

## Chapter 6

# PRACTICAL SKILLS – DOCUMENTARIES, FEATURES AND MAGAZINES

### Introduction

This is the third of four chapters on the basic skills needed to develop and produce effective audio materials for distance and open learning. It builds on and extends the skills discussed in the two previous chapters. The chapter deals with two main topics:

- Compiling documentaries and features
- Producing magazine programmes

In Chapters 4 and 5, we concentrated on the basic skills needed to develop and produce scripted talks, unscripted interviews and audio discussions. We also looked at the technology and techniques of location recording; and the methods available for editing audio material for use in the studio. Here we go on to explore how you can combine and use these basic skills in the production of documentaries, features and magazine programmes.

### Compiling documentaries and features

The terms 'documentary' and 'feature' are often used interchangeably in audio. However, there is some advantage in distinguishing between them. In Chapter 2, we offered the following broad definitions:

- **Documentaries:** Factual reports on past or present questions, issues, situations or events, incorporating narrative, description and analysis, and usually combining several of the following elements – scripted talk, interviews, discussion, actuality and/or archive material.
- **Features:** Audio material dealing with similar factual themes to documentaries, but approaching them in a more imaginative, creative and artistic way, often using music and dramatisation.

As the definitions suggest, these two formats have a good deal in common; and there is therefore a good case for looking at them together. In particular, they are more complex formats than the simple forms we have discussed so far. And for this reason, their development and production make more demands on the professional skills of both subject specialists and audio producers.

However, responding to these demands is worthwhile, since documentaries and features can offer students unique learning opportunities and experiences to which otherwise they would have little chance of gaining access.

### **What documentaries and features have to offer**

- Field trips and visits to places and situations of interest and relevance to their studies – using actuality, descriptive commentary and analysis
- Opportunities to observe, analyse and evaluate the application of knowledge, the practice of skills and the effects of values and attitudes in the real world
- Factual reports on significant events and issues in the past – using archive material, eye-witness evidence, dramatisation, expert comment and analysis
- Analytic accounts of current issues and events of importance to particular courses – using the voices of people with first-hand experience and expertise

In developing and producing documentary and feature programmes, you need to go through each of the ten key stages of the process discussed in Chapter 3. Here we concentrate on the first seven stages of the process.

## **1. Preparing a detailed outline**

As for any audio material, you start with a detailed programme outline. This will:

- Identify the target audience
- Spell out your aims and objectives
- Outline the main content and basic structure
- Indicate the audio forms you are planning to use
- Suggest support material and student activities

In addition, you need to identify the resources required (and likely to be available) for the programme. You also need to work out a realistic schedule for its development and production. Remember, the programme outline is a flexible working document, that will be modified and refined as work on the documentary or feature proceeds.

## **2. Researching content and contributors**

Here are some of the questions you need to ask:

- What do you know about the subject already?
- What do you need to find out?
- What printed sources are available to you?
- Are there people who can provide information and advice?
- Who should take part in the programme?
- What form should their contributions take – scripted talks, interviews, participation in discussion?
- What other audio material would be useful – actuality, archive material, drama, music?
- Is such material available, accessible and affordable?
- Who will present the programme and act as audio tutor?

### **The researcher's notebook**

As you proceed through this stage of programme development, keep a detailed notebook.

- Write down the names of your sources and contacts.
- Keep a record of the information you obtain.
- Make a note of possible contributors to the programme, and other audio material you might be able to use.
- Jot down your ideas on the main sub-topics you will cover, and the order you will present them in.

Gradually, as you complete your research, a fuller picture of the programme will begin to emerge; and (with luck) you will begin to 'hear' it in your imagination. However, be careful not to spend **too** much time on research. Set yourself a deadline to complete this phase of programme development. Do not use the research as an excuse for not getting on with the process of programme making.

### **3. Commissioning and collecting materials**

By the end of the research phase, you should have developed clear ideas about:

- The content and structure of the programme – the main topics you need to cover, the order in which you will deal with them and the rough allocation of time to each
- The audio materials you need to commission and/or collect – what needs to be scripted, who you need to interview or involve in a discussion, what questions need to be asked and answered, and what other audio materials you need to collect (The wider the variety of forms, the more interesting your programme is likely to sound.)

Once you are clear on these matters, you can go ahead with approaching, briefing and contracting potential contributors (see Chapter 3) and recording the material you need.

The exact division of labour in these tasks is a matter for discussion and agreement between subject specialists and audio producers. No formal rules apply here: how the work is divided up will depend on the skills, interests and availability of the people involved. What is important, however, is that there is close consultation and collaboration between subject specialists and audio producers, ideally growing out of a shared set of perspectives, developed over time, within the framework of course team activities.

Many of these shared perspectives will have been incorporated into the detailed outline for the programme. This document now becomes especially important. The more clearly subject specialists and producers have thought through the purposes of the programme, and the way they plan to approach it, the more efficient and effective will be their collection of material.

Before conducting an interview or recording a discussion, subject specialists and producers should have agreed exactly what they want, where they plan to use it in the programme, and roughly how long the final version will need to be. Similarly, if you are commissioning drama, selecting archive material, or recording actuality or music, you should know where you are planning to use the material and for how long. There are three practical reasons for this:

- First, if you know exactly what you want, you are more likely to get it.
- Second, clear thinking at an early stage will save you a lot of time in editing later.

- Third, contributors will be justifiably irritated if you record 30 minutes of material, but only have time to use, say, two minutes of what you recorded.

At the same time, when collecting material, keep an open mind (and an open ear) for new and unexpected material that can improve and strengthen your programme. Don't let your detailed outline become so fixed and unchangeable that it blinds (or deafens) you to ways of making the programme more interesting, relevant or challenging to your students.

Also, remember that most documentary and feature programmes will be presented by an audio tutor. So you will need to allow time for this. But the presentation script also allows you the opportunity of commenting on the audio material and introducing visual support and activities, that can increase your students' involvement, interaction and learning from the programme. So, when you are collecting material, keep notes on how it can best be introduced and supported by the audio tutor:

- What should the students listen out for in particular?
- What would it be useful for them to look at while listening?
- What activities would help to facilitate and reinforce their learning?

#### **4. Selecting, editing and ordering material**

This is a key stage in documentary and feature production, which is best carried out jointly by subject specialists and audio producers. First, listen carefully to the audio material you have collected, and make brief notes:

- Identify the parts you are likely to use (Note down the 'Cue In', 'Cue Out' and 'Duration' – see Chapter 5).
- Decide on the order in which you plan to use them.
- Make notes on the tutorial links (plus any support material and activities) that will help the students get the most out of the material.

Secondly, using these notes as a guide, rough edit the materials – as indicated in Chapter 5. If the original material was recorded on cassette, this is also a good time to copy it onto open-reel tape, ready for fine editing and use in the studio. It's also useful at this stage, if you are working with open-reel tape, to arrange the inserts in order of presentation. When the insert materials have been rough edited, check the duration of the bands and decide whether further rough editing is needed, in terms of either content or the length of the audio slot available to you.

Ideally, in a 15-20' (15-20 minute) documentary or feature, individual inserts should probably not be shorter than 20-30" (20-30 seconds) (long enough to establish a voice or sound), and not longer than 1'30"-2'00" (any longer and the student may lose the overall argument of the programme). Using inserts of about this length (0'20"-2'00", with an average of say 1'00"-1'15" per insert), the interaction between the audio tutor and the insert material will give the programme a lively rhythm and pace. And provided that the quality of the material is good, this will help to hold the students' attention and interest. For longer programmes (say 30-40'), the inserts can be longer (say up to 2'30"-3'00"), giving the programme a slower, more reflective pace and rhythm.

Third, draft/design any printed/visual support material and student activities you are planning to use. [**Note:** Support material should be drafted/created in exactly the form in which it will be presented to the student; so that the audio tutor will be looking at exactly the same material that the students will be using when they are listening to the audio.]

Now that you have rough-edited inserts and draft support material, the next stage is to draft the audio tutor's presentation script.

## **5. Drafting the presentation script**

The role of the audio tutor as presenter was discussed in Chapter 3. This role is particularly important in documentary and feature programmes. This is because their relationship to other study materials (e.g. printed texts) is not always self-evident to the students.

### **The audio tutor's role – a reminder**

The audio tutor has a key role in documentary and feature:

- Introducing the material
- Explaining its purpose
- Relating the material to the rest of the students' learning activities
- Linking the various parts of the audio material and presenting them as a coherent argument
- Recapitulating and reinforcing the main points
- Guiding the student through the support material and study activities

There is usually a strong case for the audio tutor's role to be undertaken by one of the subject specialists responsible for the course. An expert voice, with knowledge and understanding of the subject matter, backed up by training in script-writing and audio presentation, will give authority and authenticity to the programme. It will also give distance and open learning students a greater sense of involvement in a real educational enterprise.

However, the role of audio producers is also important, particularly with presenters who have little experience of working in audio. Producers have a key role in:

- Explaining the functions of the audio tutor
- Providing training in effective script-writing and studio presentation
- Working closely with script writers as they develop their presentation scripts
- Supporting them in the studio and helping them give a good performance

Ideally, the drafting of the presentation script should be a joint activity – with subject specialists providing expert knowledge and pedagogy, and producers providing professional assistance and support in effective audio communication.

The layout of the audio tutor's script is also important. The basic conventions of script layout were introduced (with reference to scripted talks) in Chapter 4. The conventions for documentaries and features are essentially the same.

#### **Basic script layout – a reminder**

- Clearly written, typed or word-processed on good quality paper
- Double- or triple-spaced, on one side of the paper only
- With wide margins and numbered pages
- With sentences (or ideally paragraphs) not running over from one page to the next

However, for programmes using pre-recorded insert material, we need to extend these conventions. There are two main reasons for this:

- First, the programmes are more complex. They include not just a single voice but a combination of studio speech and pre-recorded materials.
- Secondly, because of this complexity, it is important for the audio tutor, producer and technician(s) to be able to see at a glance where they are in a script, and to see what is coming next, so that they can be prepared for it.

### **Script layout – additional conventions**

- In the left-hand margin (if you write from left to right) – or in the right-hand margin (if you write from right to left) – indicate the source from which each part of the programme is derived.
- The sources are usually indicated using CAPITALS – e.g. ANNOUNCER, AUDIO TUTOR, [TAPE] INSERT 1, 2, 3 ....etc., SIG (-nature) TUNE, MUSIC/CD and so on.
- Pre-recorded sources are identified briefly – e.g. SHORT TITLE, CUE IN, CUE OUT and DURATION.
- These re-recorded sources are also separated from speech that is to be recorded in the studio by having a line drawn above and below them in the script.

These conventions are illustrated by the following sample script from the Bangladesh Open University.

SAMPLE SCRIPT		PAGE 1
SIG TUNE	FADE UP – HOLD FOR 15’ – FADE UNDER AND OUT	
ANNOUNCER	This is the Bangladesh Open University. You are listening to a programme for students of the Open School. This programme is for the SSC course on ‘The Geography of Bangladesh’. And as usual you’ll need your copy of the Audio Notes for the course. Here to introduce the programme is your Audio Tutor, Dr Md. Anwar Haque.	
AUDIO TUTOR	Welcome to the fourth programme in our series on the geography of Bangladesh. Before I tell you about the subject of the programme, I want you to listen to the following sounds. Where do you think they were recorded? And what do you think was happening? Listen carefully.	
INSERT 1	SOUNDS OF FISHERMEN	DUR 0’ 20”
CUE IN	Sounds of the sea.....	
CUE OUT	...voices of fishermen (NATURAL FADE ON TAPE)	

SAMPLE SCRIPT	PAGE 2
AUDIO TUTOR	So, what were you listening to? (PAUSE) If you said it was the sound of fishermen, you're right. In fact, it was the sound of fishermen fishing off the coast of Bangladesh. And that's the main subject of this programme – the resources that are available to us from the water off our coast. Now listen again – this time to what one of the fishermen has to say about his work. What are the main problems he faces?
INSERT 2	FISHERMAN ONE <span style="float: right;">DUR 0' 45"</span>
CUE IN	"I have been a fisherman for the past twenty-five years.....
CUE OUT	....and those are the main problems we fishermen face."
AUDIO TUTOR	Now I want you to look at Frame One in your Audio Notes. (PAUSE) That's Frame One in the Audio Notes. (PAUSE) As you can see, here's a map of the coastline of Bangladesh. Now I'd like you to look at the bottom right-hand corner of Frame One....
[SCRIPT CONTINUES]	

This type of script layout:

- Is easy for the audio tutor to read, mark-up and correct
- Gives the producer space to write production notes on the script
- Gives the technician(s) space to write technical notes on the script
- Makes a clear distinction between speech to be recorded from the studio and pre-recorded material that will be played into the programme from the control room
- Allows the audio tutor, producer and technician(s) to look ahead easily, so they can see what is coming next and be ready for the changes

Once the studio script has been prepared, enough copies should be made for the producer, technician, audio tutor and any other people involved in or affected by the programme. Ideally, the script ought to be distributed as far as possible in advance of the studio recording session:

- To allow the audio tutor (and any other contributors) time to read through and familiarise themselves with the final version of the script
- To allow the technician(s) time to familiarise themselves with the script; to check the technical facilities needed and to obtain any music or sound effects (FX) the programme needs

## **6. Rehearsal and recording**

The basic routines of rehearsal and recording in the studio were discussed in Chapter 3. There was also a discussion of the presentation and production of scripted speech in Chapter 4. Most of the principles discussed there apply equally to the studio production of documentaries and features.

Three main people are involved in the studio production of documentaries and features:

- The producer – who is in general charge of activities in the studio and takes overall responsibility for programme production
- The technician – sometimes called ‘studio manager’ – who is responsible for using the technology in the studio to deliver good quality sound
- The audio tutor/presenter – plus any other ‘live’ (i.e. not recorded) contributors to the programme – who delivers the script at the microphone

In some cases, particularly when an external presenter is being used, it may also be thought advisable to have a subject adviser attend the studio session, to ensure that the content of the programme is appropriate and acceptable – though of course this should have been sorted out at the scripting stage.

Essentially, the procedure is as follows:

- Everyone should arrive at the studio on time – or preferably a bit earlier. (Studio time is a scarce and valuable commodity – don't waste it!)
- Usually, the technician will have set up the studio and control room in advance and made sure that the equipment needed is available and in good working order.
- The producer should first check that everything required for the recording is there – script(s), insert material, music etc. If possible, the producer and/or technician should also have a stop watch; and everyone will need something to write with.
- Before the rehearsal starts, it's useful (particularly with inexperienced presenters) for the producer to run through the script with the audio tutor. While this is happening, the technician can run through the insert material, checking the 'cue in' and 'cue out' for each band against the script, and deciding whether any 'equalisation' (sound modification/improvement) is necessary.
- When the 'read through' has been completed, the producer should make sure that any changes to the script are passed on to the technician.
- The technician can then 'take level' on the audio tutor; and make any adjustments to the microphone position. When the technician and producer are satisfied with the sound quality of the audio tutor's voice, the rehearsal can start.
- In rehearsing a documentary or feature programme, there is usually no need to play through the whole of each insert. You can save time by playing just the opening and closing words (or sounds) of each insert. This will be enough to check the level and the balance between the audio tutor's voice and the insert, and to give the audio tutor an opportunity to practise introducing and responding to each of the inserts.
- During the rehearsal, the producer should avoid interrupting the presenter too often. Usually, it is worth stopping the rehearsal after the first few minutes, to offer encouragement to the presenter and to advise (where necessary) on how the presentation could be improved. This usually involves slowing the presenter down, so that the voice can be used more expressively. After that, unless there is a major problem, it is good to let the rehearsal continue, giving the audio tutor an opportunity to relax and settle down into the script.

- As a general rule, in working with presenters in the studio, producers should concentrate on providing positive and constructive advice and suggestions. Presenters are much more likely to respond to constructive criticism, if it is preceded by positive feedback and support. Always find something good to say about a presenter's performance, before going on to offer constructive advice and suggestions about how the performance could be improved.
- It is also important during rehearsal for the producer to listen carefully to the playing in of the inserts, and the audio tutor's pick-up of the script after each insert. Establishing a good rhythm and pace for the programme during rehearsal usually makes the final recording much smoother; and also tends to save valuable time in post-production fine editing.
- Once the rehearsal has been completed, it is worth taking a short refreshment break, before going on to the recording. But be careful not to break for too long and lose the momentum of the recording session.
- If the rehearsal has gone well, the final recording should not be a problem. Now the producer's main task is to listen and make sure the programme is recorded to the highest professional standards. To do so, the producer needs to be in a good position to monitor the studio output – the final sound of the recorded programme – either on headphones or a loudspeaker.
- If errors are made, or if the performance of the technician or audio tutor is inadequate, it is easy to stop recording and re-record the part that needs correction or improvement. Don't settle for poor quality!
- At the end of the studio session, the producer should listen to a short section of the final recording, to make sure that the sound quality is satisfactory. Also, make sure that the recording is properly labeled. Thank the technician and audio tutor for their efforts – and go home for a good rest!
- If you have time at the end of the session, play through the whole recording to check the duration, and also to decide whether post-production editing is necessary. If only a little editing is required, this is often done at the end of the recording session. Otherwise, an extra editing session will need to be booked.

## **7. Post-production editing**

The general purposes of editing were discussed in Chapter 3. If an audio programme is carefully planned and well produced in the studio, post-production editing should not be necessary. However, despite the best efforts of producers, presenters and technicians, some post-production editing may be necessary; and it can make a positive

contribution to the professional and technical quality of the programme.

As we suggested earlier, there are three main reasons for editing after the final studio recording. The most common of these is to reduce the duration of the programme to fit the time-slot available. If you are having to reduce the length of your programme:

- First, time the programme accurately, and work out exactly how much time you need to lose.
- Second, listen carefully through the programme (several times if necessary) and identify and time insert material (either whole inserts or parts of them) that can be removed without doing too much damage to the content and structure of the programme. **[Note:** It is usually much easier to maintain the structure of a programme by editing out parts of the insert material, rather than cutting the audio tutor's presentation.]
- Third, if cuts in the insert material do not provide sufficient savings, look at the possibility of cutting out a whole section of the programme (inserts and presentation script), though obviously one that will not damage the overall argument of the programme too much.
- Fourth, when you have decided on your cuts, look through the programme script and support material, to check whether your proposed cuts have implications for the rest of the programme and the support material.
- Fifth, only when you have gone through these steps should you actually start cutting the material. Also, as a safety measure, it is sensible to make a copy of the final studio recording before you start editing. In this way, if anything goes wrong in the editing, or if you change your mind, you still have an intact version of the programme.
- Sixth, when you have completed editing, play through the programme again to re-time it and also to check that the audio and any support material are still consistent following the editing process.

In addition to cutting for time, it may also be possible to improve the professional and technical quality of the programme by careful fine editing. The most common way of doing this is by reducing or extending the pauses between studio presentation and the insert material.

Ideally, you should have got this right in the studio. But occasionally, over-enthusiastic presenters or technicians mean that pauses need extending. Or slow reactions mean that the programme would sound better if the pauses were shortened. It may also be that quality can be

improved by further fine editing on the insert material or on the audio tutor's presentation.

Finally, post-production editing can be used (within limits) to correct any content errors that may have been missed at the script-writing, script-editing or recording stages. Hopefully, this will be a rare event. But if it is necessary, remember that you can only cut out material during editing. You can't introduce new material – unless of course you re-record. If re-recording does prove necessary, remember:

- The material has to be re-recorded in the same acoustic as the original
- It is virtually impossible to successfully replace single phrases or sentences
- You will normally have to re-record a whole link or piece of insert material

## **Producing magazine programmes**

Magazine programmes were described in Chapter 2 as follows:

**Magazines:** A popular and widely used format; usually broadcast on a regular basis (daily, weekly, monthly); dealing with a number of different topics, linked by a common theme; using a range of different audio forms; and usually presented (in distance education) by an audio teacher or tutor.

Magazine programmes are an excellent way of keeping distance and open learning students informed and up-to-date about what is happening in the institutions they are part of and the courses which they are following. Not only can they be used to provide practical information and advice; but they can also create a sense of identification and involvement with the institution. And in this way, they can combat the problems of isolation and the dangers of drop-out.

### **Production procedures**

The production techniques used for magazine programmes are very much like those discussed above for documentaries and features.

- **Preparing a detailed programme outline:** Having identified the audience, aims and objectives of the programme, you need to define its main theme and decide on the number of topics ('items') you are going to cover, and the subject matter they will deal with. You also need to decide whether support material or a back-up information service would be of value. What resources will you

need for the programme? How long will it take to produce? When should you start?

- **Researching the programme:** Having selected the topics, you need to research each of them – What do you need to find out? Who should your contributors be? What audio form should the contributions take? When, where and how will you record the material? Who will present the programme? You can present this information in the form of a provisional ‘running order’ – a list of ‘items’, arranged in probable order of presentation, with notes on audio treatment and intended duration.
- **Commissioning and collecting material:** Once you are clear about what you want to include in the programme and how you are going to do it, you can then go on to commissioning and collecting the material. It is common in magazine programmes to commission at least one more item than you are likely to use – on the grounds that at least one item may not work well in audio terms. (If all the items are good, no problem: you can keep one of them for later use.) In commissioning and collecting material, keep in mind the duration of the programme and the fact that you need to allow time for the presenter. (More on this later.) Also, the more variety of audio forms you can introduce, the more interesting your programme will sound.
- **Selecting, editing and ordering material:** It is at this point that you begin to finalise your ‘running order’ – i.e. make final decisions on what you will include in the programme, and how long each item will be. The time needed for this phase of programme development should not be underestimated. By the end of this phase, you should have a banded insert tape, with all the insert materials fine edited, ready for the programme presenter to draft the presentation (or ‘linking’) script.
- **Drafting the linking script:** If you are clear about what you’re including in the programme (and why) and you have fine-edited the insert material, writing the presentation script should not be difficult. The programme will usually start with an opening signature tune, followed by a ‘menu’ – i.e. an indication of what’s in the programme. The presenter then introduces each item and links it to the next. The programme usually ends with information on what’s likely to be in the next edition and when it can be heard, followed by the closing signature tune. The key questions to be considered are (a) whether to use one or two presenters, and (b) what sort of balance to aim for between the presenter(s) and the insert material.
- **Rehearsal and recording:** The procedures for rehearsing and recording magazine programmes are essentially the same as those discussed earlier for documentaries and features. The main difference is that magazine programmes (particularly those focusing on news and up-to-date information) are likely to be

recorded much closer to transmission or (less frequently) distribution on cassette. It is also possible, at least in radio, to broadcast the programmes 'live'. In this case, the precise timing of the insert material and presentation links becomes vital, as does the need for an experienced presenter and thorough rehearsal.

- **Post-production editing:** Again, as with documentaries and features, the post-production editing of a magazine programme should not be necessary if the programme has been carefully planned, well rehearsed and well recorded. However, the possibility of editing does provide the producer with an opportunity to polish and sometimes significantly improve the quality of the final version of the programme.

## **Some production hints**

What follows are some practical suggestions for the production and presentation of magazine programmes for formal and non-formal distance and open learning.

### **Regular transmission slots**

Magazine programmes are likely to be most effective if they are transmitted:

- on a regular basis – daily, weekly, monthly
- on regular days and at regular times

Students will then know when the programme is due. If they find it useful and interesting, they will develop the habit of listening on a regular basis. In this way, magazine programmes can be used as an efficient, effective and reliable way of communicating essential information to students.

### **Signature tunes**

It is useful for magazine programmes to have a signature tune ('sig tune') – i.e. a piece of music which regularly opens and usually closes the programme, and may also be used as a 'spacer' between items. This is not only an attractive way of opening and closing the programme. It also:

- Gives the programme a clear identity, which makes it readily identifiable to the audience
- Attracts their attention and gives them a chance to settle down before the programme starts

The exact type of music you choose is a matter of culture and taste. But in general it should probably be lively, engaging and easily

memorable – the sort of music that arouses your interest, rather than putting you to sleep. Instrumental music has the advantage that it can be faded and held under the voice of the announcer or presenter without distracting from what is being said. However, vocal music can also be used. And songs have the advantage – often used in non-formal education – that they can incorporate the main educational messages of a programme in a way that the audience will remember and internalise.

It is generally enough to play the signature tune for 15-20" before the voice of the announcer or presenter comes in. However, vocal music usually needs to be played for longer than this, e.g. for one verse of the song. After 15-20", instrumental music can then be faded under the voice of the announcer or presenter and lost. Alternatively, the signature tune can be faded and held under the opening announcement, brought up again briefly (probably no more than 10") after the announcement, and then faded and lost under the voice of the presenter.

At the end of the programme, you need at least 15-20" of signature tune, though if you have time, it can be longer. Ideally, the closing signature tune should end on a natural fade in the music, indicating the end of the programme. One neat way of achieving this (particularly useful in live broadcasting) is to have a pre-timed closing sig tune (say 2'00" of music).

- Start the music exactly 2'00" before you want the programme to end; but with the 'fader' on the mixing desk closed, so that the music is not heard in the programme
- Slowly fade up the music as the last words of the script are being spoken
- When the words are finished, fade up the music completely and run it to its natural end.

In this way, your programme will end exactly on time, with the music coming to a natural conclusion.

### **One presenter versus two?**

Most magazine programmes tend to have a single regular presenter. This gives the programme a clear identity. Listeners become familiar with the presenter's voice and personality; it is associated with the programme; and over time a relationship of familiarity and trust can be established. However, a case can also be made for having two presenters. There are two main arguments in favour of this:

- First, it adds variety and dynamism to the presentation of the programme

- Secondly, it offers an opportunity to have both a man and a woman presenting the programme

Set against these arguments are the opposing views that:

- Having two presenters, particularly if they are in dialogue with each other, tends to consume too much programme time, reducing the time available for the substantive items in the programme
- There is a danger that having two presenters leads to programmes becoming too inward-looking: the presenters tend to talk to each other, rather than communicating directly with the listeners

However you resolve these arguments, it is important that the presentation is well informed, friendly and student-centred. The presenters are there to represent the interests and concerns of the student, and to present materials that respond to their particular concerns and needs.

### **Duration, number of items and item length**

The usual duration of broadcast magazine programmes tends to be 15-30', with an average of 3-6 items in each programme. If you allow

- 1'30"-2'00" for the opening of the programme – sig tune, menu, introduction to the first item
- About the same amount of time for the closing section – follow-up information, details of the next programme, closing sig tune
- And if you allow say 0'30"-1'00" for each of the presenter's links between items

– that gives an average item length of about 3'30".

Using items of about this average length (say 3'00"-4'00"), provided they are interesting and relevant, will give you a lively and fast-moving programme, which should hold the interest and attention of your students. Although 3'00"-4'00" may seem a relatively short time to non-producers, it is in fact long enough to deal very effectively with most magazine topics. And, since rules are made to be broken (at least for good reasons!), if you have a topic that needs more time, you can always vary the format – e.g. having one longer item and a number of short ones. However, as a rule of thumb, you should always allow nearly one-third of your magazine programme time for presentation.

### **Menus and trails**

It is useful for the presenter to begin a magazine programme with a brief 'menu' – i.e. an indication of the main items to be covered in the programme. In this way, although individual listeners may not be

interested in all the items, if they are told it is likely that they will find at least one or two which do interest them, and will therefore continue listening to the programme.

Similarly, at the end of the programme, it is useful for presenters to 'trail' (i.e. give advance information about) topics coming up in the next or later programme, which (if they are interesting and relevant) will carry the audience forward.

### Programme structure

Implicit in the discussion above is a basic structure for magazine programmes, with the following main characteristics:

<b>Introduction</b>	Opening sig tune (15-20") – Programme announcement – Presenter's introduction – greeting, menu & introduction to item 1
<b>Main body</b>	A series of say 3-6 items, linked to the main theme of the programme, arranged in a coherent order – with each item introduced, concluded and linked to the next item by the presenter(s)
<b>Conclusion</b>	Presenter's conclusion – reminder of important points and information in the programme, trails for next and future programmes, good-bye to the listeners – Closing sig tune (0'15"+)

### Audience participation

Although radio is essentially a one-way medium, you can make magazine programmes more involving and interactive by inviting students to respond to and participate in the programmes. This participation can take a number of forms:

- Students can be invited to take part in the programmes – asking questions about their courses, providing comment and feedback on materials and student support, sharing their experiences as distance and open learners.
- Programmes can invite letters, phone calls and e-mail from students. These can then be broadcast and responded to on air by appropriate people.

- Listeners can be asked for their ideas and suggestions about the sort of topics they would like included in the programmes. Competitions could be run – with modest prizes (such as appearing in the programme) for the most original and imaginative contributions.

In all of these ways – and no doubt others you can think of – students can be encouraged to share in the ownership of the programmes – to see them as a way in which their voices can be heard and in which they can be actively involved and participate in shaping their own educational opportunities and experience.

### **Wider applications**

So far, we have been thinking of magazine programmes mainly as a broadcast format. However, these techniques can also be used on audio cassette, for a number of different purposes. For instance:

- Cassette-based magazine programmes can be used to introduce new students to an institution or project and how it operates.
- They can also be used for the induction of students into particular courses and programmes of study.
- In addition, magazine programmes can serve a number of special purposes – e.g. help with study skills; advice on choosing courses, support for students with disabilities.

Whenever there is an identifiable group, with a particular need, magazine programmes on audio cassettes – ideally with printed support – can be considered as an attractive, accessible, economic and effective way of responding to it.

**Some questions to ask if you are thinking of starting a magazine programme**

- Who would the programme be aimed at?
- What would be its main aims and objectives?
- What sort of subject matter would the programme deal with?
- Would it be broadcast or distributed on audio cassettes?
- If broadcast, who would transmit the programme, how often and when?
- Who will produce and present the programme?
- What resources will they need? Are they available?
- What support materials and/or services would be useful? Who will provide them?
- How will the students benefit from the programme? Is it worth the investment?