

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
HORACE M. ALBRIGHT TRAINING CENTER  
Grand Canyon, Arizona

PI-43

"WRITING FOR EAR"

1. Know your subject thoroughly.
2. Know your audience.
3. Place yourself, as a writer, in the position of the listener. This is a most important, as well as difficult accomplishment.
  - a. Know what you want the listener to feel.  
Guess what they already think (not know).
4. Effective "writing for ear" requires more skill than writing for publication or reading.
  - a. Listeners should be able to "keep up" with what they hear without putting forth special effort. Readers can stop and read and ponder if they so desire; this is not possible for listeners--the recording goes right on.
5. By following guidelines, most, if not all, interpreters can do effective "writing for ear."
6. Determine exactly what story is to be told or what message is to be presented and how you plan to "get it across." That is, have a definite objective.
  - a. Audio and/or audiovisual presentations should "fit in" to the overall interpretation for the Park.
  - b. Seek concurrence from the Regional Office.
  - c. Visuals should not determine the story to be told. If visuals are to form a part of the presentation, they should not be selected until after the script has been completed.
7. Decide on the approximate proper length for the script.
  - a. One and a half to two minutes is considered ideal and three minutes should be considered the maximum for audio station messages, even if you think more should be said. (For "standup" situation.)

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- b. AV presentation narrations should not exceed 15 minutes. (10 - 12 minutes is recommended).
8. Make ample notes.
9. Prepare an outline.
  - a. Check the sequence of the points you have included. Important points should be listed in order of their importance, except when chronological occurrence controls sequence. Points of special importance should be included, if possible, near the beginning of the script.
10. The time and place to write depends on the individual. Being physically fresh and in quiet surroundings contributes, in most instances, to effective writing.
11. Prepare a draft.
  - a. Proceed slowly and carefully, as listeners must listen at your pace; therefore, they cannot listen critically.
  - b. Write freely--as you think--without giving special attention to grammar, punctuation, or other things that may be disruptive. That is, write your thoughts just as they come to you.
  - c. Remember that first impressions are often best.
  - d. Have good reference books readily available.
  - e. Strive to write in such a way that you will "capture" your listeners at the very beginning, preferably emotionally.
  - f. Do not be afraid to be emotional. Only the uninformed fear emotion. If listeners are not involved emotionally, the great majority of them will lose most of the message.
  - g. Be personal but not juvenile. Do not figuratively "pat listeners on the head" or "hold their hand."
  - h. Write so that listeners will be oriented with respect to what they are seeing.
  - i. Relate the presentation with what visitors see today.
  - j. Do not talk about things that cannot be seen.

- k. Use simple, easy-to-understand words and short, straight forward sentences.
  - l. Replace the mental position and/or situation of the visitors with that which you provide, so they will not only be able to follow you, but will want to. This calls for simple-- but not juvenile--language.
  - m. Your message should not be too specific, nor detailed. This avoids development of the impression that the narrator considers listeners as being immature, if not actually ignorant.
  - n. Try not to think as a specialist or scientist. Most listeners are not interested in the scientific approach. Of course, do not be "mealy-mouthed," nor hedge with "ifs," "ands," "buts," etc. Be positive.
  - o. Avoid technical detail. You are not to teach; you are to inspire. If listeners add substantially to their understanding and appreciation of the Park, it will not be because you told or taught them, but because you inspired them to delve more deeply into a subject or subjects.
  - p. Do not "preach."
  - q. Be brief. When you have nothing more to say that is worthwhile--stop.
    - (1) Do not over-interpret.
    - (2) Never repeat, unless it is to emphasize one or, at the most, a few words.
  - r. Have a strong "close."
  - s. Be eager to experiment and seek criticism.
  - t. As is the case with other kinds of writing, there is no substitute for practice.
  - u. Use appropriate music and sound effects (animals and other natural sounds, battle sounds, etc.) freely to add to the mood established by the narration.
12. On a placard indicate approximate duration of the presentation.
13. As you conclude, instill a definite desire on the part of listeners to do more with the presented subject by extending to them a positive invitation.

14. If the message is for an audio station that is one in a series, it should include directional information to next station.
15. Read draft aloud, both to yourself and others; then have someone else read it aloud and you listen.
  - a. It should be pleasing to the ear.
  - b. Read the script to reviewers; do not give them a script to read--let them just listen.
16. Revise the draft. This requires detailed and critical analysis.
17. If a recorder is available, make a trail tape and listen to your narration.
18. Based on an evaluation of the effectiveness of the narration, make any necessary editorial changes of the script.

Branch of Audiovisual Services  
National Park Service, WASO