
UNIT 4 RADIO TALK AND PROFILE

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4.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

By the end of the unit, you should be able to :

- explain the feature of radio scripts in the 'spoken-word' mode;
- describe the technique of radio talk;
- present a good talk after 'rehearsing' your script;
- distinguish between a **radio** talk and a radio profile; and
- plan a radio profile.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous unit (3) of this Block has made you familiar with certain general features of writing for Radio. This includes writing for **the** ear, the use of spoken language, narration and sound-effects and the formats for radio scripting. The present unit aims at equipping you with the understanding of what makes a good radio talk. The guidelines given should help you to discern the basic requirements of a radio talk — the audience and — the **situations**. This unit prepares you for the task of writing a radio talk. In order to **write** and present a radio talk successfully, you must understand what are the essential elements which make for communication between the talker and the listener. Communication **will** take place only if these elements are included in the talk. Some of these requirements may seem obvious, but the fact is that talkers neglect them, **both** in the writing and in the delivery of talks.

We will learn that language **skills**, like mechanical skills, require endless practice. The activities interspersed in the unit merely give you an idea of how to go about refining and polishing your skills. **You** should be able to construct similar exercises on your own for further practice.

4.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF RADIO TALK

Radio talks are of different kinds — longer or shorter in duration, addressed to special groups such as students, community workers, field workers, educated elite, teachers and instructors and so on. But whatever the audience, it is the business of the talker to formulate for himself, with the help of those who **commission** the talk, some idea of the projected Audience. What is their level of information on the subject? What are the issues which are upper most in the minds of the people? The talker must attempt to **answer** their questions and meet their needs. Only **then** will the talk be relevant.

Let us note the unique characteristics of a radio talk.

- A talk is something which is listened to. It is not something which one reads. It is true, of course, that a talk may subsequently be published and can be read or referred to. But that is another matter; and in any case, only a small number of the talks delivered find their way into print.
- A talk may be listened to by individuals, alone, in a room, in a home, or in the company of members of the family or friends. In this respect, a talk differs from a speech or a lecture, which is addressed to a collective audience or a group.
- In a radio talk, the speaker is not face to face with his audience. They do not see each other. Communication is in one direction only, from the speaker to the audience, and it is totally dependent on words and the manner in which they are delivered.
- The talk is something which can be enjoyed in retrospect. But you should remember what the speaker has said in order to be able to think over it, understand its full implications, and thus appreciate it.
- The talk is personal. It is a particular person who is speaking to you.

4.2.1 Attractiveness

The two most important subjective factors which make **for** recall are interest and attention. They are closely connected. If you are interested in something you will pay attention to it, and if you listen to it carefully, you will remember it. So the first thing the talker must do is to rouse the interest of the listener. If something concerns him, he will naturally become interested in it and will pay attention to it. But if it is of remote or merely academic interest, he will at best listen to it without closely following its argument.

If a radio talk is on the functioning of the Railways, the focus should be on the safety **aspect** rather on a **budgetary** analysis. The radio talk is aimed at the listening public and therefore should centre round points that will hold the listener's attention.

4.2.2 Clarity

Similarly, any material **that** is retained and remembered possesses **certain** characteristics. The listener **perceives the** talk as a whole or as a pattern, and in remembering it also it is this pattern that comes to the mind. Experimental evidence shows that the listener tries to get hold of the pattern, the central theme **of** what is communicated in the talk.

Psychologists have described this process, the process of reacting to given material, as an effort after meaning. We not only seek to find a meaning in what we perceive, we also recall more easily something which we have understood. The lesson for the talker is to ensure that there is a central theme in what he says. A talk which is a series of disjointed observations will not be recalled. It will leave little impression on the listener.

Psychologists have also drawn attention to a factor, described as the 'dominant detail' which facilitates recall. What is dominant detail? If you ask a friend the story of a film, the answer might be 'Oh! it is the eternal triangle; but this is not the whole story. The friend may add that it is the eternal triangle with a difference. This difference is what gives the clue to the dominant detail. Thus, while **human** beings attempt to perceive objects as unitary wholes, there is some detail which stands out apart from the rest and influences what is perceived. This dominant detail is a kind of nucleus around which the other images cluster in a process of recall. It sets the stage for remembering. Take the well-known film *Arth*. It is the eternal triangle, but right through we see the heroine trying to forge a life of her own. This **movement** towards the woman's self-identity is the dominant detail.

4.2.3 Content-density

Do not burden your script with details which in any case make little impression, and which are easily forgotten. Chief among these are figures. Once they get into lakhs and crores, they mean nothing to the common person. It is much better to give comparisons. For example, if you want to say that the population of Australia is very small, it would be more revealing to say, the total population of Australia is only equal to the number of children born in India in just one year. If you must give

4.3 TECHNIQUE OF RADIO TALK

Radio talk demands meeting certain basic requirements. They are :

- Clarity
- Informality
- Self-Explanatory

How is the talker to meet the special requirements of the **radio** talk? Let us discuss each requirement and see what it demands. Of course, these requirements are interrelated, and if you satisfy one you may also be satisfying one or more of the **others** at the same time.

4.3.1 Clarity

In 4.2.2, we have discussed clarity which helps the listener to recall dominant details of the talk after a certain lapse of time. Let us see how we can achieve clarity. It is commonly agreed that, unlike the written articles, the radio talk is heard; it is not read. Therefore, the meaning of each sentence must be clear when heard only once. **You** cannot listen to it a second time to unravel its meaning. In the case of a printed article, if you do not get the intention of the author on reading it once, you can re-read the article or parts of it which you find obscure. But this is not possible in the case of a talk. So, the first principle of writing a radio talk is to make each sentence transparently clear. This can **be** achieved in the following ways :

Sentences should be short: A good rule to follow is to keep the sentences down to **about** three lines each. Long sentences frequently involve qualifying clauses. You can simplify them by putting the qualifying clauses into separate **sentences**. (see unit 3).

Activity 2

Read the passage given below and make this effective for a Radio Talk.

The Indian Constitution, said to guarantee freedom of religion, hedges it with so many restrictions such as the ability of the state to prohibit religious practices endangering **law** and order, health and morality and also determines to itself the right to distinguish essentially religious practices from those which are secular in nature and merely associated with religion, so that the so-called guarantee actually amounts to precious little.

(Check your answer with the answer given in 4.7)

Sentences in the active voice tend to make for easier comprehension than those in indirect speech in the passive **voice**. **For** instance, it is better to say, "Several distinguished economists believe that a huge **budgetary** deficit tends to result in inflation", rather than to say, "The view that a huge deficit in the budget will tend to result in **inflation**, is held by many distinguished economists."

Difficult and uncommon words should be avoided: Remember that the listener neither keeps a dictionary close on hand, nor has the time while listening to refer to it, if difficult or uncommon words are used in the talk. Easy communication is basic to radio talk.

Activity 3

Read the sentence given below and convert into active voice.

Mental peace and the continuation of mental and physical faculties with passing years was sought to be achieved by the eastern mystics by the practice of yogic exercises.

(Check your answer **with** the hints given in 4.7)

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4.3.2 Informality

There is an important **respect** in which a radio talk differs from a public speech or lecture. A speech or lecture is heard or listened to by a **collective** audience or group. In the case of the radio talk, however, it is the individual, a few family members, perhaps a friend or **two, who** constitute the audience. The radio talker speaks to them — thousands of such small groups — in the **intimacy** of their homes.

The radio talk is like a **conversation** with friends. It is informal, it is chatty. True, the other party, the listeners, can not butt in, they cannot interject. It is the talker's job to do that for them by raising questions and doubts on their behalf, and trying to answer them. The **successful** talker will attempt to do so.

In a radio talk, the **personality** of the presenter is important. One may have made a special study of a subject, another may have inside knowledge, a third may have been an eye-witness to an **important** event. That is why listeners are interested in what the **talker has, to** say. The talker is not a disembodied voice which is presenting dry-as-dust fact. So, when you prepare a talk, assimilate your material thoroughly, consider the main **thesis** you want to put across, and harness the crucial facts which articulate your case. 'The upshot of the issue as I see it is this....', 'This is what I can make of the **problem**... . Statements of this kind, in the first person, are entirely **in order** in a radio talk.

Activity 4

Read the passage given below and make it personal, informal and chatty.

A widow becomes **the flotsam** and jetsam of Indian society washed ashore at the portals of exploitative ashrams in the hope of dying there and attaining moksha (**salvation**), or remains prey to the predations of relatives who enslave or mentally torture her. Reduced to virtual non-status through a series of rituals masquerading **under** obscurantist religious sanctions — the breaking of her bangles or **banishing** her from auspicious functions — she loses her independence and capacity to fight for her property rights.

(Check with answer in 4.7)

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4.3.3 Self-Explanatory

The talker is not face-to-face with his audience. This is another point of difference between the radio talk and the public speech or lecture. In the latter two cases, the speaker faces his audience. The talker does not have this advantage, and so has problems. Facial expression communicates a great deal. The audience can see from the hint of a smile on the speaker's face that he is making a mild joke, or that he is saying something tongue-in-cheek. Again, on the other hand, one can see from his expression that he is serious-about the point he is making. Such visual aids are not available for a radio talk. So the talker has to make up for them in the way he or she reads the **script**.

Reading out a script is rather like speaking lines in a play. The talk has to be carefully rehearsed, so that every nuance of meaning is brought out. However, the talk must on no **account** be over-dramatised, because it would then cease to be a conversation, and would sound unnatural.

One of the important advantages which face-to-face communication gives the speaker is the feedback through the expressions on the faces of the audience. If he sees them looking puzzled, he can explain the point further. If they look bored, he can move on to the next point, and so on. The talker on the radio has to manage without these important signals. The talker must, therefore, anticipate audience response when writing his script, or when rehearsing it. If he finds anything lacking in clarity or taking **too** much time, he should find a corrective for it.

Activity 5

Given below are some opening sentences (a–f) from excerpts.

- 1) Identify those you think can be used, as they are, as opening for radio talks.
- 2) Give the ones selected, suitable titles to focus the theme.
 - a) Three o'clock in the morning — dark, cold, peaceful. The telephone rings with a start, I get up and lift the receiver : Kaun?
 - b) It is found out that in the manufacture of safety matches the material contents — chlorate of potash, sulphur, phosphorus, red antimony, black antimony, glue, veneers, splints, blue paper and gun powder form 61 per cent of the total cost of production.
 - c) There is a convenient penchant to sweep under the rug some of the most grotesque evils that plague society until some apocalyptic incident jolts people from their escapist reveries.
 - d) One can watch the varying moods of rivers — almost human — in the **ceaseless** cycle of the seasons. A narrow, slow, silvery streak of water during the hot summer, a wide roaring broad-bosomed torrential spectacle during the monsoons.
 - e) The second **Asiad**, the tenth Asian Games, will be remembered for the emergence of a new power in sports arena of the Continent : While China reasserted its supremacy by maintaining the dominance gained at the New Delhi games four years ago, the host country, South Korea, rewrote history by toppling Japan for the **second** position.
 - f) Voltaire, enumerating the advantage that animals have over man, observed that they have no theologian to instruct them, their funerals cost them nothing and no one starts lawsuits over their wills. This set me wondering. What is the advantage man has over animals?

(Check your answers with Aids to ~nswers'4.7)

4.4 TARGET AUDIENCE

The radio talk is usually enjoyed in retrospect. While it is on the air your attention is **focused** on what is going on. You dare not relax your attention for fear of missing a crucial link. It is only when it is over that you can think over what has been said, especially the main point, to grasp the significance of what has been said. But in order to do this you must be able to remember it. The secret of writing effectively for the

radio is to write so as to **be** remembered. Radio writing must be memorable.

Broadly speaking, there **are** two sets of factors which determine recall. They are subjective factors and objective factors, and a talk should be organised keeping **these** factors in mind. The **subjective** factors relate to the mental make-up of the person who has to remember, and the objective factors to the material which has to be remembered.

4.5 RADIO PROFILE

The radio profile is usually a talk, feature, magazine or even documentary on a certain personality. There is no one way of doing a radio profile and very often its presentation depends on circumstances. Say for instance, Salman **Rushdie**, the distinguished writer, wins a Pulitzer Prize for writing. There can be a Radio Profile of him so that Indian listeners get an idea of Salman **Rushdie**. There are various ways one can go about:

- i) We may want to **interview** him as part of the profile. If **Salman Rushdie** is in India, we can make **an** attempt to get him for a brief interview. We can write a script about him and get him to speak on **certain** important issues.
- ii) We may discover that Salman **Rushdie** is in England and has no immediate plans of visiting India. We make a hurried attempt to find out whether anyone has ever recorded a conversation with **Rushdie**. If yes, can we have access to it and use it for our programme? Our script would certainly become more lively if it incorporates **excerpts** from interviews from the archives. In which case we **can** have a scripted profile of **Rushdie** **intercut** with archival material (**i.e.** prerecorded interviews).
- iii) We search high and low for archival materials and discover that no one has ever interviewed **Rushdie**. Even if there has been one there's no trace of any such material. We do not want our programme to be a straight talk. Why not interview people who know **Rushdie** or are familiar with his work? We manage to track down **several** people **who** are familiar with **Rushdie** and his work and have a lot of interesting information to share. In which case, we can have a scripted profile of **Rushdie** that incorporates several other speakers.
- iv) We discover that we are very lucky and have access to all of the above. In which case we have a **scripted** commentary, **Rushdie** himself as well as some archival interviews of **Rushdie**. If we have all these resources at our command, we can even go to the extent of producing a radio commentary.
- v) If we do not have **access** to any of the above, all is not lost. We **can** produce a well scripted talk that will both inform and interest listeners.

Now, all the rules for writing that we have talked of in unit 3 and the present one are relevant for producing a radio profile. Even though options 1, 2, 3 and 4 may **need/demand** a lot of running around, it is hard to produce a well written 'talk'. On the other hand it runs the **risk** of being monotonous and dull. How does one get out of that? Well, there are no hard and fast rules, but keeping the following in mind can certainly help.

- i) Research is always **most** important. Whether you include all your materials into the programme or **not**, you should know everything that there is to know about that person. Your facts should be checked and cross-checked several times over.
- ii) Avoid dates, numbers, and technical jargon. For instance, nobody is interested in knowing how many articles **Rushdie** has published, on which day and in which magazine and in what edition.
- iii) Your presentation **should** be informal. You may be writing about a writer but there's no need to get into any high-flown emotional rhetoric (**....As the sun sets to the west and the hills are tinged with pale orange, Salman **Rushdie**, writer, thinker and 'lost soul in hiding, makes a secret vow to himself...**) It should also be noted that the script writer cannot run away with **informality**. So **when** you make a programme on say, a pop singer, think twice before using words like **'ripoff'**, 'rap', 'funky', etc. Not only do these words risk extinction but they are probably not found in the dictionary. It's always preferable to **use** words that

everybody is familiar with.

- iv) Selection is an important part of producing a profile. Human beings are multifaced. It's quite impossible to deal with everything all at once. Take one aspect of that person and write about it. Of **course**, you should acknowledge the existence of other aspects but do not attempt to deal with everything in depth.
- v) An attempt must be made to concretize the abstract with specific examples. Anecdotes and examples come in very handy here. If say, we are making a profile of famous theatre director Peter Brooke, we may say; "Peter Brooke's work is replete with symbolism" (**general/abstract** statement). This could be concretized with: "Peter Brooke's work is replete with symbolism. In The Mahabharata for instance, **Arjuna** is a character who changes constantly. In the end, he is victorious but not above blame. We watch him increasingly become besmirched with mud and blood from his wounds."

4.6 SUMMING UP

A Radio Talk implies communication between the talker and the listener. There are certain essential elements which, if ignored or neglected, will render the talk ineffective. **They** are interrelated, and in satisfying one you may be satisfying one or more of the others at the same time.

As the Radio Talk is usually listened to by individuals, it should be informal, even chatty.

- The talk should concern the issue uppermost in the mind of the listeners.
- The writer must, therefore, use appropriate language to hold the interest of his listeners. For instance, short sentences, simple words, personal interjections, rhetorical questions, etc., make for **clarity** and liveliness in delivery.
- The talker should not burden his talk with figures which are usually forgotten. Likewise, he should not use unfamiliar names, and, if forced to use them, he should choose the name least unfamiliar to his audience.
- The talk should be personal and should reflect the talker's knowledge and his own **view** or perspective.
- The talk should be memorable at its first presentation, since it will not be repeated.
- If the theme is clearly expressed, the dominant detail highlighted and irrelevant matter struck out, there is no reason why the talk should not leave a **lasting** impression on the mind of the listener.
- Radio profiles could be talks, features, magazines or even a documentary on a personality.
- Research and organisation are equally important in the writing of a radio profile.

4.7 AIDS TO ANSWERS

Activity 1

- i)
 - a) Some sentences are too long.
 - b) The vocabulary is pedantic with quite a few words of four or **more** syllables.
 - c) The presentation will be dull.
 - d) There is no effort to **link** the talk directly with the urban commuter's problems, so he can see himself in the picture.
 - e) Think of other reasons.
- ii) Agglomerations, phenomenal, installation, alleviating
- iii)
 - a) Too many figures **make** a radio talk monotonous.
 - b) The fact of rapid population growth has been repeated in at least five sentences.

Activity 2

The sentences consists of nearly seventy words, and the listener would lost the sense of it before he gets to the end. To make it effective in a radio talk you should break it

up into **different** sentences. and the key idea should come into the **first** short sentence. thus : 'The Indian **Constitution** is said to guarantee freedom of religion. but **this** freedom comes to naught in view of **the** power of the state to restrict it'. (27 words)
"These restraining **powers** include the right to interfere with any **religious practice** if it endangers. etc. etc."

Activity 3

- a) 'Eastern mystics, **becomes** the subject of your sentence.
- b) 'Achieved' becomes '**achieve**'.

Activity 4

- a) Write in the first **person**, 'I' — 'you' **form**.
- b) Substitute simple words for the more **pedantic ones**, i.e., **exploitative**, **predations**, **obscurantist**, etc.
- c) Replace the cliché 'flotsam and jetsam' with words indicating your **sense** of **disgust** at the status allotted to widows in **society**.

Activity 5

- a) The Day Everything Went Wrong
My Past Catches Up **With** Me
- d) The Seasons of **River**
Rivers Make Me **Think**
- e) **The Second** Asiad
- f) **What** Makes Man **Superior** to Animals?
The Simple Life