



Program Evaluation Primer

This primer is a tool to help you evaluate programming from the perspective of the listener. It can be used as a tool to evaluate program performance against known audience needs and the positioning of your station in the marketplace. The primer is not the Mother of All Primers. Rather, it is a resource you can use to encourage program makers to align their content and performance closer to the listener. It can be used in several ways:

- to evaluate a 'slice' of a program
- to evaluate a program's overall flavour and impact against station benchmarks
- to identify particular elements of production or presentation that could be made different, or have more impact.

As with most templates, this primer is a guide. It isn't necessary for you to follow each component doggedly. It can be more effectively employed to crystallise your thinking in one, two, or three directions per session.

When conducting program evaluations it makes sense to make them private occasions between you and the program team involved. Follow the guidelines below to gain maximum effect:

- avoid marathon sessions. Make your sessions no longer than 1.5 hours to ensure the programs team is focused on the session and not on an approaching deadline.
- pre-audition the material you wish the team to listen to, so you can readily access it and not waste time.
- have a clear idea of the issues you wish to raise prior to the session – your daily listening will provide you with plenty of topics
- give thought to what the team or individuals need to do to improve and develop prior to raising the issues during the session.
- be specific with your comments, as per the feedback model and ensure you provide positive feedback for things well done
- approach the session in a cooperative and non-judgemental manner – invite the team to explain "What happened" during patchy performances or lifeless content.

A key point to consider when giving feedback is to make the task 'do-able' and achievable. If you want someone to do something differently, you may well have to tell or show him or her how to do it.

PEP is divided into two parts, both of which can be used independently. If you are listening to a program in terms of HOW IT COMES ACROSS, then apply the Form section. If you are listening to a program to evaluate its ingredients AND WHETHER TOPICS AND OTHER CONTENT HIT THE MARK, then apply the Content section.



– HOW THE PROGRAM IS COMMUNICATED TO THE LISTENER

PITCH

- Overall, does the presenter link material into my life experiences? How does s/he do that?
- Does the presenter carry on an open dialogue with me, the listener, and pose questions, conjure images, and encourage me to use my imagination?
- At what level of the high-brow/low-brow scale is the program pitched. Is it appropriate to the audience you should be pitching at?
- Does the presenter break down complicated concepts into easy-to-understand ideas?
- Is the presenter effective at using metaphor to explain concepts, and using analogies and comparisons to make the material accessible to me?
- Is the presenter economical with words, getting to the point quickly?
- Does the presenter use plenty of concrete language to keep me 'grounded'?
- When listening, do I get the impression that introductions are delivered to me as an individual or do I feel as though I'm a spectator?
- Do I feel close to or distant from the presenter?
- Is the presenter a good storyteller, and do I find myself being drawn in to stories and examples?
- What needs to be done to make the program more understandable and accessible to me, the listener?

ENERGY

- What is the energy level (or rhythm) of the program – does it match the time of day it's being aired and my biorhythms?
- Do energy levels vary with subject matter and do I get a sense of contrast and difference that keeps me interested?
- Is the presenter's tone variable? Does s/he use tone to illustrate energy and other emotions? Do I find myself being drawn into active listening because my ears have picked up tonal change?

- Do I get excited from time to time over the content I'm listening to or what is coming up on the program?
- Do I experience a range of emotions when listening to the show overall?
Emotions such as curiosity, suspense, titillation, laughter, concern, shock, thrill, expectation, empathy, re-assurance, disbelief, desire, anticipation, pleasure, inspired, moved, etc?
- Did I experience any magic or powerful moments?
- Do I feel engaged? Does time seem to pass quickly?
- How could the presenter enhance the energy levels of the program?

FLOW

- Is the program seamless – no gaps or hiccups that present me with out-cues or perfect moments to stop listening?
- Does the presenter effectively segue from one item to another so it appears there is no beginning or end to the listening experience?
- Does the presenter 'own' everything on the program so it sounds like one big whole?
- Do I get a sense of a continuous momentum?
- Are music, talk, and promotional material nicely interwoven into the program so it sounds like one continuous companion to my life?
- Is talkback smooth, filled with cliff-hangers, and evocative?
- Do I feel that forward promotion of good things to come in the program keeps my focus on what's coming up?
- Are live-liners and spoken promo's seductive enough to motivate me to listen longer for the promised content?
- Does the presenter change pace, pause, or do other things with his/her voice that give me a bit of a jolt?
- Do recorded promo's enhance or arrest the flow of the program?
- How can the presenter improve the flow of the program?

DIRECTION

- Does the presenter show me how to get more control over my life?
- Does the presenter seek to empower me the listener?
- In talk programs, do I get the impression that the presenter is part of a passionate search for solutions or is s/he problem focussed and blame orientated?

- Do I feel a sense of optimism or hope for the future after have heard how the presenter deals with material?
- Does the presenter give me plenty of ideas and things I can use in my daily life?
- Do I hear much of the EST factor when the presenter introduces material? Like the biggest, best, easiest, brightest, fanciest, shortest, funniest, liveliest, damndest, safest, classiest, fairest, etc, etc.?
- Does the presenter give plaudits and recognition to the things that make my community great? Do I feel as though I get a pat on the back from time to time?
- How can the presenter change the program positioning to provide more value to the listener?

PERSONALITY

- If I were to meet the presenter in the street and talk to him/her, what impression would I go away with?
- Does the presenter 'click' with me? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Is the presenter's personality accessible – do I feel as though s/he is talking directly, one on one to me?
- How well do I feel I know the presenter?
- Does the presenter manage his/her ego in a way that positions me as an equal?
- Does the presenter give everyone a fair Go?
- Is there anything tiresome about the way the presenter positions him/herself?
- Does the presenter seem really curious about and aware of the things that go on around him/her, or do they seem to know it all?
- Is the presenter a multi-faceted personality or a prisoner of a self-made image?
- What things are special and unique about the presenter on air? How can the presenter capitalise on their uniqueness more?
- Is the presenter's 'turn of phrase' unique or special?
- What is likeable about the presenter?
- What could the presenter do differently to present the better parts of his/her personality on air?
- What parts of the presenter's personality would be better left on the other side of the studio door?

FOCUS

- Does the presenter get hijacked with process or does s/he focus issues back on to people?
- Whose language register does the presenter use: the expert's or language that I'm familiar with?
- Does the presenter identify with the 'experts' and the 'elite' or is the presenter an advocate of his/her target audience so I feel as though the presenter is working for my interests?
- Is the presenter providing too much commentary and too little curiosity?

- How often does the presenter use the word “You” in his/her presentation and directly talk to me? Is it more or less than their use of the words “I”, “me”, “my”, “mine”?
- In discussions, interviews, and debates, how much of the time do I, as a listener, feel a participant, and how much of the time do I feel a spectator?
- What does the presenter do to make me feel a part of what is going on?
- Does the presenter ask lots of real questions that sound like questions?



WHAT'S IN THE PROGRAM FOR THE LISTENER

An interesting question that program evaluators can ask is “What, as a listener, did I find myself doing with what I was hearing?”

Sometimes evaluators get bogged down in the processes and in-house machinations of programming at the expense of becoming aware of the real effects that content is having on them as listeners. It may be a good idea to attend to specific program craft issues separately from this exercise, which seeks to take the listener's perspective.

Research has shown that most people listen to radio with half an ear (unconsciously) and only lend both ears to programming (conscious commitment) when something is said or done to evoke their full attention. Begin to notice when program content demands your full attention and when it doesn't, and begin to think of the reasons why it has that effect.

We each bring a frame of mind to the listening experience. It may pay dividends to, at least in the first instance, adopt the frame of mind of a target listener when you are evaluating content.

Because you are equipped with an imagination, it isn't too difficult to imagine you are listening to a recorded excerpt as a consumer of a radio station as opposed to a professional program maker. Try it. You may find you gain some interesting insights into the impact content has on your listeners.

ACCESSIBILITY

- Does this content tap into what I know or something I have experienced?
- What level of knowledge is required for me to understand the content I'm listening to? Is it above, at the right level, or below my general understanding?
- What relevance is the content to my daily life: does it refer back to my hopes, feelings, aspirations, fears, needs, concerns, or activities?
- What can I actually do with what I've just heard?
- How does what I've just heard add to what I know already?
- How has the content been introduced to me? How have I been invited to consider it?
- Do I get a sense of place and community from the way the content is structured and delivered to me?
- Are the people I'm hearing (guest or presenter) people who seem to care about me?
- Are the people on the program one of “us” or are they one of “them”?

EMOTION

- Has my curiosity been evoked by the introduction of content by something happening right now, that's new, better, here at last, a breakthrough, cure, or solution?
- Has it been linked to some benefit or value I may gain by listening?
 - goodness
 - health
 - love
 - peace
 - choice
 - dreams
 - happiness
 - fairness
 - liberty
 - vision
 - truth
 - justice
 - rights
 - honesty
 - opportunity
 - ethics
 - safeguard
 - success
 - strength
 - prosperity
 - freedom
 - family
 - protection
 - empower
 - safety
 - purity
 - status
 - respect
- Has the content pressed any of my emotional hot buttons?

Curiosity	confidence	exhilaration
enthusiasm	shock	humour
self-control	desire	disbelief
hope	expectation	anticipation
titillation	thrill	scepticism
suspense	belonging	sense of knowing
sympathy	empathy	discovery
happiness	joy	material desire (greed?)
compassion	triumph (winning)	pleasure
concern	motivation	comfort
encouragement	re-assurance	

- Does the content frequently make me feel bad, depressed, without hope, or powerless?

STRUCTURE

- Is one or two major points introduced to me and explored, or is the content all over the place?
- Do I get closure when I listen or am I left up in the air?
- Do I get bite-sized chunks of information and not long streams of it?
- Is the content compatible to my listening habits and attention span? Does it go on too long?
- Do I know more at the end of particular segments, interviews, etc., than I did in the beginning?

- Does the content help my find solutions or it full of blame and recrimination?
- Am I being told what to think or am I given things to contemplate?
- Do I feel as though I'm bombarded with information that adds to my confusion?
- Is my liking for storytelling being satisfied?
- Am I constantly confronted with "issues" or are those issues made relevant to me?
- If the program is a talk program, which of the columns below best describes my listening experience of the program?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Stories about the real impact of economic policy. E.g.: What the lower dollar will mean when I spend my money ◆ Medical stories which explore how breakthroughs and medical technique can improve the lives of listeners ◆ On the scene coverage of events, disasters, demonstrations, etc., involving commentary from participants ◆ Doing the crime and fairly doing the time. Discussions on how we should impose penalties, how we can better encourage crime prevention, where do you intervene etc. ◆ Personal safety in the streets. How to take responsibility , how unsafe is it really out there, how do you protect yourself, etc. ◆ How did you get kids to learn. How to improve teaching methods. What specifically do the young of today need to learn to equip them for life in the new millennium, etc. ◆ Ways of staying healthy: diet, exercise, mental attitude, eating habits, looking good, etc. ◆ Finance stories which focus on personal finances: how to make extra money, how to save disposable income, where to buy cheaply, how to buy real estate smartly, blue chips to buy, etc ◆ Stories on what makes people abuse their children, sexual abuse and prevention, what precautions to take, how to identify if child/grandchild is a victim | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Discussions about macro economics and policy which stay in the stratosphere, and, by nature of the language used, exclude many listeners ◆ Health issue-type stories which focus of bureaucratic process and abstract concepts ◆ Distant dialogue on same events with so-called experts or policy-makers ◆ Criminologists, sociologists talking about crime as an abstract. Law and Order policy discussions where the impact of crime on individuals is concealed ◆ Experts, politicians, etc mouthing motherhood statements and cliches on how society is to blame, getting back to decent values, etc. ◆ Educational policy discussions which deal with 'methodology', politicians carping about abstract issues, gobbledy-gook about education theory ◆ Same kind of discussion without concrete reference points, tips, comparisons, etc. ◆ Finance stories which deal with global capital markets, use the money jargon, and can not be grounded in the experience of most listeners ◆ Same discussion but focussed on policy and so-called expert comment. Using language that represents euphemism for the real thing. |
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MIX

- ❑ In an average listening span, do I get a broad slice of content?
- ❑ If I listen earlier, do I hear a different kind of program that is perhaps heavier or more topical? If so, why is that?
- ❑ Is there plenty of light and shade in one average listening span?
- ❑ If the program is a talk program, do I get a cross section of the following as a regular listener?
 - ◆ Stories that provide my immediate the information needs and information gathering preferences.
 - ◆ Stories that link into major trends I'm interested in and that supply solutions to some of my quandaries.
 - ◆ Stories that are fun and make me laugh.
 - ◆ Life Affirmation stories that link into life's daily struggles, life's triumphs, life's conundrums, etc.
 - ◆ How-To's: stories which give positive ways of getting better outcomes in a broad range of subjects/issues
 - ◆ Curiosity Markers: stories that evoke fascination, curiosity, puzzlement, and maybe even a bit of juicy gossip?.
 - ◆ Chase of the Gods: stories that explore personal and spiritual development in a concrete way
 - ◆ Triumphs: stories which explore HOW a person succeeded against the odds, and how they DID success.
 - ◆ Martyrs and Victims: stories of battlers and people confronting big business, big bureaucracy, having the odds stacked against them, etc. that focus on what they confronted and don't give me a dose of depression
 - ◆ Person Behind the Persona stories: unpacking what makes the political, social, celebrity, sportsperson, tycoon, etc., 'tick'
 - ◆ Controversial: stories that raise my hackles, effectively unpacking the beliefs, values, and motives, of people who offer controversial (and usually dogmatic) solutions to major issues
 - ◆ Investigative Stories which focus of what people DO or have DONE in some context
 - ◆ Nostalgia: Original clips, and other material to transport me back in time to my "best years".
 - ◆ Unpacking Stories: stories which unpack conventions, institutions, cultural ideals, icons, etc., and by effective questioning lay bare the underlying motives or reasons.
 - ◆ Arts, theatre, literary, music, and dance stories which are conducted in a language register that people understand: make sure that you are extremely careful with visual medium stories. Radio is an auditory medium. Talk about the *people* who make art rather than 'high falutin' pieces on the art itself.

- ◆ Character Stories: stories, which through careful questioning, reveal idiosyncrasies, quirks, strengths, weaknesses, make me laugh and provide role models which are outside the square
 - ◆ Celebrity Stories: which use the Parkinson or the Barbara Walters techniques of interviewing.
 - ◆ Accessible Politics: life is much more than the serious pursuit of political and economic rhetoric. Local political stories, relevant and grounded.
- ☐ Do I get a much smaller dose of the following?
- ◆ So-called *news* stories that focus on endless point scoring and undermining - *the phoney war*
 - ◆ Pack Stories: interviews and pieces involving the same themes, agenda, or angles, pursued by the mass media pack.
 - ◆ Artsy Fartsy: stories with 'artistes' who take a 'Gods-eye view' of their own work, and attempt to preserve the so-called mystery of their creativity
 - ◆ Book Interviews which don't focus on a part of the book which is directly relevant to me: It is better when I hear about 'good reads' than hearing an assembly line of authors flogging their book.
 - ◆ Precious discussions about the abstract meaning of life: "Why are we here?", "What is Life?", "What is art?", etc.
 - ◆ Worthy stories which are a free kick for the story originator but offer little to the target audience
 - ◆ Experts Parade: stories which use specialists, academics, establishment know-alls, and which contain a litany of abstracts and concepts
 - ◆ Panels of Pointy Heads: Terribly intellectual types solving the problems of the world
 - ◆ Telling Stories: stories that set up the presenter and/or guests as 'educators' – I usually do not choose radio as a high value education medium.
 - ◆ Strict Parent Stories: content, guests, angles, and presentation and questioning styles, which imply there is a 'preferred' way of viewing an issue, idea, group, practice, cultural norm, etc. This includes political correctness, any form of absolutism, dogma, or philosophy, which demands we all think the same way.
 - ◆ Talkback Slabs: blocks of access-type talkback that are not clearly defined and directed towards me or my concerns, hopes, fears, or aspirations