Should you script, ad-lib, or outline your podcast episodes?

From: The Audacity to Podcast, Daniel J. Lewis, 2013

https://theaudacitytopodcast.com/should-you-script-ad-lib-or-outline-your-podcast-episodes-tap146/

In podcasting, there are three different formats for presenting content.

1. **Script**—you write and read the script verbatim into your podcast.
2. **Ad-lib**—you speak freely without restriction or direction.
3. **Outline**—you have a basic list of content you want to share

Script

When you're concerned about perfection, the highest accuracy, or you're not yet comfortable speaking into a microphone, you may be considering, "Should I script my podcast?" This may be the right way to go for some podcasters.

Scripted audio and video is all around us.

- Movies and non-reality TV shows are scripted and performed by (usually) skilled actors.
- News broadcasts on radio and TV are scripted and either read from a teleprompter or script.
- Political speakers usually read from a teleprompter, too.
- Commercials are almost always scripted.
- Some popular podcasts—like Grammar Girl and others from Quick and Dirty Tips—are scripted.
- Even late-night comedy shows are partially scripted.

Scripting ensures that you'll get the message exactly right, often to precise timing, which is crucial in all of these media. But this precision and accuracy comes at the cost of time and presentation quality.

The downside to scripts is that they must be read. It takes professional coaching or years of practice to get good at reading a script naturally.

Scripted podcast content doesn't work in long form. I think around ten minutes is the longest you should let a scripted podcast be.

Because most of us aren't professional voiceover artists, reading a script will often produce loads of editing as you struggling to perform perfectly.

When I first started my podcast, I scripted my episodes and performed them verbatim. This took many hours to produce a single episode, and it's why I only had nine episodes in two years.

Ad-lib

On the total opposite to scripting would be ad-libbing. **This is when you speak freely and have no restrictions or directions for your content.**

This can be very comfortable for some people to present, but others will be very uncomfortable with publishing something unpolished.

Ad-libbing allows your personality to fully show through (as long as you're presenting something you truly care about).

Conversations are a form of ad-libbing, as each participant speaks as the thoughts come to them.

Free-flowing thought can be hard for a listener or viewer to follow, and they may often be annoyed by the rabbit trails and excessive emptiness a podcaster speaks to make a simple point.

I know I can struggle with a little too much ad-libbing. This means I'm wasting your time to tell you something in five minutes that could take me one.

Outline (recommended)

A hybrid between a rigid script and ad lib would be an outline. **This is when you have your points you want to cover, and the extra information handy, and then you present from those points.**

This doesn't mean every episode is "10 ways to …" or "How to … in 5 steps." You may have some of that (and it makes for great episode/post titles!), but you don't need to share your outline. You can present great content from a 5-, 10-, or 50-point outline without your audience ever knowing your list, but still receiving the information.

This is my top recommendation because it gives your content flow, while still allowing freedom to ad-lib as you elaborate your points. Using an outline in conversations keeps the discussion moving and ensures you present a structured message to your audience.

1. Outline your content with headings, subheadings, and lists.
2. Script or transcribe the things that must be accurate (quotations, technical descriptions, etc.).
3. Ad-lib by writing some concise sentences that summarize what you spoke, without being a transcript or commentary.

Basic Hybrid Outline

By Michelle Ruoff, October 25, 2018 https://live365.com/blog/how-to-write-a-podcast-script/

Intro: [Say your podcast name and topic, your name and who you are, what you're going to talk about, and your call to action] *(Duration)*
Music Jingle: Repeat at beginning of each episode to help listeners easily identify your podcast *(Duration)*
Topic 1: [Set up your overall theme and discuss a point, topic, or segment in detail] *(Duration)*
Topic 2: [Discuss one point, topic, or segment in detail] *(Duration)*
Interlude: [Music break or sponsor ad] *(Duration)*
Topic 3: [Discuss one point, topic, or segment in detail] *(Duration)*
Topic 4: [Discuss one point, topic, or segment in detail] *(Duration)*
Outro: [Summarize theme, topics, and segments with conclusion] *(Duration)*
Closing Remarks: [Thank audience, thank guests, talk about the next episode, and do one final call to action] *(Duration)*
Closing Music Jingle: Repeat intro music jingle to help listeners identify the jingle with your show *(Duration)*

More Detailed Hybrid Outline

- **Topic 1 Header** *(Duration)*
    - Main Point
        - Supporting Point
        - Supporting Point
    - Supporting Data/Reference
    - Case Study/Example/Anecdote
    - Conclusion
- **Segue**
- **Topic 2 Header** *(Duration)*
    - Main Point
        - Supporting Point
        - Supporting Point
    - Supporting Data/Reference
    - Case Study/Example/Anecdote
    - Conclusion

Tip: Including the duration for each part of your script will help you stay on track with the length of your podcast episode. You can also estimate how many words comfortably fit into the length of your podcast episodes to help guide you when writing scripts.