

Writing For Media

Week 10

Broadcast Reporting II

Rules of Style – Abbreviations

- What do these letters stand for – Mo, Dec., GMT, ETA, mm, and bros.?
- If you had to hesitate for a moment (Missouri, December, Greenwich Meridian Time, estimated time of arrival, millimetres, brothers), the rule is simple—don't use them.
- News writers should write a word as they want it to be read. If they want Secretary General, they should write Secretary General and not Sec. Gen.
- However, if and when abbreviation is to be read by the newscasters as an abbreviation, it should be written that way, with hyphens separating the letters: F-B-I, I-B-M, p-m, N-B-A.

- Well-known acronyms such as NATO, NASA, UNICEF and OPEC obviously don't need to be spelt out, nor do they need hyphens between the letters because the individual letters are not meant to be read.
- The only exception to this rule is title of personal address – Mr., Mrs., Ms., Miss, Dr. There is no need to spell them out because newscasters can read them without hesitating.

Rules of Style – Pages

- Here are some rules to preparing pages of copy to be read: one story to a page.
- A newscast script will often need to be rearranged at the last minute—stories added, subtracted, or shuffled.
- Few radio stories run longer than one page. TV stories often do. The most graphic way to indicate on the bottom of the page that the story continues onto the next page is with a heavy, dark arrow pointing to the right. Otherwise, the newspaper cue for a continuation—(*MORE*)—can be typed at the bottom of the page.
- *FIRST ADD* should then be included in the heading of the second page.
- So why not simply number the pages 1,2,3, etc?

- Numerals are reserved for numbering the pages of the final newscast script.
- How do writers indicate that the story is finished? Many type -0- or -30- or #####, centred, a few lines after the final story.

Rules of Style – Time References

- Because the element of immediacy is one of the strongest assets of the broadcast news media, every effort should be made to give up-to-the-minute reports and to write copy in a way that makes it sound fresh and timely.
- Present tense should be used whenever accurate and appropriate.
- As much as possible, avoid emphasizing old time elements – be wary of words such as *last night*.
- Avoid undue repetition of “today” – better to use “*late this morning*,” “*this afternoon*”, etc.

- When appropriate, try to pinpoint times in terms that listeners can relate to – i.e. using phrases such as “*during rush hour*” than to report precise time such as “between 5 p.m. until 6 p.m.”.

Rules of Style – Quotations

- Newspaper reporters commonly make extensive use of direct quotations. So do broadcast reporters, only they capture quotations on audio or videotape during an interview.
- Those recorded sections of the interview are called **soundbites** or **actualities** and serve the same function as quotations in print stories.
- Soundbites allow a source to provide more information while adding colour and authenticity to a story.

Rules of Style – Punctuations

- Newscasters have different lung capacities, but all of them need to take a breath once in a while.
- A newscaster reading copy that lacks a place for a natural pause is either going to add an unnatural pause or turn blue.
- Most newscasters get hungry for air every 20 syllables or so. If a sentence is that short, the period or question mark will provide the opportunity to inhale. Otherwise a dash (-), ellipsis (...) or comma (,) should be written into the copy to make sure that the newscasters pause where it suits the sentence construction, not in the middle of phrases.

Similarities and Differences Between Writing For TV and Radio

- TV journalists look for stories with strong visual appeal.
- TV journalists are striving to show, as much as tell, their audience the news.
- TV journalists must fashion their scripts based on the video they've shot in covering the story.
- These journalists let the video tell the story and provide only that information that the video does not.
- The difference between the copy for radio and TV is that TV stories are written in a **split script**, in which the video descriptions are on the left and the audio, or reporters narrative, is on the right.
- In radio news, there is no need for split script as there is only the audio element.