

Writing for the Ear



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We'll Start With Some Basics Universal
to Radio, TV, Social Media, Etc.



The Basics

When writing for the ear:

- Keep It Short
- Keep It Simple
- Keep it Conversational
- But Don't Dumb It Down

Keep It Short

- **Nonbroadcast:** The county sheriff conducted extensive interviews with witnesses to the accident.
- **Broadcast:** The sheriff interviewed witnesses.

Keep It Simple

- **Nonbroadcast:** Governor Chris Christie, trying to avoid a government shutdown before the start of the long Fourth of July holiday weekend, met with the State Senate Majority Leader and Assembly Speaker, to address complaints from Trenton Democrats about the governor's plan to raid Horizon Blue Cross' cash reserves to pay for drug rehabilitation programs. Leaders in the senate and assembly consider Christie's plan an overreach of government and inappropriate interference with the operations of a private, nonprofit business.
- **Broadcast:** Governor Chris Christie met with Democratic leaders in Trenton today. The Democrats aren't happy with Christie's budget proposals to fund new drug addiction programs in the state.

Keep It Conversational

- **Nonbroadcast:** David Wildstein, who orchestrated the scheme of political retribution that became known as Bridgegate and then cooperated with federal prosecutors to help convict two members of Gov. Chris Christie's inner circle, will spend no time in prison for his role in the scandal. The former Republican operative was sentenced to three years' probation and 500 hours of community service Wednesday morning. He was also fined \$10,000 and prohibited from seeking or accepting employment with any government agency.
- **Broadcast:** For one of the masterminds of Bridgegate, it could have been a lot worse. Instead of jail time, Chris Christie confidant David Wildstein was sentenced to probation and community service. He will also pay a \$10,000 fine.

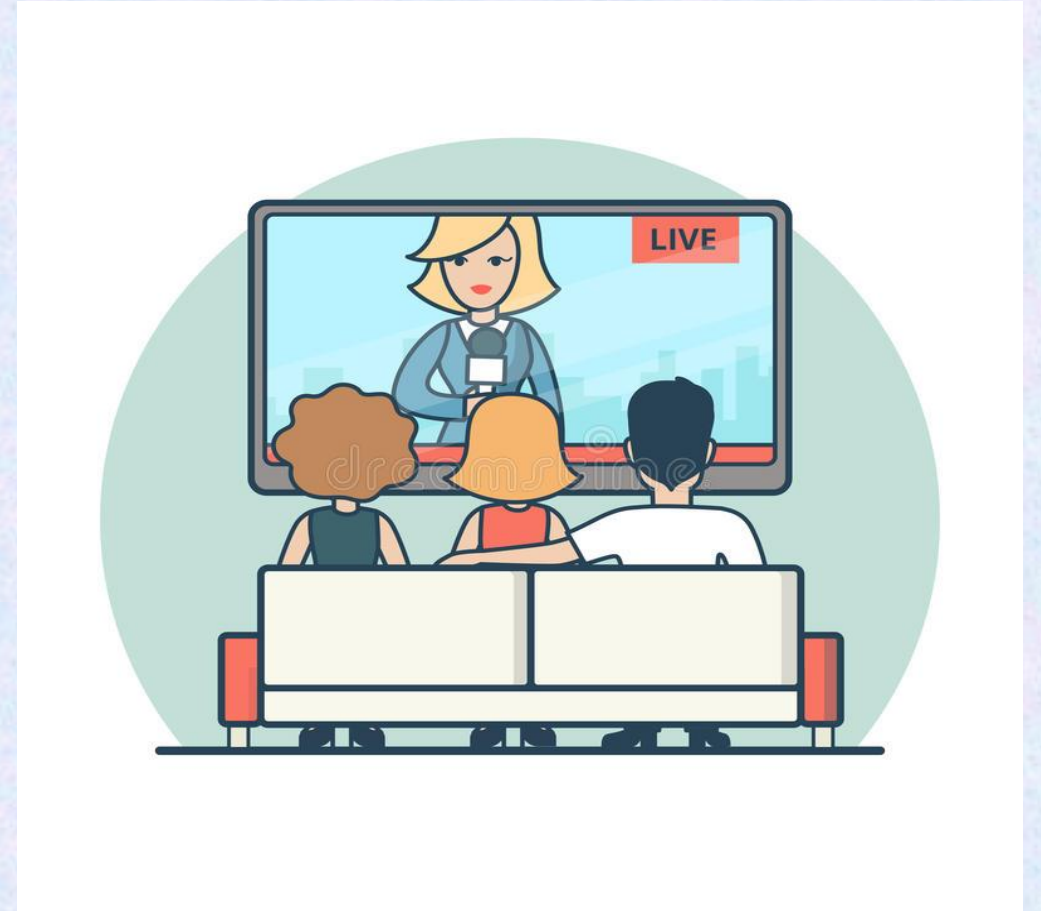
When Audio's Involved

- Give a brief lead-in that previews the sound bite
- Example: New York subway riders are concerned after police say a 28 year old man shoved a female passenger onto the tracks in Brooklyn last night.
- After the bite plays, give a quick outro with any details that weren't featured in the audio
- Example: 28-year-old Isaiah Thompson is facing assault and reckless endangerment charges--Thompson's previously been charged with pulling subway emergency brakes.

When Audio's Involved

- Don't flood your intro with information, but don't leave too much out
- You don't want to give away the contents of your sound bite in your preview
- Don't use the same phrasing in your intro that's used in the bite

But Don't Dumb It Down



Additional Basics

- **Use Active Voice:**

Passive: The protestors were arrested by police.

Active: Police arrested the protestors.

- **Use a Lead-In Sentence:**

They were cheering on Wall Street today.

- **Leave Out Unnecessary Details**

Nonbroadcast: After pulling the driver out of the school bus, the escaped convict drove 14.8 miles through two towns before being apprehended, police said.

Broadcast: Police say the women hijacked a school bus and then drove nearly 15 miles before she was caught.

Additional Basics

- **One Main Idea Per Sentence**

Nonbroadcast: Two King County Superior Court judges are asking for help cleaning up the courthouse at Third Avenue and James Street after they say two jurors and half a dozen employees have been assaulted. The judges, Laura Inveen and Jim Rogers, acknowledged Tuesday that there are difficult underlying circumstances contributing to the unsanitary and potentially frightening atmosphere around the courthouse.

Broadcast: Two King County Superior Court judges are asking for help cleaning up a county courthouse. Judges Laura Inveen and Jim Rogers say jurors and employees have been assaulted in the building. They also describe the courthouse at Third Avenue and James Street as unsanitary.

Additional Basics

- Attribution Goes at the Start of the Sentence

Nonbroadcast: Three construction workers we injured, police say.

Broadcast: Police say three construction workers we injured.

- Use words that can capture an audience and create understanding.
- Puts modifiers next to what they modify & avoids dependent clauses
- Follow linear order (subject, verb, object) as much as possible
- Read your copy aloud!!

Some Tips from the Streets of New York

- Writing for ear is even more challenging these days...as listeners have less and less time to devote to listening to anything.
- To keep it conversational, stay way from jargon or “inside speak.” For example, I stay away from “police speak” words like homicide, suspect, and vehicle because no one talks that way when speaking in a regular conversation.
- Describe the emotions of the newsmaker. When possible use audio to convey these emotion - people cheering for something, an angry witness, crying teacher, laughing child, etc.
- If you “bury” the lead the listener will lose interest. Get the critical info into the first few lines.
- Short and concise sentences. Run on sentences lose the audience.
- Avoid too many numbers. Ears glaze over with a sentence like this: *A new survey says 26 percent of the town's 812 residents shop at the mall four days a week at an average of 33 minutes each visit.* Confusing!
- Be Conversational!!

Putting the Basics into Action

- IF YOU'RE WONDERING ABOUT THE SIRENS YOU HEARD LAST NIGHT IN THE SLEEPY VILLAGE OF MARGARETVILLE, A COUPLE OF MASKED GUNMEN STOLE OVER \$500 FROM THE EXXON STATION AND GOT AWAY IN A BLUE PICK-UP TRUCK. THANKFULLY NO ONE WAS HURT, BUT THE SUSPECTS ARE STILL AT LARGE.
- TURNS OUT STUDENTS AT BAYLEY COLLEGE WEREN'T WRONG ABOUT THAT FEELING OF BEING WATCHED. CAMPUS POLICE ARE INVESTIGATING AFTER HIDDEN CAMERAS WERE FOUND IN CAMPUS PUBLIC BATHROOMS AND LOCKEROOMS. SHOCKED STUDENTS ARE DEMANDING A MEETING WITH ADMINSTRATORS TO ADDRESS SAFETY AND PRIVACY CONCERNS.

The Basics in Action

(New York, NY) -- NYPD cops really want to find a man who has attacked two people in the Bronx with a metal pipe. In the two attacks last month, the wanted man broke a woman's arm with the pipe and hit a teenager so hard he fell to the ground. Cops have released surveillance photos of the attacker, hoping someone will recognize him and turn him in.

Rewrite: THE NYPD SAYS A MAN WHO BEAT TWO BRONX RESIDENTS WITH A METAL PIPE LAST MONTH IS STILL ON THE LOOSE--HIS FIRST ATTACK BREAKING A WOMAN'S ARM AND THE SECOND KNOCKING A TEEN TO THE GROUND. SURVEILLANCE PHOTOS OF THE MAN ARE AVAILABLE ON THE NYPD'S WEBSITE.

Edits: the "when" the attack happened and the "where" to access the photos

Writing for TV

- The same rules apply!
- Be clear, concise, and get the action out in front
- Visuals help further the narrative
- When you're working with B-roll and graphics, scripts can be longer since those elements help keep the audience's attention.
- TV Example in action: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sh1P-5ssx8>

It's Friday Afternoon, So Let's Enjoy a Little Feature Audio



Some Basic Tips for Writing Promo Copy

- Commercial, professional noncommercial or student-run, a lot of stations tend to write generic promo & imaging copy:
 - ✓ *The best variety of the 90s and now is on Mix 101-point-5*
 - ✓ *For the latest news, remember to watch Campus Connection, Weeknights at 6 on Cable 12*
 - ✓ *KPPR, the Catlow Valley's source for NPR News*
 - ✓ *You're Watching ICU-TV, Indiana Central University Student Television*
 - ✓ *WRRX, The Rock Alternative*
 - ✓ *WUNI, Real College Radio*
 - ✓ *You're Tuned to News Radio KSOZ AM 1240*

Hat tip to broadcast consult Tracy Johnson for some of the examples material

Generic Copy Is...

- Safe
- Rarely becomes outdated
- Means less time in the production studio
- Generally doesn't annoy or offend listeners

There is really isn't anything inherently wrong or evil with generic imaging copy, it's just...

- BORING

Write to Capture the listener's ear!

- *We're mixing up another fresh batch of music. You can almost taste it now...Mix 101-point-5.*
- *Making you smarter by the minute. KPPR, your home for NPR, Catlow Valley news and stuff your neighbor will never know.*
- *You have to watching ICU-TV tonight at 8 because you won't believe what our reporter discovered inside ICU's Cromwell Hall.*
- *Cue WSOU Promo*



Thank You!

Questions?