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English lectures

Speciality/ level: audiovisual /master 1

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Writing for radio

Introduction

When writing for the radio, you should always bear one thing in mind: you are writing for listeners – not for readers. The listeners will only hear your text once and they will have to understand it immediately.

Readers of a newspaper or an online article can read sentences that they do not understand two or three times. They can even look up unfamiliar words in the dictionary.

Radio texts have to be well presented, logically structured and easy to understand. If listeners stumble over unfamiliar words or cannot follow your train of thought, you lose their attention.

❖ **Characteristics of radio writing**

- In radio, **simplicity** wins. Simple words, clear
- **short sentences** and a **logical structure** are necessary: Research shows that listeners find it difficult to understand sentences with more than 15 words.

Example

Not good (sentence too long):The globally-active pharmaceuticals group PILLCO, which – at its Supervisory Board meeting on Friday of last week

- Radio language should **be lively**. But it is even more important that it should be understood immediately. Radio language should be **very close to spoken language**
 - For instance, when you are writing a script about the U.S. Ministry of Defence, it might not be a good idea to use the synonym “Pentagon”. Not all of your listeners would know this term
- avoid **long, complicated sentences** and **specialist jargon**. If you use words that your listeners do not understand or language that they find offensive, you alienate them and not get your message across

- **Repeat important terms:**

It is confusing for radio listeners, if you replace nouns or names with pronouns. It is better to repeat the name or noun. This may not sound elegant, but it guarantees clarity

- **Numbers and figures :**

Radio is not the medium for detailed figures and numbers. Example (not good): 50 %
(better): half

- **Active verbs**

If possible, write in the active voice.

Example

(not good):

”A contract between PILLCO and city officials will be signed today.”

(better):

”PILLCO and city officials will sign a contract today.”

❖ **The structure of a radio script**

1. Strong introduction

Always start with a strong opening, which catches the listeners' attention, arouses their interest and makes them want to hear more about this topic.

2. Details:

3. Summary/Conclusion:

❖ **The outward appearance of the radio script**

➤ Only write on one side of the paper

If you have to turn the pages of your script to read text on the reverse sides, your listeners will hear your rustling pieces of paper. This unwanted sound will distract them.

➤ Space between the lines and clear paragraphs

Generous space between the lines of your text will make it easier for you to focus on the text while you are reading it on the air. It will prevent you from accidentally slipping into the wrong line.

➤ Avoid words and expressions that are hard to pronounce

If you think you could have a problem pronouncing a certain word, choose a simpler one.

Numbers and figures can also be linguistic stumbling blocks, especially larger numbers. It helps if you write out thousands, millions and billions in words rather than figures. It's easier to read "two million" than to see a figure like "2 000 000" and have to count the zeroes to figure out whether you are dealing with millions or billions¹.

¹ DW-AKADEMIE, Writing for radio, 53110 Bonn, Deutschland, <https://www.rtc@dw-world.de>