live from Africa

A HANDBOOK FOR AFRICAN RADIO JOURNALISTS

Ivor Gaber with Fiona Ledger & Brian Barber

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The Institute for War & Peace Reporting builds peace and democracy through free and fair media. Programmes include reporting, training and institutional capacity building projects for local media in areas of crisis and conflict.

IWPR is an international network of not-for-profit organisations. This book is a project of IWPR - Africa.

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For further information on IWPR, or to support its work, see: www.iwpr.net

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INTRODUCTION

Despite what older journalists might tell you, there has never been a "golden age of journalism" – that is, a time when the process of obtaining and transmitting the news was simple. And today is no exception.

From the first "war correspondent" who covered the Crimea, through the Vietnam generation to today's intractable conflicts in Sudan or the Democratic Republic of Congo, the journalist's struggle to deliver the news has always included having to battle official efforts to control, restrict and censor.

At the same time, journalists have increasingly become targets for attack. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 346 journalists have been killed in the line of duty over the past decade. Other journalist groups give even higher figures.

In conflict areas such as Iraq, where the death toll has spiralled, journalists are directly in the line of fire. Under repressive regimes they suffer attack and imprisonment. Even in stable, democratic societies, they have been murdered for doing their job and reporting on crime and corruption.

And it is not just the increased physical threat that is taking its toll. In a globalised economy, when corporate multinationals are monopolising the media and, critics would argue, are "dumbing down" serious journalism, reporting budgets and foreign bureaus are being cut. International news is falling victim to insular and parochial perspectives. The focus is shifting away from serious issues of policy to personality journalism and headline-grabbing trivia.

But amid these disturbing trends, there is some encouraging news. Clear opportunities are emerging for local journalists.

As some mainstream media organisations abandon serious international news, the opportunity for diverse local voices to make a difference at home, and internationally, is increasing. The shrinking world of instant communications is enabling local media to make an impact on the international agenda as never before.

At the same time, a growing movement of international media development organisations is working, with support from private funding and western governmental development agencies, to strengthen local media to help create the conditions for peace, development and democracy.

The Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) is one such organisation, now working in more than two dozen countries. Starting in Southeast Europe and the former Soviet Union it spread its work to Afghanistan, the Middle East and now Africa. Its task is to support training, reporting and the building of capacity in media institutions for local journalists.

Our experience has underscored the enormous obstacles faced by local reporters. Often they experience direct repression, a chronic lack of resources and a dearth of professional support.

But we have also seen the capacity of local media, when given the right assistance, to demonstrate extraordinary courage and achieve the highest international standards of accuracy, objectivity and impartiality. The many international journalism awards won by IWPR recognise the accomplishments of local journalists working throughout our network, as does the success of the Ugandan Radio Network, established by IWPR in late 2005.

The wider picture is also positive. According to the United Nations Development Programme, in the past two decades, "81 countries took significant steps towards democracy, and today 140 of the world's nearly 200 countries hold multi-party elections – more than ever before." Developing democracy means an

essential, and expanding, role for local journalists the world over. This presents them with great potential and a huge responsibility.

New communications technologies, in particular mobile phones and the spread of the internet, are also helping to level the playing field. It is now cheaper, easier and quicker to obtain and disseminate information than ever before. The once very separate and diverse areas of the media are converging, so that text, audio and video are all available online, all the time (depending, of course, on computer access and bandwidth).

These developments are immensely empowering for journalists and populations at large.

But new opportunities also highlight the need for increased training and responsible reporting. And that is exactly what this handbook is about – it is a practical, hands-on manual designed to help local journalists in societies undergoing major crisis and change. In particular it is targeted at radio journalists working in Africa. This is a deliberate choice for IWPR. Africa is, in terms of development, now the most important region in the world – and, in terms of audience reach, radio is by far the most important mass medium in Africa.

But it will also, we believe, be of use to all journalists, everywhere. It outlines the core internationally recognised standards of journalism and provides essential guidance on many of the basic techniques of reporting.

The handbook reviews reporting on general, political and human rights issues. It has sections on location recording and computer-based audio editing. It provides guidance on safety and security and sensitive reporting in conflict areas, as well as libel issues. Developed out of the radio journalism workshops that were run as part of IWPR's Uganda Radio Network project, it also reviews the particular requirements for reporting for IWPR.

Each chapter provides exercises, discussion sections and further references. The handbook can either be used in coordination with an international trainer or can be worked through on its own. Additional training material can be found on the IWPR website.

Journalism is about rights but also about responsibilities. In many societies, for the first time in a generation or more, local journalists have the chance to report freely on what is happening in their own country.

How they establish professional standards and quality will not only set the scene for succeeding generations: it will also put their leaders under the spotlight, assist their communities to reconcile their differences and lay the groundwork for stable and democratic development. This handbook seeks to support them in that essential task.

Anthony Borden
Executive Director, IWPR

CHAPTER ONE

WHY BE A JOURNALIST?

If you are using this book, it is a pretty certain bet that you are already a journalist or you have an interest in the profession.

During IWPR training seminars, we have discussed with hundreds of people around the world why they became journalists. Everyone is different, of course, and there is no right or wrong answer. But certain themes occur again and again in these conversations. And certain common dilemmas are evident.

Journalism in Africa has a long and distinguished history going back to the 19th century, when newspapers critical of the colonial authorities began to appear in Liberia, Angola and the Gold Coast. The first radio broadcast from Africa was in 1923, just one year after the BBC was first established.

Since its inception, the medium of radio has played an important role in African society, informing, entertaining and on occasion helping to stimulate political change (as in South Africa) or causing political mayhem (as in Rwanda). Radio journalism, like print and television journalism, serves society, exposing injustice and holding politicians accountable to the public. In a time of crisis, it can unite or divide the country. During the Second World War, radio came into prominence in Africa as a means of broadcasting news and keeping up morale. An early example of a popular African broadcaster is Isa Kaita, who was based in Accra. Unusually for that time, Kaita (who later became a Northern Nigerian politician) gave detailed accounts of what was happening in the region, including a description of his own journey from Lagos to Accra under attack from German U-boats.

In this chapter, we describe some of the main reasons people become journalists and discuss some of the dangers and potential pitfalls. In an exercise later, you can analyse your own reasons.

SERVING SOCIETY

Many people say they want to become journalists to serve society. Exposing injustice, holding politicians accountable to the public, helping the country in a time of crisis – all this good journalism can and does do. But so do other professions – doctors and teachers, for example, or politicians themselves (at least

THE CHANGING FACE OF JOURNALISM

Changing Society

"The most important thing is for you to know that as a journalist, in a continent facing the problems of hunger, horrible violations of the human rights of ordinary people, lack of education and development for millions, you should come to the realisation that you have to contribute to change the society."
Ibiba Don Pedro, award winning journalist, the *Guardian* 2005

Lobbying for change

"There has been considerable interest shown in the question of petitions sent by the Ijebu Igbo Patriotic Society embodying requests for the opening of a Telegraph and Post Office at this town... But at present the ordinary man in the street who has to dispatch letters and telegraph messages has to go eleven miles to do so."
Nigerian Daily Times, 4 Dec 1936.

Photo: P. Kavuma

some of them). The goal of serving society does not in itself explain why you might want to be a journalist.

TELLING "THE TRUTH"

Aspiring journalists often proclaim their dedication to the truth. Getting the facts right, as this book outlines, is journalism's primary challenge. But "the truth" is a complex concept. Indeed a central principle of international journalism is the aim of presenting competing "truths" in a balanced way. Does a journalist have the capacity to determine the truth, and what happens if and when he or she is proved wrong?

REPRESENTING YOUR PART OF THE WORLD

Most journalists identify, consciously or subconsciously, with their own community – its language, religion and ethnicity. Sometimes, the outsider journalist is better able to give an impartial overview than the local journalist. He or she is less vulnerable to intimidation, having no family in the country, and is able to count on making a quick exit. But the outsider's independence should be weighed against their lack of local knowledge. The local journalist has good contacts, knows the hidden agenda of people in power and can evaluate the significance of events from the point of view of local people.

HIGHLIGHTING ISSUES

Journalism helps to inform those in authority about what is really going on in a country. Even with the best intentions, politicians and officials can become isolated from the real lives of the majority of people. Sometimes this is because they are surrounded by people anxious to please them and tell them what they think they might want to hear. Journalism can be a valuable direct channel to them. But there are also dangers to be aware of – a journalist may risk succumbing to the same temptation of trying to please a leadership audience in order to maintain acceptance within that community.

PUBLIC WATCHDOG

A well-informed public is the cornerstone of all civil societies. Hard-hitting but fair journalism about issues that matter to the public helps create pressure for change and improvement.

This means having access to reliable information about what political leaders and officials are doing. Is government policy fair and effective? Is a particular leader or official honest? Are promised policies and projects going ahead as planned? Are citizens' rights respected? If not, why not?

Yet this, perhaps the most classic of journalistic roles, also carries risks. Officials, opposition politicians and unofficial groups – including business and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) – will bombard you with partisan views, challenging your capacity to remain fair and balanced. Muckraking is hardly a way to make friends (or income). "The definition of independence," goes the old journalistic saying, "is when everyone hates you."

CURIOSITY

An insatiable curiosity is a common – perhaps indispensable – quality for journalists. Good journalists have a natural curiosity, which energises them to do a good job and enjoy their day-to-day work. They are quintessential "news hounds" and read everything they can get their hands on, including, or especially, newspapers they don't agree with. They care about detail and always want to know why. And having found something out, they want to tell others.

But this instinct brings its own pressures. News is relentless and requires dedication to stay on top of it. Many reporters tire of starting from scratch on every story, feeling ignorant and constantly having to brave the first "cold call" as they start afresh on a new story they know nothing about. Many journalists eventually specialise in particular topics. Others simply burn out.

INFLUENCE

Journalists can exercise a lot of influence – and some are attracted to the media for this reason. Building an audience can be good for your career and can help you make a difference through your reporting. But it can be dangerous, too. A sense of power can threaten your impartiality and the reporter will lose credibility if he or she becomes too closely associated with those in authority or in opposition. Complacency is fatal for good reporting. Constantly being fêted by those seeking to influence you can also have a damaging impact on your health, and in particular on your waistline.

FAME

Many journalists would like to be famous and this can be an incentive to excel in the job. A young reporter may be inspired by world-renowned faces such as CNN's Christiane Amanpour, the late Peter Jennings of ABC or the BBC's Jeremy Paxman, and dream of having their own faces on the box. The BBC's correspondent in Baghdad during the Iraq War – Rageh Omar – was dubbed the "Scud Stud" and signed a book contract as soon as the conflict finished. But if fame can bring benefits, it is also a drug and a distraction, and should never be more important than the story itself. The best journalists become famous because of the consistency and insightfulness of their work.

MONEY

Journalism is a job and a way to make money. Famous names like those mentioned above can command million dollar salaries. In conflict areas, particularly when the international press pack turns up, working as a fixer, translator or assistant reporter can earn you good money, especially if you are bright, responsible and have good English. But few journalists are among the highest earners, and local wage inflation at the high point of a crisis can evaporate quickly as soon as the story moves on to the next war zone. As businesses, media houses are highly unstable. More radio or television station owners go bust than retire early.

Worse, a focus on money makes you vulnerable to accepting bribes, dishonest payments, or gifts for favours. Such behaviour has absolutely no place in honest journalism, and has destroyed many a good career. If you want to make money, you would be better off looking for another job.

ADVENTURE

Many people become journalists because they want adventure – the feeling of waking up and wondering what new challenges await them. The ability to speak to a wide range of people and ask them all kinds of (often somewhat impertinent) questions can be exciting. So can foreign travel and, at the extreme, journeys to the frontline of human endurance, such as a disaster area or war zone. With this, too, can come a strong sense of camaraderie, leavening the usual fierce competition within the trade.

But most journalists face a lot of routine and boring work. Reporting on press conferences, business results and endless trials can test endurance in their own ways. Constant travel can be wearing. Waking up in a hotel in the middle of the night and not being able to remember which city you are in is very disorienting. Personal and family lives often suffer, sometimes made worse by alcohol, drug abuse and cigarettes. A growing number of media organisations recognise the extreme stress faced by journalists by providing hostile-environment training, counselling for those suffering post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and, all too often, memorials for those killed in action.

LOVE OF CRAFT

Many journalists do their job for a very simple reason – because they love it. A radio or television presenter in full flow during a live broadcast can feel very gratified when such an exciting task goes well. The best reporters pore endlessly over reports or doggedly pursue their sources because they are driven to do so. Top editors simply love words, cleanly and crisply presented. It feels great to be good at what you do.

But it is important to recognise what journalism is and what it is not. Most importantly, it is for the moment and not for the ages. Journalism is not literature and a news broadcast is not a feature film. Purple prose and over-dramatisation are signs of journalistic immaturity and can be embarrassing in the cold light of day. Concentrating too much on the scriptwriting and getting the precise turn of phrase can be an obstacle to good reporting. Speed often matters more than depth, and deadlines invariably undermine absolute quality.

SUMMARY

A journalist:

- is curious about the world
- questions what he or she is told
- wants to tell people what he or she knows
- enjoys being the first to know
- is passionate about accuracy and fairness
- is interested in people
- is obsessed with news and current affairs
- never takes no for an answer
- always wants to know and do more
- has just a tiny touch of ego

EXERCISES

Review the preceding categories and try to decide why you want to be a journalist. Be honest with yourself, and try to discuss the subject openly with your colleagues and friends and compare your responses. What are the most common answers?

Ask yourself some typical questions:

Do you follow news and current events carefully?

Are you an actor or an observer?

What do you like to read, watch and listen? Are you a news junkie?

Are you interested in politics?

Who are the people you admire? Are any of them writers or journalists?

ADDITIONAL READING & REFERENCES

A large number of websites are dedicated to journalism, ranging from learned reviews and journalism schools to the latest hot gossip. Below is a short list of some of the main US and UK sites that many journalists use for reference and training on a regular basis:

A major source of news about Africa can be found at All Africa Global Media at www.AllAfrica.com.

World News Network – www.wn.com – pulls together many of the world's top news sites and has an exclusively African service on www.wnafrica.com.

The BBC's news site – www.bbc.co.uk – is one of the world's best. The BBC's training site – www.bbctraining.com – is also well worth visiting.

CNN International – www.cnn.com – and the One World site – www.oneworld.net – are invaluable sources of news, particularly news focusing on the developing world and environmental issues.

Both Google and Yahoo have their own world news services which are updated constantly. They can be accessed by going to the main Google or Yahoo pages and clicking on the "News" button.

Also worth looking at are:

Media Guardian: www.mediaguardian.co.uk
Poynter Institute: www.poynter.org (contains links to many other journalism sites)
Columbia Journalism Review: www.cjr.org
American Journalism Review: www.ajr.org
The UK's National Council for the Training of Journalists: www.nctj.com/index.html
Institute for War & Peace Reporting: www.iwpr.net (see, in particular, the training pages)

Media and media ethics are the focus of a burgeoning field of studies, as well as extensive dramatisation in fiction and film.

Everyone has their favourites, but some key texts in the genre include:

The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Kosovo, by Phillip Knightley (Johns Hopkins)
War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning, by Chris Hedges (Public Affairs)
Scoop, by Evelyn Waugh
The Quiet American, by Graham Greene

Two essential films about reporting for and running a newspaper:

All the President's Men, from the book by Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward
Citizen Kane, by Orson Welles

CHAPTER TWO

INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

Journalism is as diverse as the world it covers. The hard-news radio reporter works differently from the features producer, who has different instincts from the show business correspondent or the sports correspondent. Reporters in the United States and Europe have distinctive styles of working, just as reporters in Africa will differ from country to country.

Yet amid this diversity, journalist organisations around the world have sought to codify professional ethics. Most agree that accuracy, impartiality and fairness are the foundation stones of good journalism, principles that also go to the core of IWPR training. This chapter reviews those international standards, examining the key elements essential for good journalism. Of course, there are differences, but quite often they are of tone, stress and degree. Take a look at the following, all of which draw on these core standards:

The first obligation of journalists under the Ugandan Journalists Code of Practice is:

"No journalist shall disseminate information or an allegation without establishing its correctness or truth."

The preamble to the Code of Ethics of the Nigerian Press Organisation begins:

"Journalism entails a high degree of public trust. To earn and maintain this trust, it is morally imperative for every journalist and every news medium to observe the highest professional and ethical standards. In the exercise of these duties, a journalist should always have a healthy regard for the public interest."

And the Code of Conduct of the Media Council of Zambia has as its first injunction:

"The public has the right to know the truth. Therefore journalists have a duty to report the truth either as representing objective reality or representing what the source says fairly, accurately and objectively."

All the codes find it easy to agree on what journalists should avoid:

- libel and slander (defamation)
- plagiarism (passing off others' material as one's own)
- accepting bribes
- making the story up (fabrication and pure invention)

Responsible, fact-based reporting is the bedrock of diverse specialist approaches to journalism, including covering war crimes, reporting on victims and trauma, and undertaking peace reporting (a complex and sometimes controversial topic). It is also the media's core contribution to democracy and development.

So what is the media's role in a democratic society?

THE MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY

First and foremost, the media has to provide citizens with the information they require to enable them to make informed judgements about their localities, their regions, their country and the wider world. Democracy simply does not exist when voters – who are required to decide whether local, regional and national leaders deserve to be re-elected – do not have the information that would make such choices meaningful. Journalists have a duty, both to their fellow-citizens but also to politicians, to try and ensure that the choices made at the ballot box are informed decisions. If this information is absent then rumour, emotion and tribal or racial loyalties dominate the political decisions that voters make.

Photo: IWPR Africa

In particular, this means that the media has a duty to provide the public with information about the words and actions of politicians – both those in power and those in opposition. This is known as the "watchdog" function and is vital in a democracy in order that voters can come to a considered judgement at election time.

But the media has to go further than simply seeking to provide information. Democracy was relatively straightforward as it was originally practised in the city-states of ancient Greece. All male citizens took part in the decision-making process – they could speak and vote as individuals. Modern societies are much larger and infinitely more complex. Thus in a society of 20 million voters, attempts have to be made to organise and crystallise opinions into manageable blocks. This is partly the role of political parties but is also the role of the media.

The media can, and should, act as a transmission mechanism between government and the governed. If there is growing public concern about the quality of the water supply in a particular region then it is the role of the media to represent that concern. If a particular section of society – say market stallholders – feel they have a grievance then they should be able to turn to the media to represent those grievances to the wider society.

Equally, whilst the media hold politicians to account by monitoring their activities, it also has an obligation to provide space for politicians to respond to the concerns of the public, to counter what they believe to be wrong information and to put their own policies before the people. This should not just happen at election times. And it should not, of course, include only the governing party.

Finally, the media's role in a democracy is also to provide the forum within which public debate is held. This means offering all main parties equal time or space and treatment, but it also means seeking out local issues which might deserve a national hearing.

Thus the media's role in a democracy can be summed up as providing reliable information to support responsible public debate, to hold

officials accountable and to inform the decisions of the electorate.

Many of the journalists' professional codes stress these fundamental democratic roles as part of the underlying responsibilities of individual journalists as well as of the media as a whole.

THE KEY ELEMENTS

Nearly every code of ethics agrees on at least three fundamental factors in the practice of journalism: impartiality, accuracy and fairness. These can be considered the basic universal standards of journalism.

Ethical guidelines also stress honesty and decency in newsgathering. Many codes also cover protection of sources as an essential component of newsgathering.

1. Impartiality

Most journalists' codes of conduct and rules highlight impartiality or independence in reporting. But this concept can be difficult to define.

Impartiality means reporting should not support one political party, religion, people or ethnic group over another. It allows for fairly reporting one side's policies or pronouncements, and for including comments that one party or group may make about another. But the core principle is that the reporter should not directly express his or her own comments, opinions or political preferences.

Balanced journalism means providing a clear distinction between what is fact and what is opinion.

Publications, broadcasters and online providers in many countries find it hard to survive without some financial backing. Political parties, pressure groups or powerful businesses with political interests are the natural candidates to support them. In such cases, the newspaper, radio and television station should, from time-to-time, make the audience aware of the source of its financial backing.

Responsible publications and broadcasters make clear distinctions between news reporting and other forms of coverage. This can be done, for example, by ensuring that what is broadcast in news bulletins is impartial reportage whilst other programme formats, such as current affairs programmes or chat shows, provide space for comment and opinion. This allows comment and opinion to be clearly labelled.

In general, radio journalists do not directly express their own opinions, as feature writers can and do. However, broadcasters can still exercise great editorial influence through decisions such as which subjects are covered; who is, or is not, interviewed; and how they are interviewed. This is particularly difficult to monitor but such decisions can decisively influence the output of the radio station. Therefore, journalists and editors need to take great care in trying to ensure that editorial decisions are not influenced by any considerations other than those of impartiality and balance.

In the West, many media outlets are owned by large companies and the issue of commercial impartiality is also sensitive. Editorial and business or advertising departments are usually separated by a so-called Chinese Wall which ensures that no direct communication about editorial content takes place between the editorial and other departments. There have been cases where an editor has resigned because a publisher or owner sought to influence the content of the publication. Similarly, the failure of editors to resign under such circumstances has led to the discrediting of some publications and broadcasting outlets.

A classic tension occurs if a broadcaster has a story that may embarrass the owners or a major advertiser. If it broadcasts the report, then it may lose income. But if it suppresses the report, it is not being impartial and its reputation may suffer.

Political impartiality can be difficult to maintain

for many reasons. In some countries, the media are directly attacked if they criticise the authorities and will be deemed partisan or "lackeys of foreign governments" even if they are only trying to maintain an independent line. It is an especially difficult position to maintain during times of conflict when societies become highly polarised.

Impartiality is also hard to maintain for more mundane reasons. The remarks of a state president will invariably be taken to be more newsworthy than those of a village leader, even if the national leader is patently repeating the lines written for him by his media advisers, while the villager may be raising neglected concerns that go to the heart of government policy.

Many people complain that stories are sometimes not objective. This may be a valid criticism, especially if the journalist has an obvious agenda. Or it may simply be a coded way of saying that the article does not fit their point of view.

Most experienced journalists would agree that pure objectivity in a news story is virtually impossible to achieve, but that does not mean it is not something to be strived for. Attaining objectivity is problematic, because the way we see the world is inevitably coloured by our gender, national or ethnic origins, religion and so on. Hence a journalist should always be conscious of his or her own perspective but at the same time strive to be impartial when reporting.

2. Accuracy

Every journalists' code stresses the need for accuracy. The urge to get it right is always strong and always takes priority over speed. There are no prizes for being fast and wrong.

Writing for radio news requires skills of presenting information clearly, concisely and effectively. It is based on hard facts, so the reporter must know how and where to find reliable information.

This means good observation, good listening, plenty of background reading and, above all, talking to the right people to find reliable information.

A journalistic axiom is that the best reporters are only as good as their personal contacts. So you must learn how to cultivate them and how to evaluate the information offered. This means assessing who is reliable (and getting their trust), and who is not. A critical challenge is how to reconcile conflicting accounts of the same event.

Journalists need to take extensive notes or tape record interviews when possible to be sure the report they file is as precise as possible. Dedication to this recognised principle is crucial to maintaining a journalist's integrity and credibility – even if it is just getting names down correctly. Accuracy requires meticulous attention to detail, as one small error undermines the reliability of a whole report. This means checking and double-checking facts whenever possible, even generally accepted information.

Getting the story straight may mean calling sources back to make sure what they said is portrayed correctly, especially if another source is disputing it. This is called fact-checking, and sometimes it may mean delaying the report to avoid mistakes if there is any doubt. Getting it wrong can affect future credibility and at worse can cause serious damage, including a legal challenge.

Accuracy is not just about facts; it is about proper context. Damaging information about a candidate before an election, or about a company's performance, will have serious consequences. So the listener needs to know where it came from and whether this source has partisan motives. Are there hidden interests pushing the information that should make the reporter wary and should be exposed so that the audience can make a fair judgement? It makes all the difference if some product is criticised by a consumer or by a representative of a rival company producing a similar item.

Above all, a journalist relies on facts and testing the facts for reliability. Good stories may start from a journalist's excitement or even anger. But they must treat honestly the search for information to support the story and accept that it may reveal unexpected and perhaps disturbing results.

3. Fairness

To be fair to the people you interview means being fair both in how you gather the information and in how you present it.

Interviewees have the right to know the context of the news item or current affairs feature they are being interviewed about; what kind of contribution they are expected to make; whether an interview will be live or recorded; and how it might be edited.

Subjects have a right to know if they are being recorded and how that recording will be used. Investigative inquiries might require some variation of this, but fairness to all parties and the story remains the guideline.

The International Federation of Journalists says the journalist shall only use fair methods to obtain news (including sound), photographs and documents. This means identifying oneself as a journalist under normal circumstances, and never using threats or displays of force to get information.

Just because you have learnt something from somebody doesn't mean that you can use it for broadcast. In general, information should only be broadcast when you have secured reliable and, in most cases, on-the-record sourcing through fair and transparent means.

Fairness in presentation means allowing someone you are criticising the chance to respond to those comments within the same story. Someone may be unhappy about a story you transmit about him or her. But they should never surprised, because the reporter should, if at all possible, always have discussed the critical points with him or her before transmission.

If you do not feel comfortable discussing your criticisms with a subject of the story, you should feel uncomfortable broadcasting them. (Note: this does not mean reading out your script, but it does mean explaining the substance of the criticisms that you are about to broadcast).

Indeed, if you are criticising an individual, your report will be stronger if you also include all the counter-arguments and positive points of the individual. Your piece will appear more balanced and more reliable, and the criticisms will have more weight.

4. Honesty and Decency

The way journalists do their jobs and present the results – their standards of ethics and practice – is vital to keeping public trust. Whether written or not, a code of good practice is a healthy reminder of how important it is, in gathering, checking and distributing the news, to play by the rules. Given the complexities and occasional moral dilemmas faced in the practice of journalism, it is also helpful to have a sense of one's own boundaries, guidelines and personal ethics.

As well as accuracy and fairness, most codes stress honesty, transparency and common sense in newsgathering. They balance the pressures to ferret out information at all costs with a concept of decency. Reporters will invariably be persistent in their reporting but must not use harassment or intimidation.

Journalists should gather information openly and should not, except for exceptional circumstances (and with the explicit approval of their editor), use hidden recording devices. The BBC, for example, only allows secret recording if it is the only way to obtain information that is in the public interest or to prevent the commission of a crime.

Anyone criticised should have a fair right of reply.

Journalists should avoid undue intrusion where people have suffered trauma and shock and should respect a person's right to privacy.

Children and victims of sexual crimes must be treated with care, and legislation in many countries requires that they not be named or photographed.

Business journalists should not report on a company in which they have a financial interest.

Many media organisations have detailed rules governing securities ownership and trading by journalists. All relevant declarations of interest must be made to senior editorial staff so that assessments can be made as to whether there is a danger of any conflicts of interest emerging involving particular reporters.

Yet due to the complexity of ethical questions, many journalists' codes and policies avoid declaring too many absolute rules. In extraordinary cases, well-established rules of newsroom practice must sometimes be reconsidered in light of a higher public interest. Codes of practice usually specify that journalists should never pretend to be something they are not. How can a journalist expose dishonesty if he is not honest himself? Yet sometimes the only way to expose corruption of officials conclusively, for instance, may require adopting a disguise or a subterfuge to trap such people. In such cases, consultation with editors and peers and a strong sense of one's own ethical codes provide essential guidance.

When facing an ethical dilemma, always ask:

- Is there another way to get the same information?
- Can you explain your decisions, in good conscience, to those affected?
- If a similar situation occurs, would you handle it in the same way?
- How would you feel if you were the subject, rather than the reporter, of the story?
- Have you done everything you can to be accurate and fair?
- Have you tried to find all the significant aspects of a story?
- Are the decisions free from outside, and especially personal, influences?

5. Protecting Sources

Journalists' codes of ethics generally emphasise the protection of sources, sometimes in apparent defiance of law. Some refer to a moral obligation not to reveal sources.

At IWPR, we consider protection of sources a journalist's fundamental right. But it is hard to make the case that such confidentiality has been universally accepted as an international standard. Sometimes confidentiality is breached, often with serious consequences for the journalist or the source involved.

Organisations like the International Federation of Journalists, the US-based Committee to Protect Journalists and the Paris-based Reporters Sans Frontieres have all taken up cases where journalists have sought to protect the identity of their sources when faced with strong pressure – sometimes from courts, sometimes from repressive governments – to reveal names.

In a pragmatic sense, a journalist who promises to keep a source anonymous but then subsequently reveals the name will find it very hard to gain the trust of sources in the future. But when a whistleblower or political opponent gives a strong or revealing anonymous statement to the press, officials may want to know the name so that they can penalise the person and make other people fearful of making similar remarks in future.

Often the question is framed in legal terms. If a journalist receives confidential information from an anonymous source, the government may wish to take legal action against the source, arguing that the leak breached confidentiality laws.

The issue goes to the heart of the debate over freedom of information. Yet most countries do not guarantee a journalist's right to protect sources, and occasionally journalists have gone to prison over these issues. Some courts

are sympathetic and look at whether the public interest is best served by such protection.

6. Presenting All Sides

In a dispute, you must try to speak to all sides, but remember that may not be enough. In a conflict, there will be warring factions but there will also be international official observers, diplomats, independent non-governmental organisations and unaffiliated civilians. No one has a monopoly on the truth, but the less affiliated a person is, the more reliable their information may be.

Where an accusation is made against someone, make sure that it is presented in a fair context. That means including balancing information or other important factors, particularly a fair right to reply to any accusations being made.

Be transparent about the journalistic process. You are a journalist serving a public role, and should be up-front about what you are doing. The clearer you are about this in your own mind, the more confidence you will bring to the task of coaxing sensitive information out of others.

Avoid conflicts of interest or situations that might create such conflicts. Impartial journalists should generally not hold public office while working in the profession, take important jobs in political parties, participate in public demonstrations when reporting on them, or do anything that would suggest to the public that their reporting is being influenced by such events.

Avoid financial conflicts, or any appearance that personal gain (other than salaries) is a motive for the report.

Accepting payment from a source to influence your reporting is entirely unethical.

Reporting on a company in which the journalist has a personal interest is unacceptable.

While it may be necessary sometimes to accept a meal or a drink, nothing should suggest that a favourable report is being promised in return, or that an unfavourable report might be dropped.

Similarly, do not pay for information except in extreme circumstances, which should be cleared with your editor.

7. Asking Difficult Questions

A journalist is serving the public's right to know, and therefore has a responsibility to probe. But that does not mean being rude or discourteous. BBC editorial guidelines say "be searching, sharp, sceptical". Whatever your own opinion, respect your sources and be direct. But do not be either discourteous or emotionally attached to one side of an argument.

People should know how their words or images are going to be used (though careful exceptions may be necessary in undercover or investigative stories). Be careful what you record. This can be especially important when reporting a conflict when sometimes, however unwelcome it may be, the military can set the rules.

Use unnamed sources with extreme care. Journalists will sometimes cite senior diplomats, high-ranking officers or other anonymous witnesses who ask to be protected. But this is not a licence to allow them to make unreliable accusations, or for the journalist to make up the source. If the name is withheld, provide the closest possible description to indicate the credibility of the source. In all cases be transparent, especially with your editor, who may require you to try to convince a source to come on the record before enabling you to publish especially sensitive information.

If it feels like your information is "too good to check" – in other words, the story is so strong that you are reluctant to hear information that casts doubt on it – then this is a good indicator that the story should be most definitely checked thoroughly.

8. Use common sense and always ask yourself:

- Have you obtained your information in a reliable and ethical way?
- Have you done everything you can to be accurate and to corroborate your facts?
- Are your decisions free from unfair influence or bias?
- Have you provided balance and context, in particular the right of reply and fair comment, to anyone criticised in your report?
- Is there no other way to get the information, especially in the case of an unnamed source?
- Are your sources reliable, and have you spoken to all sides involved in the story?
- Is the information reasonable, and does it make sense?
- Most of all, can you stand by your story?

EXERCISES

EXERCISE 1

The police let you know, off the record, they are about to arrest a well-liked local businessman known for his charitable works and public service. They say they are looking at fraud and bribery charges. It is late evening and no formal documents are immediately available.

You call the businessman, who confirms that he knows about the allegations and expects to be arrested the next day. He declines to give a direct answer on the accusation. He asks you wait a day before broadcast so that he can tell his family. He says he will look after you if you can delay the story.

- What are the ethical dilemmas?
- Are there any other practical problems?
- Should you discuss it with anyone?
- Do you need more information?
- Should you put the story together?
- How might you write it on the few facts above, and what do you need in order to expand it properly?

EXERCISE 2

You have reported on a war crime and published an important story that mobilised international attention to an atrocity. In so doing, you have observed all the classical ethical guidelines of journalism: respecting your sources, keeping your notes carefully, only publishing exactly what you can confirm.

Years later, an international tribunal summons you to testify. Your notebooks are subpoenaed. You are called upon to break your pledges as a journalist and reveal the names of sources and other information which you would not, as a journalist, publish at the time.

Do you participate in the tribunal in order to support the prosecution of an alleged war criminal? Or do you refuse, even at personal risk, in defence of ethical journalistic codes?

ADDITIONAL READING & REFERENCES

Many web sites contain references to international journalism codes, including:

www.uta.fi/ethicnet
www.presswise.org.uk
www.ifj.org
www.journalism.org

For a listing and links to several major individual codes, see:

www.asne.org/index.cfm?id=387
www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=32&aid=16997
www.nytco.com/pdf/NYT_Ethical_Journalism_042904.pdf
www.apme.com/index.shtml
www.about.reuters.com/aboutus/editorial

CHAPTER THREE

WHAT MAKES NEWS AND HOW IS IT REPORTED ON RADIO?

NEWS JUDGEMENT AND STORY TYPES

Trying to define just what exactly is news is difficult. But knowing how to identify a story to research is perhaps a journalist's most vital skill. This chapter examines issues of news judgement and examines the different story types commonly used.

Most journalists would agree with the cliché that "Dog Bites Man" is not news, but "Man Bites Dog" is. Why? Simply because the first happens all the time and the second is an unusual, even bizarre, occurrence. But there are also more everyday ways of looking at what makes a story.

News, in its simplest terms, is something that has happened. It can be an event or a trend, something that occurred suddenly, or something ongoing. Someone won something, or lost; conflict erupted, or was resolved; something was built, or destroyed; someone failed, or they succeeded.

But life can be a little more complicated and debates about "what makes news" reverberate around newsrooms, journalists' pubs and university departments across the world. There is no one single agreed definition. Here are two, slightly cynical, ones to ponder:

"News is what someone, somewhere doesn't want printed – all the rest is advertising."
Lord Rothermere, British 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 BBC radio news editor

The reality is that there is no such thing as news per se. What one society, at one time in its history, regards as news would not be accepted as news in other societies at other times.

Obviously there are certain major world events – the attack on the World Trade Center in New York (9/11) or the Indian Ocean tsunami – that most people would agree should be included in any newspaper or news bulletin. But, for example, in centrally controlled economies the annual wheat harvest is regarded as an important news item – partly because it affects such a large section of the population, but also because it can act as a propaganda tool for the regime to advertise its "successes". However, in most developed countries the size of the wheat harvest would not be regarded as news – except for those publications covering agriculture or the grocery trade.

Having said that, it is possible to divine certain attributes of stories (rather than the subject matter itself of stories) that make journalists say, "That's something we must cover". These are what's known as news values.

THE INGREDIENTS OF NEWS

New or "Apparently New"

Journalists try to transmit news as soon as practicable after learning of it – that's why it's called "news" rather than "olds". But there are times when journalists find themselves having to present their listeners with information that might not be as "new" as they would have wished. We all miss stories, but if we are to do our jobs and serve our listeners, we have to find ways of presenting the missed story in ways that make them look new. That can mean finding a new piece of information that adds something to the story or a comment from someone who has not yet spoken.

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

the key building blocks in constructing the news agenda. Sometimes the conflicts are quite 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.

As a result, the media is often accused of focusing on negativity. This is true but does not mean that the journalist has necessarily created the negativity. It just means that he or she has asked him 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 information going to benefit, please or enthuse?" and sought out comments from them, but that tends to happen far less often.

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, "Who is this going to affect?" In other words, "What is the relevance of this information to my audience?" Relevance also means finding stories that the audience can understand, in terms of their own experiences, values and societies. Thus, for example, a story about the latest developments in internet voice telephony available only in the West is not going to resonate with a poor rural population in the Central African Republic that has no access to telephones, let alone computers. The location of an event – geographical proximity i.e. whether the event is happening close to the audience – is a major determinant of relevance.

Importance

Journalists seek to make judgements about what is important. Thus a summit meeting between the president of the United States and his Chinese opposite number might not be relevant to the life of the average Namibian, but it will make news because by most criteria it is deemed important. There is generally a consensus about the importance of major events. But there is much debate about some world events that, whilst still important, do not fall into this category and are not strictly relevant to the audience. This is one of the reasons that foreign stories, important as they are in their own right, tend to get less coverage than domestic ones.

Timeliness

In general, news media cover events that fall within their own time span. For a daily newspaper, for example, anything that has happened over the last 24 hours is news. But for a radio station with an hourly bulletin the question becomes more problematic. And some events don't happen over the news cycle of a radio station or a newspaper. For stories such as global warming, we have to rely on specific events – such as the hurricane that engulfed New Orleans, or the latest findings from international scientists – in order to report on trends which otherwise might fall off the news agenda. Thus we need to find "pegs" for stories, such as chronic poverty, if we are to keep them in the forefront of public attention.

Personalisation/Celebrity

The media is people-focused. This is partly because most of us enjoy reading and hearing about other people – and there are certain categories of people that particularly interest us, such as celebrities (including politicians), children, victims, heroes or a David triumphing over a Goliath. Many stories can also be more easily understood when couched in terms of

individuals. For example HIV/Aids is a huge issue and most people cannot take in the fact that, for example, in Uganda seven per cent of the population is HIV positive. But if we hear the story of a family of six living in a displaced person's camp in Northern Uganda, in which every member is HIV positive, and we learn 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" has more impact than "The United States and the United Kingdom have invaded Iraq in order to secure regime change". Celebrities such as David Beckham, Madonna or Nassun Dur need only do soething very ordinary for journalists to regard it as a big story.

Scandal

If we put together the media and its audience's interest in personalities with the notion of disruptions to the norm, we can better understand why there is such a great appetite for stories that involve scandals or scandalous behaviour. By definition, scandals involve individuals, usually well known, who have become involved in actual, or alleged, improper behaviour. This generally centres on three areas – sex, money and/or the abuse of power. The particular attraction of these stories is that they involve an element of curiosity about the lives of the rich, famous and powerful, with a sense of hubris as one of these figures falls from grace. In addition, the stories frequently contain references to "innocent victims" and sometimes whistleblower "heroes".

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. However, 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. Many journalists shy away from doing these stories – which is a pity because decisions by these organisations are often important and relevant to African audiences and, with a little work, the story can usually be told in relatively simple terms.

Expectedness

Newsrooms are driven by their diaries. Predictable events – press conferences, parliamentary sittings, state visits etc. – attract coverage, irrespective of their importance. This is because the 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 one requires that the second story be guaranteed to produce more significant news than the first. Journalists are also attracted to stories that are clearly news, because they are comprehensible to the listener and easy to follow-up.

Unexpectedness

If diaries are the bread and butter of news, the exciting "breaking story", events happening out of the ordinary, are what really excite journalists and grab the listener's attention. However, the event has to be relatively easy to understand and has to happen within the news cycle of the media organisation. For example, a sudden mudslide that kills 100 in Rwanda fits these criteria. However, it would be less likely to be seen as news if the 100 people had died not in the slide itself, but as a result of drinking water over a period of a year from a river that had been polluted by minerals from the mudslide. This is true even though the mudslide and the number of deaths would have been the same.

Development

In developing countries, both audiences and the media take a great interest in stories about development, particularly those that concern the provision of direct material contributions – new schools, the distribution of mosquito nets, a new road etc. These stories are not only of interest to the people whose lives are likely to be directly affected by the changes – they are

also of interest to a wider audience that sees the overall development of the country as relating directly to their, and their family's, well-being and prospects for the future.

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 local, 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 Mbale who ate a live snake just because he was hungry, the woman from Hoima who won the Miss Ugly competition and turned out to be a man.

A QUICK GUIDE TO THE INGREDIENTS OF NEWS

Does your potential story deal with something that:

- is new or apparently new?
- represents a disruption to the norm (e.g. disasters and crime)?
- involves conflict/difference/argument (up to and including violence)?
- is relevant, and understandable, to the target audience?
- can be told briefly and clearly?
- falls within the media's timeframe?
- involves people – particularly celebrities, children, innocent victims, heroes?
- is about scandals – sex, money and abuse of power?
- is about concrete contributions to the development process?
- is unusual or quirky or humorous?
- involves large numbers of people or large amounts of money?
- is the first, last, largest, oldest?
- will provide the audience with interest, entertainment and/or distraction?

REPORTING THE NEWS

Radio is a great medium for reporting news – and in particular, it is a great medium for following rapidly changing events. The reporter with a satellite phone in a war zone can come up live in a programme against the sound of gunfire, plunging the listener inside a breaking story. Like television, radio reporting is immediate. But a radio reporter has more flexibility than a television journalist – the most visible piece of radio equipment is a microphone. This is far more discreet than the lens of a camera, which can quickly cause alarm or anger in a crowd.

ROUTINE

The morning and evening meetings are the starting point for day and night shifts. It's here that the editor looks at what is in the diary – running stories, press conferences, anniversaries, government announcements – as well as the progress of breaking stories. The editor will also be looking at what the other media are running, including newspapers, radio and television. Once an agenda is set for the day's reporting shift, the primary job of most reporters is feeding material into the hourly news bulletins.

CORRESPONDENTS

More senior staff will take on the bigger stories. In a large radio station some of these stories will fall to correspondents who have a speciality. For example, a story about the government purchasing a new type of tank could be covered by the defence correspondent. If there are plans to introduce a new strategy for teaching four-year-olds to read, this may be covered by the education correspondent. But there is always a need for general reporting, both in the news bulletins and in more extended current affairs programmes which have more space for analysis and debate.

LIMITS TO RADIO

There are of course limitations to radio reporting and there are times when the radio reporter envies his television counterpart. With

words and sounds alone it's hard to do justice to disasters like 9/11, the 2002 volcanic eruption in the Congolese city of Goma, and the floods in Mozambique in 2000 or more recently in New Orleans. Pictures of devastation and destruction say a great deal more than words, and in a crisis pictures are what the public want. This is when the radio reporter must use his or her powers of reporting to the full – using the skills of writing, observation and description, and complementing this by searching out articulate eyewitnesses and responsible officials to interview. The radio reporter can do much to bring a major news story to life for his or her listeners.

But lack of physical pictures is not the only limitation of radio – there is also a limit to the amount of information that a listener can take in at one time. The newspaper reader can always go back and take another look at what he or she has read. Not so the radio listener. In radio there is no going back – information comes and goes swiftly. The exception of course is if the programme has been put on the Internet, or produced as a podcast (a programme that can be stored and replayed on an MP3 player), so that it can be listened to again and again. But for most, the experience of listening to the radio is fleeting and transient. So the radio reporter must persevere in being economical and clear in writing and structuring stories, unfolding events to the listener step-by-step.

To state a truism – sound is at the heart of radio. And here there is a sense in which radio can compete with television, because sound generates pictures in the listeners' mind, whether it is children crying in a playground after a mortar attack, or an opposition politician in full flight attacking the government for corruption. Television reporters covering a big event, after listening to a compelling report by a colleague from radio, often wryly note that "radio has the best pictures". This is an echo of an observation made many years ago by the famous American journalist Walter Lippman, that the job of a journalist is "painting pictures in men's minds".

The good radio reporter must have a passion for sound – both in terms of people's voices and the ambient (surrounding) sound that is heard on location. Having recorded good quality sound, the reporter must have the technical ability to cut, shape and script sound at speed.

DIFFERENT FORMATS FOR DELIVERING NEWS

A reporter will supply material to news bulletins or current affairs programmes in a number of forms.

One is a written dispatch from the scene, which forms the basis for a story read by the newsreader – sometimes known as a news script or, more colloquially, as a straight read.

The quickest way to convey information in a rolling story is a two-way, sometimes known as a Q & A (question and answer). If the reporter is in the centre of changing events, the presenter will often ask quite simply, "What's happening now? What can you see?" If the story is fast-moving, then this is a simple interview with the reporter giving information about what he or she has seen or heard. However, two-ways can also be used to get a reporter's analysis of an event. In this case, it is important that some form of preparation takes place. The reporter needs to inform the production staff and the presenter about the sort of questions that will enable him or her to provide the best pre-prepared answers. It doesn't benefit anyone to have the studio presenter put a question that elicits the answer, "I don't know".

The two-way is commonly followed up later by a dispatch also known as the voicer. This is a written dispatch by the reporter which he or she then records, either on location or back at the studio. This gives the reporter a chance to order his or her thoughts and, for the listener, it provides maximum information in a minimum amount of time.

Another version of a dispatch is the illustrated dispatch. This will include one or two sound bites embedded in the written piece delivered

by the reporter. If the reporter's piece contains just one main piece of sound, or contains just one on-the-spot interview, it is sometimes referred to as a doughnut, the sound being the "jam" inside.

A more elaborate way of presenting news is the **package**. This will contain maybe three voices briefly linked together by the reporter, plus some sort of audio or **actuality** recorded on location. This is sometimes known as **wildtrack**, because the audio has been recorded separately from the interview. For example, a reporter covering a plane crash will want to interview the head of the airline, an aviation expert and perhaps relatives of the passengers. Wildtrack or actuality might include weeping relatives or an airport announcement. A more light-hearted package – looking at a new bus service, for instance – might include some music to give colour and pace. A package can last from two minutes to five, depending on the house style of the station.

STORY VS. ISSUE

A good story has a beginning, a middle and an end. It responds to the key questions set out in Chapter 5: who, what, when, where, why, how and what does it mean? Remember to think of the listener, and what would make him or her want to listen to your story.

One of the biggest difficulties, especially for young journalists, is distinguishing between a story and an issue. A story may be about an issue. But an issue in itself is not always a story.

In discussing story ideas, many reporters say that they are concerned about a subject in their community and want to make an item or a programme about it. This is very positive, but not enough. Poverty, education, security – these are subjects. A journalist has to dig deeper to find an event, a development, perhaps a trend to be able to construct a narrative in which something distinct occurs.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PEG

The other essential component of story selection is keeping up with the news.

Knowing the news intimately is the best way to tell whether your story idea is new. There is little point in trying to do a story about something which has already been widely covered in the media. A news item, or a news feature, should sound fresh and break new ground. That means something new has happened. It may also mean you have a fresh angle, or a new source, to add to the information which has already been published.

The news peg can be a problematic concept since it refers to what is on the news agenda, or is the subject of particular controversy at the moment. Just as your editor will not want a piece very similar to something the station has already covered, he or she will also tend to be less interested in subjects which are totally off the news agenda.

The balance is never entirely clear, and different editors will view the question of the peg differently. Some journalists resent the whole concept of the peg as a very limiting, pack-like approach to journalism. They argue that it is up to individual journalists and media organisations to determine what is news, not to follow events blindly. But when a big story breaks, the power of the peg is undeniable.

Following the peg means targeting stories that relate to the key events and issues of the moment. It could mean a story directly about a major news issue (the assassination of a prime minister, for instance), or it could mean an off-angle piece that contributes to the subject (about the prevalence of violence and gun-culture in the society, for example). An item can often be adjusted to relate to the peg by re-writing the intro. But be aware that stories may be spiked (discarded) if the news peg shifts too radically.

In any event, you must be aware of the main news at all times. This underscores the single most important task of a journalist, namely, to be an avid news consumer. Read and listen to everything you can. Listen to your own station and the competition. Read newspapers, particularly those with views you strongly oppose, and surf the internet to see what

media organisations in other countries are saying. You can even listen online to live transmissions or you can download podcasts.

Consider Your Audience

How do you know what sort of story people are interested in? The answer is that different people are interested in different stories, according to their background, profession, or where they live.

The first rule then is to consider your audience. Is it a story they are likely to be interested in, that they should know about? For example, an international audience will not be interested in an ordinary car crash, which killed two people on a local road, unless the victims were foreigners or internationally famous. But a local audience will be.

The car crash might even produce a follow-up feature if it points up how bad the roads are and how maintenance has failed, and if it raises attention to the need for more work on the roads. Potential news features exist all around and that is what makes them worth looking for. A good journalist uses eyes, ears and lots of acquired knowledge to find features.

STORY TYPES

Some news organisations categorise their stories, a practice which is also followed by IWPR. In selecting your story you should therefore know what kind of story you intend to cover.

News Stories

News stories can be divided into two different categories: breaking or spot news, and set-piece or scheduled news. Sometimes the latter is called diary material because a news organisation knows when something is scheduled to take place and has it down in the diary to cover, whilst other stories are, logically enough, known as off-diary.

1. Breaking/Spot News – This is what most people understand as news in its hardest form. It is something that just happens: a plane crashes, a gunman assassinates a politician, a severe storm destroys homes, war breaks out, an earthquake rocks a region, a volcano erupts and so on.

2. News Analysis – This has to take the listener beyond the normal "spot" news story and would typically go into more detail and explanation than is possible when you are under pressure to put together a hard, breaking news story which is still developing. Here, you could be under a lot of pressure, both to gather facts and to stay on top of a rapidly moving event (if for instance the death toll in a bombing is steadily rising). Such breaking news stories must have context so that the listener can understand why they are important (the "What does it mean?" question). But they cannot be cluttered with analysis which will only get in the way of the important first facts.

   When the dust has settled, and the spot story has been fully covered, it might be time to stand back and produce a separate analysis. Such a piece must be more than the news story dressed up with a few longer sound bites and more context. An analysis needs to seek opinion – for example from politicians, military commanders, aid workers or diplomats – setting out their views on what happened, why it happened and, crucially, what an event means for the present and the future. Try and cast an analysis forward.

3. Set-Piece or Scheduled News – This category is usually predictable (as above, it can often be in the office diary). It revolves around scheduled events planned in advance: the president of a country delivering a key speech, or a company announcing its financial results for the past year. But remember that the unexpected often happens. Breaking news can interrupt set-piece news. The president is shot while speaking or is jeered or falls over; or the speaker diverges from prepared remarks. So the journalist must be ready for this.

4. Background Features – These are items, usually run in extended news bulletins, which provide background information to illuminate and provide context for the day's harder news. Anniversaries can be a good reason to put together background features, for example assessing ten years of independence or a decade after a tragedy.

5. Investigative Features – Sometimes the news is the story itself. This is because, while nothing in particular has happened and no event has taken place, investigative research in the feature reveals information that changes our understanding of events which have already taken place or are underway. An investigative feature may reveal conditions in a workplace, problems facing a minority community, a growing environmental crisis or perhaps positive advances being made in the educational system. The drama in these stories is the ongoing cumulative effect and, in digging out the information, the journalist makes it into news.

6. Colour Features and Human Interest – These can be the most fun and certainly provide the journalist with a lot of creative production opportunities. Such features do not need to be hard news. They can be entertaining as well as informative, for example a personality piece about a political leader or a feature about travel or food. Sport and entertainment are other popular themes. These are often called human interest stories. After all, a good news service should not be all heavy and serious. The key to producing features is first of all good ideas and good research. The material must be carefully selected before writing and editing, and then assembled in an intriguing or attractive way. There needs to be a logical structure and a striking conclusion. When producing features, you can often start with a specific subject, trend or issue to illustrate more general ones.

   For instance, if you are doing a feature about how people have left villages for the towns, find a specific village and some of its people and use their stories to illustrate the problems and successes. Remember that people are always of interest to other people.

   If you want to do a story about a project, try and do it through the eyes of the people affected. Try to humanise issues. You can fill out the picture with statistics and broad information later, but they will be boring unless you can show what they mean to people.

EXERCISES

Read the following statements and identify where the news is and what the reporter needs to do to develop them. What type of story would you write?

1. Lots of children are dying during childbirth, because there are no medical facilities for their mothers. This is especially the case outside the capital and the major cities.
2. The government has sent soldiers to guard the major trade routes to catch smugglers bringing goods across the border without paying customs duties.
3. The education ministry has raised ten million dollars through an appeal for contributions from the public.
4. Many former refugees who have returned to the country this year are finding life difficult.
5. Some refugees who returned to the capital this year have protested outside the municipality because of their crowded living conditions.

ADDITIONAL READING & REFERENCES

An Introduction to Journalism: Essential Techniques and Background Knowledge, by Richard Rudin and Trevor Ibbotson (Focal Press) is a good general introduction

Research and training links for journalists (in partnership with Columbia Journalism Review) can be found at: www.powerreporting.com

For guidance on computer-assisted reporting: www.nicar.org

CHAPTER FOUR

STORY SOURCING

Sources are the building blocks of your story. Get your sources lined up well and the story will fall into place almost unaided. Miss a key source and your story – no matter how important and well-recorded or how much effort you've made – won't be aired.

Be strenuous and self-critical in assessing your sources. Are they in a position to know the information they are giving you and are they reliable, or are they just passing on hearsay? Would your reporting stand up to rigorous fact-checking or other independent scrutiny? Are corroborating sources truly independent of each other? If you are reporting from a document, do you have it in your possession or have you only been told about it?

In addition to strong sourcing, good journalism also ensures that sources are transparent. A solid news story allows the audience to form its own judgement on its reliability and accuracy based on the sources provided. Clearly identifying sourcing is essential in stories about conflicts, disputes or any controversy. Besides adding credibility, it is also the journalist's own protection against accusations of bias or partiality.

Sourcing addresses the question, "How do we know?" and requires active attribution. We could know that "12 people died in fighting" either because somebody told us or because we personally counted the bodies. But if a guerrilla leader is the source, how do we know he is telling the truth? We might know production of pistachios is up this year because a government statement said so. But do we trust government statements? Do we need to check with others? The key is to identify sources clearly so that the reader can come to his or her own conclusions.

PLANNING YOUR REPORTING

The first step for any story is to plot your sourcing and plan your reporting accordingly. Break the story idea into its simplest components, and chart the essential and optimal human sources, as well as documents and eyewitness or other accounts you would need to make the story work.

Much sourcing is common sense, but it is remarkable how often these basics – in the light of time, resource or other pressures – are neglected.

- The key is to identify sources so that the reader can come to his or her own conclusions.
- If you are profiling an individual – especially someone of political importance – it is imperative that you speak to that person or at least try very hard to do so. If you cannot, or the person refuses, state this in the story.
- If you are reporting a conflict, make every effort to speak to both sides, and to find a non-aligned source for independent assessment.
- If you are doing a reaction piece, for example, about a major public event, speak to and record a diverse selection of people on the street, as well as experts.
- If you are reporting from a specific location, bring the listener there by presenting some notable details and human colour from your own eyewitness observations. Make clear to the reader that this is you, the journalist, on the spot.
- If your article is based on a report or document, do everything you possibly can to gain access to the original and to have sources confirm its legitimacy.
- Be transparent and tell the listener, for example, "according to a document seen by this reporter" or "according to a

document obtained by this station".

- Remember the fundamental principles of international journalism are impartiality, fairness and accuracy. These goals can only be delivered through careful selection of your sources.
- One further note: plan your time as well as your sources. It is essential to be well prepared before interviewing any source. But do not leave the most important source until too late. It is the reporter's nightmare to require a last interview with a source to confirm a fact or obtain a balancing comment, only to find they are unavailable. Allow for the difficulty and variability of contacting people within your deadline.

ONE OR TWO SOURCES?

In general, one should confirm controversial information from two or more reliable sources. This means that one of the sources did not learn the information from the other or that they themselves did not learn it from the same source. This is a classic rule of international journalism.

If you only have one source but you are confident that it is reliable, then use the information – but with the strong proviso that it is vital to inform the audience where the information has originated from.

Using a single source in such a case depends on assessing the reliability of that source and the likelihood of the facts being correct. In such cases, the source should almost always be named. Sometimes of course, only one person can know some information, but be sure that is the case. Two or more sources are always best.

Where you know a fact to be in dispute, do not hide the complexity but make clear that different people have different opinions on the question.

IDENTIFYING SOURCES

In identifying sources, provide relevant detail so that the reader can come to a fair judgement about the person's reliability. This means explaining clearly the basis of the source's expertise and the potential points of conflict or bias.

The more scrupulous you are about this, the more trustworthy your reporting will appear. It may be necessary to include a short sentence of background to clarify context for the reader, for example to explain if a source has a financial or professional interest in the subject, has had a long-standing dispute with the person he or she is criticising, or has some other personal involvement.

For example, if you are using as a clip a critical comment about government policy, the description "according to commentator Joseph Mazina" is not as precise as "according to Joseph Mazina, a regular columnist for the leading opposition newspaper Tribune". Or if you are using a comment supportive of the government, "Michael Katovu is an independent expert on the region" would be misleading if Michael Katovu is in fact "a consultant who has regularly advised the government on regional issues".

AUTHORITATIVE SOURCES

A good source is always someone in authority who is in a position to know. A defence minister is clearly an authoritative source on matters of defence policy; so is a senior official in his ministry, especially if you can use the person's name. But he may not be the best authority on other matters, such as finance or foreign affairs. Where possible, always give the person's full name and title, such as Secretary for Defence Stephen Masindi.

Remember also that an official or authoritative statement may not provide all the relevant facts, and indeed may be designed to hide some. Just because something is the official position does not mean it should not be checked or a contrary view should not be sought in the interest of being fair and reliable. This would especially be the case, for example, if asking a defence minister about the detailed progress of an ongoing military campaign where he is partisan and therefore may be specifically unreliable. Despite, or

indeed because of, his authoritative position, he may not tell the truth or may be adding pro-government "spin" in an attempt to portray events in a favourable light.

REPORTER OR EYEWITNESS

A strong source is of course the reporter him or herself, or another reliable eyewitness who hears and sees what is being described.

It must always be clear from the context of the rest of the story that the reporter personally witnessed the events. Otherwise, the source should be mentioned: "Uganda Radio Network was at the scene about 20 minutes after the blast. Correspondent Rachel Kasuma reported seeing five bodies on the ground and dozens of policemen trying to move the crowd away."

NO SOURCING

Specific sourcing is not necessary if information is not disputed by anyone, for instance when relaying a clear historical fact, such as "Uganda became an independent republic in 1962". But remember that many historical facts are disputed, so be careful.

OFFICIAL SOURCES

An official source is someone with access to information because of his or her job, although they may not necessarily be the person in charge. A police officer might be an official source about a security story, a civil servant on a story about government policy handled by his or her department, a UN or NGO worker for a story about humanitarian affairs they are working on, and so on. Always seek to quote the full name and title of the person if possible, though sometimes you may get information on the understanding that the person will not be named. But always be sure then that you are not being misled.

In all cases the key is to demonstrate why the source is in a position to know the information they are telling you. For example, "Godfrey Faridah, chief economist at the ministry of finance, said prices had fallen 20 per cent since the same time last year" is better than "an official said...". When sources are unnamed, describe their position as closely as possible. If the economist in the example above refused to allow you to name him, referring to him as "a senior official at the ministry of finance" is again better than simply "an official".

Do not make sources plural if they are singular. One policeman is "a policeman" not "police sources". If one diplomat says something, the source is "a diplomat" not "diplomatic sources". In all cases, avoid the imprecise term "western diplomatic officials".

AVOID PASSIVE SOURCING

Passive sourcing should be avoided. Terms such as "it was understood", "it was reported" or "it was believed" are not appropriate for international journalism. They are unclear and lazy. The report must say who "understood" or who "believed". "It was reported" is especially irritating since that is what you are supposed to be doing. The same is true of the ubiquitous term "reportedly". But "Radio Kampala reported" is fine if that is the source. "Everyone knows that" is definitely not a valid source.

LOCATION OF SOURCING IN A STORY

Sourcing should be near the beginning of every story. Its precise location depends on how controversial the material is. If a story is about a forthcoming official visit by a president, it will probably be an undisputed fact (unless it is a secret visit), so the sourcing need not be in the first paragraph. If it is secret then the story must show right at the beginning how the reporter knows his facts and will require reliable sourcing.

If the visit is actually taking place and everyone can see it, then it may not even need a specific source. What happens on the visit will need clear sourcing. Any facts that could be challenged or are doubtful will need a source close to the stated fact. With an allegation especially, the source usually needs to be at the beginning.

CONTEXT

Always tell your reader how and from where the information was obtained. For example,

"said at a news conference", "in a statement to reporters", or "in an interview with this newspaper". Avoid the showy and overused term "exclusive interview". Ideally, record your source saying the information into your microphone – then there can be no doubt or dispute about the authenticity of the quote.

If some quotations from a source come from a previously published report, a document or public statement, and other quotations within the same article come from a direct interview, clearly identify which is which.

SOURCING OPINIONS

If the story involves a dispute between two or more parties, and only one side of the dispute is immediately available, use sources for facts not opinions and make sure it is clear that the story has been sourced from only one party.

An opinion can be important, however, if it has a relevance to the dispute in question. It might be proper to report, "A Tanzanian diplomat today accused Rwanda of promoting evil policies", as such an accusation obviously represents a factor relevant in the dispute between the sides.

But opinions should always be openly sourced. In such cases, do everything you can to avoid anonymous sourcing. If someone has something harsh to say, they should be willing to stand by it and put their name to it and preferably say it into your microphone.

Finally, remember the rules of impartiality and balance. Your report should not take sides in the dispute, and must present the opinions as viewpoints, not as facts. If you are producing a critical report, you must allow the other side a fair response.

EXPLAINING SOURCING: GROUND RULES

It is imperative to explain journalistic ground rules carefully, and to observe them scrupulously. This is especially the case with members of the public, who will not be acquainted with the way the media works. People who have made you welcome deserve to know what will happen, so be open with them if you are going to quote them. Public figures and officials will be more used to dealing with the media, but it is always useful to clarify the ground rules before you begin an interview. When recording an interview, obviously anything said into the microphone is on the record. When not recording, the following general guidelines apply.

On the record: this means the journalist may use the information in full, and name the person speaking. You should always try to gain the interviewee's consent to speak on this basis, such as by citing the public interest of his or her remarks.

Not for attribution: this means the information and the quotations may be used, but the name must be withheld. The journalist should agree with the subject how he or she will be identified, and should negotiate to make this as specific as possible ("member of the army general staff" is much better than "an officer").

On background: this means that neither the name of the source nor the information or quotes may be used. It provides the journalist with facts that can help direct his or her reporting, but which cannot be used unless independently verified.

A journalist must never break his or her own commitments to these rules and, while interviewing, must indicate clearly in notes if the ground rules during a conversation change. Sometimes it may be possible to bring "background" information on the record through a subsequent conversation, such as by explaining that other sources have provided corroboration. But this can only be done by clear and cordial agreement. Note that the term "off the record" is common, but may be taken to mean either "not for attribution" or "on background" and thus its usage should be clarified.

ANONYMOUS SOURCES

If a source is unwilling to put his or her name on the record, be sure you are not giving them a license to spread lies and rumours. They may have a legitimate reason, such as fear of reprisal for speaking out. But if they won't put

their name to something they have said, think carefully about whether you are willing to put it in your story under your own by-line.

The *New York Times* has had a few scandals in recent years, but it also has one of the most detailed codes of conduct in the business. As highlighted on the website of the Project for Excellence in Journalism, former executive editor Joseph Lelyveld developed a simple two-question test before using anonymous sources:

1. How much direct knowledge does the source have of the event?
2. What, if any, motive might the source have for misleading us, "spinning" the story, or hiding important facts that might alter our impression of the information?

Only after these questions were answered satisfactorily would The *New York Times* run with the source. And then, as far as possible, the paper would suggest how the source was in a position to know the information it provided ("a source who has seen the document", for example) and what special interest that source might have ("a source inside the office of the general staff").

EXERCISES

Sourcing a story can often confront journalists with difficult professional and ethical choices. Take a look at the examples and questions below and discuss your views with colleagues.

1. A source has read you an extract from a secret government document on serious safety problems with the country's nuclear reactors and you have made a note of the text. The source is aware you are going to use the information as the basis for a story and has allowed you to cite "sources close to the government".

- What are the potential pitfalls?
- Would you try to verify the story with another source?
- If you cannot verify the story, would you publish what you have?
- Are there other sources you might want to speak to?

2. This same source is called out of the room abruptly on an urgent telephone call.

   Do you sit patiently and wait, or quickly rifle through the secret report left in open view on his desk?

3. A car bomb has exploded in the centre of Kampala and word is filtering back to the press that many civilians have been killed and injured. It looks like the bomb may have been outside one of the hotels used by foreign dignitaries but the area has been cordoned off and no one can get near.

   Who can you ring to get information? (Think of all the possible sources that could be approached, ranging from those in a position to know hard facts about the number of dead and injured to those able to give a detailed description of the scene.)

4. What is wrong with the following phrases?

- "It is reliably understood…"
- "People say that…"
- "Word in the capital is that…"
- "It was patently obvious that…"

ADDITIONAL READING & REFERENCES

Help on finding experts:

www.ibiblio.org/slanews/internet/experts.html

Policy.com, a non-partisan site for links to policy issues: www.policy.com

Poynter Institute tips on evaluating the value of sources: www.poynter.org/content/content_view.asp?id=4634

Use the helpful search engine on the website of the Project for Excellence in Journalism (www.journalism.org) for tips and discussions on sourcing problems.

CHAPTER FIVE

BUILDING THE STORY

"Get the story right and the words just write themselves."
- anonymous BBC radio bulletin editor

Understanding the story and knowing what you want to tell the listener is the single most important aspect of successful writing for radio. Hence, how the story begins is crucial. The BBC Guidelines make the point that:

"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."

And the guidelines have this to say about the last sentence:

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

So the radio journalist should ask him or herself, does the story tell the listener:

What has happened?
Where it has happened?
When it happened?
Who was involved?
How did it happen?
Why did it happen?

You might recognise the above questions, but perhaps the most critical ones of all might not be so apparent – What does it mean? Who's likely to be affected?

Consider this example of a straight read. To what extent does it answer the above questions?

Rioting has broken out in the centre of Kampala following the arrest of opposition leader Kizza Besigye. The rioting began this morning and is still in progress.

There have been running battles between his supporters and Ugandan police firing tear gas and bullets. Several cars and shops were set on fire as disturbances spread out from the city centre.

Dr Besigye was arrested three weeks ago after returning from a four-year exile.

He has been charged with treason, as well as the alleged rape of a woman in 1997. Mr Besigye denies alleged links to two rebel groups.

He was arrested after addressing a rally just outside the capital, Kampala before being escorted to a police station in the centre of the city.

Suleiman Kiggundu, chairman of the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC), which is sponsoring Dr Besigye in the election, condemned the arrest. "This is a barbaric act designed to thwart any challenge to Museveni's rule," he told the AFP news agency.

Now to the questions:

What happened – riots
Where – Kampala
When – today
Who – Besigye supporters
Why – because of the arrest of Besigye
How – by looting and setting fire to cars
+ What it means – it's part of the election battle

Here's another example, this time from an introduction to a reporter package:

Photo: IWPR Africa

In a surprise announcement the chairman of Gulu district council in Northern Uganda, Colonel Walter Ochora, has said that he wants to be the NRM's next presidential candidate.

Speaking to reporters at a Uganda Radio Network seminar in Gulu, the controversial LC5 chairman said that making peace in the North would be his campaigning priority.

Our correspondent, Charles Eniwoke, now reports from Gulu.

What happened – Ochora announced his candidature
Where – Gulu press conference
When – today
Who – Walter Ochora
Why – this will be covered in the reporter package
How – in a speech to a press conference
+ What it means – this will be covered in the reporter package

The cue allows for the reporter package to develop the story in more depth. But if there was a sudden need to cut the length of the item, then the cue alone, written in the form of the inverse pyramid, could stand alone without the listener being aware that a linked reporter package had in fact been dropped.

The most important information is, therefore, generally presented right at the beginning of a news story. The most important facts are packaged as succinctly as possible in the lead, with the barest necessary explanation. The "Who?" and "What?" generally come first, followed by "When?" and "Where?" More detail comes later in the next two or three sentences – the "Why?" and "How?" followed by the "What does it mean?"

BUILDING THE STORY

In radio, the listener has no second chance to take in the gist of a story. This effects the way a story is structured as much as how it is written. The radio news story comes and it goes (unless the programme is being listened to on the net or as a podcast). Someone reading a paper can scan back to a line he has already read to check it for meaning. The radio listener does not have that luxury. A clear, logical structure is therefore just as important in radio as clarity of expression.

In the international tradition of journalism (including radio), the climax – the most

important material – is therefore generally presented right at the beginning or introduction. The most important facts are packaged as succinctly as possible, with the barest necessary explanation, at the beginning. The story then moves into the detail or body of the story by covering the facts in a diminishing order of significance and importance.

THE PYRAMID STYLE

Radio news stories are generally in one of two formats. The first – the straight read – involves the newsreader reading a news script which encapsulates the whole story. The second format is when the newsreader reads an introduction, known as a cue, which then leads into either a clip from an interview or a reporter package.

The intro – be it in the straight read or the cue – contains the most important material. A successful intro – generally between 10 and 20 seconds (roughly 30 to 60 words) – provides the main points of the story, and aims to attract the listener's interest. A good test of an intro is to assess whether the opening itself could stand alone as a comprehensible brief news item.

Following on from the intro, the story proceeds to the explanation, laying out the main facts of the article, the individuals or organisations involved and the issues of debate.

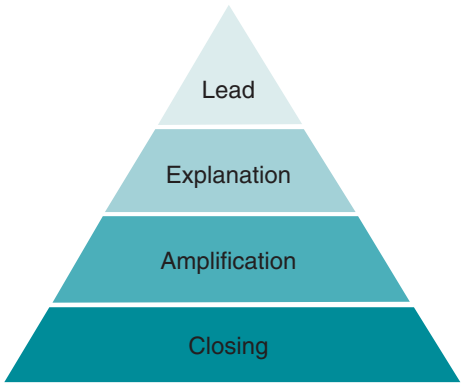
The amplification takes up further points of interest, delves into more detail, elaborates initial perspectives in more depth or provides more colour or extended quotations from participants.

The closing may tie-up the piece, pulling together various strands of the story, or offering a speculative tone, often through a direct quotation from a participant. But it should not contain fresh information or introduce an important new theme or concluding point, which should have already been covered. In general it is a light touch, and in many cases may be left out altogether or be cut for space.

This structure recognises that the purpose of a news story is not to keep the listener guessing but to present facts rapidly, clearly, accurately and simply. Crucially, it also helps editing, allowing stories to be quickly cut down to fit into a reduced time slot and readily adapted for changing circumstances.

If a story is structured in the inverted pyramid form, it is a relatively simple matter to cut the material from the end up without losing the essence of the information. It might even end up as a single paragraph story. But if properly structured, it will still be clear, self-contained and informative.

PYRAMID STRUCTURE



This structure recognises that the purpose of a news story is not to keep the reader or audience guessing, but to present facts rapidly, clearly, accurately and simply.

DETAIL

The correct amount of detail is vital. Think of it like working the zoom on a camera lens. Zoom in too far and you will have lots of detail but no sense of the broader picture and why it is relevant. Zoom out too far and you will see a broad expanse but nothing detailed enough to be of real interest in the photograph.

The key piece of information in your story, of course, is the news: a politician is elected, a development project is implemented, violence breaks out in the street and a number of people are killed or injured. But be sure to include the detail that makes it relevant and newsworthy. Is it

the first outbreak of violence in a certain region? Is it a key opposition victory in a local election which signals trouble for the government in the coming general vote? Has a central plank been laid in the West's development strategy? In each of these examples, it is important to give the news and say why it is news.

Details make stories live and credible. But adjectives should only be used if they really tell something extra and add to the listener's understanding. Do we care if the minister was wearing a grey suit? Maybe not. Do we care if his suit is orange when he has only ever been seen in grey? Yes we do, because this is unusual behaviour and by wearing the orange suit the politician is sending out a message – maybe that he is daring, risk-taking. Do we care if he appears without a tie? Only if this is unusual. If he always wear a casual shirt without a tie, don't waste space pointing this out. When in doubt, put in all the details you think will make the story better. Editors can always take them out – but, as they are not on the spot, they cannot add them.

PUTTING INFORMATION IN THE RIGHT ORDER

A man called Stephen Abodwe mistook his daughter for a burglar. His daughter, who is called Patience Abodwe, said she came home late and forgot her key. He chopped her hand off as she climbed in through the window. He lives in Port Harcourt. The girl is now in hospital, where he took her when he realised who she was and what he had done.

Better

A man chopped his daughter's hand off in Port Harcourt yesterday. Stephen Abodwe said he mistook 15 year old Patience for a burglar. She said she came home late and climbed in through the window because she did not have a key. Mr Abdowe rushed his daughter to National General hospital in Port Harcourt, where she is recovering well.

IDENTIFYING INFORMATION

Some things need explaining and this can slow down the telling of the story and make the structure of the story heavier than you would like. Political party affiliations can be very complicated, so ensure that on the first (or, in rare exceptions, the second) reference within a story, the full name of the party is spelled out with a brief indication of its approach or bias: left - or right-wing, religious or ethnic, social democratic or conservative, regional. And be sure that this general description is fair and not an all-too-convenient shorthand that reflects the prejudice of other parties or politicians.

When it comes to individuals, details can make their story more accessible or interesting. It helps the audience to know that Joseph Mwanga is a successful tailor in Mbarara, rather than in Kampala, because the listener will value the success of a tailor who is operating among people of another ethnic group. Audiences may need to be reminded of some facts even about a well-known personality:

- The basketball player, renowned for shooting with his left hand.
- The businessman, who was released from jail only a year ago after serving a sentence for hitting a policeman.

Try to anticipate and answer complications, clarify possible confusion and give context. If two people in the story have the same last name, indicate whether they are related or not. If an event takes place in the countryside, indicate how far it is from the capital and whether it is north, east, south or west. If an opposition party makes a statement, remind the reader whether it is a large and influential party with the potential to take power in time or a smaller grouping. Sometimes you may have to add some words, such as "the desert town", as many will not know it is in the desert, or "the industrial suburb" or "the southern city".

The main rule is to provide basic identifying information for all people and organisations you mention in your story. Do not assume prior

knowledge from your listeners. On first reference, provide the full name and proper title of all individuals: “Lieutenant - General George Jackson”, not “General Jackson”; “Deputy Prime Minister Martin Smith”, not “Martin Smith”. Include basic geographical information: “Mombasa, Kenya’s southern coastal city”; “Abuja, the capital of Nigeria”; “Kisumu, Kenya’s third biggest town situated on the shore of Lake Victoria”. Some places are trickier and need quite detailed definition in a political story. Zanzibar is a case in point because of its unusual political status. The BBC describes it as a semi-autonomous territory which maintains a political union with Tanzania, while having its own parliament and president. All of that information is necessary if you want to be accurate about Zanzibar’s political identity.

EXERCISES

Consider the following dispatch from Warra in Nigeria’s delta region and answer the questions below.

Ijaw militant youths yesterday threatened to kill the nine expatriate oil workers kidnapped last Saturday if the Federal Government fails to meet their conditions very soon.

National Vice President of the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), Comrade David Reje, said in an interview with newsmen that the divide and rule tactic allegedly adopted by the Federal Government in negotiating the release of the hostages, would lead nowhere.

“Peace would not return to Niger Delta until true federalism is adopted in Nigeria, outright killing of expatriate oil workers and not even abduction would be the hallmark,” he stressed.

Comrade Reje said people of the Niger Delta should be allowed to control their resources and pay taxes to the central government, because the people are tired of seeing their resource used to develop other areas while they languish in abject poverty.

1. In terms of basic information (the “5 Ws”), is there any vital information missing?
2. Could you run this story on the basis of the above information? (Assume it has come from a reliable freelancer in the area.)
3. Is there anyone else you or the freelancer might call for additional information or comment?
4. Assuming the quote is available as an audio clip, rewrite this story as you might use it in a radio news bulletin.

ADDITIONAL READING

For a good overall view of the practice of radio journalism see:

Broadcast Journalism: techniques of radio and television news, by Andrew Boyd

International Radio Journalism: history, theory and practice, by Tim Crook

CHAPTER SIX

INTERVIEWING

WHAT IS THE POINT OF THIS INTERVIEW?

The interview is the building block of radio journalism – news reports, feature packages and live programming all depend on interviewing in one form or another.

However, from the start you must be quite clear why you are interviewing someone. This means working out what the interview will add to the listeners' understanding of any given situation. It is not enough to interview someone simply because they are famous or because they wish to hear their point of view broadcast. Sometimes it is very clear who needs to be interviewed as a story unfolds. It may be the victim of an attack, the officer who made an arrest or the official who oversees an organisation.

RELUCTANT INTERVIEWEES

But getting people to actually tell you what they know can be far more difficult. There are many reasons for people not to share information with you:

- The victim of a disaster may be traumatised.
- A politician may be busy or simply tired of speaking to journalists.
- A local citizen may be shy, may distrust journalists, may have had a bad experience, or may find the formality of an interview off-putting.
- A potential whistle-blower may fear that talking could put him in danger or jeopardise his career.
- Some people do not want to talk, because they have something to hide.

CONFIDENCE IN YOUR MISSION

Although you may be nervous of interviewing powerful people, or feel sorry for someone who has lost a relative in a car accident or has just been attacked, you must remind yourself about your public role as a radio journalist. The stories you are reporting are of importance to the public and your right and responsibility to obtain information is a central component of any democratic society. You are working in the public interest, and this should give you confidence to press on.

GETTING THERE AND BACK

Often the person you want to interview cannot come to the studio. They may be very busy (a government minister, for instance), or they may be caught up in the events you are reporting (someone leading a rescue operation after a building has collapsed, for instance). Your editor will want that interview in good quality, cut for transmission as soon as possible.

PRELIMINARY CONTACT

Once you have the broad consent of the person you want to interview, talk to them on the phone. This is very important if somebody else has set up the interview. This conversation will give you the chance to outline to him or her the thrust of the interview. You also have a chance to evaluate the way they speak – quick and crisp, or slow and rambling. It's at this point that you will discover if they have a speech impediment. If your interviewee has a bad stutter, you might decide to do a report rather than an interview.

Do not go into too many details about the interview. It can make an interviewee nervous or critical of your approach if you start listing all the questions you are going to ask. It may encourage them to try and prepare a script in advance of the interview and end up sounding like a pre-programmed robot. Be clear, firm and friendly. This preliminary exchange should put the interviewee at ease. It should also serve to ensure that you have the right contact numbers and the correct address, with plenty of points of reference in terms of other

buildings and natural landmarks if street names and building numbers are missing.

PLAN THE INTERVIEW

If you are unsure of the background to the story, do some homework. If there is someone you know who knows the background, have a brief chat. Look up basic facts on a relevant website – most news sites have their own archive. You should now take a moment to sketch out a number of key question areas. If you write out the questions with a view to repeating then word-for-word, you too will end up sounding like the aforementioned pre-programmed robot. You may, of course, abandon these question areas and follow another line of questioning if the interviewee says something unexpected, but always start out with a clear view as to where you want to take the interview.

TECHNICAL CHECK (PART 1)

Take the time to run through your equipment BEFORE you set off. This means checking and packing the following:

- microphone and lead (check for any crackle in loose connections)
- headphone (check for any crackle in loose connections)
- recording machine (MP3, minidisc, cassette etc.) (check record level if machine is manually adjustable; make sure headphone levels are up; headphone levels set at zero can make it seem as though nothing is recording)
- minidisc or tape – have one in machine and one spare
- mobile phone with number of interviewee keyed in
- put your machine on hold when you pack it away so it does not get inadvertently turned on

(See chapters 15 and 16 for technical aspects of recording.)

TECHNICAL CHECK (PART 2)

As soon as you have greeted your interviewee, examine the room for distracting sounds (you can do this while setting up equipment). The sort of things that can spoil an interview include:

- acoustic qualities – a big empty room with no curtains, carpets or soft furnishings is not a good interview environment. Your microphone will pick up echo from the walls and floor. Your recording will sound fuzzy and poorly defined. Find out if it's possible to move to somewhere which is smaller, hopefully with some fabrics or carpets to soak up echo. If not, hold your microphone very close to the interviewee's mouth – this will help you make a well-defined and focused recording.
- air conditioner (ask if it can be switched off)
- fan (again, ask if it can be switched off)
- intermittent banging (if possible find whoever is making it and ask for ten minutes' silence)
- crying baby (not an easy one to deal with, but perhaps mother and baby could move a bit further away)
- loudly ticking clock (can make editing difficult – move it or smother it with clothing)
- mobile phones (both yours and the interviewee's should be switched off. Even phones in "silent" mode can send interfering network bleeps which you might not hear but which can ruin an interview)

TAKING LEVEL

Once you have adjusted everything in the environment to ensure you will get a good quality recording, take a voice level from the interviewee. That is, do a quick question and answer to test the level of his or her voice against yours, and play this back to yourself. You can use this opportunity to label your interview, stating time, date and place, and then go on to ask for your interviewee's name and how they would like to be described in the programme. That way you have a description or title that they are comfortable with. Most people

are sensitive about how they are presented publicly in terms of title, rank and status.

A minister may make it clear that he expects you to interview him from behind his desk. This could put you in a vulnerable and uncomfortable position, stretching across a huge expanse of wood. Explain that the microphone needs to be near in order for his voice to be heard at its best. Draw up a chair so that you are sitting side-by-side and then do your sound check.

In the course of taking the voice level, you may notice that the interviewee has some odd mannerisms which could interfere with the recording. For example, she or he may want to grab the microphone when speaking, or may have a tendency to bang the table to emphasise a point, or nervously fiddle with a pen, clicking it on and off. Again, be firm and friendly, pointing out that all these noises will distract listeners from what they are saying.

A NOTE ON INTERVIEWING OUTSIDE

If you are interviewing in town you are likely to have to deal with a lot of background noise, such as traffic, generators, dogs barking etc. To keep extraneous noise to a minimum, make sure your microphone is near to your interviewee's mouth. If you have a manual record level on your machine, wind it down. Let your machine run for three to five seconds before you start the interview and let it run for a further three to five seconds after the last answer.

If it is very noisy, for example in the middle of a demonstration, you may need to let your machine run for a couple of seconds between question and answer, so that you can cut and mix your questions together. Avoid recording a voice against music. If you do it will be difficult to edit the person you are interviewing, because the music will jump with each cut. If you have to interview against music, let your machine run for five seconds between each question and answer.

A NOTE ON INTERVIEWING IN THE STUDIO

Interviewing someone in the studio may feel safer to you – you have colleagues to help you out if you have a technical problem, and you may even have a producer listening in to the interview ready to suggest another question. However, a radio studio can be an alarming place for your interviewee, especially during a live news or current affairs programme, where people are rushing in and out, and engineers or producers are barking instructions while pre-recorded interviews are playing out.

Try to find a minute to greet your interviewees and talk to them before the interview is recorded or goes out live. This serves to check names, titles or job descriptions. You can also tell them what to expect in terms of running order, including the first question you will put to them. For example, you might say, "You are the second item after the news. I shall introduce the story, give your name and ask you first why you think a reduction in interest rates is necessary." If someone is taking part in a discussion, make sure that he or she knows who the other participants are.

THE INTERVIEW

Everyone has a slightly different approach. Some reporters may be abrupt, challenging a source to give a crisp and clear reply. Others may be more conversational, seeking to coax information out slowly.

News and current affairs style interviewing is generally more swift and to the point than interviewing for a package or documentary feature, especially if it is live and time is at a premium.

Whatever the style, the purpose of the interview is for the person you are interviewing to cast light and information on the topic in hand. Think of the "six-plus" basic lines of questioning:

Who?
What?
Where?
When?
Why?
How?
+ What does it mean?

As the interview unfolds, ask yourself if these are being covered.

THE INTERVIEW SURVIVAL GUIDE

You own questions should be short and crisp. You should look interested and engaged and acknowledge the importance of what your interviewee is saying by nodding in response. Do not mutter agreement, or make any sound of acknowledgement – this will sound awful on the recording, a disembodied voice just grunting.

It's important not to be influenced by the speech patterns of the person you are interviewing. So if they are whispering and traumatised by seeing a friend killed, or surviving an attack, you must not start whispering yourself. Your voice must remain steady and firm. You can make it plain by your facial expressions and body language that you are sympathetic.

- Converse informally with the interviewee before the interview starts but do not get into the meat of the interview with your recorder switched off.
- The first question should be open but focused. In other words use the question to set out the general direction you want the interview to take.
- The other questions should also be open i.e. they should not invite one-word answers (Yes, No etc).
- Questions that begin "Why", "How", "What" are better than those that begin "Do you agree/support/favour …" or "Are you going to?"
- If you have phrased a question badly don't by shy about re-asking it, especially if you are intending to use your questions on air.
- Don't be afraid of putting questions from both sides of the argument. But you should phrase these in terms of "What would you say to those who claim….?" or "How do you respond to the criticism that ….?"
- Avoid sounding like you are putting your own point of view. You are there to test the interviewee on behalf of the audience.
- Interrupt for clarity and also if the interviewee is going on too long.

How to interrupt:

- Use eye contact to ask for the interviewee to pause.
- A light touch on the arm can make interviewees pause.
- Listen out for breath-breaks and then jump in firmly.
- Phoney segues – repeat the interviewee's words and turn them into a question.

UNDERSTANDING

If you do not understand the answers you are recording, ask for further explanation. Never worry about appearing stupid. There is no shame in saying, "I'm sorry I did not understand what you said, can you repeat that?" If you do not understand what the interviewee is saying, how can you expect the listeners to understand?

CLIPPING

If you know the interview you are recording will be cut up into small sound-bites, be careful not to "tread" on the interviewee's answers. For example, if a top jockey makes a dramatic statement about retiring from horseracing after today's race, don't come rushing in with a follow-up question which overlaps the end of his answer. You will not be able to separate your voice from his, and it will be impossible to use the answer as a clip or sound-bite on its own. In many radio stations, an illustrated bulletin is fashionable. This means that news stories are sometimes accompanied by a short sound-bite. Your editor will be very disgruntled to find that your interview cannot be clipped because you kept rushing in and talking over your interviewee's answers.

COMMON FAULTS IN PHRASING THE QUESTION

OVERLOADED AND SHOWING OFF

Q *Given the fact that there is a food shortage – food production is down on last year by 25 per cent in the country – and that 60 per cent of farmers are subsistence farmers, why have you not given more support to those farmers that operate within the mechanised sector of agriculture?*

BETTER

Q *What do you say to those people who say that you aren't supporting big, mechanised farmers sufficiently?*

DOUBLE-BARRELLED QUESTION

Q *When do you think you will implement a zero tolerance policy and, in connection with that, do you think there is anything that can be done about juvenile crime?*

BETTER

Q *When will you start a zero tolerance policy?*
A ...
Q *Is there more that could be done about juvenile crime?*
A...

DIFFICULT INTERVIEWS

If you need to ask difficult or very delicate questions, you can begin the interview – it if is not live – with a few friendly queries, building up trust and creating a more relaxed atmosphere, before posing the hard question, "How do you respond to reports of prisoners being tortured?" In all cases, your information should be well documented, especially if you are asking critical questions. If your charges are vague or unsubstantiated your interviewee will be able to dismiss them too easily. This can make you look foolish and result in the interview being brought to a precipitous close.

When you do challenge your subject, do so with facts, not opinions.

If the story you are reporting involves two different people in conflict with each other, be precise and thorough in quoting one to the other. That way you will have clear responses on both sides.

UNRELIABLE WITNESSES

Remember different people may have differing views of an incident, so you may need to clarify where people were standing. Someone might say the left wing of a plane hit the ground and another might say the right wing. It could depend on whether they were in the front or back of the plane.

Remember too that a truthful person may omit or forget relevant facts and seemingly minor details that would help clarify the information. This is another reason for getting clarification (as well as for drawing on several sources for one story). Careful listening may also help you assess if a person is fabricating events. Ask an eyewitness to start at the beginning and tell you what happened in order. Ask straightforward, factual questions and don't pre-empt their answers.

Allowing for a bit of silence sometimes helps people to think, answer more truthfully, or even say something that they would have withheld if they had been rushed through the interview. You are an interviewer, most of all you must see through the fog of misinformation. This requires keeping an open, curious mind. Do not jump to conclusions.

GIVING A VOICE TO THE VOICELESS

Remember some people never get to talk. They are not powerful, they are not decision-makers, they are always spurned, their presence ignored, their opinions discounted. But as victims, these people can provide powerful testimony on important stories. Treat such people with respect and sensitivity. They may reveal information and opinions which throw new light on a story. The very young and very old are frequently ignored, because they are often pushed aside and their powers of expression may be poor.

When interviewing very young people, patience is important. Avoid any question which can be answered by a yes or no. Rather than saying, "You want to be a footballer when you grow up, don't you?" it's better to say, "Tell me about what you want to do when you grow up."

You may have the opposite problem when interviewing people who are very old. They may talk too much. They are also easily diverted from one story or anecdote to another. The more you try to steer them the more confusing it is for them. It's better to let them talk, make a mental note of where you will make your cuts and ask the same question again if the original answer went off on a tangent.

A BBC interview with seven-year-old football prodigy Jack Higginson has become legendary for the brevity of Jack's answers.

Interviewer: *You want to sign for Manchester United but you can't until April 4th.*

Jack: *Yeah.*

Interviewer: *That's when you are 8… that's what you want to do isn't it?*

Jack: *Yeah.*

Interviewer: *Are you a big Man U. fan?*

Jack: *Yeah.*

Interviewer: *Your specialty is scoring hat-tricks isn't it?*

Jack: *Yeah.*

Interviewer: *Tell us about that.*

Jack: *What did you say?*

Interviewer: *You scored 37 goals last season.*

Jack: *Yeah.*

DIFERENT TYPES OF INTERVIEW

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 or her position.

The "Expert" Interview (factual interview)

This could be with 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 people in the street for their opinion on a topical issue. It can also be an interview with someone who has had an unusual experience. Because most people are not experienced in doing interviews, it's best to keep your questions simple.

VOX POPS

Vox pop comes from the Latin vox populi, or voice of the people. A vox pop is a short answer to a simple question, for example, "What do you think about the increase in road tax?" The same question is put to a number of different people and then all the answers are edited together. Vox pops can give a big story a popular dimension and resonance at a grass roots level. While being careful not to present them as any sort of scientific straw poll, intelligently done, vox pops serve to remind us what ordinary people feel about the events of the day. They are often given to novices to do, but they are hard work.

Here are some pointers:

- A vox pop should include a range of people, but always keep the wording of your question exactly the same.
- Don't get drawn into doing an interview.
- In a noisy place, let your machine run for three to five seconds before talking and let it run another three to five seconds after the person you are interviewing has

finished.

- You will probably need to record about eight to ten people in order to come up with four or five good vox pops.
- Record a variety of voices – young, old, male, female, sensible, outraged, funny, unreasonable and from different ethnic backgrounds.
- Vox pops are cut together, rather than carefully mixed, usually for 20 to 40 seconds.
- The vox pop should be audibly on location but not drowned by passing lorries, blaring music etc.
- 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 pop, except perhaps to ask an additional question or to 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 rainy Friday morning.
- 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, the future of the world etc.).
- Remember that you're asking busy people to stop and talk into a microphone, so you need a juicy question about which they're likely to have an instant opinion.
- 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.
- Wear comfortable shoes.

STUDIO INTERVIEWS

Before going on the air:

Know WHY you're doing the interview. This is also known as focussing your interview. What exactly do you need to know from the person you're interviewing? The clearer you are about why YOU think this is an important subject, the clearer it will be for your listeners.

LISTEN to your prospective interviewee carefully BEFORE making a commitment to have them on the show. Talk to them on the phone first. Do they know their subject? Are they a good talker? Can they talk about their subject in a way that ordinary people can understand? If yes, book them for an interview. If not, thank them for the useful information and look for another guest.

PLAN your on-air questions in advance, though don't write them out word-for-word (they should sound conversational). Every good interview has a beginning, middle and end. By planning your questions in advance, you won't have to make it up on the spot. If your interviewee is a good talker, you will need fewer questions. Figure on six questions for a ten-minute interview if your guest is reasonably verbose.

Write the intro you will use on air. Do it before the show.

The most important function of the intro is to hook the listener. Make it catchy and appealing. Most importantly, tell your listener WHY they want to stay around to listen to your interview.

Don't try to make up your intro on the spot. You have a lot to think about – making your guest feel comfortable, your upcoming questions, what's going on in the studio and outside etc. By pre-scripting, you will avoid the risk of forgetting your interviewee's name (easily done).

On air:

Be organised and calm. If you are flustered, your guest will be flustered too. The best way to relax your guest is to be relaxed yourself.

Keep your questions short and tight. The listeners want to hear your guest, not you. Your function is to get your guest to talk about the issue/subject.

Don't become part of the story by launching into editorialising, debates and commentaries – that's not your role. (That doesn't mean you shouldn't ask critical questions. Just don't make the story your own personal issue.)

Avoid long and rambling questions. They are usually a sign that you don't really know what your question should be. Especially if your guest has to ask, "Excuse me, what was the question?"

You don't have to stick to the questions you've pre-scripted. If something interesting comes up, and you have time, follow it up. But keep an eye on your original question list.

Avoid jargon. If your guest uses a term that your listeners won't understand, ask, "What's that?" Your listeners are not experts. Your role is to make the interview understandable.

Avoid acronyms and abbreviations – tell your listeners what they stand for. You can't take it for granted that your audience will know what the UNDP, UNESCO or the ILO stand for. It's the same with technical terms (the ones that nobody knows unless they have a doctorate in the subject).

Watch the clock. If your interview is scheduled to last ten minutes, don't make it 15. Or five.

After the interview:
Listen back to your interview. Figure out what you'd do differently next time. Get used to hearing your own voice on tape. Everybody says, "I don't sound like that." Guess what – you really do. So get used to it.

Listen to yourself as though you were a listener who doesn't know you. Did you follow all the steps above? Use the experience to do an even better interview next time.

Ask the other people working on your show for feedback – or (if you're feeling courageous) the programme director at the station where you are working.

And, above all, remember that interviewing is an art, not a science. There is no right way to do an interview. Develop your own style, and keep working on it.

EXERCISES

1. Find a colleague to interview through role-play. For example, imagine that your colleague is a government minister who is tightening up the laws against cutting down hardwood trees, but that you know he runs a logging company which is illegally clearing huge tracts of land. Your colleague should make it as hard as possible to be interviewed. Write a cue, work out opening question and four supplementary questions.
2. Take a story which is in your station's bulletin and do a series of vox pops in the street on that story. Make sure you ask the same question, worded in the same way to each respondent. See if you can get any of your vox pops included in the next bulletin if the story is still running.

ADDITIONAL READING

Interviewing for Journalists, by Sally Adams and Wynford Hicks (Focal Press)

Violence – A Guide to Ethical Reporting about Victims & Trauma, by William Cote & Roger Simpson (Columbia University Press).

Getting the Most from Your Interview, from the Project for Excellence in Journalism: www.journalism.org/resources/tools/reporting/interviewing/themost.asp

http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/today/listenagain/ has excellent examples of interviews going wrong, courtesy of the BBC.

CHAPTER SEVEN

WRITING FOR RADIO

The news writing style outlined in this chapter reflects what is usually accepted internationally, especially in English-speaking countries. The central principle is that **the listener comes first**. The prose must be direct, and delivered in such as way as to attract the listeners' attention and make them want to carry on listening. In structuring a news bulletin, a report or package, the reporter must ask, "What does the listener need to know first, and then in what order should I deliver the rest of the information?"

In literature or film, the audience expects to be entertained and may be held in suspense. The order in which events unfold can be unpredictable. The audience is prepared to wait for the climax or punch line. Not so with news. People want information, and they want it up front.

Feeling engaged is a plus for a news audience and can be an important factor in the success of a radio news operation. But the main purpose is to convey information. In newspapers or on the web, there is no guarantee a reader will take the time to finish the story, or indeed will look at more than the beginning of the report. So the writer must cater especially for that.

We can't really watch someone listening to the radio and then deduce which bits they listened to and which they ignored. But watch someone reading a newspaper or a web page. The pattern is very different from reading a book. With a newspaper, the reader scans the page, the headlines and then the first sentence of a story that attracts. Readers make a decision about what to read and how much, turning pages slowly or quickly, depending on how well the reports attract them or what information they find on their special interest.

There are many different places within a newspaper or a web site for the reader to go, and many articles competing for attention. There are also many different newspapers to read and literally countless web sites. It is with reason that the fast skimming of vast numbers of online information sources has become known as surfing.

Writing for radio is very different from writing for newspapers. You are writing for the ear, not for eye. What you read when you broadcast should sound completely natural, like a piece of spoken speech. There should be no feeling that you, the broadcaster, are sitting alone in a studio reading a script. The good broadcaster does not read to the listener but talks to the listener. The fluency and ease that this demands starts with good writing.

RADIO AND NEWSPAPER STYLES

There are some ways in which writing for radio is similar to writing for print – namely, to write as clearly and concisely as possible. But because the listener does not have the opportunity to listen again to an unclear or dense sentence (unless he or she is listening on the internet), writing for radio demands even higher standards than writing for print. Newspaper headlines have a telegraphic style which is tempting for radio broadcasters to use. For example, a newspaper headline might read:

"Tanzanian Minister for Finance, Hon. Basil P. Mramba MP, says tax is..."

In radio the definite article is needed. If you were talking to a friend you would not say, "I see Tanzanian minister for finance is making a statement about tax." Nor should you do so on the radio. So a radio version of the above would read:

*"**The** Tanzanian minister for finance, Hon. Basil P. Mramba MP, says tax is..."*

Some newspapers use long sentences and subordinate clauses. Avoid this when writing for radio. For example:

"The minister for defence, George Johnson, who gained a reputation as a tough home office minister, announced big cuts in naval expenditure today."

It is better to say:

"The minister for defence, George Johnson, announced big cuts in naval expenditure today. This will result in the lost of 200 jobs. George Johnson took on the job of minister three months ago. Before that he was home office minister, where he made big budget cuts."

Avoid starting with a subordinate clause. For example:

"Following his success in Argentina, where he scored two goals for Uganda, Charles Mwanga has taken his country into the Africa Cup quarter finals with his superb hat-trick against Nigeria."

It is better to say:

"Charles Mwanga has taken his country into the Africa Cup quarter finals with his superb hat-trick against Nigeria. This follows his success in Argentina, where he scored two goals for Uganda."

With radio it is important to test each word you write. Watch out for repeating words in the same or consecutive sentences. If you can lose a word without changing the meaning of what you have written then it is not needed.

SOME EXAMPLES OF WORDINESS

He came to the radio station by virtue of the fact that he had an important announcement to make

Change to
He came to the radio station because he had an important announcement to make.

At this very point in time the government is trying hard to make big improvements in the educational sector.

Change to
The government is trying hard to make improvements in the school system.

Always read aloud what you have written. It does not matter how experienced you are, reading aloud is a very good way of testing what you have written. Difficult names should be written out phonetically.

OBJECTIVITY

Your opinions and views are irrelevant when you are writing a news story. But sometimes bias can creep in. For example:

"The government claims that it cannot reduce personal income tax at the moment."

The word **claims** immediately casts doubt on the government's integrity. You are not judging the government either way, so you can use **says** instead.

Adjectives can add colour, but they can also distort the facts. For example:

"The soldiers fought bravely to hold their position for two hours."

How do you know they fought **bravely**? They may have all been terrified but had no option but to carry on fighting.

Photo: IWPR Africa

UN trainee takes notes during a press conference

ACTIVE AND PASSIVE

Try, as much as possible, to write in the active tense. Radio news is all about something taking place, or people doing something. It has an active feel to it. The active tense is also more concise than the passive tense, so it saves you time. It is quicker and crisper to say, *"The government is taxing everyone who has a second home,"* rather than, *"Everyone who has a second home is being taxed by the government."* Similarly, *"The Queen gave a speech to the Maori community,"* is better than, *"A speech was given by the Queen to the Maori community."*

Sometimes, however, it makes more sense to write in the passive. For example, *"The president was violently kicked by a grey horse as it cantered past,"* is a more effective way of conveying the story than, *"A grey horse kicked the president violently as it cantered past."* Even if the horse is actively doing the kicking, we want to hear about the president first, because he and his injury are more important than the horse.

ACRONYMS

Give the full name of a political party or organisation on the first reference – "the Movement for Democratic Change, MDC", for instance, not simply "the MDC". Provide a brief identification for context unless it is entirely clear – "the Forum for Democratic Change, FDC, the main opposition party". Major international organisations and other very common acronyms do not need to be spelled out, but it is best to be cautious rather than assume your listeners are masters at deciphering acronyms. EU, UN, NATO and US should not need explanation, but others need spelling out – for example, the ECA, the Economic Community of Africa, or the UNHCR, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, or even the CAR, the Central African Republic. While the person reading a newspaper can ponder a while what an acronym stands for, the radio listener does not have that luxury. If the listener stops to think about what something means, he will be missing the next bit of information being broadcast. In some cases, neither the acronym nor the full spelling is the best choice. For example, the International Bank for

Reconstruction and Development is much more commonly known as the World Bank.

It is always best to avoid the overuse of acronyms. Mention the acronym when the organisation is first referred to but only if the initials will be used later in the story. In a radio report containing many names, provide a short reminder to re-identify an organization, character or a source if he or she re-appears in the story long after the second reference. For example, "Dr Faizal, the opposition leader of party X..."

NAMES AND TITLES

When you first mention someone, give him or her their full title – though within reason. The Zairean dictator Mobutu styled himself Mobutu Sese Seko Nkuku Ngbendu Wa Za Banga (The All-Powerful Warrior Who, Because of his Endurance and Inflexible Will to Win, Will Go from Conquest to Conquest, Leaving Fire in his Wake). But, for journalistic purposes, a first mention of Sese Seko Mobutu, followed by subsequent references to Mobutu, would suffice.

JUDGEMENT

Detail can help a listener judge the quality of an eyewitness. If, for example, you were reporting a story about a bomb attack and were quoting a policeman, it would be better to say, "Pierre Dupont, a police officer who was on the scene shortly after the attack, said the attack had devastated the whole street", rather than simply, "a policeman said the attack had devastated the whole street".

CONTEXT

Always consider whether your audience needs context to understand who or what someone is. The amount of context required will vary depending on the audience but some context is nearly always essential. For example, a Ugandan audience knows that Museveni is president of Uganda and that Lake Victoria is the largest lake in Africa. Kenyans know that their first president was Jomo Kenyatta. But all of these things might need to be spelled out to a West African or American audience. Equally, a Ugandan audience will need help evaluating a story coming from Afghanistan. If, for example, the Helmand province of Afghanistan is mentioned in a story about production of opium, it is relevant that the province is the country's biggest producer of the drug. So, instead of saying simply, *"Government troops entered Helmand to destroy crops of poppies"*, you might write, *"Government forces entered Helmand, the largest opium-producing area in the country, to destroy poppy crops."*

The same rule applies for detail as well as structure. If you are in doubt, provide more rather than less. That gives the editor the choice of whether to include all the detail you report or not. If you omit details about the scene, or people you have interviewed, he or she cannot include it later.

DRAW ON ALL SENSES

The reporter should never forget to play on all of the senses when conveying a story to the listener. Remember that you are up against television with its pictures. You have to give your listeners enough stimulus to imagine where you are and what is happening.
The radio journalist can capture sounds and voices for the listener to hear, but will have to describe for example the retch-inducing smell of a mass grave, the gloomy atmosphere of a largely abandoned village, the tense crowd of demonstrators facing a line of riot police, so tense that even small children know to be quiet. As a reporter, push yourself to get the telling detail which conveys the essence of the story.

In a more extended piece of reporting, say a four-minute package or half-hour feature, it can be very effective to start with a small, focused image. A package on Islamic education might start with children reciting the Koran, rather than an imam talking about the importance of education. A report on Kenya's transport problem might start with a lively, articulate boy who fills holes in the road for money, rather than an interview with the minister of transport.

This is sometimes called the "delayed drop". A story about the slow delivery of humanitarian

Photo: IWPR Africa

Boda Boda enroute to rally

aid, for example, may begin with a brief description of the day-to-day struggle for survival in a refugee camp, which illustrates the broader issue. Bringing the story to life in this way can transform what could be a dry political or bureaucratic article into an urgent, human report, engaging the reader's own interest.

While a straight intro is the simplest and safest, sometimes you might want some variety or novelty. The purpose is to attract or intrigue – in which case, answering the key questions may come later. A hard news lead may be inappropriate for a trend or human interest story. But do not wait too long or you will lose your audience. For instance:

"People in Bugalia have been living in fear for the past five years, but finally the government took action that will save lives in the region. This report from our correspondent Anthony Bugali."

The word "fear" may intrigue an audience. But the majority of the key questions remain to be answered in the reporter's package, which might begin as follows:

"After first evacuating some 500 villagers, special military units yesterday blew up live mines and shells left behind after a conflict six months ago..."

Novelty or intriguing intros should be used sparingly and only where they are truly more interesting or compelling than a straightforward one.

Sometimes, when writing an intro for a package (but not in the cue or for a straight read), you may want to create an atmosphere:

"The smell of death and a pall of smoke hung over the debris-strewn street. This was all that was left to mark the massive shelling that began here last night and continued unabated for 12 hours."

Sometimes you might want to jolt the listener's attention by beginning with an arresting clip. For instance:

"It's totally unbelievable. It's like looking at the

craters of the moon.

"This was the reaction of General Lugulu on first arriving at the town of Guringa in Southern Sudan. He was surveying the battered remains of the town pounded throughout the night by enemy shellfire, leaving dozens dead, hundreds wounded and most buildings in the centre shattered."

But the important point when not using a straightforward lead is to get the basic information across as soon as the atmosphere, or point of the intro, has been established.

Details make stories live and credible. That does not mean packing in too much detail. It does mean letting colourful facts – and in particular audio actuality and interviews – rather than adjectives tell the story. Adjectives should only be used if they really tell something extra, not just paint a pretty picture. Tell your story through action and sound rather than mere description. Adjectives can undermine a story's impartiality as they can imply a value judgement.

Compare these two sentences:

"The noisy room was abruptly cleared by the furious chairman because of an abuse-shouting delegate."

"The chairman banged the table with his gavel and ordered the delegates to stop shouting and leave the room immediately."

COMMON CUE-WRITING MISTAKES

CUE MISMATCH TO START OF PACKAGE

CUE: *Now the business news. Sabiiti has announced it is planning to increase its workforce by 35 per cent. The company has announced profits for the third successive year, having gone through a decade of steady decline. Justin Akwamba reports.*

SABIITI/AKWAMBA
IN: *"THIS HAS BEEN A GOOD YEAR ...*
(SABIITI ACTUALITY)
OUT: *...JUSTIN AKWAMBA REPORTING"*
DUR: 1.15

Better

CUE: *The Lagos-based Sabiiti engineering company is planning to take on another 1,000 workers next year. The company has announced profits for the third successive year, after a decade of steady decline. Our correspondent, Justin Akwamba, now reports from the company's Lagos headquarters*

SABIITI/AKWAMBA
IN: *"THIS HAS BEEN A GOOD YEAR...*
(SABIITI ACTUALITY)
OUT: *...JUSTIN AKWAMBA REPORTING"*
DUR: 1.15

CUE MISMATCH: REPETITION

CUE: *Police in Nairobi say up to a pound of explosives was involved in a blast which killed one man and seriously injured another in a house near the main railway station last night. Detonators were found at the house, but no terrorist involvement is suspected. Rebecca Namusisi reports.*

BLAST/NAMUSISI
(transcription)
NAMUSISI: *Detonators were found in the house in Station Road, but police say there is no suggestion of terrorism being involved. They believe a pound of explosives was used, killing one man and injuring another...*

Better

CUE: *One man has died and another has been seriously injured, following a blast last night in a house in Station Road, Nairobi. Police say up to a pound of explosives was involved and detonators were found at the house but no terrorist involvement is suspected. Rebecca Namusisi reports.*

BLAST/NAMUSISI
(transcription)

The second gives telling detail of what actually happened in an active manner.

If you do use adjectives, ask yourself whether they can be explained better by actuality – if the chairman was furious, let us hear it and then let the listeners judge.

BACKGROUND

The journalist should always ensure that she or he has enough background information to be able to understand and do the story. Remember, if you do not understand, it is unlikely that your audience will. If you are unsure, go back and ask again.

The reporter must always remember that the audience will probably not know as much about the background as he or she does. So ensure that there is enough in the story for the audience to understand the context.

JARGON

Jargon is a language used by a group of people with a certain expertise. Some journalists can't resist using jargon because they think it makes them look knowledgeable. The "aid industry" in developing countries has generated a huge amount of jargon. NGOs, or non-governmental organisations, like to talk about "food insecurity" and "undernutrition" instead of "lack of food". Consider this World Bank report:

"The main objective of this project is to support the conservation of biodiversity and natural ecosystems as well as promote economic growth and development based on the

NAMUSISI: *The house in Station Road was almost destroyed in last night's blast. Police still have no explanation as to why explosives and detonators should have been in the house, but emphasise there is no suggestion of any terrorist involvement. The two men caught up in the blast are both known to the police. Forensic scientists and army bomb disposal experts are waiting for the remains of the building to be structurally safe before moving in. Conditions are so dangerous that the body of the victim, 32 year old Abdullahi Khan, has still not been removed. The other man, 30-year-old Ahmed Majid, is in hospital with bad burns. Police are waiting to question him when he comes out of intensive care.*
Dur: 40 secs

RAISING A MAJOR ISSUE IN THE CUE WHICH IS NOT IN THE PIECE

CUE: *The minister of education has announced there will be free primary school education from next year. This comes shortly after a programme for improving school buildings was launched. Windows have been mended, boreholes sunk and roofs repaired. Sam Kamara asked Mohamed Garba, minister of education, about the changes.*

INTERVIEW (transcription): *We're very pleased with all the building work going on. We feel that all this will make a better environment for teachers and pupils.* (no reference to the abolition of school fees)

Better

CUE: *The Minister of Education, Mohamed Garba, says there will be free primary school education from next year. This follows the launching of a programme for improving school buildings. Sam Kamara asked Mohamed Garba how the government can afford to do away with school fees altogether.*

INTERVIEW (transcription): *Education has been a priority for a number of years, but it's only recently, with the help of the donor community that we have been able to put enough funds into education to make major changes.*

sustainable use of natural resources by local communities in Mozambique."

If you are writing this up for radio you need to make it "real", and find out what is meant by all these abstract phrases. Biodiversity – is this a reference to trees, wildlife, fish? How is economic growth being promoted? Is it through selling food or wood? Or by making mats out of raffia and selling them? Which local communities will be affected?

The financial world is another place where jargon is common. But as the BBC News style guide says, "blueprint", "escalation", "ceiling" and "target" can all be replaced with the simpler and easier to understand "plan", "growth", "limit" and "objective".

Police and emergency services can often describe things in very stilted terms. It is easy to pick up the vocabulary they use in an attempt to sound authoritative. For example, a police report might say, "The pedestrian was fatally injured." But it is much clearer to say, "The pedestrian was killed." There may at first glance be something impressively weighty about saying, "The two perpetrators of the crime appear to have gained access to the rear of the premises by breaking down the door." But it is much clearer to say, "The two men appear to have got into the back of the shop by breaking down the door."

INFORMATION OVERLOAD – NUMBERS AND STATISTICS

A common mistake in radio is to put too much information into one sentence in an attempt to be informative and concise. This often takes the form of trying to quote figures or tables. It does add some authority to your report if you quote figures. However, give too many figures and you will leave your listeners far behind. Here are some basic rules:

- Always round your figures up, or down, to the nearest big number. For example, say, "Nearly 400 people were made redundant," rather than, "three hundred and ninety six people were made redundant."
- Always write out your figures in full, if it is essential to give a precise figure. For example, "It is now known that one thousand three hundred and fifty five people have died in the Tsunami disaster." If you don't write out that figure you may be caught out when you, or the news presenter, suddenly stumble on the figure "1,355" whilst live on air.
- Use percentages with care, and do not mix them up with figures. For example, do not say, "One out of ten women have given up smoking by the time they reach the age of 40, but ten per cent of men have given up when they reach the same age." Keep your terms of reference the same. Be clear in your mind what a percentage increase is. If you say the cost of rice has gone up by one hundred percent, this means the cost has doubled. Your listeners would probably find that easier to understand than a percentage.
- Avoid giving vague quantities in a report – for example, "some people are protesting" or "a number of people turned down the offer" or "a wave of arrests took place at dawn." Find out what numbers are involved and convey that information as plainly and clearly as you can. If you cannot get anything more precise, then make it clear who you are quoting. For example, "According to the police, a stockpile of weapons has been discovered in a warehouse at the port, and a number of men have been arrested."

ATTRIBUTION AND QUOTATION

Avoid delaying attribution. For example:

"Nigeria is heading for war," says the leader of the opposition party.

This is increasingly done in radio and television, with the result that an opening statement creates a false sense of drama where none exists.

"Condom use is encouraging underage sex," says the Catholic Coalition for Celibacy.

It's only when we hear who is being quoted that we know how to evaluate the quotation.

AMERICAN ENGLISH OR ENGLISH ENGLISH?

American English is becoming increasingly popular in Africa and other parts of the world. This is due to a number of factors: the influence of Microsoft software, which promotes American spellings and grammar; satellite television; and, finally, the large number of people leaving the continent to work in America and returning with American turns of phrase. Liberia and South Africa have a long history of using American English to a greater or lesser extent. It's worth being clear what your listeners are used to, especially if a large community of listeners in America listen to your programmes on the internet. Here are some examples of different names used for same thing.

WILDTRACK CHILD CRYING

SCRIPT: *Amina hasn't eaten for two days.*
WILDTRACK CHILD CRYING HOLD UNDER SCRIPT.
Her mother tries to comfort her with water from a small cup
WILDTRACK CHILD CRYING UP AND LOSE INTO NEXT INSERT
AMINA'S MOTHER ON LACK OF FOOD
IN: *I give her some water but she's in pain from lack of food...*
OUT: *...I've looked everywhere.*
DUR: 10"
Amina's mother Ayesha hasn't eaten for nearly a week. She is beginning to despair that the food convoy promised two weeks ago will never come to this small desert community.
AMINA etc.

EXAMPLE OF A SCRIPT FOR A PACKAGE

WITCHES/LEDGER
CUE: *For over 200 hundred years, women in northern Ghana have run the risk of being rejected by their community and sent to the witches' home in Gambaga. But for the past ten years, Comfort Ntimoa-Mensah, of the Presbyterian Church, has been helping women return home. Fiona Ledger reports on how women ended up in the witches' home in the first place.*
IN: *For Miriam Agabote…*
OUT: *...out of witchcraft.*
DUR: 49"
Ten years ago, the lives of women in the home was much bleaker. Yaba Badoe visited the community in 1995, talking to the witches through an interpreter.
WITCH EX AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE
IN: *Local language then ….How do the women…*
OUT: *...less often today then 3 secs local language*
DUR: 43 secs
WILDTRACK WITCHES SINGING (BRING UP FROM PREVIOUS INSERT AND LOSE *The women come from a variety of spiritual backgrounds: Christian, Muslim and Animist. The Presbyterian Church has no agenda to convert them to Christianity, but rather aims to give them practical help. Besides providing them with money, to buy and sell salt in the market, they have also improved their essential amenities. Comfort Ntimoa-Mensah again.*
IN: *We help...*
OUT: *...can see*
DUR: 1'06
But when it comes to reintegrating women into the community, negotiation is backed up by practical support. The women return home not to beg for charity but with a level of self-sufficiency and the ability to make money through trade.
END PACKAGE ON WILDTRACK WITCHES SINGING BRING UP FROM INSERT AND FADE TO TIME
30 SECS AVAILABLE
Total Dur: 4mins 20 APPROX

American English	UK English
liquor store	off licence
trunk (car)	boot
hood (car)	bonnet
potato chips	crisps
apartment	flat
attorney	lawyer
garbage	rubbish
yard	garden
gas	petrol
elevator	lift
faucet	tap

CUE WRITING

The cue is that part of the script – usually read by a newsreader – which introduces a clip, interview or reporter package. Matching the recorded piece to a well-written script or cue is the hallmark of good radio. The cue and the following piece should be considered as one seamless whole. Ideally the reporter should write the cue and indicate to the presenter or producer where the sound insert should start. At the very least, the reporter should supply cue material: that is, all the necessary information needed to understand the point of the dispatch, interview or package. Here are some cue-writing "dos" and "don'ts":

- The cue or introduction into a radio report or package should serve to make the listener aware of what is about to follow.
- The cue should give the listener a sense of anticipation.
- The cue should give the listener just enough information to make sense of what comes next.
- The cue should not repeat the opening words of the report.
- The cue should not be a potted summary of what is to follow.
- The cue should not raise listeners' expectations about what is not in the piece. This can happen when a sloppily written cue is followed by a hastily edited piece.
- If the piece starts with actuality (sound of something happening, recorded on location) or wildtrack or music, the cue should prepare the listener for that. It should not make the listener think that the first thing he or she will hear is the reporter's voice, if that is not the case.
- The cue should be only long enough to provide the listener with the information he or she needs. (Anything over 20 seconds would need to be justified by the complexity or importance of the story.)

LINKING SOUND

When constructing a package or introducing a piece of sound with a cue, the written link should work harmoniously with the recorded piece – the commentary and the recorded sound should work as a single 'seamless robe'.. When you are interviewing a mother who has lost all her children in a mortar attack, her words, her weeping, the weeping of others, will have far more impact than the script that introduces them. The more dramatic the situation and the stronger the sounds you record, the plainer your writing can be, the less it needs to draw on adjectives and descriptive phrases.

When writing a script for a package or half-hour programme, keep the script to an absolute minimum at the top. Preferably, you should start your report with a piece of sound or a pithy sound bite from someone you interviewed. Then come in a with a one-liner. You can build up the script as you go further down the piece.

EXERCISES

1. Take a front page story from the paper and outline how you would make it into a radio package, listing people you would interview and sounds you would record.
2. Record a bulletin as it goes out on your station or a rival's station. Test the lead of each story and see if you can improve on the structure of the story.
3. Take a story in the bulletin and analyse how many of the six basic questions it

answers and in which order.

4. Discuss with colleagues possible ways of constructing a four minute package about the following:

   You are a reporter working in Sudan, where civil unrest means that humanitarian aid is failing to get through to the starving population. The situation in relief camps is dire and you have just returned from one camp with your own disturbing eyewitness assessment of the crisis. On your return to the capital, as you are considering how to write your story, an official from the Red Cross calls and offers you an advance copy of a previously unpublished report on the situation. The report voices strong criticism of how aid is being distributed and offers concrete proposals for improvement. You are now in possession of first-hand knowledge of conditions in the camp and an exclusive report. How would you construct your package? What would be the balance between description of conditions and voices and the report?

   One version of your story will be for an African publication. Another version has been commissioned for the US market. What would be the difference in level of detail between the two?

ADDITIONAL READING

Writing for Broadcast Journalists, by Rick Thompson (Routledge)

On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction, by William Knowlton (Zinsser Quill Press)

A useful general site is http://radio.about.com, which contains all sorts of information and links about radio production.

Tip sheets on writing, constructing and editing from the Poynter Institute's online site: www.poynter.org/content/content_view.asp?id=31907&sid=2

CHAPTER EIGHT

VOICING AND PRESENTATION

GOOD PRESENTERS EQUAL HIGH RATINGS

Some people are blessed with naturally good broadcasting voice. Others are not. Either way, very few people sound good when they first perform at the microphone. Good broadcasting takes practice, which can and should be done both at work and at home.

Broadcasting news is about getting information across to the listener as clearly and concisely as you can. It is also a performance. Pace, timing, energy, the quality and fluency of the presenter's voice – all these things, aside from the quality of the news being broadcast, will determine whether the listener carries on listening or switches off. If listeners enjoy a certain presenter's style, they will listen regularly. Good presenters are very important to the popularity of a station.

Whilst there is an element of performance in any piece of broadcasting, the presenter's personality should not dominate what he or she is broadcasting. Good presenting is about having a distinctive personality, but not letting that personality stand between the listener and the story.

You will have been chosen to be a radio news journalist, or news presenter, because someone heard potential in your voice, and because you are a reasonable journalist. But when you first hear yourself broadcasting, you may not like what you hear. You may think you sound too young, too hesitant and not authoritative. This is a very common reaction. Let others be the judge. See if you can get an older and more experienced broadcaster to listen with you to your recorded voice and pick out your strengths and weaknesses.

Knowledge of one's listeners is crucial. It allows you to understand the tone to use when speaking to them and to know which topics will interest them. Knowing your audience facilitates contact and determines the kind of relationship that you can develop with the listeners. Your station may have done an audience survey in the past. If it has, such a survey is recommended reading to enable you to gain a proper understanding of your audience.

GETTING IN THE MOOD

The good presenter is relaxed but energetic, natural in delivery but not casual or theatrical. Do not try to be somebody else. If English is your second language you may think that when you are broadcasting you must put on a special English accent. Don't. Broadcast English in the way you speak English. You may discover, as a novice presenter, that you mispronounce a few words – that's not unusual. Sort those words out and get them clear in your head, but don't change your accent.

Presenting is a remarkably physical business. Not surprisingly, when a live presenter comes off the air after an hour or two, he or she will usually feel exhausted. But your body can work against you as well as with you. If you are physically tense your voice will sound tense. It may sound unnaturally high or forced. To unlock yourself you need to do some physical exercises to loosen your neck and shoulders. Drop your head and let yourself go limp, close your eyes, count to ten and then slowly lift your head. Bring your shoulders up as high as you can. Drop your shoulders and then rotate your head clockwise and then anti-clockwise. This should get rid of the tension in your muscles and in your voice.

By the time you reach the studio your voice should be warmed up and ready to go. The voice is like a musical instrument and presenting is not that different from singing. Like a singer you need to loosen your voice as well as your body. Singing is good, any kind of singing. It exercises your mouth and body, and it raises your energy levels.

ON AIR

When the red light comes on, your presentation should sound rich and varied. You should be hitting different notes to convey the variety of what you are saying, especially at the end of your sentences. A monotonous voice kills the meaning of what is being broadcast and bores the listener. Think about what your body and face are doing when you broadcast. If you are slumped in your chair, your voice will sound limp and dreary. Make yourself comfortable in your chair, but do not slouch – sit up and breathe from your diaphragm. If the style of your station is upbeat and informal, smile. Yes, you really can hear a smile in someone's voice, just as you can sound dreary because you have a dreary expression on your face.

Getting your volume right is crucial. A studio microphone is a powerful thing – you do not need to shout. Put your headphones on and you will hear just how loud you are. Think of yourself as chatting to a friend not to people hundreds of miles away.

FLUENCY

Good broadcasting starts with good writing, but the best-written report, the most exciting, well-edited interview, can be ruined by poor presenting. A basic fault for many novices is lack of fluency. There is nothing more irritating than hearing hesitation, stumbling over words and mispronunciation. There are two simple cures. The first is to practise reading aloud, preferably with someone listening who is following what you are doing on a spare script. The second is to make sure that you never read a script, either live or recorded, with which you are not totally familiar.

The fluent reader will not only read what is precisely in front of them, but also be reading ahead. Some people never learn to read that fluently. Their brains will always be struggling to decipher the symbols on the page. It can take three months to discover whether you can realise your potential and become a good presenter.

PRONUNCIATION

For listeners to understand you fully, good pronunciation is essential. Words must be pronounced fully and properly. Do not cut words short. Radio pronunciation is not informal speaking. Pay attention to how you articulate when you speak. Some find it useful to focus on pronouncing the first and last syllables of words.

You also need to write out phonetically any names, or even words, which you find hard to pronounce. For example, if you are not confident about pronouncing the name of the UN's emergency relief coordinator, Jan Egeland, you can write out a phonetic version of his name: Yan Egger-land. And write out financial terms in the order of pronunciation i.e. not, "It cost $4,000, that's around Ush 8,000,000" but "It cost four thousand dollars, that's around eight million shillings"

USING YOUR VOICE

Since there are no images in radio, voice is the main instrument used to convey emotion. An obituary is certainly not read using the same tone as the coverage of an anniversary. Use the proper tone at the proper moment. Try and make your voice musical by using inflection.

Listen to a friend over the phone. You can normally tell how the person is feeling – good or bad. Listeners should be able to perceive the emotions of the text through your voice. Apart from having a pleasant voice, you must learn to make it express emotion.

When reading for radio, your voice must fluctuate. There are moments when one's tone must be higher and other moments when it should be lower. Certain words deserve more emphasis than others. For instance, the beginning and end of a news story will not be read with the same intensity as the middle of the story.

Breathing, pauses and emphasis

Breathing is the spoken word equivalent of punctuation. Short breaths, for instance, represent commas. Longer and deeper breaths should serve as full stops. They mark the end of a phrase or the end of an idea. When scripting for radio, it is always useful to

mark longer pauses in your text. You can use a slash / symbol for short pauses, // for longer pauses and underlines _ for emphasis.

Rhythm

To master your rhythm is to speak at a proper speed, taking time for pauses and giving yourself time to breathe easily. Proper rhythm allows you to read a long paper in a consistent fashion, with no difference in speed between the beginning and the end. Proper rhythm will prevent you from losing your breath before you have finished reading a story. If you often feel out of breath while reading a text, review your sentences to make sure they aren't too long. If you find it difficult to find a proper rhythm, imagine you are talking to a friend and start from there.

USE YOUR TIME PROFITABLY

Always keep ahead of the game when on air. While a package or report is being played out, don't dream. Make sure you know what is coming up next, whether it's the weather, a time check or another item. Be prepared. Don't muddle along. Be ready for the worst: for example, the equipment freezing so that none of your items can be played in. Have something written for this eventuality and plenty of trails so that you can talk to listeners about what is coming up later in the day. If you enjoy ad-libbing – talking off the top of your head without any script – and you are good at it, you won't find this too disconcerting. If the thought of this happening terrifies you, do one of the exercises at the end of this chapter.

AD-LIBBING

In some radio stations, presenters ad-lib all the time. This is a question of house style, and how skilful the presenter is at ad-libbing. It can be irritating if a presenter "back announces" every item (i.e. tells the listener what he or she has just been hearing) with a personal aside. It can also reveal bias and shallowness in the presenter's thinking, and so lose him or her credibility. There is a problem with some presenters who think they are better at ad-libbing than they actually are. If you think you have a flare for off-the-cuff remarks, be sensitive as to how the producers or editors are receiving your cheerful banter, and ask them if you sound all right. The news bulletin is best kept an ad-lib-free zone.

SILENCE

When on air, avoid silence. Your listeners may not understand what is happening and may choose to change the station. Do not panic if you stumble on a word, just breathe, re-read the word and keep on going as if nothing had happened. Always be ready in case the next planned audio is not available because, for instance, a mistake has been made somewhere along the line.

SOME THINGS FOR A PRESENTER TO AVOID:

- Don't eat chocolate – it gums up the mouth.
- Don't drink fizzy drinks – burping on air is not recommended.
- Do eat something before you go on air – microphones are very good at picking up rumbling stomachs – but not a large meal.
- Don't drink alcohol – you might think a beer will relax you but it can become a habit, with one beer soon becoming three or four.
- Don't ad-lib if you are not good at it.

EXERCISES

1. Read a dispatch unprepared and record yourself.
2. Read the same dispatch, taking five minutes to read through the text and mark it up.
3. Record yourself and compare the two recordings.
4. Read a news bulletin in two different styles: formal and casual.
5. Record and compare two recordings with a colleague.
6. Imagine there is a technical fault and see how long you can ad-lib with no written material to hand.

CHAPTER NINE

PROGRAMMING

The vast majority of radio stations in Africa broadcast music programmes and phone-ins. These programmes are cheap to make. They also attract good audiences and hence a decent amount of advertising. Yet all over the continent there is a hunger for other types of programmes. Not just news but also interviews, features about people and historical events. Listeners also want to be entertained with stories and drama. This chapter will look at some of the possibilities, outlining the costs and production demands involved.

NEWS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS

News is expensive to produce, but with the price of digital technology coming down, and access to the internet increasing, even the most poorly-resourced local station can provide reasonable local, regional and continent-wide news. The IWPR website is an obvious first stop. It provides a range of news and news feature stories from around the world and has a dedicated Africa section. Other websites dedicated partly, or wholly, to African news include the BBC, allafrica.com, IRIN, One World and Panos.

But when it comes to stories in your own back yard, good contacts are essential. Newsroom staff should be hired as much because of the number of people they know and their appetite for gossip as for their broadcasting and writing abilities. Equipped with mobile phones and some form of transport, these newshounds can supply the station with a steady stream of local stories.

In many African stations there is little distinction between news and current affairs; there is no division of labour between people working on the news desk and those going out to record and report. Generally, it is just the news editor and the programme editors who are fixed points at the station, and sometimes they are one and the same person. The news bulletin and the current affairs programme that generally follows it should feed off each other. For example, writing a story for the bulletin can often go hand-in-hand with recording interviews, actuality and vox pops, all of which can be clipped for the bulletin and run in a longer form in a subsequent current affairs programme. Equally, the people working on a current affairs programme should be feeding material into the next news bulletin.

Constant effective communication and regular meetings are vital if maximum use is going to be made of the knowledge and recorded material that the station has at its disposal.

The BBC World Service currently runs a news bulletin of six or seven stories. Four or five of these may run with some sort of sound – for example, ten to 15 seconds of actuality (taken from an interview or speech), or a correspondent's report, which may run from 30 to 40 seconds in length. A current affairs programme like the BBC's Newshour, which comes after the news, will give fuller treatment to some of those stories featured in the bulletin.

The editor or producer of a current affairs programme has to decide how much to quarry from the news. He or she may decide to expand on a dispatch by interviewing the correspondent who wrote it. Or they may ask the presenter to talk on the phone to someone affected by the events in the story. Alternatively, they might interview an expert in the studio who can throw further light on a story (for example, asking a doctor specialising in nutrition to comment on the implications of a food convoy being delayed).

In each case the current affairs programme has the air time, not available in the news bulletin, to provide analysis and background. A current affairs programme is not obliged to tackle all the stories covered in the news

Photo: IWPR Africa

bulletin. And it may come up with its own stories, generating news as well as following it.

SPORT

Sport often goes hand-in-hand with the news, but more and more radio stations are launching independent sports programmes. Sports programmes attract novice reporters who think that because they follow football regularly, that they are perfectly suited to their dream-job of being a radio sports journalist. But sports programming is not easy. It is very information-intensive – each story carries a large number of names and figures. It demands very high standards of accuracy – getting a score wrong will be picked up much more quickly by listeners than misquoting a politician. It also demands high levels of energy and fluency – sports programmes tend to be presented with slightly more pace and speed than other programmes.

Sports broadcasting also requires ingenuity. Sportsmen and women do not always make the most articulate interviewees and they need drawing out. This is not always easy because interviews are conducted in the heat of the moment, just before or just after a big event. It is all too common to hear reporters asking players the same kind of questions: "How do you feel?" when they come off the pitch after winning or losing; "How's the leg doing?" after an injury; "It's been a bad season for the club. When are you going to turn the corner?" etc. These sorts of questions have their place, but a good sports reporter should look for more information and insights. This means making an appointment to do more in-depth interviews, away from the relentless timetable of training and performance. The reporter should prepare for this carefully so that he or she can ask better informed, more angled questions in order to get fuller, more interesting answers. A more leisurely and thoughtful encounter can produce a more interesting interview and may even produce a valuable piece of news.

MUSIC

Music programmes are hugely popular with listeners and station owners alike. They are cheap and cheerful for all concerned. There are hundreds of different ways of running a music programme, but the rule is to play

music which is popular but not entirely predictable. You are in danger of losing listeners if you broadcast the same sort of music all the time. Many stations choose a computerised music programme to ensure an even mix of songs throughout the schedule. That is one way of dealing with music output. The other is to think about what image the station wants to project through the music it broadcasts.

There are interesting editorial choices to be made when it comes to music. To what extent do you want to play – and, by implication, promote – local musicians? What is your ratio of African to Western music? Do you want listeners to drive the direction of output with a request show? What ratio of music to chat do you want?

Like sport, music attracts young hopefuls who see DJ-ing as their dream job. A typical mistake of the novice presenter is to talk too much over the music. It drives listeners mad. The ideal music presenter should be aware of the latest tastes, be well connected with the music world, and be an experienced broadcaster, with a great voice and respect for the music.

PHONE-INS

Phone-ins are popular and also cheap. They allow a radio station to engage with its listeners in a very direct way. Phone-ins give listeners a chance to air their views and opinions to a much broader audience. With the growth of digital technology, phone-ins have been enriched by text messages and email contributions. The set-up can vary. At its minimum, a phone-in requires one presenter and several phone lines, with someone to deal with calls as they come in, screening out people who are abusive or peddling propaganda. The presenter can be joined by one or two guests, who inject specialist knowledge about the given topic of the day. It's important to trail phone-in programmes heavily so listeners can take down the station contact number and have time to think about the topic being debated. Some stations even encourage listeners to email or text in their questions ahead of the transmission, giving the producer and presenter time to plan the running order of the programme.

The presenter of a phone-in needs to be firm and fair, and be ready to cut people off if they stop adding to the value of the programme. Some people just love the sound of their own voices; some people are very long-winded; some are tireless in coming back each week, again and again. These people need to be cut off before they bore all the other listeners. A presenter or producer should not be tempted to put a good talker on regularly. It puts other listeners off to hear the same person coming up again and again. It also makes them suspicious that they are friends or relatives of people at the station.

A presenter also needs to be tough and quick with callers whose comments are libellous. They must be cut off quickly with a well phrased comment disassociating the station from the comments made.

A log should be kept of all listeners used in a programme and their numbers. That way you will be able to see who the regular callers are. You will also be better equipped to deal with any fall-out after the programme is transmitted, in terms of government objections, or criticism from other listeners or from organisations mentioned in the programme.

MAGAZINE PROGRAMMES

Like a current affairs programme, a magazine programme may have a number of different items in it, linked by a presenter, but it is not driven by the news. It could be a programme made up of odd stories and anecdotes – funny and intriguing people or events that don't make the news. It could be a programme with a theme – science, education, the arts or health. Whatever type of magazine programme the editor or station manager decides upon, the agenda needs to be clear and there should be a regular presenter. All this will help the programme have a clear identity.

FEATURES

A feature or documentary feature is like an

extended package, but involving more voices and sounds. Thematically, it will explore different sides to a news story and give more background. Radio documentary features are expensive to make – although cheaper than television documentaries – but they are of huge value in terms of documenting and understanding our world. While fragments of news on their own will not stand the test of time, a well-made feature will tell historians of the future what our society was like. While news tends to deal with politics, the actions of the powerful and decision makers, the documentary feature can delve in detail into the lives of the people further down the ladder: a subsistence farmer, a rat catcher or a once famous musician.

The BBC is one of the few radio broadcasters which regularly puts out half-hour features. Even BBC editors are very careful in commissioning features because of the time and money they absorb. Exploring a big subject – like the decline of the railways in Kenya, or the growth of mobile phones, or the lives of children born of a mixed race marriage – may mean a producer ends up working with up to six hours of raw material. All of this has to be logged and cut and scripted. This can take up to a fortnight, and not many station managers are willing to release staff for that length of time.

But it is possible for a reporter to make the occasional feature while carrying on normal duties, accumulating material bit by bit. There may be something in the news that merits being made into a feature – a human rights report on house girls being badly treated, for example. The reporter will need to read the report to do a news story, and possibly also record an interview with the author of the report for the station's current affairs programme. But more material is needed for a feature, for example a number of interviews with house girls about their experiences and interviews with their employers. The girls may vary in how articulate they are and the employers may be wary of appearing exploitative. All this takes time, but the end result is worth it, even if a reporter ends up using his or her free Sundays logging, editing and scripting.

OTHER WAYS OF FILLING A 15 OR 30 MINUTE SLOT

One-to-one interviews – a good talker with an interesting life, well-interviewed, can make for a very good programme. These sorts of interviews are also something you can stockpile when a number of interesting people are in town at the same time.

Profiles on location – a variation on the above is to visit somebody prominent or famous where they live and record them not just in interview, but also interacting with people around them or pointing out the things they like about their home or environment.

Discussion programmes – either live or pre-recorded, a lively discussion programme, bringing together people with different points of view, is always good radio. This could be more on the news and current affairs side, picking up something in the news and debating it. Or it could be a moral debate, reflecting on ethical issues. The important thing is to invite people who are approaching the chosen theme from different angles. There's nothing more boring than listening to a discussion where everyone agrees with everyone else.

DRAMA

Well-performed and produced, with good actors and storylines, a drama can be hugely popular. But drama can also be very expensive and time-consuming. Scripts have to be written, actors found, scenes recorded, edited and mixed, opening and closing announcements made. Most radio drama in Africa today is development drama, broadcast to get across a particular message. NGOs have funded dramas about a range of issues, including safe sex, good governance or immunisation for babies and children. This is a big venture but worth looking into if there are producers in the radio station interested in recording and directing, and good actors around with a strong local following.

There are other cheap and independent ways of carrying drama in the output. One is to find a good actor to perform a short comic monologue on the events of the day. Or to find two actors, ask them to develop vivid and recognisable characters, then record them in a lively improvised conversation. These can make lively weekly or bi-weekly entertainment slots of five to ten minutes in length. If you know there is a well-known local story teller, sign him or her up to do a weekly story. A number of stories can be stockpiled in one recording session. The oral tradition is still strong in Africa and radio is perfectly designed to keep that tradition alive.

SIGNATURE TUNE

A strong signature tune will go a long way to attracting listeners to a particular programme. Time should be spent considering what music to use. It may be from a commercial recording. If you are thinking of doing this, find out about copyright – you will need to come to some arrangement with the record company and artist if you are playing their music regularly. Alternatively, you might want to pay a one-off fee to commission a local musician to play something. Your signature tune could be as simple as several phrases of drumming, or it could involve a composition with a complex harmony. It is best to stick to an instrumental for a signature tune – even if the lyrics are consistent with the theme of the programme, you don't want the presenter's voice fighting with the lyrics.

JUNCTIONS

If you think of the schedule as a necklace, with all the programmes as individual pearls, then spare time to think of what is holding the pearls together. Many very good pieces of programming are spoilt by wobbly, badly planned junctions: play-out music at the end of a programme coming to an abrupt halt, followed by the panicky shuffle of papers, continuity announcers crashing into presenters, muddled time checks, trails for upcoming programmes failing to play etc. The only way to tackle this is to sit back and listen to station output, paying careful attention to the beginnings and ends of programmes. It is worth recording some junctions and playing them back to presenters and/or continuity announcers. These junction mistakes have a habit of returning again and again, because nobody has sat down to think through what went wrong and how it can be remedied next time round.

EXERCISE

Listen to your local radio stations, or the BBC. Make a log of the different types of programming they use and then answer the following questions:

1. Does the programming mix work?
2. How would you improve or adapt the programming for your station?
3. Can you think of new programme formats for your station?
4. Describe a new features magazine you would like to launch.

ADDITIONAL READING

Radio Production, by Robert Mcleish (Focal Press) is a very good overall guide to all things radio.

CHAPTER TEN

INTRODUCTION TO LIBEL

The essential right to freedom of speech is balanced by a requirement of journalists to use that right responsibly – and by the risk that subjects of media reports may have recourse to legal action if they believe they have been subjected to a libel.

Laws covering defamation vary hugely from country to country and it is imperative to have a good understanding of libel and privacy laws within your own country.

Repressive regimes may deploy libel laws to silence their critics, arguing that a report has defamed them, regardless of its accuracy. In the absence of an independent judiciary, such cases have resulted in extended jail terms for local journalists.

England, which has some of the world's most strenuous libel laws, protects people's right to their "good name" and provides wide leeway in defining defamation – the general term covering libel and slander. But it balances this right with a number of defences available to journalists (although the burden of proof lies with them to prove their innocence). Cases of criminal libel – which involve a finding of libel and malice and can involve prison sentences – are very rare, but the financial penalties from verdicts in civil cases can be ruinous. (In this chapter we talk about England (which in fact covers England and Wales) and English law and not Britain and British law, because Scotland and Northern Ireland have their own legal systems.)

Libel law in the United States sets a very high burden of proof on any potential claimant, especially a public figure (the law is different for private individuals). A public personality bringing a libel suit in the United States has the burden of proving that a reporter not only published false information but also did so recklessly and maliciously, without attempting to determine whether it was true. In essence, there has to be intent.

THE BEST SAFEGUARD: SOUND JOURNALISM

Journalists must have a healthy respect for the laws of libel and privacy because they uphold the right to an individual's "good name" and the right of private citizens to conduct their private lives without intrusion.

That said, there is a balance to be struck. Journalists should not allow concern about the law to prevent them from doing their work conscientiously for the public good. The best safeguard against a libel action is good journalistic practice; thorough, accurate and balanced reporting; careful and sceptical editing; and fair-minded presentation.

Because laws and the way they are implemented vary so widely, journalists must always be sensitive to good practice in their own country and in countries where they may be distributing their stories.

In practical terms, this means that if reports are being distributed in English, journalists must be aware of the libel laws in England and in the United States. The tough English law sometimes acts as a "lowest common denominator" and will be discussed at length in this chapter.

FORUM SHOPPING

Increasingly, libel cases are being heard by courts outside what might normally be thought of as their natural jurisdiction. Print publications and radio and television stations can be sued in courts in countries not where they are published or broadcast, and not even where the journalist is working, but in countries where they are sold or distributed. With the expansion of the internet, there are even more

of these "extra-territorial" cases, and it could be that your audio report uploaded from one particular country could be subject to action in any country which has access to the site.

This is known as "forum shopping", where a plaintiff seeks to bring an action in a country where he or she believes the chances of winning a libel case are greatest.

One recent example of this, and perhaps a key case in the extra-territorial jurisdiction issue worldwide, is the case of Dow Jones & Company Inc vs. Gutnick in Australia. On December 10, 2002, the High Court of Australia ruled that publisher Dow Jones could be sued in the Australian state of Victoria for an article posted on Barron's Online, a US-based website owned by Dow Jones. Despite submissions to the court in support of Dow Jones from the likes of Reuters and Amazon, among others, the court ruled that, regardless of the location of the hosting server, the alleged defamation of the plaintiff, Joseph Gutnick, took place in Victoria.

Apparently, it took place everywhere else, as well. The judge's ruling read, "For myself I would see no immediate reason why, if a person has been defamed in more than one jurisdiction, he or she if so advised, might not litigate the case in each of those jurisdictions."

This ruling in the case could open the floodgates to a large amount of litigation in Australia and in other countries.

Internet libel, in fact, is no different from normal libel. If you libel someone, and the court can prove at least one person has seen it in a specific country, then you might face a libel action in that country. If you publish online, you will be seen and heard in dozens of countries, and could be sued in any one of them.

Media organisations thus face the daunting prospect of having to understand libel law in several different countries. IWPR is monitoring closely the changing environment of multi-national and international libel cases and will advise editors and contributors of any important new developments.

For now, the advice on third-country libel suits is clear:

- Know the law in your own country.
- Know the law in England.
- Assume that any third country would be just as strict on libel as England.

A COMMONSENSE APPROACH

Before going into the specific details of various laws, it is important to have a common sense approach to the issues.

Be attentive to complaints about accuracy and fairness, and be prompt in correcting errors. An angry listener treated fairly who sees that you are willing to correct mistakes might be less inclined to take further action. A swift correction can also be seen as mitigating evidence in a court.

Never ignore a threat of legal action. Talk about it with a senior editor as soon as possible. Do not hope it will go away.

Be sure that senior editors have a chance to check sensitive items early before they go out. Decisions that might need legal advice – whether there might be some protection against a person likely to sue or whether a tough statement might be protected because of the circumstances – should not be made by a single journalist a few minutes before transmission.

Good journalism means sometimes taking a risk, but it must always be for a good, well thought-out reason. Taking sound legal advice and considering issues of libel is often about risk assessment.

Some countries consider libel a criminal matter, which means the accused could go to jail. Others consider it a civil matter, but losing could incur heavy damages. Some plaintiffs will use both civil and criminal law.

In some countries, insults or even strong criticism against a minister or a public official may be considered libellous or even criminal. In other countries, criticism of public figures is given wide latitude in the interest of the public good and democracy. There is simply no universal agreement, so journalists must familiarise themselves with local law and practice.

The London-based organisation Article 19, which promotes freedom of expression for the media, has proposed that universal guidelines could be drawn up on the basis of international law, various national standards and generally accepted legal principles. This would "set out an appropriate balance between the human right to freedom of expression . . . and the need to protect individual reputations".

SOME BROAD DEFINITIONS

Until that happens, there are no universally recognised guidelines. But there are some common elements covering defamation and privacy that journalists should know about.

First, what is a libel? A standard definition would be a false statement published about someone that damages that person's reputation or business, or holds the person up to ridicule or public hatred. Slander is the same, except it is impermanent or spoken, not written. But note that in England a defamatory broadcast on television or radio is deemed "published" and hence is considered a libel not a slander.

In many countries, truth is a defence against libel. But you might have to be able to prove that a statement is true, with the risk that you could be held responsible if you cannot. Or you might be held responsible if you can be shown to have published the statement without checking its accuracy, especially if it turns out to be false. You might know it to be true – but you will have to prove it. In some countries – but not many – the person alleging libel may have to prove that the statement in question is not true. And it is generally not a defence to report what somebody else said if it has not been independently checked for truth, no matter how reliable you thought the source.

Even a note given to a small number of people, or a summary of an article or broadcast used in a conference of editors who are planning publication, could be considered "published".

A libel in most countries is about a person, a small group of identifiable people (it is generally not about a group of people unless they are named) or an institution. This is often a question of fact and degree.

In some states, adverse comments about a head of state, a minister or a public official could bring legal proceedings and even jail. Conversely, such criticism may be considered fair in those countries which encourage debate in the public interest for the greater good of society.

A statement about a national, ethnic, religious or similar group might not be libellous, but it might fall under laws banning incitement to hatred or hate speech. Some states place a ban on criticising the heads of friendly nations.

Remember, it is possible that people can be identified in an article even if they are not specifically named. An official could be identified by position, occupation or address. If a group is so small that its members are easy to identify individually – workers in a small office, for instance – they may all be able to sue. In many countries, those suing may have to prove real damage to their reputation. In others, courts may presume damage and the defending party may have to prove that no damage was done. And the bigger the complainant's reputation or place in society, the bigger the damages.

ALARM BELLS

The alarm bells should start ringing when a report gets personal – that is, if it includes accusations of professional dishonesty or incompetence; suggestions of immoral,

criminal or improper behaviour; questioning of a person's ancestry; or allegations that somebody is mentally ill or suffers from the likes of a sexually transmitted disease.

A city official might be scorned in his community if he is convicted of drunken driving, or a restaurant owner might lose business if an inspector reports a violation of health rules. If true, accurate reports of such instances should not give rise to a libel action. But if these people have not been convicted in a court, how will you prove your claims to be true?

ENGLISH LIBEL LAW

Organisations which distribute news in England, such as IWPR, must be familiar with the specifics of English libel law and its defences.

The classic definition of defamation in English law is "a statement that lowers the reputation of a person in the mind of a right-thinking person". Who that might be is a difficult concept, but it is generally taken to mean the average man or woman in the street.

There are four main possible defences:

1. Truth: This is the most obvious defence. But remember, the issue is not about what you believe to be true or even what you know to be true, but what you can prove to be true.

   Example: In 1993, the magazine New Statesman wrote a story about rumours that Prime Minister John Major was having an affair with a caterer. The rumours were ruled defamatory and the magazine had no defence. Major settled the dispute out of court, but he could have pursued his claim and probably put the magazine out of business.

2. Fair comment: This defence applies to statements not of fact but of opinion. It must be obvious to listeners that the statement is a comment or opinion. However, the underlying facts on which the comment is based must be demonstrably true.

   Example: In the Eighties, a BBC satire programme – in a play on words of the New York Times's famous motto "All the news that's fit to print" – described the tabloid newspaper the News of the World as having, "All the nudes fit to print, and all the news printed to fit". The newspaper's editor, Derek Jameson, sued the BBC. The court accepted that the statement was defamatory but agreed the defence of fair comment, because the statement seemed justified by the lurid contents of the newspaper.

3. Privilege: Statements made in parliament, or in English courts, may enjoy privilege. Likewise, a privilege to broadcast information that turns out to be false may be permissible in other situations, though this is a very complex area of law with many contradictory rulings. In England, statements from parliament enjoy absolute privilege: in other words, they can be recorded and you cannot be sued. Statements in courts enjoy qualified privilege. Although you can report what is said in court, the report must be fair. This means that there must be coverage of any reply or counter-accusation, even if in a subsequent broadcast; and the report must be contemporaneous, i.e. it must be broadcast at the first opportunity you have following the proceedings.

   Example: In 1980, police in England captured the Yorkshire Ripper, an infamous serial killer, by chance, when his car was stopped for a routine reason. When the police chief realised he was the man they had been searching for, he called a press conference and told journalists, "We've got him." Many papers, including the Evening Dispatch in Darlington, ran the story with those words as its headline. The Ripper was charged later that day. The papers claimed protection against contempt of court and libel, arguing that the police press conference was covered by qualified privilege. The courts agreed, but probably because so many papers had gone along

with it.

4. Death: Someone who is dead cannot be libelled. Basically, this is because there is no one to file a suit. But be careful that a libel of the dead does not also implicate a person who is still living. Defaming a dead man may also defame the individuals and institutions he was associated with.

EXCUSES, EXCUSES

It is equally important to be aware of what is not a defence under English law.

One of the most common of journalistic misconceptions is that if you insert the words "allegedly" or "reportedly" before the defamatory statement it is not a libel. Alas, ignorance of the law is no excuse – a libel is a libel, no matter what words are used to dress it up.

Other common excuses that don't work are:

"But I don't live in England…"

Different country: You can be sued for libel in any country in which your material appears. For example, Russian businessman Boris Berezovsky sued a US magazine for libel not in his native Russia, or even in the US, but in London. This is possible because the magazine sells a few copies in London.

"But it wasn't me, it was my network…"

Limited liability and individual responsibility: Working for a limited company does not protect individuals from libel suits. You can be sued for libel personally. Libel suits can be sent simultaneously against the radio station, the reporter personally, and thirdly, against the broadcasting network including any satellite distributor or internet provider carrying the broadcast. This is an odd exception to the laws of limited liability in England.

"But the other radio stations reported it…"

Repeating a report already broadcast or published: It is not a defence to say that you only repeated a libel. All this does is provide the would-be litigant with one more media organisation to sue. Jeffrey Archer, a former British MP, won libel damages from the Daily Star newspaper in the late Eighties, after it ran a version of a story about his paying a prostitute which had originally been published in another paper. The first paper had contacted the prostitute but the Star had not, and thus could not rely on the defence of truth. Remember: no matter how many other people may have written or broadcast the story, do not write it unless you know that you yourself can prove it.

"But everybody knows that already…"

Rumour/hearsay: Saying that you are reporting a rumour or hearsay is not a defence against libel. If the court decides that the "man on the bus" might have a lower opinion of the subject as a result, you are not protected. It is also no defence to say, "it is widely known that…" or, "everyone believes that Mr A deals in drugs". The test is: can you prove that he does it, not just that people think it?

"But that's what he really said…"

Reporting comments that defame: If Man A says something bad about Man B, and a radio station broadcasts the comments on the basis that Man A really did say them, this is no defence. The judge is not concerned with whether the comments are accurately reported, but rather whether they defame the subject.

"But he denied it on tape…"

Denials: Reporting someone's denial is no defence if the court decides that, in the mind of the right-thinking person, the statement nevertheless lowers his or her reputation. Statements such as "The Palace denied that Charles fed his cat to his dog" are unacceptable.

"But my script was about his company, not about him…"

Unwitting link: Anything that could link your

subject to specific individuals may be libellous. English courts are likely to allow a head teacher to claim defamation if his school is criticised, and the same goes for company chiefs and police chiefs. Companies, corporations and organisations also have reputations and can sue in their own right.

"But I didn't even use his name…"

Anonymity: If you broadcast a story saying a member of a football team had sex with an under-aged girl but do not name him, you will not get a single libel suit; you will get eleven.

"But I obeyed the ethical code…"

Following the rules: Many journalists' associations have ethical codes that say each story should be accurate, fair and balanced. It should carry both sides of the argument, and the journalist should not comment. These guidelines are all very well, but they still may not save you from a libel suit.

"But it was an honest mistake..."

Ignorance: Claiming you did not know the law is no defence. Nor is it enough to say that you "did your best" to contact the subject for their side of the story. You have to have had firm grounds for believing the story to be true.

PUBLIC INTEREST DEFENCE

In some countries, public interest can be a defence. This is not what "interests the public", but the argument that the report was aimed at the welfare of the public. This is a standard that some courts apply in many cases, such as alleged breaches of privacy or confidentiality and sometimes even security (depending on the individual country and how much public debate is encouraged). But it is not universal law, and accuracy and fairness still applies. You need to know whether this defence applies in your country. There is no general public interest defence in England.

OTHER ISSUES

Some countries do give more latitude to opinion and comment, provided the facts are not distorted. A reviewer might say that a new play was a waste of time and money, so long as no personalities are specifically attacked and so long as the judgement is clearly given as a matter of opinion and not of fact.

However, actors have been known to sue successfully where their professionalism has been attacked. They have also lost cases, so it is a gamble for them. Their chances of success may depend on the reputation of the reviewer.

Opinions may be strongly stated, as long as they are relevant and based on sound observations, not conjecture. And they should not be presented as fact.

"The play is a waste of time because it says nothing new about our lives" is clearly an opinion. "The lead actor appeared to be drunk" is much riskier. Is it a fact? Can you prove it? Is it damaging to the actor's reputation? Almost certainly.

But there is another major factor, other than what the law says – and that is what is culturally acceptable in a given society. One has to consider whether there is good reason to challenge this. And bear in mind that cultural issues may also influence the courts.

Highly exaggerated statements or satire may be protected if it is clear that it is meant to be a joke or poking fun. But cultural attitudes make a big difference here. What might be seen as fun in one society may be seen as insulting in another. Making fun of a prominent person,an ethnic group or a religious community, might be seen as highly damaging. The journalist has to exercise proper care or be ready to take the consequences in the interests of something worthwhile, like bringing about some form of improvement in society.

REDUCING THE RISK

Here are some suggestions on how to practise safe journalism:

When someone's reputation is at stake, be careful with every word and every detail. A three-minute news package might pass muster with every lawyer in the country, but it can still be undone by a single careless word in a script or sound bite.

Review your work carefully, especially if you or someone else has made significant changes, for implications that you did not intend. If an intro refers to drug dealers, are you confident that everyone who could claim that they were being referred to is a proven drug dealer?

The difference between "X happened" and "A said X happened" is crucial to safe reporting about accusations of crime or improper performance. If you report that the police have accused someone of a crime and your report is based on an official document, you may be safe – even if the accusation is later shown to be false and the person is absolved. You would have no protection if you simply reported as fact that the person had committed the crime before there had been any conviction.

Accounts of an event by victims or witnesses might be compelling. But unlike police or court documents or proceedings, these accounts are not usually protected by the qualified privilege that attaches to court reports. When they concern the behaviour of people who can be clearly identified, treat them with great caution, especially if you cannot confirm the account from other reliable sources. Hearsay evidence is not admissable in court and hence should be used with extreme care, especially when it goes beyond what you can confirm from other sources.

Be especially careful with what neighbours, colleagues, friends or others say about the past lives of people who are suddenly in the spotlight. The source may be prejudiced about the person.

Be sure that you understand the distinctions between different types of crimes – some charges are more serious than others. In some legal systems, homicide could mean murder, manslaughter or an accident of some kind. Do not take shortcuts just to be brief or dramatic. It could land you in trouble.

Do not assume that a set of events represents a plot or a scheme if an innocent explanation is possible. Even if the facts are protected by privilege, a conclusion based on those facts might not be.

In some countries, the law may not be as important as the local cultural attitude towards honour. People in some societies might injure or kill in defence of a reputation.

People affected must always be given the chance to reply or defend themselves from accusations

PRIVACY LAWS

Privacy laws are another hazard for journalists. Some countries have none at all, whilst others have very strong ones. Some privacy laws do not give protection to people who are obviously in the public eye, others specifically protect such people. Pop stars and footballers may have less protection than other people because they depend on the media for their popularity. But many laws still protect them in certain cases.

France, for instance, has a much stronger privacy law than the United Kingdom. Some laws say that while individuals are not protected, say, from paparazzi in a public place, they may be protected on private premises, for example their homes. You need to be aware that children often have special legal protection.

Even prominent people have a right to be left alone if they are genuinely seeking to preserve their own privacy. But journalists usually do have a wide freedom to report about events that are deemed to be in the public interest or

in areas easily accessible to the public, even if some of the subjects of news stories and photos might be embarrassed.

In many countries, local journalists' associations or unions have ethical codes of practice governing such things as privacy.

Here are some tests to consider:

Is an event or person truly of significant interest? Is it in public? Even prominent people have a right to be left alone. Is it really "news"? Of course, news about pop stars, footballers and the like may be entertainment news rather than so-called hard news – it's news nonetheless. But it might also be scandalous. The question should be, "Is it fair?"

Are you using someone's name or picture for commercial gain without permission?

Are you using someone's name in a manner that casts them in a false light? For example, illustrating a story about street crime with the voice of a vagrant. Or using someone, without their permission, to illustrate something that is not specifically about them.

INCITEMENT TO HATRED

Apart from issues of libel, good journalists also seek to avoid using language which smacks of prejudice, and they try to be sensitive to the people they are reporting on. This not a question of being politically correct, but rather of ensuring use of appropriate language, and especially not using language that may incite hatred or violence. It is not generally about what the law allows, though in some countries the law does penalise such language.

In the United Kingdom, for instance, there is a law against race discrimination. Ridiculing a disabled person may be against some laws.

Following the genocide in Rwanda, a United Nations tribunal sent some broadcasters and journalists to prison over the use of hate language that may have inspired some of the killings.

Every community has words that are clearly insulting to another group. Good journalists should generally avoid using them to describe a particular person or group of people.

It is worth remembering that a story that is legally safe to publish might still fall short of standards for fairness, relevance or taste.

"Can we broadcast this?" is a question for lawyers. "Should we broadcast this?" is a question for reporters and editors. Equally, a decision might be taken that it is in the public interest to broadcast something that might breach the law – the deciding factor here is what is for the greater good of the public. That is a risk and decision that only a senior editor, publisher or owner should take. Responsible journalists draw such risks to their editor's attention.

TO SUMMARISE

In this section you have learned that:

Laws on libel and other restrictions on freedom of speech vary widely from country to country and you must ensure that you know what rules apply for where you work.

There are some common elements of libel law – especially regarding broadcasting, identification and defamation.

Truth is the best defence against an accusation of libel. Also, make sure you know whether some form of privilege might apply or whether there could be a public interest defence.

You should introduce essential safeguards into your own newsroom and into your own methods of reporting.

You should retain your research materials, as they may become relevant evidence.

Laws and ethical and cultural rules and practice vary widely. You must know what applies in your country.

EXERCISES

Read the following examples and questions and discuss your answers with your colleagues:

1. During a campaign speech in your town, one legislator describes a rival as a clown, contends that he has taken repeated bribes from the building industry and calls him a traitor to his party.

   Are any, all or none of these statements safe to use in your report? Should you refer your story to anyone else?

2. Work is to begin on a long-awaited highway near your town. One evening, a man calls your office and says he has seen documents that prove the main contractor of the highway is using inferior material and defrauding the government. The caller refuses to give his name but says he works for the highways department. If you do not broadcast an item exposing this, he says he will take his story to a rival radio station. He will call you back in half an hour for your answer.

   What do you and your colleagues – and your boss – need to do immediately? What will you say to the mystery caller when he calls back? Is there a possible strategy for getting the story, or do you reject it out of hand? How should the fact that a competitor might run the story influence you and your station?

3. Several new restaurants appear in town. You hire a writer to review one of the most popular. Here are some sentences from his script:

   "I wouldn't feed the kebabs to my cat."

   "I think the kebabs were left at room temperature too long."

   "The health department's file on this place is thicker than the kebabs."

   "Health department inspectors reported finding rat droppings in the kebabs."

   "My sources at the health department would not go near this place."

   "This is the worst restaurant in the universe."

   Would you use any, all or none of these statements, or modify them in any way? Why?

ADDITIONAL READING & REFERENCES

For an up-to-date overview of English law from a journalist's perspective: McNae's Essential Law for Journalists, by Tom Welsh and Walter Greenwood (Butterworths Law)

CHAPTER ELEVEN

ELECTION REPORTING

Election reporting is, in essence, no different to any other form of reporting. But during election campaigns, the media, as well as politicians, come under even more intense scrutiny than usual, as politicians and the public follow the news with far greater interest than normal. Any report is monitored for possible bias, distortion or inaccuracies. In such an atmosphere, journalists and editors have to maintain even more care and diligence than usual. This is when the good habits of impartial reporting, fact-checking and reliable sourcing really come into their own.

As outlined in Chapter Two (on International Standards), the media plays three key roles in a democracy:

- It relays the information required to enable citizens to make informed judgments.
- It seeks to represent and crystallise public opinion to the politicians.
- It gives politicians a space to respond to public concerns and to set out their own policies.
- It provides the space within which public debate takes place.

As was made clear in the earlier chapter, all these functions are absolutely vital in order to enable democratic elections to take place and journalists therefore have to be committed to fulfilling all these tasks as best they can during election campaigns. However, there are additional functions that fall upon the media during elections.

First and foremost, they have an obligation to report the campaign itself as fully and fairly as possible. This sounds straightforward, but that is rarely the case. During election campaigns, politicians who in the preceding years might have treated journalists with hostility, suspicion and downright rudeness, suddenly become the journalists' best friend. There is nothing fundamentally malevolent about such behaviour – after all, democracy is about winning the trust and confidence of the electorate, and what better way to achieve this than through the media? Nonetheless, it can place journalists in difficult situations.

First, there is a natural tendency to seek to maintain good relations with whichever party looks like winning. Hence, with an eye to the next few years, as opposed to the next few weeks, journalists can, quite subconsciously, find themselves favouring the favourites.

Equally, because many journalists are naturally contrary and iconoclastic (some would argue that this is an essential part of the journalist's make-up), they can, equally subconsciously, find themselves using the campaign to settle old scores with those politicians who, for the past years in government, have been giving them a hard time.

Another pitfall to watch out for is accepting articles and reports from freelancers who are working (either on a paid or voluntary basis) for one of the competing parties and who are hoping that their journalistic output will find its way into the media without being identified as coming from a partisan source.

An important function of the media during campaigns is to ensure that the voices and views of those representing minority interests are hard. These may be minor parties, special interest groups or marginalised sections of society (the poor, ethnic minorities and, in some societies, women).

In addition, the media play a vital role in not just reporting communications from the politicians to the people but also vice versa –

they are the ones who are able to tell the politicians about the concerns of people in different localities. It is in this aspect that the local and regional media are particularly important – as they are in their role of creating a space for the election debate to take place.

However, before and during the campaign, journalists play a vital role in keeping voters informed, not just about the campaign, but also about the electoral process itself. This means, in the early stages, collaborating with the electoral authorities to provide full and accurate information about registration, monitoring the process and taking up complaints when it appears not to be functioning properly. When it comes to the actual vote, journalists then have a duty to tell electors where and when to vote, to monitor the voting process and to report any problems. Finally, at the count and the declaration of results, the media has a duty to report the results and to monitor and report any allegations of malpractice.

THE ELECTION AGENDA

One of the key issues during election campaigns is, "Who sets the agenda – the politicians, the media or the public?" This is a different question from, "Who should set the agenda?" This latter question is more one about democracy, rather than the media. Here, the answer is that the election agenda should be set by politicians, who should be responding to the public's agenda, with the media really being the site of the contest.

However, in reality what happens is that, since the media is the crucial election arena, journalists try to establish what the public's agenda is. They then try to interpret politicians' utterances in the light of this agenda by selecting those election stories that they believe best reflect this agenda. However, because the media have the final editorial say, politicians, and to a lesser extent, the public believe that the media themselves are deciding what the election agenda should be.

Increasingly, though, politicians have sought to counteract what they see as the media dominating the agenda by hiring professional media advisers, often ex-journalists, who use a variety of both legitimate and sometimes illegitimate techniques to try to ensure that they get the best possible media coverage. This raises the question, "What can journalists do to try to counterbalance politicians' efforts to dominate election coverage?"

CHALLENGE POLITICIANS CLAIMS

In an election campaign, politicians go out to try to persuade people to vote for them – that's what democracy is all about. To do this politicians tell voters:

- what their plans will be if they are elected.
- what their previous achievements in government have been.
- what the shortcomings of their opponents are.

All this is perfectly legitimate - that's what elections are all about. But, equally legitimately, journalists have an obligation to test the authenticity and value of the politicians' claims.

Journalists do this by:

- checking politicians' facts and claims with experts.
- analysing and comparing party pledges.
- looking back at what they said at the last election.
- looking back at what they did when last in power.
- using NGOs and other specialists to challenge the politicians.
- using the public to challenge the politicians.
- conducting their own challenging

interviews.

In order to achieve this, journalists need:

- to be informed and well-prepared.
- to have a stock of impartial experts available.
- to find out and reflect what the voters are thinking.
- to identify issues that are important to the electorate.
- to collect party manifestos and previous statements.

REPORTING ELECTIONS – SOURCES

In general terms, reporting elections is much like any other reporting and, as stated in earlier chapters, sources are the key. For experienced political journalists, this should not be a major problem – good political sources are their daily bread and butter. But for the general reporter thrown into the election fray, establishing political sources can be problematic.

The Parties

Political parties are a good starting point. During election campaigns, they are geared up to look for, and welcome, media coverage. Most political parties have, at least during election campaigns, full-time press officers – often at regional and national level. Parties at local level often have a volunteer who is responsible for local press relations. If this is not the case, then the party's general secretary or chairperson would be the appropriate person to contact.

You need to make contact with political parties in order to:

- Find out the names of candidates.
- Establish their campaigning timetables.
- Find out about the party's election strategy and tactics.
- Hear when they are holding news conferences and other events.
- Obtain copies of party publications.
- Get on the list to receive press releases.
- Put in bids to interview leading politicians.
- Establish contacts and procedures for ongoing media inquiries.

In addition, it's worth remembering that establishing good personal relationships is the key to building up your sources, and to do this there is no substitute for making face-to-face contact. With these sources in place, it should mean that the parties will contact you with stories that they might have decided not to distribute more widely. It also helps smooth your path to gaining that exclusive interview when the big political personality comes to town.

But it's not just party officials that are useful sources during elections – so too are party activists. As sources they can:

- Tell you about events that the party officials have not told you about.
- Reflect the mood among the party grassroots.
- Keep you up to speed on the latest gossip about both their politicians and the opposition.

Politicians

But the real focus of elections, apart from the electorate of course, are the politicians themselves. They are obviously very important sources of information during election campaigns. Making contact with them can be difficult but it's certainly worth the effort. As sources, politicians can give you:

- The inside story of the campaign.

- News from the top party bodies.
- Exclusive interviews.
- Personal stories about being on the road.

Election Authorities

The election authorities can be important sources of information during, and particularly before, a campaign. They can provide information about:

- The registration of voters.
- The registration of parties.
- The nomination process (in particular providing official lists of candidates).
- The progress of the campaign.
- The performance of the media.
- The counting procedures.
- Campaign finance.
- The overall conduct of the campaign.

Election authorities, unlike parties, are not always very good at using the media. This is usually because, as civil servants or quasi-civil servants, they are conditioned to be shy of, if not hostile to, media attention. However, they are a vital source of information for the sort of issues outlined above. Hence it is important during the campaign that you as the journalist stay in touch with the authorities – regular check calls or specific inquiries should be made on a proactive basis.

NGOs/Pressure Groups/Religious and Other Organisations

Many groups in society, not necessarily overtly political, take a keen interest in the campaign and they can prove to be valuable contacts for journalists. These specialist groups often have particularly pertinent observations to make about the parties' policy proposals in their own areas of expertise. Reporters who already have good contacts with such groups should be proactive during the campaign. They should tell their NGO and other specialist sources that, for the weeks of the campaign, they will be focusing on the election and that, should they hear of anything that they think might make for a political story, they should not hesitate to make contact. But the keen reporter should not just rely on this happening – regular check calls, and calls to get reactions to election developments, should be part of the election reporter's daily routine.

Other Media

All journalists make use of other media – whether it's listening to rival stations or reading the daily newspapers. On the one hand, do not be shy about following-up stories that you have found in other media. But do not just copy them. We all miss stories – that's what the other reporter's exclusive is all about. If it's big enough, you need to follow it up. But you must try to add new information, either by getting new facts or by getting a quote from a new source – another politician, an NGO or an official source.

The Public

The public don't just play the central role in elections as voters, they are also an important source of information. The public know what is happening on the ground. If you go to a new area to report the election, don't just talk to party officials. Find out what the voters in the area think, use them to find new stories. The public can also be encouraged to phone the radio station, not just to give their opinions but also to provide tips to the newsroom.

ELECTION REPORTING FORMATS

Election reporting, like all reporting, is focused on the audience. They want to be interested and entertained. They want to feel this election is about them. They want you to put their questions and concerns at the top of your agenda. So how do we do this? Here are a few ideas.

News Coverage – "The Horse Race"

Obviously we cover the campaign in all its aspects. From the public's point of view, one of

the most interesting aspects is what is known, sometimes dismissively, as "the horse race". It suggests that a keen interest in who is going to win is somehow less important than lofty discussions about the issues. But people aren't necessarily profoundly interested in politics, so journalists need to do everything they can to engage their attention. One way to do this is to report stories about who is up, who is down, who is going to win and who is going to lose. These stories can be based on opinion polls (see later section), where these are reliable; on politicians' own assessments; on what members of the public are saying; and on the informed speculation of reporters who are in touch with the campaign, who have travelled the country with the candidates, seen the size of the crowds, gauged their mood and spoken to voters at grassroots level – scientific it might not be, but in terms of entertaining radio it certainly grabs audiences.

Political Interviews

Political interviews occur, or should, throughout election campaign. But that is not the start and end of it. Election coverage can be enlivened by interviewing not just politicians but others as well. This could include interviews with the behind-the-scenes people at the parties who are making the election "happen", the grassroots activists, international observers and, most of all, the voters. What do they think of the campaign? What issues are important to them? How have the candidates been performing?

Press Conferences

Press conferences are the staple of much election coverage. They can be very dull, with politicians using them to repeat their key election messages. But they can be enlivened by journalists, for example, asking challenging questions, putting to politicians charges levelled against them by opponents, reflecting back to the politicians what the public is saying.

Comparing Promises with Past Performance

Elections are about promises and past performance. Looking in detail at what the parties are promising, how these promises compare with each other, how they compare to past performance and seeking experts' analysis and evaluation of these promises is part of the media's role during elections. It is vital that such items should be produced and presented in a way that is beyond criticism, in terms of impartiality and balance. Experts should be chosen with care, both with respect to their knowledge and reputation and with respect to their perceived political independence.

Special Reports

Elections are good opportunities to move beyond the daily news agenda and undertake proactive reporting. Special reports, preferably done as a series, add life and variety to election coverage. Here are a few examples of approaches you might take.

- Issues
  Elections should be, but aren't always, about issues – health, education, jobs, the environment and so on. Many politicians give less emphasis to these matters than they do to attacking their opponents. But the job of the radio journalist is to think first about the audience, who do want to know where the candidates stand on the issues of the day. Hence a report about health might include an examination of the relevant promises made by the candidates, an expert assessment of those promises and past performance, and then actuality and interviews from a local hospital about what is actually happening on the ground.

- Local campaigns
  Although elections tend to be dominated by the national battle, what is happening at local level is also of interest, particularly to listeners in that locality itself. A series of reports focusing on particularly interesting electoral battles, or locations which are particularly newsworthy, is a good way of enlivening election coverage and also of bringing the voices of people, particularly those living some distance from the radio station, onto the airwaves.

- Personalities
  Politicians frequently complain that the media is "obsessed with personalities" but the truth is more complicated. Firstly, the media frequently take their cues from the politicians, who themselves spend a great deal of time and effort attacking their opponents. Secondly, in a democracy, politicians are asking voters to put their trust in them to deliver on their promises, so an investigation of the person behind the promises is legitimate. And thirdly, radio is all about people, complex issues can be brought to life by focussing on the people who are behind the issues. Personality pieces can revolve around a different style of interviewing. Interviewing politicians in locations away from the campaign trail can be rewarding – they can be encouraged to relax and reveal a little of the "man behind the message". It might take a little time to pierce politicians' shells, but the results can be rewarding.

- Campaigning
  One aspect of election campaigns that is receiving increasing media attention is analysis of the way the parties are fighting the campaign. This is partly a result of the growth of the activities of media and marketing advisors (sometimes known as spin doctors) who are said to package politicians and parties in order to increase their voter appeal. The media have responded by turning their own spotlight on the activities of the spin doctors – seeking to make their campaigning methods transparent. These reports can look at the strategy and tactics of the leading parties and analyse how they change tack in response to the moves and counter-moves of their opponents. Such reports are not only in the spirit of democracy, in that they make the campaign more transparent to the voters, but can also make for some fascinating listening.

- "Sideways" Reports
  Election campaigns are serious matters. But that doesn't mean they need to be reported in a completely straight-faced way. Occasional reports that look for humour in the campaigns – odd incidents, strange pronouncements, quirky candidates – can enliven any station's coverage. Local personalities who are not politically aligned can be brought in to throw a different light on the election campaign. Even using a music compilation to introduce the week's election news can do great things for audience attention.

  Again it should be stressed that impartiality and balance are at a premium – if one party or politician has been put in the spotlight in one report then, either in the same or subsequent reports, efforts should be made to ensure that other politicians and parties receive the same treatment.

Polling – Surveys and Focus Groups

The use of opinion polls during elections is hugely problematic. Carrying out a scientifically valid opinion poll costs money and requires knowledge and experience. In most developing countries the media, which fund such activities in the West, do not have the resources to do this. Where polls have been carried out by reputable organisations, journalists should always report the name of the polling organisation, the sample size, the margin of error and when the polling was carried out.

Frequently, the media and political parties carry out their own polls, which are completely unscientific and cannot be used to make any meaningful statements about what voters think about a particular issue. However, that is not to say they are of no use whatsoever. Such polls are in fact extended vox pops and can be used to give a snapshot of what people on the street of a particular village or town are thinking on the day the reporter went out to quiz them. Perhaps of more use are focus groups – small discussions in which voters discuss particular issues in depth. Again, they cannot be used to make generalisations about what voters think, but they can give interesting insights into the way some voters are thinking. Recording such groups and then editing them

into a package can make for an interesting election item.

International Perspectives

Elections are a time when foreign interest is at a higher level than normal. Hence during campaigns foreign journalists, observers and others are easier to contact. Getting their views on the local election campaign can give listeners a different perspective on the election and make for variety of output.

Voters' Perspectives

At the height of the election battle, the central characters in the drama are often ignored. The voices of voters should be heard loud and clear and worked into as many reports as possible. This can be done in the form of vox pops. Or it can be done in more considered ways, by presenting politicians with the views of the voters, either indirectly or directly. Indirectly, you can achieve this by putting to the politicians what you are being told by voters. Directly, you can arrange face-to-face encounters between voters and politicians, or assist members of the public in making their own election reports.

Access for Politicians

Elections are a time of intense communication – from the politicians to the people, from the people to the politicians and from pressure groups and others to everyone. Most election coverage consists of journalists mediating what the politicians are saying. We listen to a speech and decide which part of it is most newsworthy. However, it is also a time when politicians have a right to have direct access to the voters, unmediated by journalists. Clearly, they can do this by holding campaign rallies, but the media should also provide them with such a platform. At times, politicians will pay for this access. But stations should also, as part of their public service commitments, offer politicians the opportunity to use their airwaves to reach the electorate.

Access for Special Interest Groups

Special interest groups – or "civil society", as they are sometimes collectively known – have a vital role to play during election campaigns. These groups – NGOs, businesses, churches etc. – have specialist knowledge and interests, and they have a right to participate in the election debate. They also make valuable sources of information for reporters. Giving them access to the airwaves, and in particular giving them opportunities to question candidates, is an important contribution to the election debate and also makes for lively programming.

Access for the Public

However, even more important than the special interest groups, or the politicians, is the public itself. Apart from all the other opportunities to hear their voices (as elaborated elsewhere), special efforts should be made to enable their voices to be heard – particularly by giving them an opportunity to put their questions and observations directly to politicians, either via a phone-in, by email or, best of all, face-to-face. These exchanges, which will usually require some controlling, can also be enlivened by the presence of representatives of special interest groups, who can add their own expertise and special pleading to the programming mix.

SOME PROBLEMS IN ELECTION REPORTING

The media and democracy are intrinsically linked – but in transitional societies that are evolving from authoritarian systems into democratic ones, this relationship can be problematic. This is particularly true at election times, when politicians often fail to distinguish between opponents of the government and enemies of the state. Thus a wide variety of pressures can be, and are, applied to journalists during elections. These pressures can make free and fair reporting difficult, and sometimes almost impossible.

Pressure from Politicians and Their Supporters

Journalists' efforts to report elections fairly can be compromised by the efforts of politicians and their supporters to influence what is reported. Dealing with politicians' spin has

been covered at length earlier in this chapter – that sort of pressure is, in general, legitimate. However, politicians and their supporters have also been known to use less legitimate methods as well.

All politicians want to win the elections they are fighting – otherwise what's the point? But, sometimes they allow their enthusiasm for victory to outweigh their commitment to the democratic system. They may bring all sorts of pressures to bear on editors and owners of media organisations, in order to maximise the positive coverage and minimise the negative. These pressures can range from outright physical intimidation, to legal threats, to withdrawing advertising and refusing cooperation in a whole range of ways. In turn, this can lead owners and editors of radio stations to pressurise journalist to be biased in their favour.

In addition, journalists face direct pressure from politicians, their advisers and supporters. This pressure can be of two sorts: positive inducements to provide good coverage, which include offering to provide food, transport, presents and cash; and negative pressure, including threats, harassment and physical violence. Physical attacks can also come from other sources, including party activists, mobs in the street, police and the military.

Obstruction by Officials

Journalists can find their ability to cover elections impeded by obstructive election officials. These officials, whose function is to ensure that the ballot is carried out freely and fairly, should see the media as key partners in the exercise of their duties. Alas, this is not always the case and election officials, particularly those coming from a civil service background, often see the media as a necessary evil, rather than an important ally.

Achieving Balance – Being Fair

Even when journalists are not being intimidated or obstructed, achieving balance during an election campaign can be problematic. This can be due to a number of factors. First, there is the reporter's own personal political bias. Journalists are, or should be, interested in the world around them. Hence, most of them have their own political views. It is important that you recognise what these are in your own case, and even discuss them with colleagues. By doing this you can then see, and check, that your reporting is not being influenced by your own views. Another cause of lack of balance is that some politicians and parties are better at communicating with the media than others. Hence, they can get more coverage. Try to make contact with politicians and parties who appear to be media shy.

Finally, there is the difficult question of balancing coverage between those major parties that have a serious chance of gaining power and the many smaller parties who are running candidates without any real hope of winning. These are difficult decisions that need to be discussed with colleagues and editors, and are frequently subject to election broadcasting rules about fairness and free access.

Ultimately, election coverage, like all other reporting, is about fairness. It's a difficult concept to define but it is a more useful criterion for journalistic excellence than objectivity, impartiality or lack of bias. This is because the latter three all contain the implication that they exist in some definitive, attainable form. They don't – they are as subjective as the notion of fairness. But the term "fairness" is one that requires us to ask of ourselves, "Have I been as fair as I possibly can to all sides?" Sometimes, despite our best efforts, we know we have not. This happens to all reporters. Good reporters use this predicament to improve their reporting and to maximise the possibility that the next time such a situation is encountered, the reporting will be fairer.

LOGISTICS AND COSTS

Covering elections in many parts of Africa is time-consuming and expensive. Distances are great, travel costs can be high and overnight stays are often involved. All these factors

make on-the-spot reporting problematic, particularly for freelancers. This situation can lead to journalists accepting facilitation – offers of transport, or money to cover transport. This creates three problems: first, an expectation on the part of the politicians that facilitation will result in favourable coverage; second, pressure on the reporter to report sympathetically; and third, it can create problems for the radio station if members of the public see their reporter arriving in a particular candidate's transport.

SAFETY DURING ELECTIONS

The general issue of personal safety whilst reporting is covered in detail in a separate chapter, with a special section on election reporting. However, it is worth reiterating three key rules for reporting elections in potentially hostile areas:

- No story is worth the risk of injury or worse.
- Take local advice – stay close to local reporters.
- Always let your office know your timetable and movements (and make sure that your mobile phone has credit and a charged battery).

CONFRONTING ELECTION REPORTING PROBLEMS

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

Other freelancers are competitors but 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 to persuade your news editor that running a slanted story in the bulletin will make the station appear of poorer quality than its competitors

Bullies hate the light. If you are being threatened, then expose who is doing it on your radio station. Get other journalists to report it on their stations as well. But to reiterate, personal safety is paramount.

Freelance journalists are poorly paid. Many political parties, government bodies, NGOs and businesses take advantage of this. It is important to 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.

HOW TO DETECT POTENTIAL ELECTION IRREGULARITIES

The International Federation of Journalists identifies, as one of the major issues in any election, the degree of fairness and transparency. Even when the poll is being monitored by representatives of political parties, local NGOs or international observation teams, journalists should attempt to determine for themselves the degree to which problems are affecting the quality of the electoral process.

The guidelines produced for election workers and monitors by the American National Democratic Institute, NDI, are a useful monitoring tool for journalists.

NDI advises its teams to try to observe, research and record the severity, frequency and pattern of any of the following issues with an assessment of 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, and 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; and

- "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."

EXERCISES

1. A leading candidate has told you he will be making a major announcement during the campaign in his home village. It is many miles away and you have no funds for transport. Do you accept his offer of a lift to and from the venue? Justify your decision either way.
2. You accept the offer, he stops for lunch and invites you to join him. Do you accept? Justify your decision either way.
3. After the meeting, but before you have set off home, he asks to see your dispatch. Do you agree? Again justify your decision.
4. As you leave an election press conference, you are given a bag containing a baseball cap, a T-shirt and some balloons, all carrying the party logo. What do you do?
5. An election is taking place in which 30 parties are putting up candidates for parliament. You have tried to cover the campaign by giving the majority of coverage to what you perceive as the major parties. A minor party has complained about being ignored. Write out the main points you would use to justify your decision.
6. In the same scenario, you have decided to give equal coverage to all 30 parties. One of the two major parties have complained about lack of coverage. This time, marshal the arguments as to why you decided to give equal coverage to all parties.

ADDITIONAL READING

A great deal of sensible advice about election reporting is found in the BBC's reporting guidelines for politics and policy at: www.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/edguide/politics/

CHAPTER TWELVE

HUMAN RIGHTS AND JOURNALISM

The media is an essential check on power, and as such it is a crucial pillar of human rights protection. Yet the media also depend on human rights in order to operate effectively.

By virtue of their profession, journalists are often witnesses to human rights abuses. They have an ethical obligation to report on such abuses, whether it is the unlawful detention or mistreatment of prisoners, deportations, illegal executions or massacres. The spotlight of the media is a primary mechanism for mobilising the political will to obtain redress.

Because journalists are often the first to bear witness to and report serious human rights abuses, it is frequently their work that provokes legal authorities to investigate. In recent years, prosecutors have cited press reports as evidence in their efforts to try war crimes suspects from Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. With the establishment of the International Criminal Court in The Hague, the importance of human rights reporting will continue to grow.

At the same time, journalists, especially those reporting in conflict areas, themselves depend on human rights protection. Journalists are not singled out for special treatment under humanitarian law. However, human rights conventions accord all civilians certain protections. In theory, parties to a conflict should allow journalists to work freely in conflict zones and refrain from harassing or detaining them.

In reality, this is often not the case. Journalists are often imprisoned or harassed by all sides in a conflict. But when this occurs, news organisations, governments and human rights organisations can apply pressure under these rights to seek a journalist's release or protection.

HUMAN RIGHTS AGREEMENTS

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, several European philosophers proposed the concept of "natural rights", rights belonging to a person by nature and because he was a human being, not by virtue of his citizenship in a particular country or membership in a particular religious or ethnic group.

At the same time, the founder of the Red Cross, Henri Dunant, began expressing concern for the plight of the sick and wounded in wartime and worked to establish the first Geneva Convention, which was signed in 1864. In the late nineteenth century, and into the twentieth, these rights progressed further as political and religious groups worked to end slavery, serfdom and exploitative labour practices.

These values – that we now call human rights – were enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations just after World War Two. In its preamble, the Charter stated that the UN aimed to "reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small." It entered into force in October 1945.

The international human rights movement grew quickly in the second half of the 20th century. In 1946, the Nazi military and political leadership in Germany were put on trial in Nuremburg for the crimes they committed against civilians and a new legal concept was born: crimes against humanity. These proceedings would lead to the expansion of the Geneva Conventions in 1949 to protect civilians during wartime, specifically outlawing attacks on civilians and civilian property.

In 1948, the UN established the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, enshrining respect for basic human rights as a necessary condition of any country seeking to be part of

a modern international community. Article 19 of the declaration specifically addresses media freedom by guaranteeing the freedom of opinion and expression, including the right to "seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers".

The Cold War slowed down the development of international human rights institutions, although it was human rights conventions that helped open up the Soviet Union. Out of this effort, leading independent international organisations committed to human rights were established.

Following the UN's lead, other organisations drew up their own human rights agreements. For example, in 1990, the Islamic Conference Organisation declared, "Human beings are born free and no one has a right to enslave, humiliate, oppress or exploit them and there can be no subjugation but to Allah the Almighty."

In 1993, the UN created the office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to monitor and enforce human rights worldwide. It also established war crimes tribunals to prosecute crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. Subsequently, the UN has aided Cambodia, East Timor and Sierra Leone in their efforts to establish tribunals to try war crimes suspects.

In July 2002, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court entered into force, establishing a permanent court to try those accused of serious crimes such as crimes against humanity and genocide.

REPORTING HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

Reporting on human rights requires the same adherence to high standards as reporting on any other subject. But because of the great sensitivity, journalists need to be especially careful and sensitive about the possible dangers and pitfalls.

In most conflicts, any side may commit violations, and journalists are at risk of reporting more on abuses committed by one side, because they are seen as the "aggressors" or because there is more information about the alleged crimes. Although journalists must take care to distinguish between a policy of human rights violations and an isolated act of human rights abuse, they must be prepared to report any human rights violations by any group.

The underlying principle of human rights is universality: everyone is entitled to protection of life and freedom from abuse, regardless of ethnic origin, religion or gender.

Those who have sought to challenge the legitimacy of international courts, such as the UN tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, have questioned its balance, although the court has prosecuted individuals from all parties to the conflict.

Reporting violations means getting the maximum amount of evidence possible without disturbing any evidence at the scene. Ask everything several times and check all the answers. Make video or sound recordings, if possible, but do not remove anything such as identity papers, photographs or other material from the scene. Verify facts as much as possible through the use of multiple sources – human rights groups will often interview dozens and dozens of people before releasing an in-depth report.

Often, human rights abuses become a banner that one party will raise against opponents, governments or any other dominant power in a region. As such, journalists must avoid being identified with any particular group involved. Take precautions not to be used by one party or another, and make sure that your reports are based on sound evidence.

Journalists must be cautious in blindly accepting allegations about human rights abuses because they are often part of an ongoing propaganda war. During the conflict in Kosovo, several seasoned journalists from prominent news

organisations erroneously reported massacres that did not happen because they were misled by their sources. When the fighting ended, they discovered that people they had reported killed were still very much alive.

On the other hand, journalists must not be too quick to dismiss allegations of atrocities. In the late Seventies, when Cambodians began fleeing across the border into Thailand with stories about the Khmer Rouge's atrocities, journalists were reluctant to take their accounts at face value because they were so horrific. It took several years to verify that such reports were true. And the reports of the genocide in Rwanda were not immediately accepted, let alone acted upon, by the international community.

Journalists need to be aware of the sensitivities in seeking information in such a charged atmosphere. Outsiders who are unfamiliar with the history and politics of different ethnic and national groups, as well as reporters who are members of one of the groups, may be deliberately used to spread false information.

Also, always remember that while the reporter might be able to leave a region (and fly back to a base in another country) many of the people interviewed cannot, and this has an impact on how willing they are to talk, or to what extra danger they may be exposed. Journalists must take all possible precautions not to jeopardise the safety of their sources, translators, drivers and fixers.

INTERVIEWING VICTIMS AND WITNESSES

- Try to interview people separately. Group pressure can distant and exaggerate a story.

- Clearly identify yourself as a journalist. Say exactly who you are working for and why. Do not raise unrealistic expectations with those interviewed. Does the person think you can help them in a practical way? Make sure the interviewee understands that you are not a representative of a human rights organisation but that you can pass information on to them.

- Explain why it is important to report incidents. The goal is to expose abuse to the world. But remember that the victims may be afraid of this. You should respect their wishes and look for alternatives. Agree at the outset with anyone interviewed whether you can use their name, or if they need to be anonymous for their own safety.

- Confirm basic details. Get the full name, occupation and age of the person being interviewed, even if they are not to be used in the story, as a means of establishing credibility. Where can they be contacted later if necessary? Assume this may be the only chance you have to meet this person, and the only opportunity to get his or her personal details.

- Confirm supporting details. Get clear descriptions of places, names of those present, their positions, ranks if appropriate, as well as any recognisable uniforms or insignia of alleged perpetrators.

- What weapons were seen or used?

- Ask repeatedly about timing and the sequence of events. Most human rights violations take place in chaotic conditions. Remember that victims and many others involved may become very confused about the order of events. Those interviewed should be asked sensitively to repeat their story to expose inconsistencies. Do not be afraid to say, "I know this is difficult for you, but could you describe the whole incident again?"

- Compare the stories of different witnesses. While looking for inconsistencies, also be aware that if everyone is telling exactly the same story, it may indicate that it has been concocted for the media. You can avoid falling for this by gleaning as much detail as possible and looking for holes in witnesses' stories.

- Appreciate the degree of stress for victims. Take breaks if possible and don't be afraid to be human. Offer your interviewee a tissue or something to drink (or smoke). Remember that such interviews can be very traumatic.

INTERVIEWING THE ACCUSED

- Where possible, seek to interview the people accused of human rights violations. This depends on the risk. But the story will be stronger with comment from all involved.

- Be open and honest with those accused. Never pretend you are asking about something else – this is unethical and can be dangerous if you are later found out. Explain that you are trying to establish the truth.

- Make sure that you have researched the situation in detail, and build up your questions carefully. Wild or unsupported accusations will result in a shouting match (or get you in serious trouble) and will not advance your search for information.

- The underlying basis of the criminal justice system is that people are innocent until proven guilty. Remember to undertake your journalism with a cautious and precise mind, sceptical both of the justifications of the accused and of the claims of the accusers.

EXERCISES

Being a good journalist means being aware of what is going on in your own country and on the international stage.

Discuss with your colleagues the two following questions:

1. What human rights trials are going on internationally at present?
2. Are there human rights issues in your own society that should be reported?

Try to write the outline for a news feature on each, taking account of various viewpoints. For question two, whom would you like to interview and how you would prepare for these interviews?

ADDITIONAL READING & REFERENCES

This chapter provides an overview of a topic of critical importance, and further reading is highly recommended.

A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide, by Samantha Power (HarperCollins)

Crimes of War – What the Public Should Know, by Roy Gutman and David Rieff (W.W. Norton). The book spawned an organisation with further resources: www.crimesofwar.org

The International Committee of the Red Cross includes the text of major treaties on its website: www.icrc.org

The United Nations also has details of major treaties, courts and tribunals on its site: www.un.org/law. See also the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights: www.ohchr.org/english

Human Rights Watch (www.hrw.org) and Amnesty International (www.amnesty.org) are the leading international human rights groups, providing a wealth of reports and alerts.

The International Criminal Court is a new multilateral institution set up to prosecute war crimes internationally: www.icc-cpi.int

Columbia University School of Journalism has a human rights reporting course, with the curriculum and a useful bibliography available online: www.humanrightsreporting.com

The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma offers ideas and resources for sensitive reporting on victims of trauma and crimes: www.dartcenter.org

Institute for War and Peace Reporting: www.iwpr.net

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

JOURNALIST SAFETY

THE DEADLIEST YEAR FOR A DECADE

At least 63 journalists were killed in 2005 while doing their job or for expressing their opinions, the highest annual toll since 1995 (when 64 were killed, 22 of them in Algeria). Five media assistants (fixers, drivers, translators, technicians, security staff and others) were also killed.

For the third year running, Iraq was the world's most dangerous country for the media, with 24 journalists and 5 media assistants killed. Seventy six journalists and media assistants have been killed there since the start of fighting in March 2003, more than in the 1955 to 1975 Vietnam War. Terrorist strikes and Iraqi guerrilla attacks were the main cause but the US army killed three. Iraqi television producer Wael al-Bakri, 30, was shot dead by US troops on 28 June. An American military spokesman admitted the next day in Baghdad that a US unit was involved in his death and said an enquiry had been opened. No result has been announced either in this case or with respect to the other killings which have been investigated.

Journalists killed in 2005

- Afghanistan 2
- Azerbaijan 2
- Bangladesh 2
- Belarus 1
- Brazil 1
- Colombia 1
- Dem. Rep. of Congo 2
- Ecuador 1
- Haiti 2
- Iraq 24
- Kazakstan 1
- Kosovo 1
- Lebanon 2
- Libya 1
- Mexico 2
- Nepal 2
- Pakistan 2
- Philippines 7
- Russia 2
- Sierra Leone 1
- Somalia 2
- Sri Lanka 2

The statistics, compiled by the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists, make for grim reading. Ten journalists, most of them foreign correspondents, died in the 21 days between the start of the US-led invasion of Iraq and the fall of Saddam Hussein. (Other journalists' groups cite even higher figures.)

But it is all too easy to forget that almost twice as many again were killed during 2003 in other parts of the world, often far away from the battlefield. Some were murdered because of their coverage of corruption; others were killed because their reporting got too close to the shady world of paramilitaries; and others were simply the targets of robbers.

It is therefore an understatement to say that a journalist's work is dangerous, especially in modern-day conflict zones. The truth of the matter is that you can never remove the element of risk.

There are some simple principles and guidelines that you can follow, however, in order to help reduce the level of that risk:

Never put the story above personal safety.

- Be prepared – in terms of professional training, first aid and safety equipment.
- Be informed – know the territory you are travelling in, as well as your companions or fixers.
- Do your homework thoroughly first.
- Be calm – ensure that you are in a good

Photo: IWPR Africa

physical and mental condition.

Many international media organisations have now made training for war correspondents compulsory. This has focused mainly on courses on physical safety – understanding conflict zones, equipment and basic things to look out for, as well as a review of basic emergency medical treatment. Increasingly, organisations are also considering how to train – and provide counselling for journalists if necessary – on issues of stress and trauma.

Journalists working for smaller organisations, or freelancers, often do not have this opportunity to be trained. But fortunately scholarships are increasingly being made available to allow them to attend these courses. Some of the organisations involved in helping foster the safety of journalists, and those working in the field of stress and trauma, are listed at the end of this chapter.

What follows is not designed as a substitute for full and proper training. It does, however, cover many of the basics and sets out some essential "dos" and "don'ts".

BASIC RULES

- Always make your own decisions by assessing what could go wrong and by considering how you should guard against.
- Ask yourself, "How can I get a story without becoming a story?"
- Always question whether the story is worth taking a risk for.
- It is easy to be caught up in the adrenalin of a conflict, whether a demonstration on the streets or a battle. Never be affected by what other people think about you. It is your life, so make your own decisions. Do not be ashamed of fear – it is a good sign of a need for caution.
- Always consider ways to minimise any risk in covering a story. Try not to get excited or you will not think clearly.
- Do not follow anyone else thoughtlessly into battle, whether another journalist or soldiers on the frontline.

Suppose a group of soldiers are moving up to the frontline and invite you to go with them. Do not think about whether to accept or reject the invitation in terms of what they might think about you. What are the risks? Are they worth it for the story or pictures? Does it really matter if you do not go?

It is not a question of personal courage. Your job is different from that of soldiers. Their job is to fight, and maybe to die. Yours is to stay alive and report what you see to the world. Journalists occasionally have to put themselves at risk – but the question, once again, is whether there is any story that justifies losing your life.

GETTING CLOSE TO THE ACTION

Always consider whether moving into danger will help the story. Often it will not. For those shooting video or still pictures or recording sound, the decision is less easy. But the principles are the same – do the pictures or the audio justify the risk?

The job of a journalist is to find out what is going on, capture the overall picture, and have the report published or broadcast. Experienced soldiers know that those in the front line of a battle almost never know what is really happening, except what is immediately in front or behind them. There is too much movement and noise. Invariably, they are witnessing only one of many snapshots of the wider conflict.

In fact, more might be found out about the situation some distance back – at a command post, for instance.

The large international news organisations have the luxury of being able to piece together many different viewpoints – from the battlefront, from headquarters in the field and from politicians back home – pulling together all the varied pieces of the jigsaw puzzle. Not every organisation can afford to do that, so you have to ask yourself where the best story is to be had.

Also, remember that the job of a radio reporter is different from that of a photographer. A photographer or cameraperson has to have some images to capture the essence of the conflict. Either way, a good motto is: “Get the pictures or story and then get out.”

You do not need to show your bravery to anyone. It is more courageous to take your own independent decision than simply to go along with the pack.

TARGET AWARENESS

Always carry a journalist ID with you. Never carry a weapon. If you are captured by soldiers, why should they believe that you are neutral if you are carrying a weapon? It is also against international conventions on the protection of civilians.

Generally identify yourself as a journalist, otherwise you may be mistaken for a spy. It is usually better not to get through a checkpoint at all than to get through on false pretences. But there might be cases where you might need to break this rule, if there are good journalistic reasons. Local knowledge and checking with experienced colleagues will help you make that decision.

Always be wary of empty roads. Why are they empty? Develop an awareness of your surroundings and what might be a target for the other side. Wear clothes so that even from a distance you do not look like a combatant. On the other hand, sometimes clothes that are too bright might mark you out as an easy target, especially if snipers are around or if demonstrators are not happy at seeing people from the media.

In general, avoid khaki or any other colour that may make you look like a soldier or militia member.

Near a spot from where combatants are firing, assume that they may draw return fire.

A camera from a distance, especially held near the face, can look like a grenade

launcher or a sniper's weapon from the front. If you feel under threat, take the camera off your shoulder and show it side on, so that the opposing side can see what it is.

MINIMISE YOUR TIME AT THE FRONT

If you have to go, always have a specific goal – to conduct an interview with soldiers or those caught on the frontline, for example, or to get an idea of the conflict zone. Remember that frontlines are not always clear – do not get caught in no-man's land. Plan the trip beforehand, and make sure you can leave when you want to. Do not go to the frontline just to hang around, for the experience.

Make sure that you have a safe vehicle, that you know how it works and that it has enough fuel to get you back. Avoid depending on soldiers for your transport, because their vehicles are a military target. Ensure you have thought of the best means of escape or evacuation if you need to leave in a hurry.

Make sure you let others know about your travel plan, giving precise details and checking in regularly, so that somebody will realise quickly if you have not kept to your plan, including coming back as expected. It may be safer to travel with other journalists and in convoys with other media vehicles. Listen to those with experience and avoid anyone you think takes too many risks.

WEAPONS RECOGNITION

In a war zone, try to think of things from a soldier's point of view. Analysing how dangerous the current situation is will be helped by knowing a few simple things about weapons and the technical aspects of modern fighting.

1. Heavy Weapons

Protective clothing helps, but heavy weapons are always dangerous. Distinguish whether heavy weapons fire is artillery or mortar. Artillery – field guns firing shells – has a low flat trajectory which means you can take cover from it behind the lee of a hill. Mortars have a shorter range but their high trajectory means you cannot hide in the same way.

Try to work out whether the incoming fire is direct – has a line of sight – or is indirect, using a spotter. If it is indirect, readjustment to specific targets will be slower. Without sophisticated guidance systems, accuracy may only be within 100 metres – which means anyone 50 metres away from the intended target could still take a direct hit.

Figure out the pattern of successive incoming rounds. A shot may have landed far away because it is a ranging shot. If the next one is closer, you should be moving away before the third one hits the target.

The impact of heavy weapons rounds varies considerably over different terrain. They achieve maximum impact on hard, flat ground. The best place to be when a round lands is flat on the ground, because the impact will create a hole which drives the shrapnel upwards. If you are out on a flat plain, away from cover when a round has just landed, the best place to be when the next round comes in is directly in the shell hole of the first. Your instinct will be to run, but actually you are much better off lying flat in an artillery strike area than running.

In a building, it is safer under staircases or the beams. Keep away from glass windows. It is better to knock the glass out to avoid splinters.

When travelling in a convoy of vehicles, try not to go in the first or last one. The classic tactic of artillery or aircraft is to try to knock out the first and last vehicles and trap all the others. Once out of the vehicle, run away from the road if you can, rather than down it, where you are a natural target for strafing or snipers. But watch for mines in roadside areas.

2. Small Arms

In the Second World War, about a million rounds of small-arms fire (from rifles and machineguns) were fired for every person killed. So in the middle of a conflict, the chances of survival are - in statistical terms -

reasonably good. Most fire goes high.

Trained soldiers are generally better shots, while untrained soldiers may spray indiscriminately. The armies of western countries estimate that a trained soldier is generally accurate up to 100 metres. Other armies or militia may be less accurate.

One major light weapon used in many conflicts around the world is the Kalashnikov (the AK-47 and later models), popular because it is robust, easy to learn to use, and has a reasonable range. It is deemed to be a "close quarter battle weapon" and is not accurate at longer range. Be aware, however, that should a bullet strike a target even at 1,000 metres, it can still cause considerable damage.

The Kalashnikov has its safety-catch lever on the right hand side, which – as most people are right handed – means you can normally see what position it is in. Up means the safety catch is on and the gun will not fire. The first down position is for fully automatic fire, the final down position is for single shot operation. Always err on the side of caution.

3. Landmines

Mines planted by any side are nearly always a hazard, especially as they are often not marked in conflict zones. But always look out for signs and use common sense thinking on where they are likely to be. Spots in sealed roads are generally easy to see.

Elsewhere, especially in fields, it is not easy. Certainly never touch or pick up anything in such a zone.

Mined areas are always likely near defensive or abandoned positions. A field lying fallow by a cultivated area may indicate mines, but anti-personnel traps may be sown even in cultivated areas.

There are two kinds of landmines: anti-personnel and anti-tank. Anti-tank ones are usually big and designed only to detonate on a heavier impact. They are often protected by the smaller anti personnel mines that can be triggered by any pressure.

Remember that most mines have not been designed to disintegrate, so that they may remain "live" and in place for many years after a conflict has ended.

FIRST AID

This subject needs a special handbook in its own right. But it is impossible to stress enough how important it is to learn first aid, since it substantially increases everyone's chances of surviving a serious incident or accident.

During a war, many more people die of disease and wounds than in actual combat. After serious accidents or injury, the first five minutes often decide whether someone will live or die. A two-day first aid course can teach how to deal with major blood loss, wounds, broken bones, burns and other eventualities. It means you can help yourself and others, too.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

In a handbook about journalism, it is worth raising a caution about substance abuse, especially in conflict areas. Journalists often smoke, and especially in the West, drink. Many, in fact, drink a great deal, and some take drugs.

Any job involves professional pressures, and how people deal with that is up to them. But for some, the culture of journalism seems particularly prone to abusing substances, to the extent that it affects their livelihoods, and even their lives.

Professional war correspondents – that unique breed that travels from conflict area to conflict area around the world – face extreme risks and the often daily trauma of seeing death before their eyes. A number of them have had particular problems with alcohol and drug addiction.

It is important to keep your energy, your health and your judgement. Away from the front,

memories and traumas can return, which cause some to seek escape. But doing so through the bottle is not the best way.

Needless to say, remember that journalism is also about learning about and respecting other societies, which includes taking into account where religion and culture forbid alcohol.

RIOTS AND DEMONSTRATIONS

Remember, all stories carry a risk. Many people are wary of – or even hostile to – reporters and news teams, either because they have something to hide or perhaps because they do not like the organisations that the journalists work for. So it always pays to think about the risk before covering any story.

This is especially true when covering riots or demonstrations. Mobs are unpredictable and while they may sometimes want the publicity, they can quickly turn nasty, putting news teams at risk.

Similarly, security forces often do not want witnesses to what they are doing, or are simply unable to distinguish demonstrators from journalists. It is essential that reporters think carefully about where to position themselves.

It is always best to try to get above a crowd where possible. Never get between demonstrators and the security forces. That is like being in no-man's land in a war, where you can unwittingly become a target of either side. Is tear gas likely? If it is, then prepare for it.

Plan escape routes in advance, so that you can get away quickly with the story. Think whether you need to take special precautions with equipment – sometimes it is better to hide it. If it comes to a choice between your equipment and your life, abandon the equipment.

Leave vehicles well away from the scene so they do not get damaged and can provide a quick way out. It is often a good idea to try to use inconspicuous vehicles. Similarly, as in conflict zones, think about clothing so that you do not stand out as a target.

The secret of all risk assessment is to think ahead about all possibilities, and use common sense. Know where your colleagues are and be ready to look after them, too.

The golden rule is: if in doubt, get out.

EXERCISES

Choose a country you are covering and discuss with colleagues likely scenarios where you need to take precautions. Try to answer the following questions:

- What clothing should you wear? Do you need gas masks or other safety equipment?
- How would you protect your equipment?
- What sort of vehicles should you travel in?
- What do you need to know about the vehicle and how would you check it?
- Where are you going to stay and how safe is it?
- Do you know how to get out in an emergency?
- Are you trained in first aid and do you have a first aid kit in your supplies? What should it include?

ADDITIONAL READING & REFERENCES

Committee to Protect Journalists: www.cpj.org

On Assignment – a Guide to Reporting in Dangerous Situations: cpj.org/Briefings/2003/safety/journo_safe_guide.pdf

International Press Institute: www.freemedia.at/index1.html

Reporters sans Frontieres: www.rsf.org/

International News Safety Institute: www.newssafety.com/insihome/index01.html

Crimes of War Project: www.crimesofwar.org/thebook/book.html

Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma: www.dartcenter.org/index.html

The Rory Peck Trust: rorypecktrust.org/

The Kurt Schork Memorial Fund: www.ksmfund.org/

A number of organisations offer safety training, including:

AKE: www.akegroup.com

Centurion: www.centurion-riskservices.co.uk

Pilgrims: www.pilgrimsgroup.co.uk/index.html

Several memoirs by war correspondents highlight the risks and pressures of frontline reporting, including:

The Bang-Bang Club: Snapshots from a Hidden War, by Greg Marinovich and Joao Silva (Basic Books)

My War Gone By, I Miss It So, by Anthony Loyd (Penguin)

Charlie Johnson in the Flames, by Michael Ignatieff (Grove Press)

SAFETY AT ELECTION TIME

The International Federation of Journalists' Safety Manual states that no story is 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, prison, 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, SAUJ, 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". This 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 Uganda, Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea, and Kenya show that election time is when the heat is most turned on journalists and the media.

All journalists' organisations should seek a declaration similar to that obtained in South Africa from political parties and national

authorities. 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 if they consider it 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 that 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 enough (extra) pay 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 if you are 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 election activities that can take up cases of threats and intimidation. This body should include representatives from international organisations defending press freedom, or people who know how to get in touch with them. Support from abroad can act as a deterrent to a government which is tempted to bully an independent media.

STAYING OUT OF TROUBLE - THE BASICS

Never carry a gun or other 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 that 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 than 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 whom 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 – 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 sunglasses 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 that 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.

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 local people. Pay attention to advice from people living in a region or an 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 it out. 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 a 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 also 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 – your office, your home, your journalists’ organisation, or the International Federation of Journalists – informed about where you are at all times.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

REPORTING FOR IWPR

IWPR was established to provide a platform for responsible journalists in crisis areas, who are so often locked out of local and international debate over conflict and crisis issues in their own countries. The goal of this work is to:

- Strengthen democracy and civil society.
- Build trust between communities.
- Inform international responses.

Our main programme areas are:

- Reporting and research.
- Training.
- Capacity-building.
- Syndication, media appearances, conferences, seminars and other public events that enable IWPR material to be disseminated widely, contributing to public dialogue and debate.

IWPR takes a practical approach. We believe the best way to learn journalism is to do it. Participating in a basic skills workshop or working your way through a journalism handbook such as this one is only the start. The real learning begins when you pick up a reporter's notebook or a microphone to report your own story.

Many of the staff at IWPR are journalists, and we are drawing from our own experiences. We learned the craft from a good (and sometimes harsh) editor, a senior role model, or a supportive colleague who worked side-by-side with us as we developed our own skills.

The constant trial-and-error, the detailed comments and the constructive suggestions can be frustrating and time consuming, but it is the best way to learn lasting lessons. This is the nurturing environment IWPR seeks to provide.

WORKING WITH INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

This handbook is aimed at those working in radio journalism. In Uganda, IWPR is running its own web-based radio news agency (Uganda Radio Network – www.urn.co.ug). But we are also keen that if, in the course of your work, you come across a story that you think might interest an international audience, then you should consider writing it as a news story or feature for the IWPR news website (www.iwpr.net).

For local journalists, the experience of working with IWPR may be very different from their home media. Intensive oversight, heavy reporting, re-reporting and fact checking, and extensive, detailed editing that to many feels intrusive are concerns sometimes raised by participating journalists. But the system at IWPR in fact draws on standard systems and habits of many international media.

IWPR does not claim that this system of editing, and the basic international style of journalism, is necessarily superior to other approaches. As we said at the outset, different forms and habits apply in different parts of the world.

But the underlying principles of fact-based, responsible reporting – working from universally accepted principles, as outlined at the beginning of this handbook – do offer benefits which can enable media to play a critical role in supporting democracy and building trust in areas emerging from (or at risk of) conflict and crisis.

The international style of reporting and editing is a predominant approach aiming to achieve

these goals. The experience of working within this tradition provides invaluable lessons for any journalist, however they may wish to adapt them to their own circumstances and media environment.

THE REPORTING/TRAINING DYNAMIC

IWPR breaks down the process of producing an article, or radio item, into basic components and seeks to support local journalists at each step along the way.

The first step is to identify local issues for coverage. This means comprehending the potential story's news value (see Chapter 3), assessing reader/editorial interest, and clarifying if and how the story has already been covered within the media. This process should result in the production of a "commissioning brief", a short memo drafted by the journalist and approved by the commissioning editor outlining the story, the approach, and some of the primary details and/or sources to be included, as well as a deadline and agreed length.

Step two is to plan the reporting. This means identifying sources and critical material, and charting a strategy for obtaining the information within deadline. This process should start with an evaluation of the story and then consideration and investigation of all possible sources for research – local contacts, newspapers, websites, web archives etc.

Step three is arguably the most important: reporting. The more you follow the lessons in this book, the smoother the process will go. But be prepared – IWPR editors, like editors for many international media, are likely to send you back with questions to do follow-up reporting, fact-checking or further digging for sensitive information. This is time-consuming, and it can seem frustrating to receive basic queries from editors who don't seem to understand the story. But what they are actually doing is trying to strengthen your sourcing or balance, clarify issues for the reader or listener and make your story stronger.

Consultation and revision is the labour-intensive process of editing, clip-by-clip, line-by-line, word-by-word. This can require considerable effort and communication. For written stories, the process typically includes two stages. Firstly, editing is done by the commissioning editor (often the programme manager or in-country trainer, sometimes working with you in a local language), who will look for factual accuracy and basic structure. Following translation, a second edit is then usually undertaken in English by the managing editor or assistant editors for style and general clarity. (They will also flag the story to the executive director and possibly lawyers if there are libel or other serious concerns.) This results in the final edit. It's a similar process for radio stories but here much of the editing will take place locally.

Again, the closer you can stick to the guidelines in this manual, the less editing you will receive. Pay particular attention to your commissioning brief and especially to length – if you are asked for 800 words and write 2,000, your story will be slashed. If you are asked for two minutes and you do four, expect your story to be edited down. As above, it can be frustrating, but have patience – the job of the editor is to ensure the text, or audio, is clear and accessible, to improve your story and increase your audience.

Publication or transmission makes the effort worth it – it's what all journalists strive for, and your commissioning editor at IWPR will also agree a modest fee, payable upon publication on the website. This electronic dissemination reaches a wide international audience, including diplomats, journalists, academics and analysts. It is a core means by which IWPR works to provide an essential platform so that local journalists can impact international debate on their own countries.

Journalism, however, is also local, and IWPR's primary goal is to strengthen media locally. IWPR builds relationships with local and regional publications and broadcasters, so that your reporting can be disseminated at home, where it matters most. Your story may

Photo: IWPR Africa

also be produced in a local language version for publication in the press or use by radio stations.

IWPR is also increasing its international syndication. This facility offers participating local journalists the chance to be published in important national and regional newspapers, especially in North America and Europe, or heard on internationally respected websites. Again, this builds an international platform for local voices. To avoid misunderstanding, it is important to note that syndication fees are rarely paid to IWPR. When they are, IWPR pays half of the amount to the original author and retains the balance to defray syndication costs.

A strong civil society is about vibrant debate, and IWPR works to feed your reporting into discussion and dialogue about key issues for peace, democracy and development locally. This may include a regional conference, media appearances, or a seminar at the IWPR offices with local officials, human rights and other NGO representatives and, of course, journalists and editors.

Evaluation helps reinforce lessons learned, clears up any mistakes or misunderstandings (from time to time on IWPR's side as well), and assesses the results of the report. This assessment may come in an editor's note or a conversation with your trainer or commissioning editor. IWPR's distance-learning accounts via the IWPR Academy provide participating journalists with a secure online facility to review editing versions, receive feedback, and track overall development. (Evaluation should be two-way, so if you want to flag thoughts and assessment of IWPR and the training and editing process, please do.)

TIPS FOR WORKING WITH IWPR

As outlined, this is a heavily involved editorial process. Sometimes it can go very quickly and easily; sometimes it can be very involved and trying. The more you do it, the easier it will seem, which is precisely the goal.

The key for reporting for IWPR is to observe the guidelines in this manual for balanced and

concise writing and well-sourced, fact-based reporting. If your story matches the commissioning brief, includes a sharp lead and observes the core reporting and other journalistic principles, you should have few problems.

As part of that, remember to report for a wide audience, beyond your town, country or region. Make basic facts clear, identify individuals and parties on first reference, communicate in a way that will extend interest in your story, rather than just preach to the converted. Demonstrate fairness and respect, and observe a moderate, balanced tone. Editors spend a lot of time trying to clarify and smooth out stories in this way, but the story will be better and sharper if you incorporate this instinct by yourself.

The process may take patience, but understand that your story is not the only one editors are working on. They are processing material as fast as they can. So the cleaner you can present it, obviously the less work they will have to do.

Finally, not every story works out. An experienced journalist understands that stories do get "spiked" (not used) from time to time. It is certainly not pleasant, but it is part of the profession. Sometimes it is because the story was not well done. But often it is because other stories came up, or because the news peg changed so the story is out of date.

If a story is not used, you may ask your commissioning editor if a "kill fee" is payable. This will be a partial payment and is generally applicable if the story is withheld because of editorial or news decisions, not because the story is of poor quality or because it has been delivered late.

But either way, learn the lesson and then shake it off. You are writing and producing journalism, not poetry, and tomorrow is always another day – and another story.

RESOURCES

IWPR's training programmes include field workshops and seminars, extensive on-the-job style training via collaborative reporting projects, and extensive online training modules and printed material such as this book, as well as the online IWPR Academy distance-learning system (see www.iwpr.net).

The website provides links to a wide range of other specialist and training websites, covering everything from basic skills to reporting on war crimes. There is a wide bibliography of specialist and basic training guides, and many of these are listed online.

Basic and specialist training workshops are led by local and international trainers according to needs, so we welcome feedback and ideas from our local participants and partners. We will also be producing further editions of this manual, and look forward to incorporating insights from participants in our programmes to make it more useful.

IWPR capacity-building projects work to strengthen local media and media institutions – whether a training or free-speech group or a local newspaper or news agency. For further information about IWPR's overall programme, or how you may work with us in your area, also see the IWPR website.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

FIELD RECORDING TECHNIQUES

FIELD RECORDING

The essential working tool for any journalist on the job is a 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, such as echoes, are cut to a minimum in the 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 familiarising ourselves with the instrument 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 mic. 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 mics you will need and where you're going to place them.

Unidirectional microphones

These mics are directional, and they're more sensitive to sounds coming from one particular direction, often the front of the mic. They are good for favouring one sound while rejecting another from a different direction, but you need to know what you're doing.

Omni-directional microphones

An omni-directional mic picks up sounds from all directions. It's a good general-purpose mic, particularly useful for interview work, but also good for recording atmos and actuality. Many a package has been made using only an omni mic.

The uni and omni-directional mics are the most common types of mic – but you'll also come across these:

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

Clip mics
Often used in television, as they're less obtrusive. Clip mics are usually small omni mics, 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 mic 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 – stiff fabric will rustle. And if you clip a mic to a man's shirt, make sure that his tie doesn't fall across the mic. Clip mics have their uses but hand-held mics will generally give you a better sound.

The Microphone and its Accessories

As well as your mic, you will need:
Connections: the usual output is called an XLR (see diagram), which goes into either another XLR, or a 3.5mm or 6.5 mm plug. You can get adaptors to make leads of different sizes compatible (see diagram). More expensive recording machines and mics often use an XLR connector on both ends of the cable.

Typical microphone connector.

XLR to 3.5mm jack | XLR to XL | 3.5mm jack -6.5mm jack

A windshield: often a foam cap, which covers the recording end of the mic. The windshield minimises wind noise on location, and acts as a "pop" screen (A "pop" is the sound of air hitting the mic made by saying letters like "p" and "b". A small screen in front of a mic can minimise this.)

A lead: connects your mic 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 mics need to be powered by a small battery. Check it before you leave and replace it 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 mic (if you really have to record that location interview in the pouring rain) slip a condom over your mic, under the windshield.

Headphones

You should always try to record in the field with headphones. You need to monitor the sound levels to ensure that you are not recording at too high, or too low, a level and that you are getting similar levels from your voice and the interviewee's.

You will also be able to hear popping or sibilance (the sound made by the saying the letter "S").

Headphones cut out most of the exterior sounds so that you can concentrate on the recorded sound. They should be comfortable to wear. Always check them with your system to make sure they are compatible, i.e. that you can clearly hear the interview you are recording.

Try to use as short a mic lead as possible, so that it doesn't get tangled.

How to hold your mic

Do:

- Hold the mic firmly but comfortably, and well away from the connection at the bottom, with the top of the mic cable wrapped around the hand that is holding the mic.
- If you're recording a lengthy interview, you may want to rest your mic-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 mic on an interviewee, check the mic position isn't recording rustle from clothing.

Don't:

- Let rings or bracelets knock against the mic or the lead.
- Grip the mic 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.

WHAT ARE YOUR CHOICES?

Broadcast interviews always technically sound best when recorded in a studio, but that may not be possible when you are trying to interview busy people.

It's not often that an interviewee has the time to come to the studio at a pre-arranged time, and they are often very wary of studio interviews and demand a list of questions that you are going to ask.

You could take a radio car and transmit the interview live to the studio. How many radio stations do you know that could do that? Very few stations have the resources, or enough sponsorship, to purchase and maintain such equipment.

You could go to the interviewee and record the

interview on the spot and bring it back to the radio station for editing. This is the most common way of gathering material. So what do we need to make a field recording?

There are many forms of recording equipment available to journalists today. The most common versions are detailed below.

TAPE AND CASSETTE VERSIONS

Reel to reel

Uher

Positive Features	Negative Features
Very good quality (at high speed) Reliable Easy to edit	Heavy and large Power-hungry Short recording time (15 minutes) Does not like dust, vibration or humidity Tape not easy to load

Professional audio cassette machine.

Marantz

Sony

Positive Features	Negative Features
Smaller than tape machines Uses less power than tape machines 45 minutes recording time Cassettes are simple to load	Quality lower than tape More difficult to edit Does not like dust or humidity Power-hungry

Other cassette players, including dictation machines

Mini cassette Micro cassette Audio cassette

Positive Features	Negative Features
Small size Low cost	Very poor quality Does not like dust nor humidity More difficult to edit Unreliable

Digital audio tape (DAT)

Sony

Positive Features	Negative Features
Very high quality Simple to load Easy to identify tracks Editing on the machine Track labelling on the machine 60 minutes recording time Small size	Does not like dust or humidity Power-hungry Not reliable in the field Does not like vibration Expensive

DISK VERSIONS

Minidisc systems

Sony

Positive Features	Negative Features
Very high quality Simple to load Easy to identify tracks Editing on the machine Track labelling on the machine	Does not like dust or humidity Not very reliable in the field Does not like vibration Some versions can be power-hungry

Compact disk recorders

Marantz

Positive Features	Negative Features
Very high quality Simple to load Easy to identify tracks Editing on the machine Track labelling on the machine	Does not like dust or humidity Not reliable in the field Does not like vibration Power hungry Expensive 80 minutes recording time

DVD recorder

Fostex

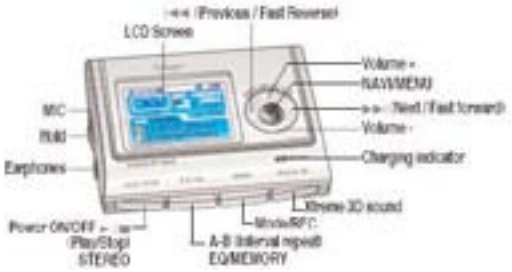
Positive Features	Negative Features
Very high quality sound Simple to load Easy to identlfy tracks Editing on the machine Track labelling on the machine Full mixing capability	Does not like dust or humidity Not reliable in the field Does not like vibration Power hungry Very, very expensive

Hard drive recorder

Iriver

Positive Features	Negative Features
Very high quality sound Easy track marking Editing on the machine Track labelling on the machine Massive recording time	Does not like dust or humidity Does not like too much vibration Can be expensive

Solid state versions



Iriver

Marantz

Positive Features	Negative Features
Very high quality sound No moving parts to go wrong Can be relatively low cost Massive recording time Reliable in the field Easy to use	Small display Small connectors can be damaged easily Vibration, dust and humidity resistant

Cell phone interfaces

When you are working in the field it may not be possible to get a recorded interview back in time for the news bulletin, or the interviewee may not be able to get to the studio in time. One method of getting round this problem is to use a GSM phone interface.

One such device is the Conex FlipJack which

provides an extremely effective audio mixer which can be connected to a standard mobile or cell phone.

The FlipJack is a small mixer with a headphone amplifier fitted into a robust metal case. It weighs about the same as an average mobile phone and fits in the palm of your hand, although it is also supplied with a handy belt clip. Along with two microphone inputs (which are balanced so that you can transmit interviews using two mics with the sound properly balanced), it also has sockets for headphones, a tuner input (so that you can hear your own station) and an aux output (so that you can record the interview onto your recorder). This means that outside broadcasts can be made from the middle of a village, a procession or anywhere in the world using mobile phone technology. On the front of the FlipJack are two "push-in" buttons, on/off and air/cell, which switches your headphone between the phone or the tuner. Finally there are two LEDs, red (for low battery power) and amber (which assists in setting mic levels).

The two mic inputs are XLRs and mic 2 can be switched between mic or line. So you could use the FlipJack to record a series of interviews at an outside event onto a recorder, and then play them down the line to the studio. You can add inserts to a live interview from your recorder using mic 1 with the recorder on mic 2. For something like a town meeting it would be possible to set up more than two mics, feed them through a small mixer and then send the audio back on the mobile, via the FlipJack.

The audio quality is much improved using a good quality microphone through the FlipJack, rather than just relying on the microphone on the mobile phone.

The system is designed around the Motorola GSM phone and needs an adapter for all other phones. See adapter guide below. It is essential that you keep spare nine volt batteries, as the system uses battery power only.

The FJ-10

TO SUMMARISE

1. Tape systems

   Not unless you have no other choice.

   They are often bulky, power-hungry, not good with rough handling or vibration and poor with dust or humidity.

2. Cassette systems

a) Not unless you have no other choice.

b) Less bulky, power-hungry, not good with rough handling or vibration and poor with dust or humidity, poor sound quality (especially the micro cassette).

3. Disk systems

a) Minidisc is the best choice amongst these systems.

b) Some are bulky, some are power-hungry, not good with rough handling or vibration and poor with dust or humidity. CD or DVD needs to be kept still while recording. Hard drive systems also need to be still but are not as sensitive as the optical disks.

4. Solid state systems

a) Probably the best choice for field recording.

b) Small, low power usage, vibration and humidity are not a problem, no moving parts, so can handle most field situations. Many have the ability to download into a computer as a data file (which speeds up the process, as you do not have to download in real time).

c) Can record over ten hours and listen for around 30 hours on a single charge.

FIELD RECORDING – THE TECHNICAL ASPECTS

BEFORE LEAVING

Some kind of water resistant bag is essential to carry the kit. It must be big enough for all the equipment, for the spare batteries and tapes, for the cables and for the recording machine.

Try to keep the microphone cable separate from the headphone cable. Starting an interview by undoing all the knots in the cables looks unprofessional and puts you in a bad frame of mind. It's a good idea to use some sort of ties to keep the cables tidy when they are in the bag, or separate pockets for the headphones and microphone cable.

Before you leave for the interview, check your equipment – does it all work?

BEFORE STARTING THE INTERVIEW

Listen and look at the environment within which you are going to record the interview. Are there noises which will make it difficult to record? Are there hard surfaces which can reflect sounds? Is the air conditioning or fluorescent lighting making a noise?

Is there a great deal of echo? Try changing location.

Make sure there are no radios or music playing in the background. It is almost impossible to edit interviews when you have that kind of background noise.

Try a test recording and listen to it carefully.

If you are happy, then record the room sound with no speaking for at least 30 seconds in case you have to use it as a means of reducing unwanted extraneous sounds during editing. This is particularly important if you cannot turn the air conditioning or the fluorescent lighting off. (See Appendix 1)

Check that you can move the microphone easily from you to the interviewee.

Check that you do not get cable noise when you move the microphone, adjust your hand position so that the connector does not move.

THE INTERVIEW

For reference, start the interview with the time date and place of the interview and then ask the interviewees to state their names.

During this recording, you can check the levels and recording quality.

Move the microphone so that you get consistent sound between you and the interviewees. It is important to try to keep the microphone about 15 to 20cm from the interviewee's mouth, otherwise you will get poor quality recordings. If the interviewee is creating pops with the "p" and "d" sound, and sibilance with the letter "s", then move the microphone to one side of their mouth.

If you are recording outside, try to keep the microphone out of the wind and wear your headphones with the volume up so you can hear all the ambient sounds.

Never let an interviewee take the microphone from you during an interview, for both technical and editorial reasons.

As soon as the interview is finished, check the quality. If there are problems, do not be afraid to ask to record some of it again. Do this before the interviewee leaves.

If you can, "write protect" your recording. This prevents it from being inadvertently erased. And label it as soon as you have finished.

Put it in your bag and close it.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

INTRODUCTION TO DIGITAL EDITING[1]

There are many benefits to digital audio editing. You can edit your recordings more precisely and create high quality audio files. You can get rid of all those heaps of audio tapes that are lying around in your office and you can transfer them onto a number of CDs and minidiscs, or archive them on a web site.

With editing software you can:
Record (digitise) the audio file into the computer from an external source (tape recorder, CD, minidisc etc.).
Edit the digitised file (cut, paste, normalise, sample, mix etc.).
Convert the digitised file into the audio format of your choice.

Here, we'll explain the process of editing using Cool Edit, although most of the functions explained can be applied to any other editing software.

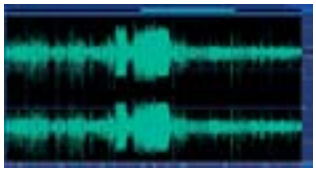
Cool Edit is a sound manipulation programme that allows you to open, create, record or edit sound. You can use Cool Edit to record your own music, voice or other audio; and then edit it, mix it with other audio or musical parts, touch it up and add effects.

This guide gives you a concise introduction to Cool Edit's basic features and sound editing capabilities. There are other audio editing programmes, such as Soundforge and Cubasis. Cool Edit, or Cool Edit Pro (a more advanced version) is among the most popular audio editing systems and is found around the world (it has now been acquired by Adobe and renamed Adobe Audition).

BASIC NAVIGATION IN COOL EDIT

Cool Edit is designed for user-friendliness. There are several basic components that you will be using in Cool Edit:

Waveform Display



This is the main window where your audio files are displayed for editing. Your audio appears in the shape of a waveform.

Display Range Bar

Located at the top of the screen, this indicates which part of the entire waveform is currently being viewed. When you zoom in on your waveform, the bar will become smaller in size, since you are viewing a smaller portion of your entire audio file.

Transport Toolbar

This is where you access basic audio functions in Cool Edit. They are as follows:

- stop
- play
- pause
- play to end
- play looped
- go to beginning
- rewind
- fast forward
- go to end
- record

Time and Amplitude Rulers

The time ruler is on the bottom of the waveform display. The amplitude (intensity) ruler is to the right of the waveform display.

[1] This tutorial contains material which is used with the permission of Fondren Library, Rice University, under the Creative Commons attribution licence.

Zoom Controls

The zoom controls allow you zoom in either horizontally (magnifies time) or vertically (magnifies amplitude) with respect to your waveform.

Time Display Fields

These are useful when selecting and editing audio. The Sel time display fields show the time at which your selection begins and ends, as well as the total time of the selection. The View time fields show the beginning, ending and total time of the part of the waveform currently in the Waveform Display

CONNECTING AN EXTERNAL AUDIO DEVICE TO YOUR COMPUTER

Recording audio from the external audio device

In order to be able to "grab" audio from your external audio device (this includes DAT, minidisc, cassette players, microphones etc.), you need to connect the external device to your computer, or more precisely, to your sound card. If you look at the back of your computer, you will see the words Line-in or Mic-in or icons like this:

 for Line-in

 for Line-out

 for Mic-in

These are inputs on your sound card.

To connect the device to your sound card, follow this logic:

As you want to import a sound FROM your external device INTO your computer, you will put one end of an audio lead in the Line-out socket on your minidisc, for example, and the other end into the Line-in socket of your sound card.

Recording audio from the computer on to the external device

When you want to remove your digitised audio from your computer and store it on a CD-ROM, minidisc or memory stick, you need to use the reverse process to the one outlined above:

As you want to export sound FROM your computer INTO the audio device (a minidisc for example), you will need to plug one end of an audio lead into the Line-out socket of your sound card and the other end into the Line-in socket on your minidisc.

TROUBLESHOOTING

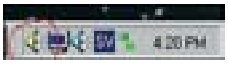
No Line-out on audio device	Some audio devices don't have an audio output plug. In this case use the headphones plug to send audio to a computer. If there is no headphone plug you will be unable to proceed (but only very old machines have no headphone outlet).
Can't hear the sound	Sometimes sound card inputs are marked incorrectly. If you can't hear the sound, try plugging the audio lead into different sockets in the computer. If you still can't hear the sound, it might be a problem with the volume control settings – for more about that, see "Specifying the recording source".

SPECIFYING THE RECORDING SOURCE

We will assume that your external sound source is connected to your computer. If this is not the case, go back to the "Getting the audio in…" section and follow the instructions.

[There is no "Getting the audio in..." section. I take it the reference is to the "Recording audio from the external audio device" and "Recording audio from the computer on to the external device" sections?] It is if it needs clarifying please do so.

Now, click twice on the speaker icon in the lower right corner, as circled in the following picture:



The following should appear.

This panel controls only your play levels. You can use it to "tell" your sound card where to play the sound from. It has faders similar to that on a real sound desk.

When you open the sound card, you do not always see all the channels of the Volume Control, such as CD, Wave, Microphone etc. If you do not see them, you have to choose **Options** and **Properties**, and there you can select all the lines you would like to have included in the mixing desk of your sound card.

To see the panel for the recording control, you need to click on **Options**, then on **Properties** and select **Recording**. A panel with the recording control will show on your screen. Select the audio source – where you want to import your audio from (**Line-in** for external audio device, for example, or **Microphone** if you are recording from a microphone).

In this picture, the sound will be recorded from an external source, hence **"Line"** is selected. It is best to keep this recording control desk open, as you may need it for regulating your live recording levels when you do start recording.

DEDICATED FOLDER

It is recommended that you create a dedicated folder for your digitised audio.

To create a New Folder double click on **My Computer** and select which drive you wish to store your audio on, for example hard disk drive (C:).

Double click on C, click once on **File**, scroll to **New** and click on **Folder**. Your new folder will now appear with a temporary name. Rename your folder as something logical, such as "My Audio". Remember to save all your audio files in this folder.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Can't hear the sound	Check if the "Mute" or "Mute All" tick box in the Volume Control window is ticked. If yes, untick it and you should hear the sound. If you still can't hear anything, try other sound card inputs at the back of your computer.

RECORDING SETTINGS

Now open a new file in Cool Edit. To do this, click on File and select New. A new window appears prompting you to choose the settings for digitising your audio. These settings will influence the quality and the size of your digitised audio.

Bit depth

This is another setting that influences the quality of your file. It describes the number of bits to use for each sample on each channel. The default bit depth in editing software and encoders is 16 bit.

Sample rate

A sample is simply a snapshot of a sound at a given point in time. The sampling rate is a measurement of how many snapshots are taken. The best comparison is a movie camera that takes 24 still photographs per second. When they are played back at a certain speed in the cinema, the result is almost like real life. Each frame of film is a sample; 24 frames per second is a sampling rate. If you reduce the number of frames per second, the film would look like a sequence of still images. For sound, this would mean that the gaps between sequences would be artificially filled with noise.

The list below illustrates how sample rate influences audio quality:

8,000 Hz	Telephone Quality
11,025 Hz	Poor AM Radio Quality
16,000 Hz	Reasonable compromise between 11 KHz and 22 KHz
22,050 Hz	Near FM Radio Quality
32,075 Hz	Better than FM Radio Quality (Some boards support 32,000 instead)
44,100 Hz	CD Quality
48,000 Hz	DAT Quality

The default quality usable for Cool Edit work is 44,100 Hz.

Channel

You can choose whether you want to record your sound through one (mono) or two (stereo) channels.

Stereo means that each channel is recording separate sounds, and only when they play simultaneously do they make a meaningful audio sequence. This is why files recorded in stereo are twice as large as the sounds recorded in mono. Use stereo for the recording of music.

Mono channel means that the recording is being done through one channel only. It is acceptable for speech recordings by microphone i.e. for all news and current affairs programmes.

When you convert from mono to stereo, you will only get an artificial stereo effect because the second channel is just a copy of the mono channel you started with.

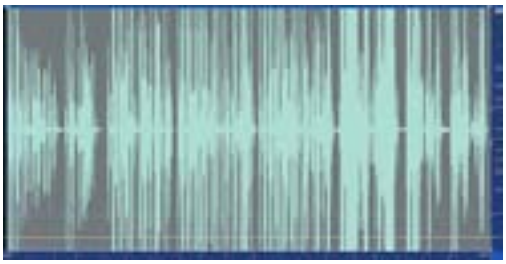
WAVE FORMS

Before we start recording, one more tip: to see what your audio looks like as it's being recorded, click on Options, Settings and then select Live update during record.

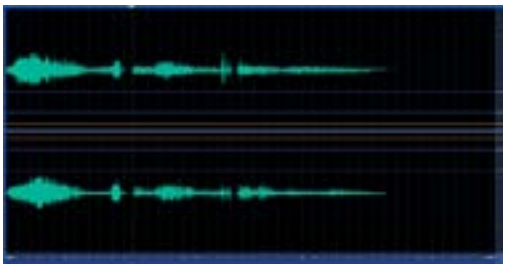
When you start recording you will see the sound wave in the Cool Edit window.

When you hear a sound, you actually register changes in the air pressure around your eardrum. These vibrations are then picked up by your ears and converted to electrical signals that your brain interprets as a sound. If we were to graph the air pressure at your eardrum as a function of time while you were listening to a short sound, it might look like a wave. That is the reason why sound files recorded in Cool Edit are shown in a waveform.

By listening and looking at your wave carefully, you will learn a lot about how the sound is represented visually. Have a look at these examples:



Wide wave form: distorted
Mono



Narrow wave form: too quiet
Stereo

First notice that mono waves consist of only one wave, while stereo waves have two bands of waves.

When a recording is too loud and therefore distorted, the top and the bottom edges of the sound wave are unnaturally flat, as if they were cut with scissors.

The preceding images of sound waves are examples of what yours should NOT look like.

DIGITISING YOUR AUDIO

RECORDING

Before you actually start recording, you need to check your recording levels to make sure that your audio is loud enough, but not too loud.

Play your sound. To monitor the volume, click on **Options** and then on **Monitor Record Level**. It will activate the **VU meter** – a unit that visually shows the volume level as your sound is playing. The red line (one if you are recording in mono and two if you are in stereo) moves from left to right following the intensity of the sound. In the following picture, you are recording at 12db.

VU meter

It is recommended that you record at as high a level as possible without clipping. Clipping is what happens when your recording level is too loud, which distorts your sound. You should try to keep your recording level **between -12 and -3.**

Note that you cannot control the recording level from the Cool Edit interface. You need to go to the **Recording Control** mixing desk of your sound card and slide the fader up or down to adjust the recording volume. You can also adjust the recording level by adjusting the volume on the external audio device.

You are now ready to start recording.

Use the control buttons at the bottom of the screen, on the left hand side. They operate in the same way as on any other sound device.

Just click on the **Record button** (red dot). You will notice that the red dot becomes a black square. Click on it when you want to stop recording. You will see your recording represented on the screen by a waveform.

You have just completed the first recording exercise!

EDITING

This section introduces some of the basic editing functions of Cool Edit.

PREVIEWING

You probably want to listen to what you have recorded. You need speakers or headphones connected to the **Speakers** port in the back of your computer (or to the **Line out** if you do not have a specific Speakers port).

You also need to set up your sound card to be able to listen to your recorded piece. Open

your sound card by double-clicking the speaker icon at the bottom right hand corner of the screen and the Volume Control desk below will appear.

If you want to hear what you have recorded, you need to slide up the fader of the Wave channel. To control the volume of your speakers or headphones, slide up the channel called Volume Control.

Now click on Play in the control buttons of Cool Edit Pro and enjoy your first digital audio.

While listening to a wave, you will notice a yellow line that moves across your screen. That is the cursor. It's very important, as it is used to mark your editing points.

UNDO OPTION

Before you start editing, it is very important that you have activated the option Undo. To activate this option, go to the Edit menu and select Enable Undo. This means that every time you edit something, if you are unhappy with the result, you can delete your last action. You can undo your actions up to 80 times.

Note that once you have saved your file, you can't use the Undo function.

USING ZOOM AND TIMER

It would be very hard to edit a wave of 30 minutes' recording viewed on only one window – because all the sounds are so close together that it's difficult to see where individual pieces of sound start and end. That is why we use the Zoom – to get a more detailed picture of the part of the wave around the cursor we want to edit.

Zoom in: Click to stretch the wave. The part of the wave around the cursor will be shown in more detail. If you want to see other sections of the wave, move using the green bar, just under the toolbar.

Zoom out: Click to shrink the wave. The wave will become smaller and will fit the screen.

Zoom out full: Click to shrink the whole wave in one screen.

Zoom selection: Click to show the selection fitting in one screen.

The bar at the top of the screen (just under the toolbar) shows the part of the wave you are viewing. If the whole bar is green, you are looking at the whole wave. You can move along the wave when it is zoomed. Point your cursor on the green bar until it becomes a hand. Hold the left button of the mouse and drag it to move along the wave to the right and left.

The timer is another useful tool to help you edit.

The timer shows the length of your audio. By default it shows the time in decimal format – minutes, seconds and milliseconds (mm: ss.dd). You can change the format in Display Time Format in the View menu.

The time on the left represents the length of the track up until the cursor. The table on the right shows the beginning, end and total length of the selection (in the upper row) and of the whole wave (in bottom row).

You can use the timer as a control to adjust your selection or your programme to a particular length of time – or, to be very precise, when choosing the point where you start cutting, pasting or whatever editing you want to do.

COMMON EDITING FUNCTIONS

Editing sound in Cool Edit is very similar to editing text in Microsoft Word. The main functions you will use for most of your editing are Cut, Copy and Paste. You will find these under Edit. You can also use buttons on the toolbar at the top of the screen or shortcut keys.

Mix and Crossfade are functions used in the Multi-track View of Cool Edit. The use of Multi-track View is tackled later in this chapter.

Most of the time you can conclude from the shape of the wave where the words or a music sequence begin and where they end. Play the wave a few times to become more familiar with the shapes and how they represent a change in your sound.

DELETE

As a first step, you can erase a portion of your audio. Play the wave and then pause, just at the beginning of the section you are planning to delete. Left-click with your mouse on the point of the wave where you want your selection to begin, hold down and drag until you reach the end of the section you wish to delete – just as you do in any other Windows application. When you release the button, the area you want to delete is highlighted. To listen and check your selection, click on Play. It will only play the selected part of the wave.

If you want to be more precise, by making the same selection bigger or smaller, you can do it by right clicking the mouse. If you click the left button you will lose the selection and will have to make a new mark. You can modify the selection with the right button and play it as many times as you want until you are sure that the selection includes exactly, and only, the part you want to delete.

Now just press the Delete key on your keyboard or click on Edit, scroll to and click on Delete Selection. Click on Play to listen. If you are not satisfied with the result, you can always use Undo.

COPY/PASTE

The next step will be moving a portion of audio to a desired place in the wave.

Select the section you want to move to another place in your audio. When you are satisfied with your selection of audio, choose Cut in the Edit menu (or Ctrl+X on your keyboard). The portion of audio has now gone from your recording but it is still stored on the clipboard and can be put somewhere else. You then need to find the exact point of the wave where you want to insert it.

Once you are sure you have found the point where this section of audio should go, select Paste in the Edit menu (or press Ctrl+V on your keyboard).

The shape of your selection now appears again on the screen, but in its new position. Listen to the result and decide if you are happy with it.

TRANSFORM FUNCTIONS

Cool Edit allows you to transform the wave in different ways, reducing noise, amplifying or creating effects with the voice or music you have previously recorded. This can be very useful if, for example, your recording is too low in volume. You can also create imaginative effects and echoes for your programmes and jingles.

This manual will not go into too much depth about these options. You can experiment and learn about it yourself using Cool Edit Help.

The best way to master the use of effects is to try them (see Appendices).

MAKING SELECTIONS

Selecting is the essential tool you will be using in order to edit your sound files.

For basic selection:

Place the cursor at the point in your waveform where you would like to begin the selection and then left-click and drag to the right to

highlight your selection.

To extend your selection, hold down the right mouse button and drag to either side.
To adjust your selection by single pixels, use the right and left arrow keys.

You can also make a selection by double-clicking on the Sel Time Display Fields and entering the start and end times of the clip you want to select.

Fine-tuning your selection:

Use the zoom tools  to magnify the waveform display. From here, you have greater control over what specific audio is selected.

- Use the Edit menu or the toolbar  to Cut, Copy and Paste selections of sound.
- You can use multiple clipboards for greater versatility in working with your selections by using Set Current Clipboard.
- The Mix Paste  command mixes the audio data on the clipboard starting at the insertion point. This allows for smoother transitions into the audio file. You can experiment with the settings in the Mix Paste dialog box to find the best option for your needs.

To delete or insert silence:

Silence is defined as any audio below a given threshold for a given time period.

To delete silence in an audio file, select part or all of your waveform. Then go to Edit > Delete Silence to define your thresholds. Click OK to delete the silence.

To convert a selection to silence, select the part of the waveform you would like to silence and go to Transform > Silence.

To add silence to an audio file, select your insertion point, then choose Generate > Silence and set a time. This will increase the total time of your audio file.

SPECIAL EFFECTS

You can add special effects to selections of audio by using the Transform menu.

Here are a few options you might find useful:

- Recording Level settings. For good and bad practice, see Appendix 1.
- Noise Reduction reduces unwanted background noise, such as tape hiss or microphone background noise. See Appendix 2.
- Amplitude changes the volume of sound at different points in your audio file. See Appendix 3.
- Delay Effects adds effects like echo, reverb and flanger to simulate an acoustic space for your sound. See Appendix 4.

Cool Edit has a variety of more specialised sound editing tools that are not covered in this guide.

EXPORTING YOUR SOUND

When exporting to MP3, real audio or any other file format:

When you have finished editing, go to File > Save As.

Specify the file format you wish to save as in the Save as Type field.

Click Save.

Your sound is now ready to be broadcast or archived.

EXAMPLE 1

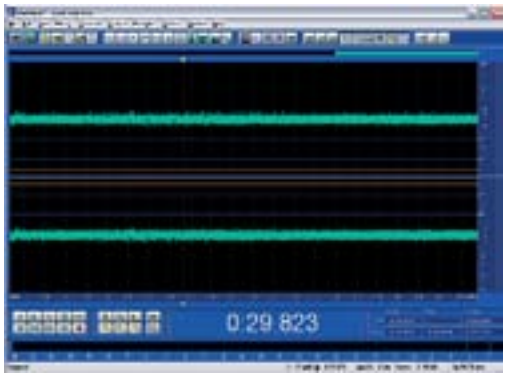
Example of good and bad recording techniques

The green bar is the current sound level, the yellow vertical line is the maximum or peak sound level. You should aim for the sound level to be near to the zero point at the right hand end of the bar, with occasional peaks over the zero point. The green bar changes to red at the zero point. Do not record with the bar being red most of the time, as it will sound distorted. It is easy to increase the level of a recording but not to reduce the distortion in a recording which is at too high a level. See Example 2.

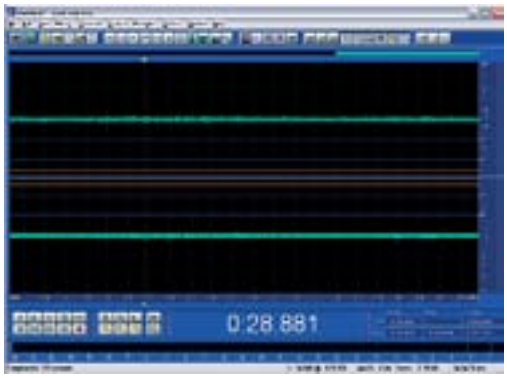
This example has been recorded at too high a level. The tops of the wave form have been cut off and this results in distortion of the sound.

EXAMPLE 2

Example of noise reduction using Cool Edit Pro



Ambient sound of room with air conditioning running



After 50 per cent noise reduction

You can reduce the noise more but you then run the risk of distorting the voices

Interview with air conditioning running

You can see that the smaller sound waves between the words show a significant amount of background noise which will also be heard

during the speech.

Interview after 50 per cent noise reduction

EXAMPLE 3

Example of low level recording being amplified using Cool Edit

This wave form has been recorded at too low a level. By using the amplification tool, you can boost it by whatever dB you wish. In this case, we intend to increase it by 10Db.

You can now see that the entire wave form has been boosted by 10dB.

It is possible to only boost a selected part of the waveform.

In this case we have selected 15.55dB boost

You can clearly see the effect of boosting the selection.

EXAMPLE 4

Example of adding echo to the selection using Cool Edit

We have selected Stereo Vocals 1 in the echo menu.

Although you cannot see the echo, if you look at the two wave forms there is a marked difference between before and after adding echo.

APPENDIX 1

GLOSSARY OF RADIO TERMS

This is a list of words used in radio production. Some may be used in your radio station, others not. But it is always useful to know what terms other radio stations are using if their staff come to you for training, or if you are involved in a co-production.

Audio – means sound. This could be music, words or wildtrack.

Back anno or B/Anno – this is short for a back announcement, the announcement made by the presenter telling people what they have just heard after an interview or piece of music is finished.

Bed – a music bed describes the music running under speech for a prolonged period of time. Most often heard on music stations. If you use music like this, make sure it occasionally comes up to breathe and make sure it doesn't drown the speech.

Bulletin – a series of short news stories coming after the news headlines.

Clip – piece of sound, cut so that it is ready to be broadcast. Can be long or short.

Cue – presenter's introduction to an interview or report.

Donut – item where the reporter "wraps" his or her voice around a clip or sound bite. Sometimes called a wrap.

Drive-time – late afternoon rush-hour period when people are listening in cars. A peak listening time.

Feature – a report with several voices and wildtrack. Also called a package. A feature can be as long as half an hour, or as short as two minutes. It can be topical and news-driven, or it can be reflective, analytical and timeless.

Ident – point in a programme where the station is identified, either through the presenter announcing the station name or though a pre-recorded jingle.

ISDN – high quality line that can link one studio with another, either within a country or internationally. Both studios have to have compatible ISDN facilities to connect.

Jingle – music and voice used to trail programme or advertise a product, usually ten to 20 seconds long.

Level – the volume of sound or audio, the volume of someone's voice at the microphone or in a studio.

Link – another word for a cue.

Mic – short for microphone. Sometimes spelled mike.

Mixing – combining two or more pieces of sound with each other or with a cue.

Off mic – when a person sounds distant because they are not speaking directly into the microphone.

Package – a report with several voices and wildtrack. Also called a feature. Length varies from two minutes to seven minutes.

Popping – caused when an interviewee is too close to the microphone and says a word beginning with the letter "p". Remedy: move the microphone a little further away, or move it down just below the mouth of the interviewee.

Promo – a short piece of audio put out to advertise a forthcoming programme. It can consist of one voice or several voices, plus wildtrack or music. It is not generally longer than 30 seconds. It can be called a trail.

Q & A – short for "Question and Answer". This can also be used to describe an interview.

ROT – short for Recorded Off Transmission. A recording of a programme as it is being broadcast.

Segue – two pieces of sound or audio (voices or music) coming one after another without the presenter intervening with a cue or link.

Slug – word or phrase used to identify an item quickly. It can also be called a catchline.

Sound bite – same as a clip, though generally not longer than 20 seconds.

Sting – burst of music, used to punctuate or break up transmission.

Straight read – news item that consists only of newsreader script.

Top and tail – term for editing the front and end of a piece of sound, so it starts and finishes exactly where it should.

Vox pops – from the Latin "vox populi" which means the voice of the people. A series of quick responses by people out on the street or in a crowd to the same question.

Wildtrack – background noise, specific sounds relating to what the interviewee does (e.g. sound of sawing to go with interview with carpenter).

Wrap – item where the reporter wraps his voice around a clip or sound bite.

APPENDIX 2

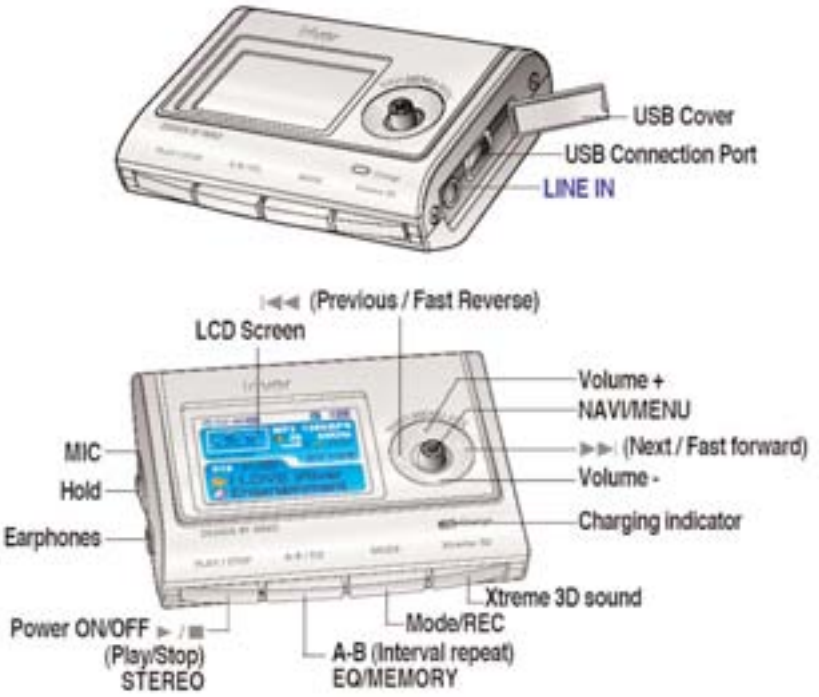
The International News Safety Institute has devised the following safety code.
"The International News Safety Institute is dedicated to the right of all journalists to exercise their profession free from persecution, physical attack and other dangers to life and limb. While recognising that some conditions under which journalists and media staff work never can be completely safe and secure, INSI will strive for the elimination of unnecessary risk, in peace and in war. It will draw on the expertise of its members and supporting organisations to lobby on behalf of working journalists everywhere who embrace the INSI Code of Practice and confront physical or psychological barriers to the free and independent gathering and dissemination of news.

1. The preservation of life and safety is paramount. Staff and freelances equally should be made aware that unwarranted risks in pursuit of a story are unacceptable and strongly discouraged. News organisations are urged to consider safety first, before competitive advantage.
2. Assignments to war and other danger zones must be voluntary and only involve experienced news gatherers and those under their direct supervision. No career should suffer as a result of refusing a dangerous assignment. Editors at base or journalists in the field may decide to terminate a dangerous assignment after proper consultation with one another.
3. All journalists and media staff must receive appropriate hostile environment and risk awareness training before being assigned to a danger zone. Employers are urged to make this mandatory.
4. Employers should ensure before assignment that journalists are fully up to date on the political, physical and social conditions prevailing where they are due to work and are aware of international rules of armed conflict as set out in the Geneva Conventions and other key documents of humanitarian law.
5. Employers must provide efficient safety equipment and medical and health safeguards appropriate to the threat to all staff and freelances assigned to hazardous locations.
6. All journalists should be afforded personal insurance while working in hostile areas, including cover against personal injury and death. There should be no discrimination between staff and freelances.
7. Employers should provide free access to confidential counselling for journalists involved in coverage of distressing events. They should train managers in recognition of post traumatic stress, and provide families of journalists in danger areas with timely advice on the safety of their loved-ones.
8. Journalists are neutral observers. No member of the media should carry a firearm in the course of their work.
9. Governments and all military and security forces are urged to respect the safety of journalists in their areas of operation, whether or not accompanying their own forces. They must not restrict unnecessarily freedom of movement or compromise the right of the news media to gather and disseminate information.
10. Security forces must never harass, intimidate or physically attack journalists going about their lawful business.

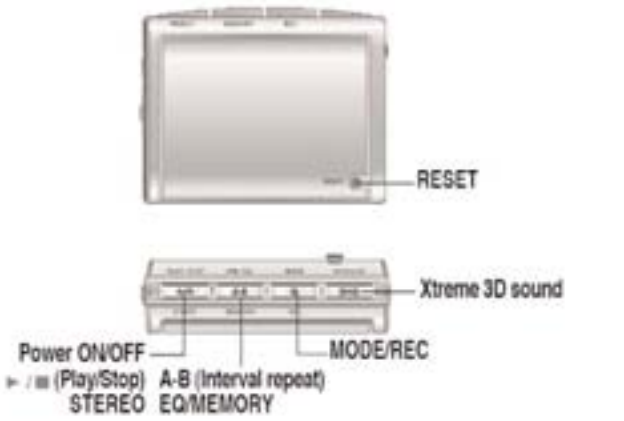
APPENDIX 3 – THE I-RIVER MP3 PLAYER/RECORDER

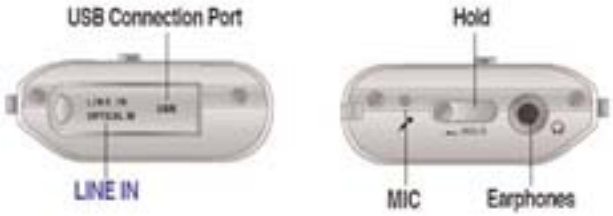
The latest and most useful kind of solid state-recording technology is the MP3 player. MP3 is a solid state player -i.e. no moving parts These are mini-computers, about the size of a small dictaphone, which are mainly used to download music from the internet. However, some models can also be used for recording with a microphone. Recordings made with MP3 player/recorders can be transferred to a computer for editing and transmission. IWPR's Uganda Radio Network project has been using the I-River MP3 player. The following is a full guide to its operation.

Front View

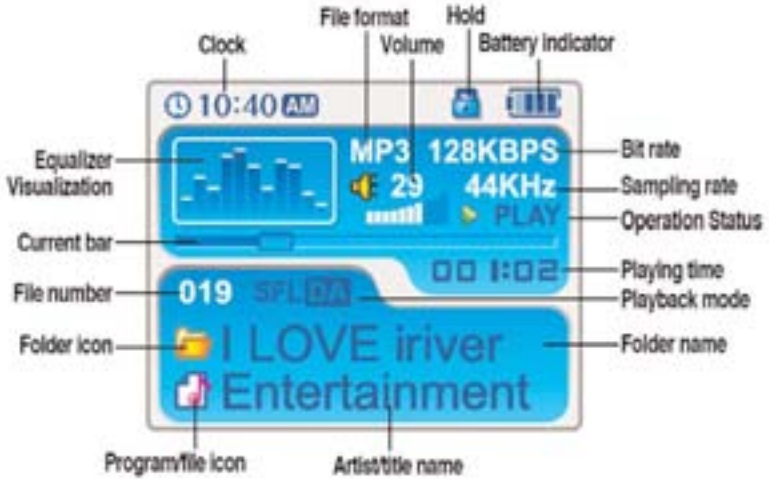


Rear View / Side View



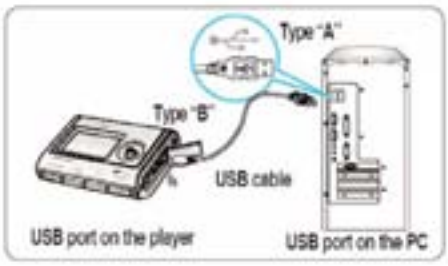


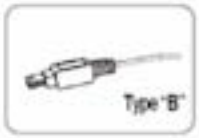
LCD Screen



Connecting to the PC

1 Connect the USB cable (provided) to the USB port of your computer.





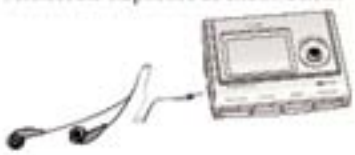
2 Lift the protective cover over the USB port and connect the USB cable to the player.

3 "USB CONNECTED" will appear on the LCD screen of the player.

Note • Connect the USB cable to the PC after playback stops to avoid errors.

Turning on the player

• Connect the earphones as shown below.



• Put the HOLD switch to "OFF".

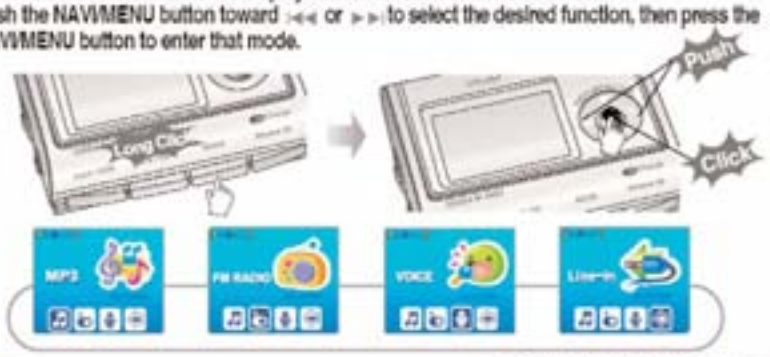
• Press the PLAY/STOP button to turn on the player. The "My Image" appears on the LCD.
• Press PLAY/STOP again to play.

Turning off the player

Press and hold the PLAY/STOP button to turn the player off.

Changing functions

Press and hold **MODE** button to display current function on the **LCD** screen.
Push the **NAVI/MENU** button toward ⏮ or ⏭ to select the desired function, then press the **NAVI/MENU** button to enter that mode.



Adjusting the volume

Push the **NAVI/MENU** button to the **VOL +** direction to increase volume.
Push the **NAVI/MENU** button to the **VOL –** direction to decrease volume.

Recording voice

1 Press and hold the **MODE/REC** button. The current function appears on the **LCD** screen.

2 Press the **NAVI/MENU** button to the ⏮ or ⏭ direction to select Voice mode.
Press the **NAVI/MENU** button (or **PLAY/STOP**) to enter Voice recording mode.
(The recorder will be in standby mode.)

3 Press the **MODE/REC** button and to begin recording.

To pause recording voice

Press the PLAY/STOP button to pause the recording process. Press the PLAY/STOP button again to restart recording.

To stop recording voice

Press the MODE/REC button to stop recording.
Note: After stopping a recording, starting again will create a new voice file.

To play a recorded file

Press the MODE/REC button to stop the current recording.
Press PLAY/STOP to play the recorded file.

Note

- The recorded file is saved as VOICE000.REC in the VOICE folder.
- If "00:00:00" is displayed on the LCD, the player's memory is full. To record, delete files and/or folders on the player to make some space available.(Refer to page 5-3, Software Instruction Manual)
- Keep the player far away enough from the source to avoid distortion in the recording.
- The player can not record when the memory is full or the battery is low.
- Recorded REC files can be converted to MP3 files using iriver Manager. (Refer to Software Instruction Manual)

Preparing Recording from an external audio source

1 Connect the LINE OUT jack of the external equipment to the LINE IN jack of the player.

Note

- To record from an external microphone, change the "Record Type" in the Settings menu. (Refer to page 5-24/5-25)

2 Push and hold the NAVI/MENU button to enter to Setup Menu. Select "Control" by pushing the NAVI/MENU button toward ⏮ or ⏭ direction.

3 Adjust Line-In Recording Mode, Line-In Recording Volume, Line-In Auto-Sync and Line-In/External Mic on Control Menu.
Refer to page 5-24/5-25 for details.

Recording from an external audio source

1 Press and hold the MODE/REC button. The current function appears on the LCD screen.

2 Press the NAVI/MENU button to the ⏮ or ⏭ direction to select Line In mode.
Press the NAVI/MENU button (or PLAY/STOP) to enter recording standby mode.

3 Begin playback on the external device and then press the MODE/REC button on the Iriver player to begin recoding.

To pause recording from the External Source

Press the PLAY/STOP button to pause the recording process. Press the PLAY/STOP button again to restart recording.

To stop recording from the External Source

Press the MODE/REC button to stop recording.

Note

- The recorded file is saved as AUDIO000.REC, AUDIO001.REC... in sequential order. Files are saved in the RECORD folder.
- Files recorded using an external microphone are saved as EXMIC000.REC.

To play a recorded file

1 Press the PLAY/STOP button at stop mode.

2 After pressing the NAVI/MENU button, select a recorded file using the VOL + or VOL - switch.

3 Press the PLAY/STOP button to play.

Customizing the function settings (Menu)

Basic operation

- Press and hold the NAVI/MENU button to display the menu system.
- The MENU system is composed of 6 main menus with sub-menus.

To select Main Menu

1 Push the NAVI/MENU button to the ⏮ or ⏭ direction to select menu.

2 Press the NAVI/MENU button to view the menu contents.

Enter Sub Menu

Push the NAVI/MENU button to the ⏮ or ⏭ (VOL + or VOL -) direction to select sub menu.
Push the NAVI/MENU button to confirm.

You can set, cancel or change sub menu by pushing the NAVI/MENU button toward ⏮, ⏭ or VOL +, VOL -.

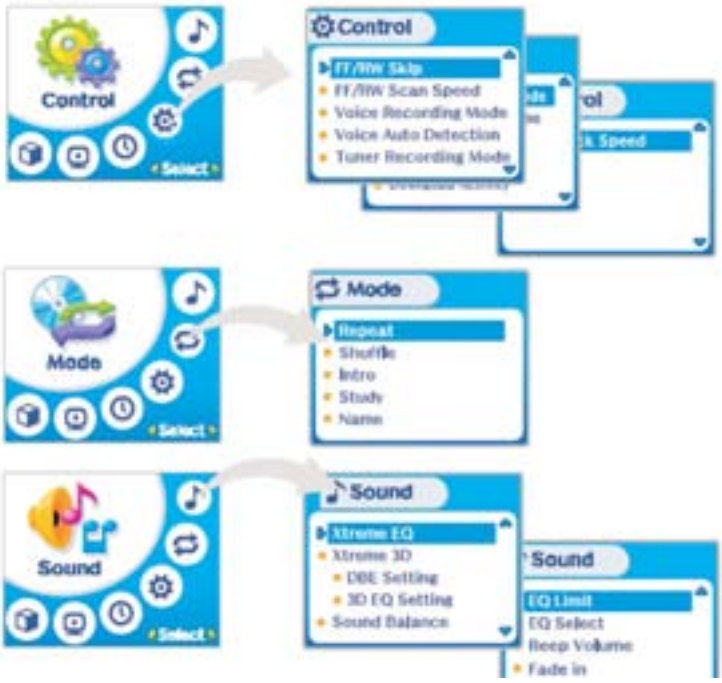
Exit Sub Menu

Press the PLAY/STOP button to return Main MENU at the sub-menu setting.

Exit Main Menu

Press the PLAY/STOP button to exit Main Menu.

Configuration



General

Resume

ON : Playback resumes from the previous location in a song when the player is stopped or powered off.

OFF : Playback begins from the first track after the player is stopped or powered off.

Display

Back Light

You can adjust the time that the Backlight stays on.
Sec : The backlight stays on from 3 to 30 seconds.
Min : The backlight stays on from 1 to 30 minutes.
Always : The backlight turn on always .
Press the NAVI/MENU button to set Sec/Min/Always.

Visualization

During playback, you can display visualizations, the elapsed time of the track, or the free memory on your player.

Waveform ▸ Progressive ▸
Level Meter ▸ Free Space ▸

Time

Normal : display elapsed time.
Remaining : display remaining time.

Note • Time display may not be accurate for files encoded in Variable Bit Rate formats.

Voice Recording Mode

You can adjust recording quality when recording voice.

ON : When recording voice, the recording level is automatically controlled and recordings from long distances are enhanced.
OFF : AGC(Automatic Gain Control) not activated.
Bit Rate : 8Kbps~160Kbps
Sampling Frequency : 11.025KHz ~44.1KHz

Tuner Recording Mode

You can adjust recording quality when recording from the FM Tuner.

Mono : Recorded to Mono sound.
Stereo : Recorded to Stereo sound.
Bit Rate : 8Kbps~320Kbps
Sampling Frequency : 11.025KHz ~44.1KHz

LIVE FROM AFRICA: A Handbook for African Radio Journalists reviews reporting on general, political and human rights issues. It has sections on location recording and computer-based audio editing. It provides guidance on safety and security and sensitive reporting in conflict areas, as well as libel issues. Developed out of the radio journalism workshops that were run as part of IWPR's Uganda Radio Network project, it also reviews the particular requirements for reporting for IWPR.

Each chapter provides exercises, discussion sections and further references. The handbook can either be used in coordination with an international trainer or can be worked through on its own. Additional training material can be found on the IWPR website.

Journalism is about rights but also about responsibilities. In many societies, for the first time in a generation or more, local journalists have the chance to report freely on what is happening in their own country.

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