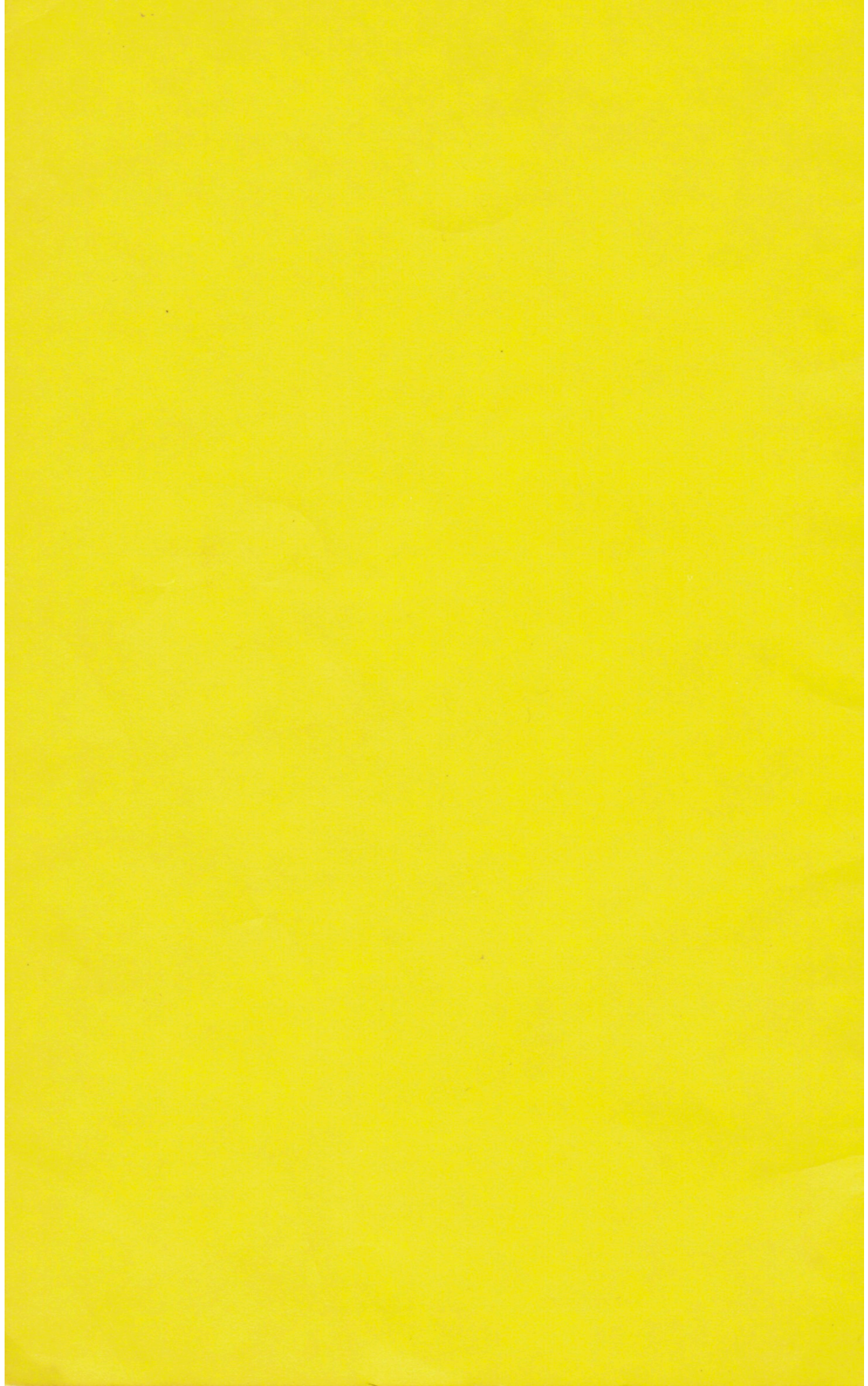


VOA

GUIDE

For Writers And Editors



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Our constant aim and effort is to tell the news as it is. That means accurately. It means also that we report the facts showing the whys and the context of events. And we try to put these facts in a way that'll be understood by people of political and cultural backgrounds much different from ours.

Thus we seek out the news of the world and our country which will be of interest to overseas peoples. This is a highly selective process, calling for judgment, understanding, and knowledge of the interests of people in other countries. Here are some of our guiding principles:

1. VOA is a consistently reliable and authoritative source of news — accurate, objective and comprehensive.
2. VOA represents America, not any single segment of its society, giving a balanced projection of the nation's events and its institutions.
3. VOA as an official radio presents United States policies clearly and effectively, and responsible discussion and opinion on these policies.

Each of our newscasts is basically a world news report, with the day's big story on top, followed by a report on other events of the day and the hour. But because our broadcasts are beamed to different regions of the world at various times — calculated to reach listeners in most cases at their breakfast time or dinner time — we select carefully the news of interest to those areas reached by any given broadcast. Each broadcast should carry a balanced world news report as of the hour it is aired, just as a morning or evening newspaper does. Some stories of major interest on one continent are of lesser interest elsewhere, and in broadcasts to other parts of the world are dropped to a lower position or omitted.

Serious political and governmental news is the major news for VOA. We also cover economic and social developments, and cultural events. We report sports events, especially to areas where they are popular. Within limits of brevity, we also carry features of general interest, including light ones for closers, and obituaries of internationally-known people.

VOA pays special attention to elections, both in our country and abroad, to focus attention on open-society countries.

Local crime is of no interest to us, but a crime such as a political assassination is big news all over the world.

OUR OWN SOURCES

VOA gets its news from wire services, thirty VOA correspondents in the United States and overseas, world-wide radio intercepts from FBIS, U.S. networks and press, U.S.I.S. reports and diplomatic reports.

Thirty agencies and services feed these services into the newsroom:

1. United Press International (five services) — A, B, WCNS, sports and radio wires.
2. Associated Press — A-wire (information only).
3. Reuters (two) — A-wire and Special (Latin American, African, Mid-East news).
4. Agence France Presse — A-wire (in French).
5. IPS (four) — House wire, Mideast and Africa files (same machine) and Europe wireless files.
6. UNY — USIA wire feeding from U.N. and N.Y.C. to Washington IBS and IPS.
7. United Nations press release wire (official U.N. releases).
8. FBIS (two wires) — Radio intercepts from other countries, plus supplementary local country developments.
9. Diplomatic Telecommunications wire (USINFOs).
10. Xerox Telecopier (linked to VOA bureaus in New York, Los Angeles and Miami).
11. Commercials (four wires) — Western Union, R.C.A., Amn Cable & Radio, and Telex.
12. Munich wire, two-way to VOA European Bureau.
13. Spot monitoring of U.S. television and radio networks news programs through Operations Studio.
14. Through our Strowger system we monitor many events, including proceedings at the United Nations, the Organization of American States, Congressional hearings and State Department briefings.

OUR NEWS SERVICES TO VOA AND THE WORLD

The newsroom's output, in final written form, is transmitted to its users by four internal teletype circuits, all operative twenty-four hours a day.

The VOA wire carries the main stories, and reaches all desks.

The VOB wire carries newscast patterns and regional stories for Latin America and Africa (for which there is not enough room on the VOA wire).

The NCA wire goes to all desks, and carries correspondents' reports, news analyses, and features for behind-the-news use in broadcasts; also on-the-half hour summaries which otherwise would slow down the VOA wire.

VOC is a direct wire to Seventeen-fifty and Seventeen-seventy-six Pennsylvania Avenue for quick transmission of messages to and from other elements of U.S.I.A.

HOW THE NEWSROOM OPERATES

The Newsroom receives more than one-half million words a day of news copy from its many sources, and produces every day complete news files of about one hundred thirty news stories for two hundred fifty-two newscasts, totalling about eighty thousand words.

Incoming news materials are routed to the Coverage Editor through the Slot Assistant. The Coverage Editor, under supervision of the Duty Editor, assigns the stories to the six Regional (National, Europe, Far East, Near East, Africa and Latin American) desks. These desks write and edit all stories in radio-news style about their geographic region and prepare the patterns for all newscasts to their region. This is done under the supervision of the Duty Editor. All stories are finally edited by the Copy Desk, also under the Duty Editor, then put on the VOA, VOB or NCA internal teletypes to the language desks and studios for translation and broadcast.

The Newsroom staff is normally seventy writers and editors with ten copy clerks, three clerk-transcribers and two secretaries.

The operation is carried on continuously twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week. Speed and accuracy are imperative in every function.

OUR OWN CORRESPONDENTS

For the News Division, VOA correspondents in the U.S. and abroad file correspondents' reports, news inserts and advisories. For Current Affairs they do features, news analyses, interviews, and occasional documentaries.

The correspondent's report runs behind the news, is about two and one-half minutes long (thirty lines) and should provide added background, a sense of immediacy and presence. The report should place news events in political, historic and geographic perspective. These run on the NCA wire.

Inserts — preferably no longer than forty seconds — run in the news. Texts of these, with an intro, move as separate stories. They should be incorporated into the newscasts to the greatest extent feasible. Doing so changes pace, brings in another voice, conveys authenticity, authority, and immediacy.

Advisories are just that. Correspondents give the facts via the Coverage Desk. Writers put the facts into news stories.

Facts from correspondents' reports and inserts also should be used along with other sources in writing the newsfile. When a taped insert is not used but the correspondent's facts are, you write it: "VOA Correspondent Henderson Alpine reports from the Matterhorn that...." Or: "Our correspondent reports...."

The Coverage Desk tries to keep regional desks informed of what correspondents' material is on hand or expected.

An important point for editors and writers, and especially for VOA correspondents and reporters: You should know the deadlines of major VOA regional broadcasts, and should write to these deadlines. This may mean filing an interim report on a developing story. These stories are used mostly in the back half, after the newscast. Thus, programs on the air at noon or two p.m. (Washington time) should include reports related to the spot news in the newscast. We can't wait until the end of the day for a wrapup with the full story. The later reports are useful mostly to Latin

America and for the nighttime "breakfast shows" for the Eastern world.

WHAT CURRENT AFFAIRS DOES

The Current Affairs Division produces the commentaries, news analyses and longer features, including documentaries, that make up most of VOA "back-of-the-news" programming. These are written in the same radio style used for the news. Short sentences and simple words are preferred. These scripts do, however, serve to explain sensitive political subject matter and may, when necessary, fall back on exact official language. Commentaries and news analyses are three to three and a half minutes long (thirty-six to forty-two lines). Features which use tape inserts or call for two or more voices may run longer.

Current Affairs also issues U.S. and World Opinion Roundups and Week in Review. Opinion roundups rely heavily on exact quotes from newspaper editorials and commercial radio and television commentaries. Lead-ins and summaries are done in radio style. Attribution comes both before and after — "That was the Chicago Tribune" follows an excerpt from that paper.

The Week in Review, broadcast by most language services, is a recapitulation of the week's news done as much as possible around voiced actualities of the week's news makers.

The Special Events Branch plans, coordinates and makes arrangements for coverage of newsworthy events, both in and outside of Washington. This is done either in response to special requests, called "hoopies," or by the Branch's initiative based on developing news events.

In providing coverage, Special Events makes arrangements for correspondents and engineers, recommending specific equipment or techniques required to cover the events. It also arranges for the reproduction and distribution of the taped material once the coverage is completed.

Special Events arranges all travel for coverage of events twenty-five miles or more outside of Washington. This covers transportation, lodging, per diem, and other expenses. It also coordinates assignments of correspondents and engineers.

Special Events is responsible for maintaining a network of purchase-order correspondents for coverage of events outside the Washington area. These "stringer" contacts exist in all states, including Alaska and Hawaii.

The Branch monitors all incoming feeds from Munich and New York. Language services are notified promptly of material intended for them.

The Branch is the exclusive channel between VOA and the Rights Clearance Division (IGC) for ordering all off-line radio and TV programs, and for clearance procedures on remote coverage of events.

The Program Documentation Unit and its component the Tape Library are also part of the Special Events Branch. The PDU screens all incoming tapes in English and issues a daily log of these tapes as part of the morning menu. These tapes eventually become part of the VOA tape archives. The Tape Library processes more than thirty thousand tapes a month and is the prime repository of all the English language tapes. The PDU also produces the VOA Catalogue of Selected Programs and fills requests for these tapes for USIS offices overseas.

The Program Documentation Unit provides special monitoring services and issues tape highlights for major news events.

And Special Events is the home base of the official VOA Stamp Club with more than one hundred fifty thousand members in all parts of the world.

THE NEWS OPERATIONS STUDIO

Editors in the News Operations Studio work directly under the Coverage Desk, which assigns the stories VOA news will cover and determines the extent of the coverage.

Correspondents and off-line material are two prime resources for the Coverage Desk. (Off-line material is anything fed from the State Department, Pentagon, networks, etc.) The News Operations Editor has the initial editing and processing responsibilities for this material.

In most cases, a Coverage Editor initiates the basic requests (a White House correspondent is instructed by telephone to do

a news insert on Nixon's day, a cable is sent to our Mideast Bureau in Beirut asking for a report on Mideast fighting). The Coverage Editor also notifies the Operations Editor to expect the requested material and make the necessary technical arrangements.

When the material is fed, the primary responsibility of the Operations Editor is to insure that the material fulfills our needs. He does this by discussing the material with the correspondent and "live editing" the feed. The editor can call upon either a regional desk or the Coverage Editor to assist in this editing. If the feed does not meet our editorial standards, the tape will not be distributed for broadcast use.

The Operations Editor is generally responsible for monitoring all off-line material and selecting news actualities. He calls the networks, for example, to get an actuality re-fed if necessary.

The studio is not solely a helpful tool of the newsroom and the English Division. The editor must be attuned to the needs of Current Affairs and Special Events, which share with the newsroom a house responsibility to thirty-five language services.

The editor's second concern is processing material. Unfortunately, processing sometimes replaces editing as the first priority. The editor must strive to avoid this. Processing includes a myriad of functions. However, it basically means that the editor, working with the engineers, strives to receive material in an orderly manner and of high technical quality, notifies the editors and services having a germane interest in the material, properly distributes recorded material and notifies the Coverage Desk about the disposition of transcribed texts (all voice feeds must be accompanied by an English text).

VOA correspondents feed material in English via the news operations studio. This is all tape recorded. The material is fed by "beeper calls," "two-ways," or "direct lines."

Correspondents at the White House, Congress, State Department or in New York City (Fifty-seventh street and the U.N.) feed via leased "direct lines" to the operations studio. Master Control sets up these lines and notifies the operations studio and central recording of the arrangements.

A "two-way" is a radio quality A.T. & T. or R.C.A. circuit booked for a specific time. The coverage desk makes this booking

through VOA traffic. This must be done well in advance of the feed. The correspondent feeds from a studio — usually a local radio station, USIS Post, or a telecommunications office.

A “beeper call” can be made from any commercial telephone anywhere in the world at any time telephone service to Washington is available. The correspondent simply telephones the operations studio (737-0015). Line quality is much more chancy than on a “two-way.” During the hours when the operations studio isn’t manned, its calls are automatically switched to central recording. Central recording notifies the newsroom and English regionals as to what is being fed and on which Strowger position the call can be heard. Correspondents should, if their call goes to central recording, remind the engineer on duty to notify the interested parties.

In every case, the correspondent before he reads his material gives a billboard of what he has ready to feed, and the times of his pieces. The person who receives the call then asks for a voice check (or level) and uses this time to notify the elements to which the material is directed.

The correspondent’s procedure in feeding is just as important as the engineer’s or editor’s procedure in receiving the material. In the case of a news insert, the correspondent first reads his introduction, then gives a count down before starting his insert proper. (Example: five... four... three... two... one... President Nixon left Washington xxx) The countdown and the time of the piece enable the engineer to record directly on a cartridge of the proper length.

Correspondent reports, roundups, analyses and features must have an introduction even though a countdown isn’t necessary.

On all feeds, it is imperative that the correspondent not break off the circuit until he is assured the material has been recorded properly, without pronunciation mistakes, interference, or other difficulties that would prevent its being broadcast. If a printed text of the feed has not been received in Washington, the correspondent, after completing his voiced report, should spell out all names of persons, places and organizations that may not be readily known to a transcriber.

Equipment correspondents use varies with different bureaus.

None of it is highly complex since engineering help is rarely available on overseas assignments. Whenever possible, VOA's engineering field service briefs correspondents on the particular equipment they'll use.

COPY GUIDELINES

Ideally, you should have a first-hand source for every story — on-the-spot information from our own correspondent, a monitored report from the scene, or a USINFO. Whenever doubt exists, you should try to get a first-hand source. For that the Coverage Desk can turn to our correspondents, stringers, USIS posts and monitors. First-hand sources are particularly important for VOA when reporting official U.S. stories, such as those from the White House or State or Defense Departments. If you have a first-hand source that is all you need. If you do not you must have two sources, such as reports from two wire services. Even two sources require careful evaluation.

Use radio intercepts (FBIS, etc.) in reporting events that took place in the country where the report came from, not the broadcasts of a neighboring country.

Maximum length for most news stories is twelve lines (one minute air time at VOA speed of announcing). This can be exceeded only on stories which dominate the world's news that day. In longer stories where detail seems imperative, mark optional ("OPT" at start of paragraph and "END OPT" at end) enough material to enable the language desks to use a shorter version.

For major stories with various developments, separate stories are often necessary. But they should be combined within a wrap-up story as soon as possible, keeping within our limits for a single story.

Triple space all copy. Have margins at least one inch wide on each side of a page.

Put one story on one page of copy, unless it's a collection of regional items such as "Asia Specials," or a two- or three-minute summary roundup. Stapling up copy from other VOA copy saves time and is sometimes necessary, but rewriting an earlier story often sharpens and simplifies it.

Clip together all source copy relating to an item of news and save

it for filing at the end of the shift. This enables anyone to check the sources without having to search through scattered pieces of paper.

Every story, headline, summary or pattern must be slugged for the teletype circuit involved: VOA, VOB, or NCA.

All A-wire items are numbered by copy editors, who record the number and the identifying slug line in a log. "X" file numbers begin at midnight; "Y" file numbers begin about one p.m. The Africa desk slugs its regionals "AFR" and the Latin American desk "LA" for VOB transmission.

In addition, every story has a distinctive one- or two-word slug like "Nixon," "Viet Action," "Disarmament," or "Nigeria." These slugs should be descriptive of content, not cryptic. Also, the current date, in Arabic numbers, like 5/16/72.

Sign off each item with your initials, preceded by the initials denoting the desk where written. NA for National Desk, FE for Far East, AF for Africa, EUR for Europe, ME for Middle East and LA for Latin America.

After editing, the copy editor will add his initials, and when it moves on the wire the teletype operator will add his initials and the time of day, giving a complete record of the course of the story. Like this: ME/CRS/MT/LH 2:50 p.

Frequently a fast-moving story needs quick changes. Preferably this is handled by re-writing the whole story with a new X or Y number, with a parenthetical notation subbing out the earlier story. But if a minor change can be handled by changing a word or a paragraph, this can be done by subbing out the out-of-date paragraph, using the original X or Y number and its slug. The sub would appear under this kind of heading: X-45 sub in Treaty.

//Sub following for second graph of X-45//

And at the end of the new material, mark it this way:

//Pick up third graf X-45 beginning "The signing...//

Similarly, new material may be sent as an "add," "update," or an "insert" if it fits into a story already sent, using the same X or Y number of the earlier story, and marking plainly that it is to be inserted at a specific place.

Typographical or factual errors which creep into news stories MUST be corrected as quickly as possible. Corrections are given the same X or Y number as the story in which the error occurred,

and repeat the original story-slug. It is helpful to S P A C E out the corrected word so there will be no mistakes as to what is being corrected. It will read like this:

X-12 Correction in Treaty

Date

///in third graf, first line, read it:///

xxx needs of the C O M M U N I T Y (not communists as sent) xxx

Many of our news stories are received in advance of release, embargoed against being put on the air until a certain hour. Many of these can be written and put on the teletype to the language desks, but must be clearly marked at the top and bottom of the page. If it's for automatic release at a certain hour, the slug at the top of each page should read like this:

///For release at 6:30 p.m. EDT///

And at the bottom of the page add this:

///Watch release time///

If a story reaches us for advance release but at a later notification, slug it: /// Hold for Wire Release./// This means it cannot be broadcast unless and until the newsroom sends a note on the wire saying the story is released.

HEADLINES AND PATTERNS

VOA newscasts are compiled from patterns, prepared by regional desks in the newsroom, of selected X or Y items and/or AFR or LA items. This is done of necessity, because of manpower and wire-space limitations, rather than following the more desirable practice of writing separate, complete newscasts.

Pattern-makers must be aware of their audiences and the time they hear the newscasts. Pattern-makers must be sure to carry the top news-stories as well as major stories of interest to the target area, and must not be tempted to discard stories because they're "old" in terms of domestic broadcasts. They must try to produce a well-balanced newscast, to achieve a flow or transition by juxtaposition of items, and to avoid becoming heavy with one story or becoming parochial. They should try to make the newscasts interesting: for example, by including a sprightly closing item. They must count their lines, to be certain the newscasts are timed properly, and can designate optional material to allow for flexibility.

Pattern-makers should, when they can, include taped news

inserts from our correspondents in place of items written in the newsroom to give immediacy, presence and a change of pace to a newscast.

The following example shows the way many items can be used in a nine-minute newscast by judicious editing within the pattern, and also shows use of a taped news insert.

VOA-30 PATTERN FOR THREE P.M. ENGLISH ROUND-
UP 5/17/72

1. X-56 FOURTH GERMAN TREATIES WITH ADD
2. X-40 SECOND PRAVDA-U.S. (DROP LAST GRAPH)
3. Y-10 NIXON
4. Y-6 WALLACE-PRIMARIES WITH MEDD TAPE
5. Y- INDOCHINA (TO COME)
6. Y-9 VIET TALKS
7. X-42 SECOND BERLIN VISITS
8. Y-3 MIDEAST POL
9. Y-4 BUSING (LAST GRAPH OPTIONAL)
10. Y-7 GUNS-WALLACE (WITH SUB)
11. X-58 TITO-CEAUSESCU
12. Y-1 CASTRO-BULGARIA

EUR/DG/JTW 5/17/72 PS 202P EDT

When headlines are used, they should be in the present tense, short and to the point. An example follows:

VOA-30 CLOSING HEADS FOR THREE P.M. ENGLISH
ROUNDUP 5/17/72

WEST GERMANY'S BUNDESTAG APPROVES RENUN-
CIATION-OF-FORCE TREATIES WITH THE SOVIET UNION
AND POLAND.

THE SOVIET COMMUNIST PARTY NEWSPAPER PRAV-
DA SAYS IMPROVEMENT IN SOVIET-AMERICAN RELA-
TIONS IS BOTH POSSIBLE AND DESIRABLE.

AND PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE GEORGE WALLACE,
RECOVERING FROM AN ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT,
WINS TWO STATE PRIMARY ELECTIONS.

EUR/DG/JTW 5/17/72 PS 211P EDT

OUR STYLE

Bear in mind two things: (1) We are writing for the ear, not the eye. (2) Everything we write must be translated into other languages.

Since our stories will be heard, not read, we rewrite everything written for print, especially newspaper and news agency copy. Always be conscious of the way your copy sounds. Try reading it aloud, if only in a whisper, to see how effectively it can be voiced. If it sounds stilted or is lacking in rhythm or proper emphasis, recast it.

We want short, declarative sentences. As a general rule, no sentence should exceed thirty words. But short sentences can become monotonous or give a staccato effect. If that happens, a longer sentence sandwiched in can give a change of pace. The ultimate test: How does the copy *sound* when read aloud?

Strive constantly for simple language. Say "legs" rather than "lower extremities." Avoid fancy and erudite words, and if you're forced to use them, try to explain them. Always remember that your copy is being translated and that our English-language broadcasts are being heard by many to whom English is a second language.

Above all, discard Americanisms, jargon and cliches. Keep in mind disparate experience and language barriers.

To give listeners a sense of the immediate, we should use the present tense whenever feasible. "President Nixon is flying to Chicago, where he will make a major foreign policy speech." "Apollo 16 is orbiting the moon." There is excitement in the present tense.

It will, of course, be necessary to use the past tense in reporting something that happened before the time of broadcast. Thus we say "President Nixon *said*..." or "The State Department *announced*..." or "Radio Moscow *said*..." But bear in mind that what actually is said is frequently in the present tense in our story. For example, "President Nixon *said* he *hopes* the Soviet Union will carefully consider the American plan," not *hoped*. The first verb is past tense because the President's act is complete. But he was hopeful when he said it and still is at the time of broadcast. So "hopes" is present tense.

Sometimes when you use the past tense, you will need a time element. "The U.S. Senate voted *a few hours ago* to extend the foreign aid program." "U.S. mines designed to block shipping to seven North Vietnamese ports were activated *at Eleven Hours Greenwich Mean Time Thursday*."

News agency and newspaper stories are designed for the printed record; hence the use of "today" and "yesterday" is universal. We don't need them for radio except when it is necessary to establish a time element. With most stories, the use of the radio medium itself establishes the fact of immediacy, that here's something that just happened. Moreover, the international dateline can make the time element sound absurd. But if it is clear in the context of what is being said that we are using Washington time, we may name the day of the week when something happened. "President Nixon vetoed a bill passed by the U.S. Congress *last Friday* that would have denied federal aid to private schools operated by churches."

The present perfect tense conveys a sense of immediacy and may be used when appropriate. ("Peace talks in Paris have been postponed again.") But we avoid the pluperfect "had" as much as possible.

Place names are important. Don't say "from here" unless it is made clear where you are. "Here in Washington" is definite and locates both the story action and the origin of the broadcast.

In reporting a speech or official statement, resist the tendency to use long quotes. Frequently, it is better to paraphrase: Secretary Laird said the United States will take the actions needed to prevent the delivery of supplies to North Vietnam.

To be sure that your listener understands whom you are quoting, it is wise to repeat the name rather than mentioning the name once and using "he" thereafter.

Avoid piling modifier upon modifier, as in "a two-thousand-three-hundred million dollar foreign aid authorization bill." Obviously, "a foreign aid authorization bill totaling two-thousand-three-hundred million dollars" would be better.

If you use parenthetical phrases, they should be short so the listener does not lose track of the main point. Avoid such constructions as, "President Blank — who was elected last year after

a bitter political battle between the Socialist Party and a rebel faction of the Farmers Party that is strong in the rural areas of Mesopotamia — has been ousted from office in a bloodless coup.”

Be sure to give both sides. If the other side in a conflict has no comment, say so. In this connection, make the fullest use possible of FBIS reports.

Avoid sensational language, especially hair-raising verbs and adjectives. You can achieve colorful writing without them.

Always spell out year numbers, as well as all other numbers, to avoid teletype and typewriter garbles.

Don't use initials for international organizations or countries any more than you have to. Write around it if you can. If you can't, put hyphens between the initials to indicate that each letter is pronounced separately: U-S-S-R, I-L-O, O-A-S. Do not use hyphens in the few instances when the initials are pronounced as one word, as in NATO, CENTO, and UNESCO. But always give the organization's full name at the outset of the story.

Get right to the heart of the story, dropping details that merely clutter the main point. Digest the information available, sit back and ask yourself what happened, and then tell it in a simple, straightforward fashion.

And as a final word: Keep reminding yourself that you are writing for translation. Shun such Americanisms as *rundown* (in the sense of *summary* or *detailed account*). If a word or phrase is likely to be unfamiliar to the people of other countries, explain it briefly.

SOME VOA QUIRKS

VOA's round-the-world listeners make it necessary for news writers and correspondents to modify and adapt many American usages. Here are a few of them.

We use the metric system for weights, measures, distances, etc. Every writer should learn the most common conversion factors (see table at end of this guidebook).

Numbers are difficult to assimilate by ear. Eliminate unnecessary ones and round off the figures wherever possible. (Contrary to this rule, we never round off figures when reporting the New York stock market results.) We never use the word “billion”

since it means one thousand million in the United States and one million million virtually everywhere else. Write "one" before a figure — not "a" hundred or "a" thousand, which may sound like "eight" on the air. "Three hundred fifty" is sharper and quicker than "three hundred and fifty." Likewise, it's better to say "fifteen hundred" than "one thousand five hundred."

Be careful in naming seasons — spring, summer, autumn or fall, and winter. It's summer in Argentina when it's winter here. Better just name the month, if possible.

Radio always reports "news conferences," not "press conferences." We can call Ron Zeigler "news secretary" if we want, although his official title is press secretary. And for us, so-and-so "told newsmen" is better than "told reporters."

It's Czechoslovakia or Czechoslovak, never Czech, unless it's a localized Czech or Slovak story. Use Laos, the noun, and Lao, the adjective, not Laotian. We call it "the Soviet Union," not "the Soviets," which means something different. When possible, we pinpoint which state within the U.S.S.R. we are talking about, as Byelorussia, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, and the Ukraine.

In a formal context, we refer to the People's Republic of China, although for clarity we also continue to use the terms Mainland China and Communist China. In like fashion, we use both terms, the Republic of China and Taiwan.

"Red" is not a synonym for Communist in VOA. If we were quoting a Tass item which referred to a "socialist reconstruction," we would use the term "socialist." Otherwise, we carefully distinguish between socialists and communists. The word "revolutionary" in the Chinese lexicon is frequently meaningless, since the Chinese Communists are virtually capable of referring to a "revolutionary fish sandwich." Avoid use of the word except in direct quotes or when something is truly revolutionary.

VOA reports on U.S. "state guard" activities, not on the "national guard" or "militia," which may be misunderstood in other countries. And let's not talk about "riot police." Usually, they're just police, both in America and abroad.

We spell out Mister, Missus, Doctor, Governor and other titles because they are susceptible to teletype and typewriter garbles. And we "mister" everyone the second time we use his name,

except for criminals, athletes, artists, musicians and historic figures. But don't "mister" a man the first time around.

For heads of state who are well known it is permissible to use only the surname, as President Nixon (rather than President Richard Nixon), Prime Minister Heath, and President Sadat.

Don't use "Monsieur" for a Frenchman, "Herr" for a German, etc., for the obvious reason that our international stories would soon become a hopeless mixture of titles if we did.

Frequently, our news stories are based on reports from VOA correspondents. News writers should attribute the information to the correspondent by name if he has made a pertinent observation or interpretation, or has an exclusive. Omit the name if only a routine fact is stated. For example: "Our correspondent in Paris said the Council of Ministers is expected to issue a communique following their final session Friday."

Only staff correspondents should be entitled VOA Correspondent. Not stringers.

ON PRECISE WRITING

The careful writer recognizes circumlocutions, redundancies, and cliches — and, to use a cliché, avoids them like the plague.

As we know, phrases that once were fresh become clichés through overuse. To wit: "naked aggression, easy prey, mute evidence, crystal clear, mounting tension, the Middle East powder keg," and so on *ad infinitum*. Fortunately, such bromides rarely appear in our copy, and, if they do, they incur the displeasure of copy editors.

There are many empty words, the most frequent of which are compound prepositions. A brief list:

for the purpose of — for
in order to — to
in the event that — if
with regard to — about
inasmuch as — since
with the result that — so that

Be ruthless in cutting empty words.

The original, precise meaning of some words has been cor-

rupted. For example, “massive” is seldom used correctly in the sense of huge physical size. Instead we have massive searches, massive invasions, massive aid programs and massive evidence of poor writing.

And watch your use of these words:

Giant — If it’s big, tell how big it is.

Lengthy — Fancy writing for “long” and has a connotation of “long and tiresome.”

Shortly — It does mean “in a short time” but “soon” is usually better.

People and *persons* — “People” (collective) means a group of “persons” (individuals). Use persons in specific casualty stories: “Six persons were killed of the hundreds of people on the train.”

Some — Do not use when you mean “about” or “approximately.”

Further and *farther* — “Further” applies to time or degree; “farther” applies to distance.

Crisis — It connotes a turning point that will determine a whole future course. Do not use it to describe a dangerous situation, such as tensions in the Middle East.

Unique — It means the *only* one of its kind. Ordinarily “unusual” is the right word.

Less and *fewer* — “Less” refers to quality, “fewer” to number.

Personnel — A stuffy word. Often “staff,” or “people,” will say better what you mean.

Hopefully — A recent fad word, usually misused. “The Prime Minister said the terrorists would hopefully give up their arms.” That means “in a hopeful manner” — not what the writer meant. Why not say, “The Prime Minister said he hopes....”

Presently — This word can be variously interpreted as meaning “now” or “soon.” Why use it?

Table — Let us not “table” a draft resolution. In the United States it means to put aside, to defer action. Outside the U.S. it means to introduce.

Historic — Use sparingly. Maybe the moon landing *was* historic, but for most other events let’s leave it to the historians.

Major — Not every speech is major, even the President’s.

First Lady — Good for domestic use, but we say Mrs. Nixon or the President’s wife.

Some barbarisms creep into copy, in spite of editorial vigilance. These were noted in just one week of VOA's output: "upcoming" for forthcoming, "disadvantaged people" for poor people, "finalize" for complete or end, "dialogue" for talks, "meaningful" for useful, "upswing" for increase, "dog fights" for air battles, "updated" for newest or latest, "determination" for decision, and "the other side" for enemy. One piece of copy used the word "shootout," meaning gun battle.

Eschew absolutes and superlatives, especially if a value judgment is involved as in the "most famous" or "greatest." Shun the suffixes "-wise" as in price-wise. Don't say "over the week-end" when you mean last week-end or next week-end.

Week-long, day-long, year-long are overdone. If you mean one day, one week or one year, say so.

Be careful in using sound-alikes that may confuse listeners to our English-language broadcasts. Examples: *sighted* and *cited*, *threw* and *through*.

To form the plural of nouns taken from the Latin, use the letter "s" — *ultimatums*, *referendums*, *honorariums*, *dictums*. Note, though, we do use *data*, *memoranda* and *media*.

Don't say a nation is "tiny." Its people might not think it is. And a nation is not "she"; it is "it."

Use "mob" sparingly; usually they are just crowds or demonstrators who aren't intent on violent action. And be careful with "opened fire on." It presupposes who fired first. Just say "fired."

We have too many "rounds of talks." Usually just "talks" is better, although sometimes we need "series of talks."

"Respectively, latter, former" are taboo on radio because they require the listener to check back, which he cannot do.

Smooth transitions flow from logical organization and careful writing. Throwing in a "meanwhile" should not be confused with developing a transition. Also, use "but" sparingly and only when it introduces a statement that contradicts an earlier statement in the story. "On the other hand" is nearly always superfluous.

Don't strain to avoid repeating the word "said." Let the content of a quote characterize the quote rather than coloring it yourself with the use of such words as "admit" — unless there is genuinely an admission — or "reveal" — unless there is genuinely a revelation.

In our effort to use simple, straightforward, translatable English, we must battle constantly against bureaucratese and gobbledygook. Don't over-use "program" and "project," especially if "plan" is what we are describing. And "put on the agenda" usually means "scheduled for discussion." Virtually all of the statements we get from the United Nations, the State Department, the Pentagon, NASA, and other official sources need to be simplified for our listeners. The skillful writer can do this without distorting the basic meaning.

GUIDANCE AND HELP

Twice daily we receive brief memoranda from the VOA policy office. This is the only channel for policy guidance to VOA. Under no circumstances should you take any action concerning policy matters on the basis of suggestions or advice from other sources. Since VOA is government radio and U.S. government actions and policies are major news, policy guidance is useful and necessary. You are reminded, however, that the policy mechanism is not authorized to censor legitimate news nor is any VOA element authorized to suppress or alter news items by invoking policy considerations. If you spot problems in this area, call them to the attention of your editor at once.

Policy guidance notes are kept on a clipboard at the slot. Kept there also is the slotboard; it carries information and instructions on current, continuing, and future stories. All newsroom editors and writers should read these boards daily. Any mistake in our output reflects upon the person who makes it; a mistake that indicates unfamiliarity with the slot and guidance boards is especially dire.

The language desks have much knowledge and expertise about their countries, and should be consulted on sticky problems therein. Also, confer with the specialists in the newsroom on handling of stories they have spent years with.

Each editor and writer is urged to read The New York Times, the Washington Post and the Washington Star to keep up with the national and world news not reaching his desk, and, of course, the current VOA teletype report of the day's news up to the minute.

Dictionaries, encyclopedias, almanacs and Who's Who (both U.S. and international) are vital to writers and editors. Get the habit of using them if you haven't it already. We can't afford mistakes in facts or spelling.

The geographical dictionary is most useful for places, the biographical dictionary and Who's Who for people. If a fact is in question, the newsroom library has the Britannica, the Americana and the Columbia encyclopedias.

The Political Handbook, the Statemen's Year Book, the almanacs, Facts on File, Deadline Data on World Affairs, and the New York Times Index all are filed up to date and may prove useful. Query the VOA and USIA libraries.

On points of usage, we have Fowler's *Modern English Usage*, Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style*, and Theodore Bernstein's *The Careful Writer* and Miss Thistlebottom's *Hobgoblins*. Also, even though you have been writing radio news for years, you will find pleasure and stimulation in *Writing News for Broadcast*, by Edward Bliss, Jr., and John M. Patterson.

CONCLUSION

This is a new and expanded version of a *Guide* prepared primarily by Herb Little, former Deputy Chief of the VOA News Division, now retired. The present Deputy, Duncan Scott, did the yeoman work on this edition.

Follow this guide closely.

To follow it closely should contribute to the professional character of our broadcasts. As our broadcasts are professional so they are a contribution to realistic understanding of the United States and the world. And realistic understanding, not illusion, must underlie accommodation among men and among nations.

Charles L. Eberhardt
Chief, News Division
Voice of America

CONVERSION TABLE

<i>To Convert</i>	<i>Into</i>	<i>Multiply By</i>
Acres	Hectares	0.4047
Feet	Centimeters	30.48
Feet	Meters	0.3048
Gallons	Liters	3.785
Hectares	Acres	2.471
Inches	Centimeters	2.540
Kilograms	Pounds	2.205
Kilometers	Miles	0.6214
Liters	Gallons (U.S.)	0.2642
Liters	Pints (U.S.)	2.113
Meters	Feet	3.281
Miles (statute)	Kilometers	1.609
Pounds	Kilograms	0.4536
Quarts	Liters	0.9463
Tons (short)	Kilograms	907.185
Yards	Meters	0.9144



