

For full version of abbreviations click 'Abbreviations' on FB's website. Hard News and Soft News on Today

I used to think of the BBC as Auntie, and treat her with affectionate respect. Then Mr James Naughtie said on the Today programme just before the 2005 general election he hoped 'we' would win (meaning the Blairites). This confirmed me in the view that BBC now stands for Blairite Broadcasting Corporation. Hence the rather abrupt terms in which I sent a message to the Today programme on 26 May 2005.

The Today programme, at around 7.45 after discussing the newspapers, always has some silly item that makes me switch off. Today it was the voices of South American tribes speaking their barbarous tongue. It's not what we want to hear as we struggle to start the day. Please give us sensible news items about things that actually matter to us (not OUGHT to matter).

I was rather surprised to get a civilised reply from a named individual.

Thank you for your e-mail regarding our recent item on a fast-disappearing Native American language. I'm sorry you didn't like the report. But with the greatest respect, such is the lot of a three-hour programme. Some listeners will love an item, others will loathe it. We try and balance news reports across the programme to ensure a breadth of coverage and a variety of hard and soft news.

I do not accept that this particular report was not "sensible" (what exactly does that mean?). The extinction of a language is of huge interest to anthropologists and sociologists alike, and is as worthy of coverage and as relevant to many listeners as a sports result, a political intrigue or a bomb attack overseas.

I accept it wasn't to your liking, which is a shame. But stick with us: invariably there'll be another report along in a minute which could find greater favour.

I sent an answer in the same vein.

Thank you for your reply. I found it instructive, with its contrast between hard news and soft news. I infer that this translates as follows-

Hard news = genuine news

Soft news = current affairs items that are not real news.

What I was trying to say in my previous email was that most listeners to the Today programme (at least those who are going out to work or travelling to work) want nothing else but hard news. There's plenty of it, and we want to be fully updated at the start of the day.

What we don't want from Today is soft news, which we prefer to keep for times when we relax after work.

This was sloppy, and I got what I asked for.

I'd be interested in seeing the research which supports your confident claim that 'most listeners . . . want nothing else but hard news'. It contrasts sharply with the analysis our own research department has carried out, and with the feedback we receive each day via e-mails, letters and the website.

Today is a news and current affairs programme. I'm sorry if you'd prefer to save 50% of that for after-work hours, but there are currently no plans to alter our format or balance. However, we will of course continue to monitor the specific views of listeners and, where possible, to target our coverage accordingly.

I confessed my fault.

Well, blow me down!

I never knew that Today was a news *and current affairs* programme.

I deserved your sarcasm. I'll know better in future.

The old Auntie here reasserted herself. It wouldn't do for her to be seen to be *sarcastic* to listeners.

Mmm - wouldn't want to put you off altogether. Really didn't intend to be brutally sarcastic: genuinely do feel free to feed in thoughts anytime.

I might just do that.

