

Transcript of BC Studies Podcast Episode Episode Four: “How do you make a Scholarly Podcast?”

[Introductory music: “Mist” by Devon Throness]

Isabelle Ava-Pointon:

Hello and welcome to the fourth and final episode of the BC Studies Podcast “An Introduction to Scholarly Podcasting.” My name is Isabelle Ava-Pointon; I’m the Podcast Coordinator at *BC Studies*, and I’m also your host today. I’m speaking to you from the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations.

In today’s final episode, we’ll be exploring the question: “How Do You Make a Scholarly Podcasts?” and we’ll go through a step-by-step guide to making your own podcast. Along the way we’ll get some helpful advice from some of the scholars we heard from in our previous episodes.

For the sake of simplicity, I’ve broken the podcast creation process into five easy steps: planning, writing, recording, editing, and publishing.

So let’s start at the beginning. Once you’ve decided that you want to create a scholarly podcast, the first question you should ask yourself, is “why?” What does this medium afford that you can’t do in a written work? Michael Faris believes that this is one of the most crucial questions you can ask yourself before starting this project.

Michael Faris:

I think my first question, to almost anybody, is always a question of “why?” Even if you’re just starting a research study – “why are you using that method?” or “why those participants?” And I think the first question I’d encourage somebody who’s thinking about starting a scholarly podcast is “why?” Why is this medium better or more suitable for your topic or for what you want to argue than a book or than a journal article or than a documentary or than data-dumping your data set on a website? There are all sorts of ways to communicate, and I think starting with the question of why, and what a podcast affords you and who it might reach is probably the most important thing.

Isabelle Ava-Pointon:

Once you understand why you want to make a podcast, the next question is to decide what your podcast will be about. Here’s Charles Woods’ advice for choosing a topic.

Charles Woods:

Fill a gap. That’s the best way to contribute meaningfully to the discipline, to the field. When I started developing *The Big Rhetorical Podcast* three years ago, other rhetoric and writing studies podcasts, like *Rhetorcity* and *Pedagogue*, were emerging, and I didn’t want to mimic the work of those brilliant scholar-podcasters. So I found my niche, which was talking to

graduate students and early career scholars about their work. And also promoting new books and conferences and other events in the field. So make sure to fill a gap.

Isabelle Ava-Pointon:

Once you've found your place in the scholarship and you've decided on a topic, the next step is to decide on the format. Interview podcasts are perhaps the most common form, especially in scholarly podcasting. Usually, you have one or two hosts, and every week, or however often they post, they have an interview with a different expert in a field. Another option is to just have a conversational podcast between two hosts, or to have only one host who talks the whole time. No matter what you decide, remember that podcasts themselves are conversational, so even if you monologue, your listeners are going to expect to be able to interact with you on different platforms.

The format you choose also affects the tone of your podcast, which is always something to keep in mind. This can be based on your topic – if it's a serious topic, perhaps a serious tone is more appropriate, but remember that podcasts in general tend to be more informal.

This brings us to the second step, which I call "Writing." Now, this name is a little bit misleading, because you don't necessarily have to write out an entire script for your podcast episode, but you can if you want to. If this episode includes an interview, you probably can't script out what you and the interviewee are going to say – and you wouldn't want to. But, you can choose to have a more or less structured interview by pre-setting questions or just seeing where the conversation takes you. If it's more of a conversational podcast between multiple hosts, you can choose what topics to discuss in this episode, or again, you can just see where the discussion takes you. However, if it is more of a monologue-based podcast, it does make sense to plan out what you're going to say to a certain degree of detail.

Once you've decided on a script, or not, for your episode, you should also start thinking about segmentation. By this I mean that every episode should have certain distinct segments that come up again and again throughout the series. Usually, these segments would include the introduction, where you play the intro music and tell listeners the name of the podcast they're listening to [laughs], then you might have a brief introduction to the person you're interviewing, if that's what you're doing, then you'll have the interview, and then at the end you might have a debrief before your concluding music and acknowledgements. Now this is just one general example, of course you can do what you want with it, but this gives a certain consistency between episodes in a series, and helps the listener know what's going on in any given episode.

Once you have a general idea of what you're going to say, the next step is actually recording it. This is often a bit daunting for folks who haven't used recording technologies before, but it's really not that scary. In fact, Jentery Sayers recommends that new podcasters not get too caught up in the technical side of recording.

Jentery Sayers:

I think the most important one, and this is one I also use in my courses, is to go low-tech. It's to just record and then experiment with editing, and not get caught up in "which microphone should I use" or "do I have a studio?" or what have you. Like, that stuff can come later, if ever. And I'm not saying it doesn't matter, that production doesn't matter, but it can be an incredible barrier.

Isabelle Ava-Pointon:

With this advice in mind, I'm going to explain the simplest approach to recording. You can check our show notes for more information and links to articles about specific equipment, but we're just going to explain it as low-tech as possible.

The most important part of recording is your recording environment. Ideally you want to be in somewhere that's quiet, and a space that's relatively small. If the space is too big, you start to get echoing and a tinny sound quality. Another tip is to have the surfaces of your space as soft as possible. In fact, some professional podcasters actually record in blanket forts.

Depending on the format of your podcast, you might be recording in places that you can't really control. Some podcasts are taken on the go, interviewing people in different places, moving around. For that you will need a portable recording device. The simplest is of course on your phone – most smartphones nowadays do have basic recording technology, and while it's not the fanciest, it's certainly very serviceable. There are of course more expensive mobile recording devices and microphones that you can look into, but if you're just starting out, it's good to go with the simplest option.

The most common form of recording, especially now that we're all stuck at home in the COVID-19 pandemic, is the recording of oneself. Again, for that you can just use a phone, or the recording options on your laptop. You can invest in a microphone, and microphones come in a huge range of prices and options.

Finally, probably the most common form of recording nowadays is virtually, over Zoom or another video conferencing platform. Thankfully, Zoom itself has its own recording system, Just remember before the call, in your Zoom account, you should check the recording option "record each participant separately." This makes it a lot easier to edit, because each participant will have their own separate audio.

In the end, the best way to get comfortable with recording is to just jump in. Start off recording yourself saying anything you want, test your audio settings. It's always good to play around with the settings before doing any serious recording.

Once you have your recordings, it's time to edit them. This is probably the part of the process that scares people who haven't done audio editing before the most. While you shouldn't be scared of editing, you should remember that it does take quite a bit of time, as David Gaertner points out.

David Gaertner:

I think the biggest trap people always fall in with sound editing, is they don't really realize how long it's going to take to produce that recording into a consumable sound file. And so, I think the general consensus is that, like, one minute of sound is about thirty minutes of editing. Something like that, I don't know if that's the exact metric, but it's a lot. And so, not trying to do too much when you start out. Start out with like a five-minute piece, don't aim for an hour in your first piece. Start small, build your skills.

Isabelle Ava-Pointon:

Building these skills isn't as hard as it may seem. Here's Kyle Stedman with some comforting words.

Kyle Stedman:

It's easier than people think. I think sometimes that people are afraid of just, like, the tech side. I know not everyone has the same tech skills, so I can't say for sure, but if you find the right tutorials, if you get to know your program or whatever you're using, I just don't think it's as scary as you think.

Isabelle Ava-Pointon:

As Dr. Stedman mentioned, there's a lot of resources online, especially in terms of video tutorials that give detailed answers to every question you could possibly have about your platform, especially if you're using Audacity. This is a free audio editing technology that I would absolutely recommend to anybody who's beginning podcasting. In fact, many experts and professional podcasters still use Audacity – I use it myself.

Another resource you can tap into is your local community radio. David Gaertner wholeheartedly recommends this approach.

David Gaertner:

The other big piece of advice that I always give to colleagues who come to me with this question is: take advantage of your local community radio station! [laughs] There are amazing folks there who can help. They can help you with those first edits into sound, and in fact at UBC we have a team that is set up specifically for liaising with faculty, and I know lots of units do. So don't think you have to start all by yourself.

Isabelle Ava-Pointon:

In terms of the basics of the actual editing process, I find it's a lot like writing an academic paper. You import your sound, the different sound files you want, and then you edit them. You can cut and paste sentences, or whole paragraphs. You can take out unnecessary or incorrect information. You can even re-write whole sections, although this usually involves re-recording [laughs]. You can also take out what I'd call audio typos – the "ums," the "uhs," the accidentally-long pauses – all of this can be magically edited out.

Another similarity with writing papers is that you need to save your work. In fact, my computer crashed in the middle of making this episode, and I had to start from the beginning. Most importantly, though, remember to save a copy of the original audio recordings, in case something goes wrong in editing, and you need to start over. Because those can't be regained. Editing is also when you can add music and sound effects if you want. This is, of course, not necessary, but it's another way to take advantage of the auditory medium. I would recommend that it's usually a good idea to have intro and outro music, just as that plays into the serial aspect of podcasting.

I would also recommend going through multiple drafts. Just like with papers, it's often a good idea to leave it for a while and then go back to it, and even get feedback from peers. In fact, Kyle Stedman recommended reaching out to other podcasters.

Kyle Stedman:

Reach out to friends. Reach out to people who aren't friends yet. People don't realize how honouring and how much it makes people feel good to be asked to be a part of something. So I think number one is to reach out.

Isabelle Ava-Pointon:

Finally, once you feel that your podcast is ready, it's time to publish it to share it with the world. You can either publish your scholarly podcast yourself, or submit it to a journal like *BC Studies*, which accepts submissions of scholarly podcasts for publication. If you want to publish with us, take a look at our submission guidelines on our website. But if you want to publish it yourself, here are the steps you'll need to follow.

The first place you'll need to publish your podcast is on an RSS feed. This is, as you may remember, one of the basic criteria for an audio file to become a podcast. Now, to do this without a lot of coding, you will need to go through a podcast hosting service, such as Spreaker, Buzzsprout, or Podbean. Depending on the platform and the services you want, hosting can be free, or it cost a monthly fee. Once you have your podcast published on an RSS feed, you'll want to add it to some of the biggest databases on the internet. The four key databases to get your podcast on are: Apple Podcasts, Google Play, SoundCloud, and Spotify. To submit your podcast to these databases, you can often go directly through your podcast host. But if you need more information, you can check out some of the links in our show notes.

Brenna Clarke Gray reminds us that publishing your podcast is not the last step.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

This is not a medium if all you really want to do is lecture – it's a conversational medium. So planning ahead for how that engagement will take place, and also to set up boundaries around it – what are you comfortable having people share opinions on, and what are you not, and how will you signal that to listeners, and all that kind of stuff, like it's really important.

Isabelle Ava-Pointon:

In order to be prepared for when listeners want to contact you, I would recommend creating a website for your podcast. It also helps to have accounts on different social media for your podcast specifically, so you can separate your personal accounts and your podcast accounts. And there you have it! The *BC Studies* guide to making your own podcast! I hope that the practical advice in this episode can help you on your podcast journey just as much as the more theoretical and conceptual explorations we looked at in some of the other episodes.

This brings us, of course, to the end of our mini-series. I want to thank you for listening, and I hope that you enjoyed it, and hopefully learned something along the way [laughs].

We would like to thank again Dr. Jentery Sayers, Dr. David Gaertner, Dr. Brenna Clarke Gray, Dr. Michael Faris, Dr. Kyle Stedman, and Charles Woods for contributing their time and energy to this project.

Finally, I would like to thank again Devon Throness, who allowed us to use his song “Mist” in our podcast. “Mist” was composed, performed, and recorded by Devon Throness, Copyright 2021 ThronessMusic.

[Concluding Music: “Mist” by Devon Throness]