

Writing Spaces Assignments & Activities Archive

Engaging Podcasts as a Dynamic Genre for Invention

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Overview

Instructors who maintain a robust definition of text “connect our students so much more with the real world of writing. We prepare them for the world [...] so that they can participate in that conversation” (Marchetti & O’Dell). Podcasts represent a digital genre that embodies “ways of knowing, being, and acting” (Bawarshi & Reiff 78). Instructors can utilize podcasts to engage students with thinking about the research process—including invention. Moreover, implementing podcasts into writing classrooms provides students with the opportunity to examine the multiple modes and media used to deliver credible information. The following assignment directs “attention to both writing and aurality, and other composing modalities” to provoke “thoughtful understanding of a whole range of modalities” (Selfe 618). This assignment demonstrates how instructors can take up podcasts in writing classrooms to further engage students with the process of invention. After constructing a collaborative list of podcasts together as a class, this assignment asks students to choose a podcast on a particular topic and listen to a few episodes to form a research question. Ultimately, students will produce an annotated bibliography composed of the texts mentioned in their podcast and a number of outside sources which contribute to their research question.

Time Commitment

2 weeks (4 class meetings)

Materials

Materials needed include a device for listening to podcasts (smartphone, tablet, computer, etc.); classrooms should be

equipped with similar technology for in-class listening.

Assignment Process

- Instructors will select a podcast episode for listening in class (if meeting F2F) or independently if delivery is via an online or hybrid format. Podcasts with half-hour or hour episodes work best. This podcast will act as a common text for discussion and as a model of how to use podcasts to search for topic ideas (described in the next step of the assignment).
- Next, instructors lead a class discussion about how podcasts as a digital genre can be used for formulating research questions and performing primary and secondary research. For example, the podcast *99 % Invisible* is a well-researched, innovative podcast about design, culture, and their overlapping history. One episode (“Shade”) in particular covers the lack of shade in urban areas like Los Angeles. Producers interview architects, writers, and city planners and research a story about the impact of building design on residents of Los Angeles, particularly the working class and homeless populations who suffer most from the lack of shade. This episode would be an excellent invention tool. Together, the class could list all the topics covered, the sources provided in the podcast, and outline the next steps in the research process. At this stage in the assignment, encourage students to think about a topic which interests them.
- Then, the class will perform genre research and produce a collaborative list of podcasts which cover a wide range of potential topics in categories such as: sports, music, politics, popular culture, self-care, horoscopes, true crime, etc. Students should choose one podcast from this list on which to focus for the remainder of the project.
- Next, students will listen to a few episodes of their chosen podcast with the goal of formulating a research

question or topic: Should Pete Rose be banned from the baseball Hall of Fame? How do city planners create anti-homelessness spaces through design elements? How does the American judicial system disproportionately affect people-of-color?

- Then, students should pay particular attention to the texts mentioned and arguments formed in their episodes: Is an expert on the topic interviewed? What arguments are being formed? Was an article or book referenced to support an argument? What is the credibility of the speakers and texts mentioned?
- Finally, students will produce an annotated bibliography of the critical texts mentioned in their podcast episodes and a number (2-3) of outside resources related to their topic. Annotations should include relevant information uncovered through analysis of the questions (and other similar inquiries) made above to reveal how podcasts can contribute to both invention and research.

Learning Outcomes

Students engaging in this assignment will:

- Understand how podcasts can be employed as a crucial part of the invention process
- Identify the key features of podcasts as a dynamic genre during the research process
- Consider the multiple modes and media in which reliable, effective information is delivered
- Demonstrate how to find and evaluate content during research

Learning Accommodations

- While podcasts are easily accessible online, instructors should consider the various ways collaborative list building and discussion might differ based on F2F, online, and hybrid instruction. Instructors might assign breakout rooms during virtual, synchronous meetings before

returning to a larger discussion or list-building activity. Asynchronous discussion might happen via Google Docs or LMS discussion boards with students linking to podcast websites as they work both independently and collaboratively.

- Subtitles and transcripts should be included whenever possible in accordance with university ADA statements. Many podcasts provide audio transcripts on their accompanying websites; many platforms which host podcasts, like YouTube, provide a subtitle function.

Works Cited

- Bawarshi, Anis S., and Mary Jo Reiff. *Genre: An Introduction to History, Theory, Research, and Pedagogy*. Parlor Press, 2010.
- Marchetti, Allison, and Rebekah O'Dell. "Beyond Literary Analysis." *Heinemann Podcast*, Feb. 2018, <https://blog.heinemann.com/beyond-literary-analysis-podcast>.
- "Shade." *99 % Invisible*, Radiotopia, episode 385, 14 January 2020, <https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/shade/>
- Selfe, Cynthia L. "The Movement of Air, the Breath of Meaning: Aurality and Multimodal Composing." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 60, no. 4, 2009, pp. 616–663.

Further Reading

- Danforth, Courtney S., Kyle D. Stedman, and Michael J. Faris, editors. *Soundwriting Pedagogies*. Logan: Computers and Composition Digital P/Utah State University Press, 2018, <http://ccdigitalpress.org/soundwriting>.
- Llinares, Dario, Neill Fox, and Richard Berry. "Introduction." *Podcasting: New Aural Cultures and Digital Media*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.