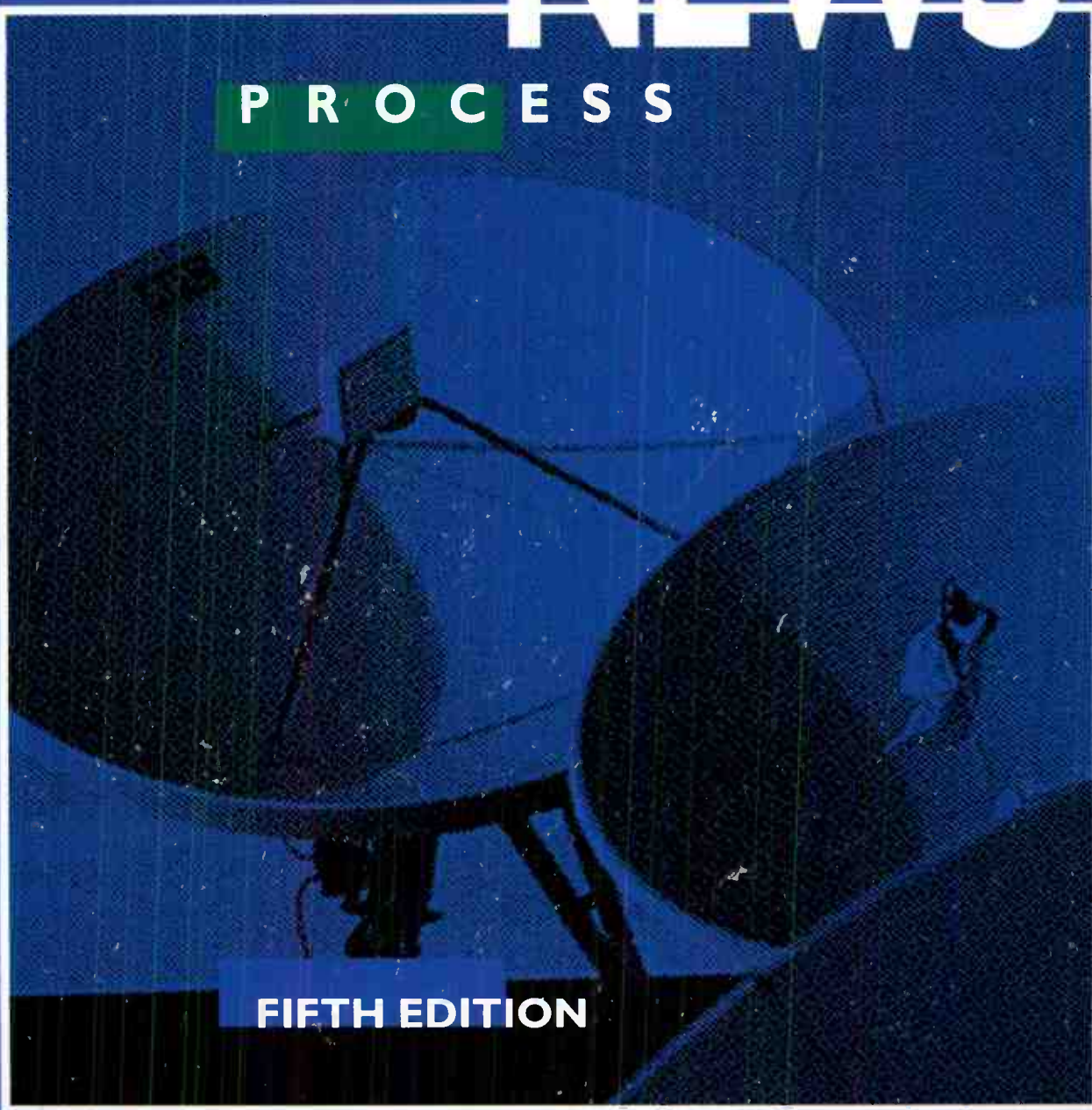


T H E

BROADCAST NEWS

P R O C E S S



FIFTH EDITION

FREDERICK SHOOK / DAN LATTIMORE / JAMES REDMOND

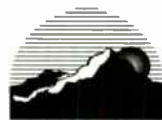
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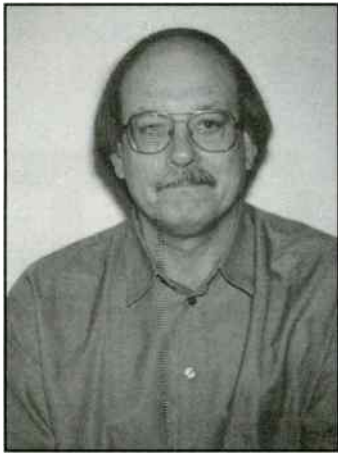
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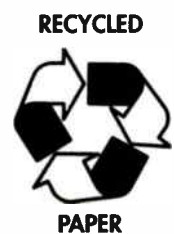
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Preface



Broadcast journalism's unique style continues to evolve after more than 75 years of radio news and a half century of television news. Even as the profession matures, each generation must challenge the reporting practices and philosophies that formed the holy grail of its predecessors. Otherwise, broadcast media would become irrelevant in the face of forces such as audience fragmentation, lifestyle changes, new forms of media, and ever more intense competition for audience share in a world filled with information choices.

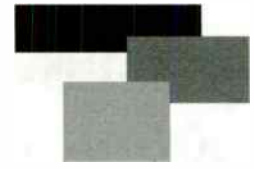
This book therefore concentrates on the strengths every journalist needs to survive in a changing job market: strong writing, powerful reporting methods, and compelling storytelling. Whether you enter radio or television such abilities will help you compete for your first job and serve you well throughout your career. They are just as valid, and will be just as essential, whether you work in commercial broadcasting, or for a corporation, government, or any of the new media.

You will discover many exercises and assignments to help you apply the concepts in each chapter. The exercises are for in-class use. The assignments offer broadcast-related experiences outside the classroom. Finally, you will find in the appendix important journalistic ethical guidelines.

This edition features the addition of a third author, Dr. Jim Redmond. He has more than 22 years experience in broadcast news, with 18 years of television reporting and anchoring experience in top 25 markets, including Denver and Portland. We are grateful for his many contributions to this fifth edition of the book.

Although we cannot list all who contributed, we are especially grateful for the contributions of KCNC-TV, KUSA-TV, KMGH-TV and KHOW-AM in Denver; WHBQ-TV, WPTY-TV and WUMR-FM in Memphis; former CBS news correspondent Charles Kuralt; NBC news correspondent John Larson; Seattle TV reporter and weatherman Nick Walker; Denver radio and television news personalities Don Kinney, Roger Ogden and Bob Palmer. John Walsh, former Colorado State University professor, deserves special recognition for his contributions to the chapter on radio news. Dr. Elinor Grusin, professor at the University of Memphis, and Laurie Lattimore, University of Alabama, deserve special commendation for their contributions to the legal chapter. Special thanks go to photojournalists Mike Murray, Kenn Bisio and Eric Bakke for many of the photographs we have used. Finally, a major thanks goes to the many colleagues and former students who have contributed in numerous ways to the evolution of this book during the last two decades.

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PART

ONE

BROADCAST NEWS WRITING

- 1 Writing for Broadcast
- 2 Scripting Visuals
- 3 Writing the News Story
- 4 News Selection
- 5 Features

Good writing is the foundation for all successful broadcast journalists. The major emphasis of this text, therefore, is on writing. You must learn to write, rewrite, and write again until your stories are polished and ready for broadcast. It has been said, after all, that good writing is rewriting what you have rewritten.

Part One covers the basics of broadcast news writing. Chapter 1 provides the stylistic characteristics of broadcast news writing, emphasizing the importance of word usage and grammar. In Chapter 2 you will learn how to script visuals for television news, which includes important technical information for the control room crew as well as the anchor copy read on the air. Chapter 3 develops the foundation for writing the news story by examining the elements of news, different types of news leads, and story organization. In Chapter 4 we discuss the value judgments necessary for news selection. Chapter 5 emphasizes features, an increasingly important aspect of broadcast news. In that chapter an interview with John Larson, an Emmy-winning network correspondent, gives tips on writing features for broadcast.

We can't emphasize enough the importance of professional writing skills. If you want to be a successful broadcast journalist, you have to write well.



BROADCAST STYLE GUIDELINES

1. Use standard-size 8½ × 11 paper.
2. Double space.
3. Use only one side of the paper.
4. For radio copy, use 65-space line (set margins at 10 and 75). When timing your copy, 16 lines will equal about one minute of air time.
5. Put slug in upper left corner of page: reporter's name, story identification, date, and page number.
6. Start story about four to six lines below the slug.
7. Indent five spaces to indicate a paragraph.
8. Make new paragraphs in the story every five to eight lines.*
9. Use plenty of commas and ellipses (. . .) in your copy to indicate phrasing and give it air. Many newscasters interpret commas as breath marks, and ellipses as slightly longer pauses. For electronic news readers commas are not so much grammatical marks as phrasing indicators.
10. Use end mark (### or -30-) at the end of the story.
11. If a paragraph or sentence carries over to another page, try to break the copy at a comma or natural pause point so the newscaster can change pages more easily while continuing with the story.
12. Start each new story on a fresh page; this will permit changing the story order if necessary.
13. Omit datelines.
14. For the person who will *read the copy on air*: Underline key words or those that may be difficult to pronounce. Writers: Call these words to the attention of the newscaster. Many newscasters prefer to mark their own copy to enhance their delivery and are taught to do so by announcing coaches. Writers may emphasize words by using all capitals or bold type, but all hand marks on newscaster copy should be left to the person who will read the copy on the air.
15. Include phonetic spelling for words with difficult pronunciation, with all capitals for the syllable to be emphasized, using a combination of common words or letters that will result in the correct pronunciation. Although wire services frequently provide pronouncers, you often will have to make up ones of your own, particularly with local names and stories. Put the pronouncer inside parentheses immediately following the correctly spelled word. For example: "Cairo (KAY-roh), Illinois." *use your own dictionary.*
16. Eliminate most abbreviations. Exceptions are Mr., Mrs., Dr.; commonly abbreviated groups such as YMCA and UN; and time designations.
17. Capitalize freely. *- WRITE IN ALL CAPS - not. I told other wise.*
18. Handle numbers in news copy as follows:
 - Spell out numbers one to eleven.
 - Use numerals for 12-999.
 - Use the words for thousands, millions, billions, and trillions.
 - Whenever possible, round off without distorting the meaning, unless the exact number is significant.
 - Spell out things like "dollars," "cents," and "percent," when the symbol normally used might be hard for the newscaster to read."
19. Use *st*, *rd*, *th*, and *nd* after dates, addresses, and numbers to be read as ordinal numbers (2nd, 16th Street).
20. In age references use a combination of the years, and the words "year old." For example, "21-year-old."

*The combination of #7 and #8 above makes it easier for newscasters to find their place as they glance up at the camera, or radio control room engineer, and back down at the copy. The indenting also helps reduce the "TelePrompTer eyes" effect for TV newscasters because it breaks up the regular caging of the eyeballs back and forth as the person reads the TelePrompTer.

21. Avoid beginning sentences with the person's age and in general with any number.
22. Follow traditional punctuation, but use question marks only when needed for inflection.
23. Use direct quotes sparingly. Avoid the words *quote*, *unquote*, and *quotation*. Set off a quote with phrases such as "in these words," "in his words," "as she put it," "his exact words were."
24. Do not begin a story with a name. Titles precede the name: "Senator Wayne Swanson says the U-S must meet its social goals," never "The U-S must meet its social goals, Wayne Swanson, senator, says."
25. Use complete name in the first reference, except the Pope and the President.
26. Omit obscure names and places if they are not meaningful to the story.
27. Strive to use present tense, but don't force it.
28. Avoid repetition of the time element "today."

The following editing changes may be made in broadcast copy. Other editing will require retyping the story. Many newsrooms use computerized script software, which eliminates hand-correcting scripts. Occasionally in live shots or late inserts, however, "hard copy" script editing may be necessary.

1. Eliminate material by completely blacking it out.

Example: Officials said ~~said~~ school would open today.

2. Change entire words by blacking out the word(s) and inserting the new word(s) above.

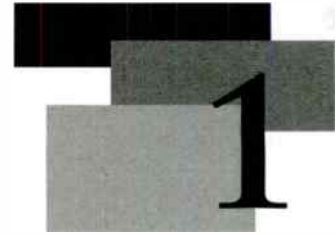
Example: Officials ~~said~~^{said} school would open today

3. Add limited new material with a line indicating where it is to be inserted when read.

Example: Officials ^{said school} would open today.

Broadcast writers must cover the news of the world in fewer words than appear on a single page of many newspapers. Newspaper readers can scan an article over and over. On radio and TV, they will hear it only once.

Bob Palmer, Denver Television Anchorman



Writing for Broadcast



The challenge to broadcast writers is to motivate a half-interested person to become vitally interested in the news. Imagine hearing the following story leads in tonight's news:

It was like an old plot from Star Trek . . .

Everyone knows how dry it's been in recent months, but few city residents knew how serious the drought had become until late this afternoon.

Most of us would like to live to be 100, and today American scientists are saying it's possible.

If you're even a little interested in news — and most people are — this sort of writing helps spur even more interest. With such writing you can gather and hold an audience, although not all stories are suited to this treatment. Broadcast journalism demands complex writing skills because you must take a day's events, compress them into a few minutes, yet communicate the significant and interesting aspects of what has happened that day. You must learn how to communicate the essence of stories in little time in a way that is accurate, succinct, interesting and full of imagery — and all this to an audience that will have only one chance to hear, understand, and retain what you have said. Few writers without well developed skills are up to the task.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PRINT AND BROADCAST JOURNALISM

When you write for newspapers, you are producing information that will be taken in through the eye. Newspaper readers never hear what you are trying to say; they only see your work. A simple experiment offers dramatic proof of the difference between writing for print and broadcast: Find

a copy of any newspaper, and read one article into a cassette recorder. Now play back the recording. It probably sounds ponderous and artificial. That's because what you read into the recorder is the written word spoken aloud, not the way people talk. Newspaper writing as we know it is still evolving after 200 years, and it hasn't come close to meeting the demands for *hear* copy that broadcast journalism makes.

When you write for broadcast, you are taught to write the way you talk, although obviously more formal and precise than in everyday conversation. Radio and television are good friends to most people. We often turn on the set to hear a friendly voice tell us what's happening in the world. If the voice talks like a newspaper, we probably won't listen long. Yet writers sometimes overlook the maxim that voices on the air must read words intended to be heard — more formal, obviously, than most routine conversation between friends but much less formal and stilted than copy for print journalism.

Broadcast stories must therefore be clear, concise and economical. Listeners and viewers don't get a chance to replay a broadcast story if it is unclear. In a five-minute radio newscast you must subtract a minute for the commercial and 30 seconds or more for the intro, weather report, and close, so you're left with only about three and one-half minutes in which to cram the news of the day. Even in a half-hour television newscast — after subtracting four commercial breaks of two minutes each, a show open and close, some “chat” time for the news anchors to toss to sports and weather, as well as the scripted sports and weather segments — only eleven to 13 minutes of actual news content time may remain.

HOW THE EAR WORKS

The ear has less patience than the eye. It gets upset when you drone on and on with a story or when you hurl fistfuls of detail at it. Newspapers are full of facts, numbers and figures.

A federal survey shows that the number of meals served in public schools has dropped 18 percent in the last 18 months as more families send sack lunches to school with their children. The decline in number of full-price lunches has averaged nearly 12 percent, according to the survey, and the decline in number of reduced-fare lunches has averaged 27 percent. Officials attribute the fall-off in total number of lunches served to a 25 percent increase in the cost of full-price lunches, which have been raised from \$1.60 to \$2.00, and to a 140 percent increase in the cost of reduced price lunches, which have jumped from 40 cents to 95 cents in the last 18 months. All increases are attributed to cutbacks in federal subsidies for school lunches.

Look closely at the story in the above example. What does it really say? Could you understand the story without studying it? Broadcast writing will not tolerate such abstraction. Radio and television intentionally avoid such detail and opt instead to deliver more generalized impressions. Compare the same story for broadcast:

A federal survey shows that parents are fighting cutbacks in government lunch subsidies with the brown bag. Over the past year and a half, sack lunches have replaced nearly one hot school lunch in five. The cutbacks have hit low-income families the hardest. Nationally, reduced-price lunches average 95 cents. That's nearly 140 percent more than a year and a half ago. Full price lunches are about two dollars, or 25 percent more than a year and a half ago.

As another example, a newspaper story might report that public school teachers can earn an average annual salary of \$40,000, while parochial teachers earn an average of \$20,000 per year. The story also might report that the average yearly cost to educate a child in public schools is \$3,000, while the same average annual cost in parochial schools is \$1,800. Now try writing a simple broadcast story using the above facts:

The cost of education keeps climbing, but parochial schools seem to be holding the line. Figures released today show public school teachers in this area earn about 40 thousand dollars. That compares with parochial salaries around half that — about 20 thousand dollars a year. Officials say it cost about three thousand dollars to educate a child in public schools this year . . . and about 18 hundred dollars a year in parochial schools.

Notice that you have still used figures, but you have not crammed them into two sentences. You also have given your audience reference points by saying that parochial salaries are about half the salaries in public schools, while the per-child cost of education is much higher in public schools.

TREATING NUMBERS

Simply stated, the most effective rule for handling numbers in broadcast copy is the following:

1. Spell out numbers one to eleven.
2. Use numerals for numbers 12-999.
3. Use the words for thousands, millions, billions, and trillions.
4. Whenever possible, round off without distorting the meaning, unless the exact number is significant.
5. Spell out things like “dollars,” “cents,” and “percent,” where the symbol normally used might be hard for the newscaster to read.

The larger the numbers become, the more abstract they loom to your audience. Some writers throw around the word *billions* almost as callously as some public servants. Try to imagine a billion of anything. Imagine your audience trying to make sense of a story that talks about a \$24 billion increase in defense spending. Your calculator will show that \$24 billion is a yearly expenditure of close to \$800 per second, \$2,880,000 per hour, and nearly \$70 million a day.

Somewhere within the story you can help the audience make sense of these figures by relating them with an eye toward understanding. Help your audience make similar sense of figures by telling them that the new supersonic transport is the length of two football fields, instead of 200 yards or 600 feet long. The broadcast media tend to be poor at abstraction, so vivid writing and imagery can be substituted. Your writing will be more interesting and easier to understand.

Similarly, as you write for broadcast, for every unneeded word you lose, you gain time and clarity. Every word you eliminate without losing essential meaning saves a second or two that you can give to some other story. Every unneeded word is one fewer element to muddle your story's meaning. In sum, then, write lean, be brief, and choose powerful words that telegraph your message without getting bogged down in rhetoric.

WRITING TO AN AUDIENCE

Writing is both art and craft, but always it is an act of communication that requires not only a message but also someone to hear it. You must have something to say to someone else, and who that someone else happens to be (your audience) helps determine how you tell (your style) what you have to say (your message). To these considerations of audience, style, and message, you should add a fourth element, purpose, to your consciousness as a writer. Purpose answers the questions of why you are writing the story, why it is important, to whom it is important, and how your story will affect those who hear it. Keeping in mind these four essentials — audience, style, message, and purpose — will immediately make you a more competent writer.

Who is your audience? If you work in radio, your audience at 7 a.m. might be made up of sleepy-heads at the breakfast table or commuters fighting early morning traffic. Your audience might be a grandfather just waking up to your newscast or a trucker hurrying down an interstate freeway. Whatever the hour of the day, your audience is not a faceless mass. Your audience is a single human being much like yourself. This is the single human being to whom you must write. Writing to the mass audience, the faceless crowd, requires little commitment to communicate what others need and want to hear. Much better is to imagine your audience as a single person who quite often is beset by distractions that lure her from your message, whether the distraction is a crying baby, a stoplight, the doorbell, or an article in the newspaper that just caught her eye.

When you are doing morning drive-time radio news, you are, in effect, a passenger in a vehicle on its way to work, having a chat with the driver about the day's events. It's a close, personal, one-on-one conversation. The same is true with television. The late night newscast often is delivered to people sitting alone or in groups of two or three at the end of the day, or to people in bed watching the news before they go to sleep. **Electronic news is not delivered to an audience in a stadium but, rather, individually situated people with whom you are having a one-way conversation of sorts.** It's close and personal, not distant and aloof. You are not announcing to them. You are sitting there in the car, or in their home, having a friendly chat.

TARGET AUDIENCE

A station has a target audience, a primary bloc of listeners or viewers with certain characteristics of age, economics, or lifestyle that give it a somewhat common identity. The station offers programming calculated specifically to attract that audience. The target audience of an easy-listening format FM radio station, for example, might be affluent “oldsters” prone to travel, investment, and involvement in community cultural affairs. A heavy metal station, on the other hand, might cater to a target audience of younger listeners between ages 18 and 30. Other stations may program primarily to reach African-American, Hispanics, or other minority audiences, or a “middle-of-the-road” audience of the primary buyers in our society between the ages of 18 and 49. These audiences have different backgrounds, needs, and interests, and your writing can take these factors into account.

As a listener or viewer, you sometimes can determine a station's target audience by assessing the nature of its commercials. When one football personality had his own sportscast on a Kansas City, Missouri, station, he pulled a high percentage of women viewers. Station ratings reflected a “bulge” in the number of women viewers during the 10 o'clock news when he began his sports

show. Subsequently the nature and choice of some stories within the sportscast were altered to reflect women's interests (more women's tennis, for example). The increasing number of women in the audience was indicated by the growing number of commercials for women's products. Conversely, in radio, commercials for backpacks, bicycles, stereos, and similar products may indicate that the station is reaching an intended target audience of young adults.

With your audience defined, you can begin to write in a meaningful way to all those single human beings out there who are trying to listen. The story you write is your message. The way you tell it is your style. Some stories will be humorous; others will be deadly serious. Some will entertain; others will inform. The nature of the story, its essence, will determine your style and how you treat the story.

ACCURACY

An essential quality of fair reporting is accuracy. No station can maintain an image of journalistic integrity if news reports are consistently inaccurate. Missed facts, mispronunciations, distortions of emphasis — all damage your credibility. Inadequacies, half-truths, and inconsistencies raise questions in listeners' and viewers' minds about the possibility of biased reporting. Journalism has come under attack for fair reporting. Even when your accuracy and fairness are above reproach, some in your audience will castigate you for reporting what happened and others will chastise you for not reporting what happened.

Given the nature of journalism, all this is to be expected. Anyone in the news, whether public official or labor union leader, wants to be shown in a favorable light. Accurate reporting demands that you show people as they are, whether good or bad, and "let the chips fall where they may." Your role as journalist never is to tell people what they would like to hear. Your job is to tell the story as accurately as you can, even when the facts are unpleasant.

Accuracy is demanded of you in many ways. In even the simplest stories you will have to check and re-check the smallest details and verify that names, ages, and addresses are complete and accurate. You will have to determine whether streets and rivers run in the directions that wire services and fellow writers claim. You will have to ascertain whether your use of statistics is fair or misleading. You will have to find out whether "yesterday" in Paris is still "today" in the United States. If you are diligent in your commitment to honest, accurate reporting, your audience will trust you, and will seek out your station as a professional information source. On a more personal level, inaccuracy is one way to lose your job or subject yourself and your station to costly lawsuits.

ATTRIBUTION

As a journalist, you should not take responsibility for predicting the future or vouch for the accuracy of statements you cannot substantiate. Statements don't have to be attributed unless you have a reason, and usually less frequently than in print journalism. Too much attribution interrupts continuity and makes the story more confusing. Some statements, however, must be attributed:

1. Sodium phenobarbital injections provide a more humane way than compression chambers to dispose of pets.

2. Abortion is a return to primitive, barbaric values.
3. Continued imports of foreign oil will drive America bankrupt.
4. Less demand for gasoline will cause many independent retailers to go out of business.
5. Carlson will withdraw as the nominee for highway director.

Looking again at the statements above, you can easily identify their controversial nature. As a journalist, why should you assume responsibility for reporting this type of information as fact? Example 1 calls for attribution to an expert, someone with the qualifications to state as fact that sodium phenobarbital injections are more humane than other pet disposal methods. Statement 2 is an emotion-laden value judgment; either you must attribute the statement to a source or label your story as personal comment or an editorial. Statement 3 places you in the position of crystal-gazer unless you attribute. Who says foreign oil imports will drive America bankrupt? Tell your audience who made the statement, then let the audience judge for itself the accuracy of the statement and the integrity of the source. Statement 4 begs attribution in a similar way. Did an independent gasoline retailer make the statement, or an economist or a politician? Statement 5 fails to include the source. Only Mr. Carlson could decide to withdraw his name from nomination, so the audience should know the source of the story. In many cases though, attribution is unnecessary, a situation that is most common when the source is obvious or obviously can be trusted.

Poor: According to Barbara Davidson, technical assistant for the Houston District Court, Judge Conrad Hill has deferred sentencing in the case until December 15th.

Better: Sentencing has been deferred until mid-December.

Equally futile is to attribute sources that can be summarized in fewer words:

Marvin Atkins, acting assistant director of investigations for the St. Louis metropolitan strike force, said arresting officers took five suspected drug dealers into custody in the raid, including the 15-year-old daughter of a prominent St. Louis family.

Change to:

Police say they arrested five suspected drug dealers, among them the 15-year-old daughter of a prominent St. Louis family.

Although newspapers often delay attribution until the end of the sentence, broadcast stories usually sound more natural if you name the source at the beginning of the sentence.

Newspaper style attribution: The Fort Worth area can expect an unusually chilly month, according to the National Weather Service.

Broadcast attribution: The National Weather Service predicts an unusually chilly month in the Fort Worth area.

In broadcast attribution, as with all broadcast writing, sound, clarity, and brevity are all important. *Says* is a helpful word. The examples of attribution, above, use the word “say” or “says” frequently. *Says* is a clean, simple substitute for the more pontifical *stated*, *asserted*, *according to* that appear often in newspaper writing. *Says* also is a clean way to reduce sentence length, as the following examples demonstrate. In each example the word *says* substitutes nicely for the italicized words.

Johnson *further charged that* the city will experience a decline in property tax revenue.

Change to:

Johnson says the city can expect a decline in property tax revenue.

and

He *stated that* new laws are needed to provide authority to close down pornography shops.

Change to:

He says new laws are needed to close down pornography shops.

Or consider this problem and how it would sound in a news broadcast:

"I'm proud I was able to sail the Atlantic by myself, but now I'm just glad the voyage has come to an end."

This wording might lead to confusion about who said what — the person in the news or the person reporting the news. An indirect quote here could ease you out of potentially confused reporting:

He says he's proud he managed to sail the Atlantic alone, but he's glad the voyage is over.

Quoting the Source

The problem with quotation marks in broadcast copy is that no one can hear them. No one in your audience ever sees broadcast copy. The challenge is to find acceptable ways of quoting news sources, whether directly or indirectly. Early broadcasters often tacked on the awkward "quote" just before reading the direct quote and finishing with an equally awkward "unquote" after reading the direct quotation. More acceptable and natural sounding are phrases such as:

Councilman Lee attacked the proposed power plant, calling it, *in his words*, "a public health nuisance and a waste of tax dollars."

Opting for the indirect quote in this example, you could say:

Councilman Lee says the proposed power plant would be a public health nuisance and a waste of tax dollars.

Use the direct quote if it adds emphasis or additional impact to your story, but use it sparingly and with discretion. Most often you can substitute attribution, naming the source at the beginning of the sentence that contains the quotation:

The President says . . . *and these are his words* . . . "No person shall go hungry in America."

General Electric *calls* the new silicone chips a "revolutionary discovery."

German newspapers are asking for the execution of what they call "Israeli sympathizers."

Other Attribution Words

When you write any story that requires attribution, you may be tempted to try word substitutes for the familiar “said,” as used in the following example:

Doctors *said* the new vaccine may cause cancer.

In this example, “said” is a neutral verb. It places no value of any kind upon the statement that follows. Equally neutral are the words “told” and “reported,” which simply relate an act of communication without imposing any value on the statement communicated:

Doctors *told* reporters the new vaccine may cause cancer.

Doctors *reported* the new vaccine may cause cancer.

Beyond this point, attribution words begin to impose an editorial flavor to your writing because they tend to change the story’s meaning. Words that change the meaning include:

asserted

added

disclosed

warned

pointed out

stated

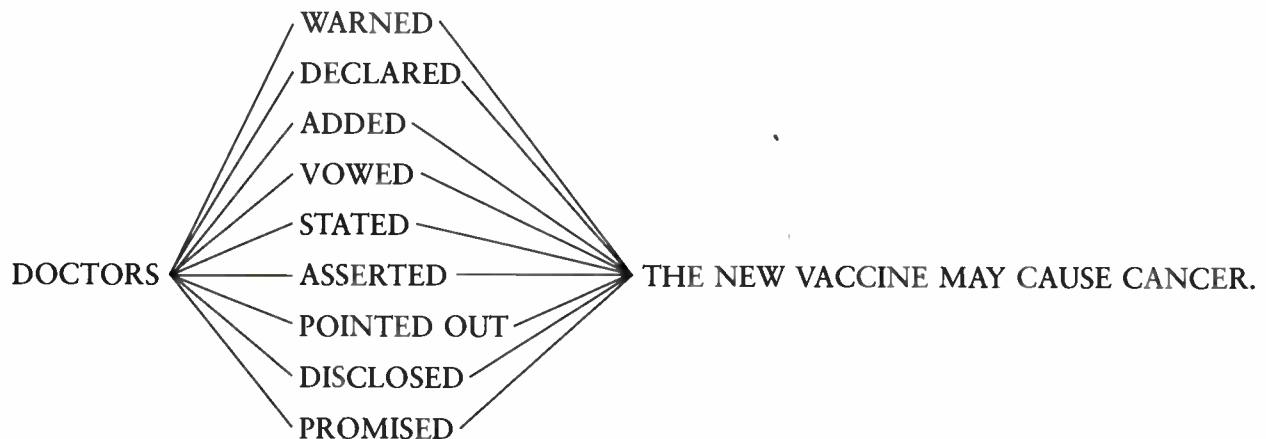
declared

vowed

promised

continued

The subtle changes in meaning become apparent when you substitute these words for the more neutral “said,” “told,” or “reported.”



In this example, *asserted* sounds as if the writer is challenging the doctors’ statement. *Warned* is an acceptable word for attribution, but *declared* sounds pompous. *Added* indicates that the possibility of cancer was given almost as an afterthought. *Vowed* is too strong; it implies a pomposity beyond the doctor’s original intent. *Stated* is stiff and formal. *Pointed out* makes the statement sound as if it is secondary or peripheral. *Disclosed* makes the statement sound as if the doctors had exclusive information just now being made public. *Promised* sounds more dire than the doctors may have intended the statement to be. Each word imparts a slightly different meaning to the information.

Names, Ages, and Titles

Just as you treat attribution differently for broadcast, so must you treat names, ages, and titles differently. The best advice in this regard is to write so there is little chance your audience will misunderstand. As a general rule, names are delayed in broadcast stories until you have prepared your listeners to be on the alert for the names. With some exceptions, titles and ages generally are placed before names, again so your stories sound more natural and more conversational. Imagine how sticky and meaningless the following story would sound on the air:

Surgeon General William H. Shearer announced today that Charles R. Mahaffey, 45, chairman of the U-S Pharmaceutical Corporation, had succeeded Donald P. Ingraham, 64, president of the National Educational Media Association, to head the government's Anti-Smoking Campaign. The appointment is effective next month.

You can improve meaning dramatically by delaying names, ages, and titles until the ear is ready for them:

The Surgeon General's office has appointed a replacement to head the government's Anti-Smoking Campaign.

In the lead you have announced that someone has been appointed to fill a position. If audience members are interested in this story, they are alerted to hear the name you now can give them:

The new man is 45-year-old Charles Mahaffey, chairman of U-S Pharmaceutical.

In this identification of the name, Mahaffey's age comes before his name. This treatment sounds more conversational than "Charles Mahaffey, 45, is Chairman of U-S Pharmaceutical Corporation." An exception to the general rule of placing titles before the name is given in this example. You could write just as easily, however:

The position will be filled by U-S Pharmaceutical Chairman Charles Mahaffey. The 45-year-old appointee will replace current chairman Donald Ingraham next month.

Now put the story together in two of its possible forms and compare it with the original version:

The Surgeon General's office has appointed a new man to head its Anti-Smoking Campaign. He is 45-year-old Charles Mahaffey, Chairman of U-S Pharmaceutical. Mahaffey will take over from Donald Ingraham next month.

or

The Surgeon General's office has named a major corporation executive to head its Anti-Smoking Campaign. Named to head the post is U-S Pharmaceutical Chairman Charles Mahaffey. He replaces Donald Ingraham next month.

These stories drop all reference to Surgeon General William H. Shearer and his middle initial. Attribution is not essential and only adds to the story's complexity. The ages of the men involved are optional; they can be added or deleted at your discretion.

Consider another example in the treatment of names and ages:

Mark J. Conley, 29, and Lester J. Callaway, 44, were injured in the crash. The two men, both of Plainsville, were reported in satisfactory condition at Pleasant Valley Memorial Hospital.

Reading this example on radio or television is dangerous because it dumps unknown names on the audience before the audience is prepared to hear them. A better approach to the story for broadcast is:

Two Plainsville men were injured in the crash. They are identified as 29-year-old Mark Conley and 44-year-old Lester Callaway. Both men are hospitalized in satisfactory condition.

This approach alerts your listeners that two people from their community were injured. If they are interested in the names, they now are prepared to hear this information. The ear is prepared a second time for the identities by the “cushion” phrase “They are identified as . . .” This treatment sets up the ear twice and makes names and ages easier to catch. Middle initials are unnecessary, so they are omitted.

Exceptions to the rule of delaying names in the news are when the names are well known. No one is likely to miss or misunderstand the President’s name or that of a well-known politician, athlete, or Hollywood celebrity. In these cases, beginning the story with the name is acceptable — and sometimes preferable — because the well-known name helps capture a listener’s attention. When writing for broadcast, titles usually go ahead of the name. The exception occurs when long or unusually cumbersome titles are involved. Imagine trying to say on the air:

University of Wyoming Anthropology Department Chairman Doctor George Frison today announced discovery of an ancient Indian burial ground long hidden from modern-day humanity. The burial ground is located ten miles north of Laramie, Wyoming, on a ranch.

Such a long title would confuse your audience. One of the following examples would be much better:

Doctor George Frison, anthropology department chairman at the University of Wyoming . . .

or

Doctor George Frison, the head of anthropology at the University of Wyoming . . .

You still would not start the story with Doctor Frison’s name, though. He is not the news, nor is his announcement of the anthropological discovery. The real news is the discovery itself and Doctor Frison’s name is peripheral to the substance of the story. Granted, the implications of his expert title lend credibility to the story, but this expertise does not alter the substance or nature of the event. The story for broadcast might be:

Scientists say they’ve discovered an ancient Indian burial ground about ten miles north of Laramie, Wyoming. The announcement was made by Doctor George Frison, the head of anthropology at the University of Wyoming.

An example of broadcast news attribution is given in Figure 1-1.

VIDEO	AUDIO
Midday report	
AB (<i>Anchor initials</i>)	(AB)
	<p>Some local health officials think the federal government has exaggerated its warnings about smoking Mexican marijuana tainted with a deadly herbicide. But city health officials say they doubt even heavy use of the marijuana in question would pose a serious health hazard.</p>
	<p>Local toxicologist Dr. Daniel Rosenbaum calls the recent publicity . . . "An hysterical reaction to a relatively insignificant problem."</p>

FIGURE 1-1. Example of broadcast news attribution.

VERB TENSE

Newspapers traditionally report the news in past tense, using words like *said*, *reported*, *occurred*, *burned*, *announced*, and *injured*. Broadcast news, however, is “now.” Your stories will sound old and out of date if you dwell too often in the past tense. News sounds more current and dynamic if you report in the present tense:

Police say two persons are being questioned.

The White House tonight reports new developments in the controversial question of . . .

Firemen are battling a two-alarm fire that broke out late tonight . . .

Let’s look at some other examples:

Present tense: Striking coal workers hope a settlement can be reached tonight.

Past perfect tense: Striking coal workers were reported hopeful that a settlement could be reached tonight. (Is there a chance they are still hopeful?)

Past tense: Striking coal workers hoped a settlement could be reached tonight.

The shift in tense changes the meaning of the story subtly and, as you shift from present to past tense, the immediacy of the story is lost. The sentence written in past tense sounds somewhat negative about hopes for a settlement. Present tense offers the broadcast writer an additional benefit: It helps keep sentences shorter. Sometimes, however, present tense sounds awkward and artificial. If it does, switch to past tense or past perfect tense.

ACTIVE VERSUS PASSIVE VOICE

Excessive use of the passive voice in broadcast writing often is a sign of lazy thinking. Active voice, by contrast, results in more understandable copy, shorter sentences, and dynamic expression. If the subject of the verb receives the action, the verb is in the passive voice:

The burglar was shot three times by police.

If the subject of a verb is the doer of the action, the verb is in the active voice:

Police shot the burglar three times.

Although active voice generally is more lively, specific and concise, passive voice is useful to place emphasis on the object of the action. In the passive voice example, emphasis is placed on the burglar (the object of the action). In the active voice example, emphasis is placed on the police (the doer of the action).

PHONETIC PRONUNCIATION

The news is loaded with “tongue-tanglers,” those innocent and sometimes not-so-innocent looking words that reflect unusual or difficult pronunciations. Any newscaster who comes upon these difficult words on the air without warning can hesitate, stumble, or massacre the word. To avoid this, spell the word phonetically and put it in parentheses beside the offending word. Hyphenate between syllables, and use capital letters to indicate where the stress belongs.

Three traffic deaths are reported this Memorial Day weekend near Saguache (Suh-WATCH), New Mexico.

Flood control experts expect the next trouble spot along tributaries flowing into the Arkansas (Are-KAN-sus) River.

Audiences harbor strong feelings about correct pronunciation. The venerable Walter Cronkite became the subject of national debate in Ann Landers’ advice column for pronouncing FEB-roo-air-ee (February) FEB-yoo-wary. Other readers took news commentator Paul Harvey to task for calling III-ih-NOY (Illinois) III-ih-NOISE, and berated NBC’s David Brinkley for saying ZOO-ology instead of ZOE-ology and HIGH-ness instead of HAY-ness for “heinous.” Other readers were reminded of former President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s saying NU-cue-lar instead of NU-clee-ar (nuclear), and of President John Kennedy’s calling Africa, Cuba, and Alaska, respectively AF-ri-ker, CUE-ber and a-LAS-ker.

PHONETIC SPELLING GUIDE

The following guide to phonetic spelling is used by United Press International.

Vowels

- A Use AY for long A as in *mate*.
Use A for short A as in *cat*.
Use AI for nasal A as in *air*.
Use AH for short A as in *father*.
Use AW for broad A as in *talk*.
- E Use EE for long E as in *meet*.
Use EH for short E as in *get*.
Use UH for hollow E as in *the* or *le* (French prefix).
Use AY for French long E with accent as in *Pathe*.
Use IH for E as in *pretty*.
Use EW for EW as in *few*.
- I Use EYE for long I as in *time*.
Use EE for French long I as in *machine*.
Use IH for short I as in *pity*.
- O Use OH for long O as in *note*, or ough as in *though*.
Use AH for short O as in *hot*.
Use AW for broad O as in *fought*.
Use OO for O as in *fool*, or ough as in *through*.
Use U for O as in *foot*.
Use UH for OUGH as in *trough*.
Use OW for O as in *how*, or ough as in *plough*.
- U Use EW for long U as in *mule*.
Use OO for long U as in *rule*.
Use U for middle U as in *put*.
Use UH for short U as in *shut* or *hurt*.

Consonants

- Use K for hard C as in *cat*.
Use S for soft C as in *cease*.
Use SH for soft CH as in *machine*.
Use CH for hard CH or TCH as in *catch*.
Use Z for hard S as in *disease*.
Use S for soft S as in *sun*.
Use G for hard G as in *gang*.
Use J for soft G as in *general*.

Phonetic pronunciation helps the newscast flow smoothly and prevents the sudden loss of credibility that occurs when a newscaster muffs a word audience members either are familiar with or have heard pronounced correctly on competing stations. Almost all states have unusual spellings and pronunciations that confuse new employees, and foreign names crop up continually

in the news to present new pronunciation problems. The news services provide a list of phonetic pronunciations each day for foreign names and places in the news, and most state broadcast organizations provide regional pronunciation guides.

TIME REFERENCES

Unlike newspaper readers, broadcast audiences cannot re-read the story or seek clarification if at first they do not understand a fact or figure. For this reason, broadcast writers use a slightly different style when referring to the time of day or week. The writer for print might say, "The meeting begins Thursday at 8 p.m." Knowing the broadcast audience will hear the information only once, the broadcast writer would strive for immediate clarity with a sentence to the effect, "The meeting begins tomorrow evening at eight o'clock." References to days of the week are obscure and should be replaced whenever possible with phrases such as "day after tomorrow" and "one week from tomorrow."

Time reference in newspaper copy: The next liftoff is scheduled for 5:33 a.m., (EDT), March 16.

The same time reference in broadcast copy: The next liftoff will be a week from tomorrow at 5:30 in the morning, Eastern Daylight Time.

Whenever the broadcast writer must make reference to time or to days of the week, instant understanding is the immediate goal. The concern for audience understanding is the primary influence on writing style.

Broadcast copy usually flows better and sounds smoother if time references in a sentence are placed near the main verb. Reading the following examples aloud, notice the effect that time reference placement has on the sound and rhythm of your copy:

(verb) (time reference)
The body was found in a ravine near Pueblo last month.

(verb) (time reference)
The body was found last month in a ravine near Pueblo.

(verb) (time reference)
Another officer was killed in a similar accident about a year ago.

(verb) (time reference)
Another officer was killed about a year ago in a similar accident.

(verb) (time reference)
The fire broke out at 11th and Central late this afternoon.

(verb) (time reference)
The fire broke out late this afternoon at 11th and Central.

Achieving a polished sound in your copy sometimes demands that you ignore the rule and place time references elsewhere within some of the sentences you are writing. You seldom will go wrong if you listen to the sound of your copy.

WORD USAGE

Newswriters draw from a full, varied vocabulary, rich in specific words that convey exact meaning and connotation. The writers understand differences in words for specific situations. For example, the word “government” is more neutral than the word “regime.” If a word has more than one meaning, it is used in the correct context to avoid confusion. The audience must be considered when examining word usage in the news story. Obviously the New York NBC radio audience is different from that of the locally owned El Paso, Texas, station. The two audiences have different backgrounds and interests, and the language used in each location must be tailored to that audience. Generally, the simple word is preferable to the complex, the concrete to the abstract, and the active to the passive voice. Slang, foreign words, highly technical words or phrases, and clichés should be avoided. The following list of words and phrases indicates word usage preferred by journalists.

1. ACCEPT, EXCEPT: ACCEPT means “to receive.” EXCEPT as a verb means “to exclude,” and as a preposition means “with the exception of.”
2. AFFECT, EFFECT: AFFECT usually is the verb; EFFECT is the noun (“The drought will affect farmers. The effect will be higher food prices.”) EFFECT may be a verb, however, when it means “to bring about” (“The change can be effected only by litigation”).
3. AFTERWARD, AFTERWARDS: Use AFTERWARD rather than AFTERWARDS. The same rule applies to TOWARD.
4. AGREE TO, AGREE WITH: You AGREE TO a proposed action, and you AGREE WITH someone.
5. AGGREGATE: Do not use when you mean “total.” It means “a group of distinct things gathered together.”
6. ALLUDE, ELUDE: You ALLUDE to a movie (mention indirectly), and you ELUDE a tackler (escape).
7. AMONG, BETWEEN: Use AMONG when referring to more than two. Use BETWEEN with reference to two only.
8. ANNUAL: The first time cannot be ANNUAL. A tradition must be established.
9. AVERSE, ADVERSE: AVERSE is the verb meaning “oppose” (you are AVERSE to it). ADVERSE is the adjective meaning “bad” (ADVERSE weather).
10. BESIDES, BESIDE: BESIDE means “at the side of.” BESIDES means “in addition to.”
11. BLOCK, BLOC: BLOC is a coalition or group with the same goal.
12. COMPOSE, COMPRISE: You COMPOSE things by putting them together. Once they are together, the object COMPRISES or includes various parts.
13. CONSENSUS: CONSENSUS means “general agreement.” Therefore, to say “CONSENSUS of opinion” is redundant.
14. COUNCIL, COUNSEL: COUNCIL means “an assembly.” COUNSEL means “to give advice.”
15. COUPLE OF: The OF is necessary. Don’t say “in a couple minutes.”

16. DEMOLISH, DESTROY: Both words mean “to do away with completely.” Therefore, “partially DESTROYED” and “totally DEMOLISHED” are incorrect.
17. DIE OF: One DIES OF an illness, not from it. Also, a person DIES after an operation, not from or as a result of, or following, an operation.
18. DIFFERENT FROM: Things are DIFFERENT FROM each other, not different than.
19. DROWN: “Someone was DROWNED” is incorrect unless the victim’s head was held under. Say, “John Jones DROWNED last night,” not “John Jones was DROWNED.”
20. DUE TO, OWING TO, BECAUSE OF: BECAUSE OF is preferable.
21. ECOLOGY, ENVIRONMENT: ECOLOGY is the study of the relationship between organisms and ENVIRONMENT.
22. EITHER: EITHER means one or the other, not both.
23. FARTHER, FURTHER: FARTHER applies to distance. FURTHER means “in addition to.”
24. FIRST, FIRST EVER: The word FIRST is finite in definition. If something is the FIRST, it never has been before. FIRST EVER has come into common use, particularly among sports announcers attempting to make some new milestone sound greater than simply the FIRST time it was accomplished. “First ever” is redundant.
25. FLIERS, FLYERS: Pilots and handbills are both fliers. “Flyers” is a misspelling.
26. FLOUT, FLAUNT: FLOUT means “to mock” or “to show disdain.” FLAUNT means “to display showingly.”
27. FUNERAL SERVICE. A FUNERAL is a service. Leave out “service.”
28. HEAD UP. Leave off “up.” People HEAD committees; they do not HEAD UP committees. Likewise, people make rules; they don’t make them up.
29. HEALTHFUL, HEALTHY: HEALTHFUL means “to cause health.” HEALTHY means “possessing health.”
30. IMPLY, INFER: The speaker IMPLIES. The hearer INFERS.
31. IN ADVANCE OF, PRIOR TO, BEFORE: Use BEFORE; it’s more natural.
32. IT’S ITS: IT’S is the contraction for “it is.” ITS is the possessive pronoun.
33. LEAVE, LET: LEAVE alone means “depart from” or “to isolate.” LET means “to permit or allow.”
34. LESS, FEWER: LESS applies to situations using the singular form. FEWER applies to the plural (“They have FEWER members now, and the chairman has LESS income.”)
35. LIKE, AS: The formal writing style uses LIKE to compare pronouns and AS to compare phrases or clauses containing a verb. LIKE, however, is being used increasingly as a substitute for “as” or “as if” in informal usage. Thus, because broadcast writing emphasizes the informal/conversational style, LIKE is generally preferred.
36. MEDIA, DATA, ALUMNI: These are plural forms of medium, datum, and alumnus, respectively.

37. OPINION, ESTIMATION: OPINION is a judgment. ESTIMATION is an evaluation or a guess.
38. ORAL, VERBAL: ORAL denotes use of the mouth. VERBAL can indicate writing, although it may apply to spoken words as well.
39. OVER, MORE THAN: OVER refers to the spatial relationships. MORE THAN indicates figures or numbers.
40. PEDDLE, PEDAL: PEDDLE means “selling.” PEDAL designates a form of locomotion.
41. PRINCIPAL, PRINCIPLE: “A rule of truth” is a PRINCIPLE. The “first or dominant thing” is the PRINCIPAL one. The head of a school is the principal.
42. RELUCTANT, RETICENT. If a person doesn’t want to act, he is RELUCTANT. If a person doesn’t want to speak, she is RETICENT.
43. ROUT, ROUTE: ROUT (pronounced ROW-t) means to “scoop up,” or is what happens to an army when it is sent into full-blown retreat or what happens to a football team that loses 50–0. (The battle was a rout. The game turned into a rout.) ROUTE (pronounced ROOT) is “a road or direction”; also as a verb, “to direct or send something a certain way” (I’ll be traveling on route 95. Will you route this through Omaha?)
44. SINCE, BECAUSE: SINCE is time-related. BECAUSE is action-related.
45. THAT, WHICH: THAT restricts the reader’s thought and directs it in the way you want it to go. WHICH gives subsidiary information. (The legislature *that* passed the speeding law must now rescind it. The legislature, *which* passed the speeding bill, will take up a new bill now.)
46. UNDER WAY, UNDERWAY: The latter is not correct, but don’t say something got UNDER WAY unless it’s a ship. Say it “began” or “started.”
47. UNIQUE: Something that is UNIQUE is one of its kind. It can’t be very, quite, rather, or somewhat unique.
48. UP. Don’t use UP as a verb.
49. ALL RIGHT, ALRIGHT: The latter is incorrect.
50. WHO’S, WHOSE: WHO’S is a contraction for “who is.” WHOSE is possessive.

GRAMMAR

A working knowledge of the major grammatical principles is essential. The following list of 10 basic grammatical rules provides a start toward a more detailed knowledge of grammar.

1. Verbs must agree with their subjects in number.
Example: We are; you are; he is; a bloc of voters is; a group of women is.
2. Words intervening between the subject and the verb do not affect the number of the verb.
Example: Improvements in security measures have increased travel costs.

3. When the subject is one of the following words, the verb must be singular: anybody, each, every, everybody, nobody, either. Neither and none almost always require a singular verb.

Example: Each of the news services has filed a story.

Neither of the senators plans to attend.

If *neither* is used to link plural nouns, however, a plural verb is used.

Example: Neither astronauts nor cosmonauts have visited the orbiting space station in three years.

4. When the subject is a collective noun, the subject is considered singular or plural depending on the meaning you wish to convey. If the meaning of the subject is a collective body, use the singular; if you are thinking of individuals within the collective body, use the plural.

Example: The governor's staff is planning a victory celebration.

The governor's staff are listed individually by position.

5. Verb tenses should indicate the correct sequence of action; therefore, a verb in a subordinate clause should be consistent with the verb tense in the main clause.

Example: When Governor Johnson finished the speech, he realized he had overlooked his minority constituency.

6. Active voice is preferred for most verbs. Passive voice may be used to emphasize the receiver of an action (such as the injured in a car accident) or to emphasize an indefinite statement.

Examples: Write, "The plane hit the tower" rather than, "The tower was hit by the plane." To emphasize the receiver of the action, however, write "The woman was injured in the auto crash."

7. Modifiers must be located closely enough to the word or phrases they modify for the reader to be able to distinguish clearly what they modify.

Incorrect example: The president said after the news conference he would return to Washington.

Correct example: After the news conference the president announced he would return to Washington.

8. Pronouns must refer to their antecedents.

Incorrect example: The senator told the investigator that his statement was incorrect (whose statement?).

Correct example: The investigator's statement was incorrect, the senator told him.

9. The case of a pronoun must suit the function of the pronoun.

(a) A pronoun used as an object of the preposition must take the objective case.

Example: He came with me (not I).

(b) A pronoun used as an appositive must agree with the word it explains.

Example: Only two reporters, John and I, could go to the speech. ("I" refers to the subject; therefore, the pronoun must be in the subjective case.)

(c) A pronoun modifying the gerund must take the possessive case.

Example: The station management appreciates your exercising restraint in reporting sensational news.

10. The elements in a series must be grammatically parallel. Adjectives should be linked with other adjectives, adverbs with adverbs, infinitives with infinitives, and so forth.

Incorrect example: The North Sea oil companies plan to install new drilling equipment, to hire additional employees, and computerize lab operations.

Correct example: North Sea oil companies plan to install new drilling equipment, to hire additional employees and to computerize lab operations. (All three of the companies' plans were put in the infinitive form "to").

CONCLUSION

Writing is both art and craft, a discipline requiring many skills to master. Those who write constantly sharpen their skills most rapidly because good writing builds on practice. As you begin to sharpen your own writing skills, listen to radio and watch television. Decide for yourself what is good writing and what is not. Learn to discriminate, both in your own work and that of others. As your confidence builds and your skills increase, so will the quality of your writing.

Name _____

Date _____

Exercise 1-A**Style**

1. Using a pen or pencil, correct the following copy as it should appear on a radio-TV script.

Five memn are reported missing a in an avalanc he near Aspen, Colorado.

* * *

johnson said it would bet he first time in five year such an election hdas been called.

* * *

Unionworkers soy they'll strike if further jab cuts are announced.

* * *

At issue are recent tax cits for property owners outside city limits.

* * *

Daylight Savings time has finally arrived — noon too soon for local schools.

* * *

Local savings and loan firms durrently pay 5125 per cent interest on passbook accounts.

2. Rewrite to eliminate passive voice and wordiness.

EXAMPLE: The office was struck by a falling tree.
A falling tree struck the office.

Most workers are affected by the new tax laws.

Thousands of migratory workers are hired by growers each year.

Restrictions on sex and violence in prime time television were thrown out by a federal judge.

Part of the reason for society's attitude toward alcoholism was verified last year by university scientists.

Unless voters come up with an answer, the schools will stay closed.

New budgets for the public schools were turned down four times in a row by area voters.

Officials say most damage was caused by flooding along two minor tributaries.

More than 22 million cattle were believed ready for slaughter this month, according to information made public by the National Beef Association today.

Sidewalks, landscaping, five-foot bike lanes separated by a one and one-half foot raised median, parking and two lanes of traffic are recommended for Peterson Avenue improvements.

The flu is thought by officials at the Disease Control Center to be of the Type-A variety, and they believe up to ten million Americans could be struck this year by the disease.

Name _____

Date _____

Exercise 1-B**Writing**

1. Rewrite the following story to make it conform to broadcast style:

Jonathan Jones, 39, shot and killed his wife Joan, 40, while alone with her in their house today. Police arrested Jones on second degree murder charges.

2. Rewrite the following sentence in a way that will alert your audience to pay attention for the names. Include the men's ages, according to broadcast style, as part of the sentence.

The victims are identified as Joseph Jones, 43, and Samuel Smith, 27, both of Lenexa.

3. Rewrite the following story into a presentation suitable for broadcast. Pay attention to the need for attribution.

Water quality in the city will be degraded if local industry is allowed to dump waste water, untreated, into nearby rivers. A group of concerned citizens, at a public hearing on water quality, made that assertion last night at a County Land Use Commission hearing.

4. Rewrite the following sentence in broadcast style to make it understandable for a broadcast audience.

Persons seeking information can call 491-6484 Monday through Saturday, eight a.m. to 10:30 p.m. and noon to 10:30 p.m. on Sunday.

Name _____

Date _____

Exercise 1-C**Word Usage**

Underline the correct word usage in the capitalized words.

1. The new Arab proposals are **UNIQUE/SOMEWHAT UNIQUE** to past peace initiatives.
2. Farmers will **GO UP/GO** to Denver tomorrow in a tractor parade to emphasize their new demands.
3. New IRS regulations say it is **ALL RIGHT/ALRIGHT** not to declare your first one-hundred dollars in interest income.
4. Authorities still haven't found the man **WHOSE/WHO'S** responsible for the slaying that occurred last night.
5. Imi Singan today **FLOUTED/FLAUNTED** new atomic weapons before citizens of Shurnga in a display of power.
6. Correspondent Lamn witnessed George Sming's **FUNERAL/FUNERAL SERVICE** and files this report.
7. Mark Milty volunteered to **HEAD UP/HEAD** the Republican platform committee, after a chaotic meeting.
8. College graduates find jobs easier to land **BECAUSE/SINCE** they've attended school.
9. The finance committee is a committee **THAT/WHICH** legislators find challenging to work on during legislative meetings.
10. Today's school board meeting **BEGAN/GOT UNDERWAY** to the shouts of hecklers.
11. **ITS/IT'S** now time for the five o'clock channel eight news with Buzz Langer and gang.
12. The court ordered police to **LET/LEAVE** African-American demonstrators alone after three police-related killings.
13. The new AMC Ute demonstrated **LESS/FEWER** problems than any other four-wheel drive vehicle.
14. Stock market trends look **LIKE/AS IF** the current recession is over.
15. Pastor Paul's prayer had a calming **EFFECT/AFFECT** on the audience.

16. All parties EXCEPT/ACCEPT the Cubans agreed to withdrawal from embattled Zinger.
17. AFTERWARD/AFTERWARDS the new Revised Standard Version Bible translation will be read to close the worship service.
18. A HEALTHY/HEALTHFUL vacation idea is a fun-filled week in beautiful Arizona, where the sun shines daily.
19. Congressman Knoll's speech IMPLIES/INFERS that he opposes abortions, his opponents claim.
20. Amtrak advises advance reservations PRIOR TO/BEFORE/IN ADVANCE OF departure time.
21. New employees are DIFFERENT FROM/DIFFERENT THAN their predecessors SINCE/BECAUSE they don't drink.
22. Sheriff's officers say the victim DROWNED /WAS DROWNED accidentally while alone in the municipal swimming pool.
23. BECAUSE OF/DUE TO/OWING TO the Argentine earthquake, Senator Hill never did travel there.
24. In a COUPLE/COUPLE OF minutes we'll have a special report from Washington.
25. New atomic weapons can TOTALLY DEMOLISH/DESTROY mankind, Pentagon officials claim.
26. Surgeon General William Jaans reports more Americans DIE FROM/DIE OF cancer caused by cigarettes than from all other illness combined.
27. "It is my OPINION/ESTIMATION that historians will be kinder to Smith than we were."
28. High school ORAL/VERBAL English scores indicate ignorance of basic English.
29. MORE THAN/OVER fifty percent of all Americans go on vacations each year.
30. Snowmobiles may TOTALLY DEMOLISH/DESTROY the ECOLOGICAL/ENVIRONMENTAL habitat of the wild zulu bird.
31. The new anti-obscenity law won't allow EITHER FILMS OR MAGAZINES / BOTH FILMS AND MAGAZINES.
32. Air Force FLYERS/FLIERS are soliciting new enlistments in Nashville.
33. "Babe Ruth did more to FARTHER/FURTHER baseball than almost anyone," says Baseball historian Rex Schimpf.

Name _____

Date _____

Exercise 1-C**Word Usage (continued)**

34. The FIRST/FIRST ANNUAL energy meet took place in Willoughby Convention Center today.
35. The drought continues to be AVERSE TO/ADVERSE TO good skiing conditions in the Colorado Rockies.
36. One BLOCK/BLOC of farmers claims its strike will stop the flow of fresh produce onto supermarket shelves.
37. Dorn National Bank plans to build BESIDE/BESIDES the Smith University campus.
38. Opponents claim the new administration will be COMPOSED/COMPRISED of many friends of President-elect Snucker.
39. The Los Angeles City Council has reached a CONSENSUS/CONSENSUS OF OPINION not to renew the Raiders football lease.
40. COUNSEL/COUNCIL is available for anyone accused of a misdemeanor, claims New York District Attorney Jones.
41. New PEDAL/PEDDLE technology will reduce wear and tear on this vital part of a bicycle.
42. The chief PRINCIPAL/PRINCIPLE of Christianity is eternal life.
43. Reporters noted a RETICENCE/RELUCTANCE by President Clasquinn to speak during the news conference.
44. The AGGREGATE/TOTAL national debt today reached five-billion dollars, according to Treasury Secretary Sullivan.
45. Bank robbers ELUDED/ALLUDED police after they triggered the vault alarm.
46. Unemployment is highest AMONG/BETWEEN the 20 to 30 age group, the government reports.
47. New elected officials will include a town mayor, council, and FIRST EVER/FIRST marshal for the small rural community of three thousand.

-
48. The ROUT/ROUTE to be followed is due east, the same direction the Army took after burying the dead of the worst ROUT/ROUTE of the Indian wars when Custer was annihilated at the Little Big Horn.
 49. The FIRST ANNUAL/FIRST CVU ALUMNUS/ FIRST ALUMNI meeting is scheduled for tomorrow in Detroit.
 50. New government DATA/DATUM show television to be the most-watched MEDIUM/MEDIA.

Name _____

Date _____

Exercise 1-D**Grammar**

Edit the following sentences to conform with Associated Press Radio/TV style. Correct all errors.

1. These advantages, in addition to the clear presentation and simple style, makes this a style-book you will want for your newsroom.
2. The finest cameras and most skilled videographers are used by this station.
3. When the letter you sent to the Business Office was not forwarded, there was naturally some confusion between their accounting division and I.
4. Neither of these possibilities were explained in your query to the station manager.
5. We were pleased to learn that the crowd at your tour were so enthusiastic about the new control room.
6. If anyone else was on his beat, they would do the same thing.
7. The Videotape editor who had sent three orders and two requests for extra cassettes were visited by our representative.
8. Beginning her report Monday, she found she would not be through until the following week.
9. The reporter of the story and not the three accountants who supplied the facts and cost estimates believe the charge is necessary.
10. This crusade was conducted to reduce the number of fatal highway accidents at the end of the year which was successful.
11. Believing the man was innocent, the case was dismissed by the judge.
12. Employing such communication media as newspapers, radio and television, the campaign platform of the party was presented.

Name _____

Date _____

Exercise 1-E

Pronunciation

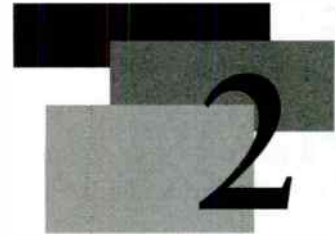
Write pronouncers in the right column for the words in the left column. Use phonetic pronunciation with the combination of words and letter combinations in upper and lower case letters. Upper case means more emphasis, lower case less emphasis. Try to make the pronouncer actually sound the way the word(s) should be pronounced with correct emphasis.

Example: Boston = BOSS-tun

Normally typed word	Pronouncer
1. Cairo (the Egyptian capitol)	_____
2. Cairo (the town in Illinois)	_____
3. Chicago	_____
4. Boise (capitol of Idaho)	_____
5. Arkansas	_____
6. Oregon	_____
7. Brussels (the city in Belgium)	_____
8. Junta (South American government)	_____
9. Tennessee	_____
10. Pueblo (American Indian dwelling)	_____

One good word is worth a thousand pictures.

Eric Sevareid



Scripting Visuals



In television news so much complicated information has to pass through so many hands to get a story on the air properly that formatting of scripts is a key element. In a business governed by seconds, the control room has little time to figure out what a reporter or producer wants. The script has to be clear, concise, and correct. Although journalists are accustomed to those requirements when collecting information and writing a story, they sometimes are not careful enough about them in the technical side of the script.

A television story is really two stories that come together on the air as one. One is the story you write in words and the reporter or anchor reads. The other is the story of video and superimposed graphics to visualize what is going on. When you bring the visual elements — constructed by photographers, editors, technical directors, audio engineers, character generator operators, and tape room technicians — together with the words of the journalist, you have the powerful combination known as a TV news story. Done well, the visuals and the written words reinforce one another and become more than either is separately. Done poorly, the story is deficient at best. At worst, it blows up on the air, disarming the viewer and embarrassing the news organization. We've all seen weird-looking things on television news. Most of them can be traced to a seemingly small error in script format that causes a major on-air disaster.

In radio, words-only carry the story. In television, pictures carry the story, with words serving to interpret and explain. So heavy is the visual impact of television that stations commonly rebate 75 percent of airtime cost if the picture portion of a commercial is lost during broadcast. If only the sound is lost, the advertiser receives a 25 percent refund. Similarly, in television news, pictures carry great impact. In the best television news, words support visuals. Most half-hour television newscasts contain fewer words than appear on the front page of many newspapers. Visuals and graphics have to deliver a tremendous amount of information. Watch any TV newscast with the volume turned down and observe how much information you can translate from visuals into words. If you were to write down every detail — height, weight, sex, age, facial features of every person in the news, descriptions of events and activities portrayed on television, and the information from graphics — your report would swell quickly.

Nevertheless, television without words has limited story-telling ability. Silent pictures seldom tell you the names of people in the news, what direction streets run, how long police officers have been on the scene, or the complexities of a legal story; nor can they give you weather forecasts, sports statistics, or abstract concepts of much substance. **Because of such limitations, television demands two sets of information: a set of words and a set of pictures.** Learning how to marry the two takes skill and time.

WRITING TO THE PICTURE

When you write for television, pictures rule much of your script. The length and structure of the visual story determine how long the script can be, and sometimes in what order your information is presented. Your copy **must flow as usual, because it still will be heard** and it must not “fight” pictures that are on the screen.

Preview the Videotape (VTR)

The process of writing television copy begins with a preview of the videotape before editing, if possible. The preview helps you in two ways:

1. It alerts you to possible treatments of the news based on the visuals you have to work with.
2. It lets you know what information you must put in words and which can be carried by the visuals alone.

Almost always you can glean ideas for the lead and body of your script as you preview the visuals. Linda Ellerbee, former network news reporter and anchor, said:

In putting together a television-news story, the usual practice is to write the words, record them, then go into the editing room and match pictures to them. The pictures are supposed to fit your words. Words first, pictures second . . . At Weekend, the pictures came first. That is, the [video] was shot, the producer arranged the pieces he chose in the order he chose to use them, the editor assembled the pieces, then the reporter wrote and recorded the narration that would complete the story. It is a better way.

Changing the words to fit the pictures makes more sense, because once the [video] is in the house, you cannot change it. But it's tougher for a reporter; it makes you work harder and think more. It makes you write to the pictures and with the pictures, letting the pictures tell the story. Don't misunderstand. This technique works only when the pictures do tell the story.¹

Too often, when the process is ignored, the newscast has the look of a poorly produced slide show, with video serving mostly as visual fruit salad to support unrelated words.

Write Loose

If anything, the script writer should underwrite scripts that accompany visuals. Few elements of the newscast are as distracting as the constant chatter of a newscaster's voice over powerful,

dramatic visuals and compelling natural sounds. Pauses become an element of the script. If the copy has too much detail, the audience will never remember it anyway. Instead, the script writer should deliver impressions and let the visuals tell as much of the story as possible.

Avoid the Obvious

Anyone who writes for television can profit from the advice of creative writers. The best writers deliver just enough detail to stimulate the imagination. They allow people to think instead of telling them what to think. This approach allows the viewer to supply information from past experience, and hence to participate more directly in the vicarious experiences of television news.

Edward R. Murrow became a legend because of his simple, precise reporting. One night during a World War II blackout in London, he remembered, "It was so dark I walked bang into a cow and she seemed glad to see me." Another time, after accompanying a bombing raid to Berlin, he reported, "The clouds formed castles and battlements in the sky." Murrow used few adjectives, yet his writing was descriptive.

The same techniques can be used when writing to videotape. Written words should supply only the information the visuals cannot. Also, words may create an image in the mind that conflicts with images on the television screen. (Is the governor's wife really "vivacious?") If your tape shows tired people standing in long lines outside the unemployment office, the viewers do not need to hear how weary the waiting people are; the tape will show their fatigue.

Perhaps you have videotape of Miss America's arrival in your area on a windy day. As she steps from the plane and descends the steps, a gust of wind blows off her hat and frazzles her hair and a piece of wind-blown paper wraps around her neck. Surely, as footage of these scenes is rolling that night on your newscast, you could say something to the effect, "High winds tore off Miss America's hat as she emerged from the plane, then wind-blown trash assaulted her again as she came down the steps." But consider how much more elegant your writing will be if you say, just before we see Miss America emerge from the plane, "The wind played tricks on Miss America from the moment she arrived," followed by momentary narrator *silence* as the tape tells its own story and lets us see for ourselves what happened.

Reference Words to Pictures

When people or objects in the visual story must be identified, the words should be aligned to the pictures as closely as possible. The script must be exactly on cue, for example, when a close-up shot of a newsmaker appears on the screen. The person's name will be voiced on air just as the person's picture appears. Or a police officer might be holding up a murder weapon for display. The image will tell your audience the murder weapon is a gun, but not what caliber it is or that it was stolen hours earlier from a pawn shop just down the street.

SCRIPT FORMATS

Script formats vary from station to station, although almost all television scripts follow the split-page format. The formats used in this text prepare you for the general approach to successful

scripting. When you actually go to work in a TV newsroom, local preferences may differ from the script formats presented here.

The director's instructions are written on the left side of the page, with major commands in ALL CAPS. Information the director needs, but is of lesser importance, is indented under the major commands and is in upper and lower case. Generally speaking, anything that, if missed, will cause the story to blow up on the air is in ALL CAPS. In contrast, things like superimposed titles of interviewees and indications of a geographical location are indented and in upper and lower case. That way, the director has immediate, visual clues regarding the importance of elements. Usually, a lot is going on in the control room, and people have to glance away from scripts to monitors and at buttons to push. With easy-to-find visual clues, the director's job becomes easier.

News copy, on the right side of the page, is usually written largely with normal capitalization. Although some anchors prefer to use all caps for their scripts, research has shown that the normal type is easier for most people to read properly. Scripts for most short stories (20 to 30 seconds) can be written on a single page. Most scripts contain a short, on-camera lead that introduces the story and sets up the viewer for the tape that follows. If you consistently begin visuals and story narrative together, the show will look choppy and lack proper flow. This practice is acceptable from time to time, such as when you lead live with a related story, then cut directly to videotape and begin reading the new but related copy. Otherwise, viewers will be most comfortable with the regular pattern of a brief, five- to 10-second lead-in before the video appears on screen.

Television news scripts are fairly simple if you keep a few technical things in mind. As mentioned earlier, they are really two scripts stuck together. On the left is a script for the director of the show, which is a kind of road map for the technical crew to follow in switching among videotapes, studio cameras, and other audio and video sources. The second script, on the right, is the one the anchors read. In a given story, part of the copy may be read on camera and part covered by field videotape.

Video is timed from its first frame. When video is inserted into a story, the video time is different from the story time. *Story time* is the whole thing, including the anchor lead-in. *Video time* (indicated in script formats as TRT) is just the video portion, not including the on-camera anchor copy.

All script pages have numbers. The preferred style is to use letters for segments of the newscast and numbers for stories within each segment. Thus, A-1, B-1, and C-1 are all the first stories in their respective segments. If a story has two or more pages, lower-case letters are added after the main page number (for example, A-1a, A-1b, A-1c).

BASIC TERMINOLOGY

VO means "voice-over" video. The pictures appear on the air with background sound, but the anchor keeps narrating story information while we're looking at scenes from where the video was shot.

SOT stands for "sound on tape," or videotape in which all the sound is from the scene, often an interview or a speech. Although SOT has become a common reference throughout the industry over the years to mean videotape with sound full, SOT is used also in operations that have converted to digital video and no longer use tape. The news anchor stops talking during SOTs.

TRT, which means "total running time" of the video element, refers to *only* the video's running time. It tells the director exactly how much video time exists before he or she has to get the anchor camera or other visual element on air before the picture goes to black.

Story time is recorded in the upper right corner of the first page of each story script. All stories have a story time, the time required for everything including the anchor on-camera lead, the video inserts, and any other elements that comprise the complete story. **Story time is not the same as TRT.** TRT is just the video element. Story time is the whole thing.

CG means character generator. It consists of computer type that will appear on the screen.

Outcue is the last three to five words in a soundbite.

Tag is the term indicating a brief wrap-up or ending to a story.

AT refers to the time when the sound on the video has to be raised while the person on tape talks and lowered when the anchor resumes the narration.

Split-squeeze remote refers to placing one or more people in a frame along with a frame of the anchor all on screen at the same time.

SAMPLE SCRIPTS

Pages 42–48 include samples of various scripts. First is a simple anchor on-camera read. The samples progress through more complicated stories including VOs, VO-SOT-VOs, reporter packages, and live remotes. Each script sample is in the proper format and includes the proper commands along with script copy explaining the details of the script. Scripting may seem a little complicated at first, but it really is quite simple, and logical. Please read through the sample scripts on pages 42–48 before continuing with the story samples.



A reporting team interviews a news source for a broadcast news package. In the script, the person's response, or soundbite, will carry the designation SOT for Sound On Tape.

On-Camera Reader Format

Slug:
Writer:
Date:

Story Time: 1:02

AB

(AB)

Television news scripts really are simple. They have two columns. In the left half of the page, you put instructions for the show director. The right half of the page has copy the anchor will read.

In this case the anchor initials in the left column tell the director to put anchor Amy Babb on camera for this story.

At the top of the right “reader” or anchor column, you put the anchor initials inside parentheses. **Anything inside parentheses in the reader column means “don’t read this aloud; it’s just for instructional purposes.”**

Most TV newscasts have two or more anchors, so you need initials at the beginning of every story to designate which anchor is to read it.

You put in paragraphs frequently to make it easier for anchors to find their places in the copy when they glance from the TelePrompTer to their desk copy of the script and back up.

Every story has a newscast page number. Use letters for the segments and numbers for the items within each segment (A-1, B-2, etc.).

Finally, you type three pound signs in the center of the reader column at the end of the story, and pen in the final story time in the upper right corner after you time it.

#

On-Camera Reader with Graphic Format

Slug:
Writer:
Date:

Story Time: 30

AB/Box: Fire

(AB)

In this case you want the director to put a box graphic of a fire over the shoulder of the anchor.

This takes a simple note after the anchor initials in the director column and nothing in the reader column. That's because the anchor doesn't have to do anything special, just keep reading.

/Box: Pyramid

If we want to look really "zippy," we can change the graphics in the box over the anchor shoulder just by indicating to the director to put something else in there.

The director instructions are put on the scripts directly across from the point in the anchor copy where the item is supposed to happen.

#

VO Format

Slug:
Writer:
Date:

Story Time: 1:11

AB

(AB)

When you set up the script for voice-over copy (which means we will roll some field video pictures while the anchor continues narrating from the studio) you need just a couple of additional things.

VO

CG: White Station & Poplar
Memphis, TN

At the point you want the director to begin the field video, you put VO in the director column, at the left margin. You do not put anything in the reader column, because the anchor just keeps going.

You also need to tell the director when to insert a character generator locator indicating where the video came from. You just note CG in the director column, followed by whatever you want to be typed on the lower third of the screen.

This command must be indented under the VO, as are all sub-commands (those that will not cause the piece to blow up on the air if they are missed).

At the end of the video, you need a TRT, which stands for total running time of the videotape. Normally it includes 3–5 seconds of pad, indicated by “+pad.”

All tape times are from the first video in that story and do not include anchor on-camera reads. In this case, the VO tape runs 1:01, and the on-camera lead is :10. So, while the TRT of the VO portion is 1:01+pad, the whole story time is 1:11.

TRT 1:01+pad

#

VO-SOT-VO Format

Slug:
Writer:
Date:

Story Time: 1:54

AB

(AB)

A VO-SOT-VO story is nothing more than a voice-over with a sound bite in the middle. So it usually starts out with an on-camera lead. Then you put in the field video while the anchor continues with the narration.

VO

CG: Tom Lee Park
Memphis, TN

This can be scenes of a disaster, or set-up video of an event, a meeting, or any other kind of news story in which you have a videotape from the scene to cover the anchor voice-over.

Usually a locator CG is indicated in the left column so the director will insert the typed information over the video, telling the audience where the picture came from.

Then you have the SOT, where someone is interviewed or is making a speech. (The SOT designation means "sound on tape.")

When you hit the SOT, you want the anchor to stop talking, so you put the letters SOT in the reader (anchor) column.

You also have to put an AT time in the left column to tell the director how many seconds into the videotape to have the audio turned up for the soundbite.

Just below the director instruction to take the soundbite, you put in a CG of the person's name and title, so the director will know to insert it when the person appears on camera.

AT: 52 SOT

CG: Emerson Jessup
School Board Member

(SOT)

VO-SOT-VO Format (continued)

Slug:
Writer:
Date:

Story Time: _____

Outcue: “. . . and I figured it out.”

AT 1:02 VO

(AB)

At the end of the soundbite (or SOT, as it's shown on scripts), you type the word “outcue” in the director's column, followed by the last five words the person says in the bite. That way the technical crew can listen for the cue and make a quick and clean switch.

When you want the anchor to start talking again, usually narrating behind more field video, you need his/her initials to indicate when to begin.

You need another “AT” time in the left column, followed by a “VO” instruction. That tells the director what time into the videotape to cue the anchor to begin narrating again while videotape from the scene continues.

At the end of the story you need a TRT in the director's column (left side) and three pound signs in the center of the reader column (right side).

#

TRT 1:42+pad

Package Format

Slug:
Writer:
Date:

AB

Story Time: 2:02

(AB)

The last major format is for a package report. That's a story done by a reporter that includes all the cover tape, narration, and soundbites in a complete "package."

These are completely edited before the newscast, with only CGs to be inserted live. So, for the director, you just need four things.

First, the usual anchor instruction for the on-camera lead.

Second, an SOT indication to roll and take the "package" videotape with its sound up full.

Third, the necessary CGs indicated.

And fourth, an outcue and TRT.

In the reader column, just an SOT designation tells the anchor to stop.

(SOT)

SOT

CG: Bill Smith reporting

CG: Near Jackson, TN

CG: Homer Smithers
Railroad Inspector

CG: Bill Smith (standup)

Outcue: . . . reporting for
Eyewitness News

#

TRT: 1:27+pad

Live-Shot Format

Slug:
Writer:
Date:

Story Time: 1:30

AB

(AB)

For a live shot, you just do a toss for the anchor similar to the lead to a package. Then indicate "REMOTE" in the director column where you want the remote to pop up.

Below that you put your CG indicators, and any other things like VO-SOT-VOs or SOTs that will be rolled into the remote piece.

In the anchor column, just put REMOTE inside parentheses to indicate to the anchor to be quiet and let the remote person talk.

REMOTE

CG: Roberta Smith (standup)

(REMOTE)

SOT

CG: Near Jackson, TN

CG: Homer Smithers
Railroad Inspector

Outcue: "... and by golly,
that's it."

TRT 1:00+pad

REMOTE

Outcue: "... and back to you in
Memphis."

###

AB

(AB)

At the end of the remote indicate the anchor who will thank the reporter or guest. Either write specific copy to read, or indicate (ad-lib thanks).

STORY SAMPLES

You'll find actual news stories written in the proper script formatting beginning on page 52. The following story discussions refer to those scripts.

Story Sample 1 (page 52)

Story Sample 1 is about a plane crash in Nevada. It begins with the anchor on camera, so we have the anchor's initials, AB, at the left margin of the director's column (left column of the script format). Directly across from those initials, in the reader column, the anchor initials appear again, but this time within parentheses. Whenever you want to tell the anchor something that is not to be read, the information is within parentheses.

In this story, a voice-over videotape (VO) covers part of the anchor read. The VO instruction appears directly across from where we want the anchor narration to begin. No instructions have to be put in the anchor column. Studio cameras have little red lights that indicate if they are turned on or off. When the anchor is reading along and the light goes out as the director takes the video insert, the anchor will know the videotape has begun.

Right below the director's VO instruction is the CG indicator, indented. CG means "character generator," or computer type that will appear on the screen. The indentation indicates to the director that it isn't crucial and if something has to be dropped, the elimination of CG won't cause the story to blow up.

Because the anchor takes about 22 seconds to read the portion of the script covered by video from the scene, the editor cuts 22 seconds plus a little *pad*. A little pad video always goes at the end of the tape to ensure that no "black" goes on the air. Otherwise the video might drop out before we get the buttons punched for the next visual element. Right across from the TRT, in the anchor column, the end marks # # # are used to indicate the story is finished after the last line of narration.

The on-camera anchor lead begins, "Just last week . . ." Copy to be read on the air should be timed by reading it aloud. That way you will hear the sound of the copy and the times will be more accurate. That paragraph takes about six seconds to read. Therefore, the story time in the upper right corner will be :28 (the lead time of six seconds, plus the :22 for the videotape narration). The script contains no reference to individual videotape shots, their length or content.

Story Sample 2 (page 53)

In Story Sample 2 we make a few adjustments to the format. First is a slash (/) followed by the notation "Box: Crash" after the anchor's initials in the director's column. That tells the director we want the anchor on camera, but with a box graphic over one shoulder of the anchor. Normally you don't indicate which shoulder because that is a production format element determined ahead of time by the anchor assigned to read the story.

The anchor reads two short paragraphs, then stops for a soundbite of Sam Tucker. SOT appears in the director's column to tell the director to take the videotape insert with the sound full. SOT also appears in the anchor column, but enclosed in parentheses, which tells the anchor

to stop reading. In this case, if the () were not there, the anchor might say “SOT” on the air. Parentheses are used in the anchor column to tell the anchor to do something but the anchor never reads it.

Sam Tucker’s soundbite runs 26 seconds. We put the outcue — the last three to five words the person says in the soundbite — just above the TRT designation. That way the technical crew sees the outcue words and gets ready to make another switch when hearing them about 26 seconds into the tape.

After the soundbite ends, we have to come back to the anchor on camera for a tag to the story. So we put the anchor’s initials in the director’s column under the TRT, and in the anchor’s column we put the anchor’s initials inside parentheses, followed by the copy to be read. Finally, # # # indicates the end of the story.

Story Sample 3 (page 54)

Story Sample 3 is an example of how to script a VO-SOT-VO format, starting with the anchor on camera, then covering some narration with videotape, then having a soundbite of a person, and concluding with more anchor narration covered with videotape. The big differences in this format are the “AT” times and a second voice-over tape element after the soundbite.

The AT times indicate when the sound on the tape has to be raised while the person on tape talks and then lowered when the anchor is supposed to start narrating again. “AT” times indicate major changes in key elements for the technical crew to make while the videotape keeps going. In this case the audio engineer will have to move the audioboard slide up a bit — to increase the sound from the tape when the person talks — and then slide it back down again when the person is finished and the anchor narration resumes. The VO tells the director the anchor has to talk over the pictures. Again, the TRT is at the bottom of the story.

In this case the on-camera lead is :07, a :15 voice-over lead into the soundbite, a soundbite of :34, and then another VO tag of :10. The story time is the TRT plus the on-camera lead-in, or about 1:06. You have two CG indicators, one for the locator over the first VO showing where this video was shot and the second consisting of the name and second line title or description of who talks in the soundbite.

By the way, we do not use an abbreviation for the word “Mount” in the anchor column, but we do for the character generator (CG) in the director’s column. Abbreviations should be avoided in the anchor column because they can be easily confused. The CG indicator, however, should be typed exactly as you want the information to appear on the screen. In many newsrooms the person who operates the character generator computer gets the information directly from the scripts. In this case, “Mt.” would be best for the typed locator to be superimposed on the videotape.

Story Sample 4 (page 55)

Story Sample 4 is not much different from what you’ve already seen. It is a VO-SOT-VO with the addition of an anchor on-camera tag finishing the story. Again, the major elements the director must see quickly are to the left margin of the director’s column: the VO, the AT times for the SOT and second VO, the TRT when the tape runs out, and finally the anchor initials indicating when the anchor is to come back on camera again.

Story Sample 5 (page 56)

Sometimes the anchor has to stay on camera, but the special graphics being used behind, or over the shoulder of, the anchor have to change. Story Sample 5 is an example of how to do an on-camera anchor reader that has multiple changes in the over-the-shoulder box graphic commonly used in television news production. The anchor stays on camera all the time. The director just needs to know where to change the graphics in the shoulder box. Those indicators are placed directly across from the narration copy. The director can't read your mind, so if you put the box changes all in a short list together, some strange-looking things may go out on the air. Putting box changes across from the point in the narration where you want the change to occur gives the director a spatial sense of when they happen along with the order of the changes.

Story Sample 6 (page 57)

The final example is Story Sample 6, which shows how to do a split-squeeze effect. You've seen these before, when television operations put two people in little frames talking to each other or being interviewed by a reporter. This effect is used commonly for anchors to toss to and from live shots of reporters in the field or to interview people from remote locations.

In the director's column, you put the initials of the anchor who will do the talking first, followed by a slash (/) and the words "split squeeze," followed by an indicator of what is to be in the second frame. In this case, we're putting Homer Jones there.

In the anchor column are the questions to be asked of Jones, after the anchor initials in regular script form. When Jones answers, we have an indicator inside parentheses for the anchor to wait for the answer.

As Jones answers, the director puts him full screen with his name in place of the left column anchor initials. Normally, when the person is put full-screen for the first time, his/her name and title is placed after a CG. Or the name could be placed in the split-squeeze shot as long as the CG operator spaces the graphics correctly so the person's name appears under his/her picture. When the anchor asks another question, we go back to the split squeeze of both of them on screen and then switch back to a full shot of Jones when he answers again.

Or both people can be up on the screen as they engage in the conversation, which is what our example does when the second question is asked, Jones answers, and the third question is asked. Then we go back to Jones full for the answer to the third question. We end the interview back on a split-squeeze effect. Usually the show director ad-libs these interchanges to some degree, as we don't really know what a person will say, and how long it will last, on a live interview.

NOTES

1. Linda Ellerbee, "And So It Goes: My Adventures in Television News." *Playboy*, April 1986, 198.

Story Sample 1

Slug: Plane crash

Writer: Smith

Date:

AB

VO

CG: Mt. Diablo
"Nevada Triangle"

TRT: 22+pad

Story Time: 28

(AB)

Just last week, two other planes crashed into the same mountain . . . earning it the new name, Nevada Triangle.

Any similarity to the Bermuda Triangle ends with the name. Mount Diablo is in desert country, a day's walk from civilization.

Search crews wandered the area for two days this week before they picked up signals from the plane's crash locator.

Two F-A-A officials suffered heat stroke and were evacuated after daytime temperatures reached 120 degrees.

Oldtimers call the area unfit for man and warn . . . enter at your own peril.

#

Story Sample 2

Slug: Plane crash

Writer: Smith

Date:

AB/Box: Crash

Story Time: :40

(AB)

Just last week, two other planes crashed into the same mountain . . . earning it the new name, Nevada Triangle.

Oldtimers say the mountain has claimed other lives in its time, but not because the peak has any mystical powers.

(SOT)

SOT

CG: Sam Tucker

“Nevada Triangle” resident

Outcue: “. . . it’s just an old pile of rocks!”

TRT: 26+pad

(AB)

The search resumes tomorrow for the three missing planes.

###

AB

Story Sample 3

Slug: Plane crash
 Writer: Smith
 Date:

Story Time: 1:06

AB/Box: Plane crash

(AB)

Indian folklore credits Mount Diablo in western Nevada with mystical powers . . . and this week aviators are taking note.

VO

CG: Mt. Diablo
 "Nevada Triangle"

Since last weekend three planes have crashed on the mountain's western slope . . . earning it the new nickname, Nevada Triangle.

Other pilots have reported close calls with the peak, among them Las Vegas charter pilot Ted Ferrell.

He says he's not superstitious, but neither is he a fool.

AT: 15 SOT

CG: Ted Ferrell
 Charter Pilot

(SOT)

Outcue: ". . . a high, dangerous mountain I'd rather fly around."

AT: 49 VO

(AB)

Ferrell says, if anything, he expects the legend surrounding Mount Diablo to grow bigger and more ominous with time.

But it's a reputation for mystic power, the pilot says, of little real substance.

TRT: 59+pad

###

Story Sample 4

Slug: Food protest
 Writer: Smith
 Date:

Story Time: 58

AB/Box: Protesters

(AB)

Mayor Davis walked straight into a hornet's nest today . . . It was a confrontation between truck drivers and shoppers.

VO

CG: Big Foods
 14th & Marshal
 North Little Rock

At issue is the price of food at two local supermarkets . . . both with contracts that guarantee annual wage hikes for union truck drivers.

Today a group of citizens said enough is enough. They demanded Mayor Davis ask for the Governor's support.

AT: 13 SOT

CG: Elizabeth Windsor
 Grocery shopper

(SOT)

Outcue: “. . . on the state level,
 not the local one.”

AT: 31 VO

(AB)

Local truckers argue they're already underpaid and they'll shut down deliveries if they don't get a raise. The result would be a serious food crisis at local supermarkets.

Just the talk about that possibility has caused a run on groceries at Big Foods and Wiggly Pig outlets in North Little Rock.

The truckers say a strike vote may be taken as early as next week. No word yet whether the Governor plans to get involved in the dispute before then.

###

TRT: 46+pad
 AB

Story Sample 5

Slug: Faces & places

Writer: Smith

Date:

AB/Box: Faces & Places

/Box: Madonna

/Box: Map

/Box: Kennedy

Story Time: 40

(AB)

In "Faces and Places" tonight . . . we'll start with the latest adventures of Madonna.

She peeked around a door at a New York restaurant today, while in town to take part in an international film festival honoring French actresses.

Speaking of faces, here's the political face of the United States showing the pattern of victory for recent Republican Senate candidates.

Republicans won throughout the West and Midwest. But Dixie belonged to the Democrats, and enough seats were retained in the Eastern states to retain a slim majority.

All of which is why Senator Ted Kennedy looked so relieved at his victory party in Boston. Kennedy won despite the most spirited campaign against him since he was first elected to office.

Obviously any margin of victory makes you smile, even a slim one.

#

Story Sample 6

Slug: Rescue interview

Writer: Smith

Date:

Story Time: 1:30

AB/Split-squeeze remote

(AB)

Tonight we have Homer Jones, the man who rescued the little girl, live to talk about the ordeal.

Thanks for being with us, Mr. Jones.

What went through your mind when you jumped into the river after Amy Prescott?

Remote

(Jones talks)

CG: Homer Jones

Rescued girl

AB/Split-squeeze remote

(AB)

Have you ever had any special training in rescuing people?

(Jones talks)

Remote

(AB)

What did the little girl say to you after you got to her and were hanging onto that tree trunk, waiting for the firemen to get a line out to you?

(Jones talks)

AB/Split-squeeze remote

(AB)

Thanks a lot for being with us tonight. You really are a hero, Mr. Jones, and what you did says a lot about the kind of people who live in South Railswitch, Utah.

###

Name _____

Date _____

Assignment 2-A

1. Use the following fact sheet to write a standard format news script, complete with director's instructions. (For your convenience, standard script blanks are provided at the end of this assignment.) Consult the scene breakdown so your script will match the visuals as edited. Commonly used abbreviations are:

Est. LS = Establishing long shot	MS = Medium shot
CU = Close-up	MLS = Medium long shot
MCU = Medium close-up	LS = Long shot

Story #1: Threshing Bee

Facts: this weekend (today) Platte County Fairgrounds Platte City, Mo. Twentieth Annual Old Fashioned Threshing Bee and Picnic. Dozen old time threshers McCormick Deering John Deere International Harvester Wilson's Thresher showing how it used to be in the good old days 600 people attending the day film shot and aired machines (including dozens of old tractors . . . some with spoke wheels dating back to 1900) all makes and descriptions . . . most still running machines circling the block square fairground serving watermelons homemade ice cream barbecue beef many people brought tents and sleeping bags to stay overnight many oldtimers fairgrounds clogged with smoke oldtimers said the air still has a "clean smell" Photographer burned shirt as hot soot and sparks drifted through air no admission charge car races at night little boys impressed with the old machines and tractors some women wore sunbonnets. (Script should fill :47 total time.)

BREAKDOWN SHEET

Scenes		Scene Length	AT*
LS	— Establishing shot fairgrounds with steam engine visible	04	04
MCU	— man taps throttle; series of rapid cuts shows machine speeding up, belt running, etc.	11	15
MS	— man feeds bundles oats from truck into thresher with pitchfork	08	23
Cutaway	— people (some "oldtimers" in straw hats) standing around watching	02	25
MS	— threshing machine and man operating it	06	31
LS	— smoke pours from thresher; man pitches oats into hopper (he's in a "T" shirt)	08	39
LS	— straw shoots onto pile	05	44
LS -	— fairground	03	47

*Accumulated Time

2. Write scripts from the following facts. No breakdown sheet is provided because the scenes are general and routine in nature. Videotape of the X-C 80 shows a routine take-off, flight, and landing on the California desert near Edwards Air Force Base. Tape of the packing plant shows general demolition scenes of the old tower (bulldozers, wrecking cranes, dump trucks, etc.). Use a blank script sheet, provided at the end of this section.

Story #2: X-C 80

Maximum script length: 20 to 25 seconds

The U. S. Air Force today released footage of one of the two X-C 80 prototype planes built to test long-range bombers and their capability in modern warfare. The prototypes fly at speeds up to 2,000 miles per hour. The plane is made of a composite graphite skin invisible to radar, heat-seeking and laser devices — called by press releases a “revolutionary design concept” in airplane fabrication. Superior even to Stepeth Weapons technology. The planes were developed as bombers, but hold only the pilot. Each plane cost \$12 billion to design, test, and produce. The plane’s guidance system was designed in your town.

Story #3: Packing Plant Demolished

Maximum script length: 35 seconds

The local packing plant is being razed today. It was shut down about two months ago when the company decided to relocate to the Midwest near Chicago, to be closer to major rail lines. The plant was built in 1898 and ran continuously until two months ago. It is located in the north part of the city, an area that will be converted into a new shopping center and low-cost apartment housing complex. The packing plant contributed \$4 million monthly to the local economy and employed 1,900 workers. Many of these workers have been relocated and transferred at company expense to Chicago, but approximately 800 are out of work, most of them with families. The building is an historic landmark and was designed by German architects who began work on the concept in 1895.

Name _____

Date _____

Assignment 2-A

Story #4: Shooting

Facts: bodies gone when photographer arrived occurred 8505 E. 116th St. your city wife in process of getting divorce living with mother husband arrives about 5:30 barges into house has gun (.38 caliber revolver) shoots wife she dies at scene wife's sister in bedroom gets shotgun wounds man before he's wounded throws chair breaks out window flees with shotgun around back of house and into adjoining field police at scene investigating police helicopter called to join in search through woods suspect: John J. Jones, 31, 10001 S. Main St. killed: Jessica Jones, 29, no children, her sister, who wounded Jones, is Cheryl Smith, 22; she suffered head wounds when struck with gun in good condition at General Hospital suspect not located at newstime (10 p.m.) search continuing at that time, but helicopter had been called off search. Script should fill 1:07 total time.

SHOT LIST

Scenes	Scene Length	AT*
Est. LS of house shows broken front window	04	04
CU — house address	02	06
MCU — detective holding gun (murder weapon)	10	16
MS — broken glass on floor; detectives in room	05	21
MCU — blood stained venetian blinds and other debris on floor	03	24
MS — kitchen table still set for dinner — detective looking around room, in refrigerator	09	33
CU — broken window	03	36
LS — back of house; pan to show path suspect apparently followed; ends with people looking for second gun	06	42
MLS — helicopter flying overhead	05	47
MLS — police searching through woods	05	52
MS — more police search	09	1:01
MLS — helicopter cutaway	03	1:04
MCU — police inspecting trail for signs of blood	03	1:07

*Accumulated Time

Script Format

Slug:
Writer:
Date:

Story Time: _____

Script Format

Slug:
Writer:
Date:

Story Time: _____

Script Format

Slug:
Writer:
Date:

Story Time: _____

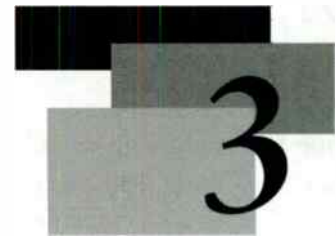
Script Format

Slug:
Writer:
Date:

Story Time: _____

Every news story should have structure and conflict, problem and denouement, rising action and falling action, a beginning, a middle and an end.

Reuven Frank, Former President, NBC News



Writing the News Story



News sometimes is defined as whatever people are interested in hearing about. Some “news” is little more than gossip (the latest marriage of a Hollywood celebrity); some is public relations (the story of a singer acting in a new movie); other news tells us of crime in the community or of the local efforts of teenagers to improve bicycle safety.

ELEMENTS OF NEWS

Regardless of the event, news contains one or more of the elements discussed next: timeliness, proximity, significance, conflict, prominence, and human interest.

Timeliness

News is what happens now, what happens in the immediate present, or what will happen. Newspapers often tell you what happened yesterday. Broadcast journalism is especially adept at fast reporting.

You often have little chance for historical perspective in your writing. Frequently you will be unable to say why an event happened, simply because no one has had time to find out by the time you go on the air with your report. You then must wait to report the important “why” of events in follow-up reports.

Proximity

News is what happens close to us, either emotionally or geographically. We tend to be interested in events that happen within our community because quite often they affect us in some way. Who

can hear of a car-train collision without wondering for a split second whether the victim is someone we might know? Who in a community is not affected by rising property values or increased taxes? Who is not interested in some way about the drought or the approaching storm?

We also have tremendous affinity for reports of interesting events that happen far away from us. Sometimes, if the event is big enough, it far overshadows the less important happenings in our own community. Examples include war and disaster stories, space exploration, or the discovery of Stone Age tribes living on a South Sea island. Whether you are dealing with local, national or world news, learn to “read” it as your audience would; determine what is most **momentous**, most **interesting** or most significant about the story you are writing.

Significance

News is what is significant to the audience. Whatever the story, ask yourself who is affected by it or is interested in it. In a metropolitan area a story about a teachers’ strike, though important, may directly affect only about one in every 20 people in the audience. A story about dramatic increases in food prices or a developing cold front may affect almost everyone listening. As you assess the potential significance of the story, always ask yourself how it affects your audience.

Conflict

News is what results in dramatic conflict and, hence, human interest. Radio and television borrow heavily from traditional theater. They prefer dramatic conflict. Television prefers the visually dramatic, and radio works best when you report the sounds and emotions of events. In some respects the preference of broadcast journalism for the dramatic is a strength; in others, a weakness.

Few people in the audience consciously define the essential differences between print and sound and pictures. Yet a huge difference separates the broadcast media from print. Broadcasting uses sound, color, movement, and light to report; print uses words and still pictures. **Sound, color, movement, and light** traditionally produce emotional responses, whereas **print and still photographs** tend to produce more literal, rational responses.

Dramatic conflict is whatever happens between two opposing forces. The conflict can be between one person and another, or one nation and another, or it can be between humans and an outside influence or force. In simplified form, dramatic conflict occurs in four basic definitions:

1. *Person versus person*: the struggle between individuals in a boxing match, a chess championship, or a senator’s fight against organized labor; other examples include the test pilot who fights to keep his job after mandatory retirement age, clashes between pro- and anti-abortion forces, the women’s rights movement, and an elderly woman on welfare struggling to avoid eviction from her home.
2. *Person versus self*: the struggle of a person to kick drug addiction; the triumph of athletic achievement in an individual sport (such as a runner seeking to improve her “best time”); the triumph of an individual over a physical handicap.
3. *Person versus fate*: the struggle of an individual to survive after a wilderness plane crash until help arrives; a public figure’s fight against cancer; shipwrecks; families made homeless by fires and disasters.

4. *Person versus nature*: significant weather events; consequences of air and water pollution; individuals who cross the sea alone, by balloon, or sailboat.

Prominence

News is what happens to prominent people, places, or things. Nearly everyone is interested in the prominent names that make news. Everyone from the President and his family to pop singers and motorcycle daredevils attracts our attention. Often such newsmakers provide us with vicarious experiences in the activities and achievements in which we would participate in real life if only we had the opportunity, the courage, or the ability. If you watch people listen to radio or television news, you will discover that prominent names in the news capture and recapture their attention during the course of a newscast. Similarly, the famous places and things in our lives — from the Washington Monument to our favorite city landmark — perk our interest in the news.

Human Interest

Ultimately, *news is anything people are interested in, whether significant or trivial.* If you think a story would interest a majority of your audience, it probably is newsworthy. Some journalists

might add a seventh element — Is the story visual? — but all stories have the potential to be visual if the reporter's knowledge and vision are broad enough. How do you visualize abstractions such as inflation, political loyalty, subtle discrimination, or white-collar crime?

Perhaps a reporter stand-up might show what kind of house \$200,000 buys today compared with what the same money would have bought a decade earlier, or maybe you can show how many groceries \$50 might purchase at current prices and the relatively fewer groceries the same \$50 would buy if annual inflation were to reach 12 percent. A family's political loyalty may appear in the shot of a child on his father's shoulders wearing a cap with the candidate's name in bold letters, or political loyalty might be visualized in a meaningful way through a variety of devices ranging from file footage to graphics to legitimate reenactments and even occasional dramatizations, provided they are labeled clearly and presented within the context of a larger news story.

Elements of News

1. *Timeliness.* News is what happens now, what happens in the immediate present, or what may happen.
2. *Proximity.* News is what happens close to us — whether within our own community or that affects us emotionally because we can identify with some aspect of the event.
3. *Significance.* News is what affects us in some way, whether financially (an increase in gasoline prices), physically (cancer-causing food additives), or in some other way that has a direct bearing on us.
4. *Conflict.* News is whatever happens between two opposing forces, whether between individuals, nations or as the result of fateful occurrences.
5. *Prominence.* News is what happens to famous people, places or things.
6. *Human Interest.* Ultimately, news is anything people are interested in. If you think a story would interest a majority of your audience, it is probably newsworthy.

APPLYING THE NEWS ELEMENTS

An understanding of news helps you highlight the elements to search for in each story you write. It helps you define treatment and style for any story because it offers a way of extracting the essence of any event for emphasis in your lead. Let's take an example. Firefighters are going on strike for higher pay at 6 a.m. tomorrow morning if wage negotiations aren't ironed out by that time. They want an average wage increase of 70 cents an hour, or a total additional cost for fire protection services of about \$1.5 million. The property tax increase needed to cover the higher wages would amount to an average of \$6 per household in the community. City and fire union representatives are meeting late into the night.

This story contains all elements of news. The story is happening now; it is happening close to us; it has the potential to affect us financially, emotionally, and perhaps even physically if the community is left without fire protection if the strike materializes. Dramatic conflict is present in the form of person versus person — firefighters taking drastic action to force a response from the city — and prominent community leaders are helping resolve the problem.

WRITING LEADS

One of the most important things a journalist does is to construct the *lead*. That's the beginning sentence or two of the story that provides the spark of interest for your audience. In broadcast news the lead is crucial because it must catch the interest of listeners/viewers, as well as hold them for the rest of the story. With the advent of preprogrammed station buttons on car radios and the remote control "clicker" in television technology, a fundamental problem is to keep people from hopping around from station to station.

Leads are the way you open stories. In all of the several different lead-writing techniques, the bottom line to creating an effective lead is simple. Whatever grabs the attention of the listener/viewer and makes that person want to know more is a good lead. Particularly in recent years, as available channels have increased substantially in number, fragmenting the audience into ever smaller segments, electronic news organizations have emphasized retaining listener/viewer interest. That means providing interesting, compelling information in such a way that the person listening or watching doesn't have any urge to punch the button for a different channel.

Few organizations encourage their writers to tell all of the essential elements of a story in the first few sentences, in the style of a traditional summary lead, as discussed next. Rather, though you may use a summary technique to tell a key *aspect* of the story in the first sentence or two, facts commonly are salted throughout the story. The best stories are written in a powerful, crisp style with one strong and vital sentence flowing into the next. Each is a necessary and intriguing element to provide information to, and hold the attention of, the person to whom you are communicating.

Constructing the Summary Lead

Based on your knowledge of the audience, the writer has to choose the one or two essential facts for the lead that will telegraph the essence of the story to the listeners/viewers. Through the

technique of the summary lead, you can alert them to what the story is about and indicate in the first sentence why they should be interested. Looking again at the essential facts of the firefighter's strike story, perhaps you decide that the significance of the protest is the potential loss of fire protection within the community if a strike materialize. Your lead then might summarize how your audience would be affected by the strike:

Detroit may be without fire protection by six o'clock tomorrow morning.

In the story's lead you have said why the audience should know about the strike: the listener/viewer may be without fire protection by tomorrow morning. You've created personal interest in the story. Although the summary lead indicates what is to come, it doesn't give much specific information. For this reason, it sometimes is called the "throwaway lead." Certainly you can report just the facts of the story without concern for helping your audience understand the importance of the event, but a concern for understanding is the mark of a professional writer.

Other Types of Leads

The nature of news changes from story to story. Your choice of leads can help reflect the special emphasis that each story requires.

Hard News Lead

The hard news lead is used most often in breaking news or in updating an already established major news story, as in:

At least 40 communities in western New Mexico are threatened by radioactivity that escaped late today from a nuclear generating plant near Albuquerque.

In contrast, the summary or throwaway lead to the same story would be far less specific, as in:

Officials are keeping close watch on a potentially dangerous situation in western New Mexico this afternoon.

Another example of the hard news lead is:

In New York City, 15 firefighters were injured today and more than 200 persons left homeless in what the city calls its biggest fire in eight years.

In this example a later hard news lead to update the story might be written:

Three teenagers have been arrested in New York City and charged with setting a fire that left 15 firefighters injured and more than 200 persons homeless.

The hard news lead that many broadcast writers use strikes to the heart of the story. It is an intrinsic part of the story, unlike the summary lead, which can be eliminated without weakening the story's essential meaning.

Soft News Lead

Soft news leads are used most often for feature stories or interpretive “think” pieces. They are appropriate whenever you wish to emphasize the lasting value of a story or to play upon the universal human interest inherent in a story. This treatment lifts the event you are reporting out of the category of hard news and gives it a perspective that otherwise might be lost or overlooked in hard news stories.

Millions of today's Americans grew up in small towns, not knowing the stench of industrial smells or the hustle-bustle of big-city life. It's a memory more and more Americans would like to go home to.

Within the category of soft news leads fall several types of leads that can be used to “spice up” your newscast. These leads, although useful, are used less frequently than summary and hard news leads because of their obvious emphasis on the unusual.

Suspended Interest Lead

A suspended lead delays the climax, or the essence of the news, until the very end of the story:

A Cheyenne rabbit grower couldn't figure it out last weekend when somebody broke into his garage and stole eight dishes and all his rabbit food. But it all became clear last night when the thief returned and stole all his rabbits.

Question Lead

The question lead is dangerous if the question lacks substance and fails to elicit the interest of your audience. Again, it is to be used sparingly and only with issues that may lead to debate:

Would you go to the moon for ten-thousand dollars? A major airline is betting you would and may soon begin selling round-trip tickets to the moon. . . against the day when public space flight becomes practical. The airline says if you buy tickets now, at ten-thousand dollars each, you'll be guaranteed passage on the airline's first flight to the moon . . . when and if such flights become practical.

Freak Events

The freak event is natural material for a lead that emphasizes the unusual nature of a story. The lead is constructed to give the unexpected event top billing:

A cemetery full of Canada Geese, from 50 to 60 thousand of them, seems to be Hinkley, Ohio's biggest headache tonight. Conservation officials say the geese are far from their normal migratory routes and have settled on the one lake in the area — in the heart of Hinkley's cemetery.

Well-Known Expressions

This lead capitalizes on well-known expressions that most members of your audience have heard before:

A ten-year-old Frankfort boy has proved again Ben Franklin's saying that “a penny saved is a penny earned.” Today Jody Murray cashed in his life's savings. . . nearly 170-thousand pennies. . . for a total of nearly 17-hundred dollars. And what will he do with all that money? Why, save it, of course.

The Staccato Lead

The staccato lead sets the tone of a story. It develops something of a one-two-three punch to get the story off the ground and into the consciousness of your audience. This lead is useful when summarizing a number of related events, such as actions at the city council meeting, or a collective impression of the day's weather:

Rain. . . then sleet, snow, and wind . . . that's how the day began along the upper Great Lakes.

Metaphor Lead

The metaphor lead uses the figure of speech to the story's advantage. It invites comparisons with other aspects of life with which we may be familiar:

Mayor Stanford says San Diego is truly the windy city tonight . . . with more than 15-thousand politicians gathered here for the national mayors' conference.

Literary Allusion

The literary allusion features references to fictional or historical characters. Edward R. Murrow made such a reference during a broadcast report from World War II London when he reported, "For a moment I thought I was back in the London of Mr. Pickwick's time." Another lead of this type is:

Shakespeare would feel at home tonight in Ashland, Oregon . . . city of the famous Shakespearean festivals.

Parody Lead

The parody lead is a take-off on events and sayings currently in vogue and of widespread public interest. Some television commercials, for instance, burn themselves into our consciousness and become part of our everyday national vocabulary. If not overdone, these events and sayings give life to some broadcast leads:

They say you go around only once in life, but Voyager crew members say they're going around the world twice this year . . . if favorable weather holds.

Many times you may not be conscious of the style or name of lead you happen to use in a given story. More often, your judgment as a writer will dictate your approach to the story and your treatment of it. Still, knowledge of the various leads and their uses can help you form a starting point as you decide approaches to the various events that make up a normal day's news.

STORY ORGANIZATION

Newspaper Structure (Inverted Pyramid)

Newspaper reporters have used the inverted pyramid style (see Figure 3-1) in news story organization since Civil War days when dispatches were transmitted from the battlefields via telegraph.

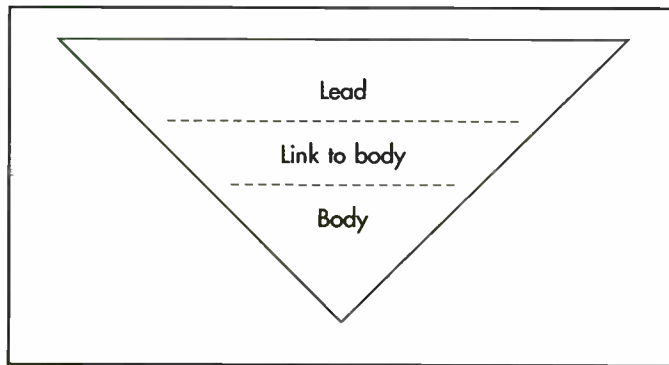


FIGURE 3-1. Inverted pyramid news structure.

The inverted pyramid style was used commonly because the telegraph wires were subject to sabotage and other frequent interruptions in service. By putting all the essential facts at the first of the story, reporters had a better chance of transmitting at least some of the story in usable form.

Newspaper lead

Inverted pyramid style summarizes as many of the five W's as possible in the lead (who, what, when, where, and why)

and sometimes H (how). Although some reporters are relaxing this structure now, it still is used at many newspapers. The following contains the five W's — who, what, when, where, and why:

Fifty (who) demonstrators were arrested (what) today (when) after they temporarily shut down a coal-fired electrical generating plant near Huntington, West Virginia, (where) to protest (why) what they called "unacceptable air quality standards" in the area.

Broadcast Structure (Pyramid)

The broadcast story structure more closely resembles an ordinary pyramid (see Figure 3-2). The story begins with a concise lead that includes only the most important aspect of the story, with emphasis on only one or two of the five W's. It then follows an informal style with the rest of the information usually presented in decreasing order of importance. The story must be built around the lead, however, with the most important information coming at the beginning of the story, just as would be true in a newspaper story. The difference is that sentences tend to be shorter and contain fewer facts. Often the broadcast story is told in chronological or narrative form.

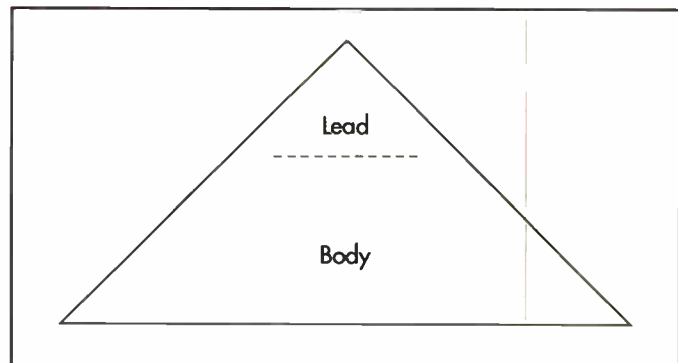


FIGURE 3-2. Pyramid news structure.

Broadcast Lead

The newspaper lead is too long for broadcast news. It would be difficult to follow if read aloud, and more difficult to read aloud than the typical broadcast lead, which follows in this example:

Police in Huntington, West Virginia, today arrested 50 demonstrators for shutting down an electrical generating plant.

FRESHENING THE STORY

Because broadcast audiences expect to hear news that is happening now, you often can freshen and update old stories by delaying reference to when the event happened. Let's assume the morning edition of your local paper reports on the previous night's school board meeting:

The Board of Education last night recommended a no-smoking policy in the entire school district, even for teachers on break in the faculty lounge.

Your early morning broadcast might report the same story but with a different emphasis on the time reference. Although the story occurred the previous night, your radio broadcast should move it into present tense:

The school board is taking a strong stand against smoking in public schools . . . and says regulations may be enforced even against teachers who smoke during coffee breaks. The board is recommending a district-wide no-smoking policy, approved last night at the board's regular meeting.

The reference to "last night" is buried near the end of the broadcast story, and the lead and body of the story sound current and up-to-date. Consider how much brighter the story above sounds than if you were to start off by saying, as newspapers do, "The Board of Education last night recommended . . ."



A television reporter makes last-minute changes before breaking into normal programming with a special news report.

UPDATING YOUR STORIES

Some news that you report will be in the nature of ongoing, evolving stories and will have to be updated each time new developments occur. A generous application of common sense is your best guide in knowing when to update a story. In general, however, you should update a story every time new information occurs, and even if no new information is available, you should rewrite all copy at least every three radio newscasts. In television news you are considered derelict and unfit for duty if you don't entirely rewrite early evening news stories for the late newscast.

The reasons for updating are obvious. No one in your audience wants to keep hearing the same story again and again throughout the day or evening. You are in the business of reporting news (new developments) and should pass along this new information to your audience at the earliest opportunity.

Imagine a downtown fire in which a business is destroyed and damage has reached an estimated \$350,000. Your two a.m. story might be:

Firefighters are battling a two-alarm fire in the downtown business district.

By five a.m., when the fire is out, your lead might be:

Investigators are trying to learn what caused the fire that destroyed a downtown business during the night.

By eight a.m., your lead might be:

Damage is estimated at 350-thousand dollars in the aftermath of a fire that destroyed a downtown business early this morning.

Your lead at 12 p.m. might be:

Arson is suspected in the two-alarm fire that destroyed a downtown business early today.

Always lead with your most up-to-date information in a continuing developing story. Listeners will appreciate the freshness of your newscast.

LOCALIZING

State Senator Richard Long is among those attending a national governors' conference today in Washington.

A broadcast lead similar to this one gives listeners in your region reason to become interested in an otherwise national story. You should search for local tie-ins to national stories whenever possible. Other examples are:

A Pittsburgh businessman is among 72 persons who escaped injury today in the crash landing of a passenger jet just outside Paris.

Cold weather hangs over most of the western United States, but the weather service says Utah may escape the worst of it.

Albuquerque seems to be doing more than its share in the national fight against muscular dystrophy.

Localizing is a crucial factor in any form of **mass media** writing. Human beings in diverse media environments are highly selective in subjecting themselves to mass media. Armed with remote controls and continually expanding listening and viewing options, including the growing world of Internet computer communications, people have little patience for that to which they do not “connect” themselves quickly.

You see this effort by mass media outlets to achieve connectivity almost every day. When the local television station does a local angle on some occurrence far away, it is trying to relate the event to its viewers’ world. Therefore, many stations do local angles on stories that really may not have much to do with their market, aside from the fact that the story somewhere else is interesting. For example, when the Oklahoma City federal building blew up, television news departments all across the country did “could it happen here?” stories examining federal building security in their markets. Likewise, when major earthquakes hit California, a spate of stories appeared in other parts of the country about what would happen if a similar earthquake were to strike there. In the case of a notorious murder, or other crime that lends itself to market self-examination by media, local angles often are fashioned to relate local viewers to the event in a personal way.

In other cases, stories that are local may not generate much **listener/viewer** interest unless they are told carefully in such a way that the story clearly has something specific to do with the individual. One of the best examples is the tax story. A school district asking voters to raise the mill levee makes a boring and distant story unless you tie it directly to people by pointing out how much their taxes will increase. Saying the tax levee will go up 25 mills doesn’t mean much, but saying the average 100-thousand dollar home’s taxes will increase 18 dollars a year helps the person listening or watching the story identify with what is being said and perceive the story in terms that have real implications for that person. A person may decide that’s a small price to pay for better schools, or that the increase in taxes is too large. In either case, though, the audience can understand the story in concrete, personal terms instead of consider it as abstract, impersonal information.

If you are going to put a story about car-jacking in the newscast because police in St. Louis just broke up a big ring of the thieves, you will need something to tie it to the place where you are producing the newscast. You could start with, “Police in St. Louis have a new way to prevent car-jackings.” But that’s far away and doesn’t seem to have much to do with you or me (unless we live in St. Louis). The first thought that crosses our mind may well be, “Who cares?” Car-jackings are a problem everywhere, so beginning the story by creating local interest could pull listeners/viewers into a story where they would learn some good prevention techniques. Consider this example of how to start.

You’re at a stoplight when the car-jacker strikes. What do you do? Some advice from a place where they have a lot of experience with that sort of thing, St. Louis. . . .

COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

Good electronic news writing is not all that complicated in many ways but highly demanding in other ways. It is straightforward, matter of fact, and provides a great deal of freedom that other

forms of written expression do not. It is not burdened as much by traditional written conventions. But because the audience cannot re-read the copy several times to understand what it means, as it is heard only when the newscast is read, electronic media writing is one of the most demanding writing forms. To be truly effective communication, five components must be present in all electronic media writing:

1. *The writing must be conversational.* Because radio and television writing is meant to be read aloud to an audience, it has to be written in normal conversational terminology. Generous use of contractions helps to achieve that, and it avoids traditional awkwardly written constructions. Although we don't want to end up being so informal that our newscasts sound like street jargon and, thus, alienate viewers with different perceptions of what sounds "right," we still need to sound like we're talking to the listeners/viewers rather than reading to them. Effective conversational tone is hard to achieve and takes considerable practice.

2. *The writing must relate to the listener/viewer.* In our mass-mediated world we have such a deluge of information sources that we have become quite adept at dumping from our minds information with which we don't relate. We've all had the experience of watching television for an hour or two and just a few minutes later having little recollection of what we saw and heard. We don't clutter our memories with things we don't perceive are important to us personally. In electronic media writing, then, we have to make stories tie in to the audience members' world. Like conversational writing, relatedness takes effort, experimentation, and practice. We can frame stories within the local context and use examples that help most people put the story in their terms.

Consider a lead with the intent of generating personal identification on the part of the viewer and, thus, greater desire to learn more:

When your lights go out, you may wonder what's going on at the power company. Today, in Huntington, West Virginia, a lot of folks saw the lights blink as demonstrators temporarily shut down a coal-fired power plant. They were protesting what they called "unacceptable air quality standards."

The Huntington, West Virginia, power outage has nothing to do with our viewers, except that we've all experienced having the power go out and the inconvenience it causes. So that is a point of relatedness we can use to create a tie between a distant event and the listener/viewer. It immediately means something to our audience in a personal way.

Sometimes techniques will work, and other times you'll write something that sounds out of place. In cases when you can't make it work right, you can cut the copy.

When working at relatedness, a natural tendency is to overuse the word "you," and to slip into a predictable and boring pattern of phrases like, "What would you do if . . ." or "You think you've got troubles . . ." As you work on making copy relate to individual audience members, you will have to work at being creative so you don't become predictable and dull. The fundamental question people have in the back of their mind as they engage with newscast is: "What does this have to do with me?" If you can answer that in the first few sentences of your story, you'll accomplish the goal of relating it to the viewer.

3. Writing must be *creative* to keep it and our newscasts interesting. The daily facts of life can get boring without the creativity of interesting phrasing, varying story flow, plays on words, and other devices at the writer's disposal to turn ordinary events into extraordinary stories. The retired CBS reporter Charles Kuralt made an entire career of taking little stories about the ordinary people in everyday life and turning them into creative art works through his story-telling

genius. So can you, if you work at it. Try new things, experiment with different ways of approaching a lead, paragraph, or story. You have to let yourself go a little bit with creativity. Most creative writers do substantial rewriting. They start out with one thing, then decide it doesn't work and try another. To get a great piece of copy may take a half-dozen attempts.

4. *Writing has to make sense.* While we work at being conversational, relating the story to the listener/viewer, and being creative in the approach and phrasing, it all has to be tied together with logical flow. What we're all about is understanding. Sometimes, trying to be conversational, practicing relatedness, and generating creativity end up with something that is just confusing. Then we have to strip out the essential details and start over. The audience has to understand the who, what, where, when, why, and how much of the journalistic effort or your story is just so much gloss.

5. *Writing has to be technically correct* so people reading your copy can understand it and deliver it properly. As we've said before, electronic media writing combines the oral form of human conversation and the written language our eighth-grade English teachers worked to help us learn. The newscaster has to be able to read properly constructed sentences with clauses that flow together. In addition, script formats in television and radio news must be precise because the technical crew depends on clear and concise script commands to execute the various elements such as audio/video inserts, special television graphics, and changes in anchors or remote locations. All of those things, from the written language conventional rules to the technical commands of the script, have to be applied correctly.

One of the best ways to test your copy is to read it aloud. When you do that, you hear it as the audience will. Often your ears will catch errors or awkwardness that your eyes don't as you proofread silently. When you try something and aren't sure if it works, you might ask a colleague to listen to it as you read it aloud, and then tell you what he or she thinks.

When a radio or television journalism effort incorporates excellence in all five areas — conversational tone, relatedness for audience members, creativity, making sense, technical aspects — the result is excellence. When any one area breaks down, the result is, at best, diminished communication and, at worst, a story that blows up in complete failure on the air.

Name _____

Date _____

Exercise 3-A**Leads**

Use the following information to write broadcast news story leads. Use no more than three of the five W's found in many newspaper leads. Double-space all copy.

Example: It's raining again tonight in Chicago . . . after two straight days of serious flooding.

What: raining

When: tonight

Where: Chicago

1. Another governmental entity has entered the battle over the proposed Scenic Knolls development proposed just north of Central Valley. The Regional Council of Governments Wednesday, last night, joined the conflict by asking a state commission to rescind its approval of a request for the North Central Valley Sanitation District to serve the development.
2. A 19-year-old freshman basketball player died this morning during practice at Central Valley University. The freshman, Todd Smith, collapsed while running during a practice game. Smith had not had any known illness, according to trainer Mike Way. Smith was pronounced dead at Central Valley Memorial Hospital after all efforts to revive him failed. An autopsy will be performed by Collins County Coroner Sam Stizel today.

Name _____

Date _____

Exercise 3-A**Leads (continued)**

3. The President announced a new two-billion dollar energy plan while traveling through the Western United States on a busy three-day tour. He announced his plan at a Western Governor's Conference meeting in Salt Lake City. The plan calls for a five-year program to ease strains brought on by strip mining and other energy ventures.

4. The Administration recently proposed eliminating 20 weather stations around the country. However, Central Valley appears to be winning the battle to keep its station. Both House and Senate Subcommittees on Weather Service Appropriations have favored continued funding for the 20 stations, members of the state's congressional delegation announced this morning.

5. A fourth grade school teacher in Kansas City has been acquitted of child abuse for spanking a 10-year old girl with a wooden paddle after the girl lied about having gum in her mouth. The Kansas City District Court jury returned a verdict of not guilty after deliberating three hours. Lynda Kristle had been charged with child abuse after parents noted bruises on the child's buttocks.

Name _____

Date _____

Exercise 3-A**Leads (continued)**

6. A spokesman for the Pulitzer Prize Advisory Board announced an appeal for two million dollars in funds to provide for the “financial good health” of the prestigious awards. Dr. William J. McGill, president of Columbia University, which oversees the awards, called the fund-raising effort a “low-key appeal to friends.” The awards program currently is running about a \$25,000 deficit. The Pulitzer Prize was established by Joseph Pulitzer, longtime editor of the New York World.

7. The Federal Aviation Administration is investigating two large pieces of ice that fell through the roofs of two homes after apparently falling from the wings of an airplane overhead in Fargo. No one was injured in the ice-crushed homes yesterday morning. One chunk fell through the roof of the R. D. Moore home in Fargo. Mrs. Moore was alone at the time of the accident but was in the basement and was not injured. The other home, owned by E. Harry Masto, was only slightly damaged as the ice fell through the garage roof near the outside edge.

8. The wholesale price index climbed 1.3 percent in April, according to a Commerce Department report. That was the largest increase in four months. However, even with that large jump, wholesale prices have risen only 3 percent since last April, the report noted.

Name _____

Date _____

Exercise 3-B**Writing**

1. Rewrite the following story for broadcast:

The State Patrol has reported the death of an elderly woman whose death lifted the state's traffic death toll for the year to 189. The victim, 78-year-old Othello Smith, was killed when a vehicle rammed through the wall of her house at 201 South Broadway. Police said the vehicle, driven by Johnathan Jones, 23, went out of control and smashed into a living room, coming to rest on the couch, where Mrs. Smith was asleep. Jones was treated for apparently minor injuries at the local hospital.

(WRITE YOUR STORY HERE)

Name _____

Date _____

Exercise 3-B**Writing (continued)**

2. Write a broadcast story from the following telephone conversation with a police detective in a metropolitan area. Not all the information need be included.

“The white male came in the Sunset Bank at 2000 Main Street about one p.m. today and stuck a nickel-plated revolver in the face of a teller, Ms. Susie Smith. He shoved a paper bag at her and she put about \$2,500 in it and he hurried out. Ralph Jones, another teller, followed the guy but lost him on the street. The robber was wearing a stocking cap, dark glasses, and was about five feet, three inches tall and weighed around 110 pounds. He fits the description of the same guy who robbed the place last September and got about \$5,000. Nobody was hurt, but the employees were scared as hell.”

(WRITE YOUR STORY HERE)

Name _____

Date _____

Exercise 3-C

Writing in Broadcast Style

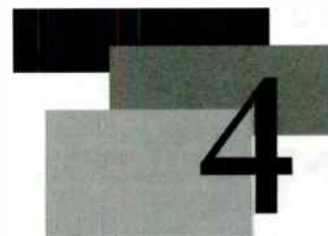
From each set of facts below, write a news story in proper broadcast style.

1. Keynote speaker for a local writing club will be Paul Friggens, area editor of the *Reader's Digest*. The workshop will be from 9:00 to 3:30 p.m. at the Ramada Inn. It will be for all aspiring freelance writers. Cost of the workshop is \$10 for members and \$25 for nonmembers of the Central Valley Pen Women's Club. Friggens has been a newspaper editor, magazine writer and editor, and journalism instructor at Columbia University. Other speakers at the conference will be Sally Stancil, family living editor of the local newspaper, and Dr. Ralph McQueen of Central Valley University Department of Journalism.

2. The Agriculture Department has officially proposed new rules to overhaul the \$5.5 billion annual food stamp program. The announcement came today of the anticipated change in the program that will take place later this year. Assistant Secretary of Agriculture C. W. McMillan announced the proposals today and called for public comment through next month. The plan calls for tighter eligibility requirements for those on the higher end of the poverty scale and for easier access to the program for poorer people and the elderly.

If you don't like riots or militant feminists, or opponents of ERA, or Republicans, or Democrats or whatever, you don't read the newspaper article — you just go on to something more agreeable. Nobody has yet invented a way to provide the consumer of live broadcast news programs that luxury of selection.

Richard Salant, Former President of CBS News



News Selection



“The news,” David Brinkley of ABC News once said, “is what I say it is.” Thousands of broadcast journalists around the country decide each day for millions of listeners and viewers what is and what is not news. The process of news selection involves countless judgments. People are involved in the process every time they read the daily newspaper, an endeavor that occupies the average reader from 20 to 30 minutes a day. Most people don’t read the paper from front to back; they select what to read based on their interests of the moment.

In radio and television, in contrast, you may have to sit through the entire newscast for any given story. If the news is dull, you can’t simply turn the page. You must suffer through it, switch to another station, or turn off the set.

NEWS SOURCES

News reaches the station through all manner of sources. It is assembled locally by reporters, videotape crews, writers, stringers, editors, and producers. Information from all over the world is relayed to the newsroom. Syndications, news services, and networks send prerecorded stories or “feeds” down the line for recording and later broadcast. Two-way radios, telephones, and police monitors blare in the newsroom throughout the day, alerting the assignment editor to breaking news within the community. If broadcast in its entirety, all this information would fill more than the day’s broadcast schedule. Instead it must be processed and distilled into compact reports, usually from five minutes to 30 minutes in length, including commercials, that will illustrate the most important and interesting events of the day. When you put together a news broadcast, you are concerned with the total content of the show. You must organize the news, determine story order and length, the number of actualities or visuals and, as the day goes on, which stories must be added, shortened, and dropped.

NEWS JUDGMENT

The judgments involved in the news process are as individual as the people who make them. How do you decide what makes the biggest story of the hour? What stories should follow it? How long should they be? Even the networks don't always agree on the lead story of the day. Experience is the best teacher in answering these questions, but you can follow guidelines of common sense as you select the stories you will air. News judgment requires the same discipline as any other skill, and it must be developed over time. You can begin by studying newscasts of stations you respect. Study their news judgment, talk with news personnel about what makes news, and practice making news judgments in your everyday life. Learn to distinguish what is serious and significant, what events are essential to know about, what stories affect your life directly, which stories are nice to know about but have little impact in your life, which stories exist by themselves and which are "manufactured" (wouldn't exist if you didn't cover them).

News judgment is affected by our background, our education, our friends. All the things that make up one's own "culture" come to play in our fundamental values and the way we view the world. Journalists must consider their personal perspective when covering the news, particularly their context of daily life. A danger of newsroom myopia, or near-sightedness, comes with working in the intense, deadline-driven world of news. This work can become all-encompassing to the exclusion of much of what most people consider normal activities. And journalists are intensely competitive both for the status of being the best among their contemporaries and for advertising dollars that flow more abundantly to those with the highest ratings. Because of the paranoia of competition, in which fear of another journalist beating them to a major story is substantial, journalists maintain constant surveillance of the competition.



Television newsrooms are "processors" of information where news judgments are made every minute.

Many news directors have several television sets in their offices so they can monitor their primary market competition continuously. This can result in coverage dictated by what other news operations are doing rather than the conviction that "our audience needs to have this information." In "pack journalism," news organizations chase the same things because other media are pursuing them rather than considering the real merits of the story. The result, day after day across the country from the largest networks to the smallest stations, is almost identical story selection and newscast order. Rather than a variety of news voices, the news coverage, format of stories, and time allotted to them are alarmingly similar from station to station.

Several studies of the network evening news support this theory of limited news content despite seemingly unlimited news outlets. Rather than a marketplace of ideas, the highly competitive media in contemporary America appear to foster a marketplace of similarities because of their continuing effort to appeal to the largest audience possible.

News Judgment

The news director at a Miami radio station sent his staff a memo of guidelines on news judgment. Here are some excerpts:

1. Lately a lot of material has been creeping into our news shows that does not belong there. Effective immediately, kill all but the most major developments in international news. Stay away from D. C. stories on obscure economic indicators. All we should be interested in are the Consumer Price Index and unemployment figures.
 2. Emphasis should be placed on the following items:
 - a. Consumer
 - b. Public education
 - c. Quality police matter
 - d. Employment
 - e. Transportation
 - f. Environment
 - g. Aviation
 - h. Minorities
- a. Consumer-oriented stories include items such as the clear meat packaging ordinance, consumer frauds, dangerous items and substances, auto recalls, and price gouging.
 - b. Just about everyone has contact in some way with public education. The big ones here are bus-ing, drugs in school, school money problems, and school taxes.
 - c. When I say quality police matter, I don't want to hear a robbery of under \$1,000. In other police matters, I'm not interested unless they're dead. I don't want to hear about fires unless the property loss is more than \$25,000 (or there is injury or death).
 - d. Employment covers things such as the airline merger, mass layoffs, companies moving large staffs here, or opening plants with mass local hiring.
 - e. Transportation covers new highway construction, continuing highway bottlenecks and unsafe conditions, development of rapid transit, and changes in fares. Also, coverage of the development of express bus lanes should be included.
 - f. The environment covers land-use management, water resources, water pollution, air pollution, resource recovery, land pollution, and endangered species.
 - g. Aviation-related businesses are the largest single category of employment in Dade County. When you hear a story from an airline, A.L.P.A. or the machinists union, I want your eyes to bug out. . . .
 - h. Minority group coverage includes Cubans, Blacks, anti-war factions, abortion reform, etc., but don't let yourself be sucked in by opportunists.

Separateness

News, as a culture, has a tendency toward separateness. That is partly because of the nature of work scheduling, which contributes to the social isolation of news people. Also, television news organizations frequently have high turnover, which precludes putting down social roots. For the last two decades the average length of employment of most television news directors, anchors, and reporters has been about two and one-half years in a city. Then they move on as their careers improve or their employment fortunes shift. After working for a half dozen stations, that circumstance can result in the misimpression that all news is the same and all audiences are similar, with a kind of homogenization of production processes, values, and approaches. Yet, the people and controversies in Seattle and Atlanta, New York and El Paso, Phoenix and Duluth are substantially different. In some ways Americans are very similar and in others quite different.

Futures File

An indispensable part of the newsroom is the *futures file*, a simple filing system such as an accordion-style folder with pockets for each day of the month. Into these pockets place newspaper clippings about upcoming events, notes from telephone calls, public relations releases about political and business activities, dates of court sentencings, and the like. The file contains ready references for events that should be covered in the days and weeks ahead, and consulted daily so you can prepare for "predictable" news events.

News operations usually include shift work, wherein 24-hour-per-day operations require people to do their jobs early in the morning and late at night, in conjunction with the normal working hours of eight to five. They work hours such as four a.m. to one p.m., ten a.m. to seven p.m., two p.m. to eleven p.m., and eleven p.m. to eight a.m. Like other shift workers in our society (police officers, for example), they end up spending their free time with the only other people free when they are, their co-workers. Thus, conversation centers on work, even when away from the newsroom. Recreation time to escape the pressure of work (for

example, playing golf, fishing, or having a picnic) becomes another opportunity to talk about what goes on in the newsroom. Escape from work, then, is really no escape at all.

Because most people work normal hours, social organizations usually are set up to fit into the hours outside of the traditional eight to five work day. Service clubs almost all meet at breakfast or lunch. Other social organizations, such as the Elks, Masons, and Knights of Columbus, meet in the evening. A work shift of two in the afternoon to eleven at night doesn't allow participation in the wider society to any great extent. Breakfast and luncheon meetings are problematic because you don't get to bed until after midnight and don't rise until mid-morning. You can attend night social gatherings only if there's news to cover, and then you are a journalist observer, not a social participant. Therefore, the journalist quickly can become a kind of isolate among the collective of society, mixing mostly with other journalists and functioning in a kind of separate sub-culture.

Jargon

Another way journalists are distanced from the audience they are trying to serve is the tendency to be around the same sources continuously (police officers, politicians, government public

relations people, and so on), in which jargon often becomes interwoven in the fabric of daily conversation. The language of the source becomes the language of the journalist, who intrinsically understands its meaning. That meaning, however, sometimes is lost on an audience not used to interpreting the terminology.

What does the term JIC, pronounced in ordinary conversation as “JICK,” mean to you? To some federal employees JIC is understood immediately to mean the “Joint Information Center,” which coordinates news releases and media queries during disaster or military operations. If that acronym sneaks into a reporter’s script, however, the audience can be left wondering what the reporter is talking about.

Journalist Lifestyle

The journalist lifestyle has a danger that is important to keep in mind as a person who will decide what is covered and how. Journalists may have a different view of what is news, and therefore important, than “normal” people whose lives do not involve reading the wires constantly, looking at television feeds from around the world, or covering politicians and others seeking (or running from) coverage. Only news professionals read two or three wires, peruse two or three newspapers, and watch a half dozen news feeds every day. Yet they determine what ordinary folks get to see every night. Clearly, the newsperson may think something is an “old” story because he or she has seen so much of it over a couple of days, but the viewer may have seen it only once, if at all. To the person who doesn’t have the time for the journalists’ near fanatical pursuit of current events information, the story may be new and different.

Audience Perspective

The audience perspective is important and audience “wants,” as revealed in market research, should be blended with current “needs” for information. When a news organization considers only audience “wants,” though, it is apt to do a “historycast” of yesterday’s concerns rather than a “newscast” of today’s issues. The concerns of the day ebb and flow with human events that rise and fall like waves on the sea. Often people “want” to know more about something after they first hear of it, but never before. That is not to discount the importance of market research. You need to know what general areas concern your audience. But news is a combination of information “wants” and “needs,” each of which has to be satisfied for the audience to be both attracted to and informed by a newscast.

People use news programming in several ways. Research has demonstrated that while the news is on, people ignore it, concentrate on it, argue about it, agree with each other about it, use it to isolate themselves from others or to bring a family together in a mutual viewing group activity. They do virtually everything when the TV is on that they do when it is not. They rarely just sit and watch it for hours. Rather, they engage and disengage selectively almost minute by minute as the pictures in the box and the events in their personal world spin around together.

Theorists talk about news providing “surveillance” needs to those who consume it. In our culture, for others to perceive us as an informed, “with it,” knowledgeable person, we read the paper each morning (actually, scan it quickly) and usually tune into a newscast or two on radio or television. We then have snippets of knowledge to use in conversing about the concerns of the day

at work and in our social world. We can come across as bright and informed rather than out of touch and dull. We maintain “surveillance” on the concerns of the day and thus are part of the dynamic of contemporary life.

Thus, to much of the audience, news means a few minutes a day catching up on things to use to impress others positively, as well as for any other purpose. News is our common currency of the world and how we fit into it. What’s more, how people define “news” is highly variable. Some think of crimes of violence as news, and the daily process of politics more as boredom than as “news.” We tend to be captivated by sensationalistic events and disasters even though our long-term quality of life is affected more directly by the visually dull activity within the walls of state legislatures and congressional offices.

With overpowering pictures driving the visual media, television news often concentrates on what is titillating but not necessarily all that important in the course of life for most Americans. The combination of information about reality and entertainment values, often distortional in nature, has become known as *infotainment*. Within that context, the journalist has to keep in mind the audience’s perspective. It exists uniquely apart from the journalist’s own world of shift work and obsessive consumption of current events. And journalists and the audience alike must recognize that the way a story is covered can misrepresent the reality.

Crime Coverage

Many newscasts emphasize crime coverage because audience research indicates people are concerned about crime. Some news consultants have encouraged their station clients to lead with crime whenever possible and emphasize crime coverage. This may be a factor in the public perception of crime. When crime stories are shown almost every night, crime may appear to be worse than it really is. The news content and the market research may exist in a kind of symbiotic relationship wherein one feeds the other. If television news focuses continually on violent crime, people may become more concerned about it. If people are more concerned about crime, station audience research may reveal that worry. The research findings then may be used to foster more crime coverage as the station attempts to cover news of interest to viewers based on audience research.

Television is a medium driven by the picture. Only certain kinds of crime play well on television. White-collar crime is dull. Shots of bank building fronts, computer screens crammed with data, and a short sequence of some accountant being walked to a police car with a coat over his handcuffs isn’t all that exciting. Much more visually interesting is a stick-up of a convenience store. Now the visuals have power, with the store lights glaring out into the night, cop cars in front with strobe lights flashing, perhaps a broken window, and a body in the street or crumpled behind the counter. Yet, the convenience store story affects few people, and the embezzlement story could have cost thousands of people their savings. In the 1980s the U. S. Savings and Loan industry was rocked by a kind of white-collar crime in the form of junk bond manipulation that caused serious financial problems for thousands of financial institutions and millions of investors whose savings were at-risk.

In the television business, footage of stick-ups, gang wars, and other violent acts is called “bang, bang” news. These things tend to happen in lower socioeconomic areas. When station formats emphasize street-variety violent crime, they reinforce social stereotypes. Night after night the poor and disenfranchised are seen as being the criminal element, and some racial groups over-represented in pictures of those arrested, being led down halls to court in chains, and paraded

about the criminal justice system. Yet the economic conditions, not race or ethnic origin, are what fosters crime.

The journalist has to consider how accurately the society at large is reflected in the daily newscast. White, middle-age accountants convicted of embezzlement and Black gang members convicted of robbing a convenience store at gunpoint have one thing in common: They are criminals. Yet we see much more daily coverage of the latter than the former, because they and their misdeeds make better pictures on television. To equalize the pressure to provide good “pictures” that will draw and satisfy an audience and at the same time provide usable information to that audience is an intricate balancing act.

News judgment is just a two-word phrase. But it incorporates a vast complexity of self-examination, audience awareness, and strong ethical perspective.

HARD VERSUS SOFT NEWS

The two most classical distinctions are between hard news and soft, or feature, news. *Hard news* is what people expect to see and hear. It is the news they need to know to get along in life from day to day, news that helps them decide which course of action to take or that affects them financially, physically, or in some other important way. Hard news tells about rate hikes in utilities, property tax increases, important Senate action, and major crime in the community.

Soft news is optional to most audiences. It is news they might enjoy hearing but could live without, such as a report on how a local television newswoman learns to belly dance, how more male CPAs are growing beards these days, the Rhode Island man who pushes a peanut up the sidewalk to pay off an election bet, or how local school teachers are exercising three times a week until semester’s end. These stories may contribute to our awareness of social or community trends or to our understanding of how events affect us. If they serve either of these functions, they are justified, but not if they replace stories we really need to know. The distinction between soft and feature news is important to recognize. Chapter 5 provides further discussion of feature news.

Lead Stories

The lead, or first story in the newscast, must be the biggest story of the hour — the event that merits special attention because it is the most important. The lead story may be obvious some days and obscure on other days when several big stories are breaking. Generally, you can solve the problem by asking which story affects or interests the most people in your audience. Sometimes the choices can be tricky.

Imagine that the state utility commission raises utility rates in your community, meaning you will pay more to heat and operate your home. The same day, police announce the fifth rape-murder to occur in your neighborhood within the last three months. Which story should be the lead? Only you can answer the question, based upon your knowledge of community interests and concerns. Ordinarily the rate hike might lead the newscast, but the unusual number of violent crimes may have created an issue of personal safety that would make the rape-murder story more important to your audience.

In the absence of such finely cut decisions, hard news generally takes precedence as the lead story at most stations. Whatever you decide to go with as the lead story, you always should lead with the most current developments.

Line-up

Local news usually is placed first in the newscast unless it is obviously overshadowed by important regional, national, or international developments. The show builds from the lead story, with similar items grouped together. If you lead with a crime story, you don't jump immediately to a story about plans for a new shopping center in your area even if it is the second most important story in the newscast. Instead, a "buffer" will smooth the flow of the news—a story from district court, for example — followed by the shopping center story. Except in the shortest radio newscasts, you should avoid a line-up that groups stories from most to least important in 1-2-3 order. In doing that, the newscast would become progressively less interesting, and the audience progressively more bored.

Most television producers operationalize a concept called *thematic blocking*. In grouping similar items together, they use whatever logical thread seems to connect stories. That can mean grouping by subject, geography, or just about any other device that helps tie stories together. This will be discussed later in Chapter 14. Suffice it to say, thematic blocking helps the audience digest the avalanche of news of the day by putting it into story groupings that flow into and out of one another easily. Thematic blocking also helps increase the story count in the newscast. Short anchor readers can be slipped in among other stories to help make the transitions that bolster the feeling that a lot of news is included.

Some producers attempt to give each segment of a newscast the emotional flow of an entire newscast. By that we mean that they begin each segment with a strong lead kind of story. That lends importance and energy to the beginning of the segment. Then you move through a series of stories of lessening drama but still plenty of substance. Finally the segment ends with a positive



Dozens of elements in the newscast finally come together as the technical director and others orchestrate pictures, graphics, live shots, voice-over copy, natural sound, music, studio presentations and electronic effects.

story or, at the least, the final story in the segment ends with a positive tone. It's similar to a newscast with a strong front end of dramatic news, lessening emotional power toward the middle, softer more enjoyable material in the form of sports and weather, and then a final "kicker" story to end positively.

The emotion of newscast blocking must be considered. If a newscast is full of depressing information — story after story of tragedy, violence, people dying — it becomes something to punch out of, not tune into. People will put up with only so much negativism in their lives, and then they seek positive reinforcement. That is not to say you should avoid putting in news that is important, just that you be sensitive about its effect on the audience. This is particularly important since invention of the television remote control. When people had to get up and walk six feet or so to change channels, they did so only when they felt strongly about what was on. With the "clicker," though, churning through the channels has become a kind of national recreation. Losing a viewer is easy, and in the ever more fragmented mass media world, that's the last thing you want to do. Therefore, newscasts are produced increasingly with an appreciation for the way viewers may receive the information and react to it.

NEWSCAST CONTENT

The time available in a newscast should be used for stories of substance. Stories to avoid include minor robberies, minor crime, fender-bender traffic accidents, suicides, minor court decisions, and small fires. Each of these examples may have special properties on a given day, however, that make it special enough to include in the news. A minor traffic accident becomes news if the driver lost control because he saw a nude sunbather.

SPOT NEWS

A spot news story is an event that breaks out, day or night, without warning. As you begin your career in broadcasting, you may find yourself covering a variety of spot news — the fires, hold-ups, car wrecks, plane crashes, drownings, and murders that occur from time to time in almost any community. Gradually you will learn that news doesn't change. Only the names change. The same stories return day after day, year after year. The stories often are accounts of violence, and they will leave some people in your audience cold. Still others in your audience will be interested in these events. Listeners or viewers in your audience may have witnessed a car-train collision and will be eager to learn what happened. Others in the audience may be vitally interested in hearing about the third hold-up in as many days at the mom-and-pop grocery just down the street from where they live. Some spot news is momentous: a million-dollar warehouse fire, a major drug raid, a train derailment, flash flooding, and grain elevator explosions. Other spot news barely qualifies for the title and requires unusual angles to make it airworthy.

In general, as you make judgments about spot news, ask yourself what lifts the story out of the ordinary. Try not to waste precious air time reporting minor-injury accidents, inconsequential fires, and \$25 hold-ups. Many reporters are satisfied covering only the *what* of events. Others go beyond surface coverage whenever possible and ask *why* events occurred and what *consequences* are likely. These questions help the reporter probe for the cause of stories. This is not to imply that you should become a crusading journalist, only that you should go beyond the symptom of a

Guidelines for News Content

Because all guidelines are meant to illustrate an "average" news day, and few news days are average, the following tips are set down only to help you develop a news sense.

- Use recordings from the field whenever possible, but keep them brief and concise, generally not more than 30 seconds in length.
- Write your news stories in present tense whenever possible.
- Stress local news of substance and interest, and cover it live whenever possible.
- For at least two stories in a five-minute radio newscast, provide as much detail and depth as a balanced newscast allows. Make all other stories more snappy and concise.
- End newscasts whenever possible with a bright, upbeat story (or *kicker*) that will leave your audience smiling or amused. Much news is sober, and few people want to leave newscasts feeling somber.
- Make most news stories at least two sentences long. One-sentence "headlines" are appropriate if used in association with a series of other one- and two-sentence stories, as in a news-in-brief wrapup.
- Try to use two or three short stories rather than one long one to make a five-minute radio newscast sound more comprehensive.
- Update and localize wire stories whenever possible. Look for a local tie-in with state and national stories, and lead such stories with local emphasis in the first sentence.
- Regardless of their source, check all stories for accuracy, especially when they involve crime, legal action, or political charges.
- Rewrite all stories that are used in subsequent newscasts. No listener wants to hear the same story again and again.

problem (the grain elevator explosion) and get to the cause (lax safety standards that surround the handling of grain dust). When people are aware of problems, they can address the causes.

Many stations keep vehicles in the field to cover spot news. These remote vehicles can be cars, station wagons, or vans equipped with two-way radios and, in the case of television, videotape gear and live broadcast capability. In-car monitors and two-way contact with assignment editors back at the newsroom assure continual awareness of reports from fire, police, sheriff, highway patrol, and other government agencies in the community. Mobile news reporters often can reach the scene of spot news within minutes if they are in good field position to begin with.

Whether minor spot news is a legitimate component of your newscast is a value judgment. Many people in your audience will want and expect to hear it. Others will wonder why you bothered with it in the first place. Somewhere in most of us lies a source of morbid fascination with the disaster and mayhem that befalls others. Often, when we disavow our interest in such events, we still secretly like to know about them and will listen in spite of ourselves. Almost always, pedestrians turn to watch as an ambulance goes by with sirens blaring and red lights flashing.

Spot news is only one component of broadcast journalism, however, and never should dominate the news line-up or upset the balance of an otherwise representative report of the day's events. Momentous events occur by the thousands each day all over the world. Is the car wreck at Fifth and Main one of them?

REFERENCE SOURCES

Tools of the broadcast writer include reference materials. No newsroom should be without at least the minimum references.

City directories help locate people, their addresses, and telephone numbers. People not listed in telephone directories might be found in the city directory. This reference is especially useful when you are trying to contact someone near the scene of a fire or an accident for eyewitness information. Most city directories also provide cross-sections by name, address, and telephone number. This enables you to locate individuals even if you know only their address or telephone number and are unsure of their name.

Computer databases provide quick answers to many questions. Census data, articles from various publications, and encyclopedias are just some of the material available on databases.

Lists of radio and television stations in the region are helpful when you need audiotape or videotape feeds from locations outside your immediate geographic area.

Pronunciation guides are essential references for state and local pronunciations, as well as national places and names. If you have any doubt about a given word, you can look up the word in these references.

Out-of-town telephone directories help you locate people and agencies outside your immediate area.

Unlisted telephone numbers and frequently called numbers can be listed to speed the reporting process. Such a file of numbers contains many numbers that aren't listed in the phone book — a police dispatcher's private line and the home number of a competitor station's news director, for instance — and that may be unavailable from other sources on a moment's notice. (Of course, unlisted numbers are not to be given out to anyone except those who are authorized to use them.)

Public officials and agencies comprise another reference source, listing position held, political affiliation, pertinent telephone numbers, political record of official involved, function of agency, and the like. Most states have a "Blue Book" directory listing congressional representatives by name, party, terms held, office address, and telephone number. These directories are helpful when you must quickly learn as much as possible about a public official.

Dictionaries, of course, are indispensable to any writer. Besides an up-to-date dictionary, you may want a dictionary of synonyms, a thesaurus, and even a book of famous quotations as a stimulus on days when you suffer from uninspired writing.

Newspapers and news magazines help you keep abreast of local, regional, state, national, and international news. Most newsrooms subscribe to local and state newspapers and at least one or two news magazines.

Newsroom radio monitors and television monitors to help keep tabs on the competition and as a check against your station's news coverage. Monitoring the competition keeps you alert to any stories you may have missed in the day's news coverage.

Name _____

Date _____

Exercise 4-A**Selecting the News (continued)**

5. Mrs. Jolene Smith was elected president of the Central Valley Chamber of Commerce last night. Mrs. Smith has been a member of the Chamber for 12 years. She is the first Black woman president in the 48-year history of the chamber. Mrs. Smith is owner of the Campus Book Shop. She and her husband, Stan, moved to Central Valley 15 years ago from Minneapolis. The 42-year-old Mrs. Smith has two children attending Central Valley University — Tom, a 19-year-old sophomore, and Ted, an 18-year-old freshman. She will be installed at the Chamber's annual banquet next Thursday at the Varsity Inn.
6. United Fund Executive Director Paul Simmons said today that Henry Brown will head this year's fund drive that begins in October. Goals for the new year will be set by the executive committee at its next meeting. Brown is president of the Union National Bank and a former state senator.

Name _____

Date _____

Exercise 4-B**Prioritizing the News (continued)**

5. Robert R. Rankin, 63, chairman of the board at Union National Bank, died at Central Valley Memorial Hospital early today of heart disease. Private funeral services will be held at Goodwin Funeral Home Wednesday. Rankin stepped down as bank president three months ago but retained his position as chairman of the board. He had planned to retire from that position at the end of this year.

6. Dedication activities for the new mall have been postponed because of the 12-inch snowstorm that hit Central Valley yesterday. They have been rescheduled for next Saturday.

Name _____

Date _____

Assignment 4-A

Choose a TV station you respect, and log all the stories broadcast in a normal half-hour news broadcast.

STATION YOU WATCHED: Channel _____
Call Letters _____

After completing the log of stories on the next page, determine the percentage and actual broadcast time of:

Hard news (percent) _____ %
(length) _____ minutes

Soft news (percent) _____ %
(length) _____ minutes

News you consider essential to know about:

(percent) _____ %
(length) _____ minutes

News that would affect the audience in some way, whether financially, physically or emotionally:

(percent) _____ %
(length) _____ minutes

Newscast Log

Story #	Length	Hard News (check)	Soft News (check)	Essential? (check)	Affects Audience?
1.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
6.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
7.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
8.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
9.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
10.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
11.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
12.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
13.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
14.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
15.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
16.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
17.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
18.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
19.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
20.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
21.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
22.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
23.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
24.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
25.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Name _____

Date _____

Assignment 4-B

Developing a Beat

Develop a campus reporting beat that you will visit at least once a week for four weeks. Each week, as a standing class assignment, write at least one story suitable for broadcast from the beat source you visit, and submit to your instructor the copy you generate. You will need to visit the beat source in advance, introduce yourself, and secure permission to stop by weekly. You should need only a few minutes each week to question your beat source about recent happenings, with perhaps another one-half to full hour to go through records and other documents as you research facts for your stories. Possible beat sources are listed below, with additional spaces provided for other beat sources in your area.

University Police Office

University College Deans

University Housing Office

Student Union Director

Panhellenic Council

Bookstore Manager

Student Government

Religious Organization(s)

Health Center

Research Center

School Governing Board

Vice President for Academic Affairs

Vice President for Business

Vice President for Student Affairs

President's Office

Physical Plant

Other (please identify)

If you have any interest in people to begin with, you can stick a pin in the map, go there, and find an interesting story.

Charles Kuralt, retired CBS news correspondent



Features



People fascinate people. We imitate them, listen in on their conversations, secretly admire their accomplishments and watch in awe at their goings-on. What is it about people that “tickles our fancy” so much? For one thing, we all share a sympathetic interest in what life does to us and for us. At newstime we don’t listen to the news and watch it only for the big stories of the day. We want to hear the “little happenings,” too — the scandal, the gossip, the humor in the lives of others. The news is full of stories every day about heroism, tragedy, greed, winning and losing — events that lead broadcast journalism so naturally to the feature story.

Features are stories about people and things that interest people. They are stories your audience can feel something about and become involved in — stories that entertain and inform. They help keep life in perspective by showing us how other people cope with life, and sometimes they remind us that life isn’t all bad news after all. The feature story is one means of imposing balance in newscasts that otherwise would be primarily about things gone wrong.



FEATURES VERSUS STRAIGHT NEWS STORIES

If you are alert to life, interested in people and the things they do, you can identify dozens of potential features. Most important is your ability to supply a fresh perspective to events that seem common and ordinary to the average person. The mark of any creative writer is to see the unusual in the commonplace. It is a capability that comes from learning all you can about everything in life, and from an intense interest in other people. Feature stories have come to be defined as soft, “non-news” stories about subjects such as lace-making in Denmark or the man down the road who still plows with mules. The true sense of a legitimate feature story, however, incorporates not only the concept of hard news stories told through people but also what New York Times writer Bill Carter calls the serious journalistic treatment of highly emotional, personal stories.

The Feature Story

The most memorable television feature reports reflect a skillful blend of both art and craft — that magical combination of words and pictures, sound and content. Generally, reports that contain most of the following elements will produce the strongest feature stories.

- An attitude that the reporter is not the story.
- A lead that instantly telegraphs the story to come.
- A script free of information that viewers already would know.
- Strong, natural sound to lend the story added realism.
- Historical perspective that defines the story's larger context.
- A point of view.
- A strong, central character or characters engaged in compelling action that is visual or picturesque.
- An element of the unexpected.
- Short soundbites (interviews or other shots of people talking on screen) that act to enhance and prove the story you are showing.
- No more than two or three main points in the story.
- A strong closing element that the story builds toward throughout its entirety.

Legitimate feature stories speak to subjects of universal interest and concern, and they allow broadcast audiences a way to care more about “the facts” than they would about a traditional fact-based story crafted solely from the reporter’s words. The story about an elderly New York woman who takes in heroin-addicted babies and helps minister to their mothers may say more about how a community addresses drug abuse and rehabilitation, and how ineffective government programs have become, than a facts-only story about the number of drug-addicted babies born each year in New York.

The difference in writing straight news and features is basically one of approach. The straight news story usually follows the four W’s approach: who, what, when, and where. Feature reporting also covers the four W’s, but often it deals also with the “why” of the story and tries to speak to the consequences of events. Consider first the following straight news story.

Figures released today by the federal government show that inflation rose another one and one-half percent last month, for an annual rate of 18 percent per year. Officials say the biggest inflationary gains occurred in housing costs, up nearly 14 percent since the beginning of the year. Officials say that at current rates of inflation, single-family dwellings soon may be priced beyond the incomes of most middle-class Americans.

Now compare the above treatment to that in the feature story below.

For the last four months, the James Casey family has been camped in this tent just outside Philadelphia. With four children to feed and more than a thousand dollars in unpaid bills . . . James Casey is among more than eight million unemployed Americans. Disaster overtook the Caseys in a series of measured steps. First, auto sales fell off at the assembly plant where Casey worked as a journeyman welder. That led to temporary layoffs. The Caseys fell behind in their house payments. Then serious illness struck their youngest child. The medical bills grew. And then one day, Casey opened an envelope at work. It contained his final check and a notice of termination. The Caseys lost their house, and each day they hope against hope that a new job will come along. For now their tent is home. They can afford no other, and at nightfall when the kerosene lamps are lit, the Caseys know the true meaning of what it is to hear that once again last month . . . inflation rose another one and one-half percent or 18 percent a year.

The basic difference in the two stories is one of approach. The first story has a standard news approach that tells about inflation in abstract figures. The second approach, the feature story, tries

to evoke some human emotion as it focuses on a single family to illustrate the consequences of inflation.

A CONVERSATION WITH NBC CORRESPONDENT JOHN LARSON¹

John Larson looks for the little details that many other journalists miss in their reporting, just one trait among many that give his work its singular style. In his first year with NBC, he received a national Emmy for “Dateline NBC’s” coverage of the Houston floods and also received a regional Emmy for his report on gun control. Prior to joining “Dateline NBC,” Larson worked as a general assignment reporter for KOMO, Seattle, Washington (1986–1994). While there, his reporting garnered many awards, including 13 regional Emmys for Best Reporter, Best Hard News Reporting, Best Breaking News Reporting, and Best Investigative Reporting, in addition to awards in other categories. He also received 1989 and 1991 UPI National Broadcast Awards for Best National Feature Reporting for his work at KOMO.



NBC News Correspondent
John Larson

Previously, Larson worked at KTUU-TV, Anchorage, Alaska, serving as News Director and Anchor (1983–1986), Assistant News Director and Reporter (1982–1983) and Anchor/Reporter (1980–1982). During that time he received a Cine Golden Eagle Award for Best Television Documentary of 1983 for his work on “Iditarod ‘83,” a chronicle of the 1,000-mile Alaskan trail sled dog race. Larson began his journalism career as a stringer for the Boston Globe in 1979. He graduated from Colgate University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1975.

In the following interview, Larson talks about television news and his approach to the reporting process.

Q *Some journalists drive by some of the stories you report without ever seeing them. What accounts for your ability to identify the often overlooked story and pinpoint its larger meanings?*

Larson The first step, of course, is that I look for them — the stories, and their larger meanings. I discovered years ago how some reporters use detail to tell powerful stories. John McPhee of *New Yorker Magazine*, or John Hart, formerly of NBC News, would use small, carefully chosen details to craft extraordinary stories. They frequently collected these details from everyday people, interviews other journalists might not take time to do. The result — their stories came alive with fresh, meaningful detail.

Following their example, I began looking inside my stories for telling details. I think of them as “small truths” — the things people say, a daughter’s nickname, the shape of a scar, the platoon’s motto — *anything* that might reflect greater meaning. While covering a story about an Army battalion leaving for the Gulf War, for example, KOMO photographer Mark Morache and I focused only on the soldiers’ final ten minutes with their families, specific conversations that

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spoke of duty and the price of patriotism. The same month, KOMO photographer Bill Strothman and I did a story about reactions to the Gulf War by listening to conversations in one elevator, during one trip to the lobby.

I began reporting in Anchorage, Alaska — a wonderful city, rich with stories. It was a small market, and I was assigned a lot of small stories: city hearings, local political races, fund-raisers, etcetera. I learned that when I pay attention to detail, small stories tell me much about who we are — our beliefs, frustrations, ambitions, values. I learned that small stories often illustrate bigger stories. Once I began looking for details and small truths, everything changed. I looked at stories differently. I looked for stories other reporters weren't looking for. I asked different questions. I looked at videotape and listened to recorded sound differently. I accepted that talented photographers and videotape editors hold keys to powerful television.

Q *Many of your stories and the people in them linger in the mind long after your reports are aired. What practices do you follow to make your stories so memorable?*

Larson First, I try to take time to have regular “What if?” conversations with people I respect. For example, I'll be talking with a colleague about covering government stories, and one of us will wonder, “What if we did a story about one piece of legislation from the point of view of the piece of paper? Who touches it? Who gets copies? Who changes it? Why?” Or we'll be talking about covering crime and we'll wonder, “What if we did a story about crime, not about the most immediate victims, but about people who live next door to crime scenes? What would that tell us about our city?” I've learned that memorable stories frequently begin at the moment of conception, before I ever make a phone call or shoot a frame. And they are frequently the product of “What if . . . ?” conversations with a friend, family member, editor, or photographer. Great ideas produce memorable stories.

I look for stories that are most likely to produce memorable moments on videotape, moments that will surprise the viewer or reveal a truth. A friend calls these moments “wow's” or “ah-ha's.” A spontaneous moment on tape can involve viewers more than a reporter's voice or narration. Memorable moments allow viewers to participate and experience the story for themselves.

I look for what I call, “echoes”: characters, details, small stories that suggest higher themes. For example, one child's confusion speaks to the greater fear shared by flood victims. The details of one man's nightmare show us a real effect of an arsonist. I like to think powerful stories bounce off the back wall of viewers' living rooms and echo in their mind.

Such echoes are seldom literal. They remind viewers of something special that they know to be true, a shared understanding. I look for universal themes such as aspiration, fear, pride, sorrow, arrogance, in even the most common assignments. We are all players in the one, great story of human existence. I try to remember the things we share, and look for them while I work.

I've found memorable stories are often the result of memorable effort. Good stories seem to happen when I try hard, or care a lot. I have my own values and sensibility — the things that make me who I am. When I bring them to work, my work gets better. When I get in touch with my own curiosity, outrage, insecurity, or joy, my work gets better. I do not mean biases. I mean passions, emotion, values.

Q *Some journalists and media observers dismiss the feature story as “soft” and anecdotal, even though it might provide serious journalistic treatment of a subject and address larger issues. What do you say to such critics?*

Larson Such media observers are not very observant. “Feature” is the *way* you tell a story, not the subject matter or topic. Feature does not mean soft. I’ve done investigative features, breaking features, general news features. Feature reporting is the process of applying basic story-telling techniques — character, setting, surprise, metaphor, plot — to daily news reports. For example, instead of reporting the effects of a flood by concentrating on statistics, a feature reporter will follow a family, moment by moment, as they return to their submerged neighborhood, allowing detail to help viewers understand the extent of suffering.

Q *What is your definition of the legitimate feature story?*

Larson I think legitimate feature stories share common characteristics. They are almost always about people — strong, central characters. They usually offer a sense of place. They bring special light or added depth to a topic. A legitimate feature should strike a familiar chord, or “echo,” with the viewer. A legitimate feature also has several levels. As NBC correspondent Bob Dotson has long said, good stories have a “story within a story.” It may, at first glance, be a simple story, but as the story unfolds, it is really about something deeper. A story about a homeless man trying to tune his radio becomes a story about confusion, mental illness, and losing one’s way. Features are *not* frivolous. If a story is poorly focused, or just plain silly, then it doesn’t matter what you call it. It’s just a poor story.

Q *In your opinion, what is the role of the feature report in television news?*

Larson Feature reporting — or as I would prefer to call it, story telling — is essential to television news. Story telling puts human faces in the news, not generalizations and stereotypes but, rather, unique and unmistakably human faces. Headlines, by definition, must highlight and simplify the news. Story telling delivers information and, in the process, reveals small truths about all of us. It offers pieces of life. News can be so dehumanizing! Feature reporting — story telling — stuffs humanity back into the headlines. It helps us understand each other better. It builds bridges between people. Feature reporting reminds us who we are and who we want to be.

Q *What kind of interview sources make the best television? The best journalism?*

Larson Good television and good journalism are not always the same thing. For the sake of clarification, let’s say “good television” means good production technique and the elements of good story telling: powerful pictures, rich sound, action, a dramatic story line, surprise, and strong delivery. Good production techniques can apply to a situation comedy, a movie of the week, or a news story. “Good journalism,” on the other hand, is about truth. It is penetrating, elevating, moving. It helps us understand ourselves, our community, our world. I believe good journalism brings us together, building bridges of understanding. The best interview sources for television, just like the best television news stories, reflect both good journalism and good production technique. The best interviews are therefore surprising, informative, active, telling, and true.

I prefer that people I interview *share* their experience with the viewer, rather than discuss or analyze it. People caught in the middle of a story unfolding before your eyes make terrific interviews: a flood victim piling sandbags on the river bank, a rancher rushing to secure his home in the path of a wildfire. The best interviews are immediate — allowing both the person being interviewed and the viewer to forget a television camera is present and tape is rolling.

Let me state here what should be obvious: Television reporters must first be good journalists. Whether they are good “producers” will determine how powerfully they tell their story. Spontaneity is key to good interviews, even in the most staged press conference. If you can’t control which people you interview or where you interview them, make sure your questions are fresh, sharp, engaging.

Q *Even when under deadline, how do you manage to avoid formula reporting (VO, bite, VO, standup close, or a variation thereof)?*

Larson I consciously work to avoid formulas and predictable reporting. Unfortunately, this often means I have to work harder. People use formulas because they generally work. Formulas get the basic job done with an acceptable amount of effort. However, formulas kill one of the most powerful story-telling tools I have — surprise. Here are some ways I try to avoid formula reporting:

I look for different perspectives and different “voices.” If other reporters are writing about what the city council said, I might write about what the person sitting in the back row of the city council heard. Jackie Shearer, who helped produce the memorable series on the American civil rights movement, “Eyes on the Prize,” once told me she looks for the least powerful person in the room, and tells his or her story. I try to avoid always telling stories from the official point of view, that of the police chief, the politician, the bureaucrat, or the manager. The most powerful stories are frequently told from the perspective of the least powerful person, the least powerful voice.

I remember what surprised me, and then write my story to allow viewers to experience the same surprise. For example, I once walked into a factory that had just gone out of business. It was eerie. I was surprised how all the giant machines were silent and the people were gone. So I wrote to that surprise, “The first thing you notice about the Rayonier Pulp Mill is the silence. . . .” Then I was silent long enough for viewers to be struck by the silence, too. The silence probably surprised them, made them curious, and helped them understand something important has been lost, just like it had done to me.

Instead of always organizing my stories by the “facts,” I sometimes organize them by pictures and sounds. Good pictures and sound can drive my writing decisions. A strong piece of videotape can focus and simplify my story immensely. This often helps me beat the most brutal deadline. The facts will still be there, but told a different way.

I try to take time, even under tight deadline, to ask for input. I ask photographers what they think the story is all about, or how they think the story should begin. I’ll ask the subjects of my story what they think the real story is, and I’m often surprised by their answers. I try to remain open. I’ll ask at the end of most interviews, “Is there anything I haven’t asked you about, anything you just want to say?” Interviewees sometimes try to avoid the question, but I usually don’t let them off the hook too easily.

Q *At what point in the reporting process do you begin to write your story?*

Larson No surprise here. I start at the very beginning. I begin thinking of words, sentences, observations, or anything that might help lead the viewer to the story just as soon as I understand my assignment. I call these lines “handles” — ways the viewer can become interested in the story, and hang on. Handles are striking observations, details, ironies. I search for handles throughout the story, and they help determine what to write.

I begin writing as soon as I can, even if it's just an opening line or a section I know won't change during the day. I try not to set my writing goals too high at first. It just blocks me. I found that once I get a few ideas down on paper, new and better ideas often follow. I rewrite throughout the day — as I meet new people, see a great picture, or learn something. I've learned not to stop writing until I have to.

Some of my best writing is in the edit bays, right on deadline. I may have already written a script, but then I see how pictures and sounds are falling together, and I know I need to rewrite something right now!

Q *Your writing shows restraint and discipline. What tips can you share to avoid overwriting, especially when dealing with abstract or complex issues?*

Larson First, find an editor. You *must* have a strong person to edit your writing. No exceptions. Before he moved to work at KATU in Portland, Gary Walker edited me expertly for years. So did Janice Evans, who left for KUTV in Salt Lake City, Utah. Good editors bring out your best work. If you tend toward overwriting, you may be protecting your favorite lines and soundbites too much. Be ruthless. Drop anything that isn't absolutely necessary. Remember, less is more. Good writing has a tendency to disappear, drawing attention to the story and not to itself. Avoid adjectives and adverbs when possible. Use nouns and verbs. And watch your verbs. Avoid the verb "to be" in any form. Search for stronger verbs. Tighten your story's focus by continually asking yourself, "What is this story really about?" "Who really are my strongest characters?" "How am I proving this story with sound and pictures?" Answer these questions, and your writing will be clearer, stronger. Poor writing is often the result of unfocused thinking, not poor writing skills. Keep paring your words and story line down until they are as lean as they can be. Again, be ruthless.

Q *Often, you let the pictures, sound, silence, or even other people do the talking. What is your philosophy about when to use the various writing instruments in television — words, images, sounds, silences, actions, and behaviors?*

Larson Pictures and sound — the argument of a farmer, a cry from the back of the room, the sound of wood splitting — are the bricks I use to build stories. My words are mortar. Properly used, pictures and sounds offer the most compelling television. When I first began reporting, I inadvertently began organizing my stories by video. At the time, I assumed everyone did it this way. I'd draw a vertical column of eight or so boxes in my notebook at the end of each day. Then I'd write the name of a specific piece of good video or sound in each box: an airplane landing, the sound of the wheels hitting the pavement, a soundbite with a pilot, and so on. Next I'd arrange my video boxes, searching for the best order of pictures to surprise my viewer, and demonstrate points I wanted to make in my story. I have since refined this practice somewhat, but I realize I was doing things backward — organizing my stories by video instead of by editorial content. Yet, this was giving me better stories than other reporters working the same story. I'd prioritize my video first, then decide how my facts could follow. I wouldn't omit facts, but I would let the video drive my decisions of how to tell my facts. Interview sound, natural sound, silence, and pictures all permit viewers to experience stories for themselves. I try to use words to guide viewers through their own experience of discovery.

In some ways, I think learning to write for television is about learning when to shut up. I try to be equally demanding of my words, sounds, soundbites, silences, and pictures. They all must

support or advance a story, or be cut. I also use sound to punctuate sentences. Sound can be used as an exclamation point (“Look out!”), comma (“On your mark,”), or ellipses (“I’ve always wondered...”). Some words of caution. Sound is not noise. I try to use only sound that advances my story line or proves a point. Every story has a voice, a story teller who takes the viewer by the hand. Usually it is the reporter/writer voice, but in “natural sound” stories, it is a main character’s voice. Whoever it is, I’m careful not to confuse or lose that voice by mixing it with too much sound or too many voices. This makes the viewer work too hard to follow the story.

Q *What criteria help you determine when to stop writing words?*

Larson Practically speaking, I rarely put more than two sentences together without breaking the sentences for sound. I always try to stop talking long enough to allow the sounds and pictures prove whatever I’m reporting. For example, if I’m writing about people waiting to buy tickets to a big game, I shut up and let them wait for a while. I also choose words to deliberately set up a rhythm, a cadence. I make sentences short when I want to build tension, immediacy. Just like a preacher, a reporter can use the rhythms of a sentence, of his or her own voice, of a soundbite, or the combination of all three to draw the viewer closer.

Q *Viewers often listen to television news rather than watch it. What do you do to help keep renewing the contract with viewers so they watch your reports rather than merely listen to them?*

Larson A reporter once told me, “I wish I could just say to the viewer, come here and look at this!” Well, why can’t you? I sometimes “call” viewers to the television set and challenge them. For example, I’ve written, “If you’ve ever wondered how an 80-year-old man picks himself up after losing everything he owns, take a minute and *listen . . .*,” and then I let him talk. I believe you sometimes must strongly encourage viewers to give you their full attention: “She hoped she would never see what you are about to see now . . .” or, “If you’ve listened to what Clara Wells has been saying, you can guess what happened next.” I’m careful not to overuse this kind of writing. If the sounds and pictures don’t pay off with a memorable point, I’ve abused it. Viewers and news directors don’t like that.

Q *When you arrive at a story, what is the first thing you do?*

Larson I search for a reason to care. I look for a character, a predicament, a quest, a telling detail that will help me and my viewers care. When I’m on the scene, I look for people who have strong stories to offer. I do not choose them because they are loud, colorful, or odd.

Once I find people who care, I try to be quiet and listen. I don’t interrupt them. I listen for what they are trying to accomplish, or trying to understand. It may be a personal goal or quest of some sort. They may be trying to fix a water hose, or get a message to someone. These small details can help me tell a good story. When I’m at a breaking news story — a fire, a shooting — I sometimes walk up to the front line, turn my back on the action, and look in the opposite direction. I often find my story in the people who are there helping, worrying, caught up in the action. Sometimes I’ll close my eyes and concentrate on sounds. I’ve never found a great story in the flames or body bags.

Q *What story elements do you look for throughout the reporting process?*

Larson I look for plot. I call it “quest” — any search, goal, task, or ambition I can build into a story line. This can be something as simple as someone hoping to get to the head of the line at a rock concert. I look for universal truths, “echoes,” or handles — details about the people in my stories that my viewers will recognize as true and will help them care. This can be something as serious as the saddest moment in a woman’s life, or something as simple as watching a child take his first steps while waiting in an airport. I look for spontaneous moments captured on tape. They are rarely what you set out to find, but they are exactly what happened and are often more interesting than your original story idea. Then I try to make sense of the moments, putting them in an order that helps people understand the greater meaning of the story, and allows them a sense of participation. And last, but definitely not least, I look for a strong character. I give viewers a reason to care about the character. A good character is more than a loud soundbite.

Q *When you cover stories, how do you put people at ease?*

Larson In general, I try to treat people the way I would want my own family treated. I say hello. I wipe my feet on the mat outside. I try to listen closely. I do my best to forget my deadline and remember that I’m a guest. I try to talk to them before the cameras arrive and, when possible, after the cameras leave. All of this helps put people at ease.

Sometimes I try to let the photographer interview the people in my stories. People who are not accustomed to being interviewed tend to freeze when a reporter shows up, wearing the suit and tie. They tend to relax while chatting with a photographer. The photographer and I will discuss questions beforehand, and then the photographer can ask the questions while shooting pictures of the subject doing something. Sometimes I’ll purposefully walk away, telling the subject to talk to the photographer while I do something else. It helps put people at ease.

I try to avoid sit-down interviews whenever possible. Sit-down interviews almost seem as though they were designed to make people uncomfortable. If I must do a sit-down interview, I try to be as casual as the situation allows, talking honestly with them, expecting honesty in return. Some people have asked me, “How do you get people to trust you?” The question itself makes me worry. I’m not sure I trust a reporter who thinks trust is a way to get things. The best way to get people to trust you, and I mean this, is to be *trust-worthy*. If you are worthy of the trust you ask people to place in you, they tend to sense it and open up. Are you willing to walk away from a story for the right reasons? If not, maybe you’re not to be trusted. Are you willing to withhold something from your viewers to protect them [the interviewees] or their family from undeserved pain? If you are, your interview subjects will begin to trust you. Take your reporter hat off and put your human being hat on. Then burn the reporter hat.

Q *What interview settings do you most prefer?*

Larson I prefer interviews that take place while people are doing something — the victim of a fire searching the ashes of her home, a Little League pitcher warming up before entering the game. When people are doing something familiar, they are more likely to be relaxed. Don’t wait for the big moment to start talking to people. Get a wireless mike on them as soon as you can. Often the best comments are made while everyone is getting ready for whatever is supposed to happen. Now that I’m working for “Dateline NBC,” I’m doing a lot of sit-down interviews. In sit-downs, I most like unexpected exchanges, unexpected discussions about off-topics, and moments that allow the real face of the interviewee to be seen.

Q *Documentary filmmakers have said one of their responsibilities is “stockpiling history.” What do you most hope to accomplish as a television journalist?*

Larson I'd like the body of my work to be filled with compelling, human stories, stories that engage viewers' hearts and minds. I hope my work breaks stereotypes and puts uniquely human faces in the news. I hope my work helps people care. I want to help keep the light burning.

Q *How do you want your stories to be remembered?*

Larson In Alaska, there's an impossible-to-pronounce Eskimo word, “Qavlunaq,” which, loosely translated, means “the movement of an unseen object.” It describes what happens when a great fish swims just below the surface of the water, out of sight but very real. Eskimo fishermen can sense a great fish's presence by reading subtle changes in the surface tension of the water.

I'd like my stories to be remembered as efforts to accurately cover the news of the day, and something more — to report the movements of the unseen objects, the great fish that swim just below the surface of daily news. Daily news stories are often stories of greater truths: greed, ambition, hope, desperation, humor, and faith. We all share these truths on one level or another. I hope I have paid attention well, like the fisherman, and have noticed what is of value. I want viewers to remember the people in my stories — their heart, backbone, humor. I'd like to be remembered as someone who was grateful for the work, respected the people he met, and loved the stories they offered.

TELLING THE FEATURE STORY

It's been said, “There are no dull subjects, only dull writers.” Good feature writing presupposes that you have an overwhelming interest in people. It is this interest in people — and sometimes in places and things — that allows you to write interesting stories about almost any subject. Feature writing by definition is a more personal form of journalism than most reporting, more intimate in its expression, which in turn allows you more freedom to decide story treatment, emphasis, and tone.

FEATURE WRITING HINTS

Few rules govern the style or form of features, but you will usually need some kind of angle if you are reporting about subjects not well known to your audience. The angle can be as simple as an emphasis on the unusual in which you give your audience a little surprise:

Jonathan David lives in Fargo, North Dakota. He's just starting third grade and says by Christmas he'll know how to read. Nothing unusual there, except that Jonathan is 81, and he says it's hard to run a business these days without some “book learning.”

Besides your angle, you will need a treatment appropriate for the subject — a way to establish the tone of your story. As a feature writer, you are a story teller, a “show-and-tell” expert who

During his tenure as *On the Road* reporter for CBS News, Charles Kuralt elevated the feature story to the status of art form. His secret was a blend of writing and pictures that formed extraordinary reports of commonplace events. In the following excerpt from an interview at CBS News in New York, Kuralt was asked about his ability to make commonplace events so memorable.



Photo Courtesy of CBS News

Charles Kuralt

It helps to be interested in the subject to begin with. I see the work of young reporters, occasionally, who I'm sure are more interested in how their questions will come out than in the subject. I think it helps not to come on like a big-time television personality. I think it's probably good advice to have more interest in the subject than you have in yourself when you go out to a job.

I've found that if you hem and haw a little bit in asking your question, maybe even half intentionally, it puts the fellow at ease, especially if he's somebody who's never been on television before. What you're trying to do, of course, is make him forget the necessary lights and cameras and microphones and all that, and just be himself. And he'll reach that state of grace a lot faster, of course, if he's not overwhelmed by this big shot standing there with a microphone in his hand.

I try to keep myself in the background. Often I don't even appear on camera. I think you should appear on camera once in a while to remind people what you look like even if you're not very prepossessing, as I am not, but I hate to see young reporters end their brief reports on camera. There's always a better ending than that. Some little moment with which you can leave the viewer to make him feel something about this story. He's going to feel nothing about this fellow standing on camera, ending his report and giving his name.

To the extent that you can in television, I think it's a good idea to keep yourself in the background — fulfill the old and honorable duty of the reporter, which is to be the person in the back of the room taking notes.

Excerpted and edited from an interview conducted by Kuralt's former associate radio news producer Don Kinney. Used with their permission.

draws in the audience by revealing, tidbit by tidbit, the fascinating story you have to tell. As a story teller, you can drop straight news style and concentrate on what some writers call the *anecdotal approach*. In your story lead, you set up interest and make the audience hungry to learn more of what you have to tell. Like the master story teller, you tease and delay (while still keeping your story simple and concise) until finally you drop the punchline.

When you avoid typical news style, your writing can become more conversational, more casual than usual. As your story unfolds, you reveal its various elements of human interest and emphasize them for maximum audience interest and understanding of the larger issue about which you are reporting.



A reporter reconfirms facts and gathers background information at a community meeting.

Name _____

Date _____

Assignment 5-A**Writing Feature Stories**

1. Research and write a feature story on one of the following topics, or a similar subject of your choice. If you choose your own topic, secure permission from your instructor before developing the story.

For your feature story, identify a strong central character who illuminates a larger issue. Find individuals who *build, strive, achieve, triumph, overcome*, or otherwise distinguish themselves through their accomplishments. Be certain the person is engaged in compelling, visual activities that help to illuminate the central message.

How streets are named in your community

In what ways people use laptop computers

How fax machines have affected mail and express delivery services

2. Identify and list ten potential feature stories in your community. Write a 1½-minute feature story for broadcast on at least two of the topics you have identified. Imagine you have your choice of visuals to work with.

Note: If you or other members of the class can shoot videotape and have access to equipment, arrange to shoot and edit a visual piece to accompany your script.

Arrange a day in class for presentation, discussion, and critique of your feature stories (and videotape).

3. Watch feature stories on television. Determine which subjects, visual elements, word combinations, and treatments make the best feature stories in your view. Discuss your findings in class.

To make this assignment more meaningful, invite a local reporter/photographer team to speak in class on story coverage, and discuss how the news team covers feature stories.

-
4. Get a county map of your area, select a location, go there, and dig out and write a story suitable for broadcast.

 5. Using the classified ads from your newspaper, identify at least three subjects that would be worthy of feature treatment. Using the classified ad as your starting point, write a feature story suitable for broadcast.

Note: To fulfill this assignment, you will have to use in-field research, using the ad as your starting point.

6. Compare the coverage of feature news on local stations with those on your favorite network news. Identify common types of stories found on network news versus local news broadcasts. Discuss your findings in class, along with a general discussion of the value of feature material in local news broadcasts.

Name _____

Date _____

Exercise 5-B**Kicker**

Write a kicker (last story of the newscast that leaves the audience smiling) from the following facts:

It's bad enough, maybe, for anyone to be named "Pigg," but it is especially difficult for police officer Roland L. Pigg of Paducah, Kentucky. After much agonizing and a lot of trouble, Pigg has legally changed his last name to "Page." "People would either hang up or giggle when I would answer the phone at headquarters," he said, "because I would say, 'Hello, this is Officer Pigg.'" Someday, Page said, he would like to be chief of police, and he asked how it would sound walking up to people and announcing, "Hello, there, I'm Chief Pigg of Paducah." He said it would sound silly.

(WRITE YOUR STORY HERE IN BROADCAST STYLE)

Name _____

Date _____

Exercise 5-C**Feature Writing**

First write a straight news lead for each set of facts. Then write a feature lead. Finally, write a feature story for each set of facts.

1. Tim Parsons, 5-year-old boy, saw a squirrel in his back yard this morning about 8:30. He chased the squirrel up his large pecan tree. Tim followed the squirrel as far as he could up the tree, but the squirrel leaped into another tree in the neighbor's yard. Tim had gone so far that he was stuck. Firefighters were called at 9:45 a.m. to come get Tim out of the tree. Tim's mother and father were at work, but a babysitter, Ellen Ditmer, called the firefighters when she couldn't get him out of the tree.

2. Police received a call yesterday to retrieve a stray pig. Mrs. Rose Watkins told police that she was watering her front lawn when a pig appeared. When police arrived, however, the pig had gone. Two people, Walt and Theresa Ray, had seen it heading for Central Ave. about LaPorte St. Three squad cars were summoned to find the pig. About two hours later Patrolman Tom C. Riley spotted the pig going into a vacant lot. He chased it on foot, tried to tackle it, but ended up in the dirt. Two other patrolmen helped, and Riley finally cornered it near the fence in the next yard. Riley suffered minor lacerations and a bruised thigh. The owner, E. R. Rucker, was ticketed for letting a nondomestic animal run free in the city. The pig had slipped out an open gate at the Rucker house.

Name _____

Date _____

Exercise 5-C**Feature Writing (continued)**

3. An accident at 1726 E. Roseberry caused approximately \$21,000 damage to a service station and two parked cars. The Valley View Mobil Station was damaged when Terry McClendon of 4050 Kingsville Ave. drove away from the station's gas pumps and caught the loop of a hose on the front bumper of her car, pulling the gas pump over and rupturing the gas pipes. Electrical wires also were pulled loose, causing a fire that spread to three other pumps and a nearby car of station manager Dale Philpot. Heat from the fire also caused heat damage to the car of Ray Reguso. Damage to the station was estimated at \$13,000, and to the Philpot car of \$2,500, and \$500 to Reguso's vehicle.

4. More than 59,000 diamonds have been taken from North America's only diamond mine in Murfreesboro, Arkansas, since the first stone was found in 1906. The first stone was found by John Huddleston, who owned the 78-acre field. Finders are keepers at the state park that is now on the site. It was purchased by the State in 1972 after several unsuccessful attempts at commercial mining. Finds have included the 40.42-carat Uncle Sam, the 34.25-carat Star of Murfreesboro, and the 15.25-carat Star of Arkansas.

Name _____

Date _____

Exercise 5-C**Feature Writing (continued)**

5. *House and Home* magazine reports that sale of homes to singles is on the rise. Singles want a tax break and a chance to build equity. The magazine indicates young singles are more mature than those of the early 1980s, who flocked to singles-only apartments. Figures indicate a 34 percent increase in buying among this segment of the population today over ten years ago.

BROADCAST NEWS COVERAGE

6 Broadcast News Organization

7 Art and Craft of Interviews

8 Soundbites

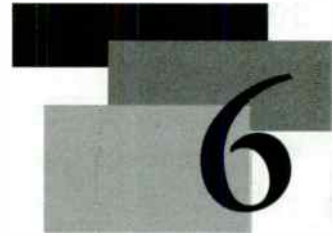
9 Electronic News Gathering

Gathering news is the principal task of the news department. The actual news show is the culmination of efforts by journalists at the station and around the world. Part Two of this book provides a basic organizational structure to help you understand where each job fits into the final newscast production. Who writes the news the anchor delivers on the evening news? Who decides what stories to use and in what order they will appear? Who decides what network news feed stories will be used? These are simple organizational questions that can help you understand where you fit into broadcast journalism and how the process works. The major task of the reporter is news gathering. Thus, two chapters are devoted to skill-oriented material that will help you become a more proficient news gatherer. Another gives tips on interviewing, and the fourth discusses how to use soundbites.



The best television news people in the country are journalists. We've gone through two . . . people who were fantastic voicers . . . but didn't know a damn thing about news . . . and the viewers knew it.

Albuquerque TV Newsman, Cliff Nicholson



Broadcast News Organization



Local market radio and television stations in the United States vary in the extreme from one-person news departments to sophisticated operations with annual budgets of \$30 million or more. Almost all stations of any size subscribe to one news service, and sometimes as many as two or three separate services. If the station uses only one news service, it may be a tip or stringer service. A *tip hotline* may invite listeners to call in story tips for special recognition or a small payment. *Stringers* report stories and may act as photographers, even though they're not employed by the station. Stringers are paid for each story they're asked to generate, or in the case of stories produced on speculation, payment is made only if the story is aired. Although the range of jobs varies greatly from station to station, the most frequently encountered positions in broadcast journalism are somewhat similar in the medium- to large-market operations.

JOBS IN BROADCAST JOURNALISM

News Director (or News Manager)

On the local level, the position of news director is the highest in the broadcast news field. The news director must be a person with extensive news experience, administrative ability, and supervisory experience. The news director, usually responsible to the station manager or program director, is in charge of the entire news operation. In the smaller markets the news director may be called on occasionally as an "on-air" personality. Most stations, however, discourage on-air performances because the responsibilities call more for personnel management and policy decisions than news reporting and presentation otherwise might allow. This position demands public relations ability, as the news director frequently represents the station at large, attending public functions, answering complaints about news coverage, or simply being a "personality" within the community.



Many support personnel work behind the scenes although the audience never sees them.

Executive Producer

The executive producer is usually the number-two person in a news department. The “E.P.,” as this person often is called, normally is in charge of the on-air look of the newscasts, with supervisory responsibilities over all the individual newscast producers, of which one usually is assigned to each newscast the newsroom presents. The E.P. typically has substantial experience as a newscast producer and specializes in visualization of the day’s events. This person must be highly skilled in graphic technology, video presentation, and television story conceptualization, as well as blocking and executing complicated newscast programming.

News Producer

The news producer is responsible for the total look of a newscast, from content to the number of items, story line-up, commercial breaks, timing and the most effective forms of story presentation. The job requires expert knowledge of broadcast news and production techniques and requires working with the newscasters, reporters, writers, camera operators, editors, and directors.

News caster

The newscaster is the on-air personality who presents news to the audience. Some newscasters are little more than announcers who read prepared news scripts, although in many newsrooms the newscaster is a working journalist who helps write and prepare the news show. The newscaster, also called “talent” or “anchor person,” often edits news copy, writes and rewrites stories. The way in which newscasters are used in the newsroom is highly variable. Some are permitted little editorial voice and others are central to the coverage and presentation decisions of the news operation throughout the day. Some are merely readers whose sole function is as a presenter. Others are truly anchors — solid journalists who also happen to be excellent on-air personalities. The job varies greatly from one station to the next but usually is among the highest paid.

Assignment Editor

The assignment editor covers everything that happens. In touch with field crews by two-way radio or cell phones, the assignment editor orchestrates coverage of the day’s news. Known at some stations as the electronic news coordinator, this person assigns stories to reporters and photographers, lines up interviews, and handles news calls. Telephones ring, monitors blare with exchanges between local police, fire and sheriff’s officials, and wire machines belch out copy. In addition, the editor must study local newspapers, monitor the competition, deal with public relations practitioners with story ideas, create a news file, and read the mail — all to find a new story or a different angle to a story.

In the midst of chaos, the assignment editor makes snap decisions about which stories of the day will be covered and by whom. Throughout the day the assignment editor keeps tabs on which stories have been covered, which are yet to be assigned, and which are in the process of being covered. Obviously, the job demands expert knowledge of news and logistics. An assignment editor from Chattanooga summed up his job by asking:

Who bears the greatest responsibility for a story, especially a major story, being missed? Upon whose news judgment does the six o’clock news depend the most? Who works with the reporters the most? Who must be the most organized staffer in the newsroom? Who gets the least amount of public exposure? And whose job is the least transferable from market to market?¹

Reporter

The reporter writes news and reports it, so a thorough understanding of broadcast news is essential for this position. Much of the time, the reporter gathers and reports news from the field in the form of “voicers” (stories recorded for later broadcast or voiced reports over videotape) and “stand-ups” (on-camera reports delivered live from the field or recorded on videotape for later broadcast). Some stations employ special assignment reporters who specialize primarily in one area of the news — science, government, medicine — and others rely primarily on general assignment reporters, people who are assigned to cover the news, whatever it may be, where it happens, and whenever it

happens. The beat reporter follows a fixed routine each week covering police headquarters, district court, the sheriff's office, city council, and the planning and zoning commission.

Photographer

The news photographer shoots video and may operate live ENG equipment (see description of ENG equipment later). At small stations, this person writes and reports news as well, but generally is restricted from such activity in union markets. The position requires extensive knowledge of electronic and video equipment, sound recording, lighting techniques, news values, and creative editing. Some news photographers like to be called "photojournalists," "videojournalists," or "videographers." Regardless of the trendiness of the title, this person captures the visual images used in television news. The essential skills of photography in terms of shot composition, framing, and sequencing are the same regardless of the medium used to store those images.

Writer

Although reporters and newscasters do much of the writing for newscasts, few large operations can do without behind-the-scenes writers to help prepare the show. The news writer, also frequently called an "associate producer," is involved with everything from headlines to scripts, from wire copy to original feature material. At other stations, newscast producers commonly write much of the news show including story teasers, headlines, hand-offs, lead-ins to prerecorded video news packages, not to mention many of the news stories in a typical newscast. The writer also assembles finished reports from many sources: wire copy, telephone interviews, still pictures, and VTR. In radio, the biggest demand for writers comes from stations that offer news 24 hours a day. In television, writers are most in demand at stations that originate from one hour to an hour and a half or more of news each day. Good writers tend to make good reporters and, assuming they understand the complexities of broadcast news production, may struggle through the ranks to become reporters and newscasters.

ENG Coordinator

The ENG (electronic news gathering) coordinator has evolved since the development of portable television equipment that fostered "live" broadcasting from the scene of news events. When live broadcasting is done with remote trucks or vans, small microwave links must be established. It is a complicated and sometimes time-consuming task that requires considerable television engineering knowledge and skill, as well as an appreciation for news coverage demands. Sometimes the ENG coordinator is a former assignment editor or photographer, and other times an engineering or production person who has gravitated toward the newsroom in career development. The ENG coordinator works with the assignment editor and newscast producer to get the right equipment positioned at the right place at the right time. Larger newsrooms usually have this specialist on staff to relieve the assignment editor and newscast producer from yet another whole set of complicated problems to resolve along with their regular news coverage responsibilities. In small operations the job often is layered on top of the other responsibilities. ENG is the topic of Chapter 9.

Videotape Editor

Because television by its nature is visual, it eats up large quantities of videotape stories, all of which must be edited. The VTR editor occupies a key position, as stories brought in from the field must be edited into polished, professional presentations. The job requires specialized knowledge of picture and sound editing.

RELATED JOBS

Other positions related to production of the daily newscast include:

- newsroom secretary: handles incoming calls, general correspondence and clerical duties.
- graphic artist: prepares graphics and other visuals to be used in the newscast.
- sound person: records and monitors sound during in-field videotaping and audio recording.
- lighting person: responsible for lighting news subjects and news events in the field.
- engineer for live, in-field production: assures integrity of broadcast transmission signals during live broadcasts of news events, or direct transmission of signals back to station for recording and later playback.
- field producer: accompanies tape crews and reporters to oversee production of in-field news coverage.
- researcher: responsible for researching files, old photographs, film morgues, etc., during generation of news stories, special reports and documentaries.

Other jobs that are related to newscast production but may not require knowledge of broadcast journalism include:

- studio floor director
- technical director
- audio and video control
- stage manager (also known as floor director)
- set carpenter
- electrician
- studio camera operator

Figure 6-1 summarizes the overall organization of a typical broadcast station.

NOTES

1. Gene Pinder, "Assignment Editor is One Tough Position," RTNDA Intercom 3, 12 (June 1986), p. 2.

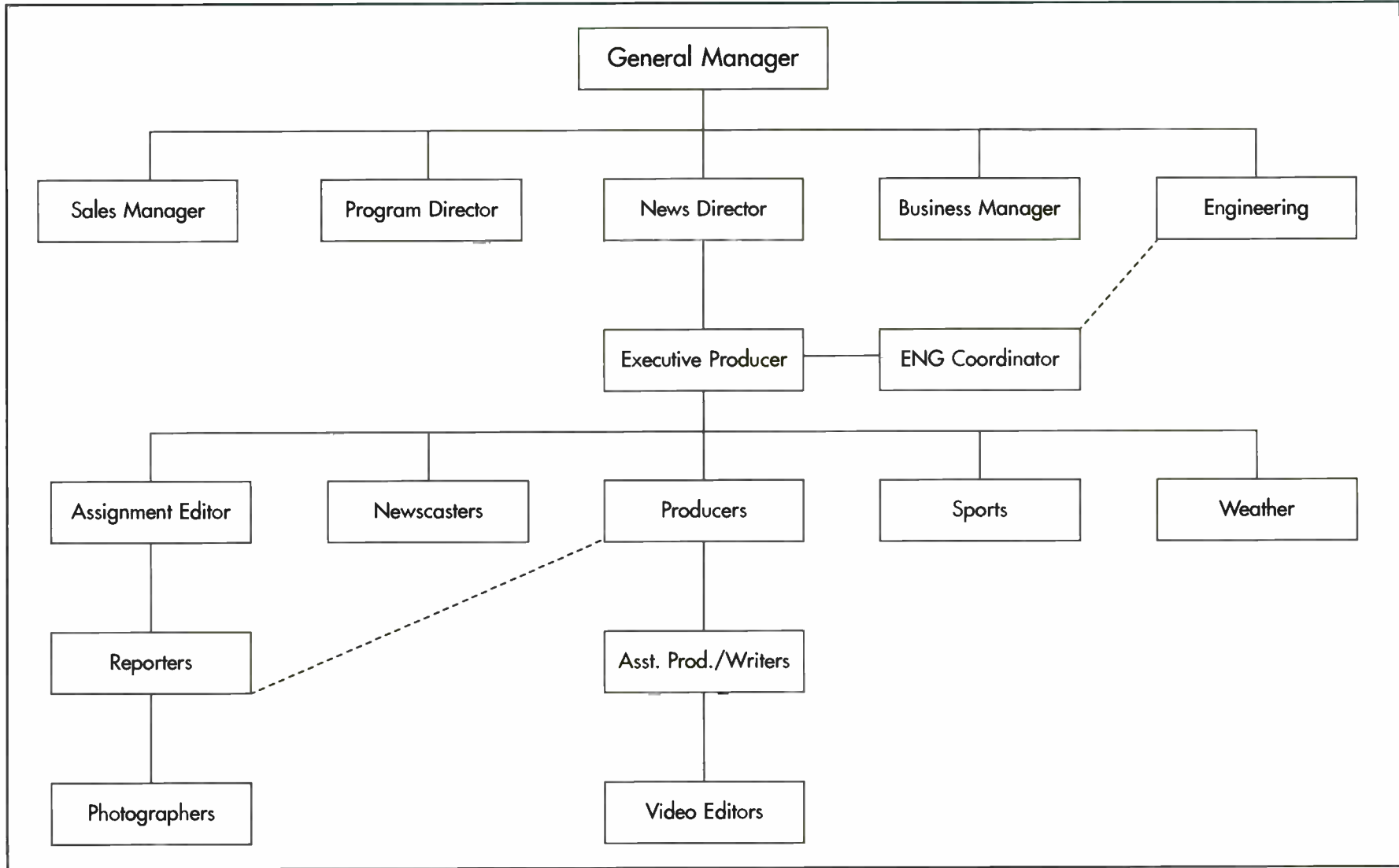


FIGURE 6-1. Typical organizational chart of broadcast station and news department.

Name _____

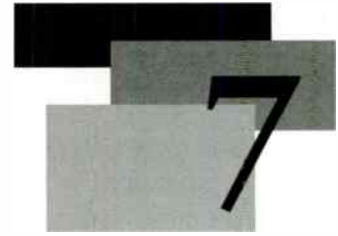
Date _____

Assignment 6-A

1. Interview a broadcast journalist who holds the type of job you're most interested in learning. Find out how that person became interested in broadcasting and rose to the position he or she now holds. Share pertinent comments with others in class discussion or record the interview for playback in class.
2. Arrange to visit a radio newsroom to observe newsroom organization, typical staff duties, and the delivery of an on-air broadcast. During your visit you may wish to question working journalists about their job responsibilities and seek advice about obtaining a job in broadcast news. Prepare a report to share with the rest of your class.
3. As a class project, arrange to tour newsroom facilities at a local television station. Many stations prefer to conduct tours in the late evening when most of the news program has been put together. Arrange to watch the actual news broadcast and talk with news personnel about job duties, the job market, and other topics of interest to you.

The trick is to conduct it in such a way the person forgets it's an interview and has a conversation.

Bill Moyers, CBS Television



Art and Craft of Interviews



Interviews are such an everyday part of broadcast journalism that we often take them for granted, yet they represent an important way to spice up broadcast news with life and dimension. The interview is a reliable way to improve viewer and listener interest in your newscast, provided it is honest, spontaneous, and conversational. As with most actualities, the best interviews are spontaneous, never stilted, rehearsed, or contrived.

In the range from simple entertainment to serious discussions, the most frequently heard interviews are brief news or spot interviews. Throughout your career as a broadcast journalist, you no doubt will conduct most forms of the interview at one time or another. Some interviews, for example, provide a vehicle through which eyewitnesses can describe in their own words and emotions the drama of hard news events. Someone who has just witnessed a helicopter crash or escaped from a burning apartment house has a vitality of description few reporters could ever match without becoming personally involved in the story.

Interviews may expose the sincerity or falseness of political figures as they speak their opinions about important social issues. Interviews can entertain and inform us with intimate glimpses of celebrities being themselves, children's first frightened confrontations with department store Santa Clauses, and talks with experts on every subject from the future of solar energy to parapsychology. Interviews are powerful tools that contribute to broadcast news much of its immediacy, mood, essential detail, expert interpretation of important events, and the kinds of entertainment values that give zest to radio and television communication.



THE INTERVIEWER

Good interviewing takes practice, sometimes years of it. The Bill Moyers, Ted Koppels, and Barbara Walters of the world work hard at developing and maintaining their interview skills. If

you want to become a skilled interviewer — the person who asks the right question at the right time, who consistently asks insightful questions, a journalist who can probe for honest answers without offending — you will have to practice the art of interviewing. All prerequisites for successful interviews presuppose that you come to the occasion thoroughly prepared, that you know everything you can about the interviewee and the subject at hand. Few things kill an interview more quickly than an interviewer who obviously is not knowledgeable or interested in the subject at hand.

BASICS OF GOOD INTERVIEWS

When you conduct an interview, you are the mind and mouthpiece of your collective audience. You are responsible for asking questions your audience would ask if given the opportunity, seeking clarification if the interviewee wanders, keeping the interview an exchange of information instead of a conveyor belt of information from special interests (politicians seem to be especially adept at delivering public relations material to your audiences in hard news form), and pacing the interview so it builds to a satisfying conclusion.

Interviewing is an art that builds upon another art, the art of listening. Many people, even so-called professional interviewers, are so intent upon formulating their next question that they fail to hear what the interviewee is saying. Honest responses to honest questions are the heart of spontaneous interviews. You can kill the life of any interview quickly by concentrating so intently on your next question that you fail to hear.

Broadcast journalists seldom have time or sufficient reason to write down every question they intend to ask. A better method is to list on a note pad, by subject area, topics you'd like to cover in the interview. Some journalists write down a few key words or the four or five most important questions they intend to ask. They store other questions or subject areas in the back of their mind in case the interview falters or fails to develop as they anticipate. Regardless of your method, questions can never be prepared totally because interviews often develop spontaneously. The attentive interviewer capitalizes on this situation.

Consider, for instance, an interview with a major oil company executive about rising energy costs. The interview is to center on the price of gasoline, but as you will notice, the subject gradually becomes federal energy policy.

Interviewer: *What will happen to the price of gasoline over the next five- to ten-year period?*

Executive: Well, I think the price can be well over two dollars a gallon by 2000. As prices move up above two dollars, you will see an enormous impact on the average American family, because gasoline then becomes the major factor in the family budget.

Interviewer: *How major?*

Executive: Already people are spending more on the family car, out of their total budget, than on food, and this really appalls me.

Interviewer: *Some people might think that oil interests would be delighted over the prospect of an ever greater share of America's disposable income.*

Executive: That's not the point. If energy is truly short, as I believe it is, we have two alternatives to control its use. One is laws and regulations that control cars — force

people to use more fuel-efficient cars. The other is not to try to effect fuel savings with laws and regulations; instead, let prices increase radically so people have to control their own rates of consumption. This approach in effect creates voluntary rationing. Oil profits then would dip slightly or stay about the same, assuming gasoline use declines below current levels.

Interviewer: *Still, you might enjoy current levels of profit from fewer sales. Doesn't that amount to higher profits just as it would if you were to increase sales and, therefore, profits?*

Executive: No. We need those profits to invest in new explorations, to find new energy reserves, and we need profits, too, so we can research new energy alternatives.

Interviewer: *You mention energy alternatives. What specifically?*

Executive: In Nebraska they have a program to mix 10 percent alcohol, made from corn, in their gasoline mix. If this works, they could go to 100 percent. Now you can run cars on potatoes, on corn, or coal, and these things are going to be powering automobiles in the form of liquid fuel after oil has become so expensive it will be very difficult to continue using conventional oil.

Interviewer: *To what extent can oil companies become involved in such research?*

Executive: To the extent that we're allowed to — I should say encouraged to — by the federal government. And it's in this area where I think the federal energy program falls short. We need a greater commitment to the development and maturation of alternative fuel processes.

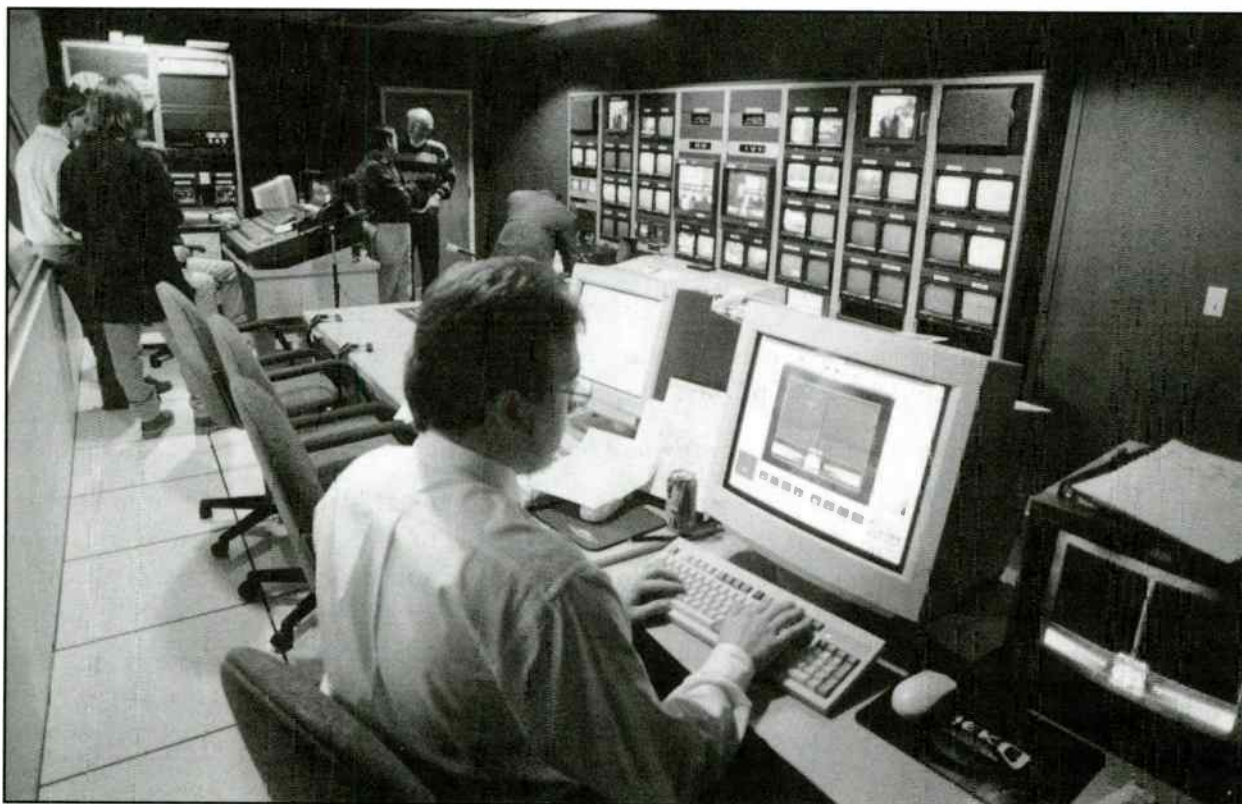
Interviewer: *In your view, how likely is such a commitment by the federal government?*

Executive: I'm discouraged by the lack of foresight we see today in Washington. Currently, in my view, the emphasis is misplaced, with too much talk about increased oil imports, more drilling for oil around the world. With oil, we're always going to experience high prices, shortages, and politics. Especially politics, as the oil-rich nations use oil to manipulate concessions from those countries who use it the most. About these things it seems sometimes that Congress lacks foresight, and previous administrations haven't done all they could to ease the problem.

The interviewer helped this discussion develop spontaneously by listening carefully to the oil executive's responses and guiding the interview in directions in which it would develop naturally. The interviewer followed up on the oblique reference to new energy alternatives, a subject peripheral to the original intent of the interview, and gradually led the discussion into federal energy policy. Several portions of the interview could be used on the air — anything from the future cost of gasoline to likely energy alternatives in the years ahead.

TOUGH QUESTIONING

Only once did the interviewer approach the role of devil's advocate with the question, "Some people might think that oil interests would be delighted over the prospect of an ever greater share



Control room personnel make last minute changes prior to airtime.

of America's disposable income." Such questions, though sometimes warranted if the interviewee is especially reticent about responding to controversial subject matter, may offend the audience if asked without just cause. The tough questioning should be saved for interviewees who intentionally try to change the subject or who talk nonstop to avoid the subject. When warranted, the tough question works wonders: "Twice you've avoided answering the question, Mr. Mayor. Did you ever accept bribes from bail bondsmen?" If silence is the ensuing answer, it can be more eloquent than words.

TIPS FOR INTERVIEWING

The following are guidelines for questioning and interviewing. No matter what the topic, they constitute sound advice.

Avoid "yes and no" and leading questions. Questions that require only a simple "yes" or "no" as the answer impart little real information to your audience. And replace leading questions that begin with "Do you think . . .," "Were you scared . . .," "Are you against . . ." with questions that begin with "Why?" or "What do you mean . . ." Questions that require an articulated response from the interviewee almost always result in the strongest interviews. A related problem is demonstrated by the interviewer who asks and answers each and every question. For example: "Chief Walters, we know you've had a tough time maintaining discipline among your officers. We know all the steps you've taken to reinstitute good morale, but the feeling among most people in the community seems to be that your changes have come too late to do any good. Based on those

facts, don't you think you should resign?" This litany tends to make the interviewee hostile, which in turn makes your audience hostile toward you and your newscast. Questions that require an articulate response from the interviewee result in the strongest interviews.

Don't fall into the trap of saying "I see" or "uh-huh" after each response from the interviewee. These comments may be an honest attempt to show interviewees that you understand what they are saying, but too often they imply to your audience that you agree with whatever the interviewees are saying. Imagine your embarrassment if someone were to comment during an interview, "The space program was one of the biggest government farces of all time," and your answer, unthinkingly, was, "I see" or "uh-huh." The same advice applies to head nodding on videotape or during live broadcasts. Better that you bite your tongue than imply agreement.

Don't ask two-part questions. Another troublemaker in interviews is the two-part question: "First, sir, is it true that Westinghouse plans to double its plant facilities within the next four years at the Rocky Mountain site, and second, is it true that profits have fallen over the past year from just over 12 percent on gross sales to a little more than 7 percent?" If your interviewee doesn't forget one or both parts of a double-barreled question, your audience almost certainly will.

Avoid obvious questions. An example of an obvious question is: "Senator Kennedy, you're a member of the Democratic Party, are you not?"

Avoid questions of bad taste. Some maniacal impulse among a few radio and television journalists has resulted over the years in the scandalous tactic of asking questions in obviously poor taste of accident and disaster victims who are still in shock. Examples are: "How did you feel after you learned your son had drowned?" and "Did you fear for your life when the high-voltage current passed through your body?"

Near Lenexa, Kansas, when a mother was returning home from the skating rink with a carload of children, the car was struck by a train. All but one passenger, a girl of about 13, were killed in the accident and a TV crew was dispatched to the scene. When the crew arrived, the girl had been taken to a nearby hospital and the news director ordered an interview with the girl at the hospital's emergency room. The girl, still in shock, related through her tears circumstances that surrounded the accident: "Mom came to the railroad track. The warning signals were flashing, but us kids were making so much noise she didn't notice the train. We screamed out, 'Mom, there's a train!' Then the train hit us, and I don't know what happened after that." Should the girl have been interviewed? Did her response add substantially to the routine information contained in the report accompanying film of the aftermath? Only your conscience can provide that answer, but to ask the girl to relate details about the accident is going one step too far.

Be courteous. First you can help put the other person at ease by appearing relaxed yourself. You should maintain constant eye contact while the other person is talking and minimize the intimidating effects of microphones and other broadcast hardware whenever possible. Sticking a microphone into a person's face tends to make the person ill at ease. Warm up the interviewees, help them relax, and be honestly interested in what they say. The interview is a conversational discussion, and it demands that you practice hospitality just as you would as a guest in someone's home. In interviewing, as in most other endeavors, courtesy should be the rule.

LIVE INTERVIEWS

The live interview provides interest and mood available from no other source. Each day the hundreds of people who are interviewed for television news tell their stories with more enthusiasm, conviction, and drama than journalists could ever accomplish through written, third-person

accounts read on camera. It is one thing to hear the reporter's account of an air disaster and quite another to hear an observer's still strong impressions of a mid-air collision. Always the best interviews do more than deliver facts. They provide the credibility, mood, vivid details, and unexpected insights that help give news reports authenticity and vitality.

Typical Problems

Since the advent of live television news, the interview has taken on a new and sometimes unwarranted function: It is used not only to enhance live reports, but also sometimes substitutes for the story itself. Reporters who have just arrived on the scene with instructions to "go live immediately" seldom have time to research the event adequately and prepare a reasoned report. They are forced instead to rely on a few seconds of on-camera introduction to the event, an interview that forms the main body of the report, then a few seconds of on-camera close, in which the implication is, "There you have it, folks."

In reality what the folks at home receive is not a report but a headline service that contains hurried interviews with one or two people who give their sometimes inexact versions of what happened. The approach works at times, but often it fails because the interview, at its best, never stands alone as the entire story. In its finest form, the interview proves the rest of the story and helps the report achieve at least the illusion of immediacy.

The Reporter is Not the Story

Over time the television news personality, whether anchor person or field reporter, inescapably assumes a certain "star quality." Seen frequently on television, in promotional advertisements, and on billboards around the city, the reporter becomes a public figure. Instant public recognition becomes a feature of everyday life that is established further by station surveys of how well the reporter is recognized in the television market and how well viewers like the reporter's on-air personality.

As subjects of so much attention, on-air reporters may begin to think their presence on camera is the story. Journalists who fall victim to this syndrome refuse to let the story tell itself. They dominate interviews with long-winded questions, appear on screen more frequently than necessary, and fail, in the end, to take advantage of television's strongest assets: strong visuals, good natural sound, and meaningful interviews. Even though television reporters can't help but become personalities, their first obligation is to remain competent journalists. The best journalists know when to step aside and let the story tell itself.

The Soundbite Versus the Talking Head

A soundbite (the topic of Chapter 8) is the point of emphasis that proves the story and what's been said about it both visually and in the reporter's narrative. Frequently the soundbite is nothing more than that little moment of drama that elevates the story into a believable, interesting and sometimes more dramatic report. In contrast, a talking head is radio with the picture of a moving mouth that spouts meaningless information. It is the interview that substitutes for the story and induces droopy eyelids in viewers. Journalists who scorn the talking head argue that because television is visual, it should show the news, not merely tell it. Abstract or complex ideas, however, cannot always be visualized, and the rush to keep television news visual often deprives viewers of the critical statement or the complex explanation from a knowledgeable expert. When these

interviews are used, they are kept to minimum length so as not to confuse or bore viewers. The argument is that television (and its viewers) prefers the dramatic and that print, not television, is the best way to deliver complex facts and ideas.

To a great extent that point of view is valid but often is espoused by journalists who consider all interviews to be mere “talking heads.” A telling distinction exists between the so-called talking head and a legitimate soundbite, a distinction attributed to former CBS news executive Fred Friendly. He told the story of government hearings at which learned experts testified on the maximum weight that postal workers would be allowed to carry on their daily rounds. The hearings droned on until a mail carrier stepped to the microphone to testify why the weight of his daily loads should be reduced. “I’ll tell you why it matters,” testified the mail carrier. “What matters is Tuesday. Tuesday is the day I gotta climb 13 floors with 122 pounds on my back, because Tuesday is the day *Life* magazine comes.” The point is made, and the story enhanced all because this brief moment of sound put the entire hearing and the issues that surrounded it into perspective.

Challenges of the Live Interview

Among the most difficult interview forms, the two-minute live interview, is something of a juggling act. The reporter must elicit a statement, in the brief time available, that really says something about the story and be able to bring the interview to a smooth close in the allotted time. The longer the interview, the easier it is to zero in on subject matter and to elicit meaningful responses from the interviewee.

“On the types of stories I cover,” says NBC news correspondent Bob Dotson, “I can burn 40 minutes of tape if I have to. The person I interview knows I will pick out the meaningful responses so he can tell me now or he can tell me later.”

In live television, by contrast, the people who are the most important newsmakers often have become television performers over the years. They know the clock is in their favor, and they can talk for three

How to Control the Live Interview

The reporter who conducts live interviews must elicit meaningful information in the brief time available (often a minute or less), yet maintain control of the interview’s development, and bring the interview to a smooth close on air. To meet the challenge, on-air journalists use a variety of techniques.

- Prior to on-air broadcast, the person to be interviewed can be given a predetermined cue that signals the interview must end within 15 seconds. The cue may be something as simple as a touch on the knee (off camera) or a prior cue to the interviewee: “When I ask you this question, that will be the end of the interview.”
- Some interviewees will talk nonstop unless the interviewer finds some way to cut them off. When these people stop to breathe, the interviewer should be ready to jump in with a new question. In normal conversation the interruption might be considered rude. On television the same interruption may be barely noticeable to home viewers.
- In extreme cases interviewees may talk right over a question as the reporter tries to move the interview in a new direction. To regain control, the interviewer’s only recourse is to become more assertive and jump right back into the interview with a question that begins something to the effect, “Forgive me, but . . .”
- A smooth exit line, thought out in advance, can bring the live interview to a smooth close. The exit line may be something as simple as, “Dr. Steele, thank you very much,” as the reporter takes a step away from the interviewee and faces the camera to wrap up the story from the scene. The exit line also can serve as a pre-arranged signal for the sound person to cut the interviewee’s microphone and for the camera operator to zoom to a tight shot of the reporter, eliminating the interviewee from screen.

minutes and still not give meaningful answers to the reporter's questions. Reporters who conduct live interviews must have the background necessary to make live television news interesting and meaningful. They must be able to meet people easily and have the capacity to help interviewees forget the pressure of the moment. They must be instant students of people and, regardless of the situation, they must be unflappable. They also must have a certain amount of grit, so when interviewees try to seize control by running out the clock, they can adopt their best Mike Wallace style, interrupt, and say, "You're evading the question. What were you doing on the night of March 23?"

THE INFLUENCE OF HARDWARE ON NEWS SOURCES

It happens everyday in America: A band of strangers — producer, sound operator, camera operator, reporter — invade the everyday routine of a person unfamiliar with the ways of television news. With great efficiency the crew unpacks imposing cameras, microphones, recorders, lights, and cables. Once the gear is set up and operating, the unblinking eye of the camera lens turns toward the person to be interviewed, the tape operator yells "rolling," the first question is asked and the interviewee freezes in paralyzed fright. To say that the hardware of television news is intimidating is an understatement.

TECHNIQUES TO PUT THE INTERVIEWEE AT EASE

As the on-camera interviewer, you can help put the other person at ease by appearing relaxed yourself. Constant eye contact with the person will help minimize the intimidating effects of microphones and other broadcast gear. When you offer yourself as the reference point, the interviewee can concentrate on you as a person — not on the lights, camera and action that's happening all around. To a great extent the art of good interviewing is the art of conscientious listening. Reporters who half-listen to the interviewee while they think up more questions to ask can kill the interview quickly. Careful listening helps the reporter build the interview around what's just been said. Because the interview is a conversation, it demands that you be a courteous listener just as you would be in a normal conversation. To help put interviewees at ease, the crew's conduct is especially important.

"When I have a reporter with me, I try to fade into the woodwork," says freelance photographer Bob Brandon of Houston. "The last thing I want is for someone to be aware of me or the camera."

The person in charge of lighting may want to avoid shining bright lights directly into the interviewee's eyes, instead bouncing lights indirectly off walls and ceilings or hand-held reflectors. Microphones, another intimidating fact of television life, should be as inconspicuous as possible. Sometimes a microphone mounted on the camera or a miniature microphone pinned to the speaker's lapel solves the problem. Shotgun microphones, which pick up faraway sounds, may diminish the intrusions inherent in sound recording.

TECHNIQUES TO ELICIT MEANINGFUL RESPONSES

Live interviews are at their best when they elicit interesting information, and reporters can use several techniques to draw out concise, meaningful responses. One technique is to avoid giving the

impression that you are an insider who already understands the story. If you are a friendly person, yet obviously a competent journalist who avoids coming on as a big-time television reporter, most people will be glad to give you the information you want and will explain it succinctly.

“I find that if you hem and haw a little bit in asking your question, maybe even half intentionally, it puts the fellow at ease, especially somebody who’s never been on television before,” says former CBS reporter Charles Kuralt.

Another tried-and-true technique is to look blankly at the interviewee if you would like the person to restate the response more concisely. Most interviewees feel compelled to restate the point if you indicate through an impassive face that you want them to continue. The situation is different if you interview the governor or anyone who appears frequently on television and is not overwhelmed by bright lights and the hoopla surrounding live reporting. Public figures wise to the deadlines, restrictions, and demands of television news can perform with a virtuosity that sometimes amazes even veteran journalists. The following anecdote, shared by a journalist who swears the story is true, makes the point.

A reporter arrived late to cover the governor’s press conference and asked the governor if he would linger a moment afterward to give a statement. The governor agreed. The reporter set up his camera, turned it on, and said, “Okay, Governor, go ahead.”
“Go ahead, what?” replied the governor.
“Give me an answer.”
“About what?”
“Look, Governor,” said the reporter, “didn’t you just have a press conference?”
“Yes,” said the governor.
“And didn’t you just answer some questions?”
“Yes.”
“Well, pick out one of them and answer it again!”
And, so the story goes, the governor did just that.

Unless you cover a beat in which you talk routinely with public officials or other personalities, most of the people you interview will not be media types. Some of the best quotes and stories you bring home will come from the person down the street or the janitor around the corner. The trick is to put these people at ease and make sure they give you information in a way that television viewers can understand.

KEYS TO INTERVIEWING SUCCESS: A RECAP

Prepare an interview subject before you actually start. You never know how experienced a person is, so doing this every time you interview someone gets everything set up right and avoids potential problems. Say something like:

I don’t know how many of these you’ve done. Just talk to me. Ignore the camera. It’s just a window to our conversation. [If you are using a stick microphone, say: “I have to point the mic at you to pick you up, but don’t reach out and grab it or it’ll make a ‘clunk’ noise and we’ll have to cut that out.”]

People see performers on TV every day clutching microphones in their hands singing, talking, or whatever. Unless you tell them not to grab the microphone when you point it at them, they will. By “setting up the person” to know what you want him/her to do, you create



Listening is one of the reporting arts. The best interviews often are conversations in which the reporter lets the subject do as much of the talking as possible.

a warmer tone of mutual cooperation. You'll find this technique especially helpful when dealing with people who are not used to being interviewed.

Except in special circumstances when you are dealing with seasoned interviewees (career politicians and others used to being on TV a great deal), begin the interview with a couple of questions you have no intention of using on the air. Don't spend a lot of time doing this, just enough to "break the ice." Once people start talking, they settle down a little. Just two or three minutes spent getting them to talk about themselves makes all the difference in the quality of the interview you'll have when you get down to the real material you're interested in. You can ask them things like, "What brought you to Seattle?" or, "Did you always want to be an astronaut?" or, "Tell me a little about yourself. What do you do for fun, and do you have a family?" What you are doing is setting a personal tone of relationship with the person in which the veneer of distance will disappear and the interviewee will come across as a person, not as a robot with well-rehearsed answers.

Know when to shut up. Some reporters, thinking they have to fill any pause, jump in with a question when the interviewee is just pausing naturally and is about to continue. In addition, when a person finishes an answer if you just keep looking and pointing the microphone toward him/her, the interviewee tends to say something more. Your body language tells the person to keep talking. When interviewees do continue talking, subconsciously thinking they need to fill in more detail to complete the answer, they often provide much richer material. The first answer to a question can be rather dull. The ensuing additional detail can be the stuff of exclusive revelations.

Don't hesitate to ask a subject to explain a point again. What you are after is a short, concise, clear answer that just about anyone could understand. Particularly with specialists in highly technical areas, things get complicated fast. After a complex answer from a world renowned physicist on the ramifications of Einstein's theory of relativity, you may need to say something like, "Could you explain that again — and assume I'm fifth grader?"

Here are some other excellent ways to ask people to answer again, but in a different way:

"How would you explain that to a fifth-grade class?"

"Could you take me through that again but explain it a different way?"

"What does that all mean to the average person?"

"I don't really understand what the key point is. Could you boil it down for me?"

Excellent reporters know they don't know everything, and they readily admit it. Most of the time when you ask to have something explained again, the interviewee will smile, relax a little, and get really conversational with the answer. Then you'll have a great soundbite.

Listen to what the person says in answer to your question. When reporters have a list of questions to ask and run through them without listening to what the person replies, they'll miss the follow-up opportunity that could lead to an Emmy-winning disclosure. The questions you think are important are only an interview guide. Often the richest material is found when those questions are used as a framework for exploring a subject and you ask follow-ups freely along the way.

Jot down two or three key questions in a reporter's notebook or pad. Refer to it as necessary in the interview. In standard interview shots you won't be on camera most of the time anyway, so looking at your notes will not be distracting.

Remember the purpose of the interview. It is not to get a lot of material that will go on the air exactly the way it was recorded. You will be able to rewrite it in a much tighter script that will be clearer for the audience. You're doing the interview to elicit a powerful, concise statement (emotional or factual) from a credible source, to enclose within your package.

Name _____

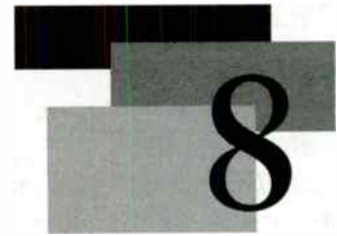
Date _____

Assignment 7-A

1. Conduct a minimum of three practice interviews with friends to develop your ability to phrase ad-lib questions. In each instance, have a friend decide spontaneously on a topic about which the friend is knowledgeable. Then begin the interview. Pursue the subject seriously, and extract as much information from your friend as possible about the subject. Some possible topics include: movie directors, how to grow indoor house plants, tips for beginning cooks, the job market for college students, rock climbing, hang-gliding, county politics, the future of newspapers.
2. Interview a prominent or interesting person in your community. Call the person in advance to arrange an appointment. Research the subject area, and prepare meaningful questions. Arrive on time with a tape recorder that works and with which you are familiar. In advance of the interview, make a short test recording to be certain that sound levels are set properly and that your audio is of broadcast quality.
3. Edit the tape you recorded in assignment #2 into a story suitable for broadcast. Write a lead-in and tag to accompany the edited interview. Play the tape, and critique your interview in class.
4. Repeat assignments #1 and #2 a minimum of three times. Practice makes perfect!

One of the most important ingredients for any news department is live, local coverage.

Dan Rather, in *The Camera Never Blinks*



Soundbites



When they are at their best, radio and television have tremendous power to involve, to sweep you up in psychological and physiological ways, because they use sound and motion to dramatic effect. In a newscast, the sight of a starving child, the sound of a crying person, the roar of a fire out of control, the angry voice of a taxpayer — all are capable of altering your blood pressure, your heart, and your breathing rates.

SOUNDBITES DEFINED

A soundbite is the sound, and in television, the video of a news event. Soundbites — or *actualities* as they often are called in radio — help you take your audience to the scene of the event. They allow the audience to participate vicariously in news events and hence have a way to understand events more fully. Broadcast media prefer the dramatic, however, and can pull the news out of context through unduly dramatic actualities. The isolating glare of microphones and cameras can make the sounds and sights of 100 angry protesters in emotional frenzy seem like a mob of thousands to the audience unless you maintain perspective in your reports. Typical soundbites come from many sources: excerpts from a speech, news conferences, public statements, experts, interviews, eyewitnesses.

The list goes on, but you can count on obtaining bites from day to day from almost anyone who makes news or watches it happen. The soundbite can come from the mayor at a news conference, a moon-bound astronaut, a bank teller who has just been robbed, an underwater rescue diver, a passenger safe at last after an airplane hijacking, an expert on solar energy, or a hostage who has just been released. Soundbites constitute one form of writing for broadcast. They allow you to stop writing for a moment or two and let a person in the news craft an observation, express an idea, or reveal a thought or feeling. Some reporters think of soundbites as an essential part of the story, but the best soundbites never are self-contained reports. They help illustrate a

story somewhat the way a newspaper picture might, and typically they add a dimension that the script could not.

The fundamental purpose of the soundbite is to provide credibility. Understanding that, you are free to use soundbites in more varied ways than often is done. Skilled writers easily can rewrite what a person says in an interview into a more concise, clear description. But the soundbite adds the air of authority, first-person experience, expert support for the points made. Therefore, you select the portion of what is said that provides the most impact. Soundbites are not there to tell the story, but are supposed to provide credibility support for the piece.

Reporters who know little about a subject sometimes take the lazy way out by cutting a long bite of 30 to 45 seconds in which the interviewee explains something in detail beyond what the audience needs or wants to know. That makes for a boring, ineffective story. Better, the reporter would paraphrase concisely most of what an interviewee says and then drop in the strongest 10 seconds or so of the interviewee's comment as the actual bite used in the piece. Soundbites are just the electronic journalist's version of quotes, and they should be used the same way a good print reporter uses quotes — to provide support, first-person perspective, and drama, but always concisely and powerfully.

Outstanding reporters use parts of an interviewee's sentence, with the lead-in by the reporter (in a package report) or the anchor (in a story to be read in the studio) providing the rest of the sentence. For example, the anchor could say, "The governor went on to blast the legislature as" . . . (now the governor's soundbite picks up angrily) . . . "a bunch of clowns who keep fiddling while Rome burns!" Or the most powerful part of a statement can be used to kick off the story, followed by the anchor's or reporter's narration of the rest of the sentence to weave the soundbite into a meaningful context. To continue the example: The governor pops up on camera fuming, "That pack of wild dogs in the legislature wouldn't know a bone with meat on it if it was right in front of 'em." The reporter or anchor then adds, . . . "the governor angrily charged at today's news conference." It's entirely appropriate to use soundbite sentence fragments, in which the anchor or reporter narration completes the sentence, as long as the context of the comment is not distorted.

Journalistically, you need to use soundbites as devices to help provide accuracy. The basic concern with soundbite presentation is whether it reflects reality accurately. If what you've done distorts the meaning the speaker meant to convey, you need to do something else so your work is ethical, always embraces integrity, and furthers the pursuit of truth, not manufactured illusions of reality.

You can use a soundbite in three ways:

1. To provide factual information.
2. To help prove a visual or add a dimension of realism from the news environment itself.
3. To reveal a person's inner self.

Often, soundbites function at all three levels. If a political candidate announces, "I choose not to run another term," the bite contains the literal information of the announcement, and it also may carry a sense of the environment (reporter reaction, silence from a roomful of stunned supporters), as well as the speaker's emotion as conveyed through the speaker's voice, emphasis, pausing, and rate of delivery. Frequently, bites can be used not only for information but also to help prove the visual. If you show store owners sweeping mud from flooded stores in a mountain community, a bite to the effect, "We'll reopen for business by noon" may reinforce the video's message that flood damage is relatively light. Just as commonly, bites help reveal the inner person. If, in an interview, you ask an elderly person, "Do you ever think about accepting charity?" the

person may reveal a deeply held conviction in her reply, “I’d rather live on the streets than accept government handouts.” If soundbites don’t say anything new, or don’t add to what you have written or shown in the main story, they can be dropped.

Because soundbites serve to enhance stories rather than substitute for your own reporting, they should be kept fairly short, usually no longer than 8 to 12 seconds. Occasionally a bite will be so dramatic or full of information that it can run longer, but in most cases 10 seconds should be considered a maximum. The reason for keeping bites short is that longer bites may take on the speaker’s pace, authority, and focus, and may even impose an unintended editorial point of view, particularly when institutional news sources are used in interviews. When broadcast stories average between 20 to 70 seconds, bites longer than about 10 seconds begin to dominate editorial content. Print journalists sometimes speak contemptuously about the short length of bites in broadcast stories, but almost never do quotes in print run more than a sentence or two — about 10 seconds if they were to be spoken aloud.

TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

A common source for soundbites is the statement or interview from a news source that is recorded off a telephone line into a normal tape recorder at the radio station. The person with whom you are speaking must be told that his or her voice is being recorded onto audiotape. Telephone interviews are commonly used when you are pressed for time and can’t interview a news source in person, or when a reporter in the field must phone in a late-breaking story in time for an upcoming broadcast.

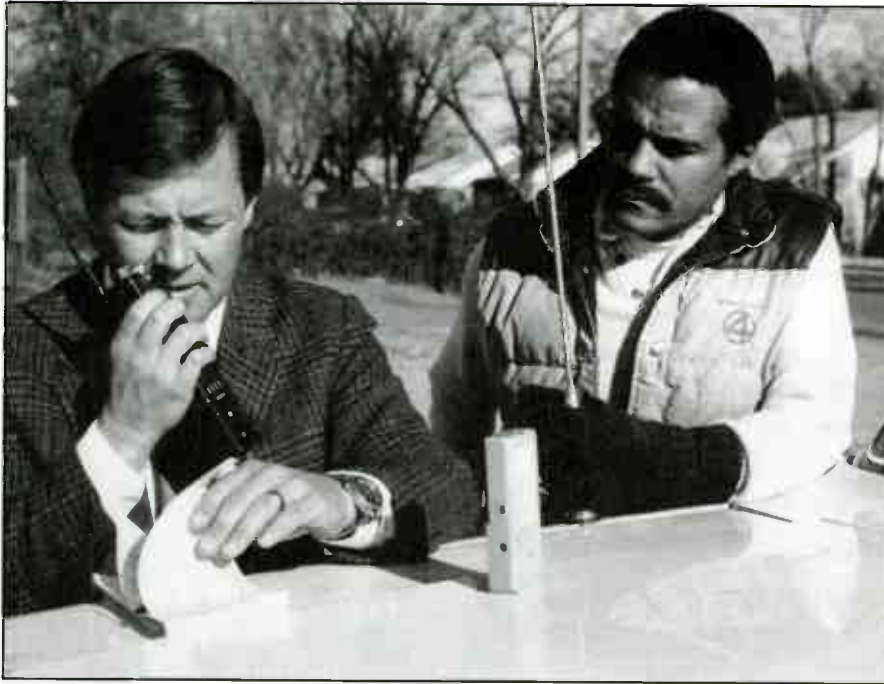
Most telephone recording systems feature a normal telephone receiver with a hand switch that shuts off the telephone mouthpiece to exclude extraneous noise from the newsroom while the recording is being made. A simple press of the switch reactivates the mouthpiece so you can converse normally with the news source when you wish.

TELEPHONE RUNDOWNS

At most radio stations and many television stations, news personnel routinely make telephone rundowns, a check just before major news broadcasts to determine whether important news is breaking. These checks are made with police, fire, sheriff, and other local agencies according to a master list of the most frequently called and important agencies. Some stations have automatic dialing devices that make these calls at the push of a button. Often, as you make these rundowns, you may be greeted with a brusque “no news today” and a slam of the receiver on the other end even as you identify yourself. This happens because news sources have their own deadlines and are contacted daily not only by your station but by competing stations as well.

TELEPHONE COURTESY

Whether you are recording a telephone interview or using the telephone for routine checks of fire, police, or sheriff’s department happenings, “telephone manners” are important. Courtesy pays off



A television reporting crew converses with the assignment desk via two-way radio before reporting a story live from the scene of a breaking news event.

two ways. First, it helps you get the story, and second, it makes access to information easier next time you have to call the same source about a story. When you call sources, you should give your name and the station call letters or channel number and tell them whether you plan to record and air their comments. When the conversation has ended, thank the source for taking time out from a busy schedule to talk with you.

LEAD-INS AND TAGS

When used alone, soundbites require lead-ins and tags — a way to introduce the bite to the audience and a way to get out of it and on to the next story. The common formula for handling actualities in short newscasts at many radio stations is: two lines in (the lead-in), 20 seconds for the actuality, and one line (the tag) out. This formula, however, is somewhat arbitrary and won't apply in every situation.

The *lead-in* can be both the story and an introduction to the actuality. Here is an example written and prepared for a radio newscast.

The blizzard is moving north to Canada tonight . . . after dumping more than a foot of snow on the Dakotas and Minnesota. The blizzard was so intense it made driving impossible . . . and many drivers were forced to spend the night in their cars . . . or truck stops along the road.

CT
:14

(Outcue " . . . all day trying to get out.")

The storm left many rigs frozen solid . . . and the forecast for wind and cold makes even worse driving conditions likely tomorrow.

In the 15-second lead-in the story is introduced and the soundbite set up. In this case the soundbite contains excerpts of interviews with stranded motorists telling of their experiences in the blizzard. The actuality is noted on the radio script as “CT,” meaning a prerecorded cartridge for radio. The same interview could have been on videotape.

Increasingly, with news operations in radio and TV stations being merged or subcontracted, the old radio news references are disappearing. For example, the CT reference (typed out in some radio operations as CART) now is frequently seen as SOUNDBITE or even the television designation for sound-on-tape, SOT. We recommend the SOT designation because it is less confusing for people moving among different formats. Sources ranging from audiotape to digital storage devices to computer disk, or something else, could be used for sound storage.

In some operations the last three words of the lead-in are underlined to cue the director or sound engineer that an insert or soundbite follows. Underlining, however, often is a device that announcers in radio, or anchors in television, use to tell themselves where to place emphasis. As a general practice all underlining should be left to the person who must read the copy on the air.

In the example on the previous page, the length of the actuality, 14 seconds, is given, along with a standard outcue that gives the last five or six words in the cut so the engineer knows when to reopen the newscaster’s microphone. The tag wraps up the story and brings it to a polished, professional ending. It most often refers to the bite even if only to reidentify the speaker in the bite just ended. The tag tells the audience that the story has ended and that you are ready to move to a new story. Lazy writers often eliminate story tags; professionals almost never omit them.

The length of lead-ins should be kept to about 15 seconds and tags no more than 10 seconds. If you are writing the intro to a comprehensive stand-up report from an in-field reporter, a one-sentence lead-in may suffice. An example is shown on the next page.

The TV script is fairly simple and straightforward. The SOT and TRT designations in the director’s column are at the left margin because they are crucial commands that, if missed, will cause major on-air errors. The CGs are indented because we want them to be inserted, but if the director misses them, the story will still air without viewers’ recognizing the omission as a major error. An AT time is included only for the CG for the babies’ father, because that has to hit at the specific time when his interview pops up in the piece. The other CGs are not time-critical. Finally, because we’re coming back to the anchor for a tag to the piece, that has to be indicated after the TRT. In the anchor column we have the anchor initials (AB) and sound-on-tape designations (SOT) within parentheses so the anchor won’t actually say those screen directions on the air. The copy to be read is in short paragraphs to facilitate reading on the TelePrompTer.

Lead-ins usually sound best if they are self-contained; they don’t telegraph that a soundbite follows. These lead-ins also are called *blind lead-ins*. In the following examples, consider each sentence to be the last line in the story, just before the actuality is to be played on the air.

Original: Johnson was asked how the wheat agreement will affect bread prices.

Rewrite: Johnson says wheat subsidies will not cause higher bread prices in America.

Johnson (on tape): “We anticipate absolutely no economic effect in the supermarket from this measure . . .”

In this example the lead-in helps summarize the tone and substance of the soundbite with Johnson. The original example, although used at some stations, lacks impact and would leave your audience hanging in mid-air if the soundbite failed to play or if loose production caused a brief interruption or pause before the sound began. With blind lead-ins the story can stand alone without any apologies or wearisome explanations about how we’ll have that tape (or interview)

<p>Slug: Six kids Writer: Smith Date:</p> <p>AB/Box: Babies</p> <p>SOT</p> <p>CG: Kristy Martin Reporting</p> <p>CG: Bellevue Hospital New York City</p> <p>AT: 31 CG: Bill Williams Babies' father</p> <p>Outcue: "... Kristy Martin reporting for TV-9 News."</p> <p>TRT: 1:37+pad</p> <p>AB/Box: Babies</p>	<p>Story Time: <u>1:55</u></p> <p>(AB)</p> <p>For only the sixth time in the world since the turn of the century . . . a woman has given birth to six children at once.</p> <p>TV-9's Kristy Martin has more on the multiple birth from New York City.</p> <p>(SOT)</p> <p>(AB)</p> <p>At news time, doctors report the remaining two children have little chance for survival.</p> <p>They say given another month, all six of the children might have survived.</p> <p>###</p>
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for you in just a few minutes,” although the story admittedly is more complete and interesting with the cart or videotape.

Original: We asked councilwoman Lopez if lower tax bills will result.

Rewrite: Councilwoman Lopez says the council is not certain the measure will result in lower tax bills.

Councilwoman Lopez (on tape): “I don’t see one drop of relief for any property owner in town. . . .”

Original: We asked foresters what caused the fire.

Rewrite: State foresters say lightning probably caused the fire.

Forester (on VTR): “There were no people in the area, no campfires, but the area is extremely dry, and the lightning buildup last night was tremendous.”

Original: We talked with Senator Clark today, and she said:

Rewrite: Senator Clark says she’s in favor of the bill.

Original: We asked Russell how he thinks the council will decide.

Rewrite: Russell says he thinks the council will vote against annexation.

Original: Here’s what Martinez thinks.

Rewrite: Martinez says he thinks professional hockey in Boulder is years away.

In the examples you simply rewrite the lead-in to summarize what the tape says. The lead-ins are restructured to be more direct, and they will sound cleaner and have more impact. When writing lead-ins, you should avoid echo-chamber or parrot effect. This is a lead-in that says in almost the same words what is on the start of the tape:

(Newsperson): . . . Brand retailers say independent stations are behind the gas war.

(Audiotape): “Independent stations are behind the gas war. . . .”

OR

(Newsperson): . . . but say it will be months before the stadium is completed.

(Video): “. . . Despite earlier predictions, the Bears say it will be months before the stadium is completed.”

OR

(Newsperson): . . . The President is in Japan, signing the final agreement that returns control of three American missile bases to the Japanese government.

(Video): “The President is in Japan to sign the final agreement that returns control of three American air bases to the Japanese government.”

Parroting in the lead the identical content of the actuality makes the newscast sound unprofessional. The problem occurs most often when someone else has edited the soundbite and the writer has not taken time to check how it begins. Often you can cut the first sentence of the

soundbite you will use on air and use the information contained in that sentence as the substance of your lead-in. The lead-in thus will flow even more naturally into the piece you air.

EDITING THE SOUNDBITE

Few things drive audiences away from a newscast faster than tapes that run too long. Almost no soundbite can be broadcast without some editing. News conferences, especially those called by special-interest groups, can drag on and on. Eyewitnesses often are emotional, confused, and wordy. Scientists sometimes are complex and obtuse. The aim is to pull out the gems or nuggets of what you have recorded and use just those sections to illustrate the event's essence as succinctly as possible. Signs are posted at many broadcast stations warning personnel to reserve anything more than two minutes for World War III or the Second Coming. A minute often is too long for most taped inserts in radio, and in television stories few soundbites are worth more than 20 seconds.

Be judicious in your choice of what to run from a long-winded interview or press conference. Pre-screen what is important for your audience to hear. Don't leave that job up to your listeners and viewers. Common practice calls for careful selection of the cut or cuts you will use, then demands that you tighten even what you have chosen. A few edits will eliminate unnecessary pauses (unless they are needed for dramatic effect or as telltale signs of the speaker's hesitancy to answer a question), or a 15-second harangue of no importance in the middle of a piece you have chosen to air. In addition, you may wish to use more than one cut from the interview or news conference. If you do, you will need to write bridges, or audio links, between the cuts you plan to use.

A radio newscast script might appear as follows:

(LEAD-IN) Three police detectives were shot-gunned to death outside a Miami Beach apartment house today while investigating a routine car theft. Eyewitnesses say the three officers had knocked on an apartment door and were waiting for it to open when the shots broke out.
SOT
:32
(OUT: ". . . the most awful thing I've ever seen.")

(BRIDGE) Miami Beach police have identified at least two suspects. Police Chief Martin Smith says eyewitnesses are helping create police sketches of the third suspect.
SOT
:15
(OUT: ". . . a stocky man, about 6-feet-two inches, with dark, curly hair.")

(TAG) Chief Smith says all three slain officers had families. A benefit fund has been established through Miami Beach police headquarters.

Bridges, whether between tape cuts, or delivering voice-over pictures between two or more cuts of SOT (sound-on-tape), help transfer the story smoothly from one related subject to another without wasting time. The bridge can be something as simple as delivering a question on air: "Does Davis support public education?" Davis then answers this question on tape. The question just cited is five words long, much cleaner and quicker than a 15-second fumble question.

In the unlikely event that an interview is run on the air unedited, some stations ask that you identify the reporter in the lead-in so the reporter's voice is recognizable as the interview progresses. Then you would say something to the effect: "Davis told KCUS newsmen Mark Johnson he's against any public support of parochial schools." This treatment prepares listeners for two voices. They now can identify the second voice as the newsmen.

Finally, rarely open an interview or soundbite with the newsmen's question. This sounds clumsy in radio and takes over what should be the lead-in's function. In television nothing looks worse than a vacant-eyed interviewee's head on the screen while a 15-second voice-over opening question caresses the audience into mental oblivion.



A reporter cuts voice-over narration to introduce a soundbite for a television news package.

Name _____

Date _____

Assignment 8-A

1. Record and edit a soundbite suitable for broadcast from a news conference, speech, or similar event in your community. Write the story (lead-in and tag) that will accompany your soundbite, using standard broadcast script format.
2. Using a newspaper or magazine as a source of facts, choose six news stories and assume that the quotations are tape-recorded soundbites. Write blind lead-ins for each of the six stories. Include standard time and outcue designations as part of your script for each story. In each case identify the speaker who will be talking in the soundbite. Identify the speaker by name and title preceding the SOT to set up the speaker's identity for the audience. Otherwise it will seem like a different voice out of nowhere.
3. Listen to several radio and TV newscasts. Write down, verbatim, five blind lead-ins you hear. Rewrite to improve them.
4. Attend a city council meeting and tape-record the proceedings while you take hand-written notes. After the meeting, write the script and edit the tape into a one-minute presentation suitable for broadcast. Allow only one hour for this assignment!

Name _____

Date _____

Assignment 8-B

Following is an interview between a broadcast interviewer and Dr. Raymond Beardsley, supervising research engineer in a solar energy research laboratory at a major university. Write a self-contained or “blind” lead-in and tag, and mark in bold brackets which portion(s) of the interview you would air. Follow proper script format, and include a time and outcue as part of your script.

(WRITE YOUR LEAD-IN HERE.)

Interviewer: After more than 20 years of research, what are your findings about using solar energy to heat and cool homes?

Engineer: Solar energy has many possible uses, but the heating of buildings and water is the most advanced and the most competitive with fossil fuels.

Interviewer: How practical are these systems?

Engineer: Practical enough to supply about three-fourths the heat requirement in average homes . . . and about three-fourths the hot water an average family uses in a year’s time.

Interviewer: But aren’t you talking about areas where the sun shines most of the time? What about areas where there’s not much sunshine?

Engineer: Of course, abundant winter sunshine, high heat requirements, and expensive fuel . . . all these things favor the use of solar energy, but most regions in the United States are suitable for solar heating.

To this point the interview has developed along predictable lines, but now comes a departure from the original subject and the interviewer follows up.

Engineer: As a matter of fact, we’re seeing increased sales of solar heating equipment in the Northeast, areas that receive less sunshine than, say, people get in the far West states. Even then during cloudy stretches, a gas-fired furnace can take over, but we

find it's not used more than about one-fourth the time. Sunlight provides heat the rest of the time.

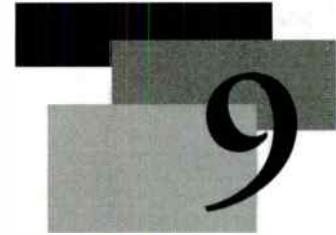
Interviewer: Is solar heating competitive with natural gas at today's prices?

Engineer: No. But it's cheaper than electric resistance heating in most parts of the country and will be on a par soon with propane and fuel oil in sunny climes. We're going to see savings continue to increase as energy prices go up and solar equipment prices hold steady or even decline.

(WRITE YOUR TAG HERE)

News . . . is news, and reporting . . . through any medium . . . is still reporting.

Mitchell Charnley



Electronic News Gathering



5:48 p.m. — 12 minutes before airtime for the six o'clock news in Minneapolis-St. Paul. An airliner carrying 300 passengers is closing in for an emergency landing. Air traffic controllers confirm that a crash is possible, and reporting crews from three television stations speed to the airport in vans equipped with electronic news gathering (ENG) equipment. All three crews set up television field cameras, videotape recording and playback units, and microwave transmitters that can beam signals live through the air to be recorded at the home station for later broadcast, or rebroadcast instantly to viewers' homes.

News directors monitoring the developing story now are faced with a tough decision. If they opt for live coverage, viewers may witness an event in which up to 300 persons will die before their eyes. From two stations come orders for live coverage. A third news director balks at the story's potentially overwhelming impact. He orders his crew to videotape the landing for later editing and playback, either in a special report or on the regular 10 o'clock newscast. Finally, the plane appears on the horizon. It lands safely without event. The television crews leave, and soon the airport is back to normal.



THE ENG REVOLUTION: A BRIEF HISTORY

In the strictest sense there is no such thing as "electronic journalism." For all the marvelous gadgetry and electronic technology that surrounds broadcast news, no machine in the world, when plugged into a wall outlet, will generate news stories. Journalism remains today, as it always has been, a process by which news events are reported and, sometimes, interpreted. The process involves the reporter's judgment, perception, creativity, language skills, integrity, intellect and hard work, and some means to deliver the finished story to an audience.

That concept of journalism has not changed much in 200 years. What has changed are the incredible strides in making the story more immediate, in the rapidity with which the story can be covered in the field and delivered to American homes. Behind this ability to report stories almost instantly are the technological breakthroughs that have resulted in electronic news gathering (ENG) or, as some broadcasters call it, electronic journalism (EJ), and through satellite news gathering (SNG).

The Heart of ENG

The heart of any ENG system is made up of portable television field cameras, lightweight videotape recorders, and microwave transmission facilities. Barely five years after these systems had been introduced and tested under the fire of broadcast news reporting deadlines, they had almost made the newsfilm camera obsolete. Consider why. In the 1960s and early 1970s, a logistics expert would have been required to secure same-day coverage of a story from New York for broadcast on a midwestern station. First the news director in the Midwest would have called a station in New York and requested film of the event. The footage would have been shot in New York, packaged, shipped to the Midwest via air freight, picked up at the airport, driven to the station, processed, edited, and finally projected into the television station's film chain (telecine) and broadcast to home audiences.

If the story broke as late as ten a.m. in New York, it would have required a minor miracle to air film footage of the event by ten p.m. that evening. Today, as the news director at the same station, you could righteously complain if you didn't have the same story on the air within ten minutes after it broke, or less. Because of satellite broadcasts, you could expect important overseas stories to be available in an equally short time.

The Development of ENG

Whether on radio or television, broadcast news always has been touted as the most immediate. Broadcast journalists argue that newspapers are full of yesterday's news, and broadcast news is "now." The argument that broadcast news is immediate held true for radio but, until development of ENG, it never quite held water in television news. TV news broadcasts normally are scheduled no more than four times a day, with the major newscasts at five or six p.m. and again at ten or eleven p.m. Regular programming fills the remainder of the television broadcast day.

Most stations are reluctant to break into normal (and lucrative) programming except for bulletins and other news of earthshaking interest. Five-minute newsbreaks on the hour have been common in radio for generations. These have just never been done on television, except in recent years for the one-minute newsbreaks on the hour during prime time. Even then, the breaks do more to promote the upcoming regular TV newscasts than to inform viewers. They are, in effect, a simple headline service.

Another reason for television's standard news day schedule, until now, relates to technology (not to mention the extreme difficulty of preparing hourly television newscasts with a limited staff). Consider for example, the difference in the hardware that reporters must carry if they are reporting, respectively, for newspapers, radio, and television. The newspaper reporter can cover a story with only a pencil and a notepad. The radio reporter adds to these resources a lightweight, portable

audio tape-recorder that weighs an additional five pounds or so. To go live from the scene, the radio reporter has only to walk to the nearest telephone or to speak into a portable transmitter, either carried by the reporter or located conveniently nearby in the reporter's news car. The television reporter, by contrast, goes to the event burdened with camera, videotape cassette recorder (VCR), lights, cables, microwave equipment, and similar paraphernalia — a burden that even today may exceed 50 pounds.

Live Television Broadcasts of Yesterday

Imagine the problem that early television reporters faced. Until the introduction of ENG, a live television broadcast from the field (also called a “live remote”) required a huge mobile van stuffed with heavy, bulky equipment — huge cameras, unmanageably large two-inch videotape recorders, thousands of feet of thick cable, primitive microwave relay facilities, switchers, monitors, and a full complement of engineers to manage all this gear. No wonder that live television remotes were attempted only in the case of important, and usually predictable, news events — political conventions, space missile launchings, U. N. reports, state funerals, and the like — or to broadcast routine sporting events in which the huge cameras could be manhandled into place a day or so before broadcast and mounted heavily on huge, immobile tripods. To cover the more routine events, television news relied on 16mm-film cameras that became lighter and more manageable as the years passed. Even so, they produced pictures that had to be driven back to the station, processed, and edited before they could be broadcast.

The problem that ENG solved was how to make television news as immediate as radio news. Even during World War II, Americans in the most remote parts of the country could sit at home in living rooms illuminated by kerosene lamps, tune in their battery-powered radios, and hear Edward R. Murrow's live broadcasts from London on CBS News. As German V-bombs fell on London, American radio audiences nearly half a world away could hear the bombs' ugly explosions split the night while Murrow described the devastation from a rooftop somewhere overlooking Trafalgar Square. Murrow used radio to help listeners “see” with their ears in those days. In one memorable broadcast he artfully portrayed the dignity with which Londoners walked to bomb shelters during the nightly air raids. He accomplished this “audio portrait” by laying his microphone on the sidewalk outside a bomb shelter, a perfect spot to catch the unhurried sounds of footsteps as bombs exploded nearby.

The traditions of radio news reporting that Murrow helped to establish continue to this day. If a tornado develops somewhere in our vicinity, we look to radio for live reports

Technology Speeds the Reporting Process

Although radio news reporting appears deceptively easy these days, it has been made simple by the tremendous advancements in reporting technology that now are being realized in television.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, sound for radio and film could be recorded in the field only with the aid of a van the size of a milk truck that overflowed with bulky, low-quality wire and wax cylinder recording equipment. Magnetic audio recording tape did not exist until the late 1940s.*

Over the years, as transistors and silicon chip technology helped to make miniaturization possible, portable audio recorders were introduced that could, by themselves, supplant the entire function of a truckload of old audio equipment. These units, familiar to almost everyone, weigh only a pound or so and in some cases produce sound comparable in quality to the larger studio sound recorders.

*“Development of the First VTR,” Ampex Corporation.

of its progress. Live interviews with visiting dignitaries, live reports from the scene of an airline crash — all are easily possible with radio. And today, because of ENG, these reports are equally possible on television.

The Attraction of Television

Above all else, the attraction of television news has been that it is *visual*. No one ever has asked radio to provide pictures, or newspapers to run movies on the front page. At its best, television is unexcelled in its ability to take us to the scene of an event and make us “eyewitnesses” to news in the making. Without pictures live from the scene, fast-breaking events reported on television would be nothing more than radio accompanied by the talking head of the television news reporter or by a static slide thrown up on the screen to cover the absence of more suitable pictures.

Beginning the Search

As late as 1956, television news was mostly a copycat, a carbon copy of newspaper-style journalism and radio news rolled into one. The average television viewer was treated to occasional live coverage of boxing matches, and even more infrequently to live broadcasts from political convention floors. Television cameras were unbelievably heavy and hard to move. All broadcasts were in black and white. For sports coverage, stations were stuck with huge cameras that sat passively on tripods at strategic locations throughout the stadium.

For convention coverage, something better was needed than simple bird’s-eye views of the action. Producers wanted roving cameras that could be moved up close to a national political figure for an interview, next to the convention delegation from Florida, then to the speaker’s podium as delegates were polled. What was needed was a light, mobile television camera that was not tied to an umbilical cord of coaxial cables that fed the signal back to a central location for broadcast. Also needed was a camera that would broadcast in color, go virtually anywhere, and operate in almost every temperature extreme while it unfailingly produced high-quality pictures.

The networks began to explore these problems. As early as 1956 they had fashioned a field unit with a standard camera and self-contained generator linked clumsily to a huge mobile van. It was an arrangement of infinitely more utility for convention coverage than it ever would be in the Nicaraguan jungles. By the 1960s, however, the networks had developed what at the time were major breakthroughs in technology. Even as early as 1958, electronic systems were available to cover political happenings “on the move” from down on the convention floor.

The first camera units weighed an unwieldy 90 pounds or so, but they were portable after a fashion, in about the same way a 90-pound chunk of lead becomes portable when a handle is attached to it. The operator held a shoulder-mounted, battery-powered television camera, which fed signals to a portable transmitter mounted in the operator’s backpack. The contraption was reminiscent of a Buck Rogers outfit — antennas sprouting from the operator’s headgear and from the backpack transmitter, large batteries and a camera that drew unflinching attention to itself. This equipment allowed no candid shots. Still, it worked, and refinements managed to reduce the size and weight further.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, CBS had become the recognized leader in ENG research. Electronic news gathering as we know it today had long been in the planning stages at CBS labs,

and even then CBS was experimenting with prototype cameras the size of a cigarette pack. (A major hang-up in producing these miniature cameras lies in lens optics. No technology exists to produce a comparably sized miniature lens, although further research in liquid optics may help to solve the problem.) The impetus for miniaturization was simple. CBS wanted to be first with the news and needed lightweight electronic cameras that did not depend on film processing to accomplish the trick.

On October 26, 1972, CBS used its new ENG technology to pull off an important news “scoop.” After years of social upheaval over the Vietnam war, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger appeared for the first time on national television to utter a phrase that made headlines around the world: “A war that has been raging for ten years is drawing to a conclusion,” Dr. Kissinger announced. “We believe peace is at hand.” Peace was not immediately at hand, of course, but the statement did mark the beginning of the end of the Vietnam war. And it was a statement of immense political impact at a time when President Nixon wanted favorable publicity to help him win reelection.

CBS covered the news conference with electronic cameras and broadcast Kissinger’s statements live to the nation. A spokesman at one of the other networks said, “(Our network) had its tail whipped that day. We had talked about ENG, and when CBS went on the air live with the Kissinger story and we didn’t because we had to process our film, the barriers disappeared very quickly. We began our conversion to ENG the next day.”

Serendipity at Work

At the local level, the adoption of ENG was hastened by two remarkable events in May 1974, one in St. Louis, Missouri, and the other in Los Angeles. KMOX-TV, the CBS-owned-and-operated station in St. Louis, already owned one of the first generation of pure, electronic journalism (EJ)



Electronic news gathering allows live news coverage from virtually any location.

cameras, a color Akai unit that was small, portable, and lightweight. The Japanese-built camera originally was purchased to shoot digital displays of election returns in the KMOX-TV studios. The camera was mounted on a small stand in the studio and had no other purpose at the time than to be trained unblinkingly on the election board. Technicians already had adapted the camera to produce broadcast-quality pictures. In their spare time they proceeded to adapt an old van that had been used to haul equipment back and forth to the station transmitter, and on this van they mounted an antiquated microwave dish for experimental purposes. This jury-rigged system, made up of a less than adequate camera, an old van, and a rusty microwave dish, was operational by late May 1974, when CBS President Arthur Taylor happened to be visiting KMOX-TV.

The afternoon of Taylor's visit, southern portions of St. Louis were hit with a terrible wind and hail storm, and news management made the decision. "We have the capability to go live," management said. "Let's do it." And so KMOX, at two o'clock in the afternoon, took its Rube Goldberg "ENG van" to the scene of a school where all the windows had been blown out, cut into the middle of afternoon programming, and broadcast the storm and its aftermath live from the scene. The reporter at the scene that day was Sandy Gilmore, who later became a correspondent for NBC News. Breaking into regular programming with live material throughout the afternoon, Gilmore was able to report, while Taylor watched with fascination back at the newsroom, that anxious parents should not worry; no children at the school had been seriously injured.

Later that afternoon, Taylor invited Tom Batista, General Manager of KMOX-TV and himself a proponent of ENG, to accompany him on the CBS plane back to New York. On the way he told Batista, "It's a go. CBS will put the money into ENG, and KMOX will be the pilot station."

The Early Days of ENG

Fred Burroughs, former News Director at KMOX-TV, recalls with a slight shudder the early ENG days in St. Louis:

"I remember going downtown to a big fire at two o'clock in the morning. Reporters from all three stations were there, and a good friend of mine, a film cameraman with the ABC affiliate, was shooting with a little hand-held Bell and Howell film camera.

"He saw our camera crew out covering the fire with an Ikegami minicamera — the old one with the backpack and the cables and tape machine — and it was unbelievably bulky.

"My friend didn't understand at all. He stood there with his little camera and watched our guys in water and fire hoses, with cable and tape machines and camera all twisted together, and he turned to me and asked, 'And this is the wave of the future?'

"Our guys were very unhappy to begin with, lugging all that gear, and it was those kinds of events that put doubts in our minds. We would ask ourselves, 'Why are we attempting this?' But it didn't take long until the competition said, 'Hold it — ENG works,' and then the competition was soon into ENG up to their necks, and ENG did become the wave of the industry."

The same month in California, the Los Angeles Police Department finally discovered the hide-out of the Symbionese Liberation Army. Crews from KNXT-TV, tipped off by police radio monitors, were among the first reporters on the scene. The crew pulled into an alley to within a few feet from the guns of Patty Hearst's captors and began sending live pictures to afternoon viewers. By early evening the networks had joined pool coverage that included 50 other local stations and were relaying to the nation live coverage of the siege as reporters ducked bullets and police dove for cover beneath their cars.

By mid-summer 1974, carpenters were tearing walls down in the KMOX newsroom and installing racks to hold ENG equipment. One-inch, reel-to-reel videotape recorders were installed. Newsroom desks were outfitted with TV monitors, microphones, and adequate lighting so reporters could do live shots not only from the studio but also from the newsroom itself. Three vans were purchased and equipped with the necessary gear to originate live news broadcasts from the field. From the first day of

conversion at KMOX, the idea was to go live on every story possible. For two weekends in October 1974, KMOX conducted trial broadcasts with ENG. Then, on Monday, October 14, the station went all ENG. Although KMOX-TV was not the first station to do live ENG broadcasts, it is credited as the first local station in the United States to convert its news operation from film entirely to ENG.

The CBS Decision

CBS chose St. Louis as the test market for several practical realities. Although KMOX was the smallest of the five local television stations owned by CBS, Inc., KMOX employees were all covered under the same national labor agreement as were CBS television network employees. This consideration was significant, as no one had yet worked out which film and engineering unions would cover ENG technicians and camera operators. CBS thus employed an efficient way to avoid initial jurisdictional problems with ENG at the network level. Another consideration for CBS management in 1974 was whether ENG would work as it was designed. St. Louis obviously was a safer market to test the limitations and pitfalls of ENG than, say, WCBS in New York or the CBS Evening News.

The Competitive Advantage

Because ENG has the capacity to make audiences eyewitnesses to the news, the station that takes them first to the scene of breaking news has a distinct competitive advantage. The story aired live at six o'clock on one station shows up as old news when broadcast for the first time on film or tape at ten o'clock on another station. As a member of the television audience, however, no one normally compares ENG coverage among stations at any given moment as one can sit down and



KMOX-TV, St. Louis, became the first local station in the nation to convert its news operation entirely from newsfilm to videotape.



Since the advent of ENG, helicopters have become an indispensable tool of the television journalist.

compare newspaper coverage. The real competitive value of ENG lies in enabling the station to fulfill viewer expectations. Once a strong loyalty develops, the viewer expects his or her favorite station to have the important news and to have it first. The station's on-air and promotional efforts help to project that image. If the station is aggressive in covering the news, hiring good people, and using the latest technology to help improve what it puts on the air, it has a good chance to be number one in the market, or at least to make a strong showing in the market.

ENG Abroad

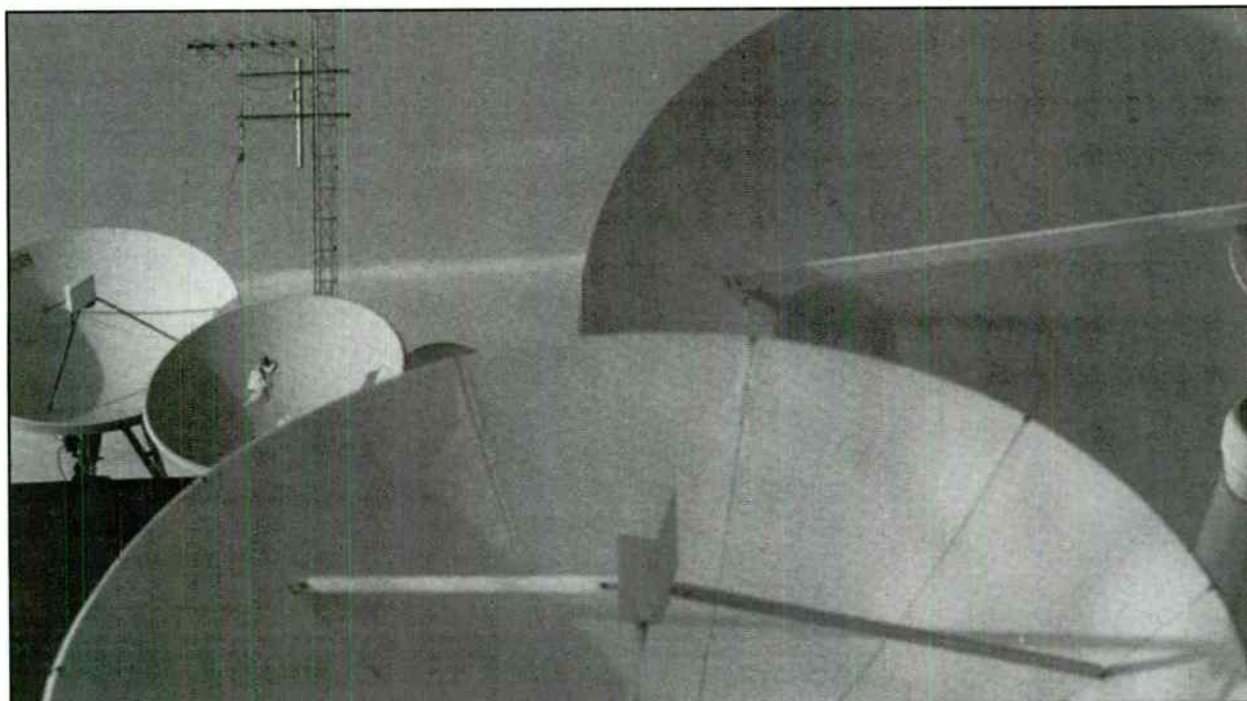
What makes ENG so immensely valuable at the network level is the ability to go anywhere in the world with a self-contained production outfit. American audiences still would not be seeing some of the stories covered overseas today if networks relied on film. By 1977, American networks had demonstrated routinely that news could be returned from abroad more quickly with electronic gear than with film. Pictures returned to this country were remarkable in their clarity, and late-breaking stories from foreign countries soon were being aired the same day, even from the scene.

During the overthrow of the Shah of Iran, for example, news agencies working in Iran could not feed color pictures out of that country because of censorship and a general breakdown in the social order. NBC News, however, had a well-established bureau in Cairo that could feed stories back to the states from Iran, via satellite, almost on demand. The other networks had similar facilities. Had news stories been shot on film in Iran, they could not have been fed from Egypt. No color motion picture film processing was available in Cairo. Even if the film could be processed, the story still would have been at the mercy of local quality control standards that may or may not have met network processing standards. As a further difficulty, the networks would have been forced to rely on local telecine machines to convert film images to electronic signals for broadcast via satellite, and in that part of the world telecine machines can prove highly unreliable.

Today with ENG, crews can go virtually anywhere in the world and operate without the need to rely on local film-processing facilities. Once the piece is recorded on videotape, it is ready for broadcast. One of the paradoxes of modern life is that practically anywhere in the world, even though local stations in some of the developing nations may be primitive, almost all countries have access to the Intelsat satellite system, which they've installed largely for voice and Telex communications. Given a favorable political situation, American crews can wheel up the equipment they travel with, plug it into the system, and feed the story back to New York via the Intelsat system. Because of this system, American audiences were able to watch their President travel through Africa, Monrovia, and Nigeria, and to follow American negotiators on shuttle trips between Cairo and Tel Aviv during Middle East peace initiatives. When the President returned home, the networks concluded coverage of the event with a four-way live hook-up using ENG equipment in Tel Aviv, Cairo, Andrews Air Force Base, and at the network studios in New York. Equally absorbing "history in the making" was beamed around the world when the American hostages were returned from Iran; during the successful launch and return to earth of the space shuttle Columbia; and during the attempted assassinations of President Ronald Reagan and Pope John Paul II.

SATELLITE NEWS GATHERING

Another technological revolution has taken place in broadcast journalism: the advent of satellite news gathering, SNG. Through microwave and satellite technology, local TV news operations can cover stories live and in color from anywhere in the world. No longer must local news audiences depend upon network news anchors and reporters for national and international news. Today they can receive those same stories via satellite, as reported by reporters from their favorite local station. This national and even global news-gathering capacity often is made possible through



Stories are sent and received by TV stations around the world through satellite dishes like these.

cooperative networks of local stations, which make their satellite uplink dishes, helicopters, and mobile studio vans available to member stations.

For a station in Seattle, this means that local coverage of hurricane damage at a Houston shipping port is as simple as flying a reporting crew into Houston. The crew then can uplink reports to Seattle using a cooperating station's satellite facilities in Houston. Although this reporting flexibility does not guarantee better television news, it does offer that potential. Viewers throughout the country need to know how distant stories affect them. Businesses in Seattle may need locally tailored reports that tell them about effects of the hurricane on shipping throughout the Pacific Basin. Those same businesses may want to know how Pentagon deficits are likely to affect an economy heavily dependent upon aircraft manufacturing.

For all its potential, SNG carries with it some pitfalls. Some observers fear that once huge investments have been made in satellite technology, stations will have no choice but to use it. This might guide stations toward certain kinds of news at the expense of other, possibly more important stories. "The temptation is to do stories that lend themselves to your technology," says Mike Crew, news director at WJKS-TV, Jacksonville, Florida. With huge investments in electronic news gathering ability, television journalists are under pressure to put live reports on the air whenever possible. Live stories help justify ENG expenditures that may run as high as several million dollars at the largest local television stations. Stations that aggressively promote their ability to cover news live may gather wider audiences among viewers who believe live capability helps stations do a better job of reporting "all the news." This tendency has resulted in large "antenna farm" gatherings of local and network satellite dishes at major events such as the bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building and O.J. Simpson murder trial.

Viewer expectations often remain unrealized, however, because the ability to go live is simply that — an ability. Not all stories warrant live coverage, and those that do seldom break at times when they can be broadcast live. The exceptions are the highly visual and dramatic stories that deserve live coverage because of their significance. At the average station only a few stories a year may fall into this category — important resignations, strikes, major crime, disasters and other so-called crisis stories. Run-of-the-mill stories might better be videotaped and brought to the audience at a more sensible time, after reporters have had a chance to research the story and edit it into a more thoughtful and comprehensive package.

COVERING LIVE STORIES

Because most newscasts are aired at scheduled times, news events that are covered live must be happening during the same narrow window of time as the newscast. Hard news rarely breaks to coincide with scheduled newscasts, and when it does, crews must reach the scene and set up their equipment before the live broadcast can begin. The tendency, therefore, is to cover the predictable daily events — the routine speeches, news conferences, interviews, and sporting events of the day. Newsmakers have grown more sophisticated over the years, and now, wise to the ways of television news, routinely schedule announcements and news conferences too late in the day for anything but live coverage.

The result is that a game of manipulation is played daily between the media and those they cover, and those trying to get covered. Fundamentally, television operations attempt to build within the audience the sense of that newsroom being the "station of record" to which a viewer will tune when something big happens. Nationally and internationally, as the Persian Gulf crisis and the subsequent Gulf War demonstrated in the early 1990s, CNN is the network of record.

When the Gulf War began, the traditional networks (ABC, CBS, NBC) were slow to interrupt normal entertainment programming for news coverage from the Middle East. In one case, a CBS affiliate news director actually walked into his station's control room and ordered the technicians to switch over the station to CNN and put it on the air because CBS continued airing soap opera coverage for more than an hour after CNN began continuous coverage of the outbreak of the war. At the time, the station had a CNN affiliation as well as one with CBS. The action, however, jeopardized the station's contract with CBS, which required that the network's programming would be carried during most day-parts.

Basis in Advertising

To understand what happened requires a basic realization that television stations exist primarily to make money. They cover news, in the deregulated environment, only to the extent that it provides positive public image and revenue to them. Television news is fundamentally a business within the envelope of a profit-generating industry. Advertising dollars are the primary measure of success for broadcasters and, increasingly, for cable companies. Thus, the interruption of programming and the commercial breaks within those programs constitute serious decisions with potentially multi-million dollar consequences. For example, one estimate put the losses for NBC from the Gulf War in the neighborhood of \$37 million because of lost advertising revenue and increased news coverage costs.¹

Because it is advertiser-driven, the television industry historically has operated from a "mass audience" perspective. That means the industry does not think in terms of individual viewers watching alone or in small groups in their homes. Rather, the industry sees viewers in huge groups of several million, and it develops programs and advertisements based on common socio-demographic characteristics. The entire audience of widely disparate individuals, thus, is chunked into blocks such as age 18–49 women with 2.5 children and incomes above \$40,000 per year.

Clearly, averages are mathematical abstractions that can be absurd. Children don't come in .5 quantities. The entire television industry, however, sees viewers as a mass that can be delivered to advertisers on a "cost per thousand" basis. The audience within a target block is perceived as a large collective of individuals to whom specific products — or stories, in the case of news marketing — will appeal. In the case of major events, large numbers of people certainly do engage with the media at the same time. Presidential elections, the NFL Super Bowl, the Miss America Pageant, and even notorious trials such as that of former professional football player O. J. Simpson all can generate millions of viewers at a time.

The predisposition to think of the audience as a mass contributes to what is called "pack journalism," wherein most journalists cover the same story, with the result that it dominates the news everywhere for a period of time. The technology of a given medium has a tremendous effect on what it covers. If it involves pictures, a story can generate enormous television coverage though it is little more than visuals. Context and deeper meaning can be lost in a sea of images. As Gans underscored in the days before the electronic news-gathering video technology replaced film, pictures are everything when it comes to television: "Consequently, all suggested stories are automatically judged by whether they lend themselves to filming; and when top producers compile their lists of selected stories, they always begin with, and give most thought to, the films they hope to run that day."²

An advertising-driven news medium centering to a large extent on pictures has created an interesting context within which television news operates. News programs are designed,

formatted, and aired with an eye on audience ratings. Millions of dollars are spent annually on television news consultants who advise stations and networks on how to tailor their product to audience tastes so more people will watch and, thus, more money can be charged for the commercials carried within the news programs. With the duality of attention to picture and advertising sensitivity, television is predisposed to superficiality rather than depth. That is true particularly when it comes to subjects that do not lend themselves to pictures, such as coverage of government bureaucracy, legislative processes, and the intricacies of finance.

The Competition in TV News

Competition is intense in television news, particularly since FCC deregulation and the rise of cable television increased the number of competing channels markedly beginning in the mid-1970s. The pressure to generate ratings is an ingrained part of the television news business because of the combined forces of inherent journalist competitiveness and the millions of dollars in advertising at stake. Former Seattle television news reporter Julie Blacklow described the way ratings pressure affected the KING-TV newsroom in the early 1990s:

The "ratings" system turned television news into a popularity contest; a full-fledged, knock-down, clobber-the-opponent competition.

Being the best, being right, being thorough and being responsible became less important than being No. 1. Advertising rates (how much your station can charge for a commercial) depended solely on your place on the Nielsen chart: the higher you ranked, the more advertisers paid to run their commercials on your station. News became, and remains, singularly dollar-driven and ratings-obsessed. And we began to watch very closely what the competition was doing on a nightly basis; to see what stories seemed to be drawing more viewers.

With the posting every morning of "ratings" score sheets on newsroom bulletin boards, we were able to see exactly how many of you were watching. If a story on Satan-worship in Sultan played big, it would be copied instantly by the other stations.

The effect of imitative behavior, coupled with the inexcusable power of consultants dictating to newsrooms what stories should be emphasized, is disconcerting and troublesome, to say the least. And these realities explain why television news is the way it is today: a daily dose of mostly meaningless, poorly researched, irrelevant and insubstantial "filler," pretending to be news; a series of "live shots" for no particular reason other than to justify the purchase of expensive technology; a recounting of every rape and shooting in our cities with none of the pain or humanity behind those horrifying acts."³

This view is extremely cynical, possibly partly the product of the disillusionment that comes to the serious journalist when the realities of news as a business settle in. Even so, that view of ratings as all-important and technology as a key to surge those ratings have created an all too common approach in many newsrooms of "live for live's sake." It means each major newscast has a live remote broadcast within it regardless of whether news really is happening at broadcast time. As a result, in many American television markets, night after night, you see reporters standing in front of darkened buildings on the ten p.m. or eleven p.m. news explaining "live" what happened earlier, or a five p.m. news "live shot" of something that happened early in the afternoon or even in the morning with only the reporter reporting the event actually "live" at 5.

What's more, live remotes are extremely time-consuming. First you must have the anchor do a five to ten second toss to the remote reporter. Then the reporter talks for ten to 15 seconds to set up the package insert often used in live remotes. After the package is aired, the normal

procedure is to come back out to the reporter live at the remote again. Another ten to 15 seconds are used to wrap up the story from the scene and do a toss back to the studio anchor. Then, to make the anchor look smart, he or she usually asks a brief question of the field reporter, followed by a quick answer. The question and answer usually are scripted carefully in advance to make sure that both reporter and anchor look intelligent. All of that eats up three or four minutes on something that otherwise would be a 30-second voice-over.

Because live shots take up so much time, other news cannot be covered within the tight time constraints of the newscast. Thus, the belief that audiences want to see live coverage contributes to manufacturing it at the expense of other coverage.

Camera Position

Camera position also affects audience perception of news events dramatically. If the camera at a demonstration is shooting from behind demonstrators toward a police line, you'll see the faces of the police opposing the mob. Of the mob itself, you'll see only the backs of those involved and the featureless backs of heads. On the other hand, a camera shooting from behind the police would show only their backs, but you'd see the angry faces of the demonstrators taunting the police, spitting at them, throwing things, and otherwise attempting to trigger a violent confrontation. Each camera position reveals things the other cannot. To get the full story of a confrontation, you need both points of view. Showing only one point of view clearly distorts reality to a substantial extent.

In the case of live shots, rarely is more than one camera available, so you are much a victim of your positioning. And people have become quite sophisticated in performing all kinds of dopey, and sometimes obscene, activities in the background of live camera coverage. One sportscaster in a major market was doing a live report from the local NFL team's locker room after a game when one of the linemen unwittingly walked into the background briefly without a stitch on, facing the camera. Suffice it to say that when you go live, anything can happen, and often does.

Bad and Good Live Reports

Frequently, too, big names in politics, sports, and business, hoping to use the station for free publicity, arrange their airport arrivals conveniently just in time for live coverage during the six p.m. newscast. Journalists who are forced to cover an important story live because of someone else's schedule have lost control of the story. They have no chance to check accuracy; no time to assure that the story is balanced. Further, live interviews, when present, must run as is with no time for editing, no time to probe beneath surface answers. A skillful interviewee can talk nonstop during the minute or so available and project an image of righteous indignation when cut off because the time allotted for the story has run out.

Except for extremely newsworthy events that are highly dramatic and visual, most stations rarely interrupt normal entertainment programming for live reports. For one reason, live inserts throw off the programming schedule and may preempt lucrative commercials. Live inserts also may drive viewers away from the station when their favorite programming is interrupted. And always the question must be asked: Will viewers be exposed to possible violence, bad taste, or obscenity?

Anyone who has watched much television news can recall instances in which the reporter on a live story should have stayed home. Examples of stories that should not be covered live include everything from the aftermath of a mattress fire (in which no one is injured or available to be

interviewed) to the reporter standing on a pier as she describes a hurricane gathering force miles away and out of sight over the horizon. Equally arcane are the live weather reports from the local botanical garden or the live standups in which the reporter describes barely visible scenes over his left shoulder.

Good live television, by contrast, contains strong elements of visual interest and dramatic significance. Such reports — the successful rescue of trapped miners, or on-scene reports of a threatening flood — offer a compelling reason to go live. They allow the audience to witness history in the making or to participate in an unusually dramatic story that touches many lives as it develops. Stories that lack visual impact and substance serve only as contributions to bad television.

Qualities of a Good Live Reporter

Journalists who do live reports cover stories into which they suddenly have been injected, sometimes without the benefit of adequate preparation, research, or insight. To do the job effectively, they need to know a little about almost every subject under the sun, to think quickly, and to have such a solid foundation in reporting skills that they can simply react when they do not have time to think. They need extraordinary abilities to ad-lib, to draw solid answers from strangers encountered only minutes before, and special gifts of perspective to help the audience understand the causes of the event they are reporting.

“To be successful at live reporting, individuals must have some very basic traits that have nothing to do with education,” says Roger Ogden, former General Manager of KCNC-Denver. “They must be able to think on their feet. They must have a sufficient vocabulary, and they must have an analytical mind so they can quickly weed fiction from fact.”

Changes in the Live Reporting Process

With the advent of live capability, news stations have had to reassess traditional ways of covering the news. Newsrooms have been reorganized; field crews have been altered; traditional job responsibilities, have been redefined. Nowhere are the changes more obvious than at the assignment desk. In times past the assignment editor's job was simple: “Cover everything that happens.” In touch with field crews by two-way radio, the assignment editor today not only dispatches reporters from one location to the next but also coordinates live news inserts in scheduled newscasts or when regular programming is interrupted.

Ways to Improve Live Reporting Skills

Live reporting demands individual traits that include personal resources such as a quick and analytical mind, the ability to speak extemporaneously, a well-developed vocabulary, good judgment and a sixth sense for what makes news. But even these traits can be improved further through training and practice.

Some news directors cite the desirability of news experience in radio, a relatively instant medium that requires the ability to present frequent live, ad-lib reports. Other stations cite the benefits of general assignment reporting, a job in which the reporter learns not only to identify and develop the sources that make news, but becomes an expert in covering a vast array of news topics. Individuals in the position learn, as well, how to meet people, how to conduct meaningful interviews, and how to present themselves on camera.

Beyond such experiences, the live reporter has access to that old maxim that “practice makes perfect.”



Television photojournalists function as primary reporters in the news-gathering process.

Today's assignment editor also may decide which stories will be taped on the scene and which will be fed live to the station. Stories not important enough for live coverage can be videotaped on the scene and microwaved to the station at a later time, or can be beamed live to the station for recording and later editing on videotape. Whenever live stories are to be used in scheduled newscasts, two-way radio communication with the field crew enables staff members at the station to evaluate the story, suggest interview questions, or even relay information about the story in progress that may be unknown to crews in the field.

Live Feeds With VTR "B Roll"

Live reports may contain some tape-delayed material. Crews that arrive at a news event as shortly as 15 minutes before airtime may videotape and field-edit significant action or microwave the raw footage back to the station for immediate editing. By newstime, the preshot and edited videotape (known in the trade as a "B roll") can be rolled over a live stand-up report — either from the scene or from the studio. The term "B roll" is a holdover from film editing days when sound from a filmed interview (the "A roll") would be carried on one projector and scenes of the event (the "B roll") would be carried on a separate projector. The basic process remains the same, except that the filmed A roll has been replaced by the live stand-up report, the B roll is now on videotape.

THE ETHICS OF ENG REPORTING

Only a few years ago, before the rapid evolution of ENG, broadcast journalists faced fewer of the challenges, problems, and opportunities that electronic news gathering now makes commonplace.



Two-way communications facilities allow field reporters to converse with news personnel at the station or to broadcast live on-air reports from the field.

Broadcast journalists did not have the ethical problems involved in deciding to broadcast airline crashes live and in color. They did not have to make instant news judgments as developing stories were sent live to mass audiences. Live coverage of dramatic events, such as an airliner crash or an apartment house fire, tends to be more emotionally involving than reports shown after the fact. Live coverage offers the viewer more intense anticipation about the story's outcome and, hence, more suspense. An additional element not present even in live radio news coverage is the possible visual identification of victims before next of kin can be notified.

Ethics in journalism implies a responsibility to be believable and to earn the public trust. No journalist can afford to compromise truth or good taste. To do so is to lose faith with the public and to bias the information upon which viewers form their opinions and decide courses of private and public action. Ethics (and professionalism) in journalism presupposes a belief in service to the public, a belief in self-regulation and autonomy in one's work. In some ENG broadcasts those considerations are outweighed by the capability that ENG provides to go live almost at will.

In the infancy of ENG, the tendency at some stations was to go live on every conceivable kind of story. We have the capability, the reasoning went, so why not use it? Suddenly reporters, unprepared for the consequences of this technology, were given the freedom to bury themselves in it. Viewers across the nation were assaulted with startling shots of plane crash victims receiving last rites on bloody landing strips, vulgar obscenities uttered unthinkingly and sometimes with calculation by news interviewees, the actual commission of suicide by a man holding hostages in a sleazy bar, naked "streakers" and "mooners" flashing for the minicams at protest rallies, and acts of violence that included the assault of a social organizer who was struck in the head with a glass water pitcher as he delivered a speech.

"Many stations learned the hard way," in the view of the late Steve Huddleston, who served in the 1970s as executive news coordinator at KMOX-TV in St. Louis. "Obviously, there were some stories that no responsible station would broadcast: a riot or its location, the most gruesome

details at the scene of a crime, for example, but they would do almost everything else, and sometimes they got into trouble.”

The ability to broadcast live calls for a news ethic because a journalist seldom can “background” a live broadcast adequately. There is no lead time to bone up on the event, no leisure to reconsider a decision once it is made. By the time people see a story on their home screens, it is too late for the reporter to back down from a bad decision, or from a lapse in news judgment or good taste.

Consider the consequences of one station’s decision in a midwestern television market. The story began when police surrounded a local bar where an armed man had taken several customers hostage and threatened to kill himself. ENG crews from several stations arrived almost simultaneously and worked their way to within feet of the doorway where the gunman was barricaded. A police negotiator tried to talk the man into peaceful surrender. At that point, one station broke into regular programming with a live report from the scene. The gunman yelled to the camera crew, “If you don’t get away from the door, I’m gonna’ shoot myself!” and suddenly he did put a gun to his head and pull the trigger. The man died in full view of the camera and the thousands of viewers who were watching, many of them children who had tuned in to late afternoon programming. The other stations at the scene videotaped the story but did not broadcast it live. Viewer reaction to the event as broadcast live was immediate and irate.

THE BENEFIT OF PERSPECTIVE

Newspaper reporters have relative leisure to develop a perspective about the story that is being reported. The same is true, to a lesser extent, of the broadcast journalist who prepares a delayed



Electronic news gathering relies heavily upon video and audio that can be assembled from various sources into compact news reports.

report on audiotape or videotape. This leisure of perspective occurs as notes are gathered, the reporter drives back to the newsroom, the story is typed, the copy is passed through editors and rewrite persons, and finally emerges as a finished story. The process of the print story (or delayed broadcast account) is more self-correcting than the instant report because it is the product of more reflective thought.

The leisure of retrospective analysis applies not only to an on-the-scene inspection of the event, the taking of notes and gathering of facts, but also to the assimilation of the story by its intended audiences. Newspaper and delayed broadcast audiences know the story has evolved through time and that its author has had time to analyze the event more thoroughly than the reporter of a live event. Audiences who witness live reports must assume more of the burden of making sense of news events. With live ENG, television reporters are saying to their audiences: "Here are the facts, as best we can report them, as they are happening." This is a far cry from saying, "Here are the facts of what happened," because in the live report so little is known at that point about the happening. The emphasis is almost entirely on the "what," with little consideration, by necessity, of the essential "why" of the event or of its potential consequences.

Manipulation is the main ethical problem that has to be reconciled by television journalists. It is aggravated by increasingly sophisticated people and organizations seeking coverage. Journalists always have been wary of, though not always perceptive about, those trying to use them. For example, a candidate for Congress in a major market recognized that the local stations didn't have much news to cover on the weekends, that their newscasts were mostly filler material. So the candidate carefully orchestrated rallies and other public appearances and campaign events to take place on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. The stations all showed up weekend after weekend to cover the only thing going on in town, the candidate's staged events.

The result was substantial audience awareness of the candidate, a major increase in public knowledge of the person, and myriad positive images of the candidate doing wonderful things. The candidate's opponent kept staging events during the week when other events were going on that competed for space on the evening newscasts. As a result, the weekend candidate, who was less well known at the beginning of the campaign, won handily. The stations could argue that they were only covering the "news" that occurred on the weekend, but it was "news" created by and for a candidate engaging in the political business of manipulating voters — and using the media effectively to do it.

Public relations professionals can be effective tools for the journalist to use. They can be resources to get information that is hard to get elsewhere, and valuable contacts who can make available hard-to-get individuals. A symbiotic relationship exists between news professionals and public relations professionals. Each functions partly because of the other. Maintaining neutrality, however, always must be at the front of the journalist's mind, and the recognition of the many agendas at work in the media message marketplace.

INSTANT NEWS POLICY

Television news operations traditionally employ far fewer employees than their newspaper counterparts. For that reason, television reporters typically conduct far less research than newspaper reporters do. TV stations may do only one or two stories per week, or at best a series on that one story. Often, fast-breaking news events preclude proper backgrounding, even for seasoned reporters. When events as calamitous as earthquakes in Mexico City, the Soviet Union's nuclear meltdown at Chernobyl, and volcanic eruptions in the Philippines occur, reporters must react almost instinctively. Their primary concern is how to report the story as thoroughly as possible

with little information available. The demands of live broadcast do not lend themselves to treatment in a handbook of ethical guidelines. Policies must deal in broad generalities because, in news, few events can be dealt with in specifics. There is no way to know what to predict.

At some stations the problem is handled by designating certain key people who are responsible for dictating “instant policy.” Often these individuals are the news director and the executive news producer. “When we have a major breaking story — a hostage situation or a plane crash — we call those people in,” says Roger Ogden, former General Manager at KCNC-TV. “They make the kinds of decisions that can’t be printed in a manual.”

Even when guidelines exist, there is the real question of whether they can be implemented routinely. Nora Beloff, former reporter for the British Broadcasting Corporation and the Reuters news agency, says, “The life of a journalist has to be a series of compromises in which ethics is unlikely to be the overriding consideration.” The reason for this, simply put, is that there is no time to form ethical decisions while under the pressure of deadlines and instant reporting.

These decisions, Edward R. Murrow once said, must be “hammered out by the individual on the anvil of experience.”

“Our people, both in the newsroom and in the field, have to have a solid news or editorial philosophy to begin with, because broadcast news happens so quickly,” adds former NBC Vice-President Thomas Wolzien. “When you’re sitting in the newsroom or the control room at five-thirty or six o’clock, and you’re going live somewhere, you have a real problem because you don’t have time to think. You can purely and basically react.”

DETERMINING STORY POTENTIAL

Just as ethics and good taste are a matter of individual judgment, so too are the considerations that dictate whether a given event should be covered live in the first place. Don Hewitt, executive



Radio news personnel discuss preliminary story selection and lineup for an upcoming newscast.

producer of CBS' 60 Minutes, maintains that, for the most part, live television is not good television. Hewitt believes the best television has drama that cannot be built into a live broadcast unless the event in and of itself is dramatic. And, says Hewitt, few events are inherently dramatic.

In this context, live coverage of people escaping from a flood-ravaged canyon is dramatic, but a meeting of city council might better be taped and edited into a solid story for later presentation. Nothing is inherently dramatic in scenes of council members sitting around a table while a reporter tries to explain what they're doing. On the other hand, a 15-second "talking head" piece with the winning quarterback at the Super Bowl might be as dramatic as a live shot of an oil refinery explosion. The joy in a mother's face as she is reunited with her child lost in the mountains may be as valid for live coverage as the rescue of stranded motorists trapped on a snowy interstate highway. The point is that decisions about each story must be made on the basis of the individual conditions that surround each event.

LIVE COVERAGE OF THE NEXT WAR?

The challenge widens even further. Facilities are close at hand that would enable journalists to cover the next war, wherever it may be, via live broadcasts. Tiny microwave facilities and portable satellite ground stations would make such broadcasts a realistic possibility. The same capability during the Vietnam War, for instance, would have enabled audiences to see an assault on what was called "Hamburger Hill" as it was happening. Minicams on the hill would have shown troops on both sides being shot and falling. The justification for these broadcasts — and they could be extended to include even live coverage of executions — is that journalists have a responsibility to show viewers what is happening in this world, pleasant or not. If a society fosters war or capital punishment, the reasoning goes, its members should be involved in the consequences of these decisions as witnesses.

Each of us as individuals must decide the merit of these proposals, not only as members of society but also as journalists. Edward R. Murrow, a reporter for much of his adult life, used the instruments of radio and television. But, he observed, the instruments he used were mass media where he as the reporter was remote from his audience. "It is rather like putting letters in a rusty mail box and never being sure that anyone comes to collect them," Murrow wrote. "Yet the job of a reporter who can never see the eyes of his listeners is to provide information upon which opinion and belief can be based."

One problem with live reporting is that its effects cannot always be measured, let alone predicted. The ethics that guide ENG must remain the same that have guided news reporting through the years in all media: fairness, accuracy, restraint, and concern for the audience's right to know about the events that are understood best in the perspective of time and with the benefit of full information.

NOTES

1. "News Coverage of Gulf War Has Cost NBC \$37 million," by J. Lippman *Los Angeles Times*.
2. *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time*, by H. Gans (New York: Vintage Books, 1991).
3. "No News Not Good News: 10-second Sound Bites May Be the Undoing of Real TV Journalism," by Julie Blacklow, *The Seattle Times*, Feb. 9, 1992, p. A-19.

Name _____

Date _____

Assignment 9-A

1. Tour news facilities at a nearby TV station and observe, firsthand, the operation of ENG camera, editing, and transmission equipment.
2. Invite a local newsperson to your class to discuss live broadcast coverage.
3. Discuss in class the ethical considerations of live broadcast coverage of an event in which profanity and obscene gestures are a probable element of the story. Should your audience be subjected to these spontaneous occurrences? Do these occurrences lend anything of value or substance to your news report? Should any or all be allowed on the air?

Name _____

Date _____

Exercise 9-A

Consider that you have the following stories you could broadcast live via ENG equipment on the ten o'clock newscast. Because you have only one ENG van in this instance, determine which story you would cover, and defend your answer in the space provided below.

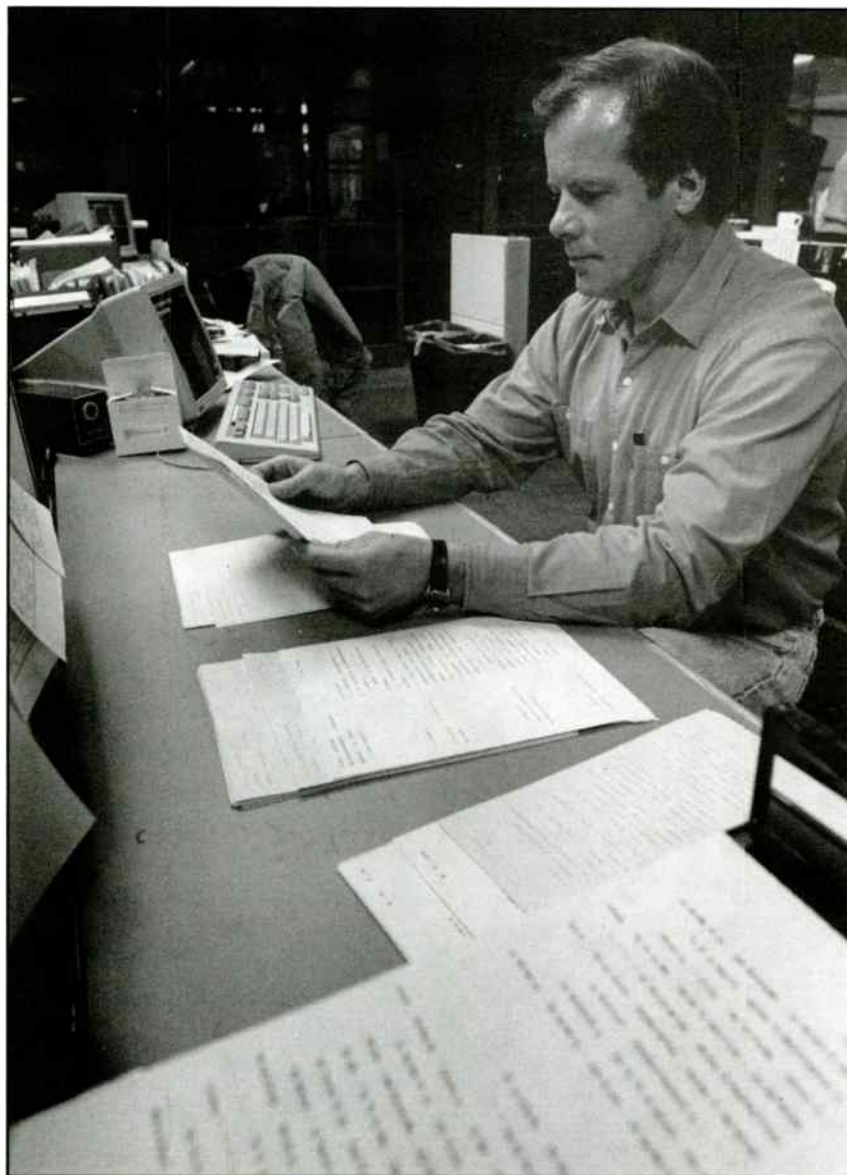
1. Twelve injury victims are arriving at the local hospital from a gondola accident at a nearby ski slope.
2. The mayor of your city has called a late evening news conference following the city council meeting to announce his resignation.
3. A Hollywood celebrity is in town to kick off the annual muscular dystrophy campaign in your town.
4. A gasoline tanker has overturned on the interstate freeway just outside your city. Flames and smoke are billowing hundreds of feet into the air. The driver has been killed, and passengers in two other cars have been seriously injured.
5. Your city's university basketball team will play an equally ranked team in a game of statewide interest tonight. You will be able to broadcast the closing minutes of the game and interview players and coaches live during the ten p.m. newscast.

PART
THREE

BROADCAST NEWS EDITING

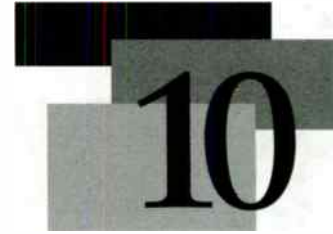
- 10** Editing and Rewriting Broadcast News
- 11** Video Editing Basics
- 12** TV News: Gathering and Editing the Raw Material
- 13** Radio News
- 14** Preparing the TV Newscast

News comes from various sources. You may gather some as a reporter yourself. Most of the news you broadcast, however, will come from other journalists. That news may be from other local reporters, stringers, network news feeds, wire associations, feature services, and public relations agencies or departments. No matter what the source of the news, editing is a must, just as important for the electronic news media as it is for print. Although the media have some facets of editing in common, they differ in several ways. Primarily, the news must be edited for the ear in electronic media; therefore, the writing style must be sound-oriented. Rhythm is important. For instance, leads must be quite short, and specific items may be repeated in certain stories. Also, the newscaster must be particularly careful to produce clean copy.



*The task of the journalist is to hold a magnifying mirror
before our society to show warts and all.*

Wes Gallagher, Former AP General Manager



Editing and Rewriting Broadcast News



Broadcast stations, whether radio or television, strive for uniqueness in the sound and style of their newscasts. News, after all, is one of the main components of any broadcast station's image — how the station is perceived by its listening or viewing community. News is one commodity that can help set the station apart from the similar entertainment and network affiliations typically found from one station to the next. Although all stations have access to common information sources, they rarely can set themselves apart if they use only those sources. All stations commonly monitor local police, fire, and emergency channels. They cover the same news conferences, the same spot news events, and they subscribe to the same wire services. Typically, they also receive the same public relations releases, video news releases, and weather reports. And they patronize similar audio and video syndication services, subscribe to the same newspapers, and create virtually identical futures files.

To make themselves unique, the best news organizations insist on reporter enterprise, story ownership, and follow-up on major stories. In these three areas no competitor can cover daily news exactly the same. A further benefit derives because news is covered less from the perspective of treating important stories as one event after another and more as part of an ongoing process.

“We rush from event to event simply because we are able, too seldom pausing to reflect on what we have just witnessed,” says Tom Brokaw, managing editor and anchor of NBC Nightly News. “As a result, too many developments are left unresolved or in a bewildering state. The place of contemplation is overrun.”¹

Reporters who generate unique story ideas and follow the stories as they develop over time infuse a station's newscasts with uniqueness and perspective available in no other way. These reporters realize that stories that matter take different twists and turns as they develop. Few news organizations provide as much follow-up as audiences would like, but reporters with a strong sense of story ownership follow stories as a matter of routine, relying less on the assignment editor to point them in the direction and treatment of news stories than upon their own news judgment and philosophy.



A television news anchor makes a final script review prior to airtime.

At too many stations the job of determining what is news is shifting away from reporters. During site observations at the three network TV affiliates in Memphis, Kathleen Wickham of the University of Memphis found that “television reporters . . . initiated almost no story assignments on their own.”² Assignment editors still play a key role in advance story planning and sometimes are the “first reporter” on stories, but ongoing communication must exist between reporter, producer, and assignment editor. “Putting together a news story for TV must be a collaborative undertaking, much more so than in newspaper journalism,” says Stephen Hess of the Brookings Institution. “It is the nature of technology.”³

NEWS SERVICES

As another line of defense to preserve uniqueness in newscasts, most stations insist upon complete rewrites of material that likely will be duplicated at other stations. When deadline pressures or small staff size prevents complete rewrites of copy, most stations still insist that you edit the copy so it sounds different from the competition. Editing and rewriting have the additional advantage of tailoring the copy to special styles and rates of on-air delivery. The major news services furnish stations with news of non-local origin. Each wire service provides multiple wires — a principal or “trunk” wire plus a broadcast wire, sports wire, financial wire, state wire, and other special services. Depending upon the number of wire services to which a station subscribes, it could receive as many as one to two million words per day.

One task of the newsperson is to select and edit wire copy for each newscast. The “rip and read” method is not professional. Even though wire services may do an excellent job of writing,

the copy at the very least should be edited to your style and voice. Extra attention must be given to putting the story into broadcast style. All wire copy has to be checked for misspellings, excessive modifiers, and too much attribution. If you have a question about a story that cannot be answered locally, you should call the nearest bureau for clarification. Newsrooms commonly display the nearest bureau's telephone number near the wire service printer or in a special newsroom telephone directory of important numbers. Additional information is available in the wire service style book, which contains spaces for the phone numbers of regional, state, national, and international wire service news centers.

Editing Wire Copy

If the required changes are minor, you can edit wire copy both to improve flow and to make the copy conform more closely to a given style of delivery. This example shows how copy can be edited without changing essential meaning:

~~098CCP~~
~~(Leavenworth) Prison officials in Leavenworth say a~~ ^A 45-year-old inmate escaped from the U.S. Penitentiary in Leavenworth ~~and~~ remains at large today. The man apparently walked away from the prison's honor farm ~~earlier today~~ and escaped with the help ^{from} of accomplices ^{parked} who waited nearby in a car outside the prison walls. The suspect was ~~sentenced in Kentucky in September to~~ ^{serving} a five-year term for importing ~~heroin~~ drugs from Mexico.

The changes made in this wire copy are relatively minor but do reduce wordiness and improve flow. Even so, unless changes are neatly made, the copy is difficult to read on-air and should be retyped if time permits.

Rewriting Wire Copy

If major changes are required in wire copy, the entire piece should be rewritten. Consider the following example:

~~083DDR~~
 Stress-Women
 (~~Cambridge~~) A British ^{Doctor} Endocrinologist warns ^{that stress may trigger} that young career women ^{who get too wrapped up} hormone changes ^{that can lead to baldness and hair on the} in their activities may start to have such problems as hair on their faces and chests; and baldness of the head. According to Dr. Ivor Mills of Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge, ^{calls} England, the problem is known as "stress disease" and involves hormonal changes. ^{He} Dr. Miles says strain on the brain ^{results in} is blamed for increased male hormone production in women, resulting in aggression, ^{ruthlessness} infertility and insomnia.
 UPS 09-19A10:58 AMD

This copy obviously is difficult to read, although editing has tightened the story and made it flow more easily. When changes of such magnitude are made, the copy will be almost impossible to read, a problem that can be eliminated through rewriting:

A British doctor warns young career women that stress may trigger hormone changes that can lead to baldness, and hair on the face and chest. Dr. Ivor Mills of Cambridge calls the problem "stress disease." He says strain results in male hormone production in females, resulting in aggression, infertility, and insomnia.

Localizing Wire Copy

Wire copy should be localized when appropriate. Many stories of national importance can be localized by an interview with a local authority. A story about the rising cost of automobiles can be localized through an interview with a local import dealer. An economics professor from a local college could be used to add noteworthy perspective to the story. Look at the following wire story:

American auto prices rose an average of 16 percent last year, a report released today by congress revealed.

Rep. Thomas Hansen, R-Hawaii, said in Washington today that the 16 percent increase in auto prices had contributed to the nine percent decline in auto sales during the year.

Imported-car prices rose only three percent, while import sales were up 20 percent last year.

Then compare it with the localized story below:

The rising cost of foreign-made cars is creating a boom in American car sales. One local dealer says his sales are up 18 percent this year despite a general slow-down in import sales. The owner of Smith Automotive, Robert Smith, says he believes foreign car prices may double within the next five years. This confirms a national report released today by Congressman Thomas Hansen of Hawaii. Hansen says import car prices have risen 16 percent with a corresponding decline in sales. In contrast, American cars have increased only three percent in price, and U.S. car sales are up nearly 20 percent.

Finally, wire service or newspaper copy is often rather stiff and officious. It is meant to be read with the eyes, not spoken to another person as though you are having a conversation — which is what broadcasting does. When you are reading broadcast copy on the air, you are chatting with individuals sitting quietly in their home, or at work, or even riding along with them in a car (if it's for radio). So you have to incorporate some conversational tone and audience relatedness to that copy. A good test of your writing is to ask yourself, "Is this the way I'd explain it to a person over coffee?" If the answer is no, rewrite it. Although you have to be a little formal, you want to work to make the copy sound natural when it is spoken aloud.

Consider the following two rewrites of the previous examples on the British doctor's warning and the American car sales boom. These examples push the conversational tone and audience relatedness approach.

If you're a working woman, stress may be making you bald and, at the same time, growing hair on your face and chest. Sounds crazy, but a British doctor, Ivor Mills of Cambridge, says stress among young career women can trigger hormone changes that will do just that. He says increased mental strain results in male hormone production in females, resulting in aggression, infertility, and insomnia.

You're not alone if you've switched from driving a foreign car to one made in America. There's a boom in American car sales with one local dealer moving 18 percent more cars despite a slow-down in import sales. Robert Smith, who owns Smith Automotive, says he thinks price may be the reason, with foreign car prices expected to double within the next five years.

Smith's experience supports a report on national car sales trends released by Congressman Thomas Hansen of Hawaii. Import car prices have shot up 16 percent with a corresponding decline in sales. But American cars had only a three percent increase in price during the same period, and sales for domestic autos are up nearly 20 percent nationally.

VIDEO NEWS RELEASES

Public relations practitioners provide television stations with video news releases, or VNRs. With reduced budgets in many newsrooms, public relations professionals have seized the opportunity to provide video news packages to stations. The packages usually are transmitted via satellite to stations, along with a fax of the script. Some VNRs are distributed by mail on video cassette, but these distributions are limited because of their high cost.⁴ Usually the major video supplier is a company specializing in VNR distribution. The public relations agency or corporation pays that company to distribute the VNR for it. Each day the major video companies send a "budget," or list of stories, along with story scripts and time of day the video will be transmitted to the station. The station can record all, part or none of the material as it chooses.

Normally the video material includes several packages of about 90 seconds each, along with additional B-roll (background video) material. B-roll video is useful if stations prefer to produce their own stories from the material or want anchors to voice the stories from the studio. In addition to the budget and story scripts, the printed material also may include suggestions for ways to localize the story.

About 75 percent of all television stations regularly use VNRs⁵. The most popular topics for VNRs are health, business, politics, lifestyles, fashion, and sports. Key to their use by the station is the story's news value. Assuming the VNR's core idea is strong, often you can improve it and further localize it by redoing the entire piece or by using only B-roll video and perhaps a soundbite from the VNR. Regardless of how they're used, VNRs provide a valuable addition to the sources for television news.

Other forms of public relations video contribute other valuable material for television stations. These include satellite news conferences and satellite interviews (also called satellite media tours). The news conference allows TV news personalities to participate in a question-and-answer session via satellite with a spokesperson from an organization. The person may be the chief executive officer, a key person within the organization or, infrequently, a public relations person. Often a press conference follows the presentation. Sometimes the journalist will be in a studio equipped with interactive uplink facilities or may watch the satellite feed and phone in questions.⁶ Satellite media tours offer individual interviews with an expert or a celebrity in a remote studio or a

remote location such as the person's home or office. Each interview is exclusive and may even be carried live. The guest, however, may do 20 or 30 of these interviews a day for stations around the country.⁷

Although most public relations agencies understand the importance of preparing material especially for broadcast, many public relations practitioners do not have broadcast experience and do not understand the differences among media. You must exercise sound news judgment in evaluating publicity material not only for style, but also because it may represent undue emphasis on special-interest points of view. Many times the information in VNRs is newsworthy but may have to be reworked to meet the news department's requirements. Answers to the following questions offer a guideline.

1. Is the self-interest point of view unduly emphasized? If so, can it be eliminated?
2. Is the material localized? If not, can it be localized?
3. Is the lead well written to capture the most important aspect of the story? If not, can you rewrite the lead?
4. Does the news story have unnecessary material? Can you condense it? (Publicity material often is padded.)
5. Does the material correspond to your broadcast style? If not, can it be edited to conform?
6. Do you have any questions about the story? If you do, call the contact person whose name should appear on the release. Call collect if the source lives outside your area. The public relations practitioner should be happy to answer your questions.

DEALING WITH PR PEOPLE

Public relations professionals can be extremely useful to a news organization. They provide substantial material, particularly stories that involve large companies, government agencies, well-funded candidates, and personalities who can afford the services of professional communicators. They often are called media relations officers or, in the case of members of Congress, congressional press aides. Regardless of the title, their job is to make their employer look good and to generate positive news coverage.

Because public relations professionals have an agenda to communicate a specific point of view, the material has to be considered within that framework. They are not fact gatherers as much as fact providers, always in ways that reinforce the positive image of their boss. No journalist should put public relations material in a newscast without checking it and, in controversial circumstances, double-checking opposing points of view.

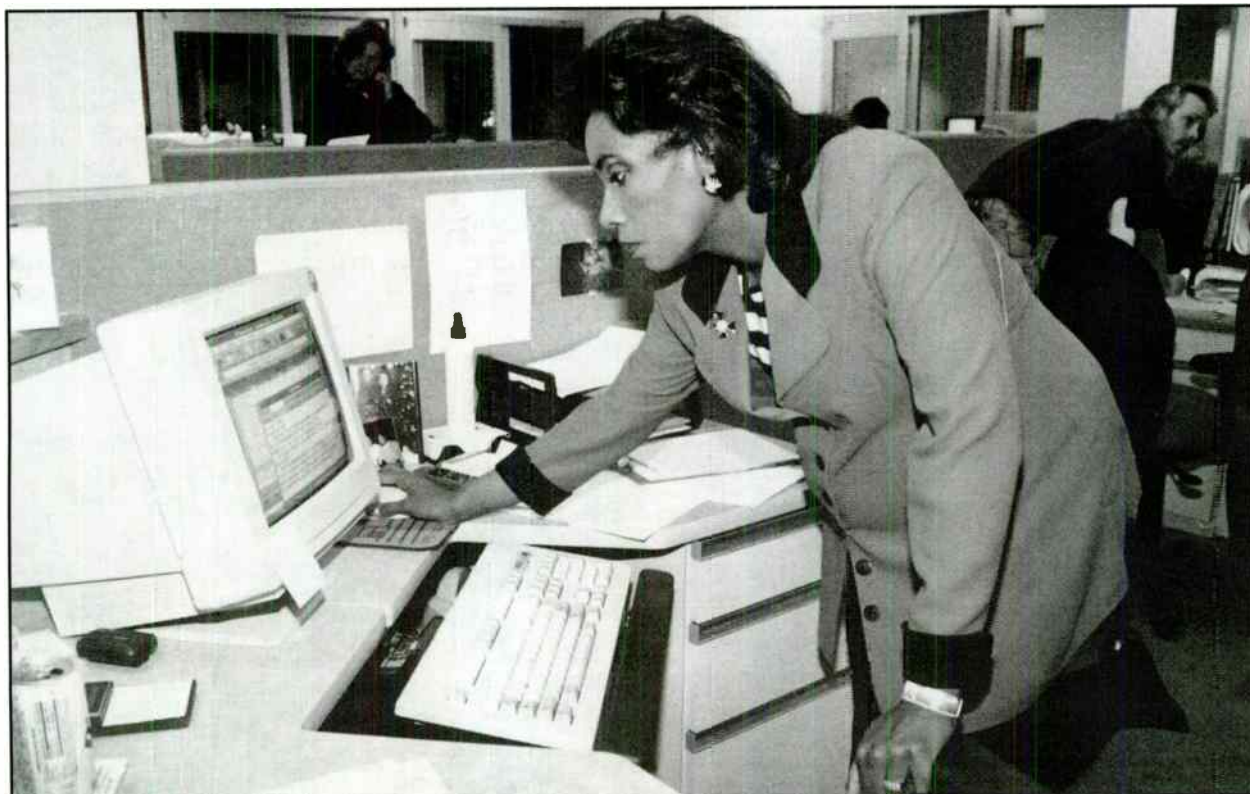
Virtually every government agency has public relations people with titles ranging from "public information officer" to "media relations specialist." Their abilities vary considerably with their training and experience. Often they are the point of contact for data on government programs or official positions on controversies. A call to the public information officer of a U. S. Forest Service regional headquarters can generate a landslide of reports, charts, even video news releases on whatever subject you may be investigating involving that agency. You often will get much more information than you need.

Consider this real-life situation. A major controversy arose in a western state over the management of a mountain drainage area. Mining interests, environmental activists, loggers, and

others were involved. A television reporter had to put together a minute-and-a-half story about the situation, which was generating considerable public interest. The reporter called the U. S. Forest Service regional office at noon, when she got the assignment, and asked the public information officer for some background material. What the reporter needed was a short fact sheet and perhaps a few paragraphs of the Forest Service's position. At three p.m., when the reporter arrived back at the station from doing some other interviewing, the material had been delivered in the form of an environmental impact statement on the drainage area. It was more than 300 pages in length and full of complicated engineering schematic drawings, stream flow data, and several terrain maps that were too detailed and complicated to use as visuals on television. The public information officer was trying to be helpful by providing all the information he had, but the reporter was left with a mountain of material to digest in the two hours before the story had to go on the air. She pulled a couple of quotes from the first few pages of the environmental impact statement to read on-air.

Many public relations people are solid professionals who know media needs. Unfortunately, some individuals are promoted (or demoted) into jobs at which they really aren't very good. When dealing with PR people, you will have to get to know them and, through trial and error, develop a sense of whom you can trust to provide what you need. Particularly in the case of television, PR people with no experience in the visual media don't understand the need for pictures. In some cases, public relations people are only on temporary assignment and have marginal, if any, experience in the media for which they are supplying information.

As examples: the U. S. Army does not consider public relations to be a career field for officers but, rather, an additional or temporary duty. As a result, a former military police commander can end up being an Army Public Information Officer for a few years. A person whose job was to restrict information is suddenly in the position of providing information to the civilian news



A newsroom computer terminal allows the reporter to research and write stories, monitor the daily news flow, and access databases from any number of sources.

media, a role contrary to all his previous training. On the other hand, the U.S. Air Force and U.S. Navy do view public relations as a career field and have long-term, seasoned individuals dealing with the media. In some corporations the media relations responsibility gets dumped off on a secretary. In others it is an additional duty for a senior executive with access to key players throughout the organization. In still others it is a separate department with a vice-president at its head and offices in charge of in-house newsletters, corporate closed-circuit newscasts to remote factories or offices, and slick magazine-style publications generated by the organization. Often you will have no idea what kind of PR person you are dealing with until you work with the contact for a while.

Fax transmission has become a favorite vehicle of PR people to funnel information to newsrooms. Over-use of fax machines, however, has rendered them almost useless in many instances. Too many people have news organizations' fax numbers and keep churning out "junk" faxes that are neither requested nor of much interest. Some public relations people justify their existence by reporting to clients all the faxes they've sent. Particularly in election years, fax machines are more hassle than they are worth to many newsrooms.

In a recent election, one of the authors of this text witnessed the ineffectiveness of faxing in a major market television newsroom. The fax machine was at the edge of the assignment desk area, which was located in the middle of the newsroom. It had a pile of fax material under the printout feed as high as a normal office desk, about three-and-a-half feet. No one had looked at the faxes for three days. The pile was full of the minutia of campaigns. Every candidate from dog catcher to congressional representative had sent myriad releases ranging from supermarket appearances to position statements to schedules of neighborhood meetings. And it was all for nothing. The deluge of information was such that it was simply ignored.

In summary, journalists should:

1. Know your PR contacts as well as you know your other sources. They can be extremely valuable, or worthless, or somewhere in between.
2. Double-check the information provided, and always be aware that it is provided to advance a given point of view (which is the case with most sources of information). Often you may have to seek out opposing views to balance your coverage properly.
3. If you are going to have anyone send a fax to you, make sure he/she sends a cover sheet with your name on it, as well as a short description of the material or a story slug you provide him/her.

WEATHER BROADCASTING

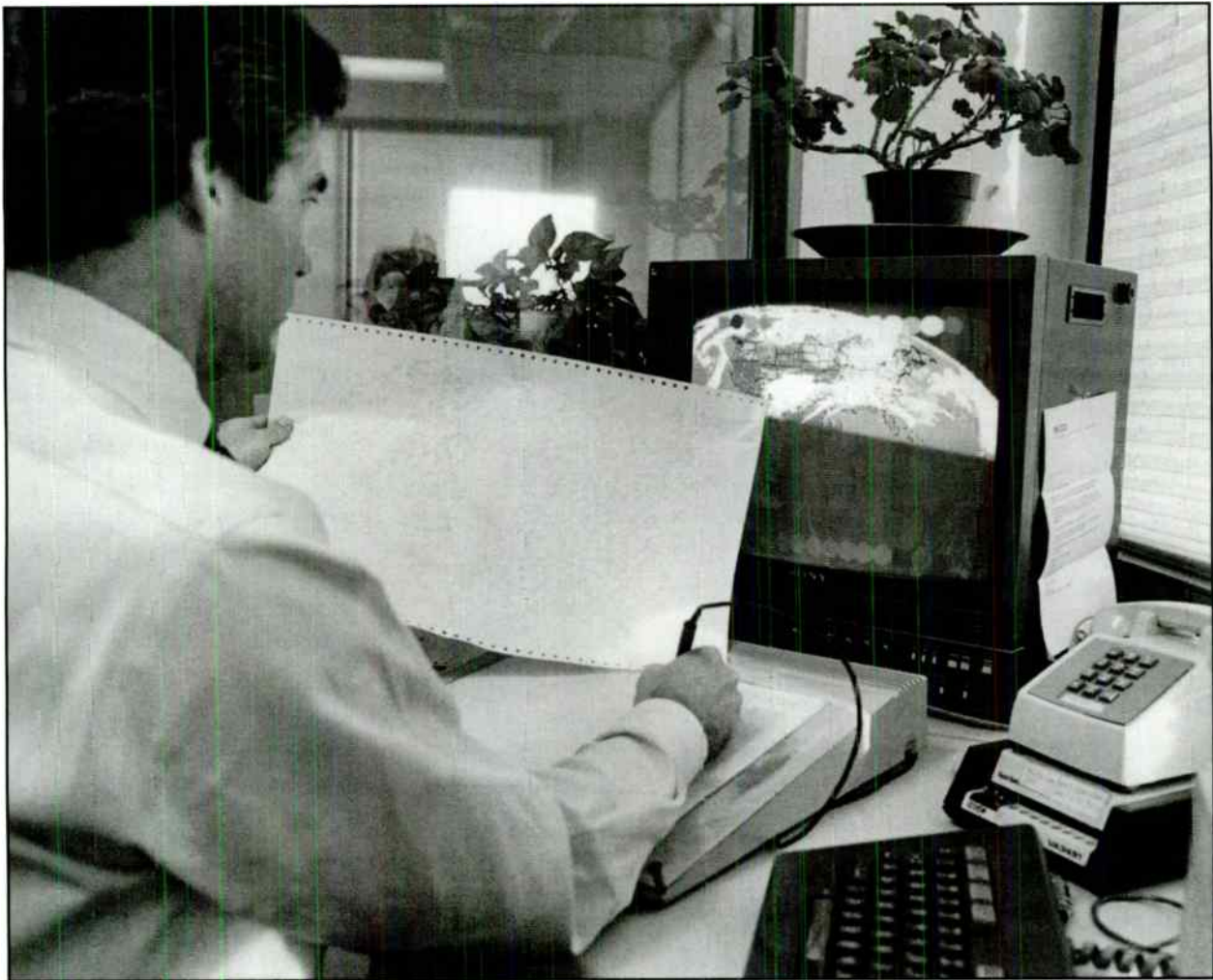
Broadcast audiences take weather as seriously as they do their money. Except when weather patterns become predictably routine, most audiences want weather statistics, and they follow significant changes in the weather. Historically, radio has been the medium of choice for constant weather updates and monitoring, although cable

Sample Weather Forecast for Radio

Weather for the Dallas-Fort Worth vicinity . . . Look for southerly winds five to 10 miles per hour and warmer temperatures through tomorrow. Highs today in the upper 70s, with overnight lows in the mid-50s. Warmer tomorrow with highs predicted to reach 85 degrees. Increasing cloudiness and a 20 percent chance of rain by tomorrow evening at this time. Currently, the downtown temperature is 68 degrees.

television and local commercial television outlets have begun to make inroads into radio's dominance as the medium of choice for weather information.

Both 24-hour weather news services and local cut-ins during weather extremes make television a viable option for weather information. Further, ENG gives television the ability to provide on-scene coverage, even if it's used only during regularly scheduled newscasts. ENG still, however, is underused in providing audiences live coverage of developing storms. Audiences want to see weather information as well as hear about it.



Some television weather personalities are meteorologists, specialists in the study of weather and climate.

NOTES

1. Brokaw, Tom. "The New News Technology: Master or Servant," an address presented at The Cost of Technology: Information Prosperity and Information Poverty, a national conference sponsored by the Gannett Center for Media Studies, November 10, 1986. The complete address is available from the Gannett Center for Media Studies, 2950 Broadway, New York, NY 10027; 212-280-8392.
2. Wickham, Kathleen W. "The Presentation of Story Ideas: A Exploratory Study of Gatekeeping in Local Television News," unpublished master's thesis, University of Memphis, 1987.
3. Hess, Stephen. "Television Reporting: Self-fulfilling News," *IRE Journal*, 13, Fall 1989.
4. Brody, E. W. and Dan Lattimore. *Public Relations Writing*, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1990), pp. 165-175.
5. *Medialink, The Video News Release Handbook*. (New York: Video Broadcasting Corp., 1990), pp. 4-5.
6. Brody and Lattimore, p. 165.
7. Brody and Lattimore, p. 165.

Name _____

Date _____

Exercise 10-A**Wire Copy Editing**

Edit the following wire copy. Indicate which copy could have possibilities to localize and to add visuals or taped actualities. Try to include conversational tone, and see what you can do to make the story relate to the average viewer.

Oil is once again flowing in the Trans-Siberian pipeline. Repair crews plugged a leak in the pipeline, Tuesday with a wooden wedge. The leak, which was caused by a truck ramming into a pipeline, caused the seven and three-quarter billion dollar system to shut down only 24 hours after it had been reopened. The pipeline had been shut down for ten days following an explosion at a pump station.

-30-

Authorities in Prospect, Connecticut, hope to have autopsies completed today on the nine persons who were apparently murdered and then left in a burning house early Friday morning. Five autopsies have already been completed. Dr. Elliot gross, who's Connecticut's chief medical examiner, says Mrs. Cheryl Beaudoin died of a combination of head injuries and a stab wound in the chest. Four of her children also suffered head injuries. It is the worst mass murder case in Connecticut's history.

-30-

Name _____

Date _____

Exercise 10-A**Wire Copy Editing (continued)**

The Labor Department says thousands of persons receiving unemployment benefits will no longer receive payments because of a drop in the nation's insured unemployment rate. Labor secretary Ray Marshall says the cutoff in benefits will affect an estimated 218-thousand persons in 37 states who have already received 26 weeks of regular unemployment compensation.

-30-

When the town of Hondo, Texas, applied for Federal funds to help build a million-dollar civic center, it was turned down because its three percent jobless rate is below the minimum required for assistance. Town officials believed they were being penalized for having too many hard-working citizens so they sent out a request for welfare-collecting loafers to take up residence in Hondo. Mayor Woodrow Glasscock says so far he's received over 600 responses, including one from a German man who said he'd consider helping out . . . if the town will pay his fair to the U. S!

-30-

The senate is expected to spend most of the week looking at a bill providing partial public financing for senate election campaigns. That bill would give candidates the choice of accepting public funds or raising their own. If they accepted public money their spending would be limited by a formula based on the population of the state. Republicans are opposed to the measure, calling it a waste of money, and are threatening a filibuster.

-30-

Name _____

Date _____

Assignment 10-A

1. Call or write to a public relations agency or department and ask for a copy of a news release sent to a radio or TV station. (Use the news release provided at the end of this chapter if you cannot obtain one from your area). Analyze the release by answering the following questions:
 - a. Is it written in broadcast style? Does it require any changes? What are they?
 - b. Is the lead the best it could be? If not, rewrite the lead.
 - c. Could you delete any copy? If so, delete it.
 - d. Is the story important to your local community? Can it be localized? If so, localize it.
 - e. Does the story have any gaps? Problems that you cannot find out about on your own? If so, call the public relations person and ask.

2. Edit or rewrite the news release for a radio broadcast.

GIVING UP THE CANAL
Press Release

Contact: Churchill Roberts
The University of West Florida
Pensacola, Florida 32514
Tel: 904-474-0000
Fax: 904-474-0000

Air date: PBS, Tuesday, June 26, 199X 9 p.m. EDT/8 p.m. CDT
Length: 57:40

GIVING UP THE CANAL, a television news documentary, looks at the paradox which is Panama — a country both proud of its special relationship with the United States and ashamed of its dependence on the superpower. Panama has been called one of the last vestiges of U.S. colonialism. Until 1977, the U.S. maintained its own city-state inside the country — the Panama Canal Zone — a ten-mile strip over which Panama had no jurisdiction. Fourteen U.S. military bases or installations still dot the tiny isthmus, but the strongest symbol of both Panamanian nationalism and dependence on the United States is the mighty Panama Canal. Built with the U.S. dollars and ingenuity, the Canal has long been a source of pride for many U.S. citizens. However, for many Panamanians, the canal has long been a reminder of U.S. domination — a reminder of their position as tenants in their own country.

The 1977 Panama Canal Treaties stipulate that on midnight of December 31, 1999, control of the Canal will pass to Panama. GIVING UP THE CANAL examines this process in which the U.S. is gradually becoming the tenant, Panama the landlord. It looks at how implementation of the Treaties has been complicated by lingering doubts among Panamanians about the legitimacy of treaties negotiated by dictator Omar Torrijos; by U.S. charges of Panamanian incompetence and inability to run the Canal profitably; and by the strained relations between the U.S. and Panama during the rule of General Manuel Noriega.

The U.S. invasion of Panama on December 20, 1989 brought about the downfall of Noriega, but it also renewed charges of U.S. imperialism and raised questions about whether Panama would ever be able to govern itself and the Canal. GIVING UP THE CANAL reports on the difficult task of the United States relinquishing control of a country born of U.S. expansionism and nurtured on U.S. dollars.

The documentary also reports on how Panamanians must deal with an economy in shambles, a police force dominated by former members of Noriega's Panamanian Defense Forces and a national pride wounded by U.S. intervention.

Producer Sandra Dickson and Executive Producer Churchill Roberts are professors of communication arts at The University of West Florida. Their previous documentaries include RELIGION AND REVOLUTION IN NICARAGUA and CUBA, CASTRO AND CHRISTIANITY. They began working on GIVING UP THE CANAL in January 1988.

Underwriters for GIVING UP THE CANAL include The University of West Florida and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

###

Video Editing Basics

Video editing, both art and craft, is an essential part of television news. Without editing, raw visuals from the field could not be molded into compact, concise presentations of maximum effectiveness. Editing means selecting images and sounds, their timing and sequence. Editing — often ignored or misunderstood by the public — is the heartbeat of any visual presentation. Without editing the news story could not exist.

The process of editing video is different from any editing process used in the history of filmmaking. Video splices, unlike film, are accomplished electronically. No cement, no physical splices, no film reels or projectors are involved. Electronic videotape replaced film in television news in



Satellite dishes and microwave relay facilities are indispensable to the reporting process.



A videotape editor previews scenes at an editing console before making a final edit.

the mid-1970s. Beginning in the mid-1990s news organizations began converting to digital video equipment. As with any new technology, economics were prohibitive for most news organizations to switch to digital equipment until their existing facilities had been fully depreciated, and early digital equipment was extremely expensive. As prices fell, however, more organizations began using digital equipment. However, videotape remains the prevailing format in many news operations and journalism education environments.

The basic concepts of picture organization are the same across technologies. In news film, shots were pulled off the processed film reel and hung in a box device. The editor noted what each shot contained and placed it in the order to be spliced for the final story. The scenes then were cemented together. In videotape editing, editors are not able to separate the shots, or glance at small frames of them to check them physically. The videotape editor often keeps a sheet of paper handy while previewing the tape, noting the time into the tape of various key shots. That way the editor knows where to find them on the tape when the editing begins.

In videotape you have a minimum of one playback deck and one record deck. The field tape is put in the playback deck and the editor selects the shots, recording them onto the playback deck with a switching device called an editor. When shots that have to go next to one another on the final record tape, are far apart on the original tape, the editor has to fast-forward or fast-reverse the tape, whizzing through all the shots between. This back-and-forth nature of editing videotape can be tedious if the photographer in the field has failed to shoot the story in a logical sequence.

In digital editing, the field video is fed into the computerized editing system through a playback deck. Once into the computer, the shots are displayed as icons on the screen. Each icon is the first frame of each shot. Thus, digital editing is a kind of return to the film-editing technique of a shot box. The computer monitor is filled with all the shots from the field as icons. The editor



An editor works with the AVID NewsCutter digital editing system.

Photo courtesy of AVID Technology



A computer monitor displays scenes stored on an AVID NewsCutter system.

Photo courtesy of AVID Technology



A companion monitor displays time code for each frame of video from a scene in the monitor at left.

selects them and pulls them down into an editing strip at the bottom of the screen. Certain shots can be made slow-motion or even to run backward. When the piece is assembled, the editor can play back the video to check it. Finally, the edited video is recorded onto another medium for playback or sent to a file server for use in the newscast. Traditional filmmaking techniques of mixing wide, medium, and close-up shots, along with the theory of screen direction, apply across media. Since the days of Charlie Chaplin, one of cinema's earliest and foremost innovators, the concepts of telling a story with moving visual media have remained much the same. What is important is not the technology used to deliver moving pictures to the audience, but, rather, the meaning conveyed in those pictures and whether they support the narration script, and vice versa. What we're doing, regardless of whether it is on film, videotape, or digital, is telling a story.

THE BASIC EDITING PROCESS

The video editing unit at almost all television stations consists of four components:

1. Video player
2. Video player/recorder
3. Editing control unit.
4. Television monitors that show scenes from both player and recorder.

The control unit operates the electronic and mechanical functions of the video player and recorder. Editing decisions are entered in the control unit, which in turn operates the player and recorder during actual editing. On some units the editing control is incorporated as a physical part



The videotape cassette editing system allows electronic transfer of material from the playback unit onto a master cassette in the videotape recorder.

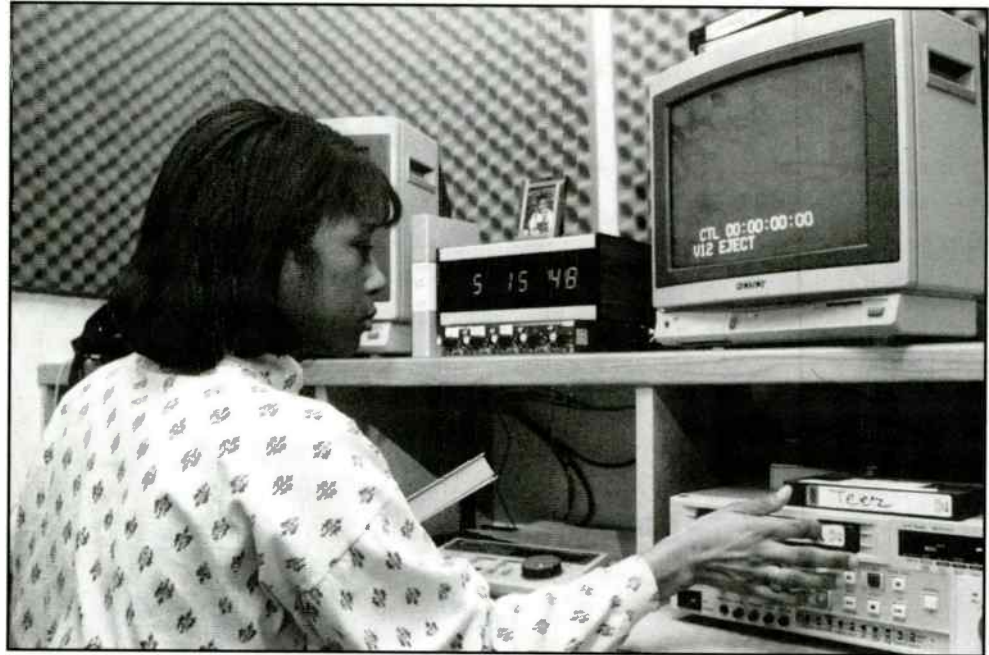
of the video machine. All components — player, recorder, editing control unit, and the two television monitors — are fitted onto a movable rack known most commonly as the editing console. A videocassette from the field, in brief, is edited in the following manner:

1. The cassette is loaded into the video player.
2. Scenes (and sound) on the cassette are transferred electronically to the video recorder. Signals fed from the player are re-recorded, in order, on a master cassette.
3. All instructions for the transfer of scenes and sound are performed by entering appropriate instructions in the editing control unit.

EDITING CONTROL UNIT

The exact layout of the editing control unit varies from one manufacturer to the next, but the schematic diagram shown in Figure 11-1 on page 234 represents the features found on most units. The editing control unit is divided into four distinct areas:

1. The controls that operate the player whenever actual edits are not being performed.
2. The controls that instruct player and recorder to perform actual edits of varying nature.
3. The controls that operate the recorder whenever actual edits are not being done.
4. Digital counters that display elapsed scene time in hours, minutes, seconds, and frames.



Editing attends to the interrelationship of images, words and sounds, their timing, pace, and rhythm.

Player Controls

Referring to Figure 11-1, the left row of player controls, REC, FW, REW and STOP, is used much like the controls on audio cassette recorders. With these buttons the operator can record manually, fast-forward, rewind, and stop the cassette in the video player. Player controls in the second row marked PLAY, PAUSE/STILL, and SEARCH are used to play scenes from the raw field tape on the left monitor. When the PLAY button is pushed, scenes from the field tape play at normal speed. The PAUSE/STILL button stops the tape and displays a single still frame from the scene at that point. The SEARCH button activates the shuttle control, which allows the editor to view the tape at slower or faster than normal speed.

When the shuttle control is activated, the tape can be viewed at speeds ranging from a frame or two per second (each second of video contains 30 frames of picture) to as fast as five times normal speed (up to 20 times on some units). The shuttle control is a great time-saver when the editor must locate scenes that are separated widely within the 20-minute field cassette.

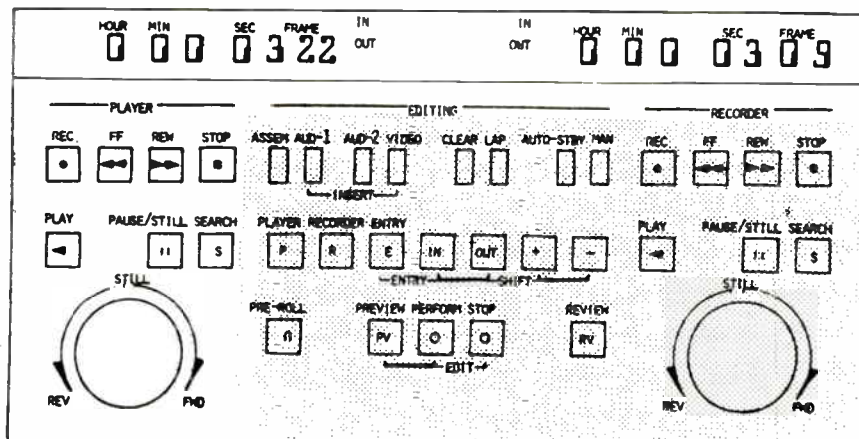


FIGURE 11-1.
Player controls.

Recorder Controls

The controls that operate the recorder (on the right side of the editing control unit) are identical in function to those on the player side of the editing control unit. The only difference is that they operate the recorder, not the player. Scenes from the recorder are displayed on the right monitor.

Editing Controls

Three rows of buttons control all editing functions (see Figure 11-2). The first row of buttons is marked ASSEM, AUD-1, AUD-2, VIDEO, CLEAR, LAP, AUTO STANDBY, and MANUAL. The first four buttons on this top row are used to tell the editing control unit what type of editing is to be performed. The editor has two choices: (a) the Assemble (ASSEM) mode, or (b) the INSERT mode (AUD-1, AUD-2, VIDEO). To understand the nature of each type of editing, we first examine a piece of videotape (Figure 11-3).

1. The control track (CTL) consists of one electronic pulse for each frame of video and is necessary to regulate recording and playback speed. Film is controlled in much the same way except that film has physical, not electronic, sprocket holes.
2. The video track carries the picture information as electronic signals from the camera that are recorded magnetically on the videotape.

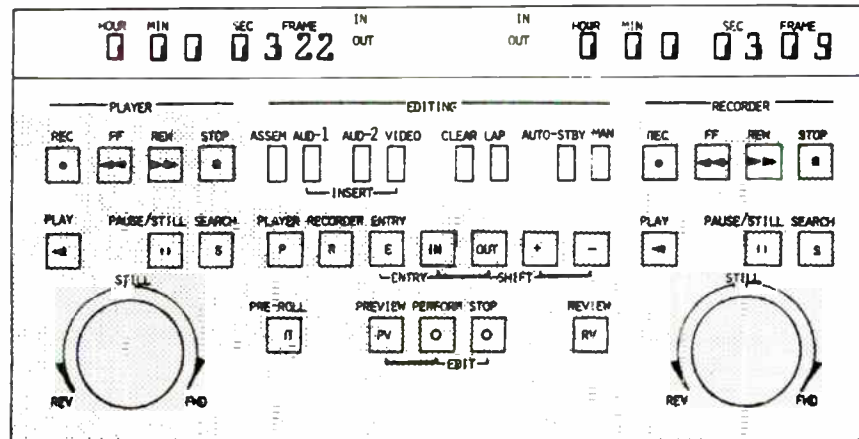


FIGURE 11-2.
Editing controls.

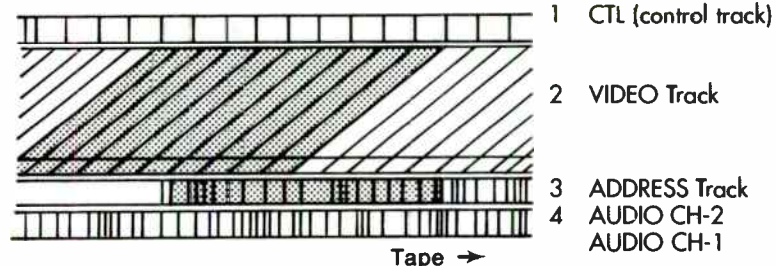


FIGURE 11-3.
A piece of videotape.

3. The address track accepts an optional time code, in hours, minutes, seconds, frames, or in real time. The address track requires an accessory time code generator that is used, for example, at sporting events where three cameras record an event simultaneously from different angles. The time code from the address track later can be displayed on the editing console, and the editor can select scenes from each tape based on the real time displayed from each tape.
4. Audio channels 1 and 2 carry the sound tracks. Normally, sound in the field (interviews, standups, wild sound) is recorded on channel 2, although some stations record sound on both channels. During editing, voice-over narration normally is recorded on channel 1.

In the ASSEMBLE mode, all information on the field tape is transferred to the master cassette: video, address track, and sound on channels 1 and 2. At the same time, a control track (see the control track in Figure 11-3) is laid down on the master cassette. Editing in the ASSEMBLE mode is similar to splicing sound film in which sprocket holes, pictures, and sound are contained within each scene. In the INSERT mode, only the video track and/or channels 1 and 2 are transferred to the master cassette. No control track is laid down during insert editing, so a control track already must be present.* Hence, if you intend to edit in the INSERT mode (for example, when you wish to lay down video only, or sound only on channels 1 and/or 2), you first must record a control track on the master cassette. Only then can you make insert edits. Without a control track, scenes on the master cassette will break up and will be unsuitable for broadcast. Continuing along the top row, the CLEAR button clears the digital counters on either the player display or the record display. The LAP button, when activated, tells the total time of the last edit in hours, minutes, seconds and frames.

The next three buttons, ENTRY, IN, and OUT are used in combination. These buttons tell the player and recorder to begin and end edits with frame accuracy. Touching PLAYER, ENTRY, and IN, for example, will enter an edit-in point on the player side. The scene will be transferred to the master cassette in the recorder beginning precisely at this point. Touching RECORDER, ENTRY, and IN will enter an edit-in point on the recorder side. The recording of a scene from the player will begin exactly at this point on the master cassette. Conversely, touching PLAYER, ENTRY, and OUT will tell the control unit the precise frame on which to end an edit. The out point also can be entered on the record side by touching RECORDER, ENTRY, and OUT.

Edit points, once entered, can be shifted forward or backward by touching the buttons marked + and -. To advance an edit point on the player, simultaneously touch PLAYER and the button marked + once for each frame of shift desired. Touch PLAYER and the button marked - to retard the edit point. The same procedure is followed if you wish to shift an edit point on the

* If the editor wishes to edit in the INSERT mode, a control track first must be recorded on the master editing cassette. Because the process differs from one editing unit to the next, we will not attempt to explain the proper procedure on a case-by-case basis. A simple process, however, is to drive both player and recorder with a sync generator or black burst generator. Even an older television camera that feeds an external sync pulse to both player and recorder will suffice. An uninterrupted control track then can be laid down on the master cassette by touching the following buttons (see Figure 11-3): ASSEMBLE (on the first row), PLAYER and ENTRY and IN on the second row, and PERFORM on the third row. (Be certain the video player is in STOP position.)

When activated, the AUTO STANDBY button automatically enters a new edit-in point and pre-rolls the master videocassette five seconds at the completion of the preceding edit. The button functions only during ASSEMBLE edits. It is inoperative during INSERT editing. When activated, the MANUAL button cancels the control unit's automatic editing capabilities, including the memory for electronic edit-in and edit-out points. The MANUAL mode is used rarely at most stations. On the second row, the first button is marked PLAYER. When this button is activated, editing instructions that relate only to the player side can be stored in the editing control unit. When the RECORDER button is activated, instructions that pertain to the recorder can be entered.

recorder. Simply touch RECORDER and + or - as appropriate. Whenever entry in or out points are stored, lighted arrows appear next to the IN or OUT designation at the top of the control unit next to the digital frame counters. The third row of editing controls is marked PRE-ROLL, PRE-VIEW, PERFORM, STOP, and REVIEW. The first button, PRE-ROLL, backs up the videotape a predetermined number of seconds in anticipation of the next edit. Videotapes must be pre-rolled for three reasons:

1. To avoid mechanical damage to the videotape. Videotape heads spin against the tape at high speed and eventually put a small “dent” in the oxide when they are parked in still-frame “pause” for too long while the editor is searching for the next scene. Pre-rolling not only backs up the tape but also relaxes the tape tension around the recording heads.
2. To avoid electronic interference at the point of the edit. Tapes that are not pre-rolled during the lengthy editing process may exhibit a moving line of electronic interference at the point of an edit — a phenomenon known among engineers as “creep.”
3. Finally, tapes must be pre-rolled to allow the player and recording machines to reach full speed prior to making an edit so electronic signals from the tape are stable or “locked-in” to produce a usable image.

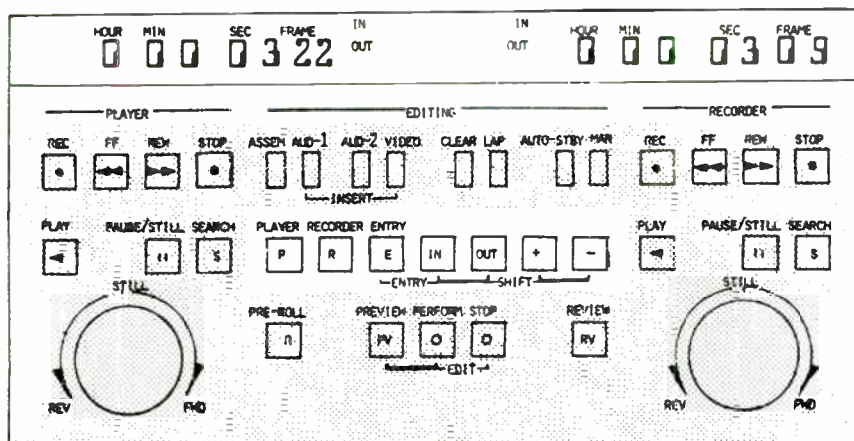


FIGURE 11-4.
Second row
of buttons.

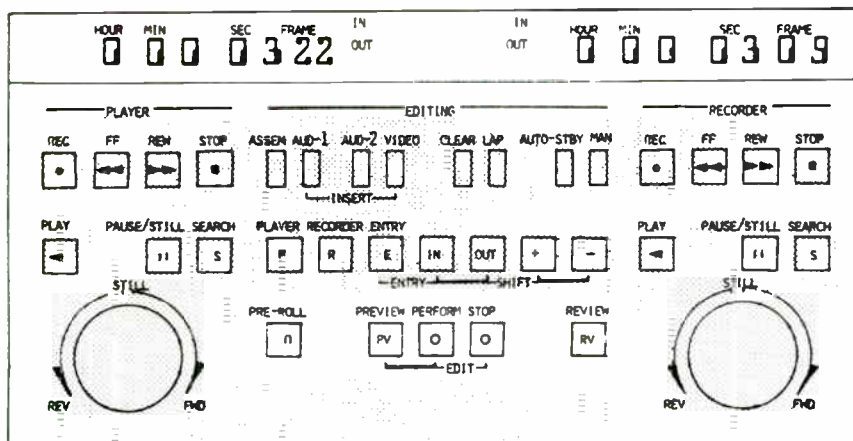


FIGURE 11-5.
Third row
of buttons.

To pre-roll tape on the player side, press **PLAYER** (on the second row) and **PRE-ROLL**. To pre-roll tape on the recorder side, press **RECORDER** and **PRE-ROLL**. As stated previously, the pre-roll is performed automatically on the recorder side when **AUTO STANDBY** is activated in the **ASSEMBLE** mode only. Once edit-in and edit-out points are entered, the edit can be previewed before it actually is made. The **PREVIEW** button allows the editor to see how the edit will look without making an actual edit. The **PERFORM** button actually performs the edit. When this button is activated, signals are transferred from the player onto the master cassette. In addition, if the tape has not been pre-rolled prior to an edit, the **PERFORM** button will pre-roll both player and recorder automatically.

The **STOP** button ends edits that are in progress (i.e., signals that are being fed from player to recorder). It is not necessary, however, to stop an edit manually with the **STOP** button if an edit-out point has been entered on either the player or the recorder side. Once an edit is complete, it can be reviewed by touching the **REVIEW** button. This allows the editor to check the edit just made before going on to the next edit.

Making an Insert Edit

When making an **INSERT EDIT**, any of the following combinations of sound and picture are possible:

- audio 1 only
- audio 2 only
- video only
- audio 1 and 2
- audio 1 and video
- audio 2 and video
- audio 1, audio 2, and video

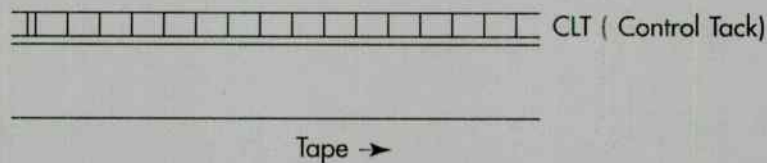
To make an **INSERT** edit, follow these steps:

1. First be certain that the master recording cassette contains an acceptable **CONTROL TRACK** (see the accompanying box).
2. Press any of the three **INSERT** buttons you wish to use (Audio 1, Audio 2, and/or Video). In the **INSERT** mode, the assemble edit capability is canceled and the automatic standby feature is automatically defeated.
3. Find the scene you want in the player (use either **PLAY** or **SEARCH** mode).
4. When the scene is located, press the **PLAYER** button on second row, center section of the editing control unit, then press the **EDIT** button and the **IN** button simultaneously.
5. Next enter an edit-in point on the recorder side by pressing the **RECORDER** button on the second row, center section of the editing control unit, then press the **EDIT** button and the **IN** button simultaneously.
6. Once an edit-in point has been entered on the record side, pre-roll the recorder by pressing **RECORDER** and **PRE-ROLL**. This step backs up the tape five seconds in anticipation of the edit and prevents damage to the tape when it is parked for prolonged times in **PAUSE/STILL**.
7. Play through the scene on the player side until you find the ending point. At the end of the material you wish to transfer, mark an edit-out point by pressing **PLAYER**, **ENTRY**, and

The Control Panel

The control track gives beginning videotape editors more headaches than any other part of the editing process, although it's nothing more than the electronic equivalent of sprocket holes in film. The control track consists of an electronic pulse applied to each frame of video. Since there are 30 frames of video per second, the videotape must have 30 separate pulses for each second of running time. Without these pulses (the control track), the tape will not record or play back at normal speed and a bad picture will result.

To lay down the control track, you first must record black on the master cassette in a manner appropriate to the process established by your station. Once the control track is recorded, you can edit in the INSERT mode and insert or replace any combination of the VIDEO, AUDIO CH-1, OR AUDIO CH-2 portions of the program.



To summarize: A control track must be present on the master editing tape. If the existing control track has first been laid down and is suitable, the INSERT mode can be used. If the control track is absent or is unacceptable, the ASSEMBLE editing mode must be used.

OUT. During the actual edit, the edit will end precisely at this point (within two to four frames of accuracy on most systems).

8. To preview the edit, press the PREVIEW button on the editing control unit.
9. To perform the actual edit, press the PERFORM button on editing control unit. (Some units require that you press both PREVIEW and PERFORM at this stage.)
10. To review the edit you have just made, press the REVIEW button on the editing control unit.
11. Repeat procedures #3 through #9 to accomplish the next edit.

Making an Assemble Edit

To make an ASSEMBLE EDIT, follow these steps:

1. Press ASSEMBLE and AUTO STANDBY on the editing control unit.
2. Find the scene you want in the player (use either PLAY or SEARCH mode).
3. After locating the scene, press the PLAYER button on the second row, center section of the editing the control unit, then press the PLAYER button and the IN button simultaneously.
4. Next enter an edit-in point on the recorder side by pressing the RECORDER button on the second row, center section of the editing control unit, then press the EDIT button and the IN button simultaneously.
5. Once the edit-in point has been entered on the record side, pre-roll the recorder by pressing RECORDER and PRE-ROLL. This step backs up the tape five seconds in anticipation of the edit and prevents damage to the tape when it is parked for prolonged times in PAUSE/STILL.
Note: When the editing control unit is in the AUTO STANDBY mode, the manual pre-roll is

necessary only at the first edit-in point. At the end of all subsequent edits, a new edit-in is entered automatically on the record side, and the recorder is pre-rolled automatically.

6. Play through the scene on the player side until you find the ending point. At the end of the material you wish to transfer, mark an edit-out point by pressing PLAYER, ENTRY, and OUT. During the actual edit, the edit will end precisely at this point (within two to four frames of accuracy on most systems).
7. To preview the edit, press the PREVIEW button on editing control unit.
8. To perform the actual edit, press the PERFORM button on the editing control unit. (Some units require that you press both PREVIEW and PERFORM at this stage.)
9. To review the edit you have just made, press the REVIEW button on the editing control unit.
10. Repeat procedures #3 through #8 to accomplish the next edit.

TV News: Gathering and Editing Raw Material

Television has the capacity to take the viewer to the scene of an event and is unique among news media in showing viewers the news as it happens. Within this context, the field crew's job is at once difficult and rewarding, a task that requires mastering a complex blend of creative and technical skills.

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

At most television stations you will enter the field as part of a crew whose membership is determined by available staff and operating procedures, station resources, and possible union regulations. Regardless of how many members it has, each crew is responsible for story research, contacts with news sources, scheduling times to shoot the story, conducting interviews, shooting the video, setting up lights, working the sound and videotape equipment, and editing or supervising editing of the story into a product ready for broadcast.

Many small stations operate with one-person reporting crews that are responsible for all the duties just mentioned. The largest stations normally divide the responsibilities between two and often three people: reporter-producer, photographer, and sound person-videotape operator. Specific duties of some of the possible positions are outlined on the following pages.

Field Producer

The duties of the field producer are to identify the story (or to consult with the assignment editor about the story) and contact the story source(s), schedule interviews, decide upon story content and treatment, and coordinate story production with other members of the crew. This includes shooting and editing schedules, transportation logistics, and deadlines.

Reporter

The reporter presents all on-camera material, conducts the interviews, and scripts all material for the story. In the absence of a producer, the reporter assumes the producer's duties as well.

News Photographer

The photographer shoots the scenes that are recorded or beamed live to the station. The photographer also is responsible for setting up lights and should expect help from everyone else on the crew, depending on any union regulations, in carrying and setting up the lights and stringing necessary power cords.

Photographer-Sound Person

The photographer, or at some stations a sound person, is responsible for the sound quality of all story components and for monitoring battery levels in the field. Sound sources for which this person is responsible include (a) all sound recorded in the field (reporter's voice, interviews, natural background sound — also often referred to as “wild” or “nat” sound); (b) reporter narration, if the story is a package report and narration is recorded in the field; and at some stations (c) music or other sound selections used as part of the story. During editing, the reporter and photographer work closely along with the producer in helping to make editing decisions. In most operations the photographer and editor are the same person. In larger markets, however, full-time editors work in the station and photographers are kept on the street producing new field video throughout their shifts.

BEFORE ENTERING THE FIELD

You will cover two basic types of stories in the field — the predictable and the unpredictable — those under your control and those not under your control. Whenever possible, story preparation and research should be done in advance. Unless the story breaks without warning, you can often make advance telephone calls to gather information, to develop story angles, and to set up

schedules for any interviews you may want to tape. In this way you will know as much about the story as possible before you enter the field. You'll have an idea of what questions to ask, what scenes to shoot and which people to contact.

VO or VO-SOT-VO

The on-air format of the story often is assigned by the producer or assignment editor, based on the day's budget of news. A story may be assigned as a reporter "package," which means a self-contained story with reporter narration. Or the story may be used as a VO — video that the anchor will "voice over" on the air. Or the decision may be made to use it as a VO-SOT-VO, in which the anchor will still narrate the story but it will include a soundbite (normally an interview of someone talking to a reporter or making a statement at a news conference). Natural sound from the scene, such as a woman crying out for her lost child, may be aired with audio up full as a soundbite.

Reporter Packages

Stories are called packages if they meet one crucial test: By definition, a package must stand alone as a complete report of the event, aside from the few seconds of copy (the lead-in) that the studio newscaster reads to introduce the report. Video packages are constructed something like the classic short story with a beginning (the open), middle, and the end (the close).

The Open

The open may take any of several forms. Some examples are:

1. The *voicer*: open with reporter's voice over video from the scene (sound under) throughout the opening segment of the package.
2. The reporter's voice heard over sound-under video of the news event for the first few seconds of the open, then the scene cutting to the reporter on-camera who delivers the balance of the open as a "stand-up."
3. Open with reporter "stand-up" (15-20 seconds), in which the reporter speaks directly to the television camera in the field.

The Middle

The middle section of the package can be either an interview or scenes of the news event with the reporter's voice-over.

1. If the middle section is an interview, the video and sound will be of the person talking.
2. If the reporter reads voice-over narration during the middle section, video from the scene of whatever is being covered will be shown with natural background sound laid in the story at a lower level than the narration track. The natural sound of a brook babbling, or cars driving by on the freeway, adds realism to the scene as it is shown. Technically, the reporter's voice may be delivered (a) live from the studio or announce booth;

(b) prerecorded as part of the videotape package; or (c) prerecorded on separate audio-tape, hard-drive disk, cassette, or reel-to-reel. Normally, reporter package narration is edited onto the same playback videotape as everything else. Occasionally, however, it is easier to pre-feed video to the station and cut it there while narrating live from the field during the actual broadcast. That's what often occurs in live reports, particularly of breaking news events.

3. If the middle section of the package contains an interview, it normally would not begin with the reporter's question. Instead, to help keep the pace moving, the reporter should introduce the interviewee with a *blind lead-in* as part of the open and then cut immediately to the interviewee's response.

The Close

The close of the package is similar to the open: The reporter's voice-over may be heard, or the reporter may deliver a stand-up close on camera. Sign off the close with something to the effect: "For KBNS News, I'm (Your Name) at the Federal Courthouse." A reporter on camera is not the news. Generally, you'll do best to *show* the news. For this reason, consistently showing the reporter in the open or close of the package should be avoided, if possible. The reporter can be on camera, occasionally, in what is called a *stand-up bridge* in the middle of the piece. The stand-up should have something to do with the story. The background should be selected carefully to help support the story. Stand-ups that are shot against neutral backgrounds just to pop the reporter up on camera look silly. By showing the news instead, the audience will be grateful and you'll have done a more effective job of reporting.

Some General Guidelines

Generally speaking, the reporter should avoid beginning the story with a soundbite, unless the bite has some extraordinary quality such as unusual emotion or exceptionally dramatic information. Otherwise, natural sound up full should be used whenever possible as a way to help draw audiences into the story. Sound is as important as the picture in transferring meaning. We are creatures with senses of sight and sound, and much of what we draw from our world comes in mutual reinforcement of the two. Voice-over stories normally follow the form of: voice-over lead-in, soundbite(s), voice-over tag. Also, the strongest packages don't normally end on a soundbite, but rather begin and end with scenes of the news event.

In the case of reporter stand-ups, the home audience first sees the story, not the reporter. During live reports, however, beginning the story with the reporter full screen is acceptable. If the reporter is shown on camera during the open, the background should be entirely different from the background used for the next section of the package (i.e., the middle). For instance, the reporter might deliver a stand-up in front of the supermarket where soft drink bottlers are picketing. Some protesters might be visible behind the reporter. When the next section of the package (the middle) begins, the screen might be filled with shots of protesters, followed by a shot of the reporter inside the supermarket interviewing a shopper. Because the shopper is in a setting entirely different from where the stand-up took place, there is no danger of a *jump cut*, the illusion that the interviewee magically pops on and off the screen. This jump cut would have occurred if the shopper had been interviewed outdoors, in the same location where the reporter stand-up was photographed.

If you can't change backgrounds, you might begin with the reporter stand-up (a wide view), then cut to the shopper in a close-up (without the reporter appearing in the frame). This approach also can solve the jump cut problem.

BALANCE

Reports should have balance. In reporting a controversial story, all relevant sides of the story should be reported. Often, controversial issues have several sides. If you interview students who are upset by fee hikes, for example, you are obligated to interview administration officials who support the fee hikes.

ON-CAMERA APPEARANCE

Reporters should dress appropriately for on-camera appearances. The clothes to wear to cover a mountain rescue or mine disaster obviously would be different from those for an interview with city officials or the opening of a symphony concert. Most stations offer guidelines on appropriate dress for on-air and field talent, and most discourage casual dress except in extenuating circumstances. The bottom line is: Dress to fit the scene. When covering a combat zone in a war, a coat and tie would look out of place. The same is true when doing a story on a farm drought with a field being plowed in the background of the stand-up. On the other hand, an open-collared sport shirt would look wrong in a stand-up on an economic story with the New York Stock Exchange floor as the background. Reporters should fit the scene and ambiance of the story. The renowned retired feature reporter Charles Kuralt rarely wore a tie in his stand-ups of stories about ordinary people. All White House correspondents wear professional business attire.

PERSONALIZING THE STORY

Television news can capture the colors, sounds, and emotions of news happenings, and you can personalize the story by giving the viewer real human beings to relate to. Say you've been assigned to do a feature on Mother's Day, and you wish to personalize the story. You might want to begin with shots of busy operators at the telephone company, then interview a couple of operators to see how many calls they've handled, go from there to shots of telephone lines reaching to the far horizon, and over these shots play some prerecorded conversations between mothers and their children. Throughout this story the emphasis is on people — people who are special to each other. By emphasizing people, the audience can identify with the story.

Or take another happening — heavy rains that are keeping farmers from planting spring crops. To personalize the story, you must talk with the farmers who are unable to plant, learn their feelings, and find out how the rains will affect their income. Talk with food experts to learn whether delayed planting will affect supermarket prices. Talk with weather experts to find out when the rains may end. Again, you are personalizing the story by giving your viewers real human beings with whom to relate.

EDITING THE NEWS PACKAGE

The news package is a standard feature in virtually all television newscasts. Functioning as a self-contained report of an event, the package combines voice-over narration, visuals, natural sound (often referred to as NAT sound), and soundbites. Most news packages are able to tell a complete story in as little as one to one and one-half minutes, with an average length of around one minute, ten seconds. Although packages should not be edited according to any formula, they often follow a standard format: a voice-over (VO) open, a soundbite (interview or statement), more voice-over, a stand-up, and final VO to close. The only real difference between an anchor-delivered VO-SOT-VO and a reporter package is that in the case of the package, the narration voice is that of the reporter.

Who Edits the News Package

The task of constructing news packages falls most often to the video editor working in association with the reporter or producer, or both. At some stations, photographers may both shoot and edit the package. An advantage of this system is that the photographer is familiar with each shot from the field, and sometimes the photographer's recall of available shots can save time.

Conversely, the editor who has not shot the story may be more objective about scenes that come in from the field. The uninvolved editor, with less emotional attachment to the visuals, may be able to construct a more smoothly flowing visual narrative. Photographers have a habit of making sure their favorite shot gets in the package, even if it really isn't the best one for use on-air.

Time Constraints

The typical half-hour newscast may contain ten or more packages. Smoothly edited packages often appear deceptively simple to those who are not familiar with the editing process. A rough rule of thumb for packages with soundbites and reasonable sophistication is one hour of editing time per finished minute of edited video. On the other hand, a simple two-minute package that requires no sophisticated editing may be cut in an average time of as little as 40 minutes. At most stations, four to six video editors are required to edit the various packages that will be used in a half-hour newscast. News line-ups are subject to frequent change as stories are changed, added, or dropped, so each package normally is edited on a separate videocassette to allow for maximum flexibility in the final news line-up.

THE SOUND TRACK

The sound track is an essential part of the video package, and the editor should monitor sound quality and recording volume closely during the editing process. Sound transferred at low volume to the master cassette must be boosted in volume for playback. Boosting low signals amplifies buzz, hiss, and other objectionable background noise on the master videocassette. Proper sound

levels can be determined only by consulting the VU (sound level) meters on the videotape recorder and playback units.

The VU Meter

The VU meter provides a visual check of sound levels in units called db's (decibels). A change of one db in level, up or down, is just enough to be perceptible to the human ear. To assure proper recording volume, the VU meter should register most of the time between -3 and -7 db for primary sound levels, with occasional swings into the red zone on the VU meter (between 0 and +5 during extremely loud passages) (see Figure 12-1). Recordings made with the needle consistently in the red will be distorted and of poor sound quality. Secondary sound sources, such as background sound for video that accompanies reporter narration, should be kept at -10 to -7 db on the VU meter. These are general guidelines, and you will have to listen to the mixed sound and adjust the balance depending on the kind of sound being used (a brass band might be mixed in lower as background sound, a babbling brook higher).

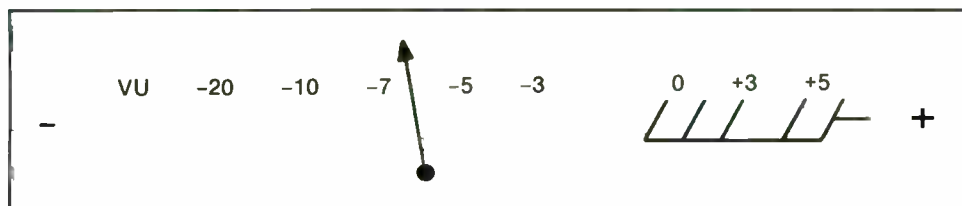


FIGURE 12-1. The VU meter.

Sound Overlaps

Sound overlaps help tie the video package together and make it flow smoothly. Overlaps are the extension of a particular sound past the beginning of an incoming sound. Music may be faded out, for example, a couple of seconds after a soundbite begins, or NAT sound of playing children may be faded out gradually just after voice-over narration begins. Overlaps eliminate the abrupt, jarring nature of packages in which sound and picture end together at the end of a cut, to be replaced the next instant by completely new sound and pictures, known among editors as the "cold cut."

STEPS IN EDITING THE NEWS PACKAGE

The following is the basic procedure is for editing videotape, as that is the technology used most commonly in newsrooms. The same fundamentals apply to digital editing in terms of multiple audio track manipulation and using varying sound levels to mix audio for maximum realism. Although editors often switch audio tracks for various reasons, we recommend keeping primary

Constructing a Package from A-B-C Rolls

Non-sync packages — those in which voice-over narration is delivered live by the anchor person in the studio or by a reporter in the announce booth — can be constructed on A-B or A-B-C rolls, depending upon whether two or three separate videocassettes are used.

In non-sync packages the A roll, or first cassette, contains the silent or wild sound footage that leads into a separate soundbite on the B roll, plus ten seconds of “pad” footage for insurance in case voice-over copy runs longer than anticipated.

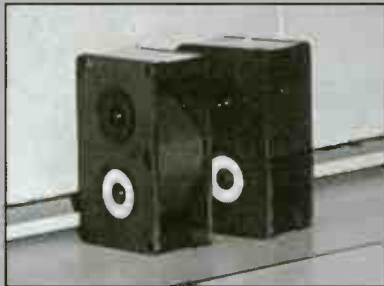
When voice-over copy that accompanies the A roll has been read, the studio director punches up a cassette called the B roll on a second playback machine. This second cassette contains the soundbite, cued to the first words of the speaker, plus additional footage to accompany voice-over narration after the bite, and another ten seconds of pad footage.

If only A-B rolls are used, the studio director will punch back to the studio when voice-over narration after the bite and, of course, another ten seconds of pad footage.

If a second soundbite follows, it is edited onto a third or C roll of tape. Again, the C roll contains a few seconds of pad footage after the bite.

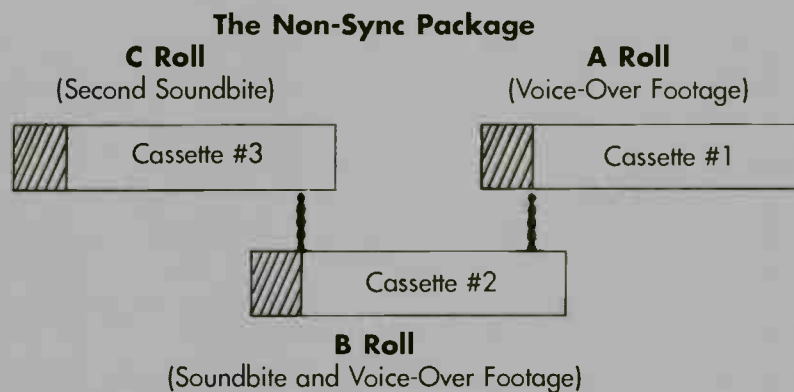
Pad footage at the end of each roll ensures that, even if the announcer hesitates, coughs, stumbles, or reads the script at a different pace than when it was pretimed, the story will not go to black on the air. Enough additional footage will be available on each of the rolls to cover the mistakes or changes in delivery.

Editing the package on separate rolls also eliminates the possibility of “up-cutting” an incoming soundbite. Up-cuts occur most frequently when non-sync packages are edited onto a single cassette. In these cases 20 seconds of silent footage may be available before the soundbite, while the announcer requires 22 seconds to read the accompanying script. If the announcer reads past the beginning of the soundbite, the first few words of the bite will be clipped or up-cut.



An A-B roll package on 2" videotape cassettes is ready for broadcast. The A roll contains scenes that accompany voice-over narration. The B roll carries a soundbite followed by additional scenes that accompany more voice-over narration.

(Photo courtesy KMOX-TV, St. Louis, Missouri)



Many stations use three separate cassettes or videotape — known as A-B-C rolls — to construct non-sync packages, those in which voice-over narration is delivered live on-air while the tape is broadcast to home audiences. Shaded areas indicate pad footage that can play in the event the voice-over announcer alters delivery. Dotted lines indicate where the studio director cuts from one cassette to the next.

audio on audio channel 1, and background sound or special effects audio on channel 2. That works best when the story is played back on the air because the audio engineer can open both channels on the audio board and not cause errors by “chasing” the audio sources as they switch around.

Determine the Presence of the Control Track

At most television news operations, master cassettes with prerecorded control tracks are provided each video editor. Tapes with prerecorded control tracks save valuable time in the editing process. If no control track is present on the master tape, it must be recorded before editing can proceed. All editing from this point proceeds in the INSERT mode. If the editor reverts to ASSEMBLE mode editing for any reason, the control track will be destroyed for approximately four seconds at the end of the assemble edit, and the tape will not be usable for broadcast. Each time the scene crosses a break in the control track, the video will roll. This occurs because the spinning video record head randomly disorients signals on the videotape at the end of each assemble edit.

A basic technique is to “black” your record cassette with a control track and no picture. In television stations the edit suites have “black burst” fed into them through a special routing switcher. You can create the same kind of source by jacking a video camera into the recorder input, turning on the camera while leaving on the lens cap, then recording the signal on the tape. We advise you to black an entire tape. That way you’ll never have to worry about where the break in the control track might be. When you lay down only four or five minutes of control track for an individual piece, you’ll always have a breakup or “video roll” between pieces if you want to play back all of them for some reason.

Colorbars and Countdown Leader

The package normally begins with an element that home viewers do not see — colorbars, a rectangle containing various colors of the rainbow in vertical-bar patterns, plus a contrast scale that ranges from pure white to no exposure at all. The colorbars and contrast scale allow engineers to set optimum video levels before the tape is aired and are available as standard resources in all editing rooms.

Countdown Leader

Another element home viewers do not see is the countdown leader, which allows the tape to be easily cued for playback. The countdown begins with the number 10 and continues through 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3 to the number 2. Two seconds of black follow the last number (2), at which point the first picture of video begins in the news package. During playback, the package is cued to allow enough roll time for the tape to reach stable playback speed. Editors normally begin sound two seconds after the first picture in the package. This helps avoid “clipping,” the annoying loss of the first word or so when the package is broadcast to home audiences.

Record the Narration Script on Videotape

As the next stage in editing, the voice-over script of reporter narration is written and recorded on videotape (sound only) before the visuals are edited. Most frequently, the reporter records sound

through a microphone directly onto a videotape cassette while sitting in a soundproof audio booth. You end up with a narration track on a videotape as shown in Figure 12-2.

Highly efficient reporters often record the narration in the field at the end of the field cassette. That's the smartest thing to do for three reasons:

1. Writing the story immediately after you've finished gathering the facts and done the interviews is easiest because everything is fresh in your mind.
2. When you record narration at the scene, you have a "normal" background sound presence in your narration track, and it won't sound different from your stand-up, which will be the case if you use an expensive sound booth at the station to record tracks.
3. You don't wind up at the end of the day trying to fight other reporters to get into the sound booth, slowing down the editing procedure and possibly not making your slot in the newscast. When you record narration in the field, you can sit back and read the paper or drink coffee late in the afternoon while everyone else is scurrying around.

At this point in the editing process the narration is only one resource to be used, along with the video of the story and interviews shot in the field. It may contain several takes of a given sentence or paragraph — each take an effort on the reporter's part to achieve perfect delivery of his or her lines. In the industry a reporter routinely puts an audio label at the beginning of each take of narration. That is accomplished by saying, "Take 1" (or "Take 2," "Take 3," etc.), followed by a "3 . . . 2 . . . 1" and the beginning of the sentence to be used. Noting which "take" to use is helpful to the editor — something penned onto the script, such as "use third take." When an editor lays down a piece of narration only to hear a retake later and have to redo it, valuable minutes are lost and sometimes stories get dropped from the newscast because they aren't ready when they're supposed to be.

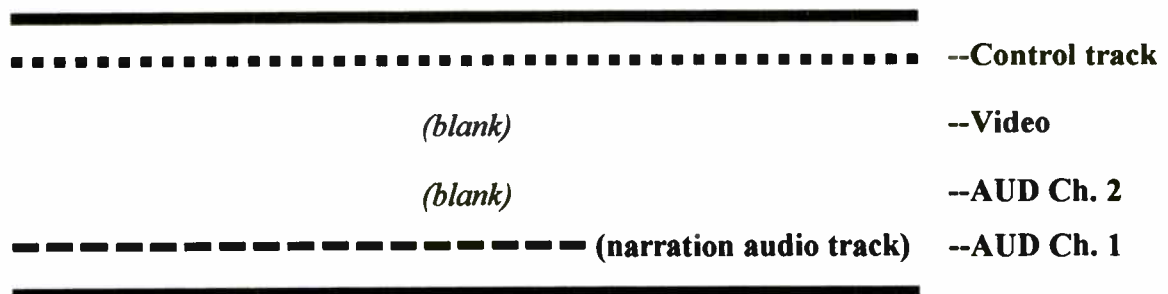


FIGURE 12-2. Narration only.

Edit the Various Elements into a Finished Story

Once you have a record cassette that has been blanked with a control track, a cassette with the reporter narration, and a field cassette with the video, soundbites, and reporter stand-ups, you're ready to put the piece together.

Lay down the primary audio and video

In this first step, you want to put together the primary audio portion of the story with video appearing only when it is a soundbite portion or a standup. First, you make sure you have whatever countdown is appropriate. Be sure that the edit controller is in INSERT mode and that you will be recording onto a tape with a control track. Edit in the countdown leader. Now you are ready to begin building the actual story.

Edit in the first thing in the story. If it is a soundbite, edit it with audio on channel 1 and video selected. If it is a reporter narration track, edit it with no video inserted. You're going to add visuals to cover that audio track later. Lay down only the good takes of the voice track, in order, on audio channel 1 of the master videotape cassette. On the editing control unit, activate only AUD-1 on the top row, center section of the editing control unit. You'll have black on the video channel of the tape, and the reporter narration in AUD 1.

When the narration ends, stop the edit and get ready to insert the soundbite. Take out the narration cassette from the playback deck and load the field cassette that contains the soundbite. Cue it up to the part you want to use. Set the in-point for the playback machine on the edit controller, and cue up the record machine with a natural pause after the end of the narration and set its in-point. Be sure the video switch in the recorder side of the edit controller is on, along with AUD-1 for the sound of the person.

Make the edit and press the "edit stop" button when you reach the end of the soundbite. When the soundbite ends, re-cue the record machine to the end of the bite, plus a natural pause. Take the field cassette out of the playback deck and re-load the narration cassette, cueing it to the next piece of narration to be laid down. Continue building the narration and soundbite or standup sections.

At this point your piece will have all the audio on channel 1, and video only in those places where you have soundbites, standups, or natural sound played as a soundbite. At times you'll want to use AUD-2 for special effects when you lay down narration, bites, and standups, but those are special circumstances and are best left until you have more experience manipulating the various audio tracks. Keeping all the primary audio on one channel is the normal procedure, because AUD-2 then can be used for the background sound and you don't risk messing up any of the primary audio by forgetting what is recorded where.

Experienced editors often flip audio channels around to fit special needs. For example, they may want to fade in music under the narration in place of normal background sound on AUD-2. Pre-mixing two audio sources, and then editing that into a piece, is done frequently in special productions to enhance natural sounds, or to add music to the natural sound in the background, or for some other purpose. As you gain experience and confidence in editing you should feel free to experiment with various ways to use the two audio channels. In these special productions, however, be sure to alert the audio engineer who will control the playback on air. Whenever anything is out of the ordinary, you want to make sure everyone knows what's coming so a mistake doesn't result out of habit.

Fill in Cover Video

At this point the master cassette still contains blank sections of video at places where only the reporter's voice has been recorded (see Figure 12-3).

Appropriate visuals now are laid in against the prerecorded voice narration to fill the blanks. Normally the natural sound from the field scenes is used "sound-under" (Figure 12-4.). Put all background sound on AUD-2, and lower the audio level so the background sound doesn't overpower the narration track and soundbites. If desired, add music or other sound under. The most

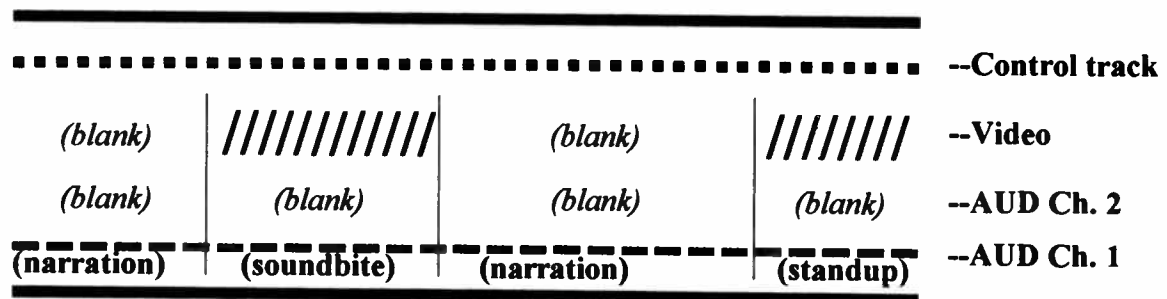


FIGURE 12-3. Narration, soundbite, narration, stand-up.

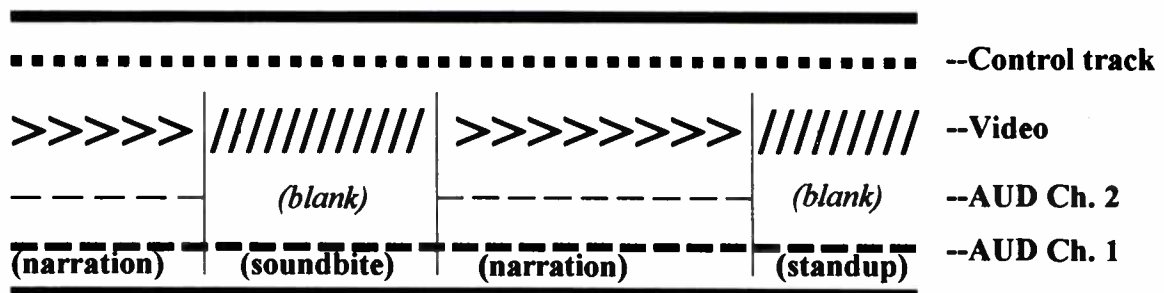


FIGURE 12-4. Finished package.

common practice is to put all narration, soundbites, and standups on one audio channel, and all background sound or special effects on the other. Sometimes, though, more involved audio track manipulation is used.

Add graphics to the package

If the reporter wishes to superimpose graphics (names, addresses, etc.) at any point in the videotape package, a log is made that shows that information as it should appear on the screen, along with start and stop times for the “supers.” Copies of this log are delivered to the studio technical director and to the character generator operator, who types up the supers and stores them in an electronic retrieval machine for call-up at airtime. If a character generator is part of the videotape editing console, graphics may be superimposed as part of the editing.

Pad scenes to avoid “going to black”

As mentioned earlier, include plenty of pad at the end of the edited package. Pad consists of approximately five seconds of picture after the last section of package that the home audience is to see or hear. The pad assures against the screen going to black the instant the package is broadcast. If the studio director momentarily misses the cue to punch up another picture source at the end of the package, the pad can continue playing until the director recovers.

Finally, the master cassette is delivered to the designated room, where tapes are played back at airtime.

EDITING TIPS

Edit Point Errors

Video editing can be accomplished for the most part with frame accuracy, although occasionally edit points may slip. Professional editing units normally feature either +2 or +4/-0 frame accuracy. An accuracy of ± 2 frames means the edit point may begin or end within two frames from the desired point. An accuracy of +4/-0 means that the edit may slip forward from the desired edit point as much as four frames, but that it will never begin earlier than the desired edit point.

To correct for the potential of edit points to “slop” forward (often with two or more frames of black between two scenes), most editors retard their desired edit-in points a minimum of four frames. In this manner, edit points that do slop forward are guaranteed not to extend past the exact point where the editor wants the outgoing scene to end (see Figure 12-5).

To retard the edit point, the editor enters an entry-in for the beginning of the next incoming scene, then retards it at least four frames by pressing the **PLAYER** button on the control unit and pressing **ENTRY** and **M** simultaneously at least four times. To meet FCC broadcast standards, all edits on small-format (1/2-inch and 3/4-inch videotape) must be free of flags, tracking errors and time-base errors.

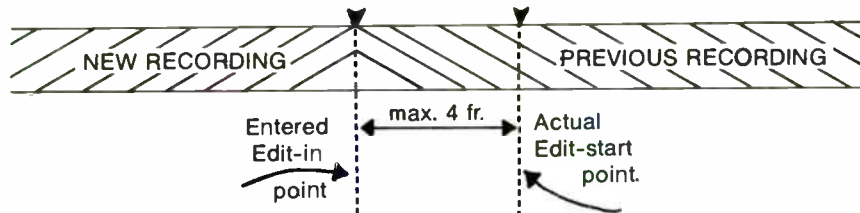


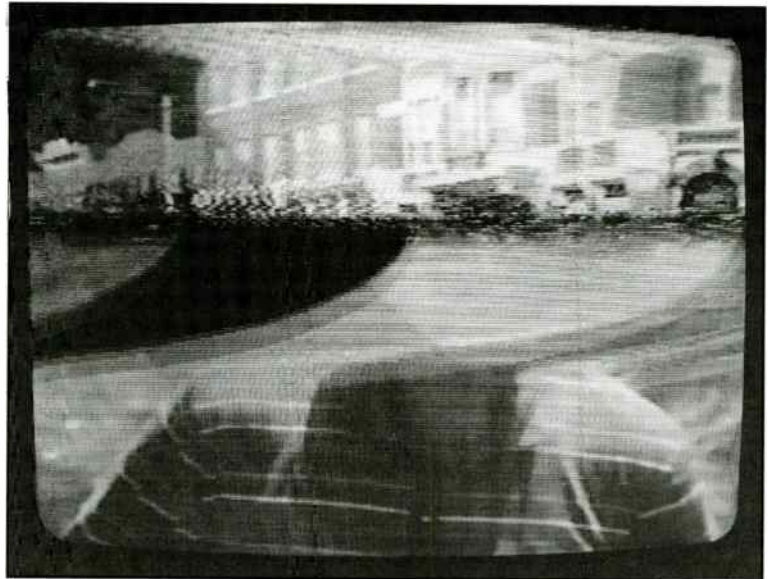
FIGURE 12-5. Edit point retarded four frames to avoid possible incoming scene beginning in black.

Flags

Flags often are evidenced as a series of black and white curved lines in the first frame of incoming video from a new scene (photo). Possible causes include weak video levels when the scene originally was taped in the field, and field cameras that fail to produce a sufficient number of lines of video to fill the television screen. (At least one half-line of picture is lost each time video signals are dubbed from one tape to another, and missing lines may appear as a dark bar at the top of the television screen.)

Tracking Adjustments

Whenever a tape is loaded in the player, a few scenes should be previewed prior to editing to determine whether tracking is acceptable. Tracking is the process by which the video head on a playback machine follows exactly the same path as the video head that recorded the signal. When tracking is bad, a herringbone pattern may appear on the monitor. If tracking errors appear, adjust the **TRACKING** control on the player until the scene clears.



Flags at the edit point between scenes are evidence of an unacceptable edit.

Time-Base Corrector

Almost all small-format videotape must be time-base corrected, either during editing or during actual broadcast, before it is suitable for broadcast. The time-base corrector (TBC), a small box filled with complex electronics, enhances the picture and other electronic information stored on videotape. A critical role of the TBC is to improve synchronizing information on the control track, which in turn helps to eliminate picture jitter and breakup.

SMPTE Time Codes

The Society of Motion Picture Technicians and Engineers (SMPTE) Time Code helps editors conserve valuable time. Displayed on television monitors only during editing, the SMPTE Time Code appears in a small inset as a series of numbers that show accumulated hours, minutes, seconds, and frames of video. In- and out-points for each scene to be used can be noted simply by jotting down the time code at each of these points on a master shot sheet. Thanks to time codes, tape of events shot simultaneously by two or more cameras can be located quickly, and scenes of action recorded simultaneously from different camera angles can be match-cut with frame accuracy.

Time codes also allow editors to write detailed cutting instructions for a news package so engineering technicians can edit the tape later with no reporter present. In this way, scenes fed live to the newsroom for recording and later editing can be “shot-sheeted” even as they are being recorded.

Another advantage of the time code is that reporters in the field can synchronize tapes with their watches. As the photographer shoots various scenes, the reporter can consult a watch and jot down the times that important scenes were taped. During editing, these scenes can be retrieved with speed and precision from a reporter’s shot sheet constructed in the field.

Tape Crease

Occasionally during playback or recording, a videotape with physical damage may emit an unusual noise — something like the sound of a zipper closing — as it moves past the rotating



A reporter uses SMPTE time code in "shot-sheet" recording.

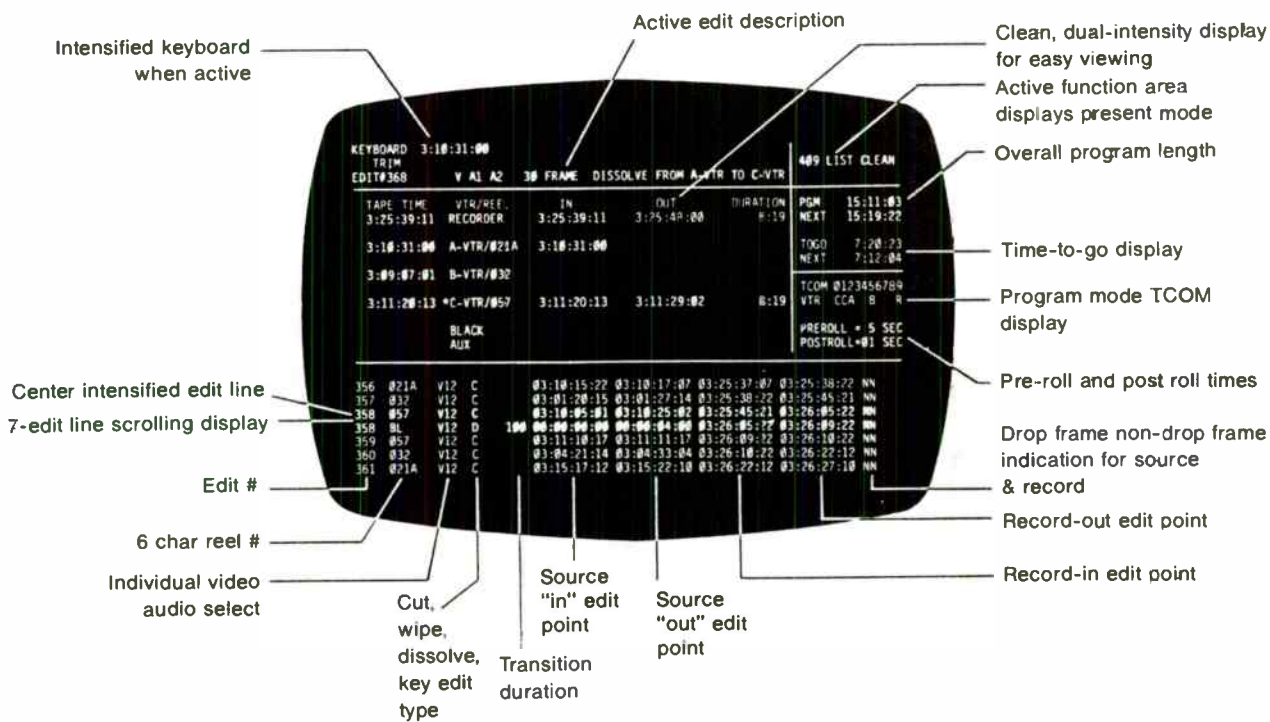
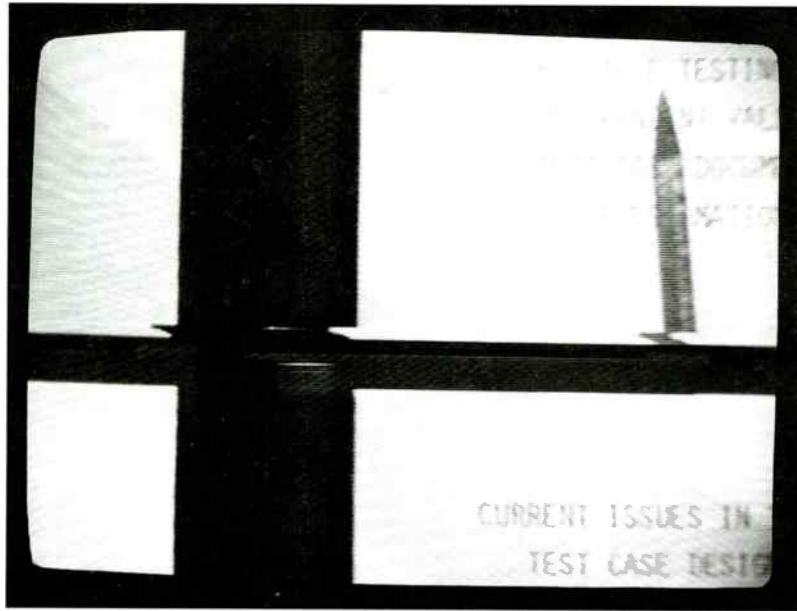


FIGURE 12-6. Status display generator providing all important edit information on a standard video monitor.

video heads. At the same time, a noticeable disruption in the picture will move vertically across the television screen. If creasing (also called wrinkling) appears, the offending videocassette should be replaced.

Skew Adjustment

Skew errors appear during editing as horizontal drift in the top part of the picture. To adjust skew, the vertical hold on the television monitor is adjusted until the frame line is visible, then the skew control on the videotape machine is adjusted until the bend in the frame line is eliminated.



Skew errors can be eliminated by adjusting the skew control on the videotape machine.

(Photo by Daniel J. Fanning)

Recording Button

A tab or removable button on the bottom of some videotape cassettes provides a means to prevent accidental erasure of prerecorded material. If the button is removed, the tape cannot be used for recording. Only when the button is in place is recording possible. The same precaution holds true when field recording.

Additional Problems

Other problems that occur fairly often during videotape editing include clogged or dirty video recording heads, momentary drops in line voltage, and occasional dropouts in the picture area because of missing oxide on the videotape.

Name _____

Date _____

Exercise 12-A**Covering Stories**

As an in-class exercise (or an individual written assignment), consider how you might cover the following stories in the field and whether you would include interviews and standups or use only silent shots and voice-over narration.

1. After a series of high-rise apartment and hotel fires around the country, city inspectors find that only two buildings in your city meet current fire safety codes. The fire department is pressuring city officials to require that all existing buildings be upgraded to meet safety codes. Officials say other high-rise buildings already under construction may not meet national safety codes.
2. Workers at a local soft drink bottling company are picketing local supermarkets, trying to discourage shoppers from buying the bottling company's products. The picketers carry signs, and a spokesperson says the major issue is equal job opportunities for minority workers. Supermarket managers also are available for comment.
3. Proposals are being made to have Congress designate a local river as wild and scenic, a designation that would protect the river from further commercial or agricultural development. Environmentalists say the river is the last in the state that could be so designated, and they want the river protected in its current state for future generations to enjoy. State officials say local agriculture will be seriously jeopardized if the river's waters do not remain available for irrigation.
4. A truck carrying radioactive materials has just overturned on an interstate highway outside the city. Officials are trying to determine whether the site is contaminated; the governor has been notified; and National Guard troops are guarding the area while traffic is rerouted. All officials at this hour are refusing comment. The truck driver cannot be located.
5. Police say a young boy, possibly between 12 and 14 years of age, has robbed a convenience store and escaped with an estimated \$1,000 or more in cash. The store clerk was forced to lie on the floor while her hands and feet were bound with adhesive tape. Police are on the scene and are interrogating the store clerk.
6. At two p.m. you learn that the School District will cancel all after-school recreational programs for elementary school students at community centers within the district. The decision will impact families with "latchkey" children significantly. The story could be aired first at five p.m.

Assignment 12-A

Name _____

Date _____

Field Reporting

Develop a reporting beat that you will visit, at least once a week for four weeks. Each week, as a standing class assignment, write at least one story suitable for broadcast from the beat source you visit and submit the copy you generate to your professor. You will need to visit the beat source in advance, introduce yourself, and secure permission to stop by weekly. You should need only a few minutes each week to question your beat source about recent happenings, with perhaps another one-half to full hour to go through records and other documents as you research facts for your stories. Possible beat sources are listed below, with additional spaces provided for other beat sources in your area.

University Police Office

School Board

City Police Department

City Building Department

State Patrol Offices

City Council

Municipal Court

Municipal Planning and Zoning Department

County Court

County Commissioners Office

District Court

Other (please identify)

Fire Department

Sheriff's Department

Local Park or Forest Service Offices

Wildlife Offices

"This — is London."

Edward R. Murrow

13

Radio News

News is an integral part of our daily lives. At the very least, we read the headlines in our local newspapers over breakfast or in waiting rooms. We watch it on local and network television newsbreaks during prime-time television programs in the evening. On our way to work, or as we drive to the grocery store, our radios are tuned to our favorite radio stations, where we hear more of the day's events. We can become so accustomed to hearing it on radio that we sometimes forget it's there. We find ourselves hearing news stories without really listening to them. That is an unfortunate side effect of "passive" media.

During World War II, Americans sat around their radios and listened as CBS's Edward R. Murrow described events as he saw them from various vantage points in London and brought the sounds of a terrifying war into living rooms all over America. His style and his dedication to news helped a nation understand the devastation of the blitzkrieg and the personal strength of a nation under siege. Journalists such as Murrow and Lowell Thomas took news beyond the scope of newspaper coverage and gave events a reality apart from the written word. Murrow's reports demonstrated that stories built solely upon words fail to take advantage of one of the broadcast journalist's most powerful allies: sounds from the natural environment that can reengage the audience and help create a sense of realism available through no other means. Reports with sound are more interesting, more memorable, and more realistic than reports built solely upon words. Natural sound helps audiences see with their ears.

THE EVOLUTION OF RADIO

Today, radio news is so much a part of most of our lives that we almost ignore it. Before the war years, however, the idea of radio news created a sort of knee-jerk reaction within the news industry. The years between 1933 and 1939 marked a time of conflict between newspapers and radio news. Radio was becoming a powerful force in the news industry, and print media fought to



A radio journalist records an audio report.

protect themselves from the threat of radio. News services like Associated Press boycotted the fledgling medium. As a result, NBC began its own news collection efforts, and CBS soon followed. To head off an expensive media news war, both sides agreed on a compromise called the Biltmore Program. In this pact between radio networks and print media, the networks essentially agreed to stay out of the news-collecting business. The pact established a Press-Radio Bureau that provided 30-word bulletins based on news service stories. It also assured newspapers the opportunity to “scoop” radio news by limiting newscasts to certain hours. Finally, it prohibited commercial sponsorship of news programs.¹

World War II forced the pact out of existence and opened the door for networks to cover news as events happened. It was a time of growth in radio news unparalleled in the medium’s history. The years between 1939 and 1944 saw radio emerge as a powerful and credible information source. Stations expanded news programming year after year until the mid 1960s, when social and technical growth pushed radio news into the background behind Top-40 entertainment radio and television news.

The glory days of radio news may have waned in the colorful glow of the television screen, but radio has survived as a viable conduit for news. Networks continue to cover events for their radio affiliates. Associated Press and United Press International news organizations provide wire and audio services to their radio subscribers. Programs like National Public Radio’s All Things Considered have recaptured some of the flavor of those glory days when audiences would tune in just to hear the news. In part, radio news has survived because the Communications Act of 1934 mandates broadcasters to serve the community. The “. . . interest, convenience and necessity. . .”

clause suggests that broadcasters should provide their communities with basic information services. License approval and renewal often have depended on how well a station has served community needs, and until recently the Federal Communications Commission has held news coverage in high regard when considering whether a station has indeed fulfilled its mandate. The Commission's recent mood of deregulation seems to deemphasize its past interpretation that news programming must meet the public's interest, convenience, and necessity. This is evidenced by the fact that many stations have cut back or completely dropped their local news coverage to make room for more entertainment programming. By the time of FCC Chairman Mark Fowler, in the 1980s, public interest, convenience, and necessity had been redefined as being whatever the public was interested in. Thus, if something draws an audience, it is in some public's interest. Any sense of a higher purpose or responsibility for broadcasting evaporated along with most of the longer, traditional, hourly radio newscasts at the network and local levels.

The role of radio and radio news has evolved as a result of changes in mass media technology. A major reason has been the rise of stereo FM radio stations, which are primarily music outlets. Another factor is the subsequent decline of AM radio, which historically had a sense of serving a wider audience. Radio stations formerly employed many news professionals who broadcast hourly newscasts of five minutes or more throughout the day with blocks of 15, 30, or even 60 minutes of news and information in late afternoon, the dinner hour, and late evening (similar to today's television newscasts). In the contemporary world, however, radio news is confined mostly to "drive-time" segments of three minutes or less. Ninety-second "newsbreaks" are common, providing only a sequence of short headlines.

Most communities still have access to radio news during morning and evening commuter rush hour. Rather than fact-gathering news departments of several people at a station, however, one news person working each drive-time shift is more common. This person mostly reads wire service copy and acts as a kind of sidekick for the disc jockey. Indeed, a disc jockey often fills the news person role in these "breakfast club" broadcasts. Radio news, with a few exceptions, has become more superficial and less of a "depth" medium.

One area in which radio news has prospered is in the news/talk format. Although usually featuring vitriolic current issues, talk show hosts, whose job is to generate audience participation through telephone calls about controversial subjects, the concept of news/talk requires more emphasis on what is going on day-to-day. Thus, in the news/talk stations full-time radio news journalists continue to be viewed as fundamental to station operations rather than relegated to the sidekick role. Also, many National Public Radio affiliates continue to pursue a more serious approach to radio news that mirrors, on the local level, their network's approach to serving an audience more interested in current affairs than music or drive-time "breakfast club" humor. Radio news has changed fundamentally from a service virtually all stations provided as part of their community commitment to one among many radio program options focused increasingly on narrow niches of target audiences.

RADIO STATION ORGANIZATION

Radio is a business, and as a business, it is organized into departments. Most stations have programming, operations, sales, and news departments. Some larger stations also might have promotional, research, and legal departments. Station size, community size, financial support, and station commitment to its community play major roles in how top management organizes and

operates a radio station. In a small town on the East Coast near Washington, DC where radio stations are plentiful and signal reception is good, you may find a radio station owned and operated by a husband and wife. They may be on the air only eight hours a day from sun-up to sun-down. Their programming department staff meetings might take place over eggs and toast in the morning before they leave for the station. The operations department, which is responsible for equipment, production facilities, and engineering, might be run entirely on advice from a consulting engineer. They might sell advertising time for as little as twenty dollars a spot with special discounts for long-term contracts, which bring the price of an ad down to as little as fifteen dollars or so. Local churches might get free air-time on alternating Sundays and Saturdays. Their news department might employ a local high school or junior college student who is paid by the story plus minimum wage for working an on-air shift. They never miss city council or school board meetings, and they try to be on the scene when local emergencies arise. They know that success, to a great extent, depends on their dedication to serving the community.

Larger stations and stations in larger markets have similar organizational responsibilities, but they are operated quite differently. The programming department makes decisions about program content, placement, and length, essentially to determine the "sound" of the station. Its staff meetings might include doughnuts and coffee, but the meetings are conducted in a more formal environment. Decisions made in those meetings have repercussions not only for the station but also for the program director's future with the company. In the operations department the atmosphere is no less formal, and making operating decisions is a full-time job. In some very large stations, this department is responsible for millions of dollars worth of equipment and facilities. The news department might be staffed with several full-time reporters, a news anchor person, a news director, and possibly a news producer. They might have a news service for national and regional news. The service might include a regular audio feed of selected comments to be included with stories coming over the wire. Reporters depend on scanners to help them cover their beats and find fast-breaking stories. They might have specially equipped mobile vans to help them transmit live from the scene. In the larger markets the equipment inventory might include a helicopter or small fixed-wing airplane from which a reporter can broadcast live from "over the scene" of a traffic jam or accident.

Whether the station is a mom and pop operation or owned by a corporation, each department exists to improve the radio station's business profile. Department staffs work not only for their department but also for the station's overall profit picture.

NEWS DEPARTMENT ORGANIZATION

Although station departments tend to affect each other to varying degrees, in this book we are concerned primarily with the news department. It is headed by a person called a news director. Her or his responsibilities vary depending on whether the station is unionized, how large the station is, how large the market is, and how much commitment the station has placed on its news operation. Basically, the news director is responsible for generating new audiences and for the overall quality of the news program.

The station's newscasters and reporters are responsible directly to the news director. If the station has an assignment editor, the reporters work through him or her in reporting individual stories. The news director must know which stories will have the greatest impact on the community and what information is available on the wire. A quick check of the program log will tell the

news director at what times and how long the newscasts will be, and which commercials will be aired during the newscast. Knowing the advertisers and the order of the spots is important, as it might affect the order of the stories on either side of the commercials. For example, placing a hail damage story just before or after a commercial for an insurance company's hail policy would be in poor professional taste.

Besides overseeing newscasts and reporters, the news director also must work with "operations" to assure that the station has the right kind of equipment to be able to gather and produce news stories. Production rooms must be scheduled in advance, mobile van equipment must be checked and made ready for the next assignment, new equipment might be needed as old equipment wears out, and management needs to be kept up to date on what is happening in the news department. The news director's job is a varied one that, in the course of a week, probably will involve every other department at the station.

The reporters cover and write stories the news director and assignment editor have decided to include in upcoming newscasts. A reporter may be sent out to cover a local meeting, interview a city official, or talk with local merchants about how a recently passed piece of legislation will affect business. If the station has a wire service, the news director might assign a reporter to rewrite selected wire copy and pick the actualities for those stories off the audio feed. If the news department were to have "footsoldiers," they would be the reporters. The words of a newscast are theirs. The interviews are theirs. The sweat, frustration, and anxiety of meeting deadlines are theirs. They attend the city council meetings that last past midnight, and they interview the belligerent union official who "doesn't listen to your station anyway," and they wait in a blizzard for four hours to get the fire chief's confirmation that the fire was possibly started by an arsonist. After all the effort and all the time, the reporter may turn his or her story over to the newscaster to be read on the air.

The most visible member of the news department is, of course, the anchor or newscaster. The newscaster's voice is the one listeners will hear when they tune in. As the newscast draws near, the newscaster does his or her own share of sweating and being anxious. The stories he or she must read flawlessly are often in someone else's words, yet, regardless of the quality of the writing or the quality of the journalism, the newscaster must prepare to read it as professionally as possible. The newscaster's voice and name are well known to the listening audience and that voice becomes a credible source for news. A "bad" story might be the reporter's fault, but the audience will blame the anchor. Just as the reporter must rely on his or her personal credibility to be assured of faithful news sources, the anchor must develop personal credibility to attract faithful listeners.

Although the newscaster is the most recognizable voice in the news department, reporters sometimes get to go on the air with their stories. The following are some tips to help you improve your on-air delivery.

- Speak at a comfortable pace as though you're telling your story to a friend rather than reading it to strangers.
- Relax and concentrate on enunciation.
- Try to keep your voice in as low a register as comfortable.
- Be interested in the subject matter; audiences can tell if you're just going through the motions.
- Avoid movement or mannerisms that might take your mouth away from the direction of the microphone or create unwanted noise in the studio.
- If you make a mistake with a word or phrase, correct it quickly and pleasantly; don't draw attention to your mistake.



A radio broadcast engineer monitors voice levels at the master control board during a live in-studio interview.

- Vary your pace slightly as you read, and avoid rhythmic reading patterns.
- Be sensitive to people involved in the stories you are reading as well as to the people who are listening to you.
- Pause between stories to let your audience know you are changing subjects.
- Avoid opening and closing your mouth at the end of each sentence.
- If you must clear your throat or cough, turn down the microphone pot.
- Whenever you're in front of the microphone, remember that you are a professional.

PREPARING THE NEWSCAST

“Rip and read” is a method of producing a newscast by selecting stories off the wire and reading them on the air. The newscaster might be a disc jockey who is on the air at the time, or may be a station employee whose part-time responsibility is being the news director. The wire services allow stations on a tight budget to provide their audiences with regional, state, national, and international news. If the station buys both a wire service and its accompanying audio feed, the newscast can provide the added dimension of actual comments from sources, known as *actualities*.

Wire services might provide the only news a station uses, but they also can be an integral part of a full-time news department's newscast. News directors read the wire service copy before each newscast, looking for important stories. If they find one, they might rewrite it to fit the length or station's "sound," or they might assign a reporter to find a local angle for tomorrow's newscast. Wire services can be a radio news department's most valuable tool in the battle to serve the community's news needs.

Wire services are not the only resource option the news director has. The station might belong to a network that provides regular newscasts that are fed to their subscribers at scheduled times during the day. A news director might opt to do a newscast just before or just after the network feed. Because the network news would cover national and international news, the station's news department is free to concentrate on local news. A station that has enough financial resources might subscribe to a network, a wire service, an audio service, and a feature service.

Of course, all those options won't replace the reporter covering local news. News directors still have to rely on their reporters to collect information, check the facts, conduct the interviews, recheck the facts, write the stories, edit the tapes, recheck the facts, and do the follow-up if necessary. In journalistic circles the word "lead," has three basic meanings:

1. It may mean the first sentence of a story.
2. It may mean the first story in a newscast.
3. It may mean the idea for a story.

Story coverage begins with following up this last kind of lead. Story leads come in many disguises. You may find one in the local newspaper classified ads, on the bulletin board at the



A radio journalist reporting news live from the scene of a news event.

laundromat, in conversation with a police officer, in the court records, or in the mayor's indiscriminate remarks during a heated discussion at the city council meeting.

A reporter must be alert to leads. If the station has a scanner, and if you pay attention to it, you can get some leads directly from the police and fire dispatchers.

The story lead is only the beginning. Once you get your lead, you have to decide whether you can do the story. Whom do you need to contact to get information? Can you reach the people who have the information while the story is still timely? Are ethical considerations involved? Is the story a hard news story or a soft news story? By answering these questions, you will have begun organizing your story. In part, you will have defined what you want to write about and how you need to proceed. These are the same questions your news director will ask if he or she has any doubts about the story.

Always begin by investigating your lead. This is just the beginning. You will want to keep defining the story to make sure you actually have a story. Who were the key figures? What was the most important thing that happened? How did that affect the community? Why did it happen? Who will be the best sources to contact? Is the story news?

Once you have defined your story, you are ready to follow up your lead. As you begin asking questions and researching the facts, some points to keep in mind are as follows.

1. The interview
 - a. Conduct yourself as a professional, regardless of how unprofessional your source might behave.
 - b. Have your questions ready; know what you want to find out and how you plan to find it out.
 - c. Ask the tough questions; don't be intimidated, and don't let the tough questions go unasked or unanswered.
 - d. Try to end the interview on a positive note; you might ask permission to call back if you find you need more information.
 - e. Don't take "no comment" for a final answer; find out why your source will not or cannot answer.
 - f. Be prepared to tape-record everything your source says, and let the source know you will be taping the interview.
2. The equipment
 - a. High-quality cassette recorder, a recorder that meets minimum broadcast standards.
 - b. High-quality microphone and mic cable; you want a good quality audio signal.
 - c. Batteries — at least two complete sets of fresh batteries.
 - d. AC cord for the recorder.
 - e. Cassette tapes; (have two or three extra tapes handy).
3. Procedures to note
 - a. If possible, familiarize yourself with the interview environment — the room, office, or underground garage.
 - b. Relax your subject; talk to him or her directly and casually.
 - c. Before sticking a microphone in his or her face, check your meter levels and start the tape.
 - d. Once you start the interview, avoid looking at the recorder.

- e. Say your name and the interviewee's name on tape, and record your announcement that the interview is being recorded for your station's news program.
- f. Place the microphone close enough to the interviewee to get a meter reading between -10 and 0 dB.
- g. Speak slowly, deliberately, and in even tones; keep your voice under control and in as low a register as is comfortable for you.
- h. Pause after your questions; let your subject answer.
- i. Pause after the interviewee's answer; sometimes a short pause will result in an answer you didn't expect.

The quality of the recording will determine two important aspects of putting together a radio news story:

1. Which actualities you will be able to select.
2. How long you will take to find the one you want while you're reviewing the tape in the production room.

The actuality not only must contribute to the story, but it also must be of high sound quality. If the comment you select is a mass of garbled noise, it is worthless as an actuality. If your tape is filled with hissing and background noise, you will spend a great deal of time listening, searching, and hoping to find one usable bite. Once you know which actualities you will use in your story, you can start looking for the word processor.

WRITING THE STORY

You followed up your lead. You collected the information. You interviewed your sources. You reviewed the tapes. Now you have a notebook full of scribbled notes, a couple of good soundbites you think will be useful, and a blank computer screen or blank sheet of paper in the typewriter. It's time to write.

Radio news presents some special conditions that your counterparts in print and TV do not face. For one thing, you cannot use visual references to clue listeners into the story. Everything the audience learns from your story, is learned from having heard it. If you tell the audience of a raging fire that destroyed a beautiful Victorian mansion on Baker Street, each of your listeners could get different impressions of what you mean by the words "raging," "beautiful," and "mansion." Visual references help make adjectives seem more objective to the audience. In radio, you don't have that luxury.

Another challenge that radio news writers face is the brevity of their stories. In part, visuals help print and television reporters include more information in their stories. You might need 10 or 15 seconds to describe the condition of a subcompact car after it has been hit by a runaway snowplow, but you might have only 30 seconds to tell the whole story.

Still another difference is that someone else may deliver your story on the air. He or she will not deliver the story exactly as you would, so you must write with that thought in mind. You might know just the perfect way to deliver a novel-sounding line that would help your story, but the newscaster might not see it quite the same way. The result can be unprofessional at best, and disastrous at worst, if the story is sensitive.

Certain aspects of writing tend to be consistent from story to story and station to station: Set margins for a 65-space line, and double-space the copy. Using this guide, the average broadcaster will deliver at a rate of about 16 lines a minute. If your story has to be 30 seconds, you know you will have to write an eight-line story. If your news director has only five minutes to put together a newscast, this line count technique can speed the writing process. You can use the following guide in Table 13-1 to help organize the newscast. To get all ten stories into a five-minute newscast, your stories must average 30 seconds in length, including the two actualities. This underscores the importance of writing for time rather than writing for space. It also demonstrates how valuable a tool the line count technique can be.

Once you have the margins set and you know how long your story must be, you will need to provide some non-copy reference information, or information that won't be read on-air. This information helps journalists plan the newscast. No single format is used by all stations, but most stations recognize certain information as being important. If your news script is formatted, it might look like Figure 13-1. The non-copy reference information is a valuable planning tool. At a glance, information is available about story length, content (slug), and the time of day for which it was written (newscast). This information is important in planning the upcoming newscast and

TABLE 13-1. A Guide to Radio Newscasts

Newscast Length	Minutes of Commercials	Number of Stories	Number of Actualities
5 min.	:60	10	2
10 min.	1:20	18	3
15 min.	1:20	25	5

NEWS	
REPORTER: S.K. OOP NEWSCAST: 4:00 PM	DATE: NOV. 16, 1987 SLUG: AIR CRASH LENGTH: :30
TEXT	
<p>Federal Aviation Administration investigators are at the scene of this nation's latest air disaster. A Denver bound Airward flight 21 carrying 85 people crashed into a wheat field near Goodland, Kansas after colliding with a jet fighter. F-A-A spokesman Howard Friese (FREEZE) says the crash raises some serious questions.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">FRIESE CART :05 "IT'S A MYSTERY WHY . . . AS A COMMERCIAL AIRLINER."</p> <p>Names of the crash victims are being withheld this hour pending notification of relatives.</p>	

FIGURE 13-1. Format of radio news script.

subsequent newscasts for which the same story may have to be rewritten. The station also may use the non-copy reference information to create a reference file of its newscasts for the week, the month, or the year.

PUTTING IT ON THE AIR

Once the story is written, a newscast must be put together. Stories will be selected according to which will be most important and interesting to the audience. In the last few minutes before a newscast, the news wire and the weather wire will be checked one last time. You may have to recheck the story by phoning your source “just to check for last-minute developments.” If your station has a mobile van out on the road, the news director or assignment editor might call reporter, on the two-way radio to see if they have anything to report or if they are ready for their regular live report. The newscaster also will select a couple of stories as pad, which will be used if the newscaster still has time to fill after reading the last regular story.

With that done, the stories will be placed in a specific order based on the relative importance of the stories and which commercials are scheduled during the newscast. The newscaster will preread the stories for content and pacing. Backtiming the last couple of stories that will air after the final one is normal practice. Backtiming allows the newscaster to end on time. If the local newscast must end at a specific time, say 5:05, so the station can join the network newscast, the newscaster must wrap up the local news at exactly 5:04:59. As the station comes out of the last commercial, the anchor will check the time. If it is 5:03:29, the anchor knows that one minute 30



A radio broadcast is delivered from the announcer's booth.

seconds remain to finish the newscast. Because the anchor backtimed the last two stories and found they will take one minute 15 seconds, 15 seconds will remain for sign-off. If everything works, the anchor will be saying “goodbye” as the network theme music fades in.

Even before the newscast is over, reporters will be calling their contacts for new leads, and the news director will be checking the wires for those big stories. Reporters with a serious commitment to bringing the world a little closer to their audiences thrive on the fast-paced schedule of a radio news department. At first, having to tell a story in less than a minute seems futile, but with practice you will discover just how much you really can say in 30 or 40 seconds. If you develop the skills and talents necessary for good story-telling, you will discover how memorable your stories can be to your audience. You also will find out how important those story-telling skills are to building an audience that will think of your station first whenever it’s time for “the latest in news, weather, and sports.”

NOTES

1. John Bittner and Denise A. Bittner. *Radio Journalism*, (Prentice-Hall, 1977), p. 5.

Name _____

Date _____

Assignment 13-A**Preparing a Newscast**

Select, edit, and schedule a five-minute newscast from the following copy. Figure two minutes for commercials. Include introductions, transitions, pad copy, etc.

Legalize Marijuana

A spokesman for a local group says the City Council will be asked to legalize marijuana Tuesday night on behalf of the more than 10,000 Central Valley residents he claims regularly smoke pot.

Bill Sperry, founder of the local chapter of the Citizens Association to Legalize Marijuana (CALM), said the group will ask the council to remove penalties for private possession of one ounce or less of marijuana.

Sperry said a Central Valley University Drug Information Team survey of CVU students two years ago showed about 10,000 of them regularly use marijuana.

A recent public information poll nationwide showed that 70 percent of all college students regularly smoke pot., he added.

The CALM proposal follows the intent of recent legislation passed by the state legislature, he said.

The home rule portion of the legislation enables cities like Central Valley to enact their own ordinances prohibiting possession of not more than one ounce, provided that penalties do not exceed the state law (\$100 fine for possession of one ounce or less), Sperry said.

The CALM proposal follows the recommendations of the National Commission on Marijuana and Drug Abuse which found that possession in private use should no longer be an offense, he said.

Sperry added that the American Bar Association and the American Medical Association also urge the elimination of all penalties, he said. Eliminating the fine and court appearances (in private possession cases) would help direct police time to serious crime and engender respect for law enforcement and government authorities, he said.

Such action also would save tax payers money because it currently costs from \$700 to \$800 to prosecute each possession case, he said.

He added that about 200 to 300 letters have been sent by CVU students to city council members in the last two months asking council members to adopt CALM s proposal.

Council members have not made their positions on the issue known, however, he said.

The request for the change is to be presented to council members at 7:15 p.m. during the citizen participation portion of the meeting.

Sperry announced the group's intentions at a press conference held this morning on the steps of the Municipal Building, 300 Laporte Ave.

-30-

Tax Program

By a party-line vote of 38-25, the Democratically controlled House this morning approved the governor's tax program.

The bill must now go to the Republican-controlled Senate where major parts of the package are expected to be scrapped.

According to the governor's office, Republicans seem inclined to salvage only higher income tax emxs exemptions and tax breaks for the elderly.

-30-

Oil Shale

Nearly 6-thousand barrels of oil and other petroleum products produced form Colorado and Wyoming oil shale will soon be in use by the military.

The oil, gas and aviation fuel will be tested at various military installations around the country. According to company spokesman for the Paonia refinery that produced most of the oil, if the tests are successful large government contracts may be forthcoming.

-30-

Railroad Derailment

A broken drawbar may have caused the derailment of one car of a Union Pacific train near Central Valley early this morning, according to a company spokesman.

However, railway officials have not made any official report as to what caused one car to go off the tracks approximately three miles south of Central Valley at 4:30 a.m.

There were no reported injuries or property damage. Sheriff officers were called to the scene to help direct traffic, but there were few problems, according to reports.

The train was traveling northwest with a load of coal, the company official said.

-30-

Health Department

The State Health Department announced today an massive inoculation plan for all school children who have failed to have all their shots prior to school entrance.

A meeting between health department officials and state school administrators has resulted in a plan to require suspension of any student who refuses to receive in a plan to require suspension of any student who refuses to receive the free shots.

Recent outbreaks of measles and mumps has caused the concern among state officials. One school district had a 30 per cent decrease in attendance one during one week last month largely due to a measles epidemic.

-30-

Water Break

A major water main broke around 7:00 this evening at Cedar and Raritan Streets effecting hundreds of homes.

Water Department authorities say the 12-inch main broke when a valve popped out of a conduit. Repairmen are working now to restore full water facilities to the huge area, extending from Virginia to Third Avenue—North to South, and Zuni to Franklin-p East Ea to West. The area is roughly 3 miles long, and one-half mile wide.

Water is being directed through auxilliary lines, but pressure is low, and officials say it could be morning, before than the main break can be repaired.

-30-

Hospital malpractice insurance

Possible alternatives to Central/Valley Memorial Hospitals malpractice insurance program will be considered by the board at its meeting Wednesday.

The meeting will be at 1 p.m. in the hospital conference room.

According to CVMH administrator, T. R. Peterson, the alternatives are being considered because of the rising costs of premiums in the hospitals current insurance program.

One alternative being investigated includes establishing an individual trust fund within CVMH supported through an increased mill levy in the district. If such a person is approved by the board, Peterson said it could go into effect as early as next year.

Another possibility is forming a joint malpractice insurance fund with other Area hospitals.

Also on the board's agenda is a discussion of remodeling the CVMH Family Practice Center. Peterson said there may be some controversy on the item since the building is currently on a temporary lease. An exact cost for the remodeling has not been determined.

-30-

Leash Law

Opposition to the current city leash law has led one resident to begin a campaign to modify the law.

Alexander Gaebler, a self-employed painter, has been knocking on doors in an effort to get signatures on a petition supporting a modification.

In a little more than a week, he said he has obtained 300 signatures.

His modification of the leash law would allow the dog owner the option of not only physical control, such as a leash, but verbal or hand control within a reasonable distance, as stated in the petition.

This would alter the city ordinance which law states that a dog should either be restrained and controlled by being in an enclosure (such as a fenced yard) or on a leash, according to Lt. Clarence Davis of the city Police Department.

A leash is defined as a thong, cord, rope, or other material that isn't longer than six feet, according to the city ordinance.

- more -

It is unlawful for the owner of any dog to allow that dog to run-at-large within the city, Davis added.

Gaebler said he is in favor of a leash law. But it has to be flexible for the people who are responsible enough to walk their dog without having a leash, he said.

He added that even if he had to take a test or be certified in some way, he'd be willing to meet requirements in order to have the freedom to use or not use a leash on his dog.

Something has to be done. People can't sit on their front porch without having their dog chained up.

-30-

MS Dance

Approximately \$15,400 was raised by the enduring marathon dancers who participated in the weekend's Dance for Those Who Can't at Central Valley University.

The money will be presented by check to Jerry Lewis Muscular Dystrophy Telethon in Las Vegas, Nev., in September, said Jean Bradley, dance chairman and member of the events sponsor, Chi Omega sorority.

Ms. Bradley estimated that 183 dancers participated in the 30-hour event. Two years ago, she said approximately the same amount of money was raised in a 48-hour dance.

-30-

Railroad

Spurred by recent train derailments, the National Transportation Safety Board, Thursday called for emergency replacement of 300,000 steel wheels on railroad cars that carry hazardous materials.

The board acted after its investigators said fractures of such wheels — cast by Southern Wheel Co. in Birmingham, Ala. — had been involved in four railroad car derailments, including the Feb. 22 one near Waverly, Tenn. that cost 12 lives and injured 50.

In its recommendations to the Federal Railroad Administration (the NTSB itself had no enforcement powers), the board urged FRA to use its emergency powers to prohibit the use of cars equipped with Southern high-carbon wheels from carrying hazardous materials or being placed in trains moving hazardous materials.

- more -

The replacement will take a year to 18 months and will cost private railroads about \$85.5 million, James L. King, the NTSB's chairman-designate, estimated.

The cast-steel wheels fractured after they were subject to overheating, Elmer Garner, the NTSB's chief railroad investigator, told the board before it issued its recommendations Thursday afternoon.

They were cast with highcarbon content to make the wheels wear longer, King and Garner said, but the carbon also made them brittle and subject to cracking.

-30-

U.S. Dollar

The United States and Germany today jointly announced new measures to protect the battered U.S. dollar from further unwarranted poundings on international markets, including making available to the United States an additional \$2.7 billion in German marks to buy dollars when necessary.

A high U.S. Treasury official said the measures demonstrate a very clear mobilization of resources to counter disorderly markets in which the U.S. dollar has lost substantial value in recent months against the German mark, Swiss franc and some other currencies.

The American currency, which stood at 1.6451 marks on the Frankfurt market in morning rates, slipped to 1.6842 immediately after the announcement. In Zurich, the dollar fell from 1.9805 Swiss francs to 1.9525 within the hour.

The key to the American-German plan was a commitment by the U.S. Federal Reserve Board to increase buying up dollars from foreign, exchange markets when the U.S. currency drops in value.

-30-

It is a civic duty to humanity . . . for reporters to bring the whole picture into focus repeatedly and every day if possible.

Howard K. Smith, late anchor, ABC News

14

Preparing the TV Newscast

The chef and the television journalist share a common circumstance: What takes them hours to prepare is devoured in minutes. Dozens of people invest hundreds of hours in the average newscast, then airtime arrives and the 30 or more stories they have prepared flash by on the screen and into oblivion. Each day the process is the same: Write another show, shoot another videotape, edit another story, and hurry. The clock never stops.

FORMAT AND PRESENTATION

The format is the form in which you serve up the news. In earlier times the format was simple: The half-hour allotted for news, weather, and sports was divided into three segments. Each night the pattern was the same. National and international news came first, followed by local news, then weather and sports. The news was delivered straight to the camera, formally, without “happy talk” or other diversions between personalities.

Today the emphasis is on a floating format with two dominant anchor personalities working in tandem to tie the entire show together. The news “floats” in the sense that given stories can be placed anywhere within the newscast, depending upon the news, sports or weather day. In this way emphasis is placed where it should be, irrespective of whether the news is local, regional, or international. If major weather is the big news of the day, the newscast may begin with a brief report by the weathercaster, who then can admonish the audience to stay tuned for more weather details later in the regular forecast. If a major sports story dominates the day’s news, it, too, can be placed higher in the show. Connecting the entire newscast are the two news personalities who do “hand-offs” to sports and weather and occasionally or regularly may engage in brief conversation with other reporters.



A typical television studio from which live broadcasts originate.

The job of shepherding the newscast into a finished unit falls to the news producer. The producer is concerned with the total content of the news: the organization, length, visuals, which stories to add, shorten, or drop. In any newsroom, the producer's job demands intimate knowledge of journalism, writing, television production, and showmanship. Every component of the newscast, from script and visuals to talent and timing, must be orchestrated into a smooth-flowing presentation that builds logically throughout the half hour. The show must maintain audience interest, end within a few seconds of the exact time allotment, yet look so professional that what in reality is a complicated orchestration appears so simple that anyone could do it.

Components of the Television Newscast

The Script

No television newscast would be possible without a script. The script (see Figure 14-1) is the foundation of your show and most commonly is written in split-page format. On the left half of the page are instructions that will be carried out in the control room by the director — who will call up shots from the various studio cameras, create special effects, orchestrate the various sources of sound and visuals that make up the newscast — and by other personnel responsible for the audio (live mics, sound tracks from videotape, cartridges, cassettes), name supers, still

<p>Slug: Six kids Writer: Smith Date:</p> <p>AB/Box: Medicine</p> <p>SOT</p> <p>CG: Kristy Martin Reporting</p> <p>CG: University of Tennessee Medical Center, Memphis</p> <p>AT: 31 CG: Dr. Beaufort T. Farnsworth Research Chemist</p> <p>Outcue: ". . . Kristy Martin reporting for TV-9 News."</p> <p>TRT 1:28 + pad</p> <p>AB/Box: Medicine</p>	<p>Story Time: <u>1:46</u></p> <p>(AB)</p> <p>It's a medical breakthrough a lot of us are going to appreciate. Scientists today announced the isolation of a natural pain killer.</p> <p>The substance is endorphin, an amino acid found in the brain. It appears to be 50 times more effective than morphine.</p> <p>TV-9's Kristy Martin has more on the way American and Scottish scientists found it.</p> <p>(SOT)</p> <p>(AB)</p> <p>And, Kristy reports, along with fighting pain, endorphins may be another weapon in the fight against drug addiction. Regular doses keep addicts from getting a high from heroin.</p> <p>###</p>
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FIGURE 14-1. TV script format.

pictures, graphics, and charts. On the right half of the page is the actual story that will be read by on-air talent. Clearly, the script is the heart of the newscast, essential to a professional presentation.

The Visuals

Visuals in a television newscast come from many sources. The most common forms often are used in combination with each other, so a still picture behind the newscaster might precede a videotape, which then might give way to a live, in-field report that is aired during the news.

Video

Video usually refers to pictures and sound from the scene. In most operations it is in the form of videotape (VTR), but it can be digital video stored in computers. Normally it has been edited for air presentation but sometimes is broadcast “raw” — uncut just as the photographer shot it. Video content might be a prerecorded insert from a reporter, recorded either in the field or in the studio; a previously recorded story from the network or syndication service; or a story “lifted” from the early evening network news. All the visual stories to be used in a newscast can be edited onto separate cassettes for maximum flexibility in the news line-up. Within the newscast a story often is referred to as VO (meaning it will be “voiced-over” by the anchor) or SOT (meaning it will be used with the sound up full, as in a soundbite or reporter package report). (Chapter 2, “Scripting Visuals” introduces newscast formats.)

Graphics

Computer-generated graphics are created and stored in an electronic storage system, then recalled as needed throughout the newscast. Staff artists and photographers may prepare supplementary charts, graphs, still photos, and artwork. One type of graphic is a still-frame of a scene shot in the field. These often are stored in computers and called ESS, which means “electronic still-store.” When a graphic is used with the anchor on-camera, it usually is put in a box or electronic frame beside the anchor’s head. Graphics however, can be used full-screen or by themselves. One example of full-screen graphics is the weather forecast. When the weather person is standing on camera pointing around at the map, the map is really an electronic graphic with the weather person superimposed on top. In the studio the weather person usually is looking at a specially colored blue or green Chromakey wall, figuring out where to point by watching on-air monitors outside the camera range.

Some newsrooms don’t require the script writers to indicate where the special effect is coming from, as that is a concern primarily of the technical crew. In those cases, normal scripting includes the anchor’s initials, a slash (/), and a one- or two-word indicator of what the graphic representation should look like. Thus, “AB/Downtown fire,” would be appropriate.

Other newsrooms require more detailed instructions for the special effect source. For example, AB/Box: fire; AB/ESS: Fire; AB/Graphic: Fire; AB/Card: Fire. Figure 14-1 provides an example of scripting the visual elements in the director’s column (the left side). (For more discussion of newscast scripts, see Chapter 2, “Scripting Visuals.”)

PRODUCING THE HALF-HOUR NEWSCAST

The specific steps discussed in this section usually happen concurrently but are separated here to help clarify the newscast production process.

Determine the News Hole

The challenge of filling a 30-minute telecast with 20 to 30 or more news stories is compounded as you subtract time for commercials, weather, and sports. An average half-hour newscast usually breaks down to fewer than 15 minutes of actual news time. To begin with, most television stations use commercial “end breaks,” which take 30 seconds or more out of each half hour. You rarely get control exactly on the hour or the half hour. The real “half-hour” newscast starts with only about 29 minutes of actual program time.

Consider the list of items in Figure 14-2, which must be subtracted to determine the “news hole” the producer can fill. The mathematics are easier if you begin with the “out” time of the program, because that’s the largest number, then subtract the “in” time, and work on down through the things that have to be subtracted to get the “news hole.” Also note that the time subtracted for the internal breaks includes :05 pad for each break. The switching of commercial inserts always consumes a little time, so four 30-second commercials take just a touch longer than that to actually run on the air. You always can fill a few extra seconds of program time, but never run over, so we suggest that you figure every 2:00 break at 2:05. As a rule of thumb, any break over 1:00 in length should have the extra :05 added for producer “pad.” Actual producing experience has shown this to be an excellent “real life” factor to keep you out of time trouble.

Some producers insist that 20 to 30 items be used in the time left for news in a half-hour newscast, to give the show a faster pace and the illusion of more news content. Because time is inflexible, however, the more stories that are added, the shorter they must become. That’s one reason many stations produce capsulized summaries, under promotional names such as “World in a minute,” wherein quick snippets of video are cut to fit a rapid-fire compilation of six to eight headlines that the anchor reads. With a lot of pictures, and some headlines from around the nation or world, the illusion of a lot of information is created with very little information in reality.

Program “out” time	10:29:30
Less Program “in” time	-10:00:30
Determines total program to fill	= :29:00
Less four internal breaks of 2:00 (2:05) each	- 8:20
Less 4:00 for sports	- 4:00
Less 3:30 for weather	- 3:30
Less :30 “chit-chat” for tosses to sports & weather	- :30
Determines news hole for story scripting	12:40

FIGURE 14-2. Determining the news hole.

Block the Newscast

Once you have figured out your news hole, you go to work putting together all the elements that ultimately will comprise it. Consider this scenario:

It is 6:30 p.m. on a weeknight. Your early evening newscast has just finished and now you must think ahead to the late evening news. In national news today the President announced a major tax increase; Middle East nations raised crude oil prices; a conservative senator was accused of an illicit affair in Washington; a major American city was threatened by radioactivity that leaked from a nuclear generating plant; and the network has advised you it will feed a special live report on today's Senate debate over the future of nuclear power generation at 10:03:30 p.m.

In local news, police have tipped you that they will raid a massage parlor tonight at 9; you have videotape of a gigantic traffic snarl that occurred when a bridge collapsed during rush hour (four persons killed); inspectors say local restaurants are among the most unsanitary of any in the state; and you have videotape of the capture and arrest of two suspected bank robbers.

Besides these stories, a stringer has sent you home video of recovery efforts for the bodies of two children who drowned in a nearby lake. You are inundated with news service copy and have prepared several strong feature stories that have not been aired and are becoming less timely as the week progresses. It is obvious, as usual, that you have more news than you can air. Selection begins at this point as you decide which stories to drop and which to air.

As a producer, you have several things to do. First, you have to figure out the news hole. Then you look at the day's budget of news and consider the mixture of visual stories (those with supporting video from the field or special graphics) which can be used to illustrate the stories. You then block the newscast into logical segments separated by commercial breaks. For purposes of this chapter, a series of steps has been put into graphic illustrations to help you understand the way in which a newscast is produced. In our examples the specific story slugs are only to illustrate how a newscast looks on paper as it evolves throughout the evening to just before airtime.

During the process of newscast development, the producer does several things at once. You have to figure out how much time you have; how to set up the segments to give the program a nice, even feel; get the commercials on the air where they are supposed to run; budget the times for every element of the newscast, assign all the people in the newsroom (writers, anchors, reporters, yourself) to the various things that have to be scripted, and time the program. In most newsrooms producers use a form, either printed or in their computer software system, to organize the newscast and keep track of everything. Figure 14-3 is an example of such a form, and it is the one we will use to build our newscast.

Fill in the Newscast Format Sheet

The most convenient road map in producing a television newscast is the format sheet, or news line-up, a guide that shows you each element of the newscast, its length, accumulated or elapsed time after each story in the newscast, and in what order the stories will appear. It is referred to commonly in newsrooms as "the rundown," or "the line-up" and is generated by the newscast producer at the beginning of the shift. From that point, all concerned with the newscast use it to write the assigned scripts and produce the necessary elements which come together on-air to make a very complicated process look simple. It keeps everyone together and organized. It usually is an

Newscast Format Sheet

DATE: _____

Producer: _____ Anchor: _____

Writer: _____ Anchor: _____

Out time: _____

- in time: _____

= Program: _____

- Spots, wx, sports: _____

- Pad: _____

= News hole: _____

VIDEO: Blank = anchor on camera
 VO = anchor voice-over
 SOT = sound on tape
 V-S-V = VO-SOT-VO
 PKG = reporter SOT report
 Live = live remote report

Back Time	Slug	Writer	Anchor	Video	Budget Time	Actual Time	Remarks

FIGURE 14-3. Typical television news rundown format sheet.

evolving document, having a basic framework at the beginning of the shift and then pieces added or removed up until the news actually goes on the air.

The format sheet indicates the writer, source of visuals, and who will deliver each story in the newscast. A quick glance shows the producer the relationship of each story to the next, as well as commercial line-up and placement. Computerized newsrooms use a similar device, although it normally appears on a computer screen at each desk in the newsroom and can be printed as needed. News programs generally are organized in one of two ways.

1. The producer simply numbers each item/story consecutively throughout the newscast; or
2. The producer organizes the program in blocks that commonly are identified by the letters A, B, C, etc.

When letter segments are used, the pages are numbered from 1 on, within each segment. Thus, you'd have A-1, A-2, A-3, and in the next segment B-1, B-2, B-3. Segments can be as long or as short as necessary. This numbering scheme, discussed in full in Chapter 2, generally is best for longer programs with more than one commercial break, because this system enables one to flip segments more easily if something is not ready on time.

Figure 14-4 is an example of a newscast blocked according to the lettered segment approach. The newscast format sheet is filled in partially with a pre-show tease, the station end-break, and a newscast with five segments. In the "Remarks" column, the producer has indicated, near the right margin, special graphics for some items. The "Remarks" column is for anything extra that doesn't fit anywhere else. Some newsrooms don't put the actual on-camera graphics superimposed behind the anchor on the rundown. That is a function of the director and technical crew in their control room preparations. Sometimes, however, producers want to make sure certain things are used. The notes are put at the right margin so they'll stand out, and to save room for front-timing (discussed shortly).

This is a typical ten p.m. newscast. Although some newsrooms do not include the pre-show tease as part of the actual newscast production, we have done so here to show how the length of the end-break affects program time and how the front-timing and back-timing work out. In this practice version of a newscast format sheet, we have included a boxed area for you to figure the news hole to be scripted. Also, in the upper right corner is a list of the common video source abbreviations. In most newsrooms those two things are not printed on the newscast producing forms because experienced producers are familiar with these items and require no printed reminders.

Decide Story Order

You have major stories and major visuals. They may or may not be equally important. The biggest story of the day, especially if it breaks late in the evening, may have no visuals at all and you will have to lead your show with copy read live on camera. Some producers insist on leading with a dramatic tape story to catch and hold viewer interest, often cutting to it within ten seconds after the show begins. The technique of hitting viewers hard and quickly with dramatic footage is used to lessen the chance they will leave the room or switch to another station.

The same reasoning lies behind the use of teases and headlines that promote the upcoming newscast throughout the evening or just before the commercial break that precedes most newscasts. Viewers who have just finished their favorite program suffer momentary inertia. If you can

Newscast Format Sheet

DATE: _____

Producer: Diana McKibben

Anchor: Janet Smith

Writer: Dave Knopik

Anchor: Bob Thomas

VIDEO: Blank = anchor on camera

VO = anchor voice-over

SOT = sound on tape

V-S-V = VO-SOT-VO

PKG = reporter SOT report

Live = live remote report

Out time:	10:29:30
- in time:	9:58:10
= Program:	31:20
- Spots, wx, sports:	18:55
- Pad:	1:00
= News hole:	11:25

Back Time	Slug	Writer	Anchor	Video	Budget Time	Actual Time	Remarks
	Pre-show tease PRE-SHOW BREAK	JR	JS	VO	:15 3:05		9:58:10
	A-0 Open			SOT	:10		
	A-1 Airline crash	JR	JS/BT	V-S-V	:45		(Crash)
	A-2 Inflation	WD	BT		:15		(Dollars)
	A-3 Demonstration	WD	JS	VO	:30		(Protest)
	A-4 Recount	TL	BT	LIVE	1:30		(Ballot)
	A-5 Family hour	JR	JS		:20		(TV)
	A-6 Tease BREAK #1	WD	JS/BT		:10		(Bumper)
	B-1 Tower	BT	BT	V-S-V	:35		(Tourism)
	B-2 Eagle point	JS	BT/JS	V-S-V	:40		
	B-3 Bus driver	JR	JS	VO	:25		(Highways)
	B-4 Accident	JR	JS	PKG	1:40		
	B-5 Tease BREAK #2	WD	JS/BT	VO	:15		
	C-1 Toss to sports	DD	3-shot		:10		
	C-2- (sports rundown)	DD			4:00		
	C-9 Toss back	DD	DD/BT		:10		
	C-10 Tease Weather BREAK #3	JR	JS/BT		:10		
	D-1 Toss to weather	CB	3-shot		:10		
	D-2- (see weather)			maps	3:30		
	D-9 Toss back	CB	3-shot		:10		
	D-10 Tease BREAK #4	JR	JS/BT	VO	:15		
	E-1 Faces & places	JS	JS	VO	:30		(F&P)
	E-2 Belly dancing	BT	BT	Pkg	1:30		(Dancer)
	E-3 Reax ad-lib/Bye	JR	JS/BT				
	E-4 Close			SOT	:30		
10:29:30							

FIGURE 14-4. Typical TV news rundown.

tickle their interest with a tease before they change channels, you may be able to hold them throughout the entire newscast and count them in your ratings. In its most effective form, the tease should intrigue viewers about a story in the hope they will stick around until the story is aired. Teases may drive part of your audience away from a broadcast, however, if viewers don't care about the latest in French fashions, for example, or how many frogs are marching on Miami tonight. The same considerations hold true for teases within the newscast that are read just before commercial breaks.

Pace the Newscast

Good producers always are aware of the program's pacing. When blocking the newscast, the producer must be careful not to end up with a couple of commercial breaks back-to-back. When you go especially long with a segment, because much of the day's news seems to be related and the content flow is best that way, you have to figure out how to keep from having an inordinately long, combined commercial break. During a four- or six-minute series of spots, your audience may zap around to other newscasts with their "clickers." In effect, you can drive away the audience through poor pacing.

A good way to get an estimate of how long your segments should be, based solely on the time at hand, is to divide the news hole by the number of segments. Thus, if you have a news hole of ten minutes, with five segments to be built, you know most will be in the neighborhood of two minutes long. Usually, the final segment in a newscast is shorter, and that time is transferred to the earlier, hard news segments. So you could have the first two, of this example, with 2:30 of script time and the last segment contain only 1:00 including a kicker and "goodbye."

Setting breaks around news flow is advisable when it can be done without moving a break more than a minute or so from its intended position. More than that should be avoided. Not only does it cause enormous time problems later in the program, but some advertisers buy specific quarter hours for their commercials. Sliding a break past the quarter hour may result in a summons by the news director or general manager. The TV organization may lose several thousand dollars because a spot was not played where the advertiser paid to have it aired.

Many producers have come to understand the importance of building segments like they are mini-newscasts. Each segment should have a strong lead that is significant to the intended audience and will encourage the audience to engage with the newscast. Then the segment moves from strong and powerful through stories that are of interest but less dramatically compelling and ends with something positive. Research has indicated that news viewers get tired of too much negative news. It's depressing, and often the viewers are left feeling helpless regarding events they can do nothing about.

Therefore, at the end of the segment, you finish with something that's more uplifting. For example, if you had a segment starting with a bludgeon murder that was particularly gruesome, you might flow out of that into a story about increasing neighborhood patrols, then a sidebar about a citizen's crime-watch effort at self-policing a local neighborhood, and finally a story about a criminal being arrested in another case, or someone being sentenced. In this crime block the negative news of the murder and necessity of more police patrols is tempered by the sense of citizen involvement in the crime-watch story. And at the end of the segment, the story about an arrest or sentencing provides a positive sense about something in law enforcement going right.

You must work with the news of the day, but how you do that can help the viewer put the various events into a personalized context. News, by definition, tends to be the exceptional, the

out of the ordinary. So when we cover crime, it often is because it is unusual or shocking. That can lead to the misimpression that it is worse than it is. As responsible journalists, we want to reflect reality, not distort it, so having some balance of positive and negative news is essential in our producing effort to serve our audience.

Determine the Visuals

Assuming that you have visuals for all major stories you will air, you have to decide their order and choose the copy that will be read live to accompany them.

Insert Commercial Breaks

Lay in commercials where they interfere least with news continuity. Some stations have rigid requirements for commercial placement — Break #1 at 10:07, Break #2 at 10:12, etc. — but this practice artificially restricts how you play the stories and how long news segments can run between commercial breaks. A better guide is to let the news determine commercial placement.

You will find all commercials listed and identified in the station's daily program log, a reference that lists all commercial breaks, station IDs, program elements, their running times, and sources for the entire broadcast day. The log should be consulted before each news program to identify commercial sponsorship. In this manner, for example, if you report the story of a major airline crash on a day you are scheduled to air an airline commercial, you can pull the conflicting spot in time to avoid embarrassment. Some advertisers, including airlines, have in their advertising contracts a provision whereby the commercials are pulled if a disaster occurs.

If you have significant theme-related news on a given day — international news, domestic politics, or major local crime, for example — you may want to span a break with that topic instead of delaying the break artificially. Usually, however, you should not extend a news topic past a break, then begin another unrelated group of stories (from local crime to Mideast peace talks, for example). Occasionally you may have to break up a single story with a commercial, but few stories warrant such length. Stories that might warrant extended coverage of this nature include major disasters, historical developments, or assassinations. If you use commercial breaks as natural transitions in the news show, the broadcasts will look smoother and more professional. Think of the commercial break as yet another production tool to help set up the pace of the newscast.

Assign Copy to Writers

The format, or news line-up, sheet includes space to identify which writer will prepare each story. So far you have identified the following local items that must be written: massage parlor raid; bridge collapse/traffic jam; unsanitary restaurants; capture of bank robbers; and two children drown. Reporters just back from the field may write their own copy; staff writers may write and rewrite other copy; and air talent and the producer may write still other stories.



The assignment board provides ready reference to the day's local stories, and which reporters will cover them.

In all cases the producer assigns maximum length to each story that is to be prepared, although negotiations between the producer and reporters may result in somewhat different times than assigned originally. Usually the reporter thinks a story is worth more time than the producer does, and negotiations begin from that point.

Script Commercial Breaks and Teases

Whether you should script commercial breaks is a matter of taste and judgment. Few professional journalists will mention a product name, although almost all journalists are willing to say, "We'll have more news in a minute." To say more than this, they believe, is to place themselves in the role of salesperson, and their feeling is; Who wants to hear a pitchman giving the news?

Lead-ins to commercials take several distinct forms. The most simple lead-in is a direct cut from news to the commercial without a transition of any kind. This method works well some of the time but causes trouble when, for example, a news story is so similar in content to the commercial that it becomes difficult to tell where news ends and the commercial begins. The direct cut also is obvious and awkward when the story just before a beer commercial is about a brewer's strike.

Slightly more separation is provided by a simple fade-to-black between news and commercials. This technique interrupts the pace of the show momentarily and tends to appear somewhat

awkward to the viewer at home. More professional and conducive to station identification is the bumper graphic that appears on the screen momentarily between the last news item and the commercial. The bumper usually identifies the station or news team, sometimes with a short slogan against artwork, and provides distinct separation between news and commercials. A similar device uses a live studio shot of the news set, with talent in place, over which is superimposed a short headline teasing the next story that follows the commercial break. Frequently the talent will voice the tease as a two-shot, with both anchors on camera, or with voice-over video of the major story in the next segment.

Prepare Hand-Off Transitions

You also may wish to script the ad-lib transitions (hand-offs) from news to sports and weather, and back again to news, if your station requires interchanges among personalities. We don't mean that you should script the transitions verbatim, because to do so will sound stilted and contrived. Rather, you can consult with news, sports, and weather personnel (including field reporters who will be delivering "in-studio" reports) to determine what brief conversation they might engage in as the show switches between news personnel and from news to weather and sports. Brief, light-hearted banter — sometimes even serious discussion about important topics — is considered at some stations a way to help the news team appear more cohesive, friendly, and competent, if the banter is not overdone. This concept was imitated widely when it was introduced by WABC-TV, New York, and represented one more step in television's search for new ways to present the news.

Time the Newscast

The producer now determines actual total length for each story (lead-in plus taped story length and tag, etc.) and accumulated or elapsed time following each element in the show. Precise arithmetic is necessary when shows must end exactly on time so the station can join a network or other program that begins at a set hour. Often the director has as little as 10 seconds' leeway between the end of the newscast and the start of a new program. Often, running times for each videotape are not determined, nor is the tape edited until the talent has written or timed all copy that will accompany the tape.

Timing stories against a stopwatch may not reflect the altered rate at which voice-over copy is delivered during the actual broadcast, so most editors automatically add five seconds of a scene to the finished length of the visuals. This protects the show from "going to black" on the air in case the newscaster stumbles, hesitates, stops to cough, or otherwise alters the on-air delivery rate.

The producer often times the newscast two different ways, at two different times in the evening. Called *front-timing* and *back-timing*, these are discussed in-depth in the following section. Basically, the producer uses front-timing once the newscast is blocked, using the "budgeted," or estimated, times the producer hopes the stories will run. The producer starts with the "in" time of the newscast and adds all the budgeted times, in order, to see if everything will fit. Then, just prior to the actual newscast, the producer subtracts every item's "actual" time, in reverse order beginning with the end of the newscast, from the final "out" time when the newscast must be finished (back-timing).

Front-Time, Back-Time, and Prepare Pad Copy

In the last few minutes before airtime, most good producers double-check their timing. Even with computer systems that time the show as it is produced, this is necessary because the computer systems use line counting to figure out how fast an anchor reads. Normally the anchor has been timed in the middle of the day months before, not during an actual newscast, and that factor put into the computer. Anchors don't always read the same, though, and producers need to know exactly where they are at every minute of a newscast.

How do you know you are running late just five minutes into an hour newscast? The only way is with front-timing or back-timing. Even though most computerized newsroom systems do this, you can't trust the machines and should do it yourself. Machines are literal; people are not. When the day has been slow and the anchors have had a nice, relaxing dinner with some wine, they'll read slower than the computer timed them that day a long time ago. And when their adrenaline gets going with a lot of breaking news, they'll read a lot faster. If you have timed your scripts exactly with anchors reading the copy aloud during the shift that day, you'll *know* where you are and not become the victim of a computer, wondering what happened.

Basically, front-timing and back-timing are the reverse of one another. In front-timing, the producer simply starts out with the "in" time from the log when the program is to start. Front-timing often is done early in the producer's shift, after the program is blocked, to make sure the show will work as budgeted. In Figure 14-5, you can see that time, 9:58:10, was typed into the "Remarks" column at the top, straight across from the "Budget Time" of the pre-show tease. That is the time when the item is to *begin*. The producer adds each item's budget time to the previous item's beginning time, in turn, and ends up with a column of clock-times indicating when each item should start. In effect, we "add-up" through the newscast from the "in" time to the end.

At the bottom of the "Remarks" column, you can see we ended up with a final time of 10:28:20 noted after the E-4 Close finishes. That is 1:10 less than the actual "out-time" shown in the block in the upper left corner of the form we used to determine the news hole. That's the time cushion producers refer to as "pad." Your newscast should have some pad time because things have a habit of happening, which eat up any extra time. Filling in a few seconds of pad with the anchors chit-chatting just before they say "goodbye," or some wire copy "fill" (also referred to as "pad copy"), is much easier than running short and having to jump out of the middle of a final story in a herky-jerky fashion that looks unprofessional. As you can see the times in the back-time column are different. These will be discussed further beginning on page 295.

Stack the Newscast Script

Next assemble all pages of the newscast in consecutive order. The process of physically stacking the newscast scripts usually occurs all day long as the various pieces of the final program are finished. A half-hour or so before air any final scripts are added and the completed script set is double-checked. Most newsrooms operate from a rundown, as discussed earlier, wherein stories are assigned a number before they are physically ready for the final script. Those who are assigned to write those stories put the appropriate number on them before they turn in the stories. In some operations, and when things get wild with breaking news or with small newsbreaks in the evening,

Newscast Format Sheet

DATE: _____ VIDEO: Blank = anchor on camera
 Producer: Diana McKibben Anchor: Janet Smith VO = anchor voice-over
 Writer: Dave Knopik Anchor: Bob Thomas SOT = sound on tape
 V-S-V = VO-SOT-VO
 PKG = reporter SOT report
 Live = live remote report

Out time:	10:29:30
- in time:	9:58:10
= Program:	31:20
- Spots, wx, sports:	18:55
- Pad:	1:00
= News hole:	11:25

Back Time	Slug	Writer	Anchor	Video	Budget Time	Actual Time	Remarks
9:58:26	Pre-show tease	JR	JS	VO	:15	:18	9:58:10
9:58:44	PRE-SHOW BREAK				3:05	3:05	9:58:25
10:01:49	A-0 Open			SOT	:10	:10	10:01:30
10:01:59	A-1 Airline crash	JR	JS/BT	V-S-V	:45	:40	10:01:40 (Crash)
10:02:39	A-2 Inflation	WD	BT		:15	:12	10:02:25 (Dollars)
10:02:51	A-3 Demonstration	WD	JS	VO	:30	:33	10:02:40 (Protest)
10:03:24	A-4 Recount	TL	BT	LIVE	1:30	1:34	10:03:10 (Ballot)
10:04:58	A-5 Family hour	JR	JS		:20	:35	10:04:40 (TV)
10:05:33	A-6 Tease	WD	JS/BT		:10	:08	10:05:00 (Bumper)
10:05:41	BREAK #1				2:05	2:05	10:05:10
10:07:46	B-1 Tower	BT	BT	V-S-V	:35	:41	10:07:15 (Tourism)
10:08:27	B-2 Eagle point	JS	BT/JS	V-S-V	:40	:37	10:07:50
10:09:04	B-3 Bus driver	JR	JS	VO	:25	:18	10:08:30 (Highways)
10:09:22	B-4 Accident	JR	JS	PKG	1:40	1:31	10:08:55
10:10:53	B-5 Tease	WD	JS/BT	VO	:15	:11	10:10:35
10:11:04	BREAK #2				2:05	2:05	10:10:50
10:13:09	C-1 Toss to sports	DD	3-shot		:10	:10	10:12:55
10:13:19	C-2- (sports rundown)	DD			4:00	4:25	10:13:05
10:17:44	C-9 Toss back	DD	DD/BT		:10	:10	10:17:05
10:17:54	C-10 Tease Weather	JR	JS/BT		:10	:10	10:17:15
10:18:04	BREAK #3				2:05	2:05	10:17:25
10:20:9	D-1 Toss to weather	CB	3-shot		:10	:10	10:19:30
10:20:19	D-2- (see weather)			maps	3:30	3:30	10:19:40
10:23:49	D-9 Toss back	CB	3-shot		:10	:10	10:23:10
10:23:59	D-10 Tease	JR	JS/BT	VO	:15	:12	10:23:20
10:24:11	BREAK #4				2:05	2:05	10:23:35
10:26:16	E-1 Faces & places	JS	JS	VO	:30	:41	10:25:40 (F&P)
10:26:57	E-2 Belly dancing	BT	BT	Pkg	1:30	1:53	10:26:10 (Dancer)
10:28:50	E-3 Reax ad-lib/Bye	JR	JS/BT		:10	:10	10:27:40
10:29:00	E-4 Close			SOT	:30	:30	10:27:50
10:29:30							10:28:20 1:10 pad

FIGURE 14-5. News rundown with actual story times and final back-time.



Entire live newscasts are directed from this control room.

numbering may be done just before the final scripts are handed out to those who need them. Numbering usually is in the upper right corner of the script.

News copy used to be typed on special carbon packs that yielded from five to seven copies — one each for newscasters, director, producer, audio person and TelePrompTer operator. Now, however, necessary hard copies often are run off in a copy machine or simply printed through the newsroom computer. Additional copies may be necessary for the computer graphics operator who types out, on a special keyboard, name supers and other information that will be displayed electronically on the television screen during the newscast. Each page of the script must be numbered in consecutive order. Then, if the script is dropped or otherwise shuffled out of order, it can be reassembled quickly.

Despite the growth of newsroom computer scripting, many people in the newscast process still use physical copies of the script. That's because having pages in your hands may be easier than trying to find things in a computer program. Also, computers go down. Nothing is worse than being in a computerized newsroom when the computer dies just before the news is to go on. That actually happened to a station in the early days of newsroom computers. It was impossible to do the news, so a filler program had to be aired instead. Finally, having physical copies is particularly advantageous for anchors. They can use them, along with the TelePrompTer, to deliver the news better, as well as provide a backup if the TelePrompTer malfunctions or a last-minute item has to be ad-libbed into the midst of the newscast while on the air.

Assemble Visuals in Order

Late in the newscast production cycle the video editors and technical crew will have completed most of their work. Just before going on the air, all visuals should be in order. The visuals include

all graphics, still art, and pictures, character generator information, and videotape. Visual elements are numbered in consecutive sequence, just as the script is numbered. At this point you can check the copy against the order of the visuals and the line-up of all other elements in the show. The one time you fail to compare copy against the line-up of all visuals inevitably is the time an out-of-order newscast falls to pieces before a trusting audience of thousands.

Proofread and Time Final Script

As the script begins to flow in from writers, reporters and newscasters, it should be edited, checked for obvious errors, and timed for final length. All scripts should be checked for length against the original times assigned on the format sheet. If the copy contains mistakes, this will be one of the last chances for correction. Also, reading the copy aloud at this point is a must. Consider the poor newscaster who, without benefit of rehearsal, comes across the following sentences that she must read aloud to her audience: “Swarms of angry, pro-Castro crowds stormed the city street,” or “Connors said he could win the match with one arm tied behind his back.”

Again consider Figure 14-5. We’ve finished everything, and the “actual” times are noted on the rundown. These are the true “read” times for each element. This example shows you the reality of producing. When a producer blocks a story early in the evening, the budget time is what that producer *thinks* the story is worth compared to everything else in the program. It is a “guesstimate,” and all the people writing and producing stories for the program try to make their items come in at the budgeted time. The reality of creative work, however, means that most won’t be exactly the same time that was budgeted.

That’s why, on this training form, we have included the “Actual Time” column. As the stories come in and we have final times for them, these are penned into the column. You can see that the show was three seconds long from the start because the pre-show tease runs :18 instead of the budgeted :15. As you look down the column, note how some stories are longer, some shorter, than what was budgeted.

In back-timing, the producer simply works in reverse order, using the “out” time at the bottom of the newscast and working back up to the top. This is done only when everything is completed. Back-timing with rough estimates of how long things will run doesn’t do much good. What you are after when you back-time is the absolutely last moment an item must begin for you to be on time. In our example, Figure 14-5, look at the first column from the left of the page, titled “Back Time.” At the bottom of the column you can see that the producer started with the final “out” time taken from the program log, which indicates when the show has to be finished. Then each “actual” time of every item in the newscast was subtracted from that “out” time, and the resulting final time when the item must begin, at the very latest, was penned in beside that item’s slug in the “Back Time” column. The producer works in reverse order, beginning with the last item in the newscast and subtracting all the way up to the beginning, penning in the latest possible start time for each item in the newscast.

At the top of the “Back Time” column, when all the times have been calculated, you can see the pre-show tease must begin no later than 9:58:26. Comparing that to the log time when the show should begin (noted in the boxed area where the news hole was computed), you can see this newscast only has a real pad of just :16. The producer originally set up the show and front-timed the elements early in the evening with 1:10 of pad, but that evaporated as stories came in at slightly different times from the original budget. If this producer had not back-timed, she would

think, as the news began, that the program had plenty of slack. Having back-timed, however, she knows that with only :16, she's got to keep the anchors reading briskly.

Traditionally, before newsroom computers, producers back-timed on their copy of the news-cast script after it was completed and distributed. That is still done by many producers who want the last possible start times on each page of a hard copy script. On the *last* page of the script the "out" time of the newscast is penned at the bottom. Then the length of the last item is subtracted and that time is written at the top of that page so the producer can see, at a glance, the last moment when that item should begin. If the "out" time on the final script page was 10:29:30 and that last item was an anchor read kicker lasting :30, the time for that story to start at the top of that page would be 10:29:00. The producer continues the process of subtracting each item back up through the newscast and writing the times on the tops of the pages. Thus, if a producer back-times on the script, every page will have a clock time that is the latest that item can begin without being late.

The advantage of back-timing is that it works back from the absolutely last moment, when the newscast must end. Any time during the newscast, a simple glance at the back-time for a story, as the anchor begins reading it on the air, tells you if you are late, early, or exactly on time. In this newscast the producer sitting in the control room while it is on-air could glance at her back-time at 10:05. If the A-5 "Family hour" story was just starting, she'd know she was okay. If the anchor was just beginning the A-2 "Inflation" story, she'd know something was wrong and immediately begin analyzing the situation and planning what to drop later in the newscast to make up the lost 2:21.

One additional encouragement to use back-timing: Most stations get a little off their log time during the day. When that happens, the only way to make it up is in the live newscasts, which have some flexibility. A producer often gets the show a few seconds, or even a few minutes, later than the log says. If you've back-timed, you immediately know exactly how much you have to drop. If you've only front-timed, you'll have no idea.

We strongly recommend back-timing. The greatest sin in broadcasting is going long. When you do, commercials have to be dropped and the television operation loses money. If you are a little early going into sports and weather, the anchors can eat it up with a some extra chit-chat, but when you're late, you can do nothing to keep from looking bad. Particularly when a newscast has a visual story, such as a feature package, at the end, you must hit that item exactly on time. If you realize you're running late after the story starts, dumping out will look terrible on the air. The only way to be sure of your timing is to back-time. Many producers front-time as they build the show and then back-time as a cross-check just before they go on the air, much as we have done in the example in this chapter.

The Process of Preparing the TV Newscast

1. Determine news hole
2. Block the newscast
3. Fill in Newscast Format Sheet
4. Decide story order
5. Pace the newscast
6. Determine the visuals
7. Insert commercial breaks
8. Assign copy to writers
9. Script commercial breaks tosses and tenses
10. Prepare hand-off transitions
11. Time the newscast
12. Front-time, back-time, and prepare pad copy
13. Stack the newscast script
14. Assemble visuals in order
15. Proofread and time final script
16. Rehearse and adjust the newscast

Rehearse and Adjust the Newscast

In this discussion “rehearsal” means a full run-through of the newscast, not simply reading through the scripts getting familiar with the copy. All on-air personnel should informally practice a little before any live appearance.

Two schools of thought govern rehearsals before airtime:

1. Rehearsal time polishes the show and builds confidence among the talent and technical staff.
2. First runs usually are the best, and rehearsals destroy the energy and vitality that otherwise would be expended in front of the audience during actual broadcast.

Regardless of which method you prefer — rehearsal or straight-from-the-cuff presentation — be certain you are as prepared as possible when the magic moment of airtime arrives and it’s “News, weather and sports — coming right up.”



The TelePrompTer™, as seen from the studio news desk.

Name _____

Date _____

Assignment 14-A**Formatting a TV Newscast**

Format a complete ½-hour television newscast, using the format sheets provided immediately following this assignment.

1. Assume you are formatting your newscast for a metropolitan audience.
2. You have 7 minutes of commercials to slug.
3. Weather lasts 3 minutes.
4. Sports, with intro, lasts 4½ minutes.
5. Your newscast begins exactly at ten p.m. and ends at 10:29:30.
6. Follow the guidelines in this chapter as you prepare your format sheet.
7. To the following list of available stories, feel free to add any eyeball copy you wish, with or without graphics. Identify with an asterisk any copy you add.

PKG., 1:09: Some area restaurants said to be among the most unsanitary of any in state.

SOT bite, :45: President signs major tax increase bill into law.

PKG 1:15: (from CBS) Saudi Arabia raises crude oil \$3.20 a barrel.

Reader: U. S. Congressman arrested on homosexual charges (graphic available).

PKG 1:40: This area threatened briefly today by minor radioactive leak at nearby nuclear generating plant.

Live net feed, PKG 1:20: Today's Senate debate over future of nuclear power generation. Will begin at 10:03:30.

Live feed and videotape to cover live report any time during the ten p.m. newscast: Police raid a massage parlor at nine p.m. — Prostitution arrests expected — This is the start of a city-wide crackdown on unlicensed massage parlors. Good visuals expected.

Giant traffic snarl that occurred when Cherry Creek bridge collapsed during rush hour this afternoon, four persons killed. Good video. You decide time.

Two suspected bank robbers arrested, video of both arrest and capture. Not aired at five p.m. You decide time.

VO of recovery efforts for the bodies of two children who drowned today in nearby lake. You decide time. Story used at five p.m., ran :38 seconds.

Senior citizens rally at State Capitol for support of a threatened Meals-on-Wheels program. A high school student speaks against violence in her school. PKG (feature) 1:30 as is. Can be recut to 1:10.

Do high food prices deprive you of a nutritionally balanced diet?

Bomb squad almost blows up briefcase with man's lunch. VO-SOT-VO; soundbite with bomb squad technician, sheepish to say the least.

Public hearings in State Senate on hunting controversy. Governor appears to recommend that all hunters must pass hunting safety course, regardless of age. Cover footage available of hunters, today's hearing, and Governor's statement that too many people are being killed in hunting accidents. Calls it a crisis. You decide length and treatment. You have VO and SOT bites that can be run separately, or as a produced VO-SOT-VO.

Two-man burglary and robbery team broken up in robbery attempt last night in which one of the men is shot dead. PKG used at noon and five p.m. but fresh info on identities and the fact that both men operated together.

PKG, 1:09 + Druggists are often robbed following major drug busts.

Reader: Airline pilots and technicians begin work slowdown tonight at Airport to protest unsafe airports. PKG may be available by ten p.m.

Reader: Fluorescent lights may cause cancer. You decide length of story.

Reader: Number of teenage pregnancies is on the rise again. You decide length.

Reader with graphic: Metro transit drivers may strike for more pay. You decide length.

Reader with graphic: GM is recalling three million cars and trucks with defective suspension systems. You decide length.

Reader: Someone is stealing pet rabbits all over town. One resident lost eight rabbits and five feeding dishes last night.

VO-SOT-VO of recovery efforts for the bodies of two children who drowned today in nearby lake. You decide time. Story used at five p.m., ran :38 seconds.

Senior citizens rally at State Capitol for support of a threatened meals on wheels program.

Newscast Format Sheet

DATE: _____

VIDEO: Blank = anchor on camera

Producer: _____ Anchor: _____

VO = anchor voice-over

Writer: _____ Anchor: _____

SOT = sound on tape

V-S-V = VO-SOT-VO

PKG = reporter SOT report

Live = live remote report

Out time: _____
- in time: _____
= Program: _____
- Spots, wx, sports: _____
- Pad: _____
= News hole: _____

Back Time	Slug	Writer	Anchor	Video	Budget Time	Actual Time	Remarks

Newscast Format Sheet

DATE: _____

Producer: _____ Anchor: _____

Writer: _____ Anchor: _____

VIDEO: Blank = anchor on camera

VO = anchor voice-over

SOT = sound on tape

V-S-V = VO-SOT-VO

PKG = reporter SOT report

Live = live remote report

Out time: _____

- in time: _____

= Program: _____

- Spots, wx, sports: _____

- Pad: _____

= News hole: _____

Back Time	Slug	Writer	Anchor	Video	Budget Time	Actual Time	Remarks

Newscast Format Sheet

DATE: _____

VIDEO: Blank = anchor on camera

Producer: _____ Anchor: _____

VO = anchor voice-over

Writer: _____ Anchor: _____

SOT = sound on tape

V-S-V = VO-SOT-VO

PKG = reporter SOT report

Live = live remote report

Out time:	
- in time:	
= Program:	
- Spots, wx, sports:	
- Pad:	
= News hole:	

Back Time	Slug	Writer	Anchor	Video	Budget Time	Actual Time	Remarks

Name _____

Date _____

Assignment 14-B**Writing and Delivering a TV Newscast**

As a class project, write and deliver a half-hour television newscast complete with commercials, sports, and weather. Follow the steps outlined in this chapter. Follow the outline given below only as practical according to facilities available for your use.

Step 1: Assign personnel to the following positions:

NEWSCASTERS

- 1.
- 2.

COPYEDITORS

- 1.
- 2.

WEATHERCASTER

- 1.

FIELD PHOTOGRAPHERS & EDITORS

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

SPORTSCASTER

- 1.

STUDIO PERSONNEL (floor directors, video, audio, prompter, playback, etc.)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

NEWS PRODUCERS

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

GRAPHIC ARTISTS

- 1.
- 2.

SCRIPT WRITERS

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Step 2: (Due _____, _____)
Write Copy day date

Each member of the class should submit a minimum of three stories (five copies of each) suitable for broadcast. One or more of the stories, at your instructor's option, should be accompanied by a graphics card.

Step 3: Decide story order.

Producers should list all stories available for broadcast, assign stories that remain to be covered locally, then determine story line-up for the entire newscast. Late-breaking stories within the community can be covered just before the newscast is aired on a particular day. Don't forget commercial placement in the line-up.

Step 4: Prepare format sheet.

The producers should assign final length for each element and story in the newscast, and channel all copy that must be rewritten to the writers. Provide at least five copies of each story.

Step 5: Time and block the newscast based on "budget" timing. Producer front-times to determine pad.

At this time producers should determine the accumulated time of the show following each element in the newscast.

Step 6: Editor: Begin to edit videotape.

Step 7: Script commercial breaks and hand-off commentary between newscasters and sports and weather talent.

Step 8: Prepare visuals.

Graphic artists prepare all graphics and other still visuals to be used in the show. All visuals are numbered and stacked in order.

Step 9: Edit, proof, and time copy.

Talent edits, proofreads, and times all copy against a stopwatch.

Step 10: Producer: Back-time the final newscast with "actual" times of all elements.

Name _____

Date _____

Assignment 14-B**Writing and Delivering a TV Newscast (continued)**

Step 11: Produce and videotape commercials.

(Note: Many TV stations will make old commercials available for your use. Contact the general manager or program director of the station.)

Step 12: Stack newscast.

The producer and on-air talent stack all copies of the newscast in order and number pages.

Step 13: Assemble graphics and other visuals.

All visuals are assembled in order. Number each graphic in consecutive sequence.

Step 14: Check copy against visuals.

The producer and on-air talent check copy against graphics, VTR, Vidifont, and the line-up of all other elements in the show.

Step 15: Back-time finishing copy and prepare pad copy.

Writers are responsible to prepare pad copy while the producer back-times all finishing copy with assistance from on-air talent.

Step 16: Prepare TelePrompter copy.

A volunteer from class now can prepare TelePrompter copy if a prompter machine is available.

Step 17: Distribute copy and rehearse show.

Copy is distributed to the TelePrompter operator, audio person, director, anchor talent, and producer, and the show is rehearsed.

Step 18: Present final show.

Finally, it's airtime, and the show is presented for videotaping, playback and final critique by the class.

Name _____

Date _____

Assignment 14-C**Evaluating Local TV News**

The following assignment is a class project intended to involve all members of the class in a critical evaluation of local television news programs in your area. Emphasis is on developing sensitivity to news programming techniques by deciphering news treatments that reflect the station's desire for higher ratings and by becoming aware of the probable stimulus of news consulting firms. From the list of subjects below, choose one or more categories to investigate, then make an informal report of findings to the class.

Because television market size varies from area to area, you may have only one station in your community to investigate, or as many as three or more stations. If only one station is available for analysis, the class should monitor the station for as long as a week — each student taking one or more categories on successive nights so that all students are involved in the exercise.

CATEGORY 1:**Reporter involvement**

In class, determine which students will investigate examples of reporter involvement on the TV stations in your community.

1. (student's name) _____ (Channel _____)
2. _____ (Channel _____)
3. _____ (Channel _____)
4. _____ (Channel _____)

Name _____

Date _____

Assignment 14-C

Evaluating Local TV News (continued)

Channel monitored _____

Date monitored _____

**CATEGORY 2:
Story Breakdown**

Each student who signs up for this category should take note of the following elements:

1. Total number of stories in the late newscast of the station of choice.
2. Subject matter for each story.
3. Average length of each story (total number of stories divided by total news time available, less commercial and weather/sports).

Story Breakdown	Actual Length	Visuals Used in Story
Story # 1 (subject) _____		
# 2 _____		
# 3 _____		
# 4 _____		
# 5 _____		
# 6 _____		
# 7 _____		
# 8 _____		
# 9 _____		
#10 _____		
#11 _____		
#12 _____		
#13 _____		
#14 _____		
#15 _____		

Story Breakdown	Actual Length	Visuals Used in Story
#16 _____		
#17 _____		
#18 _____		
#19 _____		
#20 _____		

Use bottom of page for additional stories, if necessary.

Average length of each story: _____ seconds.

For reference: Other students doing this assignment.

1. _____ (Channel _____)
2. _____ (Channel _____)
3. _____ (Channel _____)
4. _____ (Channel _____)

Name _____

Date _____

Assignment 14-C

Evaluating Local TV News (continued)

CATEGORY 3:

Visual Content and Sources

In this category, observers should identify the number of videotape stories that appear in the early or late evening newscast. For each story that uses videotape, jot down the subject matter and total screen time of visuals.

Visual Content

- 1. (student's name) _____ (Channel _____)
- 2. _____ (Channel _____)
- 3. _____ (Channel _____)
- 4. _____ (Channel _____)

Name _____

Date _____

Assignment 14-C**Evaluating Local TV News (continued)****CATEGORY 4:****Commercial time and content**

List each commercial within the newscast, including sports and weather, its running time and the sponsor. (Identifying products and sponsors will help you determine audience make-up for that particular show. You may notice, for example, that pantyhose commercials appear in the sports portion of the newscast — a tip-off that many women are watching the sports). Record and add up total time the newscaster's face is on the screen during the news, and total times that sports and weather talent appear on the screen.

1. (student's name) _____ (Channel _____)
2. _____ (Channel _____)
3. _____ (Channel _____)
4. _____ (Channel _____)

As part of this assignment, determine percentage of commercial time versus total news time including sports and weather.

Name _____

Date _____

Assignment 14-C

Evaluating Local TV News (continued)

CATEGORY 5:

Soft News Content

Determine the number of non-hard news stories that appear in each newscast. List specific stories and the length of each story. Into this category fall feature stories, all “happy talk” or banter between anchor talent, etc.

Soft News Content

- 1. (student's name) _____ (Channel _____)
- 2. _____ (Channel _____)
- 3. _____ (Channel _____)
- 4. _____ (Channel _____)

Name _____

Date _____

Assignment 14-C

Evaluating Local TV News (continued)

CATEGORY 6:
Sports and Weather

Determine average length of sports and weather shows. List and time each story in sports and make a log of videotapes that appear in sports. Determine average length of any sports interviews that appear and identify interview subjects. Use the log that follows.

SPORTS	Subject	Length	Visuals	Interview	Length
Story # 1					
# 2					
# 3					
# 4					
# 5					
# 6					
# 7					
# 8					
# 9					
#10					
#11					
#12					

Average length of sports programs you watched this week on Channel _____. Average number of tapes used in #_____ sportscasts this week. Average length of weather show _____ minutes (less commercial time).

For Reference:

Other students engaged in this observation are:

1. _____ (Channel _____)
2. _____ (Channel _____)
3. _____ (Channel _____)
4. _____ (Channel _____)

Name _____

Date _____

Assignment 14-D

Do each of the following problems to determine the news hole. Use the following items in each of your program solutions. Include in your calculations any pad you think might be appropriate, based on what you studied in this chapter.

Commercial breaks = 8:00 (4 breaks of 2:00 each)

Sports segment = 4:30

Weather segment = 3:30

	Problem#1	Problem #2	Problem #3	Problem #4	Problem #5
In time	10:59:30	4:47:52	10:01:12	4:58:30	10:00:03
Out time	<u>11:27:06</u>	<u>5:58:09</u>	<u>10:36:31</u>	<u>5:29:30</u>	<u>10:32:13</u>

Name _____

Date _____

Assignment 14-E

This assignment provides practice in calculating the news hole for a newscast. Given the following beginning and end times for the news program, and the indicated mandatory items, determine the amount of time left that you, the producer, has to fill with news. Note that this is a Friday night newscast during football season, so we have a longer than usual sports segment, as well as long credits that run every Friday night as a positive, team-building tool for the station.

Time in	9:59:47
Time out	10:33:16
Commercials (6 breaks of 2:00 each)	
Produced newscast open	:18
Sports	5:30
Weather	3:30
Weekly consumer report	2:45
Long credits (it's Friday)	:24

Name _____

Date _____

Assignment 14-F

This is a back-timing exercise. It should help you see how working back from the end of the program to “out” time works. Back-timing begins by looking at the program upside down. The producer subtracts each item from the last to the first up to the beginning. To help you see how back-timing works, the newscast is listed from the end of the program, at the top of the list, down to the show open at the bottom of the list. For reference, we have done the math for the first two items. For this newscast, the following apply.

In	10:00:00
Out	10:20:30
Sports	2:30
Weather	2:30
Three breaks at 2:00 each	6:00
Credits (preproduced)	:30
Newscast open (preproduced)	:10

Item	Time	Back-time (latest possible item start)
Program “out” (from log)	10:20:30	
Newscast credits	:30	<i>10:20:00</i>
Bye bye	:10	<i>10:19:50</i>
Kicker	1:10	
Break #3	2:05	
Weather	2:30	
Break #2	2:05	
Sports	2:30	
Break #1	2:05	
Car wreck	:30	
Shooting	1:25	
President on crime	:45	
President’s budget	:30	
City budget	:45	
School budget crisis	1:30	
School maintenance cost	:25	
School test scores	1:00	
Newscast open	:10	
Pad left in newscast		

PART
FOUR

BROADCAST NEWS PROBLEMS AND POTENTIALS

- 15 Legal Considerations
- 16 Ethics and Professionalism
- 17 Research, Ratings, and Promotion
- 18 Your First Job

This section provides a discussion of the major legal constraints within which broadcast journalists must function. To fully understand the legal framework and potential of broadcasting requires a sense of the major historical developments of the industry. A related consideration is that of ethics and professionalism that give the industry credibility, encompassing privacy, fairness, and personal conduct. The role of research, ratings, and promotion is a natural extension of this discussion. The book concludes with some practical suggestions on how to get a job in this profession.



The price of such rules (Fairness Doctrine) for news has been dangerously neutral and bland journalism.

Fred Friendly

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Legal Considerations

Historically, broadcast media never have been as free from government regulation as the print media. Although some of the restrictions of broadcast media were swept away in the 1980s, many still remain. The justification for strong government regulation has come from the assumption that the airwaves are public property in much the same way as a river or a public park. Given the limited number of frequencies available for broadcast signals, government must act as a representative of the public. Government regulators are to license broadcasters who will serve the public “interest, convenience, and necessity.”

The first major attempt to regulate came in the wake of the Titanic’s sinking in 1912 amid reports that shipboard wireless operators might have summoned help earlier and loss of life would have been less dramatic if the airwaves had not been jammed. The Radio Act of 1912 gave government the right to allocate licenses and wavelengths to anyone who applied. Yet, the law gave the Secretary of Commerce little enforcement power if stations did not stick to assigned frequencies. For example, the woman evangelist Aimme Semple McPherson operated a pioneer radio station from her Temple in Los Angeles during the early 1920s. The station wandered all over the dial. After repeated warnings, a government inspector ordered the station closed down. Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover received the following telegram from McPherson:

Please order your minions of Satan to leave my station alone. You cannot expect the Almighty to abide to your wave length nonsense. When I offer my prayers to Him, I must fit into his wave reception. Open this station at once.

Unlike McPherson, a number of early broadcasters asked for government regulation when radio was still in the experimental stages. Broadcasters wanted a traffic policeman, someone to bring order out of the engineering chaos caused by wandering signals. The radio audience never knew if the station it wanted would be disturbed by another station’s signals. To make radio profitable for advertisers that were increasingly interested in the new medium, broadcasters requested stronger regulation.

The result was the Radio Act of 1927, which became the foundation for the Communications Act of 1934, the law governing contemporary broadcasting. The Communications Act transferred the regulation of broadcasting from the Department of Commerce to a new, independent regulatory agency, the Federal Communications Commission. The FCC would regulate communication sent by wires, cables, or radio. The agency had much broader powers to cover additional broadcasting technology. Since 1934, numerous congressional amendments have been added. These, plus a myriad of FCC rulings and court interpretations, have created a large volume of legal guidelines over electronic media. A 1996 amendment to the Communications Act is the latest.

FAIRNESS DOCTRINE

I am returning herewith without my approval S 742, the "Fairness in Broadcasting Act of 1987," which would codify the so-called Fairness Doctrine. . . . This type of content-based regulation . . . is, in my judgment, antagonistic to the freedom of expression guaranteed by the First Amendment.

— Ronald Reagan

From 1949 until 1987 the Fairness Doctrine required broadcasters to devote reasonable time to covering controversial issues of public importance, and to do so fairly by providing a reasonable opportunity for contrasting opinions to be aired on those issues. This was one of the major regulatory statements of the FCC that affected working broadcast journalists. In essence, the FCC said that, to operate in the public interest, a station had to report on important controversial issues and had to do so fairly. The FCC regulated content with the Fairness Doctrine for nearly 40 years. In its 1985 Fairness Report, however, the agency indicated it wanted to abolish the doctrine. The FCC got the green light to move ahead with its plan when the D. C. Court of Appeals ruled in 1986 that Congress had "permitted" fairness regulations but had not "mandated" them.

The FCC ruled the Fairness Doctrine obsolete in 1987 because of the massive number and variety of other information sources. FCC commissioners decided they no longer needed to monitor the editorial decisions of broadcasters by outlining how to air diverse views, a policy upheld by the U. S. Supreme Court in the 1969 case *Red Lion Broadcasting Co. v. FCC*. In 1989 the U. S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit agreed with the FCC's decision to drop the Fairness Doctrine.¹

A federal appeals court in 1993 narrowly affirmed the FCC's position that abolishing the Fairness Doctrine meant broadcast stations no longer had to provide equal coverage for ballot issues.² The Committee Against Amendment 2 complained to the FCC that KARK-TV in Little Rock had not sufficiently covered the opponents of a 1990 ballot proposal to change interest rates for consumer credit and loans. The FCC said even though it had not mentioned referenda or initiatives specifically when it first abolished the Fairness Doctrine in 1987, it had concluded that the doctrine hampered broadcasters in discussing controversial public issues, which would include ballot issues.

The Committee and the Arkansas AFL-CIO appealed the FCC's ruling to the Eighth Circuit. The majority opinion said elimination of the Fairness Doctrine was under the FCC's authority because it was a commission policy, not a statutory requirement. The court further ruled that Congress was not interfering with the doctrine when it established section 315 of the 1959

Communications Act, which said broadcasters must afford a “reasonable opportunity for the discussion of conflicting views on issues of public importance.” The dissenting judges argued that section 315 made the Fairness Doctrine a statutory requirement that only Congress could repeal.

Ever since the FCC abolished the Fairness Doctrine in 1987, Congress has tried to counter the action by amending the text of the 1934 Communications Act. In 1987 President Ronald Reagan vetoed such legislation. New language again was rejected in 1991 after the Senate introduced a bill designed to make the Fairness Doctrine law. A 1994 congressional campaign to add the Fairness Doctrine was halted after pressure from listeners of talk shows and religious broadcasts. Conservative talk show host Rush Limbaugh helped defeat the campaign when he told listeners the measure would cripple talk radio and force political correctness.³

POLITICAL CANDIDATES AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

Section 315 of the Communications Act specifically concerns fairness in political broadcasting, and it gives precise regulations of that content. The major thrust of the section says:

If any licensee shall permit any person who is a legally qualified candidate for any public office to use a broadcasting station, he shall afford equal opportunities to all other such candidates for that office in the use of such broadcasting station, provided that such licensee shall have no power of censorship over the material broadcast under the provisions of this section. No obligation is hereby imposed upon any licensee to allow the use of its station by any such candidate.

This law applies to both free and commercial time given by a station. The rules for what constitutes a “legally qualified candidate” include announcement of intention to run, qualifications for holding the office for which the candidate is running, and either qualification for the ballot or a “substantial showing of being a bona-fide candidate.” Furthermore, if one candidate uses the station’s facilities to produce a program, any other candidate for the same office has the same right. This section applies only to the political candidates and not the candidates’ spokespersons.

The FCC has said the law requires equal opportunities, which may not be the same as equal time. The time of day, as well as the amount of time, must be considered because of differences in audience size and makeup. Section 315 does not require broadcasters to provide any time at all, nor does it require broadcasters to notify legally qualified candidates of their opponents’ broadcasts. Instead, the candidate must ask for time within a week of the first appearance by the political opponent.

There is no right of censorship under section 315 even if content is racist, vulgar, or libelous. Although broadcasters cannot be held liable for remarks over which they have no control, candidates themselves can be held legally accountable. If a candidate makes nonpolitical use of a broadcasting station, the requirements of section 315 still apply. The broadcast of Ronald Reagan movies when he was an official candidate triggered claims to equal opportunities for airtime.

Exempted from the requirements of 315 are candidates’ appearances on bona fide newscasts, news interviews, news documentaries, or broadcast news events, including unedited news conferences broadcast live in their entirety. Beginning in October 1975, the FCC also excluded political debates and presidential news conferences as “on-the-spot” news events. At first, only non-broadcast organizations could sponsor debates that would be exempted as news events. This ruling allowed broadcasters to carry presidential and vice presidential debates sponsored by the League of Women Voters without having to give equal opportunities to minor party candidates. In

1983 the FCC broadened the exemption to include broadcaster-sponsored debates and eventually those sponsored by political parties and candidates themselves, in 1988 and 1989.

A more troublesome category for the FCC is the so-called news interview show. The “Donahue” show sought and got exemption from section 315 requirements in 1984. The FCC based its decision on whether the show’s host could control discussion. In Donahue’s case, the agency agreed he could. Although section 315 does not mandate broadcasters to provide time at all, another section of the 1934 Communications Act does. Section 312 (a) (7) requires stations to sell “reasonable amounts of time” to legally qualified candidates for federal offices. The requirement was meant to prevent broadcasters from refusing to sell advertising time as a result of their having to offer candidates the lowest advertising rate 45 days before a primary and 60 days before a general election under section 315. Repeated violations of this candidate access law could result in loss of the station’s license. Under section 312 (a) (7), stations can give either free time or commercial time or both, but they must make time available for political campaigning. They cannot refuse politicians all access to the media. This does not apply to state and local candidates.

During the 1990s, this section of the broadcast regulations has been subjected repeatedly to FCC reconsideration. Between 1991 and 1994, the FCC said “use” of broadcast time for political purposes referred only to messages paid for by the candidate. Under this interpretation, negative appearances, such as use of a candidate’s picture in ads by opponents, are not considered “use” for equal opportunities purposes.⁴

Then in 1994, the FCC reverted to its pre-1991 definition of “use” of broadcast time for political candidates.⁵ Following the equal opportunity guidelines set forth in section 315 of the Communications Act, the FCC once again declared that any positive appearance of the political candidate’s voice or picture — regardless of who paid for the appearance — was considered use of broadcast time and must be afforded to all opposing candidates. During the 1980 and 1984 presidential campaigns, for example, any movies with Ronald Reagan were considered “use” and other candidates were required to be given that much free airtime. Bona fide newcasts, documentaries, news interviews, and broadcast news events are exempt from sections 312 and 315. The journalist is free to cover and report on candidates and issues without regulatory interference, which clearly would be an infringement on the First Amendment press clause.

Candidate Access Rule

According to FCC rules, broadcast stations must provide reasonable access to political candidates by allowing for some advertising during prime viewing or listening hours. The commission said, however, that stations do not have to ignore contracts with commercial sponsors to give candidates their choice of broadcast time, and they do not have to sell odd blocks of time to accommodate a candidate’s message that would complicate the normal program schedule.⁶

Censorship of Political Content

The FCC declared in 1994 that broadcasters are allowed to restrict explicit anti-abortion advertising to certain times of the day without damaging the message. The commission said this “channeling” of political information does not violate the anti-abortionists’ speech rights, nor does it violate the no-censorship provisions in section 315 if broadcasters air the ads at times when children are less likely to be viewing.⁷

The FCC disagreed with a federal district court's 1992 ruling in *Gillett Communications, Inc. v. Becker* that some anti-abortion advertising is indecent.⁸ The court said neither the equal opportunity rule nor the candidate access rule was violated when WAGA in Atlanta refused to air anti-abortion ads. Congressional candidate Daniel Becker wanted to buy a one-hour block on Sunday afternoon following the NFL football game to air the 30-minute video, "Abortion in America — The Real Story." The station refused to air the tape, claiming it was indecent.⁹ The court sided with the station, but the FCC openly rejected the court's finding that the material could be considered indecent and therefore not aired.

Without a doubt, no other regulatory statement has generated as much controversy as the Fairness Doctrine during its almost 40-year lifetime and in the several years since its demise. Those who oppose it say the doctrine "chilled" speech — the opposite of its stated intention — because broadcasters stayed away from controversial subjects for fear of failing to represent all viewpoints. Those who favor the Fairness Doctrine and argue that it should become a federal law insist that the regulation only told journalists to do what good reporters say they do anyway: Give the public balanced coverage of important, controversial issues.

STAGED NEWS

Another concern of the FCC has been staged news — falsifying or re-creating an event for a newscast. Examples of news staging are infrequent because it not only is against FCC regulation, but it also is unethical journalism. There are several important instances of staging, however. The most famous, the one that initiated the FCC's concern, was Orson Wells' production of "War of the Worlds," obviously not a newscast, although excerpts from the program were represented as spot news that interrupted "normal programming" from time to time.

In 1969 an FCC investigation of news staging held up the broadcast license renewal of the CBS-owned Chicago station WBBM-TV. A reporter filmed a "pot party" by Northwestern University students to show the prevalence of marijuana on a college campus. The reporter was a recent Northwestern graduate, and charges of staging were levied against the reporter and the station. A station ultimately is responsible for everything it airs except political broadcasts. Generally, though, the FCC has tended not to be too hard on the station for

CBS Policy on Staged News

Staging is prohibited. Broadcasts must be just what they purport to be. We report facts exactly as they occur. We do not create or change them. Therefore, all journalists must adhere to these basic principles scrupulously.

Say nothing and do nothing that may give the viewer or listener an impression of time, place, event, or person that varies from the facts actually seen, heard, and recorded by our equipment.

It may be necessary, in occasional situations (e.g., a moon-walk simulation), to recreate an event for subsequent broadcast. In each situation, however, (i) the fact that a re-creation is being broadcast must be made explicitly clear to the viewer or listener and (ii), the re-creation must be a faithful reproduction of the original event. Re-creations should be used sparingly.

These basic principles are expressed necessarily in broad language. Any doubts or questions as to their applicability to specific situations should be checked promptly with management. However, the guiding principle always is "when in doubt, don't." Producers, correspondents and reporters working with camera crews are responsible for the actions of the crews.

Any employee who has information indicating that this standard is being violated should submit it promptly to senior management.

what a reporter has done. Actually, the FCC usually tries to avoid involvement in staging or slanting charges. The FCC will investigate charges that tape has been edited to give a dishonest or false impression, but considerable evidence of a deliberate attempt to stage or slant a news event is required before it will become involved. The penalty for violation can be refusal to renew the station license — the most severe penalty the FCC can assess. In the case of WBBM, however, the FCC held up the license renewal for 18 months. Legal fees cost the station hundreds of thousands of dollars.

LIBEL

Traditionally, libel laws have been among the most pervasive of all the restraints on broadcast news. As the courts have defined libel, it is published defamation that damages *reputation*, not character. Character is who you are. Reputation is the person people think you are. In all libel cases the person suing must prove the media were guilty of some degree of fault, either negligence or reckless disregard for the truth. The standard of fault depends on who is suing — public or private person — and the subject — public or private.

Does “published” mean the broadcaster is exempt from this restraint? No. The courts have ruled generally that because a broadcast is disseminated to a mass audience and often is from a written script, it is libel. However, an ad or a live report might fall under the lesser law of slander, *oral* defamation.

Civil and, in some instances, criminal libel are covered by state law. Thus, each state has its own libel regulations. You should be familiar with the law in your state. State laws, however, must be in harmony with the U.S. Constitution as interpreted ultimately by U.S. Supreme Court decisions. These decisions provide guidelines for working journalists in all states. Knowing these general guidelines will help you to understand and avoid libel problems. The plaintiff (the individual suing for libel) must prove at least four elements:

1. Publication
2. Identification
3. Defamation
4. Some degree of fault.

Usually, falsity also must be proved. Falsity, however, may be connected to the fault element.

Publication means only that the report was communicated to a third party. With broadcast, publication is assumed. Identification does not have to be by name. It can be by description, occupation (if a town has only one football coach, for example), or even a well-known nickname. Defamation means that a person’s reputation (not character) is damaged by what was said. Public persons suing over stories about public issues have to prove actual malice — knowing falsity or reckless disregard for the truth, a constitutional standard set in *New York Times v. Sullivan*, a landmark case that will be discussed later in this section. States are allowed to determine the degree of fault a private person must prove, as long as the courts do not impose liability without some showing of fault. In most states, private individuals must prove simple or gross negligence, which is defined in various state libel cases.

Public persons suing over a story of public concern must prove falsity, and private persons also have had the constitutional requirement to prove falsity in stories involving issues of public concern since a 1986 Supreme Court case.

Libel can be of two types. One is libel *per se* — words that are damaging on their face (e.g., thief, liar). The second is libel *per quod*, which is damage by extrinsic circumstances not included in the story or by innuendo. In a Tennessee case, a reporter wrote that a woman shot her husband who was in the home of a woman who lived next door. The reporter did not include the fact that the woman's husband and several other persons also were present. The sexual innuendo amounted to libel *per quod*.

New York Times Versus Sullivan

The single most important requirement coming out of the 1964 Supreme Court ruling in *New York Times v. Sullivan* is that the defamation must be made with actual malice. This means that the First Amendment will protect even false and defamatory statements made about a public official's public conduct unless the official can prove the media defendant published the material with knowledge that it was false or with reckless disregard. The *Times* case involved a Montgomery, Alabama, police official by the name of L. B. Sullivan, who supervised the Montgomery Police Department in the early 1960s and who said he had been defamed by an ad in the *Times*. The full-page editorial advertisement, titled "Heed Their Rising Voices," said thousands of young Black students who were trying to achieve human rights were being met by police brutality, citing numerous incidents that involved the Montgomery police. Sullivan, though not named in the ad, sued and won in Alabama.

The *Times* appealed to the U. S. Supreme Court, which reversed the Alabama Supreme Court. Justice William Brennan said Alabama's libel law was unconstitutional because it relied on the rule of strict liability, which did not require a showing of fault and instead required only that the statements were published and that they were about Sullivan. The decision acknowledged that some of the statements were false. The Court said, however, that some false statements would be allowed in the interest of promoting open, robust debate on matters of social and political importance. Most important, the Court said Sullivan, as a public official, would have to prove the statements were made with "actual malice," which was defined as knowledge of falsity or reckless disregard for the truth.

This standard applies to plaintiffs who are public figures and public officials, persons who have exposed themselves voluntarily to publicity or to the public limelight. Whether the actual malice standard applies to private plaintiffs who are suing mass-media defendants is not clear. The Court, in *Gertz v. Welch*, left the question to state law. States, however, cannot impose liability without fault, even in cases involving private persons. In addition, state courts cannot permit recovery of presumed or punitive damages (usually the larger damage awards) unless the plaintiff proves actual malice. A private figure who fails to meet this tougher standard of proof can collect damages that compensate him or her only for actual injury.

Libel Defenses

Some situations may exonerate the communicator of libel. The three principal defenses are truth, privilege, and fair comment. Another is privacy rights.

Truth

Truth is the best defense possible, but it is not always usable because it is so difficult to prove. Proof of truth comes mostly from people not connected with the station because journalists seldom witness the actual event. The journalist must be able to use sources to prove the truth if needed. Thus, doctors, lawyers, and ministers may prove to be dangerous sources because they would not have to testify about information obtained from a client's privileged communication. In using the truth as defense, objectivity is tested. A journalist who fails to cover both sides of a story or to check information thoroughly runs the risk of showing carelessness and indifference to others' rights. Journalists cannot afford such negligence.

Privilege

Of the three principal defenses, privilege is the most complicated because what is privileged material in one state may not be in another. It is safe to say, however, that privileged materials can be used even though they may be false. Privilege protects materials coming out of official proceedings and actions of members of the judicial, legislative, and executive branches of government at all levels. This protection does not exist in unofficial forums and for certain records. For instance, police dockets in some states are not privileged.

The defense of privilege is qualified in that the reporter must have written a fair, accurate, and complete account from the official record or proceeding. Journalists sometimes err by reporting defamatory comments made outside the official meeting — for instance in a hallway during a court proceeding. Even though some courts have allowed the defense of privilege at open public meetings involving unions, political parties, chambers of commerce, and the like, in which public issues were discussed, there is no guarantee of privilege in these instances. If journalists consider airing potentially libelous material from such forums, they should exercise caution and seek legal counsel first.

Fair Comment

Journalists traditionally have criticized the actions of people and institutions affecting the public's interests. Entertainment activities such as plays, concerts, political addresses, and sporting events have been written and talked about in a variety of ways. The commentaries, however, must be fair, have a basis in truth, and not be done maliciously. This sort of safe harbor often was reinforced by dicta (words not part of the opinion) found in the *Gertz* case, in which Justice Powell said that "Under the First Amendment there is no such thing as a false idea."

In its 1990 *Milkovitch* case, the Supreme Court removed this so-called safe harbor when it said the First Amendment guarantees of freedom of expression do not include a separate constitutional privilege for opinion. Although journalists are still free to state opinions, lower courts probably will take a harder look at these cases to make sure that they are strictly opinion and that they do not either imply or state false and defamatory facts. Aside from libel problems, FCC regulations in this area must also be given careful attention.

Privacy

A much younger concept in terms of legal development is privacy law. Privacy is the concept that a person has the right to be left alone. The concept began evolving in the 1880s but was discussed

first in a *Harvard Law Review* article by two young Boston lawyers, Louis Brandeis and Samuel Warren, in 1890. Their article was a reaction to snooping and prying by the press into private lives of prominent Boston citizens, themselves included. New York state enacted the first privacy law in 1903, but the concept was slow to catch on in many states. Now, however, almost all 50 states and the District of Columbia recognize a legal right to privacy, either through statutes or through common law precedent. Four areas of privacy concern people working in the media.

1. False light involves distortions or fictionalizations that would be highly offensive to a reasonable person. This could happen by running a videotape of a person without his or her permission, to illustrate a story that has nothing to do with the individual. Another way this type of invasion of privacy might occur is by embellishing the facts. False-light invasion of privacy sounds a lot like libel and requires the plaintiff to prove actual malice when the story is a matter of public concern.
2. Publication of embarrassing private facts is a tort still not recognized in some states. This type involves the broadcast of non-newsworthy, private, embarrassing facts that are highly offensive to a reasonable person. One such case involved a man who deflected the gun from a person attempting to shoot former President Gerald Ford. Later news stories referred to him as a homosexual, and he sued for publication of embarrassing, private facts. He lost the case, with the court noting that he had been involved prominently and publicly in gay rights activities in San Francisco. Facts that an individual already has made public willingly cannot be considered private. Journalists, however, must be careful to weigh the news value of potentially embarrassing facts about the lives of private individuals.
3. Misappropriation involves taking a person's name or likeness for commercial purposes without the individual's consent, which usually occurs in the context of advertising.
4. Trespassing or intrusion may occur as a result of a journalist's conduct in newsgathering. A journalist can be found guilty irrespective of whether he or she airs any information or footage obtained. The act of intruding, either physically or with a hidden camera or microphone, may be enough to convict. In deciding such cases, courts will look at the place where the intrusion is claimed to have occurred. A person's home is considered more private than an office. Courts also will ask whether the journalist received permission to enter into the plaintiff's private property.

As more emphasis is placed on privacy rights, journalists should not assume that private property becomes public because something newsworthy occurs there. As in all invasion of privacy suits, defenses include arguments that the disclosure was not highly offensive to a reasonable person, that the disclosed material was newsworthy, or that the plaintiff gave consent.

Contracting with a Source

The difficulty of bringing a libel or invasion of privacy case against a journalist does not mean the journalist cannot be held accountable for breaking a promise to a source. The issue can often be one of breaking a contract. One case involved two rape victims who agreed to be interviewed for a news series. The station promised the women they would not be identifiable on air, but the lighting used during the interview did not mask the victims' features adequately. What's more, no attempt was made to disguise their voices.

When a promotional announcement aired on the station the weekend before the series began, the employer of one of the rape victims recognized her. She also received telephone calls from others who saw her in the promo. When she complained to the station, she was promised she would not be recognizable in future segments. When the next segment aired, however, people who knew the two rape victims could identify them readily, and the face of one victim was clearly visible at one point in the program. One of the women never had told her family she had been raped, and both claimed that the failure of the station to maintain their anonymity caused them great distress.

They sued for breach of contract, negligent infliction of emotional distress, and intentional infliction of emotional distress. The appellate court ruled the station was guilty of breach of contract and negligence in not taking adequate steps to fulfill its promise to maintain anonymity. The intentional infliction of emotional distress claim was denied because that requires "severe mental pain or anguish . . . inflicted through a deliberate or malicious campaign of harassment or intimidation."¹⁰ Clearly this was not a libel case because the truth of the facts broadcast by the station was not disputed, but the station made a promise, did not fulfill the terms of that promise, and was held liable by the court for the harm its broadcasts caused.

Doe v. American Broadcasting Cos. emphasizes two important aspects of journalism. One is that the people we use in our stories are, in a very real sense, our victims. We put them on television and get them to say things that sometimes cause them a lot of trouble. That goes with the territory of covering news. When a source is made a promise by a journalist, however, that promise must be kept. It is a contract.

The second thing this case underscores is how careful television journalists must be when dealing with promotion producers. Most stations hire people specifically to promote what those stations are doing. Those people frequently have no journalism background, and their job is to make people want to watch the newscasts. Sometimes the promos do not represent accurately the stories being promoted in the effort to hype them, and that distortion can affect the journalist's reputation and legal liability.

One way to dampen the tendency toward promotional distortion is to provide promotion producers only the edited story, not the raw field tapes. In the case of stories involving sensitive topics, the raw field tape may include scenes the reporter and photographer know can't be used but that a promotion producer may use in ignorance. Examples include sensitive interviews such as the rape case discussed previously and cases in which judges have issued restraining orders on media use of information such as victims' identities or other evidence.

In one case, a judge issued a restraining order against publication of the names of ten sexual child abuse victims. During the 10 p.m. news one evening, the reporter covering the trial that day told a videotape editor to use a wide shot of the courtroom, including a large card with the children's names listed. On a normal television set the names could not be read, but on a large screen television the identities were clear. The district attorney filed contempt of court charges, and the parents of the children involved threatened substantial lawsuits. Three station employees were fired, two others were disciplined, the station incurred considerable legal costs, and its reputation as a news organization was tarnished seriously, all because of one shot in a news story lasting about five seconds.¹¹

CONTEMPT OF COURT

The power of the courts to regulate news reporting involves two major areas: free press versus fair trial and the right of reporters to protect their news sources.

Free Press Versus Fair Trial

Free press versus fair trial discussions get quite involved, as they bring the First, Sixth, and Fourteenth amendments to the Constitution into conflict. Why the conflict? Journalists are concerned with crime news. Journalists believe citizens need to know what is going on in their city or town for safety reasons. They also believe citizens should know what goes on in their courts so they can see the fair administration of justice. Media critics worry that the media place too much emphasis on crime. They believe excessive publicity interferes with the judicial process and stress that the Sixth Amendment's guarantee of a fair trial means an impartial jury that has not been prejudiced by media accounts. Since the Sam Sheppard case in the early 1960s, both the press and the bar have been more acutely aware of how harmful excessive publicity can be to the rights of the accused. The Sheppard opinion, however, was a sharp denunciation of the judge's failure to control his courtroom, as well as media failure to act responsibly.

Although media still are confronted with restraining or "gag" orders in connection with judicial proceedings, Supreme Court rulings have given more assurances of open criminal proceedings over the past 10 to 15 years. The landmark *Richmond Newspapers* case in 1980 recognized that the media and the public have a First Amendment right to attend criminal trials. Also as a result of two fairly recent Supreme Court rulings, both *voir dire* (juror examinations) and preliminary hearings before a magistrate are presumptively open unless a compelling need for closure can be proven by the parties wishing to exclude the media.

Although the High Court has not applied its rulings specifically to civil cases, journalists should respond to attempts at closure the same as they would in criminal proceedings. In such an event, journalists should identify themselves as members of the press, state their objections to being excluded from the proceeding, and respectfully request the judge to hold a hearing. If that request is denied, journalists should request a recess to contact their news directors and the stations' attorneys to appeal the closure formally. Even though recent Supreme Court rulings have given journalists more access to criminal proceedings, access to information is still curtailed. Restraining orders are placed on witnesses, attorneys, policemen, and other officers of the court to prevent media representatives from talking with these individuals.

In many states, the bench, press, and bar have worked together to draft guidelines that will preserve a defendant's right to a fair trial as well as the public's right to be informed about operation of the criminal justice system. The guidelines suggest types of material that can be released without harming the judicial process. They also list types of information that can hinder the defendant's right to a fair trial. Because these are voluntary agreements, they work well only in communities in which all sides of the free press-fair trial controversy demonstrate a spirit of cooperation.

Another aspect of trial coverage that broadcast journalists need to be informed about is the use of cameras in courtrooms. Canon 35 of the American Bar Association banned cameras and other electronic equipment in courtrooms for years following the outrageous conduct of photographers in the trial of Bruno Hauptmann, convicted of kidnapping the infant son of Charles and Anne Lindberg. Again in 1965, cameras were an impediment to a fair trial, according to the Supreme Court in the *Billy Sol Estes* case. Even so, as photographic equipment became less intrusive and disruptive, some states began to permit telecasts and broadcasts of criminal trials.

In Florida, which permitted cameras in the courtroom, two Miami police officers argued they had not received a fair trial because the presence of cameras had been psychologically disruptive. The Supreme Court ruled in *Chandler v. Florida* that the mere presence of cameras in the

courtroom did not interfere with a fair trial and refused to place a ban on their use. Instead, the High Court said states could adopt their own rules regarding courtroom cameras.

Today, cameras can be used to some extent in almost two-thirds of the states, and in early 1991, some federal district courts allowed cameras for the first time on an experimental basis. Because rules vary among states, each broadcast journalist will have to check his or her own state's law.

During the 1980s and early 1990s, many states provided liberalized access for television cameras in trials. This access usually rested on agreement of both sides in the case to the presence of cameras. Following the year-long murder trial of former professional football great O. J. Simpson, the debate over cameras in court intensified greatly. The Simpson trial was the most extensively televised trial in history and one of the most heavily viewed television offerings during 1994 and 1995. It included details of a gruesome double murder with a national celebrity as defendant, the new technology of DNA testing of blood samples, and allegations of racism by Los Angeles police detectives who investigated the case against the black defendant.

Despite Simpson's acquittal of charges by the jury, according to public opinion polls taken in the weeks following the verdict, a significant number of Americans were convinced he was guilty. Perception of the celebrity defendant's guilt or innocence tended to follow racial lines. Whites generally perceived him as guilty, and blacks generally believed in his innocence. Based on what happened in the Simpson case, questions have been raised about the effect of extensive televised coverage of courtroom proceedings on public perception, as well as on the defendant's fair trial rights. Some indications suggest that judges in the future may not be inclined to turn other high-profile cases into media spectacles.

Shield Laws

The relationship between journalists and sources has taken a strange twist in recent years. Normally, the discussion centers on the journalist's need to be able to assure his or her sources that their names and other information will be kept confidential. This promise of confidentiality is necessary, they say, to get certain types of information they would not be able to get otherwise. For years, journalists assumed they had a First Amendment right not to reveal their sources — until the 1971 *Branzburg v. Hayes* case (actually three cases in one). Here, a divided court said journalists are like all other citizens and must testify when summoned before a grand jury. The decision left lower courts to decide on a case-by-case basis whether a limited reporters' privilege exists. Many courts have given this protection in all cases except the grand jury hearings mentioned in *Branzburg*. In making the determination, courts usually will take into consideration whether the person seeking the information has shown the reporter has knowledge that is relevant to the case at hand, whether the information goes to the heart of the matter, and whether it could be obtained elsewhere.

In addition to a limited constitutional protection for their sources, journalists' right of confidentiality is protected to a greater or lesser degree by state shield laws. A reporter generally will have more protection for names of his or her sources than for things the journalist may have witnessed personally. Although the laws vary from state to state and some observers believe they are not very useful, others disagree. Just the existence of a shield law may make some officers of the courts more reluctant to subpoena a reporter.

The other side of the confidentiality controversy is demonstrated in this question: Can a reporter be held liable for violating a promise of confidentiality to a source? This question has

arisen before, but it reached the Supreme Court for the first time in 1991 in *Cohen v. Cowles Media*. The Court held that journalists do not have a right to disregard promises that otherwise would be enforced by law. The final word will have to come from the Minnesota Supreme Court, which now must review its state constitution to see whether it shields the press from this action.

OBSCENITY

Obscenity is one of the most difficult concepts to define. Court interpretations have changed the definition many times. The decision in *Miller v. California* is the last case of real significance. In *Miller*, the court said local community standards should be used to determine whether something is obscene for that particular community. It emphasized that standards in Las Vegas will not be the same as standards in a small town in Utah. According to *Miller*, a work is obscene according to the following three-pronged test:

1. Would a person, applying contemporary, local community standards, find that the work, taken as a whole, appeals to prurient interests (morbid interest in nudity, sex, or excretory functions)?
2. Does the work depict in a patently offensive way sexual conduct defined specifically by applicable state law?
3. Does the work in question lack serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value?

That's the law as it applies to all media and interpreted by the courts. Broadcast media have other restrictions too. Until 1963 the FCC had control over obscenity. That year, the provision of the Communications Act that authorized the FCC to forbid the use of obscene language was moved to the U.S. Criminal Code. It reads:

Broadcasting obscene language. Whoever utters any obscene, indecent or profane language by means of radio communication shall be fined no more than \$10,000 or imprisoned no more than two years or both.

Things such as broadcasting George Carlin's "seven-dirty words" comedy routine at times of the day when children could be in the audience have been held to violate Section 1464 of the Criminal Code. The FCC did not drop its involvement with obscenity, though. Under the general charge to stations to provide for the "public interest, convenience and necessity," the FCC in 1978 won Supreme Court approval to regulate broadcast indecency and, thus, obscenity. The standards by which broadcasting is regulated *vis à vis* indecency are more stringent than the standards for print as a result of this decision of the Court.

Three types of utterances — profanity, obscenity and indecency — are mentioned in Section 1464. The FCC appears to opt for the lesser term, indecency, to avoid dealing with the complex, constitutional definition of obscenity. While moving away from regulating in some areas, the mood of the FCC in recent years has been to attempt stricter controls over broadcast of indecency. The agency's attempt at a round-the-clock ban on indecent broadcasts was blocked by the U.S. Court of Appeals in Washington in 1990. The FCC, however, has been compiling a record to show that such a ban is necessary to protect children.

Regulation of Indecent Programming

In recent years there has been a push toward more regulation of indecent programming on radio and television. For example, the FCC has cracked down on radio stations airing the “Howard Stern Show.” Through May of 1994, radio stations were fined a total of \$1.9 million for airing the Stern broadcasts, which included material deemed indecent.

In the Public Telecommunications Act of 1992, Congress prohibited indecency between midnight and 6 a.m. for all broadcast stations except public radio or television stations that signed off the air before midnight. Those stations could air indecent programming beginning at 10 p.m. When the act was challenged in court, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit threw out the double standard. It ruled that the ban from midnight to 6 a.m. met most constitutional requirements, but Congress did not justify treating public broadcast stations differently. The court accepted the government’s argument that it should regulate indecency to support parents’ ability to control what their children watch, and the court accepted the government’s contention that it had a compelling need to protect minors.

The D.C. Circuit said the “safe harbor” for indecent programming between midnight and 6 a.m. was tailored narrowly to protect viewing rights of adults, yet restrict access to children. The court, however, did not agree with the different hours for public broadcasting stations that may go off the air before or at midnight. The court said allowing public broadcasting stations to air indecency before midnight undermined the arguments for protecting young minds and helping parents control what their children watch.¹²

Regulation of Violence

The four major television networks agreed in 1994 to supply an advisory to parents in newspapers and *TV Guide*, warning of violent programming. In February 1995, the Department of Defense, the U.S. Postal Service, and Amtrak decided not to advertise during any television show with excessive violence, excluding documentaries, sports programs, and news. The three spent a combined \$68 million on television advertising in 1994.¹³

In 1995, the U.S. Senate voted to establish a ratings system for violent programming on television. Senators debated whether to require that new TV sets be capable of blocking violent programming with a device known as the V-Chip.¹⁴ In early 1996 Congress did revise the 1934 Communications Act to require the V-Chip.

Regulation of Cable/Telephone

In the fall of 1992, Congress passed the Cable Communications Policy Act that, among other things, required cable companies to carry all local broadcast signals. Turner Broadcasting — owner of CNN, Headline News, and TNT — immediately challenged the must-carry rules. These regulations reduced the number of channels available for cable networks. The U.S. District Court upheld the must-carry rules despite Turner Broadcasting’s claim that it is content-based and favors one speaker (broadcasters) over another (cable operators). In a 5–4 decision, the U.S. Supreme Court supported the theory behind the must-carry rules but remanded the case to the lower court

for factual development.¹⁵ Justice Anthony Kennedy said the lower court must compile evidence that without the must-carry rules, cable operators would drop broadcast stations. The government's justification for the regulation is the potential monopoly of cable stations to prevent subscribers from access to other broadcast programming.

The Satellite Home Viewer Act of 1994 stated that because cable operators have compulsory licenses to transmit distant broadcast signals, they can deliver programming without permission as long as they pay royalties.¹⁶ Satellite operators have a compulsory license to deliver programming to homes unable to receive over-the-air broadcasts. Satellite operators, however, cannot transmit such broadcasts to homes able to receive network broadcast signals.¹⁷ When it established compulsory licenses, congress was promoting cable companies, which operate in a local area and not through direct transmission to a home like satellite transmission. Satellite signals to homes with over-the-air capabilities could severely damage viewers, ratings, and advertisers for broadcast licensees. The 11th Circuit Court of Appeals said satellite systems delivering signals to homes able to receive over-the-air broadcasts do not deserve the compulsory license because of their advantage of delivering programming directly to homes.¹⁸

The latest development in this area of regulation is with the telephone companies. Several of the Regional Bell Operating Companies — which formed after the 1982 breakup of AT&T — have won federal court approval to offer video programming over their fiberoptic cables. In late 1994, five of the seven Baby Bells were considered to have First Amendment rights to offer such programming and provide direct competition to the cable companies.¹⁹

The telephone companies have received further affirmation of their entrance into the video programming market with congressional deregulation of all telecommunications industries, to promote fair competition in the 1996 Telecommunication Act. The removal of regulatory barriers will permit cable companies to offer telephone service, telephone companies to offer video, and all could offer local and long distance telephone service.

A major factor in the push to deregulate the telecommunications market is the view that cable developed a virtual monopoly. Few cable subscribers, in the regulated world of the 1980s and early 1990s, had a choice of cable companies. Typically, cable systems carved out exclusive service areas with entire communities limited to a single cable provider. Evolving telephone line technology provides the capability of using telephone lines to carry television signals, as well as normal telephone data, thus creating immediate and powerful competition to the cable television industry.



All states now have open records and open meetings laws. Most of these are patterned after the Federal Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), covering records, and the Federal Sunshine in Government Act, covering meetings. Journalists have to know how to request information through both state and federal open records statutes. Many journalists keep form letters on their computers for using the FOIA. The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press in Washington (202-466-6313) provides advice to journalists with access problems.

In addition, all journalists should research their own state statutes governing open records and open meetings so they will know what they are entitled to under the law. In addition to legal access, reporters should try to develop sources of information within government offices. Both the legal and the informal approaches are necessary to get the best possible information.

Many times, government agencies also place restrictions on employees about how they are to handle the media. As you gather spot news, you will deal with the full spectrum of public officials. Many of them, especially in law enforcement, work under news policy guidelines similar to those listed at the end of the chapter. As you read these guidelines, consider the types of news coverage they might restrict.

COPYRIGHT

The Copyright Act of 1976 replaced the outdated 1909 statute to conform to a recognition of electronic media. The act says that film, videotape, and photographs may be copyrighted. Under the new law, copyright extends for the life of the creator plus 50 years. Portions of a work may be used under fair use guidelines, the most important being whether the use affects the market value of the work adversely. People working in broadcast news should know that copyright protects the method of expression — the sound or pictorial recordings themselves — but not the idea of creating that expression or the facts contained in it. Therefore, though you can copyright the product you have created, you cannot lay claim to the facts therein. Anyone else can go out and tape or film or record the same event or object. That person simply can't take your work and make copies of it without your consent once you've placed copyright notice on the work. Notice of copyright is the placement of the copyright symbol, © followed by the word "copyrighted," the year, and the owner's name.

THE FUTURE

The newest form of communication to enter the legal realm of our information-saturated society is the Internet. Over the years, radio and television added a new dimension to questions of libel, copyright, and obscenity. Now, cyberspace — sometimes referred to as cyberia — is charting entirely new territory in these legal matters.

Cyberspace encompasses the Internet, World Wide Web, and online services such as Prodigy, CompuServe and America Online. What legal model do regulators follow — print or broadcast? Who owns the rights to the published work — the individual, the on-line service? Who is responsible for defaming statements? Who is the "community" when determining whether material is obscene based on community standards? Answers to these legal questions are still in progress as courts, and government officials battle to monitor cyberspace (if that is possible, much less reasonable), but some standards are evolving as the two entities fight to catch up with technology.

The Net and Obscenity

Among the most popular Usenet discussion groups are the various "alt.sex" groups. Brian Reid, director of the Network Systems Laboratory at Digital Equipment Corp., estimates that up to a half-million users hook into cybersleaze monthly. Whereas the Smithsonian Web site took seven weeks to get 1.9 million "hits;" the Playboy site reached 4.7 million hits in seven days.²⁰

Cyberporn is pervasive and easy to find. Usenet newsgroups on the Internet offer some of the most questionable material. *Hustler* and *Playboy* magazines both have electronic versions on the Web. Some allow anyone with a credit card, even kids, to order pornographic CD-ROMs for home delivery. On-line services drop members for inappropriate content, but the gateways into the Internet allow users to tap into material of every description.

Censoring the Net is difficult. Besides the First Amendment questions involved, trying to determine liability for misconduct is a logistical nightmare. The heart of the matter is choosing a regulation model. Should the content on the Net be tightly controlled like radio and television, or should it be as unrestrained as magazines and newspapers?

The 1996 Telecommunications Act outlaws transmission of indecent materials to minors over computer networks. Individuals who post messages on the Net are responsible for the content. Democratic Sen. Jim Exon wanted to apply the broadcast obscenity rule banning any indecent material, officially defined as the “seven dirty words” originally articulated by comedian George Carlin.²¹ This model is questionable, however, because cyberspace doesn’t resemble broadcast, in which licensed stations take up appropriated public air space to beam material to thousands of viewers with no idea what will be coming. Cyberspace is more like locker room chat or postal correspondence, places where we would not accept content regulation. Because the Net is transmitted via a modem and telephone lines, the recent law is similar to the model that resembles restrictions on harassing or obscene phone calls but still protects First Amendment rights in the context of individual privacy.

While Congress is fumbling through regulatory models, U.S. courts are struggling to determine the most applicable “community” when considering whether material is legally obscene. In July 1994, a U.S. District Court in Memphis convicted Californians Robert Alan and Carleen Thomas on charges of conspiracy and interstate transportation of obscenity because they allowed users to download pictures of bestiality, torture, self mutilation, rape, and the like for a fee.²² The case was tried in Memphis because a West Tennessee man complained of the material the Thomases were offering. The government pushed for Memphis as the community because of its more conservative atmosphere. The Thomases and First Amendment advocates argued that the pornography was not made available in the Memphis community but, instead, in the virtual community of the Internet, which has different standards, if any at all. The case is being appealed and is seen as an important precedent for fighting cyberporn.

The Net and Copyright

The Internet and on-line services deliver breaking news, manuscripts, photos, and a plethora of other creative works that can easily be downloaded and stored. The accessibility to great research resources and multiple dissemination opportunities increase the likelihood of piracy on the Net. But all information in cyberspace is copyright-protected, even without the optional copyright notice, and journalists should not use material without permission.²³ As a general rule, works posted to the Internet are no different from other published materials.

Publishing newspapers on the Internet is more complicated than just securing copyrights to each item in the paper. When putting a newspaper online, publishers must not violate contractual agreements like wire service agreements, syndication contracts, and advertising contracts.

Business Week magazine referred to copyright violations on the Internet as “highway robbery,” claiming that instances of piracy go far beyond violations used with a photocopy

machine. By 1995, a digital copyright system was being designed to put a “cypher,” a code identifying the owner, in each published work on the Internet.²⁴ There is still some question about whether this defeats the purpose of the Internet: quick and widespread distribution of material.

Courts are beginning to hold on-line service providers liable for civil damages if subscribers download copyrighted expression such as games and pictures. A federal court in California enjoined a bulletin board operator for managing illegal trading of Sega video games over the Net. Chad Scherman, operating as “Brujjo Digital,” asked users to upload Sega software and even charged to download the pirated material.²⁵ In Florida, a federal court said a bulletin board operator could pay civil damages for copyright infringement even if the operator does not encourage or participate in illegal trading of copyrighted works. George Frena was guilty of copyright infringement when subscribers to his commercial bulletin board illegally downloaded 170 pictures from *Playboy* publications.²⁶

The Net and Libel

A big debate is under way over who is responsible for libel on the Internet. Publishers and broadcasters are responsible for libel because they control the message sent to the public. Common carriers like telephone companies, however, are not responsible because they have no control over libelous statements.

A New York court decided in 1995 that an Internet provider could be responsible if it edits electronic messages posted by subscribers. Long Island securities investment firm Stratton Oakmont Inc. sued Prodigy for \$200 million because an anonymous user of Prodigy’s “Money Talk” bulletin board portrayed the company falsely as criminals involved in fraud.²⁷ The court said that, because Prodigy marketed itself as a family-oriented on-line service that screened new messages on its bulletin board, it was more like a publisher than a common carrier.

The Prodigy case differed from a similar case against CompuServe, the New York court said, because CompuServe did not attempt to edit messages on its bulletin board.²⁸ The U. S. District Court for the Southern District of New York ruled in *Cubby, Inc. v. CompuServe, Inc.* that the on-line service provider is not responsible for defamation placed by subscribers unless it had “actual knowledge” of the libel. The CompuServe court said an on-line service cannot be expected to review every message posted over its electronic network.

Another 1995 case has added a new wrinkle to the libel issue. A Caribbean resort owner is seeking the name of a user on America Online so he can sue the subscriber for libel. The user, identified as Jenny TRR, posted a message in June indicating that the “only white instructor” at the Carib Inn was stoned when he gave her scuba diving lessons.²⁹ The case could have serious implications for libel as well as user privacy and freedom of speech on the Internet.

Sample Guidelines

1. Using news media for personal gain: An employee will not, directly or indirectly, seek publicity through the press, radio, or television.
2. News media credentials: Representatives of the news media who produce credentials will be admitted to coverage of any scene or disaster, crime, accident, or similar occurrence, when cleared by the officer in charge of same.
3. Interviews with news media: Representatives of the news media are authorized to interview any member of this department on a person-to-person basis, regardless of rank; but, this privilege shall not extend to any act that may in any manner jeopardize the investigation in progress or a future court proceeding.
4. Courtesy of news media: All courtesies will be shown to news media in the field, as well as within the facilities of this department. An employee, in turn, should expect members of the news media to extend like courtesies to which members of this department are entitled in the exercise of their duties.
5. Preferential treatment: No preferential treatment will be shown to any representative of the news media.
6. Photographing prisoners: Photographing any individual in the custody of this department by the news media will not be authorized within the confines of the sheriff's department building. Federal prisoners in the custody of the department may be photographed by news media only upon authorization by the arresting federal agency or the U. S. Marshal. When escorting a prisoner outside the facilities of this department, photographing by the news media will not be restricted.
7. Releasing names: An employee will not release the name of a person killed by a criminal act or accident until identification has been verified and an earnest effort has been made by the coroner's office to notify next of kin; however, if the next of kin has not been notified after a reasonable time, this information will be released.
8. Information that will be released:
 - a. Victim's name, address, age, sex, race, occupation, and next of kin.
 - b. Description of subject(s) involved in the crime.
 - c. Amount of money taken (if any), except in robberies where the amount should be withheld.
 - d. Weapon used (if any).
 - e. Type of force used.
 - f. Injuries suffered by victim(s) or subject(s)
 - g. Facts and essential circumstances of any arrest or incident, which includes name, address, sex, race, occupation, age, and, if over 18, charges.
 - h. All events occurring in the judicial process.
 - i. Accident reports, miscellaneous incident reports, arrest reports
 - j. On rape or sex offenses, only the age, race, and general location of incident.
 - k. Witnesses' names on drownings, accidents, etc.
9. Information that will not be released:
 - a. Names, addresses, and exact location of female victims of sex offenders.
 - b. Names and addresses of witnesses to Class 1 crimes
 - c. Statements made by subject(s) after arrest.
 - d. Names and addresses of subject(s) wanted for crimes, unless help is wanted from the news media in an effort to locate subject.
 - e. Details of subjects' previous arrest record.
 - f. Juvenile offenders' names and addresses.
10. Police Lines: At the scene of a major crime incident or disaster, police lines are set up to control crowds and preserve evidence. Representatives of the news media with proper press credentials will be allowed past lines, where the preservation of evidence and order will not be affected.

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If we are to be faithful to what journalism really stands for, we cannot operate by what surveys tell us our customers want.

Richard Salant, Former President of CBS News



Ethics and Professionalism



Essential to the definition of professional broadcasting is the journalist's sense of ethical standards. Legal standards protect society against unethical and abusive conduct, and if you have a strong commitment to professional ethics, most of the legal restrictions will be academic to you. Many of the ethical decisions you will make relate to the concepts of privacy and fairness and to the specific codes and policies of professional conduct.

ETHICAL FOUNDATIONS

In the American model the journalist is presumed to be a neutral observer of events who does everything possible to keep personal bias out of the news being reported. Many journalists aspire to that ideal in the belief that the public has a right to receive news and information free of political or other values that affect the way it is reported. In reality, however, we are all human beings and, thus, products of our past experiences. We are value-laden beings subject to perceptions of reality determined by the way we see the world. Our belief systems are constructed from early childhood through our relationships and experiences. Thus, "truth" often differs depending on one's background and perspective.

Intelligent journalists know where their opinions rest and work hard not to let them interfere with objective reporting. Sometimes, though, that translates to unfairness in reporting, not only for the side the reporter may disagree with but also one with which he/she agrees. For example, a reporter who is a political conservative may be harder on candidates with whom the reporter agrees because of a conscious effort not to favor them.

In addition, we tend to view the world based on our ideology. In the American concept of the world, hard work is supposed to produce success. When people work hard but still fail, we tend to see that as somehow unfair. But are street people, called “bums” by a former generation, always victims of an unfair system, or are they sometimes products of their own bad choices along life’s road? When you do a story about street people, your values will greatly influence what and how you report that story. The way you perceive their world may not be the way they do.

In American culture we have a strong belief in the separation of church and state. Further, we view government as something that has enormous power in need of balancing. The U. S. Constitution was set up with not only a separation of church and state, but also a separation of powers among the three major elements of our system: executive, legislative, and judiciary. When we report on events elsewhere in the world, we do so from an American perspective, and our cultural values influence our interpretations. For instance, in the Mideast one of the major religions does not embrace the concept of separation of church and state, nor is the military considered separate from the other two institutions. Indeed, the founder of Islam was a religious prophet, military general, and government statesman all wrapped up in one person.

How do you report objectively on another culture that has core values different from yours? When our values get mixed into our perceptions of objectivity, it becomes an ethical question. That has to be a constant concern for journalists, for in human beings perception is truth. Frequently truth is not a finite, easily definable set of facts but, rather, a complex set of beliefs steeped in our mythologies and experiences. Finding the “truth,” therefore, is an unending pursuit that requires an always open mind and willingness to consider opposing points of view. How good are we at doing that?

In 1644 John Milton delivered a speech to the British Parliament against licensing of the press, which later became the foundation of Western free press theory. In the *Areopagitica* the “marketplace of ideas” was forged as a fundamental concept, of finding truth. Within that concept, if all ideas are permitted to be placed in the market of public opinion, truth will prevail. The concept of the press being “free” to provide a marketplace of ideas was integrated into the U. S. Constitution as part of the First Amendment, which prohibits any abridgment of “freedom of speech, or of the press.” The concept was a direct result of the European struggle for religious and political freedom, primarily in England from the reign of Henry VIII on.

A major flaw exists in the concept of the marketplace of ideas. It is that the market is not an open one where all ideas are on the table. Rather, the marketplace of ideas is a fairly small arena in the modern context of mass media. It is generally confined to those who can buy their printer’s ink by the 55-gallon drum or can afford to own a radio or television station. To have an idea is not the same as being able to convey that idea to millions of people so they can consider its worthiness. This natural economic limitation, further complicated by technical limits of the radio wave spectrum (only so many possible radio stations are available on the dial), is the keystone of the debate about whether contemporary media represent all societal interests. In advertising-driven media the idea marketplace tends to be defined in terms of content worth selling to narrow economic and demographic categories. For example, tailoring newscasts to a target market defined as “single-family homeowners in the 18-49-year-old group with at least two children and more than \$40,000 of annual income” clearly opens up considerable debate about whether media so focused can possibly serve the wider society.

Considerable research supports the view that the reverse may be true: media generally supporting prevailing middle-class ideologies with only limited serious criticism of government policy and middle-class values. In addition, recent analysis of network “top of the hour” radio newscasts indicates little diversity of content or emphasis and strikingly “uniform presentation of

news.”¹ Indeed, one could argue, the ideas of the contemporary media marketplace are not what rule it but, rather, the fairly uniform pursuit of narrowly defined audiences.

The ethical journalist faces never-ending questions about the how and why of coverage. Are marginalized social groups covered effectively? Do media anxious to please certain target viewers tend to reinforce prevailing mythologies by producing programming that reflects those viewers “wants?” How does the structure of radio and television (economic and technological) influence coverage? Considering the last question: Radio is a medium of sound, television primarily a medium of pictures. Although some stories work well within the printed context of the daily newspaper, they are dull in electronic media. For example, video of the state legislature is usually boring stuff — just a bunch of people standing or sitting around. From the ideal of providing compelling video that will draw viewers into the newscast, almost nothing is worse than showing people standing around. In one major-market television newsroom, producers, reporters, and photographers were ordered, in a newsroom memo, to stop putting what the executive producer termed “BOPSAs” (a bunch of people standing around) on the air. Is it any wonder that much of television news focuses on dramatic events that are compelling visually but often of marginal social import in the greater scheme of things?

Television often has been criticized for lacking depth and follow-up and failing to provide a wider context to the sea of images it washes over the audience. That may be one reason television news ratings have declined in the post-cable era when wide ranges of viewing choices are available. When some choice other than news programming is available, millions of Americans choose “other.” Is that because they simply do not care about current events? Or might it be that what they see on television has little to with their personalized worlds? Or has television news been so captivated by entertainment values, making it more “infotainment” than journalism, that those seeking traditional news must go elsewhere to get it? The answer is probably a combination of those possibilities and additional factors.

As news viewing has been eroded by competing media, many news organizations have sought to preserve market share by manufacturing a mass-mediated kind of reality through orchestrated “hot button” news series during major rating periods. When news departments create these series, with little relationship to the flow of current events, are the journalists involved being ethical? Are they ethical in producing newscasts with a great deal of emphasis on the “human” side without a wider context addressing the “why” and “what” of the situation? Television tends toward the emotional. Pictures are powerful emotionally. But has television news gone too far with such fare in the seemingly endless parade of people weeping on the evening news for one reason or another? Has traditional current-events coverage about the greater issues of public policy been displaced by this fare because the audience doesn’t want the former, or because television journalists have become hostages to their own technology?

In journalism, ethical questions like these arise every hour of every day. Although you may have to make a decision once or twice a day about the length and format of a story, everything you write, shoot, edit, and read on camera reflects your journalism ethics. If you were asked to write one or two paragraphs defining your personal journalism ethic, what would you say? What will you do as a journalist in the field when you are confronted with such things? Will you be willing to give up a nice car, a home in the suburbs, your children’s college education, and walk out of a newsroom where what you see as unethical behavior not only is accepted but encouraged?

Journalism ethics is not a simplistic set of finite criteria. It is a complicated area driven by ideals that emanate from the 17th century and continue to influence our concept of what being a member of a free and democratic society means. Maintaining journalistic ethics is a never-ending struggle with powerful influences.

Privacy

The concept of privacy that has legal definition in most states and has been interpreted variously in the federal courts. Beside the legal constraints of privacy law, critics often ask the question, “Do the media have the *ethical* right to invade a person’s privacy even if the legal right is there?” For example, in the TV interview by ABC’s Barbara Walters with tennis star Billie Jean King, did Ms. Walters have to probe into the homosexual affair Ms. King had with Marilyn Barnett? How far into a person’s private life should an interviewer delve? Not very far, if you ask the viewing public. Many polls indicate that a majority of people think invading the privacy of a person while gathering the news is wrong. On the other hand, journalists must balance that criticism with the responsibility to the public’s right to know. That balance must be struck with an acute sense of news judgment and fairness.

On the local level journalists face these ethical questions almost daily. The TV reporter and cameraman on assignment in San Angelo, Texas, faced a difficult decision when they followed police to do a report from inside a murder victim’s house. Police allowed the reporter and cameraman into the home, but the victim’s husband requested that they leave. They did, but not until after they had the story. Did they invade the privacy of the husband even though police had given their permission? That’s both a legal and an ethical question. The legal question was never answered because the husband who brought suit died before it ever came to trial. The ethical question is perhaps easier to answer in this case.

Maybe some of the tougher questions fall into a gray area. Should a drowning victim be shown being pulled from a lake? Should the reporter do a live interview from the hospital with the father of a flood victim? Should the names or visuals of juveniles who have committed a crime be used in a story? (Some states have legal restrictions regarding the use of juvenile names in a story, but many states leave this to the media’s discretion.) Broadcast reporters and editors confront these and many similar questions, daily. How should you respond ethically to such decisions?

Fairness

Often, bias, or unfairness, lies in the eye of the beholder, but it occurs in stories themselves whenever reports are false, incomplete, omit an essential detail, or unfairly emphasize one point of view over another. The key to fairness is not simply to report both sides of an issue but, rather, to report all points of view with equal energy. Political and religious bias may be present, either intentionally or unintentionally, whenever ideas, issues, and candidates receive unequal emphasis or unequal energy. An 8-second soundbite with a politician may portray more emotional energy, conviction, and psychological heat than a similar 8-second bite with the opposition. The short bite may be superior even to a 35-second bite. One could argue that the 35-second bite gives one candidate more visibility and emphasis, but one also can argue that the 8-second bite gives the other candidate an unfair advantage because it is so compelling and memorable. Equal time does not automatically constitute fairness.

Something of a writer’s personal sense of ethics and fairness show through in any story in the writer’s choice of words, the order in which the words are expressed, and what facts in the story

receive most emphasis. David Brinkley of ABC has said the journalist cannot possibly be objective in the sense that to be totally objective is to have no likes or dislikes, no feelings one way or another about anything. What is possible, Brinkley says, is to be fair — to make a totally honest effort to report the news event or the newsmaker as representatively as possible. Most stories are neither all black nor all white. They usually have more than two sides if the issue at stake is especially controversial.

To be fair in your reporting of such stories, you must report with equal emphasis all salient points of view, irrespective of your own social and political views and feelings. You must be, as former CBS News President Richard Salant said, “just as skeptical of those news sources we admire and of stories with which we agree as we are of those we dislike and the stories with which we disagree.” The difficult, if not impossible, goal of being totally objective does not overrule your responsibility to strive for fairness.

Professional Codes

Ethics can be divided into two major categories: professional ethics and personal ethics. Journalists initiated several codes of conduct during the 20th century, the social responsibility era of mass communications. There are significant codes for all news media practitioners to consider, including the Canons of Journalism and the responsibilities of a free press as recommended by the Commission on Freedom of the Press. The RTNDA Code of Broadcast News Ethics Code provide guidelines for ethical conduct of broadcast journalists. The RTNDA Code is provided in the Appendix to this text.

Station Policies

In addition to codes, many stations have their own policies that specify certain conduct. The policy statements may cover many aspects of behavior expected of the broadcaster. For example, the station policy may cover how to handle sex crimes, other crimes, race, suicide, and people with disabilities.

Policy statements also may cover aspects of the job relating to ethics. The guidelines may involve conflict of interest, moonlighting, political activity, and freelancing.

Typical Policy Guidelines

1. **Sex Crimes:** Handle with as much care as possible. State that the crime was committed, provide essential facts, but don't go into detail. Don't report the victim's name. For example, you might report a rape case like this:

A 21-year-old Central Valley woman was raped early this morning as she returned home from work. Police are seeking a 6-foot man, weighing about 175 pounds.
2. **Crime Stories:** Provide the facts, but don't sensationalize with morbid details. Avoid going into the “how” of the crime. Never use juvenile names without the court's permission. Don't report that a person is arrested for questioning. Report suspect's name only when a charge has been filed.
3. **Race:** Unless the race is an important part of the story, don't mention it. If, John Smith is the first Black mayor of Central Valley, though, use it. Sometimes in describing fugitives in crime stories, race may be important.
4. **Suicide:** Don't say someone committed suicide until the coroner has ruled the death a suicide. As in any crime story, state the facts simply without detail. Attribute the suicide ruling to the coroner.
5. **Disabilities:** Never joke about a disability. Don't mention a disability unless it is essential to the story.

Personal Ethics

The individual professionalism of journalists and the media organizations within which they work are challenged every day. How you conduct yourself will be crucial to your personal success and that of your employing media organization. The stakes for both can be high.

A reporter was assigned to do a seemingly innocuous five-part series on how to buy a car, for broadcast during a November ratings period. The series was conceived as a consumer-oriented series to help give viewers the feeling the station was helping them cope with their world. The reporter found a dealer who would cooperate but required the interviews to be shot in such a way that the specific identity of the interviewee and the dealership involved would be kept confidential. The trade-off was full disclosure on the “tricks of the trade” of buying and selling cars. The series proved to be a strong one, with solid consumer information on things like the “hand-off,” in which the “greeter” in a dealership hands off the customer to a “closer,” who actually does the hard selling. Tips were provided on how to counter high-pressure tactics by the “closer.” Also included was specific information about how to find out the dealer’s real cost for any vehicle, and how to bargain down the price through approaches such as asking for dealer financing (which often provides the dealer additional profit).

After the series aired, a local consortium of auto dealers, incensed at the television station’s effort to school customers on the ins and outs of getting the best deal, got all of its member dealers to cancel their advertising on the station — an annual loss of more than a quarter million dollars. The reporter was not fired, but neither the reporter nor the television station involved has attempted another aggressive consumer series affecting such a crucial advertising clientele.

Along with the economic leverage some advertisers use to influence coverage, major ethical questions arise about how television journalists see their relationship to the society in which they function. Television newscasts typically provide abundant coverage of crime, but it is a specific kind of crime. So-called white-collar crime — accountants embezzling millions, people cheating on their income taxes — is hard to show on television. The visuals are boring shots of spreadsheets with lots of numbers, or the front doors of financial institutions. Blue-collar crime, the stuff of lower socioeconomic classes, is much more visual. Stickups of convenience stores, gang fights, a violent incident at a school — all provide strong pictures with emotional power: police cars with their lights flashing, angry or injured people with fire in their eyes, and blood on the street.

The result is that crime on television is not necessarily the kind that harms the nation, deeply but, rather, is powerful superficially while usually involving only a few people. Violent crime coverage, like war video, often is termed “bang-bang” news by those in the journalism business. Bang-bang crime is a staple in some news formats that emphasize primarily crime coverage that is visually powerful. This coverage frequently features minority groups because violent crime tends to be more common among socioeconomically disadvantaged people. It may contribute to socio-economic racial stereotyping. If most people involved in crimes shown on the evening news night after night are Black or Hispanic, the audience quite likely will consider people of those ethnic groups more prone to violence. Thus, news coverage can affect stereotyping in a multicultural society that has had a history of polarization by race.

In addition, the intense coverage of crime is driven by television station marketing studies that show Americans are greatly concerned about crime. That may distort the perception of crime in the society though. When we see violent crime nearly every evening on the news, because “action news” emphasizes coverage of crime, does that, in turn, contribute to an increase in viewer fear and anxiety about crime?

For many people, the very definition of news means that it is the exceptional, the extraordinary. For something to be news, it has to be different. Does coverage of topics within the

context of television news, therefore, create a kind of manufactured reality on the screens in our living rooms separate from the reality of most of our daily lives? The discussion about coverage of crime in the preceding paragraph argues that it does. In the area of politics, evidence exists that television has changed the way national leaders come into prominence and policy is set. Television coverage has a tendency to re-frame complex political discussions into simplistic campaign positions and pare down involved political arguments into superficial soundbites of just a few seconds. Are we as a society, then, as much a victim of television news coverage as a beneficiary of it?

Every day of your television news career you will be covering events, putting together stories about what you see and find out, and attempting to build a trust relationship with your audience. Some of the ethical questions raised in this chapter are over-arching, philosophical issues regarding the way an entire industry perceives its role. It is an industry made up of many individuals doing their jobs day in and day out, but it has a special role in creating the fabric of American society, and within that special role rests great responsibility. The journalist must, at all times and in all ways, be honest, forthright, and uncompromisingly ethical.

In the final analysis the individual's personal ethics will make the difference in a situation. Professional standards cover major issues, but in many cases the professional or station codes do not cover individual circumstances. One of the essential attributes of any occupation that makes it a profession is a code of ethical conduct. It is not the occupation itself that is professional, though; it is individuals within that occupation. For an individual to be professional, he or she must have an overriding sense of public responsibility. Also required is a keen sense of personal and professional ethics.



PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOR

From a sociological perspective, professional behavior may be defined in terms of four basic criteria:

1. *Expertise*: specialized knowledge and skill vital for a broadcaster; acquired through education, experience, and professional relationships.
2. *Autonomy*: use of one's own judgment without outside interference; allows one to rise above the mediocrity of surrounding people and do what one thinks is the best action in any given situation.
3. *Commitment*: the continued devotion to and pursuit of excellence within one's profession; working toward goals without detour.
4. *Responsibility*: maturity and devotion to benefit society.

Professional behavior encompasses demonstration of intellectual competence, freedom from outside interference, and high ethical conduct. If you are to rise above mediocrity, you must develop a sense of professionalism that you will exhibit no matter where you work. Achieving professionalism is the best means to attain genuine job satisfaction in your career.

NOTES

1. Washburn, P.C. "Top of the Hour Radio Newscasts and the Public Interest," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* (1995), 39(1), 73-91.

Name _____

Date _____

Exercise 16-A**Ethical Problems**

1. You are asked to cover a rape case for the radio newscast. You find out the following facts. Write your story from the facts.

Rape victim: 19-year-old sophomore at Central Valley University . . . she's from Miami, Fla. and is majoring in music . . . 5'8" and weighs 130 pounds. Her name is Dorthy Green.

Rape Suspect: 35-year-old Tom R. Spencer, assistant librarian at the university. He lives at 3030 Colcord and has been picked up by police for questioning.

Incident: Miss Green was studying late at the library. When it closed she left to walk back to her dorm. She was wearing shorts and a halter top when her assailant grabbed her from behind and made her go with him in the trees behind the dorm. He tore her clothes from her, raped her at gunpoint, and let her go without further harm except a threat that if she tried to identify him, she would be "dead, dead, dead," She called women's crisis center immediately upon returning to her dorm at 1:20 a.m. Police picked up Spencer at his apartment about 3:15 a.m.

(Your story here)

Name _____

Date _____

Exercise 16-B**Ethical Problems**

1. You receive the following actuality from the policeman investigating a murder at an exclusive mansion near the city. Would you have to edit any of it? If so, what would you delete?

“I found Mrs. Davis lying in a pool of blood near the swimming pool, the machete-type knife still in her rib cage. It looked like she had been stabbed 5 or 6 times. It was the worst scene I’ve witnessed in my 26 years on the force.”

2. How would you edit the following news story?

Mrs. Emily Jester, 64-year-old black woman, committed suicide this morning in her garage. She lived at 4332 Chestnut Rd. A neighbor heard a shotgun blast about 10:30 this morning at Mrs. Jester’s and went to check. A 16-gauge shotgun was found in the room with Mrs. Jester after the neighbor, Tina Willis, called police. The coroner, Dr. Tom P. Pratt, is investigating the incident.

3. As a reporter for Station XYYZ-TV, you are invited to cover the opening of a new educational service center. The center sells equipment to help children with learning difficulties. You have a child with a mental disability, and the public relations director offers to give you a reading machine while you are at the opening covering the story. What do you do?

Name _____

Date _____

Exercise 16-B**Ethical Problems (continued)**

7. You are covering an assignment at a solar energy research lab. After doing the story, you decide that would make a good feature story for a particular magazine. That night on your own time, you write an outline and query letter to the editor. Later you get a response from the editor. She says she would like the article and she'll pay you \$200 for it. You then wonder, because you gathered the information while doing the story for your TV station, if it's right to make money freelancing on this subject. What do you decide?

8. The police have arrested Paul Robbins, a local bank president, for questioning about embezzlement. They have not charged him but are holding him the 24 hours before they have to bring charges and are still questioning him. In your state you can report the story legally. Do you think you should before charges actually have been filed? If so, why? If not, why not?

9. At least twice a week you talk with Sarah Reinhart, public information officer for the state Department of Health, as part of your beat. She's always open and honest. This week she tells you the director is going to crack down on the state university cafeterias with surprise investigations next week. She asks that you not report anything until the inspections are done. What should you do? When should you keep information confidential, and when should you broadcast it?

Research, Ratings, and Promotion

The paychecks that keep the broadcast journalist's mortgage and utility payments up to date come from station revenue. Revenue derives from advertisers who buy airtime within the newscast at rates determined by the number of households tuned to the station and by the composition of viewers within those households. Newscasts create audiences. Stations sell the audiences to advertisers. Although journalism is among this society's most valuable estates, it is irrefutably a business as well.

THE NEWS PRODUCT

Most journalists would contend that if they produce any "product" at all, it is the news story or newscast. Station managers and owners, however, are more likely to think of their news department's "product" as the viewing audience. And, though journalists tend to think of their primary audience as viewers, in a real sense the station's paramount "audience" is made up of paying advertisers. The business of television consequently revolves around the station's efforts to attract the largest possible audience and then to measure how well it succeeded. Toward that end, audience research and news promotion are critical to the continued success of most news operations.

BROADCAST RATINGS

Stations live and die by the ratings book, the report card that tells broadcasters the size and composition of their audiences for specific programs. Broadcast ratings are statistical estimates of the number of households tuned to a program and the types of people within those homes. Given the

approximately 94 million TV households in the United States¹, to survey each home individually would be impossible, so ratings are based upon samples of the population at large.

Two companies best known for national broadcast ratings and research studies are Arbitron and Nielsen. These companies use a common sampling technique called *area probability sampling*. This means that individuals who comprise the samples are chosen in proportion to their distribution within the population at large. If the Boston area comprises 4 percent of the national population, then 4 percent of the national survey population will be drawn from the Boston area in numbers that reflect a representative profile of viewers in the area according to considerations such as sex, age, income, and ethnic diversity.

Commonly, the sample size is surprisingly small. An average local sample might consist of anywhere from 200 to 500 people, and a national sample representing viewing activity in 94 million homes might contain 1,500 to 3,000 households. How can such a small sample be accurate? The A. C. Nielsen Company says the reason lies in the nature of mathematical odds.

Imagine 100,000 beads in a washtub: 30,000 red and 70,000 white. Mix thoroughly, then scoop out a sample of 1,000. Even before counting, you'll know that not all beads in your sample are red. Nor would you expect your sample to divide exactly at 300 red and 700 white.

As a matter of fact, the mathematical odds are about 20 to 1 that the count of red beads will be between 270 and 330 — or 27% or 33% of the sample.

So, in short, you have now produced a "rating" of 30, plus or minus 3, with a 20 to 1 assurance of statistical reliability.

These basic sampling laws wouldn't change even if you drew your sample of 1,000 from (92) million beads instead of 100,000 — assuming that the (92) million beads had the same ratio of red and white.

This is a simple demonstration of why a sample of 1,000 is just as adequate for a nation of (92) million households as for a city of 100,000.²

In effect, the sample is a scale model, representative of the whole, which is determined strictly through chance selection. Because each of the 94 million U. S. households has an equal chance of being selected for a survey, the chance of a particular household being selected in a 1,500-home survey is about one in 63,000. Even so, in the most tightly controlled research, survey results can be reported with a precision level as high as 95 percent.

Metered Surveys

The market, or boundaries of the survey area within which the primary viewers of a station are located, are designated as the area of dominant influence (ADI) by Arbitron, or as the designated market area (DMA) by Nielsen. In larger markets, electronic meters measure viewing activity every day of the week. Arbitron Meter Service, for example, operates in cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Dallas-Ft. Worth, Washington, Miami, Detroit, Houston, and Boston. Meters are installed on television sets in hundreds of households throughout each market to record when the set is on and what channel is selected. Subscribing advertisers, television stations, and networks receive overnight rating reports of viewing activity ("overnights") based on data these meters provide.³ To be certain the meters are statistically accurate, other families are asked to fill out diaries that provide additional information about the respondent's age, education, ethnic origin, occupation, product use, and the like.

The Nielsen Television Index (NTI) also provides national estimates of household tuning information. Each of the 1,750 households in the sample is equipped with the storage instantaneous audiometer (SIA), a small electronic box stored inconspicuously in a household closet or basement. Minute by minute, this device records and stores tuning activity, including on-off activity and channel selection, for each television receiver in the home. At least twice daily, computers retrieve the data via phone lines. To provide cross-checks of statistical accuracy, viewers in other households are recruited to keep diaries that indicate weekly viewing activities for each person.

Another Nielsen service, the national audience composition (NAC) sample, helps determine who is viewing a given program according to parameters such as sex, age, geography, and income. Some 1,750 households are used for NTI; about 3,200 are used for NAC.⁴ Nielsen and Arbitron also provide metered services for local estimates. Nielsen, for example, provides metered market service, patterned after the NTI, which operates in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, San Francisco, Philadelphia, Detroit, Boston, Washington, DC, and Dallas-Ft. Worth.

Diary Measurements

In smaller markets, diary measurements are used almost exclusively, and major surveys are conducted as few as three or four times a year. Diary measurements include the Nielsen station index (NSI), which measures local TV in some 220 markets. Respondents for the NSI are drawn from a sample of more than 200,000 telephone households with both listed and unlisted numbers. Cooperating families fill out a diary showing viewing activity for each TV set in their homes.

Coincidental Ratings

For spot-checks of program performance with faster turnaround than diaries, clients can contract for telephone coincidental service, called “coincidentals.” During the actual broadcast of a newscast, news special, or other program, operators survey viewers whose names appear on a listed telephone sample. Results are available within a few days.⁵

People Meters

Among the most recent developments in audience measurements are people meters, first introduced in the mid-1980s by Arbitron-Time Inc., Nielsen, and AGB Television Research, Inc.⁶ The people meter is a small unit placed on or near the television set. Directly or via remote control, household family members indicate their presence as viewers by pushing a lighted button on the meter. Data are stored electronically and polled periodically using telephone lines.⁷ People meters potentially are more accurate than hand-written diaries, as respondents can watch television without having to remember which channels they tuned in, at specific times or to write it all down. People meters identify which family members view television, keep tabs on what they watch, how often they switch channels, and which commercials they avoid.⁸

Opponents say people meters are polarizing and intrusive. Viewers must punch personal codes into a handset both when they begin and end viewing, and at times viewers in as many as

half the 4,000 predesignated Nielsen people-meter households have refused the people meter in their homes.⁹ Inevitably “button-pushing fatigue” sets in as viewers grow weary of watching television with their fingers on a keyboard.

As an alternative to punching in personal codes, some people meters allow ratings companies to identify viewers and watch their viewing behavior even as viewers watch their favorite programs. Nielsen Media Research has developed a “passive people meter,” for example, that knows, second by second, whether viewers are watching TV or have turned away from the screen. A scanning camera hooked to a computer is programmed first to detect human presence in the room, then to scan for progressively higher resolution until it matches the facial characteristics of household members to those stored in its memory. Unfamiliar faces are counted as household guests.¹⁰

On-Line Databases

In addition to data contained in the rating book, which represents as little as one-third of all the data obtained during a survey, the major research companies also maintain on-line databases that provide client access to the remaining data. This information can indicate the number of people who watch both the station’s 5 p.m. and 10 p.m. newscasts, for example, thereby indicating whether news content should be altered significantly to avoid repetition between the early and late shows or whether the advertiser is reaching similar or radically different audiences profiles. Data also can be customized for clients according to the customer’s own research needs. The research staff can help interpret survey results and monitor more closely the attitudes and viewing behavior of individuals who kept diaries, for example.

Tracking Surveys

Every television market has something of a life of its own. Audience turnover is inevitable as viewers come and go. Attitudes and behaviors within the market shift to reflect the spontaneous happenings and ongoing concerns within the community. To discern shifts in viewer and community attitudes, tracking research is used to gather information in regular, ongoing “waves.” If comparisons are controlled tightly and of adequate sample size, the station can better ascertain changes over time in viewer reactions to diverse concerns such as its coverage of major news events, changes in news personalities within the market, and the effectiveness of its promotion efforts.¹¹

Focus Group Research

Stations hire consultants to conduct focus group research to pinpoint viewer attitudes and other information specific to a particular market. A dozen or more viewers from a broad cross-section of the community are recruited to discuss their opinions about local television newscasts in the presence of a trained interviewer or moderator. The meetings normally are held in a hotel conference room or other public place, and recorded. The resulting information can be incorporated in reports that recommend specific action to the client station. Qualifying panelists are paid a fee or “emollient” averaging about \$25 for their participation. The value of focus group surveys is their ability to unearth and refine highly specific information regarding what viewers most like and dislike about newscasts in their community.

Telephone Surveys

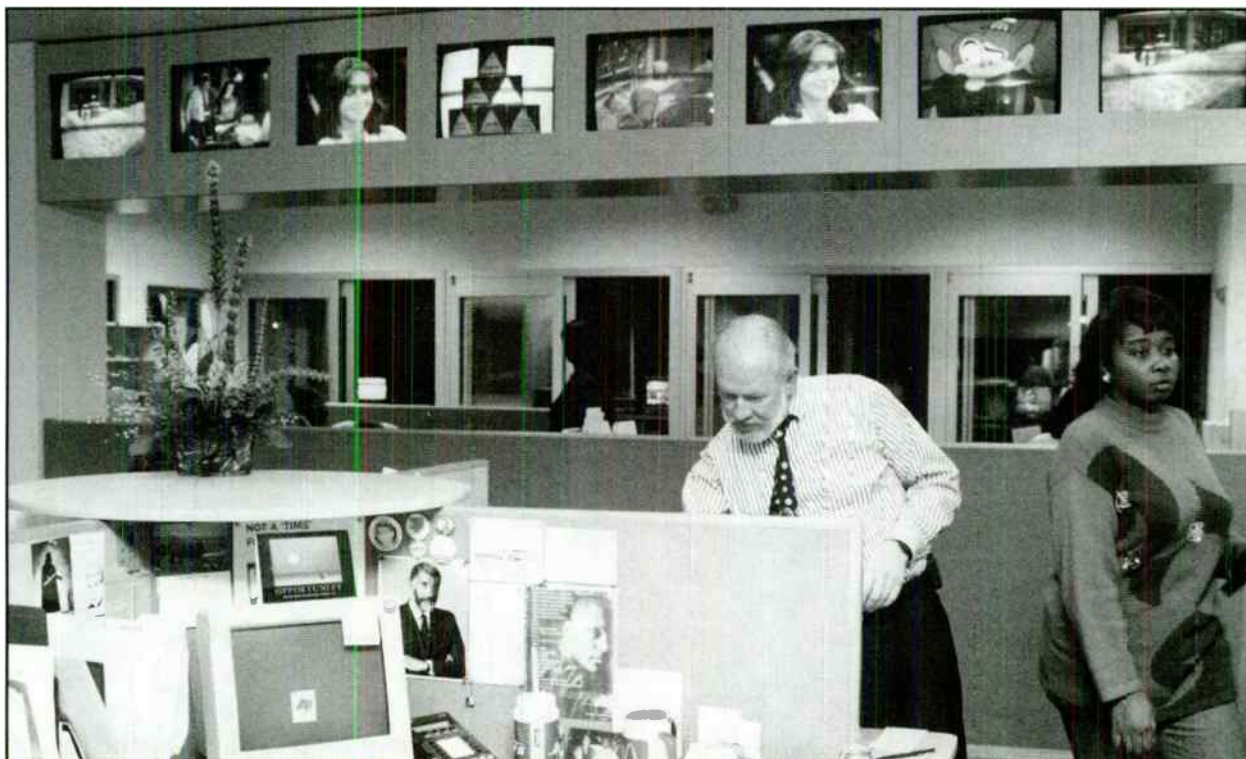
Consultants also conduct periodic telephone surveys in client markets. For fees of \$1,000 or more per survey minute, trained telephone interviewers query viewers in specific markets about their viewing habits and preferences. Thus, to conduct a 15-minute telephone survey of 400 respondents, a station might pay \$15,000.

In-House Research

Stations sometimes conduct their own in-house research on an interim basis to supplement major research from their consultants and ratings services. Specialists at area colleges and universities frequently are recruited to assist in questionnaire design, statistical sampling, data processing, and analysis. In-house research, though possibly less accurate than national surveys, allows stations to test for reactions to programs, often more quickly and at lower cost than for contracted services.

Rating and Share Defined

From the data amassed through survey activities, rating and share percentages are determined and published in a ratings book, which tells the station how it is doing as compared with its competitors in the business of attracting viewers to its programs. Rating is the percentage of households watching a station compared with all households with television sets, whether in use or not. Share is the



Monitors showing the output of competing stations help news operations keep a wary eye on one another throughout the day.

percentage of households watching a particular station, in comparison to all households using television at that time.

Rating: Households watching a particular station as a percentage of total households with a TV

Share: Households watching a particular station as a percentage of households using television

A large rating is better than a large share because it means the station is reaching a large percentage of the total potential market audience. Although large share numbers are important, they may not add up to a large number of viewers. A late night show in a market of 1,000 television households might have a 50 share but only a 5 rating. That would be the case in the following example, which assumes that 100 households are viewing television:

The Difference Between Rating and Share

To understand the difference between rating and share, assume a market with 1,000 television households, in which 600 households are watching television. Further assume that 240 of those households using television (HUT) are tuned to your station. That means the station has a 24 rating (24% of the total number of households with television), and a 40 share (40% of the households using television.)

$\frac{50}{100}$	Households watching station	= 50 Share
	Total households using television	
$\frac{50}{1,000}$	Households watching station	= 5 Rating
	Total households with TV	

How Ratings Translate into Profit

How much a given station gets of all its money depends upon the size of the audience it amasses. A station with 200,000 viewers might charge \$1,540 to air a 30-second commercial, whereas a station with 500,000 viewers could charge \$3,850 for the same 30-second commercial. In another example, a network program with a 6 rating might earn a station \$26,000 for a 30-second spot, and a 26 rating would earn the same station \$190,000 for the same 30-second spot, a difference of \$164,000.¹² Despite increasing competition from other media broadcast television is a huge business. In 1994 its advertising revenues exceeded \$27.1 billion, a 15% increase over the previous year.¹³ Clearly, the stakes are high.

Demographics

Anyone is welcome to watch a newscast, but some viewers can be more profitable to the station because of their attractiveness to advertisers. Whether the advertiser is a travel company, a hard rock promoter, or a farm equipment dealer, it strives to reach an audience of potential customers.

The luxury car dealer who predominately reaches viewers with household income below \$12,000 is throwing away his money. Demographic studies help advertisers direct their messages at target audiences.

Demographics are the vital statistics of the community, expressed by age, race, sex, income, occupation, and place of residence. Demographics give the advertiser information such as marketwide indications of incomes and breakdowns of viewers according to age and sex, buying patterns on large-ticket items, and the size and distribution of minority audiences within the market. Most coveted among the age groups are viewers 18 to 49 years of age because they tend to earn and spend more income than those in other age groups. For non-news programming, other age groups can be wonderfully lucrative, among them children with large allowances, teenagers, and the well-to-do retired set.

Within the 18-to-49-year-old viewing group, broadcasters have long coveted 18-to-34-year-old-women viewers. Research shows that these women, regardless of education or economic status, spend more than any other age or gender group, and that they make or influence the major buying decisions in their households about everything from toiletries to transportation.¹⁴ In the United States nearly half the people who are 18 years of age or older, are between the ages of 18 and 34.¹⁵ To lure more women in the 18-34 group from entertainment programs — which they tend to watch more frequently and with greater loyalty than news — some stations target their news specifically to this group. This narrowly focused approach accentuates “lifestyle reporting,” with greater emphasis on news reports and features about women’s issues, family, health and entertainment, and less overall emphasis on traditional hard news and political reporting. To avoid excluding conventional audiences, which tend to be older and predominately male, the station must strive to offer stories that appeal to everyone: “How you can spot Alzheimer’s in your parents, and what you can do about it.”¹⁶

News Consultants

News consultants help stations better understand viewer attitudes and behavior within the market, help develop anchor and reporting talent, and help the clients position themselves better against competitors. The following are some of the consultant’s activities:

- Determine viewer preferences in news and talent
- Predict and respond to audience behavior
- Perform statistical and audience analysis
- Originate research designs and perform analyses
- Conduct image and personality research
- Develop marketing and promotion strategies
- Conduct workshops and seminars
- Develop communication skills
- Do talent consulting and coaching
- Do wardrobe, hairstyling and makeup consulting
- Do placement services
- Develop franchises (specialized segment reports such as Weather Watchers, Health Beat, Spirit of Texas)
- Design newscast formats
- Design weather, sports, and news sets
- Bring the client station into closer contact with its viewers; represent viewers and their interests to the station.

Consultants

For most businesses, research and development are part of becoming number one in the marketplace. The same considerations hold true in broadcast news. Research helps the station assess viewer attitudes and to position itself against the competition. Because the research, management, marketing, and processes are so complex and the financial stakes are so high, hundreds of stations

employ the services of national news consultants. For contract fees based on market size, consultants conduct market inventories that include the strengths and weaknesses of the client station and its competitors, analyze viewing patterns and trends within the market. A standard two-year consulting contract might call for an account executive of the consulting firm to visit the station every other month, and to initiate research about viewer attitudes and behavior. Separate fees may be charged for additional services such as talent coaching, set design, seminars, and specialized research.

Commonly, consultants conduct research to determine who is available to view the station, and which of those viewers (by age, income, sex, address, and occupation) are watching. Consultants also help determine how often viewers watch the station, including the number of viewers who watch both the station's early and late newscasts. Still other surveys will help determine how well reporters and anchors are recognized in the market, what people like and don't like about TV news in their viewing area, and everything from the personal performance and style of the station's talent to surveys of which anchors are most likeable and personable. Through this research, consultants can determine which anchors and newscasts are the biggest personal favorites among viewers and even track attitudes about the station's reputation within the community.

Consultants work for the station manager, or the station owners, not the newsroom. And, though consultants may make recommendations that extend to what times newscasts should be aired and whether to hire or fire anchors and reporters, the station is under no obligation to act on their recommendations. The consultant is a partner in research and development, not a replacement for the judgment of station management or newsroom employees who have more intimate knowledge of the marketplace and its viewers by virtue of their residency in the community.

Using News Anchors to Help Attract Audiences

For nearly three decades, audience researchers have documented the role of newscasters in attracting audiences to particular newscasts. By the early 1970s, researchers had discovered at least four levels of characteristics that influence audience perception of television personalities. In 1973, Herschel Shosteck ranked these clusters, in order of importance, as:

1. Voice and speech (pleasant voice, good speaking ability, good use of grammar)
2. Professional attributes (knowledge of subject, intelligence, level of awareness about events, good analytical ability)
3. Personal attributes (good personality, appealing as an individual, a demeanor of warmth and concern)
4. Appearance (dresses properly, attractive).

Personal qualities alone, however, seldom can both attract and hold audiences. "While news personalities with high personal appeal definitely draw viewers," said Shosteck, "news content and presentation format . . . contribute substantially to the attractiveness of television newscasts.

Audience studies continue to reflect that many viewers choose what newscast to watch based on the anchor rather than solely upon news content or presentation formats. Nearly 45 percent of viewers in one market selected their news program because of an anchor. Viewers cited characteristics such as "he seems like one of the family," to professionalism, credibility, intelligence, knowledge of subject matter, delivery skills, and physical appearance, including dress and cosmetic appearance. Other important attributes included the newscaster's gestures, voice, and warmth.¹⁷

Our own informal surveys of consulting companies and newscasters themselves expand the list to include honesty, integrity, curiosity, calmness, objectivity, good reporting skills, empathy, compassion, and community involvement.

THE RISE OF PROMOTION

The increasing emphasis on news research and promotion has paralleled the growth of television news. As the profitability of news became apparent in the 1970s, marketing the news received greater emphasis. Even then, news executives tended to view marketing as something that belonged more in show business than in journalism on grounds that the product is news, not soap.¹⁸ Then, in the 1980s, came the realization that news departments need promotion. "You can have the best news on TV, but if no one is watching, it's not going to do you a whole lot of good," says Stu Kellogg, Oklahoma City news director. "Promotion and marketing are certainly a part of making TV news a winner."¹⁹

The essence of promotion is the drive to motivate more viewers to switch to the station's newscasts and become loyal viewers. The foundation of this promotion effort is market research to help the station determine its strengths and weaknesses, as well as those of the competition. The station looks for vulnerabilities in the market and seeks to fill a niche no other station has filled. The approach is similar to the garment retailer who discovers that women executives want wider selections in business attire and opens a store to serve them.

Once the station has identified a certain niche or position within the market, viewers have to be told. "Positioning a station and promoting it properly are key issues of the future," says Peter Hoffman, chairman of McHugh-Hoffman, a TV consulting firm in Fairfax, VA.²⁰ Perhaps market research shows that news viewers want a station that's involved with the community and concerned about local issues, but they can't name a station that really stands out. The station then might seek to position itself in the market by becoming more involved with and concerned about the community than any other station, and by demonstrating that fact tangibly and visibly at every opportunity. The station will not succeed merely through promotion that says it is now involved in the community. It must become what it purports to be through its public service and community relations, through issue-oriented and consumer reporting that reinforces its involvement in the community, and through its sponsorship of activities such as Crime Stoppers, canned food drives, adoption placement services, and expanding the weather to provide regional coverage.

Yet another aspect of community involvement may mean satisfying viewers who want more local sports coverage. In this case the station might decide to beef up its sports staff and promote the fact that it provides more local sports coverage than any other station. Always, the essence of promotion is to promote strengths, not weaknesses. If market research shows that an anchor is perceived to lack authority, the station may work to promote strengths that will overcome viewer objections to the anchor. If the anchor is a strong field reporter or interviewer, perhaps these attributes can be brought to the viewer's attention through promotion. The anchor might even be asked to do more field reporting and interviews to demonstrate desirable anchor attributes more tangibly.

Although promotion is critically important, quality in news reporting can be its own reward. "Good reporting is its own promotion," says Mike Beecher, director of news and public affairs, KFVS-TV, Cape Girardeau, Missouri. "Beyond helping attract and hold loyal audiences, good reporting can help win awards which earn the station valuable recognition that can itself be promoted."²¹ Even though promotion can help attract viewers and reinforce the station's image, every station first must develop something worthwhile to promote.

Promotion Off-Screen

Throughout the broadcast day, stations use every conceivable device to promote their news. Motorists on the local freeways are exposed to billboards, taxi and bus signs, and radio ads that promote talent and admonish citizens to watch the station's news. Throughout the year, viewers in the community are invited to attend health screenings and fairs that the station sponsors. Stations know that for the TV news program to be accepted, it must become involved tangibly and visibly in the community, and it must keep the community aware of its efforts.

Elsewhere to be seen are the station's satellite trucks, and perhaps a helicopter with the station logo flying overhead toward some news story, or landing at elementary schools so the photographer can shoot pictures of the school children and broadcast them at the close of the newscast that night. Additional promotions are aired throughout the broadcast day at commercial breaks: "Tonight on the late news, learn CPR techniques that could help you save the life of someone you love." And this evening at the Kiwanis banquet, you can hear the station's lead anchor deliver the keynote speech.

Sweeps

Stations constantly invite people to watch their programs, but they ask most insistently during the survey periods called sweeps, conducted in February, May, and November. Sweeps are a less costly alternative to continuous sampling, which is impractical in all but the largest markets and at the network level. During sweeps periods, stations strive to build audiences with the best news reporting, entertainment programs, and promotion they can muster. Viewers are treated to first-run movies, the best entertainment programs, and lavish specials. News departments trot out their best mini-series and ratings-related features. They do special reports on everything from teen sex to how to check your credit rating. Some viewers even are tempted with prospects of free vacations and cash prizes. Because the results of sweeps survey periods will influence the station's ratings for months to come, stations tend to offer their strongest and most tantalizing programs during these periods. Between sweeps, the broadcast fare is likely to be far more pedestrian. In response to what critics call "front loading," the Federal Trade Commission has issued "Guidelines Regarding Deceptive Claims of Broadcast Audience Coverage." These guidelines state that television stations ". . . should not engage in activities calculated to distort or inflate such data — for example, by conducting a special contest, or otherwise varying . . . programming, or instituting unusual advertising or other promotional efforts, designed to increase audiences only during the survey period. Such variation from normal practices is known as 'hying'."²² Ultimately, as technology advances, daily measurements in all markets may one day render sweeps periods unnecessary. In fact, daily measurements may be the only solution to end the hype to which viewers are now periodically exposed.

Image Advertising Versus Product Promotion

Typically, news promotion divides between image and product promotion. Image advertising typically is staged and highly produced to project an impression of the news operation as the station

would like itself to be perceived (“warm, caring, friendly, believable, comprehensive”). “Image advertising traditionally shows reporters jumping in and out of helicopters, the lone anchor at the typewriter in a dimly lit room, or the anchors dressed in casual clothes swapping wieners with indigent children in the park,” says Bill Brown of Media & Marketing, Inc.²³

In product promotion, the news product is its own advertising. The footage seen in promotional spots comes from actual news reports, and whenever anchors and reporters are shown on screen, they are doing their jobs, not playing themselves or acting out their roles as they would in image advertising. At Christmas time the anchors seen in product promotion spots don’t just ride in a sleigh with kids from the orphanage. They also work to raise money to send the orphans to college and to help save the Christmas light display at the county courthouse. The philosophy governing the spots is that there’s no need to stage what already exists. “Often there is little justification to go out and hire a production crew at great expense to re-create what’s already there,” says Brown. He offers the example of a simple product promotion spot to illuminate the work of Herb Dennenberg, consumer reporter at WCAU-TV, Philadelphia:

Senior citizens saw their dream vacation become a nightmare when, without warning, their travel agent went bankrupt. Herb Dennenberg learned of their story, helped organize a trip to Florida, and gave them a vacation they’d remember all their lives. Herb Dennenberg’s consumer investigations make good things happen for people. They’re part of what makes Channel 10 News, News Plus.²⁴

The alternative to this approach, image advertising, would be to show Herb Dennenberg waving to the camera from a sailboat or some other similarly contrived spot focusing on image rather than true performance. In addition to its credibility, another advantage of product promotion lies in its potential effectiveness at low cost. A station can spend tens of thousands of dollars on image promotion, or for perhaps \$50 it can produce a taped spot in which parents thank an anchor for a Wednesday’s Child segment that introduced them to their adopted child.

Image promotion tends to be more effective among people who are already loyal viewers. Consequently, an image spot portraying an anchor or a reporter as warm or caring may have its greatest influence on those who already are loyal viewers. “People who recognize image promotion are the people who already use your product,” says Brown. The phenomenon is not unlike cola drinkers who tend to focus on cola ads. The billboards that people recognize, and where they are and what they say, most likely are either very penetrating for some creative reason or they happen to be products that those people already use, says Brown. Image promotion serves the station best on some occasions, but even then the news product may be sufficient to promote the image.

Topical Promotion

Every day, viewers who never or seldom watch a station’s newscast tune in throughout the broadcast day to watch other parts of that station’s program schedule. As viewers watch the station’s other programs, they can be exposed to topical promotion, spots that invite viewers to tune into the news for interesting news stories and series reports:

Project Abuse continues Monday night with a special program for parents . . . helping them understand the threat of sexual abuse their children may be facing. Our adult program offers advice on talking to children about sexual abuse and what to do when children are being abused. For the sake of your children, join us Monday night at eight for a special program for parents, a part of project abuse on WCCO Television.²⁵

Also known as *episodic promotion* or *tune-in*, topical promotion is effective because nearly all viewers tune away from their favorite news station occasionally, whether to watch another station, even a station they don't prefer, simply for content. Once viewers begin to watch another station, their viewing may become a habit and they may switch loyalties altogether. Raw material for the spots commonly are excerpts from the news reports or prerecorded specials themselves. Whether the spot amounts to a statement about the station's aggressive news coverage ("you saw it here first") or promotes a series to help women prepare to reenter the workforce, implicit in every topical promotion is the lure, "See what we just did (or) look what we're about to do or show you. Try us and you'll like us."

In their topical promotions, stations strive for subjects that appeal to both men and women, ideally in as broad an age range as possible. Health and consumer reports that address topics such as car repairs, safe sexual practices, and how to perform the Heimlich maneuver, provide the grist for topical promotions that may help generate far larger audiences for the nightly newscasts.

Proof-of-Performance Advertising

The most obvious promotion is to remember to tell people you're doing a good job. This promotion can be accomplished through spots that show an audience something you've done, such as a helicopter rescue of flood victims, or a mention during the lead-in to an investigative report: "So far this year Channel 9 has exposed more than a dozen consumer frauds in the area." Among the most powerful of these tools is the proof-of-performance spot that reminds viewers the station is living up to its promises. Perhaps the station has carved out a niche as the best spot news station in the area or has positioned itself as the station with the best sports coverage. Thereafter, every time the station scoops the competition with a hot spot news story, or airs outstanding sports coverage, proof-of-performance spots are aired to remind the audience that the station is being faithful to its stated commitment. In this promotional spot by KOTV-TV, Tulsa, following Memorial Day flooding in Oklahoma, the station strives to illustrate the extent to which it is involved with and concerned about the community.

These pictures were taken by a stringer (that's a freelance cameraman) of a rescue during Memorial Day weekend flooding. A KOTV cameraman was also on the scene, but he wasn't shooting these pictures. He was the one driving the Eyewitness News truck that was pulling the victim out of the water. It's nice to work somewhere where the priorities are right.²⁶

As self-serving as these efforts are, audiences need to know about the station's significant achievements. A station doesn't have to hide the fact that it's doing a good job. If self-service becomes the news station's primary product, however, audience erosion is inevitable.

Other Promotional Devices

Other promotional devices include news teases: "The city's leading mayoral candidate says she may quit the campaign. The exclusive story tonight on Channel Two at eleven." Also important is the graphic display of talent credentials, such as the Seal of Approval from the American Meteorological Society, and frequent mention of temperatures and weather conditions gathered from

throughout the ADI by station-recruited “weather watchers” to help establish a greater regional presence. Graphic elements also are crucial to the station’s promotion efforts. Consistent graphics showcasing and use of theme music as the show opens and closes and at commercial breaks, help give the station an easy-to-recognize identity.

CONTENT: THE NEW BATTLEFIELD

Talent, both primary (anchors) and secondary (field reporters), are among any station’s most important assets. “Talent glue,” the sheer charismatic quality of some anchors, can hold together a newscast even when its other elements are less than ideal. Researchers at Kent State University found that viewers who regard the newscasters as “friends” watch the local news more often and perceive the news as more important and realistic than viewers who don’t think of the newscasters as friends.²⁷ It follows naturally that talent recruitment and development is a high priority at most stations. When programming is mediocre, one school of thought holds that the most immediate, if short-term, financial return may be had through talent development and promotion.

In the past, sales and promotion departments sought to build a news image based upon the anchor personalities, with the assumption that audiences judge the newscast by its anchors. Today, though, researchers have reported a gradual drop in the percentage of viewers within news audiences who watch a news show primarily because of an anchor. Today, at most stations, talent alone may not be enough to win the battle for ratings. In part because of the national news consultants, local newscasts have become more homogeneous and more difficult to differentiate from one station to the next. Talent provides one way to differentiate the station’s look, but “the industry has woken up to the fact that no matter how you tell it, who tells it, how graphically well it is done, what you tell is important,” says Steve Ridge, manager of TV consultation for Frank Magid and Associates.²⁸ Given this view, levels of consistent excellence in all areas of the newscast may be the accurate predictor of long-term audience loyalty, a concept that holds no one individual as indispensable and that viewers must be offered meaningful, informative, and interesting news content, told in a clear, understandable manner, that they can relate to their own lives.

Typically, the newsroom and the sales department have been distinctly separated. The credibility of news, it is argued, would be damaged irreparably if news content were to be subject to the whims of advertisers. The philosophy was enunciated in a memo that William Paley, founder of CBS, issued to the network in 1954: “An advertiser who sponsors any type of information program produced by us does not thereby purchase or in any way gain, any rights to control the contents of the program.” Yet today, as broadcasters compete for more elusive advertising dollars, some stations, at the request of advertisers, have begun to create news segments and informational broadcasts as vehicles for commercial messages. A health segment that emphasizes jogging and walking is created for a sport shoe manufacturer, for example, or a financial report is sponsored by an investment banking firm.

Targeted Broadcasting

As audiences fragment and more viewers drift away from traditional local and network news sources, advertisers hope to reach specific profiles of viewers through an approach called *targeted broadcasting*. Rather than using mass media to reach an entire audience of women aged 25 to 54,

advertisers might try to reach only the most affluent women in the group, perhaps 8 or 10 percent of the total population of this group of women. If this most profitable group watches the Arts and Entertainment Network with greater loyalty than either local or network news, advertising dollars will be shifted from news to the A&E Network.

Further, advertisers are more likely to use *bundled media*, incorporating specialized magazines, special-interest TV, and books rather than traditional mass media, to reach such audiences, thereby draining ever more advertising dollars from mass to specialized media.²⁹ Inevitably, the mass media themselves are eroded. “When the networks’ share of viewers dips to 40 percent, their days as a mass medium will be over,” says Gordon Link, media director at McCann-Erickson Worldwide in New York.³⁰

Another trend with similar intent is *narrowcasting*, in which stations target their broadcasts at narrowly defined audiences to meet advertiser goals, as when the broadcaster creates a business traveler’s weather report for sponsorship by an airline company.³¹ Activities such as these prompt fears of possible conflicts of interest. Will stations dare follow the airline-sponsored report with stories that indict the sponsor as the airline with the highest number of late departures and arrivals in the industry?

Psychographics

Advertisers also rely on psychographics to determine the values and attitudes of specific audience segments. Rather than lump male viewers demographically into an 18-to-35 age category, for example, market researchers study the individual attitudes and values that drive people to buy specific products. No longer are viewers’ age and sex used as the sole predictors for consumer buying choices and behaviors.

Psychographics (or socio-psychographics) include additional variables such as the viewer’s lifestyle, self-esteem, religious and political affiliations, and shared values within primary demographic groups. Advertisers use this information to help design commercials that reach specific target audiences, based on their psychographic profile. Broadcasters also can use psychographics to help identify more effective station promotional campaigns and programming schedules.³²

MARKET RESEARCH PROBLEMS AND TRAPS

Media organizations use the material covered in this chapter to define themselves, their products, and their markets. Market analysis does have some pitfalls, though. If the basic methodology is flawed no research is worth the time to print the results on paper. The point of doing research is to get an accurate picture of whatever you are studying. If you approach the problem incorrectly, flawed decisions will be based on illusions.

As a media organization employee, you need to understand what to consider when people start saying things like, “Our research shows . . .” or “the research we have clearly demonstrates . . .” Frequently market research does not provide finite answers but, rather, strong indications. Also, those doing the research may have a vested interest in a specific outcome. For example, if a news consultant really believes some news packaging technique or approach to producing newscasts is the best, that consultant may, consciously or subconsciously, skew the research design or resulting data. Communities vary considerably from one region of the nation to another. Because

of that, formula approaches to news may provide quite different results in viewing patterns from one market to another.

Many media organizations, as discussed earlier in this chapter use focus groups to determine what audiences want in newscasts. The problem comes when media managers develop the incorrect impression that focus groups are decision-making tools. A focus group is useful only in gathering preliminary information so other research techniques, such as telephone or in-person survey interviewing, can be used to probe the identified areas further. Focus groups are only a first step in the market research problem. Broadcasters, for example, often contract with a consultant to conduct a series of focus groups — perhaps 15 to 20 — all set up to generate audience information. Focus groups do not provide statistical data, though, so the number of focus groups held doesn't mean much in terms of result validity.

In addition, focus groups are susceptible to the way the focus group leader, or a particularly strong personality among the participants, guides the discussion. Group dynamics come into play, and some individuals withhold their opinions if they are contrary to the group leader's indicated point of view. Thus, focus groups provide data that is tenuous at best. In a broad research program, they are useful in gaining an understanding of the general concerns circulating within a community, but focus groups don't go much further.

Telephone surveys are perhaps the most common research technique used in American media today, often used to follow up focus group work. They are generally inexpensive, fast, and easy to use when targeting specific parts of a community. Where telephone surveys break down is the difficulty of getting what is called "qualitative" data. That's the kind of thing you learn when you ask a person to "tell me what you think of TV news in Dallas." Such an open-ended question may generate a wide range of descriptions with nuances of meaning that are not easy to break down into simple categories.

Statistical evaluation is more difficult because complicated answers are difficult to code numerically. Therefore, telephone survey researchers like to use simple questions that ask respondents to agree with one of three to five statements written by the researchers. Although respondents actually may fall somewhere among the various answers, the forced choice makes them take a position that is somewhat like the way they feel, but not exactly. In survey research, then, the study can be easily skewed at the outset because of the forced choice of answers created by the researchers.

The greatest "real world" methodology problem for telephone surveys is the tendency to limit the research to people who describe themselves as news viewers. That means the research applies only to those people, not to individuals whose viewing habits differ from the researchers' predetermined classification. This gets people into big trouble in the fragmented world of television viewing. In one major market a telephone survey was conducted in which respondents were prequalified. People were asked at the outset, "Would you describe yourself as a regular viewer of local television news?" If the answer was "yes," the interview continued; if "no," the person was thanked and the interview terminated. Initially some 600 people were called, but after those who said "no" were eliminated, some 450 full interviews were completed. Statistically, that is a large enough sample to provide useful data.

Results of this survey were curiously parallel to what the Nielsen ratings for the market showed. In fact, the research results virtually mirrored the rating book. Why would that be the case? Because only people who already described themselves as being committed news viewers were included in the survey. And these people naturally agreed with statements describing their favorite station. The flaw in the research was that it threw out the people who did not describe themselves as regular viewers of local television news. In the market in question, a full 40 percent of viewers at 10 p.m. (when the major local news programs aired) were watching other, non-news

programming, according to the Nielsen ratings. The research project asked only those who already were fans of specific newscasts to describe what they liked — and they liked what they watched.

The irony in this study is that the viewers who didn't consider themselves regular viewers of local television news are the ones who should have been analyzed. With 40 percent of viewers in that market selecting other programming during newscasts, a substantial uncommitted market remains to be tapped. And, in the case of the market involved in this study, only 10 percent of those uncommitted viewers would have been enough to move the number-three station up to number one. Uncommitted viewers are the easiest ones to get to sample a newscast. Getting loyal viewers to switch from their favorite newscast to another is most difficult.

What's more, you can learn a great deal from people who don't buy your products or, in the case of television programs, tune in. Maybe some of those viewers just don't care about what's going on, but they may have other reasons for not watching local news programs. Viewers who de-select may not think existing local newscasts offer much "news." But how would you know why viewers de-select local news if you don't ask them? Some viewers clearly may prefer to watch snakes hatch on the Discovery Channel. On the other hand, some viewers tune out of local news because it doesn't fulfill their information needs. If that is a significant number of people, maybe the station can provide for their information wants and needs and win the ratings battle with them.

Whenever you exclude respondents through some qualifying question, you may jeopardize your study seriously. For example, if you were doing a telephone poll late in the last presidential campaign, would the following be a good thing to have your telephone solicitors do?

[When respondent answers, ask] "Do you plan to vote for President?
[If "no," discontinue interview]

You can see that this would give you no information on *why* a person did not plan to vote, which could tell you a lot about the effectiveness of campaign tactics being used. Or think about this situation. You work for Pepsi Cola and are trying to figure out how to gain more market share against your arch rival, Coca Cola. You start a telephone survey interview with this pre-qualification question:

[When respondent answers, ask] "Would you describe yourself as a regular Coke drinker?"
[If "yes," discontinue interview]

That would eliminate all self-described "Coke" drinkers from your sample. If you are doing this survey in the South, that means almost everyone. In that region of the country, "coke" is a generic term that means just about any soft drink available. If you don't do follow-up questions asking what kind of "coke" the person likes, you'd never find out what you really need to know.

In another news study a major national television news consultant asked people to indicate their content preferences for the newscasts they watched. The station involved then was provided a list, in descending order, with the most frequently mentioned preference on top of the list. The station news director then put the list up on large signs at strategic points around the newsroom, including the wall of the conference room, where producers and assignment editors met twice a day to discuss coverage and newscast design. It was titled, "They want," indicating that the viewers wanted these items in their newscasts.

The news director also sent a memo to all producers indicating they should try to get at least five items from the list in each of their newscast blocks outside of the time set aside for sports and weather. The topic lists often reflect specific regional concerns. For example, some communities

are more concerned about weather (number one on the following list) than others. Weather is a bigger deal in North Dakota, Chicago, or Florida during hurricane season than it ever is in Hawaii, where the temperature doesn't change much during the year.

THEY WANT

1. Weather
2. Local issues (stories about neighborhoods)
3. National issues
4. Positive stories
5. Live remote reports during the news
6. Sports stories
7. Needs of the elderly
8. Crime
9. Economic and business stories
10. Medical information
11. Education
12. Consumer stories
13. Investigative reports
14. State government
15. City government
16. Editorials

The problem with this kind of approach is not one of identifying subjects for which a given audience may have a preference. The problem is in attempting to force the findings of a relatively broad research project into story selection for daily newscasts. If you were a producer working in this newsroom, having received the memo and seeing the sign in the conference room, your tendency would be to put a weather story in the top two news segments of every newscast. But weather comes and goes as a news topic. Many days it's not news. Some days it's very big news. Trying to do weather as "news" all the time would make you look silly. The same is true of most such topics. Further, when a producer of a half-hour newscast, with a news hole of about 10 minutes (after commercials, sports, and weather are subtracted), blocks out time for five stories from the list, limited time remains for the rest of the day's events.

The result can be the invention of news. If nothing is going on at 5 p.m. but we must have a live remote in every 5 p.m. newscast because the research shows that viewers like live remotes, we end up with reporters standing in front of empty buildings reporting news that happened three hours earlier. When the gathering market research results in inventing of "news," media organizations have moved from reporting to creating events, controversies, and community concerns. Rather than reflecting reality, they become manufacturers of something that may not exist except in the minds of those trying to satisfy viewer expectations and preferences.

A final consideration regarding research: News is a perishable commodity. It's what is happening today as the course of human events evolves, often unpredictably. Market research is limited by when it is done. After the field information is collected, it then is tabulated and analyzed. Weeks after the respondents actually told field workers what they thought about something, it gets to the news director in the form of a consultant's report. That time lag can render even the most rigorous research meaningless.

Consider this example. In 1989 China had serious problems with student protests of the oppressive Chinese government. Prior to the uprising, if you had conducted a national survey of

Americans with a huge number of respondents, say 10,000, you probably would have elicited little interest in learning more about the intricacies of Chinese politics. When the uprising occurred, however, CNN had recently established a satellite up-link from China and immediately began sending video of the violence. When the situation escalated into a full-scale confrontation at the huge square in the capital, the Chinese army rolled tanks into Tiananmen Square in Beijing. One young man stood in front of the lead tank with his hand and arm outstretched, ordering it to halt. The tank stopped, and a photographer took a picture that went around the world, gracing the cover of *Time* magazine that week. All the while CNN reports were appearing in television newscasts about the crisis in China. If you had taken another national survey of Americans following the controversy, again with a huge sample of 10,000 respondents, a significant number of respondents surely would have indicated a desire to know more about what was going on in China. The course of events clearly has everything to do with what people say they want to know more about.

People engage with specific newscasts for many reasons:

1. They like the presenters.
2. They have the feeling a certain station will give them the news they need to know quickly.
3. They trust a specific news source when something vital to their concerns happens, turning to their so-called station of record.

All these things tend to fluctuate, though, depending on the context of daily life. Market research can provide solid evidence of past performance and a good indication of what probably will help build audience in the future. Researching news audiences, however, always is complicated by the very nature of news as being fluid and dynamic.

Any research is only as strong as the methodology used. Looking for the holes in research projects is important. Also determining whether the consultants who do that research have any internal agenda that may be driving it is important. Statistics is a science of using numbers to draw inferences, playing loose with the numbers is easy, particularly when most people who read the results are not expert statisticians. When you are faced with a piece of research that makes you wonder about its validity, a good place to check it is your local university. Find a statistician who has no vested interest in the research. Ask that person to look it over and tell you whether it's solid. Those who provide market research commercially do so as a business, and customers may get what the salesperson thinks they want so more business will be forthcoming. That is not to say market research is always flawed. It is to say market research always should be questioned, especially when it seems to provide simple answers to complex problems.

WHAT LIES AHEAD?

The “business” of journalism impacts news content and perhaps the role of journalism itself. Concern increases as the drive to increase profitability leads stations away from serving the traditional but generic “mass” audiences in favor of content that will attract narrowly defined target audiences. In time we may even witness a decline in the appetite for traditional journalism, which historically has addressed society’s problems and issues and sought to give a broad understanding about world happenings. Given a choice, what youthful, affluent audience would seek stories about poverty in Third World countries, or about the aging of America, if broadcasters were to cater to their greater interest in news stories focused on upward mobility?

Or perhaps we fail to give viewers enough credit. Perhaps narrowly focused stories will become just one more resource for mass audiences that seek information in all its diversity. Given the audience research and promotion techniques available to today's broadcasters, changes are certain to occur in broadcast journalism in both style and substance. As always, it will fall to the journalist — not the advertiser or the general manager — to protect a profession whose stock in trade always has been fairness, accuracy, and balance. Without the traditional integrity of journalism, broadcast news will fail not only as a vehicle for information but as a vehicle for advertising, as well.

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Name _____

Date _____

Assignment 17-A

1. As part of a class discussion or assigned paper, share your views about whether broadcast news is an “information service” or a “consumer product.” Contrast your view with the notion that the news department’s “real product” is the viewing audience and that the station’s “true audience” is made up of paying advertisers.
2. Prepare a paper on the primary research methods and hardware that research companies use to determine broadcast audience size and composition.
3. Discuss the difference between audience rating and share. Tell which is most desirable, a large rating or a large share, and explain why.
4. Explain the role of news consultants in helping a broadcast organization attain ratings dominance in news. Include as part of your explanation a discussion of the anchor’s role in attracting and holding an audience.
5. Describe news “sweeps,” and explain the potential impacts of sweeps, both negative and positive, on news content and promotion.
6. Describe the differences between image advertising and product promotion, including as part of your response an evaluation of the relative costs involved, the probable impact, and the audiences most commonly reached with each form of promotion.
7. Describe and provide examples of all proof-of-performance advertising you observe while watching commercial television news stations in your area over a one-week period. Discuss your findings in class.
8. Discuss the approaches called *narrowcasting* and *targeted broadcasting*, and examine their potential impact on traditional local and network news programs.

Your First Job

Finding your first job in radio or television may be the most difficult part of your career in broadcast journalism. Advice on finding first jobs often is sought from working journalists, all of whom have faced the same challenge at some time in their lives. It's a familiar dilemma: You need experience to land a job, but you can't gain experience unless you first have a job. The advice most journalists offer is to get experience before you leave college, in whatever broadcast-related field you can find. Work on the school newspaper or at the campus radio station, volunteer to sweep floors at local radio and television stations, try to set up your own summer work — do an internship at a station of your choosing, but get experience.

Often, small commercial stations without union restrictions offer the most rounded experience. At these stations, given enough time, you may be able to sample most of the available jobs, from writing and reporting to on-air delivery. With this experience, you can determine which jobs are best suited to your interests and abilities.

Besides acquiring a well-rounded liberal arts education, which is essential for the broadcast journalist, you should immerse yourself in courses that offer hands-on experience in the practical and creative aspects of radio and television production, electronic field production, audio and video editing, and writing for broadcast. You may encounter an occasional station that doesn't require a college degree as a condition for full-time employment, but it will be the exception. Other stations, particularly those on low budgets in small towns, may hire from the ranks of the so-called mail-order "schools of broadcasting," which may be fine for those pursuing disc-jockey careers but which, in our view, fail to offer adequate preparation for a career in journalism.

GAINING EXPERIENCE AS A STRINGER

Many people gain valuable experience working as stringers for radio and television stations. The stringer is a freelance journalist who covers stories either on speculation or on assignment from

the station. If you live within the coverage area of a station, you may be able to sell the station occasional stories and films about news events in your area. If you originate a story on speculation, you will not be paid unless the story is aired. Stories you are assigned to cover, whether aired or not, generally earn you a minimum fee. A routine 30-second story for radio may command as little as \$5 or less. Stories for television, when accompanied by visuals, may earn you \$25 or more. Obviously you will not become rich as a stringer, but you will gain valuable experience, not to mention the possibility of important contacts if the people in the newsroom like your work.

COMPETITION

The more than 1,000 television stations in the United States offer limited employment opportunities. The same is true at the nation's nearly 8,000 radio stations. Somewhere, however, is a station that can put you to work if you show up at the right time with the right skills. Large-market stations typically receive several hundred applications for the few positions that come open each year. These stations have the luxury of choosing from among the best qualified applicants — those with prior experience who don't require extensive training. Even when trainee positions are available, applicants are chosen on the basis of previously demonstrated skill and aptitude (talent), qualities that seldom are identifiable without prior job experience.

Because few stations can afford to commit staff time and financial resources to train the beginner, your best approach is to get broadcast experience, of whatever kind, whenever possible, before you apply for your first big job. Jobs in broadcast journalism tend to be similar from station to station, although job titles and classifications are not always the same. As you begin to apply for jobs, you should zero in on those that most nearly complement your interests and talents.

It's a good idea to stay flexible. If you want to be on-air, the competition is intense. You'll probably have to start in the smallest markets and work your way up to the majors. If you are willing to learn, though, a lot of opportunity resides behind the camera. Beginning in the mid-1990s, a serious shortage of qualified television newscast producers developed throughout the industry because of expansion of the Fox network and the launch of new cable system newscasts. Producing is less glamorous than anchoring, but it often carries more responsibility and authority. The producer runs the newscast, and it is an excellent career track toward becoming a news director. Even if you think you want to be a reporter or an anchor, you may want to consider opportunities to be a producer.

If you take a job that is not exactly what you want to do, once inside a newsroom you often can get other opportunities. For example, if you are hired as an assistant producer in a medium-market station, you may be able to volunteer to do reporting a couple of Saturdays a month. That will get you valuable reporting experience, expose you to some solid criticism in story construction in a kind of "risk-free" environment as a person just helping out, and build your image as a team player who should get a break. By taking a job as an assistant producer, you may be able to start in a much larger market, at better pay, than by sticking to an "on-air" only approach. Once inside a news operation, you may find some jobs that are a lot more fun for you than reporting or anchoring. What is most important is developing a career that will make you happy. Stay flexible and watch for opportunities in the short-term that will get you where you want to go in the long-term.

RESUME TAPE

The most effective way to market yourself for a television news reporting job is with a strong audition or resume tape. The tape showcases your on-air appearance and voice, your personality, and the best work you've done to date. News directors are notoriously fidgety when they view tapes, especially from entry-level journalists, so move straight from a brief slate or graphic that gives your name, address, and telephone number to the strongest package you've produced, and be certain the first package includes a strong standup. Skip colorbars and tone at the start of your tape. News directors want to see and hear you, not colorbars or 1,000-hertz tone. Ideally, try to appear on camera within the first 30 seconds after the package begins. Most news directors advise you to avoid starting with an anchor's on-air intro to your package, and most suggest that you skip music in resume packages. Suggested packages you might put in your resume tape include:

- A spot news package
- A hard news package
- City council/school board story or trial coverage
- A softer or specialty reporting package
- An example of what you most like to do
- A live shot or a live interview on tape

Avoid an endless succession of feature stories, because news directors may see your tape as evidence of inexperience in reporting or even inability. For sports resume tapes, try to include one or two complete sportscasts and a sports report. If possible, showcase sports journalism in which you have developed sources or broken a significant story. Mark and label your tape neatly, and on the inside include a rundown of the tape's contents, a resume (with references), and a one-page cover letter. Good market sizes to seek for your first job are between ADI 75 and 125. News directors prefer that you not send unsolicited tapes. If you do, expect your tape to go unviewed and eventually to be destroyed. Few unsolicited tapes ever are returned. Once you've received permission, give the news director a couple of weeks to view your tape before you call the news director again.

THE RESUME

When you apply for any job, you must sell yourself to the prospective employer. The resume helps you sell yourself by summarizing your life history in a presentation that takes only a few minutes to read. Most resumes work best when you present them in person and ask for a job. If you cannot apply in person, send out as many resumes and letters of application as possible. The person who mails out 200 resumes may get 25 "thanks-but-no-thanks" replies, one or two indications of interest, one or two interviews, and perhaps even one or two job offers.

An even more efficient method is to identify stations with job openings, prepare your resume and visit these stations with resume in hand. Your resume should be brief, concise, neatly typed,

free of spelling errors and erasures, and well organized. It should include all relevant work experience including summer jobs. No matter what the work experience, it shows you can hold down a job. If you have no experience, promote your education. List any special courses that may qualify you for a given position, your major, and any academic honors you have received. Also mention extracurricular activities and campus offices you have held. List almost any activity that speaks to your general character, work aptitude, and scholastic ability.

Visit your library for examples of resume formats. For your reference, we have included a sample resume, which follows the generally accepted format for listing, in the following order, your name, address, and telephone number, job objective, employment history, education, pertinent special information, and a brief summary of personal characteristics and hobbies.

PERSONAL RESUME

Patricia S. Smith
0000 Bonita Avenue
San Diego, CA 00000
(312) 000-0000

JOB OBJECTIVE

Employment as a broadcast news writer and reporter.

EMPLOYMENT

- 1994-1996 KSCU-FM, Grand Lake, MI
News Director: responsible for overall news operation. Supervised a staff of seven full-time employees. Duties included administration, writing, reporting and on-air broadcasts.
- 1993-1994 WKBW-TV, Buffalo, NY
Copy manager: writing advertising copy for clients not using an advertising agency. Supervised production and taping of spots, including selection of appropriate talent, background music and sound effects.
- 1987 WDOE Radio, Dunkirk, NY (Lake Shore Broadcasting)
Copy editor: courier for early evening news. This position was part-time summer employment following freshman year of college.

EDUCATION

- 1989-1993 Boston University, Boston, MA
School of Communication B.S. in Telecommunication
HONORS: Dean's List two (2) semesters
- 1986-1989 Oakfield High School, Oakfield, CA
HONORS: Graduated with a California State Regent's Diploma

GENERAL

Traveled extensively in Europe after graduation from college. Broadened my knowledge of various cultures and methods of communication in France, Switzerland, Germany and England.

PERSONAL

- Born 23 November 1973
Health Excellent.
Height: 5'6"
Weight 125 lbs.
Hobbies Reading, photography, skiing, swimming, hiking

REFERENCES

James Cartwright, General Manager
KSCU-FM
111 State Street
Grand Lake, MI 00060
201-555-0000

Sydney Spencer, Account Executive
WKBW-TV
1292 E. 192nd
Buffalo, NY 00085
208-555-0000

Dr. Robert Rayton, Associate Professor
School of Communication
Boston University
Boston, MA 80500
903-555-0000

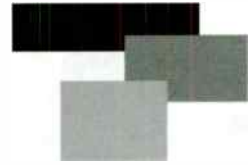
Name _____

Date _____

Assignment 18-A

1. Prepare a personal resume that sells yourself effectively to a prospective employer. The resume should be well organized, brief, concise, neatly typed, free of spelling errors and erasures. Include all relevant work experience, including summer jobs. If you have no work experience, promote your education, including any special courses and honors that qualify you for the position you want. Use a format of your choice or use the accompanying sample resume.
2. Develop an audition tape for radio that showcases your ability to write, edit, produce, and deliver the news effectively.
3. Prepare a television audition tape that effectively showcases your on-air appearance and voice, your personality, and the best work you've done to date. Begin the audition tape with a brief slate or graphic that gives your name, address, and telephone number, then move straight to the strongest package you've produced. Be certain the first package includes a strong standup.

APPENDIX



Code of Broadcast News Ethics Radio Television News Directors Association

The responsibility of radio and television journalists is to gather and report information of importance and interest to the public accurately, honestly and impartially.

The members of the Radio-Television News Directors Association accept these standards and will:

1. Strive to present the source or nature of broadcast news material in a way that is balanced, accurate and fair.
 - A. They will evaluate information solely on its merits as news, rejecting sensationalism or misleading emphasis in any form.
 - B. They will guard against using audio or video material in a way that deceives the audience.
 - C. They will not mislead the public by presenting as spontaneous news any material which is staged or rehearsed.
 - D. They will identify people by race, creed, nationality or prior status only when it is relevant.
 - E. They will clearly label opinion and commentary.
 - F. They will promptly acknowledge and correct errors.
2. Strive to conduct themselves in a manner that protects them from conflicts of interest, real or perceived. They will decline gifts or favors which would influence or appear to influence their judgments.
3. Respect the dignity, privacy and well-being of people with whom they deal.
4. Recognize the need to protect confidential sources. They will promise confidentiality only with the intention of keeping that promise.
5. Respect the right of an individual to a fair trial.
6. Broadcast the private transmissions of other broadcasters only with permission.
7. Actively encourage observance of this Code by all journalists, whether members of the Radio-Television News Directors Association or not.

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