UNIT 11: SOME BASIC CONCEPTS AND WRITING FOR TV NEWS

UNIT STRUCTURE

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11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- define the special terminologies related to television
- explain the principles of writing for television news
- discuss the principles of preparing news copy

11.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous units, we have discussed about reporting for television. We hope by now it must be clear to you that reporting for TV is indeed a specialized job and certainly requires more concentration and skill than reporting for radio or print. This is of course due to the additional visual element in TV.

In this unit, we will explain some basic concepts and terms which are commonly used in Television and is very important for a TV professional to be familiar with. Again writing for TV requires specialized skills. Therefore, we will also discuss about writing for TV news in this unit.

So, let us begin by discussing some concepts and terminologies.

11. 3 SOME BASIC CONCEPTS

Every profession, every discipline has its own set of terminology, its own lingo which is commonly used by the members within that fraternity. Doctors commonly use medical terminology in their interactions, researchers have their own jargons and corporates speak in their own business language. Television professionals also do the same. Therefore, for every member in a television programme crew needs to be familiar with these terminologies so that they can converse easily and there is no miscommunication. Let us discuss some terms related to television.

PTC

A reporter at a news site can send the newsroom what is called **'piece to camera'** or **'stand upper'**. Here the reporter can be seen telling the story from the site. This kind of presentation immediately establishes the reporter's presence on the spot and he tells the story straight to the camera and through the camera to the viewer. It is usually placed somewhere near the middle or at the end of a story and it is usually about two to three sentences long. The tone is generally conversational, but that does not mean that it is delivered spontaneously. In most cases they work out the sentences and memorise them. The difficulty is that some reporters can do it very easily while others can never do it well. The latter should know how to write spoken language on a small note and try to memorize this as far as possible. It is not necessary to remember a very long PTC but for many even a small piece is difficult. Nowadays, portable electronic prompters are available to deal with this problem.



Framing: Framing here refers to how the shot is framed or composed, i.e., what objects and people will be visible on the screen or within the frame of the shot.

There is something important about the **framing** of this type of story by the cameraperson on location from where it should be given. The reporter should not stand against a wall or such other background unless it is relevant to the story. Preferably the reporter should be seen at the scene of the event itself and should also include something visible in the frame to that effect. Ideally, the reporter should be seen in the proximity of the most important action elements of the story being covered, not in the centre of the frame but on one side so that he appears as a part of the action and not a superimposition on it.

Sound bite:

Apart from the anchor's description of the news story and the PTC and narration of the reporter, news stories also usually contain a brief comment from an expert or a witness or any other person related to the event. This brief tape recorded comment or interview is called a **sound bite** or **'cold bite'.** The reporter/newscaster begins on camera and reads up to a certain point in the script; then the person interviewed appears on tape, making a comment relevant to the story. After the bite, the reporter/newscaster reappears so as to tag the story before moving on to another issue.

Usually a sound bite is a very short piece of a speech selected from a longer speech or an interview depending on the importance pf the words in view of the story in consideration.

As the context of what is being said is missing, it is quite easy to misinterpret or manipulate the interviewee's words and place it in a completely different context. Journalists need to refrain from such activities and act only within the limits of ethical standards.

Politicians of the new generation are well versed in the skill of giving clear and to the point sound bites. News stories are almost incomplete without the use of sound bites. Good news stories contain at least one sound bite. Sound bites are useful to help guide **footage** editors focus on parts of dialogue that help advance the overall message.

The term is sometimes written incorrectly (or ironically) as "sound byte".



Footage: Raw, unedited, video recorded material. Also known as **rushes**.

Logging

Logging means making a note of or writing down what is on the tape after the video has been gathered. The purpose of logging a tape is to make sure that there is no confusion later regarding what footage is in which tape and in what order. Although this is generally used to prepare for editing, this is a good activity for reviewing the quality of shots - what went right and where there are areas for improvements. Also, when editing, this is a good way to find out if there is a shot that they didn't get and still need to get.

The name of the video tape being logged, the names of the people in the team, the date of shooting are all written down carefully on the log sheet so that it serves as a ready reference. The name written on the video tape

itself should be the name written on the log sheet. That way they are easily paired up if the log sheet and tape get separated.

Ambience Sound

In radio as well as television, there are four types of sound that together make up the sound design of a programme. These are the spoken words, music, special effects and the *diegetic* or *ambience sound.* Of the four elements, while spoken word relates to the monologues and dialogues etc, music can be any element that is instrumental or with lyrical verses added later on; SFX or special effects are the transitions and several other add on effects that are used to enhance the feel of the programme; ambience sound is the diegetic or 'natural sound' that is present at the time of recording/ shooting. All the other elements of sound design can be added later on to create an illusion as if they were present at the scene of action. However, only the ambience sound is present when recording. Ambience sound helps create a sense of what the surrounding is like.

It is necessary to record ambience sound both in fiction and non-fiction programmes. Especially in case of shooting nonfiction programs, particularly news, ambience sound plays an important role in establishing the context. Ambience sound arises from the shooting location itself. For example, the sounds of people chattering, the rush of vehicles and the sound of the horns.



LET US KNOW

Sound can be either **diegetic** or **non-diegetic**.

Sound whose source is visible on the screen is called **diegetic sound**. Examples include voices of characters, sounds made by objects in the story, music coming from instruments in the story space. It is also known as **actual sound.**

Sound whose source is neither visible on the screen nor has been implied to be present in the action is called **non-diegetic sound**. Examples include narrator's commentary, sound effects which is added for the dramatic effect etc. It is also known as commentary sound.

OB Van

Often we see that the reporter on location can have a conversation with the presenter in the studio. This is because the reporter can send and receive signals to the studio with the help of an outdoor broadcast van (OB Van).

The OB van is the heart of any big Electronic News Gathering (ENG) or Electronic Field Production (EFP) unit. All signals - both video and audio - come to the OB van, are processed there and then broadcast. A typical OB van is a small vehicle which is divided into three major portions.

The first portion is where the director sits with technicians. This portion has the **video mixer** and a wall of video monitors. These monitors get all the video feeds or inputs from various sources. In the next portion the sound is managed. The last portion of the van is the video store. The video store has a collection of video tapes and could also have a live event system that is used for slow motion pictures and replays, particularly useful in sports events.

A satellite dish is located on the roof of the OB Van. It also has the main transmitter, i.e the high power amplifier (HPA).

The dish antenna on the OB van transmits signals to a satellite which are being downlinked at the **earth station**. The earth station routes the pictures and sound to the bulletin on air, which sends back the sound of the presenter. The sound from the channel's earth station then travels back to the OB van by satellite, which in turn is connected to the reporter's earphone.



Video Mixer: It is a device used to select between several video sources and add special effects. It is also known as **vision mixer**, **video switcher** or **production switcher**.



Earth Station: Terrestrial end of a communications link to a satellite.

Live Telecast

Live Telecast means telecast of an event as and when it actually happens in real time. In modern times, live telecast has become one of the most widely practiced phenomenon of TV journalism. TV news channels usually opt for this technique to make the news coverage more enthralling. The most widely accepted live telecast is of the sporting events like cricket matches etc., when the viewers stay glued to their TV sets in order to remain updated with the developments. Nowadays, this technique is also being applied during the time of election coverage and Parliament sessions. We also encounter live telecasts during any breaking events in order to grab

the viewers' attention. With the help of high end sophisticated techniques news channels telecast live programmes.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q. 1. Define the following terms:

a. PTC

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b. Sound bite

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c. OB Van

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Q. 2. What is the importance of logging?

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Q. 3. What do you mean by ambience sound? What is its significance?

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ACTIVITY 11.1

Watch NDTV 24X7 or News Live television news channel and carefully notice the manner in which PTC is delivered. How many times in a particular news story does a reporter appear on screen, the way he delivers the PTC – the posture, the background and the content of the PTC etc. Make a note of it and practice on your own.

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11. 4 PRINCIPLES OF TV NEWS WRITING

11.4.1 Preparing News copy

When you've got a thing to say,Say it! Don't take half a day…Life is short— a fleeting vapour—Don't you fill the whole paperWith a tale which at a pinch,Could be covered by an inch!Boil her down until she simmers,Polish her until she glimmers

———Joel Chandler Harris in *Broadcast Journalism* (Cohler, 1985)

Television news presentation is an audio-visual presentation where the language and style of the news should be such that it conveys the thrill and excitement, the urgency and pathos of a given event.

Preparing a news copy is something reporters are engaged in, day in and day out. Though it may appear to be a normal, everyday thing to do, it is actually a very challenging job. The process begins the moment a reporter is assigned to cover an event. He visualizes the news story before he starts shooting the event. It is not only enough for him to record the incident and report it on screen. He has to coordinate with the cameraperson and allied staff (light men etc) to get the necessary visuals. Again he has to think about 'angle' for the news story. Finalizing the 'angle' means deciding from

which perspective to look at the incident because a single event can have various dimensions.



Cutaway: A shot which is inserted in the middle of another continuous shot.

Once these preliminary decisions are made, he records the event. Covering an event implies its coverage both in audio and video forms. Different shots of the same action are taken, from different angles so as to convey the desired meaning. It is also important to include extra shots which can be used as **cutaways** in editing. Cutaways are extremely important and an absolute necessity. Remember, your story will be broadcast over the TV Channel. In case the channel decides to take a stance and set an agenda that involves your story, the anchor will have to speak at length using your footage. If you don't have enough footage, the channel will have to show the same footage over and over again, as we see in today's news bulletins. That is why, along with the basic footage, cutaways are equally important. For example, if you are interviewing a street vendor or a shopkeeper where something has happened, or a shopkeeper who has been looted by the local goonda. Don't ust stop with interviewing the shopkeeper and the employees or shooting the broken showcases, furniture, etc. Take footage of the street, the other shops, establishing the locality. If time permits, go ahead and shoot the approach road to the shop and interview some neighbours. This allows the channel editors to build up the story for broadcast, making it more interesting for the viewers. Audio is recorded in the form of ambience (natural) sound, sound bites of relevant people of the event and piece-to-cameras (PTCs) of the reporter.

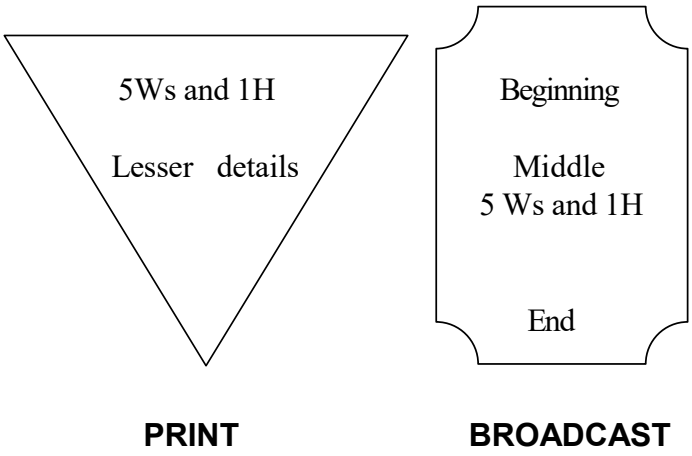
Finally when the shooting is over, the reporter comes back to the office and may either do the editing of the news story himself or take the help of technical editors who are specially engaged for the purpose of editing.

But before the actual editing can begin, the reporter has to prepare a news copy. While writing copy based on the report gathered, the script writer/ reporter should examine the following points:

- Story points: What are the things that need to be highlighted
- Pictures: See if relevant visuals are present and if not, how to make do with the existing footage.

- Narration, referred to as Voice-overs (VO), and bites also known as Sound–on-Tape (SOT): This is the audio that describes the related pictures.
- Hand out materials such as press release: These are materials that are provided by the PR personnel engaged in the event. These help decide on the 'angle' of the story besides providing valuable background information.
- Time allotted: A news story can run for 30 seconds or continue for several minutes. The time available for the news story is a key factor in deciding the content of the news story.

As far as the general structure of a television news story is concerned, most news channels follow a definite pattern. However unlike the inverted pyramid style of a print news story the TV news story follows a straight line or chronological order. The five Ws and one H are answered in each sentence. The sentences of broadcast media are much smaller than the print media news stories. The script writer follows the rule of giving one idea per sentence.



Writing Styles for Print and Broadcast Media

You can condense the formula for TV news story into the acronym WHAT.

W What happened

H How did it happen

A Amplify the intro

T Tie up loose ends

When preparing a news copy, the first important thing you need to remember is that all television news stories have three different parts - the beginning, middle and end. If you carefully watch how news is presented in all television news channels, you will notice these three different parts. Let us discuss briefly about these three different parts.

The Beginning

You don't need a pen or keyboard to begin writing a television news story. You do need an organized mind and knowledge of your viewers' interests and concerns. Before you put the first word on paper or enter the first sentence in your computer, you will think about the story and its effect on viewers' lives.

- **What's In it For Me?**

When writing the beginning of a news story, find a WIFM for your story or What's In it For Me? It is the question you should imagine every viewer asking. When you are faced with a news story, ask what's in it for your viewers. Viewers will not listen to or watch for long a story that does not affect them. Finding a WIFM helps news writers know which information should be included in and omitted from stories and hence stay focused.

- **Focus**



Wire copy: News coming in from news agency or wire services.

The focus of your television news story is the point or points you want viewers to understand. If you are using **wire copy** as a source of information for a story, your job is to choose from the wire copy information that will interest your viewers. You put that information into context by defining a focus.

- **The Lead**

By asking a WIFM you define a focus. You separate information that should be included in a story from that which shouldn't. You have a general plan for the direction your story will take based on your viewers' interests and concerns. Now you are ready to pick up a pen or sit at a keyboard.

The first sentence of a television news story is called its lead. Television news stories need to hook or grab viewers' at the very beginning and pull them into the story. They need to start strong. They need a good lead. The lead is the most important sentence you will write.

In searching for a strong lead, don't exaggerate the story. Don't distort or misinterpret it. Do look for the most compelling way to draw viewers into the story. Your first sentence may determine whether viewers stay tuned.

The Middle

A television news writer starts strong with a lead that grabs or hooks viewers. It is the "sell", which means you sell the story through the lead. Then the writer delivers the goods, following the lead with the "tell". You know about the 5Ws and H. These are the six questions journalists traditionally strive to answer in their stories. Your job as a television news writer is to answer questions. This can be done in the form of a voice over that narrates the story over relevant visuals interspersed with related sound bites. In this part of the news story, the reporter can make an appearance in the form of a **Bridge PTC**.



Bridge PTC: This kind of PTC is used when it is not possible to show something visually, or when the reporter wants to show the scene of action. Bridge PTC can also be used when there is a diversion in the story.

All journalists strive to answer the basic questions. But print and wire copy writer have a luxury television news writers do not – the luxury of time. Print and wire copy stories can fill paragraphs and pages with detailed answers to readers' questions. Television news stories must be short to keep viewers' attention. How long does it stay interesting to you? Time constraints on television news stories virtually guarantee writers will be forced to cut some information.

What is acceptable information to leave out of your television news stories? How much is too much to leave out? As you become more comfortable writing news stories, you become more confident of the decisions you make about including and omitting information. As you come to know your viewers better, you come to recognize the information that will interest them. As you better educate yourself about the top issues affecting your viewers, you become better able to recognize the information that impacts and relates or adds context to those issues.

The End

In this part of the news story, the news writer puts an ending to the story. He may do this in different forms. The reporter may summarize the entire story by a personal appearance before the camera in the form of a PTC or may even end it in a Voice Over. The news story may even conclude with a promise to the viewers to bring more information in subsequent stories.

For example: “We’ll continue to follow this story and will bring you all the details”; or “We’ll update you on this story as details become available.” However, it should be remembered that false promises are dangerous and should be avoided.

Basics of film making

Along with the above skills it is important that a TV News reporter learn the basics of film making. Even though in many cases, a cameraman accompanies a TV Reporter, it is the duty of the TV reporter to direct the cameraman as to how a shot is to be taken, the angel of the camera, the types of shots that have to be taken. Sometimes, an OS (Over the shoulder shot) is better while conducting an interview. At the same time a low angel shot may look odd if a reporter is interviewing a criminal. A shot against the light may give a bad picture, wheras in certain cases, a silhouette may add effect to the story.

Above all, one must remember that along with social responsibility, media is a business and a reporter can earn name for herself if she is able to give visually good footage along with a good story. Whatever the logic behind it, good TRP rating always boosts the earnings of a TV Channel and it would be the duty of a reporter to think of contributing towards it.



LET US KNOW

Six steps to news copy preparation:

1. Understand the news-worthiness of an incident.
2. Grab the story line and then proceed for collecting facts through research/ interview/ dialogue/ documentary/ archive etc.
3. News judgment intuitions and writing skills should then be applied.
4. Determine the essential elements of information of the press release or report. Always use the Ws and H formula and organize the elements in order of importance.
5. The lead should be written with only one important feature.
6. The rest of the details should be placed in the order of diminishing importance.

11.4.2 RULES FOR WRITING FOR TELVISION

Here are a few rules to follow while writing news for television.

1. Write in conversational, informal style.

2. Be specific, simple and direct. Vague, generalized action or information tends to be confusing. The first requirement for writing news for broadcast is clarity. Understanding must be immediate.

3. Avoid flowery language.

4. Be brief. Each sentence, ideally, should contain only one idea or image. Give them a unit of information at a time. If you give them too much information all at once, they can't take it in.

5. Use appropriate words. Keep a dictionary and a thesaurus handy. Make use of it at the slightest instance of doubt.

6. Be sure you know the meaning of the words you use. Be aware of fine distinctions in words. (example: difference between "says" and "claims").

7. Choose words that are familiar to everyone in the audience. Do not use technical jargons unless absolutely necessary.

8. Write in present tense and active voice.

9. Do not bombard the viewer with huge numbers and figures. The fewer figures the better. Round off wherever possible, except in cases where the exact number is significant.

10. Spell out figures from one to eleven. Use numerals for 12 -999. Use hyphenated combinations of numerals and words for figures above 999. (Example: 33 - thousand.)

11. Avoid errors in writing the script. A news script with grammatical errors is difficult to read and could land the news anchor in very awkward situations.

12. Underline words that require special emphasis or words that may be difficult to pronounce. In case of difficult pronunciations,

particularly in case of names of people and places write down the pronunciation also beside the word.

13. Never split words or hyphenated phrases from one line to the next.

14. Avoid abbreviations, except in cases where the abbreviation is more popular or better known than the

15. Cross-check facts for accuracy before you write.

16. Identify all people clearly. Be careful while using attribution. Don't end a sentence with attribution. It should always come at the beginning of the sentence. (Example: Don't write **"……", the Prime Minister said**. Instead write **The Prime Minister said, " ……"**)

17. Don't begin a story with a person's name unless the person is famous. Use a "qualifier" to introduce the person. Include the name later. (Example: Chairperson of the company, Prakash Das)

18. Use complete name in the first reference, thereafter use just the last name or first name.

19. Omit doubtful names and places if they are not meaningful to the story.

20. If age must be mentioned, the age has to come before name. (Example: The victim, 21-year-old Rob Roy.)

21. Use direct quotes carefully and sparingly. It is better to use sound bites. If sound bites are not available on tape, and it is unavoidable to use a direct quote, then set it off with such phrases as: "In the words of.." "As he put it..." or try to paraphrase as much as possible.

22. Avoid use of the word 'meanwhile'. Most news channels make indiscriminate and liberal use of this word, which is incorrect. Use it only when a close relationship exists between subject matter and intervening time.

23. Grab the audience's attention by writing a strong lead.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q. 4. Write the basic rules of writing numbers in a television news story.

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Q. 5. Write the basic rules of writing titles and names in a television news story.

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Q.6. Unlike the inverted pyramid style of a print news story the TV news story follows a _____ or chronological order.

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Q.7. What is a bridge PTC?

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Q.8. What are the 5Ws and 1H?

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ACTIVITY 11.2

1. Prepare a television news copy on an important happening in your locality. Use the basic principles of writing a television news story keeping in mind its three different parts.
2. Rewrite the following passage into a television news story using the basic guidelines of broadcast writing that you have learnt:

New Delhi, Jan 18 (PTI) The Government's decision to reduce troops in Jammu and Kashmir was open to review "as and when the situation demands", Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee said today.

"The decision was taken in the context of a particular situation. It is always subject to review. If the number of infiltrators increase or the situation deteriorates, of course there will be a review of this decision," he told reporters after an Investiture Ceremony of the National Cadet Corps (NCC) at their Republic Day camp here.

To a question on recent terrorist attacks in J and K, he said the decision would be reviewed "as and when the situation demands" but these attacks "are not enough reason.

Observing that the prevailing levels of infiltration has gone down, Mukherjee said the terrorists always chose major national events like Republic Day or Independence Day or the visits by certain foreign dignitaries to grab world attention.

The Defence Minister said India has been consistently emphasizing that Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf "should stick to his own commitment" that Pakistani soil would not be allowed to be used for terrorism and anti-India activities.

Maintaining that militancy depended on the logistical support provided to it, he said the current reduction in cross-border infiltration of terrorists was "mostly due to fencing and stepping up of vigilance by security forces".

To a question on the confidence-building measures (CBMs) with Pakistan, Mukherjee said it was unfortunate that "continuous and unabated support" was still being given to militants by that country.

11.5 LET US SUM UP

- A reporter at a news site can send the newsroom what is called 'piece to camera' or 'stand upper'.
- A sound bite or 'cold bite' is a type of story that includes a brief video-taped interview with someone relevant to the news story.

- Logging means making a note of or writing down what is on the tape after the video has been gathered.
- Ambience sound is the diegetic or 'natural sound' that is present at the time of recording/shooting. Ambience sound helps create a sense of what the surrounding is like.
- Live Telecast means telecast of an event as and when it actually happens in real time.
- The OB van is the heart of any big Electronic News Gathering (ENG) or Electronic Field Production (EFP) unit. All signals-both video and audio-come to the OB van, are processed there and then broadcast.
- A television news story can be divided into three basic parts: Introduction, Body and Conclusion

11.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans. to Q. No. 1 :

a) **PTC: PTC** stands for **piece to camera.** When the reporter tells the story directly to the audience (through the camera) from the site, it is called PTC. It is also known as stand-upper. This kind of presentation immediately establishes the reporter's presence on the spot.

b) **Sound bite:** Apart from the anchor's description of the news story and the PTC and narration of the reporter, news stories also usually contain a brief comment from an expert or a witness or any other person related to the event. This brief tape recorded comment or interview is called a **sound bite** or **'cold bite'.**

c) **OB Van:** OB van or Outdoor Broadcast van is a vehicle which contains all the necessary equipment necessary for any big Electronic News Gathering (ENG) or Electronic Field Production (EFP). It is like a mobile studio which can go anywhere and broadcast programmes directly form the field. Live telecast from the field is absolutely impossible to achieve without the presence of OB Van.

Ans to Q. 2) Logging means making a note of or writing down what is on the tape after the video has been gathered. The purpose of logging a tape is to make sure that there is no confusion later regarding what **footage** is in which tape and in what order. Although this is generally used to prepare for editing, this is a good activity for reviewing the quality of shots - what went right and where there are areas for improvements. Also, when editing, this is a good way to find out if there is a shot that they didn't get and still need to get.

Ans to Q. No. 3) Ambience sound is the diegetic or 'natural sound' that is present at the time of recording/shooting. The significance of ambience sound is that it helps create a sense of what the surrounding is like. It is necessary to record ambience sound both in fiction and non-fiction programmes. Especially in case of shooting nonfiction programs, particularly news, ambience sound plays an important role in establishing the context.

Ans to Q. No. 4) When writing numbers for television news, the following rules should be kept in mind:

- Spell out figures through ELEVEN. Use numerals for 12-999. Use hyphenated combinations for numerals and words above 999. (Example: 33 -thousand.)
- Round off numbers unless the exact number is significant.
- Use "st," "nd," "th," and "rd" after dates, addresses and numbers to be read as ordinary numbers. (Example: "2nd Street," "May 14th")

Ans to Q. No. 5) When writing *titles and names* for television news, the following rules should be kept in mind:

- Titles precede names.
- Use complete name in the first reference, then last name OR first name thereafter.
- Omit obscure names and places if they are not meaningful to the story.

- Use phonetic spellings for difficult pronunciations.
- In age reference, precede the name with the age. (Example: The victim, 21-year-old Rob Roy.)

Ans to Q. No. 6) Straight line.

Ans to Q. No. 7) Bridge PTC is a kind of PTC which is used when it is not possible to show something visually, or when the reporter wants to show the scene of action. Bridge PTC can also be used when there is a diversion in the story.

Ans to Q. No. 8) **5 Ws** — Who, What, When, Where, Why and **H** - How



11.7 FURTHER READING

1. Belavadi, Vasuki (2007) Video Production. Oxford University Press
2. Kaushik, Sharda (2003) Script to Screen : An Introduction to TV Journalism. New Delhi : Macmillan India Limited.
3. Hyde, Stuart W. (1998) Television and Radio Announcing. New Delhi : Kanishka Publishers.



11.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q.1. A TV journalist has to speak in the language of television. Why?

Q.2. Write the salient principles of writing news for television.

Q.3. How and why do you think there has been a steady decline in the quality of television news content?