

Producing a Podcast

What is a podcast?

The word 'podcast' is a combination of two words: *iPod* (a portable music player) and *broadcast*.

A podcast is an audio recording that can be downloaded from the internet. Podcasts can be played on a computer, or on any device that has the ability to play digital audio files. The file-format used is MP3.

Podcasts are often released in a series. Listeners can follow the series, or listen to individual episodes. It is possible to use computer software to download podcasts automatically, and to transfer them automatically to an MP3 player.

Podcasts may feature a wide variety of audio content. Some podcasts contain music, and others feature informal discussions. There is no limitation on what you might include.

Why produce a podcast?

There are several reasons why you might produce a podcast:

- they provide a simple way to promote your project or publish your findings
- they often contain informal discussion, which makes them a more exciting alternative to traditional publications
- they can be distributed over the internet for free

Podcasts also allow people to absorb content in a variety of contexts – on the bus, in the kitchen, while walking the dog, etc. This is something that you might consider. Are there any

people who would be interested in your project, but who are unlikely to sit down and read a printed publication? If your project involves the study of a particular place, then could your podcast function as an audio guide?

Equipment

Podcasts are audio files. The basic requirement is, therefore, equipment which will enable you to record sound.

There are several ways to record sound. Many smartphones, tablets and computers now have a camera that can record sound. While the quality of the recordings will be limited, this provides you with a cheap way to record sound for your podcast – assuming you already have access to these devices!

For the highest quality results, a dedicated sound recorder is needed. These will enable you to record your audio in high-quality, uncompressed file formats such as WAV. This is very valuable, since uncompressed audio files can be edited multiple times. You will probably want to do this, as your raw sound recordings are unlikely to make a compelling podcast by themselves.

There are many models of digital sound recorder available. An affordable model is the Zoom H1, which also has the advantage of being very easy to use. Digital sound recorders have the advantage of allowing you to transfer your recordings straight to a computer. An alternative is to use a portable MiniDisc player with an external microphone. These components can be obtained relatively cheaply, especially if you buy second hand. The disadvantage is that they are harder to use.

If you are producing a podcast that consists of edited sound recordings that already exist, then you don't need a sound recorder. For instance, your podcast might involve editing oral history recordings that you have already produced. In this case, you won't need any further dedicated sound equipment.

How to make a podcast

Content

The first question to consider is: what will your podcast be about? Are you going to record a discussion, read an essay, or include edited oral history interviews that you have already produced?

It's also important to consider your audience – indeed this might help you to answer the questions above.

Producing the recording

When you record your podcast, don't forget about the following:

- Begin the podcast by saying who you are and what the name of your project is
- Find a quiet place, and eliminate all background noise
- Make sure that everyone talks at an equal volume, at a roughly equal distance from the microphone(s)
- If you are recording outside, you will need to cover the microphone
- Provide any contact information at the end of the podcast

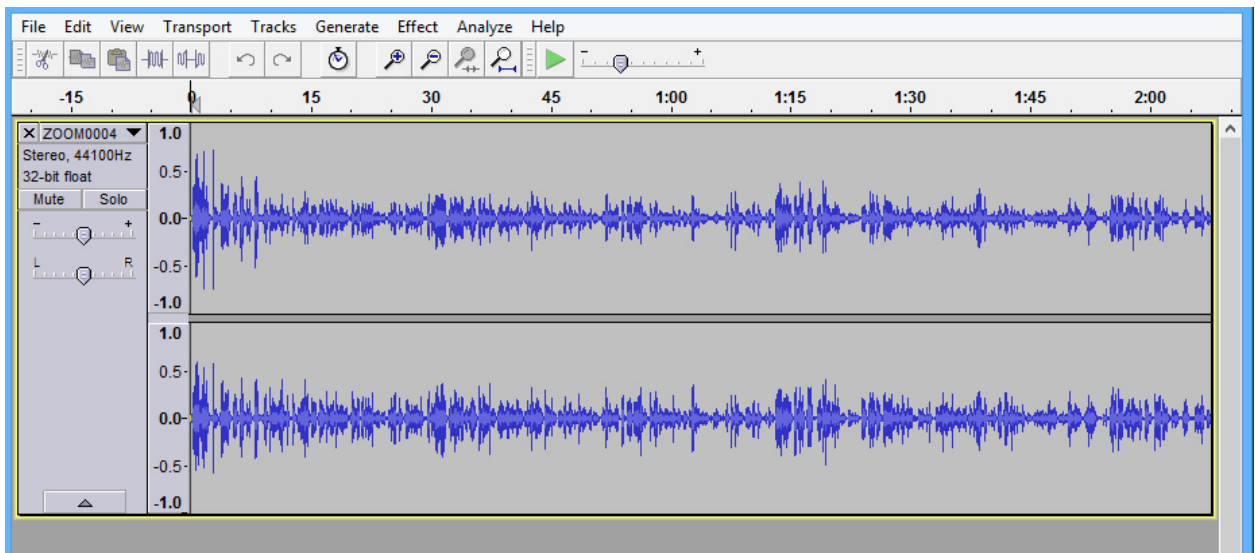
If you are producing a series of recordings, then you may wish to record a standard introduction to be used on all of them.

Editing your recording

The key to producing a good podcast is in editing your recording. In doing this, it's important to be ruthless with what you delete. Two hours of recordings might, for instance, be edited down to a 30 minute podcast.

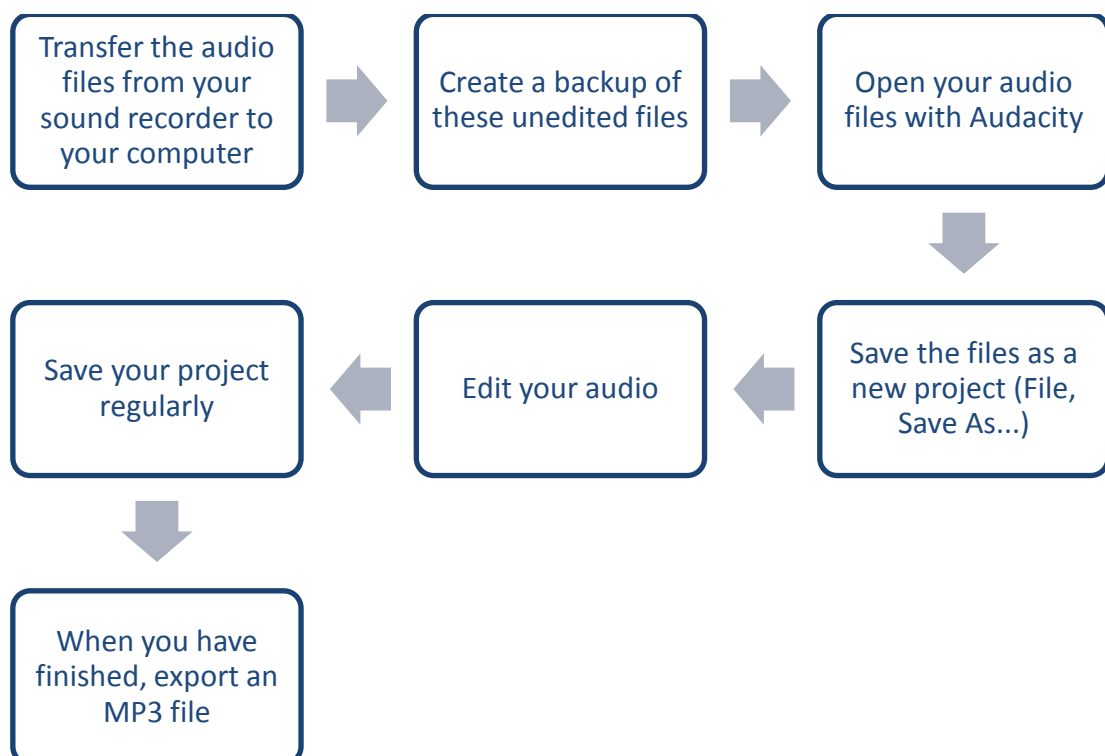
The best program to use to edit your audio is Audacity. This is a free program. It can load the MP3 or WAV files that your sound record will produce. It provides a nice visual interface, as well as tools such as noise removal and the ability to add a fade-in/out effect.

Audacity will also allow you to export audio in MP3 format, which is the format that you should use for the final version of your podcast. It is important to understand that MP3 is a 'lossy' format – in other words, every time you save a sound recording as an MP3, the quality is degraded. For this reason, you should use a 'lossless' format such as WAV until the very end of this process.



Screenshot of Audacity, a free and open source audio editing program, used to produce podcasts. (Program and screenshot produced under the GNU General Public License)

The following diagram outlines a workflow that you can use.



Promoting your podcast

Once you have created your podcast, the next step is to make it available on the internet. There are websites such as SoundCloud which will host audio files. SoundCloud has the advantage of allowing users either to play recordings immediately, or download them for later use.

Alternatively, there are other services – such as iTunes – that allow you to release a podcast. If you host your own website, then you will also be able to upload MP3 files.

Once your podcast is available on the internet, you need to make sure that people can listen to it. You could post about it on Facebook or Twitter, or use other social media tools to get the word out.

Encouraging people to subscribe

There is technically a difference between podcasting and simply making sound files available on the internet. The difference is that podcasts appear in a series, like a newspaper or magazine. Listeners can subscribe to them, and receive updates when new podcasts are available.

You may want to encourage users to subscribe to your podcast. To do this they will need the address of your podcast's RSS feed. An RSS feed is a web address that can be used by computer software to check if a website or podcast has been updated.

How, then, do you find out your podcast's RSS feed? If you are using a service such as SoundCloud, you can give users the RSS feed of your account. To do this, you will need to apply to use their podcasting service. Information about this can be found at the following link: <http://help.soundcloud.com/customer/portal/articles/1209292-soundcloud-for-podcasters>

Users can then take that RSS link and paste it into software that can download podcasts. A well-known example of this is iTunes. Another free program for receiving podcasts is gPodder (<http://gpodder.org/>).

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