UNIT 9: REPORTING FOR RADIO

UNIT STRUCTURE

9.1 Learning Objectives
9.2 Introduction
9.3 Reporting for Radio
9.4 Qualities and responsibilities of a radio reporter
9.5 Criteria for selection of radio news
9.6 Sources of radio news
9.7 Let us Sum up
9.8 Answers to check your progress
9.9 Further reading
9.10 Possible Questions

9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- explain the basic job of a radio reporter
- discuss the qualities and responsibilities of radio reporter
- outline the criteria for selection of radio news
- discuss the sources of radio news

9.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit you have been introduced to the concept of radio news. You will now be acquainted with the basic features of radio news, the different types of radio news bulletins and radio features and current affairs programmes. In this unit, we will discuss reporting for radio news.

Here, we will deal with the basic responsibilities and qualities of a radio reporter, the criteria for selection of radio news and the sources of radio news. Although these things are more or less same as that for print media and television as well, but because of the nature of the medium and certain technological differences, reporting for radio slightly differs from reporting for radio or television. This unit aims to point out these differences.

So, let us start of with the first section where you will be introduced to the concept of radio reporting.

9.3 REPORTING FOR RADIO

Like TV and newspaper reporters, radio reporters also have to go to the field and report events as they have observed. Field reporters are responsible for live coverage of events as they occur, recording actualities, **voicers** etc. and occasional research for and production of **minidocs.**

Radio field reporters are called general assignment reporters, correspondents or special assignment reporters. Their work is similar to that of their television counterparts with obvious variations because of the differences in electronic technology.

In covering a story, reporters investigate leads and news tips, look at documents, observe events at the scene, and interview people and take notes. At their office, they organize the material, determine the focus or emphasis, write their stories, and edit the accompanying sound material. Many reporters enter information or write stories using laptop computers and electronically submit the material to their offices from remote locations. In some cases, news writers write a story from the information collected and submitted by reporters. Radio reporters often compose stories and report “live” from the scene. At times, they later tape an introduction to or commentary on their story in the studio. Some journalists also interpret the news or offer opinions to readers, viewers, or listeners. In this role, they are called commentators or columnists.

Live reporting is a very important part of any radio reporter’s responsibility. When you report live, it is your responsibility to create a word picture of a scene, including sights, sounds, smells, tension in the air and factual details - the extent of a blaze, the names of the victims or the value of stolen goods as the case may be. When reporting live, you may be equipped with a cell phone. You’ll use it to indicate when you’re ready to give your report, and you’ll hear your cue to start as the program line is fed



Voicer : Also known as voice track. It is the pre-recorded voice of a DJ or Radio personality that is recorded and stored in a computer to be played at a certain time in a pre-programmed sequence of events such as at the beginning of a song, end of a song, etc.



Minidocs: Brief documentaries presented as a series, usually over several days.

to you. Even when you are describing at the conclusion of an event, you may work from notes that you scribbled as you gather information.

Here are a few tips for effective live reporting —

- Don't report rumours, unless they are essential to the story - and make sure that you specify in the story that these are the rumours doing the rounds.
- Don't make unsubstantiated guesses as to facts such as number of people injured or the value of a gutted building. Report only confirmed facts.
- Control your emotions. Remember, though, that a bit of genuine excitement in your voice will convey the significance of your report.
- Don't identify yourself at the start of the report because the anchor will already have given your name. Identify yourself at the close of the story, following the policy set down by your station.
- In the event of physical danger — a police siege or a confrontation between rival groups or street gangs — don't become so absorbed in your story that you endanger yourself or your station's equipment.
- Be prepared to discuss the event with the anchor after you have given your report. This means doing sufficient investigation prior to going on the air to enable you to answer questions.



CHECK YOUR PRGRESS

Q.1. Radio field reporters are called .....reporters, correspondents or special assignment reporters.

Q.2. When are the radio journalists also called commentators or columnists?

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Q.3. During live reporting, at what point in the story should the reporter identify himself/ herself? Why so?

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Q.4. What activities does the job of a radio reporter involve?

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ACTIVITY 9.1

- Visit your nearest local radio station and find out the responsibilities of the news reporters working there.
- You are asked to report on the MNREGA scheme of the government in your district. You are to find out whether the scheme has been a success or a failure by gathering information from different relevant sources.

9.4 QUALITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF A RADIO REPORTER

Radio is an aural medium. Despite the absence of sight, colour and movement, radio is still a potent source of news for the masses. This is possible, because radio reporters are able to stir the imagination and retain the interest of their listeners.

The radio reporters' stories form an important part of a news bulletin. The job of a radio reporter is a very challenging and exciting one. Given the fact that radio news is immediate, reporters always have to be on their toes to get the latest news and happenings around them.

Some people say, 'journalists are born not made'. This is a debatable issue in today's times when hundreds of journalism schools are being established across the world to groom aspiring journalists. But either way, we have to agree that the fate of a radio station, to a great extent, depends on the quality and calibre of its staff, especially its reporters who are the heart and soul of a station. When we talk about the qualities of a reporter, we are not only talking about the inherent qualities of a reporter but also the responsibilities that come along with the profession. In the following section, we will also learn how good journalists react when they find themselves at the crossroads.

If we look at what reporters do, perhaps we can gather some insight into what qualities one should cultivate or develop to become a good reporter.

1) **Intelligence**: Good reporters are able to understand complex issues. Though this is something that is inherent in a person, intelligence can be developed with experience and rationality.

2) **Knowledge:** Good reporters always have broad general knowledge and experience in order to understand a number of different areas and have the ability to go from one area to another easily. It is said that a good journalist is one who is the 'Jack of all trades'. He or she needs to know atleast something about everything. Knowledge is something that grows with exposure to information of all kinds and needs to be nurtured with a lot of effort.

3) **Effective**: A good reporter has the ability to get things done. Excuses and personal problems don't work in the competitive media world. Reporters should be able to work under pressure; work well with others under pressure; and be well organized.

4) **Curiosity**: A good reporter should have the need to be curious enough to go beyond the surface. They should not take things at face value but look at things in a questioning manner. They should always have the urge to seek information, to find out about people, events, and activities and to understand them; to be sceptical at times. In other words, they should have the 'nose for news'.

5) **Comprehension:** A reporter, who wants to make a mark in the profession, should have the ability to analyze information. He or she should be able to sort the important from the unimportant; and understand what he or she is writing about.

6) **Judgment:** In reporting, it is not sufficient only to gather information. A reporter has to learn to sort the important from the unimportant effectively; be able to weed out information, determining what readers need to know and what will make a complete, accurate story.



LET US KNOW

Watergate scandal: It was a political scandal in the United States resulting from the break-in of the democratic national Committee headquarters at the Watergate office complex in Washington DC. Effects of the scandal led to the resignation of the President of US, Richard Nixon on August 9, 1974.

7) **Persistent:** Good reporters have the quality of knowing when to continue to seek or push for information and when to give up the need to be energetic; of not stopping just because someone says “no” (remember reporters Woodward and Bernstein and the obstacles they encountered unraveling the Watergate scandal, which forced the resignation of U.S. President Richard Nixon in 1974). There will be many hurdles on the way to gathering news, what is important is how to overcome those obstacles and gather the information you want.

8) **Literacy:** Contacts, sources and energy are not sufficient to be a good reporter. Radio is an aural medium and, unlike TV, it does not have the visuals to explain things or concepts. Therefore, a radio reporter should have the ability to attract the listeners through only ‘sound’ or ‘words’. So, language skills of a radio reporter are very essential. Good reporters possess great grammatical skills; reading ability coupled with comprehension and acceptable writing skills.



Blimp: A small airship.

9) **Motivation:** Good reporters have the drive to work beyond the normal 8-hour a day. There can never be any fixed working hours for good journalists. News can happen anywhere and at anytime. And since news is a perishable commodity, journalists must cover the story when it occurs. They should have the motivation to carry on with their job against all odds.

10) **Personal Stability:** Good radio reporters have the ability of keeping their cool when the world around seems to be falling apart. It is but natural for reporters to be moved by events and happenings they cover but they must have the ability to remain professional and do the job even though they may be witnessing unpleasantness. One still-famous example is the radio reporter who was broadcasting when a large dirigible (blimp), the Hindenburg, exploded just before landing in 1937 in New Jersey. Although emotional, he kept reporting. In addition, the more stable you are, the more apt you are to treat people fairly and write objectively.

11) **Objectivity of reporting** is a major challenge reporters are faced with all the time. It is also one of the pre-requisites of good reporting. Objectivity is about being neutral in reporting and not taking sides. A reporter may be inclined towards a particular ideology, but that should not be reflected in his reporting of any event or phenomenon. Reporters play a major role in shaping a democracy, so objectivity remains a major responsibility reporters are expected to fulfill. Standing with the truth and truth alone is what good journalists do.

12) Good reporters always try to get **documentation.** They always try to get physical material. Why is that? Because a human source has absolutely no standing whatsoever, particularly in the credibility of the reader.



Hand-maiden: something that supports and helps

13) One basic ingredient of the reporter is **enterprise.** Without it, you shouldn't be in journalism. It is the ability to be a self-starter, to look around and see news. The authorities don't want you to have this ability. To some extent, any concentration of power fears a good

reporter because he or she is in an adversarial relationship. The reporter is an opponent of power. In some countries, the press is hand-maiden to the parties of governments, but in a democracy like India, we have a free press. The press acts as a check on power.

14) Another quality of a reporter is the ability to **look beneath the surface**, to look beyond the press release, the handout, the statement given to you, or the authoritative remark. Most people in our society are victims of the hierarchy of credibility. The higher the authority, the more credibility we give them.

15) There's a thinking process that's somewhat unique to journalism — **rational thought**. If you look at the way reporters work, you'll notice they engage in two steps. One is called reporting and the other is called writing. If you make an analogy, you can see that reporting is what we call the analytic process and writing is what we call the synthesis. The reporting process consists of taking an event apart and examining it and its constituent segments. The writing process consists of pasting it together in a form that may be somewhat unlike the original event, and has coherence and meaning.

16) Reporters should be dedicated to providing **accurate and impartial news.** Accuracy is important, both to serve the public and because untrue or libelous statements can lead to lawsuits.

17) A **nose for news, persistence, initiative, poise, resourcefulness, a good memory, and physical stamina** are important attributes of a good reporter as is the emotional stability to deal with pressing deadlines, irregular hours, and dangerous assignments.

18) Radio reporters and news analysts must be **comfortable speaking to the public** and should have a pleasant voice. All reporters must be at ease in unfamiliar places and with a variety of people.

19) A good radio reporter should have a very good **voice** and he should always concentrate on **pronunciation**.

20) Finally, a good reporter is a student for life. The reporter who is serious about his trade has the quality or characteristics of being

forever a student. If you talk to reporters, you will find them the most exciting people around. They're **always learning** something!



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.5. Name some of qualities of a radio news reporter.

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Q.6. What do you mean by objectivity of reporting?

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Q.7. Why is curiosity an important quality of a news reporter?

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9.5 CRITERIA FOR SELECTION OF RADIO NEWS

The hunger of knowing the latest relevant information is insatiable. New and interesting information constitutes radio news. There are other definitions but this should serve our purpose as a practical and easily understandable definition. Radio news is not only new and interesting information; it also has certain ingredients which help you to distinguish a news item from the one which is not.

Immediacy: The event must be fresh, almost pertaining to the last hour, if not the last minute. For radio, the news has to be reported almost immediately because there are hourly bulletins. Even a day old news is not news at all. Any development brought to light after the event like the revelations on the private life of an important public figure or person of eminence can be news provided it is interesting and it sheds new light on this personality. A historical or archaeological discovery can also be news especially when connected with a public controversy, like the Ayodhya issue,

in the state of Uttar Pradesh (UP) in India. But then it must be brought to light for the first time.

Proximity: The closer you are to an event, the newsier it is to you. Any event of your environment would interest you much more than that of far off places, however important they might be, and would therefore, constitute news. An earthquake of severe intensity causing heavy damage to property and loss of life in distant Peru or Columbia cannot excite you as much as one of moderate intensity in the hills of Meghalaya, or even neighbouring Bangladesh.

Proximity is not necessarily physical; it could be psychological and emotional too. People living away from their homeland sit for hours before a short wave radio and are emotionally close to the land of their birth, especially if they have migrated in recent years, no matter how far away they are physically.

By and large, more distant a place the less newsy it would appear to you.

Conflict : As in literature or films or TV, so in case of radio news. People are less interested or not interested at all, in what they perceive to be routine developments. Strikes, bandhs, violence and arson, wars and invasions, natural disasters and the like unfortunately interest human beings more than their opposites. An element of controversy is the spice newsmen look for in a story.

Consequence and importance: A legislator may cross the floor of his assembly or parliament and join another party, a minister may resign, someone may die and a battle of succession may ensue. By itself the event may seem innocuous but it could be an indication of some major developments to follow- a government may fall, a dynasty may break up and so on.

Likewise, the fact that a man is Prime Minister or President makes people interested in almost everything connected with him. That makes news because of his importance.

Drama: Finally, a news story can also have elements of drama or suspense in it. A parliamentary walkout, kidnapping, a miraculous escape, a hijack, etc are examples of stories with dramatic element.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.8. What are the criteria based on which radio news items are selected?

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Q.9. What do you mean by proximity?

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9.6 SOURCES OF RADIO NEWS

News is such a commodity which sometimes presents itself spontaneously but more often than not one has to scratch the surface or tease someone or something to get an interesting story. Here the term 'story' refers to news and is widely used in the media world. Sources of news can be very wide and diverse. For a radio station, the most important sources of news are its reporters and correspondents. Apart from that there are different news agencies and other sources of information as well.

There can be two major types of sources of news. They are-

1) **Impersonal or General and**
2) **Individual or Personal sources.**

1) **Impersonal or General sources** include sources in various government and non-government offices, industries, institutions, news agencies, and political parties where news items emanate from the organisations in general, not from an individual involved with the organisation. Normally these news items are available to anyone interested.

News agencies are such organisations whose principal objective is to gather or collect news and supply the same to different news enterprises and in some cases individual persons also with a strict sense of maintaining impartiality and quality. They are also a major source of information or news. These agencies also function on a similar note like newspapers or any other news organisations. The only difference is that the agencies serve their news items to various news organisations including newspapers, electronic media etc. Agencies have their own reporting and editing setup for covering news from any corner of the country or the world. There are quite a few reputed news agencies like Press Trust of India (PTI), United News of India (UNI), UNIVARTA (UNI's Hindi Service), Bhasa (PTI's Hindi Service), and foreign-based ones like the Reuters, Associated Press (AP), Agence France Presse (AFP), Asian News International (ANI), IRNA (Iranian News Agency), and TASS (Russia) etc..

2) **Individual or Personal sources** include persons whether in official or unofficial capacities who would pass on some information for news purposes. Individual sources are cultivated and nurtured by the reporters. This may take the form of an information or a hint which might lead to an interesting development and can be translated into a news item. In other words, an official or a functionary in an organisation who is the main source of your information. For example a sub-inspector in a police station can be an important personal source for a reporter covering the law and order beat.

At this point let us ponder over an important aspect here. Whenever a news item is broadcast the bulletin's journalist quotes someone or some organisation as the source. Without quoting a source the scale of credibility of a news item is not much. While quoting a source, we should remember that higher the position or designation of the source, more is the credibility of the news item. For example, if one has to report about a killing or an accident or a politically important development, if we can quote someone of senior rank of the police like the SP or the IG or the DGP or the president or general

secretary of a political party, this would be far more credible than quoting someone from the lower ranks.

Now, during reporting activities many a time one comes across situations in which some officials or other persons agree to divulge sensitive information with a condition. That is, his or her name cannot be quoted as the source of the information as it might cause trouble for them officially. In those cases the reporter must take prior permission of the sources to mention their names. If the source does not want to be identified the reporter can mention 'highly-placed sources' or 'senior officials' in the news items so that the credibility is not lost.

The importance of sources is felt very acutely at times of crisis. This is because at normal times a personal source would act quite in a favourable manner for sharing positive information for news purposes. But, whenever a crisis comes up involving the organisation, the same personal source may refuse to entertain the journalist's request for hints or information. So the relationship between the journalist and the sources must be of such a nature that even at times of negative development or a crisis situation, the latter does not refuse to entertain the journalists' request.

The success of a journalist depends upon his ability to create a good panel of sources to a very great extent. Every reporter needs to build up his 'personal' sources which would prove vital for hinting or tipping him about news or things about to happen.

One has to take the initiative to get oneself introduced to a potential source- an official, a political leader or whoever it might be, if needed and also some people in the lower echelons of the official hierarchy. There can never be any fixed source for a reporter. Anyone anytime can act as a source.

Finally, sources should be protected and nurtured as the relationship between a source and a reporter is a lifelong affair.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.10. What are the different types of sources of news?

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Q.11. Why are sources important for a reporter?

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Q.12. Name four important news agencies.

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9.7 LET US SUM UP

- Like TV and newspaper reporters, radio reporters also have to go to the field and report events as they have observed.
- In covering a story, reporters investigate leads and news tips, look at documents, observe events at the scene, and interview people and take notes. At their office, they organize the material, determine the focus or emphasis, write their stories, and edit accompanying sound material.
- Live reporting is a very important part of any radio reporter's responsibility. When a reporter reports live, it is his responsibility to

create a word picture of a scene, including sights, sounds, smells, tension in the air and factual details.

- The fate of a radio station, to a great extent, depends on the quality and caliber of its staff, especially its reporters who are the heart and soul of a station.
- Some of the important qualities of a radio news reporter are – Intelligence, Knowledge, Being effective, Curiosity, Comprehension, Judgment, Persistent, Literacy, Motivation, Personal Stability, Objectivity of reporting, Enterprise, Ability to look beneath the surface, Rational thought, Accurate and Impartial coverage, Feeling comfortable in speaking to the publical and prosperity to learn.
- The criteria for selection of radio news are: Immediacy, Proximity, Conflict, Consequence & importance, and Drama.
- There can be two major types of sources of news. They are - 1) Impersonal or General and 2) Individual or Personal sources.
- Impersonal or General sources include the sources in various government and non-government offices, industries, institutions, news agencies, and political parties where news items emanate from the organisations in general, not from an individual involved with the organisation.
- Individual or Personal sources include persons whether in official or unofficial capacities who would pass on some information for news purposes.



9.8 FURTHER READING

- Bhatt, S.C (1993) Broadcast Journalism- Basic Principles. Har-Anand Publications Pvt Ltd.
- Baruah, U.L This is All India Radio. Publications Division
- Belavadi , Vasuki (2007) Video Production. Oxford University Press
- Sahay, Uday (2002) Making News-Handbook of the Media in Contemporary India . Oxford University Press

- David, J (2007) Radio Broadcasting Journalism. New Delhi : Cyber Tech Pub
- Kundra, Shipra (2005) Basic Audio Visual Media. Anmol Publications Pvt Ltd.

9.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q.No 1 : General assignment

Ans to Q.No 2 : When the journalists interpret the news or offer opinions to the listeners, then they are called commentators or columnists.

Ans to Q. No 3 : During live reporting, the reporter should identify himself/ herself at the close of the story. This is because the anchor will have already given the name of the reporter while connecting to him/her.

Ans to Q. No 4 : The job of a radio reporter involves a variety of tasks including covering news stories, investigating leads and news tips, examining documents, observing events at the scene, and interviewing people and taking notes. Back at the station newsroom, they organize the material, determine the focus or emphasis, write out their stories, and edit the accompanying sound material. Many reporters enter information or write stories using laptop computers and electronically submit the material to their offices from remote locations. In some cases, news writers write a story from the information collected and submitted by reporters. Radio reporters often compose stories and report “live” from the scene.

Ans to Q.No 5 : Some of the important qualities of a radio news reporter are intelligence, knowledge, curiosity, comprehension, judgment, persistence, objectivity of reporting, rational thought etc.

Ans to Q.No 6 : Objectivity of reporting means being neutral in reporting and not taking sides. A reporter may be inclined towards a particular ideology, but that should not be reflected in his/her reporting of any

event or phenomenon. It is also one of the pre-requisites of good reporting. Standing with the truth and truth alone is what good journalists do.

Ans to Q.No 7 : Curiosity is an important quality of a good reporter because he needs to be curious enough to go beyond the surface. Reports should not take things at face value but look at things in a questioning manner. They should always have the urge to seek, or find out information about people, events, and activities and to understand them; even they need to be sceptical at times. In other words, they should have the 'nose for news'.

Ans to Q. No 8 : Immediacy, Proximity, Conflict, Consequence and importance and Drama

Ans to Q.No 9 : In news, proximity means the closeness of the news listener to the news. Proximity can be physical as well as emotional or psychological. The more is the proximity, the greater relevant is the news item for the listener.

Ans to Q.No 10 : Sources of news can be very wide and diverse. There can be two major types of sources of news. They are -**1) Impersonal or General and 2) Individual or Personal sources.**

Impersonal or General sources include sources in various government and non-government offices, industries, institutions, news agencies, and political parties where news items emanate from the organisations in general, not from an individual involved with the organisation. Normally these news items are available to anyone interested in them.

Individual or Personal sources include the persons whether in official or unofficial capacities who would pass on some information for news purposes.

Ans to Q.No 11 : The importance of sources is felt very acutely at times of crisis. This is because at normal times a personal source would act in quite a favourable manner for sharing positive information for news purposes. But, whenever a crisis comes up involving the

organisation, the same personal source may refuse to entertain the journalist's request for hints or information. So the relationship between the journalist and the sources must be of such a nature that even at times of negative development or a crisis situation, the latter does not refuse to entertain the journalists' request. The success of a journalist depends upon his ability to create a good panel of sources to a very great extent. Every reporter needs to build up his 'personal' sources which would prove vital for hinting or tipping him about news or things about to happen.

Ans to Q.No 12 : Press Trust of India (PTI), United News of India (UNI), Reuters, Associated Press (AP).



9.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q.1 "The job of a radio reporter is not only exciting but very hectic as well". Discuss the duties and responsibilities of a radio reporter.

Q.2 Mention some qualities of a good reporter.

Q.3 "A good reporter is one who is also a good interviewer". Discuss.

Q.4 "Objectivity of reporting is a major challenge reporters are faced with all the time". Explain why objectivity is also considered a yardstick of good reporting.

Q.5 Briefly enumerate the various qualities of a reporter for radio.