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CMS 998: New Media Literacies

Lesson Plan:
Podcasting – Expressing Yourself Online Using Audio

Overview

Students will create and publish a simple audio "podcast" – a digital audio file downloadable by anyone on the Internet. In the process, they will learn terms, tools, and techniques of the media form. They will also listen critically to each others' work and discuss the unique characteristics of this medium in relation to other media.

Podcasting is an increasingly popular activity. The ease of downloading audio files combined with the ability to take them anywhere on an MP3 player (like an iPod) has made it popular to listen. The ease of recording, editing, and uploading audio has made it popular to become a producer. As technology continues to expand the ways in which people can create their own media – recording via cell phone, uploading directly via a web page with no upload step, and using a simple microphone that plugs into the iPod – podcasting is likely to become more popular with teens.

Learning Objectives

Technical: Students will learn the technical terms of podcasting, including sometimes-confusing acronyms and neologisms. They will step through the process of creating their own podcasts in such a way that they learn the distinct elements involved. Students will learn about audio levels as they record themselves. They will learn the basics of "waveform" "multitrack" editing using a simplified tool that represents the software that audio professionals use. They will also learn how to find and subscribe to podcasts, and will appreciate the technical distinctions between audio streaming, downloading, and podcasting.

Conceptual: Students will explore the medium of podcasting in the context of prior media like radio. The teacher may wish to push the class to ask what is new or different that makes podcasting special. Students will be encouraged to discover the unique affordances of podcasting by articulating these ideas in class and grappling with firsthand production. The teacher will encourage "transmedia navigation" by asking the students to portray an idea or experience from another media form in audio. Students will exercise collaborative problem-solving while working in groups in the classroom. By the end of this lesson, the class should have a firm understanding of what constitutes podcasting and what is involved in the process of producing podcasts.

Materials
- One Internet-connected computer for each pair of students
- Built-in microphones on the computers, or working plugged-in microphones
- A downloaded copy of the software program *Audacity* along with the *LAMELib MP3 Codec*
  > http://audacity.sourceforge.net/
- A computer projector and speakers to show examples
- (optional) A place to upload the final audio files and a service to create your feed
- (optional) Students may bring audio they wish to edit
- (optional) Portable digital audio recorders (Minidisc, Flash-based, iPod-based)

Definitions
- *Podcasting:* A neologism referring to both the process of publishing audio on the Internet using specific standards, and the practice of subscribing to such "feeds" for automatic download. It is a portmanteau of "iPod" and "broadcasting" but in reality podcasts do not require an iPod to be listened to.
- *Feed:* People who podcast typically produce ongoing series of audio files rather than just one-off episodes. This is often referred to as a "feed". In a more technical context, the feed is the URL (web address) of the RSS file which is used by a feed reader program (such as iTunes) to automatically check for new episodes.
- *RSS:* "Really Simple Syndication" or "Rich Site Summary". RSS is the technical standard that describes a podcast and is used by computers to communicate about podcast contents. Each podcast has an "RSS feed" which users need in order to subscribe.
- *Audio Levels*: When recording or editing audio, the loudness at any particular moment is referred to as the "level". Most audio editing programs show the levels as moving meters. If the meters show red, the audio is "clipping" and will sound distorted.

Procedure
Before leading the class through the process of creating a podcast, it is a good idea to play some samples and explain some of the terms of the medium. A good place to look for examples of existing podcasts is the iTunes Music Store "Podcasts" section:
> http://www.apple.com/itunes/store/podcasts.html

If the students are familiar with blogging, it may be helpful to explain that podcasting is somewhat like blogging but with audio. Each is serial and typically can be subscribed to.

Before getting too deep into the details of podcasting, it may be useful to explain that when we use the word, we often refer to the specific *technical standards* involved, the *set of tools used*, and the particular *phenomenon* – all with the same word.

Explain to your students that it is helpful to think of the process of creating a podcast as four steps:

Gather: In this step, you collect the audio you wish to use. This can be audio that already exists online or elsewhere, but it is often audio which you create yourself. Demonstrate to the students the process of importing audio into Audacity as well as recording directly to a track via the microphone. You may find the tutorials located here helpful:
> http://audacity.sourceforge.net/help/

Produce: In this step, you combine the audio into a single piece by editing the individual elements and squencing them before, after, and on top of each other. This process is called "multitrack editing" and this tutorial can form a good structure for your students to try this hands-on in the classroom and return to later for reference:
> http://www.edhsonline.org/other/audacity/

Once you have demonstrated the steps of this tutorial, explain that the students will be creating their own podcasts using the same technique. Encourage them to break up into pairs, one to each computer. Ask the class to address a particular question, theme, or project of your choosing. Suggest that they consider how the medium of audio could be used effectively for their idea. You may want to point them to a repository of free online music that they can use to add a "sound bed" to their piece. One such site is "ccmixter":
> http://ccmixter.org/media/view/media/samples

Publish: In this step, the students will make their creations available to others. They must first choose "Export As->MP3" in Audacity. If you have access to a web site to upload the audio files and create a feed, you may show the students how to do so. If not, you may wish simply to gather their audio files onto your computer so that you can listen to them together. Typically the publish step consists of two sub-steps: upload the audio file and create the descriptive "entry".

Listen: Explain to the students that an important part of the process is listening to others' work. Podcasting is a rapidly changing medium, and new things are always being created. Today, you are going to listen to each others work and discuss it. A few questions you may wish to ask include:

- How did this piece make good use of the audio medium? What is unique about audio that lends itself to certain ways of communicating?
- What is it like to think about making your voice available on the Internet for anyone to hear? How is that empowering? How is it intimidating?
- What has the process shown you about how more traditional media like TV, radio, or the movies are produced? What gets left out? What kinds of decisions that you faced today do producers of those media forms face?

Further Discussion
Given sufficient time, there are several relevant discussion areas you may wish to explore:

- Is Podcasting "the end of radio?" as Wired Magazine referred to it?
    - http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/13.03/curry.html

- How does podcasting differ from radio? What are the benefits and disadvantages?
    - http://www.current.org/tech/tech0421mytime.shtml

- What are the ethics of podcasting?
    - http://www.podcastblaster.com/press/2006/10/20/podcast-ethics/

Resources

Wikipedia overview of podcasting:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Podcasting

Free music for use in podcasts:
http://ccmixter.org/media/view/media/samples
http://freesound.iua.upf.edu/
http://music.podshow.com/

Audacity and tutorials:
http://audacity.sourceforge.net
http://audacity.sourceforge.net/help/
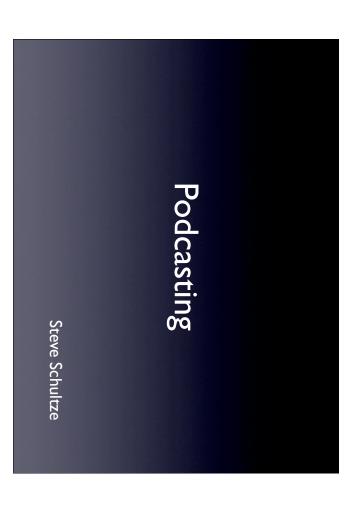http://www.edhsonline.org/other/audacity/

"Podcasting Legal Guide: Rules for the Revolution":
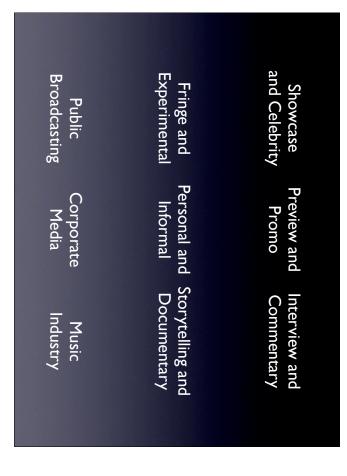http://wiki.creativecommons.org/Welcome_To_The_Podcasting_Legal_Guide

Apple iTunes (free download):
http://www.apple.com/itunes/

Suggested Slides (on following pages)

Podcasting

Steve Schultze

Origins of Podcasting

Christopher Lydon
Radio Host - Berkman Fellow

Adam Curry
MTV VJ - Geek/Entrepreneur

Showcase and Celebrity	Preview and Promo	Interview and Commentary
Fringe and Experimental	Personal and Informal	Storytelling and Documentary
Public Broadcasting	Corporate Media	Music Industry

Origins of Podcasting

Blogging + Audio

What is Podcasting?

- **A standard** for syndicating audio or video
- **A set of tools** for doing so: web standards, user software, hardware
- A **cultural phenomenon** and **aesthetic** encompassing a broad range of content

How To Podcast

1. **Gather** your audio
2. **Produce** your episode
3. **Publish** to the world
4. **Listen** to the others

Our Podcast Goals

- have **fun**
- explore issues of an **emerging technology**
- experience hands-on **production**
- share your work **publicly**

Gather

- Recording in Audacity
- Capturing phone calls
- Other sources
  - CC-licensed podcasts
  - **Music:** podsafe.com, CC search, Garageband loops

Produce

Audacity Production Tutorial

http://www.edhsonline.org/other/audacity/

Listen

Publish

- **Upload:** send your file to the server
  http://tobedecided.com/podcast/

- **Post:** publish your file via RSS
  this will be done automatically

Audio Tour   Music Montage

Opinion Essay   Radio Theater

Satire   Performance

Personal Diary   How-To

Comedy

Adaptation   Audio Greeting Card

Call-in