

**Podcasting for Beginners - Margaret Holborn, Head of Education -
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The Newsroom education team started podcasting in November 07 - we were total beginners. Our aim was to use podcasting to complement our newspaper and website workshops and to explore another way to create the news apart from the written word. As the Newsroom is moving in November 08 to a new purpose built classroom we are starting to rethink our offering to schools and podcasting is a way for us to prepare for this.

Below are some hints and tips if you are thinking of starting podcasting with students, building on our experiences of the last three months. This is a learning journey for us - we learnt by doing but also from our mistakes. We are just at the beginning and we will no doubt be able to add more suggestions in the future.

Getting Ready

Research - there are some good sites on the Internet with lots of ideas, tips and hints. A list of ones we found useful at the bottom of this article.

Listen - to a range of podcasts, not just educational ones. This will give you an idea of formats, structures and what works and what doesn't.

Talk to colleagues - think about the possibilities of podcasting not just within your subject area or class, but the school and beyond (start to think outside the box).

Get the equipment and software - and as soon as you get it start using it!

Practice - try to record something every day even if it is just a few minutes to build up confidence. Initially we interviewed staff about their jobs and what they had watched on TV so we could familiarise ourselves with the equipment, sound levels and editing. You need to know how to work the equipment and software before you get the students to use it. Apart from interviewing each other we then interviewed students and teachers about their experiences at the newsroom and from that learnt a lot about the importance of preparation. Once familiar and confident with the preparation and recording our next step was to hand this over to the students and we got them to interview each other. We then got students to interview a journalist. See

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/newsroom/story/0,,2250798,00.html>

Preparation

As we moved towards creating our first podcast lesson we realised the importance of preparation. On average it is about 80% preparation time to 20% recording and editing. Some considerations are:

Roles - students need to be clear what their job is. For instance, if you are doing a news magazine podcast you may need a presenter, a producer/sound engineer and also reporters and interviewees. The students need to be briefed as to what they are expected to do.

Content - you need to leave a lot of time for pupils to research what their podcast is about. The more research they have done and the more familiar they are with the content, the more natural, flowing and detailed their podcast will be.

Format - the students need to think about the structure of the podcast - its introduction, reports, links in and out, sounds they might use, cast off at the end - there needs to be a variety to keep the audience listening throughout.

Script - the script is the key to a good podcast. Students need to think about writing for a listening audience as opposed to a reading one. Try to get the students to write in short sentences. When they are reading aloud breathing is important to ensure equal sound and tone, punctuation in the script such as commas and dashes can help with this. Try to promote an informal and conversational style - they can use colloquialisms and even start a sentence with because! Get them to spell difficult words out phonetically so they don't stumble on them when they are recording. Finally, get everyone to practice reading out their section aloud and get others to listen to it - a lot of script editing may go on at this stage. You should also have a run through of the show before you start recording.

Questions - a lot of podcasts have question and answer sections. It is the job of the interviewer to get a detailed answer out of their guest so that the listener can build up a picture in their mind. Avoid closed questions - ones where the interviewee can answer with "yes" or "no". The five Ws of journalism (who, when, what, where and why) along with "how" are useful ways to start questions. Keep the questions simple, you don't want your guest to forget what you have asked them. It is a good idea to let the guest have the questions in advance so they can think about their answers.

Production

It goes without saying that you should try to find a quiet environment to record. However, portable recorders pick up background noise. We have encountered people walking along corridors outside, computer and printer humming, tapping feet, dropped pencils and script rustle. You can start to anticipate these. Perhaps you should put a sign up on your classroom door "podcasting in progress" to try to reduce any noise outside the room. Check your recording levels before you start and throughout the recording - this is why you or the sound engineer needs

headphones so you can listen as the podcast is being made. If you are aiming to do most of the recording in one go think about how you sit the group, how the microphone is passed round (you need to aim to reduce microphone rattle) and also where the microphone is placed. Hopefully through lots of initial practice you will work out the optimum position of the microphone to get equal sound levels (so the voices don't dip in and out). Having a script will help the engineer know when to move the microphone and when not to. Be prepared - have extra batteries, portable recorders get through a lot of them and even if possible a spare recorder. If you have limited time to record you don't want to be dealing with equipment malfunction.

Finally, think about the students you select to do podcasts. It is good to get a variety of voices in recording to interest the listener. Bear in mind that those who are good at writing do not necessarily have as good oral skills and for some children podcasting might be a better way to record attainment than writing. As with all types of learning some will take to podcasting easily - for others it will take time as they embrace a whole new set of skills.

In our three months thus far we have discovered lots about podcasting and we have only just really started! We have learnt that recording the news involves different skills than reporting the news for a print medium. Our first podcasts are at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/newsroom/story/0,,2250798,00.html>

To find out more about the Newsroom's programmes for schools see <http://www.guardian.co.uk/newsroom/story/0,,728472,00.html>

Useful websites

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/podcasts> - whole range of podcasts from the Guardian

<http://www.podiumpodcasting.com/whatispodcasting/index.html> - full of useful information, hints, tips, school podcasts and links to National curriculum

<http://www.wolverhamptonclc.co.uk/2007/03/02/tips-for-a-successful-school-podcast/> - useful top ten tips for a school podcast plus lots of podcasts from schools across a wide age range and variety of curriculum subjects.

<http://www.newsday.co.uk/guidance.php> - Newsday 2008 support package pack pages 27-29. You may well decide to enter a news podcast as part of this National Competition sponsored by Learn Newsdesk from the Guardian.

<http://digitalmedia.oreilly.com/pub/a/oreilly/digitalmedia/2005/08/10/improvingpodcasts.html?page=1> - top ten tips, aimed at adults, but very useful

newsroom
archive and visitor centre

 **learn.co.uk**
from the **guardian**

 **Softease**
Inspiring creativity and excellence through ICT

 **podium**
tell your story

basic information on podcasting in schools with useful links such as Downs FM.

www.teachingideas.co.uk/ict/podcasting.htm - generic information

theguardian

TheObserver

GuardianUnlimited