

Tackling the Formal, Presentational Style of Reporting at Radio Slovenia

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Abstract

Top most on [Matej Praprotnik's](#) mind is making sure reporters at [Radio Slovenia](#) are equipped to tell good stories. But when reporters, producers, and announcers are first hired, the only training they receive is focused on elocution. Staff are taught a particular style of Slovenian, one that Matej says leads to very formal, informational approach to storytelling. He would prefer the staff sound more conversational. To address the issue, Matej hired [Rob Rosenthal](#) to run narrative storytelling workshops for his staff. Rob is a long-time, documentary audio teacher. He also produces [Sound School](#), a podcast from PRX and Transom about audio storytelling. Recently, Matej and Rob chatted about the Radio Slovenia workshops and their impact. Their interview was edited for length and clarity.

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Matej Praprotnik is not hearing what he what he wants to hear on the radio.

Matej, the Assistant Director of Radio Slovenia, says his staff excels at gathering and conveying information for listeners. But all too often, the stories the reporters produce lack narrative, character development, and scenes. He says that makes the pieces less interesting and less valuable for listeners.

Matej told me in a recent interview that one major reason for this issue is training. “There is no workshop (at the network) that focuses on how to tell stories on radio,” he said. “I think editors assume that people who come to Radio Slovenia already know that, and they don’t.”

The one training opportunity that Radio Slovenia offers its reporters and on-air hosts is a six- to twelve-month course in elocution. Staff are taught a very particular style of Slovenian—one that sounds formal and presentational.

Matej says this type of voice training impacts the way stories are told on air. Formal speaking requires formal writing. “And I will give you one simple example of that,” Matej explained. “You would be encouraged not to report in the first person. The training I received was: you don’t say, ‘I went down this great underground cave in Postojna...,’ Or ‘So follow me...,’ Or ‘Join me....’ [...] And when I started writing that in my stories, the newsroom had a problem with that, and my colleagues said, ‘You know, the things that you do are a little bit too informal.’”

Matej went on to tell me that the elocution training tends to lead people to write in a manner that runs counter to common practice in audio storytelling. For instance, instead of writing short sentences with colloquial words, reporters often write long sentences with formal language.

On top of that, the training erases local dialects and modifies people’s unique way of speaking. “It affects the way you narrate the story—not only the melody, but also the selection of words,” says Matej. “At the end of that training, most people on Radio Slovenia sound a little bit the same.”

Matej eagerly pointed out the value of this training. The Slovenian language is essential to the country’s culture and identity. The training helps preserve Slovenian, which is spoken by only about two million people worldwide. But at what cost, he wonders?

He asked himself that question after listening to podcasts from the U.S., like *Radiolab* and *This American Life*. “I was amazed by the conversational nature of the storytelling,” he told me. That’s when he recognized that Radio Slovenia’s reporters needed to learn additional skills. “I want to hear more good storytelling. I would like to hear more stories that I would listen to even if the topic is completely irrelevant to me.”

Matej contacted me several years ago to ask if I would facilitate workshops for his staff. Of course, after Matej explained what he was looking for, I immediately agreed

to help. (I'm ashamed to admit I had to take a moment to find Slovenia on a map. I knew it was in central Europe, but I had no idea it was sandwiched between Italy, Austria, Hungary, and Croatia, along the northern Adriatic Sea.)

I facilitated a handful of online workshops for reporters and producers working at the network's three main channels—Radio Slovenia 1, a news channel; Val 202, a music station; and ARS Radio 3, an arts channel. Staff from local stations, plus the network's English language service, also attended. During the workshops, we discussed writing, structure, character development, and scenes—classic elements of narrative storytelling.

Ultimately, Matej felt his staff needed something more rigorous than online conversations about craft. In 2022, Matej brought me to Slovenia to run a week-long workshop in Matavun, a very small town in Slovenia's karst region known for the Škocjan Caves, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In 2023, we held another workshop in Matavun. Then, in 2024, we moved to Planica, in the foothills of the Alps, and held the class in a training center for Olympic ski jumpers.

These intensive workshops are like a radio bootcamp, where reporters are encouraged to experiment and try new approaches to storytelling—to find their voice, literally and figuratively.

Students were given a seemingly simple assignment: produce a short profile of an interesting person. But the story also needed to include conflict, character development, and scenes. In essence, they were taken through a set of building blocks for narrative storytelling—from idea to reporting to writing to line editing to tracking to finished story. At the end, the participants played their stories at a public event, an annual audio festival in the capital city, Ljubljana.

Matej says the workshops have had an impact on the attendees. "The reason I know? I listen to Radio Slovenia," he said, laughing loudly. "People who went through the training hear better. They're better at articulating their goals for a new project. People can pitch their ideas much better. They dedicate more time to narration and writing for radio, and on story structure."

These workshops prompted Matej and his staff to create guidelines for pitching, along with a pitch form. "It makes (producers) think about the target audience, your goals, your storytelling, the structure," he explained.

Staff who don't attend the workshops learn from their colleagues who do. Matej told me they hear their colleagues writing in new ways, and they'll try it themselves.

However, not everyone is on board. There is resistance. "I would not call it significant or relevant," he said with a shrug. "I think in every newsroom you have people who do not want to change, who just oppose any change. Then it's a matter of leadership to make them move anyway."

As we chatted, I reminded Matej about a critique I encountered early on when I held online workshops for his staff. A reporter said to me, with a bit of disdain, “That’s the American way.” She wasn’t wrong. I’m American. My teaching assistant, Samantha Broun, is American. The majority of stories I play for students in my workshops are U.S.-based productions. Indeed, *Radiolab* and *This American Life*—Matej’s references points regarding narrative—are American.

I told Matej that what the reporter said has stayed with me. I don’t want to impose my American sensibilities. I don’t wish to be an “audio colonial presence” in Slovenia.

“I’m not really worried,” he responded, “because once the workshop is over, reporters and producers will switch to Slovenian language and they will start producing stories in Slovenian, and I don’t hear an American influence. What I hear is better stories. I hear storytelling that is a little bit more courageous, a little more experimental; they dare to, you know, do a little trick there and then. Maybe they can find their own signature. [...] (Plus,) the things that they learn at the workshop are pretty much universal. They make sense in any language.”

In 2025, a fourth audio workshop was held in Kope, near the town of Slovenj Gradec in north-central Slovenia. To hear a sample of what students have made in the past, listen to these episodes of *Sound School*: [Stories from Slovenia](#), [Keep the Universal in Mind for Local Stories](#), and [For the Love of Radio, Get Out of the Studio](#).

Author Details

Rob Rosenthal is a story editor, reporter, and producer for radio, podcasts, and multimedia. He produces a podcast on audio storytelling for PRX and Transom called [The Sound School Podcast](#). His productions include [The Turning](#), a series about former nuns in Mother Teresa's order as well as a series for the Children's Radio Foundation called [I Will Not Grow Old Here](#), about a young woman trying to find her way out of a township in South Africa.