

Broadcasting and social science research

Introduction

Social science researchers on occasion argue that, as modes of dissemination, television and radio are largely irrelevant. This argument is advanced on one of the following grounds:

- because the subject matter was not appropriate to radio or television;
- that the broadcasters would not be interested;
- that even if the material was suitable, and the broadcasters willing to transmit it, some still wonder what would be the value in having their material broadcast, indeed it might be positively harmful to their academic credibility.

This last consideration even leads researchers to go so far as to take active steps to hide themselves from the attentions of broadcasters. But in an age of mass media such attitudes have to be confronted, for the health of social science is as dependent upon its public profile as it is on the quality and relevance of its scholarship.

Arguments for engagement

BBC and ITC research consistently demonstrates that television is regarded as both the most used and most trusted source of news and information in Britain today – hence, arguably, the most important medium for the public dissemination of social science research.

Research undertaken by the ESRC has indicated that research findings that receive publicity in the mass media benefit in terms of both recognition and perception among opinion formers and even among fellow academics. In crude number terms, it's worth pointing out that the audience for BBC TV's *Breakfast News* contains more viewers from social classes A and B than are included in the circulations of the *Financial Times*, *The Times* and the *Independent* combined; and Radio Four's *Analysis* programme's audience of 800,000 is higher than the circulation of any broadsheet newspaper.

But there's another important argument as to why social scientists should engage with the broadcasters; and that is that today, television is now the central location for the national debate. A case made powerfully by sociologist Graham Murdock, writing in *Social Scientists Meet the Media*:

"Television occupies a uniquely privileged position in the orchestration of social debate. It is the major site for explorations of the state of the nation and the main public forum for discussions of governmental performance and policy alternatives. Debates centre

around the competition between a range of discourses, each of which offers a distinctive way of talking about and looking at a particular domain of social life or political action.”

And Murdock goes on to argue why social scientists should actively seek engagement with television:

“The stakes in this contest are threefold: visibility – to be seen and heard; legitimacy – to have one’s claims treated as credible, authoritative and worthy of respect; and precedence – to set the agenda and terms of debate.”

Murdock’s arguments for engaging with television and radio can be elaborated thus: television is the most effective way of reaching:

- ‘opinion formers’ (senior executives, civil servants etc);
- the public;
- academic peers.

It is also the most effective way of:

- returning research to respondents;
- raising the profiles of the researcher and his or her institution;
- getting involved in wider public debates; and
- meeting the broader obligations of accountability that are incumbent on publicly funded researchers.

Social science research lends itself well to dissemination by radio and television. This is because social science researchers, unlike their natural science counterparts, do not wander around laboratories in white coats peering into test tubes. Social scientists are engaged with people – specifically, with people in social settings – the very stuff of factual television and radio. Thus there is a mutuality of interest between social science researchers and television and radio producers that is yet to be adequately exploited by academia.

Engagement with the broadcasters

There are a variety of ways in which social science researchers can involve themselves with television and radio; these are broadly divisible into proactive and reactive strategies. The former occur when the researcher seeks to interest a broadcaster in an idea for an item, programme or series; the latter involves the academic being invited to contribute to a programme as an expert commentator. The proactive mode, in which the researcher has the opportunity of setting the programme’s agenda, is the most useful but also the most difficult to negotiate, in that it involves trying to drive the broadcasters on to the social scientist’s terrain. It is far easier for the researcher to come to be seen as a reliable radio or television ‘talking head’.

A survey of LSE academic staff, undertaken in 1998, revealed that 80 out of 130 staff polled received regularly requests for TV or radio interviews – these averaged out to roughly one radio and one television interview request per month. The LSE has a particularly high profile among journalists as the ‘home of social science’ – a profile which is helped by its proximity to central London, its directory of experts and its proactive press office. Nonetheless, there are a variety of ways in which academics in less high-profile institutions can raise their profile with journalists and producers.

The starting point for such interventions is for the academic to get him or herself on to one of the databanks of the various news organisations. This requires the researcher to be known as someone who:

- can be relied upon to be available;
- can deliver an original perspective;
- speaks in accessible language; and
- has a pithy turn of phrase.

There are no ‘golden rules’ for getting oneself into such a position – the most effective route is the Catch 22 one of being someone who has been heard or seen making such a contribution before. However, starting from scratch, there are a number of strategies that can be invoked to capture the attention of broadcast journalists:

- by publicising a book;
- by sending out occasional press releases about research;
- by writing for broadsheet newspapers (not easy) or for the specialist weekly or monthly press;
- by speaking at meetings, seminars etc where journalists are likely to be present;
- by phoning newsdesks or specialist correspondents to offer ‘expert’ comment on a breaking news story;
- by being recommended by a colleague, a subject association, research funder or university press office;
- by participating in a phone-in or studio discussion programme;
- as a result of an entry in a university list of ‘experts’.

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TV and radio news and current affairs

News and current affairs are the areas of programming that tend to make greatest use of social science researchers as expert contributors. National television and radio news bulletins are among the factual programmes that have the largest audience reach – regularly reaching between 6 and 10 million viewers a night.

These programmes have an enormous appetite for 'expert comment', although clearly there are some pitfalls to be aware of when offering a perspective on a breaking news story (these are dealt with in the ESRC's 'Pressing home your findings'). Nonetheless this is a highly effective means of engaging in the national debate.

In giving a comment on a breaking story the academic will probably be part of a 'package', ie one recorded voice amongst others. For national news, the interview might last for five minutes but only one 20-second answer is likely to be used. However, it is worth drawing attention to the 24-hour radio and television news services now available, all of which make much greater use of experts for both packages and studio-based items. Although these channels have relatively small audiences (with the exception of *5Live*), they do provide both an entry point to other outlets and real broadcasting experience. The BBC's *World Service* is also an important outlet for serious speech-based material.

Local television and radio news

One of the easiest ways of breaking into national news or current affairs (and one of the most useful) is via local radio and television stations. Local BBC stations, outside London, have a high speech content and an imperative to feature local stories.

One effective way of gaining experience and getting known is for the academic to contact local radio and television stations and offer to provide a local perspective on a major national or regional story. This local perspective has two aspects. First, the broadcasters favour the expert from the local university – it costs them little and gives a national story a local 'spin'. Second, the canny researcher can often find a local angle for a national story, either because their own research covers the local area or they know someone who can, ie colleagues or local pressure groups who should be more than willing to assist in the gathering of local information.

For local BBC news one can expect virtually the whole of the interview to be broadcast in breakfast, lunch or 'drive-time' local news programmes – in addition

shorter 'cuts' (at around 30 seconds) will be used in the news bulletins throughout the day. Independent radio stations follow the same pattern but tend to run both the interviews and the 'cuts' at shorter length.

(It's worth bearing in mind that local radio stations are also often supplied with news and current affairs items by some central point within their organisation. For example, BBC local radio stations, apart from undertaking their own news gathering, also depend on the BBC's London-based General News Service, which supplies a constant flow of news and current affairs items, frequently tailored to specific station's needs. Thus, for example, it is quite possible for an interviewee to find him or herself in a studio in Broadcasting House in London, undertaking a series of interviews on the same subject, switching from station to station, sometimes with bewildering rapidity.)

In one sense London-based academic researchers have an advantage for, although they cannot play the 'local' card (since London stations tend to see their role as more national), they do have, numerically, more talk-based outlets to exploit. In addition to a BBC local radio station (whose speech content is now increasing) and local commercial music stations, they are also served by two speech-based stations – LBC, a more chat-orientated AM station, and News Direct, a rolling FM news service. Both stations make great use of 'experts' and, along with IRN, commercial radio's national news service, can be contacted at the headquarters of ITN (which can be very convenient if an interview is also being undertaken for ITN's news programmes on channels 3, 4 or 5).

Television news

News bulletins are gargantuan with mammoth appetites. A great deal of air time has to be filled, mostly at short notice. In order to ensure that this happens in as efficient a manner as possible, news organisations have adapted particular routines to ensure that the flow of news and feature material is sufficient to more than fill their slots. Researchers should seek to take advantage of this by making themselves aware of the news production chain, who they are talking to and where, in terms of the overall production process, that person fits in.

Who does what in radio and television news?

In broad terms the broadcast news production process is as follows:

Editor: Has overall responsibility for the output. Usually presides over the morning planning meeting but tends not to be involved in the hour-by-hour decisions later in the day.

Programme or Bulletin Producer/Editor: Responsible for the editorial content of what appears on screen.

Programme Director: In charge of the bulletin on air, ensures the programme runs smoothly.

Chief Sub-Editor: Responsible for ensuring that the written style of the programme is consistent and seeks to ensure the accuracy of stories.

Chief Sub (Video): Assumes similar responsibility for the visual content of the programme.

Planning Editor: Looks ahead to the following day/week/month to ensure that sufficient stories are being commissioned to fill the available airtime.

News/Assignments Editor: Is responsible for ensuring that the stories that have been planned ahead are covered and, in co-operation with the programme editor, ensures that the programme doesn't miss any major breaking stories on the day.

Item Producer: Responsible for organising coverage of a story, directing the film crew and overseeing the editing.

Reporter: Pursues the story, undertakes the research and the interviews, writes and voices the final script.

Current affairs programmes

As useful as it is to appear within a news package as the 'expert' voice, there is much greater value in securing a live or 'as-live' studio interview, and that means being invited on to programmes such as BBC TV's *Newsnight* or *Channel Four News* or their daily radio equivalents, *Today*, *the World at One*, *PM* or *The World Tonight*. This latter programme in particular makes use of large numbers of 'experts' and tends to give them relatively generous amounts of airtime (see 'Engagement with Broadcasters'). However, it is worth bearing in mind that these programmes like to use commentators who meet all the criteria listed previously and therefore are, to some extent, the 'usual suspects'; paradoxically, they also like to develop their own particular coterie of experts as a way of enhancing their particular programme strands.

Local current affairs programmes, on both radio and television, vary enormously. Hence it is difficult to generalise. The best advice, and this applies to all contacts with the media, is to know the product. In other words it can repay handsome dividends to familiarise yourself with the output of your local radio or television programmes. If you are able to offer these outlets something which more or less meets their style of presentation and content it will make the chances of success much greater.

Programme outlets

Television News

BBC – Breakfast, Lunchtime, Six o'clock and Nine o'clock, News 24, BBC World
Other – GMTV, 5News and Sport, ITN Lunchtime, ITN Early Evening, Channel Four News, Channel Five News, ITN Nightly News and ITN World News, ITN News Channel (24 hours), Sky News, Tonight with Trevor McDonald

Radio News

BBC – Radio 4 bulletins on the hour plus 30 minutes at 6 pm and midnight. Radio 5Live, BBC World Service.

Other – Independent Radio News, Sky News Radio

Television Current Affairs

BBC – Breakfast News, Newsnight, Panorama, News 24, BBC World Service

Other – GMTV, The Big Breakfast, Channel Four News, Dispatches, Sixty Minutes, Sky News

Radio Current Affairs

BBC – Radio 4, Today, World at One, PM, World Tonight and World this Weekend. Radio 5Live, World Service Around the Clock

Other – Talk Radio (LBC and News Direct are London stations but both have an appetite for national stories.)

The 'chat-show' circuit

Not every researcher is a 'natural' for such programme formats. Whilst many, arguably most, academics can learn to deliver the essence of their research in a cogent style suitable for television or radio news, the same is not always true of the 'chat-show' format. This is more a medium for the performer – academics who are happier hunched over their keyboards, or engaged in one-to-one conversation, are best advised to avoid this medium.

Breaking into television talk shows is not easy, since these programmes tend to be very much 'celebrity' oriented. Radio is easier, particularly local radio. They are always on the look out for lively local guests for magazine programmes, phone-ins and late-night chat shows. Nothing works as well as a direct approach to a producer – this can be achieved by a simple phone call to the station. It is important that when the researcher makes such a call he or she should have a particular reason for making the call at that particular time – for example, something happening nationally or locally relevant to their research, publication of a book, the holding of a conference and so on.

The process for breaking into national talk shows is slightly more complicated. Direct approaches can be made to the programme producers and, if the researcher has recently appeared on a news or current affairs programme, then that can help. But personal recommendations are even better. Good contacts with local radio stations can pay dividends: it's not unheard for producers on local radio to suggest names of guests to their national broadcasting counterparts.

However, it is important that the researcher ensures that he or she has listened to or watched the show they are about to appear on – for example, if it's the type of show where the host's stock in trade is to humiliate his or her guests, then the academic might be well advised to consider declining invitations to appear. Equally, it might be useful to know that, for example, a particular phone-in attracts a high proportion of elderly listeners.

Radio Talk Shows

BBC – all local radio stations

Radio 5Live – Nicky Campbell and Late Night Live (both Monday to Friday)

Radio 4 – The Exchange (Tuesday afternoon), Any Questions

Independent Radio Network – LBC (London), through most of the day Talk Radio.

Documentary production

Dealing with enquiries from television and radio researchers

A major issue for many social science researchers is establishing how best to deal with phone enquiries from television and radio producers and researchers. Some might specifically want to talk to the academic with a view to their appearing in their programme; but many more are on general 'fishing expeditions' and are looking for help in short-circuiting the research process. The former situation is easy for the academic to deal with – find out as much as possible about the programme and their specific contribution, and then make a decision as to whether or not to participate. It is the latter situation that is so much more problematic for academics.

Many, understandably, resent the demands made on their time by dealing with enquiries from radio and television documentary makers. There can be no fixed rules about how to deal with these situations because, at one extreme, it could be that the academic's research interests are so central to the producer's focus that his or her research forms the centrepiece of the programme; whilst at the other extreme, many academics, having spent a great deal of time talking to the TV or radio researcher, and having provided a great deal of detailed information, perhaps having been interviewed at length, are then disappointed and frustrated to find on transmission that their research, and they, have ended up on the proverbial cutting-room floor.

The best guidance that can be given when the call comes in from the eager television researcher is:

- establish how close the producer's agenda is to your own;
- if there's a gap then it might be appropriate to suggest a colleague;
- if it does fall within your *own* area of interest then fax or e-mail a brief summary of your research (it is useful to keep one available for such situations);
- if there is a follow-up call the academic should indicate how much time they have available;
- if the call takes longer, offer one of three choices – ending the conversation there and then, offering to give an interview on tape, or offering to act as a paid consultant to the programme;
 - always be polite – remember today's enthusiastic researcher is tomorrow's editor of *Panorama* (and anyway bad reputations travel fast).

Radio and television programme commissions

Most academics would prefer broadcasters simply to choose to feature their work as the centrepiece of the programme or series. This is a desirable and not impossible goal, but academics need to be aware that the commissioning process for radio and television programmes, and even for individual programme items, can be every bit as convoluted as that which exists for the commissioning of academic research.

There are three possible routes to securing the commission of a programme or series. The most straightforward way is to interest a broadcaster in adopting a programme or series idea as an in-house production, based on the academic's research. Secondly, intermediaries, such as an independent production company, can be persuaded that the academic's research might form the basis of a programme or series which could be offered to one of the broadcasters, or thirdly the academic can make a direct approach to a broadcast commissioning editor, seeking to persuade him or her of the viability of the research as a basis for a programme proposal. This last procedure is not discussed at length since, in most circumstances, the commissioning editor will direct the researcher towards a production company that already has a track record in the relevant subject area. (In the absence of knowing an appropriate production company this is an effective way of establishing which companies have the confidence of the commissioning editors; it might also provide some guide as to the likelihood of the proposal eventually being commissioned.) Independent television production companies



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tend to be members of Pact – The Producers Alliance for Cinema and Television – which can be contacted on 020 7331 6000.

The key to gaining a commission is very much to 'know the market' – there is little point in pitching a programme idea into a void. The item or programme must fit an existing or planned series, and any proposal for new series must be in line with the culture and context of the channel. Commissioning editors often tell producers that they have no shortage of good ideas – the shortage is having ideas that fit the programming slots that they, and the schedulers, have calculated are likely to draw the largest possible audience to the scheduled slots.

This entails the would-be programme maker watching television, listening to the radio and monitoring broadcasters' forward planning through the trade press and the Internet. It is a complicated process and hence the general advice is that it is best to seek an intermediary – either a producer, a production company or a specialist adviser. Such intermediaries can also be of assistance on a range of other issues which may arise, such as editorial control, the academic's specific role in the production, production credits, fees, rights and so on. (These are covered later in this chapter.)

Subject matter – television

This is a difficult area about which to generalise. Perhaps the easiest way of dealing with it is to take a typical week of terrestrial broadcasting in the year 2000, with an indication of the type of programming (other than news and current affairs) that might be appropriate vehicles for social science research. (It is worth noting the fact that had this chapter been written two years ago, before the terrestrial channels changed their profiles, some would say 'dumbed down', the number of potential outlets for social science research would have been far greater.) However, what follows is no more than a snapshot – series come and go, so there are series and programmes which just happen not to be running in the particular week under review.

The available outlets can be broadly broken down into the following categories:

Multi-subject general series – Panorama (BBC1), Dispatches (C4), Cutting Edge (C4), Modern Times (BBC2), Heart of the Matter (BBC1)

Themed series – Docu-soaps (sex and relationships are currently tending to dominate this category across all channels)

Business – The Money Programme (BBC2), Working Lunch (BBC2)

Politics – On the Record (BBC1), Powerhouse (C4)

History – Timewatch (BBC2)

Nature/environment – Countryfile (BBC1), Green and Pleasant Land (C4)

Disabilities – Sign On (C4), Deaf Century (C4)

Ethnicity – Asia2 (BBC2)

Education – Learning Zone (BBC2)

The Education Zone, which includes BBC programmes for both schools, adults and the Open University, is a major commissioning area for social science research. However, commissioners in this area tend to follow established school and other curricula and are therefore looking for specific researchers to cover specific areas (the same is true of Channel 4's schools programming). Hence, new research is less likely to be of interest than expertise in areas of knowledge that form the current curricula.

The commissioning process

This is much the same for radio and television, though there are some minor differences between the various channels. Broadly speaking, most radio and TV channels invite proposals in the autumn, usually based on an outline list of series they are planning to transmit 12 to 18 months in advance, hence it is sensible to start thinking about this process perhaps two years before the research programme actually concludes. The more established producers will undertake only a relatively limited amount of research for these first bids, since most channels undertake a short-listing process (less well-established companies usually undertake more early research). The short-listing stage, when more details are required, usually takes place in the spring and commissions are finally agreed in the early summer, for transmission the following year.

Programme/series content

In general what producers or commissioners are looking for are:

Ideas that fit existing slots: This is to labour the point made previously, but it cannot be overstressed. Broadcasters operate within schedules and the job of commissioners is to find programmes that fit these schedules. This does not mean that a series idea that did not, for example, involve sex has no chance of currently being commissioned; but it does recognise the fact that, as in all things, there are fashions in programme commissioning.

Ideas that offer exclusive access or exclusive stories: Commissioners are very keen to trumpet 'firsts'. Getting access to areas of UK life that have so far been denied to the cameras is one thing that is always welcomed; the other is offering commissioners programmes that are news stories in themselves and lend themselves to promotional lines such as: "Tonight we reveal..."

Ideas that are salient: However, there is a journalistic sleight of hand which means that whilst broadcasters like to believe they are running ahead of the pack, they also like to make sure that neither is the pack too far behind. In other words, ideas that relate to current issues and concerns, ie ones that have high salience, are easier to 'sell' than those that don't.

Ideas that challenge existing notions: To compound the conundrum, producers are very keen on ideas that appear to challenge existing preconceptions. This gives the programme, or series, that elusive quality of 'newness'; it provides a rationale (and narrative) for the programme and, hopefully, gains publicity for the programme or series.

Media coverage: All this adds up to the fact that broadcasters are hungry for publicity; the incestuousness of the media is a function of both of fragile egos and economic necessity (publicity being the lifeblood of television). Commissioners are avid readers of the daily cuttings that circulate around their offices – any mentions of programmes that they have commissioned are eagerly devoured. Mentions in the news pages, and even better the editorial columns, are veritable feasts. Canny producers and researchers can hasten the chances of their programme being noticed by writing linked articles in the press to coincide with transmission.

Good visual content: This is to state the obvious – it is obviously vital for television production and it is perhaps not as difficult for social researchers as might first appear. Much social science research is about processes and procedures, rather than events. However, utilising contacts made during the research process can be a useful way of securing access to companies, schools or wherever. Care has to be taken in these negotiations, but they can make the difference between gaining a commission or not. In addition, there are other visual devices available that can lift the visual content of an 'ideas' programme, apart from any actual visual sequences that are central to the research. These devices include unusual interview locations, actor reconstructions (always identified on screen), computer graphics and archive material.

'People' involvement: Almost more important than strong visual locations is providing 'people' content for the programme. This is always a difficult area, given that researchers usually give undertakings of confidentiality to their respondents. Conversely, television and radio producers' first question is almost invariably 'can you supply the bodies'. There are ways round this problem – the most successful being to seek the co-operation of related campaigning organisations which usually have access to members and supporters who are only too happy to participate in publicising their cause (care has to be taken in ensuring that the programme does not imply that the programme participants themselves were the actual subjects of the research).

Strong 'talking heads': This notion applies to the participants, as discussed above, and to all the other 'experts' involved in the programme. It is not feasible to discuss in full what makes a good 'talking head' – although some tips and suggestions are to be found at the end of this chapter.

Narrative content: We live in a narrative – story-telling – culture and hence producers respond positively to programme proposals that appear to have the structure of a finished programme embedded within. A research programme that, for example, looked at the impact on miners' wives of the miners' strike in the early 1980s would lend itself to a fairly clear narrative chronology. Even where research projects are not

chronologically ordered it is still possible to conceptualise them as containing some sort of narrative structure.

Linked support material: Both the BBC and Channel 4 are keen to extend their information function beyond the simple act of watching television. Hence programme and series proposals that contain suggestions for further material – available either in printed form, on the Internet or via an advice line – are always welcome and can enhance the chances of acceptance.

The process of TV production

Given that there is a certain mystique about the nature of the television production process it might be helpful to set out that process, and indicate at what points intervention by the researcher are appropriate (assuming that the researcher can lay some claim to having originated the programme or series idea, rather than having been consulted by a producer who was already working on the project).

Pre-commissioning

Idea/story: This is the crucial stage of intervention when the academic* approaches the producer with the idea.

Preliminary research: This is a phase of joint working when the producer and/or his or her researcher work with the academic in establishing the broad shape of the proposal.

Outline budget: This is mainly the responsibility of the producer.

Proposal/treatment: Writing treatments is a specialist function that is best undertaken by the producer; however, the academic should be involved in the process and certainly have approval of it before it is submitted.

Pre-production

Research: Research for a television (or radio) programme is different from its academic namesake – it's far more about finding interviewees, locations and examples than undergoing a detailed process of discovery.

Recce: The 'recce', or reconnoitre, might involve perhaps accompanying the TV researcher in order to make introductions and smooth paths.

Structuring: This is the document which sets out the overall shape of the programme – writing it is again a specialist function for the producer, but one which the academic could expect to be consulted about.

Budget: The producer's responsibility.

Draft script: The final version is down to the producer but the academic should be consulted and involved.

Production planning: The producer's responsibility.

Storyboarding: The producer's responsibility (this involves the detailed mapping of how particular sequences are to be shot).

Shooting script: The producer's responsibility (the guide to how the production is to be undertaken).

Production

This is the on-site filming and involves the academic to the extent that they are involved in the final production as a 'talking head'. At most other times during production the wise social science researcher seeks to avoid being too closely involved.

Post-production

Logging: The producer's responsibility (involves making a detailed list of everything that has been shot).

Restructuring: The producer's responsibility, but it should involve some discussion with the academic, in which the programme might be restructured in the light of what people have said on camera and how the sequences have unfolded.

Paper edit: The producer's responsibility (the process of mapping out what the final edit might look like).

Scripting: The producer's responsibility but, as with restructuring, discussion and consultation should take place with the academic.

Off-line editing: This is a rough cut version of the programme and the academic should ask if he or she can have a viewing, since it is at this stage that major changes can still be made.

Re-scripting: In the light of the rough cut scripts usually need adjusting, and the academic should be consulted about any major changes.

Preliminary audio dub: The producer's responsibility.

Final scripting: If there are any major changes the academic should be consulted.

On-line edit: This is the final cut, and whilst the academic might find it interesting to observe the process this is very much the producer's domain.

Audio dubbing: The same applies to this process.

Transmission

At this point there's not much that the academic can do other than cross his or her fingers – although some thought should be given to securing possible accompanying publicity.

* The term academic rather than researcher is used here to avoid confusion with programme researchers.

Who does what in TV and radio documentary production?

Commissioning Editor: Employed by a broadcaster and is responsible for commissioning programmes, either for an entire channel or, more likely, a particular range of programmes. The following are employed either by a department of a broadcast channel or by an independent producer.

Executive Producer: Responsible for ensuring that the programme is delivered on budget and on time and that the department or production company's good name is preserved.

Series Producer or Editor: Has overall editorial control of a series. He or she will delegate work on individual programmes to producers but the coherence of the whole project is the responsibility of the series editor.

Producer: In overall charge of the programme, particularly in terms of content, but also has responsibility if the programme is delivered in a form that does not satisfy the commissioning editor.

Director: (sometimes combined with role of producer) Responsible for the sound and look of the programme. She/he directs the camera crew on location and the editor in post-production.

Associate Producer: A slightly nebulous title given to someone who has played a significant role in the production process (ie more than an assistant producer or researcher) but has not undertaken a specific role. An academic whose work has been central to a programme or series, and has undertaken further work for the programme, can reasonably request an associate producer credit.

Assistant Producer: The person who assists the producer, which can mean anything from making the tea to taking responsibility for whole segments of the programme.

Scriptwriter: The role often undertaken by the producer and/or researcher, although on occasion a specialist scriptwriter can be brought in.

Researcher: Depending on the programme, the researcher's role can be a fairly junior, on the other hand, in the production of, say, a historical series, it can be very senior. As mentioned earlier, TV and radio research is not the same as academic research, although it has been known for academics to be given a 'researcher' programme credit.

Film Researcher: A specialist who is familiar with archive work and spends his or her time trawling through film libraries looking for material.

Consultant: This is the most usual title that academics contributing to programmes or series are credited with. There are no specific job descriptions of consultants, although it is important to establish if one is to receive a series or programme consultant credit.

Terms and conditions

There are a number of ways in which academics can be paid for their work in connection with the production of a radio or television series (and it's worth pointing out that the latter medium has far more money available than the former).

First, by being given a one-off fee for proposing an idea – this is only usually paid if the idea is adopted. Second, a one-off fee can be negotiated for interviews and any other front-of-camera work, such as presenting. Third, payment can be sought for specific programme roles, whether it be as an associate producer, consultant or whatever. Finally, a share of the production fee can be requested. However, this would be unusual. The production fee is the production company's profit, paid at the conclusion of the process. (Obviously this last option does not occur if one is working directly for a broadcaster.)

Fees are mostly negotiable, depending on the size of the contribution. With news and current affairs interviews fees are not normally offered but are usually paid if requested. The standard BBC fee can be as low as £30; other interview fees can be up to £100. The basic rule is 'if you don't ask you won't get'. Fees for research and consultancy work are subject to individual negotiation. As a rough rule of thumb it's worth bearing in mind that a television or radio researcher is likely to be on as little as £80 to £100 per day (perhaps rising to £150) – there are no massive fortunes waiting to be made in broadcasting.

Copyright is always a difficult area and never more so than in the context of TV and radio programme proposals. Ideas cannot be copyrighted and therefore programme proposals, and even research findings, are immediately in the public domain; nor can the content of interviews be copyrighted. Hence, the best guidance for academics is to try and ensure that there is a relationship of mutual trust between them and the TV or radio organisations with which they are working.



“In many ways what is perhaps most surprising is not how much radio differs from television but in fact how similar it is.”

Radio

Much of the above applies equally to radio as well as television. However, the opportunities to contribute to radio programmes and series, whilst limited to the BBC, tend to be greater. Taking one week in the year 2000 as looked at earlier, and excepting news and current affairs, one comes across the following array of possible outlets:

BBC Radio 4:

- The Moral Maze – moral dilemmas
- Broadcasting House – news-based chat
- Law in Action – law
- All in the Mind – psychology
- The Westminster Hour – politics
- Analysis – social policy
- Start the Week – general conversation (book linked)
- Women's Hour – general features
- You and Yours – consumer and social security issues
- The Food Programme
- Turning World – issues from abroad
- So Near Yet So Far – UK society compared with Europe
- Shop Talk – business, money and technology
- Case Notes – health-related issues
- Thinking Allowed – social policy
- Days that Shook the World – history
- The Message – media

There is also a wide range of programmes produced by the BBC *World Service* which make use of social science research; it's worth drawing attention to one series in particular – *The Way We Are* – a weekly magazine programme specifically devoted to covering UK social science research for an international audience.

In many ways, what is perhaps most surprising is not how much radio differs from television but in fact how similar it is. Among the criteria listed above for attracting interest, perhaps the only real difference between television and radio is, perhaps rather obviously, that the material doesn't need to be visual – yet, paradoxically, it does. Radio programmes, in order to be listened to, require variations in tone and texture. In other words, a long series of talking heads, linked by a commentary, are not enough. Radio producers have to find actuality – sound effects, interviewees in unusual sound locations, archive material, music, poetry etc. Thus, in many ways, thinking visually is as useful for radio as it is for television.

The production process for radio has fewer stages and it tends not to last as long as in television, but the commissioning process can be as protracted. Independent radio production companies are generally members of the trade association 'Radio', which can be reached on 020 7428 0541.

Academic's survival kit

Whether working in radio or television, in reactive or proactive mode, the key to emerging from the process not just unscathed, but with the feeling that it has been worthwhile, lies in the quality of the relationship with the production team. That relationship should be one of collaborative equals.

The producers have something the academic wants – access to a mass audience – and the academic has something they want – expertise. The academic should seek to be as friendly and helpful as possible, whilst at the same time ensuring that their professional and personal standings are respected. It's a difficult line to draw between being treated as an equal and being seen as 'difficult', but it is worth getting it right. This requires setting out clearly, in advance of production, the academic's role and time commitments. If these are exceeded, marginally, it is perhaps no more than a minor inconvenience, but

if these commitments are extended significantly then a renegotiation of programme credits and fees would be appropriate. But it needs to be borne in mind that these negotiations should be held with the right person – the researcher might be the main point of contact but it's the producer and executive producer who are responsible for these type of issues.

The performance

Giving advice as to how to make the best possible use of broadcast interviews is best done in face-to-face training sessions. However, a great deal of nonsense is often talked during such sessions. 'Research' is often quoted claiming to show that the 'impression' television interviewees make on their audiences can be broken down by percentages – a certain percentage is attributed to appearance, another percentage to the voice of the interviewee and then finally a tiny percentage is based on content. Such 'research' should be treated with scepticism. However, the basic message – that television (more so than radio) is a highly impressionistic medium and that it is the impression made by interviewees, rather than the content of interview, that tends to stay with the viewer – is a useful observation. But that does not mean that content doesn't matter. In fact content is the single most important factor in contributing to a positive impression. This is not just because of the content itself, which does play a role in forming the viewer's overall impression, but because if the interviewee is responding well, providing pithy and relevant answers in plain language, his or her own confidence will rise and hence the way she/he looks and speaks will leave the audience (and the producers) with a highly favourable impression.

That said, here follows some general tips and guidelines that are worth bearing in mind prior to undertaking radio and television interviews.

Television interviews

- You are talking to people in their living rooms, sitting rooms, kitchens, – you have to grab their attention.
- Know why you are there. What is the reason that you have decided to do the interview, what is the message or messages you are trying to get across?
- Ask yourself 'Am I the best person to give this interview?'. It might be that a colleague is better placed.
- We see people before we hear them; remember your appearance is crucial.
- Do not allow your clothes to distract. Television cannot cope with busy patterns, bright colours, blacks or whites. Dress appropriately.
- Always check the context of your interview. How long will it be? What other items will form part of the package and so on.

“The producers have something the academic wants – access to a mass audience – and the academic has something they want – expertise.”



- Once you are in the studio, or for that matter in front of the camera, you are performing. Never let the camera catch you unawares, assume that a shot will be cut to you before the interviewer starts to introduce you. Take your cue to leave the interview set from the interviewer.
- Language is crucial. Avoid jargon (make a note of your own professional language and then find an 'English' equivalent).
- Wherever possible use examples and pictures; try to avoid statistics. If you must, use numbers and fractions not percentages, as they are more easily grasped.
- Always challenge assumptions in questions that you think require challenging. Never allow assumptions to lie on the record that you feel are negative.
- The two most important questions in any interview are the first and the last. You can find out the first by asking, the last is usually signalled by use of 'finally' or 'briefly' or some similar form of closure.
- Always prepare for any interview, no matter how thoroughly you think you know the subject. It is imperative not to enter into an interview without having given it careful thought and consideration.
- Try and use every question as a means of getting to where you want to get to, not where the interviewer wants to get to.
- You are there as a partner in an information-gathering exercise. Remember you are not a victim (even if it feels like that sometimes).

Dos and don'ts of television interviews

- Do arrive at the studio or location in more than good time; nothing is likely to prejudice your own performance than being late.
- Do watch the programme that you are likely to be appearing on beforehand to get some idea of the style and pace.
- Do record, watch and discuss your appearances afterwards – we all learn from practice.
- Do pay attention to the floor manager who is your link with the production side. He or she will be telling you, and more importantly the interviewer, precisely what is taking place.
- Do ask for a glass of water, as both a means of refreshing yourself and as a prop in emergencies.
- Do accept offers of make-up; not only will it help your appearance but the five minutes in the make-up room are a useful time for you to recap and revise what you are going to say.
- Do feel free to ask your interviewer to cover specific points, although he or she is under no obligation to do so.

- Don't be overfriendly with your interviewer. He or she is the viewers' friend, not yours.
- Conversely, don't get into an argument with the interviewer. He or she will always appear to have won. But don't passively accept rudeness or aggression – you have as much right to respect as they do.
- Don't take notes into the TV studio with you: they will distract you and the rustle of paper will distract the viewer.
- Don't drink alcohol before giving an interview. You will often be offered hospitality, but television studios are hot, and people who have taken in alcohol even in tiny doses sweat and slur their words.
- Don't assume the viewer or for that matter the interviewer knows a great deal about your subject; always explain and give background information that will be helpful.
- Don't give monosyllabic answers; on the other hand do not ramble on at great length.

Additional points for radio

Perhaps the biggest single difference is that it is possible (although not always necessary or desirable) to jot down in advance one or two key points or facts and figures, for later use in the interview.

Reporter visits you

- Find somewhere quiet – a small room, or inside a car is good.
- The microphone will be very close to your face; try to ignore it.
- Concentrate on the reporter's face and the questions.
- Not happy? Ask to do it again. (But not when you're live!)

Telephone interview

- They'll want it now. Are you prepared? No? Say you'll phone back in ten minutes. Keep that promise.
- Use that time to make notes. Just notes. If it's a script you will sound wooden.
- Again if you don't like it, ask to do it again.

Studio interview

- They may invite others to confront you on air. Ask who'll be there.
- There will be a table and microphone. Concentrate on the interviewer.
- Take notes on a small card if it helps.
- Cutting in is unattractive, but if you decide it's necessary do it decisively, or don't do it at all.

- Don't thump the table. Don't crinkle papers. No clinking jewellery.

Remote studios

- You can't see the interviewer. Listen hard.
- Cut in if necessary, with confidence or not at all.

The phone-in

- You will have headphones on.
- Questions from listeners may irritate you. Always be polite.
- Note down the name of callers as they begin – use names only once.