

Podcasting tips for teaching

Why podcasts?

Thoughts from Faculty:

"I wanted to be more inclusive in my classroom and to provide students opportunities to express knowledge in different ways. So I started by... giving them the option: You can do an essay, or you can do a podcast or a video essay. So it started as a way for them to explore their creativity to explore different ways of expression and creative expression. And it got really good responses." **Lorena Escadon, Creative Industries**

"We know our students are very busy in their lives. And that opportunity for review is often something that they don't necessarily put importance to. So I came up with this idea of a three-minute [audio] review." **Wendy Garcia, Nursing**

For more, listen to [Podagogies: Teaching with Podcasts](#)

Benefits of using podcasts in teaching

- **A different way to learn:** So much of remote and asynchronous learning involves visual information. Podcasts allow students to absorb information differently and in different spaces. They can close their eyes, take a walk, or even wash the dishes, all while taking in course content.
- **An effective way to connect:** listening to a podcast is a personal experience. It can help you as an educator connect with your students. With guests, it can be an informal and personable way for your students to learn from others. And, if your students create podcasts, it can be an opportunity for them to speak to you and their peers in their own voice.
- **A way to reinforce other learning:** Podcasts offer the opportunity to summarize, reflect and review key takeaways from course content. They can help students prepare for an assessment like an exam or midterm. Alternatively, students can produce podcasts of their own to contribute to collectively create a class study guide.
- **A fast and simple option:** While highly-produced podcasts are an option, often the most effective are the simplest to create. It's all about an authentic listening experience. All you need is a simple plan, some point-form notes, and a short recording on your smartphone to share.

Podcasts as assignments

Podcasts offer students a new way to express themselves and reflect on content. If you are looking to provide your students with choice, recording a podcast can be offered as an option instead of writing a traditional essay.

When assigning a podcast, provide clear expectations in terms of:

- Length: consider how long it will take to produce the content, and how long it will take to review submissions.
- Scope: consider providing a framework (three questions, a topic from a list, a top-five...)
- Production value: There is rarely a need for studio-quality audio, and it's good to let them know. You can provide the option of adding royalty-free music and sound effects, being aware that this will require more technical skill.
- How/if content will be shared publicly or within the class



A podcast can be a group assignment, allowing students to play to their strengths. For example, while one conducts research, another can use their technical skills. Additionally, podcasts can be collected from several students/groups to create a series or compilation. Student-produced audio content can become a class resource like a study aid for the exam, or a way to learn from each other's experiences in relation to the course content.

Podcast planning tips

When creating a podcast, planning is key. The podcast should have a clear focus and structure. Beyond that, it needs to flow naturally, so it's all about striking a balance between having a plan and avoiding overplanning.

Having a sense of how you will address the points in the chart below is a good place to start. If you are assigning a podcast to your students, you may wish to adapt and share this chart with your class.

Content plan	Production plan	Audience plan
In teaching, podcasts are often a series of audio recordings consisting of one, or a combination, of the following: • Course content review • Stories/case studies • Interviews • Reflection/food for thought Content should follow a consistent and predictable structure and be kept to a short, consistent length.	When it's time to plan and record the podcast, aim for the following: • Lightly scripted (point form) • Short, consistent length • Conversational tone • Consistent treatment Optional additions*: • Multiple voices • Theme music • Sound effects • Natural sound of relevant environments <i>*Note: Layering sound requires audio editing software and more advanced skills.</i>	Ensure the following: • Easy to access on any device • Available at a scheduled time • Provide a transcript And consider the following: • Opportunities for engagement (answer listener questions, have a reflection exercise for your students, a discussion board, etc...) • Opportunities for a broader audience (posting to soundcloud, iTunes, personal blog, social media...)

Tools

As suggested above, creating a podcast can be as simple or as complex as you want it to be. Below are some suggestions of tools that range from beginner to advanced.



Record with your phone

You can record with a phone's native app for short, casual podcasts. However, iPhones record natively in the m4a format, which you will need to convert before sharing. This [online converter](#) can change the file to an mp3.

The following apps provide more features, including audio gain control and recording format options:

- [Easy Voice Recorder Pro \(Android\)](#)
- [ASR Voice Recorder \(Android\)](#)
- [Voice record pro \(iOS\)](#)

Record with Zoom

With Zoom, you can create an audio recording alone or with others. It is a great option for podcasts involving interviews and panel discussions. In fact, since episode 11, the teaching centre team has been producing [Podagogies](#) this way. Here are some quick tips from our experience to ensure the best possible result.

- **Test your microphone** - our hosts use [Blue Yeti mics](#), but our guests use whatever they choose. If they have a reliable external microphone, the result is better, but we have never had a situation where the audio wasn't usable (at least not yet!). Regardless of the mic you are using, it's always a good idea to do a quick test recording to hear how it will sound before jumping in. For example, you may find there are background noises you hadn't noticed before that you can address.
- Once you get started, **turn off the cameras**. It is easy to forget your listeners won't be able to see you. If you turn off your camera, you're less likely to use gestures to speak to your environment without describing it for those who can't see it.
- **Mute when you are not talking** - this is especially important for those hosting a podcast with guests. Likely, they will be asking short questions, and remaining silent for much of the response. To avoid unnecessary background noise, it's a good idea to turn off the mic when you won't be speaking for a while.
- **Convert the audio file** - Zoom records audio in the m4a format (this file is created automatically when you record a session). You will need to convert to an mp3 before sharing. This [online converter](#) can change the file to an mp3.

For more advice on using Zoom for podcasts, check out [this article on the Zoom blog](#) featuring professional podcasters.

Getting good sound

For best results, be sure to find a spot where you are unlikely to be interrupted by any noises:

- Turn off the notifications on any devices
- Avoid sitting near appliances or computers with motors or fans

Find ways to dampen any echo in order to achieve a more professional sounding recording. One of the following will do the trick (feel free to experiment to see what works best for you):

- Sit in large, upholstered furniture like a sofa, chair, or a bed with an upholstered headboard
- Surround yourself with soft textiles, such as curtains, blankets or pillows
- Record inside a coat/clothes closet (a tip from professional podcasters and journalists who were recording from home during the pandemic)
- Place a puffy winter coat over you and your recording device to create a mini-soundbooth



If you are recording on your phone in a fairly quiet space, an external microphone is likely unnecessary. Keep the phone about 8-12 inches from your mouth, slightly below your chin for the best results.

When recording with a laptop, a microphone is key. It is easier to get an external microphone in that ideal position of 8-12 inches away, below the chin. And, most external mics will be more directional than the built-in mic, which means by pointing it towards you, you can eliminate some of the background sound. Choose an external microphone that connects through the USB port so you can still plug in your headphones as well. Or, use headphones with a built-in mic. Our [Audio-Video Tech for Teaching](#) guide includes several mic suggestions.

Editing podcasts

Editing adds another level of complexity to creating podcasts that isn't always necessary. If you have a plan and keep podcasts short, you can go straight from recording to sharing. However, if you'd like to layer in music and other sounds, cut out tangents or awkward pauses, or even get rid of hisses and hums, you can try out one of the following, listed from simplest (and free) to more complex (and expensive).

- [Audacity](#) is an open-source audio editing program that is used widely by podcasters and is fairly straightforward. Here is a link to [video tutorials for audacity](#) that were created for academics, not audiofiles.
- [Hindenburg](#) was created with podcasters, and not sound engineers, in mind. It does come at a cost, but offers many features to make editing easier, including optimizing your audio automatically. It also has educational pricing.
- [Adobe Audition](#) is a professional-level audio editor that is part of the Adobe Creative Suite. If you are investing in the suite for Photoshop and other software already and have some experience using multimedia editing tools, this platform is a good choice and offers plenty of features.

Adding royalty-free production music

You can quickly give your podcast a more polished sound by adding a little music to the beginning. Here are some sites where you can find and download a track that suits your podcast:

Free	Free and pay-per-track options	Pay-per-track
josephmcdade.com/music youtube.com/audiolibrary	Music on motionarray.com bensound.com	Audiojungle.net premiumbeat.com

Sharing your podcast

For most, sharing your podcast (and those produced by your students) with the class will be the main priority. You can do this by [adding the files to a Google Drive folder](#) and sharing the link on D2L Brightspace and/or via email.

For those who'd like to reach a larger audience, there are many options. Most podcasters post to multiple platforms to increase their reach. Here are some of the bigger names to consider:

- To quickly share your podcast, you can create a channel on [SoundCloud](#).
- Other platforms may require you to host and generate an RSS feed using another service. Here is an article that lists [5 free podcast hosting services](#).
- To add your podcast to [iTunes](#), you will need to go through a more involved process, but it's worth it if you're looking to reach a larger audience.



- Google podcasts is a less popular option, but the platform is very simple and clean, and available to many devices, including Google smart speakers. To add your podcast, follow the steps on [Google Podcasts Manager](#).
- Likely better known for the ability to make and share music playlists, Spotify also hosts podcasts. Here is the [Spotify for Podcasters](#) guide.

Other apps to check out:

The following apps offer features that may be of interest to educators exploring podcasting.

- [Synth](#): (web app and iOS options) App for creating and sharing micro-podcasts - share on the app (public or private), let others contribute, download option available.
- [Headliner](#): (web app) Headliner makes a video from a podcast, or a snippet of a podcast that can then be shared on social media or downloaded as a video file. It also has built-in captioning.
- [Descript](#): Edit your audio by editing your transcript. Free - \$15/month.
- [Otter.ai](#): An automated transcription service.
- [Read&Write Chrome extension](#): For students who prefer to learn by hearing content (or for yourself), this accessibility tool includes a feature to highlight any text on a webpage and turn it into an audio file.

Further reading and listening

Podcast examples

[Talk Paper Scissors](#)

Diana Varma teaches in the school of Graphic Communication Management. She developed this podcast with her students in mind. To hear more about her approach to using podcasts in teaching, watch her video on the [Inspired Teaching Showcase](#).

[Meet Amanda Cupido](#)

Ryerson School of Journalism alumnus and Toronto Public Library's Innovator in Residence uses the podcast format to introduce herself to the TPL community. Consider doing a similar recording to introduce yourself to your class, or have students create one to introduce themselves to their classmates.

[Ryerson Rewind: Dr. Mehrnaz Shokrollahi](#)

This short episode in the Ryerson Rewind series is an example of non-narrated storytelling, a technique that could work for content delivery, scenarios/case studies, and student reflection.

[TED Talks Daily](#)

This daily series is an example of repurposing content. There is a brief introduction, followed by a previously recorded TedTalk. Consider how students may wish to listen to your lecture material as a way to reinforce learning. Remember, Zoom will create an audio file for you, so it's just a matter of sharing it.



More on podcasting in education

EDUCAUSE Review: [There's something in the air: Podcasting in education](#)

This article from 2007 that imagines a campus where students learn through podcasts illustrates the platform's strengths.

National Public Radio: [Teaching Podcasting: A curriculum guide for educators](#)

If you want to take podcasting to the next level in your course, NPR's comprehensive guide provides step-by step instruction on how to introduce students to podcast production and audio recording.

Inside Higher Ed: [How to create effective podcasts and spread the word about your work](#)

This guide for faculty discusses using podcasts to share research and thoughts on education with the academic community and beyond.

Podagogies, The Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching: [Teaching with Podcasts](#)

In this podcast about podcasts, hosts Curtis Maloley and Chelsea Jones sit down with educators at Toronto Metropolitan University who use podcasting who discuss their experiences and provide their advice.

