

Peter O'Connor	Introduction to Journalism
Week 4	Broadcast journalism: TV news
<p>1. BROADCAST JOURNALISM began in the US, Europe and parts of East Asia with radio broadcasts in the 1920s. The first high-definition TV service was made from the Alexandra Palace in the UK in November 1936: broadcasting in a range of 25 miles. During the late 1940s and early 1950s US TV viewers began watching the news on four networks: NBC, CBS, ABC and DuMont. In 1950, only 9% of American homes had a television. Today, most countries offer a mixture of public and private broadcasting services, the public service carrying no advertising, the private service largely financed by advertising. In China, Chinese Central Television also offers English-language TV on CCTV9: http://www.cctv.com/english/index.shtml. In Japan, the public service broadcaster NHK provides domestic TV and an international radio news service, NHK World, broadcasting in about 47 languages from HQ in Shibuya. In Britain the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), offers numerous radio stations at home and worldwide (on the net) and an international TV station, BBC World. In the United States, PBS, headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia, is a private, non-profit enterprise operated by the nation's 349 public television stations and relies largely on public subscriptions: http://www.pbs.org/ PBS Radio brings you some interesting programs, in particular the Prairie Home Companion hosted by Garrison Keillor HERE at http://prairiehome.publicradio.org/ - highly recommended and carried in Japan by Eagle 810, the US military radio station, previously known as the Far East Network [FEN].</p> <p>BROADCAST NEWS This class will not be analysing the differences between public and private service broadcasting as other SILS courses (for example see http://www.f.waseda.jp/glaw/) perform that function. Instead, we will focus on the practicalities of producing TV broadcast news, with an emphasis on political reporting. We'll talk about the working life of some talking heads and discuss the power and significance of TV news: the broadcasting of politics and the politics of broadcasting.</p> <p>If you watch TV news in most countries, you'll notice that most broadcasters, like most flight attendants and movie stars, but unlike the average representatives of most professions, including politicians, are often young and reasonably good-looking or have telegenic or 'made for TV' faces, such as John Sergeant (BBC top left), Jeremy Paxman (later) or Andrew Marr (top right) who bears an unfortunate resemblance to the grim Russian President, Vladimir Putin (bottom left). Most TV news offers a combination of telegenic veterans like Larry King (lr. right), and glamorous, but surprisingly effective, presenters. Looks are important, but when, in the early days of radio, male BBC Radio announcers wore a dinner jacket and bow-tie in the studio, they were, of course, invisible. Could evening wear be 'heard' by the radio audiences of the 1920s and 1930s?</p>	

2. Packaging the news

SOME IMAGES YOU DON'T FORGET: the 1963 assassination of John Fitzgerald Kennedy in Dallas, as filmed by a bystander, Abraham Zapruder, is still packed with the power of the unexpected and the little understood: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4DwKK4rkeEM> Film of the terrorist attacks on the US on September 11th 2001 will always pack a punch. How much this punch depends on the organisation of events as a 'news package' is open to question, but when news is recorded, it has to be presented as a story to be understood in one take, with a beginning, middle and end.

The crucial differences between TV news packaging and newspaper journalism are, first, technology and, second, the need for 'balance'. To make an effective news package, the news programme needs a studio anchor, an outside reporter, and a large team of technicians, producers, editors and camera operators. It must show good pictures and play memorable soundbites. Secondly, broadcasting in the UK and Japan is legally bound to be 'impartial' – this doesn't apply to newspapers. In Britain, Parliament originally shared out wavelengths as a public resource, and this gave the government a hold on radio and TV that it never gained on the press. When we come to examine the politics and business of newspaper ownership, we'll see that although it is deeply controversial, politicians get far more excited about who owns TV channels because TV reports for everybody, while newspapers report only to their readers.

Look closely and you'll sometimes spot the earpiece dangling from an presenter's left or right ear and clipped to the back of his or her collar. This is the presenter's lifeline to the studio: here he or she receives prompts and ideas from the news editor or the producer. Sometimes the earpiece drops out: that's when the presenter looks baffled. The other crucial technical advance is the see-through autocue that allows the presenter to read the news while speaking to camera.

The presenter is central to the news package: the short 1-4 (usually 2) minute film that gives the news as a story, tries to make it chronological even though it often consists of a number of simultaneous events because it can only tell one story. It needs gripping footage, but nothing so gripping that it overwhelms the story. The script must complement the footage, not simply describe it. A good script will refer to the picture, but at a slight angle. When the footage shows President X waving and ducking into a limousine, the reporter should say something like. "President X looked confident as he left for the summit this morning" rather than "President X waved and got into his car..." Such a script would be too literal. In the TV industry, the phrase used is "Lord Privy Seal-ish": like showing a man wearing ermine in a toilet with a seal instead of the person who bears that ancient title.

3. In the editing suite

The news editing suite, where news packages and the piece to camera [PTC] are put together, is a tense place. It takes an hour or so to shape an hour's worth of material into a two minute package and it has to be ready for its slot in the programme – or else. Failure to 'make the gate' is a cardinal sin in TV news and not easily forgiven.

The three key people are the reporter, the picture editor and the producer. The reporter

has notes or raw footage on a screen, and a mike. The picture editor sits to one side, in front of two screens, two film decks and piles of technical equipment. He or she takes the footage (usually just-shot film plus material from the previous week) of interviews, debates, ministers coming and going and so on and assembles these snippets in narrative form on a master tape, at the same time recording the reporter's words.

For the picture editor, a live incident can make great footage. Here's Deputy PM John Prescott campaigning in the 2001 election, being pelted by an egg and throwing a punch: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VRQDnGTcc4A>

The Prescott incident was spliced together from more than one angle, but most footage is a bit late or badly angled and sometimes different news organizations will 'pool' or trade footage. The skilled picture editor cuts and reshapes the raw film at high speed. There will be glitches – a hair in the lens, flutters in the picture or the sound recording.

Good reporters and fast, experienced picture editors can make a big difference: but they need a good producer. The producer oversees the whole process apart from the script, and takes responsibility for delivering the tightly timed news package to the editor of the news programme. The producer has to be able to cut to the heart of the story, organise the camera crew, organizing logistics such as delivering the package from outside (it might be put together in an outside broadcast van, for example) to the studio. The producer writes the cue, the introductory section which the presenter reads before showing the package.

Besides all this, the producer has to get the best out of the reporter and here there is often a power struggle as reporters have their own ideas about the story, how much time it is worth and so on. Some reporters put up a fight, others turn into dummies. The producer also has to oversee the picture edit. All this involves compromises and teamwork, and the tension in an editing suite or outside broadcast unit can be considerable. Good cameramen will know where to shoot, where to catch the best effects, long shots and angles, when to go where the officials don't want them to go. Sometimes the editing suite is in an underground car park – for example at a political conference – but the team manage to pull everything together only to be told at the last minute to shave ten seconds from a package.

The other element in the news package is the PTC: piece to camera. Here the reporter appears on the screen – a talking head, speaking directly to the viewer. Some do a 'walk and talk': weaving backwards in and out of traffic, machinery, people, without losing the thread of the report is a skill in itself. In a war situation, the reporter steps backwards over manholes and ducks under tank turrets without batting an eyelid but sometimes events get too close for comfort. On April 7 2003, US warplanes dropped a missile on a US/Peshmerga convoy in Iraq. The BBC's John Simpson was with the convoy in a vehicle just behind the missile. In his PTC, Simpson had to 'write to a picture', not to digested facts as he would for a newspaper report. A confusing situation had to be stripped down and explained: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zAHmqNoLTf8&mode=related&search=>

THE TV NEWS DILEMMA: what is the news editor to do when there's no picture? Or when there is footage, but its longer than the airtime the event deserves? Without a picture, TV news can go for a talking head, an interview, and graphics. It often happens that an unimportant story (for example Prescott's punch) has unforgettable images while a far

bigger story has no footage. When you have unimportant but nevertheless gripping footage it becomes a question of news values, always a problem for the programme editor.

It's all a far cry from the early BBC news where pictures were deemed vulgar and the announcer would hold a newspaper up before the camera, while an elegant hand would point to newsworthy items from one side of the screen.

4. News packages to remember ~ & satirical commentary

The British politician Denis Healey described being attacked by the Conservative Minister Geoffrey Howe as "like being worried by a half-dead sheep". In 1990, the man least expected to knife Margaret Thatcher in the back was Howe, her longest serving, longest-suffering Minister. Howe had resigned 12 days earlier without saying why. His explanation in this Commons speech signaled the end of Margaret Thatcher's domination of British politics. The BBC package: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1C2hieHKgA> by John Cole is expertly put together. Soon after, her resignation is on the One O'Clock News <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sTDS23DY670&mode=related&search=>

Behind the news programmes lurk the satirists and cartoonists. We saw John Major in both these clips: always a modest figure, he was a far smoother operator than was realised at the time. Succeeding Thatcher in 1990, Major was depicted on Spitting Image as a 'grey man' who could only discuss peas while wife Norma agonised about Virginia Bottomley: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DACkfFtOm-k&mode=related&search=> It later turned out that the unassuming Major was having a torrid affair with his vivacious Health Minister, Edwina 'Salmonella' Currie. The effect of this merciless clip on Major's political career is hard to gauge, but it cannot have done him much good.

5. Good on TV: what does it take?

RICHARD NIXON knew how to work the media. He turned misfortune to advantage with the Checkers speech: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XatkKzjV90w>. But watch John Kennedy take on the jowly Nixon in this election debate and you'll appreciate what it is to be telegenic: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tRpxKHIRQUc>.

Here's Jeremy Paxman taking on George Galloway M.P., who had stood as an independent candidate (for the 'Respect' party) in the 2005 election having been thrown out of the Labour Party. Galloway won the election, defeating the black Labour incumbent: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tD5tunBGmDQ>. And here's more Paxman: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tDZLalEkm4Q&mode=related&search=>

The UK's best radio/TV politician was probably Tony Benn, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZLGHY2WS_M Before the Iraq war Tony Blair was pretty convincing: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lSieUhqIR6k> Watch Bill Clinton in 1992: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGTQZnC-6a4&mode=related&search=>CNN's Rosemary Church refusing to give the benefit of the doubt to an Israeli spokeswoman in an ingenious split screen sequence <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6fn5NZ6LBk> where ground footage undermines (without clearly contradicting) the Israeli version of events.

6. And now for something completely different ~

Nicholas Whitchell and Sue Lawley handle a gay rights protest:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EqCAJsk3LQU>

Report on same -

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O6xxMSc0-DM&mode=>

Weatherman Michael Fish in October 1987

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=suicDUg6H5Y>

Damage report the following day

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UeRvHS1w1Ks>

And a slip of the tongue:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YpBlw6wkLmA&NR=1>