

The Newscast

First course, Second grading period, Week 6

The newscast — whatever its length and particular style, commercial or public — is an essential element of radio broadcasting. In many ways it is the foundation of the broadcast schedule occurring regularly. One could easily argue that it is the most important programming any station provides to its listening public.



Enduring Understanding

The newscast is an essential component of radio broadcast programming.



Essential Questions

What is a newscast? How does one compile a newscast?



Objectives and Outcome

- Students will understand the purpose of a newscast and recognize a news story.
- Students will know the essential steps to producing a news story on a deadline.
- Students will begin the process of compiling a newscast segment.



Suggested Time

One week



Resources and Materials

Newswriting for Radio (www.newsript.com), an online tutorial written by a veteran radio and print journalist

Old Time Radio (<http://www.old-time.com/>)

Hear Edward R. Murrow, Eric Sevareid, Douglas Edwards, Sigrid Schultz and other radio news broadcasters report on history's events. They are articulate. Their commentaries paint a picture of first-hand accounts.

Poynter Institute Online High School Journalism Guide (www.poynter.org) links to online editions of high school newspapers and features Al's Morning Meeting, a "fresh look at a news event, a trend, or some quirky thing he has read, with tips on how to pursue the story and make it your own."

See all other teacher textbook desk copies. There is something in almost all of them on newsgathering, news writing, and the newscast.

Pretaped newscasts of three or more different stations

Daily copies of your local newspaper

Any school news available in written announcement form
"Format," Writing for Television, Radio and New Media, pages 133-135
"The News Reporting Function" and other areas of news coverage, Radio Production, pages 63-70
"Newsreading and Presentation," Radio Production, pages 115-127
"News Announcing Basics," Announcing, pages 154-174
"Painting a Picture With Words," Announcing, pages 178-181



Procedure

1. Select one commercial and one public radio station. Stick with these all week. WTOP and WAMU are good choices in the D.C. area.

Pretape three newscasts of the selected stations: one top of the hour on WTOP and two on WAMU — the NPR national news at the top of the hour and the local D.C. news that follows it.

The Newscast On-Air

2. Play a news wrap. This may be a recent on-air one or one produced by a student for the first term's end-of-term project. Use it to remind students of the progression of news from spot or news wrap to newscast. Review the vocabulary in "News Vocabulary 2."

3. Play the three newscasts, but stop after the first five stories in each one. Have students take notes on the order and content of the stories as they listen. Give students copies of "Listen to a Newscast" to help them record the information.

4. Compare and contrast the three newscasts. What were the top stories on each? How were they handled differently? What did they have in common? If students are slow in responding, you may wish to review the basics of what news is (See "All That's News" and "What Is News?" in the First grading period, Week 5). In that context, discuss why each story was a reader or a wrap. Discuss the order of each newscast's stories. To what extent do audience and demographics influence the order of the news?

The Editorial Meeting

5. Using A1 page and Metro section of The Washington Post/your local newspaper, students list the top news stories for the day in the D.C. area/your community. Discuss how these stories can be expanded and followed up. Zero in on one or two stories in particular for discussion and be very specific. Is there a council meeting or public hearing scheduled? Will the police be investigating a case?

Using the school news available, what events will be taking place in their school? A game, club meetings, guest speakers, no more doughnut sales?

By the end of class, students should be making the connection that news is on-going as well as breaking. For the purposes of this lesson, the newscast that students will begin to compile does not have to be breaking news, but it does have to either advance a current story or require the coverage of an event.

6. Generate a list of possible stories, particularly stories that can be done at school. For example, if The Post covers standardized testing, No Child Left Behind, a change in SAT examinations, removal of sodas from schools, or a local firm or ballpark moving into your school district, a student could do a follow-up “news” story by interviewing the principal and other school officials about how this news affects the school.

Make sure these stories are very, very specific and focused. One thought or idea is what each news wrap or reader is about.

Each student should have a story assigned/selected by the end of class. All students will try to complete a wrap for this newscast. You may arrange with those students who have time issues and taping difficulties to do readers for this assignment by the end of the week instead.

Give students another copy of “Listen to a Newscast” to use with their homework.

7. Students write their questions and begin their interviews after focusing their news wraps with the teacher. If you have to team up people on the same stories, do not worry. It will work. They can go together to get the tape and both use the same material.

8. Students should get interviews, pull tape cuts, and begin to write scripts.

9. Have a brief meeting when class starts to get an overall sense of where everyone is in the process of collecting tape and writing their wraps. Choose eight to 10 stories that are the most developed. Divide the class and have each group finish the wrap together in class. It should include an intro. List the stories in order of news importance with the group. Drop two or three for time and importance and explain why. If there is time, a representative from each group reads the group’s intro to the wrap.

Another possibility would be to divide students into groups of five to six students. Each wrap will be used to complete a newscast. They will need to listen to the wraps, list them in order of news importance (exercising their news judgement) and write the group intro into the newscast.

10. If this lesson could be extended another week, all students should finish their wraps. Then all wraps and any readers that were not finished by deadline because of time or tape issues should be assembled into various five-minute newscasts. Each newscast should be produced with a host reading the intros and students reading their wrap copy or readers.

If the focus is extended another week, continue to hold regular editorial meetings, discuss what is coming up in their school that they might cover, and have listening sessions to local newscasts.

Newscasts, then and now

Also during an extra week, students could be introduced to some of the great newscasters of the past. Edward R. Murrow, Eric Sevareid, Douglas Edwards, Sigrid Schultz and other radio news broadcasters report on history’s events again on Old Time Radio (<http://www.old-time.com/>). The pioneers of newsbroadcasting will be studied in more detail in the second course of radio broadcasting.

Current topics and ideas on how to cover them can be found on the Poynter Institute site. If there is time, also explore newscasts from the NPR Next Generation project (www.npr.org/about/nextgen/).



Homework

Assign chapters of two or more of the sources listed above. Students should take notes on what they have read. What are the essential messages in each chapter?

Students listen to two local newscasts on WTOP and WAMU and, using “Listen to a Newscast,” list the stories they have heard. They should also begin organizing their own assignments, including whom they will interview to get the tape they will need for wraps.

Work on scripts for news wraps and conduct interviews if unable to do so during the school day.



Assessment

Assess students’ classroom work and participation, the notes on homework reading and newscast listening handouts.

Assess their wraps or readers. In particular, students should be learning how to recognize a news story and show that they know how to produce a wrap on a focused angle of a story.

Give them feedback on their developing news judgment during the “compilation of a newscast” stage. Do they avoid redundancy and vary the stories in the newscast? Do readers and wraps flow well?



Academic Content Standards

Compare and contrast how media genres (nightly news, newsmagazines, documentaries, Internet) cover the same event. (DCPS English Language Arts, 9.M.1)



Industry Standards and Expectations

Analyze the elements of a newscast production. (Performance Element, Pathway KS Statement: Demonstrate the ability to deliver a broadcast production. States’ Career Clusters, National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium)

Demonstrate how to obtain information to use in writing a story. (Performance Element, Pathway KS Statement: Demonstrate writing processes used for various journalism media. States’ Career Clusters, National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium)

Professional electronic journalists should pursue truth aggressively and present the news accurately, in context, and as completely as possible. (RTNDA Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct.)

Professional electronic journalists should present the news fairly and impartially, placing primary value on significance and relevance. (RTNDA Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct.)

Listen to a Newscast

Name _____ Date / /

Station _____ Call Letters _____

1. Story topic:

Is this a wrap or reader? Circle one.

If this is a wrap, provide the following —

Interviewee's name or title: _____

Why an expert on the topic: _____

Position on the topic: _____

2. Story topic:

Is this a wrap or reader? Circle one.

If this is a wrap, provide the following —

Interviewee's name or title: _____

Why an expert on the topic: _____

Position on the topic: _____

3. Story topic:

Is this a wrap or reader? Circle one.

If this is a wrap, provide the following —

Interviewee's name or title: _____

Why an expert on the topic: _____

Position on the topic: _____

4. Story topic:

Is this a wrap or reader? Circle one.

If this is a wrap, provide the following —

Interviewee's name or title:

Why an expert on the topic:

Position on the topic:

5. Story topic:

Is this a wrap or reader? Circle one.

If this is a wrap, provide the following —

Interviewee's name or title:

Why an expert on the topic:

Position on the topic:

News Vocabulary 2

Anchor	The person who narrates or coordinates a newscast
Attribution	Indicating who is speaking in an actuality
Echo	An inadvertent repetition of information — in an intro and report, an intro and interview, or a voice track and actuality. You can have an echo without repeating the exact same words. If an intro says, “Congressman Jones is the first Democrat ever to be elected in northern New Hampshire” and the reporter says “Northern New Hampshire has always been represented in Congress by Republicans,” it’s an echo. (NPR Intern Edition definition)
Field Report	News item filed from outside the studio. Reporters may be recording on disk or, in the case of breaking news, reporters may be using a telephone to report on air from the site of the unfolding event.
Hourly	Newscast starting at the beginning of the hour or format clock
Intro	Intro is shorthand for introduction. It’s the copy that a host will read on the air, and usually includes information for the program director about tape time and other peculiarities of the tape in question. (NPR definition)
Pieces	A news or feature report broadcast in the body of a program. Pieces can be of almost any length, from a minute and a half to 20 minutes — or even longer.
Reader	News story without tape
Super Spot	Informal. A piece that is little more than a spot with more details — something around a minute and a half long. Show producers will sometimes ask a reporter to reduce a piece to a super spot length so that it can fit a small hole in the program.
Top of the Hour	At the beginning of an hour of scheduled programming
Wrap	Recorded report following this pattern: reporter’s voice, actuality, reporter’s voice. The report is “wrapped around” the actuality.