TELEVISION SCRIPTING

News writing for television seems so simple, until you try it for the first time

Experts in English or print journalism often struggle with turning stories into tight scripts that are meant to be heard, not read

News written for TV (broadcast means writing for the eyes and ears).

Broadcast writing must be shorter and more concise than the writing done for print news.TV Scripts are often no more than 30 - 60 seconds long, and broadcast writers need to think about how much listening and viewing time they will have.

Every writer knows the KISS rule: Keep It Simple, Stupid (simple)!

If a reporter puts too many twists, turns, or facts into a story, he risks obscuring its message.

Write the way you talk.

This doesn't mean use slang, but make your story conversational.

Make viewers part of the conversation. Don’t lecture them.

Use subject-verb-direct object structure whenever possible. e.g., Toko Paul (s) won (v) yesterday's jackpot (d.o.).

Put Attribution at the Start of the Sentence

Print news stories usually put the attribution, the source of the information, at the end of the sentence. In broadcast news-writing we put them at the beginning.

Example:

Print: Two men were arrested, police said.

Broadcast: Police say two men were arrested.

Remember the verbs-They’re the action words that come between subjects and objects, telling what happened and when.

Keep It Short- Shorter sentences are more easily understood than long ones.

Don't start with a question or a quote

Identify the speaker before what is said. Leave out ages, middle initials, addresses, jobs, titles, etc... Unless they are important to the story.

YOU CAN ONLY TALK FOR AS LONG AS YOU HAVE IMAGES: It sounds simple, but a good television piece is planned well before you hit the record button on your camera

IMAGES SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS: Images can be deafening. If your visuals do not support your words, your audience will remember the visuals but not the news. If you are explaining how faulty wiring led to a blaze while showing video of the charcoal remains of a house, don’t expect your audience to pay attention to your well-researched details. If you say it, show it.

DON’T SAY WHAT THE PICTURES DO, SAY WHAT THEY DON’T: Give your viewers the information to understand why they are looking at those photos. “This is the first murder on record in Freetown.”

Write in all capital letters.

Spell things out phonetically.

Hyphenate words that go together. Monster-truck, switch-hitter, actor-director, etc...

Spell out numbers up to eleven.

Use words for big numbers.

Spell out signs and symbols