



THE BRITISH
ASSOCIATION FOR
CONTEMPORARY
LITERARY STUDIES

BACLS

GUIDANCE

SHEETS

AHRC and BBC Radio 3 New Generation Thinkers Scheme

Application:

- Think carefully about which aspect of your work to pitch for a programme. Some parts of our research are more attractive to the media and a public audience than others. Think about what part of your research makes the best story, is most entertaining, will enable a wide and engaging approach.
- Choose a snappy programme title.
- Look at programme summaries on the BBC iPlayer. These are written by producers. How to do they represent the programme? Not all are good – some are often written in haste! – but many, especially for the Sunday Features, will give you a good idea of what they're looking for.
- Make your programme summary engaging. Think about the top. Start with a hook. How are you going to draw your listener in? What story are you telling? What detail can you put in them that will grab the producer's attention and stick in their minds? What will the story arc be?
- The current research activity summary can be more academic, but this is not a funding proposal. It still needs to be written in a tone appropriate for a non-specialist and wide audience. And you still need to make it sound engaging.
- Think carefully about what you choose to review. Again, think about how to stand out. Don't review the latest blockbuster – everyone will be doing that. But don't review something totally obscure. Choose something visible and relevant to the public, but try also to be original.

Audition:

- Treat the entire day as an audition. Contribute at all times as usefully and noticeably as possible. Observe basic rules of politeness – don't talk over people, if it's "hands up" wait to be chosen. BUT, radio is the tyranny of the articulate so do not defer, and if it's not 'hands

up' do not wait to be invited into the conversation. Make sure you stand out in discussion, conversation and in the actual audition bits.

- **The Debate:** The current format includes a debate section where you will tag in and out of an ongoing discussion on a set topic of which you will have been notified in advance, chaired usually by a NGT alumni helping for the day. Prepare thoroughly for this. Many people do very badly. Treat it like an exam that you have revised for/a performance that you have rehearsed for. Cram. Research arguments for and against whatever the topic is that year and embed them in solid, engaging and entertaining examples. Have relevant jokes, literary references, political references and even scientific evidence memorised to draw on. Do not waffle in general terms. Yes, they are interested in your opinions, but they are more interested in the contribution you make to the debate in terms of knowledge and entertainment. Are listeners going to want to listen to you?
- **The Pitch:** The current format includes a 5 minute 'to camera' pitch of a programme based on your research. Do not describe what the programme will be about – perform it, so they get a taste of what it would sound like. Script it in advance, and practice. Make sure the timing is spot on – that's crucial in radio. And tell a good story – that's what they're looking for above all else. Think in particular about how to hook your listener at the top. And change your mindset – as academics, we often deprivilege the anecdote, the colour, the story, in order to present the information. For radio, an art of cultural storytelling, it needs to be the other way around and the story has to be the driver.
- Take advantage of the morning session when you get to break out and work on your pitch ideas with experts. Listen to them – they know what they are talking about – and use the lunch break to revise your pitch in light of their feedback. It will be better for it.
- Listen to a good amount of Radio 3 speech broadcasting beforehand so you know what they're looking for and what the different formats are: review and discussion (Free Thinking), column (short recorded piece c. 5 mins), essay (15mins), documentary (45 mins).

Aftercare:

If not successful...

- Do not despair if not selected. Competition is fierce and the decision is not as simple as just choosing the best. The winners are cast to ensure coverage of disciplines and diversity of representation. So if you are not successful in one year, have another go.
- The auditions are themselves an excellent opportunity to network with editors and producers at the BBC. Take that opportunity and maintain those connections.

If successful...

Celebrate! Then the hard work begins. You will need to:

- Manage an increased workload on top of your academic role and responsibilities
- Adjust to the far shorter turnaround times usual in the media – you will not receive notice about most things far in advance
- Learn how to write for radio and a wide audience
- Learn how to collaborate creatively with a producer
- Consider what this means for your future career – some NGTs return to their academic careers without much shift after their tenure. Others use the NGT scheme to launch parallel broadcast careers. The latter should not be undertaken without serious reflection on both the benefits and disadvantages this presents to one's academic career.

But overall, enjoy! The scheme is a remarkable opportunity to work with the BBC, to receive high-level media training and to get your research out to a wider audience. And the more you put into it, the more you will get out of it.

Written by BACLS Member Sarah Dillon (Academic and BBC Broadcaster; 2013 New Generation Thinker).