



MALAWI REPORTING

COVERING THE TRIPARTITE ELECTIONS



USAID
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**INSTITUTE FOR
WAR & PEACE REPORTING**



INSTITUTE FOR WAR & PEACE REPORTING
iwpr.net

IWPR Europe

48 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8LT, United Kingdom
Tel: +44 20 7831 1030

IWPR Netherlands

Zeestraat 100, 2518 AD The Hague, The Netherlands
Tel: +31 70 338 9016

IWPR United States

729 15th Street, NW Suite 500, Washington, DC 20005, United States
Tel: +1 202 393 5641

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Cover photo: Graham Holliday

**INSTITUTE FOR
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The Institute for War & Peace Reporting

The Institute for War & Peace Reporting gives voice to people at the frontlines of conflict and transition to help them drive change. IWPR empowers citizens and their communities to make a difference – building their skills, networks and institutions, supporting development and accountability, forging peace and justice.

Working in three dozen countries, IWPR's innovative programs are crafted to respond to the needs of the people they serve. Projects prioritise locally informed objectives and lead to sustainable outcomes. Beneficiaries include citizen and professional journalists, human rights and peace activists, policymakers, educators, researchers, businesses, and women's, youth and other civil society organisations and partners.

Headquartered in London with coordinating offices in Washington, DC and The Hague, IWPR is overseen by an international board of trustees made up of internationally recognized journalists and media professionals, business and financial sector executives, philanthropists and civil society leaders. Its 125-person global staff is led by an executive management team of experts in media and governance, program development and management, policy and advocacy, financial development, finance and human resources.

About IWPR's Programmes

The strength of IWPR's programming is rooted in its ability to help individuals and groups develop the knowledge, skills, relationships and platforms they need to communicate clearly, objectively, effectively, persuasively and safely and to use that knowledge and those tools to affect positive change. Projects and initiatives are developed in partnership with local organizations and are designed to meet the unique needs of the individuals and groups they will serve and the communities in which they operate.

IWPR's Global Programming Focus

Promoting Free Expression

IWPR builds the skills of professional and citizen journalists working in traditional media (newspapers and magazines, radio, TV) and in social and new media (Facebook, Twitter, Internet news magazines and portals, blogs and other online vehicles). Programs train and mentor them to report fairly and objectively with the goal of achieving internationally recognized standards of reporting and analysis. Reporters, editors, producers, bloggers, and managers learn the value of producing substantive content that informs while helping to define the roles of citizens, civil society, government, the media, business and others in building fair, pluralistic, democratic systems that value and respect the opinions of all constituencies. Whether in repressive or closed societies, transitional environments, or democratically developing states, IWPR encourages the development and exercise of freedom of expression, assembly, and belief and uses journalism as a tool to advance peace and social justice.

Strengthening Accountability

Working with international and local partners, IWPR supports the capacity of civil society and human rights groups to more effectively advocate for government and institutional accountability and transparency, with programming designed to reduce corruption, strengthen rule of law, and promote basic rights. It promotes and publicizes the work of international courts and tribunals that support justice and hold individuals and groups responsible for crimes against humanity. IWPR helps communities to more effectively fight against immediate and longer-term threats by building knowledge, empowering, and supporting citizen activism, and helps countries and regions to heal from conflict and war through support for transitional justice.

Building inclusive Societies

IWPR has supported peace and reconciliation in conflict zones around the world for 20 years. These efforts, along with campaigns and activities that encourage free and fair elections, counter extremism, and enhance the ability of civil society organizations to be effective, are all critical to building societies that value and build on the strengths of all of their peoples, including their women, youth, minorities, and traditionally marginalized communities. Societies are most inclusive and cohesive, and strive for the benefit of all citizens, when economies are strong, people are healthy, and the populace is educated; hence, IWPR's focus on these areas of concern.

IWPR employs a skilled staff and expert consultants in a variety of fields to support its capacity-building activities and to assist in providing journalists, civil society and civic activists with the basic and advanced skills and knowledge that support sustainable and positive change. It employs tools and technologies in programming that encourages citizen understanding, participation, and involvement and builds local expertise. All programs and projects are measured and evaluated to ensure that future initiatives and those who participate in them benefit from valuable "lessons learned"

IWPR Malawi

IWPR Project Manager:
Cheulekene Mita

Trainer:
Ivor Gaber

MALAWI REPORTING

Covering the Tripartite Elections

**Handbook for the USAID/NDI/IWPR
Course in Election Reporting for Malawi**

By Ivor Gaber

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Introduction

This Course Handbook has been produced to accompany the USAID/NDI/IWPR Course in Election Reporting, which is being run for Malawian journalists in the run-up to the 2014 Elections. The Handbook, which follows the day-by-day course programme, contains copies of the slides used during the course plus a great deal more supporting material. In particular, given that the majority of the participants in the course come from radio stations, we have included detailed advice about radio journalism. However, it is important to note that the material presented in text boxes throughout the text represents PowerPoint presentations and can be best understood in the context of the course itself. In addition, IWPR previously produced a book “Live from Africa: a Handbook for African Radio Journalists” which can be downloaded for free from:

<http://iwpr.net/live-africa-handbook-african-radio-journalists>

IWPR gives voice to people at the frontlines of conflict, crisis and change. From Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, IWPR helps people in the world's most challenging environments have the information they need to drive positive changes in their lives — holding government to account, demanding constructive solutions, strengthening civil society and securing human rights. Amid war, dictatorship, and political transition, IWPR forges the skills and capacity of local journalism, strengthens local media institutions and engages with civil society and governments to ensure that information achieves impact.

The National Democratic Institute's support for IWPR is part of a program funded by the United States Agency for International Development to foster an inclusive, transparent and credible electoral process, as well as greater citizen participation in local governance following the elections in Malawi and is made possible by the support of the American people.

1. What Makes a Journalist and What Makes News?

The journalist

A journalist is:

- Curious about the world but ...
- Questions what she/he is told
- Wants to share with people what she/he knows
- Enjoys being the 'first to know'
- Passionate about accuracy and fairness
- Interested in people
- Fascinated by the news
- Obsessed with news and current affairs
- Never takes 'no' for an answer
- Always wanting to know & do more
- ... and has a tiny touch of 'ego'

The audience

What the audience wants is:

- Information that directly affects their lives
- Information they rely on to judge what they need
- News about their locality, tribe etc.
- Space for public discussion
- And entertainment

What makes news?

News Values:

- People
- Conflict/Difference/Disruption
- Relevance
- Scandal
- Celebrity
- Timeliness
- 'Apparently New'
- Simplicity
- Expectedness – running stories
- Unexpectedness
- Quirky
- Entertaining

Constructing the News Agenda: Not what should be but what it is

“News is what someone, somewhere doesn’t want printed – all the rest is advertising” - Lord Rothermere (newspaper owner)

“News is what we call the stories we choose to put in our news bulletins – if it’s not in the bulletin then it’s not news” - Anonymous British radio news editor

Ingredients of News

Conflict/Difference/Disruption

Normal life is unexceptional. People get up, go to work and go home. It is disruptions to the norm that interest and excite us – a strike, a political argument, even a war. Hence journalists look for disruptions to the norm as a key building-block as they ‘construct the news’ Sometimes the conflicts are real such as the war in the North of Uganda but sometimes they are either ‘found’ or even ‘created’ by journalists looking for a story. ‘X’ says this, so the journalist goes to ‘Y’ and gets an alternative view.

Negativity

The media is often accused of focusing on negativity. This is true but does not mean that the journalist has created the negativity, only that he or she has asked himself or herself, after receiving some information - who is this going to upset, offend or anger? He or she then goes and finds out what this person makes of the original information. Of course it would be better if the journalist also asked the question who is this going to benefit, please or enthuse and also sought comments from them.

Relevance

Newspapers, radio and TV stations do not operate in a vacuum. They need to make a profit, or at least gain an audience. Hence news and programme editors should always be asking themselves the question - who is this going to affect. In other words, they need to ask – how is this information relevant to my audience?

Personalisation/Celebrity

We all understand complex issues better when they are boiled down to the experiences of one person or one family. HIV/AIDS is a huge issue and we cannot take in the fact that 10% of the population is HIV positive but if we hear the story of a family of six from Mzuzu in which every member is HIV positive and what this means for their daily lives, then the story becomes more understandable. We also tend to explain international stories in terms of personalities – Bush and Blair have invaded Iraq in order to overthrow Saddam Hussein, for example. People like

David Beckham or Madonna do not need to do anything out of the ordinary for journalists to regard it as a big story.

Timeliness

In general news media cover events that fall within their own time span. When a big event happens it is usually obvious. But some events don't always happen over the news cycle of a radio station – usually 24 hours. On big stories like global warming we have to rely on specific events – such as Hurricane Catherine, or reports from international scientists – in order to report on trends which otherwise might fall off the news agenda. Similarly we need to find 'pegs' for stories such as HIV/AIDS if we are to keep them in the forefront of public attention.

'Apparently New'

With big running stories we sometimes have to find ways of keeping them sounding 'fresh', or 'moving the story on'. This requires both finding new information or at least finding new angles to existing stories. Sometimes journalists miss stories but the stories need to be reported. Hence new ways of reporting the story have to be found. At other times, in an attempt to beat the competition, we predict what might happen as a result of some event in the future. These 'predictions' tend to emphasise the negative, rather than positive, consequences of the event.

Simplicity

Many stories are not simple in themselves – life is complicated – but they can be told in a simple way. The art of journalism is cutting through the thicket of detail in order to reach the essence of a story. Most events are susceptible to this treatment, but some stories are not and as a result get less coverage than they might merit. For example, stories about the World Trade Organisation, the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank can appear to be complex and many journalists shy away from doing these stories (which is a pity).

Expectedness

Newsrooms are driven by their diaries. Predictable events – press conferences, Parliament, state visits etc. attract more than fair share of coverage. That is

because news media need to plan their daily and weekly coverage. If they know something is going to happen they can allocate a reporter to cover it. For the reporter to be taken off that story and moved to a different story would require the second story to be guaranteed to produce more significant news than the first. Journalists are also attracted to running stories, they are clearly 'news' (because 'we' ran the story yesterday), they are easy for listeners to understand and they are easy for journalists to follow-up on.

Unexpectedness

If diaries are the bread and butter of news the unexpected 'breaking story' is the thing that motivates most journalists. Events happening out of the ordinary excite journalists and interest the public. However, the event has to be relatively easy to understand and happen within the news cycle of the media organisation. For example a sudden mud slide that kills 100 people fits these criteria; however, one can envisage a situation in which 100 people are killed as a result of a mud slide but the slide might have taken place over a year and the people died not in the slide itself but as a result of drinking water from a river that had been polluted by minerals carried downstream by the mud.

Entertainment

Radio news needs to attract and keep an audience. Hence bulletins have to have a varied range of material, some heavy, some light, some national, some international and plenty of sports and showbiz. Of particular appeal for journalists, and audiences, is the odd or unusual story that people remember and talk about with their friends – the boy from Zomba who ate a live snake 'just because he was hungry', the woman from Blantyre who gave birth to quintuplets and so on.

2. Politics and the Media

The media in a democracy should:

- Relay the information required to enable citizens to make informed judgments.
- Seek to 'crystallise' and 'represent' public opinion to the politicians.
- Give politicians space to respond to public concerns and to set out their own policies.
- Report on day-to-day politics as well as during election campaigns.
- Inform people about the electoral process.
- Give voice to as wide a range of interest groups as possible.
- Seek to act as a check on government and an inhibitor of the abuse of political power.
- Provide the essential forum within which the public debate is held.

Sources of political information:

- Rallies
- Posters
- Personal conversation
- Flyers
- Marketing – t-shirts, caps etc.
- Road campaigning
- Faith and other groups
- Canvassing – doorstep and SMS
- Advertising
- Online – websites, news groups & e-mail
- And of course the media – press, radio and TV

The 'election agenda'

- Who sets the agenda - the politicians, the media or the public?
- How do we get election stories?
- How do politicians make information available to journalists?

How to minimise politicians' domination of election agendas?

- Challenge politicians claims
- Check facts and claims with experts
- Analyse and compare party pledges
- What they did they say last time?
- What did they do this time?
- Use the public to challenge the politicians
- What do we need to do in order to achieve the above?

Journalists need to:

- be informed and well-prepared
- have a stock of 'impartial experts'
- find out what people think - in order to
- pass 'their' questions to the politicians
- identify issues that are important to the electorate (transport, health etc)

How do we do this? Some ideas:

- News Coverage – ‘the horse race’
- Interviewing politicians but also members of the public
- Press Conferences
- Party campaigning activities
- Examining and comparing party commitments
- Looking at past performances
- Experts’ predictions and analyses
- Personality reports
- Local campaign reports
- Voters’ perspectives
- Reporting the parties’ campaigning methods
- Light-hearted items
- Polling - surveys and focus groups
- International perspectives
- Giving politicians direct access
- Giving the public direct access
- Giving pressure groups direct access
- Bringing the three groups together

Reporting the elections – sources:

- Political parties (national/regional/local)
- Press officers
- Politicians – across all factions
- Party activists
- Election authorities
- NGOs/Pressure groups/Religious and other organisation
- Industrialists/trade union leaders
- Other media
- The public

Some problems in election reporting:

- Politicians bringing pressure to bear on editors and owners
- Editors/owners pressuring journalist to be biased
- Politicians pressuring journalists
- Biased coverage by a radio station
- Achieving balance
- Obstruction by officials
- Threats of (and actual) violence against journalists
- Bribery
- Language Barriers
- Bias Coverage and radio
- Logistics and Costs
- Covering elections in areas of insurgency
- Dealing with politicians' 'spin'

Some possible solutions:

Enlisting the audience – coverage that is lively but balanced is likely to attract more listeners (and hence more advertising revenue) than coverage that is slanted to one side and as a result – dull.

Other freelancers are competitors – they are also your colleagues. Journalists can help each other in election campaigns. At an event, see if you can agree that you will all report the full story rather than a one-sided version. In that way you can try and persuade your news editor that by not running a balanced story his or her news bulletin will not be as good as that of the competitors.

Your personal safety is paramount – no story is worth risking personal injury for. (Advice on safety for reporters is given in a separate section)

Bullies hate the light. If you are being threatened then expose who is doing the threatening on your radio station. Even better – get other journalists to report it on their stations.

We live in the real world. There is a limit to the number of battles you can fight. Pick the battles you can win – small victories are better than big defeats.

Freelance journalists are poorly paid. Many political parties, government bodies, NGOs and businesses take advantage of this. Recognise that they are trying to 'buy' favourable coverage. Don't let this happen. Always seek to maintain the highest personal and professional ethics and standards – remember the words of William Shakespeare – *'To thine own self be true, then thou canst be false to no man'!*

Ultimately, it's important to remember that your career success (as opposed to financial success) will depend on how you handle these complicated situations.

3. Surviving the Elections

How to detect potential election irregularities:

One of the major stakes in any election is its level of fairness and transparency. Even when the poll is being monitored by representatives of political parties, electoral or international observation teams, journalists should attempt to determine by themselves the degree to which any problems affect the quality of the electoral process.

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) in the United States gives these guidelines to its observer teams. They might be used as an inspiration for journalists: "Try to observe, research and record the severity, frequency and pattern of any of the following issues and the number of voters influenced.

- * Unfair attempts to influence voters or election officials through bribes, employment promises, threats, intimidation, systematic disruption of the election process, unbalanced media access;

- * Disenfranchisement of voters through: unreasonably restricting the registration process, unreasonably restricting candidate eligibility, failing to properly list registered voters, failing to distribute voter identification cards, requiring unreasonable supplemental voter identification, systematic complication of the election process, incomplete distribution of election materials;

- * Fraud, such as stealing ballots, stuffing ballots, destroying ballots, misreading, miscounting, providing misleading reports to the media, voting twice, trying to remove indelible ink;

- * Logistical problems, including insufficient number of ballots, ballots missing for certain parties, insufficient number of envelopes, ink that washes off, inadequate secrecy of the vote, missing officials, missing voter registry, no artificial lights;

* Civic education: voters do not seem to have a reasonable understanding of their right to freely choose a candidate or how to express their choice, and administrators do not have a reasonable understanding of their duties and how to execute them."

Safety at Election Time

The International Federation of Journalists' Safety Manual states that a story isn't worth your life. And that should be the starting point for everyone -- from the editor to the eager and enthusiastic freelance trying to get the big story that will make his or her name. Journalists must learn to survive, to avoid injury, jail, expulsion or any of the other perils of our profession -- and still get the story.

In August, 1992 - when it was becoming apparent that attacks on journalists were increasing at a frightening rate - the South African Union of Journalists convened a seminar to which representatives of the major political organisations in the country were invited.

This resulted in the "Declaration of Respect for the Rights of Working Journalists", which was signed by the African National Congress, the Congress of South African Trade Unions, the Democratic Party, the Inkatha Freedom Party, the National Party, the Pan African Congress, and the South African Communist Party. The pledge said:

"We share the concern of the SAUJ at recent attacks and threats of attack against journalists, and agree that the rights of working journalists should be respected at all times while they are engaged in news-gathering in South Africa.

"We acknowledge that the SAUJ expects its members to work in accordance with the Union's Code of Conduct and the IFJ Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists.

"We undertake within the limits of our influence and abilities to respect and promote the physical safety of journalists, including news photographers and radio and television crews".

While journalists in the rest of Africa might think the situation in South Africa could not be repeated in their country, election violence is clearly not a South African invention. Recent events in Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea, and Kenya show that election time is when the heat is most turned on journalists and media.

All journalists' organisations should seek from political parties and national authorities a declaration similar to that obtained in South Africa. It sets the right tone for the election campaign and provides a point of reference if journalists run into trouble.

Journalists' Rights

Journalists have the right to refuse an assignment they consider too dangerous. It is a right worth using more often. If you start feeling uncomfortable or the situation suddenly turns ugly, turn back. You cannot be fired for refusing a job which puts your life at risk. Don't hesitate to say no and don't feel guilty. If other journalists take reckless risks, they are foolhardy and should not be encouraged.

If you are covering a dangerous assignment, you have the right to full insurance (life, health, riot, property). If your employer or the organisation commissioning your services refuses to provide basic assurances of support in the event of things getting ugly, consider turning down the assignment.

Freelancers are often badly exploited, and should be confident in demanding coverage or to be paid enough (extra) to cover the cost of insurance. If you are attacked, report it to your employer and to your union, even if you are not injured or only slightly injured. If the followers of a particular political organisation or movement are responsible, ask your editor to take it up with that organisation. Make sure that your union does the same.

Publicity also increases public awareness of the problem. If you know of attacks against journalists that have not been published, ask your union to take up the issue with your editor. Information is the only weapon we have in fighting violence against journalists. Unions cannot, for example, demand that employers

provide protective clothing unless they have adequate information about the level of attacks.

Media organisations need an overall picture of what is happening if they are to take up the issue with politicians. Sometimes it is useful to have an independent body monitoring elections activities that can take up cases of threats and intimidation. This body should include representatives from international organisations defending press freedom or persons that know how to get in touch with them. Support from abroad can act as a deterrent on a government tempted to bully the independent media.

Staying out of Trouble

Never carry a gun or a weapon. Get basic first aid training. This does not mean an obligation to provide medical care to every victim you see, but it may assist an injured colleague.

Know your rights. It is useful to have an understanding of the regulations which relate to unrest areas, and to know which areas are affected. This knowledge will allow you to challenge with confidence any member of the security forces who tells you that you may not take photographs, or who orders you to leave an area when you have a right to stay. Remember that an irresponsible or uninformed act may not only put you in danger, but could also have repercussions for colleagues.

Know your destination. Be as prepared as possible before leaving the office. Know what political, racial, religious or any other conflict exists within a region. Information can keep you out of trouble. Talk to other journalists. Networking is important. If you have experienced problems in a particular area, warn other journalists to be careful.

Make contacts. Get to know the media officers of all the major organisations in the area. Look out for press marshals at rallies and marches. If you have any difficulty, ask a steward for help. If you are covering a major protest march or political rally, survey the route/venue beforehand. Look for telephones that can be

used, vantage points from which you can survey the event without being too close in case of trouble.

Be familiar with the roads and where they lead to in case you have to leave suddenly. Learn and observe local community protocol. This could include who you speak to first when you go into a community, and how you address leaders.

Dress appropriately. Always dress in comfortable clothing that does not limit your freedom of movement. Especially no heels or narrow skirts. Clothing that attracts attention to you is out of place in a trouble zone. Dress to be inconspicuous. Avoid leather jackets, expensive sun glasses or jewellery. They make you a walking target for criminals. Be aware of the colours of the political movements and parties active in your region, and avoid wearing them in the same combinations.

Some journalists prefer to dress formally, but many believe that it is better not to be too well-dressed for fear of being mistaken for police officers. Avoid t-shirts with political slogans. There is a debate whether it is better always to be instantly identifiable as a journalist or not. Some journalists think it is a good idea to wear a t-shirt which announces "press" or "media"; others point out that journalists are sometimes targeted precisely because they are from the media. There is no easy or safe answer. It is clear that there will be times when it is better to be identifiable and others when it is not.

Use your judgement

Before leaving home:

The most basic rule of covering conflict is never to travel alone. If there is no-one else from your news organisation available, telephone around to find a colleague to take along. It is worth the time and trouble. And while we might be in competition, we are still colleagues. Watch out for one another. Always tell your editor, colleagues and family where you are going and what time you expect to be back.

Make sure someone at home knows what to do and who to contact if you don't arrive.

In the field:

Listen to the locals. Pay attention to advice from people living in the area. They know best. It is essential to carry a press card. Keep it handy. Don't keep it in your wallet - you'll be advertising your money every time you take out your press card.

The breast pocket of your shirt is a good place. Watch out for big crowds. They are a good signal for what is happening. But don't stop your vehicle in front of the crowd, or try to drive through it. And if things are too quiet and there are few or no people on the streets, this could indicate danger.

If there are other journalists about, stick close to them. Never be seen to be too friendly with the security forces. If a security officer offers his or her hand, don't take it. Apologise and say you don't mean to be offensive, but you cannot afford to be seen shaking hands. If you are caught in the middle of a disturbance, move away - but don't run. If you run, you could be seen as a target. Do not attempt to cross directly from one side of a confrontation to the other.

Above all, remember to keep someone informed about where you are at all times.

4. International Codes and Guidelines

International Federation of Journalists' Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists

- a. Respect for truth and for the right of the public to truth is the first duty of the journalist.
- b. In pursuance of this duty, the journalist shall at all times defend the principles of freedom in the honest collection and publication of news, and of the right to fair comment and criticism.
- c. The journalist shall report only in accordance with facts of which he/she knows the origin. The journalist shall not suppress essential information or falsify documents.
- d. The journalist shall only use fair methods to obtain news, photographs and documents.
- e. The journalist shall do the utmost to rectify any published information which is found to be harmfully inaccurate.
- f. The journalist shall observe professional secrecy regarding the source of information obtained in confidence.
- g. The journalist shall be alert to the danger of discrimination being furthered by media, and shall do the utmost to avoid facilitating such discriminations based on, among other things, race, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinions, and national and social origins.
- h. The journalist shall regard as grave professional offences the following: plagiarism; malicious misinterpretation; calumny; libel; slander; unfounded accusations; acceptance of a bribe in any form in consideration of either publication or suppression.
- i. Journalists worthy of the name shall deem it their duty to observe faithfully the principles stated above. Within the general law of each country the journalist shall recognise in matters of professional matters the jurisdiction of colleagues only, to the exclusion of any kind of interference by governments or others.

Reporters and the Election

by John Lawrence, Briefing paper by Training Editor of "The Nation", Kenya

The text of a statement prepared for journalists in Kenya facing a historic challenge – the country's first truly democratic multi-party elections in the early 1990s:

In a few weeks, Kenya will be holding its most exciting general election in nearly 30 years. It will be an election that will be grassroots in every sense. From the humblest village to the biggest towns, Kenyans will be voting in their first truly democratic multi-party elections. Every school hall, sports ground and beer hall will be invaded as an army of sweet-talking, promise-it-all politicians and their campaigners take to the hustings.

To report the promises of these politicians we will need a small army of correspondents. You!

How you report the conduct of the election will largely determine the selling power of the Nation group of newspapers. So, let us start with a warning: covering elections, even in Western society, presents many problems. In Kenya, as with any other fledgling multi-party nation, it will be like walking in a minefield. One false step and your reputation -- and your newspaper's -- could be blown to smithereens. Here are some of the ways you can survive:

1. Report events exactly as they happen - and not as you would like them to happen. This means that you must be impartial in every way.
2. Give equal prominence to all the major candidates. This means attending an equal number of candidate's meetings.
3. Be careful not to colour your reports with inflammatory language.
4. Report what candidates say and not what interested parties say candidates said.
5. Be careful not to be seen to be taking sides in political arguments.
6. Do not (in any circumstances whatsoever) accept any inducement from a candidate or his/her supporters. Do not even take a ride in a politician's car.

7. Do not promise any politician (or anyone else for that matter) that a report or a story will appear in the paper.
8. Report what you see without exaggeration.
9. Do not use extravagant language in describing crowd scenes. (A Kenya Nation report talked about a crowd of 40,000 at a political rally in an area which had three men, 10 chickens and a dog.)
10. Exercise fair play. If a candidate makes an accusation against his opponent, ask that opponent for a comment.
11. You should listen for:
 - a. PROMISES: These are usually part of the party manifesto or platform: lofty pledges to initiate irrigation schemes, build highways, lower taxes waive education fees. Or they could be titbits for village consumption: "Vote for me and I will give you 10 new cattle dips". "Vote for me and no child in the district will go barefoot". "Vote for me and your stomachs will be full of ugali forever". So you've got to be alert. You could get a national story or one for the provincial round up briefs.
 - b. HECKLERS: Hecklers, people who like to disrupt meetings with their interjections, can provoke violence or laughter in equal measure. Be alert for humorous, rapid-fire exchanges. You may get a good verbatim quote.
 - c. THE UNEXPECTED: Unexpected, quirky things often happen at public meetings. Like the man at the harambee who offered a pig's head (having already eaten the pig!). Or Wilson Leitch's famous order to chop off the fingers of people flashing the multi-party salute.
 - d. CONTRADICTIONS: Be prepared for a sudden departure from the prepared speech, particularly contradictory statements or fundamental shifts in platform policy. Do not rely on the printed text alone. You will need acute powers of observation. You will need to gauge the mood of the meeting. Is it tense, light-hearted, gay? Look around and observe the placards, the expressions on people's faces. Are there trouble-makers?
 - e. THE CROWD: How big is the audience? To estimate accurately the size of a crowd is an important skill. But it is wise to quote a variety of sources: yours, the police, and the organisers.

- f. CONFRONTATIONS: In a volatile political situation, anything can happen. Certain signs will prepare you. These include the number of infiltrators from the opposition camp. Are they armed? (even with stones). Listen to what people in the crowd are saying. And observe the security presence. Are they armed with shields, batons, machine guns and teargas? Are they expecting trouble? Do they appear nervous? Do not jump to conclusions about how trouble has started if a sudden commotion takes place. Talk to people, you may have missed something or an act of provocation.

If you carry out all the points raised in this rather long list, you will have performed a valuable service for your newspaper group. Remember, you will be in on the ground floor as history is made.

Ethics and Credibility - Making readers believe

*by Joseph N. E. Igbinedion - Head of the Department of Mass Communication,
Auchi Polytechnic, Bendel, Nigeria*

High standards of professional conduct are crucial to journalism everywhere – and most certainly in Africa, where journalism is often under suspicion. To be effective, journalists must be trusted by readers, listeners and viewers. Public suspicion results in loss of faith in the media and hampers the contribution journalism makes to the economic and socio-political development of the continent. To build public trust journalists must work at two levels:

- Establishing a high standard of professional ethical conduct, so the motivations for what they print are not suspect.
- Making certain that everyday coverage is complete, fair and unassailably accurate.

Here are the steps to professional ethical conduct:

1. Monetary and material reward: Gifts of money, tickets or anything of value compromise your integrity as a journalist. Some newspapers and stations list gifts a reporter can accept. Others warn staff members against accepting anything of value. Gifts are often intended to influence your coverage. Avoid them.

2. Conflict of interest: Journalists should not be members of organisations they may have to cover. There may be pressure by fellow members to conceal information that should be made public, or to publicise events that are not newsworthy. Avoid secondary jobs, political involvement or public office if they compromise your integrity.

3. Deceitful identification: Never falsely identify yourself to gain access to persons or places and then write stories on the experience.

4. Withholding information: You may be asked by government to withhold publication of a story until government has investigated the problem or acted on it. Sometimes you may have access to information on security matters. Some African absolutists say: print the story. In such situations, exercise caution. But don't hold back stories that protect government officers, not country.

5. Right to privacy: Respect an individual's right to privacy. Before publishing a story on a private person or a public official, ask whether the story is of value to the public. Many African journalists don't believe that a government official's private life has any relationship to his public life.

6. Morbid curiosity: Avoid pandering to morbid curiosity. Decide how much and why you need specific details in sex or crime stories. If you must use details, make sure they are necessary for the full understanding of the story.

7. Objectivity: Keep your biases and opinions out of news stories.

8. Upright reporting: Do not engage in shameful reporting methods. Hidden tape recorders, extorting information, or paying for information are repugnant practices. They cast doubts about the ethics and credibility of the publication or broadcast station. Editors and reporters must be obsessed with accuracy. Everything must be done to ensure the accuracy of a broadcast and printed story, headline and photo caption. Here are ways of achieving accuracy:

- a) Be sceptical of information. Double-check everything. There is a newsroom saying: "If your mother told you that, check it out."
- b) No story should be published or broadcast without at least one – and preferably two – editors having read it.
- c) Make sure sources know what they are talking about. Quote someone only if he or she is in a position to know and is close to the source of the information.

- d) During an interview, rephrase the person's response and give the interviewee a chance to verify or correct the statement as you understand it. This permits you to sort out questions of accuracy beforehand, rather than after the story is published.
- e) Don't make assumptions. Don't guess, for example, on someone's middle initial.
- f) Be wary of newspaper clippings. A reporter might have gotten it wrong 10 years ago. Keep references such as dictionaries and telephone books nearby.
- g) Reread the finished story carefully. Watch for errors of context, emphasis, balance, as well as for spelling and other basic mistakes.
- h) If you are wrong, admit it. Run newspaper corrections in a fixed and prominent page position. Don't bury corrections in the back of the paper.
- i) Statements that are not self-evident or not universally accepted by readers or listeners should be attributed to the appropriate source.
- j) A story can be factual but not fair. Do everything possible to get both sides of the story. Allegations against an individual require a response. Consider delaying publication, if possible, to make every effort to reach the other side for comment. On ethics and credibility, one editor has written this summary: "Be fair, unbiased, accurate, complete, factual, professional, aggressive and compassionate."

5. Radio Journalism – The Essential Elements

The Four P's of Production:

Preparation – the information, the interviewees, the logistics & equipment

Production – keep it simple, 'less is more'

Post-Production – focus on the story and meeting the deadlines

Presentation – think about audience, audience, audience

News report can consist of:

Script/commentary

Interviews

Actuality

'Atmos'

Standupper

Music

News bulletin can consist of:

Straight read

Cue and clip

Cue and voicer

Cue and package

Cue and two-way

Cue and live interview

Cue and discussion

News programme can consist of:

News bulletin

Packages

Studio interview

Studio discussion

'Remote' interviews

Phone-ins etc.

Newsgathering

Sources:

- The 'diary'
- Follow-ups
- Official sources
- Unofficial sources
- News releases
- Press conferences
- Other events
- Agencies
- Freelancers
- Other media
- Internet
- The public
- Personal experience/knowledge

What the audience wants:

- Information that directly affects their lives
- Information they rely on to judge what they need
- News about their locality, tribe etc.
- Space for public discussion
- And entertainment

So we ask the basic questions:

What happened?

Who was involved?

Where did it happen?

When did it happen?

How did it happen?

Why did it happen?

What does it mean?

Example

What? Who?

A tsunami or gigantic wave has caused tens of thousands of deaths in nine countries in the Indian Ocean.

Where?

The most devastated countries were Indonesia and Sri-Lanka.

When?

The tsunami engulfed whole communities at midday on December 26, 2004.

Why?

Authorities say the tsunami was caused by a massive earthquake below the sea off Indonesia. The high number of deaths was due to the concentration of people along the coastline because of the tourist industry.

How?

The sea retreated, emptying bays and inlets, before the tsunami smashed onto the coastline, destroying everything in its path and killing tens of thousands of people in a matter of minutes.

What does it mean?

Devastated areas will take years to rebuild with the support of the international community, said the UN Secretary General.

Writing for Radio

“Get the story right and the words just write themselves”

- What’s the top line?
- Don’t save the best bits for last
- Show me - don’t tell me
- Never assume

The Crucial First Sentence...

“The first sentence in a radio news story is all-important. It must have, partly the character of a headline. It must instantly establish the subject in the listener’s mind, show him or her why the story is worth hearing and signpost the direction it is going to take. But it should not try to say too much”

- (BBC Guidelines)

... and the last sentence

The last line should round off the story and point ahead to any next developments. The last words are the ones the audience will remember – so make them memorable without introducing any startling new information.

It’s a listening medium

- Write as you speak, in simple sentences
- It doesn’t have to be grammatical
- Shorten words as we do in speech
- Test your script as you write
- Weigh each word – if in doubt, leave out

There's no going back

- Use the present tense where possible
- It's a conversation with a listener - not with your colleagues
- Write brief sentences using "active" voice
- Don't use adjectives, pronouns & lists
- Full name first, then shorten

Make it easy on the listener

- Don't overload with too much information
- Simplify and use round numbers
- A bracket/quotation mark is hard to hear
- Don't use abstractions, repetitions and tongue twisters
- Finally, avoid clichés

It's got to be understood by the listener

- Layout your script for clarity
- Do you understand it?
- Re-write to suit your own reading style
- Mark it up – as you want to say it
- Practice it aloud
- Record, listen back and learn

How does this sound?

Malawi government on Monday finally agreed to raise salaries for the university of Malawi lecturers who have been boycotting work forcing authorities to shift to a later date the opening of UNIMA constituent colleges.

Ministry of Education spokesperson Rabbeca Phwitiko confirmed the development, saying this will lead to the opening of all UNIMA colleges soon. "Government has agreed to increase the salaries of University of Malawi lecturers by 25 percent," confirmed Phwitiko.

According to Phwitiko, the move to raise salaries for lecturers applies to all UNIMA constituent colleges, while Mzuzu University has been given a go ahead to review their salary structures.

Phwitiko said: “the agreement was arrived at between UNIMA management and the government. An official letter has since been written to the lecturers to inform them of the issue at hand.”

Meanwhile, University of Malawi Workers Union President Mr. Frank Kapeni confirmed receiving communication that college Principals should invite students as soon as possible.

Or is this better?

The University of Malawi colleges are to re-open and lecturers there are in line for a 25 percent salary increase, the Government has announced.

This follows a strike by the lecturers which forced the University to postpone the start of term. No date has yet been announced for the re-opening of the University.

Government spokesperson Rabbeca Phwitiko said that the salary increase will apply to all colleges of the University and Mzuzu University has also been given the go-ahead to review its own salary structures.

Not everything is as it sounds:

Sudan said the Eritrean leader had a bad record when it came to upholding human rights.

or:

Sudan, said the Eritrean leader, had a bad record when it came to upholding human rights.

or:

The Eritrean leader said Sudan had a bad record when it came to upholding human rights.

Voice Training for Radio

What are your aims?

- To get people to listen
- To communicate a message
- To speak so that you are understood
- To sound as if you are talking to a person - not reading a script

How do you start?

- Read your script before you broadcast
- Mark up your script, re-write if necessary
- Check pronunciation of difficult words
- Get to the studio in good time, don't run
- The mike should be around 6" away
- Sit up straight
- Have water nearby
- No heavy meals before broadcast
- Get your breathing right

How do you read?

- Speak clearly – no mumbling
- Concentrate on pronouncing first & last letters of each word
- Vary your pitch and tone to make sense
- Brief pauses help you and the audience
- Speak slightly slower than normal – 3 words a second
- Sound like you are interested
- Some emotion and enthusiasm help
- Record, listen and learn

6. Interviews & Press Conferences

Types of Interviews (form):

Vox pops
Eye-witnesses
Principles/participants
'Views' people
Experts/observers
Two-ways

Types of Interviews (content):

Subject/friendly - what happened?
Subject/hostile - why did you do it.....?
Information/eyewitness - what did you see?
Information/VIP - what are you going to do/announce and why?
Object – what's your view? (vox pop)
Information 'views person' – what do you think?
Information/expert - What's happened? So what?

Planning the Interview

- What do I want out of the interview?
- What does he/she want?
- If there's a gap, how do bridge it?
- What do I know (subject & interviewee)?
- What does he/she know?
- What do I need to find out?
- What areas do I want to cover?
- In what order shall I cover it?
- Is there a 'nugget of gold' I'm looking for?
- How do I find it?
- How do I begin?
- How do I end?
- Write out a plan

Conducting the Interview

- Check equipment
- Arrive on time
- Find the right location
- Do a brief level/recording test
- Be observant
- Converse informally but don't start the interview with your recorder switched off!
- Questions should be open i.e. they should not invite one-word answers such as Yes & No
- First question should be open but focused.
- Ask why, how, what etc. Not 'Don't you agree ...' or 'Is it true ...'
- Avoid sounding as if you are putting your own point of view into questions

Don't be afraid to:

- Re-phrase badly put questions
- Put questions from both, or all, sides of the argument
- Interrupt - when you don't understand or for brevity
- Maintain eye contact unless you want a reluctant interviewee to continue talking
- Silence is golden..... don't worry about pauses (unless the interview is live)
- At the end of interview ask if you've missed out anything
- Always be polite even in difficult situations

The Radio Interview

Before doing any interview it is important to research your subject thoroughly and choose your interviewee carefully. You are looking for an interviewee who can speak clearly, concisely and with authority. Research is important because it enables you to focus the interview. An interview should be to the point; it should not be long and rambling.

Control: no matter how important the interviewee is, once the interview has been granted, the journalist should be in control. You should try and decide how the room will be set up for the interview, where the interviewee will sit/stand, and - most importantly - the agenda of the interview and the questions.

The Confrontational Interview (opinion interview)

This is an interview with a politician, a trade union leader, an activist, or anyone who represents an interest group or a party in a dispute/conflict. The interviewer must balance the interview, by putting the opposite point of view and making the interviewee justify, explain and defend his/her position.

The interviewer should not let the interviewee use the interview for his/her own purposes, e.g. to put across propaganda. The interviewer should be assertive in asking questions, but should avoid becoming aggressive, which can damage the journalist's authority.

The "Expert" Interview (factual interview)

This could be with a professor, an academic, an analyst or even an expert journalist. The aim is to extract information, explanation and analysis. The interview is not confrontational - the expert is here to try to help the audience better understand the story.

"Ordinary" People

For example, a vox pop - when you ask ordinary people in the street for their opinion on a topical issue. It can also be an interview with an ordinary person when they have had an unusual experience. Because ordinary people are not experienced in doing television interviews, it's best to keep your questions simple.

10 Things You Always Wanted To Know About Vox Pops (But Were Too Afraid To Ask!)

Vox pop is short for vox populi, Latin for voice of the people. It sounds simple enough, recording voices of passers-by, but there's more to vox popping than meets the ear:

- A Vox pop consists of a montage of voices and opinions recorded on location (often your nearest main shopping street)
- A Vox pop should include a range of voices: young, old, male, female, multi-ethnic, sensible, outraged, funny, unreasonable
- Vox pops are cut together rather than carefully mixed
- The vox pop should be audibly on location but not drowned by passing lorries, blaring music etc
- A vox pop is normally 20-40 seconds - any longer will sound very laboured
- The best vox pops are pacey, quirky, memorable
- A vox pop is an excellent piece of texture for a radio package or as an introduction to an interview or discussion
- Normally the reporter's voice does not appear in a vox, except perhaps to ask an additional question or reiterate the original question
- The vox pop purports to be the views of the general public but it never is - it's those six people you persuaded to stop and talk to you on a cold rainy Friday morning. Don't present your vox as being a scientific survey of public opinion
- It often rains when you have to go out to record a vox

Be Prepared: The Vox Pop Checklist

- The subject of your vox pop needs to be something that people will have a definite opinion about - often an item that's in the news.
- Avoid vague or woolly subjects (the existence of God, or the state of the English language).
- Remember that you're asking busy people to stop and talk into a microphone, so you need a juicy question on which they're likely to have an instant opinion.

What will you ask?

- Ask an open question so that you don't end up with a series of yes/no responses.
- The question should be simple and quick to understand.
- Keep a couple of supplementary questions in reserve, but no more than two.
- You're not recording a documentary.
- A location with steady background atmos is good. Avoid distracting noises, e.g. sudden surges of loud traffic, music, beeps from a pedestrian crossing.
- Do you need permission to record there? If you're on a street or in a park you probably won't, but you will need permission if you record in a station, department store, shopping centre, on public transport etc.
- Check that your recording equipment (DAT or minidisk, mike and cans) is in good working order before you leave the office.
- Take spare batteries.
- Wear comfortable shoes!

Press Conferences

Press Conferences – before & during

- Find out the details
- Is it worth it – what do you/they want?
- Do your preparation
- Arrive early
- Sit at the front or near the PA system
- Arrange post-conference interview
- Ask if speeches available in advance
- Make notes of the Q&A
- Don't perform
- Work with other reporters
- Listen and learn
- In post-conference interview, seek clarification of press conference

The Press Conference

Press conferences (News Conferences) are often a valuable source of news for broadcast journalists. However, they can often pose difficult problems for inexperienced (and even experienced!) journalists. Below is a list of checkpoints to consider.

Is it worth going?

Do not automatically assume that every press conference merits your attention. Some will not. If possible, try to find out as much as you can beforehand, and assess the likely news value of the story. If the news value is low, you can perhaps just write a few paragraphs based on what you know from the organiser's press release.

Yes, it's worth going. But what do I want from it?

First, you want to understand the story, and prepare some questions based on it. There will usually be some sort of printed sheet available. If you don't see one, ask in case you've missed it. If the organisers say they have run out of

copies, make a polite fuss and explain how they really should have prepared more – you will often find a spare copy turns up. You'll usually want a short, good quality interview with the principal speaker(s) covering the principal points. To get the interview you'll need to get close to the speaker(s), with a tape recorder that works! There are times when you will NOT need an interview, but they are rare.

The table is too far away. I can't get close. What do I do?

Don't panic. At some point, preferably before the action starts speak to the organisers and tell them you are a radio reporter and you need an interview. Tell them the table is too far away, and anyway you don't want to record the whole meeting; you need specific answers to specific questions, face to face. (If the organisers are reluctant, push the point. What is the purpose of a press conference? It is to allow the press to get the story. If they want publicity on radio, the best publicity is an interview etc. etc.). Of course, there are occasions when it will not be possible to get the speaker close-up, e.g., a VIP etc. But you can still try. Find a good vantage point, where you expect the VIP to pass, and shout your question as they go by. Many journalists succeed in getting a few valuable words from VIPs in this way. VIPs are accustomed to media attention. The worst they can do is ignore you. If anyone complains, you have a water-tight defence: you're just doing your job.

Oh no... I've arrived too late! I've missed the important bits. What do I do?

Don't worry, be happy. You should still try for an interview, and you can ask the following kind of questions without anyone realising you don't know anything: "What for you is the most important point about today's meeting?" "What do you say to people who disagree with you on this?" "What is the next step on this issue?"

I've got the interview, what now?

Check that you are right. Is the interview recorded? If not, do it again. Remember, after the PC and the interview, you may know everything about the story, but your news editor knows far less. If the press conference has produced some sort of dramatic news, controversial opinion, accusation, defence, statistics etc., then find a telephone and quickly send a short resume. This does not have to

be a dispatch; just a few lines will be sufficient for the moment. The point is you will be able to get the main details of the story on-air quickly.

Remember:

Your job at a press conference is NOT somehow to re-create the atmosphere of the press conference. The Press Conference is NOT the story. Your job is simply to report the basic details of what was said, by whom, about what. There is no point in recording for half an hour, use a pen and paper instead! Handwritten notes are quicker to check than a long cassette recording.

Some journalists regard a press conference as a chance to perform in front of their colleagues, to ask long, grand-sounding questions, to monopolise the floor, even to make impolite comments about other reporters, and of course to hang around afterwards putting the world to rights. Don't be intimidated, don't get dragged into discussions, and don't feel small. You may be inexperienced, that does not mean you are insignificant. Some of the best questions are often asked by inexperienced reporters. Remember the Emperor's New Clothes.

Apart from these few notes, it is difficult to talk in theoretical terms about how to handle a press conference. Only press conferences can teach you how to handle press conferences. Your natural, initial reaction upon arrival may be "What is going on? Who's who? Where do I start?" But relax, keep your ears and eyes open, be polite, be confident, be courageous. The picture will clear in time, and somewhere in that room is the person who will give an interview to illustrate your story. All you have to do is wait, watch and it should soon become apparent who you need to speak to. When you've spotted your target, wait for your chance, when it comes, grab it. Watch for free goodies too – coffee, cakes, pens. But to sum up, it's this: Get in, get the story, and get out.

7. Location Recording

Introduction

The essential working tool for any journalist on the job is notebook. But in addition to the notebook a radio journalist must always carry a recorder to cover a story. Covering a story by recording its audio away from one's station or base is what is commonly called field recording or location recording.

Unlike a studio, which is a closed and controlled environment, field recording presents many challenges. While unwanted external sounds such as traffic noise, and internal interference for instance echoes, are cut to a minimum in studio, recording in the open makes one susceptible to all sorts of distracting and competing sounds.

This chapter on field recording seeks to guide the radio journalist on how best to record good audio while working outdoors and in environments such as offices.

We start by familiarizing ourselves with the instruments used to capture sound, the microphone. We then move on to the equipment used to record it, the recorder. And we finally review how best to use both tools together.

Microphones

What type of microphone should you use?

If you're going out recording with almost any type of portable recorder, you'll need a microphone. For interview work, go for a mono mike. You can use a stereo microphone for recording atmos. and actuality, but if you want to record voices in stereo, you need to think carefully about how many mikes you will need and where you're going to place them.

Cardioid mikes

These mikes are directional, and they're more sensitive to sounds coming from one particular direction, often the front of the mike. Cardioid mikes are good for favouring one sound while rejecting another from a different direction, but you

need to know what you're doing: if you're just starting out, take an omni mike. It's the most flexible, but cardioid mikes need more careful use.

Omni-directional microphones

An omni is an omni-directional mike, meaning it picks up sounds from all directions. It's a good general-purpose mike, particularly useful for interview work, but also good for recording "atmos" and actuality. Many a package has been made using only an omni mike. The Cardioid mikes and Omni-directional mikes are the most common types of mike - but you'll also come across these:

Gun mikes

Useful for recording more distant sounds, e.g. a voice on a stage or the speaker at a press conference. Your gun mike should come with a grip or stand.

Clip mikes

Often used in TV, as they're less obtrusive. Clip mikes are usually small omni mikes, and come in a box. There are a variety of sizes, but they're all small enough to clip on to clothing. Where you clip the mike is very important - too far from the voice and it will sound distant; too close to the chin and it can sound muffled. You need to consider your interviewee's clothing - taffeta and other stiff fabric will rustle. And if you clip a mike to a man's shirt, make sure that his tie doesn't fall across the mike.

Clip mikes have their uses but hand-held mikes will generally give you a better sound.

The Microphone and Its Accessories

As well as your mike, you will need:

- A **windshield**: often a foam cap, which covers the business end of the mike. The windshield minimises wind noise on location.
- A **lead**: connects your mike to your portable recorder. Before you set off, check you've got the correct lead with the right connections for the portable recorder you're using.
- **Batteries**: some mikes need to be powered by a small battery. Check before you leave and replace if you're in any doubt about how old the

battery is. If you're going to be spending a long time on location, take spare batteries.

- Tip: For emergency waterproofing of your mike (if you really have to record that location interview in the pouring rain) slip a condom over your mike, under the windshield!
- **Headphones:** Don't forget...a mike will pick up noises that you may not hear - or that your brain tends to filter out. So always wear headphones when you're recording.

How to hold your microphone

Do:

- Hold the mike firmly but comfortably, and well away from the connection at the bottom
- If you're recording a lengthy interview, you may want to rest your mike-holding arm on a chair or table.
- Support the lead so that it doesn't sway or knock against chairs, tables, yourself etc.
- If you're using a clip mike on an interviewee, check the mike position isn't recording rustle from clothing

Don't:

- Let rings or bracelets knock against the mike or the lead.
- Grip the mike too hard - your hand will go numb and may start shaking. If your arm does start to feel tired (and it will), simply ask the interviewee to pause for a moment, and swap to the other arm/hand.
- Twizzle the mike in your hand as you use it - this will cause mike bumps

Hearing what your mike will hear

Indoor objects:

If you're inside, listen for the noises of air conditioning, clocks, the hum of electrical equipment, distant toilets, music or traffic, lifts, etc. These can cause you editing problems later on. Ask if electrical equipment can be switched off or clocks moved - but don't do this yourself, just in case any accidents occur. Check you're not on an airport flight path.

Computers, mobile phones and fluorescent lighting may cause RF (radio frequency) interference. This will give you an unwanted buzzing, clicking or humming sound.

What kind of room are you in?

Large rooms (like halls, churches etc) can be very reverberant, giving you a "bathroomy" sound to your interview. You can cut down on this boomy sound by holding the mike closer to your interviewee's mouth. (But beware of 'popping'.) You could also try to find a smaller room - even a cupboard may give you a better sound

If you have to do your interview in a large reverberant room or hall, don't do your interview near the centre of the room. Try to move to the side but not a corner (which would give you a boxy sound). Don't stand too close to the wall, or you'll pick up too much reflected sound. Closing the curtains (if there are any) will cut down the reverberation in a large room.

Outside:

If you're outside, find a sheltered location if possible to protect the mike from wind noise. Rain will make a noise if it hits the mike. (In fact, water and any technical equipment don't get on together.) If you're near traffic, choose a side street rather than a main road. A car makes a useful temporary studio if the weather or traffic noise is awful.

Where should you position your microphone?

Exactly where to place your mike depends on what kind of mike you're using - but here are some general rules:

In a quiet location and using an omni mike, hold the mike about 6-8 inches/150-200 cm from the voice (yours or your interviewee's). If you want use your voice and your interviewee's, they need to be the same level. You will achieve this by one of two ways:

- In a quiet location - find the midway point between you and your interviewee and hold mike there (or slightly nearer the quieter voice).
- In a noisy location - move the mike between you and your interviewee as you take it in turns to speak, but beware of mike noises that may be caused by the movement of the mike and the lead.

You can, of course, record your interview sitting, standing or walking. You always want to get as close as you can to your interviewee, without imposing on their space. It's better to sit or stand slightly to one side rather than directly opposite, which can feel confrontational.

Avoiding 'popping' and other mouth noises

If you hold the mike too close to some interviewees, you'll get a nasty 'popping' sound caused by the blast of air on plosive syllables (b or p) hitting the mike. This is not a problem you can completely cure by editing, so avoid popping by:

- Always wearing headphones so that you'll hear it when it occurs
- Angling the mike to one side of the popping person's mouth.
- The nervous interviewee may have a dry mouth, which makes clicking or smacking noises when they speak. Give them a drink of water.

Mike positions and controlling levels

Often you'll need to do more than simply set levels and let the recording run. Here are some common problems and their solutions:

1. Problem: Recording an interview in a noisy environment (e.g. busy street, sports event, press conference) and trying to get a good level on the speaker/interviewee above the background noise

Solution: Position the mike closer than usual, but be very careful to avoid popping. Set your level with the mike in this position.

2. Problem: Recording both a quiet and loud voice - and getting the balance of levels right.

Solution: So that you're not constantly fiddling with the levels, set your level against one of the voices and then position the mike so that it is nearer to the quiet voice and further away from the loud voice

Recorders

There are many different types of recorders on the market today. They however all fall under two categories: Digital audio recorders, and analogue audio recorders. The analogue recorders are the more traditional and these are basically tape recorders. The digital recorders are new technology and include recorders such as the DAT, Mini Disc, and more recently the I-river.

DAT stands for Digital Audio Tape, and as can be deduced from its acronym DAT uses tape. Though it has been around for a while however, DAT is not commonly used and both its recorders and tapes are fairly scarce.

The Mini Disc is more popular but its popularity is dwindling. It uses a small recordable disc, which can take up to eighty minutes of audio. Though it was a breakthrough in terms of superior audio fidelity for its price, malfunctions such as easy loss of audio and breakdown due to dust render it undesirable to most radio journalists.

Review

Before going out to the field ensure that:

- You pre-test your equipment.
- Your recorder is fully charged, or that your batteries have power.
- You have sufficient memory space, or enough tapes/ discs for your recording.
- Your microphone is working well.
- The joints of your cable are intact and do not produce crackle sounds when recording.
- You carry your windshield.
- You carry your headphones.
- You are familiar with your recorder and are comfortable and confident using it.

On location:

- Make a quick assessment of sound interruptions by wearing your headphones, and do what it takes to minimise them. You could:
- Move further away from the noise source.
- Shield the wind using your body.
- Get closer to the interviewee.
- Record the constant sound separately e.g. hum of a near by computer. (This can then be eliminated in studio)
- Shut the windows to cut out external noise.
- In short improvise to ensure the get the best sound in your present conditions.

Don't forget to:

Check your sound levels before recording; this is best done during the casual chit chat preceding the interview.