

WHY PRODUCTION IS THE HEART AND SOUL OF RADIO!

ABOUT THIS CHAPTER ...

As the producer you are often a presenter, researcher, reporter, journalist and sound engineer all rolled into one! And you make radio happen! This chapter explores:

Live productions

- live radio programmes (as in a morning show with live studio guests, listeners' phone-ins, and music)
- live outside broadcasts (such as a sports commentary)

Producing features

- with no dubbing/editing facilities
- with dubbing and editing facilities

Producing radio dramas

- 'edudramas'
- soap operas

WHY PRODUCTION IS THE HEART AND SOUL OF RADIO!



BRINGING THE COMMUNITY INTO THE RADIO

IS YOUR STATION REALLY IN TUNE WITH YOUR LISTENERS?

At its best, community radio is the voice of the people. It is interactive – it listens to its listenership and acts as a resource centre, information hub and community bridge-builder all rolled into one.

At its worst, it is the voice of one or two presenters; a jukebox blaring out one person's taste in music, or a repetitive talk show, dominated by the same callers vying to hear themselves on radio.

'Bad' stations cannot be interactive because their last telephone bill wasn't paid on time. They cannot call up their interview partners, and in a poor community, who is going to spend their last cent on a phone call waiting in a queue to go on air? They have no field recorder, no cassettes, no microphone, no minidiscs, so they cannot send presenters into the community to gather information, interviews, or chase up local stories.

They take the cheap way out and rely too heavily on a few 'star' presenters. Some hope to get away with dominating the airwaves with a false American accent, a long play list, and a big ego. But to hold a two-hour morning drive show together, you need to prepare, have something of value to say, and have good people skills and hands-on studio knowledge.

drive show

programme that takes place between 07h00 and 09h00 and 16h00 and 18h00 (when people are driving to or from work)

HANDY HINT!

How to recognise if you are an ego-driven presenter!

- Do you remind the listener of your own name every two minutes?
- Do you use slang and jargon and noisy jingles?
- Are you high on noise and low on content?

If so, then you're definitely ego-driven! Practise putting your listeners first, rather than yourself.

THE RADIO AS THE TRUE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

The mission statements of community radios stations all agree on their role to uplift and inform. Many aim for a 60/40 music-to-speech ratio. Much of that speech percentage will be made up of phone-ins and talk shows based on local news, events and stories. That is the strength of community radio.

The world at your fingertips!

Some radio stations clearly recognise the enormous value of production. Unable to produce their own features, they take up free offers from production

houses like ABC Ulwazi, or go online and download features from the World Space or OneWorld websites. Topics are all on human rights, social and environmental issues, and all in English. But just playing them is not enough.

Localising ‘world’ issues

To get as much ‘meat’ from these English-language productions as possible – and not just play them after midnight as airtime-fillers – presenters must make each report relevant to the listeners. First, you need to listen to the features, and translate the introductions or summaries provided. Then use the programmes to trigger discussions and phone-ins, not at midnight of course, but at suitable times during appropriate day-time programmes.

Lack of resources

Some stations struggle to pay the telephone bill. Some don’t have even one field recorder. These problems have to be solved – a fundraising strategy as part of an overall business plan will help make a field recorder and accessories affordable.

FAST FORWARD

For detailed information about resources, see Chapter 4 on page 55 and Chapter 6 on page 88.

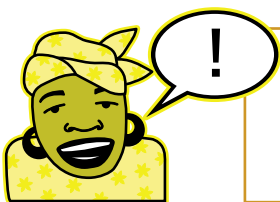
footprint

the reach or extent of a station’s signal

LET’S MAKE IT CLEAR!

Stations need producers to:

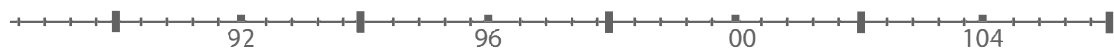
- shake up those familiar stories and put a fresh, less familiar angle on the ones that keep coming up in the community
- open new windows on the world with reports from other communities, other people and cultures, beyond the station’s own narrow footprint.



THINK ABOUT IT!

Apartheid divided our communities into ethnic groups –blacks, Indians, coloureds. If we restrict our community radio programming to our own ethnic group, we do little more than endorse the divisions created by the racists of the apartheid regime.

THE ‘HEART’ OF RADIO – LIVE PRODUCTION



Live radio is what community radio does best – but it’s not as easy as it sounds. Live radio demands self-confidence, fluency, the ability to think on your feet and a cool head to improvise when the machinery gives trouble!

LIVE PROGRAMMES REQUIRE TECHNICAL AND CREATIVE SKILLS

Before you sit down in front of the microphone, you must:

- know how to operate a broadcasting studio with absolute confidence
- know how to handle the switchboard for listeners’ phone-ins
- command good microphone skills for best sound quality
- speak fluently and clearly and in accordance with the station’s style
- have competent interview skills for problem guests and callers

REWIND 

- be able to write good scripts for the ear - see the activities in Chapter 4 on page 55
- be able to write a clear running order and script key words for the links
- know how to segue, cross-fade and time speech over intros to music
- look at the wall clock and work with it, so as not to run over time
- make informed choices about the music and themes for phone-ins, taking into account national events (on Heritage Day, for example, you could play many more local bands).

The seven 'P's of presentation

Don't forget the seven skills of presentation...

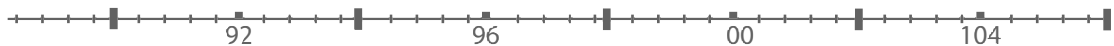
1. **Posture** – Release your lungs by sitting up straight.
2. **Pitch** – Vary your voice; don't keep it on the same tone.
3. **Pace** – Use faster pace for fresh news. Match your pace with the content, and finish the bulletin with a slower pace to signal the end to the listener.
4. **Pause** – Pause when you change subject matter or want to create suspense.
5. **Projection** – Change the volume of your voice for different styles.
6. **Pronunciation** – Beforehand, write down difficult words and show where the stress lies (for example bouquet pronounced bookay).
7. **Personality** – Your style must fit that of the station and the subject.

LIVE OUTSIDE BROADCASTS

Live outside broadcasts require in-depth and up-to-date knowledge of the subject. They demand all the skills of presentation, plus tip-of-your-fingers knowledge (about, for example, the sport that you are commentating on).

HANDY HINT!

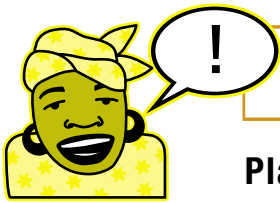
Remember, different sports require different styles! Sport commentating requires that you pace yourself; be it a long slow sport like the Comrades Marathon, or a fast soccer match or horse race. Listen and learn from the masters of the art! And practise!

THE 'SOUL' OF RADIO – PRODUCING FEATURES

Even if you have few or no production facilities, you can still produce a feature! A feature is longer than a news report and is scripted. It tells the story of a particular person or topic and is 'illustrated' with different interviews, ambience and sound effects to create TV in your head – like a sound picture.

PRODUCING A FEATURE

Even with a minimum of facilities – just one recorder and no production studio – it is still possible to produce good, thought-provoking stories. All it takes is a few basic skills and lots of imagination!



THINK ABOUT IT!

What are the ingredients of a feature? What makes a feature different from a news item, a talk show or an interview? Why choose that format for radio?

Planning and research is everything!

- Make a plan around the topic you need to research.
- Draw up a list of who you want to interview and what you want to record.
- Obtain permission from relevant authorities and network with role players.
- Research the topic thoroughly, using local experts, libraries and the Internet.
- When setting up interviews, try to create a balance in those giving opinions – depending on the topic, make sure you get men and women’s views, black and white, old and young.
- Write down key moments that need to be recorded in a step-by-step approach to cover the angle of your story thoroughly and fairly.

Technical preparation

How well you know your field recorder is essential for being a successful producer:

- Read the manual.
- Check the functions.
- Practise on friends and family to get thoroughly familiar with recording and playback, the mic and recording levels.
- Use headphones at all times to hear what is being recorded.
- Play back and listen critically to your recordings.

HANDY HINT!

When you go out with your field recorder, make sure the batteries are still working well and that you won’t run out of cassettes!



ACTIVITY!

As a Nokuphila FM producer, you decide to follow up a story about a school for children with special needs that is causing concern in the community. Parents from private homes think the school is keeping property prices low. They don’t like living near the special-needs school and are worried that their own children are frightened when they see some of the disabilities.

1. Think of two different angles you may want to take on this story.
2. Now list at least four tasks you need to do to prepare.
3. Plan how you can record without editing.

A matter of purpose

Whatever the purpose, your report must have one! By giving your report a purpose, you give it a focus. The purpose is not a pie-in-the-sky idea, but a concrete reason that expresses why you want to make the feature, what you want to achieve, what message you want to put across, and which audience you want to reach. Here are some ideas:

- You may want to emphasise to the parents who are complaining that children living with disabilities need to feel a part of our community, that they also have hopes and fears and feelings.

- Your programme may play the role of bridge-builder and you may want to address all stakeholders and help defuse the situation that has built up since residents started phoning in, complaining to your radio station.
- Your show may be a youth programme urging young volunteers to come forward and help at a school that has few resources.

Proper planning

Spend time planning constructively. You'd need to prepare by:

- fixing a date to visit the school.
- writing a plan – a 'script' – as a guideline, because, having no cutting facilities, you want to be sure that everything you say and record are right the first time.
- placing the items in the order you want to record them.
- timing the items approximately so that you have an idea of their length.

Plan specifically, step by step for edit-free recording success!

LET'S MAKE IT CLEAR!

This is how such a plan could look with approximate timing for each step:

- Enter school yard with description of the location, building and first impressions (0'20).
- Summarise the complaints received by local residents in your phone-ins (0'30).
- SFX of entering school, walking to director's office (0'20). Press PAUSE.
- When ready, release PAUSE and continue.
- Interview director. Quote from Constitution and government white paper on need for special schools and aims of integration into mainstream education where possible (max. 3 mins). Press PAUSE.
- When ready, release PAUSE and continue.
- Move on to woodwork lessons. Record ambience. No comment (0'30).
- Interview woodwork teacher about difficulties facing teachers and learners alike – try to highlight the prejudice of the residents (2'00).
- Press PAUSE to identify fluent speakers among learners.
- When ready, release PAUSE and continue.
- Mic ON. Interview learners (2'00).
- Press PAUSE.
- Outside – move to residents' spokesperson.
- When ready, release PAUSE and continue.
- Mic ON. Introductions and nature of the complaints.
- Challenge their need to complain (4'00 in total).
- Press PAUSE. Ask yourself, Do I have enough material? Add up recorded material. 12'40 approx.
- When ready, release PAUSE and continue.
- Summarise and sign off to time (approx. 2'20).

HANDY HINT!

Although, as a community radio station, you are not under the same time restrictions as mainstream stations, think of the short attention span of your average listener. Fifteen minutes is a good length for a feature!

Writing for radio

Writing for radio is writing for the blind! Your listener cannot see what you see, so you need to:

- use words, adjectives and adverbs, to paint pictures and describe atmosphere
- describe in enough colour and detail what you can see.



CHECKLIST

Here is a **checklist for producing a feature** – and you can do this with just one field recorder! Make sure that you:

- master all the functions of a field recorder
- look around for good stories to tell
- prepare well (research thoroughly and remember to credit your sources)
- write a plan, and stick to it as a guideline (you can improvise around each step, but at least you know what direction you're going!)
- use 'natural' hesitation and pause for thought (but remember that you have no editing facility!).

HANDY HINT!

Press the PAUSE button if you start hesitating too much and, worse still, lose the thread of what you are saying. Regroup your thoughts, play back your recorded material and listen on the headphones, rewind and continue, and record over the fluff.

WORKING WITH A TEAM

Too much work? Then maybe you need a team!

A production team

Producing a feature consists of writing, reading, recording, and sound-engineering skills. On a regular basis, that can mean a lot of work for just one person! It, therefore, makes sense to pool your skills with others and form a production team. That way, you can produce more programmes more effectively.

The aim of a production team

If, for example, you need to fill a regular slot on a community magazine programme, your team needs to meet at least once a week to:

- identify key community issues
- network with NGOs, CBOs, ward committee members and other community builders and involve them in the process of selection of topics and research
- develop themes and radio formats that are guided by each station's own mission statement to uplift and inform their communities
- save time by allocating each person a different field of research or a different production task
- reflect the situation and level of knowledge of each community and aim to raise the general level of awareness in the vernacular
- share the workload of producing regular programmes.

PRODUCING A FEATURE WITH DUBBING AND EDITING FACILITIES!

Modern technology

A modern production studio is usually equipped with:

- a computer and Cool Edit, Pro Tools or Soundscape software
- a mixing desk, amplifier, and monitors
- overhead speakers
- 2 or 3 CD players
- 1 minidisc player
- 1 or 2 cassette decks
- 1 record player (optional extra)
- 1 reel-to-reel (optional extra)
- a library of SFX stored in the computer or in an archive
- a library of CDs and /or records stored in the computer or in an archive
- a wall clock showing seconds
- 2 or 3 microphones
- 2 or 3 swivel chairs on rollers.

Following the script

Sometimes, you may be asked to produce a short feature, or 'package'. This consists of a script with inserts, music and sound effects (SFX). This will all be clearly written down in a script, which you must follow.

The script usually consists of written 'links' and a transcription of all the recorded inserts. These inserts are given to the producer on cassette, together with the sound effects and music, which the producer can use at his/her own discretion.



CHECKLIST

Make sure you do the following:

- Read the script through carefully.
- Correct it, checking the content, time references, ages, etc.
- Time the links and inserts.
- Mark phonetically the pronunciation of difficult words or names.
- Mark those sections or CDs you could cut out if necessary without altering the main message.
- Choose a speaker whose voice fits the subject.
- Listen through the inserts, topping and tailing them.
- Write an introduction, giving the story the angle you need.

top and tail

to trim time from the start and end of a recording

HANDY HINT!

Check that the pages of the script are numbered – correctly – and that the script is clearly formatted for easier reading (use 14-point font size and double-line spacing).

FAST FORWARD

See ABC Ulwazi's website on page 107 for an example of a full script, along with tips on how to put a feature together.

The results of your work

You should now have:

- a product that is ready to play
- a feature voice (links), inserts, sound effects and music mixed in at the appropriate place – like a film on air or a radio picture
- a final script, showing corrections, edits and cuts
- a final mix that has been saved, mastered and clearly labelled on CD or minidisc
- a quality radio sound
- a style of presentation that fits that of your station
- a product that matches what your client asked for!

Last thoughts when working at the computer...

We all know what long hours we sit in front of the computer, so – for your own health – don't forget to follow these helpful guidelines:

1. Your back is very important!

- Don't slouch – sit as if you are driving a car, one hand on the space bar, the other on the mouse.
- Don't sit cross-legged. Lift yourself out of your hips (pelvic floor) and keep your lungs open, your back straight.
- Don't give yourself neck-ache by sitting too close to the screen.
- Use the zoom tool to enlarge and spare your eyesight.
- Turn down the headphones to spare your hearing.
- Don't sit for more than an hour at a time. Get up and stretch.
- Dehydration is a problem. Don't forget to drink at regular intervals – but remember to use a non-spillable bottle in the studio!

2. Speed is very important!

- Don't listen to gaps and pauses – be economical, and place the cursor just before the part you want to edit. Think, listen, cut, delete.
- Always listen to the whole sentence again to check your edit.
- Recognise your icons quickly. Know your editing programme.

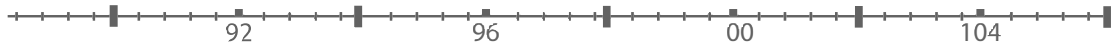
3. Your eyes are very important!

- Use them to recognise the sound wave and thus make digital editing quicker.

4. Your ears are very important!

- Always make your final decision on what you hear.
- Listen to the final result with your eyes shut and ears open, even though the computer offers you the visual representation of sound in 'wave form'.

PRODUCING RADIO DRAMA



Radio drama, with well-defined characters who speak in the vernacular, is a perfect tool for conveying the colour and drama of everyday life, while raising social issues in an entertaining way. In this section, we explore both ‘edudramas’ as well as soap operas.

Why drama?

Because everyone loves a good drama!

In African countries, as in all rural cultures worldwide, there is a strong culture of storytelling. Historic events and local tales are told and retold. This oral tradition still has an important place in South African culture, and radio has been an extension of that. But in urban areas, in particular, traditional storytelling has, to a large degree, been overtaken by an increased interest in entertainment.

The challenge

Arguably, the spoken word is the most effective way of communicating messages. But we need to constantly refresh the way in which we present them. We can communicate important messages in all sorts of ways. Drama is one of the most challenging!

ENTERTAINMENT + EDUCATION = EDUTAINMENT!

People of all ages, income groups and cultures want stories that are packed with humour and drama, portraying modern characters in modern (or even science-fiction) settings. The soap opera provides TV viewers with that every evening. But entertainment blended with education gives you ‘edutainment’. So listen for hidden messages on marriage, divorce, loyalty, careers, health, drug abuse and alcoholism in those soapiers you watch!

Edudrama

In their efforts to tackle the poverty of communities, community leaders saw the value of using community radio drama. Many broadcasters, such as the BBC World service, also recognised that drama – or soaps – were the perfect vehicle for social change.

Radio is more interactive than TV

Even more sophisticated youth who have been exposed to TV all their lives are not put off by educational drama (‘edutainment’) on radio, and may even be stimulated to ask questions and find answers through interactive call-ins.

HANDY HINT!

Remember that entertainment doesn’t have to mean comedy – it means holding the listener’s attention.

The pitfalls of ‘edutainment’ or ‘edudrama’

There is very little opportunity in the community radio sector to produce radio drama as there are so many obvious financial restraints – voice artists, producers, and studio equipment are, for example, very expensive.

Similarly, production houses do not write or produce radio drama for the community radio sector purely for its entertainment value. Radio dramas are usually commissioned and funded by government departments, parastatals, or foreign funders such as UNESCO or the European Union. The aim is to use the combined power of radio and drama as a vehicle for conveying important social messages.

Beware the message-driven script!

The danger of `edudrama´ is that it may become too driven by its messages – oversimplified (too `dumbed down´!) and overladen with repetitive messages that are drummed into a message-weary community. There is a danger of a Eurocentric paternalism, a missionary-like attitude that `aims to enlighten those living in darkness´, to bring `the Gospel to the heathen´, using terms that don't even have an equivalent in the vernacular.

It's a matter of R-E-S-P-E-C-T!

Show your listeners some respect! Listeners in South Africa are used to good storytelling. Dramas that are message-driven will fail if they are not riding on the strength of a good plot. That's why it's called a drama and not a sermon! Bring back an exciting storyline with exciting characters, because radio listeners are too sophisticated to be fobbed off with `in-your-face´ information delivered by stiff characters and set in a poor storyline.

Writing for whom?

Different groups need different messages – no `edudrama´ can be written in a vacuum. A writer should bear in mind what kind of audience he/she is writing for. Are you targeting youth? Women? The unemployed? Children in an urban area? A rural area? A major city?

Pre-evaluation is invaluable!

Before writing a script that is intended to inform and uplift a particular group in the community, it is wise to first find out about that group. A pre-evaluation looks for what gaps need to be filled, what the target audience already knows, what they need to know and how all those involved in that particular field can contribute.

Conduct a pre-evaluation by drawing up a questionnaire for people to answer, either verbally in a vox pops or in writing. The questionnaire should help you to find out what they know and think about the subject. You then need to interview the experts – the NGOs, the media, the clinics, for example. Try to uncover the discrepancies and areas that need addressing.

Research your storyline

Like all fiction and non-fiction writing, your story needs to be well researched. You can build it around actual events gleaned from newspaper reports. Once a storyline has been developed, you can begin to flesh it out with characters and dialogue.

Refreshing old stories

Radio drama can act as an agent for change and development by creating new stories around current issues, as well as breathing new life into old stories that may have been exhausted by too much telling.

HIV/AIDS is a very good example. Many people have become bored by the usual statistical, shock-tactic approach. So this poses a real challenge for producers to come up with a fresh approach for what is a priority subject.

A wild imagination!

Go into the imagination of the listener, where anything is possible! A black security guard outside the bank can fall in love with a white bank teller inside and buy a house together and get married! And all that in a drama aimed at teaching you about banking and personal finances!

Make magic!

Make facts look magical! The effects of the new local government boundaries laid down in the 2000 Municipality Act had to be transmitted to South Africans nationwide. How better to convey factual, dry legal material than via a soap opera in the form of a family living in an informal settlement waking up to their right to participate in government, as portrayed in *Phaphamani Tsohang!*

Opportunities for all!

Radio provides opportunities for many people, especially those living with disabilities. Physically challenged listeners are able to enjoy the world via their radio at home, but they could also be used by the station – as voice artists, for example. When a producer is auditioning for parts in a radio drama, physical attributes don't count – only the voice counts! To give another example, visually impaired people can work as presenters or work as sound engineers. There are plenty of opportunities!

HANDY HINT!

Asked whether she preferred radio or TV, the little girl replied: 'Radio – because the pictures are better!' So, think pictures!

The world of 'sound pictures'

Radio drama is made up of sound pictures. In the theatre, atmosphere is created on stage through lighting, music, sound effects (SFX) or backdrops. But with radio drama, the voices plus a combination of SFX and music must convey the mood. With digital editing, these are usually put in later, so the voice artist needs to imagine the scene and create the mood and set the scene through the voice.

Sound effects (SFX)

Why not create your own SFX! If you can't go out with a field recorder and record SFX, try the following suggestions:

- Use CDs on which every kind of sound effect has already been recorded.
- Imitate animal noises! Bark like a dog, cluck like a chicken, crow like a cockerel...
- Capture the sound of walking through grass by spreading old recording tape on the floor and walk on it.

- Use empty coconut shells for horses' hooves.
- Most importantly, be inventive!

The moods of music

Music helps paint the mood for the listener. Use music as:

- a signature tune that brands the programme
- bridging music that takes listeners from one scene to another
- flashbacks that take us into a dream world
- background music to a scene in a shebeen, at a party, etc.
- ambience to enhance danger, romance, comedy
- an element in the drama – for example, a story about a youth band's rise to fame.

THE SOAP OPERA

What has no beginning or end? A soap opera, of course!

A radio drama series, or 'soap', has an advantage in that it allows the development of several different storylines with many different characters over a period of a few weeks (for example, 26 episodes) in various dramatic settings. But what makes up a soap opera?

- It can go on forever! There are many episodes, but each one has a main storyline and one main message.
- The secondary figures and subplots can take over at any time.
- There is more space for comic relief or creating different kinds of tension and drama.
- There is always a cliffhanger! At the end of each episode, the listener is usually left not knowing which way the story could go – so he/she must tune in again to find out what happens. (Sometimes, the feeling is like hanging onto a cliff until the suspense is lifted the next day!)
- The dénouement – or unravelling of the tension, where the dilemma is finally resolved – and a feeling of satisfaction is what draws the listener and viewer back.



ACTIVITY!

Test your understanding of a soap opera. Watch Isidingo or any other regular local television soap.

- Note down the main story, the two main characters and the main message or theme.
- List the secondary figures and the subplots.
- Think about what techniques are used so that you can follow this episode even if you didn't see the last one. What helps you to understand the story?
- How does the episode end? On a cliffhanger or a dénouement?
- What do you expect from the next episode?

How many of the techniques used in the TV soap can be transferred to a radio soap, given that on radio you can only hear, not see the characters? Certainly there will be more action, sound and dialogue in a radio soap!

A perfect example

Here's a real-life example: the opening scene of *Phaphamani Tsohang!* – a radio soap in the series 'Rebuilding Civil Society'. What elements of 'soap' can you identify?

SCENE 1:

EARLY MORNING AT BIG BOY AND NALEDI'S SHACK.

Present: Naledi and Big Boy.

FX: INSIDE AMBIENCE. A RADIO IS PLAYING GOSPEL. NALEDI IS HUMMING ALONG AS SHE SWEEPS THE FLOOR. DISTANT BACKGROUND SOUNDS OF CHILDREN PLAYING AND DOGS BARKING.

WE HEAR AN AGITATED VOICE SHOUTING AND COMING CLOSER.

1. Big Boy:

OFF- MIKE – COMING CLOSER

Ma, Ma!

FX: BIG BOY FLINGS THE DOOR TO THE SHACK OPEN LOUDLY.

2. Naledi:

What is it BB? O mathiswa ke eng ha kaale?

3. Big Boy:

Oh, Ma, it's terrible. Come quickly, I think the little girl from next door is dead.

4. Naledi:

What? Little Busi? Oh no! Oh no! What's happened?

5. Big Boy:

She was playing with some of her friends by that ditch. She fell in. I think she's drowned. You must hurry. Lock the door and come!

FX: NALEDI GRABS HER KEYS AND THE DOOR TO THE SHACK CLOSES AND IS LOCKED AS THEY LEAVE DURING CUE 6.

TWO PAIRS OF HURRIED FOOTSTEPS ON SAND UNDERLIE THE REST OF THE SCENE.

6. Naledi:

This is awful. Has someone called an ambulance?

7. Big Boy:

Yes, little Siphon ran to the houses to find someone with a 'phone. They're sending an ambulance. But you know what it's like – it will probably take at least an hour.

8. Naledi:

Does Busi's mother know?

9. Big Boy:

Ja – Thandi is already there. Ma, I don't know if Busi is dead or just unconscious. Our Mozambican lekwekere found her.

10. Naledi:

Mang? Ma'Tools? Let's pray he could help her. Oh, we must hurry. Poor Thandi. [Vehemently] And damn that ditch! I knew it would cause problems. It's right where the children play.

HANDY HINT!

Four simple tips for writing a drama script:

- Write a good story about what you know, even from your imagination!
- Invent good characters with distinctive mannerisms and voices. Get into the skin of the characters so you know how they would react and behave in situations.
- Don't write in too many characters. Use no more than six.
- Write the way people talk so that the characters sound natural. Listen to lots of dialogue so that you become aware of how people interact, interrupt, agree, disagree, argue, etc.

HANDY HINT!

- To practise pace and fluency, light a match and then tell your life story in the time it takes the match to burn down to your fingers! Note how you speed up to finish before the match ends and starts burning your fingers.
- Make the most of your situation! No inspired scriptwriters? Then look around you for relevant stories.



ACTIVITY!

Here's a true-life story taken from *Homeless Talk*, a newspaper written by the homeless and sold on the streets. Look at the characters, their dilemma, the advice given. How would you put it together in a three-part drama? Don't forget to think of a catchy title for the drama.

The story

A husband and wife are both HIV-positive but in good health. They are considering having a child especially now that Nevirapine is available. Still, it is a difficult decision and the wife, in particular, is having sleepless nights worrying about it. They seek advice.

The advice-giver is also HIV-positive and points out that even with Nevirapine, there is a 50/50 chance that the baby will be HIV-positive. All babies born HIV-positive only have a 30% chance of living up to the age of five years.

The advice-giver reminds the couple to consider what will happen if either of the parents becomes ill and can no longer care for the child adequately.

The advice-giver has known her own status for years and decided long ago not to have children. This has proved to be the most devastating aspect of being infected.

She suggests that they visit Nkosi's Haven, a child-care centre in their area that looks after HIV/AIDS orphans. This will allow them to see the effects on the child of losing both parents to AIDS. But they can also see a way of bringing joy to the many children orphaned by AIDS by taking one home for visits or on outings. This could fill the void they are experiencing as a childless couple.

dramaturgy

playwriting,
creating a
drama

Listening and learning!

As you listen to the drama, take the time to be critical, positive as well as negative.

- Make notes on any flaws, the music, any bad acting.
- Discuss the dramaturgy. Does it work? Is it funny? Sad?
- Correct the flaws where you can – or learn from your mistakes for your next production.

FEEDBACK

Wouldn't it be nice to know what the listeners think of your product? So, ask for feedback from the stations. Get them to set up focus groups.

Focus groups

Each station can set up a focus group, specifically to listen to and evaluate the success of the drama. The members of the group will be paid a 'motivation' fee to talk about a selection of episodes, what messages came across, whether they could identify with the characters and what relevance, if any, the storyline bears to their own experience.

LET'S MAKE IT CLEAR!

Here is an example of what ABC Ulwazi learnt about their 'edudrama' series, 'Rebuilding Civil Society', when various focus groups listened in to *Phaphamani Tsohang!*

Impact

Stations provide anecdotal evidence that there is impact at the behaviour level too.

There are now people who take responsibility for their lives, they talk more often about HIV/AIDS, they volunteer to distribute condoms and attend workshops or campaigns on HIV/AIDS awareness. The other thing is that people have been requesting the station to help them whenever they experience problems with councillors or council-related issues. This shows that listeners understood the message from the series that they should not be afraid to talk to their councillors.

The listeners were very positive about the series because some have been phoning the station, wanting to know how they can go about starting community projects that can create jobs for the unemployed. Other listeners have been expressing their concern about HIV/AIDS and requesting the radio station to have more programmes that address this issue.

Yes, something changed in our community. Although we have 10 councillors in our region, one of them took part and even came and talked on a talk show about democracy.

I enjoyed the series. It made people talk and raised issues and encouraged people to come out and talk. It deals a lot with local issues. The fact that it was dramatised, people were able to relate to it and it was easy for people to remember and understand; they could refer to the different characters. It shook our councillors. They wonder where we got the information from.

(Source: Rebuilding Civil Society: Democracy in Deed, Series 2/Audience Reception Study, September–October 2002, Nell & Shapiro.)

And now what?

What can you do with the evaluation results? Don't waste what you found out from your focus groups and listeners' clubs. Take into account the criticisms and the praise when you produce your next series.

Now everyone is happy!

- The listeners have been involved in evaluating the content and language, and feel a sense of 'ownership'.
- The radio drama producer can produce programmes that will meet the demands of the community and find listener support.
- The station manager can use the success of the evaluations to attract funding for more educational programming and boost income.
- The marketing manager can use the figures in the evaluation report to convince local and national business advertisers and sponsors that their station's soap opera attracts a loyal listenership, thus guaranteeing them a ready audience for their products and services.



THINK ABOUT IT!

- Good radio means loyal listeners.
- Loyal listeners attract advertisers to buy advertising slots.
- Selling more advertising slots brings more income for the station.
- This is all part of staying on air! And staying on air is, after all, what a community radio station is about!

WRAP UP!

- The producer can bring your community into the station by going out and recording local events and stories. And this can also be done on a shoestring budget – all it takes is one operating field recorder, one microphone, one set of headphones and a good concept.
- Production brings the outside world into radio. You can broaden your station's footprint and your listeners' outlook by translating stories from outside and bringing them to life using local talent, storytellers and drama.
- 'Edudrama' can be produced around issues of direct concern to your listeners, live in the studio without scripts and tailor-made for your community.
- The regularity of radio soaps and good programming is good for business. Your station becomes successful and self-sustainable.

