

# Sound Stories: Podcasting, Broadcasting, and the Public Radio

“When two millennials get divorced, who gets the podcast?” Jokes like this one—a tongue-in-cheek play on the stereotype that the only thing millennials love as much as avocado toast is making and listening to podcasts—make the rounds on social media, racking up likes and shares. But are podcasts and stories told with sound really the exclusively millennial/Gen Z fare they are often pegged as?

This course will establish and investigate the long history of stories told and circulated through sound, from the origins of the audio drama on public radio (like Orson Welles’ infamous *War of the Worlds* broadcast and *The Little Orphan Annie Radio Show*) to the contemporary boom in podcasting (in investigative journalism podcasts like *This American Life* and *Serial*, and in narrative podcasts like *Welcome to Nightvale*). This deep dive into stories told with sound will also focus on podcasting as social justice and activism (in *1619* and in *Native America Calling*), audio dramas as a form of adaptation (the NPR *Star Wars* radio drama), and the visualization of podcasts and radio in other media (like Jean Shepherd’s radio work leading into *A Christmas Story*, and Duncan Trussel’s “spacecast” animation, *The Midnight Gospel*.)

Throughout the course, students will be responsible for analyzing a regular news media podcast (like NPR’s *On Point: Week in News* or The New York Times’ *The Daily*) and for composing a research paper on sound-related media. Students will also have the opportunity to create their own podcast and participate in workshops on operating audio-editing software like *Audacity*. Class-wide interviews with podcast hosts and with an Advertising Operations Specialist at FiscalNote will give students a taste of the larger media and communications world and the position of sound stories within it.

The public, free, and accessible nature of the radio and of podcasts will also be a point of focus for the course. In conjunction with our focus on the public, accessibility, and the politics and cultural power of free media, all readings, listenings, and media, etc. will be free of cost: this is a \$0 course.

# ASSIGNMENTS

News in Sound Log (x10)	175 x 10 = 1750 words	200 points
Interview Reflection	250 words	25 points
Podcast & Reflective Essay 1	Project + 500 words	175 points
Popular Media Podcasting Piece	750 words	175 points
Analytical Essay	1500 words	200 points
Cumulative Sound Log	500 words	25 points
Podcast & Reflective Essay 2	Project + 750 words	200 points
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>/ 6000 words</b>	<b>/ 1000 points</b>

## News in Sound Log:

Each week, you will be responsible for listening to a weekly or recurring news podcast and composing a brief reflection in response to it. For our first week, we will all be listening to NPR’s “Week in News” program, but you are free to elect any podcast you wish after that. I do stipulate, however, that you must cover at least three different news media podcasts throughout the semester (not including NPR’S “Week in News” program).

Points to consider as you reflect:

- What is the ideological background of the folks presenting the podcast? How does it shape their presentation of the topics they are discussing?
- What kind of demographic does the podcast seem to have? How is that evident in the editing, mood, tone, delivery, and content of the news podcast?
- What kind of events does the podcast consider newsworthy? And what does answering this question tell us about the kind of news media outlet that it is?
- What did you learn from this news media podcast? What kinds of thoughts does consuming it conjure up within you?

## Interview Reflection:

Compose a 250-word reflection on *one* our in-class Zoom interviews (with either Blast Points Podcast, Joseph Giglio & Allyson Blinkhorn, or Kevin Rogers).

## Podcast & Reflective Essay 1:

Using the skills you’ve obtained in our free audio editing software workshops, from your consumption of varying sound stories, and from reading articles in this course about sound, you will create a podcast episode (of at least ten minutes), and you will write a corresponding reflection paper

on the goals of your podcast and how you went about achieving them. Whether your podcast is an informative show, a documentary, a fictional audio drama, or any other genre you see fit is up to you: what is important is that you establish goals with your tinkering and you can clearly outline how you've taken steps in your recording/editing process to meet those goals.

### **Podcast & Reflective Essay 2:**

Now that you've done a great deal of thinking about, writing on, and tinkering in sound stories, you're prepared to create a more ambitious project. Create a 15-20 minute podcast episode that, like the previous podcasting assignment, is open-ended in theme/topic/genre. Again: whether your podcast is an informative show, a documentary, a fictional audio drama, or any other genre you see fit is up to you: what is important is that you establish goals with your tinkering and you can clearly outline how you've taken steps in your recording/editing process to meet those goals.

In your subsequent reflective essay, it may be helpful to reflect on how your workflow has changed and how your sense of what podcasting is and how it can function have evolved from the previous project.

### **Analytical Essay:**

Write a 1500-word essay where you analyze a sound story (feel free to run it by me if you are not sure what qualifies) and compose an argument about the social, cultural, political, or formal work that this sound story is performing. Some elements to consider:

- How does the sound story use the form of its delivery: (digital/analog interface, acting, narration, volume, pitch, panning, diegetic and non-diegetic sounds, music, mixing and mastering, etc.) to accomplish what it sets out to do?
- Why does it matter that this is a story that is told through sound, and not any other medium? What does it mean for sound that this story is best told in sound, and sound alone?
- What ideologies or causes might the sound story advance through its telling? How does it speak to those specific causes?
- What insights into the moment/place the sound story was crafted does the sound story offer us? Why are these insights something we should be writing about?

Your essay will include at least five scholarly sources that you will put into conversation with one another. You may make use of as many "non-scholarly" sources as you see fit to build the argument that you want to build, but these sources will not count toward the five-source obligation.

### **Popular Media Podcasting Piece**

Compose a short-to-moderate length think piece that is tailored to the specifications of the submissions page of a popular news/entertainment media site. [Here](#) is a good example. You do not actually need to submit the piece for consideration...but nothing is stopping you!

### **Cumulative Sound Log:**

Now that you've spent an entire semester listening to the news from varying media sources, reflect on how the experience has changed, altered, cemented, or otherwise affected your thinking.

# SCHEDULE

Date/Week	Topic	Assignments Due	Listen/View/Read
<i>Introduction to Sound</i>			
<b>WEEK 1</b>			
Jan 11	<i>Introductions</i>		--
Jan 13	<i>The History of Radio</i>		“ <a href="#">Radio Activity: The 100th Anniversary of Public Broadcasting</a> ,” Marina Koestler Ruben
Jan 15	<i>Sound Studies</i>		“The Disruptive Nature of Listening: Today, Yesterday, Tomorrow,” by Hildegard Westerkamp (Canvas)
<b>WEEK 2</b>			
Jan 18	<i>Audacity Workshop, #1</i>		“ <a href="#">Audacity Editing for Beginners: 16 Tips in 9 Minutes</a> ”
Jan 20	<i>Audacity Workshop, #2</i>		“ <a href="#">How to Mix and Master in Audacity in 2020</a> ”
Jan 22	<i>Workshop: News in Sound Logs</i>	News in Sound Log #1 on NPR	<a href="#">This Week's "NPR'S This Week in News"</a>
<i>Sound Stories: A History</i>			
<b>WEEK 3</b>			
Jan 25	<i>Exploring the Radio Drama</i>		“ <a href="#">Radio Drama: Then and Now</a> ,” by Carina Pereira
Jan 27	<i>The Classic “War of the Worlds Story”</i>		<a href="#">War of the Worlds</a> , Orson Welles
Jan 29	<i>Commercialism &amp; Good Ol’ Family Values on the Radio</i>	News in Sound Log #2	<a href="#">Classic Radio Theater (with Little Orphan Annie) (1936)</a>
<b>WEEK 4</b>			
Feb 1	<i>Horror on Air, 1</i>		<a href="#">Dark Fantasy</a> Audio Drama (1941) (01, 03, 04)

Feb 3	<i>Horror on Air, 2</i>		<i>The Shadow</i> , " <a href="#">The Message from the Hill</a> ,"
Feb 5	<i>Adventure on Air</i>	1). News in Sound Log # 3 2). <b>Podcast &amp; Reflective Essay 1</b>	<i>The Lone Ranger</i> , " <a href="#">The Osage Bank Robbery</a> ," and " <a href="#">Crooked Banker and Sheriff</a> "
<b>WEEK 5</b>			
Feb 8	<i>Suspense on Air, 1</i>		" <a href="#">Sorry Wrong Number</a> ," Agnes Moorehead
Feb 10	<i>Suspense on Air, 2</i>		" <a href="#">Johnny Got His Gun</a> ," James Cagney
Feb 12	<i>Suspense on Air, 3</i>	News in Sound Log #4	<i>Philo Vance</i> , " <a href="#">Star Studded Murder Case</a> ," " <a href="#">Vanilla Murder Case</a> "
<i>The Contemporary Podcast</i>			
<b>WEEK 6</b>			
Feb 15	<i>Nonfiction Podcast Stories 1</i>		<a href="#">Serial, #1-3</a>
Feb 17	<i>Nonfiction Podcast Stories, 2</i>		<a href="#">This American Life</a> , " <a href="#">Cars</a> "
Feb 19	<i>The Contemporary Audio Drama</i>	News in Sound Log #5	<a href="#">Welcome to Nightvale</a> , <a href="#">Episodes #1-4</a>
<b>WEEK 7</b>			
Mar 1	<i>Activism and Podcasting, 1</i>		1). <a href="#">1619, Episode 1: The Fight for a True Democracy</a> 2). Erik Steinskog, "Afrofuturism and Black Sound Studies" (Canvas)
Mar 3	<i>Activism and Podcasting, 2</i>		<a href="#">Native America Calling</a> , " <a href="#">Canada's Lobster War</a> "
Mar 5	<i>Sharing Submissions</i>	1). News in Sound Log #6 2). <b>Popular Media Podcasting Piece</b>	--
<b>WEEK 8</b>			
Mar 8	<i>Audio Dramas &amp; Elsewheres, 1</i>		<a href="#">Liberty</a> , Episodes #1, 2, 3
Mar 10	<i>Audio Dramas &amp; Elsewheres, 2</i>		<a href="#">Liberty</a> , Episodes #4, 5
Mar 12	<i>Audio Drama as Ambience, 1</i>	News in Sound Log #7	<a href="#">Alice Isn't Dead, # 1-4</a>
<b>WEEK 9</b>			
Mar 15	<i>Audio Drama as Ambience, 2</i>		"The Notes of Human Music," Seán Street (Canvas)

			<a href="#">Alice Isn't Dead, # 5-7</a>
Mar 17	<i>Audio Drama as Ambience, 3</i>		<a href="#">Alice Isn't Dead, # 8-10</a>
Mar 19	<i>Breaking into the Scene: A Zoom interview with Joseph Giglio &amp; Allyson Blinkhorn (and myself)</i>		<a href="#">Move Away, Episode 1: "Facemask"</a>
<i>Sound Stories &amp; Other Media</i>			
<b>WEEK 10</b>			
Mar 29	<i>Introduction to Adaptation</i>		<a href="#">The Midnight Gospel, Episode 1</a> (on Netflix w/free trial)
Mar 31	<i>Radio Storytelling &amp; A Christmas Story</i>		<a href="#">"WOR Radio Job at Piano Factory."</a> Jean Shepherd
Apr 2	<i>Preparing for Final Podcast</i>	1). News in Sound Log #8 2). <b>Analytical Essay</b>	--
<b>WEEK 11</b>			
Apr 5	<i>Star Wars...on air?</i>		The NPR <i>Star Wars</i> radio drama
Apr 7	<i>The Analytical Podcast</i>		<a href="#">Blast Points Episode 188 – The Star Wars Radio Dramas</a>
Apr 9	<i>Blast Points Podcast Zoom Interview</i>	1). News in Sound Log #9 2). Prep questions for Blast Points Podcast Interview	( <i>No reading, interviewing Blast Points</i> )
<i>Signing Off</i>			
<b>WEEK 12</b>			
Apr 12			
Apr 14	<i>Zoom interview with Kevin Rogers of Fiscal Note</i>	Prepare Interview Questions	<a href="#">"Podcast Promotion: 13 Marketing Tactics To Get More Podcast Listeners,"</a> Ross Winn
Apr 16	<i>Open Work on Final Project</i>	News in Sound Log #10	--
<b>WEEK 13</b>			
Apr 19	<i>Peer Review</i>	Bring in semi-completed draft of submission.	--

Apr 21	<i>Conclusion</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Podcast &amp; Reflective Essay 2</b></li><li>• <b>Cumulative Sound Log</b></li></ul>	--
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