
Splendid Speaking Articles

Topic: Making Podcasts

Peter Travis offers tips on creating podcasts.

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TECHNOLOGY

Podcasting 2

Peter Travis looks at simple solutions to becoming a podcaster.

If you read my introduction to podcasting in Issue 52 of *ETp*, you will have seen what an exciting addition this technology is to the language teacher's portfolio of content and teaching tools. In this issue I'd like to show you how you can use the tools yourself and add to this pool of resources by becoming a podcaster.

Simpler than you think

Thanks to the emergence of many simple-to-use web services, podcasting is a lot simpler than you may think. Of course, the maxim 'no pain, no gain' applies to podcasting as it does to anything else in life. You're not going to produce a fancy 'radio show' broadcast without a little bit of work. But if you're looking for something new and exciting to do with your students this term, podcasting really is surprisingly simple. After dipping your toes in the water with the easy 'One-minute' podcast described below, you'll hopefully be enthused enough to move onto the radio show format that follows.

In this article we'll look at some questions you need to consider when planning a podcasting project, list the basic kit you'll need and examine two sample projects you could try. Space doesn't allow for step-by-step instructions on using podcasting tools, but links to tutorials are supplied.

Your podcasting objectives

Irrespective of the type of podcast you set about making, there are a few basic questions you'll need to address:

- **Purpose?** Is it to create listening materials for your students? Do you want your students to showcase their speaking skills? Or is the podcast for promotional purposes to showcase your school, college or department?
- **Theme?** A teacher-developed podcast might consist of recordings based on information taken from existing materials, such as handouts, assignment/task sheets or study skills information. You could record this content, perhaps in the form of a conversation between two teachers or a teacher and a student asking questions. Student-created podcasts can be used to increase motivation, help develop a sense of audience and offer the opportunity for self-expression. Your learners can podcast on general themes such as musical tastes, the experience of living in another country or advice on studying English.
- **Audience?** Are you happy for your own podcasts to be listened to by anyone in the world as well as your students? You certainly won't be alone as there are many other language teachers out there doing just this. You should consider how you could promote your student podcasts. You could partner with a group of students in another country, add a link to your podcasts in your email signature or promote it through other student podcasts you come across. You can also submit your podcast RSS feed to podcast directories to increase awareness.
- **Frequency?** Teacher-developed podcasts will need to appear frequently if they are to become an established part of your course. If time permits, try publishing at least once a week. Your student podcasts are likely to be project-based and will require a fair amount of planning. Why not aim for one per month?
- **Length?** Yes, hour-long lectures can and are delivered as podcasts, but generally, long recordings should be avoided. People live busy lives and have short attention spans, so bite-size chunks, anything between three and 15 minutes, are ideal. Longer recordings should be broken down into separate sections and topics in order to create a little variety for the listener.
- **Scripted versus spontaneous?** For your early podcasting experiments, scripting your recording first will mean you'll make fewer mistakes and will avoid the need for editing. The script can also double as a transcript for students. However, there's a strong argument that the 'live' feel of semi-scripted or spontaneous recordings make them more interesting to listen to.
- **Listening support?** Will you be offering supplementary materials, such as worksheets or questions, to guide the listener? These will be useful for any podcasts you record yourself which are aimed at developing your students' listening skills.

Tools you need

- You'll need a **microphone** unless you're using an MP3 player with one built in. A good quality microphone will lead to crisper, clearer recordings, but if you're just

starting and this is all experimental, keep it simple. Adequate recordings can be made with microphones that are built into headsets. Even cheap karaoke-style models will enable you to get started and once you really get the bug, you can always treat yourself to something more expensive!

- For a **recording device**, the simplest solution is a PC or laptop. An MP3 player can be a more flexible and portable solution, although remember you'll need to be able to transfer your recording from the MP3 player to the computer using a USB connection, for example. Check whether yours can do this before opting for this method.
- **Headphones** give you a better idea of the quality of your recording than trying to listen through the laptop or PC speakers. However, once again, a simple headset will do the job for your early experiments.
- You'll need a **hosting service** for your podcasts, which makes publishing them an easy process. Podomatic (www.podomatic.com), for example, is very popular with EFL teachers and will enable you to get your recordings online quickly, easily and for free! You'll automatically get an RSS feed for your podcast and listeners get the chance to leave comments on each broadcast.
- Eventually you'll want to use **editing software** to delete parts of the recording you don't want, to join separate recordings together, or insert jingles to make your own radio show! You can download Audacity (<http://audacity.sourceforge.net>), a very popular editing tool, absolutely free of charge.

Getting started

Let's look at two possible ways to get started with podcasting. The first scenario requires no editing time, and the focus is on short, prepared, very simple recordings. The second scenario introduces the idea of editing and, although it will require a little more of your time, it's still pretty straightforward.

Scenario 1: A One-minute podcast

Let's imagine you want to produce a short, weekly or twice-weekly study tip for your students to reinforce topics covered in a writing skills course you're running. You have a list of subjects, including things such as brainstorming, organising ideas, awareness of audience, paragraphing, writing topic sentences, etc. Each of these will be a separate podcast and will be very short – we're talking one minute! They'll also be semi-scripted, or even scripted, to allow you to plan carefully what you want to say and help you keep to the point.

Start by planning and (semi-) scripting your talk. Practise delivering it, making sure you keep to the one-minute time limit. Try to sound as up-beat as possible, using exaggerated intonation and sentence stress. It will feel odd at first, but monologues such as this can sound quite dull if you don't inject them with a bit of enthusiasm. This is why podcasters tend to prefer an interview format.

When you're ready to record yourself, plug your microphone/headset into the PC or laptop. We're going to use a piece of software in Windows called 'Sound Recorder'. Click 'Start', 'All Programs', 'Accessories' and 'Entertainment' and select 'Sound Recorder'. When you click the red button you'll notice you only have one minute of recording time. You can play the recording back and re-record yourself as many times as you want. When you've finished you simply save the .wav file to a location on your computer.

Next you'll need to sign up for an account on Podomatic to upload your file. A step-by-step crib sheet on creating a Podomatic account is available from the Splendid Speaking website (www.splendid-speaking.com). When creating your account, remember to give your Podomatic address a short, memorable name such as 'englishwritingskills'. Search engines such as Google will very quickly find your new podcast and the closer the title is to the content, the more visits you're likely to get.

Add some text to accompany your podcast, including an introduction to the topic, and, if you scripted the podcast, perhaps a copy of the transcript for your listeners. When you click the 'Upload' button, Podomatic will convert the .wav file to an MP3 file for you, allowing your students to download it to play on their MP3 players.

That's it! Welcome to the world of podcasting! You can now send your students the weblink to the podcast. If they use iTunes or a web-based 'podcatcher' like Netvibes (see the Splendid Speaking website for more information on this), send them the link to the RSS feed which appears on your Podomatic page so that they can subscribe to future broadcasts.

Other possible projects that would lend themselves to teacher-developed podcasts include short anecdotes or daily news bulletins for listening practice or pre-session information and lesson summaries. Your students could make contributions with one-minute personal introductions, tips on studying English or advice for students planning to visit their country. The one-minute format is also ideal for students preparing 'long turns' for exams like IELTS, FCE and CAE.

Scenario 2: Radio show format

OK, you've tried the first approach and now have the podcasting bug – or have a little more time on your hands – and want to try something more ambitious. Essentially, the main difference between this and the previous scenario is the inclusion of editing software.

You've decided to create a 12- to 15-minute podcast, featuring your students talking about food from their home country. One or two students will act as host, a couple will give a short talk on their chosen dish and others will be interviewed. You'll also be using jingles to separate each section, which will help give your podcast the feel of a radio show.

Again, you'll need a Podomatic account with an appropriate name and time to prepare the talks and interviews. You'll also need a copy of Audacity to edit your recordings. The main things you'll need to learn will be how to delete sections of recordings that are not required and how to join tracks or recordings together to create your show. Audacity is very intuitive for these basic tasks and you'll pick these skills up very quickly. How you organise the recording and editing will depend upon your situation. You could designate

one PC as the development computer with everyone recording themselves at the one workstation. Alternatively, students might work from PCs in a self-access centre, each with Audacity installed and doing their own recording and editing. The individual recordings would then be assembled at the main workstation.

To create that 'professional' radio show you'll need short jingles and one very popular site for these is Flashkit (www.flashkit.com). You'll find a huge number of 'sound loops' just a few seconds long and ideal for our purposes. Most of these are royalty-free, but always check any licensing details before including third party content in your podcasts. When you've finished, Audacity allows you to save your file in MP3 format, which you can then upload to your Podomatic account.

Ideas for other projects of this nature are endless and could cover various topics such as book or film reviews, travel guides, debates and discussions. The focus might be on presentation skills, interactive communication between pairs of students or for areas of pronunciation your students wish to practise. And don't forget to invite listeners to offer feedback through the comments feature of the podcast.

I hope you find the time to experiment with podcasting and I'm sure your efforts will be worthwhile. And don't forget to tell the ELT community about your podcast when it's published. We're linking to podcasts from the Splendid Speaking website and would be more than happy to include yours. Happy podcasting!

Web links

An example of a simple single-file teaching podcast for students reading the set texts for Cambridge FCE and CPE:

<http://www.settexts.podomatic.com>

An example of short teacher and student presentations with an added quiz factor!

<http://oxfordenglishcentrepod.podomatic.com>

An example of a lovely student-generated radio-show podcast:

<http://bardwellroad.podomatic.com>

Let us know about your project when it's ready:

www.splendid-speaking.com/forums/forumdisplay.php?f=22

Crib sheets, tutorials and links to help you with your podcasting projects:

www.splendid-speaking.com/products/teachers.html

Peter Travis is the co-founder of Flo-Joe, a website for Cambridge Exam preparation (www.flo-joe.co.uk). He also manages the Splendid Speaking website (www.splendid-speaking.com), which features podcasts of students participating in exam-style interviews.

info@splendid-speaking.com