Podcasting Guide

Contents

Planning

Planning a podcast is similar to planning any other type of digital media. You first need to start with your idea and consider your audience. This will help guide the length of your podcast or series and the type of content that you include.

Think about things like how many episodes you might make – is it self-contained or part of a larger story? Is there a theme or topic that ties the series together? How will the podcast or series conclude? What should the listener take away from your podcast/s?

It might be helpful to look at the University's Podcast Hub so you can see what's already being produced; you may be able to tap into an already established series: https://www.abdn.ac.uk/events/podcasts/

Audience

The first big question to tackle is 'who is your listener?' The audience type will influence the format and structure of the podcast and it's important to note that a podcast developed with 'everyone' in mind, will likely lack a bit of personality so it's worth tailoring it for a specific demographic. For example, if the podcast is aimed at a younger audience you may wish for the talking sections to be shorter with more frequent intervals. If your audience is intended to be other academics in your field, then it would be appropriate to assume a shared level of understanding and any associated vocabulary.

Format

At the planning stage you will need to consider the general structure of your podcast. Will your episodes be centred on in-depth interviews, narrative storytelling or perhaps roundtable discussions? Listen to some examples of podcasts that appeal to you and use this to inform your planning. Some suggested formats:

• Solo monologue – a presenter discussing a topic or storytelling
• Interview – fairly formal conversation/question and answer pattern
• Conversation – similar to interview but more information & fast-flowing
• Panel – Three or more people discussing a topic
• Ramble – unstructured, improvised and informal

Content

When planning out the structure, decide how long you want each section to be and how you will introduce yourself and the speaker, if relevant. It is useful at this stage to break the podcast into chunks, a broad example could be as follows:

• branded introduction (music or audio sting)
• formal spoken introduction
• speaker/interview
• break (sponsor or promotion or brand announcement)
• speaker/interview
• spoken outro
• end audio sting

Planning this general structure will not only help guide you when recording, but will help in post-production when piecing all the elements together. You could create a written script, or drawn storyboards, or even use sticky notes to help plan out your structure. We've included a template storyboard in the [appendix of this guide](#) that you might find helpful.

Our top tips for good podcast content:

- Make sure the host has succinctly and clearly introduced themselves and their topic, so the audience understands the purpose and knows what to expect.
- Deliver in an engaging and conversational tone, using clear structure – beginning, middle and end.
- Use academic sources to support ideas being discussed and explicitly identify these.
- No lengthy pauses, background noise or detracting sound effects.
- Podcast is carefully focussed on topic and within a reasonable length.

Creating a test podcast, or pilot episode can be a good way to try different approaches, test equipment, garner feedback and test ideas before you produce a full episode or series.

Participants

Will you be the host or narrator, or will there be an external host working with you? What roles have been defined for everyone? Will you be interviewing anyone? How and where will you interview them?

It is useful to meet with any planned participants before the recording to discuss roles, key conversation topics and/or questions. This will help them prepare and enable them to give more fluent answers or responses.

University Style Guide

The brand of a podcast is defined by the listeners overall perception of the series, therefore we have to carefully consider our style and approach to all podcasts.

A University of Aberdeen podcast should reflect our brand and be:
• Personable, approachable and inclusive
• Informative and knowledgeable
• Considered, respectable and confident

As a University we speak with a common voice which reflects our brand, outlined above, however a tone of voice should be flexible and will differ based on the audience of each individual podcast series. Communication is always best received when the listener feels they are being spoken to directly, therefore in some cases a more informal tone is required and in others a more formal stance may be taken.

Equipment

Before recording you will need to set-up your equipment, and make sure any participants are also prepared. The following are recommendations for the best sound quality:

Hardware

• **Headset microphone** – if you plan on recording straight into your laptop make sure you have a decent quality headset microphone. You can test the quality of these using recording software to make sure the quality is acceptable. Never use in-built laptop microphones as the sound quality is terrible.

• **USB microphone** – can plug directly into your computer via the USB port, simple plug and play. Good quality and usually budget-friendly, these have to be connected to your computer to record anything.

• **Smartphone** – not the best quality, but most smartphones have decent in-built microphones and recording software on them ready to go. Ensure your phone is at mouth level - stacking a few books up next to your laptop and placing the phone on top could improve sound quality. Avoid moving the mic around as the sound volume and quality will be noticeably variable.

• **External microphones** – these can come in many forms but external audio recorders generally record on to SD cards and are popular with podcasters. Some are single input (one person, one mic), some are double input (two microphones recorded at once). Good quality but higher price.

• **Headphones** – when recording, make sure you have headphones plugged in to stop any echoing, and also use headphones when editing. Built-in laptop speakers aren't built for audio production – monitoring your audio using headphones will help you create the best quality audio mix for your podcast.

Software

There are several options for recording your audio that come free with most computers and phones. Everyone will need to record their own audio but, if there's a podcast host, they should also ensure the call itself is being recorded if possible (e.g. using the record feature on Microsoft Teams during the call).

• **Audacity** – is our top recommendation as it is free and available for both Windows and Mac systems. The software can also be used for editing and post-production making it ideal for recording.

• **Windows Voice Recorder** – pre-installed on all windows PCs. As simple as opening the program and pressing the record button.

• **Mac Voice Memo app or GarageBand** – Both are simple to use with the former being the easiest to use. Bandcamp give you more control over your recordings.

• **Phones** – most phones have a built-in audio recorder.

• **Microsoft Teams** – the 'host' of each call can record meetings in Microsoft teams. You may want to ensure that individuals have their cameras switched off to stabilise the connection.

Make sure you test your recording software before you start and check the levels. You can do this by recording yourself talking for a couple of seconds and listening back to the audio.

When recording make sure you know where the file is being saved to. If recording on a phone, then make sure you can send the file directly from the phone or upload it to a computer to send. Files can be sent via ZendTo (you can find a full ZendTo guide on Toolkit: https://www.abdn.ac.uk/toolkit/systems/zendto/).

Recording

Once you have set up your equipment and software ready to record you will need to ensure you are recording in a suitable environment. A few basic tips are as follows:

• Avoid large echoey rooms – this will reduce feedback and improve audio quality

• Avoid hard surfaces – these can increase echoes and reverb. You can fill the space with blankets or cushions, any materials that help to soften the hard surfaces and make the audio sound cozier.

• Avoid using the surface you are recording on – for example if you are drinking water throughout make sure the glass is on a separate surface to avoid audio interference and noise.

• Keep microphones close to your mouth, but not too close – you'll want to try and get your microphone about a hand or two away from your mouth (4 to 6 inches). Too close and it will cause too much noise and too far away and you may be too quiet or not picked up at all.

• Do a levels test – start with an ice-breaker question with your participants such as "what did you have for breakfast today?". This puts your participants at ease, and also allows you to adjust your equipment or recording volume accordingly.

During the recording do not be afraid to re-do sections or re-ask questions if you want a better take. If recording interview style content, the host's job is to not only ask questions but to oversee directing the podcast, and making sure all the content you want out of the recording is attained. If you want specific answers with your interviewee talk to them informally about this and make sure they can relay it back comfortably and naturally.

Keep track of time

It is useful to make notes throughout the recording, with specific timestamps, that you can use in the edit. This may be for marking where in a conversation a question is asked, or to make an awkward pause/section that will need edited out.

Keep an eye on the time to make sure no section goes longer than it needs to, as per your original plan. For instance, you may want each question and answer session to last no more than 15 minutes, so you will need to make sure you or the guest isn't rambling too much. If the guest is running long but you don't want to interrupt their cadence, then make sure you are noting down good soundbites that could be used to help shorten the piece.

Post-production

This is where your pre-planning will come in most handy. You already created a general
structure of your podcast before recording – now take into consideration how the recording went, what
you ended up discussing and checking against your notes. You may have more or less content than you
initially expected, and now need to edit this into an engaging audio file.

First you'll need to decide which software you would prefer to use for editing; the University recommends
Audacity, which is free of charge and quite user friendly. There is a full guide on Toolkit showing how to use
Audacity: https://www.abdn.ac.uk/toolkit/skills/audacity/

In your editing software of choice, you will need to pull in all your audio, from both the podcast
recording itself and any branded stings/intro (music/slogans/sound effects) you have. Using your planned
structure, you can move blocks of audio around to construct your podcast.
Whilst editing, keep an eye on the levels for your audio to make sure it isn't too quiet or too loud. It's
also important to ensure consistency between different sections of recording so make sure that each
clip's volume is peaking around the same level. You can also add natural fades to audio to make transitions
smoother.
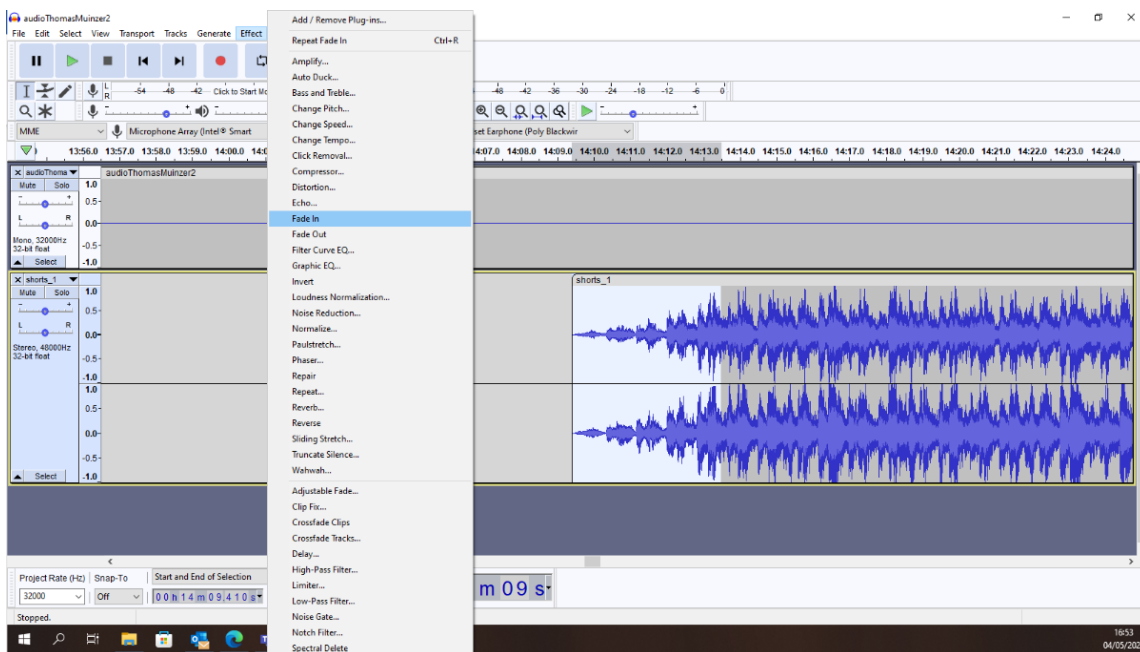
Once you have constructed your podcast and listened to the whole podcast from start to finish, reviewing
volume, content, pacing and finishing touches, you can export it as a .wav or .mp3. We recommend an mp3
as it will be universally accepted. Make sure you send the podcast to anyone involved for sign-off. It's also
useful to send the podcast round for feedback at this stage so that you can make any final tweaks before
publishing.

Supporting Materials

Transcription

To meet legal accessibility requirements, you need to provide the information in your podcast in an alternative format. This allows people to consume your content even if they are deaf, or if the environment is too noisy to hear the audio etc.

The standard alternative format for audio is a written transcription. It is possible to create a transcript of an audio file using Microsoft Word, follow this video for instructions:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6dFQDIkd3r8

You will then need to manually proof the document against your audio file to make sure that there are no discrepancies, and that the transcript is correct.

You can learn more about accessibility in the Accessiblity for Creators resource on Toolkit:

https://www.abdn.ac.uk/toolkit/skills/accessibility-for-authorscreators/

Information and References

Wherever you publish your podcast, you will likely be required to submit episode information, or a blurb. This is a concise summary of what the podcast is about, the main topics covered and why a listener would be interested in the content. If you are hoping to host on the University website a short blurb a requirement for publishing.

Do not forget to create a Title and Tagline for your podcast so that listeners can quickly glean from a list what your podcast is about. The title and tagline should be a snappy line of text that summarises the content and also reflects the style and tone of your podcast. For example,

- *Hidden Systems*: "An investigation of the body's inner worlds"
- *Nature's Revenge*: "A conversation about nature's hostile response to the Anthropocene"

You may also wish to include a list of any works you refer to in the podcast, as you would for a written piece of work. You can see examples of this on the University's 'Into The Headlines' podcast series:

https://www.abdn.ac.uk/events/podcasts/into-the-headlines/#panel2643

Publishing

Artwork

All podcast hosting services, websites and social media channels will require artwork for your podcast. This will usually be a potential listener's first impression of your podcast, and helps them decide whether they want to listen. Keep in mind that cover art is usually very small so text should be minimal, and if used, should be as large as possible. Consider whether you want to use a photograph, illustration or colours for the cover art. You can use graphics software such as Canva to help create your image. Toolkit has a resource about Canva and how to use it: https://www.abdn.ac.uk/toolkit/skills/canva/

Teaser

If you plan to advertise your podcast on social media, it can be helpful to have a short audio clip to go alongside your artwork. You will need to identify an audio clip of no more than 20 seconds that encapsulates the subject matter, or the tone of your podcast. Or it could highlight an interesting exchange, or descriptive introduction – anything that inspires listeners to download your podcast.

Platforms

Once you have your completed podcast saved as an mp3 file, and have your artwork, transcription, and accompanying information ready, it's time to publish.
There are many locations such as the RSS feeds, podcast sites, blogs, University Podcast Hub, SharePoint, Panopto, YouTube, social media channels, and School sites that might be appropriate for publication so it's best to check with your School, lecturer, tutor or manager where you should publish your podcast.

Support

If you experience any technical issues and need assistance, please contact the IT Service Desk at myit.abdn.ac.uk

Appendix – Audio Podcast Storyboard

Scene#	Duration	Audio type	Narration/Dialogue	Notes
e.g.:	0:00-0:30	Voice/music, etc.	In this column you can plan out your podcast content. You can plan the outline of your dialogue in dot-points, or as a script with speakers listed by name if you prefer. Note however that a full script can come across as stiff in delivery, so you may get a more natural sounding discussion if you just list your discussion points.	You can include direction notes or links to files, etc.
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
etc.			To add more rows, right-click and select 'insert row below'.	