

**“Is This Thing On?”**

**An Innovative Approach to Teaching Microphone Etiquette and Vocal Technique**

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#### **Introduction**

Gen Z now devotes over twice as much time to spoken word content compared to young adults aged 13-34 in 2014. Spoken word's portion of total audio consumption has risen by 55% in the last nine years (NPR & Edison Research, 2023). Recently, Aenlle et al. (2022) recommended podcasters seek out more training opportunities. Seeing a rise in spoken-word audio consumption, there is a pressing need to teach students in the agricultural communications discipline microphone etiquette, vocal technique, and the technology used in the spoken-word audio space. As educators, the rise in spoken word audio consumption means we must teach this skill in our agricultural communications discipline, or we are falling behind the technology and new media curve.

Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) tells us people can learn by watching others and our thoughts and feelings matter when we learn. Utilizing the four steps outlined in Bandura's theory, educators can use this creative approach to teach how to properly handle a mic, vocal technique, and about the equipment used in spoken-word audio. The theory's components as they relate to this innovative idea include: 1) attention — teach the material; 2) retention — students will verbally repeat the concepts learned; 3) reproduction — students will create deliverables to demonstrate the concepts learned; and 4) motivation — increase self-efficacy by providing encouraging feedback at the end of the activity from instructor and classmates.

#### **How it Works**

This innovative approach to teaching microphone etiquette and vocal technique can be employed in a two-day vocal workshop consisting of two 50-minute sessions. Thus, it can easily be incorporated into a traditional semester-long course. In lecture day one, it was explained that the activity was meant to familiarize students with speaking confidently into a mic under any circumstance. Three mic, speaker, and mic stand combinations were set up. Students were instructed on proper mic etiquette for both mic stand and handheld scenarios as well as the mechanics of mics and mic types and their sound outputs. After the basic instruction was given, each student came up in sets of three. Each was instructed to introduce themselves and then speak for an additional fifteen seconds on a topic of their choosing. Examples given were to introduce themselves, tell a story, act as a rodeo/sports announcer, or speak as an auctioneer. To make them feel more comfortable with each other, between each set of students, they were asked to verbally share their experience on hearing themselves talk as well as point out any mistakes they made regarding mic etiquette.

On the second day, students engaged in a podcast advertisement challenge. They were divided into teams of 4-5 members. Each team had designated roles: two primary roles—advertisement

voice(s) and scriptwriter—and three optional roles—creative director, satisfied customer with a testimonial, and product expert. Students were given guidelines to create an agriculturally-, rodeo- or livestock-show-focused 30- to 45-second podcast advertisement with a hook, pitch, and call to action at minimum. The instructor provided a bag of mystery products from which each group blindly chose by drawing out of the bag. Each product was an agricultural product or byproduct (i.e., an ear of corn, a beef jerky stick, honey, a rubber chicken). Teams were allotted 25 minutes to develop their advertisement and were free to select their preferred mic setup. Each group presented their advertisement live to the class, showcasing their creativity, marketing competencies, and mic etiquette skills.

### **Results to Date**

The two-day vocal workshop was used in two agricultural podcast production courses at [University] in Spring 2023 and Fall 2023. Fifty-four ( $N = 54$ ) students participated. At the end of the course, students were asked to reflect on their favorite assignment. Many students noted this innovative workshop as their favorite from the course and helped them make connections in the class saying, “It made me get out of my shell and I had a blast with my group,” “I thought it gave us all a chance to meet new people in the class,” and “it brought us together and it was fun coming up with ideas for the ad.” Other students commented on feeling creative and inspired. They said, “the podcast ad challenge was so much fun. We really got to use creativity in our topics” and “this was a lot of fun. It has me contemplating starting my own [podcast] because of how much I enjoyed it.” One student specifically noted the growth in confidence they saw in a classmate, “the absolute best thing was seeing [student name] come out of his shell! When he started auctioneering, my mouth dropped. It was awesome when the class cheered for him!” Additionally, during verbal reflection after the workshop, several students verbally thanked the instructor for the approach and indicated they were excited about the class. This workshop was modified to fit a one-day format for a one-hour and fifteen-minute course in Fall 2023.

### **Future Plans**

In the future, we plan to incorporate more challenges using the two-day vocal workshop as a model. Additionally, we plan to make this an extra credit competition where the students vote on the winners. If this course were to be taught in an online space, we would modify it to be a solo assignment where each student listens to each others’ advertisements and then vote on a winner, with the winner being awarded extra credit.

### **Resources Needed**

This innovative two-day vocal workshop requires access to a minimum of one mic/speaker setup. The best setup would be one unidirectional mic with a stand, one omnidirectional mic with a stand, and one handheld unidirectional mic. Electricity is required. There is no additional cost associated with this innovative idea.

### References

- Aenlle, J., Loizzo, J., Lundy, L. K., Bunch, J. C., & Folta, K. M. (2022). Podcasts in production: An examination of current and best practices for agricultural and natural resource podcast producers, *Journal of Applied Communications*, *106*(4). <https://doi.org/10.4148/1051-0834.2461>
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