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# UNIT 1 RADIO FORMATS

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

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This is the first unit of Block 1, Course MJM-002. In this block, we have included four units: radio formats, presentation techniques, spoken-word programmes, news and news reels. The first unit aims at providing basic information about various Radio Formats. It discusses how radio broadcasts comprise a variety of programmes in different formats. Although these formats come for a detailed discussion separately, this unit serves as a curtain raiser of the formats discussed in the Course. In this unit, you will be familiarised with the characteristics of different formats and how they are used in the production of a variety of programmes.

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## 1.1 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit you will be able to:

- identify the categories of radio formats;
- enumerate the characteristics of various radio formats;
- differentiate between the formats, which are similar to each other; and
- appreciate the various programmes produced in different formats.

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## 1.2 PROGRAMME FORMATS

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A format is a framework for organizing and articulation of ideas and talents. Different formats are used in radio as it has a wide range of audience with different tastes and preferences. It has to provide a variety to relieve the monotony in broadcast as well as convey messages effectively. Understanding the formats of the programme will help you to choose the appropriate format as per the requirements of the theme, target audience, nature and objectives of the programme.

The selection of a format is related to a number of factors such as:

- the nature of the subject and its ramifications;
- the nature of the recordings involved – studio based or outside broadcast (OB) based or both;
- the nature, content and extent of documentation required; and
- the resources available.

The broadcast of a Radio station includes a variety of items. Some of them cater to the needs of general audience and as such may include items, which could interest most of the listeners. Programmes are also broadcast for specific audiences such as women, youth, children, students, farmers, industrial workers and senior citizens to meet their specific communication needs. The special audience programmes bring specific items of relevance and interest to a particular audience. Specific interest programmes also include western music, sports commentaries and programmes in dialects etc. The techniques of production and presentation of these programmes vary widely which will come for detailed discussion in separate units.

### 1.3 SPOKEN-WORD PROGRAMMES: BASIC FORMATS

We are sure, you must be an avid listener of radio programmes. Think of some of the programmes on radio that you like and try to identify their formats. At this point, do not worry about the accuracy of what you have written. You will be able to review it after reading this section.

Programme	Format
*	*
*	*
*	*
*	*

The basic elements of a radio programme are, Word, Music, Effect and Silence which convey messages, ideas or thoughts. The listener creates his/her own pictures with the help of these elements. Keeping in view the nature and emphasis, radio programmes are broadly grouped under the following areas: Spoken-word, News and Music programmes. News also comes under Spoken-word. However, due to its distinct identity it constitutes a separate category. The basic formats of Spoken-word programme are: Talks, Discussions, Interviews and Plays. Features, Documentaries and Magazines, Talk Shows, Commentaries, Quiz, Poetry Recitation, Radio Reports and Advertisements are some of the other formats of spoken-word.

#### 1.3.1 Talks and Discussions

Most of the spoken-word formats are talk-based. Talk is a straight delivery of words by a particular speaker. Radio talks are generally of short duration i.e. 5 to 10 minutes. Talk can be an effective format to present an opinion on an issue or a problem. These are generally planned in advance; however, talks on important items or current affairs are also arranged at a short notice. In large radio stations, the producer prepares schedules of talks on a quarterly basis wherein; subjects relating to Economics, Politics, Science, Sports, Social, Art, Culture, Festivals, Anniversaries etc. are included. In Special Audience Programmes emphasis is placed on talks of specific relevance and importance to the target audience.



Discussion in progress

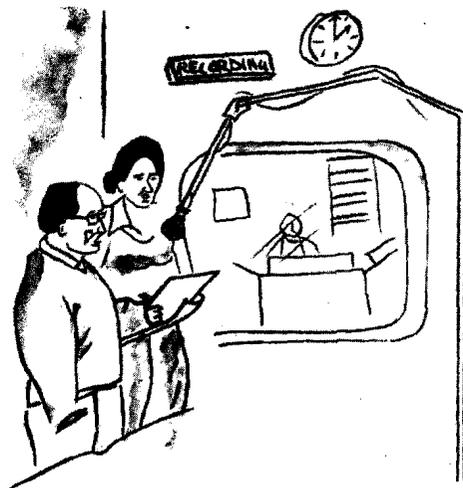
In sharp contrast to the talk, which is presented by one person, a discussion generally includes 2-3 participants and a moderator. A discussion presents analysis of an issue from different angles and brings forth more than one opinion on a given subject. The subject may be political, social, cultural or issue based but it must evoke the interest of a listener and sustain it. The duration of the discussion varies from 15 to 30 minutes depending upon the topic, utility and the number of participants. The role of the moderator is crucial for the success of discussion. S/he conducts the discussion, introduces the subject as well as the participants. S/he facilitates the presentation of diverse viewpoints and provides equal opportunity to each participant to express views. The discussion is concluded by summing up the main issues raised in the programme.

### 1.3.2 Interviews

An interview requires the participation of two people; the interviewee and the interviewer. Interviewee is the subject expert who may be a political leader, scholar, adventurer, dancer, actor, comedian etc. An interviewer raises questions and queries about the subject, personality or issues to elicit more details for the audience. The interviewer always keeps the objective of the interview in mind. S/he brings the expert to focus on those points, which are related to the objective. The interviewer asks appropriate supplementary questions, hence; the ability to listen attentively and to think quickly are essential attributes of an interviewer. The interviewer needs to do his/her homework thoroughly and study the background of the interviewee to bring forth new, interesting and vital information. It is important to note that the interviewee is the main focus of the interview and the questions are framed in such a manner that the listener's doubts or queries are addressed. The technical aspects, microphone placement, background noise etc. should also be kept in mind while producing an interview.

### 1.3.3 Drama

Radio Play, according to **Robert McLeish**, a well known authority on radio broadcasting "is turning of words and action into satisfying pictures within the listeners mind by using the techniques of drama." The medium in its relationship to drama is unique. According to **W.H. Auden** a renowned author, 'the disembodied voices of radio' can create characters and setting conveniently. The listener constructs a profile of each character in mind according to his/her interpretation. The principles of radio drama also apply in commercials, dramatized readings, short serials and educational programmes meant for children.



Recording of dialogues for a play

Music and effects play an important role to create and understand the characters and the time frame. Effects such as a car drawing up, car stopping urgently with the screech of tyres, passage of time through ticking of clock, night time through owl hooting, early morning through cock crowing, outdoor rural setting through birds singing etc. help to spin the imagination of the listener. With the help of these special effects radio drama conveys not what is real but what is understandable. However, using too many effects restricts to convey the message. Music and Effects are primarily used to underline a specific dramatic point. You will learn more about it in the unit on 'Radio Drama'.

Check Your Progress 1

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

1) List the factors, which should be kept in mind while selecting format for a radio programme.

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 .....

2) What are the basic elements of a radio programme?

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 .....

3) Which formats are considered as spoken-word?

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 .....

**1.4 OTHER FORMATS OF SPOKEN-WORD**

Besides what you have learnt in section 1.3, there are several other spoken-word formats in which we find the fusion of one or more basic format. Spoken-word on radio can be presented in many and varied forms as they are suited to the tastes of wider sections of the audience, particularly for those who have cultivated good listening habits. Programmes such as short stories, serialization of novels, travelogues etc., have been tried successfully by many radio stations. While the cardinal principles of spoken-word - simplicity, lucidity and euphony (pleasantness of sound especially in words) apply to all these formats, the producer of the programme has to show good sense of judgement in selecting the short stories, attempting episodic division of a novel. For a mass medium like radio, literary pieces of a high intellectual caliber, philosophical or sheer experimental in style, would not suit. The selection of the speaker is also crucial to the success of the programme. S/he has to have a flow, modulation in voice and adequate measure of histrionics in order to portray emotions through voice.

**1.4.1 Features and Documentaries**

A Radio feature is a 'sound picture of a person, event place or development imaginatively presented by a creative person'. Radio documentary belongs to the genre of features. It is referred to as 'radio dramatic presentation of actuality'. According to Robert McLeish, "A documentary programme is fully fact based on documentary evidence, written record, attributable sources, contemporary interviews and the like. Its purpose is essentially to inform, to present a story or situation with a total regard for honest and balanced reporting. If the producer sets out to provide a balanced, rounded and truthful account of something or someone - that is a documentary". Writing and presenting a Feature requires creativity. Gathering facts, presenting them creatively, the art of using music and effects, selecting proper voices are some of the challenges, which the producer of features has to face. Both features and documentaries include more than one basic format of spoken-word.

The dividing line between a documentary and a feature is very thin. One of the largely accepted views is that if the producer provides a balanced and truthful account of a place or a person, it is considered a documentary. However, if s/he gives greater rein to imagination and does not stick to the facts, even though the source material is real-that is a feature. New formats such as docu-drama, (combining the elements of documentary and drama) have also emerged. We should be careful to ensure that fact and fiction are not combined and their boundaries are clearly demarcated, maintaining the essential difference between what is real and what is not.



#### 1.4.4 Talk Shows

Talk shows have become very popular on television. Talk shows are also organized on radio. In this format, two or three speakers are invited to speak on a given topic, and the audience present in the studio question them. This may be termed as an extension of interview format in which one person talks with one expert. In talk shows, the experts may be more than one, and the persons to ask the questions are also more than one. Experts are called to speak on social issues, Cartoonists may speak on creativity, Literary writers may speak on their style of writing, Doctors speak on health related issues such as AIDs or problems of drug abuse etc. People from different walks of life or from the related field, as per the objectives of the programme are invited to participate and ask questions. Experienced and articulate anchor persons conduct the Talk shows and navigate the programme with style, wit and a sense of humour to make it interesting and lively.

#### 1.4.5 Quiz

Quiz programmes are generally studio-based. The participants are invited according to the topic selected for the quiz. The Quiz Master, who conducts the programmes puts questions to the participants, gives them reasonable time to answer the questions and announces the correct answers. The level of the questions is kept appropriate to the level of the target group. The duration of the quiz programme is generally kept 20 to 30 minutes. The time, duration and nature of questions varies according to the target group.

#### 1.4.6 Reports

A Radio Report is based on outside recording (OB), including excerpts from speeches, eyewitness accounts with actuality, interviews, and statements by the local authorities etc. Radio report uses a narrator in order to link up pieces of actuality sound pertaining to an event. The presenter's job is to put this material into a coherent perspective, filling the gaps. The chronology of the event should not get distorted despite various parts being presented in the report in a different order. The producer here resorts to the technique of "back and forth" in order to give prominence to important segments of the event.

Keeping in view the primary purpose of communication to keep the listener informed, radio report brings to the listeners an account of functions, happenings, accidents, visits of important personalities, or any cultural show or exhibition. This format can be effectively used to cover various functions in an institution. The duration of a radio report is usually of 10 to 30 minutes depending upon the importance of the event.

#### 1.4.7 Advertisements

Advertising is a paid form of communication and its prime objective is to sell a product or an idea. This is generally done by imparting information, developing attitudes and inducing actions beneficial to the advertiser. Social Advertising is also undertaken on various themes, such as Consumer protection, Environmental protection, Health care, Polio vaccination, Communal harmony, Exercising ones franchise etc.

Among the various mass media available, advertising on the Radio is extremely inexpensive. Commercial advertising on the radio is accepted as spots or jingles from 10 to 60 seconds duration. The sponsorship of certain programmes is accepted and the sponsor gets Free Commercial Time (FCT) to advertise his/her product or service. The advertisement tariff is related to the reach of the radio station, listener-potential, the duration and time of broadcast. Time check advertisements which are in the form of a slogan or jingle normally of seven seconds duration are accepted on commercial channels.

The client usually approaches an advertising agency with his/her advertising requirements. Agencies have their own creative departments and production departments. The agency converts the client's objective into a message and ensures the following factors:

- whether it grabs attention;
- whether it is relevant;
- whether it is centered around a promise; and
- whether it is branded clearly.

The agency uses different formats including music in preparing the advertisement. Before the advertisement is finalized pre-testing is also done. The advertisement for broadcast has to be in conformity with various regulations. You will read about them in detail in Unit 9 on Advertising on Radio.

### 1.4.8 Poetry Recitation-Symposia

In addition to the above, some other programmes, viz., poetry recitation, also make use of the spoken-word. Renowned poets and upcoming poets are invited for such broadcasts. *Mushairas and Kavi Sammelans* of 30 or 60 minutes duration are planned, recorded and broadcast. Poetry recitation has its special attributes and form, which is quite different from the prosaic form of our speech and conversation. Lyricism is also an ingredient of poetry, an effect is created by its inherent rhythm and meter. It easily lends itself to musical presentation. Poetic expressions are capable of condensing an entire philosophy or concept in a few words or couplets. The effect of the poetry is achieved through emotive impulses delving deep into the meaning of the words. The style of recitation adds to the impact of the poetry.

Poetry recitation is a part of oral and social traditions of our society. *Mushaira, Kavi sammelan* get tremendous response among Indian audiences. Poetry is not the staple diet of broadcasting; however, to reflect all contemporary art forms, poetry recitation cannot be overlooked. Poetry recitation is a part of literary magazines on radio; poetic symposia are presented like concerts.

#### Activity

Listen to radio programmes on a nearby station for three days. List the programmes you listened to. Indicate the format in which each was presented.

## 1.5 NEWS PROGRAMMES

For quite some time the quickest and the most important way of getting new information used to be Radio. Even today, there are many loyal listeners of radio news who start the day with listening to morning news bulletin. Radio News is basically a spoken-word item. But as its production is distinctly different from that of other programmes, it is taken as an independent segment of broadcasting. Radio News is different from a newspaper or television news. Radio news can only provide hard facts and not the finer details of an event as given in newspapers. The reader of a newspaper can select news items of his/her choice, which is not possible with radio news. Moreover, one can leave a story and go back to the previous one, which again is not possible with radio news. Although the radio news is written in advance, it is 'presented' and not 'read'. The medium is voice-to-ear, not news-to-eye as in newspapers. Radio news is presented in different formats, viz., News Bulletin, News Magazine, Newsreel etc.

### 1.5.1 News Bulletins

The News Bulletin has been the traditional format of presenting radio news. The News Bulletins cover both national and international news, human-interest stories and sports news, which generally round off the major bulletins. There are some special Sports bulletins of five minutes duration separately.

News casting comprises collection, selection, scripting, editing, production and presentation of news bulletins. News agencies constitute the main source of news, however; there are several other sources of news collection. These include staff correspondents, part-time correspondents and monitoring service. The latter provide material, based on monitoring of external broadcasts. Only newsworthy items are selected for broadcast. The factors that govern news-worthiness are timeliness, proximity, conflict, prominence, Governments action, human interest, weather, sports and developmental activity.

The News Bulletin is written in crisp, precise, to the point manner and in simple words. Care is taken that the news report is accurate, balanced, objective and clear. In preparing the news, command over the language is a must in order to explain the complex issues in simple terms to a common listener. There are some recent innovations in presenting News Bulletins. Correspondents' voice dispatches and excerpts from the statements of leaders or eminent personalities having news value are included in the news bulletin. These dispatches are 'live' as well as recorded. With the availability of satellite newsgathering facility, the news bulletins are able to incorporate more 'live' dispatches from the field.

### 1.5.2 News Magazines

News magazine format is in vogue these days. A news magazine as the title suggests, includes a variety of news based items in different formats. These could be a news bulletin, a topical commentary, talk, interview, discussion and a press review. The correspondents' dispatches are also often included. While a news bulletin is generally of 5-10 minutes duration, a magazine is of longer duration. The 6 a.m. News in Hindi of All India Radio is cast in the format of a bulletin while the 2.30 p.m. News in Hindi is a comprehensive news magazine.

### 1.5.3 Newsreels

Newsreel is in the nature of a news report. It is generally of ten minutes duration. In sharp contrast to the news bulletin which is broadcast live, newsreels are always recorded. In a news bulletin, news items are dealt in crisp and concise manner. Newsreel deals a story in greater detail by including voice dispatches, interviews and actual background sound. It may also include spot reports, eyewitness accounts, comments, reactions and extracts from speeches. Thus, Newsreel supplements news bulletin and provides background of the news. Voice plays a dominant role in newsreels through the comments of the main players of news as well as the analysis of a given issue.

#### Check Your Progress: 3

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

- 1) State two differences between the following:
- Radio news and Newspaper news
  - News bulletins and Newsreels

a) .....

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b) .....

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## 1.6 INTERACTIVE PROGRAMMES

The process of communication combines message, transmission, channel, decoding, receiver action and feedback. It is a continuous cycle of sending a message and receiving the feedback. Radio has for a long time been a one-way communication medium. This one-way nature was one of the limitations of radio medium. But thanks to strides in technology, radio has overcome it to a considerable extent. Radio has found new ways of broadcast using and connecting phones to its studios in addition to replies to listener's letters. Open-house programmes, people's forum and similar OB based programmes, Listeners club programmes, etc., which provide the two-way communication system to the radio. Phone in, Radio Bridges, Voice Mail are the other programmes of interactive nature introduced in the recent times.

### 1.6.1 Phone-in Programme

Phone-in programme gives a chance to the listeners to participate in the programme directly by raising questions/queries live on air. Such programmes are very popular in Metro cities and places where large numbers of people have access to phone facilities. In Phone-in programmes, experts from different fields are invited to speak, and later the person anchoring the programmes allows the listeners to raise questions to get clarification on the points, where they have some doubts. The listener can participate through the phone line/s (there may be more than one and the numbers are announced well in advance), which are connected to the studios. Thus, the listener can get replies to his/her queries in real time. Phone-ins on health related subjects are a regular feature of programming in several stations.

These Interactive programmes are proving useful in the field of education. **Indira Gandhi National Open University** is using interactive radio as part of its learning package from 186 AIR radio stations. Students can pose questions to the experts from their homes and interact freely to seek further information, clarification and guidance on academic matters. In addition, various issues related to admissions, submission of assignments, examination, declaration of results etc. are also taken up during Phone-in sessions. Students enrolled with the university, parents and prospective students get their doubts clarified by posing questions during such sessions. Toll-free phone facility available in 80 cities helps to reach out to the listeners and involve them in the broadcasts.

The phone facilities at present are limited and available to a certain sections of people. However, as the facilities increase, the techniques and formats of interactive communication will become more useful and popular among the people.

#### Activity

Listen to a phone-in programme on a topic of your interest. Analyse whether it has been able to facilitate interaction.

### 1.6.2 Radio Bridge

Radio Bridge signifies the extension of Phone-in programmes. In a phone-in programme, listeners usually interact with the experts located in the studio of a particular radio station. However, in a Radio Bridge programme four or more studios of different cities are connected and experts called to discuss a given topic or issue. Thus, the listeners are able to listen to the opinions or views of different experts at one time from different places and can also elicit clarification from the experts 'live'.

### 1.6.3 Voice Mail

To obtain feedback of the listeners, letters are invited from them. However, this form of feedback has its limitations. It is through writing only, which takes time. People generally avoid writing letters and expressing their appreciation or criticism of a programme. To overcome this, Radio stations have now dedicated telephone for receiving voice mail. The listener can now record his/her views, opinion or suggestions over phone at any time, which will be automatically recorded on the tape. The 'replies to listeners letters' programmes include the comments of the listeners in their own voice recorded in the Voice Mail Box, along with replies. Thus, radio is able to get a quicker feedback and that too in listener's own voice. Listening to one's own voice over radio not only involves the listener in a programme, but also forges a sense of belonging and affinity with the radio station.

## 1.7 MUSIC PROGRAMMES

Music constitutes a predominant component in radio broadcasts. Background music helps the listeners to understand and appreciate the mood, setting, place or time particularly in radio play. Vocal Music, which is word-based, serves a similar purpose. A synergy of Music and Speech in radio heightens the dramatic effect. Music is also used as a bridge to link different sequences.



Recording of a music concert

Radio provides different forms of Music. Those include; Classical Music, Hindustani and Karnataka Light Music, Light Classical Music, Folk and Tribal Music, Choral Music, and Instrumental/Orchestral Music besides film music. The formats of Musical broadcasts include Music Concerts-classical and light, independent songs, and (light and light classical) Musical operas, Music Magazines and Music features. Film songs in different languages, Western Music-vocal, instrumental and orchestral of classical and pop variety form part of Music broadcasts. These include programmes of the listener's choice. Presentation of Music programmes is done in different ways, some are presented as independent items while others are compered and presented.

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## 1.8 LET US SUM UP

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To learn the production techniques of radio programmes, it is necessary to get an idea of broadcasting in general and the various programme formats and the production approach in particular. This unit serves as a curtain raiser for the units which will follow in the course delineating the characteristics, nature and types of various radio formats.

We discussed three major groups of radio broadcasts: Spoken-word programmes, News, and Music programmes. Talks, discussions, interviews and plays constitute spoken-word programming. News also belong to the spoken-word format but news has its own sub-formats like news bulletin, news magazine and newsreel. It is therefore given the status of a separate format. Interactive programmes also come under the format of spoken-word, the technical production being different from the talk and other basic formats of spoken-word. Music programmes constitute a sizeable part of a station's programming in different sub-formats like concerts, magazine and features. Music programmes cover a wide range including classical, light classical, folk, orchestral and choral types.

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## 1.9 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS : POSSIBLE ANSWERS

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### Check Your Progress: 1

- 1) While selecting the format of a programme the objectives of the theme, the composition of the target audience and nature of the programme need to be kept in mind. It is also important to consider whether it is completely studio based or includes OB recordings and whether it requires collection and incorporation of documented material like interviews, effects, music etc. The budget of the programme also needs to be considered while deciding the format.
- 2) The basic elements of a radio programme are word, music, effect and silence. All these convey messages, ideas or thoughts.
- 3) Talk, discussion, interview, drama, feature, documentary, magazine, commentary, talk show, quiz, reports, and advertisement form part of spoken-word programmes. Though news is also spoken-word, it is reckoned as a separate category.

## Check Your Progress: 2

- 1) Talk is a straight delivery of words by one speaker whereas a discussion generally includes 2-3 participants and a moderator. A discussion presents analysis of an issue from different angles and brings forth more than one opinion on a given subject, while a talk is one individual's presentation of views. The talk does not require any moderator who is crucial for the success of discussion. Talks are generally of short duration; 5 to 10 minutes whereas discussions can be 15 to 30 minute duration.
- 2) Documentaries present a factual, balanced and truthful account of actualities concerning an event, a place or a person. However, features present the real source material creatively and imaginatively and not merely sticking to the facts.

## Check Your Progress: 3

- 1) a) Radio news bulletins can only provide hard facts and not the finer details of an event as given in newspapers.  
b) The news items of one's choice can be selected and retrieved while reading newspaper, which is not possible with radio news.
- 2) a) A news bulletin is broadcast live whereas newsreels are always pre-recorded.  
b) In a news bulletin, news items are dealt in crisp and concise manner, newsreel deals a story in greater detail by including, interviews spot reports, eye witness accounts, comments, reactions and extracts from speeches.