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How to make an educational podcast?

Tips and tricks for your first educational podcast

version 1.0

By Centre for Innovation

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Why podcasts?



Audio podcasts have a broad range of opportunities for use in (higher) education. Would you like a quick overview? Listen to this podcast:

<https://soundcloud.com/oasiavanooten/how-can-we-use-podcasts-in-education>

Some more time? Read on for more tips & tricks!

An advantage of podcasts is that they are a flexible medium for both teachers and students. They can be listened by students anywhere, anytime, while doing other things and even when offline. Teachers can produce podcasts after some basic training in their own time without (necessarily) depending on a production crew.

The use of podcasts for education has many advantages, here we would like to highlight a few:

- **Flexibility** - Learners can listen to episodes anywhere and anytime - even on the move while doing other things. Flexibility can also be seen in the sense of learner control, for example, having the opportunity to pause and playback excerpts. Video also provides this feature, nevertheless, audio-only can have the advantage that you do not need to look at a screen and thus have more control: solely listening, listening and taking notes or listening and reading the transcript.
- **Less pressure** - teachers find it easier and more informal to talk without having to worry about their (on-screen) appearance.
- **Informal learning** - The informality of podcasts can appeal to learners. This can mean the voice of the teacher, the informal place of learning, as well as the informal channels that are used (podcast channels like iTunes or SoundCloud).
- **Inclusivity** - Access to the digital world differs around the world, and outside the West (especially in the Global South) bandwidth needed to download material or to participate is still an issue. Internet access may be unstable, not always available or expensive. Podcasts (or MP3 files) are easier to download and to play, especially on mobile phones

(a large percentage of learners in less affluent regions of the world will access a learning content on a mobile phone instead of a PC).

- **Delivery of fresh content** - Podcasts can facilitate teachers to provide fresh content or inform on current affairs. When delivered on a podcast channel you can “push” episodes to students hooking into current topics and providing content at the right time in a flexible way.

Different ways of using podcasts in education

AUDIO LECTURES

This is a podcast where the teacher presents a narrative or lecture to the student. Next to explaining concepts or theories, you can also use this moment with your students to give a short overview of the week’s course content and to highlight important research in the field.

CASE-STUDIES/ EXPERT INTERVIEWS

These are podcasts where you make a connection with the outside world, for example case-studies, interviews or a round-table with experts – the students can listen in and this provides them multiple voices (Bower et al., 2010; Drew, 2017). To a far extent this format does not ask active participation of the listener per se, but you can imagine that in a debate with opposing opinions, a student is triggered to decide his/her point of view. This format also invites to discuss these opinions later in class or on an online discussion forum. An example from the online course *International Humanitarian Law in theory and practice* can be found here:

<https://soundcloud.com/user-542495654-897696505/michael-schmitt-from-us-naval/s-MCycic>

REFLECTION

Another way of using audio or podcasts is by giving students feedback on assignments or by answering questions that have come in - this can be done both to individual students or to a group. Although not “direct”, you could label it as a dialogue between teacher and student.

FIELDTRIPS

When a podcast is used to give instructions for a fieldtrip another layer of dialogue and interaction is achieved. Students are exposed to a location outside the classroom, interact with their environment and maybe with their peers, and get hands-on guidance through a podcast. Examples are a field trip to prepare students for practical work in a lab, an archaeological site but could also be a city tour to get to know important (historical) sites.

RADIO STYLE

When you are a podcast or radio listener yourself, you are probably familiar with radio “documentaries” where a reporter goes in the field and combines interviews & atmosphere sounds. Mixing it afterwards with a voice-over commentary. This podcast style can be quite

time-intensive when it comes to recording on location and editing all the pieces together, but the end-result will be very dynamic!

STUDENT GENERATED PODCASTS

Letting students make their own podcast in the context of an assignment promotes active and dialogic pedagogy most. On one hand students develop a deeper understanding of the topic. On the other hand, it stimulates development of collaborative, problem-solving and creative skills. An example can be found in the MA in Public Administration (at Leiden University, taught by Alexandre Afonso) where the teacher gave students an assignment to prepare a podcast policy pitch instead of a traditional essay. An example of one of the student podcasts can be found here:

<https://soundcloud.com/alexandre-afonso-16/the-policy-pitch-how-to-reduce-the-number-of-migrant-deaths-in-the-mediterranean-sea>

How to create a podcast?

Below you find some tips and tricks on how to create a script for a podcast. The focus here is on a “lecture style” podcast. For the other podcast formats it is also important to prepare your recording beforehand. For example, when recording an interview, you will need to prepare your questions and it is also recommended to draft the answers - to check if you achieve the storyline you have in mind. When designing a field trip you will need to walk the tour beforehand and make notes, for a radio style podcast you will need to prepare a script with all the different elements to make sure you have a clear story with beginning, middle and ending. The general structure below is recommended for all podcast formats in order to make your story clear and comprehensible for your learner.

PRE-PRODUCTION

Creating a podcast starts without a microphone. In the pre-production phase the learning goals and content of the podcast need to be developed and put into a clear storyline.

Start by asking yourself two questions:

- ✓ What are the **learning goals** of my podcast? (Or more general, what is the goal of the podcast?)
- ✓ What is the **design** of the podcast? (What type of podcast do you want to create?)

When these two questions are answered, you can start developing the content of the podcast.

Writing the Script

The purpose of creating a script is to create a storyline for the podcast. Any story should have a clear beginning, middle and ending to guide the viewers of the podcast. To make the podcast more interesting to listen to, a strong main question helps to engage the listeners and give them focus. TIP: start your script with raising a question that students find interesting.

COMPOSITION OF THE SCRIPT

A script consists of three parts:

OPENING

- ✓ Answer in the opening text what you are going to explain in the video. Tell them why it is relevant what you are talking about.
- ✓ You can start with a misconception, followed by 'let's find out if this is true'.
- ✓ You can ask yourself the question that your podcast is telling an answer to.

MIDDLE

Write down what the answer is to the main question and explain key concepts:

- ✓ Make connections between different parts of the explanation. Rephrase shortly what you just did, followed by the new question to be answered.

ENDING

Summarize what the viewer has heard;

- ✓ Relate the content of the podcast to other learning material (or coming podcasts).

Tips for script writing

KEEP IT SIMPLE

There is a temptation to dress up explanatory text in long words and sentences, in an attempt to really convince. When writing your podcast text, however, it is usually far more effective to concentrate on simple concepts, which can be grasped immediately. In addition, these sentences will be easier to pronounce when recording. A good target is creating a sentence of around 10 words avoiding any excessive use of commas.

USE ACTIVE LANGUAGE

Along the same lines, try to write in the present tense, using words the target audience is familiar with. A useful method of finding out whether or not your text is easy to read is to read it out loud. If you stumble over particular words or phrases, or cannot reach the end of the sentence without needing to pause for breath, odds are that it is difficult to read.

ADDRESSING THE AUDIENCE

In developing podcasts, you want to create a community of learners that engage online with your material. It is therefore very important to directly address the audience by using words as “we”, “together”, instead of “I” and “they”. For instance:

- ✓ “In this talk, we will explore...”
- ✓ “Are there any examples you could think of? <short silence> One example could be...”

By addressing and engaging the learners directly the participation in the debate will greatly improve.

LENGTH OF THE SCRIPT

It is also important to consider the duration of your podcast. Most research into educational podcasting advises to stick to 15 minutes maximum (Salmon, 2008 and Cosimini, 2017). Many public podcasts are longer than 20 minutes, engaging the audience with interesting interviews and stories – this keeps you listening. People are easily distracted so bring your content in ‘bricks’ or ‘chunks’ if the story is long. To calculate the time of the podcast before recording use a word/time calculator online. Look at the amount of words you have in your script and calculate the length with: <http://www.speechinminutes.com/> In general people use about 130 words per minute when speaking so a podcast of 6 minutes would consist of about 700 to 800 words.

Production

Equipment needed

An average laptop should be able to record the message you want to send out. You can make use of Kaltura [CaptureSpace](https://video.leidenuniv.nl/) which is available for university staff via <https://video.leidenuniv.nl/>, (you can add the tool via “Add new” >”CaptureSpace”). We have also had good results on iPads and Macbooks using iTalk. If you wish to improve sound quality, we advise you to attach an extra USB microphone (for example the Blue Snowball) to your laptop or computer. When going on location it is advisable to have an external audio recording device (for example a Zoom handheld recorder) to be as flexible as possible.

When recording an audio lecture or interview:

- make sure you choose a silent place where you do not get disturbed;
- keep the microphone as close as possible to your mouth, but not too close as you should try to avoid “popping” sounds (you can also use a pop-filter). Also make sure you test before you start recording for real, to check if the audio level and quality is good enough;
- When recording with a USB microphone on your laptop, mute the speakers, so you do not get feedback;
- It is best to put your microphone on a tripod, in order to avoid contact noise.

Post-Production

You can do the editing of the final product yourself. Good and free audio recording and editing software is [Audacity](#). Kaltura CaptureSpace also provides you some basic editing tools. Please make sure that any additional material you use (music and sounds) is copyright free. We recommend the minimal creative commons license of [CC BY SA NC](#). YouTube has a good audio/music library at <https://www.youtube.com/audiolibrary/music>.

More info

Via the links below, you can find more information:

- [How to start a podcast show](#). - Like the format of podcasting? Here is how you can start your own show and increase your authority.
- [How to make a successful podcast](#) - general tips
- Leiden University Video Toolkit - more information on script writing and general media production tips that also apply to podcasts. Please ask for a draft copy (web version will be available in spring 2019).

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