**Podcasting is perfect for people with big ideas. Here's how to do it**

Surprisingly few academics have learned how to podcast – but it’s a great way to reach a wider audience *Todd Landman*

[](https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2016/jan/13/podcasting-is-perfect-for-big-ideas%22%20%5Cl%20%22img-1) **I**n the face of conflict in the Middle East, the flow of refugees to Europe and the violence associated with Islamic State and other militants, there has never been a more important time to talk about human rights. And talk about them is what I do – not in a lecture hall or at conferences with academics, but in a podcast series. Let me explain why.

I have worked as a political scientist for 25 years, focusing on human rights problems such as the struggle for citizenship rights in Latin America and the relationship between inequality and human rights violations.

I am part of a wide network of people dedicated to producing sound evidence on human rights, and my work has been communicated through articles, books and reports. But I am limited in my ability to reach the people I would most like to engage and influence – those who do not have an academic understanding of human rights but might benefit from finding out about it.

There is a new breed of academic who understands this and is committed to bridging the gap between academia and the real world. Many blog, actively seek media coverage of their research and appear on radio and television to shed light on the issues of the day.

However, not many academics are podcasting and I’m not sure why. Podcasting is a great means of communication: it captures the human part of knowledge creation. We can hear academics and practitioners talk about what they do, why they do it and why it matters, in their own words.

Podcasts are certainly growing in popularity. Recent figures show that [1.7% of the time Americans spend listening to audio is devoted to podcasts](http://www.edisonresearch.com/podcasting-bigger-think/), and that 15% of Americans – around 39 million people – [had listened to a podcast in the last month](http://www.edisonresearch.com/a-major-shift-in-podcast-consumption/). And the UK is catching on fast. In late 2014, the BBC [announced record figures for podcast downloads](http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2014/10years-podcasting) of its programmes.

This is why, after experimenting with a [few podcasts for my own blog](http://www.todd-landman.com/podcasts/?doing_wp_cron=1447411681.4442250728607177734375), I decided to launch my own series, [The Rights Track](http://www.rightstrack.org/), in which I interview interesting people about their research and work in the field of human rights.

The wonders of modern technology mean it’s possible for me to interview my guests over Skype, so it doesn’t matter where they are in the world. My producer Chris Garrington records our calls using something called [ecamm Skype Call Recorder](http://www.ecamm.com/mac/callrecorder/).

She edits the podcasts using a very simple set up – a MacBook Pro and its free audio editing software Garage Band. I record myself at the same time using a lapel mic into my iPhone, and then send Chris the audio file, which she edits it in with her recording of our guest. Once that’s done she adds a jingle, a voice introduction and back announcement and our podcast is done.

And if you want to record the interview yourself, rather than using a producer, you can use a set-up similar to Chris’s – it doesn’t have to be expensive at all. For anyone interested in giving it a go, there are some great online courses, such as [Colin Gray’s Podcast Liberation](https://www.thepodcasthost.com/university/courses/podcast-liberation-set-your-podcast-free/).

So far, the experience has been excellent. We have already covered a wide range of topics – including civil and political rights protection, the role of NGOs and the difficulties of measuring the prevalence of torture – and future podcasts will examine economic and social rights, the use of repression and police violence and how systematic research helps in legal advocacy.

For me, the podcast format is like a fireside chat – it allows listeners to hear experts discuss their work in their own voices, and allows the experts to express themselves more freely than in the usual academic forms of dissemination. We have even been able to work in questions from social media to provide real-time responses within our podcasts.

Funding came on the heels of other impact-related projects on human rights. I had some money left over for a pilot project of six podcasts and won a grant from the Nuffield Foundation for the full series. The Economic and Social Research Council also has funds, and many research-intensive universities have Impact Accelerator Award programmes that support these kinds of projects.

I hope more academics will recognise podcasting as a way of reaching out, sharing, communicating and discussing their research and what it means for the real world.

**Scroobius Pip: ‘With podcasting, you can give a platform to unexpected people’**

The spoken-word artist turned DJ has taken on a new guise for Distraction Pieces, with guests from Russell Brand to morticians

**A** fixture on the UK spoken-word scene, [Scroobius Pip](http://www.scroobiuspip.co.uk/%22%20%5Co%20%22) (aka David Meads) got his break in 2007 with [Thou Shalt Always Kill](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CWrMGXwhFLk), the first release in an eight-year collaboration with hip-hop producer Dan le Sac. In 2014, he quit his award-winning show on Xfm (now Radio X), [The Beatdown](https://www.mixcloud.com/discover/scroobius-pip/), to start a podcast, [*Distraction Pieces*](http://www.scroobiuspip.co.uk/distraction-pieces-podcast/). A book of the same name, gathering conversations from the podcast, is [published by Cassell on 15 August](https://scroobiuspip.backstreetmerch.com/en-gb/artist/scroobius-pip/hardbacks/distraction-pieces).

**How would you describe the podcast?**
It’s interesting conversations with interesting people. Obviously it’s important to have some big names in there, such as Simon Pegg, Alan Moore and Billy Bragg, but we’ve also had people such as [Dr Suzi Gage](https://www.theguardian.com/profile/suzi-gage), who studies recreational drugs and their potential benefits and negatives, and the mortician [Carla Valentine](https://thechickandthedead.com/) talking about the taboo of death. It can get incredibly heavy – we’ve had debates about race and mental health – but there’s also a lot of silly nonsense.

 **How did it start?**
I went on an American podcast called [*The Joe Rogan Experience*](http://podcasts.joerogan.net/) in 2013. At the time, I had a radio show on Xfm, which went on to win two Sony awards. Joe asked: “Why do you work for someone else?” I said, “Well, they’re on FM.” He pointed out that most of my listeners were listening online and said: “I don’t know why, in this modern age, you’d work for someone else.” So I left Xfm in 2014 and started *Distraction Pieces*. Now I couldn’t do it any other way.

**Why not? Because the podcast gives you more freedom?**
Completely. You can give a platform to unexpected people and talk about really challenging things. Also, there’s no time limit. My first guest was Russell Brand. At the time, he was everywhere in the press, but it was always 30-second soundbites. My podcast is 60 to 90 minutes long and not even Russell could maintain a front for that long. After 20 minutes it turned into a conversation between two blokes and he started to open up.

**You had a full-time music career before this. What’s happening with that?**
I decided I was going to take a couple of years off music to do acting, different kinds of writing and this podcast. Now I get over 100,000 listeners a week and it’s one of the most successful things I’ve ever done. That’s bittersweet at points, because I’ve worked very hard as a musician, but at least people are finding out about my music through the podcast.

**Was it a longstanding ambition to be a broadcaster?**
Not at all. I’ve got a stutter – so it wasn’t an obvious career choice. I had to have my arm twisted to start doing my show on Xfm. Within a week or two I fell in love with it. It made me remember how good it felt when I got my first bit of music played on the station. All of a sudden I was giving other acts their first bit of airplay and it felt amazing to get that out there and push things.