UNIT 1 PRODUCTION PROCESS

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Producing informative, entertaining and educative programmes that are effective for the target audience, would be the aim of any radio station, anywhere. The popularity of a radio station or channel depends upon the quality and content of its programmes. Every programme needs to go through a planning and preparation stage before it gets produced. In this unit we will discuss various stages of programme production and you will be able to appreciate that how much effort and thinking is required to make it effective and broadcast worthy.

1.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

● describe the pre-requisites of a radio programme;
● analyse the requirements of various stages in Programme Production;
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- explain the specific planning required for programmes of special nature; and
- discuss the importance and process of post production.

1.2 STAGES OF PROGRAMME PRODUCTION

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 are made. Without proper planning, any interesting theme or creative idea may not make the desired impact.

In the **Production** stage actual recording takes place after doing proper rehearsals. There could be more than one take of any piece of recording due to various reasons. The best take is chosen at the time of editing which is a part of **Post Production**. In post production many other inputs are given for the value addition of any programme. Adding sound effects and making a final master copy of any programme (Mixed Master) is also undertaken during post production process.

1.3 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. 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 the effective communication 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. We have no reason to believe that a dull and boring programme, even if informative, will be listened to. Programme should be planned and executed in such a manner that it **attracts and holds the attention of the listener**.

1.3.1 Pre-requisites of a Radio Programme

Planning a programme requires an understanding of the requisites of the medium. 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 voice quality must be such that can captivate listeners. For example, if drama is not well acted, script is badly read, then you cannot 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 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 any good radio programme is to disseminate appropriate information on a relevant theme. The planning efforts must be directed towards this goal so that the message conveyed produces the desired impact.

1.3.2 **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. 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.

Some sounds are indicators 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
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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, march-past or death.

Pause

In a medium of sound, pauses have a role to play. Pauses are used imaginatively to convey meaning. Radio is called 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 her voice stops. Son 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.

1.3.3 Target Planning

It is imperative 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. 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 the society or nation. In that case, you need to design your programme in such a way so as to create its demand.

Activity 1

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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1.4 PRE PRODUCTION

There are some common elements in planning radio 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.

1.4.1 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. 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 conceptualization. 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 organized. It reflects the need assessment of the programme and production requirements.

1.4.2 Content Planning and Research

Content planning begins when you collect and collate all the material connected with a subject. 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. 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.

1.4.3 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 format 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.

1.4.4 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 ensure 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.

Every radio station maintains a classified directory of talents. Scouting talents is a continuous process and additional names are added to the directory. The producer draws talent taking into account the requirements of the programme on hand. 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 voice-age.

1.4.5 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.

1.4.6 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 adapts the novel as a radio play. Such clearances may not be required if the copyright law permits it.

There are several OB-based programmes like the kavi sammelans 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.

1.5 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 lookout for good script covering different themes, including historical and humorous plays. 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. 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.

**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 could also 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 Programme**

The planning with respect to 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 Programme**

Each sports organisation, at state and national level, prepares a calendar of sporting activities. A producer has to plan the coverage according to the importance of the event 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: Use the space below for you answers.*

**Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.**

1. List 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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1.6 REHEARSALS

The two important steps of production are: rehearsal and recording. Studio time is precious and therefore, before the talker/artists/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 Read Over Room (ROR). This is the first stage of rehearsal without microphone. The second stage of rehearsal is inside the studios with microphones. There would be no need at all or less requirement for post production, if the producer and the artistes devote adequate time and attention to do proper rehearsals.

1.7 RECORDING / PRODUCTION

After the proper planning and rehearsals the pre production stage come to an end and now the programme is ready to be recorded which is also known as Production stage. Recording is the responsibility of the producer. It is, therefore, necessary for him/her to check the studio recorder, studio clock and other equipments sufficiently in advance so that there is no hassle at the time of recording.

If you have given enough importance to the pre-production part then your production becomes easy. If you have scripted a programme well, checked the content for authenticity, verified its value for the target audience and rehearsed with your artistes then the actual production is like a breeze. You may record the programme in two situations which are as follows:

1.7.1 Studio Recording

Mainly the radio programmes are recorded in a professional recording studio which has got all the technical facilities to record a programme with such a high quality that it is suitable for broadcast. There are different studios to record different categories of programme like Talk, Music or Drama. The studios are built with such specification that they are most suitable for a particular category of a programme. For example Talk studio will be small and clarity of voice is the main concern, where talks, interviews or discussions are recorded; whereas a music studio will be larger in size, have more reverberation and have scope for more number of microphones. In the same manner the Drama Studio will have its own peculiarities.

1.7.2 Outside Broadcast (OB)

All programmes can not be recorded in the four walls of the studio and for that you have to move out to record the segment for its importance.

The outside or outdoor broadcast (OB) is done for the 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, religious function, 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 categorised into two; ‘Live’ and ‘Recorded’. The basic preparation for both ‘live’ and ‘recorded’ OB programme is almost the same. However the place (location) and magnitude of the programme have a direct-bearing on that. 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;
- 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. S/he must meet the organisers 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. 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, types of microphones, 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 organisers in advance.

Microphones with cables and stands/boom are the basic tools of any 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.

1.8 POST PRODUCTION

Post-production, as we discussed earlier, refers to works carried out after the recording process is over. Post-production is essential to remove any imperfections or defects contained in the recording either by oversight of the recordist or by performers / artistes. In spoken word programmes, for example, the speaker may have fumbled at places during his / her speech,
made some wrong statement and corrected it during the later portion of the
speech, or some unwanted sound disturbance may have occurred at some
points when the recording session is on. Naturally, you want to remove
such unwanted portions in the recording so that the final programme comes
out clean and flawless. In a group discussion recording, it may so happen
that one of the voices sounds much louder than others, so there is a need
to balance the volumes of different speakers at the post-production stage
at least, if not done during the production stage itself. Similar pitfalls and
disturbances are prone to occur in other kinds of programmes as well –
music concerts, audience participation shows, interview programmes etc.

We have noted that Audio Editing and Audio Mixing are the two important
stages in post-production. Audio Editing consists in removing unwanted
portions in the recorded material, altering the sequence of wanted audio
clips and reassemble the desperate recorded segments. Mixing denotes to
mixing all the audio tracks to make a final master copy of the programme.

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 objective.

Check Your Progress 3
Note: 1) Use the space below for you answers.

2) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.
1. Why is it important to undertake a reconnaissance survey or ‘recce’
before OB recording?

2. Why is it important to undertake a reconnaissance survey or ‘recce’
before OB recording?

1.9 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 emphasized 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.
1.10 FURTHER READINGS

1.11 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1
1. Some of the pre-requisites for a radio programme are:
   - element of interest in presentation
   - relevance of the theme for the target audience;
   - spoken language;
   - short and simple sentences;
   - limited use of statistics;
   - clarity and accuracy of the content;
   - conflict/debate/analysis

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. 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.