

## WRITING FOR THE TELEVISION NEWSCAST

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Broadcast News Writing, Reporting, and Producing

The major difference between radio and TV news is, of course, pictures. When you write for television, pictures are always crucial to a story. In radio, you must create pictures in your mind and then find the words to paint those pictures for your audience. In television, you can show the actual pictures.

### **Combining Words and Pictures**

The battle over which are more important in television news – the words or the pictures – is endless. There is no doubt that words are vital and that some broadcast writers use them more effectively than others. Charles Kuralt is an example of a writer whose words rival the pictures for prominence in a story. But even Kuralt would be hard pressed to tell his stories without pictures. His talent lies in his ability to strengthen the pictures with words. Great pictures and great words make great television news.

The beauty of good pictures is that they do not need a lot of words – just some good ones. The challenge for TV writers is to avoid clashes with the video. Do not tell viewers what they are seeing. Instead, support the video by saying what the video does not or cannot reveal. Fill in the blanks, but do not overpower the video. Give your viewers time to savor the pictures.

Such advice assumes that you have good pictures to work with. If you don't, then the words do become crucial because they are needed to prop up the video. But because TV news is not about using poor video, stories with bad pictures are likely to be dropped for more appealing ones unless the messages they convey are too vital to be eliminated completely.

If the pictures are poor, however, you can be sure you'll be asked to tell the story quickly. A frequent criticism of television news is that it relies on the pictures too much, but right or wrong the formula is not likely to change: poor pictures, short stories; good pictures, long stories.

### **Sound Bites**

As in radio, sound bites, the words of newsmakers, are key to telling a good TV news story. An advantage for TV writers is that TV sound bites feature the faces of the newsmakers as well as their voices. Good TV newswriters weave their copy between and around the sound bites, much in the way that radio writers create wraparounds. This combination, called a package, is the best way to tell a news story on television.