Centre for
Society and
Mental Health

THE CSMH PODCASTING TOOLKIT

Being interviewed for a podcast
A guide for researchers

KING'S
College
LONDON

UKRI

Economic
and Social
Research Council

Before you start

What is a podcast?

According to our good friend Wikipedia, a podcast is an *"episodic series of spoken word digital audio files that a user can download to a personal device for easy listening"*.

Podcasts are a powerful communication tool, which have maintained popularity over the last few years. No longer a tool just for media savvy producers, many academics and higher education institutions have created their own podcasts to engage wider audiences with their work.

What are the benefits of being interviewed for a podcast?

Not only can you publicise your research to a wider audience, but you can also:

- Practice public speaking

- Talk about research in a condensed and accessible way

- Engage with different audiences

- Improve confidence

- Monitor and evaluate the impact of public engagement

Most importantly, a podcast can increase the visibility of King's research and facilitate engagement and collaboration between our academics and wider society.

So what is this toolkit all about?

This is one of three guides which have been designed to show social science researchers* based at King's College London, at any level, how they can use podcasts to disseminate their work.

One example we will keep returning to is [Our Sick Society](), a mental health podcast by the [ESRC Centre for Society and Mental Health](). This podcast was funded by the King's Impact Acceleration Account, and was co-created by:

- a senior academic with experience of podcasting and radio broadcasting

- two early career researchers from the Centre

- an expert by experience

- a professional podcast producer

- the Centre's professional services team

The podcast project aimed to:

- Produce content shaped by experts by experience, hearing their voices as presenters and as well as guests

- Build the capacity of team members to communicate and engage stakeholders in research via podcasting

- Share expertise developed throughout the project to the wider King's community

This is one of three guides which have been written to address our final aim - the publication of a comprehensive toolkit to share expertise, tips and tricks for researchers interested in podcasting. The other guides cover:

- Creating a social science podcast

- Leading a guest podcast episode

* academics in other fields may also find this toolkit helpful, but we use examples of content, stakeholders and topics drawn from social science research.

Contents

Click the images to be taken to each section.
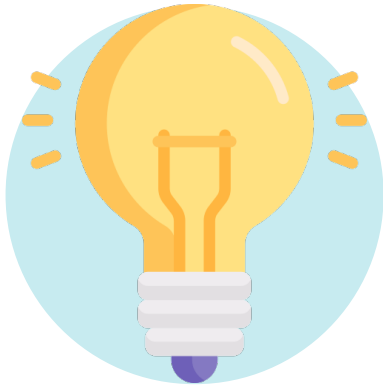
Section 1: Before you say yes

While it is tempting to say yes to every opportunity to publicise your work, the reality is that there is often little return for your time and efforts. Before saying yes to be interviewed, you should consider the following:

Setting personal objectives

Basically, what is in it for you? Could you:

- Find a new audience for a particular research paper or other output?

- Make new contacts or networks through participation? Either with the production team, other guests or listeners.

- Demonstrate your expertise or specialism in a particular area? Great for the CV!

- Improve your confidence in public speaking, engagement and communication?

Outline a brief list of personal objectives, and make sure they are **SMART**!

- **Specific**: includes a clear and narrow description of your objective

- **Measurable**: outlines metrics to track and evaluate success

- **Achievable**: realistic and motivating, not overly ambitious and off-putting

- **Relevant**: contributes to your wider project goals and purpose

- **Time-bound**: uses deadlines and milestones for reflection and learning

Complete **Task A** on p13 to outline your personal SMART objectives

What to know about the podcast

It is important to find out more about the podcast before you agree to take part:

- **The theme** – what topics do they cover and why?

- **Their target audience** – who listens?

- **Their brand** – what do they represent? What is their tone and approach?

- **Their format** - do they have a set format for episodes?

- **Their content** - what type of content do they include?

- **Key contributors** – what type of guests do they have?

- **Reach** – how many people listen and how much engagement do they receive?

Complete **Task B** on p14 to log information about the podcast

What will you have to do?

Find out how much work will actually be involved in being a episode. Find out:

- How much time is needed for recording

- When and where the recording will take place

- How much control you have of what is included in the final episode

- If there a particular piece of research, area of expertise, or personal experience they want you to comment or reflect on

- How much support for promotion you need to give

Time is also precious in other ways - you can always charge a participation fee!

Once you have this information, reflect on your personal objectives and decide whether participating will be a good use of your time.

Section 2: How to prepare

There are many things to consider when preparing for an interview. Let's go through them one by one.

Discuss and confirm consent

Before you record, make sure that you fully understand what you are consenting to. While your recording will be used in the podcast episode, clips may also be used in marketing and communication materials. Request information or a consent form and ask someone from the podcast to walk you through it. Always file and keep any correspondence which refers to consent, as you may change your mind about taking part before, during, or after the interview.

Agree a location

If you are recording in person, make sure that the location is both practical and comfortable. It may sound obvious but open plan offices, noisy cafés, or busy outside areas are not ideal! If some locations do not feel appropriate – for example meeting near a hospital setting, in your workspace, or in your home, make sure the team are aware of this and work together to find somewhere that works for everyone.

If you are recording remotely, make sure you select a platform that you are comfortable using. While the podcast team will usually take care of technical matters, you will need to select a device and equipment carefully. Always use a microphone for the recording, never the laptop speaker, as the audio quality will be much higher. Ask the team to arrange a test run to make sure your equipment and connection is up to scratch.

Who is my interviewer?

Once you have carried out the broader research on the podcast, you will need to spend a bit more time looking into the interviewer themselves. It is useful to find out information on the following:

• What is their background? Are they an academic or a journalist or neither?

• What is their style? Are they a serious or casual interviewer? Do they ask prepared questions or is it conversational?

• Are they inquisitive or argumentative? Do they tend to listen actively, or do they interrupt?

What is the story?

Think about the reason why you have been approached for interview. It may be that you are running an event, or that your area of research is being highlighted. Either way, you will be forming one part of the wider story that the interviewer is trying to cover.

- Is there a theme to the episode? For example, if you are being interviewed about your recent research on the mental health of young people, is the focus on your methodology, the wider topic of youth mental health, or a feature of your study or activity (for example, co-production)?

- Is anyone else being interviewed? Who are they and what is their background?

- Have there been any recent major news stories that are related? Are you contributing to current opinion on the matter or is this a standalone piece?

What do I want to say?

You may want to request questions ahead of time, but this runs the risk of sounding scripted or unnatural in the recording. If the interviewer asks a question in a different way, you may become flustered or sound strange if your prepared answer isn't quite right. Instead, ask for a broad list of topics they would like you to cover. Prepare key messages to deliver and make notes about topics which are likely to be asked:

- Tailor messages according to the station, show and audience

- Write them clearly for use as reference during the interview

- Keep them brief – you don't want to sound like you're reading a script

- Think about possible questions they could ask in response to your answers, prepare for unexpected follow-ups or rebuttals

Section 3: On the day

Dress appropriately
This may seem strange for an audio recording! Wear something comfortable and breathable which won't distract you during the interview. Avoid wearing jewellery or items that will create noise.

Some podcasts video record their interviews, so make sure you're neat and tidy and avoid loud patterns or colours.

Plan your journey
Get there on time! Give yourself enough time to relax before the recording starts. If recording remotely, make sure the space is neat and tidy, and distractions are limited.

Drop the jargon
During the recording, keep the language basic and brief. Avoid technical terms and acronyms that the audience (and the interviewer) may not understand.

Listen
Listen carefully to what the interviewer is asking and how they ask it. They may want you to answer a question in a certain way, which isn't always obvious.

Don't rush to answer
Podcasts are edited, and any pauses in audio are easily removed in post-production. If you need some time to think about an answer, that's okay! But do give the host a heads-up that you may take some time before you respond.

You can say that you don't know!

If they ask a question you cannot answer, it's okay to say that you don't know! Maybe the reason why you don't know is relevant, but don't pretend to know an area in case you get asked to elaborate.

Use sound bites

Try not to give overly long answers. Interviews can get heavily edited, and sound bites are often used to promote the episode on various platforms. Be conscious that some things you say may be used without context. If you're worried that this may happen, you can ask them not to use what you just said, and re-record it in a different way.

Don't forget your personality

Think about podcasts you have enjoyed in the past. Experts who are personable and relaxed often make the most engaging guests. Keep the audience in mind! Use anecdotes or case studies to illustrate topics which you are discussing, particularly those which are complex or technical.

Keep to time

Some interviews can be very long, while others just require brief commentary on topics or news stories. Remember your key messages and stay on topic. Try not to go off-track or talk for too long, unless prompted by the host!

Stay focused

Even when the interview ends, equipment may still be recording. Be professional and don't say anything you don't want included in the final cut!

Complete **Task E** on p17 to prepare for a pretend podcast interview

Section 4: After the interview

Clarify next steps
Make sure you know:

- How long you have to request changes or omissions

- When the episode is due to be released

- How the episode will be promoted – websites, platforms, social media accounts - and what you can send to support this

- Whether they need any social media account information for tagging in promotions

Say thank you!
Maintaining positive relationships with podcast teams can be valuable in the future. If deserved, be courteous and follow-up with a thank you email or social media post.

Where to seek support
If you feel as though you need support, ask if the team can direct you to relevant services or contacts. This is particularly important if you have been asked to share personal information or experiences outside of your profession.

Listen back
Although some may find this painful, it is helpful to listen back to the episode! Take notes about your speaking style, responses and what you would say differently next time. You could ask the host for feedback. Also make a note of how the episode was edited, and what was included and excluded. This will be helpful in future interviews.

Review your objectives
Finally, revisit and review the objectives you set for this activity. Did you meet them? Do you have any tangible outputs or evidence of success? Is there something more you can do to increase the impact of participation? Make sure you keep a note of your interview and include in your CV, King's page or other research profiles!

A: Set your SMART objectives

Complete the below activity to identify SMART objectives for your interview.

SPECIFIC - Include an answer to "who, what, when, where or why".	
MEASURABLE How will you determine success? Use metrics and or deadlines.	
ACHIEVABLE How will you make this happen? What skills/support will you need?	
RELEVANT How does this objective contribute to your career and professional development goals?	
TIME-BOUND When will this objective be achieved? What are your deadlines?	

B: Podcast information

Pick a podcast, perhaps one you would like to be interviewed on, and complete the table below

Theme – what topics do they cover and why?	
Target audience – who listens?	
Brand – what do they represent? What is their tone and approach?	
Format and content - what format is used and what type of content is included in episodes?	
Key contributors – what type of guests do they have?	
Reach – how many people listen and how much audience engagement do they receive?	

C: Podcast and interviewer styles

Listen to the following interviews carried out by two different hosts:

1. Green space and mental health from The Mental Health Foundation: https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/podcasts-and-videos/how-sleep-and-green-space-can-help-your-mental-health

2. An interview with Youth Mental Health Ambassador to the government, Dr Alex George from The Happy Place podcast https://open.spotify.com/episode/01xwhPn1Zh5Gtlyvg0Yggb

See if you can answer the following questions:

- What is the theme of the show?

- Who is the target audience for the podcast?

- Why do you think guests were invited to take part?

- Why do you think the guests agreed to participate?

- How did the host engage with the guest?

- What are the three key messages being communicated in the episode?

- What did you like about the episode?

- What didn't you like?

- Did anything surprise you?

D: Podcast guest reflections

Listen to this show about Covid-19 and mental health from BBC Sounds:

https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/w3ct0sfh

Thinking about the language and terms used by guests, complete the questions below.

- Was the language used by the guests appropriate for the target audience?

- Who did you find most interesting and/or engaging? Why do you think that was?

- Who did you find least interesting and/or engaging? Why do you think that was?

- Was anything confusing or not adequately explained?

- What complementary information would have been useful for the listener?

- How do you think the audience are likely to engage with the podcast team?

- What can you learn about being a guest from this episode?

E: Preparing for an interview

Your area of research is in the spotlight after a local MP criticised public spending in a TV interview. In response, the Our Sick Society podcast has invited you to take part in an episode, which will include the MP and a member of public from their constiuency. Although you are aware that the MP is calling for spending cuts to your research, you are not sure what the constiuency member stance is on the topic.

You will be recorded individually, and have been given a 10 minute slot in the episode.

- What information will you request from the production team?

- What are your objectives for taking part?

- What are your key messages?

- How might you follow-up on discussion after the episode?

Ask a friend (or pre-record yourself!) to interview you, ensuring that both the questions and your responses remain within a 10 minute window.

The Our Sick Society Team

This guide was developed by:

- [Verity Buckley](#) – Project lead

- [Dr Sally Marlow](#) – Principal Investigator

- [Buddy Peace](#) – Producer

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With support from the wider project team:

- [Dr Charlotte Woodhead](#) – Episode lead

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- Lavinia Black – Episode lead

- [Katie Lowis](#) – Production Support

Feedback

We hope you found this guide and the wider toolkit useful! If you would like to provide feedback or make content suggestions, please email csmh@kcl.ac.uk.
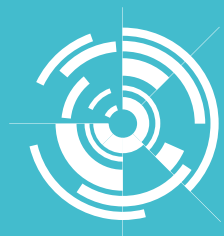
Further support

Email csmh@kcl.ac.uk to join the King's Podcast Producers Teams group.

Contact kern@kcl.ac.uk for more information about the King's Engaged Researcher Network.

[Visit the KERN website for other channels of support available across King's](#)

More in the series

- Creating a social science podcast

- Developing a guest podcast episode

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