

# VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITIES

**AN INTRODUCTORY GUIDE TO COMMUNITY  
PRODUCTION OF PODCASTS**



**GIJTR**

Global Initiative for Justice  
Truth & Reconciliation



International Coalition of  
**SITES of CONSCIENCE**

The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC or the Coalition) is a global network of museums, historic sites and grassroots initiatives dedicated to building a more just and peaceful future through engaging communities in remembering struggles for human rights and addressing their modern repercussions. Founded in 1999, the Coalition now includes more than 300 Sites of Conscience members in 65 countries. The Coalition supports these members through seven regional networks that encourage collaboration and international exchange of knowledge and best practices. The Global Initiative for Justice, Truth and Reconciliation is a flagship program of the Coalition.

**Learn more at [www.sitesofconscience.org](http://www.sitesofconscience.org)**



*Colectiva Normal* is an interdisciplinary group composed of documentary filmmakers, journalists, designers and academics who are committed to the creation and dissemination of high-quality narrative projects with social impact. Since 2018, the *Colectiva Normal* has been developing a podcast co-creation methodology in which the producers work hand in hand with the characters to develop stories whose content and aesthetics reflect their voices and experiences. Our motto: we work with the protagonists to tell the stories with them and not just about them.

**[www.colectivanormal.com](http://www.colectivanormal.com)**

**Cover:** Woman giving her testimony during podcast production in Mahates (Bolívar), Colombia, 2022. Photograph taken during the process.

# ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

The purpose of this guide is to introduce readers to the world of the podcasts and how this format can become a tool for telling stories. We will present the different stages involved in creating a podcast, but not with the intention of training producers (although we would be honored if that happens). Rather, we want to detail how local knowledge and expertise that communities have are crucial to bringing a podcast to fruition. More importantly, this guide will hone the narrative and creative skills of those who want to tell their own stories and circulate them beyond their communities. We believe that it is not enough to tell stories, but that you have to learn to tell them well. A well-told story becomes a tool for social change and is a credit to the protagonists, while doing justice to the complexities of their own lives.

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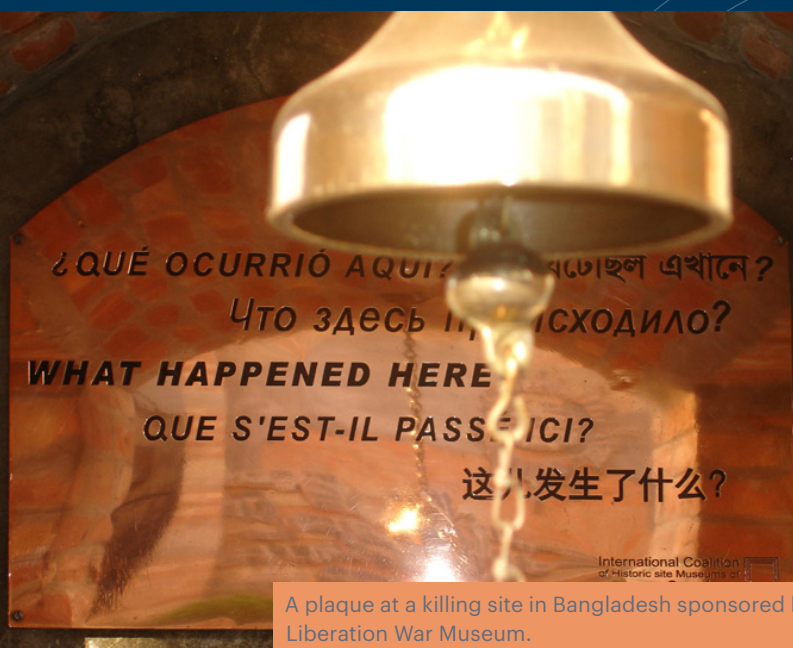
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[www.gijtr.org](http://www.gijtr.org)

# ABOUT THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE FOR JUSTICE, TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION (GIJTR)

Around the world, an increasing call exists for justice, truth and reconciliation in countries where legacies of gross human rights violations cast a shadow on transitions from repressive regimes to participatory and democratic forms of governance. To meet this need, the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC or the Coalition) launched the Global Initiative for Justice, Truth and Reconciliation (GIJTR) in August 2014.

The GIJTR seeks to address new challenges in countries in conflict or transition that are struggling with legacies of or ongoing gross human rights abuses. The Coalition leads the GIJTR, which includes eight other organizational partners:



A plaque at a killing site in Bangladesh sponsored by the Liberation War Museum.

- American Bar Association Rule of Law Initiative (ABA ROLI), United States;
- Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR), Indonesia;
- Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVr), South Africa;
- Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam), Cambodia;
- Due Process of Law Foundation (DPLF), United States;
- Fundación de Antropología Forense de Guatemala (FAFG), Guatemala;
- Humanitarian Law Center (HLC), Serbia; and
- Public International Law & Policy Group (PILPG), United States.

In addition to leveraging the expertise of GIJTR members, the Coalition taps into the knowledge and longstanding community connections of its 300-plus members in 65 countries to strengthen and broaden the GIJTR's work. GIJTR partners, along with members of the Coalition, develop and implement a range of rapid-response and high-impact program activities, using both restorative

and retributive approaches to justice and accountability for gross human rights violations. The expertise of the organizations under the GIJTR includes:

- Truth telling, reconciliation, memorialization and other forms of historical memory;
- Documenting human rights abuses for transitional justice purposes;
- Forensic analysis and other efforts related to missing and disappeared persons;
- Victims' advocacy such as improving access to justice, psychosocial support and trauma mitigation activities;
- Providing technical assistance to and building the capacity of civil society activists and organizations to promote and engage in transitional justice processes;
- Reparative justice initiatives; and
- Ensuring gender justice in all these processes.

To date, the GIJTR has led civil society actors in multiple countries in the development and implementation of documentation and truth-telling projects; undertaken assessments of the memorialization, documentation and psychosocial support capacities of local organizations; and provided survivors in the Asia, Africa and the Middle East and North Africa regions with training, support and opportunities to participate in the design and implementation of community-driven transitional justice approaches. Given the diversity of experience and skills among GIJTR partners and Coalition network members, the program offers post-conflict countries and countries emerging from repressive regimes a unique opportunity to address transitional justice needs in a timely manner while promoting local participation and building the capacity of community partners.





# CONTENTS

Introduction.....	7
<b>SECTION 1 : The Podcast.....</b>	<b>9</b>
WHAT IS A PODCAST? .....	9
PODCAST ADVANTAGES .....	10
HOW CAN I LISTEN TO PODCASTS? .....	11
<b>SECTION 2 : The Production Stages of a Podcast.....</b>	<b>12</b>
PREPRODUCTION (PREPARATION PHASE).....	12
Planning.....	12
Interviews .....	14
Informed consent.....	17
Script preparation.....	18
SCRIPTWRITING .....	21
PRODUCTION (RECORDING THE PODCAST).....	27
POSTPRODUCTION (MOCK-UP, ASSEMBLY, EDITING, AND POSTING).....	28
<b>SECTION 3 : Challenges and Learning Opportunities.....</b>	<b>31</b>



# INTRODUCTION

This manual was developed using the experience of creating podcasts based on stories from survivors of the armed conflict in Colombia, produced entirely by communities with no previous production experience. The program was part of the project by the Global Initiative for Justice, Peace and Reconciliation (GIJTR) to support the transitional justice process in Colombia. Implementation was led by the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience and entrusted to the Colectiva Normal in the second half of 2022.

The hope is that this manual will provide a basic methodology for producing community podcasts as part of memory processes around the world, not just in the countries where the GIJTR operates but in any location where communities without previous training are planning to develop memory initiatives using their own stories in this format.

For best results, we suggest that the exercises to develop stories and prepare scripts based on the interviews be led by people with experience carrying out interviews, who can generally be found at local radio stations, and they should be focused on telling stories that are always present in communities.

**For more information visit [www.gijtr.org](http://www.gijtr.org)**



Man giving his testimony in Buenaventura (Cauca), Colombia, 2022. Photograph taken during the process.

## SECTION 1.

# THE PODCAST

### What is a Podcast?

The term “podcast” was first used in 2004 to describe something that was revolutionizing radio show production at the time: more and more programs were being broadcast over the Internet that people could access via their portable MP3 devices (the most famous of these digital audio players was the iPod, created by Apple.)

The term *podcast* was first used in 2004 to describe something that was revolutionizing radio show production at the time: More and more programs were being broadcast over the Internet for people to access via their portable MP3 devices (the most famous of these digital audio players was Apple’s iPod).

*Podcast* is a combination of two words: *iPod* and *broadcast*.

Initially, podcasts made it easy for radio stations to broadcast their shows on demand, allowing stations to post them online for listeners to download and listen to whenever they wanted. Today podcast producers are no longer just large broadcasters but also small groups of narrators and storytellers, as well as individuals and even communities. Podcasts generally have very diverse content, have many uses, and are produced by all kinds of companies and people. Some podcasts are investigative journalism, fiction, interviews, sports, movies, or comedy, whereas others serve to share scientific knowledge or educational materials – for example, those used as audio guides for museums and cities, those that capture soundscapes, and those that deal with biographical topics. In short, there are as many topics and as much content as there are podcast producers.

## Podcast advantages

The most important advantage of this format is its portability: You can listen wherever and whenever you want, which also means that the podcast starts and ends when you decide. Most importantly, podcasts, like radio, offer the listener the option to do other things or to continue with their routine while listening.

The podcast is a versatile structure because it is compatible with most of today's digital devices. You can listen on phones, tablets, or computers. In addition, you do not always need to be connected to the Internet to listen to them, since they can be easily downloaded. Podcasts can be downloaded to apps like WhatsApp and to USB drives. And many podcasts have content that moves through community stations.

With the podcast format, producers have the opportunity for greater creativity and experimentation because they have the freedom to choose the topics to be discussed. They can also choose how to distribute it and when it will be posted.



Podcast recording session, Buenos Aires (Cauca), Colombia, 2022. Photograph taken during the process.

In the context of community projects, the podcast is a format that is compatible with oral culture and tradition, which is the way most rural communities share and pass on their knowledge. In addition, it makes use of sounds, accents, voices, and ways of speaking that are meaningful to people and with which

many can identify. And compared with other narrative formats (TV, documentary, film), the podcast is much cheaper to produce and easier to distribute. All these advantages make it a user-friendly vehicle for people to tell their own stories and reach all kinds of audiences.

## How can I listen to podcasts?

You don't need to have an account on any platform to listen to a podcast. But at a minimum, you need Internet access. You can listen to many podcasts directly on the web; all you need is to find the web page of the broadcast you want to listen to.

The vast majority of podcasts provide a download option. To download one, follow these steps:

- 1. Connect to the Internet**
- 2. Download a podcast listening app (for example, Spotify, Google Podcasts, SoundCloud, Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, Spreaker, Amazon Podcasts).**
- 3. Find the podcast you want to listen to and go to the list of episodes.**
- 4. Subscribe to the podcast you like most.**
- 5. To listen without an Internet connection, simply download the audio.**



Woman being interviewed during podcast production in Mahates (Bolívar), Colombia, 2022. Photograph taken during the process.



## SECTION 2.

# THE PRODUCTION STAGES OF A PODCAST

In general, the production of a podcast (from the initial idea to its posting on the Internet) consists of four main stages: preproduction, scriptwriting, production, and postproduction. Each involves different types of activities, described below.

## **Preproduction (preparation phase)**

### **Planning**

At this stage, you create an idea or plan for what you want to do and what you need to do it. This is when the project and the story you want to tell are defined. In addition, the work team is formed, tasks are assigned, the necessary contacts are made, and a budget is drawn up.

Furthermore, the participants' direct experience with the topics to be discussed is called on, as well as their familiarity with the people and with the context, since they are in a unique position to record daily life and present to future listeners how things are done in their communities. In addition, local participants have access to testimonials, people, and facets of daily life that would take a foreign researcher years to acquire.

To define the story you want to tell, ask yourself questions like: What is the topic you want to address, and from what perspective do you want to address it? What is the objective? Who is the audience? How can you create a link between listeners and the story you want to tell?

To define the story that you want to tell, take into account how easy it is to

access the protagonists and their testimonies. Is it easy to interview prospective subjects? Will they be willing to tell their story and participate in the project? How many interviews will be necessary, and how many people can offer their point of view? In addition, do some research to learn more about the topic and determine context and whether the story has been told before—and if it has been, determine the unique angle or elements your podcast can offer. The research should also identify the relevant events and their different protagonists. If necessary, visit actual locales, keeping open the possibility of capturing the sounds of those places you will study.



Man giving testimony during podcast production in Mahates (Bolívar), Colombia, 2022. Photograph taken during the process.



Recording an interview, Cereté (Córdoba), Colombia, 2022. Photograph taken during the process.

## Interviews

Interviews are the cornerstone of testimonial podcasts like the ones we focus on in this project. Interviews are much more than having a tape recorder and an established set of questions. Rather, they are a deep conversation with the interviewee, but one that is focused on the story at hand. And it is this story that determines what information is necessary, since it is impossible to cover everything in a single interview (see Planning, above).

Conducting a good interview is an art, and there is no one way to do it. It all depends on the topics to be discussed, the interviewee's personality, the interviewer's skills, and the place and time chosen to conduct an interview. There are, however, some necessary steps that can help an interview produce good results.

- **Identify the interviewees:** You must carefully select the people to interview because you will build the podcast's story around their testimonials. That is why they must be carefully identified based on their characteristics, personality, and knowledge.

- **Chose the time and place:** The interviewee's willingness to answer certain questions or attitude toward the interview in general depends on the time and place for the interview. Some times and places may not be appropriate to discuss certain things, or a location may prevent the interview from being conducted seamlessly or without disturbance. A good place and the right time create an ambience for a good conversation.
- **Interview design:** The interviews are designed based on the topic to be addressed. The design consists of determining the set of questions that can lead you toward the topics that the podcast will address. This is known as a semistructured interview. In this type of interview, you decide in advance what you want to know, and based on that, you define a question script. But these are open-ended questions – that is, questions that require an answer other than yes or no and provide the interviewee with freedom of expression. In addition, open-ended questions seek to reveal the perceptions of the interviewees and dive deeper into their knowledge about the events to be discussed.
- **Interview:** During the interview, the interviewer must be very familiar with the equipment being used (recorder, microphones) so technical issues do not become a point of distraction. We recommend that two people conduct the interview: One will be responsible for the technical aspects, and the other will lead the interview. The interviewer must carefully listen to what the interviewees are saying, know when to be quiet, and know what questions are relevant. To do this, even when there is a general question script, the interviewer must flow with the conversation, allowing the interviewee to respond to the questions freely and without a time limit.

## Two important tips for podcast interviews

1. Although the interview should flow like a conversation, for the podcast format, the interviewer's verbal responses must not mix with the interviewee's voice. In a conversation, it is normal to respond to answers with expressions like "yes" or "of course," or with sounds that express agreement or empathy. But for the podcast, you have to take great care that the interviewer's voice does not overlap with the interviewee's answers. The great challenge for the interviewer is to remain silent



Recording an interview, Riosucio (Chocó), Colombia, 2022. Photograph taken during the process.

during the answers and to choose the right moment to speak. We recommend that the interviewer use only their body language to react to the story: Nodding, looking into the interviewee's eyes, and using hand gestures are all ways of responding to what we are hearing.

2. In the podcast format, do not forget that the listeners are not able to see the interviewees' gestures. Often we "talk" with our body or use visual references to describe certain events – when someone stretches out their arms to show the size of something, for example, or points to a part of their body to indicate where they felt something. In these cases, the interviewer should invite the interviewee to describe things in their own words instead of using gestures ("the hole was about three meters" or "it hurt here on my shoulder").

### Other important things about interviews

There are several advantages when the people conducting the interviews belong to the same community as the interviewee. The most important is that they have an inside perspective, which can be more authentic. Another advantage is that when the interviewer and the interviewee already know each other, they have a relationship of trust that will make the conversation more fluid. And that already



puts them at an advantage over the best journalists because, although they are experts in their field, they do not belong to the community and do not know the interviewees well enough.

However, some of that shared knowledge can affect the content of the podcast. Since the interviewer and the interviewee share the same social references and the same cultural heritage, it is possible that during the interview they may tend to take many key issues for granted; in other words, to think that many things that are discussed are trivial (what they eat, weather, clothes, transportation, landscape), that everyone is familiar with those topics and therefore they are not relevant to the story. The same happens when the interviewer and the interviewee belong to the same family. That is why during the interview you must try to assume the perspective of someone who does *not* belong to the community and not lose focus on the podcast audience. This means remembering that the story is being told to someone who does not share the same cultural references and who may be surprised by all the details of the daily life of the interviewee.

If the interviewer is already familiar with the interviewee's story, and the interviewee thinks that it is not important to delve into details, an alternative identified by one of the teams that participated in the project was to create a questionnaire, give it to the interviewee, prepare everything to record, and let the interviewee respond alone with the recorder. In this way, the interviewee narrated the events with all pertinent details, knowing that the person behind the recorder would hear the story for the first time. In other words, both the interviewer and interviewee have to make an effort to be generous to the listeners. That means giving them all the elements so they can have the same degree of comprehension as the protagonists already have.

## Informed Consent

Informed consent is an invitation given to a person to participate in the project. But for interviewees to decide whether to participate, they must receive all the information about the project and how their testimony will be used in a clear way. That consent may be obtained in writing or orally. Many people do not like to sign documents and prefer instead to give their approval orally, so



Recording an interview, El placer (Putumayo), Colombia, 2022.  
Photograph taken during the process.

the consent must be read and their response recorded. We suggest presenting the consent twice: at the beginning of the interview and then at the end. This is important because by hearing how their testimony will be used after the interview, the interviewee can feel even more confident about their decision. Before ending the interview and thanking the interviewee for their participation, verify that you have this free and informed consent.

## Script preparation

Scripts are the backbone of these types of podcasts. But before creating them, it is important to carry out a series of technical steps that will facilitate writing. A backbone is strong only if its vertebrae are in the right place. In this case, the interviews act as vertebrae. For this reason, before anything is done with the scripts, it is essential to safeguard and preserve the interviews. This is done by keeping them all well organized and stored.

After finishing an interview, first save it to a hard drive and label it appropriately. Ideally, you should have two copies of each file (one on a computer or external hard drive, and one on some kind of cloud or Internet storage site). In addition, each file should have a clear name so you can easily identify and locate it later

during the production process. Including the name of the interviewee and the date (day, month, year) are ways of doing it. Examples:

**Int\_Pedro\_Perez\_070922**

**Int\_2\_Pedro\_Perez\_080922**

**Int\_Catalina\_Salgado\_101122**



Scriptwriting workshop with “La Colectiva Normal,” Bogotá, Colombia, 2022. Photograph taken during the process.

Once the interviews are stored and labeled, you can proceed to transcription. For this you can use various types of programs, such as Trint, Descript, Otter.ai, Sonix, or Google transcribe. Although each program is different, they all perform the same action: transform oral content into written text. But these written texts are not a faithful reflection of the oral testimony. Transcription programs are not always accurate and can get some words wrong: Sometimes they don’t separate them, don’t always recognize place names, or don’t identify proper names. The reason transcripts are not always reliable is that spoken language is much more open than written language. For example, the same word can be pronounced differently by two people (because of an accent or the way each person speaks). On the other hand, there is always just one way to write a word in a given language.

In addition, at the time of transcribing, the programs cannot identify the rhythms, the intention, or the mood of the interviewee. That is why it is advisable to “clean” the transcripts. Cleaning is simply reading the transcripts while listening to the recording. It is a very useful task because it allows you to correct those words that the transcription program did not recognize or transcribed incorrectly. It also allows you to add punctuation, separate ideas, organize paragraphs, and identify key moments that can then be used in scripts. This cleaning work helps the transcribed text to reflect the oral testimony as faithfully as possible, thus facilitating the work of the scriptwriter, who will develop the story using these transcripts as primary sources.

Once the interviews are stored and clearly identified and the transcripts are ready, you can then proceed to writing the scripts.



Production session with “La Colectiva Normal,” Bogotá, Colombia, 2022. Photograph taken during the process.



Participant presenting the script outline for a podcast, Bogotá, Colombia, 2022. Photograph taken during the process.

## Scriptwriting

Scriptwriting may be one of the most complex tasks in creating a podcast. The podcast tells a story, but that story doesn't exist before the script is written. What exists is a series of events in which the protagonists participated, and they have memories, experiences, stories and interpretations of those events. But the story as such does not yet have a shape (and even less so for future podcast listeners). A screenwriter can even tell two totally different stories based on the same interview or on the same material. The story emerges in the process of writing the script, which is simply a procedure in which stories and events that share connections are threaded together. Think of the protagonists' stories as the raw material with which an object is made. The script is that finished product and writing the script is the manufacturing process. So craftsmen are required to give shape to the testimonies, to find a place for the characters, rhythms for the stories and intentionality for the events. The script, ultimately, is like a translation task where what is already a reality for the protagonists of the story is put into a language that can be understood by many people.



An easy exercise to help you shape your story is to tell it to other people. Often, when you want to tell a story that is very familiar to you, you tend to forget that not everyone knows it as well as you do. This can cause you to forget important details, such as the location of the story, the year, and certain explanations about the context that others need to know to fully understand the story. When you explain it to another person, they will tell you what they did not understand, what they did understand, what they found most interesting, and what information might be missing.

A good way to start your script is by reading through each and every interview and identifying key themes, places, people and events. The best way to organize it is to write everything on the computer or on paper if necessary. All this work can be done with transcription programs, since most of them have tools to underline and highlight parts of the text, or put labels or colors on them depending on the topics that are considered important. Those sections that are selected can then be exported to the document that will serve as a script.

Another very easy way to identify ideas and organize them is by using colored sticky notes. For this exercise, you can use five different colors of notes, for example: yellow, orange, green, pink, and blue. Each color will indicate one type of information. Yellow could be scenes; orange, characters or testimonies; green, places; pink, anecdotes; and blue, historical events or milestones. Once you have a clear system, put together different sections of your script by sticking the Post-it notes on a 50- by 70-inch page (see image on page 20). This way you can easily visualize the story and balance it so that its components are evenly distributed.

Various formats can be used to write the script, but it should at least contain sections identifying a timeline, dialog, music and sound effects. Here is an example:

## Chapter 1: “If life is a drag...”

**Synopsis:** Pedro, the protagonist, tells how he came up with the idea of traveling through time

Scene	Source	Voice	Music	Sound Design
#1	Narrator	Welcome to “How to earn a living.” Today we want to tell you about how someone escaped their misery		
	Int_Pedro_Perez_070922	“And then it occurred to me that the best idea was to tell this story” (0:17)		
				We hear hammer blows
	Int_Pedro_Perez_070922	“But the beginning was never easy” (0:04)		
	Narrator	And in the city, it was not easy to convince people		
			Start bumper	

When writing scripts, you have to try to “measure” the speaking times for each voice. Ideally, the voice of the narrator alternates with the voices of the interviewees. Try to find a balance so the narrator does not speak much more than the other people do and that the testimonies are not so long and elaborate that they don’t leave room for the narrator to speak.

Voices should also alternate with other sounds, whether ambient sound, sound designs, or music. For this reason, as you write the script, take notes of the sounds that accompany the testimonies. For example, if someone is talking about a place or an activity, include soundscapes of those things. Those sounds help give strength to what is being said. But you also have to find a balance between sounds and voices. Sounds should not simply reflect what the voice is already describing, nor should voices simply tell what ambient sounds present



Man giving testimony during podcast production in Mahates (Bolívar), Colombia, 2022. Photograph taken during the process.

to the listener. Voices and sounds must be in a kind of dialogue. For example, when you talk to someone, you are not simply repeating what the other person tells you. On the contrary, you are reacting and complementing what you hear. A dialogue is a back- and-forth between people. In a podcast, voices and sounds should try to do the same thing.

The script for this type of podcast is a combination of oral testimonies and the written texts that accompany them. That is why it is important to find a good balance between oral and written materials. Writing a script for a podcast is not the same as writing a short story or an article, for example. When you write reports, stories, novels, or even academic works, certain literary license is allowed – in other words, use of words and expressions that are not part of everyday language. For example, a formal letter or email usually begins with the formula “Dear...” But if you go to a bank or any other institution, you never greet a representative like that. The same should happen during scriptwriting. For example, the word *pernoctar* means “to spend the night away from home,” and it is a word that we might have heard once or twice. But in everyday life, you would rarely use that word, and you don’t tell friends that you *pernoctó* (“stayed overnight”) in someone’s house. In scripts it is better to avoid this type of literary license, since they must reflect the way we communicate on a daily basis.

We recommend that you also use local expressions or words that are typical of the region. It is always possible in the podcast to give a brief explanation of the meaning of those unique expressions. To determine whether the script works narratively, read it aloud and pay attention to whether what is being said sounds natural, whether it sounds like someone on the street telling you a story and not like someone *reading* you a story.

Now, all stories must have a narrative arc. This is simply the structure or asides that accompany a story. The classic narrative arc consists of an opening, a development, and a conclusion. This type of construction allows you to organize the story in sequences, presenting the main facts of the story and the secondary facts that complement it. In each of these sections you can introduce characters or events that can give twists to the story, but in the end, those elements should lead the listener to the conclusion. Here are some basic elements of this type of narrative structure.



**Beginning:** The story is introduced; the characters, the place, and the start of the action are presented. This section is like an invitation that helps the listener immerse themselves in the local atmosphere, to understand the circumstances the story is based on. A good beginning immerses the listener in a situation that they did not know about and creates the desire to know more, to continue listening to the story. Essentially, the mission of this section is to captivate the listener.

**Development or crux:** Here the protagonists face a new situation, something that changes them and forces them to make decisions that they had not considered before. There is tension that needs to be resolved, a series of events that push the story in new directions. It is the moment when problems arise and the story begins to become more complex. At this point in the narrative, listeners should be familiar with all the characters so they can become fully immersed in the plot and develop an interest in how the story ends.

**Conclusion:** This is where the tension or conflict faced by the protagonist is resolved. We know that not all stories have a happy ending, but the most important thing in this section is for the listener to find that the crux of the action or tension in the story was resolved. Ideally, the listener leaves the podcast feeling that the resolution of the conflict resonates in some way



Woman giving her testimony during podcast production in Mahates (Bolívar), Colombia, 2022. Photograph taken during the process.



with their own personal story. In the case of stories told in this project, the idea is that in the end, positive aspects of the experience can be highlighted, emphasizing resilience or the lessons learned, things to come and challenges taken on.

This narrative structure is the most basic of all, but just because it's basic doesn't mean it's easy to achieve. It is even more difficult when the protagonists of the events are the ones who tell their own stories. You can add all kinds of things to this basic structure, like surprise elements or characters, unexpected twists, or plays with time (instead of creating a chronological narrative, alternate between past and present events). The important thing is that in the end there is a resolution of the conflicts or tensions that arose during the story.

## **Production (recording the podcast)**

The podcast narration is just as important as all the previous stages. The narrator acts as the host of a meeting, the one who receives the guests (the listeners), makes them feel comfortable, and persuades them to stay. The voice is the fundamental element in the language of the podcast. The voice establishes contact with the listeners because it serves to explain, relate, accompany, discuss, and whisper. Therefore, you have to do a lot of work to find the perfect tone for the narration but also the volume and rhythm necessary for the story to work.

You have to find a good narrative voice and a good tone to tell the story. A pivotal event can be ruined by using a tone like sportscasters use. Similarly, a very happy moment in a story can be damaged by using a funeral-type tone of voice. In either case, the person narrating must be very familiar with the script. That is why you should read it many times before recording it and that you do it out loud. In this way you can feel comfortable with the language and identify the moments of tension in the story. You can also find the rhythm and tone that best fit the plot. When the narrator is practicing, you may also want to adjust elements in the script, to change words that the narrator doesn't feel comfortable with because they don't sound natural or don't express the way people normally speak.

There are also a series of technical aspects that the narrator must keep in mind: finding a place that is soundproof or sufficiently insulated so there are no noises that “contaminate” their voice, keeping their mouth facing the microphone, always speaking from the same distance and from the same angle, controlling their breathing, avoiding hitting the table or making noises with other parts of their body, and, of course, having a comfortable chair.

Even when the narration of a text has turned out well, it is always preferable to have several takes, leaving you the option during the postproduction process to choose the best one.

## **Postproduction (mock-up, assembly, editing, and posting)**

Imagine the podcast as the process of following a recipe to prepare a dish that you don’t cook every day. In preproduction, each of the necessary ingredients is gathered, with care taken to not omit anything and to make sure everything needed is of good quality. In production, the ingredients are cut and mixed, and everything is ready for cooking, either on the stove or in an oven. Postproduction is when everything is cooked, when the ingredients go into the fire. It is an important stage because even when the entire recipe has been followed to the letter, the dish can still burn. The same thing happens in postproduction of a podcast. The best stories can be ruined if the sound is not good, if the music is not captivating, if it does not have good sound design, if the soundscapes are poor, if the narration is not well done.

And while postproduction for this project was handled by a team of professionals with extensive experience in sound design, sound engineering, composition, and use of specialized equipment and software, podcast producers can do many things to facilitate all the postproduction processes and ensure the podcast does not burn in the oven. Here are some of those tasks:

- Ensure good audio quality for all interviews.
- Organize files properly.
- Provide enough soundscapes and ambient sounds.
- Choose an appropriate and captivating piece of music.
- Deliver good narration, with plenty of takes for each of the texts.



- Mark all the timings in the script and the moments when ambient sounds should enter.
- Deliver all materials on time, and ensure postproducers have access to that material.

This is a brief description of each of the most important stages of postproduction:

**Mock-up:** The mock-up is a first assemblage of all the voices that make up the podcast. At this point, there is no music, there are no soundscapes, and there are no effects of any kind. The purpose of this mock-up is to listen to each and every voice, and make sure that the narration and testimonials fit the script. It is also a time to make sure the tone of the narration is appropriate, noting whether any speaker takes up a lot of time and whether the story flows according to the script. They say anything works on paper. That is why the mock-up allows you to have a real impression of whether the way you decided to tell the story works.



Man giving testimony during podcast production in Mahates (Bolívar), Colombia, 2022. Photograph taken during the process.

**Assembly and editing:** Once the necessary adjustments have been made, you proceed to add the sound effects, music, and ambient sounds. It is the last stage when something can still be done to make the story work properly. Music and sound design are not just accessory elements; they are essential to the story. There is a lot of evidence that the same scene can be interpreted in very different ways depending on the music that accompanies it. That's why sound design can make a story more effective and make the listener more willing to connect with the story.

**Posting:** This is the final touch and consists of uploading the podcast to different platforms to make it public. The idea is to make it accessible to as many people as possible. This is why it is advisable to use not one but several platforms (for example, Anchor, Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, Ivoox, Spreaker, or Anchor.fm). In addition, we suggest conducting an advertising campaign through social networks (Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, Instagram, Twitter), as this increases the opportunities to reach more people.



## SECTION 3.

# CHALLENGES AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

The main challenges of this project involve moving from the oral record to the written record. This change of register involves several efforts on the part of the protagonists and those who tell and produce the story. For example, you have to conduct interviews, record testimonies and listen to various versions of events. But in order for them to become a podcast, all these oral inputs must ultimately be transformed into a script. And the script is simply written text with very special characteristics, since it is written not to be read but to be narrated in a way that mimics speech.



Recording a testimony at the interviewee's house, La Chorrera (Amazonas), Colombia, 2022.  
Photograph taken during the process.



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Writing is always a challenge full of complexities, even for those who have made it their profession. So for people and communities focused on an oral tradition to produce and share knowledge, scriptwriting presents additional challenges. The main one is to write in a way that mimics the rhythm and vocabulary of spoken language. You have to write in such a way that anyone can understand, which means you have to get rid of expressions that are understood only locally (for example, *parcero* [“friend”], *chévere* [“awesome”]), as well as expressions



Recording of a podcast in La Chorrera (Amazonas), Colombia, 2022. Photograph taken during the process.

that imitate institutional language. (In Colombia, for instance, people have become accustomed to hearing and using expressions such as “actors in the conflict,” “forced displacement,” “violation of rights,” and “victimizing acts” that are not necessarily understood by someone who does not live in the country.)

It is difficult to write the way you speak, just as it is rare for someone to speak the way they write. That is why the script must be thought of as a text that must imitate speech, even though it is written. In addition, the script is an exercise in cocreation among protagonists, communities, and producers. The job of the person writing the script is to make sure that the story becomes a universal story – in other words, that it has the structure of a narrative (beginning, development, conclusion) and that it will be understood by people who are not familiar with the protagonists or their contexts. But the events, expressions, characters, and way of describing them belong to the protagonists and their communities. In the end, the script is a harmonious mix between the local and the global, between the subjective and the universal. Finding that balance is what makes the script an authentic cocreation.

Turning your own story into a podcast is also an exercise in historical memory. But it can just as well be an opportunity for catharsis and healing for the protagonists. In the exercise of recording their own story, writing the script, and narrating it, narrators (who are usually the protagonists themselves) can find an opportunity to reflect on their own condition, on the events that accompany the story, or on the role played by the institutions or characters in the story. Making a podcast is like objectifying personal history – that is, trying to see it from the outside. And that can lead to seeing things from a perspective or an angle that perhaps they had not appreciated.

Another learning opportunity for the protagonists and the communities is that being the protagonists of their own stories is one thing, yet it is quite another to have to tell and listen to these stories. The podcast turns stories into something new, gives them another kind of life. Once it becomes a podcast, the story will begin to circulate through many media channels and be heard by many different people, to the point that the story no longer belongs to its protagonists. In other words: *The story is born from its protagonists, but it no longer needs them to exist.* That can create an ambiguous or strange feeling: “Now I can bring my story to many people, but I am no longer essential for the story to exist.” To prevent this feeling of strangeness from creating discomfort,

this project involves the protagonists in each and every one of the podcast creation phases. Remember that the objective is not to tell stories *about* the communities but *with* them.

This philosophy of cocreation means that protagonists and communities are involved in the project from beginning to end and that often this collective work can mean having to do the same activity several times. This is especially true with scriptwriting and narration. Scripts have to be thought of as a process, not a onetime task. Scripts are visited and revisited as many times as necessary. This means writing and rewriting, editing and reediting; cutting and pasting; and rehearsing various endings, various beginnings, various moments of tension, etc. The same goes for the narration. It is recorded and rerecorded more than once, until the appropriate tone is found. This means that you have to plan for a lot of time to carry out these tasks. Arm yourself with a lot of patience and the willingness to do it as many times as necessary.

Because many preproduction activities have an important technological and digital component (it is essential to have access to the Internet to send and store files, to use the transcription programs, and to communicate with the facilitators and support teams in the process), in rural areas, work schedules and strategies must be developed to help overcome the difficulties inherent in the poor connectivity that exists in many areas. For example, if high-speed



Participants reviewing recordings near the river, Buenos Aires (Cauca), Colombia, 2022.  
Photograph taken during the process.



Boys and girls from the community during the recording of a podcast in Mahates (Bolívar), Colombia, 2022. Photograph taken during the process.

Internet access is always a problem in the community, people should plan to travel to places where they can easily connect. Those trips or activities to access suitable equipment must be a fundamental, and not an accessory, part of the planning process and must be reflected in the activity planning, schedules, and budgets of each local team. This is critical because it will guarantee good workflow and communication between the communities and the podcast production support teams.

Lastly, to facilitate the workflow between communities and support teams, take into account that time in rural areas does not flow in the same way as urban time. In communities, sometimes you have to travel a lot or wait several days to find the person you want to interview. There may also be difficulties sending a file, for example. That is why it is important to plan all interviews well in advance and try to follow a strict schedule of activities. Support teams make it a point to follow those schedules because a failure in a single activity (such as not being able to send a file) can disrupt the entire workflow not only for one community but for all parties involved.





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