

Podcasts: an Introduction

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What are podcasts?

What do podcasts offer?

Accessing podcasts

Managing podcasts –
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What are podcasts?

Podcasts are a new form of digital media that exist in episodic format and can be updated automatically. The word **podcast** comes from “iPod” (a popular portable listening device) and the word “broadcast.” Podcasts are typically series of episodes published on a schedule. Although podcasts can be in either audio or video form, the **audio** form is more common. Podcasts can be published and made available by anyone who is capable of recording and disseminating them. Podcasts are usually free to listen to, subscribe to, and download. Podcasts are managed by **aggregators** (more on that below) that offer the option to subscribe to series and automatically create a feed of episodes and downloads; however, podcasts do not require subscription. Podcasts can be **downloaded** to computers or mobile devices, or can be **streamed** via the internet.

What do podcasts offer?

Similar to television programs, podcast programs vary in genre, format and content. Podcasts can be **news or culture programs** that have been aired live on the **radio** and then disseminated in digital format, such as the shows on your local NPR station. Podcasts can be **pre-recorded shows** that have been written and directed, such as America’s Test Kitchen. Sometimes these podcasts are produced by radio stations or networks and aired as part of the regular schedule, such as WBEZ’s human interest podcast This American Life and recent investigative hit Serial. Others might be produced by a media outlet or individual(s) and then later picked up by a radio station or network, such as the Slate Group’s politics and culture podcasts or the comedy podcast WTF with Marc Maron. Still others may only be available via their websites, computer programs and mobile apps, such as the dramatized radio-show style podcast Welcome to Night Vale. **In all cases, whether aired on the radio or not, a podcast is available for streaming or download online.**

Accessing podcasts

Podcasts can be accessed through several points of entry. The simplest way to access some podcasts is through their website, where episodes can be streamed using an internet browser. Podcasts can also be streamed or downloaded through podcast aggregators for either computers or mobile apps. Once downloaded through a program or app, podcasts are then available for **offline listening** and can be accessed at any time. A podcast aggregator is the best way to manage your subscriptions to multiple podcasts. Browsing and finding new podcasts is also possible through a program or app which features popular podcasts and highlights podcasts in categories of interest.

Managing podcasts – using aggregators

Aggregators aid in **subscribing** to podcast series, **downloading** episodes (either automatically or manually), **keeping track** of new or finished episodes, and **discovering** new podcasts.

Different devices offer different podcast aggregators. Some of the most common include:

- Computers:
 - **iTunes** (available for both Mac and Windows).
- Mobile devices (smartphones and tablets)
 - Apple: iTunes “**Podcasts**”; Stitcher Radio for Podcasts
 - Android: **Stitcher**

Managing podcasts, continued

The first step after downloading the podcast aggregator program or app is to **create an account** (sign in to iTunes with your Apple ID if you are already an Apple user). Then you can **browse or search** for podcasts. “Save” a podcast series to your account by **subscribing** to it, for easy access to new episodes each time you open the program. You may **stream** episodes from the aggregator or **download** episodes to listen to later. It’s highly recommended to stream or download over a **wireless connection** instead of using your mobile data (mobile data is often limited and slower in speed). You may opt for **automatic download** of new episodes, or download them **manually**. Once an episode is finished downloading it can be listened to at **any time**, requiring no internet connection. For more specific options regarding downloading, find the **Settings** section within the app or program. This may offer options like which episodes to download (all, only new, etc.) and which episodes to delete (played) and how many episodes to keep (# of recent episodes or episodes within a given time frame).

Management tasks:

- Find: browse or search
- Add: subscribe
- Listen: play via streaming or download
- Download: make available for offline listening and add to queue
- Share: send podcast recommendations to friends directly or on social media

References and tutorials

<http://www.howtopodcasttutorial.com/what-is-a-podcast.htm>

<https://www.policygenius.com/blog/listen-podcasts/>

<http://serialpodcast.org/how-to-listen>

Apple iTunes and Podcasts app: <https://www.apple.com/itunes/podcasts/fanfaq.html>

Stitcher app: <http://www.stitcher.com/faqs>

Notes: