

# *Broadcast Journalism*

by Liz George

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## Liz George:

Liz has been a journalist for over 17 years and has extensive experience in all aspects of reporting both in print and broadcast.

She is probably best known as an anchor and international correspondent for CNN International, where she presented the news for four years, as well as enjoying a stint as a programme presenter on the sailing programme "Mainsail". A chance for her to combine her passion for sailing with her passion for television.

Before joining CNN, Liz worked for the BBC in New York and London for 8 years on both national television news, BBC World Service Television and in radio.

Liz started her career in newspapers, training as a journalist with the Surrey Advertiser on the National Council for the Training of Journalists indenture scheme. She describes herself as an "old school" journalist who is dedicated to the principles of free speech and honest reporting.

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INTRODUCTION:

The principles of truth, honesty and decency lie at the core of every journalist I have ever known – people who have often put their lives at risk in an effort to report the news.

The job you do is important. Knowledge and understanding are fundamental to enabling change and the development of society. And everyone should have the right to free speech!

By seeking out the truth, reporting it honestly and fairly, you are the people who provide access to that knowledge and understanding.

But all this only works if your audience trusts what you are saying, so remember the code of ethics we all strive to achieve and which binds us together:

**BE IMPARTIAL  
BE ACCURATE  
BE FAIR  
PROTECT YOUR INTEGRITY AND INDEPENDENCE  
HAVE A RESPECT FOR PRIVACY  
UPHOLD STANDARDS OF TASTE AND DECENCY  
AND SAFEGUARD THE WELFARE OF CHILDREN**

Being a journalist is a way of life, which for me has been enormously rewarding, exciting, interesting and fun, and I wish you the same.

**ENJOY!**

*Liz George*

## BIG CHALLENGES, BIG REWARDS:

TV and radio are so much a part of our every-day lives that we take them for granted. They are like old friends, a familiar presence, there in the background.

How often do you notice the television on in the corner of the coffee shop? How often do you put the radio on to keep you company when you are at home?

It's this relationship that makes broadcast media so powerful but also presents you with some of your biggest challenges.

Reading a newspaper is a conscious decision with all your attention focused upon the article or news report. With television and radio, you're likely to be chatting or carrying out some other activity, so broadcasters have to compete for your full attention.

As TV and radio journalists the challenge is to report the truth, accurately and impartially in a way that is interesting enough to make your audience take notice.

The reward, if you can meet this challenge, is that your report will have a far larger impact on a wider audience, than any print media.

## REMEMBER THE OFF BUTTON:

The moral code that binds all journalists together and makes it possible for us to do our job is: To report the truth, accurately and fairly in a manner that is impartial and independent from any outside influence.

Don't forget, journalists are not special. The only reason you get access to interview key people or report on events is because you are trusted to convey to the wider population what you have found out, in accordance with this code.

Any journalist who breaks this code, reflects badly on every other journalist and in some cases, particularly in areas of conflict, this can mean life and death.

It is only by upholding these values that you earn trust from the people who are involved in the story and also from your audience.

And, if your audience does not trust you, they won't listen to you. Remember switching you off is as easy as a flick of the finger and very soon you'll just be talking to yourself!

## GETTING STARTED:

A journalist is only as good as their last story, which is why we are all so protective of our contacts and sources. It's essential to nurture and build relationships with people across a wide section of society who can give you a variety of perspectives and keep you in touch with what matters to your audience. But, remember most of your contacts will be interested parties and their information may well be biased, so be prepared to check, check and double check your facts.

### *Where to find your stories:*

*Press Releases, Diary Stories, Planned Events, Press Conferences, Government Reports, Government Press Offices, Politicians, Civil Servants, NGO Press Offices, Newspaper Reports, Newspaper Notices, Advertisements, Atoll and Island Chiefs, Social Clubs, Schools, Youth Groups, Hospitals, Friends, Family, Coffee Shop Chatter, Fishermen, Tradesmen, Farmers, Shop Owners, Market Places, Stock Market Reports, Businesses and of course:*

*Police, Ambulance & Fire Services.*

If you promise to keep a source confidential, honour that promise. Your journalism will suffer if people who give you information on the condition that they remain anonymous are subsequently identified. But beware these promises of anonymity may lead to a conflict with the interests of justice – don't enter into undertakings of confidentiality lightly or without considering the possible consequences.

### TIME'S TIGHT:

In TV & Radio you have a time limit. Trying to pack a whole day's events into, say, a half-hour prime time bulletin means each individual report needs to convey as much information as possible, as concisely as possible. No news report should run longer than 1.5 minutes for TV and 1 minute for radio, unless under exceptional circumstances.

*How many words do you speak in a minute?  
I take 1 second to speak 3 words, so for a 3 minute report  
that's 540 words!*

If you are going to get as much information over to your audience, as a newspaper reporter gets over in their front-page article, you need to make every word count. Thank goodness you've got sound and vision to help!

**MAKING EVERY WORD COUNT:**

Do your research so that you have a depth of understanding about your story.

**WHO?  
WHAT?  
WHEN?  
WHERE?  
HOW?  
WHY?**

Ask yourself; do you *really* know WHO this story is about? Have you got behind the issue to *really* appreciate WHAT is happening and the implications of that WHAT? And importantly, have you got to the crux of WHY? You may find that the answers are not the obvious ones.

*Imagine: A press release lands upon your desk announcing that the staff of one of the holiday resort islands have raised enough money to provide treatment for two children who have Thalasaemia. The money was raised by having collection boxes around the resort, which visitors donated to.*

*Ask yourself: Who is this story about? The staff who raised the money, the visitors who donated the money, the children who received the treatment or other children with Thalasaemia who are not getting treatment?*



By really getting to grips with WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, HOW & WHY you can then decide who you need to interview for your soundbites, what questions you should ask and what pictures or sound you need to gather for your report.

*For example: The holiday resort island is holding a press conference to announce the successful charity collection. This may give you some soundbites from staff at the resort. But think about what else you need in order to turn this into a radio or television report: Pictures of the children who are going to receive the treatment, pictures of children who are not getting treatment, pictures of under resourced hospitals? Soundbites from the families of the children, from overworked doctors, from the Health Ministry?*

**And don't forget check, check and double-check your facts.**

PICTURE THIS:

“A picture is worth a thousand words” ... In television we’re lucky, we can show people what is happening, without having to use up precious words. So make the most of that advantage: write to the pictures, don’t just describe what the viewer is seeing.

*For example: If your video footage shows a child getting a blood transfusion. Don’t write: “this child is getting a blood transfusion”. Instead add more information: “A blood transfusion every 4 to 6 weeks can delay the onset of Thalasaemia” or “blood transfusions to delay the onset of Thalasaemia need special filters that cost US\$ 18 each.”*

Think about how your words can add layers of information to the pictures that are being shown.

**With TV reporting your first thought should be: What pictures can I show?**

AND HEAR THIS:

The same principals apply to sound. If you are hearing the sounds of a hospital, your script need not say “this is a hospital”, instead think about adding more details: Who’s being treated, what they’re being treated for, which hospital?

**With radio reporting your first thought should be: What sound illustrates this story?**

## ACHIEVING BALANCE:

So, you've done your research, you've decided upon your pictures, or sound, and who you are going to interview to get your soundbites. But now you need to ask yourself whether your report is properly balanced.

*Have you got both sides of the argument?  
Do the people giving the soundbites hold equal weight?  
Have you given everyone a fair and equal chance to set out  
their views?  
Have you got someone who is neutral and can bring clarity to  
the arguments?*

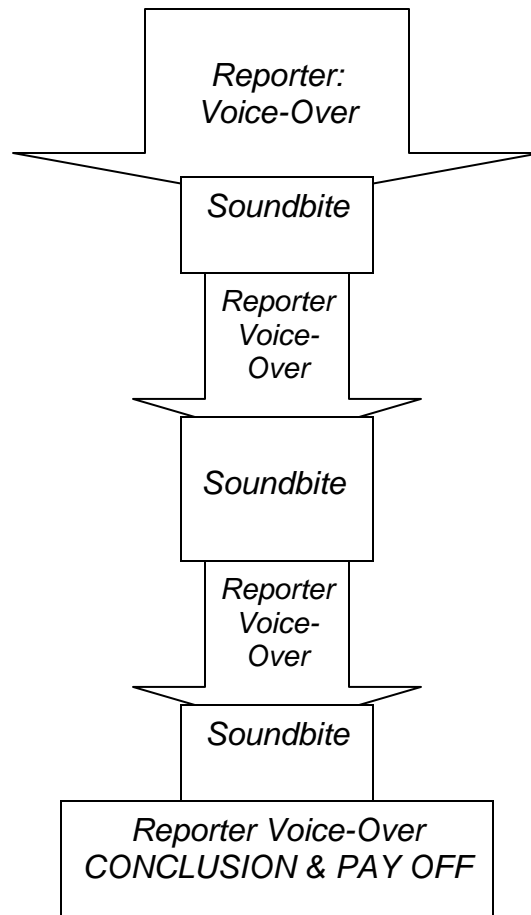
It goes without saying that your own voice-over script should be impartial, open-minded and fair. Your job is to report the facts, not to offer your own view: Be precise with your use of language, avoid exaggeration and be careful not to make value judgments.

## NEWS REPORTS – THE PACKAGE:

For broadcast journalists the most commonly used type of report is a package, so called because you “package” together all the material with a scripted, pre-recorded voice over.

### *Cue/Intro/link:*

*The introduction to your story. Read by the presenter. Short and sharp, this should summarise the main point of your story and grab your audience’s attention.*



TV journalists voice-overs should be covered by pictures: The more dramatic the pictures, the higher they should go in the report. But, don't forget – take time to think about your conclusion too:

Will this be pre-recorded in vision as a “stand-up” or “piece-to-camera” or will you use pictures to make a lasting impact upon your audience?

## NEWS REPORTS – THE INTERVIEW:

Your news editor may decide he or she wants to explore a subject in a little more depth, or that an issue warrants greater explanation or simply that an interview will liven up the news bulletin. But don't think this is your lucky day! Setting up a good interview takes just as much time and effort as producing a package:

You must do your research first: Know exactly what questions you want answered. Don't forget you shouldn't let your interview run much longer than around 1.5 minutes, if the interview is for TV and 1 minute if the interview is for radio – so get to the point ask the searching questions without delay.

To get the most out of an interview, set it up first with a short voice-over that explains the issues and poses the opposite side of the argument. Remember you still need to balance the views being expressed on your airwaves.

*Cue/Intro/link:*

*Read by the presenter. Short and sharp to summarise the main point of your story.*



Interviews can either be conducted live in the studio, or pre-recorded on location. If you pre-record your interview make sure that you capture your questions on tape, for TV reporters with a single camera you might need to record your questions at the end of the interview:

***TV TIP:***

*Make a note of your questions to record at the end of the interview and remember how the camera is positioned; you don't want to cross the line.*

Points to remember when conducting interviews:

Ensure your interviewee is fully briefed on what subject you are going to ask them about.

Give your interviewee a fair chance to set out their answer in full.

Be polite and courteous, your interviewee is more likely to give you better and more forthright answers.

## NEWS REPORTS – THE LIVE

Eyewitness reports from a journalist at the scene are usually conducted live. They bring a sense of urgency and drama to the news, the impression given to your audience is that the news is happening as they listen or watch and that you have the very latest and up-to-date information. Live reports can be used from the scene of a natural disaster or emergency, the scene of a crime, to report on court proceedings or from other situations where cameras and recording equipment are not allowed.

*Looking Lively! Or hints for successful lives.*

*Agree questions beforehand. You don't want to be made to look a fool if your presenter asks you something you don't know.*

*Keep your answers short; a good rule of thumb is to make three points per question (any longer and you'll start to ramble!)*

*Ensure you keep your answers impartial and balanced. Make sure you attribute any information you glean from people on the scene (they may be wrong! – yes, even the officials).*

*And finally,*

***IF IN DOUBT LEAVE IT OUT!***

*In other words, if you don't know the answer, don't make it up.*

## NEWS REPORTS – NEWS IN BRIEF

Shorter and straightforward reports can be handled as a news-in-brief (NIB). These are usually no longer than a minute in length and simply deal with WHO-WHAT-WHEN-WHERE-HOW-WHY.



TOP TIPS:

As broadcast journalists your deadlines are extremely tight – a matter of hours, sometimes minutes to the next bulletin. Despite this pressure, always remember the six Ps:

**Prior Preparation and Planning Prevents a Poor Performance!**

*Things will go wrong in live broadcasting – it's a fact. Don't panic; take a breath and smile (yes even on radio – you can hear when someone is smiling!). It will help to calm you down and it will draw the audience over to your side. Explain the problem, apologise, people are sophisticated in their understanding of broadcasting and move on. It helps to have rehearsed some stock phrases in your bathroom mirror!*

Keep your scripts simple. One thought per sentence, no exaggerated or emotional language, no adjectives, avoid clichés and no jargon.

*Phrases that should never be used!*

*"It remains to be seen..."*  
*"Only time will tell..."*  
*"It's a game of two halves..."*

Finally, we all love our mums, remember she is your audience so re-read your script and ask yourself:

***Will my mum understand this?***

THE LAST WORD:

A very dear colleague and friend of mine always used to remind me:

“This is not heart surgery, we’re not landing an aeroplane ....  
.... So let’s have fun!”