

Writing for **television, **radio,** and **new media****

ELEVENTH EDITION

Robert L. Hilliard

Writing for **television, **radio,** and **new media****

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Robert L. Hilliard

Professor Emeritus, Emerson College



Australia • Brazil • Mexico • Singapore • United Kingdom • United States

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Eleventh Edition**

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*For
Amy and Roger*



Ella and Jeff

*whose use of the written word has informed, stimulated, and
entertained and, above all, raised our consciousness and our
consciences*

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PREFACE

The year 2012 marked the 50th anniversary of the publication of the first edition of this book, then entitled *Writing for Television and Radio*. The technological aspects of media have changed considerably in the past half century, and we have recognized these changes not only with the title of this book, currently *Writing for Television, Radio, and New Media*, but, as available and appropriate, with new sections and examples reflecting the impact of technological advancement. With each new edition we have discovered and reaffirmed something that has continued as a hallmark since the beginning of recorded literature: Even within technological change, the principles of good writing remain virtually the same. They adapt to the requirements of the new form of distribution—for example, new principles of dramaturgy for television when that medium emerged in the first half of the 20th century. Yet, those new principles were based on the same principles that governed stage dramas in western culture since Roman and Greek dramaturgy of 2000 and 5000 years ago. The chapter in this book on “The Play” illustrates that. What changes for the playwright and for the writer in another format in a new media is principally technique. The 10th edition expanded that approach with extended narrative and examples of writing for the Internet.

This edition, the 11th, recognizes a subset of the Internet that has expanded exponentially in the past few years, especially since the last edition of this book: Social Media. Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and other social interchange programs not only have gained millions upon millions of users, but have expanded in content, not the least of which is that of commercials. Just as we have in past editions added techniques of writing commercials for the Internet in general, in this edition we have added material on writing for the social media, including techniques appropriate for effective commercials.

As this edition goes to press, texting is ubiquitous. (Okay, what’s the texting shorthand for that word?!) Finding a way to condense an important advisory into 140 characters requires creative thinking—and spelling. In the play, *Inquisition*, one of the characters asks “why would anyone text someone when they can actually talk to them live more effectively and efficiently?” Another character answers that it’s mostly teenagers who are texting, their fragile egos hiding behind silent words rather than opening themselves to verbal conversations. The point is that texting is, for whatever reasons, widespread, as is tweeting and notifications on Facebook. Therefore, writing techniques relating to effective use of these programs is important.

In the 10th edition of this book we noted the emergence of a new, powerful factor in communications—convergence. In this edition we carry the concept even further.

Convergence is the melding of different means of audio and video delivery so that they become interdependent and differences among them become blurred. The traditional broadcasting model has moved closer to the Internet model, and the Internet has opened up to accommodating broadcasting procedures. TV stations not only stream onto the Internet, but originate on web sites, as well. Television manufacturers make their products Internet compatible, and Internet developers are adapting to high-quality full screen video. Internet radio has grown. Analog has converted to digital. Internet-based relationships of the media to their audiences have been marked by dramatic increases in mobile, hand-held audio, video, and data receivers, with various applications or apps, for virtually any content or service available. Individuals can communicate from virtually any place and virtually to the entire world with video, audio, and text. Advances in high definition, video-on-demand, 3-dimensional pictures, video compression, and receiver software mark some of the ongoing changes in technology. Social Internet sites—some with hundreds of millions of active members—have created new psychological- and sociological-related adaptations. These dramatic changes require frequent new editions of textbooks in this field, including this one devoted to writing, if current students and current and future practitioners are to keep up with the requirements of their profession.

Although the basic principles of good writing remain essentially the same, as in any field, concepts, approaches, and techniques must be adapted to fit the advantages and the disadvantages of the new model. This edition, as past editions, is not designed to teach you how to write Internet software programs. That differs from helping you learn to write *for* the Internet, adapting your writing for radio and television, your writing of audio and video. If you want to write software or online programming such as video games, you would do well to take a course specializing in those areas.

USING THIS BOOK

As with previous editions of *Writing for Television, Radio, and New Media*, revisions to this Eleventh Edition are based largely on comments and suggestions from users of the book—professors in colleges and universities and students and professionals. I am aware that many professors who use this book as a text do not include some or many of the chapter subjects in their curriculum. For example, some institutions have separate courses for writing the television drama or sitcom, or for news and sports, or for commercial advertising writing. The inclusion of Internet writing techniques and approaches in most chapter formats may not be germane to those courses that concentrate specifically on broadcast

television and/or radio. This book, however, is designed to provide a coverage that is broad and deep enough to offer a selection of formats that will cover the needs of almost any given writing course. Many beginning courses in media writing use virtually the entire book's contents as a comprehensive introduction for the future professional writer. Other courses use this book as a menu, with the user picking and choosing the contents that fit her or his needs and ignoring those chapters that are not relevant to the particular syllabus.

This edition also continues to include suggestions for writing for diverse audiences such as racial and ethnic groups, women, children, and various lifestyles. Hopefully, this material will help students become more aware of the multicultural society in which we all live—an imperative for current and future professionals, who must understand the needs, concerns, and goals of all peoples and nations if they are to function effectively and contribute meaningfully to an increasingly shrinking world.

FORMAT EXAMPLES

During the past few years the reality show format has proliferated in popularity and scheduling, and this edition attempts to reflect that trend adding that genre to other format examples. One of the longest-lasting and most popular of the reality shows is the highly successful “Dancing With The Stars,” segments of which are included in this book.

THIS WRITER'S RESPONSIBILITY

I wish to emphasize to the student a key rationale for this book: Creativity and talent cannot be taught, but principles and techniques can. If you are willing to devote time, energy, and hard work to learning the basics of writing, you will be able to write at least an adequate script for any video, audio, or Internet program or project. If you also have writing talent and the determination to combine it with effective principles and techniques, you are on your way to making important contributions to the media industries. With persistence and luck, you may also find yourself with an Emmy on your mantle and a Porsche in your driveway.

But while you are doing all that, do not forget that television, radio, and the Internet are the most powerful forces in the world for affecting the minds, emotions, and even the actions of humankind. Like it or not, as a writer for the media, you are (or will be) in a position of tremendous power to serve either *only* the bottom-line economic self-interest that dominates most of the media, or you can choose to make certain, as well, that you serve the audience's individual and group well-being. In other words, you can use the media's influence to help make a better world for everyone.

FEATURES

A key feature of this textbook is using real-world examples to illustrate applications of writing principles and theories. This approach is used in all chapters, with radio, television, and Internet professional scripts and storyboards. For example, in Chapter 4, “Commercials and Announcements,” readers will find straight-sell, drama, humor, testimonials, and other types of spots. Chapter 6, “Features, Documentaries, and Reality Programs,” includes scripts such as the rundown for a Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade and, as noted earlier, for the reality show “Dancing With The Stars.” Chapter 10, “The Play,” includes a script excerpt from a produced screenplay and, as an example of your power as a writer through the power of the media, a strong presentation of a political view in an excerpt from the 2000’s first decade powerful series, “Boston Legal.” Chapter 7, “Interview and Talk Programs,” includes the script of a broadcast interview of this book’s author about another of his books.

The application of video and audio writing continues to be a critical component of this textbook. As with previous editions, new quotes containing advice for would-be professionals from current professionals in the field in various format areas and in various chapters are featured. Reviews of earlier editions of this textbook referred to it as a “bread-and-butter” approach to writing for the media. This new edition attempts to continue to that approach.

PEDAGOGICAL FEATURES

A key pedagogical approach is to present principles to the learner, followed by pertinent explanatory examples, followed by exercises applying the material thus far learned, concluding with evaluation of the student’s work. Each chapter in this book attempts to follow this process with, where warranted, application exercises at the ends of chapters. As part of the practical approach of this textbook, many exercises suggest projects beyond the classroom and into the student’s real-world environment. For example, reflecting similar approaches in the exercises for other chapters, a sample exercise in Chapter 5, “News and Sports,” is “If your college or university has a radio or television station, arrange to write a news story for one of the news programs.”

NEW TO THIS EDITION

This edition contains new material on writing for the Internet, specifically that related to social media, the fastest growing area of communications. It continues the emphasis on different program formats found online, stemming from the concept of convergence. The various key writing formats are retained, but references to people and events have been updated, where appropriate and necessary, to reflect significant changes since the publication of the previous edition of this

book. Keep in mind, however, that in the year it takes for a book to reach a student after the author has submitted the manuscript to the publisher, the fast-changing nature of the media may make any reference quickly obsolete. While some new examples of scripts, such as political spots reflecting the 2012 national elections, are included, scripts throughout the book considered excellent writing examples are retained. Although the economic recession that prompted some of the new material in the chapter on “Professional Opportunities” in the previous edition is ostensibly over as this is written, the competition for jobs in a changing communication landscape prompts additional suggestions on seeking and obtaining a writing position including the use of social media and additional tips on seeking and handling interviews.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robert L Hilliard began his media writing career as a sports reporter and, after service in World War II, became a radio writer-announcer and a writer-director in the fledgling field of television. While working in the media in New York, including a stint as a theater, film, and television critic, he developed the broadcasting curricula at two area colleges. He taught a writing course that became the basis for this book, first published in 1962 and named by *Writer's Market* as one of the 10 best books on writing.

He spent more than 15 years at the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in Washington, D.C., as Chief of the Public Broadcasting Branch. He also served as Chair of the Federal Interagency Media Committee, linking 25 federal agencies and reporting to the White House, and chaired other federal media and education groups. Hilliard left Washington to become Dean of Graduate Studies, Dean of Continuing Education, a tenured professor of media arts, and currently a professor emeritus at Emerson College in Boston. He has been an officer, board member, and committee or project chair for a number of professional organizations and national, state, and community groups, and has been honored with awards from a number of media, educational, national, and international institutions and organizations.

Hilliard earned a B. A. degree from the University of Delaware, M. A. and M.F A. degrees at Western Reserve University, and a Ph.D. from Columbia University. He has published some 35 volumes on the media, including, with co-author Michael Keith, *The Broadcast Century and Beyond: A History of American Radio and Television*; *Global Broadcasting Systems*; *Waves of Rancor: Tuning In the Radical Right*; *Dirty Discourse: Sex and Indecency in American Broadcasting*; and *The Quieted Voice: The Rise and Decline of Localism in Radio*. He is also author of *Surviving the Americans: The Continued Struggle of the Jews After Liberation*; *Media, Education, and America's Counter-Culture Revolution*; and *Hollywood Speaks Out: Pictures That Dared to Protest Real World Issues*. He is author of a number of plays and the recent novels *Phillipa* and *The Greener Trees*. The film documentary, *Displaced: Miracle at St. Ottilien*, deals with his work in helping to save the lives of thousands of Holocaust survivors at the end of World War II in Europe, during which he received the Purple Heart as a U.S. combat infantry soldier.

Dedicating his work in communications to world peace, equal opportunity, and civil justice, Hilliard has been a consultant for government, industry, and education in the United States and abroad, lectured on all continents, published hundreds of magazine and newspaper articles, and made hundreds of speeches on media potentials and responsibilities, including their application to world affairs and education.

The Mass Media

CHAPTER

1

During the process of writing, the writer is usually isolated, alone in a room with whatever instrument she or he uses for writing: pen, pencil, typewriter, computer. Yet every word, every visual image has to be created with the thousands and even millions of people in mind who will be watching or listening. When you write for a mass medium, you are writing for a mass audience. The nature of that audience must constantly be in the forefront of your mind and be the key to what you create.

Although millions may hear or see what you have written, they will experience it individually or in small groups: a family at home in a living room, a few youngsters in a schoolyard, several college students in a dorm's common room, an individual on a bus or subway, a person alone in his or her room, a commuter in a car. Increasingly compact and mobile receiving devices, such as iPod (New iPods), make it possible for almost any individual, anywhere, to receive what you are communicating. The Internet audience is even more individualized while at the same time being limitless, one person sitting alone at a computer or connected through a hand-held device. Potentially millions of people throughout the world are simultaneously seeing and hearing what you wrote. You are writing for an individual, for a small number of people who have a lot in common, and for a large number of people who may have little in common.

Reaching such an audience effectively is especially difficult because it is not a “captive” audience. Most of what airs over television, radio, and cyberspace is free. Unlike the theater or movie audience, which has paid a fee and is not likely to leave unless seriously bored or offended, the television, radio, or Internet audience can press a button, hit a key, or click on an icon to move to something else if it doesn't like what it sees or hears.

People who go to a play or film usually know something about what they are going to see from reading reviews viewing excerpts, or being influenced by ads. Although some television viewers carefully select shows, most viewers tune in to particular **formats** (evening soaps, family **sitcoms**, police programs, reality shows, movie channels, et al) and to specified continuing series, including local and network newscasts, by force of habit. Many people will switch to another program if the one they are watching does not hold their interest, or they will watch only half-heartedly or intermittently, missing some of the story content and, most regrettably from the viewpoint of the network and station, the commercials. Radio listeners do the same. They may tune in to a particular music or talk-show format, but if the music or discussion subject is not exactly what they want at the moment, it's easy for them to flip the dial to something more interesting. Many viewers and listeners shop around the dial at random until they find something that grabs their attention. Internet users have an even wider choice than do radio and TV users. Although the latter may have hundreds of channels to choose from, the former can browse the World Wide Web and choose from hundreds of thousands of sources.

What does this mean for the writer? You must capture the attention of the audience as soon as possible and hold it. Every picture and every word must be purposeful, directed toward keeping the audience's interest. As a writer you must make certain that no irrelevancies and no extraneous moments are in your script. Write directly, sharply, and simply. The mass media audience is as diverse as the population of wherever the given program reaches—in cyberspace it's the entire world. The opinions and prejudices, the educational, social and political backgrounds, the economic status and the personal creeds of people watching and listening vary from A to Z.

In recent years, radio has changed drastically. Terrestrial radio at one time was highly localized, serving the special needs and interests of each station's specific community. As a result of the vitiating of virtually all anti-monopoly rules by the Telecommunications Act of 1996 and through subsequent Federal Communications Commission (FCC) rulings, radio has become by and large a consolidated industry. Large conglomerates bought up as many stations as they could afford, and by the end of the first decade of the 2000s most small independent radio stations that had been dedicated to providing local service disappeared. In some larger cities as many as eight stations are owned by the same company, which saves money by consolidating personnel and services. Large conglomerates program their owned and operated stations from central sources sometimes hundreds of miles away from the stations, frequently with the exact same programming to distant local areas that may have little in common. Concomitantly, many of these consolidated stations have had drastic personnel reductions—some with no local programmer or on-air personality—thus eliminating any possibility of serious or informed local service. In part because radio listeners in many communities no longer have their special interests in music being served, subscribers to satellite radio have increased, Internet radio has proliferated, and listeners have a choice of many more music genres and greater opportunity to find that which most suits them. Although terrestrial conglomerates and satellite providers have

attempted to provide news and weather directed to some regions and cities, local news has faded seriously, especially in small markets. An example: Officials tried to warn the people of a community of a toxic spill from a train accident, but the local radio station, conglomerate-owned and computer-operated, had no one on duty. Local radio service might have prevented the resulting illnesses and death. (If you are going into radio, you may wish to consult the Hilliard-Keith book, *The Quieted Voice: The Rise and Demise of Localism in American Radio*.)

Because financial rather than artistic or social considerations control programming decisions and content, the producers and advertisers try to reach and hold as large a segment of the viewing or listening population as possible. In television, the easiest and most effective way to do this is to find the broadest common denominator—which frequently turns out to be the lowest. The term *LCD* is used to describe this lowest common denominator programming target. Despite increasing **narrowcasting** programming—programs oriented toward specialized audiences, reflecting the growing number of program and distribution sources such as multi-network and multi-channel cable and satellite systems and Internet sites carrying streamed and original programming—the primary aim of video producers too often still seems to be to present material that will not offend anyone.

The most popular commercial network shows—sitcoms, action adventure, police, hospitals, reality, talent programs—follow that formula. Programs willing to deal in depth with ideas or to present controversial material are in the minority. There are exceptions. The drama series *Boston Legal* invariably included a controversial social or political issue in its scripts, frequently taking an irreverent view. *60 Minutes* from time to time deals with significant issues, although the degree of controversy the program is willing to tackle is usually mild. Its original success prompted a spate of similar shows, such as *Dateline*, *48 Hours*, and *20/20*. They sometimes cover key events and touch on serious issues but mostly limit their content to non-controversial human interest features. News and documentary programs that do deal with controversial issues in depth don't last long. Self-censorship of controversial ideas, with the occasional exception of comedy satire such as, *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*, predominates.

Some PBS and NPR news and public affairs programs still challenge the status quo, but government pressure on public broadcasting to reflect or at least not challenge the government's political policies has resulted in timid programming. Perhaps the most controversial programming in the mass media today, aside from the alternative programming that has found a home on the Internet, is on talk shows. However, inasmuch as the mass media (including newspapers and magazines) are owned predominantly by political conservatives, virtually all television and cable network and syndicated radio talk shows—there are some exceptions such as MSNBC's Rachel Maddow and Ed Schultz shows—range from moderate right-wing to radical right-wing, with personalities such as Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, and Bill O'Reilly dominating the airwaves. With alternative news web sites, and bloggers and tweeters their own gatekeepers, the Internet offers a greater variety of information and opinions than do the traditional media.

Although traditionally and consistently politically conservative, the media have become less and less conservative in terms of social behavior. Partial nudity, profane language, undisguised sexual situations, and non-judgmental recognition of the real-world's alternative life styles are staples of early 21st century programming. Although obscene material is banned from the airwaves, indecent and profane material, euphemistically labeled adult programming, is permissible under certain circumstances. The FCC defines indecent program material as “language or material that, in context, depicts or describes, in terms patently offensive as measured by contemporary community standards for the broadcast medium, sexual or excretory activities or organs.” Therefore, the writer for the media is cautioned to check with the appropriate legal representative of his or her organization, while at the same time exercising every effort to maintain the integrity of what is being written. A sad commentary on the mores and Psychological sensitivity of viewers is that violence, sometimes deliberately graphic, has become a high-ratings staple of television.

DEMOGRAPHICS

When network radio, which was comparable to network television today, disappeared in the 1950s as television took over the older medium's most attractive programs and stars, radio, to survive, became fragmented into local audiences. Individual stations developed formats that appealed to specifically targeted groups of listeners. As noted earlier, the elimination of most monopoly controls and increased consolidation have resulted in a diminishing of programming specifically designed by a local programmer for a local audience. Nevertheless, ideally, the writer should attempt to prepare material that appeals to and is needed by a specific audience.

The makeup of the potential audience for a given program or station is called **demographics** or **demos**. The principal demographics are age and gender within the given market's locale. Some demographic studies go deeper, into job or profession, income, and education. When the audience's beliefs, attitudes, and behavior are included—such as political affiliation, religion, where the viewer or listener shops, and what brands he or she buys—it is called psychographics. These conditions and interests of the audience determine the kinds of writing that appeal to the given audience, as well as the product or service the audience is most likely to purchase. The demographics of radio audiences sometimes are even more precise than those of television audiences. Because radio is virtually all music—with the exception of some full-service stations, talk, all-news, all-sports, religious, and a few other specialized formats—each station attempts to program to a specified group of loyal listeners who are attracted to a particular music type and format. Radio stations may even break down their potential audiences into which interest groups might be listening in a particular place (home, work, car, on the street) and at a particular time of day or night. Cable audiences are fairly easily

targeted because most cable channels are quite narrow in scope, and Internet audiences, with the exception of some browsers, are usually interested in a given site's subject matter. The Internet reaches a more diverse, worldwide audience but still tries to reach the demographics most likely to buy any given product or service.

The basic concept of demographics use is illustrated in the following example: Take the same product and stress in the advertising spot the specific appeal that would be most effective with a given audience.

For an audience in a highly urbanized area: "The new Powerhouse Six is the latest in automobile styling. Its sleek, long look and ample interior, however, belie its length of only 86 inches, short enough to fit into some of the smallest parking spaces."

For an audience in a middle-class suburban area: "The new Powerhouse Six is the latest in automobile styling. Its ample interior is large enough to carry six children and assorted soccer, band, and school picnic equipment."

For an audience in an upscale suburban area: "The new Powerhouse Six is the latest in automobile styling. Its long, sleek look makes it a perfect second car that reflects the superior workmanship and appointments of its interior and exterior."

For an audience in a rural area: "The new Powerhouse Six is the latest in automobile styling. Its rugged exterior and roomy interior match the super-charged engine's remarkable 32 miles per gallon."

Well, you get the idea! Factor in what you know about the audience's age, gender, income, political milieu, religious affiliations, and other available information and you can pinpoint the content that might be most effective. For example, during the economic recession in the latter half of 2000's first decade more and more ads stressed "low price." When you get to the different formats in this book, practice writing your assigned scripts for different demographics. An important part of demographics is the racial and ethnic makeup of the specific market. Station formats reflect the interests of the audience.

Advertisers want to go beyond the basic demographics of age, gender, social and economic class, education, nationality, and religion, to identify the likely customers for their specific goods and services. They want the **psychographics** of the viewers and listeners. Psychographics go more in depth than demographics and try to determine lifestyles, values, attitudes, and even personality. Psychographics attempt to tell the advertiser not only whether the potential customer is likely to want to buy the product, but how they *feel* about it. Finding the feelings and behavior of the buyer in relation to the product or service facilitates more specific targeting. Researchers have developed even further levels of depth in audience analysis. **Geodemographics** combines geography with demographics in researching specific neighborhoods by their zip codes and factoring in housing style and income level with other **demos** to hone in on that narrow target of potential customers. And if that isn't enough to add to your knowledge of the basic demographics approach to audience research, there is also a method called **cohort analysis**. This essentially seeks to find common

bonds that prompt a group of people to think and feel the same way about a given item or an issue, based on similar experiences in the same time frame. Marketing campaigns, for example, have been targeted to specific generations, such as Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964; Generation X, 1965 to 1976; and Generation Y, between 1977 and 1995; and Generation Z, frequently called the Internet generation.

In sum, advertisers want to know not only how many people see their show (networks and stations are more interested in the numbers inasmuch as ratings determine the prices they charge for commercial air time), but whether the audiences they reach are likely purchasers of what they are selling and engage themselves with the product or service by continuing to watch during the commercial, record the show, and blog about it.

Because the Internet is interactive, audience research is possible in greater depth and on a broader basis. **Cookies** track every site you log onto. Information is collected on your tastes in content and, through analysis of the ads you click on, your product and service interests. Even your financial and medical information can be tracked and made available; financial and health organizations and companies are among the Internet's biggest advertisers. Invasion of privacy? Of course! In the latter part of the first decade of the 2000s, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) called for self-regulation. As this is written, however, your medical records, drug prescriptions, financial information, and much more are an open book.

THE ELECTRONIC MEDIA

Thus far we have dealt, principally, with the television and radio media. What about films made for TV? What about **cable**? Is there a difference between a script prepared for a cable pay channel and that written for a local cable access channel? Is a different writing approach needed for material distributed by satellite? Does one write differently for the Internet? What about other systems that make up the panoply of *electronic mass media*? To paraphrase Gertrude Stein, writing is writing is writing. The demographics may differ among people watching. The material permissible on an over-the-air station can differ from that seen on a pay-per-view “adult” channel. The techniques of writing programs for a type of format, whether for broadcast or cable, are essentially the same. But the medium sometimes does affect the message.

No overt distinction is made in this book among writing for broadcast, cable, or satellite transmission except where the demographics or other special considerations mandate different format or technique requirements. This is not true, however, for the Internet. Still developing in these early years of the 21st century, the Internet nevertheless has been moving steadily from using little-changed adaptations of television and radio writing (“streaming” programs

from the older media was the most direct way of enlarging broadcasting's audience base) to using its interactive ability as a creative base for entertainment programming. Writing for the Internet's full potentials requires different approaches and techniques. A story headline in *Time* magazine in mid-decade stated: "Spending more time with your computer than with your TV? Then TV's coming to find you." NBC's *The Office* streamed mini-episodes that people at computers could watch when they had a little time to spare. ESPN, Comedy Central, Discovery, MTV, HGTV, and other cable networks implemented broadband channels. NBC and CBS planned on-line-only reality shows. CBS launched an online channel, "innertube," for programming developed solely for the Internet and supported by advertising. In addition, CBS showed episodes of a number of its TV programs on the Internet the day after they appeared on television. One of the network's premiere programs, *CBS Evening News*, was offered free, in full, for Internet streaming. The hit reality show from Fox TV, *American Idol*, went on the Internet, and even Internet radio began using television materials, with a number of channels playing the music of *Idol* contestants. By the end of the first decade of 2000, online programmers included Cinemax, CNN, CNN International, College sports TV, E-online, Fox News Channel, GSN (game network), HBO, TBS, TCM (Turner Classic Movies), WE (Women's Entertainment), TV Guide, and the Weather Channel. ABC and NBC joined to add to their shows such as *Dancing With the Stars* on the popular video web site Hulu blockbuster programs such as *Desperate Housewives*, with extension of their programming to Hulu's partner sites such as MySpace and AOL.com. With Internet access becoming faster and faster, what started as 2-minute clips of shows are becoming longer and longer, with original programming of 10 and 20 minutes, moving toward full-length presentations. Original online shows are called **Webisodes**.

While most people studying to write for the electronic media concentrate on television and radio, it is important to understand that the Internet is fast becoming the base for both origination and distribution of virtually all media programming. While some critics say that the new media will not replace the older media, but will result in radio and television growing and adapting into new models, **convergence** (the melding of two or more media) thus far suggests otherwise.

Production techniques may seem irrelevant to the writer. But the writer should know at least some of the key production elements to understand what each medium can do. The writer must be able to write for the eye and ear, in addition to mastering the use of words. For example, the film format for television is not the same as the format for a **live-type** show recorded before a studio audience. Within each format, reflecting different aesthetic as well as physical approaches, are varying production techniques made possible by different equipment and technical devices. The writer must understand the production elements just as a painter understands different brushes, canvasses, and paints. The writer's basic tools are covered in Chapter 2.

Although other technologies developed after radio and television, such as cable and satellite, are often referred to as “new media,” they are essentially distribution systems. Except for programming in the larger sense—such as narrowcasting, given the multiple channels and fragmented video audiences here in the United States—their aesthetics are essentially the same as the older media. That is, they rarely require special or different writing techniques for their programs. They merely distribute through an additional service the programs that otherwise would be aired over traditional television or radio.

But cyberspace is different. The Internet sets up a number of special technical, aesthetic, and psychological parameters that the writer must understand and use if he or she is to prepare a script that has optimum impact in the newer medium. In this sense, the Internet is to the writer today what television was when it first opened up to programming. For example, the approaches used for writing a drama or documentary for film or a play for the stage or any program for radio had to be adapted to the needs and potentials of television. The same principle applies to writing for the Internet today.

TELEVISION AND THE MASS AUDIENCE

Television can combine the live performance values of theater, the mechanical abilities of film, the sound and audience orientation of radio, and its own electronic capacities. Television can use the best of all previous communication media.

Television combines both subjectivity and objectivity in relation to the audience, fusing two areas frequently thought of as mutually exclusive. With the camera and various electronic devices, the writer and director can subjectively orient the audience’s attentions and emotions by directing them to specific stimuli. The television audience cannot choose its focus, as does the stage audience, from among all the aspects of any given presentation. The television audience can be directed, through a **close-up**, a **zoom**, a **split screen**, or other camera or **control board (switcher)** movement, to focus on whatever object or occurrence most effectively achieves the purpose of the specific moment in the script. Attention can be directed to subtle reaction as well as to obvious action.

Objectivity is crucial to lending credibility to non-dramatic programming such as newscasts and documentaries. Creating an objective orientation is accomplished by bringing the performer more openly and directly to the viewer, for example, through the close-up or the zoom, than can be done in the large auditorium or theatre, even with a live performance, or in the expanse of a movie house. Unlike most drama, where the purpose is to create illusion, the performer in the non-dramatic program (television host/hostess, announcer, newscaster) wants to achieve a non-illusionary relationship with the audience. At the same time, the small screen, the limited length of most programs, and the intimacy of the living or bedroom when watching at home or on an iPod anywhere create effects and require techniques different from those of a film shown in a movie theater.

Stemming from the early days of television when all productions were live with continuous action, non-filmed television continues to maintain a continuity of action that differs from the usually frequent changes in sequence that one sees on the movie screen. A few television programs are still done as if they were live: recorded with few breaks in the action. In this respect, television borrows a key aesthetic element from the theater.

Television screen size—even 60 inches or more—restricts the number of characters and the size of the setting (note how poorly large-scale films look on television), and by the limited time available for a given dramatic program (approximately 21 minutes of playing time for a half-hour show and 42 minutes for the hour show, after commercial and **intro** and **outro** time has been subtracted). This is especially true if watching on a small hand-held device. Television uses virtually every mechanical technique of film, adding electronic techniques of its own to give it a special versatility and flexibility. Even so, the most successful shows still reflect a cognizance of the small screen and limited time, concentrating on slice-of-life vignettes of clearly defined characters.

There is a negative side to television's mechanical and electronic expansion. After videotape's advent in 1956 with its editing capabilities, television gradually moved from live to taped and filmed shows, and the center of television production, which had been in New York City with its abundance of experienced theater performers, moved to Hollywood. Soon the Hollywood approach dominated television. Some television critics argue that much of television has become a boxed-in version of the motion picture. Conversely, some film critics believe that television techniques imported to Hollywood have negatively affected films and have made them smaller, busier, and blander.

The writer must always keep in mind that television is visual. Where a visual element can achieve the desired effect, it should take precedence over dialogue; in many instances, dialogue may be superfluous. A story is told about a famous Broadway playwright, noted for his scintillating dialogue, who was hired to write a film script. He wrote a 30-page first act treatment in which a husband and wife on vacation reach their hotel and go to their hotel room. Thirty minutes of witty and sparkling conversation reveal that the wife has become increasingly disturbed over her husband's attention to other women. An experienced movie director went over the treatment and thought it presented a good situation. However, for the 30 pages of dialogue he substituted less than 1 page of visual directions in which the husband and wife enter the hotel, perfunctorily register, walk to the elevator, enter the elevator where the husband looks appraisingly at the female elevator operator, and the wife's face expresses great displeasure as the elevator doors close.

A simple test can show that many television writers have not yet learned the visual essence of their medium. Turn on your television set and turn the brightness down until the picture is gone, leaving only the audio. Note in how many programs, from commercials to dramas, you will “see” just about as much as you would with the video on. Is much of television, as some critics say, still just radio with pictures?