

1.4 Writing a Radio Drama: Script/Production Issues

Obviously radio dramas have to be written differently to television ones. Television relies on two human senses, whereas radio only uses hearing. As such, some stuff in scripts won't work so well over the radio and they'll be a production nightmare. Before you've even started recording, consider what the script will sound like and how realistic the sound requirements are. Be upfront with your writer about which bits may need revision. You need to manage their expectations.

This list of production challenges is adapted from an excellent book by Claire Groves and Stephen Wyatt and also features on the BBC Writersroom webpage <http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/writersroom/posts/Writing-Radio-Drama-the-bad-news-and-the-good-news>. Think about these problematic scenes when you're reading over the script for a prospective radio drama:

A huge social event with a huge visual spectacle, such as a party or a battle. There are some decent Creative Commons 0 sounds for crowd effects on freesound.org, but it's still a tough one. Practically you need to consider how you're going to hear your lead voices over the event because otherwise it's going to sound like a confusing mess.

Anything with significant physical choreography (car chases, martial arts, etc). Action is a pain to achieve as you're probably going to need some decent sound effects *and* audio cues in the character's dialogue to suggest what's happening. Lots of "thud" noises going on for 15 seconds is boring for the listener. Sourcing all of these sounds is an absolute pain as well. This does have an upside though. Personally, I've found the reliance on purely audio and no visuals for such stuff does work wonders for sci-fi and horror "monster attacks" if you have a series of very creepy and ambiguous sounds. During Episode 5 of *Crowe*, for example, there were very subtle sounds of flies, sneakers walking, and metal being dragged on concrete that got louder and louder as the creature drew near. Use the lack of visuals to your advantage to portray a vibrant and imaginative environment. But keep your action short, simple and sweet and think about the amount of work you're giving yourself later for sound sourcing.

Scenes with more than three people. It is tough enough recording three people at once using only the directional microphones with our current URB studio setup. But also the listener might lose track of who all of the people are in a scene without being visually reminded. Where possible only have conversations between two characters at any given time, and only involve three if it's absolutely necessary.

Overdone voiceovers using the past tense. A voiceover works well sometimes as a narrative device, as it did for our production of *Glass Mannequins*. But it shouldn't be used as a shortcut for bits that deserve more time in a story. Don't make them too long or expository. If you're going to do that, remove the other acting opportunities and turn it into an audiobook instead. Alternatively, rewrite the voiceover to be in the present tense. For our production *The Acid Personality*, the voiceover was the narrator throughout. This worked because they were talking about events as they unfolded. Their dialogue "in" the scene was minimal.

Voiceovers that aren't clearly differentiated from where the lead is actually "in" the scene and talking to other characters. If possible, ask your script writer to break these two up with other characters' dialogue or notable sound effects. For *Glass Mannequins* we reduced the atmospheric sounds during voiceovers. You could also emphasize the music for these bits. Alternatively, for the final episode of *Crowe* we used different reverb effects for the lead's V/O and their in-scene battle. Your V/O is in danger of pulling the listener out of the story.