



# Sound Reporting: The NPR Guide to Audio Journalism and Production

By Jonathan Kern



**Sound Reporting: The NPR Guide to Audio Journalism and Production** By Jonathan Kern

Perhaps you've always wondered how public radio gets that smooth, well-crafted sound. Maybe you're thinking about starting a podcast, and want some tips from the pros. Or maybe storytelling has always been a passion of yours, and you want to learn to do it more effectively. Whatever the case—whether you're an avid NPR listener or you aspire to create your own audio, or both—*Sound Reporting: The NPR Guide to Audio Journalism and Production* will give you a rare tour of the world of a professional broadcaster.

Jonathan Kern, who has trained NPR's on-air staff for years, is a gifted guide, able to narrate a day in the life of a host and lay out the nuts and bolts of production with equal wit and warmth. Along the way, he explains the importance of writing the way you speak, reveals how NPR books guests ranging from world leaders to neighborhood newsmakers, and gives sage advice on everything from proposing stories to editors to maintaining balance and objectivity. Best of all—because NPR wouldn't be NPR without its array of distinctive voices—lively examples from popular shows and colorful anecdotes from favorite personalities animate each chapter.

As public radio's audience of millions can attest, NPR's unique guiding principles and technical expertise combine to connect with listeners like no other medium can. With today's technologies allowing more people to turn their home computers into broadcast studios, *Sound Reporting* couldn't have arrived at a better moment to reveal the secrets behind the story of NPR's success.

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### Editorial Review

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Stories have been told eons longer than they have been written, and we still love to listen. Because the human voice is intimate and compelling, radio remains a favorite medium, wonderfully companionable and portable, especially as computers provide webcasts and downloadable files. Many avid listeners are enamored of the spoken-word programs heard on National Public Radio, and now Kern, formerly the executive producer of *All Things Considered* and currently in charge of training at NPR, delineates the values and practices that yield stellar audio journalism. Comprehensive and lucid, this distinctive handbook explains how sound paints pictures and how narratives are shaped and paced for the ear instead of the eye. Readers will recognize the NPR staffers who contribute telling anecdotes to Kern's instructions in areas ranging from fairness and accuracy to field and studio production, the difference between reporting and hosting, the importance of background research, and the subtleties of booking. As media evolves in this digital do-it-yourself era, Kern's insider course in audio journalism deepens appreciation for the professionals we rely on to set high standards. --Donna Seaman

#### Review

"Comprehensive and lucid, this distinctive handbook explains how sound paints pictures and how narratives are shaped and paced for the ear instead of the eye. Readers will recognize the NPR staffers who contribute telling anecdotes to Kern's instructions in areas ranging from fairness and accuracy to field and studio production, the difference between reporting and hosting, the importance of background research, and the subtleties of booking. As media evolves in this digital do-it-yourself era, Kern's insider course in audio journalism deepens appreciation for the professionals we rely on to set high standards."

(Donna Seaman *Booklist*)

"Sound reporting, from idea development to the finished news story or interview, gets the full treatment. . . . this work describes the interconnected avocations involved in bringing sound reporting to life."

(*Library Journal*)

"I think *Sound Reporting* ought to be required reading for anyone aspiring to a career in journalism, audio or otherwise. And also for anyone currently employed in the field who sometimes wonders if journalism hasn't lost its way. This is not just 'how to do it,' but how to do it fairly, responsibly, and intelligently. And what news organization is better equipped for the job than NPR?"

(Jane Pauley)

"In an age when good and bad information mix freely, it is essential that sources of credible, accurate journalism remain so. Jonathan Kern's work helps ensure those sources will stay strong and, in the process, provides a fascinating inside look at the imperfect science we call journalism. His attention-getting, real-world examples from NPR and elsewhere illustrate how journalists succeed (and fail) at being fair and accurate in pursuit of truth, making this guide essential reading for anyone—from the newsroom reporter to the investigating blogger to the public radio fan—who is committed to fair and compelling reporting."

(John Keefe, senior executive producer for news, WNYC, New York Public Radio)

"Writing for the ear is an art form. What Jonathan Kern has accomplished with this marvelous guide is doubly artful: using clear, colorful, conversational language, he teaches us how to write clear, colorful,

conversational radio copy. He also teaches us how to interview, produce, and paint audio pictures with sound. There is no other 'how-to' radio journalism manual to compare. ”

(Judy Muller, Annenberg School for Communication, University of Southern California)

#### About the Author

**Jonathan Kern** is the executive producer for training at NPR. He has worked in almost every position in radio news, including executive producer of *All Things Considered*.

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##### **Heidi Fritz:**

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