

**RADIO READING
RESOURCES FOR
VOLUNTEERS**



Be heard

Presentation skills for
radio readers



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RPH Australia acknowledges the traditional owners of the lands on which we work and live and pay our respects to Elders past, present and future. We embrace diversity in working to build inclusive and connected communities.

These resources have been created by **Kim Stewart** for RPH Australia utilising original materials developed by the Community Media Training Organisation (CMTO). Produced with the assistance of the **Department of Communications and the Arts** through the **Community Broadcasting Foundation**.

We also thank our project partners: **Tagged PDF** and the **CMTO**.

Introduction

Reading for radio involves skills and knowledge that are common to all radio programs, as well as some that are specific to the program requirements of broadcasting to people with print disabilities.

Although practice is the key to learning any skill, this guide will give you a basic overview of what is involved in radio reading.

The information in this guide is aimed at radio readers, but is also useful for any producer new to making community radio.

What is effective on-air reading?

Preparation

Radio reading is essentially a performance. Like any performance, you can do a better job with practice and preparation.



Allow enough time to thoroughly pre-read articles before going to air.

Practice listening

Listening to yourself, and others as they read for radio, is a good way to improve your reading.

Listening checklist


- Does the reader / presenter's voice rise and fall in a natural pattern?
- Do they speak clearly and maintain a constant volume?
- Do they sound "out-of-breath" at any point?
- Does the presenter read at an acceptable speed?
- Does the reader stumble over words or continually misread or mispronounce words?
- Does the presenter speak confidently?
- Does the presenter's voice become mechanical or contrived when reading scripts?
- Does the reader move smoothly from one segment to the next?

Radio Reading formula

Over decades of Radio Reading, proven methods of conveying printed information clearly and meaningfully have been developed.

These include:

- on-going practice
- continuous learning
- listening to other readers' styles
- sharing knowledge and resources with your team
- seeking and accepting feedback on your performance



Reading styles

The role of a radio reader is to read articles in context, conveying the meaning of the story.

Your role in communicating to people with a print disability centres on your ability to convey information. The key challenge for readers is to convey information that essentially has been written to be read rather than spoken.

As well as knowing the meaning of a story, the way it is read will have a style. Although you can learn from experts, do not copy them. For you to genuinely communicate with your listeners, you need to be yourself.

For you to present the readings effectively, there needs to be an empathy between you and your listener. For empathy to develop, you need to be yourself. When reading you should be relaxed, natural and confident.

Breathing

The way your voice conveys the meaning of what you are reading is determined by your breath control, your vocal quality and your physical and emotional state.

The breath exiting the body is the strength and force behind your voice. By gaining mastery over the way that you breathe, you can better control your voice. Breathing must be from deep down in the diaphragm with no tightening of the chest and throat muscles.

Related to breathing, resonance gives your voice power and richness. Take short, quiet breaths to sustain tone of voice. Don't crouch forward over the diaphragm. There should be no movement or tension in the shoulders. Try to be relaxed.

Vocal quality

There are a range of techniques that can influence voice quality. This section describes them and then in later sections in this guide, techniques for developing your voice will be covered.

Stress

The words you stress or emphasis relates to the amount of vocal force applied to a syllable, word or phrase. Vocal force or volume is used to highlight key words and phrases and works with pause and pace for

listener interest. Stress is used to animate the article writer's voice.

Pace

This is the speed at which we speak and read. The pace is determined by the meaning of the sentence and is varied depending on the context of the article. Variety of pace should be planned when planning the reading.

Pause

A short stop, or pause, should be used according to the meaning of the article. Pauses may be used for dramatic effect or to denote a quote. Pausing is used to separate title, body, paragraphs and sentences and can give the reader time to take in what they are hearing. It can be used to take a breath at the end of a sentence or between phrases as well as to indicate direct speech and quotations. Vary the length of pauses for greater effect.

Inflection

Is changing the tone or pitch of your voice to indicate questions, uncertainty, concern (upwards inflection), or downwards (strong statements, definite conclusions), or both in one sentence for variety, particularly in long sentences with many clauses.

Correct pronunciation

Indicates knowledge of the material being read. Use of reference material such as dictionaries, and other team members is important if you are ever in doubt about words you are given to pronounce.

It may be useful to mark your articles during pre-reading to indicate where in the text you will use these vocal control techniques.


We now move on to discussing techniques for getting the best out of your voice.

Physical and emotional influences

Listeners to your program are most interested in what you have to read. If you are tired and emotional, it will affect your ability to convey the information. If you are in a bad mood, your ability to control your voice and breathing may be effected.

Doing vocal warm-ups may help you to be relaxed when you go into the studio. Being relaxed can help you control the technical aspects of breathing and voice quality.

Effective presentation



Some RPH listeners are older and may have hearing loss. Your clear reading voice is crucial to their understanding and engagement.

You can become aware of the qualities of effective voice by listening to other programs at your station. Consider joining the station's programming review committee, if there is one. If there are too few or no formal opportunities to do this, you can arrange for these reviews yourself by approaching others who may be interested in participating.

In striving for continuous learning and development, you can focus on your breath control, vocal quality and physical and emotional state while presenting a program. You should also find time to discuss these ideas with colleagues who are keen to receive constructive feedback on their presentation style.

Linking with listeners

Apart from the technical areas outlined in the previous sections, there are other factors that affect the relationship between a reader and a listener. These include the reader's:

- Personality, attitude and empathy for listeners
- Knowledge and level of interest in the subject matter
- Attitude to interviewees and/or other readers.

When listening to other presenters, try to identify these factors and think about how each can impact positively on the relationship to the listener.

Personality & presentation

Your voice is distinct and personal. After all, you have been using it for a while now and it carries with it all of your experience. Because of that it carries your view of the world and yourself. The voice you use to speak is very similar to the one with which you think.

It is the voice that describes your personality.

To create rapport with a listener, you have to represent yourself with your voice, to be yourself, rather than trying to use a voice of someone else.

The key to communicating meaning to your listener is you... You and your relationship with the listener.

The listener tunes in for the sound of other human beings. Your voice is the only tool you have to convey your relationship to your listener and to the material you present. A good radio voice is one that sounds relaxed, friendly and authentic—it doesn't sound as if you're "putting it on".



Improvisation: the ad lib

Practice moving naturally between short improvised pieces and scripted material.

Like reading scripts, improvised pieces can be thought of before they are spoken. You can make preparations for making an 'unscripted' time call. In other words, script everything you want to say before it goes to air!

Time calls

Tell the time regularly. Exactness is not crucial. Use analogue time: "half past twelve" is better than "twelve thirty". If your station is streamed or recorded for later replay, time calls may not be used.

Station IDs - what station is this?

Tell people what station they are listening to often. For example: "You are listening to 4RPH 1296am, your radio reading station"

Extra points

Each program starts with an Intro and the newspaper's headline story. When returning to reading after a sponsor break, mention the name of the publication and the date.

Each reading ends with an outro. The names of the program team (e.g. readers, editors and panel operator) are all given in the outro. Your program team should be listed on your running sheet.



Scott Whelan, PBA FM, Adelaide.

"I want to be a role model for people to achieve their goals in life... I'm not saying it's easy, but I am saying have a go".

Scott is a long term volunteer and presenter, with a sense of humour that engages listeners. He also has cerebral palsy.

"I started at PBA FM in the beginning of 1994 as part of a student union program for Salisbury Uni. From there, was asked to co-host a local music specialist program, which I ended up hosting for 23 years.

Along the way I've hosted programs ranging from blues to breakfast, been a board member, programming director and now find myself chair of the management committee. The inmate has truly taken over the asylum!"



Communicating meaning

Imagine yourself as a listener and present information in a way that would draw you into the messages being conveyed.

Remember your listener. Think of one special person who is giving their whole attention to what you are reading. Remember that they cannot see the page that you have in front of you and that you are their eyes and ears. Read clearly, carefully and accurately.

Prepare your material well. Understand what you are reading about so that your audio interpretation of it will be correct and easily assimilated. Prepare your voice. Relax. Read with confidence. A smile on your face and interest in your material will come over in your voice.

Sound interested in what you read and listeners will be interested too!

Guide the listener. The individual listener's immediate need from radio is to hear the program or the program format that they are accustomed to. So it is important to regularly remind listeners of what they are listening to now and what will be coming next.

Radio as a medium encourages a fluid audience, with listeners constantly tuning in and out. This is why there is a need to repeat a number of basic components such as the time, station, programme identification, etc.

For many people, radio is something they play in the background. Work to help listeners maintain attention. Keep it simple and clear. Articles need to be read without interruption. Radio listeners cannot refer back to something they think they heard a moment ago, so radio is about communicating meaning at first hearing.



Handy hints

Handling mistakes

Don't worry—it happens to all of us!

If you are doing a "live" read (that is, not being recorded for future broadcast) and stumble over a word, just repeat the word. If you make a minor mistake or really jumble up a phrase or sentence, just say "I'll read that again". Don't apologise as it only draws more attention to the mistake.

Work to avoid 'dead air'

Know what you're going to do before you do it. Plan what you're going to do in a break. Decide what's to be done and the order. For example, a time call, station ID, sponsorship announcement, then back to reading. If you're even slightly unsure, write down what you're going to say.

Saliva: Excess or lack of saliva are two problems that sometimes bother broadcasters. A common cause of excess saliva is sugar. If you have an acute excess saliva problem it is wise to eat a cooking apple just before going on air. The high acidity has the effect of partially restricting saliva glands.

A dry mouth is best compensated by sipping warm water just before and during your on-air shift. This will help avoid coughing fits better than coffee or tea. Warm water is a general recommendation for all readers—take a glass of warm water into the studio with you.

Phlegm: Milk may create phlegm, causing the voice to sound thick. If you find this to be a problem it's best to avoid hot drinks with milk prior to going on-air. Chocolate can also be a hazard.

Pre-reading

Before the broadcast, readers must pre-read:

- **Scan** the headline, source, writer, any accompanying photograph and then the

whole article (paragraph by paragraph) to understand its meaning

- **Note where the article begins, how it develops, where it ends.** This will help you see the writer's purpose, adopt an appropriate tone and emphasis and use appropriate sense units in conveying meaning to the listeners.
- **Look for difficult words and names.** Prepare their pronunciation by speaking them aloud several times.
- **Look for accompanying acronyms and abbreviations.** Mark them if this will help and decide how to give the listeners a clear sense of their meanings. Uncommon ones may need repeating
- Now pre-read more closely. Look for and mark any difficulties of syntax or phrasing.
- **Picture your listener in your mind's eye** and adopt a tone, emphasis and vigour in your reading that would keep them interested right to the end. Aim for a sense of clear, natural speech.

Microphones



You could think of the microphone as your listener's ear—which effectively it is! Does your voice and the style of program suit a close-up, intimate style? Or do you want some more distance between you and the listener?

The interaction between your voice and mic is influenced by the volume at which you use your voice, and your distance from the mic.

What's the best position for the microphone?

It's important to know how studio microphones work. Normally they are unidirectional or cardioid. These microphones are more sensitive at the front than at the side or behind.

How close should I be to the microphone?

About 10cm (four inches) is a good starting point. Bear in mind:

If you're too close to the microphone:

- Your P, T, S and Q sounds might cause popping or hissing noises
- Your breathing will sound loud
- Your voice might sound “boomy” and distorted
- Your volume levels will be difficult for the panel operator to control
- The slightest movement away from the mic will result in a noticeable change in your voice

If you're too far away from the mic:

- You will sound as if you're on the other side of the room
- Your voice will be difficult to understand
- The mic will pick up other unwanted noise in the studio
- Your voice will have an echoing sound.



Arnold Baldwin, Vision Australia Radio, Perth.

“My wife drew my attention to a call for volunteers in the local newspaper. I applied for an audition and, when the day came around, I was handed a script with hard news, some magazine pieces and a poem about a frog. That was my first experience in radio.

We are an RPH station so we have to think about our listeners while preparing and presenting to them. Off air, I had to learn about story selection and allocation, pre-reading and pronunciation plus marking up for reading aloud. On air, I had to learn to be aware of what was going on in the studio at all times, to learn the use of the mute button, and learn how to exchange notes and cue. Then there was breathing, volume, and tone – and the fine art of learning how to read to time!”

About this resource

You can find more Radio Reading Resources for [stations](#) and for [volunteers](#) on our website.

We developed these community media training resources to support the Regional Development project, which aims to broaden the national reach of Radio Reading services to reach people with a print disability living in regional and remote areas.

RPH Australia is supporting stations, outside the current Radio Reading Network, to produce new, diverse, quality local programming made by and for people with a print disability in their community. [Contact us](#) to find out more.

About us

RPH Australia is the peak body for the Radio Reading Network; community radio services dedicated to providing access to information for the estimated 5 million Australians with a print disability. We champion the rights of all people to access printed material, empowering equal participation in cultural, political and social life.

Radio Reading programming aims to meet the information needs of people with a print disability (those who are unable to effectively access printed material due to visual, physical or cognitive impairment, age or low literacy).

It provides a voice for people in our community with a print disability and caters directly to their information needs and interests.

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