

ON OUR MINDS

Mental Health Audio Stories



Please make a copy to edit this lesson.

THEME: Health + Wellness

SKILL LEVEL: Intermediate/Advanced

OVERVIEW: In this assignment, you will learn how to make your own podcast segment! You will learn how to create an audio story, write a simple script, and edit audio. The result: a **3-5 minute** audio story about a young person and their experience with mental health.

After you're done, SRL may package your story as a segment within a podcast episode.

SEGMENT

A 3-5 min story
made by a student



EPISODE

A few students' stories
put together by SRL and



SERIES

Multiple episodes
published by SRL

(your assignment!) linked together by theme and [Well Beings](#)

****IMPORTANT:** In your story, please use FIRST names only for young people under 18.

LEARNING GOALS:

- Understand how to record AUDIO INTERVIEWS (in person or virtually)
- Understand how to gather or ask AUDIO SCENES
- Understand how to TRANSCRIBE recorded audio
- Critically think about story STRUCTURE and create a SCRIPT
- Understand how to EDIT AUDIO to form a cohesive narrative

VOCABULARY/RELATED TERMS:

A **PODCAST** is an audio-only story or conversation available online.

A **PODCAST SEGMENT** is an audio story within a podcast episode.

An **INTERVIEW** is a conversation in which a journalist asks a subject (or subjects) questions about a specific topic or issue.

An **AUDIO SCENE** is a recording of something going on (versus an interview), think b-roll for audio :)

A **SCRIPT** is a document with transcribed (written-out) soundbites and voiceover narration. It will help you see your beginning, middle, and end and serve as your guide for editing.

SUMMARY: 2020 has been a roller coaster of a ride with the pandemic, distance-learning, protests for racial justice, the election, climate change, the economy—the list goes on... These global and national events plus all that is going on in our homes and neighborhoods affects our MENTAL HEALTH.

What is Mental Health? Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices [\[source\]](#). Many factors contribute to mental health problems, including: biological factors (such as genes or brain chemistry), life experiences, and family history.

[Mental illness](#) is on the rise among adolescents, with 1 in 5 teenagers living with a severe mental disorder [\[source\]](#). And 70% of teens say that anxiety and depression are

major problems among people their age in their community [[source](#)]. That means that mental concerns are really common. There are many resources available, though young people may not always know where to go for help.

Why report on Mental Health? The media plays a crucial role in advancing our understanding of mental health and reducing stigmas around these conditions. Youth journalists, in particular, have a unique perspective and opportunity to show what mental health really looks like for young people, what kind of services are available to them, and the real stories behind the statistics.

CLASSROOM CONVERSATIONS

Before embarking with your students on generating story ideas and diving into production, it is important to first:

1. Have class conversations about mental health. You could invite your school counselor or nurse to join you in these discussions.

[TEACHERS: USE THESE CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES TO START THE CONVERSATION](#)

2. Familiarize yourself with podcasts and talk with your students about how podcasting can be a great format for telling mental health stories.

Resources:

[NPR podcast curriculum for teachers](#)

[NPR podcasting guide for students](#)

[NPR training](#)

Some great podcasts to listen to with your students:

[Kids These Days](#)

[Guided By Voices](#)

[A Teenager Talks About Mental Health and Hope](#)

[Oregon Students Fight for Mental Health Days](#)

ASSIGNMENT: Create an AUDIO STORY about yourself or a student(s) in your community who experiences mental health challenges. What has their experience been like? What resources, tips, or tactics have they found to help deal with these challenges?

Edited audio stories should be **max. 5 minutes** in length. The best student pieces will be packaged by SRL as segments within podcast episodes.

FORMAT OPTIONS - CHOOSE YOUR ADVENTURE :)

1. Personal Story (*all levels*)

- Students narrate what they are doing and how they are feeling throughout the course of their day or over a period of time -or- students retell a story that happened in the past
- Include AUDIO SCENES to illustrate your story (for example: recording audio of you typing on a computer; sitting in on a Zoom class; the sounds of cooking; your family dinner conversations; your track practice; practicing an instrument, etc)
- AUDIO DIARY EXAMPLE: [Kids These Days: What's it like living with anxiety?](#)

2. Conversation (*intermediate*)

- A student reporter interviews another student who experiences some kind of mental health challenge: what is their experience really like? and what advice do they have for other young people?
- Both voices are included in the piece -- sounds like a conversation
- The interview is edited for clarity and brevity
- Ask your subject to record AUDIO SCENES to illustrate their story (see above for examples)
- CONVERSATION EXAMPLE: [Oregon Students Fight for Mental Health Days](#)

3. Investigative Story (*intermediate/advanced*)

- A student reporter takes listeners on a journey investigating a specific topic (for example, social isolation)
- Includes a VOICE TRACK (like voice over) from the student reporter throughout the story: introducing the topic, explaining why the reporter is curious and what questions they hope to answer, introduces characters, includes statistics and data, and adds a conclusion
- Story includes interviews with at least one young person (for example, a school counselor and two students experiencing a certain mental health challenge)
- Ask your subjects to record AUDIO SCENES to illustrate their story (see above for examples)
- INVESTIGATION EXAMPLE: [Kids These Days: Perfection](#)

PRODUCTION STEPS:

1. Find a subject and ask if they'd like to participate
 - Mental health is a sensitive topic. Make sure the person wants to tell their story and also has their parent's consent (if under 18)
2. Fill out the [SRL PITCH SHEET](#) and return it to your teacher
3. Write your interview questions or plan out your audio diary
 - Look at [Art of the Interview](#)
 - What audio scenes can you imagine?
4. SCHEDULE your interview and PREPARE your subject
 - **A teacher should be present for all interviews**
 - Participants (and their parents if students are under 18) must sign an [SRL release form](#) before conducting interviews.
 - We strongly recommend students read this blurb at the beginning of all interviews:

READ TO YOUR SUBJECT:

Before we begin, I want you to know that your story will be edited and may be included in a series by [PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs](#). This podcast will be available to the public. That's why it's so important for you to only share what you're comfortable with everybody knowing about you. If I ask you any questions that make you feel uncomfortable, you don't need to answer them. And if you want to stop at any time, just let me know.

Also, we have a lot of resources at <https://studentreportinglabs.org/mental-health-resources/>. To provide additional support, my teacher (or Youth Media Producer) is on this interview with us. Does all of this sound OK? Do you have any questions or concerns before we start?" [If subject is under 18, add:] "And how would you like to be named in the edited audio story--first name only? Or do you prefer to remain completely anonymous?"

5. RECORD your interview or audio diary
 - Interviewers and subjects can record audio using their phone's voice memo app in a quiet place, like a closet
 - If you have a mic, use it :)
 - Record one minute of ROOM TONE: the sound of the quiet room (this will help you edit later). Ask your subject to record ROOM TONE too

6. Record AUDIO SCENES
 - Read this [guide for recording audio scenes](#)
 - For instance, if your story includes how hard it is to focus at home, record audio scenes that illustrate this: family members cooking and talking in the kitchen; someone knocking on the front door and your dog barking; your siblings playing video games, etc.
7. TRANSCRIBE your interview or audio diary
8. Highlight best soundbites
9. Make a SCRIPT with the best soundbites and audio scenes
10. Write and record your voiceover/VOICE TRACK. Voice track should include:
 - A WARNING at the very beginning about what topic will be discussed
Example: "Before we get started, we want to let you know that we talk about depression in this story. If you or someone you know is experiencing mental health issues, we have a list of resources available to help. It's at the website [insert SRL website page]".
 - An INTRODUCTION to introduce the topic and why you are reporting on it or why it matters to young people. Then introduce your first character.
 - CREDITS at the very end: read off the names of students who worked on the episode, your teacher, and your SRL Youth Media Producer.
11. EDIT your audio story using any audio or video software or app
 - Beginner/basic programs include WeVideo, Pocket WavePad, Hokusai Audio Editor, Anchor, and more
 - Advanced programs: Audition, Premiere, or Final Cut
12. SUBMIT the script AND rough cut to your teacher
13. Get feedback from your teacher, ask clarifying questions, edit a fine cut
14. Get additional feedback from your teacher and then edit a final cut

HOW TO SUBMIT:

- This challenge/project does not have an active deadline to submit to PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs. However, students are encouraged to publish their stories on their school/club/program website or through video/social platforms such as YouTube, Instagram or Twitter and tag @reportinglabs.

HOW WILL THESE STORIES BE SHARED?

In 2020, WETA launched [WELL BEINGS](#), a major public media campaign addressing the health needs of Americans. The campaign debuted with the YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH PROJECT, beginning with original digital content, social media campaigns, and information on mental health resources from project partners emphasizing mental health needs and voices of youth.

The SRL audio stories produced for this assignment will be packed into thematic episodes and published as a special podcast series. Well Beings will promote the podcast across digital and social platforms—a great opportunity for a wider audience to hear your work and amplify important stories!

EQUIPMENT TO CONSIDER: You don't need a lot of technology to record an audio story -- oftentimes your phone is the perfect instrument -- but here are some options if you have some money to spend. ([SLIDES 7 & 8 in this equipment list](#))

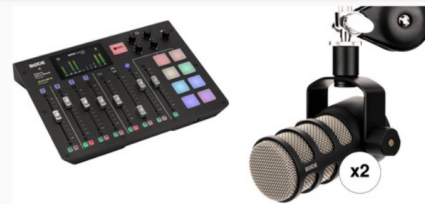
PODCASTING - Studio Setups \$850 - \$2,000

RODECaster Pro 2-Mic Kit - **\$850** ([B&H](#))

RODE Procaster Mic Only **\$230** ([B&H](#))

RODECaster Pro 4-Mic Kit - **\$1,350** ([Adorama](#))

Shure SM7B Vocal Mic (UPGRADE) - **\$400** ([B&H](#))



PODCASTING - Portable Devices \$60 - \$350

Rode Directional Mic for iPhone - **\$80** ([B&H](#)) Android \$60 ([B&H](#))



Zoom Portable Recorder - **\$100** ([B&H](#))



Marantz Professional Portable Recorder - **\$350** ([Amazon](#))

