



# **Submission Guidelines**

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# Table of Contents

<b>THE ART &amp; SCIENCE OF CREATING SERIALIZED AUDIOBOOKS</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>CONTENT REQUIREMENTS</b>	<b>4</b>
LENGTH	4
VOLUME	4
CONTENT	4
<b>TECH SPECS</b>	<b>6</b>
ENCODING	6
ID3 TAGGING	6
NAMING	7
<b>ADDITIONAL NOTES</b>	<b>8</b>
FREQUENCY OF UPDATES	8
SUBMITTING YOUR FIRST EPISODE	8
GUESSING HOW PEOPLE WANT TO LISTEN	9

## **The Art & Science of Creating Serialized Audiobooks**

Back in 2005, a handful of authors had – isolated from one another – the same basic idea. They would harness the power of new media and get their book in front of a wider audience. And to our delight, the idea took root and grew.

It's been many years since those first pioneering audio files were released. The audience for serialized audiobooks has grown significantly. Hundreds of authors have joined the playing field. Thousands of listeners have enjoyed books delivered in this fashion. Expectations have been established.

And now you are here, considering creating a serialized audiobook of your very own and having us help distribute it on Podiobooks.com. Outstanding! There's plenty of room.

Your first question is probably “how do I do it?” To which we have a simple answer: learn from those that have come before. That, and take sage advice found in this brief document.

This guide is *not* a comprehensive how-to manual. Making a serialized audiobook blends together a variety of arts and sciences. Creating the definitive work on the subject is an endeavor that would lead to a 300+ page tome. This is *not* that 300+ page tome.

No, this guide assumes you're going to do the bulk of the learning on your own. There are plenty of great books on the subject of home recording, podcasting, writing, editing and performing that would serve you well to read. There are also plenty of experienced people offering advice. If you aren't sure where to start, this document is *not* the place.

This guide answers some very specific questions on file preparation for inclusion on Podiobooks.com. **Please follow the guidelines contained within to the letter.** If in doubt, find out.

A quick note on our “acceptance” policy: Podiobooks.com is *not* a publisher. We are a distributor of serialized audiobooks. As such, we do not judge the quality of what you have written, recorded or produced. Our measuring stick for inclusion starts and ends with technical specifications. Meet those and your book will be listed on Podiobooks.com.

## **Content Requirements**

Consider for a moment that you are creating serialized content. That means that your audiobook will be delivered in a sequence of audio files. A single short story that consists of a single file is, by definition, not able to be serialized. Only material that can be divided into multiple files can be serialized. These files are called “episodes”. There can be many different ways to prepare these episodes, but some general accepted practices have evolved for audiobooks delivered in this fashion.

### ***Length***

How many episodes are required? How long should each episode be? Both are valid questions. Yet both *do not* have a firm answer. Books need to be as long as books need to be, which naturally leads to the conclusion that... episodes need to be as long as episodes need to be.

But in general, the “sweet spot” for episode length is 20 to 40 minutes. Not surprisingly, this closely mirrors the average commute time for many. Also, people tend to prefer books where the episodes are of a consistent length. You don’t have to re-write chapters of your work to make them longer or shorter, however. An episode *does not* have to contain a single chapter. Many authors combine chapters to achieve a more consistent length. Others have chapters span one or more episodes rather than create 2 hour audio files.

### ***Volume***

I cannot stress enough the importance of producing episodes with consistent volume levels. I speak of consistency within an episode, across episodes and across other downloadable media files. **Please make sure you are maximizing your sound.** You do not want to run the risk of being drowned out by the sounds of traffic, or forcing your listener to scramble for the volume control when your all-too-quiet file ends and their next audio in queue starts playing -- at ear splitting levels.

### ***Content***

There are four parts of serialization you likely have heard during your learnings:

1. Beginning (intro)
2. Episode content (the “meat”)
3. Ending (outro)
4. News and Information (the “chatter”)

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Please note that the last one, News and Information, is *not* appropriate for inclusion in your episodes distributed on Podiobooks.com. While the podcasting community has a rich tradition of including this information within an episode, it doesn't really fit on our site. It's fine if you are podcasting the files on your own site, but the contents of files stored here on Podiobooks.com should be timeless and free of extraneous content.

Intro and outro sections are most often consistent. In other words, they are exactly the same across all episodes, with the possible exception of the outro on the last episode of your book. Content and production varies widely across titles, but they generally include:

- Name of the book, author, narrator and episode in the intro
- Special attribution (music, publisher, etc.), web address and thanking the listener in the outro
- Appropriate music (make sure you have the legal rights!) underlying both.

Intros tend to be well under a minute in length. The shorter, the better. Say what you need to say, and then get on with the story. Your listeners are going to hear this 10 or more times before the book is over. Keep that in mind.

Outros can be longer, but only if necessary. Resist the temptation to have a "credit roll" at the end of the file, or to play the entire track of the music you use for your serialized audiobook. Remember that people have more files than just yours in their listening queue. Be respectful of their time.

The primary content area should be all story. You can – and probably should – use some sort of audio cue to denote chapter and/or scene changes. You can also use appropriate sound effects. Note the word *appropriate*. Some authors score their entire production with music, effects and sound environments. I posit this is **very** time consuming and a true art form. When considering adding effects of this kind, *treat them as if they cost you money*. And you are on a tight budget.

## **Tech Specs**

There are lots of right ways to format your final files. And as of right now, none of them matter except for ours. Please don't ask us to make exceptions. We won't. The specs below are set to insure that your .mp3 files are as compatible as possible. If you're doing something slightly different, fine. But you'll need to go back to your master files and encode, tag and name your files to these specifications before submitting episodes to Podiobooks.com.

And if you don't understand what we're asking for below, then you may be jumping ahead. Grab a book on how to create MP3 files. Any podcasting book will cover it in detail.

### ***Encoding***

Bit Rate: 128 kbps

Sample Rate: 44.1 kHz

Stereo Mode/Channel: Joint Stereo

### ***ID3 Tagging***

It's easiest if we provide an example of completed tags.

**NAME (also called TITLE):** Nocturnal 09

**ARTIST:** Scott Sigler

**ALBUM:** Nocturnal

**GROUPING:** Podiobooks.com

**TRACK:** 9

**YEAR:** 2008

**GENRE:** Podcast

**ARTWORK:** (included on every episode)

**NAME (also called TITLE):** Your choice here. I suggest using a short name for your book (doesn't have to be the full title) and then a double-digit sequential order of the episode in question. This helps people find your episode(s) inside their larger list of episodes from multiple sources. Your book and the episode number are the most important pieces to communicate.

**ARTIST:** Name of the author. Do not change this from episode to episode. Make sure your capitalization and punctuation stay consistent across episodes. If you are submitting a compilation, use the name of the compiler, not the individual episode author.

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**ALBUM:** The full title of your book. Note that this may be different than the shortened version you are using in the NAME field. Make sure you keep the same capitalization and punctuation across all episodes.

**GROUPING:** You will always enter “Podiobooks.com” in this field. It’s a special tag utilized (as far as I can tell) by iTunes. Setting this field allows people to isolate episodes received from Podiobooks.com away from their normal podcast content. If your ID3 tagging program does not allow you to set this field, then use iTunes. It **is** required.

**TRACK:** Enter the sequential episode number. This should match the number used in the NAME field, if you are taking our suggestion. Also, if you know the total number of episodes (because you’ve produced them all), please enter that in the “of” field that accompanies track number, if your ID3 tagging program supports it.

**YEAR:** Set this to the current year that the serialized audiobook version was released. It’s likely the same calendar year in which you upload the file.

**GENRE:** Always set this field to “Podcast”, as the episodes are primarily delivered via the podcasting mechanism. It’s not a perfect system, but it’s where we live today.

**ARTWORK:** Every episode of your book should contain embedded artwork. That artwork is likely going to be the cover of your book, but you may chose something else. Should you deviate from your cover, please use images no larger than 300x300. Going larger simply increases the file size of the episode for no good reason.

*I again stress the importance of filling out the above-mentioned ID3 tags exactly as we have outlined. Failure to do so will result in your episode being rejected and returned to you until corrected, resulting in a delay to your audience. Not good.*

All other tags are optional. Fill them out if you like or leave them blank if you like. It is totally your choice.

### ***Naming***

Now that you have your file compressed to our settings, assigned and edited ID3 tags, and embedded artwork for your episode, it's time to name your files the proper way. We use this format:

**PB-[ShortTitleOfYourBook]-[##].mp3**

**PB:** This signifies the file is a part of Podiobook.com and helps keep our files together in playlists or portable media players.

- The dash is used as a separator of the elements making up the name. No spaces, please.

**[ShortTitleofYourBook]:** If your book has a short name, use the whole thing. But if it gets large, shorten it. You may opt to use the shortened version you used when filling out the NAME ID3 tag. Capitalize the first letter of each word, and run them together. Spaces cause all sorts of problems with file names, so don't even think about it. Also, don't use any "funny" characters. Stick with A-Z and 1-9.

**[##]:** This is the sequential number of your series of episodes. It starts with "01" and it climbs in single-digit increments until you reach the final episode of your title. Even if you have chapters 1, 2 and 3 all included in one file, you'll still call the first one "01". If your first complete episode is a prologue or introduction, you will **still** name the very first file "01". It's an episode number, not a chapter number (though they can be and often are the same).

Following this naming convention, your mp3 files' names will look like this:

**PB-NoggleStones-00.mp3**  
**PB-AmerIndian2192-04.mp3**  
**PB-7thSon-27.mp3**

## **Additional notes**

### ***Frequency of updates***

By default, we – and your listeners – expect to see new episodes of your book on a weekly basis until complete. We're not slaves to that rule, but you should know that the audience expectation has been set. If you feel you will be unable to provide weekly updates, I highly recommend recording and producing **all** of your episodes before you begin releasing them on Podiobooks.com.

### ***Submitting your first episode***

Ready? Good. Before you submit, please double check you've done things correctly. It's shocking and sad how many first time authors fail to read the instructions above. Doing it right isn't hard, and it's frustrating when we check a

## Podiobooks.com Submission Guidelines

file to see that something was left out. Check. Double-check. Triple-check if you must. Please?

Now that you are really ready, use RapidShare.com or a similar service – **do not forget to include your return email** -- to get your first episode to [inquiry@podioobooks.com](mailto:inquiry@podioobooks.com). We'll check the naming convention first, then move on to ID3 tags and finally open it up in a waveform editor (Audacity). We will not listen to your entire file, but we may make some spot checks. Errors in recording – including repeated lines, coughs and other issues – will be missed. It's your job to make sure you narration and production values are high, not ours.

If your file passes the check (and really, it's easy), we'll send you more information on how to get us the remainder of your files, plus the additional information necessary to get your book listed on Podiobooks.com.

### ***Guessing how people want to listen***

Over the years, I've heard authors come up with some very interesting thoughts and ideas about how people listen – or how they might listen – to their books. In every case, these authors have been making assumptions based largely on how they themselves like to listen.

Those assumptions are always wrong.

The reality is the people have different ways they want to listen. You cannot cover them all. Do not even try. Your job is to provide the files in such a way to allow the maximum enjoyment for the maximum number of people. If you follow the guidelines set forth in this document, you'll be ahead of the game.

Part of our job is to figure out ways to make it easier for folks to listen. We're doing a good job, but frankly have a long way to go. We're working on it. That may mean we come back to our authors in the future with some changes. So you really, really want to hold on to your master files. Storage is cheap. Or stick 'em on a DVD somewhere. Just make sure you have an archive that you can easily manipulate in the future.

With that... see you on the site!