

Podcasting in a Writing Class? Considering the Possibilities

Episode 4: Podcast Assignments 2—Media and Message Assignments

By Jennifer L. Bowie

Transcript of the Podcast

<http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/16.2/praxis/bowie/episode4.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 4 “Podcast Assignments 2—Media and Message 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 website.

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. This article draws from my experience as an Assistant Professor at Georgia State University. Inside and outside the academy, I teach and research podcasting, digital media, writing, usability, and rhetoric.

In this episode, I present four possible podcast assignments that focus on media and message concerns: The Week in Review, Media & Message Comparison, Option from List of Various Media, and Regular Individual Podcast Series. I have included many clips from student work as examples. Without further ado, let us begin Episode 4 “Podcast Assignments 2—Media and Message Assignments.”

[Musical transition]

Week in Review

My favorite podcast assignment is the Week in Review podcast, as I have received some of the strongest student podcasts as a response to this assignment. Students in my

Senior Seminar and in my undergraduate *Electronic Writing and Publishing* classes have completed this project and I plan to incorporate it into future classes. Depending on size and length, I recommend having this be a smaller team collaboration. Two students worked well for me. Since my classes tend to have limited lecture time and are mostly discussion, a “lecture in a box” podcast of the actual class would be hard. So, instead, the students produced weekly review podcasts which they posted on iTunes University. Each team was responsible for covering one week of class. In these reviews, they provide a summary of the content of the class; a reflection on the material covered including the readings; key points for the week; thoughts on what they learned and what they plan to do with it; and additional resources relevant to the topic. In my *Senior Seminar* they designed the assignment as a class. They also chose to require both students to speak on the podcast, a relevant quote, and some connection from the material covered that week to something outside the class. They also set the time to be approximately 15 minutes, with a range of plus or minus two and a half minutes. Other than these requirements, I allowed students to design the podcast however they want—choose their own podsafe music, which is music with correct permission to be used in podcasts, album art, arrangement, and so on. If due to class length or number of students there are weeks not covered by students, the teacher could cover the remaining weeks. This would be a way to connect with the students and even could work to de-center the classroom, as some student-produced Week in Review podcasts may be much stronger or at least more interesting to the audience—the students—than what the teachers produce.

My main goal for this assignment is community building and collaborative knowledge development. Since the class is the audience for these, I encourage students to use the Week in Review podcasts to connect the material to their classmates. While the assignment focuses on providing information, students also use these as a way to entertain their peers—providing music they like, odd accents, jokes, nicknames, and more. I also like to encourage them to draw on the discussions of the week, and students will often quote each other’s readings responses, tweets, and comments made in class. The students become responsible for their peers’ understanding of what was covered that week and they find unique ways to make the knowledge more applicable and interesting. In addition, I encourage students to develop their understanding and applications of ethos, tone, style, summary, analysis, and critique through this project. In the associated webtext, I have provided a sample assignment description.

In my classes these Week in Review Podcasts are often considered “medium sized” projects. They take much more time than the reading responses and smaller projects, but do not take the effort that I would expect for a final project. In advanced classes, these projects are nice because the students need minimal additional training, beyond training on how to podcast, so I can start assigning them within a few weeks of the start of class.

Empirically, students find this podcast assignment to aid in their development of knowledge and skills. Overall, students thought the Week in Review contributed to their understanding and application of electronic writing and publishing, giving in a 4.3 of 5. Of the remaining 18 knowledge and skills, the average student scores were four or higher for 13 of them including audience, purpose, tone, context, critique and analysis. I will put a table with this information up on the webtext page for this episode so you can see how all 19 skills were rated.

I have included a few clips from some of the Week in Review podcasts my students have completed.

[clips from podcasts]

Media & Message Comparison

For this assignment, which is particularly good in writing classes where genre and media are studied, students compose a short paper and a short podcast about the same topic. It would be possible to include options of other media—a blog post, a webpage, whatever else that would fit. In my *Senior Seminar*, they did two arguments, one in podcast form the other a short print paper form. I also required a reflection, which they could either do on paper or as a podcast (or whatever media they did the other two parts in, depending on the class), where students compare how the two texts are different—including what they did differently and how they considered things like audience, purpose, context, tone and ethos. With this assignment, my students considered differences in genre, media, and rhetorical techniques for the various media, audiences, genre, and so on. Interestingly, many students thought their written argument was stronger, mostly because they have been writing arguments for at least all of their college education; however, in almost every case the podcast assignment received higher grades and more effectively responded to the assignment (the assignment is included on the accompanying webtext, so feel free to check that out). While this shocked many of them, it also led them to think about what made arguments work and how a written

argument for a teacher may not be as persuasive as a podcast with music and accents for an audience of peers.

My purpose with this assignment is to prompt the students into thinking about how to “write” or argue in different media. For my rhetoric students this assignment draws heavily on the ancient rhetorical tradition, allowing them to fully apply the canon and oral argument techniques. By also doing a written argument, I hope students will consider how these rhetorical techniques change with paper arguments, and possibly how rhetoric changed as argument became print. In classes where I have opened this up to other media, I challenge them to analyze how their selected media impacts and even can make the message. With this assignment, I foster media analysis and critical and reflective analysis. I have found the assignment draws heavily on students’ invention, style, and audience analysis skills.

This assignment could be a medium- to large-sized project. I tend to make it a medium sized project and require it around the mid-semester point, after students have covered many of the necessary rhetorical concepts and are ready to try them out. As a medium-sized project, I require 2-4 single spaced pages for the print argument, and approximately 5 minutes for the podcast. For the reflection, I ask for 1-2 pages, single spaced, or 2-4 minutes in podcast form. I have put the assignment description for the podcast and paper Media Analysis Project on the webtext, but feel free to open this up to any media.

I have found this assignment to be highly successful. In my 2008 study of podcasts in a writing classroom, students found that the Media Analysis Project contributed to 25 of the 29 skills. The students gave this assignment a 2.8 of 3 for overall applied rhetorical skills and rated 10 other skills above a 2.5 including written communication skills, arrangement, ethos, logos, critical thinking, analysis, and style, and I’ll put this up on the webtext so you can see all the scores.

Options from a List of Various Media

In classes where I teach several media and genres, I may allow students to select their media for a project from a list. In my undergraduate *Electronic Writing and Publishing* class, they can choose from one of many different types of media writing we covered for focused projects—including blogs, online help, e-journals, and podcasts—and either do a detailed analysis of the media and/or work within the media. In other classes, such as my *Senior Seminar* and my graduate *Electronic Writing and Publishing* class they can

choose to do their final projects in podcast form. The result is often a creative use of the media. One of my *Senior Seminar* students, Ashley Judge, a professional ballerina, did the [Rhetorina](#) podcast series for her capstone project with several episodes focusing on various rhetorical concepts such as ethos, logos, and pathos. Another student, Brett Jones, created a 32 minute podcast argument for progymnastmoda in the US educational system, called *A Progymnasmodcast*. Another student did a podcast analyzing the rhetoric in the last two stasys of execution for convicted Georgian Troy Davis, including interviews with one of the authorities on the case and with an Amnesty International abolition coordinator involved with the case. Graduate student midsemester and final “papers” have included a look at blogging in education, a discussion of gaming and literature, a study of the past and future relationship of electronic and print publishing, a podcast book review, a discussion of the fear of changing textual dynamics in hypertext, and an analysis of the design of Saint Maarten websites. I have found that these projects are often interesting and use the media in ways that support and further their arguments and work. I have included a few clips from my graduate classes to further illustrate the range of work.

This project idea is very flexible and can fit myriad instructor pedagogies, purposes, and goals. My goals vary depending on the class. In my undergraduate *Electronic Writing and Publishing* class, I make this a medium-sized project, with the main goals technological literacy and media writing skills. In my graduate classes and *Senior Seminar*, I allow the students to select media that fit their ideas for their project, thus focusing on genre, media selection, purpose, and audience. However, the range of possibilities for this project idea is vast, and I invite other teachers to adopt this assignment in ways that best fits their own pedagogies, purposes, and goals. I have included two different projects on the webtext where students were given a choice of media. One of these was the capstone project for my *Senior Seminar*—a very large and weighty project. The other is a smaller project in my *Electronic Writing and Publishing* class. For this project, students were given a limited choice of three media: podcast, blog, or wiki.

These projects have proven to be successful in my classes. In my Fall 2010 *Senior Seminar* class, students were given the option to select their own media for the Capstone Projects. For those who selected podcasts, they rated this project as contributing at least a 4 of 5 to their knowledge and skills in 15 areas. Student also gave ten of these areas a 4.5 or above, including their overall electronic writing and

publishing skills. Other skills areas the students rated high include oral communication, critique and analysis, tone, logos, and purpose.

For those who did not select podcasts, they did not rate their projects as contributing as strongly to as many skills. In my survey I did not inquire about each media type, only podcasts and non-podcasts. Students rated the non-podcast capstones as contributing at least a 4 of 5 to their knowledge and skills in 13 areas. This is two less areas than students rated the podcasts as contributing to. There were only two areas where students rated the non-podcast capstones as contributing a 4.5 or above—overall electronic writing and publishing skills and critique & analysis. This compares rather poorly to the ten areas student found podcasts contributed to. Thus, it seems these students own ratings suggest that podcasts can lead to a richer learning experience than other media, and supporting my own arguments here and in the companion article “Rhetorical Roots and Media Future: How Podcasting Fits into the Computers and Writing Classroom.” It is beyond the scope of this article to examine this in more detail here, but I suggest this investigation as future work in our field.

Here are some clips of what students have done.

[clips from podcasts]

Regular Individual Podcast Series

In classes with a strong focus on podcasts, a regular student-produced podcast series may work well. This topic could be related to class, such as a regular reading review, a discussion of their writing process throughout the semester, or a podcast on the class topic. The topic could also be student selected on an interest, career path, community service of some type (say a podcast for a local charity), or something else. Regardless, a focus on what makes a podcast series and how to develop consistency, audience interest, and topics could be the academic focus of the project. I’ve not had a chance to try this assignment, but hope to try it out in a future class.

So, do consider these four media and message projects: The Week in Review, Media & Message Comparison, Options from a List of Various Media, and Regular Individual Podcast Series.

This concludes Episode 4 “Podcast Assignments 2—Media and Message Assignments.” Thanks for listening. Do check out Episodes 3 and 5 to learn about more podcast

assignments. In 3, I provide guidelines for teaching podcasts and present three response podcast assignments. In 5, I 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 were 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](#).

This text is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0 United States License](#). Rights to the student samples are reserved by their authors. Please give me, Jennifer L. Bowie, and *Kairos* credit, don’t make money off of this, and share any derivative works.

Thanks for listening!

[Music fadeout]

Student Podcast Clips:

These clips are listed in order based on the topic and start time for the clips.

25:09 Week in Review Clips

- 1) Manfredi, Robert. (2008). “WIR: Robert Manfredi,” for ENGL 4320:005:FA08 , posted 9/16/2008 on iTunes University.
- 2) Cho, Ian, & Domit. Brian. (2008). “WIR: I Cho B Domit,” for ENGL 4320:005:FA08, posted 10/07/08 on iTunes University.
- 3) Woodard, Arch, & Jones, Brett. (2008). “Week In Review Pirate Cast,” for ENGL 4320:005:FA08, posted 10/15/08 on iTunes University.
- 4) Judge, Ashley. (2008). “WIR: Judge,” for ENGL 4320:005:FA08, posted 11/19/08 on iTunes University.

39:54 Clips from Graduate Students

- 1) Gonzales, Kallen. (2009). "Here Comes Everybody - 8121 MMMP," for English 8121 Fall 2009.
- 2) Sirkin, Austin. (2009). "Podcast1," for English 8121 Fall 2009.
- 3) LeMaster, Liane. (2008). "StoryFlex_1," for English 8123 Spring 2008.
- 4) Williams, Keith C. (2009). "Podcasting Podcast," for English 8121 Fall 2009.
- 5) Donald, Matt. (2010). "No Such Things as Ghosts (In the Machine): Relieving the Fear of Changing Textual Dynamics in Hypermedia," for English 8121 Fall 2009.

Link in the Transcript:

- ◆ *Rhetorina*, a rhetoric student podcast:
<http://deimos3.apple.com/WebObjects/Core.woa/Browse/gsu.edu.2124884021.02124884032.2173554180?i=1925357101> (One sample Rhetorina podcast)

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.
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