
PACKAGES & REPORTAGE

Bringing interviews to life

Making packages is fun! It's an opportunity to use radio creatively. In contrast to simpler radio formats they add:

- Interest
- Life
- Variety
- Entertainment

Careful editing and clever scripting can allow you to use several voices to cover a lot of information in quite a short time. This is done by having a clear idea of what is to be said, then eliminating repetition and digression.

Conflicting or complementary views can be placed side by side very effectively without digression or argument.

THE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS

The package will probably contain three elements drawn together creatively:

- **Interview** material, or selected clips of an interview.
- **Narration** or links, done normally on location or sometimes in the studio, (though narration is not always needed).
- **Actuality**, sound effects, or other illustration, such as poems, quotations, music, drama etc.

THE IDEA

As with all programming, the aim of the package must be absolutely clear. The idea needs to include more than just the subject, some thought also needs to be given to how it will be treated.

SUBJECT

Subjects can be amazingly varied. You can make a package on virtually any topic. Topics may be prompted by cuttings, press releases, wire services, listeners letters.

ANGLE

For any subject there are likely to be many different areas of interest that could make good reportage, but one package can seldom cover all. You must also decide which "angle" you are going to approach the subject from. This allows you to focus on one aspect of the subject and deal with it well.

THE PLAN

RESEARCH THE SUBJECT

If the programme maker does not understand his or her subject, or is taken by surprise by something that comes out in an interview, the programme will probably suffer as a result.

Research is a task that takes time and skill. Research will dig into the subject, looking for all that has been written or said about it. A good researcher will never be satisfied until he or she has uncovered the real roots of the subject. These will be found in:

- The original documents
- The source of the information
- The eye - witness

- The true expert
- The people involved

Once the research has been done, then it is possible to start considering what material needs to be gathered.

PLAN THE PACKAGE

Content

On the basis of your research decide on what interviews and actuality you might want to record. Think about the setting for the interviews - where and how would it be best to record? Are there things which could be demonstrated? You want to build up a picture in sound only.

'Show', if possible, rather than just describe at a distance:

- If you can test it, then test it
Could you switch it on for me?
- If you can make it work, then work it
Oh yes - just look at all those pretty lights flashing!
- If you can taste it, taste it
Mm smells nice - can I taste it?
- Record both 'it' and the reaction to 'it'
(EATING SOUNDS) Yes! that tastes superb!

Think of your microphone as a video camera – use it to give the wide picture, and also to zoom in on one subject.

Structure and flow

If at all possible choose a visual or 'time' structure. This makes it easier to follow the package logically.

Opening

Look for the most compelling, most suitable opening. Remember, it need not be the chronological beginning.

Links

The term 'links' is generally used to indicate those parts of a package read by the reporter. This can be misleading. The best package is not a series of interviews stuck together with little pieces of narrated speech.

You began by developing an idea - deciding on a specific subject and angle. Now your task to keep that idea alive and well throughout. This is the purpose of your spoken links.

Normally it is this linking speech or narration, flowing around and between the sections, which holds the feature together. Therefore, it must complement the rest of the material. It must:

- lead smoothly from one item to the next
- explain, describe
- draw strings together
- never pre-empt – let the material speak for itself
- always do more than back-announce and introduce speakers
- marshal the facts

Remember, a link by narration is not always necessary; a 'segue' is often more effective. (straight from one item to the next)

Ending

Build up your package to a strong ending, to give it a sense of finality and completeness.

Music

Music is not often used in this type of programming, but in the right place it can be of value. Here are a few thoughts as to where it might be of use:

- Where the type of music will identify the location and the event for the listener
- Where the music will help give an idea of the historical perspective
- Where the programme is about or related to music of some type
- Where a well known lyric will help to make a point

SET UP THE RECORDING

Arrange to meet the people, and make sure you chose the right location as well. You will know over the phone if the person is likely to be of use as an interviewee. Make sure you agree time and place, and that you know how to get there.

WRITE THE CUES

Write your in and out cue material (for the cue sheet) before starting. This will stop you using the cue material as part of the package.

RECORDING

Don't record too much material – you will only regret it later! As a general rule, think in terms of gathering around 8 minutes material for a 3 minute piece.

TRAVELLING

Travelling to and from a recording is useful time. You can think ahead as you journey out. On the way home, the editing process can start.

EDIT IN YOUR HEAD

Edit in your head as you record

- Does this need condensing?
- Or elaborating?
- Is it relevant?
- How will this fit with other material?

RECORD ACTUALITY

Recordings of real settings and surroundings bring a package to life. They allow the listener to picture what is happening, or what is being said. Thereby, the impact is greater. You might record:

- 1) wild track, or general background sounds
- 2) spot or particular individual sounds

Go on – use a cliché – everyone else does! (School bell for a school piece etc...)

If actuality is recorded behind an interview:

- 1) balance carefully the speech against the background
- 2) beware of editing problems, especially against rhythmic sounds such as music

RECORD LINKS

The best pieces often have their links recorded on location. This can make the reporter feel very self conscious, but the results are worth it.

It is often better to use 'oblique' cues, rather than direct questions. And avoid phrases like:-

"Next I spoke to ..."

"... had this to say."

"To find out more ..."

"one of the organisers"

"go along"

- they are over used!

BACK TO BASE

Listen to all the material that you have recorded before editing anything.

Make a note on paper of the questions, the essentials of the answers and their durations.

Judge the material rigourously: good, possible, poor.

Discard any obviously unusable material.

Edit, building section by section. Mix in any actuality or sound effects as needed.

AND FINALLY

Once the programme is finished, prepare it for airing. Make sure that it is accompanied by the cue sheet ready for the presenter who will introduce your package on air.