

Targets: I can explain the common words used in parts of a radio script. I can explain effective techniques to use when writing a radio script.

Writing a Radio Script

By Dave Gilson

Writing for radio is different than writing for print. You're writing for the ear, not the eye. Listeners have to get it the first time around- they can't go back and hear it again (unlike re-reading a sentence in a magazine). And while a reader may get up and come back to an article, a radio listener who gets up may not come back. **So you want to grab their attention** and hold onto it for as long as possible.

Starting to Write

As you start writing your script, you first need to have a good idea what your story's going to sound like. You've picked your topic and done some research. You've listened to all the clips and ambiance, maybe selected some music. Basically, you already have all the elements floating around in your head. Start writing your script by laying out all your cuts in the order you think you're going to use them. Then start writing your narration around them.

Telling a Story

As you write your narration, try to tell a story with a beginning, middle, and end. Draw listeners into the story by setting a scene, raising a question, playing a weird noise, or introducing a character. Use narrative elements like foreshadowing, suspense, and scene changes to move the story along.

A few aesthetic considerations to keep in mind as you write your script:

Be conversational. Your narration should sound as natural as possible, like you're telling a story to a friend. This is not the same as trying to imitate spontaneous speech. Instead, this means writing in a style that sounds as relaxed as possible. Use phrases and words you normally use. When you read your narration aloud, do you sound like yourself?

Be visual. Give your listeners a chance to imagine the people, places and things in your story. Create a sense of scene; describe people; include interesting sounds. Avoid a story that's just a series of talking heads or facts.

Be concise. Long sentences usually don't work too well in radio (but there are exceptions). Mix up your sentence structure. It's surprisingly easy to fill 3 or 4 minutes of airtime- so don't overwrite.

Be energetic. Use the active voice. Use punchy verbs and contractions. Mind your tenses – don't switch back and forth between past and present. Most radio stories are done in present tense. Some exceptions include commentaries, and news stories about past events.

Be experimental. Add music underneath voice.

Name_____Date_____Sequence_____

Acts and Tracks

Some common words to describe parts of a radio script

Tracks or trax: the reporter's narration

Actualities or acts or ax: the words of other people

Ambience or ambi; also called nat (natural) or wild sound: all other sounds

Label each actuality "ACT". Note who's talking. Actualities are usually distinguished from narration with boldface, italics, capitalization, indentation, or some combination of these.

Label each track of your narration "TRX" or "TRK". Note how long it takes for you to read it. Use parentheses or brackets to note when ambience (labeled "AMB" or "AMBI") or music is playing. The more specifics about how this sound will be used, the better. This will help your editor and will remind you what to do when you're mixing the final version.

Give the phonetic spelling of hard-to-pronounce words and names in parentheses after the name.

Note the estimated length of the entire story at the top of the script. A rough rule of thumb to use: one page of single-spaced script usually corresponds to a minute and a half to two minutes of produced tape.

The Tufted Titmouse
by Ms. Colella
Total Running Time: 1 minute

AMBI: Call of Titmouse & Melodic music with bird sound in background.

ACT

Rick: That's a cool bird call. What is it?

AMBI: Call of Titmouse

ACT

Elaine: That's the **Tuft-ed** Titmouse!

Rick: I see it. It looks like a small Card-in-al, but it's gray.

Elaine: Yah! Look at his pointed crest at the top of his head. That's called a **t-u-f-t**.

AMBI: Call of Titmouse

ACT

Rick: Look, he is taking a seed from the bird feeder!

Elaine: Oh! He is feeding it to a smaller bird that looks like him. Do you think it is the baby?

Rick: I think it is!

Elaine: It's cool to see birds taking care of each other.

AMBI: Call of Titmouse

TRAXS

Elaine: **Tuft-ed** Titmouse love to eat sunflower seeds. Be sure to keep your feeder full of sunflower seeds in order to catch glimpses of these acrobatic tree foragers. You'll be able to see them break open the seeds with their beaks as they hold them steady with their feet. The Titmouse is a crafty bird!

AMBI: Call of Titmouse & Melodic music with bird sound in background.

Sounds of the Titmouse provided by The Cornell Lab of Ornithology.