UNIT STRUCTURE

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5.5.1 Writing for radio features

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5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- explain the structure of a radio news bulletin
- discuss the language and style of radio news
- narrate the process for writing radio features and current affairs programmes.

5.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, we have discussed about reporting for radio. Now another very important thing to know along with reporting is writing – writing both radio news as well as radio features and other current affairs programmes.

In this unit we will discuss this very essential aspect of radio – writing for radio programmes. Writing for radio is quite unique and requires special skills of 'writing for the ear'. In this unit you will get some basic idea about how to write radio news, laying emphasis on language and style and rules for writing the news copy. You will also get an idea about writing for radio features and radio current affairs programmes. But before you can start with writing it is important to know how a radio news bulletin is structured.

frequencies close to one another. “This is All India Radio giving you the news’ is the usual form. This also makes it possible for the newsreader to take a deep breath.

4. **Repeat headlines:** The headlines are repeated at the end of the bulletin after which comes the closing announcement “that is the end of the news” or “that is the end of this bulletin”. The announcer of the station then chimes in and tell you: “You have been listening to a bulletin relayed from Delhi. This is Guwahati station of AIR”.

The arrangement of items in a bulletin requires considerable skills and editorial ability. We have to keep in mind that the bulletin is more than simply the total of its items. It means that the stories have to be integrated as much as possible. For example, all stories about a major national development or an important international event have to be taken together, as far as possible. They have to be brought together and made into a compact form, taking care to avoid repetition. This is to be done in such a way that after the main news in the story, the reactions, repercussions, comments, along with any offshoots or sequels, are arranged in a logical and interesting manner.

Let us suppose that there is a story about India winning the last of the three test matches of a series against Australia and thereby winning the home series 2-1. This series win has come after 24 years and obviously there is a lot of excitement among the Indian fans about this win. Now the news of this win would naturally be the lead story of the bulletin wherein the statistics would be provided and the scores would be mentioned and also who was adjudged the man of the match and man of the series. The story might also say that this series win has come after 24 long years. After this story, several related stories will also follow wherein comments of the cricket experts, reactions of the fans, family members of the cricketers reacting to the win in their respective hometowns etc. will be accommodated. Immediately after this, an analysis of the match might also follow wherein the anchor will discuss the significance of the win with a cricket expert and dissect the match to discuss the turning points of the game. Finally the anchor

The compilation editor is the one who prepares the final product which goes on air. So the bulletin editor must ensure that he gives each item a proper shape and strings them together like beads in a rosary.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS A



1. What are the different parts of a radio news bulletin?

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2. What is a broadcast sehedule?

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5.4 LANGUAGE AND STYLE FOR RADIO NEWS

Radio is a medium of the ear. Whatever effect we might want to achieve, the only possible way is by way of words – words weaved into sentences in such a way that the listener gets a smooth ride, without jerks. And if the journey has to be smooth for the listener, so does it have to be for the reader or anchor too. This style which makes it possible is called the radio style.

Writers of broadcast news know that people absorb news through a different sense when they listen to it than when they read it. Be it TV or radio, broadcast news is spoken word medium. In other words, broadcasters are talking to people, telling them the news. People get their news vial their ears. The only way you can get your message through to your listeners is by way of what you say and how you say it. Since there are no visuals to help out, and people cannot see the expression on your face and so they have to understand it by your voice modulations. The person listening may probably be busy doing

The government plans to tackle environment pollution under the eleventh five-year plan. The new project will try to find solutions to problems of pollution, migration of people from villages to cities and settlement.

2. Avoid being dull, avoid using bureaucratic language.

Therefore, instead of writing *'the judge issued a habeas corpus'* write *'the judge ordered the authorities to bring the suspect before court*.'

3. Give your copy a sense of immediacy.

Use the present tense and not as you would use in newspapers. Things happening on radio should appear to be happening now.

Therefore, instead of writing '*the zilla parishad chief secretary said today a toll tax would be levied on the new bridge constructed outside the village'* write, '*the zilla parishad chief secretary says a toll tax will be levied on the new bridge constructed outside the village.'*

4. Use simple, short, declarative sentences.

When the sentence is too long and winding, split the sentence into two/three sentences. At the same time try not to sound staccato too. The cardinal principle, however, is not to cram too many things into one sentence.

Therefore, "*the Guwahati City Corporation and the village panchayat have decided to work together. They will also attempt at increasing people's participation in all developmental works under the 7th five year plan."* is better than "*the Guwahati City Corporation and the village panchayat have both agreed on the desirability of working together and increasing participation of the people in all developmental works under the 7th five year plan".*

5. Avoid sound clashes

"The building is built by a building contractor", is wrong. It sounds more like the tongue twister. *So, a*void such constructions. Also be careful with words that would similar: accepted—excepted etc.

story by saying, "*Police have not released any information in this case,"* mention what is known. Then conclude with, "*Additional information is expected soon*," only if it's vital information that the listeners should not be without.

Notably, every news organization's standards are slightly different and each radio network and affiliate has their own "house style."

News radio writers should familiarize themselves with the network's standards and with the radio station's house style before beginning script work. And anything that is potentially unclear should be addressed with the reporter or anchor who will be reading the script on the air. This extra step will help limit inaccuracies and errors on the air.

11. Avoid "he/she" ambiguity

When referencing more than one individual in a script, always reference that person by name or title. Utilizing "he" or "she" can be confusing, particularly when there's multiple individuals referenced in the story.

12. Use proper format

Format requirements vary by radio station, but in general, scripts should be in all caps and double spaced. Date the first page of the script. Indent all paragraphs. Don't use semicolons and write out abbreviations. Use underlines for emphasis and dashes for long pauses.

13. Provide pronunciation guides

In the case of uncommon or difficult-to-pronounce names, provide a notation on pronunciation following every instance of the name.

14. Write a good introduction or cue.

- The 'cue' being the first part of the programme, it should attract the listener to make him want to keep listening to the rest of the programme.
- It should create interest to the people for listening.
- It should make the listeners feel the broadcast item is relevant or important for them.

5.5 WRITING FOR RADIO FEATURES AND CURRENT AFFAIRS PROGRAMMES

In the previous sections we have discussed about writing for radio news let us now discuss writing for radio features and current affairs programmes.

5.5.1 Writing for radio features

Step 1

Identify the USP of the feature story — why should the viewer find the story interesting. Look for a theme that will appeal to most people. This could be a struggle against adversity, selfless work for a good cause, or something really funny or unique.

Step 2

Remember radio is all about 'sound'. There are no visuals that can attract people to your programme. So this has to be made up for with the help of appropriate words. A news story can be driven by facts, but a feature story must have compelling words, or there is no reason to have a feature in the first place. Consider the mood you want to build with the feature, and use words to build the story around them.

Step 3

Interview people with the good soundbites in mind. Ask your interviewees specific questions that relate to what you need for the feature and encourage them to speak openly. Create dynamic and active interviews. Talk to the subjects while walking around an environment providing sounds that have significance to the story.

Step 4

Let the feature story tell itself. Allowing the interviewees to talk in their natural setting is also a great device. The idea is to use plenty of natural sound in a feature story. Listening to people going about their lives tells a great story without the reporter doing a thing.

b. An introduction of the experts who will take part in the discussion.

c. A general outline of the aspects of the topic which will be discussed

d. The possible questions which will be put to the experts

e. A brief summary.

In case of such a programme, the written script cannot be followed accurately since it cannot be foretold exactly on what lines the discussion will advance. Therefore the moderator is also generally an expert on the topic who can put in questions and comments spontaneously as the discussion progresses. The introduction is followed from the script, but as for the summary, only a tentative summary can be prepared in advance. But the summary that is finally worded depends on the course and outcome of the actual discussion.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS C



1. Mention five guidelines for writing a good, radio feature.

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2. What are the points that are contained in a radio discussion script?

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a. Be natural and use vocabulary/words you know the meaning of.

b. Avoid being dull, avoid using bureaucratic language.

c. Give your copy a sense of immediacy.

d. Use simple, short, declarative sentences.

e. Avoid sound clashes

4. Do not use unfamiliar abbreviations which can confuse the listener. But do use abbreviations which both the reader and the audience have come to expect. Generally, people know what you mean when you say AIDS. Use familiar acronyms. Acronyms spell out words made from initials. Use the familiar ones like NASA, etc. Do not use hyphens between the letters of an acronym. Read them as words.

C)

1. Guidelines for writing radio feature are:

a. Identify the USP of the feature story.

b. Remember radio is all about 'sound'.

c. Interview people with the good soundbites in mind.

d. Let the feature story tell itself.

e. Craft the feature story to build curiosity.

2. Usually the following points are covered in a radio discussion script:

f. The introduction, normally containing the significance of the topic which will be discussed

g. An introduction of the experts who will take part in the discussion.

h. A general outline of the aspects of the topic which will be discussed

i. The possible questions which will be put to the experts

j. A brief summary.