

BROADCAST WRITING

You might argue it's about words. You could contend it's conceptual. You may claim it's an art or an in-borne talent. Perhaps you'd say it doesn't matter. What is "it"? "It" is **broadcast writing**, and it's really not as complex as it may seem. It's simply a communicative process. It's a process so unique that Andy Rooney once said, "No one speaks as he writes or writes as he speaks; writing for broadcast is a compromise between the two." It *is* unique but it *can* be learned. How? The same way you'd develop other skills – by repetition ... by practice ... by learning the rules and applying them until they become second nature – but never assumed. That's where this style guide comes in. It's designed to be your guide to improve your broadcast writing skills. Consider this a formal **welcome** to the wonderful world of broadcast writing!

WRITING FOR THE EAR

David Brinkley once said that the ear is the least effective way to receive information. We may read well, and we may even receive the information we read well, but we're terrible listeners. Listening is a totally different way to receive information. As a broadcast writer, your challenge is to format that information for your listeners' ear so they can understand it the first – and most likely only – time they'll hear it.

Note: Beware of "it"! It may be a vague pronoun!

Note: Look closely at Jefferson's quote. Can you find four words to edit out without changing the meaning?

THE SIX "CS"

To help ensure you can successfully communicate using broadcast copy, you must learn and apply the six "Cs": **clear, concise, conversational, complete, current, and correct.**

CLEAR:

You must ensure your audience understands your copy the first time they hear it. Your listener cannot go back and read it. Work at writing in a simple, understandable style; write to express an idea, not to impress your audience. Basically limit sentences to one main thought. Don't make your listener work to understand your copy. Most won't bother.

CONCISE:

Broadcast copy is short. You must learn to express many thoughts in few words. Thomas Jefferson once said, "The most valuable of all talent is that of never using two words when one will do." Get to the main point. Use only essential words. Eliminate wordiness. Make your point and move on. It's kind of frustrating to read wordy, redundant copy, isn't it?

CONVERSATIONAL: We basically "converse" using simple, common language. Why not *write* "for the ear" in the same style? Write a story much the same way you'd tell it to a friend. But, don't forget our Andy Rooney quote from the previous page.

COMPLETE: Your copy must answer the five Ws (who, what, when, where, and why), except, perhaps, "why." That may be unknown at airtime. But don't raise new questions or leave old questions unanswered.

CURRENT: Current copy is timely copy – both in content and the way it sounds. Last week's events, accidents, and incidents are not today's news. One way you can make your copy *sound* much more timely is by using (but not forcing) one of the present verb tenses whenever it's possible (and correct).

CORRECT: The hallmark of journalism as a writing art - either print or broadcast - is the accurate presentation of facts. Your finished product must correspond accurately with the facts of the story. In the field you will follow every possible lead to get the facts as well as report them.