THE LONDON SCHOOL
OF ECONOMICS AND
POLITICAL SCIENCE

Podcast guidance

How to produce an LSE podcast

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Welcome!

If you are interested in producing a podcast for your department or initiative, this guide is for you.

In this document, we will outline the principles of podcasting and offer a step-by-step guide to the production process.

The advice provided accommodates all levels of experience and assumes production is being done in-house. If resources or funding is available, however, sourcing production support is advised. The cost of production support varies considerably and can be anywhere between £2K-20K.

Feel free to contact us on comms.filmandaudio@lse.ac.uk for information on approved external suppliers.

If you are seeking funding for research-related podcasts, you can also contact the KEI Integrated Service on research.kei@lse.ac.uk.

When to make a podcast

Before embarking on a podcast, it's good to reflect on whether this medium is the best vehicle for your project. Consider the intentions for the project and how an audio-only series can help you meet your objectives.

So, what are the benefits of the podcast?

- Podcasts are long form content in which issues can be explored at length and with a more conversational tone.

- You can build a personal connection with an audience over time.

- Although it is very difficult to build an audience, when done successfully, you can reach new people.

- Podcasts have a flexible format (see page 6) and offer a high level of editorial control.

- Podcasts can (and should) have an emotional impact.

- Podcasts provide the opportunity to tell stories through multiple voices and perspectives directly.

What you need to make a podcast

- **Time.** From pre-production and interviewing to editing and post-production, creating a series of podcasts takes a lot of time.

- **Resources.** Good quality microphones, quiet recording spaces and editing software are all essential.

- **Multiple skills.** Successful production teams have a wide range of skills. They can conduct engaging interviews, edit material into compelling stories and effectively promote their content.

- **A production and publishing schedule.** Regularity and consistency are essential in building a following.

- **Promotional strategy.** 50 per cent of podcasts have fewer than 26 downloads per episode within seven days of their release, so it's a competitive landscape.

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Format

Choosing the right format will keep your content organised, give structure to your podcast and – most importantly – make the series accessible to your listeners.

Here are some popular formats:

- **Guest-focused podcast.** An interview style show features a host (or two) who interview a new guest in each episode. The guest brings their unique expertise, and the host helps the listener to understand it.

- **Conversational podcast.** This involves two or more people, who have great chemistry together, having a conversation. Unlike an interview podcast format, however, these two people are both hosts.

- **Non-fictional narrative podcast.** This is an excellent podcast format for listeners who like to learn more about a new subject. Non-fictional narratives can connect real-life issues to research. You can tell one story per episode or span your story across an entire series.

Guest-focused

Conversational

Non-fictional narrative

Narrative Storytelling

Whatever podcast format you choose, storytelling is key.

Storytelling in podcasts is an essential skill that allows you to capture attention and engage with listeners. You might think, "I am not doing a fiction podcast. How is storytelling important to me?" – however, content without a story is often not sufficient to engage and sustain the listener's attention.

Tips for storytelling in podcasts:

- **Find a structure.** Consider the best way of telling your story and then stick to it. This will ensure that you tell the story you intended to, not just what presents itself. There are lots of online resources, such as this Masterclass page, which offer a helpful introduction to narrative structure.

- **Always move your story forward.** At every step, the audio should contribute to getting the listener a little further down the road. You do not want to confuse or bore a listener.

- **Show, don't tell.** Descriptions, anecdotes and stories bring the listener into the story. Telling does the discovering for them, which can make the experience of listening feel flat.

- **Use signposts.** A signpost (usually in voice over form) says: "this is where we went, this is where we are, this is where we're going". It is useful repetition that invites the listener into the logic of your storytelling and calls attention to key information.

- **Script like you speak.** Read anything you have scripted out loud to yourself before recording. You want your script to sound natural and, more specifically, you want it to sound natural for you.

Technical: production

There are many components you will need to investigate when considering the production of your podcast. This stage involves recording your interviews, voice over, and any other sound clips you need.

Sound quality

Good quality audio makes content more pleasurable to listen to and creates a sense of professionalism. Sound quality depends on the following:

Location

- All recording needs to take place in a quiet location. Listen for sounds in the room (air conditioning, fans), in the building (other people's conversations) and outside (loud traffic, construction).

- Rooms that have more soft furnishings tend to be better as they reduce echo. Books, cushions, duvets are all excellent at absorbing noise.

Recording devices

- Good quality microphones are essential to capturing good audio. The resource list (on page 14) outlines several options at different price points.

- Using the microphone correctly is key. Ensure the mic is a minimal distance away and faced towards the speaker. Make sure the speaker doesn't breathe onto the mic, unless there's a pop shield. Also, ensure the microphone isn't rustling against any clothing or jewellery.

- If you're conducting an interview remotely, spend time configuring your software's setup. Zoom, for example, has options to record separate audio tracks for each participant.

The content

- Audio content typically comprises of interviews, voice over, sounds effects and music. Sound effects and music are usually compiled in post-production, although it is often helpful to record ambient noise if parts of the podcast are taking place on location.

- For instance, if you're recording audio at a train station, it's helpful to record some background noise before embarking on an interview or voiceover. Ambient sound can then be used when editing to establish locations and smooth transitions.

Technical: production

Interviews

Podcasts interviews are typically relaxed and conversational, as well as focused and well-structured. Finding this balance can be difficult. While there isn't a prescribed way to achieve this, the following pointers can help:

- **Prepare.** Do some research into your interviewee and the topic you'll be discussing.

- **Be the bridge between the interviewee and the audience.** While it's important to have knowledge of the subject you'll be discussing, remember to think about the audience's perspective and what they want or need to know.

- **Don't script questions.** Scripted questions detract from the spontaneity that listeners find engaging. Instead, prepare bullet points.

- **Plan the structure of your interview.** Consider the best place to begin the interview and what would be a good ending.

- **Listen to your interviewee.** Be prepared to temporarily divert from your bullet points if your interviewee says something particularly interesting.

- **Press record way before you begin and keep rolling after you finish.** Often the most insightful and engaging comments come before or after the formal interview. Always ask permission if you want to use something from these sections.

Voice over

- Voice over can be recorded prior to and/or during the editing stage (see Technical – post-production), once you have a clear sense of what you need to say, and when.

- The use of a voice over helps to give a podcast an authorial voice and, in turn, a distinctive character. It also provides an episode structure.

- As such, a voice over should introduce and close an episode. It can also act as a useful bridge during the episode itself, providing chapter points, explanation or context. Here are some tips for producing a voice over:

- If scripting a voice over, try to write as you would speak. Rehearse each section before recording and make amendments to make sure your words flow.

- Record at least two takes so that you or the editor can choose the best section.

- Use voice over to signpost content. It's important to use voice over sections to anticipate, reiterate and reflect the key points of the episode. (See page 7).

Technical: post-production

After you've recorded your interviews and voice over, the next step is to edit your podcast. Post-production – or all the work that happens after you've captured most, if not all, of your audio – involves utilising both technical and creative skills. This phase can be broken down into three main stages:

1 **Editing**

2 **Sound design**

3 **Mixing/mastering**

Editing

If you are not working with a dedicated editor, you will need some software to edit your podcast. There are many options to choose from, including free apps, subscription services, and one-off software purchases. All benefit from some prior production or editing experience, but there are choices for all levels.

Please see the resources page for a selection of editing software options. You will also need a pair of good headphones. Here are the key steps for editing your podcast:

1 Use any outlines or plans that you've written ahead of time to help structure your podcast.

2 Listen to your interviews once before editing and take notes (including relevant timecodes).

3 Construct your rough cut by laying out the interview clips in their desired order. Keep each person's audio on a separate track in your editing software.

4 Once you have the rough order of your edit, you can start cutting sections out. Eliminate any tangents in the conversation that don't contribute to your message. Be ruthless and don't be afraid to keep cutting. Approach every section with the question: "is this adding to the story?" – If not, cut it.

5 This is a good point to script and record bridges/voice over. Are there dense sections of interview audio that could be more succinctly replaced with voice over? Are you guiding your listener through your story? Don't forget to signpost (see page 7 and page 9).

6 Remove noise, pops and background sounds as much as possible. Edit out any obvious stumbles and interruptions where possible.

7 Once you have assembled your rough cut, you can start working on pace. Eliminate or build in pauses where it benefits your story. Allow your content to dictate the pace and length of the episode, rather than trying to fit your audio into a specific format.

Technical: post-production

Sound design

- Adding music can evoke emotion and drive forward your narrative. Music can also be used to help pace your episode and create breathing space.

- Sound effects can embellish your story and add texture.

- Most podcasts have a distinct intro and outro piece of music that usually accompanies voice over and helps to establish a brand.

- There are a range of sources for free and affordable royalty-free music and sound effects. There are now also companies that specialise in composing podcast music. Please see the resources pages for more info.

Mixing/mastering

- You'll need to adjust the levels of your clips so that the dialogue volume is consistent throughout. The volume should not peak over – 0.1 dB.

- You can mix your music and sound effects creatively, but make sure that any music which runs underneath dialogue is sufficiently quiet.

- Work on fading audio in and out and mixing clips together, so they do not begin and end abruptly.

- There will be a number of tools built into your editing software that can help mitigate some problems in your audio, such as a noise remover and various EQ filters. Use these modestly.

- When you are happy with your episode, export both high-quality WAV and mp3 files. Mp3 files will be used for uploading and sharing. These should be between 128-160kbps and in stereo.

Publishing

Once the podcast is edited you'll want release it into the world. Before this, you'll need to have a thumbnail (see page 13) and description for the podcast. The program Mp3tag is necessary for combining this data to the podcast file.

To publish the podcast, you'll need to find a podcast-hosting service which can then feed podcast apps and platforms. There are numerous hosting platform options available.

- Buzzsprout offers a good free plan, including clear walkthroughs for getting set up and distributing to all the relevant platforms, as well as a user-friendly experience. It also offers some performance analytics.

- Some podcast platforms, such as iTunes, require you to register your podcast before they take the feed from the podcast hosting website.

As well as being a video and audio player, LSE Player also hosts and distributes podcasts. LSE Player is only able to host a certain amount of content. As such, if you wish to submit your podcast for LSE Player it must meet the following criteria:

- Have at least five episodes fully completed with five more in production.

- Meet one or more of the LSE 2030 objectives.

- Be of a highest quality, both in its content and production.

Promotion

Once you've finished editing your podcast/ episode, it's time to package it for publication. What is the point of your podcast? Can you summarise the podcast in one sentence? Does it have a clear identity? It should be clear to prospective subscribers what they can expect from your podcast. If they're not sure, they might be less likely to subscribe.

Here are some key considerations for the promotion of your podcast:

- If you don't yet have a logo/icon for your podcast, contact LSE's Design Unit. Make sure you're happy with your podcast logo design, as it's not something you'll change frequently, if ever.

- For new podcasts, you should plan your episode release schedule and promotional activities in advance. Are there events at which you can promote the new podcast, or specific communications activities you can tie it to?

- Consider a website, or a landing page within your existing website, to showcase your podcast. Once you start promoting the podcast — on social media, in emails, at events, etc. — this will be a handy place to link to.

- When promoting your podcast, you should use links to the most popular apps, and reduce the number of steps required to subscribe. If you have set up a website for the podcast, make sure it includes links to these popular platforms.

- With each new podcast episode, think carefully about the episode title and description. Many users will make their decision to listen or not based on these two things alone, so it's important to get them right. If you need ideas, look at how other popular podcasts present their episodes.

- Who are your target audiences and through which channels will you reach them? Why should they listen and subscribe? If you want to target a particular demographic — students in your department, for example — use existing channels such as internal newsletters to reach them. Put posters up in corridors frequented by your students. If your target audience is researchers in a particular field, can you plug the podcast at one of your upcoming events? Are there frequently used hashtags this community follows?

- Use your social media channels to promote the podcast and the individual episodes. Encourage guests on your podcast to use their social media networks to promote the podcast too. Providing guests with suggested text to use on their own social media to make it as easy as possible for them to help with promotion.

- If you have budget, you may wish to use paid promotion to reach new potential subscribers.

Resource list and kit guidance

Advice

Gimlet Academy podcast
(on Spotify), a podcast about podcasting.
gimletmedia.com/shows/gimlet-academy

Microphones and recorders

Rode NT-USB
rode.com/microphones/nt-usb
A great USB option for home or studio recording.

NTG1 shotgun mic
rode.com/microphones/ntg-1
Can be mounted on a stand, can be used on location, requires XLR cable and recorder.

Tascam DR-40X Portable Digital Recorder
Connect mics via XLR and record to device (SD card). Can be powered via batteries or mains.

Headphones

Sony MDR-7506/1 Professional Stereo Headphones

Online recordings

Riverside.fm. Currently only available via Google Chrome, this is a simple way to record podcast and video interviews at the best quality over the internet.

Zoom.us. Make sure you have the desktop app installed in order to access the audio recording preferences. To modify these preferences, go into your Zoom settings and select the recording tab. Here, you should select 'Record separate audio file for each participant'. You can decide where files are saved under 'local recoding'.

Editing

Adobe Audition (monthly subscription service): it is powerful and flexible, offering full functionality. Requires prior editing knowledge.

Audacity (free): relatively simple to use. Requires some prior editing knowledge.

GarageBand (free with mac): this is relatively simple to use. Requires some basic prior editing knowledge.

Hindenburg (one off payment): intuitive and relatively simple to use.

Soundtrap (monthly subscription service): simple to use, great for beginners. It doesn't have a full range of functions.

If you are working with an external producer, they may be using heavyweight software like **ProTools**.

Sounds

Music and SFX (Free)

Free Music Archive (Music only)

YouTube audio library
Music and SFX. (Requires Google account)

Freesounds (SFX)

Music (Paid)

Audio Network (Music only)

PremiumBeat (Music only)

Artlist (Music and SFX)

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Contact us

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