



## Teaching Practice

### Podcasting for ESL 101 by Martin Sankofi

There is hardly any getting around podcasting these days. And if you aren't already working with podcasts, the word itself will most likely ring a bell. Podcasting, according to the New Oxford American Dictionary was word of the year 2005, and is not only rapidly finding its way to a wider Internet audience but also into our classrooms. It is indeed a useful little asset that serves our purpose well; the good thing about podcasts is that they are absolutely free of charge. The question that remains is how can we make use of it in our schools?

#### Podcasting basics:

A podcast is defined as „a digital recording of a radio broadcast or similar program, made available on the Internet for downloading.“ It is ready to be listened to by anyone who finds this particular recording useful; this can be anything from a favorite BBC show that you have missed, to a learner specific program, produced by English teacher, John, a technical talk, a comedy, you name it, there will be a podcast for it.

Among other things, podcasting means:

- listening to recorded radio programs online at any desired time
- downloading these programs for use with your computer, a CD or any mp3 player
- producing and publishing audio programs

If you want to get going, all you need is a computer and a broadband connection. In order to listen to the podcast on your way to work or if you wish to play it to your students, an mp3 player or a CD burner is necessary. Despite the name, any mp3 player can be used and an ipod is not a prerequisite.

### How does podcasting work?

Let's say the above-mentioned English teacher John, records a 20 minute program for his students, a program about moving house. When finished, he uploads it to a server and then the program can be downloaded from his web page and listened to by his students or, for that matter, anyone who stumbles across it by accident.

The first step is really about finding suitable downloads among the great number of programs available. For this you can go to a podcast directory. Typing the word „podcast directory“ into Google for example, should give you plenty of good starting results. Specific ESL directories, like the „English-caster“ or „Charles Kelly's Easy Online RSS Reader for English as a Second Language“, make it easy to find specific English programs. Apple's free iTunes music player already features a built-in podcast directory and an easy downloading option.

Once you have found a podcast you like, you can either download it from the directory or go to a related web page to find out more about it. The web page might provide additional material or full transcripts of the shows, a description of the program or an archive of older recordings.

Downloading instructions still vary greatly, but they are basically down to ‚Follow the instructions!‘ and will either tell you specifically what to do, as on „Voice of America“, or ask you to ‚right-click‘ or ‚option-click‘ on a link, as on the „Alphabet“ listen and repeat podcast.

The following points might prove useful when working with podcasts:

- Full transcripts, like on ESLPod can easily let you decide if the program suits your purpose or not.



- Often podcasters supply a road map of their shows, an outline, supplying information about guest speakers and other interesting aspects. For example, „Floe-Joe Radio“ sends out a newsletter with exercises ahead of each new podcast.
- A blog is another interactive form of communication that you will often see on web pages with podcasts. The podchef blog and the gastrocast are excellent examples of such interaction.
- Last but not least, given the fact that you want to work with podcasts on a regular basis, you could think about subscribing to a podcast. This way the new shows will automatically be downloaded to your computer as soon as available. So called ‚Feed Readers‘ or ‚podcatchers‘ catch all the podcasts you have subscribed to. They work like the mailman: like the newspaper you have subscribed to, which is brought to your mailbox by a mailman, feed readers automatically transfer subscribed podcasts to your computer, and thus save you a lot of time and work.

### Podcasts in the classroom

There are three types of podcasts which can be considered for classroom use. Authentic podcasts, teacher produced ones and student produced podcasts. While authentic ones are good raw input material, processed ones are specifically tailored to learners‘ needs. Below are a few specific suggestions of how to make use of them:

- Breaking News has a daily ready-to-go lesson plan, including a short podcast. Their lesson plans are detailed and you can make use both of a short news item and a word file containing exercises.
- Podcasts can be used like language labs; for example, talkenglish.com is a place where students can respond to or repeat a phrase on a certain topic.
- There are many authentic podcasts on science, history, maths and virtually any other subject, so they also provide a goldmine for teachers of other subjects using English as the classroom language. Check out History according to Bob if you teach history in English.
- Use podcasts to lighten up one of your lessons.

Lots of entertaining shows are available as podcasts. Coverville is a podcast about cover songs. Charles Kelly uploads a new song regularly on his Learn a song podcast.

- Floe Joe Radio offers a regular program with integrated exercises and newsletter, designed for students preparing for the Advanced Cambridge Exam.
- You can ask students to bring in a short podcast that they would like to share with their peers. One method of making student produced language material more accessible to the public, is recording a podcast with them. If you want to experiment with this, have a look at pod-EFL.

There are a myriad of ways in which podcasts can be used in our classrooms and although the development is only in its initial stages, it has already made a considerable impact both in the technical world and in the ESL classroom. Podcasts are a great free source of audio output and make both learning and teaching a bit easier.

### WebPages in order of mention:

If you are using podcasts, I would be happy to hear from you.

*English Teacher John podcast*

<http://www.englishteacherjohn.com/podcast/>

*Englishcaster*

<http://www.englishcaster.com/>

*Charles Kelly's Easy Online RSS Reader for English as a Second Language*

<http://a4esl.org/p/>

*Voice of America*

<http://www.voanews.com/english/podcasts.cfm>

*Listen and repeat English podcast*

<http://www.manythings.org/repeat/>

*ESLPod*

<http://www.eslpod.com/index.html>

*FloeJoeRadio*

<http://www.splendid-learning.co.uk/podcast/index.html>

*The podchef gastrocast*

<http://podchef.motime.com/>



*Breaking News*

<http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com/index.html>

*Talkenglish.com*

<http://www.talkenglish.com/>

*Coverville*

<http://www.coverville.com/>

*History according to Bob*

<http://www.summahistorica.com/>

*Learn a song podcast*

<http://www.manythings.org/songs/>

*For a Feed Reader and playback solution in one try  
the free iTunes*

<http://www.apple.com/itunes/>

**Professional profile:**



Martin Sankofi teaches English at HLM Herbststraße; a school for fashion and arts and crafts. In 2005 he started as a student at Donau Universität Krems (MSc for e-learning and e-teaching) He collaborated with a team on

the “Focus on Modern Business” series. In 2005 he took a sabbatical to travel Asia.

Martin can be contacted at [sankofi@gmx.net](mailto:sankofi@gmx.net)