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**Broadcaster how-to guide: How to create radio spots**

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**What is a radio spot?**

Radio spots are short (usually 15-60 second) radio pieces that deliver one single, clear message. They can be presented in various formats, but two of the most common are straightforward announcements—also called Public Service Announcements or PSAs—and short dramas.

For example, [here](http://scripts.farmradio.fm/radio-resource-packs/covid-19-resources/radio-spots-covid-19-part-one/) are FRI’s radio spots about COVID-19.

**When should radio spots be used?**

Radio spots should be used when you need to quickly and efficiently deliver a specific message to your audience. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, a radio spot can deliver brief but informative and potentially life-saving messages about the symptoms of infection, how to keep yourself and others safe from infection, relevant statistics, availability of health services, and more.

Radio spots are most effective when played regularly throughout a station’s programming, but particularly when they are integrated into commercial breaks, between or during relevant programs, or at any other break in your program schedule. Note that radio spots are much more effective as part of a campaign that includes various media and radio formats. Rather than being stand-alone messaging, radio spots work best when content is expanded on in other programs.

**When are radio spots not useful?**

Radio spots may not be the most effective radio format to:

* Teach or explain complicated skills, methods, or practices.
* Promote long-term attitude change. This requires long-term attention to addressing the barriers to attitude change, a task that’s best achieved through a combination of radio formats and other media.

**How can radio spots help me serve my listeners better?**

* When used as part of a larger awareness-raising or emergency response campaign, radio spots are a valuable format for delivering important information quickly, clearly, and concisely.
* Radio spots can stimulate dialogue, which can result in positive social, behavioural, or attitude change.
* Spots can raise awareness about the availability of products and services, offer advice, raise awareness, and deliver a call to action.

**How can radio spots help me produce better programs?**

* Radio spots can reinforce important points from your programs. For example, in an emergency response program about the COVID-19 pandemic, radio spots are a useful format to reinforce key messages about the importance of handwashing and physical distancing.
* Spots can be played throughout your station’s programming schedule to remind listeners of important issues, services, facts, etc., and encourage them to listen to more detailed programs on the subject.
* While not always necessary, producing radio spots as a team can help you expand your pool of resource persons and expert sources on certain topics. It may also help to have different people review the spot to ensure the information is clear and relevant. For example, a radio spot team could include the writer, producer, a subject matter specialist, and a funder.

**How do I get started? (Learn more about these and other points in the *Details* section below.)**

1. Determine your communication objective
2. Gather information about potential audiences
3. Keep it short and simple
4. Think of a spot as having three parts
5. Make sure your spots include women’s perspectives
6. Partnering and cost-sharing
7. Air the spot often

**Details**

**Determine your communication objective**

Before you plan and produce your spots, think about what you want to achieve. What is the message you are trying to deliver and who is your intended audience? For example, are you creating a PSA that presents the risks of COVID-19 in rural communities and how to address them? Are you advertising that a local NGO is distributing mosquito nets? Spots should focus on ONE thing you want your listeners to know and do. If you need to discuss multiple issues or multiple aspects of an issue, you need to develop a new spot for each one, or consider producing full-length programs.

1. **Gather information about potential audiences**

As a farm radio broadcaster, you may have a good idea of the issues that affect your audience. Your spots will be more effective, relevant, up-to-date, informative, and engaging if you gather as much information as you can about your audience and about other aspects of the situation. This might include:

* the availability of health services in the region,
* the quality and accessibility of the road network,
* the climate, common crops, and farming practices in your area,
* the cultural and religious beliefs and practices of your audience,
* the average age of your listeners, and
* the level of technical information with which your listeners are comfortable.
1. **Keep it short and simple**

Radio spots are much like radio advertisements. The first sentence should grab listeners’ attention. Spots should use simple words and short, uncomplicated sentences. Use active voice\* sentences and language that is natural and conversational. Address the listener directly and ask them to do something or consider potential consequences. See the examples below:

* *Farmers, a new and larger wave of locusts is coming. The generation of locusts that damaged crops in January and February has been breeding and their eggs have hatched. Adult swarms are forming and will soon be feeding. This new wave of locusts could be many times larger than the previous one. Alert your local authorities when you see bands of hoppers in your area so that they can take swift action. And stay safe by staying indoors during spraying.*
* *What are the symptoms of COVID? The most common symptoms are shortness of breath, cough, fever, and chills. If you experience any of these symptoms, immediately isolate yourself from others. And seek medical attention if the symptoms get worse.*

*Note*: beware of airing poor, ineffective spots that are unhelpful to your listeners or that discourage them from listening to your program or station. There are many types of poor spots, for example:

* spots that are simply a boring presentation of facts expressed in complicated or jargon-laden\* language,
* spots that describe a situation but offer no specific call to action or advice, and
* spots that overwhelm the listener with too much information, which could worry them or cause them to tune out.

Here are examples of each of these types, along with a short description of why they are ineffective:

1. *COVID-19 is a respiratory illness caused by the novel coronavirus that originated in Wuhan, China in December 2019. It is transmitted to the mucosae and conjunctiva through infected droplets. Airborne transmission is also possible with the presence of microbes within the droplet nuclei. It is highly contagious and there is currently no cure for COVID-19.*

This spot is a presentation of facts expressed in complicated and jargon-laden language that is difficult to understand.

1. *In countries around the world, a highly contagious disease called avian influenza has resulted in the death of millions of farm and wild birds. Either the disease has killed the birds outright, or birds have been deliberately killed in an effort to stop the further spread of the infection. This has had a devastating effect on farming families who rely on poultry for income and for food. Avian influenza can in some cases by spread to humans.*

This spot presents a situation but doesn’t offer any call to action that tells people how they can prevent or manage avian influenza. Spots should help people understand a situation, but it’s also important that they tell people exactly what they can DO to address a particular issue. (Note: avian influenza is different from COVID-19. There is no evidence to suggest that people can become infected with COVID-19 through contact with poultry or other livestock.)

1. *COVID-19 is dangerous. Wash your hands frequently. Keep at least two metres apart from everyone not in your family. Don't touch your face, especially mouth, nose, eyes, and ears. Try to cough into your elbow. Stay home if you are feeling unwell. Wear a mask if you have to travel outside. Stay away from older people and people who health conditions such as diabetes and heart problems.*

Unlike the last two spots, this spot does have a call to action. The problem is that it contains way too much information and way too many calls to action. After hearing this spot, listeners may be overwhelmed by information and have no clear idea of what actions they should take**.**

For more examples of good radio spots, read FRI’s radio spots on [the desert locust situation in East Africa](http://scripts.farmradio.fm/radio-resource-packs/locust-resources/radio-spots-on-the-desert-locust-situation/) and on [avian influenza](http://scripts.farmradio.fm/radio-resource-packs/package-79/avian-influenza-spots/). For pre-recorded, multi-lingual radio spots that counter disinformation about the COVID-19 pandemic, see [UNESCO’s audio resources](https://en.unesco.org/covid19/communicationinformationresponse/audioresources).

1. **Think of a spot as having three parts**

A radio spot can be written in three parts, while remaining short and simple:

Part I: The **beginning** sets the scene, introduces the characters, and defines the problem, situation, or barrier.

Part II: The **middle** presents the problem or conflict, and suggests possible decisions or actions that can be taken to resolve it.

Part III: The **ending** resolves the problem by offering a solution and/ or suggesting next steps.

See the examples below, where Part I is **bolded**, Part II is underlined, and Part III is *italicized*:

1. **SFX**: **Person coughing and sneezing**

**Narrator:** **Hear that? Right now, a cough could be a sign of something much more dangerous to your health.** COVID-19 is an infectious disease that affects your lungs. It’s spread when a healthy person comes into contact with droplets spread through a cough, sneeze, or exhalation from an infected person. *To prevent the spread of COVID-19, always cover your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or a tissue when sneezing or coughing. Dispose of the used tissue immediately. By following good respiratory hygiene, you can protect the people around you from COVID-19.*

1. **Narrator:** **During the coronavirus lockdown, many market vendors are having difficulty selling their produce because customers are not able to visit the market as often.** To keep your family well-nourished, stock up on non-perishable food items. It’s important to eat fresh fruits and vegetables to maintain a healthy diet, but try to purchase produce that stays fresh longer, such as squash, garden egg (eggplant), yam, orange-fleshed sweet potato, carrots, and moringa. You can also dry fresh produce or use other methods to extend the shelf-life of perishable foods. *If you do go to the market, wear a mask and keep a distance of at least two metres from others. Avoid touching your face and clean your hands and all your purchases as soon as you get home.*

Remember to answer all or most of the 5Ws and How (Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How) in your radio spot. Before recording, read it aloud to someone else to ensure it is clear and makes sense.

One way to present radio spots is as mini-dramas. Use a maximum of three or four characters to keep the drama short and simple. Use local names, customs, music, and language to engage the audience. You can follow the directions in this section to build a three-part spot.

Here is an example of a dramatized radio spot from FRI’s [Avian Influenza Radio Spots](http://scripts.farmradio.fm/radio-resource-packs/package-79/avian-influenza-spots/):

**Host:** *Do you own chicken, ducks, or other food-producing birds? A serious disease called avian influenza or bird flu is killing poultry all over the world. Bird flu spreads in the droppings, mucus, blood, or feathers of infected birds. To reduce the spread of this disease and to protect your family and your community, you must pay close attention to everyone who enters or leaves your farm.*

**SFX:** Chickens clucking, rustling, and other farm sounds

**Person #1:** *[Name of person #2], did I tell you that [insert male name] is coming to visit?*

**Person #2:** *Wait, I remember hearing that some farms in his village have bird flu!*

**Person #1**: *What does that matter? He is not sick!*

**Person #2:** *No, but it is a bad idea for him to visit. The soil in his village could be contaminated. If he comes to our farm, he could infect our entire flock. Just a small amount of bird droppings on his shoes could spread bird flu to our farm and kill all of our chickens. Could he stay at our uncle’s house while he is here? Uncle doesn’t have any poultry.*

**Person #1:** *Yes, I’m sure that would be fine. Can we go to visit him there?*

**Person #2:** *Yes, of course! It would be great to see him again.*

1. **Make sure your spots include women’s perspectives**

You can make your radio spot more effective and credible by ensuring that a gender-balanced team of radio station staff, resource persons, and community members have input into the spot. These people can help ensure that it includes accurate and relevant information—or their voices could be featured in the spot itself. For example, for a radio spot about preventing teen pregnancy, you could include a representative of an NGO or a local program that works on sexual and reproductive health, a teenage girl or couple, a local health educator, and a female radio producer.

Radio spots should be written in a way that avoids gender biases and stereotypes. Here are some things to keep in mind to ensure a spot addresses gender equality:

* Think about your whole audience. Even if an element of your radio spot or program is of greater interest to men, make sure that the content is respectful to women. And vice versa.
* Make sure the spots are played during a time that is convenient for women to listen.
* Take time to learn the different ways that women and men are affected by the issue and how they are able to respond to it.
* Partner with local organizations that focus on gender. For example, an NGO could explain its work and help you to understand about gender and agricultural issues in the community and give you ideas on how to develop other gender-sensitive items for the program.
* Be mindful of language: Use language that is inclusive of men and women. For example, in English, you might use “mankind” instead of “humankind.” Rather than “police man” you could use “police officer.” Find similar examples in your broadcast language(s).

* Portrayal of women and men: Your radio spot and your overall program can challenge gender stereotypes. For example, you can represent women as having multiple roles in society, rather than primarily as mothers, wives, or daughters.

For more information on incorporating gender into your farmer program, read our [Broadcaster how-to guide on gender and farm programs](http://scripts.farmradio.fm/radio-resource-packs/package-95-researching-and-producing-farmer-focused-programs/gender-and-farm-programs/).

1. **Partnering and cost-sharing**

Consider partnering with local NGOs, government ministries, district governments, and funding agencies to support the production of radio spots. You might also consider approaching a local celebrity, musician, or community activist to help promote your message. For example, in [this song](https://twitter.com/RadioMiraya/status/1242040678806433793) on Radio Miraya in South Sudan, a popular local musician is raising awareness of COVID-19.

1. **Air the spot often**

Radio spots should be aired consistently throughout the day. If you are running an ongoing awareness campaign about COVID-19, for example, your COVID-19 spot should air once before and after the main program that addresses the topic. It should also be played about once an hour throughout your station’s programming schedule to remind people, raise their awareness, and increase the likelihood that they will share this information with others in their community.

**Definitions:**

*Active voice:* In a sentence written in the **active voice**, the subject of sentence performs the action. In a sentence written in the **passive voice** the subject receives the action. For example, “Mr. Okolo broadcasts his program every Thursday” is an example of a sentence in the active voice. “A program is broadcast every Thursday by Mr. Okolo” is an example of a sentence in the passive voice. Sentences in the active voice generally communicated your intended message more effectively and are easier for your listeners to understand.

*Jargon:* Special words or expressions that are used by a particular profession or group, for example, health or agricultural experts, and are difficult for others to understand. (*Keep in mind that jargon is not just technical language. Any language that is not part of the everyday speech of the audience is jargon. For example, if broadcasters speak in the local language but include agricultural or health terms in English or French, this is jargon to the audience*.)

**Where else can I learn more about radio spots?**

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