

# [Codes and conventions of factual programmes](https://assignbuster.com/codes-and-conventions-of-factual-programmes/)

Introduction

In this assignment I will be writing a report that identifies and investigates the issues, codes and conventions of factual programmes. I will be a Head of Factual Programming and I have been asked by my TV Station to provide guidelines for my production staff. I will be identifying any potential issues within a factual programme that has a refence to accuracy, bias, subjectivity, privacy, impartiality, representation, objectivity and impartiality. I will then be explaining these and how they work within factual programmes.

Issues relating to factual TV programmes

Accuracy

Although researchers are employed to make sure that your factual programmes are completely true and well researched, as a producer your first job while producing your programme is to make sure the information you’re including is legitimate. When you make a factual programme you’re making a claim to the audience watching that your programme is completely truthful and therefore if you twist the truth or even make events up you could be considered to be fraudulent. If you’re making a reconstruction of an event for your documentary you must make sure you make it clear to the audience that this is a reconstruction and not observational footage. You must do this as in a factual documentary you’re reflecting normal life and making a claim to the audience that the footage taken is reflecting a normal life and day lived by the contributor. If you were thinking of instigating a certain event as a producer, for example telling the contributor to confront someone they would not have in their normal lives that could be seen as breaking your contract with the viewers. This could lead to complaints from the audience on how accurate your documentary actually is and how much of it is faked.

Bias

The phrase bias refers to the point of being prejudice towards a certain group of people which feel to be different to anyone else; race, sexuality, gender. When a writer goes to a company to see if their script is worthy enough to be commissioned they can to take into considerations if it is offensive towards a group or if it can damage the company. If it can they the company will more than likely prevent them from commissioning the script as they do not want to come across as offensive. An example of when this could occur would be if a script singles out females in a way which is considered to be sexiest and then the people offended may press charges against the company.

Impartiality

Within the news its vital for it to be reported with accuracy and to be shown as impartiality. When presenting a news story, it needs to be impartiality as this means the views are shown to be fair. On top of this it would need to include different arguments for each point to make sure it’s not agreeing with one side. An example of this would have been during the Scottish referendum as this is when Scotland were going to do a vote to see if they should leave the UK. During this time the BBC would need to stay impartial as they would need to show the opinions of Scottish people and individuals within the rest of the UK. This is due to the fact that the BBC is owned by the public so they have to be unbiased in these situations. If the BBC made this story not impartial then it may make the audience angry and less likely to continue watching the news on this channel.  Another good example of impartial documentaries are the ones made by Louis Theroux as he shows both side of the story by standing back and letting other people provide the information. This allows the programmes to sustain a neutral balance.

Objectivity

This is when there is a lack of prejudice, bias or judgement, and is not on either side of the argument. This is the ability to analyse and understand the truth whilst making an obvious decision from the discoveries that have been made through research.  A factual news programme would need to present the bare facts of the subject in their report, without including any of their own opinions or emotions into the report. This allows the viewers to come to their own conclusion and opinion about the subject. A good example of a factual programme that has to remain objective is ‘ BBC News at Ten’

Subjectively

Subjectivity is basically the opposite of objectivity, in the sense that with subjectivity you can include your own opinions and emotions into your reports. Subjectivity doesn’t work well for a factual news programme because it would be unbalanced and opinionated. A good example of a factual programme that uses subjectivity would be BBC’s ‘ Match of the Day’, where the pundits would present the facts and statistics of a game, but deliver them with their own opinion and judgement. American news programmes, like ‘ FOX News’ are very subjective, because the anchors will give their own opinions and views on the reports they present to their viewers.

Privacy

Privacy is perhaps the most talked about and the most controversial when it comes to factual programming. There are many grey areas when it comes to someone’s privacy. A factual news programme, such as ‘ BBC News’, will release suspects or victim’s names of certain crimes, even without knowing all of the facts of the story. This is controversial because obviously if the suspect is proven innocent and released by the police after questioning, his or her name has been broadcast to the public, which could in fact be a threat to their safety. In the digital world we live in today, privacy of our information is something which is often discussed and debated. In factual programming it is possible to get interviews with victims of crimes, and if they wish to remain anonymous then the programme will usually use an over the shoulder shot from behind the victim so you can’t see their face, and they will also use voice manipulation so you won’t be able to recognise their normal voice.

Representation

Representation in factual programming is about how various groups, different topics and different individuals are portrayed or represented in the media. It’s important to represent groups equally in factual programming, you can’t represent one group in a bad light but represent another group in a better light. For example, the factual programme would be deemed racist if you represented white people in a good light, but represented black people in a bad light. You always have to represent groups fairly.

Contract with viewers

This is an unwritten rule or agreement that factual programming has with its audience and viewers. It basically means that if you advertise your programme as factual, then your audience expects it to remain unbiased, balanced, and remain impartial. If your programme is thought or accused of being biased, unbalanced, or if it has misrepresented a side of a topic or subject, then your programme will lose credibility with your audience and viewers because you have not lived up to the expectations of a factual programme.

Codes and conventions of Factual Programmes

What are factual programmes?

Factual television is a genre of TV which is always non-fiction as it speaks about real people and real events that have occurred.  This genre would include things such as; documentaries, news shows, chat shows, review shows, reality TV and some over sub-genres. An example of a factual programme would be big brother. The channel 4 show focusses on the life of normal people in a small environment with challenges to complete in hope for good content for their audience to continuing watching. On top of this they also do a celebrity one every year as it would more than likely attract a wider audience.  The positives of factual programmes are that they can educate and inform the people that are watching whilst also creating some form of empathy for the audience to change. On top of this it also provides neutral, balanced and accurate material which could lead to fairer content. However, factual programmes also have their negatives as some channels may give off a biased story as they could go against what another political party are saying. They also give no impact to society as they have a niche audience. The two main examples of factual programmes I am going to discuss is going to be documentaries and the news. Documentaries tend to offer vital information’s on a various amount of topics whilst the news state statistics and facts to help contract with their viewer.

What are codes and conventions?

Codes and conventions are the ingredients that are used by the media to help communicate ideas through visual, audio and technical techniques. Each media text has codes and conventions that would make up their genre and allows the audiences to have an understanding of what they are watching.  There are different types of codes used to break up different sections. Visual codes would could consist of using angles, camera shots and movements to help define the genre. For instance, a low angle would make the character seem much more powerful and a little bit intimidating as it makes them look much bigger than they actually are.  Lastly, technical codes consist of things that have been changed during post production in a hope to make the genre seem more realistic. Examples of these would be editing, lighting and camera techniques. However, conventions are known to be the way in which codes are being used as this would improve the audiences understanding of the character roles in the programme. The way in which these are used can define whether a character is an antagonist or protagonist whilst giving the audience an overall better understanding of the importance of each character.

Presenter

The role of a presenter is to say the information given to you in a matter that will engage the audience, through using clear language and making the structure easy to understand. Another role of a presenter is to be able to narrate the story effectively which could involve using voiceovers for certain stories. It is very common for a presenter to perform in front of a green screen as then pictures can be displayed behind them if needed. An example of famous presenters would be Sian Williams and Bill Turnball and they present on the BBC. The BBC hire presenters that are non-bias as they want to create content that will not offend their audience. If it was biased it would be constantly changing the ideas of their audience and persuaded them to do things in a certain way.

Correspondent/field reporter

A field reporter and correspondent will typically work for a radio show, newspaper company or television news. This member of the group will travel to different areas to report the news from where it is actually happening. They have to research the information themselves and then they need to create a script for themselves to use during the recording section. A disadvantage of becoming a field reporter is the fact that they can get interrupted by the general public quite often which could ruin the story. An example of when a field reporter would be needed id if a member of parliament is doing a speech and the news company wanted to report on it.

News reader

The news reader is the person in charge of reading out the news to the audience. The news reader is also responsible for helping the research section and making sure everything written down makes sense and is factual. On top of this they always use formal language and appear to constantly be impartial as otherwise some audience members may get offended. To link with being formal they are also meant to keep eye contact with the camera as it further shows professionalism.  An example of this would be BBC news as they are always dressed in suits and they rarely change facial expressions whilst speaking.

Links to the studio

Linking to the studio is when a news team within a studio want to speak about a news story but they partner up with another news company so they gather more information or to share a guest to interview. An example of when this occurred would be when BBC news as they do this sometimes when they want to speak about a news story with a different studio which would have someone who is an expert on the situation.

Interviewing

Interviews are very important in the media industry as they are used to help get added information from people who are known to be experts on this situation. Interviews allow the audience to learn something new in which they probably never would have before. An example of this would be the BBC’s ‘ Match of the day’ as they interview a vast majority of players and managers to get their thoughts after the game. They ask questions on whether they think the game was deserved and if they believed the team played well etc.

Actual footage/images

This is footage that can be related to whatever the news reader is discussing. They more than likely will put the video on whilst the reader speaks over the footage. This is used to visually helped the audience understand the story more. An example of this would be from the BBC again as they are always using this when speaking about different countries that are involved in war.

Modes of address to the user

The mode of address to the user is in basic about how the reporter presents news to the audience. An example of this would be BBC and ITV news readers precise languid but unlike BBC three and channel 5 is much less formal and uses slang to attract the younger audience. BBC three traditionally has celebrities and does the news in a whopping sixty seconds. This furthermore attracts the younger audience.

Report structure

Most reports in the news focus on putting the most important aspects of the story at the top of story and then leave the least important sections and the bottom of the story. They present it from top to bottom. This would mean the most important information is obviously discussed first.  This could be seen as a positivity as it allows the audience to put on the news and see a story which interests them right at the start.

Documentary Formats;

## E xpository

## These types of documentaries consist of exposing a person or a topic of some sort. It is also known as being a classic documentary and they are also known for having a commentator that would speak over the story to full explain what is happening.  Expository documentaries express what they are saying towards the audience as they are either; historical, biographical or discuss some over event. The rhetoric insistently presses upon us to read the images in a certain fashion. Historical documentaries in this mode deliver an unproblematic and ‘ objective’ account and interpretation of past events. They also consist of having a lot of interviews in spaces without pictures/videos being shown. An example of an expository documentary would be ‘ Backstairs Billy: The Queen Mum’s Butler’. This documentary is about William Tallom and he was the queens devoted servant. This documentary is made up stories, videos and photos of William with the queen. The queens mother and princess Diana. The documentary focuses on how he was very close with the royal family but now lives in a flat, alone, with the press constantly hounding him.

## Interactive

## This type of documentary interacts with its participants and uses archival film to retrieve history.  Its deficiencies are intrusiveness, excessive faith in witnesses, and a tendency to produce naïve history.  These participatory documentaries strongly agree that it is not possible for the film maker to not change the events after it is being filmed. In these documentaries it’s not only the film maker which is involved in the programs as the audience also get an understanding of how certain situations can be changed their presence. An example of a documentary like this would be ‘ Ross Kemp on Gangs’. This is adocumentaryseriesthat was broadcasted onSky 1from 21 September 2004, until 6 January 2009. The series follows Kemp and a film crew around the world as they interview members of “ gangs”, locals who have been affected by gang violence, and the authorities who are attempting to combat the problem. Kemp then tries to establish contact within the gangs in an attempt to talk to their leader.

## Observational

## This type of documentary likes to observe things whist recording them and tend to not use commentary afterwards whilst controlling less technical aspects. Observational documentaries attempt to simply and spontaneously observe lived life with a minimum of intervention. These documentaries were first brought to life in the 1960s due to the increase in technology as this made it possible to carry smaller cameras and portable equipment to pick up sound. A type of documentary that follows this would be the show ’16 and pregnant’. This reality TV shows follows the lives of pregnant teenagers and discusses how they plan to deal with their situation and high school at the same time. This show would be an observational documentary as it follows pregnant teens around and observes their day to day life and what it’s like to deal with it. Even though there are not any interviews the girls still discuss their raw emotions and express what effects this will cause.

## Performative

## The performative documentary acknowledges the emotional and subjective aspects of a documentary whilst also addressing the audience the emotions. Describes the issues with in humans in a way that abstract disembodied of Western philosophical tradition. They are strongly personal, unconventional, perhaps poetic and/or experimental, and might include hypothetical enactments of events designed to make us experience what it might be like for us to possess a certain specific perspective on the world that is not our own. Often, a battery of techniques, many borrowed from fiction or avant-garde films, are used. Performative docs often link up personal accounts or experiences with larger political or historical realities. A documentary that follows this would be ‘ Biggie and Tupac’. This speaks about how they were both shot in two different occasions, they were both apart of the east-west. The documentary uses an ex police officer that has evidence that the LAPD purposely ruined the case to benefit all the groups involved.

## Reflective

## This documentary the film maker is the main focus within shots whilst also narrating the documentary. The reflective documentary is typically associated with documentaries that are experimental. This is where the viewer is as interested about the film is being created as they are with actual content. Sometimes the documentary can draw attention away from lighting and editing compared to the actual documentary itself. This form of documentary tend to have the most factual information as it is always about realism. On top of this the viewers are easily swayed be the person who makes the documentary. An example of someone who creates a few reflective documentaries would be Louis Theroux. He is very well known for making his programmes controversial and as he is always in front of the cameras he is now a casual interviewer. In some occasions he takes part in certain activities that he is documenting, so he can get an inside look, but still impartial and slightly detached.

Poetic

A poetic documentary is typically about a topic that the people involved in can relate to as they interviewees and presenters can relate to the topic. It will normally speak about someone’s life but it is presented through editing, camera shots, music and camera angles. It is a lot more artistic compared to the other styles of documentaries due to this. In this documentary music is vital as it sets the tone and mood of the storying whilst having hidden messages in it.

Participatory

This is known to be when to be when the film creator has a direct address within the subject and is actually involved within the documentary. An example of a documentary like this would be Nick Broomfields ‘ Kurt and Courtney’.

Conclusion

I think if you are creating a factual programme then you need to make sure that every point discussed in this essay is at least considered, and if needed, acted on. If you created a factual programme that is unbalanced and biased towards a certain opinion, then your programme will not be respected by your audience, and it will gain a very bad reputation for only showing one sided arguments. Factual programmes that have considered all of the points discussed in this essay, and if they abide by them, then I feel as if that programme will be a lot more popular than a factual programme who have ignored some of the discussed points. Personally, I think that all of the points discussed in this essay are important, but impartiality, balance and bias are incredibly important for a factual programme. I believe this because impartiality, balance and bias are the three things that new viewers for your programme will notice straight away. If they feel the programme is one sided and biased, then this will turn them off straight away from your programme, and it will make them have a bad opinion of your programme. Audio codes would consist if everything that can be heard within the scene. Examples of this would be sound effects, music, voiceovers and sound effects. These are all used to help show the story in an easier manner for the audience.

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