Podcasting in a Writing Class? Considering the Possibilities

Episode 1: Introduction and Background

By Jennifer L. Bowie
Transcript of the Podcast
http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/16.2/praxis/bowie/episode1.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 1 "Introduction and Background." 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 will first present this series, then introduce podcasting, discuss how it fits in a writing classroom, present the advantages, describe studies I draw on throughout the text, and consider digital divide issues. Without further ado, let us begin Episode 1 "Introduction and Background."

[Musical transition]

 "Podcasting in a Writing Class? Considering the Possibilities" is a multimodal text, with two main components: a hypertextual webtext and this six episode podcast series. I encourage you to listen to the podcasts and explore the webtext to experience the full article. This multimodal text is a companion to another multimodal text "Rhetorical Roots and Media Future: How Podcasting Fits into the Computers and Writing Classroom." In "Rhetorical Roots" I address how podcasting may be used in classrooms

to help students rethink the "old" writing concepts we have been teaching, such as audience, tone, purpose, and context—along with the five canons—in new ways and consider how students may bring the lessons they learned from podcasting back to their print text writing. In this article, I focus on the practice of podcasts in our writing classes. I introduce the concept of podcasts and present a short definition of them and list some advantages to podcasts in Episode 1, this episode. I also touch on digital divide and literacy issues. In Episode 2, I present the three types of podcasts to consider incorporating into your writing classroom: teacher-produced podcasts, student-produced podcasts, and externally-produced podcasts. In Episode 3, I begin presenting possible podcast assignments. I provide some basic information on integrating these assignments and having students produce podcasts, and then present three response podcast assignments. In Episode 4, I focus on four media and message assignments. I finish the possible assignments in Episode 5, where I cover two genre-based assignments. I complete the article in Episode 6, with a tip, information on resources, and a conclusion. In Episodes 2-5, I have also included clips from student work, as examples of what students have done with podcasting.

Many podcasters provide ethos in the beginning part of the podcast by telling the listeners who they are. Following this trend, here is my background. I am Dr. Jennifer L. Bowie, a Senior Usability Research Analyst for The Home Depot website. Previously, I was an Assistant Professor at Georgia State University. Inside and outside the academy, I teach and research podcasting, digital media, writing, usability, and rhetoric. I have taught eight classes with podcast components from having podcast "readings" to a podcasting-intensive *Senior Seminar* class. I am also a podcaster, with my own web and digital media design podcast called Screen Space, a "podposter" for the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing conference in 2009, and a forthcoming triathlon, duathlon, and running couplecast with my husband. I have also presented at various conferences on podcasting and have conducted research on podcasting including classroom research, usability research, and interview research with successful podcasters. This podcast article is based on my experience as a podcaster and as a teacher and researcher of podcasting.

Now that I have introduced the article and myself, let's talk podcasting!

[Musical transition]

"Podcasting is so much more than a technology. It truly is an art form…" Rob Walch and Mur Lafferty

First, I will define what a podcast is, for those of my listeners who may not be familiar. Podcasts are episodic digital media files distributed over the internet, usually through RSS feeds and collected by subscribers through RSS feed readers and podcatcher software, such as iTunes. Podcasts are designed to be subscribed to, so the subscribers will receive the latest podcast episode when it is published, or when their software is next scheduled to check. While podcasts can be a range of files, the most common are audio and video, and it is these two types I focus on in this article.

Podcasting started out as a grassroots collaboration and many of the earliest podcasters were passionate and noncommercial, podcasting for the love of the technology and their topics. Six years later, companies of all sizes, including Fortune 500 companies and many charities, have podcasts. As podcasts become increasingly popular among the grassroots and businesses, those of us in computers and writing may be considering incorporating podcasts into our classes. Since podcasts are a greater departure from typographic-based texts, just as are webpages and blogs we may already include in our classes, integration may be more problematic. Podcasts tend to be visual and/or auditory texts with typographic-based texts as support, such as a transcript or captions. The emphasis changes, but the writing and argument skills still hold true.

[Musical transition]

The Studies

Throughout this series, I will provide some empirical support for the podcast assignments. I draw on findings from two different studies. I conducted survey studies in my Fall 2010 and in my Fall 2008 *Senior Seminar* classes. In both cases, I am providing data from a survey given at the end of class. While the two surveys differ somewhat, in each I asked how various assignments and class components contributed to the student's understanding and applications of various skills and knowledge related to writing. In the 2008 study, I asked about skills and knowledge in 29 areas and in Fall 2010 I asked about 19 areas. In both classes, the students were senior rhetoric and composition students at Georgia State University and were going to graduate that semester or the next. In my Fall 2010 class, 10 of 14 students took the survey. In my

2008 class, 9 of 10 students took the survey. For both studies, I received IRB approval, and I collected digital version of the surveys. I have included various tables of results on the relevant episode related webtext pages. Both studies are larger than just the surveys and I am only pulling a small amount of data from the surveys. I later plan to more fully analyze and present these studies. I offer the limited survey information as empirical support for my arguments in this podcast series.

[Musical transition]

Advantages

There are several advantages to integrating podcasts into a writing classroom, listed in no particular order:

- **One: Higher Student Achievements:** Researchers Belinda Tynan and Stephen Colbran and also Dani McKinney, Jennifer Dyck, and Elise Luber found that podcasts can lead to higher student achievements.
- **Two: Student Support and Enthusiasm:** Students tend to like using podcasts as part of their learning, as found in five different studies: by Tynan and Colbran; by McKinney, Dyck, and Luber; by Michael Huntsberger and Alan Stavitsky; and by Evans.
- **Three: Time- and Location-Shifted:** The anytime, anywhere option with podcasts is a strong advantage. This advantage is supported by findings from two studies, one by Evan and one by Huntsberger and Stavitsky. I've also had students rave about the advantages of listening anytime and anywhere.
- **Four: Improved Electronic Writing and Publishing Skills**: In the Fall 2010 survey, I asked students how podcasting contributed to their understanding and application of several skills and knowledge related to class. Students either agreed or strongly agreed that podcasts contributed to their understanding and application of 15 skills, including audience, purpose, context, ethos, pathos, and logos. I will provide a list with these findings in the webtext, so please check it out to see the full list.
- **Five: Costs:** Podcasts are usually free and [Audacity](#), one of the better podcasting programs, is also free. If students have their own microphone, whether it be a USB microphone, an iPod/iPhone or MP3 players that can record,

or a $1000 dollar recording setup with microphone and sound board, then there do not need to be any additional costs. I'll discuss cost further shortly.

- **Six: Learning through Listening:** According to Cebeci and Tekdal learning through listening is more attractive and "less tedious" than reading and it is a primary learning method for people from the beginning. They suggest it may motivate those who do not like reading and is a richer medium for understanding. As Manning states on page 2 "what one hears through the speaker's intonation, dictation, and reflection conveys a richer understanding not only of the content, but of the speaker. Listeners connect to that voice and may feel less isolated."

- **Seven: Good Knowledge Distribution Model:** Podcasts are a good way to distribute information with subscriptions. With a subscription, the texts are automatically delivered directly to the students so there is less information retrieval and searching time. Also, the files are easy to share. The copyright issues often associated with fair educational use are less of an issue too, as often these files are distributed free online for anyone interested.

- **Eight: Not "Lost in Time":** Podcasts also provide a more permanent record then just speaking and allow people to rewind and replay the text.

[Musical transition]

Digital Divide and Technological Literacy

When considering any technology in the classroom it is important to also consider the digital divide and technological literacy issues. As our students may be on either side of the divide, we cannot and should not just add technology into the classroom without some considerations. Access to technology and technical literacy are two key components of the digital divide. While most college students have some access to technology, whether their own laptop or a campus computer lab, the amount and ease of access are serious concerns. If students do not have convenient access to technology, such as at home or even suitable campus lab hours, accessing podcasts, let alone creating them, can be problematic. Also, if students do not have an MP3 player or a phone that plays MP3s, some advantages of podcasts—such as the time- and location-shifted benefits—are lost. Even when students have MP3 players, some students do not have the technological literacy to know how to download the podcasts on to their phone or MP3 player a single time, let alone set up a subscription. I have found students will

tend to listen on their computer or read transcripts rather than learning how to download the files on a portable device. Thus, even access is not always enough and additional information on how to access and download the podcasts may be necessary.

In addition, those on the less digital side of the digital divide likely have less technological literacy than their peers. Podcasts require a certain level of technological literacy to access and more to produce. However, integrating podcasts can in some ways advantage those on the less tech side of the divide. With podcasting, students may develop their technological literacy skills, which is especially helpful for those with lower literacy levels. Since the majority of my students do not have any experience producing podcasts, they start from a similar place. Granted, those with higher technological literacy in other areas may have some advantages, but, I've had several students struggle with other technological components of my class, then shine with podcasting. In fact, I've had those on the low tech side of the divide even helping their peers on the other side of the divide.

Some divide issues can be mitigated in similar ways to how we have mitigated other divide issues since we began incorporating technology into our classrooms. Providing students with in-class workshop time with the technology can help a great deal. Providing the students with information on the other resources they have available— labs, training, and equipment—can also help. I always offer to loan out my USB headsets, which are good for recording and editing podcasts, to students who do not have a microphone and cannot utilize the lab equipment. I've also gotten a special technology grant from a group on campus in charge of the iTunes University initiative, and was able to provide my students with an iPod for the semester. There may be initiatives like this on other campuses. Also, for students who simply do not have access to computers outside the classroom, one workaround for listening to podcasts is to burn the podcast onto a CD or DVD. According to the Consumer Electronics Association, 90% of households in the US have CD players and 84% have DVD players. The teacher could burn the CDs or DVDs or the students could do this during their workshop time.

On a related note, cost is another concern with the integration of podcasts into our classrooms. Money for technology is often a digital divide issue and those on the less tech side often do not have the money to buy the technology. Luckily podcasting is a fairly low cost addition to a class. Software is often a huge expense, but there is good free software. I use [Audacity](#) and recommend my PC students use it too. It is free, has a shallow learning curve for the basics, and is used by many podcasters. Rob Walch and

Mur Lafferty also recommend it, stating on page 265 "Audacity is the best and cheapest option." If the students owns or has access to a Mac, GarageBand is another free option that comes with Macs and is a decent program. As long as students have a computer or access to a computer, the only other piece of equipment they may need is a microphone, and I recommend USB microphones, which run about $25 and up. Many students already have microphones, some build into their laptops and other have bought them for gaming or chatting by voice. My school also loans out equipment, which some students took advantage of for their microphones. Between school borrowing, previous ownership, my microphone loans, and school labs, I've not had a student need to buy a microphone yet.

So, while we should consider digital divide and technological literacy issues, we should not let these issues stop us from incorporating podcasts into our classrooms. There are plenty of ways to alleviate many of the issues with thoughtful planning, information on resources, and possibly loaning out equipment. Of course, incorporating podcasting will enable students to develop a new technological literary area, and thus may be helpful for students regardless of their literacy levels or location on either side of the divide.

[Musical transition]

Thanks for listening to Episode 1 "Introduction and Background" in the multimodal text "Podcasting in a Writing Class? Considering the Possibilities." Tune in to Episode 2 "Podcast Types to Consider" where I discuss the three types of podcasts that can be incorporated into writing classrooms.

I do hope you check out the companion piece, also published in *Kairos*, where I discuss how podcasting can enable us and our students to rethink "old" writing concepts, such as the rhetorical canon and other writing skills, in new ways. The companion piece, "Rhetorical Roots and Media Future: How Podcasting Fits into the Computers and Writing Classroom," is available at: http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/16.2/topoi/bowie.

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](#).

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Thanks for listening!

[Music fadeout]

Links in the Transcript:

♦ *Screen Space*, my blog and podcast about users, texts, and technology: http://www.screenspace.org/
♦ My ATTW 2009 PodPoster: "Shifting Time, Location, and Texts: An Assessment of Podcasting in Our Classrooms." http://www.screenspace.org/Podposter.html
♦ *Audacity*: free sound editing software: http://audacity.sourceforge.net/

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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