

MIPA Video “Best Practices”

Created in a collaborative effort by MIPA Video Advisers

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BROADCAST WRITING

Use short, concise sentences

Use Subject-Verb-Object (active voice) format as much as possible

Avoid the “being” verbs such as “is”, “are”, “was”, “will be”.

Use a conversational tone. Think about how you’d tell the story to your friends.

Contractions are okay!

Use language that applies to your audience while still being professional.

Include all news elements-who, what, where, when, why, and how

Ages

- should be placed in front of the person referenced
- should be written out and hyphenated according to the number rule

Remember your audience isn’t looking at their calendar, so make dates easy to understand.

Use effective transitions into soundbites and video packages

Do not be redundant, and avoid obvious or cliché phrases.

Regarding numbers

- write out one through ten, the rest should be numerical
- write numbers beyond that
- write out “thousand,” “million,” “billion,” and “trillion”
- Write out dollars and cents and hyphenate

Script could be in all caps-that’s how the pros do it.

Soundbites should be put in lower case to show difference

Use a readable font

Write phonetically

- this will help anchors pronounce things properly
- the audience will never see the script anyway

Use hyphenations when each letter of an abbreviation is meant to be stated (ex: N-H-S)

Don’t use hyphens with abbreviations that are meant as acronyms (ex: RAISE reading program)

Don’t use hyphens in scores or team records - write it out instead

Don’t page your audience (ex: “Attention all seniors”)

Don’t say “we” or “us” unless you’re speaking on behalf of your broadcast staff.

CAMERAWORK

Use a tripod if at all possible.

White balance each time the camera position is changed or the lighting itself changes.

Shoot multiple angles/perspectives, such as close-up, medium shot, long shot (to set the scene), worm’s eye view, bird’s eye view, etc.

Watch out for smudges/fingerprints on camera lens.

Avoid noisy backgrounds - this includes both sound and visual activity in the background - unless the ambience adds to the story.

Avoid shooting people in front of walls and/or lockers; if you have no other choice, at least shoot at an angle to the wall so as to add depth to the shot (i.e. “converging lines”).

Be conscious of lighting; this doesn’t mean you have to have professional lighting equipment, but it does mean you don’t put people in front of windows, you position/re-position existing lights to your advantage, you watch out for light contrast, etc.

Fill the frame with your subject matter; don’t be afraid to get close!

Camera moves (e.g. zoom, tilt, pan, dolly/truck) should be smooth. Use them sparingly!

AUDIO

Use an external microphone if at all possible, UNLESS you’re gathering natural sound, in which case the camera’s mic might be sufficient.

If you don’t have an external mic but need to capture good sound, get your camera close so as to minimize any extraneous sounds between the cam and the source. And, be aware of the environment; try to shoot in a quiet(er) setting.

Lavalier/lapel mics are preferred in many situations, including lengthy interviews.

Use a stick/handheld mic for live environment, quick interviews, or when a lavalier mic is not practical.

- The hand/arm should stay out of the frame.
- It is acceptable to have a mic flag in the shot.
- This mic should always be held by the reporter, not the interviewee.

Check audio levels on the camera and on all other pieces of equipment in your production workflow before filming. Make sure there are no low levels, peaks, or extraneous noise.

Use both the camera’s sound meters and your ears to make sure the sound is good before shooting.

Audio levels throughout a video package and show should be consistent.

Regarding music, make sure you know what’s legal to use! Learn about “fair use”.

The music should always be appropriate to the subject at-hand. (e.g. no hip-hop music during a serious news story)

For MIPA’s purposes, if your music source isn’t copyright-free, be prepared to prove you have the legal right to use it.

Voiceovers should be clear, they should be recorded without any background noise, and they should not overshadowed by music.

Re: voiceovers, watch out for the popping of p’s (plosive sounds picked up by a mic when the wind from a person’s breath hits the mic’s diaphragm.)

News stories often sound best when the same microphone is used throughout interviews, stand ups and voiceovers. This gives consistent audio quality, presence and level throughout the video package.

GRAPHICS

They should enhance the overall impact of a story

Graphics should help the audience understand the story or information better.

The message should be simple and limited in content.

Each graphic should be bite-sized chunks that viewers can easily consume.

Graphics should not contain whole sentences.

Graphics can give key information to be used along with the anchor or reporter’s dialogue.

For full-page GFX, start information in the top left-hand corner.

Viewers read graphics from left to right, one line at a time, so that’s how your text should flow.

Think of the order in which your audience should interpret the information and plan accordingly

Lower-Thirds (aka name graphics) are used for names, websites, email addresses, etc. This information should be on the lower third of the screen, hence the name.

Graphics should be grammatically correct and not contain any misspellings.

When creating graphics:

- Keep all text inside the “safe title area”use the safe text area and appropriate margins.
- Be consistent with font choice, size, style.
- Use good contrast (e.g. white letters with black edge/shadow) to improve readability
- Avoid colors that “bleed”, such as reds and greens
- Avoid using boxes or squares that end near the edge of the margins.
 - Place edges well within the safe text area OR have them run off the edge - but decide on one of them.
- Avoid serif fonts
- Scripty/handwriting-type fonts are almost never a good idea.
- No Comic Sans!
- Use thick bold text
- Avoid using thin horizontal lines and thin, delicate text (for example script or handwriting fonts.)
- Avoid overly complex backgrounds, yet don’t use flat fields of a solid color. Try using gradients.

INTERVIEWING

Use the appropriate mic

- handheld mics are most common
- lavalier mics tend to be for longer form, sit-down interviews
- interviewee should never hold the mic
- part of mic (especially with mic flag) can show in the shot, but the interviewer’s hand or arm should NOT be visible
- person talking should be heard at all points
- be careful of background noise

The camera shot

- “Elbows up” or tighter for the shot in almost all cases
- interviewee should be looking at the interviewer, not directly into the camera
- interviewer should rarely, if ever, be on camera with interviewee. They should stand beside the camera, not in front or behind.
- shots should be properly framed without clutter or distractions in the background
- proper headroom
- proper nose room (rule of thirds-interviewee’s eyes should be at upper cross sections, facing inward)
- avoid mug/profile shot

- proper lighting (see camera work for more information)
- watch out for bright light sources (e.g. windows) BEHIND the interviewee
- setting should reflect focus of story, if at all possible
- Coach your interview
 - ease your interviewee(s) into the questions to get the person comfortable
 - coach them through (“don’t worry about the mic”, “forget the camera is here”)
- Questions
 - have them begin saying their name and spell it out loud (this can be used for their lower-third super)
 - interviewer should attempt to ask open-ended questions that evoke responses
 - avoid close-ended questions or confusing questions that evoke one-worded answers (avoid “yes or no” questions)
 - use phrases like *describe*, *explain*, or *tell me* to get people talking
 - avoid asking too much in one question!
 - as an interviewer, make sure you listen to what your subject says
 - let the person talk, and think about any follow-up questions that should be asked
- When selecting interview soundbites:
 - look for emotion and opinion
 - try to keep those bites short.
 - let the reporter supply the facts of the story in a voiceover or stand-up.
 - for multiple sound bites, use b-roll to move back and forth with the interviews and to avoid jump cuts

NEWS REPORTING

Clear news angles/elements dictate the content

You should be free from bias

Tell us the who, what, where, when, why

Answer this question: “So what?” (in other words, why should your audience care?)

The content should be original and free from copyrighted material

Appropriate for intended audience

The best news stories for broadcast usually contain some or all of the following:

- **a reporter introduction** (usually reporter is seen on camera) that establishes a context for the story
- **b-roll** which is meant to visually connect the story with the audience
- **a voice over** that has been carefully scripted and annotates the story at hand (usually intertwined throughout the entire package)
 - ** *In some cases this is replaced with live reporter commentary- but should still be free from bias; it should be evident that reporter is knowledgeable on the live subject and is prepared*
- **interviews** (usually no more than 30 sec. at a time) with clear visual and sound that help clarify the story and add meaning, perhaps human interest to the story
- **graphics** can be used to identify or clarify but should not dramatize or overemphasize
- **reporter out** brings the story back to the studio/anchors. Often a last summary or alludes to future implications of the story.
- Close with your station’s “tag” (ex: “Reporting for WXYZ, I’m Jim Johnson.”)

TALENT APPEARANCE

The production has consistency in dress of their on-air talent. Programs are encouraged to promote a more professional appearance based on standards of broadcast television (shirt and tie, no face piercings visible, short hair, clean-shaven, conservative make-up)

Hair

- Male:
 - well-groomed
 - industry standard is usually shorter
- Female:
 - avoid trends and wild colors
 - most women wear hair down
 - should not overlap eyes/face or impede with microphone

Makeup

- goal is to avoid shine
 - tend to wear it heavier than normal in order to achieve this
- should match with skin tone
- avoid sparkly eye shadow or bronzer

Clothing

- solid colors tend to be best
- avoid bright whites or loud patterns
- cool blues, natural tones and pastels tend to work best
- be conservative
 - tends to be better to dress more formally
 - avoid cleavage or too much skin showing
- pay attention to your background
 - avoid blues with blue background; greens with green screen, etc.
- avoid flashy/trendy accessories and/or jewelry
 - simple, understated accessories tend to be best
 - should not make noise (i.e. bangle bracelets)

TALENT PRESENCE

Talent should display appropriate emotion to fit the story content. By default, anchors should appear positive and lively.

Good eye contact

Posture and gestures are appropriate

Voice (including volume, speed, and clarity) is appropriate

Apparent preparation of information

Good inflection of voice

Appropriate grammar

All information disseminated should be handled with care and respect

Delivery and choice of words is professional

TIPS FOR PRODUCING A SHOW

The primary transition used between cameras is a cut.

Fades are okay from the studio to tape, or from tape to the studio. Other transitions are generally avoided. Avoid crazy wipes.

The show should follow a logical, intuitive sequence of events.

Video packages are an appropriate length to tell the story. This means that they are not unnecessarily long or short- material is edited thoughtfully.

No jump cuts are present.

Editing is fluid and contains no glitches, black image between clips, etc.

Pacing is appropriate and aids in the delivery of the message.

In live production, cuts between anchors in-studio occur at logical points. There is no excessive time before a take to a story package.

Special effects like chromakey and graphics are used appropriately.

Avoid continuity errors such as changes in costume, placement of objects, etc.

Follow the 180-degree rule (crossing vectors) to avoid crossing the axis when filming.

The overall show or presentation should be informative and helpful to the audience

The show should leave the viewer feeling like they have something to take away, whether it be information, emotion, insight, etc.

Special effects do not distract from program’s content

Avoid technical errors.

The viewer shouldn’t have to wish for more, all things should be provided for them with ease

Lighting, props, and set should assist in delivering the message

All elements should work together to give the audience one cohesive look & feel

The show should flow together from segment to segment with appropriate transitions when needed

Nothing should feel haphazard or thrown together at any point

it should be apparent that there is a purpose and intent with each element of the show

Notice anything we should change/add/delete?

Contact MIPA at mipa@msu.edu!

MIPA Video “Best Practices”

Michigan Interscholastic Press Association

On the web at mipamsu.org

