Podcast Assignments

Introduction

This mode of assessment represents an alternative form of examination and can be regarded as the **audio equivalent of a range of different assignments** that can include essays. Podcasts are essentially audio files that are downloaded or streamed online by the user to listen to when they want.[1] It is a medium that is adaptable in argument, research and presentation and is, therefore, highly useful within a teaching and learning context.[2] A podcast assignment can be regarded as equivalent to the work undertaken by students at university. It follows the same principles as any written piece as it requires students to research, plan, develop their argument and convey their ideas clearly.[3] It is a flexible assignment, so students can be given different audiences to direct their podcast to. Podcast essays have become very important in both entertainment, education and academic research and the format allows for a high degree of flexibility.[4] The podcast allows students to communicate in different ways and develops their digital proficiencies.[5] This is all completed whilst focusing on the academic skills they are building within their university careers. This guide is a collection of practises from other institutions that have employed podcast essays as alternative assignments.[6]

Podcasts and how to use them

Podcasts can be constructed as a narrative, interview, a series of short stories or as documentary. Regardless of the mode of construction, the podcase can be used to build an argument and address an issue. Students might record themselves, conversations with others, or use archive audio clips to create their work. The most important thing to remember is that the podcast essay is never just an assemblage of audio materials. It is always the presentation of an organised and coherent argument. As such, it can be used as a replacement for a traditional research essay, presentation, group project or literature review. Indeed, the flexibility of the format allows the podcast to serve as an alternative for a range of

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[1] See https://campustechnology.com/article.aspx?aid=57399, https://mediacommons.psu.edu/faculty/instructors-guide-to-media-activities/basic-podcasting-assignment/ and http://blogs.sussex.ac.uk/tel/2017/11/14/podcasting-higher-education/.

[2] See https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/technology/whitepapers/Podcasting_Jun07.pdf and https://tomprof.stanford.edu/posting/1026.

[3] See https://arthropodecology.com/2013/08/28/hear-this-podcasts-as-an-assessment-tool-in-higher-education/ for a direct example of a podcast assignment being used. See https://www.chronicle.com/blogs/profhacker/four-mistakes-i-made-when-assigning-podcasts/41377 for a reflection on using podcast assignments.

[4] See https://library.educause.edu/~/media/files/library/2005/6/eli7003-pdf.pdf, https://academictech.uchicago.edu/2019/02/01/creative-assignments-podcasting/ and https://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/beyond-distance-research-alliance/projects/impala1.

[5] See https://lra.le.ac.uk/bitstream/2381/405/3/EDEN%202007%20EdirisinghaSalmon%20Podcasting%20in%20HE%20paper.pdf.

[6] See https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/podcasting/.

assignments. The length of the podcast can be determined by the length of the original essay or presentation. For example:

- a 10 minute podcast for a 1,000 to 1,500 word literature review
- a 20 minute podcast for a 2,000-2,500 word essay
- a 20 to 25 minute podcast for a group research project
- a 30 minute podcast for a 4,000 to 5,000 word research essay

One of the advantages of using a podcast assignment is that alongside the actual podcast, students could also submit evidence of their work. This might include a script and bibliography to demonstrate the research that has been undertaken with the work. A portfolio of work could include the podcast and the supporting material such as a journal or log-book which records the work done by an individual or group. For example, a podcast submission for an essay could consist of:

- a podcast
- a script
- a bibliography

Indeed, as a formative assignment, students could be asked to submit a draft script to explain the progress of their work.

If the podcast contains interviews with others, students can also be guided through the process of ethics, copyright and release forms for those they speak to in their work. Guides on conducting interviews and the responsibilities of the interviewer as well as sample release forms are provided by a range of research and academic organisations.[7]

Podcast assignments could be set with same questions and criteria that are used with academic written pieces. Just as within these traditional assessments, students should be asked to create and compose their responses, to explore and extend their examination of the issues. They should allow for different or original responses and the finished piece will be judged by a specialist in the subject area. As such, a podcast assignment can be regarded as directly equivalent to a written piece of work.

Podcast assignment questions should ask students to analyse, interpret, defend, explain, develop, justify, propose, or, compose their responses. Wherever the knowledge and understanding of a student needs to be assessed, a podcast assignment can be employed to test their comprehension and skills.

Podcast assignments and how to support students

The podcast assignment will have the same components as any piece of written work; an introduction, argument, discussion and conclusion. Students should be encouraged to approach the development of the podcast in the same manner as their academic work; plan, prepare, research, create, edit and submit.

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[7] See https://www.ohs.org.uk/advice/ethical-and-legal/3/ and https://cdn.vanderbilt.edu/vu-cft/resources/teaching_resources/technology/Audio-Video%20Release.pdf.

Just as word counts restrict essays and allow them to be focused, specifying the length of podcasts allows students to make decisions in the development of their work. The instruction to limit a podcast to 10 minutes can result in a work that concentrates on the issues rather than allowing a podcast that could last for an hour and which drifts from topic to topic. In that sense, podcast assignments can again be regarded as comparable to their written counterparts as they require decisions with regard to content, structure and presentation.

As with understanding the structure of written work, for podcast assignments students can be guided through a structure.[8] Students could consider the following issues as they prepare for their podcasts and regard their work as pre-production and post-production:

1. Understanding – read the question that has been set carefully and consider how to respond. Remember at the outset to place this in the context of the time limit given to the podcast assignment.
2. Research – by reading through relevant books and articles, students can develop their own perspective of the issue. Through a broad reading of the topic and around the topic then students can decide on the approach of the assignment.
3. Bibliography – build a reading list for the podcast. This can be added to throughout the process as students change approach or alter their position.
4. Argument – as with a written piece, the presentation of the argument is vital. Through a reading of the relevant literature, students can define how the podcast will present their ideas and way in which it will be framed.
5. Presentation – as an audio project, clarity is essential. Students can be encouraged to be clear and concise with their work, to focus on the issues, avoid getting side-tracked and to prevent overly-complex approaches.
6. Style – students can decide upon how to communicate their ideas. For example, perhaps a voice-over that introduces the podcast at the outset, or, one that sets a question to the listener. The project could just be a recording of the student, or, they could use music or audio from an archive if the discussion required a historical context. Students can begin to make decisions about the best way in which to relate their argument. An appropriate style for the content and argument is vital.
7. Script – once the argument, content, presentation and style is complete then a script for the entire podcast can be produced. This details out the flow of the podcast and it allows the student to clarify their decisions. A script is necessary for any spoken word elements or any extra audio such as interviews or music that is used. Students can be encouraged to create a detailed script to submit as a draft plan to a tutor or to ensure the podcast maintains a coherent and clear line of argument. A script can be set out as prose, but students could be encouraged to detail out the podcast in terms of the tone and engagement.[9] For example:

Time or Audio File No.	Narration	Notes: tone, details, etc.

[8] See https://guides.library.georgetown.edu/audio.
[9] See https://guides.lib.umich.edu/ld.php?content_id=42525884, https://guides.lib.unc.edu/ld.php?content_id=38631062 and https://guides.library.georgetown.edu/audio for examples of audio script.

0:00 to 0:15 File 1001 – author audio	"What does it mean to be human"? This is the question that has come to the fore as the development of artificial intelligence has accelerated.	Focus, calm, clear: speak slowly to make sure the issue is clear.
0:15 to 0:30 File 1002 – audio clip of Dr Sam Caro File 1003 – author audio	*Quote from Dr Sam Caro:* "The changes that are coming in government, business and everyday life are colossal. No-one is entirely sure what will happen next". Dr Sam Caro, a specialist in artificial intelligence and ethics from the University of Virginia.	Quick transition from previous section right into the quote.

8. Rehearse and revise – once the script is produced, the script can be spoken through, practiced, edited and altered to make the argument stronger or build in further research.
9. Record – here the podcast can be produced using a number of different programmes outlined below. Recording the podcast does not mean the final product. All editing platforms allow for revisions and changes.
10. Listen – go through the final version and make sure it answers the question, demonstrates your research and communicates clearly.

Podcasts and how to make them

Whilst some students may be familiar with listening to podcasts, recording and then editing them properly may not be a skillset they have developed. A range of services are provided within the university to assist with this work. Microphones and iPads with access to editing software is provided by the [Digital Transformations Hub](#) (DTH). Students can borrow equipment to complete their assignments and draw upon the expertise and resources provided by this team, too.

For recording audio, the DTH has a range of services to support students:

https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/artsdigitalhub/resources/audio.aspx

Essentially, all that would be needed for a podcast is a computer and a microphone.

For recording a podcast, bear in mind these factors:

- Familiarise yourself with the equipment and software
- Find a quiet place
- Practice as if you were recording
- Imagine your audience and speak directly to them
- Speak slowly and consistently
- Avoid hesitations, repetitions, overly long silences, informal expressions, saying "er", "um" and maintain an appropriation tone

Some universities and colleges have also highlighted the significant resources available freely online.[10] Students can be advised to look at the tutorials that introduce the basics to podcasting and producing.[11]

Editing programmes can be found for both Windows and Mac users:

- Audacity
- Garageband
- Premier Pro

Audacity is a free, open-source software that can be downloaded to produce podcasts. It is intuitive and easy to use. A range of guides about how to use Audacity can be found from other universities.[12] Garageband is designed for Macs and there are a range of guides for supporting students in developing podcasts with this software.[13] PremierPro is Adobe's audio editing software and is supported by the DTH.

There are a range of free sound archives where students can download material that could be used in their discussion.

- Wikimedia Commons – a database of audio files that can be used for free without copyright restrictions
- Creative Commons – a source of audio files that can be used for free under the Creative Commons License
- Free Music Archive – a source for high-quality legal audio downloads
- British Library Sounds – a selection from the British Library's extensive collections
- BBC Sound Archive – a range of audio files that are free to download for educational use

Students should use the bibliography and script to confirm all audio files that have been used within the podcast.

Podcasts and examples that can inspire

Using podcasts for the first time can present some challenges for students. It might be useful for staff members to record one as an example. To familiarise students with the format, the following examples could be given to lead students and faculty into developing their ideas, their confidence in the format and to guide them into building something original in response to the questions set.[14]

- A Podcast approach to Greek and Latin Orality
- Digital Communication and Participatory Culture
- Group Podcasting Assignment for a World Cultures Classroom

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[10] After https://weblearn.ox.ac.uk/access/content/group/info/howto/podcast_audacity_guide.pdf and https://ds.bc.edu/making-a-podcast-with-audacity/.
[11] See https://www.npr.org/2018/11/15/662070097/starting-your-podcast-a-guide-for-students?t=1564838041766 and https://www.bbc.com/academy-guides/podcasting-what-do-i-need-to-know.
[12] See https://www.kent.edu/sites/default/files/file/audacity.pdf.
[13] See https://kb.iu.edu/d/audq and https://www.users.miamioh.edu/warrencn/DLI/podcast_garageband_doc_final6-22-07.pdf.
[14] After https://kenyon.libguides.com/c.php?g=280050&p=2131438.

Podcast assignments and how to upload them

Turnitin will not support multimedia submissions so Moodle Assignments will have to be used. Usually, the file size will be restricted so longer audio pieces will have to be submitted via the MediaSpace Button. Complete information on setting up Moodle Assignments and instructions for students are available on the workspace. The process for submitting a video assignment and a podcast assignment will be the same.

https://workspace.nottingham.ac.uk/display/Moodlehelp/How+to+add+a+Video+Assignment

Using Moodle Assignments also provides students with an option to submit multiple files. So, a podcast submission could be accompanied by a bibliography and a storyboard as part of a portfolio of work.

Podcast assignments and how to mark them

Marking podcasts can be approached with an alternative grading rubric that can be tailored to particular types of assignment.[15] However, as a podcast assignment is structured in the same way as an academic work with an introduction, argument and conclusion and it requires research and development appropriate to academic standards then it can be assessed in a broadly similar manner as any written work. The key criteria set out by the Faculty of Arts can be used to grade a podcast assignment:

- Structure and argument
- Knowledge and understanding
- Presentation

The existing grading criteria allows for students who have used innovative approaches to be rewarded appropriately. Just as an essay might provide an original structure or argument, then a podcast which incorporates an inventive style can be acknowledged for this work within the criteria. Podcasts which lack structure or do not communicate an argument can be penalised in the same manner that an essay would be critiqued for not stating the position clearly.

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[15] See https://www2.uwstout.edu/content/profdev/rubrics/podcastrubric.html

Podcast Assignment Marking Scheme

	Structure and Argument	Knowledge and Understanding	Presentation
Exceptional Class I quality ("Starred First") **100** **98** **95** **92** **90** **88** **85**	• Superb structure, maintained throughout, that helps to highlight salient points • Precise, focused argument • Innovative and original thought	• Exemplary answer to the question • Outstanding knowledge and understanding of the relevant material • Well-formed in response to existing debates, with outstanding criticism of others' arguments • Exemplary integration of wide reading, as appropriate • Sure handling of analytical terms and critical concepts • Exemplary analysis of evidence / examples	• Lucid style and accurate presentation at an outstanding professional standard • Outstanding professional presentation, including referencing and bibliography as appropriate.
	At higher levels of study, an answer in the 85-100 range might contain elements of publishable quality (depending on the discipline, topic, and task).		

	Structure and Argument	Knowledge and Understanding	Presentation
Class I quality 82 80 78 75 72 70	• Excellent structure • Clear, coherent argument • Independence of thought and/or evidence of originality, especially at the upper range	• Comprehensive and effective answer to the question • Excellent, wide-ranging knowledge and understanding • Well-digested and extensive reading (as appropriate for the task) • Sure handling of analytical terms and critical concepts • Accurate analysis and effective criticism of others' arguments • Excellent discussion of evidence / examples	• Clear communication and accurate English used • Professional presentation, including referencing and bibliography as appropriate.
Class II.i quality 68 65 62 60	• Good to very good structure • Sound argument, generally well-directed to the question • Some independence in thought and approach	• Thorough answer to the question, covering most or all aspects • Good to very good knowledge and understanding • Wide reading (as appropriate), generally well-digested • Appropriate handling of analytical terms and critical concepts • Critical awareness and satisfactory analysis of different points of view • Good to very good discussion of evidence / examples	• Generally clear communication and acceptable English style • Good to very good presentation, including referencing and bibliography as appropriate

	Structure and Argument	Knowledge and Understanding	Presentation
Class II.ii quality **58** **55** **52** **50**	• Generally coherent structure • Adequate and generally relevant argument • Some signs of independence in thought and approach, but often derivative of existing scholarship	• Adequate to good answer to the question, covering the main aspects • Adequate to good knowledge and understanding • Fair amount of reading • Some awareness of different points of view, maybe with some deficiencies in analysis and characterisation • Serious attempt to make appropriate use of analytical terms and critical concepts, maybe with some deficiencies • Some discussion of evidence / examples	• Generally coherent structure • Some deficiencies in clarity and English style, but generally adequate to good • Moderate presentation, including referencing and bibliography as appropriate.
	Typical weaknesses in this class include over-reliance on one or two authorities; some irrelevance; some incoherence in argument and/or structure.		
Class III quality **48** **45** **42** **40**	• Adequate to weak structure; there may be some irrelevance • Some ability to interpret questions and to convey information adequately, but weak argument • Little evidence of independence in thought and approach	• Some aspects of the question addressed adequately, but failure to address important aspects of it • Limited knowledge, with serious errors and/or omissions • Limited to adequate reading • Limited discussion of evidence / examples	• Moderate level of fluency and technical competence, with errors in communication • Poor presentation, with poor or perhaps incomplete referencing and bibliography.

	Structure and Argument	Knowledge and Understanding	Presentation
Soft Fail quality 38 35 32 30	• Little or no discernible structure • Little or no discernible argument • Could scarcely be considered a serious attempt at the task • Failure to address the question adequately • Typically brief and/or incomplete	• Failure to address the question adequately • Little evidence of knowledge and/or understanding • Little or no evidence of relevant reading • Some demonstrable ability to communicate information about relevant material	• Widespread incoherence and/or irrelevance • Minimal acceptable level of communication and technical competence • Poor or very poor presentation, with poor, incomplete or no referencing and bibliography.
Hard Fail quality 28 25 22 20 -------- 18 15 12 10 -------- 8 5 2 0	• Extensive incoherence and/or irrelevance • Could not be considered a serious attempt at the task whatsoever • Typically very brief and/or incomplete	• Failure to show understanding of the question • Failure to show evidence of any knowledge and/or understanding • Failure to show evidence of relevant reading • Little ability to communicate information about relevant material	• An unacceptable level of communication and technical competence, characterized by serious errors • Very poor presentation, with poor, incomplete or no appropriate referencing and bibliography.