

How to Write a Successful Podcast

(A handout from the Writing Lab at the College of Charleston)



WHAT'S THE FORMAT FOR A PODCAST?

- **Intro:** A good podcast intro will welcome listeners, state the podcast name, and include a short jingle or intro music. You may also choose to include your podcast's theme or tagline, guest names, and the topic of the episode. Example: "Hello and welcome to [podcast title], the show that [insert concept of show or tagline]. I'm [host name]. In today's episode, we will discuss [insert talking points] with [guest name]. We'll discuss the ins and outs of [episode topic] and offer listeners a special surprise at the end. Be sure to listen all the way through for the details!"
- **Guest introductions:** The guest intro should help listeners understand why they should care about what your guest has to say. The scripting process is a great time to make sure their bio and other information is correct. Even if you're familiar with your guest, it's good practice to write down a formal introduction that presents your guest's credibility. Example: "Our guest today is [guest name]. They are a [insert role, title, experience] with a passion for _____. They're going to share with us [episode topic]. Hi, [guest first name]! Thanks so much for joining us!"
- **Segues:** Well-planned transitions help your podcast flow naturally. It's helpful to mark your transitions with a sound effect, music jingle, or transitional phrase.
- **Outro:** Give a brief overview of the episode, a quick thank you to your guests and listeners, and consider offering a teaser for the next episode. Call-to-Action (CTA) Your closing remarks should include a call-to-action (CTA) asking your listeners to leave a review of the show, interact on social media, or check out the show notes for additional information. Example: "Next week, we'll continue to help you frame your podcast by helping you nail down the details that will give structure to your new podcast! [Outro music]." Example: "Want to ask a question on a future episode of "Podcasting Q&A"? Click on the link in the show notes to record your question in a soundbite! [Outro music]."
- **Credits:** If your podcast has editors or producers who helped you make your show, read the credits, rolling out the outro music in the background as you read the credits or play a few seconds of outro music after to wrap up the episode.

WHAT ARE SOME TYPES OF PODCASTS?

- **Solo show:** If you host a podcast by yourself, prepare at least a basic outline before you start recording. You may find it difficult to come up with things to say for 30 or 45 minutes if you don't plan ahead. But many solo shows write a complete word-for-word script of each episode. Once the script is finished, recording and editing are quick and painless. Alternately, you can record sections at a time and then stitch them together.
- **Interview show:** Detailing a list of questions and main talking points stimulates conversation, helping you avoid running out of things to say. Your guest likely has less podcast experience than you, so they may not be so comfortable thinking on their feet. Providing a list of questions and comments before the show allows them to prepare the thoughts and anecdotes they want to share during the recording.

- Co-Host show: You'll want to script some things, but leave other areas of your episode open for organic conversation. Some classic co-host mistakes include
 - Interrupting one another. ("This is important and I want to mention it before you move on.")
 - Making the same argument your co-host made a moment ago.
 - Talking so long people forget your co-host is on the show.
 - Transitioning abruptly from one point to another.

WHAT ARE SOME GLOBAL SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING YOUR PODCAST?

- Use a script to sound more focused, produced, and polished and to ensure information is clear, concise, and in order.
- Write and speak clearly. Listeners only hear it once, unless they replay it. Your meaning has to be clear the first time your listeners hear it.
- Use inclusive language such as "we" and "our" to connect with listeners.
- Pay attention to rhythm. A bit of variety holds a listener's attention longer.
- Use editing to eliminate unnecessary pauses.

HOW CAN YOU WRITE LIKE A SPEAKER?

- Write everything the way you would say it, not the way you would read it.
- In your script writing, try to use contractions and simple words.
- Write it out exactly as you want it read. Example: What does ".25 in." mean? Point-two five inches? A quarter of an inch?
- Write out names for symbols. Example: "Dollars" rather than "\$."
- When using an acronym or abbreviation in a script, establish the full name first. Example: "We'll examine optical character recognition, also known as OCR."
- In general, avoid all but the most common acronyms, whenever possible.
- Use short sentences of 25 words or fewer so listeners can easily follow you.
- A sentence shouldn't take more than one breath to say.
- Convey one idea per sentence.
 - Example: Instead of: "Thompson, who trained as a lawyer at Harvard and went on to get his MBA at Wharton, assumed his current position last February."
 - Use this: "Thompson trained as a lawyer at Harvard and went on to get his MBA at Wharton. He assumed his current position last February."
- Avoid the passive voice to add directness.
 - Example: Instead of: "The car was driven by the boy." Use: "The boy drove the car." (See the Writing Lab's handout on "Active vs. Passive.")

HOW TO WRITE FROM A TO B (LINEAR STRUCTURE)?

- Be sure to make it clear the first time. Listeners don't want to replay the file.
- Don't start a sentence with a subordinate clause (Use your discretion.)
 - Example: Instead of: "Even though it wasn't clear exactly what the job entailed, Thompson thought his new role would be a chance to escape the humdrum life of an attorney."
 - Use this: "Thompson thought his new role would be a chance to escape the humdrum life of an attorney, even though it wasn't clear exactly what the job entailed."
- Use contractions. They sound informal and friendlier. Also, it's easier and more natural for the narrator to read. Examples: There is = there's; Do not = don't; Is not = isn't.

- Mark your script for reading like this:

How to read a podcast script and not sound like you're reading

If you've listened to my Trafcom News Podcast, you've probably heard me say that I'm not a big fan of reading in a podcast, unless you're deliberately sharing the passage of a book or article. However, in the real world, we know that podcast scripting is not uncommon. Just recently, I've had to coach a few people on how to record audio that didn't sound stilted or silly. This is more difficult than it sounds.

Here are the tips I shared, based on my experience in scriptwriting, voiceover and podcasting.

slow down here

- Prepare. Do not read the script cold.
- Let's assume that the script is well written, but still needs to be tweaked for the ear. Look for too-long passages, complex sentences, or phrases that can only be understood by the eye, not the ear. Revise them.

- Do not use brackets [] or parenthesis () or quotation marks. Why not? You can't see them; this is audio! Instead of: "All employees not only need to know what the company's mission is (so leaders must not stop communicating) but they also need to know what they can do to make it happen." Use this: "All employees need to know what the company's mission is, and what they can do to make it happen. So leaders must never stop communicating."

Why not quotation marks? It's not clear when a quote ends, so the listener may lose track.

If you use a quotation, start with a signal phrase such as "In these words."

For long quotations, consider using a different voice. For example, if you're a CofC student, ask another CofC student to read the quotation.

WHAT IS A FORMAT FOR READABILITY OF YOUR PODCAST SCRIPT?

- Times Roman 14-point font.
- 1.5 spaced lines – or greater, if your narrator prefers. Break the pages at the ends of sentences.
- Number the lines (MS Word will do this automatically.).
- Write out URLs as they should be read. For example: w-w-w-dot-c-of-c-dot-edu. Spell out unusual words phonetically, with stress. For example: Xochimilco = zoch-ee-MIL-co.

HOW CAN YOU TEST OUT YOUR SCRIPT BEFORE RECORDING?

- Read your script aloud and have someone else read it aloud.
 - Do you/they stumble? Does it flow well? Does it make sense?
- Be careful of over-rehearsing. If you know the script too well, the podcast might sound rushed. Speak through your script with attention to what is being said as you say it.
- Are there any sound-a-likes or homonyms? Example: "Thompson won a special achievement award from the Law Society, and his wife won two. Or was that "too"?"

HOW CAN YOU FIND A TOPIC FOR YOUR PODCAST?

- Ask yourself, "What could a podcast do for this topic that a paper couldn't?" (Emotion? Humor? Storytelling?)
- Type your episode topic into one of these tools to see what questions your audience has about it:
 - Answer the Public

- Google Trends
- Keyword Generator

The above is based on information from: <https://www.csbj.edu/writing> centers and <https://castos.com/podcast-script/> and <https://convertkit.com/resources/blog/podcast-formats> and <https://www.buzzsprout.com/blog/write-podcast-script-examples>

Bdd with LS and JW: 2023