

# If you're thinking of switching to radio...



...some things to consider



## Radio Documentary Advantages

**Access is no often easier. You're less obtrusive. You can sometimes get more authentic content. People forget you're there...**

**The equipment isn't heavy. No tripod! You can make a great radio documentary using your smartphone (see page 16).**

**Remote working is easier (see page 15).**

**You don't have to shoot pictures... Pictures are so powerful they can act as a barrier to creativity. With video your script *must* have some sort of relationship to the pictures...**

**...so no pictures means you have more freedom with the script...**

**...which means a radio documentary can be really creative.**

**It's easier to edit interview clips (no need for cutaways).**



## Radio Documentary Ingredients



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**SCRIPT** — the reporter (you) speaking

**SOUNDBITES** — your interviewees speaking

**QUESTIONS** — the sound of you asking questions

**VOX POPS**

**LOCATION SOUND** — the sound of a place, a thing or an activity

**AUDIO PIECES TO CAMERA** — you speaking on location

**SHOW AND TELLS** — somebody demonstrating something to you

**MUSIC**

**Exercise:** Listen to a radio documentary, with paper and pen. Note the different ingredients as you hear them.



## Your Script

**The core skills of writing for radio are very similar to writing for television. But because there are no pictures, you may need to explain/describe more. Use short, single idea sentences. Love the full stop! Clear, obvious subjects, objects and verbs. Active, not passive writing. No complicated words or phrases. No jargon. No clever stuff. Are you writing how ordinary people speak? You should be. Don't say anything you don't understand yourself. Use contractions — “isn't” rather than “is not.” It's written to be heard — so read it out loud *as you are writing it*.**

**Exercise: Transcribe a radio documentary. That's right. Write every word down. This is a powerful learning experience.**



## Your Script (2)

**Remember, like all factual writing, you are trying to answer the “geography” questions...**

**Who?**

**What?**

**Where?**

**When?**

**Why/Why not?\***

**How?**

**How much?**

**What next?**

*\* often the answers to these questions come in your interview clips*





## Recording Interviews

**You need a quiet location. Avoid background noise and music.  
Make sure you're wearing headphones.  
If you're recording on a Marantz, get the levels right. No distortion!  
Make sure we can hear your questions...  
...so move the microphone towards *you* when you ask questions.  
Get the contributor to say “My name is XX and I’m xxx” — you may find it useful to use in the edit (see page 10).  
Check you’ve got the recording OK at the end of the interview!**



## Location Sound

**Sometimes called “atmos” or “natural sound” or “wildtrack”  
— this is the sound of a place, or activity, rather than the sound of somebody speaking.**

**Location sound can help the listener feel as though she is “there” with you.**

**So wherever you go, record a minute of location sound.**

**Also — record the sound of any activity that is relevant to the story.**

***Make sure you record using headphones.***

**Exercise: Record one minute of location sound in three different locations. Make them as different as possible.**





## Location Sound in the Edit

**Think about using location sound at the start and end of your documentary. It also works well after soundbites. Or when you change location. It can even work really well to punctuate individual lines in your script. Remember, unless it's obvious what is happening, you may need to explain the sound a little in your script. Be careful not to *over-use* your location sound. It can become annoying. When we've heard enough, *fade* it gently out. Listen to how natural sound is used in professional documentaries and steal the best ideas...**

**Exercise: Listen to the use of location sound in the Global Coronavirus radio package. How does the reporter script to it?**



## Location Sound + You

**Think about recording some script yourself, while on location - a kind of “audio piece to camera”**

**You can describe what you are seeing/hearing/smelling/tasting — even feeling.**

**You can use it to explain what you are doing/where you are going with the story.**

**Don’t try to say too much — 20-25 seconds is enough.**

**If you’re comfortable, try to do this *without a script* — it will sound more natural.**

**Exercise: Record an “audio piece to camera.” Put yourself into a location and then describe what you can see/hear etc**



## Introducing Clips

**There are no on-screen captions in radio — so *you* normally need to introduce everybody who speaks in your script. There are three ways to do this:**

**“Tony O’Shaughnessy is a lecturer at Cardiff University. He **says\*** the strike is unavoidable.” **Followed by the clip.****

**“Tony O’Shaughnessy is a lecturer at Cardiff University.”  
**Followed by the clip.****

*\* says is almost always the best verb to use.*



## Introducing Clips (2)

The third way is to get the contributor to introduce themselves. Remember: ask **everybody\*** you interview to introduce themselves and say what they do. *“Can you just say your name and what you do, please — and start by saying “My name is...”*

**“My name is Tony O’Shaughnessy and I’m a lecturer at Cardiff University.”**

**You can use this as one of the ways to introduce people in your documentary.**

**(It can get a bit boring if you do this for everyone, so vary it!)**

*\* except vox pops, which don’t need to be introduced.*



## Show and Tells

**“Show and tell” is just another way of describing a demonstration...  
Your contributor *does* something and describes what they are doing.  
You can ask questions as you go along, or wait until the end.  
You may need to go back and re-record some of the sounds as well.**

**Exercise: *If it's safe*, record a friend making a cup of tea and explaining what they are doing as they go along. Edit it down to 30 seconds.**






## Using Music

**Music is super powerful. So be careful.  
Just because *you* like a piece of music doesn't mean  
it's objectively brilliant.  
Don't over-use it. A small amount of music goes a long way.  
Do you need permission to use the track? You probably do.  
Why not use software like Garageband to create your own...?**



**UGC**

**User Generated Content is easier with radio. You don't need to teach people how to film.**

- **Interviews them to record their answers on their phone and send you the file**
- **Or experiment with the  Anchor podcasting app.**
- **You can ask people to record one minute of natural sound on location.**
- **Listen to the Open Country documentary.**



**I only have a smartphone...**

**Don't worry! A smartphone is good enough to record audio for your documentary. But...**

- Make sure you use your headphones.**
- Make sure the phone is close to the person you are interviewing.**
- Don't forget to move the microphone back towards you for questions.**
- Consider spending a small amount of money on these things to improve the audio from your smartphone...**



## Smartphone accessories



**Double lapel mic - so you can record your questions as well as the contributor's answers.**



**Splitter — so you can plug the microphones and headphones into your phone at the same time.**



**Adapter — if required**





**How should I edit?**



**You should be able to access  
Adobe Audition...**



**...but if there are problems, Audacity is a  
free download.**

**We will support you with tech problems or questions and there are guides to using  
both of these products available on Learning Central.**





Listen to great documentaries



# Any questions?

