

# A Broadcast Journalism Unit

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## Introduction

This unit is designed to be included in the one-quarter introductory journalism course that I teach at Wayzata High School. The course, Journalism 1, serves as a prerequisite for Journalism 2, a production course in which students create the school newspaper and a daily, eight-minute news and announcements program, called NewsBreak, which is televised throughout the school. Journalism 1 meets every day for about 85 minutes (4 x 4 block schedule) for nine weeks.

Overall, Journalism 1 covers the basics of news media production as well as news analysis, since many students don't intend to take the production course. They study journalism fundamentals (What is news? What is the purpose of the news media in a democracy? How can bias be detected? etc.), news writing, feature writing, editing, newspaper design, ethics, law and media ownership. In the final unit – described here – students study broadcast journalism. In the last days of the term, we watch and discuss “All the President’s Men” as a summary activity.

In the broadcast unit, all students will need to learn how to analyze broadcast news, having already analyzed print media. Some will also need training to contribute to NewsBreak, which involves writing and performing both live and on videotape. This broadcast unit will include a variety of topics and activities that address the diverse needs of Journalism 1 students.

### *DAY 1: Introduction to Broadcast Journalism & Broadcast Writing*

**Assignment due:** Read Chapter 16 on broadcast journalism in Carole Rich, *Writing and Reporting the News: A Coaching Method* (Wadsworth).

#### **1. Part One, “The Medium is the Message.” [20 minutes]**

- a) Turn on classroom TV (or a prepared videotape) and say a few opening remarks, then turn off the TV. Ask students if they were watching the TV while you were talking (majority = yes). Ask individuals to recall what you were saying. The point: when a TV is on in the room, people automatically watch it and often “zone out” – what does that say for our potential to get in-depth information from TV news?
- b) Turn the TV on again and watch a few minutes of TV news from CNN or CNN Headline News. After a worthy and somewhat detailed story, turn off the TV. Ask students:
  - What do they remember seeing?
  - What do they remember hearing? Press them for details. If the report states that gas prices will increase, ask them by how much ... and why?
  - Were all the images useful for understanding the story? If not, why were they used?

[Possible addition: Ask students to do a media ethnography, watching their family watch TV news and interviewing them.]

- c) Turn the news on again. Time two or three stories to get an average (probably 20 or 30 seconds per story). Ask a student to read an article aloud from the front page of a newspaper. Stop him or her after 30 seconds. Show the class that only two or three inches of text can be read in 30 seconds, whereas a front-page newspaper article continues for another 15 or 20 inches.... What's the difference (pros and cons) between print and broadcast journalism? Review concept of "news cycle" – breaking news is usually communicated today on TV, while news analysis is increasingly relegated to print. Although TV is a visual medium, TV news still requires writing – how must broadcast journalism be *written* to be effective?

## 2. Writing News for Broadcast [20 minutes]

Use the following overhead to give a brief lecture:

Writing broadcast news

1. Keep it short and simple (subject – verb – object).

*Police have arrested a suspect....*

- Cut out unnecessary words.
- Use active voice, not passive.
- *Students were dismissed early today by schools...*
- *Schools dismissed students early today...*
- Avoid long introductory or parenthetical phrases.
- Be conversational, when appropriate.

2. Attributions go at or near the beginning.

- *The nation's unemployment rate will drop this year, Bush said.*
- *Bush claimed that the nation's unemployment rate would drop this year.*

3. Remember: the audience cannot see the text!

*The mayor said, "I need to take off some weight."*

The mayor said he needs to take off some weight.

(Use your voice and facial expression to signal a quote.)

*The mayor said he would... "hit the weights" ...next week.*

~~Ticketmaster said that they can't refund tickets.~~

Ticketmaster said that they canNOT refund tickets.

4. Make the script easy to read.

... *a budget deficit of 22-Billion dollars* ....

... with the addition of Sam Cah-SELL, the Timberwolves...

5. Story order signals priority (1<sup>st</sup> = lead story).

Group related stories together.

Miscellaneous notes:

- scripts are typed large (like this: 18 pt.)
- text is one narrow column, double-spaced
- direction cues are written in the large margin
- text is marked by hand to aid verbal expression
- number pages just in case...
- broadcast pieces are brief (15-30 seconds) and timed closely

**3. Part Three: Connect with the textbook.** [5-10 minutes]

— Discuss its tips on writing

— Look at exercises at the end of the chapter, such as the following....

**4. Part Four: Practice writing.**

Review writing standards for “hard news” in newspapers (5 W’s + H, inverted pyramid, summary leads, etc.).

Distribute newspapers. Have students practice translating newspaper articles into broadcast reports. Limit stories to 20 or 30 seconds when read aloud. Ask students to consider the function of each sentence. End by having a few students read their stories for the class.

**5. Homework: Comparing TV and Newspaper writing** [*Due on Day 2*]

a) Obtain the text of two broadcast news reports. This can be done a couple of ways:

- Watch and videotape tonight’s news broadcast from ABC, CBS or NBC (5:30 pm) or CNN or CNN Headline News.
- Go to CNN’s transcript page (<http://www.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/>), click on a news reporting show (not analysis or commentary) and find stories. Or use the link that says, “Click here for breaking news transcripts,” which often provides what you’ll be looking for.

*Choose stories featuring only a reading by the anchor and possibly a video clip with quotes (not an interview with a special analyst or with a reporter on the scene). [Note: The writing for NewsBreak is for anchors only and does not feature remote links with reporters or live interviews, which are more complex.]*

- b) Copy and paste the text for the two stories into a word-processing file, such as MS Word.
- c) For each broadcast report, find an article on the same topic on the website of a major daily newspaper, such as *The New York Times* or *Washington Post*. Copy and paste the text into your file but on a separate page. You should have one page with broadcast text for two stories (shrink to fit – single-space, 10-pt. text is fine), and one or two separate pages of newspaper text.
- d) Compare the two versions of each story:
  - Use the word-count feature to compare the lengths of each version (the newspaper article should be much longer).
  - Compute the average length in words of the first five sentences of each story (newspaper sentences should be much longer).
  - Note the sentence structure of each (newspaper sentences should be more complicated, often departing from the basic subject-verb-object structure).
  - Note the use of attributions (the broadcast sentences should begin with attributions, while the newspaper sentences should end with them, if they're included).
- e) Write a summary paragraph for each story based on your observations.

## ***DAY 2: Broadcast Writing and Marking Scripts***

### **1. Part One: Review basics of broadcast writing (3 minutes)**

### **2. Part Two: Analyze a broadcast text together (20 minutes)**

Eleven more American troops were killed in Iraq this weekend alone. Those deaths bring the total number of U.S. troop deaths in Iraq to 700. Most were killed after President Bush declared an end to major combat. The U.S. administrator in Iraq, Paul Bremer, says Iraqi forces will not be ready to fight insurgents alone by the June 30 hand over date. That means a large number of U.S. troops will remain in Iraq.

— CNN (4/19/04)

In the story above, each sentence has a clear function:

- #1: Reports key fact in story – recent deaths.
- #2: Puts number in context – total deaths.
- #3: Highlights ironic fact – the real struggle is ongoing.
- #4: Reports related fact – U.S. leadership believes struggle won't end soon.

#5: Explain consequence of this fact – U.S. troops must stay there.

When you write a story for broadcast, try to break it down into clear ideas, expressed in simple sentences. Now try to rewrite this newspaper article in broadcast style, using five brief sentences:

Weakened by the heat and a mile-long sprint to the finish, Catherine Ndereba had to receive her winner's medal and olive wreath in a wheelchair. As for the traditional bowl of beef stew, she took a pass. It was much too hot for that.

Ndereba won the Boston Marathon for the third time Monday, running together with Elfenesh Alemu for 10 miles before sprinting away in Kenmore Square to finish in 2 hours, 24 minutes, 27 seconds. The 16-second margin of victory matched the closest in the history of the women's event.

"Toward the finish, I felt like I was dead," said Ndereba, who collapsed to the pavement at the finish line, where it was 85 degrees. "All of the sudden, I had all those cramps and I could not stand.... The heat was too tough. So I was going out there knowing I had to run very smart."

Timothy Cherigat won the men's race in 2:10:37 to complete a Kenyan sweep. He broke away from Robert Cheboror right before Heartbreak Hill to win by 1:12 as Kenyan men took the first four spots and six of the first seven. A Kenyan man has won 13 of the last 14 Boston Marathons, and the country is so deep at the distance that Cherigat is not on the Olympic team despite winning the world's oldest and most prestigious annual marathon.

"It is sad because the team has already been chosen," he said. "I will wait for my time, and it will come."

— Associated Press (4/19/04)

### 3. Part Three: Writing practice/homework check (20 minutes)

- a) Students take out their homework assignments and exchange them with a partner, who reads the newspaper versions of the two stories and tries to write a brief broadcast version of each. Then they compare their version with the broadcast text from CNN, ABC, etc.
- b) Meanwhile, the teacher circulates to check homework. (I initial homework that is completed on the due date; I collect and grade it all at the end of the unit.)
- c) Review a few stories with the class and discuss observations made while doing the assignment.

### 4. Part Four: Marking a script (20 minutes)

- a) Distribute a handout with several brief broadcast scripts.
  - text exercises available in *Broadcast Voice Handbook* by Ann Utterback
  - sample broadcast copy marked for delivery available in *Writing Broadcast News* by Mervin Block
- b) Explain how scripts can be marked to indicate pauses, intonation and emphasis.

- c) Demonstrate how a sentence would sound if marked in different ways.
- d) Ask students to analyze scripts, mark them up and practice reading them.

**Homework:** Read articles on risk and do assigned tasks – due Day 3. [Use remaining time.]

Ropeik, David. “Journalists can be seduced by aspects of risk.” *Nieman Reports*, Winter 2002, p. 51.

— Summarize major points in one paragraph.

Ropeik, David. “Understanding factors of risk perception.” *Nieman Reports*, Winter 2002, p. 52.

— List 3 things (not in article) we don’t fear enough and 3 things we fear too much.

Glasser, Barry. “The fate of false fears.” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 26, 2001, pp. B16-18.

— Summarize major points in one paragraph.

### **Day 3: Media Analysis & Broadcast Writing**

#### **Part One: Media Analysis**

- a) Review homework (10 minutes)

Q: *Is the news media guilty of fear-mongering? Sensationalism?*

Reminder: Top journalistic priorities are accuracy and fairness; blowing a story out of proportion is a failure to report with accuracy.

Discuss readings and how understanding concepts helps one view the media critically.

- b) Watch “Newsroom” clip (10 minutes)

Q: *Is broadcast news superficial?*

Play clip from the CBC comedy series “The Newsroom” — Toronto is threatened by an imminent nuclear power-plant meltdown, and the local TV news director is concerned with production values (music, graphics) rather than actual news coverage.

- c) Check websites for the contents of primetime news programs and news “magazines” (10 min)

Q: *Are stories legitimate or sensationalized?*

Teacher leads investigation with large-screen display:

— Use The Tyndall Report (<http://www.tyndallreport.com/>) for network news coverage

— Use program websites to check news magazines

ABC: <http://www.abcnews.go.com/sections/2020/index.html> (“20/20”)

NBC: <http://www.dateline.msnbc.com> (“Dateline”)

CBS: <http://www.cbsnews.com/sections/home/main100.shtml>

(“48 Hours,” “60 Minutes,” “60 Minutes II”)

**Related homework:** Local TV news analysis (10 minutes for explanation) *Due on Day 6.*

(I intend to create a viewing log handout to simplify this assignment.)

Fill out a viewing log while watching a broadcast for four local TV news broadcasts (WCCO, KSTP, FOX-9 and KARE). Try to watch at the same time (early evening, 6:00; or late, 9:00 or 10:00). Students with a VCR could do this on two nights by twice watching one channel and taping another.

Viewing logs should include the time allotted for each story, story type & content. Note any aspects of the story that are stressed to make it seem important or urgent. Also note any attention-getting techniques (“live,” “breaking news,” “continuing coverage,” on-scene reporting, etc.). Also note the time consumed by ads and which products are advertised.

Write a summary for each broadcast, noting the total time given for local news, national/international news, entertainment, miscellaneous features (consumer news, investigative reports), weather, sports and ads. Finally, summarize your impressions of the broadcast – did you find it informative, relevant, sensational, superficial...?

### **Part Two: Broadcast performance**

- a) Measure your reading rate (10 minutes)

Use reading-rate exercise found in *Broadcast Voice Handbook* by Ann Utterback.

- b) Create a news broadcast (35 minutes) *Due Day 4 (tomorrow).*

Groups of four create a four-minute newscast using stories from a daily newspaper.

Determine roles: 2 anchors for national/international/local news, sports, on-site reporter

Each person writes their own script: two stories, each 30-seconds long.

**Homework:** Read your own script aloud, repeatedly. Tape yourself reading it (preferably on video, but audio is fine) and watch or listen to your tape. Try it again.

### **Day 4:**

#### **Part One: Broadcast performance**

- a) Group broadcasts. (45 minutes)

Add complexity by having second group serve as floor director + 3 cameras; floor director indicates which camera person should look at while reading.

b) Summary discussion (10 minutes)

### **Part Two: Create a Public Service Announcement (PSA)**

a) Read article & discuss: (15 minutes)

Dewan, Shaila K. "The New Public Service Ad: Just Say 'Deal With It.'" *New York Times*. January 11, 2004.

b) Introduce homework: Create your own PSA. (15 minutes) *Due Day 6*.

In media studies, much attention is given to the potentially negative effects of advertising. There are, however, some positive ads, and one type is the public service announcement, or PSA. For this assignment, students will create a 30-second PSA. If equipment is available, they could film their PSAs and show them to the class. If there's no equipment, they can make PSA storyboards and present them to the class. Each person will be graded on one PSA, but students are allowed and encouraged to help each other.

The main source of PSAs in America is the Ad Council ([www.adcouncil.org](http://www.adcouncil.org)), which offers students tips for how to make a good PSA. They also can apply tips from "How to Create Your Own Print Ad" on the Adbusters website (<http://adbusters.org/spoofads/printad/>), since the Adbusters information (choosing an objective, audience, format, concept, visuals and copy) applies easily to a TV ad as well.

Instructions on the Adbusters site involve the following steps:

1. Choose a topic.
2. Decide on your communication objective.
3. Decide on your target audience.
4. Decide on your format.
5. Develop your concept.
6. Develop visuals.
7. Write a slogan.
8. Write the copy.

### **Day 5:**

1. Work on PSAs.
2. Reserve time in the computer lab to check Ad Council and Adbusters websites.

**Day 6:**

1. Collect unit homework
2. PSA presentations

**Unit scoring:**

<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Points</b>
Comparing TV and newspaper writing	10
Risk articles	10
Local TV news analysis	10
Broadcast performance	10
Public Service Announcement	20

*Note: The typical assignment in this course is worth 5 points, so these assignments have relatively high point values.*