

LHBS/Radio Broadgreen Training Unit

Section 2 – Programme Presentation

In this section, we will provide you with the knowledge of the basic studio layout, the equipment used, presentation style and how to put together a basic two hour music based programme.

As you will be aware, there are many different styles of radio and radio presentation. Breakfast show presenter Christian O'Connell may be suited for the fast moving Absolute Radio, but I very much doubt he could walk into the BBC Radio 4 studio's and present the talk/fact based "This Morning" programme "cold". Every person has an ego and their own style. It is this what makes radio presentation different. When you present a radio programme, it is part of you that is also being broadcast. As trainers, we cannot advise what is right or wrong with your own style, but we can say what is suitable/unsuitable for hospital radio. You will also be advised about OFCOM's Programme Code.

All forms of radio broadcasts are set by a timetable or clock. As we broadcast mostly music based programmes, we shall deal with music based presentation. For a basic music programme, the "clock hour" would start with a news bulletin at the top of the hour. Here at Radio Broadgreen, we use Sky News Radio via satellite for our news service. The next item would be the weather bulletin read by you, introduction to your show and then onto your first song, and so on.

It is probably worth pointing out some of the pit falls that you can fall into. One of the greatest sayings in radio is "if you have nothing to say, don't say anything". This is very true of the fact that a presenter mundanely chatting about nothing of interest, would become very boring to listen to, the same can be said for the presenter who has lost track of time and waffles on for ten minutes thinking that he/she is being entertaining – when in fact the main point was made five minutes ago! Ensure that you keep to time; any vocal links should be no more than about 3-4 minutes long (unless you are interviewing someone). And if you don't have anything interesting to say, play two tracks back to back. Another common fault is the "this is, that was" syndrome. Again saying "that was/this is" after each song played soon becomes very boring. If you have any notes, stories or recent news about the artist, mention it. And you don't have to mention the station name at each link either!

Remember that planing ahead and pre-production is an integral part of every programme. Key information that you should have to hand at all times include:

- an updated weather report for the Liverpool area
- who we are and where we broadcast to
- how to contact the station
- Public Service Announcements (PSA's)
- read only promo scripts/liners
- today's/tomorrow's schedule
- any special future programmes
- any specialist music programmes
- be aware of current news headlines/items

If you think you have nothing to say, as such, there should be plenty of information about to mention.

As a radio presenter it is your skill to use your voice as a musician would use his/her instrument. Changes in vocal tone, speed, harshness/softness are all tools used to convey what you want to say without the listener being able to see your facial expressions. Inflection of your voice is very important. Using these effects will make you a radio presenter, opposed to a Nightclub DJ spinning a couple of tunes and shouting down a microphone (that no one can understand anyway).

So lets' get started.....

The Voice

There are two main things about radio presentation. The first is knowledge of what you are talking about, the second is the voice.

Listeners respond to warmth. **Warmth** suggests a caring and friendly situation and one that the listener would feel comfortable with. Don't be too authoritative or "talk down" to your listener. **Vocal range** is something we normally don't use in our day to day life. Have you ever wondered if TV announcer Alan Dedicate (from the BBC Lottery TV programme) uses the same style of voice when he asks for his morning newspaper and a bottle of milk? No. Put simply, intensifying your spoken words using your vocal range and style, you can add great emphasis to what you are saying.

When you read a passage from a book, if you see a word *highlighted* or underlined, you mentally make a note of this. The **inclination** of some words will also add emphasis. Clarity in speech is always of importance, and you will find yourself becoming conscious of what you are saying and how you are saying it.

One other piece about using your voice, is that of **pace and speed**. A person may alter their pace as though they...are.....getting.....up.....a.....hill, only to reach the top a *race all the way down again!* Pace is the art of saying some parts faster or slower than other parts. This can add "colour" to your piece. If you read a piece too evenly, it can sound as though you are talking in a boring monotone. Adding pace will stop this. Pace should not be confused with speed. The speed at which you speak, may be fast and a little difficult for the listener to train their ears to. It is always advisable to talk slightly slower than you would normally at first. This gives the listener time to adjust to the sound of your voice, and then you can continue as you would normally.

Finally, practice makes perfect. And this is true of speech. Ensure you practice reading something and adjust your breathing or the punctuation of the article to suit. Also make sure of pronunciation (names/foreign place names, etc.) and grammar. You may have to write out words phonetically (*fo-netic-aly*), or re-write a whole section, so it will adapt well to radio.

And don't forget meaning/knowledge. If the piece you are talking about doesn't make sense, it won't to the listener either! Ensure you talk factually instead of surmising about something in general. If you sound knowledgeable, this will impress the listener.

When you use a microphone, ensure that it is no closer than 10cm from your mouth. The recommended distance is about 20cm away. This will prevent a "popping" sound of the microphone. Make sure you are sitting upright and comfortable when doing your show. Slouching makes for a lazy style of presentation and although you may be comfortable, your listener may not like a lazy sounding presenter. Also, if you are doing a read for a promo/advert, it is well advised to stand during the recording. Your voice may come from the mouth, but it starts its journey well within! Stand and project your voice.

We shall talk about sound levels in detail a little later in this section, but do remember that it is most important that your levels are set correctly. A microphone set too low and your listener will not be able to make out what you are saying. A microphone set too high will cause distortion and become annoying for the listener.

Remember that most people will be listening to Radio Broadgreen down plastic tubing or small headsets and not by large Hi-Fi speakers. It is therefore most important that levels are set correctly, and your voice is "trained" to speak clearly and concisely.

Programme Timing

All hours are made up of a clock hour, and it is most important to get timings right. How we end on the hour is an art called "back-timing". Back timing is one of the most important things you will learn. Back timing your programme requires you to work out in minutes and seconds how long is left before the top of the hour or programme close. In television, a production assistant sat in the gallery will tell the presenter how long until "stop talking", concluding to a countdown in the presenters earpiece whilst they say their final pieces to camera. This is the absolute time when the presenter has to stop before the end credits are played out. If you have never heard what is being said to a TV presenter in their earpiece whilst being on-air, it is a real eye-opener. Thankfully in radio, and in particular self operated radio, you can do your own back timing without someone shouting down your earpiece to STOP!

It may sound easy at first, but every hour is made up of 60 minutes, and each minute is made up of 60 seconds. This can lead to many a mistake in back timing when you are trying to add or subtract different times from the hour or part thereof. Let me explain a little further.

We know that the News Intro Jingle has to be played at 5 seconds to the hour. This means playing it at 59m55s, or 59'55". Great, but what about the two songs I have left to play, and the advert/promo break which is 1m30s long? You will need to calculate the timings of songs and the advert/promo break. But unlike decimal, when you start to add timings for the overall "play News In Jingle" time, you have to add in 60's or parts of 60. the example below should make this a bit more clear.

Ad/Promo Break time of 1m30s [ENDS]
Song 1 running time of 3m24s [ENDS]
Song 2 running time of 3m47s [FADE]
News In Jingle (intro) 5s

Adding the timings should give you a total of 8m 46s. We now know we have 8m 46s of audio to play up to the news. So when should we play the ad break? Simply subtract 8m 46s from the 60 minutes. This should give you a start time for this whole segment of 51m 14s. As the last song FADES, we can start the ad break any time after 51'48" to ensure we have enough audio to see us through to the News In Jingle.

After some practice, you will find it more easy to back time and add/subtract in minutes and seconds. I don't know why but I always have a tendency to do the sums two or three times just to be sure, and still get anxious when I'm looking at the studio clock waiting to fire in that News Jingle! Don't be put off by any mistakes you make. It happens to the best self-op radio presenter or studio assistant even after years of experience.

The rest of the hour, from the start will be formatted. This will be set by the head of programming who will advise you of what they expect for each hour. This may include two songs in a row after the weather/start, then a link and another song. Advert/Public Service Announcements/Promos may only be played at certain times such as twenty past and twenty to the hour. And so you can see how an hour of programming is built up.

It is worth keeping to the suggested clock so the same format is used to give Radio Broadgreen an identity; and for the listener to expect what will happen next i.e. knowing two songs segued will come after the weather, etc. Not all programmes will have a standard format. A request show or specialist music programme may not be able to use this format and so a different format may be used.

To summarise, calculate your back timing when you have about 15-20 minutes left. Back timing will ensure that you don't run out of music only to then play 30 seconds of a song to fill the gap. It will also add a much professional touch to your broadcast, and the overall sound of the station. Remember we are all volunteers and therefore amateurs, but that doesn't mean we can't be as professional as possible.

The Studio's

I won't talk about specialist programme making, documentaries and sports shows as part of this training manual as it would take for too many pages my little printer could handle, so it's onto The Studio's and equipment.

The heart of every radio studio is the mixing desk. Since the digital revolution, there are many different styles of **Radio Mixing Desk**. These desks should not be confused with **Production Desks**, which have different abilities (channel aux sends, returns, and EQ) specially aimed for the production use. The basic radio desk will have a number of faders, PFL buttons, meters, gains and may also have source selection buttons. Firstly lets talk about what you will find on the desk.

FADER – these normally work from the off position (bottom) up to the on (top) position with the ability to adjust to sound level in-between. Older BBC desk faders work in the opposite direction, from top down to “open” a channel, although most new digital desks all work as standard. Faders channels may be graduated, from 0-100 or infinity to 100 (as a percentage). They may also be graduated using the decibel scale from minus“x” to 0db. Some faders may travel beyond 0db so you can add a little gain to a low sounding bit of audio. Be careful with these desks as you may be used to pushing the fader to the top (open maximum) only to find that the audio is then too loud!

PFL – The PFL (Pre Fade Listen) button is a valuable tool that allows you to listen to an audio source without opening the fader. By doing this, you can monitor the audio AND check the audio level on the meters. PFL may be set to listen through the headphones, studio monitors or both, therefore when you depress a PFL expect the studio speakers to stop. When you PFL a microphone channel the studio speakers should mute. You will only be able to listen to the PFL'd microphone channel through your headphones.

GAIN – the gain control is normally set at the top of the channel. This should be adjusted accordingly by viewing the meters.

SOURCE SELECT – this may be a range of buttons to select a different audio source for that channel to use. This may be studio equipment, or an outside source such as ISDN lines for outside broadcasts.

METERS – All professional European radio desks use PPM (Peak Programme Metering) although there are some slight variations across Europe. The USA tend to us VU metering. The problem with VU metering is that it shows an erratic “NOW” audio level, and not a dampened “PEAK” audio level. It is MOST IMPORTANT to keep your levels as recommended at all times. So the important bit in this section is..... Music levels should reach 4PPM (this is the equivalent of 0db on a VU scale). When speaking into a microphone, the PPM level may peak to 6PPM but no more. Any audio above this could cause distortion. All audio sources need some reference point. For the purposes of radio, 0db (decibel) is the normal reference point at which the audio signal is comfortable to listen to. Therefore, we always try to aim for 0db (or 4PPM) when broadcasting music.

Audio levels are important. People unknowingly listening to a radio station with distortion or heavily processed audio can lead to feeling tired or becoming uncomfortable. This is because distortion is picked up by the brain via the ears, and although you may not be aware of a distorted sound, your brain will recognise it and make you feel uncomfortable. It has been proved that a very high pitch distorted sound (that only the younger generation will hear) can be played to unruly teenagers to stop them from gathering around shops in groups! So keep an eye on levels at all times.

Some faders may be mono (microphone, telephone) or stereo. They may also have EQ. Due to the audio processors in the transmission chain, it is very unusual for a stereo music (CD) channel to have some sort of EQ. The only channels you can expect to find EQ will be on the mono microphone channels. You could use this EQ to add some tone to the studio mic, although this is not always necessary. Sound production desks almost always have EQ amongst other extras on their channels, although there is no need to go into detail about these desks here.

STUDIO LAYOUT

The usual studio layout will have the mixing desk to which you will sit in-front to operate. To either side, you may have some outboard equipment. What I refer to as outboard equipment would include CD players, mini-disc/SD memory card devices, cartridge machines, gramophone decks and effect units. These are all devices that you may need to use during the broadcast. Apart from the effects units, all the other bits should be found on the mixing desk with a fader assigned to them.

Most radio studio's now operate a computerised play-out system. Myriad is used at Radio Broadgreen, and the use of Myriad will be given during your studio training course. You will see that Myriad is split into 4 channels. All jingles, adverts, promos and PSA will be found on the database. There is also many songs available as you should be aware after the Ward Visitor training. Myriad may also schedule what to play. This could include music as well as adverts depending on your programme.

Besides the Myriad PC's, you will also find a studio PC & monitor. This PC has Cool Edit Pro/Adobe Audition on it. You may need this to record/edit/produce some audio for on air such as sports updates from Sky News.

In front of you will be a radio controlled clock, and some indicator lights. At present the lights will indicate that the studio is live "on air" (yellow) and will also tell you if any microphone is open or "live" (red).

Switching between studio 1 or 2 is done at the Central Control unit in studio 2. You will be able to switch between the studio's from there. This will enable us to train you in the spare studio, and when time allows, you can train in the main "on air" studio. Ensure that when you do your "as live" training, the studio is not "live".

The radio stations' telephone system is also available in studio 1. Like the telephone units in the staff room and library, you will be able to make/take calls from any of the external lines. Note that the external lines don't sound when ringing in. Only the red flash indicators will tell you if someone is calling. You may be able to put a call live on air by selecting the telephone hybrid to take control of the call and using the desk to put the call out live. Please ensure you "cancel" the call when finished.

Most of your training in the studio's will be practice sessions – getting used to the equipment and knowing what it can and cannot do. We shall also try to teach you why problems may arise and what to do about them. One situation that arises is the problem with audio that is "out of phase". To reduce the risk of interference, all audio wired into and out of the mixing desk is balanced. That is to say that the audio signal for both left and right channels is wired so there is a positive and negative and a screen shroud; unlike unbalanced audio which has just the signal (+) and screen shroud(-). A problem this could cause is if the audio has been recorded "out of phase", is when one channel (say left) is wired correctly but the other (right) channel is wired in the opposite phase (the + and - are reversed). This is normally an engineering fault and will not effect you; BUT what will happen when you mix the two channels together, is that the left channel will cancel out the right channel. You may be able to hear the stereo source with the studio speakers, but you may not be able hear anything when you PFL it (depending on the desk), and you will certainly not hear much if you broadcast in mono (such as AM/MW). This fault can only be corrected by engineers or a studio producer. It is therefore important that any audio from an outside source (externally recorded onto a CD or MD), is checked before being broadcast. Radio engineering can be complicated but if you come across a problem, you may have the skills to sort the problem out yourself.

Summary

Ensure that the studio is on/off air (depending on if you are training or broadcasting live).

Pre Fade all audio before hand, set audio levels.

When speaking into the microphone, ensure it is 20cm away from your mouth.

Check audio levels at all times during your broadcast, and don't peak over 6PPM

STUDIO ETIQUETTE

When you are on air, you are solely responsible for the studio. This includes anyone drifting in to say hello, which could be off-putting to some presenters. You must ensure that your studio assistant, and anyone else in the building heeds the Red Light/Mic Live indicators.

Also make sure that if you intend to talk to a guest or member of staff, their voice can be heard adequately. There is nothing more annoying to the listener than hearing a one-sided conversation!

Ensure that if you have guests arriving to be interviewed, they only enter the studio when asked to. Tell your assistant when to bring them in. Also if guests don't arrive on time, you may have to reschedule. There is no point arriving with ten minutes of your show left to try and squeeze in an interview which should last 15 minutes or so.

A relaxed atmosphere in the studio, will enhance YOUR programme.

OFCOM Guidelines

OFCOM is the governing body that regulates all radio and television in the UK. There are a number of guidelines that you should be aware of when making radio programmes and commercial production. The golden rule is that if it is likely to offend, don't do it. Remember as a medium, radio broadcasts to adults and children of different backgrounds. Also remember that what you may have an opinion on, may not be the opinion of this charity. Care must be given when talking about delicate subjects.

Details can be found on the OFCOM website:

<http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/broadcasting/guidance/programme-guidance/bguidance/>

Programming notes

There are a number of problems that may arise when you do your programme. Having a bed of music to talk over can sound better than a dry-voiced link. Ensure though that the listener can understand what you are saying and "duck" or "ride" the level of the music bed to ensure you can be heard. Remember that most listeners don't have the benefit of expensive studio headphones.

If you pre-promote an item, make sure you do it. I know how annoying it can be when watching a 24-hour news channel and they pre-promote an item that is then binned due to lack of time. If you announce that A, B and D are coming up in the programme, ensure they are played and not "Oh I forgot to play D".

Also ensure the schedule is current, and any omissions or late cancellations are known to you. There is no point in promoting who is next, if they have left a message to say their car has broken down and they can't do their show tonight!

It is courtesy to leave the studio in a clean and tidy state when you have finished or hand over to the next presenter. It is so annoying to clean up someone else's mess during the first few minutes of your own show – and more annoying to be the first in and find you have to spend ten minutes cleaning up after someone else.

As for everything else, it's up to you. Your own programme style, is part of you. But most of all, be professional, AND ENJOY IT.