Characteristics of Broadcast News Writing

Writing is easy. After all, most of us learned to do it by the time we graduated from kindergarten. However, good writing is difficult. Sometimes it’s very difficult. If it weren’t, most of us would be novelists. So what is it that distinguishes writers from good writers? In very simple terms, it’s the ability to craft the language, not just use it. In this book we’ll help you learn how to craft the language for a broadcast audience—to tell stories in ways that will grab attention, impart information, and leave television news viewers or radio news listeners with the impression of having been at the event themselves. But before we can get to that, we need to lay some groundwork. First, let’s point out some of the differences between broadcast writing and most of the writing you’ve done during your formal education and look at some general characteristics of broadcast style.
We Get Only One Opportunity to Make Ourselves Understood

Chances are you’ve written a number of essays in your time; you might have even written for the school newspaper. In both cases, you were writing for the eye. In broadcast, you’ll write for the ear. When your English teacher read through one of your essays, the teacher had the opportunity to go back and reread sections that weren’t immediately clear. Readers of newspapers, magazines, and other printed material have the same opportunity. Broadcast audiences don’t. (Most people, we assume, don’t record the evening news to go back and look at it later unless they or family members or friends were part of the news that day.) So, we have to make every sentence we write very clear so audience members understand what we’re talking about after having heard it only once.

Additionally, even if something looks good on the page, we don’t know how it will sound until we read it out loud. You should read every broadcast script aloud so you can hear how it will sound when someone speaks the words on-air. Writing for the ear is one of the biggest differences between print and broadcast writing, but there are others.

Story Structure Is Different

Although print writers seem to be moving away from rigid adherence to the inverted pyramid style, it remains the basis of many newspaper stories, especially hard news stories. With inverted pyramid style, stories begin with the most important facts and continue with facts of lesser and lesser importance. This is done primarily to make it possible for editors to shorten stories without affecting the most important information. You might have noticed that some newspaper stories seem to end rather abruptly. Most likely, that was the work of an editor trying to fit a 450-word story into a 400-word space.

In broadcast writing, we don’t use the inverted pyramid style. On the contrary, we write television and radio news stories in such a way that the viewers would definitely notice something was missing if we “trimmed from the bottom” because we don’t build stories in descending order of the facts. Also, the end of longer broadcast news stories should either contain a summary statement or leave the viewers something to think about, and that might be lost if viewers started to tune out toward the end. So we need to hold their attention throughout the story. Note that a summary statement isn’t necessarily intended to indicate that we know all we’re going to know about that story. Often, we don’t know the resolution of stories for days or even months after
the event occurs. Frequently, the summary statement is to let the viewers or listeners know that the story is a continuing one and that we’ll follow it to its conclusion.

For specific examples, please see Chapters 7, 8 and 9.

Broadcast Writers Use Conversational Tone

This doesn’t mean speak as you would on the basketball court or at a club with your friends, but broadcast writing is a bit less formal than print writing is. You might have already noticed that we’ve written this book using contractions. That’s one of the main things that separate broadcast and print writing. More about contractions in a bit.

When you write for television or radio news, the goal is to tell a story to someone who knows less about what happened than you do. You want to impress this person, but you don’t want to make that desire obvious. The way to impress without appearing that you’re trying to impress is to use common words but use them very well. Many of us have used some words incorrectly for so long that they sound wrong when we use them the right way. Sound confusing? Just think what the viewers and listeners might be going through. Some of them know when you use a word incorrectly or try to talk above their heads; others just have a feeling that something is amiss. In either case, you, the writer, have distracted the audience members momentarily. One of the things to avoid in broadcast is anything that distracts the viewers or listeners. There are already too many things fighting against us for their attention for us to be fighting against ourselves.

We mentioned that broadcast writing is less formal than print writing is, but it’s more formal than how we speak to one another. When we talk, we don’t often think about rules of grammar, sentence construction, and the like. But when we write, we have to think about those things. Why? Because for now, television and radio news flows one way only with no immediate interaction between audience members and reporters or anchors. Just as viewers and listeners have nothing they can reread to make sure they understand it, likewise, they’re unable to ask the person speaking what he or she meant by what that person just said. More about conversational writing in Chapter 2.

Writing for Broadcast Includes Using Contractions

You don’t want the anchor (one day it could be you) to sound stiff or as though she’s talking down to the audience. One way to avoid this is to use contractions, because contractions are a big part of sounding conversational. But, as with most “rules” in broadcast writing, there
are exceptions, and you shouldn’t use contractions in every instance. For example, if you want to place emphasis on something, a contraction is not as strong as using both words. Additionally, some contractions don’t roll off the tongue very smoothly and you should avoid those. Some examples are “that’ll” for that will, “it’ll” for it will, and “there’ll” for there will. Avoid those three and any others that just don’t sound right to you when you read the script out loud. You should also be careful with contractions that sound like plurals. If you say, “The plan’s giving her reason for hope,” it’s unclear at first whether you’re talking about one plan or more than one. Television and radio audiences know only what they hear; they can’t see the apostrophe. But for the most part, write with contractions.

**In Broadcast Writing, We Use Short, Declarative Sentences**

This is closely related to using conversational tone. This doesn’t mean that all sentences should be simple sentences along the lines of “See Dick run,” but we should stick to sentence construction that makes it very evident who and what we’re writing about. Hence, we rarely use complex sentences because it’s very easy for our meaning to get lost in the shuffle. Broadcast writers also keep the subject and the verb as close to each other as possible. For example, “This morning, police arrested a suspect” is easier to follow and sounds better than “Police this morning arrested a suspect.” We also don’t often deal with complex stories as part of everyday coverage. They’re difficult to tell and difficult to follow. Even in fairly straightforward stories, it’s better to present a few well-developed facts than lots of little bits of information. The viewers are apt to get lost (in more ways than one) if you hit them with too much information in a short amount of time.

**Active Voice Is the Choice of Broadcasters**

Simply put, active voice is someone doing something and passive voice is something being done to someone or something. Here are examples of both:

*Active.* The governor gave a speech.

*Passive.* A speech was given by the governor.

There are occasions in which passive voice actually sounds better, but they’re fairly rare. Write in active voice unless the sentence sounds strange when you read it aloud. If that’s the case, try it in passive voice to see if it sounds better. But you’ll rarely go wrong using active voice. The key to constructing sentences in active voice is to make sure the action is
preceded by the actor, and that there is an actor mentioned. In the active voice example above, the actor is the governor; his action was giving a speech. Broadcast writing is full of passive voice because writers don’t follow this simple rule. “The gunman was arrested” is the worst kind of passive-voice construction because not only did the writer fail to put the actor first, there is no actor mentioned. Active voice helps us with another broadcast writing guideline: keeping the subject and verb together. We’ll look more closely at active voice and its importance in Chapter 3.

**Broadcast Writers Use Present or Future Tense When Appropriate**

Some writing coaches and textbook writers advise the use of present tense at all times, but that just doesn’t make sense. If there’s a reference to World War II in your story, you certainly wouldn’t write about that as if it were currently taking place. However, you should use present tense as often as you can. Remember, we want to give today’s news, not yesterday’s news. Also, don’t use more than one tense in the same sentence; for example, you wouldn’t write “Police arrest a Carrville man and charged him with arson.” You could place both verbs in the past tense, but your best bet is to use the present tense by telling us what’s happening now; for example, “A Carrville man is in jail tonight.” There will be more about tense in Chapter 3.

**We Write Broadcast Stories in Today Language**

The word “yesterday” isn’t allowed in the lead sentence of broadcast news stories. If something happened yesterday (or last week) and nothing new has developed, why would we include that story on the evening news? But using today language doesn’t necessarily mean using the word “today.” For example, “Police are continuing to investigate” indicates that something is going on today without us having to use the word “today.” Further, today language doesn’t mean we can’t update something that happened yesterday. It might even be necessary to use the word “yesterday” somewhere in the story. After all, if that’s when the event occurred, we can’t change that. Just don’t use “yesterday” in the opening sentence.

Also, keep in mind the news program on which your story will appear. Starting a story that’s part of the 9 P.M. update or the 11 P.M. newscast with “this morning” indicates that either nothing has happened since this morning or we aren’t out there digging for the latest information. In a world of round-the-clock news channels and
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program interruptions to bring viewers and listeners the latest news live from the scene, failing to “freshen” stories for subsequent newscasts is a major failing indeed.

How to Deal with Dates and Days of the Week

Although we don’t want to use the word “yesterday” in the lead sentences of our stories, if something happened yesterday, you’ll have to use the word at some point in the piece. When something happened is important, and we can’t say it happened today if it didn’t. If you make time references in a story, use these guidelines: Use the words “yesterday” and “tomorrow” if the event in question is only one day in the past or one day in the future. If it’s more than one day distant, give the day of the week. Dates aren’t necessary unless the event happened more than a week ago or will happen more than a week from now. For example: The bill became law yesterday. The trial begins tomorrow. The concert will be Sunday. (Note: If you write next Sunday, you leave a question as to whether you mean a few days from now or a week and a few days from now. Delete the word “next” if you mean the Sunday to follow, and put the date if it’s a Sunday that’s more than a week away.) If you use a date, it’s acceptable to write it in shorthand form rather than writing in full, such as 2nd, 4th, 21st, and so on.

Some news operations use the day of the week rather than the words “yesterday,” “today,” or “tomorrow.” CNN does this frequently because a piece might run on Wednesday evening and again on Thursday morning, or it might already be Thursday somewhere in the world. If you refer to today and the piece runs again on Thursday, it’s now a different day. So, keep in mind when your story will run when deciding how to refer to the day that something happened. Wednesday could be yesterday, today, or tomorrow, depending on what you’re talking about. But it will always be Wednesday. So, although we prefer the words “yesterday,” “today,” and “tomorrow,” there are cases in which you’d use the day of the week instead.

Broadcast Writers Use Last Names and Put Titles First

Except on first reference or when more than one person with the same name is part of the story, use the last name only. Hence, the first reference to a person in the story would be to Bill Smith, but use Smith in all subsequent references to that person. If Bill’s brother Tom is also part of the story, it might be necessary to use the full names of both men.
on all references to avoid confusion. Some writers like to use the first name only, but the only time you can get away with that is when the person you’re talking about is a child. It would sound strange to refer to 6-year-old Tommy Jones as Jones. So when you’re referring to children, it’s okay to use the first name alone on subsequent references.

When you use a title, place it in front of the name. Again, this is to avoid confusion and keep the sentence flowing smoothly. It sounds better to say “Former Midville Mayor Jane Brown says . . .” than to say “Jane Brown, former mayor of Midville, says . . .” But please, if some government official you talk to has a title like “Texas Railroad Commission Pipeline Regulatory Division Engineer,” shorten the title to something the viewers or listeners can digest. For TV, you’re going to have to do that to get it to fit on the screen for a super (graphics information superimposed over the video) anyway.

There’s some disagreement among television news writers about the need to verbally identify the people whose on-camera quotes we use because we’ll show their names and titles in supers on the lower third of the screen. However, a number of studies have shown that many people don’t watch the news closely from beginning to end.1 Often, people are preparing dinner, dealing with the kids, getting ready for bed, or talking about work that day as they watch or listen to a news program. The viewer might even be in another room during parts of the newscast. So it isn’t advisable to depend on a super as the only means of identifying a speaker.

Additionally, even with those viewers who watch the news program intently, supers don’t always suffice. Any producer or show director who has been involved with television news for any length of time will tell you that when mayhem reigns in the control room (and that isn’t uncommon), getting supers on the air falls far down the list of priorities. Therefore, we suggest verbally identifying most on-camera sources the first time they are about to appear. We’ll have more about introducing sound bites in Chapter 8 about voice-over/sound on tape (VO/SOT).

In Broadcast Writing We Use Phonetic Spelling and Avoid Foreign Names When Possible

Although broadcast writers are supposed to spell correctly under most circumstances, there are times when spelling a word correctly might result in the anchor pronouncing it incorrectly on the air. Therefore,

you should spell any uncommon word the way it sounds. This presents some special problems for closed-captioned television, but most newsroom computer systems make it possible to deal with those concerns. Viewers tend to phone the station en masse when an anchor or reporter mispronounces the name of a person or place, especially if most of them know the correct pronunciation. One of the goals of writers is to keep this from happening by spelling those names phonetically. We don’t need to spell “Davis” or “Miami” phonetically, but there’s no predicting how “Sarmiento” or “Kazakhstan” will come out of someone’s mouth unless you indicate that the anchor should pronounce those names Sahr-me-in-toe and Kahz-ahk-stan.

Some fairly common words should also be spelled phonetically because they have two pronunciations. On more than one occasion, an anchor or field reporter has been known to pronounce “bass” the way it should be pronounced in reference to a fish when the word was used in reference to a low tone on the musical scale. When that happens, it’s embarrassing for the person whose face is on-screen and for the news operation as a whole. In such an instance, write “base drum.” Although the word isn’t spelled correctly, the overwhelming majority of viewers don’t see the words but hear them only, and it’s certainly not good for the news operation’s credibility for one of its anchors or reporters to say “bass drum” (as in a drum that holds fish). Several other words are spelled the same but pronounced differently. Watch out for them. One note of warning: If seeing a misspelled word distracts your anchor, you might want to spell the word correctly, review the script with the anchor, and hope that he or she pronounces the word the way it’s supposed to be pronounced. Audience members always seem to notice even the slightest double-take by someone on-camera.

In reference to hard-to-pronounce names, sometimes we can do without using a foreign name at all. It might be important to mention the name of the French president, but if we’re referring to the French undersecretary of defense, using the title might be enough for the viewers to understand that person’s role in the story without having to deal with a difficult foreign name. However, when the name is important to the story, if you think there’s a chance the anchor will mispronounce it, spell it phonetically whether it’s a foreign name or not.

When you’re not concerned that the anchor will mispronounce a word, spell it correctly. Also, don’t count on a spell-check program to catch your mistakes. The computer doesn’t know whether you were writing “tired” or “tried” and will accept “tired” when you meant “tried” because, to the computer, you spelled the word correctly. It’s just not the word you intended to use. Computers are great tools, but they can’t match the human mind on some things, such as editing copy. At least not yet.
Chapter 1 Characteristics of Broadcast News Writing

Broadcast Writers Avoid Most Abbreviations and Are Careful with Acronyms

In broadcast writing, avoid almost all abbreviations. The fairly common abbreviation “St.” can mean either street or saint. News anchors have plenty to think about without having to figure out which one it’s supposed to be. We don’t use some abbreviations simply because we don’t need them. This is the case with courtesy titles such as Mr., Ms., and Mrs. Generally, a person’s marital status isn’t important to the story. One exception to the no-courtesy-title rule is with heads of state and their spouses. It’s appropriate to refer to President Obama or Mr. Obama, or Mr. Brown or Prime Minister Brown. Likewise, the spouses of those particular heads of state would be Mrs. Obama or Mrs. Brown.

It might be important to identify someone as doctor, but when it is, spell out the word rather than use the abbreviation. “Dr.” is short for both doctor and drive. The same is the case with president (you wouldn’t want an anchor to say pres, so don’t write it that way), senator, or representative. (Note: Such titles aren’t courtesy titles. They’re earned titles. There’s a difference between the two.)

Some agencies and entities are better known by the acronyms or abbreviations that identify them than by their full names. For example, F-B-I is more widely used than is Federal Bureau of Investigation. But notice how we write F-B-I. When you want the anchor to pronounce each letter, place hyphens between them. This is also true with A-M and P-M in references to time.

Other abbreviations that are acceptable on first reference are C-I-A, N-C-A-A (but if you want the anchor to say N-C-double-A, write it that way), N-B-C, C-B-S, A-B-C, C-N-N, and so on. Let your guide be the way you’re accustomed to hearing it. Almost no one says American Broadcasting Companies in conversation, and most probably don’t even know what E-S-P-N stands for. For local or regional groups that might not be familiar to all the viewers, give the entire name on first reference, then go to the abbreviations. For example, the group Save Our Cumberland Mountains might be called SOCUM on second reference.

In Broadcast Writing, Keep Hyphenated Words on the Same Line

We should hyphenate any words we want the anchor to read together. In addition, all parts of the hyphenation should appear on the same line. There could be a brief delay as the words are rolling up on an
electronic prompter. It looks silly when an anchor gets out half a hyphenation but has to wait for the other half to appear. For the same reason, a sentence shouldn’t carry from one page to another.

Hyphenation is called for when we use two or more words as a unit to describe something. “A long-running trial” could come out sounding as if we’re talking about a lengthy trial about running (a long running trial) without the hyphenation.

**Broadcast Writers Don’t Use Symbols**

Unlike print writers, we don’t use any symbols in broadcast. We should spell out all references to dollars, cents, percent, and other such words. We also don’t use the number sign, the “at” sign, the ampersand (symbol for the word “and”) or any other symbol you can come up with. We should even spell out “point” in “one-point-two million dollars.” If we included symbols in scripts, it could cause the news reader to pause momentarily trying to figure out exactly what we wrote. That, of course, would break the flow of the story and might even make the anchor look or sound foolish.

**In Broadcast Writing, There Are Different Guidelines for Dealing with Numbers**

Quite often, the precise amount or number of something is unimportant in broadcast. Certainly, if 163 people die in an airplane crash, the number is important. But it’s better to say a budget of nearly two million dollars than to say a budget of one million—865 thousand dollars. Additionally, filling a story with too many figures and statistics brings the flow of the story to a screeching halt and sends the viewers scrambling for their remotes. Most of the time, round off numbers.

When you write numbers in broadcast, it’s important to make them easy to read. Here are some simple guidelines.

Numbers 1 through 9—write out the word (some news operations prefer that you write out the words through eleven)

Numbers 10 through 999—use numerals

Numbers higher than 999—use a combination of words and numerals. For example: 37,915,776 should be written 37 million—915 thousand—776.

Write phone numbers and years using all numbers because that’s how we’re accustomed to seeing them. For example: 610-555-0201, 1776, 1492.
Often, Addresses and Ages Aren’t Important in Broadcast Writing

Chances are most of the viewers in a given market wouldn’t know where 1600 Eagle Street is, but they might be familiar with a certain section of town. Hence, it’s better to refer to an area or point out landmarks close to the place where an event occurred instead of giving a street address. Likewise, a person’s age usually isn’t important unless we’re talking about a 10-year-old college graduate or a 73-year-old snow-skiing champion. However, there are exceptions. When a local person dies, it might be necessary to give the age and an address so relatives of other people with the same name as the dead person aren’t alarmed for no reason. Also, when someone meets an untimely death, the age adds some context, as when a 28-year-old dies of a heart attack. Remember, in broadcast writing there are few rules that came down from the mountain on stone tablets—only guidelines.

Making Corrections to Copy

The standard markings print writers and editors use to indicate changes in a script can be very confusing to an anchor trying to read a story on the air. Someone has to change the hard copy version of the script and change the script in the computer. Most newsroom systems send the script directly to the prompter, and if you don’t make the corrections electronically, the anchor will be seeing an uncorrected version of the script. When the director and the anchor are looking at different versions of a script, that can create big problems. Producers should make any corrections that are necessary on the computer, send the revised story to the prompter, and print out another copy for distribution to the anchors and all other news personnel who get copies.

Broadcast Writing Is Punctuated Differently

The most common form of punctuation in broadcast writing is the ellipsis. The longer the ellipsis, the longer the pause. We often use the ellipsis for effect. Additionally, we underline on hard copy the words the anchor should emphasize. Hence, the anchor could read this short sentence three different ways:

Sue loves you.
Sue loves you.
Sue loves you.

The way you write the sentence is the way the anchor will say it.
Other than the ellipsis, question marks, and periods, we use few punctuation marks in broadcast. Remember, broadcast writing is meant to be heard, not read by the audience. You should write copy to make it as easy to read as possible. The easier it is for an anchor to read, the easier it will be for audience members to listen to the copy.

We Handle Quotations Differently in Broadcast

In broadcast writing, we rarely use direct quotations in the script, but normally paraphrase instead. Most people don’t speak as succinctly as we’re supposed to write, so we paraphrase what they’ve said in as few words as possible, being careful, of course, not to change the meaning. In those few instances when a writer feels compelled to use a direct quotation, it’s important to make the sentence flow as smoothly as possible, as is always the case in broadcast writing. For example:

THE PRESIDENT SAID . . . I WON’T SIGN THE BILL UNLESS IT’S AMENDED TO INCLUDE PROVISIONS FOR LOWERING THE DEFICIT . . . MISTER CLINTON ADDED THAT HE DOESN’T EXPECT THE REPUBLICAN MAJORITY IN THE HOUSE TO ADD THOSE PROVISIONS.

Setting off the direct quote with an ellipsis tells the anchor (and the listener or viewer) that what the anchor is about to say stands apart from what the anchor has said up to this point and from what the anchor will say afterward. However, if you sense the audience members might be confused, set off the quote by adding “in his words” after “the president said.” However, definitely avoid these pitfalls: “The president said, quote,” and “end quote” at the conclusion of the sentence.

Again, however, we rarely quote in text. If what someone has to say is important enough for us to quote that person, we’ll get a taped comment. In a visual medium such as television it’s better to see and hear the person who makes the comment rather than quote the person in the script. The same is true for radio, except, of course, the visual part.

Broadcast Writers Are Careful with Pronouns

Pronouns are acceptable in broadcast writing, but only if there’s no question about to whom the pronoun refers. Clarity is vitally important to broadcast news, and pronouns can create a problem in that regard.
For example: “The police officer tackled the fleeing robber. He’s a former football player.” In this sentence, it’s unclear to whom the pronoun refers, the officer or the robber. It’s likely the writer used “he” to refer to the officer, the person who did the tackling. However, there’s room for doubt, and that’s something broadcasters can’t afford to raise in viewers’ minds. In this example, it’s best to delete “he” and restate the noun.

**Broadcast Writers Use Attribution Before Statements**

If we don’t tell the viewers or listeners beforehand who made a particular comment, stated a fact, or offered an opinion, it sounds as though those things are coming from our anchor. For example, “Sally Johnson extorted thousands of dollars from X-Y-Z Bank during a three-year period, according to bank officials” sounds as though we’re making an accusation until the viewer hears the end of the sentence. Inverting the sentence takes care of that. “According to bank officials, Sally Johnson extorted thousands of dollars from X-Y-Z Bank during a three-year period” lets the viewers or listeners know right away that bank officials are making the charge, not the members of the news team.

Almost everything we know about a particular story comes from someone else and we should attribute it. Exceptions would be that an event is taking place somewhere, at a certain time, costing a certain amount. There’s no need to attribute common facts, but most other information can’t stand without the writer needing to tell the audience its origin. Words and phrases such as “accused of,” “convicted of,” or “charged with” help us in this regard. If we say someone is a convicted murderer, it’s obvious the person was convicted by a jury, but even in that circumstance, we don’t know for sure the person did the crime. Plenty of people have been on Death Row for years and the courts later found them to be innocent. Hence, we advise against saying someone did something unless a television news crew captured the event on videotape and there’s no doubt the person we’re talking about is the person we see on the tape.

**Alex Villarreal**

“Attribute” is the word etched in Alex Villarreal’s mind. She’s an International Broadcaster for Voice of America.

During her fellowship year at Voice of America, she listened to and attended countless Congressional meetings and learned the hard way, you can’t trust everything you hear.
Even government officials make mistakes. Alex says as a journalist, it’s your responsibility to report facts as facts and what someone says as what someone says, never fact, no matter how credible you believe the source to be.

One day, her bosses assigned her to monitor a Senate hearing on border security. The senators went back and forth, exchanging ideas about whether the U.S. was doing a sufficient job protecting the northern border with Canada. In the middle of an argument for more border troops, one senator said Canadian intelligence had reported there are more international terrorist organizations active in Canada than anywhere else in the world.

Alex immediately took note of the statement, knowing it would be a powerful line to include in her radio spot.

She didn’t have space to include it as a bite, so she made it part of my track. She perused the Canadian intelligence Web site, looking for the report the senator had referred to, but couldn’t find it before her deadline. She went with the line anyway. Her error was that she didn’t attribute it to the senator. She stated it as fact.

The story went out on air and on the Web. Two days later, her supervising editor approached her. Someone had complained the story was inaccurate. The Canadian Security Intelligence Service had actually reported that more terrorist groups are active in Canada than anywhere else in the world, with the possible exception of the United States.

Alex got a sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach. She searched the Web site again, and found the 2002 report, which sure enough said just what the CSI said it did. VOA issued a correction, and from that day forward, Alex has never again reported a statement by anyone without either attributing it or finding a second source for confirmation.

**Conclusion**

Someone once asked former network anchor David Brinkley if he considered himself a journalist or a broadcaster. Brinkley replied that there’s no difference because good writing is good writing. In a sense, that’s true. If you can write good print copy, you can easily make the transition to broadcast writing. But, as you’ve seen, there are some differences between the two media regarding how we arrive at good writing. The guidelines listed above don’t change the language, but do slightly alter how we use it. We’ve designed all the guidelines to make the copy easier to read and, therefore, easier to listen to. Remember, the key in broadcast writing is *don’t make viewers or listeners work to get their information*. As a writer, you should do all the work so the audience members don’t have to do any. Otherwise, they’ll turn to a newscast (or other programming) that requires less effort.
General DOs and DON’Ts

Do
- Be clear and concise.
- Make life easy for the anchor.
- Write like people talk (to a degree).
- Be careful with pronouns.
- Attribute.

Don’t
- Forget that you know more about stories than audience members do.
- Depend on the computer to catch mistakes.
- Fail to make corrections on the prompter as well as on hard copy.

Questions

1. In broadcast writing, why is it important to be conversational?
2. If print writers use inverted pyramid style, how would you describe the style broadcast writers use?
3. Why is it so important to avoid using a lot of pronouns in broadcast writing?
4. How do you handle attribution when you’re writing a broadcast story?
5. What are two important characteristics of a well-structured broadcast sentence?
6. Describe active voice and why you should use it when writing a broadcast story.