

Unit Introduction

All too often, public affairs offices focus their efforts on the print and television mediums because we think in terms of the largest impacts on publics. Don't forget about radio as a viable medium to all your publics! There will be times when the public affairs office will have to deliver a radio release, statement or public service announcement over the radio.

If you want information disseminated to radio stations to be read, you have to learn how to write in a style they can use.

So far in this course, you've written material for print publication. This unit of instruction will prepare you for formatting information in broadcast writing style.

Unit Objective

- Write a public service announcement

Unit Overview

- The six "Cs" of broadcast writing
- Broadcast punctuation
- PSAs
- Attention step
- Appeal step
- Telling point

The six Cs: Clear copy

There are six basic rules for building broadcast copy, four of which match what you've already learned when writing for print.

Clear copy:

- is easily understood the first time it's heard; the listener has no second chance.
- limits sentences to one main thought.

Test copy for these traits by reading it aloud for someone else.

The six Cs: Concise copy

Concise copy:

- is tightly written; each word must add to the story/report.
- consists of simple sentences.
- gets right to the main point.

The six Cs: Conversational copy

Conversational copy:

- is written the way people speak.
- uses common language and syntax.
- avoids military and technical jargon.

Test copy for these traits imagining you're talking to a friend.

The six Cs: Complete copy

Complete copy:

- answers the five Ws.
- must be complete in shorter time (30 seconds) than print.
- doesn't raise questions or leave questions unanswered.

The six Cs: Current copy

Current copy:

- is today's news only.
- conveys a sense of immediacy through verb tense.
- uses whatever tense is most natural and appropriate.
 - "present" tense whenever possible.
 - "present perfect" tense most other times.

The six Cs: Correct copy

Correct copy:

- must be free of factual errors -- your/unit/station/service credibility is at stake!

Double-check copy for correct names and dates, as well as correct use of punctuation and grammar.

Broadcast punctuation

Punctuation and grammar are used to clarify and aid the announcer's readability, interpretation and delivery of copy.

- Broadcast writing generally uses only seven punctuation marks:
 - Commas
 - Periods
 - Ellipses
 - Dashes
 - Hyphens
 - Quotation marks
 - Parentheses
- Do not use colons or semicolons.
- Use exclamation points only to place writer's emphasis -- in effect making a subjective statement -- so do not use them in hard news.

Broadcast writing structure

Broadcast news writing uses a different structure than print journalism. While the print journalist uses the inverted pyramid style, broadcast writers use the upright (normal) pyramid style.

Instead of a summary lead, you'll focus on the central fact -- or news peg -- for the broadcast lead. Then, instead of using the print style of the facts in order of importance, you'll round out your story by completing the five Ws/the H (who, what, when, where, why & how).

While the newspaper reporter may take 700 words to tell a story, you'll often have no more than 75 to 80. That's one reason radio is considered the "alerting" or "headline" medium.

You must learn to write in a more direct and conversational style. This is important because broadcast copy length is concise.

Broadcast news structure

The broadcast pyramid:

- is written as a "package."
- lead contains the central fact: what happened.
- body supports the central fact.
- limits itself to basic facts.

Broadcast copy length

For radio, copy length should not exceed:

- 30 seconds
- seven to eight lines (60-character, 12-point)
- approximately 75-80 words

For television, copy length should not exceed:

- 30 seconds
- 14 to 16 lines (35-character, 12-point)
- 75-80 words

Broadcast conversational style

The direct conversational style we have referred to involves omitting several common writing styles used for print writing. In broadcast writing, you have to be more direct and to the point.

Phrases and clauses:

- Avoid starting sentences with participle phrases: "Seeing the water, the pilot ejected."
- Avoid starting sentences with prepositional phrases: "In the event of a strike, the plant will close."
- Avoid starting sentences with dependent clauses: "If the pilot sees the water, tell her to eject."

Broadcast verbs

Broadcast copy, as we have learned, is current. So you want to use present tense whenever possible. Broadcast writers rarely use the past and future perfect tense when writing.

There are six main tenses:

- Simple (past, present, future)
 - Past: **The commander arrived last night.**
 - Present: **The commander arrives today.**
 - Future: **The commander will arrive tomorrow.**
- Perfect (past perfect, present perfect, future perfect)
 - Past perfect: **The commander has arrived.**
 - Present perfect: **The commander had arrived before.**
 - Future perfect: **The commander will have arrived.**

Present progressive tense is preferred by broadcasters:

- **The president is arriving at Andrews Air Force Base today.**
- **The family service center is holding its annual Military Family Day on post Saturday.**

Using active voice

"Voice" refers to sentence structure, not verb tense. Broadcast writing uses active voice, not passive.

Active voice:

- The crash injured four civilians.
- Brooks caught the ball.
- Favre won MVP honors.

Passive voice:

- Four civilians on the shore were injured by the crash.
- The pass was caught by Brooks.
- MVP honors had been won by Favre.

To identify passive voice, find the verb phrase. Look for a form of the verb "to be" or for a past participle. Once you have identified passive voice, restructure the sentence to make it active voice:

- Wrong: The colonel was bitten by the dog.
- Right: The dog bit the colonel.
- Wrong: The thief was arrested by the policeman.
- Right: the policeman arrested the thief.

Broadcast writing tips

- Write for the ear
- Write in a positive style
- Use contractions -- they're more conversational
- Avoid vague pronouns
- Avoid vague words -- for instance, where in radio is "here"?
- Consider your audience before using acronyms
- Avoid misplaced modifiers
- Attribute when necessary (same rules as in print journalism)
- Attribute BEFORE the assertion (unlike in print journalism)
- Use titles and names to establish position and add credibility
- Use phonetic spellings for unusual or hard-to-pronounce word

The PSA attention step

In a public service announcement, the attention step:

- gains listeners' attention
- uses emotional appeal to entice listeners to pay attention
- "engages" them -- gets them involved in the PSA
- must relate to the subject
- avoids yes/no questions
- is creative

The PSA appeal step

In a PSA, the appeal step:

- is contained in the body of the PSA
- holds the listeners' attention by addressing a need
- must answer the question "What's in it for me?"
- sticks to one main point
- never promises more than can be delivered

The PSA telling point

In a PSA, the telling point:

- is a summary statement at the end
- often ties back

PSA style rules

- Max sentence length = 20 words
- Use repetition to stress essential info or main theme
- Use character names instead of announcer when appropriate
- When phone number is used, use only one and repeat it toward end of spot
- Use three-word topic slug

Unit Summary

Writing broadcast copy is just one of the tools in a PA tool kit for getting out information. When you see how this works in conjunction with your communication plan, it's easy to see how effective PSAs are and how they can increase your effectiveness in disseminating information and informing the public.