



Tips For Basic Broadcast Newswriting

Keep It Short and Conversational

By [Tony Rogers](#), About.com Guide

Free Journalism Newsletter!

[Sign Up](#)
[Discuss in my forum](#)

The idea behind newswriting is pretty simple: Keep it short and to the point. Anyone writing for a newspaper or website knows this.

But that idea gets taken to a new level with it comes to writing copy for radio or television broadcasts. Here are some tips for broadcast newswriting.



Digital Vision/Getty Images

Keep It Simple

Newspaper reporters wanting to show off their writing style occasionally insert a fancy word into a story.

But that just doesn't work in broadcast newswriting. Broadcast copy must be as simple as possible. Remember, viewers aren't *reading* what you're writing, they're *hearing* it. People watching TV or listening to the radio generally don't have time to check a dictionary.

So keep your sentences simple and use basic, easily understood words. If you find you've put a longish word in a sentence, replace it with a shorter one.

Example:

Print: The physician conducted an extensive autopsy on the decedent.

Broadcast: The doctor did an autopsy on the body.

Keep It Short

Generally, sentences in broadcast copy should be even shorter than those found in print articles. Why? Shorter sentences are more easily understood than long ones.

Also, remember that broadcast copy must be read out loud. If you write a sentence that's too long, the news anchor will be gasping for breath just to finish it. Individual sentences in broadcast copy should be short enough to be easily read in one breath.

Example:

Print: President Barack Obama and congressional Democrats sought to ease Republican complaints about a massive economic stimulus plan Friday, meeting with GOP leaders in the White House and promising to consider some of their recommendations.

Broadcast: President Barack Obama met with Republican leaders in Congress today. The Republicans aren't happy with Obama's big economic stimulus plan. Obama says he'll consider their ideas.

Keep It Conversational

Many sentences found in newspaper stories simply sound stilted and unwieldy when read out loud. So use a conversational style in your broadcast writing. Doing so will make it sound more like real speech, as opposed to a script someone is reading.

Example:

Print: Pope Benedict XVI joined U.S. President Barack Obama and Queen Elizabeth II on Friday by launching his own YouTube channel, the latest Vatican effort to reach out to the digital generation.

Broadcast: President Obama has a Youtube channel. So does Queen Elizabeth. Now Pope Benedict has one too. The pope wants to use the new channel to reach out to young people.

Use One Main Idea Per Sentence

Sentences in newspaper stories sometimes contain several ideas, usually in clauses that are broken up by commas.

But in broadcast writing you really shouldn't put more than one main idea in each sentence. Why not? You guessed it - more than one main idea per sentence, and that sentence will be too long.

Example:

Print: Gov. David Paterson appointed Democratic U.S. Rep. Kirsten Gillibrand on Friday to fill New York's vacant Senate seat, finally settling on a woman from a largely rural, eastern district of the state to replace Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Broadcast: Gov. David Paterson has appointed Democratic Congresswoman Kirsten Gillibrand to fill New York's vacant Senate seat. Gillibrand is from a rural part of the state. She will replace Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Use The Active Voice

Sentences written in the active voice just naturally tend to be shorter and more to the point than those written in the passive voice.

Example:

Passive: The robbers were arrested by police.

Active: Police arrested the robbers.

Use a Lead-in Sentence

Most broadcast news stories start with a lead-in sentence that is fairly general. Broadcast newswriters do this to alert viewers that a new story is being presented, and to prepare them for the information that is to follow.

Example:

"There's more bad news today from Iraq."

Note that this sentence doesn't say very much. But again, it lets the viewer know that the next story is going to be about Iraq. The lead-in sentence almost serves as a kind of headline for the story.

Here's an example of a broadcast news item. Note the use of a lead-in line, short, simple sentences and a conversational style.

There's more bad news from Iraq. Four U.S. soldiers were killed in an ambush outside Baghdad today. The Pentagon says the soldiers were hunting insurgents when their Humvee came under sniper fire. The Pentagon hasn't yet released the soldiers' names.

Put Attribution at the Start of the Sentence

Print news stories usually put the attribution, the source of the information, at the end of the sentence. In broadcast newswriting we put them at the beginning.

Example:

Print: Two men were arrested, police said.

Broadcast: Police say two men were arrested.

Leave Out Unnecessary Details

Print stories tend to include a lot of details that we just don't have time for in broadcast.

Example:

Print: After robbing the bank the man drove approximately 9.7 miles before being apprehended, police said.

Broadcast: Police say the man robbed the bank then drove nearly 10 miles before he was caught.

Some news story samples courtesy of The Associated Press

Follow me on [Facebook](#) & [Twitter](#)

Related Searches [Broadcast Copy](#) [Barack Obama](#) [Television Broadcasts](#) [Economic Stimulus Plan](#) [Gop Leaders](#) [Congress Today](#)
