

Journalism 101: How to make a podcast



How to record, write a script,
edit and disseminate your
podcast.

© Empowering Youth through Environmental Storytelling (2025)

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The Empowering Youth through Environmental Storytelling is a collaboration between The Environment and Human Rights Academy (TEHRA), News Decoder and the Young Educators European Association (YEEA).

The purpose of these educational materials is to help young people understand the climate crisis on a systems level through engaging with the topics and foster agency through the skills and techniques of journalism.

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We cannot be held liable for how these materials are used in practice.

These educational resources have been developed to the best of our knowledge, using reliable and widely-recognized sources. While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy and clarity, we cannot guarantee that the materials are free from errors or omissions. Climate change is a field of knowledge that continues to evolve, and teachers and learners are encouraged to consult up-to-date scientific sources (e.g. IPCC, IPBES or national agencies) to complement and enrich these activities.

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This outline teaches the basics of podcasting and offers tips and advice for producing a high-quality podcast.

Creating a podcast may seem intimidating at first, but in its simplest form a podcast is just recorded bits of audio — or sound bites — pieced together to tell a story. It can also include elements that make a podcast unique and engaging, like an introductory jingle or a voiceover to transition between topics.

1. What is a podcast?

1.1 Intro to podcasts

A podcast is an episodic digital audio file that can be listened to online or via streaming applications. Podcasts emerged in the early 2000s as a new way of distributing audio content to listeners anywhere in the world. The word "podcast" is a portmanteau combining the words "iPod" — a portable media player designed by Apple — and "broadcast".

A podcast is defined as an episodic digital file, so you can use the words "episode" and "podcast" interchangeably. A podcast season refers to a group of related episodes. A one-off podcast is a stand-alone episode.

Podcasts can be long — in some cases an hour or more — but the average length of a podcast is between 20 and 40 minutes. Why? Because data shows most people listen to podcasts on their daily commutes, which typically take between 20 and 40 minutes! If you're producing a podcast for this course, it should not exceed ten minutes.

Podcasts provide a lot of flexibility and creative freedom to cover issues, events or stories. What you cover in a podcast and how you cover it is entirely up to you. Some podcasts cover or analyze the news. Others tell fictional or non-fictional stories with the help of guests or interviews. Podcasts can also be educational and teach people about a topic.





1.2 Why produce a podcast?

Audio is a flexible, inexpensive way to reach an audience. You can record any conversation or event from wherever you are in the world. All you need is a full battery and some good questions.

Podcasts are also hugely popular — particularly among young people — and their consumption has grown rapidly in recent years.

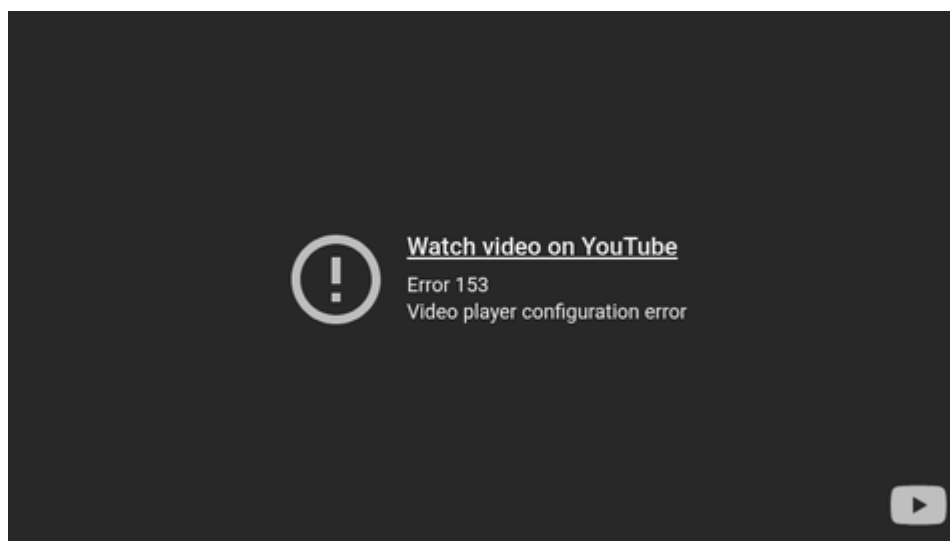
Young people have a lot to say about what they see happening in their communities and around the world, and podcasting can be an engaging medium for telling a story, particularly if you don't feel confident writing articles.

If you're making a podcast, maybe the majority of the audio will be you asking questions to the stakeholder you've found who can best encapsulate the problem and/or solution. You can include the extra data – that the stakeholder doesn't have – with your own voice, either before the conversation with your stakeholder, or weaved in between, where it best suits the quotes of your stakeholder.

1.3 Getting started: Creating a podcast plan

Before you start recording your podcast, you should come up with a podcast plan that outlines your story idea; your target audience; your podcast format; who you will need to interview; and how you will do the recording, transcription, scripting and editing. You can always modify this initial plan as you go. But having a clear idea of what you want the finished product to look like at the start will save you a lot of time later on.

Watch [this video](#) on how to make a climate podcast that people want to listen to.





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A good podcast plan should reflect that you've done all of the following:

1. Identified a focused story idea

You should identify a narrow topic that your podcast will explore. To remain open-minded about where your story may lead, it is best to frame your topic as a question.

For example, a podcast could explore the question: "Can student journalists replace local news?" or "Is the meat industry sustainable?" If you're not able to articulate what question your story will explore, your topic may not be clear to you, and likely requires further thought.



2. Determined the format and style for your podcast

Who is your audience? What is the aim of your podcast? Will you record your podcast with a co-host(s)?

If you are producing a solo or co-hosted podcast and do not plan on using interviews as the substance for your podcast, you should come up with an outline for your conversation and share it with any co-hosts at this stage.



3. Done preliminary research on your subject matter and potential interviewees

It's common practice among journalists to conduct preliminary research — and even interviews — before they start their reporting. At this stage, your preliminary research might include reading a Wikipedia article or doing a Google search. Read up on the subject matter you plan to address, talk to people, go out and record what you see in the streets. Immerse yourself in the topic.



It's also critical to consider your audience: Consider the types of people you want to listen to your podcast and conduct some research to learn more about what's been covered already so your podcast will cover new ground. It's fine to cover a topic that has already been widely covered in the news, but you will need to bring independent reporting, research and viewpoints to make your podcast unique.



4. Secured your equipment

To create a podcast, you'll need the following:

- *Audio device*: You'll need a device to capture audio, such as a smartphone or computer. Most smartphones come with an audio recorder app built into the phone, such as the iPhone's "Voice Memos" app or Android's "Voice Recorder." You can also record audio from a laptop or desktop computer.
- *Editing software*: If you plan to obtain multiple audio clips (for example, if you interview different people on separate occasions), or if you conduct a lengthy interview, you'll need editing software to edit the clips together and introduce sound bites or music to keep listeners engaged. More on this later.
- *Microphones and recording studio (not essential)*: You can improve the quality of your podcast with the help of microphones and a studio to record your audio. Before you start your podcast, you should check to see if your school has these resources available for student use. If you don't have the resources available, a room with a closed door and the microphone on your phone is enough.



2. Interviews and recording

2.1 Recording your interview

You already know who you could interview and what kinds of questions you might ask. But if you plan to make a podcast, then it's important you record the interview so that it comes out clear.

If your smartphone doesn't come with a built-in recording application, there are plenty of applications you can download to a phone. For Android, you can find applications to download [here](#). For iPhone, click [here](#).

You can also record audio from a laptop or desktop computer using a tool like Zoom or [Zencastr](#):

- Zoom has become a popular platform for communication, and many people are comfortable using this tool. With Zoom, you won't need to download third party applications or plugins to record your audio but you will need to download and install their software on your device.
- Zencastr is a free online software that you can use without having to download anything to your computer.

Learn more about how to capture audio with your device [here](#).



2.2 Podcast audio tricks

Help your listeners get into the context: "Actuality" is the term radio journalists and producers use to refer to the equivalent of "B-roll" in film. That is a recording of the environment on its own to be used in editing later.

For example, if you are reporting on a story about public transport, record getting on a bus and being on the journey; if you are recording in a school, spend a few minutes recording the atmosphere. This will be enormously helpful and will make your podcast more lively and engaging.

Practice, practice practice: It is good practice to interview your friends and relatives to get used to the positioning of the "mic". Once you make a bunch of these recordings and listen to them, interviewing will become a bit more intuitive, allowing you to concentrate on the answers you are hearing from your subjects rather than the technology.

Simul-rec/Tape sync: Simul-rec/tape sync is a technique journalists frequently use to obtain a high-quality recording from their interviews. It involves asking your interviewees to record themselves separately while you are interviewing (and also recording) them by phone or video. Once the interview is over, ask them to send you their recording. This way, you'll have two

versions of the recording — your side and their side — enabling you to choose the highest quality version.

Mute your microphone: Mute your microphone while your interviewee is speaking.

Pay attention to acoustics: Large, empty rooms tend to have an echo, so try and find smaller spaces. If you don't have access to a studio, you can increase the quality of your audio by going into a closet or putting a duvet cover over you to muffle any imperceptible background noises.

Avoid noisy, public spaces (especially cafes): Espresso machines make a tremendous amount of noise no matter where you are in a coffee shop. Another reason to avoid coffee shops and similar public places is that there is often music playing in the background. Depending on the jurisdiction, you may be in breach of copyright law if your audio incidentally records copyright-protected music.





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Avoid traffic: If you're recording someone outside, avoid doing so on noisy streets and try to find a quiet side road. Even if the interview is clear, switching from no background noise (like a transitional voiceover recorded in a studio) to background traffic noise is very jarring for the listener.

Avoid wind: If it's windy, don't record outside at all. Unless you have a special wind muffler and a high-end microphone, avoid it.

Look out for weird noises: A plane passing by, a dog barking loudly, a child screaming in the background – you will know it when it happens. All you need to do is tell your interviewee: "Sorry for that. Would you mind repeating what you've just said?" Most interviewees are very understanding and accommodating in that regard.

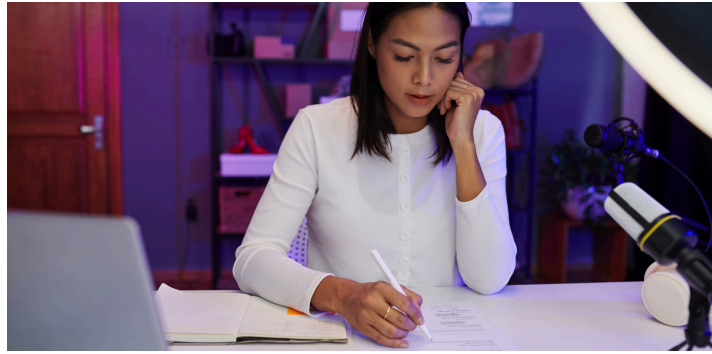
Look out for low hums: Our brains tend to be pretty good at filtering out noise, so the noises a fridge, air conditioner or microwave make might seem insignificant. But a microphone will pick it up and it will be disturbing when you listen to the audio.

Pay attention to how you hold the recording device and noise-making accessories: While you hold your phone or mic make sure you don't accidentally create noises such as nails scratching the surface of the phone case. In general, also be on the lookout for bracelets, earrings and necklaces that will make noises, both for you and your interviewees – the microphone will pick those up. Certain clothing fabrics will also make noises, such as leather and office-wear.

Get the interviewee warmed up: A common technique used in radio for getting people comfortable with being recorded is to first ask them something innocuous, like: "What did you have for breakfast?" The point is to get them and their voice warmed up. Asking a test question also gives you a chance to play the recording back and ensure you're recording at the right volume levels.

Ask interviewees to introduce themselves: Your first question should be: "Can you please introduce yourself?" You need their introduction on record because in audio you don't see the person and you also don't have "Astons" or "Supers" – that is, text superimposed on screen to introduce your interviewees. It is also a good journalistic practice to find out from your interviewee exactly how they would like to be introduced. Interviewees who are not used to audio may need a bit of coaching before you start recording.

Lookout for nervous motions: Sometimes your interviewee may rock back and forth or look away while they speak. While that is a helpful coping mechanism for them, they could get "off mic", meaning they might at times sound as if they are in the distance. The best thing to do is to ensure both of you are seated. If they tap their foot, spin in their chairs or crack their knuckles incessantly, politely ask them to stop as those kinds of movements will be picked up by the mic.



3. Transcribing, script writing, and audio editing

3.1 Transcription

Podcast transcription involves converting audio speech into a text document. This can be done automatically with the help of transcription software, although you'll still need to review the converted text carefully with a human eye. Or you can type up the transcript yourself.

You should transcribe verbatim, which means taking down everything that was said. It is okay, though, to leave out filler words such as "like" or "um."

You may find that your interviewee spoke in long sentences, stream-of-consciousness or jumped from one topic to another without connecting it clearly for the listener. In these instances, you can modify the transcript so the text is tighter, more focused and grammatically accurate.

For an example of a clean read, take a look at an article News Decoder published [on the Black Lives Matter protest](#), which featured a 45-minute video interview with human rights expert Steve Crawshaw. The text was transcribed verbatim then edited for clarity before being published.

Why should you transcribe your audio?

Transcriptions help you bring together disparate pieces from your reporting to create a narrative for your podcast.

Having the different audio conversations written out with time stamps can help you decide which parts to cut, which parts to keep and where to insert a voiceover or transition.

Take a look at how News Decoder's *Decoder Radio* advises its reporters to transcribe [here](#). In this example, the audio is transcribed verbatim and each speaker is clearly listed. Every paragraph indicates a new speaker and the timestamp.





Transcribing your audio also provides you with an opportunity to catch distracting background noises or interferences that you might not have noticed at the time of recording.

In addition to laying the groundwork for the editing process, transcriptions make your content more inclusive. People who are deaf, have auditory processing issues or aren't fluent in the language of the podcast's speakers will benefit from having a text to read alongside the audio.

Podcast transcripts are also helpful for listeners who would like to quickly cite, reference or return to a certain point in your podcast.

How to transcribe your podcast

Transcribing a podcast can be a lengthy and tedious process, but there are lots of free tools readily available. If you automate the transcription process, the results will depend on the quality of your audio.

Here, we list some tools for automatic and manual transcription. If you plan to transcribe your audio manually, these tools will make transcribing a much smoother exercise with audio playback and keyboard shortcuts.

Automatic transcription services can be expensive. If you're currently enrolled at an academic institution, check with your school to see what tools they have available, or ask if they can provide you with a free license for a transcription service. Otherwise, your phone might already have a transcription software built into its recorder.

- [Describe](#) (free version that helps easily transcribe audio, transcription service 10USD/month)
- [Happy Scribe](#) (Students get 25% off)
- [Hindenberg](#) (30-day free trial)
- [oTranscribe](#) (free)
- [Scribie](#) (\$0.10 USD/minute)
- [Sonix](#) (free trial, then pay-as-you-go 10 USD/hour)
- [Temi](#) (free trial, then pay-per-minute)
- [Trint](#) (free 7-day trial, then from 44 USD/month)
- [Transcribe](#) (free 1-week trial, then 20 USD/year)





3.2 Writing the script

A podcast script is essentially an edited transcript that combines all the transcriptions of your audio clips, including intros, outros, teasers, voiceovers, sound effects and transitions. The script should be given to the sound editor to indicate the sections and order of the audio clips you want included in the final podcast. Scripts should only be prepared after you have collected your data and recorded your interviews.

It is important to be familiar with the following scripting terms:

- Intros and outros refer to the opening and closing statements for your podcast. If you have a podcast series, you might use the same intro and outro at the start and end of every podcast to build brand recognition.
- Teasers provide listeners with a snippet of what is to come in your podcast. Typically the teaser comes before the intro.
- A voiceover is a recorded speech that you may add after recording the original conversation or interview. You might need to do this to add context for your listeners or introduce a topic or guest.
- Sound effects and transitions can help you move from one topic or interview to another. It can also help you engage listeners and put them in the context. The sound effects might be from the audio you recorded while out in the field.

Scripting your podcast is similar to drafting an article. This is the step where you decide what to keep and what to get rid of or save for later. For example, if you conducted an one-hour interview with a local politician, you might have asked them questions on a range of different subjects. You may want to consider saving the parts of the interview not directly related to your topic for another podcast or story.

The script will tell you what to do in the editing process by showing you the order of the clips and where to cut them (if you have included timestamps in your transcriptions).





3.3 Editing tips

Editing is a crucial part of the podcast process. Bad editing will quickly distract your listener and take them out of the listening experience. Bad editing may be subtle, like a slight change in background noise, or obvious, like someone getting cut off mid-sentence.

Check with your school to see what kinds of editing software might be available to you. Most computers come with pre-installed editing softwares like GarageBand or iMovie for MacOS. Other softwares like Adobe Audition, Audacity or Hindenburg can be used by both Windows and macOS.

Whatever tool you use, when it comes to editing audio it's important to listen to your edits, rather than look at the clips or wavelengths.

You should always listen to your entire edited podcast before downloading or exporting the file, to make sure you haven't made any of these common editing mistakes:

- Clipping people's words: Be careful not to cut a speaker off mid-sentence when trimming clips.
- Background noise: If you have to make edits with drastic shifts in room tone — from an outside interview, for instance, to a studio voiceover — try to separate the two clips with music or even silence. This will help make the transition less jarring for listeners.
- Inconsistent audio levels: Watch for jumps in audio levels between different clips.
- Abrupt starts or stops: Clips can sound unnatural if they're placed too close together. Pay attention to how you space your clips. Try fading out your vocal or music clips to make the transition smoother for your listener.
- Overlapping voices: Your listeners won't like to hear people talking loudly over each other. It's off-putting and can be frustrating. This is hard to control or fix in the editing process and should be avoided whenever possible at the time of recording.
- Cadence or tonal changes: There isn't too much that can be done with tonal and cadence changes but it's important to listen for them in the editing process and fix them where possible.



4. Podcast distribution

Your podcast episode or series is complete. Now what?

It's not enough to merely put an audio file on your website or social media and dust off your hands.

Promoting your podcast is just as important as reporting and recording good content.

To promote your podcast effectively, you need to have a distribution plan for conveying what your podcast is about and getting it in front of an audience.

This chapter covers some of the key methods and tools you can use to get your podcast heard by as many listeners as possible.

4.1 Write your show notes

"Show notes" are brief written content that describe your podcast episode and contain links and details to references from the episode.

Show notes appear below your podcast episode: they are inserted in the episode's description section on a podcast platform and beneath the actual episode on a blog or website post. Your show notes should include strategic keywords to boost your performance in search results.

Incorporate a written call-to-action within your notes to open up new possibilities for your show's growth.

Tips for creating your show notes

- Include your podcast title and episode number
- Less is more. Notes should be brief and easy for your reader to scan
- Keep the format consistent





4.2 Get published on a podcast directory

Identify podcast directories and submit your podcast for publication on them. Getting your podcast published on podcast directories enables individuals to find and listen to your show in their favorite app. Some of the major players are Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts and Amazon Music.

To be eligible, you will need to be able to submit at least one full episode — that is, one recording of the entire compilation of recordings for the season — to a directory. Your episode needs to be an MP3 file and should be accompanied by your podcast thumbnail (minimum 1400 x 1400 pixels, maximum 3000 x 3000 pixels).

If your podcast is listed in Apple Podcasts, it will automatically be available in popular podcast apps like Overcast, Castro, Castbox and Podfriend.

4.3 Join a podcast network

If you publish your podcast individually, you may not get many downloads. Instead, consider joining a podcast network.

Podcast networks are collections of podcasts produced, distributed or made available through a single company or network. Some examples are Earwolf, Wondery, PodcastOne and Radiotopia.

By joining a podcast network, followers of the network are more likely to notice and download your podcast. Joining a podcast network may translate into better quality podcasts if you're able to tap into production help from the network. It will also increase your podcast's credibility and exposure, and open up potential sponsorship opportunities.

As an alternative to joining an established podcast network, you can also consider joining together with other podcasters who create similar content to form your own podcast network. While this will be more work upfront, you'll be able to negotiate with sponsors and maintain creative control. This strategy may also help you gain dedicated evangelists if the individuals in your network promote your podcast to their own followers.





4.4 Promote your podcast on social media

Use audiograms (you can find a tool online, such as Canva) to post snippets of your podcast and its episodes to your social media accounts and website. If you have a guest on your podcast, ask them to share the episode they are featured in on their social media beams. You can also of course film your interviews and use snippets of the video for promotion.

Include a call to action that asks listeners to subscribe to, rate and leave a review of your podcast. Ratings and reviews are important because people tend to download and listen to podcasts that have many reviews, particularly good reviews.



What your social media post should include:

- An attractive visual
- A good hook (i.e. a sentence or two that captures readers' attention and makes them want to listen to your podcast, or a snippet from the podcast)
- A link to the episode on all of the podcast directories on which your podcast is housed
- Hashtags and tag your guests or mentions from the episode

