

PODCAST GUEST CHECKLIST

This is for people who are going to be interviewed for a podcast remotely. For example via Skype or Zencast, or another service. Maybe even over the phone.

A podcast is (usually) an audio only recording. All your audience knows about you, is your voice. Further, podcasts are an archived medium. This means that, while you are having a probably even somewhat informal conversation with the podcast host, in the end you might be heard by hundreds of people over time. Would you give a professional talk in front of hundreds of people without proper PA?

This means that you should be at least a little bit concerned with the quality of the recorded sound. An editor can only do so much trying to clean up the recording of your voice, so it is definitely worth putting in some effort yourself.

Are you being interviewed in your capacity as a professional expert?

You could ask for help from your Audio/Visual team, or borrow equipment of higher quality than what you have at hand, yourself! Your company, organization, or institute probably has an interest in supporting your outreach!

If you have a professional A/V team, you should ask them to help you set up the equipment, and record your side of the conversation for you. In this way you will represent yourself in the best way possible.

If you don't have professional help, what can you do?

Try to fulfill as many of these points as possible!

1. reduce foreign noises in your recording as much as possible.

- a. **use headphones!** The better isolated they are, the better. This reduces sound from other parties in the podcast to 'bleed' into your recording, which can be very hard to clean up. And try to keep the volume on your headphones to a minimum, a sensitive microphone may still pick up the sound coming out of your headphones. Everybody has headphones, these days, have a pair ready!
- b. **Turn off all unnecessary devices, and the system sounds on your computer or cell phone!** One very annoying thing is, when something starts beeping or rattling while you are in the middle of making an argument. Even if it doesn't disrupt your line of thought, it will be audible. Trying to get rid of it in post production might not be possible. So if that happens, you probably will either decide to repeat what you just said (which is usually not as fluent), or you decide to leave it in (which doesn't make a very professional impression), or the whole segment will be removed in the final cut (which may be a bummer). In order to avoid distraction, it's best to shut mobile devices off completely, and set your skype to "do not disturb", too. You also don't want to sit next to a running fan or a fridge, for obvious reasons.
- c. **Close doors and windows!** You should have the room to yourself, but you should also reduce outside noises. Make sure people know not to walk in on you, and remove your pet parrot!
- d. **Try to schedule during a usually quiet time of the day.** For example, if your recording room is next to a construction site, maybe you can schedule your interview for later in the evening, when there are no jackhammers.
- e. **Use an immobile, non-squeaking chair.** If you move around a lot with your chair, this will be audible in the recording, for example when you hit the table with the chair. A squeaking chair obviously is the worst.
- f. **Do not touch the microphone during the interview.** Depending on the type of microphone you use, there are different issues. But in every case, you want to set yourself up in a way to avoid playing with you microphone, bumping into it, or (especially if it is one of those smartphone headphones that dangle from your neck) have jewelry dangling against it, or have it dangle against the table, etc.

2. Optimize the sound of your own voice.

To cut this short: if you aren't planning to do (semi)professional voice recording frequently, the microphone of choice is a headset. The best is a professional headset, but even one of those cheaper smartphone headsets with the microphone on the cable is better than using the laptop's microphone.

Here is why:

1. **Constant distance from mouth.** For a consistent audio quality over the complete length of the interview, you should always have the same distance between your mouth and the microphone. Using a headset prevents the sound quality to change when you change posture. Professionals have learned to not move their mouth away from the microphone (and other speaking tricks).
2. **Optimal distance to the mouth.** An important issue is the "signal to noise ratio" in your recording. You want your voice to be significantly louder than the noise in the room (including echos), but not too loud so it maxes out. A good headset is usually build to have a pretty optimal distance to your mouth. A microphone that is far away, somewhere in the room, will give you the worst result.

Further:

- a. **Avoid dry mouth and throat.** It creates these awful mouth sounds and you don't want to end up as an example for "unintended ASMR". Drink some water!
- b. **"Warm up" your voice.** Your voice sounds different when you just got up and the first time you say something. Make sure your voice is "warmed up" at the beginning of the interview. You could read something aloud, sing a tune, or even do some of those funny exercises actors and anchors make.
- c. **Use a small, room with covered walls.** The larger the room, and the more naked walls, the more echos will it produce. Try a small room with a carpet and things on the walls that can break sound. There are podcasters who literally record while in the closet.

3. Avoid quality loss through transmission via the internet.

This takes a little bit of tech affinity, but recording your voice yourself, locally, may greatly improve your sound quality! It also has the advantage that you have a copy of what you said for yourself. Smartphones these days have apps for that, as far as I know, but here is what I recommend when using a computer:

1. Download and install Audacity
<https://www.audacityteam.org/download/>
2. Plug in your headset or microphone
3. In the menu, navigate to EDIT > PREFERENCES
 - a. Under 'Devices', 'Recording':
choose your microphone input, and 1 Channel (mono)
(don't need stereo for a single microphone, it's the same signal on both channels anyways)
 - b. Under 'Quality', 'Sampling':
Choose 44100 sampling rate (CD quality for mono, voice)
if you are recording for video, use 48000, if recording stereo, use double the sampling rate [88.2k or 96k] 32 bit sample format
(ask your host if they want different settings, this is what I use)
4. You should now be able to click the record button and speak. Adjust the microphone sensitivity so that while speaking, the volume is in the upper half of the scale, but never hits the maximum!
5. After the recording has ended, go to FILE > EXPORT AUDIO, and save as 32 bit float WAV - it's uncompressed and therefore the file will be big, but it's also the best quality.