

Writing For Media

Week 9

Broadcast Reporting I

Introduction

- Driving to work can take a long time in the city, even when all the roads are accessible for traffic. While fighting traffic, people often listen to radio.
- Broadcast writing is divided into two:
 - Television news
 - Radio news
- Without a doubt electronic journalism can be easy for listeners or viewers to absorb, but it can also be more difficult to comprehend because viewers typically are doing other things—eating dinner, putting children to bed, getting ready for work—during newscasts.

- Electronic journalism information is often one-time only; the viewer or listener can't go back to review important segments as readers can; readers just re-read the sentences if they do not understand the para while broadcast news consumers generally only have one chance to hear and comprehend the message.
- Broadcast writing must be written clearly and simply. It is catered to the ears rather than to the eyes. It is meant to be heard not read.
- The fact-filled lead which includes the 5W1H is too much information for the listeners to digest while the newscasters may run out of breath.
- Writing style for broadcast i.e. TV and radio must be *conversational*.
- The rule is: write as if you were talking to a friend.

- Broadcast journalists are not as tied to stylistic detail as their print counterparts, but hundreds of stylistic and specific writing practices are observed.
- To protect newscasters and maintain order, broadcast newsrooms have developed style rules for their copy. Mastering these rules is paramount in producing broadcast copy and the first step in understanding the special job of the broadcast copy.
- Newscasters demand that copy is consistent and easy to read. However, conventions and consistencies vary from newsrooms to newsrooms.

Basic style rules

- Here are the guidelines (or rules of styles) that must be observed when writing for broadcast.
- Each page of copy follows the same format. They are designed for **consistency**.
- Copy must be clean, readable and fast—all copies must be **typed**.
- If the newsroom software does not automatically space lines for you, always **double or, better, triple space**. Easier for newscasters to read and leave room for corrections if stories need to be edited outside of the computer.

Rules of Style – Copy

- The pages that the broadcast journalists produced do not just have to be read; they have to be read on air.
- Abbreviations, numbers, symbols, confusing corrections, sloppiness or unclear typographies—anything at all that causes the newscaster to hesitate or stumbles—impairs the newscaster.
- Computer systems in newsroom vary in sophistication; some use basic word processors (e.g. Microsoft Word) while others have their own software called newsroom systems—either way, all copies must be typed. There is no time to figure out misspelt word.

- Broadcast news writers turn out much more copies per day than newspaper reporters, so a typing speed of less than 40 wpm is a handicap. There is NO such thing as an extension or an incomplete. **News must be on time!**
- Do we type the copy in **all-caps or sentence case**? All-caps are larger and easier to read and type. Standard upper/lowercase (sentence case) gives more visual information—this is dependent on the newsroom style.
- Copy that is spread all over the page is difficult to read. **Wide margins** are best in broadcast news—they make the copy stand out.
- Allow room for about 55 to 60 characters per line.
- Radio news stories tend to be short and centred on the page—beginning with at least two-and-a-half inches from the top. TV news copy uses a different margin (split-script).

Headings in a broadcast copy

- As stories flow through the newsrooms—in and out of computers, files and newscasts—the news staff must be able to identify each one at a glance.
- Each page of copy must have a heading that tells anyone picking it up a few things about the copy on that page. There is no time to produce an involved summary at the top of each story, but a minimal amount of information is necessary:
- ***The Slug***: the slug is the name or title the writer gives a story. It's the word(s) people in the newsroom use to refer to that story throughout that day and after the story finds its way into the files. The slug serves as a “file name” under which the story is stored in the PC. A story about the recall of some Myvi might be slugged as MYVI RECALL.

- *A slug must be short.* Writers rarely waste words by using a slug longer than one or two words.
- *A slug must be clear.* The slug must clearly identify the story it heads. Watch out for slugs which might refer to more than one story in the newsroom that day. MURDER is not acceptable in a large city—there are too many of them. Be more specific—KNIFING or STRANGLER. Similarly, the name of the Prime Minister is rarely used as slugs. He is too involved in too many stories. Slug his opening address in the ASEAN conference as ASEAN ADDRESS, his Johor flood relief as FLOOD, and his tour of China as CHINA TRIP.
- *A slug must be all-caps.*

- ***The date***: Each story heading should include the date the story is written. Exact records are vital in the news business.
- ***The time of the next newscast***: News loses its freshness fast on radio. The time “7 a.m.” in the heading tells everyone that by 10 a.m. that story is already three hours’ old.
- ***The writer’s initials or last name***: Often newscasters or writers will have a question about a story. A name or initials on the story tell them whom to ask. This is the writer’s way of taking responsibility for the story. It shows colleagues in the newsroom where to direct praise or blame (e.g. WL or LIM).
- These four make up the standard heading.

- They are typed in the upper left-hand corner of the page, clearly separate from the body of the story. Stacked:

HARTAMAS STABBING

10/09

10:15 AM

DC

- Or across the top of the page:

HARTAMAS STABBING 10/09 10:15AM DC

Rules of Style – Numbers

- How do you read numbers while on the air?
- Now read this out loud quickly: \$57,313.
- If you had to pause for a moment, it may have been because of the dollar sign, which should be read last, is written first; or perhaps because it takes time to translate the numerals into words. The seconds it takes to convert these symbols into “fifty-seven thousand, three hundred and thirteen dollars” are enough to throw off a newscaster’s pacing.
- Numbers pose difficulties—they must be written in the clearest possible fashion.

- Here are the rules relating to numbers:
- Spell out all numbers through eleven. Three, six, ten are familiar words, while numerals like 1, 8, 11 can get lost in the copy.
- Use numerals for all numbers from 12 to 999. They're easy to read, and writing them out – *seven-hundred and ninety-three* – takes more energy, time and is confusing.

- Spell out the words *thousand*, *million*, *billion*, but use numerals for the numbers that modify them – 75-thousand, 3-million, 400-billion. Never make the newscaster count commas, as in 45,672,000. Write: 45-million, 672-thousand. Since numerals 1 and 11 are so skinny that they tend to get lost or confused, always spell them out – even in combination with thousand, million or billion e.g. one-million, eleven-thousand.
- Years are exception to this rule. Write 2007, not two-thousand seven.
- Ordinal numbers under 12th can be handled either way. Both *third* and *3rd* are easy to read and acceptable. From 12th to 999th, use numerals with their suffix – 22nd, 456th. Larger ordinals should be handled with a combination of words and numerals – 13-billionth, 2nd million.

- All the symbols and terms used with numbers should be spelt out. Dollar is the one used most frequently. Write: 3-million dollars, 48 dollars. Never use the dollar sign (\$). This also applies to cents, degrees, pounds, kilometers, inches, percent, feet, miles, years, minutes, seconds, hours and all metric measurements – 50 litres, five kilometres.
- Fractions and decimal points are to be spelt out – three-fourths, one-half, three point two, seven point five million.
- Numbers used in the same context should be written in the same way. Don't write a score as 24 to ten. Write: 24 to 10. However, numbers that should be read separately can often be best understood when written in different styles: His score was 60, twelve under par.
- One last rule about numbers: They should not be used too often.