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# THE WRITER

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A WRITER'S WORLD

**BRIAN J. FORD**

*Writing for*

# *Regional Radio and Television*

SOMETHING I discovered, as the producer of the radio programme rejoicing in the improbable title of 'The Gentle Dictators', is that there are many people who have a yen to write and to broadcast. Sadly, they don't manage to go the right way about doing it.

Mothers invariably bombard 'Listen with Mother' with short children's stories; housewives send a profusion of doodled scripts to 'Woman's Hour'; amateur writers pass on no end of short talks to 'Roundabout'. Back come the scripts with an attached note of rejection, and the author and would-be broadcaster sinks back into a cloud of disillusionment and sadly thinks: "Ah, well, it's obviously not for me."

And that is a pity – more so because the demand for really good broadcast scripts is rising steadily, and the supply is none too great. But you won't stand much chance at making money if you go about it this way; with a first-rate script and a topical, interesting subject, then a producer may well buy the idea – but more often than not there are more than enough scripts from his 'regulars' arriving on his desk each day.

But in regional broadcasting there is a different tale to tell. All the regions have their own deviations from the networked programmes on radio and television, and it isn't any too easy to find good material to fill the programme schedule. Here is your best chance of breaking into broadcasting. First, of course, you must be able to write well; the juggling of pet phrases and esoteric words into sentences that have sufficient conciseness to publish won't necessarily make a good script to read – and to prove the point, read this article out loud (slowly, as though it were a script) and though the first three paragraphs have that quality of coherence which adapts well to reading out loud, this last paragraph – which may look sensible enough in the printed form – just doesn't read well.

And why? Because it isn't well written. Jargon, verbosity, flowery phrases and long words for the sake of it, all these are not the hallmark of the clever, intellectual writer that many people imagine. On the contrary, the man who writes letters with sentences containing stiff, meaningless complications like: 'that which we all

desire' and 'notwithstanding' and 'such as may be appropriate' and so on is not showing such clarity of thought he thinks he is. What he displays is the lack of ability to write in an individual style.

As 'rules of thumb', keep a really good beginning and a punchy ending, as we say, uppermost in your mind; keep your sentences shorter than usual, and make the whole piece less formal and more 'chatty'.

Where do you send the material when it has been written? Well, first you must decide on your market. Read 'The Radio Times' and the local TV Weekly and find out where your regional programmes are. Listen to them specially, if you don't already, and write your piece in their style, as far as you can. Note the name of the producer (it will commend your name more to his notice, and they are all pleased to feel that you remembered the name, or took the trouble to find it out). When a 'Director' and a 'Producer' are both mentioned, send your piece to the latter, and simply send the script along saying in an enclosed note: "Since I have often heard your programme, it occurred to me that the enclosed subject might be of general interest to your audience. The topic is of topical importance because of ... and ... and I would like you to consider whether I might add this contribution to the programme on that day," or something brief along those lines. If it is a straight piece - that is, an ordinary talk - then simply head it with the title and then your name, in capitals, with a colon to indicate it is you who would read it. Alternatively you might type 'VOICE:' if someone else was to read it, or VOICE 1:, VOICE 2: if there are more than one.

NARRATOR (in vision):

Television scripts are not, in the final version, typed out like this as there are many more directions and indications on a full camera script.

WOMAN'S VOICE (behind picture)

Fade picture to Woman's Face:

But you should keep the writing to the right-hand-half of the page - like this - and the outline directions on the left-hand-side will give an indication of what kind of scene you see on the screen.

Topical narratives about local events, or short straight commentaries will bring plenty of opportunities, and demands, for your writing.

And fees? Well, they will vary from about three to about six guineas for a short talk of one-and-a-half to five minutes, depending most of all on the audience you reach. But, if you are willing to be patient, to ask for a rehearsal ~~if~~ need be, to watch the local press and act on opportunity, then there is a whole new market for you.