



SEGUES

LIVE SHOTS

VO'S

INTERVIEWING

REMOTES

TRACKS

# AIR WORDS

SEQUENCES

WRITING FOR BROADCAST NEWS

PAPAROUNDS

NAT SOUND

TEASES

LEADS

ACTUALITIES

FORMATS

VOICERS

READERS

VO/SOT'S

SOUNDSITES

STACKING

HEAD-INS

PACKAGES

WRITEUPS

## JOHN HEWITT



AIR  
WORDS

Writing for Broadcast News

John Hewitt



Mayfield Publishing Company

Mountain View, California

REF  
PN  
4784  
.T4  
H48  
1988

Copyright © 1988 by Mayfield Publishing Company

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means without written permission of the publisher.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Hewitt, John, 1943-  
Air words.

Includes index.

1. Television broadcasting of news. 2. Broadcast  
journalism--Authorship. I. Title.

PN4784.T4H48 1988 808'.06607 88-1362

ISBN 0-87484-844-X

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Mayfield Publishing Company

1240 Villa Street

Mountain View, California 94041

R00 701 100 79

Sponsoring editor, C. Lansing Hays; production editor, Linda Toy; production assistant, Jean Mailander; cover designer, Victoria Vandeventer. Foreword illustrations by Arthur Berger. Printed on 50# Glatfelter Spring Forge by Thompson-Shore, Inc.

# CONTENTS

Foreword ix

Chapter One  
KNOW WHAT BROADCAST DOES WELL 1

Chapter Preview 1  
Glossary 1  
This Business of News 2  
What Audience Research Tells Us 2  
Broadcast Strengths 3  
Different Strengths Lead to Different Approaches 4  
The Different Look of Broadcast 4  
What Are Some Drawbacks of Broadcast? 7  
What Extra Skills Must You Learn? 7  
Chapter Summary 8  
Notes 8

Chapter Two  
CHECK YOUR FACTS AND KNOW YOUR FORMATS 9

Chapter Preview 9  
Glossary 9  
Know Your Story and Check Your Research 10  
Perspective, Colorful Language, or Visuals? 12  
Script Styles (Upper- or Lowercase) 12  
The Story Slug 13  
Providing the Technical Information 13  
Readable Copy 18  
Readability 20  
Chapter Summary 28

Chapter Three  
SHIFTING FROM PRINT TO BROADCAST 29

Chapter Preview 29  
Glossary 29  
Use Concise Words and Phrases 30  
Elliptical Sentences 37  
Attribution 41  
Active and Passive Verbs 46  
The Challenge of Verb Tenses 49

LIT  
REF

#15.95

Common Reference Problems 54  
Nested Phrases 59  
Overly Long Introductory Phrases 61  
Repetition 64  
Chapter Summary 68

#### Chapter Four WRITING THE LEAD 69

Chapter Preview 69  
Glossary 69  
Leads 70  
Major Stories/Easy Leads 71  
What Interests Me About This Story? 72  
How Much of the Story Goes Into the Lead? 73  
Six Categories of Leads 74  
The Leads to Avoid 87  
Chapter Summary 94

#### Chapter Five INTERVIEWS: HOW TO GET WHAT YOU NEED FROM THEM, AND HOW TO USE BITES IN STORIES 95

Chapter Preview 95  
Glossary 96  
Adding a Bite Is a Big Change 96  
Actualities/Soundbites 98  
Interviews Need Planning 99  
How to Get Good Interview Bites 100  
Repeating Questions/Listening for Answers 102  
Pulling the Bites 102  
Putting the Bites Into a Story 106  
Chapter Summary 114

#### Chapter Six WRITING NARRATIVES: SOME MODELS 115

Chapter Preview 115  
Glossary 115  
Longer Format Narrative Writing 116  
The Function of a Good Lead-in 116  
The Time Continuity Model 118  
Particular-to-General Model 120  
Other Ways: Cause and Effect, Chronology, and Payoffs 122  
Style Elements 125  
Chapter Summary 126

#### Chapter Seven TEASES, TOSSES, AND OTHER SPARE PARTS 127

Chapter Preview 127  
Glossary 127  
Teases 127  
Tosses 131  
Bulletins 134  
Chapter Summary 136

**Chapter Eight**  
**REMOTES, VOICERS, AND WRAPS 137**

- Chapter Preview 137
- Glossary 137
- Radio's Small Staffs 137
- Reports From the Field 138
- The Voicer 138
- The Remote 141
- The Wrap 144
- Scripts for Wraps 144
- Chapter Summary 146

**Chapter Nine**  
**TV: WRITING TO STILLs 147**

- Chapter Preview 147
- Glossary 147
- Visuals as Tools 148
- Partial Screen Graphics 149
- How Long Should the CG Be On? 152
- Full Screen Visuals 153
- Chapter Summary 161

**Chapter Ten**  
**TV: WRITING THE VO 163**

- Chapter Preview 163
- Glossary 163
- The VO 164
- The Twin Tower Concept 164
- Reviewing Rules for Visuals 165
- What Kind of Shots Are Best for VO's? 166
- Visual Sequences 167
- Steps to the VO Story 168
- Learning to Write to the Time of Pictures 175
- Chapter Summary 178

**Chapter Eleven**  
**TV: WRITING THE VO/SOT 179**

- Chapter Preview 179
- Glossary 179
- The VO/SOT—A Difficult Combination 180
- Different VO/SOT Formats 182
- Your Visuals in the Writeup 183
- Use Another VO or An On-Camera Tag 183
- Chapter Summary 185

**Chapter Twelve**  
**TV: SHORT PACKAGES, LIVE SHOTS, AND LONG PACKAGES 187**

- Chapter Preview 187
- Glossary 187
- Short Packages 188
- Organizing in the Mind 188
- The Standard Parts of Packages 189

Beginning the Process	191
Writing the Story	192
Live Shots	195
Longer Packages	198
Chapter Summary	200

**Chapter Thirteen**  
**COPYEDITING AND PRODUCING 201**

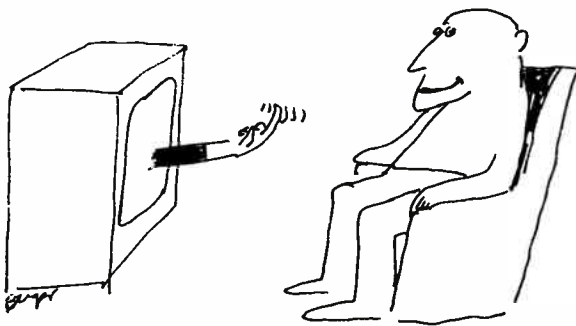
Chapter Preview	201
Glossary	201
Looking for Holes and Checking Accuracy	202
Fairness	205
Comprehensive Coverage	206
Libel, Slander, and Invasion of Privacy	207
The Producer's Job	213
Theories About Stacking Stories	215
How to Stack a Newscast	218
Backtiming	221
On-Air Decisions During the Newscast	222
Chapter Summary	222

**INDEX 223**

# FOREWORD

Every news assignment reaches a moment of truth when you must sit down at a typewriter or computer keyboard and write the story. It becomes a matter of sifting through the information, deciding what's in and what's out, coming up with a clever lead, scattering some perspective throughout, fitting everything into the producer's requested time frame, and, in the case of radio or television, writing for the spoken word.

This workbook is designed to help you with skills needed for the broadcast medium. In these pages you'll find a collection of definitions, rules, warnings, shortcuts, do nots, and exercises to sharpen your style of communicating the news. If you are working now in newspapers or magazines, broadcast requires big changes. You'll write in the sometimes awkward world of speech patterns—awkward because it all looks different on the page.



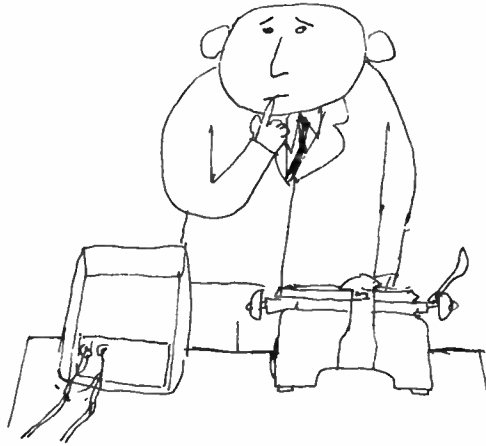
You'll be working with interviews, sounds, and pictures recorded in the field—elements that force changes in the story design. The basic need to pass along timely reports of current events is still there, but the way of doing it is changed.

Also, you'll find style standards for the copy (upper- or lowercase, hyphenating numbers, etc.) vary from station to station, or market to market. That's fine. It's hard to get broadcast newsmen to agree on anything, including definitions. What this book defines as a *package*—a narrated television field report—is also called a *takeout*, an *insert*, a *wraparound*, or a *field piece* in different newsrooms. Consequently, you might end up using a different term—whatever your instructor or news director suggests—but at least you'll be able to say, "Oh, they called that a *wrap* in the last place I worked."



You'll also find a load of hints, suggestions, and rules, but they are not absolute. When you read—"Use active voice! Put attribution first! Look out for pronouns!"—think of them as exercises toward a better broadcast style. They will help, but sometimes they can be ignored to add variety. ???

For writers, this is an exciting time. Newsroom computers are now becoming standard in many markets. Composing sentences on a screen allows newswriters a little extra time to sit and fiddle with a lead, or tighten up some wandering sentences. If a script is headed for the air, this extra chance to rework something is invaluable.



So welcome to the world of writing for your co-worker's lips and your 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 useful, often frank, and sometimes zany criticisms from students in the Broadcast Communication Arts Department at San Francisco State University and the Mass Media Institute at Stanford 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 San Francisco television station; Jules Dundes at Stanford; and my colleagues at San Francisco State, Rick Houlberg and Art France.

Don Palm was the editor who coaxed the project through reviews and rewrites. Copyeditor Toni Haskell was a godsend, unscrambling tortuous sentences and pulling together wandering ideas. Linda Toy, with infinite patience, was willing to try new ways to get this book to press.

Finally, I'd like to say that my family—son Dan and stepdaughter Nicole—put up with a lot when I would clatter away, working at three in the morning. My wife Annette was always there with support and understanding.

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

John Hewitt

# **AIR WORDS**

**Writing for Broadcast News**

## CHAPTER ONE

# KNOW WHAT BROADCAST DOES WELL

---

---

### Chapter Preview

This chapter covers the relationship between journalism and broadcast. It stresses why you should always consider the special strengths of broadcast—the power of immediacy, voice-recordings and visuals, emotion, and personal delivery. It outlines the extra skills a journalist needs to become proficient in broadcast news.

### Glossary

**ACTUALITY** The radio term for field recordings of interviews or events. Portions may be used in a newscast.

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

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

**\_\_O/C** A television script abbreviation for *on-camera*. This indicates to the director that the picture and sound come from the person reading in the studio. The name of the person who will read the story can be written on the line to the left of the "O/C."

**PRONOUNCER** The phonetic spelling of a word in a newscast story. Usually the word 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** for *sound on tape*. This alerts anyone working on the newscast that the audio portion will come from video or audio tape.

**SOUNDBITE** A portion of an interview recorded on videotape.

## This Business of News

This workbook is about news stories and how to put them together. In its most simple definition, news 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 really has to do with 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 situation should be considered.

## What Audience Research Tells Us

The general public has consistently told pollsters that radio and television are very important sources of news. They listen to radio and watch 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 feel confident in the personal delivery of newscasters.

Listeners and viewers have an on-again off-again relationship with newscasts. Researchers<sup>1</sup> 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. The audience may be driving, cooking or eating dinner, taking care of children, lying in bed, or even reading newspapers. Their attention is drifting in and out. It'll take clever leads and a sharp broadcast style to bring them into each and every story.

Another problem is that the audience gets one and only one chance to hear the story. Research has been done on what the viewer or listener perceives, retains, and understands from the newscast.<sup>2</sup> Stories written in simple speech patterns, with the least complex phrasing, are the easiest to digest in that crucial single pass. News workers should develop a simple style that promotes the maximum understanding of the story. Television writers have to be aware that the distraction caused by powerful visuals can lessen comprehension.

## Broadcast 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 what's best of all—allow us to scan the pages and read only what we want. There is no question that many of the newspaper industry's practices are aimed at highlighting those qualities.

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

- *Immediacy* News is a collection of *timely* summaries of current events. People turn first to radio and then to television for the latest information, the newest update, or the last review of the evening.<sup>3</sup> They look to you for the latest information.

Part of broadcast news work is a constant search for the newest information, the angle that "advances" the story. To capture this immediacy, some radio news staffs never leave the office, and instead conduct all reporting and interviews on the phone. In this way major stories are constantly updated and, if necessary, new leads can be prepared every few minutes. Television spends huge sums on microwave and satellite trucks designed to link any location with their broadcast 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 don't always take the time needed to evaluate sources and pin down accurate information. If unedited, unchecked rumor is the result, accuracy suffers, and the result is poor journalism.

- A second strength is the *actuality/soundbite/visual* contained in the field recordings. By using these on the air, you give your audience a chance to hear or see *how* something happened or *how* someone appeared while making a dramatic statement. Radio has the rich natural sound of voices or events. Television gives the same audio but adds the visual dimension. When in the field, don't forget how valuable the audio and videotape will be when you tell the story. Remember, audiences tell polltakers that one reason they watch television is that they like to see and hear people in the news, so that they can judge for themselves whether a person is telling the truth. Audiences are keenly aware of which actuality or picture you choose.

- A third strength is *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 it.

But this is a tricky subject to handle. The emotion must be kept in proper perspective. When pictures and actualities with strong emotion take over the story, it rightfully brings charges of sensationalism. Emotion should be treated with great care.

- A fourth strength is *personal delivery*. Just how the reporter or anchor delivers the report is crucial. An effective newscaster needs a well-written script, a comfortable voice, good pronunciation, and correct speech patterns to communicate the item.

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

The personal delivery strength carries a penalty for those who abuse it. Put too much emphasis on personal delivery and you cross the line into entertainment. It's very easy to do, and requires the utmost caution to avoid.

## Different Strengths Lead to Different Approaches

Radio and television reporters often use different methods 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 stations more cities and communities to cover.

Therefore, broadcast staffs are structured differently. They depend more on research done in the newsroom, and put far fewer reporters on the street. They seldom match the beat coverage or specialized reporting of major papers, concentrating instead on major stories and quick reactions to tips and information from many sources, including other news agencies. They devote more staff positions to engineers or videotape camerapeople 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, it will stress what's in the actualities or soundbites. At other times, it will be built around the immediacy of the story or the newscaster's abilities in delivery. 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 for the audience.

## The Different Look of Broadcast

Broadcast stories not only are gathered in an unusual manner, they are designed to be scan-read in the newscast. Their sentence construction is shorter, more abrupt, and is 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.

**TOWER JOBS  
MAY GO TO  
STRIKERS**

by Associated Press  
The U.S. Congress  
will be asked by  
President Ronald  
Reagan to rehire 455  
former air traffic  
controllers, according  
to a White House  
spokesperson.

"That's great  
news," said Roland  
Jaffe, 37, of  
Kelso, Delaware,  
after hearing the  
news.

Once a member of  
the now defunct  
Professional Air  
Controllers...etc.

CONTROLLERS/JNH/6-5

—O/C

IT LOOKS LIKE SOME  
FORMER AIR TRAFFIC  
CONTROLLERS  
COULD BE BACK IN THEIR  
OLD TOWERS SOON.

A WHITE HOUSE  
SOURCE SAYS THE  
PRESIDENT WILL ASK  
CONGRESS TO REHIRE  
OVER 450 OF THE  
CONTROLLERS FIRED  
AFTER STRIKING SIX  
YEARS AGO.

ONE WHO HAD BEEN  
LET GO REACTED TO THE  
NEWS BY SAYING...  
THAT'S GREAT.

(MORE/MORE)

**Figure 1.1** Example of how a story would appear in print (*left*) and in broadcast (*right*).

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 a transcript of your speech looks like. Try this next exercise.

---

---

## **EXERCISE 1-A**

## **VISUAL SPEECH**

For this exercise, read the following situation several times. Then explain the story, as you understand it and as if you were explaining it to a friend, into a microphone hooked to a small cassette recorder. The explanation should run about :45 (45 seconds). When you finish, make an exact transcription of your description of the story. The typed version should include every stumble, half-sentence, "uhmm," or whatever you said to describe what was going on. Be truthful in typing out the transcript. The purpose of this exercise is to produce a printed version of your normal speech patterns.

### **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 there also.

The pandas are on loan for two months. They 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?

Broadcast's power in presentation also has traps. These problems occur mainly as a result of overemphasis on one of the 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. Other drawbacks have to do with the way newsrooms operate. Three of these drawbacks are listed below.

One major 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. Limits like these often hamper thoughtful journalism.

Another 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 kind of competition, once the norm in newspapers, can be all-consuming when breaking stories must be covered. 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 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 accountant's decisions, and the ethical questions might be made by someone who has no love of journalism. That can cause morale problems.

## What Extra Skills Must You Learn?

Voice-delivered news work requires that you learn new skills that go beyond simply putting words on paper.

For both radio and television, you'll have to practice ways to *get access*—to talk newsmakers into being recorded for broadcast. That's harder to do than just getting an interview.

Once they've agreed, you'll have to ask the *right questions* to get 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.

These are all daily jobs that take away precious time a writer or reporter would like to spend on research. In broadcast, you are at a definite disadvantage because you have to do more, but always in the same number of minutes and seconds. 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.

## 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, for 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 differences extend to the scripting methods and to the steps taken in preparing stories. The drawbacks are too little time, the tendency toward sensationalism and entertainment, and problems of the broadcast industry itself.

Novice radio newsmen must be able not only to research a story, but also to 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 both to acquire the visuals and then merge these with the writing.

## 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 a 1983 *Journal of Communication* (Vol. 33) article "The attention factor in recalling television news."
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 Roper Poll, 1984, done for the Television Information Office in New York.

## CHAPTER TWO

# CHECK YOUR FACTS AND KNOW YOUR FORMATS

---

### Chapter Preview

This chapter covers the basic goals of fact-checking: accuracy, fairness, and scope of coverage. It also examines what unique broadcast elements must be included on news copy. There are discussions of simplicity, detail exclusion, and rounding off to achieve readability.

### Glossary

**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, these marks are placed at the end of the story to indicate there are no additional pages.

**INCUE** Also abbreviated as the *I.C.*, it is sometimes written on scripts that use actualities or soundbites. The incue usually includes the first four words of the bite. That helps identify the right cart and whether or not it is cued correctly.

**OUTCUE** Also known *endcue*, it 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.

**(more/more)** In some newsrooms, this 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.

- REAX** short for reaction. It is used as an abbreviation in many broadcast news situations.
- 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 clear, some stations refer to these as "live remotes."
- 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** total 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** 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 any news in any format, journalists should understand the point of their story. Then they should check and evaluate the raw news material. Some newsrooms have policies about how many sources must be cross-referenced to validate information. Leaving individual policies aside, here are three generally accepted checks on information.

**Research Check, Step 1. Is It Accurate?** Whether the news story is true in both concept and detail is the foremost concern of journalism for any medium. Even with the deadline pressure of broadcast and the uncertainty of most so-called 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*, describes 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 and wrong information from long-held and traditional sources, based solely on the authority of a single source. Dubious sources are often left unqualified. Watch out. If you aren't certain about the information, make this clear to your audience. Let them decide.

Another problem to be aware of is that within the portions of recorded interviews, speeches, and news conferences that are pulled for use in stories ("actualities" in radio and "soundbites" in TV) are unchecked facts that the interviewees or speakers claim to be true. The broadcast journalist should put these claims into some perspective.

Television news adds another dimension. Because it is photojournalism, it must try to capture the visual representation of current affairs by cutting together sequences of videotape into visual summaries. With every story, television journalists should ask themselves, 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, Step 2. 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 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 allowed 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; however, that action is on appeal.

**Research Check, Step 3. Is It Comprehensive?** Scope is the last important standard. This refers to the extent of the research for the story. Good comprehensive coverage insures that the items left out were at least considered. This standard is particularly important in broadcast, because time restrictions and the short format of the stories exclude a great amount of detail.

## Perspective, Colorful Language, or Visuals?

Another 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.

The addition of *colorful language*—or judgmental and highly charged adjectives, adverbs, well-chosen verbs, bits of narrative, the opinion of others—is also the realm of 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*," re minefields for the writer. Colorful language is tricky and should be based on the journalist's assessment of the situation.

Broadcast journalists have to worry not only about the language, but also the newscaster's delivery, the actualities, soundbites, ambient sound recordings of events, and the visuals on videotape. Each can add a dose of color to a story. Great care must be taken to review each of these elements.

## Script Styles (Upper- or Lowercase)

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 lowercase style.

Without endorsing any particular style, this workbook will use uppercase letters for its script examples. It helps to set these apart from the text. When writing for a particular news operation or class, you should follow the wishes of the editor or instructor.



## The Story Slug

At the top of each story, reporters and writers assign a single word identifier called a "slug," named after a piece of Linotype lead that followed newspaper stories through the composition and printing process. The editor or producer assigns the story slug but if not, it's wise to pick a single-word slug that relates to the topic. 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, i.e., "BANK-FDIC" or "BANK-REAX," or "BANK-JOBS," to cluster all of the 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 this example would be "BANK-REAX/jnh/6pm" and would look like this.

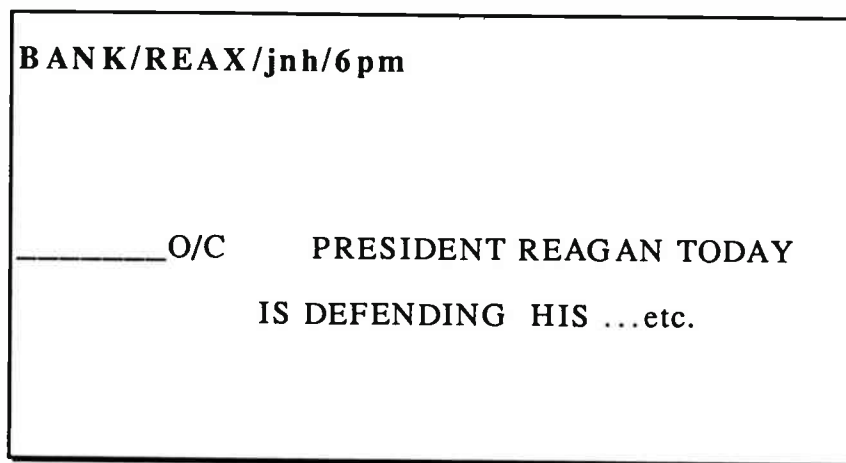


Figure 2.1. Top of script with slug.

There is no industrywide standard for sluglines. Follow your newsroom style.

## Providing the Technical Information

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

## Radio News Scripts

Because radio does not employ a large control room staff, the scripts do not need extensive technical information. A radio script generally extends across the page with 1-inch margins. This gives you a :04 line, so a :30 story would be about eight lines. For typeface, some newsrooms use all caps, some have a style with caps and lowercase, and in some others, the computer's printer decides what's best. Double space between lines, although in some newsrooms, you may be asked to leave 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-REAX/jnh/6pm**

(ANNCR:)

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

Endcue: ...are prepared for anything.

**Figure 2.2.** Portion of a radio news script.



Notice that for each cart, you'll include a tape running time, or TRT, an incue and an endcue. If you leave these out, you could still get by, but 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-REAX/jnh/6pm**

(ANNCR:)

FEDERAL BANK EXAMINERS SAY  
THEY ARE GOING TO INVESTIGATE  
THE FAILURE OF NEWTON SAVINGS  
AND LOAN.

THE LOCAL BRANCHES OF  
NEWTON SHUT THEIR DOORS ON  
THURSDAY.

SOME DEPOSITORS ARE  
WORRIED.

(cart #1F TRT=:25)

Incue: "We think this is a scandal  
Endcue: .....are prepared for anything."

Figure 2.3. Portion of radio news copy ready for newscaster.

## Television News Scripts

Because both the production and news staffs are much larger in television, it is more crucial to have the accurate technical information on a script intended for a live newscast. To do this, the TV news page traditionally has been split in half, with the left side used for the instructions to the director and the right half for the material to be read, called the *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 that the direction on the left side of the script matches the point where you want the change made in the copy. It is always advisable to make any switches at the beginning of sentences or phrases that begin new copy line.

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. This includes:

- instructions about reading from the studio ( O/C, or LIVE),
- when a CG might be inserted (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:

Slugline

**BANK-REAX/JNH/6PM**

O/C tells director that this is from the studio

\_\_\_\_\_ O/C

BANK EXAMINERS SAY  
THEY'LL TRY TODAY TO FIND OUT  
WHAT HAPPENED AT NEWTOWN  
SAVINGS AND LOAN

VO tells the director that Video provides the visual and studio the audio.

VO BEGINS

(vo)  
THE SIX BANK OFFICIALS  
WERE THERE WHEN THE DOORS  
OPENED AT EIGHT THIS  
MORNING. THEY SAY IT'LL  
TAKE TWO WEEKS TO GO  
THROUGH THE BOOKS

TRT tells the director how long the tape is.

TRT:10

(live)

O/C...back to the studio.

\_\_\_\_\_ O/C

THERE'S A PHONE NUMBER  
TO CALL IF YOU ARE WORRIED  
ABOUT YOUR ACCOUNT.

Going to use a full screen CG with a phone number.

FULL CG  
(PH# 555-1212)

(cg)  
YOU CAN REACH THE BANK'S  
TROUBLE LINE AT 5-5-5...1-2-1-2.  
THAT'S 5-5-5...1-2-1-2.

(# # #)

Figure 2.4. 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

/MOVIE/HOLLYWOOD/

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

Here's an example of both unmarked and marked copy. The goal is to block out what is unwanted, and clearly write in what is needed.

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 EXPOSITION  
WILL COST 2.45 MILLION DOLLARS.  
IT IS TO BE LOCATED IN THE FORT  
WILLIAMS PARKING LOT.

(# # #)

Figure 2.5. Unmarked TV news copy.

Copied and marked for broadcast, it would look like this.

MAYOR/jnh/6pm

O/C      ~~THE MAYOR ANNOUNCED AT A~~  
              SAYS  
~~NEWS CONFERENCE TODAY THAT~~

THE CITY WILL SPONSOR AN URBAN  
FAIR.

~~SHE SAYS THAT THE EXPOSITION~~  
              NEARLY 23  
WILL COST ~~23.45~~ MILLION DOLLARS.  
              WILL  
IT ~~IS~~ TO BE IN THE FORT  
WILLIAMS PARKING LOT.

(# # #)

Figure 2.6. Marked TV news copy.

The reason those particular marks were added will be discussed in the next section.

# Readability

It's not just the marks on the page, but the basic flow of the sentence and proportion 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 noncomplex 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 this limit helps the rookie broadcast writer compose better sentences.

**Contractions** These are usable in broadcast. You don't have to shy away from wasn't, hadn't, isn't, or it's. They are more conversational. Use them.

**Detail Exclusion** This is one of those times where your story design considers the needs of the listener/viewer. 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* 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. Count those out almost immediately unless you are convinced they are vital to the story. 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  
unnecessary.

As you can  
see, the details  
of the route  
seem a bit  
overdone.  
Leave them  
out!

Concentrate  
on other details  
to give color to  
the story.

BIKES/jnh/6pm

-----O/C THE POST OFFICE'S REGIONAL  
DISTRIBUTION SUPERVISOR BOB  
TRENT...37...OF GARMISH STREET...  
STEELTOWN... IS BICYCLING TO  
FLORIDA NEXT MONTH.

HE HOPES TO START BY THE  
WAXMAN OVERPASS...GO SOUTH  
ON I-79...TURN WEST AT GROVER'S  
CORNERS...CONTINUE ACROSS THE  
PATHWAY BRIDGE...RIDE ALONG  
HESPERIAN WAY...THEN TURN  
SOUTH ON I-360.

THE TRIP ON A 15-SPEED BIKE IS  
EXPECTED TO TAKE EIGHT DAYS.

(MORE/MORE)

**Figure 2.7.** TV news copy overburdened with details.

**Numbers As Visuals** When writing numbers to be read, here are some helpful rules:

- Some suggest hyphens to connect all parts of the number and the nouns that are modified. This depends on the individual newsroom style.

23-COWS

465-DAYS

- Spell out numbers from 1-11. Spell out decimal qualifiers (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 it out.

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 with large amounts of data—percentages, numbers, dollar amounts, etc. If your goal is to inform your audience, then you should practice rounding off.

If your story includes the number \$24,473.25 as a city budget figure, do your listeners a favor by rounding it off to "almost 25-thousand-dollars." 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:

Notice that the figures are too detailed for the viewers to retain in broadcast. Round these off.

BUDGET/jnh/6pm

-----O/C

THE MANDRAKE CITY  
COUNCIL IS MAKING PUBLIC  
ITS 1988 BUDGET FIGURES.  
THE POLICE WILL GET  
\$234,344... THE FIRE  
DEPARTMENT \$121,323... AND  
THE CITY LIBRARY \$34,500 IN  
SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDS.

(MORE/MORE)

**Figure 2.8.** TV news copy containing numbers that need to be rounded off.

**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 could change to "nearly two-thirds of the cows...one-third of the pigs...and one-fifth of the chickens." As a quick exercise, rewrite this copy. How would you do the conversions?

SURVEY/jnh/3:30pm

-----O/C A NEW STATE UNIVERSITY  
SURVEY SHOWS COLLEGE  
STUDENTS ARE THE LEAST  
LIKELY GROUP TO BE IN  
WEEKEND AUTOMOBILE  
CRASHES.

THE TWO-YEAR STUDY FOUND  
SIX OF EVERY 12 STUDENTS  
WOULD AVOID ANY  
ACCIDENTS...WHILE  
ANOTHER TWO-TENTHS WOULD  
GET INTO MINOR SCRAPES.

THIS IS 25-PERCENT BETTER  
THAN THE NEXT GROUP...  
GROCERY STORE  
CONVENIENCE CLERKS.

(MORE/MORE)

**Figure 2.9.** Exercise involving the use of parallel structures.

## READ IT ALOUD!!!!

Broadcast newsrooms often look like wards where people talk to themselves. But the writers and reporters 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 a 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,
- and a double underline means major emphasis.

Some newscasters put in short arrows ↓ to indicate a change in voice pitch.

Here's an example:

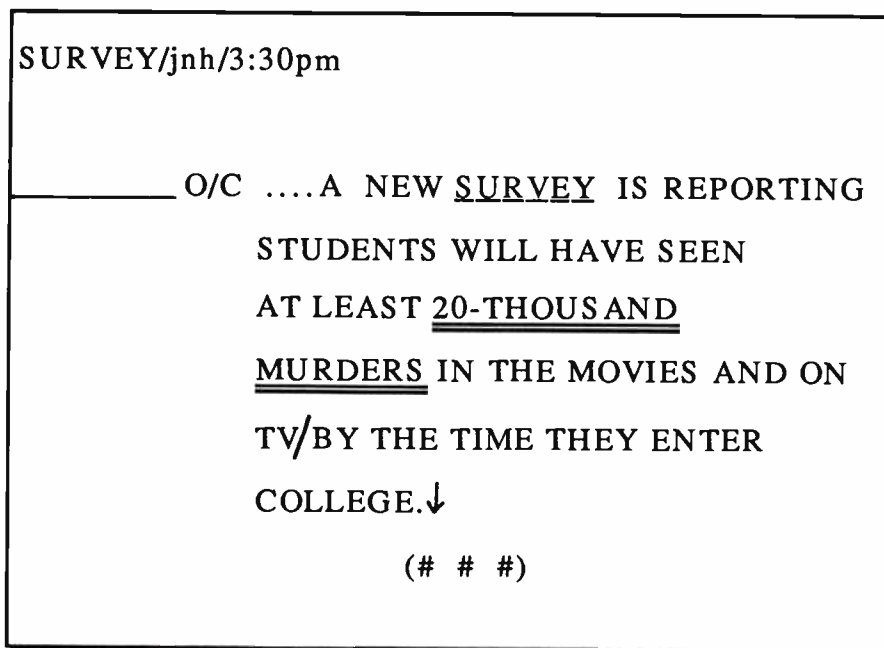


Figure 2.10. TV news copy with newscaster's marks.

**EXERCISE 2-A**

**DETAILS! DETAILS!**

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

PLANT/jnh/2pm

-----O/C THE \$24,630,243 SEWAGE  
TREATMENT AND TERTIARY REFINEMENT  
FACILITY...LOCATED ON THE SHORELINE  
AT BREMEMERS CREEK...WILL BE PUT IN  
AN OPERATIONALLY TERMINATED  
SITUATION BECAUSE OF THE FACT THAT  
THERE IS 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...ACCORDING TO LYLE  
KURST...AN OFFICIAL AT DINGLY  
LABORATORIES.

(# # #)

**EXERCISE 2-B****MORE PROBLEMS!**

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

DRUG/jnh/1pm

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

SUFFERERS FROM 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 MAKE A 4 OUT OF  
TEN PROBABILITY JUDGMENT THAT  
THE NEW OINTMENT IS  
EFFECTIVE...AT LEAST ON RATS.

HUMAN TESTING BEGINS SOON.

( # # # )

## Chapter Summary

Broadcast scripts require a certain 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.

## CHAPTER THREE

# 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 verbs, adjectives, and phrases; attribution; and multiple tenses. This chapter also deals with the problems of misused phrases, double-referenced pronouns, awkwardly long introductory phrases, and midsentence nested phrases.

You will also learn that repetition is valuable in certain cases, 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 to establish credibility.

**ELLIPTICAL SENTENCE** 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**, a **live**, a **live-er**, or a **copy story**.

**SIBILANCE** A pronunciation problem that occurs when there is a series of words, all of which begin with or include the letter S. Sibilance causes a hissing sound.

## Use Concise Words and Phrases

Broadcast writers must make an effort to use short, simple words. They should put verbs in the positive and most direct form, replace complex adjectives with short, clear ones, and pare phrases down to the essentials.

### Verbs

Look for ways to express action clearly and simply. It is wise to review the verb and its construction to see whether there is a more simple verb that will make your idea easy 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.

The second sentence is more direct and stronger.

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

**Negative:**      THE CONVICTS DECIDED NOT TO ESCAPE  
   FROM...

A more direct verb construction would be:

**Positive:**        THE CONVICTS DECIDED TO STAY IN...



As you can see, the sentence is stronger and more direct with the positive verb form. Here's a list of some verbs that have been changed. See if you agree.

### **EXERCISE 3-A**

### **WORDS AND NEW WORDS**

Review these examples. Fill in the shortened forms.

#### COMPLEX VERBS

to construct  
to reach a conclusion  
to terminate  
to blockade  
to eventuate

#### SIMPLIFIED VERBS

to build  
to decide  
to stop  
to stem  
to follow

Fill in the shortened form.

to reiterate	(            )
to monitor	(            )
to have affection for	(            )

#### NEGATIVE VERBS

to not restrict  
to not imprison  
to not dispose of

#### POSITIVE VERBS

to allow  
to free  
to keep

Fill in the shortened form.

to not pay attention to	(            )
to not remove	(            )
to not complexify	(            )

## Special Case of the Verb To Say

Although students 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, awkward and often color the delivery of the sentence. Repeat the verb *say* as often as you like. Here are two paragraphs:

MARKER/jnh/6pm

-----O/C

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.

(# # #)

**Figure 3.1.** Example of writing that uses synonyms for the verb *to say*.

Instead, you can change that to the following:

MARKER/jnh/6pm

-----O/C

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.

(# # #)

Figure 3.2. Example of more effective writing that repeatedly uses the verb *to say*.

## Adjectives

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

<u>COMPLEX</u>	<u>YOUR CHOICE</u>
ASSIDUOUS	(            )
UPPERMOST	(            )
REMORSEFUL	(            )
NARCISSISTIC	(            )
BOLD-FACED	(            )
MOTH-EATEN	(            )

## Phrases

Avoid sibilance and wordy phrases, which detract from the effective presentation of the news.

**Sibilance.** Sibilance occurs when you string together too many words that begin with S. Here's an example:

SENATORS SAID SLOPPY SHIPYARD  
WORK WAS THE CAUSE...etc.

Change that to

SENATORS BLAMED POOR SHIPYARD  
WORK...etc.

**Wordy Phrases.** In this case, you've used 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****WORDS, WORDS**

Examine this story for wordiness. Edit to simplify.

WORDS/jnh/6pm

-----O/C TWELVE MEMBERS IN GOOD  
STANDING OF THE SHERIFF'S  
SPECIAL WEAPONS AND TACTICS  
SQUAD WERE THERE TO PROVIDE  
ASSISTANCE DURING THE  
APPREHENSION OF THE  
SUSPECT...ONE JOHN E. JUDD, 29,  
OF 1223 OAK STREET,  
BRIONLEYVILLE.

(# # #)

-----O/C THE TENSE AND VIOLENCE  
FRAUGHT STANDOFF TURNED A  
NORMALLY TRANQUIL AND  
PICTURESQUE AGRICULTURAL  
HAMLET INTO A SUSPICIOUS...  
OVERWROUGHT COMMUNITY OF  
FEAR YESTERDAY.

(# # #)

**EXERCISE 3-C****BETTER CHOICES**

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

ELIMINATING/jnh/6pm

-----O/C TWO UNIDENTIFIED VISITORS  
TO THE STARLIGHT MOTEL  
SUFFERED SERIOUS AND NEAR  
FATAL INJURIES IN SPECTACULAR  
FALLS FROM SECOND FLOOR  
BALCONIES TO THE GROUND FLOOR  
BELOW YESTERDAY.

( # # # )

-----O/C TREASURE HUNTERS PLYING  
THE PLACID BLUE SALTWATER  
HORIZONS OF THE CARIBBEAN SEA  
DECLARED YESTERDAY THAT THEY  
HAD CERTAINLY FOUND THE  
REMAINS OF A 16TH CENTURY  
SPANISH FLEET GALLEON CALLED  
THE SANTA MARIA DE ATOCHE.

( # # # )

# Elliptical Sentences

Because you are aiming for speech patterns, your copy will 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.  
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 would 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.

Also, modern sportscasters get in on the fun.

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

That's how elliptical it can get. Rookie writers should avoid overusing this style but it doesn't hurt to use 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.

EVERYONE THOUGHT THE VOTE WOULD  
BE CLOSE.

BUT THAT DIDN'T HAPPEN.

IT WAS UNANIMOUS.

FIVE-TO-ZERO AGAINST SPENDING THE  
MONEY.

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-D****LOSING WORDS OR PHRASES**

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

ELIMINATING/jnh/6pm

-----O/C      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... ARE 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.

(more/more/more)

**EXERCISE 3-E****MANY TROUBLES**

Examine this story for word choice and elliptical possibilities. Again, please copyedit it .

CHOICES/jnh/6pm

-----O/C

TEST SCORES FOR THE  
STATE'S KIDS OF SCHOOL AGE  
ARE UP IN MANY DIFFERENT AREAS  
IN THE LATEST STATEWIDE  
ACHIEVEMENT EVALUATIONS.

THE SUPERINTENDENT OF  
SCHOOLS ROGER B. CARNS SAID  
INNOVATIVE TITLE FOUR FUNDED  
PROGRAMS WHICH RETURNED TO  
FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS COULD  
BE CITED AS RESPONSIBLE FOR  
THE GAIN.

LOCAL SCHOOL OFFICIALS  
REITERATED THAT ASSESSMENT  
DECLARING...IT'S A START.

(more/more/more)

# Attribution

Attribution is the use of news sources to establish credibility or doubt in your story. Attribution poses two questions for broadcast writers: Where should it be placed, and when should it be used? The first answer is easy—attribution should, and usually does, go first. But the second questions involves many individual judgments. 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.** Finally, there is a unique broadcast angle. Because story space is severely limited in newscasts, it is often necessary to condense the source of your information or to eliminate it altogether. In broadcast, you quite often shorten long government titles to "officials" or "authorities," especially when that information is of routine value or little importance.

You 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?

**One Exception: Crime.** Crime reports are an exception. 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 placement.

The U.S. and France will soon meet in new discussions about defenses, *according to the State Department's Europe Area Specialist Sally Bowles*

This placement of a lengthy attribution at the end of a sentence is fine for print, where your eyes have a chance to review the facts in the sentence after you are informed of the attribution.

It should be noted that not all print journalists think the attribution goes in this trailing position.

Some routinely place attribution in the advance position rather than at the end of the sentence.

Figure 3.3 Example of print attribution.

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

Here's an example of placing attribution first.

----- O/C      A STATE DEPARTMENT  
OFFICIAL IS SAYING THE U-S  
AND FRANCE WILL SOON MEET  
TO DISCUSS NATO DEFENSES.  
(more/more)

Figure 3.4. Example of broadcast attribution.

**EXERCISE 3-F****ATTRIBUTION PROBLEMS**

Examine these story parts for attribution problems. Be prepared to discuss how you might restructure the sentences.

ATTRIBUTION/jnh/6pm

-----O/C ALL MEXICAN FEDERAL  
TROOPERS WILL RECEIVE ETHICS  
COUNSELING IN THE WAKE OF  
THE SEX SCANDALS... ACCORDING  
TO POLICE CHIEF RAUL RAMIREZ.

( # # # )

-----O/C AN EARTHQUAKE SHOOK THE  
BAY AREA THIS MORNING...  
REGISTERING THREE-POINT-FOUR  
ON THE RICHTER SCALE...  
ACCORDING TO THE GEOLOGICAL  
SERVICE.

( # # # )

-----O/C BUGS BUNNY WILL BE  
50-YEARS-OLD TOMORROW...  
A CARTOON OFFICIAL SAID.

( # # # )

**EXERCISE 3-G****MORE ATTRIBUTION PROBLEMS**

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

ATTRIBUTION/jnh/6pm

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

(# # #)

-----O/C THE SUSPECT IS IDENTIFIED AS  
BYRON WALCOTT...ACCORDING TO  
POLICE.

-----O/C THE GIANT TANKER SPLIT IN  
TWO DURING THE HEAVY STORM  
...ACCORDING TO A  
SPOKESWOMAN FOR THE  
MEXICAN NAVY.

(# # #)

**EXERCISE 3-H****SO MANY PROBLEMS**

Examine these sentences for word choice and attribution problems. If necessary, restructure the sentences on a separate piece of paper.

TROUBLE/jnh/6pm

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

(# # #)

-----O/C A CROSS SPECIES NERVE  
TRANSPLANT WILL BE ATTEMPTED  
BY DOCTORS AT OHIO MEDICAL  
CENTER...HOSPITAL OFFICIALS  
ARE SAYING.

(# # #)

-----O/C RACE OFFICIALS SAY THE  
STREETS AND AVENUES  
WILL BE MADE UP OF 40-THOUSAND  
RUNNERS IN TOMORROW'S  
MUSCULAR DYSTROPHY  
MARATHON.

(# # #)

## Active and Passive Verbs

The passive voice, in which the thing or person responsible for the action appears after the verb, is a 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.

Good broadcast writers make every attempt to keep all the verbs in active rather than passive voice. Be careful not to confuse voice with 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," the dog is obviously responsible for the action but comes after the verb. The words *was* and *by* are indicators that a passive voice verb is there.

Turning a sentence around is easy. Here are some passive voice verbs 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 *was* and *by* are obvious. Notice also that the sentence that is in active voice is shorter and the action flows more smoothly. You are saving words and time and your writing is becoming more forceful.



**EXERCISE 3-I****REPLACING PASSIVES**

Replace passive voice with active voice in the following sentences.

EXAMPLES/jnh/11pm

-----O/C

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

(# # #)

-----O/C

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

(# # #)

-----O/C

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

(# # #)

**EXERCISE 3-J****REWRITE TO ACTIVE**

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

ABANDON/jnh/11pm

-----O/C

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

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

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

THE SEWER HAD BEEN  
FINANCED BY THE FEDERAL  
GOVERNMENT UP TO 90-PERCENT.

CITY OFFICIALS SAY THAT IF THE  
PROJECT ISN'T FINISHED...NO MORE  
BUILDING PERMITS WILL BE  
ALLOWED BY THE FEDS.

( # # # )

## The Challenge of Verb Tenses

Most of our past training has suggested consistency in tenses throughout a piece of writing. Correct 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 part of a current policy? 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 backgrounding 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 desired. The present perfect adds the auxiliary *have* or *has* and describes an action that has just been completed or is still going on. 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 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 most cases, you'll be describing a current, present action. 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 used often 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 form to add spark to your writing.

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

*At the end of a story:*

THE CITY COUNCIL 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-K****THE RIGHT TENSE?**

Examine these sentences for verb tense. Be prepared to discuss whether and how you would rewrite any of the verbs.

TENSE/jnh/6pm

----- O/C     A BELGIAN CITY CLOSES ITS  
PORT AFTER A FERRYBOAT  
ACCIDENT YESTERDAY.

( # # # )

----- O/C     YESTERDAY... THE FLOODS  
SWEPT THROUGH BIRNEY FALLS  
AND ARE CAUSING PROBLEMS.

( # # # )

----- O/C     THEN THE COLONEL  
TELEPHONES FOR HELP AFTER  
HAVING HAD TO SHRED THE  
CONTENTS OF THE SECRET  
DOCUMENTS SAFE.

( # # # )

**EXERCISE 3-L****IMMEDIACY NEEDS**

In each case, rewrite the past tense to indicate a continuing action or policy.

IMMEDIACY/jnh/6pm

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

(# # #)

-----O/C DOCTORS HOPED THE  
INJECTIONS LAST NIGHT WILL  
SAVE THE OLD MAN FROM  
INFECTION.

(# # #)

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

(# # #)

**EXERCISE 3-M****SO MANY PROBLEMS**

Examine these sentences for active voice, word choice, attribution, and verb tense. If necessary, rewrite the sentences on a separate piece of paper.

GETTING MESSY/jnh/6pm

-----O/C      AMERICANS DOUBT THE  
POLICIES OF THEIR GOVERNMENT  
IN THE IRAN AFFAIR...  
ACCORDING TO A NEW POLL.  
( # # # )

-----O/C      THE ASSOCIATED PRESS  
REPORTED THE ROAD TO  
EAGLES PASS WAS REOPENING  
YESTERDAY AFTER THE MASSIVE  
SNOWSLIDE ON ROUTE 760 WAS  
CLEANED OFF BY ROAD CREWS.  
( # # # )

-----O/C      PRISON OFFICIALS  
INVESTIGATED THE ESCAPE OF  
TWO CONVICTS. GUARDS WERE  
ASKED TO APPEAR TODAY FOR  
MORE QUESTIONS.  
( # # # )

# Common Reference Problems

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

## Pronouns

Broadcast writers often use pronouns with confusing antecedents. If in doubt, rewrite the sentence or repeat the proper name and skip the pronouns. Here are two examples:

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

But if both officials are male, you must identify the he or the sentence is confusing. Here's the rewrite.

**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:

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, including 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 OAKLAND TONIGHT  
... WORRIED ABOUT...etc.

That's probably a worthless sociological assumption about which the writer knows little. If you can, avoid the all-inclusive *they're*.

### **Misplaced Phrases:**

Phrases can end up in the wrong place when you jam too much information into one sentence. Here's an example of a misplaced phrase.

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

Where was the humanitarian work done? The best solution is to relocate segments. Here it is.

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

**EXERCISE 3-N****PRONOUN PROBLEMS**

Correct ambiguous pronoun references in these sentences.

PRONOUNS/jnh/6pm

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

( # # # )

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

( # # # )

-----O/C THE BANK ROBBERS FLED  
THROUGH A SIDE DOOR. ONE  
SUSPECT RAN INTO THE  
PARKING LOT...WHERE A GETAWAY  
DRIVER WAS WAITING. POLICE  
CAPTURED HIM IMMEDIATELY.

( # # # )

**EXERCISE 3-0****PLACING PHRASES**

Correct the sentences below that have misplaced phrases.

PHRASES/jnh/6pm

-----O/C POLICE SAY THE VICTIM IS  
IN CRITICAL CONDITION AFTER  
BEING SERIOUSLY STABBED IN HIS  
KITCHEN.

( # # # )

-----O/C THE PARK AT THE BEACH THAT  
IS OVERGROWN WITH WEEDS WILL  
BE AUCTIONED OFF ON FRIDAY.

( # # # )

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

( # # # )

**EXERCISE 3-P****SO MANY PROBLEMS**

Correct these sentences. Watch for problems with voice, word choice, attribution, and verb tense. If necessary, rewrite the sentences on a separate piece of paper.

ALL ERRORS/jnh/6pm

----- O/C A PROMINENT CLERGYMAN WAS  
WOUNDED BY A GUNMAN AND A  
WITNESS SAID HE WAS HELD AT  
GUNPOINT BEFORE THE INCIDENT.

( # # # )

----- O/C THE EVENING NEWS IS  
REPORTING THE PLANS TO  
DEMOLISH A BUILDING IN  
THE CLARINGTON MALL WHICH  
IS TOO TALL FOR HEIGHT LIMITS.

( # # # )

----- O/C COMPANY OFFICIALS SAID THEY  
ARE AT A LOSS TO EXPLAIN THE  
POLLUTED AIR FROM THE DIESEL  
TANKS THAT COULD BE SEEN  
OVER THE REFINERY.

( # # # )

## Nested Phrases

Another problem is the nested phrase, an interior modifying phrase that splits parts of a sentence, usually the subject and verb. Here's an example:

**With the  
Problem  
Phrase:**

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.

**After  
the  
Rewrite:**

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.

**Another  
Rewrite:**

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 a common fault among beginning broadcast writers. You should always check sentences for nested phrases.

**EXERCISE 3-Q****NESTED PHRASES**

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

NESTS/jnh/6pm

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

( # # # )

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

( # # # )

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

( # # # )

## 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 should be eliminated altogether. 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 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 the good use of a short introductory phrase:

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

**EXERCISE 3-R****LONG INTROS?**

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

INTROS/jnh/6pm

----- O/C    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.

(# # #)

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

(# # #)



**EXERCISE 3-S****TOO MANY PROBLEMS?**

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

ALL ERRORS/jnh/6pm

-----O/C DESPITE A LAUNCH DELAY AND  
A BALKY COMPUTER THAT CAN BE  
FIXED...THE SPACE SHUTTLE IS  
NOW IN ORBIT...SAYS NASA  
SOURCES.

( # # # )

-----O/C THE TWO PIT BULLS...WHO  
NEIGHBORS SAY ALWAYS  
ATTACKED ANYONE IN THE  
VICINITY...WERE FREED BY  
THE POLICE.

( # # # )

-----O/C ALTHOUGH THE COST TO THE  
STATE FOR THE RESEARCH HAD  
BEEN COSTLY...U-P-I IS  
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 way of adding 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 Problem:** 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.

Here it will be necessary to get rid of some of the *ruleds* and *rulings*.

**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. Here's an example:

**No  
Repetition:** THE CITY COUNCIL TODAY PASSED A LAW  
THAT WILL END SPECULATION IN HOUSING IN  
SAN BRUNO.

**With  
Repetition:** THE CITY COUNCIL TODAY PASSED A  
HOUSING LAW...A LAW DESIGNED TO END THE  
SPECULATION IN HOUSING IN SAN BRUNO.

**EXERCISE 3-T****AVOIDING COMMON REPETITION**

Edit these sentences to eliminate repetition.

REPEAT-REPEAT/jnh/6pm

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

( # # # )

-----O/C     THEY'RE NOWHERE NEAR  
THEIR GOAL OF GETTING THE  
MONEY THERE TO THE HOSPITAL.

( # # # )

-----O/C     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.

( # # # )

**EXERCISE 3-U****REPETITION FOR EMPHASIS**

In each sentence, use repetition to emphasize a single word.

REPEATS/jnh/6pm

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

(# # #)

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

(# # #)

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

(# # #)

# 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.
- Attribution goes first.
- Always use active voice.
- Use present perfect and participial verbs.
- Avoid ambiguous pronoun.
- 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 rules is the first step in learning to develop a writing style that will work well for broadcast.

## CHAPTER FOUR

# WRITING THE LEAD

### Chapter Preview

Broadcast lead sentences not only serve the same function as newspaper headlines and leads, but they also must begin a carefully constructed narrative account of whatever information you are presenting. Quite often, you can determine what should go in your leads by analyzing how the story affects you. This chapter looks at six categories of leads: new story, reaction (reax), follow-up (folo), perspective, segues, and soft or feature leads. It also examines what to avoid, including jammed, cliché question, and quote leads.

### Glossary

**CLICHE 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 in a new or breaking story.

**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, perspectives, events, or details.

**NEW STORY LEAD** A lead sentence that is 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.
- 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

When writing for broadcast, you should be spending a good portion of your time puzzling over the lead and how it will be written. The function of the lead in broadcast is far more complex and critical than it is in a newspaper.

The newspaper has a *headline*, which is written by another editor and is there to attract the eye of the reader, and a *lead*, which is the beginning of a story to which the reader has already been drawn. In the newspaper, the headline attracts and the lead simply begins.

But in broadcast, the lead must do *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 may have to break into their conversations and get their attention to interest them in the story.



## 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, you may not have any obvious major stories; in fact, you may be dealing with stories that fall into the next category—medium-interest stories. To find what's interesting here, look for something in these categories:

- *Effect on the viewers.* People are very interested if their money, jobs, personal security, or family are threatened. This is known by some as "heart, health, and pocketbook."

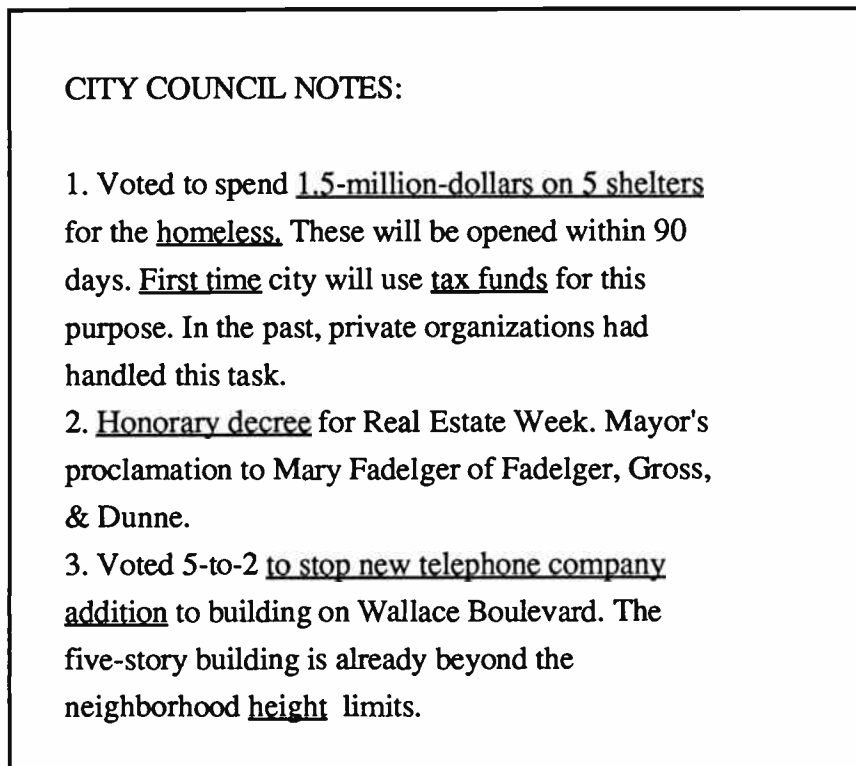
- *Proximity.* Viewers and listeners like stories that involve people or things close to them, such as the neighborhood, the city, relatives or friends, or friends' neighborhoods and cities.

- *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. These are *keywords*. Then look at what you underlined. It answers the question, What interests me about this story? Was it the new details, the tragedy, the success, the bold plan, the risk taken, the irony, or the failure? Did someone 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.



**Figure 4.1.** An example of some story information with keywords underlined:

Once you've underlined the keywords, you've got some idea of what has triggered your interest. As an example, in the third line in item 1 above, the keywords *first time* are underlined. They will probably be the key in your lead if you use that item.

## 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 leads to a different story and will lack appeal. Here's a *general* lead, accurate but uninteresting.

THE CITY COUNCIL MADE PLENTY OF  
DECISIONS LAST NIGHT ABOUT CITY  
PROBLEMS.

Much too general and not very exciting. You don't see any keywords replayed here. With this lead, you would only be cueing a segment of the audience who might be generally interested in whether the city council is still alive.

Don't ignore your keywords. The "first time" element intrigued you. Put that in the lead. To reach an audience more interested in the general concepts of the story, the lead must be more precise. Here's your rewrite.

FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER... THE CITY WILL  
SPEND TAX MONEY ON THE HOMELESS.

That's better. More of the keywords are in this lead. It attracts not only people generally interested in the city council, but also those who want to know about the homeless, social problems, bold actions by city governments, or innovative solutions by the elected officials.

### Avoid Hype in the 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 have desensitized 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.

## Six Categories of Leads

There are many different approaches to writing leads. Although it is difficult to group leads into categories, we will consider six: new story, reax, folo, perspective, segue, and feature leads. There are other ways to set up valid categories but for the purpose of our exercises, we will use these.

### New Story Leads

New story leads are the normal, everyday variety that are used for new, breaking stories. This could be an unexpected event, a scientific report, a crime story, or any action on a new topic. Whatever the theme, the new story lead is used 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. 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 either be 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'S 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 you must learn how little detail to put in these, the new leads often are the toughest to write.

**EXERCISE 4-A****NEW STORY LEADS**

Analyze this example 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 have 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.

## Reax Leads

This is a good lead for any story more than four hours but generally less than three days 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 insert 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 read about it in the paper, your broadcast lead the next morning is not the firing as much as the reaction (reax) to the firing. It's both an update and an advance to the story. Here's the reax lead on that one.

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

The next paragraph explains what happened; then the fourth or fifth paragraph returns to the reaction. The reax lead is a good choice, because of the 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 fantastic news-gathering abilities. The audience is not dumb. Be careful when even minor stories get the following kind of treatment:

THAT STORY IS JUST IN AND REPORTER  
FRANCIS RELONE IS STANDING BY WITH IT  
LIVE IN THE NEWSROOM WITH THE LATEST  
DETAILS.

**EXERCISE 4-B****NEW & REAX LEADS**

Review each situation and write a lead to respond to it. The three elements cover a 12-hour period. Keep your leads under 11 words.

***SITUATION:***

You are ready for a 6 p.m. newscast. The president, a Republican, holds a 5 p.m. news conference and accuses the Democrats of causing a rise in interest rates and an economic slowdown. The president also announces that U.S. combat troops will go to Honduras to guard newly built U.S. airstrips.

WRITE YOUR LEAD HERE:

***SITUATION:***

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

WRITE YOUR LEAD HERE:

***SITUATION:***

You are ready for the 7 a.m. newscast the next morning. You have more Democratic response. Also news that Nicaraguan troops are lobbing shells at an airfield in Honduras—saying it was used for reconnaissance flights over Nicaragua. American troops have been caught in the crossfire.

WRITE YOUR LEAD HERE:

## **Folo Leads**

A Folo lead advances an earlier story but differs from the reax because it changes the topic or angle of the story. The folo lead can cover any number of other elements, from profile sidebars, to explanations of processes, to further investigation of the original story. This type of lead presents the problem of estimating how much background the public remembers and how much is needed to brief them. If your lead is this:

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.

You can also get very lazy in folo leads, assuming that your audience knows all about it.

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

While leads like that have been used and are there for last-second ad libs, it is better to return to the keywords and advance the story by making those elements into hard leads. Here are some exercises to work on.



**EXERCISE 4-C****FOLO LEADS**

Review the examples of wire service copy and write the first :15 of each story. Your lead should be no more than 11 words long.

BERNOULLI, France...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...The Indian Government is not looking kindly on the return of American guru Baba Yaba Sash. 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.

WRITE YOUR LEAD HERE:

## Perspective Leads

Perspective is overview—a comparison with the past or other situations—and it is the journalist's job to insert perspective into stories. In newspapers that 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.

Quite often the perspective on the story is what makes it interesting; by placing that at the top, you are alerting the audience right away to the most intriguing element. So to write a perspective lead, you ignore the immediacy and provide this overview. To find the perspective, ask yourself:

1. Do we need to wrap together many related items?
2. How does it fit into the historical pattern on this particular topic?

For example, if this story is about a monkey that has escaped from the local zoo, and it is becoming a regular event there, then you might want to ignore the new story lead and instead use the perspective lead. Here's an example:

**New Story Lead.**  
Usable, but dull  
in this case:

A MONKEY IS ON THE LOOSE FROM  
THE STEELTOWN ZOO THIS  
MORNING... etc.

**Perspective  
Lead. More  
informative and  
interesting:**

IT'S THE THIRD TIME THIS  
MONTH THAT STEELTOWN  
ZOOKEEPERS ARE EXPLAINING AN  
ESCAPE.  
THIS TIME...IT'S A RHESUS  
MONKEY... 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 don't understand the situation. The cardinal rule of journalism—don't assume anything. Check your facts carefully.

**EXERCISE 4-D****PERSPECTIVE LEADS**

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

***SITUATION:***

There have been torrential rainstorms for three days. Serious flooding is happening in 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 shopping center. Water is 3 feet deep. No injuries but millions in damage. In Bestwicke, a house slid down a hillside, and crashed into the back of a cookie store. No one was hurt.

WRITE YOUR LEAD HERE:

***SITUATION:***

No negotiations today and none scheduled tomorrow. This is now the 45th day of the first hospital workers' 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

A segue is a music term describing the interval between songs. It is used as a noun ("had 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 story B is written based on key themes in story A. The producer makes this happen by clustering similar stories in the newscast. Once the story order is locked in, it's possible to write a segue lead in planned situations 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 time or location. Here's an example of a story B about the arrival of new panda bears at the zoo. It follows story A about an escaped rhesus monkey.

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

That made a smooth transition from A to B. But suppose your editor wants the segue, not to another zoo story, but to story B about a prison escape. It might be farfetched but that depends upon how you handle it. Here's an example of a segue lead.

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

The 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 thoughtful as the others, and should be saved for the last-minute segue when the 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 pulls story A, leaving story B with a lead that doesn't make sense.

**EXERCISE 4-E****SEGUE LEADS**

Review the situations and write Segue Leads for stories 2 and 3. Your leads should be no more than 11 words long.

**Story 1:** The CommuterRail Company 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 the 19 trains. Recently, CommuterRail announced it was running at 95 percent capacity.

WRITE YOUR LEAD FOR STORY #2.

**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 YOUR LEAD FOR STORY #3.

**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.

## Feature or Soft Leads

Many times you will work on a story that is timeless and can be held for weeks without getting old. Or you might be assigned a story that is soft news—an item that does not focus on a tragedy, an unexpected event, or a serious social theme. These are generally feature stories and, in many cases, it will take a clever bit of writing to get to the story. Often, you'll find a lead for this feature story by looking for the commonsense lesson it provides or by comparing it to well-known sayings, metaphors, song lyrics, poems, or nursery rhymes.

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, or 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. Here, the writer has chosen to highlight the unusual nature of this 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.

That's the feature lead. You must work on it to keep it tight.

**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. That might have even gone longer.

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 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.

Might even get a lawsuit out of that one.

A third danger of the feature lead is inaccuracy of the chosen quote. For instance, did Thomas Edison say that? It might be popular wisdom that someone authored a particular saying but you'd better look it up to be sure.

**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 a downtown point 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 8 days.

WRITE BOTH LEADS HERE:



## The 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 is forever banished; however, they should be used sparingly, if at all.

### Avoid Jammed Leads

A jammed lead is similar to the inverted pyramid leads in newspapers, 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.

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 IN 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" ones that seem to pop up in almost every newscast.

THERE'S GOOD NEWS FOR CAR BUYERS

... etc.

(or)

BAD NEWS FOR TAXPAYERS. THE... etc.

(or)

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, a cliché lead like "good news/bad news" can show up two or three times in a newscast. When they do, they 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 cliché leads, the question format becomes stale after the second or third use.

WHAT IS RED AND WHITE AND GREEN ALL  
OVER?

WELL...IT ISN'T THE ZEBRA AT THE ZOO  
BECAUSE...etc.

(or)

WHAT IS EVERYONE DOWN AT COUNTY JAIL  
WANTING IN THEIR 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.

## Avoid Unnecessary Quotes as Leads

Cold quotes, which are quotes without advance attribution, are tempting. They are dramatic. They sometimes stun the 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. If you need to use a quote, put in advance attribution.

**EXERCISE 4-H****MORE PROBLEMS!**

Review this situation, underline the keywords, and write a :25 reader.

***SITUATION:***

This occurred at Hilltop Metropolitan hospital last night at 11:30 p.m. A power failure had knocked out electricity in various parts of the hospital. Emergency generators kicked in 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 back on 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-I****MORE PROBLEMS!**

Review this situation, check out your keywords, and write a :25 reader.

***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 million 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. Parents from Riverview charged, at the meeting, 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.

Write your story.

## 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 lead in print. It must draw attention while starting the story.

At least six categories of leads are available, including new story, reax, folo, perspective, segue, and feature. Writers should also avoid jamming too much information into the lead, or beginning stories with clichés, quotes, or questions.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### INTERVIEWS:

---

---

# HOW TO GET WHAT YOU NEED FROM THEM, AND HOW TO USE BITES IN STORIES

---

---

### 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 **I. D.**

## 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 means a significant change in the structure of your story. Because of the immediate needs of the bite in terms of how it fits into the narration, and because the theme of the bite may influence the entire story, including the lead, you should design the story 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 the interview a station reporter had 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. Here's your story. Find a spot to insert the bite.

KOALAS/jnh/2pm

A BIG CIVIC EVENT  
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. THE MALE AND  
FEMALE KOALA HAVE TO  
GET USED TO THEIR CAGES.

The story to the left  
is already written.

Now you must find  
a place for a bite from  
the interview.

You discover the  
bite is :15 and from a  
zookeeper who is  
concerned about the  
special cage for the  
koalas. It isn't  
working right yet.

**"If that air  
conditioner isn't  
fixed, no one will  
see the koalas.  
We'll have to send  
them back in a  
couple of days."**

**Figure 5.1.** A copy story to which a bite  
is to be added.

As you can see, the bite is not really the same story. Suddenly the angle has shifted from the cheerful welcome to the worry about the equipment. The arrival of the koalas, treated lightly in the first copy story, has suddenly become a secondary angle in this story with a bite. The lead becomes 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  
THEY MIGHT BE SENT BACK HOME.

As you can see, the entire story suffered from the ripple effect of a bite being added.

## Actualities/Soundbites

Whether you insert an actuality in radio or a soundbite in television, you are introducing a major broadcast strength, a second channel of data. These outside recordings carry additional information in the *ambient sound*, the noninterview natural sound sequences and the stress, tension, and excitement in the interviewee's voice. These are all elements that go beyond the flattened reporting of newspapers into the more highly charged accounts in radio and television.

But these recordings also mean a lot of extra work in preparing the story. Good actualities seldom just happen; they are the product of work and planning.

Interviews must be controlled to get good bites and once recorded, someone must listen to the interviews and evaluate them, eventually pulling the bites to be used. Finally, these selected bites must be taken into account in the writing. In a sense, they will *force the design* of the story, sometimes even changing the lead, but always by adding in an element that takes up time and must be dealt with by a writeup and a transition back to the story narration.

## Interviews Need Planning

Good interviews begin with planning. We've all seen the broadcast reporter out on the street doing a standup interview with someone. That's a classic stereotype of our profession. There's more to interviewing, however, than just walking up to someone and saying "Tell me what's going on here."

In print, there is really only one reason to interview—the basic journalistic urge to gather 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 uses this *research* interview, but also often conducts a *recorded* interview for later use. It is in the *recorded interview* that the reporter should anticipate what kind of bites the interviewee might provide and how to structure the interview *in order to get these bites on tape in usable form*. As the reporter, you are looking for an actuality snapshot of the event or interviewee, something *that carries more meaning and is stronger* in its recorded form than what you can paraphrase.

This type of double interviewing is nothing new. When a witness goes on the stand during a 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, even though the lawyers already know the answer. This power of testimony gives the jurors far more than if they read a printed account of those pretrial interviews.

Caution: This does not mean you rehearse an interviewee or spell out for that person what you want in the answer. A pre-interview is to help you identify the most fertile areas for questions.

## 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, and those with accented words or jargon.

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

- 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 powerful these moments are—the eyewitness, still shaken, telling the story of what happened. Telling the facts with the added emotion in these recorded moments is something few print reporters can duplicate.

## How to Get Good Interview Bites

Usable bites don't just happen. The reporter stimulates and controls the recorded interview, guiding the interviewee into situations from which usable answers will result. These are qualities of a good interview bite:

1. It is *short*, possibly less than :15 or :20.
2. It is a *complete* answer and doesn't need the reporter's question from the tape to make sense.
3. It is *not filled with 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.")
4. It is usually *not a yes or no answer*. The reporter asks questions that do not elicit a "yes" or "no" answer. Instead of asking, "Did you see the plane crash?" a broadcast reporter would ask the eyewitness, "Tell me what you saw."
5. 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?"

**EXERCISE 5-A****HUNTING FOR BITES**

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 from a nearby pesticide processing plant.

## Repeating Questions/Listening For Answers

This topic is given a separate section because it is so important. You may have to ask the same question twice. Or three times. Or four times. Does that embarrass you? Probably, but you still have to learn to repeat questions. You can change the question slightly, or even rephrase it. But remember! You're doing the recorded interview to get bites.

How do you know when you've got them? 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 and not someone else. 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. Remember, the research should already have been done: *Your job is to get this answer 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 pulling the right bites from the interview.

In most cases, if you conducted the interview, and if it didn't ramble on for 30 minutes, you'll have a good idea if a usable bite is buried in there.

### How Short?

You are looking for a bite that is under :20, sounds like a general statement (meaning the pitch of the voice doesn't end going up, as if it's been cut off), doesn't need your question, and summarizes the thrust of the interviewee's responses. If possible, you'll trim the bite down to :10 or less. Many times this process is done under intense deadline pressure. You'll have to go to that portion of the interview where you recall a good answer, pull only one bite, isolate it, and then write the story, which could go on the air within minutes.



For this reason, it helps to make notes of good answers during the interview. Some TV reporters carry microcassette recorders with them and listen to the interview playback on these.

If you've got the time, a transcript of the entire interview will tell you a great deal. 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.

## Cutting the Bites Down

Because you can paraphrase parts 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 take off the parenthetical pauses, "uhhms," and false starts at the beginning of the sentence. In this example, the underlined portions are the ones you are keeping.

After the first trim, TRT (total running time of the tape) is :14 and the italic part is what is left.

Q: Why are the police chasing 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. It's as simple as the nose on your face.*

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

Here, the trim is from the bottom. The TRT is :10 and it requires careful writing.

Q: Why are the police chasing 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. It's as simple as the nose on your face.*

## What Should Not Be Done

1. *You should not move an answer to another question.* Maneuvering the interview's 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.

2. *You should 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, or post-interview questions with the camera trained only on the interviewer. This is a technique designed to help the reporter who stumbles through the question; however, it is hard to do accurately and usually ends up with a slightly different and more dramatic question. A better solution to a bad question is to paraphrase it in the writeup.

3. *You should not trim an answer so much that you remove the preconditions established by the interviewee.* All answers belong in the context of the delivery and it's your job to portray that context. If the interviewee says this:

Q: What is your thinking about the latest incident?

A: *I've battled violence for 20 years but I can still recognize that someone will honestly say, "Violence was necessary."*

then you cannot eliminate the first part of the answer and shorten the bite to the minimum. If you did, you get a completely different answer.

*"Violence was necessary."*

**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 changes in the story's design. In some cases, the bite or bites are so powerful that their presence will ripple throughout the story, causing everything, including the lead, to be rewritten. But that's only an extreme case; what they will always need is a writeup—the sentence immediately ahead of the bite.

### 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, whether it's the *intro*, *lead-in*, *wraparound*, or whatever. Use what the 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. Never any more than that. There are some newsrooms that like to put the ID immediately before the bite. Here are two examples:

Acceptable  
position for  
the ID.

... ZOOKEEPER LEONA WING  
SAYS IT IS NOT THE WAY  
KOALAS EAT.  
We have spent a lot of money to  
ship in tons of...etc.

Figure 5.2. Example of ID in the writeup.

ID immediately before the bite. Some prefer it; however, if the cart doesn't run, the newscaster is dead.

....AND THAT IS NOT THE WAY THAT  
KOALAS EAT... ACCORDING TO  
ZOOKEEPER LEONA WING.

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

**Figure 5.3.** ID close to the bite. This is more common in radio.

**Serious difficulties with back-to-back bites.** 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 you must introduce both, then you have to be very straightforward in identifying who speaks first.

Television can use electronic screen titles called CGs across the lower third of the screen to provide the ID. Although some dislike this, others believe it makes the writeup a lot smoother.

**HINT:** In some cases, the ID is not needed. This might involve interviews with members of large groups, as in a protest, or in the more classic vox pop, a term for interviews done randomly in the street to sample the feelings of the general population. There is no need to identify persons in the vox pop.

**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.

A short general statement placed before the bite.

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.

**Figure 5.4.** Example of a complete statement that precedes the bite.

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.

Weak!  
This shows repetition between the writeup and the first sentence of the bite.

... THE KOALAS WON'T BE CHEAP TO  
KEEP.  
EVERYTHING MUST BE BROUGHT  
IN.  
We have to bring in everything...  
tons of eucalyptus... etc.

Better.  
This shows how repetition can be avoided between the writeup and the beginning of the bite.

THE KOALAS WON'T BE CHEAP  
TO KEEP. ALL THE FOOD MUST BE  
IMPORTED.  
We have to bring in everything...  
tons of eucalyptus... etc.

**Figure 5.5.** Two examples of repetition between the writeup and the first sentence of the bite.

**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 newsgathering efforts, such as, "As she explained to our cameras." Avoid these. You want your general statement or your ID closest to the bite. Here's an example.

Weak!  
Notice the underlined throwaway sentence really says very little and wastes time.

AND AS ZOOKEEPER LEONA WING  
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.

Better. The throwaway is deleted. This makes a stronger writeup that doesn't waste time.

AND AS ZOOKEEPER LEONA WING  
SAYS...THE KOALAS WON'T BE CHEAP  
TO KEEP.  
We have spent a lot of money to  
ship in tons of...etc.

**Figure 5.6.** Two examples: one with and one without a throwaway writeup.



**EXERCISE 5-C****LOUSY WRITEUP**

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

BAD CARS.jnh/2pm

(ANNCR)

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

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

STATE CONSUMER AFFAIRS  
CHIEF BILL MCPHATTER SAYS HE  
WILL NO LONGER FEEL SORRY FOR  
USED CAR BUYERS.

STILL...HE SAYS...SOME WON'T  
GO TO THE TROUBLE OF READING OR  
EVEN BELIEVING 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.

## Getting Out of the Bite: The Tag

When you switch from the bite's endcue back to the newscaster, you are writing the tag. This is a good place to put information that didn't fit into the story before the bite. And there are two other possibilities to check on.

Does the interviewee need to be re-identified, something more useful in radio. Start the tag with his or her name.

Another way to help continuity is through *repetition*. Choose a keyword 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, it's "solving the parking mess."

(picking up in the middle of the BITE)  
...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.

Figure 5.7. Example of a tag.

## Placement of 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 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 this 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 writeup conforms to the rules.

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 A 5-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 before turning 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 come in situations involving eyewitness accounts, professional evaluation, response to charges, and description of effects.

To select a bite, choose one that is short, concise, and with proper inflections in the voice. 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.

## CHAPTER SIX

# WRITING NARRATIVES: SOME MODELS

---

### Chapter Preview

This chapter covers the construction of stories that are written to be read by both newscasters and reporters. It explores the narrative models of time continuity and particular-to-general, as well as narrative methods using chronology, cause and effect, and payoffs.

### Glossary

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

**MIC** Short for microphone. Some prefer to spell it *mike*.

**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**.

**TIME CONTINUITY** 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.

**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, between the first bite and the second bite is track 2, and between the second bite and the end of the story is track 3, and so on.

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

## Longer Format Narrative Writing

In earlier chapters, we had explored the read-only story and the story with a single actuality or soundbite. Now we shift to stories told by someone other than the newscaster, combining 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 those 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's job is to 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 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 perspective on the story, and the narrow point leads to the particular elements in this story that fit that perspective.

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.

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, then that of the speaker. The amount of identification used often varies with the station news policy.

This is the wide spot, or top of the funnel—the perspective.

This is where it narrows, with details leading directly to the story.

ZOO/jnh/11pm

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

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

CART #1 TRT 1:23

IC: "Zoo visitors got their...

EC: ...at Fenton Zoo."

Figure 6.1. Example of a lead-in.

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 Time Continuity Model

For many field reports, the time sequence of lead-in, present, past, controversy, and future provides a good model.

**1. 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.

**2. The current situation.**

Used to open reports, it sets the stage, telling place and time.

THERE WERE BIG SMILES TODAY AT THE STEELTOWN FUND OFFICES.

THE 1987 CORPORATE FUND DRIVE PICKED UP 31-MILLION IN PLEDGES...ALMOST DOUBLE LAST YEAR'S TOTAL.

**3. The past.**  
Provides some background.

THE STAFF ACCOMPLISHED THIS DESPITE THE SUMMER'S PROBLEMS WITH A SPECIAL AUDIT AND CHARGES OF MISMANAGEMENT. OVER A MILLION DOLLARS WAS MISSING... BUT NONE OF THE INVESTIGATORS HAS FILED CHARGES YET.

**4. The controversy or points of development.**

Describes the best positions or strategies of all sides.

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

**5. The future.**  
The final part is the reporting of what comes next in terms of actions or events.

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

**Figure 6.2.** Example of a script that uses the time continuity model of narration.



**EXERCISE 6-A****PLANNING AND PLOTTING**

Write a :10 newscaster lead-in and a :45 reporter's track for this situation. See if you can structure the report around the time continuity model discussed in this chapter.

***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.

## 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 story directly to the individual part. The reporter's first track starts with the individual's story. 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 backgrounder 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.

See Figure 6.3 for an example of this particular-to-general model, also known as personalization.

**1. Lead-in.**  
Begins with perspective but shifts to the person featured in the report.

THERE ARE NEW RUMORS A LOCAL FACTORY MAY CLOSE. AND IF IT DOES...BOB WATSON SAYS ONE FAMILY WILL BE A BIG LOSER.

**2. The particular.**  
Begins by profiling one person who is an example of the general trend of the story.

LISA PETERSEN HAS WORKED AT THE STEVENS TRUCK ASSEMBLY PLANT IN STEELTOWN FOR THE PAST 14 YEARS.

SHE'S NOW A MANAGER AND SUPPORTS FIVE KIDS ON HER PAYCHECK.

**3. The general.**  
At some point, as you finish the profile, you shift to the general trends discussed in the story.

BUT LISA HAS HEARD SHE'S ON THE LIST TO BE FIRED...AND SO ARE 18-HUNDRED OF HER CO-WORKERS...A LOSS OF THAT MANY JOBS WOULD BE DEVASTATING FOR THE VALLEY SECTION OF STEELTOWN. TWELVE PLANTS HAVE CLOSED IN THE PAST TWO MONTHS.

**4. Evaluation and future.** At this point, experts generally comment, giving causes and outlooks.

MAYOR CARLY ROGERS SAYS THIS LATEST WILL BE A SEVERE BLOW TO THE HOPES OF REKINDLING INDUSTRY THERE. STEVENS OFFICIALS AREN'T TALKING. THEY SAY WE'LL KNOW ON FRIDAY.

**5. Particular again.** The final portion generally returns to the person.

BUT LISA PETERSEN ISN'T WAITING. SHE'S TAKEN SOME SICK DAYS AND IS LOOKING FOR WORK. BOB WATSON FOR K-560 NEWS.

**Figure 6.3.** Example of a script using the particular-to-general model of narration.

## Other Ways: Cause and Effect, Chronology, and Payoffs

There is a prominent element of spoken narrative that we have yet to explore. This is the sense of mystery and natural drama a broadcast writer can achieve by releasing small bits of information about the story a little at a time, giving the audience the sense 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 a little at a time.

Three methods of releasing the information slowly in a story are as follows: the cause-and-effect pattern, chronological order, and the payoff.

**Cause and Effect** This form of narrative storytelling sets up an effect, then reveals the cause in the next sentence.

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... etc.

**Chronology** This method also can be used to describe what happened. In this case, you tell the story until the important event, or payoff, suddenly surfaces. With chronology, you don't hit the audience over the head with the fact that there will be a payoff.

Here's an example of chronology.

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.

**Payoff** This is the most obvious 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 delayed for many sentences. It differs from chronology because you *tell* the audience in advance that something is coming.

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.

THE SIX-YEAR-OLD CRACKED A FEW  
SIDEWALKS IN THE FAIRVIEW SECTION OF  
TOWN WHILE TAGGING AFTER 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 ...WHILE  
DELIGHTING A LOT OF CHILDREN.

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

**EXERCISE 6-B****WRITING FOR PAYOFFS**

Write two :30 stories for this situation. In the first, use chronological sequence to reach a payoff. In the second, use the payoff method by telegraphing your intent but not revealing the mystery until the end.

***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—\$2.3 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.

# Style Elements

In preparing broadcast reports, there are other narrative elements, such as lists, pauses, music, and color, that will serve as tools to help in telling stories. In most cases, these are style elements, and they can be added or dropped without respect to story themes.

## 1. *What about lists within narrative copy?*

Often, when doing broadcast stories, it's hard to ignore lists of adjectives, nouns, causes, or results, or whatever in the copy. You'll find yourself faced with "The safety board found the causes were pilot error...mechanical problems...wind shear...and lack of training." But too many lists or lists that are too long often cause a disruption in the smooth flow of narrative.

Think of the audience. Keep the lists to a minimum. Concentrate on the most important items. Limit the number of items on a list to three. If a list must be run, it might fit into the studio lead-in or tag.

## 2. *What about all the statistics?*

Often, when doing broadcast stories, it's hard to ignore lists of statistics as elements for the story; however, you must think of your audience. Keep those statistics to a minimum. Often you can put them into the lead-in or in-studio tag. If you use lists, limit the number of items on a list to a maximum of three.

## 3. *Should I leave some pauses in the tracks?*

If you have good ambient sound segments, let these play without narration. A gap or two in the tracks is a good idea in places.

## 4. *Do I need some music?*

Although it can be a wonderful addition, music is generally used to patch up weak segments. Use music wisely. Be cautious about laying down a bed of music to pick up the pace when better writing and shorter bites might do the same. Of course, if the story is about music, use it throughout.

## 5. *Adding color*

Although we've mentioned using ambient sound to add color, bites may also impart textural information. These could come in the form of *vox pop* (random interviews with people on the street), or simply people acquainted with the person, organization, or event that will provide an interesting sidelight and additional information.

## **EXERCISE 6-C**

## **PLANNING AND PLOTTING**

Explore each of the situations below and explain whom you might interview, what questions might bring good responses, what ambient sound you might need, what you might record to add color, and how long the story should be.

### ***SITUATIONS:***

1. A backgrounder on a new federal plan calling for tougher loans for college students.
2. A feature on an organization that finds homes for foster kids.
3. The beginning of a new smog inspection law.
4. A feature on a musician who is also a substitute high school physics teacher.

## **Chapter Summary**

Longer reports from the field, usually voiced by reporters, have many narrative elements that need a usable order. This chapter explores two basic models: the time continuity and the particular-to-general model. Narrative storytelling methods—chronology, cause and effect, and payoffs—also are discussed in their relationship to broadcast news writing. Finally, stylistic elements such as pacing and music can be added to expand the array of tools needed for broadcast news work.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

# 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 introduces some considerations in designing these elements.

### Glossary

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

**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.

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 the Philippines. That's deceptive and it's wrong. Too many misleading teases and your audience won't pay much attention anymore. Here are some suggestions for writing effective teases.

### **Leave Something Out But Be Careful**

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.

**This  
has too  
much  
detail.**

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 particularly 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  
NEXT.

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.

## **Don't Put the Story Payoff in the Tease**

If a decision has been made, don't say what it was! 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 to use 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 lines 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 of a chicken ranch being sued by neighbors for its smell.

THE FOWL ODOR IS LAYING AN EGG WITH  
NEIGHBORS. THAT STORY IS NEXT.

## Watch Out For Word Sensationalism

When you start working in broadcast, you are usually careful about hyping visuals or actualities. Sensational words, however, often 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 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. We will examine five types of tosses.

## 1. The 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 we don't recommend it.

## 2. The One Word Name Toss

If the newscast uses a director, as in television, 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. The 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 unless you just cannot think of anything to say.

## 4. The 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. The toss is really a tease with 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.

## 5. The Split Story Toss

In this case, the toss between newscasters is accomplished by having each read 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.

KIDNAP/jnh/6pm

BOB\_\_O/C      TERRORISTS IN BEIRUT 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 BEIRUT  
FOR WORLD VEGETABLES... A FOOD  
WHOLESALE. TWO MEN FORCED HIM  
INTO A SEDAN THIS MORNING.

MARIE\_\_O/C      LOCAL REACTION TO THE  
KIDNAPPING IS ONE OF SHOCK...etc.

Figure 7.1. Example of a split story toss.

**EXERCISE 7-B****WRITING TOSSES**

Study the situations below. Prepare tosses for each.

**SITUATION 1: (Toss to story)**

Elizabeth Burke reads the next story. It is 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)**

John Wells reads the next story. It is 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: (Need 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, Bill Davis, says if they raise the tariff, he 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 decide about interrupting 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...OUT-  
BOUND 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.



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 on the toss to story and the split story toss. Bulletins must be handled with great care and their information must be absolutely accurate.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

# REMOTES, VOICERS, AND WRAPS

---

### Chapter Preview

There is a distinction between radio news stories composed and written for the studio newscaster and those stories reported by others, generally from events taking place in the field. 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; and the *remote*, which is done live from the field by way of a car 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 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..."

**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*.

**TAKE** An attempt at recording. If a reporter tries to record the same narration four times, each is a separate take. The four takes are numbered sequentially.

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

### 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

1986 Radio-Television News Directors' 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 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 for programs. This leaves little time for field reporting, although some mixed format station journalists work half days in the field.

## Reports From the Field

Radio field reporting is done either under intense and immediate deadline pressure or, in the case of profiles, reviews, and HFR (hold for release) backgrounders, a much more relaxed schedule.

Unlike the television reporter, the radio reporter usually works alone. This can also be difficult, because the reporter must face the distractions of technical details like the mic placement and recording levels. But with this 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 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 three most-used field report formats are the voicer, the wrap, 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 remote. 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:

FIRE SAFETY LEAD-IN/jnh/2pm

ANNCR: AND WITH ALL THOSE FIRES BURNING  
THIS VERY DRY YEAR...OFFICIALS GAVE OUR  
REPORTER KIM CLARK A LESSON ON FIRE  
SAFETY.

FIRE SAFETY VOICER SCRIPT

(ON CART)...(NAT SOT...WHOOSH OF FLAMES)

THAT'S THE SOUND OF FLAMES ROARING  
THROUGH DRY BRUSH...AND THAT WAS 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 WARNS HILLSIDE HOMEOWNERS  
TO MAKE AN EFFORT THIS YEAR TO CUT BACK  
BRUSH NEAR 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.

**Figure 8.1.** Example of a studio lead-in and a voicer track script.

Notice the chronological 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****PLANNING AND PLOTTING**

Write a :10 lead-in and a :45 voicer for this situation.

***SITUATION:***

It is election day and you have a voicer due on a newscast at 11 a.m. It is now 10:30 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 mixup 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 have to do more live remote broadcasts. This might be as simple as answering questions from the studio on the air, or as complex as a two to three minute description of a scene including the replay of an actuality.

Doing a remote can be strenuous. After the clear line is set up, you must wait patiently for the newscasters to come to you, even as you watch the quiet situation that you set up deteriorate 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 you 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 they 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 time continuity (lead-in/present/past/controversy/future) or the particular-to-general (lead-in/particular case/general trend/developments-future/particular case) can be used.

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 and they are playing the cart from the studio, give them both the roll cue and the approximate time into the piece that the cart will play.

5. *When you finish, stand by for a possible question and answer session with the newscaster,* even if that hadn't been discussed in planning. You have no idea what devious plans are going through the minds of those staff members sitting comfortably in the studio.

A typical remote might go like this:

ANCHOR IN STUDIO:

WE HAVE WORD THE SUPERVISORS JUST VOTED TO END A LIFE-SAVING SERVICE. REPORTER GUY HAMILTON IS STANDING BY WITH THE STORY. GUY?

REPORTER IN FIELD:

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.

Figure 8.2. Script of a remote that includes an actuality.



## **EXERCISE 8-B**

## **REMOTE PRACTICE**

This exercise involves finding a story in the field, writing it there, and calling it in. This is what you do.

You will be assigned 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 time continuity 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 #(one, two,...etc.)

COMING IN... THREE... TWO... ONE...

Then, narrate 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 set up one and it will probably include your name, your location, and your station.

## The Wrap

A *wrap* (or wraparound) is a field story format that differs from the voicer because 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 time continuity 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 a number of tracks. It is involved and should be practiced as often as possible.

## Scripts for Wraps

A script for a wrap 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 precis 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 the track-bite-track and so on. When learning broadcast writing, you should attempt to write the story before you cover it. This will give you advance warning what your needs might be. Start with the lead-in, trying to determine what will attract the audience to this story. Remember, it will probably be what 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 the reporter to come in right at the top of the current situation, or wait until 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.

**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 TISH HAS THE STORY.

**Track 1**

ROBERT HALL IS THE SUPERVISING DIRECTOR FOR THE BENTON MODERN ART MUSEUM AND HE'S A HAPPY MAN. IN FACT...HE WAS BEAMING WHEN REPORTERS SHOWED UP FOR THE MORNING NEWS CONFERENCE. HE SAYS AN ANONYMOUS DONOR GAVE 195-THOUSAND DOLLARS. ENOUGH TO RUN THE MUSEUM 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 WANTED TO REMAIN IN THE BACKGROUND...BUT IS A LOCAL CAR DEALER.

**Bite 2**

She walked in the office one day...said she had heard stories about our problems...and wrote out a check for the money. We were greatly relieved.

**Track 3**

BUT THE RELIEF WON'T LAST LONG. HALL SAYS THE MUSEUM STAFF HAS TO USE THAT RESPITE TO SEARCH FOR GRANTS...AND THAT'S WHAT THEY'LL DO NEXT YEAR. AT THE MODERN ART MUSEUM THIS IS CARRIE TISH FOR K-560 NEWS.

Figure 8.3. This script is an example of a short, two-bite wrap.

## 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 2-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.

### **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, 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 time continuity models discussed in Chapter 6.

## CHAPTER NINE

# 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 must have mastered some elements of screen design, documentary video, and the interplay of words and recorded elements.

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

**CAMERACARD** A visual on a piece of cardboard that is placed on an easel in the studio and picked up by a camera. In the past, these were frequently used for supplementary visuals but now computer animation systems are taking over this role.

**COMPOSITE** A video still visual that is composed of a mixture of video freeze frames and CGs. This is usually done in preproduction session.

**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** 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. Therefore, the entire individual screen is called a page and is usually identified by its numerical location within the machines. Also called a *screen*.

**REVEAL** A succession 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 is put on the screen, it is a disorienting change from the picture already there. Newswriters are not graphic artists, but they must be ready to suggest what information should go into the graphic before the artist completes the design. For that reason, it's necessary to provide the following suggestions when 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 to a full screen visual, 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?

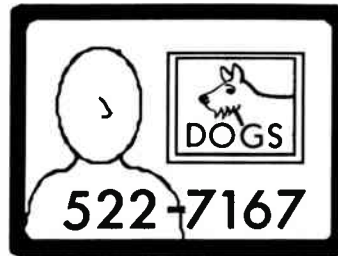
New TV news writers tend to waste time by describing what the audience can see and by adding excessive narration to situations in which the visual and the ambient sound provide details the audience can see.

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.

## Partial Screen Graphics

In these cases, the writer must use supplementary visuals while the newscaster's face remains on the screen. The most common example is the *topic box* in the corner of the screen. *CGs*, which are numbers and letters for identification and informational purposes, are also used.



### TOPIC BOXES

Topic boxes 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 remember the story as being about an arson.

Topic boxes are constructed and inserted in many ways. Older systems use slides and *cameracards* that are kept in files. These are placed into the system live when the need arises. The older systems have drawbacks. Making new slides and cameracards for the individual story takes time and the writers are often forced to rely on older slides to use with stories.

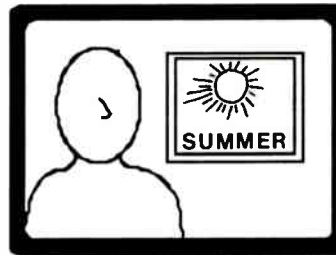
Newer systems use digital still store and computer-generated video effects techniques to compose topic boxes. Prenewscast production sessions can tie CG titles to theme pictures already in an electronic slide file. This allows great flexibility in changing or updating the topic boxes.

An example might be the story of a border clash along the Honduras-Nicaragua border. With older slides, you have to choose whatever map already exists. With the newer preproduction still stores, the map of the area can be overlaid with the words "BORDER CLASH." In other words, the newer technology allows you to select the exact words that you want.

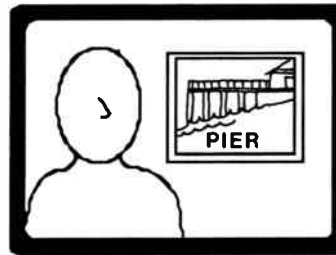
Changes in the topic box can be used to add information as the story progresses. In the following example, the changes are made to reference different ideas and visuals. Caution: this example is condensed to illustrate this point. A producer or writer would not call for so many changes within a single story.



SAN DIEGO RESIDENTS THIS SUMMER WILL HAVE SOME NEW PLACES TO SPEND A LAZY AFTERNOON.

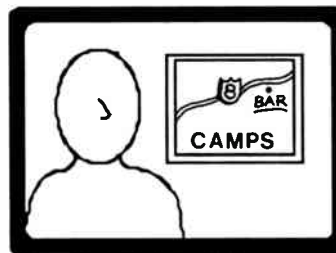


THE STATE PARKS' SERVICE WILL REBUILD THE ENCINITAS BEACH FISHING PIER... DAMAGED LAST WINTER DURING HIGH TIDES AND STORMS.



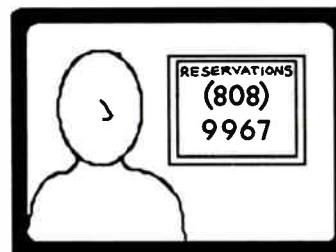
THE PIER HAS BEEN CLOSED FOR SIX MONTHS.

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.



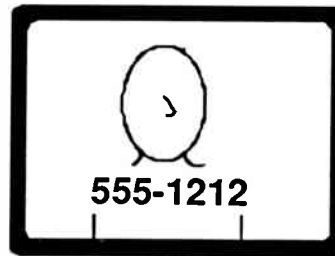


Be careful not to tie the story too heavily to an unrealistic number of graphics. The artists and directors who do the preproduction composite work may not have enough time to prepare everything you're counting on. In such a case, you would have to drop the topic boxes at the last minute, and possibly rewrite 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 electronically generated numbers and words that are superimposed over the studio picture or videotape to add information.

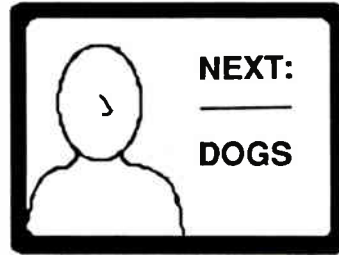
The lower-third CGs are used for names and titles, and often for phone numbers that provide the audience with a means to contact some person or agency in the news story.



**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, 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.



## 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 that completely takes over the screen, and the picture of the newscaster disappears. 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:

1. as a CG to display facts
2. as a preproduced composite with videotape to display a quote
3. as a graphic composed by an artist for illustration
4. as a freeze frame or still photograph.

## 1. Using a CG To Display Facts

Generally, this is a full-screen graphic with words and numbers to support the copy. 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:

- 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.



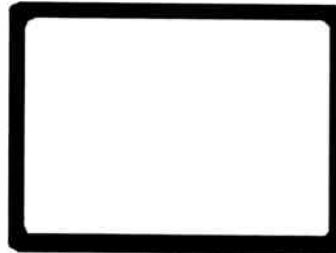
- A screen should be able to stand alone. It should have a title that is concise but understandable. Sometimes it takes a great deal of effort to devise a good title.



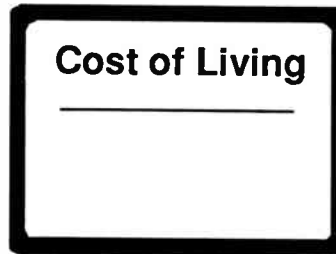
• Know the capabilities of the computer graphics machines. Most can place bands of different colored backgrounds in the screen. Quite often, it helps to use one color background with the title and one with the information. It is also simple to color the letters, but you want to avoid too many colors in the makeup.

The process of building a screen is simple.

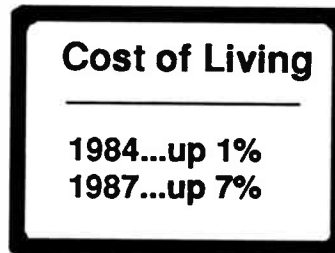
The first step is to draw a blank screen on the page.



Using your newsroom style, attempt to find a title that is short and concise.



Next, attempt to place the data under the title bar, using the fewest words possible and keeping displays parallel.





**EXERCISE 9-A****USING FULL CG FOR DATA**

For this exercise, design a graphic or graphics to present the data. Then write a story complete with the correct instructions indicating where the graphic or graphics should go.

**Caution:** CGs are not pictured on the script. It was only illustrated here to allow the student to see what CG was being used.

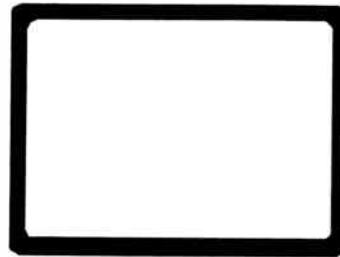
***SITUATION:***

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%, 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%. The price of all foods was up 2%, the price of gasoline up 4-cents a gallon to \$1.05, and the price of most new clothing was up 3%.

**Reveal** The *reveal* is a very effective use of successive full-screen CGs. In this case, you design a basic page and then progressive additions that, when played in succession, make it seem that you are revealing information a line at a time.

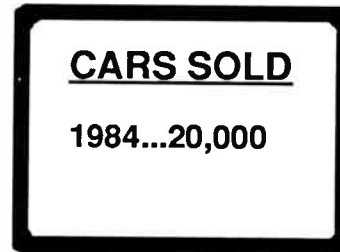
Once again, this starts with the blank screen.



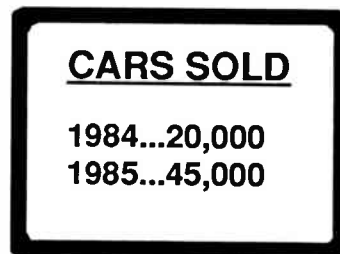
Next, the title gets put into the page.



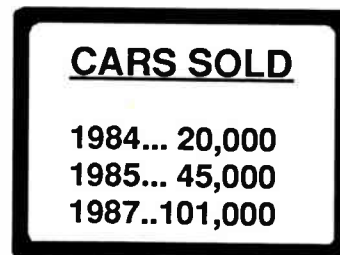
Then, the first line of information.



The previous page is used as a base; another page is designed by adding a line.



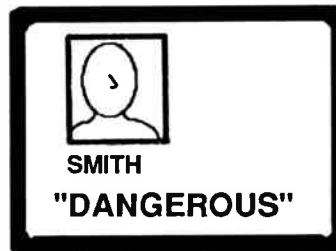
Then, the second page is used as a base, and a third page is designed that adds a line to the second page.



## 2. Using a Preproduced 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 preproduction session and recorded either as a single page in a still store or as a visual freeze frame on rolling videotape.

The standard composite is a newsmaker's head shot or an easily identifiable location or event, a still visual that is isolated in a box. To one side or below is a quote. You must judge whether the combination represents the story.



Sometimes the artist may suggest using the pictures of two persons in the composite, along with a part of the quote. Such a visual may be very confusing to the viewer who might not know which person said the highlighted quote. If the composite is not immediately clear, it should be re-designed.



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 the waters, rather than making them clear.



**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 charges of "inappropriate conduct" toward 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.

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.

### 3. Using a Full Graphic for Illustration

Full graphics are most commonly used for diagrams illustrating a process or for maps. Although some of these are still on cameracards, most are produced on computers. In either case, the newswriter should sketch out a design for the artist and then meet with the artist before the story is written. 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 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 is now 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 at Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. It's considered a dangerous hurricane, and the winds are now 120 miles per hour.

Hurricane Alicia hit the same spot in 1985, causing millions of dollars worth of damage.

## 4. 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. It is evident that this is going on. 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 that replace the picture of the newscaster. There is also a composite visual that combines a freeze frame of tape with a CG quote to add effect to the narrative.

Designing screens should be a collaborative effort with the news artist. The news writer 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.



## CHAPTER TEN

# TV: WRITING THE VO

### Chapter Preview

The VO or voice over story is a common writer's assignment in broadcast news. 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 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.
- 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, whether wide (WS), medium (MS), or closeup (CU) will do if it offers immediate identification for the upcoming sequence.
- GENERIC VISUALS** Also known as *wallpaper video*, these illustrate a story but are timeless and not tied to any 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** Closeups (CUs) or medium shots (MSs) of people or crowds who are spectators to an event in question. Inserting this reaction shot allows the editor to compress the action, change point of view, or 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 closeups (CUs), medium shots (MSs), and wide shots (WSs), to achieve variety.

## The VO

If you've already mastered 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 videotape format is the VO.

The VO or voice over story is a television workhorse, one of the four basic formats. 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 William Rukeyser used to teach interns and junior writers about the VO by having them imagine it as two stories constructed at the same time, as if twin towers were being built. There is both a narration that will be read by the anchor in the studio and a picture story that runs with 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 have mastered some of the special points of writing for spoken news. Now we ask you to learn a new language, the special grammar of film.

## Reviewing Rules for Visuals

Let's review the three rules for working with visuals that were given in Chapter 9 and let's now 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 the SOT brought up should be strong 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 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 the wrong 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 you expect to use :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 event that really happened? Discuss this in class.

## What Kind of Shots Are Best for VOs?

Having some pictures—any pictures—is not necessarily the answer. The best use of video sequences is what you are after in television.

Assuming that, here are some guidelines for selecting from raw material:

*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. 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.

*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 series of inanimate objects.

*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.

*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.

*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.

*Shots with natural (ambient) sound when it's there.* Sound is integral to every moment of life. The sounds aid our learning process. Running video silent cheats us of the ambience that helps us gather information from the videotape.

*Shots that avoid generic visuals when possible.* Generic visuals refer to videotape not shot for this story but that relate 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 proper grammar of sequences.

## What Are the Rules for Sequences?

There are certain rules worth remembering when putting sequence shots in order.

*1. Begin with the best establishing shot (ES) you can find.* Most broadcast news sequences are short, about 3 or 4 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 event takes place. If a demonstration happens in three locations—a park, 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, sized, sliced, squeezed, and the juice flows down plastic pipes, and so on.

Two actions that happen at the same time should have separate sequences.

3. *Alternate WS, MS, & CUs to provide variety.* These shots show the placement of the camera. Not only should you alternate focal lengths, but you should also alternate angles, using shots from different perspective to complete a sequence. This will give the videotape editor a variety of shots, and prevent the editor from considering jump cuts.

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:

*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.

*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 the placement of the videotape portion within the VO will force changes in the story design.

If the story opens with videotape off the top, the the picture and the newscaster's voice from the studio must reference clearly. Don't begin a VO at the top unless the producer suggests it, because this format needs careful planning in relation to the stories before and after it. Here's an example:

In this story,  
the word  
*buildings*  
must match  
the visuals  
that show up  
first.

QUAKE/jnh/3-9-11pm  
(starts vo at top)  
----VO 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  
                         THOUGHT 45 HAD DIED... BUT NOW  
                         THE TOLL IS ONLY SEVEN  
TRT :15      CONFIRMED DEAD WITH MANY  
                         MISSING.  
-----O/C      (LIVE)  
                         OFFICIALS SAY MOST OF THE  
                         BUILDINGS FELL IN A PART OF  
                         TOWN BUILT OVER AN OLD  
                         LAKEBED.  
                         (more/more)

**Figure 10.1.** Example of VO script in which the visual story opens with the videotape rather than the studio.

If the videotape is put in the normal or midstory position, it will appear sometime after about :05 into the story and also may have about :05 of studio copy after the visual.

In this next example, the only earthquake pictures available are of the hospital. Therefore, the previous story (10.1) has to be restructured.

In this case, you could not use the hospital pictures while you talk about the wreckage.

Instead, you use them later when you talk about casualties.

QUAKE/jnh/3-9-11pm  
(LIVE)  
----O/C A FEW BUILDINGS ARE ALL THAT'S LEFT IN GRIMALDI... SARDINIA... AFTER A MAJOR EARTHQUAKE HIT THE FARM CENTER MONDAY.  
RESCUE CREWS ARE STILL SEARCHING THROUGH FALLEN BUILDINGS AND STORES.  
\_\_\_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 SMALL HOSPITAL IS RUNNING OUT.  
TRT :10  
O/C\_\_\_\_\_ (live)  
INTERNATIONAL RELIEF SUPPLIES HAVEN'T REACHED THE AREA YET... BECAUSE TOO MANY BRIDGES HAVE COLLAPSED IN THE MOUNTAINOUS REGION.

**Figure 10.2.** Example of VO script that has been modified to work with available visuals.

All of this leads up to a 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 news writer must *design* the story after considering how the VO is placed and how it carries the information.

Two examples of the same VO story, but with different videotape, will show how the writer must consider what pictures are available. For both of the following examples, the story information is the same but the lead and the idea sequence change because of the different visuals.

<b>With Video of the Barn</b>	<b>With Video of Council</b>
__O/C THE PALO ALTO CITY COUNCIL IS GOING TO ALLOW THE DEMOLITION OF AN HISTORIC LANDMARK.	__O/C AN OLD BARN THAT HAS STOOD OVER 100-YEARS WILL FACE THE WRECKER'S BALL NEXT WEEK.
__VO (vo) THE OLD ROGERS FARM BARN AT THE CORNER OF ELKIN AND WHYNER IS APPARENTLY IN THE WAY OF A NEW SENIOR CITIZEN HOUSING PROJECT.	__V/O (vo) THE CITY COUNCIL TONIGHT REJECTED PLEAS TO SAVE THE STRUCTURE AT ELKIN AND WHYNER ROADS. THE COUNCIL PLANS TO USE THE PROPERTY FOR SENIOR CITIZENS' HOUSING.
__O/C (live) THE 100-YEAR-OLD STRUCTURE IS THE SECOND OLDEST IN THE COUNTY...AND WILL BE TORN DOWN NEXT WEEK. (# # #)	__O/C (live) THE STRUCTURE IS ON THE OLD ROGERS DAIRY FARM. THE BARN IS THE SECOND OLDEST IN THE COUNTY. (# # #)

Figure 10.3. Two examples of the same VO story, but with different videotapes.

*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 file, off the network, or you might be breaking down a longer package. You might be lucky and find that it was well-edited, and the sequences are the ones you need, or you may find that you need a slightly different angle, or an emphasis on 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 both looking for complete sequences and evaluating 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 news writer. 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 the 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.

*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 for each sequence in this VO. Don't forget to specify WS, MS, or CUs. Both stories are expected to be :35 with about :20 of VO. Work with both situations.

***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.

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.

<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> <p>(# # #)</p>	<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.</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>
--	--

Figure 10.4. Two examples of VOs: One with poor referencing (*left*) and one with better referencing (*right*).



## Learning to Write to the Time of Pictures

In certain situations, the writer must compose phrases that match the times of already edited pictures. 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. Here's an example:

*The list to the tape editor*

00:00-00:05 Shot of pandas arriving in truck  
00:05-00:08 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

This is a simple VO with :20 of tape in the normal placement. Here's your first attempt at the VO portion of the script:

----- VO	TWO SEMI TRUCKS BROUGHT THE CAGES WITH THE TINY BEARS INSIDE. THE PRECAUTIONS ARE A SIGN OF HOW PRECIOUS THESE ANIMALS ARE. (:06) SCHOOLCHILDREN WERE ON HAND TO WATCH THE ARRIVAL. THEIR TEACHERS HAD PREPARED THEM WITH LESSONS ABOUT THE PANDAS. (:12) THESE ANIMALS NORMALLY LIVE IN THE FORESTS OF WESTERN CHINA. THEY LOOKED OUT OF PLACE IN THE TINY SHIPPING CAGES. (:18) BUT AFTER A FEW MINUTES ...IT WAS OBVIOUS THE ZOOKEEPERS WERE GOOD AT CALMING THE TRAVELERS. (:22).
----------	---

Figure 10.5. First draft of a VO script written for timed visuals.

Those times, however, are a bit long. You really want to hit the zookeepers scratching the pandas at :14. So, we adjust the phrases. Here's a second try.

-----VO	TWO SEMI TRUCKS BROUGHT THE CAGES WITH THE TINY BEARS THE EXTRA CARE...A SIGN OF HOW PRECIOUS THESE ANIMALS ARE. (:05) SCHOOLCHILDREN FROM SPRUCE ELEMENTARY WERE ON HAND TO WATCH THE ARRIVAL. (:08) ZOO OFFICIALS BOUGHT SPECIAL AIR CONDITIONED TRAVELING CAGES FOR THESE ANIMALS THAT NORMALLY LIVE IN THE FORESTS OF WESTERN CHINA. (:14) AND AFTER A FEW MINUTES ...IT WAS OBVIOUS THE ZOOKEEPERS WERE GOOD AT MAKING FRIENDS AND CALMING THE LITTLE ADVENTURERS. (:20)
---------	--

**Figure 10.6.** Second draft: VO script adjusted to fit the visuals.

## **EXERCISE 10-B**

## **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 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 life-size sculptures. Most of the works are copies of Rodin's pieces. Some critics are charging the statues will be vandalized.

### **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 of kids climbing 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 whose head pops out from behind statue
- 00:55-01:05 MS of kid pounding with a baseball bat on leg of sculpture

## Chapter Summary

In the first attempts at the VO, it is hard to get everything right. The concept of blindly turning over sequence times to a videotape editor, then sitting down and writing something without seeing the final version, is unnerving. However, that's the process for the VO, one of the most popular of formats used in local television newscasts in this country.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

# TV: WRITING THE VO/SOT

---

### Chapter Preview

The VO/SOT, pronounced "VOH-SOT," is a combination of the voice over with a soundbite and is a common story format that should be practiced. The VO/SOT must be carefully structured, because it generally allows little time for explanation. 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 closeup shot. These shots are usually reverse angle or medium shots of the interview 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 is usually the result from an error in timing; however, it forces the 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 a segment with a soundbite. This can also be expanded to a VO/SOT/VO or even a VO/SOT/VO/SOT/VO.

## 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.

Producers look for VO/SOTs for many reasons. A reporter package from an earlier newscast needs an update and the reporter cannot be found. Your own reporter may have shot part of a package but didn't have time to get enough visuals or other interviews. You have an interview by your own reporter but the extra visuals must come from file tape. You are drastically recutting a network piece and you cannot use the reporter's voicetrack. Such events occur on a regular basis.

The solution is the VO/SOT. Because it is meant for the studio newscaster, assigned lengths for a VO/SOT might run anywhere from :40 to 1:15, enough for a good VO but sometimes not enough to combine the VO, all that goes with the soundbite, and other non-visual information in the story.

Time is not the only problem. Both the VO portion and the SOT may be strong enough to force the story design—but in different ways. Also, the soundbite will also need :06 to :10 seconds of writeup, but this writeup must be accompanied by visuals because it will be located at the end of the VO segment.

### Using Multiple Video Sources

Historically, the VO and the SOT were edited together onto one tape, causing problems if the anchor read too quickly (long silent gap) or too slowly (upcut and overrode the bite). This problem was most severe if the VO was long—more than :20.

If two video source machines are available, it is easier to set up the VO on one and the SOT on another. The SOT portion is then rolled when the anchor gets to it and is not dependent on paced reading of the VO. In the example that follows, the SOT cassette would not roll until the anchor finished the VO copy block, whether or not the VO videotape had finished its TRT (total running time).

The lead needs to be obscure so that the first VO pictures reference.

The VO begins by referencing the tiger at the top. Pictures are of the tiger.

Writeup introduces the zoo-keeper and makes a statement.

SOT talks about problems at the zoo.

Tag must explain remainder of story.

ZOO/jnh/6pm

-----O/C STEELTOWN'S NEWEST TIGER  
MADE HER DEBUT TODAY AMID A  
CONTROVERSY OVER HER CAGE.

-----VO (vo)  
THE TWO-YEAR-OLD FEMALE  
NAMED SHEEBAN HAS BEEN AT THE  
ZOO FOR ONLY TWO WEEKS. THE  
ZOO GOT HER BY TRADING TWO  
RARE PENGUINS TO A ZOO IN OHIO.

THE ZOOKEEPERS ARE EXCITED  
ABOUT SHEEBAN BUT ANIMAL  
HANDLER LILI WASKELL THINKS  
SHEEBAN NEEDS MORE SPACE.

@\_\_\_\_\_ VTR SOT (sot)  
....@\_\_\_\_\_ CG Waskell

TRT :14\_ 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.

Figure 11.1. Example of VO/SOT with tape in normal position and using two source machines.

## 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.

The VO begins by referencing the tiger at the top. Pictures are of the tiger.

Writeup introduces zookeeper and makes a statement.

SOT talks about problems at the zoo.

The on-camera tag must be longer to explain remainder of story.

```

-----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.

          @ :15_ VTR SOT                (sot)
          ....@ -----CG Waskell

          TRT :31                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.
    
```

Figure 11.2. Example of VO/SOT with VO off the top and using only one source machine.



## Your 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 introductory shots leading up to the soundbite. Although :10 is long for an identification sequence in the writeup, the classic visual order is to start with a one-shot of the interviewee, then cut to a two-shot of reporter and interviewee, then cut back to the interviewee on a one-shot when the soundbite begins. A long writeup poses a problem—the more VO time you spend on the writeup, the less you have for the traditional VO part of the story. Therefore, keep the ID of the interviewee as close to the soundbite as possible.

00:05 MS of tiger prowls cage  
00:03 CU of tiger's face  
00:08 CU of Waskell (not speaking)  
00:03 MS of Waskell and interviewer  
00:14 SOT of Waskell.

## Use Another VO or An On-Camera 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 material is not visual, and it allows the viewer to reestablish 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 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 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 of reporter and Gelden
- :08 MS of Gelden only (he's listening to question)
- :04 CU of Gelden (he's listening to question)

The boldface copy below is a bite from an interview. The bite 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."**

## 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.



## CHAPTER TWELVE

# TV: SHORT PACKAGES, LIVE SHOTS, AND LONG PACKAGES

---

### Chapter Preview

Reporters assemble various combinations of interviews, natural sound sequences, *standup bridges* and *closers*, and their own narration tracks into videotape packages. The package, also called the *takeout* or *insert*, is the backbone of television field reporting. This chapter highlights the most common ones—short packages under 2:30. It also touches on the work with live remote interior packages and the longer reports, such as features, cover stories, mini-documentaries, series pieces, and investigative work.

Both the time continuity-model and the particular-to-general model are useful to reporters in planning packages. There is a need to identify good natural sound sequences, and to study various placements and functions of the 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.
- MINI-DOC** 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.
- PACKAGE** A television story on videotape that uses the reporter's voice for narration and usually includes soundbites from other sources.
- 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 workhorses of daily television journalism. Most reporters end up doing from one to three packages a day, involving major local reporting. Short packages—anywhere from :45 to 2:30—are generally done on an immediate-need basis and completed under deadline pressure.

In short packages, the video work is subordinate to the journalistic need, and reporters are often scrambling to find visuals to cover ideas or themes within an assigned story. Producers and assignment editors regularly request coverage of stories in which there is no appealing visual element. Reporters must be inventive in daily assignments for short packages, often spending time searching for B-roll (video for illustration) possibilities or using standup bridges and closers to carry a story element for which no visual can be found.

Short packages generally are designed in the reporter's mind *before* the event is shot, or are made up of standardized sequences with which both the reporter and shooter are familiar, such as a protest demonstration's marches, speeches, picketing, or confrontation with the authorities. Back at the station, these parts are ready for quick editing. 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.

## Organizing in the Mind

Television reporters in the field often find little time to ponder the fine points of video journalism. More than one has mentioned that they've learned to plan packages as they drive to the event and to write the narration tracks in the car as they return.

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 Time Continuity Model**

By now you're a bit tired of hearing the old litany: lead-in, current situation, past or background, controversy or story, and future. 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**

This is the case in which you use 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. Maybe you and the crew should fly in a plane, go to a drugstore, attend a grade school class, find a mechanic who's working on a particular type of car, go to a gunshop, or catch up with the protesters enroute.

In short packages, you might have to use a good part of everything you have time to shoot. 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 natural sound sequences? Can these be useful in telling the story. Will you need any special mics, lights, camera equipment for this?

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

You won't want to waste any time interviewing the wrong persons. Review Chapter 5 on the elements that add value to interviews. Remember, you are looking for eyewitness accounts, response to charges, the tales of persons affected by actions in the story, and professional evaluations.

## Standups

There are various types of standups and each has a different visual effect. It is crucial, though, not to be wedded to the standups you shoot. In short packages, the standups are often outdated or the package structure you had planned changes. Don't be afraid to get rid of useless standups.

For standup bridges, you'll want to look for a transition point, a natural change in the story. It could be the division between 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.

In some cases, you may want to bridge into a soundbite from an interview that is already finished. That means the last sentence of your bridge must include the writeup. If you do that, also, shoot a bridge without the writeup. You may have to dump the interview and you'll have a backup.

For standup closers, you'll probably want to talk about the future. For that reason, you want to do the standup in a location related to the story, one that might even have some action in the background.

## Tracks

The narration written for most short packages is severely condensed. Each track usually includes a segment of information and the writeup to the next soundbite. Most novice reporters encounter two problems when starting out 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 B-roll. Covering tracks with vaguely associated B-roll lessens the chance for your audience to understand the story. If you have facts but no B-roll, you may want to put that information in the studio lead-in or the studio tag.



# Beginning the Process

There are many kinds of assignments and we'll talk about two. The first is a general topic backgrounder, one in which you'll have to set up shots, interviews, and sequences. The second is a fast-breaking assignment to cover a particular event with a known interviewee available.

## Case 1. The General Topic Assignment

In the first case, 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 are free to design the story.

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 jargon.

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.

### **Visuals, B-Roll, Sequences.**

Need pictures of fatty foods (as named in the wire story).

- in the grocery
- being prepared in a kitchen
- served to diners

Also need pictures of acceptable food in same situations

Medical illustration.

- for animation? Call the local teaching hospital.
- for stills, diagrams, and cross sections of arteries? Try a medical library.
- computer animation? Do these pictures need to move?
- Is there file tape of heart operations?

### **Interviews.**

Are there two sides to this controversy? Many sides? Do we need spokespeople for both?

- Call the American Heart Association.
- Call the local teaching hospital (research).
- Call the AMA.
- For heart patients in therapy, call a cardiologist.
- VOX POP? Do we need the general public talking about the controversy while they are eating fatty foods?

### **Standups.**

Is there a good location?

- Do a bridge in a research laboratory
- Do a standup close at American Heart Association Office

### **Tracks.**

Since the basic information about the report will be in a studio reader before the story lead-in, Track 1 could begin with establishing shots of foods.

Track 1. Pictures of fatty foods being dished out.

That's how you might plan 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. The Breaking Story**

In this case, there is no planning. You are hearing the details of the story as you drive 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. No later explanations that you were getting a good interview will be an excuse for not having the visuals. Interviews will come later. When they can be done, try for all sides.

This rush-rush breaking story is sometimes a meeting that has been scheduled for weeks, but your assignment desk found out about it only moments before you were told. 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? Etc. 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 viewpoints. 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.

- *Do you have any outstanding natural sound sequences?* Is there some sequence that jumps to mind as the establishing sequence, to carry with it Track 1?

- *Do you have all of the B-roll you wanted?* Is there some information in the story that 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.
- *Do you need any computer graphic support?*

Then, do a rough draft of the lead-in. Determine what perspective will ready the audience for 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 whether 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.

Some hints for package construction:

**HINT 1:** Do all your writing before you get to the edit room. 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 magically 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:** Narrow the angle and skip being global. Select a usable focus, one which makes for the best 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.

This is a typical short package script. It is for a morning package after a fire the previous evening.

Studio on-camera	<p><b>Lead-in</b> FIRE OFFICIALS MAY HAVE AN ANSWER TO WHAT CAUSED A GENERAL ALARM FIRE DOWNTOWN LAST NIGHT. ROB LEFFERTS REPORTS.</p>
Fire pictures Cafe owner	<p><b>Track 1</b> THE OLD DESERTED WAREHOUSE ON WALLY STREET WAS VACANT FOR YEARS. CAFE OWNER MARIO BIAN TIN WATCHED FROM ACROSS THE STREET WHEN IT WENT UP.</p>
SOT	<p>One second there was nothing and the next...there were flames coming out the windows.</p>
Firefighters at fire	<p><b>Track 2</b> FIREMEN SAY THE FLAMES WERE THROUGH THE ROOF WHEN THEY ARRIVED. FIRE CAPTAIN ALDEN CARTER SAYS THE WAREHOUSE COULDN'T BE SAVED.</p>
SOT	<p>This type of a warehouse has no fire walls and once it gets going, it's like a chimney.</p>
Smoke and traffic	<p><b>Track 3</b> THE FLAMES COULD BE SEEN FOR MILES AND THE SMOKE BLEW DIRECTLY ACROSS THE BARNES FREEWAY, CHOKING TRAFFIC IN THE MIDDLE OF THE EVENING COMMUTE. IT TOOK TWO HOURS TO REOPEN THE ROAD.</p>
Standup bridge	<p><b>Standup Bridge (Flames are out.)</b> AS DAWN BROKE ARSON INVESTIGATORS PICKED THROUGH THE BURNED OUT BUILDING... CONCENTRATING THEIR EFFORTS IN ONE CORNER OF THE RUBBLE.</p>
B-roll of arson squad; pickup arson SOT in middle	<p><b>Track 4</b> FIRE CAPTAIN ELVIN BURKE SAYS ILLEGAL RESIDENTS MAY BE TO BLAME.</p> <p>It looks like it started near an area where transients stay. We found gasoline and an old stove.</p>
Two-shot cutaway of Lefferts and owner talking by building	<p><b>Track 5</b> THE BUILDING'S OWNER SAYS THE FIRE MAY HAVE SAVED HIM SOME TROUBLE. HE JUST GOT A PERMIT YESTERDAY TO TEAR THE PLACE DOWN. THAT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN NEXT MONTH. ROB LEFFERTS FOR K-560 NEWS.</p>

**Figure 12.1.** Example of a short package script.

## Live Shots

Portable microwave equipment first became popular in the mid-1970s, but was usually limited to the larger markets where the equipment budgets would allow for the quarter million dollar costs of the live trucks. Now the technology is more refined, and although the costs are still high, medium-market and even small-market stations have been buying trucks, satellite trucks, repeater dishes, and whatever else it takes to put their reporters on live. This technological advance has changed local broadcast news reporting in many ways:

- First, reporters have to be competent in doing live shots. Live shots are no longer a specialty, but must be part of the bag of tricks of each reporter. This lowers the employment chances of someone who cannot speak extemporaneously on camera.

- Second, assignment editors and producers must always be aware of how much time and effort is involved in setting up and doing a live shot. They have to consider whether there are more effective and economical ways of telling the story.

- Third, anyone in broadcast journalism must be aware of the desire by people in the news to play to the need of television crews for live subjects during the regularly scheduled news time. Anyone proposing a news conference during the regularly scheduled evening news hours (usually 6, 10, or 11 p.m.) might be suspect. This may not stop coverage, but it is important for reporters and shooters to consider whether they are being used.

- Fourth, 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.

- Finally, everyone should 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 is at risk of being sacrificed by the need for a live location presence.

## Live Shot Procedures

Once the crew establishes a clear signal to the station, the live shot can take many forms. It becomes a mini-newscast from the field and, depending on the on-camera skills of the reporter, can be as smooth as anything from the news set. The possibilities for format are many:

- A standup by the reporter
- Q & A with the reporter
- Live interview by the reporter
- Standup by the reporter with VO
- Standup by the reporter with a VO/SOT
- Standup by the reporter with VO, VO/SOT and interview, or tracked package

The technical combinations are fascinating. Because any VO or VO/SOT material is usually microwaved back to the station ahead of time, edited, and then rolled from the studio, the reporter is forced to write and narrate these from busy, noisy, uncomfortable circumstances. Although a good procedure is to also send in a track to cover a VO, occasionally there's no time to do it.

It is crucial that writers and producers who communicate with reporters are clear about what material is available. Are the VO pictures usable? Did everything come in all right? Do we have a roll cue?

Notice that the script example below has the normal lead-in, but then has no script copy for the live shot, only cues to the time to roll, insert sound and CGs, and return to live and return to studio.

Normal slug	BACKHOE/jnh/6pm
Normal lead-in	<p>-----O/C      A CONSTRUCTION WORKER</p> <p>MADE LOCAL HISTORIANS HAPPY</p> <p>TODAY WHEN HER BACKHOE HIT</p> <p>SOMETHING SOLID.</p>
The cue to a live shot. This tells how much time until the tape and the details about it, including the CGs.	<p>ARCHAEOLOGISTS ARE CALLING</p> <p>IT A MAJOR FIND. REPORTER LANCE</p> <p>OLDAUVI IS STANDING BY AT THE SITE</p> <p>WITH THE STORY.</p> <p>---LIVE                      (go live)</p>
The EC of the tape is inside the live shot.	<p>ABOUT :20 IN</p> <p>ROLL CUE      They had searched for 12 years and</p> <p>FOR VO/SOT      what they found was amazing.).</p>
Time until a return to the studio.	<p>VTR VO                                      (VO)</p> <p>@ :13....VTR SOT</p> <p>@ :15 CG: Matthews</p>
	<p>TRT:25...(EC: ...intact totems and villages)</p> <p>-----Live at location for :15 tag.</p> <p>-----O/C                                      (studio)</p>

**Figure 12.1.** Example of studio script for live shot.



## Longer Packages

Longer packages run anywhere from 2:30 up to about 10:00 and generally cover timeless topics, from hard news backgrounders to special profiles, investigative reports, mini-docs, or sidebars. They are called segment reports, mini docs, two-or three-parters, or cover stories. They are radically different in planning, construction, editing, and writing. Here are some differences from shorter packages.

### Research

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

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 necessary 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 as time goes on the story changes. Week-old interviews may become dated. As the story evolves, new sequences are added, and old ones, even the result of hours of shooting, are discarded.

### Interviewing

Interviewing is much more relaxed and informal and requires less immediate goal-oriented answers. Reporters are usually better prepared and can proceed more in a dialogue with 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.



## **Use of Interviews**

All interviews should be transcribed, so that reporters or producers have a better chance to craft silky writeups. It is also easier to use longer sound bites.

## **Writing**

The quality of writing should be much higher than for short packages. It is possible to write and rewrite tracks. Writer and editor 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 values 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 postproduction 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% of the donated money gets passed along to the recipients. Yet the fund officers have always claimed that this is 90%. What will it take to check this out and do this story?

### ***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, etc. What will you need?

## **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. 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.

Live shots are an ever-increasing phenomenon in broadcast news, and reporters should be aware of the many format possibilities in these.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

# COPYEDITING AND PRODUCING

---

### Chapter Preview

This final chapter covers script review after it leaves the typewriter or computer printer. The reporter or writer and then the producer, who usually doubles as the copyeditor, should examine the script for accuracy, fairness, comprehensive coverage, inclusion of perspective, color in writing, libel, invasion of privacy, and adherence to station writing style.

This chapter 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. The backtime is most efficient when expressed in real clock time, rather than the elapsed time of the newscast. For 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.

**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.

**PRODUCER** A person who is in charge of a single newScast. The producer selects the stories; oversees story development; stacks the newscast; edits copy for accuracy, fairness, scope, and libel and makes any last minute changes before or during a newscast. An assistant producer might be responsible for a segment of the newscast

**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.

## Looking for Holes and Checking Accuracy

Copyediting demands great attention to detail. The writer and then the 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 writer must do a rewrite.

*Accuracy* is the first and the most important consideration in the editing of any story. A story cannot be anything but as accurate as possible in terms of the information known at that time. There can be no compromise in this area.

- Any doubts about sources must be conveyed to the audience.
- Any elements that need backgrounding must be explained.
- Every limiting adjective must be checked out.
- Every actuality/soundbite must be carefully referenced.
- Every visual must be evaluated as representative of what occurred at the event.

That's a lot. Given the complexity of many stories, it's a difficult task to accomplish. But it must be done. Even simple stories carry the possibility of errors. Here's an example:

BANK-REAX/JNH/6PM

Are these  
"bank  
examiners"?

Is the  
charge  
"fraud"?

Are all six  
bank officials  
or do they  
work for  
someone  
else?  
Did they get  
there at 8?  
Do you trust  
your reporter?

-----O/C BANK EXAMINERS SAY THEY'LL  
GET TO WORK TODAY TRYING TO  
INVESTIGATE FRAUD CHARGES  
AT TIGER SAVINGS AND LOAN.

VO BEGINS (VO)

THE SIX BANK OFFICIALS WERE  
THERE WHEN THE DOORS OPENED  
AT EIGHT THIS MORNING. THEY  
SAY IT'LL TAKE TWO WEEKS TO GO  
TRT:10 THROUGH THE BOOKS.

-----O/C (live)

THERE'S A PHONE NUMBER TO  
CALL IF YOU ARE WORRIED ABOUT  
YOUR ACCOUNT.

Is the phone  
number right?  
Is it working?  
Does the CG  
match the copy?

FULL CG (cg)  
(PH# 555-1212) YOU CAN REACH THE BANK'S  
TROUBLE LINE AT 5-5-5...1-2-1-2.  
THAT'S 5-5-5...1-2-1-2.

(# # #)

Figure 13.1. Example of script needing fact checking.

**EXERCISE 13-A****ACCURACY**

Examine this story for accuracy. Circle any possible problem areas.

ELECTION/JNH/6PM

-----O/C VOTERS YESTERDAY

SELECTED BOB HOSKINS TO BE LILA  
COUNTY'S FIRST MINORITY SHERIFF.

WITH 98-PERCENT OF THE  
PRECINCTS COUNTED...HOSKINS HAD  
A 53-TO-45-PERCENT LEAD OVER THE  
INCUMBENT...BIG JIM BELUGA.

BELUGA HAS BEEN SHERIFF  
FOR THE PAST SIXTEEN YEARS...  
AND CRITICS ACCUSE HIM OF LAX  
DISCIPLINE AND FAILING TO  
PROPERLY TRAIN THE DEPUTIES.

HOSKINS HAD BEEN A DEPUTY  
FOR BELUGA BUT RESIGNED SIX  
MONTHS AGO TO CHALLENGE BIG  
BOB FOR THE JOB.

(MORE/MORE)

# Fairness

Although we can sympathize with reporters who believe in one side or another of a story, most news organizations attempt to represent the position of all sides fairly. Fairness can be difficult to achieve at times because all of us have an opinion or two on items like landlord-tenant disputes, military-civilian battles, rich-homeless, polluters-ecologists, 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 come to their own conclusions about the story.

## EXERCISE 13-B

## FAIRNESS

Examine this story for fairness. Circle any areas to check.

POLLUTE/jnh/6pm

-----O/C A CITIZENS' 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 given to a story. If you have researched the material in depth, then you should be able to explain why certain issues were excluded. Answer these questions:

1. Have all the angles been covered, all sides questioned?
2. Do we know enough about the background of people or groups involved in this story to make judgments?
3. Is this the first step in a cause-and-effect situation (industry layoffs /factory may move/biggest employer in town/etc.)?

## EXERCISE: 13-C

## SCOPE

Examine this story for scope. Circle any words that represent areas about which you would like to know more.

BANKSUIT/jnh/3pm

-----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 libelous 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, *libel laws are state laws*, and differ across the country. (Ideally, a station should provide a summary of local libel laws.) There are, however, some general concepts that are applicable throughout the country.

Libel 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.

Slander is basically the same as libel, except that it is spoken. In some states, it is considered to be impromptu speech, and carries lesser weight in court.

Invasion of privacy is true material that identifies and harms. It covers the areas of private space intrusion, publication of private matters, and putting people in a false light, and the right to publicity. Generally, the category most involving newswriters is the publication of private matters, most notably a criminal past. The court has 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 reasons. First, the defensive one. You can save your job, your station, and a lot of heartache for someone involved in the news.

Second, the aggressive reason. If you know the libel laws, 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.

## For Libel to Exist

Certain general conditions have to exist for libel to occur in most cases.

**Identification** Even if accidental, all you have to do is make a verbal or visual identification of a person to the satisfaction of the listeners or viewers. This is also done by identifying a person as a member of a small, exclusive group; however, in that case, you will also libel the others in that group, and they all may sue you.

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 libel suit—as long as the identification is solid.

**Broadcast or Publication.** All you have to do is broadcast to at least one person.

**Injury or Defamation.** This is what it's all about. Your story could injure a person's reputation, their ability to have friends, or their pursuit of a paycheck. 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 big money could change hands.

In a sense, **malice** is serious negligence. It involves two situations. The first, called *intent*, is proven by testimony that before the story you told another person that you intended to harm the individual in the story, no matter what the truth.

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, ignoring research, or whatever. 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.

Now if malice is proven, private persons who have already proven libel can ask for additional multi-million-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 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* persons. 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 are in the public eye, even involuntarily. Sometimes stories, even when 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.

## **How About Consent?**

What if the person agreed to an interview, then libeled 15 individuals in the answers to your questions. If you use this interview, are you responsible?

If you broadcast a libelous statement, and leave it as the sole reference, without any other sources or perspective, then you might be heading to court. Just 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.

## **Privileged Situations**

"Privilege" here refers to fair and accurate account 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 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?**

The next step, if you are concerned, is to 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-D****LIBEL #1**

Examine this story for libel. Circle any possible problems.

TEACHER/jnh/6pm

-----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-E****LIBEL #2**

Examine this story for libel. Circle any possible problems.

TWITS/jnh/6pm

-----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 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-F****INVASION OF PRIVACY**

Examine this story for invasion of privacy. Circle any possible errors.

DAYCARE/jnh/6pm

-----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

The producer may get the story after the writer, but long before that, the stories have the producer's stamp on them. The producer's job is to evaluate the story possibilities, set allowable time limits, choose the story format, stack the stories into a newscast, and make certain that everything gets finished on the air. There are five principal tasks: (1) planning the newscast, (2) expanding stories, (3) copyediting, (4) stacking the newscast, and (5) making on-air decisions.

## Newscastr Planning

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 all the latest information on availability of outside material and new wire 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.

3. When you've chosen a lead 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 it throughout the day to see if you've missed anything. Begin to pass out writing assignments on the more important lesser 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. Sketch out a rough newscast. Position the major stories and HFRs first. Then begin filling in the spaces.

7. Don't vacillate. Make decisions and then follow up on them. Say yes or no. Take control of the newscast.

## Expanding Stories

The way to expand stories is to look for extra visuals or sidebar stories, interviews, and reports to fill in the gaps. Follow these steps for a simple :25 story from the wires on a forest fire.

The story comes in. You have a basic :25 reader.

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 live report. It will work with 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.

## Copyediting for Broadcast Style

The first section of this chapter reviewed copyediting for accuracy, fairness, comprehensive coverage, and libel. The producer must also check the copy for broadcast style, to make sure it is readable and clear.



## Theories About Stacking Stories

Stacking the newscast is the process of deciding on the order of stories and making sure all the stories fit into the time you have for presentation. 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. Here are some thoughts about stacking newscasts:

### Important Stories First

Newspapers have always put the most important stories on the front page. And if you know how the editors lay out a paper, you'll know the position of the story gives cues as to its importance. The biggest story is above the fold in the right-hand column, and so on.

Research has shown that the audience gives more importance 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 an additional segment lead, as well as an overall lead. Therefore, you'll have to select several other stories to lead segments.

Also, each segment acts as a page and may require a pacing within the segment to give it a contextual feeling.

### Upbeat Stories Later

It is a broadcast cliché that warm, upbeat features run towards 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 preordained 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 your 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. Some propose 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 don't believe in clustering. 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 also 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 like 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 VO's. 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, even if there's nothing visual of the same caliber that might intervene, and 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 (doesn't have to be a major one), switches to B for one national story, switches back to A for local story with videotape package, switches to B for two local VOs, switches back to A for another local package (upbeat), and then B does the tease across break and before commercial. Second segment starts on A with wrap of three national stories, then to 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 gather the possible stories into a story pool. Here's 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.

## Step 1. Assess the pool.

1. **Mayor's trip.** Mayor Bowman has returned from ten-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 the 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—the local Rapid Transit Bus System is poorly managed and is facing labor problems. Right now this is a reader only.
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 on that one.
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. Make a list

Now, make a rundown of the stories with their visual power. Identify which are major stories and which are minor stories. Here's an example of the list.

### MAJOR STORIES

Mayor	PKG
City budget	PKG
Recall	Reader
Reading	Reader
Ambulance	VO
Transit mess	Reader
Crime spree	Reader

### MINOR STORIES

LA AX	VO
Car/bank	PKG
Warehouse	VO
Tickets	VO
Fraud	Reader
Econ	Reader
State Budget	Reader

## Step 3. Find the leads

Next, select a first and a second segment lead story.

### MAJOR STORIES

Lead	City budget	Pkg
	Crime spree	Reader
	Reading	Reader
	Ambulance	VO
	Transit mess	Reader
	Recall	Reader
2nd L.	Mayor's trip	PKG

### MINOR STORIES

Tickets	VO
Car/bank	PKG
LA AX	VO
Fraud	Reader
State budget	Reader
Warehouse	VO
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, etc.). Begin by assigning story lengths. The total should be 13:00. Plug in major stories.

### MAJOR STORIES

City budget	PKG	1:30
Crime spree	Read	0:40
Reading	Read	0:35
Ambulance	VO	0:40
Transit mess	Read	0:25
Recall	Read	0:20
Mayor's trip	PKG	1:30

### MINOR STORIES

Tickets	VO	0:40
Car/bank	PKG	1:10
LA AX	VO	0:25
Fraud	Read	0:20
State budget	Read	0:30
Warehouse	VO	0:20
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 these 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.

### MAJOR STORIES

City budget	PKG	2:00
Crime spree	Read	0:45
Reading	PKG	1:30
Ambulance	VO	0:45
Transit mess	PKG	1:45
Recall	Read	0:30
Mayor's trip	PKG	1:45

### MINOR STORIES

Tickets	VO	0:40
Car/bank	PKG	1:10
LA AX	VO	0:30
Fraud	Read	0:30
State budget	Read	0:30
Warehouse	VO	0:20
Econ.	Read	0:20

The next step is to transfer this format to the actual rundown.

## Now, the rundown.

### FIRST (A) SEGMENT

(A-1) City bdgt.	PKG	2:00
(A-2) Reading	PKG	1:30
(A-3) Tickets	VO	0:40
(A-4) State bdgt.	Read	0:30
(A-5) Cr. spree	Read	0:45
(A-6) Amblnce.	VO	0:45
(A-7) LA AX	VO	0:30
(A-8) Car/bank	PKG	1:10
(A-9) Tease	VO	0:10

### SECOND (B) SEGMENT

(B-1) Mayor's trip	PKG	1:45
(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, as yet it has no problems with pingponging.

# Backtiming

Although computers are rapidly taking over this chore, the producer must learn to backtime a newscast. The backtime is the clock time a story should begin if the newscast is to end on time. It is always computed in real clock time, and is always calculated from the end of the newscast, working backward. The backtimes are important if 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. Blank format sheets should always be filled in with a pencil, to allow for scribbling when you change story TSTs and backtimes.

PAGE NO.	ANC	STORY	VISUAL	TST	BACKTIME
1	<u>BOB</u>	OPEN	VO	:20	24:00
2	<u>BOB</u>	NEAR MISS	VO	:40	24:20
3	JANE	TOXIC	VO/SOT	1:05	25:00
4	<u>BOB</u>	SCHOOL FUNDS	NO	:25	26:05
5	JANE	BAND TEACHER	PKG	1:40	26:30
6	JANE	KICKER & GOODBYE	NO	:45	28:10

**NEWSCAST ENDS AT 11:28:55**

When backtiming, subtract the TST of the final story (story 6) from the end of the newscast in clock time (11:28:55). This gives you its 6's start time or backtime. Then subtract the TST of the story 5 from the backtime of 6, and you get the backtime of 5. Subtract the TST of 4 from the backtime of 5, and you get 4's backtime. And so on. Reminder: Use a pencil.



## **On-Air Decisions During the Newscast**

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, expanding the coverage, 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.



# Index

- Accuracy, 10, 201, 202-204
- Active voice
  - definition, 29
  - use of, 46-48, 53, 58
- Actuality
  - definition, 1
  - use of, 3, 98, 147
- Addresses in copy, 20
- Adjectives, 33
- Advancing the story, 76-77
- Ages in copy, 20
- Ambient sound
  - definition, 96
  - use of, 166
- Apostrophes, 18
- Approaches to story, 4
- Attribution
  - definition, 29
  - in print, 42
  - for readability, 20
  - use of, 41-44, 53, 58
- Audio billboard
  - definition, 137
- Audience research, 2
  
- B-roll
  - definition, 163
  - use of, 189-191, 193
- Background sound. *See* Ambient sound
- Backtime
  - definition, 201
  - use of, 221
- Back-to-back
  - definition, 96
  - use of, 107
- Banked story, 137
- BG sound. *See* Ambient sound
- Bite
  - definition, 96
  - placement, 112
  - pulling, 102
  - use of, 1, 96-98, 112-113
- Box. *See* Topic box
- Bridge
  - definition, 187
  - use of, 190, 192-193
- Broadcast, 2
  - drawbacks, 7
  - strengths of, 2
- Bulletin, 127, 134-135
  
- Camera movement, 166
- Cameracard
  - definition, 147
  - use of, 149
- Cart, 9
- Cause and effect, 122
- CG
  - corner, 152
  - definition, 9
  - display facts, 153-157
  - partial, 151-152
  - script instructions, 16, 155
  - use of, 149-159
- Chronology, 122
- Cliché leads
  - avoiding, 89
  - definition, 69
- Closer, 187, 190, 192-193
- Closeup (CU)
  - definition, 163
  - extreme, 163
  - use of 165-168
- Clustering
  - definition, 201
  - use of, 216, 220
- Colorful writing, 12
- Color in narrative style, 125
- Colons, 18
- Commas, 18
- Competition effects, 7
- Composite
  - use of, 158-159
- Comprehensive coverage, 201, 206
- Computer animation, 148-149, 154, 158
- Consent (libel), 209
- Continuity, 163, 167
- Copy block, 16, 147, 155
- Copyeditor, 201, 213
- Copy story. *See* Reader
- Cover story, 187
- Cue, 188
- Cutaway, 179
  
- Decimal places, 20, 22
- Detail exclusion, 20-21, 26
- Dollar signs, 22-23
  
- Effect of lead on viewers, 71
- Elliptical sentences
  - definition, 29
  - use of, 37-40
- Emotion, 3
- Entertainment, 4, 7

Epstein, Edward Jay, 10  
 Establishing shot (ES), 163  
 Evergreen, 137

Factchecking, 10-11,  
 Fairness checking 11, 205  
 Fairness Doctrine, 11  
 Feature, 187  
 Feature lead  
   definition 69  
   use of 84-86  
 File tape, 189  
 Folo lead  
   definition, 69  
   use of, 78-79  
 Font, 9  
 Forcing the design, 99  
 Format inflexibility, 7  
 Frank, Reuven, 164  
 Freeze frame, 158  
 Future tense, 50

Generic visuals  
   definition, 164  
   use of, 166  
 Geographical data, 20

HFR (hold for release), 137, 213, 219  
 Human interest, 71  
 Hype, 73

ID (identification) placement, 107  
 Identification (libel), 207  
 Illustration, 161  
 Immediacy, 2  
 Immediacy cue  
   definition, 69  
   use of 76  
 Incue, 9  
 Initials, 20  
 Interviews  
   characteristics of good, 100-101  
   exercise (5-minute), 114  
   goals, 100  
   how to use, 102-104  
   planning, 99  
   pulling 102, 105  
   recorded, 99  
   research, 99  
   using in stories, 106  
 Introductory phrases, 61-63  
 Invasion of privacy, 207, 211  
 Investigative story, 187

Jammed lead  
   avoiding, 87-88  
   definition, 69  
 Jump cut, 163

Key, 9  
 Keywords  
   definition, 70  
   in jammed leads, 87  
   in segue leads, 82

use of, 72-73, 92-93

## Lead

broadcast, 70  
 feature, 69, 84-86  
 folo, 69, 78-79  
 jammed, 69, 87-88  
 major story, 71  
 new story, 69, 74-75  
 perspective, 70, 80-81  
 question, 70, 87, 90  
 quote, 70, 87, 91  
 reax, 70, 76-77  
 segue, 82-83  
 soft, 69, 84-86

## Lead-in

definition, 115  
 use of 116-118, 144

## Libel, 207-209

Lists in narrative structure, 125

Live. *See* Reader

Live-er. *See* Reader

Live shots, 195-197

Lower third super, 9

Malice, 208

Man on the street. *See* Vox Pop

Medium shot (MS), 163, 165-168

Mic, 115

Mini doc, 188

Money in news copy, 22

More/more, 9

MOS. *See* Vox Pop

Music in narrative structure, 125

## Narrative models

time continuity, 118  
 particular-to-general, 120

## Nested phrases

definition, 29  
 use of, 59-60

## New story lead

definition, 70  
 use of, 74-75

## Newsworthiness

as a defense in invasion of privacy, 207

Numbers in news copy 22-23

## O/C,

definition, 1  
 script instructions, 16-17

## Outcue, 9

Pacing, 217

Package (radio). *See* Wrap

Package (television)

definition, 188  
 long packages, 198-200  
 use of, 188-200

## Page (graphics)

definition, 148

Parallel structures, 24, 27

Particular-to-General

definition, 115

- use of, 120-121, 144, 187, 189
- Passive voice
  - avoiding, 46-48
  - definition, 29
- Past tense, 49, 52-53
- Pauses in narrative copy, 125
- Payoffs, 122-124, 129
- Percentages, 22-23, 27
- Performance, 7
- Personal delivery, 4
- Personalization. *See* Particular-to-general
- Perspective, 12
- Perspective lead
  - definition, 70
  - use of, 80-81
- Phrases
  - introductory, 61-63
  - misplaced, 55, 57
  - nested, 29, 59, 60
  - use of, 33-34
- Pingponging,
  - definition, 201
  - use of, 216, 220
- Point of view shots (POV), 164
- Predictability, 217
- Present participle, 50-51
- Present perfect tense, 49
- Print
  - attribution, 42
  - headlines, 70
  - journalism, 2
- Privileged situations, 202, 209
- Producer,
  - definition, 202
  - job of, 213-222
- Pronouncer, 1
- Proximity, 71
- Prominence, 71
- Public vs. private persons (libel), 208-209
- Pulling bites, 102
- Punctuation
  - apostrophes, 18
  - colons, 18
  - commas, 18
  - quotation marks, 18
  - semicolons, 18
- Question lead,
  - avoiding, 90
  - definition, 70
- Quotation marks, 18
- Quote lead
  - avoiding, 91
  - in composite, 158-159
  - definition, 70
- Radio
  - script styles, 14-15
- Radio-Television News Directors Association (RTNDA), 138
- Reaction shots, 164, 168
- Read. *See* Reader
- Read aloud, 25
- Readability, 20-27
- Reader
  - definition 30
- Reax, 9
- Reax lead
  - definition, 70
  - use of, 76, 77
- Reference problems
  - misplaced phrases, 55, 57
  - pronouns, 54-56
- Referencing visuals, 148, 165, 174
- Rehearsal marks, 25
- Relationship shots, 167
- Remote
  - definition, 9
  - use of 137-138, 141-143
  - script instructions, 16
- Repetition
  - when to avoid, 64-67, 109
  - when to use, 65-67
  - in writeup, 109
- Research,
  - audience activity, 2
  - audience retention, 2
- Reveal
  - definition, 148
  - use of, 157
- Rounding off, 23, 27
- Rukeyser, William, 164
- Scope, 11
- Screen (graphics), 148
- Scripts, 5
  - information, 12
  - look of, 5
  - radio, 12
  - readability, 20
  - style, 14-19
  - television, 16-19
  - woodshedding, 25
- Segue
  - definition, 70
- Segue leads
  - geographic, 82
  - time, 82
  - use of, 82-83
- Segues (television producing), 216
- Semicolons, 18
- Sensationalism, 3, 7, 130, 165
- Sentence length, 20
- Sentences, elliptical, 37-40
- Sequence,
  - definition, 164
  - use of, 167, 173, 189-191
- Sibilance, 30
- Sidebar, 9, 78
- Slate, 137
- Slug,
  - definition, 9
  - placement, 13
- Soft lead
  - definition, 69
  - use of, 84-86
- SOT, 2

- Soundbite
  - definition, 2
  - use of, 3, 98, 181-184, 190
- Speech
  - visual, 6
- Stacking
  - definition, 202
  - use of, 215-220
- Standup
  - definition, 188
  - use of, 188, 190, 199
- Still store
  - definition, 148
- Stringer, 202
- Tag
  - definition, 96
  - use of, 112, 183
- Takeout. *See* Wrap (radio) or Package (TV)
- Tease
  - definition, 127
  - use of, 127-130
- Television
  - script style, 16-19
- Tenses
  - future, 50
  - past, 49, 52-53
  - present participle, 50
  - present perfect, 49
  - verb, 49-53, 58, 63
- Throwaway statements
  - in writeup, 110
- Time continuity
  - definition, 115
  - use of, 118-119, 144, 187, 189
- Title
  - as CGs, 9
  - in front of names, 20
- Topic box
  - definition, 148
  - use of, 149-151
- "to say," as a verb, 32-33
- Toss
  - ad lib, 131
  - definition, 127
  - generic, 131
  - one word name, 131
  - split story, 132
  - to story, 131
  - use of, 131-133
- Track
  - definition, 116
  - use of, 188, 190-193
- Transposition marks, 18
- TRT
  - definition, 9
  - script use, 16-17
  - use of, 167-172
- TST
  - definition, 9
  - script use, 16, 168
- Tuchman, Gaye, 10
- Twin tower concept, 164-165
- Upcut, 179
- Verbs
  - tenses, 49-53, 58, 63
  - use of concise, 30
- Visual speech, 6
- VO
  - definition, 9
  - forcing the design, 170
  - in live shots, 196
  - opening off top, 169
  - script use, 16-17
  - use of, 164-178
  - writing to timed visuals, 175-176
- VO/SOT
  - definition, 179
  - in live shots, 196
  - off the top, 182
  - use of, 180-185
- VO/SOT/VO. *See* VO/SOT
- Voice Over. *See* VO
- Voicer
  - definition, 116
  - use of, 138-140
- Vox Pop
  - definition, 116
  - use of, 191
- Wallpaper video, 164
- Wide shot (WS), 163, 165-168
- Woodshedding scripts, 25
- Wordiness, 30-36
  - exercises, 45, 53, 58, 63
- Wordplay, 129
- Wrap (radio)
  - definition, 137
  - use of, 138, 144-146
- Wraparound. *See* Wrap
- Wrapper. *See* Wrap
- Wraps (television), 216
- Writeup
  - definition, 96
  - rules for, 106-110
  - use of, 106-111