



EDO UNIVERSITY, IYAMHO EDO STATE, NIGERIA



DEPARTMENT OF MASS COMMUNICATION MAC 113: WRITING FOR THE MASS MEDIA

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Lectures: Tuesday, 10.am – 12.00 noon, LC9, phone: (+234) 8034456055

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General Overview of lecture: The course teaches the students the basic skills of writing cogent and coherent media reports. This entails journalistic conventions/styles of gathering and writing materials for the print and broadcast media. The course seeks to introduce students to the basic mechanics of news writing, reporting and article writing (letters to the Editor, commentaries and features). It will also offer hands-on instruction in information gathering, organization and writing for print and electronic media. Emphasis will also be given to the peculiarities involved in writing for the two forms of media print and broadcast. Students are expected to engage in extensive exercises of writing news and articles both in the first and second semesters.

Prerequisite: This is a foundational course for beginners, therefore, it has no prerequisite.

Learning Outcomes: At the completion of this course, students are expected to:

1. Differentiate among different types of media writing.
2. Write concisely and accurately the various media disciplines – print media, broadcast media, public relations and advertising, web writing and social media writing.
3. Construct a hard news story using the inverted pyramid style.
4. Construct broadcast news writing using broadcast conventions.

Assignments: We expect to have 3 homework assignments throughout the course. We shall also have a Mid-Term Test before the Final Exam. A Term paper will also be given at the beginning of the class to be submitted on due date.

Grading: Home work, test and Term Paper: 30% of the final grade. Final comprehensive (according to University schedule): 70% of final grade.

Reference Text:

Title: *Feature and Magazine Article Writing.*

Author: Ate, A.A and Oyedeji, K.A

Publisher: Yempet Publishers

Year: 2016

Title: *Principles and Practice of Public Relations.*

Author: Babaleye, T

Publisher: PAB

Year: 2013

Title: *Writing for the Media – A Manual for African Journalists.*

Author: Duyile, D

Publisher: Gong Communication.

Year: 2011

Title: *Reporting: Principles, Approaches, Special Beats*

Author: Nwabueze, C

Publisher: Top Shelve Publishers

Year: 2009

Title: *Magazinology.*

Author: : Okoye, I

Publisher: Lagos: Mbeyi & Associates.

Year: 2004

Title: *Media Writing and Reporting.*

Author: Uwakwe, O.A

Publisher: Afrika-Links Books

Year: 2005

MAIN LECTURE

Course Details

Week 1-2: Conceptual Clarifications; Meaning of the Mass Media.

Week 3-4: Writing for Newspapers/Magazines

Week 5-6: Writing for Radio and Television

Week 7-8: Writing for Public Relations and Advertising

Week 9-10: Web Writing and Social Media writing

Week 11: News/Features writings

Week 12: Revision

Lecture 1: MEANING OF THE MASS MEDIA

Introduction: The mass media means different things to people who are not professionals. In this lecture, we shall take a holistic look at the concept of the mass media.

Objectives: At the end of this lecture, we shall know the meaning of mass media, its elements and characteristics.

The major mass media according to Ndolo (2005, pp.18-19) are:

- i. Print – Books, magazines and newspapers
- ii. Film – Motion pictures
- iii. Recording – Records and tapes, VCDs, DVDs
- iv. Broadcasting – Radio, television and cable

Elements of the Characteristics of the Mass Media

The elements of the characteristics of the mass media are:

- i. Emphasis
- ii. Fidelity
- iii. Circulation
- iv. Reproduction
- v. Feedback, and
- vi. Support.

Sambe (2008, p.35) provides a graphic illustration of the elements of the mass media both for print and electronic media:

Print Media

Elements	Books	Magazine	Newspapers
Emphasis	Interpretation Entertainment News	Interpretation Entertainment News	Interpretation Entertainment News
Fidelity	Verbal symbols Picture symbols Colour	Verbal symbols Picture symbols Colour	Verbal symbols Picture symbols Colour
Circulation	Portability Reviewability	Portability Reviewability	Portability Reviewability
Reproduction	Verbal Picture Colour	Verbal Picture Colour	Verbal Picture Colour
Feedback	Verbal Non-verbal	Verbal Non-verbal	Verbal Non-verbal
Support	Single sale	1. Single sale 2. Subscription 3. Advertisement	1. Single sale 2. Subscription 3. Advertisement

Source: Sambe (2008)

Electronic Media

Elements	Radio	Film (Movies)	Television
Emphasis	Entertainment News Interpretation	Entertainment News Interpretation	Entertainment News Interpretation
Fidelity	Sound	Verbal symbols Picture symbols Colour Sound Motion	Verbal symbols Picture symbols Colour Sound Motion
Circulation		Portability Simultaneity	Portability Simultaneity
Reproduction	Sound	Verbal Picture Colour Sound Motion	Verbal Picture Colour Sound Motion
Feedback	Verbal Non-verbal	Verbal Non-verbal	Verbal Non-verbal
Support	Advertisement	Single sales	Advertisement

Source: Sambe (2008)

Assignment/Exercise: Outline the channels of mass media

Conclusion: It is important to know that the mass media are different from adjuncts of the mass media like advertising and public relations.

LECTURE 2: WRITING FOR NEWSPAPERS/MAGAZINES

Introduction: Writing for the print media is different from writing for broadcast media. It calls for more depth and the conventions are a little bit different. The print media is guided by space while the broadcast media is guided by time.

Objectives: At the end of this study, you should know how to write for newspapers/magazines

Newspaper Writing

Newspaper writing is the opposite of simple narration. Ate (undated, p.28) identifies the reasons why it is so:

- Newspaper writing reverses the pyramid in presenting its narration.
- It exhibits simplicity which may not be necessary in regular narration.
- Newspaper stories use block paragraphing as a means of achieving simplicity

General Hints on Newspaper Writing

- Consider headline
- Write a byline and place line
- Use hard news lead
- Write the main story (body of the report)
- Include quotes in the news
- Always include attributions
- Write in hard news style (the inverted pyramid style)

Writing for Magazines

In writing for magazine, it is important to appreciate the functions of the medium in the society. Okoye (2004, p.20) outlines some functions of magazines:

1. Magazines offer in-depth accounts of current developments in the news in a way that newspapers, radio and television, because of their haste, cannot (news magazines).
2. Magazines give general knowledge and hints that help people to live their lives intelligently and happy (general interest magazines).

3. Magazines teach skills in diverse field of human endeavour (general interest magazines).
4. Magazines offer professionals and students reports of current researches, techniques and ideas in disciplines, thereby contributing to the growth of that body of knowledge (professional and trade journals).
5. Magazines enable companies to exchange information and ideas with their various publics in a cheaper and more convenient way than using the public media (house journals).
6. Magazines also provide a means of reinforcement of adherents of different points of view and interests. (eg. Religious, sports, ideological and sex magazines).
7. Magazines are used for leisure, escape from boredom, relaxation and entertainment (sports magazines, sex magazines, etc).

General Tips for Magazine Writing

- Choose a topic
- Choose interesting angles (news peg)
- Conduct research
- Create outline
- Write your article or story
- Take care of writing regimen – spellings, use of punctuation marks, etc
- Balance text with visuals
- Communicate with your audience in mind

Magazines also serve as effective channels of advertising. Ads in magazines have the advantage of permanence over those of newspapers, radio and television. They can be elaborately reproduced in full colour and high quality paper.

Assignment/Exercise: Give a distinction between writing for newspaper and writing for magazine.

Conclusion: Writing for newspapers and magazines calls for depth, clarity, conciseness among other things.

LECTURE 3: WRITING FOR RADIO AND TELEVISION

Introduction: The broadcast or electronic media has high demand of immediacy with critical components of timing and deadlines. It is transient but has the power and capacity to “transport” someone (viewer or listener) to the scene of an event. Broadcast media writing calls for brevity of sentences and conversationalism.

Objectives: At the end of this lecture, you should know how to write for radio and television.

Radio offers the public a fast, effortless way of getting information. It is a popular medium and one can take advantage of (Silva, 2009, p.2). Television is also one of the most popular and appealing media because of its audio-visual elements.

The Curriculum for Community Radio Training in Nigeria (2010, p.iv) further attests that “radio has been overwhelmingly demonstrated to be the most effective tool of mass communication in the developing world.” This according to the Curriculum is because of its “affordability, portability, ubiquity and low power demand.”

Experts, Uwakwe (2005), Nwabueze (2009) and Duyile (2011) provide a lot of useful guidelines in writing for broadcast which are useful for both radio and television. These are:

- i. Use present tense - eg President Muhammadu Buhari says 'I am the real me' while denying allegations of his cloning.
- ii. Keep it short - make it snappy. Write straight to the point. Make it brief.
- iii. Pocket your unnecessary adjectives. Just stay with the facts.
- iv. Talk to yourself - employ conversational style of writing.
- v. Use any of the following leads in writing - Hard lead, soft lead, throw-away lead and umbrella lead as identified by Nwabueze (2009, pp.177-178):

Hard lead - Gives the most important fact in the story. eg A gang of kidnappers who have been terrorizing Ugwuoba state has been arrested

Soft lead - Draws attention of the audience into other parts of the story by letting them know that important facts will soon be made known. eg Hard times await kidnappers operating in Anambra

State.

Throw-away lead - Attracts the attention of listeners to a story in an exciting manner. eg Teachers will no longer have to wait until they get to heaven before receiving their rewards.

Umbrella lead - when two or more related incidents are to appear in one story, the umbrella lead is used to tie them together. eg Clashes between rival cults groups took place in three higher institutions yesterday.

vi. News broadcast speak to the audience. the news reader does not read it to them, he speaks it to them.

vii. Do not use direct quotes in radio and television. They are confusing.

viii. Do not abbreviate names and titles. Spell them out.

ix. Write the numbers (1 - 9) in words, including (11). Also, a number such as 10,500 is written 10 thousand 500. percentages are written out eg. 50% should be fifty percent. Write in figures from (10 - 999). After 999, write them in words, thousands, million, billion, etc.

x. Generally, the standard reading time is 150 words a minute.

xi. Place titles before names.

xii. Abbreviations are not used.

xiii. Don't use initialisation unless they are well known. eg INEC

Assignment/Exercise: Construct (a) a radio script and (b) a television script.

Conclusion: Writing for broadcast media entails understanding of the medium one is writing for. Radio is a blind medium while television appeals to audio and visual.

LECTURE 4: PUBLIC RELATIONS WRITING/ADVERTISING

Introduction: Public relations is about goodwill, image building and winning the attention of the publics. It is a form of persuasive communication that can put an organisation or person in good light.

Objectives: At the end of the study, the student should master public relations and advertising writing.

Hook (2011) cited in Babaleye (2013, pp.176 - 178) provides essentials of effective public relations writing:

- Use resonant flesh and blood characters instead of boring old nouns.
- Use action words that *propel* your readers along.
- Perform the 8-word test. Keep your characters and actions within 8 words of each other, so your reader can easily follow *who* is doing *what*. The fewer words between the nouns and verbs, the better.
- Link complex sentences and connectors to help your reader navigate through the text. eg. However, because of this, therefore, thus, hence, furthermore, etc.
- Lead your readers from old information (first) to new information (second).
- Use the Problem-Solution-Action paradigm.
- Writing can therefore be defined as the ability to write logically and succinctly to communicate messages about your organisation to its various publics.

Forbes Communication Council (2016) contends that writing and editing copy is the ability of public relations and communication professionals and therefore even the best writers should be continually honing their skills. Writing for public relations is issue driven and audience driven.

Forbes Communication Council (2016) outlines nine (9) tips for public relations pros looking to produce more effective copy:

1. Always have an editor. We need editors for the work.
2. Read it loud. "I read press releases, landing page copy and emails out loud at my desk" - Kim Gebbia Chappel, Weebly

3. Know your audience - Dynamic content is king and it starts with knowing your audience.
4. Tighten up - ensure that every word does something useful and drives your point home.
5. Explain from your audience's point of view - whether its a contributed article, blog post, press release or tweets, make sure to keep your audience in mind.
6. Be clear but casual - write clearly, concisely and casually. Think about how you would explain it to your mom and use that straight forward, simple language.
7. Test on social media - one of the best way to learn how to write effective copy is to practice short form writing on social media...Twitter is a great platform for testing headlines and Facebook is great for testing new ideas and longer forms of copy.
8. Draw inspiration from sales... Your customer facing challenges may be able to pass along content ideas inspired by customer interactions.
9. Polish up your skills. Too many a times, we have the potential for beautiful copy, but it has been so poorly written that it becomes ineffective. Ensure that copy is free of typos, grammatical mistakes and passive voice.

A public relations officer can prepare different types of publications to win the affection of the publics. A typical PR person writes advertising copies, brochures, press releases, social networking messages, emails, to mention only a few in the course of discharging his/her duties. Babaleye (2013, pp.172 - 173) provides brief explanations of some public relations publication that require specific styles of writing:

1. News release - About a personality, an organisation, a product, service and an event. PR news releases are designed to promote or introduce an organisation, its products/services. Also, it could be the outcome of an event such as a conference, workshop, fundraising, book launch or even long service awards, etc.
2. Brochures - This may be a publication introducing an organisation to its products and services, its achievements, aims and objectives and future outlook.
3. Newsletter - It is the documentation of series of news stories put together to promote an

organisation and its staff and products or services.

4. Facts sheets - These are purely one or two paragraphs on specific event, products and services provided by the organisation.

5. FAQs - Frequently Asked Questions is a document that answers all pertinent questions that may be asked on the activities of an organisation.

The public relations officer can write special articles for publication and letters to the editor bringing his organisation to public light. He/she prepares media alerts for upcoming events. It is also the responsibility of PR officers to package media kits for their organisation. They can also use the organisation's website to communicate to the publics.

Writing a Press Release

Writing for PR is basically writing for the mass media (Babaleye, 2013). Writing a press release involves gathering the facts of the story and arranging them to answer the five "Ws" and "H": who?, what?, when?, where?, why? and How? Silva (2009, p.5) provides elements to a successful press release:

. Title/headline: Try to stick to the facts. It should be short and catchy to get the reader's attention so he/she will keep on reading. It should express the essence of the story.

. Date: Always put the date of the issue (ie the day you send your press release to the media) in the top right hand corner of the first page. Put the date when the press release can be used (ie published) in the left hand corner. In most cases, a press release can be used on the day of the issue and should include the words "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE" in the left hand corner.

. Lead: This is the first paragraph of the release... A good lead should grab readers' attention. It should answer the "who" and "what" question.

. Body of the news item: This body of the press release should answer all the other questions (the "how", "when", "where", and "why"). Use a maximum of 200 to 300 words for the entire press release.

. Contact name: At the end of the release, list the name, job title, business and telephone number of the person issuing the release so that journalists can contact them for more information.

Writing for Advertising

The essential of writing an advertising copy is to stimulate sales and get the consumers to grab the product or service. In writing for advertising, we shall learn from two experts - David Ogilvy (an advertising legend) and Christiana Gillick. Lets take a look at David Ogilvy's 7 tips for writing copy that sells.

1. Go big or go home. Aim for the company of immortals.
2. Do your home work. Advertising people who ignores research are dangerous as generals who ignores decodes or enemies signals. You cannot write a copy unless you know:

. Who you are writing for

.How that person thinks

. What the person reads

Research will show you the way.

3. Never talk down to your customers. A customer is not a moron. She is not your wife. Don't insult her intelligence and don't shock her.
4. The headline is 80%. When you have written your headline, you have spent eighty cents out of your dollar. Write strong headline that works.
5. Don't get distracted from making the sale. "If it doesn't sell, it isn't creative".
6. Explain why they should buy. The more information your advertising, the more persuasive it will be.
7. Your copy is important. Treat it that way. "Like a midwife, I make my living, bringing new babies into the world, except mine are new advertising companies."

Christiana Gillick (2018) provides 7 tips for effective short copy:

1. Know (and understand) your target audience. Conduct research to find out the following:

. What makes your target audience really happy?

. What makes them mad?

. What is their biggest problem?

. What keeps them at night?

2. Remember the power of one. Have one main idea that weaves throughout the entire piece. Don't get off the track.

3. Be careful on what your goal is. Once you have your goal, consider what it would take to convince you or someone in your target market to take action.

4. Find the deeper benefit to the promise. Determine the deepest benefits and select the most compelling and important (to your target audience).

5. Include user-friendly rock-solid guarantee. This helps reduce risk, makes your target consumer more comfortable trying your product or service, and increases conversions.

6. Remove the fluff. Cut the excess. Go through your copy and remove words that are over an 8th grade reading level.

7. Test your copy. Testing will allow you to see what works best for your target audience and helps you serve shorter copy next time.

Assignment/Exercise: (a) Write a press release for publication in any reputable newspaper or magazine. (a) Design an advertising copy for any medium of your choice.

Conclusion: Advertising and public relations belong to the commercial wing of the media. Excelling in these areas requires high level of commitment and education towards professionalism.

LECTURE 5: WEB/SOCIAL MEDIA WRITING

Introduction: The new media structure has taken over the entire communication firmament. People, especially the youth “live and sleep” in the social media environment. It is therefore important to understand the nitty-gritty underlying web and social media writing.

Objectives: At the end of this lecture, you should be able to effectively write for any social media platform.

Julia McCoy (2013) provides tips for compelling web writing.

- i. Does it give the reader what he is looking for in a concise way? – keep a tit-bit of information you put out there in line with the objectives of your site.
- ii. Is your web writing content easy to skim? – make sure your articles are split into appropriate sub categories headed by subheadings. Use short, concise sentence and short paragraphs to make your point.
- iii. Is your content enriched with links? – try to include links within articles to other articles on your side that are relevant to your readership.
- iv. Do you write according to “inverted pyramid” method? – begin your article with the most relevant information. Get to the point right off the bat and use the rest of your article to expand upon that same point.
- v. Do you have a team of web writing professionals in your corner? – one should never underestimate the value of a good team of professionals on your side when it comes to solid web writing.

Source: McCoy (2013) The 5 Fundamentals of Compelling Web writing.
<https://expresswriters.com>

Social Media Writing

Charli Day (2017) provides useful guides on social media writing:

- i. Use your casual voice. You need to have your brand voice.

- ii. Keep it short and simple – social media isn't the place for deep musings, case studies or pasted stories. Although Facebook gives you 400 characters

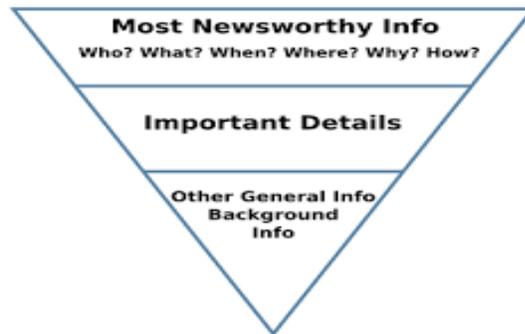
characters, please, don't use them all. The optional length of a Facebook post is 40 characters and after that print engagement wanes.

- iii. Think CTA! Your CTA or Call to Action is something you need to be aware of everytime you write your brand. A good formula for a social media post starts with a thought-provoking question and an invitation to your followers to take action. Eg watch now! Or read more.
- iv. Keep it personal. Focus on using pronouns such as “we”, “I”, “me” and “you” as opposed to the “company”, “client” or “the team”.
- v. Research pays off. You can be the best writer in the world, but if you don't do research, then your posts just won't resonate your audience.
- vi. Break some punctuation rules. You may be a professional writer but social media writing isn't like writing your master's thesis. That means you can break some traditionally held rules when it comes to creating social media post.
- vii. Write great replies. Posting updates is only part of your job as social media manager. You need to construct on point replies to your fans.
- viii. Check your spellings and grammar. Your spellings and grammar needs to be good. Poor spellings and grammar reflect badly on your brand and will give your audience the impression that you are not on top of your game.
- ix. Learn to write great captions. You can have the best product in the world but if you don't know how to caption it, then it's just plain dull. A good caption may be funny or informative depending on your brand, but it does need to summarise the product and create intrigue.
- x. Keep it perky. Your updates, captions and headlines should be exciting, inspiring and positive to drive fans to take the next action.

Source: (<https://www.agorapulse.com>)

6: NEWS/FEATURE WRITING

It follows the inverted pyramid style of writing. That is, arranging the story in descending order of importance, bringing the most important aspects of the story followed by the least important ones.



Source: <https://wikipedia.org> .

www.issc.edu outlines some characteristics, advantages and short comings of IPS:

Characteristics

- Puts information in logical order
- Arranges information from most to least important...descending order of importance
- Story starts with a climax...sets tone
- Info that follows explain & support lead
-

Advantages

- Advertises what is coming in story
- Conveys most important info upfront
- Saves readers time & editors space
- Allows editors to shorten stories from bottom
- Quick means of info delivery
- Readers can leave whenever their info needs are met

Shortcomings

- Does not encourage people to read entire story
- Stories don't end—they just stop
- No suspense—Interest diminishes as story progresses

A lot of things take place before a feature story is birthed by the writer. The steps to writing magazine features may look simple and insignificant to a layman but are very necessary for anyone who intends to master the art and science of feature writing for magazines.(Ate and Oyedeji, 2016). Betiku (2004) in Ate and Oyedeji (2016, pp.73 -74) provides steps to writing magazine features:

1. **Planning and drafting:** The first task of a writer is to give some thought to the structure of the piece and its contents. He will need to decide, if he will interview people, and if yes, when will it be done. How long will it take him to write the piece, and the writer will also have to decide what materials he will require to boost his writing.
2. **Choose the appropriate vocabulary:** In determining the above, the target audience should be put into consideration. Are they politicians or students? Are they market men and women or the intelligentsia? Whoever your audience are, do not try to impress them with long words. Clarity is the best policy for good writers, short words, when properly used can be powerful and effective as long ones.
3. **Always check the spelling of your work:** In spelling checking ones work, a dictionary must be the companion of the writer. A computer can also be useful in this regard. Wrong spelling of words is not acceptable in writing for the mass media.
4. **Always check the punctuation of your work:** An understanding of the use of punctuation is closely bound to an understanding of the patterns of sentence structure.

The lack of proper training in writing reveals itself more frequently in punctuation mistakes than in any other way.

5. **Check your syntax:** Syntax simply means the construction of sentence. As earlier observed, short sentences are simply the best. However, the length of those sentences should vary so as to give the write-up an interesting rhythm

6. **Check the accuracy of facts:** The magazine writer needs to cross check his information for the sake of accuracy. This would entail contacting other sources either primary or secondary. If one is quoting someone, the ideal thing to do is, use the person's exact words.

7. **Structure the text:** Structuring the text depends largely on the type of write-up one is embarking upon. This is because the way a news story is written is different from the way a feature article is written. In writing the hard news story, the reporter's duty is only to render the relevant facts orderly arranged to promote quick and easy readership.

8. **Decide on the balance between text and visual images:** Things like photographs, diagrams, pie charts, graphs, cartoons and other caricatures can be selected and used to balance up the text of a magazine.

9. **Retain your motivation, enthusiasm and creativity:** revisit your work, take a critical look at it and chop off the dull and uninteresting aspect of it. This may mean re-writing the piece to put more life into it.

10 **Develop your own style:** Do not be a copycat in terms of style. Study someone’s write-up and model your own unique style of writing. This process entails being a good reader.

11 **Presentation of body copy:** This involves the design and layout of the pages. All the technical aspects of sub-editing must be taken into consideration including casting of headlines, which must be interest-arousing and catchy.

Assignment/Exercise: Construct an ad on any issue of your choice for any social media platform.

Conclusion: Web/social media writing calls for creativity and innovations. The writer must track trends and be able to network effectively.