

COPYWRITING FOR THE ELECTRONIC MEDIA

A Practical Guide

MILAN D. MEESKE

R. C. NORRIS

SECOND EDITION

COPYWRITING FOR THE ELECTRONIC MEDIA

SECOND EDITION

A Practical Guide

MILAN D. MEESKE

University of Central Florida

R. C. NORRIS

Late of Texas Christian University

Wadsworth Publishing Company

Belmont, California

A Division of Wadsworth, Inc.

Senior Editor: Rebecca Hayden
Editorial Assistant: Sharon Yablon
Production Editor: Angela Mann
Managing Designer: Cynthia Schultz
Print Buyer: Barbara Britton
Art Editor: Donna Kalal
Permissions Editor: Robert Kauser
Designer: Stuart Paterson
Copy Editor: Tom Briggs
Cover Designer: Cynthia Schultz
Cover Illustrator: Adriann Dinihanian
Compositor: Thompson Type
Printer: Malloy Lithographing, Inc.



*This book is printed on acid-free paper that meets
Environmental Protection Agency standards for
recycled paper.*

© 1992, 1987 by Wadsworth, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transcribed, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher, Wadsworth Publishing Company, Belmont, California 94002, a division of Wadsworth, Inc.

2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 — 96 95 94 93 92

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Meeske, Milan D.

Copywriting for the electronic media : a practical guide / Milan
D. Meeske, R. C. Norris. — 2nd ed.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-534-15624-X

1. Advertising copy. 2. Broadcast advertising I. Norris, R. C.

II. Title.

HF5825.M38 1991

659.14 — dc20

90-28659

COPYWRITING

FOR THE

ELECTRONIC

MEDIA

PREFACE

Two major premises guided the planning of this book. The first is that students need plenty of practice if they are to become effective copywriters. Student copywriters are of course accustomed to seeing and hearing slick, high-budget commercials for national advertisers. They want to imitate such commercials right away in class. The second premise, however, is that it's preferable to learn to write for the local station — Little Rock, Omaha, Albany — where budgets are smaller and production facilities less sophisticated. That's where the beginning jobs are, not in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, or even Atlanta. This book thus seeks to prepare students for the real world of copywriting — the small or medium market — from which they can move on when they gain experience.

Given these two premises, this text emphasizes exercises that can teach and sharpen specific copywriting skills, using realistic situations typical of copywriting in small- and medium-market stations. Our experience as commercial broadcast copywriters forms the basis of the text and the exercises.

This approach combines the information of a textbook with the practicality of a workbook. Nearly eighty exercises are included, more than enough for a normal fifteen-week semester. This is a reasonable and practical approach to teaching what is considered by many an art. The text includes the usual copywriting materials, along with materials not always found in texts, such as a chapter on copywriting style and another on the legal and ethical concerns of copywriting. To help students understand the material, the text includes examples of storyboards and actual aired copy. The examples vary from ads used by the smallest stations to spots prepared by national agencies. This variety strengthens the real-world copywriting orientation sought in the text.

CHANGES IN THIS EDITION

The Second Edition features many improvements over the first. The organization has been streamlined, and smoother topical transition has been achieved in chapter sequences. Specifically, the following changes were made in the Second Edition:

- Old Chapters 1 and 2 have been combined into one introductory chapter, and that chapter is now streamlined and updated.
- The section on the organization of the commercial has been moved to Chapter 2, and that chapter has been simplified to better illustrate the two major copy formulas. With organization discussed earlier, students can begin planning and writing spots much sooner than was the case with the first edition.
- The legal implications of copywriting are now covered much earlier — in Chapter 6 rather than Chapter 12, as in the first edition. This will enable students to draw on the legal material throughout the rest of the text.

- Twenty new exercises have been added, most of them writing exercises. The additional writing exercises strengthen the emphasis on writing and provide a wider choice of writing assignments.
- Promotional copywriting has been placed in a separate chapter, and the discussion of the major types of on-air promos has been expanded and further illustrated.
- Sections pertaining to copywriting for cable have been expanded, and additional illustrations of spots used on cable have been added.
- Clearer keyboard format rules have been added. Format rules for both radio and television are included in Chapter 3, along with sample scripts. The format rules for radio copy are repeated in Chapter 7, "The Radio Commercial," and the format rules for TV copy are repeated in Chapter 9, "The Television Commercial."
- The grammar review in Chapter 3 has been expanded with an explanation of the use of active verbs, indefinite pronouns, and awkward sentences.
- A separate instructor's guide was created. It includes teaching guidelines, lists of videotapes, and details on textbook exercises.

All of these changes in the Second Edition should make the book easier to use. The book continues to present a realistic picture of copywriting at broadcast stations and cable systems and includes writing exercises to cover most copywriting experiences at the local level. The book has been thoroughly class-tested in numerous classrooms. The classroom experience, as well as the advice of many broadcasters, has been drawn upon in preparing the Second Edition.

One word of advice for students who may be using this book for a required course: Although you may not plan to become a copywriter, a thorough study of copywriting will be advantageous. In the electronic media, everyone, and not just copywriters, writes — announcers, salespeople, producers, and, in corporate TV, videographers. The electronic media depend on written scripts, and learning to write short, persuasive messages will be advantageous.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE CONTENTS

The first six chapters deal with writing for radio, TV, and cable in general. Chapter 1 discusses the copywriter's role in broadcasting and cable, the role of creativity, and the qualifications needed by a copywriter. Chapter 2 explains how to organize a commercial and is the first chapter to include writing exercises. Chapter 3 presents the basic mechanics of copywriting and format, methods of making corrections in copy, and a grammar review. Chapter 4 explains how to organize material in preparation for writing a spot. Chapter 5 looks at the use of motivational appeals, and Chapter 6 outlines the legal requirements that affect copywriting.

Chapters 7 and 8 deal exclusively with copywriting for radio, while Chapters 9 and 10 parallel the previous two with a focus on television and cable. The final three chapters deal with specialized forms of broadcast copy: Chapter 11 covers promotional writing; Chapter 12 discusses writing PSAs, political announcements, and issue spots; Chapter 13 deals with broadcast/cable campaigns.

Exercises follow each chapter so that students can practice the skills taught in that chapter. Because each chapter builds on the previous ones, material learned in doing earlier exercises helps in performing later assignments.

TO THE STUDENT

This book contains instructions, examples, and exercises designed to help you learn to write spot announcements for broadcasting and cable.

While using this book, assume that you are a copywriter for a cable system or broadcast station in the city of Yourtown, Yourstate. Much of the exercise material in the book deals with businesses in Yourtown. Therefore, you will be writing announcements for advertising clients in this hypothetical city. Or, alternatively, your instructor may prefer to localize the book to your own area by directing you to substitute the name of your city for Yourtown. Be sure to ask. Localizing the book to your own city may give you a feeling of more realism in writing spot announcements. In addition, most of the exercises ask you to write spots based on concepts presented in the chapter. Your instructor may ask you to vary the assignments to meet certain objectives.

You'll find that the amount of information provided for the writing exercises varies. This variation is included to give you a sense of the real world. Sales representatives at stations and cable firms sometimes provide copywriters with a wealth of data from which to write spots, but often they don't provide much material. You've been given the essential facts and, in many cases, data you may not need to use. Your task is to sort out the key facts and place them in a meaningful framework. Listen to and watch spots to see how copywriters have fleshed out the basic sales data.

A number of actual commercials are included in the text to illustrate points that are discussed. Read the scripts carefully, and study the instructions the copywriter specified. Where a television script is included you must blend the audio and video together in your mind to visualize the spot. Only then can you appreciate how the commercial should look or sound.

You'll also notice that some of the scripts that are reprinted don't follow the suggested style rules. The reason is that stations and agencies often have no style rules; rather, they let the copywriter decide how to place the spot on paper. Be aware of the variation, but follow the style rules in the text — they make for good presentation of a spot.

The Second Edition of this book includes a number of new exercises. Once you complete the exercises you may discover problems or omissions. If you do, I'd like to hear about them so I can improve the next edition. I would appreciate receiving your comments and suggestions. Please write to:

Milan D. Meeske
School of Communication
University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida 32816

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The first edition of this book was a collaboration between R. C. Norris and myself. Unfortunately, R. C. passed away unexpectedly in 1989 before the revision began. R. C. was often in my thoughts during the preparation of the Second Edition, just as his effort and good humor contributed to the first edition.

Thanks go to my wife, Margaret, who served as cheerleader and editor. Despite a busy schedule of her own, she found time to read a number of sections.

Many professionals from the broadcasting and cable industries contributed to this edition. They merit my special appreciation for supplying scripts and storyboards to serve as illustrations. Many of them are identified by name in the text, but several deserve special mention. Katy Gunter from CableVision of Central Florida was helpful in obtaining cable items, and Matt Weber of WOFL-TV supplied some TV material that was difficult to obtain. Chris Miotke of Robinson Yesawich and Pepperdine also came to the rescue.

Thanks, too, to Keith Fowles and Joe Hall of the University of Central Florida's School of Communication, for their advice and insight. A debt is also owed to Tony Demars of Sam Houston State University, Randall Scott of the University of Alabama–Birmingham, Stuart K. Bergsma of the University of Arizona, David Eshelman of Central Missouri State University, and Dennis D. Phillips of Colorado State University, all of whom provided feedback on the Second Edition.

Finally, gratitude goes to Rebecca Hayden of Wadsworth for her guidance and encouragement.

Milan D. Meeske

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

MILAN D. MEESKE (Ph.D., University of Denver) is a professor of communications and head of the radio-TV division of the School of Communication at the University of Central Florida in Orlando. He previously taught at the University of Hawaii and worked for broadcast stations in Nebraska and Colorado. He has published numerous articles in journals such as *Journalism Quarterly* and *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* and served on the Board of Directors of the Broadcast Education Association. His interest in radio developed while in high school, and he continues to think of himself as a “radio nut.” His hobbies include golf, travel, and collecting rock and roll records.

R. C. NORRIS (Ph.D., University of Michigan) was professor and head of the Radio-TV-Film Division at Texas Christian University prior to his retirement and subsequent death in 1989. He also taught at the University of Texas at Austin and worked for broadcast stations in Texas, Michigan, and Washington. He published the *Handbook on Super8mm Filmmaking* and produced a number of films. He was an amateur musician, a harpsichord builder, a fisherman, a vegetable gardener, and a Texas Ranger fan.

CONTENTS

Preface	xv
Acknowledgments	xviii
About the Authors	xix

INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER 1

THE BROADCAST COPYWRITER 5

BASIC DEFINITIONS	6
STATIONS, AGENCIES, CABLE TV, AND RELATED INDUSTRIES	7
The Broadcast Station	7
Writing for the Small Station	8
Writing for Medium and Large Stations	8
The Advertising Agency	9
Organization	9
Writing for the Small or Medium Agency	10
Cable TV	10
Corporate Television	11
Production Houses	11
THE FREELANCE COPYWRITER	11
QUALIFICATIONS OF THE COPYWRITER	11
A Sense of Inquiry	12
Discipline	12
Ability to Type and Use Computers	12
Knowledge of the Language	12
Knowledge of the Media	13
Dealing with Matters of Taste	13
CREATIVITY AND COPYWRITING	13
POINTS TO REMEMBER	15
EXERCISES	17

CHAPTER 2

ORGANIZING THE BROADCAST COMMERCIAL 27

GETTING STARTED 28

THE A.I.P.I. FORMULA 28

Attention 28

Identify Sponsor or Product 28

Present Sales Message 29

Invite Action 29

A.I.P.I. Summary 29

The A.I.P.I. Formula in Action 29

THE A.I.D.A. FORMULA 31

Attention 31

Interest 31

Desire 32

Action 32

A.I.D.A. Summary 32

The A.I.D.A. Formula in Action 32

CHOOSING A FORMULA 34

NATIONAL VERSUS LOCAL COMMERCIALS 34

POINTS TO REMEMBER 34*EXERCISES* 35**CHAPTER 3**

COPYWRITING STYLE — BASIC MECHANICS 43

COPY APPEARANCE 44

Radio 44

Sample Script 44

Script Format Conventions 45

Television 45

Sample Script 45

Script Format Conventions 46

Copy Paper 46

Lengthy Copy 46

The Importance of Neatness 47

The Hazards of Simplification 48

Abbreviations 48

Keyboard Symbols 49

Time of Day 49

KEEPING IT CONVERSATIONAL 49

Contractions 49

Clichés and Superlatives 50

Clichés 50

Superlatives 50

Question Lead-Ins 50

Point of View 51

Punctuation 52

The Period 52

The Question Mark 52

The Exclamation Point 53

The Comma 53

The Dash 53

The Ellipsis 54

The Hyphen 54

The Underline 54

Numbers 54

Telephone Numbers 54

Street Addresses 55

Pronunciation 55

A BRIEF GRAMMAR REVIEW 56

Pronouns 56

The Reflexive Pronoun 56

Pronoun Case 56

Indefinite Pronouns 57

Adverbs 57

Modifiers 58

Verbs 58

Subject-Verb Agreement 58

Troublesome Verb Sets 59

Active Versus Passive Verbs 59

Verbs to Avoid 59

Awkward Sentences 59

Spelling Problems 60

Additional Writing Rules in Brief 60

POINTS TO REMEMBER 61*EXERCISES* 63

CHAPTER 4**BROADCAST COPY PREPARATION 77**

THE COPY PLATFORM 78

Client and Product, Service, or Store 78

Objective 78

Target Audience 79

Sales Theme 80

Bonus Items 82

Positioning 83

Approach 83

SOURCES OF COPY INFORMATION 85

The Salesperson 86

Newspaper and Magazine Ads 86

Brochures and Pamphlets 86

Prepared Announcements 88

The Client 88

COPY PREPARATION AND TRAFFIC 88

POINTS TO REMEMBER 90*EXERCISES* 91**CHAPTER 5****MOTIVATION 105**

RATIONAL AND EMOTIONAL MOTIVATIONS 106

SELF-INTEREST 106

LIFE CYCLES AND BUYING BEHAVIOR 107

BASIC APPEALS 109

Appearance 110

Love and Family 110

Convenience 110

Humor 113

Curiosity 114

Star 116

Ego 116

Five Senses 116

Price 119

Quality 120

FEATURES AND BENEFITS 121

POINTS TO REMEMBER 122

EXERCISES 123

CHAPTER 6

THE LEGAL AND ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF WRITING COPY 135

FEDERAL REGULATION 136

The Federal Communications Commission 136

Sponsorship Identification 136

Payola and Plugola 137

Station-Conducted Contests 137

Political Sponsorship Identification 139

The Federal Trade Commission 139

False and Misleading Advertising 140

Rigged Demonstrations 141

Testimonials and Endorsements 141

Comparative Advertising 142

Research Data 142

STATE REGULATION 142

Professional Services 143

Lotteries 144

SELF-REGULATION 146

CABLE ADVERTISING 147

POINTS TO REMEMBER 147

EXERCISES 149

CHAPTER 7

THE RADIO COMMERCIAL: THE MECHANICS 159

RADIO TODAY 160

The Advantages of Radio 161

The Limitations of Radio 161

RADIO BASICS 162

Timing Radio Copy 162

Gaining Attention 162

Terminology 164

RADIO COPY AND COMMERCIAL FORMATS	164
Single-Voice Copy	165
Two-Voice Copy	165
Dialog Copy	166
Sound Effects and Music	167
Sound Effects	167
Music	168
LIVE COPY	170
DONUT COPY	170
LIVE AD-LIB COPY	170
PRODUCTION COPY	171
POINTS TO REMEMBER	172
EXERCISES	173

CHAPTER 8

TYPES OF RADIO COPY 185

STRAIGHT COPY	186
HARD SELL COPY	187
INSTITUTIONAL COPY	189
SPOKESPERSON COPY	191
The Sponsor as Spokesperson	191
Endorsements	191
Testimonials	192
HUMOROUS COPY	194
POINTS TO REMEMBER	196
EXERCISES	197

CHAPTER 9

THE TELEVISION COMMERCIAL: THE MECHANICS 207

TELEVISION TODAY	208
Network Affiliates	208
Independent Stations	208
Cable Television	209
The Advantages of Television	209
The Limitations of Television	210

TELEVISION COMMERCIAL FORMATS	211
The TV Script	211
The TV Storyboard	213
Building a Storyboard	217
Timing Copy	217
TELEVISION COMMERCIAL PRODUCTION STYLES	219
Studio Production	219
Voice-Over	220
Electronic Field Production	221
PRODUCING TV COMMERCIALS	223
Shot Composition	223
Physical Camera Movement	224
Transitions	224
Special Effects	225
Additional Terminology	226
Using Special Effects	226
Using Graphics	227
Film Versus Tape	227
Animation	228
Keeping the Spot Producible	228
The Production Budget	230
GUIDELINES FOR WRITING TELEVISION SPOTS	230
Gaining Attention	230
Identifying the Client or Product Name	232
Balancing Audio and Video	233
Emphasizing One Main Idea	235
Avoiding Overwriting	235
Stressing the Final Shot	236
POINTS TO REMEMBER	236
EXERCISES	239

CHAPTER 10

TYPES OF TELEVISION COMMERCIALS 253

THE COPY PLATFORM	254
CHOOSING THE APPROACH	254
The Problem-Solution Approach	256
The Demonstration Approach	256

The Situation Approach	258
The Spokesperson Approach	261
The Product-as-Star Approach	264
The Direct-Response Approach	264
Variations on Six Themes	267
<i>POINTS TO REMEMBER</i>	269
<i>EXERCISES</i>	271

CHAPTER 11

PROMOTION	291
PROMOTION IN THE ELECTRONIC MEDIA	292
Television	292
Radio	293
Cable	293
PROMOTIONAL STRATEGIES	294
Promos	294
Specific Promos	294
Generic Promos	296
More Promo Basics	300
IDs	301
Teasers and Bumpers	301
Logos	302
Jingle and Image Packages	306
<i>POINTS TO REMEMBER</i>	308
<i>EXERCISES</i>	309

CHAPTER 12

PUBLIC SERVICE, ISSUE, AND POLITICAL ANNOUNCEMENTS	315
PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS	316
Choosing the Type of PSA	316
Informational PSAs	316
Idea- or Goal-Oriented PSAs	317
Planning the PSA	317
Researching the Organization	319
Identifying Audience Sensibilities	319
Framing the Appeal	321
RADIO PSAs	321
TELEVISION PSAs	326
OPPORTUNITIES FOR WRITING PSAs	328