



WRITING VIDEO STORIES

Chapters 10 and 11

“All the News: Writing and
Reporting for Convergent Media”

Multimedia Reporting Course

BASIC VIDEO STORIES

READERS

- ▶ TV “readers”
 - ▶ Viewers see the anchor on camera speaking directly into the camera (i.e. the viewers)- no video is seen; these are usually 15-30 seconds in length
 - ▶ Often graphics (GFX) to provide additional information during a reader
 - ▶ Such GFX can be in the form of a box or key slide located over the anchor’s shoulder (OTS) that has wording or a design indicating topic
 - ▶ Character generator (CG) graphics produce written text that can go on those visuals (as well as soundbite “supers” and “crawls” at the bottom of the screen)

TV SPLIT-PAGE READER SCRIPT EXAMPLE

SHEEHAN (slug)

Anchor on camera (OC):

((On Cam))

THE FACE OF THE ANTI-WAR
MOVEMENT SAYS SHE IS ENDING HER
CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE WAR IN IRAQ

Anchor with OTS graphic of Cindy
Sheehan

((OTS))

CINDY SHEEHAN ATTRACTED
NATIONAL ATTENTION WHEN SHE SET
UP A PROTEST CAMP OUTSIDE
PRESIDENT BUSH'S TEXAS HOME IN
2005. HER SON WAS KILLED IN IRAQ IN
2004.

SHEEHAN SAYS SHE HAD HOPE
THINGS WOULD CHANGE WHEN
DEMOCRATS TOOK CONTROL OF
CONGRESS...BUT NOW FEELS THERE IS
NO POSSIBILITY THAT THE WAR WILL
END SOON.

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BASIC TV STORY: VOICE OVER

- ▶ VOs usually run under 45 seconds and incorporates video that runs while the anchor is speaking
- ▶ The anchor is usually on-camera for a sentence or two to set up the story, then viewers see video while the anchor continues speaking
- ▶ Video shown usually serves one of these purposes:
 - ▶ Show action– letting viewers see for themselves what has happened
 - ▶ Create a mood- Used in feature stories to give viewers a sense of atmosphere of a place or event
 - ▶ Connect a name with a face- Shows a person in the news to bring the story to life
- ▶ In newscasts, VOs help add to story count, which is desirable and add to the visual variety

VOICE OVER (VO) SCRIPT

BOAT (Slug)

Anchor OC

TAKE VO----

Super:

Boulder, Colorado

((On Camera))

FINALLY TONIGHT, A COLORADO MAN
BUILT HIS DREAM BOAT.

BUT HE NEEDED HELP GETTING IT OUT OF
HIS YARD.

((VO))

ED KENNEDY WORKED ON HIS 32-FOOT
SAILBOAT IN HIS BACKYARD FOR THE LAST
10 YEARS.

EVENTUALLY HE REALIZED IT WAS TOO BIG
TO MOVE.

SO A LOCAL CRANE COMPANY CAME IN
AND LIFTED THE SAILBOAT RIGHT OVER HIS
HOUSE.

NEIGHBORS SAID IT WAS THE MOST
EXCITING THING TO EVER HAPPEN IN THE
AREA.

KENNEDY PUT 67-THOUSAND DOLLARS
INTO BUILDING THE BOAT.

AND NOW THAT IT'S OUT OF HIS
BACKYARD... HE PLANS ON SAILING IT
AROUND THE WORLD.

CREATING VISUAL SEQUENCES

- ▶ A 30-second VO story may have as many as eight-to-10 different shots, a 45-second VO may have 10-15 shots (b-roll shots generally run three-to-five seconds each)
- ▶ Some basic rules of visual sequences in TV news stories:
 - ▶ Lead with the best video- think of the first footage shown as the “lead” of the sequence- the material most likely to get the message across quickly, and to capture the audience attention. Therefore, the most compelling video should be used upfront
 - ▶ Emphasize variety- have a mix of scenes and also a mix of wide, medium and close-up shots, a variety of shot lengths, and shots from different angles
 - ▶ Watch the logical structure- visual stories should follow the same rules as the spoken story, with shots from different times and places carefully placed in the proper order

TV “SPEAK”

- ▶ The words that come out of broadcasters' mouths can be full of fragments and delivered in staccato style
- ▶ Examples:
 - ▶ “President Obama in Washington today meeting with Britain's prime minister”
 - ▶ “A teen in custody...his parents dead of stabbing.”
- ▶ Such “TV speak” came out of the desire among news writers to convey as much information as possible in a short period of time
- ▶ The style also helps emphasize the visual aspects, a strength of TV
- ▶ Such writing and delivery has its critics who question the grammar and the comprehension such as when verbs and attribution may be left out in the interest of brevity
- ▶ TV speak can be positive so long as writers/journalists remember the basic questions—the 5 Ws and H— that all stories should address and answer

ADVANCED VIDEO STORIES

SOUNDBITES AND VO/SOTS

- ▶ Soundbites are the fundamental building blocks of advanced TV news
- ▶ SOTS can lend authority, variety and emotion to a story
- ▶ These should not be used to repeat words from a script, but should emphasize key points of a story or present opinions on the events
- ▶ Soundbites are usually used in voice-over sound-on-tape (VO/SOT) stories- these are read by the anchor, include VO, and then one or more SOTs
- ▶ They are also a key part of reporter packages (PKGs), which are the stories reporters and videographers shoot in the field, then put together back at the station to air during a news program

VO/SOT STORYTELLING TIPS

- ▶ Try to find a new angle- new info and video can help get people to stop what they're doing and really listen and watch a story; one angle is to try to find interesting contrasts or small stories within big stories
- ▶ Look for a person or people to wrap the story around- look for how people are affected by big decisions and changes; look for human interest and compelling personal drama-type stories
- ▶ Make sure every story contains emotional content- try to bring things down to the human level. Emotion lives at the heart of every story, and the writer's job is to find it and make it an integral part of each story
- ▶ Don't try to cover too many points- the limit is one or two points in these shorter VO/SOTs
- ▶ Carefully craft a story structure- pay attention to narrative structure: the beginning of each story should pique the viewer's interest, the middle should develop the theme, and the ending should try to leave a strong impression. Even shorter stories can leave the viewer with the feeling of digesting a full meal, not just a few morsels

REPORTER PACKAGES

- ▶ A story deemed especially important and interesting may be upgraded from VO or VO/SOT to a package (PKG or pack)
- ▶ These are prerecorded self-contained stories filed/produced by reporters
- ▶ They can run from 90 second to 10 minutes or longer
- ▶ Packages dominate video news because, more than any other type of video story, they provide the writer a chance to incorporate all the makings of a great story- good script, video, soundbites, stands up, natural sound, all in one
- ▶ Package elements:
 - ▶ Reporter narration: three or more voice tracks mixed in with field elements
 - ▶ Field elements: bits and pieces shot in the field- B-roll, SOTS, nat sound, SUs



PLANNING & PRODUCING THE PACKAGE

- ▶ Draw up a list of video shots needed to create sequences and serve as B-roll
- ▶ Make a list of people to be interviewed- look for sources who represent various viewpoints, and “real people” (someone directly affected by the situation). Also interview one or more officials who can provide a broader perspective
- ▶ Consider locations for shooting stand-ups- SUs are often “bridges” used in the middle of such reports to link different story parts/viewpoints
- ▶ Begin preparing the PKG as soon as interviewing and shooting wrap
- ▶ Many reporters will begin the writing part in the car drive back to the news station
- ▶ Review interviews and B-roll to select best soundbites and shots to tell the story. Use the strongest video to open the package
- ▶ Write then record your reporter narration to fill in any gaps- resist the temptation to write long stretches of narration, instead let the pictures tell the story



PACKAGE STRUCTURE

- ▶ Anchor Leads or Lead-ins: Packages, during live newscasts, are introduced by the anchor on the set- reporters usually write what the anchor will say to introduce their reports (example, page 199)
- ▶ Package beginning, middle, end:
 - ▶ Beginning- reporter's voice or best video; focus on recent events
 - ▶ Middle- one or more interview soundbites; a SU bridge possibly
 - ▶ End- often looks to the future- what's likely to happen next, give additional big picture perspective, or important additional information not mentioned earlier; reporter signs off at end: "Reporting from the Cistern Yard...I'm (your name)"
- ▶ Anchor Tag: after package, anchor says a line or two that wraps up what the reporter has said and works to make the anchor seem like he or she is also on top of the story ☺



BASIC PACKAGE FORMATS

Altered Chronology (script, p. 201)

- ▶ Used for many breaking news stories
- ▶ Anchor lead
- ▶ PKG begins with description of the present events
- ▶ Then segues into relevant details from the past
- ▶ Then looks ahead to the future
- ▶ Any controversial aspects fall between the past and future parts
- ▶ Soundbites run 5-10 seconds

Particular to General Model (p. 202-3)

- ▶ Good for trend stories or others that have widespread effects; aka personalization or focus model
- ▶ Reporter must find an individual who exemplifies the situation
- ▶ After the Anchor Lead, the piece begins with that person's story
- ▶ Then pulls back to discuss the general trend (nut graf)
- ▶ Story also covers any controversy, looks at likely future effects or events, then returns to the individual

CREATING ONLINE VIDEO NEWS STORIES

- ▶ Experts and analysts say the TV news formula that has worked so well on TV doesn't necessarily work well online
- ▶ “We don’t just do straight TV on the Web. Why would you watch something in linear form when you could choose the order?”— quote from ABC News Now executive producer Mike Clemente
- ▶ “Don’t do Web video if you don’t have anything interesting to show, and don’t compete with TV unless you can do something they can’t or won’t. In other words, use the medium.” —writer Kurt Anderson
- ▶ Four suggestions for creating online video (former broadcast journalist and CBS, ITN and Sky News executive Adrian Monck (p.204-5)
 - ▶ No newscasters
 - ▶ Make sense
 - ▶ Stick to your part of the story
 - ▶ Get graphics

SHIFTING RESPONSIBILITIES

- ▶ Creating advanced or sophisticated video news/feature stories is no longer a major team effort
- ▶ Today there are more one-man bands
- ▶ There are more and more of these at small market TV stations but also at large, major market stations
- ▶ These video journalists (called VJs in some places) do it all: the shooting, editing, writing and on-camera reporting)
- ▶ Critics say this comprises the quality of reporting
- ▶ But in the right hands of the right person it can work anywhere
- ▶ “I feel completely energized,” said Dan Adams of News 10 in Sacramento, Calif. “To me, it’s an extension of an artistic being. You capture these images and craft a story and that’s how I wanted it to look.”