

Some genres and forms of presentation common in radio

Factual reports

These come in various sizes and shapes, for example,

- **short news items or announcements**

- **news reports**

- **background items.**

They may treat things that have happened in the past, are happening right now, or will happen soon. What is common to all factual reports is that they contain reliable, objective information rather than subjective personal opinions. So they have to be researched carefully. Possible sources are: archives, press articles (in newspapers or on the internet), background interviews with persons who know a lot about the topic. It is part of the journalist's responsibility to make sure that these sources are accurate. And, as in private discourse, there are some limits to what discretion permits: personal information (although it may be fact) about private individuals can't be used on the radio without permission.

Even when you stick entirely to the facts, you as a journalist are still bringing in your personal perspective, since you are the one to decide what topics will be reported on. In community media, you have the option of reporting on themes that other media often ignore. When handling controversial topics, it is a good technique to separate your material into a number of items. This way, you can present factual background in one item, and personal opinions and perspectives (of interview partners, or of your own) in others items.

Usually, new reports are scripted in advance and presented (read) by the journalist. It is also possible to include recorded material in news items, for example, a quote of something that was said publicly – since this is a fact. However, as soon as the journalist begins to interpret events or put them into a certain personal perspective, we depart the realm of the factual and enter the field of individual opinion. On the radio, it has to be made clear whose opinion is being given. There are a variety of forms available for this, and they involve different blends of fact and opinion.

Personal perspectives

These are what make radio such an interesting medium: you get impressions of individuals, their life situations, their experience, interests and opinions. News and events take on a more personal dimension and significance. For this to work, it is essential to understand whose opinion or perspective is being presented at any given time. Since listening to the radio is not like reading a book or a newspaper – where you can look back to see who is being quoted – it is important to mention names, if possible more than once, and to associate them with the voices being heard.

Journalistic interview – in this situation, you are in the role of the host who gives another person, the guest, an invitation to speak out on a particular topic. Your job is to serve as a link between the guest and the listeners, not to sound your own opinions (see additional handout on preparing interviews)

Portraits and life stories – this concentrates more on a person and her or his life experience than on a particular factual topic (see additional handout on interviews that tell life stories). Carrying on this type of conversation on the radio can be a way of promoting understanding, reducing social barriers, preserving local or personal history and experience. Personal anecdotes and reflections make for good listening.

Discussion – (often carried on live with studio guests) here, the conversation may be more open, meaning more space for an exchange of facts and opinions between you as host and your guest(s).

All of these forms require good preparation and research on the topics. Interviews and talk can be broadcast live or pre-produced, but life stories are generally not handled in a live situation (better to record in advance).

In the above forms, one person is in the centre of attention with their knowledge, their impressions and opinions, or their personality and personal history. There is also a genre in which things work the other way around:

Vox-pop – a number of persons are asked the same (short) question, usually it is a matter of opinion. It is important that the question be well-formulated and be placed in about the same manner to each person. When the statements have been recorded, they need to be edited, which requires time and access to equipment. The order in which they were recorded is more or less accidental, and usually they are re-sorted into a kind of ‘collage’ of opinions. In re-arranging the material, voices and opinions can be set in contrast to one another. It is best to listen closely to the recorded answers and prepare a written plan for editing them.

Package – in this (usually short) form of presentation, you combine facts you have researched with statements you have recorded in interviews with individuals, and you may also add in recorded atmosphere (like everyday sounds associated with your topic) or even music. Production involves a good deal of planning and a number of work steps, but can be very worthwhile because this gives your reporting a personal dimension: who is behind the news, or who is affected by the news, and how? You are giving them the opportunity to speak (not emphasizing your own opinions).

Feature – the elements are similar to those in a package: you may include voices of those you have interviewed, atmospheric sounds, and texts you have scripted yourself. A feature is generally a longer item, and is more personal than a package, something like a short ‘film’ that has a story to it – a story that you think is worth telling.

Scripted talk (can also be live) – this is a form of narrative reporting, it can be short or long, it depends on your topic. It’s about carefully observing some scene, process, or event (however small) and presenting it in your own words in a story that makes good listening. To hold your story together, you will need a few characters (not too many!) and something that occurs in a particular time and place. The best material will be what you gather by looking and listening carefully, using all of your senses to capture the mood of that place and time. Making notes on paper or cards is a big help, as is talking to the persons who are involved in what is happening there. It is also possible, but not absolutely necessary, to use a recording device on site. Writing the script will take some time, since you need to digest and rearrange your notes. The goal is to give listeners the feeling that they are experiencing this themselves.

Important: you yourself are not the main figure in the story, you are like a lens through which the events are taken in.

These three forms all require a certain amount of time to prepare. Packages and features require the use of production facilities for editing. So that the pre-production work in the studio doesn't take too long, it is best to have a written plan for your cutting and mixing job. An exception, requiring less work but more experience:

Live reporting – this involves narrating an event as it happens. Some situations in which it might be useful: an event (sports, social, cultural, political) which you are attending, and from which you phone in a live impression, straight into the studio; or an event being managed by the station and covered in a live broadcast from the venue.

Editorial – this is a personal statement of your own opinion, and it is important that it be associated with your full name (which the presenter can announce). Your script should be written out in full before recording or broadcasting.

This form is well suited to go alongside news items: they give objective facts, and your commentary adds a personal perspective. You can record your editorial in advance, or read it live on air. Less newsy and more imaginative:

Quip (light editorial) – short, entertaining text reflecting on a word, event, or phenomenon. This may contain satirical or humoristic elements.

Fictional items

All the genres mentioned above involve creative activity, but in this section we will present a few possibilities for pure invention. This means that it is clear to producers and to listeners that 'the whole thing has been made up'. (This is also important for legal reasons: press laws require that fact and fiction can always be distinguished on the radio, just like fact and opinion as explained above).

Although the following are pure products of the imagination, they can be very close to life, and need not be fantastic or surreal. They can include humour, satire, enigmatic wisdom, or experimentation – which, as in everyday life, can take you a long way!

An important tip: don't hesitate to attempt one of these items thinking it might be too difficult. They are not more work than some of the forms described earlier, and besides, they are lots of fun. Also, producing one of these will give you valuable practice at planning and editing.

Radio play – This can be anything from a short satirical sketch to a full-length drama. It has a story line of some kind which is developed into a script (with voices to be spoken and recorded), but usually involves other sounds and music which may either serve as background tracks or be part of the story itself.

Montage – A free form for experiments with voices, music, and other sounds. A story line is not absolutely essential, but at least a clear image of the atmosphere you wish to create. During editing, several sound sources may be in use at once, so having a written outline ready before entering the studio will make mixing easier.

Other free-form items

Promo or trailer – a short clip to announce a coming event or programme, or to raise interest in a certain topic or activity.

Ident – a prepared clip repeated regularly to begin or end a particular show (the familiar 'signature' of a programme, easily recognized).

Both of these forms allow for a great deal of creativity, and they demand it as well. These are radio items that will be broadcast often (or at least, several times), so it is a good idea to plan carefully. It is possible to work with several different tracks and thus achieve special effects worth listening to more than once.