

Listening Practice and Community Involvement Through Podcasts

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TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Definition

A **podcast** is an audio (or video) file available on the Internet using syndication feeds. A person subscribes to a podcast using an aggregator (such as iTunes). The aggregator program will then find new episodes of the podcast as they become available and automatically download them. The person can then listen to (or watch) the file on his/her computer, or transfer the files to an mp3 player for portable listening (or viewing).

Recording

Equipment

1. Digital voice recorder (we use the Olympus DM-10). These are small and portable for recording anywhere. You will need to transfer recordings from the recorder to a computer for editing.
2. Digital recording software. This allows you to record directly onto a computer. Free programs include:
 - Audacity: <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>
(To convert Audacity files into .mp3 files, you will also need Lame, a free conversion program available at <http://lame.sourceforge.net/index.php>)
 - GarageBand: <http://www.apple.com/ilife/garageband/> (Macs only)
 - Your computer may have other voice recording software already installed

File Considerations

Your recordings will probably be in one of three formats: .wma, .wav or .mp3. These will vary depending on your recording equipment. You may need to convert from one format to another to edit your recording or to post your recording online. You should consider file sizes and file quality when choosing which format to use.

Editing Your Recording

We used the free software Audacity to edit our recordings. Instructions and help for using this program are available at the Audacity website: <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>. Another free program (for Windows only) is Wavepad: <http://www.nch.com.au/wavepad/masters.html>.

Because Audacity only reads .mp3 and .wav files, you may need to convert your recording from another format into an .mp3 format. We used Audion (<http://www.panic.com/audion/>). On a PC, you can also use iTunes to convert file formats.

Posting Your Recording

1. Free programs

There are several programs available on the Internet for publishing podcasts. These are generally user-friendly and will help you step-by-step. No knowledge of syndication programming language is needed. Some free programs include:

- <http://www.podomatic.com>
- <http://www.mypodcast.com>
- <http://www.blogger.com>
- <http://www.yodio.us/selfpublish/>
- <http://www.podbean.com>

2. Institutional resources

Your institution may provide server space for posting a podcast. The information technology department at your school may be able to assist you with this. This can help to limit your podcasts to your students only, rather than making them available to the general public. You may need to know how to write the syndication codes to publish these recordings.

3. Posting files online (not technically a podcast)

You might decide to make your audio recordings accessible to students without making them actual podcasts. You can simply post audio files on a website (such as Blackboard, WebCT, or another course website you may be using) without any syndication feeds. You will need to tell students where to find the audio file online, and they will need to go to the website and download the file themselves, as their computer will not be able to automatically find the file.

Additional Resources

More information on podcasting is available at the following websites:

- <http://podcastfreeamerica.com/>
- <http://www.podcastnews.com/articles/How-to-Podcast.html>
- <http://reviews.digitaltrends.com/guide31.html>

For more information on recording and editing software, including program reviews and some free downloads, visit:

- <http://www.cnet.com>
- <http://www.download.com>

There are several podcasts already produced for ESL/EFL learners. While these won't be customized to your community, you may adapt them for many of the activities we suggest. You can find many podcasts by searching for "ESL podcasts" online. Here are a few:

- <http://www.eslpod.com/website/index.php> (Well-done, currently has over 200 episodes)
- <http://a4esl.org/podcasts/> (This site has links to several ESL podcasts)
- <http://www.ugoeigo.com/> (These are video podcasts)
- <http://www.businessenglishpod.com> (a podcast "for professionals on the move")
- <http://englishcaster.com/bobrob/> (contains many slang and idiom lessons "from a Yankee and a Brit")

ESL ACTIVITIES FOR USING COMMUNITY PODCASTS

Listening

- Comprehension
 - Listen for main ideas
 - Listen for details and specific information (time/location of event, purpose, etc.)
 - Transcribe a portion of the podcast, correct against teacher-generated script
- Focus on suprasegmentals
 - Listen to podcast with script. Mark script for:
 - thought groups
 - word stress
 - phrasal stress
 - intonation
 - reductions
 - blending
 - linking
 - Record an imitation of the speaker, then listen to recording and complete a self-observation

Speaking

- Summarize information in podcasts
- Describe experiences of attending events
- Discuss with other students their experiences of attending events
 - Re-tell the most interesting story
 - Summarize several answers
 - Compare/contrast different experiences
- Conduct interviews at the event (with other participants, organizers, volunteers)
- Search for more information on the event (volunteer opportunities, future events, etc.) and report findings to class
- Give a class presentation
- Hold a class discussion about the topic
- Have students produce and share their own podcasts and videos

Vocabulary

- Identify new vocabulary, slang, idioms in podcasts
- Use new words and expressions from podcasts in other assignments
- Compile vocabulary lists useful in discussing topics in podcasts; create contexts for using new vocabulary

Writing

- Work on assignments involving summarizing, description, narration, and comparison/contrast
- Write about the topic in a journal/blog
- Write articles for student publications