The Annex Sociology Podcast Hosting Guide

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This post offers advice on hosting an episode The Annex Sociology Podcast. It starts with an overview of our show and its goals, and then offers a list of the recommended steps in the show development process.

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About Our Show

We are an Occupation-Oriented Podcast for Academic Sociologists. We present and discuss people, ideas, research findings, news stories, advice, and other topics that are of interest to sociology academics, applied sociologists, and graduate students in sociology or sociology-adjacent programs. Our goal is to be a source of job-relevant information for people who work, or aspire to work, as sociologists.

Our Shows Feature Sociologists. Discussion participants should generally be sociology (or adjacent field) professors and doctoral students, people who use their advanced sociology training in a professional capacity, or people with a professional role that is of interest and import to academic or applied sociologists (e.g., publishers, higher education administrators, nonfiction writers). Exceptions can be made, but should be based on some rationale that involves making a substantial contribution to the sociology community.

The Cardinal Rule: It Has to be Interesting or Rewarding. The cardinal rule of our show is that each of our episodes should be genuinely interesting or rewarding to some substantial segment of the sociology community. Our listeners invest a piece of their attention in our show, and every episode should make an earnest attempt to deliver something of value for that attention.

Be Intelligent but Speak Normally and Be Accessible. Conversation should be comprehensible to any intelligent, educated person. Avoid jargon, or at least define it so people can follow. Discussions of published work (both population and academic) should include a brief, plain-language summary of the piece's substantive arguments.

No Monologues. *The Annex* conveys information through conversation. We consider this conversational aspect of our content to be an important point of differentiation between us and many other academic-sociology directed media (like journals, paper panels, plenary speeches, blogs, or social media posts). However, we are open to documentary-style episodes that are narrated, but expect narration to be interspersed with archival footage or interview excerpts.

Productive Argumentation. Strive for good-faith, intellectually honest, fallacy-free argumentation. Help guests convey their ideas as intended, and give guests latitude to delete parts of their speech after the fact.

Steps in the Show Development Process

What is Your Goal?

An episode of *The Annex* is a thirty-minute to one-hour blank audio canvas capable of delivering audio information to hundreds of colleagues. Even though we are not a large show by conventional podcasting standards, but this podcast is a decent-sized platform by the standards of the academic sociology discipline. So an episode is a good opportunity to communicate something to our professional community. Your first step is to figure out what you want to do with this attention.

A well-executed show has a purpose. Setting a goal for the show helps guide you through the process of deciding whom to enlist and what to discuss.

Figure 1: Some Possible Goals for Your Episode

You might want to…	Possible subjects
• **Raise awareness**: Introduce something new to the listeners; make them aware of something's existence. • **Inform**: Provide listeners with valuable information that they do not yet possess • **Promote**: Convince listeners should do or think something. • **Process**: Discuss or debate a topic in a collaborate effort to better understand • **Entertain**: Give listeners enjoyment	• Ideas • Papers or publications • Field of study, work or thought • People • Organizations • News items • Debates • Tasks or problems typically encountered in our work

As you take further steps in the development of your show, try to keep your goals in mind.

Recruit Guests

Once you have a sense of what you are trying to accomplish in your episode, the next step is to recruit discussion partners. Fortunately, academics are generally happy to talk about their work. The toughest part at this stage is developing the nerve to invite people to chat. You will quickly learn that most people are very nice and soliciting participation is easy. Check out Figure 3 (next page) gives an example of an email that I might use for recruitment.

Annex episodes have three or four voices. Our system accommodates up to four speakers, but one of those spaces will be taken up by Lab personnel if we are providing you with an on-site producer for the session. Sometimes, people are at a loss as to how to approach potential guests. You will quickly find that most of our colleagues are very nice people who are passionate about their interests and enthusiastic to engage in a thoughtful chat on their passions. Don't copy this letter, but rather get a sense of what I'm trying to do, and then do it in a way or with a voice that is more genuine to you.

If invitees respond, the next step is to coordinate a recording time. I recommend setting aside a two-hour window that works for everyone. If your panel has people with packed schedules, you might use a tool to coordinate, like Doodle.com. Coordinate the schedule before starting show preparation, as scheduling is sometimes a deal-breaker for possible guests. If someone from the Podcast Lab is going to be part of the session, be sure to include them on the scheduling emails!

I have learned that it is helpful to remind your guests about their upcoming podcast episodes. Once I schedule a recording session, I add it to Google Calendar and include the guests on that calendar item. I also schedule reminder emails that go out to guests a few days before Recording Day. Scheduled emails are easy on Gmail.

Dear Professor Smith,

I'm an Associate Professor of Sociology at Queens College, where I run an academic sociology-themed podcast called *The Annex Sociology Podcast* (visit: theAnnexPodcast.com).

We are assembling an episode episode about the Sociology of Typewriters. I loved reading your "Ink Ribbons: A Praxis" in *The Journal of Typewriter Research*, and would love to include your experience and point-of view in our exchanges.

The episode to which you are being invited tries the introduce this field and its major findings to our listeners. Our discussions take place over a 30 to 60-minute session on Skype-like teleconferencing platform at a time that is convenient to you. It is our goal to ensure that guests put their best foot forward, and I am confident that past guests will attest doing episodes with us it is a fun, positive experience.

Making it easy for recipient can look me up.

Reassuring the guest that it will be a positive experience.

Explaining why I am reaching out them. Always be honest in your praise. Why interview someone whom you do not esteem in some way?

Telling the recipient what to do if they are interested or have questions.

Figure 2: Example Guest Recruitment Letter

Preparing Guests

Once your date is scheduled, then I recommend the following:

- Give your guests a link to our *Annex Guest Preparation Guide:* [URL]
- Send an email reiterating the episode goals, and soliciting ideas from guests about questions to ask. Guests come up with excellent ideas – they know their topic better than I do!

Show Prep

Show preparation involves developing a plan for presiding over the recording session. When I do show preparation, I try to envision a course of discussion that allows our typical listener to understand and follow what we are discussing. This involves writing a "set up" and developing a list of questions.

The Set Up. I try to start an episode with a brief introduction. My goal is to give listeners a short introduction to the show's topic, and to explain why the topic is attention worthy.

The Questions. I organize shows by questions. My experience is that a question generates about one to seven minutes of discussion. Some questions die quickly, and some generate great exchanges. A twenty- to forty-minute show can be generated from a set of about ten questions.

Some tips:

- Think of questions as steps along a path. Try to develop a sequence of questions that will bring listeners along a path towards your episode's goals.
- Try to develop a path that draws on the strengths of each of your guests. Try to frame individual questions so multiple discussants have a shot of chiming in.

- Jot down some points that you might want to make, but try to foreground the guests' responses and views.

Presiding Over the Recording Session

Tell Guests to Pause Before Logging Off. **HEED THIS**. If you listen to no other information in this document, at the very least be sure to <u>tell guests to wait until their audio files have uploaded to the server before closing the browser tab.</u>

Keep Your Guests Relaxed. People thrive on this medium when they are relaxed, social, and conversational. Part of your job as a presider is creating an emotional environment that lends itself to the type of positive dynamic that puts guests in that state of mind. Break the ice. Remind guests that we don't have *that* big an audience. Reassure them that it is our goal to have everyone come across at their best.

Over the years, I have developed policies and techniques. In Figure 3 (right), I give a version of the speech that I typically give guests before they record an episode with me. The goal is to push the environment towards one in that puts people at ease and establishes an easy, conversational tone.

> *Podcasting is different from interviews or speeches or panels in that this is <u>not</u> live. If something comes out wrong and you want to restate it: go ahead and we will simply delete the part that came out wrong. If you started and feel like you are off-track: go ahead and start over and we'll delete the part that came out wrong. You will get to review a copy of our show before it goes public, and we will take out any part that isn't communicating what you intend to communicate. So don't stress about saying the wrong thing, or getting a false start. It's not live.*

Figure 3: What I tell guests at the outset of a recording session. The speech is part of my effort to put guests at ease.

Instruction on Managing Crosstalk. I have also found that instructing discussant on the following convention helps in editing:

> *Sometimes, you are just dying to jump in to say something. This kind of jumping-in can generate an energetic back-and-forth. But it can also just be an interruption that prevents someone from completing a thought. This is how we deal with interruptions:*
>
> *If you are the speaker and someone is interrupting, and the interruption is unwelcome – say you really want to finish the thought – then keep on talking as if you are not being interrupted. When that happens, we erase the interrupting voice, and the listener never hears it. If the interruption is welcome, then just yield the floor and we will clean it up in production.*
>
> *If you are the interrupter, then pull back if the speaker doesn't want to yield the floor. We will erase the interruption, and you can start it fresh once the current speaker yields.*

Figure 4: Short speech to guide guests on interruptions

Set Up the Episode. I try to begin the episode with a 30 second to two-minute introduction. I usually script the introduction while doing show preparation. The introduction should introduce the show's topic and offer some kind of case for the topic's interest-worthiness.

Introduce the Speakers. Episodes begin with the speakers identifying themselves, so that audiences can identify them in discussions.

Start by Asking them to Describe their Work in a Few Sentences. This allows speakers to understand the point-of-view from which each discussant approaches the topic. Moreover, it helps put guests at ease. Be sure to emphasize the "in a few sentences" part.

While the Discussants are Answering, I usually focus on a few things. It's not so different from running a seminar class, really:

- Coming up with a short, plain-language summary of what the discussant just said. This is done to bring back listeners who might have gotten last in the previous conversational turn.
- I listen for jargon or other inside information that might need to explained for audiences to understand the speaker's story or point. If you hear someone use jargon, strive for a quick interruption of this sort: *Some of our listeners don't know the concept of "morbidity" – what does the term mean?* This is done in order to ensure that more listeners are able to follow the conversational turn in real time.
- I listen for opportunities to tie discussants to the conversation.

When Your Questions Run Out. Ask the guests if there are any questions or topics that they wish had been discussed.

WAIT FOR THE AUDIO FILES TO UPLOAD TO THE CLOUD!!! Then drop me a note. For the love of all that is good, make sure all of the audio files are uploaded. Once it's done, send me an email just letting me know that you're done with the session.

Reviewing the First Cut

After your recording session, our producers will cut your audio files into a polished episode. When it is ready to be reviewed, you will receive an email notification with a link to the audio file. The final step for the host is to review the edited episode.

This is an opportunity to ensure that no one says anything embarrassing or something that could cause trouble (e.g., accidental breach of confidentiality, inadvertent publiciziation, etc.). If you find something that needs to be deleted, tell your producer. For each requested deletion, please forward the time (to the second) start and end time of the deleted passed, along with (1) the last three words to <u>be included</u>, and (2) the last three words to <u>be deleted.</u>

Fat to Trim? There are times when the first cut of the episode includes a discussion that you think is uninteresting, misleading, or has some other quality that will detract from the value our listeners draw from the episode. These types of edits are a judgment call. I generally lean towards *not* deleting passages that I think are uninteresting, because others might find it interesting. I lean towards deleting parts that lack coherent thoughts or ideas.

A Show Blurb

While you are reviewing, please jot down a (1) one-sentence and (2) up to 100 word summary that describes the discussion. It helps us develop show descriptions and show pages.

Thank You for Participating in our Project!

We hope that these materials prove helpful in preparing for your episode. If you have helpful recommendations for improving this guide, then please let me know: joe@queenspodcastlab.org

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