

Absolute Beginner's Guide to Podcasting

By George Colombo, Curtis Franklin Jr.

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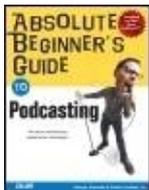
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Overview

Has anyone ever told you that you should be on radio? While radio can be hard to break into, podcasting lets you put your voice and talents to work to create your own broadcast to be distributed over the Internet to millions of people. Absolute Beginner's Guide to Podcasting is the aspiring podcaster's handbook. Authors George Colombo and Curtis Franklin will guide you through creating, editing, and syndicating your podcast, from the kinds of equipment you need to how to design a podcast that will reach the widest audience possible to legal issues faced by podcasters. You'll also learn how to:

- Design a podcast that grabs - and keeps - an audience!
- Choose the right tools - recording software, microphones, and other equipment
- Create an engaging show persona - podcasting is more than just talking!
- Craft your 'cast into a show worth listening to with post-production secrets of the pros
- Set up a web page and RSS feed that will allow listeners to subscribe to your podcast
- Effectively promote your podcast

The tips inside Absolute Beginner's Guide to Podcasting will guide you towards creating a fun and successful podcast.



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Absolute Beginner's Guide to Podcasting

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Dedication

From George:

To Sandy. You're the love of my life.

From Curt:

For Carol, my love and inspiration, and for Daniel, who has taught me more than he can imagine.

About the Authors

George Colombo has a well-deserved reputation for making technology topics accessible to general audiences. His book *Sales Force Automation* was published in 1993, and many industry observers consider it the starting point for today's multi-billion dollar customer relationship management industry. George has written for a number of business and computer industry publications, including *Computer Reseller News*, *VARBusiness*, *Selling*, and *Sales and Marketing Management*. George spent two years as the host of TEN-TV's *Spotlight Microsoft*, a weekly television show for Microsoft developers. George was also the executive producer for *Conversations with Industry Innovators*, an audio interview series he produced for IBM. He produces podcasts at UltimatePodcasting.com (the companion website for this book) and ProgressiveOrlando.com.

Curtis Franklin, Jr. has been introducing new products and technologies to readers for nearly 20 years. He was the founder of the BYTE Testing Lab for BYTE magazine, and since then has written about leading-edge technologies and their impact on individuals and organizations for publications such as *Circuit Cellar INK*, *VARBusiness*, *Solutions Integrator*, ITWorld.com, HowStuffWorks.com, *InternetWeek*, *InfoWorld*, *Network World*, *Secure Enterprise*, and *Network Computing*. As director of labs for Client/Server Labs, he directed testing and analysis of performance, capacity, and capabilities testing for a client list that included IBM, Dell, Microsoft, Intel, Shell Oil, and Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Florida. Today, Curtis directs podcasting strategy and production for TechWeb.com, contributes to security coverage as senior technology editor at *Network Computing*, and edits the Security Channel of TechWeb.com.

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From George:

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When I began this project, radio guru Walter Sabo got me started in the right direction with his unique and authoritative take on radio and podcasting. I'm also indebted to David Brown, Jonathan Brown, Matt Thompson, and Paul Figgiani for their major contributions to this book and to my understanding of podcasting and audio. Thanks to David Fugate for his efforts in finding a home for this book. I was lucky to get to know Tim Bourquin during this project and appreciated his overall support. Finally, let me give an enormous thank you to Todd Green, who has been unbelievably engaged, understanding, and supportive throughout this entire

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As the reader of this book, you are our most important critic and commentator. We value your opinion and want to know what we're doing right, what we could do better, what areas you'd like to see us publish in, and any other words of wisdom you're willing to pass our way.

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Foreword

Welcome to the world of podcasting! From this point on, sleep will seem like a distant memory, caffeine-enhanced drinks will be your crutch, and your relatives will have no idea what you are doing! My name is Rob and I host podCast411. On my podcast, I interview the industry's most successful podcasters to explore what they're doing and why they're successful. Senator John Edwards, Adam Curry, Dawn & Drew, Skepticity, and Wichita Rutherford are just a few of the podcasters I've interviewed.

George Colombo and Curt Franklin asked me to write the foreword for this book, and it's the first foreword I've ever written. When you've never done something before, it can be a bit daunting. Since you are reading this book, I'm going to assume that you are getting ready to create your first podcast...and that probably seems daunting, too. Rest assured, though, that with the help of this book, creating your first podcast will be easier than you think.

Before you start digging into this book, you should ask yourself what type of podcast you want to create. What are you passionate about? What do you want to share with your listeners? There is really no limit to what you can do with your podcast. There are podcasts about the local weather (Kansas City Weather podcast), there are podcasts on Poker (Phil Gordon's World Series of Poker Podcast), there are hundreds of podcasts that play music (see <http://music.podshow.com>), and there are podcasts just for family and friends. (One couple podcasted all the details of their wedding, up to and including the ceremony. Luckily, they cut it off before the honeymoon!) There are podcasts about Star Wars (The Force.net) and about food (Eatfeed). Some podcasts are created by teachers to help educate students or other teachers (The Tech Teachers), while others use podcasts to help fight poverty (Senator John Edwards). The point is that your podcast can be about anything but it is highly recommended it be about something you care about deeply (as is the case with all the podcasts mentioned previously). Podcasting is a lot of work make no mistake about that. But it's work you will love doing IF the subject of your podcast is something you are passionate about.

And don't let the microphone intimidate you: If you can write about a subject or even just talk about it, you can podcast on it just as successfully.

Some people in traditional media claim that podcasting is a FAD. If they mean Free Audio Download, then I certainly have to agree. However, if they mean that podcasting is a flash in the pan, then I must disagree with every fiber of my being. They thought that blogging was a fad also, and now there are more than seven million bloggers. A little less than a year ago, there were less than 20 hits when you Googled the term "podcast." Now there are almost 20 million results! This is even more amazing when you consider the fact that there are still fewer than 7,000 podcasters. I predict that the number of podcasters will increase to more than 100,000 within a couple of years and eventually will get close to the one million mark. The time to start podcasting is now, regardless of when you're reading this. Podcasting will be with us for many, many years to come.

So stop wasting time reading this foreword and dig into the meat of this book. And, oh yeah: If your podcast is good enough maybe I'll be interviewing you one of these days!

Rob, Host, podCast411

Introduction

[Welcome to Podcasting](#)

Welcome to Podcasting

Once in a while, something comes along that changes the way we think about communicating between people and groups. Desktop publishing did this in the 1980s, and the World Wide Web did it in the 1990s. Here in the first decade of the new millennium, podcasting—recorded programs distributed over the Internet and listened to on MP3 players such as the Apple iPod—will be one of these important "somethings."

In this book, we're going to teach you how to make a successful podcast happen, from planning through syndication, packaging, and marketing. We'll be taking a hands-on approach, walking you through the process of recording and editing a program, bundling it up for others to see, and then doing the web-based work necessary to send it flying out to your waiting public.

Now, after that talk about being hands-on, you'll notice that we spend some time talking about planning before we have you sit down in front of the microphone. The big reason for this is that we've found planning to be the key to reaching the end of the process with a podcast you're happy with. For most of us, keeping track of recording issues and staring at a microphone will be enough of a challenge without having to simultaneously figure out what we're going to talk about. Even when spontaneity and fun are the goals (and why shouldn't they be?), having a rough game plan will make everything much easier.

The good news for all of us is that, with a few very basic tools and techniques in hand, creating a good podcast is pretty darned easy. The odds are pretty good that you already have most of the pieces you need to get started, and coming up with the pieces to fill in the blanks should be simple and inexpensive. In this book, we'll tell you where these very basic pieces will serve you throughout your podcasting career, and where it makes sense to spend a little more money to get a much greater impact.

We're also going to talk about some of the techniques that radio personalities and recording engineers have known about for years—the basic "tricks" that will let you control how your podcast sounds and eliminate most of the "amateur" mistakes that can distract listeners from the most important aspect of your podcast: the content.

MP3 players are ultraportable, and we'll teach you how to take your podcast into the field, so your listeners can follow along as you go to events, look for wildlife, or meet interesting folks on the street. After you've recorded your podcast and edited it into the form you're happy with, we'll teach you how to package it up with the various bits of text and other information listeners will need when they want to find the file. We'll talk about how to get files onto a server, what syndication is all about, and what you'll want the website on which your podcast lives to look like.

Once you start podcasting, you'll be creating intellectual property, so we'll talk about both sides of this issue: how to protect the rights to your intellectual property while respecting the rights of others. Now, we're not giving legal advice, but we will point you at key resources and share some of the generally accepted rules on using and protecting creative works.

Most people will see podcasting as an interesting hobby, but some folks are interested in going beyond a hobby and learning how to make money in podcasting, or use podcasting for their business. We'll look at the issues you'll face as you work with advertisers, sponsors, and subscribers. Finally, we'll share a list of some popular and influential podcasts so you can go out and hear what other podcasters are doing in their recordings.

Whether you want to make a podcast that's funny or dramatic, serious or frivolous, profitable or just for fun, you're going to see that it's easy to build a podcast that introduces listeners you've never met to the sound of your voice and the force of your ideas. It's going to be fun—let's get started.

Part I: The Basics

An Overview of Podcasting

Chapter 1. An Overview of Podcasting

In this chapter

- [Podcasting Is Radio As You've Always Loved It Only Better](#)
- [How Podcasting Works](#)
- [Getting Inside the Listener Experience](#)
- [The Differences Between Radio and Podcasting](#)

Podcasting is an easy and inexpensive method for creating radio-like content that can then be distributed over the Internet. It provides you, as a content creator (that is, podcaster), with capabilities that were previously available only to professional broadcasters and required prohibitively expensive tools.

Podcasting also provides your listeners with a listening experience that has several important advantages over what they get with traditional radio.

iPods Aren't Necessary

The term podcasting is a portmanteau, or a "new word that's formed by joining two others and combining their meanings." (WordNet 2.0, © 2003 Princeton University.) The two words in this case are "iPod," referring to Apple's popular portable music player, and "broadcasting." The term is something of a misnomer, however, insofar as podcasting does not require an iPod. Any portable music player will do quite nicely or, in a pinch, a podcast can be listened to on a computer. In fact, there is a lively, ongoing debate within the podcasting community about whether or not the term is going to stick. In the absence of a good alternative, though, it looks as though it's going to be with us for the foreseeable future.

Podcasting Is Radio As You've Always Loved It Only Better

If you're old enough to drive, you probably have an intimate relationship with radio.

As is the case with most intimate relationships, this means that radio plays an important part in your everyday life. It is often the first thing you hear when you wake up in the morning, preparing you for the day ahead. You bring it along with you as you drive to work for news and companionship, and it's there with you for the ride home in the evening. It can provide a steady, reassuring presence as you go about your business during the day or it can challenge you with ideas and information that you won't hear anywhere else.

Like other intimate relationships, there are certain things about radio you love but there are also a few things that can be frustrating and annoying. Some radio personalities make you laugh and seem as comfortable and familiar as your favorite uncle. Other on-air personalities can be so infuriating that you actually find yourself screaming at the top of your lungs, eliciting curious stares from people in the car next to you at a red light.

Beyond the obvious love/hate aspects of the relationship, there's another reaction you've probably had more than once while listening to the radio: You've thought to yourself, "I can do that!" It might have happened while you were listening to your favorite taskmaster rant about the news of the day or while your local afternoon drive DJ smoothly announced artists and song titles. You listened and thought wistfully about how much fun it would be to actually be the person behind the microphone for once. Of course, unless you were ready to quit your job and pursue a career in radio, that particular dream was unlikely to ever come true. At least, that was the case before several previously unrelated technologies came together in a perfect high-tech storm and created a genuine grassroots phenomenon known as podcasting.

Podcasting's Grassroots Origins

Podcasting didn't emerge from Redmond, Washington or Silicon Valley, and its explosive growth wasn't spurred along by a multimillion dollar marketing campaign. Instead, podcasting was cobbled together from several "off-the-shelf" technologies by small group of technophiles, led by former disc jockey and MTV VJ Adam Curry and programming guru Dave Winer. The earliest known podcast began to appear in late 2004, and by early 2005 thousands of people were posting their podcasts on the Internet. Podcasts emerged that reflected almost every format that radio had ever produced during its long history, along with several formats that radio never dreamed of, if it did, never dared to broadcast!

How Podcasting Works

With podcasting, you can turn your desire to get behind a microphone into reality quickly, easily, and inexpensively. But the benefits of podcasting aren't confined to podcasters. In fact, podcasting offers some real advantages for your listeners, too.

A simple definition of podcasting is "a combination of technologies that allows users to create radio-like content with their computers and allows listeners to automatically receive that content over the Internet, then play it on their computers or portable music players."

Let's begin our look at podcasting with an overview of the entire podcasting process. Following the components of our definition, we'll take a look at the basic steps involved in creating a podcast. (Of course, we'll be reviewing the entire process in much greater detail throughout the rest of the book.) Then, we'll examine the elements of your listener's experience, comparing and contrasting it with the experience of listening to traditional radio. Finally, we'll explore the single most important element that differentiates podcasts from traditional radio broadcasts.

The Basic Steps for Creating a Podcast

Podcasters use a wide range of different tools and techniques to put their shows together. Still, there are certain basic steps involved in creating a podcast that are common among all podcasters.

Plan Your Podcast

Of all the steps involved in creating a quality podcast, this is one of the most important. (It's so important, in fact, that [Chapter 4](#) of this book, "Strategies For Planning Each Show," is devoted exclusively to strategies

and tactics for effectively planning your podcast.) Incredibly, however, this crucial step receives very little attention in most discussions of podcasting. As a result, many prospective podcasters falter in their efforts because they neglect to spend sufficient time on "show prep." The most successful podcasters make their shows seem effortless, but don't be fooled. An engaging podcast is invariably the product of careful planning and preparation.

Record Your Podcast

Of course, this is the part of the process that's the most fun! This is where you preserve your content—interviews, music, observations, instructions—on to some sort of permanent or semipermanent memory device. In most cases, that will be the hard drive of your computer. For the serious podcaster, it might be a separate digital recording unit. Or, if you're podcasting from the field (see [Chapter 9](#), "Public Syndication"), it might be a small, portable recorder. In any case, this is the heart of the podcasting process.

"Groom" Your Podcast

When all of your content is recorded, no matter how brilliant it is, it's probably not quite ready for prime time yet. This part of the podcasting process is known as post-production and it's where you edit your podcast, enhance the audio quality of the basic recording, and preserve the final podcast in a digital format that's suitable for distribution. Some very successful podcasters devote as little time as possible to this part of the process, opting instead for what they believe is a more "authentic" sound. Other equally successful podcasters groom their podcasts carefully, often devoting three or four times as much time to post-production as they do to actual recording. As we'll see later, either approach can work, depending on the end result you want to achieve. Regardless of how much post-production is right for you, there's one indispensable aspect of post-production you can't neglect. Before you're done preparing your podcast, you've got to save it in a standard digital format that's accessible to as many potential listeners as possible. Almost always, this will mean saving your podcast as an MP3 file.

Post and Distribute Your Podcast on the Internet

Needless to say, the reason you're podcasting is to share your content with people who are interested in what you have to say. (Like the tree that falls in the forest, there's a philosophical question about whether or not it's really a podcast if no one can hear it!) The vehicle for reaching your listeners, of course, is the Internet. There are two elements involved in making your podcast available to the world. The first thing you'll need to do is to find a home on the Internet for the audio file that contains your podcast. The second requirement is to distribute it to interested listeners. The way to do this is to provide them with the means to subscribe to your podcast rather than having to manually search for it each time they want to listen. This subscription mechanism is known as an *RSS feed*, and you'll be learning all about it in [Chapter 11](#), "Promoting Your Podcast." (RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication. Describing this technology as "really simple" proves that people in the computer industry have a sense of humor.)

It doesn't matter if you want to produce a podcast that's as polished as an NPR broadcast or something that feels raw, edgy, and spontaneous...or anything in between. Whatever "feel" you want to achieve, your podcast creation process will touch on each of these four basic steps.

Meet the Podfather

Adam Curry is podcasting's most visible evangelist. His podcast, known as The Daily Source Code, is consistently among the industry's most popular podcasts. The Daily Source Code is eclectic, energetic, and unpredictable, featuring Adam's entertaining observations on podcasting,

flying, music, or whatever else happens to be on his mind on a given day. A typical show will often feature Adam testing out a new piece of podcasting equipment and will include the results, whether they're good or bad. Adam sometimes provides his listeners with "soundseeing" tours of interesting locations when he's on the road. When he's at home, at "Curry Cottage" in Surrey, England, he will occasionally interview his lovely wife, Patricia Paay, creating what he refers to as a PPP (Patricia Paay Podcast). Adam's tireless efforts to promote podcasting have earned him a unique designation in the podcasting community: The Podfather!

Getting Inside the Listener Experience

Even though your focus in reading this book is on producing your own podcast, there are two important reasons why the best place to begin is to become familiar with what it's like to be a podcast consumer, or listener. The first is simply that listening to podcasts is very, very cool and we guarantee you'll enjoy it. The second, more important reason is that you cannot be a great podcaster, probably, even a very good one if you aren't intimately familiar with every facet of your listeners' experience.

As radio guru Walter Sabo notes, each medium "has its own physics." To understand this better, consider the differences between movies and television. On the surface, they appear to be very similar—they both involve images that are viewed on a screen, for example—but that similarity only exists up to a point.

Movies are good at large, panoramic shots. Think of the battlefield scenes in *Star Wars*, for example. They lose their impact dramatically when they're taken off the large screen and scaled down for television. Television, on the other hand, can create a "cozy" environment with programs such as *Oprah* in a way that's impossible to achieve in a movie theater.

In much the same way, podcasts seem very similar to radio broadcasts. After all, they're both technologies that involve the dissemination of talk, music, and other audio content. A closer look at the way these two technologies work, however, reveals some important differences. If you're going to be successful as a podcaster, it's important that you understand these differences clearly.

Listening to podcasts is, unfortunately, a little more involved than just turning on the radio. That will certainly be changing rapidly as the software environment gets better and the infrastructure evolves. Right now, though, there are three steps your listeners need to take in order to listen to your podcasts. Your first important task as a budding podcaster, then, is to become a proficient podcast consumer by undertaking those same steps yourself. The three steps are discussed in the following sections.

Download and Install "Pod-catching" Software

It's certainly possible to scour the web for podcasts that might be interesting to you. Then, when you find one, you could go to that podcast's website periodically to see if there's a new show. And, finally, when there is a new show, you could download it manually. All of that is possible, but it's quite labor intensive and very time consuming. If you had to go through that whole process every time you wanted to listen to a podcast, chances are you wouldn't end up doing very much listening.

The solution to this problem comes in the form of software that's specifically designed to help you find and download podcasts. Technically, the software packages that perform these functions are specialized RSS readers, but we're going to use the more popular designation and refer to them as "pod-catching" software. (Don't worry about the term RSS right now. We'll be exploring it in depth later on in the book.) By far, the most popular of these dedicated packages is called iPodder. (Of course, iTunes now has podcasting features,

too. More about that in [Appendix D](#).)

Point your browser to ipodder.org. From there, find the link that says Download iPodder. This link will take you to a screen (shown in [Figure 1.1](#)) that allows you to select the iPodder software designed for your computer's operating system.

Figure 1.1. iPodder.org provides "pod-catching" software for a variety of operating systems.



Currently, you can download iPodder software for Windows, Macintosh, and Linux computers as well as Pocket PC devices and SmartPhones.

Just select the appropriate folder and download the software that's right for your computer. Once you've downloaded the software, follow the onscreen instructions to install it on your computer.

Your iPodder software performs all of the tasks associated with listening to podcasts that we identified a moment ago.

Find the Podcasts You Want and Subscribe to Them

iPodder software works with a podcast directory system that's maintained by volunteers. It's organized by category, as you can see in [Figure 1.2](#). There are dozens of categories available and there are quite a few options in each category.

Figure 1.2. No matter what you're looking for, there's probably a category in the iPodder directory system that meets your needs perfectly.

[\[View full size image\]](#)



You can also get a directory listing, of the most popular podcasts or a listing of the podcasts that represent the top choices of the iPodder directory editors. While iPodder will allow you to add podcasts that you've found on the Web that aren't listed in its directory, chances are that the iPodder directory will provide all of the podcast browsing options you want.

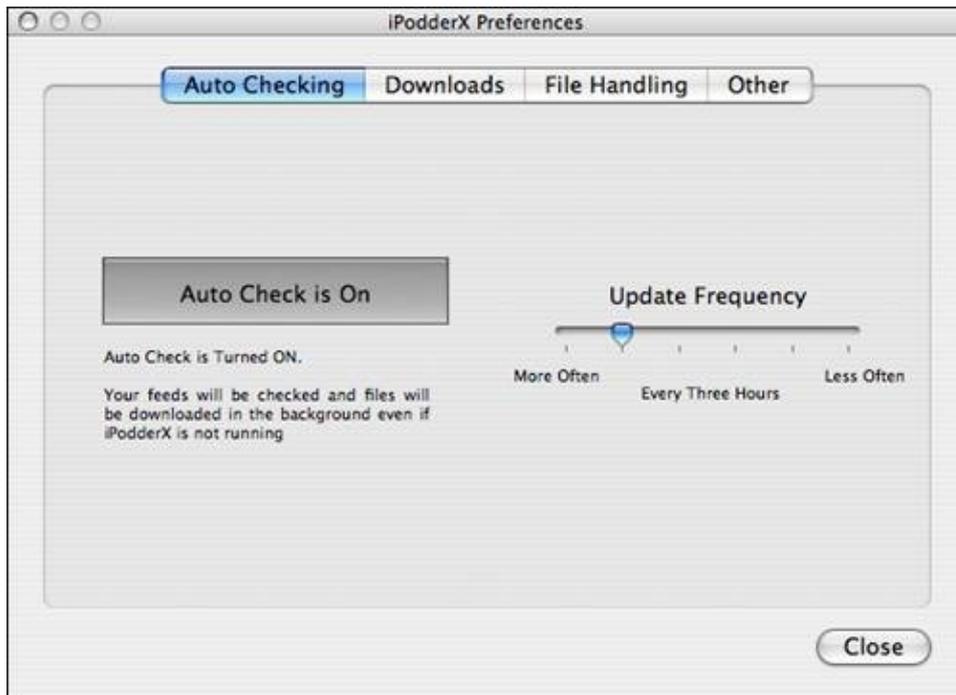
Once you've found a podcast that looks interesting, you can then subscribe to it by clicking on the plus sign at the left of the podcast's listing. In [Figure 1.1](#), the podcasts that have been added as subscriptions appear in the column on the left.

When you add a podcast subscription, you are given the option of downloading all available files, the first three files, or only the most recent file. You can also choose whether to save the file in MP3 format or, if you're using iTunes to manage your music files, you can convert each podcast to Apple's AAC file format. (You can instruct iPodder to move your files directly into iTunes if you want, or you can instruct the software to save them at a specified location on your hard drive.) Converting your downloaded podcasts to AAC creates a larger file. An important benefit of the AAC format, however, is that your podcast becomes "bookmarkable," so that if you leave your podcast before you're through listening to it, you can return to where you stopped listening rather than starting over again from the beginning of the file.

Once you've subscribed to one or more podcasts, you have a couple of options for downloading the podcast files. One option is to open iPodder and download any available new podcasts by clicking the Check Now button. The second option, however, is the one that most people select. In the software's Preferences settings, you can tell iPodder to check for and download new shows automatically, as shown in [Figure 1.3](#).

Figure 1.3. Selecting Auto Check tells iPodder to automatically find and download new shows for the podcasts you've subscribed to.

[\[View full size image\]](#)



When you tell iPodder to Auto Check, the podcasts you want will automatically be downloaded to your computer. Once the podcasts you want to hear are on your hard drive, they can also be automatically synchronized with your portable music device. This can be your portable music player (an iPod, for example), a Pocket PC or other PDA-type device, or a Smart Phone.

Listen to Your Podcasts in "The Real World"

Of course, listening to the podcasts you've subscribed to would seem to go without saying. The important part of this step for you as a podcaster, though, is the part about listening in "the real world." An enormous mistake that many potential podcasters make is to only listen to podcasts in an office or studio environment. You'll be better prepared to create terrific podcasts if you spend some time listening to podcasts in listening environments that are like the ones from which your audience is likely to listen.

Listen to your favorite podcasts in your car on the way to work or while you're out doing errands. Listen to them while you're exercising. (If you don't already exercise regularly, here's another good reason to get started!) Listen to them while you're out shopping or in line at the post office. (You can save the longer podcasts for when you're waiting in line at the post office. They'll come in handy.)

Listening to podcasts out in "the real world" will teach you some lessons that will come in handy when you begin creating your own podcasts. You'll get a feel for how background noise in the listening environment changes the listening experience. You'll also have a chance to start to start thinking about what it takes to hold your listeners' attention. Did you find your attention drifting as you listened to a particular podcast? If you did, what was happening on the show or not happening on the show when it lost you?

Following these three steps will be entertaining but it will also be enlightening. It will turn you into a connoisseur of podcasts and a real student of the medium. You should think of this process as Podcasting 101. It will provide a foundation for your podcasting success.