

A Bridge from Fools: Using the Motley Fool Money Podcast to Link Classroom Concepts to Real World Relevance

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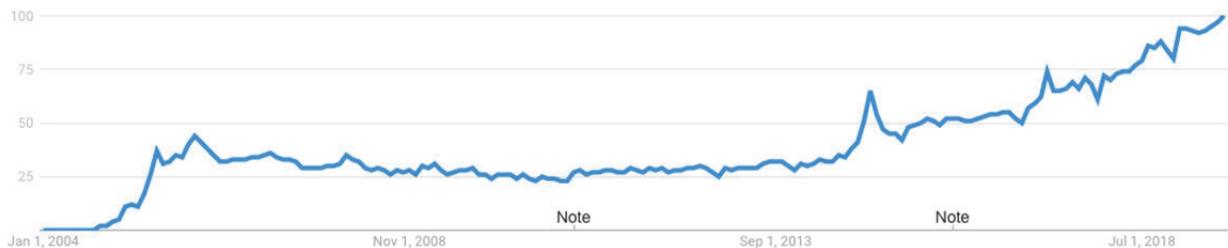
This paper shows instructors how to use a popular business podcast, Motley Fool Money, to increase interest in classroom concepts and reinforce learning. The reader is shown how to access episodes of the podcast, where to get transcripts of the podcast, and how to craft assignments using the podcast. Tips for evaluating the assignments, student feedback on this activity, and a sample of student work are provided.

Keywords: Podcast, Accounting, Financial Statements

INTRODUCTION

This paper shows instructors how to use a popular business podcast, Motley Fool Money, to increase interest in classroom concepts and reinforce learning. Podcasts are digital media files that can be listened to on portable audio devices and computers (NPR, 2019). Figure 1 shows Google Trends data on the search term “podcast”. Google Trends data is indexed to 100, where 100 is the maximum search interest for the time and location selected (Rogers, 2016). The Google Trends data suggests that Podcasts have become an increasingly popular way for people to consume media.

FIGURE 1
GOOGLE TRENDS DATA ON SEARCH TERM PODCAST



WHY THE “MOTLEY FOOL MONEY” PODCAST?

The Motley Fool Money podcast bills itself as “an irreverent, fast-paced look at the world of business and investing. Each weekly episode features a roundtable discussion breaking down the biggest headlines

from Wall Street” The show is light-hearted yet informative and I have found it to be a hit with my students. The goal of the assignment is to get students to see the connection between what they are learning in the classroom and how people are using those same classroom skills in the business world. More explicitly, I want my student to have the thought: “Wow! People really care about this stuff!”

The Assignment

Students are required to write a one-page single spaced reaction paper to the Motley Fool Money podcast.

Why Do This Assignment?

The students like the assignment and feel they are learning something. The students are given evidence that what they are learning in class is useful to business professionals making important decisions. The positive opinion of the podcast assignment transfers positive opinions about the class overall and helps foster a better learning environment.

The Assignment Helps Keep the “Curse of Knowledge” in the Instructor’s Mind

When teaching an introductory or intermediate course, it is easy for an instructor to forget, or mis-measure, the gap between their expertise and the students’ knowledge. The curse of knowledge is explained by Wieman (2007) as “the idea that when you know something, it is extremely difficult to think about it from the perspective of someone who does not know it.” When reading student reactions, you will learn that some things you assume are common knowledge are not common at all. Here are some surprises I discovered: Many students do not know what the S&P 500 is. Many do not know what an IPO is. Many students are not nearly as tech savvy as instructors assume.

INSTRUCTIONS GIVEN TO STUDENTS

Provided Here Are the Verbatim Instructions Students are Given

Each week we will have a short writing assignment (1 to 2 pages single spaced) based on the first 15 or 20 minutes of the prior week's "Motley Fool Money" podcast. The Motley Fool Money podcast is free and is available through various delivery systems. You can listen online from your computer directly from The Motley Fool at <https://www.fool.com/podcasts/motley-fool-money/>.

I prefer to listen to the podcast through my smartphone. Any podcast app should have The Motley Fool Money show available. If you are going to listen on a mobile device I recommend either of these apps: Pocket Casts (\$5.99) or Stitcher (Free). I use Pocket Casts. I have used Stitcher in the past and it is perfectly adequate.

At first, the way the podcasters speak to each other may be difficult to understand. The podcasters will use a lot of financial/accounting jargon. You should be able to follow the basics of the podcast and the podcasters will be talking about companies and brands you know about. The goal for this assignment is for you to see how the terminology and concepts you are learning about in our class is something people really talk about in the business world.

The first podcast you are assigned to listen to is the (insert: Month Day) podcast. You are only required to listen to the first segment of the episode. You may stop listening when they go to the interview, but you may find that you like the entire show.

First Assignment Due: (insert: Month Day)

Important Note

You are writing an analysis of the podcast not a report. This means you will not write in the following manner, “This happened then this happened then something else happened then the podcast ended.”

You will write more along the lines of: “The podcasters spoke about SOMETHING and I thought it was interesting because ...” The point is that I am interested in your thoughts, not just a rehash of a podcast I have already listened to.

The last thing to go on your paper is something you had to look up. For example, let's say you hear the host say *earnings-to-book ratio* and you don't know what that means. I want you to write, "I heard the term earnings-to-book ratio" and I looked it up (say where you looked it up) and I found out this is what it means: (insert definition and how it helps your understanding).

PEDAGOGY TOOLS AND TIPS

**TABLE 1
TOOLS FOR ASSIGNMENT**

| Where to: | Get it from |
|---|---|
| Get podcast app (if desired, not necessary) | Pocket Casts, Stitcher, Apple |
| Access podcast | Podcast app or directly from: https://www.fool.com/podcasts/ |
| Get podcast transcript | https://www.fool.com/podcast-transcripts/motley-fool-money/ |

I spend a fair amount of time explaining that a review is not a synopsis. Getting this point across is harder than you might think. I finally had a break-through when I explained it to my students like this: I assume some of you watch sports. After the game ends and the broadcast goes to the studio show to discuss the game, the analysts don't just say "This happened. Then this happened. Then this happened." They don't only summarize the game. Instead they discuss what happened and give their opinions and analysis about what happened. The analysts do their best to defend the statements they make. I tell my students they are free to have any opinion they want as long as they defend their position.

Collecting the Assignment

I have had students turn in hard copies of the assignments and I have had them upload assignments to Blackboard. If using Blackboard, the students are required to upload a one-page single spaced paper. Grading is done directly on Blackboard while viewing the assignment on the screen. Grading is *lenient*. The goal is to have students listen to the podcast, think about it, and feel comfortable trying to dissect and discuss it. The low-pressure grading allows the students to be open with the assignment. I approach students who are not meeting the criteria of the assignment and offer help. When I first started using this assignment it was almost wholly out of class and we did not discuss the podcast in class. Over time I have realized the students like to talk about the issues for a few minutes. This assignment is meant to be in addition to traditional classroom material, not instead of.

STUDENT FEEDBACK

The last writing assignment of the semester is an informal survey.

Instructions Given to Students for Last Assignment

For the last writing assignment of the semester please write a one-page summary of your thoughts on the podcast assignments; you can use some of the following questions as a guide to writing for this paper.

- Prior to this class, did you regularly listen to podcasts?
- Write about your initial thoughts on having to listen to a podcast and write about it in class before you actually completed the first assignment.
- Were your initial thoughts correct or did you change your mind after you listened to and wrote about the first podcast?

- What was the best thing you learned by listening to the podcasts?
- Did listening to the podcasts help you learn about business; did any of this learning help you outside your accounting class?
- How could I improve on this assignment? Even if you disliked the assignment and think I should just cancel it, assume I am not going to cancel it. Given the information that I am keeping it, how could it be improved?

RESULTS

I have coded the responses in an effort to add some quantitative analysis to their qualitative answers. The reader will see the question, the quantitative analysis, selected qualitative answers, and a discussion.

TABLE 2
PRIOR TO THIS CLASS, DID YOU REGULARLY LISTEN TO PODCASTS?

| Sentiment | Count | Percentage of Respondents |
|------------------|-------|---------------------------|
| Never | 46 | 72% |
| Not Regularly | 4 | 6.3% |
| Sometimes | 6 | 9.4% |
| Regularly | 2 | 3.1% |
| Answer Not Clear | 6 | 9.4% |

Discussion

The curse of knowledge strikes! My ex-ante belief was that my students were frequently listening to podcasts, they are not.

TABLE 3
WRITE ABOUT YOUR INITIAL THOUGHTS ON BEING ASSIGNED TO LISTEN TO A PODCAST AND WRITE ABOUT IT IN CLASS BEFORE YOU ACTUALLY COMPLETED THE FIRST ASSIGNMENT

| Sentiment | Count | Percentage of Respondents |
|------------------|-------|---------------------------|
| Negative | 32 | 50% |
| Mixed | 6 | 9.4% |
| Indifferent | 3 | 4.7% |
| Positive | 14 | 21.9% |
| Answer Not Clear | 9 | 14.1% |

Discussion

The results are mixed. It is about 2:1 negative. Here are two selected answers given to this question:

- *I thought this man must be out of his mind.*
- *I hated to hear that part in the first day of class.*

TABLE 4
WERE YOUR INITIAL THOUGHTS CORRECT OR DID YOU CHANGE YOUR MIND AFTER YOU LISTENED TO AND WROTE ABOUT THE FIRST PODCAST?

| Sentiment | Count | Percentage of Respondents |
|-------------------------------|-------|---------------------------|
| Negative/Positive (Switch) | 31 | 48.4% |
| Negative/Negative (No Switch) | 1 | 1.5% |
| Positive/Negative (Switch) | 2 | 3.1% |
| Positive/Positive (No Switch) | 12 | 18.8% |
| Answer Not Clear | 18 | 28.4% |

Discussion

Of the 32 students that started with a negative impression of the assignment, 31 were swayed into thinking it was a good assignment. Some loved it, others liked what they were learning but not the effort it took to listen and write their assignment. I did lose two students who had positive thoughts when hearing about the assignment but did not end up liking the assignment. Selected answers are below.

- *I wasn't too excited. I thought I was going to be bored to death and not know what was going on. However, after listening to the first one assigned, I was really engrossed and actually really wanted to listen to them every single week.*
- *I was a little startled and shocked. My thoughts were why do we have to write papers in accounting class and how will these podcasts benefit me? However, after listening to the first podcast I was beyond excited and surprised at the great deal of information I learned from listening to the podcast.*

TABLE 5
WHAT WAS THE BEST THING YOU LEARNED ABOUT BY LISTENING TO THE PODCASTS?

| Answer | Count | Percentage of Respondents |
|------------------------|-------|---------------------------|
| Stock Market/Investing | 23 | 35.9% |
| News/Economy | 14 | 21.9% |
| Financial Literacy | 14 | 21.9% |
| Relevance | 3 | 4.7% |
| Answer Not Clear | 10 | 15.6% |

TABLE 6
DID LISTENING TO THE PODCASTS HELP YOU LEARN ABOUT BUSINESS; DID ANY OF THIS LEARNING HELP YOU OUTSIDE YOUR ACCOUNTING CLASS?

| Answer | Count | Percentage of Respondents |
|-----------|-------|---------------------------|
| Yes | 26 | 40.6% |
| No | 3 | 4.7% |
| No Answer | 35 | 54.7% |

Selected Answers

- *The most important thing I learned was seeing things I see in class translated to the business world and their effect on the economy or a business as a whole.*

- *It gave me topics to discuss with my family and friends.*
- *I think I learned a lot more in this class, more than in any other class. It is good to get students involved in real life accounting situations that are going on in our world today.*
- *I would go back and talk to my roommates or other business students and these topics would come up. It was cool to be able to discuss them.*
- *I think the most valuable thing I learned was just hearing the way that professionals talk about business and learning how to interpret the things that I learned in class in real world situations.*
- *I was talking to a client at work and they were mentioning something about a share. I was able to recognize the word and instead of thinking about the singer (Cher) or how I learned to play in kindergarten, I thought about the business definition.*

TABLE 7
HOW COULD I IMPROVE ON THIS ASSIGNMENT? EVEN IF YOU DISLIKED THE ASSIGNMENT AND THINK I SHOULD JUST CANCEL IT, ASSUME I AM NOT GOING TO CANCEL IT. GIVEN THE INFORMATION THAT I AM KEEPING IT, HOW COULD IT BE IMPROVED?

| Answer | Count | Percentage of Respondents |
|------------------------------|-------|---------------------------|
| Double Spaced | 6 | 9.4% |
| No Writing (Quiz Instead) | 5 | 7.8% |
| Other (Less Work) | 10 | 15.6% |
| More Discussion | 18 | 28.1% |
| More Feedback | 4 | 6.3% |
| Stock Market Game/Shark Tank | 3 | 4.7% |
| Other/No Answer | 18 | 28.1% |

Discussion

If you decide to use this assignment in class, you will have to determine how often you will require reaction papers it. In speaking with other professors, some have used the basic framework but altered how often it is assigned. The basic framework can also be used with other podcasts or media.

CONCLUSION

My field, Accounting, likes to claim the notion that Accounting is the language of business. Given this claim, it is imperative that Accounting instructors strive to make their students fluent in this language. Persuading students to use the language of business outside of the context of a classroom or academic setting will help them gain fluency. This podcast assignment is a valuable persuasion tool as it allows students to practice their language of business skills in a painless way.

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APPENDIX

SAMPLE OF STUDENT WORK

Presented here is an example of student work turned in after a podcast episode that contained a discussion of restructuring charges at Hewlett Packard (HP).

One would assume corporate reorganization and layoffs could help in terms of the bottom line for a company such as Hewlett-Packard, but as the podcasters taught me, this is not always the case. In particular, they made mention of “restructuring charges” included in HP’s most recent income statement. I had to do some research on what, exactly, restructuring charges are and why they are not necessarily a good thing for HP.

What I learned was restructuring charges are usually a one-time cost a company pays when it reorganizes. These might be charges incurred in the process of employee layoffs, plant closures, relocations or asset write-offs. Typically, companies only restructure when they are experiencing significant problems and are trying to recover financially. Clearly, these charges are indicative of some larger issue within a company, but they are only meant to cost money in the short run. The goal is to spend money one time in order to save money in the long run. As a result, these short-term changes have a significant effect on a company’s income statement.

In the case of HP, these restructuring charges were incurred as the cost to split the company into two new entities as well as lay off a combined 85,000 employees. Those two events are standard in the business environment. What is not common however, is HP’s penchant for incurring these “restructuring charges” every single year since 2001. According to one of the podcasters, they have racked up almost \$15 billion in these charges since they started appearing in the company’s income statements. Taking into account what I’ve learned, I can see why investors want nothing to do with HP—they haven’t been able to figure out how to run their business consistently for the past 14 years!”