Section A

Radio News Style Notes

All staff who contribute to Radio News bulletins should be familiar with this section of the Style Guide.

A radio news bulletin should have a "personality". It is not merely a collection of stories strung together in a descending order of perceived importance.

Bulletin producers must aim to achieve a flow and balance, through careful selection of the best available material. Lead stories will often pick themselves on the sheer weight of news value, but the key lies in the mixing and matching of state, national and international material – from politics to sport, and anything in between. There can be no firm rules, because one major story can sometimes dominate a bulletin. At other times, a sports story might be the top story of the hour, or the day.

State-based composite Radio News bulletins have operated on the basis of one-third international news, one-third national and one-third state. This will vary from day to day, and from State to State, but it is a good guideline that has been successful.

In addition to the mix of stories, producers must make the best possible use of actuality and voicers. An audio teaser can be very effective in the headlines of longer bulletins.

Headlines, mid-bulletin time checks and back heads should be regular features of longer bulletins. An exception may be where a major story so dominates the news it is better to start with actuality, as a tease, then go straight to the story.

Reporters should file more self-contained packages (voicer/actuality/voicer), rather than trailing off reports with actuality. If packages need to end on actuality, avoid using reporter sign-offs.

Back announcements should also be used regularly, to re-identify less well-known talent, or after long actuality grabs, or to round off a story with extra information.

Generally, Radio News intros leading to voice reports will be briefer than those leading to actuality only. Avoid the repetitive use in one bulletin of one form of throw line.

Bulletin producers must sub-edit voice scripts before they are recorded except

in exceptional circumstances, and actuality and voice reports must be auditioned before broadcast, to ensure audio quality and presentation standards are met.

Some other key points about Radio News are listed below.

actuality

As a general rule, grabs in bulletins should be between 10 and 20 seconds long. Shorter grabs may work in some circumstances, but consider whether the listener will understand what's being said and whether the grab fairly represents the speaker's intentions. Rarely use spoken actuality before the speaker's identity has been established. Don't rely on actuality for the only mention of a fact vital to a story. Avoid using actuality for statistics that can be better explained in copy. Don't use actuality that depends for its sense on a link word. For example:

> LINK: The Minister said he would...
> [actuality]
> not oppose the bill when it comes before Parliament.

Don't edit out qualifications or hesitations important to the meaning.

advisories

Advisories are issued by the National Day Editor, State EPs and State producers and include notices about errors or style guide issues, updates on latest developments, inaccuracies, definitions or information related to a running story. They should be slugged "**ADVISORY: subject**". They will be archived in a special queue.

alternatives

It is helpful to producers to have alternative types of stories such as a copy story and a copy story with a grab as well as voicers or wraps. When an important story breaks, don't immediately go for the big production – file a copy version first.

attribution

We should credit other ABC News programs (such as Radio Current Affairs and TV News and Current Affairs) for interviews and stories that have not yet been run on those programs, as well as including a pointer to the relevant program. We should always try to get talent ourselves (deadlines and availability permitting) to avoid crediting commercial networks.

bulletin flow

If a story is good enough to lead a bulletin, then there should be a version available for the following bulletin.

corrections

The ABCWire carries hundreds of items a day, so we need a clear system for quickly correcting or removing stories, when required.

If a story is found to be wrong, or there are serious doubts about it, we need to identify it and resolve the problem.

KILL: If a story is found to be substantially wrong, potentially defamatory or in contempt, it should be killed. In the slug line write KILL before the slug and after it. For example, a 'killed' terror story would look like this: **KILL terror-howard 2 KILL.** There must be an explanation in the history line of the story.

CORRECTION: A correction may need to be run after a story is killed. A CORRECTION is also issued if a mistake that doesn't warrant a KILL is made. The original, but now-corrected version, should be put back on the wire and should look like this: **CORR terror-howard 2 CORR.** There must be an explanation in the history line of the story.

HOLD: When the accuracy or appropriateness of a story has been questioned and cannot quickly be confirmed, issue a HOLD. This should be written before and after the slug. For example, **HOLD terror-howard 2 HOLD.** After checking, issue a KILL or RELEASE. There must be an explanation in the history line of the story.

RELEASE: If a story on HOLD is confirmed, reissue the story with the original slug plus RELEASE. For example, **terror-howard 2 RELEASE.** There must be an explanation in the history line of the story.

REPLACE: A REPLACE is not a correction. Use this when a story is out of date or a fuller version is available. For example, **terror-howard 2 REPLACE.** Put an explanation in the history line of the story.

REMOVE: If a story has been sent inadvertently, is judged in poor taste or is old, issue a REMOVE with an explanation in the history line of the story. For example, **terror-howard 2 REMOVE.**

News bulletins are not to be regarded as trial-and-error forums for getting a story right, eventually. Mistakes sometimes occur, and wrong information can be passed on in good faith. Our task is to get the most accurate version to our

audience first time, and to quickly and clearly eliminate errors from our coverage. Therefore, reporters and producers are required to carefully follow the procedures set out above.

deadlines

The deadline for stories required for network use is not one minute to bulletin time. And don't plan solely in terms of your local outlet – allow time for syndication. Bear in mind other states and other time zones.

Be aware of bulletin production requirements. Producers have to sub a lead, request the audio if it hasn't been sent automatically, change audio details, put the audio in a playlist, put the copy in a rundown, print the copy and save the playlist, which then has to be loaded in the news studio.

If you file any time after five minutes to bulletin time, unless your story is significant, it's unlikely to get into the bulletin.

If your story is expected to lead a bulletin and it is going to be late, alert producers and ensure an alert goes on the wire.

durations

Ultimately, the bulletin producer decides how long a story should be. Reporters, though, must be careful not to allow their stories to run longer than necessary – or to leave a story hanging, lacking essential information. Stories should be given what they are worth, taking into account the maximum limits set out below. However, if a story is not worth the maximum, shorter versions should be filed.

> **voicers/wraps**
> Radio news voice reports should be a maximum duration of 35-40 seconds. Anything over 45 seconds should be cleared with the producer.
>
> **copy**
> Copy should be three paragraphs, with a maximum of four. Each paragraph should be no more than two lines long.
>
> **actuality**
> Actuality should be between 10 and 20 seconds long. Grabs shorter than 10 seconds may work but consideration has to be given to whether the listener (who is likely to be listening in less than studio-perfect conditions) can understand what is being said.

follow ups

Put events, follow ups and checks into the diary or the forward file. Update contacts and put new contacts into the system.

intros

The link or intro is the audience's first pass at a story. Listeners will hear it once and must understand it the first time. The link should introduce the story in a clear and concise way, but must never simply repeat the information or turn-of-phrase in the first lines of the voiceover or script.

Keep the information in the throw line brief, so the reporter's/talent's name is still close to the voicer/actuality, and ensure the throw and the start of the voicepiece work together.

live crosses

Live crosses should be used for stories that break or develop close to the hour.

network stories

If you have a story that may be of interest to interstate newsrooms ensure the content of the story sent on the wire isn't too localised. In some cases a separate, shorter voicer for the network may be warranted. If the reporter covering the story is too busy meeting local commitments, consider getting the EP or newsreader to put down a separate voicer for the network.

news flashes

Our aim is to react quickly, but never put a report to air without confirming the facts. As soon as a breaking story has been confirmed, put a brief version on ABCWIRE so everyone can use it.

The procedure for getting News flashes to air on the various networks is explained in the iNews cue: Disaster - News Flash. Be familiar with it.

When selecting sounds for a news flash give consideration to the likely composition of the audience.

prospects

The prospects list from each state and territory and the national prospects should be slugged **PROSPECTS: place of origin**. Prospects should include a brief description of the event; a master slug and/or secondary slug (if one has already been issued by the EP or the National Day Editor); the time of the event if that is relevant; a line on what is happening; the talent available or being chased and, if possible, the time that they are speaking. Some examples:

Bird flu meeting (**birdflu**) – 0830. All-day meeting of experts looking at regional responses to an outbreak of avian influenza. 1800 Alexander Downer speech.

AWB Reax (**wheat**) – Chasing AWB on calls for an inquiry into its involvement in the oil-for-food program. Chasing AWB CEO & Board President.

For the morning conference call, morning prospects should be listed first, then afternoon and evening ones if they are available.

Prospects should be out no later than 15 minutes before the conference call.

sign-offs

In Radio News bulletins sign-offs are not always necessary for domestic stories. Use sign-offs to make the most of being at the scene – at courts, fires, murders and so on, or to highlight our regional or international coverage. The form is: "Jane Doe, Brussels"; "Frank Jones, Police Headquarters, Hobart". Avoid ending radio stories with a grab.

stings

Stings are used not only to highlight major, breaking stories. They can also be used to 'lift' the start of bulletins. They should be considered for use in the headlines of major bulletins (0700, 0745, 1200, 1700). The sting can be used to 'illustrate' any of the three or four headlines used at the start of the bulletin.

story naming:

> **master slugs**
> The National Day Editor or State Executive Producer will assign a master slug to a series of related stories. This will normally be a one-word title that clearly describes the topic of the story series. For example, for a story about terror raids, the story master slug would be "**terror-**". All slugs should be in lower case. (Only advice for producers such as KILL, RPL, and CORR should be in upper case – see also "**story codes**" below.)

> **slugs**
> The National Day Editor or State Executive Producer will assign a secondary slug to each story within a series. This will normally be a one-word subtitle that clearly describes the content of the individual story within the series. For example, stories related to the terror raids might include "**terror-sydney**" and "**terror-howard**".

The secondary slug doesn't necessarily have to be the name of the talent. For example, if politicians were talking about the counter-terrorism laws after the terror raids, the slug could become **terror-laws** then numbered for talent, with John Howard on the terror laws becoming "**terror-laws 1**".

version
Each version of each story within a story series will be assigned a version number to clearly indicate the place of the story in the story series.
For example, the terror raids story slugs might include "**terror-sydney 1**", "**terror-sydney 2**", "**terror-sydney 3**" and so on.

story codes
Where appropriate, additional description codes may be added to explain the story content. Those codes include:
LEAD: Indicates lead story.
ADD: Indicates add to stand-alone story or wrap.
URGENT: Indicates breaking story or a significant development.
UPD: Indicates story updates earlier versions of a story.
STANDBY: Option while waiting for fresh story from the field.
CORR: Indicates corrected version of an earlier story.
RWT: Indicates re-written version of an earlier story.
STING: Indicates grab could be used for sting in a longer bulletin.

time codes
Where a story series is scheduled to run at a particular time of day, the story slug will include the following time codes at the end of the slug.
* ON (overnight, from 2400-0400)
* AMS (main bulletins: 0600/0700/0745)
* MIDS (1200/1300)
* PMS (from 1400).

transcripts

Provide an accurate transcript of interview grabs and voice reports. Producers need transcripts to sub a new version of a story and make editorial assessments when compiling bulletins. Online requires transcripts to prepare its stories, including to obtain direct quotes. "In" and "out" words are sufficient if a story is being prepared close to bulletin time, but it is the reporter's responsibility to get the transcript into iNews as soon as possible. Voice-reports filed from the field must also be transcribed – radio producers and assignment editors are responsible for vetting voice reports to ensure transcripts are completed.

twelve-hour rule

If an event/press conference/interview occurred 12 or more hours ago, copy and audio from that event, unless extraordinary, should no longer be used. Stories should be developed and new audio sourced.

versions

For most significant stories that aren't changing by the hour, there should be three versions (see "**alternatives**"). Breaking or developing stories are likely to need more versions, and may need a new one for each hour, or each bulletin. Also avoid letting second- or third-order elements of a story become dominant in bulletins, over time, because the main element is considered "old".

voice reports

It is up to bulletin producers to make a judgement on what works and what is an appropriate standard to put to air locally and nationally.

To ensure crisp clean and correct copy, it's important that producers sub-edit voicers filed from the field, in the office and those to go into a holders queue before they're recorded. If the producer is busy the EP or a senior journalist should assist with subbing.

Ending a voicer with actuality usually doesn't work. It can sound clumsy and leave the story hanging. If a story warrants a sign-off don't go from actuality to the sign-off. It sounds clumsy. Structure your voicer so you have a par after the actuality and before the sign-off.

In the past the style for the lead of a voicer has been a two-par intro. The problem with the two-par intro is that in some cases it can lead to overwriting or duplication of material and can mean a delay in getting into the story. There are going to be exceptions where a two-par lead is warranted but in the majority of cases a one-par intro followed by "Joe Bloggs reports" should be enough to cover the necessary information before getting into the voicer.

"Snaps" are not an option in voicers. Voicers with a snap can lead to readers editing or "snapping" voicers on the run and this can result in stories ending on upward inflections, or sloppy outs. Voicers should be self-contained and not require editing to shorten them.