

Preliminary Exercise 1: Transcription

For this exercise, your task is fairly straightforward: transcribe a three- to five-minute segment of an existing podcast episode that has not yet been transcribed.* You will turn in your transcript as a Word document submitted to a D2L dropbox.

A few technology tips:

- If you're new to searching for podcasts, there are a lot of free apps, programs, and websites where you can find them. In addition to the podcasts section of the iTunes store and Apple's kind of lousy Podcasts app, you can check out Stitcher Radio, Overcast, and Podbean. Soundcloud and Spotify, while not exclusively focused on podcasts, offer some as well. You can also check out the websites for podcast networks like [Radiotopia](#), [Gimlet Media](#), and [Maximum Fun](#).
- For the transcription itself, I would recommend using one of two free options: the website [oTranscribe](#) or the program [Express Scribe](#), which has both Mac and Windows versions. If you run into any issues with these options, let me know.

At the start of the transcript, include a roughly 250-word summary of the podcast you're transcribing, why you selected it, and what you learned about that podcast from the transcription process.

With transcripts, accessibility is key. Bearing in mind that these documents are often created for people with hearing impairments, try to format your transcript in a way that will make sense to people who haven't listened or can't listen to the podcast you're transcribing. Balance being thorough with not being overwhelming. Consider questions like this: Is it more important to represent spoken words exactly or in a way that is easy to follow (for instance, do you include every stutter and every "umm")? How can you describe nonverbal sounds in a way that will make sense to those who haven't heard/can't hear those sounds?

Your transcript is due in the corresponding D2L dropbox by the beginning of class on Wed., Sept. 19. We will take time in class that day for everyone to talk about their experience with the exercise.

* If you have a particular reason for wanting to transcribe an already-transcribed segment, let me know. We'll just have to figure out a way to make sure you can't just copy and paste the existing transcript.

Preliminary Exercise 2: Interview

Begin by reading “ProgymnasmataIntro.pdf” in the course readings section of our course’s D2L page.

For this exercise, you will need to conduct an interview with someone. Who you interview, the topic of the interview, and the tone you strike are all up to you. However, you must take on the role of an interviewer rather than a conversation partner, asking questions and offering occasional clarifications/follow ups rather than being an equal participant. Moreover, we will listen to some of your interviews in class the day they are due, so make sure you structure and sequence your questions in such a way that your classmates will be able to follow along. For instance, if you interview a super-fan of the television show *The Americans* about how they felt about the show’s finale, make sure the interview is comprehensible to someone who’s never watched the show.

You can record the interview any way you like, and it doesn’t have to sound beautiful. The built-in microphone on a laptop or a voice memo app on a smartphone or tablet are both fine options, though you are welcome to use more advanced equipment. If you anticipate having trouble getting access to a recording device, let me know ASAP.

The initial interview must last at least 10 minutes, but you must cut the final version down to 3-4 minutes. The final version should include an introduction of no more than 30 seconds in which you introduce your interviewee and provide any other necessary context. We will discuss and practice using Audacity to do basic audio editing in class in before the interview is due.

This exercise is due by the beginning of class on Mon., Oct. 1. Both the edited and unedited versions of the interview must be submitted to the corresponding D2L dropbox as .mp3 or .m4a files. If D2L won’t let you submit the files because they’re too big, you can use a cloud-storage service like OneDrive etc. In addition to the audio files, submit a roughly 200-word explanation of the approach you took for the interview. Your explanation should make reference to “The Art of the Interview,” a section that starts on page 24 of *Out on the Wire*. How did your approach borrow or differ from the approaches and strategies described in that section? You’re also welcome to make reference to the interview styles of any of the podcasters whose work we’ve listened to.

Preliminary Exercise 3: Narrative

Begin by reading “ProgymnasmataNarrative.pdf” in the course readings section of our D2L page.

Rhetoricians and podcasters share a serious interest in narrative. Rhetoricians were interested in narrative both in and of itself and as a potential component of arguments. In the *progymnasmata* handbooks you’re reading selections from, the authors emphasize certain “virtues” of narrative including clarity, conciseness, credibility, and persuasiveness. Meanwhile, Jessica Abel describes podcasts as “the most fertile ground for narrative non-fiction in English-language media” (2).

However, the ways podcasters weave narratives often violate and/or stretch the narrative virtues described by *progymnasmata* authors. Because podcasts aren’t bound by the tight schedules of radio, they can spend hours narrating and analyzing even the most seemingly simple story. They can nest stories within stories, narrate events in a non-linear fashion, and just generally experiment with narrative form in all kinds of ways.

Your task for this exercise is to narrate an event you witness firsthand. A few restrictions: (1) The event must occur after you receive this prompt. (2) Your final narrative must be 3-4 minutes long. (3) You must incorporate at least one piece of audio other than your own narration (e.g., a piece of music, a sound effect, a clip of someone else talking). (4) The event must have happened in real life. That is, you can narrate your experience of going to the movies, but not the plot of a movie you just watched.

Beyond that, you can be as experimental as you want. You can play with chronology, the level and kinds of details you provide, your vocal style, etc. in any manner you see fit.

Your narrative is due in the corresponding dropbox by the beginning of class on Wed., Oct. 10. We will listen to the narratives in class that day. Narratives should be submitted as .mp3 or .m4a files. Your narrative must be accompanied by a 150-250 written statement in which you explain your approach to the narrative and provide any other necessary details for your audience (i.e., me and your classmates). This component can be submitted as a Word document or as a comment written directly in the D2L dropbox. The audio file can be submitted to D2L or the #narrative channel on Slack.

Preliminary Exercise 4: Soundscape

Begin by reading “ProgymnasmataEcphrasis.pdf” in the course readings section of our D2L page.

In “The Soundscape,” composer R. Murray Schafer writes, “To give a totally convincing image of a soundscape ... a new means of description would have to be devised” (99). This assignment puts that line from Schafer in conversation with *ekphrasis*, an exercise in description that challenged rhetoric students to describe something so vividly that it was brought before the eyes of their audience. Your task, in short, is to practice “a new means of description” in order to bring a place before the *ears* of your audience.

More specifically, your task is to create a soundscape of a physical location on MTSU’s campus. As sound artist Salomé Voegelin puts it, “Soundscape compositions work to make the listener aware of [their] acoustic environment, to extend auditory awareness, and stretch the processes of the listener’s own sonic engagement” ([Listening to Noise and Silence](#) 31). In other words, a soundscape takes a physical place or environment and represents it in sonic form. In doing so, a soundscape should call listeners’ attention to aspects of a space that the eyes might overlook. A soundscape can rely on recordings of a place’s actual sounds to try to create as accurate a representation as possible, or it can draw on absent or possible sounds to try to imagine what a place might sound like under different conditions. Consider, for example, David Al-Ibrahim’s “Calling Thunder” (<https://unsung.nyc>), a soundscape that allows listeners to walk around Manhattan while hearing what the island might have sounded like prior to European colonization.

Your soundscape can make use of field recordings of your chosen location and/or sounds gathered from sites like freesound.org. While it can include the sound of human speech, it should not include a voiceover or other form of explicitly descriptive language. It can emphasize your location’s actual sounds or be more speculative. The scope of your chosen location is up to you. It could be a single room, a whole building, a picnic table, or a parking lot.

Your final soundscape should be 2-4 minutes long and submitted as an .mp3 or .m4a file to the corresponding D2L dropbox. Soundscapes are due by the beginning of class on Mon., Nov. 5, and must be accompanied by a piece of writing, 200-250 words, in which you identify your chosen location and explain why you chose it, then explain the approach you took in creating your soundscape. You should also include a list of all the sounds included in your soundscape, including whether you recorded them yourself or found them elsewhere. Submit the piece of writing and the list of sounds as a single Microsoft Word document.

We will listen to some of the soundscapes in class on the day they’re due.

Preliminary Exercise 5: Imitation

Begin by reading “ProgymnasmataProsopopoeia.pdf” in the course readings section of our D2L page.

Prosopopoeia was one of the most popular exercises in classical, medieval, and Renaissance rhetoric classrooms. Basically, students were given a historical, mythological, or stock character as well as a situation, then had to imitate what the character would have said in that situation. For example, “What would a coward say upon finding a golden sword?” “What would a farmer say upon seeing the ocean for the first time?” “What words would Chiron [a centaur and teacher from Greek mythology] say when he hears that Achilles [the hero of the *Iliad*] is living in the girls’ quarters?” Students would both write and perform their exercises, so *prosopopoeia* was meant to help them become both better writers and speakers as well as more careful readers and listeners.

This exercise is inspired by *prosopopoeia*, but takes a slightly different approach. Your task is to research the rhetorical context of Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address and, based on at least three sources, including at least one scholarly article, record a version of the speech that sounds as much as possible like the original would have.

I am also open to you recording a 2-4 minute segment of any other noteworthy speech of which no surviving audio or video recording exists, but you’ll need to pitch it to me first.

Your imitation of the speech should be submitted as an .mp3 or .m4a file to the corresponding D2L dropbox or the #imitation Slack channel. The exercise is due by the beginning of class on Mon., Nov. 19, and must be accompanied by a piece of writing, 150-250 words and submitted to D2L, in which you identify your three sources and explain the choices and research behind the way your version of the speech sounds.

Podcast Episode

For one of the final projects for this course, the class will collaboratively plan and produce a podcast. The class as a whole will decide on an overarching theme/topic for the podcast. There are only three restrictions: (1) The theme/topic must be related to rhetoric and sound in some way, (2) the podcast cannot be a work of fiction, and (3) the podcast must be narrative-driven. In other words, no big rambling interviews or roundtable discussions. Your episode should tell a story in a way that echoes the podcasts and radio shows documented in *Out on the Wire*. Beyond that, you all will have a lot of leeway in determining the focus and scope of the series. We will discuss and workshop the podcast repeatedly over the course of the semester.

Students will work in smaller groups of three or four to create individual episodes of the podcast. Episodes can engage the theme/topic on which the class decides from a variety of angles and must be 15-25 minutes. Each group must submit a 500-word pitch for their individual episode by the beginning of class on Wed., Nov. 14. We will discuss the pitches in class that day.

A final cut of each group's episode is due by the beginning of class on the last day of class: Wed., Dec. 5. We will listen to the series in class that day. Episodes must be submitted to D2L or Slack as uncompressed audio files (.wav, .aif, etc.) and accompanied by a transcript submitted as a .doc or .docx file. Finally, each group must also submit a document describing each group member's contributions to their episode. On Dec. 5, your group will need to turn in a hard copy of this document to me, complete with physical signatures from each group member. This is to make sure all group members pulled their weight, and that anyone who did not doesn't get disproportionate credit.