

# Podcasting: Just the Basics

by Kelly Gatewood



Envision a world where people can choose any topic they wish to learn more about and, using the Internet, select sites that will regularly deliver information on that topic to a computer. Maybe they want to find out more about differentiated learning or how to speak Spanish. Maybe they want to give their students additional opportunities to learn the content of a course. Podcasts contain information on almost any topic, delivered via the Internet in audio or video form. They allow learners to access information at anytime from anywhere, with no constraints—just the free flow of information.

As a result, a revolution is taking place in education, leading to new ways of teaching and learning. This article helps readers gain a basic understanding of podcasting. It provides a definition of podcasting, describes how the technology works, how to locate podcasts, and how they are being used by teachers.

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## What Is Podcasting?

According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project (2005), more than 22 million Americans own MP3 players and more than 6 million have downloaded podcasts “to enjoy at their leisure.” An MP3 player is a portable device that is usually smaller than a cassette tape. The device, often associated with downloading music from the Internet, stores, organizes, and plays digital music files. An iPod® is an example of an MP3 player. Many people use the word iPod to mean MP3 player in the same way that the brand name Kleenex® is used to mean facial tissue.

The word *podcasting* is derived from two words: iPod and broadcast. The EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative (2005) described podcasting as a “software and hardware combination that permits automatic downloading of audio files (most commonly

in MP3 format) for listening at the user’s convenience.” Though used overwhelmingly for music, podcasting is a method of publishing both audio and video using the Internet (Clyde 2005, 54). When people subscribe to a podcast, files are delivered to their computers whenever new information or “feeds” become available. They can listen to or view the recorded material on their computer, or it can be downloaded to a mobile device such as an iPod or other MP3 player.

## How Does Podcasting Work?

Software programs, known as *podcast aggregators* or *podcatchers*, must be downloaded to facilitate listening to or viewing a podcast. The software enables subscription to and management of podcasts. According to *Newsweek* (2006), the most popular podcast software includes iPodder,

iTunes, and Doppler Radio. These programs are tools used to subscribe to what is known as RSS feeds, which supply downloadable files. RSS stands for Real Simple Syndication.

Every time a new show is produced and made available by the podcaster, subscribers are notified by their aggregator, which then downloads the feed to the listeners’ computers or MP3 players. “The feed is really just the address of the podcast, which the software will go to each time it wants to check for a new episode” (BBC Radio 2007). The podcatcher retrieves files enclosed in the RSS feed and automatically adds the files to each user’s preferred media player—a computer or mobile device.

## Locating a Podcast

Once the software is downloaded, it is time to locate a “show.” Podcast directories are a great method for locating

## Top Podcast Directories

According to Podcasting News (2006), these are the top podcast directories:

- Podcasting News’ Podcast Directory at [www.podcastingnews.com](http://www.podcastingnews.com) is the largest user-built directory of podcasts.
- Podcast Alley at [www.podcastalley.com](http://www.podcastalley.com), one of the most popular podcasting sites, has a large podcast directory.
- Odeo.com at [www.odeo.com](http://www.odeo.com) offers a directory and podcast service.
- Juice (formerly known as iPodder) has an established, very large podcast directory, as well as a premier podcast receiver that can be downloaded at <http://juicereceiver.sourceforge.net>.
- *PodcastPickle.com* is the only podcast directory with a pickle mascot! The site features a content rating system based on the familiar movie system (G, PG, PG-13, R).
- Digital Podcast at [www.digitalpodcast.com](http://www.digitalpodcast.com) is a site with podcast listings, news, and forums.
- *PodcastDirectory.com* from Penguin Radio is a podcast directory that offers listings of podcasts by regions, cities, languages, and formats, along with podcast reviews.
- A Podcast directory is available at *Podcast.net* with listings by category or alphabetically for thousands of podcasts covering a wide variety of topics and interests.
- iPodderX at <http://ipodderx.com> allows individuals interested in podcasts to create, share, and discover top shows at no cost.

- iTunes at [www.apple.com/itunes/store/podcasts.html](http://www.apple.com/itunes/store/podcasts.html) is Apple’s proprietary (non-Web) directory, which drives a huge amount of traffic to many podcasts.  
iTunes Windows and Macintosh download: [www.apple.com/itunes/download](http://www.apple.com/itunes/download)
- Doppler Radio Window’s download: [www.dopplerradio.net](http://www.dopplerradio.net).
- Yahoo.com has a podcast search and tag-based index at <http://podcast.yahoo.com>.

## Top Video Podcasting Directories

- Genwi at [www.genwi.com](http://www.genwi.com) is a video podcast directory that features tagging and daily top episodes.
- MeFeedia at <http://mefedia.com> describes itself as “the original videoblog directory.”
- PodcastVideos at [www.podcastvideos.org](http://www.podcastvideos.org) is a directory focused only on video podcasts.
- VideoPodcast.tv at [www.videopodcasts.tv](http://www.videopodcasts.tv) is “your video podcast directory.”
- VlogDir at <http://vlogdir.com> is a videoblog directory that features new videoblogs and a random selection of videoblogs.
- Vodstock at [www.vodstock.com](http://www.vodstock.com) is a video podcast directory that features user ratings and a recommendation system.

podcasts. Using any search engine, type the phrase “postcast directory” in the search box and receive a list of many different links to directories for podcasts. Directories differ, but most allow a search for podcasts by title and description, keywords, location, host, or episodes.

Using one of the podcast directories, select a podcast that sounds interesting. One of the best ways to locate something of interest is to search by keyword. Using words from your content or teaching area, such as *science* or *elementary* can be helpful for an effective search. After finding a podcast, listen to it on a computer or subscribe to it for ongoing access. Selecting the Subscribe button allows regular delivery of the RSS feed to a computer. The process is similar to subscribing to a magazine except, instead of reading a hard copy of information delivered to a mailbox, a podcast is listened to and/or viewed in electronic form on a computer or portable device.

### How Can Teachers Use Podcasts?

Podcasts can be used for many educational purposes. Four of the most effective uses include curriculum augmentation, professional development, material presentation by both teachers and students, and effective communication with community and parents.

#### *Using Existing Podcasts as Curriculum*

Podcasts can supply an almost endless variety of content in audio and video form. The technology gives teachers one more instructional tool that can be used to communicate effectively with their students. The option is especially useful for addressing the needs of students who prefer audio or visual learning. “Podcasts can deliver educational content

for listening or viewing on your computer and iPod, freeing learning from constraints of the classroom and its clock” (Apple Education 2007). They can be used to introduce new material, support current lessons, or review material covered in class.

#### *Using Podcasts for Professional Development*

A second option that podcasts offer teachers is convenient professional development. Most teachers lead very busy lives. There is limited time for staying current on instructional technology skills or important issues in education. Podcasts can give teachers the freedom to select what, when, and where they learn. If a teacher wants to learn more about effective communication with parents, he or she can subscribe to an educational podcast on communicating with parents. The teacher could listen to the podcast at his or her desk directly from the computer or choose to sync a mobile device and listen to shows on the drive home, at the gym, or while in the tub. Content is now available anytime, anywhere. The technology opens the door to a way of learning that was not available until recently.

#### *Creating Podcast Presentations*

A third educational use for podcasts is custom information sharing. The technology offers “a unique opportunity to provide on-demand content in an easily accessible and cost-effective format” (Eash 2006, 16). Teachers can record lectures, lab directions, project overviews, and review material—and make it all available for students to download to their computers and portable devices. Students can create podcasts

to demonstrate their understanding of content, for digital storytelling, to learn to speak effectively, and for presentations, among many other uses. Podcasts enable students to assume a meaningful role in their own learning, one in which they take pride because they feel ownership (Anderson 2005, 42). They allow students one more way to express themselves.

#### *Communicating with Podcasts*

A fourth use for podcasts is to communicate effectively with community and parents. Podcasts can supply parents with information provided by their child’s district, school, or teacher. “A weekly report on the goings on at the school, interviews with teacher and pupils involved in special projects, extracts from debates, plays and concerts, and reviews of sports reports can bring parents more effectively into the school community” (Jellycast 2006). Podcasts provide an additional way of keeping parents informed.

#### Examples of How Podcasts Are Being Used

- Free Guides and Tutorials at [www.guidesandtutorials.com](http://www.guidesandtutorials.com) is a free-use site created by technology educators that provides directions on many of the technologies that teachers want to learn more



about. The Web site also demonstrates how podcasting is being used by classroom teachers.

- Mabry Middle School's Web site at <http://mabryonline.org> is an example of how one school has integrated podcasting into providing information and promoting learning. Click on Podcast Central to see examples of classroom uses of podcasts.
- Jamestown Elementary's Web site at <http://slapcast.com/users/Jamestown> provides links to podcasts made by Jamestown Elementary.
- Biology at Wenatchee High School Room 302 at [www.podcastingnews.com/details/whs.wsd.wednet.edu/sci/lorenson/Podcasts/lorenson.dtd/view.htm](http://www.podcastingnews.com/details/whs.wsd.wednet.edu/sci/lorenson/Podcasts/lorenson.dtd/view.htm) demonstrates how podcasting is used in biology class.
- Coley Cast at <http://feeds.feeburner.com/coleycast> is the official podcast of Room 34. Fifth graders at Tovashal Elementary School in Murrieta, CA, share what they're learning in the classroom. Visit Mr. Coley's Web site at [www.mrcoley.com](http://www.mrcoley.com). Of particular note is Coley Cast #9 Ellis Island Day at [www2.murrieta.k12.ca.us/tovashal/bcoley/coleycast/coleycast09.htm](http://www2.murrieta.k12.ca.us/tovashal/bcoley/coleycast/coleycast09.htm).

- Broward County Schools News 2 Go at [www.podcastingnews.com/details/www.browardschools.com/feed/podcast.xml/view.htm](http://www.podcastingnews.com/details/www.browardschools.com/feed/podcast.xml/view.htm) offers podcasts that feature information about the district, awards and honors earned, innovative programs, and educational opportunities for students.
- Mike Breeds Chenango Valley Podcast Center at [www.podcastingnews.com/details/www.cvcvsd.stier.org/Podcast/mbreed/Secure/Uploads/mbreed.xml/view.htm](http://www.podcastingnews.com/details/www.cvcvsd.stier.org/Podcast/mbreed/Secure/Uploads/mbreed.xml/view.htm) provides New York State Regents Earth Science Chemistry Review and student podcasts from Chenango High School in Bringhampton, NY.
- Podcasts for Teachers (Techpod) at [www.podcastingnews.com/details/www.podcastforteachers.org/feed.xml/view.htm](http://www.podcastingnews.com/details/www.podcastforteachers.org/feed.xml/view.htm) offers podcasting and educational technology for K–12 and all educators—live from the Bronx!
- Radio Willow Web at [www.mpsomaha.org/willow/radio](http://www.mpsomaha.org/willow/radio) is a podcast for kids and by kids, produced by 5th graders at Willowdale Elementary School in Omaha, Nebraska. Each new show is called a Willowcast and can be heard as an MP3 file.
- Radio Cambridge Podcast at [www.ahisd.net/campuses/cambridge/radio/radio.htm](http://www.ahisd.net/campuses/cambridge/radio/radio.htm) is produced by elementary students at Cambridge Elementary in San Antonio, Texas.

- U.S. History Podcasts at <http://mrturmer.podomatic.com> are created by 8th-grade students in Mr. Turner's history class.

- Coulee Kids at [www.podcast.net/show/75801](http://www.podcast.net/show/75801) offers podcast created by 7th graders at Longfellow Middle School in La Crosse, Wisconsin.
- An article about Jeanne Halderson and her students is available at <http://thejournal.com/articles/17607> (Anderson 2005).

## Closing Thoughts

Podcasts are changing the way we teach, learn, and communicate. They offer one more method to help teachers build better curricula, provide their students with differentiated instruction, increase their knowledge of educational topics through ongoing professional development, and stay in touch with communities and parents. Podcasts allow learners to “more effectively assimilate ‘chunks’ of learning over time versus an all-day session” (Pollack 2005, 2).

Joining the revolution is easy. Simply download the required software, select a podcast, and sit back. Get ready to join the growing number of educators “casting the net” for changes in teaching and learning. ■

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