
UNIT 1 TELEVISION AND ITS POTENTIAL: AN INTRODUCTION

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1.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

At the end of your study of this unit, you will be able to:

- state the specific characteristics of the television medium
- ◆ describe the potential of TV as a mass medium
- distinguish TV scripting from radio **scripting** and print scripting.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Television means an electronic system of transmitting transient images of fixed or moving objects together with sounds over a wire or through space by apparatus that converts light and sound into **electrical** waves and reconverts them into visible light rays **and** audible sound. It is an audio-visual medium.

In this unit we will introduce you to the characteristics and language of Television. This will enable you to distinguish how writing for Television differs from writing for other media such as radio and printed matter.

After studying this unit you look at a mix of current TV programmes critically and analytically. While watching these programmes you should keenly look out for elements in the programme which will be your practical visual guide to better scriptwriting.

The elements to watch out for are — idea or concept, script structure and development of content, the flow of dialogues and build-up of sequences or the storyline. Select a programme you are familiar with – one you follow every week – and make a checklist of the qualities of that programme. At the end of viewing the programme try and quickly jot down all the elements which you have observed. You should also list the elements which you thought worked, and the sequence or visual **or** sound effect of dialogue which you thought were effective in the programme.

1.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF TV

TV Production involves a number of steps. You must conceive of an idea and work out

the gradual development of that idea. But conception and development of any idea for a TV Programme will prove a failure, if one does not know whether the idea will be effective on the TV **screen**. Hence it is axiomatic for anyone involved with TV scripting to know the characteristics of TV before commencing **his/her** script. Let us list out some of the fundamental characteristics of TV:

- i) Television programmes are shown on a TV set. The set is a small screen and has room for only **close-up**, detailed stories and action. It cannot accommodate large canvasses **comfortably**.
- ii) TV can delve into **intricate details** of subjects and characters over a period of time through serials and series.
- iii) TV time is **commercially** very expensive. Plots and storylines which move at a fast pace and are short in duration are commercially viable.
- iv) TV, because of its preference for the close-up, enhances and focusses strongly on gestures and facial expressions.
- v) TV, again because of its close-up shots of **people/actors**, lends itself to close identification with **them**. The build-up of each character when you write a TV Play script should be **strong**, clear and believable to the audience.

Activity 1

Comment on any TV Programme that you watch in respect of the above mentioned characteristics. Check **your** answer with your counsellor at the study centre.

1.2.1 Idea vs Media

TV is an audio-visual **medium**. It is heard and seen. An idea is only as good as your reaction to it.

Writers often have one of two problems confronting them "What shall I write about?" or "Which shall I write about first?" Some people tend always to be facing the first question; many **professional** writers are tortured by the second; but there are times when both sorts of **writers** are faced with one or other difficulty. Finally you have to select one in particular. Try it out on other people and once you have convinced yourself about its feasibility, write it, don't abandon it midway. Generally speaking, it is very wise to insist upon seeing a work through to the end, even if one has to force oneself to do so. It is this habit which, above all others, distinguishes the professional writer from the would-be variety. **Sometimes** you may be given a specific brief which you will have to research and **develop** creatively.

Once you have made **up** your mind about what you are going to write follow these steps; it may aid you to develop a systematic approach.

- First the idea of the topic has to be concrete (you can't write if you are vague about the central **concept**).
- Then consult and collate all available audio-visual and print material and possible references (**secondary** research).
- Interview **characters** if necessary to get a "feel" (indepth) of your subject **matter**. Sift through their **experiences**, perspectives, knowledge, feelings, dreams, fantasies (primary research).
- Now, sift your **material** – visual and sound – and write a short summary of what you have felt or understood. Consult a few people to get a feedback.
- Write the script. **Try** and capture the tone of your concept. Develop imaginatively the feeling, the flavour, the kind of presentation you want to give to the finished programme.

1.2.2 The Language of Television

To write a script for **Television** it is important that you understand that the new mass

media — film, radio & TV — have developed new languages; their grammars are still developing, their full potential as yet unknown. Each codifies realities differently. Linguists tell us it is possible to say anything in any language if you use enough words or images but in the new mass media time is a major constraint.

Compressing time is of importance on radio and TV. Both media offer short unrelated programmes often interrupted between and within by commercials.

Of the new languages TV comes closest to drama. It combines music and art, language and gestures, rhetoric and colour. It favours simultaneity of visual and auditory images. Camera focuses not on speakers but person spoken to or about; the audience hears the accuser but watches the accused. In a single impression it hears the prosecutor, watches the **moving** hand of the clock and sees the moral indignation of the judge. This is real drama in progress. TV is a tiny box into which people and events are crowded, for **e.g.**, in sitcoms (situation comedies) and teleplays. The huge film screen is perfectly suited for larger than life social dramas and spectacles; in contrast, the TV screen has room for two, at the most three, faces, comfortably. In Television the scriptwriter and **director** can dig into the most humble, ordinary relationships of people. The incredibly complicated details of human relationships and small but significant real-life incidents are substances of good television drama. The deeper you probe into and examine the twisted, semi-formed complexes of emotional entanglements, the more exciting is the script

The boxed in quality of TV lends itself to static literary tragedy with greater ease than does the elastic, expandable movie.

TV **and** film being visual media they present gesture and facial awareness and convey words and emotions, happenings and characters, even thoughts, none of which could be properly packaged in words.

In **film** and TV distance and angle constantly shift. The same scene is shown in multiple perspective and focus. The viewer sees it from here, there, then over here; finally he is **drawn** inexorably into it, becomes part of **it**. **He** ceases to be a spectator. Balazs (the famous film theoretician) in his book *Theory of the film (1970)* writes:

Although we sit in our seats, we do not see Romeo and Juliet from there. We **look** up into Juliet's balcony with Romeo's eyes and look down on Romeo **with Juliet's**. **Our** eye and with it our consciousness is identified with the characters in **the film**, **we** look at the world out of their eyes and have no angle of vision of our own. We walk amid crowds, ride, fly or fall with the hero and if one character looks into our eyes from the screen for, our eyes are in the camera and become identical with the **gaze of the** characters. They see with our eyes. Herein lies the psychology of **identification**.

'Nothing like this "identification" has ever occurred as **the** effect of any other **system** of art and it is here that the film manifests its absolute artistic novelty.

Not **to** speak does not mean that one has nothing to say; those who do not speak may be brimming over with emotions which can be expressed only in forms and pictures, in gestures and play of feature.

Exercise 1

What are the distinguishing features of TV language?

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(Check your answer with aids to answers 1.5).

1.2.3 TV and Entertainment

What is **entertainment** in TV? Programmes such as soap operas (serials), games, shows (quiz etc.), sports, crime and spy story films are entertainment programmes. Almost everyone **watches** these programmes; indeed today they are one of the most popular subjects of **conversation**. Tabloid newspaper articles relentlessly describe the lives of TV stars.

TV entertainment in the West is referred to as an "anaesthetising" and "addictive" narcotic.

Entertainment **programme** on TV means excitement and excitement has necessarily to be in a fast pace. Conflict **becomes** more important than a balanced view of the world. The attempt is continually to seduce, capture and manipulate the minds of the audience, not to allow them to think for themselves, to present them with a clear-cut world view.

In fact TV has been seen by advertisers and political forces as one of the most powerful tools. It is run by self-appointed elites who run modern **societies**. **TV's** main concern is not to sell its product; it is to "sell" the existing order, to perpetuate it. It presents the prevailing pattern of man's domination by man, no matter who runs the society, and by what means. Its main task is to expand and train man's consciousness.

Entertainment programmes touch very cleverly and ostensibly, under the facade of "real democracy", every issue which affects public life and the contradictions of modern society. It is **important** for all regimes and elites in power to seek to obtain the consent, however passive, of their subjects. Every regime needs to be "seen" to justify itself to its people, and to the outside world, of its fairness and openness. What is being achieved through TV programme formats is not exploitation but manipulation of society's passive **acceptance** of all that is viewed on the screen. The Entertainment format in **TV** coopts the **producers** and viewers. It camouflages all the pains, ills, contradictions and exploitation of **society**. The elites have realised that they cannot go on accumulating wealth **unless they** accumulate the power to manipulate the minds of the many.

It has become clear to the mind manipulators that TV arouses strong emotional reactions in **those** who watch it or discuss it. Television has become a part of ordinary living in contemporary society in a way that no other mass medium or art form has approached. It is today man's constant companion.

1.2.4 TV and Information (News and Public Service Campaign)

News is **supposed** to be the most truthful and "objective part" of television — a status that gives news special importance in television's image of itself. It could be argued that the point at **which** television got the better of the newspapers as the main source of distributing news marked an important shift in the role of the medium.

The presentation of news is therefore of the utmost importance for television institutions. Indeed, it often seems that there is a direct link between the authoritativeness of television channels, and the authoritativeness of their presenters. The presenters **use** a particular style in their presentation so that they are immediately identifiable with the institution. They have to make the news seem neutral: the news must have a flavour of immediacy and urgency. In actual fact, the news, like the rest of television, is the **result** of careful processes of selection and editing. Prevailing ideas of newsworthiness **will** deem some stories important, and others less so. None of the complexities will **be** visible in the programme itself; instead, it is the job of the newsreader to present the so called objective truth, without showing any trace of emotion or **personal** bias.

A whole series of intensely ritualised conventions have emerged to shore up the

authoritativeness of the newsreader. Aside from the steady style of auto-cue address there are the titles of sequences. **Paraphernalia** of the newsroom is kept generally well **hidden**. Newsreaders are seen composed and sitting sedately behind uncluttered desks – a classic symbol of importance.

It is assumed that the most desirable tone of voice for reading the news is a moderate, **assured**, reasoned one. Intonations which might suggest specific, personal interpretations of the material being read are avoided. "Correct pronunciation" and a "classless accent" are much sought after. The classless accent is in fact an upper middle class accent which has become so naturalized as to appear "classless" or normative.

Public Service campaign is one of the more positive aspects of television. On any important issue where information has to be disseminated widely, TV shorts or spots **are** repeatedly aired, for **e.g.** the campaign to educate the Indian audience about AIDS, **about** the importance of immunization etc.

Exercise 2

List out some of the public service announcements on Doordarshan

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(Check with aids to answers 1.5)

1.2.5 TV and Education

One of the main objectives for introducing Television in India was to promote **educational** programmes. The intention was to broadcast educational and awareness programmes for farmers, villagers, the urban poor, with emphasis on special categories **such** as youth, women, physically handicapped, and the old. TV programmes were **meant** to address the sections of society which have traditionally been at a disadvantage **and** remained under-educated. Scripting for educational programmes can be challenging and interesting. Educational programmes have very clearly stated objectives which have to be understood at the outset by the scriptwriter. The scriptwriter has to be first conceptually clear about the main points of instruction. **Once** **the** concept is clear the writer can creatively develop **his/her** script – in any one of following formats:

- a programme format which is linear with an authoritative statement of facts
- a question-answer programme format which may end with a discussion summing-up or highlighting the main points
- a quiz programme
- a documentary format
- a short story, highlighting an incident which will create an awareness and carry educational messages
- a dramatized television **play/serial/series** with clearly defined educational and awareness points being brought into focus; a combination of an entertainment format weaved-in with the educational component
- animation or **cartoon** programmes
- scripts in teleplays or **telefilm** format can also be based on "literary classics".

In fact the scope and potential for developing educational programmes is enormous. the only limitation is that of the scriptwriter's imagination.

1.3 SCRIPTING FOR TELEVISION

Scripting for television means **keeping** in mind, at **all** times, a few essential elements — picture, sound, content development and pace. A script is a "blue print".

1.3.1 TV Scripting vis-a-vis-Radio Scripting

The following points have to be kept in mind when scripting for TV.

- In TV each visual **image** must tell a story or be a link in the story alongside the sound effects or talkie (**i.e. the** spoken words dialogue). In Radio the sound effects or talkie is the only tangible **image** for the audience.
- In TV a visual image or an audio effect of special kind can denote transition of time. In Radio **programme** transmission of time has to **be** stated or indicated verbally or through well-known and recognisable sound effects like the chimes of a **clock**, a countdown, musical notes and other such devices.
- In TV the visual image of a location, its atmosphere or the physical appearance of a character/individual **dispenses** with descriptive narration. The location or character is **revealed** by **the** effective use of the camera. In Radio it is **necessary** to **be** imaginatively descriptive about locations, its atmosphere and **about** the type and mannerisms of a character/individual.
- In TV editorial decisions can hasten the pace or compress a narrative as the picture (picture) and sound may help in creating different levels of messages. In Radio the sound track is the only means of conveying a message.

1.3.2 TV 'Scripting vis-a-vis Journalistic Writing

Journalistic Writing **i.e.** the written word, is closer to radio programmes **i.e.** the spoken word and sound effects, than to the TV medium which combines visual images with sound.

- 1) Journalistic writing **has** traditionally been linear concentrating more on shorthand, abbreviated descriptions (headlines) in written words. **This** is closest in TV to the News programme. TV news also gives encapsulated information with headlines.
- 2) The other main area of journalistic writing which is becoming more and more popular as the magazine business grows is
 - lengthy in-depth, **analytical** articles with photographs (visuals) which are moving or strong.
 - feature articles **which** are often creatively written and which, it has been observed, have started borrowing some of the editorial format of pace and style used in TV programmes. The articles are increasingly moving, of human interest with the storyline highlighting "THE REAL PEOPLE" in our society. One of the obsessions of TV as it has developed is the deep look into the lives, minds and hearts of "real people" through fiction or semi-fiction or non-fiction formats. Telling **stories** of "real people" has been one of the central characteristics of TV — whether it is talking about drama, or sport, or documentary or **feature** programmes. "Good television" is telling a good story. Side by side with **the** story telling factual details are underlined, the conflicts are focussed on and **the** point of resolution is reached as the story comes to an end.
- 3) Journalistic writing **also** includes Editorial articles as in the Editorial pages. An analysis is made, the **conflict**, crisis or problem is summed-up and the paper's (for paper read Editor's) point-of-view is squarely presented to the **reader/audience**. Political sides are **taken** on national and international events. To make the editorial page a two-way, open format, letters to the Editor from the readers are published. TV has not found it **necessary** to develop such a format **i.e.** the Editor's viewpoint (like the editorial **column** in a newspaper). The structure of the programming, the selection of programmes, the timings and priorities of different categories of

programmes and who owns the programme determines the editorial perspective of **everyday** TV. The audience viewpoint or right to reply is largely ignored in the **expensive** medium of TV. Even government TV stations are loathe to spend time on **indepth** analysis or perspective programmes.

- 4) Ironically, as TV expands and gains in popularity journalistic writing has started devoting greater space and interest to TV stars, TV programmes, TV **politics**. Talking about TV boosts the sales of newspapers and magazines. Journalistic writing is increasingly borrowing and popularising TV vocabulary and TV jargon.

Exercise 3

From your study of section 1.3, list out the salient features of TV scripting.

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(Check with aids to answers 1.5)

1.3.3 TV Script Formats

A TV script can be written in many different formats. Two of the commonly used formats are given below:

FORMAT 1

CHARACTER & CONTENT	VISUALS (PIC)	SOUND (SFX)
	LOCATION : PATNA STATION, BIHAR	
	Bihari labourers getting on the train in Patna, Bihar. In the crowd we focus on Paswan and his group	Announcement about the train going from Patna to Punjab . Ambience of station
PASWAN, LABOUR CONTRACTOR (In Sync for the beginning and then (V/O):	We track with Paswan along the platform and ask him to tell us his story	
— Why is it necessary for him to go to Punjab every year?		
— How many years has he been going?		
— We will highlight through his answers that HYV package was never introduced in his area because of political considerations & underdevelopment	Paswan tries to settle down in a packed wmpartment with his group	
— Even if it were, labourers and small peasants could not have availed of the package because it requires initial investment in	Paswan in CU profile	

CHARACTER & CONTENT	VISUALS (PIC)	SOUND (SFX)
<p>many inputs and developed infrastructure</p> <p>—How trickle-down benefits of the GR in Punjab etc. have not reached them</p> <p>—How despite surplus food, starvation continues for the poor</p> <p>—How he has to go every year to Punjab in search of work and send money to his family back in Bihar so that they do not starve</p>	<p>LS of crowded train with labourers travelling even on top of the carriages</p> <p>Shots of Paswan and his group through the journey to Punjab; the landscape changes as the train moves through various regions</p> <p>CU Pan on the rows of faces sitting in lines squeezed in the 3-tiered (train) bunks.</p>	<p>Fade-out train whistle</p>

FORMAT 2

INT (INTERIOR). CLOSESHOT. TAXI. NIGHT

In the F.G., (Foreground) the creased, thick, shaven back of a man's neck and hat. The driver glances around at him.

DRIVER

You're sure you know where you're going?
(the passenger **nods**)

It's none of my business; brother, but this is a rough neighbourhood

The taxi stops. **CAMERA PULLS BACK** to reveal the Doctor - short, dumpy, middle-aged. He gets out of **the** cab, carrying a small suitcase.

DRIVER

There's the number you're looking for but it's dark.
Want me to wait?

Doctor places the suitcase on the footpath beside him, pays the driver, then picks up the suitcase and **URNS INTO CAMERA**.

1.4 SUMMING UP

In this unit you were:

- introduced to the **specific** characteristics of **the** TV medium,
- given a broad **outline** of the parameters which rule the existing structure of the TV medium and why,
- given an understanding of the kind of script "which works" or "which doesn't work" in the small TV **screen**,
- told the need for agile mental analysis and observation of a variety of programme concepts, structures, styles and visualisations.

1.5 AIDS TO ANSWERS

Exercise 1

- 1) Compact and **precise** use of language
- 2) Time constraint had to be taken into account
- 3) It presents a simultaneity of visual and auditory images and hence the language used should not become redundant.

Exercise 2

1) Family planning

- 2) National integration
- 3) **Hygiene**
- 4) **Girl** child
- 5) **Child** care
- 6) **Immunisation** — for mother and child, etc.

Exercise 3

- 1) TV scripting must correspond to the visual images on the screen.
- 2) **Where** images can express, there should be no spoken words. TV scripting should **not** intrude into visual pictures.
- 3) **TV** scripting should be precise and not rambling.
- 4) **Good** TV script must be interesting, dramatic and lively.

1.6 KEY WORDS

Ambience : Location Sound

Audio-cue: Cues denote shifts in action, camera position, microphones or other technical events, in electronic editing, audio cues are often used to signal points – a word, noise or other sound that alert those producing.

Auto-cue: A device which prompts the reader of news of the written matter.

Close-up (CU): A relative determination of camera angle of view; normally a shot that shows the subject of a picture in great detail.

Camera Angle: The angle the camera makes with the subject it is shooting – regarded in a vertical as well as a horizontal sense eg. acute angle, high angle etc.

Cut: To switch to picture emanating from the second camera.

Fade: To vary the strength of an audiolvideo signal such as FADE **IN**/FADE **OUT**.

Long Shot (LS): A camera angle of view taken at a distance and including a great deal of the scene area.

Mixing (Dissolving): Simultaneously fading-out one picture while fading-up another so that one appears to dissolve into another.

Pan: Horizontal rotation of a camera from a static base; derived from the word "Panorama".

Script: The written "blue print" of a television programme; it will contain every point of artistic and technical detail necessary to its production.

SFX: Sound Effects

SYNC: Synchronize

V/O: Voice over. The narrator or character's voice overlapped on visuals, or voice speaking over other sounds and visuals.

Zoom: To move in or out of a scene — hence zooming in or out.