How to Shittily Edit a Podcast for Free

Sound editing a recording is actually not as hard as it looks. I will give you a quick and dirty guide to the basics and in less than an hour you can be editing your own shitty podcast. Take note that this is the bare minimum of what I consider it takes to produce an acceptable MP3 sound file for streaming and downloading to cellphones and computers everywhere. If you want slightly trickier tricks then do what I do – google the problem and hope there's a solution out there.

Recording a Podcast

First off you need to record the podcast. Presumably you're doing this with other people over the Internet and not all physically in a room together. To record a podcast over the Internet you will need these things (note that all the software mentioned is free):

1. A Windows computer. Sorry, I'm sure you can do this through Apple products but I haven't used a Mac since high school.
2. Skype for Windows. Don't use Skype through your browser, you need to actually install it on your computer.
3. MP3 Skype Recorder. It's an add-on that lets you record your Skype conversations. No, it doesn't do video.
4. Audacity. Free and open source sound editing software. Theoretically you could forget MP3 Skype Recorder and just use Audacity for recording your podcast but it involves fiddling with a bunch of settings and shit and I've never figured out how to get it to work.
5. LAME MP3 encoder. An Audacity add-on that lets you create MP3 files. The reason it's an add-on and not part of the core program is some legal BS you can look up if you want.

Preferably each person in the conversation will be recording so as to alleviate Internet connection hiccups during recording, which can happen occasionally. Even if there's only one other person recording beside yourself it can really help you later in the editing process. But if there's just you, then there's just you. It's still doable.

Nota Bene: Skype automatically picks your computer's internal microphone as the default audio input device. This is stupid because internal microphones sound like shit on a recording. They're okay when you're just conversing but they're really awful if you play back the recording. Before recording, make sure Skype knows to record your audio from your external mic instead. To do this:

- Go to Tools
- Go to Options
- Go to Audio Settings
- Go to the Microphone drop-down menu
- Select External Mic

And you should be good to go. Though maybe do a sound check first just to be safe.

Editing a Podcast

Okay, you recorded your podcast. Now you need to edit it. Go ahead and open Audacity.

- Click on the File menu

- Go to Import
- Go to Audio
- Select the recording you made

Save your project.

- Go to File
- Go to Save Project As

This is important because this is your raw recording, before you've made any changes at all. You may screw something up in the editing process and have to roll back changes. Yes, you could just import the audio file again instead but in the beginning of your editing career you'll probably be returning to the raw recording a bunch of times. Plus it's just part of best practices.

Note that you are saving the project as a .aup file. Audacity slices up a recording into a bunch of smaller files to make it easier to edit the whole thing. Those smaller files collectively can take up quite a bit of space. For instance, I am currently editing a 1h15m 38 MB file, but the Audacity project data is actually 614 MB. Just be aware if you're low on space on your hard drive.

Basic Editing Tricks

1. Removing Background Noise

If you listen to your raw recording you will notice that it sounds awful. There is mostly likely some kind of staticky whooshing noise in the background. That is the sound of an open mic outside of a sound recording booth. You can easily remove this noise by doing the following:

- Select a portion of the track where no one is talking and you can hear the background noise.
- Go to the Effect menu
- Go to Noise Removal
- Click on Get Noise Profile
    - You can screw around with the settings but only if you know what they mean
- Click OK
- Select the entire recording (I usually just go CTRL+A)
- Go to the Effect menu again
- Select Repeat Noise Removal at the top of the menu

You've just instructed Audacity to go through the entire sound recording and remove the sound you selected. This will probably take a bit if you have a long recording. Note that this can only remove constant and regular sounds like background noise or an air conditioner humming. You can't use this sound for removing the sound of a dog barking, for example, unless that dog is barking in exactly the same way and producing the exact same sound profile each time. And if the dog was considerate enough to bark when no one was talking.

2. Removing Portions of the Track

I dunno, do I really need to tell you how to do this? It's pretty intuitive. But for the sake of completeness:

- Select the portion of the track you want to remove

- Press Delete

3. Making Part of the Track Louder (or Softer)

Sometimes you want to make something louder. It's simple:

- Select the portion of the track you want to make louder
- Go to Effect
- Go to Amplify
- Crank the slider to the right to as loud as you want
- Check off Allow clipping if you want to really make it loud
- Click on Preview to hear the end product
- Click on OK if you like what you hear

If you want to do the opposite and make something quieter, do as above but crank the slider down instead of up.

4. Keeping Audio Levels Consistent

Do you know what I hate? Listening to a podcast with wildly varying loudness. Maybe at one point a person is talking really softly so you turn up the volume, then in the next second they're laughing and you're wincing as their shrill laughter drills into your brain. This is an example of an amateurishly produced podcast. You avoid this by doing the following:

- Select the entire recording
- Go to Effect
- Go to Compressor
- Change the Threshold to between -10dB and -16dB
  - Preview until you like how it sounds
  - Personally I stick it at -14dB
- Change nothing else in the settings
- Click OK

5. Making an MP3 File

Okay, so you've edited the thing to your heart's content. Now you need to actually make an MP3 file that you can upload online. It's pretty straightforward. First, you don't actually need a podcast to be in stereo and can instead convert it to mono. This will reduce the file size and you do it thusly:

- Go to Tracks
- Select Stereo Track to Mono

Then you produce an actual MP3 file like so:

- Go to File
- Go to Export
- Go to Save as type
- Select MP3 Files
- After that click on Options on the lower right corner
- For the settings enter the following

- o   Bit Rate Mode: Constant
- o   Quality: 64 kbps
- o   Change nothing else and Click OK
- Click Save
- Enter the Title and whatever other tags you want in the file details
- Click OK

And now you have an MP3 file you can upload online. A 1h15m podcast usually comes to around 35 MB.

Slightly More Advanced Editing Tricks

I don't feel like explaining these, but here are functions you can play around with on Audacity or terms you can google on your own to learn a few more tricks (combine "Audacity" and the term when googling):

- Silence Audio or Generate Silence if you want complete quiet on a selected part of the track
- Split Stereo to Mono or Split Stereo Track for producing two tracks out of one
- Mute or Solo for when you want to hear what it sounds like if one or more tracks is muted
- Mix and Render to combine two different tracks
- Sync-Lock Tracks if you have two different tracks and want to make sure they stay in sync and when you delete part of one track it also gets deleted on the other track
- Time Shift Tool for when you want to move an entire track forward or back
- Envelope Tool for when you want fine-grained control over the audio level of a specific part of the track
- Cross-Fade so when you combine tracks as one track fades out another increases in volume
  - o   It's useful if you're doing a brief musical intro and want to slowly fade in the voices of your speakers
- Also you can use an ID3 Tag Editor to add album art to your MP3 file

Post Script: Hosting a Podcast

I suppose I might as well cover where to stick online the MP3 file you just made. You'll need a host and an RSS feed. Since I assume you want it all for free then that eliminates a bunch of options.

1. Hosting. In my opinion the best free host is archive.org.
2. RSS Feed. For an RSS feed all you need is a blog, then you write a new post linking to the MP3 file of each new episode. There are many free blog hosts out there but personally I like WordPress.

After that if you have an iTunes account you can link it to your blog (make sure to make a Category titled Podcast and label each podcast episode with it) and you're good to go.