Kia ora koutou. This episode is about narration. It has two main aspects to it: writing your narration and delivering your narration. Let's get started.

Writing for audio. The first thing you need to think about when choosing how to write your script that you'll deliver for your podcast is to identify your relationship to both the topic and your audience, and where appropriate, to your interviewees, the guests whose voices you include on the podcast. This is something called the "rhetorical situation." It's an awareness of your relationship to the people who will listen to your podcast and also to the topic, the content, that you're speaking on, and your awareness of your relationship to the people whose stories you're telling. Podcasts, like other forms of stories and arguments, establish relationships between communities, between writers, between readers, in this case between speakers and listeners. And the way that you speak and write, what you will speak, depends on whom you're speaking to and what you're speaking about.

So I recommend getting a pen and paper and identifying the specific kinds of people you imagine listening to your podcast and what kinds of communities are they a part of. Identify the details of your potential listeners so you can understand what language you can best use to speak to them directly. Same thing with your topic. A topic that is very serious will require a certain kind of language a certain formality to it. A topic that's more comedic and light-hearted can have an informal way of writing and speaking the words that you write for it. And same with your interviewees, depending on your relationship with them, if you know them personally if you're very close with them, that's going to change the way that you speak about and with them. Whereas if you don't know your interviewees, other than the brief time that you had to interview them, that might change your relationship with them and therefore the language that you use to talk about them. So think carefully about your audience, your interviewees, and the topic. And I'd make a few bullet point notes, maybe three to five for each one of those aspects, to get a sense of who you're writing for and with before you begin the process of writing out your possible narration.

The next thing I'd add is there are different degrees of how specific you get when writing your narration. Some people write it out word for word and revise and revise and revise until they get it pristine and perfect, and that makes a lot of sense. Other people, again depending on your topic and the style that you're trying to evoke in your podcast, other people will write a kind of bullet points of ideas and notes, as I'm actually using right now, rather than specific sentences, and that allows a bit more of an informal and fluid way of talking and thinking and demonstrating that you're thinking at the same time that you're talking, rather than rehearsing like an act or a script that you've already performed. So the tension is how specific you get with the script that you write. And this will depend on your own comfort level at improvisational skills and at delivering a full script in a relaxed kind of way. So you have to choose for yourself what degree of script you write, but you should definitely write some kind of script if you have narration in a narrative non-fiction style podcast. In other situations, such as podcasts that simply conduct an interview and upload the interview directly to the web, no, you don't need a narration. That's a different style of podcast that welcomes the informal banter between interviewees and guests and co-hosts. And that kind of podcasting certainly doesn't need scripted narration. But narrative non-fiction podcasting, on the other hand, often does require a careful attention to language, the language that you use to create a relationship between you, your audience, your topic, and your interviewees.

As a general rule, I have a handful of guidelines here, five specific tips that tend to work well for writing for audio, which is quite different than writing for writing, whether you're writing for the web, whether you're writing for a newspaper, whether you're writing for an academic context. All of those have different styles of writing, but writing for listening, for people to hear you, is a quite different thing. And in fact it's almost the opposite of the things that you've learned about writing in an academic context. So here are five guidelines. They're not always right, but oftentimes they'll point you in the right direction when writing for audio.

The first is shorter sentences, shorter sentences, shorter sentences. In fact that sentence there was two words. In fact, it's a fragment. Shorter sentences. It's just an adjective and a noun. Shorter sentences. Audio is digested in smaller chunks than print, so often shorter sentences will serve you well.

Next, smaller words. No need to bust out the full breadth of your vocabulary here. It's perfectly fine if you have a rich vocabulary, and you want to demonstrate that here. I'm not saying don't use the breadth of your vocabulary and only use the same seven or eight words over and over. But, in general, people use words like "but" rather than "however" when speaking on a podcast. "However" might be more appropriate in an academic writing context, but for people's ears "but" serves the same role that however does, and it gets you there that much quicker, and it even has a punctuality to it. It even has a force.

The third item is active verbs. Now this is something you have maybe heard of and been encouraged to use in other writing contexts, but it's especially important when writing for audio. You want to charge your story with action and energy, even if it's a story of tragedy, a story of loss, a story of melancholy and mourning. You want to put the full weight of that tragic melancholic story in those verbs and let those verbs drip through your podcast episode. The word "drip" that's only a one-syllable word. But it's a pretty decent active verb: "to drip." So think carefully about verbs that you could use. Use a thesaurus. Google synonyms for words that you find common, and see if you can find some rich verbs to really drive your narration home.

The fourth item is contractions are cool. In other situations you might be told to avoid contractions, especially in academic writing. But here: drop in your "don'ts" and "can'ts" and "it's". Contractions work well. It's a way that we speak quite often. And it's a way that listeners are accustomed to listening: to language that's contracted, spoken language, to speech that's contracted. So contractions are cool. Use 'em as often as you please.

And the last thing is beware of pronouns. So without listeners being able to look back and see who was the subject of the previous sentence that your pronoun is referring to--who is the antecedent of that pronoun--they have to keep all these names in their head. So be very careful about how you use pronouns and especially how you set up your interviewees to speak. Encourage them, if they say something like "he" or "she" or "they," encourage them, say, "Oh, can you please say the name again at the beginning of that sentence?" Just interrupt them. They won't mind. They'll go back and say, "Yes, Malala said blah blah blah..." And they will introduce the name of that person rather than "she said," and that kind of specificity, rather than pronouns, will really help your listeners follow your story all the way through.

So just to recap, strategies for writing for audio: identify your relationship to your topic, your audience, your interviewees. This will give you a sense of how formal or informal your language can and should be. And then five general guidelines for writing for audio: shorter sentences, smaller words, active verbs, contractions are cool, and beware of pronouns. Next, vocal delivery.

This is the fun one. I'm gonna offer five qualities of your vocal delivery, followed by five strategies for vocal delivery, and then make a final note about your voice.

In terms of the five qualities to think about with delivery, the first is volume. This is an obvious one. You can be louder if you need to be. You can also be much softer if you need to be, very soft. Volume is easy. You can manipulate volume quite simply with your voice. You can also manipulate it by proximity to the microphone. But you want to be careful not to pop your "p"s and "k" consonants. Even if you're working with a pop screen on a nice microphone or a windscreen, those pops can still create an agitated sound for your listeners. So be careful. You can edit some of it out later in post-production, but you want to be careful with those consonants. The other thing to keep an eye on with regards to volume is that you're not "peaking" too much. If you're working with a digital recorder where you can see your levels you want to try to not go too much higher than -6 db. You certainly don't want to get all the way up to zero. That's absolutely peaking. But staying between -18 and -6 is generally a good safe space to be in terms of your db. If you're able to work with a digital voice recorder that gives you a visual note of your specific levels, the other thing is you don't want to be too soft. So you don't want to be too far away from the microphone or speak too softly. This is especially the case with interviewees who are nervous and kind of continue to back up away from the microphone the whole time. So you want to keep a close eye and make sure that they're not too soft. Volume you can adjust later in post production. But the initial audio that you get is crucial, crucial, crucial. Always best to get the best audio that you can at the beginning because you can't fix everything in post production. So volume is number one.

The next thing is pitch. Pitch of your voice is very, very high. I can go very, very high. [increases pitch] I can also come back down to the medium. And then I can go lower, and I can get a very low pitched voice. [lowers pitch] This is something to play with. What's comfortable for you? For you, is it nicer to have a higher pitched voice, kind of like this? [slightly higher pitch] Or is it better to go a little lower pitched voice, kind of around this place? [medium pitch] Or you could go quite low and have a lower pitched voice. [low pitch] Some radio voices specifically pitch their voice a little bit lower to give it a kind of resonance, to give it a kind of sense and a feel that's a bit warmer. But you should pitch your voice at whatever both sounds good to you on re-listening and feels comfortable to you when you're delivering. So play with pitch and see what works for you.

The third item tempo or pace. This is are you a very fast speaker or are you a slow and deliberate speaker? Tempo or pace. Dou speak very fast? Do you speak very slow? The risk here, especially with me and many other people, is the risk of speaking too fast. Oftentimes, you have to slow yourself down because our brains work faster than our mouths a lot of times, and people's ears often work slower than our mouths do when we're speaking. So record yourself at a certain pace saying a few sentences. Go back, listen to it again, ty saying it slower. See how that sounds. Try saying it faster. Try to find an appropriate tempo. And I bet your appropriate tempo, the tempo that is both comfortable for you to speak and comfortable for you to listen, is probably a little slower than you think.

The fourth item is rhythm or cadence. Rhythm might seem similar to tempo. But rhythm is more about the spaces between the words, the gaps between the words, the gaps between the words. You can deliver things at a fast pace, but have a syncopated rhythm. And you could deliver things at a slow pace with a uneven or a steady rhythm. So there are lots of ways that you can change the cadence of your delivery, that you can change the rhythm, the words that you choose to emphasize. Where you put those pauses, where you put those pauses. Where you put those pauses can change the meaning the feeling of your podcast. So play with rhythm and cadence. Find something that's comfortable for you and that sounds good when you listen back to it, that emphasizes the main ideas and feelings that you're trying to emphasize in your narrative.

The fifth and final quality of delivery is timbre. This is a tricky French word. Timbre essentially means the quality or characteristics of a sound or voice, so I often think of Louis Armstrong here in the way he could growl his words when he's singing. That kind of growling, rough sounding quality to his voice is the timbre of it. You might also have people who have a very round wholesome fluid voice. This kind of rounded sound is another kind of timbre. Obviously I'm exaggerating both of these quite a bit, but timbre is something you might think about in terms of your own voice. How would you describe its qualities, its characteristics (other than volume, pitch, tempo, and rhythm)? And how can you play with or modify those in ways that accentuate the story that you're trying to tell, while also feeling comfortable, something that you can say and repeat and do regularly.

So those are the five qualities of delivery that you should be thinking about as you are thinking about delivering the script and narration that you've composed for your podcast. They are again: volume, pitch, tempo, rhythm, and timbre. Let's go to five strategies for delivery.

So you've got your narration written. You've played around with those five different qualities of delivery, and now it's time to hit the record button. What the heck do you do?

First things first, figure out what position of your body is most conducive to creating the sounds that you want to create and to being simply comfortable. Try sitting up straight: shoulders back, neck back, giving yourself space to breathe deeply, not just in the top of your chest but all the way down to your diaphragm. Those of you who've done choir before will think about the ways that you hold your body to hold breath and to make sound. Try sitting up straight. Some people might like to stand, try standing straight. Some people might find that standing straight creates too much tension in their body. That's fine. This isn't a coral ensemble after all. It's just you and a microphone, and no one's gonna see what position you're in. So try sitting in a very relaxed position. Try lounging back in your chair, or even recording on the sofa with your feet propped up. Try that super relaxed position. How does your voice sound then? Do you have enough space to breathe? Can you speak and say the things you want to say? You may be relaxed, but how does your voice sound? Then you might try to find something in between the sitting straight and the super relaxed. For me, right now, I'm kind of in that sweet spot. I'm sitting mostly straight but not fully straight now. I'm sitting fully straight. I just popped my back, you might have heard it. But for me it's a little bit hunched over the microphone. I'm not hunched a lot. But if I sit too straight, I get just a little too tense. So I'm mostly straight. I'm a little more straight than I sit when I'm like watching a lecture. So you might just do about five or ten minutes of recording yourself speaking in different positions. Make sure, you can play with the proximity of the mic as well, to figure out how your voice sounds best and how you feel most comfortable.

The next thing after your body is your breath. Because together your body and your breath create sound. So once you understand how your body is situated, then pay attention to how you can breathe in that position. [breathes]I just breathed through my nose. But sometimes you might also do [breathes] ...breath of your mouth. You might do catch breaths in between. You may be speaking and [breathes quickly] quickly catch breath like that. Practice your breathing, and make sure that you have space to breathe. You listening to my breathing now? A little bit strange. Try to listen to where podcasters breathe. Try to mark it if they have a script, the transcript, that's available. Try to mark, in their transcript, where they choose to breathe. And sometimes, podcasters cut out the breaths because they tighten up the audio afterwards. But sometimes cutting out the breaths changes the rhythm, makes someone's cadence or their pace sound quite different. Breathing is an instrumental part of speaking and quite often it's normal for the breaths to be there even though we're not always paying attention to them. So pay attention to your body. Pay attention to your breath. Make sure both are comfortable and relaxed and make your voice sound good.

The third item is warm up your mouth, jaw, lips, tongue, and vocal cords. So you might go [makes high pitch to low pitch slide] from high pitch to low pitch, but also I'm moving my jaw and lips a lot. I'm over exaggerating and practicing my articulation. If any of you have done theater, just google theater warm-ups if you haven't done theater, and find some "red leather yellow leather," "red leather yellow leather," to warm up your lips, some tongue twisters, your jaw stretch, purse, purse, purse your lips like that. Work your vocal cords from low to high and back down to low. Just warm up your mouth and jaw and vocal cords a little bit before practicing so that your voice can easily occupy its full range and that you can articulate clearly in a way that both honors the quality of your voice and makes it so the listeners can understand the words that you're saying. Because if they can't understand the words that you're saying, then your story may not land.

Fourth item: it's okay to be expressive with your face and your hands while you're podcasting. In fact right now, I'm just gesticulating with my left hand, and in fact my eyebrows are up and my mouth is pulled in a kind of grin-ish position. It's perfectly fine to be expressive with your voice and your hands. Just make sure not to bump the microphone. In fact you might practice being expressive with your face and hands while you are speaking on the microphone because it changes the feeling and the pace and the ways that you energize your speech. Right now I'm gesticulating with my right hand. Did that sound different than my left hand? Go back 15 or 20 seconds and see. The ways that you gesticulate, the ways that you contort your face when you speak help give life and energy to your voice. So don't be shy about using those to your advantage. In fact, you could practice over-exaggerating them and dialing them back. And figure out where is that sweet spot in terms of how your voice sounds and its relationship to the expressiveness of your face and your hands.

The fifth and final strategy for delivery is: practice. Practice, practice, practice. There is no substitute for simply practicing your qualities, your volume, pitch, tempo, rhythm, and timbre, and practicing how you sit. How you breathe. How you warm up your mouth, and how you speak expressively with your voice, your face, and your hands. It takes practice. So give yourself time to do that. Great! So those are the two main points of conversation today: writing for audio and vocal delivery.

The last point I'd like to make about your narration is your voice. I want to make a final comment about your own voice. I don't mean "your voice," everybody's voice. I mean "your voice," you, the one listener who has me in their earbuds right now. What I mean is if you're working in, specifically the narrative nonfiction genre of podcasting, that is a genre that comes historically out of an audio documentary tradition that has been largely dominated by white men. But you don't have to sound like a white dude just because that's what a lot of podcasts in this genre sound like. I want to emphasize that your voice is important. Not what other people's voices sound like. You don't have to assimilate and sound like other voices. So embrace your own style of speaking that honors your gender and your cultural background. Same thing with English. There's not one type of English that is the right and only way of speaking English. There are Englishes. Languages change and evolve over time. They are constantly fluid. There are many ways to speak English. So don't try to speak someone else's version of English or any other language for that matter. Speak your version of that language. Speak the version of the language that honors you and your history and your culture and your voice that unites and brings all those things together. That's it for now. Kia kaha. Thanks for listening. Kia ora.