

Advanced English: The Avant-Garde Podcast

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This course is meant for students of the advanced C1 and C2 levels. Theme-based language classes aim at developing written and oral skills through the study of a specific topic.

Background

The word “podcast” was coined exactly twenty years ago. Since then, podcasting has exploded into a global industry encompassing a myriad of formats in every conceivable genre, from news, crime and business, to comedy, sports and culture.

Hidden among this vast catalog are the lesser-known offerings - podcasts which delve into strange and surprising subjects, using a distinctly aesthetic approach: a fusion of literature, sound design and performance art. These avant-garde podcasters expand the medium far beyond audio content: they make audio art.

Course Objectives

The main objectives of this course are:

- Introducing students to a range of “avant-garde” podcasts.
- Developing skills of careful listening, applied to both content and form.
- Building awareness of the links between podcasting and contemporary art.
- Facilitating the critical and aesthetic analysis of specific works of audio storytelling.

Course Description

The course content is organized around a selection of podcasts. Some offer portraits of eccentric characters (*Love + Radio*, *Heavyweight*), others the story of an entire community (*S-Town*). Some are narrated as spoken-word poetry (*Have you Heard George's Podcast?*), while others take the form of detective work (*Mystery Show*), road-trip encounters (*Home of the Brave*) or vignettes of history (*The Memory Palace*). Further themes include love, sex and emotion from a queer feminist perspective (*The Heart*) and the daily realities of life for prisoners inside California's San Quentin State Prison (*Ear Hustle*).

Each week before class, students listen to an assigned episode. In class, the discussion of the episode is oriented towards critical analysis, with close attention paid to each podcast's concept and content, and use

of voice and sound. Reading excerpts of critical texts will provide a conceptual framework for thinking about audio art, and writing short reviews of these podcasts will strengthen skills in persuasive writing.

Organization

Activities will cover the four language skills:

- Listening: one podcast episode per week.
- Speaking: weekly class discussion (summaries, analyses, debates) and one presentation during the term (on a podcast of choice).
- Reading: a variety of articles about podcasting and audio art.
- Writing: one podcast review during the semester (in class) and another at the end of the course (home assignment).