

Podcasting in a Writing Class? Considering the Possibilities

Episode 3: Podcast Assignments 1—Response Assignments

By Jennifer L. Bowie

Transcript of the Podcast

<http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/16.2/praxis/bowie/episode3.html>

Welcome to “Podcasting in a Writing Class? Considering the Possibilities” a multimodal project exploring podcasting as a part of a writing class. You are listening to Episode 3 “Podcast Assignments 1—Response Assignments.” This is a six episode podcast series with an interconnected webtext published in *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy*. A full transcript of each episode is available on the site.

I am Dr. Jennifer L. Bowie, your host for this series and a Senior Usability Research Analyst for The Home Depot website. I am also a podcaster, with a variety of podcasts including *Screen Space*: A podcast about creating usable, accessible, effective, and efficient web, blog, and digital media design for the everyday (and non-expert) designer.

In this episode, I will first present some guidelines I have developed for integrating podcasts and provide three response-based podcast assignments. Without further ado, let us begin Episode 3 “Podcast Assignments 1—Response Assignments.”

[Musical transition]

Possible Podcast Assignments

Like any media, there are a large number of possible podcast projects for writing students. In these next three episodes, I present some project ideas that should work in a variety of writing classes. Many of these assignments I have taught and I will provide information on incorporating them, along with tips and pointers on making these assignments work. In this episode, I will focus on response assignments. In Episode 4, the next episode, I will discuss media and message podcast assignments. I end the assignment discussion in Episode 5, where I cover genre assignments.

First, I will share some guidelines I have developed concerning podcasts assignments.

- ◆ The first one is **Length and Time:** Like any digital project, podcasts tend to take students more time than simply writing a paper. When I replace a paper project with a podcast I keep in mind the extra time it will take my students to record and edit. My general rule of thumb is pages to minutes. If the paper project was 10 double-spaced pages originally, then I consider the podcast equivalent to be 10 minutes. Since most people tend to read faster than a person talks, this means the podcast will have less verbal or textual information in it. So if this is an issue, do adjust accordingly. For more causal assignments, which may take less editing time, generally, you could extend the podcast time more, since you don't expect them to edit as much. In my own recordings, I've found a page of text comprising 12 point typeface, usually Georgia for me, and single spacing text takes approximately three minute of podcast time. This of course varies depending on content, speed, and the addition of things like music, but, it gives you an idea of what to expect.
- ◆ The second guideline area is **Transcripts:** For any formal assignment, I require students to submit transcripts of the podcast. My primary reason for this is accessibility. While audio podcasts will work well for audience members with issues seeing, they will not work well for audience members who have hearing problems. Much of the accessibility programs out there for digital texts are designed to work with typographic-based texts, like websites and blogs, and not audio-based texts, like podcasts. Thus, I require my students to submit transcripts with their podcasts. The transcripts can then be read by those with hearing problems—thus the podcast should be accessible for those with visual or auditory problems. In fact, an audio podcast with a digital typographic-based transcript may be more accessible than a website, and will be accessible for a broader range of listeners/readers. Requiring transcripts for accessibility brings awareness to the issue. The transcripts also give me a place to comment or follow along when grading, which can be helpful. Usually students write out transcripts before they start recording the more formal assignments anyway, so it is often little extra work for them to submit these along with podcasts. For less formal assignments, like their reading responses, I do not require transcripts because the assignments are too small. Asking for transcripts would just take more time. However, I do ask they include transcripts if they have them, since some students do still write out these more casual assignments.

- ◆ And the third area is **Editing**: The level of sound editing I require depends on the assignment. For shorter and less formal assignments, like reading responses, I require minimal editing. I mostly just want an understandable podcast where the major issues are edited out. For the larger and more formal assignments, I expect a higher level of editing and sound quality in general. If the podcast is their final project I expect it to be clean of sound issues, easy to hear, and have well balanced sound levels. I will mention my preferred sound editing levels for some assignments I discuss throughout the next three episodes.

Those are my three guidelines. Now, let's start discussing some assignments—response assignments.

Reading Response Podcast

In many of my classes, students are assigned once or twice weekly reading responses. In my *Senior Seminar* and in some graduate classes, students have the option to complete these in written or podcast form, often with a requirement of a certain number in podcast form. In my *Senior Seminar* I require three. For many, the podcasts take more time than simply writing their responses out, so I make the assignment short and casual. Their podcasts do not have to be highly sound edited and they should be short (two to five minutes for my undergrads). I do not require scripts for these podcasts. As a teacher, I enjoy listening to these podcasts as I get a better idea, often from their voices and tone, how students are reacting to the readings. I also get to hear them wrangling with ideas in ways I just don't see in their written responses. Plus, students want to make sure they do the reading for their podcast reading responses, as they don't want to "sound stupid."

One primary goal for this assignment is technological literacy, particularly podcast literacy. While students can choose when in the semester they do their podcast reading responses, I recommend they do one, at least, in the first few weeks of class to try out podcasting on a low risk assignment. If they do this then they do not have to figure out how to podcast while doing an assignment that is worth more. I have had many students thank me for this recommendation, and I have even considered requiring it. I kind of hate requiring something like that, so I haven't yet. Other goals for the assignment include increasing the student's ability to critique, analyze, communicate orally, and analyze their audiences. A key purpose of the assignment is community building, and hearing their peers on their MP3 players does seem to develop community excitement in my classes. They'll often talk to each other before and after classes about what they were

podcasting. It's pretty neat to see. I have put a sample assignment description for both my regular reading response and my podcast reading responses in the webtext.

In my Fall 2010 class, students found the podcast reading responses overall contributed to their electronic writing and publishing skills, giving the reading responses a 4.2 of 5. Students found that the podcast reading responses particularly increased their understanding and application of audience and technological literacy, which makes sense since these are often the first podcasts they do in my class and because they are creating them for their peers. Eight other areas received a 4 or higher by the students including purpose, media use and differences, oral communication, and ethos. I put a table up on the webtext for this episode with the 19 areas and the ratings students gave each.

I have included some clips of student reading responses, so you can hear what students have done.

[clips from podcasts]

Peer Review

Peer review of writing is always a tricky topic. Many students do not value their peer reviews, thinking their peers do not know much about writing. However, peers often have valuable advice to impart and the review can be helpful. In addition, writing research, conducted by David Bartholomae and others, has shown that reading aloud one's writing often helps a writer see (or "hear") what needs to be fixed. For instance, John Hedgcock and Natalie Lefkowitz on page 258, point out that hearing their texts allows students to see it in a new way, leads to better analysis, and aids in the construction of an internal representation of the text.

This idea for podcast peer review combines both concepts. In the peer review, the reviewer will read the peer's work in the podcast, commenting on it as she or he reads it. This way the writer will not only hear his or her writing out loud, but they'll also hear the enthusiasm or confusion of the reviewer, hear where she or he stumbles, and hear what works and does not work. This should make the review more legitimate in the writer's mind and more helpful. In addition, this will give the writer a copy of the review—which is not available in a face to face review. Having the podcast to refer to is especially helpful for ESL students or those with memory or process learning issues. The podcast peer reviews have been quite helpful in my classes so far from a teacher prospective. However, like other types of peer review, it generally seems like the

strongest students tend to both give the best feedback and are more willing to value the peer review (especially when done by another strong student). I had students do peer reviews of each other's *Senior Seminar* projects, which could be in a variety of media—print, web, podcast, and more. This made the podcast peer reviews fascinating. One strong peer review of a podcast played the podcast during the review and would pause or talk over the podcast—much like the director's commentary on a DVD. In fact, the student told me that was his idea. He was watching a DVD and got the idea for it. This immediate feedback to the podcast was very helpful to the podcaster. And I actually provide this peer review as an example at the end of the section, if you hear what happened. One student reviewed a website and provided the instantaneous response on opening the page including a rather confused tone, which gave the website designer an additional level of feedback. The students who reviewed written or print texts read them aloud in the review and their stumbling, confusion, and praise of the actual writing seemed helpful. Like they would read a sentence and say “I have no idea” or “Wow, that was really well written,” something like that. One downside to these reviews, however, is they tend to be very time intensive. The students who did a great job spent far longer on their podcast peer reviews than on a written peer review. While some of the students seemed to enjoy it and get more out of it, the extra time may be spent on additional print peer reviews or other things in the limited time of any writing class and semester.

In my Fall 2008 *Senior Seminar* survey, I asked how the podcast peer reviews contributed to their understanding and skills in 29 areas. Students rated the skills on a one to three scale with three denoting significant contributions, two moderate contributions, and one little to no contribution. Twenty-six areas received a two or higher average for the podcast peer critique. For their overall applied rhetorical skills, students rated the podcasts peer reviews as a 2.3 and ten other skills earned scores over this. Students rated the podcast peer critiques as contributing the most to their written communication and their technological skills. Other skills that received above a 2.3 include analysis, critique, tone, delivery, and invention.

Since peer reviews are rather private, I have only included one example, which I received explicit permission from the reviewer and the original author to use. I have included the assignment description for this example in the webtext.

[clips from podcasts]

Teacher Feedback

One of the most helpful podcasts for the students was not a student-produced podcast, but a private teacher-produced podcast—teacher feedback to student work. In several classes, I have provided feedback in podcast (or really just audio) form and students loved them. They enjoyed hearing my reaction to their work and valued this more than a written comment. In addition, they were much more likely to listen to all of my comments, especially since the grade was at the end. In fact, I had students suggest I put the grades first so they do not have to wait through the whole comment to find out the grade. Some students even reported that the feedback in podcast form made it easier for them to revise and improve their writing. For privacy reasons, I am not including any examples here, but these are likely pretty easy for you to envision.

Audio feedback for students is not a new concept. Teachers have been giving students audio feedback from the beginning of teaching. In fact, it was our first form of feedback. Technology, like tape recorders and Norton Connect, have enabled teachers to record the feedback and students to listen to it multiple times and at their convenience. For instance, Chris Anson discusses the use of tape recording student papers in 1997. Anson, on page 106, notes that when he’s recoding comments he feels a social dimension and narrative, more personal quality to comments. The recording also allowed him to loop back to earlier comments, explain greater details, refer to class, and show his own reading process. He discovered that students preferred the taped commentary and as a result evaluated his teaching more highly. Richard Beach and Tom Friedrich on 226 stated that oral feedback allows for a “descriptive, ‘reader-based’ feedback” where the readers can discuss how they are responding to the student text. Teachers can more easily express feelings, such as the feelings of being underwhelmed, overwhelmed, moved, puzzled, and they can also discuss what they expect or predict will happen in the student’s text. However, as Loel Kim points out, students can be discouraged by the sounds of disappointment, lack of encouraging tones, and even feelings that the teacher sounded mean. They also found the comments could be long, unclear, and disorientating.

[Musical transition]

And this concludes Episode 3 “Podcast Assignments—Response Assignments.” Thanks for listening. Do check out Episodes 4 and 5 to learn more about podcast assignments. In 4, I will discuss media and message assignments, and in 5 I will delve into two genre assignments. These all are, of course, part of the multimodal text “Podcasting in a Writing Class? Considering the Possibilities.”

This multimodal text was published in [Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy](#). Please check out the full webtext on *Kairos*. Full reference information, transcript, and links are available in the webtext and also in the lyrics field of the MP3. All student samples in this podcast are used with full permission. The music used in this podcast is “6” off *Ghosts I* by Nine Inch Nails, which is available under an [Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike Creative Commons License](#).

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Thanks for listening!

[Music fadeout]

Student Podcast Clips:

These clips are listed in order.

Peer Review Clips

Cho, Ian. (2008). Peer Review Capstone for Ashley Judge, for for ENGL 4320:005:FA08, posted 11/24/08 on iTunes University. Peer Review of Judge, Ashley. (2008). Rhetorina Episode One: Introduction, Rhetoric.

Reading Response Clips

- 1) Davis, Ashley. (2008). Nov 17 final response, for ENGL 4320:005:FA08, posted 11/17/08 on iTunes University.
- 2) Manfredi, Robert. (2008). Robert Manfredi Oct 29 Reading Response, for ENGL 4320:005:FA08, posted 10/29/08 on iTunes University.
- 3) Judge, Ashley. (2008). Heinrichs 23, for ENGL 4320:005:FA08, posted 11/18/08 on iTunes University.
- 4) Cho, Ian. (2008). Buck's State of Rhetoric, for ENGL 4320:005:FA08, posted 11/09/08 on iTunes University.

- 5) Johnson, Angela. (2008). Steinem Response ENGL 4320:005:FA08 11/11/08 on iTunes University.

Album Art

Album art designed by Jennifer L. Bowie. Images:

- ◆ Ruhsam, William. (2008). AKG Perception 220 Microphone. Posted 8/17/2008 on Flickr: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/bruhsam/3031270525/> with an Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 2.0 Generic Creative Commons License.
- ◆ Brassey, Anna a. (1878-83). Illustration from *A Voyage in the Sunbeam, our Home on the Ocean for Eleven Months*. Image is in the public domain. Artist may not be Brassey, but no other information was available. http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Anna_Brassey_438-victorian-woman-writing-jornal.gif

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