejuvenated by a grant from the state and federal governments.

*WSOY, Illinois*

Citizens are scurrying to collect signatures on state petitions by deadline-time tomorrow.

*KGDN, Washington*

Delegates to the rich nation/poor nation economic conference

sleepwalked their way into the fourth day of meetings...

*Peter Kalischer, CBS*

It's important to keep the action in the verb. The active voice (the subject of the sentence does the acting) is stronger than the passive voice (the subject of the sentence is being acted upon).

WEAK:

The building was destroyed by the fire.

BETTER:

The fire destroyed the building.

WEAK:

The woman was raped by the man.

BETTER:

The man raped the woman.

Sometimes the angle from which a story is approached can be switched to strengthen the verb.

WEAK:

Thunder storms brought tornados and high winds to Kentucky yesterday.

BETTER:

Tornados and high winds ripped across Kentucky yesterday.

*WBGN, Kentucky*

#### 4. Verb Tenses

Newspapers take hours to print and distribute. The most up-to-the-minute sources of news are radio and television. That is where people turn when they want a quick rundown on the latest news. In broadcast news, therefore, timeliness is a dominant consideration in the selection and the writing of news stories. Our language has a vehicle for conveying timeliness—the present tense.

WEAK:  
Police were searching for clues.

BETTER:  
Police are searching for clues.

WEAK:  
The president said...

BETTER:  
The president says...

The present tense is the most engaging tense in the language. It indicates that the action is still going on.

It's more exciting to be told, "There is a huge fire downtown!" than, "There *was* a huge fire downtown." "The president *says* . . ."—he believes it right now! "Police *are* searching . . ."—they could come up with something any moment now!

Newspapers tend to stay away from the present tense because of the time lag between when they are written and when they are read. During the intervening hours police may have found what they *were* looking for or may have given up the search. "Police *were* searching . . ." is safer. Newspapers are pulled toward the past tense to protect themselves. Broadcast news doesn't have this problem. The news is aired almost instantaneously. If police stop searching, the copy can still be changed seconds before it is to be read on the air. The present tense is reasonably safe in broadcast newswriting. It's used often:

Former Housing and Urban Development Secretary George Romney says a new political structure is developing in the United States.

*KWMS, Salt Lake City*

The village of Hershey is still operating on emergency power.

*KODY, Nebraska*

A fire official believes there will be no more bodies found in the ruins

of the Southgate, Kentucky, supper club which burned Saturday night.

*Ann Taylor, NBC*

There are many situations, nevertheless, where the present tense doesn't work:

UNACCEPTABLE:

The bridge collapses.  
Two people are being shot.

Actions that belong to moments in the recent past cannot be forcibly dragged into the present—that bridge is not collapsing now.

But there is a tense that maintains an air of immediacy while describing actions that have ended—the present perfect tense. Not surprisingly, it's the most used tense in broadcast news.

ACCEPTABLE:

The bridge has collapsed.  
Two people have been shot.

The present perfect is less dated than the past tense and can be used in more situations than the present:

The holiday weekend has given late property taxpayers a few hours' breathing time.

*KLUC, Las Vegas*

A former superintendent of schools has been arrested and charged with making harassing telephone calls to 15-year-old girls.

*WKVT, Vermont*

Still the present perfect tense does not always fit. If the results of an action are gone, or the action is explicitly pinned to the past, the present perfect tense cannot be used.

UNACCEPTABLE:

Few people have shown up at the meeting, so it broke up early.  
Two people have been shot earlier today.

In these situations it's necessary to fall back on the past tense.

**ACCEPTABLE:**

Few people showed up at the meeting, so it broke up early.  
Two people were shot earlier today.

In broadcast news the present tense remains first choice. It's used where it's comfortable.

**WEAK:**

The strike has ended.

**BETTER:**

The strike is over.

**WEAK:**

The Governor said...

**BETTER:**

The Governor says...

The present perfect is second choice.

**WEAK:**

The school board approved the plan.

**BETTER:**

The school board has approved the plan.

**WEAK:**

He vetoed the bill.

**BETTER:**

He has vetoed the bill.

The past tense . . . ? Well, it has its uses, especially in sentences in which the time the event occurred is mentioned:

Former President Nixon last night had bitter words for Washington Post reporters Woodward and Bernstein.

*Don Blair, NBC*

Four floors of the U-S State Department were damaged early this

morning by a bomb planted in a third-floor men's room.

*WINS, New York City*

There's one major verb tense that has not been mentioned—the future. Obviously, sentences cannot be shoved into the future, but when a future angle can be found in a story, it's often the best approach to the story.

**WEAK:**

The gas price increase was approved.

**BETTER:**

Gas prices will be going up.

**WEAK:**

The teachers voted to strike.

**BETTER:**

It looks like teachers will be on strike in the morning.

## 5. Numbers

In 1975 Australia actually had a net loss of 8,000 people. Last year the trend reversed, but the net gain was only 21,000, the lowest figure since 1945.

These sentences, taken from a newspaper, certainly do not engage our attention; they're barely understandable. The problem: too many numbers. Perhaps the newspaper reader's eye can follow such dense concentrations of dates and statistics—if the eye can't follow, it can always go back and reread. But the ear is confused, and probably bored by so much data. It takes time to figure out the significance of a net outflow of 8,000; it takes a second to realize when 1975 was. Those moments of thought are enough to cause the listener to miss the next facts, and soon the meaning of the story is lost.

Numbers can be as important as any other facts, but the weight of detail they contain makes it necessary to carefully monitor their use. In Chapter 1, "Copy," the rules for writing numbers in the copy were discussed. Here the question is which numbers should be allowed in the copy.

**1. Avoid numbers** As a rule, the fewer numbers in the copy the better.

Key numbers must survive. Listeners must be told the size of the budget increase or the amount of cash that was stolen. But in most stories there are numbers that, while perhaps interesting, are not necessary. They should be edited out. It's important to note how much larger this year's budget will be, but it's not necessary to specify the exact size of last year's. Write that this was the fifth robbery downtown this month, but it's not necessary to review how much was taken in each of the other robberies.

**UNACCEPTABLE:**

The proposed budget for the '81-'82 fiscal year calls for 2 point 5 million dollars in property tax relief for the state's 250-thousand property owners.

**ACCEPTABLE:**

The proposed budget calls for 2 point 5 million dollars in property tax relief.

Another example: A story on a record-breaking art auction could easily drown in numbers—the number of paintings sold, the prices of the individual paintings, the amount taken in the latest sessions, the previous record, etc. But the secret to writing a story like this is to avoid most of these numbers. The strength of the writing that follows lies in the numbers that are not here; only two are used:

Some more paintings from the collection of the late Robert Van Hirsh were sold in London last night. That raises the total for the record shattering auction to more than 28 and a half million dollars. There's still one more session to go.

*Bill Diehl, ABC*

**2. Round-Off** If a number has to be used, it should be made easy to grasp. *Almost half-a-*

*million is simpler than 496-thousand 578. More than twice as many is clearer than 12 the first time, 25 the second.*

Some of the exactness of the news is sacrificed with the use of *about* and *almost*, but exact numbers communicate little if they are too confusing to follow on the air. Unless the meaning of a story rests on the figures to the right of the decimal place, clear approximation can convey information more efficiently than befuddling specificity.

**WEAK:**

The plan will cost one point five eight million dollars.

**BETTER:**

The plan will cost more than a million and a half dollars.

**WEAK:**

The workers now earn 14-thousand, 985 dollars a year.

**BETTER:**

The workers now earn just under 15-thousand dollars a year.

Approximating should never mean distorting. The rounding off process must be accurate and fair. Words like *more than*, *less than* and *almost* have definite meanings—*13-thousand 500* is not *about 15-thousand*, nor is it *almost 15-thousand*. And it is never acceptable to leave out the *about* and say *one-million* when the number is *about one-million*. Facts are sacred.

**3. Make them real** Numbers go down more easily if the writer predigests them for listeners. Significance should not be buried under a mass of numerals. The newswriter's job is to bring to the surface the meaning of a number.

If it's 1982 and a story talks about 1983, listeners can be saved a couple of seconds' thought if the writer writes *next year* instead of *1983*. This works with most dates: 1981 would be easiest to grasp as *last year*; 1972 as *ten years ago*; No-

ember 16 becomes *later this month*, if it is later this month.

Large dollar figures can also be transformed into more comprehensible terms. 2 point 4 billion dollars becomes *ten dollars for every person in the United States*; a two percent General Motors price increase becomes *almost 100 dollars more for the average General Motors car*.

## 6. Idiomatic Expressions

Idiomatic expressions are old friends. They bring warmth and color to writing:

He said the courts are calling all the shots on the desegregation of Boston schools.

*WBUR, Boston*

There were 12 hours of negotiations yesterday...more on tap today.

*KLOS, Los Angeles*

Farmers in Southwestern Minnesota are putting up a fuss over plans for a big four-lane expressway between Worthington and Saint James.

*WCCO, Minneapolis*

But like old friends, idiomatic expressions can get too familiar and sometimes can seem so comfortable that we drop our guard. A foreign-born writer used to amuse a newsroom with his slightly distorted versions of old expressions. He'd say: "Close but no tomato." "That's second hat to me." "I just want to get my foot in the pie."

As do all words and phrases, expressions have specific meanings. They must be worded correctly and their meanings must be honored.

UNACCEPTABLE:

A local doctor is in the big time.

ACCEPTABLE:

A local doctor has hit the big time.

## 7. Metaphors

One of the best known metaphors of all time is Homer's "the rosy-fingered dawn." A metaphor is a figure of speech in which one thing is spoken of as if it were another. Dawns don't really have rosy fingers. When newswriter Peggy Noonan at CBS called the appearance of many conflicting wallposters in China "a wallposter war," she was using a metaphor. Some of the idiomatic expressions mentioned in the previous section are technically metaphors. Negotiations aren't literally *on tap*.

A good metaphor can clarify or amuse. Metaphors are important tools of engaging writing when they are kept under control. It's important not to get carried away and, for example, call a hurricane a "meteorological mastodon," as one newswriter did.

The key to using these figures of speech is to remember that they each require tiny flights of imagination. We are asked to imagine for a moment a war of wallposters. But the metaphor must paint an image that's possible to imagine.

This sentence was used on the air by a sports writer on a snowy day:

Let's scrape away the snow and get right to the meat of the matter.

Imagine scraping away snow and finding meat! This mess is called a "mixed metaphor" because it combines two noncompatible metaphors. Here are some more:

Fast food operations are flooding the country, turning small restaurants into deserts.

The stock market erupted today to a new high-water mark.

And, a network sportscaster once informed a World Series audience that "when you get nailed with that eraser, it really stings." This phrase was attributed to a New York politician: "The hottest gut issue ever to hit the city." And, press critic Alex Cockburn caught Louisiana's

Governor Edwin Edwards saying: "You've bottled them up with a maze of red tape."

Metaphors—yes; mixed metaphors—no.

## 8. Clichés

The most common problem with using well-worn expressions is that all the meaning and charm has often been worn out of them. In that case they become those hobgoblins of people who work with the language—clichés.

A cliché is any combination of words that has been used too much. Whatever wisdom and humor was in that expression or figure of speech is gone. When we hear it we gulp and think, "Not again!"

Most proverbs have become clichés.

### UNACCEPTABLE:

A penny saved is a penny earned for the president, so he's going to ask for budget cutbacks this year.

All that glitters is not gold, so the president is looking over these proposals very carefully.

But a cliché doesn't have to be a proverb. Any figure of speech we have heard too often qualifies. Here are some that have made news directors wince:

raining cats and dogs  
the cream of the crop  
a sigh of relief  
sadder but wiser  
making order out of chaos  
believe it or not  
the rules of the game  
chalked up the victory  
a slap in the face  
ups and downs  
horse of a different color  
in the final analysis  
goes without saying  
it remains to be seen  
give the green light

in the nick of time  
no holds barred  
raised the roof  
lowered the boom  
a blue-ribbon panel  
a blessing in disguise  
burn the midnight oil  
hit the nail on the head  
in this day and age  
time and time again  
needless to say  
run the gamut from A to Z  
powers that be  
long arm of the law  
once in a blue moon

dog tired  
leave in a huff  
sending shock waves  
more of the same  
once in a great while  
the light of day  
last but not least  
cold facts  
got off with a bang  
come home to roost

back to the wall  
all in a day's work  
a flash in the pan  
crystal clear  
goes without saying  
pay the piper  
few and far between  
variety is the spice of life  
the name of the game

One radio journalist was fired for writing too many weather reports that warned listeners about "the wet stuff falling from the sky" and then consoling them because "into each life some rain must fall." And, though I doubt anyone was fired for them, count how many clichés the *New York Times* uses in the lead paragraph of its editorial marking the death of Mao Tse-tung:

Mao Tse-tung's place in history is assured. When the saga of our times is written, he will be one of the towering figures . . .

Clichés make writing sound trite and unintelligent, but remember not to let them scare you away from all expressions. Just because a phrase is familiar, don't assume it's a cliché. This is the difference: expressions have been used; clichés have been overused.

According to one business expert . . . President Carter is smack dab in the middle of the biggest reason for higher prices . . . the federal government  
*KAKC, Oklahoma*

Listeners have heard "smack dab in the middle" before, but not too often. It's still fresh enough to retain its antique charm. That one is not a cliché.

A cliché doesn't have to be a figure of speech. Any words that have been used together so often that they have lost their power are also clichés:

breathless anticipation      finishing touches  
sure thing                      unmitigated gall  
packed house                   ill-fated

easy prey  
no uncertain terms  
due deliberation  
general public  
torrid pace

loud and clear  
checkered career  
impressive sight  
action-packed  
recent history

Don't all these clichés seem apt or clever? Of course they do. It is because they are well-turned phrases that they have become overused phrases. The point is that whatever their original vitality, by now these phrases are exhausted. They've become obvious, "prepackaged"—with all the spice and originality of TV dinners.

Journalists have not neglected their responsibility in the prepackaging of the language. Sometimes it seems as if newsroom typewriters are programmed to punch out these phrases at regular intervals:

long holiday weekend  
financial circles  
war-torn  
battle-weary  
poverty-stricken  
up in arms  
mounting tension  
tension is high  
lingering illness  
the nation's capital  
police scoured the  
neighborhood  
claimed the life of

on the agenda  
it's official  
hard questions  
stiff opposition  
outspoken critic  
speculation was rampant  
the incident remains  
under investigation  
failing to negotiate a  
curve  
uneasy truce  
outbreak of fighting

Some journalism clichés are not only worn out, they are hollow:

tragic fire  
senseless murder  
innocent victims

naked aggression  
reliable sources

Somewhere there must exist a mirror universe full of comic fires, meaningful murders, guilty victims, fully attired aggression—and sources who are quoted on the news but are unreliable.

How do you avoid clichés? Lowell Thomas once drew up for his staff a list of clichés and acceptable alternatives. Soon he found the alter-

natives were being used so frequently that they were becoming clichés.

You can't list creative phrasings. The ability to custom tailor phrases to fit specific situations is what distinguishes good writers. For example, Dallas Townsend dodges the standard "begin deliberations" in his writing by having a jury begin "pondering" a case. And, instead of the standard "voted down" or "rejected by union members," this story employs a lively expression from America's primary image preserve—the old West:

A possible taxi strike by union members has been headed off at the ballot box.

*WBBM, Chicago*

There are three guidelines for avoiding clichés in writing:

1. **Be creative.** A description of a city under saturation bombing, for instance, could practically write itself with "panic-stricken populations," "the city in ruins," "chaos in the streets," etc. Good newswriters don't trot out clichés like these; they find their own words.
2. **Be honest.** Bombers are supposed to be terrifying. Are they this time? It's wrong to feed listeners' expectations with the phrases they expect to hear. Writing should accurately describe each individual situation.
3. **Keep it simple.** Writing doesn't have to be littered with expressions to be clever or poetic. The simplest, most direct writing can be the strongest.

Here is Edward R. Murrow on the bombing of London during World War II—no clichés:

Last night as I stood on London Bridge...and watched that red glow in the sky, it was possible to understand that that's fire, as the result of an act of war. But the act itself, even the sound of the bomb



Edward R. Murrow in wartime London in June, 1941. In the background is the British Broadcasting Corporation's Broadcast House, from which Murrow broadcast his famed "This . . . is London" reports to the U.S. radio audience. (CBS News Photo)

that started that fire, was still unreal.

. . . Suddenly all the lights crashed off and a blackness fell right to the ground. It grew cold. We covered ourselves with hay. The shrapnel clicked as it hit the concrete road nearby. And still the German bombers came.

. . . The bombs don't seem to make as much noise as they should... the sense of danger, death and disaster comes only when the familiar incidents occur, the things that one has associated with tragedy since childhood.\*

\* Robert Metz, *CBS: Reflections in a Bloodshot Eye* (New York: Signet, 1975), pp. 93-96.

## SUMMARY

---

The late Jim Zaillian, who was news director at KNX in Los Angeles, said good broadcast writing “shows ear.” Zaillian said good newswriters “hear” the copy as they write, rather than just

“seeing” it. They avoid difficult or unnatural phrasings that might disorient the ear; they search out lively, direct and fresh language that pleases the ear.

## PRACTICE ASSIGNMENTS

---

Rewrite the following sentences in broadcast style.

1. The Burmese government plans to repair 30 temples, generally the largest of 2-thousand 217 remaining buildings in the 30-square-mile area flooded by the seven inches of rain.
2. It was predicted by the city manager that the downtown area would have to undergo extensive renovation and modification to make it a more attractive commercial area for consumers.
3. The president of the Board of Education has stated that the citywide reading test given to all 460-thousand high school students might be invalidated for 220-thousand of them.
4. The negative overall approval rating of 12 percent is strongly linked to how the public thinks the president is handling the economy. Seventy percent disapproved of that element of his job performance.
5. Police scoured the neighborhood yesterday for the two males and one female who are believed to have resided in the house prior to the blaze.
6. The attorney for the deceased woman said that the ill-fated star, whose face was lacerated almost beyond recognition, probably passed away while endeavoring to forcefully open the building’s door.
7. Industrialist Stanley Arnold, whose copious contributions to institutions of higher learning are well known, labeled the accusations spurious.
8. A 34-year-old woman has been shot by robbers during a holdup of the Shoreham National Bank this morning.
9. It is difficult to evaluate our petroleum reserves at the moment, but some experts said that there is a possibility that many gasoline retail outlets will be closed during this long holiday weekend, causing hardship for the general public.
10. The physicians say the surgical procedures would be commenced this month.
11. An outspoken critic of the administration, who represents the poverty-stricken South Bronx, is blasting the new welfare proposal in no uncertain terms.
12. It is not certain whether there will be snow, but it is clear that there will be some precipitation this evening.
13. The mayor said he wants to submit the town’s application to the federal government immediately . . . so the city can get in on the ground floor while the iron is still hot.
14. There will be a nine point eight percent increase in the cost of lettuce to consumers in this area.
15. Black leaders say they were not allowed to enter the all-white country club, but the club’s owner remains mum on the subject.
16. The entire nation breathlessly awaits the outcome of today’s election, the culmination of an incredibly action-packed campaign.
17. Coach Bob Barnes says the team will be sitting pretty if it stays on its toes.
18. You would not have wanted to be standing on Eleventh Street and Fifth Avenue last night at seven-fourteen . . . A bomb went off there, injuring three innocent bystanders and claiming the lives of two others.
19. The Supreme Court granted certiorari today in the case of Jones versus Ann Arbor School Board.
20. Mayor Andrews is expected to claim executive privilege at the extortion trial of Councilman Stanley Barker today.

# 3

---

## MEANINGS

The words used in broadcast news must be easygoing and entertaining, but they must also be exact. This pairing of purposes is what makes writing the news for broadcast so challenging. The trick is to write conversationally without letting that relaxed style lull you into blurting out misleading information. Language is the servant of meaning; it must remember its place. If words interfere with the telling of the story or distort its meaning, they are not working.

Broadcast journalists worry about meanings. They know that *ships* are vessels that are large enough to carry boats, and that *prisons* are for more serious offenses than *jails*. In a newsroom exact meanings are pursued: On land, do flags fly at *half-staff* or *half-mast*? Can *unidentified* persons be referred to as *unnamed*? (After all, they do have names; we just don't know them.) And, is it clear enough that *casualties* means *dead and wounded*?

Broadcast journalists must know that Warren Burger's title is chief justice of the *United States*, not chief justice of the *Supreme Court*; that grand jury indictments are handed *up*, court decisions handed *down*; and that the proper Eng-

lish usage is "equally costly," not "equally as costly."

Bemoaning the decline of our language skills has become popular sport. It's true; some Americans don't speak too good. But broadcast newswriters must rise above the fallen vernacular.

In conversation there is not that much at stake. We're prepared to take the reports of some of our acquaintances with a grain of salt, and if they use words incorrectly, if the story is distorted or exaggerated, at the most a few persons will be misinformed. But broadcast news has responsibility for informing entire communities, and it must be trusted if it is to work. Misuse of words, distortion, exaggeration can be dangerous, if not fatal, for the news. Meanings must be honored.

### PRECISION

The English language is a precise tool. With one of the richest vocabularies of any language, it has words to express even the most subtle shadings

of meaning. Think of all the words we have for acts of illegally expropriating property:

steal	plunder
theft	poach
robbery	pillage
burglary	sack
larceny	extort
rip-off	blackmail
break and enter	second-story job
mug	lift
holdup	swipe
stickup	cop
piracy	rifle
embezzlement	filch
swindle	pinch
heist	snatch
pilfer	knockoff
housebreaking	purloin
shoplift	

Each of these 33 words allows us to communicate a slightly different thought: a rip-off is a minor swindle; plunderers take everything; embezzlement is a financial maneuver. The specific meaning of each of these words must be respected as the word is used.

#### UNACCEPTABLE:

The woman was burglarized on her way home. (Burglary means that a building has been entered.)

Someone robbed his desk. (Robbery requires the use of force or fear.)

A shoplifter cleaned out the cash register. (Shoplifters just steal goods from shelves.)

Telling a friend that a local man has been arrested for robbery, when actually it was shoplifting, won't cause too much trouble. But that same error on the radio can cause that man serious injury. Broadcast news demands precise use of our precise language.

## 1. Usage

The language wars are fought between the "conversationalists" and the "strict grammarians." The conversationalists advocate a language that is free to outgrow the old rules. Split an infinitive! Use *like* as a conjunction! That's how people today speak. But the strict grammarians see exactness and clarity, not to mention style, being violated along with the rules. The grammatical order is being trampled by hordes of nouns used as verbs—*prioritize*, verbs used as nouns—*outage* (when the power goes back on, is that an *onage*?), and adverbs used without verbs—*hopefully*.

It's hard for broadcast journalists to choose sides in this dispute. Our writing is unabashedly conversational, yet we demand that it be precise. After all, Edwin Newman, author of two popular books attacking the debasement of the language, is a broadcast journalist.

Some of the new usages we accept; some we must reject. Phony words like *prioritize* have no place in broadcast news. They're stilted, certainly not conversational. But there is no real harm in the occasional split infinitive: "Congress refused to *seriously consider* the bill" or *like for as*: "The miners may reject this contract *like* they rejected the last one."

Broadcast journalists are clearly divided on one relevant question: Is it three *persons* or three *people*? You can't spend a day working in a newsroom without being forced to take sides on this one. The grammar books are clear: a few individuals are *persons*; an anonymous group, *people*. But in conversation a few persons are often called *people*. Take your choice—the grammar books or conversational usage. CBS insists on *persons*. KFWB in Los Angeles, for instance, and a majority of radio newsrooms, use *people*. For better or for worse, the future seems to belong to *people*.

Most questions of usage are simple. There are agreed-on rules for the use of our language. Violations of these rules jar the ear. There's a difference between a grammatical liberal and someone who doesn't know grammar. The par-

tially illiterate don't last long in broadcast news-rooms. Here are some examples of sloppy use of the language. All of these were actually used on the air.

**UNACCEPTABLE:**

The vote was by a three to one margin.

**ACCEPTABLE:**

The vote was three to one.  
The bill was passed by a three to one margin.

**UNACCEPTABLE:**

The senator said the town's chances are good at landing the contract.

**ACCEPTABLE:**

The senator said the town's chances of landing the contract are good.

**UNACCEPTABLE:**

The funds would be used to turn the property into a neighborhood park, according to the wishes of three surveys taken in the area.

**ACCEPTABLE:**

The funds would be used to turn the property into a neighborhood park. That's the plan most of the community favored when polled on the subject.

**UNACCEPTABLE:**

Intense activity will be the keyword this week at the nuclear fuel plant.

**ACCEPTABLE:**

It will be a week of intense activity at the nuclear fuel plant.

**UNACCEPTABLE:**

That, of course, is quite a different tune than what he said on April 11th.

**ACCEPTABLE:**

That, of course, is a different tune than the one he sang on April 11th.

Some must have given listeners an unintended chuckle:

He wants the junk food machines replaced with more nutritious foods.

A local teenager was heading north on Broadway when he was rear-ended by a car driven by another local man.

Most of these gaffes were caused by writers straining uncomfortably for effect; another reason why it pays to be simple and direct. Beyond that it's difficult to categorize these errors, just as it's impossible to ticket every possible violation of the rules of grammar—there are as many as there are words because there's a wrong way to use every word. The right way can usually be found with a dictionary and a grammar book. Newswriters have to be hard on their writing; others are going to be hard on it.

## 2. Dependent Words

Some words depend on other words for their meaning. This can cause trouble in broadcast news. As the words move by irretrievably, it is difficult for the listener to remember who *he* is, where *there* is and which one was *the former*.

*The latter* and *the former* should never be used—too confusing. Pronouns—*he*, *she*, *it*, *they*, etc.—should be treated as potentially confusing and used only when the antecedent is completely clear.

**WEAK:**

He told him he had only weeks to live.

**BETTER:**

The doctor told the man his father had only weeks to live.

And a pronoun should never be used if the antecedent that gives it its meaning isn't right nearby.

**WEAK:**

The mayor calls the plan a disaster. It would reduce the number of teachers at the high schools, in some cases by removing tenure. It would also increase class sizes and cut extracurricular activities. He says he's committed to fighting it.

**BETTER:**

The mayor calls the plan a disaster. It would reduce the number of teachers at the high schools, in some cases by removing tenure. The plan would also increase class sizes and cut extracurricular activities. The mayor says he's committed to fighting the proposal.

In this story, the name or description of the two characters is repeated constantly to keep their identities clear in the listener's mind. Pronouns are used only twice:

Yesterday was just "one of those days" for city police officer W-T Byers. . . Late yesterday, Officer Byers arrested a local man for driving under the influence and driving without a license. The trouble began when Officer Byers was preparing the man to take a breathalyzer test at the Rock Hill Law Center. After the man entered the breathalyzer room, he was asked to empty his pockets and take off his belt. The man complied. When asked to step into the hall for a routine frisk, the suspect reportedly began to put up a fuss. One thing led to another. Police report that the man took a couple of swings at Officer Byers. The officer took a couple of swings back at the man, and, police say, two other officers had to help subdue the man. Then, much to the dismay of all concerned, it was learned that the breathalyzer machine was not operating properly. So the man, now

handcuffed, was taken to the County Building for testing. Later Officer Byers and his prisoner returned to the Law Center for booking. The man was charged with driving without a license and assault on a police officer. By the way, police say the prisoner managed to get one last kick into the knee of the arresting officer before he was taken away.

*WRHI, South Carolina*

Pronouns aren't the only words that serve as ciphers. It's also often safer to replace *here*, *there* and *then* with the specific nouns to which they refer.

**WEAK:**

He then returned there to pick it up.

**BETTER:**

The suspect returned home later in the afternoon to pick up the gun.

Precision writing for use on the air, where the listener can't backtrack, sometimes must be overly explicit.

**3. Saying Says**

To say is the most used verb in broadcast news because saying is the activity that makes the most news.

Newswriters don't want to keep writing, "The president says . . . he says . . . his opponent says . . . the president says . . ." They look for alternatives to says, and there's no shortage of them—by one count more than 350. But each of these hundreds of verbs gives a statement a different accent.

Compare these phrases and their connotations:

- the mayor claims (there's reason for disbelief)
- the mayor reports (just giving the facts)
- the mayor declares (a forceful statement)
- the mayor mentions (offhanded)
- the mayor protests (a response to an attack)

the mayor acknowledges (an admission)  
the mayor charges (on the offensive)  
the mayor observes (just a comment)  
the mayor implies (didn't say it directly)  
the mayor demands (forceful call for action)

These verbs are not synonyms. They have their own precise meanings and can be misused.

#### UNACCEPTABLE:

The governor asserts that today will be a day of mourning. (*Asserts* is for controversial statements.)

The bill reveals that the companies would be forced to sell their holdings. (The wording of a bill is not a revelation.)

The candidate indicates that that statement is ridiculous. (*Indicates* is for hints; it is too weak for such an assertion.)

There are two ways to correct each of these sentences: One is by finding a more appropriate substitute for *says*. The other is by using *says* itself. There's a lesson here. While all these other verbs do provide a nice change of pace, *says* remains the newswriter's most valuable verb because it is so versatile. *Says* is used almost as much as these other verbs combined.

## OBJECTIVITY

When we tell stories, we tend to exaggerate. A minor scuffle can easily become a brawl since a brawl makes for a more exciting tale. Distortion? Well, our friends expect a bit of hyperbole. Similarly, in conversation we're not shy about expressing a rooting interest: "That guy deserved to get hit; he had such a mean face!"

But journalists have a different charge: to perceive and report on events for the community. They function as one of our senses, a social sense, and are entrusted with a vital political function—keeping the politicians and the people

in touch. Any distortion in the reports of these community perceivers would be frightening, as a distortion in our sight or hearing would be.

In journalism, *objectivity* simply means undistorted reporting. That's a working definition for what is, strictly speaking, an unattainable ideal. Journalists are expected to write words that are not distorted by their desire to impress or by their opinions.

### 1. Superlatives

Our language has been inflated. Fires aren't serious, they're *very* serious. Elections aren't important, they're *crucial*. Crimes are all *brutal*, rescues *daring*. Cold days are *frigid*, hot days *sweltering*. Words like *best*, *worst*, *furthest*, *largest*, *first*, *last*, *hottest*, *coldest*, and *only* are thrown around as if we were a nation of heroes. But we're not; we're a nation of *superheroes*.

Journalism *does* want to attract attention to itself. Unique or grandiose happenings intrigue listeners. And, muscular writing can help communicate the power of events. There's nothing dishonest about bringing out the drama in the news. This story, for instance, certainly doesn't mince words:

There has apparently been some deadly confusion between pilots and controllers over the years... confusion that no one knew existed until it sent a plane into the side of a mountain... Now, at the National Transportation Safety Board hearings, the officials are trying to make sure it doesn't happen again...

WINS, New York City

A dramatic introduction to a story on a hearing? Certainly, but it's all true. The confusion did cause deaths, and the plane did hit the mountain. Powerful writing is fine if the writer has the facts to back it up.

Trouble starts when the words start creeping ahead of the facts; when 24 holiday weekend traffic accidents in the state become "blood on the

streets of Georgia!"; when a store whose cash register was smashed is said to be in "shambles"; when a series of robberies becomes "fear and destruction sweeping through town!"; or when a flood downtown is written up like a disaster movie.

Words must be tightly controlled. If every fire is *very serious*, how will the really big ones be distinguished? In most parts of the country, if 80-degree days are *scorchers*, writers will be up to *fyers* and *melters* by the end of June.

Since it's virtually a sin for a journalist's language to take leave of the facts, one might call the overuse of superlatives the *worst* mistake a newswriter can make. But then there are the overgeneralizations. This clever but fallacious attempt to brighten up the usual Fourth of July story was used on the air:

Americans did not have a safe and sane Fourth of July.

All Americans??

## 2. Opinion

It's easy to call dictators *evil*, and criminals *despicable*, children *lovable*, accidents *tragic*, deaths *sad*. Most listeners would agree with these characterizations, but the point is that it is the listener's job to come to the conclusions. The journalist's job is to present the facts.

Adding subjective adjectives to writing weakens the journalist's authority as an objective observer. And, these seemingly innocuous modifiers can easily get out of hand. It's a short distance from *evil* dictators to *noble* presidents and *foolish* mayors—clear examples of editorializing. This does not mean that journalists, deprived of the opportunity to express their opinions, cannot portray events that *do* have moral content. Journalists should not *call* a spade a spade, but they certainly should *show* that a spade is a spade. If a president has committed crimes or an earthquake is unusually destructive, a balanced marshaling of the facts

should be able to demonstrate the immorality or the tragedy.

This story details allegations of an onerous crime, but the writer doesn't moralize. The facts speak for themselves:

A Chicago woman has been arrested for allegedly trying to sell her grandson. Police say the 54-year-old woman was arrested last night in her home after selling the boy to undercover youth officers for 5-thousand dollars and a 4-thousand dollar I-0-U.

WBBM, Chicago

In contrast, the use of the pejorative word *scabs* in the following sentence, which was used on the air, makes it subjective and unacceptable:

Scabs are now brewing Coors Beer in Colorado.

A word doesn't have to be emotive to be dangerously subjective. Notice how this sentence, which was used on the air, uses two adverbs to prejudice a suspect:

The man was quickly charged with driving without a license and, predictably, assault on a police officer.

The alleged speed and predictability of the charges implies that they were obvious, and, therefore, that the man was guilty.

One word that looks harmless but can be subversive is *only*.

UNACCEPTABLE:

Taxes will only go up six percent.

Let the listeners decide whether the tax increase is in fact *only* a small one.

Adverbs like *finally* or *needlessly* can also cause trouble, as can characterizations such as *hot-tempered*. Instead of writing, "The *hot-tempered* candidate *finally* answered the ques-

tion," give the facts—how often the candidate raised his voice and how long it took him to answer the question.

Except when writing a commentary or an editorial (see Chapter 14, "Radio"), a news-writer's opinions, value judgments or beliefs should never enter the copy. The only opinions in newscopy are opinions that are attributed to newsmakers.

**UNACCEPTABLE:**

The president has lost his credibility.

**ACCEPTABLE:**

The senator says the president has lost his credibility.

**UNACCEPTABLE:**

The Ku Klux Klan is out to ruin America.

**ACCEPTABLE:**

The governor has charged that the Ku Klux Klan is out to ruin America.

Newsmakers' opinions can add perspective to a story. This story leads off with a police officer's characterization:

Sawyer County Deputy Sheriff Dick Odegar calls it "one of those things you thank the upstairs for." When the car Susan Adams was driving went out of control on State Highway 77 east of Hayward this afternoon, Mrs. Adams and her 21-month-old son, Paul, were thrown from the car. The car landed directly on top of the baby, but he had landed in a snowbank and, instead of being crushed, was pushed deeper into the snow. Mrs. Adams and a passerby dug the baby out of the snow. Mrs. Adams was only slightly injured in the crash, but suffered numerous cuts and bruises trying to dig the baby out of the snow. Both are hospitalized for observation, but

officials say the baby appears to be uninjured.

*WHSM, Wisconsin*

Why are newsmakers like the deputy sheriff allowed to "thank the upstairs" when newswriters are not? Because newsmakers are active participants in the story, but newswriters must remain objective observers.

Maintaining objectivity becomes most difficult in situations where most members of a community agree. In the 1950s the *New York Times* reported a one-sided attack on homosexuals as dangerous "sex perverts." That seemed acceptable. It wasn't. Whether a newswriter's audience is conservative or liberal, it's necessary to play stories straight.

**UNACCEPTABLE:**

Another country lost! The Communist Party has won Italy's national elections.

The State Legislature came to its senses today and voted to decriminalize marijuana.

Opinion, even if it's in line with conventional wisdom, distorts the news.

### 3. Attribution

The fire was caused by two children playing with matches in the basement.

Airing a charge like this is dangerous. How can the newscaster be sure that the kids started the fire and why should listeners believe it? Two children have just been accused of seriously negligent behavior; however, newswriters are not experts on fires and their causes. If this story had been based on sound reporting, it was a fire official who pinned the blame on the children. That must be clear when the story is written. The charge must be attributed:

Fire officials say the fire was

started by two children playing with matches in the basement.

There are four reasons to attribute information:

**1. Protect the writer** Clear and honest writing demands that potentially controversial statements be attributed. This protects the writer. If it is an official's theory, let that official take responsibility for it.

UNACCEPTABLE:

The suspect had a motive for both murders.

ACCEPTABLE:

According to police, the suspect had a motive for both murders.

Of course this doesn't mean that newswriters can get themselves off the hook and use the theory of any crank on the street. They are always responsible for the reliability of their sources, and attributing statements does not lessen this responsibility.

UNACCEPTABLE:

According to bystanders, the suspect had a motive for both murders.

**2. Opinion** Anything that smacks of opinion must be attributed.

UNACCEPTABLE:

The streets are no longer safe.

ACCEPTABLE:

The mayor says the streets are no longer safe.

Here the newswriter is protecting a reputation as an unbiased observer.

**3. Protect newsmakers** But perhaps the most important function of attribution is to protect the people mentioned in the news, specifi-

cally the presumed innocent. It must be clear in objective writing that charges against suspects or defendants are only allegations. Reports of potentially criminal behavior must never be treated as established fact until the judicial system has had its say.

UNACCEPTABLE:

The suspect shot him.

ACCEPTABLE:

The suspect allegedly shot him.

The word *allegedly* does this job so effectively that it tends to get overused. Since it does imply that *criminal* behavior is being alleged, the word shouldn't be wasted on less serious matters.

UNACCEPTABLE:

It allegedly will rain tonight.

And it should be remembered that there are other ways to indicate that a charge is an allegation besides the use of the word *allegedly*.

ACCEPTABLE:

Police say the suspect shot him.

The suspect is accused of shooting him.

According to police, the suspect shot him.

The suspect is charged with shooting him.

Although peppering a story with *allegedly* and *police say* may slow down the writing a bit, this obligation to protect suspects' rights should never be overlooked.

A three-month-old Houston boy is dead. His babysitter allegedly wanted to teach the infant's mother a lesson about staying home and caring for her child. According to Houston police juvenile division officer W-C White, the baby had

been sprayed with insecticide...in the face!

*KENR, Houston*

According to the investigating officer, neither the cycle's driver nor his passenger was wearing a motorcycle helmet.

*WRKD, Maine*

**4. Add authority** Attribution also should be used when it's necessary to lend authority to charges; when a writer wants to show that it's not just a radio journalist who has come up with this theory, but that officials, trained to make such determinations, feel this way.

UNACCEPTABLE:

The two murders were not connected.

ACCEPTABLE:

Police say the two murders were not connected.

Here are some examples of the use of attribution for authority:

Police theorize the bodies may have been dumped at the site at 116th and Crandon by a garbage truck.

*WBBM, Chicago*

Bureau of Land Management spokesman Phil Jimenez says thundershowers yesterday afternoon helped put out the flames.

*KREX, Colorado*

Since newswriters are not inside the minds of the newsmakers, statements about people's state of mind, their feelings and beliefs, should be attributed for authority.

WEAK:

Major Lincoln Upton doesn't believe the unhappy employees represent a majority.

BETTER:

Major Lincoln Upton says he doesn't believe the unhappy employees represent a majority.

*KOA, Denver*

Only when people's statements or behavior make their mental state obvious can the attribution be omitted.

The lawyer for a group of Salvation Army Employees hopes to have a new bargaining unit formed by that group CERTIFIED by the National Labor Relations Board.

*KOA, Denver*

. . .

Most facts that make it into the news have a source; therefore it would be possible to use attribution in almost every sentence in broadcast news. Overdoing the attribution—"according to local officials a festival was held in the park today"—would make the copy sound pedantic. Facts that are independently verifiable—such events as arrests, court verdicts, scores, votes—do not need attributing.

UNACCEPTABLE:

According to police, the suspect was arrested.

ACCEPTABLE:

The suspect was arrested.

Of course, if the fact is not clear or is potentially a matter of debate the attribution must return.

UNACCEPTABLE:

The suspect was arrested carrying the murder weapon.

ACCEPTABLE:

According to police, the suspect was arrested carrying the murder weapon.

Broadcast writers generally use less attribution than newspaper reporters because they don't attribute facts that aren't potentially controversial

or suspect. Frequent interjections for the sake of unnecessary attribution would destroy the conversational flavor of the news.

**WEAK:**

The mayor says he will hold a press conference this afternoon.

**BETTER:**

The mayor will hold a press conference this afternoon.

Unless the mayor has a reputation as a compulsive liar, there's nothing suspect about this announcement; no need to protect the writer or add authority to the statement.

**WEAK:**

According to police, the driver escaped with only minor injuries, and fire officials say they put out the fire.

**BETTER:**

The driver escaped with minor injuries, and firemen put out the fire.

*WPDM, New York*

Sentences are clearest when the attribution is placed at the start of the sentence.

**UNACCEPTABLE:**

The world will end tomorrow, according to a mystic in the Mohave desert.

**ACCEPTABLE:**

According to a mystic in the Mohave desert, the world will end tomorrow.

Attribution prepares listeners for the statement; it tells them whose theory they are about to hear. It may confuse them to wait until the end of the sentence to find out who said it. Since broadcast news can't be reread, newswriters can't fiddle with this logical order: who is talking, then what was said—*attribution*, then *statement*. Another reason to place the attribution first is that sentences don't read smoothly when it hangs at the end.

**UNACCEPTABLE:**

A cut in taxes is the only way to solve the state's problems, the Chamber of Commerce claims.

Sticking attribution in the middle of a sentence doesn't work well either.

**WEAK:**

A cut in taxes, the Chamber of Commerce claims, is the only way to solve the state's problems.

**BETTER:**

The Chamber of Commerce claims a cut in taxes is the only way to solve the state's problems.

---

## **SUMMARY**

Writers must stay in control. They cannot allow every seductive phrase that comes into their heads to spill out of their typewriters. All potential broadcast news sentences must be evaluated.

Do they mean precisely what the story means? Do they tell the story straight, without exaggeration or bias? Has controversial material been properly attributed?

## PRACTICE ASSIGNMENTS

---

A. Rewrite the following sentences in broadcast style.

1. Anarchy and chaos reign in Cambodia . . . where mounting tension followed the explosion of a bomb yesterday afternoon.
2. The Mississippi River dealt a slap in the face to Oxford, Mississippi, last night when it toppled the proud little town's dikes.
3. The mayor and the governor skipped off to Washington today, although the latter says he won't stay there too long.
4. Cambridge police finally grabbed twelve teenagers for drug possession today, but they say they won't be arraigned until tomorrow.
5. England's prime minister and France's president will come here for a ten-day tour after the European summit and then return there.
6. The Labor Department claims the Consumer Price Index shot up point one percent this month.
7. The Weather Bureau has acknowledged that this was the very hottest Labor Day since 1935.
8. Vietnam predictably charged China with border violations today, and observed that it will retaliate.
9. Only 12 percent of the state's budget has been allocated for public transportation.
10. The woman's sister disappeared last week two blocks from her school and she's been searching for her ever since.
11. Cleveland residents are unhappy about a two percent rise in their real estate taxes. A group of 25 people protested the tax hike in front of City Hall yesterday.
12. Two innocent people died today in a downtown fire . . . the result of arson.
13. Nicaraguan revolutionaries continued their cam-

paign of terror today with the seizure of two more large towns.

14. New Jersey's wishy-washy governor isn't sure if casino gambling really is such a good idea.
15. Court clerk John Houston says the Jerry Nolan murder trial will begin next Monday morning.
16. Police say there was a tiny anti-nuclear demonstration in front of the Evanstown Utility Company this morning.
17. Democratic candidate John Losey will enter the New Hampshire primary, according to his campaign manager.
18. The Independence Party supposedly more than doubled its membership last year, according to the party's chairman, Al Olsen.
19. Italy's feared Communist Party has a good chance to win a slew of seats in this month's Parliamentary elections.
20. A Newark bank official has been placed under an embezzlement charge today. He robbed his own bank by affecting the books.

B. All the information in the following story is from the police. Rewrite the story, placing proper attribution where necessary.

A former bank teller has been charged with the robbery of the First National Bank yesterday. Most of the 50-thousand dollars taken from the bank were found in his home. The former teller -- Peter Taylor -- was fired by the bank's president two months ago. Taylor entered the bank armed with a shotgun yesterday and left with a briefcase stuffed with thousand-dollar bills. One of the bank employees recognized Taylor and notified police. Taylor was arrested at his home at 27-27 Midlands Avenue this afternoon.

# 4

---

## SENTENCES

When sentences meander, so does listeners' attention. This wandering sentence was used on the air:

The City Planning Commission met this afternoon at City Hall and decided...by unanimous vote...to recommend to the City Council an amendment to a city ordinance which would...by special exception...allow restaurants to serve liquor in areas currently zoned C-2.

The listeners probably got lost somewhere between the "unanimous vote" and the "special exception."

Most broadcast news stories aren't long enough to rely on paragraphs. Some writers indicate paragraphs; many don't bother. Sentences are the major unit of organization within stories, so much of the responsibility for keeping the news clear and concise falls on them. Good broadcast news writing is always characterized by tight, lucid sentences:

Hoboken teachers came close to reaching agreement with the city

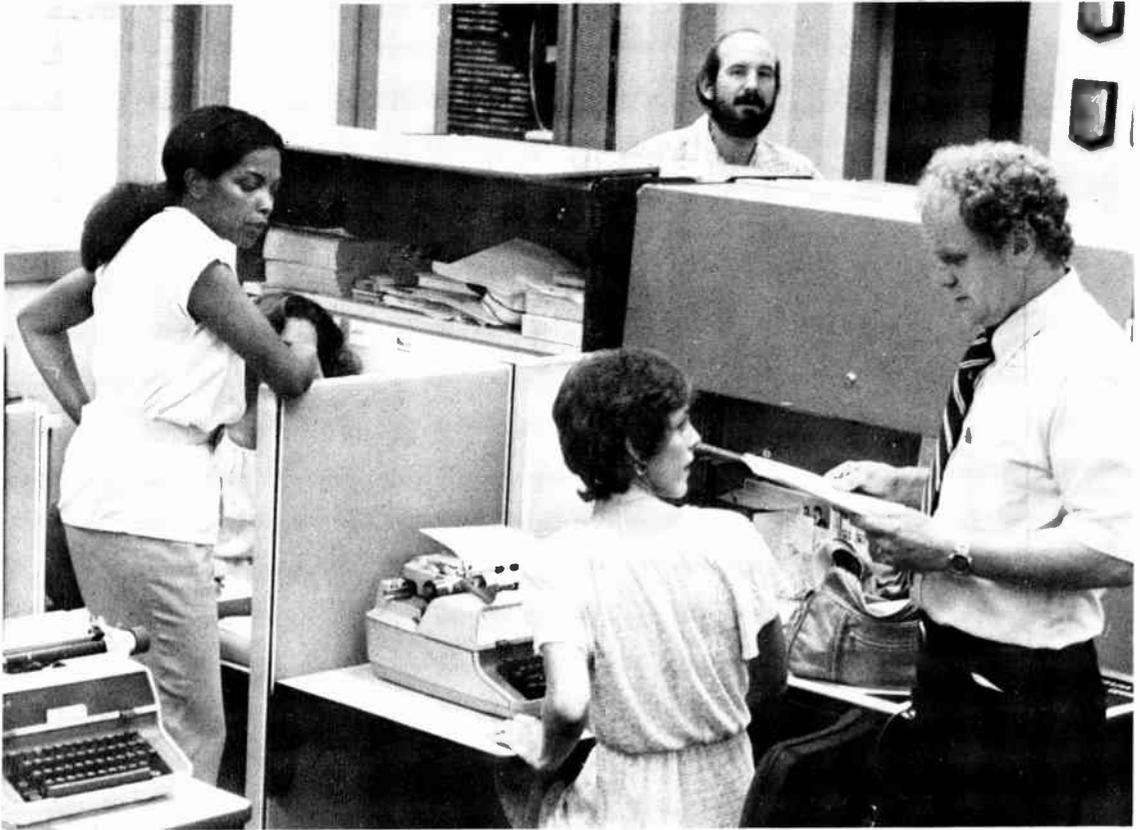
school board last night, but apparently not close enough. After two and a half hours of talks, a near-settlement was reached, but the deal fell through. The union blames the board, saying it's refused to promise amnesty to striking teachers.

*WINS, New York City*

### CLARITY

Hughes Rudd of ABC News says that sometimes after reading a particularly confusing story on the air he's tempted to read it a second time for listeners. Tempted, but he's never done it. Listeners get one chance to understand. This is one of the major differences between print and broadcast journalism. If a sentence confuses newspaper, magazine or book readers, they can simply read it again. If their attention wanders in the middle of a paragraph, they can read that paragraph again.

But broadcast news must work the first time through, and that places a number of special demands on broadcast newswriters. Perhaps the



At WSB, Atlanta, the news director discusses assignments with newswriters. (WSB, Atlanta)

most pressing is the need to make their writing extra clear. All journalism must be clear; broadcast news must be especially clear so that it makes sense without repetition and helps listeners focus their attention.

### 1. Simplicity

This sentence from the *New York Times* would make a good reading comprehension test:

After nearly 18 months of difficult and slow-moving talks, the representatives of the world's rich and poor nations appeared to be approaching agreement early today on a limited international program intended to help the developing world, but a deadlock over plans to make increases in the price of oil more difficult threatened to sour relations between the two blocs.

The sentence is grammatically correct. It makes sense. The problem is that most readers would have to read it a couple of times to figure out what it says. Look at the number of ideas stuffed into one sentence:

1. The talks have lasted 18 months.
2. They've been difficult and slow moving.
3. The talks include representatives of the world's rich and poor nations.
4. They appear to be approaching agreement on a limited international program to help the developing world.
5. The nations are deadlocked on a plan to make increases in the price of oil more difficult.
6. The deadlock threatens to sour relations between rich and poor countries.

Six ideas in one sentence; that's why it takes a couple of readings to understand. Sentences this complex can never be used in broadcast news. A good guideline: one, or at the most two, ideas per sentence.

This is how the sentence might be rewritten for broadcast:

There was some progress and some bad feeling in Paris today as representatives of the world's rich and poor nations met. They are moving closer to agreement on a plan which would provide some help to developing countries. But a proposal to control oil price increases is getting nowhere and causing tension. These talks have been going on for almost a year and a half.

This uses only five more words than the *Times*' version, but contains three more sentences—each making one or two simple points.

Simple sentences make for clear copy. Broadcast newswriters must discover simple ways to communicate the often complex thoughts that make up the news. This doesn't mean their writing has to be pedestrian. Newswriters have to be sophisticated enough to transform subtle and often involved concepts into direct, understandable language—a challenging assignment to say the least. There's nothing simple about writing simply. Here are two rules:

**1. Divide** Take a complex sentence and break it down into a few simple sentences:

**WEAK:**

Strong citizen pressure against continued showing of X-rated films at the Whitehall Drive-In has apparently convinced Whitehall, New York, officials to consider an ordinance to control pornography.

**BETTER:**

Whitehall, New York, officials are considering an ordinance to control

pornography. The effort is apparently the result of strong citizen pressure against continued showing of X-rated films at the Whitehall Drive-In.

*WSYB, Vermont*

**WEAK:**

On the fifth day of fighting between Libya and Egypt, Libya is claiming it shot down eight Egyptian planes as they attacked in waves across the desert, while military spokesmen in Cairo deny that there were any raids today, terming Libya's charges a pack of lies.

**BETTER:**

Libya says it shot down eight Egyptian planes today...as they attacked in waves across the desert. Military spokesmen in Cairo say there were no raids...and term Libya's charges...a pack of lies. The conflicting reports come on the fifth day of fighting between the two nations.

*KENO, Las Vegas*

**2. Abandon** Some facts confuse more than they elucidate. To keep a sentence simple and clear, abandon these nonessential facts. Facts that might be used by a newspaper—the exact charges in an indictment, the history of an event, a description of the circumstances—must often be cut to pare down sentences. A lean sentence minus a couple of interesting but unnecessary facts is better than a plodding sentence that can't effectively communicate any facts.

**UNACCEPTABLE:**

The Transport Workers Union agreed last night to "stop the clock" and continue negotiations in an effort to avert a strike, originally set for six this morning, that would have stranded two and a half million weekday bus and subway riders in the

---

**CLARITY**

49

metropolitan area and disrupted the life of the city.

**ACCEPTABLE:**

No subway and bus strike yet. The Transport Workers Union last night agreed to "stop the clock" and keep negotiating.

**2. Interjections and Clauses**

Newspaper writers often break up their sentences with long interjections or explanatory clauses, as in this example from the *New York Times*:

The mediators, *Josine Soumokilx, 64 years old, and Dr. Jassaon Tan, 56, both of whom are highly regarded members of the Moluccan community,* boarded the train at 2 p.m. local time, and *after nearly three hours of talks with the kidnapers* sent word that they were staying for dinner with them.

Clauses and long interjections usually cause difficulty in broadcast news; they lead to complex sentence structures that listeners cannot follow. They are especially troublesome when inserted in the middle of a sentence. Notice the distance between the subject, "the mediators," and the verbs, "boarded . . . and sent word," in the above example. If such a sentence were used on the air, listeners might forget the subject by the time the verbs arrived.

Never separate the subject and verb in a sentence with long interjections.

**UNACCEPTABLE:**

The eleventh annual Trivia Bowl, in which 48 teams are competing for championship T-shirts and the chance to have their names engraved on a trophy, is underway on the C-U campus in Boulder.

**ACCEPTABLE:**

The eleventh annual Trivia Bowl is underway on the C-U campus in Boulder. 48 teams are competing for championship T-shirts and the chance

to have their names engraved on a trophy.

KOA, Denver

**UNACCEPTABLE:**

In yesterday's Cherokee County election a measure that would replace the five-person county commission with a one-man commission was approved by voters.

**ACCEPTABLE:**

Voters in Cherokee County have ousted their five-person county commission. . . . It'll be replaced by a ONE-man commission.

WSB, Atlanta

A clause does less damage to the clarity of a sentence when used at the beginning or end of the sentence.

**UNACCEPTABLE:**

The suspect, after consultations with his two court-appointed lawyers, pleaded guilty.

**ACCEPTABLE:**

After consultations with his two court-appointed lawyers, the suspect pleaded guilty.

The suspect pleaded guilty after consultations with his two court-appointed lawyers.

But it often is safest to give the clause a sentence of its own:

**ACCEPTABLE:**

The suspect consulted with his two court-appointed lawyers. He then pleaded guilty.

Broadcast newswriters must constantly monitor the distance between the subject and verb in their sentences and they must watch that the *when's*, *while's*, *who's*, explanations and descriptions aren't tangling up their sentences. Too many interruptions tend to make writing confus-

ing. More than one a sentence is usually too many.

### 3. Names and Titles

An awkward phrasing:

Dr. Alvin M. Weinberg, director of the Energy Analysis Institute of the Oak Ridge Associated Universities, says...

Formal names and titles are rarely used in conversation and should rarely be used in broadcast news. Here are the rules for referring to people in copy:

**1. Shorten names** Broadcast journalists start by forgetting the middle initial. With the exception of a few celebrities like Howard K. Smith, initials add nothing but formality to a name. It's Henry Kissinger, not Henry A. Kissinger. Alvin Weinberg, not Alvin M. Weinberg.

Other addenda to the basic name can also be chopped off. Joseph A. Califano Junior becomes Joseph Califano on the air. There's no chance of confusing him with Joseph Califano Senior. Similarly, it's Joseph Kennedy, not Joseph Kennedy the Third.

**2. Nicknames** James Earl Carter Junior was kind to broadcast journalists. Not only did he keep his middle name and the "Junior" off the ballot; he gave himself a nice conversational nickname: "Jimmy." If a person is commonly and courteously referred to by a nickname—Chip Carter, Miz Lillian, Tip O'Neill—then it's appropriate to use the nickname on the air. But nicknames shouldn't be invented—Rosalynn Carter cannot be called "Rose."

**3. First usage** The first time a name is used it must clearly identify the person. Usually this requires presenting both the first and last names, whether the person is well known—Ralph Nader, Jane Fonda, Ronald Reagan—or just a

visitor to the news—George Willig, Emily Harris, Alvin Weinberg.

UNACCEPTABLE:

A San Francisco man, Sipple, was credited with saving the president's life.

ACCEPTABLE:

A San Francisco man, Oliver Sipple, was credited with saving the president's life.

However, if a person is very well known and has a title, often the last name and the title are sufficient to pin down the person's identity—President Carter, former President Nixon, Secretary of State Vance.

WEAK:

Egyptian President Anwar Sadat is in Washington.

BETTER:

Egyptian President Sadat is in Washington.

But *only* if they're very well known.

UNACCEPTABLE:

Dutch Prime Minister Agt will arrive next week.

ACCEPTABLE:

Dutch Prime Minister Andreas van Agt will arrive next week.

**4. Second usage** Once a person has been introduced in a story, the last name or the title alone are all that's needed: "Nader also said..." or "The Dutch leader plans..." First names alone would be too *informal*.

UNACCEPTABLE:

Tom also lost that election.

ACCEPTABLE:

Hayden also lost that election.

And titles of address—Mr., Mrs., Miss, Ms.—are too *formal*. Many stations reserve them for just one person—the president. Most stations won't even use *Mr.* for the president. *Doctor* should be used only when the person's authority as a scientist or a physician are part of the story. It's Dr. Salk, not Dr. Kissinger; and on many stations, Ms., Mrs. or Miss only if there's a danger of confusing the woman with a man with the same last name.

**5. Omitting names** An unknown name is like an obscure word—it can confuse. Often a title or description is all the information needed about a person. For example, in a short item about Latin American reaction to a projected program it is sufficient to write, "Costa Rica's president attacked the plan." No need for his name. Similarly, the name of a victim or a suspect in a crime in another city is usually unnecessary. "A middle-aged woman was injured" is fine. However, in local stories names *are* important. Listeners will want to know which middle-aged woman was injured—perhaps they know her.

**6. Titles** Alvin Weinberg's title, in the example that began this section, is much too long and unwieldy for broadcast news. "Director of the Energy Analysis Institute of the Oak Ridge Associated Universities" has enough words that are irrelevant to the point of the story to cause even the most attentive mind to wander.

Long titles can be shortened. This often requires abandoning the formal title completely. It's not necessary for listeners to learn exactly how Weinberg's business card reads. It is sufficient to call him "a local energy expert" or "an energy expert at a local university" or just "a physicist" or "a scientist." Which one is chosen depends on Weinberg's role in the story.

WEAK:

Black Panther Party Vice-Chairman  
Huey Newton

BETTER:

Black Panther Party leader Huey  
Newton

UNACCEPTABLE:

The Chairman of the New York and New Jersey Bistate Commission to End Pollution of Coastal Waters, New Jersey Assemblyman Anthony Villane of Long Branch

ACCEPTABLE:

A New Jersey assemblyman who chairs a bistate water commission, Anthony Villane

Also, the words in a title should be arranged so that they read smoothly.

WEAK:

National Security Adviser to the President Zbigniew Brzezinski

BETTER:

The president's national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski

**7. Titles first** When using a title and a name in the same sentence, put the title first.

WEAK:

Alvin Weinberg, a local energy expert, says...

BETTER:

A local energy expert, Alvin Weinberg, says...

Why? Because a title is an explanation for a name; it tells us who Weinberg is. Were the name to come first, we might be momentarily confused by it.

Sentences also flow more smoothly with the title first.

WEAK:

John Mitchell, the former attorney general, also was there.

BETTER:

Former Attorney General John Mitchell also was there.

#### 4. Quotes

Comedian Victor Borge once put together a routine in which he made a sound and a gesture for each punctuation mark in his monologue. Every time he reached quotation marks he'd say, "tswit, tswit," while waving two fingers of each hand in the air. Newscasters, however, have never been willing to do this. They will pause for a dash, comma or period and put a quizzical tone in their voices for question marks, but there is little likelihood that they will say "tswit, tswit" for every set of quotation marks.

This "timidity" on the part of newscasters leaves writers with a serious clarity problem. There is no way they can let their listeners know that there are quotation marks around that statement by the governor, even if it is important to know that those were the governor's exact words. Quotation marks lose most of their meaning on the air. All they do is encourage the newscaster to pause, which may be enough if it's not important that listeners know it's a direct quote:

The caller warned the clerk to "get everybody out of there!"

*KODY, Nebraska*

But, when it must be clear that it's a direct quote, that those are the exact words, a pause is not sufficient. The governor's exact words were: "The whole bunch of them is corrupt!" How can those words best be communicated to listeners?

By far the best solution is to get the words on tape (see Chapter 10, "Tape")—but often no tape is available. Then the simplest solution is to paraphrase:

The governor charges that the senators who oppose her plan are corrupt.

If they're not on tape, direct quotes are relatively rare on the air. Most statements are paraphrased:

Former Secretary of State Dean Rusk says any lasting settlement in the

Middle East will have to be worked out by leaders of that region...and not imposed by Washington.

*WSB, Atlanta*

Cook County Clerk Stanley Kusper is telling reporters just how much more in taxes some Chicagoans will have to pay because of a new property tax. Kusper called a news conference this morning to say the increase will be less than one percent.

*WBBM, Chicago*

Skeet appeared before the commission asking that he be allowed to retain his job, and said that he would not resign.

*KLWN, Kansas*

Sometimes, however, the exact wording of a statement that isn't available on tape is news in itself. The actual quote can be controversial, colorful or revealing. In these situations listeners must be informed that it's a direct quote, and therefore it is necessary to replace those silent quotation marks with something audible—words.

A classic example of a spot where a paraphrase just wouldn't do is when then President Richard Nixon exclaimed, "I am not a crook!" Paraphrased, the statement loses the incongruity and inappropriateness of language that makes it interesting:

The president says that he isn't a criminal.

The most obvious way to make clear that this is a quote would be to write the word *quote* at the start and *unquote* at the end:

The president said -- quote -- I am not a crook -- unquote.

Or:

The president said -- and we quote -- I am not a crook -- end of quotation.

However, while actually using the word *quote* is clear, it certainly is not conversational. This heavy-handed device has become antiquated. There are more subtle and less formal alternatives. All these more conversational phrases inform listeners that they are about to hear a direct quote:

He put it this way . . .  
She used these words . . .  
The governor's exact words were . . .  
As he put it . . .  
With this dramatic phrase . . .  
. . . what she called . . .  
These are the union leader's words . . .  
As she expressed it . . .  
To use his words . . .  
In the words of . . .

So Nixon's awkward defense could be written:

The president's exact words were . . .  
"I am not a crook!"

Here are some additional examples:

As the principal of North High School put it, "If on the night we play Salisbury we have a rainy night, we've had it."

*WRBX, North Carolina*

The mayor called the head of the Chamber of Commerce . . . in his words . . .  
"a professional fanny-kisser."

*WTLB, New York*

The president of Toccoa Falls College, Dr. Kenn Opperman, has resigned in what's called a "mutual agreement with the board of trustees."

*WSB, Atlanta*

Even with the use of these clarifying phrases, a direct quote is uncomfortable in broadcast news.

Direct quotes require that the newscaster briefly act the part of someone else.

**NEWSCASTER AS NEWSCASTER:**

As the demonstration's leader expressed it . . .

**NEWSCASTER IMPERSONATING LEADER:**

"We're not going to stand for this any more!"

That switch in roles may confuse the listener. It can be especially disconcerting when the direct quote uses the first person.

**WEAK:**

To use the words of the demonstration's leader . . . "We've had enough."

It almost sounds as though the newscaster has had enough. A paraphrase is, therefore, clearer.

**BETTER:**

One demonstrator shouted that she had had enough.

Once a direct quote gets longer than a phrase or two, it can become thoroughly confusing.

**UNACCEPTABLE:**

The union leader's exact words were . . . "A breakdown in talks has left us with no alternative but to close the plants. I have instructed all members to stay home tomorrow. We're on strike! And this strike could last weeks."

Placing more clarifying phrases in a long quote makes it clearer but still a bit stiff.

**WEAK:**

The union leader's exact words were . . . "A breakdown in talks has left us with no alternative but to close the plant." As he put it . . . "I have instructed all members to stay home

tomorrow. We're on strike!" Then he used these words..."This strike could last weeks."

The solution—always paraphrase long quotes.

#### BETTER:

The union leader said that a breakdown in talks had left workers with no alternative but to close the plants. All members have been instructed to stay home tomorrow. The union leader says the strike could last weeks.

Use a direct quote only when it's neat, compact and the wording is exceptional. Otherwise, paraphrase.

#### WEAK:

The councilman's exact words were... "I have decided to run for re-election."

#### BETTER:

The councilman says that he has decided to run for re-election.

## CONCISENESS

Great writing often comes not only in simple, but in short sentences:

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light; and there was light.

There are no wasted words in this passage from the Bible; no rambling sentences. Broadcast news may not achieve this poetry, but it must strive for this clarity and conciseness.

We've noted that long sentences are tough for the ear to follow, but they have two other drawbacks: wordiness wastes time; and long sen-

tences are hard to read smoothly on the air. Try reading this sentence from the *New York Times* aloud:

The White House spokesman, Jody Powell, said today that if the Soviet Union was willing to undertake "serious negotiations" on limitation of strategic nuclear weapons, the United States "can make changes" in plans to deploy a more accurate intercontinental missile warhead capable of destroying more Soviet missiles in their launching silos.

If a sentence this long were used on the air, the newscaster would be forced to pause for breath in the middle of phrases, which would further confuse listeners.

How long should a broadcast news sentence be? It depends on how many pauses there are in it and how good the newscaster's lungs are. But most broadcast journalists warn that when a sentence stretches more than two, or at the most three, lines of copy—it's trouble. A sentence that long will probably be difficult to say and difficult to understand.

### 1. Pauses

Newscasters have different lung capacities, but all of them need to take a breath once in a while. So a newscaster reading copy that lacks a place for a natural pause is either going to add an unnatural pause or turn blue. Here's what can happen to writing that leaves no room for breathing:

Groundbreaking and dedication ceremonies were held in the rain earlier today for a new theatre (pause) to house works produced by the County Art and Dramatic Society's (pause) summer stock resident company.

Such inappropriate pauses interfere with the flow of words and, therefore, can confuse.

Most newscasters get hungry for air every 20 syllables or so. If a sentence is that short, the period or question mark will provide the oppor-

tunity to inhale. Otherwise a dash, ellipsis, or comma should be written into the copy to make sure that the newscaster pauses where it suits the sentence construction, not in the middle of a phrase.

This story never goes longer than 19 syllables without giving the newscaster a break:

Could it be? Is it possible? Right here in Virginia? Well, Rupert Williamson thinks so...Williamson has found footprints in his strawberry patch in Dinwiddie County...Size 25 triple-D footprints to be exact. The sheriff's department thinks it's a prank...Williamson says one of his neighbors is so scared he can't sleep. The bigfoot has been seen all over the world...Some places it's called Sasquatch, Yeti, and in Arkansas the Boggy Creek Monster. Maybe it's just a case of Kilroy was here, updated. Convince Rupert Williamson.

*WROV, Virginia*

And notice how clearly the pauses are indicated in this story. The newscaster is never asked to read more than 20 syllables between commas or ellipses.

Another one of those smoking-in-bed tragedies...The victim this time a 75-year-old woman...Firemen were able to rescue Edith Mordey's 85-year-old husband, and he was hospitalized with smoke inhalation and chest pains...but it was too late for the woman...The fire was confined to the first-floor bedroom of the two-story home...The second floor apartment was vacant...The building's located at 91-06 143rd Street...in Jamaica, Queens.

*WINS, New York City*

Not all broadcast news is quite this terse, but it can never be much more longwinded, because newscasters do not have that much wind.

## 2. The Point

Broadcast journalists should never have to be told to get to the point; they should already be there. Their sentences should provide the shortest possible route to the meaning of a story.

Earlier in this chapter the need to divide sentences and abandon ideas of little import was discussed, but there's another method of keeping sentences trim—conserving words.

Some linguists maintain that less than 50 percent of the words we use actually convey meaning. The rest, they say, are merely used for style or to satisfy conventions. The broadcast journalist's goal should be to make the percentage of words in a sentence that make the point as high as possible.

### UNACCEPTABLE:

There are about 30 different states that have inserted provisions in their state constitutions allowing initiative, recall and referenda. Indiana is one of the states that does not have such a provision in its constitution.

### ACCEPTABLE:

Some 30 states have provisions in their constitutions allowing for initiative, recall and referenda. Indiana does not.

*WNAP, Indiana*

This phrase, used on the air, says in five words what could have been said just as accurately in three:

A rate increase in rents...

Every word that doesn't help make the point should be pruned. And some words must be watched particularly closely. They have a reputation for leading sentences astray:

**1. Detours** These words detour sentences because they are so imprecise. *Involved*, for example, merely hints at a relationship. Other

words must be wasted to tie down the loose ends  
this word leaves.

**UNACCEPTABLE:**

They were involved in a move to  
unseat him.

**ACCEPTABLE:**

They tried to unseat him.

*Involved* is often an ambiguous substitute for  
clearer phrasings. This suggestive sentence, used  
on the air, provides an exaggerated example of  
the problem:

He was taken to a local hospital for  
treatment of head and facial injuries  
after his vehicle was involved with  
another car....

Here are some other examples of detour  
words and phrases:

**WEAK:**

The expressway is experiencing  
a delay.

**BETTER:**

Traffic is delayed on the expressway.

**WEAK:**

The money represents one quarter of  
the funding they will need.

**BETTER:**

That's one quarter of the money  
they'll need.

**WEAK:**

He succeeded in escaping

**BETTER:**

He escaped.

**WEAK:**

The bill was delayed due to the  
opposition of one of the council  
members.

**BETTER:**

One of the council members delayed  
the bill.

**WEAK:**

That was the first proposal  
concerning a health center.

**BETTER:**

That was the first proposal for a  
health center.

**2. Redundancy** Overstating also clogs sen-  
tences with useless words. It's not enough to set  
a record; people are said to have set *new* re-  
cords, as if it were possible to set an old record.  
Similarly, surprises have become *unexpected*  
surprises, though you have to be pretty sharp to  
expect your surprises.

Redundancy blunts writing and wastes time on  
the air. See if all these words don't get the point  
across just as clearly without their modifiers:

over-exaggerate	quite depressing
completely destroy	final conclusion
general consensus	complete stop
total annihilation	honest truth
personal feelings	positively identify
brief minute	strictly prohibit

Obvious adjectives or adverbs are not the only  
form of redundancy. Often words seduce us into  
believing that they are adding meaning when in  
fact they are only wasting time. For example,  
"this nation's Greek-Americans" is just as clear  
without the "this nation's."

**3. Wasteful phrases** Our language is full of  
phrases that substitute a few words for one word.  
Newswriters try to avoid them.

<b>WORDY</b>	<b>CONCISE</b>
in an effort to	to
in order to	to
for the purpose of	to
at the present time	now
at this point in time	now
at that point in time	then

---

**CONCISENESS**

in the near future	soon
having to do with	about
with reference to	about
due to the fact that	because
along the lines of	like
in the event that	if
with the exception of	except
was the recipient of	received
is of the opinion that	believes
venture a suggestion	suggest
take action	act

There may be occasions when it is desirable to elaborate somewhat; to use a longer phrase. Succinctness is not the only goal, and a longer phrase may improve the pacing of a sentence or help emphasize a point. But, it's important not to fall into these phrases ignorantly. First look for the concise way to make the point.

### 3. Grammar

This sentence is concise:

No abortion clinic for Melbourne.  
*WMEL, Florida*

But is it a sentence? It doesn't even have a verb.

Sentences or not, such shorthand constructions are used frequently in broadcast news, in stories as well as in headlines (see Chapter 13, "Newscasts").

Some disagreement at the City Council meeting last night.  
*WADA, North Carolina*

Winter in May. The area received four inches of snow today.  
*WARA, Massachusetts*

Two dead in weekend traffic accidents.  
*KWTX, Texas*

Another highjacking in progress at this hour.  
*WKVT, Vermont*

Broadcast newswriters choose to violate the

rules of formal grammar and use these technically incomplete sentences because they save words, and their staccato rhythm gives writing punch:

Heavy action on the stock market...  
some pickup in car sales...  
*WINS, New York City*

This style can be overused. As Lynn Woolley at KRLD, Dallas, says, "It's still nice to have a noun, verb and the whole works." Some news directors won't accept any fudging at all with the rules of grammar, but most will buy it—if the result is clear and conversational.

Beginners have a tendency to exaggerate this style and write so concisely that their writing sounds like newspaper headlines.

UNACCEPTABLE:

Intellectuals appeal to Soviets to free dissidents...Administration silent.

This is so compact that it isn't remotely conversational. Even if a sentence is not complete, it must flow and be understandable.

UNACCEPTABLE:

Four percent police, fire and city employee raise approved last night.

ACCEPTABLE:

Final approval given last night to a four percent raise for police, firemen and other city employees.  
*WAZY, Indiana*

Another danger is that newswriters will use the license to occasionally stretch the rules of grammar as an excuse for sloppiness or revenge on high school English teachers.

Misuse of the language is never acceptable in broadcast news. These unfortunate examples found their way onto the air.

*The pronoun that doesn't agree:* Quite a number of Ohio farmers are plowing up

strands of winter wheat and planting soybeans in its place.

*The verb that doesn't agree:* Ford's finding of bombs in a county mine were at first taken as an act of heroism.

*The dangling modifier, or worse:* Extortion notes have been sent to two companies in addition to the three that received the letter bombs in the mail, demanding money or else more bombs will be sent.

The Cinema X theater has been convicted of shipping obscene films across state lines, stemming from the showing of Deep Throat in 1973.

The lesson? Know the language. Grammar can be learned after high school. If there's a problem, a good grammar book is the place to start. Marching naively into the realms of grammatical freedom in search of conciseness can lead to convoluted sentences and embarrassment.



Novelist Isaac Bashevis Singer has said that the wastepaper basket is the writer's best friend. Broadcast writers seldom have time to crumple pages and start again, but in their search for ef-

fective sentences they discard a lot of useless words and awkward phrasings. Broadcast sentences must be cleaned, trimmed and polished until they are clear and to the point.

## PRACTICE ASSIGNMENTS

Rewrite the following sentences in broadcast style.

1. Israel's prime minister said today that if an Arab administrative council to be set up in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip under a proposed autonomy plan proclaimed a Palestinian state, its members would be promptly arrested and the Israeli military government brought back.
2. Voters in the state will decide whether to approve a proposition that would involve a drastic cut in property taxes.
3. A campaign contribution by Roland S. Savoy to a member of the State Senate panel that for the past seven weeks has been considering his nomination as correctional services commissioner appeared today to put his already-troubled nomination in jeopardy.
4. Responding to attacks and criticism by the Administration, the oil industry insisted today that their profits are not overly excessive.
5. The mayor went to Washington for the purpose of fighting the proposal and told the committee, "We don't like the idea one bit."
6. John Stark, Democratic senator from Wisconsin, says that, before introducing his revenue sharing resolution onto the floor of the House of Representatives next Monday afternoon, he will consult privately with the Republican leadership.
7. I-C-C allows price hike in move to stem truck slowdowns.
8. France says it will cooperate "in economics, in culture and in education" with other European countries, "but militarily, no."
9. He began initiating the senior citizens program in an effort to improve and upgrade their lives.
10. Auto makers say profits not too high.
11. The 15-year-old boy, who was a sophomore at Oak Ridge High School, said he spent most of his time practicing for the homecoming game, which would have been held next weekend.
12. The decision to establish a senate is a concession to the king's critics, but it's not certain just how the senate will be chosen to assure participation from representatives of the many groups which make up the country's opposition.
13. Jane Rose, associate commissioner of the State

## PRACTICE ASSIGNMENTS

Energy Commission, has called for a halt to the building of nuclear reactors.

14. Assistant Commissioner of General Social Services and Income Maintenance Eric Falk says the welfare rolls are increasing.
15. Mrs. Jane Adamson, Ridgedale's town alderman for the last 13 years, says she won't run for reelection.
16. In the words of a leading communications expert—Dr. Henry Green—"TV is the new industrial-corporate religion . . . seizing the minds of today's youth and creating an entire generation obsessed with violence."
17. The Fire Department says that the severity of Wednesday's fire at Lamston's Department Store in which four shoppers and two firemen died has been traced to a broken sprinkler system on the store's fourth floor.
18. An extremely serious car accident involving two cars and three trucks which collided while traveling on Interstate 61 has resulted in six people dead and two people injured.
19. The City Council failed again to approve the school budget for the third time this year in an attempt to hold down costs.
20. Terrorist bullets killed two people in Italy today: Angela Lombardi, a 15-year-old high school student, and Gianninni Mordi, a 23-year-old factory worker at a Fiat plant in Turin.
21. Former Mayor Arthur S. Dorf has retracted his charges against Governor David W. Chalk . . . saying it was prompted by his drinking problem.

# 5

---

# LEADS

In broadcast news the *lead* is the first sentence, or occasionally the first two sentences, of a story:

Another time-out has been called in the Los Angeles school integration proceedings. Superior Court Judge Paul Egly has given the Board of Education a month to let him know in writing exactly how the plan's going to work. Specifically, Egly wants to learn which schools and students will be participating in the integration plan submitted by the board. Egly says he hopes to rule on the plan within a month.

*KNX, Los Angeles*

The lead doesn't sound any different than the other sentences in a story—listeners won't know they're hearing a lead. Yet writing a good lead is often the key to writing a good story.

Broadcast news stories are so short that it is imperative to get off on the right foot. It's also necessary to grab listeners' attention with that first sentence. Newswriters put their best sentence forward:

Inflation, it seems, is hitting everyone these days, even those who traffic in and use heroin. A federal drug enforcement agent says the cost of an ounce of heroin on the illegal market has jumped from 600 dollars a year ago, to 900 dollars today in the Houston area.

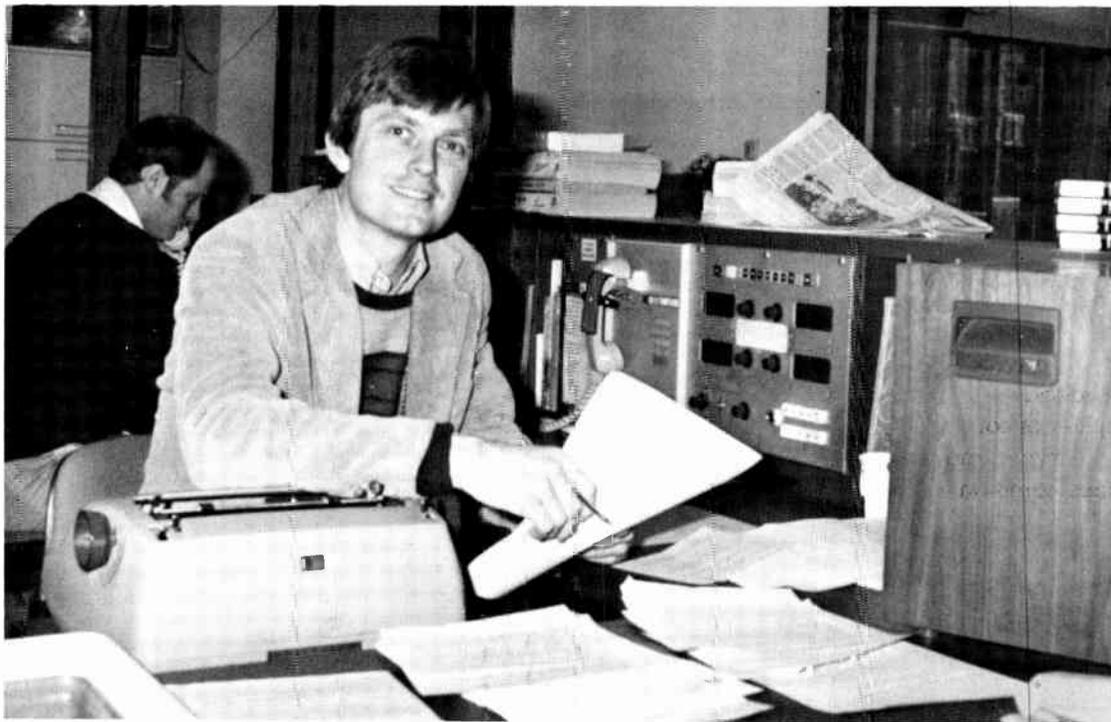
*WARU, Indiana*

Like any other sentence, the lead must follow the rules for broadcast newswriting outlined in the previous chapters, but, since this first sentence has more responsibilities, it has to measure up to additional standards.

This chapter devotes quite a few words to the story's first few words and the job they have to do.

## INTRIGUING

The news wants attention. The lead has to get it. Listeners are driving in traffic or lying on the couch or doing the dishes. A newswriter has a complex story to relate about some technical changes in the format of the venerable *New York Times*. What's the best way to break through the



At WCCO, Minneapolis, a newswriter works on the morning news program. (WCCO, Minneapolis)

road noises, the daydreams, the dirty dishes, to get that story across? The obvious strategy would be to immediately weigh in with the facts:

The New York Times will switch from an eight-column to a six-column format on September 7th.

Will that catch their ears? Doubtful. Except for that familiar name, the *New York Times*, this is just a jumble of facts. What is needed is something that will make the story sound more interesting—a lead that will bring out whatever is arresting about this story. Here is a lead that did just that:

The New York Times is getting a face lift.

*WOR, New York City*

The basic fact is still here, but what's been added

is a touch of irony: the staid *New York Times* acting appearance-conscious.

A lead doesn't have to be clever to be intriguing. Often all it takes is an unadorned presentation of what's happening:

A month-old baby is lost.

*WBLG, Kentucky*

A surprise search at the Fayette County high school yesterday...police using a marijuana-sniffing dog.

*WSB, Atlanta*

A lead is a "hook." It may be cute, it may be straightforward, but it must be sharp, to the point and baited with something fresh.

### 1. Newsworthiness

The surest way to get attention is to lead a story with whatever in the story carries the most wallop. Newsworthiness is a measure of wallop.

Broadcast journalists have to calculate newsworthiness at every stage in the production of a newscast. They must decide what questions to ask at a news conference; what facts to include in a story; what aspect of each story to use as the lead; what taped quotes to play on the air; and, finally, what stories to use in the newscast.

News judgment is a skill long-time journalists use with the same pride with which weight lifters use their muscles. Many journalists maintain that news sense is exclusively a product of experience and, therefore, cannot be taught. But the ability to decide what is newsworthy is really just a matter of common sense plus knowledge of current events and basic journalism principles. Perhaps common sense can't be taught—although learning to concentrate and think carefully can help people reach conclusions that make sense. But current events are easy to learn; the standard textbooks are newspapers, news magazines and the broadcast media. And the guidelines for evaluating newsworthiness can definitely be taught. The news judgment that the already-initiated possess is a composite of a bunch of basic rules they know too well to have to verbalize, but these rules can be spelled out.

There are six criteria for determining what is newsworthy: *importance, interest, controversy, the unusual, timeliness, proximity*. They are introduced here in terms of choosing a story's lead, but since these six standards are employed in many other broadcast news activities, they will be referred to frequently in future chapters.

**1. Importance** If historians wrote the news, this would be their standard. It's unconcerned with gossip, free of parochialism, and not obsessed with the fleeting or freakish. Importance is the measure of the significance of an event, the magnitude of its effect on the world or community, and the power of the people and positions involved.

A new tax on gasoline isn't historic, but it is more important, in most cases, than approval of an agency's budget—it effects more lives:

The R-T-A board has approved a five

percent gasoline tax for the metropolitan area....a move that will boost gas prices by at least two-and-a-half cents a gallon.

*WBBM, Chicago*

That's the lead. Later in the story the budget increase is mentioned:

At yesterday's meeting the board also approved a 237-million-dollar budget for fiscal 1978.

A death is more important than a serious injury and it belongs in the lead:

A 17-year-old from Bowling Green is dead as the result of a head-on collision around midnight last night.

*WBGN, Kentucky*

Later in the story listeners are told what happened to one of the other passengers:

A passenger, 18-year-old Danny Miller, received multiple injuries in that accident.

All other things being equal, the president's position is more important than the position of a senator. The president goes in the lead:

The Senate is moving towards a vote today on the neutron bomb...whose supporters are encouraged by what President Carter said at yesterday's news conference.

*CBS*

Lower down in the story we hear about the senator:

Doubts persist in the Senate, and a principal critic of Mr. Carter's position hasn't given up yet.

The opening of the baseball season is a more important event than an average basketball game. It's the lead:

---

## INTRIGUING

The baseball season officially underway...Seattle beating Minnesota last night three to two.

*WSB, Atlanta*

Later in the sports news:

And on the scoreboard...the Hawks beat Buffalo 87 to 74 last night.

And something happening is more important than nothing happening. In a story about potential live television coverage of Congress, the House's move toward allowing coverage goes in the lead:

Television cameras may soon become familiar sights on the House floor in Washington.

*KNX, Los Angeles*

The Senate's inaction is held for later in the story:

A similar proposal in the Senate is buried in committee.

Randy Renshaw of KLGW, Iowa, provides this example of a lead with a mixed-up sense of importance:

Damage is estimated at 3-thousand dollars following an explosion at a local factory that claimed two lives.

Loss of life is more important than property damage. Failure to emphasize the two deaths is a mistake in news judgment.

**2. Interest** People are not always interested in that which is most important. Sometimes they just want to know what the president's wife is up to or what happened to that cute four-year-old who was hurt in the crash. This is the gate through which gossip gets into the news. If Princess Anne finishes third in a horse show, that goes in the lead—ahead of the name of the

person who finished first. Famous people interest us:

Screen star Buster Crabbe spent several hours over the weekend signing autographs for movie buffs at the Baker Hotel in Dallas.

*WELO, Mississippi*

But, fortunately, interest embodies more than just social notes. In fact, if novelists wrote the news they probably would measure events in terms of the characteristics that make them revealing . . . interesting.

The president's plan to build a tree house on the White House lawn isn't important, but it is interesting and therefore newsworthy. The fact that the fire went out during a presidential "fireside chat" is also insignificant—but amusing. Often these items will make for a more intriguing lead than a straightforward recounting of the president's latest pronouncement. Similarly, a movie company's choice of locale isn't important, but . . .

Does Texas look like Wyoming? A movie company hopes so.

*KVOC, Wyoming*

And there is one minor detail in this story about gas seeping into a city's sewer system that forces itself into the lead . . . because it's interesting:

It all started when a man's toilet blew up.

*WSOY, Illinois*

**WEAK:**

A 19-year-old woman from Dallas has been missing for the past week.

**BETTER:**

One week ago tomorrow a 19-year-old woman from Dallas went on her lunch break. Everyone thought Karen Copper would return in about an hour, but so far there has been no sign of her.

*KEX, Oregon*

---

WRITING / LEADS

64

Interest is where news judgment becomes most human.

**3. Controversy** The news looks for controversy. The governor's approval of the highway environmental groups have been fighting for the past year is more newsworthy than his okay of the reconstruction of an old parkway everyone agrees has become a safety hazard.

Broadcast journalists must know what the issues are and look for new issues. If somewhere in the mayor's press conference she mentions a decision not to build that low-income housing project in the city's most fashionable district, that's the lead. If the mayor announces the appointment of a local builder as recreation director, it's the journalist's job to find out how many gyms the director owns and how much he gave to the mayor's campaign. That could be the lead to this story. When a key ballplayer says the coach can't even keep score, let alone motivate the team, and the story starts with a quote on pregame strategy, that's the wrong lead. It isn't as newsworthy.

**UNACCEPTABLE:**

A young woman has been arrested on a charge of keeping a bawdy house in Botetourt County. She had once run for mayor in Roanoke City.

**ACCEPTABLE:**

A former candidate for mayor in Roanoke City has been arrested on a charge of keeping a bawdy house in Botetourt County.

*WFIR, Virginia*

Exposing controversy and corruption is called muckraking—an important political function of journalism.

**4. The unusual** News is often news because it is out of the ordinary. If a teenager steals an elderly woman's purse, on most big-city stations that is not even a story, and certainly isn't the lead. But, if an elderly woman steals a teenager's

purse, that has to be in the lead. Similarly, politicians who say they are going to do their best to represent the people of their district are not news. If a politician says he is going to vote for a certain bill no matter what the folks back home think, that's the lead. Perhaps buried somewhere in the information about a fire downtown is the fact that this was the city's first solar-heated building. That's unusual—it should be in the lead.

**UNACCEPTABLE:**

The number of rapes was up five percent during the first quarter of this year, while the number of serious crimes overall declined.

**ACCEPTABLE:**

For the first time in 19 years, a drop in the rate of serious crimes.

*KLOL, Houston*

Of course, this bias towards the unusual, as well as the controversial, is why the news is so often attacked for being too negative. Bad news is usually more unusual than good news. It's not news that the plane arrives safely; it's news if it crashes. It's not news that politicians are honest (although some might disagree here); it's news when they're caught with their hands in the till.

**5. Timeliness** News, like food, spoils after it's been out for a while. And news perishes most quickly on the radio, where people expect up-to-the-minute briefings. Jim Farley, executive producer of NBC Radio News, calls it the medium of the "hear and now." So the lead of a broadcast story must take advantage of the freshest element of the story.

**UNACCEPTABLE:**

Two forest fires in northwest Colorado were declared under control last night after they burned more than 18-hundred acres.

**ACCEPTABLE:**

Mop-up operations are underway at the site of two forest fires in

northwest Colorado, which burned more than 18-hundred acres.

*KREX, Colorado*

If the secretary of state said something controversial at the airport before flying to Europe last night, the lead—this morning—is that the secretary is in Europe *this morning* where he will be discussing that controversial issue with European leaders.

If suspects were captured last night, the lead this morning is that they're in jail. If the accident happened this morning, the lead tonight is that the injured are in the hospital, with a report on their condition.

The mayor of Sioux City is in the hospital today...thinking of things he should have done instead of taking a ride on his son's motorcycle.

*KWSL, Iowa*

Richard Goodwin remains in jail in Pueblo this morning after he was denied bail by Pueblo Judge Phillip Cabibi yesterday.

*KVOR, Colorado*

In journalism this is called looking for the "second-day angle"—an updated slant on the story. Yesterday the story was that the airplane crashed, but today that's old news. The second-day angle is the condition of the survivors or theories about the cause of the crash. This is clearly a second-day story:

This is the second day of the flight attendants' strike against National Airlines.

*Dallas Townsend, CBS*

In radio, where the news is aired every hour or so, it's almost a question of looking for a "second-hour" angle:

The body of Indiana helicopter pilot Joseph Miles is being flown home at this hour.

*WAZY, Indiana*

Neil Nelkin of KODY in Nebraska calls this "accenting the speed of radio." Television gives the news less frequently, so timeliness is somewhat less of a consideration. But viewers still will want a different angle than the one they read in their newspaper that morning.

Some smaller radio stations, where the news is less insistent, may still use yesterday evening's angle as this morning's lead. They don't always struggle to discover a second-day angle, but there are limits. This lead, used on the air, clearly fails the test of timeliness:

A small safe, containing money, jewelry and important papers, was taken from the home of Robert Sklar last week.

There was an up-to-date angle in this story—Sklar had told the station that day that he was offering a thousand-dollar reward. It should have been in the lead.

**6. Proximity** If the government is shutting down eleven military bases and one of them is five miles outside of town, the lead is that the local base is closing. People tend to be interested in that which affects them, and local events have more effect. This means that a robbery in a neighbor's house will, for better or worse, be more newsworthy to most of us than a massacre in Pakistan.

A 19th-century newspaper editor, Horace Greeley, put it this way: "The subject of deepest interest to an average human being is himself; next to that he is most concerned with his neighbors. Asia and the Tongo Islands stand a long way off after these in his regard."

Often national stories have local angles hidden in them. For example, if the Federal Communications Commission is demanding that newspapers be prohibited from owning a broadcast station in the same town, the writer should check to see if that affects any local media. If it does, that's the lead.

**WEAK:**

States that have not ratified the Equal Rights Amendment could lose millions of dollars in revenue and taxes because supporters have organized a convention boycott.

**BETTER:**

Atlanta and the state of Georgia could lose millions of dollars in revenue and taxes because of the convention boycott organized against states which have not ratified the Equal Rights Amendment.

*WSB, Atlanta*

**WEAK:**

The federal government is pushing states which have vast areas of wetlands in the region of the Gulf of Mexico to develop coastal management areas.

**BETTER:**

The federal government is pushing states like Louisiana, which have vast areas of wetlands in the region of the Gulf of Mexico, to develop coastal management areas.

*KWKH, Louisiana*

Local news is the bread and butter of most radio stations. Whenever possible, leads must include the local angle.



The reason these guidelines cannot provide neat solutions to all problems is that they constantly overlap, and it becomes necessary to weigh importance against interest or an unusual angle against a more timely angle—this is where common sense comes into play.

War has broken out in the Middle East. That's important. It started on a Jewish holiday. That's interesting. There are many Americans in Israel—that's a local angle. Both sides are accusing each other of starting the war—that's controversy. All these facts belong in the account of such a major event, but what's the lead? The

war. That is very important, and has to be the heart of the lead. One of the other facts might be thrown in to flesh it out:

War in the Middle East...and it started today on the most solemn Jewish holiday.

Newswriters have to look over all the facts they have on a story and determine which are the most newsworthy and will make the most intriguing lead. These lists of some of the available facts on a story are followed by the lead the newswriter chose.

1. Two light planes have collided in the air.
2. It happened four miles off the coast at Laguna Beach.
3. One of the planes had a third of one wing sheared off.
4. That plane landed safely at the Orange County Airport.
5. Neither of the two people on board that plane was injured.
6. The other plane crashed into the ocean.
7. A search is underway.

Forget the plane that landed safely for the lead. The news here is the unusual collision and the important fact that one of the planes crashed into the ocean, but the timely angle—the search—also has to be in the lead:

A search is underway off Laguna Beach for a light plane that plunged into the ocean after an in-flight collision.

*KNX, Los Angeles*

1. A truck rammed into a section of the Alaska pipeline at eleven o'clock last night.
2. The pipeline was shut down.
3. 84 gallons of oil leaked out after the truck hit.
4. Repairs were made and oil started moving again at two o'clock this morning.
5. Officials are putting the blame on human error.

6. This was the third shutdown on the pipeline in the past 16 days.

An 84-gallon leak isn't very important. The news here is the interesting fact that these shutdowns are becoming a habit and the timely angle—everything is now okay:

Oil is moving again through the Alaska pipeline after the third shutdown in 16 days.

*WMAL, Washington, D.C.*

1. A gang of South Moluccan terrorists is still holding 59 hostages in a northern Holland school and in a train.
2. It's been a week since they took over the school and train.
3. The terrorists have been negotiating with Dutch officials.
4. They're insisting that the Dutch force the Moluccan government to give the South Moluccans independence.
5. Many of the hostages are children.
6. The gunmen have just said they'll release all the hostages in return for a safe flight out of the country.
7. They won't say where they want to go.
8. Dutch officials don't know whether to believe that the terrorists are serious about the new deal.

This has been going on for a week. The news is the timely element—whatever has changed since listeners last heard the story—and the answer to the important question: what's going to happen to those hostages?

There appears to be some movement in the negotiations between Dutch government officials and South Moluccan terrorists holding some 60 hostages.

*Ann Taylor, NBC*

There isn't only one answer to these problems. Here's a different version of the lead written a bit later, but based on the same facts:

The gang of South Moluccan terrorists holding 59 hostages in a northern Holland school and in a train have made a settlement offer to Dutch authorities...but the authorities don't know whether to take it seriously.

*Steve Porter, NBC*

## 2. Details

A foolproof method for encouraging listeners to concentrate on something besides their radio is to use a "kitchen-sink" lead. Chris Gardner of WFMW in Kentucky suggested this example:

28-year-old John Jones and 37-year-old Fred Wallace were killed at seven-twenty last night in a one-car crash on Madisonville's West Side near the L and N rail crossing on Highway 70.

Most of these facts don't even belong in the story. Pressing them forward into the lead means forcing a mass of uninteresting and virtually unintelligible information on listeners.

Important details can be saved for later in the story. This is all the lead should include:

Two men were killed when their car hit a pole on Highway 70 last night.

There's no action in names, addresses, ages, times, etc. Details anchor a story; they don't move it forward. Few details deserve a place in the lead, where the writer is trying to build momentum. Here are some guidelines for choosing which details to include:

**1. Names** Few names mean anything to us—the famous, our neighbors, some others. Since the lead must capture attention, starting with a name that means nothing to most listeners is an error. Mary Kellan of WAXC, New York, demonstrates with this example:

A change in Robert Silver's condition.

Who, besides Silver's friends, would care? The correct lead:

The man shot in last night's holdup is now in serious condition.

Silver's name should probably be in the story somewhere (see Chapter 6, "Stories"), not in the most important sentence—the lead. Familiar names, on the other hand, do attract attention. They work in a lead:

Former President Nixon went to a ballgame last night in Anaheim.  
*Bill Diehl, ABC*

In a small town, every local name may qualify as familiar. And there are rare occasions when a writer uses an unfamiliar name in the lead to tease the listener. This lead works because it exploits the listeners' curiosity about who this man is and what he's doing in the news:

A year ago, says Thomas Tetro, he wanted to die. He learned he had cancer of the face...  
*Liz Shanov, WCBS, New York City*

Who is Thomas Tetro?—the man who just won the Jersey Jackpot lottery.

**2. Ages** We all have one of the 80 or 100 possible ages. The particular one that made someone uncomfortable on his or her last birthday is not of great interest to a radio audience. Maybe it's nice to know the age of a person who was injured in a nearby accident or arrested for armed robbery, but that detail can be dropped into the body of the story. There's no reason to slow down the lead with it. The only ages that find their way into leads are ages that are particularly interesting or affecting:

A nine-year-old boy is undergoing emergency treatment at Nashville General Hospital after being struck by a train this afternoon.  
*WMAK, Tennessee*

**3. Addresses** In a traffic accident or a fire on a major thoroughfare, the name of the road may be interesting enough for the lead:

A skateboarding accident yesterday on State Route 113 left a Wakeman boy hospitalized.

*WLEC, Ohio*

But most addresses are just dull strings of anonymous numbers. Notice how the address slows down this lead, which was used on the air:

A representative of Phil Simpson, Incorporated, 4-21 East 8th, reported to the police that someone struck a company vehicle early this morning...

This should read:

The Phil Simpson company complains that someone crashed into a company car early this morning.

The address, if it needs to be mentioned at all, can be held for the body of the story.

• • •

Other candidates for demotion to the body of the story or complete banishment: hours of the day—"at 1:18 p-m"; exact dollar figures—"the damage was estimated at one point eight three million dollars"; car makes—"driving a Chevy Impala." Of course, there are times when each of these details may be newsworthy—perhaps this was the 16th Chevy Impala stolen in the last two weeks—but usually these details are mere technicalities.

The lead is no place for fine points. Notice how this lead, which was used on the air, is dragged down by the weight of its details:

Sheriff Arnold George reported this morning that Bob Watkins, age 20, of 5-43 Maple Street, was drowned yesterday afternoon around 5 p-m in Logan's Creek in the upper end of the county near the Randolph County line.

### 3. The Ordinary

Some facts say nothing:

The coalition of organizations for mass transit held a meeting this afternoon.

This lead, intercepted by Stan Zimmerman of WSPB, Florida, merely notes that a meeting took place. Where's the news here? The same lead could have been written, in a different tense, even before the meeting took place. The fact that a group met is rarely news and rarely does it inspire listeners to listen to the rest of the story. What happened at the meeting—that's the news.

Bill Quehm of KGMI, Washington, supplies the ultimate example of a lead filled with empty facts:

The City Council met last night at City Hall in regular session.

Lead with whatever distinguishes an event from the ordinary:

The City Council lowered city utility charges for most homeowners last night.

KGMI, Washington

UNACCEPTABLE:

The United Nations met today to act on an important question.

ACCEPTABLE:

Vietnam finally became a member of the United Nations today after the United States dropped its opposition....

WMAL, Washington, D.C.

Some words and phrases are so commonplace in broadcast news that they can easily bring a yawn. They are best kept out of the lead, or at least out of the first few words of the lead—what might be called the "lead's lead." *Yesterday* and *today* are prime examples. Practically every story used in broadcast news hap-

pened either yesterday or today. Since every lead could begin with one of these two words, it's wise not to start any leads this way. News is what is special about a story, not what is common to every story.

UNACCEPTABLE:

Today Colorado House Republicans voted not to fund the state Civil Rights Commission next year.

ACCEPTABLE:

Colorado House Republicans have voted not to fund the state Civil Rights Commission next year.

KOA, Denver

UNACCEPTABLE:

Today representatives of the U-S, Soviet Russia and Britain open talks in Geneva on a total ban on nuclear test explosions.

ACCEPTABLE:

Representatives of the U-S, Soviet Russia and Britain open talks in Geneva today on a total ban on nuclear test explosions.

CBS

The phrase *police say*, and its variations, is another news regular. It's unavoidable in broadcast newswriting because attribution is indispensable, but there's no need always to start the lead with the obligatory.

WEAK:

Riley County police say a family's escape from a burning car yesterday on Highway K-19 was "miraculous."

BETTER:

"Miraculous" is the way one Riley County police officer described a family's escape from a burning car yesterday on Highway K-19.

And there are other run-of-the-mill constructions that are not quite clichés, but are not in-

triguing either. WIFF in Indiana avoids leads that start with this dull phrase—"Meeting in executive session this afternoon in Kendallville . . ."—because it wastes eight words, says nothing and is boring.

**WEAK:**

Assistant Agriculture Secretary Carol Foreman says the department is working on an information campaign that would encourage children to make the switch to healthier foods.

**BETTER:**

It'll take some doing -- persuading the nation's kids that a fresh carrot or a juicy peach is better for them than a grape popsicle or a double fudge delight.

*KNX, Los Angeles*

And how about this insipid lead? It was used on the air:

This morning the county commissioners met at their regular weekly meeting and Sheriff John Parklin started out the meeting with his report about a Cambridge County selective traffic enforcement program.

#### 4. Punch

The lead must contain the most intriguing news and must be written in the most intriguing possible style—a style that unleashes the power of the facts. The lead should have *punch*.

In broadcast news, the short sentence is king. Short sentences are easy to read, easy to follow, powerful. So leads are often most effective when they are short and sharp:

The Red Cross says that the cost of blood is too high to give it away anymore.

*KBWD, Texas*

At times an incomplete sentence works best:

Robbery by telephone. That's what someone tried to pull off at the Seven-Eleven store on West Cook Street last night.

*KSMA, California*

The price of gasoline going up this weekend across the nation.

*KGO, San Francisco*

And, if there's irony or paradox in a story, a well-written lead can get attention by bringing it out:

About 400 workers at Hammell Manufacturing Company no longer have to raise their hands...to go to the bathroom. The recently imposed rule requiring the supervisor's permission to leave the work area was rescinded yesterday.

*KLOL, Houston*

One government agency -- the Environmental Protection Agency -- has decided to join lawsuits against another government agency -- the Tennessee Valley Authority.

*Dallas Townsend, CBS*

The lead demands a broadcast journalist's most conversational, most engaging writing:

Maybe...just maybe...your car insurance rates won't be increased as much as first thought when the State Insurance Board began its latest hearings.

*WARU, Indiana*

The magazine sales people are here... and the chamber of commerce and police agencies say they have been flooded with complaints.

*WGHN, Michigan*

Bob Walker of WRVQ-FM in Virginia says a lead is bad when "it could have touched more people's lives, been simpler and cleaner, and

---

## INTRIGUING

done it all in a five-word, seventh-grade sentence."

## PREPARING

Listeners are easy to confuse. They can be overwhelmed with a barrage of facts; the key facts can be slipped by them; and they can be disoriented by clever but misleading lines. To avoid this, listeners must be carefully guided into a story. So leads have a second job. They not only have to catch listeners' attention; they must prepare listeners to receive the facts to come.

### 1. Soft

In broadcast news too many facts can drive listeners away. A lead should not come on too strong. Jerry Godby of WLOG, West Virginia, suggested this example of one that does:

A 17-year-old Logan resident was injured yesterday when he attempted to remove a baseball from a drain pipe while construction workers were moving the drain from the boy's front yard.

That makes sense, but its meaning would be lost on the air. All the major facts in the story are hurled at the listeners at once with no preparation.

#### ACCEPTABLE:

A Logan teenager was injured yesterday after chasing a baseball... into an unlikely place.

Compare this with newspaper style. The traditional newspaper lead paragraph contains most of the "five Ws"—who, what, when, where, and why. While many papers are moving away from this style, it is still common to find—in the lead to a story about a demonstration, for example—information on who was demonstrating, what they were doing, where the demonstration took

place, when it took place and why they were demonstrating:

While the Interior Department held hearings in Fresno today on a federal government proposal to limit the size of farms using water from federal reclamation projects, farmers from across the state staged a parade to protest the plan.

This is the classic "hard" news lead, and for our purposes it's too hard—too hard for listeners to grasp. Broadcast news employs softer leads, often similar to the leads used in newspaper features:

The band wore cover-alls and the "floats" were more than 100 farm tractors. The event was a noon-time parade in Fresno to protest government efforts to limit the size of farms using water from federal reclamation projects.

*KNX, Los Angeles*

#### UNACCEPTABLE:

West Lafayette police began issuing more speeding tickets last night to protest an ordinance passed Monday by the City Council that would penalize them for staging slowdowns.

#### ACCEPTABLE:

Speeding in West Lafayette may be risky this morning.

*WAZY, Indiana*

It's not always necessary to shy this far away from the basic facts. There is nothing wrong with building the lead around a hard fact, as long as the facts are spread out enough to be easily digestible:

Gerald Ford's been given a clean bill of health by the Federal Election Commission.

*KGO, San Francisco*

The winter cloud-seeding program is still going...and officials are

already debating the need for another program next winter.

*KOA, Denver*

The five Ws? The complete story should have all these facts (see Chapter 6, "Stories"), but there's no room for them in the lead. This lead, used on the air and picked up by one of the wires, shows what can happen when all five Ws are stuffed into a broadcast lead. It is too "hard":

The New Jersey state police underwater recovery unit is readying a six-man search team to begin operations at nine o'clock tomorrow morning in an effort to recover the body of 20-year-old Fred Morrison of Oxford.

## 2. The Set-Up

An old saw in broadcast news says that for a story to be clear it should tell listeners what it is going to say—*then* say it. This is an exaggeration, but listeners need help in concentrating on the news. It's often wise to prepare the audience for what it is about to learn, and that is the lead's job. This lead tells listeners what the story is going to say:

A new development in the South Korean bribery scandal.

*KNX, Los Angeles*

Listeners are now ready to find out what the new development was. The lead has set up that information.

Not every lead has to be a set-up. Often the facts are easy enough to grasp by themselves:

Huey Newton is locked up in a California jail cell this morning... awaiting a murder trial.

*WDEE, Detroit*

There are two situations, however, where a set-up is necessary:

**1. Complicated stories** When the story is complicated, the lead should ease listeners into the intricacies. Here is a story about a tax reform plan that called for 40 different changes in tax laws. Instead of attempting to describe the changes, the lead simply prepares listeners to hear about them:

During a floor speech today, Senator Edward Kennedy will outline a tax reform proposal.

*WBBM, Chicago*

A more direct lead would have swamped listeners:

Senator Edward Kennedy will introduce a proposal today to close tax loopholes, emphasize tax credits and make more than 40 changes in the tax laws.

**2. "Yes or no" stories** Compare these two leads supplied by Chris Gardner of WFMW in Kentucky. The first has the basic fact:

Former Owensboro policeman James Stallings has been found guilty of murdering his wife.

The danger here is that by the time listeners have focused their attention on the story, the key fact may be gone; they may miss the verdict. Gardner's second version sets up this fact. It alerts listeners to listen for the verdict:

After two days of deliberations, a Hopkins County Circuit Court jury has finally reached a verdict.

When the news is yes or no, guilty or not guilty, victory or defeat, listeners usually deserve a warning that the answer is on its way. Here the question is who will get to bury a man's body—his parents or the motorcycle gang to which he belonged:

A disagreement over who would get the

body of that slain member of the outlaw motorcycle club has been resolved.

WLOD, Florida

In the next sentence listeners learn that his parents got the body. The lead set up that fact.

### 3. The Angle

In a broadcast story there's rarely room for more than one angle or approach to the story. The lead must announce that angle. It can't stray too far from the point to be made.

The president has announced a new national water policy which would give matching grants to states that enact conservation programs. *Water policy emphasizes conservation*—that's the angle. The lead can't wander off into irrelevant jokes:

President Carter got his feet wet today.

That is not the story. Nor can the lead flirt with irrelevant facts:

New electric power dams are being constructed in many parts of the country.

This water policy is not primarily about power dams. The lead has to prepare listeners for the story; it must introduce the angle of the story:

President Carter has unveiled a new national water policy...putting the emphasis on conservation.

Mutual

There are many ways to introduce the angle of a story, not all of them straightforward:

Strike — the workers say no...the buses won't go.

WBRG, Virginia

Everybody wants to be a star...and Attorney General Louis Lefkowitz's

office says there are shady talent agencies that prey on such aspiring actors and actresses.

WABC, New York City

The lead doesn't have to literally state the angle; it can play off or set up the angle, as in this July 4th story about the American Revolution:

Sometimes a revolution is a slow thing...not an overnight smash.

WINS, New York City

Or this about machines capable of performing household chores on command:

So you thought those robots in the movie "Sleeper" were just science fiction?

WCBS, New York City

But the lead must aim in the direction of the main point of the story. It must never *mislead*.

A story about an OPEC conference in Sweden is going to be about oil and oil prices. Opening with a comment about Sweden would mislead. And if the story is about oil prices, the lead should also stay away from a discussion of the safety of the oil ministers—that's another story. The lead must establish the angle:

Oil prices are not on the agenda, but oil prices are much discussed, at the OPEC conference now underway in Sweden.

CBS

In choosing the lead the writer is looking for the most newsworthy approach to the story—and the story will have to conform to the decision represented by the lead.

## TYPES OF LEADS

All leads have the twin responsibilities of beguiling listeners and warming them up for the information to follow. As the previous sections have

discussed, there are numerous ways to accomplish this, but there are a few broad categories into which most leads fall.

## 1. The Main Point

Most leads are members of this family, and all leads are at least related, since a lead can never lose sight of the main point of a story.

An example of this type of lead:

In Albany...there's some hope that the City University system may be able to reopen...thanks to a compromise package of bills which comes up for a vote today.

*WABC, New York City*

The main point—a prospective solution to the financial troubles that have closed the university—is in the lead. Here's a lead that finds a different way to communicate this same point:

The City University may get some cold cash today...enough to get it open again.

*WABC, New York City*

Another station used three different leads for the same story, in different newscasts; all of them include the main point:

A collision between a truck and a skateboard has landed a youngster in the hospital in fair condition.

A 12-year-old boy -- whose skateboard collided with a truck yesterday -- is hospitalized this morning in fair condition.

A 12-year-old skateboarder is hospitalized in fair condition after he was hit by a truck.

*WSOY, Illinois*

This type of lead works well when the central point of the story is dramatic:

A Poughkeepsie man charged with robbery has escaped from the Dutchess County Jail.

*WWLE, New York*

Gary Gilmore was shot to death today by a Utah firing squad.

*WBUR, Boston*

Still, there are situations where a main-point lead doesn't fit or a writer can do better.

## 2. Umbrellas

Sometimes a story has more than one main point. In these cases, a lead is needed that can cover all the points—an umbrella lead.

For instance, when the Supreme Court announced a decision on busing there were two completely different reactions in Boston. Choosing one of the reactions for the lead would leave it incomplete:

**WEAK:**

A leader of Boston's anti-busing protests says the Supreme Court's decision on school busing leaves the people without hope.

**WEAK:**

The president of the N double-A-C-P in Boston says the Supreme Court's decision on school busing means that desegregation is here to stay.

The solution is an umbrella lead setting up both points of view; however, such a "dual" lead can't merely throw both opinions into one over-stuffed sentence.

**UNACCEPTABLE:**

While the president of the N double-A-C-P in Boston calls the Supreme Court decision on school busing a sign that desegregation is here to stay, a leader of Boston's anti-busing protests says the decision leaves the people without hope.

The umbrella lead has to simplify as it combines.

#### BETTER:

Two different reactions today to the Supreme Court's decision on school busing.

*WOR, New York City*

Of course, if one of these reactions stood out as earthshaking it would be best to fall back on a simple main-point lead.

Umbrella leads are not only used when a story has more than one main point, they can be used to tie together more than one story. Newswriters often find themselves with little time and lots of stories to tell. The solution is often to combine related stories (see Chapter 6, "Stories"). An umbrella lead is usually given much of the responsibility for pulling the stories together.

Sometimes the lead will simply state what the stories have in common:

A couple of marijuana stories in the news...

*WINS, New York City*

Some very expensive burglaries in Santa Maria over the weekend.

*KSMA, California*

The secret to writing any kind of umbrella lead is to find the common thread that can tie the points, or the stories, together. This one is easy—two Supreme Court decisions:

The Supreme Court has said yes to lawyers and no to abortions.

*WFFV, Virginia*

Sometimes stories can be tied together by their obvious contrasts:

While the governor is in Washington to talk with the president about farm prices, commodity prices dropped in Chicago.

*KCUE, Minnesota*

Gasoline rationing and oil import quotas are under study in the White House, but in Detroit they're saying our love affair with the big car hasn't cooled.

*WSOY, Illinois*

If there isn't a common theme for an umbrella lead to exploit, the stories don't belong together.

### 3. Delays

Sometimes it's better not to jump right into a story, but to delay the main point and take another tack. One method: begin at the chronological beginning of the story:

It started raining in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, at ten o'clock last night. By the time it stopped... eight hours later...there was a waist-high torrent in the city.

*WMAL, Washington, D.C.*

This is especially effective with feature stories:

Six years ago, Larry Cox of San Diego was denied admission to a sailing class because he's blind. But Cox was determined to learn to sail, just as he had conquered water skiing.

*KNX, Los Angeles*

Another type of delayed lead steps back from the breaking events and puts them in perspective:

Congressman Thomas Downey, the young liberal Democrat from Long Island, considers himself a good friend of Israel.

*WSOY, Illinois*

This has been a bad day for boaters.

*WABC, New York City*

Essentially these delayed leads are exaggerated set-ups. They may add a touch of drama to a story by building anticipation, but if overused they just waste time and sound pretentious.

**UNACCEPTABLE:**

Teenage vandalism remains a major problem in our society.

**ACCEPTABLE:**

A young man jumped from an overpass onto a transit authority train in Brooklyn tonight.

*WABC, New York City*

And delayed leads must still point toward the main point of the story. They must introduce the angle of the story or else they are misleading. A story about defense witnesses at a major trial should not start with a discussion of the prosecution.

**UNACCEPTABLE:**

Some questions about prosecution strategy at the Mandel corruption trial.

**ACCEPTABLE:**

More defense testimony at the Mandel corruption trial.

*WMAL, Washington, D.C.*

**4. Statements**

"I have sent a letter to the secretary of state announcing my resignation as President of the United States." The words of Richard Nixon resigning the presidency tonight.

*WBUR, Boston*

Sometimes a statement by a newsmaker is so powerful that it is a ready-made lead in itself. It's rare. Statements that aren't on tape are too often confusing and usually the writer can develop a more efficient lead (see Chapter 4, "Sentences"). But if a statement is unusually compelling, take advantage of it:

"All I could think of was that I was going to hit bottom and die -- but the bottom never came." Two days after she fell five stories down an

air shaft, Linda Dalianis, feeling much better and relieved.

*WJDA, Massachusetts*

It's not necessary that the statement be a direct quote:

Adolf Hitler had sinus trouble and only four of his own teeth. That according to an X-ray of the dictator's head sold at an auction Thursday night for 375 dollars.

*UPI*

Statement leads don't include attribution in the first sentence—all the responsibility for explaining who is being quoted and what is going on falls on the second sentence:

"I will lead the fight against the neutron bomb!" Fourth District Congressman Jim Weaver made that statement today as he addressed a local Democratic club.

*KPNW, Oregon*

There are a number of different phrasings that enable the second sentence to carry out this responsibility:

Those were the words of Fourth District Congressman Jim Weaver.

The words of Fourth District Congressman Jim Weaver.

That's the way Fourth District Congressman Jim Weaver kicked off his speech....

Fourth District Congressman Jim Weaver...speaking to....

At least that's what Fourth District Congressman Jim Weaver told....

Never leave the listener confused about whose words those were.

Remember, statement leads should be reserved for particularly powerful statements:

"He's an S-O-B!" That was President Truman's reaction to the critic who attacked the singing of his daughter Margaret.

WSOY, Illinois

Most quotes are *not* strong enough to justify such special treatment. This statement lead, built around a standard piece of political rhetoric, was used on the air:

"It's time to turn the city around..." That's the word from Democratic mayoral hopeful George Loeb.

And if a statement is too unusual and shocking, a statement lead can cause more serious problems:

#### UNACCEPTABLE:

"Nuclear war with the Soviet Union is unavoidable within the next three years!" That's the feeling of one of the demonstrators protesting the SALT treaty outside the Capitol today.

A nervous listener's heartbeat might speed up considerably before that gloomy prediction is attributed in the second sentence. Never lead with a *startling* statement. Listeners deserve advance warning. They must at least be told who is talking *beforehand*.

#### ACCEPTABLE:

Demonstrators protesting the SALT treaty with the Soviet Union are marching outside the Capitol today... some of them calling war with Russia unavoidable within the next three years.

## 5. Questions

Questions perform the set-up function superbly:

Should a man be executed for rape?

WBUR, Boston

Ask that question and listeners are automatically prepared for the "answer"—a Supreme Court decision. This lead gets listeners ready to hear about an announcement from General Motors:

How much will that new car cost? G-M had at least part of the answer today.

WSOY, Illinois

Question leads also can bring out the irony in a story:

When was the last time you got a 13-thousand dollar a year raise? Well, your congressman did today.

WVOK, Alabama

Lightning never strikes twice, right?

WRVQ, Virginia

But there are two serious drawbacks to question leads. First, they sound too much like commercials, which most newscasters also read:

*Ad:* Which pain reliever do four out of five doctors recommend?

*Lead:* What's the result of the latest study on cigarettes?

Newswriters prefer to maximize the difference between their copy and advertising.

The second problem with question leads is more profound. Many newswriters avoid them because they believe journalists are in the business of telling, not asking, and that the news should be composed of answers, not questions. Still, there are situations where question leads efficiently direct listeners to information, usually by reflecting a question actually on the minds of the newsmakers and listeners alike:

Does the city of Merrill need an ordinance to control business signs?

WSAU, Wisconsin

But these leads should be used sparingly, and they should never be used as guessing games or

to rub in the fact that journalists know something listeners don't know.

**UNACCEPTABLE:**

Did you know your gas bill may be going down?

**ACCEPTABLE:**

Your gas bill may be going down if the Senate has its way today.

*WZZM-FM, Michigan*

## 6. Humor

The news is generally so grim that occasional moments of levity, when appropriate, are welcome. The lead is a good place for humor because humor is an attention-getter. Often a cleverly worded lead can *tease* listeners into concentrating on the story. This is what one station did with a Girl Scout convention:

Altos is being invaded by little green people today.

*KWHW, Oklahoma*

Good writers look for humor. You don't have to be Woody Allen to write a light lead. The trick is to think, mull the words over, look for puns or phrases to twist:

Abuse of the litter control program may result in the program itself being tossed out of the city budget.

*KGMI, Washington*

Industry and some cities are pressuring Congress to water down the clean water act of 1972.

*WNOR-FM, Virginia*

Unlike a Johnny Carson monologue, where a bad line can get as big a response as a clever line, a bad joke in broadcast news is a disaster. It's embarrassing and demeaning to the station's news operation. If a pun or witticism may not work, leave it out. And never force a joke into a story it doesn't fit:

**UNACCEPTABLE:**

The ball was in the other court today. The trial of the hockey player accused of assault during a game continues.

First problem: hockey is played with a puck, not a ball; on a ring, not a court. And no "other court" is involved—the trial is merely continuing.

Never tack a funny lead onto a sad story. A major network once began a story on the death of an actress with this horrible lead:

Rosalind Russell's performances will endure, but she won't.

No humor in obituaries, disasters, serious crime, accidents . . . or even injuries to pets. There are a lot of people listening. Humor can't be allowed to insult or offend. Here is a story about the second suicide in a jail in three months:

You've heard of a hanging judge? Well, Sarasota County has a hanging jail.

*WSPB, Florida*

Apparently the sheriff was listening, and according to news director Stan Zimmerman, the sheriff saw this as an example of inappropriate use of humor in a lead.

## SUMMARY

---

Newswriters must remember that listeners have other things on their minds. For a news story to work, it has to get those listeners paying attention

and then carefully point the way to what is newsworthy in that story. Most of the responsibility for this falls on the *lead*.

---

## SUMMARY

## PRACTICE ASSIGNMENTS

---

A. Write a lead for each of the following five stories, based on the facts given.

1.

1. The Department of Labor released last month's consumer price index this morning.
2. Nationwide, prices on the items measured in the list were up .5%.
3. The previous month's increase was .6%; the month before that—.4%.
4. In the metropolitan area, the consumer price index was up by 1% last month, according to the Department of Labor.
5. The Department of Labor said that that is the largest increase in the index in the metropolitan area in 18 months.
6. The Department of Labor said increased food costs were primarily responsible for the increase in the metropolitan area.

2.

1. The state attorney general, Louis Stoppard, held a news conference at 11 a.m.
2. Stoppard announced some changes in his staff.
3. Staff lawyer Howard Conway will become assistant attorney general for criminal affairs.
4. Conway has worked in the state attorney general's office for two years.
5. Conway graduated from Harvard Law School in 1978.
6. Stoppard: "Howard Conway is a first-rate lawyer, and I'm confident he'll do a first-rate job."
7. The present assistant attorney general for criminal affairs, Robert O'Brien, will leave that position in two weeks, Stoppard announced.
8. O'Brien has been an assistant attorney general for five years.
9. O'Brien's brother Albert was indicted two weeks ago for conspiring to fix milk prices.
10. News reports over the last two weeks have questioned whether the attorney general's office had tried to cover up the alleged milk price fixing plan.
11. Robert O'Brien's name had been mentioned frequently in connection with the alleged coverup.
12. Stoppard: "Robert O'Brien is resigning to return to private practice. We are sorry to lose him, and we want to emphasize that his departure has nothing to do with scurrilous accusations in the news media over recent weeks."

3.

1. A spokesman for Japanese Motors announced today that the company will be closing two factories in the United States.
2. The spokesman cited high labor costs as the primary reason for the shutdown.
3. According to the spokesman, Japanese Motors plans to retain its other two U.S. plants—in Toledo, Ohio, and Austin, Texas.
4. The remainder of the company's automobile production, the spokesman said, will return to Japan.
5. The factories to be closed are in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and here in the city.
6. The Tulsa plant employs 6,000 employees.
7. The Japanese Motors factory here employs 4,000 people.
8. Japanese Motors is the second largest employer in this city.
9. The two factories will be closed on the first of the year.
10. The company spokesman said there are no plans for placing any of the laid-off employees at other plants.

4.

1. A 15-foot boat capsized in rough waters off Point Lookout yesterday evening.
2. Two men—Terry Reston, 23, and Will Bendix, 25—were in the boat.
3. The men said offshore winds increased wave heights and capsized their boat.
4. The men were picked up by a Coast Guard boat after an hour in the water.
5. Both were hospitalized for observation, but the hospital lists their condition today as good.
6. The men say they were hunting sharks about 200 yards offshore.

5.

1. The City Council met last night in executive session.
2. Last week's minutes were approved.
3. The Council approved, by a vote of 11-0, a plan to send flowers to Mayor Cheryl Boutin's husband George, who is in Hasbrook Hospital.
4. The Council approved, by a vote of 11-0, the Housing Commission's budget request.
5. The Housing Commission asked for \$4,000 for the

second half of the fiscal year—the same amount as it spent in the first half.

6. The Council approved, by a vote of 8–3, a plan to make three downtown avenues—Merchant Street, South Street and Reed Avenue—one-way.
7. Merchant and Reed will go north; South Street—south.
8. Councilman Walter McCreary, who proposed the plan, said it will ease traffic congestion in the downtown area.
9. Councilwoman Martha Rigoli said the plan will inconvenience residents and hurt business downtown.
10. The plan called for police to begin changing traffic signs and rerouting traffic today.

B. Rewrite the following leads to make them more effective.

1. After negotiations with the School Board broke off, local teachers voted yesterday evening to begin striking the city's schools this morning.
2. A two-car accident at the corner of Fourth Street and Blaine Avenue this morning killed Elliot Ford, a lawyer from Hillsdale, and Lieutenant Governor Richard Coburn of East Orange.
3. The president's national security advisor, Frederick Adams, left for Israel yesterday to discuss the latest Mid-East proposals with Israeli leaders today.
4. Fourteen-year-old Jeremy Sikes, from Alabama, was killed at 9 this morning when the car his mother, Margaret Sikes, was driving hit a telephone pole on East Brunswick Street.
5. Police Officer Paul Adler said this morning that Joseph's Hardware Incorporated, of 309 Straight Street, lost \$500 to burglars between 3 and 4 this morning.

6. Today a parade in honor of the city's victorious high school football team is scheduled for Broadway.
7. Meeting in its regular weekly session at City Hall today, the City Council debated the future of the Harris Housing Project.
8. A group of over 100 chanting demonstrators, opposed to a plan to raise rents at a government-owned housing project on the West Side, marched in front of Housing Commissioner Frank Stern's office this afternoon.
9. State Senator Mary Ruggles introduced a bill today which would ban discrimination against homosexuals in jobs and housing, repeal state laws making homosexual behavior among consenting adults a crime and insure homosexuals the right to maintain custody of their children.
10. Sunlight streamed through the window of the courtroom as the jury returned from its deliberations in the case of the teacher suspended for spanking a student.
11. A fire in Newtown left three families homeless tonight and one fireman in the hospital suffering from smoke inhalation, while in Summerset—two families lost their homes to a fire that took firemen three hours to control.
12. "I will do my best to represent the people of this district in Congress." Those words from newly-elected Congresswoman Elizabeth Franks today as she began preparing to move from the state legislature to Washington.
13. Do you know how much the consumer price index rose this month? Three tenths of one percent—the smallest increase in six months.
14. The chips were down for a gambling operation in Marketville. Police raided the place for the second time in a week this morning.

# 6

---

# STORIES

The *New York Times*'s story about a survey of public attitudes toward the New York Stock Exchange used 508 words. The Mutual Information Radio Network reported on the same survey in 67 words. The *Times* employed 21 long sentences to communicate all the information. Mutual had to make do with four short sentences:

The chairman of the New York Stock Exchange wanted to find out why five and a half million investors had deserted the market since 1970. Now, after a study, he knows. Small investors are so worried about inflation that they won't take a chance on investments with any more than a small risk... Instead, they put money in savings accounts and certificates... life insurance and real estate.

A 441-word handicap is par for the course in broadcast news. Many more words can be fit on a page of newsprint than in a 5-, 10-, or even a 20-minute newscast. Walter Cronkite points out that all the words used in his half-hour CBS

Evening News would fill only two-thirds of the front page of the *New York Times*.

This is the challenge of broadcast newswriting. Broadcast stories must report on some of the most important goings-on in the world in a handful of short sentences. This chapter explains how that trick is performed.

## EFFICIENCY

*Tight* is a word heard often in broadcast newsrooms—"Write it tight!" It's clear why: There isn't room in a broadcast story for anything that doesn't move the story forward. Every sentence must serve a purpose and must accomplish that purpose efficiently . . . no extraneous information, no wandering, no loose ends, tight.

### 1. Length

How long should a broadcast story be? It would be nice to be able to give a simple answer such as, "Long enough to tell the story." But it isn't that neat. Consider this example: NBC has



A newsroom at CBS in New York. (CBS News Photo)

5-minute newcasts on the hour, but after commercials are subtracted, that leaves them only 3½ minutes for news. Much of that time is usually devoted to the top two or three stories, which include taped reports. The other three or four stories considered newsworthy at that hour must split the remaining minute or less. So how long should a story on the secretary of state's speech on underdeveloped nations be? Fifteen seconds. That's all the time left for it. Were this story any longer, another story would have to be cut:

Secretary of State Vance is at the economic meeting in Paris...he told leaders of underdeveloped countries

that the U-S is willing to play an active role in narrowing the gap between rich and poor nations...but that industrialized nations cannot be expected to do it all.

*Steve Porter, NBC*

The length of most broadcast stories is determined, in large part, by the length of the newscast and the demands of competing stories. There is some flexibility, but if a story *needs* an extra sentence, the extra seconds will require cutting a few words somewhere else.

How short can a broadcast story be? It is hard to say much about anything in less than 10 sec-

onds. Can you think of a shorter way to write this 10-second story?

Three of the nation's largest tire companies will raise prices next month. Goodyear...Firestone...and Goodrich...plan increases of between three and six percent.

*WDEE, Detroit*

And the maximum length? That's tougher. Some FM stations will go on for pages, but most news directors believe that a story without tape gets dull after 45 seconds. Actually, it's rare for a story without tape to run more than 35 seconds. The average broadcast story, to the extent that it's possible to generalize for thousands of stations, would be 20 to 25 seconds long—that leaves time for four or five sentences; 55 to 70 words. Time is tight. Stories must be tight.

## 2. Form

Most newspaper stories peter out. They use the inverted pyramid style—important information first and less important information as they approach the end. This is great for skimming a page, but how can a listener skim a newscast?

In conversation, stories don't generally decline in interest. In fact, they often build to a punch line or climax. The same is true of broadcast news. Forget the inverted pyramid. The broadcast newswriter must sustain the information level throughout a story. There's no time for the less newsworthy material they add on to the end of a newspaper story, anyway. There is no drop in the information level here:

A rather unusual march scheduled for Atlanta tomorrow....It's billed as Atlanta's first annual Marijuana March and Smoke-In. Pro-marijuana demonstrators will rally at Hurt Park and then march to the steps of the capital....Mayor Jackson's office warns that the protestors had better leave their marijuana cigarettes at home or be prepared to go to jail.

*WSB, Atlanta*

Broadcast news stories have to keep up the listener's interest in the information—they can't be allowed to sag or fade.

## 3. Supporting the Lead

The lead has responsibilities to the story—it must interest the listener in the story and direct the listener toward the heart of the story. But the story also has responsibilities to the lead. All the promises made in the lead must be delivered in the story. The story must include the information that supports the claims made by the lead.

Some leads are nearly self-sufficient. They make their point:

President Carter has signed legislation to exempt members of Congress living in Maryland from paying state income taxes.

The rest of the story need only expand on the point or add additional information:

Acting Governor Blair Lee had asked Carter to veto the bill. Virginia and D-C long have exempted members of Congress from paying local taxes.

*WMAL, Washington, D.C.*

But other leads can't stand on their own and require more support from their stories:

It was the forces of sweetness and light...versus the rowdies at Yankee Stadium last night.

The story that follows has to explain this celestial battle, and it has to justify the use of such charged terms:

Police say a couple of dozen incidents erupted in the ballpark bleachers last night when street gangs and opponents of the Unification Church romped through corridors and started fights. Nine people were arrested. 35-thousand

people came to see the million-dollar extravaganza with the New York Symphony and Korean Folk Ballet. When the Reverend Moon began to speak, however, many of the people began to leave. Moon is revered by his thousands of followers...but damned by some parents who believe his methods of conversion include brainwashing.

*WABC, New York City*

The rowdies are certainly there, and Reverend Moon and his followers pass for the forces of sweetness and light—albeit with tongue in cheek. The story explains and supports the lead.

#### UNACCEPTABLE:

The fate of Loring Air Base in Maine could be decided today. Residents are dead-set against the closing of the base...as is Maine Senator Bill Hathaway. He says Loring is the closest SAC base to the Soviet Union...and that makes it more important than ever.

The lead here states that a decision on the base is imminent. But the body of the story gives no evidence to support that claim. There is room in the story for the opinions of the residents and the senator, but there needs to be a sentence that at least tells listeners what event justifies the supposition that a decision could come today.

#### ACCEPTABLE:

The fate of Loring Air Base in Maine could be decided today. Public hearings are going on up there now on the closing of the base. Residents are dead-set against it...as is Maine Senator Bill Hathaway. He says Loring is the closest SAC base to the Soviet Union...and that makes it more important than ever.

There's only one chance to choose the angle of a story—in the lead. So, the body of the story

also must support that decision on what to emphasize.

#### UNACCEPTABLE:

Several letter bombs were found in Manhattan today...F-B-I experts note that the letter bomb has been a favorite weapon of terrorist groups since World War II. Recent developments in explosives technology have made them even more dangerous -- a letter bomb using the latest plastic explosives can be hidden in a letter no more than a few inches thick.

Interesting, but the lead promises a story about the letter bombs found in Manhattan today—the story doesn't deliver.

#### ACCEPTABLE:

Several letter bombs were found in Manhattan today...One of them exploded in the offices of the Merrill Lynch brokerage firm at One Liberty Place...Four women were slightly injured. The other bombs were deactivated without incident.

*WMCA, New York City*

Incidentally, since the lead mentions several letter bombs, this story needed the last sentence to account for all of them and support its lead.

It's a mistake in broadcast news writing to let the lead get too far ahead of the story. It's also a mistake for the story to lag too far behind the lead. The lead blazes the trail; the story must follow along in that same direction.

#### 4. Information Selection

Fortunately, broadcast newswriters are almost never in the position of having to pad a story. There's usually an abundance of information to choose from. Unfortunately, however, broadcast newswriters must often leave out newsworthy information.

By the time a story has been gathered in the

newsroom it's usually full of facts. There is the name of the victim, the time his body was found, how it was found, the clothes he was wearing, the location of the body, the date he was reported missing, the town he's from, information on his family, the apparent cause of death, information about the autopsy, the names of the person who found him and the person who will perform the autopsy, statistics on the number of people who have died in this area in the past year, etc. And this isn't even a particularly important story. There's time in the newscast for maybe 15 to 20 seconds on it. What to include? Before beginning, you must brace yourself. A newswriter has to be ruthless with facts. When you have only 15 or 20 seconds, you have no time for any but the most pressing facts. The rest, no matter how difficult they were to uncover or how much they seemed to excite the police, must simply be cut—listeners will never hear them.

The Humboldt County Coroner's Office says a man found dead near French's Resort apparently died of natural causes. The Oakland man was found dead in his sleeping bag....after being reported missing. The Coroner's Office says an autopsy is being performed this afternoon....  
*KRED, California*

Nothing on his family, no statistics, not even his name.

And here are 13 seconds taken from the mass of information available on a proposal for a new national water policy:

President Carter has unveiled a new national water policy...putting the emphasis on conservation...asking Congress for 25-million dollars for matching grants to states that enact conservation programs.

*Mutual*

Obviously this is where broadcast news gets its reputation for superficiality. There's a limit to the

depth a writer can reach in 15 seconds. Still, if those seconds are used efficiently, listeners can be presented with the heart of a story. Many of the extra facts a newspaper can present are relatively trivial.

The broadcast newswriter must choose the facts that mean the most. Two guidelines:

**1. Points** How many points can be communicated in a broadcast news story? There is the main point—either established or indicated by the lead. Then there are the facts which support that main point. Beyond that it usually is difficult to make more than one or perhaps two other major points in an average length broadcast story.

The main point:

The man who pioneered the coronary by-pass operation takes issue with those who say the surgical technique may be of little value.

Supporting facts:

Doctor Michael DeBakey has told a Houston news conference a Veterans Administration study on the procedure is preliminary and limited.

Other point (the other side of the argument):

The V-A report claims non-surgical treatment of heart patients can usually achieve the same results as the coronary by-pass operation.

*KNX, Los Angeles*

Another example. Main point:

The first attempt to add the heart of a baboon to the heart of a human has ended with the patient's death.

Supporting facts:

Transplant pioneer Doctor Christiaan

Barnard said the 26-year-old woman would have died without a transplant, and no human heart was available.

Other point:

Barnard told a news conference that he will try to use the heart of a chimpanzee next time.

*WNDE, Indianapolis*

Most stories won't fit this pattern exactly—there are many different ways to write a story. But this does demonstrate how few points can be made in the average broadcast story. No matter how the story is written, it is difficult to make more than two or three points.

Since there may be many possible points to make about a story, one of the newswriter's first decisions is which of these to include and which to eliminate. That determination is based on newsworthiness. In the story about the heart transplant, the facts that it was the first attempt to add a baboon's heart and that it ended unsuccessfully were the most newsworthy and therefore deserving of a place in the lead (see Chapter 5, "Leads"). The decision on what other point to include in the story must be based on the same standards: importance, interest, the unusual, controversy, timeliness and proximity. Barnard's statement that he intends to try a chimpanzee's heart next time is unusual and interesting. It is more newsworthy than the name of the woman who died or the specifics of the operation.

There is certainly an element of subjectivity in these decisions. Different newswriters may play a story differently, and one newswriter may select different points when writing different versions of a story (see Chapter 13 "Newscasts"). But, there are moves that most newswriters would label as errors. For example, if somebody dies and the story dwells on the injured—that's a mistake in news judgment. If an attempt was made on the life of the president and the story talks about the speech he made before the assassination attempt—that's also choosing the wrong point.

Sometimes it takes so much effort to get a piece of information that it's easy to develop an attachment to it. This affection for a point can obscure news judgement. So newswriters must fight such romantic feelings. The audience doesn't care whether information took two hours and thirty phone calls to get. Since they're just going to hear a couple of points, they want them to be the most newsworthy.

**2. The basics** Listeners have certain basic questions about a story. The newswriter must include the answers. Here it's not a matter of selecting the points that stand out; it's a matter of filling in all the holes with facts.

What are the basic questions about a story? Who? What? When? Where? and Why? Here's where these five fit into broadcast news. The story should answer most of these questions. For instance, the answer to all five Ws in 15 seconds:

One person was killed by the storms that hit Illinois yesterday. He was a construction worker in the Kankakee area -- who was crushed when an unfinished house collapsed. Seven tornadoes struck the state yesterday.

*WSOY, Illinois*

How specific the answers to the five Ws get depends on the time available and the audience. In smaller towns in a local story listeners want to know exactly who it was, where the person lived and perhaps even what time of day it happened. They may know the person and the place and may have been nearby at that very hour. In larger cities, however, these details lose significance and can be sacrificed for time considerations. And, in out-of-town stories, laborious details should be actively avoided. It's enough to say, "A construction worker . . . in the Kankakee area . . . yesterday."

But whether or not the answers are detailed, listeners should not be left with major questions about the basic facts of a story. What's missing here?

## UNACCEPTABLE:

Passenger aircraft at northern Virginia's National and Dulles airports are once again being sprayed with D-D-T before leaving on flights to California. The pesticide, which may cause cancer, has been banned for years by the Environmental Protection Agency, and airline employees did not want to have to begin using it again. But the Department of Agriculture says the concentration of D-D-T is too low to cause trouble. The pesticide remains the strongest tool available to control destructive bugs.

Why? Why spray planes? And why only planes to California? The last sentence can be sacrificed in favor of a sentence that provides this basic fact.

## ACCEPTABLE:

Passenger aircraft at northern Virginia's National and Dulles airports are once again being sprayed with D-D-T before leaving on flights to California. The pesticide, which may cause cancer, has been banned for years by the Environmental Protection Agency, and airline employees did not want to begin using it again. But the Department of Agriculture says the concentration of D-D-T is too low to cause trouble. The spray is being used to prevent East Coast Japanese beetles from reaching California and destroying crops.

*WRVQ, Virginia*

• • •

So there are two considerations in selecting the information to include in a story: What are the two or three most newsworthy points? And what basic facts must be provided?

Here is a list of facts from a story supplied by the Associated Press:

1. Italian feminists with support ranging from the Communist Party on the left to the Liberal Party on the right wanted abortion legalized in Italy.
2. A law legalizing abortion was enacted two weeks ago.
3. It's one of the most liberal abortion laws in western Europe—permitting free abortions on demand for women over 18 in the first 90 days of pregnancy.
4. The measure was denounced by the Catholic Church.
5. Under the law doctors who don't want to perform abortions for moral or religious reasons may sign up as "conscientious objectors."
6. The doctors have 30 days to apply for objector status.
7. Scores of doctors are registering as conscientious objectors.
8. The Rome Medical Association predicts that 90 percent of the doctors in the metropolitan area will eventually register.
9. The abortion law took effect today.
10. It still faces the possibility of a repeal referendum.

A newswriter for Mutual worked from a similar collection of information. Mutual had 20 seconds on the story. Most of the points from the AP story were not particularly newsworthy because they were not timely. The law had been passed weeks before . . . Mutual could not just recap that story. The timely and newsworthy elements are the law taking effect and a new development—the doctors counting themselves out. Mutual's writer decided that no other points were compelling enough to squeeze in. The basic facts were filled in, and this was the story:

The new Italian law permitting abortion on demand went into effect today. But women seeking the operation may still have trouble. The law allows doctors to register as conscientious objectors — and not be required to perform abortions. Many are doing so in predominately Roman Catholic Italy.

*Mutual*

## 5. Making Sense

The information that does pass muster is still worthless if its meaning is not communicated clearly.

A writer obtains some important but confusing information. Why did the mayor say this? What does it mean for the town? Who'll benefit? And what does "tax abatement" mean, anyway? Such befuddlement should start red lights flashing. Stop! Do not write anything. A writer should never write a story before figuring out what it's about. Unfortunately, that is done all too often. The mayor's words will be dropped into the story undeciphered, to confuse listeners as they confused the writer. If the writer doesn't understand the story, it is unlikely listeners will.

The correct move? Reaching for the phone and calling half the government, if necessary, to find out what the mayor's proposal means. The next story this writer handles on tax relief will be easier.

There's another way newswriters can go wrong. Sometimes a story is so obvious to them that they forget it still must be explained to their listeners.

Newsrooms are inhabited by news experts. They spend their working hours studying current events. Most of the stories they will deal with are stories they have been following for days or years, or stories that are similar to the stories they've done for years. A writer facing the fifth story of the day on a successful flight to Mars can easily forget that most listeners didn't hear the other four, that listeners have not been privy to all the wire copy on the Mars mission and that they haven't been on the phone all day with local scientists and professors who are commenting on it. It is easy to forget that what makes sense to the writer may not make sense to the listeners. Retro-rockets, orbiters and the first picture sent back cannot just be tossed hastily into a story. Writers must slow down and make sure they are being clear.

Stories start losing listeners as they pick up

speed. Try to ride this roller coaster of a story. It was used on the air:

A letter will be mailed today to the governor petitioning him to make two appointments to the Hightown City Council, following the recall of the mayor and another councilman last week. Only two of the five members are officially on the governing body, and no business may be conducted until the temporary appointments. Anyone from the second or third wards should submit his or her names by May eleventh to the office of the city clerk. The last Council session could not be held due to a lack of a quorum. Consequently the seasonal and overtime payrolls are in limbo until the council is back in action.

While typing this up, some guilty writer was probably mumbling, "They'll get the idea." That's the weak writer's justification for every phrase, sentence or story that didn't turn out quite right: "They'll understand." But in these short, ephemeral stories, most listeners won't understand.

How to make sense:

1. Apportion facts. It's always better to clearly communicate a couple of facts than to do an incomplete job on a bunch of facts. So, it's foolish to include too many. A fact shouldn't be in the story unless there's time to make it clear.

In the above example, it's best to forget the plea for volunteers for appointment to the Council seats. Second and third ward would-be politicians will have to find out somewhere else. There isn't time to explain the procedure fully here, and this hazy reference just serves to make the entire story foggier. The deadline date and the fact that the appointments are temporary can also be omitted. The extra time must be used to clarify the central points. Dense writing isn't efficient.

2. Explain. Clarify anything that might possibly confuse. This story mentions two Council vacancies, but then says only two of the five council members are now "official." What happened to the others? And, what does "official" mean here? These are loose ends. No loose ends are allowed. Also, what's meant by "governing body"? And, whose "seasonal and overtime payrolls" are being discussed?
3. One idea at a time. The story discusses disruptions in the Council's business in the second sentence, then gets back to the subject again in the fourth and fifth sentences. But, listeners' minds function best when they're presented with one idea at a time. When everything that has to be said about disruptions is said, then the story can move on.

A slower and clearer version of the same story:

This is the procedure: A letter will be mailed to the governor today. It will petition him to fill the two vacancies on the Hightown City Council. Those vacancies were created when the mayor and another councilman were recalled by the voters last week. Since another council member is out sick, that left only two of the five councilmen at the last session. That's not a quorum -- meeting cancelled. So, such Council business as approving city workers' seasonal and overtime payrolls may have to wait until the governor gets the official letter... and appoints the two new people.

Even the cleverest phrasings and the most interesting stories are a waste of air time if they don't make sense to listeners.

## FLOW

Like a play or a poem or a piece of music, a broadcast story's construction must satisfy certain aesthetic imperatives. The news doesn't

have to be pretty or showy, but it has to move gracefully. A story should flow from the first sentence to the last, not just because that makes it more attractive. It should flow because that will help it convey meaning most effectively.

## 1. Organization

Broadcast stories are not constructed from blueprints. They are so brief that writers rarely even resort to an outline. But there are a few principles that can guide the sentences into place and make for a smoother, more understandable story:

**1. Related ideas** The facts should be laid out in the order that takes best advantage of their natural connections. The goal is to minimize the cracks between thoughts in a story by fitting the pieces of the puzzle together properly—in other words, proceeding from idea to related idea.

WEAK:

Those Japanese fishermen who threw back the carcass of a supposed sea monster are now wishing they hadn't. Russian scientific vessels are on their way to the area off New Zealand where the creature was caught and photographed. The Japanese trawler's owners have suddenly become aware that one smelly prehistoric beast is worth more than a whole fleet load of fresh tuna. Scientists used to think that particular species had been extinct for millions of years. Now they're not so sure.

Sentences are not interchangeable. The lead here flows naturally into the discussion of the trawler owners' sudden awareness. Following it with the sentence about the Russian vessels needlessly interrupts the natural progression of thoughts.

BETTER:

Those Japanese fishermen who threw back the carcass of a supposed sea

monster are now wishing they hadn't. The trawler's owners have suddenly become aware that one smelly prehistoric beast is worth more than a whole fleet load of fresh tuna. Russian scientific vessels are on their way to the area off New Zealand where the creature was caught and photographed. Scientists used to think that particular species had been extinct for millions of years. Now they're not so sure.

*WNOR, Virginia*

#### WEAK:

Maryland Governor Marvin Mandel may take the stand today at his Baltimore Federal Court trial. Mandel's defense attorney says that the governor may be called. The first witness today is former House Speaker Thomas Hunter Lowe. Federal Judge Robert Taylor already has agreed to a limited schedule for the ailing governor's testimony...no more than three-and-a-half hours on the stand on any day.

The fact that the governor may be called is connected more directly to the limit in the time he'll be on the stand, than it is to Lowe. That direct connection must be exploited.

#### BETTER:

Maryland Governor Marvin Mandel may take the stand today at his Baltimore Federal Court trial. Mandel's defense attorney says that the governor may be called. Federal Judge Robert Taylor already has agreed to a limited schedule for the ailing governor... no more than three-and-a-half hours any day. The first witness today is former House Speaker Thomas Hunter Lowe.

*WMAL, Washington, D.C.*

**2. Sequence** Many elements in stories can be organized chronologically—earlier event, then later event, then still later event.

At a quarter to two yesterday Jersey City police got a call on the emergency line from a woman who they say was hysterical...In a heavy Spanish accent she seemed to be talking about her child getting hurt...his head....then she hung up without giving an address. She called back in about five minutes and this time the officers were able to get the address...but they say it is doubtful if the extra time made any great difference. The injured boy, three-year-old Angel Sepulvada, had been shot through the head. The bullet came from his father's service revolver. Sepulvada is a member of the Hudson County police.....The mother, who could barely answer questions, indicated the boy had found the gun while playing....but police are still investigating. The child is alive but doctors say he's not expected to survive.

*WINS, New York City*

Sometimes the sequence begins after the lead:

A Rock Hill car dealer has found out that you can't always trust a pretty face -- or in this case, three of them. According to the Rock Hill Police Department, three young women, described only as being in their early twenties, drove into Pendleton Motors on Saluda Street around ten yesterday morning. The three reportedly told Salesman A-G Waters they wanted to try out a car on the lot. At least one of the women drove off in a 1969 Plymouth valued at one-thousand dollars, and, as of this morning, Waters hasn't seen the women or his Plymouth again. City police are still investigating the apparent auto theft.

*WRHI, South Carolina*

There are a lot of facts in this story. If they hadn't been told chronologically, they could easily have confused.

## UNACCEPTABLE:

A Rock Hill car dealer has found out that you can't always trust a pretty face -- or in this case, three of them. A woman drove off with one of Pendleton Motors salesman A-G Waters's cars yesterday. City police are still investigating the apparent auto theft. Waters hasn't seen the woman or the 1969 Plymouth she was driving, valued at one-thousand dollars, again. She was one of three young women in their early twenties who drove into the dealer on Saluda Street around ten yesterday. The other two women also disappeared.

This story also uses a chronological organization, although it is a little harder to spot:

Jim Warren of Saint Cloud has been found guilty of assault. His wife testified that he had tried to strangle her, then had told her that he always wanted to kill someone, and that he was going to stuff her into a trunk. Stearns County Attorney Roger Van Heel wanted a first-degree attempted murder conviction...but the jury returned the simple assault verdict after deliberating for an hour and a half. Warren gets a year's probation...He'll spend another 30 days in jail and have a checkup at a mental health center before his release.

KCLD, Minnesota

After the lead, events are described in the order in which they happened at the trial—right through the verdict and sentence.

**3. Indexing** The final method of organization is the most heavy-handed, and therefore the least common. It explicitly states that a series of thoughts are being presented, using numbers or names to separate and therefore organize the material. The organization is written in:

The magazine sales people are here... and the Chamber of Commerce and police agencies say they have been flooded with complaints. A team of solicitors is apparently working in the community this week. Authorities have two suggestions for all local residents: The first is that solicitors be asked to prove that they have registered with the Chamber of Commerce. If they have registered, they should be carrying proof with them. The second suggestion is that solicitors not be paid with cash, or with checks made out to cash.

WGHN, Michigan

The words *first* and *second* help order this story. In the next example the key is the names of the different towns:

Police and fire protests over salary continue spreading around Indiana. In Elwood, police and firemen walked off the job early this morning after being offered a seven percent wage increase. The Elwood officers want 20 percent. In Franklin, police began a slowdown to demand a 12 percent hike. In Kokomo, a state of emergency declared by the mayor continues as Kokomo police and firemen remain off the job. Sheriff's deputies are patrolling the city. And police in Peru and Jefferson are continuing their job action for higher pay.

WAZY, Indiana

The town names hold the story together. A story this complex—making so many points—needs some form of “indexing” to control them all.

• • •

These types of story organization are not mutually exclusive. Many stories use more than one. After the lead, most accident or crime stories, for instance, go back to the chronological

beginning; then they simply connect related ideas rather than sticking strictly to the sequence of events:

A national pathology lab will attempt to determine the cause of death of a nine-year-old Shreveport boy who authorities think was a murder victim. The nude and decomposed body of John Fraley was found near his home last Friday, and local tests have failed to turn up any substantial information. Detectives say they have little to go on, although they assume the boy was the victim of a sexual attack.

*KWKH, Louisiana*

The writer's job is to choose the method of organization that organizes the elements of the story most logically and therefore enables the story to flow smoothly.

## 2. Transitions

Our conversation is studded with words and phrases whose only job is to help thoughts and sentences relate to each other. These "social directors"—transitions—play an important role. Without them, conversation is stiff and unfriendly: "Fred bought a car. His wife, Susan, doesn't think cars are a good idea in the city. She's angry." With transitions: "Fred bought a new car, *but* his wife Susan doesn't think cars are a good idea in the city. So, she's angry."

Transitions are just as important in broadcast news:

It was all finally too much for Suzy Harris of London, England. Her husband had just finished watching two weeks of World Cup soccer matches, and he was getting ready for another two weeks of tennis from Wimbledon...when the yearly tax bill on the television arrived from the government. Suzy fumed..."I don't pay the tax just to watch sport and

nothing but sport!" she yelled, and with that she snatched up the telly, ran out to the yard, got a sledgehammer, and...well to quote her..."There was an almighty bang and that was the end of it."

*Gil Fox, ABC*

Notice what happens to a few of these sentences with the transitions removed:

Her husband had just finished watching two weeks of World Cup soccer matches. He was getting ready for another two weeks of tennis from Wimbledon. The yearly tax bill on the television arrived from the government.

Without these words the story is choppy and harder to understand.

A list of transition words:

and	while
also	when
too	meantime
in addition	meanwhile
well	now
plus	again
just as	then
furthermore	so far
but	incidentally
however	so
yet	therefore
only	that's why
on the other hand	thereby

Sometimes a sentence can also be joined to the sentence that precedes it by a phrase that simply looks back such as the "with that" in the "telly" story.

Transition words, phrases or constructions may also be given larger assignments. Often newswriters face this problem: two stories, related theme, not enough time for both. Solution—combine them.

Two stories can be pulled together by an umbrella lead (see Chapter 5 "Leads"), or they can

be connected by a transition phrase. Here are three stories merged into one by two strong transition phrases:

The House Ways and Means Committee might be able to put the finishing touches on a tax cut by the end of the week...It would include a one-time-only tax rebate, and a long-range tax cut, with the emphasis on middle- and low-income groups.....In the meantime, the president and Congress seem to be trying to find a way to compromise on his oil tariff plan.....All this against a backdrop of the first encouraging signs that the recession...depression...whatever...is getting ready to bottom -- heavy action on the stock market...some pickup in car sales, and so on.

*WINS, New York City*

Transitions are the oil that enables stories, or combinations of stories, to work smoothly. Without them ideas grind against each other. The story sputters and stalls. But transition words have their own specific meanings which must not be ignored. *But*, for example, has to connect ideas that contradict.

**UNACCEPTABLE:**

The president opposed the bill, but he vetoed it.

And *and* must connect related thoughts. Otherwise it creates non sequiturs.

**UNACCEPTABLE:**

The president opposed the bill, and he left today on vacation.

Transitions must also be used judiciously.

**UNACCEPTABLE:**

Your state income tax could go down a notch at midnight, and the Legislature will have to do something in the next 16 hours...or it

automatically drops. So, a family of four -- for example -- making 20 thousand a year, under this plan, would save 28 dollars a year.

**ACCEPTABLE:**

Your state income tax could go down a notch at midnight. The Legislature will have to do something in the next 16 hours...or it automatically drops. A family of four -- for example -- making 20 thousand a year...would save 28 dollars a year.

*WDEE, Detroit*

**3. Snappers**

The final sentence in a broadcast story, called the "snapper," is second in importance only to the lead. This last line takes the tight little package that is a broadcast story and wraps it up. The snapper should be crisp and clean, and when appropriate, it can end the story with a little snap:

A magazine column in Washington recently labeled Senator John Melcher of Montana a vegetarian. Since he comes from cow country...it brought some nasty mail from back home. Melcher also says he may no longer be invited to barbecues and weenie roasts. Melcher says he is NOT a vegetarian. He IS a veterinarian.

*WMAL, Washington, D.C.*

There are five different types of snappers:

**1. The main point** It's a little late in the story to be introducing the main point, but sometimes the snapper can shoulder part of the responsibility for making that point and supporting the lead:

The consumer price index in the Los Angeles-Long Beach area went up three-tenths of a percent last month...due mainly to higher prices for coffee, hamburger and cars. Don't feel too bad, though...the Department of Labor says that's exactly half the national increase.

What it all boils down to is that we paid 17-dollars and 85-cents last month for what cost us 10 dollars ten years ago.

*KNAC, California*

While there is no room in a broadcast story for a sentence that merely restates the main point, the snapper is the logical place to conclude the story. The trick is to wrap up without wasting time repeating:

**WEAK:**

The county last month BOUGHT 2 point 6 billion dollars more in goods and services from overseas than it sold. In other words we're paying out a lot more than we're taking in.

**BETTER:**

The country last month BOUGHT 2 point 6 billion dollars more in goods and services from overseas than it sold. That is another all-time high trade deficit.

*Bob Cain, NBC*

**2. Another fact** Often the snapper is saved for one additional fact. This works only if the new piece of information helps place the story in perspective. The end of the story is no place to open up a new can of worms.

**UNACCEPTABLE:**

A spur of the Washington Metro Commuter Rail system in northern Virginia is to be officially opened today. Governor Godwin is scheduled to attend the Fourth of July Metro dedication ceremony along with the mayor of Washington and the acting governor of Maryland. There's some question whether the new spur is too little and too late to handle the growing transportation needs of this area.

The new fact must be self-sufficient; it can't leave

loose ends. And, the new fact must be relevant enough to tie the story together.

**ACCEPTABLE:**

A spur of the Washington Metro Commuter Rail system in northern Virginia is to be officially opened today. Governor Godwin is scheduled to attend the Fourth of July Metro dedication ceremony along with the mayor of Washington and the acting governor of Maryland. Metro will eventually extend from Washington deep into the Virginia and Maryland suburbs.

*WRVQ, Virginia*

*Meanwhile* is usually a calling card of another-fact snapper:

The cost of the proposed building, meanwhile, continues to rise, while county politicians continue their squabbles.

*WCEM, Maryland*

Another example of a story with this type of snapper:

Back to square one in the investigation of the shooting of porn publisher Larry Flynt. A New York judge has released a man who tried to sell Flynt's family information on the shooting...turns out he didn't have anything to sell. Flynt is still in serious condition.

*KGO, San Francisco*

This type of snapper is so common that some versions have become clichés. How often do stories end with this additional fact?

Police are continuing their investigation into the incident.

**3. The other side** In a controversial story the snapper can be reserved for the other side of the argument. This has a certain justice—the point of

view that is making the news gets most of the story, but, for balance, its opponents get the last word:

In what's considered a victory for the federal government, the Supreme Court has ruled that abortions may be legal -- but that the government does not have to pay for them. The court ruled that states aren't required to pay for the abortions of Medicaid patients just because they're legal. In a dissenting view, Justice Brennan said the majority opinion showed what he called "a distressing insensitivity to the plight of impoverished pregnant women."

*KNAC, California*

**4. The future ramification** What happens next? What are the bill's chances of passing? What is the candidate's next stop? How long before the price increase is felt in the stores? Answering these questions—looking toward the future—is a natural way of ending the story:

The council is expected to take up the budget considerations tomorrow.

*WRHI, South Carolina*

Burns says he will appeal the judge's ruling to the State Supreme Court.

*KCLD, Minnesota*

This future-ramification snapper should not have been used—probably too subjective—but it's clever:

The Council will meet again next week...to get some work done.

**5. The punch line** Some of the best snappers are the ones with the most snap:

With his wife in the hospital expecting their first child, New Kensington's mayor cancelled an

appearance before the Rotary Club today. His prepared speech: how to act in an emergency.

*WKPA, Pennsylvania*

#### 4. Rhythm

Most broadcast newswriters will tell you they don't fool with anything as elevated as "prose rhythm," but if they're good, they're wrong. All good writing has rhythm, and broadcast writing—written to be performed—is certainly no exception. Subconsciously at least, a newswriter should hear a beat. Nothing fancy or syn-copated—but without it the words and sentences, no matter how carefully turned out, will sound flat.

Fortunately, the rhythm of broadcast news is simple enough so even those who can't dance a lick can be taught it. There are four steps:

**1. Sentence length** The dominant percussion instrument in broadcast stories is the short sentence, or incomplete sentence. It can add dramatic power:

Letter bombs...the F-B-I says extortion messages have been sent to several corporations demanding money or else more bombs will be sent.

*WOR, New York City*

A phony documentary on British television last night said that American and Soviet scientists plan to set up a colony on Mars to escape the possible end of the Earth. Many viewers believed it.

*WNDE, Indianapolis*

But, too many very short sentences in a row will make the rhythm too choppy.

UNACCEPTABLE:

A new organization has been formed. It's for all you folks who are opposed to adopting the metric system. A columnist for the Chicago

Sun Times...Bob Greene...formed the group. He calls it "WAM." That means "We Ain't Metric!" Greene says he needed an idea for a column. So he came up with this ...and it caught on. Now it has millions of members. Greene says the U-S shouldn't change to the metric system. That would accommodate the other nations of the world. He says they should adopt our system.

On the other hand, too many relatively long sentences will make the rhythm sluggish.

#### UNACCEPTABLE:

A columnist for the Chicago Sun Times...Bob Greene...has formed an organization for all you folks who are opposed to adopting the metric system. Greene says he came up with the idea for the group -- called "WAM" which means "We Ain't Metric!" -- one day when he didn't have any material for a column. The group now has millions of members who believe that, instead of the U-S changing to the metric system to accommodate the other nations of the world, they should change to our system.

To keep the rhythm lively, writers try to mix one or two short sentences and short independent clauses with medium-length sentences.

#### ACCEPTABLE:

There is now an organization for all you folks who are opposed to adopting the metric system. A columnist for the Chicago Sun Times...Bob Greene... has formed a group called "WAM"... which means "We Ain't Metric!" Greene says he came up with the idea one day when he didn't have any material for a column...but it caught on and now has millions of members. Greene says the U-S shouldn't change to the metric system to accommodate

the other nations of the world.....  
They should adopt our system.

*WSB, Atlanta*

**2. Sentence structure** The straight subject-verb sentence works fine in broadcast news, but if too many are strung together or the same subject and verb are repeated too frequently, the sentence will fall flat. This was used on the air:

The New York Police Department says it's recovered about 100-thousand dollars in blackout loot. Police raided an abandoned apartment on West 108th Street. They said it had been converted into a warehouse of stolen goods. Five people were arrested. They were said to be fences buying goods from looters for resale. The law was tipped by phone.

Good writers vary the subjects, verbs and sentence structure—sometimes doing that requires a clause at the start of some sentences:

When New York Police raided an abandoned apartment on West 108th Street...they say they found 100-thousand dollars in blackout loot. According to the police, the place had been converted into a warehouse of stolen goods. Five people were arrested...said to be fences buying goods from looters for resale. The law was tipped by phone.

**3. Strong words** Some words have the power to punctuate a story. Put a strong word at the end of a sentence and it will usually pick up the rhythm:

The Black Panther founder is returning to the U-S...after hiding out the past two-and-a-half years... in Cuba.

*WDEE, Detroit*

The conviction stands...William Weeks is guilty of manslaughter.

*KCLD, Minnesota*

**4. Repetition** Writers are usually hunting down synonyms to avoid repeating words too often and sounding amateurish:

The president leaves tomorrow on his trip. He's got a lot invested in the success of this trip. The trip will carry him to 14 European nations, before he returns from the trip at the end of the month.

Falling into this unnecessary and awkward repetition is a mistake, but there are times when repetition can be used as a rhetorical device to enhance a story:

Morris Udall was second in the Massachusetts primary. He was second in New York. And Udall finished second in Iowa, Illinois and Florida. The results are in for the California primary....That's right....The

winner incidentally was Jimmy Carter with 33 percent of the vote. Morris Udall got 20 percent.

At the hands of a good writer, repetition can also clarify:

It will be noon before a decision can be reached. Noon because more members of the board can be in attendance.

KPNW, Oregon

• • •

These tricks should help writers keep stories lively. Reading and listening to other good writers also helps. A writer has to *hear* words and sentences; get a feel for the story's sound.

"Some days are beautiful," George Brooks of KCUE in Minnesota writes. "Some days, words are music."

## SUMMARY

---

The main job of the story is to communicate. That requires a smooth and selective presenta-

tion of information. A bit of an ear for the music in words doesn't hurt.

## PRACTICE ASSIGNMENTS

---

A. Write a 20- to 25-second story based on the following facts.

1. Lt. Gov. Michael Mars has completed state tour.
2. Mars says the drought is already severe in southern half of state.
3. Southern half contains  $\frac{3}{4}$  of state's population.
4. Mars describes tour as "eye-opening experience."
5. Says situation in south more serious than many people and officials realize.
6. Says Sturbridge is within 30 days of running out of water.
7. Mars is coordinating state drought assistance.
8. Says federal aid possible.
9. Sturbridge pop.: 15,768.
10. State submitted application for federal drought relief funds last week.

11. Federal decision regarding funds will be released tomorrow.

12. Drought began 2 months ago—worsening since then.

B. Combine the following information into one 20- to 25-second story.

1. Prison guards in Montana are on strike.
2. Started 4 days ago.
3. National Guardsmen on duty in prisons today.
4. There are 1600 Nat. Guards on duty.
5. NGs sent to the state today.
6. About 5000 prison guards on strike.
7. 38,000 copper workers were on strike.
8. Their strike has ended today.

9. 2 largest copper companies agreed to relatively quick settlement. Strike ended sooner than some labor mediators had expected.
10. Copper workers won extra \$1.00 per hour.
11. Had demanded: \$1.25/hr.
12. Walked off job 3 days ago.
13. Many wildcat copper strikes last year.

C. Write a 25- to 30-second story based on the following facts.

1. Alfred Lewis, county maintenance supervisor, appeared before County Commission last night asking to be allowed to keep his job.
2. He said he wouldn't resign.
3. Charged that media had "killed" him.
4. Commission last night reviewed and released an investigation, which was conducted by County Attorney David Malone's office.
5. The investigation charged that Lewis misused county vehicles.
6. It also revealed that he had granted personal favors involving the use of various pieces of county equipment during the last 2½ years.
7. Following the review, Commissioner Bob Newhouse moved that Lewis be fired, with no severance pay.
8. The motion was approved, unanimously, by the 11-member Commission.
9. Pete White, the Commission's chairman, said the Malone investigation also revealed that Lewis misused his office to better his position.
10. Lewis said: "All charges against me are totally, completely erroneous and false. My enemies are trying to ruin me and my family."

D. Write a 20- to 25-second story based on the following facts.

1. City Council meeting last night.
2. Lasted 2 hours.
3. Second meeting of month.
4. Last month's appointments approved: Sue Murphy as public relations supervisor; John Katz as assistant liaison for city affairs.
5. School Board appropriations for playground approved.
6. 12 members of Council present; 2 absent.
7. Chaired by Evan Jones, acting council president.

8. 2 percent hike in real estate tax approved.
9. Vote: 7-5.
10. Council member Jane Andrews says: "This will drive people—constructive people—away from town, people whom our town needs."
11. Jones: Hike needed for balanced budget.
12. Closing of all town parks after 10 p.m. approved.

E. Write a 15-second or shorter story based on the following facts.

1. Rick Peters, high school student.
2. Lost 2 toes when foot run over by school bus last year.
3. Sued school district for ½ million dollars.
4. 2 months ago: jury finds school district not negligent.
5. Attorney Betty Burns requested new trial last month.
6. Called previous decision "perverse."
7. District Court Judge Robert Penn denied request this afternoon.
8. Penn: "The case was properly put before a jury and decided. The proper legal process was carried through."
9. Burns says will appeal to State Supreme Court.

F. Write a 20- to 25-second story based on the following facts.

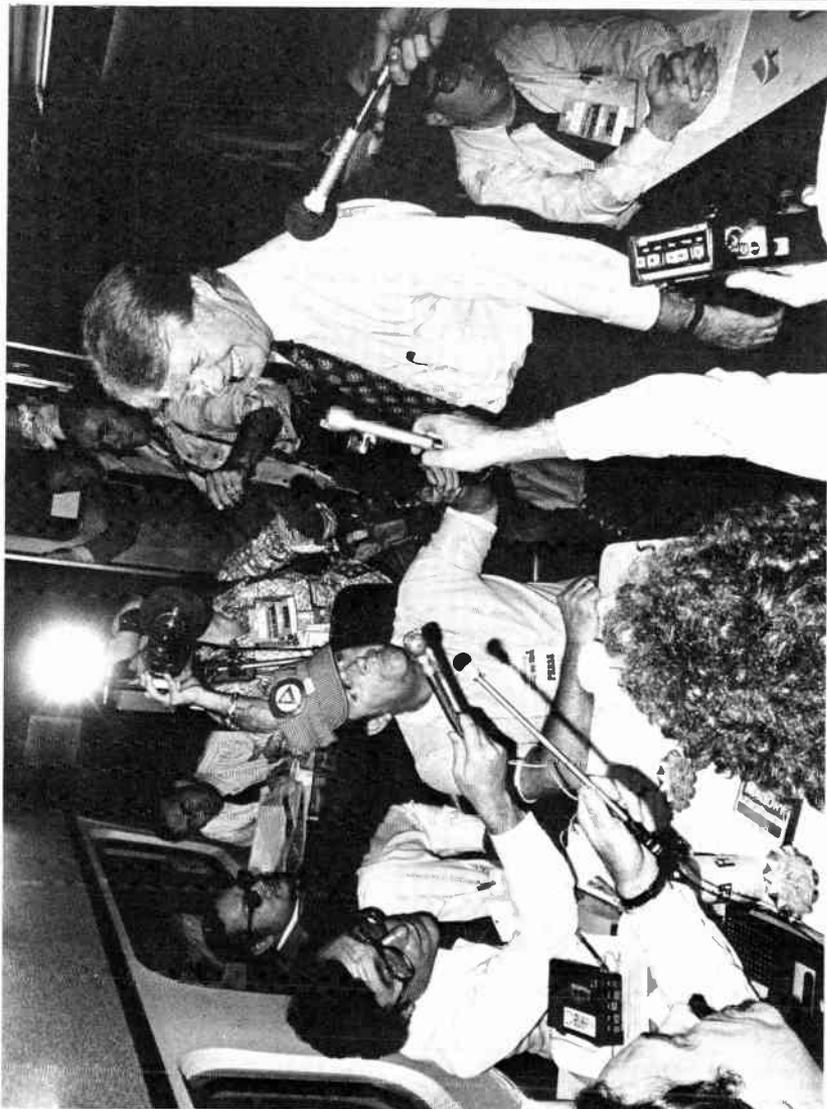
1. Man found dead in boat around noon yesterday.
2. Boat docked at marina.
3. Police identified him as Evan Rows.
4. Local police are continuing their investigation.
5. Autopsy performed last night.
6. Performed by Dr. Sybil Jones.
7. Apparent cause of death: stab wounds.
8. Rows was 32.
9. Police arrested a teenager today.
10. Charge: theft on property where the murder allegedly occurred.
11. He's 18.
12. Name: Robert Ray.
13. Will be arraigned today.
14. Presently in county jail.
15. Police say Ray is suspect in murder.
16. He was picked up in Concord at app. 2:00 this aft.
17. With him was female juvenile, name undisclosed.

## PRACTICE ASSIGNMENTS

G. Write a 15- to 20-second story based on the following information released by the police.

1. Auto accident yesterday evening, app. 5 p.m.
2. Location: Highway 14.
3. Rained yesterday.
4. Car skidded on wet pavement.
5. Left highway, rolled over on top.
6. 6 in car.
7. Were driving through town—all from out-of-state.
8. Driver of car: Gerald Smith.
9. 1 adult, 1 child seriously injured: Meredith Smith of Santa Clara, Cal., age 31, and Janey Smith, same town, age 4.
10. Gerald Smith, 33, and Jacob Smith, 6, also of Santa Clara, both killed instantly.
11. Janet Simon, 44, of San Francisco, and Joseph Shields, 14, also from SF, injured; listed good condition.
12. Meredith and Gerald Smith parents of Janey and Jacob Smith. Simon and Shields not related.

# 2



# REPORTING

***Preceding page:***

**Jimmy Carter joins reporters in a railroad press car during the 1976 campaign. (*Dennis Brack from Black Star*)**

---

# SOURCES

Many radio stations have reporters out in the field, but a reporter can only cover one story at a time, and only a story that's within easy reach. Even with creative use of a telephone, the number of stories a station's news staff can track down is limited. But most newsrooms are putting together reports every hour on at least half-a-dozen breaking events taking place around the world. How does information on all these stories reach the newsroom? Some news arrives by mail; some by telephone. From 66 to 1,200 words per minute about the day's events are sent to the newsroom by the wire services on lines rented from the telephone company, sometimes employing satellites. Similar lines bring in the sound of the news from the audio news services. Books and other publications help. And, a radio scanner draws the internal communication of police and fire departments into the newsroom.

Along with reporters and their contacts, which will be discussed in the following chapters, these are the sources of radio news. Broadcast journalists have to know how to work with them.

## THE WIRES

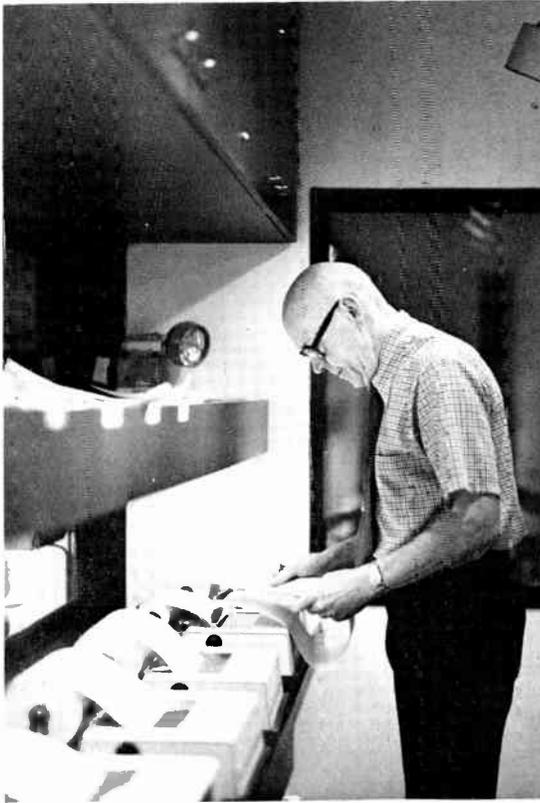
*\* test two main one*

WRRR in Rockford, Illinois, has two reporters. Neither is ever sent to Washington, let alone Tel

Aviv. But WRRR supplements its reporting staff with the more than 1,000 reporters United Press International has sprinkled around the planet. By subscribing to UPI's broadcast wire, the station can avail itself of the work of UPI's 100-person Washington bureau or its bureaus in Africa or Europe or the Middle East or the four-person UPI office in the state capital—Springfield. The wires cover the world for newspapers and television and radio stations like WRRR.

Certainly these are among the most powerful tools a news operation has. When a presidential news conference ends, UPI's Helen Thomas, as one of the senior White House correspondents, may say, "Thank you, Mr. President"; then she dashes to her phone in the White House pressroom to call in her story. Shortly it will be relayed to WRRR and thousands of other UPI customers. But UPI wasn't waiting for Helen Thomas's detailed report in order to begin its coverage. Other UPI reporters were monitoring the news conference on television and writing stories based on the earlier questions. WRRR will have a story, even if they do a newscast before the news conference ends.

The wires are fast. UPI still proudly recalls beating the Associated Press by four minutes in reporting that shots had been fired at President



At WCCO, Minneapolis, a newswriter reads wire copy. (WCCO, Minneapolis)

John Kennedy in Dallas. UPI also beat the AP by four days in announcing the end of World War I. Unfortunately, they scooped the politicians and generals, too. The war didn't end for another four days.

The wires are also comprehensive. "There are only two forces that can carry light to all corners of the globe," Mark Twain once said, "the sun in the heavens and the Associated Press down here." The AP has reporters stationed in more than 50 bureaus around the world and more than 100 in the United States. When the Communists were taking South Vietnam, for instance, the AP was covering the story with three staffers in Saigon, two near the demilitarized zone, two in Laos, two in Thailand, four in the Philippines, three on Guam, one on Wake Island and two staffers aboard a carrier in the South China Sea.

For many years newspapers, rightly viewing radio as a dangerous competitor in the news business, tried to prevent stations from using the Associated Press, but today there are more broadcast stations hooked up to AP wires than newspapers. Only a handful of radio and television stations can survive without at least one wire service teletype, or a futuristic computer printer, churning out the news of the region, world and nation.

Only three wire services attempt complete coverage of the United States and the world. One, Reuters, is known primarily for the quality of its foreign news. In larger newsrooms Reuters might be used to supplement the other wires. Most stations rely primarily on the Associated Press or United Press International.

The AP is older (founded in 1848) and larger than its rival, but UPI has been catering to radio stations longer (since 1935—when it was called United Press). Both serve well over 3,000 broadcast stations. The AP is a cooperative—owned by its subscribers—while UPI is a private company—owned primarily by Scripps-Howard.

Larger stations use both AP and UPI. Smaller stations can generally afford only one. Which one they choose might depend on the deal each wire is willing to offer or which wire the competition has, or the station might base its decision on a preference for the writing or services one provides.

The wire services' services have multiplied over the years. They have developed specialized wires designed to satisfy specific news needs. Radio and television newsrooms have found uses for many of these wires, some of which place special demands on the broadcast journalists who use them.

### 1. Broadcast Wires

Radio and television stations have different news needs than newspapers. The broadcast wires are designed to satisfy these needs.

Most radio stations cover the top news every hour, so the broadcast wires repeat and update

all the top stories every hour. Broadcast newscasters need to know facts such as the correct pronunciation of difficult names, so the broadcast wires include pronunciation guides. And news written for broadcast must follow the rules outlined in the previous chapters; the broadcast wire is written in broadcast style:

(PINEVILLE)—TWO MEN ESCAPED FROM THE MCDONALD COUNTY JAIL IN PINEVILLE, MISSOURI, LAST NIGHT... APPARENTLY SIMPLY BY WALKING OUT THE FRONT DOOR. THE SHERIFF'S OFFICE IS INVESTIGATING THE ESCAPE. THE MEN ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE LEFT THE JAIL ABOUT 11 P.-M... BUT THEIR ESCAPE WASN'T NOTICED UNTIL AFTER MIDNIGHT WHEN AUTHORITIES DISCOVERED AN EVIDENCE CABINET HAD BEEN BURGLARIZED.

UPI 07-27 12:17 PCD

This story opens with a dateline—PINEVILLE—but most stations won't read this on the air; the location is mentioned again in the lead. The line at the end of the story, or at the end of a complete newscast, gives the date (July 27) and the time (PCD is p.m., Central Daylight time).

The broadcast wires have a staff of newswriters turning information, mostly taken from the wires intended for newspapers, into copy suitable for broadcast. UPI and AP also ensure that the copy is regionalized. UPI, for instance, has 52 separate, regional broadcast wires—almost every state has a regional wire and a few states are divided into two regions. Each regional wire mixes about 30 minutes of state or regional news with the 30 minutes of national and international news everybody gets. The broadcast wires also supply stations with complete newscast scripts. Here's UPI's schedule of national newscasts:

World in Brief Summaries—3½ minutes of the top stories for use in a 5-minute newscast; sent almost every hour before the half-hour.

World News Roundups—10 minutes of news for use

in a 15-minute newscast; sent before 5 a.m., 4 p.m. and 10 p.m. on weekdays.

Hourly Headlines—1 minute of news briefs; sent before each hour.

In addition, UPI sends out a minute of sports before the half-hour eight times a day, a sports roundup five times a day; as well as regular weather, business news, features, commentaries and farm news—all ready to read on the air. The AP's schedule is similar.

Essentially, all a station has to do is rip stories, or even complete newscasts, off the teletype and read them on the air. There's no need for a news staff; a disk jockey can do it. This method, called "rip and read" journalism, is used by many stations to present the news. Rip and read has two major advantages: it is easy and cheap.

Rip and read has many disadvantages. Good newsrooms develop a style. Their copy has a characteristic "feel" to it, determined by pacing, language and news selection. Listeners won't hear this in stories ripped off a wire. The wires are certainly not known for the quality of their writing—churned out in large volumes under intense deadline pressure, it often sounds hurried. And the wires cannot risk style, even if they have the time to develop it. They have to please hundreds of stations. Turning on a little style might mean turning off some subscribers.

Still another of the basic strategies of broadcast journalism is denied to the wires—they can't localize a story for a town or a county; they have to write for whole states or regions.

Here's a lead off one of the wires; it is awkward and dense:

FIRE FROM AN UNDETERMINED CAUSE GUTTED A TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY STONE CHURCH IN KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI, EARLY TODAY AND SLIGHTLY INJURED FOUR FIREMEN.

Sitting in a somewhat less hectic newsroom, aware of the local listeners' interests and able to add whatever style suits their station, most radio and television news writers can do a better job

on a story than the wires. For example, here is the church story as rewritten for a Kansas City station:

Saint Andrew's Methodist Church on Troost Street was built at the turn of the century. A fire started in the basement there this morning... and it burned all the way through to the sanctuary and roof of the old stone church.

Wire copy should be rewritten. If there isn't time or staff for that, it should at least be edited. Sentences can often be chopped.

WIRE:

TWO MEN, ONE FROM WEST GERMANY, HAVE BEEN ARRESTED BY THE F-B-I IN FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA, AND ACCUSED OF CONSPIRING TO SMUGGLE COMPONENTS OF THE TOP-SECRET U-S CRUISE MISSILE TO THE SOVIET UNION.

STATION:

Two men, one from West Germany, have been arrested by the F-B-I in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. They've been accused of conspiring to smuggle components of the top-secret U-S Cruise missile to the Soviet Union.

*WEBN, Cincinnati*

The wording can often be improved.

WIRE:

PRESIDENT CARTER HAS DECLARED 26 DROUGHT-STRICKEN ALABAMA COUNTIES ARE NOW ELIGIBLE FOR FEDERAL AID.

STATION:

President Carter has declared that 26 drought-stricken Alabama counties are now eligible for federal aid.

WIRE:

THE HOUSE HAS OKAYED A 12-BILLION, 700-MILLION DOLLAR FUNDING BILL

THAT PROVIDES 5 POINT 6 BILLION DOLLARS FOR FOOD STAMPS.

STATION:

The House has okayed a funding bill that provides over 5-billion dollars for food stamps.

The story sometimes can be localized.

WIRE:

PATRICK HENRY'S "GIVE ME LIBERTY OR GIVE ME DEATH" SPEECH WAS REENACTED AT HISTORIC SAINT JOHN'S CHURCH NEAR THE STATE CAPITOL.

STATION:

Patrick Henry's "Give me liberty or give me death" speech was reenacted at historic Saint John's Church here on Church Hill.

*WRVQ, Virginia*

To localize a wire story it is sometimes necessary to do some additional research. This was a story about 80 Illinois communities and factories accused of missing a pollution clean-up deadline. WSOY added a sentence about the local violators:

Included among the violators are the municipalities of Bloomington-Normal and Champaign-Urbana, as well as the Revere Copper and Brass Company in Clinton, and several Peoria-area plants of the Caterpillar Tractor Company.

Operating at such high speed also forces the wires into errors. One of the AP's more famous faux pas took place at the end of the Lindbergh kidnapping trial in the '30s. AP staffers had rigged up a complex system for communicating the sentence from the sealed courtroom. They were first to report the sentence, but it was the wrong sentence. They said life imprisonment; the convicted kidnapper was sentenced to die. It took eleven minutes to correct the error on the wire.

REPORTING / SOURCES

106

The Associated Press broadcast wire once killed Marshall Tito of Yugoslavia when he was still very much alive. ABC and CBS led with the story on their newscasts. The editor on duty at NBC, however, was puzzled that the story hadn't appeared on any other wire, including other AP wires. He held the story and called AP. AP admitted that it was a mistake. CBS and ABC had to air embarrassed corrections after the wire carried a correction.

In fact, the wires conscientiously spend much time correcting themselves and updating their work. This means newswriters have to be alert for an item that refutes something they are about to put on the air. This should also make newswriters anxious to check facts on their own when possible. This version of a wire service story, for example, corrects the number of months mentioned in the first version. The original had talked of the "smallest trade deficit in ten months":

CORRECTION  
THE UNITED STATES RECORDED ITS  
SMALLEST TRADE DEFICIT IN EIGHT  
MONTHS IN MAY.

Stations that missed this revision, or used the story before it was corrected, were led into an error. It may not be feasible for a station to call Washington to check the facts on a story like this, but the frequency of errors of this sort points to the need to confirm the facts in wire stories when possible—and it should be possible on all local stories.

All this is not intended to imply that every broadcast wire story is poorly written or inaccurate—just that most can use some rewriting and checking to make them more effective. Of course, stations have also been known to make wire copy worse. One added this unfortunate sentence to an AP story:

It is believed, however, that the damage will not amount to as great a cost as that of a similar fire in November.

Because broadcast wire stories enter the newsroom with all the appearances of finished broadcast copy, it is tempting to rip and read or "tack them up"—staple them into the script and read them on the air. Good newswriters fight that temptation and treat the broadcast wires as no more than a first draft.

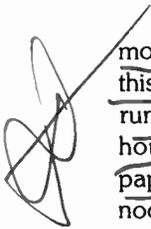
If the wires are looked on primarily as source material, it becomes obvious that the broadcast wires have a serious disadvantage—they don't contain much information. These wires are already one step removed from the facts. They are composed of stories that have been rewritten in broadcast style from print sources. Since broadcast stories must be short, they can't squeeze in too much information. Working with the broadcast wires, a writer is limited to the few facts selected by the wire service writers. A broadcast story is a poor place to look for the information on which to base an original version of that story. While the larger radio and television news organizations may rely on the broadcast wires for breaking stories that must be quickly edited, then thrown on the air, they base most of their writing on wires actually intended for newspapers.

## 2. Print Wires

Traditionally, the wire services sent two wires to the nation's newspapers—the A and B wires. Both contained national and international news. The A wire had the more important stories; the B wire had whatever was left over. Broadcast stations—with no back pages to fill with secondary news—would only be interested in the A wire.

The AP and UPI still provide national A wires, but they now offer subscribers a chance to take a mix of national news and regional stories, similar to the mix available on the broadcast wires. Separate regional-only wires are also available. Broadcast stations that choose to use a major print wire will select from this grab bag.

The first problem a broadcast newswriter has with these print wires is their schedule. The newspaper world is divided into two groups—



moming and afternoon papers. Print wires reflect this split and are designed to produce a complete run-through of the day's news every twelve hours—from noon to midnight for the morning papers and from midnight to noon for the afternoon dailies. A radio station needs to recount the news every hour, so this is inconvenient. But fortunately, the print wires constantly update the major stories—the stories in which the radio journalist is most interested. Although it isn't organized into neat one-hour blocks, the news is kept fresh enough for radio.

Another problem with the print wires is that, because there are no Sunday afternoon papers, the print wires do not send out a regular cycle of news on Sunday mornings. Sunday tends to be the slowest news day anyway; so newswriters will squirrel away some “evergreens”—feature or background stories that can be held a couple of days—for use on Sunday.

The advantage of the print wires is the wide selection of information they offer newswriters looking to carve out their own stories. The print wire's version of a story will use many more words than the broadcast wire's. It is likely, therefore, to carry many more facts. In another step to maximize the available information, most newsrooms collect different versions of a story off the wires and file them together. Newsrooms have set procedures for ripping and filing wire copy. Usually the first step is to break it down into national, international, state and local news; then to separate the individual stories. A newswriter may then look at the whole day's file on a story.

Larger newsrooms have versions of the story off a few different wires in the file because frequently one wire will miss a fact another has. In a grisly story about a Moscow man who attacked three tourists with an axe, for instance, UPI, AP and Reuters all had substantial reports on the story on their wires by 7:30 a.m.; but the AP was missing a witness's report that one of the tourists was decapitated, UPI was missing the age of the Moscow man, and both the AP and Reuters missed a description of the man as “husky.” Any

of these facts could have made it into the story. Only a writer with a chance to look over all three versions would have had them all to choose from.

The first step in turning print wire copy into broadcast stories is reading all those plentiful facts carefully. Writers wait until they understand a story thoroughly before they hazard skimming later updates.

Working from more than one wire requires that the newswriters or editor, if there is one, take responsibility for “copy control”—ensuring that the station's version of events is consistent and based on the best available information. It won't do to say, “27 are dead in a plane crash” in one newscast based on the AP, then have someone go on the air an hour later saying, “22 dead” based on UPI. When reports conflict, someone in the newsroom must carefully evaluate the different reports and choose from them a set of the timeliest and most consistent facts. Then all the newswriters must stick to that version—until the facts change again. Incidentally, when in doubt use the lower number of casualties. It's always better to add a few dead later on than to have to resurrect people you've already announced as having been killed.

Once a set of facts has been compiled, the writing begins. Here the story must of necessity undergo a total transformation—newspaper and broadcast styles are different enough so that it's a rare sentence that meets the requirements of both. Sentences off the print wires must be minced, thinned, seasoned and molded. When the stories are done, only the facts will be the same. As a rule, most broadcast writers do not allow any sentences from print wires into their copy. Not because that would be unethical—the wires are written to be “plagiarized”—it's just foolish to use newspaper sentences on the air.

Here's an example of a story off an AP print wire:

PM-UNIVERSE, 120  
NEW YORK (AP) -- JANELLE  
COMMISSIONG SAID TODAY THAT SHE WANTS  
TO MEET UGANDAN PRESIDENT IDI AMIN

DURING HER REIGN AS THE FIRST BLACK WOMAN CHOSEN MISS UNIVERSE.

ASKED WHOM SHE WOULD LIKE TO MEET, THE BEAUTY QUEEN FROM TRINIDAD, TOBAGO, MENTIONED AMIN AND SAID SHE WANTS TO SEE "WHAT HE'S REALLY LIKE."

"I WOULD LIKE TO SIT DOWN AND HAVE A CHAT WITH HIM," SHE SAID. "I'D LIKE TO ASK HIM WHY HE DOES THE THINGS HE DOES AND WHY HE HAS TO HAVE THE WORLD IN AWE."

THE NEW MISS UNIVERSE WAS ALSO ASKED WHETHER SHE STILL CONSIDERS MARLON BRANDO THE GREATEST LIVING AMERICAN.

"WELL, HE WAS THE FIRST NAME THAT CAME TO MIND, BUT I CAN COME UP WITH 10 OTHER ANSWERS," SHE SAID, MENTIONING TWO: BOB HOPE AND MOHAMMAD ALI.  
1148AED 07-21

First, what do those codes mean? *PM* denotes a story written for afternoon or PM papers; actually it means the story was transmitted during AM hours—midnight to noon. Universe is the slug (see Chapter 1, "Copy") the AP is using for the story. 120 says the story is 120 words long—a fact that is of no interest to a broadcast writer who must make it much shorter. The story begins with a type of "dateline"—the name of the city where it was written and the initials of the wire service. The line at the end of the story tells what time it was transmitted—11:48 a.m., Eastern Daylight time—and the date—July 21st. The time is important—it measures freshness.

What's the news in this story? For a New York City station, the most newsworthy element is hidden in the dateline—the first black Miss Universe is in town today. Beyond that, some of her statements are unusual and perhaps controversial, though they're much too long for use on the air and must be chopped and paraphrased. The story that was written from this piece of print wire copy employs a completely different lead from the wire copy and uses a fresh set of sentences:

The new Miss Universe is visiting New York. Janelle Commissiong, Miss Trinidad, is the first black woman chosen Miss Universe.

When reporters asked her who in the world she would most like to meet, she said...Idi Amin.

Miss Universe says she wants to sit and chat with the Ugandan president and ask him why he does the things he does.

Miss Universe also added to her list of greatest living Americans. She had mentioned Marlon Brando. Today she put Bob Hope and Mohammad Ali on the list.

WCBS, New York City

This story arrived on ABC's Reuters wire:

#### CORRESPONDENTS

MOSCOW, JUNE 27, REUTER -- TWO AMERICAN CORRESPONDENTS WERE SUMMONED TODAY TO APPEAR AS DEFENDANTS IN A MOSCOW COURT ON UNSPECIFIED CHARGES.

CRAIG WHITNEY OF THE NEW YORK TIMES AND HAROLD PIPER OF THE BALTIMORE SUN -- BOTH MOSCOW-BASED REPORTERS -- SAID THEY WERE SERVED WITH SUMMONSES AND TOLD TO BE AT THE KOLONCHOVSKAYA CITY COURT TOMORROW TO ANSWER THE CHARGES.

THE CORRESPONDENTS SAID THEY HAD NO IDEA WHAT THE CHARGES WERE.  
MORE 0518

#### CORRESPONDENTS 2 MOSCOW

IT WAS BELIEVED TO BE THE FIRST TIME ANY WESTERN CORRESPONDENT HAD BEEN SUMMONED TO APPEAR IN A SOVIET COURT AS A DEFENDANT.

MR WHITNEY AND MR PIPER TRAVELED TOGETHER IN THE SOVIET REPUBLICS OF ARMENIA AND GEORGIA LAST MONTH, BUT IT WAS NOT KNOWN IF THE CASE HAD ANY CONNECTION WITH THEIR TRIP.

IN THE LAST LEGAL PROCEEDINGS INVOLVING A WESTERN JOURNALIST, THE MOSCOW CORRESPONDENT OF THE LOS

ANGELES TIMES, ROBERT TOTH, RECEIVED A SUMMONS LAST JUNE FOR INTERROGATION BY KGB SECURITY POLICE. MORE 0519

#### CORRESPONDENTS 3 MOSCOW

THE SOVIETS ALLEGED THAT MR TOTH HAD RECEIVED STATE SECRETS FROM A SOVIET SCIENTIST. HE WAS ALLOWED TO LEAVE MOSCOW WITHOUT CHARGES BEING PREFERRED, BUT THE OFFICIAL NEWS AGENCY TASS SAID LATER THAT HE WAS WORKING FOR THE U.S. CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY (CIA).

MR WHITNEY WAS RECENTLY ATTACKED IN THE GOVERNMENT NEWSPAPER IZVESTIA OVER A STORY HE WROTE ABOUT ALLEGED SOVIET AND CUBAN INVOLVEMENT IN AFRICAN COUNTRIES.

EARLIER THIS YEAR, BORDER OFFICIALS REMOVED REPORTING NOTES AND DOCUMENTS FROM MR PIPER AS HE WAS RE-ENTERING THE SOVIET UNION. REUTER 0521

#### CORRECTION

IN CORRESPONDENTS MOSCOW PLEASE READ IN SECOND GRAF "AT THE KALANCHOVSKAYA CITY COURT" INSTEAD OF KOLONCHOVSKAYA. REUTER 0522

There's no question what the lead is here—American reporters are being ordered to appear in a Soviet court—but the broadcast writer must thin out all this information. There's no time for the history or even the name of the city where they will appear (so the correction of the name in the second "graf"—paragraph—is of no consequence):

Two American reporters are in trouble in Moscow...They have been ordered to appear in court tomorrow. The reporters, Craig Whitney of the New York Times and Harold Piper of the Baltimore Sun, say they have no idea what the charges are about.

Bill Diehl, ABC

Rewriting from print wire copy is basic broadcast newswriting. It involves taking long compilations of facts and whittling them down into short, smooth broadcast stories.

### 3. Bulletins

*when bells go off*  
The wire services are organized to move breaking news to clients with dispatch. When one of their reporters comes upon a major story, the routine news is interrupted, bells start ringing in subscribers' newsrooms and the story will start appearing on the teletype in a matter of minutes. Radio journalists are also in the business of instant news, so they have to be on their toes for bulletins on the wire.

There are three standard headings used by the major wires for breaking news:

**Flash** *is of importance to everybody*  
This is reserved for stories that are of immediate interest to absolutely everybody: man landing on the moon, the result of a presidential election, a major assassination, the beginning or end of a major war. The flash was introduced at the AP after the San Francisco earthquake. Sometimes years will go by without a flash. When something this momentous does move on the wire, ten bells will ring on the teletype, and most radio stations will shortly be interrupting their programming to air the story.

**Bulletin**  
This is news of immediate interest to almost everybody: plane crashes, presidential primary results, earthquakes abroad. Five bells ring, and stations will consider interrupting programming. The AP calls this "prime news." Bulletins are also used when the wires want to instruct subscribers that it is mandatory that they "kill" a story. The wires will send out a "bulletin kill" after sending out a story that they now believe to be dangerously inaccurate or possibly libelous.

**Urgent** Breaking news that's unusually important but not that gripping gets this treatment. Major Washington developments are

usually labeled urgent. The wires also use this designation for their important corrections. Four bells ring. Rarely will radio programming be interrupted.

#### 4. Other Wires

WBBM in Chicago, one of the largest radio news operations in the country, has the AP broadcast wire as well as the AP, UPI and Reuters A wires. But WBBM also has AP and UPI sports wires, the CQI SportsTicker, the NOAA weather wire, the Dow Jones business wire, a service called City News, which covers Chicago news, and something called DataNews from UPI, which sends subscribers reams of information at high speeds. Obviously, there is no shortage of information available to a broadcast news operation that can afford it. Here's a rundown of some of the possibilities:

**1. Weather** Weather news is a staple of all radio stations, probably because no other medium can compete with radio in keeping up with changing forecasts, conditions and storm warnings. If a small station, especially in a farm area, is going to supplement its UPI or AP broadcast wire, it will usually get a weather wire.

This is one area in which the journalist's traditional adversary—the government—gets into the news business. The National Weather Service, a branch of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, supplies weather wires tailored to different regions throughout the country. These wires are full of charts and short notations. They give nationwide and area forecasts, warnings of hazardous weather and current weather observations. Actually UPI and AP get their weather information from National Weather Service wires. By subscribing, a radio station just gets the information faster—by cutting out the middle man—and in a more complete form.

Some radio executives maintain that more people died in a recent tornado than should have, because the area's radio stations did not

have National Weather Service Wires and therefore had to wait crucial minutes before the tornado warning appeared on the broadcast wires.

**2. Sports** Sports news is important enough to some listeners, and therefore to some stations, so that the information contained on the major news wires isn't enough.

Western Union started its sports "ticker" or wire, in 1909 to provide complete play-by-play accounts of baseball games. Announcers in the studio could simulate live coverage just by reading the wire. Western Union's wire has changed hands—it is now called the CQI SportsTicker—and it no longer simulates live coverage now that games can be broadcast live. Instead, the ticker provides detailed coverage of all the major team sports—scores every half-inning for major league and triple-A baseball games, for instance. This wire is used for scores at the ballpark by sportscasters, as well as in radio newsrooms.

AP and UPI also have separate sports wires and no shortage of information to fill them. The Associated Press says it has enough sports news to operate a 1,050-word-an-hour sports wire around the clock. All these words are arranged in newspaper style.

**3. Business** Radio news can also capture listeners through comprehensive coverage of business and financial news; so some stations pay for special business and financial wires. AP and UPI provide such wires as does Dow Jones. The Dow Jones News Service uses Wall Street Journal reporters to keep up with such matters as annual reports, earnings, the price of gold and the stock markets. Then the Dow Jones broadcast unit rewrites this information for use on the radio.

**4. Farm** Farm Radio News, headquartered in Kansas City, Kansas, provides about 100 radio stations with "ready-to-read" news about livestock futures, grain futures, harvest information, etc. Reuters also has a wire that reports on farm commodities.



At KCBS, San Francisco, a newscaster reads the latest weather report, which he has "called up" on the computer display terminal next to him. (KCBS, San Francisco)

**5. Local** Some large cities and some states have special wires filled with local or regional news. In New York City, the Greater New York wire, operated by UPI, provides this service; in Los Angeles it's City News Service; in Houston it's the Houston News Service. These wires are written for newspapers, and, like the A wires, they must be completely rewritten for broadcast.

**6. High speed** Computers have accelerated the wire service business even further. An AP or UPI computer can now dump stories directly into a newspaper's computer, ready to be printed.

No one has perfected a baritone-voiced computer and broadcasters have lagged behind publishers in use of this new equipment. But the networks are now gearing up for computer-to-computer information transfers, and a few stations, such as KCBS in San Francisco, have been experimenting with computerized newsrooms. While not at that stage yet, many of the larger broadcast news organizations are now at least using the new high-speed, computer-fed wires to increase and speed up their access to information.

The AP calls its high speed service Data-

Stream: UPI's is DataNews. An old-fashioned teletype prints 66 words a minute. These print 1,200 words a minute. One high-speed printer can carry a broadcast wire plus the A wire, the sports wire, the business wire and a regional wire. Each station can choose exactly what types of news it wants the wire service's computer to feed it.

As these technological marvels become inexpensive enough for the smaller stations to afford, they should overcome the limitations caused by overreliance on a skimpy broadcast wire.

## OTHER SOURCES

The wires dominate broadcast news. They are such busy producers of information that it's hard to look beyond them. But the wires have limitations. There are holes in the services they provide that are filled by other sources of news.

### 1. Audio News Services

*world  
nat:  
stc-t-e news*

The wires omit a factor that is vital in radio news—sound. They can explain what the president said, but the wires can't provide listeners with the president's voice saying it. Reporters capture such sounds on tape for local stories (see Chapter 10, "Tape"). Audio news services bring in the sound of the news from the rest of the world.

The two major wire services also run the major audio news services. The Associated Press and United Press International each uses a network of lines rented from the telephone company, in some cases combined with satellites, to transmit newsmakers' voices and reporters' on-the-scene reports to clients who are willing to pay for these "inserts"—ready to insert in a newscast. About 1,000 stations use UPI's audio service, which, like the AP's, also gives subscribers a ready-to-broadcast, hourly national and international news program.

The taped inserts are fed to UPI subscribers hourly at 10 minutes after the hour. Each feed includes anywhere from four to 40 different reports. Inserts are repeated; on the average UPI

### AUDIO-HOURLY NEWSFEED

63 :19 SANTA BARBARA --(BLAZE)-- (ED WALDAPFEL, U-S FOREST SERVICE)

CURRENT STATUS OF FIRE (AT THIS TIME)

64 :43 SB --(BLAZE)-- (WALDAPFEL)

ANS Q: HOW BIG AN AREA BURNED -- WHAT ABOUT DAMAGE AND INJURIES (VERY, VERY FORTUNATE)

65 :28 SB --(BLAZE)-- (WALDAPFEL)

ANS Q: WHERE ARE THE EVACUEES, WHEN DO YOU EXPECT FIRE TO BE CONTAINED (CRITICAL FIRE WEATHER)

66 :41 CAP HILL --(FARM)-- (GENE GIBBONS) HOUSE REJECTS EFFORTS TO LIMIT USE OF FOOD STAMPS

67 :27 CH --(KOREAN)-- (REP

MILLICENT FENWICK, R-NJ, MBR HOUSE ETHICS CMTE) NOT SATISFIED WITH JUSTICE DEPT BRIEFING ON KOREA PROBE (CLOUD OVER CONGRESS)

68 :34 CH --(KOREAN)-- (REP JOHN

FLYNT, D-GA, ETHICS CMTE CHAIRMAN) JUSTICE DEPT OFFICIALS WENT AS FAR AS THEY COULD IN EXPLAINING PROGRESS OF KOREA INVESTIGATION (OF IT)

sends out 125 different reports each day. Both UPI and AP index or "billboard" these reports on their broadcast wires. The billboard for a UPI hourly feed is above. The inserts are numbered each day (63—68 in this feed), and their length follows the number. They never run longer than 45 seconds. Notice the three inserts on the afternoon's top story—a fire in Santa Barbara; all three are taken from an interview with a forest service official. The last few words for most inserts are noted, in parentheses, as a cue for newscasters using the insert. These words tell them when the tape is ending.

The four major networks are also in the audio news service business. A few times a day they transmit tapes of newsmakers or reporters—items that are not going to be used in their network newscasts—to local stations for use in the station's own newscasts. NBC calls this service "Newsline," CBS—"Newsfeed," ABC—"News Call," and Mutual—"Operation News Line."

These audio news services basically cover na-

## OTHER SOURCES



At KWVL, Waterloo, Iowa, a newswriter monitors an audio news service feed. (Courtesy Radio-Television News Directors Association)

tional and international news. The AP sends two regional feeds a day out of Washington to stations in each of the four time zones, and NBC is considering instituting a regional service. But with these exceptions, the national networks have not found it practical to set up localized or specialized audio services. Into this gap have stepped a number of regional operations. For example, the Texas State Network sends four feeds a day of reports on Texas news to 150 to 175 stations throughout the state. There are audio news services in many other states. The National Black Network provides a similar service for stations interested in minority news, and the Spanish Information Service does the same thing in Spanish.

The stations that receive these audio reports still have to write copy to go with them. This requires the same skills as writing to tape collected by the stations' reporters and is discussed in Chapter 11, "Writing to Tape."

## 2. Feature Services

The major wires cover most of the standard news stories, yet the many variations in radio

formats—especially on FM—have created a need for more idiosyncratic stories, perhaps written from an offbeat perspective. And, in radio news there is usually someone ready to make a dollar writing stories for stations to save them the trouble of having to write news themselves. Earth News and Zodiac, for instance, mail to stations packets of youth-oriented stories—ready to be read on the air. Here are the first few sentences of a Zodiac News Service story:

The New York Telephone Company has won round one in what could turn out to be an international war with the nation of Montmartre. Don't turn to your world maps. The nation of Montmartre exists only in the mind of New York theatre dabbler and producer Barry Richmond, who is the king of Montmartre. It all started when Richmond decided to invent the nation of Montmartre and proceeded to set up consulates, embassies, military attachés and countless other diplomatic missions all attached to his fictitious kingdom. That was fine until Richmond proceeded to list his fictitious government in the New York Telephone directory . . .

*Sort of Human interest*

One station edited this story to make it a little smoother and clearer before using it on the air:

The New York Telephone company has won round one in what could turn out to be an international war with the nation of Montmartre. Now don't go running to your maps. The nation of Montmartre exists only in the mind of New York theatre dabbler and producer Barry Richmond who's the self-proclaimed king of Montmartre. It all started when Richmond decided to invent a country and to set up phony consulates, embassies and military missions. That was all fine, until Richmond listed his fictitious government in the New York Telephone directory . . .

*KTIM, California*

These services should be handled the same way as the wires or anything else a broadcast jour-

nalist chooses to let on the air. They should be carefully edited, if not completely rewritten.

### 3. Police Radio

The police must talk to each other, sometimes over long distances, often in a hurry. They use two-way radios and it is perfectly legal for citizens to listen in. Many radio and television stations eavesdrop on police and fire frequencies—that way they find out about major stories as soon as the police do.

Other radio frequencies may also be good sources, although they are used less frequently. The networks do their best to monitor Secret Service conversations when following the president. Some stations listen in on citizens band channels for traffic information.

Radios with scanners can jump back and forth between different police or fire department channels, pausing every time someone is talking. With half an ear journalists monitor these internal communications, listening for key words such as “homicide,” or special code numbers.

Police initiate conversations on the radio with codes that provide clues to the nature and seriousness of the incidents they’re investigating. With a knowledge of the codes employed by a police department, journalists can quickly, almost subconsciously, begin to separate the newsworthy from the routine on the police radio. The “ten code” is used by the New York City Police Department and many others. Here are some of the important signals:

- 10-13 A police officer calling for assistance.
- 10-30 Robbery in progress.
- 10-31 Burglary in progress.
- 10-33 Suspected explosive.
- 10-34 Assault in progress.
- 10-40 to 10-49 Rapid Mobilizations calling for from three police sergeants and 15 police officers to eight sergeants, 40 police officers and a lieutenant.
- 10-66 Unusual incident (aircraft crash, building collapse, etc.).
- 10-70 Mobilization including a bus and 56 police officers.

The newsroom can’t waste attention on calls such as a 10-63—that means the officer is going to take time off to eat. But if someone hears a 10-70, it’s time to send a reporter to the scene or dial police headquarters . . . or both.

In larger cities, the police may also provide news organizations with a teletype which reproduces police reports. An item off such a teletype:

MAN SHOT TWICE IN THE FACE AT 1655  
MADISON AVE — A BAR. DOA AT SCENE.  
PERP FLED THE SCENE.

DOA, in this case, is used to mean the man was dead when the police arrived. *PERP*, of course, is short for that standard of police jargon—“perpetrator.” The teletype will also print the name of the precinct that is handling the case and the officer to contact for further details. Such a report off the teletype would seem to have the makings of an up-to-the-minute story, but airing it would be a serious mistake. The important thing to remember about the police radio or teletype is that they give *preliminary* reports, often just rumors, not established facts.

If someone tells St. Louis police that an airplane has hit the Gateway Arch, police headquarters might send squad cars to investigate. The radio station that hears these calls to the squad cars and jumps on the air with “An airplane has crashed into the Gateway Arch” is going to look awfully foolish when the airplane turns out to have been a large kite.

The police radio and teletype are for tips, not facts. Broadcast journalists must always confirm information off the police radio, either on the phone or in person, before airing it. And it should be noted that the FCC specifically prohibits re-broadcast of items actually recorded off police, fire, FAA, citizens band or ham radio broadcasts.

### 4. Press Releases

Press releases are the cheapest source of news. They come free; they come in droves; and they

*Usually about things that are going to happen. Soft news, such as meetings,*

are often followed by calls from public relations people who are anxious to assist. In the larger cities, press releases also conveniently arrive on a special public relations teletype.

Yet press releases—"handouts" as they are called—are not one of the more respected news sources. People in the business world don't give away anything without a purpose. In this case the free information and assistance is designed to snare some publicity. It's the rare handout that doesn't place its author, or its author's boss, in a favorable light. Press releases are advertisements as much as information. An example from the North Carolina Department of Crime Control and Public Safety:

*CONTACT: Linda Blake, Special Assistant  
for Information Services  
Telephone: 919/733-1234*

#### Highway Patrol Geared Up for July 4th

The State Highway Patrol is preparing for a record volume of traffic during the long July 4th weekend, according to Patrol Commander John T. Jenkins. He said that traffic usually increases on any given weekend, but with the activities normally associated with July 4th, the highways this year are expected to be very crowded. Traffic is expected to be heaviest on Friday night and the evening of the 4th, Jenkins said.

The Patrol is not planning any special programs to cope with the traffic except that every available man will be on duty. Jenkins said the Patrol is going to make travel as safe as possible during the holiday by strictly enforcing all motor vehicle laws. Special attention will be given to speeding motorists and drinking drivers.

According to J. Phil Carlton, Secretary of the Department of Crime Control and Public Safety, 19 persons lost their lives on the highways during the July 4th weekend last year. "I am confident the Patrol will do everything possible to make this a safer holiday and that motorists will assist the Patrol by obeying all traffic laws and driving as safely as possible," he said.

This handout is not big news, nor is it the place to turn for a balanced appraisal of the performance of the Highway Patrol. But if these public relations people want to maintain any sort of

reputation for reliability, the noncontroversial facts can be trusted.

There are four things that can be done with such a press release:

**1. Garbage file** This is how self-serving statements from minor politicians on minor issues are handled—they are thrown out. This is also the fate that awaits announcements of award ceremonies that are of little interest outside the lucky person's immediate family, or reports on esoteric or insignificant new programs.

Journalists have to ask themselves whether the information contained in a handout deserves time on the air. That judgment hinges in part on the size of the town in which the station is located (see Chapter 14, "Radio"). In large cities, where the volume of handouts tends to drown the usable information in them, the answer is usually "No." Small-town stations consider releases more carefully.

Certainly there's nothing shocking or urgent about this standard holiday preparation by the Highway Patrol. It would be no crime to ignore it.

**2. Future file** Most stations establish a file that will remind them of future events (see Chapter 8, "Gathering News"). Press releases that arrive with announcements of interesting events will be filed under the date the event will occur, so the station can arrange coverage. This Highway Patrol release might be filed for the day after the holiday so that someone can check and see what kind of job the police did and how high the fatality total was this year.

**3. Follow-up** Most handouts, if they have any value, are used as tips. Someone will call the number listed on the release and get some additional information—in this case how many patrolmen will be on duty and how does that number compare with last year when there were so many accidents. Other points of view, if there are any, should also be given a chance. But, unless the performance of the Highway Patrol has be-

come an issue, there's no "other side" to the point of view expressed in this press release.

Follow-up reporting is the only method of transforming a press release into a substantial story.

**4. Short write-up** Sometimes there are a few facts in a handout that may be allowed on the air by themselves. But since press releases are often poorly written and are written for print, the facts must be completely rewritten:

The State Highway Patrol says it's going to have every available man on duty to cope with this weekend's holiday traffic. Officials are predicting that Friday night will be their busiest. Last year 19 people died in traffic accidents over the July 4th weekend in North Carolina.

There's nothing wrong with using handouts as leads to stories, guides to upcoming events or for a few facts. However they should never just be swallowed whole. Journalists should not have to be accused of a lack of cynicism.

#### 5. Tips

Most newsrooms encourage listeners to call in tips. For every five people who just want the opportunity to talk with a minor celebrity, there may be one with something important to relate. In a competitive business like this, that's worth the inconvenience of taking such calls.

Tips are amateur press releases, and they must be looked at with at least as much suspicion. A phone call about a fire or accident can lead to the station getting a jump on the story, but first, the report must be checked out with a call to the authorities or with a visit to the scene. Listeners are not trained observers. That "huge smokey fire" can turn out to be an unusually obnoxious factory chimney.

Unsolicited accusations of corruption or other malfeasance must travel an even longer route before they come close to being allowed on the air. They reek with the danger of libel (see Chap-

ter 9, "Ethics and Law"). Such charges should not be ignored, but they must be confirmed independently in their entirety before they can be turned into hot investigative scoops. In other words, the tip is, at best, just the cue to start the investigation.

#### 6. Newspapers

In the first years of radio journalism, too often there was a striking similarity between the news people read in their papers and the news they heard a short time later on the radio. Early radio stations, in some cases, were guilty of borrowing a little news from their well-stocked print competitors. This made the newspapers understandably annoyed—occasionally annoyed enough to go to court—and it didn't do much for the reputation of radio journalists.

Radio and television journalism has matured to the point where this little crutch is no longer necessary. With help from the wires, networks and their reporters, most stations pride themselves in beating the local print media to the news. Newspapers are so used to being scooped by now that they've pretty much abandoned the "extra" edition and have begun to feature more analysis and less of the breaking news their readers have already heard on radio or television.

Yet, even with this background in mind, it's neither a waste of time nor a sin for a radio journalist to read a newspaper. Most newsrooms subscribe to a broad selection of local periodicals and often the major, nationally read publications such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Time* and *Newsweek*. If nothing else, they help keep journalists up to date in their field—current events.

There is a clear line between stealing from a newspaper and using it as a source of information. If a newspaper develops a story on its own, the radio station must give the paper credit for the story:

The Daily News reports this morning that some 55-thousand jobless

---

#### OTHER SOURCES

workers in New Jersey exhausted their unemployment benefits over the past 13 weeks. That's unprecedented in the history of the state. Most of the workers reportedly were drawing 90 dollars a week. They will now have to seek welfare or loans if they cannot find jobs.

WINS, New York City

Similarly, if the paper gets a good quote on a story, or gets a fact that no one else has, it must be given credit or else the radio station is in the position of having stolen that paper's news. Radio stations expect the same courtesy on stories they break.

However, newspapers can be used, without credit, as one source to check information—such as the spelling of a victim's name or the number dead—and stories in newspapers can be used as leads. The station's reporters can now get in touch with some of those New Jerseyites the *Daily News* says will be losing their benefits and do its own story on their plight. Certainly newspapers are too important for broadcast journalists to ignore.

## 7. Research Tools

Term papers aren't being written in a newsroom, but facts are being compiled. These facts are going to have roots and ramifications that need pursuing, and gaps and rough spots that need to be examined. Journalism requires research. The newsroom must be properly equipped.

A good supply of newspapers and periodicals is a start—perhaps with important local articles

clipped and filed. Then there are the basic books: a good unabridged dictionary—"What is the exact meaning of 'coup d'état'?"; a concise encyclopedia—"When was the last coup d'état in El Salvador?"; an almanac—"How does the population of El Salvador compare with that of the other countries in Central America?"; an atlas—"How far from the capital is that town they're fighting for?"; who's who books—"What's the background of that American ambassador who was shot?"

Telephone books are free. All current local and regional books should be there—to check names and addresses as well as to find numbers. In addition, many newsrooms purchase "reverse directories"—organized by address, not name. With such a directory a reporter can easily call the people who are along the route of a proposed highway, or who live next door to a house where a murder occurred, for quick comment.

The newsroom needs a detailed local street map for pinpointing locations and directing reporters. It should also have a map that indicates the station's coverage area—the area in which its signal can be heard clearly—to help determine whether a given story is local or not. A batch of road maps of surrounding regions—still free at some gas stations—may come in handy.

A file should also be kept of the station's own news stories for the past couple of years—to use as a research tool should an old issue flare up again.

As hungry for information as they are, newsrooms should invite in as many sources of information as they can afford and hope to absorb and use.

---

## SUMMARY

Most newsrooms get the same basic information from the wires and other standard sources. What distinguishes the top news operations is the job

they do with this raw material, and how they supplement it with whatever their own reporters are able to secure.

## PRACTICE ASSIGNMENTS

---

A. Write a 15- to 20-second story based on the following wire copy.

ATTICA, N.Y. -- CONVICTED SON OF SAM KILLER DAVID BERKOWITZ WAS SLASHED IN THE THROAT AND SERIOUSLY WOUNDED IN A RAZOR BLADE ATTACK TODAY WITHIN A CELLBLOCK AT ATTICA STATE PRISON.

"I'M SORRY, BUT I'VE BEEN CUT," THE 26-YEAR-OLD BERKOWITZ TOLD CORRECTIONS OFFICERS.

"DID YOU CUT YOURSELF?" ONE OF THE GUARDS ASKED.

"NO," WAS THE PRISONER'S SOLE REPLY. BERKOWITZ REFUSED TO IDENTIFY HIS ASSAILANT OR COOPERATE IN THE INVESTIGATION.

THE APPARENT ATTEMPTED SLAYING OF THE CONFESSED .44-CALIBER KILLER IS THOUGHT TO HAVE BEEN THE WORK OF ONE OF 17 FELLOW INMATES LOCKED IN AN ISOLATED CELLBLOCK AT THE PRISON RECEPTION CENTER.

BERKOWITZ WAS SLASHED AT 8:10 A.M. AS HE WAS CARRYING A PAIL OF HOT WASH WATER TO THE INMATES, ALL OF WHOM ARE KEPT APART FROM THE GENERAL PRISON POPULATION TO PROTECT THEM FROM POSSIBLE ATTACKS.

BERKOWITZ WAS SENTENCED ON JUNE 12, 1978, TO 25-YEARS-TO-LIFE FOR THE CONFESSED MURDERS OF SIX MEN AND WOMEN DURING A REIGN OF TERROR THAT BEGAN IN NEW YORK CITY IN JULY 1976 AND CONTINUED UNTIL AUGUST 1977, WHEN HE WAS CAPTURED BY POLICE.

B. Write a 15- to 20-second story based on the following wire copy.

ATLANTIC CITY -- MISS WESTERN WORLD YESTERDAY ACCUSED PAGEANT PROMOTERS OF CHEATING HER OUT OF MONEY, VACATIONS, A SCREEN TEST IN HOLLYWOOD AND A DIET COLA PROMOTION CONTRACT IN HAWAII.

JANE DAVIES, 23, OF LIVERPOOL,

ENGLAND, SAID SHE WILL ATTEND NEXT WEEK'S FINALS IN AUSTIN, TEXAS, TO EITHER COLLECT HER PRIZES OR CLOSE DOWN THE CONTEST.

"I'VE BEEN PATIENT. I'VE WAITED. BUT I'M BEING RIPPED OFF AND I'M TIRED OF IT AND I WANT TO LET OTHER WOMEN KNOW WHAT THEY'RE LETTING THEMSELVES IN FOR."

DICK O'NEILL OF LONG SPRINGS, CAL., THE PAGEANT'S PROMOTER, SAID, "SHE WILL GET EVERYTHING WE PROMISED HER, BUT WE NEVER PROMISED HER SOME OF THE THINGS SHE SAID."

MISS DAVIES SAID SHE PAID \$150 TO ENTER THE PAGEANT AND SOLD OVER \$200 WORTH OF TICKETS TO THE PAGEANT. SHE SAID SHE WAS PROMISED \$2,000 AS WINNER AND A \$15,000 COLA PROMOTION CONTRACT, PLUS ROYALTIES.

SO FAR, SHE SAID, SHE HAS RECEIVED \$200, A TIN TROPHY, TWO SWIMSUITS AND AN IMITATION-EMERALD CROWN.

MISS DAVIES WAS CROWNED ALMOST ONE YEAR AGO IN MADRID. HER SUCCESSOR AS MISS WESTERN WORLD WILL BE SELECTED NEXT WEEK IN AUSTIN.

C. Write a 20- to 25-second story based on the following press release from City Councilwoman Helene Green.

City Councilwoman Helene Green charged today that the Board of Education overpaid for products by nearly \$500,000 last year because of improper purchasing practices.

"This is a disgraceful situation—a blatant flouting of opportunities, abundant opportunities, to buy at the lowest possible price," Mrs. Green said.

She cited the purchase of garbage cans from two sources for prices ranging from \$11.42 to \$15.43 per half-dozen, when the same item can be obtained for \$10.02. She also charged that some staples—such as paper napkins—could be bought at local supermarkets for lower prices than those which the Board of Education paid.

"My independent audit has shown that a complete

---

## PRACTICE ASSIGNMENTS

lack of internal controls exists at the Board of Education's Food Purchasing Department. The question now is whether these overpayments are due to dishonesty or stupidity."

The Councilwoman, who has represented the Northside district for over eight years, has urged other Council members as well as the mayor and the comptroller to scrutinize her findings and to conduct their own investigations. She said she will forward her findings to the District Attorney.

The Board of Education supplies lunch to 23,000 and breakfast to 15,700 children per day. Last year it spent more than \$7.4 million on meals.

Councilwoman Green's audit began last spring, when a random voucher check turned up certain irregularities. The audit was expanded in August, when the Board of Education reported a \$175,000 deficit in its Meals Program Division.

Councilwoman Green's report states in part: "This outrageous situation can only shortchange our children in the end. The Board of Education has tried to cover up rather than solve the problem. But who will protect the interests of our children, if not the Board?"

In the last year, Mrs. Green has been responsible for the passage by the City Council of the Air Standards Act and the second Consumer Protection Act.

D. Write a 15- to 20- second story for a Macon station based on the following press release from the Stanhide Corporation.

Macon's newest industrial plant, dedicated to the craft of yesterday and the technology of tomorrow,

will be unveiled by the Stanhide Corporation at a ceremony on Friday at 12 noon.

Stanhide's new lumber mill is located two miles north of Macon's city limits, just off Route 19.

The public is cordially invited to the dedication ceremonies. A tour of the plant will be conducted. Refreshments will be served. Charles Hopewell, President and Chairman of Stanhide, will deliver the opening remarks. Miss Macon County, Terry Sharp, will also attend the ceremony.

Other special guests will include Macon officials, representatives of the State and County governments, Jack Shell, President of the Chamber of Commerce, and representatives of the U.S. Forest Service and the Agricultural Extension Service.

Stanhide is a major producer of lumber and chemicals. Annual sales for the last fiscal year exceed \$16 million. The company is located in Austin, Texas.

Stanhide's new mill represents a capital investment of over \$3.2 million. The new mill will increase utilization of raw materials through the use of newly-developed electronic saws and by the use of high-speed sanders instead of planers. The mill is expected to produce over two hundred tons of lumber per month.

The establishment of the Macon mill is part of Stanhide's "Southern Region Development Program." Within the last two years we have opened mills in Savannah, Ga., Mobile, Ala., and Tallahassee, Fla. Stanhide recently closed its Chicago, Ill. plant.

The Macon mill will generate over 6,000 jobs in its first year of operation and 8,000 by the second year.

# 8

---

## GATHERING NEWS

Reporters at WNEW in New York City got the first hint that something was up from the police radio: “We have a rotor on Madison Avenue.” Nine minutes later, WNEW had the story—a helicopter had crashed on top of the Pan Am Building. In those nine minutes the station also got a tape of an eyewitness. That’s effective reporting.

It takes a nose for news—or at least the ability to sense that when a rotor blade lands on Madison Avenue something is very wrong. Then it takes an aggressive and efficient search for facts, and behind it all, solid preparation.

A WNEW reporter had been doing a story on the opening of the helicopter service a couple of months earlier and, conscientiously, had taken down several phone numbers in the small control tower atop the Pan Am Building. The station’s reporters tried those numbers until they were able to get through to someone who had seen the crash.

Radio reporters must be fast. At a news event, the only journalists who are more conscious of their watches are those working for the wire services. Newspaper reporters have one deadline, or at the most two or three, a day; television

reporters rarely have more than a couple. Most radio reporters have a deadline every hour. That keeps them hopping.

However, gathering news for radio is much more than a race. Being first means nothing if there are holes in the story or if it’s erroneous. The community relies on reporters. Speed gathering the facts must be tempered by responsibility in handling them.

Facts are the quarry of all reporters. This chapter lays out some strategies for stalking them. The next chapter establishes the ground rules that govern the chase. Chapter 10, “Tape,” discusses how news is trapped on tape. Specific types of reporting assignments are outlined in Chapter 12, “Coverage.” Responsibilities specific to television reporting are presented in Chapter 15, “Visuals.”

### PREPARATION

#### 1. Digging

To have a nose for news a reporter has to be nosey—curious, willing to pry into things. Blake Hooper of WNPT in Alabama notes that some

people will drive past a construction site every day without thinking twice about it. But a good reporter, says Hooper, will immediately start wondering what's being built, how much it's costing, who's paying, who's getting the jobs and what this will mean for the local economy and environment. There are stories everywhere. Reporters have to sniff around and smell them out.

Reporting is not easy. A lot of drudgery goes into producing glamorous scoops. NBC's White House correspondent, Bill Lynch, was reading a voluminous report prepared by the controller of the currency on Bert Lance—who was then budget director in the Carter administration. Lynch took the time to read through it all—including the appendix. There he stumbled on the fact that Lance had continued to write overdraft checks *after* becoming budget director. Lynch mentioned that disquieting fact at a news conference held by the president that day, and his diligence produced an additional shocker. As Lynch tells it, the president looked “genuinely startled” for a moment and then confessed that he too had been writing checks for more than his balance.

Stories have to be dug out of reticent people as well as out of dense volumes. People don't always realize that that strange tale they've been telling friends qualifies as news, and when they realize they have a story, they sometimes prefer to keep it quiet. The reporter's job is to share these tales with the community and to ensure that controversial stories are heard. To accomplish this, shyness must be left home. Reporters don't have to be outgoing. In fact, some journalists are said to have chosen the profession to compensate for a retiring nature, but they must be industrious and aggressive enough to pull a story out of its protagonists.

## 2. Assignments

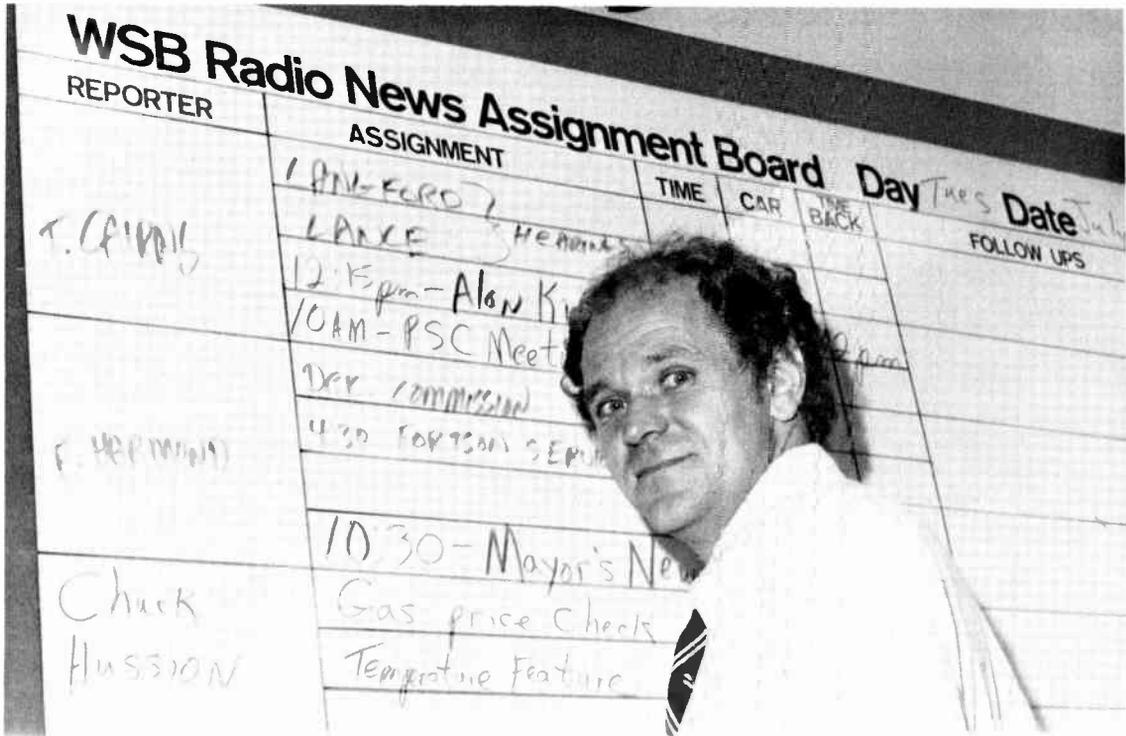
Radio stations rarely have more than a couple of reporters out in the field at any one time. Therefore, it doesn't make sense to restrict reporters to specific “beats” such as police news or city hall.

Some may have specialties, but essentially all are general assignment reporters. They follow the news. That pursuit will sometimes take reporters no further than the telephone, where they might track down a quote from the detective in charge of investigating last night's murder or another candidate's reaction to the governor's statement. But often news is pursued directly to its lairs—the room where the health commissioner is holding the news conference, the scene of the hold-up, the street where the parade is.

Just where reporters are sent is determined by a combination of their own news judgment and that of their superiors (with their superiors getting the last word, of course; a newsroom is not a democracy). The raw materials for that determination are news sources such as the wires, tips, police radio, along with the station's future file and schedules produced by the wires.

**1. Preplanned events** Although it belies the news's reputation for spontaneity, most news events are preplanned. The news media are warned, usually well in advance, that an announcement, demonstration, speech, meeting, news conference, even a police raid, is scheduled. If the station itself is notified, it files the notice under that date in the future file (see Chapter 7, “Sources”). The evening before or that morning someone in the newsroom checks through the file, sees that an announcement is scheduled and, if warranted, arranges for coverage. In big cities the local wire transmits a list of the day's major events. Those listings are called “daybooks.”

At WNEW in New York City, reporter Mike Eisgrau doubles as assignment editor. Each morning, based on the future file and daybook, he makes up a tentative schedule for the station's two other reporters and himself. The three reporters' hours are staggered somewhat to ensure that someone is in the field throughout the business day. At some stations, this schedule is written on a large board in the newsroom. At most stations it's typed, as it is at WNEW:



At WSB, Atlanta, the news director at the radio news assignment board in the newsroom. (WSB, Atlanta)

REPORTERS' RUNDOWN FOR FRIDAY, JUNE 3  
PEGGY STOCKTON:

1. 11 A.M. -Newark, N.J. - Ferrara Catering - Verona Ave. Newark PBA rank and file meet to vote on proposed new contract agreement.
2. Noon -also: NJ residents talk about the upcoming state primaries for Governor. Democratic and Republican primary voting is next Tuesday.  
-also: NJ residents talk about the fact that casino gambling is now law for Atlantic City, and

whether they'll take advantage of the chance to lose their money.

MIKE EISGRAU:

1. 9 A.M. -Emergency Financial Control Board meets to discuss next year's budget for NYC, amid warnings over possible extra deficits in years to come. 2 World Trade Ctr, 58th fl.
2. 10 A.M. -270 Bway. State Assembly Task Force on Crime Victims Compensation holds hearings on increasing such payments.
3. 11 A.M. -40 W. 8th St. - drummer

Tracy Burrows tries to break world marathon record by playing for 21 days.

4. 1 P.M. -News Closeup - Bella Abzug.

DAVID FEINBERG:

1. 1:30 P.M. -Campbell Funeral Chapel, 81st & Mad. - funeral services for Ben Grauer - many radio/TV personalities expected to attend.
2. 2:30 -  
3:00 P.M. -Fox Movietone Studio, 54th St. & 10th Ave. - Channel 13 opens its '77 Auction - to raise funds for public TV - among things to be auctioned off: George Willig's climber's shoes.
3. 4:30 P.M. -Hotel Americana - United Federation of Teachers opens its Spring conference - honors Sen. Moynihan - reaction of union leaders like Shanker to Board of Education losses in next year's budget.... -conference can provide several angles for weekend use.

Preplanned events are too often merely media events—staged strictly for publicity—such as the mayor's election-year pornography raid or, at the other extreme, a stripper's ride down Broadway dressed, or undressed, as Lady Godiva to plug her burlesque show. Reporters may have one of these performances on their schedule. Hunger for news sometimes leads the news media to swallow baloney. If the event is really nothing more than an uninteresting advertisement for its sponsors, reporters should finish their Danish,

then call the newsroom and ask to move to another assignment. If they're instructed to stay on, reporters should keep in mind this newsroom saying: "There's no such thing as a bad assignment, just a bad reporter." A good reporter should be able to pull a decent story out of almost any assignment.

Preplanned news certainly can't be ignored. Much of it is important, and all of it has the value of predictability—an important factor when trying to plan assignments and organize reporters' movements.

**2. Breaking news** Still, reporters are always prepared and anxious to toss out their schedules to track the unexpected event that gives news its reputation as a live wire. The unpredictable communicates with the newsroom through a number of channels. Most breaking events fall within the province of the police, so they'll often break on the police radio. Sometimes a tip will be the source, sometimes those stories arrive labeled "URGENT" on one of the wires. It might be a national bulletin with a local angle: How will the sharp rise in oil prices affect the local economy? Were there any local people on board that plane?

Reporters can uncover the unexpected through calls to regular news sources. Occasionally a reporter will actually be on the scene when it happens. More frequently, the newsroom learns of breaking developments first. That's why it's so important for reporters to check in regularly.

### 3. Background Information

With or without advance notice, reporters have to try to approach a story with as much of the background information as possible already in their heads, or in their notes.

On a planned story there's no excuse for failure to do the homework. For a start, that means studying the press release or wire copy that

brought the story to the newsroom's attention. With the basic facts already digested, there'll be more time for the news, and without good comprehension of these basic facts, it may not even be possible to locate the news.

An event sponsor's conception of what is news should not always be trusted. That is why preparation for covering an event should, if possible, go beyond the initial press release or wire copy. What other stories on the subject have moved on the wire today?—the newsroom should have them filed. What other stories has the station done on this subject?—those should be available in files. And, what have the local papers been writing?—if the station doesn't have a comprehensive file by subject, recent issues should at least be available.

If the press release was a straightforward announcement of the dedication of a new hospital, without a look through the files it may not be apparent that this was the hospital that environmental groups had battled three years ago because it was built on scarce inner-city park land. Failure to call these groups for their reaction would be a mistake.

Phone calls can be an important element in a reporter's preparation. Calls to the opposition or other affected parties can arm reporters with probing questions.

Encyclopedias may answer such questions as, "What's a breeder reactor?" If there's time, a visit to a library may be called for on a major story.

On breaking stories there may be no time for detailed research, but an abbreviated form of that information hunt is still worth the moment or two it requires. Reporters should at least grab whatever is around. The wires may have something on the story; it can be read on the run.

If reporters are given a story while still in the field, or if they have to dash off before looking through the files, background information should be secured by others in the newsroom and communicated by phone at the first opportunity. Preparation pays. It's necessary to be informed before proceeding to become well-informed.

## METHODS

### 1. On the Phone

Two pieces of equipment dominate the decor of all newsrooms: telephones and typewriters. Between them they sum up the journalist's job—getting and writing the news.

For a communications center, a newsroom can seem an isolated place. Instead of the world passing through, all you get are a few wandering disk jockeys and someone with the coffee. But people who presume to inform the community can't cut themselves off from the community. Some stations delegate some people to go outside and find news, but every journalist is a reporter even if trapped behind a typewriter. Everyone can at least stay in touch—report—by phone.

Telephones are powerful devices. By dialing numbers, most of which are listed, journalists—if they sound important enough to get by the secretary—can question anyone. The White House phone number is listed, and there are people there whose job is to help the press get facts. Local officials are usually anxious to talk. The telephone is the all-purpose reporting instrument. It fills holes in stories, finds local angles, determines exact spellings, pursues leads.

A story enters the newsroom on a regional wire saying that the state highway commissioner is about to propose a new six-lane highway to bisect the center of town. Within minutes someone in the newsroom is talking to the commissioner, asking where he got an idea like that. Meanwhile on another line, someone gets the mayor to carry on. Soon city council members, the head of the local chamber of commerce and some of the people who live along the prospective right of way have been contacted. It turns out to be a little more difficult to get through to the commissioner's brother. One of the calls has turned up the fact that he owns many acres along the proposed route.

Cleverness helps here. On hearing a report of a fire on the scanner, the obvious call is to the fire

department. But to get additional information, how about dialing the police—they put in an appearance at fires—or the water, power and gas companies—they will be at the scene to ensure that their pipes and wires are not going to explode or burn. If there were injuries, the obvious call is to the hospital, but how about the ambulance service—perhaps one of the drivers can come to the phone for a quick eyewitness description of the victims.

A listener tipped KABC's Rick Wallace to the fact that a DC-10 had crashed on takeoff at Los Angeles Airport. The obvious place to confirm this would be the airline. Instead, Wallace called the information office at the airport. He remembered that the office is located in the tower—overlooking the runways. If there was a crash, that office would know about it first.

The telephone is also used to fish for stories. Journalists establish a series of regular "beat calls"—numbers they dial at specific times during the day to keep tabs on developments. Local police and fire departments should be rung up several times a day. Hospitals in the area should be contacted regularly. If there wasn't a reporter at a government meeting, someone who was there should be called to find out what happened.

A list is prepared of these key contacts and their phone numbers—home and office—along with the best time to call. The best time to call a hospital or police station is *before* a shift goes off duty. The new shift won't have a firm fix on what's been happening.

KOEL in Iowa has a card file filled with hundreds of numbers. Reporter Karen Crow arrives in the newsroom at 5:55 a.m. and immediately begins to dial. By the time she's made her way through the file box, she's turned up a robbery in which the robbers wore Halloween masks, a dispute at a school board meeting and an automobile accident. Then it's time to start the next round of calls.

When reporters start getting lazy, the beat calls are the first to go. It's frustrating to call a sheriff

three times a day for weeks and turn up nothing more exciting than a lost dog. And, it's easy to lose confidence that there are stories waiting in a place so large that when you ask for the police department, someone responds, "I'll get *him*." But without these calls a radio station just cannot properly cover an area. Beat calls insure against missing that armed robbery, serious accident or murder that some official out there knows about.

Sometimes these regular calls pay unexpected dividends. Blake Hooper of WNPT in Alabama had been calling one county sheriff's department for months without learning of anything more serious than a traffic accident. Still, Hooper kept calling. One morning he talked to a radio operator who had just had breakfast with a state trooper, a trooper who was telling an exciting tale about the emergency landing of an airplane at a nearby field. Hooper called the field and had a scoop.

Good reporters keep little black books, or fat Rolodexes, filled with useful phone numbers. WNEW's Mike Eisgrau has collected more than 500 special numbers ranging from Norman Mailer's—in case Eisgrau needs Mailer's reaction to a story—to the number of the phone booth just outside Madison Square Garden—in case something goes wrong inside. Eisgrau says he learned the hard way that his black book must be photocopied—should it be lost, some record will exist. He puts time and effort into his number collection. He gets news out of it.

## 2. On the Scene

Reporters usually arrive by car, though in some clogged cities taxis or even subways are more efficient. The car might be equipped with something fancy like a two-way radio or a mobile telephone, but it must have something as basic as a good street map. There's no time for getting lost. Travel time is used to think through the story—to anticipate developments and reporting strategies, perhaps even to play with some preliminary ideas for communicating the informa-

adds  
urgency

tion. Many journalists will talk the story through in advance. In other words, they try to explain it to themselves.

Park where the car won't get boxed in. It may be necessary to move on in a hurry.

Once there, often the first thing a reporter must establish is not what the story is, but where the telephone is. Big scoops perish rapidly while searching the streets for a functioning pay phone. A direct line of communication to the newsroom is invaluable. Unless there's a two-way radio available, that telephone is going to play the major role in transporting the story from the news event to the air.

Reporters locate more than one phone, if there's a chance others will also be using them to file stories. And all journalists carry small change to work the phones, although calls are usually made collect or charged to credit card numbers. Jim Farley, now with NBC, tells the story of the time he forgot to call collect and was live on-the-air when the operator came on and asked for "five cents please for the next five minutes."

Pay phones are not the only alternative. Regular phones—in liquor stores, dry cleaners, pharmacies, lawyers' offices—are easier to work with and in quieter locations. Reporters walk in, introduce themselves and make arrangements to come back and use the phone later.

Next step: Call the newsroom and check in. The people at the station want to know exactly where the reporter is and what the situation looks like there. They may also have additional information relevant to the story. Occasionally the newsroom will order the reporter to pack up and leave for a new and hotter story.

Now it's time to get the news.

At a news event, many good reporters are masters of the art of making small talk, getting friendly. They don't just walk into city hall—they joke with the guard, exchange greetings with the television news crews and ask everybody, "What's up?" This isn't required behavior, but it can be a valuable shortcut to information. The guard can aim the reporter in the direction of the

breaking news; the television crews might advise that nothing's happening in there yet—cluing the reporter that there's time to make some calls. Reporters also talk to the people with whom many of them spend most of their time in the field—other reporters.

Major news events in larger towns attract representatives of several different media. When they are not competing for scoops, these reporters tend to get along and even help each other. They talk out their thoughts on a story and sometimes share information. But when the union leader announces the strike vote and starts walking through the lobby, they push to the front of the pack and then race each other to the phones. Friendly competition.

In competitive situations, the good story usually goes to the aggressive. The reporter who is too dainty to push to the front, too timid to approach the mayor, too polite to impose on the victims will not be a reporter for long.

News events can be tame affairs with prepared statements—transcript provided—and publicity-hungry newsmakers willing to answer everybody's questions in turn. But news events can also be madhouse scenes of police, spectators, ambulances, crazies, sometimes blood. These are the times when a reporter has to function like a quarterback after the snap. Quick thinking: "Where's the telephone? What's the story? Who's going to tell it to me?" Then quick, decisive action: ducking around police lines, press card waving in the air; quick dash for the person in charge; not finding any witnesses to interview, yelling out, "Okay, who was here when it happened?"

Radio reporters have to get tape and file reports from the scene of news events—skills to be discussed in Chapter 10, "Tape." Television reporters need videotape or film (see Chapter 15, "Visuals"). When those jobs are done, and before leaving, all reporters should always check back with the newsroom to make sure the folks back there have gotten what they wanted from this story and to clarify plans for the next story.

### 3. Questioning

Once reporters have been set on the trail of some news, the trick is to find the story—better yet, to find a bunch of stories. Stories may be conspicuous—sitting there in the first controversial words of the statement—or stories may be hiding in the questions that aren't being asked or behind an optimistic smile.

Many reporters had the news that someone had tried to wiretap Democratic headquarters at the Watergate, but for a while only two reporters went out and got the story. They got the story by digging, using the same tools a reporter might use on a good police story: industriousness, aggressiveness and much, much questioning.

Reporting is the search for answers, and they're usually uncovered by intensive questioning. To do it well, reporters need the right questions. Questions should always be to the point.

#### UNACCEPTABLE:

So I hear you, and some of your friends over here, were around when he started to shoot. I might be interested, I mean I'd really like to know, what your thoughts, at that time during the shooting, were and, while I got you here, what, considering the time element, you thought really occurred?

Reporters must stick to the subject—one subject at a time.

#### ACCEPTABLE:

What happened?

Later.

#### ACCEPTABLE:

How did you react?

And phrasing can be all-important. Politicians sometimes find it entertaining to answer questions such as, "But, I asked you about the *payment*, didn't I?" with the word, "Yes." A question that sounds ignorant sometimes may be dismissed with a joke; sometimes it simply inspires the newsmaker to treat the reporter less

seriously. Questions should reflect the reporter's intelligence and understanding.

#### UNACCEPTABLE:

When are you gonna start work on that new hospital? Where is it? Over on Fourth Street?

#### ACCEPTABLE:

When will work begin on the new hospital at the corner of Fifth Street and Lydecker?

The right question sometimes requires research. It may take a whole afternoon pouring through zoning records to come up with the question, "How were you able to build that office building *there*?"

If there's time, it's wise to write the questions out beforehand. Even if the reporter doesn't refer to them, the act of writing questions down can help focus thoughts; and written questions are a hedge against forgetting under pressure.

With all this in mind, it's still important to remember that the job of a question is to get information, not to prove how much a reporter knows. It is better for a reporter to ask and sound uninformed in an interview, than not to ask and sound uninformed on the air.

Choosing questions is an exercise in news judgment. The right questions aim for newsworthy answers. They don't ask the mayor if he believes his new plan will be good for the town. Of course the mayor will say "Yes." They ask how he plans to pay for the plan.

Frequently the news is not what the newsmaker says, or thinks, it is. The governor may speak as if the news is an attack on the state legislature, but the real story might be her concessions to the state liquor lobby.

Sometimes questions cause discomfort—that's usually a sign that they're newsworthy. Reporters have to be firm—and press on. When the person a reporter is interrogating starts coughing, frowning and looking at her watch, the reporter must have the courage to continue until the story is out.

Tough and unfriendly questions have a way of drying up a source of information. That's a risk

reporters have to be willing to take, but there's a strategy for minimizing the risk: Save the tough questions for last. "Isn't your ownership of the sewer company a conflict of interest?" as the first question is going to make it difficult to get that person to fill in the background details. Instead start with, "When will the sewer replacement project get started?" Set the trap. The pointed questions should come when there's nothing left to lose by alienating the newsmaker. Rick Wallace of KABC in Los Angeles calls this "mending the fence before breaking it."

At times reporters are faced with the imposing task of getting people to say something that they didn't intend to say. This requires not only all the common sense, news sense and firmness a reporter can muster; it may require an element of stealth.

Dick Petrik of KOEL in Iowa gets a tip that a car has hit a pole on a nearby highway. Petrik calls up the local police. "What crash?" The person on duty says he knows nothing about it. Next try—the nearest hospital. Petrik doesn't know the name of the person in the car. He doesn't know the nature of the injuries. He doesn't know if police are charging that the person was drunk. This is called fishing.

The hospital doesn't have to respond to a completely unfocused request for information, but Petrik tries an old reporter's trick: "I want to make sure I have the name spelled right on that person whose car hit a pole last night," he says, hopefully. It works. The receptionist spells out the name, and he's got it. Petrik asks for the first name, then gets the nature of the injuries and is ready to confront the local police with hard facts. He's got the story.

Overused or used inappropriately, such tactics can easily become obnoxious and counter-productive. But there are times when reporters' questions should get bold, and even cunning.

Once the angle has appeared, the questions must be aimed at getting the facts. Here radio and television reporters have a slight advantage: They don't need the minor details that fill up the newspaper columns. There will be

no room in their report for detailed background—everybody's exact address or the names of the police and fire personnel at the scene. A radio reporter needs enough of the background information to understand the story, then just the facts—plus a little spice if it's there to be gotten.

The basic, necessary facts are, not coincidentally, the same who, what, when, where and why that it takes to write the story. The questioning can't stop until all those questions have been dealt with. The spice—the nugget that makes the story special—can be harder to locate. This may require attention to some of those seemingly insignificant details.

A group of reporters in New Jersey interrogated police after the discovery of a dismembered body the week before Christmas. All the reporters left with the basic facts, but one asked an extra question and got a grim extra detail: "How was the body wrapped?" The answer: "In Christmas boxes." One extra question . . . a better story.

The final question: "Is there anything else I should know about this?" There may be something else. Sometimes the source will supply it.

#### **4. Contacts**

Reporters must cultivate some newsmakers as contacts, as these contacts will be cultivating reporters for access to air time. This is a symbiotic relationship.

News sources might use reporters for personal publicity, to grind axes, push programs, test plans, attack enemies, or sometimes even to keep the public informed. Whatever their motives, reporters need folks who are willing to blab; without them it would be impossible to get beyond the official pronouncements.

When NBC's Bill Lynch at the White House hears an official statement on economic policy, he might get in touch with an assistant secretary of the treasury, a White House domestic policy advisor, a staffer on a congressional committee responsible for economic policy, and perhaps

labor or chamber of commerce leaders. It's important for Lynch to have people who are willing to expand and explain.

Contacts can be found by hanging around with newsmakers, acting friendly, asking questions and listening. Reporters have been known to buy a politician a glass of lemonade, or whatever they drink, to establish a friendship. Phone numbers are exchanged, and the next time the reporter has a complex story to puzzle out, this new friend might get a call. When the politician hears of a story, he might call this reporter first.

The danger here is cronyism. A certain quid pro quo aspect to a reporter-source relationship is inevitable. Reporters might get their friend's name on the air once in a while as a way of saying thanks for the scoop, but when the demands of friendship start interfering with news judgment, the relationship becomes an ethical problem. Reporters can't allow their affection for newsmakers, or their desire not to lose them as sources, to put them in the position of hiding news. Police are important sources for reporters. A reporter who is not on good terms with the police may have to struggle to keep up with stories. Still, if a reporter catches the police roughing up a suspect, that's news, and it must be aired, whatever the repercussions.

A reporter without contacts is handicapped; a reporter who gets too close to newsmakers is also handicapped.



## 5. Ground Rules

Newsmakers sometimes give reporters information ahead of the time they want to release it. They expect that reporters will "embargo"—hold—the information until the agreed-on release time. Information is often sent out over the wires with such provisions. Any reporter who violates such an agreement risks losing sources and risks the wrath of other journalists. It just isn't done.

There are other ground rules by which newsmakers and reporters are supposed to play. Everything a newsmaker says to a reporter can be used in a story unless the newsmaker indicates in advance that it is confidential. There are a number of phrases a newsmaker can use, in advance, to limit how reporters will make use of their comments:

**1. Background** When a newsmaker says information will be "on background," or "not for attribution," reporters may use what that person says, but they can't attribute it directly to that person. So, on the air they might say, "According to a source close to the governor . . ." Henry Kissinger, while secretary of state, was a master of the background briefing. He was referred to in stories by titles such as "a high State Department source."

**2. Deep background** If this is invoked, reporters can still use the information, but they can't attribute it to the source in any way. If they air the information, they must do it on their own authority. Woodward and Bernstein's "Deep Throat" was a contact who gave all his information on deep background.

**3. Off the record** This is the most sweeping. It binds reporters to a pledge not to use whatever the source says in a story—unless someone else says it on the record. In other words, the information is just for the reporter's benefit. Some reporters won't accept information on these terms; however, most believe it's better than nothing.

• • •

Once the ground rules for an interview have been established, the reporter either accepts them and agrees to abide by them or walks away.

## SUMMARY

---

Good reporters, no matter what medium they are working in, have some things in common. They're aggressive; they're curious; they're

thorough; they're informed; and, as the next chapter emphasizes, they're responsible.

## PRACTICE ASSIGNMENTS

---

You're in the newsroom and . . .

1. The mayor announces a 25 percent cut in the police force. List the people you would call and the questions you would ask.
2. A report from the police radio comes in, saying the town's largest bank has just been held up . . . for the second time in a month. List the people you would call and the questions you would ask.
3. The local university has just received a 100-thousand dollar grant from an unknown philanthropist to establish an affirmative action/minorities recruitment program. List the people you would call and the questions you would ask.
4. The mayor declares July National Brotherhood Month. Local civil rights organizations issue a joint statement opposing the mayor, charging that such symbolic gestures obscure the real problems of the town's minority groups. List the people you would call and the questions you would ask.
5. In Washington the Senate has voted down a proposal to allocate more gasoline to urban areas and less to farmers. List the people you would call and the questions you would ask.

---

# ETHICS AND LAW

Consider the power of a broadcast news story to blacken reputations, to invade privacy or, on the other hand, to expose corruption and inform the public. This power burdens the reporter or writer working with the news with ethical responsibilities that approach those of the lawyer or the doctor. And many of these dictates of conscience have been imbued with the force of law.

Lawmakers and the courts have constructed a complex structure of laws around broadcasting and journalism—at least intended to protect the rights of journalists to report the news without constraint, along with the rights of the people they report on and the rights of their audience.

Final responsibility for decisions on the legality of broadcasting certain material may rest with station management, but reporters and writers must be aware of the web of laws and regulations that surrounds their activities. Similarly, if they are to do their jobs conscientiously, they must be aware of the ethical questions they may confront.

This section raises the major ethical issues broadcast journalists face, and it considers the laws and regulations that govern their work from the perspective from which they were written—

ethics. Fortunately, in this country ethical reporting is in most cases legal reporting.

Some of these legal questions are quite complex, and new developments in the courts and legislatures promise to throw some of the answers given here out of date. It is suggested that broadcast journalists supplement this discussion with further reading in books on mass communication law (see Suggested Readings) and newspaper and magazine articles on breaking developments in mass communication law.

## STANDARDS

This is a craft, a profession. Its practitioners must abide by certain standards. One of the most important of these—objectivity—has already been discussed (see Chapter 3, “Meanings”). There are others—some formulated in laws or regulations, some merely a matter of conscience.

### 1. Accuracy

Accuracy is the journalist's religion; an error of fact is a professional sin. Some might argue

whether there is such a thing as truth, but there certainly are such things as fact—the fact that the victim lives on Orchard Street not Grove Street; the fact that the commissioner said the contractor wasn't her *brother*, but she did not say the contractor was not her *friend*. Reporters must play “slow and tight” with the facts; they must struggle with them until they know them.

There are four basic attitudes that lead to inaccuracy:

**1. Fudging** It's easier to guess than to check. It's easier to write down what people probably would say than to interview them. It's easy to exaggerate a bit to give the story more weight. These energy-saving strategies are tempting but fraught with peril. It might not seem very important whether “more than 100,” “less than 100” or “about 100 people” were trapped in that building, but when a reporter says “more than 100” while colleagues and listeners read “96” in the newspaper the next day, a chunk of that reporter's credibility is lost. Can that reporter be trusted with a storm warning, a charge of corruption, or even a basketball score? Reporters can't keep their jobs if they're not believed.

William Snee, news director at WHEN in New York, tells this tale: “At a fire scene our reporter noted that there had been an explosion. Actually, firefighters had used an item called a jet axe which makes a loud boom and throws debris. Now he checks.”

And a reporter for a local wire service in a major city stumbled upon a report that a truck full of turkeys had crashed on a busy freeway. The reporter, naturally enough, assumed that the turkeys were running all over the freeway. That's how he wrote it; that's how it was aired on many local radio stations. Unfortunately, the turkeys turned out to have been frozen. Don't assume!

**2. Sloppiness** Reporters' handwriting doesn't have to be neat, as long as they can read a name off their notes. They don't have to ask the officer to repeat that name, as long as they're confident they heard it right the first time. They

don't have to double-check the pronunciation, as long as they're positive they have it right. Almost right doesn't count.

**3. Trusting** Reporters should not rest their reputations on someone else's credibility. If the police supply a name, reporters should try to double-check it in the phone book or with other officials. If a politician accuses an official of conflict of interest, reporters should double-check to see if that official really has responsibility for sewer contracts. Some newsmakers speak with forked tongues; some make errors. Double-check.

**4. Misunderstanding** Small differences in meaning can have large consequences. If the United States signs an arms control agreement with the Soviet Union *limiting* the production of missiles, calling this a *cutback* is an error. If a policeman had *applied* for a transfer before he was shot, saying that he *was* about to be transferred is an error—the transfer may not have been approved. If a person has been *indicted* for a crime, it is an error to say he has been *convicted*. These are all serious misunderstandings. Journalism is nonfiction. Accuracy is the first goal.

## 2. Libel

If reporters need the threat of prosecution to keep them accurate, they have it. Inaccurate reporting can lead the station into paying heavy damages for libel.

Individuals and clearly defined groups can claim to have been libeled if something reporters have published or broadcast about them defames them; in other words, according to the standard definition, “if it exposes them to public hatred, contempt or ridicule; or causes them to be shunned or avoided; or tends to injure them in their occupation.”

The term *libel* used to be reserved exclusively for written defamation. Spoken defamation was *slander* and potentially less serious. However,

since the advent of the broadcast media, spoken charges can carry as much sting as written charges, and many state laws label defamation on radio or television *libel*—especially if the defamatory statement was read from a prepared script, as most news reports are. But, it should be understood that what is called *libel* in this discussion may be known in some states as *slander*.

Only in exceptional circumstances is libel a criminal offense, but a person who claims to have been defamed can sue in civil court.

There are a number of “red flag” words that tend to be defamatory and, therefore, should be used with care. Some—including criminal terms such as murderer, rapist or thief—are considered libelous *per se*—in themselves. Here are some more terms that can automatically defame:

adulterer	drunkard
bigamist	ex-convict
briber	fascist
cheat	fool
Communist	gangster
confidence man	grafter
corrupt	mentally ill
crook	Nazi
defaulter	perjurer
drug addict	plagiarist

It also can be libelous *per se* to use terms that suggest that a person has engaged in clearly improper professional conduct—calling a doctor a quack, for example.

Some words aren’t libelous *per se*, but they can be libelous in context. Calling a person a bigot may not be automatically libelous, but if that person owns a store in a black neighborhood, it may be judged to be defamatory.

These words or charges are labeled “red flag” because they should be used with care, not because they should never be used. For example, there’s nothing necessarily wrong with airing charges that show someone to be corrupt—as long as those charges are true. Similarly, there’s nothing necessarily wrong with being sued for libel—as long as the reporter has a solid defense;

although it should be noted that mounting a defense against a libel suit can be quite expensive for a station—even if the station wins.

The media have four major defenses to use in court against libel suits. Understanding them is the best way to understand what is and what is not permissible.

**1. Truth** This defense is of paramount importance from an ethical standpoint. If the station can prove that that person is corrupt, the station will win in court. If it cannot be proved, why was the charge made in the first place?

Most defamatory charges should be confirmed by trusted sources or, when possible, by documentary evidence before they’re aired. If a suit develops, the courts may lean harder on the documentary evidence than the reporter did, but if it’s true that the person is corrupt, the lawyers should be able to prove it.

Truth is an absolute defense against a libel action. When libel is at issue, assume that reporting the truth is safe, while an error of fact leaves the reporter vulnerable. If it turns out to have been the person’s brother who was taking those bribes, there’s no truth defense.

Errors in reporting on criminal proceedings are particularly hazardous. Mistaking an indictment for a conviction can be libelous. Reporting that John Q. Smith was arrested for robbery, when it was John Z. Smith, is cause for legal action by John Q.

One station carried this sentence about allegations of a mass murder in California:

Two avowed homosexuals are telling police in Riverside, California, they've been in the murder business for ten years...and may have killed as many as 40 people.

It turned out that *both* men had not confessed to these murders; one was released. Had that man sued for libel, there would have been no truth defense. Once aware that an error like this has been made, the first thing to do, for legal and

ethical reasons, is to correct the error, clearly and in such a way that those who heard the false charge are most likely to hear the retraction. In other words, the correction usually should be broadcast on the same hour's newscast—as soon as possible.

**2. Privilege** What if a newsmaker makes a false, libelous charge and the reporter merely airs a tape of the newsmaker's statement? Can a reporter and a station be held responsible for airing someone else's defamation? Generally, yes. The station, reporter and newsmaker could all be sued.

Reporters are responsible for the truthfulness of just about everything they air, including quotes or taped statements. Otherwise a reporter could get away with quoting any outlandish charge a person's enemies were willing to make. There are probably people out there who could be inspired to defame quite a few of us. With the exceptions noted below, potentially defamatory charges should be checked and double-checked before being allowed on the air. When in doubt, leave them out.

Still, there are certain charges that the public has a right to hear—whether they're true or not. The second libel defense protects reporters who air charges made in special situations.

Court proceedings couldn't proceed if the participants needed to be concerned with defamation suits. And, reporters couldn't cover such proceedings if they had to worry about getting sued for libel for reporting that a witness called someone a murderer. So, the courts have ruled that people have the "privilege" of making such statements in court proceedings and that reporters have the "privilege" of reporting these statements—if their reports are "fair and accurate" and the source of the statement is clearly indicated—without fear of having to pay damages for libel. It doesn't matter whether the charge is true or not. If reporting of that charge was fair, accurate and properly attributed (see Chapter 3, "Meanings"), the fact that it was made in a privileged situation is an absolute defense.

Along with judicial proceedings, the administrative or legislative proceedings of governments are privileged. Fair, accurate and properly attributed reports of defamatory charges made by officials in official proceedings are protected. If at a city council meeting the mayor calls the president of the city council a Nazi, reporters can report that charge with impunity. Good reporters will immediately try to determine whether there is any evidence that he is a "Nazi," but the public deserves to hear their mayor's charge anyway.

Some courts have ruled recently that statements made by officials at any public meeting, not just official meetings, are privileged; so even if the mayor made the charge at a press conference, it could still be reported.

**3. Fair comment** What if a film critic reviews a particularly unfortunate movie and accuses the director of being a "sadist"? Or a sports reporter says the local college's basketball coach is "incompetent"? Or a political commentator calls the mayor a "fool"? It would be hard to prove these seemingly defamatory statements to be true. Certainly they are of a different order than the straight news reporting this book has been discussing. But, such subjective and hyperbolic charges have a role in criticism. Must critics worry about libel when they are expressing their opinions?

The courts have ruled that "fair comment" on matters of public interest is protected; fair comment is a defense in libel suits. Still, there are a few qualifications. The persons being criticized must have injected themselves into the public scene, or they must affect the community's welfare—it's not "fair" to falsely criticize some local supermarket clerk. And, while pure opinion is okay, if there are facts involved, they must be correct—it's not "fair" to accuse the coach of never having a winning record when his team won 15 and lost only 12 games two years ago. Next, the criticism must confine itself to matters relevant to the performance in question—it's not "fair" to falsely accuse the director of engaging

in adultery in the course of a review. Finally, the criticism cannot be purely malicious—it's not "fair" if the reviewer hasn't even seen the play whose director he's defaming.

**4. The Times rule** In recent years the Supreme Court has extended the freedom to criticize public officials and public figures even further. In a case involving the *New York Times*, the court ruled that even defamatory statements about public officials relating to their official conduct or fitness for office in which the facts were wrong are protected. All the Court required was for the statements to have been made without "actual malice"—which was defined as "knowledge that a defamatory statement was false or reckless disregard of whether or not it was false." In later cases the Court ruled that public figures, as well as public officials, could be subject to such defamatory statements, as long as the reporting was done without "actual malice." Plaintiffs from a real estate developer to a retired baseball player have been treated by the courts as public figures. More recently, the Supreme Court has begun to tighten the definition of a public figure again.

So a reporter can air an attack on the governor in which that official is accused of having been committed to a mental institution, then find out that the governor was really there on an inspection trip, and use the *Times* rule as a defense if the governor sues for libel. To win damages the governor would have to prove that the station knew the charge wasn't true or showed reckless disregard of whether it was true. If it was an honest or even just a negligent mistake, the station is safe.

Haven't the law and ethics diverged here? Why should the courts be protecting false charges that decent reporters would not allow themselves to make? The point is not to protect the false charges, but to protect the news media from being inhibited from reporting any potentially defamatory charges against important people by a fear that these charges might be difficult to prove true in court. By removing the

liability for false charges in these situations, the court hoped to free the media to make true charges—their constitutionally protected role.

Nevertheless, the *Times* rule should not be used as a license for sloppy reporting on subjects where people's jobs and reputations are at stake.



The bottom line for reporters who are not doing commentary or criticism is this: no charges against people should be aired unless the evidence demonstrates that they are true. The only exceptions are charges made in privileged situations.

### 3. Fairness and the FCC

The First Amendment to the Constitution says that Congress shall pass no law abridging freedom of the press. Despite the use of the word *press*—apparently few of the Founding Fathers listened to broadcast news—this sentence does prevent the government from keeping stories off radio and television, too. However, as the courts have interpreted it, the First Amendment does not prevent the government from enforcing some controls on broadcast news.

Radio and television news, unlike any other form of journalism, is specifically regulated by the federal government. This special treatment is generally justified by three arguments—all hotly disputed by many broadcasters.

First, it is argued, since the air waves belong to the people—in a way that printing presses do not—the people have some right to control how they are used. Second, since the number of broadcast frequencies is physically limited—in a way that the number of printing presses is not—someone has to determine who gets to use the frequencies and how they're used. Third, since broadcast stations have unusual power to penetrate into people's homes and lives, there is the need for some sort of minimal control over their content. Congress has charged the Federal Communications Commission with protecting the public interest by regulating the air waves.

The FCC is composed of seven commissioners appointed by the president. With the help of a large staff, they have responsibility for licensing all broadcast stations in the United States. The FCC has the power to refuse to renew the license of a station that it has decided is not acting in the public interest. That's a severe punishment. Essentially, the FCC has the power to put the owners of a broadcast station out of business. To maintain their licenses broadcasters must abide by FCC regulations. Perhaps the most important of these regulations is what has become known as "the fairness doctrine."

At this writing, Congress is considering legislation to reduce federal regulation of the broadcast industry. Such legislation may substantially modify the position of the FCC, but if the FCC's fairness doctrine falls victim to deregulation, it won't be without a fight. This doctrine is at the heart of the FCC's attitude toward broadcasting.

This is the thrust of the fairness doctrine according to a recent FCC informational memorandum: "If a station presents one side of a *controversial issue of public importance*, it must afford *reasonable opportunity* for the presentation of *contrasting views*." Each term in this requirement opens up possible areas of controversy. Here is a brief summary of what the FCC seems to mean according to a document it published in the Federal Register in 1974:

1. "Controversial issue." That's an issue that "is the subject of vigorous debate with substantial elements of the community in opposition to one another." For instance, in its rulings the FCC has implied that a mere discussion of the desirability of good health would not be controversial and therefore not subject to the doctrine; but if such issues as the nutritive qualities of white bread or the use of high potency vitamins—issues on which experts disagree—are raised, the discussion would be considered controversial.
2. "Of public importance." The principal test here, the FCC says, is "the impact that the issue is likely to have on the community at

large." It says that the degree of media coverage and the attention the issue has received from government and other community leaders are appropriate considerations in determining whether an issue is important enough to necessitate a broadcaster going out of the way to balance discussion of that issue.

3. "Reasonable opportunity." The FCC says it doesn't require that *equal time* be given to differing sides, nor that both sides be presented on a single broadcast or a series of broadcasts, just that they get their chance in the overall programming of a station. And the prominence given the positions cannot be completely out of line. For instance, the Commission says it would not be acceptable to present one side wholly in prime-time hours, and the other side only at times when the audience is smaller.
4. "Contrasting views." Here the FCC charges the broadcaster with determining "which shades of opinion are of sufficient public importance to warrant coverage. In many or perhaps most cases, it may be possible to find that only two viewpoints are significant enough to warrant broadcast coverage. However, other issues may involve a range of markedly different and important policy alternatives." Particular spokesmen for opposing points of view do not necessarily have to be allowed on the air. The Commission gives the broadcaster considerable latitude in presenting these points of view.

The fairness doctrine provides more stringent safeguards for people who have been personally attacked on the air. Persons or groups that have been attacked in discussions of controversial issues must be given a chance to respond. The station itself must notify them of the date and time of the broadcast in which they were attacked, must send them a tape, script or summary of the attack within seven days, and then must afford them a reasonable opportunity to reply to the attack; that may mean free air time.

The FCC is aware that such measures to protect the public's right to hear all sides in disputes are dangerously close to government control or censorship of broadcasting. Many people oppose the fairness doctrine on these grounds. However, in a key case the Supreme Court upheld the FCC's right to require that broadcasters comply with the fairness doctrine.

WGCB in Red Lion, Pennsylvania, had carried a broadcast by the Reverend Billy Hargis in which he attacked the author of a book entitled *Goldwater—Extremist on the Right*. Hargis said the author of the book had been fired by a newspaper for making charges against city officials, had worked for Communist-affiliated publications and had written the book to "smear and destroy Barry Goldwater." The author heard of the broadcast and demanded free time to reply. When the station refused, he complained to the FCC.

The FCC ruled that this was a personal attack, that WGCB had failed to meet its obligation to notify the author of the broadcast and that WGCB did have to provide the author with free time to reply. When the case reached the Supreme Court, it upheld the FCC's position and the constitutionality of the fairness doctrine in general.

What does the fairness doctrine mean for reporters and newswriters? Obviously the doctrine is mostly concerned with expressions of the station's opinions and, therefore, is most relevant to broadcast editorials or commentary (see Chapter 14, "Radio"), but the doctrine does reinforce certain ethical principles in reporting and news-writing. First, it puts added pressure on reporters to be objective. Early wordings of the fairness doctrine specifically prohibit slanting or distorting news relevant to a controversy. In a similar vein, they forbid withholding relevant news or facts concerning a controversy. But, the doctrine's most obvious effect on reporters is its reminder that they must be fair.

But how is a controversial issue covered fairly? A debate such as the traditional argument over how much money should be spent on the mili-

tary has many sides. There are the doves who want military spending cut, the moderates who want to keep it about the same and the hawks who believe we need to spend more. But, there also are those who believe we should not only buy more weapons but start using them and others who believe we should eliminate our army. And that's not all. There are a myriad of sub-positions and subtle variations on each point of view. How can reporters be fair to all of them? Obviously they can't.

Total fairness, like true objectivity (see Chapter 3, "Meanings"), is an unrealizable ideal. In the fraction of a minute a reporter has to devote to an issue, even in a series of reports, it is not feasible to acknowledge all possible points of view. Somehow journalists must decide which positions on an issue are the most significant. Reporters must create a working definition of fairness.

There are many factors that can be considered: how widely positions are held; which positions are most often being discussed in public debates or in governmental bodies; which positions are most likely to be adopted; etc. These echo the FCC's standards for selecting "contrasting views." Applying these standards to the military spending debate would tend to eliminate all but the dove, hawk and moderate positions, so there would be some justification for a reporter emphasizing these in a story. The danger here is that unpopular points of view will never get a chance to become popular since the media will never cover them. Therefore, somewhere in a working definition of fairness an attempt should be made to balance this bias toward conventional wisdom.

With most stories, being fair isn't this difficult. It simply requires that on a story about construction of a new downtown expressway, for example, reporters give expression to the argument that it is needed to relieve downtown traffic and the argument that it will merely serve to increase the number of cars downtown.

On a story about welfare, reporters might seek out those who think welfare doesn't provide

needy people enough to live on, as well as those who call it a rip-off. If they then give some time to the intermediate position—that the present system is about as good as we can make it, that'll pass for fair.

Reporting fairly means keeping in mind the claims of all groups to coverage and then making decisions without allowing personal beliefs, even if shared by most listeners, to interfere. It is not always possible to be perfectly fair. It is necessary to try. Reporters who have evaluated issues intelligently and who are making such a conscientious effort should not run afoul of the FCC and its fairness doctrine.

#### 4. Campaigns and Equal Time

Political campaigns require the most sensitive applications of the fairness doctrine. The doctrine includes special provisions for dealing with candidates for election. For example, if a station endorses one candidate for election, that candidate's opponents must all be notified within 24 hours and offered a chance to respond. If the endorsement was made within 72 hours of the election, the other candidates must be notified before the endorsement is aired.

The fairness doctrine is not a law passed by Congress. It is a regulation imposed by a commission empowered by Congress to regulate broadcasting. However, Congress was so sensitive to the power of broadcasts to influence political campaigns that it included in the law establishing the FCC a rule specifically requiring that candidates for political office be given equal time on the air. So, what is called the equal time rule is a law—Section 315 of the Communications Act of 1934. Here's what Section 315 says: ("If any licensee shall permit any person who is a legally qualified candidate for any public office to use a broadcasting station, he shall afford equal opportunities to all other such candidates.") Station owners, of course, are the "licensees."

Section 315 also requires that candidates not be charged excessive rates for air time. And, if one candidate gets time free, all the other candi-

dates must be given equal free time. After Johnny Carson invited the mayor of Burbank onto his show, he found he also had to invite the mayor's opponents in an upcoming election. That's the equal time rule.

There are, however, some very important exceptions to the rule. The equal time rule does not apply to any "bona fide newscast bona fide news interview, bona fide news documentary (if the appearance of the candidate is incidental to the presentation of the subject or subjects covered by the news documentary) or on-the-spot coverage of bona fide news events (including but not limited to political conventions and activities incidental thereto)." In 1975 the FCC officially made news conferences that are broadcast live in their entirety another exception. And, the FCC decided, if a station covered a debate between candidates that someone else was sponsoring, that too would be exempt from the equal time rule; hence the Carter-Ford debates in 1976 without the minor party candidates for president—debates officially sponsored by the League of Women Voters, not the networks.

That is a long list of exemptions, and it includes just about all the types of programming covered in this book. Broadcast journalists generally only worry about the equal time rule when they want to interview candidates on a public affairs program or do a documentary specifically about candidates. Then they have to remember that if they invite or profile one candidate, they have to invite or profile them all—even the candidate of the Burn the Textbooks Party, if that person has made it onto the ballot.

But the equal time rule does not apply to news and its close family. The fairness doctrine does apply, but it is much less stringent—it doesn't require equal time, for one thing. So much for the law. How about ethics?

Ethically, a radio station has a responsibility to give all the candidates for an office a reasonable shot at having their views heard. Reporters should be conscious of the need to contact and cover each candidate. Walter Dibble of WTIC in Connecticut points out that sometimes, espe-

cially in smaller towns, one candidate will be significantly more articulate than another and much more adept at making news. In order to maintain balance Dibble won't go so far as to keep the articulate candidate off the air, but he will notify the quiet one of the imbalance and make a special effort to get that candidate's point of view.

Balanced reporting gets difficult when there are minor party candidates in the race. They will get very few of the votes; do they deserve an equal share of the coverage? Most stations will offer some coverage, but not equal coverage. These candidates certainly should not be ignored; that way predictions about their poor showings in the election become self-fulfilling.

## BEHAVIOR

If reporters fail to behave responsibly at news events, they can subject already distraught people to additional torment. They must be tactful enough to know when to be pushy and when to be gentle. If reporters fail to behave responsibly in reporting events, they can invade people's privacy, spread violence and throw their own reputations into doubt. This section will also point out that at times, even if they do behave responsibly, reporters can find themselves in jail.

### 1. Conflict of Interest

It's simple.

First, reporters shouldn't accept any gifts from the people they may have to write about—no bottles of Scotch, vacations, fountain pens or dinners. Reporters don't even want to be in the position of having to distinguish between a gift and a bribe. Return them all with a polite thank you.

The only gift reporters should accept is information. Good information sources may get their names on the news once or twice in return for a hot tip, but they won't get the news biased in their favor (see Chapter 8 "Gathering News").

Second, reporters should not cover stories in which they have a vested interest. This may require getting rid of stock in potentially controversial companies or resigning from some political or community groups. Or, it may require withdrawing from coverage of related issues when they come up—asking someone else to do the story. This is not to say that reporters have to be eunuchs—they can vote, talk politics, do business. But, when these concerns become pressing enough so that they spill over into reporting, or even *appear* to spill over into reporting, something has got to be sacrificed.

Third, no deference in news coverage to the demands of advertisers or other business considerations of the station—no feature story on radishes as a favor to the radish company that sponsors some newscasts; no withholding of a few nasty details about a strike at the local newspaper because that paper happens to be owned by the same gentleman who pays reporters' salaries. Honest hunger for news may require reporters biting the hand that feeds. And the hand that feeds should know better than to try to manipulate the news.

### 2. Privacy

Reporters are in the business of poking their noses into other people's business, and their power is such that they can do a lot of harm to these people. Reporters have to sniff around; that's their function. But, there are large areas of people's lives that are off limits.

Nevertheless, the first thing to remember is that there basically is no legal right to privacy in news. The name of the victim, the name of the suspect—after arrest—and the name of the person who helped to catch the suspect are all matters of public record and can be broadcast. Any facts about people who appear in the news that are relevant to the story—what they were doing in the area at the time, their ages, marital status, personal characteristics—are fair game.

The only regular exceptions are the names of children—usually under 18—arrested for crimes.

Most states have voluntary codes that police and journalists follow which call for these names to be withheld. And many stations also will not broadcast the names of rape victims. Other situations arise that may not be covered by the codes but may call for similar tact. For example, some stations might choose not to carry the names of the people injured in a fire at a homosexual bath.

What's clearly neither acceptable nor legal is dredging up potentially embarrassing facts about people who are not directly connected with breaking news. It would be wrong, for instance, to walk into a homosexual bath and broadcast a story revealing the names of the people there. Their right to privacy would be protected by privacy laws in most states. They are not involved in news. Reporters have no right making people's private lives public to create a story.

However, the courts have ruled that public figures have surrendered much of their legal right to privacy. If a senator is seen at a gay bar, he would not have the same legal right to keep that fact private as an ordinary citizen. But is it ethical to broadcast information about the private lives of public figures? Most stations will draw a line for politicians between aspects of their private lives that affect their performance in office and personal quirks that have no bearing on the job they're doing. If the mayor has a mistress, that's his business. If he puts that mistress on the city's payroll, that's our business.

### 3. Disorder

When violence erupts, the standard rules of reporting take on added urgency. Those waiting to take to the streets and those prepared to flee to the hills will be listening to their radios. An inaccurate report or a sloppily chosen word can spread panic. The basic guidelines for covering these disturbances are discussed in Chapter 12, "Coverage." But, under the intense pressure of a riot or a terrorist action, these standard rules for reporting disorders may not be enough. The last couple of decades have taught that responsible reporting of such volatile situations demands a

code of behavior for reporters that is stricter than that employed in other types of reporting.

During a riot the line between reporting news and making news may be blurred, with dangerous consequences. Rioters have been known to perform for reporters, and by publicizing a riot reporters may be encouraging others to join in. The solution is certainly not to ignore riots. Overly restricted coverage would leave listeners confused and susceptible to rumors. Nor should reporters become cheerleaders for the police and law and order to the point where the news becomes distorted by this rooting interest.

Much thought has been devoted to preparing special ethical guidelines that reduce the chance of inciting further violence while protecting the public's right to know what's going on. The following list was compiled from the instructions given to reporters at a few major news organizations:

1. Stay in the background. This is no time to advertise the fact that a station has a reporter on the scene. Awareness that reporters are there may amplify the disturbance. Using cars *without* the station's call letters displayed may help. Reporters should also keep their conversations to a minimum and forsake the loud pursuit of interviews.
2. Wait. This is one situation where radio reporters slow down! Most stations don't carry live reports on a disturbance. CBS requires the permission of the network news division's president or vice president before they will report live on a riot. And stations delay their taped reports until some perspective is available on the situation. Reporters should secure appraisals of the seriousness of the situation from responsible officials *before* they file reports. Tape of angry rioters or scared witnesses should not be used unless their statements can be placed in clear perspective—shouted charges balanced, rumors of destruction verified and made specific.
3. Hold addresses. The exact location of the violence tells thrill seekers and looters exactly

where to go. Most stations will hold the exact address until police have control of the situation. Occasionally, however, police will ask that the address be broadcast to keep people out of the area—obviously this is a time to be in close contact with police and city officials.

Riots, hijackings and terrorist actions resemble small wars, and, as in war coverage, reporters may become responsible for withholding additional information to help police. With terrorists inside, for example, it would not be too smart to reveal on the air exactly where the police are waiting for them outside. Terrorists can listen to the radio, too.

Again, communicating with officials is all important. They cannot be allowed unnecessary censorship—reporters aren't going to withhold the fact that there are terrorists in that building; but police officials must be given an opportunity to go about their business without having their tactical secrets given away over the air.

Disorders are situations where a healthy extra dose of discretion must be added to the reporter's standard considerations.

#### **4. Panic**

Reporters also run the risk of needlessly causing panic in situations of less magnitude than riots.

"There's been a wreck involving a green, late-model Chevy." Tom Black, news director at WOHS in North Carolina, heard that on the radio one day and wondered how many people must have been worried to death in a town where so many might have a family member or friend in that kind of car. The tactful decision here would have been just to report the accident without the description of the car or to wait until the families were notified and then use names. The power of radio to panic must be considered.

For another example, ABC and most other news organizations never mention an air crash until they have the flight number. Too many listeners would start shaking if they heard "An airplane crashed while landing at Chicago's

O'Hare airport this evening." (Incidentally, most stations reschedule all airline commercials after news of a crash—the sensitivities being protected here are those of the sponsors.)

#### **5. Staging**

Events don't always behave. Demonstrators may stop chanting before reporters turn their tape recorders on. The police officer may put down his walky-talky before the television crews have begun filming. The black students may enter the previously all-white school before reporters are in position to describe the scene.

It's tempting, therefore, to stage events—to ask demonstrators to start chanting again, to ask the police officer to fake that call-in for the camera, to ask the mothers to take their children and repeat their walk into the school. This is especially seductive when radio reporters are working with tape or when television reporters are working with film or videotape. Getting good sound or good visuals can be an important part of getting the story. News directors may frown on reporters who come back without tape of the chanting demonstrators.

Be that as it may, staging is clearly unethical. Reporters observe events; they do not direct events. Once they cross that line and help shape events, those events lose their integrity and reporters lose their integrity. Staged events are phony. The news should include only what "really" happens.

Better to come back without tape of the chanting. Asking demonstrators to repeat it is wrong. Asking rioters to throw another rock through a window so a reporter can get the sound—the ultimate example of staging—is outrageous.

#### **6. Hidden Mikes**

In the course of investigations, reporters have occasionally resorted to the use of hidden microphones to reveal unsavory practices or catch newsmakers dissembling. This sort of trickery is illegal under federal law unless at least one party

to the conversation is aware that it's being taped—that party can be the reporter. What this means is that a conversation between two unaware people cannot be “bugged,” but reporters can record conversations in which they themselves or their agents participate.

The FCC also outlaws surreptitious recording that uses hidden transmitters. The tape recorder has to be on the scene. The conversation cannot be transmitted elsewhere.

Some state laws go even further. They require the consent of both parties before a conversation can be recorded. Hidden mikes are not allowed in these states, and they're treated circumspectly by most newsrooms even where they are legal. Some will avoid the technique entirely; others use it only in connection with police or prosecutors who are working on a case.

Clearly, hidden microphones, if used at all, should be reserved for crucial stories—official corruption, organized crime—not to catch a football coach verbally attacking one of his players. There's something shady about trapping someone with a hidden mike. The alleged crime has to be pretty serious to warrant it.

## 7. Protecting Sources

Some newsmakers only talk to the press if their names, or some of their information, will be kept secret. That's fair enough. Often these people fear for their jobs; occasionally they're discussing potentially criminal behavior. Reporters are willing to trade confidentiality for important information. And this bargain is ethically binding.

Fine, but what happens when the information or the name of that informant may be relevant to criminal proceedings and a judge orders the reporter to turn it over to help determine someone's guilt or innocence? Do reporters have any more right to withhold information from a court, even the name of a confidential source or something they have sworn to keep secret, than any other citizen? Most reporters say they do—otherwise they can't do their jobs. But, the Supreme Court says reporters have no absolute

right to conceal information from courts. Since the Supreme Court has the last word, reporters may have to reveal confidential information or face the threat of being held in contempt of court.

The Supreme Court reached that conclusion while considering the cases of several reporters, including Paul Pappas, a television reporter with WIEV in Massachusetts. Pappas had been allowed to enter Black Panther Party headquarters to cover a police raid that was expected that evening. In return, he promised not to disclose anything else he observed at the Party's headquarters. There was no raid. Pappas did no story, but a grand jury investigating the Panthers subpoenaed him to testify about what had happened while he was at Panther headquarters. Pappas refused—unwilling to violate his pledge. The Supreme Court ruled that the grand jury's right to subpoena witnesses superseded Pappas's pledge.

This is an issue on which reporters' own ethical codes and the law collide. Reporters' moral senses and their view of what is required to do their jobs effectively may tell them that they have to keep their word and keep sources confidential. But the Supreme Court says that defying a court by refusing to reveal sources is illegal. Reporters have spent as many as 46 days in jail in defense of their position.

Many states have made the situation less difficult for reporters by enacting “shield laws”—laws that give reporters the legal right to withhold confidential information and the names of their sources in court. Reporters should check whether there is such a law in their state. But the case of *New York Times* reporter M. A. Farber has thrown the power of shield laws into question. Farber was jailed for refusing to turn over to the judge some information a defense attorney wanted in a state that has a shield law (New Jersey). Also, the absence of a federal shield law leaves reporters unprotected in the federal system.

Where confidential material is involved, reporters may have to consider—before agreeing to

protect the identity of a news source—whether they are prepared to go to jail.

## ACCESS

So far this chapter has outlined reporters' responsibilities. Now it's time to consider some of their rights.

Reporting is gathering information. Access—the ability to get to that information—is essential. There are some special procedures that help reporters get close to the news. Reporters are given their own seating areas by governmental bodies; they are often permitted to visit areas that are off limits to the rest of the public; a press card can often get them past police or fire lines. Hospitals and police departments have also set up special procedures for releasing information to the press.

Nonetheless, the courts so far have generally been unwilling to concede that the news media have the right to special access to information. No one has any more legal obligation to talk to a journalist than to any other private citizen. Recent court rulings would also seem to imply that reporters have no more legal right than others to "trespass" on private property. Reporters certainly can be kept out of homes. Privacy laws specifically protect people who are not involved in news from "intrusion upon their seclusion or solitude." And, courts have ruled that reporters can be evicted from public places such as restaurants if they are causing a nuisance.

So, with the exception of the special procedures some organizations have set up, reporters are in the same position as the rest of the public when it comes to gaining access to information. Fortunately, the public's right to know at least what its government leaders are up to has been broadened considerably in recent years.

### 1. Courts

As a rule, trials are open to the public and therefore open to reporters. Most hearings and appellate proceedings are also open to reporters. In

exceptional circumstances, however, judges have closed the proceedings in which they are presiding to the public and the press. In most states that requires an awfully compelling excuse—such as the need to protect secret testimony—and the judge has to open proceedings when the excuse is no longer valid. Reporters cannot be excluded just to punish them.

One area where reporters are always denied access is grand jury hearings. These hearings to determine whether there is enough evidence to indict a suspect are secret—to protect suspects from publicity in connection with crimes of which they may never even be formally accused.

Judges' deliberations are also private, and sometimes out of their deliberations have come alarming strategies for keeping what goes on in open courtrooms private. Desire to control publicity and reporters has inspired some judges to impose "gag orders" specifically prohibiting reporters from broadcasting or printing certain information. These gag orders would seem to be direct violations of reporters' First Amendment right to report without prior restraint, and they have consistently been overturned on appeal. Unfortunately, by that time the damage may already have been done. The Supreme Court has ruled that courts should protect defendants' rights to trials untainted by excessive publicity through their own efforts—sequestering juries, changing the location of trials—rather than by abridging reporters' rights. Yet, in some courtrooms reporters may still have to fight and sue for their rights.

Reporters' rights to get into courtrooms are generally protected and their right to report on what they see is certainly protected; but once in a courtroom reporters have no right to physically interfere with proceedings. They are as vulnerable as anyone else to contempt citations for disruptive or unruly behavior. Judges cannot tell reporters how to report, but they can tell them not to hound the trial's participants in court, not to noisily record reports in court, or even not to smoke in court.

Judges' control of their courtrooms goes be-

yond decorum. In many states reporters lose one of their major tools, the tape recorder, when they enter a courtroom or even a courthouse. Many courts have a fear of recording devices, and cameras, for that matter, that dates back to the wild courtroom scenes at the Lindbergh kidnaping trial in 1934. Even in a state in which recorders are allowed at trials, the judge may retain control of such key matters as the placement of microphones—limiting the tape a reporter can get during a trial. Outside the courtroom, witnesses are frequently discouraged, if not actually proscribed by the judge, from giving interviews during a trial. Lawyers may not be willing or able to talk either. While a trial is in progress, the only voice reporters may be able to get on tape is their own.

There are signs, however, that judges are losing their aversion to the tools of broadcast journalism. Microphones, or even television cameras, are grudgingly being permitted in courtrooms in some states, along with reporters.

## 2. Police

Laws, codes or official guidelines in many states spell out what information on crimes the police *should* make available to reporters. Here's the standard list:

1. Basic factual information on the defendant including name (unless underage), age, address, job and marital status.
2. The exact charge.
3. The name of the agency that made the arrest and information on the investigation if there was one.
4. Basic facts on the arrest, including where it happened, whether the suspect resisted, whether there was a chase, any weapons that were used and a description of anything that was seized.

Reporters should insist that they be provided with all this information within a reasonable pe-

riod of time. However, there are some facts that laws, codes or guidelines require that the police *not* disclose. The idea is to protect the defendant's right to do a fair trial by keeping potentially prejudicial statements from potential jurors. The standard list of information police are instructed *not* to release:

1. Reports of confessions.
2. Statements about polygraph tests, fingerprints, ballistic tests or laboratory tests.
3. Statements about the credibility of potential witnesses and anticipated testimony.
4. Opinions on evidence or arguments that may be used at the trial.
5. The criminal records of suspects.

News organizations often join police and prosecutors in pledging to withhold such material. Nevertheless, the police on occasion do let information slip, and this restricted material—especially in major cases—has been known to find its way onto the air.

Incidentally, such official documents as the police “blotter”—a record of what the police have been up to—and arrest records are public records and therefore open to inspection by the public. Reporters should be able to look them over (see Chapter 12, “Coverage”).

## 3. Hospitals

Medical personnel are obviously more concerned with treating their patients than satisfying journalists, but most hospitals recognize their responsibility to keep the public informed. Hospitals should be expected to designate someone (see Chapter 12, “Coverage”) to provide reporters with this basic information on newsworthy patients within a reasonable period of time:

1. The name, address, age, occupation and marital status of patients.
2. The general nature of the injuries—what parts of the body have been injured, what bones broken, the degree of seriousness of burns.

3. If the person is dead, the time of death and the person's name—after next of kin have been notified. (Even if reporters can get the name elsewhere, they should give officials reasonable time to tell relatives.) Hospitals should also release the cause of death—but only after it's been confirmed, and that may mean waiting for an autopsy.
4. The condition of patients—usually labeled with one of these terms (in increasing order of severity): *good, satisfactory, fair, poor, serious or critical.*

These guidelines represent standard practice, but they're not legal requirements. At some smaller hospitals, reporters may have to employ all their persuasiveness, aggressiveness and moral authority to get hospital officials to satisfy their ethical obligation to keep the public informed.

Hospital officials generally do not and should not be expected to speculate on matters with legal implications, such as whether a patient was drunk, shot or a suicide. They leave that information to the police to release.

Hospital officials should be expected to cooperate with journalists. And journalists have an even more serious responsibility to hospital officials—staying out of the way. Lifesaving efforts come first (see Chapter 12, "Coverage").

#### **4. Government Records**

Officials push lots of paper. Written on those papers can be material of interest to the public and therefore of interest to reporters. Often the material is embarrassing to the officials who control it. In the past there were many ways to hide embarrassing papers. Federal officials stamped them "secret"; local officials locked them in cabinets. But in recent years legal moves have helped get these documents out in the open. These laws are often called "sunshine laws," and they bring to mind the expression, "Sunshine is the best disinfectant."

The federal Freedom of Information Act strictly limits the information the federal govern-

ment can classify as "sensitive," and it streamlines the process of getting information released. Hundreds of employees of the FBI and CIA alone are now involved in finding information the public has requested under the law. Although the process requires time and lawyers, reporters have been able to use this law to shed light on some of the less savory activities of the government.

For instance, NBC reporter Carl Stern used the law to expose a questionable FBI counterintelligence program. Stern had noticed the code name "COINTELPRO New Left" on the bottom of some documents that had been stolen from an FBI office. He became curious. Stern asked the FBI director to explain and was rebuffed. His contacts on Capitol Hill didn't know what COINTELPRO was and Stern's best official sources wouldn't say anything—even off the record. All this secrecy made the story sound even more intriguing.

With his traditional means of getting information exhausted, Stern filed an official request with the FBI for the documents on the program under the terms of the FOI Act. He asked for anything they had on the "establishment, disestablishment or modification" (these are not words Stern would use on the air) of COINTELPRO New Left. The FBI said "sorry" and argued that this was sensitive material. So Stern and his lawyers filed an official complaint in the U.S. District Court, asking the judge to examine the documents "in camera"—in private—to determine if the FBI's excuse for withholding them was valid under the FOI Act. The judge ruled that release of the documents would not threaten national security and ordered the FBI to turn them over.

There was plenty in those papers that was newsworthy. With the help of the FOI Act, Stern had uncovered evidence that the FBI had set up a program of spying on and disrupting radical groups, using methods that were clearly of questionable legality. Stern had quite a story. Congressional and judicial investigations soon followed.

All 50 states now have sunshine laws that provide some form of public access to *state* and *local* government documents. These laws are not specifically designed for reporters. They are designed for all citizens, but reporters, as the eyes of the public, are often in a position to do the most with them.

Reporters should get a copy of their state's sunshine law—as well as the FOI Act—and familiarize themselves with each. Often they won't have to take “no” for an answer when they ask to see a document. The law will be behind them.

## 5. Government Meetings

Much reporting on government is reporting on meetings; yet again there are government agencies that feel more comfortable if no one is watching them go about their (or our) business. Reporters often have to fight to keep meetings open. Although the federal government does not, most states now have laws to help reporters win those fights.

Such laws generally require that all meetings of state and local government agencies at which business is being discussed be open to the public. The only exceptions usually are portions of meetings where personnel matters, business transactions, litigation or investigations of wrongdoing are being discussed.

Despite these laws, the public's elected representatives often go to great lengths to keep the public out. They may look for such loopholes as the word *meeting* itself, and call their meeting a *work session* because work session may not be specifically mentioned in the open meeting law. All else having failed, an Iowa school board once met in the men's room to keep a female reporter out.

It's the reporter's responsibility to challenge these dodges and keep meetings that should be open . . . open, even if it requires threatening, or going through with, legal action. Again, knowledge of the state open meeting law is invaluable. Reporters have to be prepared to mind not only their own ethical and legal responsibilities, but others' responsibilities as well.

## SUMMARY

---

These laws and ethical requisites are complex. Is it necessary that broadcast reporters master them? Yes. Simply behaving decently gets reporters through most situations, but good reporters inevitably reach situations where what they are doing hurts someone, or what someone else is

doing is hurting reporters' ability to do their job. At these times, reporters need to have a clear picture of their rights and responsibilities.

Here is one summary of the responsibilities of broadcast journalists:

### CODE OF BROADCAST NEWS ETHICS RADIO-TELEVISION NEWS DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION

#### *Article One*

The primary purpose of broadcast journalists—to inform the public of events of importance and appropriate interest in a manner that is accurate and comprehensive—shall override all other purposes.

#### *Article Two*

Broadcast news presentations shall be designed not only to offer timely and accurate information, but also

to present it in the light of relevant circumstances that give it meaning and perspective. This standard means that news reports, when clarity demands it, will be laid against pertinent factual background; that factors such as race, creed, nationality or prior status will be reported only when they are relevant; that comment or subjective content will be properly identified; and that errors in fact will be promptly acknowledged and corrected.

#### *Article Three*

Broadcast journalists shall seek to select material for newscast solely on their evaluation of its merits as news. This standard means that news will be selected on the criteria of significance, community and regional relevance, appropriate human interest, service to defined audiences. It excludes sensationalism or misleading emphasis in any form; subservience to external or "interested" efforts to influence news selection and presentation, whether from within the broadcasting industry or from without. It requires that such terms as "bulletin" and "flash" be used only when the character of the news justifies them; that bombastic or misleading descriptions of newsroom facilities and personnel be rejected, along with undue use of sound and visual effects; and that promotional or publicity material be sharply scrutinized before use and identified by source or otherwise when broadcast.

#### *Article Four*

Broadcast journalists shall at all times display humane respect for the dignity, privacy and the well-being of persons with whom the news deals.

#### *Article Five*

Broadcast journalists shall govern their personal lives and such nonprofessional associations as may impinge on their professional activities in a manner that will protect them from conflict of interest, real or apparent.

#### *Article Six*

Broadcast journalists shall seek actively to present all news the knowledge of which will serve the public interest, no matter what selfish, uninformed or corrupt efforts attempt to color it, withhold it or prevent its presentation. They shall make constant effort to open doors closed to the reporting of public proceedings with tools appropriate to broadcasting (including cameras and recorders), consistent with the public

interest. They acknowledge the journalist's ethic of protection of confidential information and sources, and urge unswerving observation of it except in instances in which it would clearly and unmistakably defy the public interest.

#### *Article Seven*

Broadcast journalists recognize the responsibility borne by broadcasting for informed analysis, comment and editorial opinion on public events and issues. They accept the obligation of broadcasters for the presentation of such matters by individuals whose competence, experience and judgment qualify them for it.

#### *Article Eight*

In court, broadcast journalists shall conduct themselves with dignity, whether the court is in or out of session. They shall keep broadcast equipment as unobtrusive and silent as possible. Where court facilities are inadequate, pool broadcasts should be arranged.

#### *Article Nine*

In reporting matters that are or may be litigated, the journalist shall avoid practices which would tend to interfere with the right of an individual to a fair trial.

#### *Article Ten*

Broadcast journalists shall not misrepresent the source of any broadcast news material.

#### *Article Eleven*

Broadcast journalists shall actively censure and seek to prevent violations of these standards, and shall actively encourage their observance by all journalists, whether of the Radio Television News Directors Association or not.

# 10

---

# TAPE

All reporters carry a pencil and pad. Radio reporters also carry a cassette tape recorder. (Some even take it when they are off duty—if something comes up, they are prepared.) On that tape recorder reporters can capture the sounds of events for listeners—the voice of the survivors, an interview right after the verdict, the sound of the guns or their own descriptions of the rubble. Besides getting information, radio reporters' primary responsibility is feeding that tape recorder. (Television reporters work with more equipment, discussed in Chapter 15, "Visuals.")

## TYPES OF TAPE

Short sections of tape are played in a newscast as part of the presentation of some stories. They are called "cuts." With rare exceptions, the sounds that dominate these cuts are people talking. Newsrooms divide the possible combinations of voices that may be heard on a cut into four categories—*actualities*, *Q and As*, *voicers* and *wraps*—distinguished from each other by who is doing the talking.

### 1. Actualities

Rioting in Matamoros, Mexico; an ABC reporter tapes interviews with a fire chief from a nearby town in Texas and an English-speaking intern at the hospital where the injured are being taken. Then the reporter selects the best quotes from these interviews and puts them on separate tapes. Soon they are ready to be used in stories on the rioting. The first cut gives the fire chief's reaction upon arriving at what he thought was a fire:

When we got to the scene of the fire, then I saw that it was more than a fire . . . it was a riot.

The next cut gives the chief's more detailed description of the rioters:

Some of them were still in the furniture store, and they were putting cars together on the street and blocking it off and setting them on fire.

Finally, the intern's recap of events:

They started out with violence . . . started some fires in front of the mayor's office, and trying to blow up a car

and things like that. The local police answered with guns. Then they went to the jail and tried to get out some of the people who were there. And everybody with guns and knives, and we had about 22, 23 hurt.

Newsmakers or eyewitnesses are talking in these tapes. Their language isn't grammatical or always perfectly clear, but their statements convey the excitement of being there and participating. These tapes are called "actualities" because they consist only of the actual voices of newsmakers.

Actualities are the most basic kinds of tape. Radio news is at its best when they are used since they give listeners a chance to hear voices—their tone, inflection, pacing and emotion. Mere quotes in a newspaper can never bring the people who are making or witnessing the news this close.

How long should an actuality be? That decision is based on the length of the newscast, the significance of the story and the importance of the taped quote. Actualities must be long enough, however, to establish that someone is speaking—one lonely phrase floating in the middle of the story would likely confuse listeners. Few actualities are shorter than 5 or 10 seconds, but the newscaster doesn't want to surrender the air for too long to another voice either. Long actualities break the flow of a newscast and may become boring. A statement must be electrifying to warrant more than 30 seconds. Most actualities run between 10 and 25 seconds.

Of course these are guidelines, not rules. One station obtained the tape of the pilot's radio conversations just before a major air crash. That tape made a gripping actuality—5 minutes long.

Incidentally, some politicians have learned to phrase their comments in neat 20-second packages that are perfect for use on the air. These experts in media probably get more air time than those who speak in convoluted, rambling sentences that are difficult to edit into 10- or 25-second actualities.

What sort of comments does a reporter look for in an actuality? Something the newsmaker can say better than the reporter:

✓ **1. Eyewitness reports** Reporters can state the facts, but unless they were present, they cannot describe what it was like to watch the event develop. Eyewitnesses should be given a chance to do that on tape. However, it would be a waste of time to have an eyewitness discuss background details such as where Matamoros, Mexico, is. Reporters or newscasters can do that.

✓ **2. Expert knowledge** Reporters can explain the extent of the damage, for example, but they're not trained in matters such as what causes fires. They'll let a fire department official speculate on that on tape.

**3. Subjective comments** Reporters can cover the details of a plan. But the proponents of the plan can do a better job of explaining why they believe in it. Newsmakers' feelings and beliefs make effective tape. For example, here is former President Gerald Ford talking about an election:

It seems to me that in this election the focus should not be on the executive branch, but the corrections should come as the voters vote for their members of the House of Representatives or for their senator. That's where the problem is, and I hope there will be some corrective action taken so we can get some new leadership in the Congress of the United States.

KLOS, Los Angeles

• • •

Reporters don't write the words in an actuality. They are not responsible for the grammatical errors in what the newsmaker is saying, but reporters are responsible for ensuring that the actuality adds something to the story. The actuality must be clear and limited in scope—rarely more than one or two ideas per cut. It must make sense and be newsworthy.

This comment by former President Richard Nixon on the occasion of his visit to a ballpark doesn't make much sense and is not of concern to anybody but baseball trivia experts. But it is newsworthy simply because we hear Nixon's voice so infrequently now. It's unusual:

I'm delighted to be here again, and I remember that the last time I was here was in 1973, opening day. And, I hope it's a good omen because that day, I remember Nolan Ryan pitched, the Angels won three to two and Frank Robinson, playing his first game for the Angels as you remember, hit one over the left field wall.

*KMPC, Los Angeles*

Reporters are also responsible for seeing to it that actualities are factual. In stories that are still developing, it is often wise to avoid actualities that include changeable facts—such as the number dead. The actuality would have to be thrown out if the death toll were to rise.

Also, no tape should ever be used unless it is audible. Anything that reporters have difficulty in understanding, listeners probably would find completely unintelligible after it has passed through the transmitter, the atmosphere and their radios. But while all tape must be clear, the quality that is demanded depends on the importance of the comment and the situation in which it was recorded.

Actualities are recorded in two types of situations: The first is an interview in which reporters have control over the dialogue, can comfortably position their microphones and steer the conversation into potentially useful areas. The second is an uncontrolled situation such as a speech, comment made over a bullhorn at a demonstration or an argument between two newsmakers. Here the tape recorder is merely eavesdropping, and reporters are at the mercy of events. In uncontrolled situations, a little more leeway might be given for poor quality tape. In controlled interviews, there's no excuse for lapses in quality.

## 2. Q and As

The meeting of the Policemen's Benevolent Association delegates is finished. They've decided to postpone a decision on the city's new contract offer for a week. Mike Eisgrau of WNEW in New York City files this tape of the head of the PBA

explaining, with Eisgrau himself asking questions:

*PBA President:* Well actually, we recessed the meeting on the issue of this offer that was made by the city to have the delegate body go back to their membership, poll their membership for their feelings. We want the membership to have input into whatever we're doing. We want them to have a say.

*Eisgrau:* One week from now you come back here?

*PBA President:* One week from now we will come back.

*Eisgrau:* And what are you going to do then?

*PBA President:* At that time, whatever the delegate body dictates, that's what we're going to do.

*Eisgrau:* If they find out from the rank and file that the rank and file is not happy with this proposal, are we talking about the next step—a job action of some kind?

*PBA President:* If the delegates so state, that's what we will do.

In a Q and A, the question makes it onto the tape along with the answer. Some stations are pleased to have their reporters' voices on tape—it shows that their people were there. But most stations feel that a reporter's voice is not particularly exciting. Reporters are on the air frequently and are not newsworthy in and of themselves. From this perspective, an actuality is preferable to a Q and A. Q and As have another drawback: mixing two voices—the reporter asking the questions and the person giving the answers on one tape—may confuse listeners. Listeners may not be sure where the answer ends and the question begins.

For these reasons, many news directors insist that reporters use a Q and A instead of an actuality only when there is justification for it. Here are the possible justifications:

**1. Can't edit** A reporter in the field cannot edit tape. So if there's a good cut with an unnecessary question in the middle of it, the reporter has two choices: throw out the actuality or use it with the superfluous question. Mike Eisgrau's question, "One week from now you come back

here?" wasn't necessary, but he was not in a position to edit it out, and the material around it was worth using.

**2. Important question** A question can be newsworthy. The PBA president was not going to mention a possible job action, but that's what was on listeners' minds. Eisgrau's question gets it onto tape: ". . . are we talking about the next step—a job action of some kind?" The very discussion of a job action by police is newsworthy.

Sometimes a question is needed to understand an answer. The PBA president's statement, "If the delegates so state, that's what we'll do," doesn't make any sense without the question it follows. That statement is newsworthy; the question has to be included to support it. Similarly, a reporter couldn't just use an actuality where the mayor says, "Fire them all!" A Q and A with the question "What will you do if the police strike?" would have to be used. (Another solution is to leave out the question on the tape and let the newscaster's lead-in to the story set up the answer. See Chapter 11, "Writing to Tape.")

Sometimes newsmakers refuse to comment; occasionally this nonresponse is news in itself. But "No comment" alone doesn't make for a very informative actuality. Again, the reporter's questions must add the substance missing from the answer. A smart reporter turns "No comment" into a usable Q and A by putting solid information into the questions.

Although the PBA delegates, who were filing out of the meeting, had been instructed not to talk with reporters, Eisgrau chased them anyway to get this Q and A:

*Eisgrau:* What about the one-man patrol cars?

*Policeman:* No comment.

*Eisgrau:* What was your reaction to the deferral of the six percent wage increase?

*2nd Policeman:* No comment.

The story is in the questions. Actually, Eisgrau never filed this last Q and A. The PBA presi-

dent's revealing answers made a better cut than various delegates saying, "No comment," no matter how informative the questions they were ducking.

Sometimes a Q and A features a whole chorus of reporters, as in this classic scene in which a pack of journalists is chasing an official who has no desire to talk:

*Reporter:* Mr. Mayor, what did the D-A say to you?

*Mayor:* I'm sorry, gentlemen, but I'm not going to discuss that.

*Reporter:* Was the recreation center contract mentioned?

*Mayor:* I really can't comment on that.

*Reporter:* Are you considering resigning?

*Mayor:* Please! I have no comment. Now let me through! Will you?

**3. Explaining** Newsmakers are liable to slip into jargon or talk about issues that the public does not understand. When the words get dense, reporters must often interrupt with a question that clarifies and, thus, saves the tape.

*PBA President:* The new schedule would have 16 six to two's.

*Eisgrau:* Six p-m to two a-m shifts?

*PBA President:* Right. . .

• • •

These are the situations where the questions rightly claim a place on the tape. Reporters should not include their own questions just because they were proud of their phrasing or, impressed with their tone of voice. Eisgrau also got this exchange on tape:

*Eisgrau:* And what about the one-man patrol cars?

*PBA President:* Well, the one-man patrol cars, we still don't like it, and they want to implement that.

What they stated was they would put it in on a trial basis, but it's still a bad pill to swallow.

Here Eisgrau simply began the tape after the question and used this as a straight actuality.

Since Q and As have more than one person talking, they can hold interest longer than an actuality—up to 40 seconds without pressing it.

### 3. Voicers

Rick Wallace of KABC in Los Angeles is driving toward the airport where a DC-10 has just crashed on takeoff. There's a huge traffic jam on the outskirts of the field. Wallace triple parks and climbs on top of his car to look over the fence that surrounds the airport. He can see the plane lying on its side; so he starts his tape recorder and begins describing the scene. He's recording a "voicer."

An American businessman has been arrested in Moscow. ABC's Charles Bierbauer collects information on the chance the businessman will be released, then phones in a report on what he's found. Bierbauer is also doing a voicer.

Voicers are reporters' monologues. They do not contain anything as special as a newsmaker's voice, but they provide an alternative when there is no newsmaker to interview. Fire officials sometimes prefer to wait until they've put out the fire before explaining themselves to reporters, and survivors may be in no shape for an interview. But, it is always possible to arrange an interview with yourself.

Voicers also supplement actualities and Q and As. A reporter can walk to the back of an auditorium and record some background on the press conference; a White House reporter can summarize the decision-making process behind the president's proposal; a reporter can describe the scene of the disaster. From the scene of that disaster the reporter might also be expected to send back a few actualities.

A voicer is a kind of broadcast story. Unlike actualities or Q and As, the reporter is totally responsible for the words on tape. Voicers generally run from 20 to 50 seconds.

When all a reporter has to do is describe the scene, it may be possible to produce a voicer extemporaneously. Nevertheless, most voicers are written out in advance. Not too far in advance, however—there isn't time for that—and

not under the best circumstances—no typewriters, dictionaries or neat stacks of papers are available at most disasters. Most voicers are written on small pads while leaning against the hood of a car, a fence or a folding chair. Still, voicers must meet all the standards of good broadcast writing, plus some more.

Voicers have to justify themselves. They must answer a basic question: Why are we listening to a report from the field? Is the reporter saying anything that could not be said by the newscaster? The answer should be that the reporter is providing us with an element that only a trained observer on the scene can present. The writing, therefore, must emphasize that special element.

There are two types of voicers—ROSRs and reports. Both take advantage of the reporter's proximity to the action:

1. **ROSRs** "ROSR" (pronounced "rozer"), along with half-a-dozen other radio news acronyms, is a name invented by the people at ABC News. It stands for *Radio On Scene Report*; the key words are the middle two. "on scene."

The reporter is *there*, and what that reporter can provide that the newscaster cannot is the feeling of what it's like to be *there*.

At the Palace of Versailles in France after a bomb exploded:

Standing in the garden of the palace I can see on the first floor a line of tall French windows, about 12 or 13 feet high. A whole line of them has been smashed in . . . In one of them the mouldings have been blown out, and stacked up against the bottom of it are piles of wood, either bits or pieces of the window or of the wooden shade. Everywhere you look, furniture, decorated with gold, heavy wallpaper, ripped, torn, blown apart.—Jack Smith, ABC News.

A newscaster in the studio can give the facts on the bombing. Only a reporter on the scene can provide this vivid description.

ROSRs are the most personal form of radio news. The first person, which is excluded from other copy, is welcomed here:

I'm sitting on the front lawn of a house. What remains of a single-story house across the street from me . . . there's nothing there but burned-out timbers. The house next door is gone, the house down the street is gone, the house on the corner—just a small portion of it is left standing. Directly across the street from me—about 50 feet away—appears to be the fuselage and one of the engines of the plane. There is a car across the street from me totally demolished and burnt up.

*WINS, New York City*

This is radio news at its most evocative. Peter Flannery, news manager for ABC Entertainment, says he likes to see ROSRs call into play as many of the senses as possible—the smell of the smoke, the feel of standing in the snow drifts. "After hearing a good ROSR," Flannery says, "a listener should open the paper the next morning and say, 'I heard that picture on the radio yesterday.'"

Clearly, however, the degree of evocation must suit the story.

#### UNACCEPTABLE:

The car's fenders are distorted, jagged metal jutting out. Clouds of steam billow up from the radiator. On the street a lonely hubcap, jarred loose in the accident. Another car has wrapped itself around a utility pole. This time on Interstate 80. The driver, Art Smothers, was not hurt. . . .

#### ACCEPTABLE:

A car hit a utility pole here on Interstate 80, and while the driver, Art Smothers, was not hurt, his car's taken quite a beating. The front end is bashed in and steam is pouring out of the radiator . . .

And trite subjectivity should not be allowed to sneak in with the first person, as in this phrase used on the air in a ROSR about a terrorist attack:

A senseless act of terrorism . . .

Reporters can perceive for listeners in ROSRs, but they should still let listeners do the concluding.

ROSRs are rare. They can only be used when a situation's sights, sounds, smells and feelings

are newsworthy: the scenes at crashes, fires and floods, for example; or historic meetings, important trials and colorful events. At run-of-the-mill news events the sight is usually people in business attire talking to each other or perhaps a police officer giving out information; the sound is voices questioning and quipping; the smell is doughnuts, coffee and smoke. These less picturesque events get a different kind of voicer.

**2. Reports** Being on the scene gives reporters another advantage over writers in the newsroom: Not only can they describe events, they are also in a position to develop a sophisticated understanding of their meaning. Reporters with the newsmakers are in a position to question, observe and analyze:

Egypt is passing the word that it has no interest in negotiating a new disengagement with Israel. Qualified sources explain it this way: Last January when Egyptian and Israeli forces were interlocked across the Suez Canal and any false move could have brought disaster, both sides were willing to heed urging that they pull back. As part of the package Egypt lifted the Red Sea blockade, agreed to clear the Suez Canal and gave other indirect assurances. Today, these sources say Egypt feels no need to pay any price for further Israeli withdrawal. Specifically the Egyptians say that they will not make any political concessions such as even a limited declaration of non-belligerency in return for another slice of Sinai with or without the Abu-Rodeis oilfield. The Egyptian position is that Israel should pull back as a next step toward peace, but that the political issues of peace can be discussed only at the reconvened Geneva Conference.—Richard C. Hottelet, CBS News.

Reports are voicers that tell the story with the understanding of one who was there. They are used much more frequently than ROSRs because any story complex enough to deserve explanation can support a report. Reports are filed from serious fires, court hearings, candidates' headquarters, picket lines and ribbon-cuttings. At the scene of a crash, a reporter may file a few ROSRs and a report.

Reports do not resort to the intimate descrip-

tion used in ROSRs. But reporters are *there* and it doesn't hurt to remind listeners of that fact with at least a "here":

The feeling among Arab observers *here* in Cairo is that the Saudis have lost a round.

*John Cooley, ABC*

To emphasize the reporter's presence at an event, it may also help to include some first-person references, as in a ROSR:

A museum curator *here* told *me* that some statues inside have been blasted into a thousand pieces.

*Bill Dowell, ABC*

Of course, this too can be overdone.

#### UNACCEPTABLE:

Yes, your reporter was right there on the spot as a museum curator looked me in the eye and said, "Some statues have been blasted into a thousand pieces."

Often reports offer analysis or perspective, occasionally even some well-founded interpretation:

Energy and inflation problems are deemed so overwhelming that no solution to them is seriously expected to emerge from the 24-hour get-together. What is at stake is the very existence of the organization.

*Peter Kalischer, CBS*

Reports can also discuss the feelings of newsmakers—if the reporter has information to back up the discussion:

Auto executives feel a general economic recovery will lift the industry out of its most prolonged slump in sales since the great depression.

*Bill Curnow, CBS*

However, reports are not excuses to let guesswork into the news, and they are not editorials. They must remain objective. This report on one of the networks, about a conference in Libya

directed against Egyptian peace moves, fails the test of objectivity:

Libya's supreme ruler, Muammar el-Quaddafi, complete with swagger stick, is the host for this conference . . . and he can be expected to indulge his penchant for flaming rhetoric, even though it may be doubted this meeting will produce anything else . . . With the exceptions of the Syrians, all these leaders here have at least one thing in common. In every Arab war with Israel, they have contributed almost nothing but strident speeches. They are, as the saying goes out here, ready to fight to the last Egyptian . . . There is almost a holiday mood here, until you remember that these people are shouting not for peace and understanding, but for hatred and revenge . . .

That is not analysis; that is undisguised abhorrence.

• • •

When filing either kind of voicer, it is wise to leave out changeable facts. In an ongoing news-event, the number of casualties or the cost of the damage may change within hours or minutes. Stating those numbers in a voicer may make that voicer obsolete in those hours or minutes. It's better to leave such facts to the writer responsible for the lead-in to the voicer (see Chapter 11, "Writing to Tape"). The voicer is frozen on tape, but the lead-in can be changed at any time to update facts.

In general, also leave out the time element in a voicer. If a reporter filing a story at 10 p.m. says, "The city council *tonight* decided . . .," that tape is useless after midnight. It is also important to leave something to be said in the lead-in. Every taped report must be introduced in the newscast; that introduction should include some facts. A voicer that says everything of significance almost is "lead-in proof." Often it's best to leave the basic introduction to the situation for the lead-in and begin the voicer as if the scene has already been set. This voicer talks about "the crash," leaving the lead-in a chance to explain what crash:

Aviation experts from Canada and the United States are trying to pinpoint the cause of the crash, American officials joining in the search because the Air Canada

jet and its engines were built in the United States. Investigators are looking at two possible causes—engine failure and a tire blowout. Whichever, they do agree that the pilot's action in maneuvering his aircraft away from landing lights may have averted an even greater tragedy.—James Walker, ABC News, Toronto.

Voicers often start with the word *the*—*the fire, the meeting, the arrest*—to allow the lead-in to introduce the subject:

The general said in a statement issued today that his troops vacated the town of Mapai yesterday afternoon . . .

Chris Wallace, CBS

The lead-in can now introduce *the general*—General Peter Walls of Rhodesia.

Even with these special requirements to satisfy in writing voicers, reporters most often go wrong by violating one of the most basic newswriting rules—clarity. Perhaps *being there* makes it harder to remember that listeners are not there and may know nothing about the story. This voicer, which was used on the air, would make complete sense only to an expert on the issues. It concerns a plan for a county to buy control of its electric supply from the present electric company, Consolidated Edison.

Con Ed Chairman Charles Luce has a lot of disagreements with the report received by the Westchester County Legislature on the possible takeover of the utility by the county, but basically he says the bottom line is the rate structure and how much it would cost the people of Westchester to take over the utility. The basic difference he says is that, in Con Ed's computation, it would actually wind up costing Westchester County more money for electricity after the takeover than it does now. The issue is how much the Con Ed assets are worth in Westchester County and the difference is in the range of hundreds of millions of dollars.

This violates basic rules. It contains abstract terms—"rate structure"—unexplained issues—"Con Ed assets"—and it doesn't slow down

long enough to make points clear. That this voicer was probably scribbled on a note pad outside the room where Luce spoke, just before the reporter dashed to the telephone, is no excuse. In fact, the difficult situations under which most voicers are written should make reporters more inclined to write simply and clearly. This is the last place to hazard a complex wording.

Voicers, like other broadcast stories, can't afford to make more than a couple of points. However profound the analysis, the writing must be direct:

Con Ed Chairman Charles Luce disagrees with a report received today by the Westchester County Legislature . . . a report which suggests that the county might save money by taking over Con Ed's operations. "Not so," says Luce. According to his calculations, a county takeover would actually increase electric rates. The difference between Con Ed's arithmetic and the report's arithmetic seems to hinge on the price the county would have to pay to buy Con Ed's assets in Westchester. Luce believes buying those assets would cost the county hundreds of millions of dollars more than projected in the report. Those hundreds of millions of dollars, Luce says, would have to be paid by consumers . . . in higher electric rates.

Most voicers end with an "ID"—identification of the reporter and the station:

—Greg Adams, WERC News.

—I'm Duane Gray, 12-10 News.

Some news organizations ask the reporter to add the location to the ID. This seems more impressive on networks when the locales mentioned stretch around the world, not just across town:

—Bill Redeker, ABC News, Tokyo.

—David Dow, CBS News, Quito, Equador.

But it is also used in local news.

One or two stations have fiddled with this standard close, which is now so much of a cliché that Kermit the Frog uses it on Sesame Street. WNEW in New York City, for instance, has re-

porters identify themselves and their locations at the beginning of a voicer:

This is Mike Eisgrau at City Hall . . .

#### 4. Wraps

Wraps are hybrids—part voicer, part actuality. First the reporter tells the story; then a newsmaker makes a comment; then the reporter returns to conclude:

*Reporter:* The 920-thousand member International Association of Machinists has informed President Carter that he has lost their support. The union sent a letter to the president accusing him of abandoning his party's principles, platform and his campaign pledges. Union President William Wimpisinger says Mr. Carter has caved in to the right and doesn't merit the union's support.

*Newsmaker:* As far as I'm concerned he's through. I don't think he can lead the country. I don't think his record gives us any hope that he can lead the country in terms of responding to the challenges of the latter 1970s and into the 1980s.

*Reporter:* The Machinists' Union is angered by the president's support for the natural gas pricing compromise, his failure to get the labor law revisions passed, and his temporary shelving of a national health insurance plan.—Dick Uliano, Washington.

*WINS, New York City*

To produce a wrap, the reporter selects an actuality, or in some cases a Q and A, and then writes a voicer that fills out the story. The voicer is "wrapped" around the actuality. The challenge is writing a report that does its part in telling the story, while smoothly introducing and setting up the actuality. This requires the same writing skills as writing copy to go with an actuality in the newsroom. The first part of the wrap (the "lead-in," see Chapter 11, "Writing to Tape") must answer any questions that may be raised by the actuality and tell listeners whose voice they'll be hearing in the actuality. After the actuality plays, the reporter has to wrap up the story (the "write-out" see Chapter 11, "Writing to Tape").

The only difference between writing a wrap

and writing to an actuality in the newsroom is that wraps, like voicers, should take advantage of the reporter's proximity to the action.

Wraps are the most sophisticated type of tape a reporter can send back. Essentially they are self-contained stories:

*Reporter:* Arrest orders have now been issued for striking Dayton, Ohio, school teachers—many of whom today defied a county judge's order to quit picketing and return to the classroom. Teachers have rejected a six point five percent wage increase here, and while many say they are troubled by the threat of jail or a fine, most agree with teacher Bob Bruggeman that now striking employees have very little choice but to defy the court order.

*Newsmaker:* I have had my share of dedication that everybody calls for . . . and sacrifice that everybody calls for, and they've left me no other avenue, so here I am.

*Reporter:* The judge who issued the back-to-work order says he expects arrests will start this afternoon, and each teacher arrested could get up to ten days in jail.—Bob Faw, CBS News, Dayton, Ohio.

Guidelines on the length of wraps? Generally they run between 30 and 60 seconds. They are the longest of the four types of tapes because they are the most varied.

## TECHNIQUES

Each reporter is a one-person reporting crew. Potential cuts have to be led into the cassette recorder; they have to be sliced into usable form and packaged for shipping to listeners. Reporters are responsible for all this as well as for gathering facts.

### 1. Interviewing

The previous chapter discussed how to get information by questioning. Working with tape gives reporters an added responsibility when interviewing newsmakers: They have to get newsmakers to say what they have to say on tape.

Newspaper reporters need only the facts. Radio reporters need a cogent 20-second version of the facts, spoken while their tape recorders are on and no airplane or loud truck is rude enough to roar by. There are no guidelines for warding off trucks and airplanes, but there are ways to encourage newsmakers to supply good actualities:

**1. Preparation** The frantic pace of breaking events necessarily limits preparation time, but any extra moments—on the way to the scene, during a lull, during a boring speech—should be snatched for this purpose.

Reporters should arrive at an interview as familiar as possible with the interviewee and the issues surrounding the interviewee. That takes reading—clips, newspaper articles, press releases—and talking—with contacts, opponents, even other reporters.

Reporters should begin an interview with a clear idea of what they want to ask. As noted in Chapter 8, “Gathering News,” writing questions out in advance helps to order thoughts, even if the reporter is never able to refer to the written questions. At least reporters should take a few moments to think through the line of questioning.

**2. Short essay questions** If reporters ask: “Isn’t it true that you oppose the construction of those new apartments downtown because they’ll break up the community there?”, they can expect the following response: “Yes.” And one word makes a poor actuality.

Reporters want “short essay” responses to their questions, so they shouldn’t ask true/false, yes/no or multiple-choice questions. Questions should be phrased so that newsmakers do the talking, not reporters: “What’s your reaction to the plan to build those new apartments downtown?” “What do you think they’ll mean for the community?” This way the newsmaker has to do some explaining.

**UNACCEPTABLE:**

I hear that this was the worst accident ever on this stretch of highway and that both cars were on fire when you arrived. Right?

**ACCEPTABLE:**

What did you see when you arrived? Has there ever been an accident this bad on this stretch of highway?

The job demands that reporters get impressive answers, not that they ask impressive questions.

Reporters’ questions may be open and general if all they need is a basic rundown of the situation: “Why are you demonstrating?” More often time and tape are tight; so reporters rely on specific questions that get to the heart of the matter: “What will you do if the school board doesn’t change the policy?”

**3. Repeating** What if a candidate delivers a broadside while a reporter is still in transit or before the tape recorder is ready? Or while the television camera people are yelling for room? Simply ask the candidate to say it again. A reporter might say, “I didn’t catch that, would you mind repeating it?” Or, “Could you please explain that again?”

Most newsmakers are understanding. Usually they have as much desire to get their statement on tape as the reporter does. Reporters cannot be afraid to repeat a question or ask a newsmaker to repeat a statement for the second, third or fourth time. One advantage of repeating questions is that the newsmaker often perfects the answer—which makes for a tighter actuality.

**4. Guiding** Before interviewing someone, most reporters have a good idea of what they need from that person; what they want that person to say. They want survivors to say it was horrible; they want demonstrators to state their complaints. Without putting words in people’s mouths, reporters’ questions should lead newsmakers in the direction of usable tape.

Interviews are rarely fishing expeditions. They are designed to obtain specific pieces of the

story. They should be tightly controlled. Newsmakers must be guided through the interview—given a chance to repeat and clarify confused answers and reminded to keep their statements concise. The quality of the answers can be a serious problem. Some newsmakers, especially amateurs, are too wordy and unclear. A reporter's question to an eyewitness might elicit an answer like this:

I was standing here when I saw this plane, you know, flying real low. I, ah, stand here a lot, you know. You see I work at night, at that Exxon station. So, you know, I, ah, like to come here and watch the planes. So anyways, I was here, where I am a lot, and this plane with fire coming out of an engine, you know, I don't see *that* too much you can bet, this plane is flying real low, you know. I almost jumped out of my pants. But I saw the whole crash. Anything more you want me to tell you 'bout it?

It's perfectly appropriate, and sometimes imperative, that reporters suggest to persons being interviewed that their comments will be more effective if they keep them short and to the point. Frequently it is necessary to interrupt a filibuster to bring the interview back on course:

Sir, could you simply describe what you saw the plane do?

Interviewing, like most interpersonal activities, requires a deft combination of firmness and friendliness. Someone treated with compassion will be more forthcoming than someone who feels stepped on. At times a little verbal hand-holding may be needed to calm microphone fright—perhaps a couple of gentle questions to settle a person down. But, reporters can't waste much time or tape on friendly chitchat; getting good tape fast—that's the goal.

**5. Clarifying** Reporters are the listeners' representatives. They must remain conscious of their responsibility to raise any questions the listeners might have. Answers full of jargon or

obscurities are useless as actualities. Reporters have to be ready to interrupt for the definitions and explanations that listeners need:

Wait a second. What zoning laws are you talking about?

Without this law could they build the shopping center?

What would this shopping center mean for the community?

Conducting an interview with a tape recorder is like writing a story. The end product must be just as lucid. The interviewer has to steer the interviewee into statements that are understandable enough to be used on the air. That may mean asking questions that both of them can easily answer. Again, there's more going on here than information gathering.

**6. Listening** When the tape is rolling and a harried newsmaker is staring at that microphone, the pressure is on the reporter. Fortunately, we are born with multitrack minds. Reporters must be thinking up questions, guiding the interview and clarifying statements . . . all at once. They also have to listen.

There is a danger that reporters become so sure of what the newsmaker is going to say, that they forget to listen to what that person is saying. Once in a while a bombshell explodes in the middle of the standard answers. Frequently a remark is made that at least requires a follow-up question.

Reporters also listen to determine if they've got "it"—that tight, substantive statement that makes a solid actuality. When WCAU's reporter got this on tape from a woman whose apartment house in Atlantic City was going to be turned into a gambling casino, it was clear that this was the actuality:

I lived here now for over nine years and this is my home. We've sold a business, and we've retired. My husband is over 70, and at this time in our lives it's not fair to uproot us and make us move.

When they've got "it," reporters should make mental, or written, notes of what has been said, so they can find it quickly on the tape. Then, if they only need one good actuality from that person, reporters can bring the interview to a close. If they haven't gotten the statement they need, reporters must be plotting their route to it.

**7. Microphones** In the field mikes work best when they are four or five inches from the speaker's mouth, not when they're a polite distance away or a few bodies back in a crowd. Radio and television reporters have to get to the front of the pack and can't be shy about sticking their microphone into a newsmaker's face.

At organized news conferences, all reporters set up their recorders at the front of the room, so that the speaker talks directly into their mikes. At times it's possible to plug the recorders directly into the room's PA system.

Microphones are sensitive enough to pick up all sorts of sounds. The hand that holds the mike mustn't fidget; papers shouldn't be rustled on a desk that supports a mike. And a microphone picks up the "yeah"s and "uh-huh"s that we use to assure people that we are listening. These sounds may be effective tools in interpersonal communication, but "yeah . . . uh huh" sounds awfully funny in the background on an actuality. Reporters can nod their heads to demonstrate the requisite interest; some won't even nod—believing it to be a form of editorializing on what they are hearing.

**8. Tape and batteries** Interviews are too valuable to risk losing. Since weak batteries in the cassette recorder can threaten an interview, check and change or charge them regularly. A faulty tape cassette can also ruin an interview. Cassettes should not be overused and should be checked to see that they are wound tightly and not ripped. Always carry spare cassettes.

Under the pressure of a breaking event, reporters have been known to start recording one interview over the end of another—wiping out some material. Again, check.

Reporters record the name of the person being interviewed at the beginning and again at the end of the interview; that way, if they forget who is talking when filing, the answer is never too far away.

## 2. Phoners

Phoners are telephone interviews. They used to be called "beepers" because of the beep every 15 seconds that the FCC required to warn people they were being recorded. The beep no longer is necessary, but the first thing to learn about telephone interviews is that a warning is necessary. The FCC still requires that people be told in advance that their comments on the phone may be used on the air. The only exceptions are the station's own reporters—they don't need to be warned—and people who call telephone call-in shows, who should know what they're getting into.

The governor is asking for a city tax cut; the mayor says it isn't feasible yet. Reporter Bob Parlante of WHDH in Boston calls the president of the City Council for his opinion. The City Council president is apparently in the mood to be controversial. Parlante tells him that he is being taped, starts recording and selects this phoner from that tape:

I think the mayor would like to hold onto a bit of a surplus that we might generate this year and sit on it for a while, and lower the tax rate next year when he runs for reelection.

This phoner, of course, has another name. It's also an actuality. A phoner can also be a Q and A that is recorded on the telephone.

There is no simpler way to get sound for the newscast. Instead of hustling from event to event, reporters can let their fingers do the walking and get comments from newsmakers all over the area. There is no substitute for being on the scene to report on events. There's no excuse, however, for failing to take advantage of the telephone's ability to get speedy actualities and Q and As when confined to the newsroom.



At KGW, Portland, Oregon, a reporter records a phoner.  
(Frankie Jenkins/KGW Radio 62)

### 3. Natural Sound

A reporter was sent down to a railroad station to get commuter reaction to a change in service. With his actualities recorded, the reporter dashed back to the newsroom to record a voicer. But his news director sent him dashing right back to the railroad station—that voicer had to have the sound of trains and commuters in the background.

Natural sound does for radio news what pictures do for newspapers. NBC reporters covering battles over the landing of the supersonic Concorde jet were specifically instructed to raise their microphones to the sky to record the sound of the landings. One WNEW reporter traveled across the Brooklyn Bridge to find a supermarket in which to record a voicer on the closing of a supermarket chain. He wanted the sound of cash registers in the background.

War reports benefit from the sound of shoot-

ing in the background—although bullets whistling may be going a bit too far. A farm story could use a couple of moos, clucks or baaas. A piece on the garment center should have some hustle and bustle in the background. One NBC reporter recorded a voicer on the death of a foreign leader with the sound of church bells behind him.

Of course, the natural sound should not be so loud or intrusive as to obscure the reporter's words, and it always must be clear what that noise is. If the natural sound is people yelling, the story must explain who is yelling and why.

The neatest way to handle natural sound is to record it alone on some tape; then bring it back to the newsroom to edit into the story. This way it can be kept at just the right volume and faded in and out if necessary. WNEW's Mike Eisgrau recorded the sound of the rifles at a local gun club; then mixed that sound into a report on gun

control. He started the shots at full volume, then faded them to a “bed”—quiet enough to read over.

A rough version of this effect can also be produced in the field without editing facilities. Reporters aim their microphone at the sound they want . . . to establish it. Then they turn away from the sound and bring the mike closer than usual to their mouth to keep the sound unobtrusive in the background while they talk. At the end of the report they might aim their mike at the sound again to reestablish it for a conclusion.

If it's available, natural sound is compulsory in ROSRs. For example, an NBC reporter describing bomb destruction on Manhattan's Park Avenue opened his voicer by aiming his mike at a man with a broom sweeping up the broken glass. Reporters must describe the look, smell or feel of events in ROSRs. The sound, at least, they can allow the listeners to experience directly.

One day, reporters were handed an assignment that presented an opportunity to get some natural sound without leaving the newsroom—the death of the inventor of the teletype.

#### 4. Filing

Different stations look for different mixes of tape from their reporters. Many expect their reporters to send back at least one voicer or wrap from each news event to “establish their presence” at the event. In addition, these reporters try to get a few usable actualities or Q and As. Other stations are primarily interested in the actualities. Large metropolitan stations often are more wrap-oriented, while small stations and the networks stick to shorter voicers and actualities.

If there's no hurry, reporters can carry all the tape back to the newsroom to edit. But there usually is a hurry. An hourly newscast is always approaching, and the station will want to include something timely on that story in that newscast. Reporters have to “file”—send in their story from the field—as soon as possible.

Tim Lennox of WERC in Birmingham, Alabama, once covered a story that had to be

handled in quite a hurry. That day the National Weather Service wire had been warning of possible severe thunderstorms—par for the course in that area at that time of year. Suddenly the station heard a report of unusually high winds causing destruction in a suburb. Lennox was already in a station car driving to the scene when the newsroom informed him over their two-way radio that the weather wire was calling those high winds “a tomado.”

Arriving in the area, Lennox tackled his first job: to find out exactly where the tomado had struck. His method: ask everybody he saw on the street until he was directed to the destruction. He knew when he was there—13 houses had been virtually leveled. Lennox described what he saw in three ROSRs, filed by dictating them directly into the two-way radio in his car. Normally they would have been recorded in the newsroom and put on tape cartridges—“carts”—for use in the next newscasts. This time those voicers went on the air live.

As rescue workers and relatives dug through the rubble searching for bodies, Lennox began looking for tape. First target: someone with the facts. Lennox asked a fireman, who directed him to the fire chief, who directed him to a civil defense official. Lennox recorded a brief interview with him on his SONY 110B tape recorder—standard in radio news (though more advanced SONY models and Superscope cassette recorders with variable speeds are beginning to gain a foothold). Then the mayor arrived and Lennox got his comments on tape; time to file again.

The tape could have been sent to the newsroom by plugging his cassette recorder into the two-way radio, but transmitting the tape over the air tends to reduce the quality of the sound. As a rule, telephone wires carry sound with less distortion, so Lennox needed a phone. While the tornado had tossed about houses on one side of the street, it had ignored those on the other side. He walked up to one of those houses—where residents were still in shock over the death of neighbors and friends. Although he felt insensitive,

Lennox did what he had to do as gently as possible. He got permission to use the telephone, and he also got an interview with one of the women in the house—an eyewitness: “All of a sudden there was this big explosion . . . .” Having secured access to a phone, the process of filing the story began. There were eleven main steps:

**1. Select** Quickly, Lennox had to choose cuts from his tape of the interviews. He moved back and forth on the tape, searching for usable sections, and chose this Q and A with the mayor:

*Mayor:* I think we’ve got it under control at the moment. However, they’re still looking for several more missing persons. They’ve found four bodies and there are two that they can’t account for at this time. I believe Birmingham fire and police have it under control at the moment.

*Lennox:* The four, were they children? I had an unconfirmed report . . .

*Mayor:* There was a mother and two children over here . . . about two doors down. I haven’t gotten a report on who the other person is. There are two children missing and they have found another person off by the side of the hill. Apparently about eight houses on this side of the road were simply picked up and blown completely off the hill . . . down into a ravine and there’s water at the bottom. There could be bodies down in the water.

**2. Note** The cassette recorder has a counter, so the exact place where a cut ends or begins can be noted. In his note pad Lennox jotted down these numbers along with the first few words of the cut—the in-cue: “I think we’ve got . . . .”—and the last few words—the out-cue: “. . . in the water.” Looking at his watch, he noted the length of each cut, which he also scribbled in the pad.

**3. Cue up** Pushing the rewind button, Lennox returned to the place on the tape where his first cut began, as indicated by the numbers on the counter. That cut was then “cued up.”

**4. Call in** The next problem? Getting through to the newsroom. The storm had knocked down some phone lines, and those that remained were in demand; but Lennox was able to get a dial tone and place his call. After warning the reporter in the newsroom who took the call that he had three cuts ready to go, Lennox said, “Stand by.”

**5. Hook up** He then proceeded to dismantle part of the telephone. First, he unscrewed the round plastic mouthpiece of the receiver (some reporters carry a wrench for this, but usually it can be done by hand) and removed the round microphone from under the mouthpiece. This inexpensive microphone is what gives phone conversations their tinny sound. Sound quality is not determined by the wire but by the amplification equipment. Reporters substitute their 100-dollar microphones for the telephone company’s.

Removing the mouthpiece and the microphone from the receiver exposes two metal strips. Lennox took out a wire with a small plug on one end which he placed in the “monitor” output of his recorder. The other end of the wire had two clips with jagged teeth. He attached these “alligator” clips to the two metal strips.

His tape recorder was now hooked up to the telephone. By plugging his microphone into the recorder and pushing the red “record” button, Lennox was able to talk through the microphone into the telephone.

**6. Fill-in** Back in touch with the reporter in the newsroom, Lennox provided a quick run-down on the first cut—the Q and A with the mayor. The newsroom would use this information to write a lead-in for the tape (see Chapter 11, “Writing to Tape”). Then Lennox passed on the needed details: the in- and out-cues and the length of this Q and A.

**7. Countdown** The reporter in the newsroom flipped a switch so the phone line Lennox was on was “patched in”—connected—to a

reel-to-reel tape recorder. Lennox played a couple of seconds of his first cut to allow the newsroom to “take a level”—adjust the volume on the reel-to-reel. Then, he re-cued the Q and A; the reporter in the newsroom started recording on the reel-to-reel; and Lennox said, “Five, four, three, two, one . . .” This countdown would be used to help rerecord the cut onto a tape cartridge later.

**8. Play** At “zero,” Lennox pushed the forward button on his cassette recorder, the Q and A played through the phone and was recorded in the newsroom.

**9. Stop** Through the telephone receiver’s earpiece, Lennox monitored the tape as it played. Listening for the out-cue, and double-checking by glancing at the counter, he figured out when to press the “stop” button. Using the counter, Lennox cued up the actuality of the civil defense official, summarized it, read off the cues and time, counted down and played it. Then, he cued up the eyewitness actuality.

**10. A voicer** With the “record” button depressed, Lennox was then able to read a ROSR through his mike over the phone wires and into the reel-to-reel recorder. He counted down and started reading at “zero”:

The damage, it’s just hard to believe. As the mayor said, there were houses that were completely ripped up from their foundations and thrown off this hill and thrown into a valley. What’s making it worse—if anything could make this situation worse—the rain has continued here. The rain is pouring. It’s pouring on rescue workers and the survivors. There are people in the house across the street, and one of the residents of the house—one of the houses where the children are missing—was there. She was uncontrollably crying . . . hoping that the children will turn up safe.—Tim Lennox, WERC News, in Smithfield.

**11. Confirm** Before saying “goodbye,” Lennox checked with the reporter in the newsroom to make sure he had gotten all the cuts on the reel-to-reel.

In the newsroom, Lennox’s three cuts were “dubbed”—rerecorded—onto carts; then they were walked into the studio and used on the air (see Chapter 17, “The Profession”).

If Lennox had recorded a wrap, he would have sent it the same way. While the newsroom recorded, he would have read his introduction into the microphone with the “record” button down, hit the “forward” button to play the actuality, then “record” again to read the conclusion. Or the pieces of the wrap could have been sent separately with separate countdowns, and edited together in the newsroom. But there was not time for any of this.

Tim Lennox spent the remainder of the afternoon and evening in the pouring rain, getting new tape and filing it. Twenty-three bodies were eventually found in the rubble. WERC’s coverage of the tornado won a state Associated Press award.

Stories are not usually filed under such trying circumstances, but the same basic procedures are used.

## 5. Editing

In the field, editing tape means selecting from a tape. All a reporter can do is select whole sections of that tape to file. But if that tape is carried back to the newsroom or gathered by phone from the newsroom, it can be “cut and spliced”—rearranged in the form that turns it into the most effective cuts.

Bob Parlante of WHDH in Boston conducted a telephone interview with the president of the State Police Association, Fred Guerrero:

*Reporter:* Listen, I know what you’re going to be talking about tonight. Why don’t you run it down very briefly for us. Okay? We’re rolling.

*Guerrero:* The meeting tonight will be to inform the membership of the current status of negotiations between the state police and the governor’s Office of Employee Relations. At this meeting tonight, will be all members of the State Police Association, the Association numbering approximately 900, and at this particular time, uh . . . at this particular time, *the*

*members will be voting on options that they would like to take in light of the latest delay by the fact finder, Mr. Howard of Michigan, in rendering a fact finder's report in the current state police negotiations hiatus.*

*Reporter:* And those options are what, Fred, quickly?

*Guerrero:* Quickly, well the options will be anything that the membership mandates from waiting, continuing to wait—we've been waiting five years now—up to and including a full-scale strike.

Parlante edited the two italicized sections together into one actuality for use on WHDH.

With the tape on a reel-to-reel tape recorder (tape recorded on a cassette machine has to be dubbed to reel-to-reel before it can be edited), Parlante found the places where he wanted to make cuts—between “negotiations hiatus” and “and those options,” for example. He marked the exact spot on the tape itself with a grease pencil, then pulled the tape away from the machine and placed it on an “editing block”—a piece of metal designed to hold the tape firmly in place.

Using a razor blade he cut the tape—separating the section he wanted to use from the answer after it. Then he made a similar cut between “Quickly, well . . .” and “. . . the options will” and threw out the section of tape with his question and Guerrero’s “Quickly, well.” Parlante placed the tape that ended with “negotiations hiatus” on the editing block next to “the options will,” and connected them—“spliced” them together with a piece of adhesive tape. They now could be played back as if they were one smooth statement.

Using this method, coughs or deep breaths can be cut out of the tape, “uh-huh”s or “you know”s excised and, more significantly, dull sections removed from the middle of an actuality—“internal editing”—or a couple of related answers merged into one actuality.

It should be noted that electronic editing devices, now used in television reporting to edit videotape (see Chapter 15, “Visuals”), are beginning to be heard from in radio news. They promise to speed up the process of editing cuts

by, among other things, removing the necessity of actually cutting the tape.

Editing guidelines:

1. Edit out: anything on the tape that is not relevant, newsworthy or understandable. Meaningless pauses longer than three seconds and reporters' questions that add nothing should be cut. Cut sections that are of poor technical quality or are marred by extraneous noises. Leave out facts that can be told more clearly by the newscaster or a section where a newsmaker stammers annoyingly.

If there is sufficient time to edit this tape, only the italicized sections will be used:

You know *this is the first time, that we, I mean . . . I mean not we but the, the school board has voted to, you know, voted to, negotiate with a union.*

2. Leave in: substantive or revealing comments, particularly (as outlined earlier in this chapter) expert knowledge, eyewitness reports and subjective comments. Leave in reporters' questions if they are important or needed. Leave in meaningful pauses or sighs:

Yes . . . . . I guess you guys are right . . . . . I'm finished.

A wily tape editor can easily reverse the meaning of a talk by cutting and flipping the words and phrases. A simple splice and the State Police Association is ready to strike:

The members will be voting on (*splice*) a full-scale strike.

Clever, but it couldn't be more unfair and unacceptable. Reporters have an ethical responsibility to ensure that their editing *never changes the meaning of a quote*. Editing cannot be allowed to make a statement stronger or weaker, or to change its connotations. A statement by a police chief:

---

## TECHNIQUES



At KGW, Portland, Oregon, a reporter-newscaster edits tape (left) and then uses the finished cart on the air. (Frankie Jenkins/KGW Radio 62)



If the mayor gives the order, we're going to go in there and get those hostages out. If the mayor gives the order, my men are all in position . . . their guns are loaded . . . we're ready as we can be.

The opening clause *cannot* be edited out of the first half of this actuality:

*If the mayor gives the order, we're going to go in there and get those hostages out.*

But the second qualifying statement—"If the mayer gives the order"—can be edited out of the second section without distorting its meaning:

My men are all in position . . . their guns are loaded . . . we're ready as we can be.

Editing must preserve the integrity of a statement.

One other consideration: Voices get lower at the end of a thought. A cut that ends with a rising inflection sounds awkward and may momentarily confuse listeners. When editing, try to end the cut with the inflection falling.

## 6. Carts

Tape cartridges—"carts"—are the final version of a cut, ready to be used in a newscast. These

rectangular plastic containers, filled with a continuous loop of tape, are designed, when used properly, to cue-up to the start of a cut automatically. All the newscaster or engineer has to do is push a button, and the cart immediately starts playing at the beginning of the cut. If more than one cut is recorded on a cart, it cues-up the second cut after the first has stopped playing.

Cuts are usually dubbed onto carts from reel-to-reel tapes after they have been edited or directly after a feed from a reporter in the field has been recorded. If a station has a few cart machines, each cart has one cut on it. If the station has a limited number of playback machines in the studio, it may be necessary to place a few cuts on a cart so they can all be used in one newscast.

After they're recorded, carts must be labeled. Stations usually paste a removable label directly on each cart which lists the slug, the name of the person or persons speaking on it, the out-cue and how long it runs. Many stations supplement this label with sheets that include a description of the contents of each cart. A newswriter can use these sheets when writing lead-ins to the cuts, although most still want to listen to the cart before they begin writing.

On the next page is a sheet that details all the carts that Mike Eisgrau of WNEW in New York City produced after a news conference on a

REPORTER: Eisgrau

DATE: 7/11

STORY: ~~XXXXXX~~ news conference  
on possible PWA job action

TIME: \_\_\_\_\_

CUT #	TYPE	LENGTH	TIME USED	DESCRIPTION
5645	A	:42	5p	Reame gives his opinion on 1 man patrol cars Outcue: not be jeopardized
566	VA	:65	6p	Grau wrap ...the meeting has broken up for a half hour..De Millia says there are no threats of a job action....Kummerfeld says the work charges are key issue Outcue: contract deadlock
567	A	:30	6:30AM 10PM 6 <sup>A</sup> 9 <sup>A</sup>	Sam DeMillia, PWA president, on backing off on job action threat Outcue: many things
568	A	:15	5a ga MID	Police comish. Mike Codd is asked what happens if there is a job action Outcue: situation might be
569	A	:16	10PM 8 <sup>A</sup>	Codd...dangers of 1 man patrol cars Outcue: the street

possible police job action to protest instituting one-man patrol cars. Type A is an actuality, type VA is a voicer/actuality—a wrap.

The newsroom may have a playback device for carts that makes it possible to stop them at any point while a newswriter is working with them. If so, those newswriters must remember to re-cue the carts before they are filed or handed

to a newscaster. One of the most common problems in radio news is a cart that starts somewhere in the middle of the newsmaker's or reporter's statement because that's where it was left.

Since cuts lose their news value after a day or so, carts are erased by passing them over a magnetic device called a "bulk eraser"; then they are ready to be used again.

## SUMMARY

---

A balance must be established when reporting with tape recorders. Reporters cannot devote so much energy to their search for sound that they fail to fulfill their basic responsibility for gathering

information. But good tape is so important, and can be so elusive, that reporters must always be conscious of where their next cut is coming from.

## PRACTICE ASSIGNMENTS

---

A. Select two actualities and one Q and A from this interview at City Hall with Mayor Judy Douglas. Then write two voicers based on the interview.

Q. Mayor Douglas, it's taken the city over five months to award the school lunch contract. Why?

A. Well, uh, it's been a very delicate issue, a very sensitive issue. As you know, there were, uh . . . many interested parties, and we felt that, uh . . . we couldn't make any hasty decisions. We had to study all sides of the question.

Q. You awarded the contract to the Strawn Company today? Is that correct?

A. Yes.

Q. The Strawn bid was significantly higher . . . at least \$25,000 per year . . . than that of the Jackson Food Corporation, the nearest competitor. Why has Strawn been awarded the contract?

A. Well . . . price is not the only consideration in a matter such as this . . . especially when we're dealing with our children. Quality and service are also considerations. After all, we're dealing with an issue in which the health of our children is involved.

Q. You felt that Strawn would ensure the health of our children more than Jackson?

A. Well, uh . . . yes, that was a factor, health was a factor. We felt that Strawn's menus were, on the whole, more nutritionally balanced. This was no off-

the-cuff judgment. We consulted with several nutritional experts in this matter.

Q. So the nutritional content of the menus was the decisive factor?

A. Well, it's hard to pinpoint one factor in such an important decision, but . . .

Q. What were the others?

A. Well, yes, I guess you could say health was the most important thing.

Q. As you know, Mayor Douglas, this station broadcast a story last week charging that the president of Strawn is your husband's uncle. Does that have anything to do with today's announcement?

A. I said last week that I, and my husband, have no personal or financial connection with either Strawn or Jackson. I stick by that statement. I have no idea how the media will react to today's announcement. I can't worry about that.

Q. But the story has generated a lot of controversy in town. Do you foresee today's announcement creating any political problems for you?

A. Well, political problems are a funny thing. I mean, they're always there. Some people might choose to believe that the contract was awarded on some basis other than, uh . . . well, than merit, I suppose you could say. But all I can say is the health of our children is what's behind this contract.

Q. It's been reported that, no matter who wins the contract, an investigation of the whole matter will be conducted by an independent audit committee. Is this so?

A. Citizens of the community have the right to investigate anything they want.

Q. Will you cooperate with such an investigation?

A. Absolutely! I don't think it's necessary . . . but if that's what people here want, I would welcome it.

Q. Mayor Douglas, are you still planning to run for re-election this year?

A. Well, I never said I definitely would . . . I'll make my decision on that soon.

Q. Some people . . . such as council president Marrero . . . have said their support for you would hinge on the outcome of the school lunch contract. Are you waiting until the controversy over this blows over before deciding on your candidacy?

A. I'm not waiting for anyone. I just haven't decided yet. And I'm sure everyone involved . . . including my good friend Jim Marrero . . . will agree that the Strawn contract is the best possible decision.

Q. So when can we expect an announcement on your candidacy?

A. Soon, soon.

B. An anti-busing amendment to the state constitution will be voted on by the state legislature today. A group called Preserve Neighborhood Schools has organized a demonstration in support of the bill. About 50 people are marching in front of the State Capitol, chanting, "Save our schools!" and "Busing must go!" The following is an interview with the president of PNS, Herbert Frank, at the demonstration. Select two actualities from the interview, and write two voicers about the interview and the demonstration.

Q. Why are you here today?

A. Well, we're here to show our support for Senator Bill Barge's fine amendment which, we think, will begin to put this state . . . and this country . . . back on the right track.

Q. Why are you opposed to busing?

A. Well, first let me say that this isn't just a busing issue. It's also a neighborhood issue, and a state control issue. I mean, the federal government—and especially the courts—are telling us how to run our schools, how to run our communities . . . and these are things which local people should decide, and legislators, elected representatives, should decide. The courts shouldn't be able to tell us these things!

Q. But why are particular?

A. Because b . . . the opposite of . . . hurts children. . . hasn't integrated t . . . children of either race.

Q. Could you explain . . .

A. Well, busing has just re . . . the suburbs. It hasn't resulted in . . .

Q. Do you think an anti-busing stop white flight?

A. Well, I don't know, but maybe. I a . . . things could be that much worse, do you?

Q. What about the argument put forth by so . . . opponents that the anti-busing amendment is just trying to return to the "separate but equal" days?

A. Well, that's ridiculous! This is not a racial issue! We have nothing against black and white youngsters going to school together, or playing together, or whatever. But busing isn't the way. Busing tears down neighborhood schools . . . it eats away at the community.

Q. Studies have shown that the great majority of school children don't attend the school nearest their home, and not for any racially-motivated reasons . . .

A. Well, they should.

Q. Some people say they couldn't care less about busing, but they oppose the Barge amendment because it tampers with the constitution. What do you say to them?

A. I say we're sick of the courts, and the judges, telling us what to do, how to live . . . What do they think we elect representatives for?

Q. These opponents say the constitution establishes basic rights, but shouldn't be applied to timely, transitive issues.

A. This is a question of basic rights. Our right to decide local issues for ourselves, without the interference of the courts.

Q. What kind of press coverage have you been receiving?

A. Well, we've felt kind of slighted by the media. I mean, they . . . you . . . they're not against us, but they haven't paid enough attention, we don't think.

Q. What do you think the outcome of today's vote will be?

A. Well, everyone says it will be close, but I think it's passed, based on the conversations I've had with a number of legislators.

Q. And then?  
A. Excuse me?  
Q. What are?  
A. If it passes

## PRACTICE ASSIGNMENTS

your future plans?  
us, we'll take it to other states. And if it

doesn't . . . but I think it will . . . but if it doesn't, we'll  
push harder for it next year.

Q. Thank you.

A. Thank you.

# WRITING TO TAPE

John Grimes of ABC has this actuality to include in the newscast he's writing:

I think it's unacceptable to the American people, and no political leader could go into an election year on a platform of failure to give tax relief to the American taxpayers.

Who is talking? What is "unacceptable to the American people"? Which "political leader" does this refer to?

Obviously, the cut makes no sense by itself. Grimes has to write a story around it that answers these questions. He writes this copy to be used *before* the cut is played:

President Carter has put himself squarely against plans to cut federal taxes on capital gains. Democratic Representative James Jones of Oklahoma warns Mr. Carter's opposition could mean there'll be no tax cut this year...

Grimes also has to write something to be read *after* the cut has played to wrap the story up:

Democratic Representative James Jones of Oklahoma says he's proposing his own tax cut compromise.

Tape isn't self-sufficient. When newswriters get a cart for use in a newscast, they have to get the facts on that story—either from the wires, their own reporters or their own research—and write a story around that piece of tape. Even the voicers and wraps that reporters produce need introductions to integrate them into the newscast. And similar introductions are used in television news before videotape or film stories are shown (see Chapter 16, "Writing to Visuals").

## LEAD-INS

Listeners are rarely thrown into a cart cold. They are led in by the newscaster. This introductory copy that newswriters must write could be called the introduction. It's usually called the "lead-in."

Lead-ins have two functions: First they have to do their part in telling the story. In fact, the lead-in may be responsible for carrying much of the necessary information:

The advertising for Mick-or-Mack stores says "Come on down!"...but someone went a little too far late this morning. A car crashed through the front window of the Tower's Mick-or-Mack store shortly before noon. Police on the scene say 57-year-old John Wysong of Roanoke was apparently ill when he lost control of his car. It hopped the sidewalk and smashed into the front of the store. As passers-by ogled at the late-model Buick parked in the middle of the produce section, 96 newsman John Kessling talked to this eyewitness...

*WFIR, Virginia*

The other function of the lead-in is setting the scene, preparing listeners for the tape.

### 1. Preparing

If the tape records a complaint about the possible elimination of the state Civil Rights Commission, the lead-in must prepare listeners by explaining why the Commission might go and by introducing the person speaking on the tape:

Colorado House Republicans have voted not to fund the state Civil Rights Commission next year, thereby eliminating the agency that investigates cases of sexual and racial discrimination. The Reverend Milton Proby is chairman of the commission...

*KOA, Denver*

If the tape has the governor talking about "House Bill 21-97," the lead-in has to explain what that is:

Governor Straub today urged the legislature to...as he put it..."Get off its duff" and move on some key issues. The governor was particularly interested in passage of House Bill 21-97...the city

revenue sharing plan. He talked about why that bill is a top priority...

*KROW, Oregon*

When writing to a cart, newswriters must ask themselves not only what needs to be said about this story, but what needs to be said for this cart to make sense.

Voicers and wraps should have fewer holes to fill than actualities and Q and As because they feature professional storytellers. Reporters won't leave many loose ends in their tape. In writing a lead-in to a voicer or wrap, newswriters just have to figure out what facts the reporter left them. Usually the lead-in gives only a bare-bones description of the event:

A train hit a van-camper last night near Columbus, Georgia, killing two members of an Arlington, Texas, family. More on that from KRLD Newsman Russ Rossman...

Actualites and Q and As, on the other hand, can be awfully skimpy:

What was burning was City Hall, in Matamoros, a fumiture store right next to it, and from what I could tell, part of a bank.

This gives the lead-in a lot of work to do:

Mexican troops, armed with submachine guns, are patrolling the streets of Matamoros, Mexico...across the Rio Grande from Brownsville, Texas... following a night of rioting. Rioting students burned City Hall... and battled with police last night to protest alleged Mexican police brutality. Brownsville Fire Chief Mario Guyaygos says he was called in to help Matamoros firefighters battle the fires set by rioters...

Now that actuality will make sense.

## 2. Something Different

The "parroting," "echo-chamber" or "heckle-jeckle" effect:

### UNACCEPTABLE:

*Lead-in:* Fireman Robert Blarney called it one of the hottest and most violent fires he's ever seen...

*Cut:* That was one of the hottest and most violent fires I've ever seen.

Lead-ins have to find something different to say. They must set up the tape, but they can't repeat the wording or the ideas used in the tape.

### ACCEPTABLE:

*Lead-in:* A huge fire swept through two garden apartments on Glover Avenue this afternoon. Fireman Robert Blarney helped put it out...

*Cut:* That was one of the hottest and most violent fires I've ever seen.

If the cut is specific, the lead-in may want to confine itself to a general description:

The City of Orlando has yet another convention center proposal to look over. This one was presented by the Orlando Development Consortium. Consortium spokesman Gerald Simons made the presentation to a city commission...

*WKIS, Florida*

Metro Fire's Jim Sallee says the cause of yesterday morning's Continental Inn fire has been found...

*WVLK, Kentucky*

If the cut is vague, the lead-in should pin things down:

The holiday weekend has given late property taxpayers a few hours breathing time. Clark County Treasurer Bill Galloway says, though, if the property tax bill is not paid

by tomorrow...a four percent penalty is added. Galloway says the county has no grace period...

*KLUC, Las Vegas*

If the cut spells things out, the lead-in might give the background:

Manhattan Chamber of Commerce officials say they're taking advantage of the American Institute of Baking's move of its headquarters from Chicago to Manhattan. Director of Economic Development James Rothchild tells us how...

*KMAN, Kansas*

If the tape covers one point thoroughly, the lead-in can concentrate on other points. The cut this lead-in introduces has the mayor explaining his reasons for opposing a tax cut; so the lead-in, after introducing the issue, gives someone else's reasons:

Should Councilman Bill McPherson get the 20-thousand signatures required to have his sales tax repeal measure placed on the November ballot...it's going to be quite a fight. The Metro School Board is against it...claiming they'll lose 38-million dollars from their operating budget, and Mayor Dick Fulton tells WLAC's Eddie Parker that he'll fight passage too...

Even while dodging redundancy, the best lead-ins stay close to the most important facts in a story. That isn't difficult when writing to actualities and Q and As—newsmakers leave plenty unsaid. But because voicers and wraps are more complete, they may force the news-writer to scrounge for additional morsels of information to relate. That is why lead-ins to voicers and wraps are often only a couple of sentences long:

In Rome...a mass treason trial is underway...David Willey reports that

among the 200 people expected to testify is the Italian Prime Minister...

*Ann Taylor, NBC*

The newswriter's struggle to avoid redundancy is also why good reporters try to leave out one or two basic facts in their reports (see Chapter 10, "Tape")—to leave room for a lead-in:

The purchase, which cost about 800-million dollars, was made because the three airlines want to supplement and upgrade their air fleets. But, the government is touting the sale as proof that it is trying to reduce the huge balance of trade surplus with the United States. It is, however, only a small contribution. The U-S trade deficit with Japan has grown to a huge three point two billion dollars, depressing the value of the dollar overseas . . . and forcing up prices of imported Japanese goods in America.—Bill Redeker, ABC News, Tokyo.

What's left for the newswriter? Redeker consciously left out the most basic facts of the purchase:

Three Japanese airlines say they are planning to buy 28 U-S jets. More from Bill Redeker in Tokyo...

*Don Fisher, ABC*

One network newswriter developed a method for writing to those voicers and wraps that seemed to be "lead-in proof" because they said too much. He'd steal the reporter's first sentence for his lead-in, and just edit that sentence off the start of the cut. That worked . . . until one day he forgot to do the edit. The story went on the air with the voicer repeating the lead-in word for word . . . an unusually faithful echo.

Actually, no cart is lead-in proof. There is always something different to say in the lead-in even if the reporter seems to have said it all—even if only a sentence stating the purpose of the cut:

Reporter Dean Johnson talked with Mayor Freund about his plans for renovating City Hall....

### 3. Throws

The last sentence of the lead-in turns over—"throws"—the air to the person on tape:

Brenda Hancock says bankers are beginning to realize the importance of dealing with women...

*KWMS, Salt Lake City*

Then we hear Brenda Hancock's voice.

Arv Johnson reports from the Independent-Republican state convention...

*WCCO, Minneapolis*

Then Arv Johnson's report plays.

As the last sentence before a new voice comes on, these "throw" lines have an important job. It is worth distinguishing them from the rest of the lead-in and spending some time looking at them. The simplest method of introducing a new voice would be with an incomplete sentence:

Mayor Kucinich's reaction...

Mayor Kucinich says...

As the mayor explains it...

But most stations avoid these incomplete throw lines. There is a danger in using them: Too often in radio news some technical problem delays a cart or keeps it off the air completely. The newscaster who has just read an incomplete throw line can look pretty foolish in these situations:

Mayor Kucinich's reaction...

ah....was...ah...

Incomplete throw lines leave the newscaster hanging in the middle of a sentence and therefore vulnerable to technical slip-ups. It's always safer to use a complete thought as a throw line:

The whole thing doesn't seem to bother Mayor Kucinich...

*WCCO, Minneapolis*

Now if the tape doesn't play, the newscaster can simply read the rest of the story. Even if the tape plays smoothly, a completed thought as the throw line sounds fuller.

**WEAK:**

Metro Narcotics officer Dan Stopka comments...

**BETTER:**

Metro narcotics official Dan Stopka says it's the first such operation ever uncovered in southern Nevada...

*KLUC, Las Vegas*

**WEAK:**

City Commissioner George Stewart says...

**BETTER:**

City Commissioner George Stewart says he was impressed...

*WKIS, Florida*

Only two kinds of people speak on carts—newsmakers and reporters; and they require different introductions. Since the four types of tape (actualities, Q and As, voicers and wraps) feature different combinations of reporters and newsmakers, they get slightly different throw lines:

**1. To actualities** Only one voice is heard—a newsmaker's; the throw line must tell listeners to whom this unfamiliar voice belongs. That means the name of the newsmaker *must* be mentioned in the throw line:

The city's new railroad consolidation coordinator, Don Weisbaum, explains what happens next...

*WKNR, Michigan*

From Wakarusa Manor Governor Bennett went to Valley View and gave us this assessment...

*KLWN, Kansas*

If the speaker has been introduced earlier in the lead-in, the throw line may contain nothing

more than the person's name and a hint at the content of the actuality:

Dr. McNulty says the installation of the pacemaker is a very expensive proposition...

*WCAU, Philadelphia*

But if the rest of the lead-in doesn't give the necessary information on the speaker, the throw has to do the job:

One of those parents filing suit is Cherokee P-T-A President Peg Harrison...

*WHOO, Florida*

The superintendent of operations for the bus lines, Robert Truscott, suggests some other ways of getting to work...

*WBBM, Chicago*

Sometimes throws to actualities use verbs such as *says* or *explains* to indicate that listeners are about to hear the person talking:

Oneida County Humane Officer Toni Hanna says "dog-napping" is getting to be big business here...

*WTLB, New York*

Some stations use phrases like *tells us* or *we talked to* in their throw lines; some go further and mention their call letters:

KWHW News talked with Booker about his decision to withdraw...

*KWHW, Oklahoma*

But the throw line does not have to be too explicit. As long as an actuality is preceded by a sentence that includes the newsmaker's name, listeners understand that the name belongs to the next voice they hear:

Her bloodstained body was found in the trunk of her parents' car by State Police Trooper Jim Wyner...

*WSJM, Michigan*

Then Wyner speaks.

**2. To voicers** There is also only one voice on these cuts—but this time it's the reporter's. A few stations don't even bother to mention the reporter in a throw line to a voicer. They rely on the reporter's own final ID—"Paul Parker, WINS, at the New York Hilton"—to take care of the identification.

Most stations *do* tell listeners who they are going to hear before the voicer plays, but they don't waste many words introducing their reporters. No description or title is needed; all that's necessary is the name:

Patti Berman has the report on their report...

*WJET, Pennsylvania*

Linda Ashley reports that you can get relatively cheap burglary insurance...

*WDEE, Detroit*

The throw line might also mention the reporter's location, especially if it's exotic:

David Dow in Quito tells us about it.

*Dallas Townsend, CBS*

The pitfall in writing throw lines to voicers is repetition. It's too easy to get stuck using the same words over and over:

Neil Curry has that report...

Leonard Pratt has the story...

Bernard Redmont reports...

John Given has the story...

Writers must vary their throw lines. Here are some from one newscast:

Neil Curry handled that part of the Ullman plan...

A backgrounder now from Group W's Leonard Pratt...

Bernard Redmont filed a report on a revolution which accomplished its major goals over 200 years ago, but is still wrapping up details...

Overseas to John Given in Tokyo...

Let's get an update from Matt Cooney...

*WINS, New York City*

**3. To Q and As** Throw lines to these cuts are more tricky. There are two voices to introduce—the newsmaker's and the reporter's. Both names must be mentioned in the throw:

Butler told Jerry Bohnen he was inspired because the convention brought together the top blacks in the country...

*KMAN, Kansas*

One obvious strategy is to mention that the reporter was questioning the newsmaker:

WLAC's Eddie Parker had a talk with Mayor Dick Fulton about that today...

*WLAC, Nashville*

**4. To wraps** In a wrap the reporter introduces the newsmaker on tape, so the throw line's chief responsibility is to mention the reporter. For instance, this throw line could have been used for a voicer; it was used to introduce a wrap that contained a tape of the fire commissioner:

News 88's Irene Cornell has the details...

*WCBS, New York City*

Then on the tape Cornell uses her own throw line:

Fire Commissioner Augustus Beekman says they never had a chance....

However, the throw in the lead-in to the wrap could have hinted that an interview with the fire commissioner was coming:

Fire Commissioner Augustus Beekman was on the scene and News 88's Irene Cornell filed this report...

Since a wrap is a prepackaged story, the throw line has less responsibility. It must mention the reporter, but the newsmaker's name is optional.

Lead-ins to wraps are the most susceptible to redundancy, since there are so many elements to the wrap. How's this for a parroting effect?

*Lead-in:* Reporter Marv Johnson reports on the mayor's call for a cutback in the city sales tax...

*Reporter in wrap:* The mayor discussed with me his call for a cutback in the city sales tax...

*The mayor in wrap:* I'm calling for a cutback in the city sales tax.

## WRITE-OUTS

What's left to say after a voicer or wrap has been played? The lead-in and reporter's story should have covered all points, and the reporter has signed off:

...Charles Bierbauer, ABC News,  
Moscow.

Rarely will the newscaster return after a voicer or wrap with more information. But actualities and Q and As are a different story. Even with their lead-ins, these cuts leave loose ends.

*Lead-in:* T-V-A's generating plant at Brown's Ferry is out, and spokeswoman Brenda Carnes says the agency is asking us to cut back on the use of electricity...

*Cut:* The T-V-A today did issue an urgent appeal to all consumers to temporarily curtail their use of electric appliances during the peak hours of three p-m to nine p-m today. It's very unlikely that the emergency will

deteriorate to the stages of a blackout, but we would like to point out that if you're not conserving electricity, it is costing us dearly because we're having to buy power to cover these peak periods.

That's not enough. A newsmaker cannot wrap up a story—for one thing, many listeners may still not be clear on whose voice they've been hearing. The newscaster has to conclude:

Spokeswoman Carnes tells us the T-V-A doesn't know how long the problem will last.

This final section of a tape story is called the "tag line," the "close" or the "write-out."

### 1. Renaming

Who was that talking? Listening with partial attention or tuning in after the lead-in, many listeners do not catch the name of the person they were just listening to in an actuality or Q and A. So most newswriters take a second to remind them. The first few words of the write-out should include the name of the newsmaker who was talking on the tape. Some writers simply state the name:

The Commission's chairman, Reverend Proby.

Or they mention the name again in a quick recap of the content of the tape:

Reverend Proby defending the Civil Rights Commission.

There is, however, a more conversational and informative alternative. The name can be restated as part of a sentence that communicates additional information:

Proby says his agency handles about 2-thousand cases each year, and most can be solved locally.

KOA, Denver

The name is there. Another version of the same write-out:

Proby says there is now the chance that the federal government will step in and run the Colorado civil rights program.

*KOA, Denver*

Only if the name of the person speaking on tape is relatively unimportant are the first few words of the write-out free of responsibility for repeating that name. For example, WCBS in New York City carried a story about robots trained to perform household chores. It featured an actuality in which the president of the company that made the robots described them. Because he was not an important part of the story, he was not renamed after the cut was played.

## 2. Concluding

Along with repeating the name, the write-out must bring the story to a close. This may require adding new information. The write-out after a tape of a city official discussing bus shelters:

Bradley says the Council Transportation Committee will review an ordinance allowing such shelters to go up, but that the city doesn't have the money available to build them if private industry won't. The Regional Transportation District says it wants to build another 100 shelters, but the bulk of them will have to be paid for by private companies.

*KOA, Denver*

Or the write-out may conclude with one short sentence. The editor of a local journal has analyzed the president's energy plan on tape. Here is the write-out:

And Lawrence promises that...in the next issue...the Oil and Gas Journal

will have plenty to say about the president's proposals.

*KAKC, Oklahoma*

Write-outs for actualities and Q and As can use the same approaches to conclude stories as snappers (see Chapter 6, "Stories"): supporting the main point, giving the other side of the issue, giving the punch line. The two most common, however, are adding another point and discussing future ramifications.

The cart contains Smathers' attack on the state's education system; the write-out is making another point:

Smathers says he is running a strong second in the Democratic race for governor. That despite figures released yesterday which show him with about one-million dollars less in contributions than front-runner Robert Shevin.

*WHOO, Florida*

The cart has an FDA spokesman reevaluating their ban on saccharin; this write-out speculates on the future:

That F-D-A man guesses the sweetener will be sold as a non-prescription drug, carrying a warning about what happened to those rats in Canada.

*KAKC, Oklahoma*

Beware! Write-outs can parrot just as easily as lead-ins.

### UNACCEPTABLE:

*Cut:* That's the craziest plan I've ever heard.

*Write-Out:* Gentry called the plan the craziest he's ever heard.

There are generally enough points to be made about a story to fill the write-out with something besides an instant replay of the tape or the lead-in. But, if a story is so painfully thin that it is impossible to squeeze out another fact or even

future ramification, then it might be necessary to fall back on the most primitive form of close:

City Council President Gentry.

It's better to be terse than redundant.

## TAPE COPY

How should a story with tape appear on the copy that will be used in the script for the newscast? Writing out a verbatim transcript of the cut would be time consuming and of little value. Newscasters just need the copy they are going to read—the lead-in and the write-out—plus enough information so they know when the cart is over and it's time for them to read again.

### 1. Cues

First, a bookkeeping matter: There are usually a few carts in a newscast. To ensure that the newscaster or engineer plays the right cart with the right story, most stations ask writers to include the number of the cart in the copy. After the lead-in they type the word *Cart*, then a colon and that number:

Cart: 409

Newscasters know when the cart is supposed to begin—right after the lead-in. But, how do they know when it's over and time to read the write-out? Waiting for silence at the end of the cart would allow that silence to go out over the air—that is unacceptable. So newswriters add two important pieces of information on the copy for the story:

**The time** Noting how long the cut runs gives newscasters an idea of how long they have—10 seconds? a minute?—before they are “on” again. The time in seconds is usually written after the word *Runs* and a colon:

Runs: 15

**The out-cue** The real secret to bringing newscasters back at exactly the right moment is giving them a cue. Newswriters jot down the final words said on the cart. Those final two or three words are called the “out-cue” (see Chapter 10, “Tape”). Newscasters hear those words and then begin talking again. They're usually written after *Out* and a colon:

Out: within the state

Out-cues are simple except when those final words are also said earlier in the cut. This is called a “double out.” In a Q and A, for example, the newsmaker's last words may be “Yes, that's correct,” but he may also have said the same thing—“Yes, that's correct.”—in response to an earlier question in the cut. Merely writing the out-cue here could lead the newscaster or engineer to stop the tape too early.

To solve this problem newswriters write *Double out* next to the out-cue. Then whoever is playing the cut knows that it must be allowed to play until that out-cue has been said twice:

Out: Yes, that's correct.  
(Double out)

The number, time and out-cue of a cart are placed after the lead-in and before the write-out, if there is one. They are separated from the copy by a few lines and often indented—you don't want these cues accidentally read on the air as part of the story.

Some stations add one more item: an “in-cue”—the *first* few words on the cart (see Chapter 10, “Tape”). This may help ensure that the right cart is playing, but otherwise the in-cue doesn't tell newscasters anything they need to read the story. Most stations leave it out.

CIVIL RIGHTS  
3/31  
gat

Colorado House Republicans have voted  
not to fund the state Civil Rights

Commission next year, thereby eliminating the agency that investigates cases of sexual and racial discrimination. The Reverend Milton Proby is chairman of the commission...

Cart: 409  
Runs: 15  
Out: within the state

Proby says there is now the chance that the federal government will step in and run the Colorado civil rights program.

KOA, Denver

Voicers and wraps end with the standard reporter IDs—usually called “direct closes,” “standard closes” or “standard out-cues.” Instead of the actual out-cue—“12-10 News”—many stations simply type the word *direct* or *standard* after *Out*; or they use abbreviations like *std* or *soc*:

SPANK 3 august amn

An elementary school teacher in the Chester-Upland school district has been acquitted of charges stemming from her spanking of a nine-year-old student. WCAU's suburban reporter Duane Gray has more...

Cart: 9  
Runs: 39  
Out: soc

WCAU, Philadelphia

## 2. More Than One Cart

All the examples considered in this chapter so far use only one cart per story. Radio stories sometimes use more:

AIR RESCUE  
27 April  
felice

A 21-year-old motorcyclist from Roy is recovering from accident injuries.

He was rescued yesterday by a helicopter crew from Hill Air Force Base. Air Force Information Specialist John Loflin says the helicopter was on a routine training flight west of Ogden when crew members spotted Ned Patterson....

Cart: 28  
Runs: 10  
Out: that did it

Loflin says the helicopter crew didn't have to call in any support services...

Cart: 28  
Runs: 20  
Out: him into Ogden

Air Force Information Specialist Loflin says Patterson was suffering from a broken jaw and head injuries when the chopper crew arrived. Patterson was taken to McKay Dee Hospital, where he is reported in serious condition.

KWMS, Salt Lake City

The lead-in and write-out in this example follow the same rules as the others discussed in this chapter. But the copy in between the two cuts is something new—a combination lead-in and write-out. It leads into the second cart and writes out of the first. These bridges between carts must contain enough information to prepare listeners for the second cart, while also mentioning the name of the newsmaker in the first cart. KWMS did this in one sentence:

Loflin says the helicopter crew didn't have to call in any support services...

Bridging carts that feature *different* newsmakers is trickier. If the first cart has the union president, the second, the company's president, the copy in between them could read:

Mullaney called the company's offer

completely unacceptable...but company President Larry Jameson says that's all he can afford to pay...

Writing copy to bridge two voicers or wraps in one story is easier since these cuts are more self-sufficient. If the story includes reports on the two candidates for an office, they can be bridged with:

Meanwhile at Stanton headquarters on the West Side, reporter John Hendley found the mood more subdued...

Stories can include more than two cuts, although a story with many cuts is more of a short documentary (see Chapter 14, "Radio") than a news story. Most news stories with tape use one tape; a few use two or three.

## **SUMMARY**

---

Lead-ins and write-outs have double responsibilities. They have to meet the same standards as other broadcast writing, while at the same

time they have to make the tape comfortable in the newscast.

## **PRACTICE ASSIGNMENTS**

---

Write lead-ins and, where necessary, write-outs for the actualities, Q and As and voicers produced in the

Assignments on page 168–170, at the end of Chapter 10, "Tape."

---

# COVERAGE

Each story is different. The best part of a story is often that which makes it unique, and the best reporters are often those who can find a unique approach to a story. There is no formula that works for every fire story or demonstration. News is news because it's full of surprises.

That said, it must also be acknowledged that reporters do have certain standard strategies in mind when they cover particular types of stories—priorities on whom to interview, information on what facts and opinions they can expect to get; guidelines.

It would be foolish to follow these guidelines slavishly—reporting remains a creative profession. But, it would be equally unwise to venture out in search of news without the benefit of the tricks, techniques and theories other reporters have developed. This chapter introduces the basic procedures radio reporters should at least have in their repertoires. With the techniques discussed in Chapter 15, "Visuals," these procedures should also be of value to television reporters.

## TRAGEDIES

A call to police, a tip or a conversation overheard on the police radio usually provides the first clue.

Then a reporter is on the way. Whether it's a fire, accident or disaster, the first rule is: keep your eyes open. How high are the flames? How far is traffic backed up? How widely is the wreckage scattered? How many fire trucks are here? How many cars were involved? What are the weather conditions? Before they have had a chance to question anybody, reporters already should have secured a collection of basic facts.

### 1. Officials

The first person to talk to after arriving on the scene is usually whoever knows the most about what's going on—the fire, police or civil defense officer in charge. In many areas, the chief wears a white hat. When reporters arrive they walk toward that white hat; otherwise, they stop the first person in uniform they see and ask, "Who's in charge?"

At least part of the interview with the person in command is recorded. Simple, direct questions should produce the first couple of usable actualities. A good opening question: "What did you see when you arrived?" That gets them to set the scene on tape. Then: "What happened?" "Anybody hurt?"

At a fire in New York City in which six firemen were killed, the person in charge was the fire

commissioner, Augustus Beekman. WCBS in New York City used this actuality of Beekman discussing why the men couldn't be saved:

There were men inside and men on the roof . . . The men who were inside we were able to get out. The men who were on the roof, unfortunately, went down at a point in the building at which the fire erupted, in other words in full flame.

From this initial interview with an official, reporters must start to assemble a clear picture of the event which they can then communicate in a voicer or wrap. Perhaps it will be necessary to catch up with a couple of other officials, without recording, to fill in the holes.

Experience and even advance preparation make for speed here. Rick Wallace of KABC in Los Angeles works in an area that is plagued by brush fires; so, he has made it his business to study brush fires. He spent a night with firefighters at a small fire, just to learn. Now when he arrives at a fire and hears talk of "back fires," "chimney effects" and "pre-ignition," Wallace doesn't have to waste time seeking translations and explanations—he's an expert of sorts himself. The voicers come quickly.

In interviews with officials, reporters must be on the lookout for facts that measure the scale of the tragedy—obviously the number of dead and injured, the number of alarms, the number of houses or cars destroyed, comparisons with other local disasters. These facts should then be allowed to speak for themselves without the aid of trite and subjective descriptions like *senseless* or even *tragic* (see Chapter 3, "Meanings").

After talking with officials, a radio reporter in New York City filed this report from the scene of that fire in which the six firemen died:

A corner supermarket in a middle-class neighborhood in Sheepshead Bay on Avenue I and Ocean Avenue became a tomb today for six firemen—the worst toll in the Fire Department since 1966. These firemen were on the roof of a Waldbaum's supermarket here when it collapsed under them without warning, plunging them into the flaming wreckage below . . . and

apparently they had no chance. The other firefighters rushed in, went to the rescue of some of their fellow officers, managed to drag out some. But, the flaming wreckage, the smoke, the flames, kept them from seeing the others and finding the others. There were no screams for help. And so by the time they got to the other men, it was too late. . . .

Stan Brooks, WINS, New York City

With a couple of actualities on tape and a voicer or wrap written out, reporters should check their watches. If a newscast is approaching, first priority is filing these first reports.

The next interview at the scene of a tragedy is often with the most disheveled rescue worker there—someone who appears to have been close to the action. Questions: "Could you describe what it was like in there?" "What did you see?" "What were you thinking?"

## 2. Witnesses

Officials, police, firemen are professionals—trained to react with a certain detachment, a stance that doesn't make for particularly gripping actualities. The extraordinary is best communicated through amateurs—survivors, relatives, eyewitnesses. So amateurs, rather than professionals, are the next interview targets.

Survivors and relatives must be treated tactfully. Approaching them is difficult, but it must be done . . . delicately. "How does it feel to lose all you own?" is of course unconscionable; but, "Would you mind talking with us for a moment?" . . . then "Could you describe what you saw when you came home?" is acceptable.

Eyewitnesses make the best actualities. If necessary, reporters have to walk up to a crowd of bystanders and yell forcefully, "Okay, who was here when it happened?" Then: "Could you describe what you saw?" Never, however, should these witnesses be relied upon for such crucial information as the cause of a fire, accident or disaster.

Speculation about arson must be left to fire officials. Disposition of blame in an accident should be left, properly attributed, to the police.

And the nature and severity of injuries is a determination only doctors and nurses can make. Even the police or ambulance drivers can only give the number hurt and a description of what they said and how they looked. They are not in a position to say who is near death and who is just in shock.

Therefore, questions should be directed only to those qualified to answer. Just as eyewitnesses are not qualified to speculate on the cause of the accident, police, who arrived later, are in no position to describe what the crash looked like—that's a question for the witnesses. And don't ask neighbors what the firemen are saying or the firemen how the neighbors are reacting. Ask officials officials' questions and witnesses witnesses' questions.

Frequently bystanders complain that it took too long for firemen or rescue workers to arrive. Walter Dibble, news director at WTIC in Connecticut, warns against airing such charges of tardiness. Bystanders usually are not aware of exactly when officials were notified, nor are they expert on how long is "too long."

Witnesses and rescue workers must be interviewed promptly—before they wander off or are sent home. Then the reporter can record ROSRs while strolling around the scene and pursue other leads. Perhaps an ambulance driver who has returned after a trip to the hospital is able to contribute some actualities based on comments made by the victims: "What did they tell you?"

### 3. Hospitals

If there were casualties, attention shifts to the hospital. The seriousness of what goes on there may make reporters' inquiries seem like harassment. But most hospital officials respect the job journalists have to do and have established procedures for releasing information. Reporters must learn them—the newsroom should have these procedures posted or filed.

Some hospitals assign the supervising nurse in the emergency room responsibility for handling

all inquiries; some designate a public information officer, perhaps with the hospital's supervising nurse taking over at night. Whoever has the job should be prepared to give reporters basic information on newsworthy patients (see Chapter 9, "Ethics and Law") without unreasonable delay.

That information usually includes those familiar terms for patients' conditions *good, satisfactory, fair, poor, serious* or *critical*. Unfortunately, this is one code that reporters can't even attempt to break. These terms simply do not have clearly defined meanings, and reporters are not qualified to speculate that *critical* means someone may soon die or that *satisfactory* means the injury will definitely not be fatal. All reporters can do is pass on the hospital's designation:

Six firemen died, many were hurt, seven seriously . . .  
WNEW, New York City

At some small hospitals, obtaining even this basic information can be a chore. A nurse who is unaccustomed to dealing with the press may insist that the reporter wait until some hospital official arrives at nine the next morning. Aggressive reporters cannot be content with that. They must be persuasive and insistent enough to get the information.

The basic facts at the hospital can be obtained by phone, but on major stories, stations may want a reporter on the scene grabbing information as it becomes available and in a position to interview survivors and relatives.

Reporters head for the emergency room. Some of the relatives and survivors may be in the waiting room there, and the nurse in charge of "triage"—arranging for treatment according to the severity of the injuries—may have information on the victims.

Hospital officials may permit visits to the rooms of those who are not seriously injured; otherwise, reporters have no business barging into hospital rooms.

One of the firemen injured in that New York City fire was interviewed at a hospital:

I was lucky to be able to crawl out. I landed on my back, but . . . I was able to get out by myself.  
*WINS, New York City*

Then the wife of a fireman who was not seriously injured:

One of the other firemen called me up and told me about a quarter to eleven, I guess. I hadn't heard about the fire, but I started to assume that something had happened because he was so late getting home; so in a couple of minutes I was going to call the firehouse to see if there had been an accident.  
*WINS, New York City*

At a hospital the line between aggressive reporting and obstructing lifesaving efforts must be honored. There is nothing wrong with gently asking someone who is not seriously injured for a comment. But there is something terribly wrong with any action that interferes with the treatment of the seriously injured.

• • •

One additional warning to reporters covering tragedies: double-check names! If an official says a person has died, repeat the name of that person to the official to make sure you have it right . . . and get the name of the official. The hospital, the coroner and the police should each be able to verify the name of the person. It's wise to call at least two of the three. This is no time for an error.

There are two questions the radio reporter tries to answer at tragic events: First, "What exactly happened?" That answer comes from the officials and eyewitnesses and is communicated through their actualities and in the reporter's reports. Second, "What was it like?" The witnesses, rescuers, survivors and relatives all help answer this question, as do the reporter's ROSRs.

## CRIME

Perhaps this section should be titled "Alleged Crime" to keep the caveat—"innocent until proven guilty"—inscribed on reporters' minds.

Crime must be covered with utmost care. When reporters get interested in the law, the law gets interested in their reporting. Many of the legal questions considered in Chapter 9, "Ethics and Law," are raised primarily in crime reporting.

### 1. Police

Many stations can't afford to send reporters down to police stations or to the scenes of crimes. Instead, they rely on the police radio and regular beat calls to the police. The person on the other end of these calls may be a dispatcher, desk sergeant or the entire police department. These people are not always interested in reporters finding out everything that has happened.

If reporters can visit the police station, they may find their news on the police "blotter"—a record of what the police have been up to which is kept at the station and, in some cities, transmitted on the police teletype (see Chapter 7, "Sources"). The blotter is public information, as are arrest records (except when minors are involved), and, therefore, should be available to reporters. Most of the events recorded are too insignificant for radio time (in small towns: lost cats, cars that wouldn't start), but they're worth looking through.

Occasionally big names are listed in connection with little crimes—that's news. More significant events, which the police may not be anxious to discuss, may also have been dutifully recorded on the blotter. Nevertheless, an examination of the blotter must be supplemented by talks with the police on duty. Even at the police station, reporters are dependent on the police opening up and talking.

Police and reporters have had a bad marriage from the start. Reporters gripe that the police don't provide enough information. Police accuse reporters of hindering investigations or demanding information that might damage someone's rights. Reporters claim police give them the run around. Police accuse reporters of being out to get cops.

But, reporters must live with police for the

sake of the news. Life is easier if they can establish a rapport with them, a task that is extremely difficult without a reputation for fair and accurate reporting. Even with such a reputation, it's not easy to win the confidence of the police, especially over the phone.

A beat call may elicit an answer like this: "Nope, quiet, just the way we like it." The reporter has to decide, based on experience with that officer, whether that answer can be trusted. If not, it may be necessary to run through, as inoffensively as possible, the list of potentially disquieting events, just to confirm that none of them has slipped the mind of that officer.

When a station covers a crime from the newsroom—usually because its town has more crimes than it has reporters—a reporter gathers the facts on the phone and throws in a phoner with one of the police describing the charges or the arrest.

If a reporter is sent to the scene of the crime, the first priority, again, is an interview with the officer in charge. Detectives, if they have a moment to talk, are the best source for details on the crime as well as speculation on suspects and motives.

Detectives and other police officers are not always anxious to talk. In some cities and towns the police chief has made it clear that he doesn't want to hear his people on the air. It may be necessary to interview police officers and detectives with the cassette recorder off and then convey their comments in a voicer. In most cities, however, police officers do not object to going on the air.

Here is a voicer, based on information supplied by the police:

It happened in downtown Flushing, the busy corner where Kissena Boulevard runs into Main Street. The suspect, dressed in green overalls and wearing a black wig, reportedly walked up to a woman teller at a Manufacturers Hanover Trust branch and demanded a bag of money. Police say Howard Ford, an off-duty city detective moonlighting as a teller, saw what was happening, pulled his service revolver, identified himself and ordered the holdup man to surrender.

Police say the response was a burst of gunfire. Ford shot back. Customers scrambled for safety as bullets went back and forth. The suspect collapsed outside or the street and died. Ford, shot once in the stomach and once in the leg, collapsed and was rushed to a nearby hospital, where he died three hours later.—Stan Brooks, Ten-Ten News.

WINS, New York City

Next interview neighbors, witnesses, the first cop to arrive on the scene, etc.—remembering that such charged matters as identification of victims and theories about suspects should be left entirely to the police. If a neighbor suggests a suspect on tape, that tape cannot be used. The suspect could sue for libel (see Chapter 9, "Ethics and Law").

A suspect's race or ethnic background should not be mentioned unless it is connected to the motivation for the crime or unless the suspect is still at large and it may aid in the arrest. And, even if a suspect is caught red-handed, it's: "Police say the suspect was caught red-handed."

When a suspect has been formally charged with a crime, reporters must make sure they know what law was allegedly broken. Statutory rape, for instance, means having sexual intercourse with a female who is under age—even if she consents. That must be understood. The names of crimes have specific legal meanings and are rarely interchangeable. Chapter 3, "Meanings," noted the differences between words like *robbery*, *theft* and *burglary*. Here is another example of some crucial semantic distinctions: *Murder* means killing with malice . . . *first degree* if it was premeditated, *second degree* if it was not. *Involuntary manslaughter* means it was an accident; *voluntary manslaughter* that it was intentional but committed without malice. And all these killings are *homicides*.

Reporters must also understand the exact meanings of the legal procedures that follow as that suspect enters the criminal justice system.

## 2. Courts

There are two separate bodies of law in this country: civil and criminal. Criminal laws deal

with crimes against “the people”—murder, robbery, running a red light. Civil laws handle disputes between citizens or businesses—breach of contract, libel.

No one faces jail for committing a civil offense. People can sue in civil court because they feel they’ve been wronged—the wrong is called a “tort”—or because a contract has been violated. If the plaintiffs win, they are awarded “damages”—money or relief from the wrong.

It takes an unusually hot suit to draw reporters into civil court. This is unfortunate. As large corporations or even small businesses slug it out with each other in civil court, the depositions they file and the testimony they present often reveal the true nature of economic power in a community. There’s news here, though it may take time and sophistication to secure it.

The criminal courts have no such trouble attracting reporters. They have most of the violence, sex and corruption. They also have an intricate structure that reporters must master.

The names and responsibilities of the different levels of trial and appellate courts vary by state. In some states, for instance, the supreme courts are near the bottom of the hierarchy—in some states they are supreme. All the different courts will be mentioned in the news. Their roles must be studied.

Reporters must be concerned with all the stops a case makes on the road between arrest and prison or freedom. Courthouse regulars—lawyers, clerks, other reporters, even judges—can be pumped for information on how the criminal justice system operates in a state. The chart on pages 188–189 provides a good introduction to the basic structure.

A station has a responsibility to listeners and to the suspect to follow through with coverage of the legal proceedings after an arrest. All that may be needed are regular calls to the district attorney, defense attorney or the court clerk; or the station may decide to send a reporter to the trial.

If so, the first thing that reporter confronts in many states is the prohibition against taking tape recorders into the courtroom, or even court-

house, discussed in Chapter 9, “Ethics and Law.” That and the unwillingness or inability of the participants in a trial to give interviews while the trial is in progress tend to restrict coverage of trials to voicers—reports on what has transpired in the courtroom. These voicers are usually scrawled in a notepad while sitting through the occasionally slow proceedings, then filed on the nearest phone. The action is usually with the witnesses. Here is a voicer on a trial in progress:

Zoo director Bob Truit is charged with abusing an 800-pound baby hippo that died when attempts were made to move it from the Birmingham Zoo. The Humane Society of the United States says Truit misused a cattle prod in the move attempt. Prosecution witnesses testified that the director repeatedly struck the hippo on the rear end. But one defense witness said that use of a cattle prod . . . even many times . . . on young animals is normal. And defense witnesses testified that another official—the zoo’s veterinarian—had misused a drug—M-99—given to the hippo to allow the move. If convicted, Truit could face a maximum three months at hard labor and a 500-dollar fine. Testimony will resume next week.—Greg Adams, WERC News.

When trials wander off into procedural debates, the action shifts to the lawyers and judges; and additional pressure is put on reporters to follow the intricacies of the law involved. Appeals and some hearings also revolve around legal strategies. At these levels, lawyers are more often available for interviews—since there are no more potential jurors to bias.

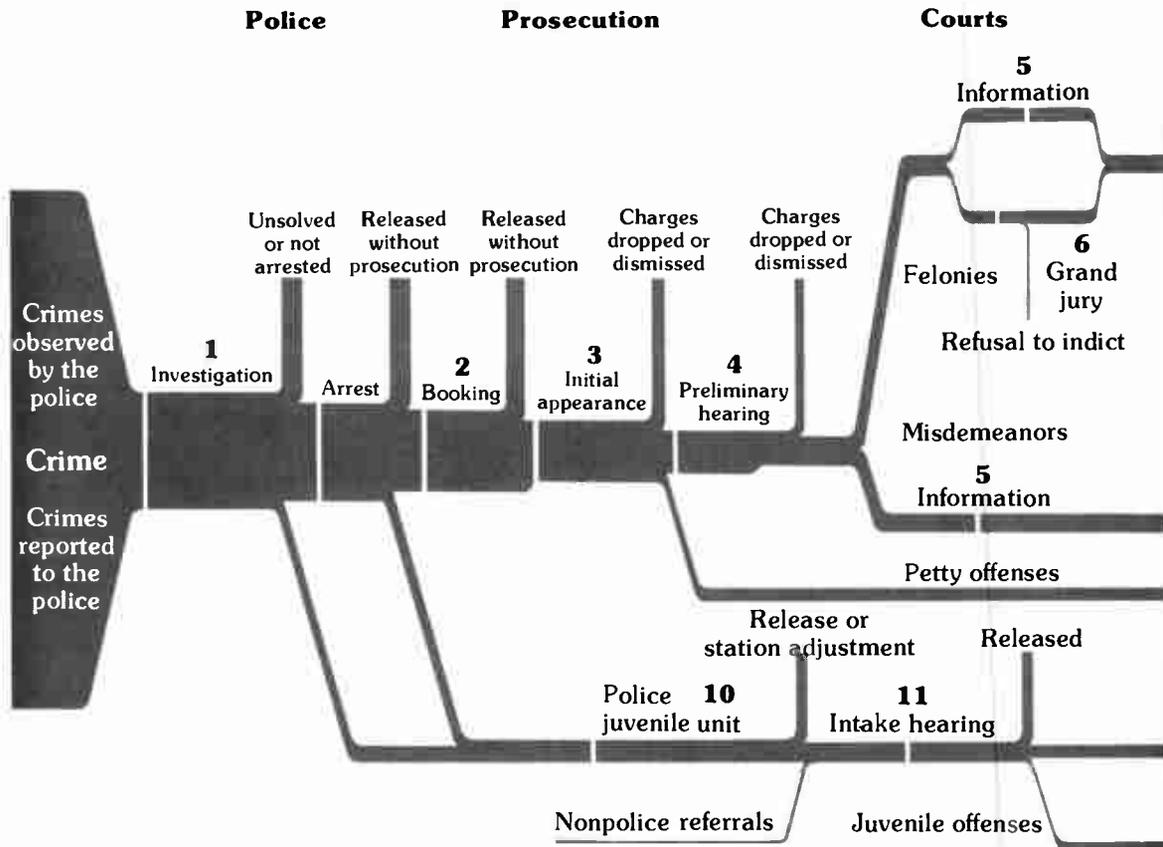
WERC got the prosecutor’s comments on a delay in a hearing for a death row inmate:

This thing has gotten ridiculous now because two-and-a-half years have gone by and he’s still in state court. He’s gotten everything that’s coming to him as far as I’m concerned.

*WERC, Alabama*

After a verdict the reporter should sum up the arguments that held sway. Participants in the trial may also be willing to talk at that point, and a

This chart, prepared by a presidential commission, shows how cases move through the criminal justice system—from detected and reported crimes to prosecution, the courts and the corrections system. Procedures in some states may vary from those outlined here. The varying weights of the lines reflect estimates of the relative numbers of cases that reach each stage in the system. (The President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, *The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society*, 7-12; 1967)



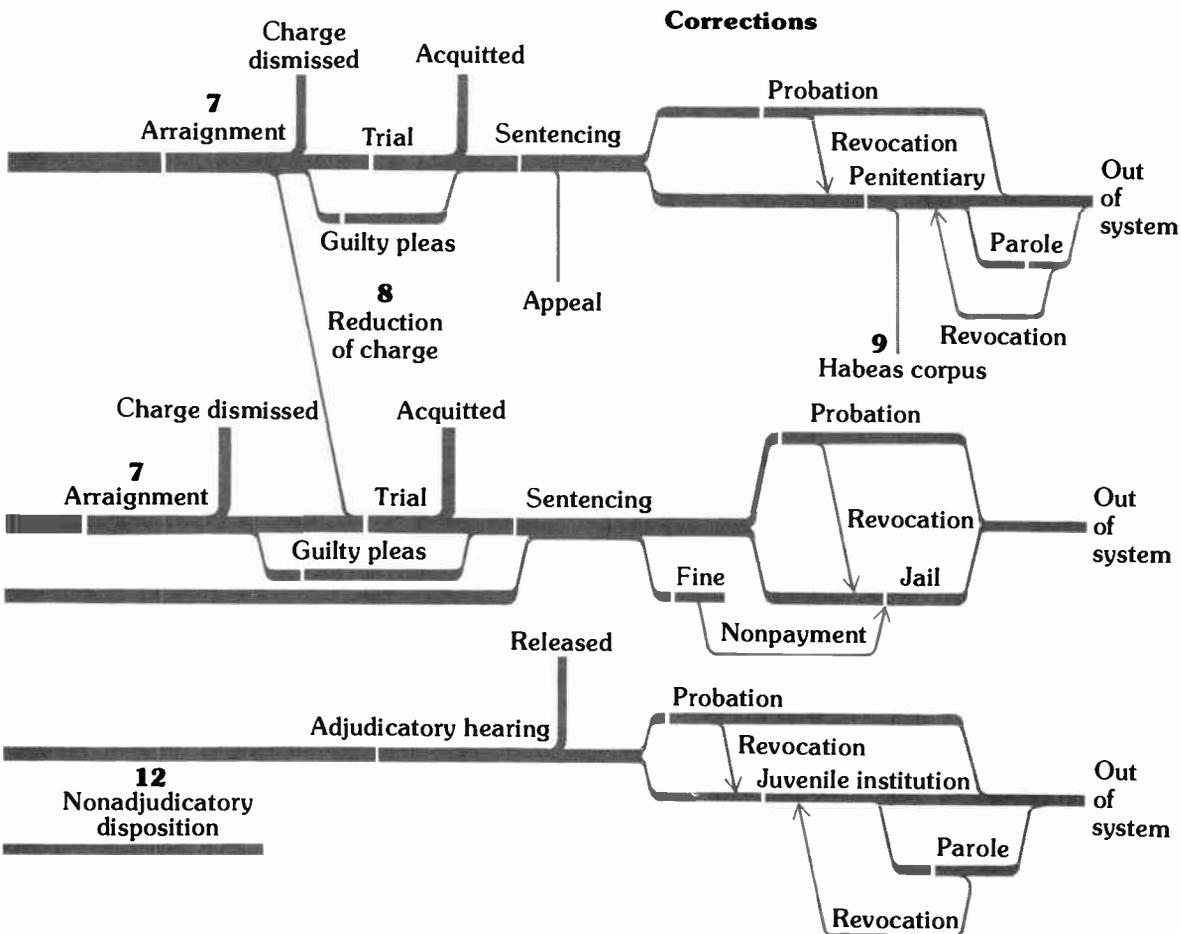
**1** May continue until trial.

**2** Administrative record of arrest. First step at which temporary release on bail may be available.

**3** Before magistrate, commissioner or justice of peace. Formal notice of charge, advice of rights. Bail set. Summary trials for petty offenses usually conducted here without further processing.

**4** Preliminary testing of evidence against defendant. Charge may be reduced. No separate preliminary hearing for misdemeanors in some systems.

**5** Charge filed by prosecutor on basis of information submitted by police or citizens. Alternative to grand jury indictment; often used in felonies, almost always in misdemeanors.



**6** Reviews whether government evidence is sufficient to justify trial. Some states have no grand jury system; others seldom use it.

**7** Appearance for plea; defendant elects trial by judge or jury (if available); counsel for indigent usually appointed here in felonies.

**8** Charge may be reduced at any time before trial in return for plea of guilty or for other reasons.

**9** Challenge on constitutional grounds to legality of detention. May be sought at any point in process.

**10** Police often hold informal hearings, dismiss or adjust many cases without further processing.

**11** Probation officer decides desirability of further court action.

**12** Welfare agency, social services, counseling, medical care, etc., for cases where adjudicatory handling not needed.

story on the verdict may include their comments—taped or paraphrased:

After deliberating about an hour and 45 minutes, the jury returned a verdict of innocent on all charges against elementary school teacher, Annette Hart. The mother of the nine-year-old child had lodged the criminal charges . . . accusing the 27-year-old teacher of bruising her son. An official of the Chester-Upland school district said that Miss Hart's only wrong—as far as the rules on corporal punishment are concerned—was that she had inadvertently paddled the youngster without the presence of another witness—because the other teacher was suddenly distracted from the classroom. After the verdict, Miss Hart said she'd be more careful to have two or three witnesses in the future. She said she expects to return to the school this fall.—I'm Duane Gray, 12-10 News.

WCAU, Philadelphia

## POLITICS

Governments hold meetings. Government leaders, leaders of opposition groups and candidates for office give speeches and hold news conferences. Reporters have to cover all these events, constantly looking for cracks in the public façade that reveal the inner workings of political organizations.

This is covering politics—perhaps a journalist's most serious responsibility. Politicians—battling for power—and reporters—the scorekeepers and sometimes referees in that battle—have been using each other for years. Politicians feed reporters many of the stories necessary to keep the newscast stocked with news of significance; but the political news that doesn't come in the regular feedings is what elevates the good reporters above the pack.

There are two ways to cover most political stories: the routine way—and reporters do have to master this—and the enterprising way. Enterprising won't always turn up anything, but the scoops and the awards are likely to go to reporters who *are* enterprising.

## 1. Meetings

Too many stations are forced to cover meetings by phone. That means a call to an official or two afterward for a rundown of what happened. This leaves the politicians in complete control of the information the reporter gets about the meeting. And no matter how honest, politicians are not about to freely give information that hurts them. Increasing the number of phone calls, especially to opposition politicians, should help, but for important meetings the telephone is a weak substitute for being there.

If reporters are able to attend a meeting, preparation might include a visit to the city clerk or whatever official can fill them in on the agenda. This allows reporters to collect some background on the potential controversies and to do some reporting beforehand, such as contacting some of the citizens who may be affected by the discussion but aren't likely to attend.

Some interviewing can be conducted before things get underway. If the issues to be discussed are clear, reporters can get a story on the air even while the meeting is still in progress.

WCAU in Philadelphia was covering a hearing of the Pennsylvania House Agriculture Committee on a bill to restrict the use of pain-killing drugs for race horses. Their reporter in the state capital filed an actuality with the state senator who introduced the bill. The newscaster in the studio read a lead-in noting that the hearing was about to begin; then this discussion of the effect of one of the drugs—"Bute"—was played:

Recently there was a dramatic illustration of the controversial use of Bute at Pimlico, a race track in Maryland, when jockey Robert Pineda was killed in a pile-up that was caused by a horse who broke down and caused a multiple-horse collision, throwing their jockeys in the fall, killing jockey Pineda.

And the reporter also filed a voicer based on the same interview before the hearing started:

Senator Howard says that, according to Horse Racing Commission statistics for 1975 through 77, over 78

percent of all horses entered at Pennsylvania flat racing tracks were doctored with Butazolidin—commonly known as “Bute”—a powerful pain-killing drug. Howard says this interferes with the animal’s natural protection against injury . . . which is pain. As a result, he says, injured animals are often fatally damaged when they break down on Pennsylvania tracks.—In Harrisburg, this is Jim Wiggins, 12-10 News.

*WCAU, Philadelphia*

Some reporters tape a meeting in case there are any heated exchanges. At hearings and meetings of larger organizations, it should be possible to plug into the public address system in the room. Otherwise, reporters have to make do with their own microphones—a poor arrangement if people are speaking from different positions.

Most of this tape is useless because most of the time meetings sound dull. Some reporters save their tape for interviews after the meeting and spend their time during the meeting taking notes and working on voicers. Afterwards, it’s appropriate to ask politicians questions that allow them to repeat into the tape recorder interesting comments made during the meeting.

The goal is to get statements from all sides in a dispute—politicians, the affected parties and interested spectators. At that hearing on horses and drugs, interview targets would include horse trainers, veterinarians, animal lovers and the state legislators on the committee. The reporter also puts together a voicer or a wrap, either summing up the meeting or covering a few important points. Here’s a report on an international meeting in Paris:

The 27 top-level delegates to the rich nation-poor nation economic conference sleepwalked their way into the fourth and unscheduled day of meetings still locked in major disagreement. U-S Secretary of State Cyrus Vance left for Washington at four Paris time this morning after waiting fruitlessly for the conference to resolve its problems. Chief among them was resistance by the 19 poor nations to an energy advisory body composed of both oil producers and

consumers. The plan was finally dropped altogether. It was to have been the payoff to the eight industrialized nations in return for a billion-dollar aid package to poorer countries, and threatens to undermine that agreement. Weary British Foreign Secretary David Owen told newsmen after the all-night session that the gap between the eight and the 19 is too wide to be bridged.—Peter Kalischer, CBS News, Paris.

Politicians can hide controversy by choreographing meetings in advance or using legal wordings as camouflage. Good reporting is distinguished from the routine by the ability to see through to the effects and political meanings of issues. That takes preparation.

Contacts help. Reporters can prepare themselves by staying in touch with the players (see Chapter 8, “Gathering News”) from the mayor and the opposition leader to the clerks. If befriended, these people can provide the analysis necessary to understand play. These are the people who are qualified to point out the strategies and disclose who stands to gain. It’s worth the time spent waiting in their offices or tracking them down at their watering holes.

Study helps. A chart that explains the organization of the city government can usually be obtained. The city charter and a directory of city agencies also make interesting reading. And politicians’ voting records and statements in legislative bodies are all matters of public records—they occasionally stand in revealing contrast to campaign statements or recent positions. Budgets, too, should be read—line-by-line. It’s a rare shenanigan that doesn’t involve money.

Similar collections of paper and people surround conferences and hearings. A reporter who is acquainted with them is better prepared to understand. It’s like putting on the colored glasses at a 3-D movie—suddenly the action can be seen to have depth.

## **2. Speeches**

Many reporters begin coverage of a speech with a visit to the public relations people handling the event. They are not about to whisper

dirt about their bosses, but, since their job is to handle the press, they should be able to provide some early direction—at least a guide to what the politician wants the news to be.

PR people often have the text of the speech to hand reporters. This can be used to select potential actualities, but it's necessary to listen to the actual speech for digressions. It is away from the prepared text that some of the biggest news gets made.

During the speech, the tape recorder is usually plugged into the PA system, if possible. If not, it should be placed up front with the microphone near the speaker's face. Merely holding a mike up to a PA loudspeaker does not produce high-quality sound.

If the speech promises to be long, reporters might want to try to turn their recorders off as they get to dull sections of the prepared transcript. Otherwise, reporters just listen and take notes—in-cues, out-cues and times of potential actualities. They can also begin composing voicers.

Here is an actuality recorded from the PA during a speech by the British prime minister in New York:

Our response to political or military adventurism must be measured and appropriate and this is certainly true in Africa. Because of our past history, we can't escape involvement in Africa's struggles. Africa has shown that she welcomes this involvement where it contributes to redressing the evils of poverty and underdevelopment. But there's a big gap between involvement and intervention.

ABC

The PR person should be able to answer the key question at these events: "Will I be able to get the politician alone afterwards?" The answer is usually "yes," in which case it may not even be necessary to record the speech. Any important points can be repeated again in the interview after the speech. Extemporaneous answers may make for more pithy actualities. This is also an appropriate time to change the subject. The real news, and therefore the best actualities, may

have nothing to do with the subject of the speech.

An Alabama station interviewed Comelia Wallace *after* she announced her candidacy for governor:

*Wallace:* I just decided today that I felt it was something I should do. I decided to run 'cause I wanted to insure that the people of Alabama have a choice, that they have an honest governor, a choice to vote for someone honest, and there are not as many candidates in the field as I thought there would be.

*Reporter:* So you just made this decision today?

*Wallace:* Yes.

*Reporter:* Anything in particular just kick it off today, or have you been thinking about it a little bit all along?

*Wallace:* No, it was really today.

WERC, Alabama

Reporters also work the audience after a speech, looking for reactions to record. These actualities can help fill subsequent newscasts with follow-ups on the speech.

Coverage of speeches is distinguished from the routine by the reporter's ability to place thoughts lifted from the speech in perspective and by the sharpness of the interviews afterwards.

### 3. News Conferences

When Bill Moyers was White House press secretary, this is how he described his jousts with reporters at press briefings: "They pull it out of me until there's nothing more I want to tell them."

Like Moyers' briefings, most news conferences are a snap for newsmakers to control. There are many tricks they can employ short of Richard Nixon's eventual strategy—not holding any more news conferences. Newsmakers can filibuster—go on and on about the insignificant until there's no time left. They can also avoid direct answers to questions:

*Question:* Why won't the new bus lines service black neighborhoods?

*Answer:* A number of black leaders were consulted about this plan. In fact we talked with people from all areas of the city . . .

Newsmakers can dodge follow-up questions, depriving reporters of any opportunity to pin them down. They can call most frequently on those reporters least likely to ask challenging questions, and they can plant self-serving questions with friendly reporters.

The reporter's job is to break through. Every story isn't Watergate; every politician isn't Richard Nixon. There's no call for boorishness or paranoia, but reporters have to be forceful and persistent enough to challenge the newsmaker for control of a news conference. That requires standing up and asking in a strong and commanding voice whatever questions the reporter needs answered. It may require repeating questions that have been evaded, standing up again for follow-ups, changing the subject and, if the situation permits, cutting off a filibuster. One reporter who has done the homework and isn't shy may dominate a news conference.

Of course, the best way for reporters to avoid being denied in a news conference is to step outside the news conference format and engage a newsmaker one-on-one in a private interview afterward. If they can arrange such a session beforehand, many reporters will sit on their best questions during the conference—why share the fruits of their labor with the competition.

News conferences, like speeches, yield actualities. Reporters primarily file actualities and wraps.

#### **4. Campaigns**

Communicating to the people is how elections are won—and that is where the news media come in. Campaigns are more and more media events. In a visit to a shopping center a candidate can reach hundreds of voters, but if a radio or television reporter is there, that candidate can reach many thousands.

Clearly reporters are in a position to tip the

balance, so their first responsibility is to be evenhanded (see Chapter 9, "Ethics and Law").

Hot issues have a way of materializing around election time—often not to be heard from again for another two or four years. Reporters have to be ready for them. Most stations help by preparing files on each of the candidates at the beginning of the campaign; press releases, position papers and newspaper stories are collected. A reporter assigned to follow a candidate can read through the file, catch up on the issues and be ready to spot inconsistencies, wavering or even the occasional fresh idea.

Candidates rarely serve meat in their speeches. They've learned that substantive positions can alienate as many voters as they attract; so the political reporter is fed a steady diet of bland pledges to help all and hurt none, sprinkled with platitudes about the decency of the voters and the essential soundness of our democracy. These statements must be labeled "not news!" and kept out of actualities.

#### **UNACCEPTABLE:**

When I go to Washington I will do my best to represent the fine people of this great city and to uphold the great principles on which this nation was founded.

**Rule:** If any candidate for any office could have said it, it is probably not newsworthy. News is issues, attacks, controversy and any clear portents of what these people will do if elected. If the candidate won't bring up the issues, it becomes the reporter's job to bring them up.

Candidates should be asked to respond to their opponent's attacks; they should be questioned about the major issues, and vague points in their positions should be pounced on. Matters of concern to the people must be covered. Reporters may have to press, probe and confront to get something of substance on tape.

As the field of press agency has advanced, reporters covering major campaigns have found themselves the recipients of prerecorded actualities featuring the candidates. They come on

cassettes, ready to use. Most reporters keep them off the air; they want to use tape that results from their own questioning, not from some public relations agent's script.

Campaign coverage can become a Ping-Pong match of charges and countercharges. That's okay, until the last days before the election. When the voters are presumably making final decisions, there may not be time for the opponent to prepare a response to a particularly virulent charge. At that point, reporters may avoid airing unsubstantiated attacks that cannot be answered. Coverage of a sudden charge of corruption the afternoon before the vote may have to be postponed, despite its obvious news value.

## 5. Investigation

All reporting requires investigation—NBC's Bill Lynch searching through the appendices at the White House (see Chapter 8, "Gathering News"), KOEL's Dick Petrik seeking to discover what armed robbery the sheriff was after (see "Introduction")—but the phrase "investigative reporting" is used to single out truly exhaustive reporting projects, projects that most stations cannot give their reporters time to do. Reporters must do them anyway.

To be a reporter is to be constantly on the lookout for signs that those in positions of trust are not trustworthy. Beginning reporters shouldn't come on like Sherlock Holmes and fantasize a Teapot Dome scandal every time a politician gets a free cup of coffee. But, when a radio reporter is too caught up in three-car accidents to follow a solid tip on a conflict of interest, it's time to start considering a career as a disk jockey.

Investigative reporters keep their ears to the ground—in touch with contacts, open to tips; they keep their eyes on the money—who stands to gain; their fingers on the phone—pursuing tips, checking leads; and their faces buried in the records—it's in the documents somewhere. These reporters, of course, are just doing what all reporters do—only more so, and if they get

something, the results will be that much more satisfying.

As careers and reputations are brought into question, the need for caution naturally increases. Caution means everything is double- and triple-checked; most investigative reporters require confirmation by at least two sources before they'll run with a story. Caution does not mean watching out for whoever might be offended.

Investigations are not necessarily aimed at catching wrongdoing; nor do they have to be about politics. KNX-FM in Los Angeles won an award for a documentary about rape. It, too, required investigative reporting. Reporter Bob Madigan pored through police statistics, FBI statistics, statistics from the Los Angeles Committee on Assaults Against Women, statistics from the local rape crisis hotline—all to get an accurate picture of the scope of the problem. Then he talked with department of corrections officials, police, the district attorney, social workers and psychologists; then rape victims—some women who had called the rape hotline agreed to talk on tape.

This was all standard. Madigan really showed enterprise by persuading prison officials to put him in touch with convicted rapists. He was able to record their voices at a group therapy session. All of this took almost eight months. The result—a 90-minute documentary (see Chapter 14, "Radio").

Incidentally, Madigan produced this documentary while continuing his regular reporting and writing duties. KNX-FM has only a three-person staff. How do they find time for such investigative reporting? News Director Christopher Ames says the secret is budgeting time well and "working their asses off."

## PROTESTS

The squeaky wheel gets greased; the media cover disputes when they disrupt. Few paid attention to the complaints of Croatian nationalists

against the Yugoslavian government . . . then a few of them hijacked a plane.

There is something unfortunate about a system of coverage that favors yelling or violence. Ignoring protests or terrorism, however, would create a more serious problem—paranoia that there is something going on that we're not being told about. Reporters should make an additional effort to cover the gripes of groups that don't resort to loud protest, but they can't ignore serious disturbances, even if they seem to be blatant media events. They're news; they get covered.

Strikes and other protest demonstrations provide easy actualities through interviews on the street with demonstration leaders and the people doing the picketing; reporters just have to be sensitive to the difference between leaders and self-proclaimed leaders. But the real challenge is to produce voicers and actualities that cut through the rhetoric to the central areas of disagreement. This, of course, requires a talk with the other side.

In a strike, management should be easy to track down; they're not shy about expounding their views. In a protest demonstration, the officials or policy makers who are the targets of the demonstration may be less inclined to go public. Deft telephone dialing or door knocking may be necessary to give these people a chance to defend themselves—perhaps just on background (see Chapter 8, "Gathering News").

The standard routine for covering a street protest is: interview the protesters, piece together the meaning of their complaint for voicers and wraps, and search out the other side. Often there's one more task: tracking down the effect of the strike or protest on the community—services interrupted, people inconvenienced, economic ramifications. Carrying out all these assignments demands some homework on such matters as "piece goods," "attrition," "CETA jobs," and, perhaps, the grievances of Croatian nationalists.

The more heated the protest, the more pressure may be placed on reporters. Angry protesters may even choose to vent their wrath on a

reporter as a representative of "the media." The best policy in these situations is passivity; listen and try to understand. Reporters are there to learn, not debate.

When a protest boils over into violence, reporters find themselves in an uncomfortable position. Aside from concern over the situation, their own safety and the mine field of potentially criminal acts they have to discuss judiciously, there's the danger that their reports may further incite violence or cause panic.

This actuality about a situation in Matamoros, Mexico, was aired by ABC. How might people react when they hear something like this about their town on their radios?

When we got to the scene of the fire, then I saw that it was more than a fire . . . it was a riot.

A reporter cannot use, or let a newsmaker in an actuality use, the word *riot* lightly. One poorly chosen word can touch off further trouble (see Chapter 3, "Meanings"). Being told there is a riot in your town may inspire various sorts of behaviors—not all of them safe. Reporters must remember that a bottle thrown through a store window may be called an *incident*; it is not necessarily a *disturbance*. A crowd of unruly kids may constitute a *disturbance*, but it is not automatically a *riot*. Four people were killed and about two dozen injured that day in Matamoros. City hall and dozens of stores were burned. In this case, ABC was correct in airing an actuality that labeled that situation a *riot*.

Other crucial semantic distinctions: Angry demonstrators pushing against police lines do not represent an *outbreak of violence*. Violence involving blacks is not necessarily *racial violence*.

Reporters are not alchemists. *Crowds* cannot automatically be transformed into *mobs*; *mobs* into *angry mobs*; *fires* into *arson*; *shots* into *snipers*; *struggles during arrests* into *police brutality*. If such charged designations are to be used, they must come from responsible sources and be clearly attributed to them. Rumors and unverified tips are unacceptable (see Chapter 9, "Ethics and Law").

The pressure to keep reporting balanced also increases during protests or riots. Airing charges that the police shot an innocent teenager—without giving the police a chance to respond—can overheat already heated situations, as can reporting that demonstrators have begun attacking police—without giving the demonstrators' side of the story. Of course, ignoring such charges would also be a mistake.

In addition, reporters must keep the size of a protest in context. If only 100 of the 30,000 students on campus are participating, that must be noted.

These are standard rules of careful, ethical reporting—amplified in importance by a volatile situation. They may not be enough when things get rough. Supplementary rules that many news organizations have adopted for covering disorders are discussed in Chapter 9, "Ethics and Law."

## FEATURES

Dick Petrik of KOEL in Iowa is talking with a judge about an upcoming trial. His final question: "Anything else interesting going on?" and Petrik has stumbled on a feature. The judge mentions that he plans to play golf this afternoon with three friends and that all four of the players have had open-heart surgery. Petrik gets their names and has an intriguing story about the "open-heart foursome"—a human interest story.

Many such feature stories pop up on the trail of harder news. Reporters have to be alert for eccentric hobbies or unusual achievements, and the other exaggerations and anomalies that attract the interest of human beings.

In other words, reporters must be prepared to look beyond the story they are pursuing. The bit players—the mayor's secretary, the police dispatcher—may be newsworthy in their own right. That house with the elaborate Christmas decorations passed en route may be a story. A

few minor events—local garage sales, for example—may add up to a trend and a feature.

Features are news. It didn't take public relations people long to figure out that the media have this sweet tooth and to begin feeding them features to satisfy it. Feature stories that are heralded in press releases, over the wires or by tips are then pursued like other stories. Reporters get the assignment, gather facts (the facts in features should be handled with no less care), do a couple of interviews and then file. The point of interest in the story must be captured, either on tape or in the reporter's notes; then background information must be obtained to support that point.

Features may depend heavily on emotions, as expressed in people's voices. Actualities—the participants in a program for the handicapped, the winners at an awards dinner—are essential. Features also benefit from the personal touch—the reporter's own voice. The ideal form for a feature is a wrap.

Since hard news can speak for itself, a straightforward recounting should do. Feature stories, however, require more telling. As a rule the writing should be more lively. Delayed or humorous leads work well. Puns and anecdotes, where appropriate, can be effective. And when a story's main job is to be interesting, it is even more important to use real terms—delicious apples and tuna on rye instead of groceries and take-out food. Strong snappers also help bring out interest. Features usually leave room for creativity.

A feature wrap out of Atlantic City:

*Reporter:* Whether or not casino gambling can buy happiness, there are some things casino chips definitely can buy . . . things like delicious apples, barbecued chicken and tuna on rye. Ever since the Resorts casino opened, Bohack's Market, on Pacific Avenue, has been accepting casino chips as currency. Co-owners Robert Rosenfeld and Bruce Gamberg admit it's a gimmick, but it's working.

*1st Owner:* We did it just to get into the spirit of things. When the casino opened we put our sign up, just to get in the mood.



A reporter for KFJZ, Fort Worth, reports live from a mobile radio unit. (KFJZ, Fort Worth)

*Reporter:* What's the response been?

*2nd Owner:* Fantastic, we've gotten almost a thousand dollars worth of chips through here already.

*Reporter:* And most of those chips have been coming from out-of-towners who walk by the market on their way to and from the casino. The gimmick is proving to be so successful that a number of other stores and restaurants also are taking in the chips.—In Atlantic City, Lori Yapczenski, 12-10 News.

*WCAU, Philadelphia*

Listeners start losing interest when the feature itself is a cliché. Treed cats or kids selling lemonade aren't much more interesting at this point than a lost dog. Keep an eye out for something different.

## LIVE

With a telephone line or a two-way radio that can be fed directly onto the air, radio reporters can cover an important breaking story live.

Certainly "live" is radio news at its most exciting. Listeners like live coverage because it's dramatic; they are there as breaking events break. News directors like it because listeners like it; reporters, however, have some qualms. Reporting live increases the pressure and can deprive journalists of their most basic tool—their writing.

Frequently reporters have a chance to write a live report out in advance or at least to scribble some notes, but sometimes they are compelled to go on the air extemporaneously. For professionals who have been trained to care deeply about their choice of words, that is not an altogether comfortable experience. Here are some tips on reporting live:

1. Prepare. The first rule of reporting live is to try to get as much down on paper as possible. Jotting down the points that should be covered is invaluable. Scrawling out the sentences ahead of time helps order thoughts,

even if there's no opportunity to read those sentences. And, the reporter can also prepare by rehearsing the report. Of course, taped or live, the more information reporters gather before they have to report, the better the job they do.

2. Emphasize the timely. Recaps may have a place, but the purpose of live reporting is to report the very *latest* developments—additional police arriving, the terrorists peeping through windows, the building still smoldering. The present tense must take command. Even if it would otherwise not be of great significance, the fact that something is happening on a major story at this moment is exciting in itself, and these breaking developments draw listeners into the live report.
3. Evoke. "The whole point of live reporting," says David Heller, news director at KLOS in Los Angeles, "is to provide an evocative word picture of what is going on. Simple facts are not as important as describing the scene." This should bring to mind another type of report—ROSRs (see Chapter 10, "Tape").

Live reporting employs the same elements as ROSRs—sights, sounds, smells, the first person. Reporters here are scouts, sending back personal reports on the scene.

4. Stay calm. It's fine when the excitement creeps into reporters' voices, but they must keep it out of their minds. Ad-libbing into a live microphone under duress leaves reporters vulnerable to all sorts of errors. Calmness and concentration are necessary to guard against speculation, embellishment and sloppiness. Reporters should not get caught up as participants; they are observers, just reporting what they see and what they have learned.

When reporting live, reporters should be prepared to answer questions on the air asked by the newscaster or announcer in the studio. If the station favors this live exchange, the reporter might think through, and even suggest, possible questions beforehand.

One final piece of advice for reporting live from Voight Smith of WJVM in Illinois: "Try to get there *before* the fire is out."

## SUMMARY

Different types of coverage, different strategies; but it's important to remember what they all have in common. Every story—the ones mentioned here, the stories that fall in between these

categories or outside of these categories—requires an enterprising, thorough and responsible pursuit of facts and tape.

## PRACTICE ASSIGNMENTS

List the people you would interview on tape and the questions you would ask on the scene in the following situations:

1. A fire breaks out in a large downtown department store. Four shoppers are hurt. It is the third fire at a large store in the past two months.
2. The annual meeting of the Propertyholders' Association is held. On the agenda is a City Council bill to raise annual real estate taxes five percent.
3. The mayor has announced a slash in the budget of the city's poverty programs. A coalition of minority groups comes to City Hall to confront the mayor.
4. Some of the local high school's gym equipment—valued at about 70-thousand dollars—is stolen. A night guard and a janitor were in the building when the crime occurred. Local police are on the scene.
5. College students in your town organize a one-day sit-in and boycott of classes. They're protesting the police's conduct in the arrest of a student on drug charges.

3



**PRODUCING**

***Preceding page:***

To provide detailed traffic news for inclusion in the station's newscasts, WSB, Atlanta, employs a helicopter, shown hovering over a major interchange as the afternoon rush hour begins. (*WSB, Atlanta*)

# 13

---

## NEWSCASTS

Larry Clark is responsible for the 12:55 p.m. newscast on KAKC in Tulsa, Oklahoma. All the stories that he and others in the newsroom have written for that show are spread out in front of him. Clark now has to “produce” the newscast. His job, once the stories have been assigned and written, is to arrange these stories so they flow and hold interest, to mix in weather and sports news, to put the commercials in place, to add the open and close and, finally, to combine all this in a package that is 5 minutes long—exactly. The newscast is the final product.

Few people are actually given the title *producer* in radio journalism, but this is one of the more important jobs anyone responsible for a newscast has to do. In the more specialized world of television news, the person with these responsibilities, and in charge of the entire newscast, usually does have the title *producer* (see Chapter 15, “Visuals”).

### ORDERING

The seven news stories that Larry Clark had to turn into his 12:55 newscast, arranged alphabetically:

1. Air force confirms that Soviet bomber flew close to the East Coast; *with actuality*.
2. Call for suspension of ban on saccharin.
3. Classes being held despite fire in school last night.
4. Local reaction to president’s plan for solar energy; *with actuality*.
5. New college to be dedicated here; *with actuality*.
6. President discusses energy at news conference.
7. Weather service says that funnel-like clouds in the sky aren’t tornado clouds; *with actuality*.

In what order should these stories be used? Broadcasting them in alphabetical order seems even-handed, but the jumps from national news to local news, then back again to a local story, might disconcert listeners. They also might have difficulty with the rapid switch from energy to a new college, and then back to energy again. And is that Soviet bomber the story most likely to catch the ears of Tulsa listeners?

Clearly, alphabetical organization leaves something to be desired. Stories have to be carefully placed in a newscast. The organization of a news show must meet some of the same standards as the organization of a story.

First, the newscast needs a good lead story—a story that gets attention and discourages dial

twisting. Then the newscast must be arranged so that it flows as smoothly as possible from story to story. And finally, the newscast benefits from a good close, perhaps a story with a twist that leaves listeners thinking.

A sheet on which the order of stories is written down is called a "lineup." Most veterans disdain lineups, preferring to shuffle the stories until they proceed logically or to work out the order in their heads. But, newer members of the profession should take the time to write out a lineup to

help organize their thoughts on organizing the newscast.

The lineup should include the story's slug, its length and whether or not there is any tape to go with it. This somewhat more elaborate lineup, prepared by producer Hal Terkel for the CBS World News Round-Up, also includes out-cues for the tape used in the newscast as well as the name of the reporter who filed each tape. The numbers on the right are the times of the lead-in and write-out used with each tape.

WNR 4/10

1. HARRISBURG...ROTH		<i>:58</i>
	TAPE...1:12	
	OUTCUE...CBS News, Harrisburg.	<i>:05</i>
-----		
2. ROYALTON, PA...LANDAY		<i>:10</i>
	TAPE...1:33	
	OUTCUE...CBS News, Royalton, Pennsylvania.	<i>:24</i>
-----		
3. WASHINGTON...SERAFIN		<i>:20</i>
	TAPE...:52	
	OUTCUE...CBS News, Washington.	<i>:29</i>
-----		
4. CAIRO...SEFTON		<i>:13</i>
	TAPE...:46	
	OUTCUE...CBS News, Cairo.	<i>:28</i>
-----		
5. TEHRAN...PLANTE		<i>:06</i>
	TAPE...:37	
	OUTCUE:...CBS News, Tehran.	<i>:07</i>
-----		
6. DAR ES SALAAM...DANIELS		<i>:12</i>
	TAPE...:57	
	OUTCUE...CBS News, Dar Es Salaam.	<i>:30</i>

---

**PRODUCING / NEWSCASTS**

The lineup gives the order of stories. There are a number of guidelines for determining that order.

## 1. Newsworthiness

Importance, interest, controversy, the unusual, timeliness and proximity (see Chapter 5, "Leads") are at work again here. The newscast should open with the most newsworthy story. Listeners want to hear the hour's lead story first, and the station wants to grab listeners' attention with the most powerful story.

In the example that opens this section, the most newsworthy story for KAKC was the clouds that did not harbor tornadoes. Negative news isn't ordinarily big news, but this story could not have been more timely or more local; and, since the presence of tornadoes is very important, their absence, while not unusual, is significant. (On an earlier newscast, before the tornado story broke, the story that classes were being held in the school that had had the fire was the lead.)

In choosing the lead story, proximity often is the dominant consideration. Some stations practically insist that the lead story be a local story.

Which story is the most newsworthy can be debatable. At 6:30 a.m. ABC Entertainment (see Chapter 14, "Radio") led with a story about Russia's prosecution of two American correspondents. The second story in the newscast concerned rioting in Mexico. But just a half-hour earlier, ABC Information had led with the Mexican rioting and played the prosecution of the correspondents third. One of the more controversial differences in news judgment in broadcast journalism history came on the day Elvis Presley died. On its evening television news program ABC led with his death, NBC led with his death, even BBC radio in Britain led with the death of the American rock star; but the CBS Evening News led with Ronald Reagan's support of the Panama Canal treaty. CBS officials are still defending that decision.

Sometimes the lead story is obvious. On the day Pope John Paul I died, all three networks led with the same story all afternoon and all evening.

Newsworthiness is *the* major criterion for selecting the lead story. For the rest of the newscast it is *one* criterion: all other things being equal, stories should be placed in order of their news value. Seldom are all other things equal, however.

## 2. Variety

When listeners stay tuned to a radio station for a couple of hours, they don't want to hear the same stories repeated every hour in the same order. When new stories are breaking, it's easy to freshen the lineup, but even if there are no new items, the newscast must be changed. Preserving variety, then, becomes another consideration in ordering a newscast. Sometimes a moderately newsworthy story is moved down in a newscast, or ignored completely, not because it is out of date, but because it was just aired an hour ago.

Stories of lesser import are often shifted about. For instance, on the 5:30 a.m. newscast on WMAL in Washington, D.C., a shutdown in the Alaska pipeline was the lead story. It wasn't mentioned at all on the 6:05 newscast. The Alaska pipeline returned to become the second story at 6:30, the last story at 7:00, then it was ignored completely at 7:30. The story wasn't changing, it wasn't getting much less timely, nor were the competing stories that morning changing. The writers of these newscasts were simply concerned with keeping their newscasts sounding fresh.

Stories should be reordered for each newscast. If possible, the lead story should be varied and stories should be dropped if they are not that important and have already been used several times. However, the Pope's death is still the lead story no matter how many times it has been used. Proper attention must still be paid to the most newsworthy stories.

## 3. Geography

A newscast is a tour of events around the world, and anyone who presumes to be a listener's tour

guide should know better than to hopscotch from Vietnam, to city hall, to Washington, then back to the Far East for a story about Japan.

Newscasts flow most smoothly when geographical jumps are kept to a minimum. Normally this means doing national stories, international stories, regional stories and local stories in separate groups. If the newscast only includes local news, this may mean separating in-town and out-of-town news. All other things being equal, this works well.

In the example that began this section, there were four local stories and three national stories. KAKC's Larry Clark did the four local stories, then the three national stories:

1. Weather service says that funnel-like clouds in the sky aren't tornado clouds; *with actuality*.
2. New college to be dedicated here; *with actuality*.
3. Classes being held despite fire in school last night.
4. Local reaction to president's plan for solar energy; *with actuality*.
5. President discusses energy at news conference.
6. Air force confirms that Soviet bomber flew close to the East Coast; *with actuality*.
7. Call for suspension of ban on saccharin.

Again, all other things are usually not this equal. On the same day that James Earl Ray escaped from prison, the hostages on a train in Holland were released. Most stations led with Ray's escape, but they didn't then cover all the national stories. Their second story was the release of the hostages—an international story. Newsworthiness outweighed the need for geographical coherence.

This lineup from WOR in New York City is organized primarily by geography, but it still manages to get the most newsworthy stories to the top:

1. Senator to meet with city officials on finances—*local*.
2. Letter bombs sent to corporations—*local*.
3. N.Y. Democrats split on choice for president—*local*.
4. President appoints nine regional delegate chairmen—*national*.

5. Senate hearings on legislation to break up oil companies—*national*.
6. Senator on law that would force disclosure of foreign bribes—*national*.
7. Reactions to Boston busing decision—*national*.
8. Government report on cigarette advertising—*national*.
9. Report on interview with Italy's Communist Party leader—*international*.
10. Higher customs rates in Soviet Union may restrict support for dissidents—*international*.
11. 18-year-old man hit by train—*local*.
12. Parents object to graduation speaker—*local*.
13. Bank official indicted for embezzlement—*local*.
14. Newspaper changes format—*local*.

#### 4. Natural Tie-Ins

A newscast is an unlikely program. Items on many different subjects are thrown together without a common theme to unify them. Of course this lack of coherence is unavoidable since there are so many stories to cover. But, when there is an opportunity to put two related stories together and make the show a bit less disjointed, writers should seize it.

When possible, stories with similar subjects should be placed together. KAKC went from the story on local reaction to part of the president's energy plan to his news conference where he discussed energy. Not only did this eliminate one abrupt transition between stories, it eased the even more difficult transition between local and national news. WOR employed a similar strategy by exploiting the natural tie-in between the local presidential politics story and the national story about the president's political moves.

Stories about labor disputes should be placed together, fire stories should be done one after another, economic stories make a natural grouping; except of course when other considerations are more pressing. If six firemen died in one fire, and the other fire was interesting only because it temporarily allowed a pet snake to escape, the natural tie-in should defer to news judgment. The firemen's deaths should open the show; the snake fire might close the show.

## 5. Tape

A newscast should sound smooth; it should also sound lively. A few minutes of the newscaster reading copy without breaks can sag. A change of pace is needed.

Short of having the newscaster break into song, the only change of pace available is tape. Tape gets the newscast out into the world and brings on a fresh voice or two for a fraction of a minute. It perks up a newscast.

Tapes are valuable pieces in the organization of a newscast. (Videotape and film play the same role in television newscasts; see Chapter 15, "Visuals.") They should be used in such a way that their value is exploited, not wasted. In KAKC's newscast four of the seven stories have an actuality. If they were all placed together in the show, that would leave one section of the newscast very busy and the other section very dull. Instead, Larry Clark interspersed the tape stories with the nontape stories:

1. Weather; *with actuality*.
2. New college; *with actuality*.
3. School fire.
4. Solar energy; *with actuality*.
5. President's conference.
6. Soviet bomber; *with actuality*.
7. Saccharin.

Here is an NBC newscast with Ann Taylor:

1. Kentucky fire; *with actuality*.
2. Dutch hostages.
3. Summit meeting; *with actuality*.
4. First Lady.
5. Memorial Day.
6. Italian trial; *with voicer*.
7. Belfast violence.

This is another rule that is often honored in the breach. A desire to apportion tape throughout the newscast must be balanced against the other guidelines. If the three most important stories all have tape, they might still have to be used one after another at the top of the newscast.

## 6. Blocks

When newscasts grow long, organizing them gets complicated. Often the newscast is broken down into different segments—"blocks"—that make the task of ordering stories more manageable.

Blocks are usually separated by commercials or special features. Because of this natural break between segments, they can be treated separately without having to flow smoothly into each other. Each block can be seen as having its own lead story, and maybe even its own concluding story.

Blocks may also restrict ordering options. The station may insist that the show open with a block of local news, followed by a block of regional news; no matter what the news value of the stories.

In its 7:45 a.m. newscast, WSB in Atlanta uses a commercial to separate the national and local news. The first block, before the commercial, is a brief rundown of national stories; the top local story and a more detailed presentation of the local news follow the commercial.

Blocks are invaluable on those stations with endless newscasts—all news. Lineup sheets are prepared that break each hour into separate segments. A preliminary lineup from WCBS in New York City for the hour from 3:00 to 4:00 p.m. is reproduced on the next page.

Written to the left of each block of stories is the time, in minutes and seconds after the hour, at which that block begins. The first block begins at 3:07:30—after the network news and commercials. Commercials are not listed on this sheet, but they are played between blocks. *Flanders*, *Nachman*, *Athens*, *Kalb*, *Cox* and *Cornell* are reporters; their names are often written with, or instead of, the slug for a story. A *T* after a story or after the name of a reporter means that the story includes tape.

All-news stations use different formats, but all of them break hours into separate blocks to order their presentations for listeners and keep writers and editors sane.

PRODUCER'S RUNDOWN

PRODUCER CALLAGHAN

ANCHORMEN PARSON-FARNSWORTH

TIME 3:00 P → 4:00 P

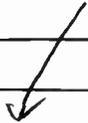
DATE 7/21

07:30 COUNCIL-FLANDERS(T)  
-NACHMAN(T)  
BATES  
STEIN

12:00 SPORTS YANKEES  
METS

15:00 SUMMARY  
TAX  
UNIVERSE  
ATHENS - FEATURE(T)

18:30 BUSINESS - WILLIAMS



21:30 FEATURE MEDICINE

26:30 - ATHENS(T)  
HEAT DEATH

31:00 CAIRO  
BEIRUT - HALB(T)  
FLOOD(T)  
PRICES - COX(T)  
CONSUMERS / DRUGS

38:00 FEATURE SPECTRUM II

41:00 NEWS RACE #4  
42:00 SPORTS REGATTA  
CHIEF / SPILL / SMOEL

45:00 SUMMARY  
COUNCIL - NACHMAN(T)  
BATES - ATHENS(T)  
N.J. LOTTERY

48:00 BERGMAN - CORNELL(T)  
CROATIANS  
HELP

51:30 FEATURE EDITORIAL  
COPS + BLACKS(T)

55:30 ROBOT / CIRCUS  
BEAD / HANA GLIREE

PRODUCING / NEWSCASTS

206

## 7. Spots

Newscasters may have to read the commercials. Newswriters or producers have to fit them into the newscast. More properly, since commercials pay the bills, they have to fit the newscast around the commercials—the “spots.”

On a network, the spots may be scheduled to the second in advance. The newswriter must write a block of stories that ends at that exact second. Local stations can be more flexible. Usually a show's format specifies about when the commercials should be used, but the writer can move them around 5 or 10 seconds to allow room for a story.

KAKC puts the commercial after the first story in the newscast. Larry Clark's lead story, the funnel-like clouds, ran 45 seconds. It wouldn't have made any difference had it run 5 seconds more or less—moving the commercial a bit—as long as the whole show added up right.

Radio spots generally come in two lengths—30 seconds and 1 minute. Newswriters just have to know which they're making room for.

## 8. Kickers

The Boy Scouts of America has sued a sportswear manufacturer, Popsicles Playwear Limited. The Boy Scouts want the company to stop making baby clothing bearing the scout motto "Be Prepared" on the seat.

*Bill Diehl, ABC*

That's a “kicker”—an offbeat story used to end the newscast. Many stations like to leave listeners marveling, if not smiling. Most kickers are funny. They don't have to be; unlikely will do:

A Cleveland woman has kept the ashes of her late husband in a hall closet since 1975...waiting for a Cleveland shipping firm to fulfill a promise to scatter them on Lake Erie. The firm reneged because of publicity and federal anti-pollution regulations. But the company said it would fulfill

the promise if the woman gets a permit from the government. Her reaction: "If people can throw beer cans and cigarette butts in the lakes, why can't they scatter my husband's ashes?"

*Don Budd, Mutual*

A warm human-interest story also makes a good close for a newscast:

Six years ago, Larry Cox of San Diego was denied admission to a sailing class because he's blind. But Cox was determined to learn to sail, just as he had conquered water skiing. He has now achieved his goal -- even to the point of sailing solo in the San Diego boat harbor with his instructor on the dock relaying directions by walkie-talkie. Cox jokes that the biggest obstacle to sailing is finding his way to the boat.

*KNX, Los Angeles*

Most writers collect interesting or unusual stories off the wires, and from the station's own reporting, for possible use as kickers:

Roger Smith of Watsonville, California, is looking for an intruder...and a very good housekeeper. This sneak slipped into Roger's house through a window he had broken...took nothing, but made Smith's unmade bed before he left.

*Gil Fox, ABC*

Not every newscast ends this way. Some newswriters avoid closing with a light story because doing so has become almost a cliché in radio news. Offbeat stories can be placed elsewhere in the newscast, but, since these tales ordinarily are not of any importance, the end of the newscast is the logical place for them. At the end of the newscast, they also can provide a bridge back to the station's entertainment programming. It can be somewhat disconcerting to

go from a minor disaster straight into a song about dancing.

## 9. Timing

The stories have to fit. A 5-minute newscast with a 1-minute commercial leaves 4 minutes for news only. On an especially heavy news day there may not be room in those 4 minutes for a kicker, and some other stories may have to be cut or dropped.

With the time in seconds written on the bottom of each story (see Chapter 1, "Copy"), to determine how many stories will fit, the writer has to add up their times, including tape. Some more experienced journalists simply add up the number of lines of copy; they know how many lines they can read in the allotted time. Bill Diehl's ABC Entertainment newscasts have room for 3 minutes and 50 seconds of copy. Diehl reads one line in 4 seconds, so his copy plus tapes should be 58 lines long to fill the show. Diehl records the number of lines in each story, instead of the time in seconds. If he is running long, he eliminates a story or trims some lines. This story started out more than 16 seconds long:

Several suspects are being questioned by French police in connection with yesterday's terrorist bombing that caused heavy damage at the Palace of Versailles outside Paris. The chief curator at Versailles says the damage can be repaired in two or three months.

*Bill Diehl, ABC*

Diehl's show was overstuffed, so he cut the final sentence, trimming the length to 12 seconds.

Veteran writers, who have been writing the same newscast for years, can often gauge how much copy they have room for by staring at the script. Less experienced journalists should not attempt this trick. The penalties for an inaccurately timed newscast include having to rush through the final story, leaving out the last half of

the final story, or having to stretch 10 seconds of copy for the 20 seconds left until the network news starts.

Sometimes each block in a show must be timed separately. ABC gives its affiliates the option of selling a 30-second commercial during the newscast. Diehl has to write one block of stories exactly 30 seconds long—called "fill"—to cover that time for the stations that don't sell the space. There's no leeway on the length of that block; hundreds of stations cut out and in for exactly 30 seconds.

Newscasters may "backtime" sections of the newscast. For example, they might backtime the sports, weather and kicker—determining that they take 50 seconds total to read. If it's a 5-minute newscast that begins on the hour, the newscaster should be at 4 minutes, 10 seconds after, when the sports begins. With this knowledge the newscaster is aware of whether the show is running short or long, and can pull a story or slow down a bit to compensate. Backtiming permits double-checking in the studio.

The length of stories may also influence their position in the newscast. There may only be room for one 20-second story before the commercial; so a 30-second story, though it is more newsworthy, will have to be used later. And, that 40-second piece with an actuality may be too long to fit in the newscast at all.

Timing is one rule for ordering newscasts that is often inflexible.

## COMPLETING

The newswriter's rule: jump into a newscast, feature first. First a writer writes the light stories—the "bottom" of the newscast—then the hard news. This approach is safer because hard news stories have a way of changing. If they are written too early, they may have to be rewritten later. Also, since features require somewhat more originality, they're best written early—before the time pressure gets too intense.

Completing a newscast may mean writing

some stories of a different sort from those considered so far in this book. Sports, weather, financial and farm news are often placed at the "bottom" of the newscast. Completing the newscast also may require some finishing touches—final tasks needed to turn a series of stories into a newscast ready to be read on the air.

## 1. Rewrites

Listeners want news, not reruns. A story used in the previous newscast cannot be reused in the same form without boring everyone who has been listening since then. The easiest solution is to hold the story for another hour. Don't use it in this newscast; by the next newscast, those who are still listening will not remember the exact wording. Some stations let writers get away with this if the story isn't very important. If it is very newsworthy, it must be included for those listeners who were not listening an hour ago; and the story must be rewritten for those who were.

If there has been a new development on a story, the rewrite must emphasize that. But, even if events do not change, the story must.

The first time through the writer presumably chose the most powerful angle. What's left for a rewrite? Sometimes there is another equally valid approach to the story hiding in the source material.

In Virginia, Governor Mill Godwin is tackling the problem of aiding drought-ravaged portions of the state. Farmers there have complained of barren fields and a lack of hay to feed their cattle. Godwin is appointing a water-supply task force to work on the problem...and he says state funds might be used to purchase feed and sell it to farmers below market value. Three localities, including Fairfax County, have asked for the power to impose local water emergency plans.

*WMAL, Washington, D.C., 3:30 p.m.*

The version of this story used on the next newscast takes a slightly different tack and brings in some new facts:

Worsening drought conditions in Virginia have prompted Governor Mill Godwin to name a water-supply task force...The Shenandoah Valley and central Virginia are the hardest hit areas...with farmers now saying they're having to sell off cattle because they can't get the hay to feed the herds this winter...Godwin says state funds might be used to purchase feed for re-sale to farmers at below market cost.

*WMAL, Washington, D.C., 4:30 p.m.*

When there are fewer facts to choose from, and really only one possible angle, writers just use fresh sentences to say the same thing:

The woman from Winona who helped Donald Howard escape from a county jail last year...will be eligible for parole in October.

The state parole board decided today to release 23-year-old Nancy Brown from the Sauk Centre Institute for Women in October. At that time she will have served six months of a three-year sentence. Howard is serving a life sentence in the Saint Cloud Reformatory for hiring another man to murder his wife.

*WCCO, Minneapolis, 11:55 p.m.*

Then, the same story half an hour later:

And...here is a prison story from Minnesota. The state parole board says Nancy Brown of Winona... the woman who helped Donald Howard escape from a county jail last year...can leave prison in October. She will have served six months of a three-year sentence. Howard's serving a life sentence for the murder of his wife.

*WCCO, Minneapolis, 12:30 p.m.*

Stories on succeeding newscasts don't have to be entirely different, but they must be reworked enough so that listeners don't experience *déjà vu*. There is always another way to write a story.

## 2. Tie-Ins

Even those of us with the shortest attention spans do not jump from one subject to another in conversation every 20 to 40 seconds; but newscasts have to move that quickly to cover the news. A device, borrowed from conversation, can make this skipping about seem less abrupt.

If we change subjects when talking to a friend, we usually ease the way with a phrase that leads from one topic to the next: "*Speaking of fires, did you see the pictures of that one in Detroit last night?*" That first phrase is called a "tie-in."

Tie-ins have the same function as the transitions used within stories (see Chapter 6, "Stories"), but on a different level. They ease the flow from one story to another:

While the drought is plaguing the West, too much water is playing havoc with the Mid-West.

*KPNW, Oregon*

There are two types of tie-ins:

**1. Related** This is the "speaking of . . ." kind of transition. It leads into a related story. Two stories on the Mideast might be bridged with one of these tie-ins:

In another Mid-East development...

The Mid-East was also the scene of...

Mid-East experts are also watching...

There's another story out of the Mid-East today...

Meanwhile, in Cairo...

Demonstrations also broke out in Lebanon...

Most of the work in related tie-ins is often done

by one of two words: *also* and *another*. KNX in Los Angeles did a story on the Korean bribery scandal, then began a story on allegations that Exxon had made illegal payments abroad with this phrase:

In another bribery case...

KOA in Denver followed a story about a mountain rescue with:

Another search is underway in the mountains west of Denver.

And, KFLA in Kansas, after a story about a fire on a farm:

Chet Molhagen is also worried about the effects of fire and other emergencies — Molhagen is the head of the Red Cross Emergency training class that will...

Transitions between stories should not be forced. It's better to have no tie-in at all than to try to relate basically unrelated stories. Loren Edward Tillett III, director of news at WROV in Virginia, reminds that the lack of rain in California and the price of vegetables, for example, are related; the city council and prostitution are not. "That drought will be felt at the supermarket" is okay as a tie-in; "Another group concerned with pleasing the public" is not.

**2. Switch** This kind of tie-in has a more difficult job. It bridges the deeper chasm between unrelated stories. Essentially a switch tie-in alerts listeners that the subject is changing.

Most switch tie-ins play upon geography. To go from a local story to something about the president's day, many stations use:

In Washington...

WSOY went in the opposite direction, from national to local news, with this transition phrase:

In news of this area...

Here are some more switch tie-ins:

Also in the news...  
Later this afternoon...  
Closer to home...  
Elsewhere...  
Over in Europe...  
But that was not the case for...  
In local news...  
Down in the state capital...

Switch tie-ins can be reserved for the most abrupt transitions in the newscasts—from local news to international news, for example, or from a murder to the weather. “In sports” and “Here’s a traffic update” are switch tie-ins.

It is possible to ease listeners into a story on a different subject without a formal tie-in. Many writers try to mention the location in the lead of the story to orient listeners. Some of Dallas Townsend’s leads on the CBS World News Round-Up:

Rhodesia this morning announced the end of its military operation in Mozambique.

The North-South Conference moves toward its end in Paris.

Still unresolved here in New York...

The place names in these leads warn us where we are going as we move around the world.

• • •

Most stories do not start with a tie-in. Otherwise the newscast would be a jumble of locations: “In Israel,” “In England,” “Back home,” and forced connections: “In another story involving a person . . .” A few tie-ins go a long way—the average 5-minute newscast might use one or two.

Following is the list of stories used in a 10-minute noon newscast on WRVA in Richmond, Virginia. When John Harding put together the newscast, he included the three tie-ins shown in italics:

1. VEPCO Attacked
2. Prisoner Walks
3. Body Murdered  
“*And . . . in another homicide case . . .*”
4. Matthews Arrest
5. Waste Disposal
6. Gov’s Letter
7. Transplant
8. Newhart Trial  
“*In Norfolk . . .*”
9. Water Spout
10. Elderly  
“*In Chesterfield . . .*”
11. Chesterfield Schools
12. Hanover Sewers
13. Henrico Manager
14. Army Exercise
15. Wild Ponies
16. Stocks
17. Weather

Another problem with tie-ins is that many have become clichés. Here are a few that should be left in peace:

In a lighter vein...  
In other news...  
On the home front...

When used, tie-ins usually go before the lead. If the writer knows in advance where the story will be placed, the tie-in can be written with the lead; otherwise, it can be added when the newscast is organized.

Writers have found other ways to tie together a newscast. On rare occasions a common theme can be found that unites some of the stories, and the writing can bring out this theme. Notice how news director John D. Watkins uses the words *still* and *continue* to connect the leads in this newscast:

The Pope still recuperating from a bout with the flu...

Former Attorney General John Mitchell still out of prison...

Coal miners still voting on the latest contract proposal...

Peacekeeping forces continue to move into Southern Lebanon...

KGO, San Francisco

This too helps smooth out a newscast.

### 3. Headlines *- think of newscast*

"Headlines" is a newspaper term that has found a place in some broadcast newscasts:

In the headlines...

A U-W regents committee directs the administration to devise a plan to get rid of stock holdings in companies doing business with South Africa...

The controversial right to privacy bill, passed by the assembly, is aired before a Senate committee this afternoon...

And, Assembly Democrats are coming closer to formulating that super amendment and a state budget bill...

WIBA, Wisconsin

Some stations use headlines like this to open a newscast. Some use a headline as a "bill-board"—a line before a commercial designed to encourage listeners to stay tuned:

Bye bye rebate...that story next.

KAKC, Oklahoma

There are two headline styles:

**1. Teases** A tease, like "Bye bye rebate," is supposed to intrigue listeners and keep them listening out of curiosity. Teases are short—designed to be catchy, not necessarily clear.

On this Wednesday morning...we'll look at how NASA plans to spend our money in space, the black market in babies...and what IS Billy Graham going to do with those 23-million

dollars? Those stereo news features upcoming.

WRVQ, Virginia

Teasing fits uncomfortably in broadcast journalism, which is supposed to be in the business of delivering. The danger here, as pointed out by Rick Barber of KWBZ in Colorado, lies in a tease like this: "Three dead, twelve injured . . . we'll be back after this message." You can only go so far in manipulating and confounding an audience.

**2. Self-sufficient** Don Schrack, news director at KFWB in Los Angeles, insists that headlines be complete; no teasing. Schrack believes listeners should be able to tune in, hear only the headline and get a basic understanding of the story.

Of course there is a limit to what can be said in one sentence. All headlines must be written concisely, but many news directors, like Schrack, demand that a headline, no matter how slim, be able to stand on its own:

Sandusky woman credited with saving local boy from drowning in swimming pool yesterday afternoon.

Sandusky Rotary Club inducts new officers in special ceremonies today.

WLEC, Ohio

Headlines are usually written in an abbreviated style, often employing technically incomplete sentences (see Chapter 4, "Sentences"):

A federal probe into murders at the Atlanta pen.

WSB, Atlanta

A headline certainly is no place for wordiness:

WEAK:

Sixth District Congressman Wyche Fowler says the Federal Bureau of Prisons is about to begin a thorough investigation of the Atlanta Federal

Penitentiary...scene of a rash of murders in recent months.

#### 4. Weather

This conversation was overheard in a park:

"What's the weather like?"

"I don't know; I haven't heard a radio."

Broadcast weather reports have taken over the job of keeping tabs on the troposphere from arthritic joints, knowledge of cloud formations and even our own senses. People have come to depend on radio to tell them what it's doing outside and what it's going to be doing. This is about as close as the news comes to predicting the future.

Interest in the weather varies by region: It is highest in farm areas—where there is money riding on it—and lowest in places like Southern California—where the weather often gets dull. Just about every radio station includes some weather news—mostly as part of newscasts.

On many stations the weather opens the show:

Clear skies and 79 degrees in Richmond at noon....This is John Harding reporting.

*WRVA, Virginia*

If the weather is making news it can force its way into the body of the show:

Mother Nature continued to vent her wrath today in south-central Texas, where 14 inches of rain pushed the Guadalupe and Medina Rivers over their banks for the second day in a row...

*WCAU, Philadelphia*

But normally, the weather resides at the back of the newscast:

This afternoon...partly sunny and not

quite so warm with widely scattered thunderstorms...high 92...Tonight and tomorrow...partly cloudy and a little cooler with chance of showers and thundershowers...low tonight 68...high tomorrow 85...Currently it's 98 degrees in Jackson...98 in Kalamazoo and in Battle Creek it's 90 degrees or 32 Celsius. -- I'm Scott Marshall, WKNR News.

*WKNR, Michigan*

Information on the weather can be garnered from the wires, including the National Weather Service wires if the station subscribes (see Chapter 7, "Sources"). The wires transmit forecasts and current statistics for each area in a region. Some stations listen to a weather radio frequency also provided by the National Weather Service; some subscribe to private weather forecasting services such as Accu-Weather in Pennsylvania; some get weather news by telephoning airport terminals; some use their own meteorological equipment; some employ their own meteorologist.

There is one other method for compiling weather information that should never be ignored. "You'd be surprised," notes David Heller of KLOS in Los Angeles, "how up to date your current weather information can be simply by looking out the window and walking outside every hour or so." This supplement to other sources can prevent that unfortunate situation where the newscaster is talking about partly sunny weather while listeners are watching rain.

Many stations use the same format for the weather in each newscast, so all the writer has to do is get the latest facts and plug them in:

Your Fourteen forecast...  
Sunny today...  
Partly cloudy tonight...  
Then, mostly cloudy tomorrow with a chance of light showers...  
Today's high -- 68...  
Overnight low -- 47...  
High tomorrow -- 65...  
Now sunny and 58 degrees.

*WSJM, Michigan*

These communicate the necessary information, but it's not a bad idea, if there's time, to go beyond lists of numbers and put the weather for an area into words:

Rain is in the forecast for most of us again today...A slight chance of sprinkles here in town, but a good chance outside, especially in the mountains and deserts. The Coachella Valley got about an inch and a half of rain yesterday, and several expensive homes were flooded. A lot of people were still digging out from the tropical storm that blew through here a couple of weeks ago. There's a flash-flood warning out for the desert areas today.

For the rest of us, it'll be cloudy and damp, with a high of around 75 or so. It's 70 right now in Los Angeles...Orange County has 73...The Valley trailing at 69 degrees. Light smog in the midst of it all.

*KLOS, Los Angeles*

A couple of pointers for writing weather copy: Fronts, barometers and the weather on the other side of the continent may be of some interest, but listeners are most concerned with whether they should wear a sweater and bring an umbrella. It's a mistake to stray too far from the chance of precipitation and the temperature.

With our present knowledge of the permutations of the atmosphere, five-day forecasts are not that far removed from five-day guesses. Listeners want to hear the odds on the weekend, but writers should not imbue long-range predictions with any more certitude than they deserve. "They're predicting rain this weekend." Not: "It will rain this weekend."

Finally, weather news should follow the rules for broadcast writing. There may be an excuse for tossing in a few extra numbers, but there is no excuse for unexplained technical terms or formal language.

**WEAK:**

Variable cloudiness tonight with a high probability of lingering precipitation.

**BETTER:**

Cloudy off and on tonight, with a few more showers likely.

*WTLB, New York*

And, watch meanings. For instance, a tornado *watch* means conditions are such that a tornado might occur. A tornado *warning* means there has already been a tornado in the area.

## 5. Sports

There are listeners who care more about the fortunes of the Cincinnati Reds than the Soviet Union; who are more interested in the pronouncements of Don Shula than of Tip O'Neill. Don't sneer; the motivations of sports fans and news fans are not all that different. Most stations make an effort to satisfy sports aficionados.

A few stations employ a special sports reporter; most assign sports to newswriters for inclusion in the newscast—usually near the end, where it's least likely to annoy the uninterested.

The sports news can be a sentence or two:

On the WABC scoreboard: The Mets are leading the Padres...two to nothing...after six in San Diego. The Yankees took the night off.

Or it can include longer items:

Chris Evert began defense of her women's title at Wimbledon today with an easy victory over Ruta Gerulaitis of the Indiana Loves. Other American winners included Rosey Casals, Joanne Russell and Julie Anthony. Jimmy Connors will play his first match of the tournament today. Connors has been seeded number one.

*WNDE, Indianapolis*

Sports information is available from the wires, including special sports wires (see Chapter 7, "Sources"), or it can be tracked down on the phone with calls to the team's public relations office or to the players themselves. The audio news services (see Chapter 7, "Sources") carry sports cuts, and reporters can liven up the sports news by obtaining their own actualities.

Producing a solid sports report takes enterprise; it also takes expertise. Neither a journalist's sex nor an antipathy for Howard Cosell is an excuse for ignorance. Sports news is important to enough people to be important enough for journalists to study.

Study sports? If that sounds like fun, it is probably not necessary. But prospective journalists who start concentrating on the traffic when their radios start emitting scores have some homework ahead of them. Newswriters have to know what Kareem Abdul Jabbar does for a living, how to transform goals into "hat tricks" and how to sound excited when writing of "sudden death." It may be necessary to start reading the sports pages and possibly to secure an apprenticeship with a friendly sports nut. They enjoy nothing more than initiating the innocent into the intricacies and lore of athletic contests.

The sports likely to turn up in newscasts have expanded beyond baseball, football and basketball to include hockey, soccer, track and field, golf, tennis, auto racing and horse racing. The final entry on that list is of particular importance in radio news. Followers of the "sport of kings" have been known to have more than a rooting interest in their favorites. Occasionally they make wagers on the outcome of equestrian events, which tend to increase their concern with the results. The spread of legal off-track betting has exaggerated this tendency. Racing fans, therefore, become loyal listeners of a station that regularly supplies the latest racing results. Forgetting to give the results of the eighth race can trigger more angry phone calls to the station than omitting the results of an election.

Writing sports copy can be pleasant. Free from the portentous and often tragic content of the

rest of the news, it's possible to have a little fun. Cleverness is allowed, if not required. A touch of subjectivity, such as a slight rooting interest in the home team, is occasionally appropriate. A more liberal use of slang and undefined terms is also permitted:

The Tigers take on Baltimore today... on the road. The Bird will try for his seventh in a row.

*WDEE, Detroit*

Bill Alford of KNOW in Texas points out that since sports news is targeted to a specific audience, there's less need to worry about background information. Those listeners who don't know who "the Bird" is probably won't care. Language should be clear enough for all sports fans to understand.

Otherwise all the rules of broadcast news writing apply. Obviously, numbers are a problem. "The most important thing is always the score," says Lynn Woolley of KRLD, Dallas. Scores mean masses of undigested numbers. Many stations stick to scores of interest to the hometown fans, plus any unusual performances. Howard Cosell, in his ABC radio sports shows, only lists the winners—"Atlanta, Los Angeles, Oakland . . ." But other stations run through the whole list of scores on the theory that listeners can pick out any scores in which they are interested and ignore the rest.

Blender manufacturers anxious to add new buttons to their machines were faced with the necessity of devising countless variations on the words "blend" and "chop": "mince," "grate," "grind," "liquefy," etc. Sports writers are faced with a similar problem, and their solution is similar. How many ways can you say that one team has defeated another? After exhausting "team A over team B" and "team A tops team B," many resort to "edged," "downed," "dumped"; then soon "slammed," "crushed," "bombed," "smashed," "clobbered," "whipped," "slaughtered," "wiped out," "annihilated." What about "grated" and "liquefied?"—even tennis can become a violent sport.



The sports director of WSB, Atlanta, covers a race from a mobile radio unit. (*WSB, Atlanta*)

Action verbs are nice, but it's wise to stay away from the more sadistic. Even in the heat of the playoffs, they sound rather silly.

Another pitfall in sports writing is the cliché. Baseball alone may have spawned more expressions than any other human activity save war and sex. It's a "game of inches," where the "batter steps into the box," "waits as the pitcher eyes the runner, then delivers," and with "one swing of the bat, sends the game into extra innings." This language has its charm, but it's a quality best appreciated after a few beers in the grandstand, not at the end of a radio newscast. Be inventive! Play with the clichés:

It's wait till next year for the American League. It's been wait till next year for six years in a row...and 14 of the last 15 all-star games. It happened quickly last night in New York. The National

League scored four runs in the first inning...and won seven to five.

*WMAL, Washington, D.C.*

## 6. Traffic

Radio gets its largest audiences during the morning and evening "drive times"—rush hours—which gives a good idea of where most of radio's listeners are. Until people figure out how to read a newspaper or watch television while driving, drivers will remain radio's primary audience.

It didn't take news directors long to realize that among the most useful information a person fighting rush-hour traffic can receive is information on how to sneak around that traffic. Almost all stations in areas large enough to have traffic try to say something about it, usually in their news broadcasts.

In large cities, where drivers spend an hour or two a day changing lanes and breathing exhaust, traffic reports are staples of newscasts. These reports usually include information on commuter bus and railway lines. You can't listen to the radio on a train, but you can tune in before you leave to check on how things are running. And, your wife or husband can tune in to check out your excuse if you're late.

The problem is how to find out what traffic is doing. This is the one area in which the wires are no help. Traffic changes too rapidly for even the wires to be able to keep up with any but the most serious tie-ups. No station can afford to place a reporter at all key intersections and bus depots. Some find traffic news important enough, however, to employ a helicopter to fly over the major arteries, surveying patterns and offering tips.

The vast majority of stations, lacking helicopters, are forced to scrounge. Bits of traffic news can be gleaned from the police and police radio—often the AAA helps. News of major problems on bridges, railroads and bus lines is provided by the authorities that run them. They must be called regularly, but these people have a natural tendency to downplay their own prob-

lems. A half-hour delay may be labeled "10 minutes" or ignored completely. Tips also help. And WBBM in Chicago has a simple method of getting traffic news: A traffic reporter covers the city from their studios . . . on the 102nd-floor Skydeck of the Sears Tower.

Many stations "borrow" traffic news from other stations—stations that have helicopters, for example. This is stealing and is unethical and probably illegal.

Traffic reports are difficult to verify and tough to get, but as part of the newscast, they should be treated diligently. Incorrect information still hurts a station's reputation. A scoop on a backed up road is a substantial scoop. An extra phone call often pays off in traffic reporting.

There is little room for "great" writing; most traffic news is straightforward:

The Fort Worth police department is advising motorists who normally take the North Freeway to avoid a portion of the road between Belknap and Northside Drive. The north-bound lanes are impassable thanks to a hole in the Trinity River Bridge. They'll be closed to traffic until nine o'clock tonight.

*KFJZ, Texas*

But, as in any other writing, it is still better to make the facts real rather than just listing them.

WEAK:

The West Side Highway is tied up to 96th Street. The F-D-R Drive is clear all the way to the bridge.

BETTER:

The F-D-R Drive looks like the better route out of town tonight. It's clear all the way to the bridge, while the West Side Highway is slow going up to 96th Street.

## 7. Financial and Farm

Some more numbers that some listeners wait for at the end of the newscast are the Dow Jones average, closing stock prices, the price of gold, the price being offered for soy beans at the local grain market and Midwestern hog prices. Most such financial or farm facts are available from the wires, including the special business and financial wires and farm wires (see Chapter 7, "Sources"). The prices being paid for farm products at local markets can be obtained with a phone call. Most stations know where and when to call. Here's a farm report put together through a call to a local market:

Midwestern hog prices are steady to mostly 50 cents lower

Southeast Virginia hog markets are 50 cents lower  
at 40 to 42

Virginia broiler prices are Steady  
at 43 to 44 cents

Midwestern cattle prices....

choice steers are 39 and a half to 41 and a half

choice heifers 38 to 39 cents

Opening prices on the Richmond grain market....

number two red winter wheat two dollars and five cents  
number two yellow shelled corn one, 90  
number one soybeans six, eleven  
barley one dollar and 55 cents

WRVA, Virginia

Many listeners don't own stocks; many don't care about the price of "broilers" (chickens); but many stations find that they benefit by catering to those who do care. Financial and farm reports can capture listeners.

One problem in writing these reports is, again, numbers. Lists are unavoidable, but when possible, writers should step back from the decimal points and explain, for instance, what the gross national product means. Here is a stock market report that accompanies the numbers with some words:

The stock market has jumped ahead on near record trading volume today after yesterday's close at the highest level in nine months.

*Peter Maer, Mutual*

Both financial and farm news must be localized. If there is a General Motors plant in town, a GM earnings report deserves extra attention. If the local farmers plant lots of beets, beet prices must be emphasized.

Financial and farm stories each have their own vocabularies which reporters must understand and translate. All journalists should be able to handle basics such as the gross national product or wholesale price index. A local professor or a textbook can provide instruction if necessary. And, reporters in farm areas should talk to some farmers or agriculture professors if they think "futures" are just what promising students have. ("Futures" are shares in commodities purchased and traded before they are ready to be delivered.)

## 8. The Open and Close

Newscasts have been known to begin with anything from the sound of fire alarms to a prayer. The networks, however, don't waste much time on an opening:

NBC Radio News...I'm Steve Porter.

Mutual doesn't even identify the newscaster or the show until just before the first commercial.

Some stations sell newscasts to single sponsors, so they want to mention the sponsor's name in their opening. This is read by an announcer:

It's time now for the 6:30 edition of WWSR Local News and Sports, sponsored today by \_\_\_\_\_. Now, here with the news is \_\_\_\_\_.  
*WWSR, Vermont*

And, some stations make quite a production out of it:

(play WRKD news theme)

This is WRKD radio Sunday Morning News; a summary of news from around the state of Maine and the world of sports, plus the weather forecast for this area.

*WRKD, Maine*

Closes usually reflect the opening. NBC is equally succinct at the end:

Steve Porter, NBC News.

Mutual still doesn't say anything. WWSR mentions the sponsor again:

You've just heard \_\_\_\_\_ with the six thirty edition of WWSR Local News and Sports, sponsored by \_\_\_\_\_.

and WRKD:

(play WRKD news theme)

You have been listening to WRKD radio news...the latest news of Maine,

sports news, plus the weather forecast...from the wires of United Press International and the WRKD newsroom.

Such formats may or may not strike listeners' fancies. All that's needed for clarity is that at some point in the newscast the station and the newscaster are identified. The opening and the closing lines provide excellent opportunities to take care of that obligation.

## SUMMARY

---

Before the news is allowed on the air it should be carefully organized, with stories in a logical and comfortable arrangement, and should be com-

plete. In some areas, listeners may need the current humidity or the latest price of hogs to feel fully informed.

## PRACTICE ASSIGNMENTS

---

A. Order the following stories for the 11 a.m. newscast.

- 7 1. Labor Department announced this morning that unemployment increased four tenths of one percent last month. **5**
- 6 2. Twin seals born in local zoo this morning. **4 9 3**
- 6 3. Suspect in last week's murder of a five-year-old boy arrested last night. **3**
- 9 4. Teachers' strike here in 4th day—still no talks; *with actuality.* **7**
- 6 5. Opening of new Woolworth's downtown store scheduled for tomorrow. **2 8**
- 4 6. General Assembly approved resolution condemning Israel last night. **1**
- 8 7. Local sales tax to be voted on by City Council this afternoon; *with actuality.* **10**
- 5 8. Japan agreed this morning to new trade pact with the United States. **2**
- 7 9. Auto workers will walk out at noon today unless contract is signed. **4**
- 2 10. Sports. **10**
- 13 11. Weather. **11**

1 1. Auto workers walk out.

2 2. City Council votes down local sales tax, five to four, for second time this year; the mayor is angry; *with actuality.*

3 3. President of teachers' union requests mediation; *with actuality.*

C. Order these stories for the 4 p.m. newscast.

1. Department of Health and Welfare reaffirms ban on Medicaid abortions this afternoon.
2. Flash flood warning in effect today and tonight for area.
3. Chamber of commerce picnic today cancelled due to flash flood warning.
4. Two local teenagers arrested on drug charges this afternoon.
5. State legislature passes anti-busing bill this afternoon; governor vows to veto; *with actuality.*
6. President announces today he will deliver new energy message at end of week.
7. Bomb kills two in Rome department store this morning; Red Brigade claims responsibility.
8. Study released this morning says town has lost

---

## PRACTICE ASSIGNMENTS

- 2-thousand, 400 jobs this year, mainly due to closing of local GE plant; *with voicer*.
9. Pope announces today a 10-day tour of France, Belgium, Portugal and Spain.
  10. Dow Jones index rises two points in anticipation of president's energy message.
  11. National Institute on Health says this morning that common food dye linked to cancer.
  12. Weather
  13. Sports
- D. Order these stories for the 3:30 p.m. newscast.
1. Local residential fire this afternoon . . . causes, injuries unknown; *with voicer*.
  2. Mayor announces hearings on controversial school construction contract; *with actuality*.
  3. Consumer price index rises two percent last month, announcement this morning.
  4. Oil companies release 3rd quarter profits today; almost all show gain of at least 30 percent.
  5. Local woman indicted this morning in check-cashing conspiracy.
  6. Italian Parliament elections held today; Communists expected to gain.
  7. SALT hearings continue in Washington.
  8. Iran announces ouster of two British newsmen today.
  9. First woman judge appointed to State Supreme Court this afternoon; *with voicer*.
  10. Stocks
  11. Weather
  12. Sports

# 14

---

## RADIO

One of the first experiments in transmitting the human voice through the air was a newscast, Lee De Forest's broadcast in New York City of the 1916 presidential election results. Unfortunately, if this was the birth of radio journalism, the profession got off to a bad start. De Forest mistakenly announced that Charles Evans Hughes had been elected.

The first broadcast by a commercial radio station, KDKA in Pittsburgh, was a news broadcast—also presidential election results, the election of 1920. This time they got the results right.

Radio and radio news moved into living rooms together. After a long but eventually successful battle with newspapers for the right to use the wire services, radio news established itself as the most sprightly news source, as radio was establishing itself as the country's dominant medium.

About 20 million people heard the name of the winner of the 1924 presidential election on their radios, before they read it in a newspaper. Only about 500 had been listening to KDKA four years earlier. Charles Lindbergh's flight across the Atlantic in 1927 and the kidnapping of his

baby in 1932 provided radio with further opportunities to show off its speed and ability to dominate the coverage of breaking events.

But the most striking exhibition of the power of radio came on December 7, 1941, with these words from CBS newsman John Daly: "The Japanese have attacked Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, by air. . . ." \* That news broke on a Sunday afternoon. Since there are no Sunday afternoon newspapers, Americans spent the remainder of the afternoon and evening by their radios, and radio stayed on top of the story.

If the Spanish-American War and World War I were newspaper wars, and Vietnam a television war, World War II certainly belonged to radio. Newspapers, and even newsreels, could not match the drama of Edward R. Murrow's voice describing the German bombing of London:

The fires up the river had turned the moon blood-red. The smoke had drifted down till it formed a canopy over the Thames. The guns were working all around

---

\* Robert Metz, *CBS: Reflections in a Bloodshot Eye* (New York: Signet, 1975), p. 99.

us, the bursts looking like fireflies on a southern summer night.\*

After the war, the era of families gathering around the radio ended as it had begun—with the introduction of a new medium. Television stole radio's variety shows, soap operas, comedies, dramas, game shows and much of its audience; but radio kept the news.

## PROGRAMMING

According to the Federal Communications Commission, there are more than 4,500 AM and more than 4,000 FM stations in the United States. They all carry some news and public affairs; almost all feature regular newscasts. Why?

There are two factors that keep the news on the radio: First, it's something radio does well. While they are not necessarily expensive to produce, hourly news reports satisfy the listeners' desire to keep up with global events as well as developments that may affect them at home. Since the cost of producing television newscasts is significantly higher, television can't compete with the frequency of radio news broadcasts.

The second factor that keeps the news on the radio is the FCC (see Chapter 9, "Ethics and Law"). The FCC has the power to license broadcast stations. Every license must be renewed every three years, and the FCC has made it clear that the amount of news and public affairs programming is one of the criteria it uses when deciding if a station meets the public interest needs and desires of the community in which the station is located. A license to broadcast is a valuable commodity. Few stations would jeopardize it by denying their community news.

Important as it is, radio news still is second in importance on most radio stations. Though about 100 (AM and FM) have all-news formats and another 250 or so feature information, all

the rest of the nation's radio stations attract listeners primarily with some other form of programming.

### 1. Formats

Television kicked radio out of the living room and exiled it to the bedroom, kitchen and car. New formats were necessary to survive in these new surroundings, formats that emphasized what radio could do better than TV; in most cases that turned out to be playing records. Records are cheap and fairly safe from televised competition—turntables make boring visuals.

This list of the ten most-listened-to formats in the largest radio markets, from *Broadcasting Magazine*, shows how recorded music dominates the radio dial:

1. Contemporary music/Top 40
2. Middle-of-the-road music
3. "Good" music
4. Album-oriented rock
5. Country music
6. All-news
7. Black music
8. Talk
9. Classical music
10. Oldies music

With the exception of format 6, and possibly 8, on this list, the news is an interruption. Therefore, many newsrooms are conscious of the need for the news to complement their stations' formats—to make the jump from music to news as smooth as possible. Of course, this does not mean that contemporary stations stick to news about the Bee Gees or that classical stations include items about the 19th century. News is still news, and no adjustment to a format is going to turn it into music.

But newsrooms *have* found less direct ways of reflecting their stations' formats. Top 40 stations, for example, make an attempt to copy the tempo of their music—snappy and fast—in their newscasts. The news director of KWEB, Minnesota, Brad Larson, explains: "Ours is an up-tempo,

\*Metz, p. 96.

contemporary music station, and we design our newscasts to be up-beat and current. Newscasts are short and to the point." This might mean stories that are only 15 or 20 seconds long and newscasters who read at a slightly faster pace. John Erickson, a news director in Portland, Oregon, puts it succinctly: "KGW is a rocker, and we keep the tempo up."

The writing on a rock station also tends to be more dramatic and colorful:

A fiery accident involving a sports car and an Amtrak turbo-liner has claimed the lives of two I-S-U students.

*WBNQ, Illinois*

A classical music station, on the other hand, might go in the opposite direction and make its stories somewhat longer and less hectic. Classical stations also tend to avoid flip phrases like these used by a Top 40 station:

Commuters get socked with a big increase in train fares...The latest round of violence in Lebanon has the White House keeping quiet...and has given the Kremlin a red face.

*WABC, New York City*

A classical station strikes a straightforward, sober note:

A group of former mental patients has released a previously unpublished state report...detailing charges of beatings, contraband and deaths at the Fairview state hospital. The group opposes involuntary psychiatric treatment...and wants the state to close this hospital for the criminally insane.

*WFLN, Philadelphia*

Most news directors are conscious of who listens to their station and are conscientious about providing information of value to them. Peter Tonks, news director of WWLE, a middle-of-

the-road station in New York State, says, "Our target audience is 40-plus in age; therefore we attempt to gear our news reports to subjects and information of interest to an older, often retired audience." Tonks looks for health-care stories and may use a story about Social Security that other stations in the area would pass up.

Perhaps the most dramatic instances of news tailored to an audience can be found on progressive rock stations. Vicky Cunningham, news director of a station in Marin County, a suburb of San Francisco, states their credo: "KTIM-FM is a progressive rock station. Listeners are interested in what usually interests people in the 18-34 age group: drugs, sex, liberation movements, government bungling and corruption." Her view of the interests of young adults may seem limited, but the idea of emphasizing youth-oriented news is fair enough.

Progressive rock stations may also tamper extensively with the style of their news; stories tend to be longer and more folksy, using much slang. The first person sometimes appears. For example, KTIM-FM devoted a minute and a half at the top of a newscast to efforts to legalize cocaine:

Well, the report I received over the wire indicates that today's study may be leading up to a reclassification of coke...

KWSO in California is a religious station, and they too let their format affect their news. News director Gary Hurley says he focuses on information his listeners would like to hear and leaves the "gore and smut" to others. If the station felt called upon to report a story about a rape, Hurley says his station would substitute the word "assault."

Here we're beginning to run afoul of basic journalistic principles. KTIM-FM virtually advocates the legalization of cocaine; KWSO hides facts so as not to offend its listeners. Fitting the news to the format should not require suspending the rules of objectivity. In any case, some news directors will have none of it. They refuse

to make any concessions to whatever is filling the time between newscasts. The news is the news, they maintain, and should be done properly.

## 2. Competition

The product that commercial radio stations market is listeners. Essentially they are selling their listeners' ears to advertisers. The more ears they attract, the more they can charge for spots. The age of those ears is also important. As a rule, young people buy more than older people. Statistics about listeners are called "demographics."

The number of pairs of ears listening to a radio station and the demographics are estimated by rating services. One company, Arbitron, handles most of the business. Ratings equal money. The highest rated station in the country (at this writing WBLS, an FM disco station in New York City) can, theoretically, charge the most for commercial time.

To boost ratings, station managers have been known to do everything from switching formats—say from classical music to quadraphonic rock—to giving away huge prizes to people who answer their phones with the station's call letters. On the air personalities are routinely sacrificed to the ratings; consultants are hired; new call letters sometimes selected and then displayed in skywriting over the beaches. Disk jockeys broadcast for days straight or do their shows from a lion's cage. This is a competitive business, and the news is not above the competition.

There is something unhealthy and something healthy for the news in this ratings fever. In the face of a raft of recent research showing that even music listeners expect and appreciate regular news broadcasts, many station managers remain convinced that listeners will push another button on their car radios when the news comes on. This attitude leads to games such as broadcasting the news 5 minutes earlier than the competition so that if listeners change stations when we do the news and then change again when

they do it, we'll have them for 55 minutes; they'll have the listeners for only 5.

This attitude toward the news leaves news directors on the defensive and vulnerable to cuts in time and personnel. Some stations have cut their newscasts to the minimum the FCC will let them get away with. It may take a storm or a blackout to remind all concerned of the significance of the news's place in radio programming.

On the other hand, competition for listeners is what keeps radio journalists on their toes. Digging up a scoop, "scoring a beat"—getting a story first—can win people over. Listeners become aware of which station is on top of the news. Competition for listeners can help keep newsrooms alert.

## STRUCTURE

A radio station with a view of Manhattan's East Side looks for different things in the news than a station that looks out on Iowa cornfields. To understand radio news it is important to understand how the size of a radio station, usually measured by its potential audience, affects the news it carries.

But an investigation of radio news would also be incomplete without considering one thing that a station on the Skydeck of the world's tallest building and one in Kodiak, Alaska, have in common: network affiliation. Of the more than 8,000 radio stations in the country more than 4,600 are affiliated with one of the national networks.

### 1. Markets

These three different newsrooms are not typical, but they are representative of the difference size makes in radio news:

**1. Small** KOEL's offices sit between a park the station's editorials helped build and acres of corn and soybeans. Oelwein's small downtown area is just down the road.

A majority of the radio stations in this country operate in small towns like Oelwein, Iowa (population 7,800); towns small enough so that a good portion of the station's listeners have at one time or another exchanged pleasantries with every person mentioned in a news story; small enough so that a fender-bender on South Frederick Street can be the station's lead story because many of the station's listeners will either have seen the sheriff's car zip by or will be driving down South Frederick themselves sometime that day. There aren't many murderers, world leaders or movie stars passing through, but there is still plenty of important news. People in these towns rely on their radios to tell them whether the school board has decided to build a new high school, what the markets are paying for soybeans this morning and whether rain is going to force them to get the crops in fast. News in a small town is measured more by effect than by interest.

These are called "small market" radio stations because the audience they offer to advertisers is small. Generally any area smaller than the metropolitan areas with the 100 largest populations is considered a small market. The neighboring towns of Waco and Temple, Texas, are together labeled a small market, as is Bakersfield, California, or Americus, Georgia. Because these stations sell advertisers the smallest audiences, they charge the lowest rates—often under ten dollars to play a 30-second spot 12 times. In big cities that same spot could cost hundreds of dollars.

Small market stations take in less money, so they have less money to spend on news staff. Often disk jockeys themselves move over to the typewriter and the teletype to put together a newscast. Stations that can afford a news director may expect that person to double as a record spinner.

Even when a small station can hire full-time news people, there's no room for specialists who can write the news but not report it on the air or who have a great voice without the ability to write a lead-in or work the audio board. If a

small station has a news staff, the people on it must be versatile.

The news on KOEL in Oelwein? A robbery at gunpoint in a store in a nearby town is news as is a plan introduced at a council meeting to turn an old school building into a health clinic, or two people hospitalized after a car accident or someone's plan to challenge a speeding ticket in court. Almost anything exceptional that happens to the area's citizens is news on KOEL.

KOEL's news director, Dick Petrik, believes in getting as many names on the air as possible. The station broadcasts death notices from local funeral homes, and someone phones the local hospitals to put together special reports on patients. In a small market, listeners know many of those names.

Petrik looks through a pile of stories from last night's newscasts for anything that is still timely or could be updated. He finds an item about a local man injured in an automobile accident. A quick call to the hospital; Petrik gets the man's condition and in a few moments has written up a second-day story. Soon he's back on the phone dialing one of the many people he'll check with during the morning. "Got anything good, bad or indifferent for me?" Petrik asks.

**2. Medium** In the middle of the newsroom at WRVA in Richmond, Virginia, are a large desk, a typewriter and a board covered with so many tape recorders, switches, blinking lights and dials, that the news director himself says he isn't sure how to work all of them. Five different police and fire radio frequencies are constantly monitored here. Tapes are recorded on two reel-to-reel recorders, then edited and transferred to carts. Reports are received from a two-way radio system, direct lines to the State Capitol and City Hall and five regular telephone lines. One of these lines was used to patch in reporter Dave Miller's conversations with a sniper who eventually shot himself. (This is the incident illustrated in the photograph on page 3.)



John Harding, WRVA, Richmond, at the typewriter, works on a newscast. Two reporters assist him.

Sitting at a desk in front of this electronic display is the editor on duty, John Harding. Right now all this gadgetry isn't doing Harding any good. He has a 10-minute newscast to do in less than an hour and not enough fresh news to fill it.

Harding has the misfortune of working the morning shift in what is generally considered to be an "afternoon news town." All morning WRVA has been leading with a story on a heart transplant at a local hospital—but it's the third transplant this week, and the novelty had worn off the story even before it was broadcast over and over this morning.

Reports on the police radio of car thefts and minor accidents continue to interrupt Harding's thoughts. But these stories are not significant enough to be news in an area this size where few listeners are likely to know any of the people involved.

Richmond is considered a "medium market." With its suburbs, it has the 45th largest population of any metropolitan area in the country. The 30th to the 100th largest metropolitan areas are

generally labeled medium markets. Salt Lake City is one, as are Green Bay and Peoria.

WRVA has three women and five men hired to fill their newscasts with stories more newsworthy than minor accidents. The entire news staff can write, report and read the news on the air. At this moment, one reporter is covering a hearing on teacher certification at the State Capitol; another is at a hearing on waste disposal at City Hall; a third reporter is with Harding in the newsroom, using the phone and preparing copy for later newscasts.

Harding doesn't have much news worthy of a medium-market station until he hears a report on the police radio about a suspect mistakenly released from jail—that's news. Then, he finds out police have a new theory about a body that was fished from the James River a couple of days ago. They are now calling it a homicide—that's news. Harding's newscast is beginning to fall into place. He needs murders and escapes, not robberies and accidents, to interest his listeners.

Other stories he uses this hour: a former home

for the elderly is being turned into an apartment complex; a new elementary school gets the okay in a Richmond suburb; another suburb postpones discussion of a county sewer plan.

Minutes before Harding goes on the air, reporter Dave Miller at the State Capitol phones in a story about an attack by a candidate for governor on the state's power company (see page 2). "There's nobody alive who isn't interested in electric rates!" Harding exclaims. That's news. That's also the hour's lead story on WRVA.

**3. Large** Almost one out of every ten people who listen to radio in the United States tunes to a New York City station. This is the largest of the large markets. Here names don't attract listeners; people barely know their neighbors, let alone some guy who smashed his car in Queens. Robberies of grocery stores do not make news here; murders have to be creative to get coverage. New suburban elementary schools and sewer plans are usually ignored—unless someone has organized a demonstration.

The "large markets" are the 30 largest metropolises in the country. These are the cities with major league sports teams. Los Angeles is second largest, Chicago third, Philadelphia fourth. Hundreds of thousands of people may hear a spot broadcast on a station in one of these cities. Advertisers have to pay for all those potential customers.

If New York City listeners tune to WCBS-AM, they hear news—that is all the station broadcasts. WCBS is one of two stations in the city, and about 100 in the country, that broadcast all-news. Even in a town that's filled with spicy events, like New York, all-news is a hungry business. Instead of having to put together a newscast that lasts 5 or 10 or even 20 minutes, WCBS's staff has to fill the whole hour with news, and as soon as that's done, there's the next hour to fill.

The person responsible for filling two of the most important of these hours is staring at the wire copy on her desk. Associate Producer Liz Shanov writes and orders the news that is broad-

cast from 5 to 7 p.m.—most of the evening drive time. (It can take quite some time for New Yorkers to drive home.)

Actually Liz Shanov will end up writing only 30 minutes of copy herself. The rest of her two hours of news will be filled with reports produced by one of the largest radio news organizations in the world, supported by the money advertisers are willing to pay for all those listeners. Of course not every New York City station makes a big production out of the news. Some make do with a news staff of two or three. All-news is the most expensive radio format, however, and WCBS does not stint on staff or resources.

Three reporters are now out in the field collecting the evening's news. Another reporter in a "tape operations room" is recording phoners. The editorial director is recording opinions next door. A helicopter pilot/reporter is getting ready to follow the evening's traffic jams. A traffic reporter in the newsroom is on the phone with the police. A business expert at *Business Week* magazine is preparing a report on the gross national product. A sports reporter is next to a radio, listening to an afternoon game on another station. A meteorologist is studying the dials in a weather center the station built in his home. Other CBS-owned stations are phoning in stories they think New York may be able to use. And of course, the CBS network is preparing to feed national and international news on the hour, plus sports and a separate tennis report.

Besides Shanov, two other people in the newsroom are now writing copy for earlier or later hours. Two desk assistants are collecting news on the phone or ripping it off the wires. And all this activity is being coordinated by an executive producer sitting at a desk at one end of the WCBS newsroom. At the other end is the studio where two of WCBS's least formal newscasters are going on the air: "Good afternoon. I'm Pat Parson with Ben Farnsworth. When the temperature's higher than my golf score, I know it's getting hot."

Shanov begins choosing news with a stop at the executive producer's desk. All the material

that has come into the newsroom that day is either sitting on that desk or in his wastepaper basket. For instance, it's the executive producer who decides that a murder at a bar is not of much interest to the listeners—there are a few murders most days in New York City. But, the executive producer decides to save a story off the wires about the strange death of 60 ducks on Long Island.

There are whole wires in the major markets devoted just to local news (see Chapter 7, "Sources"). More copy ends up in the executive producer's wastepaper basket than on his desk.

The news in New York that day? Finger-pointing following a recent power blackout; the cousin of the late mob leader Carlo Gambino sentenced to jail; sewage washing up on five Long Island beaches. Shanov says: "These beaches are immediately to the west of Jones Beach, where everybody goes to escape the heat. That's what makes this a much bigger story." Not that every story she uses is crucial. There's room for a kicker on a PR stunt that went bad:

That giant salad they were supposed to make in a 24-foot-wide swimming pool in Albany...ended up as a big wilt...

*Liz Shanov, WCBS*

A WCBS reporter is with the Israeli prime minister, who is visiting the city, but the reporter's first report notes that there is only one small group of demonstrators there. Shanov decides not to use the story again in her second hour. There's too much else going on in New York this evening.

## 2. Networks

The first of the major radio networks, the National Broadcasting Company, was formed in 1926. By 1927 NBC was operating two networks, dubbed the Red and Blue networks. The Columbia Phonograph Broadcasting System limped onto the scene in 1927 and soon

dropped the word "phonograph" from its name when it lost its first backer, the Columbia Phonograph Record Company. CBS struggled for equality with NBC throughout the 1930s.

In 1941 the FCC ordered NBC to get rid of one of its two networks. The idea was to weaken the overwhelming dominance of NBC, but the FCC ruling had implications that went well beyond that. The ruling forbade a network from broadcasting more than one program at a time. NBC sold its Blue network, and it became the American Broadcasting Company. Twenty-five years later, when ABC decided to set up four different radio networks, it was still limited by the ruling to which it owed its birth: all four had to broadcast at different times.

Before television, the radio networks broadcast news and entertainment programs that are similar to what the television networks show today. When television moved in, the radio networks were left primarily with news.

Local radio stations needed the networks to bring them stars such as Jack Benny and Bing Crosby, but they didn't need networks to provide disk jockeys and records. So, most radio programming started being produced locally, with that one exception—news.

A local radio station still could not afford to hire a London or Washington correspondent. The wire services provided the information but not the expert correspondents and sound: "From where I stand on the battlefield, you can hear the guns." The networks were still needed for national and international news. For a time they broadcast one type of program exclusively—hourly newscasts.

Four networks have survived the big-time radio era: NBC, CBS, ABC and the Mutual Broadcasting System. Each has a series of affiliates in cities and towns across the country. The networks are allowed to own no more than seven AM and seven FM stations. CBS owns KNX in Los Angeles and WCBS in New York, but it doesn't own KOIN in Portland, Oregon. Instead they have a contractual arrangement. KOIN has exclusive rights to CBS shows in its

broadcast area, and CBS pays KOIN to carry its shows. CBS pays because it uses KOIN listeners to enlarge the audience for the commercials in CBS programs.

The network-affiliate relationship doesn't only work one way. Networks rely on their affiliates to cover breaking stories in their areas, and career-minded reporters take advantage of these opportunities to get their reports on a network.

This arrangement between networks and stations has not changed much. But, as marketing techniques have become more sophisticated and new types of programming have developed, the services provided by the networks have multiplied, with the most dramatic developments at ABC.

**1. ABC** In 1968 ABC decided that four networks were better than one. First of all, this allowed ABC to have more than one affiliate in an area. For instance, ABC now has four affiliates in Chicago: WLS, WDAI, WJJD and WVON.

The four networks each have their own identities: The American Contemporary Radio Network is aimed at a "teeny bopper," Top 40 rock and roll audience; WABC in New York City and WIXY in Cleveland carry ABC Contemporary. Its newscasts are broadcast at 5½ minutes before the hour. While these newscasts cover the top stories of the day, the writers always look for youth-oriented angles and stories. When the rock group Fleetwood Mac toured Russia, ABC hired a satellite to use in coverage of the tour... primarily to feed this network.

The writing on ABC Contemporary tends to be short, fast-paced, action-oriented; in other words, it is in the style attributed earlier in this chapter to contemporary stations. Here is ABC Contemporary's lead-in to a voicer on an upcoming Supreme Court decision:

One of the hottest potatoes to be handled by the Supreme Court in recent years is the Alan Bakke Case...Bakke filed a reverse

discrimination suit last year after being turned down for entrance to a California medical school because of a minority quota. In Washington, we asked ABC's Tim O'Brien what's been holding up the ruling...

And the ABC Contemporary newscasters read this copy fast and lively.

A major concern of ABC's American FM Radio Network is sound. Its affiliates, all FM stations, many stereo, broadcast a higher quality sound; so ABC-FM uses a special high-fidelity microphone and less tape—too often carts are of less than perfect sound quality.

ABC-FM network is carried by progressive, album-oriented, rock stations like WPLJ in New York City or KLOS in Los Angeles. Its primary audience: "18-34, college-educated, urban, sophisticated, intellectual, lightly counter-culture"—this is how the listeners are described by ABC executives. ABC writers are wary of these people's cynicism and therefore hesitant to stretch for phony-sounding connections and angles. They look for trend stories, stories on ecology, energy. Unemployment among college graduates is an obvious story for ABC-FM.

The writing and the announcing are "mellow," "laid back," knowing and informal. ABC-FM's version of the lead-in to the voicer on the Bakke decision:

You may or may not have been on pins and needles waiting for a decision by the Supreme Court in the reverse-discrimination case of Alan Bakke...but ABC's Tim O'Brien tells us it's on its way...this week...

American-FM newscasts are broadcast at a quarter after the hour.

The American Entertainment Radio Network is designed for country and western or middle-of-the-road music stations: WSMB in New Orleans, WPEN in Philadelphia. News Manager Peter Flannery says the audience tends to be

older, blue collar, Bible-belt, Middle America. These listeners, Flannery says, are not dial twisters, but they are also not always listening intently.

The news on ABC Entertainment, broadcast on the half-hour, is more traditional than on Contemporary or FM, but the writers are told to be on the lookout for human-interest stories that will make those listeners pay attention.

When a young boy was lost playing in the snow, then found dead as the snow started melting 15 days later only five feet from the front door of his house, ABC Entertainment, in Flannery's words, "played the hell out of the story." He says the network is looking for the kind of story that gets people saying, "You'll never guess what I heard on the radio."

Both ABC Entertainment and ABC Contemporary also send affiliates 1-minute news summaries which are, alas, sometimes broadcast instead of the full newscasts.

The American Information Radio Network is the traditional one of the four. It has mostly traditional, "deep-voiced baritone" newscasters; it is on at the traditional time—on the hour—so it competes directly with the NBC and CBS newscasts. ABC Information may not be surrounded by music in its affiliates' programming; it is used by many talk or all-news stations such as KGO in San Francisco and WNTS in Indianapolis. The writing can afford to be more analytical, less folksy. ABC Information's lead-in for that voicer on Bakke:

The U-S Supreme Court is wrapping up its spring term this week. Among the crucial decisions yet to be announced is the Alan Bakke reverse discrimination case. Apparently part of the delay is due to a backlog of paper work. Tim O'Brien has details from Washington...

American Information has the most affiliates—over 550. Entertainment is next with over 450, then Contemporary—about 340—and FM—about 200. These four separate ABC

networks give ABC another advantage. Since each is aimed at a clearly defined audience, ABC can sell spots to advertisers interested in reaching specific audiences. Acne remedies, for example, can reach the pimply faces for which they are intended on ABC Contemporary. The four networks are efficient buys for advertisers, and therefore, even more valuable to ABC.

**2. NBC** In 1975 NBC embarked on an ambitious project—an all-news network called the News and Information Service, NIS. NBC kept the 5 minutes at the top of the hour for its regular network news and used the remaining 55 minutes for NIS. All-news is expensive, and with less than a hundred affiliates, NIS folded in 1977.

NBC was left with its news on the hour, carried by about 270 affiliates. The newscasts these affiliates receive are put together by a staff of 20 producers and editors, 36 associate directors and engineers, four management executives, seven writer/newscasters (all in New York), as well as the dozens of NBC reporters and bureaus around the world. NBC has one radio-only reporter at the White House, for example, and uses the services of two other reporters there who also work for NBC television.

NBC was planning to try again to add a second network in 1979; this time a network designed for Top 40 or album-oriented rock stations.

**3. CBS** CBS also broadcasts newscasts on the hour including the World News Round-Up, a program that debuted in 1938. Almost 270 stations carry CBS's newscasts. In addition CBS, along with the other networks, offers its affiliates a number of different shows such as cooking features, sports news and 22 news analysis programs including "Mike Wallace At Large," "Spectrum" and "Capitol Cloakroom."

**4. Mutual** Like ABC, Mutual has set up different news networks. Mutual has three: one broadcast on the hour, which is the most tradi-

tional; one on the half-hour; and one at 55 minutes past, somewhat more progressive in style. These networks offer a variety of financial arrangements to affiliates. The newscasts on the half-hour, for example, come without commercials. This network's affiliates can sell their own spots, but they have to pay Mutual to carry these newscasts.

A staff of 22 writer-newscasters, headquartered outside Washington, and 13 reporters in the field produce Mutual's newscasts for a total of about 760 affiliates.

**5. NPR** There is now an additional major national radio network, National Public Radio. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting established NPR in 1971. NPR sends out seven newscasts and two public affairs shows each day, including the esteemed "All Things Considered," to more than 200 noncommercial stations in the United States. The stories on NPR's newscasts tend to be longer and slower paced than on commercial stations, and, according to NPR's new director, they aim for completeness rather than timeliness. In other words, they are as concerned with the background as they are with breaking developments.

• • •

UPI's audio news service includes an hourly newscast, so its about 1000 subscribers must be considered affiliates of a network. AP's audio news service has about 600 subscribers who also receive an hourly newscast. In fact, the Associated Press recently changed the name of the service to the Associated Press Radio Network. In addition, there are a number of smaller radio networks such as Mutual's Black Network, which services black-oriented stations, and regional networks such as the Texas State Network. This is a growing business.

When a local station is affiliated with any one of these networks, it gets network programs over a line leased from the telephone company and sometimes hooked up to satellite transmitters. Then at the prescribed time, the newscasts and

other programs are sent over the wire, in most cases introduced by tones that can cue the station's machinery to automatically switch the network on to the air. So KREW listeners in Sunnyside, Washington, can hear Douglas Edwards "live from the CBS newsroom in New York."

## PUBLIC AFFAIRS

News departments may be given responsibility for programs other than newscasts. Most stations carry some public affairs programming such as editorials, documentaries and interview programs. Some station managers see these as listener turnoffs, which is why they are so often buried in Sunday morning time slots when few people are listening. But other stations have used public affairs programs to attract listeners and to inspire whole communities to think about and even solve problems.

### 1. Editorials

This is where all those opinions that have been leashed and kept away from the news can be turned loose. You think it's crazy for a man who has been convicted of embezzling to be allowed to keep his seat in the state legislature? If you are in a position to write an editorial, you can say so, in so many words:

It would be incomprehensible for the members of the House to allow this man to remain in state government.

WXYZ, Detroit

Fairness?—the FCC simply requires that stations provide time for those who feel differently to respond (see Chapter 9, "Ethics and Law"). This would seem to be part of a "personal attack" so it would be necessary to notify the state legislator himself and offer him air time.

Editorials don't have to be argumentative. They can be used to interpret events:

Take a stand present viewpoint

It was a bitter eight-month fight, and in the end Robert Bonin was the loser. But even with his resignation, there was clearly no winner in the battle. The past months have been difficult ones -- tragic ones -- for the courts and the Commonwealth, and there is no cause for celebration.

*WEEI, Boston*

Or to push civic responsibility:

So, for a stronger nation and a better state, today is your day! Be sure you vote.

*KQV, Pittsburgh*

And, this "Spectrum" commentary mixes entertainment with opinion:

The tomato, alas, has become a rare delicacy to be savored quickly, once a year. Sometimes in the dead of winter, I look at the store's offerings of pale plastic baseballs and I understand why strong women weep. A salad is just not a salad without a good tomato.

*Marianne Means, CBS*

Broadcast editorials have succeeded in ousting the corrupt, building parks, promoting health-care campaigns, raising money for various causes as well as increasing awareness on political issues. Occasionally they are demonstrably wrongheaded—that presumably is one purpose of the rebuttal time.

Editorials are usually the responsibility of the station manager, but that person often seeks writing and reporting help from the news staff. Some larger stations hire full-time editorial directors to handle these duties. And, an editorial committee that may include the news director and other management staff may make policy decisions; stations are usually careful not to allow their editorials to be used for personal vendettas or idiosyncratic crusades.

Despite the conspicuous presence of subjectivity, editorials have much in common with broadcast news: They are written for the same medium and, therefore, have the same need to be conversational and clear. Facts cannot be treated any more loosely. The writing must still say what it means.

Editorials are composed of four elements.

### **1. The issue**

The city of Pittsburgh is considering a change in its method of garbage collection in order to save money and provide a more efficient collection service.

### **2. The background**

At present garbage is collected once a week from the backyard or rear of the residence by a crew of sanitation workers who dump the 55-gallon garbage cans into a burlap sack. One of the workers then carries the sack out to the street where he throws it into a collection truck.

This method works pretty well most of the time except when there is a heavy snowfall, hard rain or traffic obstruction on the street. Then the garbage may not be collected for two weeks, and there are lots of complaints.

The city is thinking about providing every householder who now receives collection service with an 80-gallon plastic container mounted on wheels. It would then become the responsibility of the resident of the house to wheel this container out to the curb where it could be picked up and dumped much faster by a special lift attached to the truck.

### **3. The opinion (or recommendation)**

This might work well in some areas where it is quite flat, but, in

Pittsburgh, we don't think this is the answer.

#### 4. *The support*

Besides the five- or six-million-dollar outlay required to furnish every home with its own 80-gallon container and to equip all the trucks with special lifts, there are too many other reasons why this system won't work.

Too many Pittsburgh residents are too old or otherwise handicapped to push the containers out to the street. Too many streets and alleys where collections have to be made are too narrow, or too steep, or both. Even if the resident could get the container out to the curb there is the danger of it running away down a hill and crashing into the street.

We think there must be a better way to collect garbage.

*KQV, Pittsburgh*

Sometimes the issue is not stated, just the opinion. Sometimes the support is combined with the background or the opinion. But these four elements, in whatever order or combinations, are the building blocks of editorials.

Susan Burdick is editorial director at WEEI in Boston, but when she is preparing an editorial she functions like a reporter. Burdick clips all relevant newspaper stories; she visits or calls the parties involved, reads through the relevant documents, attends city council meetings. Burdick also strolls over to the newsroom and chats with reporters covering the issue. Hers are, at least, informed opinions.

Like most stations, WEEI emphasizes local issues in its editorials. It tries to comment on the major problems confronting its community. Burdick discusses ideas and opinions with the station's general manager every morning and with its editorial board every few weeks. Once a position has been agreed upon, Burdick's job is to state it, explain it and make it sound convincing.

She begins with an outline. She notes what points she wants to make, then gives each point a paragraph and tries to arrange them in an order that works. She likes to lead the editorial with the issue and then the opinion—"to tell them where you stand":

Debating the death penalty is getting to be an annual event on Beacon Hill. This year there are two measures up for review. First, a bill to restore the death penalty for certain types of murder. Second, a proposed change in the state constitution. We'd like to say once more for the record: We strongly oppose any move to reinstate the death penalty in Massachusetts.

Giving the background can be the toughest job. Burdick's editorials can run no longer than a minute and a half. One of her major problems is keeping the background from eating up most of that time.

Burdick says she is always catching herself becoming too complex. The goal is to present just enough background on the issue so that listeners think, "Yeah, I know what she's talking about." If the issue itself is too complex, Burdick does a series of editorials to cover it. If the issue has been hanging around the news for a while, less background is needed:

The arguments on both sides of the issue are old hat by now, but deserve repeating. Proponents say the death penalty would, first and foremost, deter crime. It's justifiable punishment, they say, for something as brutal as murder. Many argue imprisonment isn't enough to keep criminals off the street -- that they too often are paroled or furloughed.

Those who oppose the legislation say the statistics are clear: The death penalty does not discourage would-be killers. Most murders, they argue, are not premeditated. And

some opponents point out there's been discriminatory use of the death penalty against minorities and the poor.

Next, the heart of an editorial—the support or why you came to that conclusion. As Burdick says, “Obviously, you have to be convincing.”

We think the most compelling argument against bringing back the death penalty is one cited by the State Supreme Court several years ago. The death penalty, it said, is cruel and unusual punishment. In a humane society, there's simply no justification for such extreme revenge. What's to be gained by taking yet another life? A man who's convicted of murder should be punished -- but through imprisonment, not death.

In this editorial Burdick leaves to the close the responsibility for wrapping up, and repeating the opinion:

The death penalty has not been carried out in Massachusetts for more than 30 years. It's a sad comment on our society that it's even thinking of restoring the death penalty. And it would be tragic if the legislature and the citizens allowed it to get back on the books in Massachusetts.

Not all of Burdick's editorials follow this same format, and editorial writers at different stations have different styles. They all face the same problem of presenting a clear and convincing case, but the best writers are often those who devise the most creative solutions to this problem.

Burdick found an original and effective way to criticize the mayor in one of her editorials. She obtained a tape in which, she says, the mayor contradicted himself within only eight seconds. The editorial was built around that tape.

## 2. Documentaries

Documentaries give broadcast journalists time to stretch out. Writers move from the tight broadcast news story to the luxury of a 5- or 10-minute “mini-doc”—a short documentary—or to a series of reports on one subject, or even to a full half-hour documentary.

A new, “comprehensive” high school, three times as large as other high schools, opened in Nashville. WLAC could have covered the news in a story, perhaps including an actuality featuring the principal or the head of the school board, but news director David Tower felt this story deserved a more thorough treatment. Tower spent two days at the school and visited the new experimental classes. He interviewed students, teachers and administrators. The result?—a half-hour documentary.

There are also subjects that don't make it onto newscasts because there aren't any breaking developments—no “news peg.” Lisa Bergson of WRFM, New York City, investigated such a topic, the abuse of personal records, in a series of more than 30 3-minute reports.

Since filling a half-hour program or even a series of 3-minute shows with one person's voice could dull even the most exciting subject, most radio documentaries rely on liberal amounts of tape. Tower had the teachers, students and administrators tell most of the story about their new high school. Bergson used at least one actuality in each installment of her report on personal records.

Writing a documentary, therefore, is similar to writing stories that use tape. The use of the language is the same. There is the same need to set up the tape. Where documentary writing differs is in the organization. Arranging one or two actualities in a story doesn't take much thought; ordering half-a-dozen or more cuts in a documentary becomes a substantial task.

National Public Radio's “All Things Considered” program features short documentaries on topics of national interest. Reporter/writer David Ensor was aware that people were beginning to perceive First Lady Rosalynn Carter as an in-

fluent member of the administration. He began thinking of preparing a documentary about her when one of his contacts resigned as one of Mrs. Carter's speech writers, raising the possibility of some controversy. The problem—where to get tape.

The president's wife was not available for an interview, but she was scheduled to speak at the National Press Club. Ensor decided to record her speech there and fill out his report with tape of people who knew her. Even this wasn't easy.

Few of the First Lady's associates were willing to say anything controversial on tape. Most spoke only "on background" (see Chapter 8, "Gathering News"). Ensor talked with former employees, but not on tape. He talked with a friend of hers from Georgia who preferred that he not record the conversation. He was told that the First Lady's staff was functioning less than smoothly, but only "on background." Ensor could use this information, but he needed sound.

Finally, Ensor got one former member of Mrs. Carter's staff, whose job had been dealing with the press, to complain—on tape—that he wasn't told what to say to the press. Then a representative of the Commission on Mental Health, which she chaired, discussed Mrs. Carter's performance—on tape. Ensor also got UPI's White House correspondent through five presidencies, Helen Thomas, to evaluate this First Lady—on tape. Ensor obtained a long but fascinating reminiscence from an acquaintance of Mrs. Carter in New York. With Mrs. Carter's own statements to the Press Club, Ensor had enough sound.

He then "rough edited" his tape, making preliminary versions of the actualities he thought he would use. He typed up descriptions of the better cuts and spread them all in front of him.

Documentaries can make more points than news stories, but the number of points that can be covered coherently remains limited. To organize a documentary, writers first have to decide what points they want to make.

Ensor essentially had three issues to deal with: "the influence question," "the competence

question" and Mrs. Carter's personality. How powerful was Mrs. Carter? How well was she handling that power? What was she like?

With these questions in mind, Ensor arranged the cuts he had rough edited. Most documentaries are organized around their tape. Writers order the cuts, often by shuffling index cards, each representing one cut, and then fill in the copy necessary to say what must be said between the cuts.

Ensor started his documentary with a joking reference to her influence from Mrs. Carter's speech. Then, he used a statement of hers on the Equal Rights Amendment to focus the discussion of her impact on issues. Next, the competence question. He used a complimentary tape from the representative of the Commission on Mental Health and an uncomplimentary tape from her former staff member.

For insight into the First Lady's personality, Ensor used his longest tape—2 minutes and 8 seconds from her acquaintance in New York. Finally, a concluding comment on the influence and competence questions from UPI's Helen Thomas.

Ensor spelled all this out in an outline (most writers prepare an outline for documentaries). Then, after the outline was approved by his editor, Ensor wrote the story and prepared final versions of his cuts.

As in a broadcast story, the opening and closing lines of a documentary are especially important. Ensor opened with his tape of Mrs. Carter joking about her role. He closed with this discussion of a quote from her husband:

So perhaps Rosalynn Carter, as an advisor, was best described by Jimmy Carter. He called her a "perfect extension of myself."

### 3. Interview Programs

Documentaries take more time and effort than some stations are prepared to expend. Instead, they take care of their public affairs responsibilities with interview programs. When they

feature searching, in-depth questioning, these shows can be quite valuable.

Obviously, the more controversial and interesting the guest, the more successful the program is likely to be. As a rule, heads of local abortion clinics work better than Boy Scout leaders.

Most of the rules for interviewing discussed in Chapter 10, "Tape," apply here. There is the same need to ask short essay questions, to guide an interview and to listen to what's being said. However, the inability to edit questions and responses (assuming the interview is being aired live or unedited on tape) puts added pressure on the interviewer.

Since all questions are heard, the questions must be more carefully worded and even more carefully prepared. In this situation all questions should be read from a sheet prepared in advance, unless something new comes up in response to an answer.

Easier questions should still precede the tough ones (see Chapter 8, "Gathering News") to make the guest feel comfortable at the start. But a long interview should dig deeper than an interview that is designed to produce only a few 20-second actualities. The tough questions must be designed not only to get a controversial sen-

tence or two, but to reveal the person and the complexities of the issues. A worthwhile interview program must add some of the depth that's often missing from radio newscasts.

Tracking complexities requires lots of research. Interviewers who haven't done their homework cannot hide behind their editing. Their foolish question is there for the audience to hear. And, even if they are not embarrassed, they certainly do not possess the tools to dig below the superficialities if they barely understand the superficialities.

On the other hand, since the interview itself is the final product, the interviewer must be prepared to explain and simplify when necessary—to communicate to an audience that is not expected to have done the homework.

It's best not to rest an entire program on the vagaries of conversation. The host should always prepare a scripted open and close for the show. These introduce the interviewee and review the subjects that will be, or were, discussed.

Interview programs are often produced on Sundays, and stations use them as a source for actualities and Q and As. This helps fill slow Sunday newscasts, and helps promote the interview program.

---

## SUMMARY

The tone of news or public affairs programming may be affected by the company it keeps on the air. Similarly, the nature of the station on which news shows are broadcast may affect their outlook. But these effects can be exaggerated.

When reporters arrive on the scene or newswriters begin to write a documentary or newscast, their basic responsibilities as journalists outweigh their obligation to format or station size.

4



TELEVISION

***Preceding page:***  
**A reporter for WTVF, Nashville, reports from the State Capitol. (Courtesy Radio-Television News Directors Association)**

# 15

---

# VISUALS

The focus of the preceding chapters has been radio journalism, but virtually all those discussions apply to television news. Television journalists are also writing copy that is to be read aloud by newscasters and must be received by the audience's ears. All the basic writing rules are the same. Television journalists rely just about as heavily on the wire services. They follow many of the same rules in covering stories. They look for the same things in interviews, and must write on-scene reports and lead-ins to the material they bring back from the field.

Television news does follow a different schedule than radio news. Instead of a short newscast each hour, most television stations have full-hour or half-hour newscasts at dinner time and again at 10 p.m. or 11 p.m. Still, television news is basically radio news with one major addition—visuals. The techniques taught in the previous chapters remain relevant, but working with visuals demands an additional set of reporting, producing and writing skills. These are outlined in this and the following chapter.

## TELEVISION NEWSCASTS

By 6:30 p.m. New York time, the graphics have been selected, the videotape from around the world assembled. Walter Cronkite and the executive producer of the program have arranged their 22 or so minutes of news. Cronkite has edited the copy newswriters have prepared for him.

Now Cronkite, sitting at the same desk where he has worked on his script, puts on his jacket and turns to face the camera. A makeup woman applies some powder to keep his nose, cheeks and forehead from shining. After a signal from the director, a videotape of the show's logo is superimposed on top of a shot of Cronkite at his desk while an announcer says, "This is the CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite."

What follows is the first runthrough (some of the show will be redone when a partially videotaped, partially live version of the newscast is sent to other affiliates at 7 p.m.) of a program that is the culmination of a day's work by a team

of people that makes the staff working on any radio news broadcast seem small. Including technical personnel and CBS reporters around the world, more than 90 people contribute to the production of this newscast.

Even smaller news organizations employ many more people to produce a television newscast than just about any radio newscast. KATV in Little Rock, Arkansas, has a staff of 35 working on news shows. The complexities of television news require more, and more specialized, personnel.

Next in charge, after the station's news director, is a producer. (The larger stations may add an additional news executive between producer and news director—an executive producer.) The producer heads the team of journalists who report and write the show. Producers supervise the selection and writing of stories, the selection and editing of visuals to use with these stories and the ordering of the stories in the newscast.

Working under the producer, most stations employ an assignment editor and perhaps associate producers, as well as a team of reporters. After receiving assignments, reporters cover stories in the field with videotape or film and turn their facts and images into a package for use in the newscast—under the supervision of the producer or an associate producer.

At some stations the newscasters—"anchors"—and reporters write all the copy that is used on the air. WTEV, New Bedford, Massachusetts, for instance, has no employees who only write news. On the other hand, KOOL-TV, Phoenix, Arizona, has six newswriters.

To help coordinate this staff, most stations have a regularly scheduled meeting early in the afternoon to discuss the evening's newscasts. At WTEV the anchors, producers and sometimes some reporters get together at 2:30 to plan, and go over what they have lined up.

All the people mentioned so far are journalists, but getting the news on the air also requires the cooperation of some nonjournalists—broadcasters. In charge on the technical side is the show's director. This is the person who liter-

ally calls the shots as the show is broadcast, who chooses cameras and camera angles and feeds in all the elements of the newscast at the correct instants.

The director usually works with an assistant director, a technical director (who presses the buttons that actually control the equipment), an audio person, camera operators, videotape and film editors, a stage manager and, depending on the size of the station, perhaps additional technicians to work the machinery used in the broadcast.

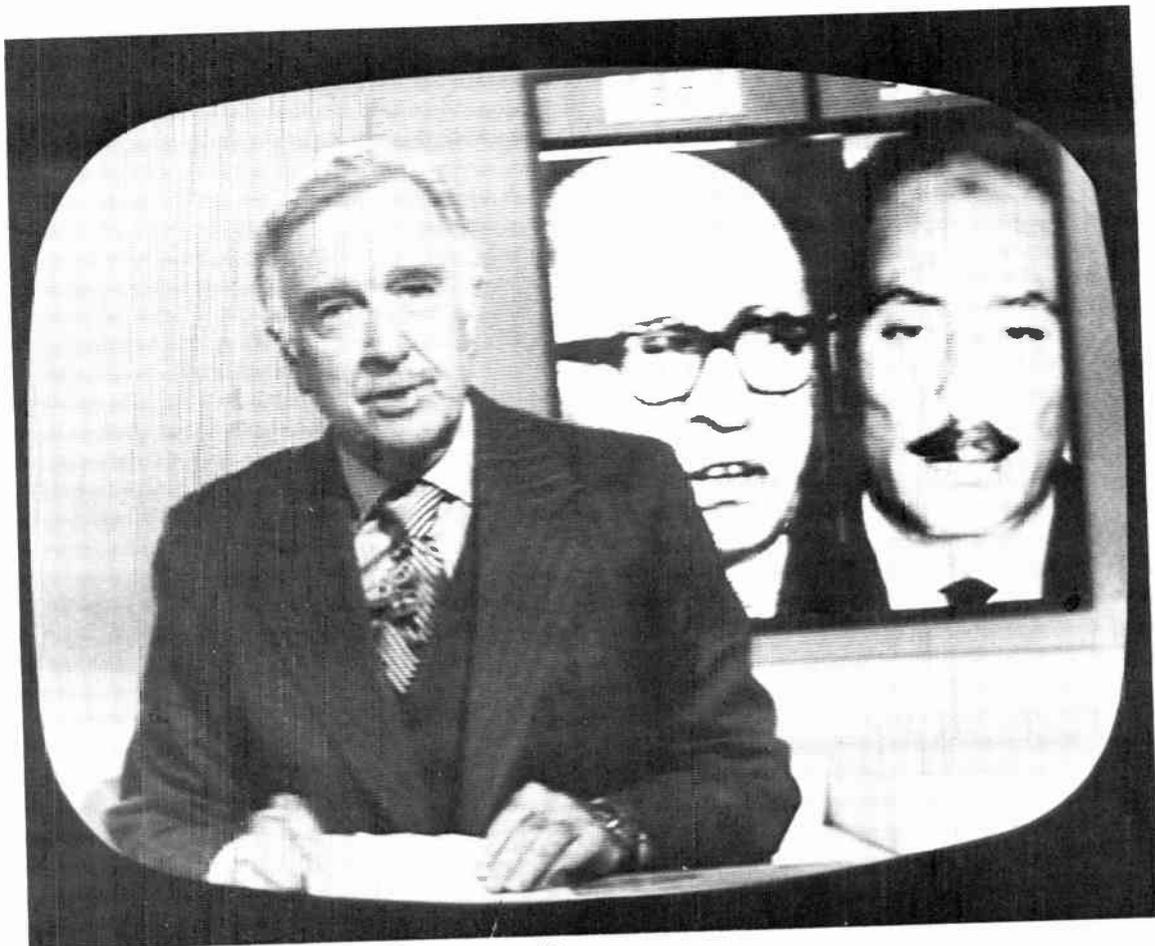
At most stations the director meets with the producer a half-hour or an hour before the newscast airs to "block out" the show—figure out what equipment to show the visuals on and what cameras to use. The producer and the station's journalists have made the decisions about what will be on the newscasts. Now the director and the station's technical staff are responsible for making the program air smoothly.

## 1. Talking Heads

After a signal from the stage manager, Walter Cronkite looks at the camera and begins talking. We see his head, his mustache and his shoulders.

Once the opening formalities have been taken care of—perhaps a shot of the "news team" trotting to their desks, teases from some upcoming stories or just the logo and announcement CBS uses—the screen is filled with a shot of the anchor's head. This head is talking, reading the opening story, and this shot, the staple of television news, is called a "talking head."

The term "talking head" has negative connotations in television journalism because talking-head shots certainly do not make much use of the medium. The story the anchor is reading could have been written for radio. The only difference between a talking head on television and a newscaster on the radio is that view of the television newscaster's face—not a particularly profound addition. Still this shot has its place. Often there are no visuals available, especially on out-of-town stories, so there is no choice. And



Walter Cronkite on screen with a chromakey graphic.  
(CBS News Photo)

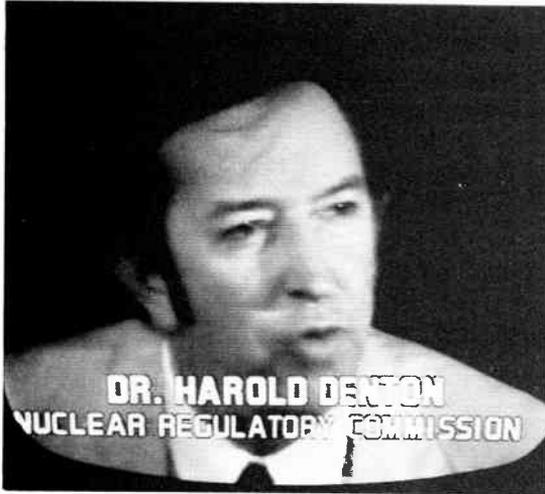
some particularly complex stories may be better understood without the added distraction of visuals. Watching Walter Cronkite's face may make it just a little easier to understand what he's saying.

## 2. Graphics

Visually, the next step up from a talking head is a talking head plus a graphic. As Cronkite reads a story about Egypt and Israel, to the side of his head is a picture of each country's leader. That picture doesn't give the audience much information, but it helps them focus on the story. It also makes a more interesting shot. Graphics are used

more and more in television news. Some stations include them almost every time a newscaster appears on camera.

A graphic can be a photograph. Some stations obtain color slides, some use newspaper photographs supplied by the wire services if they have nothing else on a story. A graphic can also be a word or two, a drawing or a chart. Many stations employ artists to fashion illustrations for stories. Technical devices enable moving graphics to be produced. In addition, character generators used by most stations now make it easy to write on the screen. Charts, names, even long quotes can easily be placed in the picture.



A super—a lower-third—often is used to identify the person appearing on camera. (CBS News Photo)

There are four ways a graphic can be used:

**1. Supers** The simplest graphics are just IDs. They identify or explain a person, thing, place or picture. Stations may use a graphic to remind viewers of the name of the newscaster they are watching, to inform them of the name of the person being interviewed or the address where the accident took place. Stations also use them to let viewers know that they are watching old film or videotape—"file footage." At most stations these IDs are typed out on character generators that store them in computer memories for use throughout the newscast. IDs are called "supers" because they were once superimposed over the picture; the technical process involved now is more sophisticated. Most times, IDs appear in the lower third of the screen, so they are also referred to as "lower-thirds."

**2. Keys** Frequently a graphic appears to be right behind the newscaster. Usually it isn't. Television news uses an electronic process that takes graphics and electronically combines them with a shot of the newscaster so that they seem to be behind that person. One method for doing

this is called "chromakey." A camera is programmed to drop out everything on screen of a particular color—usually a medium blue. The background behind the newscaster is blue, so it disappears and then is replaced by something else. With chromakey the blue background behind Walter Cronkite is removed electronically and replaced by a picture of Mideast leaders which has been transferred to a slide and projected on another camera. If Cronkite made the mistake of wearing a blue tie of the same shade, that also would disappear and be replaced by whatever is in that position on the slide.

Other types of "keys" just drop out a box-shaped area in the shot of the newscaster and replace that with a graphic or even moving pictures.

**3. Rear projection** Not all television studios use keys. Some actually have screens behind the anchors on which they project graphics. This is called "rear projection," and it's now pretty rare, though the term is often used to refer to what are in fact keys.

**4. Full screen** Occasionally a particularly interesting picture or chart may be given the entire screen—a photograph of the wreckage at the scene of a plane crash for which no videotape or film is available or a chart of changes in the price of an average market basket of food. Most of the time, however, graphics have to share the screen.

### 3. Film

From its earliest days whenever television news wanted to show action that took place outside of the studio, it used film. The early television film stories were direct descendants of the movie newsreel. In fact, when they began doing television news, each network contracted with companies that produced newsreels for footage. Soon television stations began producing their own 16mm film to illustrate their stories. Camera operators usually go with the reporter to the

scene of a news event, shoot some shots and interviews and then bring the film back to the newsroom to develop and edit. It is projected on a "film chain" directly into a television camera, then the film appears in the newscast.

In film stories the visual potential of the medium is being used to its fullest. Neither radio nor newspapers can match shots of, for example, people fleeing a sniper or police units moving in. Yet more and more television stations are abandoning film. CBS uses virtually no film stories in the Evening News. It still has on-the-scene reports, but they are no longer recorded on film.

#### 4. Videotape

Videotape is a first cousin of the audiotape used in radio news. Like audiotape, it records electronically coded signals that can be played back immediately or erased. The difference is that, besides sound, videotape can also record moving pictures.

Videotape has many advantages over film: The picture quality is higher—it looks more "live." It doesn't have to be developed—it can be played back immediately after it's recorded; and it can be reused—just erase and start again.

Nevertheless, two significant technical problems delayed the adoption of videotape for "remotes"—on-the-scene reports—in television news: First, early videotape cameras and recorders were too bulky to use on the scene at news events. Second, the videotape was difficult to edit. You can see film; you just find the frames you want, cut and splice together. But pictures are coded on videotape in invisible electronic signals. Thus it was hard to find particular shots. Also, the tape is too large and expensive to cut up like audiotape. To edit, it was necessary to get two precisely coordinated tape recorders rolling and then transfer scenes from one to the other.

Both these problems have been conquered by new electronic and computer technology. Compact, lightweight videotape cameras and recorders have been produced that match the portability of film cameras. And precise, computer-

aided editing systems have been developed that make videotape, if anything, easier to edit than film.

Now on most stations those shots and interviews from the scene are recorded and then played in the newscast on videotape recorders. The use of videotape doesn't change the selection of shots or interviews; it just makes them a little easier to work with and better looking on the air.

Since pictures are recorded electronically on videotape, reporting with videotape is called "electronic newsgathering," or ENG. Most stations use 3/4-inch videotape cassettes to record their remotes. But there is another alternative: Videotape stories can also be sent back *live* to the newsroom. Since they are shot with small television cameras, the camera's signal can simply be transmitted back, usually by microwave transmission, and put directly on the air. The ability to go live is another tremendous advantage videotape has over film. Most television stations are switching or have switched to ENG.

#### 5. Rundowns

With all these elements—graphics, film or videotape, and newscasters on camera—ordering a television newscast becomes a complex task. The lineup for a radio newscast must only take into account carts and a newscaster; occasionally there is another voice or two. Television newscasts have all those visuals plus more people—a weather person, a sportscaster, perhaps additional anchors or reporters. The lineup must become a more sophisticated document. In television it's sometimes still called a "lineup," sometimes a "rundown."

The basic principles for ordering the newscast are the same as in radio (see Chapter 13, "Newscasts"); the problem is just what to do with those visuals and extra people. All other things being equal, the visuals, like the tape in radio news, should be spread out. There is no sense using all the most visually exciting material—the videotapes or film—at once.

The order in which the different people in a television newscast appear is determined in large part by the format of the newscast. The weather and sports in particular are given set spots in the newscast in deference to those who go out of their way to watch them. The sports most frequently is aired two-thirds of the way into the show; the weather near the end.

Decisions on how to order the newscast are the responsibility of the show's producer, and the producer is responsible for writing up the rundown. Then the rundown, along with the script for the newscast, becomes one of the lines of communication between the journalistic and technical staff. Since directors use the rundown as a guide to the elements they must incorporate in the newscast, the rundown must include technical information along with journalistic information.

Formats used in rundowns vary widely from station to station. Some large news organizations prepare versions of the rundown throughout the day as the newscast takes shape. Some small stations make do with informal lists or information posted on a board on the wall of the newsroom. The basic information that all rundowns should include is the story's slug, the visuals and sound that are used with it and the story's length.

The rundown for an hour newscast on WABC-TV in New York City is shown on the opposite page.

The codes:

1. The letter next to each slug is the initial of the anchor reading the story.
2. Tse: tease.
3. CX: commercial.
4. TBA: to be announced; this story has not been selected yet.
5. DEF: Daily Electronic Feed; this is a service provided by the ABC network (CBS and NBC do it too) for its affiliates, through which it sends national and international videotape and film stories for use on their local newscasts. This is equivalent to the audio news services provided by the radio networks.
6. O/C: on camera.
7. Art Card: a graphic including some art work.

8. STC: still to come; their name for headlines before commercials.
9. VTR: videotape (recorder).
10. R/P: rear projection.
11. v/o: voice over videotape or film; the newscaster in the studio reads the narration live.

Obviously, the producer who made up this rundown did not bother to fill in all the columns completely. For instance, not all the "on camera" stories are marked as such in the proper column.

## TELEVISION REPORTING

Dennis Johnson, medical reporter for KOOL-TV, Phoenix, got hold of a copy of a study on health hazards in copper smelters. The study made some strong charges about potential medical problems for workers inside these plants, and more than half of the copper smelters mentioned were in Arizona. Johnson called the director of the study in New York for further information, then made plans to cover the story at a copper smelter well out of town the next day.

He needed interviews with workers, but workers would only be free to talk at the beginning or the end of their shift. They left work at 3:30 p.m.—too late for his 6 p.m. newscast. Johnson and a camera operator had to leave the station at 4:30 the next morning to get there in time to conduct interviews before the start of the shift.

All reporters need facts. As noted in Chapter 10, "Tape," radio reporters are also after sound; radio reporters would have conducted similar interviews with the plant's workers. But television news adds an additional item to the reporter's shopping list. Johnson also had to make sure he came back with the proper visuals.

For the benefit of the visuals, after interviewing workers, John and his camera operator toured the smelter with company officials. The tour provided dramatic footage of brilliant orange molten copper. Then they hurried back to Phoenix for an interview on camera with an

DATE 6p, Sun., 12/4/ EYEWITNESS NEWS SHOW

NO.	SLUG	O/C	FILM	VTP	R/P	REPORTER	FILM	LIVE	T A
1	Open								:15
2	Plane Crash(d)								:20
3	Womb (j)		Art Card	x		Penny		x	2:40
4	Mideast (j)								:20
5	Murder (d)	o	x	x		v/o			:30
6	Biko (d)				x				:15
7	Biko Rally(j)	o		x		Chee	x		1:30
8	Bermuda (j)				x				:20
9	Tse/CX# 1 (d)				x				1:10
10	Shanker (j)				x				:20
11	Dwelling (j)		art card	x	x	v/o			4:45
12	Watermain (d)	o		x		Chee		x	2:00
13	Tse/CX#2 (d)		x	STC:		Dentist			2:15
14	Menorah (j)			x	x	v/o			:30
15	Imm. Chanukah(j)		x		x	Penny	x		2:00
16	Dentist (d)			x	x	Storm	x		5:35
17	Tse/CX#3 (j)		x	STC:		Repair			2:5
18	Ship (j)								:15
19	Woman Cops(j)								:15
20	Repair (d)			x	x	v/o			4:00
21	Tse/CX#4 (j)		x	STC:		Review			2:15
22	TBA DEF (j)			x					1:30
23	Review (d)		x		x	Lape		x	2:10
24	Tse/CX#5(d)			x	STC:	Sports			1:55
25	TBA DEF (j)			x					1:15
26	Sports (d)			x	x	Michael		x	4:10
27	Met Bazaar(j)			x		v/o			1:00
28	Tse/CX#5 (d)		x	STC:		Jail			1:55
29	Jail (j)			x		v/o			2:00
30	Weather (d)	o		x		v/o			:30
31	Tse/CX #7 (j)								1:00
32	Pads (d)								1:00
33	Gourmet (d)			x		Lape		x	4:55
34	Bye/Credits			x					1:15
35									OFF: 6:58

TELEVISION REPORTING  
245

official from the company that owned the smelter.

Johnson had the luxury of not having to cover any other stories that day, so he could return to the newsroom and start looking over the videotape they had shot. With the visuals in mind, he typed up a rough draft of the story.

Next, Johnson selected the sections of the interview he planned to use. He wrote a few more drafts of the story—tightening it each time—before he showed it to his producer for approval. With the producer's okay, Johnson moved to the editing room to work with a videotape editor. Again, if he had had to cover more stories that day, he would not have been able to sit in on the editing himself; the editor would have had to work from the script alone.

The copper smelter was the lead story on KOOL-TV's newscast that evening.

## 1. The Crew

Television reporters like Dennis Johnson need help. Unlike the radio reporter who can carry all the necessary equipment—a cassette recorder and a notebook—in one hand, television reporters need a camera and lights, in addition to sound equipment of some sort and a notebook.

Many small stations make do with one-person reporting crews. Ed Howard of KULR-TV in Billings, Montana, works for such a station and has to cover stories solo. Howard must hold the camera himself while conducting an interview. To videotape himself, Howard sets the camera up on a tripod, shoots, plays it back to see what the shot looks like; then, if it looks decent, he shoots for real. "I'm a one-man band," Howard says. His technical responsibilities curtail to some extent his flexibility as a reporter.

At most stations, such as KOOL-TV in Phoenix, reporters get help in the form of a single camera operator. This person is responsible for shooting the videotape or film, setting up the lighting and working the sound equipment. At large stations and the networks, these responsibilities are divided among two or even

three people—a camera crew. Union regulations at many large stations ensure that nobody does another's job; in other words, reporters don't touch cameras or any other technical equipment.

Reporters are responsible for the reporting. The camera crew or camera person is responsible for the technical quality of the videotape or film. However, the actual choice of shots falls into a gray area. Generally, the reporter decides what to shoot and the camera operator chooses the angle and composition of the shot. But with experience they should be able to offer each other suggestions and make decisions cooperatively.

Since antagonism between the reporter and technicians can be both unproductive and uncomfortable, the best advice on working with a crew is to work *with* the crew.

## 2. Shooting

Television reporters are tied to their cameras . . . loosely. They have to be free enough to get the story—to roam around in search of information at a news event and to cultivate sources and dig for facts (see Chapter 8, "Gathering News"). But on most stories they cover, television reporters are expected to return with videotape or film which brings viewers as close as possible to the story. To do that effectively, they must honor the whims of the camera.

The basic strategies of reporting were discussed in earlier chapters. Here are the special routines and requirements demanded by the television camera:

**1. Schedules** Most stations stagger their reporters' schedules somewhat so that someone is on duty early in the morning—in case anything breaks—and someone is around in the evening to get a fresh story for the 10 or 11 o'clock newscast. Generally, reporters are each responsible for two or three stories a day. When they finish one story, someone, a messenger perhaps, often takes the videotape or film back to the newsroom so the processing can begin while the reporter and crew move on to the next story.



A WSB-TV, Atlanta, news crew covers tornado damage.  
(Courtesy Radio-Television News Directors Association)

**2. Slating** Reporters should write down in a notepad a brief description of each of the shots they get in the order they are shot. People's names, what they are doing, what the shot is showing, all may help when the videotape or film is replayed in the editing room. Reporters will recall the meaning of most of their shots; they may need to know the meaning of all of them. "Slating" shots in a notebook also makes it easier to jot down a draft of the story in the car, before looking at the videotape or film, and slating will make it easier to find the shots when editing.

**3. Ratio** Many stations ask their camera crews to stick to a certain ratio of film or videotape shot to film or videotape used in the story. At WTEV in New Bedford, the news direc-

tor asks camera operators to shoot no more than three times the amount of videotape or film that will be used in the final version of the story. Large stations can afford to let their crews use more videotape or film—generally a four-to-one ratio—and some stations have no limit on overshooting since they are using videotape which can be reused.

Each individual shot—a shot of a fireman fighting the fire, for example—should be held long enough to permit healthy portions of that image to be edited into the final version of the story. As a rule, the camera should stay on every shot for at least 20 seconds. If the shot is important enough to be used a few times in the story, the length of time the camera should hold is multiplied. Camera wiggles, loud trucks and bystanders yelling "Hi Mom!" all require that the shot

be held that much longer to compensate for the ruined moments.

**4. Types of shots** Camera shots are usually divided into three groups: close-ups, medium shots and long shots.

A *close-up* (CU) is a shot of a person's head and perhaps shoulders. (Occasionally the camera will come in even closer so that the screen is filled with eyes, nose, cheeks, mouth and little else—an "extreme close-up.") Tight shots of a sign or a person's hand nervously fiddling with something, or a charred doll at a fire, would also be labeled close-ups.

In general, *medium shots* (MS) show objects and a little of their surroundings—the charred doll surrounded by a few yards of rubble, the business sign and some of the store window. A medium shot of a person usually includes everything from the waist up.

*Long shots* (LS) place things in perspective—a whole row of stores, a view of the entire burnt-out building. Long shots of people include their whole bodies and, necessarily, much of what is around them.

The role these shots can play in telling a story is discussed in later sections. One technical point, though: The more tightly a camera focuses on a subject, the more apparent any inadvertent camera movements are. So beginning camera operators, who may have some trouble keeping a camera steady, might want to emphasize longer shots.

**5. Camera movements** There are two basic ways in which a camera can move: it can pan and it can zoom. Both tend to be overused by beginners.

In a *pan* the camera slowly turns to sweep a large area. Pans are used to follow movement—perhaps a police car arriving; to show the scope of something—a crash site; or to pinpoint physical relationships—how close the X-rated movie theatre is to the high school.

Still, some news directors warn new reporters against using any pans at all. For one thing, they are difficult to do well. The camera must be

moved slowly and steadily or the result will be a jerky blur. Too many pans in a story and viewers get dizzy. And there is never any excuse to "spray the garden"—pan back and forth across a scene. One pan should be sufficient.

There is a simpler way to shoot two things that are near each other. Instead of panning from one to the other, shoot one, then the other. This avoids all those wasted seconds while the camera moves between them. Steady shots are also much less vulnerable to a slip by unsteady hands.

If a pan is going to be attempted, it is always wise to pause for 10 seconds or so at the beginning and the end of the pan. Shoot the X-rated movie theatre for a few moments, then pan, then shoot the high school for a few moments. That way it is possible to edit out the pan and still use the shots.

In a *zoom* the camera doesn't actually move, only the lenses do—gliding from a close-up to a long shot or vice versa. This can add meaning to a story. The camera can start with a long shot of the crowd, then zoom in on the speaker; or zoom from a close-up of a business sign to a shot of the whole store and maybe the neighboring stores.

But zooms too are difficult to do smoothly and are easily overused. It is often best just to shoot the close-up and long shot separately and edit them together in the story. And, as with pans, it is safest to hold the shots at both ends of the zoom, so they can be used if the zoom is edited out.

Motion makes for good footage, but, as a rule, it's best if what is being shot does the moving, not the camera or the lenses. Moving pictures are generally best shot by steady cameras.

**6. Shooting order** There are two rules that determine the order in which videotape or film should be shot. The first rule is to get the "temporary scenes" first. Anything worth shooting that may not be there later gets top priority. Certainly the flames themselves at a fire story fit into this category; so do interviews with eyewitnesses or survivors—they may leave. On a police story, often the police arrange to parade suspects they

have arrested in front of reporters before arraignment—that scene is temporary and gets first priority.

After the people or things that may not be around too much longer have been shot, the reporter and crew can deal with the more permanent subjects—an interview with the fire chief, shots of the fire trucks or shots of the gutted building.

The second consideration when determining shooting order is the order in which the shots will probably be used in the final version of the story. All other things being equal, it's helpful if stories are shot in approximately the order they will be used. This is called "editing in the camera," and it should make it easier to edit the story in the editing room.

### 3. Composition

What makes a good shot? In television news the major concern is the event, not the aesthetics. Good shots clearly show what happened. The more exciting the happenings, the more exciting the shots.

However, once the camera has located the event, there are some technical and even aesthetic rules that can make its shots of that event easier to follow and more attractive to look at:

**1. Framing** Television monitors are not all adjusted the same. Often, something that is visible on the edge of one screen is off screen on another. So camera operators must allow for what is called a "ten percent cutoff." They have to figure that anything that appears in a band around the edge of the screen—the outer ten percent of the picture—may not be visible on some monitors. Therefore, they keep important subjects, such as the top of someone's head or the top line of a protest placard, out of that unreliable area.

**2. Headroom** A good portion of the shots used on television news are of people. People look silly with their foreheads cut off. Except in

extreme close-ups, it is necessary to leave them some headroom—enough so that even after the ten percent cutoff is taken into account, there will be a bit of space between the tops of their heads and the top of the screen.

Many beginners go too far in this direction; they leave as much as a third or a half of the screen on top of a person's head. Since there usually isn't too much going on above our heads, that's usually wasted picture. The solution is either to tilt the camera down so we can see more of the person, or even better, to zoom in to a closer shot. All that is necessary is enough headroom to separate the hair from the top of the screen on any monitor.

**3. Balance** Shots should be composed so that they direct attention on the screen to whatever is most important. The simplest way to do that is to put the proper center of attention in the middle of the screen. Certainly it would look strange if the person doing the talking was way off to the side.

Nevertheless, too much symmetry is rather dull. Interesting shots are often less than completely symmetric. In fact, some broadcasters believe that the viewer's attention on the screen does not focus on the center of the picture, but on two points, one-third of the way from the top and one-third of the way from either side. This is called the "rule of thirds." Many standard television news shots are built around these points instead of the center of the screen. (Note the position of Cronkite's head on page 241.)

**4. Leading the action** If the camera is panning to follow a jogger, it's important to leave more room in the picture in front of the jogger than behind the jogger. That way it appears as if the jogger has some room to run into. Leaving more room behind the jogger would make the person seem to be constantly on the verge of running out of the picture. Always "lead"—keep the camera a little ahead of—the action.

The same rule applies when shooting somebody talking. Interviewees usually are not looking

directly into the camera. They have their heads turned a bit toward the right or left. When shooting a person talking, leave extra space in front of them—on the side of the picture they are facing. Give people space to talk into.

**5. The line** Some events move in set directions—parades, football games, even conversations. When shooting a parade or a football game it is important to shoot it all from the same side of the action. Otherwise, when the shots are edited together, the parade will keep flip-flopping—moving from left to right on the screen, then from right to left—or it will not be clear which way the football teams are trying to move the ball.

It is necessary to imagine a line in the direction of the action and stay on one side of that line only. The line for a parade would run down the middle of the street on which people are marching. The line for a football game runs from goal post to goal post through the middle of the field. When shooting a conversation, the line runs from one person's head through the other person's head. No matter where the camera is placed, if it doesn't cross that line, one person in the conversation will always seem to be speaking toward the left and the other toward the right. If shots of them talking are edited together, it will be clear that they are facing each other. However, if the camera shoots one of the participants from one side of the line between them and the other from the other side of that line, they will both seem to be facing the same direction, rather than facing each other.

If people are milling about during a demonstration, there is no set direction of motion and the line becomes unimportant—it doesn't matter where the camera shoots from. But as soon as those people start marching, the camera must stay on one side of the line of march to keep the images it captures coherent.

In sports, a baseball game has no set direction of motion. Shots taken from the third-base line, first-base line, behind homeplate and centerfield can all be mixed together without disorienting

viewers. But, in football, basketball, hockey, soccer and tennis the cameras have to pick one side and stay on that side.

#### 4. Telling the Story

The best television news videotape or film can almost be shown silent. The pictures themselves tell the story. When covering a story for television, reporters have to make sure that as much of the meaning of the story gets into the camera as is possible.

There are four things to look for:

**1. Impact** When shooting a story, television reporters follow the guidelines for newsworthiness outlined in Chapter 5, "Leads": importance, interest, controversy, the unusual, proximity and timeliness. They look for shots that demonstrate important points, are interesting or show controversy. But there's an added consideration when measuring visual newsworthiness: the amount of excitement, action, impact.

News cameras must be on the lookout for the spontaneous debate on the street as the governor walks by the protesters, a scuffle on the picketline, the embarrassed mayor dashing away from reporters, the suspects trying to hide their eyes from the cameras, firemen battling the flames—action.

Television news is often attacked for distorting events by emphasizing the moments of violence or conflict and underplaying the hours of calm. Reporters, especially when covering a demonstration (see Chapter 9, "Ethics and Law"), have to be sure to place events in context and provide complete and accurate accounts. But, if a demonstration lasts 4 hours and must be recounted in a 2-minute videotape report, some telescoping of events is inevitable, and television reporters would be foolish if they didn't emphasize the most dramatic, the most newsworthy, developments.

Of course, a shot does not have to be violent to have impact. Sometimes there is as much excitement in a survivor's face as in the battle be-

tween the firefighters and the fire. And if a suspect has been arrested for arson, a shot of that person's face—"Who would do such a thing?"—has as much impact as the flames.

**2. Cover shots** The few moments of excitement alone do not tell the story. Around the action, if there is any action, reporters must insert scenes that illustrate the basic issues, introduce the protagonists and set the scene. When shooting a story, reporters must be conscious of how they will write that story (see Chapter 16, "Writing to Visuals") and choose shots that "cover"—match, illustrate—the points they want to make. For example, at the scene of a protest, aside from whatever dramatic footage may be available, reporters need cover shots of the police to use if they will likely discuss the police presence; they need pictures of the building in front of which the demonstration is being held, to cover discussion of the target of the protest; plus the signs protesters are carrying, to cover discussion of the issues; shots of traffic congestion, if blocked traffic is an issue; and street signs for possible use when the location of the demonstration is mentioned.

In addition, it is always smart to snoot some general scenes of crowds, buildings and signs. These shots can be used during discussions for which there are no more specific illustrations. A story can be ruined by failure to come back with the appropriate cover shots.

**3. Reaction** To communicate the meaning of an event or action it is not always sufficient to shoot the event or action itself. The meaning of something often becomes clear only when we see its effect, the reactions it causes.

Rather than simply shooting the candidate's plane arriving, reporters make sure they get a shot of the people waiting for it at the airport. Editing that reaction shot in adds meaning to the arrival. Rather than simply showing a smashed-up car, reporters get shots of the skid marks, the pole it knocked down and the backed up traffic. Rather than just that person sitting on the flag-

pole, reporters include shots of the crowd gathered below. People, especially their faces, are the best visual conveyers of meaning; so getting reaction shots often means getting shots of people reacting to an event or action.

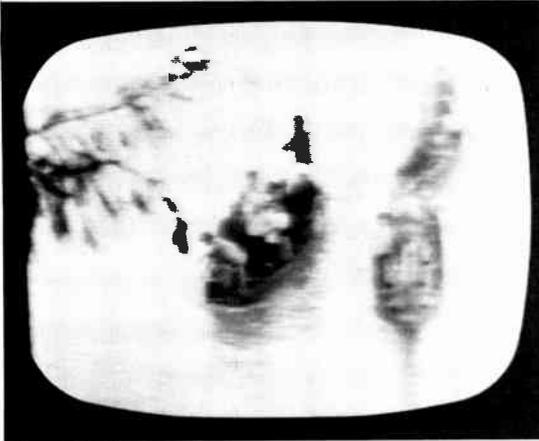
**4. Sequence** We arrive in a park. The first scene we see is the trees and benches of the picnic area off in the distance. As we walk closer we notice that the normal crowds of people are missing. When we arrive in the picnic area, it is clear that all the picnic benches are empty. Then we look closely at one of them. The bench is covered with large, red ants. Only then do we look up to see a park worker who explains that the area has been closed by the ants.

That is the way people generally see things: first from afar, then closer and closer—with more of the meaning of the scene becoming available as they begin to see the details. Television reporters often imitate this sequence—far away, closer, close. They start with a *long shot* of the area—an "establishing shot." This orients viewers; it tells them where we are—in an auditorium for a speech, on a middle-class block with police and onlookers gathered around, or at the scene of a fire.

Next, a *medium shot*. We are approaching the meaning—we see who is speaking in that auditorium; the specific home where police attention is focused; the smoldering building itself. Finally, *close-ups*. Now we get the picture—the speaker's face talking, the body on the floor of the house, an exhausted firefighter.

Not every scene is revealed in this way. Sometimes the videotape or film is edited so that it begins with a close-up and opens out to an establishing shot. But reporters should make sure they get this logical sequence of shots—establishing, medium, close-ups, so they have the pieces with which to put together a logical presentation. Reporters don't just jump up to objects and events. They get a sequence of shots that may be used to lead the viewer step-by-step to the meaning.

• • •



Notice how this videotape or film of a fire can pretty much tell the story, using these techniques, without any words:

- LS Burning building and fire trucks
- MS Firefighters fighting fire
- CU Chief giving orders
- LS Huddled survivors
- CU Face of a survivor
- MS Covered bodies
- CU Crying relative
- MS Bodies being carried away
- LS Building smoking (no flames)
- CU Exhausted firefighter



## 5. Sound-Bites

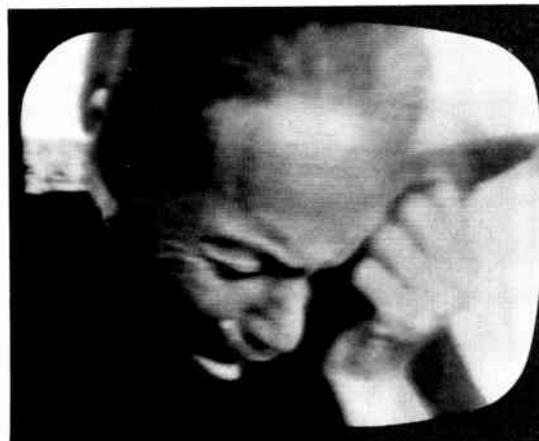
Up to this point the emphasis has been on *silent* videotape or film. Most television news reporters also include selections from interviews with or statements by newsmakers. These short sections in which people talk on camera are called *clips* or *sound-bites*.

A sound-bite is the television equivalent of an actuality or a Q and A. It is edited into videotape or film stories just as an actuality or Q and A is edited into a wrap. Most of the rules for getting and choosing actualities and Q and As (see Chapter 10, "Tape") also apply for sound-bites.

Sound-bites should include the same sort of information as actualities: eyewitness reports, expert knowledge or subjective comments—information newsmakers can provide better than reporters.

Sound-bites generally run about the same length as actualities: as a rule, 10 to 25 seconds, though some go longer, some shorter.

Here are some sound-bites from a videotape report on teenage suicides. First, a girl who has considered killing herself:



I was ignored. I was criticized . . . in many ways punished for these feelings. Nobody is supposed to think about suicide and death. That's bad. It's an evil thing to think about.

Telling the story of Vietnamese boat people: long shot, medium shot, close-up. (CBS News Photos)

Then a Q and A with a young woman:

*Reporter:* How do your friends and relatives react when you talk about the possibility of suicide?

*Woman:* They laugh.

*Reporter:* Laugh?

*Woman:* They laugh. Everyone laughs. They don't . . . it's not real to them.

And an interview with a psychologist discussing what these young people are asking from their parents:

Understand me. Give me the time to sit down and get inside my head, and let's share some feelings. Let's share some ideas. Don't tell me "tomorrow." Don't tell me I have a tennis game and tell me I've worked too hard today . . . just listen to me.

*Morton Dean, CBS Evening News*

When interviewing for television, the same basic rules apply as in radio (see Chapter 10, "Tape"). One minor difference is that the need for visuals makes the positions of the interviewer, the interviewee and the camera a consideration. The idea here is to place the camera behind the reporter and not too far off to the side. That way, when the newsmaker looks at the reporter he or she is also looking in the direction of the camera. Placing the camera off to the side, between the two people, would make all shots of the newsmaker profiles.

Most interviews are shot with close-ups on the interviewee. There is little need for a "two shot" that just brings in the side of the face of the reporter holding the mike.

The same standards are used when editing interviews on videotape or film as are used when editing audio tape. Material that is not pertinent or clear should be edited out (see Chapter 10, "Tape"). But a serious problem arises when trying to edit together two sections of a television interview: the problem of jump cuts.

## 6. Cutaways

The president of a dog food company is discussing on camera the settlement he has just reached with a union. The reporter wants to

include the section of the interview where the president blasts the union leader and a later section where he responds to the reporter's question by predicting a huge price hike. The reporter wants to edit out the section in between where the company's president discusses the quality of his dog food.

Throughout the interview the company's president is being videotaped in a close-up. If the ode to his dog food is removed and the attack and prediction put next to each other, two matching shots would be placed together—both close-ups of the company's president. The problem here is that while these shots are *almost* identical, they can never be *exactly* identical. In each shot the man's head is in a slightly different position. If the shots were edited together, his head would seem to jump at the edit point, the place where the videotape has, loosely speaking, been "cut." This would be a "jump cut." It would be disconcerting to the eye and unprofessional looking. What to do?

The solution is to insert another shot between the two close-ups of the newsmaker. This extra shot is called a "cutaway"—the picture cuts away for a few seconds from the person being interviewed. There are two kinds:

**1. Reverses** A shot of the reporter asking a question can serve as a cutaway. With that inserted, we see the company's president blasting the union leader, followed by the reporter asking the question about prices and then the president predicting. No jump cut because the two close-ups of the president are no longer next to each other.

But how does the camera get shots of the reporter asking questions to use as cutaways? There is only one camera covering the story and that camera cannot instantly pan back and forth between the reporter and newsmaker. Instead, what reporters do is wait until the interview has ended and then, with the camera aimed at them, re-ask the questions. These repeated questions are called "reverses" because the camera position is reversed.

There is something a little dishonest about reverses. Those tough questions Mike Wallace on "60 Minutes" is hurling at some defensive individual were actually reshot after the interview, perhaps with the interviewee no longer in the room. There's no choice. This is the only way to fully cover such an exchange with one camera, but it puts an ethical burden on reporters. They have to be careful as they repeat their questions not to change their phrasing or tone in any way that would distort the meaning of the answers that have already been recorded.

**2. Video-only** It is possible to edit two sections of an interview together without putting a reverse, a question, in between. A video-only cutaway also does the trick. Here the two sections of the interview are edited together, but another shot is used to replace a few seconds of the close-up of the interviewee talking. The interviewee talks straight through, the audio track is unchanged. But the picture goes from the close-up to the cutaway, back to the close-up again. As long as the cutaway is placed at the very end of the first section of the edit or at the very beginning of the second section or so that it covers both the end of the first and the start of the second, the jump cut will be gone.

For use as video-only cutaways, camera crews take shots of reporters nodding their heads before or after the interview, or shots of the crowd at a speech or news conference, or shots of the back of the newsmaker's head, or the newsmaker's profile, or the newsmaker's fingers fiddling nervously. A few seconds of any of these can be inserted unobtrusively in the middle of the interview. Reporters shooting an interview must always be sure that the crew has gotten one or two of these shots to use in case it's necessary to use a video-only cutaway.

And, video-only cutaways do not have to be as meaningless as shots of reporters nodding their heads. Sometimes it is possible to cut away to a shot that covers—illustrates—what the newsmaker is talking about. For example, if the interviewee is discussing dog food prices, the

reporter might decide to cut away to a shot of dog food on the shelves at a supermarket.

Video-only cutaways require separating sound and picture on the film or videotape. This is no problem on modern videotape editing equipment, nor is it a problem on the "double-system" film equipment used by the biggest television news organizations. But, many stations still use "single-system film" where the picture and the sound are inseparable. To do video-only cutaways with single-system film, stations must actually roll two synchronized rolls of film when the story is being aired. One roll, the "A roll," has the interview and perhaps the narration on it. The second, the "B roll," has the cutaways and perhaps the cover shots. Whenever an edit comes up in an interview, to avoid the jump cuts on the A roll, the newscast director simply switches to the B roll for a few seconds of cutaway.

## 7. Stand-Ups

If sound-bites resemble actualities, stand-ups resemble voicers. At some point in most videotape or film stories, the reporter appears on camera at the scene to relate information garnered there. These on-camera reports are called "stand-ups" for the simple reason that reporters usually deliver them standing up.

**1. Points** Stand-ups, like voicers, are written on the scene, without the benefit of typewriters or the other conveniences of the newsroom. Reporters prefer to read the stand-up while looking straight into the camera; so it has to be memorized. And, while the stand-up is recorded on the scene, the rest of the story won't be written until the reporter has returned to the newsroom. So, the stand-up must be written with an as-yet-unwritten story in mind.

All these limitations point to the need for simplicity in a stand-up. A stand-up with too many points in it is more difficult to compose on the scene, more difficult to memorize and more difficult to fit into the rest of the story. Few



A TV reporter records a stand-up at an ERA rally. (Martin A. Levick from *Black Star*; © 1978)

stand-ups attempt to make more than one, or at the most two, points.

A stand-up at the end of a story on a long-shoremen's strike:

Some businesses have begun shipping by air. But for most products that is too expensive . . . companies are just waiting for some sign of a break in the strike.—David Culhane, CBS News, New York.

As is a voicer, the stand-up is enhanced by information that points up the value of having a reporter on the scene (see Chapter 10, "Tape"). The first person and a personal angle can help. Incidentally, stand-ups can be recorded over a few times to get them right. Reporters can also try a few different stand-ups, each emphasizing different points. The final version can be selected when editing the story.

"Cute" stand-ups are in fashion. They fit in comfortably with the "happy talk"—light banter—now emphasized at many stations. Still, whatever a station's favored mix of show biz and news, reporters must try to get something meaningful into their stand-ups, even when encouraged to record them while standing in a lion's cage (it's been done). If nothing else, include an interesting fact about lions. Stand-ups can't say much, but if they don't say something, no matter how photogenic the reporter, they are a waste of time.

**2. Length** Most stand-ups are short—10 to 20 seconds. Upon occasion they run longer, especially in complex stories that require a lot of explaining but don't offer much in the way of visuals.

**3. Background** A stand-up employs a variation of the talking-head shot. To increase visual interest, reporters try standing in front of something interesting. At a protest, the stand-up can be recorded in front of the marchers; at a fire, in front of the smoking building (not too close); at a speech, with the audience in the background.

Zooms are used frequently in stand-ups—starting with a shot of the reporter and zooming out to show the angry demonstrators nearby, or starting with a long shot that includes a view of the store that was robbed and zooming in on the reporter.

The search for interesting backgrounds has brought reporters to some strange places. A reporter with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation ended a story on surf sailing while standing on one of those contraptions. After reading his ID, he fell into the water. It's generally not necessary to go this far, but producers look with disfavor upon reporters who return from a colorful festival with a stand-up recorded in front of a blank wall.

**4. Openers** Occasionally stories start with a stand-up—an “opener.” Since reporters generally want to begin a story with a shot that catches the viewer's eye and since a stand-up is usually among the duller shots in a story, openers are rare. They are used most frequently in stories about economics, or in political analyses that don't lend themselves to good visuals, or perhaps for a crime story for which no shots of the scene or the characters are available. Once in a while, too, a reporter has produced an unusually clever stand-up and decides to use it to kickoff a feature story. Openers are also used on live stories to emphasize at the start that the reporter is there:

It has been a very confusing night for reporters, for the airlines and the passengers. When we arrived here at Newark Airport amid all the confusion, we found one D-C Ten preparing for take-off.

*WCBS-TV, New York City*

Then the videotape and the rest of the story.

**5. Bridges** A stand-up can also be used in the middle of a story to “bridge” two other sections of the report. These too are rare. It's difficult to write something that will fit neatly in the middle of a story that hasn't yet been written. And again, there are usually more visually interesting shots to use in the middle of a story. On the other hand, since it doesn't require much videotape or film to record a stand-up, it is not a bad idea on some stories to try a bridge. If it works and fits, it can be used. If not, no harm done.

Bridges work especially well when the reporter demonstrates something. Here a reporter does a bridge stand-up while opening a door to the roof from which the brick that killed a woman was thrown:

Tenants say one of the problems here is that anyone who wants to get to the roof can. The door here is always unlocked.

*WNEW-TV, New York City*

This stand-up is surrounded by the rest of the story.

**6. Closes** This is where stand-ups usually appear—at the end of the story. They lead naturally into the reporter's ID—“Garrick Utley, NBC News, London.” Reporters should generally record one or two closes. Most of the time they end up using one.

To write a close that fits comfortably at the end of a story, reporters choose from the same set of options available for a snapper (see Chapter 6, “Stories”) or a write-out (see Chapter 11, “Writing to Tape”): another fact, a future ramification, the other side, a punch line, a restatement of the main point. Of these, the first two are the most common and often the easiest to tag onto a story. Another fact (at the end of a story about a man who hiked to safety after a small plane crashed):

Searchers today at last found the wreckage of the tiny plane and the bodies. And Norman Ollestad left the

hospital. He said he would never fly again.—Terry Drinkwater, CBS News, Los Angeles.

A future ramification stand-up:

The search for more radium will take several days. And medical tests are to begin on the brickyard workers who were closest to the radium dump. The problem, said one state official, will be here for a long time.—Harold Dow, CBS News, Denver.

## 8. Editing

Television news reports are much longer than radio voicers or wraps (see Chapter 10, "Tape"). They average 1½ or 2 minutes long. Editing the videotape or film into a story becomes a complex proposition.

Film is edited on special editing projectors. Each frame can be seen and the reporter and whoever is doing the actual cutting can look over the film and decide exactly where to cut. Videotape is edited using two videotape recorders and an "editor" which controls them. Small television monitors allow the shots to be seen. At large stations reporters supervise either in person or by giving editors a copy of their script; at small stations they may be asked to actually operate the equipment.

Often reporters begin writing their stories while riding back to the newsroom. Usually they have written most of the material before they begin editing. In many cases they actually have recorded their narration (see Chapter 16, "Writing To Visuals") before they edit, so the videotape or film can be edited to fit the writing. Less frequently, the videotape or film is edited first; then the story is written to fit the visuals.

The order in which these tasks are performed should not affect the content of the story. The visuals must do certain jobs and the writing has to meet certain standards. If the story is written first, reporters must be aware of what shots are available; their writing must take the visuals into account. If the videotape or film is edited first, the

order in which it is edited must take into account how the story has to be written.

Some editing notes:

**1. Cuts** Each shot or portion of a shot is called a "cut." A cut is an edited version of a shot. If the story includes 10 seconds of a shot of the firefighters fighting the fire, that's a cut. Then the 5-second close-up of one of the firemen's faces is another cut. The story might also include a 10-second cut from a shot of the huddled survivors.

Silent cuts should be on screen just long enough for the viewer to comprehend whatever information is in them. For example, a shot of two people should be held, as a rule, longer than a shot of one—there is more information in it.

This is clearest when words are in the picture. A shot of words should be edited so that it is long enough for viewers to read comfortably. A cut featuring a stop sign doesn't deserve more than 3 seconds by this standard; a shot of a sign reading, "Passengers Only Beyond This Point"—5 seconds. Too short and viewers might be confused and even frustrated, too long and viewers might get bored.

Long shots generally contain more information than close-ups. Hence, long shots are usually given more time on the air when editing. Cuts with action in them hold interest longer than static shots. When editing, action shots usually are held longer. Of course, there are other considerations. Some shots may have to be held a little longer than they deserve because the reporter has a lot to say that needs to be covered by that shot.

The average silent cut runs from 4 to 12 seconds. Shots may run shorter if they are very simple—the stop sign, for example; if a group of shots are combined in a "montage"—a series of short shots edited together, perhaps different shots showing gas prices or faces in a crowd; or if they are just providing views from different angles of the same scene—a series of medium shots of a crowd, perhaps.

As a gimmick, NBC once ran a videotape story

that was all one cut, with the camera starting in a truck and then being lifted up by a helicopter. But shots must be very interesting to run more than 12 seconds; viewers tire of scenes rapidly.

**2. Order** A television videotape or film story has the same job as any broadcast story: clearly communicating information. It is not surprising, therefore, that many of the rules for arranging shots reflect rules for arranging thoughts in broadcast news stories. For example, as writing that presents too much information, too quickly, sinks a broadcast story (see Chapter 6, "Stories"), too many cuts that are too busy make a videotape or film piece confusing. As too many long sentences make a story drag, too many long cuts make videotape or film boring. And varying the cut length helps pace a videotape or film piece, as varying sentence length paces a story. Editors of words and visuals have to maintain a snappy but comprehensible pace.

Similarly, the rule that stories should deal with one subject at a time (see Chapter 6, "Stories") also applies when editing videotape or film. It makes no sense to sprinkle cover shots of police throughout a story on a protest. Viewers understand best when presented with one issue at a time—keep the cop shots in one section of the story. Even if the videotape or film survives violation of these basic storytelling rules, the copy that has to go with these haphazard cuts will suffer.

A videotape or film story also has a lead shot, as any broadcast story has a lead sentence. Reporters differ on the importance of the lead shot. Phil Barnouw of KNXT, Los Angeles, is among those who believe a story should lead with its best shot. A fire story might lead with the flames or the bodies; a protest story with the most dramatic confrontation; a story on unhealthy conditions in mental hospitals with the grisliest scenes inside. The strategy here is obvious—catch their eyes.

Other reporters disagree. They believe in softer lead shots that guide viewers into the story. They might begin the mental hospital story with an establishing shot of the outside of the build-

ing. They want to build up to the dramatic footage. Both schools of thought agree that attention should be given to both preparing and engaging viewers with the lead shot. They just disagree on which should be emphasized: preparing or engaging.

Other rules for ordering cuts follow from the rules for shooting visuals that tell the story, discussed earlier in this chapter. Editors must take into account the logical sequence for approaching scenes: long shot, medium shot, close-ups (although good editors frequently play with this pattern). Editors also want to mix in reaction shots as they order the cuts to bring out meanings.

**3. Visual continuity** In one shot a firefighter is wearing a hat; in another shot his hat is off. That's no problem if the two shots are used at different points in the story, but it would be disconcerting if the shots were placed next to each other. Proximity in a story implies proximity in time. Viewers would wonder how that hat had suddenly disappeared. Editors must be aware of the need to preserve visual continuity.

If a fire truck is moving in one picture, it can't be parked in the next. There are two ways around this problem. First, when shooting the moving fire truck, allow it to drive out of the frame. That hints at off-camera activities and makes it possible for viewers to accept seeing the truck standing still in the next cut. The second solution works for most of these situations where visual continuity is a problem: edit in a shot in between. Go from the moving fire truck to a shot of the fire, then back to the parked fire truck. This technique also solves the problem of the firefighter's hat; just cut away to a shot of the fire truck; then it's possible to return to the now hatless firefighter without breaking the visual continuity. It's similar to using a cutaway to avoid a jump cut.

**4. Sound** Editing a videotape or film story is similar in its complexity to organizing a radio documentary (see Chapter 14, "Radio"), and

videotape editors borrow a trick from documentary producers for simplifying the task: They start by choosing and ordering their sound.

The average videotape or film story uses one or two sound-bites and a stand-up. Rarely does a story open or close with a sound-bite; it's too confusing, like a radio actuality without a lead-in or a write-out (see Chapter 11, "Writing to Tape"). The sound-bites usually are delayed for a while to allow the cover shots to set up the story. There is nothing wrong with editing a couple of different sound-bites together, but, more often than not, the sound-bites are spread out in the story. And the stand-up, more often than not, is a close.

If more than one sound-bite is used, reporters usually go first with the most objective; then they use the more opinionated comment. In other words, first the doctor, then the patient; first the

police officer, then the victim. This seems the logical way for a story to unfold, though it is certainly not a rule.

Once the sound-bites and stand-up have been selected and roughly placed, the story should begin to fall into place around them. Here is a fairly standard version of a fire story:

LS Smoldering building and firefighters: 10 secs.

MS Firefighters fighting: 5 secs.

CU Chief ordering: 5 secs.

*Sound-bite:* Chief explains: 20 secs.

LS Huddled survivors: 10 secs.

CU Survivor's face: 5 secs.

*Sound-bite:* Survivor describing: 10 secs.

LS Guttled building: 10 secs.

MS Exhausted firefighters: 10 secs.

*Stand-up:* 15 secs.

TOTAL: 1:40

## SUMMARY

Graphics, videotape, composition—these are guides to what television news should look like. Its looks, in turn, play an important role in shap-

ing the writing that determines how television news sounds.

## PRACTICE ASSIGNMENTS

Describe how you would shoot the following stories at the scene. Indicate whether each shot is a LS, MS, or CU.

1. Policemen's Union pickets City Hall at noon, protesting lay-offs. The mayor comes out to meet the protesters. Lunchtime crowd gathers. *CU*
2. Your town's largest bank is robbed of 600-thousand dollars on a weekday morning. One teller is shot and seriously injured. A bank customer is abducted as a hostage. *MS*
3. It's discovered that the water in the seals' pool at the zoo has been poisoned. One seal has died and

*LS*

- several are ill. Police say the culprit climbed over a metal picket fence in the middle of the night and contaminated the water while the night guards were patrolling other parts of the zoo.
4. A 24-year-old woman is found strangled to death in her home in a prosperous section of town. Police are at the scene. Neighbors gather. Her body is carried out. *MS*
5. A city commission publishes a study charging that at least half of the apartment buildings in the poorer sections of town violate city building codes. The mayor, accompanied by aides and various community leaders, goes on a walking tour to check out the situation for herself. *LS*

# 16

## WRITING TO VISUALS

The copy on the next page, written for the CBS Evening News, follows the rules for broadcast writing outlined in the earlier chapters. The edits here were made by Walter Cronkite himself; he is managing editor of his program in fact as well as in name. Note how Cronkite saved time and words. (The original was typed in executive size; it has been reduced here.)

If anything, television newswriting must be even more conversational and clear than radio newswriting. When we can actually see the newscaster talking, stiff, formal language seems even more uncomfortable. And, with visuals to distract us, convoluted copy is even more difficult for us to follow. So, the basic writing style is the same for television, but again the presence of visuals complicates matters. Television writing must work in partnership with visuals, which places tough demands on the writer. There's a new set of rules to master.

### COPY

First a basic difference in the copy: Each page of television news copy is divided in half. The copy that the newscaster reads, at most stations, is written on the right-hand side of the page only.

PANEL #4 --  
Buffalo etc.

Former Giant  
quarterback Craig  
Morton ran for one  
touchdown and passed  
for another...leading  
Denver to its second  
victory. San Diego  
and Washington each  
won for the first  
time.

INTO TAPE "FOOTBALL"

*WNBC-TV, New York City*

The right-hand side of the page is the "audio" column—anything the newscaster reads goes there. The left-hand side of the page is reserved for video information. In this section from a sports report by Dick Schaap, "PANEL #4—Buffalo etc." tells the director to place on screen at that exact place in the copy a graphic (#4) with a series of scores including the score of the Buffalo game. "INTO TAPE 'FOOTBALL,'" which as often happens wanders unobtrusively into the audio column, tells the director to play at that spot in the copy the videotape they have labeled *football*.

All the style rules for copy discussed in Chapter 1, "Copy," still apply in the right-hand column of television news pages. Of course, the

14. CROMKITE

For the record,  
the National Weather  
Service says ~~the~~  
~~experts have figured~~  
~~out~~ that last month  
was the coldest  
January in the  
eastern United  
States in at least  
177 years.

The forecast for  
the next 30 days:  
More of the below-  
normal cold, WHICH

The weather service  
SAYS COULD MAKE  
said if the bitter  
cold continues  
through March, this  
winter could be the  
coldest since the

founding of the  
Republic."

(Incidentally, THANKS TO  
the  
recent warming ~~is~~  
BOAT TRAFFIC HAS  
trend ~~was a break for~~  
RESUMED  
Mississippi River  
barge operators.

Commercial traffic  
has been restored  
(along a 160-mile  
stretch UP THE MISSISSIPPI  
from St.

Louis down to

Cairo, Illinois. A  
STRETCH  
~~that had been~~ clogged  
BY ICE  
for almost a  
month.)

time it takes to read a line changes because the lines are half as long.

Obviously, basic broadcast copy rules do not apply on the left—the video column. "PANEL #4—Buffalo etc." manages to break a handful of the rules for typing broadcast copy all by itself, but that is no problem. The standard broadcast copy rules all but disappear on the left-hand side of the page because the information written there is not read on the air. During the show those notations are just read by the director and the technical staff.

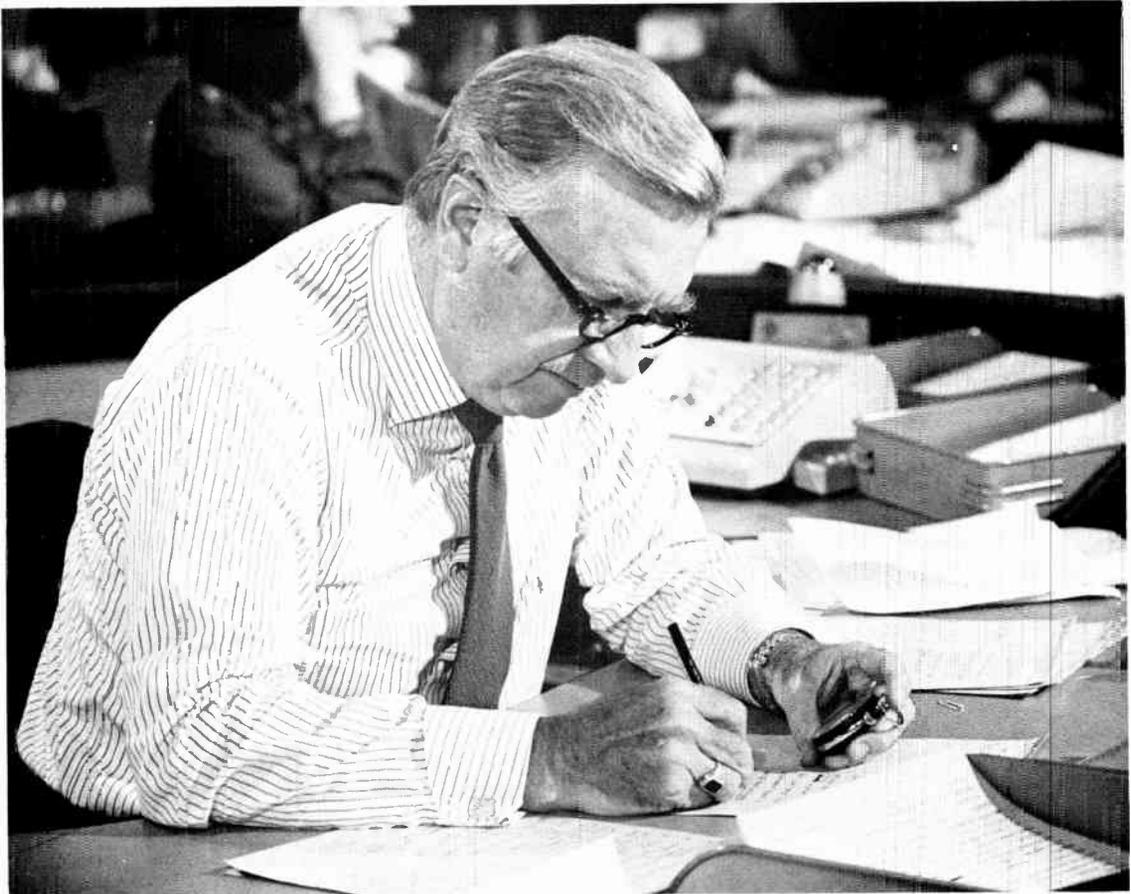
The technical cues in the video column must be precise and legible, but they may include

abbreviations, numerals below eleven, code, and they may be handwritten. The information that needs to be included in that video column varies for different types of stories.

### 1. Tell Stories

A television story that uses no videotape or film is called a "tell story"—the newscaster just tells the story. The visual here is a talking head or a talking head plus a graphic, and the copy in the right-hand column is really no different from a radio story.

If no graphics are being used, all that's neces-



Walter Cronkite times his copy as he edits. (CBS News Photo)

sary in the video column is the name of the anchor. The name should be lined up with the first line of the story, so it is clear that the anchor is on the air from that point on in the copy.

Cronkite

Good evening.  
Secretary of  
State Vance put  
the Carter  
Administration's  
foreign policy into  
full gear today.  
Arriving in Israel on  
the first stop of a

six-nation Middle East  
tour, Vance talked of  
peace and the U-S  
commitment to Israel's  
security and survival.

*CBS Evening News*

## 2. Graphics

The director usually needs to know exactly where in the copy the graphics come up and exactly where they should disappear. To keep things precise, the notation in the video column should be lined up exactly with the line in the audio column at the start of which the graphic is supposed to appear.

In this story, a full-screen graph of unemployment rates is used. The place where the graph should come up is made extra clear by the arrow. "OC" means that it's time to lose the graphic and return to a shot of the anchor—in this case, Roger Mudd—on camera.

start GRAPH → That pushed the nation's unemployment rate back up -- this time, to seven percent. Since the beginning of the year, unemployment has declined only slightly and in the past seven months, it has hovered stubbornly between six-point-nine percent and seven-point-one percent.

OC → Last month's increase reflected layoffs in the steel industry and strikes.  
CBS Evening News

The codes stations use for graphics vary widely. Anything that is clear to everyone in the newsroom and studio is acceptable. A simple set: for a key of, for example, a plane crash: *Key—Crash*; for a super reading "Houston vs. Green Bay": *Super—Houston vs. Green Bay*; for a rear projection slide reading "Gasoline": *RP—Gasoline*. Finally, to lose a graphic, just write the anchor's name, indicating that the anchor is back on screen, alone.

### 3. Videotape or Film

Sometimes a newscaster in the studio reads the narration for a videotape or film story live in the studio. In that case, the copy is written up just like copy to graphics. In the left-hand column, lined up with the proper line of copy in the right-hand column, a cue is written that tells the

director to play the videotape or film at that moment. There should be a cue at the point where the videotape or film ends, too.

Here is the spot where some videotape comes up in a sports report. "VO/SILENT" means that the newscaster is reading a *voice-over* narration for *silent* videotape.

VO/SILENT                      Oakland's Super Bowl  
RUNS: :43                      defense was awesome  
   against Pittsburgh.  
   The Raiders sacked  
   Terry Bradshaw five  
   times...costing him 51  
   yards...  
   WNBC-TV, New York City

More often, the soundtrack has been pre-recorded on videotape or film. The entire story is ready to play as a package. All that is included in the newscast script in this case is a lead-in with certain basic information about the videotape or film in its video column. This is similar to the way wraps and reports are handled in radio newscast scripts (see Chapter 11, "Writing to Tape").

The video column on such a lead-in should include some identification of the videotape or film—either a slug, a number or the number of the machine that will be playing it; plus the length of the videotape or film and the out-cue. Sometimes the terms "track," "SOT"—sound on tape—or "SOF"—sound on film—are included to emphasize the fact that the story includes a soundtrack.

Here is the lead-in to a videotape story. The videotape is ready to be played on the station's third ENG—videotape—machine.

Last night we reported on two tax shelter schemes currently operating in North Dakota.

Tonight Karen Lockett takes a look

at fraudulent investments and ways to spot them.

TAKE ENG 3  
TIME 2:10  
OUT: STANDARD

*KXMB-TV, North Dakota*

The lead-in is sufficient for the newscast script. But, at some point in the production of the story, the reporter will have to sit down and write a script for that story which includes detailed information on the videotape or film. That copy must match up the cuts and the narration.

If the narration is written before the videotape or film is edited, the script for the story may be used as a guideline for the editor and should contain the reporter's plan for editing the story. Some reporters who have gone through the shots carefully in advance even include on the script the numbers from the unit counters on the editing machine that indicate exactly where they want the shots cut.

If the videotape or film has already been edited, reporters may first work from a "spot sheet"—a simple list of the cuts and their lengths in order. But, as the story is written, the information on the spot sheet is transferred onto the script. These scripts often are shown to the newscast's producer for approval before they are recorded or before the story is edited.

In the script for a videotape or film story each cut (very short cuts that essentially show the same thing may be combined) is listed in the video column, next to the first line that should be read when the cut is on screen. Times and out-cues have to be noted for sound-bites and stand-ups:

Oil Refinery 8 secs.	More gasoline will be available in the weeks ahead. New figures show that refineries increased their production by three percent last week.
-------------------------	---

Oil Drill  
8 secs.

How were they able to suddenly produce more? There have been suspicions that the companies were delaying production to get higher prices later on. But at a news conference today Energy Secretary Schlesinger said they simply have been overly cautious.

Schlesinger  
5 secs.

Schlesinger/SOT  
Cutaways: LS Schlesinger  
Audience

Runs: 41  
Out: "...gasoline lines."

Stand-up/SOT  
Runs: 14  
Out: Direct

*NBC Nightly News*

There is no need to write out the sound-bites or the stand-up in the story's script—the reporter doesn't have to read them. But, for the record, here is the text of that unusually long sound-bite:

There could maybe have been some undue conservatism on the part of the companies in managing their inventories. If they had run down the crude oil inventories and the consequent gasoline stocks at an earlier point, we would have had an easier condition in May and in June, but we would have had a tighter condition in August. I would hope that the American people would not react to a slightly eased situation by returning to a pattern of driving or a pattern of demand for gasoline that might recreate gasoline lines.

And the stand-up:

Asked why all the companies happened to be unduly conservative at the same time, Schlesinger said the president had ordered the Justice and Energy Departments to investigate for possible collusion. He didn't think there was any.—Andrea Mitchell, NBC News, Washington.

As usual, stations don't pass up the opportunity to use slightly idiosyncratic formats and their own jargon. But most videotape or film scripts contain the same basic information as in the example above.

## NARRATION

Writing narration to go with visuals is one of the most difficult skills in broadcast journalism. The language must be sharp, the timing exact and the words have to click with what appears on the screen.

### 1. Background Graphics

These aren't too difficult to write to. Rear projection or keyed graphics are unobtrusive additions to television news stories. The lead-in for the story on oil production used as an example in the last section was read by John Chancellor with a graphic behind him that featured a sketch of a car filling up and the word "gasoline." It's not necessary that Chancellor's copy say anything about that graphic.

#### UNACCEPTABLE:

The gasoline crisis...which we've illustrated in this graphic...

As long as the background graphic refers to the major point of the story, as it should, viewers themselves should be able to connect the picture or words and the story.

Chancellor R/P -- gasoline	The government said today that gasoline supplies this summer will <u>not</u> be critically short, although the supply situation will continue to be tight. Energy Secretary James Schlesinger said more crude oil from overseas will ease the situation...but he
----------------------------------	--

also said we have a continuing supply problem that is, in his words, as "plain as mashed potatoes." Here's a report.

VRT -- Schlesinger

Runs: 1:16

Out: Direct

*NBC Nightly News*

Writing to background graphics, therefore, is really the same as writing a tell story, or a radio news story, for that matter. The only trick is to avoid redundancy. If the graphic says "Peace?" it is foolish to start the story, "Peace? That question is being asked..." Incidentally, the beauty of one type of background graphic—lower-thirds—is that they remove the need to mention a name in the copy. Merely repeating what is said in a lower-third is usually a waste of words, if not redundant.

There is an exception to this redundancy warning, however. Character generators are sometimes used to print important statements—perhaps the president's exact words on oil shortages—on the screen. The goal here is *extra* clarity, so in this case repeating those words in the copy makes sense.

When graphics are given the whole screen they are no longer in the background; more complex writing requirements come into play.

### 2. Writing Away

A newscaster is discussing the weather. On screen is some videotape of young people throwing a Frisbee in a city park. That's an extreme example of "writing away" from videotape. The writing has little to do with the visuals except insofar as they demonstrate that it was a nice day.

Sometimes it is necessary to write copy that relates only marginally to the visuals. It's an alternative to a talking head when presenting information for which no relevant illustrations are available. There are no shots that illustrate tomorrow's forecast; so after the weather maps

and under the graphics, it's either shots of Frisbee players or the weather person's head.

Discussion of a proposed city income tax might present similar problems. Graphics with the numbers help, but under them a reporter might decide to use videotape of people going to work, people walking into a bank or shots of the city council debating the tax.

Crowds on sidewalk	How much would people have to pay in city income taxes? Its sponsors say the average worker would pay less than 200 dollars a year.
Graphic -- tax rates	
8 secs.	

Situations like these, where it is necessary to write away from the visuals, are not that common. Clever reporters should return to the newsroom with shots that cover most aspects of the story (see Chapter 15, "Visuals"). Information on inflation can be illustrated with supermarkets and stores; details of a proposed highway can be matched with shots of the present roads, the projected right-of-way and the meeting at which the new road was debated. There may be a subject or two in a story that is difficult to cover, necessitating writing away for a cut or two. But writers try to write close to the visuals whenever possible.

The real danger when writing away from visuals is words and images that not only don't help each other but actively conflict.

#### UNACCEPTABLE:

Crowds on sidewalk	Few people would be affected by the new city income tax. Its sponsors say only ten percent of the people who work here would even have to fill out the forms.
Graphic -- tax rates	
9 secs.	

The narration is talking about few people; the picture shows crowds? This could be saved by writing at least a little closer to the visual.

#### ACCEPTABLE:

Crowds on sidewalk	Most people would not be affected by the new city income tax. Its sponsors say 90 percent of the people who work here would not even have to fill out the forms.
Graphic -- tax rates	
11 secs.	

### 3. Spotting

This is the other extreme:

Stalled caravan of trucks	Two drivers parked their rigs at the front of this caravan on I-94.
5 secs.	

*Jim Cummins, NBC*

The writer here is writing extremely close to the videotape—"spotting" the videotape. With the word "this," he is almost pointing to the shot for the viewer. Once in a while this helps. It may not be clear in the picture that this is a truck caravan. Spotting the visuals can help clarify unclear shots, but usually it isn't necessary. Just show a shot of a gas station blocked by protesting truckers and write what happened at that gas station; viewers will understand that the station on screen is the very same one being discussed in the narration. It is not necessary to write "This is the gas station where . . ." If the visuals and writing are good, viewers can spot things themselves.

#### WEAK:

Trucks parked on highway	These were some of the 300 big trucks that lined both sides of the Indiana turnpike . . . two and three abreast.
7 secs.	

#### BETTER:

Trucks parked on highway	The big trucks -- 300 of them -- lined both sides of the Indiana
6 secs.	

turnpike...two and  
three abreast.

Matt Quinn, ABC

Writing too far away from the visuals is usually a mistake. Writing too close can sound phony and simplistic. The solution is usually the middle way.

#### 4. Coordinating

A writer has to write a story about an air crash. No videotape or film is available yet, so the station is using a black-and-white photograph of the wreckage-strewn site obtained from a photo wire. It has been transferred to a slide for use on the air, full screen. The writer begins the story as it would begin on radio:

Anchor            A D-C Ten jet crashed  
                      this afternoon seconds  
                      after taking off from  
                      Chicago's O'Hare  
                      airport. Officials  
                      say there were over  
                      270 people on board  
                      American Airlines  
                      flight 191 headed for  
                      Los Angeles.

Now it's time to use the slide. The words here do not have to tell viewers they are seeing the crash site.

WEAK:

Slide: Crash     This was the scene on  
          Site     the ground where the  
          6 secs. plane crashed. Notice  
                      the twisted and  
                      charred pieces of  
                      metal.

However, neither is this the time to discuss unrelated matters, to write away from the slide.

WEAK:

Slide: Crash     Eyewitnesses say that  
          Site     one of the plane's  
          10 secs. engines fell off  
                      shortly before the  
                      plane crashed.  
                      There's no word yet  
                      from officials as to  
                      whether this may have  
                      caused the crash.

What is needed is writing that relates to the slide without overexplaining it. The writer chooses those facts in the story that fit the slide most closely and brings them in here, facts that concern the visual but tell viewers things that aren't apparent when looking at the visual.

BETTER:

Slide: Crash     The plane crashed and  
          Site     exploded in a vacant  
          10 secs. lot a quarter of a  
                      mile from the airport.  
                      Ambulances rushed to  
                      the scene, but it was  
                      soon apparent that  
                      there were no  
                      survivors.

This information *coordinates* with the slide. The writing makes the visual clearer and the visual makes the writing clearer.

The writer then decides to lose the slide as the story concludes:

Anchor            Eyewitnesses say they  
                      saw an engine fall off  
                      one of the plane's  
                      wings shortly before  
                      the plane hit the  
                      ground. There's no  
                      word yet from  
                      officials on whether  
                      this may have caused  
                      the crash — the worst  
                      ever in this country.

Coordinating visuals and copy requires matching shots and information.

teacher would not see him.

John Cochran, NBC

**UNACCEPTABLE:**

Body carried out	Police have charged 24-year-old Robert Silversmith with the murder.
4 secs.	
Suspect being arraigned	The victim -- Fred Hardy -- was a 30-year-old father of two. He was a neighbor of the suspect.
6 secs.	

To put it bluntly, the victim goes with his body; the suspect goes with shots of his arraignment.

**ACCEPTABLE:**

Body carried out	The victim -- Fred Hardy -- was a 30-year-old father of two.
4 secs.	
Suspect being arraigned	Police have charged a neighbor -- 24-year-old Robert Silversmith -- with the murder.
6 secs.	

Notice how the videotape and the narration fit together in this section of a report on Pope John Paul II's visit to his hometown.

Pope arrives in open car	The Pope came home to his birthplace...and to the church he worshiped in as a boy.
5 secs.	
Pope in front of church and crowd	Here -- as elsewhere in Poland -- a huge throng was waiting for him.
4 secs.	
Pope shakes hands in crowd	But this one was different...there was less awe, more familiarity.
4 secs.	
Pope talks with elderly woman	Old people talked with him about his student days when he sat in the back of the classroom hoping his
8 secs.	

It is possible to "write through" a cut. In other words, not every new shot has to be accompanied in the script by a new sentence. Often copy is matched with a sequence of shots rather than an individual cut. When this is done, it is not always possible to put the word at which the cut begins flush left in the audio column. It's sufficient if the cut is lined up with the line *during* which it begins:

Pope shakes hands in crowd	But this one was different... In his hometown the Pope found people, especially old people, who knew him...and treated him with less awe, more familiarity.
5 secs.	
Pope talks with elderly woman	
5 secs.	

The demands of the visuals necessarily modify the standards by which information is selected for a story (see Chapter 6, "Stories"). For example, anything the Pope did out of reach of the television cameras would be less likely to find its way into the story--no cover shots available. Major facts should not be ignored just because there are no visuals to use with them. They can be included in the lead-in, or, if necessary, the reporter can write away from the videotape or film for a couple of cuts to get them in. However, when reasonable, the visuals affect the choice of facts, just as the facts affect the choice of visuals.

The visuals may also affect the wording itself. If only 4 seconds of videotape are available of the Pope standing in front of the crowd at his old church, there is no time for:

Pope in front of church and crowd	Huge crowds have showed up everywhere the Pope has gone in Poland...and the square here in front of the church where he was baptized was jammed.
8 secs.	

That won't fit. Facts must be abandoned and the language changed to fit the videotape:

Pope in front of church and crowd  
4 secs.      Here -- as elsewhere in Poland -- a huge throng was waiting for him.

And, if there had been 5 seconds of that shot that were too good to ignore, the wording could have changed to accommodate the videotape:

Pope in front of church and crowd  
5 secs.      Here -- as elsewhere in Poland -- a huge and enthusiastic throng was waiting for him.

If that shot had really deserved 6 seconds:

Pope in front of church and crowd  
6 secs.      Here -- as elsewhere in Poland -- a huge and enthusiastic throng came to listen to him and pray with him.

There are many accurate and pleasing ways to word thoughts. To coordinate copy and visuals, writers must be prepared to explore these alternative phrasings. The needs of the visuals may force them away from their first choice sentences. Visuals do limit writing options, so radio newswriters have more freedom than television newswriters. But these sacrifices are repaid when the visuals and the sentences begin to harmonize.

## 5. Sound

Writing to sound-on-tape or sound-on-film sections of television news stories requires some of the same skills used to set up actualities and voicers in radio lead-ins (see Chapter 11, "Writing to Tape").

In television news, people who are plucked off the street for interviews and sound-bites do not have to be identified; seeing their faces tells us about as much as we need to know about them. But anyone with significant impact on the story who appears in a sound-bite must be identified. If there's no lower-third, the writing must do the job, as it has to in radio (see Chapter 11, "Writing to Tape"). A television throw line:

Precht  
10 secs.      Catholic Church leaders such as Christian Precht note the improvement in human rights statistics, but press for guarantees that the improvements are not temporary.

*David Dow, CBS*

Then Precht comes on to speak his piece.

Even when there is a lower-third to handle the details of the identification, the sentence before the sound-bite must still set up the statement, at least indirectly. In his throw line to the sound-bite with a child psychologist on teenage suicide quoted in the previous chapter, CBS's Morton Dean leaves the name to the lower-third but takes responsibility for introducing the statement in his narration:

Dr. Brodlie  
9 secs.      The advice from adolescent psychologists is for troubled young people to talk...to someone. And for parents to listen to their children...to hear their message.

Then Dr. Brodlie speaks, with a lower-third giving his full name. In the same report, Dean uses a short but even more explicit throw line:



LS Briefing room 7 secs.	She was up at five o'clock this morning with two dozen other balloonists from Ontario and the northeastern U-S... for the first meet in which she'll pilot her own balloon...without an instructor on-board.	Balloons taking off 3 secs.	Balloonists refer to an event like today's as a mass ascension.
Rosenthal and pilot friend 5 secs.		Patrick and Rosenthal in balloon/SOT Runs: 20 Out: "...any of them." Cutaway to people waving up 6 secs. Cutaway -- horses in field below 10 secs.	"What happens to people as you float over them? What's their attitude toward balloons?"  "Oh, they... they all wave and think it's great and wish they could be up here." "How about the animals?" "Well, some of them don't like us too much. But you try and fly... you put the burner on before you get to them and fly over them, high, and so you don't disturb any of them."
Leaders at table 8 secs.	At this morning's briefing for the pilots, the "go-" or "no-go" decision... based largely on how stable the air is... was announced by the meet's leader.		
Meet leader/ Runs: 7 Out: "...this morning."	"If we're going to go, people, we ought to go this morning. Anyone that feels strongly that they don't want to go this morning?"	CU Champagne bottle opens 4 secs.	One of the great traditions of ballooning is champagne. It would be sacrilegious for a balloon to head up into the skies without a bottle of bubbly to share later with the chase crew and the farmer in whose field it's landed.
Balloons on field 4 secs.	Balloons are an expensive hobby. Karen Rosenthal's British-made craft cost 10-thousand dollars. She'd been saving for three years to buy it.		
Rosenthal's balloon 4 secs.			
Balloons on field 3 secs. Fan 2 secs.	All these hot-air balloons have three things in common -- giant fans are used to fill them with air... propane burners are used to heat that air...and the balloons themselves...in the air or on the ground...are a riot of bright color.	Stand-up SOT Runs: 11 Out: Direct	Karen Rosenthal says she makes all her ascensions now with one great ambition in mind. She wants to be the first woman to solo across the Atlantic Ocean.—Russ Patrick, CBC News, near Batavia, New York.
Burner 2 secs. Rosenthal's balloon 5 secs.			

*Canadian Broadcasting Corporation*

## SUMMARY

Television newswriting changes to meet the needs of the visuals. But, with the exception of the shot or two that is allowed to explain itself, television stories still are written so that the writ-

ing could stand on its own. The words, meanings, sentences, leads and stories of television news do the same jobs as in radio news, plus a few more.

## PRACTICE ASSIGNMENTS

A. Two full-screen slides are available to illustrate this story. Write a 25- to 30-second story based on the wire copy, and indicate in the video column where you want to use the slides.

*Slide 1:* A condor. *Slide 2:* Brush fire burning.

FILLMORE, CALIF. -- A TWO-DAY BRUSH FIRE THAT INCHED ACROSS THE LAST REMAINING BREEDING GROUND OF THE GIANT CALIFORNIA CONDOR WAS DECLARED FULLY UNDER CONTROL TODAY.

THE BLAZE, BELIEVED STARTED BY ILLEGAL FIREWORKS, BLACKENED 120 ACRES OF STEEP, ROCKY TERRAIN IN THE LOS PADRES NATIONAL FOREST.

A U.S. FOREST SERVICE SPOKESWOMAN SAID NONE OF THE CONDOR NESTS WERE HARMED. THERE ARE BELIEVED TO BE ONLY ABOUT 40 OF THE ENDANGERED BIRDS ALIVE.

THE FOREST SERVICE SPOKESWOMAN SAID THE FORCE OF 240 FIREFIGHTERS WAS REDUCED TO 45 MEN WHO REMAINED ON THE LINES THROUGH THE NIGHT. THE BLAZE WAS DECLARED UNDER CONTROL AT 8 A.M., BUT FIREFIGHTERS REMAINED TO MAKE SURE THE LAST EMBERS WERE OUT.

STEEP TERRAIN HAMPERED CONTROL EFFORTS AND FIREFIGHTERS HAD TO BE FLOWN INTO THE AREA BY HELICOPTER, USING MOUNTAIN-CLIMBING TECHNIQUES TO CLIMB UP THE ROCKY HILLSIDES AND HACK OUT FIRE LINES.

THE BLAZE STARTED SUNDAY AND QUICKLY SPREAD INTO THE HUGE 53,000-ACRE CONDOR REFUGE IN THE LOS PADRES NATIONAL FOREST. HOWEVER, THE FIRE DID NOT ENDANGER ANY OF THE NESTS OF THE GIANT BIRDS.

"THERE ARE NO KNOWN ACTIVE NEST SITES THAT WE'RE AWARE OF IN THE AREA WHERE THE FIRE WAS BURNING," A SPOKESMAN SAID.

NO STRUCTURES WERE THREATENED AND ONLY ONE FIREFIGHTER WAS INJURED WHEN A FALLING ROCK HIT HIS HEAD. HE WAS NOT SERIOUSLY HURT.

B. The following silent videotape has been shot for this story:

LS smashed trains 20 secs.  
CU crushed front of train 25 secs.  
MS injured people being removed 20 secs.  
CU face of uninjured but shocked survivor 5 secs.

Write a lead-in plus a 30- to 35-second story with videotape. You can edit the videotape any way you want. For example, 8 seconds of the long shot may be used at one point in the story and another 10 seconds at another point. But, no more than 20 seconds of the long shot can be used. Indicate the cuts in the video column. Here are notes on the story:

2 commuter trains collide . . . crash at 8:58. . . both trains packed—rush hour. . . head-on crash. . . police say trains not going that fast—estimate 15 mph each at time of crash . . . police say about 400 people on board both trains plus 12 crew members . . . police say at least 80 injured . . . at least 20 injured seriously . . . injured taken to St. Vincent's Hospital . . . no report of any fatalities at this time . . . one passenger: "All of a sudden there was this horrible sound like an explosion, and we were all thrown about. It was terrible, people were bleeding and screaming." Railroad officials say they have no idea what went wrong . . . unconfirmed report here that a signal problem may have been at fault. Authorities promise a full investiga-

tion . . . trains were the 8:20 from Pennsylvania Station downtown and the 8:15 from Merrick . . . . crash site one mile from Jamaica Station in Jamaica.

C. The following silent videotape has been shot for this story:

- LS abortion clinic with protesters in front 25 secs.
- MS clinic and protesters 20 secs.
- CU sign: "Women's Clinic" 20 secs.
- MS protesters with signs: "Abortion is murder"; "Right-to-life" 15 secs.
- CU protester's face while chanting 10 secs.
- MS Reynolds marching in protest line 10 secs.
- CU Reynolds 10 secs.
- CU reporter nodding head 10 secs.

In addition, the following sound-bites are available:

- Reynolds: "Abortion is immoral, it is murder. It's as simple as that. We can't allow this in our community." 7 secs.
- Reynolds: "We're protesting today and we'll continue to protest any attempts to open abortion clinics here. They are

going to be taking human life in there." 11 secs.

Write a lead-in plus a 45- to 50-second story with videotape using at least one sound-bite. You can edit the videotape any way you want. The sound-bites cannot be edited. Indicate the cuts in the video column. Here are notes on the story:

Opening of abortion clinic today—first in town . . . some doctors at local hospitals had refused to do abortions . . . . clinic will have sliding fee scale—to enable people in all income brackets to afford abortions . . . . named "Women's Clinic" . . . . founded by coalition of local women's groups . . . . will also provide family counseling, diet information, pre-maternity care and contraceptive counseling . . . . staff: 6 doctors, 13 nurses, 5 counselors, 2 psychologists. Clinic expects to do about 100 abortions a week. Group of about 30 pickets from local Right-To-Life group here this morning to protest. Marched for over two hours in front of clinic. Leader of group Wilma Reynolds, a housewife in the city. Reynolds vows further protests at the clinic. Reynolds says will call mayor, council members and governor in attempt to shut clinic down.



# 5



# THE PROFESSION

*Preceding page:*

At KGW, Portland, Oregon, a newscaster at work.  
(Frankie Jenkins/KGW Radio 62)

---

# THE PROFESSION

The road to careers in broadcast journalism used to start in newspaper journalism. Many of the first broadcast journalists began that way, and they directed newcomers to the same path. This has changed. Broadcast journalism has established itself as more than just a wayward cousin of the press. It has emerged as a distinguishable, and occasionally distinguished, profession with its own academic foundations and its own self-contained career ladder.

A background in print journalism still has value because the newspaper reporter employs the same standards of accuracy, fairness and thoroughness; and the newspaper reporter gets more of a workout in collecting and presenting details. The rigors of wire service reporting provide especially good training in finding facts. But a stint in print is not only no longer necessary; it leaves the prospective broadcast journalist lacking skills in writing broadcast style and reporting with tape, without which it's hard to get a job in a broadcast newsroom. And the fact that most radio journalists also must handle announcing and audio production, and most television journalists must go on the air and work with camera crews, makes crossing over from a newspaper even more difficult.

At a big-city radio station in the 1940s the announcers and writers might never have seen each other. Scripts might be sent over a teletype from the corner of a newspaper's newsroom, where they were written, to the radio studio where the announcers ripped them off and aired them. Announcers didn't write; writers didn't announce. Each was a specialist, and neither was initiated into the secrets of audio production.

No longer. Money, as usual, was the catalyst. Station owners soon realized that it is cheaper to hire a writer who can enunciate or an announcer who can punctuate than to spend twice as much for two specialists.

The newsrooms of most of the radio stations in the country today are populated by people who can write, report, order and air the news. Most of these journalists can also edit tape, work an audioboard and read commercials. There are a few more specialists in television news, but it's still harder to get started without on-the-air skills and some knowledge of production.

The emphasis in this book is on journalism skills. As Michael Gross of WRKD in Maine says, "A journalist can learn to become a broadcaster, but it's tough for a broadcaster to learn to be a journalist." The next two sections, however,

touch on broadcasting skills that are invaluable to a broadcast journalist: newscasting and audio production.

## NEWSCASTING

You don't have to know how to read the news on the air to work in broadcast journalism. There are jobs at some of the large stations and networks, especially in television, for writers, editors or producers. But, writers who can read are qualified for many more positions and positions at many more stations.

Broadcast news is supposed to be written conversationally. It would be easy to say that it should be read on the air conversationally if in conversation a person pronounced every word perfectly clearly and exaggerated the emphasis on certain key words to bring out their meaning and if that person talked slightly faster than most of us.

"Talk into the mike, don't read into it," advises Robert Samek of WSUB, Connecticut. But plain talking is not enough to hold the attention of people who are looking at traffic or their ironing, not the newscaster's eyes, as the newscaster attempts to explain complex developments. Even television newscasters have to compete for attention with household events.

Newscasting should incorporate some of the friendly style of conversation, but it is not mere talking.

### 1. Enunciation

Accomplished singers are said to have "good ears," not "good mouths." The secret to perfecting what comes out of the mouth is learning to work with the ears. Newscasters must hear how they sound. A tape recorder is invaluable; borrowing others' ears, especially other newscasters', is wise; but newscasters must also learn to listen to themselves as they speak.

Are they pronouncing every word carefully? If friends frequently respond with "huh?" or "what?", there is trouble. "'Rom d' Gate Lake te

d'Lantic Seabor keep d'umbrellas 'andy,' won't do on the radio. Every word must be pronounced clearly; syllables enunciated precisely: "From the Great Lakes to the At-lan-tic sea-board . . . keep the um-brel-las han-dy." These syllables must pass through a microphone, amplifier, transmitter, receiver, speaker and ear. They should leave the mouth firm and precise. Swallowed words choke meanings. You can usually tell when you are talking to experienced newscasters; they don't mumble.

One trick: concentrate on pronouncing the last letter in every word.

### 2. Air

Robert Seiden of WNAE, Pennsylvania, points out that the voice is a wind instrument. Without air passing over the vocal cords, they don't make a sound. With too little air, the voice is small and stays in the back of the throat; too much air, and the voice tends to be forced and distorted. Seiden says, "A buoyant, well-supported sound floating on top of a column of air is the desired effect."

The resonant sound that most good newscasters achieve is powered by a solid breath behind each syllable, with the lungs and throat open wide. Junior high school music teachers lecture about the need to breathe from the diaphragm. Newscasters should heed that advice.

### 3. Emphasis

Read this sentence *without* emphasizing one word more than another:

A decision has finally been reached in the bribery trial of the state's biggest contractor. A jury has found him innocent.

That dull, monotone voice is the enemy! It buries meaning and bores listeners. Emphasis is one defense against the monotone.

Newscasters must sculpt sentences as they read them. To keep sentences attractive and

allow meaning to come through, they should pronounce some words with added force and pause for an instant to dramatize others. Try reading this sentence, accentuating the underlined words and pausing at the slashes:

A decision has finally been reached / in the bribery trial of the state's biggest / contractor. A jury has found him / innocent.

Writers call for some accenting and pausing in their copy (see Chapter 1, "Copy"), but not enough for newscasters. Whereas a writer may underline a couple of the most important words in a story, newscasters want to emphasize perhaps a couple of words per sentence. Some newscasters go over their copy before reading it on the air and scrawl lines under the key words and slashes to pinpoint the pauses. Douglas Edwards of CBS added lines and slashes to this copy before he read it on the air:

Members of the city council of Chicago have voted themselves a 60- percent raise in salaries/over a four-year period. That would push their pay from 17 thousand 500 a year to 28-thousand dollars. And the White House is upset about it, inflation fighter Alfred Khan saying so. But the Chicago city fathers/ apparently/are unimpressed. Bob Crawford of WBBM has the story...

However, it's not necessary to mark up copy as long as newscasters understand that they cannot treat words evenhandedly. Words have meanings; sentences must be interpreted. This doesn't mean overdramatization or that newscasters should scold criminals and celebrate

heroes with their voices. It means that newscasters must understand what they are reading and use proper emphasis to share that understanding with listeners. And emphasis isn't conferred on words randomly; it is the key words and the most pertinent facts that should be highlighted.

Newscasting employs more emphasis than conversation. "If you feel as though you are over-emphasizing, you're probably using the correct emphasis," advises Todd St. Claire of WXLS in Connecticut.

#### 4. Inflection

A second defense against the monotone is inflection—altering the pitch through the course of a sentence.

Inflection usually conveys one of two basic meanings. When the voice gets higher at the end of a phrase, that means the thought is incomplete:

Calling it one of the  
heard...  
ever  
worst proposals he has

Questions that are about to be answered also use a rising inflection:

meeting?  
accomplished the  
What was at

Complete thoughts, on the other hand, should be signified by the voice getting lower—a falling inflection:

He voted against the  
new  
plan.

Stories should end with the voice dropping in pitch; so snappers should be read with a falling inflection:

He says he'll  
never  
go back.

Inflection helps punctuate stories. Too much inflection sounds sing-song and irritating; too little, and the news sounds flat.

## 5. Pace

Most newscasters read the news a little faster than they normally speak to keep things lively and avoid boring the listener.

In an ambitious effort to come to some scientific conclusions about announcing, tests were made in the 1940s to determine the ideal pace for a newscaster. It was determined, somehow, that 140 words per minute was too slow to maintain interest and 200 words per minute too fast for the average listener to follow. Their ideal pace—175 words per minute.

It's hard to believe that any aspect of our lives has slowed in the past four decades, but today most news directors would say they want newscasters to average only 150 words per minute. That's just a guideline; the best pace remains the most natural pace.

Speeds vary widely from station to station and newscaster to newscaster. Beginners, nevertheless, should compare themselves to other newscasters and use the 150-word-per-minute standard to get a fix on how their pace compares to average. Most beginners have a tendency to hurry their reading, especially when nervous.

## 6. Reading

Newscasters should read in advance all copy they are going to read on the air. For one thing, they have the last shot at catching an error before it is aired, and they will read more comfortably if familiar with the copy. To avoid getting surprised by an unclear correction or an unfamiliar name, for example, it's worth the time to read everything over at least once. Unfortunately this time is not always available. Stories can break as

the newscaster is walking to the studio; they sometimes have to be read cold, right off the wire.

These situations are saved by the prodigious capabilities of the human eye. The eye can scan a few words ahead on a line while it is reading other words. Newscasters must strengthen that faculty and learn to anticipate and prepare for the words that lie ahead. That way they can see trouble coming—an error left in the copy, an unfamiliar word—and prepare for it by occasionally editing and rewriting as they read. A difficult trick to be sure and a risky one; an ad-lib lowers all defenses against errors. Best that newscasters are never put in this position; but if a mistake sneaks into copy that has to be read cold, they must be adept enough readers to catch it.

## 7. Microphones

Keep a distance from them—six inches in the radio studio. It's not necessary to yell or whisper. A natural volume is fine—loud enough so that someone across the room could hear. Microphones are sensitive. They pick up the sound of papers being rustled—slide the sheets aside, don't turn the pages of the script. Mikes are also overly sensitive to p's, t's and b's popping, and s's sizzling (see Chapter 1, "Copy"). It's often necessary to underplay these letters when talking to a mike.

And it sounds most friendly if the newscaster talks as if that mike were a person.

## 8. Voices

Many people used to believe that news could only be read by a baritone. This kept a lot of tenors, altos and sopranos unemployed until women's liberation helped rid us of this particular bugaboo. Most news directors are probably still fans of deep, resonant voices, but they are learning to accept some variety in their station's news sound.

Almost all news directors would agree that it is a mistake for beginners to attempt to force their

voices to sound lower. Forced voices sound forced and foolish. "Through use the voice will find its own comfortable timbre," says Ray Kendall of KNDE in California.

Of course, not everyone has the pipes to broadcast the news. Some need work—accents must sometimes be eliminated, enunciation perfected. Some voices will never make the grade—too squeaky or nasal, perhaps. Voices can be improved, but there are people who are better off aiming at a behind-the-scenes position.

## 9. On Camera

The television newscaster has to read the news while being watched by the audience. Appearance becomes important; dress, neatness and looks enter into the calculations. Eye contact becomes important—most stations use "teleprompters" or monitors that place the script so that it appears right on top of the camera lens. That's how television newscasters manage to read and look at the camera at the same time. The newscaster's "business"—where the hands are kept, how the papers are shuffled—becomes important, too.

There is, perhaps, a subtle difference between television and radio reading styles. On TV things are toned down a bit. Overemphasis can look phony, and the extra sense available for communicating with the audience removes some of the need to bring out meanings. Television newscasting involves significantly more emphasis and intonation than conversation, but somewhat less than radio newscasting.

## AUDIO PRODUCTION

Packaging all the elements of broadcast news into a form that fits neatly on the air requires an ability to work a collection of electronic machines. Most radio stations prefer that their journalists have this ability.

Radio journalists should know how to gather and file tape using a cassette tape recorder, and

how to edit taped reports and transform them into tape cartridges ready to use in a newscast. These skills are discussed in Chapter 10, "Tape." Carts then have to be combined with commercials, live reports, perhaps some theme music, and live microphones, to produce a newscast on the air.

Some large stations have engineers to handle this job; many stations don't. So, radio journalists should be familiar with the basic techniques of audio production. It may also be valuable if they get to know the electronics that explain how it all works.

Television journalists should know how to work with film, slides or videotape. These skills were discussed in the previous chapter. The actual production of the newscast—directing, switching, working cameras and lights—is not generally the journalist's concern. Some familiarity with these matters helps, but the subject is too broad to be discussed here. This discussion confines itself to radio production.

### 1. The Audioboard

The newsroom and the news studio at WBLG in Lexington, Kentucky, share the same room. Russ Clarkson is sitting at the typewriter finishing his copy for the 6:30 p.m. newscast when he hears a disk jockey in the studio across the hall announce on an intercom that Clarkson has one minute till air time. There are no engineers on duty at WBLG. Clarkson and the disk jockey alone are responsible for getting his newscast on the air.

Clarkson puts on a set of earphones, so he can hear the final minute of the disk jockey's show; then he swivels to the right in his chair. Now he is facing the "audioboard." Directly in front of him and behind his microphone is a series of switches, gauges and "pots"—dials for controlling volume. These devices, which make up the audioboard, enable him to monitor and control all the sounds that leave the news studio.

Clarkson glances at the pot that controls his microphone. During his first few days at the station he had tested it to see where it should be set



The equipment in a studio at WRVA, Richmond. (John Harding, WRVA, Richmond)

for his voice to come through at the optimum level—so that the needle on the nearby gauge moved freely, near but not into the red area. Now, he just has to check to make sure that it's set at this predetermined level.

To Clarkson's left: three separate tape cartridge playback machines. Clarkson takes the three carts he is using in the newscast and pushes them into the machines—they cue up automatically.

Through the earphones Clarkson hears the disk jockey play the news jingle. He switches on his mike; the disk jockey flips a switch putting the news studio on the air; and Clarkson begins reading the first story.

There is an actuality in his lead story. After he has finished the lead-in, Clarkson pushes a remote-control switch on the audioboard that plays the first cart machine. Automatically his hand

moves to the pot that controls his mike to turn it down—in case he sneezes or coughs. The cart ends. His mike is turned back up, and the pot that controls that first cart machine is turned down—carts dubbed from cassette recorders may have a "whhitt" sound at the end, which shouldn't be permitted on the air.

Clarkson reads the time; that is the cue to the disk jockey that it's time for a commercial. At WBLG, spots are played on card machines in the main studio. Clarkson listens for the end of the commercial in his earphones, then returns with the rest of the news.

A reporter is ready for a live report over the telephone. By flipping a switch, Clarkson patches that phone line into one of the pots on the audioboard. After reading a lead-in, he turns on that pot and the reporter is on the air. Through the report Clarkson is "riding the

gain”—checking the reporter’s volume on a gauge and making minor adjustments when it gets too loud or soft by gently nudging the pot. On a bad connection, turning up the volume for the reporter also raises the volume of the background hiss. These considerations must be weighed to get the clearest possible sound.

After the reporter closes, Clarkson instantly turns up the studio mike, turns down the pot that carried the reporter and reads the rest of his stories, playing his other two carts. Then the time again, and the disk jockey plays a second commercial. Clarkson returns with the weather and sports, then reads his close and it’s back to the disk jockey for the remainder of the hour.

Clarkson swivels back to the left and starts writing the next hour’s newscast.

## 2. Electronics

A newscaster leans over a microphone in a radio studio and begins to read the news. The newscaster’s voice produces sound waves that wiggle an element in the microphone. That wiggling causes small pulses of electricity to be produced, pulses that reflect the pattern in the sound waves. Those pulses are magnified by an amplifier and then converted again, this time into a pattern of radio waves that still reflects the original sound waves produced by the newscaster’s voice. In AM, *amplitude modification*, broadcasting, the signal is coded into the radio waves through variations in the amplitude—strength—of the waves. In FM, *frequency modulation*, changes in the frequency of the waves—how fast they come—reflect the pattern of sound waves.

Radio waves travel through the air and are picked up by a radio antenna. The receiver converts the waves back into electrical pulses. They are amplified again and, finally, are used to pull a magnet that wiggles a cone in the radio speaker in such a way that it produces sound waves that exactly imitate the newscaster’s voice.

This process relies on a complex series of electronic devices ranging from tiny capacitors to

mammoth transmitters. Does a radio journalist have to understand how all this works? Not necessarily, but it helps.

It’s easier to handle the machines involved in audio production with an understanding of what they are up to, and some small radio stations demand that their journalists possess such an understanding.

The FCC requires that someone who knows how to operate a transmitter and the other basic electronic equipment at a radio station be on duty at all times. In other words, there always has to be someone around with a third-class FCC radio license. Engineers fill the bill at the large stations, but small stations simply require that their announcers have third-class licenses. That way they don’t have to have more than one person working at a time.

Jim Farley, executive producer of NBC Radio News, gives this advice: “Everyone, if they want to get a job in this field, should get a third-class license before getting out of college. If they’re ambitious, they’ll get a first-class license too—that way they’ll never go begging for a job.”

These licenses are won by passing tests given by the FCC around the country. The FCC publishes a booklet with the information that must be mastered to pass the third-class test. That booklet, plus a basic understanding of electronics, should be sufficient to prepare for the test. If that understanding of electronics is lacking, it can be picked up through books or courses.

To pass the first-class test it is necessary to take a course in broadcast electronics. Some colleges and electronics schools offer such training.

Ohms and watts may seem a long way from leads and stories, but they can provide a shortcut to a newsroom.

## CAREERS

How to build a career in broadcast news? There are as many different routes to the top jobs as there are people in those jobs. Journalists are too informal to stick to one or two recruiting strate-



At the National Black Network, a newscaster and an engineer at work. (Edward Pieratt from *Black Star*; © 1978)

gies. But there are certain qualities that most people who do the hiring look for, and there are ways of investing yourself with those qualities.

### 1. The Bottom

The bottom is, of course, where you start. There are two “bottoms” in broadcast news:

**1. Gopher** “Go for coffee; go for pencils; go for wire copy.” The largest newsrooms entrust beginners with these responsibilities. Their job titles are desk assistant or perhaps production assistant, editorial assistant, copy person; and these are the only positions in the top news organizations that recent college graduates, without professional experience, have a shot at.

A desk assistant’s journalistic duties are usually

ripping and distributing wire copy, listening to the police radio, getting traffic reports or recording actualities. Generally, they are given no real chances to write or report. At unionized stations, gophers are specifically prohibited from doing writers’, reporters’ or engineers’ jobs—“touch that typewriter and it’s a union grievance.”

The advantage of such a position for a beginner is the eight-hour-a-day opportunity it affords to study how a top news organization works. The disadvantage is that such jobs don’t really give young journalists a chance to do journalism. After a year as a gopher, they may be a lot more knowledgeable, but not necessarily any better.

Some desk assistants do succeed in moving up to writing, reporting or newscasting positions at their stations, but too many find themselves stuck as desk assistants. Jim Farley, someone

who climbed from gopher at WINS to second-in-command at NBC Radio News, still cautions that once you've worked as a desk assistant there is a tendency for others always to look at you as a desk assistant. You can get overlooked. So Farley recommends a second method of entering the profession.

**2. Small stations** "This route," Farley explains, "means you go out to a small market in the "boondocks" where you will do everything. You'll water the transmitter—if the ground is wet the signal radiates a little further. (Against FCC regulations, incidentally.) You'll sweep the floors, run your own board, announce, write, report, maybe sell some commercials. The five-day work week doesn't exist in a small market. You work six days, and you're on call on your day off." At a small television station reporters may get a chance to anchor, edit, work the remote cameras and maybe set up the teleprompter.

Small stations tend to be in small towns, where they pay small salaries, which may be less than comfortable for potentially big stars. But, it is here in the small markets that the trade is best taught and learned. Few news directors would disagree that a year spent in Oelwein, Iowa, doing everything, is more productive than a year ripping and distributing wire copy in Los Angeles.

Of course not every broadcast station adheres to the highest standards of journalism. Beginners may have to demand a little more of themselves than the station requires.



Gopher or small-station positions are both labeled "entry-level" jobs, but broadcast journalism has become so competitive that even to watch the wires or to apprentice in the smallest markets it is usually necessary to get some background in the field. Despite the title "entry level," full-time jobs rarely go to pure beginners. This sounds like the old conundrum, "You need experience to get a job, but you need a job to get experience." Nevertheless, there are

methods of preparing for entry-level positions, ways of sneaking up on that experience. They all require hustle and dedication. For better or for worse, radio journalism is no longer a field diletantes can "just try."

## 2. Education

Courses in broadcast journalism help; there is no longer any doubt about that. It was, and still is to some extent, fashionable for news directors to debunk an education in broadcast journalism; their line being that they want young people who studied politics, economics and literature in college. The techniques of newswriting and reporting, they say, can be taught in six months on the job.

That's all true. You can't underestimate the value of a strong liberal arts education. Anyone who allows college to slip by without meeting the great ideas and thinkers, and learning to use advanced tools of thought, may be handicapped. A few weeks in a newsroom trying to explain complex statistics about the local economy, or writing about the meaning of a revolution in Africa, will reveal the handicap.

It's also true that news directors can teach broadcast journalism skills in a half-year of on-the-job training. The catch is that there are few news directors left who bother to take the time to do the instructing. Why should they waste half a year on an economics major when they can hire people who were trained in broadcast news in school?

It is now practically impossible to walk in off the street and tell a news director, "Hire me! I've got a good liberal arts education." Even the most strident critic of journalism schools wants to see whether the applicant can write a couple of 20-second stories or put together a wrap. They don't teach those skills in political science courses. Liberal arts help; courses in broadcast journalism may be decisive.

## 3. Experience

News directors are practical-minded. They like to hire people who have shown they can do the job

somewhere else. Experience is the key listing on a resume.

Beginners can start assembling their list of credits at a college radio station. Some college stations do good work; others can be made more professional. College radio may not be the real world, but any time people are listening, some of the real pressures of the profession are there. College television stations are rarer but obviously just as valuable.

Beginners can also get experience by creating their own "subentry-level" positions. These are jobs that are not offered; they are asked for, often invented. They don't pay much, if anything, and they don't provide much of a chance to play Walter Cronkite. Still, they get feet in doors.

Some stations hire "stringers" to cover government meetings, high school sports or campus activities. Covering a high school basketball game may not be the most pleasant way to spend a Friday evening, but it's professional experience. It may be necessary to call some local stations and remind them that they could use some coverage of campus activities.

Similarly, someone who can show up at a breaking event other reporters may be missing and record a few professional-quality actualities may be able to get some cuts on a local radio station. The AP audio news service, for instance, buys such freelance actualities.

Getting experience in broadcast journalism may take aggressiveness and creativity, but these are qualities that keeping a job in this field also requires.

#### **4. Job Searches**

Broadcast news is not a profession that can be conquered simply by doing well in school and being a good person. Broadcast stations do not recruit on college campuses. There is no systematic method for them to uncover the best job candidates. Instead they often end up hiring the most diligent and pushy; the people who write, call, visit and sell themselves.

An organized search for a person to fill a position in broadcast journalism generally means that the news director places a classified ad in a trade publication. *Broadcasting Magazine* is the main forum for such advertisements. The jobs are waiting under "Help Wanted—News." The *RTNDA Communicator*, the publication of the Radio-Television News Directors Association, also contains some classifieds.

Beyond these "help wanteds," the responsibility for making contact rests with the applicants. They can place their own "situations wanted" ads in these same publications or use the mails, the telephone or personal visits to bring their credentials before news directors.

Are news directors the people to contact? Usually, yes; they run the news operation. However, at small stations with one-person news teams, news director itself is the entry-level position. The hiring at these stations is done by the general manager or the station's owner.

A mass mailing is another good first step. Since there are more applicants than jobs, it's wise to try as many different stations as possible to try to equalize the odds. *Broadcasting Magazine* publishes a "yearbook" that lists all the radio and television stations in the country, along with facts about their formats, their phone numbers and addresses, and the names of their news directors and other key personnel. One strategy is to choose 100 or so stations in selected areas of the country and to send their news directors or general managers a letter and resume. Most will not take the time to respond. Most of the rest will say, "Sorry." One or two may express interest—that's a start.

The next step would be to follow up the letters with a phone call.

Some people get in a car, pick a bunch of stations in one area and spend a couple of days visiting and asking to see the news director, resume in hand.

As in reporting, there's a line between aggressiveness and obnoxiousness. It may make sense to call back every couple of months to see if anything has opened up, but calling every week

may seem like pestering. The best strategy is to make as many news directors as possible aware of your qualifications . . . and fond of you.

## 5. Mechanics

When looking for a job, the tools of the search must be sharp; the person prepared. All of this is for naught, of course, if the person isn't capable, but too many capable people fail to find jobs because they couldn't master the mechanics of looking for a job.

**1. Resumes** A resume is a sheet of paper that sums up a person's background and qualifications. It should be neat, concise—rarely more than a page—and it should be organized so that the most flattering details stand out. Resumes want to get attention, but the prospective journalist who wrote in bright red letters across the middle of his resume, "STOP! YOUR SEARCH IS ENDED!" was going a little too far.

Resumes are not works of journalism; they are advertising. They don't have to be balanced; they should stress the positive. This is no place for humility. If someone won an award for a piece of journalism, that has to be on the resume. If a person was captain of the football team, that should be there too. But there is no need to mention failing to make the team.

Since experience is what news directors want to see, that is what they should be shown first. If the person has any experience, that's the first listing on the resume—after the name, address and phone number. Experience should be noted in reverse chronological order—the latest job first. Then education. Forget elementary school and high school, unless there's a chance the news director went to the same one. Colleges and graduate schools, if any, are important. Relevant courses should be mentioned; relevant extracurricular activities noted. Throw in grades or the grade point average if they are good.

If there is something to fill it, honors and awards make a nice listing: dean's list, Kappa Tau Alpha Journalism Society, etc. References

may be listed; otherwise it should be made clear that they are available on request.

Some potentially good journalists write poor resumes: bloated, self-deprecating or sloppy. A resume should be lean and proud.

When resumes are sent through the mail, they should be accompanied by a well-written, personally addressed cover letter that notes the position in which the person is interested and briefly sums up the person's qualifications for that position. The cover letter might request an interview. Some cover letters are abrupt—"I can write. Let's talk." Some are long arguments for their authors. Whatever works . . .

**2. Audition tapes** If a decision to hire is going to be based in part on how a person sounds on the air, news directors want to hear the voice that is being considered for the job. And television news directors want to see what an applicant looks like on the air. News directors may request an audition tape.

An audition tape should sound or look professional. It should demonstrate a wide range of skills: good writing; preferably some reporting; the ability to handle different types of stories—breaking news and features, perhaps sports and a kicker; the ability to read a commercial. A person already working at a station might just record a newscast and send it out—that's called an "air check." Otherwise, an audition tape should be recorded on the best equipment possible. Gaining access to a radio or television studio is best; a good reel-to-reel tape recorder will do for radio. Of course, the tape should be error free.

Radio audition tapes can be on reel-to-reel or cassette tapes. For television, most news directors prefer 3/4-inch videotape cassettes. A few clean copies of the audition tape should be made, and then the resume, cover letter or classified ad should specify that it's available upon request. Stations have a responsibility to return tapes they have requested.

Some stations make their own tapes of job applicants by having them read some copy in a studio when they come in for an interview.

**3. Interviews** Letters, resumes, phone calls, classified ads and audition tapes are all methods of getting into the news director's or general manager's office. It is there that the final decision on whom to hire is made, and the impression a person makes in an interview in that office will be a determining factor.

Some advice on interviews from Jim Farley at NBC: "Without being pushy, obnoxious, over-aggressive, or overanxious, you want to communicate the idea that you want this job very badly, that you're willing to work harder than any of the other applicants sitting outside the door.

"The idea you want to get across is, 'Hey, I'll work any hours you give me.' A problem in the radio business is that somebody's got to work overnights. Throughout radio, the important shifts start at three or four o'clock in the morning. You've got to communicate that you'll work overnights with no complaints, weekends with no complaints.

"And," Farley adds, "you've got to mean it."

Applicants shouldn't give the impression that they are ready to turn the newsroom upside-down, but they shouldn't be shy and intimidated, either. The best way to inspire confidence is to be confident. Applicants shouldn't interrogate the news director, but should ask questions, show an interest in the workings of the newsroom and demonstrate that they understand how broadcast news works. News directors are looking for reasons to justify their eventual decision. Hand them justifications for hiring and withhold justifications for saying, "Sorry."

**4. Writing tests** Many stations combine the interview with a writing test to get a quick fix on the applicant's journalistic skills. There is no simpler way to determine whether a person can handle the news.

Generally, in a writing test applicants are handed a batch of print style copy, perhaps some stories from a newspaper or a roll of wire copy, and asked to transform this copy into broadcast style, perhaps a complete 5-minute newscast. Speed counts.

Writing is like athletics—the more you do, the better you get. People looking for jobs in broadcast news should go into training for a month or so. Every day they should sit down at the typewriter with a newspaper and spend a couple of hours banging out broadcast stories and newscasts. Practice makes fast and confident, if not perfect.

## 6. Rigors

Broadcast journalism is a career you have to want badly, because a lot of other people want it, too. It's an employer's market. Journalism schools are turning out many more applicants than stations have jobs for.

After the first rejection letters, the whole enterprise may seem hopeless. For a person who hasn't really learned how to write and report broadcast news, it may be hopeless. But, someone who is prepared, and good, has to remember to be resolute.

In a profession where doggedness counts, persistence in looking for a job is recognized as a virtue. The person who keeps calling back, without being obnoxious about it, to see if a job has opened up, the person who sends out follow-up letters and volunteers to do some part-time work while waiting for something full-time to develop, may be the one who comes to mind when a position is available.

The person who sends out 100 letters has a better chance than the person who sends out 25. The person who answers the ads in *Broadcasting* for a few months has a better chance than the person who answers them for a week or two.

And what kind of work is it when you get it? This is how Michael Owens of KSIS, Missouri, describes broadcast journalism: "Low pay, long hours, griping with city officials and the most exhilarating work in the world."

And, Stan Zimmerman of WSPB in Florida insisted that this book make one final point: "Be sure to tell them they won't get rich, but they'll have one hell of a lot of fun."

---

# SUGGESTED READINGS

The following books were helpful to me as I prepared this book. I recommend them.

## Writing

Strunk, William, Jr., and E. B. White. *The Elements of Style*. New York: Macmillan, 1959.  
Zinsser, William. *On Writing Well*. New York: Harper & Row, 1976.

## Reporting

Burrows, William E. *On Reporting the News*. New York: New York University Press, 1977.

## Television

Stone, Vernon, and Bruce Hinson. *Television Newsfilm Techniques*. New York: Hastings House, 1974.  
Fang, Irving E. *Television News*. New York: Hastings House, 1972.

## News Media Issues and History

Sandman, Peter M., David M. Rubin and David B. Sachsman. *Media: An Introductory Analysis of American Mass Communication*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976.  
Metz, Robert. *CBS: Reflections in a Bloodshot Eye*. New York: Signet, 1975.  
Barnouw, Erik. *Tube of Plenty: The Evolution of American Television*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1975.

## Mass Communication Law

Gora, Joel M. *The Rights of Reporters*. New York: Discus, 1974.  
Franklin, Marc A. *The First Amendment and the Fourth Estate*. Mineola, N.Y.: The Foundation Press, 1977.



---

# INDEX

- abbreviations, 11–12, 261  
ABC, 47, 69, 93, 107,  
109–110, 113, 149–150,  
153–156, 171, 174, 177,  
192, 195, 203, 207–208,  
215, 228–230, 266–267  
ABC Contemporary, 229–230  
ABC Entertainment, 229–230  
ABC FM, 229–230  
ABC Information, 230  
accidents, coverage of, 142,  
182–185  
Accu-Weather, 213  
acronyms, 12  
active verbs, 26–27  
active voice, 27  
actualities, 149–151, 162, 171,  
183, 185, 190, 192–193,  
234–236, 252, 282  
throw lines to, 175–176  
writing lead-ins to, 172–173  
writing write-outs for, 177–178  
actual malice, 136  
Adams, Greg, 156, 187  
addresses, 69  
adjectives, 26–27  
adverbs, 26–27  
advertisers, 140, 142,  
218–219, 224, 230  
affiliates, 228–231  
ages, 69  
aggressiveness, 127  
air checks, 287  
air crashes, 142  
album-oriented rock, 222,  
229–230  
Alford, Bill, 215  
all-caps, for typing copy, 8  
for emphasis, 14  
“allegedly,” 43–44  
“alligator” clips, 163  
alliteration, 17  
all-news, 205–206, 222,  
227–228, 230  
“All Things Considered,” 231,  
234–235  
almanacs, 118  
AM, 283  
American Contemporary  
Network, 229–230  
American Entertainment  
Network, 229–230  
American FM Network,  
229–230  
American Information  
Network, 230  
Ames, Christopher, 194  
analysis, 155  
anchors, 240  
angles, 74  
announcing, 229, 277–281  
another fact, 95, 178, 256–257  
appeals, 187  
apportioning facts, 89  
approximation, 30  
arbitron, 224  
A rolls, 254  
arraignment, 189  
arson, 183  
artists, 241  
Ashley, Linda, 176  
assignment boards, 122–123  
assignment editors, 122, 240  
assignments, 122–124  
Associated Press, 88, 103–113,  
231, 286  
atlases, 118  
attribution, 42–45

- audioboards, 281–282  
 audio column, 260–265  
 audio news services, 113–114, 215, 231  
 audio production, 281–283  
 audition tapes, 287–288  
 A wires, 107, 111–112
- background information, 124–125, 129  
 backtiming, 208  
 Barber, Rick, 212  
 Barnouw, Phil, 258  
 basic facts, 87–88, 129  
 batteries, 160  
 beat calls, 126, 185–186  
 beats, 122  
 bed, 162  
 beepers, 160  
 Bergson, Lisa, 234  
 Berman, Patti, 176  
 Bible, 55  
 Bierbauer, Charles, 153, 177  
 billboards, 113, 212  
 Blair, Don, 29  
 “blaze,” 21  
 blocking out, 240  
 blocks, 205–206, 208  
 blotters, police, 145, 185  
 Bohnen, Jerry, 176  
 booking, 188  
 Borge, Victor, 53  
 bottom of the ladder, 284–285  
 bottom of the newscast, 208  
 breaking news, 124  
 bridges, 256  
 British Broadcasting Corporation, 17, 34, 203  
*Broadcasting*, 286  
 broadcast wires, 104–107, 113  
 B rolls, 254  
 Brooks, George, 98  
 Brooks, Stan, 183, 186  
 brush fires, coverage of, 183  
 Budd, Don, 207
- bulk eraser, 168  
 bulletins, 110–111  
 Burdick, Susan, 233–234  
 business, coverage of, 217–218, 227  
 business wires, 111  
 B wires, 107  
 bystanders, 183–184
- Cain, Bob, 8  
 camera crews, 246  
 camera operators, 210, 246  
 campaigns, coverage of, 139–140, 193–194  
 Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 256, 270–271  
 careers, 277, 283–288  
 cart machines, 282  
 carts, 162, 166–168, 229, 282  
   more than one in a story, 180–181  
   noting in copy, 179  
 cart sheets, 166–168  
 cassettes, videotape, 243  
 cassette tape recorders, 149, 162  
 CBS, 17, 19, 25, 27, 31, 37, 63, 66, 70–71, 83, 107, 113, 154–157, 176, 191, 221, 227–232, 255–257, 269–270, 279  
 CBS Evening News, 82, 203, 239, 243, 252–253, 260, 262–263  
 CBS World News Round-Up, 15, 211, 230  
 Chancellor, John, 265  
 character generators, 241–242, 265  
 chromakey, 241–242  
 chronological leads, 76  
 chronological stories, 91–92  
 citizens band, 115  
 City News service, 111–112  
 civil courts, 186–187
- clarity, 47–55  
 Clark, Larry, 201, 204–205, 207  
 Clarkson, Russ, 281–283  
 classical music, 223  
 classified ads, 286  
 clauses, 50  
 clean copy, 13  
 clichés, 32–34, 216  
 clips, 252  
 closes, after tape, 177  
   stand-ups, 256–257  
   to newscasts, 218–219  
 close-ups, 248, 251–254, 257  
 Cochran, John, 268  
 Cockburn, Alex, 31  
 Code of Broadcast News Ethics, 147–148  
 college radio stations, 286  
 colleges, 285  
 combining stories, 76, 93–94  
 commas, 56  
 commentary, 232  
 commercials, 207, 225, 244–245, 282–283  
 common language, 20–24  
 Communications Act, 139  
 competition, 224  
 complex sentences, 49  
 composition of shots, 249–250  
 computerized newsrooms, 9, 112  
 conciseness, 55–59  
 confidential sources, 143–144  
 conflict of interest, 140, 147  
 contacts, 129–130, 191  
 contemporary formats, 222–223, 229  
 contempt of court, 144  
 continuity in visuals, 258  
 contrasting views, 137  
 controversial issues, 137  
 Cooley, John, 155  
 Cooney, Matt, 176  
 coordinating visuals and writing, 267–269

- copy control, 108  
copy style, 7–18  
    summary of rules, 18  
    tape, 179–181  
    television, 260–265  
CQI SportsTicker, 111  
Cornell, Irene, 176–177  
Corporation for Public  
    Broadcasting, 231  
corrections, rules for correcting  
    copy, 12–13  
corrections, wires, 107  
Cosell, Howard, 215  
country and western music,  
    229  
courses in broadcast  
    journalism, 285  
courts, access to, 144–145  
    coverage of, 135, 186–190  
cover letters, 287  
cover shots, 251, 254, 266,  
    270  
crews, 246  
crimes, coverage of, 185–190  
criminal charges, need for  
    attribution, 43  
criminal courts, 186–187  
criminal justice systems, chart  
    of, 188–189  
“critical” condition, 184  
criticism, 135–136  
Cronkite, Walter, 82, 239–242,  
    260–262  
cronyism, 130  
Crow, Karen, 126  
cue up, 163  
Culhane, David, 255  
Cummings, E. E., 7  
Cummins, Jim, 266  
Cunningham, Vicky, 223  
Curnow, Bill, 155  
Curry, Neil, 176  
cut and splice, 164  
cutaways, 253–254, 258  
cuts, 149, 235  
    noting in copy, 264  
Daily Electronic Feed,  
    244–245  
Daly, John, 221  
dangling modifiers, 59  
dashes, 14–15, 56  
DataNews, 112  
DataStream, 112  
date, in heading, 9  
daybooks, 122  
dead, names of, 185  
    number of, 108  
deadlines, 121  
Dean, Morton, 252–253, 269  
debates, coverage of, 139  
decimal points, 11  
deep background, 130  
“Deep Throat,” 130  
defamation, 133–134  
delayed leads, 76–77  
deleting, letters from words, 13  
    lines of copy, 12  
    words from copy, 12  
demographics, 224  
demonstrations, coverage of,  
    194–196  
dependent words, 38–39  
desk assistants, 227, 284  
details, in leads, 68–69  
    in stories, 87  
detectives, 186  
detour words, 56–57  
Dibble, Walt, 139–140, 184  
dictionaries, 118  
Diehl, Bill, 30, 69, 110,  
    207–208  
difficult language, 21  
digging, 121–122  
direct closes, 180  
directors, 240, 244, 254, 261  
disc jockeys, 281–283  
disco, 224  
disorders, coverage of,  
    141–142  
documentaries, 194, 234–235  
double-checking, 133, 185,  
    194  
double out cues, 179  
double-system film, 254  
Dow, David, 176  
Dow, Harold, 257  
Dowell, Bill, 155  
Dow Jones business wire, 111  
Drinkwater, Terry, 256–257  
drive times, 216, 227  
dual leads, 75–76  
dubbing, 164  
Earth News, 114  
echo-chamber effect, 172  
editing, 208  
    audio tape, 164–166  
    in the camera, 249  
    videotape or film, 243, 246,  
    257–259  
    wire copy, 105–107  
editing blocks, 165  
editorial committees, 232  
editorials, 138, 227, 231–234  
editors, videotape and film,  
    240, 257  
education, 285  
Edwards, Douglas, 231, 279  
Eisgrau, Mike, 122–123, 126,  
    151–152, 157, 161–162,  
    166–168  
elections, coverage of,  
    139–140, 193–194  
electronic editing, 165  
electronic newsgathering, 243  
electronics, 283  
ellipses, 14–15, 56  
embargoes, 130  
emergency rooms, 184  
emphasis, 13–14, 278–279  
encyclopedias, 118, 125  
endorsements of candidates,  
    139  
ENG, 243, 263  
engaging language, 24–34  
engineers, 281  
enunciation, 278

- Ensor, David, 234–235  
 entry-level jobs, 285  
 equal time rule, 139–140  
 Erickson, John, 223  
 establishing shots, 251  
 establishing sound, 162  
 ethics, 132–148  
 executive producers, 240  
 experience, 285–286  
 expert knowledge, 150, 252  
 expressions, 31–32  
 extreme close-ups, 248–249  
 eyewitnesses, 183–184  
 eyewitness reports, 150, 252
- fair comment, 135–136  
 fairness doctrine, 136–139, 231  
 Farber, M. A., 143  
 Farley, Jim, 65, 127, 283–285, 288  
 Farm Radio News, 111  
 farm news, 217–218  
 Farnsworth, Ben, 227  
 Faw, Bob, 157  
 FBI, 146  
 feature news services, 114–115  
 features, 76, 196–197, 207–208  
 Federal Communications Commission, 115, 136–139, 143, 160, 222, 228, 231, 285  
 Feinberg, David, 124  
 file footage, 242  
 files, 118, 125  
 filibusters, 192–193  
 filing tape stories, 162–164, 183  
 film, 242–243  
   noting in copy, 263–265  
   shooting, 246–249  
 film chains, 243  
 financial news, 217–218  
 financial wires, 111
- fires, coverage of, 182–185  
 first adds, 10  
 First Amendment, 136  
 first-class licenses, 283  
 first sentence in a story, 61  
 first usage, names, 51  
 Fisher, Don, 174  
 “five W’s,” 72–73, 87–88  
 Flannery, Peter, 154, 229–230  
 flash, 110  
 flow, 90–98  
 FM, 283  
 form, of stories, 84  
 formal language, 20–21  
 formats, of newscasts, 218–219  
   of stations, 222–224  
 “former,” 38  
 Fox, Gil, 93, 207  
 fractions, 11  
 framing shots, 249  
 Freedom of Information Act, 146–147  
 fudging, 133  
 future files, 116, 122  
 future ramifications, 96, 178, 256–257  
 futures, 218  
 future tense, 29
- gag orders, 144  
 garbage file, 116  
 Gardner, Chris, 73, 68  
 general assignment reporters, 122  
 general managers, 233  
 gifts, 140  
 Given, John, 176  
 Godby, Jerry, 72  
 gophers, 284–285  
 gossip, 64  
 government, coverage of, 190–194  
 government meetings, access to, 147
- government records, access to, 146–147  
 grammar, 37–38, 58–59  
 grand juries, 144, 189  
 graphics, 241–242  
   noting in copy, 262–263  
   writing to, 265  
 Gray, Duane, 156, 180, 190  
 Greater New York Wire, 112  
 Greeley, Horace, 66  
 Grimes, John, 171  
 Gross, Michael, 277  
 ground rules for interviews, 130
- habeas corpus, 189  
 Hammond, Geoff, 20  
 Hancock, Brenda, 174  
 handouts, 116–117  
 “happy talk,” 255  
 Harding, John, 211, 226–227  
 headings, 9–10  
 headlines, 212–213  
 headings, 9–10  
 headroom in shots, 249  
 hearings, coverage of, 187  
 heckle-jeckle effect, 172  
 helicopters, 216, 227  
 Heller, David, 198, 213  
 hidden microphones, 142–143  
 high-speed wires, 112  
 hijackings, coverage of, 142  
 Homer, 31  
 homicides, 186  
 hooks, 62  
 Hooper, Blake, 121–122, 126  
 horse racing, 215  
 hospitals, access to  
   information, 145–146  
   coverage of, 184–185  
 Hottelet, Richard C., 154  
 Houston News Service, 112  
 Howard, Ed, 246  
 humor, 79, 207–208

- Hurley, Gary, 223  
hyphens, 15
- ideas, 90  
idiomatic expressions, 31  
IDs, 156–157, 176, 180, 242  
impact of shots, 250  
importance, 63–64  
in camera, 146  
incomplete sentences, 58–59,  
71, 96–97  
in-cues, 163, 179  
indexing, facts in a story, 92  
inflection, 166, 279  
informal language, 20–21  
information selection, 85–88  
with visuals, 268–269  
initials, 41  
inserts, 113  
interests, 64–65  
interjections, 50  
internal editing, 165  
international news, 204  
interviewing, 128–129,  
157–160, 164–165,  
235–236, 253–254  
for jobs, 288  
ground rules, 130  
interview programs, 235–236  
invasion of privacy, 140–141,  
144  
inverted pyramid, 84  
investigative reporting,  
194–195  
“involved,” 57  
irony, 71
- jargon, 22  
Johnson, Arv, 174  
Johnson, Dennis, 244–246  
journalese, 21–22  
journalism clichés, 33  
judicial proceedings, 135  
jump cuts, 253–254  
“Junior,” in names, 51
- KABC, Los Angeles, 126, 129,  
153, 183  
KAKC, Oklahoma, 32, 178,  
201, 203–204, 207, 212  
Kalischer, Peter, 27, 155, 191  
Kappa Tau Alpha, 287  
KATV, Arkansas, 239  
KBWD, Texas, 71  
KCBS, San Francisco, 9, 112  
KCLD, 92, 96–97  
KCUE, Minnesota, 14, 76, 98  
KDKA, Pittsburgh, 221  
Kellan, Mary, 68  
Kendall, Ray, 281  
KENO, Las Vegas, 49  
KENR, Houston, 44  
KEX, Oregon, 64  
KEYH, Houston, 15  
keys, 242, 263  
KFJZ, Texas, 197, 217  
KFLA, Kansas, 210  
KFWB, Los Angeles, 37, 212  
KGDN, Washington, 27  
KGMI, Washington, 70, 79  
KGO, San Francisco, 71–72,  
95, 211–212, 230  
KGW, Portland, 223, 276  
kickers, 207–208, 228  
kills, on wires, 110  
kitchen-sink leads, 68  
KLGa, Iowa, 64  
KLOL, Houston, 65, 71  
KLOS, Los Angeles, 31, 150,  
198, 213, 229  
KLUC, Las Vegas, 28, 173  
KLWN, 53, 175  
KMAN, Kansas, 173, 176  
KMPC, Los Angeles, 151  
KNAC, California, 94–96  
KNDE, California, 281  
KNOW, Texas, 215  
KNPW, Oregon, 77  
KNX, Los Angeles, 8, 35, 61,  
64, 67, 71–73, 76, 86,  
207, 210, 228  
KNX-FM, Los Angeles, 194
- KNXT, Los Angeles, 258  
KOA, Denver, 44, 50, 70,  
72–73, 172, 177–180,  
210  
KOB, New Mexico, 20  
KODY, Nebraska, 28, 53, 66  
KOEL, Iowa, 1, 4, 126, 129,  
194, 224–225  
KOIN, Portland, 228–229  
KOOL-TV, Phoenix, 240,  
244–246  
KPNW, Oregon, 98, 210  
KQV, Pittsburgh, 232–233  
KRED, California, 86  
KREW, Washington, 231  
KREX, Colorado, 44, 65–66  
KRLD, Dallas, 58, 172, 215  
KROW, Oregon, 172  
KSIK, Missouri, 288  
KSMA, California, 71, 76  
KTIM, California, 114, 223  
KULR-TV, Montana, 246  
KVOC, Wyoming, 64  
KVOR, Colorado, 66  
KWBZ, Colorado, 212  
KWEB, Minnesota, 222–223  
KWHW, Oklahoma, 79, 175  
KWKH, Louisiana, 67, 93  
KWMS, Salt Lake City, 28,  
174, 180  
KWSL, Iowa, 66  
KWSO, California, 223  
KWTX, Texas, 58  
KWWL, Iowa, 113  
KXMB-TV, North Dakota, 264  
KYNN, Nebraska, 20
- large markets, 227–228  
Larson, Brad, 222–223  
“latter,” 38  
law, 132–148  
leading the action, 249  
“lead-in proof” voicers,  
155–156, 174

- lead-ins, 155–156, 163,  
171–177, 239, 263–264,  
270  
    final sentence of, 174–177  
leads, 61–79  
lead stories, 201, 227, 246  
length of stories, 82–84  
Lennox, Tim, 162–164  
libel, 133–136  
licenses, first- and third-class,  
283  
licenses to broadcast, 222  
lighting, 246  
lines of copy, average length in  
seconds, 16  
lineups, 202, 204–206,  
243–245  
live reporting, 197–198, 243  
local angles, 66–67  
localizing wire copy, 105–106  
local news, 204  
local wires, 112, 228  
Lockett, Karen, 263  
long sentences, 55, 97  
long shots, 248, 251–252, 257  
loss of life, 64  
lower-thirds, 242, 265, 269  
lung capacities, 55–56  
Lynch Bill, 122, 129–130,  
194
- Madigan, Bob, 194  
Maer, Peter, 218  
mailings, 286  
main-point leads, 75  
main-point snappers, 94–95  
making sense, 89–90  
malice, 136  
manslaughter, 186  
maps, 118  
margins, 9  
markets, farm, 217–218  
markets, radio, 224–228  
Marshall, Scott, 213  
matching shots, 253
- meanings, 36–45  
Means, Marianne, 232  
media events, 124  
medical reporters, 244–246  
medium markets, 225–227  
medium shots, 248, 251–252  
meetings, coverage of,  
190–191  
metaphors, 31–32  
meteorologists, 213, 227  
microphones, 160, 163,  
280–281  
    hidden, 142–143  
microwave transmitters, 243  
middle initials, 51  
middle-of-the-road music,  
222–223, 229  
Miller, Dave, 1–4, 225, 227  
mini-documentaries, 234  
minors, 140–141  
“Miss,” 52  
misunderstanding, 133  
Mitchell, Andrea, 264  
mixed metaphors, 31–32  
mobile telephones, 126  
montage, 257  
“MORE,” 10  
Moyers, Bill, 192  
“Mr.,” 52  
“Mrs.,” 52  
“Ms.,” 52  
muckracking, 65  
Mudd, Roger, 263  
murder, 186  
Murrow, Edward R., 33–34,  
221–222  
music, and news, 222–224  
Mutual, 74, 82, 86, 88, 113,  
207, 218–219, 228,  
230–231
- names, 51–52  
    in leads, 68–69  
narration, 257, 263–271  
National Black Network, 114
- national news, 204  
National Oceanic and  
Atmospheric  
Administration, 111  
National Public Radio, 231,  
234–235  
National Weather Service  
wires, 111, 162, 213  
natural sound, 161–162, 270  
NBC, 8, 28–29, 65, 68, 82–83,  
107, 113, 122, 127, 129,  
146, 161–162, 174, 194,  
203, 205, 218, 228, 230,  
256–258, 266, 268, 283,  
285, 288  
NBC Nightly News, 264  
Nelkin, Neil, 66  
networks, 224, 228–231  
Newman, Edwin, 37  
News and Information Service,  
230  
News Call, 113  
newscasting, 277–281  
    television, 281  
newscasts, 201–219  
    television, 239–244  
news events, 127  
Newsfeed, 113  
news judgment, 62–68, 87,  
122  
Newline, 113  
newsmakers, 129–130  
newspapers, as news source,  
117–118  
newsreels, 242  
*Newsweek*, 117  
newsworthiness, 62–68, 87,  
193, 203, 250  
*New York Times*, 20, 32, 42,  
48, 50, 55, 82, 117, 143  
*New York Times* rule, 136  
nicknames, 51  
“no comment,” 152  
Noonan, Peggy, 31  
“not,” 14  
not for attribution, 130

- numbers, copy style rules, 10–11  
in writing, 29–31  
numerals, 10–11, 261
- obituaries, 79  
objectivity, 40, 132, 155, 223–224  
O'Brien, Tim, 229–230  
officials, at tragedies, 182–183  
off the record, 130  
“only,” 41  
on-scene reporting, 126–127  
openers, stand-ups, 256  
opening lines, newscasts, 218–219  
open-meeting laws, 147  
Operation News Line, 113  
opinion, 41–42, 231–234  
need for attribution of, 43  
ordering newscasts, 201–208, 243–245  
organization of stories, 90–93  
other sides to issues, 95–96  
out-cues, 163, 179, 202, 263–264  
outlines, 90, 235  
overgeneralizations, 41  
overstating, 57  
Owens, Michael, 288
- pace, 280  
panic, 142  
pans, 248  
Pappas, Paul, 143  
paragraphs, 47  
paraphrasing, 53–55  
Parker, Eddie, 173, 176  
Parker, Paul, 176  
Parlante, Bob, 160, 164–165  
parroting effect, 173, 177–178  
Parson, Pat, 227  
passive voice, 27  
past tense, 29
- patching in, 163–164  
Patrick, Russ, 270–271  
pauses, 55–56, 279  
noting in copy, 14–15  
“people,” 37  
per se, 134  
personal attacks, 137–138, 231  
personal language, 25–26  
“persons,” 37  
Petrik, Dick, 1, 4, 129, 194, 225  
phoners, 160, 227  
phonetic spelling, 16  
police, access to information, 145  
as sources, 130  
coverage of, 142, 185–186  
police code, 115  
police radio, 115, 124, 185, 226  
police teletype, 115  
politics, coverage of, 190–194  
Porter, Steve, 68, 83, 218  
pots, 281–283  
Pratt, Leonard, 176  
preparation, for interviews, 158  
for reporting, 121–125  
for reporting live, 197  
preplanned events, 122–124  
present perfect tense, 28–29  
present tense, 27–29  
President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, 188–189  
press cards, 144  
press releases, 115–117, 124–125  
print wires, 107–110  
privacy, 140–141, 144  
privilege, 135  
producers, 201–202, 240, 244  
programming, 222–224  
progressive rock, 223, 229  
pronouns, 38–39
- pronunciation, 15–16  
protecting sources, 143–144  
protests, coverage of, 194–196  
proverbs, 32  
proximity, 66–67  
public affairs, 231–236  
public figures, libel, 136  
privacy, 141  
public interest needs of community, 222  
public officials, libel, 36  
public relations, 191–192  
public relations teletype, 116  
punch lines, 96  
puns, 79
- Q and As, 151–153, 162–163, 252  
throw lines to, 176  
writing lead-ins to, 172–173  
Quehm, Bill, 70  
questioning, 128–129, 157–160, 182, 236, 253–254  
question leads, 78  
Quinn, Matt, 266–267  
quotation marks, 53  
quotes, 53–55  
“Quote . . . unquote,” 53–54
- race, suspect's, 147, 186  
radio markets, 224–228  
radio scanner, 103, 115  
radio stations, number of, 222  
sizes, 224–228  
Radio-Television News Directors Association, 147–148, 286  
radio waves, 283  
rape victims, 141  
ratings, 224  
reaction shots, 251, 258  
reading aloud, 17  
reading rate, 280

- real things, 26  
 rear projection, 242, 244-245  
 Redeker, Bill, 174  
 "red flag" words, 134  
 Red Lion, Pennsylvania, 138  
 Redmont, Leonard, 176  
 redundancy, 57  
   lead-in and tape, 173-174  
 reel-to-reel tape recorders, 164  
 regional news, 204  
 regional wires, 105, 107  
 religious formats, 223  
 remotes, 243  
 renaming after tape, 177-178  
 Renshaw, Randy, 64  
 repetition, 98  
 reporting live, 197-198  
 reports, 154-155  
 rescue workers, coverage of, 183  
 research tools, 118  
 resumes, 287  
 Reuters, 104, 108-109, 111  
 reverse directories, 118  
 reverses, 253-254  
 rewrites, 209  
 rewriting wire copy, 105-110  
 rhythm in writing, 96-98  
 riding the gain, 282-283  
 riots, coverage of, 141-142, 195-196  
 rip and read, 105  
 rock music, 223  
 ROSRs, 153-155, 162, 164, 184, 198  
 Rossman, Russ, 172  
 rough edits, 235  
 rounding off, 30  
 Rudd, Hughes, 47  
 rule of thirds, 249  
 rundowns, 243-245
- St. Claire, Todd, 279  
 Samek, Robert, 278
- satellites, 113, 231  
 "says," synonyms for, 39-40  
 scanners, 103, 115  
 scanning copy, 280  
 Schaap, Dick, 260-261, 263  
 schedules, reporters, 122-124, 246-247  
 Schrack, Don, 212  
 scores, 215  
   copy style, 11  
 scripts, 244  
 second-day angles, 66  
 second person, 25  
 second usage, names, 51-52  
 Secret Service, 115  
 Section 315 of  
   Communications Act, 139  
 Seiden, Robert, 278  
 sensationalism, 147  
 sentences, 47-59  
   length of, 96-97  
   structure, 50, 97  
 sequence, in stories, 91-92  
 sequence of shots, 251-252, 258  
 set-up leads, 73-74, 76, 78  
 Shanov, Liz, 2-4, 10, 69, 227-228  
 shield laws, 143-144  
 shooting videotape and film, 246-249  
 short sentences, 96-97  
 sibilants, 17  
 simple language, 21  
 simple sentences, 49  
 Singer, Isaac Bashevis, 59  
 single-system film, 254  
 "60 minutes," 254  
 slander, 133-134  
 slang, 23-24  
 slating shots, 247  
 sloppiness, 133  
 slugs, 9, 244  
 small markets, 224-225, 286  
 Smith, Jack, 153  
 Smith, Voight, 198
- snappers, 94-96, 279-280  
 Snee, William, 133  
 soft leads, 72-73  
 SONY 110B recorders, 162  
 sound-bites, 252-253, 258-259, 264  
   writing copy to introduce, 269-271  
 sound on film, 263, 269  
 sound on tape, 263, 269  
 sources of news, 103-118  
 "Spectrum," 230, 232  
 speeches, coverage of, 191-192  
 spelling, 15  
 Spencer, Susan, 270  
 splicing, 165  
 split infinitives, 37  
 splitting sentences in copy, 13  
 splitting words in copy, 13  
 sponsors, 218-219  
 sports, 214-216, 227, 244  
 sports wires, 111, 215  
 spots, 207, 225, 282-283  
 spot sheet, 264  
 spotting visuals, 266-267  
 staging events, 142  
 standard out-cues, 180  
 stand-ups, 254-259, 264-265  
   writing copy to introduce, 270-271  
 startling, statements, 78  
 statement leads, 77-78  
 station managers, 232  
 statutory rape, 186  
 "stealing," list of words with similar meanings, 37  
 Stern, Carl, 146  
 stock markets, 217-218  
 Stockton, Peggy, 123  
 stories, 82-98  
   form, 84  
   length, 82-84  
   organization, 90-93  
 street maps, 118, 126  
 strikes, coverage of, 195

- style, copy, 7–18  
     summary of rules, 18  
     tape, 179–181  
     television, 260–265  
 subjective comments, 150, 252  
 subjectivity, 41–42, 232  
 succinctness, 56–58  
 Sunday news, 108, 236  
 “sunshine laws,” 146–147  
 superficiality, 86  
 superlatives, 40–41  
 supers, 242, 263  
 Superscope recorders, 162  
 supporting the lead, 84  
 Supreme Court, 138, 143  
 syllables, number a newscaster  
     can read without a pause,  
     55–56  
 symbols, in copy, 11  
 symmetry, 249
- tact, 183  
 tag lines, 177  
 talking heads, 240–241  
 tape, 149–168  
     as consideration in ordering  
     newscasts, 205  
     copy style rules, 179–181  
     writing to, 171–181  
 tape cartridges, 162, 166–168,  
     282  
 tape cassettes, 160  
 tape recorders, in court, 145,  
     187  
 Taylor, Ann, 28, 68, 173–174,  
     205  
 teases, 212, 244–245  
 technical directors, 240  
 technical terms, 22  
 telephone company lines, 113,  
     231  
 telephone directories, 118, 126  
 telephones, 125–127  
     for filing tape, 162–163  
     phoners, 160, 227
- teleprompters, 281  
 tell stories, 261–262  
 ten code, 115  
 ten percent cutoff, 249  
 Tennant, Jan, 270  
 Terkel, Hal, 202  
 terrorists, coverage of, 142  
 testing copy, 17  
 Texas State Network, 114, 231  
 third-class licenses, 283  
 Thomas, Helen, 103  
 Thomas, Lowell, 33  
 throw lines, 174–177  
     television, 269–270  
 tie-ins, 210–212  
 tight writing, 82  
 Tillett, Loren Edward III, 210  
*Time*, 117  
 time, noting in copy, 17  
 timing, copy, 16–17  
     newscasts, 208  
     television copy, 261  
 timeliness, 65–66  
 tips, 117, 124  
 titles, 51–52  
 “today,” 70  
 Tonks, Peter, 223  
 Top 40, 222–223, 229–230  
 tornado warnings, 214  
 torts, 187  
 Tower, David, 234  
 Townsend, Dallas, 15, 17, 19,  
     25, 33, 63, 71, 176, 211,  
     216–217  
 tragedies, coverage of,  
     182–185  
 transitions, 93–94, 210  
 trespassing, 144  
 truth defense, 134  
 Twain, Mark, 104  
 two shots, 253  
 two-way radios, 126, 197  
 typing, 8–9
- Uliano, Dick, 157  
 umbrella leads, 75–76, 93
- underlining, 14  
 unions, 246, 284  
 United Press International, 77,  
     103–113, 231  
 unusual, the, 65  
 urgents, 110–111, 124  
 usage, 37–38  
 Utley, Garrick, 256
- verbs, active, 26–27  
     tenses, 27–29  
 video column, 260–265  
 video display terminals, 9, 112  
 videotape, 243  
     noting in copy, 263–265  
     shooting, 246–249  
 violence, coverage of, 195  
 visual continuity, 258  
 visuals, 239–259  
     writing to, 260–272  
 voicers, 153–157, 162, 183,  
     186–187, 190–191, 254  
     throw lines to, 176  
     writing lead-ins to, 172–174  
 VTR, 244–245
- WABC, New York City, 25,  
     74–77, 84–85, 214, 223  
 WABC-TV, New York City,  
     244–245  
 WADA, North Carolina, 58  
 Walker, Bob, 71  
 Walker, James, 156  
 Wallace, Chris, 156  
 Wallace, Mike, 230, 254  
 Wallace, Rick, 126, 129, 153,  
     183  
*Wall Street Journal*, 111, 117  
 WARA, Massachusetts, 58  
 WARU, Indiana, 61, 71  
*Washington Post*, 117  
 Watergate, 128  
 Watkins, John D., 211–212  
 WAXC, New York, 68  
 WAZY, Indiana, 58, 66, 72, 92

- WBBM, Chicago, 33, 41, 44,  
 53, 63, 73, 111, 175, 217  
 WBGN, Kentucky, 27, 63  
 WBLG, Kentucky, 62  
 281-283  
 WBLS, New York City, 224  
 WBNQ, Illinois, 223  
 WBRG, Virginia, 74  
 WBUR, Boston, 31, 75, 77-78  
 WCAU, Philadelphia, 156,  
 159, 175, 180, 190-191,  
 197, 213  
 WCBS, New York City, 2-4,  
 10, 69, 74, 109, 176, 178,  
 183, 205-206, 227-228  
 WCBS-TV, New York City,  
 256  
 WCCO, Minneapolis, 23, 31,  
 62, 104, 174, 209  
 WCEM, Maryland, 95  
 WDAI, Chicago, 229  
 WDEE, Detroit, 26, 73, 84, 94,  
 97, 176, 215  
 weather, 213-214, 227, 244  
 weather wires, 111  
 WEBN, Cincinnati, 106  
 WEEI, Boston, 231-234  
 WELO, Mississippi, 64  
 WERC, Alabama, 156,  
 162-164, 187, 192  
 Western Union, 111  
 WFFV, Virginia, 76  
 WFIN, Ohio, 25  
 WFIR, Virginia, 24, 65, 172  
 WFLN, Philadelphia, 223  
 WFMW, Kentucky, 68, 73  
 WGCB, Pennsylvania, 138  
 WGHN, Michigan, 71, 92  
 WHDH, Boston, 160,  
 164-165  
 WHEN, New York, 133  
 White House, 122, 125, 192,  
 194, 230  
 who, what, when, where and  
 why, 72-73, 87-88  
 WHOO, Florida, 175, 178  
 who's who books, 118  
 WHSM, Wisconsin, 42  
 WIBA, Wisconsin, 212  
 WIEV, Massachusetts, 143  
 WIFF, Indiana, 71  
 Wiggins, Jim, 190-191  
 WINS, New York City, 29, 40,  
 47, 56, 58, 74, 76, 91, 94,  
 117-118, 153-154, 157,  
 176, 183, 185-186, 285  
 wire services, 103-113,  
 124-125, 239  
 witnesses, coverage of,  
 183-184  
 WIXY, Cleveland, 229  
 WJDA, Massachusetts, 77  
 WJET, Pennsylvania, 176  
 WJJD, Chicago, 229  
 WJVM, Illinois, 198  
 WKIS, Florida, 173, 175  
 WKNR, Michigan, 175, 213  
 WKPA, Pennsylvania, 96  
 WKVT, Vermont, 28, 58  
 WLAC, Nashville, 173, 176,  
 234  
 WLEC, Ohio, 69, 212  
 WLOD, Florida, 73-74  
 WLOG, West Virginia, 72  
 WLS, Chicago, 229  
 WLUC, Las Vegas, 175  
 WMAK, Tennessee, 69  
 WMAL, Washington, D.C., 68,  
 70, 76-77, 84, 91, 94,  
 203, 209, 216  
 WMCA, New York City, 14, 85  
 WMEL, Florida, 58  
 WNAE, Pennsylvania, 278  
 WNAP, Indiana, 56  
 WNBC-TV, New York City,  
 260-261, 263  
 WNDE, Indianapolis, 23, 25,  
 87, 96, 214  
 WNEW, New York City,  
 121-124, 126, 151,  
 156-157, 161, 166-168,  
 184  
 WNEW-TV, New York City,  
 256  
 WNOR, Virginia, 90-91  
 WNOR-FM, Virginia, 79  
 WNPT, Alabama, 122, 126  
 WNTS, Indianapolis, 230  
 Woolley, Lynn, 58, 215  
 WOR, New York City, 62, 76,  
 96, 204  
 wordiness, 55, 57-58  
 World War II, 221-222  
 WPDM, New York, 45  
 WPEN, Philadelphia, 229  
 WPLJ, New York City, 229  
 wraps, 157, 162, 196-197  
 filing, 164  
 throw lines to, 176-177  
 writing lead-ins to, 172-174  
 WRBX, North Carolina, 54  
 WRFM, New York City, 234  
 WRHI, South Carolina, 25, 39,  
 96  
 write-outs, 177-179  
 writing tests, 288  
 WRKD, Maine, 44, 218-219,  
 277  
 WROV, Virginia, 56, 210  
 WRRR, Illinois, 103  
 WRVA, Virginia, 1-2,  
 211-213, 217-218,  
 225-227, 282  
 WRVQ, Virginia, 71, 78, 88,  
 95, 106, 212  
 WSAU, Wisconsin, 78  
 WSB, Atlanta, 48, 50, 53-54,  
 62, 64, 67, 84, 97, 123,  
 200, 205, 212, 216  
 WSB-TV, 247  
 WSJM, Michigan, 175-176,  
 213  
 WSMB, New Orleans, 229  
 WSOY, Illinois, 27, 64, 75-76,  
 78, 87, 210  
 WSPB, Florida, 70, 79, 288  
 WSUB, Connecticut, 278  
 WSYB, Vermont, 49

WTEV, Massachusetts, 240,  
247  
WTIC, Connecticut, 139, 184  
WTLB, New York, 54, 175,  
214  
WTVF, Nashville, 238  
WVLK, Kentucky, 173

WVOK, Alabama, 25, 78  
WVON, Chicago, 229  
WWLE, New York, 75, 223  
WWSR, Vermont, 218–219  
WXLS, Connecticut, 279  
WXYZ, Detroit, 231  
WZZM-FM, Michigan, 79

years, 11  
“yesterday,” 70

Zaillian, Jim, 35  
Zimmerman, Stan, 70, 79, 288  
Zodiac News Service, 114  
zooms, 248, 256

