



## Write a radio PSA.

**Public service announcements** (PSAs) are perfect for sharing health information that benefits the general public. PSAs inform people about important issues, such as getting a flu shot before flu season begins. They can also warn people about something that can harm them, such as the dangers of texting while driving.

Because PSAs are unpaid messages delivered over the public airways, the Federal Communications Commission (as well as individual radio stations) determines guidelines on the content, subject, and length of PSAs. Groups that are selling their service must pay to place ads on the radio or television, whereas groups that are sharing information for the public good usually can take advantage of free PSAs.

Most PSAs are limited to 30 or 60 seconds and can air only for a specified period of time. The sponsoring organization has little or no control over when PSAs are aired. Usually, they fill slots in the schedule when the station has no paid advertisements. Because they are so brief, PSAs must be written succinctly; include the facts such as who, what, where, when, why, and how; and use words that grab the listeners' attention.

### Here's what you'll need:

- **Pen** and paper or a computer
- **A watch** or clock with a timer
- **The radio station's PSA guidelines**—the PSA lengths accepted and the name and contact information for the station's public service director

### Here's how to do it:

- **Contact** the public service director at any local station(s) where you think the PSA will reach the best demographic for your message. For example, if you are trying to reach teens, consider a station that plays dance, hip hop, alternative, or pop music. If you are trying to reach parents, you might consider a soft rock, soft jazz, or news station. Request information from each station about specific requirements, guidelines for length and format, and any restrictions. Make certain that the stations will accept a script for a PSA rather than a spot digitally recorded in a professional sound studio. Request a sample PSA that you can listen to, so you can become familiar with the style.



# PEER<sub>x</sub> ACTIVITY GUIDE

## Spread the word about prescription drug abuse

- **Write down the key points** that your PSA must convey and how many seconds you have to convey them. Be sure to cover who, what, when, where, why, and how.
- **Think** about how you will grab the audience's attention at the beginning of the PSA. Will you pose a rhetorical question, state a hard-hitting statistic, or use a funny statement?
- **Write** the rest of the PSA script to explain briefly the key information and hold listeners' attention.
- **Time yourself** reading the PSA aloud at a slow pace, as a radio announcer would do. If the spot is too long, rewrite it until it matches the PSA length required by the radio station.
- **Type the final spot** in all capital letters, double-spaced. Boldface or underline anything that needs to be emphasized by the radio announcer.
- **Make sure** you title the PSA and note its length. Be sure to provide your name and contact information so the public service director can reach you to discuss any changes.
- **Proofread** the PSA for any errors. Check all phone numbers and Web addresses carefully to make absolutely certain they correctly lead listeners to your organization!
- **Send** the final PSA to the public service director of each radio station. Provide a cover letter with some background information about your organization and the overall issue of prescription drug abuse (check out our fact sheets at <http://teens.drugabuse.gov/peerx/prescription-drug-facts> for statistics you can include) so the station understands who is sending the spot and why it is important to air it.
- **If you don't hear back** from the public service director within a few business days of sending the PSA, follow up by phone or email to inquire whether the station will use your spot.