



## Conventions of Radio Journalism

### Part 1, Section A: Technology, Conventions and Modern Journalism

#### CONVENTIONS OF RADIO JOURNALISM

##### Purpose of Factfile?

To enable students to develop knowledge and understanding of radio conventions in journalism.

##### Specific Learning Outcomes supported by the FactFile?

Students should be able to identify, consider and define the purpose of the following technical and presentational features and conventions used in radio news platforms, and analyse their effectiveness in relation to the target audience:

- mode of address and the way in which information is presented and how that varies across formats/programmes;
- the role of:
  - studio newsreaders;
  - reporters and correspondents; and
  - contributors (for example experts, witnesses and members of the public);
- intros, outros and links;
- stingers;
- voice-over (VO);
- music, sound effects (SFX) and atmos., actuality;
- audio clips; and
- fades.

##### Target audience? Student? Teacher? Both?

Teachers and Students.

##### How the FactFile supports development of Key Stage 4 Statutory skills?

Opportunities for UICT, PS, WO and Comm throughout.

##### FactFile Content

Unit 3 of the GCSE Journalism course is assessed through an online examination, and Section A of the exam draws on students' knowledge of radio conventions, among other topics. Students may be asked to explain terminology, offer the correct term for an identified convention or correctly label examples of conventions in use. They must therefore be able to confidently recognise and recall conventions of journalistic media to meet this requirement.



This factfile is intended to clarify definitions related to basic radio conventions and offer ideas for further research. Similar factfiles on the conventions of TV, print and online formats, the role and purpose of journalism, technology and modern journalism, professional roles in journalism and journalism law, regulation and ethics are also available from the CCEA microsite.

## Radio Journalism

The most obvious conventions in radio journalism relate to the ways in which information is conveyed without images. Use of live and recorded soundbites, inclusion of music and sound effects and even the structure of sentences are all influenced by the fact that radio is an audio-only platform.

This might seem like a limitation of sorts, but radio has strengths other media do not. It can be accessed across borders with cheap and easily available equipment, meaning it can be the most reliable news source in areas of war or repression where wifi or even electricity is scarce. It doesn't have to be physically distributed like printed material, and while stations can be extremely specialised and focused on their local areas, the rise of internet radio means that these stations can be heard anywhere in the world. It can be accessed while driving, in the workplace or in a variety of other situations to which other media don't lend themselves, and podcasting platforms give radio journalists another way of telling and distributing stories to an extremely broad audience.

## Conventions of the Medium

### *Mode of address*

As with any media format, the mode of address in radio involves what it chooses to say to its audience and how it chooses to say it. The array of possible choices facing any producer is huge, ranging from degree of formality to frequency and length of audio clips and music usage. The consistency of these factors is what helps build a 'house style' for which a certain radio programme will be known.

Even within the confines of something as basic as an hourly news bulletin, programmes will vary in their treatment of it. The differences between news bulletins on BBC Radio 1 and BBC Radio 4 are a good example, despite the fact they come from the same broadcasting organisation and have certain news values in common. Radio 1 has a younger listener demographic and chooses to favour celebrity and entertainment news stories

where possible, punctuating its headlines with forceful stingers to maintain a feeling of pace and dynamism. Radio 4 has an older demographic and delivers its news in a more formal register, lacking aggressive sound effects and favouring political topics.

A journalist producing a story for a podcast will structure and present the material differently than one who is producing a straightforward news report. News conventionally demands more upfront factual material and analysis, while a podcast tends to be treated more like an entertainment narrative or plotline, using a more friendly or familiar tone and perhaps holding back information for the purposes of a strong or revelatory ending to keep listeners hooked.

### *Roles*

**Studio presenters** and **newsreaders** are responsible for presenting the information contained in a radio programme. Primarily they introduce reports or radio packages, deliver links and/or interview guests. Their personas are carefully chosen and constructed to gel with the programme, and while their appearance is incidental on radio, their voices and speech are an important component of the show's mode of address. In some cases they can function as a unique selling point (USP) for the programme and attract listeners in their own right.

**Reporters** and **correspondents** are responsible for covering stories, usually by travelling to a location associated with the event and finding sources upon which they can build their report. They may have individual responsibility within their organisation for covering a geographical area (e.g. a warzone) or a particular topic (e.g. home affairs, royalty or the arts). On location they will often find sources, conduct interviews, deliver reportage and edit recorded material for transmission. They may also report live from the scene, informing the studio presenter of events as they unfold.

**Contributors** are the additional voices called upon to comment on events, which may be integrated into the report as a live interview (e.g. a lawyer outside law courts after a verdict) or as edited excerpts (e.g. a short excerpt from a political statement by a politician delivered earlier in the day). Contributors can include experts explaining the detail of a situation, witnesses giving testimony, or members of the public offering opinions on a topic related to the story. The latter is sometimes referred to as "vox pops" (from Latin for 'voice of the people') and is intended to give a quick

cross section of the views of “ordinary people” on a particular subject.

Having a variety of speakers on any item for radio provides interest for the listener as well as supporting the idea of objectivity by potentially reflecting more than one person’s viewpoint on an issue.



## Example Student Activities

### Listener Survey:

Conduct a short survey of family and friends and ask if they listen to radio news or tend to hear it on a regular basis. Where and when do they hear it? What do they usually listen to? Is it a choice they make or do they hear it passively (e.g. on in the background at work, in waiting rooms for appointments etc.)? Do they think radio news is effective? Why or why not? Sum up the findings for your group or the whole class. Was any of what you found out surprising to you?

### Comparing Radio Programmes:

Listen to 15 minutes of a local station’s morning talk show (e.g. Good Morning Ulster on Radio Ulster) and 15 minutes of a national morning talk show (e.g. the Today Programme on Radio 4 – both these shows are available on BBC iPlayer). Make a note of the type of stories they cover, the guests and clips used and their choices of language and tone. What are the main differences you notice?

### Role of Radio:

Read the article ‘Future of Journalism: what lessons can we take from radio?’ (<https://contentinsights.com/blog/future-journalism-lessons-can-take-radio/>). What are the main points it makes about radio and its role as a medium?

### From TV to Radio:

Pick any recent news story you have read or seen

on television news only. In the absence of still or moving images, what would you do to ensure you could effectively cover it in a radio news format? What are the main facts you would want people to know, and what additional sound material would you want to include in order to present the story in an interesting way?

## Definitions

### Actuality

In radio, a field recording taken on location and played back later as a kind of soundbite – this might be an eyewitness at a crime scene, for example. Not to be confused with an ‘outside broadcast’ (OB) in which a radio show takes place live at a location other than the studio.

*Example:* this radio news summary contains actuality at 1:25 – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zF2EhYLuz8g>

### Audio clip

Any excerpt of a recorded audio track (e.g. music, speech, a film or television soundtrack), which may be inserted into another recorded programme or played ‘live’ on air to encourage a real-time response from interviewees, guests or listeners. This could be a track of music or background noise used to create atmosphere, a clip of the audio track of a film or TV show included in a review of that piece, or a short section of an actuality used to punctuate a studio-based report.

*Example:* at 6:50, audio clips of three different speakers recorded at different times/locations and at 19:30, audio clips of a recorded phone message are used in <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b087pf9t>

### Fade

The gradual introduction (“fade in”) or loss (“fade out”) of a track of sound, usually music, instead of it starting or stopping suddenly at its intended volume. A ‘cross-fade’ refers to one track being faded down and overlapping with another as it is faded up, making for a smoother, less jarring transition between two tracks; it is popular with DJs playing music, who may cross fade from one musical track into another.

*Example:* between 0:32 and 1:17 in <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p04pd321> you can hear how the levels of the music used to underscore the

countdown go up and down in volume depending on when the presenter speaks, before fading out completely.

### Intro

(see *Outro*) The 'introduction' or opening of a broadcast programme or segment (such as a news bulletin within a longer show). Commonly this will include the tuning frequencies or platforms at which the station is accessible, the name of the show and its presenters and possibly a quick rundown of what listeners can expect to hear. Many intros incorporate an identifying stinger or musical theme of some kind, or another signifying sound effect such as the 'pips' that precede some editions of BBC radio news.

*Example:* The combination of vocal recordings and stinger for <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=crxwA8owb58> act as the intro to the station's news programme. (Note this particular example emphasises the location and station rather than the nature of the news segment; this may be related to the fact that it is geographically located in a tourist spot and the audience of holidaymakers wouldn't expect a more hard hitting news programme on the local station.)

### Link

While a link/link-up could also refer to the phone or satellite connection via which a caller or interviewee in another location can participate in a radio broadcast, the term 'link' should primarily be used for the on-air delivery by a presenter or newscaster of speech intended to present or contextualise a new segment or package in a radio show. Links are often very precisely timed, even if they aren't pre-scripted (relying on a presenter's experience and judgement instead). This precise timing is to help contain programme length and ensure timing marks such as the start of a news bulletin are met neatly with no overlap or 'dead air' (unexplained silence).

*Example:* at 1:50 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=crxwA8owb58> the guest presenter delivers a link to the next track he'll play; a radio DJ discusses what makes a good link at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LbtfdMXRfDU>. Both these examples relate to radio shows that primarily play music – listen to the latest episode of the Today programme at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qj9z/episodes/player> and try to discern how links work in a talk-based programme.

### Outro

(see *Intro*) The sign-off or finishing segment of a programme. This may include a reminder of the name of the show and its presenters, a series of thanks to any contributing guests who have appeared on the programme and possibly references to what will be featured in the radio segment immediately following the outro, or the next episode of the same show. It may have to be carefully timed to meet the next segment in good time.

*Example:* renowned podcast This American Life has the same outro format each time, including music, the presenter thanking contributors and sponsors, an in-joke about a former producer using a clip from the show and an outline of what the next episode will hold. Listen from 57:35 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ojrZGdIvypk> and compare it to the closing section of the latest episode available at <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/>

### Stinger (sting)

A short piece of sound or music used to punctuate certain points in a radio broadcast, such as the opening intro or the headlines in a news programme. It may have voiceover or sound effects over it, and is usually arranged for purpose rather than being an extract of a longer piece, though this may depend on the type of programme involved.

*Example:* a variety of stingers created by sound designers and uploaded for copyright-free use can be heard at <https://www.audioblocks.com/royalty-free-audio/bumpers-and-stingers-music>. Listen to a few and consider what types of radio show and sections/cues they might fit best.

### Voiceover (VO)

Speech by a presenter or journalist which is used with other recorded audio tracks in an edited programme or package in order to explain a situation or offer an authoritative narrative voice around events covered.

*Example:* the presenter's voiceover is used in the intro to this radio documentary, set over a background of the recording from their car journey (radio music, engine sound, sat nav) to add atmosphere: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yStsg6qdr5A>



### Questions to consider?

- Which radio programmes are most likely to use each of the features above, and in what context?
- Why are different features used by different formats? How do they affect the programme's mode of address in each instance?
- Can I recognise examples of each radio journalism feature and correctly identify it in a variety of contexts?

### Additional information sources

#### BBC Bitesize

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/subjects/zquqh39>

#### Journalism.co.uk

<https://www.journalism.co.uk/>

#### Journalism and Writing Career advice

<http://www.sean.co.uk/a/journalism/index.shtm>

#### Jobs: Radio Broadcast Journalist

[http://creativeskillset.org/job\\_roles/279\\_radio\\_broadcast\\_journalist](http://creativeskillset.org/job_roles/279_radio_broadcast_journalist)

#### A Short History of Radio Journalism

[http://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/23604\\_01\\_Starkey\\_Ch\\_01.pdf](http://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/23604_01_Starkey_Ch_01.pdf)

#### Evolution of Radio Broadcasting

[https://saylordotorg.github.io/text\\_understanding-media-and-culture-an-introduction-to-mass-communication/s10-01-evolution-of-radio-broadcastin.html](https://saylordotorg.github.io/text_understanding-media-and-culture-an-introduction-to-mass-communication/s10-01-evolution-of-radio-broadcastin.html)

#### Future of Journalism: what lessons can we take from radio?

<https://contentinsights.com/blog/future-journalism-lessons-can-take-radio/>

#### Top Ten Tips for Aspiring Journalists

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/jennagoudreau/2012/11/09/top-10-tips-for-young-aspiring-journalists>

#### Print vs Broadcast Journalism: Understand the Differences

<https://www.nyfa.edu/student-resources/print-journalism-vs-broadcast-journalism/>

