

Writing for Ockham

Ockham's Razor is a talk program, a species now rare on radio. Listeners need extra help, therefore, to stay the course for close to thirteen minutes without the extra stimulation of an interviewer's questions or other stimulus. Here are some suggestions for preparing a talk. Veterans are asked for their indulgence, virgins for their attention.

The program is about scientific ideas, policy and philosophy, hence the title, and therefore tempts the writer to produce weighty sentences brimming with passive phrasing and relentless abstraction. Lists and acronyms are also to be avoided, unless funny. A talk may be based on a paper previously given at a conference. Do not adapt the paper; start afresh.

The audience is national, lay and, we hope, of all ages and backgrounds. One must entertain and engage them, as well as edify. We are also broadcast on Radio Australia. This provides an audience of 65 million, from Port Moresby to Texas. Parochial references will be obscure to them.

(next page...Tips!)



Tips:

1. Tell stories.
2. Be descriptive. One radio 'picture' is worth a thousand extra sub references.
3. Use active language, preferably in the present tense. Say 'you' and 'I'.
4. If you have just given a wodge of information, perhaps it's time for an anecdote. Vary the texture.
5. Read the pages out loud as you go. This gives a good and often surprising indication of length and whether the sentences are sayable. If they're not, change them.
6. Say something strongly, boldly. This is a rare chance to have a national platform without interruption. We will always make sure you don't offend or wreck your career (this has not happened in 20 years of Ockham's Razor). Blandness is far more dangerous than boldness.
7. Don't cram in too much. If there's more to say, do another talk. If you're good we'll let you.
8. Read the script aloud soon before the recording (we all do so ourselves) as time elapsed may have made it unfamiliar.
9. Recording is easy. Fluffs can be cut in seconds; a dull read can't be fixed. It's better to be lively and stumble a bit (we all do) rather than plod securely to the end and fall over the finishing line.
10. Never write too much. Aim for close to thirteen minutes. We need one minute to introduce you and to say who you are.
11. If in doubt, call. Problems can be solved in seconds.
12. There can be a delay before recording you. There are few of us.
13. You are perfectly free to publish the script elsewhere. Just acknowledge the ABC.
14. There is a fee. We wish it could be larger. It is no secret that the ABC is less than flush with funds.
15. Ockham's is worth doing: the broadcasts are heard by many people over a large area. Sometimes there are CDs, books and one day – who knows – the T-shirt!

Good Luck!

Robyn Williams

