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Description of document: Voice of America (VOA) Journalist Standards & Practices document (11-023 and 11-024) and the VOA Newsroom Stylebook (11-024), 2009-2010\*

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\* Note: some material undated

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*Office of the General Counsel  
Freedom of Information and Privacy Act*

February 23, 2011

**RE: Request Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act– FOIA #11-023 and #11-024**

This letter is in response to your above-referenced Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests dated December 30, 2010, and December 31, 2010, respectively, to the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG). In your requests, you ask for a copy of the Journalist Standards & Practices document (11-023 and 11-024) and the VOA Newsroom Stylebook (11-024). The SOP Manuals and New Media Guidelines are subsets of the Standards & Practices document. Enclosed are copies of the documents you were seeking. No information responsive to your request was withheld or redacted.

This release completes the Agency's response to this FOIA request, and it is now closed. There were no chargeable fees for processing this request.

If you have any questions regarding your request, you may contact me at (202) 203-4550 or write the Office of the General Counsel, Broadcasting Board of Governors, 330 Independence Avenue, S.W., Room 3349, Washington, DC 20237. Currently, inquiries are not accepted via E-mail.

Sincerely,

Andrew T. Krog  
FOIA and Privacy Act Officer





## **JOURNALISTIC STANDARDS & PRACTICES**

VOA occupies a unique position of trust worldwide as a consistently reliable source of news and information. It is a multimedia international broadcasting service funded by the U.S. government through the Broadcasting Board of Governors. VOA considers it a duty to provide accurate, balanced, comprehensive and objective news and information to audiences around the world.

The purpose of this web page is to provide a central home to the various policy guides that reside in different parts of our intranet.

The Journalistic Standards and Practices provide the policy framework within which VOA journalism seeks to meet the expectations and obligations it faces.

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## **FOREWORD**

VOA is proud of its long and distinguished record of journalistic achievement. Since 1942, in times of war and peace, VOA journalists have upheld the highest standards in their broadcasts to a diverse worldwide audience. Their determined efforts, sometimes in the face of danger, have helped VOA attract its audience and earn its reputation for excellence.

This online handbook of Journalistic Standards and Practices ensures that this tradition continues as we take into account radio, television and Internet, as well as the evolving digital media environment. It provides information about the ethical and administrative framework in which VOA journalists operate. Understanding the information inside this handbook, and applying the serious judgment journalists must bring to their craft, are critical to meeting our audience's expectations.

We publicly display this living document for two reasons. First, it is an educational tool for the journalists who come to work here. Second, it is an opportunity for the consumer of VOA programming to hold us accountable, to help us make sure that the faith and trust our audiences have placed in us for decades remain, and continue to be, fully justified.





## **THE VOA CHARTER**

To protect the integrity of VOA programming and define the organization's mission, the VOA Charter was drafted in 1960 and later signed into law (Public Law 94-350) on July 12, 1976, by President Gerald Ford. It reads:

The long-range interests of the United States are served by communicating directly with the peoples of the world by radio. To be effective, the Voice of America must win the attention and respect of listeners. These principles will therefore govern Voice of America (VOA) broadcasts.

1. VOA will serve as a consistently reliable and authoritative source of news. VOA news will be accurate, objective, and comprehensive.
2. VOA will represent America, not any single segment of American society, and will therefore present a balanced and comprehensive projection of significant American thought and institutions.
3. VOA will present the policies of the United States clearly and effectively, and will also present responsible discussions and opinion on these policies.



## **THE JOURNALISTIC CODE**

### **PREAMBLE**

Since 1942, the Voice of America has built a global reputation as a consistently reliable source of news and information. Accuracy, balance, comprehensiveness, and objectivity are attributes audiences around the world have come to expect of VOA broadcasters and their product. These standards are legally mandated in the VOA Charter (Public Laws 94-350 and 103-415). Because of them, VOA has become an inspiration and information lifeline to nations and peoples around the world.

### **SUMMARY**

Adhering to the principles outlined in the Charter, VOA reporters and broadcasters must strive for accuracy and objectivity in all their work. They do not speak for the U.S. government. They accept no treatment or assistance from U.S. government officials or agencies that is more favorable or less favorable than that granted staff of private sector news agencies. Furthermore, VOA professionals, careful to preserve the integrity of their organization, strive for excellence and avoid imbalance or bias in their broadcasts.

The Voice of America pursues its mission today in a world conflict-ridden and unstable in the post-Cold War era. Broadcasting accurate, balanced and complete information to the people of the world, and particularly to those who are denied access to accurate news, serves the national interest and is a powerful source of inspiration and hope for all those who believe in freedom and democracy.

### **THE CODE**

All staff who report, manage, edit, and prepare programming at VOA in both Central News and language services therefore subscribe to these principles:

#### **Sourcing**

- VOA news and programming must be rigorously sourced and verified. VOA normally requires a minimum of two independent (non-VOA) sources before any news writer, background writer, political affairs writer, correspondent or stringer may broadcast information as fact in any language.
- The only exceptions to the double-source requirement are facts directly confirmed by a VOA journalist or significant news drawn from an official announcement of a nation or organization. In those rare instances when a secondary source offers exclusive significant news (e.g., a verified news agency exclusive interview with a chief of state or prominent newsmaker), this story is attributed to the originating agency by name.





### Accuracy and Balance

- Accuracy and balance are paramount, and together, they are VOA's highest priority. Accuracy always comes before speed in VOA Central News reporting and language programming. VOA has a legal obligation to present a comprehensive description of events, reporting an issue in a reliable and unbiased way. Though funded by the U.S. government, VOA airs all relevant facts and opinions on important news events and issues. VOA corrects errors or omissions in its own broadcasts at the earliest opportunity.
- VOA is alert to, and rejects efforts by special interest groups - foreign or domestic - to use its broadcasts as a platform for their own views. This applies to all programs and program segments, including opinion or press roundups, programs discussing letters, listener comments, or call-in shows. In the case of call-ins, views of a single party must be challenged by the interviewer if alternative opinions are unrepresented. In interviews, points of possible discussion are submitted in advance if requested by an interviewee of stature (for example, a chief of state). However, VOA journalists always retain the right and responsibility to pursue newsworthy angles, including entirely fresh lines of questioning, during such interview.
- Whenever VOA reports a charge or accusation made by an individual or a group against another, or presents one side of a controversial issue, a response and/or balancing information will be included in the first use of a news item or feature containing that material. If the balancing information cannot be obtained by the program deadline, or the subject of the charge declines to comment that will be made clear in VOA's account, and the balancing material will be broadcast as soon as it is available.

### Fairness

- VOA has, in the words of the Founding Fathers, "a decent respect for the opinions of mankind." VOA is required to present a full and fair account of events. VOA broadcasters evaluate information solely on its merits, rejecting incitements to violence, sensationalism, personal value judgment, or misleading emphases. Attributions are specific and complete.
- VOA journalists (including correspondents, news and language stringers, political affairs writers, and program hosts) avoid at all times the use of unattributed pejorative terms or labels to describe persons or organizations, except when the individuals and groups use those labels to describe themselves or their activities.
- In news, features and current affairs programming, VOA broadcasters will meticulously avoid fabricating, distorting, or dramatizing an event. If sound at an event illustrates the reporter's account of that event and is edited for time, the remaining sound effect reflects what occurred in an accurate and balanced way. If there is a risk of misleading the audience, no use will be made of sound effects not actually recorded at the event being described.



### Context and Comprehensiveness

- VOA presents events a comprehensive account of America and the world, and puts events in context. That means constant vigilance to reflect America's and the world's political, geographical, cultural, ethnic, religious and social diversity. VOA programming represents the broadcast team's best effort to seek out and present a comprehensive account of the event or trend being reported.
- VOA broadcasters will avoid using announcing or interviewing techniques that add political coloration or bias to their reportage or current affairs programming. Music will not be used to make editorial statements. VOA journalists and all those preparing news and feature programming avoid any action or statement that might convey the appearance of partisanship.

### Procedures

When performing official duties, VOA broadcasters leave their personal political views behind. The accuracy, quality and credibility of the Voice of America are our most important assets, and they rest on listeners' perception of VOA as an objective source of world, regional and U.S. news and information. To that end, all VOA journalists will:

1. Always travel on regular, non-diplomatic passports, and rely no more and no less than private sector correspondents on U.S. missions abroad for support, as set out in the guidelines for VOA correspondents.
2. Assist managers whose duty is to ensure that no VOA employee, contract employee or stringer works for any other U.S. government agency, any official media of another state, or any international organization, without specific VOA authorization.
3. Adhere strictly to copyright laws and agency regulations and always credit the source when quoting, paraphrasing, or excerpting from other broadcasting organizations, books, periodicals, or any print media.

In addition to these journalistic standards and principles, VOA employees recognize that their conduct both on and off the job can reflect on the work of the Voice of America community. They adhere to the highest standards of journalistic professionalism and integrity. They work to foster teamwork, goodwill and civil discourse in the workplace and with their colleagues everywhere in the world, all to enhance the credibility and effectiveness of the Voice of America.



## **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST: WHAT TO WATCH FOR, WHO TO ASK**

As it states in the VOA Journalistic Code, “VOA employees recognize that their conduct both on and off the job can reflect on the work of the Voice of America community. They adhere to the highest standards of journalistic professionalism and integrity.”

VOA recognizes that staff members should be free to engage in creative, civic and personal activities, paid and unpaid, that are separate from their work in our organization. However, before engaging in such outside activities, staff members need to consider whether possible conflicts of interest might arise and consult as needed with supervisors. In all cases, VOA journalists should ensure that any outside activities do not conflict with nor compromise their VOA obligations or the reputation of VOA.

For example, before taking freelance journalistic work, paid or unpaid, VOA journalists should make sure that the tone and content of the publication, web site or program are in keeping with the standards of VOA. In general, they should not say or write anything they would not say or write for VOA itself.

VOA journalists are also reminded they should not use their professional affiliation with VOA to advocate for political or social causes and when speaking to outside groups, they should refrain from taking sides on public issues.

Official approval is needed *in advance* for:

- Teaching, speaking, or writing on matters of official concern;
- Outside media or other activities that may constitute a conflict of interest.

For the purposes of this directive, “matters of official concern” are defined as anything to do specifically with VOA, the IBB, the BBG and their policies and programs; in addition “matters of official concern” include any and all topics which VOA journalists may report on in their daily professional activities.

Employees are also reminded of several core concepts of federal ethics laws and regulations:

- 1) Employees shall not use public office for private gain;
- 2) Employees shall act impartially and not give preferential treatment to any private organization or individual; and
- 3) Employees must strive to avoid any action that would create even the appearance that they have lost impartiality or are violating the law or ethical standards.

### **Outside Media and Related Activities**

Employees who intend to engage in outside media activities must obtain approval from the Director of Public Affairs, who will consult with an agency ethics officer if necessary before advising the employee.

Outside media work will not be approved if it:

- Constitutes a conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest,
- Involves use of agency materials, time, or facilities,
- Is likely to adversely affect the agency’s ability to fulfill its mission, or
- Would involve working for outlets that broadcast to or publish in the same target area as the employee’s VOA language service.



Pertinent regulations concerning outside employment can be found in the Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch (which among other things prohibits federal employees from using the public office for private gain), and Part V of the Manual of Administration (MOA). The MOA is accessible on the BBG intranet site. The Standards of Ethical Conduct are available in hard copy from the Office of Personnel or the Office of General Counsel, or online at: [http://www.usoge.gov/pages/forms\\_pubs\\_otherdocs/fpo\\_files/reference/rfsoc\\_02.pdf](http://www.usoge.gov/pages/forms_pubs_otherdocs/fpo_files/reference/rfsoc_02.pdf).

### **Teaching, Speaking and Writing**

A related and special area of interest to the Agency is any outside **teaching, speaking or writing on matters of official concern**. This might include, among other activities, authoring an op-ed piece, addressing a service organization, authoring or posting to a blog, teaching a course at a college or university. In such instances, in addition to informing their supervisors, employees are required to submit a text, syllabus, or other physical copy to Public Affairs.

The operative word in these instances is not "approval" but "clearance," which means a heads-up for management. Additionally, if an employee is identified as an agency employee in connection with the publication, he or she is *required* to include a disclaimer that the views expressed are their own and not that of the BBG (or VOA, IBB, OCB as appropriate) or the U.S. Government.

### **Recommendations**

Above and beyond these VOA requirements, we recommend VOA journalists observe the following guidelines in place at other major U.S. news organizations:

VOA journalists should not perform public relations work, paid or unpaid. Staff members should not counsel individuals or organizations, foreign or domestic, on how to deal successfully with the news media. They should not advise government officials or candidates for public office, whether in the United States or abroad.

VOA journalists should not themselves give money to any political candidate or election cause or raise money for one in this country or elsewhere. Because of the ease of computer access to public records of campaign contributions, any political giving by a staff member could suggest the employee or VOA are taking sides.

Staff members should not march or rally in support of public causes or movements or sign advertisements or petitions taking a position on public issues, domestic or foreign. They should not lend their names to campaigns, benefit dinners or similar events if doing so might reasonably raise doubts about their ability or VOA's ability to remain neutral in covering the news.

Staff members should not serve on boards or commissions, paid or unpaid, here or abroad. They should not join advisory committees or similar groups.

The recommendation on not joining boards or advisory committees applies to émigré groups but does not apply to local or neighborhood organizations including residential organizations, houses of worship, community charities, hobby groups, sports leagues, etc. Educational institutions and alumni groups are





also excluded. However, in no case should a staff member's affiliation with VOA be used to further the goals of any nonprofit, volunteer or other organization.

***If in doubt about your affiliation or activities with any group, consult with a supervisor.*** Similarly, the activities of a staff employee's family members can create conflicts of interest or the appearance of conflicts. ***Any staff member who sees a potential for a conflict of interest in the activities of spouse or relatives must discuss the situation with a supervisor.***

#### **Contractors/Purchase Order Vendors**

Although not bound by the same regulations as employees, Contractors and Purchase Order Vendors should check with their supervisors regarding outside activities that may potentially conflict with their obligations and responsibilities to the Agency, as real or apparent conflicts may affect their continued relationship with the government.

#### **Honoraria**

Executive branch employees generally may accept honoraria for an appearance, speech or article, provided that the activity does not relate to the employee's official duties.

#### ***Contact Information***

If you have a question regarding outside media work, or teaching, speaking or writing, you should contact Letita King in Public Affairs ([lking@bbg.gov](mailto:lking@bbg.gov)) or (202) 203-4510.) For other ethics questions, ethics officer Martha Diaz-Ortiz should be consulted ([mdiazort@ibb.gov](mailto:mdiazort@ibb.gov) or (202) 203-4550.) The Agency also maintains an Ethics web page that contains a wealth of information on ethics and conduct topics. In many cases, answers to your ethics questions may be found on the Ethics web page at: <http://inside.bbg.gov/> located under BBG.



## **WHAT DO VOA'S AUDIENCES HAVE A RIGHT TO EXPECT?**

(The following is adapted from work by the Committee of Concerned Journalists, a U.S. consortium of reporters, editors, producers, publishers, owners and academics worried about the future of the profession. This modified version is intended to remind VOA journalists of their responsibilities to their audiences as well as to themselves and their managers.)

### **What do VOA's audiences have a right to expect from journalists?**

Based on research conducted by journalists to define the common principles of the profession, the following constitute a consensus about what journalists must offer and what audiences should expect.

#### **Audiences' Bill of Journalism Rights**

1. Truthfulness
2. Proof that the journalists' first loyalty is to citizens
3. That journalists maintain independence from those they cover
4. That journalists will monitor power and give voice to the voiceless
5. A forum for public criticism and problem solving
6. News that is proportional and relevant

#### **1. Our audiences should expect, above all, truthfulness:**

The integrity of the reporting should be obvious. The process of verification - how news people made their decisions and why-should be transparent in the work so we can judge the value and fairness of the information for ourselves.

Stories should make clear the sources of information, the basis of their knowledge, and why the information is believable and relevant. With anonymous sources, as much identifying information as possible should be given so readers can judge the source's reliability and potential biases.

The story's relevance should be clearly stated.

Important unanswered questions should be noted.

If the story raises a point of controversy we should expect follow up.

#### **2. We should expect proof that the journalists' first loyalty is to audiences:**

This means stories should answer our needs as audiences, not just the interests of insiders, or the political or economic system.

There should be a demonstrated effort to understand and reflect the whole community.





**3. We should expect journalists to maintain independence from those they cover:**

It should be clear that journalists are serving the citizen debate rather than the narrow interests of a faction or a particular outcome.

Journalists' work should display evidence of independent thinking--not always criticism of one side and praise of the other.

**4. We have the right to expect that journalists will monitor power and give voice to the voiceless:**

The press should use its watchdog power to uncover things that are important and new and that change community thinking. The news media should not squander this constitutional freedom on sideshow or pseudo scandals that research shows may build an audience.

The press should monitor all the key centers of power in the community-including but not limited to government.

**5. We have a right to a forum for public criticism and problem solving:**

News providers should offer several channels for public interaction--be it letters, e-mail, phone contacts, or public forums--including mechanisms for readers and viewers to make story suggestions or raise criticisms.

Over time, audiences should expect to see a broad representation of views and values reflected in the news coverage--and not just those of the extreme positions that leave no room for compromise or problem solving.

**6. Audiences have a right to expect news that is proportional and relevant:**

Journalists should be aware of our basic dilemma as audiences: that we have a need for timely and deep knowledge of important issues and trends--but we lack the time and means to access most of this crucial information.

Thus journalists should use their special access to put the material they gather in a context that will engage our attention and also allow us to see trends and events in proportion to their true significance in our lives.

# **VOA News Stylebook**

**Voice of America  
News Division  
Washington, DC**

**Updated September 2010**

# Table of Contents

**Introduction**

**Chapter 1. Usage and Style Guide**

**Chapter 2. Capitalization Guide**

# Introduction

This VOA newsroom *Stylebook* is the first of its kind to be published online. With online publication, the *Stylebook* will be updated continually.

While some aspects of this *Stylebook* are unique to VOA, much of it is based on the Associated Press Stylebook. A copy of the AP guide to style has been placed at each regional desk in the Newsroom.

Any unanswered issues in the VOA *Stylebook* should be resolved by referring to the AP guide or contacting Don Benson in the Newsroom at 203-4328 or [dbenson@voanews.com](mailto:dbenson@voanews.com).

## Usage and Style Guide

This section provides a guide to VOA Newsroom style and preference in usage, terminology, taste, punctuation and policy on a wide variety of words, phrases and issues. The goal is to enable writers to communicate with our audience clearly, precisely and consistently. *Examples are given in italics.*

**A TOTAL OF:** Avoid this phrase – it is redundant. Just put the number. *Ex: Singapore won 11 medals at the competition. Not Singapore won a total of 11 medals at the competition.*

**ABORTION:** Use *abortion rights supporter(s)* or *abortion rights advocate(s)*, not “pro-choice.” Use *abortion rights opponent(s)*, or *anti-abortion*, not “pro-life.” You may use “pro-life” and “pro-choice” when referring to the specific name of a group.

**ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS:** An acronym is a word formed from the initial letters of a phrase. *NATO. OPEC.* Write acronyms without punctuation, because they are pronounced as words. Acronyms reflect the case of the words they represent. *UNESCO* is all caps, because it is the proper name of an organization. *Snafu* is lower case because it represents common words written in lower case letters.

Abbreviations (that are not acronyms) are pronounced letter-by-letter. For *U.S. and U.N.*, use periods to separate the letters. For all other two-letter abbreviations (*EU, AU, GI, PC*), the absence of periods is the more common usage. Use no periods in abbreviations of three letters or more (*ABC, CIA, NBA, UNHCR*). Do not use periods with abbreviations in Internet headlines.

Both abbreviations and acronyms should be used sparingly in VOA news copy. Except for the most well-known terms, it is generally better to use *the group, party, organization, agreement*, etc. than to use its acronym or abbreviation. Especially avoid acronyms and abbreviations known only locally, such as *IRS* (Internal Revenue Service). When using well-known abbreviations and acronyms, the full name should normally be used first. If referring to something many times, such as in a story on the leading economic powers known as the Group of Eight, an abbreviation or acronym (*G-8*) may be used, but occasionally restate the full name or a shorter non-abbreviation reference to make sure the audience doesn’t become lost.

Some very well-known acronyms and abbreviations do not have to be explained, such as *NATO, CIA, UNESCO, OPEC* and *UNICEF*, but these are few and should be explained whenever possible, using the full name of the organization or a brief description. *The United Nations Childrens Fund, UNICEF.*

Abbreviate the names of places beginning with “Saint.” *Ex.: St. Louis, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Moritz, etc.*

**ACCIDENT, DISASTER:** Hotel fires, mine cave-ins, plane crashes and other mishaps may be accidental or intentional. Do not presume knowledge one way or the other until the facts are known, and use care to include necessary attribution. *Authorities blamed the accident on corrosion of bridge framework.* If the magnitude is great enough, use *disaster*. *More than six thousand were killed in the disaster, one of the worst fires in the country's history.* Otherwise just describe the event. *Authorities are investigating the cause of the crash.*

**ACCORD, PACT:** These common, but unnatural and unconversational, terms often can be avoided. Consider

*treaty, agreement or deal* instead.

**ACTIVE VOICE:** Use the active voice whenever possible. *The Greek parliament has approved the Law of the Sea Treaty*, rather than *The Law of the Sea has been approved by the Greek parliament*.

**AD, BC:** Avoid, when possible, the terms BC and AD, which measure time from the (incorrectly calculated) birth of Jesus. In many cases, a period BC can be expressed with reference to the present. *Archaeologists have uncovered evidence of a city abandoned six thousand years ago* (rather than *in four thousand BC*). If you must use these terms, use *AD* only in cases where the year is not presumed to be after the birth of Christ. Use *BC* in references to a calendar year in the period before Christ. *Ex: The year 43 BC*. Do not use *BCE* (before the Common Era).

**AD HOC:** An *ad hoc committee* is a committee formed to deal with a specific problem or case. In most cases, *committee* alone is sufficient. *A committee will look into the government's hiring practices*.

**AFRICAN-AMERICAN, BLACK:** Use *black* or *African-American* interchangeably for American nationals of African descent, otherwise use *black*. Other terms are outmoded or offensive and are to be avoided except in direct quotation or in the name of an organization. *National Association for the Advancement of Colored People*. Use racial designations only when relevant. See **RACE**.

**ALLIES:** Use with caution, and be sure to identify the *allies* in question. *NATO allies resumed bombing*.

**AL-QAIDA:** Spell with an "i" and use a dash between words.

**AMBASSADOR:** An ambassador is accredited to a country or organization, not to a city. *The Dutch ambassador to Brazil*. The ambassador's location in a city may be used. *The Vietnamese ambassador in Helsinki*. Although *ambassador* is a lifetime title, use *former ambassador* to avoid confusion. *Former ambassador Jeremiah Jones remained in the country to head the American Chamber of Commerce*. Additional point: the word *embassy* is lower case, even when it follows the country adjective: *the French embassy*, *the U.S. embassy compound*.

**AMERICAN, U.S.:** Use *American* to refer to people, places and institutions in or of the United States or, rarely, the Americas. *American music*. *American Muslims*. Use *U.S.* if necessary to avoid ambiguity. Traditionally VOA has used *U.S.* to refer to officials and government institutions, but because *American* is more widely understood, it is also acceptable. *The American defense secretary*. Modify as appropriate when referring to the rest of the hemisphere. *North American Major League Baseball*. *Latin American rain forests*. Be sensitive to other residents of the hemisphere who also may consider themselves *Americans*. Use *U.S.* if *American* might be misunderstood.

**AMOUNT, NUMBER:** Use *amount* with mass nouns. *A large amount of wheat*. Use *number* for things that can be counted. *A number of soldiers*. (See **FEWER, LESS**.)

**ANALYSTS/EXPERTS:** Do not overuse words such as *analysts*, *experts* or *observers*. When using the views of responsible analysts, be as specific as possible. Be particularly careful when analysts on various sides have different views. *Analysts believe* implies that everyone who knows anything about the issue agrees. *Expert* implies a person with a high degree of skill in, or knowledge of, a certain subject.

**ANXIOUS, EAGER:** *Anxious* indicates uneasiness or fear (think of *anxiety*). *Eager* means marked by enthusiasm. *I am anxious about swimming, because I am afraid of the water. I am eager to learn to swim better*.

**APOSTROPHE:** The apostrophe is used to form possessives of nouns and to indicate contractions and omissions. It is not used to make things plural. Use 's to form the possessive of singular nouns that do not end with an *s*. Use 's to form the possessive of singular nouns ending in *s*, unless the following word begins with *s*. *ex: The hostess's invitation. The hostess' seat*.

Use 's for proper names not ending in *s*. Use just an apostrophe for proper names ending in *s*. *ex: Jesus' birth. Dickens' novels*.

Use the apostrophe alone to indicate the possessive in words that end with a silent *s*. *ex: Officer Corps' training*

*program*. In some cases, the 's may be omitted. *The administration social policy goal*. This also reduces sibilance when read on the air. Do not use the apostrophe in possessive pronouns. *Its, hers, theirs*. The apostrophe in a contraction indicates omitted letters. *Can't, won't*. Generally avoid contractions in VOA copy.

**ARAB:** A resident of the Arabian peninsula or of the Arabic-speaking world or, more broadly, one whose ancestry is in that region. Note: Iran is not an Arab country, and the Iranian language is Persian, not Arabic.

**ARABIC NAMES:** Different systems of transliteration from Arabic to English lead to different spellings of names in source material. This is most evident for vowels and for consonant sounds used in Arabic but not in English. VOA's preferred usage for some frequently encountered names includes *Hezbollah* (rather than *Hizbullah* for the Lebanese guerrilla group) and *Moammar Gadhafi* (rather than *Moamer Qadhafi* or *Khadafi* for the Libyan leader).

In many Arab names, *al-* is a definite article. *Bashar al-Assad*. *Nouri al-Maliki*. Use the entire name on first reference, and note lower case *al-*. We usually omit the *al-* on second reference. *President Assad*. *Mr. Maliki*. (The *al-* is retained in Arabic.)

In Gulf names, particularly in Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, *al-* means "the family of" and should be retained. Second reference for Gulf leaders is *Sheikh [first name]* rather than *Mr. [last name]*. For example, the emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, is *Sheikh Hamad* on second reference.

*Abdul* (Abd-al) never stands alone. It is always part of a family name, e.g. *Abdul-Aziz*, *Abdul-Rahman*, *Abdul-Rahim*.

Preferred spellings and proper second reference for officials may be found in the CIA Chiefs of State publication (or the online edition at <http://odci.gov/cia/publications/chiefs/index.html>)

For the Iranian rebel group that is often spelled *Mojahedin-e Khalq*, use *People's Mojahedin*. That is the group's own usage in its publications.

**ARREST:** *Arrest* is a legal term with a very specific definition that varies among legal systems. Therefore, avoid *arrest* and use terms such as *detain* or *in custody* when formal charges have not been brought and the person is not free to leave. *Police detained two men, one a suspect and the other being held as a witness*. Use *charge* or *formally charge* when charges are filed. If the status of charges is unclear, use *detain* or equivalent.

**ASIAN NAMES:** In some East Asian countries (like China and the Koreas), the family name is written first, followed by the given name. China's Hu Jintao is *President Hu*. For Japan and the Philippines, we write the surname last. *Junichiro Koizumi* is *Prime Minister Koizumi*. In Vietnam, the family name comes first, followed by the given name. But, on second reference, use the given name. Prime Minister Phan Van Khai would be *Mr. Khai*. For Burmese and Cambodians, use the entire name on second reference. *Hun Sen*. *Aung San Suu Kyi*. In Indonesia, many people use only one name. *Suharto*. The rules for this region are almost as different as the number of countries. So, when in doubt, consult the appropriate desk editor or the Central Desk.

**ASTRONAUT, COSMONAUT:** *Astronaut* is the generic term and could include Russians as part of a larger group; limit *cosmonaut* to Russian space fliers. *A Japanese astronaut flew on the shuttle*. *A French astronaut will fly on the Chinese spacecraft*. *An American astronaut flew to the space station on the Russian Soyuz spacecraft*. *The next shuttle mission will include six astronauts, including a Russian*.

**ATTRIBUTION:** (See SOURCING.)

**BACKGROUND, OFF THE RECORD:** Among U.S. officials and Washington journalists, information given *on background* may normally be used, provided it is attributed to a generic source. In a formal briefing, the official doing the briefing will usually specify how the material is to be attributed. *A senior administration official called the election "flawed."*

Information on "deep background" is normally provided with the understanding that it will not be sourced in any way. *It was learned that the delegates agreed to a second meeting on Tuesday*.

Material that is *off the record* is normally not directly useable. But it can usefully focus the direction of a story, as when participants at a meeting are named off the record; maybe one of them will speak on the record. It may also

be a second source to confirm information obtained on the record.

These Washington guidelines may vary considerably elsewhere. It is always best to clarify with the source how the information may be used. Sometimes *off the record* only means “don’t use my name.” (see SOURCING.)

**BALANCE OF PAYMENTS, BALANCE OF TRADE:** Distinguish between the two: the *balance of payments* is the difference between the amount of money that leaves a nation and the amount that enters it. This includes all kinds of transactions, including loans, tourism, aid, goods and services. *Balance of trade* is the difference between the monetary value of imports and exports of goods and services.

BI- and SEMI-: *Bi-weekly* means every other week. Twice a week is *semi-weekly*. *Biannual* means the same as *semiannual*, or happening twice a year. *Biennial* means every two years. If possible, avoid these terms, which can be confusing. *The committee agreed to meet every other month. I water my plants twice a week.*

**BIBLE:** Catholic and Protestant *Bibles* include the Old and New Testaments with some differences. Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints also use the *Book of Mormon*. The Jewish (or Hebrew) holy book consists of what Christians call the Old Testament. The Muslim holy book is the *Quran*.

In lower case, *bible* refers to a secular authority. *The VOA Stylebook is my bible.*

**BLACK BOX:** Airline flight recorders are bright orange for visibility. Commercial air transports (and some other aircraft) have two: a cockpit voice recorder and a flight data recorder. It is not necessary to refer to these devices as *black boxes*.

**BRITAIN, BRITISH:** Use to refer to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland including England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Do not use *England* and *English* as synonyms for *Britain* and *British*. *The British Council presented a program of folk music from England and Scotland.* Avoid *United Kingdom* and *Great Britain*, except in direct quotation.

**BRITISHISMS:** Use standard American English. Our patients are *in the hospital* (not *in hospital*). Our staff is *professional* (not *are professional*). Our supplies arrive *by truck* (not *lorry*). We *make decisions* (not *take decisions*). We fuel our cars with *gas* or *gasoline* (not *petrol*). We *fire* (not *sack*) people who don’t perform. We air *newscasts* (not *bulletins*). Avoid *row*, meaning a spat or disagreement.

**CABINET:** Capitalize when referring to a specific body of advisers for a head of state or government. *Ex: The Israeli Cabinet.*

**CAN, MAY, MIGHT:** Use *can* to denote ability. *I can open this jar.* Use *may* to refer to permission. *May I open this jar?* Use *might* to show conditionality. *I might open this jar if I get hungry.*

**CANCEL, POSTPONE, SUSPEND:** To *cancel* is to annul or wipe out. *The World Bank canceled the debts of the poorest nations.* To *postpone* is to put off until another time. *Let’s postpone this meeting until Tuesday.* If the status of an event is unclear, say so. *The meeting was canceled, but organizers did not say if it would be rescheduled.*

**CANDIDATE:** One seeking an office, usually an elective office; a contender. *Mr. Ali is one of three candidates for his party’s nomination.* When an individual wins a party nomination, he or she remains a *candidate* and may now also be referred to as a *nominee*. *The nominee is the only Republican senatorial candidate to favor legalized abortion.* *Candidate*, of course, may also be used outside the realm of elective politics. *The critic listed his Oscar candidates.*

**CAPITAL CITIES, CAPITOL:** Generally avoid using the name of a capital as a synonym for the country. Use the country name instead, or quote a particular official. *A top Japanese official says* (rather than *Tokyo says*). Particularly in multilateral situations, however, it can be less cumbersome to avoid the country name. *Officials from Seoul, Washington and Moscow attended.* The building in which a legislature meets is a capitol. *The U.S. Capitol is located on Capitol Hill.* (See TALKING BUILDINGS.)

**CASUALTIES:** *Casualties* include both injured and killed. Distinguish between the two where possible. Fifty-four casualties could mean *10 killed and 44 wounded* or *44 killed and 10 wounded*. (See INJURED, WOUNDED.)

**CEASE-FIRE, CEASE FIRE:** Cease-fire as a noun or an adjective has a hyphen; as a verb it is two words with no hyphen. *They observed a cease-fire.* *The cease-fire agreement expires Friday.* *They were ordered to cease fire until*

*the situation becomes clear.*

**CENSER, SENSOR, CENSOR, CENSURE:** A *censer* is a container in which incense is burned. A *sensor* is a device that responds to stimulus. A *censor* is an official who examines material for the purpose of suppressing objectionable parts. The verb *censure* means to criticize severely. As with other similar-sounding words, use sparingly and in unmistakable context.

**CENTER ON, REVOLVE AROUND:** Use the correct preposition. *The dispute centers on a Cuban child. The issue revolves around the candidate's fund-raising.*

**CENTRAL BANK:** Use *central bank* to identify the Federal Reserve and similar institutions. Use the official name on subsequent reference. *The German central bank has raised interest rates. The Bundesbank action shocked the market.*

**CHIEF JUSTICE:** The presiding officer of the U.S. Supreme Court is *Chief Justice of the United States*, but to avoid confusion, if not otherwise clear, may be referred to as *Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court*. The other eight members of the high court are *Associate Justices of the Supreme Court*.

**CHILD, YOUTH, etc.:** There is some overlap in these terms. Generally, use *infant* for a child under age one. *Child, boy* or *girl* are appropriate for someone under age 13. Between ages 13-18 use *teenager*, although members of this age group may be considered *children* or (rarely) *young adults* (which might apply to a person older than 18), depending on the situation. *Youth* is also acceptable for those under 18.

**CHILDISH, CHILDLIKE:** *Childish* is usually pejoratively, meaning infantile and silly. *Childlike* is generally a positive adjective, used to describe qualities of trustful innocence.

**CHRIST, JESUS:** Because most of our listeners do not regard him as the messiah, avoid *Christ* (from the Greek *khristos*, or anointed) when possible. *Christians are celebrating Christmas, the holiday that commemorates the birth of Jesus.*

**CLAIM:** Except in direct quotes, avoid this word, which can be seen to cast doubt on what is being said. *Says* may be boring, but it's neutral. For balance, it may be necessary to include an opposing view. *The rebels say they downed the helicopter, but military officials say all aircraft are accounted for.* Exception: *No one has claimed responsibility.*

**CLAUSES:** Do not put long dependent clauses in the middle of sentences. Avoid dependent clauses in most cases, although short ones can sometimes be useful. *Senator Jones, who is 87 years old, urged businesses to end age discrimination.* Avoid sentences made up of two long clauses, when two short sentences would be better. Do not begin a sentence with a long clause, which can distract a listener from the main point.

**CLICHÉS:** Avoid phrases such as *wrapped up*, *wound up* and *only time will tell*. They are clichés, not colorful writing, and might also present translation difficulties.

**CLIMACTIC, CLIMATIC:** *Climactic* pertains to climax, the most forceful of a series of statements, ideas or events. *Climatic* refers to weather conditions.

**COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY:** In many countries, *college* is a vocational institution either after high school or instead of it, and *university* is reserved for a post-high school academic institution. Use *college* in the name of an institution, but *university* as the generic term. *She attended Colby College and was the only one in her family to attend a university.*

**COLLOQUIALISMS:** Avoid colloquialisms, which may be difficult to translate and are not easily understood by foreign audiences. When used, as in direct quotation, provide a parenthetical alternative to assist language services. *The convicted hacker said writing the virus was "a piece of cake" (very easy). He spoke "off the cuff" (without notes).*

**COMMUNISTS, SOCIALISTS:** Distinguish between *communist* and *socialist*. Do not use *socialist* to refer to communists, except in the names of entities and in direct quotation. *The communist party of Fredonia is known as the Socialist Alliance.* Capitalize only when part of a proper name. *Chinese Communist Party.*

Avoid *neo-communist*. A post-Cold War communist party may be labeled the *re-established communist party* (or similar).



**CONCERN:** To show involvement or caring, follow with *about*. *The human rights group said it is concerned about famine in rebel-held areas.* To indicate area of responsibility, follow with *with*. *The new committee will be concerned with financial matters.* Avoid *concern over*.

**CONGRESS, JOINT MEETING OR JOINT SESSION:** Whenever both houses of the U.S. Congress get together to hear speeches by U.S. or foreign dignitaries (other than the president), it is a *joint meeting*, not a *joint session*. *Joint sessions* are reserved for the president's State of the Union address or the counting of electoral votes after a presidential election.

**CONGRESSMAN, CONGRESSWOMAN:** Use with reference to members of the U.S. House of Representatives (not Senate). When referring to senators and representatives collectively, use *members of Congress*, not *congressmen*. (See GENDER.) *Congress* is always capitalized when referring to the U.S. House and Senate. But *congressional* is not capitalized.

**CONSENSUS:** By majority, or without significant opposition. *The convention approved the platform by consensus.* Because of the ambiguity, try to use another word. *Consensus of opinion* is normally redundant, as is *overall consensus*. *Consensus* alone is sufficient.

**CONTRACTIONS AND PREFIXES:** Avoid negative contractions or prefixes, which can too easily be missed in transmission. Use *not* rather than *un-*, *im-*, *non-*, etc. Also avoid *didn't*, *don't*, etc. Prefixes in words such as *re-enact* and *restate* are acceptable, but be sure the meaning is clear from the context.

**CONVINCE, PERSUADE:** Use *convince* when you mean to win agreement on an idea or concept. Use *persuade* when you mean to influence some sort of action. *The politician convinced the audience that he was telling the truth, and then he persuaded them to donate money to his campaign.*

**COPY, REPLICA** — A *copy* is a duplicate. *Lawyers played a copy of the wiretap after the original recording was accidentally erased.* A *replica* is a facsimile, a reproduction, especially on a smaller scale. *A replica of the Statue of Liberty was on the table.* Avoid *exact replica*.

**CREDIBLE, CREDITABLE, CREDULOUS:** *Credible* means believable. *A credible witness.* *Creditable* means praiseworthy. *His work with the poor is creditable.* *Credulous* means naive and gullible. *Police thought the victim's credulous nature contributed to the scam.* The latter two are poor choices in broadcast copy.

**CRIMES:** Use the following definitions with caution. They are simplified versions of general Anglo-American common law, and may vary considerably among jurisdictions. Countries using Civil Law (including continental Europe) and other systems may not observe the distinctions noted here.

Burglary: Unauthorized entry (not necessarily by force) into a structure for the purpose of committing a crime. The verb form is *to burglarize* (not *to burgle*).

Theft: General term for the intentional taking of the personal property of another. Larceny.

Robbery: Theft by force, threat or intimidation. *Holdup*, not a legal term, generally refers to a robbery using a weapon or something the victim is made to believe is a weapon.

Arson: Intentional burning of a house or other structure.

Homicide: General term for taking a human life. Homicide may be murder or manslaughter, or it may not be a crime, depending on the circumstances.

Manslaughter: The unlawful killing of a person without pre-meditation or malice, and can be voluntary or involuntary.

Murder: The intentional killing of a person with malice aforethought (premeditation). This is the Common Law definition. By statute, this crime is normally divided into first and second degree murder. First degree murder, in addition to the Common Law definition, often includes killings committed in the course of committing another felony (felony murder), killing in which the victim is tortured, and killing of a police officer or prison guard. Second degree murder is typically committed in the heat of passion or with reckless disregard for life. Use *kill* for a crime that has not been officially determined to be a *murder*.

**CRISIS:** A *crisis* is a turning point in an event. *The crisis passed when Khrushchev withdrew the missiles.* The plural is *crises*, which generally should be avoided in copy. For an ongoing dangerous situation, use *conflict* or *dispute* instead.

**CRITERIA:** This word is plural. *Criterion* is the singular.

**CZECHOSLOVAKIA:** Use only in historical references. *Czechoslovakia* split into the *Czech Republic* and *Slovakia* on January 1, 1993. The mutually agreed-upon division is sometimes referred to as the *Velvet Divorce*.

**DASHES, HYPHENS:** Use hyphens to link compound words (*better-suited*, *16-year-old*) and to separate double vowels created by prefixes (*re-enact*). Do not use hyphens to connect numerals with words (*14 million*, not *14-million*). (See ABBREVIATIONS, CONTRACTIONS, NUMBERS.)

Use a dash (entered as a single hyphen surrounded by spaces - like this) to separate sentence clauses for easy reading, particularly to lend emphasis or indicate an abrupt change in thought. *The NASDAQ stock average hit 6,000 today — its sixth record close this month.* Avoid the temptation to use dashes to replace commas. (See CLAUSES and SIMPLICITY.)

**DATA:** *Data* is the plural form of *datum* (which should be avoided), and it takes plural verbs. *He said the data prove the point.* Because the correct usage can sound awkward, use sparingly. *He said his research proves the point.* (See LATIN WORDS.)

**DATELINES:** Correspondents should include in their signoff the city or other location where they reported the story. *George Jetson, VOA News, Los Angeles.* The signoff is normally a city or town that, if not well-known, should be followed by state or country. *Rosario, Argentina.* Sometimes, a more creative signoff is more descriptive. *On the Israel-Lebanon Border. On board the submarine "Dolphin" somewhere in the North Atlantic. At the South Pole.* This formula may be used when the report is actually filed from another location (such as when the correspondent has returned home after a reporting trip), provided that the story is filed reasonably soon after the visit to the dateline site. Correspondents should not disguise the fact that they are not on the scene by using a general signoff. *Elroy Jetson, VOA News, Cairo* (or *Middle East Bureau in Cairo*, not simply *Middle East Bureau*).

**DATES:** Calendar dates should be written with the month and numeral only, without *st*, *nd* or *th* following. *Ex: January 2, June 19 through 24.* (See NUMBERS) Beginning in 2010, the year is pronounced "20-ten," "20-11," "20-12," etc., not "two thousand-ten or two thousand and ten."

**DAY NAMES:** Use the name of the day in all references, except in phrases that do not refer to a specific day. *ex: The battle took place Monday. President Obama said Monday that his stimulus plan will provide thousands of jobs.* (but) *Studies show that high school kids today are more interested in reading non-fiction than their parents were at that age.* The day should refer to local time. Do not use today, yesterday or tomorrow.

**DEAD BODIES:** Avoid. The word *dead* is usually unnecessary. *Many bodies* (not *dead bodies*) *were seen floating in the water.* *Corpse* (not *dead corpse*) may be used as an alternate to avoid repetition, although *body* is more conversational and more readily understood.

**DEAD LEADERS:** Refer to former leaders who are deceased as *the late* not the former. *Ex: The late U.S. president Richard Nixon. The late British prime minister Winston Churchill.* (title is not capitalized.) (See PRESIDENTS)

**DEADLINES:** Remember, material you submit in English must be edited, moved on a wire, translated and edited again before being broadcast in other languages.

**DECIMATE, DESTROY, DEMOLISH, ANNIHILATE:** At its root, *decimate* literally means to take a tenth of something, but it has come to refer to destruction of a large portion. *Decimate* is most often used with relation to aggregations of people or things, not individuals. *The Johnstown flood decimated the town, killing hundreds of residents and flattening the business district.*

It is impossible to *decimate completely*. Use *annihilate*, *destroy* or *demolish*. Phrases such as *totally destroy* and *completely demolished* are redundant.

**DEMONSTRATIONS:** Generally, refer to participants using neutral words such as *protesters* or *demonstrators*, or be more specific when their identity is known. *Labor union members rallied against the free trade agreement.* Avoid terms such as *mob* or *rioters* unless they are on the rampage, and, even then, it is better to specifically describe their actions. *Several hundred people trashed a McDonald's restaurant along the march route.* Be wary also of the word *student*; not all demonstrators of university age are students.

**DETAIN:** (See ARREST.)

**DICTATOR:** One who holds and exercises complete autocratic control, often oppressively. As with similar terms, use fairly across the political ideological spectrum. *Former Soviet dictator Josef Stalin. Former Chilean dictator*

*Augusto Pinochet.* (See HARDLINER, WARLORD, STRONGMAN.)

**DEATH, DIE, KILL:** Do not use euphemisms such as *passed on* or *expired*, except in direct quotation. Everyone *dies*, but not everyone is *killed*. Use of *kill* requires an external cause, stated or implied. *The plane crashed, and 40 people were killed (or died).* *She died on her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday.*

**DIE OF:** One dies of (not from) an illness.

**DILEMMA:** Use when referring to a (sometimes difficult) choice between two or more alternatives. *The editor's dilemma: hire an incompetent reporter or have a dangerously understaffed newsroom.* Do not use when there is no choice involved. *Gun control is a major issue (not dilemma).*

**DISASTER:** (See ACCIDENT.)

**DISCOUNT RATE:** The interest rate charged by the Federal Reserve on loans it makes to member banks. This rate affects the rates that banks then charge their customers. When referring to this and other technical terms, explain the term or make sure its meaning is clear from the context.

**DISCOVER, INVENT:** *Discover* means to learn or gain knowledge of something previously unknown; *invent* means to originate, to conceive of, or to devise something first. *After inventing a better widget, she was dismayed to discover that widgets had become obsolete.*

**DISTANCES:** Use kilometers to measure large distances on land and sea. *The suspect had a 10-kilometer head start.* Avoid use of *nautical miles*. *The piracy incident took place 300 kilometers east of Da Nang.*

**DOCTOR:** Abbreviate *doctor* when used as a title for those with a medical degree. *Dr. Timothy Speiser said the opposition leader was poisoned.* Scientists and others with advanced degrees should be referred to by another appropriate title. *Professor John Winston is on the short list for the Nobel Prize.* (SEE HONORIFICS)

**DROWN:** *He drowned* refers to an accidental death; *He was drowned* probably refers to a homicide.

**DRUGS:** Because this term refers to a broad range of active chemicals from caffeine to Claritin to cocaine, it should be avoided except when it is intended to be inclusive. For therapeutic drugs use *medicine* or *medication* or (sparingly) *pharmaceuticals*. *Prescription drugs* may be used, but keep in mind that prescription laws vary widely. For products such as heroin, cocaine and marijuana, use *illicit drugs* or *illegal drugs*, but again note that drug laws vary, and some drugs banned here are legal in other countries, and vice versa. Use *narcotics* with caution because this category includes a range of substances, from codeine to heroin. Not all illegal drugs are narcotics; heroin is, but marijuana and LSD are not.

Avoid, when possible, colloquial terms such as *drug lord* and *drug kingpin*; use *drug trafficker* instead. Also avoid *narco-trafficking* or *narco-terrorism*. Use *drug trafficking* or *drug-related terrorism*.

**EARTHQUAKE:** Earthquakes since the 1930s have been measured with the *Richter scale*, which measures the strength of the earthquake on an open-ended scale. Several other measurements of earthquake magnitude have been developed since then, although the results are similar for a given earthquake. The highest recorded Richter measurement is 8.9 (in 1906 and again in 1933). Richter and the other magnitude scales are logarithmic, meaning each single digit increase represents a tenfold increase in the strength of the earthquake, i.e. a 6.0 earthquake is 10 times more powerful than one measuring 5.0.

Because *magnitude*, as commonly used, is a figure derived from Richter and other scales, use the term *magnitude* alone when describing the strength of an earthquake. *Seismologists estimated the earthquake at magnitude six-point-seven.*

In general, do not write earthquake stories when there are no injuries or significant damage. In many regions, such as Southeast Asia, earthquakes are routine.

The *Modified Mercalli Scale*, which is not used in VOA copy but which may appear in sources, measures the intensity of an earthquake by reference to the damage it causes on a scale of 1-12.

Other terms: The word *temblor* (not tremor) is a synonym for earthquake.

**EASTERN RITE:** This branch of Christianity has an estimated 10-to-12 million adherents worldwide. As for Roman Catholics, the pope is the supreme head of Eastern Rite Catholics, but they worship somewhat differently and have a different church organization. There are five Eastern Rite traditions, most notably the Byzantine. The largest Eastern Rite church, in the Byzantine tradition, is the Ukrainian. Do not confuse with the Eastern Orthodox

church. (See ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY.)

**EDITORIALIZING:** VOA's credibility depends on the delivery of accurate, timely and even-handed news to our international audience. Many members of that audience listen critically for evidence of bias, especially a slant that conforms to U.S. government policy. Colorful, descriptive writing is a virtue, but be vigilant to avoid unnecessary modifiers that could be misinterpreted. Correspondents particularly should avoid the temptation of ending reports with a gratuitous editorial comment.

**EDITORS' NOTE:** Used at the top of a story to draw special attention to something in the story, such as language that may be unacceptable for some, or unconventional spelling. *Eds: note language 3rd graf; spelling Smithe is correct.*

**EUROPEAN UNION:** The former *European Community* (which term should only be used in historic context) is an umbrella entity of member countries that includes several constituents. For our purposes, the most important are the *European Commission* and the *European Parliament*. The *Commission* is the EU's executive body and is headed by a president. Commissioners, like cabinet ministers, have areas of responsibility, such as education. The EU legislative body is the *European Parliament*, which sits in Strasbourg, France or Brussels, Belgium.

The EU also includes the European Court of Justice.

**EXECUTE:** Criminals are executed after a legal process. Also, wills are executed. Do not use this term when referring to extra-legal killings (but you may use the term *execution-style*). Use kill, murder, assassinate or similar. The XYZ Liberation Army said it would begin *killing* (not *executing*) hostages if its demands are not met.

**EXTREMES AND SUPERLATIVES:** Use terms such as *biggest*, *highest*, *first* and other such words cautiously because they often turn out to be incorrect. Do not reach too hard for a superlative by drawing a very narrow definition. *First strikeout by a six-toed pitcher during a solar eclipse*. Also, ask yourself whether the fact that something is first is truly significant.

Avoid superlatives such as *most famous* or *greatest*, which often represent value judgments. Descriptive and colorful words are encouraged, but use caution. Something that is *unique* is the only one of its kind. A thing or event cannot be *somewhat unique* (although its status can be emphasized as *truly unique*).

Other words describing extreme situations should also raise flags for writers and editors, and should be scrutinized to ensure they are justified. *Trouble* in a city does not necessarily mean it is *in chaos*. *Asking urgently* is not necessarily *pleading* or *begging*. Remember, if a situation is *desperate* today, what will it be tomorrow when things get worse?

**FAILURE:** Lack of success. Use with caution because *failure* has negative connotations. *The meeting ended in failure*. Instead, be more descriptive. *The meeting ended, and there was no report of progress*. Leave the characterizations to direct quotes. *The ambassador described the meeting as "a failure."*

**FALL, LIBERATION:** Our *fall of Saigon* is their *liberation of Saigon*. Avoid either term when referring to the change of control of a place in a military context. Use *takeover*, *conquest*, *seizure* or similar term.

**FALSE TITLES:** Some publications add the definite article when describing an individual - *the author William Styron* - on the theory that referring to him as simply *author William Styron* confers the title of author not unlike President or Reverend. Avoid this unnatural and stilted syntax. *Filmmaker Orson Welles*.

**FAMILY MEMBERS:** Some languages do not have generic terms for son, daughter, brother or sister. When using such terms, describe them as older, oldest, younger or youngest when this information is known.

**FAMINE:** There is no internationally recognized definition of famine. It also can be a politically charged term. The U.S. Agency for International Development defines famine as a "catastrophic food crisis that results in widespread acute malnutrition and mass mortality." Use sparingly, mainly when quoting internationally recognized aid agencies or official government statements. Otherwise use *widespread hunger* or a similar alternative.

**FARTHER, FURTHER:** *Farther* refers to physical distance, while *further* means 'to a greater degree.' The two are not interchangeable. (See also Toward, Towards.)

**FEDERAL RESERVE:** (See CENTRAL BANKS.)

**FEWER, LESS:** Use *fewer* for number and *less* for amount; *fewer* for individual items, *less* for bulk. *Fewer than 10 showed up for the shopping spree, and each of them had less than 35 dollars to spend.*

**FIRST LADY:** Do not capitalize. This is an honorary title, not a formal one. Ex: *Also in attendance was first lady Michelle Obama.*

**FLAMMABLE, INFLAMMABLE:** These words, meaning easily ignited, are interchangeable. The shorter *flammable* is preferred. *Non-flammable* means the opposite.

**FORBID:** Forbid must be followed by a verb in the infinitive. *You are forbidden to say that.* One is forbidden *to* do something, not *from* doing something.

**FORGO, FOREGO:** *Forgo* means to do without or give up. *Forego* which means to go before or precede. Like other words that sound alike, these can easily confuse listeners. The meaning should be clear from the context.

**FORMER, LATTER, RESPECTIVELY:** Avoid these terms, which can confuse listeners who should not be forced to remember the order in which information has been given.

**FULSOME:** Avoid or use carefully: it can mean *abundant* or *offensively flattering, revolting* or *offensive to good taste.*

**FUNDAMENTALISTS:** (See ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISTS.)

**GAY:** Commonly accepted in the United States as homosexual, but the term may not be fully understood worldwide. *Homosexual* is preferred on first reference, but *gay* may be used interchangeably thereafter. *Homosexual* refers to both men and women. If you need to specify gender, use *homosexual men* (or *gay men*) and *homosexual women* or *lesbians*. Use *gay* when referring to men only or both men and women (but not women alone). *Homosexual groups opposed the bill, saying it would hurt gay parents.*

**GENDER, SEXISM:** Use gender-neutral terms when possible. *Members of Congress* (not *congressmen*), *mail carriers* (not *postmen*), *executives* (not *businessmen*). A gender-specific term may be used more naturally when referring to an individual. *The president's spokeswoman denied the accusation. The committee chairman ordered the protesters out of the chamber.*

Use *piloted* or *human space flight*, not *manned space flight*. *Unmanned* is acceptable. *Mankind* is acceptable, but *humankind* or *humanity* often can be substituted. (See CONGRESSMAN, NEWSMAN.)

Profiles of people in the news should be slugged NEWSMAKER: DALE JONES (not MAN or WOMAN IN THE NEWS).

**GENOCIDE:** The International Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide defines the term as the "systematic and planned extermination of an entire national, racial or religious group." Otherwise, *mass murder* or a similar alternative is preferred.

**GEOGRAPHIC NAMES:** In general, use the shortest commonly acceptable English version. *Russia. The Czech Republic. South Africa, Ho Chi Minh City.* Places occasionally change names, are created or go out of existence. As with personal names, when we defer to a person's preferences, in general use the name preferred by national authorities. When existing countries change name, continue to refer to the old name during a transition period sufficient to allow listeners to adjust to the new name. *Burkino Faso, the former Upper Volta.* Exception: use *Burma* and *Rangoon*. The *CIA World Factbook* (online at <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>) and the *Merriam-Webster Geographical Dictionary* may provide guidance, but the former reflects official bias, while the later could be out of date.

For spelling of foreign place names, use *Merriam-Webster's Geographical Dictionary*. For names not in the dictionary, the National Imagery and Mapping Agency provides online access to the foreign names database of the U.S. Board on Geographic Names at <http://164.214.2.59/gns/html/index.html> (click on Access GEOnet button).

Unless relevant to the story, phrases locating a state or other geographic entity should be optional and in parentheses. *A building under construction in (the southeastern state of) Tennessee has collapsed. An early snowstorm has closed highways and surprised residents of (the south-central state of) Oklahoma.*

**GERMANY:** The Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) and German Democratic Republic (East Germany) became a unified state on October 3, 1990. The terms *West Germany* and *East Germany* are therefore only used in historic context. *He was chancellor of West Germany in the 1960s.* Use *eastern Germany* to describe

the six German states of the former East Germany. *Unemployment remains high in eastern Germany.* The former divided city of Berlin, which is now the capital of Germany, is handled in a similar fashion.

**GERMAN STATE:** The chief executives of Germany's states hold the title prime minister. However, to avoid confusion with the head of the national government, use the title *governor* (by analogy to U.S. state governors). *The governor of Bavaria.*

**GOLAN HEIGHTS:** Syrian territory occupied by Israel in 1967. Israel later annexed the territory, but the United States has not recognized the move. This is not part of Palestine by any definition.

**GOVERNMENT, JUNTA, REGIME:** *Government* may refer to a system of political administration. *The new country's government was modeled on the French system.* It also can refer to a particular set of ruling individuals. *President Gonzalez named members of his new government.* In this latter sense, *government* is often synonymous with *Cabinet*, and must be distinguished from the state. *National defense is a state (not government) function.*

It is rarely necessary to attribute information to a government. *Britain says. . .* is almost always a better alternative to *The British government says. . .* The former is shorter and unambiguous.

*Junta* (HOON-tuh) refers to a ruling council, normally military. *Juntas* are generally temporary governing bodies set up after a coup, but sometimes they last longer. Make only sparing use of this word, mainly when it is used by those declaring its establishment. It is better to use English words to describe the situation, such as *ruling military council*.

Use *regime* only in direct quotes. Although the dictionary definition is neutral, in practice it has been used almost exclusively to refer to oppressive or unfriendly governments (*a Stalinist regime*, never the *Bush regime*) and thus carries pejorative baggage.

**GUANTANAMO TRIALS:** Call the legal proceedings at the U.S. military facility at Guantanamo Bay (Cuba) "military trials," not "war crimes trials." There are a lot of legal gray areas involved - the nature of the military courts, the status of the detainees, the nature of the individual charges against them, the applicability of Geneva Conventions practices, etc.

**GUILTY, INNOCENT:** In most common law countries, possible verdicts are either *guilty* or *not guilty*. (Some jurisdictions offer a third option: not proven.) To avoid misunderstanding, use *innocent* instead of *not guilty*.

**GUNSHIP:** Not all military helicopters are *gunships*, even if they have some guns on them. *Jane's* defines a gunship as an "aircraft designed for battlefield attack; helicopter gunships normally with slim body carrying pilot and weapon operator only." When in doubt, use simply *military helicopter*. (See WARSHIP.)

**GYPSY:** The *Gypsy* people originated in India but now live worldwide, with large concentrations in Central and Eastern Europe. In their Romany language, the word for *man* is *rom*, and thus they refer to themselves as *Roma*. Use *Gypsy* on first reference, but also include *Roma*. *Attacks against the Roma, as they also are called (or as they prefer to be called) are continuing.*

**HAJJ:** Always capitalize. *Haji*.

**HARDLINER:** One who advocates or carries out a rigidly uncompromising course of action. Because it can be considered pejorative, the term should be used evenhandedly across the ideological spectrum (as should words like DICTATOR, STRONGMAN, WARLORD)

**HEADQUARTERS:** This word is generally singular. *The headquarters is in Detroit.* It is plural only when referring to more than one headquarters. *The headquarters of Ford and General Motors are in Detroit.*

**HEALTH CARE:** Two words without a hyphen, even when modifying another. *Ex: health care debate.*

**HIV, AIDS:** *AIDS* may be used for all references to Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. *HIV* is the virus that causes AIDS. People infected with HIV do not necessarily have AIDS. Don't use *HIV virus* – that phrase is redundant. "HIV/AIDS" may be used when referring in general terms to the epidemic or efforts to fight it.

**H1N1, SWINE FLU:** On first reference, use *H1N1 swine flu*. . . and then *swine flu* on second reference.

**HOLY PLACES:** Many religious shrines have dubious links to the event that purportedly took place at that site. Use phrases such as *revered by Christians as the site of Jesus's birth* or *where Muslims believe the Prophet*

*Muhammad ascended to heaven*, rather than a flat statement that this is the place.

**HOMICIDE:** (see CRIMES)

**HOMOSEXUAL:** (see GAY)

**HONORIFICS:** After initial identification including title (if appropriate) and full name, identify heads of state and government, and the U.N. secretary-general, on second reference with Mr., Mrs., Ms. and surname. Spouses of the aforementioned also get an honorific. Ex.: President Obama, Mr. Obama. First lady Michelle Obama, Mrs. Obama. Former president Jimmy Carter, Mr. Carter. Former first lady Rosalyn Carter, Mrs. Carter.

You may use titles (Professor, Senator, Governor, Prime Minister, Prince, Councilman, Reverend, etc.), if applicable, on subsequent references for everyone else.

Identify former office-holders (including those deceased) by their former titles or with honorific (notable exceptions: *Mao*, *Saddam*). When office-holder and political challenger(s) are mentioned in the same story, use honorific for each on second reference. Ex: if President Obama ran for re-election against John McCain, it would not be appropriate to refer to Mr. Obama and McCain. Use Mr. Obama and Mr. McCain (or Senator McCain) in such a case.

All former presidents and prime ministers should be titled as in the following example: former Pakistani prime minister Benazir Bhutto. Do not capitalize the title.

All presidents-elect and prime ministers-elect get an honorific.

Generally use first name on subsequent reference for children under 18.

**HOPEFULLY:** In a hopeful manner. *We hopefully bought our first lottery ticket.* Purists object to any other meaning, although in near-universal contemporary usage, the word is used to mean "it is hoped." *Hopefully, the treaty will be ratified.* Because it is not clear who is doing the hoping, this is a word that is best left out of news copy, except in direct quotation. *The prime minister said "peace is hopefully at hand."*

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:** Use *House of Representatives* on first reference. Include *U.S.* if needed. Our listeners may not understand the *House Commerce Committee*. *The Commerce Committee of the (U.S.) House of Representatives* is longer, but much clearer. (See SENATE and UNITED STATES).

**IMPACT:** Use only as a noun, not a verb. *The tax increase will have the biggest impact on low-income people.*

**IMPLY, INFER:** *Imply* means to suggest or say indirectly. *Infer* means to deduce or conclude on the basis of available information. *The politician implied he would cut spending; the voter inferred her taxes would be reduced.*

**IN A STATEMENT:** Redundant. Just say what the person said. Ex: *The presidential spokesman said...* not *In a statement, the presidential spokesman said...* However, you may use *in a written statement*, to distinguish it from a verbal statement.

**IN CONNECTION WITH:** Not *in connection to*.

**IN HIS / HER WORDS, AS HE / SHE PUT IT:** Use very sparingly to indicate that an exact quotation follows. Use quotation marks around the quoted material so announcers can give proper expression to the quoted word or phrase. *The company executive called the bankruptcy filing a "temporary measure."* *Ms. Jones described the incident as "frightening."* *The emergency decree was, as he put it, "necessary to avoid chaos."*

**INCLUDE, COMPRISE:** Use *include* to introduce a series when the items that follow are only part of the total. Use *comprise* when the full list of items is given. Ex: *The breakfast included toast.* *The breakfast was comprised of toast, coffee, eggs and juice.*

**INCREDIBLE, INCREDULOUS:** *Incredible* means unbelievable; *incredulous* means skeptical.

**INDICT:** To formally charge. An indictment is *handed up* by a grand jury, not handed down. Because this term is not understood in many countries, generally use *formally charged*. (See ACCUSE and ARREST).

**INJURED, WOUNDED:** These two words should not be used interchangeably. While both involve physical harm, *wounding* suggests cutting, stabbing, piercing or tearing the skin. *Wounding* also tends to imply willful actions. *He was wounded in battle.* *Injury* can, but does not necessarily, include wounding. (An injured knee can merely be sprained.) *She was injured in a car accident.* A soldier gets a Purple Heart for *wounds* suffered in battle. The NFL

has an *injured list*, not a wounded list.

**INTERNET STYLE:** VOA's Internet style conforms in general to newspaper style and relies extensively on the Associated Press *Stylebook*. Although most of the guidance in this manual applies equally to VOA material placed on our Web pages, there are a few exceptions. The Web desk maintains its own style rules to supplement this guide.

Capitalize both parts of hyphenated words in Internet headlines. *Ex.: President Orders Full-Scale Investigation.*

**INTERNET HEADLINES:** Internet headlines do not need to conform to every style point listed herein for our copy. *Ex:* there is no need to put periods after US and UN. Internet heads should conform to VOA Web desk guidelines. Use single quotation marks in Internet headlines. *Ex: President Calls Opposition 'Misguided'*

**ISLAM:** Followers of Islam are *Muslims* (not *Moslems*). Their holy book is the *Quran*. They worship in a *mosque* and observe Friday as the Sabbath. The two principal branches are the larger *Sunni* and smaller *Shi'ite*. As an adjective, *Islamic* and *Muslim* are normally interchangeable. Be aware that most Muslims are not Arabs and that Islam should not be equated with the Arab world. Also, do not call *Druze* religious adherents *Muslims*. Although the *Druze* have many similarities with Muslims, they also have some components of other religious beliefs in their faith. Use *Muhammad* for the spelling of the prophet's name, and capitalize *Prophet* when it precedes the name. *Ex:* the *Prophet Muhammad*; depictions of the *prophet*. Do not use *Muhammadism* or *Muhammadans*, which are obsolete. (See ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISTS.)

**ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISTS:** Except in direct quotation avoid this term, which suggests that violence is somehow a fundamental part of Islam. Use *Islamic militant* or *Islamic radical* when appropriate. *Conservative Muslim* may be appropriate in some cases, as might *Islamic activist*. It is important to remember that most Muslims are neither radical nor militant. A sitting government may be concerned about the rise of an Islamic political movement, which may or may not be radical. Islamic political activists may be identified as *Islamists*.

**ITALICS:** **ITALICS:** Use italics for the titles of newspapers, magazines, books and other print media, and the names of websites, as well as television series, films, plays and musical pieces. Also use italics for ships, including space ships, and foreign words that are not in common use. But use quotation marks for titles of TV episodes or published articles.

*Ex.: The Washington Post* predicted that *Harry Potter* would be named best picture. *Ex:* the space shuttle *Atlantis*, the Greek freighter *Stavros*. *Ex:* They participated in a *loya jirga*. *Ex:* the *Star Trek* episode, "The Trouble with Tribbles." *Ex:* The article in *Newsweek* called "The Obama Factor."

**ITS:** *Its* is a possessive that does not have an apostrophe. But *it's* is a contraction for "it is."

**JERUSALEM:** The city is home to Israel's parliament (Knesset) and most ministries (although defense is in Tel Aviv). The United States recognizes Jerusalem as the capital of Israel (see *CIA World Factbook*, State Dept. Background Notes), although the U.S. embassy, along with most others, is in Tel Aviv. Normally, it is correct to write about *officials in Jerusalem* because that is where they are, but do not use *Jerusalem* as a synonym for *Israel*. *Ties between Israel and Jordan* (not *Jerusalem and Amman*) *are improving*. The Palestinians also describe Jerusalem as their "eternal capital."

Jerusalem includes the historic Old City, with religious sites sacred to Islam, Judaism and Christianity. The *Western Wall* (not *Wailing Wall*) is a remnant of the last Jewish Temple, destroyed in the year 70, and is at the base of the *Temple Mount* or *Noble Sanctuary* (or, in Arabic, *Haram al-Sharif*), that is the site of the *al-Aqsa Mosque* and the *Dome of the Rock*. Also within the walls of the Old City is the *Church of the Holy Sepulcher*, built at the place revered by Christians as the site of the crucifixion and resurrection.

East Jerusalem includes the formerly Jordanian-controlled section of the city, which Israel annexed in 1967. This annexation has not been recognized by the United States.

**JUDAISM:** The religion of some 13 million adherents originated with the patriarch Abraham more than 25 centuries ago. Israel was established in 1948 as the Jewish homeland, but most Jews continue to live in the diaspora. The United States and Israel have the largest Jewish communities, with significant populations in France, Russia, Ukraine and elsewhere. Hitler's "final solution" aimed to exterminate European Jewry, killing six million, or half the world's Jews, in what is now known as the *Holocaust*. Contemporary Jewish faith is expressed in three principal branches: orthodox, conservative and reform. The Jewish *sabbath* begins Friday at sundown. Special *kosher* dietary laws prohibit pork and shellfish, and ban the mixing of meat and dairy products.

**LANDMINE:** Landmine is generally used as one word, no hyphen, by the U.N. and by the International Campaign



to Ban Landmines, even though the dictionary says it is two words. One word appears to be the more accepted usage.

**LATIN WORDS:** To form the plurals of most Latin words used in English, add an *s*: *ultimatums*, *referendums*, *forums*, *dictums*.

Exceptions include: *data*, *media* and *strata*, which are plurals for *datum*, *medium* and *stratum*. *Phenomena*, which is Greek, not Latin, is the plural of *phenomenon*.

Use *alumnus* when referring to a male school graduate, *alumna* for a female graduate. *Alumnae* is the plural for female graduates, and *alumni* is the male and collective (male and female) plural.

**LAUNCH:** Limit this overused word to references involving spacecraft, missiles, ships, etc. In general, use *begin* or *start* when referring to investigations, negotiations, searches, etc.

**LEFTIST, RIGHTIST, RADICAL, CONSERVATIVE, LIBERAL:** Generally avoid these terms in favor of a more precise description of a particular philosophy. For example, *far left* is sometimes used to mean communist and *far right* can mean fascist. If so, use the more precise term. There is considerable polemic regarding these and other political labels. Use the terms sparingly and only when they are important to its context. Do not avoid descriptive terms when necessary in the story. (See **DICTATOR**, **HARDLINER**, **STRONGMAN**, **WARLORD**).

**LIE IN STATE:** Only the body of a person who is entitled to a state funeral may *lie in state*. In the United States, this would apply to a president or former president, a president-elect or people designated by the president. Members of Congress are eligible for state funerals if either house makes a formal request and the request is approved by the president. Note: the body, not the person, lies in state. *The body of the retired general will lie in state in the Capitol rotunda.*

**LIKE, AS:** Used as a preposition, *like* requires an object. *She writes like a professional.* Use *as* rather than *like* as a conjunction. *He'll be a bricklayer just as (not like) his father was.* (*Like* has long been used as a conjunction — *Winston tastes good like a cigarette should* — but this usage should be avoided in VOA copy.)

**LINE-ITEM VETO:** This is among many terms (*pocket veto*, *continuing resolution*, *omnibus spending bill*, etc.) used in U.S. government parlance that must be explained to our listeners.

**LORD:** (See **ROYALTY**.)

**MAJOR:** Avoid this overused word except when clearly warranted. *A major earthquake has claimed an estimated 50,000 lives in central China.* Try to find another adjective specific to the situation or just let the event speak for itself.

**MAJORITY, PLURALITY:** *Majority* means more than half; *plurality* means the greatest single number. If candidate Alpha received 80 votes, Beta got 60 and Delta took 40, then Alpha received the *plurality*, but not a *majority* of the 180 votes cast.

Used alone, these words take singular verbs. *The majority favors a change in the rules.* If a plural word follows *majority* or *plurality*, the verb form depends on the sense of the sentence. *A majority of 10 votes is needed to change the rules. The majority of criminals are not caught.*

Use *most* (not *majority*) in time references. *He spent most of the time in the office.*

**MANSLAUGHTER:** (See **CRIMES**.)

**MASSIVE:** Limit this overused word to physical size. *Scientists have discovered a massive planet twice the size of Jupiter.* In particular, do not use *massive* to refer to non-physical things. *An intensive search. Extensive renovations.* (See **MAJOR**.)

**MEANTIME, MEANWHILE:** Use *meanwhile* sparingly when referring to simultaneous events, only at the beginning of a sentence (not in the middle) and no more than once per story. *Meanwhile, in London, the new year was marked in the city's Millennium Dome.* Avoid *meantime*.

**MEDIA:** Is a plural, collective word, as in *news media*.

**MEMENTO:** A reminder of what is past, a souvenir. *He wore the scar proudly, as a memento of the duel.* Avoid the common misspelling, *momento*.

**METRIC SYSTEM:** The international system of weights and measures. Use metric units such as hectares, kilometers, liters and kilograms with rare exceptions (barrels of oil, ounces of gold).

For small weights, use *grams*; for larger weights use *kilograms* (or *kilos*) or *tons* (meaning *metric tons*). Use common sense: if you would use *ounces*, use *grams*. *The suspect was found with 200 grams of gold in his possession. Although Smith was smaller and 10 kilos lighter, boxing experts considered him the favorite. The village was buried under tons of debris.* In most cases it is not necessary to specify *metric tons*, particularly when, as in the last example, an exact amount is not indicated.

For length, use meters, centimeters, kilometers (pronounced KILL-oh-meeters). *The plane went down 100 kilometers north of Accra.*

For area, use square meters or square centimeters; for larger areas use hectares. *The 500-hectare plot was empty pasture except for a 100-square-meter farmhouse.*

For temperature use *degrees Celsius*. *It was a warm, sunny day; the temperature was 23 and there wasn't a cloud in the sky.* In scientific stories about temperatures near absolute zero, you also may use the *Kelvin* temperature.

For speed, use *kilometers per hour*. *The speed limit is 110 kilometers per hour.*

For fuel economy, resist the temptation to convert miles per gallon to kilometers per liter; the conventional international expression is inverted and expressed in liters per 100 kilometers. Smaller numbers represent greater fuel economy. A hybrid vehicle may average 3.4, a thirsty SUV may drink 20 liters per 100 kilometers.

When converting to the metric system, round off sensibly.

**MIDNIGHT:** Midnight comes at the end of the day, not at the beginning. However, to avoid ambiguity, provide a frame of reference. *The rocket lifted off Tuesday night at midnight.* A story embargoed until midnight Sunday may be used at 12:01 Monday morning.

**MILITARY:** Refer to people in the military by rank on first reference. For retired personnel, use the rank preceded by the word *retired* on first reference. In rare cases of dishonorable discharge, use *former* before the rank on first reference. (See GUNSHIP, STRATEGIC, and WARSHIP.)

The general term for military personnel is *troops*, not *soldiers*. To purists, *soldiers* are army personnel and are distinct from Marines, who are the land forces of the Navy. When possible, use the non-sexist terms *sailors* and *air crews* instead of *seamen* and *airmen*, unless all the individuals referred to are males. This is not always possible to know because the U.S. services use the ranks of *seaman* and *airman* for men and women.

Compound ranks (not hyphenated) should be used on first reference and shortened thereafter. *Brigadier General Geoffrey Hartman. General Hartman.* The AP Stylebook has a useful listing of military ranks in each service (under the heading *military titles*). Foreign military ranks should be handled similarly. *Colonel General Sergei Kurakin. General Kurakin.*

**MR.:** Use the abbreviation, rather than the word *Mister*.

**MRS., MISS AND MS.:** When used, choose the term that conforms to the woman's preference, if known, or to common usage. Otherwise, use *Ms*. Note that *Miss* is not an abbreviation and does not require a period.

**MONEY:** Always put currency references in U.S. dollars. Use the dollar sign, \$, in all money references. ex: *He gave me \$17. The bill's cost is estimated at \$1.2 trillion.* Make sure (if the country you're writing about has its own dollar) that you have converted to U.S. dollars before writing the dollar sign. We still use the word *dollar* when referring generally to our currency. ex: *The dollar was up against the yen.* The local currency amount, if known, may be put in parentheses for language service use. *The price was set at \$2 (19 pesos) a share.* Occasionally, it may be appropriate to put the local currency amount in copy - for example, if a country's budget exceeds a watershed amount, such as \$100 billion, for the first time. But the U.S. dollar equivalent should always be included. (See NUMBERS.)

Round off sensibly. Round off all market index and currency figures to the nearest whole number, unless figures beyond the decimal point are truly significant. Write *600* (not *599.90*). *One German mark, 65 pfennigs* (not *one German mark, 65.3 pfennigs*).

**MONEY LAUNDERING:** The term *money laundering*, referring to transactions aimed at concealing the source of money, should be explained in copy except when the meaning is obvious.

**MONIES:** Different currencies, not a synonym for money. *The exchange bureau accepted various monies.*

**MORE THAN, OVER:** To avoid possible confusion, use *more than* when referring to an amount. *More than 75 people are feared dead.* However, *over* may be used to avoid repetition. *Casualties included more than 50 killed and*

over 200 injured.

**MORMON:** Referring to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The term *Mormon* is better-known and is sufficient.

**MUJAHEDIN:** Exercise caution when using this term. The most inclusive definition is one who wages war or otherwise crusades for a principle, belief or religion, notably Islam. Therefore, its use in specific conflicts is subject to Central Desk guidance and rulings. There is an Iranian opposition group called the *Peoples Mojahedin* (*Mojahedin-e Khalq*). This is the way the group spells its name in English. So does VOA. For this group, always use the complete name, not simply *Mojahedin* on second reference.

**MURDER:** (See CRIMES)

**MUSLIM:** (See ISLAM)

**MUTUAL, COMMON:** *Mutual* means reciprocity between two or more. *The husband and wife have mutual affection.* If they share affection for someone else, the proper word is *common*. *They have a common affection for their son.*

**NAMES, NICKNAMES** (of people, organizations): Avoid unneeded names of people, places, organizations, etc. If someone or something is central to a story, or is quoted in it, or referred to more than once, the name is probably needed. Sometimes, names can be avoided by just using a title, but include the name in parentheses for language services and Web desk. *The Pentagon spokesman (Capt. Jeff Peterson) described the attack.* Remember that to many of our listeners, English names are foreign names. Be particularly careful about strange names in urgent stories that may be difficult for broadcasters to sight-read. Leave out the name if possible. Otherwise, advise the broadcast staff.

Use nicknames only when the individual is known to prefer it (*former President Jimmy Carter*), when the person is known almost exclusively by a nickname (*Bubba Smith*), or when the nickname is normally included as part of the individual's name (*Willy "the Lion" Smith*). But just because a person has a nickname doesn't mean it needs to be in a story. Do not use nicknames simply to avoid repeating a name. An unfamiliar nickname can confuse the audience. We know *Bob* and *Robert* are the same; listeners in Fiji may not.

In stories that involve juveniles, refer to them on second reference by their first name, if under age 16, or by their surname if 16 or older. Use surname, no matter what the age, if juvenile is charged with a serious crime, or in sports stories.

(See also ARABIC NAMES, ASIAN NAMES, RUSSIAN NAMES, SPANISH NAMES)

**NARCOTICS:** (See DRUGS)

**NASA:** The National Aeronautics and Space Administration. On first reference, use *U.S. space agency, NASA*; thereafter, *NASA* or *space agency*.

**NATIONAL ANTHEMS:** National anthems may be used in whole or in part in a report on a news event. For example, if longtime rivals re-establish diplomatic relations, it would be appropriate to use the national anthem as played at a welcoming ceremony for the new ambassador. The sound of nationalist protesters singing their country's anthem may be included in a report on their demonstration. Anthems should not, of course, be used in a disrespectful manner, nor should library recordings of anthems be used to dress up a report.

**NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH:** Note plural *Institutes*. NIH is the government's main medical research entity. Constituents include the National Cancer Institute, National Institute of Mental Health and the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (which is responsible for AIDS research). Use *NIH* only after clear identification. *The National Institutes of Health – NIH – announced. . . .* Otherwise, use *the research center* or similar.

**NEWSMAN, NEWSWOMAN:** Use *journalist* or *reporter*. (See GENDER.)

**NEWSPAPER AND MAGAZINE NAMES:** Use the capitalized masthead name (including the article *the* if used by the publication). Italicize; do not use quotation marks. *He was quoted in The New York Times.* When the place of publication is not part of the newspaper's name, add it. *The London Times ran the story. The German newsmagazine Der Spiegel.* For some language services, it is important to know the frequency of publication; include this information in parentheses. *Israel's "Ha'aretz" (daily) newspaper.* Information exclusive to a publication should be

attributed (and be sure you have two sources, or the original from the publication or its Web site). For those unfamiliar with the publication, it may be useful to describe it with adjectives such as *respected* or *tabloid*, or with a party affiliation. *The Anarchist Party's Publick Gazette (monthly) magazine.*

**NON-ALIGNED:** As the bipolar world of two superpowers has faded, this term has lost much of its meaning, and therefore should only be used when naming an organization, in direct quotation or in a historical reference. In such cases, be sure the meaning is clear. *Tito championed the Non-Aligned Movement.* (See **THIRD WORLD**.)

**NOTABLE, NOTED, NOTORIOUS:** *Notable* means worthy of note. *A notable discussion.* *Noted* means distinction for positive reasons. *The noted scientist.* *Notorious* means well-known for negative reasons. *The notorious thief.*

**NUMBERS:** Write out numbers *one through nine* when they stand alone. ex: *She is five years old. World War Two.* From 10 to 999,999 use numerals exclusively (do not use hundred or thousand when attached to numerals). ex: *Officials say 11,000 people were made homeless by the earthquake. An estimated 500 miners are on strike.* However, if the numbers *one through nine* modify a phrase or number, use the numeral. ex: *The 5-year-old girl is missing. He said 5 million people are living in poverty. The unemployment rate was 5 percent.* Continue to spell a numeral at the beginning of a sentence, except when the numeral identifies a calendar year. ex: *Three people were wounded in the explosion. 1996 was an election year.* Use million, billion, trillion, etc. with NO hyphen. ex: *There are 12 million people living in Jakarta.* Spell out *first through ninth*, except when they are part of a proper title. ex: *first base. He was first in line. The 1st Amendment. The 7th Fleet.* Use *10<sup>th</sup>, 31<sup>st</sup>*, etc. when greater than ninth.

In compound fractions, and in simple fractions when appropriate, use the indefinite article. One-half of the nation is ill-housed. Four-and-a-third points.

Round off numbers whenever possible. About 200 were injured.

On those rare occasions when multiple decimal places must be used, numbers after the decimal point are written (and pronounced) as individual digits. \$10.23 trillion. In cases of conflicting or incomplete information, use an approximation or use a phrase to give a general idea of the number involved. *At least 180.* Avoid the vague phrase *a number of*.

Sources often disagree on numbers, especially in casualty figures and sizes of demonstrations. If there is a VOA reporter on the scene, in general use the numbers provided by our journalist, but bear in mind that wire services often have more up-to-date information. In the event of a discrepancy, contact the reporter and try to resolve it. Sometimes discrepancies cannot be resolved. In the case of significant discrepancies, it may not be possible to finesse the issue.

Casualty figures vary widely. Bangkok television reports 70 people were injured, but Reuters says 30 were killed and more than 100 injured. Avoid *dozens* except in direct quotation, because it is not widely used internationally. About 24 people are missing. *Scores* is less objectionable, but use actual numbers if possible. More than 40 buildings were leveled in the earthquake.

**OBITUARIES:** Obituaries should be prepared for notable individuals or for those who have made a significant contribution even if they are not necessarily household names. Use straightforward verbs such as *died* and *was killed* rather than terms such as *passed on*, *passed away* or *deceased*.

Avoid ending obituaries with a headline (*Polio vaccine inventor Jonas Salk, dead at age 84*), but remind the listener of the subject's identity. *Singer Alberta Hunter will be buried in New York.*

**OBSERVERS:** (See **ANALYSTS**.)

**OFF THE RECORD:** (See **BACKGROUND**.)

**OFFICIAL VISIT:** All visits by government representatives are official, unless they are private. There is no need to use the word *official* when describing them. Use the word *private* if that's what it is.

**OK:** Possibly the most widely understood word on the planet, it is nevertheless rather informal. Use of *OK*, either as a verb or noun, should not be your first choice, but is acceptable in some cases. *The student leader says it is OK to march, but that there should be no violence.*

**ONE ANOTHER, EACH OTHER:** Two people talk to *each other*; more than two talk to *one another*.

**ONLY:** *Only* is a word with editorial connotations and often is unnecessary. Do not use the word insensitively, particularly with casualty figures. *All but five survived* (not *Only five people on the plane were killed.*) But it can be

carefully used for emphasis. *After years of double-digit inflation, residents welcomed inflation of only 8 percent.*

**OPINION POLLS:** Opinion polls should be treated with special care. They are neither unfailingly accurate nor universally interesting. Wherever possible, indicate a trend or the lack of one. The correct verb is *indicate*, not *show*. *A new survey indicates increasing support for the school prayer initiative.* If the conclusions of the poll are controversial, include whenever possible comments from those who have opposing views. Balance is essential. Remember: polls do not indicate what people think, but what they say. Mention sample size when known. *The survey among 1,200 registered voters...*

**ORDINANCE, ORDNANCE:** An ordinance is a rule or regulation, typically on the local or municipal level. *I got a ticket for violating the no-smoking ordinance.* Ordnance is military weapons and ammunition and the equipment to maintain them. *His military experience was limited to running an ordnance warehouse.*

**ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY:** Eastern Orthodox churches split from the Latin (Roman Catholic) church in the schism of 1054, after several centuries of disagreements. The Orthodox churches number about 170 million adherents, organized to a large degree along national lines, e.g. Russian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox. The head of the Church of Constantinople is called the *ecumenical patriarch*. Services and doctrines are different from the Roman Catholic Church; ecclesiastical art and architecture also are different. Do not confuse with Eastern Rite (Uniate) churches, which split from Rome and then rejoined the Catholic Church in later centuries, bringing the liturgy they developed with them, including a married clergy. See EASTERN RITE.

**OVER:** Do not use when you mean *about*. Ex.: The demonstrators were upset *about* (not upset over).

OVER: Do not use when you mean *\_about\_ or \_concerning\_ or \_on\_ or \_in\_*.

Ex.: The demonstrators were upset about (not upset over)...

Ex: The court's decision concerning (not decision over) the dispute...

Ex: A government crackdown on (not over) an alleged military plot...

OVER also is NOT used when you mean "more than."

Ex: The salaries rose more than (not over) 6 percent.

OVER generally refers to spatial relationships.

Ex: The plane flew over the city.

**PALESTINE:** Use *Palestine* only in direct quotations, in historical references when referring to the area under British mandate which began after World War One and ended in 1948, or when referring to a possible state for the Palestinian people. *The diplomat predicted rapid recognition for Palestine, when the state comes into existence.*

*Israeli-occupied territories:* Use when referring to parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip still under Israeli control.

*Palestinian Authority:* The body administering the Palestinian autonomous areas, is usually referred to as *Palestinian Authority*. Mahmoud Abbas is the elected *Palestinian president* (not *president of Palestine*). He has a Cabinet of ministers, whose members are confirmed by an elected 82-member *Palestinian Legislative Council*.

**PARLIAMENT:** A national or regional legislative body, or the building where the lawmakers meet. Use the name when the parliament, or its constituent houses, have one. *Japanese parliament, the Diet. Lower House of the Russian parliament, the State Duma.* Avoid if possible describing a chamber as merely the upper or lower house, because in some languages the terms suggest greater or lesser power. *The country's lower house, the Chamber of Deputies, confirmed the appointment.*

**PARLIAMENTARIAN:** A *parliamentarian* can be an expert on parliamentary procedure or a member of a parliament. To avoid confusion, avoid the term and use *procedural expert* or *lawmaker* or similar term.

**PASHTUN:** The *Pashtun* ethnic group makes up the majority in Afghanistan and also is found in large numbers in Pakistan and, to a lesser extent, in a few other countries. Pashtuns speak the *Pashto* language.

**PASSIVE VOICE:** (See ACTIVE VOICE.)

**PERCENT, PERCENTAGE POINTS:** Be careful to distinguish between these concepts. If a politician's approval rating has fallen from 60 percent to 30 percent, it has declined by *30 percentage points*, equivalent to a *50 percent*

drop. Do not use %. Write out percent.

**PERSON, PEOPLE:** In general, use *person* in the singular and *people* in plural form. Using *persons* as a plural can sound stilted. Use *people* when referring to a nation or to a large and indefinite group. *The Brazilian people.*

**PHILIPPINE, FILIPINO:** *Philippine* is the adjective, *Filipino* is the noun. Ex: *the Philippine government, the Philippine people...* but ... *He is a Filipino. They are Filipinos.* Do not use: *Filipina.*

**POLITICAL PARTIES:** The principal American political parties are *Democratic* (not Democrat) and *Republican*, with *Reform*, *Green* and *Libertarian* the leading minor parties. When appropriate, describe political parties, particularly when the party name does not immediately suggest its ideology. A Social Democratic party probably needs no further description, unless that particular party actually happens to be conservative. *The coalition includes the right-of-center People's Party.*

**PRACTICAL, PRACTICABLE:** Something *practical* is useful or valuable. *Practicable* means capable of being done, but not necessarily useful or valuable. *Rube Goldberg demonstrated a practicable way of frying eggs, but it wasn't very practical.*

**PREFIXES:** (See CONTRACTIONS.)

**PRESCRIBE, PROSCRIBE:** *Prescribe* means to set a rule or course to be followed, usually (but not necessarily) in writing. *The president prescribed measures to improve the economy. The doctor prescribed an antibiotic.* *Proscribe* means to denounce a thing, to prohibit. *Hitler proscribed books written by Jews.*

**PRESENTLY, CURRENTLY:** At one time, *presently* referred to events in the near future. It is now widely understood to mean the same as *currently*. Avoid *presently*, which sounds stilted and old-fashioned. *Currently* can usually be omitted or replaced by *now*. *The retired coach is now writing his memoirs*, or simply *The retired coach is writing his memoirs.*

**PRESIDENTS:** In general, refer to the president of the United States by title and surname only. *President Obama.* However, when the U.S. president is overseas, engaging with other leaders, use *U.S. Barack Obama* and the first and last names of all other officials. *U.S. President Barack Obama and British Prime Minister Gordon Brown held talks in London today.* On subsequent reference, use *Mr. Obama* and *Mr. Brown* or *the U.S. and British leaders* or similar.

Although ex-presidents officially retain their titles, *President Jimmy Carter*, to avoid confusion in our copy use *former* or *ex-*, and do not use *president* as a title on second reference. *Former president Bill Clinton. Mr. Clinton.*

Do not use *former* when referring to dead presidents. *The late U.S. President Richard Nixon* on first reference, *Mr. Nixon* or *the late president* (not *the late former president*) on subsequent references. Follow this same pattern for former and deceased vice presidents, except that they do not get honorifics.

**PRESS CONFERENCE/NEWS CONFERENCE:** Our traditional preference is for the more-inclusive term *news conference*. But *press conference*, which is part of the name of the venerable VOA program "Press Conference, USA," also is acceptable.

**PRIME MINISTER, PREMIER, CHANCELLOR, PRESIDENT:** Different countries use different titles for their top officials. The terms are not interchangeable. Use the CIA *Chiefs of State* book or Web site (<http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/chiefs/>) to verify names and titles.

Most heads of parliamentary governments are referred to as *prime minister*. *Premier*, (from the French term for *prime minister*), may be used to designate Canadian provincial leaders. *Premier* is, however, recommended for references to China's leader.

**PRINCIPLE, PRINCIPAL:** *Principle*, always a noun, denotes a fundamental truth, a standard of conduct or a basic doctrine. *She held to the party's principles.* *Principal* can be an adjective or a noun. As an adjective it means most important. *That is the principal reason for the meeting.* As a noun it means leader (*school principal*) or a sum of money placed at interest.

**PRISON:** Use *prison* for large facilities housing people convicted of serious crimes. Variations such as *minimum-security prison* should be explained if not clear from the context. *Because of the violent nature of his crime, he is in a maximum-security prison.* Do not describe a person who has not been convicted as being *held in prison*. Instead, use terms such as *detained*, *held by authorities*, etc. *The rebel leader is in custody while authorities continue to*

*interview witnesses.* Avoid the word *jail*, which may not be understood worldwide. (See ARREST.)

**PROFESSOR:** Not everyone who teaches at a university or college is a professor. Some are *instructors*. (See COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY.)

**PRONOUNS:** Be sure the antecedent of the pronoun is clear. In this sentence: *The Bank reminded the government of its policy*, does *its* refer to the bank's policy or THE government's? Use pronouns mainly to refer to a noun in the same sentence or when writing about one person, place or event. Even then, re-identify the subject noun from time to time to remind the listener. Make sure the pronoun agrees with the accompanying verb.

**PRONUNCIATION:** Use standard American English usage and pronunciation in all VOA material. For questions about pronunciation, consult the online Pronunciation Guide at <http://inside.bbg.gov>, or call Broadcast Production .

**PROSTRATE, PRONE, SUPINE:** These words all carry the meaning of lying flat. *Prostrate* means lying flat in an exhausted, helpless condition; *prone* dictates a face-down position; *supine* means face upward. Listeners will better understand terms such as *face-up* or *face-down*. Do not confuse *prostrate* with *prostate*, a male gland.

**PROVED, PROVEN:** Both are the past participle of *prove*. *He has proved his point. She has proven her case.* *Proved* is preferred, although *proven* is acceptable. Use *proven* as an adjective. *Smith is a proven genius.*

**PUNCTUATION:** VOA news copy is generally punctuated according to the rules of standard English. In most cases, do not use a comma before the conjunction in a series. *Argentina, Brazil and Chile.* Use the serial comma to separate the final two elements in a complex series. *My favorite acts are Madonna, James Taylor, and Penn and Teller.*

**QUOTES AND QUOTATION MARKS:** Quotation marks can be useful in broadcast copy to set a word or phrase apart. An anchor can do this verbally, and a translator should be particularly careful about words in quotes. Quotation marks are especially important when stories are posted on the Web. Because listeners cannot see or hear the quotation marks, they should generally be accompanied by a phrase such as *in his words*. *The minister denounced the attack, which she called "a cowardly deed."* Do not offset a direct quotation with the words *quote* and *unquote*. Use single quotation marks in the CN Internet headline. *Ex.: President Calls Opposition 'Misguided'*

**RACE:** Avoid racial identification of individuals in a story except when germane. *She is the first white mayor in a majority black municipality. Police are looking for a suspect they identify as a white male.*

**RADICAL:** (See LEFTIST etc.)

**REDUNDANCIES:** In general, avoid common expressions that are redundant or repetitious. Here are some to avoid: *new innovation, new record, final outcome, personal friend, free gift, future plans and past history*. However, sometimes these phrases can be useful for emphasis or to enliven a story, but use sparingly. *The banquet included 200 professional associates and a few personal friends.*

**REFUGEES:** In international law, *refugees* are people who flee across an international frontier because of persecution based on factors such as their political views, ethnic origin or religious beliefs. *Refugees from Kosovo are now living in Macedonia.* When displaced people remain inside their country, they are technically known as *internally displaced people*. Avoid this phrase when possible, both because its awkwardness makes it ill-suited for broadcast, and because it is a technicality of little import to the affected individuals. *Ethnic Serbs forced from their homes by ethnic Albanians are now living in northeast Kosovo.* But use the technical term when appropriate. *The International Red Cross said it could not help the internally displaced people.* Use *refugees* to describe a group including both categories. *Aid workers are helping Kosovo refugees now living in Albania, Bosnia and in Kosovo itself.*

**RELIGION:** See also entries for BIBLE, BUDDHISM, CATHOLIC, EASTERN RITE, HINDU, ISLAM, JUDAISM, MORMON, ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY)

**REPORTS SAY, IT IS REPORTED THAT:** These and similar constructions suggest some uncertainty about the information that follows. Whenever possible, specify the source of the reports. *Radio Kabul says there has been an explosion.*

Sometimes attribution to published or broadcast reports can help establish credibility. *The report in the semi-official "Al-Ahram" newspaper.*

Avoid using the word *reportedly*.

**REVOLUTIONARY:** Do not use indiscriminately. The word has a special meaning, usually political, to many in our audience.

**RIGHTIST:** (See LEFTIST, etc.)

**ROYALTY and NOBILITY:** Use proper titles when referring to kings, queens, princes and princesses. *King Juan Carlos*. Collectively, they are *royalty*, *royal family* or *members of royalty* (not *royals*). Do not use *Lord*, *Lady*, *Sir* and similar titles. *Former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher* (not *Baroness Thatcher*). People of lower rank may be collectively referred to as the *aristocracy*.

**RUMORS/SPECULATION:** VOA avoids the use of rumors or speculation in news items. However, this may need to be carefully re-evaluated on a case-by-case basis in instances where a rumor or speculation takes on a life of its own. In such cases, in general, editors should allow a responsible official to respond to the rumors or speculation and use this comment as our entry to the story. Without such an official comment, avoid doing a story unless there is a multitude of reports in major news outlets. VOA does not want to be the first to publicize a rumor or speculation.

**RUSSIA, RUSSIANS** — Use *Russia* rather than *Russian Federation*. Reserve *Soviet* and *Soviet Union* for historic references.

Use *Russian* when referring to people and things of the Russian Federation or any ethnic Russian(s), regardless of where they are living. *Scientists say Russians have a genetic trait that may confer immunity*. It also may be necessary to refer specifically to other ethnic groups in Russia. *Russian Gypsies*.

Do not use when referring to non-Russians, e.g. Latvians or Ukrainians, in the former Soviet Union. (See SOVIET.)

**RUSSIAN NAMES:** Avoid letter-for-letter transliterations, which can omit essential vowels. *Alexander* (not *Alexandr*).

The last names of Russian and other Slavic women have feminine endings that are not used in English. Boris Popov's wife is *Svetlana Popova*, but in English she is known as *Svetlana Popov*. However, use the feminine ending for women known by that name. *Cosmonaut Valentina Tereskova*.

Do not use the Russian patronymic. *Nikita Khrushchev* (not *Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev*).

**SACK:** Britishism for dismiss or fire. Avoid.

**SANCTION, SANCTIONS:** The verb *sanction* can mean approve or disapprove, so be sure the meaning is clear. To apply *sanctions*, economic or other, is to implement coercive measures against a person or government in an effort to force a change in policy or habit. *He said U.S. economic sanctions against Cuba remain counterproductive*.

**SEASONS:** Avoid the use of seasons unless clearly germane to the story. *The homeless face harsh winter conditions*. We broadcast around the world and January is winter in the northern hemisphere but summer in the southern hemisphere.

**SECRETARY-GENERAL:** Hyphenate this title, regardless of whether the organization in question uses the hyphen. *U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan*.

**SELF-CONFESSED:** Use *confessed killer* (not *self-confessed*, which is redundant).

**SENATE:** Specify *U.S. Senate* on first reference. (See HOUSE and UNITED STATES.)

**SENSUAL, SENSUOUS:** *Sensual* has to do with satisfying the physical senses and has mildly sexual overtones. *Sensuous* pertains to the senses as opposed to the intellect.

**SHARP:** This word has been overused and has therefore lost much of its impact. Try to find another adjective specific to the situation.

**SIDEBARS:** These are meant to be written to follow the main story in the newscast. When slugging a sidebar, use this style: *APEC SDBR: Trade*.



**SIMPLICITY:** Keep your copy simple and straightforward. We are not writing treaties or newspaper stories. Use *stop the fighting* rather than *achieve the cessation of hostilities*. Remember, you are writing mostly for people whose first language is not English. Avoid excessively difficult words, and explain them when you must use them.

**SIR:** (See ROYALTY.)

**SLANG, COLLOQUIALISMS:** In general, avoid slang or colloquialisms. This does not mean copy should be flat or dull; colorful terms that enliven a story should be used, provided they are explained or the meaning is clear from the context. To aid translators, provide a standard English alternative in parentheses. *The late vice president John Nance Garner said the vice presidency was not worth a pitcher of warm spit (had little power).*

**SLUG:** The slug is the title of a story, used for internal reference only. It should be as short as possible while giving users a general idea of the subject. One- or two-word slugs are preferred. The first word is often the name of the country or institution or individual featured in the story. *INDIA MISSILES, IMF LOAN, POPE ABORTION*. When a story is about an ongoing situation, a single word is almost certainly sufficient. *KOSOVO* (not *KOSOVO FIGHTING*). It is normally not necessary to use punctuation in the slug, but when needed for clarity or to separate the names of two leaders or countries, use a hyphen, not a slash. *ZIMBABWE AMNESTY. GREECE - TURKEY*.

**SMALL, YOUNG:** Use *young* (not *small*) when referring to a child. The child could be large or small for his or her age.

**SO-CALLED:** Use for a familiar nickname. *So-called Stinger missile*. Use with great caution to indicate skepticism. *A so-called patriot*.

**SOURCING:** Proper sourcing is a fundamental tenet of good journalism. If two (or 20) sources quote the militia leader as saying the hostages have been released, all we know is what the militia leader says, not whether the hostages are actually free. VOA News requires two independent sources for most stories, subject to limited exceptions including original reporting and non-controversial subjects.

The use of unidentified sources is a subject of eternal debate in journalism. Journalists routinely rely on sources who won't go on the record. At the same time, the practice is widely condemned within the profession. Nevertheless, unidentified sources seem likely to remain with us for a long time. In briefings, particularly in Washington, sources will usually specify the attribution. *A senior administration official. An individual familiar with the secretary's thinking*. In interviews, the sourcing is often a matter of negotiation. In general, try to identify the source as closely as possible. *A Commerce Department source*, is better than a vaguer phrase such as *an administration official*. Because even sources who don't want their names used do have names, the phrase *unnamed sources* may be confusing. Generally avoid extremely vague terms such as *informed sources, authoritative sources, well-placed sources, reliable sources*. (See BACKGROUND.)

These additional criteria also should be met in considering the handling of anonymous sources:

- A story that uses confidential sources should be of public concern. (We are not interested in "Gotcha" stories just for the sake of the "Gotcha," nor are we interested in scoring "scoops" just for the sake of being first.)
- Before using an unnamed source, writers and editors must be convinced there is no other way to get the information on the record. (Once you agree to treat the source anonymously, you still should try to negotiate the fullest possible description of that source's position, i.e. "*a senior Pentagon official*" is better than "*a U.S. official*," but better still might be "*a senior Pentagon official involved in planning the operation*.")
- The unnamed source must have verifiable and first-hand knowledge of the story. (You must be convinced the source knows what he/she is talking about, and you should consider asking for documentary evidence to back up the source's claim/comment.)
- You should be willing to reveal to the public why the source cannot be named. (For example, the standard "the source requested anonymity" or "the source's name is being withheld to protect him/her from possible reprisals.")
- You must be willing to reveal to your senior editor who your source is.

Other questions worth asking before running a story containing anonymous info include: What will be the possible impact of this story? What does the use of a confidential source mean to the accuracy and authenticity of your story? How would readers/viewers/listeners evaluate the same information if they knew the source's name and motivations?

**SOVIET, SOVIET UNION:** Use in reference to the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (1917-1991). *In the 1970s, he helped Soviet Jews emigrate. The Soviet Union was an ally of Britain in World War Two*. (See EUROPE and RUSSIA.)

**SPACE SHUTTLE:** Use lower case *space shuttle*, but capitalize the proper name that goes with it. *The space shuttle Endeavour.*

**SPANISH NAMES:** Wire copy often will include an individual's entire name: first, middle and last, plus family name (which is usually the maiden name of the individual's mother). *Ricardo Alfredo Nuñez Gonzalez.*

In VOA copy, generally just use first and last names. *Ricardo Nuñez.* For Mexican names, use on first reference the family name, when publicly used by an individual. *Carlos Salinas de Gortari.* On second reference it's *Mr. Salinas.* Note that some individuals do not publicly use their family name. *Vicente Fox. Ernesto Zedillo.*

For individuals with a two-part last name, such as Argentine President *Fernando de la Rúa*, note the *de la* is not capitalized on first reference because these words are particles to the main last name, *Rúa*. But do capitalize on second reference. *Mr. De la Rúa.*

**SPYING, SURVEILLANCE:** *Spying* refers to the gathering of secret information or the covert gathering of information. *Surveillance* refers to close observation, whether covert or not. There is a substantial overlap. Eavesdropping on coded military radio traffic could be described as either *spying* or *surveillance*. Clearly, *spying* has a more sinister connotation, which is why governments like to portray their own activities as *surveillance*, while their adversaries engage in *spying*. *Spy*, when appropriate, is preferred as shorter and more easily understood.

**STRANGLE:** *Strangle* means to kill by squeezing the throat to cut off the oxygen supply. *Strangle to death* is redundant.

**STRATEGIC, TACTICAL:** *Strategic* refers to overall planning and large-scale operations, normally in a military context. *Strategic* weapons include long-range bombers and missiles and aircraft carriers. *Tactical* refers to smaller, close-in or support operations. *Artillery provided tactical support to infantry troops trying to secure the bridge.*

These terms can be used in other contexts, most frequently business. *The company's new chief executive officer outlined his strategic plans, including some acquisitions and a move into Latin America. The company's heavy pre-Christmas advertising buy was described as a tactic for making way for new inventory.*

**STRONGMAN:** A political leader who exercises control by force. Avoid this loaded word except in direct quotation. (SEE DICTATOR, HARDLINER, WARLORD)

**STUDENT BODY:** This phrase can be confusing. Use *students* alone.

**SUPERLATIVES:** (See EXTREMES.)

**SURVEYS:** (See OPINION POLLS.)

**TABLE:** To avoid possible misunderstanding, do not use *table* as a verb. In the United States, *to table* means to put aside, to defer action. Elsewhere, it means *to introduce*. Accordingly, avoid using the word in either sense. *The lawmakers delayed consideration of the measure. The senator introduced the bill.*

**TAIWAN, TAIWANESE:** *Taiwan* is both a noun and an adjective. *Ex.: He is from Taiwan. The Taiwan government today issued a statement.* Avoid using *Taiwanese* except in rare instances when specifically referring to someone who is ethnic Taiwanese.

**TALKING BUILDINGS AND INSTITUTIONS:** Quote people rather than buildings. *The president says* (rather than *The White House says*). Buildings and institutions may speak, in rare instances, to avoid constant repetition. (See CAPITALS.)

**TENSE:** Write in the same tense as much as possible. Lead with the *present perfect* or *present tense* whenever possible: *President Obama has called on North Korea to allow international inspection of its nuclear sites. At a news conference at the White House Thursday, the president said North Korea's continuing refusal to allow such inspections could result in U.N. economic sanctions. The president said most members of the United Nations agree that what he calls "all necessary steps" should be taken to persuade North Korea to comply with international nuclear inspection rules.*

**TERRORIST, COMMANDO, EXTREMIST, GUERRILLA:** *Terrorists* use violence against (often innocent) individuals to advance their political or ideological agenda. Use extreme care with this word. *Terrorist* carries a lot of baggage that can be avoided by using more precise terminology. *Three men are on trial on charges including air piracy, kidnapping and murder. The South Korean president denounced the suspects, calling them "terrorist*

punks."

**Commando** is a member of a small fighting force (or the force itself) trained in making raids, especially by stealth. *Commandos were on the beach hours before the main force, cutting communication lines and deactivating mines. Commando tactics* may be employed both by conventional forces (such as Navy SEAL units) or guerrilla groups.

**Guerrillas** are unorthodox soldiers using non-standard (*guerrilla*) tactics. *Military historians study Viet Cong guerrilla tactics.*

An **extremist** holds extreme views, or advocates or carries out extreme measures. *Austrian politician Joerg Haider was denounced as an extremist after voicing support for Nazi employment policies.* An extremist need not be violent.

**THAT, WHICH:** *That* introduces an important clause that cannot be left out of the sentence. *Which* follows a comma, and introduces a non-essential clause that could be left out of the sentence. Ex: The car *that* won the race was the fastest. The car, *which* was red, won the race.

**THIRD WORLD:** Avoid this term. Use *developing countries*. (See NON-ALIGNED.)

**TIME:** Use *Coordinated Universal Time*, which, for our purposes, is the same as *Greenwich Mean Time*. The abbreviation is *UTC*, but a better short form is *Universal Time*. To assist air staff, try to include local or Washington time, as appropriate. *VOA will broadcast the news conference live at zero hours-30 Universal Time (eds: 8:30 p.m. EST). The pope arrives in Jerusalem Thursday (eds: due 2:00 p.m. local time / 6:00 a.m. EDT).*

**TITLES:** Personal titles generally precede names. *President Ernesto Zedillo. Cardinal John O'Connor.* Very long titles should not normally be in the lead of a story and may go before or after the name, or be in a separate sentence. *A senior U.S. official has called on China to improve its human rights record. John Doe, director of the National Security Council Office of Asian and Pacific Affairs, (or even a National Security Council official) briefed the congressional committee.* With long and complex titles, it is often better to omit the exact title, although it may be placed in parentheses for use by services. *A top census official (deputy director for tabulation and publication John Jones) says the count is nearly complete.*

The title alone (without a name) is NOT capitalized. Ex.: *The pope said; the president spoke.*

Do not capitalize words that are not part of a title. Ex.: *The Xinhua news agency; the French news agency.*

**TORTURE, ABUSE:** Since the mistreatment of foreign prisoners in U.S. custody first came to light in 2004, there have been conflicting definitions of what constitutes torture. We should exercise caution when using the term in our news stories.

The United Nations defines *torture* as "any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by, at the instigation of, or with the consent or acquiescence of, a public official or other person acting in an official capacity."

For our purposes, torture does not require knowledge, consent or direction by "officials."

On the other hand, *abuse* is defined generally as "treating someone or something cruelly or wrongly."

**TREATY:** An international agreement that is first signed by negotiators or senior leaders, but usually becomes binding only after ratification. In the United States, the Senate ratifies treaties. In other countries, the process may be different.

**TRY TO, TRY AND:** Usage panelists of *The American Heritage Dictionary* reject *try and* as incorrect. Use *try to*. *We will try to send astronauts to Mars.*

**UNDER WAY:** Two words, not *underway*.

**UNIQUE:** *Unique* expresses an absolute. Therefore, use of the comparative or superlative degree is impossible. Do not use *most unique* or *very unique*. Many words fall into this category, including *absolute, equal, fatal, final, total* and *unanimous*.

**UNITED NATIONS:** Use *United Nations* in full on first reference; *U.N.* is acceptable as a noun after that, or at any time as an adjective. *The U.N. has acted. The U.N. Security Council. United Nations* is a singular noun. Most U.N.

bodies are located in New York, but *UNESCO* is based in Paris and the *Food and Agriculture Organization* is in Rome. U.N. European headquarters is in Geneva, which also is home to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

**UNITED STATES:** Use *United States* in full on first reference; *U.S.* is acceptable as a noun after that, or at any time as an adjective. Do not use *United States'*. *The U.S. called for an embargo. The U.S. State Department. United States* is a singular noun. Use *U.S.* before naming government bodies if needed to avoid ambiguity. *The U.S. Supreme Court. In Washington, the Justice Department. . . .* (See AMERICAN, HOUSE, PRESIDENTS and SENATE.)

**VICE PRESIDENT:** Do not hyphenate. *Vice President Joseph Biden. The vice president attended the funeral.*

**VIRTUAL:** Something that has the effect but not the form or actual fact. *After millions of the animals were killed, the bison were virtually extinct.*

**VOA EXCLUSIVES:** Make use of phrases such as *in a VOA interview* or *told VOA*. Also credit VOA enterprise journalism when appropriate, such as a report from the scene of a news development, i.e. *The VOA Correspondent (Bill Jones) at the scene of the rioting reports...* When we give attribution in CN copy to other services that have provided us with material, we note it like this: *In an interview with VOA (Indonesian Service)...* Put the name of the service in parentheses and, of course, note the service in the source line at the bottom of the story.

Also, a news development may be put into perspective by including the analytical comments of our correspondents. *Our Beijing correspondent (Elaine Smith) says the appointment signals...*

**WAR:** Armed conflict between opposing forces, including civil war, regardless of an official declaration of war. *The Korean War. World War Two. War in Afghanistan.*

**WARLORD:** A *warlord* is a military commander exercising civil power by force, and the term thus could be applied to innumerable military commanders whose units control some portion of a countryside. Avoid this term when possible. It has been overused in some situations, including Somalia and Afghanistan. Use *militia commander* or *regional military leader* or *faction leader*. (See DICTATOR, HARDLINER, STRONGMAN.)

**WARSHIP:** A vessel outfitted for combat, or used for war purposes. Not all naval vessels are warships.

**WEBSITE:** One word, not capitalized. A location on the World Wide Web that maintains one or more pages at a specific address. Also, *webcam, webcast* and *webmaster*. However, as a short form and in terms with separate words, use *the Web, Web page* and *Web feed*.

**WEEK, WEEKEND:** Although in the United States *weekend* generally refers to the period from close of business Friday to Monday morning, the term is not consistently understood as such in other cultures. In some societies, Saturday or Sunday is a normal work day. Similarly, *week* refers to a consecutive seven-day period, but be aware that in different cultures the week begins on different days. Use these terms carefully if you use them at all. To avoid ambiguity, be precise where possible. *In an election Sunday* instead of *in an election earlier this week. . . .*

**WHEREABOUTS:** *Whereabouts* is singular when referring to one person's whereabouts. *His whereabouts is not known. Whereabouts* is also singular when referring to a collective noun, which would take a singular verb. *The team's whereabouts is not known.* However, the word is plural when referring to more than one person or thing at more than one location. *Their whereabouts are not known.*

**WIRESE:** Avoid "wirese," the print language of the newswires. Use *The president said he will ask Congress* (not *he would ask Congress*). Use *He said he is happy to be here* (not *he was happy to be here*).

**WISE:** The suffix *wise* is properly used in established words such as *clockwise, lengthwise, pennywise* and *otherwise*. Avoid it in contrived combinations, such as *weatherwise, businesswise, efficiencywise*, etc.

**WORST:** Whenever possible, avoid *worst* in favor of a more to-the-point description like *deadliest, most powerful, coldest, hottest*, etc.

**WOUND:** (See INJURE.)

**YEAR:** Although written with numerals in VOA copy, the first years of a century are pronounced without the "oh."

*Nineteen seven* (not *nineteen oh seven*), *two thousand one*.

The decade 2000-2009 has evaded naming. Refer to *this decade* or similar term. For Web usage, *2,000s* or *'00s* is acceptable if clear in context. *Technology stocks soared in the 1990s but have faltered so far in the 2,000s*.

For simplicity's sake, when referring to the year 2010, it should be pronounced *twenty ten*, not *two thousand ten*. Subsequent years should be pronounced in the same manner.



# Capitalization

VOA's guidelines on capitalization reflect those used by the Associated Press, Reuters, The New York Times and reputable dictionaries. Generally, we capitalize proper nouns and proper names, direct derivatives of proper names and nouns, the first letter in a sentence, formal titles (when used as titles) and acronyms. There are exceptions and special cases in each category that can best be illustrated by examples. For further guidance see the Associated Press *Stylebook*.

## Proper Nouns and Names

Capitalize nouns that are the specific identification of specific people, places or things: *John, Mary, New York, America, Russia, Boeing, General Electric, Airbus, the Washington Redskins, Ajax, Juventus, Congress* (for the U.S. Congress), *the Cabinet, the Capitol* (the U.S. Capitol building) (but also note it's capital and capital city, lower case).

Capitalize common nouns such as party, river, street and west when they are an integral part of the full name of a specific person, place or thing that ordinarily is capitalized: Democratic Party, Communist Party, Mississippi River, West Virginia, Pennsylvania Avenue.

But when these common nouns stand alone in subsequent references, they are NOT capitalized: the party, the river, the avenue, etc.

These common nouns also are NOT capitalized when they are an element of a name in plural use: the Democratic and Republican parties, Pennsylvania and New Hampshire avenues, etc.

## Popular Names

Some places and events have popularly recognized names that have become the effective equivalent of a designated proper name: *the Badlands* (of North Dakota), *the Series* (for baseball World Series), *the Combat Zone* (an area of downtown Boston).

## Derivatives

Capitalize words that are derived from a proper noun or name and still depend on it for their meaning: *American, Christian, English, Shakespearean, Marxist*. Do not capitalize *communism* because it is not derived from a proper name, but *Communist Party* is capitalized when it is the proper name of a specific entity. *The Progressive Alliance is actually a communist party*.

Additionally, some derivatives have become part of the language and no longer depend on their proper name ancestor for meaning. These are NOT capitalized: *pasteurize, quixotic, venetian blinds*, etc.

## Titles

Titles are capitalized ONLY when they are used immediately before a name: *Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, President Obama, Prime Minister Brown, Pope Benedict*. Without the proper name attached, titles are NOT capitalized: *the pope, the president, the prime minister, the secretary of state*, etc. Titles also are lower case when they are set off from the name by a comma: *Hillary Clinton, the secretary of state; Mr. Brown, the prime minister*; or even *the secretary of state, Hillary Clinton*, etc., (note here the title is separated from the name by a comma, so it does not immediately precede the name).

## Acronyms

Each letter of an acronym is capitalized: *NATO, WTO*, etc. Exceptions are acronyms that have entered the general language as words in their own right, such as *snafu*. There are occasional oddities: *MiG jet fighter* (lower case *i* which represents the Russian *and* connecting initials of the plane's two designers).



## **AN EDITOR'S CHECKLIST**

A distinguished California journalist developed this accuracy checklist. As they move through stories, editors have to answer the following questions among others:

1. Is the lead of the story sufficiently supported?
2. Has someone double-checked, called or visited all the phone numbers, addresses, or Web addresses in the story? What about the names and titles?
3. Is the background material required to understand the story complete?
4. Are all the stakeholders in the story identified and have representatives from that side been contacted and given a choice to talk?
5. Does the story pick sides or make subtle value judgments? Will some people like this story more than they should?
6. Is something missing?
7. Are all the quotes accurate and properly attributed, and do they capture what the person really meant?

## **MORE QUESTIONS FOR JOURNALISTS TO ASK**

These thoughts come from the American Press Institute, "How to Edit Skeptically", July 29, 2006

### **Ask your source:**

How do you know that?

### **Ask yourself:**

What is my story about?

So what?

Why does this matter?

Is the main point of the story supported? How many sources did I go to?





Do any of my sources have an agenda? Are all sides represented?

Is there more reporting to be done? Is the story fair?

How important is my story? Is it timely?

Is there anything in the story I'm unsure of or have questions about?

Are all the names spelled correctly?

Did I do the math?

Is my story in perspective?

Does this story stand on its own?

## **INTERVIEWING: BEST PRACTICES**

Whether anchor or reporter, no technique is more commonplace and important for eliciting information than the interview. The Poynter Institute is a school for journalists, future journalists, and teachers of journalists. On its website, [Les Zaitz](#), senior investigative reporter at *The Oregonian* newspaper, is quoted as saying:

The art of interviewing is as personal as the art of writing. Every reporter brings a different demeanor and skill to the job of interviewing ... But all interviews are designed to accomplish one mission: Get information to advance a story. This is best achieved with organization and preparation, whether it's a five-minute phone interview or a two-hour confrontational affair.

**ORGANIZATION and PREPARATION** are the keys to conducting a good and productive interview, whether in a live, on-air context or for a report you are preparing.

You must know in advance not only who you are interviewing but what group or interests they represent and what views they are likely to espouse. More than that, you should also be able to anticipate the answers they are likely to give you in response to your questions.

But preparation does not stop there. Knowing what the interview subject stands for, what views they have and what they are likely to say is only part of your challenge. You should also gather information on opposing points of view so that you can confront the interview subject with alternate opinions. This not only enables you to give balance and perspective to your interview, it also has the advantage of possibly provoking sharper, more vivid responses.







**LISTENING** is the next key to success. Most interviewers prepare lists of questions in advance. And when the interview begins, they plow through the list, in order, seemingly oblivious to what the interview subject has just said and thus ignoring possible follow-ups dictated by the answers.

You should prepare questions. But you **MUST** listen to what the interview subject says in response to your first one. Has the subject said something controversial that needs a follow-up? Has the subject said something so one-sided and opinionated that you must provide immediate balance or perspective by challenging him or her with a follow-up that might, for example, quote someone else or a government statement or policy. This is absolutely essential: we are not here to open our microphones to anyone to use for their personal agendas. To do so is neither balanced nor responsible.

### **AVOID CERTAIN KINDS OF QUESTIONS**

Unless you are running short of time and make clear you want a "yes" or "no" answer, you should avoid asking what are considered "dead-end" questions. The point is to keep the interviewees talking.

Also avoid what are considered "leading questions" --- ones that try to guide the interview subject's answers. Don't ask, for example, "How much will prices go up next year?" This assumes they will. Instead ask, "What do you think will happen to prices next year?"

### **ESPECIALLY FOR TELEVISION**

As a TV host, especially for a daily show, you should know where you want to go with the next question, but with a daily show, you can't always do all the prep work that you'd prefer. You've got directors talking in your ear, floor directors pointing at cameras. A lot is going on. **But you have to listen to the guest,** and not be afraid to follow-up. Do not feel obligated to ask a question you may have planned to ask. Search for any news, any advancement, any revelation/disclosure, new information. That's what will make this interview interesting.

Some TV hosts may find it helpful to prepare for an interview by writing **ONLY** talking points, **NOT** full questions. It's very hard -- and not particularly attractive or camera-friendly -- to look down while on camera and read a full question to a guest. It looks stilted and sounds that way. Two-word talking points allow you to simply gaze down momentarily at notes and then ask the guest the question in a conversational tone.

Always be prepared to offer the **OTHER SIDE**. If there's no one else to do that, it's your responsibility. i.e. "But the President says...why isn't that a better idea?" Sometimes you can avoid any feeling of confrontation by pointing out -- "Dr. so-and-so, as you know, it's my job to be fair, so in that spirit, I need to point out that ... (the other side)" or you can say, "Dr., with all due respect, why ..." This minimizes any perception that you are an advocate of any one position/policy. An interview -- for the guest -- is an opportunity to get out **THEIR** point of view, and **YOU** must be aware of that.



Always PRE-interview, if possible. Some hosts make time to introduce themselves to the guests waiting in the green room and use the opportunity to tell them what they might ask, to tell them HOW MUCH TIME they have in the show (really important to talkative types who might take the first question and go on forever), to explain about the procedures for the appearance and what to expect on the set etc. As you do this, you can assess the interview subject's comfort level, their speaking ability etc. It may also be useful to try to connect with them in some personal/professional way to establish a comfort level -- "Oh, I know Dr. So-and-so over at Brookings!" or "yes, I've covered a number of stories about..." This helps put the subject at ease when they walk on to the set, which even to some veterans find tough given the bright lights, IFB's in ears, camera-people etc.

### ONE FINAL THOUGHT

Keep the audience in mind at all times. Imagine yourself watching or listening to the interview and keep in mind when you need to explain something, politely challenge someone or gently try to get them to focus on what you asked, not necessarily what they want to go on and on about. But always do this respectfully.

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Here are some additional pointers, taken from **MediaCollege.com**, a free educational website containing tutorials, reference and other resource material in all areas of electronic media production:

### Interview Questions

Most interviews seek to achieve one or more of the following goals:

- Obtain the interviewee's knowledge about the topic
- Obtain the interviewee's opinion and/or feelings about the topic
- Feature the interviewee as the subject

It's important that you know exactly why you're conducting an interview and which goal(s) you're aiming for. Stay focused on questions and techniques that will achieve them.

**Do your homework.** You will be expected to have a basic knowledge of your subject. Do not roll up to an interview with a band and ask them how many albums they've released. You should know this already. If you show your ignorance, you lose credibility and risk being ridiculed. At the very least, the subject is less likely to open up to you.

**Have a list of questions.** It seems obvious, but some people don't think of it. While you should be prepared to improvise and adapt, it makes sense to have a firm list of questions that need to be asked. Of course, many interviewees will ask for a list of questions beforehand, or you might decide to provide one to help them prepare. Whether or not this is a good idea depends on the situation. For example, if you will be asking technical questions that might need a researched answer, it helps to give the subject some warning. On the other hand, if you're looking for spontaneous answers, it's best to wait until the interview.

Try to avoid being pinned down to a preset list of questions as this could inhibit the interview. However, if you do agree to such a list before the interview, stick to it.





**Ask the subject** if there are any particular questions they'd like to be asked.

**Back-cut questions** may be shot at the end of a video interview. It is preferable to have the interviewee stay in his/her seat while you ask the back-cut questions in order to provide video continuity. Make sure you ask the back-cut questions with the same wording as the interview – even varying the wording slightly can sometimes make the edit unworkable. You might want to make notes of any unscripted questions as the interview progresses so you can remember to include them in the back-cuts.

**Listen.** A common mistake is to be thinking about the next question while the subject is answering the previous one, to the point that the interviewer misses some important information. This can lead to all sorts of embarrassing outcomes.

## OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

The ability to ask an *open-ended question* is very important. An open-ended question is designed to encourage a full, meaningful answer using the subject's own knowledge and/or feelings. It is the opposite of a *closed-ended question*, which usually results in a short or single-word answer. Open-ended questions also tend to be more objective and less leading than closed-ended questions.

Open-ended questions typically begin with "Why" and "How," or phrases such as "Tell me about..." Often they are not questions, but a statement that implicitly asks for a response.

### Close-Ended Question

Do you get on well with your boss?

Who will you vote for this election?

What color shirt are you wearing?

### Open-Ended Question

Tell me about your relationship with your boss.

What do you think about the two candidates in this election?

That's an interesting colored shirt you're wearing.

## HOW DO YOU FEEL?

This is perhaps the most famous – or infamous – open-ended question. It has become a cliché in journalism. The reason it's so widely used is that it's so effective.

In journalism, stories are about people and how they are affected by events. Audiences want to experience the emotion. Even though many readers/listeners/viewers tend to cringe at the question, it's so useful that it continues to be a standard tool.



## LEADING QUESTIONS

A leading question subtly prompts the interview subject to answer in a particular way. Leading questions are generally undesirable as they can result in false or slanted information. For example:

*Do you get on well with your boss?*

This question prompts the person to possibly question his/her employment situation. In a very subtle way it raises the prospect that he/she doesn't get along with the boss.

**BETTER:**

*Tell me about your relationship with your boss.*

Phrased this way, the question doesn't seek any judgment and there is less implication that there might be something wrong with the relationship.

The difference in the above example is relatively minor, but in some situations it can be more important. For example, in a court case:

*How fast was the red car going when it smashed into the blue car?*

This question implies that the red car was at fault and the word "smashed" implies it was moving at a high speed.

**BETTER:**

*How fast was each car going when the accident happened?*

The question doesn't assign blame or pre-judgment.

## OBTAINING RESPONSES TO SUIT THE EDIT

Leading questions can be used in various ways. For example, a journalist might want a particular type of answer to edit alongside some other context. This can be good or bad, as illustrated by the following hypothetical example.

A journalist is doing a story on the moon landing hoax theory. The journalist gets the following statement from an advocate of the theory: "Photographs of the moon landing show converging shadows where they should be parallel. This could only happen in a studio so the photos must be fake."

The journalist then interviews a NASA engineer. This response will be edited to appear immediately after the accusation. There are several ways to ask the question, each with very different results:

*How do you explain the missing stars from the Apollo photographs?*

This question leads the engineer enough to answer the specific question, while being open-ended enough to get a complete answer. This is good.

*How do you respond to people who say the Apollo photographs were faked?*

This question elicits a somewhat-relevant reply without actually answering the accusation. The engineer will give a broad answer such as "I think these people have got it wrong." This gives the impression that the engineer is being evasive and can't answer the question.



*How do you respond to conspiracy theorists who accuse you of faking the landing and lying to America?*  
This question adds some spice with provocative phrases designed to encourage a stronger response.

Ultimately, the ethical journalist will avoid using questions that can mislead the interviewee and the audience.

Children are particularly susceptible to leading questions. Studies have shown that children are very attuned to taking cues from adults and tailoring their answers based on the way questions are worded. Of course, a journalist should always obtain permission before interviewing children on potentially sensitive subjects.

### MORE INTERVIEW TIPS

These are very general tips that apply differently to different situations. Use your judgment to decide when and how to use them.

- **Dress appropriately**, or at least dress with a purpose. Your appearance can influence the way interviewees respond to you.
- **Try to be unique**, so that it's not just another interview rehashing the same questions the subject has answered many times before. Don't push this too far; if you try to be cute or disarming it may backfire.
- **Be honest** – Sometimes it's tempting to fudge or omit important information when securing an interview. It's unethical and will damage your career in the long run.
- **Don't have an attitude** if you want a quality interview. A confrontational approach is less likely to get good information.
- **Stay neutral** – Do not reveal any personal biases or positions on a topic. Don't appear to be persuaded by a subject's opinions. Don't judge or directly criticize the interviewee.
- **Don't interrupt** – This can upset the subject's train of thought. If the answer prompts you to ask a hard follow-up question, wait for the interviewee to finish his/her answer. This ties back into not showing a confrontation attitude. [However, in a live broadcast, it may be necessary to interrupt to prevent a subject from expressing lengthy monologues or to challenge a view to adhere to time considerations. This needs to be done carefully and with respect to the subject.]
- **Minimize vocal interjections** – Ask questions clearly and succinctly, then let the person answer without further response from you during the answer. Learn to react silently, rather than interjecting "Uh-huh," "I see" or similar phrases. Try to remain facially neutral as well; nods, smiles or frowns can be misconstrued as agreeing or disagreeing with a particular answer.
- **Don't over-direct** – Don't give the subject instructions about what you want him/her to say. It's better to let them speak freely.



- **Be considerate** – Often you will need to cover sensitive or distressing topics. Show some compassion for the subject without getting too emotional or revealing a bias. Ask for permission before asking difficult questions.
- **It's not about you** – Don't talk about yourself or add your own opinion to a question or line of questioning. The interviewee is who the audience wants to hear from.
- **Informal chat** – When you finish the interview, put your notebook down, turn off the camera or recorder and have an informal chat with the subject. However, make sure that he or she knows whether the chat is on or off the record. Otherwise they may think that once the recording devices are turned off, they're free to say something they may not have wanted to say on camera.
- **Follow up** – If you missed a question, or want to get more background after the interview, you can call the subject back and get the answer. For TV, you can use the new information over a 2-shot of the interview or use with video cover.

## **MORE INTERVIEWING BEST PRACTICES**

<http://www.concernedjournalists.org/node/101>

Loosening Lips

Eric Nalder, Chief Investigative Reporter - The Seattle Post-Intelligencer, July 9, 2007

Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter Eric Nalder shares his process for setting up and conducting effective interviews.

The Set Up [1]

Reluctant People [2]

Getting All the Goods [3]

### **The Set Up**

#### **\* RESEARCH:**

Whether you have five minutes or five days, research the person and the topic. Run the name on the Internet or check the clips. Talk to the person's colleagues. Read court records. A well-researched question is a better question. A well-researched interviewer is empowered.

#### **\* PLAN:**

Make a tactical plan. Discuss it with colleagues. Whom should you interview first? Where will you interview the person? How much time will you have? Will you tape or not? The best place is usually where the person is doing the thing you are writing about. However, whistle-blowers and reluctant targets are best contacted at home. You might calm a nervous source by taking him or her for a walk. A lunch appointment requires a person to spend at least an hour with you. A phone interview is the least desirable, but also the most common.





**\* ORGANIZE:**

Write single-word clues on the flap of your notebook to remind you of issues you want to cover. Organize paperwork so you won't fumble as you talk. Prepare a comprehensive all-purpose question for cases where the door might slam in your face. Prepare the photographer and the fellow interviewer so you will work together.

**\* INNER INTERVIEWING:**

Imagine a successful interview. Warm up like an athlete. Be skeptical but never cynical.

**Reluctant People**

**\* THE OPENER:**

Having worked yourself into a friendly, courteous and aggressive frenzy, approach your subject as though you belong there. Straightforward introductions are best. Be open and unafraid. Never lie.

**\* KEEP IT GOING:**

When the door is closing on your face, find common ground. "By the way, I notice you've got a poodle. I've got a poodle. Weird dogs. Just the other day . . ." The process is to get a person talking about anything and eventually they'll talk about what you came for.

**\* TAP THEIR CURIOSITY:**

As a person hangs up the phone, quickly offer to explain what you are working on, what you know about or what you have been told. Prepare for this ahead of time.

**\* GET THEM TO SPEAK ABOUT OTHERS:**

Bring a list of other people to the interview. A payroll. A phone book. Your own list. Go down the list with the interview subject. People are more comfortable talking about others. In doing so, they will reveal more about themselves and their organization, and point you in other directions.

**\* NO BIG DEAL:**

Respond to the "I can't comment" by explaining that you need their help, that talking with you is no big deal, that you are talking with others and that you are here to learn (only, of course, if all of this is true). Say all this with a soft but relentless momentum. Massage objections into possibilities. Propose alternatives. Don't argue. Steer. Keep the conversation rolling. Respond to the "I'm afraid to comment" with a little sympathy and a lot of reassurance (if those reassurances are honest). Listen to people's concerns and understand them. Propose easier "assignments" like "just describe your job" or "tell me about your town." You'll get to the harder stuff later.

**\* PUBLIC OFFICIAL OR OTHER BIG SHOT:**

Gently, without being insulting, respond to a "no comment" from an "important" person or bureaucrat by explaining how bad that sort of thing looks in print. "Let's find a way to talk about this. Tell me about this one aspect, for instance. "As a last ditch effort, explain that you will be doing a story whether they cooperate or not (if that's true). Explain that you want to get it right. Offer to call back shortly before the story runs to describe what will be in the story. (In the process, get all the contact numbers).



**\* DETOURS:**

If a person won't talk, go to others in his or her office or to associates. You will get more information, and by doing this you will loosen them up.

**\* ANONYMITY:**

Always try to get people to speak on the record. Off the record information can only be used in researching the story and can't be woven into the story, no matter how creative you may be.

**\* RATCHETING:**

If a subject insists on talking "on background," make a formal agreement and explain that you will try later to get them to talk on the record. Take notes. At the end of the interview, or at a follow-up interview, pick out quotes that aren't too damning and say: "Now what about this thing you said here. Why can't you say that on the record?" If they agree to put that comment on the record, go to another one in your notes and say: "Well, if you can say that on the record, why can't you say this? And so on. But if a subject insists on anonymity, however, you must honor it.

**\* THE STATUE OF LIBERTY PLAY:**

Emphasize that people are more believable when they put their name behind what they say. It's the American Way: A robust public debate.

**\* FOR THE SAKE OF CLARITY:**

There are cases where someone tells you part of a story and then balks. Or you already know part of a story and can't get the rest. Try saying, "look, you've already told me this much (or, I already know this much). I should know the whole story. You don't want me to get it wrong, and I sure don't want to get it wrong."

**\* NO QUESTIONS, PLEASE:**

Sometimes making a statement is better than asking a question. Read from a document or repeat something someone said. A question might produce nothing more than a "yes, no or I don't know." A statement will provoke a comment.

**\* USE WHAT YOU THINK YOU KNOW:**

Ask the official WHY he fired the whistle-blower rather than asking WHETHER he did the deed. The question presumes you already know even if you don't have it confirmed. They'll start explaining rather than denying.

**\* LOST REPORTER:**

It doesn't hurt to say you need the person's help. "Who is going to explain this to me if you don't?"

**\* TRY AGAIN:**

When the door is slammed in your face, try again a day later or a week later. Keep trying. People change their minds. If it is terribly important, try again a year later.





## **Getting All the Goods**

### **\* CHRONOLOGY:**

Take the subject through his or her story chronologically. You will understand the tale better, and you will spot gaps in the timetable. You'll organize the interview subject, the way you would straighten a messy file cabinet.

### **\* LIFE STORY:**

Get the life story, even in cases where you don't intend to use it. You can get useful information and ask better questions as a result.

### **\* LOGIC:**

Listen for logic. Respond to your instincts. If you don't understand something, gently insist on an explanation. If a person uses A-C-D logic, ask that they fill in the "B" part. The most important information may be hidden in B. Don't be afraid to ask. There are no embarrassing questions; there are only embarrassing answers.

### **\* HOW AND WHY:**

When a person says something important, ask the key question: "How do you know that?" It sheds light on credibility, extracts more detail and is a door opener to other sources. Follow up with: "How else do you know." Also, ask people why they do what they do, rather than just asking what they do.

### **\* HYPNOSIS:**

When people reach an important part of a story, slow them down and turn them into storytellers. Ask where they were standing, what they were doing, what they were wearing, what was the temperature and what were the noises around them? Then switch to the present tense, and ask questions like: What are you doing now? What is your friend saying? You and the interview subject will walk through the scene together. This technique frequently fails at first. People prefer to tell their story the easy way, in the abstract. "I drove the car off the cliff." Tell them this won't work. "I'm trying, but I just can't picture it yet. Drive me off the cliff with you." This is how you get a story, not a bunch of facts.

### **\* PAY ATTENTION TO DETAIL:**

Inventory the room thoroughly and in an organized fashion. Look at the walls, read the top of the desk and study the lapel pin. You'll get clues and details for your story. Make notes on what you see. Make use of what you see in the interview. Ask about it.

### **\* SPONTANEITY:**

If you are on the scene, let things happen. Listen and watch for the unexpected.

### **\* TELEPHONE:**

If you can't be on the scene, ask people on the phone to describe their surroundings. This will transport you emotionally over the phone lines and provide information. Get people to tell their stories in three dimensions over the phone. Let things happen. Listen and "watch" for the unexpected.

### **\* USE YOUR EARS:**

We talk too much during interviews. Let the other person do the talking. Check your biases at the door; listen with an open mind. React with an open mind.



**\* LOOK FOR OTHER SOURCES:**

While at the interview, listen and watch for other sources. Meet the secretary, the assistants and the coworkers and make note of details about them. This will come in handy if you feel you should interview them as well.

**\* GETTING THE CONFESSION:**

Ask the subject for the names of people who support him or her. Then ask for the names of people who would criticize. Then ask what those critics are likely to say. This will jar loose uncomfortable information and tips. Ask whether the person has ever been disciplined or fired on the job or in school, charged with or convicted of a crime, arrested for drunken driving, sued, testified in court, etc. Since all this is on a record somewhere, people are reluctant to lie about it.

**\* LIARS:**

If you know someone is lying, allow the person to spin his or her yarn. Don't interrupt except to ask for more detail. Deceivers frequently provide extensive detail because they think a very complete story will add to their credibility. Listen and take good notes. When the lie has been fully constructed -- down to the last nail -- go back and logically pry it apart (nail by nail). Don't be impatient. The fabricator is now in a corner. Keep them there until they break.

**\* DON'T JOIN:**

Be sympathetic in manner, but don't join sides with the interviewee. Protect your source from exposure, if you have promised to do so, but not from his or her dishonesty and ignorance. And don't get sucked in by the embattled congressman who seems so cooperative when he grants you an interview and says, "I don't believe in taking money from those guys." You should say, "that may be true, but I'm asking you whether you took the money, not whether you believe in doing so."

**\* DON'T FEED:**

Be wary of feeding information to an interview subject. In some cases it will come back to you as fact. Cops will tell you: "Don't ask whether a person saw the red car, ask what they saw."

**\* ASK AGAIN:**

Sometimes it pays to interview a person two or three times on the same subject. One public official gave me four different and conflicting explanations for the trips he took at taxpayer expense.

**\* REVIEW:**

Go back over your notes and look for holes. Then conduct a second interview. Tell the interview subject what you believe you have learned. This will kick loose additional information, fill gaps and correct your mistakes. Do it again and again, if necessary. I like to get back to key players just before a story runs to assure accuracy. This last step has often improved the story.

**\* INNOVATE:**

If an outrageous question comes to mind, and seems compelling, ask it. During a phone interview I convinced a man sitting in a bar with a cell phone to pass the phone around so I could talk with his companions. A ship captain allowed me to go through his files only because I asked.

**\* DRAIN THEM:**

People aren't aware of how much they know. You must guide them through their memory. Visualize your subject as a bucket full of information and empty it.



**\* HONESTY:**

Don't pretend to be someone else and don't lie. You can certainly omit information, but the more you can reveal about the nature of your story, the more comfortable and helpful your subject will be.

**\* BE THE DIRECTOR:**

A great interview feels like a conversation but moves relentlessly toward the information you need. Keep control, but do so gently.

**\* BE FLEXIBLE:**

You may know what your story is about, but don't get stuck. A really great interview might be one that completely changes your story. Seek the truth, not what you believe to be the truth.

**\* PERSONALITY:**

Let your personality shine through (if you have a good one). Don't be a blank wall.

**\* OPEN-ENDED QUESTION:**

Near the end of an interview, ask the person what else our readers might be interested in. Sometimes people have more than one newspaper-worthy story in them.

**\* CHECK BACK:**

After the story runs, call the subject for his or her reaction. You'll get additional stories and tips this way.



## **COPYRIGHT, TRADEMARK, AND FAIR USE** **BBG OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL**

### **What is Copyright?**

- Copyright is a form of protection provided by U.S. law to the authors of original works fixed in any tangible medium of expression. This includes photographs, video, music, motion pictures, commercials, etc. Copyright protection starts upon creation of the work and is automatic.
- The author of a copyrighted work has the exclusive right to reproduce, distribute, perform and display the work, as well as prepare derivative works.
- A copyright owner does not have to include the symbol © with their work or register the work with the U.S. Copyright Office to be protected.
- Just because material is free on the Internet does not mean it is free to use.
- You should not use a copyrighted work unless you have permission to use it or it falls under the “fair use” doctrine.

### **What is Fair Use?**

- The “fair use” doctrine allows the use copyrighted material in a reasonable manner without the permission of the copyright owner. Whether the use of a copyrighted work is a fair use is a case-by-case determination and depends on the following 4 factors:
  - The purpose and character of the use;
  - The nature of the copyrighted work;
  - That amount and substantiality of the portion used; and
  - The effect on the work’s potential market.
- A use is more likely to be “fair” when copyrighted material is directly relevant to a news report, is used for critique, criticism, illustration or example, and the excerpt used is small in comparison to the length of the original. Keep in mind that the use of a copyrighted photograph is unlikely to be a fair use.
- VOA has several agreements with third parties to use copyrighted material. The terms of these agreements govern, notwithstanding the applicability of the fair use doctrine.
- When using material from one of VOA’s feed providers, it is important to check any restrictions that may limit its use.



### **What is A Trademark?**

- Logos, names, slogans, or symbols identifying products or companies can be trademarks. Avoid displaying a company's trademark in a manner that could mislead the audience as to VOA's affiliation with the company.
- You may use a trademark without permission in a news story if the mark is used to illustrate a point or used in an informational sense, for example, to identify a company in a report about that company.

**Consult the Office of General Counsel for questions about copyright, trademark and fair use at 203-4550.**



# Copyright and Broadcasting

**Kataryna Lyson Baldwin**

Assistant General Counsel  
Broadcasting Board of Governors  
Suite 3349

[kbaldwin@bbg.gov](mailto:kbaldwin@bbg.gov)

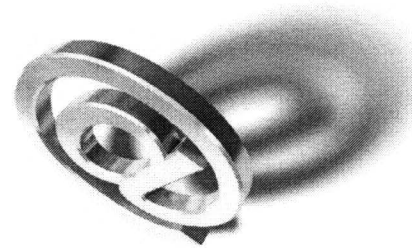
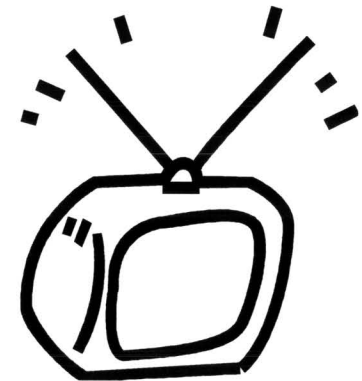
**(202) 203-4550**

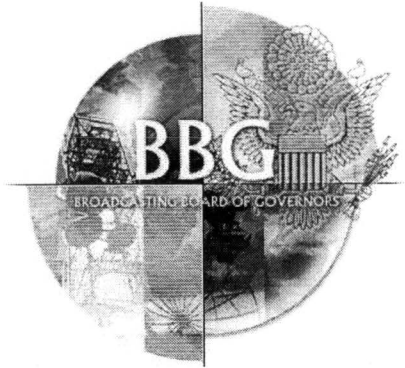


# Broadcast Methods



- Radio
- Television
- Internet
- Cell Phones
- Social Networks
- Blogs

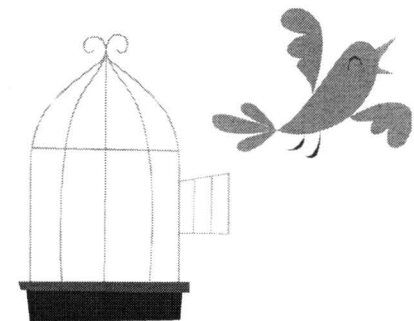




# Origin of Rights



- Contract Rights – Licensing
- Fair Use
- Releases







## Contract/Licenses



BBG has many agreements permitting the use of various forms of media for its broadcasts. These cover music, photos, newsfeeds, video and internet usage.





# Contracts



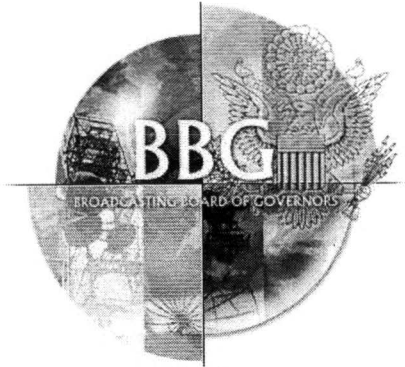
- Contracts are agreements where we obtain certain material such as photos and videos and may use them based on the permitted use in the contract, such as:
  - Allowance for certain number of uses
  - Allowance for a time period
  - Allowance for internet use



# Contracts



- Contracts are for a limited time period
- Contracts are with a specific source of information:
  - AP Photo
  - AP Graphics
  - Arts & Entertainment History Channel (for Persian TV)
  - APTN Network Pool Feed
  - AP International Video Feed
  - AP Domestic News Feed (ABC News One)



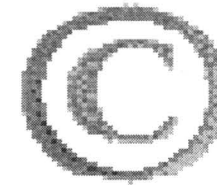
# Licenses



- Licenses are agreements where we have permission to use specific programming material for longer time periods, sometimes forever.
- Music: Use library and not your personal collection.



# How do I know if a work is copyrighted?



- Copyright protection starts upon creation of the work and is automatic.
- A copyright owner does not have to include the symbol © with their work or register with the Copyright Office to be protected.
- Just because it is free on the Internet does not mean it is free to use by VOA.



# Fair Use



- Title 17 Section 107 of the United States Code addresses the “fair use” of copyrighted material.
- The “fair use doctrine” confers a privilege to use copyrighted material in a reasonable manner without the consent of the owner of the copyright.



# Fair Use



- The law requires a case-by-case determination using 4 factors:
  - Purpose and character of use
  - Nature of the copyrighted material
  - Amount and substantiality of use
  - Effect on the potential market
- All four factors require consideration.

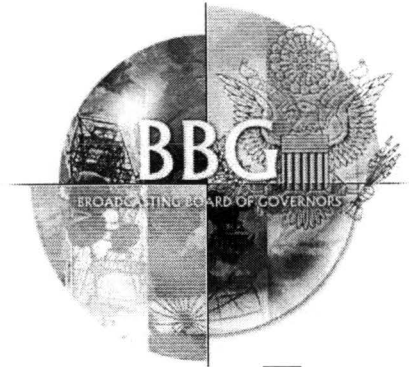


# Purpose/Character



- Purpose and character of use:
  - 2 main questions:
    - Is the use for commercial purpose?
    - Is the use transformative?
  - BBG is a government entity, so there is no commercial use.
  - Transformation occurs when one alters the original with a new expression, meaning or message.





# Purpose/Character



- Examples of transformation are when the material is used for criticism, news reporting, teaching, scholarship and research
- Transformation does not occur when the use is to entertain  
(i.e. a song used as background music).

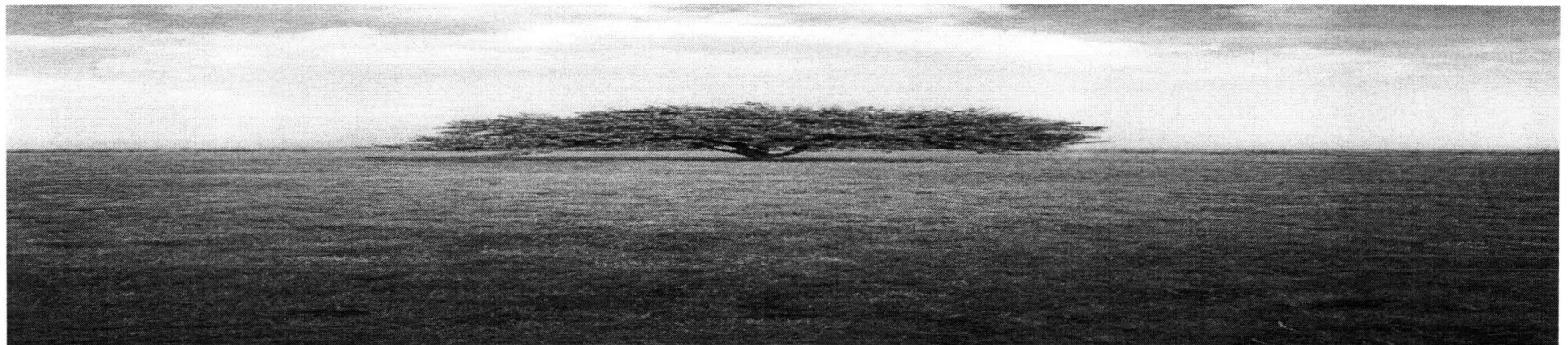




# Nature



- Whether the work is fact or fiction.
- Fact is not copyrightable.
- BUT, audio and video clips, photographs, and music are classified as artistic or fictional works.

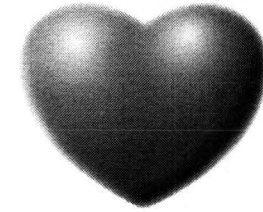




# Substantiality



- This factor looks at the percentage of use, and also, whether what is used is the “heart of the piece.”
- Normally, only a few seconds will likely be fair use, depending on the length of the original work.





# Effect



- Does the use interfere with the sale of the copyrighted material?
- The interference must be related to the potential market of the original work.





# Fair Use Tips



- There is no specific number of words, seconds, or notes that may safely be taken without permission.
- Fair use is a case-by-case determination and is very factually specific.
- Acknowledging the source of the copyrighted material is good practice but does not absolve the infringer.



# Trademarks



**“DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT IT”**



- Logos, names, slogans, or symbols identifying products or companies can be trademarks.
- Avoid displaying a company's trademark in a manner that could mislead the audience as to VOA's affiliation with the company.



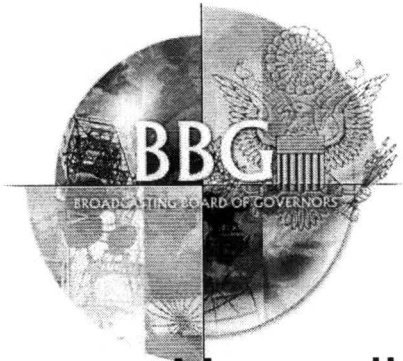
**Need help?**

**When calling  
GC:**



- Provide your deadline.
- Tell us as much as possible about your package or story.
- Tell us how you plan on using the copyrighted material and how much.
- Provide the length of the original work (seconds, minutes).

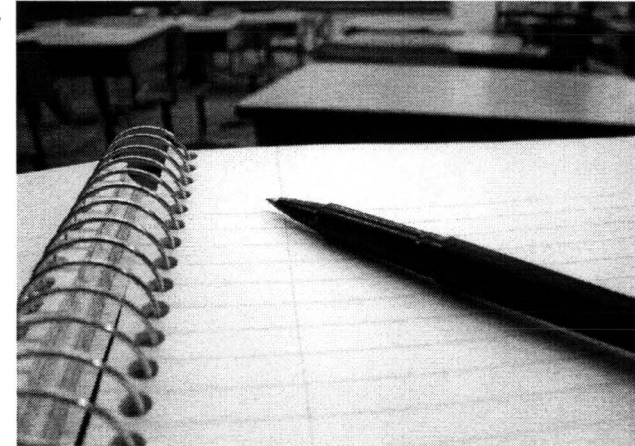




# Releases



- Normally when people appear on a broadcast they are giving their permission.
- When you have a live person perform during a broadcast, use a release form.
- When obtaining material from a source you're interviewing, such as an artist or musician, use a release form.
- Always use a release form when a minor is involved.







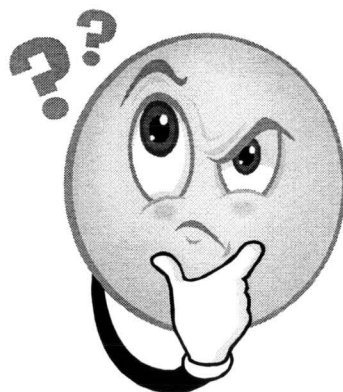
# Firewall Violations



- The U.S. Int'l Broadcasting Act created the Board of the BBG to act as a “firewall” between BBG journalists and the rest of the U.S. government.
- In the event of a possible firewall violation, notify your supervisor and the Board at [BBGfirewall@bbg.gov](mailto:BBGfirewall@bbg.gov) or 203-4550.



# Questions?





## **RIGHTS AGREEMENT**

I hereby irrevocably grant the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), its successors, licensees and assigns the worldwide, non-exclusive right in perpetuity to use \_\_\_\_ [NUMBER OF STILLS/PHOTOS OR LENGTH OF EXCERPT] of \_\_\_\_ [DESCRIBE WHAT THE PRODUCTION/VIDEO/IMAGE IS], to be used by the BBG in connection with the production, exhibition, distribution, or other exploitation in any and all present or future media, without limitation, standard and non-standard television, videocassette, video disc, DVD, Internet, cable systems, transmission via satellite, wireless cable, reproduction rights (in any format and standard such as VHS, DVD, PAL, etc) and all other video device forms and configurations, including any and all interactive devices or technologies now known or hereafter developed.

I hereby warrant and represent that I have the authority and all rights necessary to enter into this Agreement and to grant all of the rights granted herein and that the exercise of those rights will not infringe or violate the rights of any third party.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name/Affiliation

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
SIGNATURE



## PHOTO/VIDEO/AUDIO RELEASE FORM

I understand that the photograph(s), video, and/or audio recording(s) taken of me by agents, employees or representatives of the Voice of America (VOA) may be used by VOA in the production of United States Government sponsored television or radio programming to be broadcast internationally.

I hereby irrevocably authorize VOA to copy, exhibit, publish, broadcast, or distribute any and all such images and audio of me wherein I appear, including composite or artistic forms and media, in any VOA programming. In addition, I waive any right to inspect or approve the finished product, including written copy, wherein my likeness appears.

I hereby hold harmless and release and forever discharge VOA from all claims, demands, and causes of action which, I, my heirs, representatives, executors, administrators or any other persons acting on my behalf or on behalf of my estate have or may have by reason of this authorization.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Street Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
City, State, Zip Code

---

If the person signing the above is under the age of 18, the following consent should be signed by a parent or guardian.

I hereby certify that I am the parent or guardian of \_\_\_\_\_, the minor named above, and do hereby give my consent without reservation to the foregoing on his/her behalf.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

# COPYRIGHT AND FAIR USE SELF-HELP GUIDE

BBG Office of General Counsel (OGC)

## What is Copyright?

- Copyright is a form of protection provided by U.S. law to the authors of original artistic works. This includes **photographs, video, audio, music, motion pictures, commercials**, etc. Copyright protection starts upon creation of the work and is **automatic**. Copyright owners do not have to include the symbol © alongside their work.
- The author of a copyrighted work has the exclusive right to reproduce, distribute, perform and display the work, as well as prepare derivative works.
- You **SHOULD NOT** use a copyrighted work unless (1) you have permission to use it via VOA's contracts or a license agreement, or (2) your use of the work falls under the "fair use" doctrine.
- Copyright restrictions do not apply to works in the public domain (see below).

## What is Fair Use?

- The "fair use" doctrine allows the use of copyrighted material in a reasonable manner without the permission of the copyright owner. Whether the use of a copyrighted work is a fair use is a case-by-case determination and depends on the following:
  - Does your unlicensed use "**transform**" the material taken from the copyrighted work by using it for a different purpose than that of the original, or does it just repeat the work for the same intent and value as the original?
  - Is the copyrighted material used **appropriate in kind and amount**, considering the nature of the copyrighted work and of your use of the work? Each use should be no longer than necessary to achieve your intended effect.
  - Effect on the market of the work: Will VOA's use cause undue economic harm to the copyright owner?
- A use is more likely to be "fair" when copyrighted material is **directly relevant to a news report**, is used for **critique, criticism, illustration or example**, and the excerpt used is **small** in comparison to the length of the original work.

## FAQs About Fair Use in News Broadcasting:

**Q: Is using a movie clip in a movie review a "fair use"?**

**A:** Usually, yes. This is a classic fair use. For example, using 30 seconds to 1 minute of a newly-released 90 minute film in a VOA movie review would be a fair use, since you are "transforming" or "re-purposing" the original work (the film) by using it to critique the director, actors, etc., and tell your audiences whether the film is worth seeing.

**Q: What if I am doing an obituary or profile of an actor or musician and want to use clips of the artist's work in my package?**

**A:** This is also likely a fair use, provided you are using a reasonable amount of the copyrighted material. For example, if your package is an obituary on Patrick Swayzee, and you use 15-20 second clips from "Dirty Dancing" and "Ghost", among Swayzee's other works, your use of these clips would be a fair use, because you are using them for purpose of illustrating the life and career of the actor.

**Q:** What about playing a song as background music in a photo essay on the VOA site?

**A:** Not a fair use, because you are not transforming the original copyrighted work. The music is not used for illustration, example, critique, or criticism. In other words, you are satisfying the audience's taste for the song itself. Also, using the entire song further undermines fair use, although using only part of a song in this case would still not constitute a fair use. You would need to obtain a license to use the song.

**Q:** Is the use of another broadcaster's footage a "fair use"?

**A:** Rarely. Using another broadcaster's material would be a fair use only when the subject of your story is that broadcaster or the media itself. For example, the Urdu Service prepared a package on how Muslims have been depicted in the news media since 9/11, and used several news magazines covers, and 5-20 second video and audio clips from various news media as illustration and critique of the media itself. Illustrations were drawn from a range of different sources. This was a fair use of the copyrighted broadcasts/photographs because the use transformed the purpose of the original: the original footage was for purposes of news reporting, and VOA's use of the clips was to critique and analyze the media's coverage.

Another example: President Obama's first formal interview since taking office was with Al Arabiya TV. It was unusual that a U.S. President gave his first official interview to a foreign broadcaster, and *that very fact* was the angle of the story. Showing a 20 second clip of the 10 minute interview would be a fair use.

**Q:** What if the sound bite is of a public figure or very newsworthy?

**A:** The images or voice recordings captured by other broadcasters (ex: CNN, Fox, ABC, NBC, etc.) are their copyrighted property. There is no general exception for recordings of public figures or newsworthy soundbites. The fact that a soundbite is newsworthy does not make it a fair use. You should get permission to use the broadcast (assuming it is not already available to VOA via our video feed contracts).

**Keep in mind that:**

- The use of a copyrighted **photograph** is unlikely to be a fair use.
- Using video taken off the Internet for use only as **B-roll** in your package is also unlikely to be a fair use.
- Using **music** solely as background or theme music in your package is rarely a fair use.
- Finally, **always use proper attribution** of copyrighted material. This is good journalistic and legal practice.

### **Licensing:**

- VOA has several agreements with third parties to use copyrighted material. The terms of these agreements govern, notwithstanding the applicability of the fair use doctrine.
- When using material from one of VOA's feed providers, such as APTN, Reuters, and ABCNewsOne, you must check any restrictions that may limit the story's use. Questions about the video feeds should be directed to the VOA Information Services Division, not OGC.
- Always check the video library first to see if we have licensed material you can use before relying on the fair use doctrine.

### **What works are in the public domain?**

- All **federal government works** are in the public domain. Much -- but not all -- of the material on the websites of federal agencies, such as [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov), [www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov), or [www.nasa.gov](http://www.nasa.gov), is in the public domain and free to use in your broadcasts.
- However, be sure to **carefully** read the **Terms of Use or Copyright Notices on these websites**, as some photos and other video or audio may be licensed to the federal agency by a third party and would NOT be in the public domain. You should NOT use such works without seeking permission from the copyright owner.

### **Contacting OGC for help:**

You are welcome to consult OGC during our regular business hours (8:30 am to 5:30 pm, Monday – Friday) for copyright and fair use questions by calling (202) 203-4550 or sending an email to [copyrightclearances@bbg.gov](mailto:copyrightclearances@bbg.gov) and stating your DEADLINE in the subject line of your email.

After-hours assistance is available only for emergencies and only after you have first consulted with your supervisor and read this self-help guide.



## **USAGE RIGHTS**

Before using any video, it is the producer's responsibility to review the newsfeed script source information to check for rights restrictions.

- Since all VOA programming is available on the web, "No Internet Access" means the video cannot be used at all, unless special permission is given by the video contract provider through a request made by the Information Services Division.
- VOA is no longer restricted from showing the host of the ABC "This Week" weekend talk show that VOA receives from our NewsOne service. This exception ONLY applies to the host of the "This Week" program and no other ABC talent. Absolutely no video that shows or contains video or audio from any other ABC personality can be used. This includes shots of the back of heads, cutaways, walking shots, stand-ups, or anything that shows an ABC personality.
- The restriction on use of ABC graphics has been revisited, too. VOA will have more leeway on what we may be able to use. However, because of a whole host of reasons and restrictions and other potential limitations, this will have to be addressed on a case by case basis and users should contact the Information Services Division by email and phone.

Other important rights clarifications:

- **APTN** – No Access Iran and No Access VOA Persian TV- are still in effect, but VOA has been granted permission to use stories that have restrictions to other geographic regions. For example, we are allowed to use stories with No Access Russia or No Access Indonesia. Non regional restrictions still must be followed, for example, No Access Internet, No Access AP Photo, or when a story can't be used after a specific date.
- **Reuters** – No Access Iran – Stories can be used by VOA. Also other regional restrictions don't apply to VOA.
- Any material supplied by Reuters on the Reuters Live Service (RLS) or the WNE file-based stories that originates from NBC cannot be used by VOA. This information may not always be noted in the Restrictions info section. When you see NO ACCESS USA/CNN/YAHOO/AOL/WIRELESS, it means that the material came from NBC. Sometimes, the subject line or information near the title may contain the words (NBC RESTRIX).

***The restriction information has undergone multiple changes since the contracts went into effect in 2008. If you have any questions, please contact the Video Library, 382-7140 or Information Services Division, 382-7120. 3/18/10***



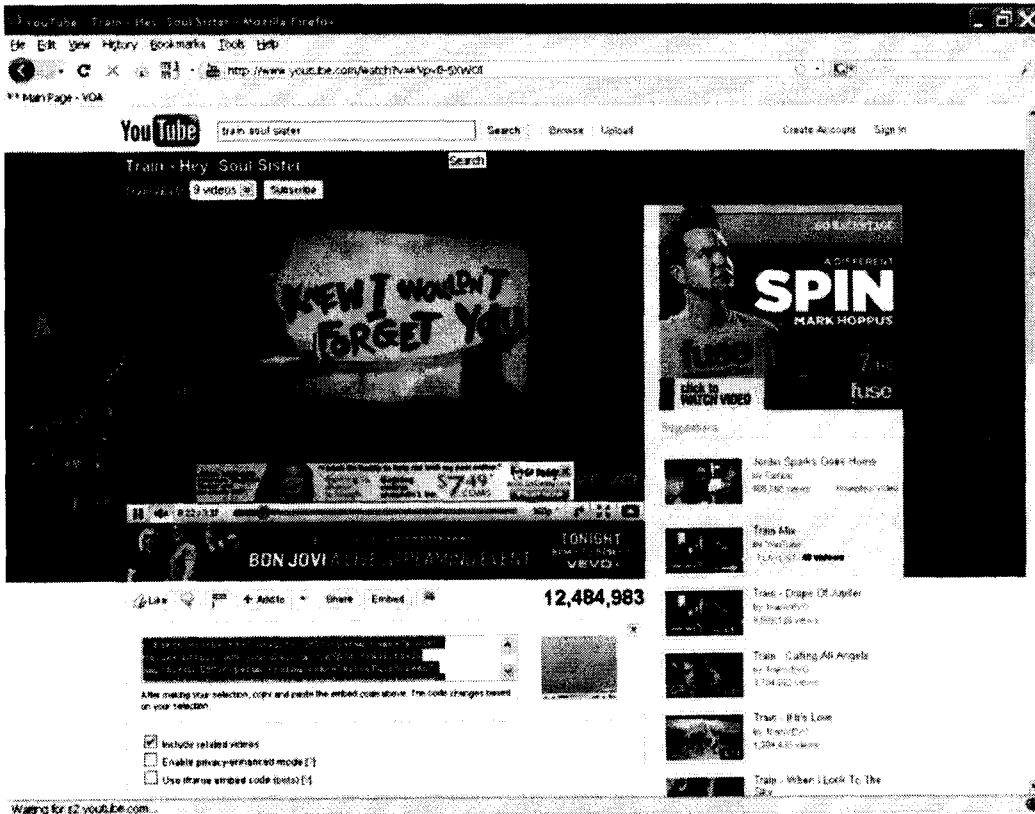
## YOUTUBE GUIDELINES

**Can I download or copy YouTube video?** YouTube content is intended to be used solely through the functionality of the YouTube service. Downloading is not offered as part of YouTube's service. Any attempts to download, copy or broadcast videos outside of YouTube's infrastructure are strictly prohibited.

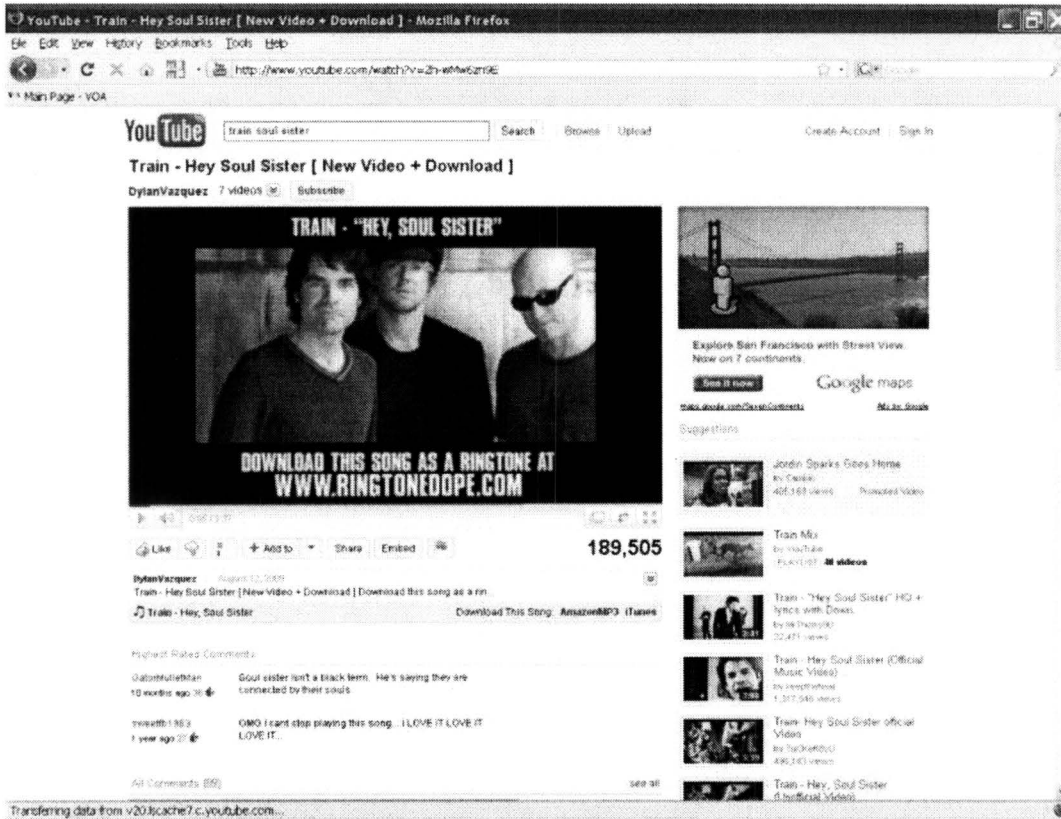
**What about embedded YouTube video?** Embedded video is effectively just a link; no copy of the video is being stored on your server. Therefore, you may use embedded video on the VOA website. However, you should still exercise caution and common sense and avoid posting videos that may infringe someone's copyright. In particular, do not post videos that contain **music, movies or television broadcasts** unless those videos are posted on the official YouTube channel of the copyright holder.

### EXAMPLES

This music clip was taken from the official channel of VEVO, a music consortium consisting of Sony, Universal and EMI. In it, the embedding has been explicitly allowed.



And here is the exact same song in an unofficial channel, where the original poster has likely uploaded the song without permission from the copyright owner and might be liable for copyright infringement. While embedding has been enabled on this channel, the individual who posted this clip likely did not have the right to do so. Embedding of the song from this channel should be avoided.



If a video that you know is infringing, or that any reasonable person would have known is infringing, and if your link materially contributes to the infringement, VOA could be liable for contributory infringement.

**What about other video sites?** Vimeo is another popular video sharing site, but the same rules apply as with YouTube.

**What about video on official music/movie company websites?** Many movie studios and music companies allow you to pickup embed code for trailers or video clips right off their main site. In those cases, it's much easier to tell that you're on an official distribution point when it's on the company website.

**Can the audio from a YouTube video be used in a radio piece?** The audio from a YouTube video cannot be used in this manner. As noted in the first item, YouTube's terms of service stipulate that embedded content cannot be manipulated or downloaded for use away from [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com).

**Can YouTube videos be used in TV packages or in TV programs?** Generally, yes, if it is a fair use, and with the following provisions: that the YouTube video is shown within its actual YouTube page, and with proper attribution: "In this video posted on YouTube..." or something similar. And as with the online guidance, you should exercise caution and common sense and avoid using videos that may infringe on someone's copyright.

**When in doubt, ask for permission.** If you're not sure if video is OK to use, ask for permission in writing from the rightful copyright owner or perform a "fair use analysis." A "transformative" use of copyrighted content will help bolster a "fair use" argument. Rather than simply posting the clip, say something about it. Offer some commentary or criticism about the video or discuss an issue that relates to it.

Remember, just because video, audio or photos are freely available on the Internet does not mean they are in the "public domain." YouTube makes no representations about the accuracy, usefulness, safety or intellectual property rights of content appearing on its site.

If you have questions about these guidelines, please contact Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com)), Matthew Baise ([mbaise@voanews.com](mailto:mbaise@voanews.com)), or the Office of General Counsel ([copyrightclearances@bbg.gov](mailto:copyrightclearances@bbg.gov)).



## **NEW MEDIA / INTERNET GUIDELINES**

### **VOA/IBB Blogging Policies**

Blogs may be hosted on VOA sites such as myVOA.com, or on external blogging sites. Bloggers are encouraged to create blogs or contribute to blogs on external sites that are popular with the target audience as this will both go to where the audience already is, and help to drive traffic to VOANews.com. When using non-VOA sites – you should identify sites that do not specifically target a U.S. audience.

- Creation of a blog and/or participation in an existing blog on behalf of VOA must be approved by a supervisor.
- Blogs or blog contributions are to be identified as being from VOA.
- Content must reflect VOA journalistic, editorial and ethical standards.
- It is the blogger's responsibility to provide balance to biased or political statements on any blog they maintain, and to prevent the discourse from becoming inflammatory. Bloggers need to maintain credibility by avoiding personal or political viewpoints.
- Blog topics should be vetted with editors/supervisors.
  - A blog should relate in some way to stories covered by VOA, for example describing what went on behind the scenes or offering insight that is not covered within the actual story or media file.
  - A blog post can simply be a less formal news report looking at an issue that users might find interesting; almost like posting your notes on a subject.
  - A blog can also be an objective, balanced, first person view of something; observations.
- Blogs need to be written in a manner that encourages feedback/responses from readers.
- VOA should clearly post "rules of engagement" for blog contributors:
  - Stay on topic.
  - No obscenity, profanity, vulgarity, hate language, SHOUTING, or other bad behavior.
  - No personal attacks. No inflammatory language or calls for violence.
- Pre-Moderation vs. Post-Moderation:
  - Most blogs should be pre-moderated to ensure that submissions meet the standards identified above.
  - Post-moderation is appropriate, if the subject matter is not sensitive, and if the service has adequate resources to regularly check blog posts throughout the day.
  - Make the moderation rules clear to the users.



- A blog should include links to the referred text and/or media files on a VOA website. It may also include links to other relevant sites.
- The VOA web site should include a link to external VOA blogs.
- Blogs should be updated regularly; in general at least three times per week.
- If a blogger is going on vacation, or will not be posting for whatever reason, inform the audience.
- Close discussion threads if you cannot continue to monitor additional comments, or if the topic is no longer timely. Be sure to inform the audience the blog is closed to further comments.

***Updated June 16, 2009***



### **Posting Content on Non-VOA Sites**

- Services should try to identify the most popular sites used by their audiences and syndicate content to those sites in the appropriate format.
- VOA content may be distributed to non-VOA sites such as YouTube, Facebook, hi5 or other social networks, aggregators, and portals, provided the sites do not specifically target a U.S. audience.
- Contributions are to be identified as being from VOA.
- Content must reflect VOA journalistic, editorial and ethical standards.
- Services are encouraged to invite comments and responses from site users provided the service has adequate resources to maintain such comments.
- It is the Service's responsibility to ensure comments are in good taste, reflect a wide range of views if possible, and are not defamatory, profane nor inflammatory.

### **Downloading Content from Non-VOA Sites**

- In general, YouTube or other social networking / non-VOA sites are **NOT** to be used as a source for video/content to be excerpted for use in programs or reporter packages. YouTube is NOT a trusted source for original video and content.
- YouTube/other material may be used if you are doing a report about YouTube or the other sites themselves --- the phenomenon they have created or something that is on YouTube/other site that has thrust the website itself into a major news story.
- Downloading content from Non-VOA web sites may be considered a violation of copyright. The Agency may not use a copyright protected work unless:
  - The Agency has or obtains a licensing agreement to use the copyrighted material; or
  - The use is covered by the Fair Use Doctrine (see GC pamphlet for more details)

***Updated June 1, 2009***



### **VOA/IBB Policies for Linking to 3<sup>rd</sup> Party Sites**

VOA services are encouraged to provide links that are relevant to story content and are suitable for all audiences. Editors should exercise judgment and not use links that may be offensive, or in some way, inappropriate.

VOA must maintain its neutrality and should not be perceived as being biased or endorsing any external sites, comments, opinions. Links should help to provide a comprehensive view, representing various perspectives.

***Updated June 15, 2009***



## **FIREWALL POLICY**

### **The Firewall**

Our most important job is ensuring the credibility of our broadcasts. An essential aid to that credibility is the firewall enshrined in the agency's enabling legislation, the U.S. International Broadcasting Act. The Act created the Board of the BBG to act as a firewall between BBG journalists and the rest of the United States government.

The firewall is violated whenever a U.S. government official tries to influence the reporting of the news by putting undue pressure on a journalist or broadcast manager of one of the broadcast entities (VOA, FRE/RL, Radio Free Asia, MBN, and Radio and TV Marti). BBG Broadcasters know that their effectiveness is based on their credibility. Their listeners are not interested in propaganda. The firewall is required to maintain the credibility of BBG broadcasts.

In 1998, legislation was passed that transferred certain functions of the USIA to the State Department. But the programs and functions of the BBG and its broadcast entities were granted to a new independent agency of the U.S. government. The principal reason cited by the Congress for preventing the Board and its broadcasting entities from being merged into the State Department was to provide a "firewall" between the State Department and the BBG journalists to ensure the integrity of the journalism. The Congressional conference report states:

"...in fact the broadcasters are journalists, reporting the news of the United States and the world to foreign audiences. The news gathering and reporting functions of the broadcasters must continue to be independent and objective."

The firewall is not meant to discourage BBG journalists from interviewing government officials or USG officials from appearing on BBG programs. But it is critical to ensuring that BBG journalists and editors can make the final decisions on what stories to cover, and how they are covered.

The firewall safeguards the ability of BBG entities to develop programming that reflects the highest professional standards of broadcast journalism, free of political interference. Prior to the creation of the BBG, the Voice of America, under the federal U.S. Information Agency, operated under a journalistic charter. This "VOA Charter," passed into law in 1977, recognized that VOA must win the credibility and respect of listeners in order to be effective. The Charter stipulated certain principles to govern VOA broadcasts, including:

- VOA will serve as a consistently reliable and authoritative source of news. VOA news will be accurate, objective and comprehensive.







- VOA will represent America, not any single segment of American society, and will present a balanced and comprehensive projection of significant American thought and institutions.
- VOA will present the policies of the United States clearly and effectively, and will also present responsible discussion and opinion on these policies.

In passing the U.S. International Broadcasting Act of 1994, the Congress used the language of the VOA Charter to establish common “broadcasting principles” for all of U.S. international broadcasting. These principles require that broadcasters include:

- News which is consistently reliable and authoritative, accurate, objective, and comprehensive;
- A balanced and comprehensive projection of U.S. thought and institutions, reflecting the diversity of U.S. culture and society;
- Clear and effective presentation of the policies...of the U.S. government and responsible discussion and opinion on those policies.

### **What Happens in the Event of a Possible Firewall Violation**

BBG journalists who experience “firewall” interference should not attempt to mediate the situation themselves. The appropriate procedure is to notify the BBG Board, and at the same time their supervisor who will ensure that senior management of the broadcast entity is advised of the concern. Please notify the Board by sending a message with relevant details to [BBGfirewall@bbg.gov](mailto:BBGfirewall@bbg.gov). If there is no access to email, or employees prefer to contact the Board by phone, they should call the BBG office at 202-203-4545.

Employees should feel free to consult with the Board about their questions on firewall concerns. The Board will look into the alleged violations and take any and all appropriate action.

The BBG Board places deep value on its firewall function in support of its journalists and pledges to continue to actively monitor this function to maintain program credibility.