



Writing for Radio and certain key points to consider for writing : A Review

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Abstract : Writing for radio is different than writing for print. You're writing for the ear, not the eye. Listeners have to get it the first time around- they can't go back and hear it again (unlike re-reading a sentence in a magazine). And while a reader may get up and come back to an article, a radio listener who gets up may not come back. So you want to grab their attention and hold onto it for as long as possible. Writing feature stories like the ones aired in India as Prime Minister *Modi ji's Man Ki Baat* is also different than writing news copy. You can loosen up a little. You can be more literary, more creative, more personal.

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Broadcast writing

Writing for radio is different from writing for print. First, you have less “space” for information, so you will have to prioritize and summarize carefully. Second, your listeners can't reread sentences they didn't understand the first time--you have to keep your writing simple and clear. Finally, the ultimate product is not what's on the page, but what comes out of your mouth--it's okay to break some writing rules, as long as the result is smooth and easily-understood.

Considerations To Keep In Mind

Be conversational. Your narration should sound as natural as possible, like you're telling a story to a friend. This is not the same as trying to imitate spontaneous speech. Instead, this means writing in a style that sounds as relaxed as possible. Use phrases and words you normally use. When you read your narration aloud, do you sound like yourself?

Be visual. Give your listeners a chance to imagine the people, places and things in your story. Create a sense of scene; describe people; include interesting sounds. Avoid a story that's just a series of talking heads or facts.



Be concise. Long sentences loaded with ten-cent words and relative clauses usually don't work too well in radio (but there are exceptions). Mix up your sentence structure. It's surprisingly easy to fill 3 or 4 minutes of airtime- so don't overwrite.

Be energetic. Use the active voice. Use punchy verbs and contractions. Mind your tenses – don't switch back and forth between past and present. Most radio stories are done in present tense. Some exceptions include commentaries, and news stories about past events.

Be experimental. For variety, stick in a tape-to-tape cut (one actuality leading straight into another without narration in between). Mix acts and tracks. For example, if someone is droning on and on, you can play them under your narration- this will convey a sense of them rambling. Even the most straightforward story can have an unusual or memorable element in it.

Be thoughtful. Try to go beyond just presenting the facts. Let your listeners know why your story matters. Is there a lesson to be learned, something to be taken away? You don't have to get too heavy or cerebral- just take it a step or two beyond pure description.

Writing for the Ear : The way you listen to speech is different than the way you read. A few tricks to make sure your listeners stay tuned in:

Write transitions in and out of your actualities. You don't have to be obvious, but acts shouldn't seem abrupt or forced. If you give someone's name three sentences before you play their clip, you should mention their name again before they start talking. This will remind listeners who's about to talk.

Write short sentences. Take a close look at long, complex sentences: chances are you can break them up into two or three smaller ones. Don't try to pack in more than one idea per sentence. Grammarians take note: broadcast writing should minimize the use of dependent clauses, relative clauses, parenthetical remarks, and compound structures. You can almost always come out with a clean sentence by putting the subject first, and the verb second.

Summarize and prioritize. There are less words in radio stories than print stories. Think carefully about what information is essential, and which details can be summarized.

Be conversational. It's okay to be less formal when you're writing for broadcast--do what it takes to make your copy easy to listen to.



Use statistics sparingly. It is easy to lose your listeners when you put too many numbers in a story. If the precise number isn't that important to the story, use words like "most," "more," "relatively few," etc. When you do use numbers, round them—i.e., substitute "about 5 million" for "4,850,326." When you're comparing numbers, try to use a plain-language fraction or multiple rather than giving two numbers.

Read it out loud. If what you've written doesn't feel natural coming out of your mouth, then there's something wrong with it.

Repeat important words : Because radio and television listeners do not pay attention all the time, and because people often switch on their sets half-way through a bulletin, it is important that you repeat the essential features several times in the story.

They might be half-listening to the radio or TV until something - perhaps a word relevant to them or their interest - triggers their attention. They then 'tune in' with their mind but, because of the linear nature of broadcast news, they cannot go back and retrieve any words they have missed. So repeat important words at least once in the story.

The Wrap-up : The end of every story should include some sort of wrap up in order to complete the story. Wrap-ups usually include a quick recap of the story, going over the facts one more time in order to summarize the story. Some stories even wrap-up the story by looking to the future, perhaps by including a quote about a future action or event, or with the announcer telling the audience of future plans.

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