Unit 39: Scriptwriting for Radio

Unit code: F/600/6670

QCF Level 3: BTEC National

Credit value: 10

Guided learning hours: 60

Aim and purpose

This unit aims to develop learners' skills in writing scripts for a range of factual radio genres and will provide opportunities to research and write scripts for radio programming. It introduces learners to relevant conventions of style, grammar, syntax and genre when writing for radio.

Unit introduction

A large amount of radio broadcasting is scripted before transmission, even when it may seem to listeners to be totally spontaneous. Many different radio genres require the use of pre-written scripts, including continuity announcements, music sequences, speech packages, radio features, magazines, documentaries and discussions. Topics may cover science, lifestyles, health, natural history, business, entertainment, archive material, investigative reports, consumer issues and more. Modern distribution technology means that today radio programming can be accessed by its audiences as podcasts over the internet or as downloads to mobile phones.

The purpose of scripted material is to ensure coverage of all intended content and to meet the requirements of schedules and predetermined timeslots by avoiding overrunning or under-running of radio programmes. The variety of dialogue that is pre-scripted is, perhaps, underestimated, particularly in music sequence production where music track introductions and back-announcements are sometimes scripted centrally and distributed via the internet daily to radio stations, leaving often only a small amount of time in the middle of a link available for the presenter to ad-lib.

Scripts may range in structure from those that are fully written and delivered verbatim, to bullet-point lists of topics to be used as an aide-memoir by a presenter. By definition, though, radio drama, radio news, commercials and speech packages need to be fully scripted, and scripting for those genres is covered in other appropriately titled units.

Learning outcomes

On completion of this unit a learner should:

1   Understand the conventions of scriptwriting for different radio genres

2   Be able to originate and develop different radio scripts using appropriate expressive skills

3   Be able to edit written copy for different contexts and audiences.

Unit content

1 Understand the conventions of scriptwriting for different radio genres

Linguistic conventions: use of reference and allusion; abbreviation; writing numbers; expanding acronyms; syntactic structures; punctuation; formulaic scripts; formal and colloquial language; WAR (warn, advise, repeat); according to genre; phonetic spelling of difficult words

Style: writing for the ear; house styles; standard in- and out-cues; signposting; pre-reading aloud; language style, eg persuasive, relaxing, exciting; aural and literary syntax; natural speech rhythms; tone; register alternative terms; synonyms; layout; continuity links; product packaging

Recognised genres: eg music scripts, documentary programmes, speech packages, live feature material

2 Be able to originate and develop different radio scripts using appropriate expressive skills

Expression: speech (received pronunciation, dialect, slang, regional accents, colloquial English); buzzwords; jargon; politically sensitive terminology; verbal shorthand

Clarity: ambiguity in written English; innuendo; hidden meanings; suggestion; implication; inference

Copy based on original material: continuity script; narrated documentary; feature production; informative items (for magazines or music sequences)

Copy based on existing material: adapting scripts for radio from other media forms (print, internet, television or cinema); genre change of a script within radio conventions (serious or spoof); turning data from other sources into readable script, eg music charts, film ratings

Support copy: continuity links for live broadcasts; trivia scripts for sports reports or similar broadcasts; background for significant events or other commentaries; atmospheric and descriptive writing; sight-readable script

Develop: from original concept to finished scripts; different scripts (differentiation by content, by genre)

3 Be able to edit written copy for different contexts and audiences

Copy: for built items (programmes, packages, features or billboards); cue sheets; promos

Audiences: differentiation by demographic (including age, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic group, geographic location)

Edit: fitness for purpose (censorship, simplification, change of emphasis or approach, conformity with house style, compliance with regulatory requirements in a different timeslot)

Assessment and grading criteria

In order to pass this unit, the evidence that the learner presents for assessment needs to demonstrate that they can meet all the learning outcomes for the unit. The assessment criteria for a pass grade describe the level of achievement required to pass this unit.

Assessment and grading criteria		
To achieve a pass grade the evidence must show that the learner is able to:	To achieve a merit grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass criteria, the learner is able to:	To achieve a distinction grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass and merit criteria, the learner is able to:
P1 describe the conventions of scripts for different radio genres with some appropriate use of subject terminology [IE]	**M1** explain the conventions of scripts for different radio genres with reference to detailed illustrative examples and with generally correct use of subject terminology	**D1** comprehensively explain the conventions of scripts for different radio genres with elucidated examples, and consistently using subject terminology correctly
P2 use scriptwriting skills to produce scripts for different programme forms and audiences, working within appropriate conventions and with some assistance [CT; SM]	**M2** use scriptwriting skills to produce competently written scripts for different programme forms and audiences, showing some imagination and with only occasional assistance	**D2** use scriptwriting skills to produce scripts for different programme forms and audiences, showing creativity and flair and working independently to near-professional standards
P3 edit an existing script for different programme forms and audiences with some assistance. [CT; SM]	**M3** competently edit an existing script for different programme forms and audiences, with only occasional assistance.	**D3** edit to near-professional standards an existing script for different programme forms and audiences working independently to professional expectations.

PLTS: This summary references where applicable, in the square brackets, the elements of the personal, learning and thinking skills applicable in the pass criteria. It identifies opportunities for learners to demonstrate effective application of the referenced elements of the skills.

Key	IE – independent enquirers	RL – reflective learners	SM – self-managers
	CT – creative thinkers	TW – team workers	EP – effective participators

Essential guidance for tutors

Delivery

Dialogue for radio is structured differently on the page to text that is meant for silent reading and a good deal of adaptation is required, for example, to adapt a written newspaper story for reading on radio. Radio dialogue must be written in conversational English rather than the formal styles that are encountered on the pages of novels and newspapers. In fact it may well be difficult or even impossible to read such material aloud. The abridgement and adaptation of published readings for broadcast in reading slots on radio is another area of scripting. Television and film scripts produce their own problems in adaptation for radio, due to the fact that most dialogue that accompanies moving image leaves much of the task of decoding the message to the eye, rather than the ear. Removing the given visual image without providing adequate aural signposting can lead to misinterpretation by the listener.

Learners will initially need to familiarise themselves with factual radio programmes that use a scripted format to create their narrative. Group listening in class to contrasting programmes, while following the pre-written scripts (see *Essential resources*), can form the basis of teaching for learning outcome 1. For example, group listening to a music sequence and a magazine programme could be followed by a class discussion comparing and contrasting the language, pace, structure, grammar and style.

Learning outcome 1 concentrates on the conventions of scriptwriting and it is fair to assume that scriptwriting conventions do differ between radio stations. Conventions will also differ according to whether the script is adapted from existing material or originates from an original idea, whether it is edited to fit a different timeslot or target audience, or adapted from a different medium.

Visits from scriptwriters for comedy programmes and music sequence presenters, workshops analysing the structure of pre-written scripts, and practical script reading work from a range of examples of factual scripts could all focus on the skills required to write and submit scripted material to a producer or commissioner. The difference between a script and an off-air transcript should also be explained. Learners should be encouraged to listen to radio programmes and identify whether the material is pre-scripted or spontaneous. This would embed the ethos of writing for the voice rather than the page and provide motivation for generating evidence for learning outcome 2.

The process of writing factual scripts could be approached from the point of view of adapting an existing published work for radio. Newspaper texts, television and radio magazine programme scripts, factual programme scripts from intelligent speech programmes and other appropriate material could form the basis of the classroom activity for exercises in adaptation, prior to learners creating original material. It is possible to distribute a pre-scripted 30-minute programme to a 'writing team' and, through group work, for each member of the team to adapt part of the script for the desired programme type. Learners could then rehearse, read and read out scripts to peers as part of a presentation, which could be recorded and reviewed. Part of learning outcomes 2 and 3 could be approached in this way.

Having understood the structural implications, the creation of original scripts could be tackled through initial brainstorming sessions. Working in writing groups, each learner could take responsibility for an identified element or series of elements that would contribute to a whole script. For example, in writing groups of five, each learner might contribute two two-minute scenes (at delivery speeds of 180-200 words per minute that equates to 600 to 800 words). Working in writing teams could encourage a cohesive approach to the writing task and develop teamworking skills, while generating individual learner evidence.

Outline learning plan

The outline learning plan has been included in this unit as guidance and can be used in conjunction with the programme of suggested assignments.

The outline learning plan demonstrates one way of planning the teaching and assessment of this unit.

Topics and suggested assignments and activities
Introduction to unit and unit assessment.
Scriptwriting conventions – whole-class lectures and playback of examples.
Assignment 1 – Scriptwriting Conventions Learners are to prepare a briefing for a group of 'new writers' on the conventions of scriptwriting for radio. Learners will: • receive an assignment brief • research different conventions of scriptwriting for radio in different genres and for different contexts • prepare materials for presentation in a form which allows them to be submitted as evidence for assessment • present their findings to their audience of 'new writers' for assessment, including the use of script extracts and/or audio clips • receive assessment feedback and have further opportunities to address grading criteria.
Writing original scripts for radio – whole-class lecture and playback of examples; planning and listening workshop.
Assignment 2 – Writing Original Scripts Learners are each to initiate, plan and research, then write sections of two substantial scripts. Learners will: • receive a brief from a commissioner for an original radio script for a production aimed at a specific audience • allocate sections of the script to individuals • carry out research for the scriptwriting, bearing in mind the requirements of the commission • develop evidence of the research for assessment • write their sections of the script • receive feedback on the submitted scripts.
Editing existing scripts – whole-class lecture and playback of examples of scripts being reworked or adapted for different contexts (including different media).
Assignment 3 – Editing Existing Scripts Learners are to each edit a minimum of two pre-published scripts from different media, adapting each script for a target radio audience different from the original intended audience. Learners will: • identify scripts from other media that could be adapted and edited for different radio audiences and contexts • use techniques of editing and adaptation to develop the new scripts.
Unit learning and assessment review.

Assessment

Evidence for assessment

For this unit, a minimum of four factual scripts or 'part scripts' (depending on programme length) are required. Throughout the unit, scripts are referred to in the plural, in order to focus the attention of the learner on the need to be versatile in responding to a wide variety of briefs that require the production of scripts. For example, two might be original scripts and two might be adapted from a published factual work, from television or print. However, each script should target a different audience demographic, and the adaptations should also target a different audience from the original.

Achievement of outcome 1 requires learners to understand and explain the conventions of scriptwriting. Evidence for achievement of this learning outcome would therefore best be a portfolio of examples with explanations and analyses of the differences between the examples, supported, at the higher levels, by appropriate explanations and justifications for their use.

For some learners, a formal viva voce assessment might be appropriate. When more than one learner in a cohort is assessed in this way, care must be taken to ensure that all learners are asked equivalent questions, and that all are given equal opportunities to expand or clarify their answers. Interviewers must also ensure that questions are not phrased in such a way as to provide or suggest an answer. Formal vivas should be recorded for the purposes of internal and external verification and at least 50 per cent of such assessments must be internally verified.

Two whole scripts or two parts of different whole scripts should form the evidence for achievement of learning outcome 2, one being adapted from another script and the other being originated from first draft through to final copy, with all revisions evidenced.

Evidence for achievement of learning outcome 3 requires two edited part scripts of a different running time to the original script, each targeting audiences different to the original intended audience.

It is important to ensure that, where a full programme script has been prepared by learners working as a group, individual work can be identified. This is best done by dividing the programme into elements or scenes and each learner being given responsibility for one part of it. The finished parts can be revised and edited by different members of the writing group, providing both original writing and revisions are clearly distinguishable.

Application of grading criteria

When applying the grading criteria, tutors should follow the advice given below. Please note that any examples of evidence given here are indicative only. This advice is not exhaustive and the examples need not specifically be included in a learner's work in order for that learner to achieve the exemplified grade.

Pass

To achieve a pass grade, learners must fulfil all the pass criteria. For each of the criteria learners must present evidence that addresses each italicised sub-heading of the content for the learning outcome.

P1: learners will be able to apply, with reasonable success, a small number of codes and a limited range of conventions used in radio scripting for a limited number of scripted programmes that might well all fall within the learner's own prior listening experience. Any description offered will be accurate and relevant and will be covered substantially, though not necessarily completely. Evidence will show a basic understanding of technical terminology but learners will generally be unsure about this vocabulary and will make fairly frequent mistakes when they do use it.

P2: there will be only basic engagement with the use of codes and signposting and there may be errors in the use of appropriate language register and omissions in conveying meaning to the target audience. Accompanying documentation will be limited, in that explanatory notes will be descriptive with little justification of purpose. In terms of the aesthetic or imaginative qualities of their work, learners will not move

beyond the conventional, but the conventions applied will be appropriate to the forms or genres within which they are working.

P3: there will be two scripts edited from an original, each for a different audience and of a different running time. There will be a basic engagement with the relevant codes and signposting. There will be omissions in adapting the language used from the original to the new audience and some errors in maintaining the meaning of the original text.

P2 and P3: learners will need frequent assistance and support, though they will take note of and make use of this help when it is given. If they are in frequent need of such help but fail to make positive use of it, they should not be considered for a pass grade for this unit.

Merit

To achieve a merit grade, learners must achieve all the pass and all the merit grade criteria. For each of the criteria learners must present evidence that addresses each italicised sub-heading of the content for the learning outcome.

M1: learners will be able to apply, with occasional errors or misapprehensions, a good range of codes and conventions used in radio scripting for a variety of scripted programmes across a number of genres, one or more of which will fall outside the learner's prior experience. Learners will be able to talk about these codes and conventions in such a way as to show how or why they are used, or are the way they are. There will be relevant examples given to support what is said, but the learner will not elucidate these examples to show how they illustrate the point they support. Learners will use technical vocabulary for the most part correctly, but may make mistakes or be unsure about usage at times.

M2: there will be evidence of appropriate use of codes and signposting. The language register used will, mostly, be appropriate to the expectations of the target audiences. The documentation will address a range of options open to scriptwriters. The explanatory notes will offer reasoned explanations of the approaches with some justification of purpose. Learners will still be working within recognisable generic conventions, but there will be some imaginative thought behind the work so that the codes and conventions will be employed with some inventiveness. Work will be approached methodically and with adequate preparation, ideas being worked out and presented neatly.

M3: there will be two scripts edited from an original for two different audiences and of different running times. At this grade there will be abundant evidence of appropriate use of codes and signposting in adapting the language used from the original to that required for the new audience, while maintaining the meaning of the original text.

M2 and M3: learners will need occasional support, particularly when dealing with more complex technology or trying to apply more sophisticated techniques. Like the pass grade learner, they will benefit from such support.

Distinction

To achieve a distinction grade, learners must achieve all the pass, all the merit and all the distinction grade criteria. For each of the criteria learners must present evidence that addresses each italicised sub-heading of the content for the learning outcome.

D1: learners will be able to apply, with almost no errors or misapprehensions, the full range of codes and conventions used in radio scripting for a variety of scripted programmes across a number of genres, more than one of which will fall outside the learner's prior experience. There will be a fully detailed explanation of the use of codes and conventions used in radio scriptwriting and supporting examples will be elucidated to show how they support the points being made. Better application of examples, and provision of argument to support points made, plus the higher quality expression, will discriminate between this grade and the merit. Technical vocabulary will be secure and used correctly and confidently at all times.

D2: there will be evidence of near-professional use of codes and signposting (that is to say, scripting skills are beginning to approach the professional standard and bear comparison with it). Language used will be fluent and totally relevant to the target audience. An extensive range of documentation will fully explain in detail the options open to scriptwriters. The accompanying notes will offer fully justified explanations of the approaches taken with detailed and accurate referencing to the scripts. Learners will apply their technical skills not just with imagination but with ingenuity, and codes and conventions will be used with occasionally surprising results.

D3: there will be two scripts edited from an original each for a different audience and of a different running time. Learners will make full use of codes and signposting in adapting the language used from the original for the new audiences and maintaining the meaning of the original text.

D2 and D3: learners will be capable of working autonomously and effectively. The term 'working independently' means that they are able to work on their own initiative, do not need constant support or supervision, give the work their full commitment, work positively and cooperatively with others, and meet deadlines. In other words, they have the kind of self-management skills that would be expected of them in a professional context. Note also that this criterion should not be taken to mean that learners do not seek advice or that they work without discussing things with their tutor, but rather that they are not dependent upon the support of others and that when they take advice they weigh it carefully for themselves.

Programme of suggested assignments

The table below shows a programme of suggested assignments that cover the pass, merit and distinction criteria in the assessment and grading grid. This is for guidance and it is recommended that centres either write their own assignments or adapt any Edexcel assignments to meet local needs and resources.

Criteria covered	Assignment title	Scenario	Assessment method
P1, M1, D1	Assignment 1 – Scriptwriting Conventions	Learners prepare and deliver a briefing for scriptwriters hoping to get their first scripts commissioned for production.	• Collated research data. • Presentation notes and slides. • Presentation (recorded).
P2, M2, D2	Assignment 2 – Writing Original Scripts	Working as part of a scriptwriting team, learners each write a section of two longer scripts.	• All research notes. • Notes on ideas. • Drafts of scripts. • Finished scripts.
P3, M3, D3	Assignment 3 – Editing Existing Scripts	Learners adapt scripts for radio audiences different from the scripts' original intended audiences.	• Portfolio of research, notes, drafts and finished scripts.

Links to National Occupational Standards, other BTEC units, other BTEC qualifications and other relevant units and qualifications

This unit forms part of the BTEC Creative Media Production suite. This unit has particular links with the following units in the BTEC Creative Media Production suite:

Level 2	Level 3
Audio Production	Commercial Production for Radio
Writing for the Creative Media	Factual Programme Production Techniques for Radio
	Music-Based Programming
	News Production for Radio
	Presentation Techniques for Broadcasting
	Radio Drama
	Speech Package Production

There are opportunities to relate work done for this unit to Skillset National Occupational Standards in Radio Content Creation as follows:

RC1   Work effectively in radio

RC3   Research audiences for radio

RC4   Contribute to the creative process in radio

RC5   Originate and develop ideas for radio content

RC6   Undertake research for radio

RC8   Pitch ideas for radio content

RC9   Evaluate ideas for radio content

RC10   Write for radio

RC11   Write for multiplatform use in radio

RC21   Produce speech content for radio

RC24   Produce live radio broadcasts

RC25   Produce radio outside broadcasts

RC26   Produce station branding, radio trails and commercials

RC30   Prepare for and conduct radio interviews

RC31   Comply with the law when working in radio.

Essential resources

Script house styles for specific radio stations and programme types may be sourced from appropriate websites, some of which are listed in the unit. Style guides and genre templates are useful and vary with the form of script and the station. The BBC Writer's Room website is a valuable resource. Transcripts of Radio 4 news output are available daily on the BBC News web page. A range of scripts and transcripts of factual programmes are available on the BBC Transcripts website. Scripts for archive radio programmes are also available from a variety of other websites and a wide range of bound scripts from *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* to *The Goon Show* can be purchased from the BBC or through internet bookstores. Scripts for news magazine programmes may also be available by contacting regional and local radio programme departments.

Examples of factual radio scripts include continuity announcements, trails, teasers, narration, discussion, investigative reporting and archive documentary. Such programmes as *Archive on Four, File on Four* and *Money Box* are often available via the BBC Radio 4 website.

Employer engagement and vocational contexts

Due to the rapid growth of the commercial radio sector in the last 15 years, most centres will be within relatively easy reach of at least one local radio station, and many will have a BBC local station nearby as well. Although normally very busy, many radio professionals will give up some time to visit schools ands colleges or to give a talk and a tour round their facilities. Contact information can usually be found on the stations' websites or in telephone directories, but specialised sites such as www.mediauk.com/radio/can provide useful links. Regional and national stations, by definition, may receive many more requests for such engagement, and may have less scope to accommodate them all.

Skillset, the Sector Skills Council for the creative media sector, has a substantial section of its website dedicated to careers, including job descriptions – www.skillset.org/careers/.

Further general information on work-related learning can be found at the following websites:

- www.aimhighersw.ac.uk/wbl.htm – work-based learning guidance

- www.businesslink.gov.uk – local, regional business links

- www.nebpn.org – National Education and Business Partnership Network

- www.vocationallearning.org.uk – Learning and Skills Network

- www.warwick.ac.uk/wie/cei/ – Centre for Education and Industry, University of Warwick – work experience and workplace learning frameworks.

Indicative reading for learners

Textbooks

Baylis P, Freedman A, Procter N et al – *BTEC Level 3 National Creative Media Production, Student Book* (Pearson, 2010) ISBN 978-1846906725

Baylis P, Freedman A, Procter N et al – *BTEC Level 3 National Creative Media Production, Teaching Resource Pack* (Pearson, 2010) ISBN 978-1846907371

Crisell A – *Understanding Radio, 2nd Edition* (Routledge, 1994) ISBN 978-0415103152

McLeish R – *Radio Production, 5th Edition* (Focal Press, 2005) ISBN 978-0240519722

Starkey G – *Radio in Context* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) ISBN 978-1403900234

Journals

Broadcast

Guardian (media supplement)

The Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast and Audio Media

The Radio Magazine

Websites

www.bbc.co.uk/radio – portal for BBC Radio

www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom – guidance for scriptwriters from the BBC

www.mediauk.com/radio/ – Media UK directory

www.members.madasafish.com/~misterdisco/writersresources.htm#Radio%20Scripts – resources for scriptwriting

www.radioacademy.org – the Radio Academy

www.radiocentre.org/ – trade body for the commercial radio sector

www.radiostudiesnetwork.org.uk/ – academic network

Delivery of personal, learning and thinking skills

The table below identifies the opportunities for personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS) that have been included within the pass assessment criteria of this unit.

Skill	When learners are …
Independent enquirers	identifying questions to answer, planning and carrying out research, analysing and evaluating information, and supporting conclusions when analysing the codes and conventions used in scripts for different genres of radio drama and by different radio stations exploring issues, events or problems from different perspectives when writing a script
Creative thinkers	generating ideas and exploring possibilities when writing radio scripts trying out alternatives or new solutions and adapting ideas as circumstances change when writing a script
Self-managers	working towards goals, showing initiative, commitment and perseverance and organising time and resources when developing a radio script managing their time towards completion of assessments.

Although PLTS are identified within this unit as an inherent part of the assessment criteria, there are further opportunities to develop a range of PLTS through various approaches to teaching and learning.

Skill	When learners are …
Reflective learners	setting goals with success criteria for their development and work and reviewing progress when writing a script evaluating experiences and learning to inform future progress when reviewing radio script work
Team workers	collaborating with others to work towards common goals and providing constructive support and feedback to others when working in a scriptwriting team
Effective participators	presenting a persuasive case for action if producing a radio script with a social polemic.

● Functional Skills – Level 2

Skill	When learners are ...
ICT – Use ICT systems	
Select, interact with and use ICT systems independently for a complex task to meet a variety of needs	presenting evidence of research; preparing scripts
Manage information storage to enable efficient retrieval	
Follow and understand the need for safety and security practices	
ICT – Find and select information	
Select and use a variety of sources of information independently for a complex task	presenting evidence of research; preparing scripts
ICT – Develop, present and communicate information	
Bring together information to suit content and purpose	presenting evidence of research; preparing scripts
Present information in ways that are fit for purpose and audience	
Mathematics	
Understand routine and non-routine problems in a wide range of familiar and unfamiliar contexts and situations	considering timings within scripts
English	
Speaking and listening – make a range of contributions to discussions and make effective presentations in a wide range of contexts	presenting evidence of research; preparing scripts
Reading – compare, select, read and understand texts and use them to gather information, ideas, arguments and opinions	
Writing – write documents, including extended writing pieces, communicating information, ideas and opinions, effectively and persuasively	