

13.

Television and Radio Scripts

How to write for
airwave audiences

WITH THE EXCEPTION of this chapter, all of the statements in this book are based on the first-hand knowledge and experiences of the authors. These notes on television represent the composite thinking of men and women (in various parts of the country) who are actively engaged in producing, or helping to produce, television programs of interest to homemakers and future homemakers.

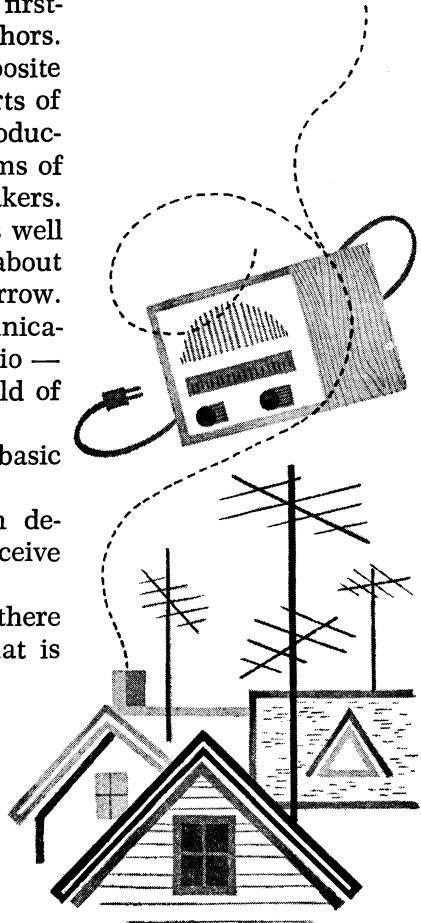
In considering their recommendations, it's well to keep in mind that much of what is said about television today may or may not apply tomorrow. This is true, of course, of all types of communications, but doubly so of television and radio — both of which are relatively new in the world of words.

Whatever changes are wrought, three basic facts will always apply:

1. The strength of a television program depends directly on the *vision* of those who conceive and produce it.

2. The word "television" suggests that there should be something visual to interpret what is

Educational television is the home economist's opportunity to get on the same wave length as the homemakers.



being said. Except, perhaps, in instances where something of wide interest is reported by persons of strong personal appeal, such interpretive visuals are not only an adjunct but a necessity. Even in newscasts they are used freely, to bring words and events to life, to fill in background, and to provide variety and thus hold attention.

3. The great factor in television is timing. Unless the program gets off to a good start immediately and sustains interest to the end, it will not be followed. For that reason, thinking must forever start with, "What is the idea I want to put across?" In other words, what is my "topic sentence?"

The Television Commercial

FACT TO FACE

Television writing is thinking in terms of pictures. To some persons the ability to think pictorially comes naturally; for others it is hard to do. It is something each person must develop within herself.

Shortest of all television presentations is the commercial or spot announcement. In one minute or less a product or an idea must be presented and put into motion in a way that prompts the viewer to action. In a commercial, that desired action is to buy and use a specific product.

Where does the home economist fit into planning and producing television commercials? What does the beginning home economist need to develop if she is to fit successfully into that picture?

According to a number of business home economists, good technical skills plus experience in working with photographers are of prime importance. Because of the high cost of producing a commercial, either live or taped, many minds must work together to figure out exactly what is to be shown and what is to be said about it. The firm's advertising agency usually carries most of the responsibility for planning and producing commercials. The home economist may or may not be included in the preliminary "brain-storming."

However, once the idea has been decided upon, her knowledge and skills will be needed. If it is a food product, she will make up the featured dish not once but several times for all to study. Various changes and improvements will be suggested before the subject is considered ready to go. Every detail of that salad or casserole or dessert will be considered thoughtfully — the type of salad bowl or plate and how the hands will pour the dressing; the surface detail and degree of brownness of the casserole; the texture and swirl of the pie filling.

Whether the commercial is to be taped or shown live, the general procedure is much the same. A series of still pictures will probably be made, illustrating each step that will be shown on TV. With these in hand, the timing of the announcer's script to fit the action can be worked out. Also, if need for further improvement should show up in these photographs, changes can be made before the commercial appears on home screens.

Frequently the show for which such commercials are designed goes on the air "live," in a city far from the home economist's home base. In such case, the approved recipe and photographs may be turned over to a home economics consultant in that area. If her hands are photogenic (as well as graceful and steady) they may be used in the action and display shots as well as for doing the background preparation. If not, a professional model's hands will be used, and the home economist will work with her behind the scenes as necessary.

Sometimes the consultant is bypassed, and the professional model proceeds according to the photographs. This means that the home economist who works on the original pictures must be extra careful to visualize each step completely, anticipating possible awkwardness on the part

QUESTION

By cooperating with the producers of children's programs, might it not be possible to stimulate an interest in homemaking in very small children? In a song-and-dance show, for one example, include hippety-hopping to the market and tip-toeing from shelf to shelf. By watching children's shows on educational channels, ideas along this line will suggest themselves.

of a non-home economist model. Just how is she to “dot” that casserole with butter? How serve the crumb crust pie successfully, or top that pudding with whipped-cream-from-a-can? The more the young home economist learns to think in pictures, the more valuable she will be in every phase of TV productions, including the commercial.

The Four-Minute Short

Many half hours on the air are made up of four- to five-minute shorts, with announcements or commercials sandwiched in between.

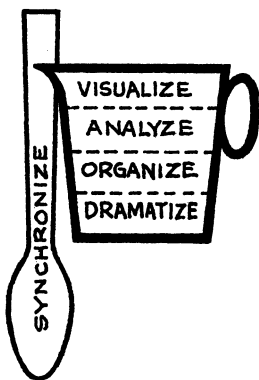
What is the basic problem in planning and doing such shorts? Successful producers of women’s interest programs stress the importance of high-appeal subject matter, narrowed down to some one idea that can be telescoped into those few minutes. Obviously, this means presenting only one segment of a broad subject. The care of clothing, for example (one aspect of the still broader subject of money management), would have to be reduced to one category of clothing, such as shoes, hats, sweaters, or handbags — each a specific subject for a four-minute presentation.

Here again, program planners interviewed mention the need for some sort of visual in every television short — and the simpler, the better. As one programmer says, “Four minutes may seem to be a relatively short period of time, but it is too long to look at one face unless there is something interesting going on.”

That brief talk on shoe care is strengthened when actual shoes in varying stages of wear and/or repair are displayed and talked about. A discussion of any phase of nutrition calls for charts or — better — displays of actual foods. A presentation on home lighting needs proper lamps or

FINE POINTS

Keep in mind the value of the dramatic pause; the value of the understatement vs. the exaggerated build-up; the value of the light touch vs. heavy-handed plugging.



photographs of lamps to bring the subject matter to life. In other words, something to look at!

What about those photographs that are to be displayed in television? The director of one business organization whose television releases are popular with dozens of stations and programmers has this to say about them:

1. Work for photographic simplicity — the simplest of accessories and as few of them as possible. Get across just one idea in every picture.

2. Pose such photographs as horizontals, so that they are in proportion to the home screen.

3. Watch the lighting. Make sure there are no shadows that will look like holes when the photograph is shown. If shadows are apparent when the photographs are being made, move in additional lighting or move the lights around in order to kill those shadowy areas. Work for contrast, but avoid sharp blacks and dead whites, both of which come out as mere blanks on the home television screen.

4. Unless you know that a specific programmer prefers glossy prints, have all photographs done in nonglossy finish. Most stations prefer these.

5. Using paper cutter, trim off white borders from all prints. If it seems advisable to crop a picture, do so, but keep to the proportions of the 8" x 10" picture.

6. Mount every photograph on heavy mat board (gray or color) to provide a frame for the picture and to keep it from buckling or bending when displayed. (A card 11" x 14" is right for an 8" x 10" photograph from which white border has been removed.) The director who generously gave the foregoing recommendations uses colored mat board for mounting photographs. Shown in black and white television, the color comes through in gray. Shown on color TV, they add a lively touch to black-and-white photographs.

LEARN FROM SCIENCE PROGRAMS

Note that in most televised science presentations, only *one* basic fact is taught or brought out at a time. Whatever the science subject, it is reduced to simple language, is made informal, informative, entertaining, and completely understandable. The same can apply in "domestic" science programs!

TEACHING VIA TV

Surveys show that students like to see other students perform in televised lesson presentations; that they respond to activity rather than to lecturing; that they derive more value from a program viewed in the classroom than when seen in the auditorium with other groups participating.

The Interview, Joint Conversation, Panel Discussion

When a program runs for 13 minutes or longer, two or more persons often make for a more interesting presentation than when only one person gets into the act. In any twosome, the interviewer logically takes the lead and asks the questions. In a group discussion, the master of ceremonies (man or woman) poses the question or problem, and designates the person who is to discuss it. The more the interviewer or M.C. keeps to that position, the stronger the show — provided, of course, the one being interviewed or questioned has something worthwhile to say and knows how to say it! The one in charge must be ever on the alert to move in if the subject matter gets out of hand or bogs down. And every person in a two-way or group discussion must know in advance exactly what is to be discussed and at what length. When the panel discussion or interview is used in teaching-by-television, the teacher actually and rightly leads, even though a student or young adult may appear to do so.

VOICE CULTURE

Whether on television or radio, the voice is important. One program director urges the home economist to develop three voice qualities — friendliness, authority, and enthusiasm. Also, to pitch her voice low.

The Televised Lesson Plan

At the time this is being written, teaching via television is still in the experimental stage — and it always will be! No two teachers will ever proceed in exactly the same way. No two groups of students will respond in exactly the same manner. No set of rules can be given that will apply to all types of subject matter and all types of groups. Here, however, are ten recommendations from an ex-teacher, based on years of classroom work and months of viewing.

1. Work for variety within a pattern of continuity. That is, stick to one type of approach throughout the series, but introduce plenty of surprise features. Identify your program by carrying some one type of visual — as chalk

board or paper dolls — through the series; in other words, establish a “trade-mark” for your show.

2. Give plenty of reasons why. In a televised lesson there is no opportunity for students to ask questions. Hence the need to anticipate them.

3. Be content to establish one point in each lesson. Too much information, too many facts, too many ideas at a time are difficult to absorb.

4. Keep at an easy pace — not too fast, not too slow. Explain the meaning of words that may not be in the students’ vocabularies.

5. Try to have a depth interview with a student at the end of the program. Group evaluation is valuable, but may not bring out as much specific information as when one student is interviewed at length and alone.

6. Watch your taped show occasionally with a group of students. Study not only what comes through on the screen, but study the students as they watch.

7. Extend the thinking scope of students and other viewers by posing an occasional problem that each must reason out to his own satisfaction.

8. Enrich the television lesson by tying in with history, geography, travel, art, and other subjects that may have a bearing on what is presented. In such ways, students’ minds are led out beyond the narrow boundaries of provincial thinking. (And that, of course, is the basic meaning of the word “educate” — to lead out.)

9. Be enthusiastic about the subject matter and those you hope to interest. Teaching — whether in the classroom or over the air — must be dynamic if it is to accomplish its end.

10. Try to be relaxed. No, on second thought, *don’t try!* If you are truly enthusiastic about and full of your subject, and eager to communicate that interest and enthusiasm to your students, you will not be selfconscious!

YOU’RE ON THE AIR

Before you go on, hum, note by note, up and down the scale. When you strike your lowest natural note, talk. That is likely to be a good place to pitch your voice for the broadcast. Stand or sit comfortably. Take a deep breath. Relax. Talk directly to some one person that you know is listening. And don’t hurry.

**PROGRAM OUTLINE
(Basic)**

Name:
Date:
Subject:
Names of Participants:

Properties: (what you will bring)
 (what you want station to furnish)

Objective: (What you are trying to accomplish)

Time Estimate	Say	Show
	<p>Introduction</p> <p>List the sequence of ideas that you want to put across. These can be in questions that you intend to answer. Plan general amount of time you will spend on each point you will be making.</p> <p>Summarize the main points you make as you go along.</p> <p>Ending</p> <p>Save some of the less important things till the end so that you can either cut or stretch easily depending on the time you have left. Include the main ideas you want viewers to remember.</p>	<p>List the order in which you will use the visuals. This order is very important for the director in order to get the camera set up for the right shots.</p>
<p>NOTE: This program outline was developed by Ardis W. McMechan, assistant extension editor (home economics television), Iowa State University through working with a number of television stations and nonprofessional television performers as one of the easiest ways for them to work with one another. Similar types of run-down sheets are used by stations in general. Keep your outline limited to <i>one</i> page and make it an outline — not a word for word script. R/C</p>		

PROGRAM OUTLINE
(Specific Examples)

Name: Sally Home Economist
 Date: June 10, Wednesday
 Subject: Sewing on new fabrics
 Names of participants:
 self

Properties: I will bring a sewing machine and examples of man-made fibers and blends with natural fibers. Will need a table to work on.

Objective: To point out the sewing machine adjustments necessary in sewing synthetic fabrics.

Time Estimate	Say	Show
1 min.	Beautiful new fabrics made from synthetic fibers or blends with natural fibers now ready for spring sewing. Have some tips ready to pass along to make your sewing most successful.	Show examples of fabrics.
3 min.	Why is stitching synthetics different from natural fibers? Discuss difference between single filament and staple yarns.	Point out trouble spots on sewing machine. Use all dacron for specific example.
2 min.	Point out importance of avoiding stitching with the lengthwise grain.	CU on small sample of stitchery on synthetic fabrics.
4 min.	What adjustments are necessary on the machine for stitching? 1. top tension 2. pressure foot adjustment 3. needle hole and needle	Demonstrate making these adjustments on the machine.
2 min.	Discuss other points in sewing on the various types of synthetic fabrics.	Show other examples of fabrics.
1 min.	Close: Remember it does take these special sewing machine adjustments to sew synthetic fabrics. If you learn these adjustments you'll enjoy using these kinds of fabrics more.	Point out on sewing machine.

When You Face That Camera

Whenever you appear in a television program, remember these personal rules:

Wear well-fitting clothes in pastel tones, with sleeves of becoming length. (Extremely short sleeves make arms look awkward.) Avoid bizarre prints and bold designs in clothing. Beware of glittery jewelry. Make sure the hair is becomingly done — and not too recently. Tight curls or waves are inclined to look hard and artificial.

Talk quietly, distinctly, informally, and sincerely. Many a televised demonstration, perfect in every other detail, leaves listeners cold because the demonstrator never smiles. Look directly into the camera from time to time. Don't talk to that sewing machine needle or into that bowl! Avoid rustling or crumpling paper, clinking metal. Use wooden spoons and rubber scrapers, and, for some purposes, plastic bowls, to cut down noise. Make sure that visuals employed are sharply clear, but free from "bounceback" of light or reflections. Keep action to a small area. Do not move around more than is necessary. When you must move, do so slowly. Whether you do an actual show-how (demonstration) or use visuals as a conversation piece, practice so that you use your hands skillfully and with grace and ease.

INTERVIEWED

When asked for an opinion, think through your answer before you give it. Remember, you are going to be quoted. Don't talk too much; let the interviewer guide the conversation. If there is something that might make for confusion, write out your statement, so that the interviewer will have your exact wording.

What About The Future?

Probably no two persons agree completely as to the future — or even the present — of television. Many educators believe that teaching via television offers far greater opportunities than have been developed to date. Many are urging programs designed to teach homemaking skills to very young children — the ones who are most enthusiastic about learning such exciting things! Most are convinced that since every television

presentation is an experiment, it should be taped for evaluation afterward. All must admit that television of the future will depend on the vision of those who are concerned with it. Suggested motto: *Without vision, television must perish.*

No two persons seem to agree as to the state and status of homemaking programs sponsored by advertising. One observer reports, "We have no homemaking programs in our community." Another says, "In our city we have three commercially sponsored women's interest programs, plus two on our local educational station."

As to subject matter, some directors recognize the appeal of fashions and clothing, reject programs on cooking, housekeeping, and cleaning because, they say, to women viewers these subjects represent tiresome work. Some of us would go further, and admit that *watching* certain programs of that type could be classified as tiresome work! But surely ways can be devised to make them interesting and important enough to watch.

Whatever one's individual opinion — whether as planner, producer, or viewer — one fact stands out: The home economist's opportunity in television is what she makes it.

What About Radio?

Like television, radio is changing. New stations are being built; more will be. Programs (some of them, at least) are improving. While at this writing there are relatively few radio programs that deal exclusively with homemaking information, that may not be true by the time this book is published. New thinking is being done. New ideas will be tried out. Here, again, the future, so far as home economists are concerned, will depend on the ideas of those home economists who aspire to this form of communication. Meanwhile, here are six points to keep in mind:

RADIOGRAMS

Radio is personal journalism — it must have that special me-to-you quality . . . There's no use writing conversation, unless it's broadcast in a conversational manner. . . Don't use a lot of figures — listeners won't remember them. . . Have an extra paragraph or two at the end of the script that can be used or not, depending on the time.

1. Radio script must be written for the ear, not for the eye. You must learn to talk on paper.

2. Radio is personal journalism, which means it needs to have that me-to-you feeling in it. You must talk not as you would to a large audience, but as you would to one friend in her own home. This feeling of intimacy and understanding is especially important in the home economics radio or television program. But underlying your friendly informality must be a feeling of genuine authority on the subject under discussion.

3. Radio calls for plenty of word pictures. You must make your listeners see things as you describe them. If you are talking about a lemon meringue pie, help each woman to see that pie with its high meringue tinged with golden brown; taste its tart-sweet filling; mentally bite into its tender-crisp crust. Help her to visualize herself making that pie step by step.

4. Radio needs simple words, short and simple sentences. That means no long, detailed recipes or directions; no foreign cooking terms. "Don't broadcast a recipe calling for more than six ingredients" is a rule that many experienced home commentators follow.

5. Radio calls for careful timing. If you are giving a recipe over the air, you must speak slowly so that listeners can write down what you are saying. One good way to manage this timing is to write the recipe yourself as you give it.

6. Radio demands above all else that a program sound sincere. That means it must *be* sincere. Sincerity is something you cannot fake. It's something you must feel inside yourself. You can get away with some voice weaknesses, if your helpful spirit and real knowledge shine through between your lines. In other words, if you have something really worth saying, and if you think of your audience while you are saying it, chances are your time on the air will be time well invested for your listeners.

"We need imagination in programming not sterility; creatively, not imitation; experimentation, not conformity; excellence, not mediocrity." — Newton N. Minow