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# *How Creating a Podcast Helped Me Understand an Audience, Communication, and the Medium of a Message in a Whole New Way*

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*Produced in Joel Schneier's Spring 2019 ENC 1101*

There are many ways to communicate, for example, through written text, spoken words, gestures, facial expressions, and other diverse ways. With the innovation of technology, we as a society have created new ways to communicate that expand the horizons of the individuals we are able to reach. With creations like YouTube and audio blogging, better known as podcasting, “the power to communicate” is in “the hands of individuals” (Geoghegan and Klass 2). In focusing specifically on podcasting, this means that individuals have the power to create anything they want ranging from any topic they desire. The different options and types of podcasts are infinite within their own genres. Different genres include comedy, business, sports, education, news and politics, and more. Within each genre there are endless, unique ways one can go about creating a podcast and communicating it well. As stated in *Podcast Solutions: The Complete Guide to Podcasting* by Michael Geoghegan and Dan Klass, “Whatever interests people have, there is a place for them in podcasting. A stage has been erected on which the “common man” (or woman, for that matter) can stand tall and be heard: The Internet. The price of admission is some basic equipment and a desire to communicate—that’s all” (Geoghegan and Klass 2). In saying that each podcast is uniquely different from one another, there is no correct way to communicate their message.

In *Writing About Writing: A College Reader*, Elizabeth Wardle and Doug Downs state and explain an important threshold concept that accurately answers whether there is a correct way to communicate one’s message when going about any type of text or means of communication; that “Writing helps people make meaning and get things done, but there are always constraints” (Wardle and Downs 10). In the sense of podcasting, this means that the information in a podcast being communicated helps relay information to others, make meaning, and accomplish tasks. But in each scenario, there are still set rules in which you should go about making a podcast specific to a genre. For example, when making a sports podcast there are specific elements that these types of podcasts adapt to that make them easy to recognize by others. Some of these elements would be interviews with players from a specific team, a recap on a recent game, or a debate about the quality of a player’s performance. Although many sports podcasts may differ from one another in the sense of what

contextual information is being spoken about, they all talk about sports and have similar elements of what makes up a sports podcast and a podcast in general (i.e. an introduction and outro, etc.). If a podcast differs too much from what is expected from a typical podcast in its specific genre, it can be difficult for listeners to effectively distinguish what they are listening to. Wardle and Downs go on to state, “[W]hy particular writing does (or does not) work depends on who the people are, where they come from, what their goals are, what technologies they have available to them, and the kinds of texts (genres) they are writing” (Wardle and Downs 11). This explains the importance of effectively addressing one’s rhetorical situation in relation to the type of communication you are doing. It will help in understanding how to successfully communicate to your audience or discourse community and determine how successful you will be at doing so. When understanding the rhetorical situation of the text you are creating, written or not, it is helpful to understand that it is often “contingent, meaning that its shape depends on the situation, exigence, and motivations that call it into being, and that it must be unique to its situation, not purely determined by pre-existing, universal rules” (Downs 480). This means that we must consider the audience, the author(s), exigence, context, genre, and technology when communicating effectively.

In order to explore how the rhetorical situation of a text can satisfy the needs of an audience or community effectively, especially in non-traditional types of texts and communications like podcasts, I created my own short example of a podcast geared towards a specific discourse community, which can be found here: (<https://soundcloud.com/ann-forgione/ae-podcast-for-stylus/s-01RIQ>). By creating my own podcast, I was able to dissect the composition of a text to see how each part can be used to understand and effectively reach the community intended for consuming the content. In the creation process, I had to fully design the purpose behind my podcast for being in existence. Creating the podcast took in measures of breaking up the idea into categories that I would need to fulfill, such as what is the message I want to send, who will be the intended audience, what is the appropriate tone of the work to come across the audience, and what are the communication channels or media I can use to send my message through to get to my audience efficiently. After creating a purpose and understanding how each piece of the podcast would work, I created a loosely constructed script similar to a rough draft you would write before composing a final essay. Creating a script allowed me to see in what ways I could use my deeper understanding of discourse communities from picking apart each part involved in the podcast to actively reaching them through communication. After the recording, editing, and publishing of my podcast I then examined my own rhetorical situation in relation to how effective it was towards my audience. By creating my own podcast and examining the parts of it I hoped to gain a better understanding of how creating a message in any aspect can be molded to accurately reach an audience and what I can do as the sender of the message to better understand the importance of an audience.

In making my podcast, I decided to create it specifically to the genre of a news and/or talk show podcast that focuses on various current events. On the specific example episode of my podcast, the *A&E Podcast Show*, my sister and I discuss the recent college admissions scandal where more than fifty wealthy individuals were involved in a scheme that allowed cheating on standardized tests and bribing college coaches and school officials to accept students as athletes even though the student had never played the sport. The scheme was directed by William Rick Singer, CEO of a college admissions prep company called The Key, and involved many well-known celebrities like Lori Loughlin and Felicity Huffman. In this episode we give our opinions and perspectives on this current

event and discuss ways in which we think universities can prevent similar situations from happening again.

When setting up the *A&E Podcast Show*, I had to keep in mind the rhetorical situation and how I could use it to create an effective and successful podcast for my audience and myself. Considering the discourse community that is the intended audience for my podcast, I decided the community of listeners who would most likely listen to the podcast would be individuals who want to learn about things going on in the world, who value listening to multiple opinions or perspectives on a variety of subjects, current events, or topics, and who are in the college-aged (or similar in age) crowd. The discourse community would share similar values of listening and appreciating perspectives that are unbiased and reliable. My podcast signals its intent for this audience and needs for this discourse community in that it involves two individuals giving two different perspectives on a current event and who are similar in age (19 and 24), which can apply to younger or older age groups. A specific example from my podcast that shows its intent is in the introduction section where we state that we are two sisters in two different states giving two perspectives on current events big, small, and in between. This shows we are unbiased and dedicated to covering a variety of topics in future podcasts.

In order to understand my role as the author of the podcast I had to make sure there was an accurate representation of myself as the main rhetor that would align with the audience. I wanted the podcast to feel like a relatable conversation between a friend or family member about things going on in the world. In order to do this, I included my sister as my co-host to give an atmosphere that is less formal as opposed to a normal news site or channel that is more formal, primarily based on facts rather than opinions, and unrelatable among younger individuals. By emulating a normal discussion between a friend or family member I appeal to the ethos of my younger audience because we are of a similar age and background. This also contributes to the values of showing a real and honest point of view. In an appeal to logos to persuade the community to see my sister and I as an accurate source, we include information about the college admissions scandal when we state facts about what exactly happened, who was involved, and at which colleges and universities it happened. Including factual information gives us a basis on which we can discuss and give our opinions and gives our audience a good overview or general knowledge of what happened to help them better understand the discussion. To persuade our audience to agree with our opinions we bring in an appeal to pathos, the audience's emotions. I appeal to pathos by noting that I myself am a college student who went through the admissions process as well as my sister. The fact that the current event focuses on college admissions allows us to feel strongly towards this issue because we and many other people go through this process when applying to colleges. Seeing wealthy individuals cheat their way into college leads others to feel upset and angry, which gives us this emotional appeal because we ourselves had to deal with applying to colleges. We can relate to feeling upset because of something unfair happening when we went through the process of applying to colleges with hard work, dedication, and effort.

The exigence of this podcast episode is to shed light on the college admissions scandal, give our perspectives on it being a college student and a former college student, and debate what should be considered right or wrong regardless of circumstances or background. The purpose is also to discuss what should be done going into the future of the college admissions process in order to create a more fair and just system. The immediate needs for this podcast in our discourse community are the importance of discussing a current and publicized scandal that has affected many questioning

values that need different perspectives. This helps to understand what the best way would be to react to something like this and how we can change the future to stop this from happening again and hurting people in similar situations (people applying to colleges) who would be represented in our discourse community. These immediate needs are met through my sister's and my discussion on how the scandal has affected not only the individuals involved or other students going to the mentioned colleges, but us as well. For example, we both spent a lot of time and effort trying to get into many colleges. We spent countless hours studying for standardized tests, writing essays, filling out applications, and working on our résumés to show colleges that we deserved to be accepted because of our academics, activities, and accomplishments. Hearing about this scandal affected us by making us feel cheated and upset because we had worked so hard to get accepted into college. We also realized that there are individuals getting accepted to schools that wouldn't have let them in if they had not cheated their way there. We then take our discussion and feelings towards the scandal to come up with ideas on how we can create a fairer admissions process for the future, such as college interviews, revised standardized tests, or qualification tests before entering a specific course or college. The context of the podcast is specific to a current event, the college admissions scandal, which happened recently and has been publicized. The timing is dependent on what is going on in the present. Therefore, our audience expects the context of our podcasts to be relevant to today and not to an event that happened a decade ago.

**Understanding that there is an audience behind every message and form of communication, and that you can have the power to craft your message uniquely to your audience, can help you to achieve effective communication in every realm.**

My podcast can be considered in the genre of a talk show or news podcast. In saying that, those genres can be broken down even more into a specific type of podcast creating its own type of genre. My podcast is similar to a talk show in that we are two hosts discussing an issue with facts in addition to our opinions. It reflects news podcasts with the constant back and forth conversation and the open-ended questions that we ask each other and discuss. It reflects the genre of a news podcast in that it focuses on a current event based around accurate

information and facts. For example, my podcast is comparable to NPR's *Up First* news and politics podcast hosted by Rachel Martin, David Greene and Steve Inskeep. A typical podcast from *Up First* states the specific current event or news for the day in extensive detail and includes actual sound clips, followed by a discussion among the three hosts and other guests. With the *A&E Podcast Show*, I tried emulating this format by stating the facts of the college admissions first, followed by a discussion and questioning section with my sister. By doing this I was able to bring in the atmosphere of a news podcast combined with a discussion section more similar to a relaxed talk show.

In recording my podcast, I stumbled upon some problems that may have affected how well I satisfied the discourse community. The limitations of my podcast are that my sister and I are in different states and had to record the podcast through the medium of a Skype call which contributed to a lesser quality of audio, the fluctuation of my audio being louder than hers, and some choppiness in the sound quality. Therefore, this limitation might not make our podcast as good as if we were creating it together in person. Another limitation would be the time limit that the podcast had to be

under six minutes long. I was unable to meet the goal of having a podcast under six minutes. Instead, it was over at six minutes and thirteen seconds. Although my podcast was over the time limit, it satisfied the expectations of the discourse community that my podcast is intended for because I was able to effectively discuss just enough of the factual information in addition to some of our perspectives within the time slot for a general discussion. However, if there was no time limit, I would have been able to better satisfy the discourse community by going into depth on the scandal including discussing more of our perspectives and questions.

The advantages of the podcast are that I had access to good editing software. My sister knows how to edit video and sound using Adobe Suite applications and was able to teach me the basic ways in which I could edit out pauses, filler words like “um,” and parts that didn’t flow together, as well as add in music for the intro and outro in order to more accurately emulate a real podcast. These limitations and advantages helped satisfy the needs of the discourse community by allowing us to get our perspectives out through a Skype call, editing to get a clear message to our audience, and using technology to increase the quality which therefore satisfies needs of reliability, easy access, and authenticity. In addition, despite the limitations I was still able to uphold the basic principles that “podcasting is automatic, it’s easy to control by the listener, it’s portable, and it’s always available” (Geoghegan and Klass 6).

By creating and examining my own podcast I was not only able to understand how to reach my intended audience through the means of a podcast, but also in a broader sense of anything having to deal with communicating to an audience. For example, the same principles of breaking apart the underlying purpose and composition of a message (text or piece of work) to understand your intended audience can be applied to giving a speech to a large group of people, writing a novel, creating a film, texting your friends, tweeting to the public, marketing a product to a consumer, and anything that would involve sending a message from the main sender to a receiver. Understanding that there is an audience behind every message and form of communication, and that you can have the power to craft your message uniquely to your audience, can help you to achieve effective communication in every realm. This will not only help you in your undergraduate studies, but it can help make any message you convey reach an audience larger than your own expectations.

## Works Cited

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Ann Forgione is currently a sophomore at the University of Central Florida majoring in marketing with a minor in digital media. She is originally from Long Island, New York, but recently moved to Orlando, Florida in December 2018 and is enjoying the nice weather all year long. She is a member of the Phi Eta Sigma honor society at UCF and has made the President's Honor Roll since pursuing her education at UCF. She spends a lot of her free time focusing on health and fitness as well as taking art courses, spending time with her family and dog, and going to the beach. She hopes to travel and experience the world as much as she can in the future.