

Thank you for giving your time to Forest Talk. We know our service provides a vital link to the community for visually impaired people in our area and your contribution really makes a difference.

We aim to provide a professional, good quality service even though we are amateurs. Having been in operation since 1984 and by sharing experience with other talking newspapers in Gloucestershire, we have gained plenty of experience of what works for our listeners and what doesn't.

This document provides hints, tips and guidance on how you can help us provide excellent quality recordings for our listeners. We regularly ask our listeners for their views on our recordings and have taken their comments into account when producing these hints and tips. We hope you find them useful.

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General information about Forest Talk

All new listeners who join Forest Talk are gifted a suitable flash drive player for free. This means our listeners can play their weekly memory stick on a compatible device.

Each week we send listeners a plastic, Velcro sealed wallet containing a memory stick. The listener returns the wallet and stick to us when they have finished listening to the recording.

General information about the wallets

- Each listener has two wallets in circulation: a black and a yellow. This allows the listener to have time to receive, listen and return the stick each week.
- The listener returns the wallet to us by removing their address label and placing it inside the wallet with their memory stick.
- Each address label has either a yellow dot or a black dot to represent the colour of the wallet it belongs to (this helps if the label becomes separated from its wallet).
- Teams 1 and 3 send yellow wallets. Teams 2 and 4 send black wallets. This never changes.

Jobs to be done when arriving at FT for a recording

In addition to creating the weekly recording there are a few admin type activities your team need to complete when you arrive at the studio!

- **Enter building and deactivate alarm.** If you don't know the keycode for the alarm contact a keyholder (see the volunteer directory for details). For security reasons the code is not included in this document. Each team has one key, usually held by the sound engineer.
- **Set up the recording room.** This is usually done by the sound engineer but furniture may need to be moved so he/she will appreciate a hand with this.
- **Process the returned wallets** (see below for more details).
- **Check for notes from other teams or the committee.** For example, we may need to remove a listener's wallet or change an address (see below for more details).

Dealing with returned wallets

Each team has to deal with the returned wallets at their recording session.

The aim is, at the end of your session, to place a sack of filled wallets of your team's colour left in the front foyer for collection by Royal Mail on Monday morning. (For example, team 1 send yellow wallets. They fill all yellow wallets and place them in the sack. Any black wallets are emptied with the listener's address labels facing out and placed in the bin for team 2 to use the following week.)

- Locate the swing bin from the front foyer room. This contains all the wallets returned during the week.
- Before you deal with the wallets refer to the Procedure Guide or Listener Updates folders (found in the sliding door cupboard) to see if any wallets need to be removed or amended. Check any previous notes of action taken and update with your own action, team and date.
- Remove memory sticks from all the wallets and open each memory stick. This makes it easier to copy the sticks at the end of the session. Place the sticks in the large clear plastic box for use later.
- Deal with any correspondence as you find it in wallets (guidance follows below).
- Place recipients' address labels in the front pocket of wallet.
- Check that the colour of the dot on the address label corresponds with the wallet colour. If no dot, or wrong colour dot, amend as appropriate.
- Replace any damaged wallets. The spares box is in sliding door cupboard.

- Stock pile the wallets your team is sending out ready for use at the end of the recording session.
- Place following week's wallets in the swing bin and return to entrance hall.
- If you are removing a wallet from circulation (because we have been notified to do so), place the address label in plastic pocket at back of Procedure Guide (orange folder) together with any accompanying note.
- Your team will need a Royal Mail sack. These are stored under the sliding door cupboard. If you see that we are getting short of these please contact the Secretary so he/she can collect some more from a sorting office.

Correspondence found in wallets

Money

Your editor needs to acknowledge receipt (but not the amount) and express thanks on the recording. Please send the donation to our Treasurer, Mr David Edwards. Stamped addressed envelopes are provided for this purpose in the sliding door cupboard. Please send it with a note to David explaining who the money came from.

Notes

- If we receive feedback about FT pass this to editor to be acknowledged on recording, then place the note in the orange folder.
- If we receive a note advising that the memory stick returned is not working check the stick with our player. If the stick is functioning it can be re used, if it is not working place it in the “faulty memory stick pot”.

Before leaving the studio

- Place mail bag in foyer ready for collection on following Monday (or Tuesday after a bank holiday).
- **Please, please** ensure any crockery/cutlery you have used is washed up and returned to its place. The CAB allow us to use their items but naturally expect us to clean up after ourselves.
- Vacuum the floor, if necessary – the vacuum cleaner is usually housed in the hall cupboard.
- Replace furniture as you found it. Ensure our kit is put away and the cupboard door is padlocked in the recording room.
- Close all blinds.
- Check all doors are closed and lights turned off.
- Set the alarm and lock front door.

The face behind the voice

When we talk to each other in person, we use our face, our gestures and our voice to communicate our message and meaning. This combination allows us subtleties of communication that we don't have when we are using just our voice.

When we are recording, our voice alone has to convey the meaning of our message. When you are recording for FT, you need to use your voice to:

- Be friendly
- Be accurate
- Be clear
- Be entertaining.

In others words, you need to convey the **face behind the voice**.

Be friendly

When you are reading, remember that you are in effect chatting to **one person** rather than a larger audience. Visualise your listener, if this helps. This will help you to sound natural and friendly.

If you are tense this will come across in your voice so before you start reading take a moment to **relax**, consciously drop your shoulders and take a deep breath. This will calm you and calm your voice, lowering its pitch, which in turn makes you sound friendly. When we are worried or tense we breathe from the top of our lungs which restricts our breath and the pitch of our voice rises. This will come across to others.

Smile while you read. This will help you to sound warm and friendly. Use your face to emphasise what you're reading. If it's a 'light' article that makes you smile this will come across to the listener. Use your hands if this helps your expression of the words (but don't wave your paper around!).



Be accurate

If you are an **editor**:

- You must ensure you provide the whole story for the reader. Does it continue on another page of the newspaper and have you spotted this?
- Check for reference to dates and bear in mind when the recording will land on our listeners' doormats.
- Keep the balance of the story in mind. This is particularly important if we are featuring a hotly contested local issue, if both sides of an issue are reported, we should include both sides.
- There is no need to censor or over protect listeners, they have a right to know what is reported in the news.



As a **reader**:

- It's so important that you read the piece through **before** you sit in the studio ready to record. This ensures you have a sense of the overall meaning of the piece, you become familiar with any tricky words or names, and won't stumble over numbers.
- Do not add your own comments when reading the news. Your thoughts on the issue are not required! Just read the item please.
- Read telephone numbers slowly. Our policy is to pronounce zero as zero (i.e. not 'Oh' or nought). Repeat the number as it will take our listener time to write it down.

- When reading website addresses, please read them correctly. This means you include the dots but omit the www. For example, you would read this address: www.bbc.co.uk as ‘bbc dot co dot uk’

Be clear

If you are an **engineer**:

- You must ensure the recording is audible and intelligible. You are the ears of the listener so your aim is to record the edition as well as possible.
- Ensure sound levels are correct and that the reader is placed correctly in front of the mike and that nothing is touching the mike stand. Even a piece of paper lightly touching the mike stand will be picked up.
- If there is background noise that we have no control over (e.g. police siren outside) and you can hear it on the recording, ask the editor to tell the listener that it is happening.
- You have the final say on the quality of the recording. If you are not happy about a stumble, cough or sneeze, stop the recording to edit it out and then go again.



If you are a **reader**:

- Follow the engineer’s instructions, wait for his/her signal to start and if you are asked to read a sentence again, do it with good grace!
- Slow down your normal speaking voice. You can’t get the words intelligently out of your mouth if you read too fast. It’s also exhausting for a listener to try to keep pace with a fast reader.
- Be aware that nerves and adrenaline will speed you up. Be conscious of your pace.
- Think about which words need stress or emphasis to get the meaning right.
- Use your whole mouth when reading. Open your mouth to let the sound out. If you speak with restricted mouth movement your voice is quiet and sounds a little lazy.
- The consonants of a word define the word. Speak them clearly for the listener. Use your lips, tongue and teeth to enunciate the consonants in the word.
- You need your breath! You need space in your chest to inflate your lungs enough to be able to read a sentence without pausing for breath. Your posture will help with this. If you slouch your lungs will be constricted. Just as our school teachers told us, sit upright and sit securely in your seat! When you have finished reading the piece try not to move away from the mike until you have finished the very last word.



Be entertaining



We don't mean you need to provide a variety performance but you do need to be interested in what you are doing. If you're bored you will be boring. Be mindful of this if you are reading a piece that does not interest you. If you sound disinterested this will come across to the listener. If you are enjoying yourself this will come over on the recording. (If you aren't getting enjoyment from reading for our listeners should you be doing this?)

Vary your speech/pace while reading. We vary our speech in conversation so it's fine to vary it while reading. You could slow down for emphasis, you could speed up a little for a short space of time if the piece requires it.

Try to avoid losing quotations in your speech. When we read print we see quotations marks to inform us that speech occurs. You need to indicate these for your listener using appropriate pausing before and after the quotation. However, don't mimic the speaker by putting on voices!

Consider describing associated pictures. It's safe to assume that most of our listeners have had some sight in the past and having a picture described can be such a pleasure for listeners. It can also bring an article to life and add to the reporting. However, avoid just reading the caption and don't describe all pictures. Choose interesting, informative pictures. A picture of the local mayor on his own probably doesn't merit a description but an image of someone in a lovely setting could add value to the recording.

If you do nothing else **LISTEN TO A RECORDING OF YOURSELF READING!** You will not sound like you think you do. You can also hear any verbal 'tics' you inadvertently use that might annoy you, e.g. kissing sounds when you draw breath, or you might withdraw too soon from the mike or use 'ums' and 'ahs' too often. You can listen to the latest recording via our website (it's usually available from the following Wednesday) or you are most welcome to borrow a memory stick from the studio.



Putting the recording together

Running order for the news recording

Following feedback from our listeners we are keen to use a consistent running order on each news recording. Our listeners have told us they appreciate the same format on each recording of the news so they know when the lighting up times will appear, etc.

With this in mind, we would like all news editors to follow this running order with immediate effect.

Running order item	Notes
Intro music fading to editor's welcome	Please use the FT brass band theme music fading into the editor's welcome
Editor welcome	Please include: Welcome to Forest Talk, your team number, the date and location of your recording, acknowledge which publications you have taken the news from and who is taking part in the recording today (readers and technician). Remind listeners to have a pen and paper handy for noting down phone numbers (they do appreciate this reminder)
Lighting up times	These are provided for you in the studio.
Chemist rota	These details are provided for you in the studio. Give the rota chemist for the weekend following your recording (if there is a bank holiday give the rota chemist for that as well)
Obituaries	Introduce these. Please provide as much info as the papers allow. Our listeners like to hear names, ages and location. If there are none to report please announce this.
Obituary music	This should be appropriate for ending the obituary announcements. You are free to choose your own piece or use the music labelled and provided in the studio
News items	Introduce readers as they change and introduce your items, particularly if you have grouped them into themes. Consider including sports related pieces, but not lists of results
Final sign off	Explain when the news recording is finished and make a link to the magazine, e.g. 'stay tuned for Maggie's magazine which follows in a moment'

How to select the news for Forest Talk

These notes are intended to help if you are new to editing the **news content** for Forest Talk. Please read this in conjunction with the running order guidelines document.

1. Allow up to four hours for preparation.
2. Obtain a copy of the Forester and Review newspapers. (Some editors find it useful to obtain two copies of each.)
3. Cut out the news items and using scrap card or heavy paper, past or tape the items in batches to the sheet in the order you feel is the most relevant. Try for links if possible or items of a similar subject, locality and so on.
4. Write a script for yourself – bullet points is all you may need - to allow fluid introductions of segments. This will help you feel prepared and create a professional recording.
5. Consider numbering the news items or sheets in the preferred reading order to give the best presentation. Explain to the readers that this has been done.

What to include

Obituaries, lighting up times and chemist rota: You must include these. Please see the running order guidelines on when these are announced and build these into your script. Tell listeners if the newspapers have no obits. You will find the lighting up times and rota details are provided for you in the studio.

Sports news: Always try to include a few items and vary the sports. Many listeners like to hear something of the local sports scene. Scores should be considered only if there is something notable about the game, match or result: e.g. Lydney Town Under-5s beat Man United 6-3 on penalties. Seek out and include news of local sports-people if they are being particularly impressive (e.g. a local sportsman/woman trialling for an international team).

Include letters published in the newspapers if you think they are of sufficient importance to the locality. Suggestion: exclude rants and politics.

Datelined items: Read through all items and exclude, edit out segments or re-word those which will not be relevant considering the recording will get to the listener on the Tuesday/Wednesday following the studio session.

What not to include

This is a tricky one! We can only include what's in the newspapers but sometimes there are items we would not use or perhaps use less of. Reports of multiple court cases are dull to listen to and of little interest.

Notes for magazine editors

These notes are intended to help if you are new to editing the **magazine** content for Forest Talk.

1. Feel free to use any theme music of your choosing.
2. If we are including the In Touch programme from Radio 4 announce this at the start and remind the listener at the end of your magazine.
3. Have you been asked by the committee to include any notices? If so, announce them early on. Do you have any thanks to give, e.g. have we received any donations that need acknowledging on air? (Please don't mention the amount of a donation.)
4. Consider including poems, light hearted articles, local items and those of a national bias in your programme.
5. It's fine to include musical interludes. Our listeners tell us they enjoy this.
6. Write a script for yourself – bullet points is all you may need - to allow fluid introductions of segments. This will help you feel prepared and create a professional recording.
7. When you sign off, thank all volunteers for their help and acknowledge the source of your articles. Use the script in the studio to remind listeners about the process for returning their wallets to us and the point of contact if they have any feedback for Forest Talk.
8. Remind listeners that the In Touch programme follows, if it's being included.

Notes for engineers

The recording equipment is housed in a wooden tray in our storage cupboard in the recording room. The cupboard is locked with a combination padlock. If you don't know the combination please ask one of the other engineers for this, their contact details are in the Volunteer Directory.

The housing of the equipment in the wooden tray enables quick assembly of the kit at each session as the component parts remain plugged in to each other within the tray. However, it is useful for you to become familiar with how and where all the leads connect just in case something comes astray.

With the equipment you will find detailed written instructions for connecting the kit. Please take some time to read these through.

If you experience a hitch during your recording session please don't hesitate to phone one of the other engineers for support. Our engineers are very knowledgeable and helpful!

At the end of the session provide a master copy of the recording to the duplicators using the memory stick attached to the large, bright orange luggage label. (This is usually in the brown tray in the sliding door cupboard.)

At the end of the session please place all equipment back in the cupboard and secure the door with the combination padlock (jumbling the numbers on the padlock).

Duplicating the sticks

- The engineer will supply a master copy recording of your edition using the stick with a large, bright orange luggage label for ease of identification.
- Check the master copy recording plays correctly before you duplicate it onto the listeners' sticks. Use the white, globe shaped player in the sliding door cupboard for this purpose.
- The duplicating machine is located with the studio recording equipment. Insert the master stick into the top left USB port on the front of the machine and load up the rest of the ports with memory sticks.
- Press the on button. The machine will read the master stick and then start to copy the recording onto the sticks. While this happens the lights for each port will flash red. When the lights stop flashing and turn green the sticks have been cleaned and have the new edition recorded on them. Any lights that stay red or continue to flash indicate that the copying process for that port/stick has potentially failed. Check the stick. It must not be sent if it has not copied correctly. Place faulty sticks in the pot labelled for this purpose.
- Take two sticks from the batch and test them in the player to ensure the copying process has worked for the batch.
- Continue the above process until you have copied the new edition onto all the available sticks, carrying out a spot check of two sticks from the batch each time.
- Fill each wallet with a stick and seal the Velcro. Place filled wallets in the post sack.
- Place the spare sticks in the brown tray so we have access to the recording during the week if we have requests.



Joining the committee

As you are probably aware, we have a management committee made up of volunteers to oversee the work of the charity. We like to have representation on the committee from each team so that we can share experiences and news. If you would like to join the team to help shape the future of our wonderful charity please speak to any committee member. Our contact details are in the Volunteer Directory.

And finally, thank you once again for
volunteering with Forest Talk!