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 2 minutes 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.