
UNIT 3 TELEVISION NEWS

Structure

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3.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- define 'television news',
- distinguish between the news in the print media (newspapers) and television news,
- point out the difference between radio news and television news,
- draft news items for television,
- discuss the techniques of television news reporting,
- describe the role of the television news reporter in TV news interviews,
- undertake reporting and interviewing.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

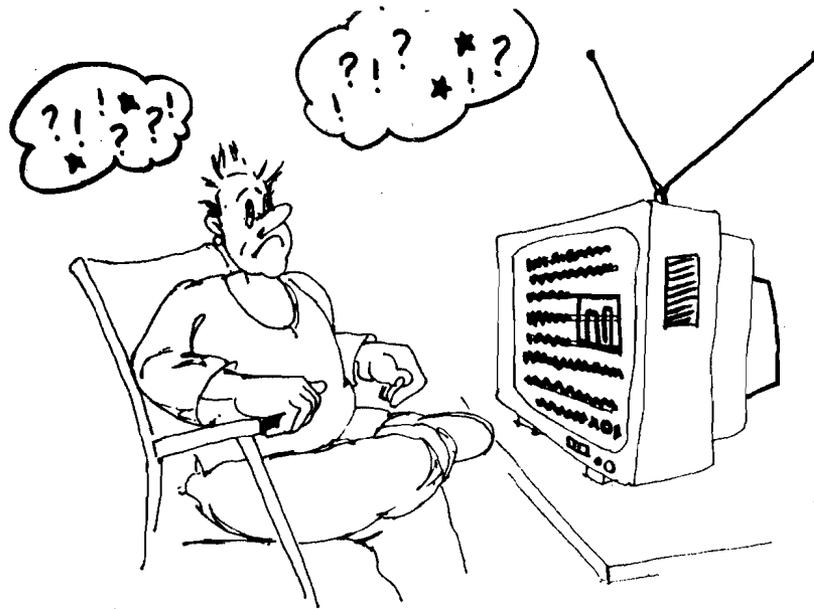
So far, in this block, we have discussed radio news, commentary and features. Having focussed our attention on the audio medium, we shall now proceed to the audio visual medium of television. In this unit we shall discuss the characteristics of television news, its style, rules and the role of interviews in the television news package. We shall also compare television news with the news on radio and in print. At the end, we think that you will be able to ascertain the qualities of television news.

In the last unit of this block we shall deal with television commentary and feature.

At the outset it is important to know that news as it is put out on television has to be treated altogether differently as compared to the news on any other mass medium. For one thing, the news items have to be matched by corresponding footage while the news is being presented. For another, the demand for visuals is considerably high, requiring constant and course updating.

3.2 PRINT AND BROADCAST NEWS

The news bulletin is a major area of programming for a television station. It is telecast live and thus has to be made error-free.



News may be any item of importance that takes place in a certain locality, something unusual, something that interests us, or concerns us. The classic definition of news known to all beginners is not really a definition but an illustration. "When a dog bites a man, that is not news because it happens too often, but if a man bites a dog, that is news". The aphorism has remained alive because it dramatically states the enduring value of novelty to the news business.

- While the news is fundamentally the same in any medium—newspapers, radio or television—yet the presentation of news differs in all the three media owing to special characteristics.
- Stories for the broadcast media generally are shorter than those for the print.
- Time is to radio/television what space is to a newspaper.
- The newspaper's space is expandable, but broadcast time is not.
- The length of a news broadcast severely restricts the number of news items that can be incorporated into the broadcast bulletin.
- Time limitations force broadcast persons to be highly selective in the stories meant for inclusion in news bulletins. That is why news for broadcast media is covered with extreme brevity as compared with the newspaper coverage.
- The broadcast stories must be concise and intelligible because the listener/viewer has only one chance to grasp the meaning. He or she cannot go back to the story the way a newspaper reader can. Therefore, stories written for broadcast must be conversational and easy to comprehend. Good broadcast copy must be easy on the ears. The rule is: write like you are telling a friend. This evolution from the newspaper style to conversational broadcast style has been a natural transition.
- The old newspaper rule of including five Ws and one H in the first paragraph of a story does not necessarily apply to broadcast news. To write clear news copy for broadcast you must remember to determine what is important in the story. Does the story lie in what happened? Or is it who it happened to? Or, perhaps how it happened? Or, is it what is happening or who will become involved? These questions must be answered in your mind before you can write a broadcast news story.

Television news-style evolved gradually. While the stories for TV news must also be shorter and conversational, just as in case of radio news, the rule is to write

in a conversational style for pictures. When writing for television, the pauses necessary to coordinate words with visuals are taken into consideration. Writing is often geared to the available pictures of the event. The words omit what the pictures show and tell what the pictures omit. Because of the visual element, the TV news-show tends to favour news stories which can be reported with pictures to news on which no picture is available.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Use the space for your answers.

ii) Compare your answers with the ones given at the end of this unit.

1) Write down three main differences between print and broadcast news.

.....

2) Mention two differences between radio and TV news.

.....

3.3 BASIC RULES OF TELEVISION

The newspapers are printed for the eye; the TV news story is presented for both eye and ear; while radio news is meant to appeal to the ear. The golden rule for TV news is: write like you talk, not like you write. To communicate information it must speak in simple language most viewers would understand. The following rules must be remembered in writing the news for television.

Clarity: The first rule of TV news is that the story must be clear at once. Unlike the reader, the viewer has no second chance to go over the material. TV news is written on the wind—here for the instant, gone the next moment.

A viewer left wondering about the meaning of what has been said at the beginning of a sentence will probably be too distracted to comprehend what is being said at the end of it.

Just as the person who writes science articles for a popular magazine must be able to translate complicated scientific jargon into the general reader's language, the writer of TV news must be able to make complicated stories simple. In short, understanding must be immediate in the TV News Bulletin. The golden rule to follow is "never underestimate the viewers' intelligence or over-estimate their knowledge".

Brevity: Clarity comes not only from writing simple sentences but also from writing short ones. Long sentences cannot be read easily by the newscaster, and a viewer has a hard time following them. Every sentence that you write for broadcast should be short, simple and easy to understand.

The average acceptable number of words per sentence in a TV copy is 13 to 14. TV news has been described as a headlines service. It is intended to give the viewer only an outline of the event. In short, there are more words in a traffic accident news item in a newspaper than there are in the entire TV news bulletin.

Formula (ELF) has been devised after an analysis of numerous broadcast scripts. This formula, simply put, goes like this: In any sentence, count each syllable above one per word. Take a second look at any sentence scoring above 20. It may be perfectly clear, but chances are it can be improved by trimming adjectives or adverbs, extracting clauses or simply dividing into two sentences.

A one-syllable word is not counted: hat, check, give

A two-syllable word counts one: bowler, grabbing, hostess

A three-syllable word counts two: radio, distributes, beautiful, misery

A four-syllable word counts three: democracy, implausible, conscientious
and so forth.

Excess syllables represent waste. A one-syllable word is always better than a two-syllable word, if it says what you want to say. And a two-syllable word is much better than a four-syllable word when it serves the purpose. Often you can save time by using:

FIRST for 'initial'
BEAT for 'defeat'
BUY for 'purchase'
END for 'conclude'
SURE for 'certain'
TRY for 'attempt'
URGE for 'persuade'

One syllable words are often either familiar verbs, pronouns, function words (the "glue" words which hold content words together), or concrete nouns.

Long words such as capitalism, totalitarianism, communication, psychotherapy often communicate abstract ideas. In writing news for TV, we cannot always escape long words. To get a difficult idea across, we should do it in as simple a manner as possible.

Conversational: TV news writers use everyday words: the language of conversation. TV journalists use a vocabulary that corresponds to the one used in daily conversation. Words used in everyday speech ought to be included when drafting news for television. Take this story written as per newspaper style:

"The vice-president of the New York branch of the Red Cross stated in a press conference today that many Christmas toys can inflict injury upon unsuspecting youngsters".

That is not exactly conversational. Instead, a TV journalist would write:

"A Red Cross official warns that many Christmas toys can be dangerous for kids".

The following is the partial list of words that are generally too formal for TV news, with conversational alternatives:

Formal	Conversational
slate	schedule
passed away	died
bar	prevent
reside	live
residence	home
nab	catch
altercation	argument

prior to	before
indisposed	sick, ill

Most of the words in the "formal" column also take longer to say, thereby wasting time. On the other hand, conversational words are short, commonly-used words and therefore communicate easily. Words that we might succeed in deciphering in a newspaper or book are much more difficult to comprehend when we listen to them.

Time Reference—Present Tense: The element of immediacy is one of the biggest assets of the TV medium in reporting news. Every effort should be made to include up-to-date reports and to write copy in a manner that sounds fresh and timely. With this in view, the present tense is encouraged. For example:

Police were searching for clues. (unacceptable)

Police are searching for clues. (acceptable)

The present tense is the most engaging tense in the language. It indicates that the action is still going on. It conveys currency of the news. It is more appropriate to phrase a sentence as, "There is a huge fire in the old city", than, "there was a huge fire in the old city".

The dynamic nature of news is better carried in copy that incorporates the present tense. Here are a few illustrative sentences:

Iraq announces that it accepts the UN proposal for a cease fire in West Asia.

or

The Chinese have test-fired another hydrogen bomb.

There are many situations, nevertheless, where the present tense does **not** work:

The bridge collapses

Or

Two people are being shot (both are unacceptable)

Actions that belong to moments in the recent past cannot be forcibly dragged into the present—that bridge is not collapsing now.

However, (the present perfect tense) maintains an air of immediacy while describing actions that have ended.

The bridge has collapsed

or

Two people have been shot (both are acceptable)

The present perfect is less dated than the past tense and is used in situations in which the present tense is unacceptable:

A constable has been arrested for impersonating as a magistrate.

There can be situations in which neither the present nor the present perfect tense are acceptable:

i) Few people **have shown up** at the meeting, so it broke up early

or

ii) Two people **have been shot** earlier today (both are unacceptable even when written in present perfect tense)

In these situations, it is necessary to fall back on the past tense.

i) Few people **showed up** at the meeting, so it broke up early

or

ii) Two people **were shot** earlier today. (both are acceptable)

Do not say 'today' when the story broke yesterday. Such practice can prove embarrassing. Be resourceful. Update the story. Move it into the present by highlighting a new fact. In such a situation, it is perfectly proper to conceal the time in case the time element is not of consequence. For example, if it is mid-afternoon and you are using a statement that the British Prime Minister made the preceding night, it is not necessary to say:

Last night the British Prime Minister, Mr. John Major, issued a strong statement condemning terrorist violence in Punjab and Kashmir.

What is newsworthy here is the British Prime Minister's condemnation of terrorism and not so much the time element. So, the sentence should read as:

British Prime Minister John Major has condemned terrorist violence in Punjab and Kashmir.

The time element can be mentioned later in the story when more details are mentioned.

Active Voice

Avoid the passive voice; it is the voice in which the subject is acted upon. Use instead the active voice where the subject acts upon the object.

Passive voice: An airliner was hit by a private plane.

Active voice: A private plane crashed into an airliner.

Active voice is clearer, packs more punch and uses fewer words.

Weak: The policeman suddenly took away the gun.

Better: The policeman snatched the gun.

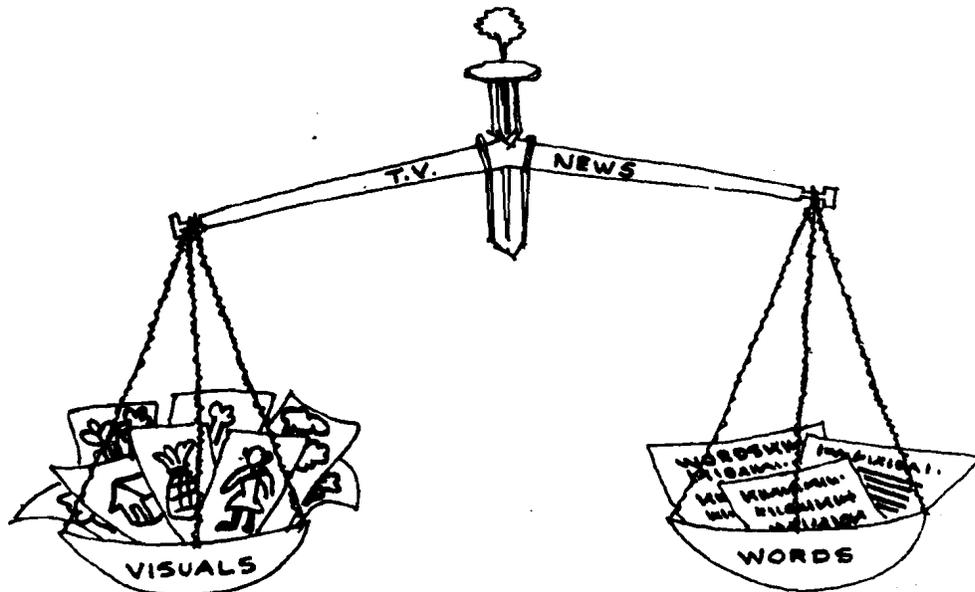
It is important to keep the action in the verb. The active voice (the subject of the sentence does the acting) is stronger than the passive voice (the subject of the sentence is being acted upon).

Weak: The building was destroyed by the fire.

Better: The fire destroyed the building.

3.4 BASIC NEWS SCRIPTS IN TV

You must have by now understood the main difference in writing news for television and other mass media as indicated in the earlier section. In addition, TV news should contain some extra qualities to give it a distinct flavour to suit the medium. We shall enumerate these qualities here.



Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answers.

ii) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

1) Why do you think 'brevity' and 'clarity' are essential for TV News? Answer in two sentences.

.....

2) We list here some words that are generally used in newspapers. You have to give an alternative, conversational word for use of radio or TV, for each of these formal words.

Formal	Conversational
--------	----------------

- slate
- passed away
- bar
- reside
- residence
- nab
- altercation
- mum
- prior to
- indisposed

- a) **Talking Heads:** The most skeletal news story is a 'reader', or 'liner'. This is a story read on camera by one of the newscasters with no visual appearing on the screen. True stories not supported by visuals generally have no place in the television medium. Such a story could have been written for radio. The only difference is that, on television, you see the face of a newscaster. Still, this story may find its way into the news bulletin because there are occasions when no visuals are available especially on out-of-town stories, or in the case of a story that broke late, making it impossible to get relevant footage on the air. Also, some particularly complex stories may be better understood without the added distraction of visuals.
- b) **Super:** 'Supers' too are also important elements to every story with video in it. 'Supers' are names or other bits of information superimposed on the TV screen. Also called IDs, they identify or explain a person, thing, place or picture. For instance, they are used to identify the newscasters by supering their names on their images.
- c) **Voice-over (VO):** Visually, the step ahead of lack lustre 'talking head' presentation is to have a talking head plus a visual. A visual may be a photograph, chart, map or graph. It is used to illustrate a story, identify a place, or simplify a complex economic news items say with the use of a graph. The narration continues over the visuals.

Apart from static visuals like graphics, illustrations, etc., the voiceover is also carried on video footage of for example a plane crash on a mountain summit, or riot-hit areas. Shortly after the newscaster begins a story on camera, video coverage appears on the screen while the newscaster continues to read.

d) **Sound-bite:** A sound bite, or 'cold bite', is a type of story that includes no

interview with someone knowledgeable about the story. The newscaster begins on camera and reads upto a certain point in the script; then the expert interviewed on the subject appears on videotape, making a comment related to the story. At the end of the sound bite, the anchor-person reappears so as to tag the story before moving on to another news item.

- e) **Stand-up:** It is a story assembled by a staff correspondent/reporter. Like the sound bite, in this story too, the newscaster begins on-camera and reads upto a certain point and then introduces the reporter. The latter then speaks from the location. These types of stories are considered to be the backbone of a newscast. Reporters prefer to read the stand-up while looking straight into the camera.
- ii) **Package:** The treatment is the same as in the case of stand-up except that the story may consist of an interview with an expert/eyewitness apart from the reporter's footage. It is sound-bite plus stand-up. The newscaster begins a news item with a brief mention of the highlights of the story and follows it up by introduce the reporter on location. The reporter then states the main points of the news and gives details in a concise style, the report may be interspersed with interviews of the persons in the news. These comments not only fill the gaps in the report but also lend an air of credibility to the reporter's inferences.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: i) Match the following columns.

- ii) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

In the left hand column some qualities/technical terms are listed. In the right hand column, brief explanations of these qualities/technical terms are given. These two columns are not arranged properly. Please match the qualities with the correct explanations by placing the number of the correct explanation against the relevant technical term.

Qualities/technical terms

Explanation

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| a) Package | 1) Expert appearing on TV screen to give some comments for a very short while |
| b) Talking-head | 2) TV screen shows the newscaster reading news |
| c) Sound-bite | 3) Newscaster is not seen but only heard and visuals are shown |
| d) Voiceover | 4) When the report by a correspondent includes a short interview |
| e) Stand-up | 5) Bits of extra information super imposed on the screen |
| f) Super | 6) Report by a correspondent |

3.5 SOURCES FOR TELEVISION NEWS

Television newsrooms generally use the same sources of news that are used by the other media. However, of late, two main sources of news for Doordarshan have come to be booked: The satellite/microwave video feed services, and syndicated video coverage.

- a) The primary sources of news on television are the news wire services' such as Press Trust of India (PTI) and United News of India (UNI) among other news agencies.

television, especially those of late-breaking stories for which moving pictures are not available.

- b) The satellite/microwave video feed is television's own unique version of wire service. It is an electronic transmission of news stories originally recorded on film or video and sent by closed circuit microwave or through satellite to subscribers who record it on their own video tape and then decide which stories to use for inclusion in their own local TV news-shows.
- c) Most stations employ correspondents/reporters who gather news by going out with a camera crew to report an incident event such as a fire, an accident, a conference, etc. At times, owing to the absence of a visual, the reporter may file a dry story (a story without any visual) or instead speak to the camera and narrate the story.
- d) Film/video coverage of many spot news events such as accidents, fires, floods, earthquake, and the like is often difficult to procure if staff correspondents/camera person are not available at the time of event. However, such an event is sometimes covered by a freelance camera person scouting around near the scene. This visual coverage is purchased from the freelance camera persons who are known as stringers. The stations have to rely on stringers for unexpected news stories, particularly if the staff cameraperson is unable to reach the scene fast enough to record it.
- e) Most television stations monitor radio news bulletins and vice versa for important news stories. If the story is very significant and there is no time to obtain visuals, such stories are telecast dry.

Check Your Progress 4

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

- 1) List all the possible sources of news for a TV Station.

.....

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.....

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.....

.....

.....

3.6 BASIC STYLE RULES

You must have noticed that every television station normally has its own rules of news writing style. Not every TV newsroom prepares its news telecast copy the same way. In general, however, these rules described below hold good. The words that TV journalists write have to be read for the ear. Abbreviations, figures, symbols anything that causes the newscaster to hesitate or stumble—impair the newscast. Therefore, to overcome this problem, TV newsrooms have developed style rules for their copy.

Typing

All news telecast copy must be type-written in triple space. When writing for radio, use the full page allowing about an inch for margins. For television, use the right half (or two-thirds) of page for news copy. The left side of the page is for video information—visual effects, film or video tape rolls, etc. The news items can be typed all caps or upper-lower case.

Activity 1

At this juncture, engage yourself in this activity.

- Watch a news bulletin on television, and observe the news packaging and presentation carefully, then, list the techniques of news delivery that were included in that particular bulletin. Mention the format used, use of 'sound-bite' in a specific news item or simply a dry type of presentation sans visuals in a 'talking head' story. What impression did the overall news bulletin leave on you? Did you like the format or did you find there was room for improvement?

Date of News Bulletin	Format
News Item 1	Stand up
News Item 2	
News Item 3	
News Item 4	
News Item 5	

You may choose the headline stories or any four stories of your choice from the news bulletin. We have filled the first item to illustrate.

Date the first page of your script. Type your initials (or last name) in the upper left hand corner of every page. Use paragraphs. When you start your story INDENT. Number the stories. If more than one page is required, make the sentence at the bottom of the first page a COMPLETE sentence. If possible, make it a complete paragraph.

Corrections

When you cross a word, REALLY cross it out. Black it out completely. Leave nothing ambiguous in your script.

Numbers

Whenever reasonable, simplify complicated numbers. It will be convenient and honest to use terms such as "approximately", "more than", "about", and "almost". For example, Rs. 2,001,897.46 in most cases should be written as "slightly more than twenty lakh rupees".

It is also important to spell out all numbers through till the number eleven. Fractions and decimal points should always be spelt out—three-fourths, one-half, three point two...

These are rules that make numbers easier to read on the air, but there is one final rule about numbers: they should not be used too often.

Quotations

Newspaper reporters generally quote their subjects directly. News items for broadcast should contain fewer quotes because there is no time for extended quotations. News on the electronic media is short and very precise as compared to newspaper reporters.

Abbreviations

The rule for the use of abbreviations in broadcast news writing is: eliminate the use of almost all abbreviations. Common sense should be exercised when handling names of government agencies or phrases that are sometimes conveniently written as acronyms. Abbreviations such as the USA or CBI are easily recognized by the average listener as the United States of America and Central Bureau of Investigations respectively.

However, the rule is not to use abbreviations in broadcast copy. News writers

should write a word as they want it to be read. If it is "Lieutenant-Governor", they should write it out in full and not "Lt.-Gov."

Attribution

Avoid the common newspaper structure in which the attribution is tagged on after a quotation. This is referred to as "dangling attribution". Do not write, "I am going to win the election", Mr. S.P. Singh said. Broadcasters do not use dangling attributions for two reasons: (1) people do not talk that way, and (2) the listener may think that the words are those of the broadcaster. The attribution should be handled for broadcast in the following manner: Mr. S.P. Singh said he would win the election. Or: in these exact words, Mr. S.P. Singh said, "I am going to win the election".

Activity 2

Before you proceed with this unit, engage yourself in this activity.

You are asked to prepare a news report on 'noise pollution', for eventual telecast on the national network. How would you proceed to undertake the assignment? Also, mention the reporting techniques you would employ. To help in this activity, we give below a list of steps involved in the preparation of the news report. You will have to put them in correct order.

- Gather visuals of locations identified by their high noise pollution levels, e.g. factories, congested traffic;
- Collect relevant statistics;
- Consult a social scientist regarding the effects of noise pollution on society;
- record voice over;
- Write to visuals;
- Record on camera the interview with the concerned expert about (a) the increasing decibel levels in towns and cities (b) the resultant impact on the general health citizens;
- Research the topic;
- Record the piece to camera.

3.7 TV REPORTING TECHNIQUES

The TV news reporter is the eyes, ears, and legs of a TV newsroom. The reporter must get the "facts" on each story assigned to him/her. And sometimes, particularly in small TV news operations, he/she should also be able to shoot news film besides reporting the story. The specific duties of a staff reporter include:

- I) gathering and reporting local and area-specific news and features;
- II) writing and editing news;
- III) presenting news on the air, conducting interviews, AD LIB reports, etc., either in the studio or from location.

Qualifications of a TV News Reporter

To perform well on the job, a television news reporter has to possess some basic and essential qualifications. Some of these are given below:

- versatility;
- good writing skills;
- a liberal education;
- excellent understanding of the TV medium;
- integrity;

- photogenic face/pleasing personality;
- good voice-quality;
- confidence.

The best television videotape or film can almost be shown silent. The pictures themselves tell the story. When covering a story for television, reporters have to make sure that as much of the meaning of the story gets into the camera as is possible.

To be able to comprehensively cover the news, television news reporters generally employ the following techniques.

a) **Piece to Camera**

Of all the skills needed for television news reporting, the piece to camera is amongst the most frequently used. The piece to camera, which is essentially in-vision, is recorded on location.

It has three advantages: it immediately establishes the reporter's presence on the spot; it is extremely simple to execute, and, it is fast enough to be considered a kind of contingency sample.

These stand-ups, are written on the scene, without the benefit of typewriters or the other conveniences of the newsroom. Since the reporter looks straight into the camera, the lines have to be memorized. Sometimes, the reporters read from a note-book or a clip-board after ensuring the opening paragraph, at least, is word perfect.

Most stand-ups are short—10 to 20 seconds. On some occasions they run longer, especially in complex stories that require a lot of explaining, but do not offer many visuals.

A stand-up can also be used in the middle of a story to "bridge" two other sections of the report. Bridges work especially well when the reporter demonstrates something.

b) **Studio Spots**

While the piece to camera is an in-vision news presentation by the reporter recorded on location, the studio spot is a news item read in the studio by someone other than the programme's main presenter, as additional information to the visuals. Usually, it is a special correspondent or a reporter who is called upon to draw together the elements of a news story with or without the aid of videotape or illustrations.

Because television news is a team effort involving many persons, the chances of human error are great in a studio set-up, particularly in an 'on-air' situation. There are four simple rules that the on-camera studio reporter/correspondent should follow:

- i) Maintain self-control. Expect problems and be prepared to cope with them;
- ii) Always prepare file copy. If film or video tape fails to come up, have the file copy close at hand, to carry on the show;
- iii) Never pick your nose or scratch yourself; and
- iv) Be familiar with studio cue-signals.

3.8 WRITING TO VISUALS

We do not watch news on TV just to get the latest news. Radio does a better job. We do not prefer television because we want to get all the news: local, national and international. The newspaper does a better job.

We, as television viewers, benefit from TV newscasts because they transport us

o the scene of action. The news is packaged and delivered to us. For this, a reporter must be able to relate words and pictures in a news story. Words fill in the factual details that pictures omit.

While the pictures are indeed important, it is the narration behind the film—in most instances—that is responsible for the success of visual news stories on television. Poorly written narration can hurt the effectiveness of visuals, but appropriate narration can greatly improve even poorly shot visuals. Writing to background graphics is the same as writing a story to visuals as described above. The trick is to avoid redundancy or repeating what the graphics show.

There are three basic rules which must be followed by the TV reporter writing to visuals:

- a) Do not cram your video narration full of details.
- b) Relate words to the pictures when telling the story. The narration and pictures must go hand in hand.
- c) Carry the viewer into the story by describing it the way it happened. Although the narrator may begin with a brief opening summary (without pictures) telling the viewer the main points of the story; when the film rolls on, the story should be told as it happened not necessarily in chronological order.

In short, writing narration to blend with the visuals is one of the most difficult skills in broadcast reporting. The language must be crisp, the timing exact and the words have to click with what appears on the screen.

Check Your Progress 5

Note: i) Given below are some statements. Please indicate whether they are true or false.

ii) Compare your answers with the ones given at the end of this unit.

- a) The final news telecast script should be handwritten by the newscaster.
[] True [] False
- b) Television news must always give correct numbers, fractions and percentages.
[] True [] False
- c) Lengthy quotations should be avoided.
[] True [] False
- d) Abbreviations should always be clearly explained in television newscasts.
[] True [] False
- e) One need not have confidence to be a TV reporter.
[] True [] False
- f) A TV reporter must have a thorough knowledge of the reporting language.
[] True [] False
- g) A newscaster can scratch his head when presenting news live on air.
[] True [] False

3.9 THE ART OF TELEVISION INTERVIEWS

To be a good reporter, a television newscaster must be a good interviewer. Whether talking face to face with a political personality or an expert, or may be when asking questions in front of a television camera, the newscaster must know how to conduct an interview.

For a good interview, learn as much as you can about the person you are going to interview, and the subject matter to be covered. Prepare your questions in advance. These should be short and to the point.

During an interview:

Let your subject talk. Remember, it is his/her opinions, ideas and thoughts that are important. If your subject's answers are not clear, or if they are insufficient, pursue the question further. Use the direct approach if your subject is hostile. Do not turn a conversation into a battle by being aggressive.

Interviewing is more than preparing a set of good questions. It is being a good listener and a good friend. It is putting your guest at ease so that the questions you pose may be best answered.

3.9.1 Guidelines for Interviewers

- a) Most journalists have considerable experience as interviewers before they come to television. But there is a vast difference between the casual questioning which takes place in the quiet corner of a restaurant or over the telephone and TV interview with its paraphernalia of lighting and camera. Due to this difference, a TV interview of any type—on-line recording or recorded on videotape, for later broadcast—makes considerably more demands on the interviewer. He should be able to think quickly to follow up with topics outside the originally planned structure of the interview, besides possessing a capacity to marshal and arrange thoughts so that questions are asked logically and as a corollary, step-by-step answers.
- b) In addition, the actual phrasing of questions needs to be considered. Too many inexperienced reporters, rather fond of their own voices, tend to make long statements. This is irritating to the viewer who is keyed up to listen to the views of the interviewee.
- c) Next come the clichés like:

Now, what do you feel about.....?
What of the future.....?

“How do you feel about” type of questions should be avoided. More usually the “How do you feel about” questions stimulate the interviewee/expert into saying nothing more interesting than a few adjectives. It is better to ask questions which help the interviewee/expert to speak about something interesting.

Then, there is the tendency to preface virtually every question with some deferential phrase or the other, presumably to soften up the interviewer:

May I ask.....?
Do you mind my asking.....?
What would you say if I asked.....?
Could you tell me.....?

- d) Questions which are too direct are quite likely to elicit either a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ without further elaboration i.e. Is it true you have resigned because of a personal disagreement with the Chief Minister?

It is better to start a question with any of the WHO WHAT WHEN WHERE WHICH WHY or HOW type of questions.

The other way is to ask a question like: “Tell me how well the new machine is

working? The answer is bound to be self-contained without a 'Yes' or 'No'.

- e) Other questions that need to be avoided are those that are too general—"Has your grandmother's death changed your views on the meaning of life?" or "How did the thief get into your house and do you think the police will catch him?" All these kinds of questions need to be avoided.

3.9.2 Research for TV Interviews

Research is the backbone of the information for a television programme, including interviews.

Research takes team work: researchers/producers look for (1) guests as interviewees (2) facts, opinions and ideas, (3) visual materials, film, slides, (4) graphics, photographs, drawings, maps and other illustrations, also, any other objects which may be shown on video. The television interview is conducted essentially to search for facts and opinions and to explore a personality on behalf of the viewer.

3.9.3 Warming Up for the Interview

We all talk and perform better with a "warm audience", with family and friends who laugh at our jokes and sympathize with our needs. At home with friends, we talk, sing, and debate freely and enthusiastically. But most of us dry up and our performance drops in the face of a large or critical audience. We clamp down on our emotions and pick our words carefully to make sure they have the right effect and also to show our "superior high intelligence and status. A TV interview and a public speech are poles apart. The perfect interviewer would evince keen interest in the subject and take the trouble to make the guest forget the audience watching and listening through the TV cameras and microphones.

TV, like radio, is an intimate medium. We watch and listen alone or in a small circle of family and friends. It is true that TV personalities are like guests in one's home. The broadcaster becomes well-known to viewers. It is important to take the audience along at every step of the interview. The hardest thing to do is to listen. Listening to your guests' answers instead of studying your list of prepared questions does two things. It encourages your guest to shed any inhibitions and respond freely to your questions. And it enables you to pick up the thread of thought and follow naturally with the next question.

3.9.4 Questions for TV Interviews

A television interview should seem like a conversation, not a cross-examination. Listen to casual conversations. Watch when and how a person responds to non-verbal reactions, say commands, reactions, comments and even gestures of hand and face such as lifting your eyebrows or frowning.

By reacting to what your guest says you make viewers sit up and take note for example:

- 1) Show surprise or wonder when called for. Your reaction draws viewers attention to the importance of what the guest has said. It also makes your interviewee react and comment in turn.
- 2) "Not really": mild disbelief sometimes with slight overtones of kidding; this forces your guest to confirm some action and defend it.
- 3) "That must have been.....You must have been delighted": show empathy. By tuning yourself to the same wavelength as your interviewee, you encourage the latter to speak openly. Express your reaction in the same vein.
- 4) Watch out for "I see" or "Un-hun". This is the beginner's way of filling time until an apt question comes to mind. It is not a true reaction, only a time filler. You can force yourself to drop a nervous habit like this once you see the recordings and become aware of how awkward it sounds.
- 5) Be interested and show it. Laugh at the jokes your interviewee cracks. Listen attentively. Occasionally nod your head or smile, or whatever, to show you sympathize and care. Avoid looking at notes, shuffling papers, looking around

for cues and otherwise ignoring your guest. As far as the interviewee is concerned, you are the sole member of the audience. If you seem to be nervous or give a brush-off, to the guest, the interview will fizzle out and end in that very moment.

- 6) Intervene to illustrate an obscure point and make it clear to the viewers. Such elaboration helps viewers to get the idea. If the example is rather inappropriate, ask to be enlightened further to clarify your doubts so that both you and the viewers understand the point correctly.
- 7) Add information and seek comments on the same. Place things in context. One method by which to add depth and guide your guest to make the interview proceed along a certain line is to exclaim and comment—for instance, "Of course, he had ambitions to lead the Party"
- 8) Give the background of your guest for your viewers information. You can inform them at the beginning about why your guest's comments are worth listening to. "You went through that yourself.....Having been the editor of the journal, you must have strong views on that."
- 9) "You once said....." Cull lively quotes from your research material and use them to start a new subject or throw new light on the same. The quotes may even contradict what your interviewee is saying.
- 10) To get a story from by-standers, pump them with simple questions and keep priming the pump as needed. Your string of questions might be
Were you there?
What happened?
Then what?
What else did you see?
Could you hear it?
How did you feel?
What did you do then?
Why did you (they) do that?
What did he say?
Did you notice anything else?

3.10 LET US SUM UP

Television news items are short and written in conversational language. The bulletin is time-bound and provides only the headlines, as it were. Clarity of TV news is very important as the viewers cannot go back to the news items. It is advisable that the TV news scripts do away with formal words, numbers, fractions and percentages.

Since immediacy is the biggest asset of a TV news item, the script should be written in the present tense as far as possible, and incorporate the active voice.

Some of the technical qualities of TV news are talking-head, super, voice-over, sound-bite, stand-up, package. Their proper usage enriches a TV news bulletin qualitatively.

Ordinary wire services of various news agencies, the satellite microwave video feed, correspondents, stringers, footages from other TV and radio broadcasts, and freelancers are the sources on which every TV station depends for its news.

As far as possible quotations, attributions and abbreviations should be avoided.

A TV news reporter must be thorough in the language of reporting. He/She should be able to convey more information through visuals than word. The visuals should speak for themselves. The story should be scripted well. One must be adept at the art of interviewing and prepare well in advance for interviews. Also one must read a lot and research on the topics assigned.

3.11 FURTHER READING

Tyrell, Robert, 1982 (2nd) *The Work of The Television Journalist*, Focal Press, London.

3.12 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: MODEL ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1)
 - Broadcast news items are shorter than the news written for the print medium.
 - Broadcast news items are time bound while the print news items are space bound.
 - Broadcast news is written in spoken language in short sentences, while the print news is written in long sentences meant to be read.
- 2)
 - Radio news depends solely on audio, while the TV news is a combination of audio and video.
 - Radio news depicts the picture in simple sentences while TV news need not explain the visuals—they are self-evident. Details however are given in the voice-over (VO).

Check Your Progress 2

- 1)
 - Brevity on TV news helps the viewers to understand even complex details easily and also fits with the time-frame of TV news. Clarity is essential because the viewers cannot go back to what has already been telecast. There is no place for ambiguity right from the word go.
- 2) Conversational Idiom
 - schedule
 - died
 - prevent
 - live
 - home
 - catch
 - argument
 - quiet
 - before
 - sick, ill

Check Your Progress 3

- a-4;
- b-2;
- c-1;
- d-3;
- e-6;
- f-5.

Check Your Progress 4

- news wire services
- satellite/microwave video
- staff correspondents and camera persons
- freelance cameraperson/producer/correspondent (stringers)
- other TV and Radio stations
- newspapers—national, foreign

Check Your Progress 5

- a) False
- b) False
- c) True
- d) False
- e) False
- f) True
- g) False