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# UNIT 13 CONTENT PRODUCTION FOR TV NEWS CHANNELS

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## 13.0 INTRODUCTION

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Content production for television can easily be described as the most important aspect of the television industry. Unless the quality of the produced content is good, you cannot expect your viewers to be glued to your TV channel. In order to leave an impact on the viewers, the television content must be interesting, informative, attractive and unique, and these qualities can be ensured at the production level. Therefore, it is quite essential to have a qualified and creative production team. We all know that TV channels carry a variety of content from entertainment to education, but in this Unit our discussion will be focused on the television content related to news and current affairs only.

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## 13.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

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After going through this Unit, you should be able to:

- describe the basic principles of television content production;
- discuss the main stages of TV production;
- explain the production process of different news programmes; and
- describe the role of different people involved in the content production in a TV news channel.

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## 13.2 PRODUCTION FOR TELEVISION

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Television is an audio-visual medium that incorporates visual and audio elements. A number of activities are required for production of television content like - recording and creation of visual elements (videos, photographs and graphics), recording of the audio elements, script writing, audio-visual editing, etc. In this section, we shall discuss these activities.

### 13.2.1 Basic Principles

It is always said that content is king, whether it is about news or other genres. Unless you produce quality television content for your viewers, you cannot expect to succeed in the long run. So far as news content for television is concerned, they may be of various types and that again depends upon the nature of the news programmes. For example, a typical TV news channel produces news bulletins, debate-discussion shows, documentaries on current affairs, feature shows, interviews, etc. While the basic principles of television content creation always remain the same, you need to work with a different approach for different formats.

Every TV production, whether it is a news bulletin, debate-discussion or a documentary, must go through the three fundamental stages before its completion. These stages are:

1. Pre-production
2. Production
3. Post-production

Many a times, these stages may take very long (sometimes even weeks or months) to reach the desired level of completion. It also depends on the type, duration, complication and intricacy of the content that needs to be created. But, a daily news bulletin or talk show will have to be completed in a few hours or a single day by following these stages. However, a good and efficient production team will usually execute each of these three phases at least to some degree before finalising the product. For example, if you have to produce a live show, you require a lot of planning for the initial two phases but you do not have the liberty to go through the third phase. Though, the 'live' editing with the help of switchers may be considered as post-production stage but it goes on simultaneously along with production.

### 13.2.2 Three Stages of Television Production

The whole process of television production may be categorized mainly in three stages. These stages are the following:

- i) **Pre-production** : Pre-production covers all the activities conducted before the actual production. From conceptualization to all other preparations for actual production fall in this stage only. Even though some people consider Conceptualization or Formulation as a separate stage, it is generally considered to be a part of pre-production only. The process of pre-production actually starts with Conceptualization.

**Conceptualization:** As the name suggests, conceptualization involves most of the thinking work and is done on paper. In this stage, you start with generating ideas for your desired content. When you have certain ideas ready, you and your teammates discuss about the feasibility, effectiveness and workability of those ideas. The length of this process will depend on the format as well as

nature of the show. If you are working on a daily news bulletin, you just think about the selection of the news pieces according to their importance and their treatment in your bulletin. But if you are working on a talk show, you may require thinking about the relevant issues to be discussed, availability of the experts on the issue, the audience to be present in the studio, etc. If needed, you need to seek some additional information through internet research, old interviews or talking to some domain experts. Once your idea is finalized, you start working on it. During this phase only, you can also decide whether your content will be telecast 'live' or recorded. You can then proceed to the next step of content creation.

Pre-production also includes arrangement of the desired support staff who will be required during the content creation. These staff may include script writers, editors, studio directors, production assistants, camerapersons, audio operators, lighting directors, graphics designers, etc. It is clear from the above description that the number of persons involved in pre-production stage of a programme will vary according to the nature of the content.

If you have decided to telecast your programme 'live', you need to check the technical aspects well in advance. If you are going to create content which can be recorded and broadcast later, things will be in better control as you can make changes if things do not go as expected.

- ii) **Production :** The production stage can be called the real tangible work on the ground. It involves most of the crew members and can be exciting as well as exhausting. This stage sees your idea or concept converting into a product. Many creative activities i.e. video recording, audio recording, performance etc. are done in this phase only. As far as writing is concerned, in some cases, it is part of preproduction and in some cases it may be a part of production stage. Just take few examples, if we talk about fiction (film production, serials, etc.), script writing is part of pre-production. In production we execute the script, but in the case of documentary films, pre-shoot scripts are written again after shooting because documentary is recording of reality. During shoot (production) we may get many new ideas, facts and angles which need to be incorporated in the script. So here, final script writing becomes part of the production stage. The same thing is applicable to the news stories also. Scripts of news stories are written after recording of the footages and bytes, so here also writing may be considered as a part of production stage.

If the show is not going 'live', production stage of news programmes may be little relaxed. Various shots are recorded, reviewed and re-recorded according to the requirements of the programme. But in a 'live' show, there is no time for reviewing and re-recording. Your attempt should be to create the content as flawless as it can be. In the case of non-live shows, it is necessary to maintain a log of must have shots and sequences, and any other necessary information that will enable the video editors to locate and identify during post-production. Without this log, your precious hours will be wasted trying to find certain key information or the best shots of the show.

- iii) **Post-production Stage :** It is only in the post-production stage that the desired content takes the final shape. As this is the final stage, here the producer gets the opportunity to give the finishing touches to the content. It is also only here that you can expect to get the fruits of all the hard work and long hours put in by the crew. Usually, the non-live programmes take many hours of post-

production, but news stories can not take longer post-production due to the immediacy factor.

The main component of post-production is the editing which is done by video editors. Video editors have to follow the script of the show, but they have liberty to enhance the impact of the show. Therefore, many a times the decisions to select the best shots, to add filler sequences or change the sequence of certain shots are left to them. Sometimes, they need to insert some graphic elements which are created by graphic artists of the channel. These graphic elements may include animations, credits, or other computer-generated contents. Once all the requirements are completed and the editing is done, the programme becomes ready for telecast.

**Check Your Progress 1**

**Note:** Use the space provided below for your answers.

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

1. What are the three phases of television production?  
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2. How long does it take to complete all the three phases of production in the context of television news?  
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**13.3 PRODUCING NEWS PROGRAMMES**

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You must remember that production of news programmes is quite different from the other television genres. For TV news programmes, usually the team is fixed and that team remains available to gather and compile the required content. In most of the cases, the production schedule of a news program is not more than a single day. Therefore, the environment of TV news production is quite hurried and intense. ‘Live’ programmes need more care and quick action. Without careful planning and execution, it can go horribly wrong. Now we are going to understand the exact nature and ways of work in a TV news organisation for production of the content.

**13.3.1 Producing a News Package**

In previous units, you must have read about the news packages or news stories many times. A news package is a special way to present news to the audience. Normally a news package has a story, some characters and some facts. News reporters spend considerable time in researching stories, collecting visuals, interviewing characters, and then writing the scripts according to the gathered information. All news packages follow a basic structure which makes them easy to understand. These packages may be of various durations but usually packages run from 90 seconds to two minutes in length. In special cases, the duration may be longer as well.

In fact, news packages are considered to be the backbone of any news show. That is why making news package is one of the most important tasks of the reporters and other employees. When the assignment desk of the news channel assigns a particular news story to the reporter, the process of making a news package begins. The reporter needs to follow the news, collect the latest information, visuals (video or stills) and bytes (or interviews) of the concerned parties and then write a script describing the event or issue.

No doubt, TV reporting needs much more than its print counterpart. In order to file a story or report, a TV reporter has to go through a long process. While going for reporting, s/he accompanies a cameraperson. The cameraperson shoots the visuals and reactions of the concerned persons. The responsibility of the reporter is to help him/her in capturing the best visuals and ask the relevant questions to the concerned persons for the news story.

But the responsibility of the TV reporter does not end here. After going back to the office, s/he has to file the report according to the visuals and bytes collected by him/her. Many a times, the reporter may take the help of graphics department, if any information is required to be shown in the form of graphics. When the news report is completed, the producer checks the script filed by the reporter. When it is cleared by the producer, the reporter has to sit with video editors to edit the final story. Here the script has to be voicecovered by the reporter or voice-over artist. And then visuals, graphics and bytes are laid over the VO (voice-over) to give it a shape of edited package. The edited news stories or packages are then used by the producer for his or her bulletin or show.

The most important thing to note here is that a television reporter has to follow the visuals of the event. This is not required for a print reporter. Moreover, a TV reporter has to be quick as s/he has to deliver the news as soon as possible. The print reporters, however, enjoy the greater time and flexibility. As the newspaper will be printed at night and delivered to the doorstep of the consumer only the next morning, newspaper reporter can file his/her story with comparative ease. But the TV reporter has to be quick and on the rub as his/her organization needs to play that news story the same day itself. So, for being a successful TV reporter, pace and accuracy both are the prerequisites.

### **13.3.2 Producing a News Bulletin**

In a typical TV news channel, the person who owns the responsibility of producing a programme is called the producer. The producer of a news bulletin has to produce his/her bulletin before its deadline. If the bulletin has to go 'live', s/he will have to prepare all the contents required for the news bulletin beforehand.

First of all, the producer decides the news stories which are to be included in the bulletin. After that, s/he decides the order of the news stories in the bulletin and prepares a run-order or rundown. In the rundown, it is mentioned before every news story that what will be its treatment and how much time is to be given. In fact, mere seeing a well-prepared run-order, you can visualise the look of the bulletin to be aired. That is why rundown is also called bulletin on paper.

Once the producer makes the rundown of a bulletin, s/he distributes the responsibility of producing the content among his/her associates and other teammates. S/he has to see whether any script is to be written, which news stories are already made in the system and which are to arrive later, what graphics elements are required,



etc. In a 'live' news bulletin, the producer has to make provisions for 'breaking news' scenario also, therefore, s/he needs to make rundown in such a way that the important and must have elements get enough time to be aired. This decision needs dynamism and quick thinking. A good producer always remains alert about the flow of news.

Once elements of the rundown are completed, the producer is ready to go live with the show. As the timing of any news bulletin is fixed, the producer needs to ensure that enough news materials are ready with him/her so that the duration of the bulletin does not fall short. When the bulletin is being rolled, the producer needs to prompt the anchor of the show regularly about the elements being added or dropped from the news show. Usually, the news anchor reads an introduction (or anchor link) 'live', then the pre-recorded story is shown. As the show is 'live', there is no scope for post-production, unless there is repeat telecast of the bulletin. If there are some errors which need to be fixed, it should be done before the repeat telecast of the same show.

**Structure of a news bulletin:** Generally news bulletins start with headlines. Most important story of the day is given priority and is given more time than the other news items. It depends on the discretion of the producer that how much time s/he wants to give to a particular news story. If s/he wants to present a news item in big way, s/he demands from the assignment team to arrange for some domain experts who can elaborate the importance and various aspects of the news. For example, an item of national or international interest is considered most important. Normally soft stories find place at the end of the bulletin.

### **13.3.3 Producing a News Feature or News Documentary**

Features and news documentaries are longer formats. They need more visuals, more interviews, more information, more creativity and also more research. You must have watched documentaries on television news channels. These documentaries may be based on the political, social, cultural and other relevant issues. Documentaries need attractive presentation and fine scripting. Obviously, such programmes cannot be effective unless there is strong research back up before scripting. Such shows or programmes also need a lot of brainstorming, efforts and hard work to be executed in a perfect manner.

But in this era of fierce competition amongst various news channels, many a times such programmes lack serious and extensive research and hence they appear hollow and do not leave any impact on the viewers. As sound research is required in the cases of TV features and documentaries, usually there is a section dedicated to research in TV news channels. The staff of this section are primarily entrusted with the task of providing backgrounders on important issues, events or personalities. The staff of this section are also responsible for monitoring of various news channels. They also provide important news elements from newspapers, websites and other sources to the input and output teams.

Usually the research section provides backgrounders and other information to the producer and script writer. On the basis of this information, the producer and script writer give shape to the programme and prepare the script. During this process, many persons are interviewed who understand the relevant issue and possess the deep knowledge of the same. These persons are interviewed by reporters who form the input team. If you want to understand the production part of any programme in a simple manner, see the following:

Conceptualisation of the show (Producer)→Research (Research Section)→  
Other important information or interviews (Reporters)→Script writing (Script  
Writer)→Editing (Video Editor)

It is a normal practice for programmes based on any specific issue to be made within tight timelines in television news channels. For this, the required information is provided by the research section to the producers and script writers. Quite often it happens that the producers and script writers do not know much about the topic/issue and therefore, they prepare the content based on the provided research only. As a result, the prepared content may lack focus and sometimes contains factual mistakes as well.

Ideally, the producer should identify the domain experts and interview them according to the need of the programme. If it is not possible, then the reporters should be included in the programming team so that s/he is completely aware of the requirements of the feature or documentary to be produced.

You must remember that for producing a good news feature or documentary extensive research is necessary. Additionally, if the producer and script writer are themselves involved in the research, it is even better as it will enable them to produce a quality programme. But in the process of programme development, especially in Indian TV news channels, the deadlines are so stiff that generally the producer and script writer do not have enough time to get involved in research.

Another issue that may crop up while producing television news features or documentaries is that the production team may lack subject expert producer or script writer. In TV news channels, producers and script writers are supposed to be the proverbial ‘jack of all trades, master of none’. Such a label is, however, not considered a bad thing in today’s news world. In fact, if you are also one of them, it will help you to evolve as a good producer and script writer in TV news channels.

**Activity 1**  
Watch a documentary on any television news channel and write down its strengths and weaknesses.

**Check Your Progress 2**

**Note:** 1) Use the space provided below for your answers.

2) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this Unit.

1. What is called ‘bulletin on paper’ and why?

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2. What are the processes involved in the production of a television news documentary?

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## 13.4 IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF TV NEWS PROGRAMMES

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In this section, we shall discuss a few important elements of television news programmes. These elements play crucial role to make any television news programme effective and attractive.

### 13.4.1 Objectivity

While watching a programme, the viewers should not feel that the reporter is biased or the story is favouring any one side. The news story must appear to be neutral. Remember that the responsibility of a reporter is to present the facts of the news, not to justify any particular side or party of the news. For example, if a reporter has covered a crime event, s/he should not only cover the versions of the victim and accused, s/he must also try to cover the versions of the investigating agency and eyewitnesses, even though there may be a need for the reporter to invest more time and labour to collect all these information.

### 13.4.2 Visuals

Television is an audio-visual medium where visuals play very crucial role. The viewers are always on the look out for engaging and interesting stuff on the TV screen. So the news stories should have a 'pull factor', and that 'pull factor' can come from the visuals most of the time. Viewers watch visuals first on the screen and if they are eye-catching, there are higher chances that they may stop to view that channel. Hence, as a television reporter, you must be able to think visually. In many cases, visuals can tell the entire news story by themselves. Therefore, visuals should be a vital integral part of the production instead of an afterthought. You must have heard the proverb, "a picture is worth a thousand words." This is absolutely true because effective visuals can help in telling a story with more clarity and impact.

The term visuals should not be mistakenly identified with only videographed content. Graphics (maps, charts, diagrams, and illustrations), animations and still photographs can also be used as visuals. Most television news programmes use graphics to enhance their impact. The main point to note is that in television it is important to present information visually as much as possible. Viewers remember visual information longer than the spoken or written words. Without visuals, you lose the force of this powerful medium.

### 13.4.3 Audio

Television is an audio-visual medium. Although visuals are quite important for TV but a television news cannot be completed only with visuals. The audio plays an important role too. It is necessary for a TV reporter to write good voice-overs. That is why a reporter has to develop the skills of visual sense as well as the art of using words effectively. Often it is seen that while writing the script, the reporter finds it difficult to write to match the visuals. Therefore, you should try to start the practice of writing according to visuals from the very beginning.

### 13.4.4 Anchor

As explained earlier, there are various types of news shows and programmes and each one is presented in a different manner and prepared in a different style. But the most common type of news programme is the news bulletin which is produced and presented daily. In such news bulletins, the news anchors or news readers read the anchor links of the packages and those packages are played after that.



Sometimes there are news commentators invited as panellists who take the news of the day, relate it to events of the past as well as try to project some probable future scenarios while analyzing it. In such cases, the speaker may often put a great deal of his/her personality into the presentation, so such news programmes take a less formal shape. Being face of the news bulletin, it is the anchor's responsibility to present the bulletin in an attractive and eye-catching way. His or her delivery should be easy to understand as well as impactful and must catch the attention of the viewers. The anchor should be able to sense what will appeal to majority of the viewers. The anchor must not allow any news item to cause unnecessary alarm or anxiety among the viewers.

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### **13.5 PRODUCTION TEAM**

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Many people contribute to the production of news content in a television news channel. These include persons involved in the assignment team who are responsible for finding potential news stories. In a news channel, the assignment editors assign specific stories to reporters to pursue. But as far as production is concerned, the role of the television producer is greater. S/he is a person who oversees all aspects of the television programme. Some producers take more of an executive role, in that they conceive new programmes and after approval from the superior authority, they hand it over to the show or bulletin producers. These show or bulletin producers are more involved with the day-to-day workings, participating in activities such as script writing, making rundown and producing bulletin and other news shows.

Apart from the producers, the role of various technical crew members cannot be ignored in a news channel set up. These persons work diligently and contribute to the smooth running of the news bulletin and other shows. Without their help, you cannot expect your work to be completed. They include the studio director, set designer, graphics artist, cameraperson, vision mixer, audio engineer, video editor and others.

#### **Check Your Progress 3**

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

1. What is the role of producer in a TV news channel?

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2. What are visuals in the context of television news channels ?

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### **13.6 LET US SUM UP**

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Content production for a television news channel is an exhausting task and it demands efforts of many people. Whatever is the format and structure of the news show, there is a need to plan all the shows in advance and prepare accordingly.

From conceptualisation to the execution, there are many stages of production which involve a lot of people from editorial and technical side to complete the job. So, basically a news bulletin or news documentary is product of a team work. Usually, in a television news channel, the role of producer becomes very important as s/he is the person who handles all major aspects of the content production.

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### **13.7 FURTHER READINGS**

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Padgaonkar, L., & Singh, S. (Eds.). (2012). Making News, Breaking News. Westland.

Schroeder, A. (2009). Writing and producing television news: from newsroom to air. New York: Oxford University Press.

Zettl, H. (2011). Television production handbook. Cengage Learning.

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### **13.8 KEY WORDS**

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**News Package :** A television news story which contains anchor link, voice-overs, bytes and PTC is called a news package.

**Assignment :** A department of television news channel responsible for content gathering. It is also called Input.

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### **13.9 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS**

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#### **Check Your Progress 1**

1. The three phases of the television production are: pre-production, production and post-production.
2. The time taken to complete all the three phases of the television production will depend on nature of the content. For example, a live news bulletin may take a few hours whereas a documentary may take weeks or months depending on the complexity of the subject and the budget allocated for it.

#### **Check Your Progress 2**

1. A well-made rundown or run-order is called 'bulletin on paper'. This is because of the reason that when you see the rundown, you get the feel of the show instantly. A good rundown neither falls short of duration nor exceeds it.
2. The processes involved in the production of a television news documentary can be described as follows:
  - a. Conceptualisation of the programme
  - b. Research
  - c. Shoot
  - d. Final script writing
  - e. Editing

### Check Your Progress 3

1. The role of television producer is of larger importance. S/he is a person who oversees all aspects of a television programme. Some producers take more of an executive role, in that they conceive new programmes and after approval from the superior authority, they hand it over to the show or bulletin producers. These show or bulletin producers are more involved with the day-to-day workings, participating in activities such as script writing, making rundown and producing bulletin and other news shows.
2. The term visuals should not be mistaken by only videographed content. Graphics (maps, charts, diagrams, and illustrations), animations and still photographs can also be used as visuals.



