

The Report with Clips

1. Introduction

Whenever journalists want to give their listeners information, they can make use of a number of different stylistic forms. These include news, interviews and reports, to name just a few.

For reports, the same rules apply as for news: journalists have to stay objective. In radio reports, the journalists should never voice their own opinions or their interpretations of the issues at hand. Their language must be precise and easy to understand. The words they choose have to be neutral – not loaded or emotional.

The aim of a report is to inform the listeners objectively, to tell both sides of a story. That way, the listeners can form their own opinion based on the arguments and views presented.

Basically, there are two types of journalistic reports: straight reports *without* sound clips and reports *with* clips. In a straight report, the journalists tell the listeners about an event or issue and the various views and positions the key players have on it. The journalists quote the arguments of the relevant parties in indirect speech.

In contrast to this, the voices of the key players are heard as sound clips in a report with clips. They present their arguments or opinions in short sound bites: authentic, in their own words and unfalsified.

As this journalistic format is very attractive to the listeners, we will focus on it in greater detail.

2. Definition

The report with clips is an objective, informative journalistic report, which consists of the journalists' narration and sound clips. In the clips, the key players of the topic the report deals with present their arguments and voice their opinions. A report with sound clips is usually between two and five minutes long.

3. When and why do we use this journalistic format? Strengths and weaknesses of the format

We produce reports and reports with clips when we want to cover topics in greater detail than we could in the news. In a report with clips, we can convey information about complex topics on which there are various opinions, because the key players can voice their views themselves.

For the listener, a report with clips is more varied and more authentic than a simple report in which only the voice of the journalist will be heard. Each time a new voice is heard in a report through sound clips, the voice-change gets the listeners' attention and they will continue following the topic at hand with renewed interest.

In contrast to this, a longer report only read by a journalist or narrator can easily come across as monotonous and boring. If the audience hears the same voice over a longer period of time, it soon loses interest in the subject at hand.

Furthermore, sound clips lend credibility to what the journalist is reporting. The main participants themselves provide the listener with the most important arguments or opinions; hence, the listener knows that nothing has been incorrectly quoted or misinterpreted.

In many cases, the voices of the key-players are well-known (e.g. politicians or celebrities). So reports with clips containing these well-known voices are also more authentic for the listeners than reports without clips. Dialects and certain well-known speech-patterns can also add authenticity to a report with clips. In addition, sound clips are also the best way to convey the emotions of the interviewees (e.g. of eyewitnesses).

Finally, background ambience sounds included on the tape while recording the sound clip will make such a report more authentic than a simple report. These background noises might occur, for example, if sound clips are recorded during a demonstration, in parliament, near moving water or in a room with specific acoustics. This always conveys to the listener that the journalist is actually at the scene of the event in question, and that makes the overall journalistic report more attractive and more credible than a "dry" report.

Of course, a report with sound clips also has disadvantages versus a simple report, an interview or news. The most important disadvantage: it is very time-consuming to produce. Journalists not only have to research the topic, they must also identify the most important parties involved (key-players), contact them and conduct interviews with them or acquire statements from them.

From this raw material, journalists must then select, and edit, the best sound clips. Then they have to write their narration linking the selected sound clips and presenting the necessary information, and finally they have to mix their spoken text and the sound clips in the studio or on the computer to create the final product.

All in all, this requires considerably more time and demands more sophisticated technical facilities than a straight report. It is not possible to produce reports with sound clips without a functioning mobile recording device (portable tape recorder, cassette recorder, mini-disc recorder etc.) and a production studio or audio-editing computer.

Furthermore, please keep in mind that not every sound clip is automatically a good sound clip (see chapter on "Use of sound clips"). If interview partners are unable to

state their views in an understandable way, it is better not to use the sound clip. In such cases, it's better to summarise what has been said.

In addition to this, you should not use sound clips if interview partners are difficult to understand due to the way they speak (e.g. dialect or speech impediment) or if the technical quality of the sound clips is poor (e.g. poor recording device, unclear telephone line or loud background noise).

A further drawback of sound clips is that they may distract the listener from the information you are trying to get across in your report. In a straight report, you are the one who determines the logical order in which the information is presented. And you choose the words to convey the information according to journalistic principles. In a report with sound clips, however, this sequence of events and the choice of words is dependent on the existing sound material.

Pros and cons of a report with clips

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lively (different voices)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Time-intensive and technically complex (research topic, contact interviewees, conduct interviews, edit, final production)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Credible (the key-players present their views and opinions themselves)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not all interviewees can provide good sound clips (speech impediments, expert language, beating around the bush etc.)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Authentic (emotions, strong statements of opinion, dialects, background ambience sounds)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sound clips can distract from the core of the information

4. How's it done?

Producing a report with sound clips requires many steps.

1. Research topic

What is it about? Who is affected by this topic? How has this topic developed in the past and what is likely to happen in the future? What are the most important contentious issues?

2. Identify relevant and suitable interview partner/s

Who are the relevant parties within the context of this topic? What opinions do they represent? Which of these key-players is willing to be interviewed and can be reached? Which of them are able to give good statements about this topic? If the

key-players are not available for interviews: who else can say something on this topic?

3. Contact interview partner/s, agree on interview dates and venues

In many cases, it is not immediately possible to get statements from all relevant parties. Some interview partners do not have the time or the desire to speak to journalists. Journalists may have to go out of their way to visit their interviewees. This takes time and costs money – so make provisions for this when planning the report.

Inform your interview partners that you will only be using some excerpts (statements) of the interview in your report. Your interviewees must be aware of the fact that you will not be broadcasting the entire interview.

4. Conduct interviews

Only conduct short interviews. Two or three precise questions should be enough to get some good sound clips. The more raw material you return to the studio with, the more you will have to listen to and screen, hence the more time you will lose.

Even during the interview, bear in mind that you will need short, concise statements for your report with clips. If your interviewees phrase their thoughts in a manner that is too long-winded or complicated, ask them to repeat what they have said in a more concise way that will be generally understood.

You can also record sound clips at a press conference, during a speech or at other public appearances. Caution with sound clips that you record from broadcasts by other radio or television stations! You might be infringing on copyright laws!

5. Listen to interviews

When listening to your recordings, jot down at which points the interviewees say something that can be used as a sound clip. Write down the exact words – especially the first and last words of the statements – so that you will be able to lead into the clip with good narration and ensure that the text following the sound clip picks up where the interviewee left off (also see chapter “Use of sound clips”).

6. Transfer sound clips and edit

If the production is analogue (on tape), you will have to transfer your sound clips from cassette to tape so that you can edit them. If the production is digital, you need to transfer the sound clips to the editing computer so that you can work on them with audio-editing software. Do not transfer the entire interviews, just the parts containing the sound clips you plan to use in your report. This saves time.

Some journalists prefer to transfer and edit their sound clips only after they have written and recorded their own narration texts. But this depends on personal preference and the technical facilities of the broadcaster (studio availability;

independent PC editing, or analogue editing with a tape machine – either with or without a sound technician).

7. Write text

Write your narration texts around the sound clips. Your link text should provide all the necessary facts and create bridges between the sound clips. Ensure that you identify all speakers with their name, function and, if necessary, their title so that the listener always knows who is speaking.

8. Record voice tracks

Record your journalistic narration text in the studio. Leave short pauses at the points where you want to insert the sound clips.

9. Final production

Insert the sound clips into the tape or sound file containing your narration. The report with sound clips is finished.

To be on the safe side, listen to the entire report one final time to ensure that all transitions are correct and the report is logical and understandable.

In contrast to this work-intensive production, the creation of a report *without* clips is comparatively quick and easy:

1. Research topic
2. Write text
3. Record report or present it live.

Caution – stumbling blocks – “What to do if...”

What to do if... you can only get clips from one side

Often, we may not be able to get sound clips from all relevant parties.

Example: In the report on the planned new factory, you have a sound clip from an opponent of the project (e.g. from a local resident who will have to move out of his house), but no sound clip from a person in favour of the scheme (e.g. from a representative of the multinational corporation that wants to build the factory).

In such cases, you yourself will have to summarise the arguments of the party that does not appear in a sound clip in your narration. Even if you were not able to get interviews with all key players, you have to present all relevant views on the topic to your listeners. Your reporting must always stay neutral and objective.

If one of the parties refuses to talk to you, you may mention this in your report. The listeners can then “draw their own conclusions”.

What to do if... the clips are too long

The length of sound clips can be a problem. In the chapter on “Use of sound clips”, we suggested that a **sound clip should not be longer than 15 – 30 seconds**.

But often, the sound clips we want to use are longer. If, for example, an interviewee needs 60 seconds to make his or her point, you may be able to shorten the clip by only using its first sentences (e.g. the first 20 seconds), then transcribe the next two or three sentences in indirect speech and, and go back into the last part of the sound clip.

Example:

Continuing sound clip (too long for the listener)	Interrupted sound clip (same statement, but greater variety for the listener)
Resident X: “I have lived in this neighbourhood all my life and feel at home here. Every stone in these streets harbours memories for me. I belong here. I know where to shop around here, where I can meet my girlfriend in the evening and where the local doctor is. My grandparents also lived in this neighbourhood. My parents live in the house next door and all my relatives live close by. If we are now moved to skyscrapers on the edge of town, we will all be torn apart. Besides, my parents are much too old to adapt to a new environment now. If they were evicted from their old house, the worry and upheaval would probably kill them.”	Resident X: “I have lived in this neighbourhood all my life and feel at home here. Every stone in these streets harbours memories for me. I belong here. I know where to shop around here, where I can meet my girlfriend in the evening and where the local doctor is.” Journalist: “Mr. X adds that his grandparents also lived in the neighbourhood. His parents live in the house next door and all his relatives live close by.” Resident X: “If we are now moved to skyscrapers on the edge of town, we will all be torn apart. Besides, my parents are much too old to adapt to a new environment now. If they were evicted from their old house, the worry and upheaval would probably kill them.”