

# Quick Guide

## What are soundbites

In media and journalism, soundbites are normally referred to as **short extracts of a longer speech or text**, in the forms of **written** or **recorded content**, such as interviews or informative pieces. They should be **concise** and **capture the essence of the full piece**. In the written press, soundbites assume the form of ‘quotes’, such as short and catchy sentences that summarize the quoted person’s point of view on a particular subject. Soundbites communicate the message in the clearest, simplest, and most concise possible manner. They consist of:

- 1) **Complete sentences of maximum ten words**, in their written form
- 2) Complete sentences that last **no more than ten seconds**, in their audio form
- 3) Vehicle the **core message** of the idea/concept or information you want to pass in a simple way

Within such tight word count and reading/speaking time limitations, language is brought down to the very essential requirements for a sentence to be understood, hence cleaned of any jargon, redundant or unnecessary content. Soundbites are not suitable to express complexities but are the most effective way to pass plain messages increasing chances these are well received by the audience.

The below table shows a concrete example of sound bite by comparing its original sentence:

Original Sentence		Sound bite	
<p><i>Sea travel is one of the most dangerous means of travelling irregularly between Africa and Europe at present. For example, more than a thousand people died at sea while attempting the journey to the Canary Islands in 2021 alone.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 39-words articulated in two inter-dependent sentences (one sentence does not make entire sense without the other to complete messaging)</li> <li>• 15 second read-out</li> <li>• Complex structure (statement and example) and concept</li> <li>• Contextual reference and use of data (at present, in 2021 alone)</li> </ul>	<p><i>Sea travel from Africa to Europe can be life-threatening</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9-word complete sentence (sentence makes sense as standalone)</li> <li>• 4-second read-out</li> <li>• Simple language</li> <li>• Essential wording</li> <li>• Basic concept</li> <li>• Vehicles core message of extreme danger (life threat)</li> </ul>

## How to use sound bite messages

In journalism, because of the way media work, soundbites often rely on several ‘attention-grabbing’ effects, such as the use of analogies (for example ‘solid as a rock’), absolutes (‘I love cakes’, or ‘we are 100% sure’) and many more. Knowing what soundbites are and how they are selected can help people or organizations to increase chances of media coverage by strategically placing them in interviews or owned content knowing that this is what will attract interest and ultimately be captured and delivered.

Beyond media engagements, soundbites can be very useful when communicating with any audience to maximize attention and make sure essential information is passed. Possible uses for sound bite messages in Communicating with Communities include:

- **In-presence:** Preparing soundbites of messages that are most relevant to community audiences (for example about protection risks and how to find help) ahead of Outreach initiatives or regular outreach exercises, and using them in face-to-face meetings, interviews, home visits etc... when meeting with the communities or sharing them with outreach volunteers/ community members or leaders for further dissemination.
- **Digital engagement:** because of their plain language and ‘catchy’ format, soundbites are widely and consistently applied when communicating on social media and instant messaging. Twitter copywriting is the most visible example, but soundbites are widespread on Facebook and other platforms where they can be associated or integrated with visuals to make them even more accessible and relatable.
- **Audio files:** Soundbites are the most suitable messaging format for recording purposes. Creating audio files from written sound bite text does not require technical skills but can easily be done by pre-compiling key messages in the form of soundbites and using embedded read-aloud (MS Word) and transcript (Google, Edge) features. Microsoft Word has a read-aloud button (under ‘review’) that allows pre-listening (and timing) of the sound bite. Windows 10 has a voice recording feature that allows to create audio files (start>voice recorder). Resulting audio files with key messages can be used cumulatively or as stand-alone files to be shared with the communities through instant messaging (WhatsApp, Turn.io etc.), be made available as accessibility features for people with visual or reading impairments, accompany text on web pages and more.