

Shifting Time, Location, and Texts: An Assessment of Podcasting in Our Classrooms

A Short Podposter by Jennifer L. Bowie for ATTW March 11th, 2009

While podcasting is a fairly new media, it is also very popular, with an estimated 30.8 million US listeners in 2009¹. But, podcasting is only beginning to catch on in technical communication, despite the clear connections and what we can learn from and teach with podcasts. In this shorter podposter, I present findings from one study that assesses how podcasts, including student-produced podcasts, impact student learning in a writing class.

Previous Research on Podcasting

What research that does exist on podcasting is mostly positive: students think podcasts are valuable to their studies, assist learning, and provide flexibility (Tynan and Colbran); students are more receptive to learning from podcasts than from lectures or textbooks (Evans); and podcasts aid in the study of material (Kraus). While these studies are interesting, they focus on *teacher-produced* podcasts. This is important information, but it is also important to understand how effective and helpful *student-produced* podcasts are in student learning.

The Study

The purpose of this study is to assess the impact of podcasting, particularly student-produced podcasting, on learning for college students in a writing class. In this podposter, I am focusing on an emailed quantitative survey. The survey participants were the nine students in the class; five were female and four were male.

The survey asked for students to rate how 12 class components contributed to their understanding and application of 28 skills and knowledge areas. A one rating indicated the component contributed little or not at all to their understanding and application, two indicated a moderate contribution, and three indicated significant contribution. Statistical significance was set to a p-value ≤ 0.05 .

Note: in the following section I will be referring to visuals that are available on the ATTW poster or in the transcript available on [the related site](#).

¹ Based on the 17 million podcast listeners found in Price, A., Gay, P. and Searle, T. (2006. "A History and Assessment of the Slacker Astronomy Podcast" Astronomy Education Review, 1.5) for 2006 and multiplied by the growth rate of 18% cited in Lewin (2007. "Podcasting Audience Up 18% Since Last Year" <http://www.podcastingnews.com/2007/03/22/podcasting-audience-up-18-since-last-year/>) for 2007, and then multiplied by this same growth rate for 2008 and 2009.

Findings

I will focus here on the 16 skills and knowledge that are most relevant to technical communication. Since I am analyzing how podcasting compares to no podcasting, I compare both the general podcast components and the student-produced podcast components to the non-podcast components. The components of each category are displayed in Table 1.

As shown in Table 1, of the three categories, the student-produced podcast components were rated as contributing the most, at 2.40. Non-podcast components were rated the second highest at 2.38 and podcast components were scored the lowest at 2.33. These findings suggest students saw the student-produced components as contributing slightly more to their knowledge and skills.

Between the podcast components and non-podcast components, six of the 16 areas have statistically significant differences, as shown in Figure 1. Five areas, audience, ethos, logos, analysis, and written communication, were significantly higher in the non-podcast components. Only one area was significantly higher for the podcast component of the class—oral communication. Delivery was also high for the podcasting components, but not quite statistically significant at $p=0.07$. As a result, it seems podcasting is good for oral communication and delivery skills.

Similarly, there are significant differences between four of the student-produced podcast components and the non-podcast components, as displayed in Figure 2. Audience and written communication were both significantly higher for the non-podcast components. However, both technological skills and oral communication skills were significantly higher for the student-produced podcast components. In addition, both delivery and tone are almost significantly higher for the student-produced podcast components with $p=0.07$. Thus, these findings suggest that student-produced podcast components offer a greater number of potential benefits.

As Table 3 displays, the most effective components were the Capstone Project and Podcasting (in general), which tied at 2.63. Following closely is the Week in Review Podcast Project and then the Podcast Reading Responses, the Media Analysis Project, and the Rhetorical Analysis Project. The least two effective components, Podcast “Readings” and the Podcasting Lectures & Discussions, both tied at 2.17. While components with at least some element of podcasting ranked among the highest and lowest, the three projects that required students to podcast were some of the highest ranked components, coming in second, third, and fourth.

Combining all of the findings, it seems that general podcasting and student-produced podcasting can be incorporated in writing classes to aid students in developing some skills and knowledge areas. Students generally found projects that required them to podcast to be more effective than components with no podcasting elements or components that involved listening to, and not producing, podcasts.

Discussion & Conclusions

While this is one part of a small study, these findings are the beginning of important research on podcasts in the technical communication classroom. As teachers of media, we need to understand what impacts these media have on our students learning, especially when our students are producing the media. Podcasting, particularly student-produced podcasting, appears to be beneficial to our students' learning and thus deserves both further research and possible integration into our technical communication programs.

Other Resources:

- [The related PodPoster site](#): Handouts, the Podposters, and more
- [Class Website](#) "English 4320: Social Media, Politics & the Rhetorical Citizen"
- [Screen Space](#): A blog and Podcast about users, texts, and technology (my podcast)
- Email: jbowie@gsu.edu