

A2 LEVEL
FACT FILES
Journalism

For first teaching from September 2013

For first AS award in Summer 2014

For first A Level award in Summer 2015

Radio News Bulletins



journalism

in the Media and Communications Industry (JMC)



Learning Outcomes

Students should be able to:

- Analyse and evaluate the following range of broadcast story types/items: - broadcast radio and TV Feature packages and bulletins



Content

Language, Forms and Conventions on Online, Print and Broadcast Journalism (page 13, specification)

A typical news bulletin is 3 minutes long, as is the case for BBC Northern Ireland, though this will be shorter for commercial radio stations such as Cool FM (usually 2'30).

At other times, such as peak listening times, news bulletins are longer, going to 5 minutes for commercial radio and more than 5 minutes at times for the BBC.

Peak listening times are generally 8am, 1pm, 5pm and 6pm for radio.



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When faced with structuring a radio news bulletin, many factors need to be taken into account:

1. News Judgement

The first factor that needs to be considered is 'What is news?' (page 13, specifications)

News is something that is new, so you would generally add the newest item to the top of the bulletin.

For example:

"It's just been announced that the Pope has resigned..."

Usually death or a serious accident will lead a local news bulletin.



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For example:

"Two members of one family have died in an accident in Armagh..."

The position of this top story will change in the running order, depending on what else happens in the news and what audio clips are available to use to keep the listening public interested and informed about the story.

2. Newsworthiness

The item might be new but is it interesting for the local audience?

Commercial stations such as Cool FM, Downtown Radio, U105 and City Beat, the Q network radio stations are all local and therefore the first item, generally in commercial radio bulletins is of **local interest**.

Journalists talk about the **Top Story** – that means the story that leads the bulletin, the story that has everyone, or most people interested in it.



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For example:

“3 people have been injured in a pipe bomb attack in Antrim” would lead over **“3 people have been injured in a car crash in England”** in Northern Ireland, unless of course, the three people injured in England happen to be on holiday from Northern Ireland.

Once the Top Story has run twice, usually in Commercial radio, then it may go further down the running order of the bulletin, depending on what else is happening in the news. **The running order** is the order in which the stories are broadcast, usually starting with the most serious story and ending with a lighter story, a sport story or the weather or indeed all three of them.

In BBC local radio, the Top Story, may not necessarily lead with something local as they have a different remit. Their lead may be something of national interest. However, BBC Northern Ireland will also want to appeal to their local audience too and often do lead with a local story.

The Top Story – can be added to and rewritten, and can have audio added to it from different sources to keep it fresh.

3. Who is your audience?

As a broadcaster, you need to know the audience your station is broadcasting to. You need to broadcast to those who are listening. Your top story is the story that most of your listeners will be interested in.

For example at Cool FM, the age target range is between 16 and 40; for Downtown Radio, the target audience average age is 50. The music and news on offer is different according to the different audiences.



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4. Politics and showing both sides of an argument

In Northern Ireland and especially in commercial stations, there is a gradual move away from reporting political stories for their own sake.

During the Troubles, between 1968 – 1998, murders and bombs were common.

Now, there is a different slant on news. Yes, there are still bomb scares and dissident republican attacks but there is a focus now on doing stories on the people who are affected by such acts.

For example, what are the effects on the people during a bomb scare in a residential area? Evacuations, people having to leave their homes, people unable to go to work. It's the same with politics. A politician might decide to close a school to save money, but what impact will this have on the local population who may have to travel longer to get to another school. The costs involved, etc?

Another example is if the government closes the A&E department of Belfast City Hospital – how does that decision impact on the people who live nearby?

If it is a dispute, between two political parties, or two organisations, you must always include both sides of the story.

Here's an example: The Directors of the Royal Hospital in Belfast say there are enough beds to deal with all patients. However, a doctor who works there, disputes this fact – give his name and if possible a soundbite/ audio clip of the doctor saying this.

You can either use this fact as a line of copy in your bulletin or use an audio clip where the person says it.

5. Writing Style

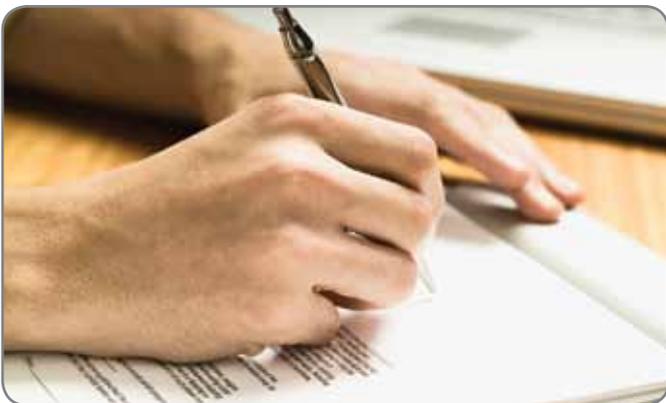
Use short and simple words in your bulletins. Depending on the radio station and time of the bulletin, you potentially only have three sentences to tell a story to your audience, unless you have an audio clip. Remember that people are likely to be doing things, while they listen to the radio, such as driving to work, looking after children etc. Don't rush your news. Read in a way to ensure you can be understood. Avoid using abbreviations such as the HET (Historical Enquiries Team). Don't assume listeners will know what the HET is.

6. Rewrite your news often

Some people will listen to several bulletins in a day, others to just one or two but they should always be rewritten with new audio or new information to keep the listener informed. The story develops as the day moves on.

An early morning house fire in West Belfast will bring stories about the blaze, the heroic firefighters and any injuries or fatalities.

By the afternoon the focus may be on the identities of the fatalities or the family of the victims. Rewriting is an essential part of a journalist's work.



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For example:

At 8am a burning house story might read like this:

"Fire-fighters are desperately trying to reach a family trapped inside their burning West Belfast home."

At 1pm the script might read:

"A couple plucked to safety from their burning home speak about their nightmare ordeal."

At 5pm the script might read:

"A couple, rescued from their burning home say they've nothing left but the clothes they're wearing."

If you are the reporter, use descriptive words. Remember you are the listener's ears and eyes. Describe what you are seeing and tell the listeners.

7. Using audio

Just as scripts have to be reworked, so too does audio. Use the audio clip in different ways to keep it sounding fresh. For one bulletin use it as one longer piece; for another cut it in two and cue it in differently.

If you are setting a scene for a news story, make sure there are sound effects in it to make it appear more credible. For example, if you're covering a court case, stand outside the court on the roadside where cars can be heard going past. If you're covering a protest, make sure you have a crowd making noise in your report. Audio and sound effects make your bulletins more interesting to listen to.



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8. Check what you've written is editorially and legally correct

If you're naming someone in court, you must give their correct name when you broadcast. That is why middle names of people convicted in court are given to ensure that while there might well be two John Browns living in Craigavon, there may only be one person called John Michael Brown.

9. Check with your editor about the style of writing in your workplace

Many news bulletins end with a weather report or a showbiz story or sport. Check which is the case in your station. Most people are interested in the weather report; indeed many of the listening public listen to the news for the weather report and will be disappointed if they don't get one!

10. Always check and rewrite anything you're not happy with

Read your copy out loud, because hearing it helps you make sense of it or not. Always ask a colleague to read it too.



Suggested Exercise

Below you will find a selection of headline stories from one day in NI. **Arrange six of these stories into a running order for a local radio bulletin. Explain your reasons for inclusion and order of priority.**

1. Pet dogs injured in bomb attack
2. Parades chief says Police need to arrest those responsible for illegal marches
3. Children hurt in school bus crash
4. Pope Benedict resigns
5. Irish actor wins an Oscar
6. Sex offender jailed for murder and rape of Southern Ireland Vet
7. Human remains discovered at a building site in North Belfast
8. Antrim-born Church leader stands down amid allegations
9. Man pleads guilty to murder of Northern Ireland born journalist
10. Weather update
11. Liam Neeson gets the Freedom of the Borough in Ballymena
12. Ryan Giggs gets his contract extended to play at the age of 40

Well? How did you do?

Here's a Suggested Structure for the above news stories for a 3 minute bulletin for a commercial radio station such as Cool FM:

Each word takes about 3 seconds to say, so for an average 3 minute bulletin you'll need on average of **540 words** in total for your bulletin (that includes audio clips too).

Most bulletins of 3 minutes have 5/6 stories in them.

A typical story in a radio bulletin is only **three sentences long**, or as journalists say, **3 paras long**.

A possible running order may include the following:

1. The Top Story – (injuries or death usually lead in a bulletin) Children hurt in school bus crash
2. Pet dogs injured in Belfast bomb attack
3. Parades chief says Police need to arrest those responsible for illegal marches
4. Ryan Giggs gets contract extended at 40
5. Liam Neeson gets the Freedom of the Borough in Ballymena
6. Weather update

Here's a typical outline of copy stories from some of the above headlines, for a typical broadcast at COOL FM.

1. **Top Story: Children hurt in school bus crash** (remember, if it bleeds, it leads – usually).

A bus carrying fourteen children with Special Needs has tipped over on its side, in a road accident in Omagh. Eight children had to be taken to hospital.

Early reports say that because the children were all wearing their seatbelts, their injuries are not thought to be life-threatening.

2. **Pet dogs injured in Belfast bomb attack**

A woman whose two family pets were seriously injured in a pipe bomb attack on her home, has said her family is lucky to be alive.

Mother of three, Aoife Sweeney suffered extensive cuts and bruises to her legs when the device exploded on the doorstep of her home in north Belfast.

The family's dog Kitty had her paw blown off while their other pet, Doodles, a poodle, suffered a broken jaw.

3. Parades chief says Police need to arrest those responsible for illegal march

Pressure is mounting against the PSNI to act against an illegal flag march that's to be staged in Belfast on Saturday.

After weeks of silence, Peter Osborne, the Chair of the Parades Commission, says that anyone who has not asked permission from the police to hold a march is doing so illegally. He says that it is therefore the responsibility of the police to do something about it.

Audio clip of Peter Osborne

4. Ryan Giggs gets contract extended at 40

(Most people know Ryan Giggs but for COOL FM listeners especially, this is a typical, popular story. Listeners would want to know more!)

A Premiership footballer has had his contract extended to beyond his fortieth birthday.

Ryan Giggs made his debut for Manchester United when he was nineteen years old, being compared to a young George Best.

He never left the club making him one of the few footballers in history to work this long and for one club.

5. Liam Neeson gets the Freedom of the Borough in Ballymena

(A showbiz story with a local angle is also a typical COOL FM story but also appealing to a BBC Radio Ulster or Downtown Radio listener.

Again, most people know who Liam Neeson is and would want to know more about this – draw in your audience!)

A County Antrim Actor who says he was an ambassador for Northern Ireland was given another award to add to his acting achievements.

Ballymena man, Liam Neeson flew into his home town this morning to be granted the freedom of the Borough.

He was welcomed by family and friends he grew up with in the county Antrim town, before he became a famous Hollywood actor.

6. Weather update

(Most radio stations such as BBC Radio Ulster, Cool FM, the Q network and indeed most radio stations UK wide would include a weather update unless it is a music station only)

A dry day with pleasant sunshine across most parts. Winds will be light.

The top temperature... 10 degrees



Suggested reading

www.bbc.co.uk/bbcschoolreport

McNae's Essential Law for Journalists

