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Empower English Language Learners



WITH

Tools From the Web



what

why

how

when

who

where

Podcasts

Get Them Talking!

Video connection: Prior to reading this chapter, view the online video "Podcasting in Plain English" at <http://www.commoncraft.com/podcasting>

WHAT IS A PODCAST?

According to Wikipedia, a podcast is "a series of audio or video digital-media files which is distributed over the Internet by syndicated download, through Web feeds, to portable media players and personal computers" (accessed August 15, 2009, at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Podcast>).

But more simply put, a podcast is like a radio show on your computer. It can consist of one episode or a series of shows connected by a common theme. Technically, to be a podcast, the audio files must contain an RSS (really simple syndication) feed that will allow users to download new episodes when they are added to a Web site. In this way, new shows get transferred onto mp3 audio players (your iPod) automatically when you connect one to your computer.

But not all podcasts need to be downloaded onto an mp3 player. Furthermore, you don't need an iPod (Apple's version of a digital audio file player) to listen to a podcast. Most podcasts will play directly on your computer, and you can listen to some episodes and not others without subscribing to an automatic feed. Here's an easy way to think about podcasts: Imagine a magazine that you like to read. You can subscribe to the magazine and get a copy mailed to your home every month. You can also go to the library and choose a particular issue to read any time you want.

At the library, there are back issues as well. It is a similar process with podcasts. Subscribe if you want. If not, just listen to the parts you like online. Podcasts, like blogs and wikis, come in all shapes and sizes. There are podcasts to help you learn Chinese (www.chinesepod.com) and podcasts about vegetarian cooking (www.compassionatecooks.com). Podcasts are created by professionals (like National Public Radio's "This American Life" www.thisamericanlife.org) and by amateurs (www.homemadehitshow.com). There is likely to be a podcast that relates to almost any topic that is taught in school.

Components of a Podcast


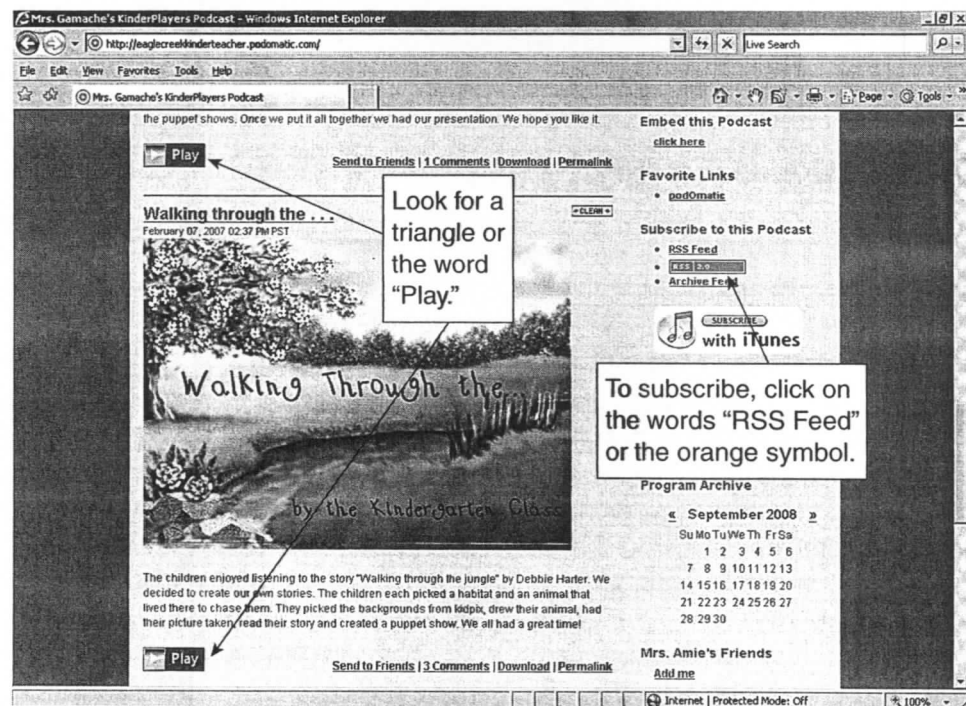
Once you find a podcast that you'd like to hear, you have some choices. First, ask yourself if you'd like to subscribe to the podcast, or would you just like to listen to it? Listening to a podcast on the computer is as simple as clicking "Play" (or the universal symbol for "play," the sideways triangle: ▶). In order to subscribe to a podcast, look for the orange RSS symbol:  (or the letters RSS: **RSS 2.0**).

Figure 4.1



Source: Used with permission from Amie Gamache. Accessed on 12/26/08 at EagleCreekKinderTeacher.podomatic.com/

Since podcasts are often embedded into blogs, many of the same features that appear on blogs can be seen alongside podcasts as well. For example:

- **Comment:** Listeners can comment about the podcast, and these comments are often displayed directly after the original post. They often display the time and date the comment was posted and the screen name, user ID, or possibly the e-mail address of whoever leaves comments.
- **Profile:** The creator of the podcasts will usually have some area dedicated to personal and/or school information. A description of the podcast project is also often included in the profile.
- **Archive/Links:** In a sidebar or side column, there can be links to other podcasts. These links can be arranged by the name or topic of the podcast or by date the podcast was created.

Creating a Podcast

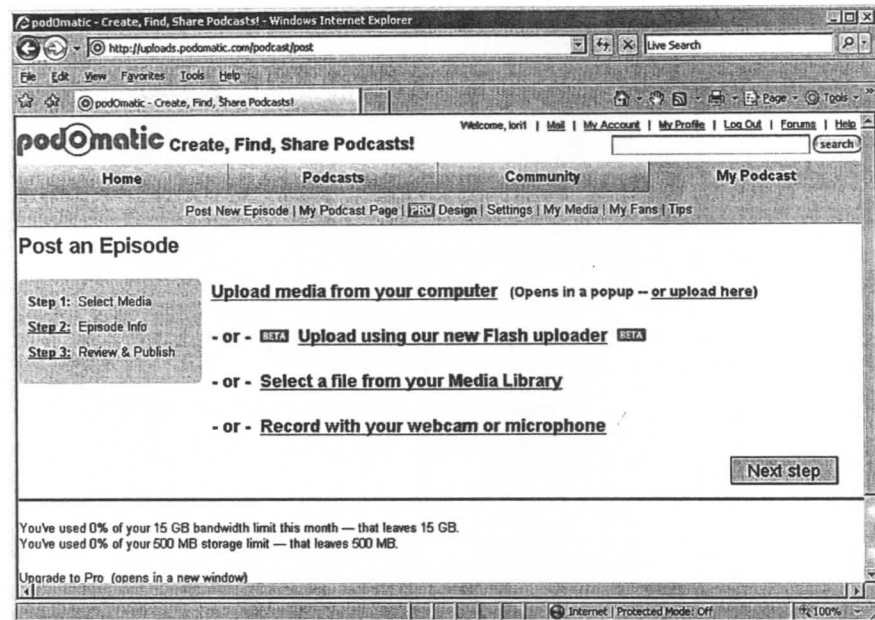
Consuming (listening to) podcasts is just half the story. Making podcasts is where the fun lies for students. A podcast can be created on any topic—it is limited only to your imagination! Students should start by storyboarding their podcast, much in the way they outline a story or research project before writing. Students create a script or a series of questions they plan to ask an interviewee. They might also consider any background music, visuals, or sound effects that they would want to include in a podcast.

After planning the content of a podcast, all that is needed is some simple technology to create one:

- A computer with Internet connection
- Speakers (either external or your computer's internal speaker)
- A microphone (either external or built in)
- A digital recorder (optional)
- An iPod or other mp3 player with a microphone (optional)

Students can record interviews, stories, autobiographies, or journal entries into a digital recorder or directly onto the computer using a microphone (note: on some computers, there is a built-in microphone that can be used). Using free programs like Audacity (www.audacity.com), students can edit the audio file and upload it to a Web page, a blog entry, or a wiki. They can also use podcast-hosting sites like PodOMatic (www.podomatic.com) to upload, organize, and share their podcasts. Here are some options that PodOMatic offers to users:

Figure 4.2



Source: PodOMatic.com. Accessed December 26, 2008, at <http://uploads.podomatic.com/podcast/post>

PodOMatic will walk you through the steps of posting your podcast to the World Wide Web. It will offer options such as writing a description of the podcast, adding photos, and including tags (keywords that will help others to find your podcast on the Web). See the “Make Your Own Podcast” section later in this chapter for more details on setting up a podcast for yourself or your classes.

Once your podcast is up and running, anyone with an Internet connection can listen in!

WHY LISTEN TO AND CREATE PODCASTS WITH ELL’S?

Podcasts abound on the Internet. There are podcasts on almost every subject you can dream of—and they are excellent, authentic listening resources for English language learners. Whether a podcast was created expressly for ELLs or just designed for listeners with common interests, podcasts can provide students with information, *aural practice*, and accent training. Listening to podcasts from different regions of the world, different parts of the country, and even different neighborhoods in your city or town can provide students with exposure to different accents, a variety of

registers, and access to colloquial and formal expressions. Furthermore, they are just plain engaging to listen to (the good ones, at least!).

As with blogs and wikis, however, it's fun to read and listen to podcasts, but it's much more fun—and more pedagogically rich—for students to create their own podcasts and publish them to the Web. When students know that their voices can be heard by their parents at home or by their relatives back in their home country, they feel motivated to create dynamic and polished podcasts. Access to an international audience is again one of the best ways to inspire students to create great work.

Beginning ELLs who may be going through their silent period may feel more comfortable speaking into a microphone in a corner of the classroom or at home rather than speaking in front of a class of peers. They can record—and rerecord—their podcasts until they are satisfied with the results, thus exerting more control over the final product and building their confidence levels with regard to their speaking and listening skills.

Students can edit and rearrange their sound files. They can be creative and allow their artistic sides to flourish by adding images and music to support the content of their podcast. They can embed their podcasts into blogs or wikis or post them onto their own homepage or Web site. In other words, podcasting allows students to tap in to a variety of intelligences (Gardner, 1983):

- *Linguistic*: Students write scripts, create dialogs and stories, and develop characters.
- *Logical-mathematical*: Students create a storyboard with a sequence of scenes and edit audio files. They time sequences and add images to correspond with different segments of the audio script.
- *Musical*: Students add music to set a tone or underscore a particular theme or mood of the podcast.
- *Interpersonal*: Students interview classmates, family, and community members.
- *Intrapersonal*: Students create an autobiographical podcast in which they reflect on a particular aspect of their lives. Students can develop a “podcast diary” and share daily reflections on a variety of topics.
- *Visual-spatial*: Students can choose digital photos to support meaning at different points in their podcast in order to create an enhanced podcast.

Podcasts engage students' talents and skills in so many ways. Once a class learns the mechanics of creating and posting a podcast, podcasting can be incorporated into every discipline in the school.

Quick List

Use podcasts for . . .

- Weather reports
- Science reports
- Poetry recitation
- Pronunciation practice
- Classroom news
- Old-time radio soap operas
- Interviews with parents, teachers, community members
- Directions to a place in school or in the community

HOW TO USE PODCASTS WITH ELL'S: A SAMPLE PODCAST PROJECT

Having students document the lives of community members is a wonderful way of strengthening questioning and investigative skills in students while also validating the community at large by bringing members of the community into the school environment. In this project, we see how a pair of teachers chose to highlight and document the exceptional lives of women in one Wisconsin town.

When wonderful student podcasts "go viral" (become extremely popular and spread via the World Wide Web), it is exciting to see them take on a life of their own. This is what happened with the "Coulee Kids" podcasts (<http://wiki.lacrosseschools.org/groups/couleekids/>)—a collection of reports and newscasts created by seventh graders at the Longfellow Middle School in LaCrosse, Wisconsin. The student podcasts have been highlighted in articles in mainstream and educational media from the *New York Times* (Selingo, 2006) to *Education Week* (Borja, 2005). Students create podcasts on topics ranging from poetry to geography.

A recent Coulee Kids project involves students in researching and interviewing the everyday heroes who live in their own community. Their homepage describes the project:

When meandering down the road of life, we encounter special people that positively impact our lives. We have the opportunity to thank and appreciate many of them, but often we aren't aware of the silent heroes that have contributed to our life as we know it.

The Road She Traveled is a project meant to honor and celebrate the women in our community that have changed not only the physical substance of the road we travel, but also the landscape we enjoy. Without the cherished contributions these women have made, we would work, live, and play in a very different community than the one encountered today.

We invite you to travel virtually down the road these remarkable women have paved and witness this gift to our community, a place for current and future history enthusiasts to learn about the unique and giving women who have helped to build this great city of La Crosse, Wisconsin!

With Admiration,

The Coulee Kids

Longfellow Middle School

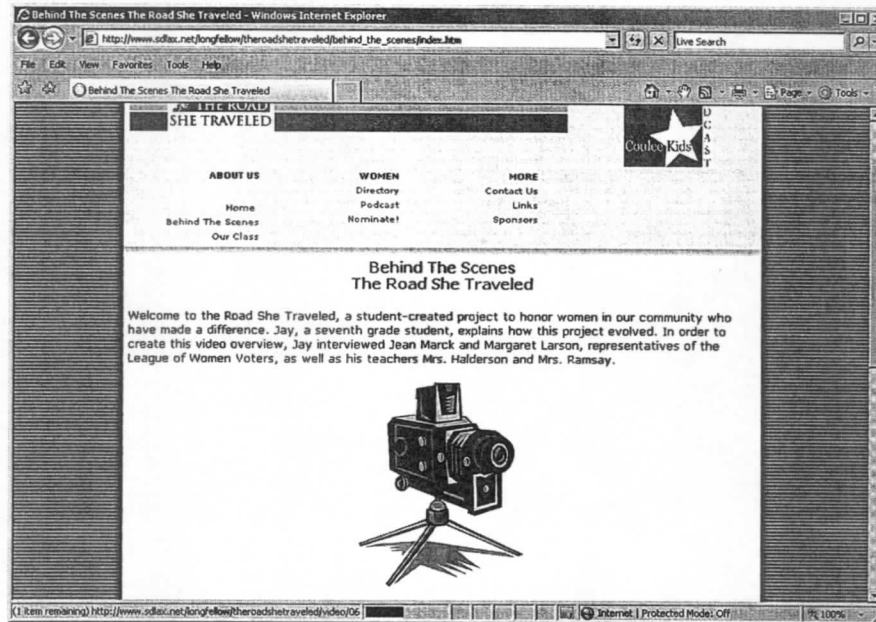
La Crosse, Wisconsin

Source: Jeanne Halderson and Elizabeth Ramsay. *The Road She Traveled Project*. <http://wiki.lacrosseschools.org/groups/theroadshetraveled/>

<http://wiki.lacrosseschools.org/groups/couleekids/>

On their site, visitors can also view an enhanced podcast (a podcast with images) about how the project evolved and who participates in it:

Figure 4.3



Source: Jeanne Halderson and Elizabeth Ramsay. *The Road She Traveled Project*. sdlax.net. <http://wiki.lacrosseschools.org/groups/theroadshetraveled/>

<http://wiki.lacrosseschools.org/groups/couleekids/>

As a connection to a book entitled *For the Common Good—A History of Women's Roles in LaCrosse County, 1920–1980*, the League of Women Voters approached members of the Longfellow Middle School faculty with the idea of documenting women's roles in the community around their school. The school purchased equipment such as scanners, cameras, and microphones with a grant from the League of Women Voters. They then sent out invitations to women across the county to come to the school to be interviewed. Teams of four students worked to create each podcast, with students taking turns being the interviewer, scanner, back-up interviewer, and the techie. In this way, each student had the opportunity to do some speaking and also use the technology.

In the first year of the project, 38 women participated in being interviewed. The school Web site currently boasts over 60 interviews of inspirational women—representing an impressive range of professions from government officials to businesswomen. The enhanced podcasts are posted on their Web site for all to enjoy:

Figure 4.4



Source: Jeanne Halderson and Elizabeth Ramsay. *The Road She Traveled Project*. <http://wiki.lacrosseschools.org/groups/theroadshetraveled/>

<http://wiki.lacrosseschools.org/groups/couleekids/>

This project exemplifies many of the 21st-century learning skills that we want our students to acquire during their K–12 experience. It is a means of raising the bar for students—as they are required to formulate ideas, write questions, speak confidently, and master the technical aspects of producing a podcast. The project also connects superbly to many TESOL standards and the TESOL technology standards. In the chart below, we can see ways in which the project connects to important standards on many levels.

"The Road She Traveled" Podcast Project: Standards Correlations

<i>Students write invitations to women to participate in the project.</i>		
21st-Century Skills	TESOL Standards	TESOL Tech Standards
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills • Initiative and Self-Direction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal 1, Standard 1: Students will use English to participate in social interactions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal 2: Students use technology in socially and culturally appropriate ways.

<i>Students write invitations to women to participate in the project.</i>		
21st-Century Skills	TESOL Standards	TESOL Tech Standards
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social and Cross-Cultural Skills • Productivity and Accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal 1, Standard 2: Students will interact in, through, and with spoken and written English for personal expression and enjoyment. • Goal 2, Standard 2: Students use English to obtain, process, construct, and provide subject matter information in spoken and written form. 	

<i>Students meet with the women, take digital photos, and interview them using digital recording equipment.</i>		
21st-Century Skills	TESOL Standards	TESOL Tech Standards
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills • Initiative and Self-Direction • Social and Cross-Cultural Skills • Communication and Collaboration Skills • Leadership and Responsibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal 1, Standard 1: Students will use English to participate in social interactions. • Goal 3, Standard 1: Students will use the appropriate language variety, register, and genre according to audience, purpose, and setting. • Goal 3, Standard 2: Students will use nonverbal communication appropriate to audience, purpose, and setting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal 2: Students use technology in socially and culturally appropriate ways.

Rules for Student Podcasting

Creating podcasts with students can be fun and exciting, but as with any other craft, there are basic rules of thumb for developing good podcasts. Here are a few suggestions adapted from Guidelines to Consider When Making ESL/EFL Podcasts by Charles Kelly:

General Guidelines for Any Podcast

Get the best possible sound quality.

- Get a good microphone.
- Record in a quiet place.
- Avoid recording in places with hard walls that give an echo.
- Avoid hum, hiss, computer fan noise and other distractions.
- Speaking close to the microphone often gives good results, but not so close that you get distortion or "pops" on letters like "P."
- Be careful to keep the recording level constant so the listener doesn't need to change the listening volume.

Additional Guidelines for ESL/EFL Podcasts

Make podcasts assuming that each show will be listened to more than once.

- ESL students are likely to want to relisten to the files.
- Keep them short, so they are easy to listen to more than once.
- Focus on one thing per show, so they make nice entries on play lists.

Don't include elements that interfere with understanding.

- Don't include background music under the talking.
- Don't include sound effects (or at least keep them to a bare minimum.)

Include the script (the text) of the podcast on the Web site.

- This allows students to easily look up words they don't understand.
- It may also allow students to use the material in ways that the podcaster might not have considered.
- Hearing impaired students can also benefit from your material.
- Search engines can help people find your podcasts.

Don't speak unnecessarily slowly.

- If you have included the script there is less of a need to speak slowly.
- While you don't want to speak too slowly, be careful to articulate each word, take breaths when appropriate, and accentuate and stress important words or phrases for emphasis.
- It is acceptable to pause at natural phrase breaks a little longer than normal to allow students to digest the information, but pausing between each word leads to unnatural intonation and rhythm.

Make short podcasts.

- Think like a student. Which would you listen to first, a two-minute short lesson or a two-hour lecture?
- It's easier for the listener to commit himself or herself to a short amount of time.

Source: Adapted from Kelly, C. (2005). *Guidelines to Consider When Making ESL/EFL Podcasts*. Accessed August 14, 2009 at <http://www.manythings.org/pod/guidelines.html>

WHEN TO USE PODCASTS WITH ELL'S

Students at any age and proficiency level can participate in podcasting projects. Here are some suggestions for adapting the Coulee Kids' *The Road She Traveled* project for students in different grades.

Grades K-5

Community members could be interviewed by small groups of students together rather than individually. Younger students could interview the teacher and staff members in the school to start and then move on to invited guests such as parents and family members. The teacher could set up a class podcast in which several students' voices are heard on one podcast together.

Grades 6-8

Students can "interview" characters from literature that they are reading, scientists they are studying, and famous people in history. They can be asked to write a script that includes key points of information from any subject area, and then they should imagine what the interviewee's responses might be. For example, if they are learning about DNA, perhaps they could interview Watson and Crick—having one student conduct the interview by asking questions and two classmates taking the roles of Watson and Crick. Then, post the interview and ask classmates to post comments about the topics addressed in the conversations.

Grades 9-12

Have students design an investigative project in which they pose a problem or a question and then interview a series of people in their community about the topic. For example, students could ask about political issues (e.g., Do you agree with the immigration policies as they exist right now?) or cultural topics (e.g., What is your favorite book—and why?). They should be encouraged to edit their podcast and produce a segment for the class podcast library.

Podcasts have endless uses in the K-12 classroom. Whatever subject you teach—be it science or physical education—podcasting projects can be designed to connect to your discipline. Students feel motivated to share their work with a broad audience of listeners (and viewers, if doing an enhanced podcast) and enjoy sharing their own thoughts and opinions with the world at large.

WHO IS USING PODCASTS WITH ELL'S?

In this section, you will learn about educator Heather Tatton's analysis of ESLPod.com—an online source for podcasts for English language learners. Heather conducted action research by exploring the site and analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the services. Finally, she offers her own perspective on what aspects are most beneficial for teaching ELLs.

AN ANALYSIS OF ESL POD

ESL Pod is a website that promotes listening, reading, and vocabulary skills for English Language Learners. I chose this site out of a desire to find appropriate listening texts to use with my current students. Many authentic sources like NPR, CNN, and others are too challenging; students struggle initially to semantically process the information and rarely progress beyond that in order to notice syntactic details. This is an issue of comprehensible input, or as Krashen would say, "i+1" (1985, p. 2); when students aren't able to comprehend overall meaning, the text is likely to contain structures way ahead of their current knowledge and is, therefore, not useful (Gass & Selinker, 2001). To compound this dilemma, the listening activities integrated with our course curriculum are too easy and are not representative of authentic language in use. Finding listening texts that are challenging and authentic, but not beyond the reach of the students has been problematic. ESL Pod appears to have achieved a middle ground. Their podcasts are reflective of authentic content, but with a slower pace of delivery, making their texts more accessible and comprehensible for ELLs. In addition, each podcast is accompanied by additional learning materials referred to as "learning guides."

The participants of ESL Pod include the designers, teachers, and ESL students. The site doesn't provide information about the technical developers or the people who maintain the website. However, information about the creators of the site is included. The masterminds behind ESL Pod are two ESL professors: Dr. Tse and Dr. McQuillan. According to the "About Us" information on the website, they volunteer to create and maintain the content and, between the two of them, do the recordings and materials development for all of the podcasts. Along with the people "behind the scenes," users of this website include teachers and students. All podcasts are free to download, but there is a charge for the learning guides. Themes are oriented toward adults or young adults and there is no difference between what a teacher downloads and what a student downloads (i.e. no teacher guides, additional explanations or activity instructions). Anyone can download podcasts, read the materials, answer the comprehension questions, and generally study the text independently and autonomously. For teachers, podcasts could be assigned as homework for their students or as a resource for group activities in the classroom.

Interactivity on ESL Pod is almost non-existent. Users have no ability to contribute to the site itself; they are merely passive receivers of the data. Nevertheless, the site does reflect a communicative approach in that the lessons are based on language in use rather than language structures and forms. By doing so, the site provides an open door to endless interactive and communicative learning opportunities in an offline setting. Users can download podcasts as well as the accompanying learning guides, all of which are intended to be used outside of the site (at home or in a classroom). In addition, users can transfer podcasts to their iPod, to iTunes, and to other listening software and/or portable devices. Thus, the site does provide numerous options for utilizing the listening texts. Teachers, for example, could be creating their own activities, above and beyond what is provided in the listening guides. ELLs may be sharing the podcasts with friends and having informal discussions or debates on the topics presented. The themes may inspire students to learn more and to do further research.

ESL Pod provides a service to ELLs and ESL/EFL teachers. Their listening texts and accompanying material reflect authentic language but at a reduced pace which makes them more accessible and useful for honing listening skills. It is a very useful tool for ELLs and teachers alike.

Source: Tatton, H. (2007, June 9). Heather's Tenor Analysis of ESL Pod. StudyPlace. Accessed August 9, 2009, at http://www.studyplace.org/wiki/Heather%27s_Tenor_Analysis_of_ESL_Pod

MAKE YOUR OWN PODCAST

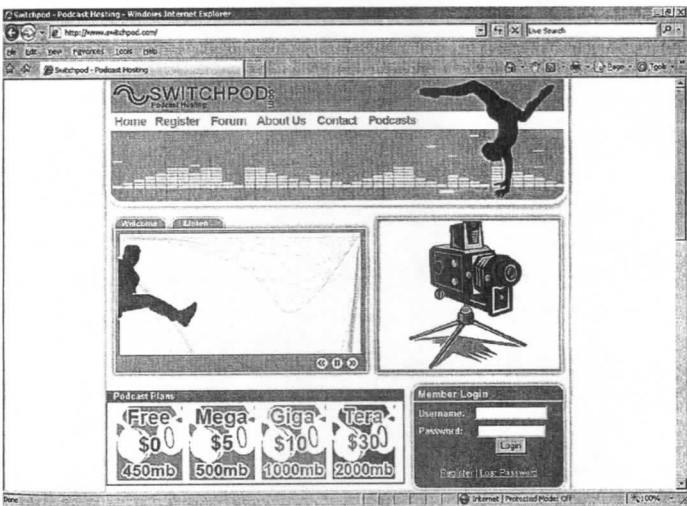
Creating a podcast can be a fun but time-consuming project. There are many Web sites that help to make the process less complicated. PodOMatic is one popular choice for schools. MyPodcast, PodBean, and SwitchPod are all good options as well.



Source: PodBean.com



Source: PodOMatic.com



Source: SwitchPod.com

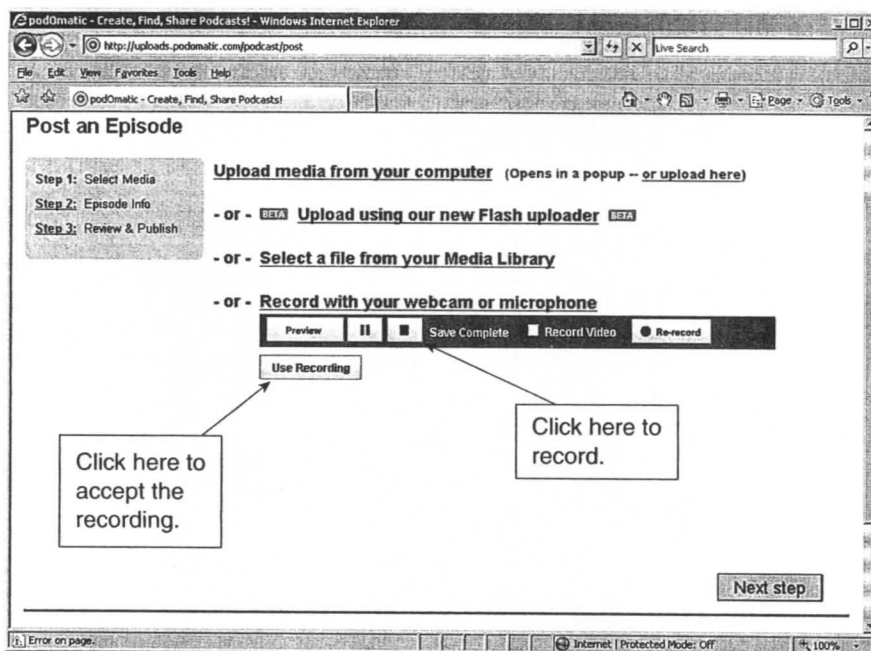


Source: MyPodcast.com

Each of these sites offers free blog hosting as well as step-by-step "wizards" that walk you screen-by-screen through the process of setting up a podcast. PodOMatic allows you to set up your own unique Web site URL (for example: <http://www.schoolpodcast.podomatic.com/>). The sites commonly offer a certain amount of storage space for free (PodOMatic gives you 500 MB of space), but then will charge for more space and more elaborate services. Most of these sites do post advertisements on your page that can be turned off for a fee.

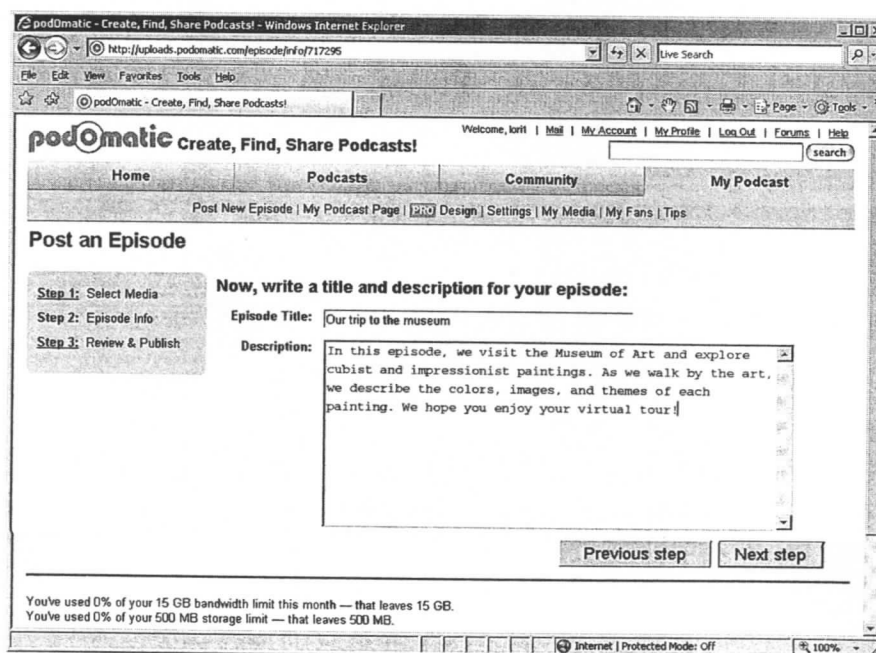
It all starts by signing up for a free account. As with blogs and wikis, try to choose a username that is easy to remember. You will then be given the chance to create a unique URL. This name should reflect the group or class with which you will be working. For example: Period3ESL or AdvancedESLWriting. This will make the address easier for you and your students to remember and find later on. It will also make it easier for visitors to find what they are looking for in a Google or other search-engine search.

A podcast recording must first be created using a microphone and a digital recorder or your computer. The resulting mp3 file can then be uploaded into the podcast-hosting site. On PodOMatic, you can record directly onto the site by plugging a microphone into the computer jack and hitting the record button:



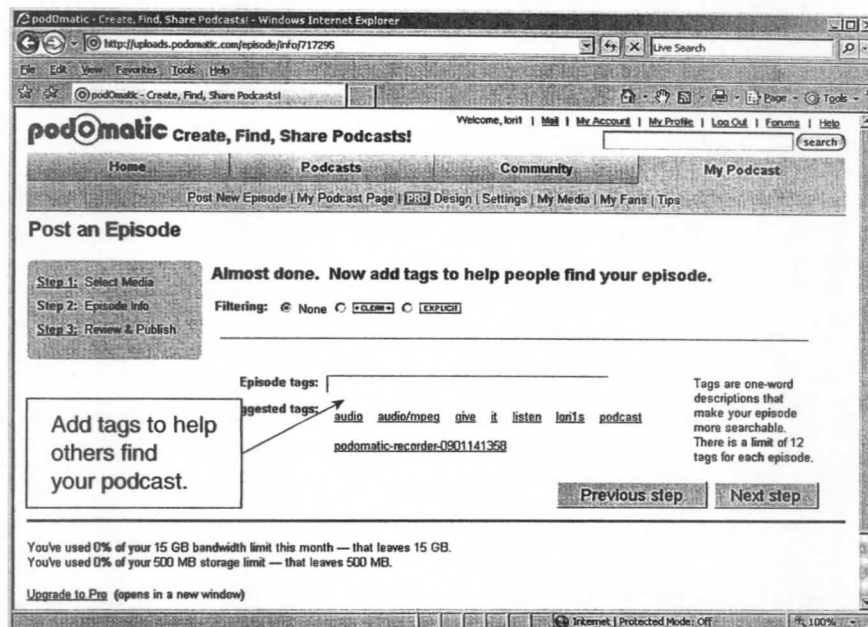
Source: PodOMatic.com. Accessed January 13, 2009, at <http://uploads.podomatic.com/podcast/post>

After recording, you can preview the clip. If you are satisfied with the way it sounds, click "use recording" and then hit "next step." Continue by writing a title and description for the podcast. The description should be short but also should contain words and phrases that would identify the contents of the podcast and help others to find it via a keyword search.



Source: PodOMatic.com. Accessed January 13, 2009, at <http://uploads.podomatic.com/episode/info/>

Click on "next step," and then add images if you like (this step is optional). Finally, add tags. As the Web site explains, "Tags are one word descriptions that make your episode more searchable." (PodOMatic.com). As with the description, tags allow others to find your podcast easily via a search engine.



Source: PodOMatic.com. Accessed January 13, 2009, at <http://uploads.podomatic.com/episode/info/>

To finish posting, click on the "post episode" button, and your podcast is ready to go! Share the URL (the Web site address) with your class, parents, administrators, and anyone who might be interested in hearing the voices of your English language learners!

WHERE TO FIND MORE INFORMATION ABOUT PODCASTS

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HELPFUL WEB SITES

- English as a Second Language Podcasts—a good collection of podcasts on a variety of topics: <http://a4esl.org/podcasts>
- ESLPod—a great collection of podcasts for students plus information for teachers about creating podcasts: <http://www.eslpod.com>
- iTunes.com—there are hundreds of podcasts that are suitable for ELLs on iTunes (download for free at: <http://www.apple.com/itunes/overview/>), plus podcasts for educators on iTunes University: <http://education.apple.com/itunesu>
- Radio WillowWeb—a series of student produced podcasts: <http://www.mpsomaha.org/willow/radio/index.html>
- Teach Digital—curriculum by Wes Fryer: Podcasting: All you ever wanted to know about podcasting for teachers: <http://teachdigital.pbwiki.com/podcasting>
- The Why's and How's of ESL Classroom Podcasting—view an excellent slideshow with a rationale regarding podcasting with ELLs: <http://www.slideshare.net/shjduarte/esl-classroom-podcasting>