WRITING AUDIO STORIES

Chapters 8 and 9

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

Multimedia Reporting Course
Audio Story Writing Differences

- Just as print and online writers follow a standard style, so do audio (and video) writers. Appendix B, pages 322-326, covers the basic rules.
- Sentences tend to be short and contain no more than one idea each.
- Sentence fragments are acceptable (when conversational). Story about growing airport security lines: “Bad news for the nation’s vacationers.”
- Audio stories focus on people, not things, events, policies or statistics - focus on people directly affected by the events of a story.
- Audio story leads contain fewer details - shorter leads help audience comprehension because the ear (and brain) can only process so much information at once. And there’s only so much a broadcaster can read before running out of breath. Leads should offer one key fact and feature just one or two of the 5 Ws and H elements.
- Audio leads place a higher premium on action - use active voice and descriptive verbs (but avoid exaggerating). Example: page 147.
Audio and broadcast leads tend to be the same kinds as print leads.

They are hard news/summary leads, soft/feature leads, umbrella leads.

Many broadcast leads are updated—daily hourly newscasts, for example, providing new information, the latest developments with ongoing stories.

Story structure is similar to the print inverted pyramid formula.

But because people cannot skip ahead to the next story (radio/TV) the stories need to hang together from start to finish.

Think of it as a “logical order” format—try to anticipate the listener/viewer’s next question and answer it in turn.

Look at story example on page 151.

Chronological order can be the best way if the timeline is important.

Transition word and phrases help connect one point with another and are critical in guiding the listener through even simple stories.

See list of transition words on page 153 and story example, page 154.
AUDIO STORY ENDING TYPES

- Summary/main point close-
  - restates central point
  - good for complex stories that include a lot of information
  - don’t use same words as lead, instead restate the same idea in another way

- Future ramification close- most common ending that gives the audience a peek into what is likely to happen next

- Information close-
  - provides additional information that is related to what’s already been reported in the story
  - can tell people how to take action/get involved

- Opposition POV (point of view) close- often used in stories with controversial topics, it’s a chance for the writer to present “the other side of the story”

- Punch line close- for lighter, feature stories designed to leave the audience smiling, upbeat
Radio Story Types: readers, voicers, wraps/wraparounds, live reports

TV News Story Types: readers, voice-overs (VOs), voice-over sound-on-tape (VO/SOTS), packages, live reports

Sound bites/actualities - equal to print quotes; add variety, emotional impact, credibility; also known as SOTs

Incue: on scripts, the two or three words that begin a sound bite

Outcue: on scripts, the two or three words that end a sound bite

Audio tracks - reporter’s narrative

Voice over - anchor or reporter speaking over video

A-roll - old film term for audio tracks

B-roll - term still used as name for the shots taken and used to visually tell the video story; not the same as sound bites

Nat sound - the ambient sounds that help a listener/viewer better “feel” and experience the story

Sound bites let us directly hear from (and see) the people who make our laws, police our streets, etc.

They let us hear the voices of people affected by tragedies, crime and changes in the law.

Key question that the writer/reporter should ask in determining which - if any - sound bites to use in a story: “How will the actualities help listeners better understand or envision my story?”
RECORDING INTERVIEWS

- Whether recording only audio or both audio and video (TV interviews) be sure to do so in a quiet place, as free of background sounds and noise as possible
- But sometimes the background sound enhances the interview - sirens blaring at a fire, protestors chanting at a demonstration - but make sure the sounds do not overwhelm the interview
- Always good to use headphones to monitor audio quality
- Immediately after an interview, play back some of it to make sure it’s there and that the audio and video qualities are good
- Get microphones (external or built in mics) six-to-12 inches from subject to ensure high voice quality - too far away voice will sound distant and will pick up “room noise”
- For TV/video interviews, shot composition is very important (see postings)
ADDING ACTUALITIES AND WRITING THE WRAPAROUND STORY

- Select sound bites that convey opinion, emotion, color, personality, or that expand or expound on an issue - do not use them to convey routine facts that you as the writer/reporter can say.
- “Writing in” to sound bites is an important technique - the two parts should complement each other.
- For live radio and TV, it should be written so that the story can be understood should technical problems occur and the SOT not play.
- Do not write lead ins to SOTs so that the SOT repeats what you wrote and said leading to it. This “echo” effect wastes time (example page 169).
- Radio/audio wrap or wraparound stories are the most common form.
- Name comes from its form: begins with live or recorded narration by an anchor or reporter, then we hear one or more sound bites, then returns to the anchor or reporter to finish the story.