

John Hewitt

**Writing
for
Broadcast
News**

55
NED'S USED BOOK
No Return w/o label

Second Edition

WorldRadioHistory

Air Words

WRITING FOR BROADCAST NEWS
SECOND EDITION

JOHN HEWITT

San Francisco State University

* Homework p. 40 3C (type out)
Simplify, cut out, rewrite

3C, 3D, 3F, ~~3G~~, 3J

* bring tape recorder

* look up info on Essence magazine = Editor coming in

* bring ^{at least} 3 scripted Qs.



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Preface

Every broadcast news assignment reaches a stage when a reporter or writer must sit down at a keyboard and compose the story. At that moment, being prepared to sift through information, deciding what to include, crafting a clever lead, adding perspective and details, integrating field actualities, and serving it all up in a conversational style on deadline reveals a lot about the writer—and about professional skills in this world of radio and television journalism.

For the student, this second edition of the *Air Words* workbook is ready to help you with the skills you need to organize and write the broadcast story. These pages are jammed with a collection of definitions, rules, warnings, shortcuts, models, and exercises to sharpen your ability to write for spoken news. You'll also find guides for working with interviews, sounds, and pictures recorded in the field—elements that dictate changes in the story design. When you've completed the exercises in this book, I hope you'll always remember to use active voice; put attribution first; look out for pronouns; and follow many of the other suggestions in this book. These rules form the backbone of a confident broadcast style, and though they can be ignored occasionally (not every sentence can use active voice), they provide reassurance when you face a keyboard at deadline time.

For the instructor, this new edition recognizes the escalating changes in broadcast news as we head for the turn of the century. In San Francisco, the local television stations are scrambling to find novel markets for their newscasts; one has a 24-hour local cable news program, another has a combined TV and radio operation. In Philadelphia, a newspaper is experimenting with a late evening TV newscast. In New York, a cable channel is continuing to confound traditional television news reporter/photographer responsibilities in the field. The 1990s are truly a crucible for consolidating old newsroom duties and defining new job roles; more print journalists will need crossover skills in writing styles, and more broadcast news staffers must have diverse abilities. For this reason, the second edition of *Air Words* is looking to the future while retaining its valuable workbook design.

There are some important new directions in this second edition. Computerized workstations are no longer novelties, and all writers will need to be familiar with wire capture, the paperless newsroom, and producing from CRTs. In various chapters, the second edition recognizes the arrival of this technology. Also, narrowing broadcast station profit margins and the proliferation of television tabloid news programs mean managers may be pushing their staffs

harder, moving them toward dangerous ethical areas. An overview on ethics is included to prepare students for new questions about privacy, intrusive news gathering, and sensationalism.

But while some change is welcome, this new edition still stands out as the only broadcast news text to provide extensive drill and exercise for each fundamental style module in conversational writing styles. Consider the question of active voice and the exercises that are there. Same with attribution, nested phrases, soundbite integration, and so on. And, while many exercises have been updated and refined, the modular design has been retained to allow instructors to proceed at an individual pace in drilling students. This unique layout recognizes that many instructors have strong theories about news gathering and story design—theories that come from years of industry experience. For that reason, many areas in the second edition invite personalized curricular innovation, especially in the areas of news story selection and producing. We hope the second edition achieves this goal: to stay grounded in the useful style structure exercises while advancing toward the new news roles needed in the next century.

And for the student, well, it's an exciting time. Welcome to the world of writing for your co-workers' lips and the audience's ears. Work hard and you'll get the hang of voice-delivered news. Good luck.

Acknowledgments

This book began as a series of handouts in broadcast news classes. It has gone through numerous revisions, and I appreciate all of the frank, useful, and often direct criticisms from students in the Broadcast and Electronic Communication Arts Department at San Francisco State University.

Along the way, a number of people read all or part of the manuscript and offered help or encouragement, including Bill Rukeyser, then a newswriter at a television station in San Francisco, and my colleagues at San Francisco State, Rick Houlberg, Art France, and Herb Kaplan, not to mention Mayfield's reviewers: Jim Bernstein, Indiana University; John Broholm, University of Kansas; Joseph R. Chuk, Kutztown University; Sue Kopen Katcef, University of Maryland; Ron MacDonald, Washington and Lee University; and Mary Pat Pierce, Purdue University (retired).

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Thanks to all. I couldn't have done it without you.

This book is dedicated to two former colleagues who were splendid thinkers and outstanding educators: C. R. "Buzz" Anderson at San Francisco State and Jules Dundes at Stanford. Both are gone, but both were industry professionals who merged experience with a solid dedication to teaching and to their students, and did it without taking the process or themselves too seriously.



What Broadcast Does Well

Chapter Preview

This chapter covers the relationship between journalism and broadcast. You'll learn why you must consider the special strengths of broadcast—the power of immediacy, voice recordings and visuals, emotion, and personal delivery. Ethical questions involving broadcast news work are explored. The chapter also outlines the extra skills a journalist needs to become proficient in broadcast news.

Glossary

:45 Refers to a timed length of 45 seconds. All story and tape lengths in this workbook will use this notation.

ACTUALITY The radio term for field recordings of interviews or events. Portions of actualities, often called bites, may be used in a newscast.

BITE A portion of a recorded interview that is scheduled for use in a broadcast news story.

ETHICS The study of moral decision making in personal or social situations. Codes of ethics are frameworks and references for making decisions in news work.

_O/C A television script abbreviation for on-camera. This indicates to the director that the picture and sound come from the newscaster reading in the studio. *Live* is also used.

PRONOUNCER The phonetic spelling of a word in a broadcast story. Usually the pronouncer is broken into syllables and placed in the copy behind the true spelling of the word, for example, "King Abu Saud (SAH-AH-`UDE)." The pronouncer is the writer's responsibility.

SOT Short for sound on tape. This alerts anyone working on the newscast that the audio portion will come from videotape.

SOUNDBITE A portion of an interview recorded on videotape.

TEMPLATE The screen format of a news computer system. The template provides a place for information and newswriting.

WIRE CAPTURE The ability of a news computer system to record, store, and display wire service stories when needed for data.

THIS BUSINESS OF NEWS

This workbook is about news stories and how to put them together. News, in its most simple definition, is a timely report of current events. It's also supposed to be thoughtful, accurate, balanced; filled with perspective; and cleverly done.

News reporters and writers prepare news for presentation. It is hoped they enjoy sifting through the blizzard of incoming news stimuli, or working under deadline, or serving as a public striver for truth. Despite all that, they should also delight in daily opportunities to craft their stories.

Much of what is studied as journalism concerns newspapers. Print journalism's writing style, reporting needs, story lengths, conventions, values, industry practices, and story variety are the venerated guideposts of this business.

Broadcast, on the other hand, is new. Misunderstood by many who believe it should act like a newspaper, broadcast has its own reporting needs, industry practices, writing styles, and story variety. In broadcast, you must write for speech patterns, design stories around the various sound and visual recordings made in the field, and work within severe time limitations. More than with a newspaper, the audience's needs must be considered.

WHAT AUDIENCE RESEARCH TELLS US

The general public consistently tells survey takers that radio and television are very important sources of news. The audience listens to radio and watches television not only for the latest and most immediate information but also because they can see and hear the people involved in the news and because they trust in the personal delivery of newscasters.

Listeners and viewers have an on-again, off-again relationship with newscasts. Researchers¹ have found that most of the radio audience and more than half of the television audience are doing something else while these newscasts are on the air. Whereas radio listeners are often in the car, listeners and viewers at home may be driving, cooking or eating dinner, taking care of children, lying in bed, or even reading newspapers. With audience attention that is drifting in and out, it takes clever leads and a sharp broadcast style to bring the audience into each and every story.

Another problem—the audience gets one and only one chance to hear the story. Research has sorted out what the viewer or listener perceives, retains, and understands from the newscast.² Stories written in direct speech patterns, with the least complex phrasing, are the easiest to digest in that crucial single pass. Newswriters must work to develop a simple style that promotes the maximum understanding. Television writers also have to be aware that powerful visuals distract viewers and lessen comprehension.

BROADCAST'S STRENGTHS

We're all familiar with the advantages of newspapers. They can be read at any time, are portable, report massive amounts of news, have specialized sections, and—best of all—allow us to scan the pages and read only what we want. There is no question that many journalism practices are aimed at highlighting those qualities.

But broadcast has its strengths: immediacy, field recordings, emotion, and personal delivery. These guide decisions about what to stress in broadcast stories.

Immediacy

News is a collection of timely summaries of current events. People turn to both radio and television for the latest information, the update, or the last review of the evening.³

Part of broadcast news work is a constant search for the update, the new information or angle that “advances” the story. To get this immediacy, some radio news staffs never leave the office and instead do all reporting and interviews on the phone. In this way new leads can be prepared quickly. Television needs the pictures and spends huge sums on microwave and satellite trucks designed to link any location with their studio.

But this pursuit of immediacy can also be a drawback. While providing the audience with a chance to listen and watch as the action happens on breaking stories, television and radio staffs work under deadlines that compress time needed to evaluate sources and review information. If facts are not thoroughly checked, rumor can be put on the air.

There is also deserved criticism of the television live shot. Too often stations send reporters to the news location either with little information or hours after the event is over. In many cases, the reporter would have had a chance to check facts and prepare a better story by staying in the newsroom. These are management decisions that often have little to do with news.

Field Recordings

Field recordings contain actualities, soundbites, and visuals, which, when used on the air, give the audience a chance to be on the scene of the event in progress. Radio has the rich natural sound of voices or happenings and television can add the visual dimension. When in the field, don't forget how valuable the audio and videotape will be for the story. Remember, audiences tell poll takers that one reason they watch television is they like to see and hear people in the news, so they can judge for themselves whether or not a person is telling the truth.

Emotion

For years print-based accounts reduced the visibility of emotion's role in events, concentrating instead on rational cause and effect or lists of details and names.

Now broadcast actualities, soundbites, and visuals have restored emotion to an important place in stories.

But emotion is a tricky story angle to handle and must be kept in proper perspective. When pictures and actualities with strong emotion become a story's driving force, it rightfully raises charges of sensationalism. The goal is to uncover genuine sentiment and let it reveal itself. Emotion should be treated with great care.

Personal Delivery

How the reporter or anchor delivers the story is crucial to the audience's understanding. An effective newscaster needs a well-written script, a comfortable voice, and good pronunciation to communicate the item.

When the newscaster reads a story, it is as if the writer is speaking. As that writer, you must also take great pains by smoothing the sentence flow, providing pronouncers (the pronunciation guides), checking the accuracy of the story, and preparing the actualities and visuals. Treacherous writing in the final script will make your entire news department look incompetent.

The personal delivery strength creates an awkward situation for those who abuse it. Too much emphasis on personal delivery and the newscast crosses the line into entertainment.

DIFFERENT STRENGTHS LEAD TO DIFFERENT APPROACHES

Radio and television reporters often use methods different from those used by print reporters to gather information about current events. Because the circulation of newspapers is limited by distance, the print medium can concentrate reporting in nearby cities. But the broadcast signal is easily beamed to a wider area, giving even tiny two-person radio news staffs a metropolitan area to cover. Therefore, broadcast staffs are structured differently.

- More research is done in the newsroom, and far fewer reporters are on the street.
- The concentration is on extensive coverage of a few important stories rather than on specialized beat reporting.
- The emphasis is on quick reactions to tips and information from many sources, including other news agencies.
- More staff positions go to engineers or photographers whose job is to get recorded interviews and visuals.

When a news story is prepared, broadcast's strengths will often suggest a unique lead. On occasion, the lead might stress what's in the actualities or soundbites. Other times, it will highlight the story's immediacy or the newscaster's presentation ability. In any case, it is important to be aware that broadcast can choose its own angle for the story lead in accord with what's best for the medium and the audience.

THE DIFFERENT LOOK OF BROADCAST

Broadcast stories not only are gathered in an unusual manner, they are designed to be spoken in the newscast. Their sentence construction is shorter, more abrupt, and built around phrasing. Although the period stays at the end of the sentence, there may be special punctuation, such as three dots to replace a comma. Here are examples of both print and broadcast.

<p>UFO fans headed to big meet</p> <p>Perris, CA. Throngs of UFO fanatics are expected to meet sometime next week in the nation's capitol to petition the federal government for the transcripts of UFO investigations in the 60s, according to Perry Outthere, the coordinator for the Southern California UFO Adherents society. . . .etc.</p>	<table border="1"><tr><th>PAGE</th><th>TAL</th><th>SLUG</th><th>VIDEO</th><th>APPROVAL</th><th>WRITER</th><th>TRT</th></tr><tr><td colspan="7">ORIGINATED: _____ MODIFIED _____ STATUS _____</td></tr><tr><td colspan="7"><p>U-F-O FANS ARE STAGING A MEETING IN THE NATION'S CAPITOL. THEY WANT THE GOVERNMENT TO OPEN UP FILES. . .FILES THEY SAY CONTAIN INFORMATION ABOUT U-F-O SIGHTINGS. ONE OFFICIAL OF THE U-F-O. . .ETC.</p></td></tr></table>	PAGE	TAL	SLUG	VIDEO	APPROVAL	WRITER	TRT	ORIGINATED: _____ MODIFIED _____ STATUS _____							<p>U-F-O FANS ARE STAGING A MEETING IN THE NATION'S CAPITOL. THEY WANT THE GOVERNMENT TO OPEN UP FILES. . .FILES THEY SAY CONTAIN INFORMATION ABOUT U-F-O SIGHTINGS. ONE OFFICIAL OF THE U-F-O. . .ETC.</p>						
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FIGURE 1.1

Left, *example of how a story would appear in print*; right, *how a story would appear broadcast*.

The structural differences are quickly obvious. The broadcast story has shorter sentences, releases facts in a different manner, and is more conversational in tone. It is written for the ear.

In almost every exercise that follows in this workbook, we'll be encouraging you to write for speech patterns. Before you do, you should see what your speech looks like. Try this next exercise.



EXERCISE 1-A

What Your Speech Looks Like

For this exercise, you'll need some type of audio cassette recorder and a keyboard or typewriter. The purpose of this exercise is to produce a printed version of your normal speech patterns.

To begin, read the following situation several times. Then put down the book, and using the cassette recorder, record your account of the story as you understand it and as if you were telling it to a friend. This is meant to be impromptu, even casual. Don't write what you are going to say. This explanation should run about :45 (45 seconds).

When you finish, type an exact transcription of what you said. Be truthful. The transcript should include every stumble, half-sentence, "uhmm," or whatever you said to describe what was going on. Then, see if you can identify patterns that both help and detract from the job of getting the information across.

Situation

You are at the nearby Leopard Creek Zoo when two pandas arrive amidst a flurry of civic activity. The mayor, the delegation from the People's Republic of China, and lots of zookeepers, onlookers, reporters, and television cameras are here also. A large delivery truck pulls up, and after several speeches, the pandas are taken from a large flatbed trailer in special wooden packing cases. The pandas are on loan for two months and will live in a special climate-controlled building that the zoo has for animals with special needs. Zookeepers will be feeding the pandas blue bamboo shoots, the only food the creatures will eat. It'll be two weeks before the public is allowed to view them.

WHAT ARE SOME DRAWBACKS OF BROADCAST?

Earlier in this chapter we discussed structural problems that occur with overemphasis on the broadcast strengths. Too much immediacy and you lose your ability to evaluate and edit the information. Too much emotional content and you begin to slide into sensationalism. Too much emphasis on personal delivery and you have problems with entertainment.

Now, there are other drawbacks that have to do with the way newsrooms operate. One critical drawback is the inflexibility of formats for stories. At some commercial stations, read-only stories are limited to :30, stories with a simple soundbite can go :45, and reporter packages are allowed a full minute. These time constraints are meant to produce a fast-moving newscast, but limits like these often hamper thoughtful journalism. Soundbites that are too short often lack information and perspective.

An industry drawback is competition. In even the smallest markets, there is usually a competitor for a radio or television news operation; in the big markets, there can be many news crews out covering the same story. This head-banging competition, once the norm in newspapers, can be all-consuming when breaking stories must be covered. Staffs are often told they must get it first to be “number one” in their market. But the old adage “Get it right! Then get it first!” still applies.

Also, commercial broadcasting exists in an industry that is not news based, but performance based. Your immediate news manager, the news director, may or may not have been a journalist. The person to whom the news director reports probably did not rise up through the news ranks. So news decisions often become accounting or sales decisions, and the decisions on ethical questions might be made by someone who has no appreciation of journalism. This can cause morale problems.

ETHICS INVOLVED IN NEWS WORK AND BROADCAST

What does it mean when we hear that journalists have low ethical standards? For most critics, it is a way of implying that journalists will do anything—illegal, immoral, or whatever—to get a story. Journalists, they say, will opt for the greatest greed over the greatest good and are only interested in building circulation or ratings. Are they right? I hope not.

The study of ethics is the study of decision making when that decision might lead to good or bad results. Ethical choices confront news staffs on a daily basis, whether they concern news-gathering methods, information release, or story choice.

Journalists are usually involved in two areas of consequences: personal and societal. In the area of personal ethical decisions, the difficulties are in protection of confidential sources, distortion of news items, outright lies, self-censorship, and taking gifts for news items. In the societal professional area, there are issues of defamation and slander, checkbook journalism or buying information,

cronyism with news sources, misrepresentation of your identity when reporting, invasion of privacy, use of stolen documents, and sensationalism in story presentation.

That's a big list and a dangerous one. Journalists work in the community and use the public trust as a shield for their work. Because they seldom have any legal standing beyond that of a private citizen, and because the first amendment does not protect the news-gathering area, reporters are often at odds with other rights and privileges when gathering information. Even so-called shield laws, designed to protect unpublished notes and important sources, seldom stand up to the judicial challenges when pitted against the right to a fair trial.

Providing a checklist so journalists can test their decisions is a difficult task; there are just too many variables in each case study to claim it is a model. Instead, writers of ethics books have tried to set up general guidelines for decisions.

Louis Day, in his book *Ethics in Media Communications: Cases and Controversies*, lists six categories a journalist should consider when facing a particularly troubling situation. These are

- A. individual conscience (your own moral standards)
- B. objects of moral judgment (who is affected by your story)
- C. financial supporters (the company you work for)
- D. the institution (journalism itself)
- E. professional colleagues (your co-workers)
- F. society (general taboos against certain actions)

As you can see, the list begins with the individual's own moral conscience, then considers those immediately affected, before considering larger and more inclusive groups. In examining the situation in which a journalist is asked to reveal the identity of a confidential source, the decision process might go this way.

First, define the problem. Be careful to consider all possible outcomes and individuals and groups affected. A court is asking the journalist to reveal the source's name. The journalist has promised complete confidentiality. If the journalist refuses, the judge is ready to send the journalist to jail.

In the area of individual conscience (category A), the journalist may decide that his or her own personal standards and values will be harmed. On the flip side, the jail option and ensuing court appearances may be damaging to the journalist's personal career and family.

Considering category B, objects of moral judgment, the question concerns the effect on the source and the defendant in the trial. Would releasing the source's name put this person in danger? Or cost the source his or her job? Would holding back the name injure the defendant's possibility for a fair trial? Is the name that important?

For category C, yes, it is necessary to consider the effect on the employers. Newspapers have been put out of business by court decisions, and the con-

tinued fight against the judge's contempt power might cost the station thousands of dollars in fines and legal costs. Can the business stand the cost?

For category D, the institution, will the stand taken by the journalist be good for credibility, or bad for it? Will the publicity damage the reputation of all who work for the station? Remember the national outrage over an NBC producer's decision to use model rocket motors to assist the ignition of spilled gasoline in the testing of a truck's fuel tank. A national poll by the Times Mirror Company found that the network's credibility had fallen significantly in the public's eyes; possibly management's concerns then brought about the resignation of the NBC news president, as well as the dismissal of several staff members.

In the area of professional colleagues (category E), you are asking if your co-workers would support your decisions. In this case, withholding the name of a confidential source, you might easily have them on your side because this issue has always been a journalist's badge of honor—not to reveal a source's name, even when threatened with jail.

The last area to consider is category F, society. This is the area of social responsibility. Journalists should believe that a society is stronger when a source can contact a reporter without fear of retribution and thus allow journalism to be in the watchdog role. It might be a tougher decision if the case involved broadcast of an overly violent sensational video. In that case, societal reaction would figure more in the decision.

EXERCISE 1-B

Ethical Analysis

Read the following situations, then define the problem, and look for the outcomes in the six areas of ethical consideration.

Situation 1

You are producer for a local television evening newscast. Your photographer returns to the station with video of a man who jumps from a downtown ledge in a suicide. Do you use the video in the story?

Situation 2

You are a radio reporter who returns from a news conference called by a local politician, who is a critic of the city's police chief. In speaking about the latest controversial incident, the politician critic, who is obnoxious himself, becomes confused and actually issues a strong statement supporting the police chief. You've been waiting a long time to get back at this politician. Is this the time to use the confused bite without perspective?

Situation 3

You are a television reporter covering a highly publicized corruption trial in your city. One of the defense lawyers slips you some sealed grand jury transcripts with new information about the case. Although the judge has made a specific issue of forbidding any revelations from the transcripts during the trial, you believe that the information is in the public interest. Do you use this new information in your coverage of the story?

Situation 4

You are a reporter for a small radio station and the local gas and electric utility offers to fly you to the new hydroelectric plant for a story. They will provide transportation, lodging, and meals for two days in an attractive resort area while you do the story. Your station could never pay for this. Do you take it?

Situation 5

A criminal in a sensational local case has never talked to the media. Now, she is calling you asking if you'd like an exclusive personal interview. The catch? She wants \$300 to help her child get an operation. Your station can afford this. Do you agree?

Situation 6

Your reporter comes back with an interview of a very newsworthy person who has refused to talk to the media. You find out that the reporter wore a wireless mic and the photographer shot the interview from a parked van a half-block away. Does it matter whether or not this individual, who is involved in a public scandal, didn't know she was being taped?

WHAT EXTRA SKILLS MUST YOU LEARN?

Voice-delivered news work requires new skills that go beyond simply putting words on paper. In the area of news gathering, you'll have to learn how to gain access to people in the news. This is not just a matter of answering questions over the phone, but of convincing them to be interviewed on-camera or before a microphone.

Once the newsmaker agrees to go on-camera, you should know how to ask the effective questions that result in answers usable for broadcast. You'll also have to learn how to evaluate and select the answers, prepare them for broadcast, and then, after the actuality has forced the story design, write the news copy. Sometimes, you'll even have to read your own story. In television, you've got to do all that plus be a visual designer and videotape editor. For many stories, you'll have to gather sidebar visuals, suggest visual design for screen graphics, sequence the visuals for narrative accompaniment, and direct the production of the videotape and other visual elements.

Although all journalists complain of deadlines, broadcast journalists have extra mechanical jobs involving tape handling, videotape editing, and so on. At some major-market cable news stations, the reporters shoot their own stories, forcing them to worry about photography, logistics, and even the security for thousands of dollars worth of equipment—constraints that don't effect a journalist with a pen and notebook. Spending time persuading a person to allow an interview or turning a messy newsroom upside down to find a missing portion of a recorded interview can take what seems like forever, when all you want to do is get back to your desk and write a clever lead.

WRITING ON NEWS COMPUTERS

In the early 90s, news computer systems finally became the norm for larger radio staffs and most television stations. The venerable typewriter is still around, but it is often stashed in a closet, awaiting the call to work if the computers go down.

The beauty of news computer systems like Basys, NewsStar, Mercury, or Autoprompt is their ability to do a multitude of jobs—jobs that before required precious time and busywork. Along with the ability to write and rewrite at will, these systems will capture, sort, and store wire copy; allow searches for keywords in copy on databases, such as your own file of past stories or commercial databases like Nexis; format, time, and direct the stories to the proper editors and newscasts; operate as a teleprompter when needed; work as electronic mail, memo, and file systems; allow field writing and sending of scripts; and provide the writer with a place to store individual stories.

The process of writing itself is easier. The newswriter can call up needed wire copy or assignment desk research on the story, store pertinent parts on a split screen, and write the story with the database on half-screen. Given the right prompts, the computer will format the story, place it in the rundown, time it, backtime the newscast, and order it up for the anchors.

SLUG	from	moved	status	length
PM Pres-Washington	RPI	3/21 08:00		

PM-Pres-Washington, 6th lead, 2nd add

President Clinton today opened the new U.S. government archive building.
 In ceremonies marking the 200th anniversary of the archive service, Archive director. . . etc.

SLUG	from	moved	status	length
PM Pres-Washington	RPI	3/21 08:00		

PM-Pres-Washington, 6th lead, 2nd add

President Clinton today opened the new U.S. government archive building.
 In ceremonies marking the 200th anniversary of the archive service, Archive director . . . etc

PAGE	TAL	SLUG	VIDEO	APPROVAL	WRITER	TRT
22		Pres	no	jnh	bark	:30

ORIGINATED: 10:20 MODIFIED _____ STATUS _____

SLUG	from	moved	status	length
PM Pres-Washington	RPI	3/21 08:00		

PM-Pres-Washington, 6th lead, 2nd add

President Clinton today opened the new U.S. government archive building.
 In ceremonies marking the 200th anniversary of the archive service, Archive director . . . etc.

PAGE	TAL	SLUG	VIDEO	APPROVAL	WRITER	TRT
22		Pres	no	jnh	bark	:30

ORIGINATED: 10:20 MODIFIED _____ STATUS _____

President Clinton took some time off from his budget worries to attend ceremonies in Washington.
 The President . . . etc.

PAGE	TAL	SLUG	VIDEO	APPROVAL	WRITER	TRT
22		Pres	no	jnh	bark	:30

ORIGINATED: 10:20 MODIFIED 11:45 STATUS HOLD

ROGER: On Cam SS: Capitol	PRESIDENT CLINTON TOOK SOME TIME OFF FROM HIS BUDGET WORRIES TO ATTEND CEREMONIES IN WASHINGTON. THE PRESIDENT . . . ETC.
------------------------------	---

FIGURE 1.2

This is the process for computer systems. Top left, the writer calls up the wire information and scrolls through it to find what is needed. Top right, splitting the screen, the writer fills in the needed template information, setting up story destination and other information. Bottom left, the writer then composes the story with the database on the screen. Bottom right, finally, the computer reformats the story into proper news script format, before sending the story to the printer for scripts and to the prompter.

There are, of course, disadvantages to news computer writing. Using broadcast-prepared wire copy as a source on the computer screen offers a stronger possibility of copycat writing than if paper-based wire copy were used. The desire to change or innovate in the copy is removed and often the stories will sound similar on many different stations.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has covered news, reporters, the different strengths of newspaper and broadcast media, and the unique skills you must acquire, in addition to writing, to work in broadcast.

News is a collection of current events summaries, salted with perspective, culled from all that happened, and packaged for a particular medium. Broadcast's strengths are immediacy, field recordings, emotions, and personal delivery. The drawbacks are too little time, the tendency toward sensationalism and entertainment, and problems of the broadcast industry itself.

Novice radio news workers must be able to not only research a story but also contact an interviewee, get permission for recording, ask questions, record the interview, pull the best bite, write the story around it, and often read the news on the air. Television workers must know how to both acquire the visuals and then merge these with the writing. Everyone should have an ethical framework for evaluating news practices and stories. The advent of news computer systems will mean staffs must train for new skills and be versed in systems now available.

NOTES

1. For research on usage, see Doris Graber's book *Processing the News: How People Tame the Information Tide* (New York: Longman, 1984) or the article "The Attention Factor in Recalling Television News," *Journal of Communication* 33 (1983).
2. There are two good books on this topic. The first is Graber's, mentioned in note 1, and the other is John Robinson and Mark Levy's *The Main Source: Learning from Television News* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1986).
3. There are many polls that arrive at this finding. The most quoted is the old Roper Poll, done in 1984 for the Television Information Office in New York. Although many new ones are around, this one is repeatedly brought out for public discussion.

2

Facts, Formats, and Readability

CHAPTER PREVIEW

This chapter covers the basic goals of broadcast journalism: accuracy, fairness, and scope of coverage. It also examines what unique broadcast elements must be included on news copy script formats. There are discussions of methods to promote information retention, such as simplicity, detail exclusion, and rounding off.

GLOSSARY

BACKGROUNDER A story used to expand history and perspective on a current news event or situation.

CART The cartridge with the recording or actuality that will be inserted into a radio newscast.

CG Short for character generated. This refers to electronically produced numbers and letters that are placed on the screen, often over other video, to give names, details, or directions. Also known as a *key*, *lower third super*, *title*, *font*, and others.

(end/end) or (# # #) In some newsrooms, marks that are placed at the end of the story to indicate there are no additional pages.

INCUE (also abbreviated as I.C.) Refers to a phrase sometimes written on scripts that use actualities or soundbites. The incue usually includes the first four words of the bite. This helps identify the right cart and whether or not it is cued correctly.

(more/more) In some newsrooms, a mark that is placed at the bottom of a script page to indicate the story continues on the next page. Its use is a matter of individual newsroom style.

OUTCUE (also known as *endcue*) A phrase that usually includes the last four words of an actuality or soundbite. This helps the engineer, producer, or director know when to cue the newscaster to resume reading. Although the incue is often unnecessary, the outcue is vital on a script.

REAX Short for reaction. It is used as shorthand in many broadcast news situations. Some stories are called reaxes.

REMOTE A story that originates in the field and is often broadcast directly from a field location. A remote is quite often live; however, to make this point, some stations refer to these as *live remotes*.

RUNDOWN The story order for a newscast. Also called the *format* or *lineup*.

SIDEBAR A story that explores another angle of a major news story. It could be a backgrounder, a profile on one of the people, or an explanation of terms or complex procedures in the story.

SLUG A single-word identifier for a news story. It is chosen when the story is assigned and should remain the same until the story is broadcast. It will also be applied to all parts of the story and to carts in radio and videotape in television.

TRT Stands for total tape running time. This refers to a tape's time from the beginning of the tape until the end. It is used for the tape only, not for written copy.

TST Stands for total story time. This refers to a story's running time from beginning to end, usually including the TRT of the tape within the story. It is not used as commonly as TRT.

VO or VOICE OVER A television news story format that uses a studio newscaster for picture and audio but inserts videotape for visuals during a portion of the story.

KNOW YOUR STORY AND CHECK YOUR RESEARCH

Before writing anything in any format, journalists should be able to answer two questions about the story: What's new in this story? and What's the point? They should also be able to explain the information within the story. They should check and evaluate the information sources. Some newsrooms have policies about how many sources must be cross-referenced to validate information.

Beyond individual local station policies, there are three generally accepted checks on information, which follow.

Research Check: Is It Accurate?

That a news story be true in both concept and detail is the foremost standard of journalism for any medium. Even with the deadline pressure of broadcast and the uncertainty of many untested facts, accuracy should be relentlessly pursued.

Any fact is only as good as its source. Sociologist Gaye Tuchman, in her book *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality*, refers to the method journalists use to verify facts as "the web of facticity," meaning that facts are perceived as wholly or partially true because they either come from an authoritative and reliable source or are compared to other "facts" already believed valid. Author Edward Jay Epstein, in his book *Between Fact and Fiction: The Problem of*

Journalism, demonstrates how journalists pass along unchecked or wrong information from always reliable or traditional sources, based solely on the authority of a single source. Dubious sources are often left unqualified.

Journalists must also be careful to pass along their doubts about facts. If some of the information is questionable, make this clear to the audience. Let them decide.

A troublesome problem lies within the portions of recorded interviews, speeches, and news conferences that are chosen for use in stories (actualities in radio and soundbites in TV). Often, the speakers make outrageous claims that are hard or impossible to verify before deadlines. Statements are assumed to be true because the interviewees or speakers claim them to be true. The broadcast journalist should put these claims into some perspective and should not build stories around non-verifiable charges based on a single source, even if it is made by a reliable source at a public news conference.

Television news adds another dimension. Because it is photojournalism, television presents the visual representation of current events by cutting together sequences of videotape into visual summaries. It is easy for visuals focused on one story element or location to misrepresent other story elements. With every assignment, television journalists should ask themselves the following: Is the visual summary accurate? Do the 20 seconds of video at the protest demonstration constitute a true picture of what went on during the six hours outside a government building?

Research Check: Is It Fair?

Fairness is an attempt to put, with equal passion and competence, all sides of the story before the audience. It is a sincere recognition of the intelligence of your listeners and viewers—letting them decide what's right and what's wrong, what's good and what's bad.

Naive? Many argue fairness will never happen, and they're partially right. There's an old debate about whether a journalist can really set aside personal values, prejudices, or previous knowledge of persons or events. As with accuracy, fairness in every story is a goal worth pursuing.

In broadcast, the question of fairness was once mandated by a Federal Communications Commission policy called the Fairness Doctrine, which essentially required broadcast stations to provide all sides of controversial issues and allow complaints about coverage. A controversial policy for decades, it was not applied to news stories on a daily basis but instead was concerned with a showing of prejudicial work over a long period of time. The FCC dropped this policy in 1987.

Research Check: Is It Comprehensive?

Scope is the last important standard. This refers to the extent of the research for the story. Good, comprehensive coverage ensures that any item not in the final story was at least considered before being excluded. This standard is particularly important in broadcast because time restrictions and the short format of the stories exclude a great amount of detail.

PERSPECTIVE

A shared objective in both print and broadcast involves the injection of perspective—the overview—into the story. Journalists do this by tying in their personal knowledge of old stories, historical facts, new angles, and sidebars of the same story. Relating the newest breaking events to trends or related items is essential to good reporting but must be approached with caution. Faulty memories or slipshod filing systems can add unbalanced perspective and can damage the story’s credibility.

COLORFUL LANGUAGE

The addition of colorful language—judgmental and highly charged adjectives and adverbs, powerful verbs, zany bits of narrative, the bizarre opinions of secondary sources—is also a dangerous area for the careful journalist. Quite often what is a commonly used adjective in front of a firm’s name, for example, the “troubled Hillview bank,” or even comments by others such as “neighbors said Wilson was strange and often crept through front yards like a burglar,” are misrepresentations we wouldn’t want used against ourselves. This problem also shows up in soundbites chosen for the newscast. Colorful language is more of a danger for broadcast journalists, who must write in colloquial language, which is not as precise as most printed text.

PRESENTATION

Broadcast journalists have to worry about not only the language but also the newscaster’s delivery. Because of the power of performance, emphasis added to certain words can cause the listener to focus on one part of the story but ignore a more crucial element. Television readers can use body language or facial expressions such as a raised eyebrow to show disdain, disgust, amusement, or annoyance with certain stories, when the text by itself does not convey the same meaning. Writers should be careful that broadcast news readers play the stories as written and do not add unintended meanings.

SCRIPT FORMATS

The written format of broadcast scripts will vary from station to station, newscaster to newscaster. This workbook does not endorse any one particular format, but the following information on text style and sluglines will help you understand the general concepts.

Text Styles

Broadcast scripts are written to be read live on the air. Each newscaster has a preference about the appearance of the script page. Some like paragraphs indented, some don’t. Some like the copy to be in all capital letters, or uppercase, and others like the more commonly used upper-and-lower-case style.

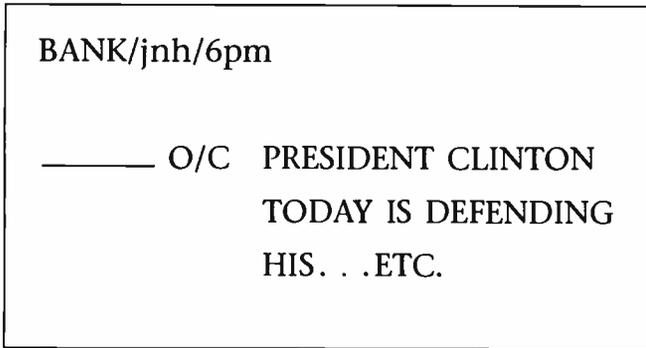


FIGURE 2.1.

Top of script with slug. When using a typewriter, position the slug at top left of script. With a computer, add it to the template and the system will format it onto the script.

This workbook will use uppercase letters for its script examples. It helps to set scripts apart from the text. In any news operation or class, a writer should follow the wishes of the editor or instructor.

The Story Slug

Producers or editors usually assign a single-word identifier called a *slug*, to each story. Its purpose is to standardize the identification of the story. The slug stays the same through the entire day, ending up as the listing on the newscast run-down. The slug should be a single word that relates to the topic. For example, in a story about federal action on banking, you might use “BANK.” Later, if that story grew wider during the day, you might use composite slugs, such as “BANK-FDIC” or “BANK-REAX” or “BANK-JOBS,” to cluster all of the related topics for this particular story. In most cases, the slug goes in the upper left-hand corner, along with your initials and a time indicator (usually the date or newscast); however, this is up to the individual newsroom style and varies widely. A slugline for our example would be “BANK/jnh/6pm.” In news computer systems, the slug is entered into the template information and the computer places the slug in the document.

There is no industrywide standard for exactly what information goes into a slug. Follow your local newsroom style.

PROVIDING TECHNICAL INFORMATION

In broadcast, it is the writer’s job to provide the technical information for production elements of the scripts. The terms used vary from station to station, depending on the size of the staff or the historical use of local styles. Terms for radio and television also differ.

Radio News Scripts

Because radio does not employ a large control room staff, the scripts do not need extensive technical information. A typed radio script, although now it’s printers that pound out the script pages, generally extends across the page with 1-inch margins. This gives a :04 line, so a :30 story would be about eight lines. Double-space between lines, although some newsrooms require triple-spaced intervals.

Technical information is usually a matter of indicating which cart you'll be using, whether or not it is cued, what the incue and the outcue are, and what the TRT is on the actuality. This is an example of a radio script:

BANK/jnh/6pm

FEDERAL BANK EXAMINERS ARE SAYING
TODAY THEY WILL INVESTIGATE NEWTON
SAVINGS AND LOAN FOR CHARGES OF FRAUD.

SOME DEPOSITORS SAY THEY ARE AFRAID
THEY'LL LOSE THEIR MONEY.

(cart #1F TRT=:25)

Incue: "We think this is a scandal..."

Outcue: "...are prepared for anything."

THE INVESTIGATION COULD BEGIN AS EARLY
AS TUESDAY.

Notice that each cart includes a tape running time, or TRT, an incue, and an outcue. Without these there might be an embarrassing goof.

In radio, with a script readied by the newscaster, any technical information is generally circled to indicate that it shouldn't be read.

BANK/jnh/6pm

FEDERAL BANK EXAMINERS ARE SAYING
TODAY THEY WILL INVESTIGATE NEWTON
SAVINGS AND LOAN FOR CHARGES OF FRAUD.

SOME DEPOSITORS SAY THEY ARE AFRAID
THEY'LL LOSE THEIR MONEY.

(cart #1F TRT=:25)

Incue: "We think this is a scandal..."

Outcue: "...are prepared for anything."

THE INVESTIGATION COULD BEGIN AS EARLY
AS TUESDAY.

Television News Scripts

Because both the production and news staffs are much larger in television, it is more crucial to have accurate technical information on a script intended for a live newscast. To do this, the TV news page traditionally has been split roughly in half, with the left side used for the instructions to the director and the right side for the material to be read, which is called the *copy block*. Most computer systems now automatically print all the left-side director cues; however, the writer must include the appropriate codes in the text copy block.

Instructions to the Director

For television, it is vital that the director's instructions be accurate and clear. But be aware that what you learn in this workbook may not be the same terminology you'll use at another station. Many stations have different systems.

It is also important to ensure that the direction on the left side of the script matches the point in the copy where you want the change made. It is always advisable to make any switches at the beginning of sentences or phrases that begin a new line in the copy block.

Always write your story first, and don't add any directions until you've come close to finishing a good copy. When that is done, add the slugline and the director's information. The director's information includes:

- instructions about reading from the studio (O/C or LIVE)
- when a CG might be inserted (for example, CG FULL)
- when the newscaster is reading over a videotape (VO)
- when the visual and audio come from a tape (SOT)
- when there is a live shot (REMOTE)
- whatever times you need (TRT or TST)
- and whatever end-of-page mark is appropriate [(end/end), (# # #), or (more/more)]

Here's an example of a television news script page:

Slug goes here → BANK-REAX/jnh/6pm

Tells director the story starts in the studio. → _____O/C BANK EXAMINERS SAY THEY'LL TRY TODAY TO FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENED AT NEWTOWNE SAVINGS.

Tells director that visual switches to video but audio remains in the studio. → VO BEGINS_____ (VO) THE FEDERAL OFFICIALS WERE AT THE BANK THIS MORNING WHEN THE DOORS OPENED.

Tells director that video is back to studio and that a phone number is keyed over lower third of the frame. → _____O/C (LIVE) ANY BANK CLIENTS NEEDING MORE INFORMATION SHOULD CALL 555-1212.

TRT: 10

CG:555-1212

(# # #)

FIGURE 2.2
Television news copy with director's instructions.

READABLE COPY

Revising and marking scripts in broadcast is quite different from copyediting in print. In radio and TV, the idea is to produce copy that can be read quickly and clearly. It often doesn't matter what it looks like. To accomplish this, a broadcast editor uses heavy marks that totally hide unwanted words and marks to indicate the flow across a gap. In broadcast, because you cannot read backwards, you cannot put in a transposition mark, such as this:

(MOVIE HOLLYWOOD)

Most punctuation is left out, primarily because it doesn't change how you read the copy. No semicolons or colons are used because they clutter the copy and don't provide a strong enough visual direction to the reader. Commas usually are replaced by three dots (. . .), which give a visual break. Apostrophes are retained for possessives and contractions, and the question mark or period stays at the end of the sentence. There are different styles regarding quotation marks;

MAYOR/jnh/6pm

____O/C THE MAYOR
ANNOUNCED AT A
NEWS
CONFERENCE
TODAY THAT THE
CITY WILL
SPONSOR AN
URBAN FAIR.
SHE SAYS THAT
THE FAIR WILL
COST 23.45
MILLION
DOLLARS.
IT WILL BE
LOCATED IN THE
FORT WILLIAMS
MALL PARKING
LOT AND SHOULD
RUN TWO
WEEKENDS IN
AUGUST.
(# # #)

MAYOR/jnh/6pm

____O/C THE MAYOR
~~ANNOUNCED AT A~~
NEWS SAYS
~~CONFERENCE~~
~~TODAY THAT THE~~
CITY WILL
SPONSOR AN
URBAN FAIR.
SHE SAYS THAT
THE FAIR WILL
COST ^{nearly 23}~~23.45~~
MILLION
DOLLARS.
IT WILL BE
LOCATED IN THE
FORT WILLIAMS
MALL PARKING
LOT AND SHOULD
RUN TWO
WEEKENDS IN
AUGUST.
(# # #)

FIGURE 2.3

The copy on the left needs editing. On the right, the marked copy is ready to be read on the air. The reason for adding these particular marks will be discussed in the next section.

although some editors use them, others think quotation marks are confusing because they don't indicate how quoted text should be said.

Following are examples of both unmarked and marked copy. The goal in marking copy is to block out what is unwanted, and clearly write in what is needed.

READABILITY

It's not just the marks on the page, but the basic sentence flow and amount of detail that makes a story readable. Here are some structural elements that help readability.

Sentence Length

A long sentence may work if it has comfortable breathing pauses and a simple topic. But that's the exception and you'll want to be on the lookout for long, complex sentences—anything over three seconds. Try breaking the longer ones into two sentences, each of fewer than 11 to 15 words. This is not a hard and fast rule but only a guideline.

Contractions

These are usable in broadcast. You don't have to shy away from *wasn't*, *isn't*, or *it's*. They are more conversational and can be used, although some stylists suggest avoiding negative verb forms.

Detail Exclusion

This is one time where story design considers the listener or viewer's needs. There is no definitive information about how many facts a listener can remember; however, studies show that a few facts presented in the least complex sentences have the best chance of staying with the audience. Review the information and decide what must get into the story and what will confuse it. You are looking for the most significant fact or facts. Some suggestions for items to exclude:

- *Middle initials.* These are unnecessary unless the individual demands that they be included.
- *Ages.* In most cases, these are unimportant. Obviously, if a 97-year-old man robs a store, you've got a different angle to the story.
- *Addresses.* Newspapers routinely put these in; broadcasters routinely ignore them.
- *Decimal places.* Any figure with decimal places has little chance of being remembered. Unless you are convinced they are vital to the story, count those out almost immediately. Round off.
- *Unnecessary geographical data.* Don't bore your audience with streets and areas you know. Evaluate whether it is useful to say it was in the Wilson Heights district.
- *Unnecessary attribution.* Decide whether it's necessary to give the source's name.
- *Unnecessary full titles.* Either eliminate or shorten most titles. An "undersecretary for Middle Eastern and Indian Subcontinental Affairs" could become a "state department official."

Here's an example of copy with too much detail:

His title, age, and address are probably not needed.

Too many details of the trip are given. Clearly there are more interesting angles. For instance, why is he doing it?

BIKES/jnh/6pm

____O/C

THE POST OFFICE'S REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION SUPERVISOR BOB TRENT. . . 37. . .OF FARMWICH STREET. . . STEELTOWN. . . IS BICYCLING TO FLORIDA NEXT MONTH.

HE HOPES TO START AT THE WAXMAN OVERPASS. . .GO SOUTH ON INT-79. . .TURN WEST AT STOVERS CORNERS. . . CONTINUE ON THE PATHWAY BRIDGE. . .RIDE ON HESPERIAN. . .AND THEN GO SOUTH ON INT-360-A.

THE TRIP ON THE 24-SPEED. . .ETC.

(# # #)

FIGURE 2.4

TV news copy overburdened with details.

Numbers as Spoken Copy

When writing numbers to be read, there are some helpful rules:

- Some suggest hyphens to connect all parts of the number and the noun it modifies. This depends on the individual newsroom style.

23-COWS
465-DAYS

- Depending on the style used, spell out single-digit numbers from 1 to 9. Some suggest that this should go from 1 to 11. Spell out decimal qualifiers (e.g., million, thousand, point).

ONE-COW
FOUR-THOUSAND-DAYS

- Except for dates, never use four digits in one number. For example, 999 is okay, but 1,999 must be written out.

ONE-THOUSAND-999
ONE-MILLION-990-THOUSAND-AND-FOUR-SHRIMP
ONE-THOUSAND-FOUR-DOLLARS-AND-12-CENTS

- Never use the \$ for money. Always spell out *dollar(s)*.

26-DOLLARS
46-THOUSAND-DOLLARS
A THREE-MILLION-DOLLAR-PLANT

- Spell out any qualifying symbols that may be misread (e.g., %).

26-PERCENT
13-DEGREES

Rounding Off

Broadcast newswriters often face stories that contain large amounts of data such as percentages, numbers, dollar amounts, and so on. If your goal is to inform the audience of the story in one reading, you should practice rounding off some of these details.

If your story includes the number \$24,473.25 as a city budget figure, you can round it off to “almost 25-thousand-dollars.” While it is not the most accurate figure, it is close enough to give the audience an approximation of the amount. When appropriate, change something like 9.56% into “almost ten percent” or “nearly one-tenth.” For print journalists, rounding off is unnecessary. For broadcast, it gives your audience a chance to remember the information.

Here’s an example to work on.

EXERCISE 2-A

What Needs to Be Rounded Off?

Rewrite this copy, rounding off the data for a broadcast audience.

BUDGET/jnh/6pm

_____O/C THE MANDRAKE CITY COUNCIL IS MAKING
PUBLIC ITS 1997 BUDGET FIGURES.

THE POLICE DEPARTMENT HAS ASKED FOR
\$234,344...THE FIRE DEPARTMENT NEEDS
\$121,323...THAT'S UP BY 21.2 PERCENT...AND
THE CITY LIBRARY REQUESTED \$86,721 PLUS
\$34,500 IN SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDS.

THESE AMOUNTS SHOW AN AVERAGE
INCREASE OF 17.24 PERCENT FOR ALL
DEPARTMENTS.

(more/more)

Parallel Structures

Watch out for lists of facts that use different measurements. You don't want to mix "65-percent of the cows...one-third of the pigs...and one out of every five chickens." That should be changed so the figures used relate to the same type of measurement. Change it to "nearly two-thirds of the cows...one-third of the pigs...and one-fifth of the chickens."

EXERCISE 2-B

Converting to Parallel Structure

As a quick exercise, rewrite this copy. Do the conversions and watch out for other elements covered in this chapter.

A NEW STATE UNIVERSITY SURVEY SHOWS COLLEGE ADMINISTRATORS ARE THE MOST LIKELY GROUP TO BE IN WEEKEND AUTOMOBILE CRASHES.

THE TWO-YEAR STUDY FOUND THREE OF EVERY 12 ADMINISTRATORS WOULD END UP IN ACCIDENTS...AND ANOTHER TWO-TENTHS OF THESE WOULD BE AT FAULT.

THIS IS MUCH WORSE THAN THE NATIONAL AVERAGE...IN WHICH ONLY A QUARTER OF ALL DRIVERS ARE INVOLVED IN CRASHES.

THE STUDY GAVE NO REASONS FOR THESE ODD FINDINGS.

(more/more)

READ IT ALOUD!

Although broadcast newsrooms often look like any other office areas, there is a subtle difference. Most reporters and writers typing at keyboards appear to be talking to themselves. In most cases, they are finishing the most important step in broadcast writing—reading the final version aloud. That’s one way to tell what’s awkward and what’s not. Read every story aloud.

Rehearsal marks, also called *woodshedding*, are a system of lines and slashes the newscaster adds to the printed script to serve as alerts for emphasized words or voice pitch drops. One system is as follows:

- A slash (/) means a pause.
- A double slash (//) means a long pause.
- An underline means emphasis.
- A double underline means major emphasis.

Computer systems have special function keys to highlight words, but many newscasters still add individual marks—underlining, slashes, or short arrows—to indicate a change in voice pitch. In television, however, this also must be reflected in changes to the prompter copy, too. Each prompter system has a method to highlight and insert these marks. Here’s an example:

SURVEY/jnh/3:30pm

A NEW SURVEY IS REPORTING STUDENTS
WILL HAVE SEEN AT LEAST 20-THOUSAND-
MURDERS IN THE MOVIES AND ON TV/BY THE
TIME THEY ENTER COLLEGE. ↓
(# # #)

EXERCISE 2-C

Rehearsal Marks

Review this story and put in rehearsal marks for reading.

RECORD/jnh/6pm

TWO WEST COAST SAILORS REACHED BOSTON HARBOR ON WEDNESDAY...BREAKING A 140-YEAR-OLD-RECORD FOR THE TRIP FROM SAN FRANCISCO.

THE PAIR ENDURED STORMY SEAS IN THE LAST PORTION OF THE TRIP BUT STILL FINISHED IN 69-DAYS...MORE THAN SEVEN-DAYS FASTER THAN THE PREVIOUS RECORD.

THE OLD MARK WAS HELD BY THE CLIPPER SHIP NORTHERN LIGHT...WHICH MADE THE TRIP IN 76-DAYS.

(# # #)



EXERCISE 2-D

Details

Review this story and copyedit or rewrite it on another page.

PLANT/jnh/2pm

THE \$24,630,243 SEWAGE TREATMENT TERTIARY REFINEMENT FACILITY...WHICH IS LOCATED ON THE SHORELINE AT BREMEMERS...WILL BE PUT IN AN OPERATIONALLY SUSPENDED SITUATION BECAUSE OF A CONDITION THAT ALLOWS UNPROCESSED AND UNTREATED WASTE EFFLUENT TO INTERMINGLE WITH RIVER WATER DURING TIMES OF EXCESSIVE PRECIPITATION IN THE NINE-COUNTY AREA DURING THE MONTHS OF NOVEMBER...DECEMBER...AND JANUARY.

THE SUSPENSION WILL BE FOLLOWED BY A 14-DAY DECON PERIOD... AND A 21-DAY REBUILD... AND A 28-DAY STANDDOWN. AFTER THAT...THE PLANT SHOULD BE UP TO SPEED.

(# # #)

EXERCISE 2-E

More Problems

Review this story and copyedit or, if necessary, rewrite it on another page. Be certain to review the accuracy, fairness, and scope of the story, and rewrite for perspective, colorful language, number style, simplicity, and all other areas covered in this chapter.

DRUG/jnh/1pm

SCIENTISTS AT MONOPOLY LABS IN FRANCE ARE SAYING
A NEW ANTI-RASH DRUG IS GIVING EXCITING RESULTS.

SUFFERERS FROM CRIPPLING BOUTS OF POISON OAK AND
POISON IVY SHOULD REJOICE.

IN 3 TESTS OVER SIX WEEKS...POISON OAK RASHES ON
4,237 RATS WERE AFFECTED 34.62% OF THE TIME FOR THE
ALPHA TEST SEQUENCE AND 21% OF THE TIME FOR THE
BETA TEST SEQUENCE. THIS LED RESEARCHERS TO A 4 OUT
OF TEN PROBABILITY JUDGMENT THAT THE NEW OINTMENT
IS EFFECTIVE...AT LEAST ON RATS.

HUMAN CLINICAL TESTING BEGINS SOON.

(# # #)

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Broadcast scripts require attention to standards and style. The copy must be accurate, fair, and comprehensive. Writers must also include technical details for smooth studio production. Finally, writers must watch sentence length, details, and parallel structure to keep the copy readable. A good final check is to read the story aloud.



Shifting From Print to Broadcast

Chapter Preview

This chapter covers many of the structural changes necessary to convert prose to broadcast writing, including the use of the active voice; concise, strong verbs, adjectives, and phrases; attribution; and multiple tenses. The problems of misused phrases, double-referenced pronouns, awkwardly long introductory phrases, and midsentence nested phrases are also explored.

Repetition, which should be avoided in many situations, can be a valuable tool, as are elliptical or half-completed sentences. Exercises provide a test for skills in this chapter.

GLOSSARY

ACTIVE VOICE Verb form in which the thing or person responsible for the action precedes the verb.

ATTRIBUTION A phrase or sentence that reveals the source of your information for a news story. Attribution helps establish credibility.

ELLIPTICAL SENTENCES A sentence fragment that is designed to mimic speech patterns and that usually is missing either the subject or verb. Elliptical sentences are sometimes used in broadcast news scripts.

NESTED PHRASES Midsentence phrases that break up the continuity of the sentence elements—usually the subject and verb.

PASSIVE VOICE Verb form in which the thing or person responsible for the action follows the verb.

READER The most frequently used broadcast format. It is a story—usually short and under 40 seconds—read by the newscaster without accompanying sound, actualities, or videotape. Also called a *read*, *live*, *live-er*, or *copy story*.

USE STRONG, CONCISE WORDS AND PHRASES

Broadcast writers must make an effort to use short, simple words. Literary writing allows the use of longer, often obscure verbs and adjectives, but conversational writing has other needs. Verbs should be positive and in the most direct form; adjectives should be short and clear; and writers should pare phrases down to the essentials.

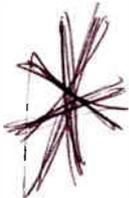
Complex Verbs

Look for ways to express action clearly and simply. Review the verb and its construction to see whether there is a more simple verb to convey the same idea and make the sentence easier to understand.

Complex: THEY VOTED TO TERMINATE THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE BRIDGE.

Instead, you could have written

Simple: THEY VOTED TO STOP BUILDING THE BRIDGE.



Negative Verbs

Quite often, long negative verbs provide a similar opportunity. Look for a positive replacement for negative verb forms. Here's an example:

Negative: THREE OTHER CONVICTS DECIDED NOT TO ESCAPE ALONG WITH THE FIRST GROUP.

A more direct verb construction would be

Positive: THREE OTHER CONVICTS DECIDED TO STAY PUT.

As you can see, the sentence is stronger and more direct with the positive verb form.

In the next exercise is a list of some complex and negative verbs and simpler verbs that can be used in their stead. See if you agree that the shorter, more direct verb is stronger and clearer.

EXERCISE 3-A

Looking for Verb Changes

Review these examples. Where indicated, fill in the shortened forms.

COMPLEX VERBS

SIMPLE VERBS

Example:

to construct

to build

to allocate

to plan

Fill in a simple form:

to reiterate

to repeat

to eavesdrop

to overhear/listen in

to have affection for

to like/love

NEGATIVE VERBS

POSITIVE VERBS

Example:

to not restrict

to allow

to not reject

to support

Fill in a positive form:

to not pay attention to

to ignore

to not remove

to keep/leave

to not complexify

to keep simple

Special Case of the Verb to Say

Although you are urged to find synonyms for words to add variety, the verb *say* or *said* is one word for which you usually don't need a synonym. Alternatives such as *assert*, *declare*, *state*, *pronounce*, *vocalize*, *exclaim*, or *voice* are stodgy and awkward, and often color the delivery of the sentence. Repeat the verb *say* as often as you like. Here are two paragraphs: The first uses various synonyms for *say*. The second uses repetition of the verb *to say*.

POLICE SAY THE SUSPECT TURNED AROUND...REACHED
FOR THE FELT-TIPPED PEN...AND MARKED THE WALLS.
OFFICIALS STATE HE KNEW EXACTLY WHAT HE WAS
DOING.
THE PROSECUTOR DECLARES SHE'LL ASK FOR A TRIAL.

Instead, you can change that to the following:

POLICE SAY THE SUSPECT TURNED AROUND...REACHED
FOR THE FELT-TIPPED PEN...AND MARKED THE WALLS.
OFFICIALS SAY HE KNEW EXACTLY WHAT HE WAS DOING.
THE PROSECUTOR SAYS SHE'LL ASK FOR A TRIAL.

Adjectives

For adjectives, the advice is much the same as for verbs: Keep it simple. Use direct, strong words and rework hyphenated adjectives. For instance, change poverty-stricken to poor and collective effort to joint effort.

Find shorter, more powerful adjectives for the following examples:

COMPLEX	YOUR CHOICE
sympathetic	<u>understanding/caring</u>
prosperous	<u>wealthy/rich</u>
remorseful	<u>sad/sorry</u>
preliminary	<u>early/first</u>
unsophisticated	<u>common</u>
gargantuan	<u>big huge</u>
venturesome	<u>daring/bold</u>
emaciated	<u>thin/sickly</u>

Phrases

Descriptive phrases are often unneeded and can be removed. In many cases, the writer might use six words where one might do. Here's an example:

THE DOG OF UNCERTAIN AND QUESTIONABLE
PARENTAGE...ETC.

Change that to

THE MONGREL...ETC.

EXERCISE 3-B

Rewriting for Phrases

Try to rewrite this story, taking out unnecessary phrases.

THE CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS ^{had a} ~~ENDURED THE LATE-~~
~~NIGHT SESSION OF THE COUNCIL THAT RAN INTO THE WEE~~
~~HOURS OF THE MORNING.~~ ^{to modify the citizens' tax structure.}

FINALLY...THEY VOTED AS A GROUP...^{unanimously} ~~ELECTING TO~~
~~MODIFY THE TAX STRUCTURE FOR THE CITIZENS AND~~ ^{change citizens'} ~~ALLOW SOME OF THE MONEY FROM TAXES TO GO INTO A~~ ^{to allow}
~~FUND TO REPAIR THE STREETS OF THE CITY.~~ ^{put some} ~~money~~ ^{in a fund} ~~to go into a fund to~~
~~repair the streets of the city.~~ ^{city street reparation.}

EXERCISE 3-C

Simplify the Story

Examine these stories for complex words, negative verbs, and unneeded phrases. Rewrite if needed.

TWELVE-MEMBERS ~~IN GOOD STANDING~~ OF THE SHERIFF'S SPECIAL WEAPONS AND TACTICS SQUAD WERE ~~THERE TO PROVIDE COOPERATIVE ASSISTANCE~~ DURING THE ~~PRECARIOUS APPREHENSION~~ OF ~~THE DREADFUL~~ SUSPECT... ~~ONE~~ JOHN E. JUDD... 29 YEARS ~~OF AGE~~ OF BELLEVILLE.

THE ~~TENSE AND VIOLENCE~~ ^{Intense} ~~FRAUGHT~~ STANDOFF ~~TRANSFORMED~~ A ~~NORMALLY TRANQUIL~~ ^{changed} AND ~~PICTURESQUE~~ ^{Peaceful} AGRICULTURAL ~~HAMLET~~ ^{town} INTO A SUSPICIOUS... ~~OVERWROUGHT~~ ^{frightened} COMMUNITY OF ~~UNALTERABLE FEAR~~.

THE ~~EXHILARATED~~ ^{excited} SCIENTISTS WERE BOTH HAPPY AND ~~CIRCUMSPECT~~ ^{suspicious} AT THE ~~IDENTICAL~~ ^{same time} MOMENT... EXPLAINING THAT ~~THE~~ TRAILBLAZING DISCOVERY WAS UNTESTED.

THEY SAID THAT ~~WHILE~~ THEY DIDN'T WANT TO ALARM THE PUBLIC... ~~THEY DIDN'T NOT WANT NOT TO NOTIFY~~ ^{But} ^{want to keep it secret} THEM EITHER.

EXERCISE 3-D

Better Choices

Clarify the stories below by deleting unnecessary words and replacing complete words with simpler ones.

~~STRANGERS~~ ~~TWO UNIDENTIFIED VISITORS WHO WERE UNKNOWN~~ ~~STRANGERS~~ AT THE STARLIGHT MOTEL ^{were} ~~SUFFERED~~ ^{seriously} ~~SERIOUSLY~~ AND NEAR-FATAL INJURIES ^{injured when they fell} IN SPECTACULAR FALLS FROM SECOND FLOOR BALCONIES TO THE GROUND FLOOR ~~BELOW~~ YESTERDAY.

TREASURE HUNTERS ~~PLYING THE PLACID BLUE~~ ^{said} ~~SALTWATER HORIZONS~~ ^{ON} OF THE CARIBBEAN SEA ~~DECLARED~~ YESTERDAY THAT THEY HAD ~~CERTAINLY~~ FOUND THE REMAINS OF A 16TH CENTURY SPANISH FLEET GALLEON CALLED THE LA GORDITA DE ORO.

THE NEWEST ADDITION TO THE BOTKINS FAMILY... ~~LITTLE~~ ^{made} ~~BABY~~ ^{William} ~~WILLIAM~~... ~~SETTLED~~ ^{made} ON A ~~CONVOLUTED~~ ^{made} ~~STRATEGEM~~ ^{made} YESTERDAY WHEN HE ~~DESIRED~~ ^{made} TO CRAWL ~~ON HIS KNEES~~ ^{made} TO A NEARBY AND DANGEROUS ~~LIGHT~~ ^{made} SOCKET.

ELLIPTICAL SENTENCES

Because broadcast writers aim to mimic speech patterns, news copy may have elliptical sentences—sentence fragments with implied but unspoken words or phrases. Elliptical sentences help to keep the word count down and to reinforce conversational patterns. Here's an example:

IT'S THAT TIME OF YEAR AGAIN...TIME FOR PICNICS...
FRIVOLITY...TRIPS TO THE BEACH.
IT'S SUMMER. THAT MEANS RELAXATION. HERE'S A REPORT.

The speech pattern and delivery of a legendary radio news reporter is the classic example. One of his stories might go something like this.

IN NEW JERSEY. A TRAGEDY. BUT ONE UNLIKE OTHERS. A
MAN...HE WAS DESPONDENT...SO HE TRIED TO COMMIT
SUICIDE. BOUGHT A GUN. PUT THE BARREL TO HIS HEAD.
PULLED THE TRIGGER.
DIDN'T WORK. HE MISSED. THE BULLET HIT THE WATER
HEATER. IT BLEW UP AND BURNED THE MAN'S HOUSE
DOWN.

Modern sportscasters also get in on the fun.

BASEBALL. HITS. HOMERUNS. OUTS. LOSERS. LET'S SEE THE
VIDEOTAPE.

That's how elliptical it can get. New writers should avoid overusing this style, but it doesn't hurt to fashion the occasional elliptical sentence to give a conversational feeling to the writing. Here's another example:

FOR BAXTER COUNTY SUPERVISORS...IT WAS TIME TO
STOP TALKING ABOUT THE HOMELESS PROBLEM AND START
VOTING.
BEFORE THEM...THE LONG-DISCUSSED SHELTER.
IT WOULD TAKE 95-THOUSAND IN COUNTY FUNDS TO
FURNISH IT...AND ANOTHER 130-THOUSAND TO STAFF IT.
THE VOTE. EXPECTED TO BE CLOSE.
BUT THAT DIDN'T HAPPEN.
IT WAS UNANIMOUS.
FIVE-TO-ZERO AGAINST. SO NO SHELTER.
AND IT LOOKS AS THOUGH THE COUNTY'S ESTIMATED
200-HOMELESS WILL SPEND ANOTHER YEAR WITHOUT A
SINGLE PLACE TO CATCH A PEACEFUL NIGHT'S SLEEP.

EXERCISE 3-E

Eliminating Words and Phrases

Examine this story for elliptical possibilities. Revise it by removing phrases or rewriting on another page.

ELIMINATING/jnh/6pm

VOTERS IN BALLARD COUNTY MADE SURE IN THE
ELECTION LAST NIGHT THAT THE REFORM FORCES IN THE
COUNTY WOULD BE TAKING OVER THE REINS OF
GOVERNMENT.

TWELVE INCUMBENTS...WHO HAD BEEN IN OFFICE SINCE
THE LAST ELECTION DAY...WERE SWEEPED OUT IN THE
STRONGEST SHOW OF DISPLEASURE WITH POLITICIANS IN A
LONG TIME.

THE HIGHEST OFFICIAL TO LOSE HIS SEAT IN THE COUNTY
OFFICES IS ROBERT...BIG BOB...GREEN...THE SHERIFF.
COUNTY MANAGER DENNIS GREEN ESCAPED WITH A
NARROW WIN.

(more/more)

Homework

EXERCISE 3-F

Comprehensive

Examine this story for word complexity, unneeded phrases, and elliptical possibilities. Please copyedit.

School-age kids
increase
only to the
TEST SCORES FOR THE STATE'S KIDS OF SCHOOL AGE
HAVE SOARED UP IN MANY DIFFERENT AREAS IN THE LATEST
STATEWIDE ACHIEVEMENT EVALUATION TEST EXAMS.

Said that
A stress is not
again
helped boost scores
agreed that
THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS ROGER B. CARNES
SAID INNOVATIVE AND NOVEL TITLE FOUR FUNDED
PROGRAMS WHICH RETURNED TO FUNDAMENTAL BASIC
CONCEPTS OF EDUCATION COULD BE CITED AS
RESPONSIBLE FOR THE GAIN.

LOCAL SCHOOL OFFICIALS REITERATED THAT ASSESSMENT
DECLARING... IT'S A START. OFFICIALS ALSO STATED THEY
WOULD PUSH FOR MORE REFORMS.



ATTRIBUTION

Attribution is the inclusion of source identification to establish credibility or doubt in your story. Attribution poses two questions for broadcast writers: when should it be used and where should it be placed. The second answer is easy— attribution should, and usually does, go first. But the first question involves many individual judgments.

When Do You Use Attribution?

Below are suggestions to help you determine when attribution is appropriate.

Use It for Credibility By naming your sources of information, you enable your viewers or listeners to judge the value of your facts. The audience knows a foreign policy statement that originates at the White House has more credibility than a foreign policy statement from the manager of the local supermarket. In stories with contested facts, attributions let the audience decide about credibility.

Use It to Show Doubt Similarly, if you have doubts about the quality of the information, it is traditional journalistic practice to alert the audience to this fact. Anonymous telephone information inserted in a story should be identified as such. Exclusive stories from other media should credit those organizations, unless you can cross-check the information. Also, the source for any information from a suspect organization, one with a big name but only four members, must be identified.

Shorten Attribution or Discard It to Save Space Use of attribution in broadcast is not the same as in print. Because story space is severely limited in newscasts, it is often necessary to condense the source of information or to eliminate it altogether. In broadcast, long government titles are often shortened to “officials” or “authorities,” especially when that information is of routine value.

Often, a writer might exclude the reference altogether, as in the case of sources that mean little to the outcome of the story. If the Consumer Price Index goes up or down, there is little question where the information comes from, so why bother with the attribution? This is not to exclude adding perspective on the Consumer Price Index so viewers know what it reports.

An exception to this is crime stories. In these it is wise to make a point of using attribution to demonstrate that you are relying on official sources. When describing a crime to which a person’s name may be linked, it is irresponsible not to use attribution.

Where Do You Put Attribution?

Although newspaper and wire service copy traditionally puts the attribution at the end of a sentence, broadcast puts it first. Here’s an example of print attribution placement.

The United States and France will soon meet in new negotiations over the GATT trade agreements, according to a highly placed state department source.

In broadcast, the attribution is first.

A STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL IS SAYING THE U-S AND FRANCE WILL MEET TO DISCUSS TRADE AGREEMENTS.

The placement of lengthy attribution at the end of a sentence is fine for print, where your eyes have a chance to go back and review the facts in the sentence after you learn of the attribution. Still, not all print journalists place attribution at the end; some put it in the advance position.

Placing the attribution first allows the audience a chance to judge source credibility as the facts are heard, rather than waiting for a delayed attribution.

EXERCISE 3-G

Spotting Trouble

Examine these story parts for attribution problems. Be prepared to discuss whether you would use the attribution and how it might be written.

A NATIONAL UNION OFFICIAL ¹ IS SAYING ⁵ THAT ALL GROCERY CLERKS SHOULD GET AT LEAST SIX-WEEKS VACATION.

^{2 days} ALL MEXICAN FEDERAL TROOPERS WILL RECEIVE ETHICS COUNSELING IN THE WAKE OF THE SEX SCANDALS... ACCORDING TO POLICE CHIEF RAUL RAMIREZ.

³ AN EARTHQUAKE SHOOK THE TRI-CITY AREA THIS MORNING...REGISTERING THREE-POINT-FOUR ON THE RICHTER SCALE...ACCORDING TO THE GEOLOGICAL SERVICE.

⁴ BUGS BUNNY WILL BE 50-YEARS-OLD TOMORROW... A CARTOON OFFICIAL SAID.

EXERCISE 3-H

More Attribution Exercises

Examine these sentences for attribution problems. Eliminate the attribution or restructure the sentences for broadcast style.

THE HIGHWAY DEATH TOLL SOARED TO 500 OVER THE LABOR DAY WEEKEND... ACCORDING TO A HIGHWAY SAFETY OFFICIAL.

THE SUSPECT IS IDENTIFIED AS BYRON WALCOTT... ACCORDING TO POLICE.

THE GIANT TANKER SPLIT IN TWO DURING THE STORM... ACCORDING TO A SPOKESWOMAN FOR THE MEXICAN NAVY.

THE NEW PROGRAM SHOULD HELP THE MAYOR'S CAMPAIGN NEXT YEAR... THINK MOST POLITICAL OBSERVERS.

THE SINGER WILL APPEAR IN FOUR CONCERTS NEXT AUGUST... ACCORDING TO HER MANAGER.



EXERCISE 3-1

Comprehensive Review

Examine these sentences for word complexity, verbs, unneeded phrases, elliptical possibilities, and attribution problems. If necessary, restructure the sentences on a separate piece of paper.

THE SAN CRISTOBAL MAYOR DID NOT IGNORE AN
ILLEGAL BRIBE DURING NEW CONVENTION CENTER
WORK...THE HERALD IS REPORTING TODAY.

A TEAM OF DOCTORS AT THE BENTON CAMPUS STATE
UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER WILL ATTEMPT A CROSS
SPECIES NERVE TRANSPLANT...HOSPITAL OFFICIALS ARE
SAYING.

RACE OFFICIALS SAY THE STREETS AND AVENUES WILL BE
CROWDED AND JAMMED WITH UP TO 40-THOUSAND-
RUNNERS IN TOMORROW'S MUSCULAR DYSTROPHY
MARATHON.

THE BALLROOMS OF KANSAS CITY'S BIG HOTELS ARE
EXPECTED TO BE FILLED SOON WITH THOUSANDS OF
SQUARE DANCING FANATICS AT THE NATIONAL TWIRLERS
MEET.

ACTIVE AND PASSIVE VERBS

The passive voice, in which the thing or person responsible for the action appears after the verb, is the most common roadblock for beginning broadcast writers. Using passive voice is a leftover from schoolwork that trained us to place the most important word or event at the beginning of the sentence. Following this rule, in writing a story about a bank robbery in which *bank* is the most important word, we naturally insert the word *bank* somewhere in the first three words of the sentence “The bank was robbed by the lone gunman.” Here the verb is in the passive voice, because the action was done to the bank not by the bank.

In broadcast, however, it is important to construct a smooth sentence flow. Start the sentence with the persons or objects that did the action, even if a word such as *bank* is still the most important item. By turning the sentence around, you get “The lone gunman robbed the bank.” It is shorter and more direct, and it is in the active voice. Broadcast writers make every attempt to keep all the verbs in active rather than passive voice.

Be careful not to confuse voice with tense. Passive voice is not the same as past tense. Voice has nothing to do with when the action happened, only with the placement of who or what is responsible for the action in relation to the verb.

Changing the Voice

There are cues to alert you to passive voice. In the sentence “The mail carrier was bitten by the dog,” *dog* obviously refers to the party responsible for the action but comes after the verb. *Was* and *by* are indicators that the passive voice was used.

Turning a sentence around is easy. Here are some passive voice constructions and the same sentences after the active voice has been used.

Passive: THE TOXIC SPILL WAS SPOTTED BY THE RANGERS.

Active: THE RANGERS SPOTTED THE TOXIC SPILL.

Passive: THE FAMILY WAS FORCED TO FLEE BY THE FLOOD.

Active: THE FLOOD FORCED THE FAMILY TO FLEE.

In each case, the cues are obvious—*was* and *by*. Notice also that the sentence that is in active voice is shorter and the action flows more smoothly. You are saving words and time.

Homework

EXERCISE 3-J

Replacing Passive Voice

Change any passive voice verbs to active.

MILITARY AND GOVERNMENT SOURCES SAY MILLIONS OF DOLLARS WORTH OF ARMS HAVE BEEN SHIPPED TO THE TERRORISTS BY THE NEW GOVERNMENT OF ARGENTINA.

Change shipped

THREE HOMES AND A SCHOOL ARE BEING THREATENED BY GRASS FIRES OUTSIDE OF TUCSON.

Change threatened

OVER 100-WORKERS AT THE XERXES METALS PLANT WILL BE LAID OFF BEGINNING NEXT WEDNESDAY.

THE FAMOUS FINNED CAR USED IN THE BATMAN TELEVISION SERIES WAS AMONG 50 AUCTIONED OFF IN CHICAGO BY A COLLECTOR.

Change auctioned

EXERCISE 3-K

Rewrite to Active Voice

Circle examples of passive voice in the story below. On a separate page, using correct format, rewrite this story.

ABANDON/jnh/11pm

THE SUNDAY NEWS HAS LEARNED A SURPRISING MOVE IS BEING MADE BY BARON COUNTY OFFICIALS TO END CONSTRUCTION OF THE NEW BACKFILL SEWER PROJECT.

INSTEAD...THE CONTRACTORS WILL BE ASKED TO ABANDON THE EFFORT.

SO FAR...ONLY PRELIMINARY SURVEY WORK HAS BEEN DONE.

IT WAS REVEALED LAST WEEK THAT BILLS COULD NO LONGER BE PAID BY THE COUNTY.

THE SEWER ALSO HAD BEEN SOLICITED BY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S TOXIC CLEANUP PROGRAM. NOW... COUNTY OFFICIALS SAY THAT IF THE PROJECT ISN'T FINISHED...NO MORE BUILDING PERMITS WILL BE ALLOWED BY THE FEDS.

(# # #)

THE CHALLENGE OF VERB TENSES

It often happens that the problem of active and passive voice is confused with the challenge of verb tenses. Tense indicates a time frame for the action, and correct verb tenses are important because they indicate the story's temporal relationship to the event.

In broadcast's condensed formats, we must tell stories with mixed chronologies. To evaluate a story for the proper tense, ask three questions: Is this action completely over? Is this action still taking place? Is this pointed toward a future event?

Is This Action Over?

If the action is finished, then you may use the simple past tense. This is appropriate for background in longer stories. Here's an example of the past tense.

WORKERS PULLED 40-PASSENGERS FROM THE WRECK AND
HELICOPTERS FLEW THE INJURED TO LOCAL HOSPITALS.

However, if you are mixing the present and the past, then the present perfect is useful. The present perfect adds the auxiliary *have* or *has* and describes an action that has just been completed. It makes the time frame indefinite, especially in the lead. Here's an example of present perfect.

WORKERS HAVE PULLED 40-PASSENGERS FROM THE WRECK
AND A HELICOPTER HAS FLOWN THE INJURED TO LOCAL
HOSPITALS.

So, remember the present perfect. It often makes a more dynamic verb than the simple past.

Is This Action Part of a Current Policy?

Because broadcast provides the latest material, it is always necessary to look for the update. In many cases, especially in the areas of policies and programs, you'll be describing a continuing action, not one that is completed. For all practical purposes, the best tense for this one is the present participle, which uses the *ing* ending. Here are a few examples.

WORKERS ARE SEARCHING THE WRECKAGE OF THE
AIRLINER TONIGHT, LOOKING FOR...ETC.

THE CITY COUNCIL IS BETTING THAT THE NORTH STATE
UTILITY GROUP WON'T RAISE THE RATES...ETC.

Is This an Action Scheduled for the Future?

In broadcast, the future tense is often used to add perspective to the lead about a future course of action. It is also used at the end of a story to suggest what is

expected next in a chronological sequence. In both cases, use the participial *ing* form to add a conversational tone to your writing.

THE CITY ATTORNEY WILL BE TAKING THE STATE TO COURT OVER THE LATEST LAW ON RENT CONTROLS.

At the end of a story,

THE CITY ATTORNEY WILL BE FILING THAT LAWSUIT NEXT WEEK WHEN THE COURTS REOPEN.

Making Your Peace With Tenses

In any work with tenses, there are many ambiguous cases. The best rule is to stay with the present perfect, the present participle, and the participial form of the future. These tenses offer a more active sound in the sentence.

EXERCISE 3-L

Tenses

Examine these sentences for verb tense. Discuss if you might rewrite any of the verbs.

TENSES/jnh/6pm

A BELGIAN CITY CLOSED ITS PORT AFTER A FERRYBOAT ACCIDENT YESTERDAY.

THE FLOODS THAT SWEEPED THROUGH BIRNEY FALLS YESTERDAY CAUSES PROBLEMS TODAY.

POLITICAL CRITICS SUGGESTED THE SENATOR SHOULD LAY LOW FOR A WHILE UNTIL THE TAXPAYERS' BACKLASH SUBSIDES.

THE POLICE OFFICER RADIOED FOR HELP AFTER SHE PULLED THE FAMILY FROM THE WRECKED CAR.

EXERCISE 3-M

Immediacy Needs

In each case, rewrite the verbs to indicate there is a continuing action or policy.

THE ZOO DECIDED TO GIVE A THREE-MONTH PASS TO EVERYONE WHO ATTENDS TODAY'S EXHIBITION.

DOCTORS HOPED THE INJECTIONS LAST NIGHT WILL SAVE THE OLD MAN FROM INFECTION.

THE WANDERING WHALE ENTERED THE EAST RIVER ON THURSDAY. MARINE MAMMAL EXPERTS CONTINUED TO WATCH ITS PROGRESS.

THE GOVERNMENT DEMANDED THE RECALL AFTER TESTS PROVED THE DOOR LOCKS FAILED IN SEVERAL CRASHES.

CRITICS SAID THE ALDERMEN WILL FIGHT THE HOMELESS ISSUE FOR THE NEXT 50-YEARS.

EXERCISE 3-N

Comprehensive

Examine these sentences for word complexity, active voice, attribution, and verb tense. If necessary, rewrite the sentences.

AMERICANS DISAGREED WITH THE POLICIES OF THEIR GOVERNMENT IN THE SAVINGS AND LOAN SCANDAL... ACCORDING TO A NEW POLL.

IT WAS REPORTED BY THE COUNTY NEWS SERVICE THAT THE IMPASSABLE ROAD TO EAGLES PASS WAS REOPENED YESTERDAY AFTER THE HUGE MASSIVE SNOWSLIDE ON ROUTE 760 WAS CLEANED OFF BY HARD-WORKING ROAD CREWS.

PRISON OFFICIALS INVESTIGATED THE ESCAPE OF THE TWO CONVICTS. THEIR TUNNEL WAS DISCOVERED YESTERDAY AND GUARDS ON DUTY WERE ASKED TO APPEAR TODAY FOR MORE QUESTIONS.

FIVE MORE OF THE BURIAL SITES WERE FOUND. OFFICIALS PLANNED TO EXCAVATE THEM TOMORROW.

COMMON REFERENCE PROBLEMS

The need for tightly condensed broadcast copy often results in misplaced modifying phrases and unclear pronoun references. Any modifying phrase or pronoun that is ambiguous must be cleared up, even at the sacrifice of smooth writing.

Pronoun Reference

Broadcast writers often use pronouns with more than one possible antecedent. If there's doubt about who the pronoun refers to, rewrite the sentence to repeat the correct proper name or noun and eliminate the pronoun.

Here is an example of an unclear pronoun reference.

THE GOVERNOR AND THE ASSEMBLY SPEAKER DISCUSSED THE SITUATION. THEN HE MADE A MOVE TO CUT THE BUDGET.

In this example, both the governor and the speaker are men. Therefore, it is necessary to identify the antecedent to the pronoun *he* or the sentence is confusing. Here's the rewrite.

THE GOVERNOR AND THE ASSEMBLY SPEAKER DISCUSSED THE SITUATION...THEN THE GOVERNOR MADE A MOVE TO CUT THE BUDGET.

Here's a second example of unclear reference.

POLICE ARRESTED FIVE-MEMBERS OF THE PROTEST GROUP AND SAID THEY ARE EXHAUSTED AFTER SPENDING ALL DAY AT THE DEMONSTRATION.

Again, identify the *they*. Here's the rewrite.

POLICE ARRESTED FIVE-MEMBERS OF THE PROTEST GROUP AND SAID THE DEMONSTRATORS ARE TIRED AFTER SPENDING ALL DAY AT THE EVENT.

As you can see, these examples of pronoun misuse are easy to correct. But there are other types of pronoun abuse. In one case, writers often use *they* when referring to a singular antecedent. Another misuse is the use of *they're* when writers generalize about a community's experiences or feelings. In the lead sentence, a writer might say

THEY'RE WORRIED IN TACOMA TONIGHT...WORRIED ABOUT...ETC.

That's a worthless sociological assumption the writer is making up. If you can, avoid the all-inclusive *they're*.

EXERCISE 3-0

Pronoun Reference

Correct ambiguous pronoun references in these sentences.

THE SUPREME COURT HAS OVERTURNED A LOWER COURT RULING ON THE DEATH PENALTY. THIS IS CONSIDERED A LANDMARK IN CONSTITUTIONAL LAW.

THE DOG SHOW IS TOUGH ON BOTH JUDGES AND THE CONTESTANTS. THEY HAVE TO SIT QUIETLY FOR HOURS.

RATS MAY HAVE CARRIED THE PLAGUE IN THE MIDDLE AGES...AND NOW EPIDEMIOLOGISTS ARE SAYING THEY ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE MYSTERIOUS ILLNESSES IN NEW MEXICO.

THE SHIP'S OWNERS FIRED THE CAPTAIN AS WELL AS THE FIRST MATE. HE HAD BEEN WITH THE COMPANY FOR ALMOST 35-YEARS.

Misplaced Phrases

Phrases can end up in the wrong place when you jam too much information into one sentence. The so-called dangling modifier gets stuck after the wrong word. Here's an example of a misplaced phrase.

ROCK SINGER GRAHAM CRETE WILL RECEIVE AN
AWARD FOR HUMANITARIAN WORK ON THE TONIGHT
SHOW.

Now, where was the humanitarian work done? The best solution is to reorganize the sentence. Here it is.

ROCK SINGER GRAHAM CRETE WILL APPEAR ON THE
TONIGHT SHOW TO RECEIVE AN AWARD FOR
HUMANITARIAN WORK.

EXERCISE 3-P

Phrases in Motion

Correct the sentences below that have misplaced phrases.

POLICE SAY THE VICTIM IS IN CRITICAL CONDITION
AFTER BEING STABBED IN HIS KITCHEN.

THE PARK AT THE BEACH...WHICH WILL BE AUCTIONED
OFF NEXT WEEK...IS THE CENTER OF THE CONTROVERSY.

THERE IS NEW HOPE FOR A CURE FOR HEART DISEASE...
WHICH IS WHAT MANY RESEARCHERS HAVE WANTED.

EVERYONE SAID THE OFFICIAL DINNER ENTREE FOR THE
VOLUNTEER GROUP WAS WELL-DONE.

VISITORS WHO INSPECTED THE PROBLEMS WITH THE
EXOTIC ANIMALS WILL BE TAKING LIMOS BACK TO THE
AIRPORT.

EXERCISE 3-Q

Comprehensive

Correct these sentences. Watch for problems with word complexity, active voice, attribution, verb tense, pronouns, and phrases. If necessary, rewrite the sentences.

A PROMINENT AND FAMOUS LOCAL CLERGYMAN WAS WOUNDED BY AN AGGRESSIVE GUNMAN AND A WITNESS SAID HE WAS HELD AT GUNPOINT BEFORE THE INCIDENT.

THE EVENING NEWS REPORTED THE PLANS TO DEMOLISH A BUILDING IN THE CLARINGTON MALL...WHICH IS TOO TALL FOR HEIGHT LIMITS.

COMPANY OFFICIALS DECLARED THEY ARE AT A TOTAL LOSS TO ILLUMINATE AN ANSWER TO THE QUESTION OF THE POLLUTED AIR FROM THE DIESEL TANKS THAT COULD BE SEEN OVER THE REFINERY.

THE VOLUNTEERS WERE TAKEN BY THE LIONS CLUB TO SEE THE INJURED SEALS. THEY WILL BE FEEDING THEM.

NESTED PHRASES

Another problem is the nested phrase: an interior modifying phrase that splits the parts of a sentence, usually the subject and verb. Some suggest that this is the second hardest adjustment beginning writers must make and the source for many problems. Here's an example.

THE STORM...WHICH UNTIL YESTERDAY WAS NOTHING MORE THAN A LIGHT RAINSHOWER...BROUGHT HEAVY RAIN AND THUNDER TO THE KEYSTONE COUNTIES.

This type of phrase is great for prose but lousy for broadcast narrative. Often the nested phrase is so long that the audience is hard pressed to remember what the subject was.

How do you fix a sentence with a nested phrase? One solution is to convert it into two sentences.

UNTIL YESTERDAY...THE STORM WAS NOTHING MORE THAN A LIGHT RAINSHOWER. NOW IT IS BRINGING HEAVY RAIN AND THUNDER TO THE KEYSTONE COUNTIES.

You can also fix a nested phrase by using a compound sentence.

UNTIL YESTERDAY...THE STORM WAS NOTHING MORE THAN A LIGHT RAINSHOWER...BUT NOW IT IS BRINGING HEAVY RAIN AND THUNDER TO THE KEYSTONE COUNTIES.

The use of nested phrases is an old school habit that should be reviewed by beginning broadcast writers. Always check sentences for nested phrases. One instructor recommends that students remember the letters *S-V-O*, or subject-verb-object, as a means of keeping the sentence intact.

EXERCISE 3-R

Nested Messes

Eliminate the nested phrases from these sentences by dividing them into two sentences or forming them into a compound sentence.

THE SENATE...WHICH WILL ADJOURN FOR VACATION TOMORROW AND WILL BE GONE A MONTH...WORKED LATE LAST NIGHT.

THE GAS PUMPS...WHICH WERE ORIGINALLY IN THE MARINA PLANS ALONG WITH NEW PIERS AND WALKWAYS... WILL COST A MILLION DOLLARS.

TEN OF THE WHALES...ON A MIGRATION WITH SEALS FROM THE ARCTIC OCEAN TO THE WARMER WATERS OFF BAJA CALIFORNIA...BEACHED THEMSELVES YESTERDAY.

THE AGENCY...BESET BY BUDGET AND STAFF MORALE PROBLEMS...FIRED 12-WORKERS THIS MORNING IN WHAT IS BEING CALLED THE MONDAY MASSACRE.

OVERLY LONG INTRODUCTORY PHRASES

There is no question that it is desirable to vary sentence structure and length. But although long introductory phrases are useful in prose, they are to be avoided in broadcast.

This doesn't mean that introductory phrases shouldn't ever be used. You can use short (two- to four-word) phrases that convey information about time or place; however, any sentence with a long, complex opening phrase should be rewritten either as a compound sentence or as two separate ones. Here's an example of a good, short introductory phrase.

UNTIL YESTERDAY...THE LOCAL UTILITY COMPANIES
COULD CHARGE WHATEVER THEY WANTED.

Here is an example of a long introductory phrase.

ALTHOUGH THE TRANSIT CARS WERE BACK ON THE
TRACKS LAST THURSDAY...NO ONE IS SAYING YET HOW THE
DOWNTOWN REDEVELOPMENT WILL DO.

Here's the rewrite:

THE TRANSIT CARS WERE BACK ON THE TRACKS LAST
THURSDAY. NO ONE IS SAYING YET HOW THE DOWNTOWN
REDEVELOPMENT IS DOING.

Here's another long intro phrase with too much information.

ALTHOUGH SEVEN SUPERVISORS VOTED AGAINST THE
PROTEST GROUP IN THE ALL-NIGHT SESSION...IT WAS NEVER
IN DOUBT.

And the rewrite, using a short, time-oriented intro:

THE OUTCOME WAS NEVER IN DOUBT. AT THE END OF
THE ALL-NIGHT SESSION...SEVEN OF THE SUPERVISORS
VOTED AGAINST THE PROTEST GROUP.

EXERCISE 3-S

Working With Unneeded Introductions

In each case, decide whether the introductory phrase is too long. Edit each sentence appropriately.

ALTHOUGH IT ADDED STRENGTH TO THE NATIONAL CRACKDOWN ON DRUNK DRIVERS...THE SUPREME COURT HAS RULED POLICE DO NOT HAVE TO PAY ATTENTION TO A NEW LAW ON BREATH SAMPLES.

ALTHOUGH FOREIGN POLICY WAS A MAJOR ISSUE SEVERAL YEARS AGO AND HAD SPARKED LOUD PROTESTS...THE STUDENTS TODAY ARE CONCERNED WITH OTHER ISSUES NOW.

EVEN WITH THE EXTRA WEIGHT AND PASSENGER LOAD STRAINING THE LIMITS OF THE BASKET...THE WEATHER WAS KIND TO THE BALLOON FLIERS.



EXERCISE 3-T

Comprehensive

Check these sentences for problems with active voice, complex words, attribution, verb tense, pronoun, and phrase problems. If necessary, rewrite the sentences on a separate piece of paper.

DESPITE A LAUNCH DELAY POSTPONEMENT AND A BALKY COMPUTER THAT CAN BE FIXED...THE SPACE SHUTTLE DISCOVERY IS NOW LOCATED IN ORBIT...SAYS NASA SOURCES.

THE TWO VICIOUS PIT BULLS...WHO NEIGHBORS SAY ALWAYS ATTACKED ANYONE IN THE VICINITY...WERE UNSHACKLED BY THE POLICE.

ALTHOUGH THE EXPENSE TO THE STATE FOR THE RESEARCH HAD BEEN COSTLY...THE WIRE SERVICES ARE REPORTING THAT TWO UTAH DOCTORS ARE RECEIVING SPECIAL COMMENDATIONS FOR THE WORK.

REPETITION

Repetition of words and phrases is generally to be avoided. Yet, if used carefully, it can be a good way to add emphasis.

When to Avoid Repetition

Except for the verb *to say*, avoid using identical or similar verbs, nouns, and phrases in the same sentence or contiguous sentences. Here's an example.

THE SUPREME COURT RULED TODAY THAT AN EARLIER
RULING BY AN APPEALS COURT WAS UNCONSTITUTIONAL
AND THAT THE RULING SHOULD BE OVERTURNED.

IN THAT EARLIER CASE...THE APPEALS COURT RULED FOR
A MAN CONVICTED ON THE STRENGTH OF HIS CONFESSION.

Repetition often leads to confusion. It will be necessary to get rid of some of the *rules* and *rulings*. Here's the rewrite.

THE SUPREME COURT RULED TODAY THAT AN EARLIER
DECISION BY AN APPEALS COURT WAS UNCONSTITUTIONAL
AND SHOULD BE OVERTURNED.

IN THAT EARLIER CASE...THE APPEALS COURT REVERSED A
CONVICTION INVOLVING AN ILLEGAL CONFESSION.

When to Use Repetition

Carefully planned repetition can add strength to the writing. Repeating a single word immediately after its first use adds emphasis. Using this sentence as an example

THE CITY COUNCIL TODAY PASSED A LAW THAT WILL
END SPECULATION IN HOUSING IN SAN BRUNO.

Notice the result if you emphasize the word *law*.

THE CITY COUNCIL TODAY PASSED A LAW...A LAW THAT
WILL END SPECULATION IN HOUSING IN SAN BRUNO.

EXERCISE 3-U

Avoiding Common Repetition

Edit these sentences to eliminate repetition.

THEY ARE PLANNING TO USE THE DOWNTOWN PLAN AS
A GUIDE FOR FUTURE PLANNING IN THE DISTRICT.

THEY'RE NOWHERE NEAR THEIR GOAL OF GETTING THE
MONEY THERE TO THE HOSPITAL.

THE FIRE RACED THROUGH THE FIRST FLOOR...AND
BEFORE THE FIREFIGHTERS GOT THERE...THE FIRE WAS
THREATENING ANOTHER BUILDING.

THE FIREFIGHTERS...HOWEVER...STOPPED THE THREAT.
FIRE INVESTIGATORS LATER SAID THE CAUSE OF THE FIRE
WAS A SHORT IN A FIRE SPRINKLER SYSTEM ELECTRICAL
BOX.

EXERCISE 3-V

Repetition for Emphasis

In each sentence, use repetition to emphasize the underlined word.

BIGTOWN STEEL EMPLOYEES ARE SETTING A GOAL TO PRODUCE MORE THAN LAST YEAR'S OUTPUT.

THE JURY RETURNED A GUILTY VERDICT. IT IS A DANGEROUS ACT BECAUSE OF THREATS DURING THE TRIAL.

Now, choose a word to emphasize by repetition.

THE WARSHIP MADE AN EMOTIONAL HOMECOMING. IT HAD BEEN AT SEA FOR 14-MONTHS.

THE MAYOR SAID THE BUDGET DEFICIT WAS SIGNIFICANT BECAUSE THE CITY HAD NO WAY TO GET THE MONEY.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provides some guidelines that will help you write effectively for broadcast. Keep the following points in mind:

- Use short, active words.
- Write elliptical sentences to mimic speech patterns.
- Put attribution first.
- Always use active voice.
- Use participial verb forms.
- Avoid ambiguous pronouns.
- Watch for out-of-place phrases.
- Avoid long introductory and nested phrases.
- Remember that carefully planned repetition of words can add strength to your writing.

It goes without saying that all of these rules can be broken when it is appropriate to do so; however, following these guidelines is a major step in learning to develop a writing style that will work well in broadcast.

4

Writing Compelling Leads

CHAPTER PREVIEW

Broadcast lead sentences must not only serve the same functions as both newspaper headlines and story leads, but also be the starting point of a rich, compelling narrative account. In major stories, the lead is usually obvious, but in minor stories, writers often employ devices such as irony, common wisdom, or the unexpected. Often, you can determine what should go in your leads by analyzing how the story affected you. This chapter looks at six categories of leads: new story; reaction (reax); update, second-day, or follow-up (folo); perspective; segues; and soft or feature leads. It also examines what to avoid, including jammed, cliché, question, and quote leads.

GLOSSARY

BREAKING NEWS An unexpected event of enough importance to be considered for coverage or inclusion in the newscast.

CLICHÉ LEAD A type of lead sentence that is built around an overused phrase.

FEATURE OR SOFT LEAD A lead sentence often used when the story angle does not involve timely or deadline information. This type of lead is usually long, and is usually constructed of information not found in the story.

FOLO LEAD (for follow up) A lead sentence that advances the information of a new or breaking story. Same as the update or second-day lead.

IMMEDIACY CUE Word or phrase that adds a heightened sense of time to a story. Examples would be “This just in” or “At this moment.”

JAMMED LEAD A lead sentence that attempts to include all story facts. Jammed leads should be avoided.

KEYWORDS Items in a story that trigger interest in themes, perspective, events, or details.

NEW STORY LEAD A lead sentence used for stories being heard for the first time.

PERSPECTIVE LEAD A lead sentence that relates the current story to previous events or trends.

QUESTION LEAD A lead sentence that begins with a rhetorical question. It is to be avoided.

QUOTE LEAD A lead sentence that begins with an unattributed quote. It is to be avoided.

REAX LEAD (for reaction) A lead that emphasizes the responses of persons or groups to previous stories.

SECOND-DAY LEAD This is the first attempt to restructure the information from a breaking story. It could happen on the second day. Also called the *folo*.

SEGUE A transition between parts of a presentation. In news, the segue is the transition into the next story. A segue lead ties a story to the preceding story.

LEADS

The broadcast lead's function is far more complex and critical than it is in a newspaper.

The newspaper has a headline, written by the copyeditor, which is there to attract the eye of the reader, and a lead, written by the reporter, which is the beginning of a story to which the reader has already been drawn. In the newspaper, the headline attracts and the lead kicks off the story.

But in broadcast, the lead does both jobs. It must draw the audience to the story topic while beginning the flow of information. For this reason, it is crucial that the broadcast lead be clever, tight, attractive, and informative.

A second reason for a good broadcast lead is the audience's wavering attention. The radio may be in the car and the television somewhere across the room. As we mentioned in Chapter 1, the audiences are doing other things while listening to or watching the news. You have to break into their conversations and get their attention to interest them in the story. Do not forget that a lead is an *attention-getting* device.

Major Stories—Easy Leads

Some stories are going to be interesting and attract viewers no matter what's in the lead. These are the major stories—big ones in anyone's book—and you'll have to work hard to keep people from watching. On a good day, you might have three or four major stories.

On a bad news day, there may not be any major stories and your story budget may be loaded with items that fall into the next category—medium-interest stories. To zero in on what's interesting, look for something in these categories:

- *Effect on the viewers.* People are very interested if their money, personal security, family, or jobs are threatened. This is known by some as “heart, health, and pocketbook.”
- *Proximity.* Viewers and listeners like stories that involve people or things close to them, such as the neighborhood, the city, relatives or friends, or their friends' neighborhoods and cities.
- *Prominence.* Prominence includes stories about highly visible personalities such as entertainment stars, religious leaders, or politicians. Also,

any stories about national or international governmental actions at a high level, actions in the area of social order such as war, or social events or themes that carry an importance solely by definition, such as health, education, or science.

- *Human interest.* People enjoy stories about successes, failures, and curious events of unknown people, as well as stories about common, everyday happenings in life.

What Interests Me About This Story?

If it isn't immediately obvious which category the medium-interest story is in, trust your own judgment. Read the wire copy or your notes and underline words that carry the story's theme. You are picking out keywords. Then look at what you underlined. It answers the question, What interests me about this story? Was it new details, the tragedy, the success, the bold plan, the risk taken, the irony, or the failure? Did someone make a heroic effort to fight city hall or rise from obscurity? If you can isolate an answer, you'll have the topic area for your lead. Your own sense of news must become the yardstick.

Here's an example of some story notes with keywords underlined.

Re: Dolphins and theories of communication

From: Researchers at the Saltmarsh Sea Mammal Park

It seems scientists now believe dolphins communicate for serious as well as playful events. In the past, it seems that the mammals have only used their underwater squeaks and whistles to warn of danger or suggest food availability. Now...the new research at Saltmarsh seems to indicate that dolphins play games to pass the time at sea. The research was done over a seven-year period and was led by Dr. Bivalve Watson.

Once you've underlined the keywords, you've got some idea of what has triggered your interest. For example, in the previous story notes, the underlined keywords "playful events" could be the focus in your lead.

HOW MUCH OF THE STORY GOES INTO THE LEAD?

Very little. Broadcast leads are best when they are short and have only enough information to suggest the guts of the story. Attempt to answer two questions in the lead: where and what. The *where* is easy but the what is more complex.

Underlined keywords help define the *what*. The *what* should not be too general, or it will be vague, will lack appeal, and may seem to promise the viewer a different story. Here's a general lead, accurate but uninteresting.

SCIENTISTS AT THE SALTMARSH SEA PARK HAVE SOME
NEW RESEARCH ABOUT DOLPHINS.

This is much too general and not very exciting. You don't see many keywords replayed here. With this lead, you would be alerting a segment of the audience who might be generally interested in whether the researchers are still alive.

Don't ignore your keywords. The "playful events" element intrigued you. Put that in or near the lead. To reach an audience more interested in the general concepts of the story, the lead must offer more. Here's your rewrite.

FOR YEARS SCIENTISTS THOUGHT DOLPHINS MADE
UNDERWATER SOUNDS ONLY TO WARN OTHER DOLPHINS
ABOUT DANGER.

NOW SOME NEW RESEARCH SAYS THE DOLPHINS
COMMUNICATE BENEATH THE SURFACE FOR OTHER NEEDS...
NEEDS SUCH AS PLAYING GAMES.

That's better. More elements that intrigued you are in this lead or its next sentence. It attracts not only people generally interested in marine biology, but also those who are fascinated by our relationship with other creatures on the planet and with attempts to communicate with them.

Sometimes, a writer gets stuck looking for a lead. Here are some devices you might explore if the lead isn't flashing out of the keyboard.

Look for Irony

Something is ironic if it is the opposite of what was expected. Because scientists only thought dolphins communicated to warn of danger, it is certainly a complete turnaround to suspect these mammals are simply playing.

Explore an Unexpected Effect

In this case, your lead won't reflect the story, but rather the strength or type of effect the story had on someone else. In truth, the viewer is only discovering that something "big" has happened. My favorite example of this was a lead on a local station about the stock market. The lead went something like this:

SOMETHING HAPPENED ON THE NEW YORK STOCK
MARKET TODAY THAT KNOCKED THEIR SOCKS OFF ALL
ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

The writer is giving the effect first, then the details.

See if Common Wisdom Is Displaced

Most writing instructors are very leery of the use of common wisdom. And rightly so! But it is a device that can be employed on occasion. It differs from

the irony example in that you aren't contradicting scientific fact, but rather going against a suspicion that everyone *seems* to hold, a communal myth. The danger is that the newswriter doesn't know what he or she is talking about.

MOST OF US THINK THAT QUITTING A NINE-TO-FIVE
JOB...BUYING A BOAT...AND SAILING AROUND THE WORLD
IS A PERFECT ESCAPE.
NOW FOR A DALLAS MAN...THAT LIFELONG DREAM...ETC.

Avoid Hype in Leads

A television station in a major California market once had an unwritten but well-known policy that urged its newswriters to insert adjectives such as bizarre, stunning, spectacular, or one-of-a-kind into almost every lead. The stories sounded like this:

THE CITY COUNCIL...IN A STUNNING MOVE...IS GOING
TO...ETC.

The constant use of such words crosses that line into hype or sensationalism, which is the repeated use of certain elements to thrill or amaze. At some point, it must desensitize the audience.

If you have stories that are indeed bizarre, you don't need to hype them. Your audience will catch on if your lead gives away enough of the story. Great storytellers don't indicate how the audience should feel.

DIFFERENT KINDS OF LEADS

There are many different approaches to writing leads. It is difficult to group leads into categories; everyone has a different opinion about whether there are six or 60 categories or whether it really makes any difference at all. We will, however, consider some commonly used leads: new story; reax; folo, second-day, or update; perspective; segue; and feature leads.

New Story Leads

New story (breaking story) leads are the normal, everyday variety that are used for unexpected, breaking items. This could be a sudden event, a scientific report, a crime story, or any action on a new topic. Whatever the theme, the new story lead is the first time that the audience will hear about this story.

Newspaper style allows you to summarize the entire story in the lead sentence, but for radio and television, you must learn to hold back some of the information in a new story lead. Broadcast stories spread out the information, releasing a little at a time. The leads have only a few details, generally the *what* and the *where*. The *who* and the *why* come later. The *when* will be either highlighted or ignored.

Including only a few details in a new story lead is generally enough to hold the audience's interest. Here's an example of the *what* and the *where* in a lead.

A MAN DROVE HIS CAR THROUGH A DOWNTOWN BANK WINDOW.

In this lead, the writer is offering a few facts, but saving the identification (who) for later and the reason (why) for the central part of the story.

New story leads will be possible in fewer than 25 percent of your stories, but because the goal is to release only a few details, the new leads often are the toughest to write. Try keeping the word count in the lead to 11 words or under.

EXERCISE 4-A

Writing New Story Leads

Analyze the situation for keywords you think will be important to the lead. Then write a new story lead.

Situation

You are writing for the Wednesday morning newscast.

You get a handout from the transit district saying they are planning to spend \$2,243,000 to redesign and rebuild some of the new articulated buses they recently purchased.

The work will start in one month.

Until the overhauls, though, more and more of the new buses will be out of service because they cannot be fixed. That leaves the district short on running stock and unable to make all the runs. Service for many commuters to downtown and back will be curtailed, meaning delays of up to 30 minutes on some lines.

With a few calls, you learn that the work is being done because of a transit district mistake in ordering the buses. The wrong gears were selected and the wear and tear on the ones chosen has destroyed many of the drive lines.

Write your lead here:

Reax Leads

This is a good lead for any story more than four hours but generally less than a day old. Basically, a reax lead advances the story, concentrating on the reaction of someone who comments on the initial event. To find that person, ask Who will be affected? Get a response from that person and it becomes the lead. Then you can follow with information about the initial event.

An example would be the city council's action to fire the transit district director. Even if that was done at a late-night meeting and you are uncertain whether your audience has heard about it or read it in the paper, your broadcast lead the next morning might not be the firing as much as the reaction (reax) to the firing. It's both an update and an advance to the story. Here's a reax lead on the story.

SOME OF BATHWICK'S BUS DRIVERS SAY THEY ARE HAPPY
THEIR BOSS WAS FIRED LAST NIGHT... ETC.

The next paragraph explains what happened; then in the fourth or fifth paragraph, return to the reaction. The reax lead is a good choice because of the need to advance to the information.

A word of caution. Don't overuse *immediacy cues*, words that tell the audience what hot stuff this story is. Because the time element is so crucial in the reax or second-day lead, it is necessary to exercise restraint in beating the audience over the head concerning your news-gathering abilities. The audience is not dumb. Be wary when even minor stories get the following kind of treatment.

REACTION TO THE SUDDEN TRANSIT FIRING IS HOT AND
HEAVY THIS MORNING AND YOU ARE HEARING IT FIRST
NOW.

SOME OF THE DISGRUNTLED BUS DRIVERS ARE TELLING
K560 NEWS EXCLUSIVELY THAT THEY ARE HAPPY THEIR BOSS
GOT HIS PINK SLIP.

EXERCISE 4-B

New Story and Reax Leads

Here are three situations: a breaking story and two follow-ups. Review each situation update and write a lead to respond to it. The three elements cover a 12-hour period. Keep your leads under 11 words. For the last situation, you need to decide whether to go with a new story or reax lead.

Situation (at 5 p.m.)

You are ready for a 6 p.m. newscast. The president, a Democrat, holds a 5 p.m. news conference and accuses the Republicans of causing a bulge in the national debt and an economic slowdown. The president also announces that U.S. combat troops will go to Eastern Europe to guard newly built U.S. airstrips.

Write your lead here:

Changing Situation (at 7 p.m.)

For the 11 p.m. newscast. You have the president's statement (5 p.m. your time) plus reaction from Republicans (10 p.m. your time) on both the economic issues.

Write your lead here:

Changing Situation (at 5 a.m. the next morning)

You are ready for the 7 a.m. newscast the next morning. You have more Republican response. Also news that some troops are lobbing shells at an airfield in the Bosnia—saying it was used for reconnaissance flights over their enemies. American troops have been caught in the crossfire and some are injured.

Write your lead here:

Second-Day, Folo, and Update Leads

A second-day, folo, or update lead all advance an earlier story. These leads are looking for the next step in the story, whether it be an investigation, explanation, action taken by government. These leads differ from the reax lead in that they are not based on a personal reaction to the story.

Although the update, second-day, and folo leads are essentially the same, they do differ slightly. An update lead can come at any time. The second-day lead is usually the beginning of the major newscast the next day. A folo lead can update, or it can branch off to a sidebar.

These types of leads present the problem of estimating how much background the public remembers and how much is needed to brief them. If your lead is

AN APPEALS COURT HAS REVERSED THE VERDICT IN THE MILTON CASE.

your listeners or viewers may not remember Milton or the verdict. A better lead stresses the background.

AN APPEALS COURT HAS REVERSED THE GUILTY VERDICT IN THE MIDTOWN MURDERS CASE.

It's tempting to get very lazy in update, second-day, or folo leads and assume your audience knows all about the story, as the writer has in the next example.

WE HAVE MORE ON THAT STORY ABOUT THE THEFT OF THE QUEEN'S JEWELRY.

While leads like this have been used, and are good for last-second ad libs, it is better to return to the keywords and advance the story by making those elements into hard leads. The following exercise will help you work on writing second-day, folo, and update leads.



EXERCISE 4-C

Second-Day, Folos, or Updates

Review the examples of wire service copy and write the first :15 lead of each story. Keep your lead to 11 words.

BERNOULLI, France (PL)...A 270 foot unsinkable ferryboat capsized and sank yesterday in choppy seas in the mouth of the harbor at Ostende, Belgium.

All 37 passengers and the crew of six were rescued, officials said late last night. The ferryboat had just completed a trip from Dover, England, and now is resting on its side in only 40 feet of water. It is a hazard to navigation, authorities conceded. At this point, officials are closing the Ostende harbor until they decide what to do about the sunken ferryboat.

Write your lead here:

ASHRAM, India (PL)...The Indian government is not looking kindly on the return of the controversial American guru Abba and his followers.

Orders have been issued to make his stay in India as difficult as possible, according to the reports from the Press Trust of India. Yesterday, the guru and four members of his party had to fill out 26-page forms in order to secure travel permits for moving around within India. Also, the guru must travel by bus after his special car permits were taken away. The Indian government has assigned agents to travel with him.

The U.S. government is interested in the guru's travels. He is wanted in the U.S. on felony charges for gun possession and illegal land possession.

Write your lead here:

Perspective Leads

Perspective is overview—a comparison with current situations, the past, or other associated material—and it is the journalist’s job to provide perspective, if needed, for each story. In newspapers, perspective may come several paragraphs after the lead; but in broadcast, it’s more common to find perspective as the lead, because a perspective lead most closely resembles the opening of a conversation, in which a person might say, “Well, it’s happened again.”

Quite often the perspective on the story is what makes it interesting; by placing perspective in the lead, you are alerting the audience right away to the most intriguing element. So to write a perspective lead, you ignore the immediacy, the new reax, or the update on the item. Instead, you begin with the overview—how this event fits into the pattern. To find the perspective, ask yourself the following two questions:

1. *Is this story related to current controversies or other events?* Even if you have new information about one of many buildings burned in today’s flash brush fire, your lead might ignore it. Instead, the lead will wrap various damage reports together, giving a perspective on the growing tragedy.

FIRE OFFICIALS ARE NOW SAYING THE ROGERS FLAT
FIRE IS THE BIGGEST IN TEN-YEARS.

2. *Does this topic fit into any historical pattern?* If the story is about a monkey that has escaped from the local zoo and you know there have been a number of such escapes, you might want to bypass a new story lead and go instead with a perspective lead. The new story lead for this story would be usable but dull in this case.

A MONKEY ESCAPED FROM THE STEELTOWN ZOO THIS
MORNING.

But a perspective lead relates today’s event to a pattern.

FOR THE THIRD TIME THIS MONTH...A MONKEY IS ON
THE LOOSE TONIGHT.
IT ESCAPED FROM THE ZOO’S MONKEY ISLAND EXHIBIT
SOMETIME THIS MORNING.
ZOOKEEPERS THINK...ETC.

Perspective leads are very popular and you’ll be writing a lot of them. Only one word of caution: Do not add perspective if you haven’t researched the facts or don’t understand the situation. Don’t assume anything, a cardinal rule of journalism, is never more important than here. Check your facts carefully.



EXERCISE 4-D

Perspective Leads

Review the following two situations. Mark keywords and write the first :15 of each story. Your leads should be no more than 11 words long.

Situation 1

Three days of torrential rain. Serious flooding now. These are reports from the suburbs of Steeltown.

In Carrington Falls, a canyon flooded and two houses were completely lost. No injuries. In East Merimac, a drainage culvert backed up and millions of gallons of runoff flooded the Eastvale shopping center. Water is three feet deep. No injuries, but 24 stores affected and millions in damage. In Bestwicke, a house slid down a hillside and crumbled the back wall of a cookie store on the street below. No one was hurt.

Write your lead here:

Situation 2

No negotiations today and none scheduled tomorrow. This is now the 45th day of the first hospital worker's strike in Brayer County in 10 years. Local 231 of the Hospital Workers wants a 4 percent raise but the county says it cannot pay any raises this year. There are 600 workers out at four locations. Only doctors are working at the hospitals and only emergency services are offered.

Write your lead here:

Segue Leads

Segue is a music term describing the interval between songs. It is used as a noun to describe a transition (“a tight segue”) or as a verb (“to segue from X to Y”). In news, the term describes the transition from one story to the next.

A segue lead for a story B is based on key themes in a previous story A. The producer makes this happen by sequencing similar stories in the newscast. Once the story rundown is locked in, it’s possible to write a segue lead where contiguous stories have the same themes.

Sometimes the segues are easy and are natural flows from the previous story. But often you may have to look hard for keywords in story A to make that leap to story B. The segue lead can be based on story conditions, as well as on time or location.

Here’s an example. The previous story, story A, is about an escaped rhesus monkey. The story that follows, story B, for which you are writing a segue lead, is about the arrival of new pandas at the zoo.

ZOOKEEPERS HAD A MUCH MORE PLEASANT EXPERIENCE
TODAY WHEN TWO RARE PANDAS...ETC.

This lead allows story B to roll off the information off in story A.

But suppose your editor wants the segue to be related in a different way. Story A is still the zoo story, but story B is about a prison escape. It might be far-fetched, but that depends upon how you handle it. Here’s an example of a segue lead for such a story B.

AN ESCAPE OF A DIFFERENT NATURE...AND FAR MORE
DANGEROUS...AT COUNTY JAIL...ETC.

Geographic or time segues are most common and are often added later by a newscaster. Here’s a geographic example for the prison escape.

ALSO IN BRAYER COUNTY...TWO-MEN WHO...ETC.

A geographic or time segue is certainly not as clever or as thoughtful as the other types of segues and should be saved for the last minute when your brainpower has failed for the day.

The Dangers of Segue Leads The segue lead’s biggest trap is the attempt to make a connection that isn’t there. That’s happened too many times in news. A second problem arises when the producer drops story A from the newscast, leaving story B with a lead that doesn’t make sense.

EXERCISE 4-E

Segue Leads

Review the three situations and write segue leads for stories 2 and 3 based on story 1 preceding them. Your leads should be no more than 11 words long.

Story 1

CommuterRail officials have announced they will reduce by 20 percent the service between Steeltown and the suburbs beginning Nov. 1. The railroad is now carrying 4,500 commuters each day on its 19 trains. Recently, CommuterRail announced it was running at 95 percent capacity.

Write the lead for the next story—story 2—here:

Story 2

The Z & O Railroad will begin a major repair program on the mainline tracks that connect Steeltown with the suburbs. Because CommuterRail uses this line for commute service, it will probably cause a severe slowdown in train speed. The work begins in November.

Write the lead for the next story—story 3—here:

Story 3

Worldwide Airlines will move its corporate offices from Brayer County Airport to downtown Steeltown. The 4,000 employees will begin work on November 1st in the new Worldwide Building near the CommuterRail station. It is expected many will depend on CommuterRail trains to get to work.

Feature or Soft Leads

Many times you will work on a story that is timeless and can be held for weeks without getting old. This kind of story is often called an *evergreen* or an *H-F-R* for hold for release. This is the area of soft news—the human interest feature story. These stories don't have the angle of immediacy, or reax, or perspective. In many cases, it will take a clever bit of writing to fashion the lead.

The lead for a feature story can often be found in the more universal themes it represents or in the commonsense lesson it provides. Reach into the bag of devices for irony, the unexpected, the heroic act, or the common wisdom. In unusual cases, you might include well-known quotations, sayings, metaphors, song lyrics, or poems. Remember, you are striving to get the viewer's attention.

Let's say this story involves a construction worker who has invented a special drill for the new Steeltown sewer project. It's not a new story, a reax, or a folo. There's not a lot of perspective to use. Certainly, there's no segue in sight.

The feature lead is what's left. In the next example, the writer has chosen to highlight the unusual nature of the event.

MOST WORKERS COME TO THE JOB...PUT IN EIGHT-
HOURS...AND HEAD HOME.
BUT SOME ARE LOOKING FOR WAYS TO IMPROVE WHAT
THEY DO.
ONE OF THOSE IS STEELTOWN SEWER WORKS WELDER
AURELIO CASTENAGA.
WHILE WORKING ON...etc.

Problems With Feature Leads Backing into the story with a feature lead can be dangerous at times because the lead can grow to unwieldy lengths, often more than half of the time allotted for the story. It took, for instance, almost :10 to get into the drill invention story example.

A second danger of feature leads is that the theme of the metaphor, quotation, or joke may not fit the situation. Here's an example of a lead for the previous story with that problem:

THOMAS EDISON ONCE SAID INVENTORS ARE CRAZY
PEOPLE...BENT ON SAVING THE WORLD BY TINKERING.
AND THAT'S WHAT ONE SEWER WORKER HAS BEEN DOING
LATELY...GOING CRAZY IN THE PIPELINES...BECAUSE HE
DIDN'T HAVE A DURABLE BIT FOR HIS DRILL...etc.

It might even get a lawsuit.

The above example also emphasizes the third danger of the feature lead—the possible inaccuracy of the chosen quote, saying, or whatever is used. For instance, did Thomas Edison really say that? Look it up. Maybe the reporter only half remembers the famous old saying. If you don't remember a quote or saying precisely, there are hundreds of viewers out there who will, and they probably won't be bashful about calling in.



EXERCISE 4-F

Feature Leads

Review the situation below, circle the keywords, and write two different :15 feature leads for this story: one using an old saying or proverb and the other using a feature lead of your choice.

Situation

Two men are attempting to break the tandem bicycle record across the United States. They will leave tomorrow from a downtown San Francisco park and head east to the boardwalk in Atlantic City. They are Michael Denton, 37, of Arlington, Virginia, and William Popper, 24, of Devonshire Springs, Maryland. They are doing this to raise money for the Muscular Dystrophy Fund. The attempt is unusual because Popper is blind. They will be followed by a van carrying spare parts and personal belongings. They expect the trip will take 18 days.

Write both leads here:

LEADS TO AVOID

Some leads are awkward. Although not grammatically wrong, they can put the newscaster in a difficult situation with long sentences, dull writing, or questionable emphasis on words. The four we will consider are the jammed, cliché, question, and quote leads. None of these are prohibited; rather, they should be used sparingly, if at all.

Avoid Jammed Leads

A jammed lead is similar to the newspaper inverted pyramid lead in which the writer attempts to tell the entire story in one sentence. In broadcast, it just doesn't work. Both the broadcaster and the audience need the pauses provided by writing designed for speech patterns.

The best method of fixing a jammed lead is to break it up into a number of sentences or to focus on some keywords in the story and try for a new story or perspective lead. Remember that the goal of a broadcast lead is to get the audience's attention and then release the information in short bursts throughout the story.

Here's a jammed lead:

ON A VOTE OF FIVE-TO-TWO...THE SANTA CLARA SUPERVISORS ARE PUTTING ON HOLD TWO MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR SEWER PROJECTS UNTIL A SUPERVISORS COMMITTEE BEGINS TO INVESTIGATE THE CHARGES OF FRAUD... MISMANAGEMENT...AND POLITICAL FAVORITISM IN THE AWARD OF THE LUCRATIVE CONTRACTS FOR THE CITY WORK ON THE NEW TREATMENT PLANT INGRESS PIPES.

Here's the rewrite:

SANTA CLARA SUPERVISORS ARE PUTTING TWO EXPENSIVE SEWER PROJECTS ON HOLD.

EXERCISE 4-G

Avoid Jammed Leads

Review the situation, underline some keywords, and write a :15 lead for this story. Keep the word count under 11.

Situation

You're working on the 6 p.m. news. At three this afternoon, a runaway truck smashed into a house under construction on a hillside above an elementary school in the Walnut Vista section of Steeltown. The truck tore the half-finished house from its foundation and the truck and house plunged into the schoolyard. The house was worth \$225,000, the truck was worth \$15,000, and the load of glass the truck was carrying was worth \$10,000. Two teenagers were playing basketball in the otherwise empty schoolyard. They pulled the driver, Roger Barnes, 36, of Prentice Falls, out of the cab.

Barnes was later arrested by city police for drunken driving and taken to jail.

Write your lead here:

Avoid Cliché Leads

Although clichés are easy to insert for leads, they should be avoided and an effort made to write a more clever opening.

The most overused cliché leads are the “good news/bad news” leads that seem to pop up in almost every newscast. Some examples of this type of lead are

THERE'S GOOD NEWS FOR CAR BUYERS...ETC.

and

BAD NEWS FOR TAXPAYERS. THE...ETC.

and

THERE'S GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS FOR DOG LOVERS.
THE...ETC.

The difficulty with good news/bad news leads or any other cliché is overuse. Because different writers prepare a single broadcast, the good news/bad news leads can show up twice or three times in a newscast. When this happens, the leads lack punch. Also, a good news lead is a bit of editorializing on our part. Maybe it was good news for some, but bad news for others.

Practice writing all of your stories without using good news or bad news leads. The day will come when you are overloaded with work, the deadline is five minutes away, and your brain has gone dead. That's the time to resurrect this tired old lead.

Avoid Question Leads

Rhetorical question leads are an old broadcast standby. They show up in plenty of newscasts—more than they need to. As with the cliché lead, the question format becomes stale after the second or third use, for example,

WHAT IS RED AND WHITE AND GREEN ALL OVER?
WELL...IT ISN'T THE ZEBRA AT THE ZOO BECAUSE...ETC.

or

WHAT DOES EVERYONE DOWN AT COUNTY JAIL WANT IN
THE OLD CHRISTMAS STOCKING?
WELL...IT COULD BE A GOOD PAIR OF EAR PLUGS...ETC.

For now, avoid using rhetorical questions for leads. As you become more skilled, and are writing for yourself, there's nothing wrong with an occasional rhetorical opening.

Something else to consider. Rhetorical questions are tough on the newscaster, especially if he or she is someone other than the writer. Sometimes it's hard to get the right inflection. Other times, the rhetorical question may simply allow the audience to answer “no” or “so what” and then ignore your story.

EXERCISE 4-H

Turning Around the Rhetorical Question

The following examples show how to change a rhetorical lead.

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO COMMUTE TO WORK? ALMOST ANYONE WHO RIDES THE BUS WILL TELL YOU THAT...ETC.

To change this rhetorical lead, eliminate the rhetorical question and start with the answer.

ALMOST ANYONE WHO RIDES THE BUS WOULD TELL YOU THAT...ETC.

Now, you try to turn around these rhetorical question leads.

WHO IS THE LUCKIEST POLITICIAN THIS YEAR? IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN BOB BOSTWICK...THE NEW STATE CONTROLLER.

WHAT'S THE MOST DANGEROUS INTERSECTION IN THE CITY? WELL...A NEW STUDY SAYS IT'S THE CORNER OF B AND OAK STREETS.

Avoid Unnecessary Quotes as Leads

Cold quotes, which are quotes without advance attribution, are tempting. They are dramatic. They sometimes stun listeners and viewers. Sometimes, they even work—maybe once a month.

In the meantime, don't use unattributed quotes as leads. Otherwise you put your newscasters in jeopardy. Quotes need dramatic reading, and most newscasters are not ready to adopt a persona at the top of every story. In the next example, an unattributed quote appeared in a newscast after a story about an unexpected tragedy. This was the lead.

I AM SADDENED...DISMAYED...AND SICKENED BY THIS
WHOLE MESS.
THOSE WERE THE WORDS TODAY OF...ETC.

Unfortunately, it was easy to confuse the opening quote with the end of the previous story. In this case, the newscaster realized what had happened and she became flustered during the remainder of the story. Before a quote, put in advance attribution.

EXERCISE 4-1

Leads

Review the situation, underline the keywords, and write two different leads for this story.

Situation

This occurred at Hilltop Metropolitan hospital last night at 11:30 p.m. A neighborhood power failure had knocked out electricity to various parts of the hospital. Emergency generators kicked in everywhere except for one operating room, in which a Caesarean section birth was underway.

A quick-thinking nurse grabbed a flashlight from another room and held it for doctors while they continued the operation. The lights were restored in 10 minutes and everything went okay. Chief surgeon Dr. Mary Wentz said it certainly made for an interesting operation. The baby girl, named Luz (for light), is fine. Her mother, Maria Espinoza, 24, of Steeltown, said she is thrilled by the nurse's quick thinking. The nurse, Byron Walcott, 28, Fairview, said it was his camping flashlight and he was lucky he was just back from a trip. "When I turned it on," he said, "I hoped I had remembered to put in new batteries. It was weak, but by some miracle, it kept on long enough."

EXERCISE 4-J

More Leads

Review the situation, find your keywords, and write two different leads for this story.

Situation

The school board met last night, and after a routine 12-hour session, they voted to close five elementary schools, all in the Riverview district, which has a high minority population. The board says the closures will save over \$2,000,000 in the next three years. The students from the closed schools will be bused to schools in Manor Heights, which is a very rich suburb, with few minority residents.

At the meeting, parents from Riverview charged racism was involved in the reassignments. They pointed out that the schools were closed in their district because all of the school board members and the superintendent live in Manor Heights. You are unable to confirm whether or not that is true. However, you do learn it will cost over \$1.5 million for the busing program in three years, an expense the district wouldn't have without the closures.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The writer has an important job in preparing the lead for a broadcast story. On radio and television, the lead sentence substitutes for both the headline and story lead in print. It must draw attention while starting the story.

Writers might be able to build leads around the story's effect on the viewer, proximity, prominence of those involved, and human interest angle. At least six categories of leads are available, including new story, reax, folo/second-day/update, perspective, segue, and feature leads. Writers should also avoid jamming too much information into the lead, or beginning stories with clichés, quotes, or rhetorical questions.

5

Interviews: Getting What You Need From Them

CHAPTER PREVIEW

This chapter covers the unique nature of recorded field interviews and shows how the inclusion of a portion of one of these—a bite—dramatically changes the simple rules of read-only scripts.

A broadcast journalist must constantly switch back and forth between two types of interviews: those done for research and those done to become recorded portions of stories. The recorded interview is seeking (1) eyewitness accounts, (2) professional evaluation, (3) response to charges, or (4) the effect of an event on the interviewee. Before an interview, a journalist should be thinking about asking *how* and *why* questions and avoiding questions that lead to “yes” and “no” answers.

Most interview bites will influence the construction of the story, from the lead to the *tag*. In this book, the sentence immediately before the bite will be called the *writeup* and there are definite rules about its design.

GLOSSARY

AMBIENT SOUND Recorded sound that is not part of an interview. It is also called *NAT sound* (for natural sound), *wild sound*, *background*, or *BG sound*.

BACK-TO-BACK Audio bites from separate sources edited together and used without any narration between them.

BITE The recorded interview portion that has been pulled for use in a news story. Also called a *cut*.

TAG A portion of copy, usually short, that follows an actuality or soundbite and ends the story. Also called an *out* or *outro*.

WRITEUP The broadcast story sentence immediately preceding a bite. It is also called the *lead-in*, the *intro*, the *throw line*, or the *ID*.

ACTUALITIES AND SOUNDBITES

Soundbites, like used car dealers, have a bad reputation. With each political campaign, critics zero in on the soundbite as if it were some newly discovered evil

of nature. But soundbites are simply the broadcast equivalent of quotes—something used by print writers since the first newsbooks in the 15th century. If a politician is skilled enough to get print and broadcast reporters to make the entire story of pre-selected quotes, then it's the reporter's fault, not the media's.

When an actuality (radio) or a soundbite (radio or television) is introduced into a story, the bite can contribute strength. Bites carry two channels of data, the spoken text in the quote and nuances in the delivery, which include the body language, gestures, and emotion of the situation, as well as the ambient background sounds. At times, these secondary subtextual elements carry as much information as what is said and could, in some situations, contradict the meaning in the spoken text.

ADDING A BITE IS A BIG CHANGE

The decision to cut a recorded interview into smaller portions, called bites, and put one or more of those into a news story forces a radical change in the story structure. Because of the immediate needs of the bite in terms of how it fits into the narration, and because the bite's text influences the entire story, including the lead, the story must be planned with the interview bite in mind. Here's a situation that happens often in broadcast.

You've already finished a :25 *reader* on the new koalas at the zoo when the producer suggests that you use a :15 bite from a late interview with the zookeeper. The producer now is willing to give you :40 for the story. Is this a simple job, to insert the bite?

Not quite. The text of the bite is

"If that air conditioner isn't fixed, no one will be seeing any koalas. We'll have to send them right back where they came from."

And here's your story. Find a spot to insert the bite.

A BIG CIVIC TURNOUT TODAY TO WELCOME TWO SMALL VISITORS TO STEELTOWN.

THE MAYOR...FOUR CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS AND THE BEAGLE HIGH BAND WERE AT THE FENTON ZOO AT NOON TO GREET A PAIR OF AUSTRALIAN KOALA BEARS.

THE RARE ANIMALS ARE ON LOAN FROM THE ZOO IN SYDNEY.

THEY'LL BE HERE FOR TWO MONTHS. BUT IT'LL BE TWO WEEKS BEFORE THE PUBLIC CAN SEE THEM.

IT TAKES THAT LONG FOR THE MALE AND FEMALE KOALA TO GET USED TO THEIR NEW CAGES.

Now, consider the bite you were given. It takes a different angle and shifts the focus from the cheerful welcome to malfunctioning equipment in the koala enclosure. The arrival of the koalas, treated lightly in the first copy story, now becomes a secondary angle in this story with a bite. The lead must refer to the possible problem with the koalas' new cage equipment.

To remedy the situation, you need more than a simple copyedit. You need

1. a new lead
2. a new body for the story
3. a writeup for the quote
4. a place for the quote
5. a better description of the controversy
6. a suggestion of what might happen in the future

The new lead might sound like this:

TWO LONG-AWAITED AUSTRALIAN VISITORS ARRIVED TODAY ONLY TO FIND THEIR ROOMS WEREN'T READY.

THE RARE KOALA BEARS ARE IN STEELTOWN FOR A TWO-MONTH EXHIBIT AT THE FENTON ZOO.

BUT THERE ARE PROBLEMS WITH THE SPECIAL ENCLOSURE PREPARED FOR THE POPULAR ANIMALS.

ZOOKEEPER BRIAN ROSS SAYS EQUIPMENT BREAKDOWNS THREATEN THE EXHIBIT.

"If that air conditioner isn't fixed, no one will be seeing any koalas. We'll have to send them right back where they came from."

ZOO OFFICIALS ARE HOPING FOR A QUICK SOLUTION. THE KOALAS ARE SCHEDULED FOR A REST PERIOD BEFORE THE EXHIBIT OPENS IN TWO WEEKS.

As you can see, the bites must be considered when writing the story. In a sense, soundbites and time restrictions force the design of the story, sometimes even changing the lead, but always by adding elements that take up time and need time-consuming introductory writeups and transitions back to the story narration.

INTERVIEWS NEED PLANNING

Securing the perfect soundbite or actuality means extra thought must go into planning the story. Good actualities seldom just happen; they are the product of careful preparation.

We're all familiar with the sight of the broadcast reporter out on the street doing a standup interview with a news source. That's a classic stereotype of our profession. It looks easy. The reporter offers the mic and the interviewee provides a perfect :20 recap of the situation. In real life, that seldom happens. It seems there's more to interviewing than just walking up to someone and saying "Tell me what's going on here."

First, the reporter has to remember that he or she is there not only to research the story but to get a soundbite. In print journalism, all interviews are designed to gather the basic research, to get the facts, to probe, to learn about the story without being put off or misled. This is done in person or over the phone and doesn't need to be recorded. Broadcast reporters must do the same legwork, conducting research interviews on the phone or in person without the camera. Then, and only then, is it time to record an interview for later use. Before recording the interview, the reporter should anticipate what kind of bites the interviewee might provide and then must *structure* the interview to get these bites on tape in usable form. Reporters must be looking for an interviewee's complete thought—something that carries more meaning and is stronger on tape than what could be written into studio narration for the story.

This type of double interviewing is a tactic used in other professions. When a witness goes on the stand during a court trial, both the plaintiff and defendant's lawyers have done research interviews during pretrial depositions. The questions they ask in court are meant to elicit a response that is revealing to the jury, revealing additional subtexts in the emotion and body language. The power of this planned testimony gives the jurors far more than if they read a printed record of those pretrial depositions. It is an old legal truism that in court lawyers shouldn't ask questions unless they know what the answer will be. The same advice goes for broadcast reporters.

Caution: This does not mean you will always have a chance to do two kinds of interviews, or that you will be able to pre-interview everyone. It only suggests that you look to the interviewee for answers in certain areas of the story.

Also, it doesn't suggest you rehearse an interviewee or spell out what you want in the answer. If the interviewee is not forthcoming and you cannot coax a good answer during the interview, find another source. Not everyone is going to provide good soundbites.

HOW TO GET GOOD INTERVIEW BITES

Good interview bites don't just happen. The reporter stimulates and controls the recorded interview, guiding the interviewee into situations from which usable answers will result.

The following are qualities of a good interview bite:

- It is short, possibly less than :15 or :20.
- It is a complete answer and doesn't need the reporter's question from the tape.
- It is free from the jargon of a particular situation or profession. Police officialeze is an example ("The perpetrator exited the building in a southwest direction, committing a 221 P.C. and a second actionable offense in the next few moments.").
- It is more than a yes or no answer. The reporter designs questions that stimulate longer, more involved answers. Instead of asking "Did you see

the plane crash?" a broadcast reporter would ask the eyewitness "Tell me what you saw."

- It is the answer to the *how* and *why* questions. A broadcast reporter might ask, "How did your firm get into so much trouble?" or "Why are the police after you?"

Look for Strong Bites

A broadcast journalist wants the actuality not just for the information but for the power of the response. Some answers are weak and should be avoided. Weak bites include

- those that are long and wandering
- those that are a recitation of statistics
- those with accented words or jargon

There are many areas in which the bite's power is evident. Four stand out as powerful and usable.

- eyewitness accounts of events
- professional evaluation by someone who has the credentials to discuss the event
- response to charges against the interviewee
- telling of the effects of an action upon the interviewee

Think how compelling the moment is—the eyewitness, still shaken, telling the story of what happened. Or the expert carefully describing how the new breakthrough will help the sick. The added emotion evident in these recorded bites is something few print accounts can duplicate.

EXERCISE 5-A

Hunting for Sources

Complete this exercise on a separate page. For each situation, name three persons from whom you could get a good recorded interview, and for each person, write two questions that would stimulate a good broadcast bite.

Situation 1

The Steeltown City Council extends commercial zoning three blocks from the present limits into some residential neighborhoods. As a start, the city will begin putting parking meters in front of houses next week.

Situation 2

Contaminated underground water is discovered in a local neighborhood. The samples contain chemicals used in a nearby metal-plating plant.

Situation 3

The late-night rock concert ended in a brawl, injuring two police officers and three concert goers. Now there's talk of ending the 34-year-old tradition called "Pioneer Days."

Repeat Questions/Listen for Answers

This topic is given a separate section because it is so important. During an interview, the reporter may have to ask the same question twice. Or three times. Or four times.

When do you do this? You have to listen. Learn to listen to what the interviewee is saying. You're looking for answers that have all the qualities of a good bite. That's why you are out there with a microphone. If the interviewee is straying off course, giving long-winded or evasive answers, you should re-ask the question. And if that doesn't stimulate an answer, re-re-ask it. Does that embarrass you? Probably, but you still have to repeat questions. Change the question slightly, or even rephrase it. Remember, the research should already have been done. You're doing the recorded interview to get bites. Your job is to get usable answers on tape.

PULLING THE BITES

Although a recorded broadcast interview is a lot of work, you cannot relax when it's over. Then it's time to start culling the stronger bites from the interview.

Now is the time when short interviews are virtues. If the Q-&-A goes on for 30 or 40 minutes, then you'll have to sift through all of that to find what you need. A 10-minute interview makes it easier to search, and in most cases easier to remember if a usable bite is buried in there.

How Short a Bite?

The optimum length for a bite is always under discussion in broadcast. Some radio stations won't use anything more than :10; the same goes for certain television operations. Others say anything up to :20 is permissible. Still others leave it open-ended, relying on the content.

Often it depends upon the rise and fall of the vocal pitch, so the answer doesn't sound cut off, and whether or not the interviewee completes a sentence. It also reflects the talking and thinking speed of your source and it helps if he or she is not a member of the "Slow.....talkers.....of.....America."

Many times this bite selection is done under intense deadline pressure. The reporter doesn't have time to listen to the entire interview but must go to a point where he or she thought there was a good answer. Then the bite must be isolated and the story quickly written, so it all goes on the air within minutes. For this reason, it helps to make notes on the location of good answers in the interview. Some TV reporters carry microcassette recorders with them and listen to the playback while returning to the station.

When deadlines aren't forcing the issue and you have days to edit the story, it helps to make a transcript of the entire interview. You may find that the interviewee never really answered the questions. You also may find second and third answers that are revealing on other topics and themes. You may find a powerful answer that is not expected, that changes the angle of the story. Transcripts are, however, a luxury and seldom available.

Cutting the Bites Down

Because you can paraphrase portions of an answer and put that into the writeup, you can trim the bites down to usable size. The best place to start is to eliminate the parenthetical pauses, "uhhms," and false starts at the beginning of the sentence. In this example, the underlined portions are the ones you are pulling.

Q: Why are the critics after you?

A: Well...Uhhh...That's a good question. I think they...they are looking for a scapegoat because their convoluted and ill-conceived programs have all failed. And I'm it. Simple as the nose on your face...called their bluff. They needed...It's just like they didn't understand what I was doing.

But if it still needs to be tighter, then trim from both the top and bottom. This requires more skill in the writeup, the sentence that prepares the audience for the upcoming sound bite.

A: I think they...they are looking for a scapegoat because their convoluted and ill-conceived programs have all failed. And I'm it. Simple as the nose on your face...I called their bluff.

Ethics

The first rule is to be very careful about the context of bites. In print, most interview bites are rebuilt from memory. In 1993, a jury found that New York writer Janet Malcolm had libeled an interview subject because she had reconstructed quotes from untaped portions of the interview. Although this ended in a mistrial because the jury could not decide on damages, the plaintiff had claimed the unsubstantiated quotes had damaged his reputation. In broadcast, it seems this wouldn't be a problem, because the answers are on audio or videotape. But the problem is context. By trimming the bite to its shortest form, reporters often eliminate qualifying statements and preconditions. If these aren't added in the reporter's tracks, then the story misrepresents the interviewee's intent. Here's an example. Given this section from an interview

Q: What about the death penalty after the brutal murders in the Baywood neighborhood?

A: I've fought against capital punishment for 20 years and will continue to do so...but emotionally...ah. I do understand there are crimes that seem to cry out for this type of penalty.

it is difficult to eliminate the first part of the answer and shorten the bite to the minimum. When this cut is made, a completely different answer could be the result.

A: I do understand there are crimes that seem to cry out for this type of penalty.

Second, answers should not be moved to another question. Maneuvering the questions and answers like freight cars may take them out of context. Although there is nothing wrong with using answers out of the original order, a problem occurs when the wrong question is linked to the wrong answer.

Third, avoid recording a better question after the interview. In radio this involves cutting in post-interview questions, and in television it means shooting reverse questions, done after the interview has ended and with the camera trained on the reporter. This technique is designed to help the reporter who stumbles through the question; however, it is hard to be accurate and usually results in a slightly different and more dramatic question. A better solution to a bad question is to paraphrase it in the writeup.

EXERCISE 5-B

Picking Bites

Review this transcript. Identify one weak bite and two strong bites, mark them, and read for time. Be prepared to defend your selections. This situation involves the extension of commercial zoning into what used to be residential neighborhoods.

Q: How long have you lived in the neighborhood?

A: 30 years.

Q: Why are you upset with the council's move?

A: You see...uh...my family has grown up and...uh. Well, the kids are gone now but my wife and I have lived in this neighborhood for almost 30 years. And it's been a nice place. And I don't see why they think that we should have commercial zoning, parking meters, and then, you know what's next, they'll be tearing down houses to put up stores. Look at these houses. People have put a lot of loving care into them. Families have grown up here. I don't know why we need more businesses in downtown Steeltown.

Q: I hear they're offering a lot of money for the homes?

A: My neighbors have been offered 20-thousand over the market price and I've even heard rumors that some have been offered 45-thousand over the current price. These homes are in the 125-thousand dollar range right now.

Q: Won't that help?

A: Well...that's what the business people of the city council think. Personally, they can take all that money and throw it in the river. This is my home. You notice they didn't vote to put gas stations in their neighborhoods. It's just another case of the little guy getting screwed by the rich.

Q: You sound like you're ready to fight this?

A: We're getting a lawyer. We've already identified a few laws the council broke in this rezoning. We'll file appeals next Tuesday. We'll stall this in the courts. We'll take it to the Supreme Court if necessary.

Q: Thank you.

PUTTING THE BITES INTO A STORY

Inserting a single bite into a story or inserting two bites back to back (edited together) forces a change in the story's design. In most cases, the bite or bites will cause everything, including the lead, to be rewritten. Bites will always need a smooth transition from the narrative, something called the writeup—the sentence immediately ahead of the bite.

The Writeup

Writeup is the term this workbook uses for the sentence that introduces the bite. Other news organizations have different names for this same device: *intro*, *lead-in*, *wraparound*, or *whatever*. Use what local custom suggests. The rules for good writeups, however, stay the same, no matter what the terminology.

Rule 1. Keep the Interviewee's ID Close to the Bite In any situation, the name and title of the interviewee should come within :05 of the bite. There are some newsrooms that like to put the ID immediately before the bite. Here are two examples; the first is generally used in television.

ZOOKEEPER LEONA WONG SAYS THAT IS NOT THE WAY
KOALAS EAT.

“We have spent a lot of money to ship in tons of...” etc.

The second example is a traditional radio writeup. In radio, because there is no on-screen identifying title, the identification should go as close to the bite as possible.

AND THAT IS NOT THE WAY KOALAS EAT...SAYS
ZOOKEEPER LEONA WONG.

“We have spent a lot of money to ship in tons of...” etc.

While the ID for single bites is easy, what happens with multiple bites edited together is a problem. In radio this is much more difficult and often precludes using the bites together, unless the voices have already been introduced, become commonly known, or are easily identified by gender. If both speakers are introduced, then be very straightforward in identifying who speaks first.

In some situations, no identification is used. This is known as a cold intro and it works only in situations where it is clear who is speaking. Generally, no ID is added when interviews are done on the street. These are called *vox pop*, for voice of the people.

Rule 2. Use a Short, Complete, General Statement This is a chance to give perspective to the recorded bite and help your listeners and viewers understand why the bite is in the story. It is unwise, although it is often done, to leave a half-completed statement and allow the actuality to finish it. Your writeup should be concise and clean.

BUT GORDON SAYS THE KOALAS WON'T BE CHEAP TO KEEP. EVERYTHING MUST BE IMPORTED.

"We have spent a lot of money to ship in tons of..." etc.

This statement is really a manner of giving perspective to the bite that's coming up. If well done, it will help the viewer or listener adjust to the different voices and faces.

Rule 3. Avoid Repetition Between the Writeup and the First Sentence of the Bite It is very easy to repeat words from the bite when you compose the writeup, especially under intense deadline pressure, because quite often you are relying only on your memory of what was in the interview. Your writeup will be stronger if you are careful to avoid this repetition. When there is a repetition, it throws away a chance to make a strong perspective statement immediately before the bite.

In the next example, notice the repetition of the verb form *brought in*.

...THE KOALAS WON'T BE CHEAP TO KEEP. EVERYTHING MUST BE BROUGHT IN.

"We have to bring in everything...tons of eucalyptus..." etc.

In the next example, notice how the writer has changed the script to avoid the repetition.

...THE KOALAS WON'T BE CHEAP TO KEEP. EVERYTHING MUST BE IMPORTED.

"WE HAVE TO BRING IN EVERYTHING... TONS OF EUCALYPTUS..." ETC.

Rule 4. Avoid Throwaway Statements A throwaway statement is an unneeded sentence or phrase that says nothing about the bite that is coming. Often, it praises your news-gathering efforts, such as "As she explained to our cameras." Avoid these. Here's an example of a throwaway writeup.

AND AS ZOOKEEPER LEONA WONG SAYS...THE KOALAS WON'T BE CHEAP TO KEEP.

SHE DESCRIBED THE SITUATION THIS WAY.

"We have spent a lot of money to ship in tons of..." etc.

Notice when the throwaway is deleted, it makes a stronger writeup that doesn't waste time.

AND AS ZOOKEEPER LEONA WONG SAYS...THE KOALAS WON'T BE CHEAP TO KEEP.

"We have spent a lot of money to ship in tons of..." etc.

EXERCISE 5-C

Rewrite for Writeups

Review the writeup in this story, identify the problems, and find ways to strengthen it.

THE STATE IS STEPPING UP THE PRESSURE AGAINST
DISHONEST USED CAR DEALERS.

TODAY THE LAWMAKERS PASSED THE LEMON
BILL...REQUIRING A WINDOW STICKER ON ALL CARS.

STATE CONSUMER AFFAIRS CHIEF BILL WOOL SAYS HE
WILL NO LONGER FEEL SORRY FOR USED CAR BUYERS.
STILL...HE SAYS...SOME WON'T GO TO THE TROUBLE OF
READING THE WINDOW STICKER.

HE EXPLAINED IT THIS WAY TO US IN AN INTERVIEW
WITH K-560 NEWS.

(CART #1 TRT: 15)

IC: "Some won't go to the trouble."

EC: "...problems and all."

The Tag: Getting Out of the Bite

A section of the story called the *tag* returns from the last soundbite back to the newscaster. This is a good place for a number of items. First, put information in the tag that didn't fit into the story before the bite. Second, the interviewee can be re-identified, something more useful in radio. Start the tag with his or her name. "CLARK ALSO SAID...."

Last, you can smooth the continuity by using repetition. Choose a key-word or phrase from the last sentence of the bite and repeat it in the first sentence of the news copy after the bite. In this example, which picks up in the middle of the bite, the phrase is "solving the parking mess."

"...and I just don't see how this will help solve the parking mess."

BUT SOLVING THE PARKING MESS WASN'T THE ONLY
PRIORITY FOR THE CITY'S TEAM.
THEY HAD TO...ETC.

Placing the Bites Within Stories

Ideally, the bite should be placed in the story to allow a studio portion before the bite and a studio tag after the bite. In most cases, the portion before the bite is longer than the tag.

Opening with the bite is extremely difficult. An actuality dislocates the audience from the familiar voice of the newscaster. If the bite is too close to the top, it is hard to include sufficient perspective or compose enough attribution for the audience to make sense out of the change in voice or picture.

By the same token, ending a story on a bite can cause problems. Without at least a one-sentence tag after the bite, you leave open the chance that the audience will not be able to separate this bite from the beginning of the next story.

EXERCISE 5-D

Using Bites

Photocopy the following transcript page. Select three concise bites and cut them out with a scissors. Staple, tape, or glue each in the middle of a blank piece of paper and write a story (about :40 total) around the bite. Be sure that the writeups conform to the rules given in this chapter.

The situation involves the three-block extension of commercial zoning into residential neighborhoods.

Q: How long have you lived in the neighborhood?

A: 30 years.

Q: Why are you upset with the council's move?

A: You see...uh... my family has grown up and...uh. Well, the kids are gone now but my wife and I have lived in this neighborhood for almost 30 years. And it's been a nice place. And I don't see why they think that we should have commercial zoning, parking meters, and then, you know what's next, they'll be tearing down houses to put up stores. Look at these houses. People have put a lot of loving care into them. Families have grown up here. I don't know why we need more businesses in downtown Steeltown.

Q: Will you sell your home?

A: I will if they're going to put a bank next door. I'd sell it in a minute. But where would I go?

Q: I hear they're going to offer a lot of money for the homes?

A: I heard that too.

Q: Won't that help?

A: Well... that's what the business people of the city council think. Personally, they can take all that money and throw it in the river. This is my home. You notice they didn't vote to put gas stations in their neighborhoods. It's just another case of the little guy getting screwed by the rich.

Q: You sound like you're ready to fight this?

A: We're getting a lawyer. We've already identified a few laws the council broke in this rezoning. We'll file appeals next Tuesday. We'll stall this in the courts. We'll take it to the Supreme Court if necessary.

Q: Thank you.



EXERCISE 5-E

Doing the Five-Minute Interview

Part 1

This assignment involves field work.

Choose a story topic and angle for a local controversy. Research the topic and sum up the problem in one paragraph.

Select a person to interview about the topic. Contact that person, do a pre-interview, and get permission for a recorded interview. Use a small cassette recorder and microphone.

Write out the objectives for answers from the recorded interview. Write out the questions you hope will stimulate those answers. Make a photocopy of the paragraph, the objectives, and the questions and turn those in as Part 1 of the assignment.

Part 2

After Part 1 of this assignment is in the instructor's hands, conduct a 5-minute interview, sticking to that time limit. See if you can stimulate the answers you want. If the interviewee doesn't answer your questions, try repeating the questions.

Transcribe the interview. Mark the bites you'd pull to make a story out of interview answers. Explain why these bites have some power. Hand in the transcription.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Placing a recorded statement in a news story has a severe impact on read-only stories. Reporters doing recorded interviews should concentrate on getting bites that are stronger than a written account could provide. These bites usually occur in situations involving eyewitness accounts, professional evaluation, responses to charges, and description of effects.

To select a bite, choose one that is short and concise, and has proper inflections in the voice. Ethical considerations forbid moving answers to another question or taking the bites out of context. The bite must have a well-constructed writeup, one which has a nearby interviewee ID and is a short, general statement that avoids both throwaway phrases and repetition of words. The transition back to the story from the bite may include repetition.



6

Writing Narratives: Some Models

CHAPTER PREVIEW

This chapter covers the construction of stories that are written to be read as copy for newscasters or as narration tracks for reporter packages. One focus is the lead-in, which must serve to funnel the interest to the story. The chapter also explores the narrative models of altered chronology, particular-to-general, cause and effect, continuity, and payoff.

GLOSSARY

ALTERED CHRONOLOGY A narrative model that flows from the studio lead-in to the present time frame, then to the past, then to the controversy or points of story development, and ends with the future.

LEAD-IN Studio newscaster's introduction to a field report narrated by another reporter. Lead-ins are short, :10 or so, and should be written by the reporter to coordinate the introduction.

MIC, MIKE Both short for microphone.

PARTICULAR-TO-GENERAL A narrative model that flows from the studio lead-in to a particular case, then to the general trend, then to the evaluation or future, and may end up by returning to wrap up the elements of the initial particular case. It is also called *personalization*.

REMOTE A story done by the reporter live while at a location other than the newsroom studio.

TRACK A portion of a reporter's narration for a report from the field. Tracks are usually scripted and recorded in the newsroom. A field package might contain many tracks, with each track separating other elements, such as SOTs. Thus, the narration between the story's beginning and the first bite is track 1, that between the first bite and the second bite is track 2, and the narration between the second bite and the end of the story is track 3, and so on.

VOICER A radio report, narrated by someone other than the newscaster, that does not contain a bite or other actuality. A voicer is usually recorded and played back from a cart.

VOX POP Short for *vox populi*. These are random street or event interviews about popular general topics. The interviewees are usually unidentified. Also called *man on the street* or *MOS*.

WRAP A radio reporter's story from the field that includes bites of actuality within it. Also called the *wraparound*, *wrapper*, *takeout*, *insert*, or *package*.

LONGER FORMAT NARRATIVE WRITING

In earlier chapters, we explored the read-only story and the studio-based story wrapped around a single actuality or soundbite. Now we shift to stories reported by someone other than the newscaster. These often combine a studio segment lead-in with a package of ambient sound, reporter tracks, and interview bites. When assembling the longer stories, the reporter picks and chooses from among these pieces and hooks one to another like a train, until the story is told, within the time allotted.

THE FUNCTION OF A GOOD LEAD-IN

Almost every radio and television field report is preceded by a studio introduction, read by the newscaster, called a lead-in. If the lead-in is carefully written, it can both provide information and carry the audience to the opening of the field report.

A lead-in has many functions. First, the lead-in must prepare the ground, not tell the story. If it gives a short version of the story, why should the listeners or viewers wait for the field report?

Second, it serves as a perspective funnel, wider at the beginning and more narrow at the point immediately before the reporter's voicer, wrap, remote, or package. The wider point is general perspective on the story and the narrow point leads to the particular elements in this story that will begin the package.

Third, the lead-in is a place to put story information crucial to the story that would not fit in the field report. This often is an update, although new material might also fit into the tag. In a television report, this is the place to put non-visual information that did not fit comfortably in the report.

Last, the lead-in identifies the next voice: either that of the reporter, or if the field report opens with a bite before the first track, that of the speaker. The amount of identification used often varies with station news policy.

The following example gives a lead-in's wide spot, or top of the funnel—the perspective.

FOR CENTURIES ZOOS HAVE GIVEN OUR URBAN DWELLERS
A QUICK LESSON IN EXOTIC WILD ANIMALS.

Next is the spot where the lead-in narrows, with details leading to the story.

BUT TODAY'S NEW ARRIVALS AT FENTON ZOO ARE
HARDLY EXOTIC...AND AS MIRIAM MCKENNA REPORTS...
THEY MIGHT BE CALLED CUDDLY.

CART #1 TRT 1:23

IC: "Zoo visitors got their..."

EC: "...at Fenton Zoo."

Not all stories need to start with perspective and then narrow to the particular elements that lead to the story. Other ways of handling the lead-in would be to use a breaking news story with a similar theme and then segue to the field package with the reporter's ID. That's a common practice when stations have stories on the shelf, known as HFR (hold for release) or banked stories.

THE ALTERED CHRONOLOGY MODEL

For many field reports, it is useful to take story elements out of their natural chronology. The altered time sequence of lead-in, present, past, controversy, and future provides a good model. See the example that follows.

The lead-in begins with perspective but shifts to set up the time of the report.

THERE'S BEEN A TURNAROUND IN THE FORTUNES OF A
LOCAL CHARITY.

REPORTER BOB WATSON SAYS THE NEW MOOD IS UPBEAT.

The voicer script follows. The first two paragraphs deal with the present situation. The end of the second paragraph brings in the past. The next two paragraphs cover the controversy involved. The fifth, the future.

THERE WERE BIG SMILES TODAY AT THE STEELTOWN
FUND OFFICERS.

THE 1994 CORPORATE FUND DRIVE PICKED UP 31 MILLION
IN PLEDGES...ALMOST DOUBLE LAST YEAR'S TOTAL.

THE STAFF REACHED THAT GOAL DESPITE THE SUMMER'S
PROBLEMS...WITH A SPECIAL AUDIT AND CHARGE OF
MISMANAGEMENT.

OVER A MILLION DOLLARS WAS MISSING...BUT
INVESTIGATORS HAVEN'T FILED ANY CHARGES YET.

THE 31-MILLION DOLLAR TOTAL THIS YEAR SHOULD GIVE
THE STEELTOWN FUND A BIG SAY IN LOCAL SOCIAL HELP
PROGRAMS NEXT SPRING.

FOR K-560 NEWS...THIS IS BOB WATSON AT THE
STEELTOWN FUND OFFICES.

EXERCISE 6-A

Using Altered Chronology Model

Write a :10 newscaster lead-in and a :45 reporter's track for this situation. Structure the report around the altered chronology model discussed in this section.

Situation

The controversy goes back to a planning commission agreement to allow a fast food franchise to move into an old, ornate bank building. The hamburger chain was going to sell burgers and fries from the old tellers' windows. The fast food company spent nearly \$900,000 converting the structure but a local neighborhood conservation group smelled a deal cooking and filed suit to stop the franchise. They want a local judge to order an environmental impact report and stop the conversion. Today, your reporter is at the courthouse and Judge Dale Hart hears the case.

The attorneys for the conservation group presented a petition signed by 80 percent of the 1,400 families in the neighborhood, asking that the planning commission action be reconsidered. The judge has promised to rule by next week.

The attorney for the fast food chain told reporters that legally there is nothing the judge can do to stop the move, unless there was fraud by city officials.

THE PARTICULAR-TO-GENERAL MODEL

Personalizing general stories provides another useful model. It highlights the particular case to general trend to particular case. To use this model, take a story of general trends or widespread effects (for example, layoffs at a local plant) and find someone who is personally affected. The lead-in is general but funnels the viewer interest directly to the individual story. The reporter's first track starts with the focus on the individual. Then the story reverts back to the general trend, discusses any controversy and future, and may end with the final details on the individual's case.

This type of model fits in very well with backgrounders and with feature stories. There are drawbacks, notably when the focus gets too wide or when you choose a person to exemplify the story who is not representative of most of those affected by the situation.

Production of the story can also be overambitious. You can minimize this problem by reducing the number of interviewees, the number of bites per interviewee, and the number of topics in the focus.

Here's an example of this particular-to-general model, also known as personalization.

The lead-in begins with perspective but shifts to the person featured in the report.

THERE ARE RUMORS THE LOCAL THOMAS WINDOW
FACTORY MAY CLOSE...AND AS BOB WATSON REPORTS...IF
IT DOES...ONE WOMAN AND HER FAMILY WILL BE BIG
LOSERS.

The track for the voicer begins with a concentration on the woman.

LISA PETERSEN HAS WORKED AT THE THOMAS WINDOW
ASSEMBLY PLANT IN STEELTOWN FOR THE PAST 14-YEARS.
SHE'S NOW A LINE MANAGER...AND AS A SINGLE
PARENT...HER PAYCHECK IS VERY IMPORTANT TO HER FOUR
KIDS.
BUT LISA HAS HEARD SHE'S ON THE LIST TO BE FIRED...
AND SO ARE 18-HUNDRED OF HER CO-WORKERS.
IT'S A LOSS THAT WILL BE DEVASTATING FOR THE
INDUSTRIAL SECTION OF STEELTOWN. TWO OTHER PLANTS
CLOSED WITHIN THE PAST YEAR.
MAYOR CARLY ROGERS SAYS THIS LATEST SHUTDOWN
WILL BE A SEVERE BLOW TO THE STABILITY OF THE
COMMUNITY.
COMPANY OFFICIALS AREN'T SAYING WHO WILL BE LET
GO...EXCEPT TO SAY SOME DOWNSIZING IS COMING. WE'LL
KNOW MORE ON FRIDAY.
SO LISA PETERSEN ISN'T WAITING. SHE'S TAKEN SOME
DAYS OFF AND IS OUT LOOKING FOR WORK.
BOB WATSON FOR K-560 NEWS.

CAUSE AND EFFECT, PAYOFFS, AND CONTINUITY

There are prominent elements of narrative that we have yet to explore. These build the sense of mystery and natural drama by releasing small bits of information about the story a little at a time, giving the audience the feeling that the important information is to come later in the story.

Broadcast writers may use this technique for two reasons. First, it helps them hold the audience's attention. If the audience heard the whole story at once, they might tune out if they weren't really interested. Second, audiences find it easier to retain information if it is given in small amounts.

Three methods of releasing the information slowly in a story are cause and effect, continuity, and the payoff.

Cause and Effect, or Effect and Cause

This form of narrative storytelling reveals the result, then immediately divulges the cause or causes in the next few sentences.

A FAIRVIEW POSTAL WORKER GOT THE SURPRISE OF HIS LIFE TODAY WHEN HE OPENED HIS GARAGE DOOR WHILE ON HIS WAY TO WORK.

INSIDE WAS A SIX-YEAR-OLD CIRCUS ELEPHANT NAMED ROXIE.

ROXIE HAD ESCAPED FROM A HOLDING PEN ABOUT THREE-BLOCKS AWAY...ETC.

Payoff

This is the most sensational method. In this format, you boldly lead the audience on, more or less promising that the payoff is forthcoming. It differs from cause and effect because the payoff is widely separated from the result by many sentences.

IT WASN'T UNUSUAL THAT A POSTAL WORKER HAD A SIX-YEAR-OLD FOLLOW HIM AROUND WHILE HE DELIVERED THE MAIL.

BUT THIS YOUNGSTER WAS SPECIAL.

IN FACT...THE SIX-YEAR-OLD CRACKED A FEW SIDEWALKS IN THE FAIRVIEW SECTION OF TOWN WHILE TAGGING AFTER CARRIER BOB JENKINS ON HIS APPOINTED ROUNDS.

AND WHILE BOB CAREFULLY PLACED THE LETTERS AND PACKAGES IN THE MAIL SLOTS...THE SIX-YEAR-OLD SCATTERED PEANUT SHELLS BEHIND...DELIGHTING PLENTY OF CHILDREN.

BOB'S FRIEND ON THE ROUTE TODAY WAS A CIRCUS ELEPHANT NAMED ROXIE...ALL PART OF A PROMOTION TO...ETC.

Continuity

This method is useful as an organizer and, at the same time, to hold the story tension. In this case, you tell the story until the important event or payoff suddenly surfaces. This differs from the payoff method because you don't tease the audience about the impending payoff.

Here's an example of continuity.

A FAIRVIEW POSTAL WORKER BEGAN HIS DAY LIKE ALMOST ALL OTHERS. HE WOKE UP...ATE BREAKFAST...DONNED HIS GRAY UNIFORM AND HEADED FOR THE GARAGE.

BUT WHEN HE OPENED THE DOOR...THERE WAS A SIX-YEAR-OLD CIRCUS ELEPHANT NAMED ROXIE.

EXERCISE 6-B

Three Methods

Write three :30 stories for this situation. In the first, use the cause and effect method. In the second, use the payoff method by telegraphing your intent but not revealing the mystery until the end. In the third, tell the story in its basic time continuity format.

Situation

Lottery winner Alfred Komp finally showed up today with the winning ticket. He had just 24 hours left until the time ran out. The prize—\$12.3 million, spread out in checks over 20 years. Komp was a week late in claiming the prize. He said he had to retrace his route to Lake Shasta, where he had vacationed for a week with his family. He had to stop at each of the six motels where the family had stayed on the vacation, and go through each of the drawers.

Finally, in the last one, at the Lost Horizons in Bellvue, he found the ticket behind the nightstand. Komp says he will quit work and become a bum now that he has the money.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Longer reports from the field, usually voiced by reporters, have many narrative elements that need a usable order. This chapter explores the basic models of altered chronology and the particular-to-general. Narrative storytelling methods—continuity, cause and effect, and payoffs—also are discussed in their relationship to broadcast news writing.



Teases, Tosses, and Other Spare Parts

CHAPTER PREVIEW

There are some small but very significant items of copy that glue a newscast together. These include the tease to stories in other parts of the newscast, the toss to a second newscaster, and the bulletin. This chapter emphasizes the considerations in designing these elements.

GLOSSARY

BULLETIN A fast-breaking news story of overwhelming importance that is inserted into program other than news.

TEASE A short item that is designed to attract listeners or viewers to a later story in the newscast. In television, videotape might be used with the tease.

TOSS A short item designed to make the transition to another newscaster.

TEASES

The well-written tease is a valuable tool for smoothing the continuity of a newscast. Researchers have shown that it is beneficial to present an audience with an agenda. The teases at the beginning and throughout a newscast accomplish this.

The essence of tease writing is to offer highlights of the story's topics, but not to give details. Emphasize themes that make the item interesting to you. Here are two teases for the arrival of a navy ship that has returned after six months at sea. The first tease has too many surface details and mentions nothing interesting about the story.

THE AIRCRAFT CARRIER SEAGULL IS HOME AGAIN AFTER A
HALF YEAR ON DUTY. THAT STORY IS COMING UP.

That's not a tease, but a capsule of the story. It emphasizes details and ignores a deeper understanding of the topic. Also, for many who aren't partic-

ularly interested in that information, you've already told them that there's a point in the newscast where they don't have to listen.

The rewrite of that tease focuses more on story themes and leaves out the details. This provides more interest.

A JOYFUL HOMECOMING FOR THOUSANDS. THAT STORY IS COMING UP.

Great care must be used to avoid bamboozling your audience with a distant story disguised as a local item. Be sure to give a geographical reference if the story isn't local.

We've all had the experience of being offended by badly thought out and poorly written teases. For instance, the newscaster may say

ALL OF DOWNTOWN DESTROYED BY A FIRE. THAT STORY IS NEXT...ON THE NEWS.

When the story is read, you find out that it's not your downtown but the downtown in Bhat Falls, a tiny village in Thailand. That's deceptive and it's wrong. Too many misleading teases and your audience won't pay much attention anymore.

Don't Put the Story Payoff in the Tease

If a decision has been made, don't say what it was! Instead, alert the audience that the story will have that information.

THE COMMUTERRAIL BOARD DECIDES BETWEEN TWO NEW LINES. THAT STORY IS NEXT.

Look for Wordplays

If you can avoid slipping overboard into the sea of puns, the tease is a glorious chance for creative wordplay. Deadlines and other newsroom jobs often interfere, but even with everything that has to be done, the thought of squeezing out one more good line can be fun. The best teases are the simplest. Here are a few examples.

For a story about the approval of a new port plan,

A CLEVER MOVE KEEPS THE PORT FROM SINKING IN RED INK. WE'LL HAVE THAT STORY.

For a story on an undercover police operation to round up fugitives,

THE OFFER SAID THE PRIZE WAS A VACATION...BUT THE RESORT TURNED OUT TO BE JAIL. THAT STORY IS COMING UP.

The point of wordplay is not to overdo it. Be subtle. You don't need to hit your audience over the head with bad puns. Here's a story is of a chicken ranch being sued by neighbors for its smell.

NEIGHBORS HATCH A PLAN TO DEAL WITH THE FOWL
ODOR THAT'S LAYING AN EGG IN THE AREA. THAT STORY IS
NEXT.

Watch Out for Word Sensationalism

The decade of the 90s has been the golden era for “reality” shows on television. The relentless sensational nature of the stories and writing on programs like *A Current Affair* and *Inside Edition* make them popular and invite comparisons to newscasts that must cover the not so sensational stories about budgets, education, and science.

When you start working in broadcast, you are usually careful about hyping visuals or actualities. Sensational words, however, slip into stories. Words like *bizarre*, *terrifying*, *spectacular* or phrases like “wreaking havoc”, “voicing concern”, “deadly calm”, or “tinder dry hillsides” have been used too often. Your audience can become desensitized. In those cases, find an alternative, or learn to be comfortable allowing the audience to make the decisions about how “terrifying” a story is.

This exercise should give you some practice in preparing teases.



EXERCISE 7-A

Writing Teases

Study the situations. Prepare a short tease for each to alert listeners that the story will come later in your newscast.

Situation 1

A local citizens' crime study committee has suggested a review of the management policies by the chief of police.

Situation 2

Thieves vandalized a local church just two days before a big holiday that celebrated the church community's ethnic history.

Situation 3

A well-known and local semiprofessional baseball team needs one additional win to make it to the league finals in Los Angeles.

Situation 4

Former members of a cult are taking their guru to court, claiming he imprisoned them and wouldn't let them leave the group's mountain retreat.

Situation 5

Air Force One, with the president on board, comes within a half mile of colliding with a small private plane near the Denver Airport.

TOSSES

A toss is a transition from one newscaster to another, used most often in television. We will examine five types of tosses.

1. *Ad Lib Toss*. This is really no toss at all. No copy is prepared ahead of time but a page is inserted into the script with the words “ad lib toss” and the newscasters are expected to chat about something. Sometimes it works but it is not recommended.
2. *One-Word Name Toss*. If the newscast has a studio crew and director, then this type of toss from one newscaster to another needs to be in the script. Usually the next reader’s name is penciled in at the bottom of the script page. The newscaster who does the tossing says “Bob.” There is no need for the other newscaster to say “thank you.”
3. *Name-Only Generic Toss*. This is the only information in this toss: “Now Laney Buntram has some news about sports.” It is a nonspecific toss and ignores the chance to give perspective to the next story. It is dull and should be avoided.
4. *Toss to the Story*. This is one of the tosses with information. Before writing this, the writer must find out the key elements to the next story and how it begins. The toss is not a tease but does offer perspective to the story lead and does include the next newscaster’s name. Here’s an example.

WELL. IT’S NOT OFTEN WE SEE ELEPHANTS ON THE
STREETS OF STEELTOWN. REPORTER LARRY DOVBUSH IS
HERE WITH THE STORY.
LARRY?

5. *Split-Story Toss*. In this case, the toss goes between newscasters when each reads part of the story, not acknowledging the transition. When working with a double-anchor team, this is an effective way to vary the tosses. The split-story toss should be invisible in the writing, and should seem like a natural transition.

When selecting a story for a split story toss, find one with several locations, time frames, or topics. An easy shift can be made from an international story to the local reax in your city.

This is an example of a split story toss. It normally would be scripted on two pages.

_____ O/C Bob reads

TERRORISTS IN BRAZIL SAY
THEY’VE KIDNAPPED A FORMER
STEELTOWN BUSINESS EXECUTIVE.
HE IS MICHAEL WHITSON...WHO

USED TO BE MANAGER AT THE
BELDON SHEETMETAL PLANT.

WHITSON WORKS IN BRAZIL FOR
WORLD VEGETABLES...A FOOD
WHOLESALE.

TWO MEN FORCED HIM INTO A
SEDAN THIS MORNING.

_____O/C

Mary reads

LOCAL REACTION TO THE
KIDNAPPING IS ONE OF SHOCK.
THOSE HERE IN STEELTOWN WHO
KNEW MICHAEL WHITSON SAY HE
WAS...ETC.

EXERCISE 7-B

Writing Tosses

Study the situations below. Prepare tosses for each.

Situation 1 (toss to story)

You are tossing to reporter Hamid Raspad. He is covering a story about a fight over groundwater contamination. The Electron plant, which makes printed circuit boards, denies that they are responsible, although they use the chemical polyphornia and it has been detected in wells around the plant. The neighbors are suing and have formed the Save Our Children Committee. They are going to set up informational picket lines around the plant.

Situation 2 (toss to story)

You are tossing to reporter John Wells. He is covering a story about a disease affecting dogs. Doctors isolated the virus, called sleeping dog or SD, and it has been found in dogs in the Southwest. It causes the dog to sleep up to 20 hours a day, and to sleep so deeply that the animal cannot be awakened. Many dogs have died when they fell asleep in dangerous situations. The symptoms, in addition to the sleeping, include discharges from the eyes and a warm nose.

Situation 3 (needs split-story toss)

The European Economic Community this week is discussing raising the protective tariff against U.S. pickle cucumbers. Right now, farmers in your area sell almost 40 tons of the pickle cucumbers to Germany and France. The new tariff would cut that in half. One local cucumber grower, Carolyn Davis, says if they raise the tariff, she and many others will go out of business. However, a local banker disagrees, saying it will only mean that Davis and the other farmers will plant different crops.

BULLETINS

Bulletins that interrupt other programming have always been a part of radio and television news. By their very nature they involve serious issues or major catastrophes. It should be understood that they could scare the pants off the audience.

The break-in to any program must be handled with great care. If you are the senior person on the shift when an important story breaks, you will probably have to make some calls to your bosses to get authority to interrupt programming. The nature of the news story and the program that's on (for example, is it for children?) will be guides to the decision. If you get approval, the bulletin format is quite simple.

For the bulletin, you probably won't have much information. The unique nature of the bulletin requires that you write it clearly, give as much attribution as possible, and repeat the lead sentence. Here's an example.

WE INTERRUPT THIS PROGRAM FOR A BULLETIN FROM THE
K-560 NEWSROOM.

A 10-CAR COMMUTER TRAIN...OUTBOUND FROM
DELANEY STATION AND HEADED FOR MAR VISTA...HAS
CRASHED INTO THE BACK OF A FREIGHT TRAIN NEAR THE
RIVERSHEAD BRIDGE.

POLICE REPORT THERE ARE SERIOUS INJURIES IN THE
CRASH. ALL AVAILABLE AMBULANCES HAVE BEEN CALLED TO
THE SCENE.

K-560 NEWS HAS REPORTERS HEADED FOR THE SCENE AND
WILL BRING YOU INFORMATION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

REPEATING...A COMMUTER TRAIN HEADED FOR MAR
VISTA HAS CRASHED INTO ANOTHER TRAIN. THERE ARE
INJURIES.

EXERCISE 7-C

Bulletins

Study the situation. Prepare a bulletin for this story.

SITUATION

You are night newswriter on the 11 p.m. weekend newscast at a major television station. It is 7 p.m. and the other staff members are out getting a pizza. You are alone in the newsroom.

You get a call from a viewer. He says that a sniper is firing a rifle from on top of a building down near the crowded Broadway nightclub district and that many pedestrians have been hit. He says he counts at least 20 down on the sidewalk and many others pinned down behind buildings.

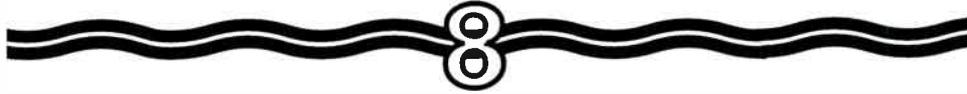
The police scanner has a code 33 in effect (officer down and needs assistance). There is yelling on all police channels. You call the police. Yes, there is a sniper. Broadway and Mason. No other information yet. Too busy, can't talk. Tell people to stay away. And the cop hangs up.

You check the paramedics. Yes, ambulances are being called. You call your news director. She gives you the authority to break in with a bulletin.

Write it.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Teases, tosses, and bulletin copy are short items that, if done well, can add to the overall news presentation. Teases should concentrate on the story interest values and not the details. Although there are many forms of tosses, broadcast writing students should concentrate of the toss to story and the split-story toss. Bulletins must be handled with great care and their information must be absolutely accurate.



Radio Remotes, Voicers, Q-&As, and Wraps

CHAPTER PREVIEW

There is a distinction between radio news stories designed for the studio newscaster and those stories reported by others, generally from the field about events taking place there. These field report formats include the *voicer*, which is the reporter's recorded narration without any actuality; the *wrap*, which is a composite of the reporter's recorded narration and bites from actualities; the *Q-&A*, a question and answer session between studio anchor and field reporter; and the *remote*, which is done live by way of a car phone, cellular phone, or special hookup.

GLOSSARY

AUDIO BILLBOARD A verbal identifier placed at the head of each take of each track that is recorded. Also known as a *slate*, it includes the story slug, the track number, the take number, and a countdown. An example would be "Bus crash...Track One...Take One...Coming in three...two...one...."

CART A plastic case with enclosed tape that is used to play back bites, voicers, and other actualities for radio newscasts. Carts come in many lengths, and are easy to load and cue. Sometimes, the term *cart* is loosely applied to any recorded element to be used in a newscast.

HFR Stands for hold for release. A story that is finished but is being saved for a later program or date. Also called an *evergreen* or a *banked story*.

Q-&A A live question-and-answer session between studio anchor and reporter in the field. Also known as a *debrief*.

REMOTE A story done by the reporter live from the field while the reporter is at the story's location.

ROUND ROBIN A series of reports, usually done live, in which the studio anchor starts by tossing to one field reporter who tosses to the next, who tosses to the next, and so on.

SLATE Same as *billboard*.

VOICER A report, narrated by someone other than the newscaster, that does not contain a bite or other actuality. A voicer is usually recorded and played back from a cart.

RADIO'S SMALL STAFFS

Although radio news is the first source of immediate information for most Americans, it is usually prepared and presented by a skeleton staff of journalists. A Radio Television News Director's Association survey estimated there were only 11,600 full-time and 800 part-time radio journalists in the country—for more than 10,000 stations. While a large, all-news major-market station may have 30 staff members in the newsroom, the average music/information station has a news staff of one to four. Staff members write each broadcast, call for recorded interviews, bring in and break down actuality feeds, and act as newscasters. This leaves little time for field reporting, although some mixed-format station journalists work half-days in the field.

DIFFICULTIES OF FIELD REPORTING

Radio field reporting is done either under intense and immediate deadline pressure or, as in the case of profiles, reviews, and HFR (hold for release) back-grounders, under a much more relaxed schedule.

Unlike the television reporter, the radio reporter usually works alone. This means it's the reporter who must deal with the technical details like mic placement and recording levels, which can be distracting. But having a decisive personal control over most of the reporting process, the radio journalist also gets a sense of accomplishment.

As a radio reporter, you'll face problems. First, there are constant deadlines that require filing over the cellular phone, regular phone, or two-way radio. You'll have to write scripts in the field, sometimes in noisy and distracting environments. You'll also be overburdened with stories and hard pressed to do as complete a job as you would like. Still, the field work is the most satisfying part of journalism.

The most-used field report formats are the voicer, the wrap, the Q-&-A, and the remote.

THE VOICER

A *voicer* is a field reporter's narration of a story without an actuality. Although this term usually refers to a report on a cart, it can be applied to a live story. Voicers are usually short, from :30 to 1:00. They are preceded by a studio lead-in, which may be anywhere from :05 to :10, depending on the station's style.

Here's an example of a voicer script. The anchor lead is a segue after other fire stories.

Lead-in:

WITH ALL THOSE FIRES BURNING THIS YEAR...OFFICIALS
GAVE OUR REPORTER KIM CLARK A LESSON ON FIRE SAFETY.

Voicer script on cart:

(ON CART)...(NAT SOT....WHOOSH OF FLAMES)
THAT'S THE SOUND OF FLAMES ROARING THROUGH DRY
BRUSH...ALL PART OF A BLAZING DEMONSTRATION TODAY
BY THE SAN CLEMENTE HILLS FIRE DEPARTMENT.
THEY BURNED AN OLD PATCH OF WEEDS BEHIND THE
FIREHOUSE TO DEMONSTRATE JUST HOW EXPLOSIVE
WILDFIRES CAN BE THIS YEAR.
FIRE CAPTAIN LARRY ANDERSON SAYS EARLY AND HEAVY
RAINS ARE RESPONSIBLE. THERE'S MORE LOW UNDERBRUSH
THAN IN A NORMAL YEAR AND THAT MEANS THERE'S MORE
FUEL WAITING FOR A SPARK.
ANDERSON WANTS HILLSIDE HOMEOWNERS TO MAKE AN
EFFORT THIS YEAR TO CUT BACK BRUSH WITHIN 50 FEET OF
THEIR HOMES. HE ALSO WARNED AGAINST PILING THAT
REFUSE NEAR THE HOUSES. OTHERWISE...HE SAYS HIS CREWS
ARE IN FOR A BUSY SUMMER. THIS IS KIM CLARK FOR K-560
NEWS.

Notice the altered chronology development of the story. The reporter explains the current situation (at the fire demonstration), then the background (heavy rains, lots of brush), then the controversy/story advance (cut the brush), and then the future (busy summer).

EXERCISE 8-A

Writing Lead-ins and Voicers

Write a :10 lead-in and a :45 voicer for this situation. Remember what purpose the lead-in serves.

Situation

It is election day and you have a voicer due on a newscast at 11 a.m. It is now 10:30 a.m. and your report is supposed to tell the story of the early hours of election day.

All morning long, you were at Precinct 19, which is in Lowbrau Elementary School. At that precinct, there was a mix-up about who was supposed to bring the keys to open up the polling place, so instead of opening at 8 a.m., it opened at 9:15, and people who wanted to vote before work were angry.

Usually, Precinct 19 has 250 voters by 10 a.m., but this morning, because of the problem, there were only 13. There are 620 registered voters in Precinct 19.

In the rest of the city, the vote totals are low, according to the registrar, and the overall voter turnout is only expected to total 45 percent for the election. The candidates are running for two city council seats and a school board spot.

THE REMOTE

With the technology now available to receive a clear line from almost anywhere, it's a sure bet that radio reporters will be doing more live remote broadcasts. This might be a simple voicer, a Q-&-A, or a complex two- to three-minute description of a scene including the replay of an actuality.

Doing a remote can be strenuous. After a clear line such as a cell phone is set up, you must wait patiently for the newscasters to come to you, even if the nice quiet situation that you set up is deteriorating into a noisy, crowded group of kibitzers. If you're on the phone, it's a sure bet that someone will want the line.

Here are some suggestions to help on your first few remotes.

1. *Make certain you and the producer agree about what part of the story you will be doing.* Find out what information will be given before and during the lead-in and where you are expected to pick up the report. If this is a round robin, you must know where you pick up from one reporter and toss to another, and what areas these reporters will cover.
2. *Script your report as fully as you can.* Sometimes you'll have to improvise, but if possible, know exactly what you'll be saying. There are too many distractions in the field to wing every remote.
3. *If necessary, use a narrative model.* The altered chronology (lead-in/present/past/controversy/future), the particular-to-general (lead-in/particular case/general trend/developments-future/particular case), and the cause-and-effect models can be useful.
4. *If you will be playing back a bite from an interview you have, be certain that you've recued the tape.* If you've already fed the bite to the studio and the anchors are playing the cart from the studio, give them the roll cue and the approximate time into the piece that the cart will play.
5. *When you finish, stand by for a possible Q-&-A session with the newscaster,* even if that hadn't been discussed in planning. Sudden impulses at the studio might overtake previous plans and the on-air anchors might just need the answer to a question.

A typical remote might go like this:

Anchor:

WE HAVE WORD THE SUPERVISORS JUST VOTED TO END A LIFE-SAVING SERVICE.

REPORTER GUY HAMILTON IS STANDING BY WITH THE STORY. GUY?

Reporter:

ROGER... AT THE MOMENT THE SUPERVISORS ARE TAKING A BREAK. BUT BEFORE THEY LEFT... ABOUT 20-MINUTES AGO... THEY VOTED TO CUT THE FUNDS FOR THE COUNTY'S AMBULANCE SERVICE.

THAT ACTION MIGHT PROVE TO BE A BIT UNPOPULAR...AND THE CROWD HERE WAS AGAINST IT. THE MOVE TO SHUT DOWN THE SERVICE BEGAN FOUR MONTHS AGO...AFTER SOME PRIVATE FIRMS SAID THEY COULD DO AS GOOD A JOB...BUT FOR LESS MONEY. WELL...A COMMITTEE CHECKED OUT THAT CLAIM AND AGREED...RECOMMENDING TO END THE COUNTY'S PARTICIPATION. SUPERVISOR KIM CLARK SAYS IT'S A MATTER OF MONEY.

CART #1 TRT :20

IC: "We have to be...

EC: ...for everyone."

THE CUTOFF BECOMES EFFECTIVE NEXT WEEK. AND THE PRIVATE AMBULANCE OPERATORS SAY THEY'LL BE READY. THIS IS GUY HAMILTON REPORTING LIVE FROM THE COUNTY BUILDING.

EXERCISE 8-B

Remote Practice

This exercise involves finding a story in the field, writing it there, and calling it in.

Your instructor will assign you a meeting or event to cover, whether it is a city council, school board, planning commission, special day for special guests, or whatever. You must do some research, then attend that event to report on what occurred.

At the conclusion of the event, you must write up a remote voicer, :45-1:00, in which you follow the altered chronology model (present/past/ controversy or development/future). You will also suggest a lead-in. If you can't think of one, remember that the first sentence or lead to your story can be turned into a lead-in.

The instructor will set up a time and phone number for you to call, and your story will be put on tape. Before you read it over the phone, you must put an audio billboard (verbal slugline) at the top of each take, plus a countdown. A billboard goes like this:

CITY COUNCIL...YOUR NAME...TAKE NUMBER (one, two...etc.)
COMING IN... THREE...TWO...ONE...

Then, feed the voicer. If you make even one mistake, give another billboard and start immediately.

Your voicer should also have a tag or standard closing on it. The instructor will provide the tag's format and it will probably include your name, your location, and your station.

THE Q-&-A

The Q-&-A is a report that allows the field reporters to add more information based on their knowledge of a particular situation. Within a time framework, you'll be able to expand on story points, give insider perspective, and generally provide the most convincing examples of reporting. There are a few pitfalls, though.

- The anchor should be aware of what the reporter doesn't know about. That will prevent the embarrassing unanswered questions.
- The anchor and reporter should agree on the area for the first question. Sometimes it is scripted, but more often it is ad libbed from a suggested topic.
- The anchor, who is sitting isolated in an announce booth at the station, should be aware of difficult conditions at the reporter's location. If there's a crowd there, and sometimes an unruly one, then the anchor must be cautious about continuing the remote for too long a time.

THE WRAP

A *wrap* (or wraparound) is a field story format that differs from the voicer in that it contains at least one, and usually more, actualities. Sometimes the term *wraparound* is used for any story in which a presenter's voice wraps around an actuality.

Although there are a bewildering variety of models for wraps, the two general models discussed in Chapter 6 can guide you in preparing these. Try either the altered chronology model (lead-in/current situation/past or background/controversy or developments/future) or the particular-to-general model (lead-in/particular case/general trends/development and future/particular case again). The wrap involves a lot of planning for the flow of the narrative. It also involves planning a writeup for each bite and using a number of tracks. It is involved and should be practiced as often as possible.

Scripts for Wraps

A wrap always begins with the lead-in, which is given to the newscaster in the studio. The lead-in page resembles a reader, except that this time the script contains the cart information, the incues, and the endcues. The transcript of the tracks used in the voicers and wraps are seldom included in the newscaster's scripts. Some stations require that a short synopsis or précis is added to the bottom of the lead-in script page. In many stations the scripts for the tracks are kept and filed; other stations keep airchecks (recordings) of the stories.

A script for a wrap is broken into many parts, and usually alternates track, bite, track, and so on. As a new reporter out on your first stories, it's a good idea (if there's time) to project ahead and fashion an idea of the story structure before you cover it. Although the story is bound to change when you get there, this exercise will give you advance warning of what your needs might be. After you have researched the topic and if you have the time, try a simple lead-in, seeing what might attract the audience to this story. Remember, the best angle or peg will probably be the topic that interested you in the story. It must also have some perspective.

Then, write the first track. This will help you determine how to make a smooth transition between what's said by the newscaster in the studio and your piece. Do you want your report to start at the top with the current situation, or should that go in the lead-in and you begin with the background portion?

Next, add the bites you hope to get from interviewees. Make a general sketch about what they will be saying. Then write the tracks that fit between them.

Finally, in the closing track, include a summary and comment on the future.

A caution here: Pre-writing is only an exercise. In the field, a story may be different, have a different angle, or be no story at all.

This script is an example of a short, two-bite wrap.

Lead-in:

MUSEUMS ALWAYS SEEM TO BE SHORT OF FUNDS BUT NOW A LOCAL CENTER HAS SOLVED THAT PROBLEM...AT LEAST FOR THIS YEAR. CARRIE LISH HAS THE STORY.

Track #1:

ROBERT HALL IS THE SUPERVISING DIRECTOR FOR THE BENTON MODERN ART MUSEUM AND HE'S A HAPPY MAN THIS MORNING.

IN FACT...HE WAS BEAMING WHEN REPORTERS SHOWED UP IN HIS OFFICE FOR A MORNING NEWS CONFERENCE. HE SAYS AN ANONYMOUS DONOR GAVE 195-THOUSAND-DOLLARS TO THE MUSEUM...ENOUGH TO RUN THE FACILITY FOR A YEAR. HALL SAYS THAT SOLVES A CRISIS.

Bite #1:

"WE WERE DESPERATE. THIS COULDN'T HAVE COME AT A BETTER TIME. OUR INSURANCE HAS TRIPLED IN THE PAST YEAR AND WE MIGHT HAVE CLOSED. THIS WILL GIVE US SOME BREATHING ROOM."

Track #2:

HALL SAYS THE DONOR WANTS TO REMAIN IN THE BACKGROUND BUT THAT SHE IS A LOCAL MERCHANT.

Bite #2:

"SHE WALKED IN THE OFFICE ONE DAY AND SAID SHE HAD HEARD STORIES ABOUT OUR PROBLEMS. SHE JUST TOOK OUT HER CHECKBOOK AND WROTE OUT A CHECK FOR THE AMOUNT. WE WERE CERTAINLY RELIEVED THAT THE CRISIS WAS OVER."

Track #3:

BUT THE RELIEF WON'T LAST LONG. HALL SAYS THE MUSEUM STAFF HAS TO USE THIS WINDFALL AS A BREATHER SO THAT FUNDRAISING FOR NEXT YEAR CAN BEGIN.

AND THAT...HE SAYS...WILL BEGIN NEXT MONDAY.

AT THE MODERN ART MUSEUM...THIS IS CARRIE LISH FOR K-560 NEWS.

EXERCISE 8-C

Writing the Wrap

Write a :10 lead-in and a 1:20 wrap for this situation.

Situation

You have three actualities on the story about the supervisors approving a new downtown building plan. This is coming up for a final vote but everyone thinks it will pass.

The new plan will allow 24-story buildings in the Rose district of town, which previously had been limited to two-story buildings but is on the fringe of the high-rise district now. One actuality is with Supervisor Rod Stern. Needless to say, all the labor unions and construction-related businesses are for the plan. You have an actuality with architect Anna Chavez-Rinaldo. Neighborhood residents have been fighting the plan, but this is a working-class district and they don't have much clout with city hall. Nor have they raised much money to fight it.

You have a bite with district resident Maria Ramirez. Use the bites in any order you wish. Write the tracks around them. You will need four tracks. The bites you have are as follow:

Supervisor Rod Stern :08

"We must move ahead with building in this city. No district can tie our hands because they don't want development there."

Architect Anna Chavez-Rinaldo :13

"It doesn't mean there will be a flood of 24-story towers built there. There are plenty of restrictions now on the bulk of buildings."

Long-time resident Maria Ramirez :10

"Sure, the supervisors allowed these buildings in our district, and not where they live in Mar Vista Estates. It's just a question of who has the power and who doesn't."

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Remotes, voicers, Q-&As, and wraps are the formats used by radio reporters in the field. Remotes are live, but voicers and wraps use a reporter's recorded narration segment called a track. Wraps, short for wraparound, also use recorded interview segments called actualities.

These different report formats can use the narrative models discussed in Chapter 6.



TV: Writing to Stills

CHAPTER PREVIEW

To work for television news, a journalist must not only be a deft researcher and skilled writer but also have mastered some elements of screen design, documentary video, and the interplay of words and recorded video frames and images.

This chapter deals with the use of still visuals on the television screen. TV news writers often compose and reference static visuals and computer-generated graphics that are added electronically to the visual portion of the newscast. These visuals include maps, titles, data, quotes, illustrations, or topic identifiers and are used so often that understanding their complex makeup is crucial.

GLOSSARY

ANIMATION A series of graphic screen pages played in succession to give the impression of sequential movement.

CG or FONT Refers to computer-generated letters and numbers that either are superimposed over a picture or that make up the entire screen over a colored background. Also called a *title, key, lower-third key, or super*.

COPY BLOCK In a television news script, the right half of the page that contains the words to be read by the newscaster. Quite often, this copy block is very narrow and exists between two lines on the page that show the limits of the teleprompter pickup.

PAGE The entire individual screen of a computer. Each still picture that is called up from a computer or still store with visuals, CGs, or composites is always on a separate page of memory in those machines. Each page is usually identified by its numerical location within the machines. Also called a *screen*.

PRE-PRO Short for pre-production session. This is the time most complicated composite graphics are layered and frozen into the still store.

REVEAL A sequence of CG pages that, when played in succession, gives the impression that lines of copy are being added one at a time.

STILL STORE An electronic memory unit for storing single screens.

TOPIC BOX or BOX Generic identifiers usually placed in a box format to the newscaster's left or right. These usually remain in view throughout the story. Also called *squeezes* or *frames*.

VISUALS AS TOOLS

Writers use words, but television newswriters use words, visuals, videotape, and the combination of words and visuals to tell stories.

Anytime a graphic appears on the screen, it is a disorienting change from the picture already there. Newswriters, although not trained as graphic artists, must assist in the screen design and must be aware of the graphic's duration and placement in a series of visuals. Working with the computer graphics artist will help. More fundamental, however, are the following rules for working with visuals.

1. *Always reference the graphic.* This means that the copy, in some way, should explain the change in visuals. This is vitally important in the switch from the news studio image to a full-screen visual or videotape, or during sequence changes on the videotape.
2. *Let the visuals tell some of the story.* For this, the writer must evaluate the visual in two ways. First, does the visual have such a powerful impact, as in the case of an air crash, that the pictures draw the viewer's attention from the narration? Second, can the visual provide simple story information that will not have to be put in the copy, such as the size of a crowd at a parade? New TV newswriters tend to waste time by describing what the audience can see for themselves and by adding excessive narration to situations in which the visual and the ambient sound provide details the audience can see and hear for themselves.
3. *Explain rather than describe the graphic.* The narration that accompanies the graphic should not describe the television screen but should talk about the situation or events the pictures represent.

Although these three rules are being introduced in this chapter on still visuals, they apply to all visual work, including videotape and computer-generated graphics and animation.

PARTIAL SCREEN GRAPHICS

These are graphics that appear while the newscaster's face remains on the screen. The most common example is the *topic box*, which appears in the corner of the screen. *CGs*, which are numbers or words used for identification and informational purposes, are also common.

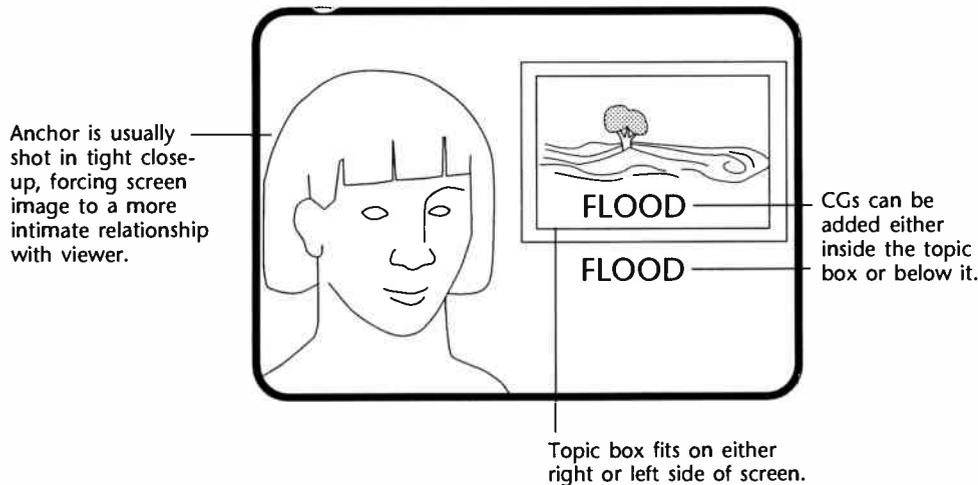


FIGURE 9.1
Partial screen graphics.

Topic Boxes

Topic boxes always have been the subject of intense study. Some researchers say this theme identifier in the corner of the screen has a powerful effect in the viewer. Improperly considered boxes may leave a wrong impression, no matter what the copy says. For example, if the story is a fire and the topic box incorrectly says “ARSON,” viewers may still think the fire’s cause is arson.

Topic boxes are constructed and inserted in many ways. Older systems used slides and cameracards that were kept in files. These were placed into the system live when the need arose. But these older systems had a big drawback—you generally were stuck with using last week’s artwork.

Most all systems now use digital still store and computer-generated graphics techniques to compose topic boxes. Pre-production sessions can tie CG titles to theme pictures already in an electronic slide file. This allows great flexibility in changing or updating the topic boxes. These boxes are then compressed and keyed over the anchor’s picture, or the boxes appear on monitors placed behind the anchor.

An example might be the story of a clash along the Serbian border. When the artist and the writer agree on the content, the pre-pro producer gets the assignment. A map of the area is called up and frozen on the screen. The words “BORDER CLASH” are generated in the CG, and then keyed over the map. The composite graphic is then saved on a still store page. Later, in the newscast, the director calls for the page to be placed in the screen corner by using a pre-set effect.

Changes in the topic box can be used to add information as the story progresses. In Figure 9.2 on the next page, the changes are made to reference different ideas and visuals. Caution: this example is condensed to illustrate this point. A producer or writer would not call for so many changes within a single story.

SAN DIEGO RESIDENTS THIS SUMMER WILL HAVE SOME NEW PLACES TO SPEND A LAZY AFTERNOON.

THE STATE PARKS SERVICE WILL REBUILD THE ENCINITAS BEACH FISHING PIER... DAMAGED LAST WINTER DURING HIGH TIDES AND STORMS.

THE PIER HAS BEEN CLOSED FOR SIX MONTHS.

THE PARKS AGENCY WILL ALSO FINISH UP TWO BACK COUNTRY HIKING AREAS NEAR FISHBECK LAKE. EACH HAS 200 CAMPSITES AND BOAT LAUNCHING FACILITIES.

THESE AREAS SHOULD BE READY BY JUNE FIRST.

FOR RESERVATIONS... CALL THE PARK SERVICE AT 898-2227... THAT'S 8-9-8-2-2-2-7.

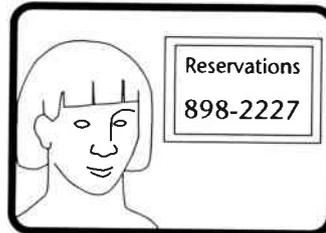
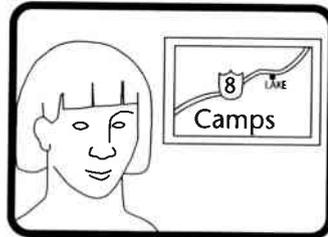
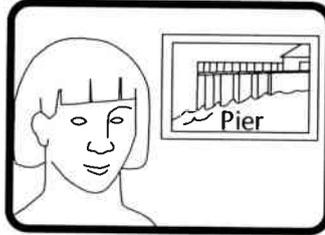
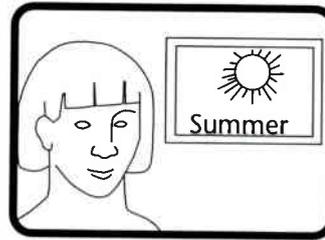


FIGURE 9.2
Changes in the topic box.

Don't rely too heavily on an unrealistic number of graphics. The artists and directors who do the pre-production composite work may not have enough time to prepare everything you're counting on. In such a case, you would have to drop the topic boxes at the last minute, and possibly rewrite of the story. Know the production realities of your station. Always ask the producer or editor what other graphics are being planned for this newscast. It may save you a lot of trouble later.

Partial CGs

Lower-third or corner CGs are electrically generated numbers and words that are superimposed over the studio picture or videotape to add information.

Lower-third CGs are used for names and titles, and often for phone numbers that provide the audience with a means to contact some person or agency in the news story.

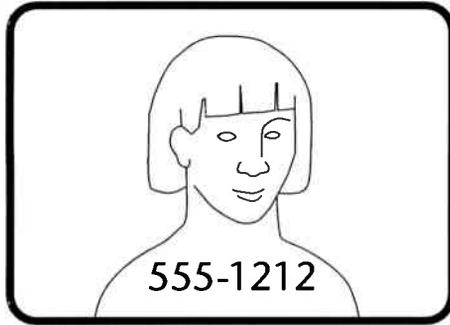


FIGURE 9.3
Lower-third CG.

TIP: If you plan to provide phone numbers late in a story, attempt to alert your audience to this fact somewhere near the top. This will allow anyone who wants to write down the number to grab a pencil and copy it. Otherwise, these phone numbers go by so fast they are ineffective.

Corner CGs are most often used in tease situations. They focus the audience's attention on interesting angles within the story. Teases often act as agendas for the newscast and can help the audience remember the material.

If you have the time, you should design the screen first, then write the story. That way, you can concentrate on the screen as a visual display, and adjust your written copy to fit it. Sometimes, under deadline, when the information in the tease is changing, the screen is designed and rewritten several times.

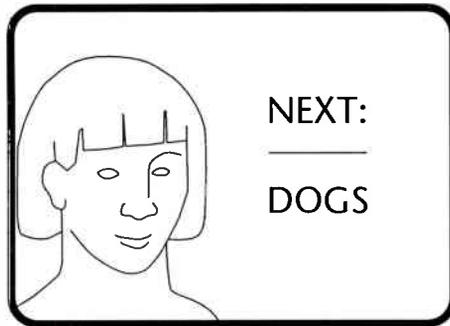
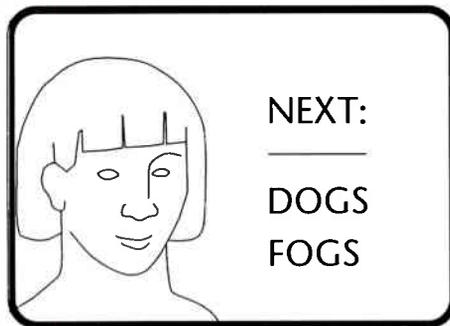


FIGURE 9.4
Demonstration of corner CGs.



How Long Should the CG Be On?

This has a lot to do with the complexity of the screen, the narration, and how the CG fits into the flow of other graphics.

A screen with words and numbers should be on long enough to read it aloud twice. That's the minimum. There is no set maximum, but you certainly don't want to leave something on the screen beyond the time that your narration has switched to another angle or topic.

FULL-SCREEN VISUALS

A full-screen visual is any visual that completely takes over the screen, causing the picture of the newscaster to disappear. This is a radical dislocation of the viewer's visual attention and requires care in use. A full screen visual can be used in four ways:

- as a CG to display facts
- as a pre-produced composite with a videotape freeze-frame to display a quote
- as a graphic composed by an artist for illustration
- as a freeze-frame or still photograph

Using a CG to Display Facts

Generally, for this, a full-screen graphic with words and numbers to support the copy is used. It may be all electronically generated or a composite with the words and numbers placed over a graphic. Although a news artist may complete the graphic design, it is the writer who must select what information goes on the screen.

Here are some rules to help you design screens:

- Use no more than five horizontal lines of copy. Otherwise, it gets too crowded and hard to read.
- Try to limit the letter count across the screen to 15. This will allow for a typeface that is large enough to read easily.
- A screen should be able to stand alone. It should have a title that is concise but understandable. Sometimes it takes a great deal of effort to devise a good title.
- Know the capabilities of the computer graphics machines. Most can place bands of different colored backgrounds in the screen. Quite often, it helps to use one color background with the title and one with the information. It is also simple to color the letters, but you want to avoid too many colors in the makeup.

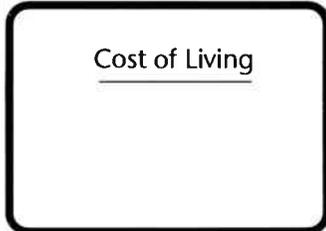
The process of building a screen is simple.

Start with a blank screen. Always draw this, because it allows you to sketch the idea.

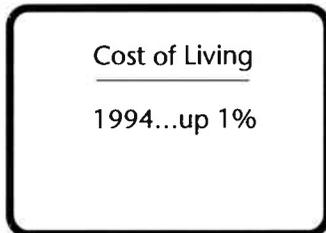


FIGURE 9.5
Building CGs.

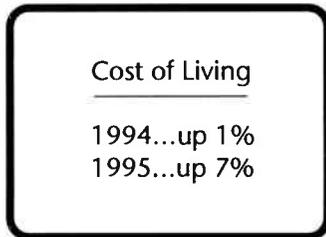
First step is to add a title. The title should stand out and should make sense if read on the screen without the anchor's story.



Next, you add the first line of information. Remember, try to keep the count down to 15 numbers or letters across the screen.



Finally, you add the continuing line or lines. Five lines is usually the maximum on a screen.



Indicating CG Position in the Script It is very important to make the script reflect exactly where you want the full CG to go. Although newsroom styles differ, it is also beneficial to write the information into the news copy block, giving the anchor a chance to understand where the audience's attention lies. Here's an example of a script with the graphic:

<p>_____O/C</p>	<p>REPUBLICAN MARVIN FOOTE SCORED AN UPSET VICTORY IN SAN MATEO'S 16TH DISTRICT ELECTION YESTERDAY.</p>
<p>FULL CG</p> <div style="border: 2px solid black; border-radius: 10px; padding: 10px; width: fit-content; margin: 10px auto;"> <p style="text-align: center;">16th District</p> <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 0 auto;"/> <p style="text-align: center;">Foote (R) 12,345 Bahr (D) 6,215</p> </div>	<p>(full CG)</p> <p>DEMOCRAT BILL BAHR TRAILED FROM THE START...AND WHEN THE FINAL RESULTS WERE IN... BAHR WAS SO FAR BEHIND THAT POLITICAL OBSERVERS ARE CALLING IT A LANDSLIDE.</p>
<p>_____O/C</p>	<p>(live)</p> <p>FOOTE'S VICTORY IS THE FIRST IN 30-YEARS FOR A REPUBLICAN IN THE TRI-CITIES AREA.</p>

FIGURE 9.6
Using a full CG to complement a script.

At the time that the midsection of the story was read, the full CG was on the screen. Notice how the director and anchor both get clear information about where the CG goes. Also notice that the CG supports the facts and is complementary, rather than being a literal copy of the words read on the screen.



EXERCISE 9-A

Full-Screen Graphics

For this exercise, design a graphic or graphics to present the data given in the situation. Then write a story complete with the correct instructions indicating where the graphic or graphics should go.

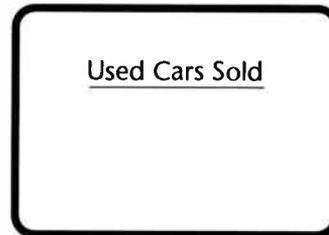
Situation

The federal government's Office of Economic Statistics in the Department of Commerce has just released a report showing the nation's wholesale rate is up .21 percent, although factory machine orders are down.

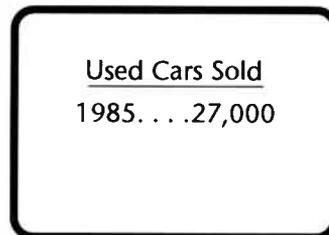
The report also lists the inflationary price boosts for different areas of the country, including the Northeast. In the Steeltown Metropolitan area, inflation last month went up 1.2 percent. The price of all foods was up 2 percent, the price of gasoline up 4 cents a gallon to \$1.05, and the price of most new clothing was up 3 percent.

The Reveal The *reveal* is a very effective use of successive full-screen CGs. In this case, you design a foundation or base page and then progressive additions that, when played in succession, make it seem that you are revealing information a line at a time.

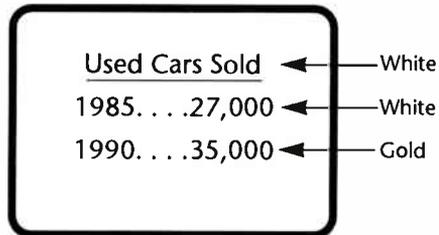
Screen 1 (page 1) of the reveal has the title. It could even start with the title and the first line of information.



Screen 2 (page 2) has the first line. When these are 'hot-changed' on the air, it will appear as if the 1985 line suddenly appears.



Screen 3 (page 3) continues adding lines of information. This could also be highlighted by moving a colored band down along the important information, or changing the colors of the letters.



Screen 4 (page 4) is the last reveal page. By this time, the audience has had a chance to compare the information.

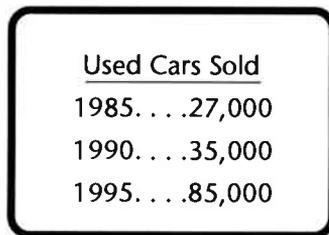


FIGURE 9.7
Building a reveal.

Using a Pre-produced Composite to Display a Quote

The combination of a freeze-frame from video and a character-generated quote fragment can have a strong effect on the viewer. Such a composite is usually made up in a pre-production session and recorded either in a single page still store or as a visual freeze-frame on rolling videotape.

The standard composite is the newsmaker's head in a freeze-frame compressed into a smaller window with a CG identifier and the words from the quote.

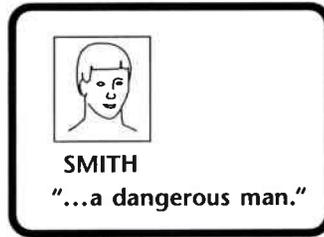


FIGURE 9.8
Various composite problems.

Sometimes the artist may suggest putting both faces on the screen. This makes it difficult for the viewer to determine who is saying what about whom.



It is also important that this composite be inserted and taken out at exactly the proper moments in the story narrative. If the writer fails to mark the script clearly, and the director fails to intuitively figure out where it goes, then the effect will be to muddy, rather than make clear, your story.

EXERCISE 9-B

A Composite for a Quote

For this exercise, design a composite picture and quote fragment to go with the story. You should be careful to make the design clear and to position the composite within the story so it has an effect. Also write the story (:30), complete with the correct instructions to the director.

Situation

School board president Randolph Erlich has been trying to get rid of a superintendent who is a constant critic of Erlich's management style. Now it looks as though Erlich has a cause and today announced that superintendent Roland Mowers will be investigated on allegations of "inappropriate conduct" towards minor schoolchildren.

Board President Erlich said that the conduct had to do with criminal child abuse charges and that he wouldn't say anything more. He said the district attorney's office is investigating.

Mowers is on vacation in the Bahamas and was unable to be reached for comment.

You check, and your videotape library has good shots of each of the persons involved.

Using a Full Graphic or Animation for Illustration

Full graphics are most commonly used for diagrams illustrating a process or for maps, and most are electronically produced on computers. In this case, the newswriter should sketch out a design for the artist and then meet with the artist before the story is written. If an animation is planned, the newswriter should suggest how the motion should look and let the artist handle the aesthetics of composition. On occasion, the artist will offer advice about the design, simplifying it or changing its scale, which could affect the words chosen to accompany the graphic.

Simplicity is a key. Reduce the information in the graphic as much as possible, using only what is needed for the viewer to recognize the graphic quickly. The script instructions for this graphic are the same as for the full CG.

EXERCISE 9-C

Use a Graphic for Illustration

For this exercise, design a map to use in presentation of the data. Use only as much information on the map as is needed. Then write a story (:30) with the correct instructions indicating where the map should go.

Situation

Hurricane Danny is heading for the East Coast of the United States. It's considered a dangerous hurricane, and the winds are now 120 miles per hour. It is 300 miles off the Florida coast, is due east of Cuba, and is moving at 15 miles per hour along a projected path that will take it over land somewhere in Florida. Two scenarios for landfall are predicted, depending on how the steering winds change. It could either hit well north of Miami or just south, in the same place where Hurricane Andrew struck in 1992, causing billions of dollars worth of damage.

You can make up maps, or use the computer animation from the weather bureau. It is a series of four satellite maps showing the hurricane's location up to the present spot.

Using a Still Photo or Freeze-Frame

Using a still photo or freeze-frame requires no additional skills. In either case, the writer should study the picture to evaluate what the viewer will get out of it. The picture tells part of the story. If someone in the picture is smiling, it is unnecessary for the writer to mention smiling. In this case, rule 3, given at the beginning of this chapter, is very important: Explain rather than describe the graphic.

Another consideration will be the placement of the picture. Quite often, producers like the picture at the top of the story. Again, this will require the writer to think like a viewer: What needs immediate explanation? How long should the picture be there? Trial and error usually is the path to solving these questions.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Switching from the straight-on shot of the anchor to a partial or full-screen visual is disorienting for the viewer. Therefore, the writer must reference the visual, let the visual tell some of the story, and explain rather than describe what's on the screen.

There are both partial visuals, inserted beside, below, or across the newscaster, and full-screen visuals, which replace the picture of the newscaster. There is also a composite visual that combines a freeze-frame of videotape with a CG quote that adds effect to the narrative, animation, and freeze-frames.

Designing screens should be a collaborative effort with the news artist. The newswriter must direct what editorial material should be on the screen and in what order it should go, and the artist will carry out the design.



TV: Writing the VO

CHAPTER PREVIEW

The *VO* or *voice over* story is heavily used in broadcast news and is a common writer's assignment in television. In the VO, the anchor reads the copy from the studio and videotape is used for a portion of the story visuals. The writer must be aware of the sequence and continuity of videotape images and of how to relate these images to the story in the most effective manner.

GLOSSARY

B-ROLL A term for additional pictures, used for illustration and explanation, which are not on the same tape as the principal audio narration or interview.

CLOSEUP (CU) An intimate camera shot, it usually encloses the face with some room between the image and the frame's border. An *extreme close up* (ECU) will cut off the hairline and the chin and is used for emotional moments; however, it is an uncomfortable shot and should be used sparingly, if at all.

CONTINUITY The orderly flow of images for any location, action, or time period in a videotape sequence.

COVER (in picture stories) A collection of video that supports a certain amount of narration in a story. It can be used as a noun (Do we have enough cover?) or a verb (Cover that part of the narration.).

COVER (in the introduction to an SOT) Routine production shots of an interviewee doing non-specific daily tasks such as answering phones, walking down hallways, etc.

DONUT Slang term for video used in a live shot. This can be either tracked or in the VO/SOT/VO format.

ESTABLISHING SHOT (ES) First visual in a sequence. It orients the viewers to a new location or theme. In the past, it was usually only a wide shot (WS), but now any shot—wide shot, medium shot (MS), or close-up (CU)—will do if it offers immediate identification for the upcoming sequence.

GENERIC VISUALS More specific to a particular story text than wallpaper video and less specific to the text than B-roll, these illustrate the story but are not necessarily tied to the specific current event. An example would be shots of

aspirin bottles for a story on dangers of aspirin. File tape also can be an example of generic visuals. Although valuable at times, generic visuals are often overused.

JUMP CUT A sudden visual jerk in the image at the edit point of two shots that have very similar but not identical pictures. An example would be the joining of two closeups of the same person when each has the face in different portions of the frame. A jump cut could also occur if the person was wearing glasses in one shot but not the other. Two medium shots of the same subject might jump if taken from the same spot.

POINT OF VIEW SHOTS (POV) A camera angle in which the lens appears to be an eye of a person watching the action. An example would be shots out the front window of a car during a sequence picturing someone driving a car. As with the reaction shot, inserting a POV shot in a sequence allows other cuts to take place that might have been awkward.

REACTION SHOTS Close-ups (CUs) or medium shots (MSs) of people or crowds who are spectators to an event in question. Inserting a reaction shot allows the editor to compress the action, change point of view, or to join two shots that otherwise would have been a jump cut.

SEQUENCE A series of videotape shots that tells the story of a single action, event, or time period. The sequence usually intercuts different focal length shots, such as close-ups (CUs), medium shots (MSs), and wide shots (WSs), to achieve variety.

VO or VOICE OVER A television news story format that uses a studio newscaster for picture and audio but inserts videotape for visuals during a portion of the story.

WALLPAPER VIDEO Use of random, unconnected shots out of sequence—shots that have only a remote connection to the story—as cover for studio VO or a reporter's narration. Wallpaper is generally the lowest form of video and is sometimes referred to as “spray painting” to cover the story.

THE VO

If you've already practiced conversational writing, careful journalistic editing, and the use of still visuals, then you are ready for the next step: mastering the complex interrelationships of the visual medium. Former NBC News president Reuven Frank always stressed that television news was photojournalism and that reporters and writers needed to know how to use moving visuals. The least complex text against video relationship is the VO.

The *VO* or *voice over story* is a television workhorse, one of the four basic formats (reader, VO, VO/SOT, and package). It is generally a brief story, ranging from :20 to :45 of total story time. In some commercial local newscasts, used alone or in combinations called *wraps*, it might account for up to 10 of the stories in a single newscast.

The Twin Tower Concept

The writer must think of the VO as a dual story. Veteran television reporter and newswriter Bill Rukeyser used to teach interns and junior writers about the VO

by having them imagine it as two towers constructed at the same time, one the narration from the studio and the other the picture story that runs opposite it. Although the edited videotape is inserted over the newscaster's picture during the newscast, both the narration and the visuals should be able to stand alone. In fact, if it is well written, the narration should be credible even if the videotape doesn't run. In a like manner, the videotape, if shown without the narration, should make some sense and contain many of the elements of the story.

We assume that you are familiar with the special points of writing for spoken news. Now we are introducing you to a new language, the unique grammar of videotape.

Reviewing Rules for Visuals

Three rules for working with visuals were given in Chapter 9. We review them here and then add a fourth.

1. *Always reference the visual.* For the viewer, each screen change from studio visuals to videotape and back is a crucial moment. Although the newscaster's face is familiar, the videotape scenes generally are not. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary that you are talking about what's seen in the tape at the same time as the viewer sees the first frames.
2. *Let the visuals tell some of the story.* Look at the videotape without any narration. It should be telling a story and passing along information. You don't need to say the traffic was heavy if the viewer can see the street was busy.

On the same note, there might be a point of effective ambient, or natural, sound where you can write a "(pause)" notation into the copy block. In this case, your video with its synch SOT brought up should be enough to convey the meaning without any narration at all. You, the writer, must judge how long to pause. If needed, you can add the time to the notation (pause :03), or you can go over the script with the newscaster and allow him or her to set the correct duration of the pause.

3. *Explain rather than describe the visual.* The rule is to talk about but not to describe exactly what the viewers are seeing. For a story on a barn, don't say it is red, because they can see that; instead, mention its history, that it was used as a dairy, and so on. Avoid the phrase "as you see here."
4. *Watch out for sensationalism.* Sensationalism means different things to different people. It can be defined, however, as the use of visuals to thrill and amaze your audience. When you are working with any photojournalism, including VOs, it is easy to pick out a sensational moment and highlight that, giving your viewers a misleading impression about events that day.

An example might occur during the coverage of a parade. For two or three hours, nothing much happens, except for bands, floats, and reax shots of little kids. Then someone throws an empty bottle at one of the floats and a scuffle breaks out as security guards wrestle with the bottle

tosser. Back at the station, your producer gives you :30 total for the story and expects at least :20 of videotape. If you use the bottle thrower, the sequence of shots necessary to explain it will take almost all of the :20. What do you do? If you use it, you might leave the impression that the entire parade was a melee. If you don't, are you ignoring an important or unusual event that did happen so you can portray the parade as peaceful? Discuss this in class.

WHAT KINDS OF SHOTS ARE BEST FOR VO's?

Having some pictures—any pictures—is not necessarily the answer.

Finding the best use of video sequences is the goal. Here are some suggestions for selecting from raw material:

- *Use shots with people rather than empty shots.* More often than not, although broadcast stories generally are about people, you have to show buildings, laboratories, offices, parking lots, parks, and so on. In these cases, it is better to have people in them than a deserted landscape.
- *Use action rather than still shots.* In most cases, and where it doesn't distort the summary of a story, shots with action are preferable to shots without action. If you are showing the front of a company's building, choose a shot with people going in and out the front door rather than the same shot with people standing still. This rule applies only when the selection of the shot does not alter the impression a viewer may get about the amount of activity during an event.
- *Use closeups rather than wide shots.* The television screen is small and people often sit a great distance from it. It is very hard to see tiny detail. Select closeup shots when possible.
- *Use simple rather than complex shots.* It's much easier to write stories about shots that focus on one or two items, rather than those jammed with information. Look for unified themes in shots.
- *Use shots with restrained camera movement.* Camera movement is the use of *pans* (side-to-side), *zooms* (in-and-out), *tilts* (up-and-down), *racking focus* (going in and out of focus), and *walking shots*. Although a little camera movement is okay at times, a sequence where five out of six shots have camera movement is generally overdone and intrusive to the topic the story is attempting to report.
- *Use shots with ambient sound.* Sound is integral to every moment of life. The sounds aid our learning process. Running silent video cheats the viewers of the ambience that helps us gather information from the videotape.
- *Use shots that avoid generic visuals.* Generic visuals refer to videotape not shot for this story but that relates to the story in a general and timeless way. Quite often file tape is used generically and, in many cases, file tape requires extra explanation to orient the viewers to what they are seeing.

VISUAL SEQUENCES

When you are planning a VO, you have to write it around the video sequences that make up the visual summary of the event. A sequence is a series of related and varied shots that tells the story of a single event, location, or time period. In some circumstances, a sequence may be a single :20 shot with a lot of action or five carefully selected shots that last :10. Even VO stories with a tape TRT (total running time) of :20 might have three sequences within that short time period.

Sequences are the backbone of visual presentation and anyone wishing to do television news work should train in the sequences' hierarchy.

The least effective video is called *wallpaper*, which uses random, non-related, but thematically similar shots. Also ineffective is using a strong sequence that tells a different story than the narration opposite the video.

Next up the pyramid is the use of generic video, random shots related to this individual item but timeless. An example might be pictures of soda cans if there is a scare about contamination in soda cans.

More powerful is the narration-backed sequence, in which coordinated video sequence shots (WSs, MSs, CUs) are supported by the narration.

The strongest possible video is a NAT SOT sequence that completes the story without narration. At this point in the VO, the narration would stop and the tape sound would carry the story.

What Are the Rules for Sequences?

As you can see, sequences are the most sought after field visuals. These sequences are usually constructed from shots collected for that purpose. There are certain rules worth remembering when editing sequence shots.

1. *Begin with the best establishing shot (ES) you can find.* Most broadcast news sequences are short, about three or four shots, and go by quickly. For that reason, choose your best video for your sequence opener. This shot should either give perspective or should immediately identify the topic for viewers. Relationship shots, in which the shooter has placed two major elements of the story (for example, the trainer and the new seeing eye dogs, the new development and the unused lot ready for expansion, and so on) are excellent as establishing shots.
2. *Maintain continuity.* Most viewers can sense when your shots are out of chronological order. If the story is about an event, it is easy to follow the passage of time. The protesters gathered, they conferred, they marched toward the police, the police watched, the protesters pushed the police, the police pushed back, the protesters retreated. If the shots were out of order, the story would lack continuity. There are some major continuities to watch for:

Location. The site where the particular even takes place. If a demonstration happened in three locations—in a park, on a downtown street, and in front of city hall—then shots for each must be separate from the others.

Time. If a candidate comes to town, then your visual story, if it isn't taking a special angle, should follow the schedule. Start with the arrival at the airport, then the motorcade, the city hall greeting, the meetings with party workers, the fund-raising dinner, and finally, the return to the airport.

Action. If you are telling the story of a price rise for frozen orange juice and you are using pictures from the processing plant, then the shots should be arranged in the order the processing takes place. The oranges arrive by truck, are dumped onto a belt, are sized, sliced, squeezed, and the juice flows down plastic pipes, and so on.

3. *Alternate WSs, MSs, and CUs to provide variety.* These shots show the placement of the camera. Not only should you alternate the wide, medium, and close-up field of view, but you should also alternate angles and camera heights, using shots from different perspectives to complete a sequence. Reaction shots, showing those who are watching, are a must!
4. *Vary shot length.* A sequence that is a series of still :03 shots becomes very predictable. An exciting event can be made dull by predictable shots.
5. *Insert reaction and point-of-view shots to help condense sequences.* A reaction shot is a CU of a face in the crowd, such as a concerned parent watching the rescue of a child. After three shots of someone at a podium, a *POV* (point-of-view) shot reverses the direction to let the audience sample what the speaker is seeing. These shots are vital to editing. Be certain that the shooter provides these shots.

STEPS TO THE VO STORY

In the best of all worlds, untouched by deadline pressure or videotape editing availability, there is a suggested order for writing a VO, outlined in the following sections.

Research Story Elements

First, determine from the research what will be important in the story. Establish this as if there weren't going to be any visuals. Be ready to change if your supporting visuals dictate a change.

Design the Story

Second, consult with the producer about the TST (total story time) and placement of the videotape within your story. Since the total story times of VOs may run up to 1:00, it is important to see what the newscast producer has planned for the length of the story.

Both the total story time and placement of the videotape within the VO will force changes in the story design. There are several different video placements. Most VOs begin and end with at least :05 in the studio, with the video inserted in the story's midsection. Other VOs begin in the studio and end in

video. But the most difficult format to write, called *video off the top*, is the story that opens with video. In this setup, it's hard to make immediate reference to the video and still begin the story. Don't choose to use this format unless the producer requests it—video off the top requires planning the position of the story in the newscast.

In the story that follows, the word *buildings* begins the immediate reference for a VO off the top placement.

VO AT TOP (vo starts at top)

A FEW BUILDINGS ARE ALL
THAT'S LEFT IN GRIMALDI...
SARDINIA...AFTER A MAJOR
EARTHQUAKE STRUCK THE
FARMING CENTER YESTERDAY.

CLEANUP CREWS ARE STILL
HUNTING THROUGH FALLEN
OFFICE BUILDINGS AND STORES.

AT ONE TIME...IT WAS FEARED
THE DEATH TOLL WOULD REACH
45...BUT NOW ONLY SEVEN ARE
CONFIRMED DEAD.

_____O/C (live)

OFFICIALS SAY MOST OF THE
BUILDINGS FELL IN A PART OF TOWN
BUILT OVER AN OLD LAKE BED.

(more/more/more)

In the next example, the same story information is used but the only pictures available are of the hospital. Therefore, because video forces the writer's hand, the story must be redesigned. This is a VO in the normal position, beginning and ending in the studio. You'll have to use the video in the portion where you mention the injured.

_____O/C (live)
A FEW BUILDINGS ARE ALL
THAT'S LEFT IN GRIMALDI...
SARDINIA...AFTER A MAJOR
EARTHQUAKE HIT THE FARM
CENTER ON MONDAY.
RESCUE CREWS ARE STILL
SEARCHING THROUGH FALLEN
BUILDINGS AND STORES.

VIDEO VO (vo)
DOCTORS AT NEARBY MELEANIA
HOSPITAL SAY THE DEATH TOLL IS
NOW SEVEN.
TODAY OFFICIALS APPEALED FOR
MEDICINES AND BANDAGES...
SAYING THE SUPPLY AT THE
TOWN'S
TRT :10 SMALL HOSPITAL IS RUNNING OUT.

_____O/C (live)
INTERNATIONAL RELIEF SUPPLIES
HAVEN'T REACHED THE DISASTER
AREA YET...BECAUSE THE QUAKE
DESTROYED TOO MANY ROADS
AND BRIDGES.

All of this reinforces our old rule: The VO forces the design. The VO has much the same power as an interview bite: it can dramatically alter both the lead angle and the flow of the narrative. When writing a VO, a newswriter must design the story after considering how the VO is placed and how it carries the information.

In the following figure, you can see two examples of the same VO story, but with different videotape, again showing how the writer must consider what pictures are available. Try and guess what the video is in each example.

<p>____O/C A LOCAL CITY LANDMARK WILL FALL VICTIM TO PROGRESS NEXT WEEK.</p> <p>____VO (vo) THE LEESBURG CITY COUNCIL VOTED TONIGHT TO KNOCK DOWN THE OLD ROGERS DAIRY BARN AT ELKIN AND WHYNER ROADS. THE COUNCIL PLANS TO USE THE PROPERTY FOR SENIOR CITIZENS HOUSING.</p> <p>____O/C (live) THE BARN IS OVER 100-YEARS- OLD. IT WILL BE DEMOLISHED NEXT WEEK. (# # #)</p>	<p>____O/C THE LEESBURG CITY COUNCIL VOTED TONIGHT TO ALLOW THE DEMOLITION OF AN HISTORIC BARN THAT HAS BEEN A LANDMARK FOR MORE THAN 100 YEARS.</p> <p>____VO (vo) THE OLD STRUCTURE IS ON THE CORNER OF ELKIN AND WHYNER. IT IS ON LAND PLANNED FOR A NEW SENIOR CITIZENS COMPLEX.</p> <p>____O/C (live) DEMOLITION SHOULD BEGIN NEXT WEEK. (# # #)</p>
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FIGURE 10.1
Two examples of the same VO story, but with different videotape. Which uses the video of the council and which uses the video of the barn?

Review the Videotape

The third step in writing a VO is to review the videotape.

Here the production paths diverge, depending on whether you are using an already edited videotape or a raw field tape.

An already edited videotape might be from the file library, off the network, or from a longer package. You might be lucky and find a well-edited one, and that the sequences are the ones you need; or you may find that needs a slightly different angle, or needs shots that aren't there. In any case, you'll have to write

exactly to the length of the shots, something we'll practice later in this chapter. If you are using raw field tape, which is uncut, you'll have to be looking for complete sequences and to evaluate omissions. Log the tape and mentally group shots you think will make a sequence within the story, then make a decision on the TRT of the videotape (it generally is :15 to :20) and give the editor a detailed shot sheet with shot order and times on it.

This is difficult for the new television newswriter. What do you pick? Experience helps. A good shooter may give you 20 minutes of good B-roll and ambient sound tape, and you have to pick :20, even before you see it edited.

When you start this process, it is important that you have an idea of what types of pictures you will want. If it's an event you've seen before, you might have a very clear idea of what to expect. Most important, you should look for sequences that fit together.

Write the Story

The fourth step in preparing a VO is to write the story. Now, you've got two main concerns. To begin with, you must arrange your information so that you reference the video at the point where the tape is first seen. Also, you must write the news copy to match the exact reading speed of the newscaster, if you hope to have words and pictures match in some places.

Referencing is important because weak or missing referencing will befuddle the audience, killing any hope for comprehension or understanding.

EXERCISE 10-A

Seeking Sequences

In this exercise, write down a list of sequences and a list of shots you would like on the raw field tape. Don't forget to specify WS, MS, or CU. Then write stories for each situation. All stories are expected to be :35 with about :20 of VO in the normal position.

Situation 1

You have a story about large pieces of sculpture being placed in four of Steeltown's parks. These are cast bronze pieces and the children are encouraged to climb on them and play with them. It is part of a program from a group called Art for People. The sculptures will be there for two weeks.

Situation 2

A local entrepreneur has started a business that buys groceries for you and delivers them to your home. The company has a small office and warehouse next door to a major supermarket down at the Mar Vista Estates Shopping Center. Orders are taken over the phone, filled in the warehouse, and then driven by van to your door.

Situation 3

A local company has announced a new electric van for intercity commercial use. This has a revolutionary battery in it. They presented the van today at a news conference and allowed reporters to drive it.

Situation 4

Protestors say the federal government is not providing enough money for HIV and AIDS research. The demonstrators have chained themselves to the front doors down at the federal offices at the post office.

Referencing matches words and pictures. One key is identifying the first visuals, even if done in an off-handed manner. Both of these next stories use the same visuals of a city council meeting but the one on the left has very weak referencing of first words.

FIGURE 10.2
Two examples of VOs. Left, VO with poor referencing; Right, VO with better referencing.

<p>___O/C THE LEESBURG CITY COUNCIL VOTED TONIGHT TO ALLOW THE DEMOLITION OF AN HISTORIC BARN THAT HAS BEEN A LANDMARK FOR MORE THAN 100 YEARS.</p> <p>___V/O (vo) THE OLD STRUCTURE IS ON THE CORNER OF ELKIN AND WHYNER. IT IS ON LAND PLANNED FOR A NEW SENIOR CITIZENS COMPLEX.</p> <p>___O/C (live) DEMOLITION SHOULD BEGIN NEXT WEEK.</p> <p>(# # #)</p>	<p>___O/C A LOCAL CITY LANDMARK WILL FALL VICTIM TO PROGRESS NEXT WEEK.</p> <p>___V/O (vo) THE LEESBURG CITY COUNCIL VOTED TONIGHT TO KNOCK DOWN THE OLD ROGERS DAIRY BARN AT ELKIN AND WHYNER ROADS.</p> <p>THE COUNCIL PLANS TO USE THE PROPERTY FOR SENIOR CITIZENS HOUSING.</p> <p>___O/C (live) THE BARN IS OVER 100-YEARS-OLD. IT WILL BE DEMOLISHED NEXT WEEK.</p> <p>(# # #)</p>
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LEARNING TO WRITE TO THE TIME OF PICTURES

In certain situations, the writer must compose stories to match the times of edited video. It is hard to do. The longer the VO, the harder it gets.

Say you have an already edited dub of a VO from another source and the shots are too short to rearrange. It describes the meeting of some politicians. If the senator shows up at :08 and the county chairwoman at :12, you'll need to hit those times in your script. Or perhaps you are working on several stories under deadline with no time to recut the VO videotape after you've written the final script. You must adjust your phrasing to hit the right times.

EXERCISE 10-B

Writing to Times

Here's an example of the shot list the videotape editor used to cut the VO:

00:00-00:03 Shot of pandas arriving in truck
00:03-00:08 Reaction shot of kids watching
00:08-00:14 Zoo workers lift cage down and open it
00:14-00:20 Zookeepers scratch pandas on head

The following is a simple :30 VO; it begins and ends in the studio, with :20 of tape in the normal placement. The script below gives only the VO portion of the script. First, time the VO portion of the script. Determine how much you need to add or remove and rewrite the script.

____VO TWO SEMI TRUCKS BROUGHT THE CAGES
WITH THE TINY CARGO. OFFICIALS SAID
THE PRECAUTIONS ARE A SIGN OF HOW
PRECIOUS THESE ANIMALS ARE.
SCHOOLCHILDREN WERE ON HAND TO
WATCH THE ARRIVAL.
THESE ANIMALS NORMALLY LIVE IN THE
FORESTS OF WESTERN CHINA. THE PANDAS
LOOKED OUT OF PLACE IN THE OVERSIZED
SHIPPING CAGES.
BUT AFTER A FEW MINUTES...IT WAS
OBVIOUS THE ZOOKEEPERS WERE GOOD
AT CALMING THE TRAVELERS

EXERCISE 10-C

More Writing to Times

As in the previous exercise, please adjust this script to make the time hit the references you think are needed. Again, you are using only the VO portion of the script.

This is the videotape rundown that went to the tape editor:

- :04 WS of police watching demonstrators
- :05 MS of demonstrators advancing up the capitol steps
- :02 CU police put handcuffs on one demonstrator
- :06 MS police take pictures of arrestees and put them in van
- :05 WS line of police chases crowd down street

_____ VO (vo)

DEMONSTRATORS MET AT THE DOWNTOWN PLAZA PARK AT NOON BEFORE THEY CONFRONTED POLICE ACROSS THE STREET.

THE PROTESTORS HAD PRACTICED THEIR MOVES FOR MONTHS... AND SHORTLY BEFORE NOON... THE FIRST WAVE ADVANCED UP THE STEPS TO CALL ATTENTION TO THE BUDGET CUTS.

THEY WERE MET AT THE TOP BY POLICE... WHO PUSHED THE DEMONSTRATORS BACK... BUT THEN THE CROWD SURGED FORWARD AND SOME BEGAN TO LIE ON THE GROUND.

POLICE THEN BEGAN THE ARRESTS. OFFICERS SAY THEY CITED AND RELEASED AT LEAST 70 OF THE DEMONSTRATORS. THE CITATIONS CALL FOR AN APPEARANCE IN MUNICIPAL COURT NEXT THURSDAY IN LINCOLN.

AS THE PROTEST GREW SMALLER... SOME GROUPS BEGAN TO RUN THROUGH DOWNTOWN TRAFFIC. POLICE STAYED CLOSE TO THEM TO DIFFUSE THIS TACTIC.

EXERCISE 10-D

Choosing Shots

In this exercise, you are to make a :35 VO story out of the situation described below. The videotape in this story should run :20. First, review the list of shots, choose the ones you would like used, then suggest the length of each shot and the order in which they'll be placed. Second, you must write the story using those shot lengths. Don't fudge by going back and changing the shot length after you have written the story. Get some practice in adjusting your script length.

Situation

You have a story about large pieces of sculpture being placed in four of Steeltown's parks. These are cast bronze pieces and the children are encouraged to climb on them and play with them. It's part of a program from a group called Art for People. The sculptures will be there for two weeks. The Art for People officials think this will introduce the kids to lifesize sculptures. Most of the works are copies of Rodin's pieces.

Some critics are charging the statues will be vandalized.

You have the following raw tape shot list:

- 00:00-00:10 WS of park with empty playground
- 00:10-00:17 WS of park with some kids in playground
- 00:17-00:25 MS of kids climbing on sculpture
- 00:25-00:35 MS kids climb on standing man sculpture
- 00:35-00:40 CU of kids near head of statue
- 00:40-00:45 CU of kid near arm of statue
- 00:45-00:55 CU of kid—head pops out behind statue
- 00:55-01:05 MS kid pounds a baseball bat on sculpture

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In the first attempts at the VO, it is hard to get everything right. The concept of a side-by-side narration and video story, each standing on its own, is challenging. Writers must also concentrate on writing and referencing to absolute times. However, writers must master the process for the VO because it is one of the most popular of formats used in local television newscasts in this country.



TV: Writing the VO/SOT

CHAPTER PREVIEW

The *VO/SOT*, pronounced “VOH-SOT,” is a combination of the voice over and a soundbite and is a common but difficult-to-write story format that needs practice. The *VO/SOT* must be carefully structured, because it is tightly compressed and allows little time for expansive writing. It is also the story format that is most likely to have mishaps on the air.

GLOSSARY

CUTAWAYS Short (:01 to :03) shots inserted into an interview sequence to draw the point of view away from the single close-up shot. These shots are usually reverse-angle or medium shots and allow a videotape editor to compress an interview during the editing process.

UPCUT An error in transition that happens when the end of the audio currently being played conflicts with the beginning of the audio from the next source. This usually results from an error in timing; however, it forces the director or engineer on the audio board to make a sudden choice about which audio will play. If the upcut is severe, it often results in a situation where one audio portion will not make much sense.

VO/SOT A commonly used story format in television news that combines a studio voice over segment with a soundbite. This can also be expanded to a *VO/SOT/VO* or even a *VO/SOT/VO/SOT/VO*. In some areas, this is called a *VOB* or *voice over bite*.

THE VO/SOT—A DIFFICULT COMBINATION

The composite of a voice over segment (Chapter 10) with a soundbite (Chapter 5) is a heavily used and difficult-to-write format for television news. Often, the *VO/SOT* is extended to include another *VO* segment and is then called a *VO/SOT/VO*.

The difficulties with the *VO/SOT* lie within its nature as a compromise between the *VO*, which can be done well in the studio, and the *SOT* package, which a reporter does accurately with recorded narration and more flexibility.

THE ZOOKEEPERS ARE EXCITED
ABOUT SHEEBAN BUT ANIMAL
HANDLER LILI WASKELL THINKS
SHEEBAN NEEDS MORE SPACE.

@:10___VTR SOT (sot)

....@:10___CG Waskell

TRT :24 EC: "...severe problems.

_____O/C WASKELL'S OPINION IS NOT
SHARED BY EVERYONE. CHIEF
HANDLER LARRY BUFFALO SAYS
THE CAGE IS ADEQUATE.

ZOO PATRONS CAN SEE
SHEEBAN IN THE BIG CATS AREA
STARTING TOMORROW.

DIFFERENT VO/SOT FORMATS

The VO/SOT is versatile in placement of the videotape. As with the VO, it can be rolled off the top. Here's an example. Notice how the left side of the script still includes information about the SOT and when it runs.

_____VO (vo)

A TWO-YEAR-OLD FEMALE
TIGER NAMED SHEEBAN MADE
HER DEBUT AT STEELTOWN ZOO.
SHE'LL BE LIVING WITH SIX
OTHER TIGERS IN THE BIG CAT
GROUP.

THE ZOOKEEPERS ARE EXCITED
ABOUT THE NEW ARRIVAL BUT
ANIMAL HANDLER LILI WASKELL
THINKS SHEEBAN NEEDS A
LARGER CAGE.

@_:10_ VTR SOT (sot)
@_:10__CG Waskell
 TRT :24 EC: "...severe problems."
 _____O/C WASKELL'S OPINION IS NOT
 SHARED BY CHIEF ANIMAL
 HANDLER LARRY BUFFALO. HE
 SAYS SHEEBAN'S CAGE IS THE
 RIGHT SIZE.
 ZOO PATRONS CAN SEE
 SHEEBAN...ETC.

VISUALS IN THE WRITEUP

Because the writeup backs up into the VO, it must now be a visual writeup as well. That requires that we see the zookeeper at exactly the same time you mention her name in the VO. This is usually accomplished by inserting the two-shot cutaway before the soundbite (SOT).

If the writeup is excessively long, in the area of :10, then you'll need to insert a sequence of shots leading up to the SOT. The classic is a close-up (CU) of the interviewee, then the two-shot cutaway, then the SOT. The CU is taken from a part of the interview where the zookeeper's mouth was closed and she was listening to your question, and the two-shot cutaway is shot before or after the interview. In either case, both of these will be in the interview field tape. However, they will be edited to become the second half of the VO. This is the progression of shots for the tiger story.

00:05 MS Tiger prowls cage
 00:03 CU Tiger's face
 00:08 CU of Waskell (not speaking)
 00:03 MS of Waskell and interviewer
 00:14 SOT of Waskell

ENDING WITH A VO OR TAG

If you use the VO/SOT/VO, you can put additional information into the second VO portion. If the same anchor reads the next story, it's quite possible you won't need an on-camera tag.

If the story does not have an additional VO portion, the on-camera tag is always necessary before another story can be read. It's a good place to put information you didn't get a chance to use before the SOT, especially if that mater-

ial is not visual, and it allows the viewer to re-establish contact with the voice that has been reading the VO/SOT before an anchor switch.

Any tag, whether in VO or not, completes the story. The SOT may be incomplete in telling the story and needs some perspective. The tag is also a place to paraphrase other comments from the SOT that bear on the story.

EXERCISE 11-A

Writing a VO/SOT

For this exercise, write a VO/SOT/VO script for the given situation that is :50 TST, including :10 of studio on-camera at the top, and a :05 on-camera tag. In addition, you must select which shots you want put together to make up the VO. You have VO from different sources.

Situation

The state highway department has announced it is going to rip up two miles of the Crosstown Highway for four weeks to repair certain bridges. They are going to divert traffic on another road two miles away. Merchants who own stores on the Crosstown Highway are furious. There will be no access to their businesses. They are hinting at a lawsuit to stop the repair work.

You have :30 of file VO from an accident last November that was caused by a crack in the roadway of Crosstown Highway. Several people were seriously injured. This tape includes

- :06 WS of accident scene
 - :02 CU of Crosstown highway sign
 - :14 MS of a victim on stretcher being put into ambulance
 - :08 MS of tow truck driving off with one of the wrecks
- You also have :30 of new video shot today by your crew.
- :18 WS (3) of traffic on Crosstown Highway
 - :04 MS of exterior of Bob's Garden Supply
 - :04 MS of the Bath Boutique
 - :04 MS of Glidden's Shell Station

You have an interview with Robert Belden, owner of Bob's Garden Supply. Plus, you have these cutaway interview shots:

- :04 Two-shot cutaway of reporter and Gelden
- :08 MS of Gelden only (he's listening to question)
- :04 CU of Gelden (he's listening to question)

And you have the following bite from Belden's interview, which runs :14.

"Closing this road down makes no sense. How are we supposed to make money? With a little planning, they could only shut down one lane. This is the easy way out."

EXERCISE 11-B

Breaking Down a Package to Write a VO/SOT

For this exercise, write a VO/SOT/VO script that is 1:05 TST, including :10 of studio on-camera at the top and a :05 on-camera tag. To do this, you must rework this package script about the donation of a \$35,000 truck to the local county food bank. Remember to consider which video fits with which text.

(Shots of truck pulling up to back of restaurant and workers help load boxes of produce and cans onto the truck.)

Track #1 "The new refrigerated truck made its first rounds today...picking up excess food from 12 restaurants. The truck's driver...Henry Williams... thinks the new storage will help the county's homeless."

Bite #1 "We used to have to get this stuff to storage as soon as possible. Now we can go from source to source without the food spoiling...and this shortens our pickup times."

(Shots of Williams in the cab, driving to warehouse, workers unloading the truck, a forklift, and workers sorting the contents into large blue plastic bins.)

Track #2 "Shortening the pickup time is a big step for Williams. By keeping the truck on the route, he gets the food back to the country food warehouse in the industrial park in one trip. The days' harvest is sorted, repackaged, and sent to the six county soup kitchens. County food bank director Ellen Stephens thinks this will improve the food quality."

Bite #2 "It can't help but taste better because it's fresher. Before the truck...we used to have to store it overnight and send it out the next day. Now it gets in and out in one day."

(Shots of the truck pulling up and a worker using a hand dolly to roll boxes off the truck.)

Track #3 "Workers at the Rogers Relief Fund kitchen think that the quick turnaround is wonderful. As they unloaded today's supplies...they praised the fundraising efforts to get the truck."

Bite #3 "It took a lot of work. The people behind this idea spent days and weeks hitting up people for help."

(Shots of the food line at the soup kitchen.)

(continued)

Track #4 “And those days paid off when the Freminger Bolt Company donated the last ten thousand dollars needed to get the truck. That was last month...and who was on the line at Rogers today serving up food... Freminger’s president Bill Frannich.”

Bite #4 “We’re only happy we can help out. We know how tough it is in these times...and this is our contribution to the county.”

(Shots of truck pulling away from loading dock and then on the road.)

Track #5 “Truck driver Henry Williams was delighted as he made his last dropoff about 5 P.M. and then took the new truck back to the garage. It’ll be in use five days each week for the next four months...and then the food bank directors will see if they want to raise money for a second one. This is Ben Briley reporting.”

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The VO/SOT is a commonly used television news format. It requires joining a VO story and a soundbite within a tightly compressed framework. It can be expanded to include another VO segment after the bite. Writers composing a VO story should be careful of video placement within the VO portion and the video reference necessary in the writeup.

12

TV: Short Packages, Live Shots, and Long Packages

CHAPTER PREVIEW

For years, the field videotape package has been the backbone of television news. Reporters had to know how to plan for these, assemble them, and work in a range of package types: the breaking stories, the backgrounders, the features, or the *mini-docs*.

Now technology has made life a bit more complex. The ease of setting up live shots, whether on local microwave or by satellite, has compounded the life of the reporter. News managers love to have reporters standing in the street, doing live intros, even hours after events are over. So those getting reporters' jobs now must not only know packages but also be extremely competent on live shots with a video insert, either tracked or a VO/SOT/VO or combination.

There is nothing mysterious about either the package or the live shot. Reporters assemble various combinations of interviews, natural sound sequences, *standup bridges* and *closers*, and their own narration tracks into these formats. This chapter highlights the most common ones: hard news, backgrounders, features, live shot *donuts* (the interior tracked video of the live shot), and the longer reports, such as cover stories, mini-docs, series pieces, and investigative work.

While both the altered chronology model and the particular-to-general model are useful to reporters in planning packages, the best packages require careful planning and optimum use of video. There is a need to identify good natural sound sequences and to study various uses of reporter involvement and reporter standups.

GLOSSARY

BRIDGE A very short (usually under :10) transition used in television news packages. It can be a tracked portion or an on-camera standup.

CLOSER The reporter's final segment of a package. It might be a track, a standup, or a combination of track and standup.

CUE An agreed upon action, word, or phrase that is the alert to an upcoming step in whatever production is in progress.

DONUT Slang term for video used in a live shot. This can be either tracked or in the VO/SOT/VO format. Also called an insert.

MINI-DOC Stands for mini-documentary. A longer (2:30–7:00) package that runs during a regular newscast but usually covers a timeless topic or angle and is prepared in advance. The mini doc may run in segments over the course of several days. Also called a segment report or two-, three-, four-, or five-parter, or a series.

STANDUP The reporter on camera in the field. It could be live but is principally a videotaped segment. Standups are used mostly as bridges and closers.

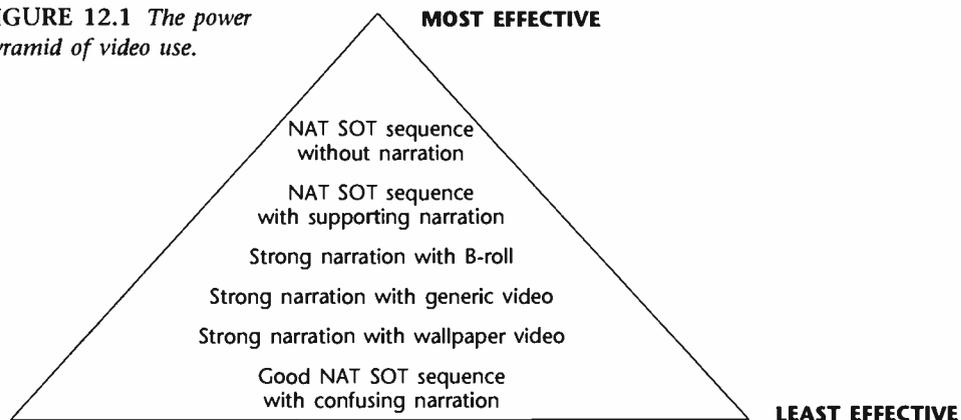
SHORT PACKAGES

A package is a complete videotaped news story from the field with the reporter's voicetracks narrating the entire segment. They are the meat and potatoes of daily television journalism. Depending on the story complexity, most reporters do from one to three packages a day. The shorter packages—anywhere from :45 to 2:00—generally involve breaking news and deadline pressure; the longer features allow time to think and create subtleties with audio and video; and longest investigative pieces—cover stories and mini-docs—are generally more work than you ever thought they'd be.

In the short packages, the video work is often subordinate to the journalistic need. Producers and assignment editors, who may or may not have been on the street reporting, regularly demand coverage of stories for which there is no appealing visual element. Reporters often must scramble for visuals to cover assignments on unexpected events, budgets, zoning battles, or education stories, often spending time searching for B-roll (video for illustration) possibilities or using standup bridges and closers to cover a non-visual concept.

Reporters need to be aware of the power of video and audio to tell a story. In Chapter 10, we discussed the hierarchy of video, from the most effective type of sequences to the least. The top of the line is the NAT SOT sequence without narration, in which the natural audio tells the story. Next in effectiveness is the NAT SOT sequence with supporting narration to fill in missing information. After that is the story where narration is written and covered with B-roll, then narration with generic visuals, and finally, narration covered with wallpaper

FIGURE 12.1 *The power pyramid of video use.*



video. Also on the bottom are the NAT SOT sequences that are used with contradictory narration, so that the spoken text confuses the viewer who might be watching the stimulating visuals.

DESIGNS FOR BREAKING STORIES

Hard news is the daily coverage of crime, government, business, marches, speeches, the courts, confrontations, education, and social activity, in expected and unexpected events. Because many hard news stories, though new, repeat familiar situations, they force the reporter to dig for information at the event scene. Hard news packages are also handled under deadlines and reporters tend to turn to familiar package structures for the backbone of these reports. At the event, reporters and shooters cover themselves by gathering old comfortable sequence building blocks: lots of MSs and CUs, cover shots, standup closes and bridges, and interviews. Back at the station, these parts allow the video editors to make quick work out of hard news packages. The track scripts for short packages are usually written before the pictures are cut; and the visuals are edited to match the flow of the rise and fall of the reporter's voice.

Organization Strategies

Television reporters on breaking stories often have little time to ponder the fine points of video storytelling. More often than not they structure packages and write the narration tracks in the car as they return to the station.

In cases like that, it's good to have a model to fall back on. Let's take one more look at the two basic narrative models we presented in Chapter 6 and see how these can be used and stretched for short package work.

The Altered Chronology Model By now you may be a bit weary of hearing the old altered chronology litany: lead-in, current situation, past or background, controversy or story, and future. But this model is the backbone of 50 percent of television news stories. You certainly are encouraged to deviate from it, but if it is needed, you can't miss by using it.

The Particular-to-General Model Another old standby. In this case, you initially focus on a person to exemplify a general trend or social observation. If the story is about an upcoming charity marathon run, you would find someone who is training for it and do his or her story, allowing this profile to tell the general story. Using this method, you can easily find a television story within the general news story. This model follows this sequence: lead-in, particular situation, past, evaluation and future, and the particular situation again.

THE STANDARD PARTS OF PACKAGES

A free-lance writer once told me that, after he submitted an idea to a famous network magazine news program, he met with a producer who liked the proposal. The producer said something like this: "Okay, what's my B-roll, what are

my sequences, who are the interviewees, and what kind of access can I get?" The producer was giving the writer a lesson in television news—the litany of the standard parts of packages. You'll be looking for the same kinds of material to combine into your packages.

Visuals, B-Roll, and Sequences

This is television. You need pictures to tell the stories, and not just any pictures but the best available. This almost always means going to a location to fly in a plane, shoot pictures in a drugstore, attend a grade school class, find a mechanic who's working on a particular type of car, go to a gunshop, or walk a mile with the protesters.

In short packages, there may be limited opportunities for pictures, possibly only one or two locations and repetitive sequences. So your planning had better pay off. Before you move from your desk, know how much of the story refers to pictures of kids at a child-care center and how much time it'll take to get enough B-roll to tell the story.

Will there be NAT sound sequences? Can these be useful in telling the story. Will you need two different sequences from the same location and can that be shot? Do you need illustrations? Do you need file tape?

Finally, the most immediate need. What is the best visual you will be getting? Will that work for an establishing shot and sequence? If so, what other sequences can you get?

Interviews

Don't waste any time interviewing the wrong persons. Review Chapter 5 on the elements that add value to interviews. Remember, the most effective bites are from eyewitness accounts, someone responding to charges, persons affected by actions in the story, and professional evaluations.

Standups

The power of standup bridges and closes depends on not only the text but also the reporter's position in the frame, the background activity, the reporter's movement, and the camera movement.

For the content of standup bridges, look for a way to make a natural transition between points in the story. It could be between two locations, time frames, or subtopics of the story theme. For instance, in a story with two locations, you'll want to do the standup bridge at the beginning of the sequence of the second location. Then decide if you want camera motion (pans or tilts), lens movement (zoom in or zoom back), or reporter activity (walk and talks, arm motions, pointing). For any movement, there must be a reason to draw the camera's focus from one point to the other.

In some cases, you may want to bridge into a soundbite from an interview that is already on tape. That means the last sentence of the bridge must include the writeup. If you do that, also shoot a bridge without the writeup. You may have to dump the interview and if so, you'll have a backup.

For standup closers, the standard is to talk about the future. For that reason, do the standup in a location related to the story, one that might even have some action in the background.

It is crucial, though, not to think that the standups are mandatory parts of breaking news. In short packages, the standups are often outdated or the package structure changed. Don't be afraid to dump useless standups.

Tracks

The narration written for most short or hard news packages is severely condensed into a series of tracks. Each track covers a stretch from one sound source to the next one, or from the beginning of the package to the first bite, from soundbite to soundbite, and from the last soundbite to either the story's end or the closing standup. Each track may repeat a few words from the previous soundbite, then include new information and the writeup to the next soundbite.

Most novice reporters encounter two problems when writing tracks.

First, they tend to overwrite their packages. They jam too much information into the tracks, stretching out the story and possibly upsetting any sense of pacing. Initial tracks should be :30 or less. Interior tracks are often much shorter, and sometimes are only a phrase that bridges between two soundbites.

Second, beginning reporters write tracks about story elements for which there is no video. Covering tracks with wallpaper video might dull the audience interest. If you are short on video, put some information in the studio lead-in or tag.

BEGINNING THE PROCESS

Although there are many assignment types, we'll talk about only two. The first is a general topic backgrounder, which is a timeless explanatory segment generally tied to a breaking story, for which a reporter has to set up shots, interviews, and sequences. The second is a fast-breaking assignment to cover an event with a known interviewee available.

Case 1: General Topic Backgrounder Assignment

You are given a topic such as the dangers of fatty foods for heart patients. The assignment came off a wire story that morning out of Washington saying there is conclusive evidence that fatty foods increase buildup along artery walls.

In this case, you need a backgrounder.

Begin by asking whether there's any part of this story that cannot be told visually, or if told visually, would be dreadful. For this story, you know that on-camera interviews with scientists may be difficult because of the scientific jargon involved.

Search for a local angle that is a good television story. The national story could be a reader that would set up the lead-in to the local story. Don't forget to find out what local companies, research universities, or hospitals have been doing in the area.

Your first step will be research. Have someone search for the latest information on the fatty food controversy.

Then go through this checklist:

1. Are there possible sequences available, especially ones with NAT SOT that might tell the story?
2. What are the B-roll possibilities? Do we need pictures of fatty foods (as named in the wire story) and can we get those in a grocery store, in a kitchen (commercial or home), being served to diners. Do we need medical illustration and should we call the local teaching hospital for stills, diagrams, and cross sections of arteries. Would a medical library have computer animation? Do these pictures need to move? Is there file tape of heart operations?
3. For interviews, are there two sides to this controversy? Many sides? Do we need spokespeople for both? Can we get help from the American Heart Association, the local teaching hospital, a local cardiologist? What about vox pop? Do we need the general public talking about this?
4. For standups, is there a good location now? Should we be doing a bridge in a research laboratory or at the American Heart Association office?
5. For tracks, am I writing anything I won't be able to cover? For instance, if there is not video of heart surgery, do I want to mention this? Maybe it can go in the standups.

That's how you might plan the package before you even leave your desk. By this time, you've got some idea of how much trouble it will be to get visuals, how many interviews might be available, and what the day will be like. The other research and the quality of the recorded interviews will give you options about the placement of the bites. You'll probably be able to design this package when you're part of the way through it.

Case 2: Two Breaking Stories

In this case, there is little advance warning. The story breaks and the reporter gets details by cellular phone on the way to the event. It is going to be a protest against government defense contracts at a local firm that supplies nozzles for gas warfare research. When you reach the scene, you and your shooter will have to rush to get the equipment out of the car and run to the location. How do you approach this?

Although every case is different, your immediate concern is getting the pictures of what's going on. Explanations that you were getting a good interview will not excuse your not having the visuals. Interviews will come later. When they can be done, try for all sides.

Another rush-rush breaking story could be a meeting that has been scheduled for weeks, but your assignment desk found out about it only moments ago. This is not uncommon. When you arrive at the meeting, the audience is jammed into a room, and the speakers are at a table facing the audience. First, you need

some pictures of the meeting. While the shooter gets those, you ask questions of anyone you can find. What's going on? How many will speak? After the shooter has some natural sound sequences of the meeting, you'll have to pull people outside to interview them. Do whatever you can to lure some of the spokespeople out to the corridor to get their sides. Once you do, check out the meeting again. You may be finished at that time.

WRITING THE STORY

When you are ready to write, take four elements—sequences, B-roll, interviews, and standups—and evaluate them in the following way:

- Do you have any outstanding natural sound sequences? Is there some video with sound that jumps to mind as the establishing sequence, to kick off the story before Track 1.
- Do you have all of the B-roll you wanted? Is there some information in the story that the B-roll will not cover? Do you need to shoot headlines, reports, or other material to cover items for which there is no outside footage?
- Do you have bites from your key interviewees? Did any of them bomb out, not giving you usable bites?
- Look critically at your bridges and standup closers. Are they any good? Are they out of date? In either case, be ready to toss them out.

Next, do a rough draft of the lead-in. Determine what perspective brings the audience into your report. Work on getting them from the perspective to your first words.

Settle on your opening sequence. What will establish the scene for the audience once they've been dislocated from the studio. Use whatever natural sound and documentary video you have.

Write the beginning of Track #1 through the background of the story. Establish what will be Bite #1. Finish Track #1 then add Bite #1.

The interior tracks should now begin to fall into place. See if your standup bridge works.

After the bridge, you need the last tracks and bites. Finally, insert the standup closer. Time the package. Are you anywhere near what the producer has suggested for a time allotment?

Now you can rewrite the tracks, smooth things down, take out excessive soundbites, record the tracks, and turn it over to an editor.

Here are some hints for package construction:

HINT 1: Do all your writing before you get to the edit room. This is easier said than done, but too much changing there will drive the videotape editor (you?) crazy.

HINT 2: Don't write tracks for visuals you don't have. Visuals never mag-

ically appear on tape, no matter how much prayer is offered in the editing room. If it's not there in the first place, it won't sneak onto the tape. Be realistic.

HINT 3: If the video is thin, narrow the angle and skip being global. Select a usable focus, one that makes for a tight television story. Maybe some of the information will have to be placed in the studio lead-in and tag. That's all right.

HINT 4: Let the tracks breathe. Don't jam your stories so tight with narration that there's no room for natural sound sequences. Also let the video, if it can, tell some of the story.

The following is a typical short package script. It is for a morning package after a fire the previous evening.

Lead-in FIRE OFFICIALS MAY HAVE AN ANSWER
TO WHAT CAUSED A GENERAL ALARM
FIRE DOWNTOWN LAST NIGHT.
ROB BOLIN REPORTS.

Track #1 THE OLD DESERTED WAREHOUSE ON
WALLY STREET WAS VACANT FOR YEARS.
CAFE OWNER MARIO BIAN TIN
WATCHED THE BLAZE FROM ACROSS
THE STREET.

Bite #1 "ONE SECOND EVERYTHING WAS QUIET
AND THE NEXT...THERE WERE FLAMES
COMING OUT THE WINDOWS AND
ROOF...EVEN BEFORE THE FIRE TRUCKS
GOT HERE.

Track #2 FIREMEN SAY THE BUILDING WAS FULLY
INVOLVED WHEN THEY ARRIVED.
FIRE CAPTAIN ALDEN CARTER SAYS THE
WAREHOUSE COULDN'T BE SAVED.

Bite #2 "THIS TYPE OF BUILDING HAS NO FIRE
WALLS AND ONCE THE THING GETS

ROARING, IT'S LIKE A LOCOMOTIVE.
NOTHING CAN STOP IT.

Track #3 THE FLAMES COULD BE SEEN FOR
MILES AND THE SMOKE BLEW DIRECTLY
ACROSS THE BARNES EXPRESSWAY...
CHOKING OFF TRAFFIC IN THE MIDDLE
OF THE EVENING RUSH.

IT TOOK THREE HOURS BEFORE THE
ROAD WAS OPEN AGAIN.

Standup bridge (flames are out...shot in morning)

AS DAWN BROKE...ARSON
INVESTIGATORS PICKED THROUGH THE
BURNED OUT BUILDING. THEY
CONCENTRATED THEIR EFFORTS IN ONE
CORNER BY THE STREET.

Bite #3 "IT LOOKS LIKE IT STARTED IN THIS
AREA WHERE TRANSIENTS SLEEP. WE
FOUND GASOLINE AND AN OLD CAMP
STOVE."

Track #4 THE BUILDING'S OWNER SAYS THE FIRE
MAY HAVE SAVED HIM SOME TROUBLE.
YESTERDAY...HE TOOK OUT A PERMIT TO
BEGIN THE COSTLY JOB OF TEARING
DOWN THE PLACE. THAT WAS TO
HAPPEN NEXT MONTH. THIS IS ROB
BOLIN FOR K-560 NEWS.

LIVE SHOTS

Portable microwave equipment first became popular in the mid-70s, but was usually limited to larger markets that could afford the quarter million dollar

costs of the live trucks. Now the technology is cheaper and there are more options for routing signals. The networks used advanced equipment to bring live war reporting from Iraq and Kuwait; later, U.S. Navy Seals found themselves staging a night landing on a Somalian beach set up with television lights, reporters, and live coverage to American television screens. In the 90s, medium-market and even small-market stations have been buying live vans, satellite uplink trucks, and more microwaves, and they've been sending local crews to do international stories, piggybacking on network satellite uplinks. There is no doubt now that live reporting has changed local broadcast news practices forever.

Local reporters need to have thick skins about live shots. News managers and station chiefs want as many live inserts as possible, even on stories long since over. Reporters have to be competent in doing live intros and field tags. A journalist who cannot speak extemporaneously on camera should think twice about this profession.

There are ethical problems as well. Anyone in broadcast journalism is aware that people in the community begin events to coincide with live newscasts, playing to the known need for live shots during the program. Therefore, it is important for reporters and producers to consider to what extent they are being used.

Producers must be cautious about hype and overuse of the "live" possibility for stories. Although live shots can be wonderfully effective as a means of expanding the studio, care should be taken that the technology is not used merely as a means of advertising the news staff.

When faced with a live shot, assignment editors and producers must always ask if there are more effective and economical ways of telling the story. Will there be better clarity and presentation from the studio? Sometimes, they may have to argue against station policies for extensive live coverage.

News staffs need to watch that the editorial values are not compromised by the live shot. Because so much of the report comes from a live standup in the field, editorial control of a story's details is minimal and, although there are cellular phones and portable fax machines for scripts, errors can creep into the story. Watch carefully that the production demands for a live location presence don't eliminate the care a staff might give to a story back in the newsroom.

Live Shot Procedures

Once the crew establishes a clear signal to the station, the location live shot can take many forms. It can be anything from a field-based mini-newscast to a fairly routine studio toss to live shot, video insert, live tag, and back to the studio. Many times, it is so smoothly done that the audience isn't aware of the planning and technology needed to produce it. The live shot format has many possibilities.

- standup with no B-roll or sequence video
- standup with the reporter doing a VO
- standup with the reporter doing a VO/SOT/VO
- standup wrapped around a package (called a donut)

- Q-&-A or “debrief” with the reporter
- live interview by the reporter
- reporter split screen with another reporter
- reporter working as part of a round robin, and tossing to another reporter
- standup with video fed from the field
- standup using video pre-fed and edited at the station

The format combinations are fascinating and a bit dangerous. It is crucial that writers and producers communicate with reporters about what material is available. Are the VO pictures usable? Did everything come in all right? Do we have a roll cue? Is the anchor going to ask a question? Will it be a question for which the reporter knows the answer?

Writing strategies are as endless as the format combinations. In some ways, live shots give the reporters quite a bit of latitude in story assembly. Everything is less formal, and except for the video work in the donut insert, the structure can be clunkier.

Script format varies from station to station; however, most examples have the normal lead-in, notes about the field intro script, and then the all-important cues to the time to roll, to insert sound and CGs, and to return to live and return to studio.

LONGER PACKAGES

Longer packages might run anywhere from 2:00 to 7:00. Generally they cover timeless topics from backgrounders to special profiles, investigative reports, mini-docs or sidebars. The longest ones have special names, such as segment reports, cover stories, three-part team reports, and so. In contrast to the short, general-assignment daily work, the planning, construction, editing, and writing of the longer packages are quite different.

Research for Longer Packages

Research can be carried out for days and sometimes weeks. Interviews can be used for research. More detailed data can be pursued. Quite often the original planning for B-roll and sequences changes many times. A potential drawback of longer packages is the lack of an angle to the story. Research may be too global. Too wide a theme makes it hard to maintain interest.

Shooting for Longer Packages

On long packages, more preparation is possible and the same crew should work on all assignments. B-roll is more comprehensive. The influence of lucky shots, often exploited in shorter packages, is not even considered. Aesthetic values in shooting are higher and more relationship shots are expected.

A problem with multiday shooting schedules is that the story may change. Week-old interviews may become dated. As the story evolves, new sequences are added and old ones, even those that are the result of hours of shooting, are discarded.

Interviewing for Longer Packages

Interviewing for longer packages is more relaxed and informal and requires less immediate goal-oriented answers than that for short packages. Reporters are usually better prepared and can proceed in a more dialogue-like format. There is the opportunity for better and longer cutaways on all interviews. Parts of interviews can be used for research. Because there is less structure, there will be more waste in interviews for longer packages. Sometimes, because production values are higher, entire interviews will be discarded.

All interviews should be transcribed. This gives reporters or producers a better chance to craft silky writeups. It is also easier to use longer sound bites.

Writing for Longer Packages

The quality of writing should be much higher and more fluid than for short packages. It is possible to write and rewrite tracks to support polished and edited sequences. Writers and editors can preview rough cuts and re-edit as needed.

A common problem with longer pieces is that broadcast workers have trouble completing a story. Producers or reporters do too much gathering and too little planning and so can become overwhelmed by the material.

Reporter Standups

Standups are written after everything else is shot and finished. They should add information. Their placement is more often used to vary the visual elements of the story while establishing relationships between angles and elements within the story.

Production Values

Production quality for long packages should be much higher. Better visuals, longer time to edit, little need to stay in restrictive formats are all benefits for the long package producer.

Note, however, that post-production time is much longer. A 2:30 piece for daily news might take one hour to edit. A 3:00 piece that is looked at as a longer package might take five hours to edit. A 5:00 package might take all day to edit, as well as to insert special visuals, music, and documentary effects in it.

EXERCISE 12-A

Longer Packages

You should read over these situations and be ready to discuss your approach to a 5:00 package on the topic. How much time for research? How many days of shooting? How long is the total production time?

Situation 1

You have heard that the local Community Fund, which distributes money to self-help agencies, is so poorly managed that only 50 percent of the donated money gets passed along to the recipients. Yet the fund officers have always claimed that 90 percent gets passed on.

What will it take to check this out and do this story? What kind of visual support can you expect?

Situation 2

A circus is in town. You are to do a long feature on the people who work in the background: the trainers, wardrobe people, roustabouts, game managers, etc.

How will you vary the sequences? What else will you need?

Situation 3

There have been so many studies about the health effects of coffee drinking that people tend to ignore them. Now there is a new one that says coffee drinking is good for those who might have heart problems. How do you check this out? What visuals do you need to cover this?

Situation 4

A famous television producer of violent programs has now come out against the gunplay and murders on the tube. She is saying that all of her scripts will now feature endings that involve what is called "conflict resolution," a means of defusing tensions. Your assignment editor thinks this is a good angle to do a three-part series on television violence. Where do you start? What will you need to get?

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Television packages come in different lengths with different rules for composing scripts. In short packages, up to 2:30 in length, the reporter or producer is often forced to find visuals to cover a journalistic need. These are generally categorized into breaking stories under heavy deadline pressure and more generic theme stories in which the reporter may have more flexibility in finding visuals.

The popularity of live shots has forced most reporters to learn the various combinations involved in remote work. The writing in the live shot can be more informal than in other formats.

In longer packages, the reporter or producer generally sets the story theme around easily obtainable and visually appealing segments. In each of these, it is important to consider the sequences, interviews, standup possibilities, and production values.

Copyediting and Producing

CHAPTER PREVIEW

This final chapter covers script review both while the story is in progress and after it leaves the typewriter or printer. The producer, who usually doubles as the copyeditor, should coach the writer through difficult stages of the story before examining the script for accuracy, fairness, comprehensive coverage, inclusion of perspective, color in writing, libel, invasion of privacy, and adherence to station writing style. The finished story is then ready for inclusion in the newscast. This chapter also details how newscasts are stacked and produced, using theories on clustering, segues, and hard news versus feature stories.

GLOSSARY

BACKTIME The start time for a newscast story, if the newscast is to end at the scheduled time. This process is usually handled by the computer formats; however, in smaller stations it is still done by hand. The backtime is most efficient when expressed in real clock time, rather than the elapsed time of the newscast. For an example, see the section on backtiming at the end of this chapter.

CLUSTERING The linking of stories with similar themes and topics in a newscast.

COACHING Assisting a writer in the completion of a news story.

PINGPONGING The rapid and predictable switching of anchors during a newscast.

PRIVILEGED SITUATIONS In reporting, the open and public proceedings of courts and of federal, state, and local governments.

STACKING THE NEWSCAST The procedure for ordering stories within the timed segments of the newscast. Also known as *formatting*. Normally, the producer or editor stacks the newscast, but at smaller stations, the newscaster may do this.

STRINGER An independent reporter or shooter who covers stories with hopes of selling the results to a station.

THE COPYEDITOR'S JOB

Once the writer has finished, the story is ready for copyediting, a process that demands great attention to detail. The producer or news editor should examine the story, looking for errors of fact, of law, and of style. If any of these holes in the story are found, the story should be returned to the writer.

ACCURACY

Accuracy is the first and the most important consideration in the editing of any story. A story must be as accurate as possible relative to the information known at that time. There can be no compromise in this area. Copyeditors can check for accuracy by

- *Reviewing sources.* Any doubts about the quality of primary or secondary sources must be conveyed to the audience.
- *Questioning jargon.* Is any backgrounding needed?
- *Reviewing adjectives.* Are the adjectives used appropriate, or do they add a sensational slant?
- *Identifying soundbites.* Every actuality/soundbite must be carefully referenced. Those with no writeup and cold intros must be reviewed.
- *Checking visuals.* Each must be evaluated as representative of what occurred at the event.

That's a lot to check for. Given the complexity of many stories, it's a difficult task to accomplish. But even simple stories carry the possibility of error. Original source material must be checked. The following exercise gives an example.

EXERCISE 13-A

Checking Source Copy

Review the wire copy to see if the broadcast script on the next page conforms to it.

PARIS, France (RPG)...The health benefits of red wine are in the news again and this time the news is good, according to the French.

At this year's Vinexpo, the world's largest wine exposition held every two years, scientists and doctors did their best to leave the impression that moderate wine consumption is great for the health.

The reason for the optimism is a new series of studies that show that the tannins in red wine increase the amount of free oxygen in the blood and prevent cholesterol pockets from forming, producing an effect similar to aspirin, said Rene Parquet, chief officer of the French wine exporting group Vin Monde.

French officials pointed out that this comes only from red wine and not white, not an unusual claim to be made in this city of Bordeaux, known the world over for its rich red wines.

European grape growers are concerned about new anti-alcohol laws that are popping up in Europe and around the globe. "There has been an increase in alcohol related legislation and it's not been the best for us," said Jacques Jerboa, a leading exporter. "Governments think they can solve their addiction problems by legislating against wine when drugs and cheap alcohol drinks are the problems," he added.

Examples of the laws are prohibitions on advertising and sales of alcohol drinks on television and in certain periodicals in countries such as the United States. "These must be carefully reviewed," said one French official.

U.S. importer Vins de France of New Jersey president Robert Vintage said it's unlikely that the new French research will change any laws. "We must learn to get the word out in any way we can, and we'll continue to do this. It's clear the public is happy keeping alcohol advertising off TV, thinking this will stop their kids from drinking," Vintage added.

(continued)

NEW RESEARCH IS SAYING IT'S OKAY TO HAVE A GLASS OF WINE WITH MEALS...AND THAT THIS IS REALLY A HEALTH BENEFIT.

THE STUDIES COME FROM FRANCE...AND CAME TO LIGHT DURING THE WORLD'S LARGEST INTERNATIONAL WINE EXPOSITION IN BORDEAUX.

RESEARCHERS SAY A SINGLE GLASS OF WINE WILL HELP RELEASE OXYGEN IN THE BLOOD. THAT OXYGEN IS A BIG HELP IN REMOVING SOME OF THE CHOLESTEROL THAT HAS BUILT UP IN ARTERIES.

THE FRENCH SAY IT'S HARD TO GET THE WORD OUT THOUGH.

FRENCH WINE EXECUTIVE ROBERT VINTAGE SAYS THERE ARE TOO MANY LAWS AGAINST WINE ADVERTISING AND THAT SOMETHING SHOULD BE DONE ABOUT IT.

EXERCISE 13-B

Accuracy

Examine this following story for accuracy. Even without the source material, an editor should suspect some areas. Circle any possible problem material.

_____ O/C

VOTERS YESTERDAY SELECTED BOB HOSKINS TO BE LILA COUNTY'S FIRST MINORITY SHERIFF.

WITH 98 PERCENT OF THE PRECINCTS REPORTING...HOSKINS HAD A 53 TO 45 PERCENT LEAD OF THE INCUMBENT... BIG JIM BELUGA.

BELUGA HAS BEEN SHERIFF FOR THE PAST 16 YEARS...AND CRITICS ACCUSE HIM OF LAX DISCIPLINE AND FAILING TO PROPERLY TRAIN THE DEPUTIES.

HOSKINS HAD BEEN A SHERIFF'S DEPUTY FOR ONLY SIX MONTHS AND HIS INEXPERIENCE WAS THE KEY CAMPAIGN ISSUE.

HOWEVER...VOTERS DECIDED IT WAS TIME FOR A CHANGE AND VOTED BELUGA OUT.

FAIRNESS

Although we can sympathize with reporters who become sympathetic to one side in a story, most news organizations attempt to represent fairly the position of any side in a dispute. Fairness can be difficult to achieve at times because everyone has an opinion, or two, on subjects like social disputes, who is getting the shaft, and so on. Scripts should be checked to see whether writers have made an effort to obtain all sides of the story, and to clearly portray these without ridicule. By being fair, you show your audience that you believe they have the brains to form their own conclusions.

EXERCISE 13-C

Fairness

Examine this story for fairness. Circle any areas that should be checked.

_____O/C

A CITIZEN'S COMMITTEE IS ACCUSING A RICHMOND AREA REFINERY OF INTENTIONALLY SPILLING MILLIONS OF GALLONS OF DIESEL FUEL INTO THE CARAHOMA RIVER.

THE GROUP...CALLING ITSELF CITIZENS AGAINST POLLUTION...OR CAP...BLAMES THE WANATAHOE REFINERY FOR TEN CHEMICAL SPILLS IN THE PAST 15-MONTHS.

A CAP SPOKESWOMAN SAID THE REFINERY DID THIS SECRETLY AT NIGHT AND THEN FAILED TO NOTIFY THE POLLUTION CONTROL DISTRICT.

(# # #)

COMPREHENSIVE COVERAGE

Scope is the extent of coverage available to reporters and editors when making decisions about what to include in a story and what to leave out. Well-researched material should provide enough information to enable you to clearly decide which points in the story deserve coverage. Try answering these questions.

- Have all the angles been covered?
- Do we know enough about the background of people or groups involved in this story to make judgments?
- Is this the first step in a cause-and-effect situation (for example, industry layoffs/factory may move/biggest employer in town, etc.)?

EXERCISE 13-D

Scope

Examine this story for scope. Circle any words that represent areas about which you need more information.

_____ O/C THE BANK OF ST. MILLS ANNOUNCED
TODAY IT WILL FILE A LAWSUIT TO
RECOVER MILLIONS OF DOLLARS IN BAD
FARM LOANS.
A BANK'S OFFICER...BOB SHIELDS...HAD
APPROVED ALL THE LOANS...SECURING THE
DEALS WITH LOCAL PROPERTY.
THE LOANS ARE NOT IN DEFAULT BUT
ARE QUESTIONABLE AND BANK SOURCES
SAID THE LOSSES COULD GO AS HIGH AS
23-MILLION-DOLLARS.
BANK OFFICIALS SAY SHIELDS IS ON
VACATION IN SOUTH AMERICA.
(# # #)

LIBEL, SLANDER, AND INVASION OF PRIVACY

Writers, reporters, and copyeditors should be on the lookout for stories that might injure someone with defamatory information. Although news staffers may not know the finer points of the law, it is important to know when to start worrying about a phrase, a sentence, or an entire item. If the story looks questionable, they should consult the news director or a company lawyer.

To begin with, defamation laws are state laws and differ across the country. (Ideally, the station should provide a summary of local statutes.) There are, however, some general concepts that apply throughout.

Three concerns in defamation are libel, slander, and invasion of privacy. Libel (and slander in many cases) is false information, broadcast to an audience of more than one, that identifies someone and injures their reputation, relationships, or occupation. Usually, libel is written information; however, many states accept scripted broadcast material, even if it was spoken on the air, as libel. The consequences of libel can be quite severe, and libel judgments against small operations could put a radio or television station out of business.

In some states, slander is basically the same as libel, except that it is spoken. In other states, it is considered to be impromptu speech, and carries a lesser weight in court than libel.

Invasion of privacy involves a true story that identifies and harms. It covers the areas of private space intrusion, publication of private matters, putting a person in a false light, and the right to publicity. Generally, the category which is of concern to newswriters is the publication of private matters, most notably a criminal past. Federal courts have ruled that anything on the public record, such as arrests and court decisions, even if a number of years old, may be reported. You will run into trouble, however, when your story about someone's past includes material from unofficial sources. To defend against invasion of privacy, reporters have to prove the newsworthiness of the material.

Why Study Libel at All?

Two good sets of reasons. First, the defensive ones. You could save someone's reputation by heading off a flawed and underresearched story. This is worth the effort, even for people not immediately likeable, because reputations are hard to repair after they have been publicly trashed.

Second, and still on the defensive side, you can stay out of court and litigation. This saves you time (going to court is tedious and may take months), and in the end, you might be saving your job and even your station.

Last, the aggressive reason. Know the libel laws and you'll know when you are in the right and can push a story or an investigation. Threats of libel suits may send you to the lawyers, but they won't automatically stifle the controversial stories.

When Does Libel Exist?

Certain general conditions have to exist for libel to occur in most cases.

Identification Even if accidental, a verbal or visual identification of a person to the satisfaction of the listeners or viewers is sufficient for the courts. This is also

done by identifying a person as a member of a small, exclusive group; however, in that case, the others in that group may sue too.

Be cautious when working with visuals. A closeup of someone's face on the air while your copy talks about drugs, offensive illnesses, and so on, is good enough for a defamation suit, as long as the identification is solid.

Broadcast or Publication All you have to do is communicate the libelous material to at least one person.

Injury or Defamation This is what it's all about. If your story could injure a person's reputation or his or her ability to have friends or pursue a profession, it's libelous. In the same fashion, you can libel a corporation and injure its ability to do business.

Negligence and Malice This is one of those odd twists. Quite likely, if the mistake gets on the air, you will already have been negligent. Negligence, however, is different from malice. If you are simply negligent, it's quite unlikely there will be large-sized damage awards. But if the plaintiff proves malice, a lot of money could change hands.

In a sense, malice is serious negligence. It involves two situations. The first, called *intent*, means the reporter planned to harm the individual in the story, no matter what contradictions changed the situation during research. It brings up the old sarcastic news adage "Don't let the facts get in the way of a good story."

It is more likely that a second definition of malice will be involved—that you did not apply normal news-gathering practices to this story. This could mean failing to consult multiple sources or ignoring research. This type of malice is generally proven by testimony that you just didn't bother to try hard enough to find out whether your information was true or not.

If malice exists, private persons who have already proven libel can ask for additional multimillion-dollar punitive damages. Even more in damages can be at stake if public persons can sue you for libel about stories involving their public duties.

How Do You Tell a Private Person From a Public Person?

Courts have decided there are two general classes of people who may sue for libel. There are those who have remained out of the public eye, carrying on their lives without seeking public office or publicity. These are private people. The majority of the people you interact with when gathering news are private citizens. When false and damaging information is broadcast about private persons, they are likely to collect damages.

But so-called public persons are viewed with a different standard. The courts have ruled there must be some leeway for news reporters who constantly work with information about persons who voluntarily or involuntarily ended up in the public eye. Sometimes stories, although based upon proven sources, will be wrong. Therefore, different standards are applied when public persons sue for libel. Even if the story is not true, public persons must prove malice was involved.

The line separating a public and private person is ill-defined. The courts have gone back and forth over the years, and there is no set legal definition. Usually, if a person voluntarily inserts himself or herself into the public eye (for example, if a candidate runs for office or a massive amount of publicity is put out about some entertainment star), that person can be considered a public person.

Someone can also involuntarily move into the public arena by becoming involved in an unexpected but highly public event. The court ruled that the man who slapped the gun hand of a suspect shooting at then President Ford had become a public person for a short time, and that the normal investigation into elements of his private life were acceptable pursuits of journalism. An invasion of privacy suit by the man was thrown out for that reason. On the other hand, just because someone is related to a public official doesn't make them a public person.

How About Consent?

What if the person agreed to an interview, then libeled 15 individuals in the answers to your questions. If the interview is cut into a story and goes out on the newscast, who is the responsible party? Who is going to get sued?

Anything you broadcast is your responsibility. If you broadcast a libelous statement, and leave it as the sole reference, without any other sources or perspective, then you and your station might be heading to court. Because someone says something in an interview doesn't mean that it is legal or truthful. You have the right to use that quote, but also the responsibility to report on its accuracy.

What Are Privileged Situations?

Privilege here refers to giving fair and accurate accounts of the community's official business. If you are reporting the actions in a privileged situation (for example, any official court proceeding, or publicly assembled federal, state, or municipal government body), you are a surrogate for the public and may report what went on, even if what happened was libelous. Therefore if one lawmaker referred to the other in a false and damaging way, you may report it, as long as it is an accurate account.

A caution: This "privilege" does not apply to statements outside the courtroom, outside the legislative chambers or outside the city council meeting room. Even if you give a fair and accurate account of a news conference in the hallway after the event, the shield of privilege is gone.

Still Worried?

It is often impossible for reporters, untrained in the law, to be up-to-date on all defamation laws. When a question arises, check with the executive producer, the news director, or the station attorneys. Be prepared to back up your angle with facts, multisource research, and a knowledge of the law. Otherwise you may get an overcautious decision from these people, who know all too well what a libel suit can do to the station.

EXERCISE 13-E

Libel #1

Examine this story for libel. Circle any possible problems.

_____O/C THE BLUE BEACH BOARD OF EDUCATION
TODAY REMOVED AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
PRINCIPAL FOR CHARGES OF CHILD ABUSE.
BOARD OFFICIALS WOULDN'T REVEAL THE
NAME OF THE PRINCIPAL...SAYING ONLY THAT
SHE WORKED IN ONE OF FOUR PINE DISTRICT
SCHOOLS.
THE BOARD STATEMENT SAYS PARENTS HAD
CHARGED THE PRINCIPAL WITH MOLESTING
CHILDREN AFTER SCHOOL HOURS IN HER
OFFICE.
TWO WEEKS AGO...IRATE PARENTS AT
MILLDOWN SCHOOL INTERRUPTED A BOARD
MEETING TO COMPLAIN ABOUT PRINCIPAL
LOUISE GITTLER.
THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE HAS NOT
FILED CHARGES.

(# # #)

EXERCISE 13-F

Libel #2

Examine this story for libel. Circle any possible problems.

_____ O/C THE LEAD SINGER OF THE MUSIC GROUP
THE WANTON TWITS IS SAYING THE BAND
WON'T APPEAR IN THE MARCH THIRD BIG
STEEL CONCERT.

LEICESTER AREA FANS HAVE ALREADY
BOUGHT NINE-THOUSAND TICKETS TO THE
TWITS CONCERT...SOMETIMES PAYING AS
MUCH AS 35 DOLLARS PER TICKET.

TWITS MANAGER AND SINGER AAZY PERCH
SAYS PROMOTER LYLE LEFEVER STOLE MONEY
FROM THEM...ROUGHED THEM UP...AND
GAVE THEM DRUGS DURING CONTRACT
TALKS.

LEFEVER WAS NOT AVAILABLE FOR
COMMENT.

(# # #)

EXERCISE 13-G

Invasion of Privacy

Examine this story for invasion of privacy. Discuss in class what you think are areas of concern.

_____ O/C A MAN WHO WANTS TO BE THE NEW
DAYCARE COORDINATOR OF ROWART
COUNTY HAS A LONG CRIMINAL RECORD.

RICHARD SEWELL ADMITTED THE
CHARGES THIS AFTERNOON.

OLD NEWSPAPER ACCOUNTS SAY THE
ARRESTS WERE ALL MORE THAN 10 YEARS
AGO AND INVOLVED BAD CHECKS AND
CREDIT CARDS.

SEWELL SAYS NONE OF THE ARRESTS
HAD GONE TO COURT AND SOLUTIONS HAD
BEEN WORKED OUT WITH THE BANKS.

ANOTHER CANDIDATE FOR THE JOB
MADE THE CHARGES PUBLIC.

(# # #)

THE PRODUCER'S JOB

Long before the producer coaches the writer or copyedits the story, the producer's stamp goes on the newscast. The formation of stories begins during the assignment stage, where the producer's needs often lead to different angles or picture coverage. After that, the producer's job is to evaluate the stories for content and length, stack the stories into a newscast, coach and copyedit, and make certain that everything gets finished and on the air. So there are five principal tasks: (1) planning the newscast, (2) developing stories, (3) coaching and copyediting, (4) stacking the newscast, and (5) making on-air decisions.

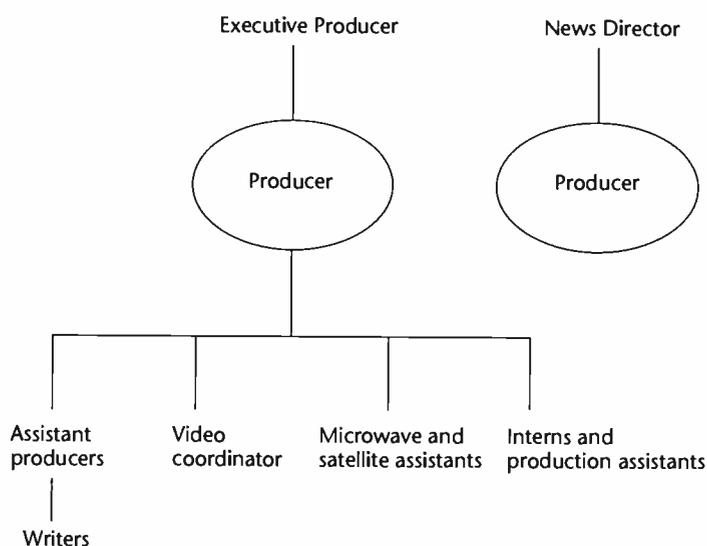
NEWSCAST PLANNING

The staff available to the producer varies from many to none (see Figure 13.1). It would seem that having a larger staff would make things easier. Not necessarily. Sometimes, it's easier to work alone, keep track of details, and not have to explain everything to everyone.

If the newscast is longer than 5:00, the planning probably goes on for hours. There are several steps that should be taken as the coverage begins.

1. See that the major stories are well covered, expanded, and updated. Get sidebar stories for these. Look for outside help in visuals, tape trades, satellite services and network feeds, stringer footage, wire stories, and so on. If you have newswriters, be sure they have the latest updates on availability of wire service information.
2. Check and prepare the HFR (hold for release) stories you have ready. Make sure the lead-ins are written into script form, the CGs are ordered, and timing is checked on the tapes. These stories can be blocked into your newscast.

FIGURE 13.1
Left, description of staff
at large-market station;
right, staff at a small-
market station.



3. Once a lead story is chosen, go all out on the coverage of this story. Make certain that there aren't any holes in the journalistic and mechanical coverage of it.
4. Keep a running list of the lesser stories and check this throughout the day to see if you've missed anything. Begin to pass out writing assignments on the more important stories.
5. Don't kill any stories until you get near the newscast. It's always better to work with options; however, don't commit writers to marginal stories until you know you'll need those stories.
6. Don't vacillate. Make decisions and then follow up on them. Say yes or no. Take control of the newscast.

DEVELOPING STORIES

The way to develop stories is to look for extra visuals or sidebar stories, interviews, and reports to fill in the gaps. Follow these steps to develop what starts as a simple :25 wire story on a forest fire.

1. Contact someone to get visuals of fire. This will provide more information to viewers.
2. Get computer artists to make a map of the area.
3. Have the assignment desk send a reporter to scene. Set up a live report. It will work with a VO and map.
4. Have a researcher check out past fires in the area. Pull file tape if necessary.
5. Have a reporter feed VO/SOT insert for a live shot.
6. Check to see whether any HFRs on fire danger are available.

By the end of step 6, you'll have a studio lead-in with a map, a live shot with a VO/SOT insert, and a backgrounder to follow all that. You'll have easily 6:00 of material. You might have to cut it down.

COACHING WRITERS

The producer's first job while the story is in progress is to coach the writer to produce a better story. Roy Peter Clark and Don Fry explain this process in detail in their helpful book *Coaching Writers: Editors and Reporters Working Together* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992). According to Clark and Fry, this coaching is a method of assisting reporters who might have hit a block while preparing the story. The coaching takes little time, and is a matter of listening and asking questions to stimulate the writer's creative process. The intention is to help the writer identify the key problems with the story, ask questions that will help the writer plan his or her own revisions, and motivate the writer to make those

changes. All this is done, the writers point out, without the producer being openly critical, taking over the story, or making changes.

This type of coaching helps in two ways: it develops the staff's talents and allows the producer to think about other items without having to rewrite every lead.

STACKING THE NEWSCAST

Stacking is the process of choosing the story content, deciding on story order, and making sure everything fits the time you have for program. If it's a 30-minute commercial evening newscast with sports and weather, you'll have somewhere around 13 minutes of news. That goes by very fast. You'll also have to plot commercial spots, teases, and tosses.

Judging a Story's Worth

Producers must be able to judge a story's merit. Is the story based upon a station's own research, material provided to the station, the investigative team, another news agency's research. Is it our exclusive? Was a feature done by the best feature reporter? Can we trust the outlying station's reporter to do the job in the live shot?

Theories on Stacking Newscasts

To sketch out a rough newscast, place the lead story and the second story at the top and roughly position the major breaking video stories and HFRs next. Then position the closer before you begin filling in the spaces.

The following sections discuss stacking theories.

Important Stories First Newspapers have always put the most important stories on the front page. This provides the readers with cues about story importance. The biggest story is above the fold in the right-hand column, and so on.

Research has shown that the audience gives more emphasis to stories on the front page or in the lead positions in newscasts. They assume that if you think it's important, you'll put it first.

For broadcast, the positioning is a bit different. You should have major breaking stories at the top of the newscast. That's expected. But at commercial stations, because of 2:00 ad breaks, you also have several segments in a newscast, and so you'll have additional segment leads to select, as well as an overall lead.

Also, each segment, if it contains a number and variety of stories, may have its own pacing problems.

Upbeat Stories Later It is a broadcast cliché that warm, upbeat features run toward the end of the newscast. If the producer finds a kicker, or funny story, it will go last.

Critics have charged that news producers go looking for these types of stories and exclude real news in order to fit the correct style of story into a preor-

dained newscast formula. In a way, they're probably right, but still it seems to be a workable formula.

As long as you remain flexible, using features and kickers is not a flawed plan, nor a bad use of the constricted time frame your newscasts have. There are many types of news stories each day, and selections should come from a variety of categories. Anyone who offers the public repetitive sameness of a single category of news is also guilty of finding stories to fit a mold. On heavy news days, you can vary the proportion of major stories to features. On light news days, the proportion floats the other way.

Clustering There are many theories about what makes a good newscast. It has been proposed that stories of a similar nature should be presented together or clustered to help the audience focus on the issues and allow a producer easy segues.

On the other hand, some broadcasters believe this is dangerous. They argue that minor stories derive too much importance from being joined to major stories, even if the theme or topic is similar. Opponents of clustering argue that an audience that gets too much of one topic at one time will tune out. Five crime stories in a row, four fire stories, or three back-to-back recreation stories will not serve your purposes.

An acceptable compromise might be to look for clusters, but stack them cautiously, and include them in the newscast only when the stories are of equal weight and topic. Limit the clusters to two stories.

Wraps Wraps are different from clusters. While clusters simply put stories with similar themes in adjacent positions, wraps combine two or three stories under a common lead into a single tightly formatted story.

For instance, a wrap may bring together minor fire stories, all with VOs. The result is a newsreel look. The new story would get a slug of "Wrap/Fire," have a TST of :50, and include three separate items. Wraps are handy formats, but can seem overdone if too many appear in one newscast.

Segues You should always be on the lookout for possible segues. Go from an international story on exports to a local business story. Go from a statewide story on school funding to local school decisions. The stories are not exactly clustered but are still tied in some way or other. These segues can give you a smooth transition between anchors.

Pingponging Many newscasts use a double anchor format. To keep up the pace, producers often begin switching anchors on almost every story. This is known as *pingponging* and too much of it becomes very disconcerting to watch. A solution is to vary the number of stories each anchor reads, avoiding predictable changes, and when the anchor reads a second or even a third story in a row, to turn the anchor to another camera.

Pacing Producers, anchors, and news directors forever argue about the pacing—the flow of the newscast. On days when you have three major consensus stories, all with active videotape, live shots, Q-&-A interviews, and sidebars, the producer will be a hero.

But on no-news days, when there is not even agreement on a possible lead story, the producer has to work to keep up the pace. Put three short packages in a row and the top of the newscast may zing along, but you'll have run out of good material and the back half will be slow. Stack three very important but nonvisual reader stories in a row and, even if you have nothing visual of the same caliber that might intervene, you will be criticized for slowing down the pacing. Producers die a thousand deaths on the bad news days.

Predictability There are different theories about how predictable a newscast should be. Some producers set up segments exactly the same way every day. First segment, 8:00, opens with anchor A reading a breaking local story (does not have to be a major one), switches to anchor B for one national story, switches back to anchor A for local story with videotape package, switches to anchor B for two local VOs, switches back to anchor A for another local package (upbeat), and then anchor B does the tease before the commercial break. Second segment starts on anchor A with a wrap of three national stories, then to anchor B, and so on.

While it's nice to have a format, it's bad to get locked into it. Sometimes there is no good local story and you should lead with a national or international item. Sometimes, the first eight stories should be national. Argue for flexibility.

How to Stack a Newscast

A good place to start is to list the possible stories on a producer's rough sheet.

Following is a list of some stories to be used in the next exercise. Call it the workbook story pool. These stories are listed in random order. To stack a newscast from this story pool, (1) review the pools, (2) divide the stories into

FIGURE 13.2
Example of a producer's working rough sheet, used to keep track of stories during the production day.

Major stories (copy)	Major stories (vtr)
2nd level stories (copy)	2nd level (vtr)

categories on the producer's rough sheet, (3) find the leads, (4) assign times and check totals, and (5) adjust times and sketch out a rundown.

Step 1. Review the Pool Start by reviewing the stories in your pool and noting what formats or element you have available.

1. *Mayor's trip.* Mayor Bowman has returned from 10-city trip to promote Steeltown's industry. She claims to have opened new markets and has some agreements. Your story is from the airport with a news conference. You have a reporter there and expect a package.
2. *Out-of-town ax.* A 35-car accident on a Los Angeles freeway left two dead and tied up the major interchange for 12 hours. You have a VO.
3. *Crime spree.* Two escapees from a state prison have terrorized the northern part of the state. Their string of crimes continues with a bank robbery where one patron is shot. You have a reader.
4. *Economic predictions.* A local bank says the regional economy will prosper through the next fiscal year. Employment will be up. You have a reader.
5. *Transit mess.* Consultants agreed with what everyone knew, that the local Rapid Transit Bus System is poorly managed and is facing labor problems. Right now this is a reader.
6. *City budget.* City administrators release next year's budget. It holds the line on taxes but will cut 10 percent of the police force and school budget to save money. You have a videotape package.
7. *Fraud trial.* The criminal trial for a former city attorney continues. He is charged with taking an aged client's money from her trust account. He invested the money for himself. You have a reader.
8. *Ambulance service.* City officials are investigating the ambulance service after complaints that the response time is very high and that the service doesn't have enough equipment in the vehicles. This story was uncovered by the local newspaper. You have a VO.
9. *Car into bank.* A motorist whose foot slipped from the brake to the accelerator made a drive-in visit to the lobby of a local bank. The car went through the front doors and ended up next to a teller's window. No one hurt. Damage was minor. You have a videotape package.
10. *State budget.* It's up 21 percent this year, mostly for higher salaries. The state hopes to get the new money by raising property taxes. You have a reader.
11. *Warehouse strike.* The 12th day of local public warehouse workers' strike. Little effect on shipping. You have a VO.
12. *Reading.* Reading scores are up for all grades at local schools. That's good news for superintendent Lyle Whippem, who advocates a back-to-basics approach. That's a reader.

13. *Recall.* The proponents of a recall drive against the school board say they have enough signatures to put it on the next ballot. You have a reader.
14. *Tickets.* City traffic officials announced they are raising the cost of a parking ticket to \$20 from \$10. This, they hope, will raise additional \$\$ for the city.

Step 2. Divide Stories into Categories on the Producer's Rough Sheet Identify which stories on the list are major stories and which are minor stories. Here's an example of such a list based on our example story pool.

MAJOR STORIES		MINOR STORIES	
Mayor	PKG	LA AX	VO
City budget	PKG	Car/bank	PKG
Recall	Reader	Warehouse	VO
Reading	Reader	Tickets	VO
Ambulance	VO	Fraud	Reader
Transit mess	Reader	Econ	Reader
Crime spree	Reader	State Budget	Reader

FIGURE 13.3
First rough sheet divisions.

<p>Major stories (copy)</p> <p>Recall Reading Transit mess Crime spree</p>	<p>Major stories (vtr)</p> <p>Mayor—PKG City Budget—PKG Ambulance—VO</p>
<p>2nd level stories (copy)</p> <p>Fraud Econ State Budget</p>	<p>2nd level (vtr)</p> <p>LA AX—VO Warehouse—VO Tickets—VO</p>

Step 3. Find the Leads Next, select a first and a second segment lead story.

MAJOR STORIES			MINOR STORIES	
Lead	<u>City budget</u>	PKG	Tickets	VO
	Crime spree	Reader	Car/bank	PKG
	Reading	Reader	LA AX	VO
	Ambulance	VO	Fraud	Reader
	Transit mess	Reader	State budget	Reader
	Recall	Reader	Warehouse	VO
2nd L.	<u>Mayor's trip</u>	PKG	Econ	Reader

Step 4. Assign Times and Check Totals Now, our station uses 8:00 in the first segment and 5:00 in the second segment (the other time is already formatted into weather, sports, and so on). Begin by assigning story lengths. The total should be 13:00. First, consider your major stories.

MAJOR STORIES			MINOR STORIES		
City budget	PKG	1:30	Tickets	VO	0:40
Crime spree	Read	0:40	Car/bank	PKG	1:10
Reading	Read	0:35	LA AX	VO	0:25
Ambulance	VO	0:40	Fraud	Read	0:20
Transit mess	Read	0:25	State budget	Read	0:30
Recall	Read	0:20	Warehouse	VO	0:20
Mayor's trip	PKG	1:15	Econ	Read	0:25

At this point, you only have 9:30 of stories to fill 13:00. You'll probably pick up more stories, but we will expand the stories we have by adding more elements. We're going to order a package on the transit mess and a package on the reading scores. We'll expand city budget to 2:00 and recall by :10.

Step 5. Adjust Times and Sketch Out a Rundown After you make the adjustments, you find your times are more reasonable. Give these times to the writers as story lengths.

MAJOR STORIES			LESSER STORIES		
City budget	PKG	2:00	Tickets	VO	0:40
Crime spree	Read	0:45	Car/bank	PKG	1:10
Reading	PKG	1:30	LA AX	VO	0:30
Ambulance	VO	0:45	Fraud	Read	0:30
Transit mess	PKG	1:45	State budget	Read	0:30
Recall	Read	0:30	Warehouse	VO	0:20
Mayor's trip	PKG	1:15	Econ	Read	0:20

The next step is to transfer this rough layout to the actual newscast story order, or rundown.

FIGURE 13.4
Finished format for
first two segments.

CAST: 11PM						
PAGE	TAL	SLUG	VIDEO	TIME	GRAPHIC	BACKTIME
A-1		CITY BUDGET	PKG SOT	2:00	_____	
A-2		STATE BUDGET	_____	:30		
A-3		TICKETS	VO	:40	SSTORE 46	
A-4		READING	PKG SOT	1:30	SSTORE 27	
A-5		CRIME SPREE	_____	:45	MAP #415	
A-6		AMBULANCE	VO	:45		
A-7		LA AX	VO	:30	SSTORE 422	
A-8		CAR BANK	PKG SOT	1:10	SSTORE 99	
A-9		TEASE 2	VO	:10		
<hr/>						
B-1		MAYORS TRIP	PKG SOT	1:15		
B-2		ECON PREDICT	_____	:20	SSTORE 2	
B-3		WAREHOUSE	VO	:20	SSTORE 6	
B-4		TRANSIT MESS	PKG	1:45		
B-5		RECALL	_____	:30		
B-6		FRAUD	_____	:30		

Now, the rundown:

FIRST (A) SEGMENT

(A-1) City budget PKG 2:00
 (A-2) State budget Read 0:30
 (A-3) Tickets VO 0:40
 (A-4) Reading PKG 1:30
 (A-5) Crime spree Read 0:45
 (A-6) Ambulance VO 0:45
 (A-7) LA AX VO 0:30
 (A-8) Car/bank PKG 1:10
 (A-9) Tease VO :10

SECOND (B) SEGMENT

(B-1) Mayor's trip PKG 1:15
 (B-2) Econ predict Read 0:20
 (B-3) Warehouse VO 0:20
 (B-4) Transit mess PKG 1:45
 (B-5) Recall Read 0:30
 (B-6) Fraud Read 0:30

You're on the way. This is a format with times and story order. It has important stories in the lead, sprinkled through the first segment, and leading

the second segment. It has a softer story at the end of the first segment, although this list has only grim selections.

It also has clustering, with the city budget series, the mayor's trip series, the ambulance, accident, car/bank series. It has potential for segues, and it has pacing, with no large blocks of read-only stories.

The producer did not suggest a wrap because there were no solid possibilities. Since no decisions have been made on the anchors, this newscast as yet has no problems with pingponging.

Backtiming

Although computers are taking over this chore, the producer should learn to backtime a newscast. The backtime is the clock time a story should begin if the newscast is to end on time (according to the clock—not the newscast duration). It is always computed in real clock time, and is always calculated from the end of the newscast, working backward. The backtimes are important to have, in case stories must be added or dropped while the newscast is on the air.

First, it is necessary to know the exact TST (total story time) on each story. Putting the story order down on a format sheet prepares you for backtiming. If

CAST: 11PM						
PAGE	TAL	SLUG	VIDEO	TIME	GRAPHIC	BACKTIME
A-1		CITY BUDGET	PKG SOT	2:00		11:00:35
A-2		STATE BUDGET	_____	:30		11:02:35
A-3		TICKETS	VO	:40	SSTORE 46	11:03:05
A-4		READING	PKG SOT	1:30	SSTORE 27	11:03:45
A-5		CRIME SPREE	_____	:45	MAP #415	11:05:15
A-6		AMBULANCE	VO	:45		11:06:00
A-7		LA AX	VO	:30	SSTORE 422	11:06:45
A-8		CAR BANK	PKG SOT	1:10	SSTORE 99	11:07:15
A-9		TEASE 2	VO	:10		11:08:25
COMM #1				2:05		11:08:35
B-1		MAYORS TRIP	PKG SOT	1:15		11:10:40
B-2		ECON PREDICT	_____	:20	SSTORE 2	11:11:55
B-3		WAREHOUSE	VO	:20	SSTORE 6	11:12:15
B-4		TRANSIT MESS	PKG	1:45		11:12:35
B-5		RECALL	_____	:30		11:14:20
B-6		FRAUD	_____	:30		11:14:50
B-7		TEASE 3	VO	:10		11:15:20
COMM #2				2:05		11:15:30
C-1		TOSS TO WX		:10		11:17:35
C-2		WEATHER		3:35	WX SET	11:17:45
COMM #3				2:05		11:21:20
D-1		TOSS TO SPORTS		:10		11:23:25
D-2		SPORTS	SPORTS	4:00	SPORTS SET	11:23:35
D-3		GOODBYE	CREDITS	1:00		11:27:35 B
		NEWSCAST ENDS		C		11:28:35 A

FIGURE 13.5
Format with
backtimes up to
newscast start at
11:00:35.

To backtime, you subtract the story time C
from the backtime of the story below A
and the result is your story backtime B

you are doing this by hand, blank format sheets should always be filled in with a pencil, to allow for scribbling when you change story TSTs and backtimes.

If you use a computer, it takes care of this automatically. In Figure 13.5, you can see how the subtraction scheme works. Go to the station log time for the end of the newscast, 11:28:35, and subtract the length of the Goodbye, 1:00, and you have the backtime for the Goodbye. To find the backtime for each story in each segment, you simply continue up the format, subtracting the story time from the backtime of the story below it. When you've got the backtime for story A-1, it should match the station log-on time, for the newscast, 11:00:35.

MAKING ON-AIR DECISIONS

The producer is usually responsible for the length of the newscast and must pull and alter stories while the program is on the air. Only the producer can make editorial changes in the booth during the newscast. Although the director must make some immediate decisions if technical needs change, the director must defer to the news editor in questions of content of the newscast.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Both the copyeditor and the producer must check all copy for accuracy, fairness, scope, libel, and writing style. The producer is responsible for planning stories, developing stories, coaching and copyediting the writers, assigning times for the reports, scheduling these in newscasts, checking to see that all stories are done, and seeing that the newscast is backtimed and produced on the air.

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