

8th Edition

BROADCAST JOURNALISM

Techniques of Radio and Television News



Peter Stewart and Ray Alexander

A Focal Press Book



Broadcast Journalism

Now in its 8th edition, *Broadcast Journalism* continues to be an essential text on the production of news broadcasting and the practical skills needed.

It includes not only basic techniques and classic examples for the production of radio and TV news, but also new technology and the latest case studies. The fundamental skills of interviewing, news writing and production now have to cope with the prevalence of Fake News and Deep Fakes and verifying content in an endless flow of social media. This edition also includes newsgathering with mobile devices, live reporting and using data and graphics. There are dozens of new images and links for downloads and further reading, plus end-of-chapter exercises and tutor notes.

This continues to be an indispensable textbook for broadcast journalism and communications students looking for an in-depth guide to the industry.

Peter Stewart is an award-winning broadcaster, radio consultant and author with 30 years' experience in media. His book *Essential Radio Skills* (2006 and 2010) has been widely praised by BBC and commercial radio presenters and managers as being the book on how to present and produce a radio show.

Ray Alexander has more than 30 years' experience in media management, TV, audio and online broadcast journalism and presentation. He has trained more than 5,000 journalists and presenters at the BBC in the UK and 22 other broadcasting organisations worldwide. He presented ITV Newsweek and was a Foreign Affairs and Political Correspondent. He is now a lecturer in broadcast journalism at City, University of London.



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Broadcast Journalism

**Techniques of Radio and
Television News**

8th edition

Peter Stewart and Ray Alexander

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Preface

What This Book Is About

People can construct their own media experiences, seek out desired information instead of waiting for it, participate in chat and get analysis and information about their interests. They sometimes seek out information that fits their own opinions rather than listening to a range of views on established media – from journalists who check, verify, provide a range of comments and make clear that there is a separation of Comment from Fact. The consumers – an audience for broadcast news – can grab news in bite-size nibbles or seek out more detail in podcasts. There is the contamination of Fake News and realistic Deep Fake audio-visual (AV) material. Live-streaming mobile applications can let anyone broadcast from a phone – but users may act on impulse and can make up their own ‘journalism’ out of stolen work, gossip, chatter, rumour and just lies and fakery. A new broadcast journalist must know to pause, often question the validity of something on social media including audio-visual material and work out the risks and implications.

Technology is something you buy.

Broadcast journalism is something you do.

This book is about things you do: writing, finding, judging and processing broadcast news, being in a production or newsroom team, reporting, interviewing, planning and more. These are not natural or simple skills. As well as the fundamental and traditional skills, editors want to hire potential staff with considerable online literacy and judgement, especially with any specialism on offer.

The Coronavirus global pandemic and social distancing bred a lot of creative ideas for getting broadcast news. Hand-held microphones do not work well from six feet away. If reporters did not have a purpose-made extending boom to hold a microphone then they would use whatever was available – even bamboo canes, a domestic plastic fitting or a broom handle and a roll of strong tape. Many local competitors started working together – usually pooling coverage of

PREFACE

scheduled events such as news conferences to reduce the number of cameras and microphones.

This 8th edition is divided into sections on core skills and needs, radio and television. This is not a sociological or academic study. The aim has been to produce a comprehensive and practical manual for anyone who wants to learn more about broadcast journalism.

Peter Stewart

Ray Alexander

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PART 1

The Principles of Broadcast Journalism



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CHAPTER 1

What You Need

Broadcast journalism is to be in love with the craft of storytelling with sound images and spoken words. Ask yourself some questions. Am I a curious person? Am I interested in people, processes, events and how and why things happen? Am I sceptical sometimes? Do I like the sound and images of life and activity: action, conflict, harmony, delight, emotion, surprise or shock? Can I write in sentences that offer one thought at a time? Words that fit with sound or images or both? Can I learn to do that? If you start by ticking Yes to these then go for it. (And finally, you do not care about irregular hours or being called in the middle of the night.)

Many wannabe broadcast journalists are aware only of reporters and presenters. Some even might think those are like a branch of show-business. But those public-facing roles are not the only jobs. A career route could start out with a job with the word ‘assistant’ or ‘trainee’ in the title but then later jobs might variously be described as: newsroom producer/script-editor/field producer/multi-media producer/video journalist/website editor/bureau producer/social media content producer, podcast producer or output producer.

Many broadcast journalists soon decide they prefer production to reporting and take a route which eventually leads to an editor position with people management responsibilities and control over the entire direction and style of a programme, station, channel or network.

Nor should you think it’s only the big national and global channels or networks that matter. Local is often the best place to start a career and some broadcast journalists stay in their home city, county or region for their entire career – they know everything that goes on and everyone in town is a contact. With more experience they understand the idea of heritage – and can think or say: ‘Remember what happened last time ...’. People can get more passionate about local issues than anything that goes on in global affairs.

But whatever you do you need to have:

- Curiosity about everything from your town to the entire world. An information-scout. Combined with a good sense of pictures and sound – understanding how they can show or tell a story in a way that words alone may not.

- Digital literacy. A sceptical attitude that includes double or triple checking information or audio-visual material, especially anything on social media. You understand the abilities or limitations of mobile devices for newsgathering.
- An understanding that Google or Wikipedia are not faultless research tools but can be used as a guide to look further and deeper.
- An ability to generate and develop ideas and to check that you have the facts to back them.
- An ability to communicate quickly and clearly in a team, especially with fast-moving working methods in a newsroom.
- Knowledge of media law: defamation, copyright, intellectual property. You know that rumour and online chat about a person or a company is not news. It has to be provably true.

Personal qualities include:

- Initiative, commitment, self-motivation and energy.
- Flexibility and adaptability to cope with changing priorities.
- Being questioning and sceptical about what people put into social media – would she really usually talk like that? Say that? Do that? Does that video look plausible? You would wait, check, check twice.

Underpinning all of these are two abilities wired into the minds of everyone in the news operation: writing skills, and an understanding of the needs of the audience no matter what technology is used.

Broadcast journalists are also professional listeners.

Melanie Reid. *The Times*. London. Review of *You're Not Listening* by Kate Murphy:

Social Media has handed a megaphone to blowhards and silenced the moderate. Worse than that, neurologically, ideological entrenchment is shutting down the bits of our brains that listen to opposing views, question and compromise. Brains are easily influenced into distinct pathways. Tell the same thing to audiences of, say, Fox News and CNN, and they interpret it in measurably different ways. It's an argument for listening to as many sources as possible to keep your brain agile and open.

Demanded skills include: achievable ideas for stories, concise fast writing, pack-aging together scripts, sound, interviews, pictures, maps or graphics, reporting

live, reading local news, multi-media skills, quickly getting sound and video that is usable, understanding media law and social media hazards, versioning text to be seen on mobile devices, knowing the names of people in the news, people about to be news, people who once were news, getting wet, hot, cold, being alert at three in the morning or standing outside a building for hours waiting for a critical moment that will last seconds. The good news? You will never be bored.

Broadcast news is about showing and hearing people and events, or processes that affect people. And often it will be on-air Live. The best storytelling takes the audience on a short journey. It says – come with me and look or listen to this.

Writing for broadcasting is not a natural process in which you just write sentences in your usual way. For the job you will obviously have done a lot of writing and enjoy the power of words. You read lots of news, books, maybe poetry. Sometimes you read something and you can think: I love that sentence and I wish I'd written a sentence like that. And one day, you will.

An Interest in Words

A 19th-century time-traveller would probably understand most of what is said today, but might think a website is a place where spiders are kept as pets. For a job



Figure 1.1 “It should be known to sensible people, if not our pedants, that the language we used a century ago will not be that in common use a century from now. Neither was the language of Chaucer the language of Shakespeare.”

The Observer, London, 1899.

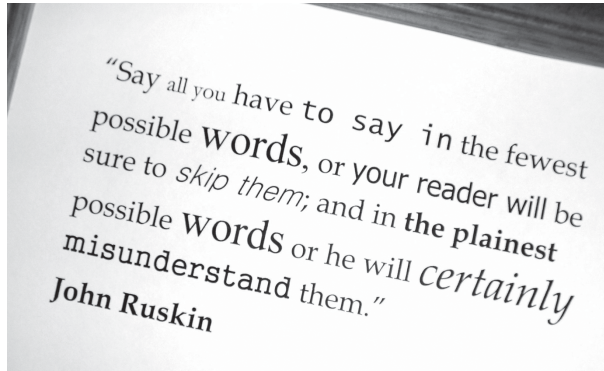


Figure 1.2 Although this is about words to be read rather than spoken, this quotation was printed, framed and placed in a local radio and TV newsroom by the editor. John Ruskin was a 19th-century critic and writer.

in broadcasting you should have an interest in words to be spoken and their precise meaning. In any language.

First Push

You might have left school and worked your way up through local journalism and have some experience. Or you may be a student who has just invested money on a journalism or communications degree. You have to prove how good you are: market yourself, persuade them they will miss out if they don't agree to see you. To succeed you need subtlety, persistence – and some experience with newsgathering and broadcast technology, which also means you can learn new or updated systems quickly. By the time a job is advertised an editor might already have a candidate lined up, so you should make your play before the job ads appear. The candidate-lined-up has to be ... you.

Plan your campaign. Make sure you are easy for potential employers to find. You could send a link to a demonstration recording of your work and a curriculum vitae (CV) or resume. A demo could include a three-minute audio bulletin followed by a topical interview of no longer than two and a half minutes or a topical news report of the same length. It should be professionally presented and labelled. If you do a television demo make sure it is well lit.

A written and printed CV/resume should be no more than two pages.

A simple format is best – a kaleidoscope of colours is irritating to read. It should give your name and email, relevant broadcast experience (including any freelance work), broadcast training, educational qualifications, any language skills, brief relevant details of previous employment, whether you hold a driving licence, a note of personal interests, achievements and the names and addresses of two referees. Also important is any specialist knowledge.

Use a clear classic font such as Arial, Times New Roman or Garamond and tailor it to suit each application.

So, have:

At least 12-point size and one-inch margins

Black on white

Consistent spacing

Name and contact details on every page

Segment your phone contact number – instead of writing 07777123456, try 077 77 123 456. It makes it simpler to call.

- Research organisations. Tailor your application or approach whether it is internship, work experience, freelance work or a contract.
- Connect with potential employers who you've met, perhaps at a school careers event, on campus or social networking sites.
- Be aware of what you are putting online that potential employers could see. You need to have what some professionals call a *hygienic background*, which means a professional and clean social media presence. Be cautious about what you post, including pictures.
- Big broadcasters tend to have a culture – find out about that. Some say they have 'values' – find out. Even find out how people dress, or what they talk about. Where do they go nearby outside their buildings for coffee breaks? Go and watch and listen. Sit there doing something on your laptop. Do not behave like a creepy spy – even though that is what you are doing. This is reasonable job research.

Haley Thomas works for CNN in New York City developing, overseeing and producing news podcasts:

To succeed as a broadcast journalist you have to absolutely love it. You can't be halfway committed, because it's not easy to make news. Young journalists pursuing a career in broadcast should walk in the newsroom ready to make their voices heard. Come with ideas, come with a willingness to learn, and come with a boldness to push creative boundaries. Persistence in the business is the key to success. And on the best days, the ones when you hit that deadline or get that breaking news on air just in time, you will get a feeling of accomplishment and pride that rivals any other.

Sima Kotecha has reported for the BBC from Afghanistan, Lebanon, Haiti, New York and from Italy at the height of the Covid pandemic and across the UK. She started as a researcher on local radio:

I love asking questions that others might find difficult to ask. I've always naturally been nosy. My mum said when I was younger I used to ask people really embarrassing questions.

TV reporter James Mates' tribute to British reporter and presenter Peter Sissons who died in October 2019:

I met Peter Sissons on my first day as an ITN trainee. He said: "You're going to be taught all sorts of stuff about pictures and cameras and sound and editing. But there's only one thing that matters – the words". He was right.

Richard Porter started on a local newspaper and eventually was responsible for the BBC World News channel:

I started at my local newspaper, the Newbury Weekly News. I answered an advert for a trainee after an unspectacular set of A-level results. That was in 1981 and I spent three years being indentured, and going on block release for my NCTJ proficiency qualification. By 1989 I was working on the Western Daily Press in Bristol. My advice now would be to go to do the very best you can academically, but combine that with experience and commitment which you can demonstrate to any employer. You have to stand out from the crowd, and showing your experience writing for a student newspaper or creating your own website is highly relevant. And it might sound obvious, but make sure you've watched or read or listened to as much output as possible of the organisation you are writing to/applying for. I still remember the interviewer for my first ever BBC job telling me how impressed he was that I had obviously done my homework on them.

John Sergeant. From autobiography *Give Me Ten Seconds*:

A plausible manner, some literary skill and rat-like cunning were the qualities the journalist Nicholas Tomalin identified as the requirements for being a reporter. I copied them down in my application to the BBC. The example Tomalin gave of rat-like cunning was that he had stolen this particular phrase from another journalist, who was also trying to identify the vital qualities. You should not be squeamish, he argued, about pinching other people's ideas, and it is difficult to imagine a journalist who does not do that as a matter of course. It is not simply laziness, it's a matter of practicality: you often have to work at great speed, and waiting for the perfect word, or the brilliant original thought, may not be possible. You have to deliver, and you have to do so quickly.

Everything so far applies whether you are seeking a place on a training scheme, a first job, are studying for a broadcast journalism degree, are working in print or online journalism but want to go into broadcasting or want to work freelance. For freelance exposure do not limit yourself to Facebook or LinkedIn, although you could even set up your own website. If you think you can get freelance work it can be useful if you specialise in a subject. Get business cards. Go to networking events about broadcast journalism. Target the right people when you pitch ideas. There can be paid broadcasting work in the many offices of global organisations, public/ press relations agencies, government departments and the bigger charities.

Neena Dhaun, who had experience as a reporter and TV presenter at the BBC and GMTV and then joined the Press Association in London as a video journalist:

News is a 24 hour, 7 day a week beast so if you are a reporter or producer then unsociable hours are what you sign up for. From personal experience the one difference or indeed problem I faced was that I didn't want to work nights, weekends or evenings when I had my children, so I made a conscious choice to do a career shift from journalism into PR. I personally think that when you have children you can't work the way you used to, so pre-empting or accepting that you will be torn between work and home is realistic. That means not covering stories or working in a way that you used to - some might say not getting senior roles because you won't put the unsociable hours in. Some may see that as problem - I just see it as another life choice.