The Autocue

The Autocue, or Teleprompter as it is officially known, is the piece of electronic equipment the presenter uses to read their script while maintaining eye contact with the audience. Its purpose is to make it appear as if the presenter has memorised their words or is speaking off the top of their heads.

With an Autocue, the script is displayed on a monitor sitting beneath an angled screen that reflects the text. Lying behind the reflective screen is a camera. As you read the script, you are, essentially, looking straight into the camera lens.

Teleprompters were invented, patented and licensed in the 1950's by Autocue in the UK, and QTV in America. Prior to their invention, presenters were expected to memorise great swathes of information or to rely on handheld notes. Prior to the mainstreaming of PC's, the scripts were composed of mechanised paper scrolls, but nowadays the process is fully digitalised.

In most TV studios, the autocues used are Master Series 12", which have brightly lit text, that can be clearly read beneath the glare of the studio lights. On the left-hand side of the Autocue there is a line indicating the point at which you are making direct eye contact with the audience. This is where you need to look.

If there are numerous cameras in operation, look for where the Cue Light is lit up, as this will show which camera is in action. This same cue light changes colour to indicate when you are presenting live on air.

Reading off an Autocue

Reading off an Autocue might all seem very simple; look at the screen and read the words. Be aware, however, that the Autocue is only a tool to help you. It is not a quick fix to avoid having to prepare or an opportunity to 'wing' your presentation. Like with all tools, you need be completely familiar with how it works. The reason reading off an Autocue appears simple is because professional presenters have put the time in to creating this air of ease.

Get to know the Script

When working with an Autocue, it is not just a case of reading the words before you. Anyone can 'read'. The role of the presenter is to bring the words to life, to impart the written words in such a way that they come across as naturally as if you were having a conversation face-to-face. Creating this 'illusion' requires you to be fully comfortable with the script.

Breaking Down the Script

It is very unlikely that you will ever be expected to read an autocue blind on air, as in, having never seen the script before. Normally you will receive a hard copy in advance. It is vital that you read through this script several times and think about the meaning of the words. Make a note of what aspect of the text are important, emphasise key words, learn how to pronounce tricky names as these will always catch you out. Write them phonetically if it helps and practise them so that they flow. No one is going to see the text on the Autocue besides you, so prepare the text in whichever way works for you. Also, very importantly, abide by the punctuation. Full stops, commas, question marks all act as signposts to enable smooth delivery.

Remember to vary your inflections and emphasis:

"If *you* like what you see, call us. We *want* to hear from you,"

Keep the inflections varied, if you emphasise the 'You' every time you say it, it won't make sense to the audience, and you will sound like you are not paying attention to your message. Vary the words and vary your tone. Most importantly, avoid monotone delivery at all costs. It is boring to listen to. Speak with energy and embrace your message. If it feels like you are overcooking your words and putting too much gusto into them, it is more than likely you have got the tone just right.

Speed

There is often the tendency when new to presenting, to speak too fast. This is very common and stems from both nervousness and a lack of confidence. In addition to speaking too fast, there is also the all-too-common merging of the sentences together without taking the time in between each one to pause. Audiences need the pause in order to process what you have just said. The trick at all times is to imagine you are speaking to one person who really wants to hear what you have to say.

There is a likelihood that you will have an Autocue operator scrolling your script up the screen for you. If this is the case, you need to create the time to rehearse together beforehand, so that the operator can learn your speed of delivery. Make sure that the operator matches *your* speed as opposed to the other way around. It is never right that you should be rushing your words to keep up with an operator who is scrolling too fast.

Software

If you are working on your own creating vlogs or business presentations, there are alternatives to the Autocue operator in the form of voice recognition software-only teleprompters. There is no

shortage of these on the market, but well-known ones are *Prompt Smart Lite* or *Prompt Dog.* The benefits of having your own software is that it enables you to familiarise and practise with the tools at your disposal, which is good preparation for screen tests and auditions.