

Podcasting in a Writing Class? Considering the Possibilities

Episode 5: Podcast Assignments 3—Genre Assignments

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Transcript of the Podcast

<http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/16.2/praxis/bowie/episode5.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 5 “Podcast Assignments 3—Genre 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.

Genre is an interesting topic in the study of digital media, especially as many media, old and new, remediate other media. In this episode, I will first present some genres that have successfully been carried over from other media to podcast form. I then present two genre podcast assignments. Without further ado, let us begin Episode 5 “Podcast Assignments 3—Genre Assignments.”

[Musical transition]

Genres Transferred to Podcasts:

Outside the classroom, podcasts have been successful in several genres, many of which can be easily brought into the writing classroom.

Education and Information

[Grammar Girl](#)'s Grammar podcast is a great example of this. Mignon Fogarty, Grammar Girl, has been quite successful with her podcasts, starting the whole [Quick and Dirty Tips podcast network](#). Her grammar podcast has ranked as high as #2 on iTunes. Due to her success, she has now written two Grammar Girl books. [Get-It-Done Guy](#), another podcaster in her network, also has a successful print book as a result of the success of his podcast on the network.

Written Word

Written word podcasts, like fiction books and short stories, have also proven popular. [Scott Sigler](#), a science fiction and horror author, was the first to podcast a book and used the audience and hype to get publishing contracts with print publishers. He is now a *New York Times* bestselling author and continues to publish in both print and podcast form. Another example is [Escape Pod](#), a science fiction short story weekly podcast magazine, which now has one of the largest science fiction magazine audiences. While science fiction may not fit many of our writing classes per se, this does show that writing can be successfully podcast and this may be useful especially for texts like the fables and **narratives** in the traditional progymnasmata.

Instructions, How-Tos, and Tutorials

Podcasts that teach the audience how to do something while listening or viewing the podcast continue to be popular. Often these work better as video podcasts, so people can learn by watching, but audio can work in some situations, such as learning a foreign language. One podcast I often recommend to my students is a podcast on how to podcast. This podcast is called "[Making of a Podcast](#)" and is episode 70 in the *Virgin Worlds Podcast*, a podcast series normally about gaming. I have linked to this in the transcript and webtext. As long as the material can be understood orally or both visually and orally for video podcasts, podcasts can make good tutorials, how-tos, and instructions.

Interviews

Walch and Lafferty, on page 63, state that "the interview cast can be one of the most interesting podcasts out there." The five interview cast examples Walch and Lafferty discuss include interviews with podcasters, famous people, the audience, and everyday people. Seal Press was doing a [series of interview podcasts with their authors](#), creating interest in the books, while often taking the books further.

Issues:

There are many popular podcasts on various issues and topics, like politics, sports, news, religion, and GLBT. While each of these could be its own genre, and authors like Walch and Lafferty list these **as** separate genres, they are similar enough in practice and they would relate to our writing classes. These podcasts often combine opinion with facts and argument, much like many of the arguments we have our students write. *Slate Magazine* has several associated podcasts, including ones that cover [politics](#), [sports](#), and [culture](#).

Speeches and Oral Presentations

Arguably, most audio podcasts are oral presentations and some podcasts are actually of speeches. There are podcasts of many speeches and presentations that were recorded and later turned into podcast **form**. These include the [TEDtalks](#), [President Kennedy speeches](#), and [African American Oratory](#). While not developed only for podcast form, these podcast speeches can be useful in the classroom as examples. Many of the previously mentioned issue podcasts are original speeches and oral presentations of material.

Tech

Since podcasters obviously have some technological literacy, and podcast listeners, especially in the early days, had some technological literacy, many successful podcasts have been done on technology. In fact, Walch and Lafferty state on page 90 that tech podcasts are one of the most popular genres. These include technology specific tutorials, help, and news. Social media is one area that has received a lot of podcast attention recently. These podcasts may be helpful sources for classes that cover social media, as they can provide timely information from experts in an area that is quickly evolving. I'll link to a few social media podcasts I listen to on the resources page with **recommended** podcasts.

These genres are both a good starting place for exploration of externally-produced podcasts and possibilities for student-produced podcasts. Now, let's discuss two possible student produced podcast genre assignments.

New Approaches to Old Genres

Students often rethink the classic rhetorical canon and writing concerns when podcasting, so why not have them rethink those "old" genres? What would a podcast research paper look like (or sound like)? How would a podcast user manual work? Podcast instructions? How effective would podcast progress reports be? Podcast memos? Podcast executive summaries? By allowing or requiring students to turn these

genres into podcasts, students will not only have to understand the genre, but a new media and how the two can and should work together.

This is another assignment I have not yet had a chance to explore much, although some of my graduate students have taken on the challenge with their projects. As mentioned in Episode 4, one graduate student has done a podcast book review, which was interesting. Many of my graduate students have begun playing with what a seminar paper would “look” or sound like in podcast form and several have attempted this new approach to a well established print-based genre. We have had many class discussions about what differences may be necessary or desired. For instance, how does one cite work in a podcast? Saying parenthetical references is awkward and listening to them is not fun. So, we have discussed how to present this information in mouth- and ear-friendly ways, drawing heavily from my own work podcasting and also their experiences. I share the techniques I developed in my podcasts, which tend to work well. For example, I advise simply writing and speaking everything out in clear sentence form. Saying “According to Smith on page 60 “podcasts rock” is more effective in audio form than “Podcasts rock (Smith 60).”

Podcasters have already done some of this work for the students. Podcasters have already taken several print, TV, and radio genres and developed them to the podcast medium. Podcasters have taken **sports** shows from TV and radio, advice columns from newspapers, instructions from print, opinion pieces from print newspapers, even definitions of words from print dictionaries. Any of these could be good examples to study for this assignment. In addition, students could study other media transitions, especially print to radio and TV to see how things evolved. Early movies, with their book opening beginnings, can be compared to modern movies that do not need to situate the story in a book. The early web newspapers and the evolution of web newspapers over time could also provide some insight, despite the fact **that** both are more typographic-based media. Students could also analyze different techniques the AP style manual suggests for print and broadcast journalism. These techniques include everything from different structures of information to different ways to write out numbers if writing a print story or broadcast story.

Rethinking established genres can certainly lead to interesting discussions, issues, and rhetorical choices, and possibly deepen one’s understanding of the established genre and the new media they are trying for the genre.

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Exploring the Podcast as a Genre

Another assignment that may be fitting for advanced undergraduates and graduates is a project where they analyze podcasts as a genre. Much like Carolyn R. Miller and Dawn Shepherd's text analyzing the genre of a weblog, students could investigate the kairos, audience, podcasters' motivations, features and elements, and the rhetorical work of podcasts. This could be done in general **or with** podcasts as a whole. Or students could examine particular types of podcasts, such as written word podcasts or couplecasts, and explore whether podcasts have subgenres or even several genres. Ken Hyland, in studying EFL/ESL students, argues on page 66 that "teachers have to familiarize students with the rhetorical structures which are an important part of the meanings of texts." He suggests a detailed genre analysis can be helpful, especially something he calls a "categories analysis" that **illuminates** the structure. While Hyland does the analysis of the argumentative essay in his article, it seems to better fit many of our constructivist and student-centered pedagogies to have the students analyze the genre or genres of podcasts. In addition, such work could respond to David Russell's article "Rethinking Genre in School and Society" and help students analyze how podcasts work within and among diverse communities and prompt students to uncover the depth and breadth of a genre from structure to social practices, related activity systems, identity of the agents, construction of the activity, tools used, production, audiences, and the content. This too would respond to Stephen Witte's theory on writing, in which he focuses on the textual, cognitive, and social, and possibly **lead** students to a better understanding of text, writing in various forms, and genre.

This is not a project I have tried in my own classes, but one I plan to work into future classes. This project could relate closely to the new genres project I just discussed. Students could first investigate podcasts as a possible genre and then develop a new approach, in podcast form, to an established non-podcast genre.

While I have not taught either of these genre-specific assignments, I have found that incorporating podcasts can help students towards a greater understanding of genre. In my Fall 2010 class, students rated podcasting as a 4.2 of 5 as contributing to their **understanding** and application of genre. Of the various podcast components, the work where students created podcasts tended to get higher scores towards understanding of genre than those where they listened to podcasts. Students did however find the lectures, discussions, and guest speaker helpful, giving this category a 4.1 of 5. The highest project was the Capstone Project, which received a 4.3 of 5. This is not

surprising, as students had to have a firm grasp on the genre of their project to be successful and they also spent more time on this project than any other class project. Students also found the Week in Review contributed to their understanding, giving it the second highest project score, a 4 of 5. Since they were developing their own genre for this project, it is logical that it would contribute to their understanding of genre.

Interestingly, it appears that the Capstone and Week in Review projects also contributed to other key writing and rhetoric skills. Students rated these two projects as contributing an average of a 4.5 of 5 to their understanding and application of audience, purpose, context, ethos, pathos, logos, and tone. This suggests that projects that lead to improvements in the understanding of genre may also lead to improvements in the understanding of these seven skills. **Since** these writing and rhetorical techniques are often a key part of genre study, the possibility is both interesting and logical. However, my findings are in no way conclusive. Further study is needed to explore this potential relationship more fully.

These assignments are just the beginning of assignments we can develop to incorporate student-produced podcasts into our writing classrooms. There is no reason that students could not podcast anything they can write and we will likely develop additional assignments and genre for this media.

[Musical transition]

And this concludes Episode 5 “Podcast Assignments 3—Genre Assignments.” Thanks for listening. Do check out Episodes 3 and 4 to learn about more podcast assignments. In 3, I present guideline for incorporating podcasts and introduce three response assignments. In 4, I discuss media and message 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. 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!

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Links in the Transcript:

- φ *Grammar Girl* podcast: <http://grammar.quickanddirtytips.com/>
- φ *Get-It-Done Guy* podcast : <http://getitdone.quickanddirtytips.com/>
- φ *Escape Pod* podcast: <http://escapepod.org/>
- φ “Making of a Podcast,” episode 70 in the *VirginWorlds Podcast*:
<http://www.virginworlds.com/podcast.php?show=1&ep=70>
- φ Quick and Dirty Tips podcast network: [Quick and Dirty Tips podcast network](#)
- φ *Say it Plain: Great African American Oratory* podcast:
http://soundlearning.publicradio.org/subjects/history_civics/say_it_plain/
- φ Scott Sigler: <http://www.scottsigler.com/>
- φ Seal Press author interview podcasts:
<http://www.sealpress.com/podcasts.php>
- φ Scott Sigler: <http://www.scottsigler.com/>
- φ *Slate* Podcasts:
 - Political Gabfest* podcast: <http://www.slate.com/gabfest>
 - Culture Gabfest* podcast: <http://www.slate.com/id/2187916/landing/1>
 - Hang Up and Listen (sports)* podcast:
<http://media.slate.com/media/slate/Podcasts/Sports/HUAL1.xml>
- φ *The Speeches of President John F. Kennedy* podcast:
<http://jfkspeeches.podomatic.com/>
- φ TEDtalks: <http://www.ted.com/talks>

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- φ 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

References

Walch, Rob, & Lafferty, Mur. (2006). *Tricks of the Podcasting Masters*. Toronto: Que.