

## ***Who can do a podcast and why should they?***

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Podcasting is a great way to use audio and/or video to reach many different people, and to make information and ideas persistently available to an international audience.

Producing material for the podcast should not require any great deal of technical proficiency. Of course, if you would like to do more unconventional things with your contribution (using embedded video, twitter feeds etc.) you can contact the PG Forum team to discuss taking this forward.

The uploading and syndication (the technical stuff) is handled at our end – *you provide the message, we provide the medium!*

## ***What this article does***

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This article gives some general advice on producing and submitting material for the *PG Focus* podcast. It is intended to help those who have never produced material in this format ensure that the content of their piece is as clear and accessible as possible.

Following these general guidelines will help ensure that the content of your piece is presented clearly and not marred by technical (such as poor sound quality) or presentation issues (such as lack of structure or excessive length).

## ***General points***

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### ***1. Structure and concision***

- Make notes to guide you.
- Plan the format of the podcast beforehand. Though podcasts can be edited afterwards, it can be difficult to make long, rambling thoughts shorter, and so it's easier if you can keep it brief and to the point during the recording.
- The suggested maximum length for any content is around 30 minutes – anything in excess of this is likely to be too long, or may require

splitting into two episodes if it is vitally lengthy (you should contact the forum if it is).

- **Concision is key to successful communication in this medium.** Don't read out an essay or a chapter from a thesis – if you are taking on a large area make some key points and where appropriate reference larger works so that your audience can follow up in more detail. The availability and speed of podcasting is a great strength, however you are also more exposed to losing your audience's attention, as you are competing for whatever else is ready to hand for the person at the time.

## 2. Practice

- Consider having a practice run. If you're doing a podcast yourself, you can try it out and then listen to the recording in order to figure out what changes you might make to the pacing, themes, etc. Get a friend to listen to it and give feedback.

## 3. Style

- Be yourself. Though you may not have experience being an interviewer or radio host, you have plenty of experience being yourself, and it is important to draw upon this. Don't worry about trying to change your voice or your style of speaking – you will come across better if you simply relax and engage with your natural enthusiasm for the topic you are discussing. Though many academic presentations occur in formal situations, podcasts can be more fun to listen to if they are not overly formal or monotonous - so just be yourself!

## 4. Recording equipment and quality

- Ensure the recording is of good quality. As PG Focus has already discovered, poor recording quality can make even the best interviews unusable. Therefore it's important to plan where the interview will happen, in order to ensure that background noise will be at a minimum. The quality of recording equipment is also important, because this can impact the amount of static or background noise that ends up on the recording.
- **ALWAYS RECORD IN A WIDELY ACCESSIBLE FORMAT!** Check your recording hardware to see if it records in mp3, wav, wma, or m4a format. Avoid formats such as DS2/DSS (Olympus Dictaphones default to this but can be set to record in other formats) as they have issues being used on different platforms. Make sure you record in a

high-quality setting – if in doubt, set the device to the highest quality it can record.

- Test your equipment before the interview – this may just mean placing the device between you and the participant (if doing an interview) or near yourself (if narrating) and recording a few seconds of dialogue. This will allow you to check that you are being recorded clearly, that the recorder is working properly, and that you are not being unduly affected by background noise.
- Also **remember to check the battery level if using a battery-powered device.**

## *If you are conducting an interview*

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### *1. Prepare yourself*

- Pre-write short questions if you're concerned that you will ramble. While this doesn't prevent you from asking new questions in the moment, it will ensure you start off on the right foot and gives you something to fall back on.
- Listen to other podcasts of a similar bent or topic to the one you are conducting to get a sense of how long it takes to answer a question, and plan your question list accordingly so that you aren't over-ambitious about how much you can cover. There may be one on the PG Forum blog site – <http://pgforum.britsoc.org.uk> – or try Laurie Taylor's *Thinking Allowed* podcast for the BBC - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qy05>.
- Also, consider asking a friend to do a mock interview so that you can record yourself and get feedback on your interviewing technique.
- If you tend to speak quickly when you are nervous, consider speaking to your interviewee for a short time before starting the interview, so that you can calm down. This could be a good opportunity to give them an idea of what topics you will be covering to help them feel more prepared as well.

### *2. Help prepare your respondent*

- Consider either sending your questions to your guest beforehand, or briefly mentioning the types of issues you will cover before starting the interview. This can prevent you from stumbling upon difficult or complicated issues, and will give your guest a sense of what they can expect, so that they are better able to provide concise answers.

### **3. Conducting the interview**

- Make sure that you prepare so that you can ask short, concise questions, and then let your interviewee have plenty of time to respond. Though podcasts can be edited afterwards, it can be difficult to make long, rambling thoughts shorter, and so it's easier if you can keep it brief and to the point during the recording.
- While you shouldn't interrupt an interviewee in the middle of a key point, your job is to ensure that the conversation keeps moving. To do this, you need to stop yourself from rambling, and you also have to make it easy for a guest to not ramble. It will help if you provide regular, concise questions to which they can respond, rather than very broad and complex ones.

***Developed by Allison Hui & Mike Bracher (last updated - Dec 2009)***

*Drawing on advice found at:*

*<http://www.mcelhearn.com/?p=152>*

*[http://blog.frogbody.com/frogblog/2006/02/notes\\_to\\_self\\_a.html](http://blog.frogbody.com/frogblog/2006/02/notes_to_self_a.html)*