

MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION

Notes by Shibani Phukan

TOPIC: Writing a news bulletin for the radio.

From our previous discussion on writing for the media, I hope that it has become absolutely clear that we have to constantly keep in my the target audience while doing the same. Our writing skills have to adapt according to our viewership or our listeners. When we write for the radio, this factor becomes even more pertinent. The reach of radio is even wider than that of television. In the most remote parts of our country, or any developing country especially, the radio continues to play an important role. The radio is perhaps also the most affordable, or more affordable than buying a television. Newspapers obviously demand a literate audience and given the fact that we live in a country with very poor literacy rate, accompanied by the reality of poverty, the daily newspaper, is pretty much an unaffordable commodity for the average Indian. So that leaves us with the radio as an important means of mass media, the truth of which becomes abundantly clear as soon as we leave the confines of urban or semi-urban India and move towards the rural parts of India. As I have already mentioned, illiteracy, is a big issue in our country. The average Indian, irrespective of the urban or rural divide, does not possess advanced language skills. Keeping this in mind, it is very important that one uses, ordinary, simple language, while writing for the radio, in a style that is primarily conversational.

Any radio house, be it the All India Radio or private ones like Radio Mirchi, get their news from various news agencies such as the Press Information Bureau, Press Trust of India, United News of India, Asian News International among others. The PTI is the biggest news agency in India. It is very important that one gets the news from a reliable source so that its authenticity is unquestionable. This is especially important given the fact that we live in times where fake news thrives.

Radio bulletins comprise of 3 types of material:

1. Stories in the form of a script
2. reports by journalists, live or recorded
3. Actuality - when you have a short segment in which an interview is conducted or somebody responds to a question etc.

Most news bulletins would have a format as we have previously discussed. National news followed by local news, followed by international stories, and ending the bulletin with news from the arena of sports and entertainment. The time allotted for each section depends on the total time allotted for the same, which is then divided according to the importance of the segment.

The ranking of stories is done keeping in mind the ethos of the radio station as well as the listeners it is targeting.

The news bulletin begins with the headlines - the stories that are considered the most important on that day, during that time-segment and so on.

Balance of stories is important. There needs to be a mix of stories in a bulletin keeping in mind the diversity of the audience.

Pace is another important factor. This depends to some extent on the nature of the story itself. A news about a natural disaster will not be read in the same manner as a review of a film.

Sentences should be kept short. Radio is an aural medium and the attention-span of the average human being is quite short. So short sentences work better. When writing the script for a news bulletin, punctuation therefore plays an important role as it gives you some clues about when to pause and for how long.

If a story is a complex one, telling it like a story with a timeline, a beginning, middle and an end, could work better.

Always be ready to improvise. This could mean curtailing your material, or to be ready with additional material, as the case may be.

TOPIC 2: Scripting a news programme for television.

As with radio, scripting for any television programme depends on the time available for it and the format which is usually predetermined.

A short news programme could include:

1. 3-4 national news. With some details.
2. 2-3 international news. With fewer details.
3. 2-3 sports news. It should be a mix of sports and should feature both international and national events.
4. Entertainment news in brief. New releases in films, award shows etc.
5. Weather forecast. Local, national, international.
6. a positive, off-beat, thought-provoking news to end with.

Things to keep in mind.

1. Write for the ear.
2. Avoid the passive voice.
3. Use the present tense as far as possible.
4. Get your fact right. Check. And check again.
5. Keep it neutral.
6. Do not jump into conclusions.
7. Deliver bad news, such as news about natural disasters or unnatural deaths in a sensitive manner.
8. Keep sensation at bay.
9. Protect your sources.
10. Check and then double-check things from the legal point of view. For example, rape survivors or victims cannot be named. The identity of a minor, even if accused for a crime, cannot be revealed.
11. Visuals are important. Television is a visual medium. Make sure the visuals are apt for the story, add to the story, and/or move it forward.
12. Audio plays an important role too. If using it as background audio, make sure it does not interfere with what is being shown or said.

PRACTISE:

1. Please write a newspaper report of 500 words about the homeless during the time of lockdown.
2. Write a script for a 15 minute radio news bulletin.

You could email these to shibaniphukan@gmail.com for feedback IF YOU WISH TO. These are NOT ASSIGNMENTS for which you will be marked.

