



Mountain Top University

Empowered to Excel

College of Humanities, Management and Social Sciences

Department of Mass Communication

Course Title: Writing For the Broadcast Media

Course Code: MCM 213

Course Lecturer: Sholabomi F. Richard



Course Description

- ▶ This course will provide a comprehensive explanation on the elements of and activities involved in the writing process as it pertains to radio and television audience. Concerning radio, emphasis should be on writing for talk shows, interviews, spot announcements, eye-witness accounts, magazines, etc. on the television, emphasis should be on the analysis and evaluation of scripts and production of talk shows, interviews, discussion programmes, drama magazines, docu-drama, etc. intensive writing exercise will be carried out.

Course outline

- ▶ Broadcast news structure
- ▶ Use of verbs
- ▶ Choice of words
- ▶ Sentence structure
- ▶ Punctuation
- ▶ Constructing broadcast news story
- ▶ Quotation and Attribution

Writing for the Eye and Ear

- ▶ Writing for radio and television is different from writing for print for several reasons. First, you have less space and time to present news information. Therefore, you must prioritize and summarize the information carefully. Second, your listeners cannot reread sentences they did not understand the first time; they have to understand the information in a broadcast story as they hear it or see it. As a result, you have to keep your writing simple and clear. And third, you are writing for “the ear.” In print news stories, you are writing for “the eye”; the story must read well to your eye. The television or radio news story has the added complexity that it has to sound good; when a listener hears the story it has to read well to “the ear.” Also for a radio news story, listeners cannot see video of what you are saying, so you must paint word pictures with the words you use in your

Broadcast News Structure

The Headline/Focus Statement:

Before you start to write your news story, pick the main actor, action, and recipient, and then use them to shape a focus statement. For example, in a public affairs broadcast release about a truck accident that killed seven traders in Ekiti, you decide the main actor is “accident,” the main action verb is “kills,” and the recipient is “traders.” Your focus statement becomes:

TRUCK ACCIDENT KILLS SEVEN TRADERS

Everything you write about this story should relate to your headline/focus statement. If you write that three to ten word statement well, you can maintain the same structure - actor, action, and recipient - in your tease and lead.

Everything you write about this story should relate to your focus/headline statement..

QUOTATIONS AND ATTRIBUTION:

Your listener cannot see the quotation marks in your copy. If you feel you must use a direct quote, alert your listener it's coming. **"I AM NOT RUNNING FOR SECOND TERM," THE PRESIDENT SAID.**

When your audience first hears that statement, they have no way of knowing it's not the announcer claiming not to be running for second term. There's a good chance they'll become confused and miss part of your story. **THE PRESIDENT SAID, IN HIS WORDS, "I AM NOT RUNNING FOR SECOND TERM."**

Unless the quote is very dynamic, you'll probably want to paraphrase it. **THE PRESIDENT SAYS HE IS NOT RUNNING FOR SECOND TERM.**

Remember to identify the source of your quote or paraphrase up front. Alert your audience that a quote is next, and begin the quote with the source. You'll also want to avoid using long quotes. Again, the best move you can make is to paraphrase. And if it's necessary to *link* a second statement with the speaker, use a conversational, clarifying phrase. **THE ADMIRAL ALSO SAID....**

Some newscasters use "quote" and "unquote" to lead into and go out of quotes, a habit that is un-conversational and unnecessary. When you begin your quote with the source, your listeners will understand who said what. *Instead of:*

THE INSPECTOR GENERAL OF POLICE SAID, QUOTE, "THE BLAZE STARTED IN THE KITCHEN."

Why not say: **THE INSPECTOR GENERAL OF POLICE SAYS THE BLAZE STARTED IN THE KITCHEN.**

That way, you're giving *attribution* to a key piece of information without dragging down the sentence - or your listener's mind. Don't worry about attributing the source if the facts are obvious or easily verified.

TITLES AND NAMES

Avoid starting a broadcast story with a person's name. Definitely avoid using the name of an *unfamiliar* individual unless you're striving for a special effect - a very rare instance in *news* writing. When you use names and titles together, remember to put the *title* ahead of the *name*.

THE VICE PRESIDENT PROFESSOR YEMI OSINBAJO SAYS....

- ▶ *Instead of:* PROFESSOR YEMI OSINBAJO, THE VICE PRESIDENT, SAYS....
- ▶ Notice that when you place the title before the name, you don't use commas. Your sentence flows much more naturally and quickly.

CONSTRUCTING THE BROADCAST NEWS STORY:

- ▶ The structure of a *broadcast news story* differs from a *print story*. The print story is written in the “inverted pyramid” style. The who, what, when, where, why, and how are usually included in the *summary* lead. The print journalist then unfolds the rest of the facts in descending order of importance. Conversely, the *broadcast story is written* in the “upright pyramid” style. At the peak is the news peg - the single most important fact (what happened). You add the remaining four “Ws” and the how to the body to complete the news story.

Broadcast writing Tips

- ▶ Be brief
- ▶ Use correct grammar
- ▶ Put the important information first
- ▶ Write good leads
- ▶ Stick to short sentences of 20 words or less
- ▶ Write the way you talk
- ▶ Use contractions
- ▶ Use simple-subject-verb-object sentence structures
- ▶ Use active voice and active verbs

Television and Radio News Writing Techniques

- ▶ *Use a person's complete name (first and last name) in the first reference, then the person's last name thereafter.*
- ▶ *Use phonetic spellings for unfamiliar words and words that are difficult to pronounce.*
- ▶ *Omit obscure names and places if they are not meaningful to the story.*
- ▶ *In age reference, precede the name with the age. (Example: "The victim, 21-year-old Rob Roy...")*
- ▶ *Avoid writing direct quotations into a news script, if at possible. Instead, let people say things in their own words during soundbites. A **soundbite** is the exact words spoken by someone in his or her own recorded voice. If you must use a direct quote, set it off with such phrases as "In the words of..." or "As he put it..." or try to paraphrase as much as possible. Avoid saying "quote" and "unquote" to lead into or end a direct quote.*
- ▶ *The attribution should come before a quotation, not after it. In contrast to writing for print media, the attribution of paraphrased quotations in broadcast stories should be at the beginning of the sentence, before the paraphrase. The listener should know where the quotation is coming from before hearing the quote. Example: "Bill Brown said he would run for re-election."*
- ▶ *Avoid most all abbreviations, even on second reference, unless it is a well-known abbreviation. This is different from the Associated Press Style rules for print stories. Write out days, months, states, and military titles each time. About the only acceptable abbreviations are *Mr.*, *Mrs.*, and *Dr.* Punctuate, by using a hyphen in between, commonly used abbreviations. For example, write "U-S," instead of "US" (United States), and "U-N" for "UN" (United Nations).*

Television and Radio News Story Format

Broadcast news stories are typed, double-spaced, and in uppercase/lowercase. Many years ago, television news scripts were written in all uppercase, but that practice has changed in recent years.

- ▶ *Make the sentence at the bottom of a page a complete sentence. Do not split a sentence between pages.*
- ▶ *Never split words or hyphenated phrases from one line to the next.*
- ▶ *Do not use copyediting symbols. Cross out the entire word and write the corrected word above it. This is one reason why broadcast news scripts are double-spaced: so you will have room to make corrections between the lines.*



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