

# Podcast Club

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Columbia University Libraries' Podcast Club offers students an opportunity to explore audio as a new way to tell stories and share research. Over the course of an eight-week project, teams of students have the opportunity to explore unique items from the Libraries' archives and Rare Books and Manuscript collections selected and shared by Columbia librarians and curators. Students interview librarians, conduct research, write scripts, record and edit audio, and publish their content accessibly.

Podcast club takes place over eight weeks followed by a Launch Party celebrating the students' work. This booklet contains the lesson plans I have used for two semesters to teach Podcast Club, along with many of the supporting documents, worksheets, and links to online works that I use to support my teaching.

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# Podcast Club Lesson Plan: Week 1

## Learning Objectives:

- Develop a set of criteria for quality and effective scholarly communications
- Be able to consider multiple lines of inquiry or storytelling that could be taken around the object

## Lesson Plan:

1. Introduce Podcast Club (5 mins)
  - a. Explain structure of podcast club
  - b. Working in teams
  - c. Researching and telling stories about objects in our collections here at the Libraries
2. Discussion and brainstorm (10 mins)
  - a. What makes good scholarship?
  - b. What makes a good podcast?
  - c. What would a good scholarly podcast sound like? Is the podcast a limited form? Can it fit alongside traditional academic publishing as a mode of scholarly communications?
3. Object Storytelling/Material Culture studies (40 mins)
  - a. Model material culture storytelling with gold spoon
    - i. The spoon can lead to a discussion of the history of cutlery, the design of spoons, it can also provide an insight or hook into a personal story about me, or can lead to a discussion of a related sociological topic (interior decorating, the influence of social media on consumerism)
  - b. What are some material culture methodologies or styles of storytelling
    - i. Provenance & Personal History
    - ii. Culture and Society
    - iii. Structure and Design
  - c. Listen to example podcasts.
    - i. Kitchen Sisters: [San Francisco-Stories from the Model City, Part 1](#) (to 9:00)
    - ii. 50 Objects that Changed the Modern Economy: [Canned Food](#)
    - iii. Articles of Interest: [Plaid](#) (to 11:05)
  - d. Discussion: How can we make a great podcast about a visual/physical object?
    - i. Write down one thing you liked and one thing you didn't like.
    - ii. Share out
      1. If you have a large group this can be done in small group discussion or can be done by all, recording on the whiteboard, for a smaller group
4. Introduce the Podcast Objects and Roles (if large enough group)
  - a. Introduce each object - show a picture and give a short description

- b. Describe the schedule in more detail
    - i. Week 2: Recording equipt/Writing interview questions
    - ii. Week 3: Interviewing/Journalism Lib. - Fact checking and finding a hook
    - iii. Week 4: Project management/scheduling - Creating transcripts
    - iv. Week 5: Writing for the ear/Introduction to editing with Audacity
    - v. Week 6: Sound mixing/Music and using copyrighted materials
    - vi. Week 7: Publishing your podcast to the web/Using Wordpress
    - vii. Week 8: Peer Review
    - viii. Launch Party!
  - c. Introduce the various Roles
  - d. Have everyone write their name AND UNI on a post it and elect which object and role they would like to work with
5. Teams get together
    - a. Share your name, 1 boring fact about yourself, 1 thing that interests you about the object you've chosen
    - b. Pass out study guides for the object to the teams
  6. What's next and goodbyes
    - a. We'll add you to slack
    - b. Take a look at your study guides
    - c. Next week we'll be learning how to use the audio recording equipment and we'll be writing interview questions

Materials:

- Name Tags
- Colored pencils and coloring pages, play dough (for fidgeting during listening)
- Sign up sheets for each object with team roles
- Post its, for people to assign themselves to teams
- Object study guides
- Sign with instructions about the icebreaker activity

## Podcast Club Lesson Plan: Week 2

### Learning Objectives:

- Have the ability to set up recording equipment, record audio, and move audio files from the recorder to
- Understand key differences in writing for the ear, as opposed to traditional writing

### Lesson Plan:

1. Using recording equipment (60 mins)
  - a. Demonstrate set up with 2 microphones, headphones, zoom recorder
  - b. Turn on recorder. Show students how to find their recording in a folder and rename it, how to delete a recording.
  - c. Allow students to practice setting up and recording themselves on the recorders.
  - d. Show students how to download files to a computer and move to a cloud computing (dropbox, google drive) folder. Allow students to practice this.
  - e. Introduce the equipment sign up sheet and checkout procedures. Introduce studio reservation and key checkout procedures.
  - f. Studio walk thru.
2. Writing interview questions (30 mins)
  - a. Collaboratively brainstorm questions that students might ask their Librarian/Curator
    - i. Encourage students to think about general questions they need to get soundbites (introduce yourself, describe the object)
  - b. Ask students to write questions ~5 for their librarians
3. Interview script critique - writing for the ear
  - a. Ask students to read a question out loud, and to self-critique whether it was easy to read. Did it sound conversational?
    - i. As students to rewrite their questions to have a conversational tone, to be easy to read.
    - ii. No compound questions - one thought and one answer
    - iii. Think about how much time you have. What questions do you really need to ask?

## Podcast Club Lesson Plan: Week 3

### Learning Objectives:

- Understand the importance of fact checking and think critically about the information in their recorded interviews
- Be prepared to conduct interviews with librarians during the following week

### Lesson Plan

1. Visit by Journalism and Government Information Librarian, Kristina Williams
  - a. "Four Corners" Activity: What is Journalism vs. What is Scholarship?
    - i. Where does podcasting fit into these paradigms and how do we research and communicate differently based on how we're defining it
  - b. Fact Checking Activity
    - i. Reading a transcript, marking what things need to be fact checked
    - ii. Where do we look to verify these facts (newspapers, archives, census records, etc.)
  - c. Finding a "hook"
    - i. Using the [What is Newsworthy? worksheet](#), consider different angles you could use to make your story interesting and relevant to a public audience

### Additional Materials:

- [Interview Etiquette](#)

## Podcast Club Lesson Plan: Week 4

### Learning Objectives:

- Understand the project lifecycle and basics of project management
- Know best practices and tools for creating transcripts

### Lesson Plan

1. Project Management
  - a. Zooming out:
    - i. Reiterate the overall schedule for the project and show where we are in that process
  - b. Zoom in:
    - i. What is next for you and how can we help?
    - ii. What are you going to do over the next week to stay on track?
      1. Write to request additional interviews
      2. Reserve equipment and time in the recording space
      3. Download softwares
2. Transcripts
  - a. Demo [Transcribe!](#)
  - b. Talk about [best practices for transcription](#)
    - i. Include individuals' names
    - ii. Include all spoken content
    - iii. Refer to relevant non-spoken audio
    - iv. Minor edits for readability are ok
    - v. Provide a transcript in HTML
    - vi. Include a link to the transcript in your show notes

## Podcast Club Lesson Plan: Week 5

### Learning Objectives:

- Understand key differences in writing for the ear, as opposed to academic writing and writing for the eye,
- Be able to improve the quality of written work for audio performance and oral perception.
- Navigate audio editing software and know where they can obtain additional help and tutorials to learn how to edit and cut together sound

### Lesson Plan:

#### Part I: Editing with Audacity

1. Use Tiff Massey interview to show basics of editing a single audio track
2. Demonstrate:
  - a. Importing an audio track in a compatible format
  - b. Zooming in and out
  - c. Selecting, playing portion of the track
  - d. Cutting and moving tracks
  - e. Noise reduction
  - f. Using history to track changes and undo individual actions if you make a mistake
  - g. How to save!

#### Part II: Writing for the Ear

1. Introduce the [20 rules for writing for the ear](#).
2. Activity editing "[The Stuff of Legend](#)"
  - a. Paragraph by paragraph: ask students to read a sentence aloud and look for ways to make it more readable.
  - b. Read out final paragraphs versus originals to see the difference
3. A second activity that can be done individually or in small groups is to have them identify and label each of the rules at work in the [Transcript from Articles of Interest \(Plaid\)](#)

### Materials

- Tiff Massey interview (WAV file)
- Handouts (20 Rules, Transcript from Articles of Interest)
- Need to have Rules and "Stuff of Legend" "cued up" so that the group can see them side by side on screen

## Podcast Club Lesson Plan: Week 6

### Learning Objectives:

- Mix and edit sound using Audacity, including modulating volume levels, reducing noise and clarifying sound, using effects, and layering audio tracks.
- Understand what audio materials are safe to use in their podcasts

### Lesson Plan:

1. Sound layering/Mixing Demo by recording the "Material Culture" podcast introduction
  - a. Print out the Intro Script
  - b. Have students read out the script collaboratively, recording directly to audacity
  - c. Import podcast theme music and demonstrate how to mix sound
    - i. Demo the following features: Adjust gains (checking and normalizing peak amplitude, -12 dec), Mute/Solo, stacking
  - d. Saving and exporting the track as an mp3
    - i. Compression settings as recommended by DLST:
      1. 128kbps 44.1 kHz, Mono MP3 -- For mostly talk-based podcasts
      2. 128kbps 44.1 kHz, Stereo MP3 -- For podcasts that have music or sound effects, or generally where stereo matters
      3. If you're having trouble staying under the 100MB upload limit with the above settings then it may be worth trying to re-encode at 96kbps and check if the quality is still acceptable.
2. Using Media and Introduction to Copyright
  - a. What is copyright? How can we use copyrighted works?
    - i. [Ask for permission](#) and due diligence
    - ii. Fair Use
  - b. Works out of copyright or licensed for use
    - i. Creative Commons Licenses
    - ii. Public Domain
  - c. [Free Music Archive](#)

## Podcast Club Lesson Plan: Week 7

### Learning Objectives:

- Understand Basic best practices for web publishing and accessibility
- Able to upload podcast audio and metadata and transcripts to Wordpress
- Understand how RSS feeds and podcast directories distribute content to listeners

### Lesson Plan:

1. RSS Feeds and Podcatchers
  - a. What are RSS feeds?
  - b. How do they connect to Podcatchers?
  - c. How do we build these connections?
2. Wordpress + Castos/Super Simple Podcasting
  - a. Demo the podcasting plugin
  - b. Wordpress best practices
    - i. How to structure content (using headings, lists, etc.)
      1. Sample Text for demonstration
    - ii. Uploading accessible media (See [Writing alt text](#) guidelines)
    - iii. Footnotes
3. Free work time

## Podcast Club Lesson Plan: Week 8

### Learning Objectives

- Think critically about the structure and coherence of a podcast
- Provide constructive peer review feedback

### Lesson Plan

1. Have students listen to the current cut of a fellow student's podcast
  - a. Provide a review using the [Peer Review Guide](#)
2. Time for co-working and to ask questions while I am there

## Interview Etiquette for Podcasters

1. Communicate with the interviewee beforehand; tell them how you hope the interview will go, agree on a time and place to meet, and about how much of their time you'll need;
2. After you conduct the interview, write to the interviewee and thank them for their time and input;
3. Shy away from asking your interviewee yes/no questions. Ask open-ended questions to get them to talk and try to locate what they are most excited to discuss;
4. Before the interview begins, be open and transparent about the interview—this means you'll need to be aware of what you're hoping to get from the interview with your librarian;
5. Be honest about how you plan to use their interview (in other words, it'll be your job to explicitly tell them that it will be in your podcast);
6. Share with the interviewee that your project is *in the process* of being made. This means that in the end, your plans might change;
7. Share your podcast with them afterwards!

## 20 Rules for Writing for the Ear

1. USE SHORT SENTENCES
2. If you want to use a comma, use a period instead
3. Use conversational language
4. Subject first, then verb
5. Attribute
6. Introduce characters immediately before or after they speak
7. Avoid honorariums - tell listeners what they need to know
8. Keep conversations to 1 character at a time if you are telling a short story
9. For longer stories we can develop a relationship with more characters and their voices
10. Provide context for your listeners
11. Signpost - provide specific directions for the listener
12. "Write in and out of tape" - set up your listeners for what they're about to hear
13. Be sparing with numbers
14. Paint a picture with numbers - "That's enough soccer balls to fill an olympic sized pool"
15. Numbers are meaningless without context - give a percentage or other relative figure
16. You cannot be too obvious
17. A good audio story takes listeners on a trip
18. Active tape provides texture
19. Read out loud while you write
20. Use your voice as a tool

## Writing for the Ear: In-Class Exercise

*The Stuff of Legend* by John Demos in The New York Times (Nov 11, 2001)

A review of Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's *The Age of Homespun*

The American pastoral, with its central signifier of clothmaking, is the subject of a remarkable new book by the Harvard historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich. Ulrich is a supremely gifted scholar and writer. And with "The Age of Homespun" she has truly outdone herself. Venturing off in a new and highly original direction, she has put physical objects -- mainly but not entirely textiles -- at the center of her inquiry. The result is, among other things, an exemplary response to a longstanding historians' challenge -- to treat objects, no less than writings, as documents that speak to us from and about the past.

"The Age of Homespun" is loosely but effectively organized around 14 specific objects, including two baskets, two spinning wheels, a yarn winder, a rug, a tablecloth and "an unfinished stocking." If this list seems unprepossessing on its face, the point is all that Ulrich makes of it through a deeply creative process of analysis and contextualizing. In fact, her objects become meaningful only when they are joined to the experience of the people who produced, owned, used and preserved them.

Or consider a little pocketbook, exquisitely twined from moosehair by an Algonquian woman named Molly Ocket, which Ulrich uses to open the history of native people during and after the American Revolution. "The weave structure," she notes, "is Algonquian, the form European." In fact, this hybrid quality matched the personal situation of many Indians. The pocketbook was donated long ago to a state historical society, whose curators described Molly Ocket, in an unfortunate bit of rhyming, as "last on the docket," thus invoking the shibboleth of Indians as a dying race. But her life tells a very different story -- of individual resourcefulness, and cultural persistence, against enormous odds.

## Writing Alt Text for Images

### Placing Alt in HTML tags

```
<imgsrc="http://localhost:4000/bnf-ms-fr-640/images/ann_999_fa_99/1qgwf622DTns6t0fyCg9  
lyNo6yHyG9r86.jpg" alt="Figure">
```

The `alt` attribute should *typically*:

- Be succinct. This means the correct content (if there is content) of the image should be presented as succinctly as is appropriate. Typically no more than a few words are necessary, though rarely a short sentence or two may be appropriate.
- NOT be redundant or provide the same information as text within the context of the image.
- NOT use the phrases "image of ..." or "graphic of ..." to describe the image. It is usually apparent to the user that it is an image. And if the image is conveying content, it is typically not necessary that the user know that it is an image that is conveying the content, as opposed to text. If the fact that an image is a photograph

or illustration, etc. is important content, it may be useful to include this in alternative text.

Example:



In this painting, the artist Emanuel Leutze used light, color, form, perspective, proportion, and motion to create the composition....

What would be the most appropriate alt attribute for the image in the example?

- A. "George Washington"
- B. "Painting of George Washington"
- C. "Painting of George Washington crossing the Delaware River"
- D. "A classic painting demonstrating the use of light and color to create composition."
- E. "Painting of George Washington crossing the Delaware River. Swirling waves surround the boat where the majestic George Washington looks forward out of the storm and into the rays of light across the river as he leads his wary troops to battle."

Option A: "George Washington" probably does not adequately describe the content of the image. The fact that it is George Washington in the painting may not necessarily be relevant in this context.

Option B: "Painting of George Washington" may be adequate, but does not provide much additional content. However, it may be appropriate to describe the image as a painting, as opposed to a photograph or other image type.

Option C: Provides more information that may help the user identify the content itself. Remember that alternative text is not just for the blind. Many sighted users would be able to

identify the specific painting in question given this description, whereas "George Washington" alone would not be descriptive enough.

Option D: Might be appropriate if the purpose of the image is to present a specific art technique and the content of the image itself is not important.

Option E: May also be an appropriate alternative if a detailed examination of the painting is in order, but is too long and verbose to be of much use - such text would be better served as text within the web page.

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