
UNIT 16 PLANNING A RADIO PROGRAMME

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16.0 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit of this block, you have read about the organisation of a radio station. You would have observed that all the inputs of a radio station are geared towards one single aim, and that is, how to produce and broadcast informative, entertaining and educative programmes in an effective way. The popularity of a radio station or channel depends upon the quality and content of its programmes. Although the word "quality" is a subjective term, yet you have to plan programmes, the content of which would satisfy the needs and wants of the target listeners. Every programme has to be properly conceived, planned and produced before it is aired. In this unit, we shall discuss the various stages of planning a programme.

16.1 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- describe the pre-requisites of a radio programme;
- analyse the requirements of the common stages in pre-production planning;
- explain the specific planning required for programmes of special nature; and
- discuss the steps of planning for Outside Broadcasts.

16.2 PROGRAMME PLANNING

Planning, as you are aware, is crucial for any activity, whether it is radio programming or nation-building. But, before planning a radio programme, you must constantly keep in mind the strengths and limitations of the medium. In radio, you have to create pictures through words, music and sound for a target audience which is large and varied. The radio communication has to draw upon the basic skills of verbal expression and mould it to suit the listening capability of its audience, i.e., the listeners. Thus, communication over radio depends on the message transmitted through sound to a listener who has to first listen and then interpret it to grasp the message. Not only the verbal expression of the communicator, but also the listening and understanding capacity of the listener is involved in an effective communication. To achieve this, the message has to be designed carefully. To know that this is achieved, proper audience feedback is necessary.

It is essential to remember that a programme on radio is addressed to 'a' listener. It is a 'one-to-one' communication though several people who are tuned to the same programme also get this communication simultaneously. A significant factor to bear is that a listener has the option to switch off the radio if s/he does not like or want to listen to a programme. We have no reason to believe that a dull, informative programme will be listened to. Alternatively, the listener may not be attentive even if s/he is actually listening to a programme. Hence, a radio programme should be planned and executed in such a manner that it **attracts and holds the attention of the listener.**

16.2.1 Pre-requisites of a Radio Programme

Planning a programme requires an understanding of the requisites of the medium. Radio is an aural medium and as such emphasis in planning and production must be on voice and sound which would enable listeners to appreciate or understand the message the programme seeks to convey. The language used in the programme must be the 'spoken language' with an informal and natural style. It should be simple and understandable, having short and simple sentences. Limited use of statistics is desirable as one cannot remember or digest a plethora of figures in one go. The theme and style of a programme should be capable of exploiting the potential of the medium. It must be suitable for the target audience.

An effective programme will have the following attributes:

Interest: The first attribute of a programme is that it should be interesting both in terms of content and presentation. The participants' voice quality must be such that can captivate listeners. For example, if drama is not well acted, script is badly read, then you can not expect the listener to be interested. A poor performance kills the interest.

Relevance: It relates to the lives of listeners in some way so that they feel involved. It may concern their livelihood, their environment or just about their activity and emotions. It may arouse admiration, curiosity, or show individuals in unusual places. Facts are generally dull, but people are interesting.

Comprehension: In addition to being relevant and interesting, the programme needs to be comprehensible to audience. The listeners should be able to understand the content to derive any benefit from it. It should also try to create concrete images avoiding abstract ideas as complexity leads to confusion.

Conflict: The element of conflict stimulates interest, whether it is between people, nations, ideas or with nature. It may bring out a controversy, a contrast or a clash of some sort. It may be in the form of a struggle, or a problem or even a challenging question.

The ultimate goal of a good radio programme is to disseminate appropriate information on a relevant theme. The planning efforts must be directed towards this so that the message conveyed produces the desired impact.

16.2.2 Elements of a Radio Programme

Radio programmes are made up of speech, sound effects, music and pause. A programmer has to plan a judicious use of all of the four elements, which are described below:

Spoken-word

It is a very powerful tool of communication among people sharing a common language. Speech is made up of words and, therefore, spoken-word is the most common and most important element of the majority of radio programmes. Words are 'linguistic' sounds through the use of which people sharing a particular language speak with one another. A radio programmer paints pictures or makes images through these words. Words present the content of the programme and voice renders them meaningful.

Sound effects

Sounds are universal in nature and can be understood by all linguistic groups. For example, sounds of wind, water flowing, storm, chirping birds, speeding motor car, gunshot, bomb blast, laughing, crying, etc., all fall under this category. These sounds can be recorded naturally or can be artificially created in the studio. When used in a radio programme, these are called 'sound effects.' Sound effects not only create an environment of the locale, but also project the image of the character. As the radio listener cannot see, but can only listen to a programme, therefore, s/he must be helped to imagine or visualise the locale, type of people involved and what they are doing and feeling etc.

Some sounds are indices of some happenings or events such as a knock on the door or a call bell which indicate that somebody has come to visit. Sound of a bird chirping indicates that it is dawn. Likewise, the sound of an owl or cockroaches is indicative of night time. There are also special sounds, such as echoed voices of the supernatural, the distorted voice of a puppet or a ghost or the roar of a lion, the chirping of a bird or a robot speech in a metallic tone.

Music

There are several forms of music on any radio such as film music, light music, folk music, classical music or western music. Music can be used to produce programmes like features or operas. Music is also used as a sound effect in many programmes to create the environment or mood. That's why in stocked tapes of music, a piece can be termed as a happy music, sad music or party music. We may use special music in the scenes of storm, war, marchpast or death.

Pause

In a medium of sound, pauses have a role to play. Pauses are used imaginatively to convey meaning. **Marshal McLuhan**, a well-known media expert, called radio a 'hot' medium, which evokes images. Pauses, if used appropriately, add to this quality of radio. You may ask, how a silence or pause can communicate? Yes, it can and that too very powerfully. Let us take an example. A mother on her death bed speaks to her son and suddenly stops. Someone provokes "Speak up mother, speak up". But, there is a silence. Here, pause or silence conveys the fear of death, helplessness and a lot of other feelings and emotions attached to it.

16.2.3 Target Planning

We shall discuss in the next unit on Audience Research that before undertaking any radio programme you must have a clear idea about your target audiences, their age, their educational and economic status, their likes/dislikes, their level of comprehension, etc. For example, if it is a programme for women, then you must know whether they are urban or rural. If they are urban, whether they are homemakers or working women. You must keep in your mind what subjects would interest them, what is relevant to them and what they will do with it. This information serves as an important backdrop in deciding the content, style, format and pace of the programme.

To make the programme material more relevant and useful, you have to pitch it at the right level and for that you require to know about the audiences. If your programme is specifically targeted at some specific audience then more focused and meaningful would be your programme. If it is meant for a very large audience and you cannot be so specific, then you may pitch your programme at the middle so that it could be enjoyed equally by a wide spectrum of people. Generally, audience for any common programme is a very heterogeneous group, especially in our country, which is so vast and diverse. You may have to cater to an audience, which is culturally, socially, regionally or linguistically quite heterogeneous.

While looking at the composition of your audience, you will also have to analyse their needs. You have to access their aspirations by providing them with an appropriate programme. You need to keep in mind the principle of demand and supply, and produce the right kind of product which is in demand. However, like all the other mass media, radio also has a dual role to play, providing the listeners with what they *want* along with items which they *need*, i.e., reflect the opinion of masses and also shape or modify the opinion. Hence, sometimes you need to supply a different kind of product looking at the larger interest of society or nation. In that case, you need to design your programme in such a way so as to create its demand.

Activity

Listen to any two radio programmes. Identify in them the elements discussed above. Analyse the composition of the spoken-word, sound effects, music and pauses. Compare and contrast them.

Check Your Progress: 1

Note: 1) Use the space below for your answers.
2) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

- 1) List some pre-requisites of a radio programme.
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- 2) What are the two roles radio has to perform?
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16.3 COMMON STAGES IN PRE-PRODUCTION PLANNING

There are three stages in programme production process, i.e., pre-production, production and post-production. While planning is required at every stage, extensive planning is required at the pre-production stage when the programme is conceived and all the necessary preparations made. Without proper planning, any interesting theme or creative idea may not make the desired impact. Planning is an on-going activity.

In a large set up, a number of producers are assigned different areas of programming such as: the spoken-word, music, drama, sports, agriculture and often special audience programmes.

A producer is the kingpin in a broadcasting organisation and it is s/he who draws his/her plan of programmes. However, s/he does not plan in isolation, as s/he is part of a radio set-up. The plans s/he draws must be in tune with the objectives of the radio station which employs them. There are two types of producers- the staff producers and the freelance producers. The latter are entrusted with the production of some selected programmes, but s/he has to plan the programme in accordance with the scope outlined by the staff producer who in such cases is referred to as Executive Producer. Every producer has to be a keen observer of men and matters and this observation provides him/her with programme ideas. Reading, discussion with people, visits to theatre, fairs and festivals help in the generation and development of ideas.

A quarterly schedule is prepared by compiling all the ideas. The programme chief interacts with producers singly as well as collectively and gives the final shape to each schedule. S/he ensures that each segment of audience gets adequate numbers of programmes on matters of relevance and interest to them and there is a balanced spread of the various issues concerning society in different programme schedules.

Implementing a programme idea included in the programme schedule has to be thought of in relation to the four basic resources – personnel, budget, technical, equipment and time. It may be difficult to modify a good idea in order to make it work with the available resources, but the producer’s most important task is to reconcile the desirable with the possible.

There are some common elements in planning programmes in different formats though the methodology of planning certain programmes such as drama, music, sports, and OBs may vary. Let us have a look at some of these common elements.

16.3.1 Identifying the Aim and Defining the Scope

In planning an effective radio programme, the most important step is to identify the broad aim of the programme - whether the intended programme imparts education, whether it is informative, aimed to generate awareness or enrichment type or entertaining in nature, whether it is being designed to meet the felt needs of any specific category of listeners. Working out objectives of a radio programme in clear-cut terms is an important part of the planning process because your entire effort is geared towards achieving those objectives.

When a decision is taken on producing a programme on a particular subject, the next stage is conceptualisation. The producer has to draw an outline of the programme indicating the main focus and other aspects that need projection. The scope is the framework on which planning is organised. It reflects the need assessment of the programme and production requirements. If the producer has to prepare a programme on child labour, for example, s/he has to study the subject including legal, social, anthropological and other aspects and consult a number of experts in the area. If the subject is complex or technical, the producer has to engage an expert to provide research inputs.

16.3.2 Selection of Format

In radio language, the word 'format' is used to refer to the form of the programme such as the talk format, the story format, the feature format and so on. Radio scripts can be written in many basic formats such as talk, feature or documentary. The selection of formats depends not on the novelty of the format, but on its suitability to express a given idea to a given audience. These formats can be used individually or in combination to make radio programmes interesting and absorbing. Many of the formats get their names from their usage in literature, e.g., story, drama; but nomenclatures, such as feature and documentary have their origin elsewhere. You will read about them in greater detail in Course MJM-002.

16.3.3 Content Planning

Content planning begins when the researcher makes available all the material connected with a subject. Sifting of the information and selecting the right material help in content planning which must ensure that the programme does full justice to the subject chosen. Overload of information may mar a programme. If the subject is vast, you may plan a series of programmes to do full justice to the topic instead of cramming all information in a single programme.

16.3.4 Selection of Scriptwriter and Other Talents

In radio broadcast most of what goes on the air is written in advance. If it is a programme in the talk format the producer selects a talker who writes the script. In the case of a feature, the producer writes the script himself or engages a scriptwriter. The selection of a script writer is of crucial importance. The producer has to brief the scriptwriter on the scope of the programme and satisfy him/herself that the script meets the requirements of the programme. If the producer gets a good script, half the 'battle' of making a good programme is won.



Producer scanning the directory of talkers indicating relevant details

Every radio station maintains a classified directory of talents. Scouting talents is a continuous process and additional talents are added to the directory. The producer draws talent taking into account the requirements of the programme on hand. There are occasions when the producer selects talents for talks and discussions from outside the directory whenever s/he is satisfied that the new talent is a must. In the case of Drama, the selection is directly related to the characters of the play and the suitability for the particular roles with reference to their grading and voice-age.

16.3.5 Selection of Time Slot

Radio stations maintain a chart which indicates the time slots for various programmes meant for different target groups. The selection of time slots is done by the station management taking into account the views of producers. The selection of time slots depends upon the preferred listening timings, which may vary according to the local conditions.

In allocating a transmission slot, the time of the day selected can be crucial to the success of the programme. It is no use putting a programme for children at a time when children are not available, nor is it helpful to broadcast an in-depth programme at a time when the home environment is busy and the necessary level of concentration is hard to sustain. The knowledge of target audience is useful in selecting time slots. Farmers, industrial workers, housewives, teenagers, etc., have certain preferred listening timings which vary according to the local circumstances.

16.3.6 Completing Contractual Formalities

There may be occasions when the producer has to make use of published material which attracts the copyright law. S/he has to secure the necessary clearances from the copyright holders, as broadcasters do not enjoy any special rights over and above those of ordinary citizens. If the producer proposes to produce a play based on an award winning novel, the radio station has to enter into a contract with the author to get the broadcast rights. The station may have to enter into another contract with the writer who adopts the novel as a radio play. Such clearances may not be required if the copyright expressly permits it.

There are several OB-based programmes like the *kavi sammalans* and sporting events. Getting clearances from the organisers for broadcast of such events in full or in part is essential. Some organisers may give permission without any monetary consideration. However, in the case of sporting events like cricket, large sums are demanded by organisers. Then, the radio station has to get into a formal legal contract. No programme can be planned for broadcast unless the broadcasting organisation gets the right to broadcast. The producer has to enter into a legal agreement with everyone who has contributed to the broadcast; be it a talker, interviewer, interviewee, commentator, participant, writer, drama artistes, music artiste etc. All these activities become part and parcel of the planning work of the producer.

16.4 SPECIFIC PLANNING FOR PROGRAMMES OF SPECIAL NATURE

So far we have discussed the common stages in planning programmes in different formats. However, for some formats, additional planning needs to be made, as detailed below:

Planning a Drama Programme

A drama producer is always in the look out for good script covering different themes, including historical and humorous plays. Usually, producers receive scripts from writers. However, these may not be suitable for broadcasts for various reasons. As a drama producer, you will have to persuade well-known writers in your area to write scripts on specific themes, such as empowerment of women, communal harmony, etc. You will have to look for literary works including works in regional languages which would render themselves well for radio adaptation. You will have to identify writers who can do the adaptation and prepare the broadcast script. Planning the cast of artists for participation in the play is equally important. They have to be selected with reference to the roles they have to play keeping in view their voice-age. Usually, a drama producer keeps a classified directory, including the suitability of artistes for specific roles and their voice-age. If the character in a play is of 40 years of age, the artiste selected must have the same voice-age though her/his actual age may be more or less. You will read about this in detail in Unit on Drama and Serials in Course MJM-002.

Planning a Music Programme

Music programmes are produced in different formats and planning will vary according to the format chosen. For overall planning, a balance between classical light, folk (vocal and instrumental) and film music needs to be made. Artistes of different grades will have to be accommodated in the respective time slots; artistes belonging to different *gharanas* (school of music) have to be featured to make the programme representative.

In case of light music programmes, planning involves selection of lyrics as well as composers, artistes and vocalists. Lyrics will have to be secured from well-known lyricists on chosen themes. The need of the orchestra and the vocalists (solo or duet) will have to be planned in consultation with the composer. The planning of choral music would be more elaborate as it involves a conductor as well as several vocalists. The placement of the artistes in the studio also will have to be meticulously planned.

Planning of Special Audience Programmes

The planning in respect of special audience programmes will have to be done in consultation with the agencies associated with them. In the case of Agricultural and Industrial Workers programmes, there are consultative panels/advisory committees attached to the radio station. The inputs received from these committees will have to be included. In the case of programmes on women and children, there are departments of the government at the state and the Centre and NGOs working in this area. Regular liaison with them needs to be made.

Planning of Sports Programmes

Each sports organisation, at state and national level, prepares calendar of sporting activities. A producer has to plan the coverage according to the importance of the fixture and the timings when the events take place. S/he can plan a live commentary, radio report or eye witness account as the case may be. Sports organisations demand royalty fee for coverage and the producer has to negotiate the terms and finalise the contractual formalities.

Check Your Progress: 2

- Note: 1) Use the space below for your answers.
2) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

- 1) List the various steps common to all formats while planning a programme.

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- 2) What specific steps need to be taken while planning a drama programme?

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16.5 PRODUCTION PLANNING

The two important process of production are: rehearsal and recording. Studio time is precious and, therefore, before the talker/artistes/participants begin recording, they are to be rehearsed. Most of the radio stations have a separate room in the studio complex for rehearsal known as **Reader Over Room (ROR)**. This is the first stage of rehearsal without microphone. The second stage of rehearsal is inside the studios with microphones. The demand for ROR and the studio is usually during working days, particularly during daytime is high. The producer has to plan the **ROR** studio bookings in such a way that s/he has adequate time to do the rehearsals and recordings. Recording during non-peak-hours and holidays will enable the producer to devote more time to rehearsals and recording. There would be no need for post-production, if the producer and the artistes devote adequate time and attention to these two aspects of production.

Recording is the responsibility of the producer. It is, therefore, necessary for him/her to check the studio recorder, studio clock, the magnetic tape to be used sufficiently in advance so that there is no hassle at the time of recording. In the case of OB there is greater need for planning.

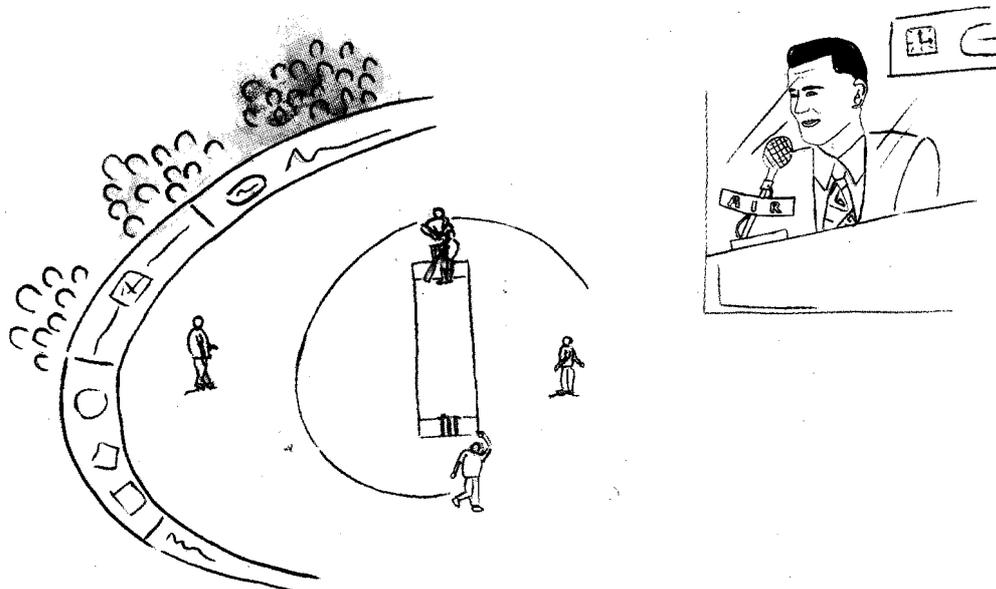
16.6 PLANNING OUTSIDE BROADCASTS

The outside or outdoor broadcast (OB) or 'remote' represents more than a desire to include in the schedule, coverage of outside events of public interest. There is a positive need for the broadcaster to escape from the cosy confines of the building into the 'real' world which is the target for all his/her enterprises. A music concert, church service, exhibition, civic ceremony, sporting event, public meeting, conference or demonstration all these demand the broadcaster's attention. It is not only good for radio to reflect what is going on, it is crucial for the station's credibility as well. Radio must not only go to where people are, it must reflect the interests and activities of many people, hence, it is important to include OBs.

The OB programmes can be broadly categorized into two; 'Live' and 'Recorded'. The basic preparation for both 'live' and 'recorded' OB programmes is exactly the same, which will be explained in greater detail. Any OB programme has to be planned keeping in mind the objective of that particular programme which will indicate the kind of treatment it should be given and the scope of the programme. Normally, OB programmes consist of coverage of:

- special events such as Republic Day Parade, Independence Day function, etc.;
- field-based discussions, interviews etc.;
- coverage of exhibitions, fairs, *melas* etc.;
- international conferences such as NAM, CHOGM, SAARC, etc.;
- national and local events, viz., funeral procession of VIPs, religious functions like *Rath Yatra*, etc., swearing in ceremonies of Presidents, Prime Ministers, Cabinet Ministers, etc.; and
- direct broadcast/relay of sport commentaries, viz., cricket matches, Asian Games, National Games, etc.

The producer in charge of an OB programme along with the appropriate engineering staff has to plan and prepare for the forthcoming event. The producer has to find out in advance as to who is the incharge of function. S/he must meet the organizers and explain in detail the kind of support expected from them, before and during the actual event. The producer along with an engineer (who would be involved in the relay and recording) must do a **reconnaissance survey** of the sports venue from where the commentary has to be made. Actually, sitting in the commentator's seat is essential to ascertain that a tree or some other object does not block the view, because s/he must 'see' to make 'live' commentary. The best vantage point to 'see' the most action should be identified in advance. Reconnaissance also helps identify as to what is available, like the power supply points, etc. The number of microphones and types of microphones required, required length of cables, etc., can be planned only after visiting the OB spot. Furniture requirement such as tables, chairs, etc., has to be intimated to the organizers in advance.



A Cricket commentary on the game in progress

For OB programme, the commentators need background material and reference material, which will give details such as the number of contingents, participating, details of armed forces display, details of school children's presentations, various states tableaux etc. The producer must procure all this material in advance from the organizers, keep at least one copy and pass it on to the commentators who must prepare their notes in advance.

Recording machines, portable recording machines in good condition that can work on power supply as well as cells are a must. The duration of the OB function determines the number of recording machines referred to as Ultra Portable Tape Recorders (UPTRs) required.

Recording tapes and empty spools obviously are one of the most important components of OB. It is essential to 'run' (i.e., wind and re-wind) all the tapes to be used for recording in advance. This will reveal any fault like broken tapes, stickiness, patchy tape, etc. Preferably a few additional tapes should be taken to OB. In case, you are using old tapes, erasing them fully in advance is a good idea. This helps the quality of the recording. Empty spools in good condition are needed.



OB recording

Microphones with cables and stands/boom are the basic tools of any recording. In fact, during the reconnaissance survey, the producer and engineer determine the number and type of microphones required so also their placement and of course the length of cables, stands/boom to be used for recording.

Uninterrupted power supply must be ensured in advance, nonetheless, back up batteries for the recorders should be carried to the OB spot.

If the OB has to be broadcast live, then telephone lines to carry the sound to the base must be booked and checked in advance. Lines are provided by the Telecommunication department or its agency.

16.7 ASSESSMENT OF PLANNING

Assessment of the planning, procedures adopted is also an important part of planning. While producing a programme, a producer's prime responsibility is towards the listener. Is it interesting? Is the programme providing a clear picture of what it intends to portray? Are the facts correct and in the right order? Is it legally permissible? Is it of good technical quality? Most of these questions are self-evident and as long as they are borne in mind will answer themselves as the programme proceeds.

Once everything has been taken care in terms of direction, production and recording, an overall analysis should be made of the programme. An exhaustive assessment of the entire programme should be made in an objective and detached manner. It is possible that some flaws may have been noticed by the actors/players/participants while recording/ production was in process. Certain defects can be edited out from the tape by an ingenious editor and a skilled recordist. A producer must not hesitate to replan/reproduce the entire programme if the assessment reveals that it is not in accordance with the planned objectives.

Check Your Progress: 3

- Note:** 1) Use the space below for your answers.
2) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

- 1) Why it is important to undertake a reconnaissance survey or 'reccee' before OB recording?
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- 2) What kind of assessment would you undertake once the programme has been produced?
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16.8 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you learned that there are four basic components of radio programmes, these are spoken-word, sound effects, music and pause. The importance of these elements was examined. We discussed the attributes of an interesting and informative programme and guidelines for a producer to achieve them. We analysed the pre-requisites in planning a radio programme, and emphasised the importance of the target audience, objectives, content, format, script, and appropriate time slot. The different stages involved in the planning of pre-production and production were analysed. The importance of planning in an outside broadcast and the steps involved were also discussed in detail.

16.9 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check Your Progress: 1

- 1) Some of the pre-requisites for a radio programme are:
- appropriateness of the theme for the aural medium;
 - emphasis on voice and sound;
 - spoken language;
 - simple, short and simple sentences;
 - limited use of statistics;
 - relevance of the theme for the target audience;
 - clarity and accuracy of the content;
 - interesting presentation; and
 - good technical quality.
- 2) Radio has to reflect the opinion of the listeners by providing them need-based programmes. At the same time, it has to shape and mould the public opinion in the larger interest of society and nation.

Check Your Progress: 2

- 1) The various steps common to all formats while planning a programme include: identification of aims and objectives, defining the scope of the programme, format and content selection, identification of scriptwriter and other talents, selection of appropriate time slot for transmission and completing contractual formalities.
- 2) While planning a drama programme, some specific steps need to be taken. A drama producer has to persuade well-known writers to write scripts on specific themes. S/he has to look for literary works including works in regional languages which would render themselves well for radio adaptation. S/he has to identify writers who could do the adaptation and prepare the broadcast script. Planning the cast of artistes in view of the voice-age of the characters is another important task of a drama producer.

Check Your Progress: 3

- 1) It is important to undertake recce or reconnaissance survey of the venue before OB recording to identify the best vantage point. The power supply points, the number of microphones and types of microphones required, required length of cables etc. can be planned only after visiting the OB spot. Furniture requirement such as tables, chairs, etc., has to be intimated to the organizers in advance.
- 2) Before the programme is produced, a thorough assessment of the programme including production planning needs to be made. The relevance, clarity and accuracy of the content, manner of presentation, technical quality, issue of copy right, etc. need to be analysed in an objective manner and correctional action taken.