

Classical Spark

Best Practice Guide to Effective On-air Positioning and Promotion

Craig Curtis



STATION RESOURCE GROUP

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The Classical Spark On-Air Promotion Guide is designed to help stations develop more consistent and effective positioning and promotion of their services, which in turn builds more listening to the station's on-air and streamed services.

The ideas described here are based on long-established practices at the best and most successful commercial and public radio stations, which at their best clearly communicate who they are and what they do to their audience in memorable ways.

Here is a checklist of ten proven tips for station promotion:

1. Identify your station clearly and consistently.
2. Understand and use positioners and liners.
3. Have a clear strategy and purpose for all promotion.
4. Tell the listener what's coming next, and in a compelling way.
5. Reinforce existing listener habits.
6. Promote similar habits and programming.
7. Promote membership and other forms of giving.
8. Cross promote to and from digital media, TV, other formats, events, etc.
9. Know the elements of a good promo.
10. Be entertaining.

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1. Identify your station clearly and consistently

This is Rule #1. Period. Use your name all the time, in every announcer stop-set, every produced promo, every standard outcue, in every piece of station communication, on every digital platform, wherever and whenever you can.

We are *not* talking about your full legal ID here, i.e. the station's call-letters and city of license, which should be only used once per hour as required by the FCC. (We'll talk more about IDs below.) We're talking about the name or identifier you most commonly use, which is the name your audience will use when they talk about you.

Typical identifiers include some combination of call-letters, dial position, format descriptor, or an institutional or station name. When using call-letters, as most stations do, remember that they do not by themselves convey what your station offers (format) or where you are located (frequency), so consider using call-letters in a combination with other identifying information. For example: Classical Radio Boston, 99.5 WCRB. Whatever you choose, the identifier needs to be short, memorable, descriptive, easy to say and easy on the ear. If you regularly trip over a station name while saying it, change it. If it is not crystal clear to the listener, change it.

As much as possible your identifier should be consistent with your digital names, such as for your web address and social media handles. And of course your logo should be a visual representation of the station identifier.

Some examples of simple names include WOSU Classical 101, 91Classical (in Nashville), All Classical Portland, Discover Classical (in Dayton), Classically Austin 89.5 FM, etc. Detroit's dual-format station identifies itself as "WRCJ-FM 90.9, classical days, jazzy nights".

Once you've chosen an identifier, establish clear rules on its exact delivery, just as you would insist on consistent physical appearance of your station logo. What order is information presented? How do you want the call-letters pronounced? Do you want to use the "point" in the dial position? (Yes, this is important.) Are there acceptable shorter and longer versions of the identifier? (These are handy for announcers hitting time posts.) How should it be used in conjunction with other positioners and liners? How does it appear in print and online? No detail is too fine to overlook.

For a classic example of effective on-air station identification and positioning, listen to [WINS, New York](#). In a few minutes I guarantee you will hear them say "1010 WINS" several times, always delivered as "ten-ten-wins". They also use "All news 1010 WINS," "All news all the time," and their famous liner, "Give us 22 minutes and we'll give you the world." WINS has been using these for *decades* and they are still enormously effective. And chances are good that there is an AM news/talk or classic rock station in your market that has similarly long-used names and positioners. Just look at the top of your ratings book.

A note about networks and multiple-station services

Identifying a single station is simple enough. If you operate a network or several repeating transmitters, you face a challenge. One option is to use a service or network name, such as “Minnesota Public Radio Classical,” in lieu of a standard call-letter/dial position combination. If, as is commonly the case, your station group includes a primary transmitter in a large city that produces a majority of your total service come, consider using the call-letters and dial position of that primary station as the full service name. For example, KUSC broadcasts its service over about a half-dozen transmitters in Southern California, but a huge majority of its total come comes from its 91.5 transmitter in Los Angeles. The entire service is branded as “Classical KUSC” on all its transmitters, with occasional use of the LA frequency, while full legal IDs for each transmitter are broadcast only at the top of the hour.

Remember that you can call a radio station anything you like, including any call-letters you like — well, within legal and trademark limitations — as long as you give the correct legal ID once an hour, as with KUSC and its repeaters. If you do use the larger service brand approach, *be sure to register your station name with Nielsen in each measured market*. It is especially critical to do this in Nielsen diary markets to make sure you get listening credit from the station names written down by listeners in a diary.

Some station groups or networks also recognize other regional stations in rotation, usually in a secondary position after the primary station name. You might say, “This is Classical KUSC, at 91.5 in Los Angeles and at 88.5 in Palm Springs,” then similarly recognize frequencies in Santa Barbara, Thousand Oaks, Morro Bay, etc. These constructions are time-consuming, and should only be done once or perhaps twice an hour, and usually in a rotation that recognizes the relative audience size of each translator or repeating station you want to acknowledge.

A note on legal IDs

If you operate only two or perhaps three transmitters, the once-an-hour recitation of full legal IDs for each station airing on all stations is fine if you do it as quickly as possible — limit yourself to the minimum FCC requirement of call-letters and city of license and omit frequencies or other positioners. If you operate three or more stations and read out all those legal IDs you subject the listener to a fog of call-letters, frequencies and city names and this is a significant turnoff. Use a system that allows for single local legal IDs to be broadcast in the clear on each individual station rather than running a long string of IDs for each station on all stations. Minnesota Public Radio, among others, has a system that does this very neatly. Most automation systems come prepared to do this very thing for you, since this is a common challenge throughout commercial and noncommercial radio.

A growing number of public radio stations have extended their coverage area using boosters and translators in addition to full-power repeaters. Make sure you understand the acceptable methods and minimum requirements for identification of boosters and translators, which do *not* require hourly IDs like your main channel or full-power repeaters.

2. Understand and use positioners and liners

Positioners and liners tell your audience who you are, what you do and where you do it.

Use of positioners and liners are hugely under-appreciated in noncommercial radio. When used properly with your station name, positioners and liners tell your audience who you are, what you do and where you do it. The phrases you use should be

simple, clear, memorable, and convey a conviction and promise to the listener. These are the phrases you want to hear back from listeners when you see them on the street, read their Facebook postings, or listen to them talk about you from behind a one-way mirror. Tell them these things clearly, then do it again, and do it again. Rinse, repeat. You get the idea. (Okay, okay, sermon over.)

First some brief definitions: A positioner is a short phrase that describes the station's format or position in the market. A liner is a longer statement that addresses how the audience uses the station, or how you *want* them to use the station. The best positioners are two or three word descriptors, while the best liners are a short phrase that presents a clear promise to the listener.

Let's go back to WINS in New York and see what they do:

Legal ID: WINS, New York
Name: 1010 WINS
Positioner: All news or All news all the time
Liner: Give us 22 minutes and we'll give you the world.

WINS often combines its name and positioner, such as, "This is All News, 1010 WINS."

Staying in New York, here are phrases used by WQXR:

Legal ID: WQXR, Newark (Yes, 'QXR is licensed in Jersey!)
Name: Classical New York (sometimes extended with 105.9 WQXR)
Positioner: New York's classical music station
Sample liner: Great music from the greatest city in the world.

WINS and WQXR both use no-nonsense names and positioners that clearly describe the station's purpose and place in the New York market, and the liners make a clear promise to their audiences. They avoid the kind of over-clever language that can wear out quickly. This is a big problem in public radio, where these sorts of things are frequently over-thought.

Other clear and straight-forward examples include "Colorado Public Radio, the classical voice of Denver" and "Classical KING-FM, the voice of the arts."

Some stations rotate other liners through the year depending on the station’s messaging needs, or adapt them in other ways. For example, WDAV in Charlotte adapts its liner “your classical companion” to different dayparts: “Your classical companion at work,” “... in the evenings,” “... on the weekends,” “... for the holidays,” etc.

Depending on the production sound of your station, consider using a mix of live and produced versions of your ID, name, positioner and liners. A produced liner or positioner with a music bed – a “sweeper” in radio jargon – can brighten the sound of your station, highlight a message, and has practical use for busy traffic and operations managers assembling logs and playlists for periods when you do not have a live announcer on duty.

For live reads, be clear with your announcers: your name must be delivered absolutely consistently and your positioners and liners *must be delivered verbatim*. There is plenty of room for host creativity and personality using context, pace, and tone when delivering these phrases, but on-air talent must not be allowed to fuss with the language.

In summary, remember that these phrases have specific purposes. Your station ID is a legal construction required by the FCC. Your station name tells listeners who you are, what you do, and/or where you are. Your positioner clearly describes your place and purpose in your radio market. And your brand value liners should be your promise to listeners — a promise you must, of course, fulfill.

Before moving on we should point out that your name, positioners, and liners, as well as all the promotional messages, production elements, sound effects, music beds, etc. are collectively referred to as “imaging,” which in turn is part of your overall “stationality,” subjects worthy of more attention than we will provide in this brief guide, but which should be kept front of mind when making decisions about what to put on your radio station.

3. Have a clear strategy and purpose for all promotion

This should be obvious, but is often overlooked.

Make sure every promo, produced or live, addresses a clearly identified station priority and audience interest, and that your promo schedule reflects those priorities and interests. Promotional goals may include building brand, daypart listening, listening occasions, time spent listening, institutional awareness, understanding of membership, building audience for a specific program, events, increasing web traffic or Facebook use, etc.

Whatever you do, decide to do it and do it intentionally, and focus on a small number of goals. WFMT in Chicago keeps its promotional inventory focused on no more than five or six items or ideas at any given time. Just as information overload in a spot, story or stopset can cause it to collapse and provide no memorable information for the listener, a station trying to promote too many things will end up promoting nothing at all.

Know how you want promotion to affect listener behavior, and determine how to measure that behavior. Track results over time using appropriate Nielsen data points. Learn the basics of scheduling strategies, such as the concept of “OES” (Optimal Effective Schedule), which allows you to create spot schedules that will reach a specified part of your audience. Remember that most listeners will tolerate more promotion and repetition than you think. There’s an old truism in radio that when the station staff has become sick of a spot, the audience is just beginning to hear it, and when the audience becomes sick of a spot they are just beginning to remember it.

Every promo, produced or live, should address a clearly identified station priority and audience interest. Your promo schedule should reflect those priorities and interests.

PRPD (Public Radio Program Directors Association) and Greater Public are good sources of information on standard strategies in the promotion and marketing arena. There are lots of smart people in public radio ready and willing to help you with these questions, such as the researchers and station reps at NPR, PRI, APM, the Radio Research Consortium (RRC), and Nielsen itself. And don’t forget your station colleagues. If you have questions, chances are good that colleagues have grappled with those questions as well and may have found solutions. Call your colleagues; spread their – and your - good ideas around.

Finally, for every promotional message, ask yourself two questions: First: What is this promo accomplishing for my station? Second: What value does it have for the listener? There should be simple answers for each question. If not, go back to the drawing board.

Regardless of its specific intended purpose, *all* promotion is ultimately branding and imaging for your station. It reminds the listener who you are and what you do. All the time. The most significant things you can do to build use of your station are to 1) extend the duration of individual listening occasions, and 2) increase listening occasions. Both are critical to your success. As you read the following thoughts, keep those goals in mind.

4. Tell the listener what’s coming next, and in a compelling way

As a framework for all promotion, consider what you are asking the listener to do. The simpler the request, the more effective the promotion. As requests become more complicated, effectiveness trails off. Saying “stay tuned” is simple to understand and simple to do. A complicated promo for a special program at an unrelated distant time requires a good deal more of the listener and is less likely to succeed.

The most important kind of promotion deals with what’s coming next. This is variously called “flow,” “forward” or “vertical” promotion. It’s the most effective kind of radio promotion – all it asks of the listener is that he/she keeps listening to your radio station.

But asking that one thing is not always easy. Even classical music listeners are easily distracted so you need to give them specific and compelling reasons to stay with you. A laundry list of pieces or composers coming up is a waste of your air time and their listening time and brain space. Think about what makes the music interesting to the listener. Frame it in a compelling way. Learn how to do a classic “tease promo,” or pose a question that will be answered in your intro for the next piece, or by the piece itself. Almost everyone will stick around to hear the answer to a well-posed question.

Some of the best examples of forward promotion can be found on your local sports talk radio stations. With their easily distractible and mostly young male audience, sports talkers have to work hard to keep their listeners engaged, so they know and use every trick in the book. You’ll find sports talkers especially good at the tease promo. It may not seem immediately applicable to classical music, but the technique can be easily adapted. Imagine an announcer saying, “Leonard Bernstein said he was the *greatest* Brahms pianist he ever heard!” You want to know who this fab Brahms pianist is, right? You have to keep listening. Your brain wants a solution to the mystery, even though it’s a small one.

In planning forward promotion, be aware of listening habits for the daypart in question. And generally think of three time frames for this promotion: what’s coming up almost immediately, what’s coming in the next quarter hour, and what’s coming in the next hour or so. Keep listeners interested in what you’re about to do, and what you have in mind for the duration of a typical listening occasion. Imagine listeners coming and going constantly. Every time you open the mic, some listeners have just arrived, some have just left, and some are in the middle of a long occasion. Understand the times of day when that coming-and-going is greater, and when audience movement is less dynamic and more stable.

Promoting what’s coming up immediately is sometimes called a “jump promo,” and typically promotes something coming at the end of a break, or after a produced spot or some other very short piece of music or content. The time frame can be as little as 10 seconds and range up to a couple of minutes. Commercial radio announcers use jump promos to keep listeners around through commercial breaks, and you’ll hear NPR news hosts use jump promos at the end of news magazine segments for the same reason. In doing a jump promo it’s good to use specific information and even a specific time reference. It can be as simple as, “Beethoven’s Egmont Overture in 90 seconds,” or even something as simple as, “In a minute, the perfect music for a perfect summer day.”

Promoting ahead over a short period of time, say 10-15 minutes, is also critically important. Partly this is due to Nielsen’s use of the quarter-hour as a standard unit of audience measurement, but it’s also a practical amount of time by which you can reasonably hope to extend a listening occasion if you give the listener a good enough reason to stick around. Be imaginative, be clear, and be specific. Some will argue that this kind of promotion should use vague “coming up” time references, though in recent years most stations (in all formats, commercial and noncommercial) have moved toward more specific references, such as, “We’ll

give away tickets to Friday’s Cincinnati Symphony concert in ten minutes” or “Your Morning Bach coming up at 7:30.”

Given the realities of typical radio listening habits, doing “stay tuned” promotion that looks ahead by more than an hour or so is of limited value. Do it only if you have something the audience will find especially appealing. Again, be specific and be clear.

But do it understanding that talking about something that’s an hour into the future is a medium-tough sell for most listeners. Certainly your heavy core/P1 listeners who have your station on all day long may find the promotion helpful, but it is unlikely to change the behavior of a lighter listener or someone whose schedule and habits will take him/her away from the radio. This sort of longer term promotion almost functions more as branding and positioning for your station, reminding listeners of the kinds of things you regularly do.

Always consider what you are asking the listener to do. The simpler the request, the more effective the promotion.

5. Reinforce and build on existing listener habits

A great deal of radio listening is habitual, based on an individual listener’s personal schedule and lifestyle. Someone who listens, say, at the office during the afternoon is likely to do so again tomorrow. Reinforce those habits with promotion.

Promoting from a specific time or daypart to the same time or daypart on future days is called “horizontal” promotion. It requires more of the listener than flow or vertical promotion (Point #4), which only requires that the listener stay put and keep listening. In horizontal promotion we need the listener to hear the message, understand the message, and return again at the same time tomorrow. That’s a lot to ask, but it’s an important part of building a relationship with a listener that leads to long-term listening and, not incidentally, the kind of regular station use that leads to membership.

Horizontal promotion can be tied to specific activities typical of certain dayparts. As one of the “adult music formats,” classical music has strong midday listening, leading many stations to do ongoing “listen while you work” or “listen at the office” promotion. On the other hand, classical music has not traditionally been a strong drive time format, but some stations have successfully promoted in-car listening in engaging ways. WETA has used the liner “Elevate your commute” to position WETA as a safe haven for stressed Washington commuters, while KBAQ in Phoenix has used the funny and timely (in 2017) “Make your commute great again” in on-air promotion and billboards, complete with a picture of Bach wearing sunglasses. (Remember, this is in Phoenix.)

Some classical stations create habits with an easily promoted idea such as “Morning Mozart,” “Bach’s Lunch,” “The Four O’Clock Waltz,” “Evening Masterworks,” etc. These islands of predictable and familiar music, which can create a listening habit you can then reinforce and

promote in a variety of ways. A good example of this strategy from commercial pop music radio is the “commercial-free hour,” which is rarely commercial-free or an hour long (!), but which has proven very effective if done at times of day when the audience has been coming and going, but is settling into new habits, such as 9 AM when people are starting work, or 1 PM when they are returning from lunch.

Promoting weekday-to-weekend flow is also an important part of this kind of promotion. Most effective weekday-to-weekend promotion is pegged to how lifestyles, activities and personal schedules change on the weekend, starting with the fact that people stay in bed later and have more control over their own schedules over the weekend. Take these things into account in planning this kind of promotion, but please do not promote weekend listening early in the week. Save it mostly for Thursday and Friday. A Monday promo for the Saturday Met Opera is a waste of everybody’s time.

In summary: Understand your listeners’ habits. Relate to them. Create new habits when you can. Reinforce them constantly.

6. Promote to related programming and interests

Flow and horizontal promotion will occupy most of your time and effort, but watch for opportunities to promote from specific programming to other similar programming. Obvious examples would be to play a Chicago Symphony CD to promote the evening concert broadcast, or play a CD by an artist to be featured later on “Exploring Music.”

This kind of promotion is easy to do and comes naturally to classical music radio stations and programmers. However, you need to understand its limitations, as it asks much more of listeners than flow and horizontal promotion. In this kind of promotion the listener must do five things: 1) hear the message, 2) understand the message, 3) care about the message, 4) remember the message, and 5) act on the message. This is a fragile construct that can easily fall apart, especially if you are asking a listener to come back to the station and listen at a time that is not normal for them. Clearly this kind of promotion can be consciously used to drive listeners to new (for them) dayparts or programs, but beware of its challenges.

A note on promotion of syndicated programming

Some syndicated classical programming appears in what we might consider our prime times, such as the Met Opera on Saturday afternoons or daytime broadcasts of “Performance Today,” but for the most part classical stations air syndicated and concert programs in evenings and during non-prime weekend hours, often when the station is automated. These programs provide stations with well-made weekly promos. but they should be used only as part of an appropriate rotation that takes into account the time the program airs and the total value the program promos have to the station when compared to other kinds of promotion.

7. Promote membership and institutional value

Promotion of membership deserves more space than we can take here. But here are some thoughts.

Most of public radio's highest performing stations produce and schedule membership promotion through the year, set aside dedicated inventory for membership or fundraising spots. This can also include messages promoting planned giving, major gifts, stock and car donations, fiscal and calendar year-end giving, etc.

When you cross-promote other services of your organization, do a reality check on the audience attracted by them. Do the alternative services attract sufficient audience to warrant promotion on your main channel?

If you worry that constant membership promotion may give the impression of the “year-round fundraiser,” make your membership spots more informational or educational in nature, explaining how public radio works and how it's funded, rather than making a hard pitch for a transactional membership.

8. Cross-promote to and from digital media, TV, other radio formats, and events

Cross promotion to events or other media has to be treated as you would any radio promotion – it must take into account the interests and habits of the radio listener. Does the message make sense at the time and in the context you present it? Will the listener perceive personal value in it? Think about placement of cross-promotion the same way you would think about placement of an underwriting message or commercial advertising, since that is effectively what you're doing: you are promoting an activity that is *not* listening to your radio station, and may even be relatively unrelated to what you do.

Understand that your digital platforms are both an extension of your station and stand-alone media in their own right. Treat them accordingly. A good website exists first to be a good website for the online user and only after that to serve as a supporting promotional outlet for a radio station. Random generic tosses from your radio station to your website, Facebook page, or Twitter account are pointless. Identify useful and appealing features of your digital platforms, or point listeners toward digital content that relates to or expands on radio programming. Give specific reasons for using digital media, just as you would in promoting radio listening. Personally relate to your digital content with engagement and enthusiasm. It's part of who you are, and is going to become even more important in the future.

Although we are focused on radio positioning and promotion here, a quick note about your website. Aside from its function and performance as a digital medium, your radio audience expects a few basic things from your site. You should at minimum provide a good quality web

stream of your main broadcast, a display showing “what’s on now,” and playlists and program schedules that are easy to find and easy to search. Host profiles are important too, as they help build personal connections with the “trusted guides” on your air. Every listener expects this of you.

In some larger public media organizations you may be expected to cross-promote to a TV station or a radio station with another format, such as AAA or NPR news. Do this with discipline and care.

In cross-promoting to TV, identify programming that will appeal to *your radio audience* and limit your cross-promotion to that programming. Obviously it makes more sense to cross-promote a “Great Performances” orchestral concert on a classical radio station than “Sesame Street,” but it may be more useful still to cross-promote to other programs with very broad appeal, such as “Masterpiece Theater” or “PBS NewsHour”. Most likely, more of your audience watched “Downton Abbey” than all the “Great Performances” of the last 20 years combined.

Cross-promoting to an NPR news station is fairly straight forward, since a significant part of the classical radio audience also listens to NPR news. Similarly, some classical music listeners also listen to jazz and blues, especially on the weekends. Cross promoting to AAA or other young adult alternative music formats is trickier, but can be done with care and imagination, just as you should carefully approach promotion of alternative music or news services your organization may stream from your website or broadcast on HD Radio. If you think your audience might be interested, promote the alternative services; if not, don’t. To cite an example, I once heard on a university-licensed station run a promo during a Met Opera intermission for a Saturday night head-banger show on the university’s student station. There may be some people who enjoy Wagner and heavy metal, but probably not enough to warrant the expenditure of valuable air time that could be used for another purpose.

Whenever you cross-promote to other services provided by your organization, do a reality check and keep an eye on the audience attracted by these alternative services. Make certain the alternative services attract sufficient audience to warrant promotion on your main channel. Whenever you are promoting an alternative service, you are not promoting your main service.

Sometimes cross-promotion to other media within your organization can simply be treated as institutional positioning that describes the breadth and reach of your organization within your community. This is an especially good way to promote institutional services that may not seem to have immediate appeal to classical music listeners. For example, if your university licensee also has a student-run alternative music station, rather than promoting new pop music on that station to your classical audience, talk about your institution’s reach and service to the young people in your town.

Many stations sponsor events, either on their own or in partnership with other organizations. All the rules of promotion still apply. What is the listener’s interest in the event? What is the best time and best way to promote the event? How do I interest the listener in the event?

Promoting a classical music performance is as easy as playing music that relates to the event, then promoting it or producing a promo with an appropriate music bed. Promoting non-music events is similar to promoting non-music public TV shows or other non-classical radio programs or formats.

If you have financial interest in an event, or are in a promotional relationship with another organization, treat and manage your event promotion as you would any underwriting agreement. Execute a contract, place a value on the spots, schedule the spots/live reads on the log, etc. This helps you track the value of your on-air promotion, which is part of the total station cost for sponsoring and presenting an event, and your contribution to that event. Remember, *there is no such thing as a free spot*. Air time has value and cost, whether or not cash changes hands. The same goes for promotion and advertising on your digital platforms. Just as there are no free radio spots, there are no free banner ads or Twitter mentions.

Don't be afraid of emotion. People come to our stations for emotional satisfaction in the first place, and that's what we give them with the world's great music.

Even when the station is presenting an event on its own, this kind of tracking and contract discipline is a good to do in order to track the true costs for putting on an event. (All together now: There are no free spots!)

Sometimes promotion of non-broadcast content or events can effectively serve as institutional branding for your station or licensee. For example, you may have a promotional relationship with a student music competition with a public performance, which will be attended by only a tiny percentage of your audience and which may not even provide a top level musical experience. In cases like this, the on-air promotion can be of greater value than the event itself or your participation in it, reinforcing your association with music education, and building a local reputation that may benefit institutional fundraising.

Though not technically cross-media or related event cross-promotion, some institutional licensees may request or even require institutional promotion on your station. This can be handled with scripted spots and credits, or through liners or secondary positioners, perhaps attached to your legal ID. KUSC in Los Angeles is licensed to the University of Southern California, and mentions the Keck School of Medicine, the Thornton School of Music, and other schools or services of USC in rotation as part of its legal ID. This is another good place to use an underwriting-style agreement with appropriate tracking and proof-of-performance documentation, just so there will be no questions about what you are providing to your licensee.

9. Know the elements of a good promo

The art of writing and producing a good promo, news story, stop-set, commercial, etc. is covered in many books and is another subject worthy of longer treatment. Here are a few thoughts to get you started, some new, some old, and some very old, but then most of our story-telling and selling skills were first developed around fires in caves.

Some of what follows comes from commercial broadcasting and media, but the tools and techniques are easily adapted to noncommercial rules and style. Remember that we're all trying to do the same thing — keep people listening, or get them to do something — it's just that our business models are different.

For starters, know what you want in advance from every promo. What is its purpose? What information do you want to convey? What do you want the listener to do?

Understand the three elements of a classic promo (or commercial):

1. The Hook: Get the listener's attention. Remember that the purpose of the first sentence of the promo is to get the listener to listen to the second sentence.
2. The Information or Case: What information do you want the listener to have?
3. The Close/Call to Action: What do you want the listener to do?

So a perfect stripped-down script might read as follows:

1. Free beer! (The Hook)
2. For everybody over 21 at Joe's Bar & Grill. (Information/Case)
3. Friday night from 9 to closing. (The Close/ Call to Action)

A smart traffic manager might follow that spot with an ad for Uber, Lyft or Yellow Cab, or maybe a PSA for Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

As you listen to and watch commercial TV, pay attention to how this structure is used, and learn how to make public radio promotion within this construct. Chances are good you already do a lot of this kind of promotion on your station, especially during fundraisers, when public radio, knowingly or not, makes the most aggressive use of standard commercial strategies!

1. Win a free trip to Paris! (The Hook)
2. Become a member, support public radio, enter the drawing. (Information/Case)
3. Join now at WXYZ-dot-org. (The Close/Call to Action)

It's time to sit down and write. Here are a few thoughts:

- Write always for the ear rather than the eye, and mostly for the heart rather than the brain.
- Only one idea per spot.
- Get to the point immediately. Do not bury the lead. In public radio we like to build our stories to a big finish, which causes us to hang on to the most important information until the end of the spot/story. Get it right out up front.
- Make every idea, phrase, and word justify its presence. If you don't need it, throw it out. Even if your station does not use 15-second promos, try writing some. The exercise in economy of expression will help your 30-second spots.
- Write using clear and concise conversational language, and in short sentences that can easily be read in one breath. (Sentence fragments are fine in the right context.) Do not use words or phrases you would not use in normal conversation. Affected and unnatural language is thrown into sharp relief when you read the spot out loud, and imagine saying it directly to another person.
- Imagine every script as a two-way conversation with a listener. How will he/she respond to each sentence? If that response is "Tell me more" or "That's interesting," go on. If the response is "I don't care," "So?," or a silent shrug, go back and start over.
- Avoid lists, too much analysis, too many numbers, too many ideas, too much 'splainin'. Emotional connections are more memorable than lots of information.
- Read and understand the skills of the great story tellers: the Torah and Gospel writers, Homer, the parables of Jesus and The Buddha, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Twain, Austen, Dickens, Lincoln, Walt Disney, Billie Holiday, Charles Schulz, J.K. Rowling, and the people who write GEICO commercials. With the exception of GEICO's ad writers and maybe Charles Schulz — a daily panel cartoon is the perfect promo or commercial length — these people may not seem the most obvious teachers of how to write a tight 30-second public radio spot, but they will teach you a great deal about telling stories in a compelling way and using those stories to engage or motivate people.
- When you're done, read the script out loud and to the clock, then read it slower, then read it slower still. Remember to "leave room" for the listener response. If you stumble over a word or phrase, chances are the problem is in the script and it should be changed. A script overloaded with words and information will collapse of its own weight, and ultimately convey no information to a listener. (Think about the rapid recitation of side effects at the end of pharmaceutical ads, or qualifications for financing

at the end of car ads. These are perfect example of spot overload. Obviously this information is legally required in the commercial, but the unintelligible fast read accomplishes two goals: it meets the letter of the law and fails to convey any useful information.)

- Find an editor. If not a formally trained writer and editor, a smart co-worker, a friend, a significant other. No matter how many spots you've written, a second pair of eyes and ears will make your work better.
- As you write, consider how you might make imaginative use of music beds and/or sound. Some public radio stations are uncomfortable with this approach and think it sounds "too commercial," but if done with understanding of your audience's interests and the format, use of sound, character voices and other techniques adapted from commercial production can be effective within a noncommercial classical music format.

There are numerous books and resources on writing clearly and writing for radio listed in the Appendix at the end of this Guide.

Remember that we do much of our best and most focused promotion during fundraisers. There's something about the need to ask people to give you money that naturally produces a hook/case/close structure. So, learn from your on-air membership department and your best pitchers.

Finally, both for fun and educational purposes, here's a series of commercials promoting radio advertising done by [Stan Freberg](#) in 1965. (The jingle is sung by Sarah Vaughan!) At 3:03 of the video is Freberg's classic draining of Lake Michigan spot, which will be used in advertising schools until the end of time.

Listen and learn.

10. Be entertaining

Radio, even radio that plays the B Minor Mass, is ultimately an entertainment medium. If you are uncomfortable with the word "entertaining," think of your station as compelling, interesting, uplifting, inspiring, relaxing, enlightening, or any of the other words commonly used by classical music listeners to describe what they value about what we do. But understand that emotional connection clearly.

Don't be afraid of emotion. People come to our stations for emotional satisfaction in the first place, and that's what we give them with the world's great music. It's okay for your other messages and hosts to show emotion too, and those emotions include fun!

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In preparing this guide, we have benefited from the thoughts, experiences and examples of many Classical Music Rising partners across the country.

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APPENDIX

There are numerous books and resources on writing clearly and writing for radio. Here are a few:

- [The Elements of Style](#) (aka “Strunk and White”) by William Strunk and E.B. White is almost 100 years old, but is still the best available guide to economic writing.
- [Rudolf Flesch](#) is best known for *Why Johnny Can’t Read*, a famous critique of how America teaches reading, but also wrote several books on clear and engaging writing, such as *The Classic Guide to Better Writing* and *The Art of Clear Thinking*.
- [Do I Make Myself Clear?](#) by Harold Evans, a long-time editor for The Times of London and Random House, pulls no punches on the question of clarity.
- [Writing News for Broadcast](#) by Edward Bliss and James Hoyt is a standard textbook at leading journalism schools.
- [The Associated Press Stylebook](#) is updated annually and covers a huge range of topics related to editorial content, writing and style for broadcast, print and digital media. Every radio station should have a hard copy of a recent edition, or a subscription to the regularly updated online guide.
- [The Chicago Manual of Style](#) is a standard guidebook for written American English and is periodically updated. Like the AP Stylebook, it is available in hardcover and by online subscription. It does not directly address writing for broadcast or creative promotional writing, but it’s a good companion resource covering grammar, usage, syntax, print and online presentation, etc.
- [Sound Reporting: The NPR Guide to Audio Journalism and Production](#) by Jonathan Kern deals largely with news production, but includes excellent guidance on clear and compelling writing and use of sound. This has become a go-to guide for commercial and noncommercial newsrooms.
- [The NPR training site](#) has a lot of great material including “[Writing for Radio: A Manifesto from NPR’s Chris Joyce](#),” and “[Write how you talk](#)” by Alison Macadam.
- The PD Handbook at [PRPD Resources](#), (requires a log-in), includes a great deal of helpful advice.
- Your local library has dozens or hundreds of books on ad copy writing. Go look through them and find the ones that work for you. Most ad agency bookshelves include copies of [The Copy Writers Handbook](#) by Robert W. Bly (*not* to be confused with the “Iron John” poet Robert Bly), [The Adweek Copywriting Handbook](#) by Joseph Sugarman, and [Ogilvy on Advertising](#) by legendary ad man David Ogilvy.
- For some examples of great radio advertising, visit the site of the annual [Radio Mercury Awards](#). Lots of great ideas that can be stolen and adapted to public radio.

- Despite pleas from many of us, the great talent, writing and interviewing coach David Candow did not leave us a book of his collected wisdom, but the following is a page of general advice and “yellow flags” that he provided for a session on radio writing at the 2005 PRPD conference in St. Louis. Print this out and put it on your wall. There are many variations on Candow’s guide that you will find on the internet.

Writing for Radio by David Candow

“Whatever touches the heart will always be engraved on the mind.” -Voltaire

The problem we face with writing for radio is that our years of scholarship have taught us to write for the eye. Therefore, when we read what we have written, we accept it because it was meant for the eye. Another problem in writing for radio is that radio isn’t an exact science, and therefore it is very difficult to set rules about how we are to work in it. Our task is to make speech, not writing. The main difference is structure. We simply don’t talk like we write. What we write, someone has to speak.

The following is a list of **yellow flags** that someone writing for radio would do well to consider in order to enhance performance:

1. A long phrased introduction to a sentence. In 1945 when American service people were returning to their homeland from the long war in Europe and the South Pacific, Joe Andrews.....
2. The use of a participle or gerund (any word ending in ~ing) at the beginning of a sentence. e.g. Walking into the lights of the television camera, the governor’s eyes blinked.
3. The use of a participle or gerund halfway through a sentence. In this case, the voice will be passive and you will have linked two separate thoughts. e.g. President Clinton presented the head of the American Cancer Society with a cheque for \$1,700,000, hoping it would help them find a cure.
4. The words **which** or **that** are strong indicators that you are about to write a subordinate clause. Put a full stop in front of them, and begin a new sentence. e.g. Congressmen debated the bill vigorously, which they thought was to their own political advantage.
5. The use of a conjunction in the middle of a sentence indicates you are linking two thoughts. e.g. The use of a conjunction in the middle of a sentence indicates you are linking two thoughts and it is to be avoided at all costs in speech.
6. The verb **to be** is the only verb in the language that has no action in it. e.g. “She is sick.” (The verb indicates the state of being.) How do you know she is sick? Write about how you know she is sick, as in: “She was lying on the floor. She was too weak to pull herself up.”
7. Homonyms and Sound-Alikes: the ear can’t distinguish between them. e.g. “The Cleveland Indians scored two runs; the Boston Red Sox one” and “sex” vs. “sects.”

8. Sibilants: words that slip and slide. e.g. She asserted she was seeking new assistants.”
9. Clichés: There is an element of truth in a cliché, that’s why we are occasionally tempted to use them. Again it could also be a missed writing opportunity.
10. Two people of the same gender in a sentence can cause confusion in the sentences that follow if you depend on a pronoun. e.g. A teenager from Minnesota went to his grandfather’s house where he got his rifle. He shot his grandfather and his girlfriend. A woman he had known for years.

“Host Whisperer” David Candow trained thousands of radio reporters and announcers in eight Countries – including the CBC and NPR – on how to sound more natural on the air.

Presented at the Public Radio Program Directors Association Conference in 2005

