

Better Writing Through Self-Editing

From...

The Public Relations Practitioner's Playbook

A Synergized Approach to Effective Two-Way Communication*

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*** (The whole works better than any one of its parts)**

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Rules Followed By The Best Writers

Those who use effective communication techniques will stress these *20 Rules for Good Writing* from the Writers Digest School:

1. Prefer the plain word to the fancy.
2. Prefer the familiar word to the unfamiliar.
3. Prefer the Saxon word to the Roman.
4. Prefer nouns and verbs to adjectives and adverbs.
5. Prefer picture nouns and action verbs.
6. Never use a long word when a short one will do as well.
7. Master the simple declarative sentence.
8. Prefer the simple sentence to the complicated.
9. Vary your sentence length.
10. Put the words you want to emphasize at the beginning or end of your sentence.
11. Use the active voice.
12. Put statements in a positive form.
13. Use short paragraphs.
14. Cut needless words, sentences and paragraphs.
15. Use plain, conversational language. Write like you talk.
16. Avoid imitation. Write in your natural style.
17. Write clearly.
18. Avoid gobbledygook and jargon.
19. Write to be understood not to impress.
20. Revise and rewrite. Improvement is always possible.

Helpful Hints for Broadcast Writing*

1. Write simple spoken English.
2. Try to keep one thought to a sentence.
3. Use the active voice.
4. Try to use the present or the present perfect tense.
5. Avoid using “today.” Try to give **your** news story the most up-to-date peg you can.
6. Do **NOT** use synonyms...avoid synonyms. Synonyms can confuse the listener.
7. Do **NOT** use pronouns. Repeat proper names.
8. Avoid direct quotes...paraphrase (it’s safer).
9. Always find a way of repeating location. Repeating the location toward the bottom of the story is important to the listener.
10. Keep adjectives to a minimum. Adjectives tend to clutter speech and obscure the main line of the story.
11. Use verbs. Do not drop verbs. Listeners need verbs.
12. **Appositions.** Please **DO NOT** use appositions. Most appositions are not natural to speech. Appositions often confuse the listener because he cannot see the necessary punctuation.
13. **Repeating**...use simple sentences. This would usually mean, you would not start a sentence with a prepositional phrase or a participle phrase.
14. **Attribution**...almost always comes at the beginning of a sentence...**NOT** at the end.
15. Place yourself in a story or two. If you are writing the cast for air in Philadelphia and the story is about a robbery in Philadelphia, say...**Here in** Philadelphia.
16. When you write a newscast or a news story this way...it must follow that you **MUST** deliver it naturally...but with authority...and if you deliver it naturally...it means that proper names may not always be emphasized...that often the verb is emphasized. **NATURAL** inflection.

OH YES...What is simple English?
...”He expressed the hope he could stay”
That’s **NOT** simple English...
...”He says he hopes he can stay”
THAT **IS** SIMPLE ENGLISH!

THE FIRST PERSON...use “First Person” only if you really mean “you.” For instance...when speaking of the United States...do not use “we” or “our.” Simply say: “The United States.”

*Portions adapted from “Writing—here at ABC”

Ed Belkin’s (KYW Newsradio) Guide to “Better News Writing”
(With modifications by Larry Litwin)

1. Keep your sentences short...crisp...and clear. Only one thought per sentence. This formula makes it easier for listeners to grasp what you are saying. It also helps your announcing.
2. Keep your language conversational. Remember, you are writing for the ear.
3. Don’t be afraid of the simple—“He says.” It’s better than such words as “observed” ...“philosophized” ...“claimed” ...and “emphasized.”
4. Use everyday language. Write—“walk” and not “ambulate.”
5. Broadcasting is a “now” medium. For past events, if at all possible, keep them in the present perfect tense. Write: “Two men have been killed...” rather than
“Two men were killed...”
6. Be human. Relate your writing to people. After all, they are your listeners.
7. Use voice-cuts. Use direct quotes for controversial quotes when not using tapes (be certain you are correct). Otherwise, paraphrase.
8. Don’t be over modest. In broadcasting, it’s best to use the first person rather than “this reporter.”
9. Assume the audience knows nothing about a particular story. Give background.
10. Don’t write above the listener’s head...or your own.

Radio Copywriting Checklist

Do I have a headline message?

Good radio copy does not differ radically from any other sales message. Start strong to create interest.

Is my message simple and focused?

Choose one theme and stick with it.

Is my copy short and concise?

An average 30-second radio spot contains about 70 words. Remember: It takes longer to say something than to read it.

Is my company name prominent?

The recommendation is to say it *three times in 30 seconds*. Really.

Can the customer find me?

Mention your location with some directionality, such as “See us on Fifth and Cherry, just two blocks north of MegalaMall.”

Is there a call to action?

A limited time offer? A special service only you have? A clear benefit for coming to you?

Did you pass the 5-W test?

Just like any story or sales message, you need to cover the basics in as lively a way as possible. Be sure you have somehow addressed each of these:

- **Who?** This means you *and* them (the audience). Are you addressing women? Parents? Busy professionals? You need not be as brazen as saying “Attention all parents,” but you will want to do something that has the same effect. Then, be sure to get your name in at least three times.
- **What?** Tell the benefits of your product or service.
- **Where?** How do they find you?
- **When?** Is there any kind of limited offer?
- **Why?** Why should someone buy your product or service? If you cannot clearly address this, do not waste your money buying radio time.

Is it personal?

Radio is perhaps the most intimate medium. It is as if you are one-on-one with your potential customer. Take advantage of it.

Are sound effects important to my message?

They are cheap and effective. (But please do not use sirens—it only distresses the car audience who will turn down the radio to see if there really is a rescue vehicle or police car nearby!)

Can music enhance my message?

It usually can. A radio producer can help you integrate music into your spot.

Any special notes to the announcer?

Is there a tone you want to convey? Certain points that are the emphasis? Tell the announcer!