ROBERT B. MUSBURGER

AN INTRODUCTION TO WRITING for ELECTRONIC MEDIA

Scriptwriting Essentials Across the Genres

F
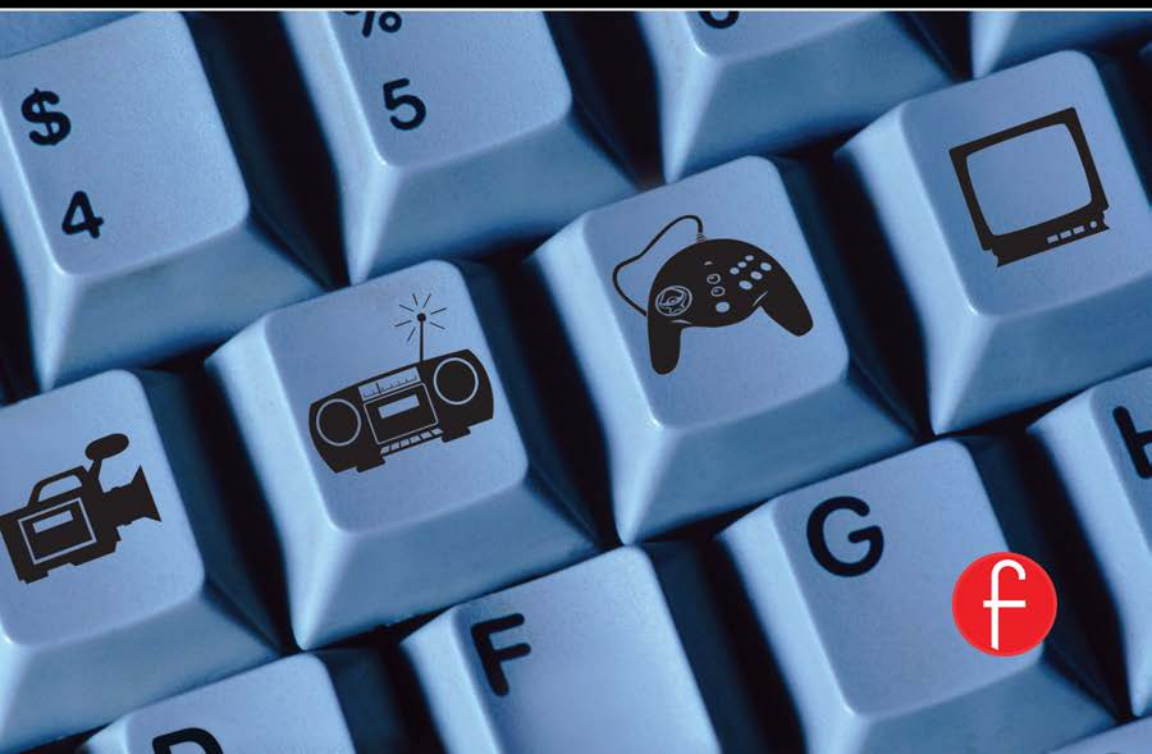
An Introduction to Writing for Electronic Media

An Introduction to Writing for Electronic Media

Scriptwriting Essentials Across the Genres

Robert B. Musburger

To Pat — friend, companion, lover, wife, and editor.
For so many years of happy work, play, and living
life to its maximum.

Contents

Preface

Regardless of the technical level of a media production, analog or digital, electronic or motion picture, at an early point in time, the basic concept and plan for a production must be recorded in some form on a readable medium. The writer is responsible for that form by laying the groundwork, designing the blueprint, and providing the means for the production crew and staff to convert an idea to a completed production.

This text has been written as an introduction to the methods of creating scripts for eight different genres of media productions: spots, news, documentaries, informational, animation, games, dramatic, and Internet productions. It is not intended to provide the means for a first-time writer to reach the level of writing of an Academy-Award winning production, but it offers the opportunity to sample the eight genres and their various differences and similarities. This sampling intends to lead the reader to an understanding of the process of media writing and the realization of the importance of the relationships between the writer and the production crew and staff. The text offers brief explanations on the actual production processes to better help the writer accept the changes to his or her script that must occur during production and postproduction activities.

To help the writer reach an awareness of how both script formats and script writing for electronic media productions reached their present state, the background of each genre of media writing places the present writing routine in perspective. The reader of this text is offered basic grammar, sentence structure, and page formatting used in script writing to develop the basic skills of presenting professionally prepared scripts.

Since this is an introductory text, a final chapter offers sugges-
tions on pursuing a career in media writing, preparing for inter-
views, and writing resumes. The author hopes this text will lead
the readers to further explore a career in writing by expanding their
educational options and continuing to write. The only way anyone
can reach a professional level of writing is to write, write, and keep
on writing.

R. Musburger
Seattle, WA

Acknowledgments

CHAPTER 1

Getting Started:
Loading the Application and Sharpening the Pencil

The wave of the future is coming, and there is no fighting it.
—Anne Morrow Lindbergh, 1940

Introduction

Before you sit down to start writing any form of script for any medium, genre, or method of distribution, you need to consider the common factors that exist among all media forms, despite their basic differences. This chapter will reveal as many common traits as possible to avoid repeating the same information throughout the text from chapter to chapter. Such topics include correct English that is written to be read out loud, writing for an audience, and understanding the laws and censorship affecting writers. At the same time, you may need to recognize that there will be duplication and repetition of some material when the redundancy is critical for that particular type of writing.

Topics included in this chapter cover the history and types of scripts, accurate and concise English, language discrimination, law and censorship, and the audience and distribution.

Background

The written forms used to instruct a production crew to carry out the writer's desires did not blossom forth overnight. Script formats evolved over many years through the development of a variety of

entertainment venues. Even within a specific medium, variations of format style evolved as the technology of the medium changed to meet the combined needs of the production staff as well as the challenges of the latest technology.

Live theatrical performances presage all forms of modern media. You may learn much from the study of live theater in addition to recognizing the field of theatrical production as a predecessor of electronic media.

In the earliest time of live presentations by actors, the actor-director determined the story line, dialogue, and action. In many cases, nothing was written, but stories passed from one troupe to another or became simpler in the memory of the originator. When productions became more complex, notes were written and passed from one performing group to another. Finally, actors and directors wrote more detailed scripts to guarantee that a play would be performed as the writer had intended.

As the theater evolved, so did the scripts that the directors and actors followed. The format became relatively standardized so that whoever needed to read or follow the script would be able to understand what was expected of them as members of the cast or crew. The script was the bible for the director, listing all of the dialogue and who spoke the lines, as well as the basic settings and action. The director had the prerogative of making modifications as the rehearsal process moved forward. But, before rehearsals started, the actors needed the script to learn their lines and basic blocking movements, both of which could be modified by the director.

Before the end of the 19th century, motion pictures followed live theater in presenting dramatic productions, as well as documentaries and other genres as the field developed. The original filmscripts mimic the format layout of theatrical scripts once scripts became the rule in film. As with theater directors, early filmmakers shot film without recorded sync sound and so needed little in the way of a written script. The director/writer told the cinematographer where to place the camera, and the actors were told where to stand and move and what lines to mimic. As the camera rolled, the director yelled directions to the actors. Little postproduction was necessary since the early films often were shot in one or two long takes in the 10-minute-long scenes.
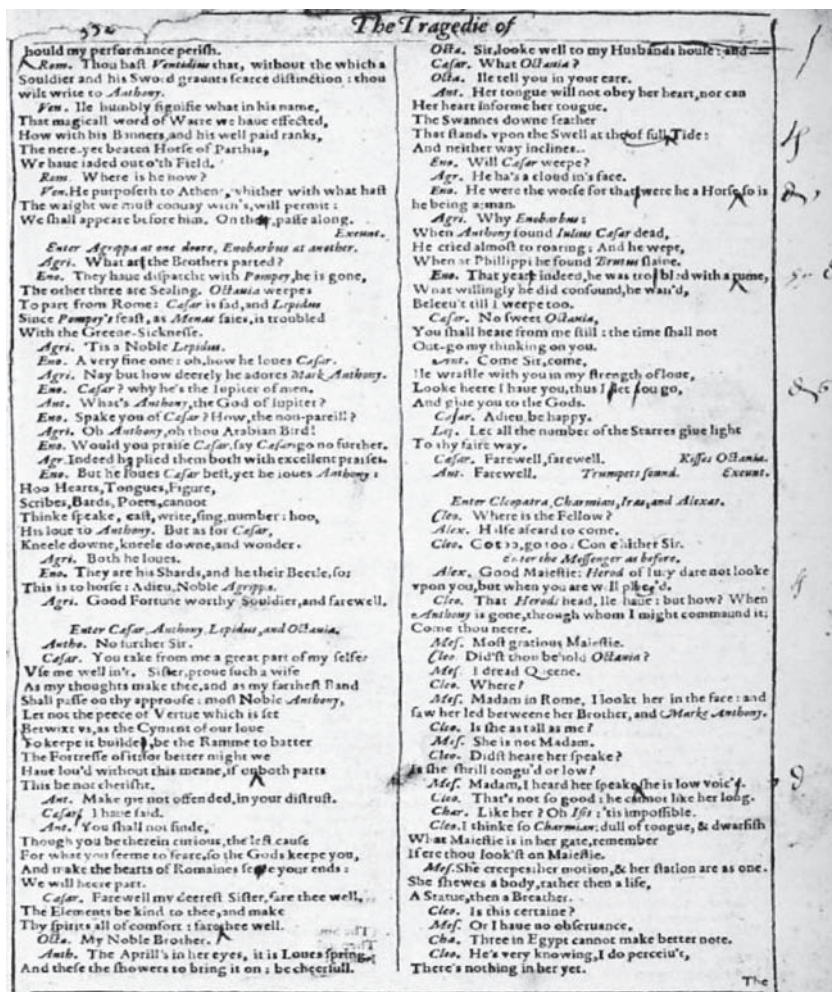
Figure 1.1. A typical Shakespearian era play script.

Mr. Morse angry and belligerent—Jamie takes a checker and throws it to the floor [beat]. Mr. Morse takes the candy stick from Jamie's mouth and throws it to the floor [beat]. Jamie takes a pencil from Mr. Morse's pocket, breaks it in his hands, throws it on the floor. Mr. Morse stands. Jamie stands. Mr. Morse takes up the board, spilling the checkers, and with difficulty tears it in two along the spine and throws it on the floor. Jamie glares. Takes up the checker box, tears it in two, and throws it to the floor [beat]. Mr. Morse overturns Jamie's chair. Now they grapple, slapping weakly at each other and making incoherent noises and grunts, two very weak individuals trying to do injury to each other. Injury would be impossible. When they struggle, Millie stands to get away.)
MR. KATZ. (*As Jamie tears the box.*) Here, that doesn't belong to you; stop it. Both of you; sit down and act right or you can't stay down here. Come on! Both of you!
GIRL. (*Overlapping.*) Jamie. Shame on you. Come on, stop that, what are you doing; you two babies. Shame on you. Stop fighting. What are you doing? (*Girl reaches them as they separate. Mr. Morse, from humiliation, shuffles directly to the only door in sight.*)
KATZ. (*Also coming from behind the office.*) Where are you going? Here, you can't go in there—
GIRL. Mr. Morse, come back and apologize; don't go in— (*To Katz.*) Oh, he isn't going to hurt anything. My God! (*Morse closes door as she reaches him.*)
KATZ. —Get him out of there.
GIRL. Mr. Morse, you can't go in there, that's the broom closet. (*Knocks.*) Mr. Morse? You're sitting in there on the slop sink, aren't you? With all those smelly mops. Mr. Morse, Jamie's sorry.
JAMIE. (*To her, joining her as Katz picks up checkers.*) I am not!
GIRL. (*Grabbing him, putting her hand over his mouth. The contact of a girl confuses and amazes him as much as the situation.*) He's sorry.
MORSE. (*Offstage.*) No, he isn't.
GIRL. (*As Jamie struggles to talk.*) What?
MORSE. (*Offstage.*) He isn't sorry!
GIRL. You hurt him very badly. (*Jamie struggles to protest.*)
MORSE. (*Offstage. After a beat.*) Where?
GIRL. You blacked his eye. (*Jamie gasps at the scope of the lie.*) (*To Jamie.*) Come here. I want to show you something. (*As she gets her purse.*)

37

Figure 1.2. A script from a 20th-century play.

FADE IN:

1.   INT CLUB CAR OF MOVING TRAIN   DAY   1

The desert landscape of central Arizona flashes by outside the window.
A drunken MAN staggers up the aisle holding a cocktail glass. He notices
ROBIN BALLARD, a delicate, 30-year-old woman, who stares blankly
out the window. He holds the glass out to her.

                              MAN
                            (slurred)
                    Buy you a drink pretty lady?

Robin continues to stare out the window.

                             ROBIN
                            (coldly)
                               No.

The Man pulls back the drink.
                              MAN
                      Well, pardon me.

He turns and walks away. Robin's reflection in the window returns her gaze.
                                                              (DISS)

2.   EXT UNION STATION, LOS ANGELES   DAY   2

Robin, surrounded by other disembarking passengers, frantically searches the
crowded platform. She brightens as she recognized LAUREN CHANDLER,
a beautiful, 50-year-old, self-possessed woman, walking through the crowd and
waves at her.
                             ROBIN
                              Mom!
                        (calling louder)
                              Mom!

Lauren spots Robin, waves and hurries toward her. The women embrace.
Robin starts to cry.
                            LAUREN
                          (concerned)
                  Baby, baby…What's the matter?

                             ROBIN
                       I. . .I left Tom.
                                                              (CONT.)

Figure 1.3. A modern film scene script.

RADIO DRAMA FORMAT

1.	SFX:	CAR TRYING TO START, FINALLY KICKS OVER
2.	BARBARA:	If I can just keep this thing
3.		going…wait…there's lights ahead, thank God for
4.		ghost towns. I hope it isn't a film set.
5.	SFX:	ENGINE DIES, CAR ROLLING ON GRAVEL AS IT
6.		COMES TO A STOP. CAR DOOR OPENS AND
7.		CLOSES -- FOOTSTEPS ON GRAVEL.
8.	BARB:	(HESITANTLY) Anyone home -- hello…hello there.
9.		(TO HERSELF) Why is it when you need a service
10.		station it's always closed? They weren't kidding when
11.		they said it gets dark fast once the sun goes down.
12.		(OUT LOUD) Hey, hello, anyone around.
13.	SFX:	RATTLING OF LOCKED DOOR, HEAVY
14.		FOOTSTEPS GETTING LOUDER
15.	BARB:	(STARTLED) Oh, hello, I'm sorry…you scared me,
16.		(NERVOUSLY) My car quit on me, it just stopped. I
17.		mean, the engine quit. I don't think I'm out of gas, and
18.		it's only a couple months old, I don't know what's
19.		wrong with it.
20.	SFX:	DESERT NIGHT SOUNDS, FOOT STEPS IN
21.		GRAVEL SLOWLY APPROACHING
22:	CAL:	What're you doin' out here? Your ole man in the car ?

Figure 1.4. A typical radio drama script.

When sound arrived, filmscripts became reasonably standardized in a single-column format. In individual portions of the script, scene description, action, movement, dialogue, and the name of the actor were set, each with variations in margins. That made it easy for actors and crew to concentrate on the their parts of the script.

Shortly after the turn of the 20th century, radio became a reality for drama, news, and, of course, commercials. The first radio scripts resembled theater scripts, except instead of describing scenes and action, instructions for sound effects and music cues completed the script. Dialogue was much more detailed since radio drama is, in essence, a series of dialogues with music and sound effects helping to build the imagination factor. Radio's advantage lies in requiring the audience to use its imaginations to fill in the visual gaps. This allows radio drama to achieve complicated effects that, until digital media arrived, were impossible to create in either film or video.

It became obvious early in the days of television that motion picture and radio script formats did not work well for live multiple-camera productions. A type of script developed for audio-video production at about the same time. The two-column format placed both sound and picture elements of the script on their own spaces in the script. This made it easier and more accurate for the cast, crew, and director to isolate the portion of the script critical to each. The left-hand column (at one time the networks NBC and CBS disagreed on the arrangement) now lists all visuals, with camera instructions, camera framing, shot selection, and transitions all entered in capital letters. The right-hand column lists all of the audio, including music, sound effects, and narration or dialogue. All copy to be read by the talent is entered in uppercase and lowercase letters, and all other instructions are in caps. This system developed to make it easier for talent to pick out their copy from all other instructions.

Some newscasters prefer to have their copy entered in all caps under the false belief that caps are easier to read on a prompting device. Readability studies indicate uppercase and lowercase copy on prompters prevents reading errors and helps readers add meaning to their delivery.

Most dramatic video productions are shot single-camera style, and some commercials and documentaries adapted the single-column

DUAL-COLUMN SCRIPT FORMAT

TITLE:	PAGE:
WRITER:	LENGTH:
CLIENT:	DATE:

VIDEO	AUDIO
1. SINGLE-SPACE VIDEO INSTRUCTIONS	1. ANNCR: Audio copy is lined up directly across the page from its matching video.
2. TRIPLE SPACE BETWEEN EACH SHOT	2. Double-space between each line of copy.
3. EACH SHOT MUST BE NUMBERED ON THE SCRIPT	3. The audio column's number must match that of its video.
4. EVERYTHING THE VIEWER IS TO SEE; ALL VISUALS, VIDEO TAPES, CG, CAMERA SHOTS, ARE INCLUDED IN THE LEFT-HAND COLUMN.	4. Everything the viewer hears; narration, music, voices, sound effects, all audio cues are in this column.
5. EVERYTHING ON THE VIDEO SIDE IS TYPED IN UPPERCASE.	5. Everything spoken by the talent is typed in upper and lowercase letters. All instructions in the audio column are typed in UPPERCASE. (FADE UP NAT SOUND)
6. THE TALENT'S NAME STARTS EACH NEW LINE, BUT DOES NOT HAVE TO BE REPEATED IF THE SAME PERSON OR SOUND SOURCE CONTINUES.	6. SAM: Note—the name is in caps, what Sam says is in upper and lowercase.
7. DO NOT SPLIT SHOTS AT BOTTOM OF THE PAGE.	7. Don't split words or thoughts at the end of the line or page. If the story continues to the next page, let the talent know by writing— (MORE)

Figure 1.5. A dual-column video script.

FADE IN:
1.   EXT DARK WINDSWEPT KANSAS PRAIRIE BACK ROAD HIWAY   NITE   1

        A small compact car swirls through the darkness of a moonless Kansas
        night, semi-ominous music mix with sound of the purring motor

                                SALLY
                              (To herself)
                    I'm free, finally free, I'm me, I can be what
                        I want to be, who I want to be, where I
                              Want to be, and when…
            Sally glances out the window.

                                SALLY
                            (A little hesitantly)
                    But it sure is dark out here, what happened
                        to stars are bright out west and where
                              did that moon go.
            SFX: Car motor cuts in and out, sputters a couple times

                                SALLY
                            Well, pardon me.
                        What's wrong with this car
    SFX: The car motor dies completely, only sound of wind and tires rolling on pavement

                                SALLY
                            What's happening
                        What's wrong with this car.
        SFX: car starter grinding, music sting, motor finally kicks over and begins running

                                SALLY
                    If I can just keep this thing going,
                    Wait, there's a light ahead, thank God
                    For ghost town, with or without ghosts.
                                                                        (DISS)

2.   EXT ABANDONED SERVICE STATION IN EMPTY TOWN   NITE   2
            Sally gets out of the car, SFX rattling of locked door and heavy footsteps on gravel

                                SALLY
                              (Nervously)
                        Hello, anyone around   (CONT)

Figure 1.6. A single-column video script.

Ideas about Interactive Script Elements & Format

1. Conventional Script Elements – Same and Similar Elements
    a. Description of scenes and visual elements; acting direction
    b. Transitions – timing
    c. Actor's lines – direction to actors
    d. Description of music, description of sound effects

2. Additional Script Elements – In Support of Interactivity
    a. Representation of the graphics and source
    b. Representation of the text and source
    c. Representation of the links, or branching logic
        i.   where linking or branching to and from
        ii. which answers/choices/actions are "right"
        iii. answer processing, scoring & conditional branching
    d. Representation of the presentation type
        i.   what the video does, and when
        ii. when the text appears
        iii. when the graphics appear
        iv. which sound track when
        v.   nature and location of any feedback
    e. Filename, or DVD chapter/timecode

A Format Used with Interactive CDs and Laserdiscs

```
TITLE:  Checking Passports                                          IMI:01

FROM : JAL01, JAL05, INT07, ORIENT14                               REV:03

VISUAL:  INT - DAY  INTERIOR OF AIPORT IMMIGRATION COUNTERS: POV KUROKAWA, WHO IS IN
THE RED LINE. HE MOVES FORWARD AS THE NEXT POSITION OPENS-HIS HAND PLACES THE PASSPORT ON
THE COUNTER WHEN THE IMMIGRATION OFFICER ASKS FOR IT.

AUDIO : SFX-HOLLOW, ECHOING SOUNDS OF AIRPORT CROWDS, PAGING, JETS TAXING IN THE DISTANCE.

                            IMIGRATION OFFICIAL
                      (DIRECTLY INTO CAMERA LENS; IN ENGLISH)
                        May I see your passport, please?

     POV KUROKAWA: KUROKAWA'S HAND PLACES PASSPORT ON COUNTER WITHIN VIEW, OFFICER
     PICKS IT UP-OPENS IT.

                            IMIGRATION OFFICIAL
                    * Why are you visiting the United states, Mr. . .
                        (PAUSES - LOOKS AT PASSPORT) Kurokawa?

COMPUTER SCREEN                             BRANCH TO:

@TEXT:
    I'm here on business.                   IMI:02
    I'm attending a convention.             IMI:03
    I beg your pardon?                      *IMI:01

 @GRAPHIC: USER-01 (standard user interface and logo)

@JUDGE:  none
@MOTION DVD:  21000-36872
           *36780-36872
@FILE: (left blank means "not applicable")
```

Figure 1.7. An interactive script.

script format. Since many of the writers and directors moved back and forth between shooting film and video productions, it became comfortable to use the same single-column format. The physical appearance of the format followed the same pattern as the film single-column format.

Multimedia, Internet, and Web page scripts have not been formalized in the same way as scripts for other electronic media. Digital scripts take a variety of forms, some borrowing from both motion pictures and video as well as from audio-video script formats. The problem of indicating branching, choices for interaction, and the variety of different media used in one digital production requires a specialized script tailored to the specific production. The script must contain enough information for the producer/director to understand what is required to assemble the segments. The editor must also be instructed on the specifics of chapter assignments, transitions, linking, and other specialized techniques in a digital interactive production.

Script Variations

Today, television writers use both dual-column and single-column script formats, depending on whether the script will be produced as a live multi-camera production or as a single-camera video production. Each studio, station, or production operation may require a specific script format for its own operation. A writer should determine from the client how to format the script. Even with the two basic standard formats, there are many variations. Such variations depend on the size of the production, the budget, the production methods used, and the personal preferences of producers. Such variations also exist in film and audio scripts, but as modifications of the basic format. Interactive script formats have not yet reached a standard format, leaving a great deal of variations in the scripts used today.

Media Differences

Each of the electronic media requires that scripts provide information in different formats to best serve the people using the scripts.

Radio scripts primarily serve the voices, secondarily served the director and, in some cases, a production operator. Therefore, a radio or sound script must accurately and precisely indicate the copy to be read, the music, the effects (if used), and timing factors. The writer must find a way to motivate the listeners so that the listeners visualize what they cannot see; the writer must prod their imaginations to feel what the writer is trying to convey using only sounds. For a writer, it is a daunting challenge, but at the same time, it is an opportunity to control the listeners by engaging their ears.

Filmscripts, like theatrical scripts, provide the basic blueprint of the production. The actors need to know their specific dialogue, and the director needs to have a written form of the overall con-cept that the writer's vision provided in the script. Highly detailed and specific shots and framing are not necessarily required in a film-script. Each key member of the production crew gains an under-standing of the part his or her work will play in the production, but the final decision of specifics rests with the director.

Television and video scripts must balance serving both the aural and visual needs to be met by the script. The script must give the director all of the necessary information, including accurate narra-tion, detailed (depending on the type of script) visuals, and timing information. Whether the script is single-column or dual-column, the same information must be easily read and obvious to the direc-tor. Talent will be most interested in the lines they need to memorize or read. The crew, in addition to their specific instructions from the director, will need to find their technical needs answered in the script. A writer is less responsible for technical matters in video scripts, providing instead general shot and transition descriptions and minimal audio instructions. But the video writer must concentrate on the visual without ignoring sound. A balance must be reached between using the tremendous power of visuals and, at the same time, stimulating the viewer's hearing senses to match, contrast, or supplement the visual experience. The challenge for the visual writer demands that the balance between sight and sound make sense for the production and maximize the power of the medium.

Multimedia scripts must cover the same areas as a video script. If the script is interactive or branched, then additional instruction

needs to be included to meet those needs. The writer working in multimedia must be aware of the technical aspects of the digital medium and must learn to use the wide variety of means to communicate to the audience without overwhelming the audience or misusing those same techniques. The world of digital production offers so many new and yet unexplored shapes, images, and combinations of the electronic media; much will come from writers exploring those avenues yet unexplored.

Basic Writing Skills

Audiences listening to radio, watching television, or viewing a film under normal conditions cannot go back and review what they have just been exposed to if they did not understand the message or were confused by plot changes. Obviously, with modern recording equipment and techniques, a replay is possible with any medium, but the goal of an audience absorbing a story as it unfolds requires that the story be told in as clearly a manner as possible. You should not write in such a muddled manner that the audience must review each section to reach an understanding of the presentation. This is not writing down to the audience, but more importantly, writing at the comprehension level of the audience within the time the audience has to grasp the material presented to it.

In order to write for the audience's comprehension level, you must know your audience. You should not write for yourself or, necessarily, for your own amusement; rather you should target a specific audience. To accomplish this, you must be aware of audience demographic analysis methods, broadcast ratings, market studies, ticket sales analysis, and Internet response analysis.

Reading to Be Heard

Media writing must be written to be read out loud by narrators, actors, and newscasters. Written material that is intended only for the eyes of a reader may be much more complicated than material to be read by a performer. You must write copy to sound as if the person reading the copy is speaking directly to

one or two people, not the possible millions that a single media performance may reach at any one moment. Most media audiences (except for motion picture audiences) are small groups of people gathering in a home, restaurant, or club. Therefore, the copy must be as natural as possible. It is as important to make the copy natural as it is to avoid slang, poor English (even though we too often do not speak our language properly), and sloppy construction.

You may use slang only to develop a character's personality or to depict a specific incident or scene, but not to make the speech appealing to only one segment of the market. As our population becomes more diverse, the tendency to use colloquial speech to appeal to a segment of the population may, at the same time, turn off or annoy a major portion of the rest of the population. Using slang is particularly tempting when the targeted market includes young people who may be using the latest fashionable speech pattern.

The Passive Voice

One major danger of using what appears to be natural speech is the overuse of the passive voice. A verb may be either active—that is, indicating an action of some sort—or passive, using any of the forms of the verb "to be." The verb forms of "to be," including *is, are, was,* and *were,* describe nothing. They simply exist. Any sentence with a passive verb may be improved and carry the story forward if an action verb is substituted for the passive verb.

> "Attitude is a breath of fresh air." This sentence sounds better if an action verb replaces *is,* as in "Attitude provides a breath of fresh air."

Often, a sentence becomes passive because the position of the subject of the sentence and the object of the verb are reversed. Simply writing the sentence as a description of *who does what to whom* automatically changes the sentence from passive to active.

> "Joe was shot in the back by Sam" makes better sense if written "Sam shot Joe in the back."

The subject of the sentence is *Sam,* and the object of the action was *Joe*; therefore, if the sentence is written in a logical order, a listener will understand immediately what the writer says.

If you use a gerund form of a verb (i.e., a verb ending in *-ing*) with a passive verb, or if you attach *have, has,* or *had* unnecessarily to the sentence, that also makes the sentence passive.

> "Sara is graduating from Rice University" is strengthened by changing the gerund *graduating* to *graduates*, so that the sentence reads "Sara graduates from Rice University."
> "The family has arrived for dinner" sounds better without the *has*, reading "The family arrived for dinner."

Matching Subject and Verb

A tricky problem with writing involves matching subject and verb in number (i.e., singular or plural). Matching number in news writing can be tricky because of the number of sentences that include quantities of items and measurements. The verb must match the subject of the sentence, regardless of the position of the subject in relation to the verb. Units of measurements are generally considered as singular. In complex sentences, the subject may be hidden by phrases or clauses. You may prevent this error by writing simpler sentences.

> The *cause* of the multiple wrecks on Highway 10 *has* [not *have*] yet to be determined
> Three thousand tons *is* [not *are*] a lot of coal. [Although *tons* seems to be plural, as a measurement, it is treated as a singular subject.]
> The new telephone company, along with its two subsidiaries, *is* [not *are*] moving to town.

Adjectives and Adverbs

Adjectives and adverbs provide the spice to interesting writing. They modify either nouns or verbs, adding color, definition, and specificity. The problem in media writing is overuse of modifiers to the point of confusing the audience by hiding the important parts of the sentence, the subject, the verb, and the object. Well-placed modifiers add much to the meaning of a sentence, but too many can muddy the meaning. You may misuse modifiers by not being accurate, by overstating facts, or by misleading the listener with an inaccurate degree of intensity.

> The *high* mountain
> The *higher* mountain
> The *highest* mountain
> The river rising *fast*
> The river rising *faster*
> The river rising *fastest*

Pronouns

Pronouns take the place of nouns to avoid repetition and to add some flexibility to a sentence. There are three cases of pronouns: subjective, objective, and possessive. The subjective case (also called the nominative case) is used for the subject of a sentence.

Subjective

> I, you, we, he, she, it

The objective case is used for the object of a verb or the object of a preposition.

Objective

> Me, you, him, her, it, us, them, whom

Possessive pronouns indicate a relationship between at least two objects.

Possessive

My, our, your, his, hers, its, their, mine, ours, yours, theirs

A pronoun must have an antecedent. The antecedent is the noun that the pronoun refers to or replaces. Mismatching the pronoun with its antecedent contributes to most misuse of pronouns. If the antecedent is a subject, then the pronoun must be a subjective pronoun, and if the noun is an object, then the pronoun must be an objective pronoun. The same holds true with possessive pronouns and their matching antecedents. Limiting the use of pronouns avoids mismatched antecedents. Remember, the audience cannot go back and check to see to what or whom the pronoun refers, so repeating the noun avoids confusing the audience.

In another quirk of the English language, *who* generally is subjective and *whom* generally is objective, but there are acceptable violations of that rule.

Like-Sounding Words

When more than one meaning is attached to a word that sounds like another, the sentence must make clear which meaning is intended in that particular sentence.

To, too, two
Their, there, they're
Your, you're

The number *two* seldom causes confusion since the sentence will obviously refer to a quantity of some sort. (e.g., "*Two* horses raced to a close finish in the final race.")

The word *to* serves as a preposition. (e.g., "The house belongs *to* you and me.") *To* also is half of a verb infinitive. (e.g., "*to* run")

Too is an adverb modifying a verb. (e.g., "The coffee was *too* hot to drink.")

Their is a possessive plural pronoun referring to a plural noun and an object. (e.g., "Sue and Sam purchased *their* new home yester-day.")

There has two meanings and uses: an indication of location (e.g., "The book is over *there*.") or an expletive used to start a sentence (e.g., "*There* are twelve stores open late tonight.")

They're is a contraction of *they* and *are*. (e.g., "*They're* going to miss class this afternoon.")

Your is another possessive pronoun. It may be either singular or plural. (e.g., "*Your* iPod is in the knapsack.")

You're is a contraction of *you* and *are*. (e.g., "*You're* going to miss the bus if you don't hurry.")

Prepositions

Prepositions, although small, carry important meaning and accu-racy to a sentence. There are many of them, and their close mean-ings create confusion if not properly used.

> To, for, of, on, above, from, under, at, by, with, until, after, over

Each preposition carries a specific meaning. *Of* is different than *for,* although these are often used incorrectly, as if they offered the same meaning.

The more difficult prepositions to use properly are defined simi-larly but yet are not precisely the same. A writer needs to know the correct meaning so as to use each word properly.

Among and between
Beside and besides
Beneath and below
Because of and due to

In general, many prepositions indicate the location of the object. If the exact location is critical to the story, then the accurate preposition must be used.

Among refers to sharing by more than two people or objects. *Between* specifically refers to one-to-one relationships.

Beside indicates two objects close to each other. *Besides* indicates that an object is in addition to the original object.

Beneath indicates two objects in direct contact, one on top of the other. *Below* simply means one or more objects are in a position lower than the others or are lower in rank than the others.

Because of always refers to one object acting in a manner to cause a change in another. There must be a direct cause-and-effect relationship.

Due to simply explains a change in the condition of an object.

Pronouns used with prepositions always are in the objective case, even if the sentence structure makes it difficult to determine the antecedent's relationship to the preposition.

Punctuation

Punctuation marks help readers deliver the meaning of copy as is intended by you. You use punctuation to tell the reader when to pause; whether a pause is long, short, or medium; when to separate individual thoughts; when to shout; when to ask a question; and when to stop. Writers may find it easy to overuse punctuation. Just as with overused special effects, overused punctuation loses its value and may distort the intended meaning.