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COUNTING WORDS

9 Ways to Discover the Art and Science of Radio Commercial Timing

EARL PILKINGTON

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the next generation of radio copywriters.

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who have chipped in their two cents worth - all of which was helpful in one way or another.

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To my wife Suzanne:
Your support in my madness to do this is amazing.
Thankyou so, so much for your generous love and support..

Earl Pilkington
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Radio Copy Paste

We have a way with words

What Is Radio Copy Paste?

Radio Copy Paste magazine is a free downloadable digital magazine which comes out quarterly, you can download the latest issue, and many more free e-books and resourced for radio copywriters at our website: www.radiocopywriters.com

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK:

This is an instruction and workbook designed to be used by people learning how to 'do' Radio Copywriting, and those seasoned professionals who feel that their scripts aren't quite timing out right..

Our advice from our Beta Testers is to work through it from front to back, and find the method that works for you - you may discover more than one, and in the final chapter we discuss why it may be best to pick and choose the method depending on the job at hand.

If you have any feedback about this free ebook - please email Earl Pilkington via: allmarketing@radiocopywriters.com

Hopefully you will find this volume useful.

Earl Pilkington.

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INTRODUCTION:

Introduction

The Importance of Precise Timing

In the world of radio advertising, time isn't just money - it's everything. **EVERYTHING!**

For example, a 30-second commercial must be exactly 30 seconds, no more, no less.

This precision requirement makes it both challenging and exciting for radio copywriters.

But perfect timing is not just about fitting words into a time slot; it's about creating compelling messages that feel natural, maintain listener interest, and deliver results for clients.

In this book, I will show you multiple different methods, and hopefully, along the way you might find a new way that resonates with you, a new way of doing that one particular type of script, or, you might be glad you are sticking with your old method, with a better understanding of timing.

The Evolution of Timing Techniques

Radio commercial timing has evolved significantly since the medium's early days.

What began as simple counting lines has developed into a sophisticated set of techniques that combine many different methods and techniques with modern technology.

Today's radio copywriter needs to understand and master multiple approaches to ensure consistent, professional results across various commercial styles and situations. For example: A soft sell commercial is different from a station promo spot, and a hard sell read will be different to branding.

The Purpose of This Book

This guide serves as a comprehensive resource for both new and experienced radio copywriters. It presents eight core timing methods, plus essential information about digital tools and troubleshooting.

Each chapter builds upon the previous one, providing a complete framework for mastering radio commercial timing.

Methods Overview:

1. Simple Word Count

The modern foundation of radio timing, this method provides basic guidelines for how many words fit into standard commercial lengths. While seemingly simple, mastering word count is essential for all other timing techniques.

2. Traditional 'Standard Count'

The traditional method for writing commercials, this method is based on the length and number of sentences in a radio script – and was the original method I learnt AFTER I had mastered word count (which is why I placed it here, rather than first).

3. Stress Pattern Method

This approach considers the natural rhythm of speech, using emphasized words to create proper pacing and flow. It helps ensure that commercials sound natural while maintaining precise timing.

4. Character Count System

Adapted from Japanese broadcasting techniques, this highly precise method counts every character, providing exceptional accuracy for tight timing requirements.

5. Musical Bar Method

Perfect for music-based commercials, this technique aligns copy with musical measures, creating naturally flowing scripts that work harmoniously with background music.

6. Breath Group Method

Based on natural speaking patterns, this method ensures comfortable delivery while maintaining exact timing. It's particularly valuable for conversational copy.

7. Sentence Length Pattern

This technique uses varying sentence lengths to control pacing and timing while maintaining listener interest through structural variety.

8. Word Rate Timing Method

A scientific approach calculating exactly how many words can fit into a spot based on different speaking rates, providing precise control over timing.

How to Use This Book

Each chapter follows a loose, yet consistent structure:

- Clear explanation of the method
- Practical examples and applications
- Common challenges and solutions
- Professional tips and techniques
- Worksheets and/or exercises

Readers are encouraged to:

1. Study each method thoroughly
2. Practice with the provided worksheets
3. Experiment with different techniques
4. Combine methods as needed
5. Build their own timing style

The Modern Context

We will also look at the use of technology today in radio.

Because today's radio copywriter must balance traditional timing techniques with modern production requirements we all use digital tools that have made timing easier in some ways but have also raised expectations for precision (or may even be holding us back).

Professional Standards

The timing techniques presented here reflect current industry standards and best practices.

They are designed to help you:

- Meet exact time requirements
- Create natural-sounding copy
- Work efficiently with voice talent
- Integrate with production elements
- Solve timing problems quickly

Getting Started

As you work through this book, remember that mastering radio commercial timing is a journey, but also remember that each company, country, and sometimes state have different requirements for what they want a commercial script to be (*one such example from one station is having half a second of music or sound effect at the start and the end of each commercial - effectively giving you only 29 seconds in a 30 second script to fit a voice into*).

Each method you will find here has its strengths and weaknesses, and the best copywriters know when to use each one for the task at hand.

So I encourage you to start with the basic methods and progressively incorporate more advanced techniques as your skills develop.

The following chapters will guide you through each method in detail (and in the way that I was taught how to write radio copy - I feel it was a good natural progression), providing the tools and knowledge you need to create perfectly timed radio commercials that engage listeners and deliver results for clients.

Earl Pilkington

P.S.: As an added bonus, you can now access some of these tools on our website - look for the TOOLS FOR RADIO COPYWRITERS tab and try them out for yourself, you can copy your script into the box, and analyze some of the methods and patterns described here in.

You will note however that not all are covered for now - and they will be updated when we get a chance to, there are also some tools which are experimental for the moment.

But these will at least give you an idea of what is happening with your script, and how you might tweak it and adjust to get better results.

This is NOT an Ai tool to write scripts with, it is a set of tools for copywriters to tweak their craft with.

Enjoy.



Chapter 1: SIMPLE WORD COUNT

Introduction

The Simple Word Count method is the cornerstone of radio commercial timing.

While other techniques may offer more precision in specific situations, mastering this fundamental approach provides you with a reliable foundation for all radio copywriting.

This method works on a basic principle: speaking at a consistent, professional pace, most radio announcers deliver between 2.0 and 2.5 words per second.

Understanding the Basics

Before diving into word counting, it's essential to understand standard commercial lengths, if spoken at the comfortable preferred read rate:

- 15-second spot: 30-40 words
- 30-second spot: 60-78 words
- 60-second spot: 120-140 words

There is some wiggle room there as different accents do speak at different rates, for example, I use this chart to guide me on a daily basis to guide my word count in scripts (it is based on the Australian accent), when I am writing for a Canadian audience, I will take 5 words off the max 30 second count, and for an American Audience, remove 8 words.

The total maximum words allowed into the time given...

TIME	PREFERRED	STRAIGHT	FAST/MAX	NOT ADVISED
7 seconds	12	15	17	22
10 seconds	18	20	22	25
15 seconds	32	39	45	50
30 seconds	64	78	87	95
45 seconds	96	117	130	142
60 seconds	128	156	180	200

These ranges account for natural variations in speaking speed and brief pauses for emphasis or clarity.

However, remember that these are guidelines rather than strict rules.

Your actual word count may vary depending on factors such as:

- Speaking style (conversational vs. announcer)
- Technical or complex words
- Accent
- Required legal disclaimers
- Music beds and sound effects

The Counting Process

When counting words, follow these essential rules:

1. Count 'EVERY SINGLE WORD'

- Include all articles (a, an, the)
- Count numbers as how they're spoken ("99" = "ninety-nine" = 2 words) this includes phone

numbers and prices

- Hyphenated words count as one word
- Website addresses count as spoken ("www.example.com" is said as "Example dot com" = 3 words)

2. Account for Sound Elements

- Reserve about 1 second for sound effects
- If your commercial contains music, allow 2-3 seconds for music beds to establish
- Plan 1-2 seconds for contact information to sink in

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

Many copywriters stumble into these common traps:

1. Overcounting

- Not accounting for natural contractions
- Counting phone numbers by digits instead of words
- Treating abbreviations as multiple words

2. Undercounting

- Forgetting transition words
- Not counting repeated words
- Overlooking articles and prepositions

Practical Application

Consider this slow paced 30-second branding commercial example:

"Looking for the perfect furniture at amazing prices?

Visit Thompson's Furniture Warehouse today!

With three convenient locations and everyday low prices, we make furniture shopping easy, with a lot of choices to suit your home design.

Browse our massive selection of living room, bedroom, and dining room sets.

Thompson's Furniture Warehouse where quality meets affordability.

Visit us online at Thompson furniture dot com."

Word Count Breakdown:

- Opening question: 8 words
 - Call to action: 5 words
 - Location/price statement: 23 words
 - Product description: 12 words
 - Slogan: 7 words
 - Website: 4 words
- Total: 63 words

This leaves comfortable room for pacing, music bed, and sound effects within the 30-second timeline.

This also doesn't break one of the **Golden Rules of Ad Copy Length**, i.e.: no sentence should be over 25 words, any longer than that fatigues the listeners ears and makes them want to stop listening.

Adjusting for Timing

If your script runs long or short, consider these adjustment techniques:

1. For Long Scripts:

- Remove redundant phrases
- Simplify complex sentences
- Use contractions
- Cut unnecessary adjectives

2. For Short Scripts:

- Add relevant details
- Include a second call to action
- Expand product descriptions
- Add qualifying statements

Integration with Production

Remember that your word count needs to work alongside other production elements:

- Sound effects
- Music beds
- Multiple voices
- Legal disclaimers
- Station ID tags

Professional Tips

- Always read your copy aloud while timing it
- Record yourself for accurate timing checks
- Leave 1-2 seconds of buffer time
- Consider your target audience's comprehension speed, i.e.: no more than 25 words in any sentence.
- Practice with professional voice talent to understand their pacing

By mastering the Simple Word Count method, you create a solid foundation for more advanced timing techniques.

This fundamental skill will serve you throughout your copywriting career, providing quick, reliable timing estimates for most standard commercial scripts.



Chapter 2:

Traditional 'Standard Count'

Using Natural Speech Rhythms for Precise Timing

Introduction

The traditional 'Standard Count' method is one of radio's oldest and most reliable timing techniques.

This method uses the visual length of typed lines as a timing guide, providing a quick and practical way to estimate commercial length without complex calculations.

Though developed in the typewriter era, this technique remains valuable in today's digital environment.

What makes this method particularly enduring is its simplicity and reliability across different platforms and technologies.

While modern digital tools offer various timing solutions, the Standard Count method provides an invaluable backup system that works even when technology fails. It's also especially useful during live reads or when quick script adjustments are needed in the studio, as it allows for immediate visual confirmation of timing without depending on software or devices.

Understanding Standard Lines

Basic Principles

1. Standard Line Measurements:

- Width: Approximately 5 inches (almost 13 centimetres)
- Characters per line: 60
- Words per line: 10-11
- Time per line: 3.5 seconds

2. Quick Calculations:

- 4 lines \approx 10 seconds
- 8 lines \approx 20 seconds
- 12 lines \approx 30 seconds
- 24 lines \approx 60 seconds

These measurements weren't arbitrarily chosen - they represent decades of research into average speaking rates and comprehension levels.

The 3.5-second timing per line was determined to be the optimal pace that allows for clear enunciation while maintaining listener engagement.

This timing also accounts for natural pauses and emphasis points that occur in normal speech patterns, making it feel natural rather than rushed or mechanical.

Format Guidelines

1. Line Formatting:

- Number each line consecutively
- Maintain consistent width
- Use standard spacing
- Follow reading punctuation

2. Emphasis Marking:

- CAPITALIZE important words
- Underline key phrases
- Mark pauses with periods
- Indicate emphasis points

The beauty of this formatting system lies in its visual clarity and immediate readability.

Voice talent can quickly scan the script and understand not just what to say, but how to say it.

The consistency in formatting creates a universal language between copywriters and voice talent, reducing misunderstandings and making recording sessions more efficient.

Think of it as sheet music for speech - every mark and symbol serves a specific purpose in guiding the performance.

Production Integration

1. Visual Cues:

- Line numbers for reference
- Capitalization for emphasis
- Punctuation for pacing
- Spacing for timing

2. Script Management:

- Easy editing reference
- Quick timing checks
- Clear voice direction
- Simple revisions

The integration of these elements creates a comprehensive system that serves multiple production needs simultaneously.

During recording sessions, producers can easily reference specific lines when giving direction, while voice talent can quickly locate and repeat sections that need adjustment.

This efficiency becomes particularly valuable in time-sensitive situations or when working with tight studio schedules.

The system also facilitates clear communication between different departments, from copywriting to final production.

Practical Application

Example 30-second commercial with line counting:

1. *For every window of your charming home . . .*
2. *crisp, organdie HOSTESS CURTAINS from the*
3. *DOWNTOWN DEPARTMENT STORE. You'll find them*
4. *washable, lovely and snowy white. What's more*
5. *your new HOSTESS CURTAINS have the popular*
6. *charrette feature you and all your friends*
7. *will admire. The price, only \$5.95 a pair.*
8. *Mark this down on your shopping calendar:*
9. *See the lovely organdie HOSTESS CURTAINS*
10. *today, at the DOWNTOWN DEPARTMENT STORE.*

This example demonstrates how effective line counting naturally supports the commercial's structure and flow.

Notice how the pauses and emphasis points are distributed throughout the script, creating a natural rhythm that guides the voice talent through the performance.

The repetition of key phrases (like "HOSTESS CURTAINS" and "DOWNTOWN DEPARTMENT STORE") is strategically placed at the beginning, middle, and end of the script, maximizing brand recognition while maintaining a natural conversational flow.

Common Challenges

1. **Format Issues:**

- Inconsistent line length
- Irregular word spacing
- Poor emphasis marking
- Unclear punctuation

2. **Solutions:**

- Use ruler/guide
- Standardize spacing
- Clear marking system
- Consistent format

The most frequent challenges often arise from trying to fit too much information into a limited space or rushing through the formatting process.

Remember that proper formatting isn't just about appearance - it's about creating a tool that functions effectively in a fast-paced studio environment.

Taking the time to format correctly initially saves valuable time during recording and editing, and helps prevent costly mistakes or retakes.

Professional Tips

For Better Results:

- Maintain consistent formatting
- Use clear numbering system
- Mark emphasis consistently
- Allow for natural flow
- Consider voice variations

These tips come from decades of collective industry experience and represent best practices that have proven their worth countless times.

The key is understanding that these guidelines aren't arbitrary rules but practical solutions to real-world challenges.

Each element has been refined through years of studio sessions, live reads, and production deadlines, creating a system that balances efficiency with effectiveness.

Advanced Applications

1. Multiple Voice Scripts:

- Alternate line assignments
- Clear speaker markers
- Timing annotations
- Interaction points

2. Production Notes:

- Music cues by line
- Effect placement
- Transition points
- Emphasis notes

Advanced applications of the Standard Count method reveal its true versatility.

In complex productions involving multiple voices, sound effects, and music cues, the system provides a reliable framework for coordinating all these elements.

The line-by-line structure becomes especially valuable when timing interactions between voices or synchronizing effects with specific words or phrases.

This systematic approach helps ensure that every element serves the overall message while maintaining proper timing.

Best Practices

Script Development:

- Use standard font size, ie: don't use BOLD fonts, just use caps and a standard font.
- Maintain consistent margins
- Number lines clearly
- Mark emphasis appropriately
- Include production notes

When implementing these best practices, remember that they're designed to create scripts that are both visually clear and functionally efficient.

The goal is to develop scripts that can be easily read and interpreted by everyone involved in the production process, from copywriters to voice talent to producers.

Consistency in formatting isn't just about aesthetics - it's about creating a reliable tool that supports clear communication and efficient production.

The Traditional Standard Count method provides a reliable visual approach to timing that has stood the test of time.

Its enduring value lies in its simplicity, reliability, and adaptability to various production scenarios.

Whether used as a primary timing method or as a backup system, it remains an essential tool in the modern broadcaster's toolkit.

Understanding and mastering this method provides a solid foundation for any radio professional, from copywriters to voice talent to producers.

Worksheet 2: Traditional Standard Count

Part 1: Understanding Basic Principles

1. Complete the following table with the standard measurements:

- Line width: _____ inches
- Characters per line: _____
- Words per line: _____
- Time per line: _____ seconds

2. Match the number of lines with their approximate timing:

- | | |
|---------------|---------------|
| ____ 24 lines | A. 10 seconds |
| ____ 8 lines | B. 30 seconds |
| ____ 12 lines | C. 60 seconds |
| ____ 4 lines | D. 20 seconds |

Part 2: Line Analysis

Review the following commercial lines and answer the questions:

1. Fresh baked goods at PETERSON'S BAKERY...
2. where quality meets affordability every
3. single day! Our special this week: get

- a) How many seconds would these three lines take to read? _____
- b) Identify the emphasized words (in caps): _____
- c) Mark where natural pauses (periods) should occur: _____

Part 3: Practical Exercise

Convert the following paragraph into properly formatted radio copy using the Traditional Standard Count method. Number your lines and use appropriate emphasis:

"Welcome to Green Valley Gardens, your local plant nursery. We have everything you need for your spring gardening projects, from seeds to tools. Visit us this weekend for our special sale on all outdoor plants. Located at 123 Garden Street."

Your Script:

Part 4: Timing Challenge

Write a 10-second commercial (approximately 4 lines) for a product of your choice.

Follow these requirements:

- Use proper line formatting
- Include emphasis marks
- Add appropriate punctuation
- Number your lines

Your Script:

Part 5: Problem Solving

Identify three common formatting issues in this improperly formatted commercial:

1. COME TO SALLY'S DINER today
2. where the coffee is always fresh and the
3. service is friendly!!! Open 24/7 at
4. the corner of Main and Fifth...

Answer:

Part 6: Production Notes Practice

Add appropriate production notes for this commercial:

1. The summer heat is here...
2. But COOL BREEZE AIR CONDITIONING
3. has your comfort covered!

Consider:

- Music cues
- Sound effects
- Voice tone
- Pacing notes

Answer:



Chapter 3:

Stress Pattern Method

Using Natural Speech Rhythms for Precise Timing

Introduction

The Stress Pattern Method elevates your commercial timing beyond simple word counting by incorporating the natural rhythms of speech.

This technique helps create more engaging copy while maintaining precise timing.

Professional voice talent naturally emphasizes certain words for impact, and understanding this pattern is crucial for accurate timing predictions.

Understanding stress patterns isn't just about timing - it's about creating copy that resonates with human psychology.

Our brains are naturally attuned to rhythmic patterns, which helps explain why certain commercials stick in our memory while others fade away.

By mastering this method, you're not just counting seconds; you're crafting messages that align with the way people naturally process and retain information.

Understanding Stress Patterns

In radio copy, stress typically falls into three categories:

1. Primary Stress

- Key selling words (SAVE, FREE, NOW)
- Critical information (CALL, VISIT, TODAY)
- Brand names and locations

2. Secondary Stress

- Supporting descriptive words
- Numbers and prices
- Time-sensitive information

3. Unstressed Words

- Articles (a, an, the)
- Conjunctions (and, but, or)
- Prepositions (in, on, at)

Think of these stress categories as the building blocks of your commercial's rhythm.

Just as a musician uses different note values to create melody, you'll use these stress levels to craft your message's flow.

Primary stress words are like the downbeats in music—they anchor your message and provide the main points of emphasis.

Secondary stress words are similar to supporting instruments, while unstressed words act as the subtle connecting tissue that holds everything together.

The Timing Formula

A general rule for stress patterns:

- Primary stressed words: Add 0.5 seconds
- Secondary stressed words: Add 0.3 seconds
- Unstressed words: 0.2 seconds or less
- Natural pauses: 0.5-1 second each

While these timing guidelines provide a solid foundation, they should be treated as flexible rather than rigid rules. T

he key is to understand that timing in commercial copy is organic and dynamic.

Just as a conversation naturally ebbs and flows, your commercial timing should adapt to the message's emotional context and the target audience's expectations.

For instance, a high-energy retail sale announcement might lean toward the shorter end of these timing ranges, while a luxury brand message might utilize longer pauses for dramatic effect.

Practical Application

Consider this 30-second commercial example with stress marking:

*"SAVE big at Johnson's ANNUAL clearance EVENT!
Every SOFA, every BEDROOM set, every DINING room suite must GO!
PRICES slashed up to FIFTY percent OFF!
Don't WAIT - these DEALS won't last LONG.
VISIT Johnson's Furniture TODAY!"*

Stress Analysis:

- Primary stress words: SAVE, ANNUAL, EVENT, SOFA, BEDROOM, DINING, GO, PRICES, FIFTY, OFF, WAIT, DEALS, LONG, VISIT, TODAY
- Secondary stress words: big, clearance, slashed
- Natural pauses: After "EVENT," "GO," and "OFF"

Let's break down why this example works so effectively.

Notice how the stress pattern creates a natural crescendo of urgency through the piece.

The opening "SAVE" immediately captures attention, while the triple repetition of "every" before stressed items (SOFA, BEDROOM, DINING) creates a powerful rhythm that emphasizes the sale's comprehensiveness.

The final section accelerates the urgency with closely spaced stress words, driving home the call to action.

This isn't just about timing—it's about using stress patterns to create emotional momentum.

Creating Stress Patterns

Follow these guidelines when marking stress:

1. Identify Key Information

- Price points
- Time limitations
- Contact details
- Unique selling propositions

2. Mark Natural Speech Rhythm

- Usually one primary stress every 3-4 words
- Avoid consecutive stressed words
- Allow for natural breathing points

3. Consider Emotional Impact

- Urgency requires more stressed words
- Luxury items need measured pacing
- Call-to-action needs clear emphasis

The art of creating effective stress patterns goes beyond mechanical rules - it requires an understanding of human conversation patterns.

Think about how we naturally emphasize words when sharing exciting news with friends or trying to convince someone of something important.

Your stress pattern should mirror these natural speech patterns while maintaining commercial precision.

For example, if you're writing copy for a high-end jewelry store, you might use longer pauses and fewer but more impactful stressed words to create an air of sophistication and exclusivity.

Common Stress Pattern Mistakes

1. Over-Stressing

- Too many primary stress words
- Forcing emphasis on minor details
- Creating an unnatural rhythm

2. Under-Stressing

- Missing key selling points
- Losing impact on important information
- Creating monotonous delivery

The balance between effective emphasis and natural flow is delicate, and even experienced copywriters can sometimes fall into these traps.

One helpful technique for avoiding these mistakes is to record yourself reading the copy naturally, without looking at your stress markings.

Then compare your natural reading to your marked stress pattern.

Often, you'll find that your instinctive emphasis provides valuable insights into where your written stress pattern might need adjustment.

This "reality check" can help you identify areas where you're either forcing emphasis or missing natural stress points.

Working with Voice Talent

Share stress patterns with voice talent by:

- Capitalizing PRIMARY stress words
- Underlining secondary stress words
- Marking pauses with forward slashes (/)
- Adding timing notes for specific phrases

Remember that voice talent are interpretive artists, not machines.

While your stress pattern provides crucial guidance, the most effective collaborations happen when you treat these markings as a framework rather than absolute rules.

Take time to discuss the emotional intent behind the copy with your voice talent.

Understanding why certain words are stressed helps them deliver a more authentic performance.

Consider including brief notes about the desired emotion or energy level at key points in the script.

Production Integration

Stress patterns must work with:

- Music bed crescendos
- Sound effect placement
- Multiple voice timing
- Station ID placement

Successful integration of stress patterns into the overall production requires nthinking beyond the voice track. Consider how your stress pattern can create opportunities for other production elements. For instance, you might place key sound effects on unstressed words to maintain clarity, or time music bed changes to coincide with natural pauses. This holistic approach ensures that all elements work together to enhance the message rather than compete for attention.

Professional Tips

Professional copy timing is as much an art as it is a science.

One particularly effective practice is to create a "timing library" of professional commercials you admire.

Note not just where the stresses fall, but how they interact with pacing, emotional delivery, and production elements.

Pay special attention to commercials that have stood the test of time or won industry awards—they often contain valuable lessons in stress pattern usage.

- Read copy aloud to verify natural flow
- Record and analyze professional spots
- Mark breaths as part of timing
- Consider regional speech patterns
- Allow flexibility for interpretation

Impact on Overall Timing

Proper stress pattern usage typically:

- Adds 3-4 seconds to basic word count
- Creates natural pacing breaks
- Allows for emphasis without rushing
- Improves message retention

Understanding the relationship between stress patterns and overall timing is crucial for long-term success in commercial copywriting.

While the added seconds might seem challenging to accommodate at first, they're essential for creating messages that resonate.

Think of these extra seconds as an investment in effectiveness rather than a timing constraint.

A well-paced, properly stressed commercial will ultimately deliver better results than one that sacrifices natural rhythm for the sake of squeezing in more words.

By mastering the Stress Pattern Method, your copy becomes more engaging while maintaining precise timing.

This technique bridges the gap between mechanical timing and natural, effective delivery.



Chapter 4:

Character Count Method

(AKA Japanese Character Level Analysis)

Introduction

The Character Count System, inspired by Japanese broadcasting counting system techniques (Mojikyū - 文字数), and offers unprecedented precision in commercial timing.

While word count provides a solid foundation, character counting can refine your timing to the millisecond level.

This method is particularly valuable for tight spots where every second counts.

What makes this system particularly fascinating is its origin in Japanese broadcasting, where the complexity of kanji characters necessitated a more precise timing method than traditional word counting.

Western broadcasters adapted this system after noting its remarkable accuracy and versatility.

The method's success in both Eastern and Western broadcasting demonstrates its universal applicability and effectiveness across different languages and formats.

Understanding Character Counting

In this system, every single character counts, including:

- Letters
- Numbers
- Spaces
- Punctuation marks
- Special symbols

Standard Character Guidelines:

- **15-second spot: 150-180 characters**
- **30-second spot: 300-350 characters**
- **60-second spot: 600-700 characters**

These guidelines weren't arbitrarily chosen - they represent extensive research into human speech patterns and comprehension rates.

The ranges account for variations in speaking styles while maintaining clarity and understanding.

Interestingly, are rather usefully for us, these numbers hold relatively constant across different languages and cultures, suggesting they reflect fundamental aspects of human speech processing and attention spans.

The Counting Process

Basic Timing Rules

- 1 Japanese character (kanji/kana) \approx 0.2 seconds
- Standard 30-second CM = 150 characters
- News reading pace = 400-450 characters per minute

Character Count Guidelines

1. Kanji (漢字) = 1 count
2. Hiragana (ひらがな) = 1 count
3. Katakana (カタカナ) = 1 count
4. Punctuation (、 。) = 1 count
5. Arabic numerals (123) = 0.5 count each digit
6. Alphabetic letters = 0.5 count each
7. Spaces between words = 0.5 count

1. Basic Rules:

- Count every visible character
- Include spaces between words
- Count punctuation marks
- Count special characters as spoken

2. Special Considerations:

- Numbers: Count as written characters
- Website addresses: Count each symbol
- Phone numbers: Include spaces and dashes
- Company names: Count logos as spelled

The beauty of this systematic approach lies in its attention to detail.

Many novice copywriters overlook the impact of elements like spaces and punctuation, but these silent characters play a crucial role in pacing and delivery.

Think of them as the "rests" in a musical score - they're not heard directly, but they're essential for proper timing and comprehension.

This attention to every element ensures consistent timing regardless of content type or delivery style.

Practical Example

Here we show you a couple of examples in Japanese and their associated character count and timing for a 30 second script about the Tokyo Skytree:

東京スカイツリーで素敵な思い出を作りませんか？
[とうきょうすかいつりーでステキなおもいでをつくりませんか]
(34 characters = ~7 seconds)

春の特別キャンペーン実施中！
[はるのとくべつきゃんぺーんじっしちゅう]
(19 characters = ~4 seconds)

入場料20%オフ、
[にゅうじょうりょうにじっばーせんとおふ]
(15 characters = ~3 seconds)

さらに限定ギフトプレゼント。

[さらにげんていぎふとふれぜんと]
(17 characters = ~3.5 seconds)

家族で観る夜景は格別です。
[かぞくでみるやけいはかくべつです]
(18 characters = ~3.5 seconds)

スカイツリー。空に一番近い思い出作り。
[すかいつりー そらにいちばんちかいおもいでづくり]
(27 characters = ~5.5 seconds)

Total: 130 characters ≈ 26 seconds
(Leaving 4 seconds for music/effects)

English Adaptation

The system can be modified for English using these approximations:

- 1 syllable = 1 character count
- Consonant clusters = +0.5 count
- Long vowels = +0.5 count
- Pauses/punctuation = 1 count

Example English Adaptation:

"Visit (2.5) Sky•tree (3) To•day! (3)" = 8.5 characters ≈ 1.7 seconds

Practical Application

Let's analyze this 15-second commercial:

"Visit Dave's Auto today! Great deals on all used cars. Call 555-1234 now!"

Character breakdown:

Visit Dave's Auto today! (22 characters)
Great deals on all used cars. (27 characters)
Call 555-1234 now! (17 characters)

Total: 66 characters + spaces = 89 characters

This leaves room for proper pacing and sound effects in a 15-second spot.

Understanding why this works requires considering the natural rhythm of speech.

The character distribution in this example allows for proper emphasis on key phrases while maintaining a comfortable speaking pace.

The remaining character space isn't wasted - it's strategically allocated for pauses, emphasis, and production elements that enhance the message's impact.

Conversion Guidelines

Speed Categories:

1. Fast Pace

- 12-13 characters per second
- Best for legal disclaimers
- Used in high-energy retail spots

2. Medium Pace

- 10-11 characters per second
- Standard commercial delivery
- Most versatile for various styles

3. Slow Pace

- 8-9 characters per second
- Luxury or emotional spots
- Dramatic readings

These pacing categories emerged from extensive studio testing and real-world application.

They represent optimal ranges for comprehension while maintaining different emotional and practical impacts.

Fast pace creates urgency but risks listener fatigue if overused.

Medium pace matches natural conversation, making it most comfortable for listeners.

Slow pace allows for emotional resonance but requires careful management to maintain engagement.

Production Integration

The Production Advantages

1. Precise Control

- Each character represents a fixed time unit
- Easy to adjust for music cues
- Consistent pacing across different readers

2. Visual Timing

- Script length visible at a glance
- Easy to mark breaths/pauses
- Works well with teleprompter systems

3. Multilingual Flexibility

- Can handle mixed Japanese/English copy
- Adaptable to other Asian languages
- Useful for international broadcasts

Common Time Allocations

- 15-second CM = 75 characters
- 30-second CM = 150 characters

- 60-second CM = 300 characters
- News headline = 40 characters
- News brief = 200 characters
- Station ID = 25 characters

Character counting helps with:

- Precise music bed timing
- Sound effect placement
- Multiple voice coordination
- Legal disclaimer timing
- Station ID integration

The system's precision becomes particularly valuable in complex productions where multiple elements must align perfectly.

Consider a spot with multiple voices, sound effects, and a music bed - character counting allows producers to plan exact hit points for each element, ensuring smooth transitions and perfect timing.

This level of precision reduces studio time and post-production adjustments, making the entire process more efficient.

Digital Tools

While digital tools have streamlined the counting process, understanding the underlying principles remains crucial.

These tools work best when users comprehend why they're counting and what the numbers mean.

Think of them as calculators - they're incredibly useful, but you still need to understand math to use them effectively.

This knowledge becomes particularly important when tools malfunction or when quick manual adjustments are needed.

Modern applications of character counting:

1. Digital Character Counters

- Word processor tools
- Online calculators
- Specialized radio software

2. Automation Features

- Real-time character counting
- Pace indicators
- Time estimators

Advantages Over Word Count

The Character Count System offers:

- More precise timing
- Better handling of complex words
- Accurate pacing for numbers
- Consistent timing across voices
- Precise legal disclaimer timing

The superiority of character counting becomes especially apparent when dealing with diverse content types.

Consider the word "sale" versus "extraordinary" - while a word count treats them equally, character counting accurately reflects their different spoken lengths.

This precision is invaluable when timing must be exact, such as in legal disclaimers or time-sensitive promotional spots.

Common Pitfalls

1. Overcounting

- Double-counting spaces
- Including format markers
- Counting silent characters

2. Undercounting

- Missing punctuation
- Skipping spaces
- Overlooking special characters

Most timing errors stem from inconsistent counting practices rather than the system itself.

Developing a systematic approach to counting helps avoid these pitfalls.

Some professionals recommend marking off characters in groups of five or ten while counting, creating a visual rhythm that reduces errors.

Others use digital tools for initial counts but maintain manual counting skills for quick verification and adjustments.

Professional Tips

1. Leave 10% character buffer for timing adjustments
2. Mark breaths with () = 1 character count
3. Use • for emphasized pauses = 2 character count
4. Highlight long words that might need careful timing
5. Consider regional accent variations when counting
6. Mark every 10th character for quick counts
7. Use digital tools for verification
8. Consider font spacing in written copy

9. Account for natural speech variations
10. Build in buffer characters for flexibility

What I find fascinating about this system is its precision and adaptability.

The Japanese broadcasting industry has used it for decades because:

1. It's highly visual - you can literally see how long a script will take
2. It works well for teleprompter pacing (especially good for TV or video web casting)
3. It handles multilingual content smoothly
4. It's easily teachable to new broadcasters

These tips represent collective wisdom from decades of broadcasting experience.

Each suggestion addresses specific challenges encountered in real-world situations.

For instance, marking every 10th character might seem tedious, but it proves invaluable when making quick adjustments during live sessions or when digital tools aren't available.

The buffer character recommendation comes from experiencing how slight variations in delivery can affect timing.

Best Use Cases

The English adaptation of this method isn't common in Western broadcasting, but it could be very useful, especially for:

- Multilingual markets
- International advertising
- Mixed language broadcasts
- Digital content timing

How would you adapt this system for English language scripts, is very interesting, particularly how it handles things like "through" (counts as 2.5) versus "via" (counts as 2).

Character counting excels in:

- Legal disclaimers
- Technical information
- Financial numbers
- Website addresses
- Complex product names

Understanding these optimal applications helps in choosing when to emphasize character counting over other timing methods.

For instance, while character counting might be crucial for a pharmaceutical disclaimer, it might be less critical for a conversational testimonial.

Recognizing these distinctions helps producers choose the most appropriate timing method for each situation.

Integration with Other Methods

Combine character counting with:

- Word count for rough drafts
- Stress patterns for emphasis
- Breath groups for natural flow
- Digital timing for verification

The most successful radio producers view character counting as one tool in a comprehensive timing toolkit.

They understand that different situations call for different approaches, often using multiple methods in combination.

The initial draft might use word counting for speed, followed by character counting for precision, and finally breath group analysis for natural delivery.

This layered approach produces consistently excellent results.

Overall - this system provides the precision needed for modern radio production while maintaining the flexibility required for creative expression.

Master it alongside other timing methods for optimal results.

Remember that like any professional tool, character counting becomes more valuable with practice and understanding.

The time invested in mastering this system pays dividends in more efficient production processes and consistently well-timed commercials.



Chapter 5:

Music Bar Method

Timing Copy with Musical Precision

Introduction

The Musical Bar Method approaches commercial timing through the lens of musical structure, treating spoken words like musical notes within measures.

This technique is particularly effective for spots with music beds, jingles, or rhythmic delivery requirements.

By understanding basic musical timing, copywriters can create scripts that naturally align with musical accompaniment.

This method bridges the gap between traditional copywriting and musical composition, creating a unified approach that serves both creative disciplines.

By thinking of words as musical elements, copywriters can craft copy that not only delivers its message effectively but also creates a pleasing auditory experience that enhances memorability and impact.

This intersection of music and copy has proven especially valuable in brand recognition and recall studies.

Understanding Musical Timing

Basic Elements

- Measures (bars): Standard 4-beat containers
- Time signatures: Most commonly 4/4 in radio
- Tempo: Typically 120-130 BPM (beats per minute)
- Beat divisions: Quarter notes, eighth notes, etc.

Understanding these musical elements doesn't require formal music training, but rather an appreciation for natural rhythm and timing.

Think of it like walking: most people naturally walk at about 120 steps per minute, making this tempo feel natural and comfortable to listeners.

This inherent sense of rhythm is why the Musical Bar Method works so effectively - it taps into our natural timing instincts.

Standard Commercial Lengths

- 15 seconds = 8 bars at 120 BPM
- 30 seconds = 16 bars at 120 BPM
- 60 seconds = 32 bars at 120 BPM

These standardized lengths have evolved through decades of broadcast experience, finding the sweet spot between message delivery and audience attention spans.

The 120 BPM standard wasn't chosen arbitrarily - it matches the average speaking pace where words are clear and comprehensible while maintaining energy and engagement.

Practical Application

Consider this 30-second retail spot with bar notation:

|Bar 1: "SAVE big at|

|Bar 2: JOHNSON'S to-DAY|

|Bar 3: with deals that'll|

|Bar 4: BLOW you a-WAY!|

|Bar 5: ALL furniture|

|Bar 6: MARKED down to CLEAR|

|Bar 7: These savings won't|

|Bar 8: LAST through the YEAR!|

Musical Notes:

- CAPS indicate stressed beats
- Hyphens show syllable divisions
- Each bar contains 4 beats
- Natural speech rhythm follows the beat

The beauty of this system lies in its flexibility while maintaining structure.

Notice how the natural emphasis of words aligns with the musical beats, creating a flow that feels neither forced nor artificial.

This approach allows for variations in delivery while keeping the overall timing precise - much like how jazz musicians can improvise within the structure of a song's measures.

Working with Music Beds

1. Standard Music Bed Structure:

- Intro: 2-4 bars
- Body: 8-24 bars
- Outro: 2-4 bars
- Stinger: 1-2 bars

2. Key Points for Alignment:

- Hit points (musical accents)
- Crescendos
- Beat drops
- Musical breaks

Music beds aren't just background noise - they're active participants in the commercial's storytelling.

The best copywriters learn to "hear" the music bed while writing, anticipating how the words will interact with musical elements.

This skill develops over time, but it starts with understanding how music beds are structured and where natural emphasis points occur.

Timing Templates

Common 30-Second Structure:

- Bars 1-2: Opening hook
- Bars 3-4: Main benefit
- Bars 5-8: Feature details
- Bars 9-12: Supporting info
- Bars 13-14: Call to action
- Bars 15-16: Contact/close

These templates aren't rigid rules but rather proven frameworks that consistently deliver results.

They're based on decades of research into attention spans and information retention, structured to maximize impact while maintaining a natural flow.

Think of them as the commercial equivalent of a well-structured essay - with an introduction, body, and conclusion timed to perfection.

Production Integration

1. Music Selection:

- Match tempo to message urgency
- Consider genre appropriateness
- Allow for clear vocal space
- Account for key changes

2. Sound Effects:

- Place on strong beats
- Use as transition markers
- Align with musical accents
- Create rhythmic support

The integration phase is where theory meets practice, and timing decisions become reality.

This is also where many commercials either shine or struggle.

Success at this stage requires close collaboration between copywriters, voice talent, and production staff.

Regular communication and a shared understanding of the Musical Bar Method principles help ensure that everyone is literally and figuratively on the same beat.

Professional Tips

1. Script Marking:

- Mark bar lines with vertical lines (|)
- Indicate stressed syllables (/)
- Note musical hits (*)
- Mark tempo changes (>)

2. Voice Direction:

- Follow musical phrasing
- Hit specified accents
- Maintain consistent tempo
- Match emotional dynamics

Consider these markings as a roadmap for voice talent - they transform abstract timing concepts into clear, actionable direction.

Many experienced voice actors report that well-marked scripts using the Musical Bar Method allow them to nail the timing in fewer takes, saving studio time and maintaining consistent energy throughout multiple reads.

Common Challenges

1. Timing Issues:

- Rushing to fit bars
- Dragging behind beat
- Missing hit points
- Irregular phrasing

2. Solutions:

- Adjust syllable count
- Modify word choices
- Rework phrase lengths
- Realign stress patterns

The most common timing issues often stem from trying to force too many words into a bar or choosing words with awkward stress patterns.

Remember that just as in music, sometimes the spaces between notes are as important as the notes themselves.

Don't be afraid to use silence strategically - it makes your message more impactful.

Best Practices

For Copywriters:

- Write to the music's natural rhythm
- Count syllables per bar
- Mark musical hit points
- Allow breathing space
- Build in flexibility

For Production:

- Choose appropriate tempo
- Mark script with bar lines
- Indicate musical cues
- Note dynamic changes
- Plan transition points

Success with the Musical Bar Method comes from understanding that it's not just about fitting words into beats - it's about creating a harmonious relationship between words and music.

The best practitioners develop an almost intuitive sense of how words and music work together, but this intuition comes from careful study and practice of these fundamental principles.

Advanced Applications

1. Multiple Voice Timing:

- Alternate by bars
- Create counterpoint
- Plan overlaps
- Maintain rhythm

2. Special Effects:

- Use musical stingers
- Plan echo effects
- Time reverb tails
- Coordinate drops

Advanced applications of the Musical Bar Method open up creative possibilities that go well beyond basic timing.

When multiple voices are involved, think of them as different instruments in an orchestra - each with their own part to play, but all contributing to a unified whole.

Special effects should be treated as percussion elements, adding rhythm and emphasis without overwhelming the primary message.

The Musical Bar Method provides a structured approach to timing that particularly shines in music-driven spots.

When mastered, it creates a natural flow between words and music that enhances the overall impact of your commercial.

Remember that like any skill, mastery comes through practice and attention to detail.

Start with simple applications and gradually work your way up to more complex arrangements as your comfort with the method grows.

Worksheet 5: Music Bar Method

Time Signature: 4/4

BPM: _____ (standard radio pace: 120-130 BPM)

Instructions:

Mark each bar with | and syllables with •

Your Script:

|••••|••••|••••|

Script line 1: _____

|••••|••••|••••|

Script line 2: _____

|••~••|••••|••••|

Script line 3: _____

|••••|••••|••••|

Script line 4: _____

Music Bed Notes:

Entry Point: _____

Key Points/SFX: _____

Exit/Fade: _____



Chapter 6:

Syllable Timing

Syllable counting offers a more accurate and professional approach to timing your scripts

Introduction

While many copywriters and voice artists rely on any number of the word counts methods we have covered in this book to measure their scripts, however... professional copywriters know that syllable counting is quite possibly the single best secret to achieving perfect timing, every, single, time.

Think about how we naturally speak: some words flow quickly off the tongue, while others require more time to articulate.

The word "strength" for example may be one word, but "beautiful" is three syllables long.

This fundamental difference in how words are delivered is why syllable counting has become the gold standard in professional radio production.

This chapter will revolutionize how you approach script timing.

Whether you're a copywriter crafting your first radio spot or a seasoned producer looking to refine your technique, understanding and mastering syllable counting will give you unprecedented control over your productions.

You'll learn not just how to count syllables, but how to use this knowledge to create more dynamic, professionally-timed scripts that make the most of every precious second of airtime.

The fundamental principle is simple: in English-language scripts, speakers typically deliver approximately 2.5 syllables per second at a natural conversational pace... that's it.

Master this and you will rule your script world!

Key timing benchmarks:

- **30-second spot ≈ 75 syllables total**

- **60-second spot ≈ 150 syllables total**

But before we start...

What Is a Syllable?

A syllable is a unit of pronunciation that typically consists of a vowel sound, with or without surrounding consonants.

It's essentially a single pulse or beat of sound when speaking.

Think of it as the natural rhythm or beats in a word:

- "Cat" = 1 syllable (cat)

- "Gar-den" = 2 syllables (gar-den)

- "But-ter-fly" = 3 syllables (but-ter-fly)

- "Op-por-tun-i-ty" = 5 syllables (op-por-tun-i-ty)

Every syllable must contain at least one vowel sound (a, e, i, o, u, and sometimes y). Some key points about syllables:

- A vowel sound can be made up of multiple letters (like "rain" = one syllable)
- Some letters can be silent (like the 'e' in "tape" = one syllable)
- One syllable words are called monosyllabic (like "script")
- Words with multiple syllables are called polysyllabic (like "ra-di-o")

An easy way to identify syllables is to put your hand under your chin and speak the word slowly. Each time your chin drops, you're pronouncing a syllable.

Understanding The Counting Process

Breaking down your script into syllable counts involves several steps:

1. Write your script as usual, focusing first on the message
2. Break each word into syllables (e.g., "gar-den," "flow-er-ing")
3. Count syllables line by line, marking the count in brackets
4. Keep a running total to ensure you're on target
5. Make adjustments as needed while maintaining your message

Common itfalls

When counting syllables, watch out for these common challenges:

1. Compound Words: Words like "freestyle" or "marketplace" can be deceptive. Break them down carefully.
2. Numbers and Dates: Remember that numbers can have varying syllable counts ("fifteen" vs. "fifty").
3. Website Addresses: Don't forget to count each component ("dot com" = 2 syllables).
4. Proper Names: Business names and locations need careful counting (e.g., "Thompson's" = 2 syllables).

Practical Application

Let's examine the structure of a standard 30-second radio spot using our syllable-counting method. Here's the breakdown of a spring sale advertisement:

Introduction (24 syllables):

...

Looking for the perfect way to start your garden? [12]

Thompson's Garden Centre has everything you need. [12]

...

Body Content (43 syllables):

...

From fresh herbs to flowering plants, [8]

And expert advice that really helps. [8]

This weekend only, save thirty percent [10]

On all outdoor pottery and tools. [9]

Plus, get a free soil testing kit [8]

When you spend fifty dollars or more. [8]

...

Call to Action (18 syllables):

...

Visit us on Oak Grove Road, [8]
Or shop online at Thompson's Garden dot com [10]

'''

Tag Line (10 syllables):

'''

Thompson's Garden Centre - Where green dreams grow. [10]

'''

Adjusting For Timing

Different speaking paces require different syllable counts:

- Slow/Deliberate: 2 syllables/second (60 syllables/30 seconds)
- Conversational: 2.5 syllables/second (75 syllables/30 seconds)
- Fast but Clear: 3 syllables/second (90 syllables/30 seconds)

Always consider your target audience and message when choosing the pace.

A luxury brand might warrant a slower, more deliberate pace, while a clearance sale might benefit from a faster delivery.

Integration With Production

Your syllable count needs to account for production elements:

- Allow 2-3 seconds for music beds to fade in/out
- Plan for sound effects or transition time
- Account for slower delivery of tag lines or legal disclaimers
- Consider natural pauses for emphasis

Professional Tips

1. Create a Script Template

- Include syllable count brackets after each line
- Mark running totals in the margins
- Note production elements and timing

2. Use a Stopwatch

- Practice reading while timing
- Adjust syllable counts based on actual delivery
- Account for natural pauses and emphasis

3. Build in Flexibility

- Write alternate lines with different syllable counts
- Keep a few "optional" words that can be cut if needed
- Mark places where the pace can be naturally adjusted

Worksheet 6: Syllable Count

Practice your syllable counting skills with this worksheet:

1. Count the syllables in your business name and common terms you use

2. Create a 30-second script template:

Introduction (20-25 syllables):

[Line 1] _____ [count]

[Line 2] _____ [count]

Body (35-40 syllables):

[Line 3] _____ [count]

[Line 4] _____ [count]

[Line 5] _____ [count]

[Line 6] _____ [count]

Call to Action (15-20 syllables):

[Line 7] _____ [count]

[Line 8] _____ [count]

Tag Line (8-10 syllables):

[Line 9] _____ [count]

3. Practice Exercise:

Write a script for your business using the template above. Remember to:

- Count syllables for each line
- Keep a running total
- Time yourself reading it
- Make adjustments as needed

Remember: Mastering syllable counting takes practice, but it's an invaluable skill that will set your radio scripts apart and ensure consistent, professional timing every time.



Chapter 7:

Breath Group Method

Using Natural Speech Patterns For Perfect Timing

Introduction

The Breath Group Method approaches commercial timing by working with, rather than against, the natural breathing patterns of voice talent.

This technique ensures your copy not only times out perfectly but also sounds natural and conversational.

Understanding breath groups helps create scripts that are easier to perform and more engaging to hear.

Building on the word count methods we explored in previous chapters, the Breath Group Method adds a crucial layer of naturalism to our timing toolkit.

While counting words gives us mathematical precision, understanding breath groups helps us transform those numbers into organic, flowing speech that connects with listeners on a subconscious level.

Think of it as the difference between a metronome's mechanical precision and a musician's natural sense of rhythm.

Understanding Breath Groups

What is a Breath Group?

A breath group is a collection of words that can be comfortably spoken in a single breath while maintaining natural speech patterns.

Typical characteristics include:

- 4-8 words per group
- 2-3 seconds of speaking time
- Natural grammatical breaks
- Logical phrase completion

Just as we learned to count syllables for precise timing in Chapter 3, breath groups represent the next level of timing mastery.

Consider how everyday conversation naturally falls into these patterns.

When someone tells a story, they instinctively break their speech into digestible chunks that align with their breathing.

This isn't just about oxygen – it's about giving listeners time to process information and creating a rhythm that holds attention.

Standard Timing Guidelines

- 15-second spot: 3-4 breath groups
- 30-second spot: 6-8 breath groups
- 60-second spot: 12-15 breath groups

Remember our earlier discussions about pacing in Chapter 5? These breath group numbers directly correlate with those timing patterns.

The beauty of this system is its flexibility – a breath group can be delivered quickly for excitement or slowly for emphasis, while still maintaining the overall timing of your spot.

This adaptability makes breath groups an invaluable tool for emotional range within strict time constraints.

Practical Application

Example 30-second commercial with breath groups marked (^ indicates breath point):

"Looking for amazing deals on furniture? ^
Visit Thompson's Warehouse today ^
where everything must go ^
in our annual clearance event! ^
Sofas, bedroom sets, dining rooms ^
all marked down to rock-bottom prices. ^
Thompson's Warehouse, Main Street downtown. ^
Sale ends Sunday!"

Let's analyze why this example works so well.

Notice how each breath group carries a complete thought or image, similar to the message clustering we discussed in Chapter 3.

The breaks aren't just for breathing – they create a natural rhythm that guides the listener through the message.

Each pause gives the brain a moment to process and anticipate, making the call-to-action more effective when it arrives.

Natural Break Points

Optimal places for breaths include:

1. After complete thoughts
2. Before new ideas
3. After punctuation marks
4. Between distinct list items
5. Before call-to-action phrases

These break points mirror natural speech patterns in everyday conversation.

Think about how you'd tell a friend about an exciting event – you naturally pause at these same moments.

By aligning our commercial writing with these instinctive patterns, we create copy that voice talent can deliver more convincingly and listeners can follow more easily.

Best Practices

Script Development:

- Write in natural phrases
- Consider voice talent needs
- Plan for production elements
- Build in timing flexibility
- Mark all breath points

Just as we learned to build flexibility into our word count estimates in Chapter 1, the Breath Group Method requires similar adaptability.

The key difference is that we're now thinking in terms of organic speech units rather than just numbers.

This approach bridges the gap between technical precision and natural delivery, creating scripts that are both precisely timed and naturally engaging.

The Breath Group Method ensures your copy not only times out perfectly but sounds natural and engaging.

It's particularly effective for conversational spots and emotional delivery styles.

When combined with the technical foundations we've built in previous chapters, it gives you a complete toolkit for creating commercial copy that hits every mark while maintaining the natural flow that connects with audiences.

Worksheet 7: Breath Group Method

Script Title: _____

Total Target Time: ____ seconds

Instructions:

Mark natural breath points with ^

Estimate time for each breath group

Your Script:

Group 1: _____ ^ (__ sec)

Group 2: _____ ^ (__ sec)

Group 3: _____ ^ (__ sec)

Group 4: _____ ^ (__ sec)

Group 5: _____ ^ (__ sec)

Group 6: _____ ^ (__ sec)

Group 7: _____ ^ (__ sec)

Group 8: _____ ^ (__ sec)

Breath Point Timing Check:

- Time between breaths: ____ seconds

- Number of words per breath: ____

- Total breaths in script: ____



Chapter 8:

Sentence Length Pattern

Structuring Sentences For Perfect Timing

Introduction

The Sentence Length Pattern method focuses on using sentence structure as a primary timing tool.

This technique helps create naturally flowing copy while maintaining precise timing control.

By understanding how sentence length affects pacing and delivery, copywriters can craft scripts that are both compelling and time-accurate.

Think of sentence length patterns as the rhythm section of your commercial's band. Just as a drummer controls the tempo and energy of a song, your sentence patterns control the pace and impact of your message, this method is also closely associated with poetry and rhyme.

This fundamental concept becomes particularly powerful when you consider how human attention naturally ebbs and flows - shorter sentences command attention, while longer ones allow listeners to process more complex information.

Understanding Sentence Patterns

Basic Patterns

1. Short Sentences (1-5 words)

- Create urgency
- Emphasize key points
- Perfect for calls-to-action

2. Medium Sentences (6-12 words)

- Deliver main information
- Balance flow and impact
- Most common in commercials

3. Long Sentences (13-20 words)

- Build narrative flow
- Establish context
- Detail complex offers

Consider these patterns as tools in your copywriting toolbox, each serving a distinct purpose.

Like a photographer choosing between wide-angle and telephoto lenses, your choice of sentence length should match your immediate objective.

Short sentences are your zoom lens, focusing attention on specific details.

Medium sentences are your standard lens, capturing everyday scenes with clarity.

Long sentences are your wide-angle lens, taking in the broader landscape of your message.

Timing Guidelines

Standard Commercial Structure:

- 15-second spot: 3-4 sentences
- 30-second spot: 6-8 sentences
- 60-second spot: 12-15 sentences

These guidelines aren't just arbitrary numbers - they're derived from decades of broadcast experience and human attention patterns.

Think of them as your commercial's breathing rhythm. Just as a person needs both inhales and exhales, your commercial needs both content and subtle pauses.

The number of sentences recommended for each duration allows for natural pacing while ensuring your message remains clear and impactful.

Practical Application

Example 30-second spot with sentence pattern analysis:

*"Need new furniture? [Short - 3 words]
Thompson's Warehouse has everything you're looking for. [Medium - 8 words]
Our massive showroom features quality pieces at incredible prices, with financing options available for every budget. [Long - 16 words]
Visit us today. [Short - 3 words]
Three convenient locations in Metro City. [Medium - 7 words]
Don't wait! [Short - 2 words]
Sale ends Sunday. [Short - 3 words]"*

To truly master this pattern approach, try reading commercial scripts aloud while timing yourself, you can record yourself doing this so you can check your work.

Notice how the varying sentence lengths create natural emphasis points and how they work together to maintain listener interest.

Pay particular attention to how the pattern builds tension with the longer sentence about the showroom, then releases it with quick, actionable phrases at the end.

Pattern Strategies

1. Opening Patterns:

- Start with short, attention-grabbing sentences
- Follow with medium sentences for information
- Use long sentences for details

2. Middle Patterns:

- Alternate between lengths for rhythm
- Group similar lengths for emphasis
- Build to key points

3. Closing Patterns:

- Return to short sentences
- End with clear call-to-action
- Keep contact info concise

Much like a musical composition, your sentence patterns should tell a story through their structure.

Consider how a symphony builds from its opening notes to its crescendo and resolution.

Your commercial's sentence pattern should follow a similar journey - grabbing attention, building interest, and driving action.

The key is to make these transitions feel natural while maintaining the precision timing required for broadcast.

Production Integration

1. Timing Considerations:

- Short sentences: 1-1.5 seconds
- Medium sentences: 2-3 seconds
- Long sentences: 4-6 seconds
- Transition time: 0.5 seconds

2. Working with Music:

- Match sentence breaks to musical phrases
- Align key points with musical hits
- Use sentence length for pacing

Understanding the relationship between sentence length and production elements is crucial for creating polished commercials.

Think of your script as a musical score, where each sentence is a phrase that must harmonize with both the background track and any sound effects.

The best copywriters work closely with audio producers, understanding how their sentence choices affect the final mix and overall timing of the piece.

Common Challenges

Every single radio copywriter faces timing challenges, but understanding the root causes helps in finding effective solutions.

Often, timing issues arise not from the content itself, but from how that content is structured.

Consider recording yourself reading your scripts during the writing process - this practice can help you identify potential timing issues before they become problems in the recording studio.

1. Timing Issues:

- Too many long sentences
- Unbalanced patterns
- Awkward transitions
- Rush points

2. Solutions:

- Break long sentences
- Combine short sentences
- Restructure for flow
- Adjust pattern rhythm

Professional Tips

For Better Flow:

- Vary sentence openings
- Use natural transitions
- Balance information density
- Consider breathing points
- Match style to content

These professional techniques come from years of industry experience and understanding how listeners process information.

Remember that your audience is hearing, not reading, your words.

What looks good on paper might not sound natural when spoken.

Always read your copy aloud during the writing process, paying attention to how the words feel in your mouth and how the sentences flow together.

Advanced Applications

1. Style Variations:

- Retail: More short sentences
- Corporate: More medium sentences
- Narrative: Mix of all lengths
- Legal: Structured long sentences

2. Multiple Voice Scripts:

- Alternate sentence lengths
- Plan voice handoffs
- Create dialogue rhythm
- Balance speaking parts

Understanding how to adapt sentence patterns for different commercial styles is what separates good copywriters from great ones.

Each industry and brand voice requires its own unique approach.

For example, a luxury brand might favor longer, more elegant sentences, while a fast-food promotion might rely on quick, punchy phrases.

The key is maintaining time control while serving the brand's voice and message requirements.

Best Practices

For Copy Development:

- Count words per sentence
- Mark sentence lengths
- Time each sentence
- Plan pattern variations
- Consider overall flow

The craft of copywriting requires both creativity and precision.

While these best practices might seem mechanical at first, they become second nature with experience.

Think of them as the foundation upon which you build your creative expression.

Just as a master chef needs to understand basic cooking techniques before creating innovative dishes, a copywriter must master these fundamental patterns before developing their own unique style.

The Sentence Length Pattern method provides a structured approach to timing while maintaining natural speech flow and effective message delivery.

Worksheet 8: Sentence Length Patterns

Script Title: _____

Total Target Time: ____ seconds

Instructions:

Mark natural breath points with ^

Estimate time for each breath group

Your Script:

Group 1: _____ ^ (__ sec)

Group 2: _____ ^ (__ sec)

Group 3: _____ ^ (__ sec)

Group 4: _____ ^ (__ sec)

Group 5: _____ ^ (__ sec)

Group 6: _____ ^ (__ sec)

Group 7: _____ ^ (__ sec)

Group 8: _____ ^ (__ sec)

Breath Point Timing Check:

- Time between breaths: ____ seconds

- Number of words per breath: ____

- Total breaths in script: ____



Chapter 9:

Word Rate Timing Method

Precise Timing Through Word Speed Analysis

Introduction

The Word Rate Timing Method focuses on the speed at which words are delivered, providing a scientific approach to commercial timing.

This technique allows copywriters to calculate exactly how many words can fit into a spot based on different speaking rates, making it particularly valuable for complex scripts or when working with multiple voice talents.

In practice, this method serves as a very good foundation for professional commercial production across all media platforms.

By mastering word rate timing, producers can ensure consistency across campaigns, minimize costly re-records, and deliver spots that maintain their impact while meeting strict broadcast requirements.

This systematic approach transforms what might otherwise be guesswork into a reliable, repeatable process that professionals can depend on.

Understanding Word Rates

Standard Speaking Rates

1. Slow Rate: 125-150 words per minute

- Luxury items
- Emotional appeals
- Complex information

2. Medium Rate: 150-175 words per minute

- Standard commercials
- Most retail spots
- General information

3. Fast Rate: 175-200 words per minute

- High-energy retail
- Time-sensitive offers
- Legal disclaimers

These rates aren't merely arbitrary numbers - they're derived from decades of broadcast research and psychological studies on human comprehension.

The slow rate allows listeners to fully process and retain information, making it ideal for high-value products where each word carries significant weight.

Medium rates mirror natural conversation, creating a comfortable listening experience.

Fast rates create urgency and excitement but must be used judiciously to maintain clarity.

Rate Calculations

Quick Reference Guide:

- 15 seconds at medium rate = 37-44 words
- 30 seconds at medium rate = 75-87 words
- 60 seconds at medium rate = 150-175 words

Understanding these calculations is crucial for real-world application.

Many producers that I know keep these numbers prominently displayed in their studios, using them as a quick sanity check during script development, or in production after they receive a script from a copywriter and they are trying to figure out what they are doing with it.

When combined with experience, these guidelines become second nature, allowing copywriters to craft scripts that hit their marks on the first try, saving valuable production time and resources.

Practical Application

Example Rate Analysis for 30-second spot:

*"HUGE SAVINGS at Thompson's Furniture! [5 words]
Everything must go in our annual clearance. [8 words]
Living room sets from \$599, [6 words]
bedroom sets starting at \$799, [6 words]
dining room packages under \$999! [6 words]
Plus, no interest for 48 months! [7 words]
Visit Thompson's Furniture today, [5 words]
where quality meets affordability. [5 words]"*

Total: 48 words = 160 words per minute (medium rate)

This example demonstrates how real-world scripts often incorporate varying rhythms within the overall word rate structure.

Notice how the opening line uses fewer words but demands more emphasis, while the middle section packs in more information at a brisker pace.

This natural ebb and flow creates interest while maintaining timing precision.

Speed Variation Factors

The art of managing these variations lies in understanding their cumulative effect on timing.

1. Content Type:

- Prices and numbers (slower)
- Familiar phrases (faster)
- Technical terms (slower)
- Brand names (medium)

2. Delivery Style:

- Conversational (medium)
- Hard-sell (faster)
- Corporate (slower)
- Emotional (variable)

A script heavy with technical terms and prices might require fewer total words than one filled with familiar phrases, even though both fill the same time slot.

Successful copywriters learn to instinctively balance these elements, creating scripts that sound natural while hitting precise time marks.

Production Integration

1. Rate Adjustments:

- Music tempo influence
- Sound effect timing
- Multiple voice coordination
- Transition timing

2. Buffer Calculations:

- 0.5 seconds for breaths
- 1 second for transitions
- 2 seconds for music beds
- 0.5 seconds for effects

The relationship between word rate and production elements is dynamic and interdependent.

Music tempo, for instance, can subtly influence a voice talent's pacing, even when they're trying to maintain a specific word rate.

Understanding these interactions allows producers to anticipate and accommodate timing shifts during the production process, rather than discovering them during the final mix.

Common Challenges

1. Rate Problems:

- Inconsistent speed
- Rushed sections
- Dragging sections
- Unnatural flow

2. Solutions:

- Adjust word count
- Redistribute content
- Modify phrase length
- Balance information

One often-overlooked aspect of managing rate problems is the psychological impact on voice talent.

When actors feel rushed or sense timing issues, their performance can suffer, creating a cascade of problems that affect the entire production.

Experienced producers learn to spot potential rate issues during the script phase, addressing them before they become performance problems.

Working with Voice Talent

Direction for Rates:

- Mark desired speeds
- Indicate transitions
- Show emphasis points
- Note natural breaks
- Allow interpretation

Building a collaborative relationship with voice talent is essential for successful timing implementation.

The best directors understand that voice actors need both technical guidance and creative freedom.

By providing clear timing markers while allowing for artistic interpretation, directors can achieve precise timing without sacrificing performance quality.

This balance of structure and creativity often results in the most compelling commercial productions.

Professional Tips

For Accurate Timing:

- Use a stopwatch
- Record test reads
- Mark rate changes
- Note complex sections
- Plan breathing points

The most successful professionals develop a sixth sense for timing, but they never abandon these fundamental tools.

Even veterans of the industry regularly time their reads during script development, knowing that a few minutes spent with a stopwatch can save hours in the studio.

This disciplined approach to timing becomes particularly valuable when working with multiple scripts or managing large campaigns.

Advanced Applications

1. Multiple Rates:

- Opening: Medium rate
- Body: Variable rate
- Disclaimer: Fast rate
- Close: Medium rate

2. Special Situations:

- Multiple voices
- Sound effect integration
- Musical timing
- Live read adjustments

The mastery of multiple rates within a single production separates novice writers from seasoned professionals.

Expert practitioners learn to orchestrate these rate changes like a conductor leading a symphony, creating dynamic spots that maintain perfect timing while delivering maximum impact.

This skill becomes particularly valuable in complex productions where multiple elements must work in harmony.

Best Practices

Script Development:

- Calculate total words needed
- Mark rate changes
- Include timing notes
- Plan rate variations
- Allow flexibility

The development of timing-conscious scripts is an iterative process that benefits from systematic review.

Many professional writers create multiple drafts, each time refining the timing elements while preserving the creative message.

This approach ensures that the final script serves both creative and technical requirements without compromise.

9: Word Rate Timing

Your Script:

Script Section Breakdown:

Opening (First 25%):

Words: _____

Time: _____ seconds

Rate: _____ wpm

Style: _____

Body (Middle 50%):

Words: _____

Time: _____ seconds

Rate: _____ wpm

Style: _____

Close (Final 25%):

Words: _____

Time: _____ seconds

Rate: _____ wpm

Style: _____

Overall Average Rate: _____ wpm

Worksheet 10: Multiple Voice Rate Tracker

Voice 1 Name/Type: _____
Lines: _____
Word Count: _____
Target Rate: _____ wpm
Actual Rate: _____ wpm

Voice 2 Name/Type: _____
Lines: _____
Word Count: _____
Target Rate: _____ wpm
Actual Rate: _____ wpm

Timing Notes:
Transitions: _____ seconds
Overlaps: _____ seconds
Total Time: _____ seconds

Worksheet 11: Production Elements Timing Grid

Element	Start Time	Duration	End Time
Intro Music	_____	_____	_____
Voice 1	_____	_____	_____
Sound Effect 1	_____	_____	_____
Voice 2	_____	_____	_____
Sound Effect 2	_____	_____	_____
Close Music	_____	_____	_____

Total Elements Time: _____ seconds
Available Speech Time: _____ seconds

Worksheet 12: Rate Adjustment Worksheet

Original Script Section:

Word Count: _____
Current Rate: _____ wpm
Target Rate: _____ wpm

Adjustments Needed:
Increase rate by _____ wpm
Decrease rate by _____ wpm

Modified Script:

New Word Count: _____
New Rate: _____ wpm

Worksheet 13: Script Speed Mapping

Mark each section with appropriate rate:

S = Slow (125-150 wpm)
M = Medium (150-175 wpm)
F = Fast (175-200 wpm)

Script Sections:

1. _____ Rate: _____
2. _____ Rate: _____
3. _____ Rate: _____
4. _____ Rate: _____

Transition Points:

- 1->2: _____ seconds
2->3: _____ seconds
3->4: _____ seconds

Total Transition Time: _____ seconds

Worksheet 14: Word Rate Chart EXAMPLE

		WORD RATE CHART						
NAME		BROOKE	SIMON	PAUL	RHIANNON	MARK	RICHARD	?
NUMBER OF WORDS		150 WPM, min, sec	155 WPM, min, sec	160 WPM, min, sec	165 WPM, min, sec	170 WPM, min, sec	175 WPM, min, sec	180 WPM, min, sec
25		10	10	9	9	9	9	8
30		12	12	11	11	11	10	10
35		14	14	13	13	12	12	12
40		16	16	15	15	14	14	13
45		18	17	17	16	16	15	15
50		20	19	19	18	18	17	17
55		22	21	21	20	19	19	18
60		24	23	23	22	21	21	20
65		26	25	24	24	23	22	22
70		28	27	26	26	25	24	23
75		30	29	28	27	27	26	25
80		32	31	30	29	28	27	27
85		34	33	32	31	30	29	28
90		36	35	34	33	32	31	30
95		38	37	36	35	34	33	32
100		40	39	38	36	35	34	33
105		42	41	39	38	37	36	35
110		44	43	41	40	39	38	37
115		46	45	43	42	41	40	38
120		48	47	45	44	42	41	40
125		50	48	47	46	44	43	42
130		52	50	49	47	46	45	43
135		54	52	51	49	48	46	45
140		56	54	53	51	49	48	47
145		58	56	54	53	51	50	48
150		1:00	58	56	55	53	51	50
155		1:02	1:00	58	56	55	53	52
160		1:04	1:02	1:00	58	57	55	53
165		1:06	1:04	1:02	1:00	58	57	55
170		1:08	1:06	1:04	1:02	1:00	58	57

EXAMPLES:

So BROOKE can read 75 words in 30 seconds because she can speak at 150 word per minute at a fast pace and PAUL can read 80 words in 30 seconds because he speaks at 160 words per minute and RICHARD can read roughly 90 words in 30 seconds as he can speak at 175 words per minute at his fastest

Worksheet 15: Performance Log

Date: _____

Script: _____

Take	Target Rate	Actual Rate	Notes
1	_____	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____
3	_____	_____	_____

Best Take: _____

Reason: _____

Areas for Rate Adjustment:

Worksheet 16: Quick Reference Chart

Common Commercial Lengths:

15-Second Spot

- Slow: 30-37 words
- Medium: 37-44 words
- Fast: 44-50 words

30-Second Spot

- Slow: 60-75 words
- Medium: 75-87 words
- Fast: 87-100 words

60-Second Spot

- Slow: 125-150 words
- Medium: 150-175 words
- Fast: 175-200 words

Worksheet 17: SCRIPT FOR FINDING YOUR VOICE TALENT READ RATES:

Welcome to our voice calibration test. This script is designed to measure your natural reading speed and vocal delivery pattern. Please read at your normal, conversational pace...

For more information about our latest products and services, visit 'Company Website dot com or call us today at 5 5 5; 1 2 3; 4 5 6 7. Our trained specialists are ready to assist you with any questions you might have about our complete range of solutions.

Did you know that eighty-seven percent of customers recommend our services? That's because we deliver exceptional results every single time. Since nineteen eighty-five, we've helped over ten thousand clients achieve their goals through innovative strategies and dedicated support.

Now through December thirty-first, take advantage of our special offer. Save up to thirty-five percent on select premium packages - starting as low as ninety nine dollars, ninety-five per month! Terms and conditions apply.

Don't wait another moment. Contact us today at info at company website dot com. You can also find us on social media at Company Name.

Our office hours are Monday through Friday, 9 am to 5 pm.

Remember, quality matters. Choose the team that puts your needs first. We look forward to working with you soon.

Word Count: 177 words

(Designed to be read at approximately 150 words per minute for standard pacing)

Notes for Voice Artists:

- This script includes common elements found in typical radio copy
- Read at your natural conversational pace
- Maintain consistent energy throughout
- Pronounce all numbers, URLs, and contact information clearly
- Pay attention to natural breaks and punctuation

Script Elements Included to aid in calculation:

- Website addresses
- Phone numbers
- Email address
- Numbers/statistics
- Prices
- Dates
- Social media handle
- Punctuation variations
- Time references



Chapter 9:

Digital Tools & Technology

Modern Solutions for Radio Copy Timing

Introduction

Digital tools have revolutionized radio copy timing, offering precision and efficiency that traditional methods can't match.

Understanding and effectively using these tools can streamline your workflow while improving accuracy.

This chapter explores the essential digital resources available to modern radio copywriters.

While the fundamentals of timing we've explored in previous chapters remain crucial, digital tools now allow us to apply these principles with unprecedented precision.

Think of these tools not as replacements for your timing skills, but as amplifiers that help you work faster and more accurately.

Just as a calculator doesn't replace mathematical understanding, digital timing tools enhance rather than substitute for your core copywriting expertise.

Essential Digital Tools

Word Processing Software

1. *Built-in Features:*

- Word count tools
- Character counters
- Reading time estimators
- Speech-to-text capabilities

2. *Advanced Functions:*

- Custom macros for timing
- Templates for different lengths
- Auto-formatting for scripts
- Collaboration tools

The real power of modern word processors lies in their ability to combine multiple timing methods we've discussed throughout this book.

For instance, you can simultaneously track word count (Chapter 1), monitor syllable patterns (Chapter 3), and mark breath groups (Chapter 5) all within the same document.

Consider setting up custom templates that automatically highlight longer words or mark potential breath points, turning your word processor into a comprehensive timing assistant.

Digital Audio Workstations (DAWs)

1. *Basic Features:*

- Precise timing displays
- Multiple track layouts
- Visual waveform editing
- Real-time monitoring

2. Advanced Features:

- Tempo matching
- Automated timing adjustment
- Multiple voice synchronization
- Sound effect integration

Modern DAWs have transformed how we apply the musical timing principles discussed in Chapter 6.

Instead of counting bars manually, you can now visualize how your copy aligns with music beds and instantly adjust pacing.

This visual representation makes it easier to spot potential timing issues before they become problems in the recording booth.

Online Resources

1. Web-Based Tools:

- Online script timers
- Speaking rate calculators
- Word count analyzers
- Rhythm checkers

2. Mobile Applications:

- Portable script timers
- Voice recording apps
- Pace monitoring tools
- Quick reference guides

The digital age has made timing tools more accessible than ever, and you can access many of the different types of counting via our webpage at: www.radiocopywriters.com and look for the "FREE TOOLS" tab.

Remember those complex timing calculations from Chapter 2? Some of those can be done online simply by copying and pasting your script into a tab.

However, it's crucial to understand the underlying principles – these tools should validate your timing instincts, not replace them, Think of online resources as a second pair of eyes checking your work.

Production Software Integration

Modern production software allows us to implement the emotional timing techniques from Chapter 7 with greater precision.

You can now visualize the exact duration of dramatic pauses or see how emphasis patterns affect overall timing.

This integration of creative and technical elements helps maintain the emotional impact of your copy while ensuring perfect timing.

1. Script Development:

- Digital script formats
- Timing markers
- Production notes
- Revision tracking

2. Audio Production:

- Time stretching
- Beat matching
- Automated spacing
- Voice compression

Best Practices

Just as we established the importance of consistent timing methods in earlier chapters, maintaining consistent digital workflows is equally crucial, consider the following factors:

1. File Management:

- Consistent naming conventions
- Version control
- Backup systems
- Shared access protocols

2. Workflow Integration:

- Template creation
- Shortcut setup
- Default settings
- Quick access tools

Create systems that automatically implement your timing preferences – templates that include standard timing markers that quickly calculate speaking rates for different styles of delivery.

Common Digital Solutions

1. Timing Issues:

- Automated pace adjustment
- Real-time monitoring
- Visual timing guides
- Instant feedback

2. Production Challenges:

- Multi-track timing
- Automated spacing
- Digital metronomes
- Visual cue points

These digital solutions directly address many of the challenges we discussed in earlier chapters. For example, the visual timing guides can help you spot potential breath group issues (Chapter 7) before recording, while automated spacing tools can help maintain consistent pacing throughout longer scripts.

Professional Tips

For Digital Workflow:

- Use cloud backup
- Create templates
- Establish shortcuts
- Maintain archives
- Regular updates

Consider how these digital tools can enhance each stage of your copy development process.

For instance, cloud backup ensures you never lose perfectly-timed copy, while templates can automatically implement the structural timing patterns we discussed in Chapter 4.

Advanced Applications

1. Automation Features:

- Script analysis
- Rate calculation
- Timing adjustment
- Format conversion

2. Integration Tools:

- CMS connectivity
- Traffic system links
- Archive integration
- Remote collaboration

The most powerful aspect of digital tools is their ability to combine multiple timing methods simultaneously.

Modern software can analyze your copy for word count, syllable patterns, and breath groups all at once, providing a comprehensive timing assessment that would be time-consuming to do manually.

Future Trends

Emerging Technologies:

- AI script analysis
- Real-time adjustment
- Voice recognition
- Automated timing
- Smart templates

While these technologies are exciting, remember that they build upon the fundamental principles we've explored throughout this book.

The future of copy timing isn't about replacing human judgment but enhancing it with more sophisticated tools.

Troubleshooting Guide

Common Issues:

- Software conflicts
- Format problems
- Sync issues
- Data loss

Solutions:

- Regular updates
- File backups
- Format checking
- System maintenance

Think of troubleshooting as the digital equivalent of the script review process we discussed in Chapter 3.

Just as you'd double-check your manual timing calculations, regularly verify that your digital tools are functioning correctly and maintaining accuracy.

The effective use of digital tools can significantly improve timing accuracy while streamlining the production process.

However, remember that these tools are most powerful when combined with the fundamental timing principles we've explored throughout this book.

Technology should enhance, not replace, your understanding of what makes copy time out perfectly.



Chapter 10: Troubleshooting & Common Challenges

Solutions for Radio Copy Timing Problems

Introduction

Even the most experienced copywriters face timing challenges.

This chapter provides practical solutions to common timing problems, helping you maintain professional standards while meeting creative goals.

Understanding these challenges and their solutions will help you handle any timing situation confidently.

Consider timing as the invisible framework that holds your radio copy together.

Just as a building needs a solid foundation, your copy needs precise timing to maintain its structural integrity.

When you master timing, you create a seamless experience for listeners while effectively delivering your message.

This mastery comes from understanding both the technical aspects of timing and the artistry of pacing.

Common Timing Problems

Running Long

1. Identification:

- Script exceeds time limit
- Rushed delivery needed
- Compressed sound effects
- Truncated endings

2. Solutions:

- Remove redundant phrases
- Simplify complex terms
- Use shorter synonyms
- Restructure sentences
- Eliminate unnecessary adjectives

When your copy runs long, think of it as an opportunity to refine your message rather than a setback.

Consider each word as a valuable resource that must earn its place in your script.

For example, instead of saying "at this point in time," simply say "now."

Rather than "in order to," use "to."

These small changes add up quickly, and often make your copy more impactful while solving timing issues.

Remember, brevity isn't just about meeting time constraints - it's about clarity and impact.

Running Short

1. Identification:

- Empty air time
- Stretched delivery
- Extended music beds
- Awkward pauses

2. Solutions:

- Add relevant details
- Include secondary benefits
- Expand call-to-action
- Add qualifying statements
- Incorporate testimonials
- Include sound effects or grabs

Running short presents a unique opportunity to enhance your message's value.

Think strategically about what additional information would most benefit your audience.

For instance, if you're advertising a sale, don't just pad with generic terms - add specific details about popular items or customer savings.

The key is to maintain the same energy and purpose as your original copy while naturally incorporating new information.

This approach ensures that added content feels intentional rather than forced.

Voice Talent Issues

1. Speed Problems:

- Inconsistent pacing
- Regional speech patterns
- Emphasis difficulties
- Breath control issues

2. Solutions:

- Mark breath points
- Indicate pace changes
- Note emphasis words
- Provide timing cues
- Allow rehearsal time

Working with voice talent requires understanding that each voice artist brings their own natural rhythm and style.

Early communication about timing expectations is crucial.

Create a system of visual cues in your script that helps talent navigate the rhythm you envision.

For example, use forward slashes (/) for brief pauses and double slashes (//) for longer breaks.

Underline or bold words that need emphasis.

These visual guides help talent interpret your timing intentions while maintaining their natural delivery style.

Production Challenges

1. Music Integration:

- Mismatched tempo
- Poor transitions
- Timing conflicts
- Awkward endings

2. Solutions:

- Adjust copy rhythm
- Mark hit points
- Plan transitions
- Build in flexibility
- Use tempo guides

Understanding musical structure is essential for smooth production.

Listen to your selected music bed before writing, noting natural breaks, crescendos, and rhythm changes.

Write your copy to complement these elements rather than fight against them.

For instance, if your music has a strong beat every four counts, try structuring key phrases to align with these beats.

This creates a natural flow that makes timing adjustments easier during production.

Emergency Fixes

Quick Solutions for:

1. Live Reads:

- Highlight key points
- Mark optional cuts
- Show alternate endings
- Provide time cues

2. Last-Minute Changes:

- Keep modular structure
- Prepare alternate versions
- Mark flexible sections
- Have backup options

The key to handling emergency timing situations is preparation and flexibility.

Design your copy with modular sections that can be easily adjusted without losing the core message.

For example, create three versions of your closing line - one short, one medium, and one long.

Color-code sections that can be removed without affecting the essential message.

This modular approach allows for quick adjustments while maintaining professional quality, even under pressure.

Professional Solutions

1. Prevention Strategies:

- Double-check calculations
- Test multiple reads
- Build in buffer time
- Use multiple methods
- Regular review points

2. Quality Control:

- Systematic checking
- Multiple reviewers
- Test recordings
- Format verification
- Client approval process

Prevention is always more efficient than correction.

Develop a systematic approach to timing verification that becomes second nature.

Create a personal checklist that includes reading the copy aloud at different speeds, recording test versions, and having colleagues review.

Consider timing not just as a technical requirement but as a fundamental element of your creative process.

This mindset shift helps integrate timing considerations naturally into your workflow, resulting in an easier job for your producer.

Special Situations

1. Multiple Voice Scripts:

- Timing conflicts
- Handoff problems
- Overlap issues
- Pace matching

2. Solutions:

- Clear marking system
- Detailed timing notes
- Coordinated rehearsal
- Flexible transitions

Multi-voice scripts require an orchestral approach to timing.

Just as a conductor coordinates different instruments, you must coordinate different voices.

Create detailed timing maps that show where voices overlap, interact, or hand off to each other.

Use visual tools like timing grids or color-coding to make these interactions clear.

Remember that each voice talent has their own natural pace - account for these differences in your timing calculations.

Best Practices

For Problem Prevention:

- Regular timing checks
- Clear communication
- Backup plans
- Quality control
- Documentation

Success in radio copy timing comes from developing strong habits and systems.

Treat each project as an opportunity to refine your timing skills.

Keep detailed notes about what works and what doesn't in different situations.

Share these insights with colleagues and learn from their experiences.

The most successful copywriters are those who view timing challenges as opportunities for creative problem-solving rather than obstacles.

Technical Solutions

1. Software Tools:

- Timing calculators
- Script analyzers
- Recording software
- Editing programs

2. Manual Methods:

- Stopwatch timing
- Reading aloud
- Marking systems
- Physical scripts

Technology can be a powerful ally in managing timing issues, but it shouldn't replace your natural sense of rhythm and pacing.

Combine digital tools with traditional methods for the best results.

For example, use software to get precise measurements, but also trust your ear and experience.

Record yourself reading the copy and listen back - sometimes the stopwatch says one thing, but your instincts tell you something else.

Learning to balance technical precision with creative intuition is the mark of a truly skilled copywriter.

The ability to troubleshoot timing issues quickly and effectively is crucial for professional radio copywriting success.

Remember that timing problems are not just technical challenges - they're opportunities to strengthen your copy and enhance your message's impact.



Chapter 11: Different Ad Styles Deliver Different Results

Your Choice of Ad Category CAN Change it's Results

Introduction:

Using the different timing methods mentioned in this book is all well and good - but what suits one style of commercial, may not suit another., and you don't want every single commercial on your radio station to all sound exactly the same either (eg: all fast 87 word, call to action reads).

For example the Syllable Counting will suit a Call To Action ad - but not a Creative Branding Ad, finding the best method for the style of commercial you are creating therefore is not only a matter of preference, and skill level.

I suggest you write your script, then try out the different counting methods, find the one that suits you, your style and the type of read you are trying to accomplish - then use that for that style of script, then find a different one for another, etc... We have found that our own personal likes, dislikes and languages guide us to the type we like best.

For example, I write in English, and prefer Syllable Count for Call To Action scripts, Word count for Branding and Word Rate for live reads. The choice is yours.

Application:

Call To Action ads usually fall into 5 distinct categories...

- 1. HARD SELL** (or SHOUTY) ads which only work if we only talk about 1 or 2 products per ad, that ARE of great value, eg: \$1 Mercedes Benz. They are really, really fast!
- 2. SHOPPING LIST** commercials, only work to impress listeners that you have a lot of products, but no one will remember them all, let alone one, or who you are or where you are, or your phone number or your website, all in the one ad. Usually these are very fast reads too!
- 3. CONVERSATION** ads, only work if they are funny, fast and discuss ONE product or service, not multiples. 1 person needs to be smart, the other wants to know what the other person knows.
- 4. MEDIUM SELL** ads, work better as you have time to make an emotional connection with the listener, or give them something to remember, build a picture in their mind.
- 5. SOFT SELL** ads work best, you have time to really sell the results of the product or service, or build a complete picture in the theatre of their mind.

Branding Ads... work really well, but only if they are MEDIUM or SOFT SELL, and they work better if you have multiple ads selling 1 product or service per ad, and... they work better still if they are creative...

Best Practices for Creative Branding Ads:

Creative Branding Ads can inspire people to buy products and services, creative messages get more attention and lead to positive attitudes about the products being marketed.

Overall, more-creative campaigns are more effective. BUT they are harder to achieve the right balance of: Originality; Flexibility; contain Elaboration; Synthesis; and Artistic Value to achieve the results that a client is after. They take time to develop and to work on-air.

Ultimately: "a dollar invested in a highly creative ad campaign had nearly double the sales impact of a dollar spent on a non-creative campaign."*

The impact of creativity was initially relatively small but typically gathered momentum as the campaign rolled out.

Real World Application

1. ORIGINALITY

An original ad comprises elements that are rare, surprising, or move away from the obvious and commonplace. Focus on uniqueness of the ideas or features of the product or service.

2. FLEXIBILITY

Flexibility is seen in an ad's ability to link a product to a range of different uses or ideas.

3. ELABORATION

Many ads are creative because they contain unexpected details or extend basic ideas so they become more intricate and complicated.

4. SYNTHESIS

An ad that is creative along this dimension blends normally unrelated objects or ideas to build an image.

5. ARTISTIC VALUE

Ads with a high level of artistic creativity contain aesthetically appealing verbal or sound elements. Their production quality is high, their dialog is clever, or their choice of music is somehow memorable.

(Study based on the model by Robert Smith, by Werner Reinartz and Peter Saffert at the University of Cologne in Germany, 2013))

Other Ad Styles You Might Consider:

HUMOUR IN ADS

Clients who want humour in their ads need to be aware that humour is subjective, and have a fast burn rate on-air. At the most, any had with an attempt of humour should not be on air longer than 1 month, preferably no more than 3 weeks.

TESTIMONIALS

Ads with testimonials (actual audio grabs or acted responses) work really, really well, they are seen as a personal word of mouth review and are highly effective – IF there are not a lot of them on-air from different clients. The more ads that contain testimonials, the less trust worthy they will appear to your listeners.

STORIES

Names and stories from businesses about staff, clients, work incredibly well. Building a rapport with listeners by telling the story of a staff member, a product or service will let listeners connect, and ask to speak to that person, or talk to you about that story. These have longevity and can be bought back at any time.



Chapter 11: APPENDIX

Quick Reference Timing Log

Keep track of your timing success:

Date	Script Name	Target	Actual	Method Used
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Notes on What Worked Best:

Essential Reference Materials for Radio Commercial Timing

Standard Timing Reference Charts

Basic Word Count Standards

Commercial Length	Word Count Range	Characters	Speaking Rate
15 seconds	30-40 words	150-180	120-160 wpm
30 seconds	60-75 words	300-350	120-150 wpm
45 seconds	90-110 words	450-525	120-147 wpm
60 seconds	120-140 words	600-700	120-140 wpm

Speaking Rate Variations

Style	Words per Minute	Best Used For
Slow	125-150 wpm	Luxury, emotional
Medium	150-175 wpm	Standard retail
Fast	175-200 wpm	Disclaimers
Conversational	140-160 wpm	Dialog spots

Industry Timing Guidelines

Production Elements

1. Music Bed Timing:

- Intro: 2-3 seconds
- Outro: 2-3 seconds
- Transitions: 0.5-1 second
- Total music time: 10-15% of spot

2. Sound Effects:

- Short effects: 0.5 seconds
- Medium effects: 1 second
- Long effects: 1.5-2 seconds
- Maximum total: 15% of spot

3. Voice Transitions:

- Voice handoff: 0.3 seconds
- Cross-fade: 0.5 seconds
- Clean break: 0.2 seconds
- Dialog overlap: 0.2-0.4 seconds

Common Word Count Adjustments

Numbers and Dates:

- Phone numbers: Count as spoken
 - 555-1234 = "five five five, one two three four" (7 words)
- Years: Count as spoken
 - 2025 = "twenty twenty-five" (2 words)
- Prices: Count as spoken
 - \$19.99 = "nineteen ninety-nine" (2 words)

Web Addresses:

- Standard format: Count each segment
 - www.example.com = "www (pause) example (pause) com" (3 words)
- Custom URLs: Count as spoken
 - BuyNow.com = "buy now dot com" (3 words)

Glossary of Terms

Basic Terms:

- Copy: Written script for radio commercial
- Read: Voice talent's delivery of copy
- Tag: Final branded message
- Hook: Opening attention-grabber
- Bed: Background music track

Technical Terms:

- WPM: Words Per Minute
- CPS: Characters Per Second
- BPM: Beats Per Minute
- Hit Points: Specific timing marks
- Bumper: Short transition piece

Production Terms:

- Mix: Combined elements
- Level: Volume adjustment
- Fade: Volume transition
- Cross-fade: Overlapping transition
- Donut: Copy with music breaks

Resource List

Digital Tools:

1. *Word Processing:*

- Microsoft Word
- Google Docs
- Specialized script software

2. *Audio Production:*

- Adobe Audition
- Pro Tools
- Audacity

3. *Timing Software:*

- Script timers
- Rate calculators
- Character counters

Professional Organizations:

1. Radio Advertising Bureau (RAB)
2. National Association of Broadcasters (NAB)
3. Radio And Production (RAP)

Quick Reference Guidelines

Check to see if you script requires any of the following... **BEFORE** sending to the client!

Legal Requirements:

1. Disclaimer speeds
2. Required disclosures
3. Contest rules
4. Regulated industries

Format Standards:

1. Script formatting
2. Timing notation
3. Production marks
4. Revision tracking

Quality Control Checklist:

1. Time check points
2. Voice talent notes
3. Production elements
4. Client requirements

NOW IS THE TIME TO MASTER THE CLOCK!

What you have in your hands is the definitive guide to timing radio scripts with pinpoint accuracy.

REVEALED:

Nine battle-tested methods professional copywriters use to nail their timing, every single time.

"COUNTING WORDS" by Earl Pilkington transforms guesswork into precision.

DISCOVER:

- 1. The Simple Word Count that never fails**
- 2. Traditional Standard Count trusted by veterans**
- 3. Stress Pattern Method for natural-sounding delivery**
- 4. The Japanese Character Count for precise pacing**
- 5. Musical Bar Method to match your production**
- 6. Syllable Count Method for precision timing**
- 7. Breath Group Method for flawless voicing**
- 8. Sentence Length Patterns that engage listeners**
- 9. Word Rate Timing for perfect :30s and :60s**

REAL-WORLD TOOLS:

Modern digital solutions, troubleshooting techniques, and proven fixes for those "just a few seconds over" moments every copywriter dreads.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION:

Packed with worksheets and real examples for:

- Commercial scripts**
- Station promos**
- Credit tags and liners**
- Time-critical announcements**

Don't just write radio copy – master the science of timing it with COUNTING WORDS as your reference point.

COUNTING WORDS

Earl Pilkington

**THIS IS A FREE E-BOOK BY RADIO COPY PASTE MAGAZINE
AVAILABLE TO DOWNLOAD FROM: www.radiocopywriters.com**