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How to be a presenter on Radio Verulam

Radio Verulam

Presenter Manual

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# Overview

Radio Verulam is the radio station for St Albans. We broadcast on 92.6 FM in the St Albans area. You can also hear us online at [www.radioverulam.com](http://www.radioverulam.com).

We are a community radio station.

This document tells you what it means to be a presenter on Radio Verulam by explaining what the brand ‘Radio Verulam’ means.

# The Mission

We love the city of St Albans. We love everything about it; the people, the businesses, the schools, the shops, our history, our heritage, our environment. We will reflect this passion for our city and community in everything we do. We will be useful, relevant and entertaining.

# The Brand

At the centre of any product’s brand (whether that be a radio station, magazine, a chain of supermarkets, a make of car) is a set of core values. These are the attributes that identify the character, personality or other traits of the brand.

Think of some of the biggest brands and their core attributes.

* Volvo cars – Safety
* Miele washing machines – Quality
* ASDA supermarkets – Value
* Radio 4 – Authority, trustworthiness

Radio Verulam’s core values are

* **We are passionate about St Albans**
* We are upbeat, positive, optimistic
* We are friendly, helpful and informative

## Passionate about St Albans

Our key unique selling point is the area in which we live. St Albans comes towards the top of any survey of the happiest places to live in the UK[[1]](#footnote-1). We are blessed to live in an area with a very definite character of its own despite its proximity to (and the gravitational effect of) London – a ‘best of both worlds’.

Humans have lived in this area for 2,000 years or more; the city we know today is at least 1,000 years old. We have a beautiful cathedral, churches, Roman ruins, a medieval clock tower, pre and post-industrial revolution coaching inns, markets and trading posts, and so many other buildings of historical significance. We are blessed with a vibrant and burgeoning music scene in every genre, acclaimed food shops and restaurants, beautiful scenery, excellent transport links, local merchants and businesses and an enormous sense of local pride and loyalty. This is a fantastic place to live.

And, we invented the Hot Cross Bun.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Radio Verulam will be a cheerleader for St Albans. Our passion for our people, businesses, bands, shops, schools, history, sports teams, heritage, restaurants, musicians, farmers, hobby groups must be sown into the fabric of every single thing we do and everything we say.**

Everything we do must reflect St Albans as the best place in the UK to live, work, play sport, get married, have kids, raise kids, run a business, see a show, eat in restaurants, go to the pub, see a local band.

**This is our fundamental selling point.**

## Upbeat, Positive and Optimistic

We must be a perpetual ray of sunshine on the radio, a station that radiates good-feeling, optimism and enthusiasm.

Even on the darkest, foulest days when the snow is coming in sideways and the M25 is stationary, we must bring cheer and some good humour to the lives of our listeners. We are a force of positivity and forward-looking, not bland, neutral, dowdy and worthy. We must be seen to not take ourselves too seriously.

## Friendly, helpful and informative

We must show that we care about our listeners, their problems and concerns; parenting, crime, health, employment, house prices, environment, parking, pollution, schools and education. We must always be reflecting THEIR concerns and experiences AND NOT OURS.

We must always keep our finger on the pulse of local issues; the rail freight terminal, pot-holes, sinkholes, traffic congestion, air quality and bring that information to our listeners as a way to foster debate and discussion.

We must be the place that our listeners turn to for information; whether the M25 is gridlocked, who’s playing at the Harpenden Public Halls tonight, what’s on at the Odyssey, or how did the Saints get on?

## Professional

We will provide a credible, professional-sounding radio service so that advertisers will choose to position their products next to our content.

# The Audience

At the heart of our radio station lie the audience; our fundamental reason for being. We are an organisation that has promised to bring about social benefit by connecting with people in our area, and we cannot achieve this mission if no-one listens.

# The Strapline

Every radio station, chain of supermarkets, shop, product, service has a strapline.

A strapline is a “sub heading”; a phrase next to the main brand name that encompasses everything about what the product or service is or does. Think about some of the straplines for some of the biggest brands.

* Tesco – Every Little Helps
* Sainsbury’s – Eat Well for Less
* McDonalds – I’m lovin’ it
* Alien – In space, no-one can hear you scream
* The future’s bright, the future’s Orange
* BMW – The Ultimate Driving Machine

Radio Verulam’s strapline is

The Radio Station for St Albans

Please don’t use any other strapline; either one of the station’s old straplines, or one that you may make up on the spot. This strapline encompasses everything that our listeners need to know.

# The Structure

The programme schedule is divided into ‘daytime’ and ‘off-peak’.

## Daytime

Daytime is the shop window of Radio Verulam. Daytime is where we present a radio service for a general audience of daytime listeners. Daytime is where we fit our content to reflect the daily routine of our target audience.

* A breakfast programme for people who are getting up and heading to work or school.
* A morning magazine-style show for those staying at home, looking after children.
* An afternoon programme for those out shopping, looking after children, fetching the children from school.
* A drivetime programme for those leaving work and getting back home to their families and their evening.

## Off Peak

Off peak programmes are our specialist shows, where we broadcast material that is truly distinctive, focused around a particular style of music (local music, country, rock, soul) or a particular specialty interest (parenting, performing arts, current affairs, food, health).

# The Reasoning

The radio market has changed fundamentally and significantly with the arrival of smartphones, the internet and streaming media. It is now possible to download any piece of music immediately, wherever I may happen to be. Therefore, simply being a radio station that plays music is no longer the compelling proposition it used to be, because there are a multitude of services available.

Just 15 years ago, the radio listener in our area had the choice of BBC national networks, Classic FM, BBC Local Radio, legacy ILR (Chiltern/Oasis and London ILR Heart/Capital/Melody/Jazz/Kiss) or their CD collection.

These days, the available choice has increased hugely; a listener may now receive all existing FM channels plus tens of new channels that are broadcast on DAB, which includes 24x7 services that play 70s, 80s, 90s music, Asian-language, Russian-language, French-language, Polish-language, Tamil, Greek, Punjabi, rock music, gold, rolling news, stations targeted at gay people, kids, Christians, Muslims.

In other words, the choice of listening has increased hugely, and with every passing day we have to fight to compete with all these new services that are each attempting to

Research shows that fewer and fewer young people are using radio as a method of communication as they are increasingly using mobile digital media such as social media (twitter, facebook, instagram etc.) for communication, information and entertainment.

The internet and social media has also completely redefined the meaning of ‘local’. There is no longer a rallying point for ‘local’.

# The Presentation

We need to be reminded about what makes a good radio programme. Some of the basics are listed here. But first, we’ll start as we will finish.

Before you open the microphone, always ask yourself

Is it relevant?

Let’s expand on that.

## Radio is intimate

Whereas many thousands of listeners may be listening, while you’re on-air you should only ever be talking to **one person**. Please ensure that when you are talking on-air you are addressing an individual. Try and have a clear idea of who that person is. Refer to the listener in the second person singular (“you”) not the plural (“you guys”, “you people”, “all of you”).

* “How are you today?” feels friendly to the listener.
* “Hello everyone out there!” makes the listener feel disassociated with you. You are setting up a division between you and them, which does not exist in the mind of your listener.

If you co-present a programme, your job is much more difficult, in fact it’s exceptionally difficult. Not only does it mean you have to consider a conversation with a second physical person, you must ensure that your focus is on the unseen audience member, it also means increased amounts of preparation and planning, which we will cover later. “In studio” observations should be avoided, as this is not about the listener.

Your programme is not about you.
It is only ever about the listener.

Regardless of whether you are alone or with another presenter or guest, you must always **respect your listener**. It is important that you treat them as an individual, an equal, a friend; they should not feel preached to or patronized, and definitely not insulted or belittled.

## If you fail to plan, you plan to fail

**Preparation and planning is the most important part of delivering your programme.**

I will say that again.

**Preparation and planning is the most important part of delivering your programme.**

Planning your programme is critical. An unprepared programme is obvious to spot; it sounds clumsy and lacks direction. You are taking your listener on a journey, so ensure that you have a clear map of where you intend to go during your programme so that the listener wants to come with you.

It’s worth noting that even the most chaotic radio programmes like “I’m Sorry I Haven’t A Clue” (Radio 4), Chris Evans (Radio 2) and Chris Moyles (Radio X) spend a huge amount of time planning each programme to allow them to sound spontaneous on-air. It may sound like they just turn up, open the mic and trust their luck, but every single thing they say is carefully planned. **Planning your show is the silver bullet to doing a good turn.**

If you have guests on your programme, ensure you have done your research and can confidently introduce them to your audience, otherwise your listener will immediately recognise that you are unprepared and you will sound mal-informed, unprofessional and incapable.

## The Hour

Creating a “clock” or running order for your programme is advisable. This way you can plan your journey and stick to it. It will also make it so much easier for you to announce (“forward promote”) what’s coming up later in the show. This is an integral part of radio presenting; it is your job to get our listeners to listen longer by sign-posting what is going to happen next and later.

Failing to signpost what’s happening next is like asking your listeners to follow you on a mystery journey, one that your listener can abandon at any time by simply turning off the radio.

The following should be a standard for inclusion in all our shows.

* Forward promote what you will do in your programme.
* Forward promote the next programme.
* Forward promote other programmes, features or station promotions.

Please use the “prospects” system on the website to identify and deliver what interesting content is coming up on other programmes.

## The Link

Just as you would plan the content of your programme and each of your hours, please ensure you have a roadmap for **every single one** of your links.

Setting guidelines on how your link will begin and end will allow you to keep on track and not sound disjointed, unplanned or messy.

**Before you open your microphone you must have a good idea of what you are going to say**, why you are saying it and whether it’s relevant to your audience. It will help you keep track of what’s going through your mind and will stop you from losing your listener’s interest. It will showcase you as a professional broadcaster.

Just like the construction of a house (where the foundations need to be laid before you build the walls), the construction of each link is important. Each and every link must satisfy at least two of the following criteria.

* Local (relevant to people who live in the St Albans area)
* Helpful
* Friendly
* Informative

## Link Duration

There is no set duration for the perfect link but, like watching someone’s wedding speech, listeners will get bored with lengthy, non-engaging or irrelevant presentations.

As a rule of thumb, in a music programme, we should consider a link which goes beyond two minutes to be too long. If you prepare properly beforehand, you will be able to say the same thing with fewer words while focussing on getting across the main points.

**Preparing the one thing that you want to say and knowing how you are going to end the link is essential** to keeping your links to the right length.

## If you have nothing to say…

…don’t say it! A listener will never judge you for what you don’t say. If you really haven’t prepared your link or genuinely have nothing of value to share, just play the next record until you are ready.

“Don’t be a bore, less is more!”

## One Thought Per Link

A conversation with someone who keeps going off on tangents is difficult and eventually tiring to follow; even more so with radio. **Each link should only really deliver one piece of information.** If you have too many “threads”, “themes” or “subjects” each time you open the microphone you are at serious risk of losing your audience.

## Themes and Threads

It is advisable although not essential that radio programmes have a thread; a story, subject or theme that can be followed through the hour, or entire programme. Like an advertising campaign, where one commercial is not enough, a comment or observation on your programme should run throughout a predetermined amount of time.

“In the next hour we’ll be talking about the potholes on the roads in St Albans …” is much more efficient than a single throw away comment you make on subject. Especially as different listeners tune in all the time.

It is also important that content in your show has a theme because it is easier to follow, just like the ‘journey’ mentioned earlier. It will develop as you deliver your comments and it encourages increased responses from your listeners. Audience interaction (whether your show is live or not) is always very encouraging.

Most importantly, radio listeners are usually not hanging on your every word, so you must frequently tell them what you are doing.

## Tell them, tell them, tell them!

Have you noticed that certain commercial radio stations tell listeners the name of the radio station every few minutes? There’s a reason. Radio listeners generally don’t pay attention.

Radio programmes are a mostly passive experience; it’s on in the background and to get the message across you need to repeat it.

* Tell them you’re going to do it
* Tell them you’re still going to do it
* Tell them you’re about to do it
* Tell them you are doing it
* (Assuming it’s appropriate) Tell them you’ve done it

## Standard stuff

Please ensure you reference the name of the radio station. If people are listening it’s because they like what you do and if you want them to listen to you again, and you’ll want to remind them which station to tune into.

Depending on the time of day or type of programme it may be appropriate to tell them (usually in the mornings) the time and the weather ahead. It’s advisable to tell the listener what’s ‘coming up’ on your show, or the next show at the beginning of your link. “Travel news on the way…”, “More details about tomorrow’s gig at the Trestle Arts Base coming up…” or “I’ll play Adele in a moment…”.

## Beginning, Middle and End

Whether you prepare it or not, your link will have a beginning, a middle and an end. It is therefore best to know what happens at these three points ahead of delivering them on-air.

Like “One Link, One Thought”, having a single thread through your links should ensure you are able to easily stick to this fairly standard practice in link construction.

* Perform the ‘standard stuff’ as mentioned above of, say, identifying the radio station, giving the time, the weather and forward promoting what’s coming up
* Attract
* Deliver
* End

This simple structure should prevent you from going off ‘round the houses’ and losing your audience. This is particularly important if there is more than one of you in the studio. Ensure your co-presenter knows the roadmap to the link, and to prevent the link overrunning, make sure that they know what the “end” is going to be.

## Interviews

Radio Verulam has many interviewees throughout the week and good interviewing is an art form which seems deceptively simple. In fact, delivering a great interview involves many different skills.

The golden rule for good interviews is simple.

DO YOUR RESEARCH!

That is the single most important thing you can do when interviewing. But, to take it a little further, here are some other tips.

* If possible, try to meet the guest informally before the interview. This will help by making them more relaxed. They will be naturally tense if the first time you meet them, you are waving a microphone.
* Try to avoid scripted questions. It will sound like an interrogation.
* Make rough notes of the direction you want the interview to go. Guests’ answers will often create a new set of questions for you to ask. If you’ve scripted your questions you run the risk of missing the most important answer to follow up.
* Ensure your guests are relaxed before and during the show, chat to them when the microphone is off.
* Ask before you start the interview how the guest prefers to be referred to – first name, surname or formal title such as “Sir”.
* Ask beforehand what NOT to ask, because some things are too sensitive to share on the radio.
* Use open, not closed questions (e.g. How? Why? Tell me about… etc.)
* Don’t be too formal, try and relax and “have a conversation”.
* If an interviewee responds with one-word answers (“Yes”, “No” or “Okay”), it means firstly that you have asked the wrong question. Get them to qualify their answer by asking, “So tell me more...”

## Local is Focal

**Being ‘local’, or talking about local matters is the one single theme that is likely to be of interest to your audience; it is a core part of Radio Verulam’s personality.**

Whether it is a link about last night’s Saints match, an observation you made while walking down St Peter’s Street or a comment over a recent council decision, it’s likely to be appreciated by your audience.

Even if you are presenting a purely music based programme, please ensure that there is some local content woven into the show. “Lily Allen’s new song is coming up next” is not as engaging as “A few tickets are still available for Lily Allen, live at the Alban Arena next week, but if you can’t wait for that, I’ll play her new song, next”.

## New listeners are tuning in ALL the time

Many people construct their radio programmes as if people start listening at the beginning of the programme and continue all the way until the end.

Unlike television or mixed-content speech radio stations like Radio 4 (unless it’s a Breakfast show where a radio alarm clock is set to a specific time) this is rarely the case. People will be tuning in and out of your programme for its duration.

Therefore, you should be continually trying to keep people’s attention throughout your programme and never assume they have heard something you’ve just done.

## Look forward, not back

It’s very tempting to ‘back announce’ songs that you have already played. “That was Stevie Wonder, and before that you heard The Beatles and Level 42.”.

Bearing in mind that the listener may have only just tuned in, you will want to tell them what they can expect from your programme to keep them listening. It is bad practice to revert to things that have happened in the past. Forward promotion (as explained above) should always be a consideration in your programme.

The reason why there is news every hour, a high frequency of the same commercials and a high repetition of songs on some stations is because **new listeners are tuning in all the time**.

## Contact us

By all means encourage interaction in your programme, but you **must give listeners a reason** to get in contact. If you are unable to give listeners a genuine reason to call you, send a text, Tweet or add you as a ‘Friend’ on Facebook, don’t bother.

* “If you want to get in touch with the programme, send us a text…” is not likely to get a response.
* “If you also heard the thunder last night, get in touch and tell us what makes you scared.” is much more likely to get a response.

## Please don’t say...

### “It’s all gone wrong…”

Never draw attention to any mistakes you make or technical difficulties. Almost certainly the listener hasn’t noticed. We appreciate that it’s a natural temptation to apologise for errors, but please just move on. A listener only knows what you tell them and will neither be interested in or even know that you have pressed the wrong button or forgotten something.

Definitely do not give a running commentary of your difficulties.

Avoid “in jokes” or comments on matters within the studio. The listener will not understand. The radio listener is concentrating on their current activity; they are not visualising you in a radio studio. And in fact, most people have no idea what a radio studio is; it’s simply not part of your listener’s world of reference.

### “We’ll be back...”

There are two inexcusable phrases that many people attribute to television.

* “We’ll be back after the break”; and
* “Welcome back after the break”

Never use these phrases. Not only does it assume that your audience goes away from your programme, it actually gives people a reason to go away.

Equally, we must be mindful that the commercial or advertising messages in your programme are the businesses that keep the radio station on-air. It is standard practice to ensure listeners stay with your programme during a commercial break so tell them what’s coming up (features, a competition or songs). Never refer to a commercial break.

### “I am live...”.

…when you are not. Likewise, please avoid soliciting for immediate response on a pre-recorded programme.

### “Goodbye.”

Please, never say “Goodbye” at the end of your programme. It gives listeners a cue to switch off or switch over and as such is it disrespectful to the presenter who follows you. Thanking your listeners for listening, is of course acceptable. “Thanks for listening today, coming up next is treat for music lovers…”.

## The Golden Rule

Always ask yourself this question about anything you do.

“Why do people listen to my programme? Rather than another programme, their own music collection, their iPod, or Spotify?”

It’s because you are **interesting** to listen to with **relevant** information and **engaging** conversation delivered in a **professional** manner surrounded by **great music**.

It’s stuff that is appealing to your audience, not what is appealing to you.

Or, in short:

“Is it relevant?”

If it is, do it.

If it isn’t, just play another song.

# Music Policy

During daytime hours Radio Verulam plays upbeat, familiar, credible music from the last five decades. What does this mean?

### Upbeat

The mood of the station is positive, optimistic and bright, and this should be reflected in our music. In daytime, your listener has the radio on as accompaniment while they do other things; shopping, driving, cooking, doing the ironing. The listener wants entertainment while they do this, and too many downbeat, mid-tempo, mellow tracks or ballads do not give the energy that we want to come across over the speakers.

### Familiar

Familiarity of music is critical; it makes the difference between a listener staying for just a few seconds versus staying with us for many minutes at a time. Take the ‘dip in’ test – pick a station at random and see whether you recognize the track they are playing in the first 10 seconds; listeners are by definition conservative about their music and need to be introduced to new music with care and consideration.

### Credible

We’ll play music by artists with a credible track record that are known for producing good music with longevity. We will not play novelty records, unknown cover versions, obscure B-sides, album versions, or non-radio mixes. It’s not entirely about chart position, either; remember that ‘Mr Blobby’ was a number 1 too!

### Why don’t we play new music?

New music is difficult; while a new song may be upbeat and credible, new music tracks, by their very nature, lack immediate familiarity. It very often takes a while before tracks ‘grow on us’, and this usually only happens when the track has been played on popular TV shows. It is not our mission to break new music, and there’s no expectation on the part of our listeners that we should.

Bear in mind that radio stations that **do** introduce new music (Radio 1, Radio 2) do so only after very, very careful consideration by a large panel of music scheduling professionals, and even then there’s no guarantee that the track will go on to become really familiar. We simply do not have the resources to do this, so there is no point in making a rod for our own back.

### But I’ve played the same thing as I did yesterday/last week!

Remember that **listeners are tuning in and out all the time.** The same person that listened to you at 2pm yesterday is not the same as those who are tuned in at 3.30pm today, so it is highly unlikely that they will notice.

Repetition is not a bad thing; by playing a narrower playlist we are establishing a reputation for the music we **do** play, which is not possible if we have a very broad playlist with a huge number of tracks. We as those who are involved with Radio Verulam only notice repetition because we are so close to the mechanics of the station and we listen far more consciously than our regular listener, who probably doesn’t even notice.

### Policy

If you present a daytime show **you should stick to the music selected on the Myriad log**. The Myriad log contains music that has been selected that satisfies the criteria of being upbeat, familiar and credible, and it has been scheduled in order that each track is rotated evenly and according to a number of rules. These rules exist to prevent the same track appearing more than once in the space of two hours, or the same artist within the same hour, for example.

Please do not break this policy without a good reason.

### When to break this policy

You can break this policy in order to reflect current events in the news (either to mark the event, or remove tracks that may be inappropriate) or as part of features that make your show more relevant.

For example, on the news of the death of David Bowie or Prince, we reflected the public mood by playing more of their music, and we should do so again.

Perhaps you need to change one or two tracks to reflect a theme of your show, a topic perhaps; this is fine, but please do not change more than one track in a row, and never more than one or two tracks within a three-hour show.

You should also substitute tracks to reflect events in the news if the scheduled music may be considered inappropriate. Be constantly on the lookout for music that may not be appropriate in the light of recent events in the news, especially if those songs are scheduled immediately after a news bulletin.

For example, in June 2016, there was a mass shooting at a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida. The news was the lead article in the news bulletins for days afterwards as it was one of the worst mass shootings in US history. Consider whether the tracks you are going to play contain lyrics or a title that may not be appropriate; examples in this case may include “Bang Bang” by B A Robertson, “Murder On the Dancefloor” by Sophie Ellis-Bextor, and so on. The golden rule; **if in doubt, leave it out.**

**Never substitute a track simply because you want to hear it**; the show is about your listeners, not about you. As soon as you play music just because *you* enjoy it, you dilute the impact of the music selection we play for the whole station, which is ultimately damaging for all of us. On a practical level, if you swap tracks you might play a track which was played recently (or will be played soon), and in any case, **remember that everything we do is for, about and because of our listener, and not us**.

### Put it in context!

If you play a track by a local artist, always signpost the track as being that of a local artist before and after, and use the track as a way to highlight the other programmes that feature music by local artists on Radio Verulam (The Parsons Knows Monday at 7pm, West Herts Drivetime Drivetime Sessions, Wednesdays 5.30pm).

Remember that **local is focal**; a track by local artists gives you a way to immediately reference our local area and all the many highly talented local bands and artists that we have the pleasure to enjoy.

### Please don’t criticize the music on-air

If you have a comment or concern about the music we play, please address it to the station manager directly. Please **do not** criticize the music on-air; listeners have no concept of how the music is selected or scheduled and don’t know (and indeed, do not need to know) that it’s not you selecting it.

# Local News

We broadcast local news bulletins after the national news each hour between 0602 and 1802, Monday to Friday.

### Overview

News on radio is a completely different beast from news copy you read on websites or in printed newspapers. Newspaper and website copy can contain far more detail because the reader is able to re-read anything that s/he has not understood and, crucially, readers are able to skip through articles at will.

On radio, listeners only have one chance to hear the story and understand it, and have no way to skip on to the next one, or on to something more interesting. Most people who are listening to the radio are doing so while doing other things; driving, do the ironing; washing-up, working at the computer. We are not the focus of their attention; the radio is probably just on in the background. So **economy of words** and **brevity** are critical.

So, the goal is to tell a story using the fewest number of words that you possibly can. Any more than three or maybe four lines per story the listeners will not be able to remember what the story was about by the time you have reached the end.

**Economy of words** is everything; ensure that every single word in your final script can justify its place. Never use three words where one will do.

### The So What? Test

Once you’ve found a potential story, read it through and ask yourself “So What?”. Why is this story important for us to broadcast? What implications will it have for our audience? If you can’t answer that – if you can’t explain WHY the story is interesting, then it’s probably not worth running.

### The News vs. What’s In The News

A good phrase to remember is “Tell me what’s in the news, don’t tell me the news.” This isn’t *Newsnight*, and we don’t have the resources available to the BBC. I only need to know a flavor of what’s happening, not the full details of everything happening.

### A basic formula

Using this formula, you should be able to get three or four stories in a single bulletin in about 60 seconds. A typical reading speed is 3 words per second, equating to about 180 words you need to write for the whole bulletin.

* Browse through hertsad.co.uk and the prospects system.
* Pick three or four stories that all pass the So What? test.
* Read the articles thoroughly and understand them.
* Write three sentences that sum up the facts about the story using the fewest words that you possibly can.
* The first sentence should be entirely self-contained; you should be able to read the first line on its own and STILL be able to understand the story.
* The second sentence should provide a little more detail or information.
* The third sentence should introduce a new fact or a new angle.
* As you write the script READ the story out loud. It is the only way you can work out how easy or difficult the story will be to read at the microphone.

### Style Guide

#### The basics

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Duration | No more than 60 seconds. |
| Number of stories | 3 to 4 |
| Incue | “And this is (name) with the news for St Albans” |
| Outcue | None |
|  |  |

Use the **active voice** – “Lorry drivers blockaded the port…” instead of “The port was blockaded by lorry drivers…”

**Ages** – “Martin Brown, 39, of Acacia Road, St Albans”. No, this is a newspaper-ism. “The 39-year old man from Acacia Road…” (but, see the So What? test. Is his age important?)

**Use everyday language** - “Hertfordshire Police” are just “the police”. Ditto “East of England Ambulance service” (“an ambulance”), and “Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue” (“the fire brigade”). When standing in a pub, do you tell your friend that you were “pulled over by Hertfordshire police”?

**Suicide** – Do not run any story about suicide.

**Make it personal**, if appropriate – in the top line of the story, use personal pronouns to make the story sound more personal to us. “The cost of filling your car is going up…”, “If you were affected by the St Albans Sinkhole then…”

**Direct speech** – If you’re adapting newspaper articles, as a general rule, don’t read quotes contained in the article on-air. It does not bring the same feeling of authenticity that a direct clip of the person in question has, and it’s very easy through inflection to give a different spin to the words they actually said.

### Examples

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Website copy | Radio Copy |
| Officers from the Herts Police specialist child online safeguarding team arrested a 25-year-old man from St Albans last Wednesday, April 20.The man, who works at Busy Bees nursery within the grounds of St Albans City Hospital, has been questioned on suspicion of inciting a teenager to engage in a sexual act, and released on police bail until July 22, pending further investigation by the police.As a result, Ofsted decided to temporarily suspend the registration of the nursery, an action labelled as ‘extremely disappointing’ by Busy Bees.The centre was closed for one day – Monday – with 100 children having to be relocated to the nursery provider’s other local nurseries.However the suspension was soon lifted, allowing the centre to reopen as usual on Tuesday (26).Ofsted press officer Emma Bowden-Wright said that it had suspended the registration of the early years setting while an “urgent investigation” was carried out.She added: “When it comes to the early years, the safety of young children is paramount. Decisions to suspend registrations are never taken lightly.”Ofsted did not respond to further questions in relation to either the brief closure, or the education watchdog’s investigation. But, its findings are expected to be published shortly.A man who is a member of an online vigilante group contacted the Herts Advertiser about the group’s work, and to alert the paper to last week’s arrest.He said that alleged evidence had been handed over to the police, after a decoy account was set up by the online Facebook group.The man, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said: “We are all vigilantes, but we aren’t here to cause trouble – we are here to protect children.”For legal reasons, the Herts Police would not comment on the actions of the group.When the nursery was shut at the start of the week, a Busy Bees spokesman confirmed that a member of staff at the hospital-based centre had been arrested “in connection with an incident that took place away from our nursery.“We are treating the situation seriously and in accordance with our procedures have contacted all the relevant agencies.“The safety and care of children at our nurseries is and always will be our first priority. As this continues to be the subject of a formal police investigation, and for reasons of confidentiality, we are unable to provide any further information.”After the nursery had successfully appealed against its closure, Marg Randles, managing director of Busy Bees, said on Tuesday that parents were relieved at Ofsted’s decision to lift its suspension, as it had been a “major feat to find places in our neighbouring Busy Bees nurseries for over 100 children”.She praised the nursery manager and staff for working ‘tirelessly’ over the weekend to ensure each child was looked after during the one-day closure.Marg said that although Ofsted’s decision to temporarily suspend the registration was “disappointing, we understand that Ofsted has a duty of care to children and needed some time to investigate further”. | A man from St Albans is being questioned by police on child grooming charges.The 25-year-old man who works at the Busy Bees Nursery at the city hospital has been released on bail.The nursery was closed on Monday meaning around 100 children had to attend a different centre. |

# Weather

‘Fixed’ weather bulletins on Radio Verulam are broadcast at the following times.

* Mondays to Fridays 0630, 0659, 0730, 0759, 0830, 0859
* Mondays to Fridays – hourly at xx59 between 0959 and 1859
* Saturdays 0659, 0730, 0759, 0830, 0859
* Saturdays – hourly at xx59 between 0959 and 1759
* Sundays – hourly at xx59 between 0659 and 1759

That said, during breakfast and in the mornings, it’s fine (and actually a good idea) to mention quickly the weather at other times as well as part of a link in the show.

*“Lovely and sunny here in St Albans this morning, but feeling a bit chilly – this is Radio Verulam, and here’s Coldplay…”*

### Technical things

When you read the weather up to the news, here’s how it works.

1. Fire the weather bed at around xx:59:30
2. The weather intro will say “St Albans Weather”
3. Read the weather
4. When you’re done (which should be around xx:59:47) fire the news in jingle
5. At around xx:59:55, open the IRN fader.

### Writing the weather

Weather is an important part of our programming because it is an important part of our listener’s daily lives. The reason people need to know is that it informs both their immediate decisions (Should I take an umbrella? Do I need a coat? Do I need a jumper?) and their short-term plans (Will I be able to have a BBQ this weekend? Will I be able to do some gardening this weekend?)

Therefore, make the weather as **useful** as you possibly can, to help the listeners in their choices.

### Basic structure

**No more than 15 seconds.** It should be perfectly possible to deliver the “now-cast” and the forecast for tonight and a bit of tomorrow in 15 seconds (roughly 45 words).

* What’s it like now (if you’re live in the studio)
* What will it be like tonight
* What will it be like tomorrow

### Not too technical!

Meteorology is an entire branch of physics, with its own set of jargon and technical terminology. None of that is required within a weather read. This is not the shipping forecast, and we’re not just delivering a list of data points. For example, don’t mention wind speeds or directions (what exactly do winds of 30 mph from the south-west feel like?) – just “windy” or “breezy” will do.

Instead, focus on how the weather **feels** to us. Is it cloudy? Overcast? Windy? Cold? Warm? Sunny? Muggy? Snowing? Raining? There’s really a very tiny vocabulary of words you need to describe the overall sense of the weather without having to mention explicit data.

### Make it immediate!

If you’re live, you can capitalise on the immediacy of radio to show just how accurate and up-to-date your weather really is, which shows the listener that you are connected with their world. There are dozens of websites available to tell you the weather forecast, but there is simply no substitute for **looking out of the window!** Please don’t slavishly read off the BBC or Met Office weather websites; if they say it’s sunny and there are rain spots on the window, you will sound foolish and disconnected.

### Make it relative!

“Slightly warmer than today” and “feeling cooler than today” or “becoming windy overnight” is **far more useful** to a listener than explicit temperature readings or wind speeds.

### Mention place names

Keep it local. Mentioning place names connect you with people in those places, and marks you as someone who knows about the places in the area. Have a list of these places to hand (shopping centres, schools, streets, churches, parks, villages, universities, pubs) and rotate them.

## Here’s what bad looks like

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| And now the weather. It is overcast with near-total cloud coverage and a temperature of 12 degrees Celsius (that’s 53 fahrenheit) and winds from the east at 5 miles per hour.Tonight a few millimeters of rain is expected to fall from around 6 o’clock, clearing to the east by tomorrow, when the temperatures will reach 15 degrees Celsius. | * Wordy. The introductory jingle will already say “weather”, so don’t say it again. 59 words = 20 seconds to read.
* Technical and full of data. “near-total cloud coverage”, C to F conversions, wind speeds and directions.
* No locality. This could be anywhere.
* Disconnected. Doesn’t sound like the reader is **sharing the experience** with the listener of the current weather.
 |

## Here’s what good looks like

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Cloudy and cool at the moment here in St Albans; currently at Christopher Place it’s 12 degrees.A little rain on the way this evening, but tomorrow looks dry and slightly warmer than today. | * Concise. We’ve got a whole 24 hour forecast across in 34 words (about 11 seconds to read).
* Focused on perceptions, not data – “Cloudy and cool”.
* Local – “here in St Albans” and Christopher Place mentioned.
* Immediate – Current temperature reading makes it sound accurate and gives a sense that it’s right up to date.
* Useful - “A little rain this evening” (so I need a brolly)
* Relative – “warmer than today”
 |

# Travel

## When

We broadcast a traffic and travel bulletin at the following times.

* Mondays to Fridays 0720, 0740, 0820, 0840, 0940, 1040, 1140, 1340, 1440, 1540, 1620, 1640, 1720, 1740, 1820, 1840
* Saturday 0740, 0840, 0940, 1040, 1140, 1240, 1340, 1440, 1540, 1640, 1740

Outside of these times, you should broadcast traffic and travel information at the next suitable junction if something major is happening and you are able to (i.e. if the show is live).

## Why

For a number of years, traffic and travel has been radio’s “killer app”. Unlike any other medium radio is able to get relevant information to the right people right now; radio and traffic information go hand-in-hand.

If you’ve ever done traffic and travel information for more than a few shifts, you will know that for 360 out of 365 days in a typical year, traffic and travel bulletins are mostly the same; the usual queues in the normal places on the roads, there might be one or two train problems, but broadly speaking, one morning rush hour is much like any other.

However, it’s those five days a year where we have the chance to make our name, and traffic and travel information becomes THE MOST IMPORTANT THING ON RADIO VERULAM. These are the five days a year (on average) when there’s snowfall, or a huge incident that closes the M25 for hours, or a significant train problem like industrial action or a derailment.

This is where local radio comes into its own. National radio like Radio 2 or 5 Live cannot hope to cover the granular level of detail that our listeners want during times of significant, widespread transport disruption. Even Heart or Three Counties -- with their remit to serve a large area of the home counties -- cannot do what we can for St Albans. On such days, listeners actively start moving up and down the dial to find a station that will give them the local information that they need. We need them to land on us, and we need them to stay.

## How

Nuts and bolts time. How do you prepare a traffic and travel bulletin on Radio Verulam?

### Format

For a typical bulletin, **start with the thing that is causing most problems for the greatest number of people**. This is normally always the motorways, because they are the roads with the highest capacity. Then, move on to the trunk routes and A-roads, and then to local routes around the city and other towns.

Break this rule if there is a significant problem in the city itself, or if the A405 is closed because of an accident, or maybe all the trains are suspended at St Albans City station. Remember that unexpected problems always trump “situation normal”.

The following is a suggested template to follow for a typical rush hour with no real unexpected problems.

* Motorways – M1, M25 and A1M
* Trunk routes – A405, A1081
* Local roads – St Peter’s Street, London Road, High Street, Hatfield Road, Harpenden Road
* Trains – St Albans City and Abbey Stations
* London - Tubes
* Luton Airport

## Top Tips

#### Know Your Patch!

Nothing is a bigger giveaway that you don’t know what you’re talking about if you don’t sound confident, sincere and knowledgeable about the places, roads and areas that you’re mentioning. And the only way to be confident about this is to **know your patch**. Go and explore

#### Know what it’s like to travel

Not much you can do with this if you can’t drive for any reason, but you’re trying to help out motorists and commuters. You will sound so much more empathetic and connected if you understand what it’s like to be a commuter or a driver in our area.

#### Know what it’s like to be stuck in traffic

Go and find a traffic jam and get deliberately stuck in it. I am not kidding. You might be sitting in a nice air-conditioned studio, but the people you are trying to reach are sitting in a traffic queue trying to get home for their dinner. It’s boring, frustrating and leaves you feeling helpless and angry.

# LEGAL AND REGULATORY

It is very important that you understand the legal and regulatory guidelines.

Contravention of the law or regulations could have serious consequences for the station, its Directors and for you.

If you don’t feel you have a good enough understanding, please contact programme.controller@radioverulam.com

## GENERAL

We are regulated in almost exactly the same way as any commercial and BBC radio station in the UK. It is a condition of our licence (i.e. our FM capability) that we abide by all relevant laws and regulations.

Broadly, we need to be aware of:

 Law

 Primarily libel, defamation, contempt of court

 Regulations

 Ofcom code, ASA code

 Reputation

 Balance and appropriateness

## LAW

### LIBEL

You may libel someone if you do or say something which:

 Holds somebody up to hatred, ridicule or contempt

 Causes them to be shunned or avoided

 Lowers them in the eyes of right-thinking people

 Damages them in their office, trade or profession

**In general, avoid unpleasant things being said or inferred about people**

These are NOT defences against a libel action:

 It was innuendo

 I didn’t name the person

 It was unintentional

 Everyone else was doing it

 It was a joke

Libel can also occur if:

 A caller libels someone

 An interviewee libels someone

Try to avoid this happening and if it does, terminate the call or interview and make a correction.

### CONTEMPT OF COURT

Contempt of Court may occur if we create a substantial risk of serious impediment or prejudice to active proceedings. This is viewed very seriously by judges.

Once someone has been arrested or a warrant for arrest has been issued, you are at risk. Nobody need have been charged.

These statements all would qualify as contempt of Court because the allegations have not been decided upon by the Court:

 “I see they’ve arrested the man who attacked the woman in St Peter’s Street”

 “The murderer appeared in court today”

 “His victim was in court today”

**In general, never say something about an ongoing investigation where arrests have been made or a Court case unless you are reading a report prepared by a journalist**

## ELECTIONS

We are required during local or national election periods to achieve balance between major parties.

If a candidate from one party takes part in programme, others must also be given the chance.

Additional Ofcom rules apply – no candidate may be a presenter for the period of the election. If you are a candidate or likely to be, please inform programme.controller@radioverulam.com

## OTHER AREAS

Children and young people (under 18) in court cases must not be identified by name or by anything which might make it possible with other information to identify them

Ditto for victims of sex crimes

Do not comment on “spent” convictions. If in doubt, don’t mention a conviction.

## REGULATORY

You should familiarise yourself with the Ofcom code for broadcasters (search online for Ofcom code). In summary be aware of:

 Protecting children

 Inappropriate content, watershed

 Harm and Offence

 Violence, Suicide, Hypnotism, Exorcism, Occult should never be promoted

 Crime

 Inciting crime is a serious regulatory offence

 Religion

 Promoting religious views or seeking recruits to a particular religion is not permitted

 Impartiality, accuracy and balance

 Steer clear of contentious subjects OR read the code and seek more guidance if presenting potentially contentious material

 Fairness

 Informed consent to interviews

 Always make sure someone knows they are on air, do not undertake pranks like “wind up” calls; they are fraught with legal and regulatory risk, and in any case don’t fit our station style

 Privacy

 People are entitled to privacy regarding their personal affairs. Only where those personal affairs tangle with exposure in the public interest might there be a defence for invading privacy but this is an area for the professionals; avoid it.

# CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Radio Verulam volunteers are a talented group of individuals and we want to celebrate that talent. However, Radio Verulam must be compliant with the Ofcom Broadcast Code. [[3]](#footnote-3) Therefore, in accordance with Section 9 of the code, Radio Verulam has a policy of not allowing self-promotion for commercial gain on air. If you are presenting or assisting on a program, you must not personally self- promote any business or related product or service (i.e. book) on air whereby you may benefit from commercial gain.

Exceptions

* You are permitted to be a guest on an unrelated show to promote things you may be doing, running workshops, promoting events, selling books.
* You are permitted to promote/celebrate the achievements of other presenters on your show provided that it is normal to mention such events/businesses of others on the show
* When interviewing guests, such as an author or musician, where you might want to relate to the guest, it is fine to mention that you are an author or musician in general terms.
* Specialty shows may run gig guides or discuss workshops which could potentially result in a direct or indirect benefit to the presenter. In such instances, the presenter will need to ensure to promote things fairly, so for instance we just can’t promote one band/pub and not others that may be in the area.
* Presenters and volunteers may also be asked to host/MC events as individuals, for which they receive compensation; again, in such instances, the presenter will need to be ensure to promote such events fairly.
* Promoting charity events, volunteer organisations or fundraisers you are involved with is fine.
* Be mindful as well of social media, using Radio Verulam as a promotional tool to promote your own business, event, or product is not good practice.
* When meeting with members of the community, potential sponsors and stakeholders in your Radio Verulam capacity, it is not good practice to self-promote.

If in doubt leave it out.

Obligations

* Comply with the RV policy
* Disclose any potential conflict of interests to the Volunteer Manager who will provide guidance, ahead of time.
* If you hear something on air that you think may be crossing the line please report it to the volunteer manager.
1. <http://www.stalbansreview.co.uk/news/10317642.St_Albans_is_5th_happiest_place_to_live_in_the_UK/?ref=rss>
http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2634559/Not-grim-north-Harrogate-beats-northern-towns-including-Stockport-Inverness-named-happiest-place-live-UK.html [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://www.stalbanscathedral.org/news/archive/2014/the-city-of-st-albans-claims-the-original-hot-cross-bun [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. https://www.ofcom.org.uk/\_\_data/assets/pdf\_file/0005/100103/broadcast-code-april-2017.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-3)