

Broadcast News Writing

Tips

- Tell what is happening now.
- Use conversational style.
- Read your copy out loud before recording or going on air.
- Use active voice.
- Use short sentences.
- Use present tense.
- Use who did what.
- Give attribution first.

Broadcast News Writing

- Reporter is assigned to a story.
- He heads to the location with a photographer.
- The photographer videotape the event.
- The reporter stands by taking notes, interviewing life sources to get a human angle of the story.
- They attend a press conference and ask several questions.
- Converting broadcast scripts into print-style stories for the station's Web site.
- Associated press style test (the bible.)

Producing a Newscast

- 14 news stories to be squeezed into a 30-minute broadcast that includes weather, sports and commercial breaks.
- A complex process: many editors and producers who plan every second and adapt to constant changes.

Logging the tape

- Reporter insert the videotape into a machine to watch and choose the sound bites she wants to use.
- She types the complete sound bite with the time listed on the tape.
- The first few words and last few words of a sound bite.
- Hearing-impaired viewers + help convert the script to online story.

Planning a rundown

- Out of 32-minutes, the reporter will have only (1:30) for the story for the 30-minute newscast at 5pm and 2minutes for the hour-long 6pm newscast.
- The reporter writes 15 seconds introduction for the anchor.
- 20 seconds for a question & answer with the anchor at the end of the story.
- The producer determine how much time each story can run.

The Producers role

- Determine how much time each story can run.
- A “**rundown**” drafting a schedule for a newscast each story is allocated by minutes & seconds, p. 226.
- Write promotional briefs “**teasers**,” news brief of about 20 to 25 seconds that will air a few times a day to encourage viewers to tune into the evening newscast.

The Producers role

- “Keep it really short and not give too much away.” It is an art.
- He writes most of the anchor’s material and some of the smaller stories including rewrites of national stories.
- He checks all the graphics and names flashed on the screen to make sure they are accurate.
- He works closely with assignment editor.

Assigning the stories

Assignment editor:

- Keep a file of story ideas.
- Creates an assignment sheet as a starting point at the morning planning meeting.
- The photographers are assigned to pair with the reporters.
- The pictures often come first: this is TV.
- The immediacy on the Web can pose problems: "official confirmation."
- Edit scripts. He looks for spelling, accuracy and completeness.

Recommendation for writing well

- Clarity and brevity.
- Use of plain English.
- Avoid repetition especially between the reporter's writing and the sound Bite.
- Picking sound bites that have emotion.

It's showtime

- News director heads for the studio where he anchors the 5pm. Show.
- He reads from the teleprompter: a machine that contains the scripts, which scroll as he reads.
- The anchor introduces the stories before the reporters deliver them.
- He asks the reporter's questions to provide additional information "a tag."

Writing tips

- Why should I care?
- What's it all about?
- So what?
- Attribution.
- A good lead: capture attention, conversational, active voice, moves the story forward.
- Get rid of the information people already know.

Writing tips

- Your words should complete the video, not describe it.
- Don't write like a police report.
- Use sound whenever you can.
- Sound bites.
- The end.

Job qualities

- Candidates should have enthusiasm, good writing ability and at least two years of experience.
- Candidate's writing ability: the difference between delivering a report and telling a story.

Broadcast vs. Newspaper and Web writing

- **Attribution:** always first in broadcast. First or last for print and the Web.
- **Active voice:** active voice is preferable for print but even more necessary for broadcast.
- **Present tense:** use when possible for broadcast. Past tense is more common in print and the Web.
- **Updated leads:** use the latest information. This technique is recommended for all media, but especially for broadcast and the Web.

Broadcast script format

- They are written in two columns, with directions for the technical crew on the left and the story text on the right.
- The reporter's text is usually in capital letters.
- The sound bites are in uppercase and lowercase letters.
- Sources for sound bites are identified by a machine called a "character generator," which produces titles that are superimposed under the video to identify the speaker.

Broadcast script format

- The script should contain a slug “a one-or two-word title) usually assigned by the producers.
- You should not split or hyphenate words at the end of a sentence.
- The script will be read in a teleprompter (needs to see the whole word.)
- Example p. 231

teasers

- (tease) is a short blurb to entice viewers to tune in or stay tuned to a newscast.
- Tease something interesting or unique in the program that will affect the viewers.
- Write it as telling a friend: “guess what? You won’t want to miss this?”
- Teasers can include audio and video.
- P. 236.

Lead-ins

- The anchor reads a lead into a package by a reporter.
- It should give the essence of the story and sometimes the context for how it occurred.
- It should not repeat the reporter's lead.
- It ends with a statement that the reporter, cited by name, has more information or just the name.

Writing for radio

- The copy is shorter.
- Radio newscast may totally about 90 seconds with six or seven stories.
- A typically story might contain fewer than 100 words.
- You should create word pictures by describing the scene.
- Sentence lasts only five to six seconds on the radio.
- Keep each sentence focused on a single thought.
- Ask what the listener will and won't be able to digest.

terms

- **Reader:** a script that a newscaster reads without any background noise or comments from sources.
- **Actuality:** the equivalent of a sound bite.
- **Natural sound:** (ambient sound) this is background sound, the same term that's used in television news.
- **Wrap:** a story from a reporter that may include actualities.
- **Voicers:** a story a reporter reads; it may contain natural sound but does not include actualities.

Broadcast style

Punctuation:

- Avoid quotation marks.
- Write out the word quote in this way:
“she said..quote...this situation is impossible.”
- The reader’s emphasis should make the end of the quote clear.
- Limit punctuation to the comma, period, question mark and dash.

Broadcast style

Numbers:

- Write out the numbers one through nine.
- Use numerals for numbers over 10.
- Write out hundred, thousand, million, and trillion.
- Write numbers as follows: 13-hundred, two-thousand, 15-million-230-thousand.

Broadcast style

Numbers:

- Spell out fractions: one-half, three quarters.
- For decimals: 17-point-two-million dollars.
- Addresses, telephone number and time of day are written in numerals.
- Separate telephone number numerals with dashes: 5-5-5-1-3-2-2-4.
- Limit the use of numbers, they can be numbing.
- Use percentages to give comparisons.

Story structure

- A broadcast story needs a clear focus, a lead, a body, and an ending.
- It should be geared to audio and video.
- The focus should be provided visually.

Beginning:

write to your pictures first. Build your lead around a visual that foreshadows the story to come.

Story structure

Middle:

- use strong natural sound to let the viewer experience what happened.
- Use people engaged in compelling action that visual.
- Use surprises to keep viewers involved.
- Use short sound bites.

Story structure

Ending:

- Build to strong ending throughout the story.
- Make it visual.
- Make your viewers care about the story and the people.

Leads

- An anchor will introduce your story.
- Every story needs its own lead that must fit the pictures the viewer sees.
- Choosing which image to begin with will help whether the story needs a hard or soft lead.
- In all cases, get to the focus quickly.
- Put a human face on the story whenever possible. P. 240.

Leads

- **The you voice:** stress the impact within the first few sentences.
- Do not afraid to use the pronoun you, especially in consumer stories. P. 241.
- **Impact leads:** lead with the effect on viewers as in the previous lead. An impact lead often uses the you voice.
- **Advance the lead:** by stressing the next step to gain immediacy.

Leads

- **Focus on a person:** especially for a feature or a news story with a hard news lead. It goes from the specific to the general. The person is one of many affected by the problem. P. 241.
- **Mystery-teaser lead:** an effective soft-lead technique, don't keep the viewer wondering what the story is about for too long. Get to the point within the first few sentences.

Body of the story

- Identify your focus first.
- Then jot down the order of your supporting points.
- Limit transitions, one point should follow another one naturally.
- Most of the basic news elements (5Ws & How) must be included in the story but not all in the same paragraph.

Body of the story

- **Where**: broadcast stations reach broad audience, reports can superimpose the location on the screen, but you also need to say it in the story.
- **When**: all broadcast stories have a “today” element, avoid using a.m. & p.m., specify the time element, place it after the verb which is conversational order.

Body of the story

- **Who**: Avoid using unfamiliar names in a lead and too many names in a story. Identify by a superimposed title under his image in the taped segment. For delayed identification, use an age, a location, an occupation or some other generic identifier, then follow with the person's name. Use the title before the name.

Ways of organizing broadcast stories

- **Problem/solution:** a statement of the problem, supports by facts, offers background, discusses the solutions. Ends with the next step in the action.
- **Time sequence:** order by time, broadcast stories need immediacy, it is usually a reverse chronology that starts with the present action, goes to the past and ends with a future.

Ways of organizing broadcast stories

- **Hourglass:** a type of time sequence, start with a hard-news summary lead and then rebuild the story chronologically.
- **Circle:** envision your story as a circle. The lead is supported by points related to the focus in the lead. In a circle construction, each part of the story is equally important. Your ending can refer to a point in the lead.

Ending

They are called “**tags**” or **wrap-ups**.” the reporter has the last word in a package, followed by his name and the station identification.

Most common endings:

- **Summary**: a fact that reinforces the main idea without repeating previous points.
- **Future**: the next step in some action.
- **Factual**: a fact or a background statement.
- **Consumer**: helpful items.

Revising stories

- Read your story aloud.
- Check all your sources, names and titles for spelling and accuracy.
- Eliminate any bureaucratic language.
- Delete adjectives, let video show the scene.
- Make sure your transitions don't repeat the sound bites.
- Look at the video without the sound; then listen to your story without the video.