I. Narrative

What story am I telling?

Who are the people with something at stake in the story I am telling? Am I giving fair voice to their perspectives?

Am I the right person to do the telling, or should I reach out to guest hosts or interviewees who can lend the benefit of specific experiences, areas of expertise, or credentials to the narrative?
Why is this story worth telling?

II. Audience

Who is my primary audience?

Who else might be interested in listening to my finished podcast (i.e., who might constitute secondary audiences)?

What elements of the story will matter the most to each of these anticipated audiences?
III. Style and Technique

What existing podcasts or podcast hosts do I find engaging? What do I find engaging about them?

What lessons can I take from these examples as I plan my own podcast?

What are some of the advantages of pure sound (i.e., unaccompanied by visuals or other media) as a storytelling medium? What are some of its limitations and challenges?

What audio techniques will I use to create compelling atmosphere and texture for my audience (in ways that enhance rather than distract from the story I am telling)?

***These could include the incorporation of music, ambient sound, or sound effects, as well as the integration of multiple narrative styles (e.g. voice-over monologue, recorded conversation, audio from a live event)
Now it’s time to use your answers to the questions above to map out your story arc. Feel free to shuffle, remix, add to, or ignore certain sections of this worksheet to suit the particular goals and needs of your project. **10-15 minutes is a good target length** for your first podcast, and it **probably shouldn’t exceed 20 minutes** unless you have a strong rationale for doing so (e.g., a particularly compelling or well-known guest/interviewee). Capping it at 20 minutes keeps it within the attention span of most potential listeners and ensures that it will fit nicely into an average commute.

| SEGMENT             | DURATION | OUTLINE || KEY POINTS || AUDIO CLIPS |
|---------------------|----------|----------|--------------|--------------|
| Introduction        |          |          |              |              |
| Theme/Interlude Music |         |          |              |              |
| Framing/Setup       |          |          |              |              |
| Body Section 1      |          |          |              |              |
| Body Section 2      |          |          |              |              |
| Body Section 3      |          |          |              |              |
| Recap/Wrap-Up       |          |          |              |              |
| Outro Music/Credits |          |          |              |              |
From the Drawing Board to the Recording Booth

Where you go from here depends a lot on your own speaking style and the structure of your podcast or audio essay. You could write out a full, detailed script containing everything you wish to convey. You might, however, decide that you’ll sound more natural and conversational without a full script. If that’s the case, you might rehearse using the map you drafted above, expanding conversationally on each key point in your body sections.

If your podcast includes interviews, you will need to do some preparatory research about your interviewee and their work, but rather than develop a script you will draft a set of interview questions and potential follow-up questions in case your guest’s answers are too succinct or need some unpacking.

If you will be using more than a single audio element (which you likely will be) it is always a good idea to draw up a list of the individual components that you envision incorporating into your project (i.e. an interview, a TV soundbyte, an archival interview clip, intro music, outro music, a monologue voice-over segment). This will help you make the most of your precious recording time and ensure that you get all the coverage you need with any interviewees with whom you’ll be working.

Ultimately, you are the expert on the story you are trying to tell, so you will be the best judge of what kinds of supporting documents will best serve you as you plan, rehearse, and record your project.

V. Rehearsing

1) **Find a quiet place** with minimal distractions

2) **Practice like you will record**: try to align your rehearsal environment as closely as possible with the environment you will be in when you record

3) **Imagine an audience member** and direct your speech to them

4) **Bring your own personality and style to the narration** (it will make it more interesting for you, and therefore more interesting for your audience)

5) **Speak slowly and consistently** and try to maintain a constant distance from the microphone
VI. Recording

- Make sure you are familiar with your equipment and have tested it several times before going to record, especially if you will be recording with guest interviewees or collaborators
- If possible, have a backup recording device (could be a memo recorder, or even a phone with a little plug-in microphone) in case of technical difficulties
- Get familiar with a hardware and software setup and stick with it until you want to do something it can’t handle
- If you are going into the field, make sure you make a gear checklist that you can use to double check your equipment as you pack it up
- Unless you are in a studio, record one full minute of ‘room tone,’ or ambient sound of your recording environment that can be used to patch when editing

VII. Editing

- 90% of the editing happens before you sit down at the computer; smart, thorough planning will save you loads of time
- When it comes to editing, you can easily spend as much time as you allow yourself to spend, so set a threshold that will help you craft a quality finished product without sinking needless hours into fine tuning at the micro scale
- Edit using high quality speakers and/or headphones, but then listen back to your finished recording using common consumer-level audio equipment that your listeners will likely use (e.g. phone w/ earbuds, built-in phone speaker) so you can hear how it will sound to the majority of your audience
- Enlist the help of friends and colleagues as listeners who can lend a fresh ear to your project and give you constructive feedback at multiple stages of the editing process

Created by Nicco Pandolfi (2018)