

# Storytelling with BBC Telling Lives

## Contents

Introduction	2
The Storycircle: Games and exercises explained	4
What makes a good personal story and how do you write it?	10
The first draft of the script	14
What to avoid in a personal story – the law, taste and decency	16
Creature comfort: an exercise in taste and the law	19
Recording the script	22
Editing the recording (two demonstration CD's enclosed)	26
Delivery of stories for broadcast	27
Additional material	29
Acknowledgments	30
Appendix 1: Scheme of work	
CD 1: Audio editing tutorial, documents and handouts	Inside back cover
CD 2: Audio CD - Examples of stories from Inside Lives	

# Storytelling with BBC Telling Lives

## Introduction

Digital Storytelling was introduced by the BBC to give television viewers the skills to make their own two minute film for broadcast and publication on the internet. In workshops run by the BBC they were taught to tell their story, write a script, and to master industry standard image and video editing software. Using a personal story and pictures from their photo album. The films they made were fascinating and revealing. Many of them were broadcast by the BBC. The archive sits on a BBC website [www.bbc.co.uk/tellinglives](http://www.bbc.co.uk/tellinglives)

The storytelling process was later transferred to radio. Listeners to BBC Local Radio were invited to create a personal story using the same storytelling process used in the TV project. In this project they were taught how to record their own voice and use sound editing software. Almost all of the stories produced in these workshops were broadcast.

So two forms of storytelling were developed. Digital storytelling for television taught in five day workshops and radio storytelling in two and a half day workshops. The training has also been accredited by the Open College Network at levels 1 to 3.

The storytelling workshops produced outcomes that exceeded the sum of the individual skills that were taught. Participants discovered creative skills in writing, speaking, and film making as well as new skills to use software. But beyond these expected outcomes they often came to terms with their own story - many talking about events in their lives that had not been fully explored or resolved since they had happened. It was a cathartic process. As they told and developed their idea in the storycircle they learned to give and receive feedback, and their narrative gained significance as others gave it value. The power of their own story produced a high level of motivation to master the processes required to turn it into a creative piece of writing, radio or television.

During the BBC project everyone completed their story by the time their workshop had ended.

Participants also had an increased understanding of how the media work. They understood how words, and pictures worked together to hold and steer the attention of viewers and listeners. Passive media users became content providers and intelligent critics of what was being broadcast.

There is an integrity about the process too. It is often the case that the media come into a community, take their story away from them to deliver it back in broadcast form in a voice they don't recognise. Through this workshop process there is no mediator or professional producer editing the completed story. The BBC gives the participants the skills to create their own story and to deliver it to the broadcaster in its finished form. There are no surprises for the storyteller when it was aired to the public.

At the end of each workshop there is a celebration. Friends and family are invited to the first performance of the finished story. The storytellers are able to comment on their story and what it has meant to them to be able to tell it. This is the second stage of building their confidence in their new found creative skills. Publication is the next step. Modern digital technology provides more opportunities for broadcast, and the internet is a cheap way of publishing everyone's story to the world. A survey of participants conducted by the BBC showed that 87% of them felt generally more confident in life after making a digital story and 49% went on to further training of some kind.

Here the process of running the storycircle - perhaps the most valuable part of the process - is presented as a scheme of work and practical guide.

**Just a note about facilitating a workshop. There is only one way to understand this process and that is by participating in one yourself. Tutor training events are designed to give you the same experience as your workshop participants.**

## **THE STORYCIRCLE**

### ***The storytelling games are used to:***

Create a spirit of mutual interest, fun and co-operation.

Help participants find their own stories and tell them.

Inspire confidence.

Lead to useful feedback.

### ***You will need:***

Plenty of pens and paper.

A plastic bag containing randomly assorted household objects.

A box of matches and a glass of water

**Before the event ask the participants to bring with them a personal photograph which has a story to tell.**

### **The Day**

The facilitator outlines the day and makes it clear that everything said in the room stays between the four walls until everyone is happy for it to go further. The facilitator will lead and join in the games, chair the storytelling and feedback. Sit everyone in a circle - paper and pens provided. The morning is taken up playing informal games and in the afternoon participants start work on their personal story ideas. There will be laughter and tears, as people are connected to their feelings and memories. Generate a supportive atmosphere and manage outbursts very sensitively, and sometimes firmly.

Some participants may have literacy or learning difficulties. Make it clear that if people are happier telling their stories orally that's fine. Writing will help crystallise thought, and create a form which can be easily edited, but it is not the only way. Participants can join in storytelling games by speaking, using notes, or having someone else help them to write.

Have plenty of breaks to allow the creative process to be refreshed. If you are running short of time drop an activity to make time for a breather.

### **The Games**

Here are some examples that work well. Make instructions clear and helpful and always create a deadline - it will focus and free everyone to get going. Facilitators should join in too - it really helps your group to hear your personal stories as they emerge through the session. Ideally there are no observers in a storycircle - everyone joins in.

### ***Remembering Names***

This is an icebreaker. Say your name and something about yourself. "I'm Carol and I met a wonderful man last night." Go around the group, each person repeating what has been said before, and then adding their own name and something about themselves. By the time you reach the last person, he or she will have to remember everyone else's name as well as all the little things they have said about themselves.

*Example: Pointing to the person on his left Rod says: "You are Fran and you came on the bus." Then he carries on around the room: "You are Nadia and you are a keen gardener... she is Mary and she is wearing big boots. He is Andy and he fell off his bike yesterday. You are Fatima, you had a row with your partner and you are still not speaking..." etc., etc.. until, finally: "and you are Carol and you met a wonderful man last night, and, err, "I'm Rod and it's my birthday."*

Lots of laughter, help and encouragement should be given, it is not a competition and there will be improvisation.

### ***Pick a Word***

This shows how all that is needed to write a story is a skeleton to flesh out. A list of the same ten words produces a variety of stories because the people writing are all different. The odd word will be used in the same way but some very inventive combinations crop up!

Everyone in the circle is asked for a word, any word. As people start

calling them out in turn, everyone writes them down and the facilitator writes them on a flip chart or whiteboard. House, Hob Nobs, Red, Duvet, Doctor, Bizarre, Bull, Treadmill, Sky. (It may help to explain unusual words.) People developing their literacy skills may prefer to work with pictures at this stage in which case everyone draws a picture on a flipchart. Allow ten minutes to write or invent a story using all these words or pictures. Then ask everyone to read or tell their story to the group.

*Example: "It has to be a crimson duvet," Sarah insisted, but it was like a red rag to a bull. John wanted the bedroom to be the most restful place in the house – not the most bizarre. They'd been together for two years but this was their first house. John looked forward to making a home to get away from the treadmill of his job at Sky TV. Sarah looked at John across her tea cup. "I've just been to the doctor's, perhaps that's why I want strange things," she said. "These Hob Nobs taste strange too."*

**At this early stage in the day it's important to give plenty of positive feedback.**

### ***Mystery objects***

This exercise generates stories that are a little more personal, as each person is prompted by objects selected at random from the magic story bag. It loosens the imagination and prompts memories of past events.

Pass around a bag containing a number of random objects. Each participant takes out one object. Allow ten minutes to come up with a story about the memory that it provokes. Likely objects are: toy car, nail file, key ring, postcard, stone, bottle, paint brush, lump of soap.. you name it. After ten minutes everyone reads out their story.

After each reading make sure you give lots of praise and affirmation point out all the parts which work well for you.

### ***A favourite Toy or Game***

This game makes things more personal still. It loosens the memory.

Write about a favourite toy or game from your childhood.

This usually leads to an event surrounding what the toy meant, and reveals a little personality. At the end of ten minutes, everyone reads out their story.

*Example: "My favourite toy was a skateboard. Only it wasn't mine. Buying me a skateboard was banned. Too dangerous. So I would call on Simon, Darren, and Dene, and use theirs.*

*We would crouch on the skateboards and hang onto the back of a Raleigh Chopper, picking up speed down Porter's Hill, a very long hilly road, with a T-junction at the bottom.*

*We often had to swerve and crash into a tree or a hedge to avoid the cars we spotted coming towards us up the hill. And then there was the junction. There was no way of knowing what was coming across it. The cyclist towing the skateboarder might just manage to stop and fall off, but the speeding skateboarder would sometimes have to plough on regardless. Unable to stop, we would grit our teeth and race across, momentarily terrified, crashing into a gravel car park on the other side.*

*Once a speeding Mini drove across. The driver sounded his horn, but I don't know why. I would live forever and I was always quite safe - so long as I didn't have my own skateboard.*

### **Photographs**

Participants bring a photograph with them. The photographs are passed around the table. Everyone in turn writes a caption to sum up the story in the picture.

What is really happening in the picture? Then, taking one photo at a time, everyone reads their caption out loud. The owner then goes on to explain what the true story is behind the picture.

Photographs are extremely good memory joggers, and they are often very personal.

We also see how the only person capable of telling the real story is the one who owns the photograph.

Only the storyteller knows how they felt at the time and the context of the picture. This can be very revealing, and start off questions or group feedback and validation.

The photograph might provide the inspiration for the memory that the storyteller goes on to write later in the day.

### ***Coming to a decision***

Participants write about an important decision they have made, how it made them feel and what the outcome was. It is a good exercise to try to get this told in exactly 50 words - not 49, not 51. After ten minutes everyone reads out/tells their story.

### ***The first time.***

Participants write about the first time they ever had to do something - anything, and how it made them feel, what the outcome was. After ten minutes everyone reads out/tells their story.

### ***The Match Game.***

This game is great for focus, convincing people they do have something to say and that they can say it concisely without long introductions or waffle.

Make sure that you have permission to use matches, that there are no active smoke detectors in the room, and that you pass around a glass of water to drop the burning matches into. If it isn't practical to use a match, you could pass around an alarm timer set to no more than 15 seconds.

In the time it takes a match to burn each participant, in turn, tells the group about a passionate moment in their life: a person, thing, issue or place about which they feel, or once felt, passionate. When the match goes out they must stop talking. The burning match concentrates the mind on getting straight to the heart of the story and keeping it short.

### ***Love and Hate.***



Ask each participant to make a list of ten things they hate, and another list of ten things they love. Ask everyone to read them out their list of loves quickly. Next ask each person to read out their list of hates, with feeling and emotion. As each person takes it in turns this serves as a group icebreaker but also allows the facilitator to hear the full range of the participants' passions, and of their voices. The facilitator can then suggest to each storyteller how one or more of the things on their list may be useful for the stories itself, and hearing the range of the storytellers' voices will also be helpful ahead of recording. The facilitator can suggest this is just the sort of feeling required for delivering the story, when storytellers record their finished scripts.

At the end of each and every game played, find some useful and encouraging conclusion to draw from what the participants have said... something designed to be helpful later on when they work on scripts for their finished story.

### ***Three objects***

This game helps someone decide what he or she might want to write a story about. The participant has to come up with three objects, which sum up what is most important to them. For example, a spade, a baby, and a chess board (This person is a chess playing gardener who has just had a child). The participant then has to choose one of the objects as the most important, and then tell a story about it.

At the end of each game the facilitator finds some useful and encouraging conclusion to draw from what the participants have said... something designed to be helpful later on we people work on scripts for their finished story.

After playing a selection of three or four of the games above it's time start work on the first draft of their script. Their personal story.

*After all the storytelling games and exercises it is time to start work on the story that will be recorded for publication. The following section can work well as a handout for tutors and storytellers.*

## **WHAT MAKES A GOOD PERSONAL STORY AND HOW DO YOU WRITE IT?**

Everyone will have a favourite story, but in the 2 minute form there are ways you can make sure each story works for everyone.

- The story should be *personal*. *Personal thoughts, ideas and experiences*. Whatever it is about, the author should be at the heart of it. Not necessarily the focus, but a definite presence. So if a participant wants to write about their job, for example, the emphasis should be on *why* the job is important to *them*, or something that makes it a story about themselves rather than about the job. It is the job seen through their eyes, told using their voice.
- If it has this personal element a good story can be about anything: the time my hamster died, why I don't like going to the dentist, how I felt when I was diagnosed with cancer. It can be about the past, the present, or even the imagined future. What matters most is emotional honesty and a willingness to really speak to listeners rather than talking at them—a kind of intimacy.
- If, for example, someone wants to tell a story about 'my early life in the village'; including details of people and places, this is not within the scope of a two minute story. But you can suggest they write about *one day* or *event* from this time that stands out in their mind most. Feelings are important. As they tell the story, they can give a sense of 'my early life in the village' by including some social / historical information as added *details*.
- What rarely works is a story which sounds like a formal CV or an informal shopping list: "I did this and that, and then we went there, and after that this happened, and then.. and after that it was all leading up to this". To get

around this, use a vehicle (like a day or an event) to get the story told. It need not be a day or an event, it might be another person, a recurring hope, fear, love. For example, if someone wanted to talk about the time they went to build an orphanage, they could focus on a favourite child they met while doing the building. Then we can connect emotionally.

- Participants should have a *focus* for their story in mind. If stuck, it is very helpful to ask participants to sum up their story in one or two sentences maximum; this really helps them focus, and it can even be done as a separate exercise, (\*\*see down page\*\*) a bit like the match game.
- Some stories have very definite structures - beginnings and endings, with a nice sense of process or dilemma in the middle, and others are more like a seemingly random stream of consciousness that follows a constant driving emotion or theme. It might also help to ask people: 'what do you want your story to do? What effect do you want it to have on listeners? Do you want to make them laugh, think, understand, get up and do something with their lives...?'
- Once there is a focus, anything that doesn't serve that aim probably doesn't need to go in, especially when you only have 2 minutes. Anything which is on the cutting room floor has not been seen by the audience, so they don't necessarily miss it. 'There shouldn't be a gun in act one if it doesn't go off by act five', said a famous playwright, meaning everything that goes into the story should be there for a good reason.
- Don't repeat words unless you're making a point by doing so. Look for alternative words, and don't use two or three words or sentences where one will do.
- The form and the content should go together, ie. the way the story is told should reflect what is being told. It may or may not be appropriate to use a more unusual narrative device, for instance, speaking from the point of view of

your favourite pet. Some stories work best when they are told straight.

- Budget for *silence* and allow for good spaces between sentences, and dramatic and pregnant pauses. People speak at different speeds, but 250 words is a rough guideline before you time things.
- Drafting: each story will need to go through successive drafts before it is finished and participants should be aware of this from the start, so that they don't take any suggestions for change too personally. A deadline should be given for writing the first draft, and afterwards enough time should be built-in to allow everyone to read out the first draft. While this is happening, all the participants should be looking out for what works best - what we need to hear more of. So encourage participants to act as a mini-audience and feedback what they like and what they think works. What does not work so well can go as a result, without concentrating on it first and destroying a storyteller's confidence. Elegant expressions and structure changes can come after the first draft.
- Participants should write the way they speak, as the story will be recorded. You don't want it to sound distanced or formal. If unsure (this can be quite difficult), a participant should read it to someone they know well and ask for an honest opinion: 'would I really say this?'. But an even better way to achieve this can be to notice the way people speak and present it back to them. (\*\*this can even be an exercise in itself\*\*). When you have heard what the story is about, ask the participant questions about their story to clarify, and write down the colloquial answers that they give you. Then present what they say back to them. "You know you just said '\*\*' and that would sound far better, it is you and it is what you really say, so why don't you write it in the script?". Scripts can be greatly improved by listening out for the phrases people use about their experiences when they are more relaxed.
- When reading over the first draft, there's usually one line or one point that really stands out. A good tip for the second draft is to begin with that line as

an attention-grabber. It is important to avoid rambling introductions, so an attention grabber could take you right into the heart of the story and help to cut a lot of unnecessary background info. It can also help you to do interesting things with the structure and chronology. Remember - you don't have to explain things immediately, right at the start in the history of the storyteller. You can start with an attention grabber first and then go "back in time" to explain it, once people are listening to you. eg. Start in the present or in the recent past, and then go into the remote past to explain your start, before moving forward in time again.

- It's often a good idea to start not only with an attention-grabbing statement, but also with something that poses a question of some kind, even if it isn't phrased as a question as such, (eg. 'I consider myself very fortunate to have Parkinson's Disease'). This is another way to make the listener want to find out more.
- An ending should be definite. It can often be useful to "frame" the story, by referring to something which is at the start of the script. This will tie things up satisfactorily. A moral of the tale would serve the same purpose, but the end does not necessarily have to tidy everything up. Some things can be effectively be left unanswered, but even if the story ends with an interesting question mark, it should be clear that this is the end of the story. The story should have a direction and a trajectory.
- The story is a journey and often works best when it takes the listener AND the storyteller to unexpected places.

## **THE FIRST DRAFT of the SCRIPT**

The best stories centred on an event. It can be significant, humorous, sad, joyful or intriguing. At this stage a deadline of half an hour works well.

Emphasise they are about to start work on the first draught of their script, which will probably be rewritten. Let people work where they feel comfortable. Some may prefer to be away from the main group or simply facing away from distractions.

After half an hour bring everyone back together for the first reading and feedback session. This is a pivotal time in the storycircle when everyone listens and offers feedback. Ask the group to listen out for or make notes about the parts of each story that they really like.

The idea is that there are no experts anyone can give feedback. Begin by inviting positive feedback. What did people like? Which phrases stood out and stuck in the memory? What did you learn?

Follow this by asking if there was anything in the story about which they would like to hear more. At this stage you will often hear engaging phrases that bring the story alive. Write them down and ask the storyteller to write them down too and to attempt to include them in their script.

Lastly invite comment on what could be left out or didn't work or capture interest. Suggest redrafting the story to make less of these points - or to make them more interesting.

Try to reach a consensus of positive opinion, but emphasise that the storyteller is in control, and this is advice to help the story. Point out the privilege of exposing their ideas to a trial audience or focus group so early in the process. Many writers long for this luxury.

Make notes as you go, and then sum up each story with the suggestions for a re-write. Ask the storytellers if they are happy with what they may need to do

with them. Sometimes, but not often, a story may be told perfectly first time.

After the rewrite, ideally at another time, there should be one last read through of each story before it is recorded. It is much easier to address changes before recording; impossible after!

## **WHAT TO AVOID IN A PERSONAL STORY**

There are dangers in allowing people to tell a personal story for broadcast. Some events especially if they identify other individuals may go beyond the bounds of the law. Without guidance storytellers may inadvertently defame an individual, be in contempt of court or simply write something that is in bad taste. So here are some basic guidelines. If you have doubts then check with a professional. If you are working in partnership with a broadcaster seek the advice of one of their senior staff. It is always better to check than transgress, and check early to give the storyteller time to amend their script before recording.

### **Defamation/Libel**

Saying something about another person which can be judged to tend to expose him (or her) to hatred, ridicule or contempt, cause him to be shunned or avoided, lower him in the estimation of right thinking members of society generally, or disparage him in his business, trade, office, or profession.

It is not only the storyteller who can be sued, but the publisher and the broadcaster too.

If a complaint comes to court, the complainant does not have to prove that what is said is false; you have to prove that it is true. So by not naming the person the allegation is made about is only a safeguard if it can be reasonably judged that other people who know the person are not led to believe (s)he is the person which is being talked about.

So how might you defend yourself?

1. Prove that what you said is true. This is called justification.
2. Show that what you have said is an honestly held opinion about something which has already been proven true, and that there was no ulterior or malicious motive behind your opinion ('this is called fair comment'),



3. The person defamed is now dead. Legally speaking, you cannot defame the dead.

### **Contempt of Court**

There are five things that you can never legally publish about another person if they have been arrested or charged with an offence, because they may prejudice legal proceedings.

- Previous convictions - saying someone arrested or charged has a previous conviction
- Descriptions of the defendant
- Guilty implications - someone is legally innocent until proven guilty
- Jury sayings - anything a jury member says about a case being tried
- Statements by witnesses - e.g. descriptions of a person arrested may then suggest that he or she is the person who committed the crime

### **Taste and decency**

This is wide ranging subject well beyond the scope of a short guide like this one. The BBC publishes Guidelines for Producers on it's website. The section on taste begins like this:

*“The BBC is required in the Agreement associated with its Charter not to broadcast programmes which "include anything which offends against good taste or decency or is likely to encourage or incite to crime or lead to disorder, or be offensive to public feeling". The BBC seeks to apply this requirement to all its broadcasting, programmes and services, whether for domestic or international audiences.”*

Enough to say here to take care over graphic descriptions of violence or sexual activity, swearing, and inappropriate references to a person's disability, race or gender. In the end all of these things are a matter of judgment based on your knowledge of the anticipated audience and the context of the broadcast or publication. Sometimes, for local radio broadcasts, a good test is

to ask your self if you would be happy if this description was used just before the teatime news on BBC1. If in doubt discuss the story with a broadcasting professional at an early stage in the process so that there is time to change the script before it is recorded.

A test script follows for you to test your skills in identifying potential problems.

If you want to know more you can read the BBC Producers Guidelines in full here: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/info/policies/producer\\_guides/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/info/policies/producer_guides/)

This exercise relates to the above section 'What to avoid', and can work well as a handout for tutors and storytellers. Read through this script. Mark the parts that you think create problems on legal grounds or in matters of taste.

*Creature comfort - by Sean Richard* .(Unedited version)

There has always been an animal involved somewhere in my life, besides my Dad. I can remember having to run down a rainy street in my boxer shorts to save my own neck. He'd tried to throttle me with the dog's chain, because I stopped him kicking my Mum. She had threatened to report him for what he was doing.

I can still feel the thud of the tarmac on the soles of my feet. By the time I reached the Police Station they were bleeding. The confused dog was running after me, barking.

My first foster home stank of cats. It was a bed and breakfast, and I was told to stay in my box room, where I slept with a well fed parrot, who wouldn't. The squawking even entered my nightmares. I didn't have dreams then. The cats were better cared for than me. The landlady must have spent the money she received for me from Social Services on them.

A nice little earner for her - I knew she was only in it for the money because she didn't talk to me or listen but I noticed how carefully she chose the cat food. And she's still coining it in now in that house at the end of the terrace, next to the Pelican club. Told you it was all about animals.

It's strange then that an animal also saved me. But only after a really low point in a care home, where bullying, prostitution and drugs went on. I couldn't make friends so the staff singled me out. I was ridiculed and made to feel like a frightened rabbit. Back at my Dad's, I locked myself in the toilet and sliced my wrist so many times with a shining new razor blade that my thick red blood covered the tiles.

When I recovered, I was put with a family who had a horse. Strawberry the horse, and just as sweet. He talks to me, and listens, in a way we both understand. I couldn't get onto him at first, and now we go bareback, faster than my memory can keep up. I can hear his snorting, see his breath, feel his warm white hair, and the confidence I know now. Not all animals are animals.

I dream dreams nowadays. My Dad has been arrested. We both know he's guilty.

## Edited Version

There is more than one way to make a script legally safe or to avoid offence. So this example is just one way of doing it – although each of the points identified in the script would have to be resolved, they can't be ignored. Some parts of the original script are absolutely wrong, others a matter of judgment. Some are a compromise to reduce the risk and keep the story.

### *Creature comfort - by Sean* <sup>(1)</sup>

There has always been an animal involved somewhere in my life, besides my Dad. I can remember having to run down the rainy street in my boxer shorts to save my own neck.

He tried to throttle me with the dog's chain, because I stopped him kicking Mum. She had threatened to report him for what he was doing.

I can still feel the thud of the tarmac on the soles of my feet. By the time I reached the Police Station they were bleeding. The confused dog was running after me, barking.

<sup>(2)</sup> One foster home stank of cats, and I stayed in a box room, where I slept with the well fed parrot, who wouldn't. The squawking even entered my nightmares. I didn't have dreams then. The cats did - they were all looked after. <sup>(3)</sup>

But unlike them I didn't feel that my foster carer talked or listened to me. Told you it was all about animals. <sup>(4)</sup>

Strange then that an animal saved me. But only after a really low point in the care home, where bullying, prostitution and drugs went on. <sup>(5)</sup> I couldn't make friends so I was ridiculed. <sup>(6)</sup> I felt like a frightened rabbit.

I tried to take my life, <sup>(7)</sup> but when I recovered, I was with a family who had a horse. Strawberry the horse, <sup>(8)</sup> and just as sweet. He talks to me, and listens, in a way we both understand. I couldn't get onto him at first, and now we go bareback, faster than my memory can keep up. I can hear his snorting, see his breath, feel his warm white hair, and the confidence I know now. Not all animals are animals.

I dream dreams nowadays. <sup>(9)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup> The surname has been removed so that we can refer to both father and storyteller without identifying them. But it is worth remembering that anonymity should not be used lightly. It can lessen the credibility of a story. An alternative might have been to remove all references to the father instead.

<sup>(2)</sup>This reduces the chance of the foster carer being identified.

<sup>(3)</sup>The point here is that the boy feels he was not well cared for. We can communicate this without suggesting that the foster carer also had dubious motives for housing him.

<sup>(4)</sup>Similarly, we can talk about the boy's feelings without libelling the carer and pinpointing her home. Talking about the end terrace and the Pelican club is not far removed from reading out her address.

<sup>(5)</sup>The reference to bullying, prostitution and drugs can be left in the script because it does not identify a particular care home, its users or staff. It is common knowledge that these things have gone on in care homes and there is no implication that particular people deliberately allowed it to happen. It is sometimes the case that a story can be made far too safe. Legal advice was taken on this example, in a real story.

<sup>(6)</sup>The claim about staff singling the boy out is non-specific so it may well also be quite safe. But as we cannot balance it or demonstrate it, we have said the boy 'was ridiculed', and 'felt frightened', in the passive.

<sup>(7)</sup>We are not making descriptions of a suicide attempt so graphic that they may encourage 'copycat' behaviour. The Samaritans argue that this happens following media coverage. The boy must have been low to attempt it, and this is the point to get across.

Some may argue that the description is valid because it is powerful, and without it the story is weak. Do we need to desensitise the audience? Nevertheless, if a storyteller insists on the description, it's important to have the discussion about it. If there's a complaint later and you cannot demonstrate that there was a serious discussion about the value of the disputed phrase it's difficult to defend your decision to broadcast it.

<sup>(8)</sup>It could be argued that in a small rural community, even naming the horse might identify the boy, and thus his father. In this case the risk is probably small.

<sup>(9)</sup>If the father has been arrested, we would be seriously in contempt of court by suggesting he is guilty. If the case was over, and he had been found guilty, only *then* may we say something along the lines of: "My horse and I always knew he was guilty."

## **RECORDING THE SCRIPT**

### ***Choosing your place***

It is really important to find as quiet an environment as possible for recording. There is a surprising amount of noise once you start to really listen for it. A microphone picks up every sound.

Beware of the constant noise made by strip lights and computer fans, and interruptions from mobile phones and other electrical and technical equipment. If possible, turn them off, especially mobile phones. They interfere with recording equipment even in silent mode. Also, beware of traffic outside the window, and people in adjoining rooms.

The size of the room you record in can make a difference. Generally speaking, the smaller the room the 'flatter' the sound will be - there will be less echo and background atmosphere, and the sound should be closer and 'cleaner'.

### **Using the mini disc player and the microphone**

All mini disc machines record digital information to a high standard. They have a record button, a stop button, and a play button. They will work with a variety of microphones. The standard connection is a mini jack socket.

You will need to stop the long microphone cable from creating rattling noises during recording. To do this with a hand-held microphone you create a small loop of the wire in your hand, the same hand you use to hold the microphone. Take care not let the loop touch the microphone itself. This means that if the microphone cable touches anything, your hand will absorb the vibration *before* it reaches the microphone. Otherwise a noise called microphone or cable rattle is recorded along with the storyteller's voice.

Hold the microphone slightly at an angle to the storyteller's mouth, so that they are not speaking directly into it. This reduces popping noises caused by

the sound of a loud 'p' or 'b'. The rush of air makes an audible pop if the microphone is in front of the mouth.

The square mini disc has an arrow on it. This shows you which way to push it into the slot or lid of the minidisk player. When the disc is pushed home and the lid is closed, power comes on. Allow a little time for the recorder to read the disc. You will hear a whirring noise. When the whirring has stopped, press record (often a red button with a circular symbol). The recorder will create a new track number for you, and then go into standby mode.

Next you will need to measure the level of the storyteller's voice.

Ask the storyteller to read a few lines from the script. As they speak, watch the level meter on the mini disc recorder's digital display. It should be peaking with their voice at a maximum level of between -4 and 0. Make sure it *never regularly goes above zero*, because this would cause a distortion on the recording. To increase the recording level, either turn it up (using the other buttons on the mini disc), or simply move the microphone closer to the storyteller's mouth. To decrease the level, either turn it down on the mini disc, or move the microphone further away from the storyteller's mouth.

When you are happy with the level, press play (as well as record) to take the mini disc player out of standby mode and begin recording. To stop the recording, press the stop button, which is usually denoted by a square symbol. Always give the mini disc time to save your recording onto a track *before* you move the machine or do anything else with it. This gives it time to save a table of contents for you (denoted by TOC on the digital display).

### **Relaxing the participant**

It is important to relax the participant as much as possible before recording each take. Nerves cannot be eliminated and some may even help, but you do not want a rigid or a faltering performance. If necessary, drop shoulders, deep breathing, massage solar plexus on hand...

## Storytelling delivery

This is a performance; we are aiming for the personal touch. We don't want it to sound as if the storyteller is reading a paper, even if they are.

So if necessary, tell the storyteller to visualise talking to a friend in the pub, anyone they feel comfortable with, as they read.

We don't want to ham things up too much but if it sounds wooden or limp encourage the storyteller's feelings to come across on the recording. This can be done by listening out for certain phrases, underlining them and asking the storyteller to emphasise them. E.g. Act out value judgment phrases like '*disgusting pimps*', or feeling phrases like '*full of dread*', '*so in love*', '*I was terrified*', '*utter adoration*', and action phrases like '*ran as fast as I could go*', '*drink spilled everywhere*'.

If there is direct speech in the script it is also very effective if the storyteller puts on a different voice, especially if it is supposed to be someone else's voice. Don't be afraid of a little improvisation.

Ask the storyteller to sit still during the recording and beware of rustling paper. If the script is across two pages, try to avoid having to turn the page. Lay both pages in front of the storyteller, or if they really have to turn the paper over, ask them to stop reading *before* turning it, then pause, turn, pause, then start reading again. This way the rustling can be edited out afterward.

If there is time, a word-processed script with double line spacing, or a rewritten script without lots of corrections can be very helpful.

You are aiming for a minimum of one attempt or 'take', and a maximum of four, per person. But it is often worth having at least two takes, as the storyteller may be more relaxed second time around.

As the recording proceeds listen out for mistakes. Make a note of each track



number and the corresponding quality of each delivery. In this way you may be able to combine the perfectly read first half of one take with the perfectly read second half of a second!

## **EDITING THE RECORDING**

### **Transferring tracks from mini disc onto a computer for editing**

The mini disc player connects to a PC or laptop using a 3.5 mm jack. Each recorded track is played back from the mini disc and captured on the computer using audio editing software.

There are many types of editing software, but all of them have the standard tools to record, stop recording, save the recording, and display the audio waveform.

Unwanted parts of the audio can be edited out or replaced using the cut, copy and paste button.

The editing tools on each piece of audio editing software are standard and interchangeable. Accompanying this manual is a CD called 'Sarah's story', which will load into *any* of them. As a sample story which still needs all Sarah's mistakes editing out, it acts as a good tutorial.

The other CD with this manual contains a powerpoint presentation which teaches all the techniques required to edit 'Sarah's story'. The visual demonstration is based on a piece of audio editing software called 'Cool Edit Pro' now marketed as 'Adobe Audition'

Storytellers' *finished* recordings can be burned onto a CD for distribution. It is usual for everyone who participated in a storycircle to receive a CD copy of all the stories written and recorded in their session. The same CDs are suitable for broadcast.

The enclosed CDs – Editing Tutorial and Examples of Storytelling contain further material and a practical exercise to help you to develop your editing skills as well as the full text of this manual and the legal worksheets.

## DELIVERY OF THE STORIES FOR BROADCAST

A few points to remember when preparing stories for broadcast

### Radio cues

Almost everything you hear on the radio has a short introduction, which is read by a presenter. A few sentences, written in advance, called the 'cue.' It is worth writing one even if it is not used. Cues help presenters and listeners move seamlessly from one radio item to the next. A cue should be brief and straight to the point.

e.g. "When travellers move in alongside other people's houses, we often hear complaints. Caravan dwellers may be labelled as thieves and drop-outs. But how fair is this? Bill's caravan has been parked in central Middlesbrough for several weeks now, and *he* describes gypsy families as hardworking, honest, and God-fearing. Here is his story..."

Sometimes there may be a footnote, called a 'back announcement', or 'back anno'. It reminds the presenter to read something at the end of the item, and is a chance to get additional information across.

e.g. "And that was Bill, who attended a free digital storytelling workshop run by the University of Teesside and the BBC. If you would like to tell *your* story, call us on 01642 866752."

A cue sheet should also include information about the length of the recording, and its first and last few words, or 'in words' and 'out words'. Ideally, a radio cue looks like this:

**CUE:**We often hear complaints when travellers move in alongside other people's homes. Caravan dwellers may be labelled as thieves and drop-outs. But how fair is this? Bill's caravan has been parked in central Middlesbrough for several weeks now, and *he* describes gypsy families as hardworking, honest, and God-fearing. Here is his story...

**IN:**I'll never forget

**DURATION:** 18"

**OUT:**.... and that's my story.

.....

**BACK ANNO:** And that was Bill, who attended a free digital storytelling workshop run by the University of Teesside and the BBC. If you would like to tell your own story, call us on 01642 866752.

## **Additional material**

Audio stories may also be posted onto a BBC website. An attractive looking web page is needed to hold their attention - which is where your photos and text come in.

A digital photograph of the storyteller, or one or two of the storyteller's photographs scanned, named, and e-mailed to the producer of the website along with the script will make all the difference. Some images and text hold the user's attention as they listen to the story online.

Research has shown that people are more likely to read text which is broken up into small paragraphs, each paragraph one or two sentences long. The white space and the 250 word target makes things easier on the eye, and increases interest in the story.

## **In summary**

**To produce audio stories for broadcast you will need -**

- **A safe spacious room with a table to facilitate story circles.**
- **A quiet area for recording stories.**
- **A mini-disc recorder, microphone and mini-discs to record the stories**
- **A set of computer speakers to listen to the playback.**
- **A computer with audio editing software installed.**
- **A CD burner on your computer and a stock of CD-Rs.**

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