



(A Podcast About) Making Better Podcasts  
 Season 1, Episode 3  
 "Sections, Bits, and Callbacks"  
 Transcript

*(Music begins)*

**David:** This is a podcast about making better podcasts.

*(Music abruptly changes, "Theme" music begins)*

*(Applause)*

**Generic Announcer Guy:** That's right, David. And on today's episode of (A Podcast About) Making Better Podcasts, Sections, Bits, and Callbacks: how to use recurring structural elements to make your series the best it can be. As always, I'm the Generic Announcer Guy, along with Strings McGinty and The Good Podcasting Band. And now, from an untidy desk not too far from New York City, here's your host, David Hoffman!

*(Music ends, applause continues)*

**David:** Thanks, Guy. First off...

*(Applause continues)*

...no, please, folks, thank you. Thank you. Good evening, everyone.

*(Applause ends)*

In the last episode, we talked about storytelling, using narrative arc as a way to give a piece of audio...

**Anna:** a beginning, middle, and end.



(A Podcast About) Making Better Podcasts  
 Season 1, Episode 3  
 "Sections, Bits, and Callbacks"  
 Transcript

**David:** And these are absolutely crucial techniques. Crafting tight narrative structures is an excellent way to keep people's attention as they listen to your show. But this is not the only tool you need in your box. People are fickle, attention spans are short, and audiences have never had more things to choose from. If you're not constantly, actively working to hold the attention of your listeners, it's very easy for them to tune out and do something else.

So how do you snap someone's brain to attention when they're in danger of drifting? You've all got brains, right?

*(Applause, cheers)*

Are they in danger of drifting?

*(Rimshot, cheers, laughter)*

But seriously, folks, let's begin by talking about beginnings. How things kick off is crucial to how they will continue.

*(Music begins)*

Have you ever thought about the fact that TV shows don't just start? They always have an opening: some kind of theme music, a title card. Now, sometimes there's what's called a cold open, which is a little bit of the story or a standalone sequence before that title card, but that's also part of the intro. There's this whole series of things that are there to get you into the right frame of mind for the rest of the show. Movies, radio shows, also – there's always something at the beginning



(A Podcast About) Making Better Podcasts  
 Season 1, Episode 3  
 "Sections, Bits, and Callbacks"  
 Transcript

that welcomes you in, lets you know that the curtain is going up and the show's about to start.

*("Theme" music begins)*

**David:** A talk show, like this, has a whole flurry of bits and business at the beginning: theme music, then the announcer, then the host comes in, then the monologue, and then some banter with the band leader...

*("Theme" music ends)*

How you doing, Strings?

*(Guitar playing)*

Awesome.

*(Guitar playing, applause)*

...and on and on. There might be 20 minutes of this stuff before the first guest comes out. Did you ever wonder why? Who here has wondered that?

*(Applause)*

All that might seem corny and unnecessary, but it's actually really important. You see, A piece of media is a conversation, whether it's a TV show or a podcast, not just with your co host or your guest, but with your audience. They're there in the room with you.



(A Podcast About) Making Better Podcasts  
 Season 1, Episode 3  
 "Sections, Bits, and Callbacks"  
 Transcript

*(Applause, cheers)*

That's right. You're in the room.

*(Applause)*

And you always have to welcome someone into a conversation.

And that is just like I'm going to welcome my first guest. Ladies and gentlemen, he is the business development lead at CitizenRacecar. Please welcome Oliver Cox!

*("Theme" music begins, applause, cheering)*

**Oliver:** Thank you so much for having me. It's great to be here.

*("Theme" music ends)*

**David:** So Oliver, one of the many things that I like about you is that you are a good talker. You are outgoing, you're charming, if I may say.

*(Crowd whoops)*

And You're a salesman, so you talk to people professionally. And I'm curious, if you want to initiate a conversation with someone, how do you do that? You're standing in a room, you see somebody over there, you'd like to talk to them. You walk up to them, what do you do? What's the first thing you do?



(A Podcast About) Making Better Podcasts  
 Season 1, Episode 3  
 "Sections, Bits, and Callbacks"  
 Transcript

**Oliver:** Oh, that's a great question. It depends how deep you want to go. On one level, you might say that the best thing to do is to make eye contact and to make some assessment of to what extent are they receptive to a conversation. You can usually make judgments about those kinds of things by, uh, body language. And then once you've made that assessment, you... you have to say *something*. And usually that will be some kind of salutation, like, "hello". Or, there's usually something that you can notice that maybe you appreciate, maybe that, you know something about, that you like, that you can address somebody about and compliment them on. "I like the bag that you chose. I think it's pretty cool, I have one just like it."

**David:** But you have to break the ice, yeah?

**Oliver:** Yes.

**David:** Why? What would happen if you just walked up to someone and just started talking? "Hi, there's something that happened to me this morning. I was walking my dog and this happened, and then that happened, and then that happened."

**Oliver:** It would be... it would be rather awkward. And I think that what you're referring to is that there's a process that we undertake as people. We do something with people we're meeting for the first time, where we... we establish how we're going to relate to each other. What is the level of formality of our interaction? What is the relationship that we have with each other? What is the topic of conversation, maybe?

And a lot of that stuff, a lot of that information transmission, happens subconsciously, and without us saying it specifically.



(A Podcast About) Making Better Podcasts  
 Season 1, Episode 3  
 "Sections, Bits, and Callbacks"  
 Transcript

The medium of that information transmission is either pleasantries, like, "hey, how are you doing?", "What's happening?" Or, intro, icebreaker, small talk type stuff, like a... like a compliment or, um, some of the things that I mentioned earlier.

*(Music begins)*

**David:** And honestly, I think jumping straight into a podcast without setting things up for your audience might be even worse. In a conversation, you're meeting someone where they are. In a podcast, or any other kind of media, you're asking them to leave their current reality and join you somewhere else. That's kind of a big ask. You can't expect someone to just be there instantly. You need an entryway, an airlock, a decompression chamber that pulls them from the real world into this new space of the show.

*(Music ends)*

**David:** You know, there's a very old fashioned word that people don't use very much anymore for this kind of social pleasantry, and that's "etiquette".

**Oliver:** Mmm.

**David:** That there's a certain etiquette to how to approach someone and initiate a conversation, or how to begin a story or how to, sort of, let someone know what's happening in an interaction. And I think people used to think about that a lot and there were a lot of rules about it and now it's gotten very loose. Um, but it's still really important, it?



(A Podcast About) Making Better Podcasts  
 Season 1, Episode 3  
 "Sections, Bits, and Callbacks"  
 Transcript

**Oliver:** It's incredibly important. And obviously in... in previous times, you wouldn't speak to somebody whom you hadn't been introduced to. And you would have to seek some kind of introduction to somebody that was new to you. But now, with a more kind of open, freewheeling society, you can just make those connections oneself. But the risks associated with that is that people can be affronted, um, uncertain, not know what to do when somebody just, as you say, starts... starts speaking to them.

*(Music begins)*

**David:** That's the function of this introductory business: it pulls people in and situates them. It gives them a chance to prepare themselves to pay attention. In our talk show example, the monologue exists because it introduces the host. It gives you a chance to know who they are and what they're like, even if you've never seen the show before. That way, you've met them, so they have the social authority to introduce you to the guests.

Having a long introductory segment also gives you a chance to establish the tone of the show. What kind of experience the audience is going to be in for. Professor Fisher, our narrative expert, talked about this in the last episode:

*(Music ends)*

**Michael:** If you're making a comedy, make them laugh early. If you're making a horror, make them scared early. If it's a drama, make them *feel* early. You have to find a way to, to get them on your... not just world, but tone.



(A Podcast About) Making Better Podcasts  
 Season 1, Episode 3  
 "Sections, Bits, and Callbacks"  
 Transcript

**David:** Is it going to be scary? Is it going to be informative? Is it going to be, you know, am I going to feel comfortable or uncomfortable listening to this?

**Michael:** Am I supposed to laugh at this? *(Laughs)*

**David:** Right. Am I supposed to laugh at this? Right. Okay. Totally.

This is comforting for the audience. It allows them to settle in, give them a sense of what to expect.

And this is just the beginning... of what I have to say about intros.

*(Rimshot, applause)*

**David:** See what I did there?

*(Applause)*

**David:** Hey, Generic Announcer Guy...

**Generic Announcer Guy:** Yes, David?

**David:** Do you ever go to Broadway shows?

**Generic Announcer Guy:** Are you kidding me? With what you pay me, a big night out is standing on the sidewalk, watching TV through the window of a Best Buy.





(A Podcast About) Making Better Podcasts  
 Season 1, Episode 3  
 "Sections, Bits, and Callbacks"  
 Transcript

**David:** That sounds nice.

**Generic Announcer Guy:** Oh, especially when they have the captions on.

*(Laughter, applause)*

**David:** Well, if you ever did get to the theater, you'd notice that Broadway musicals usually start with an overture...

*(Music begins)*

...which is a ten-minute-ish-long piece of instrumental music, where the orchestra plays little excerpts of the songs you're going to hear later in the show.

*(Music pauses)*

**Generic Announcer Guy:** I'll take your word for it.

*(Laughter, applause)*

*(Music begins)*

**David:** They do that for two reasons. First, like we've been talking about, it's an introduction. It tells the audience to take their seats, welcomes them to the world of the play, gives them a sense of the tone of the thing. They can hear if the songs are gonna be bright and funny or dark and serious, and start getting into that mood.



(A Podcast About) Making Better Podcasts  
 Season 1, Episode 3  
 "Sections, Bits, and Callbacks"  
 Transcript

*(Music intensifies)*

It also does something else, though, that's equally important. It makes it so you've heard the important melodies that you're going to hear later. Even if you're not paying that much attention, they get into your ears. So, when you hear someone singing that same tune a half an hour or an hour and a half later, you're not hearing it for the first time.

At least subconsciously, you're recognizing it. "Oh, that song. I know that song."

People love to recognize things. It tickles your brain in a satisfying way. That's the power of what we refer to as "callbacks". Bringing back a line or a bit of audio from earlier in the episode, or from a previous episode.

We've done that twice in this episode, brought back clips from the last one. If you're listening to this episode without having heard the previous one, they're still useful clips. They were relevant to the conversation, and they gave us a little additional depth and sonic variety by introducing new voices. If you have listened to that other episode, it did all those things and also made you say, "Hey! I remember that". Like an inside joke.

Now, you can overdo this, of course. Too much recycling gets to sound lazy and boring, like those awful montage episodes they used to do in old sitcoms when the writers were on vacation. But a little bit of this can be really fun and engaging.

*(Music ends)*



(A Podcast About) Making Better Podcasts  
 Season 1, Episode 3  
 "Sections, Bits, and Callbacks"  
 Transcript

**David:** What's next on the show tonight, guy?

**Generic Announcer Guy:** Well, David, now it's time for The Recurring Segment!

*("Theme" music begins)*

**David:** Uh, thanks guy, but we don't actually have recurring segments on this show.

*("Theme" music ends)*

**Generic Announcer Guy:** Bummer.

**David:** It is a bummer, because recurring segments do the same things as callbacks, but in a way that's more interesting and harder to mess up. That's why they were so popular in old school broadcast media, like David Letterman's Top 5 lists, or the Puzzler in the middle of every episode of Car Talk.

On a practical level, it's one less thing you have to reinvent every time. Writing a new Top 5 list for every episode may be hard, but it's easier than coming up with a totally new thing to fill that 10 minutes. And these kind of recurring bits manage to do two things that seem like they completely contradict each other. They're comforting, because you know what's going to happen,

*(Crowd: awwww)*

**David:** but they're also exciting because you don't know what's going to happen.



(A Podcast About) Making Better Podcasts  
 Season 1, Episode 3  
 "Sections, Bits, and Callbacks"  
 Transcript

*(Crowd: gasp!)*

**David:** You know it's the time in the show when they go to the story in the red chair, but you don't know what that story is going to be.

*(Music ends)*

**David:** Recurring segments also connect one episode to the next, making the series feel more like a... series. For example, here at CitizenRacecar, we produce an interview show called Formative, with our client New York Edge

**Generic Announcer Guy:** Available wherever you get your podcasts!

*(Cheers, applause)*

**David:** Right, thanks guy. Anyway, It's a show where young kids, 11, 12 years old, interview interesting grown ups about their lives and careers. That series has a recurring segment. At the end of every episode, the adult host comes in and asks every guest the same question.

*("Formative" theme music)*

**Formative Host:** To wrap this up, we have one last question we ask all of our guests. If you could go back and speak to your 13 year old self, what would you say?

**Formative Guest #1:** Oh, wow. That's a tough one. I would probably say, keep your chin up. Don't be discouraged... *(fades out)*



(A Podcast About) Making Better Podcasts  
 Season 1, Episode 3  
 "Sections, Bits, and Callbacks"  
 Transcript

**Formative Guest #2:** Oh, well what I would tell myself is "don't worry about it. You know, it will come... *(fades out)*

**Formative Guest #3:** I knew this was coming, and I, I thought about this, and I thought about how I shouldn't be too... I shouldn't think about it too much, but I probably should have thought about it a little bit more. *(Host laughs)*

*("Formative" transition music)*

**David:** Now That's a small thing, but what it does is connects that interview to all the other interviews in the series. It makes them feel like they're all part of the same story. I think the show is maybe 20 percent better just from that one small decision.

**Generic Announcer Guy:** And that's math!

**David:** More or less.

*(Music begins)*

**David:** Anyway, I think if there's one thing that would improve most of the DIY podcasts out there, it's coming up with some recurring segments and committing to them.

**Generic Announcer Guy:** Now it's time for "Marvin's Complaint Corner". "Let's see what's in the mailbag, Jim".

**David:** Or whatever. Some people seem to think things like this are corny. They have a commitment to naturalism. They think it's



(A Podcast About) Making Better Podcasts  
 Season 1, Episode 3  
 "Sections, Bits, and Callbacks"  
 Transcript

more honest and real to have an unadorned, unedited conversation and throw it out into the world.

Here's the thing, though: a recording session is not a natural situation. Even if you keep things simple and don't do all the goofy things we do on *this* series

**Generic Announcer Guy:** No one does as many goofy things as we do on *this* series, David.

*(Applause)*

**David:** That's probably true. But like I'm saying, even if you want to keep things simple, there's nothing natural about speaking into a microphone. There's nothing natural about being interviewed, even if it's a quote-unquote "unrehearsed free flowing conversation", in your life outside of podcasting, how many hour-long conversations do you have with someone while other people sit there and listen?

Like it or not, by making a podcast, you are putting on a show. So put on a show! Give it some structure. Give it some oomph. Do some of the things that real showbiz shows do to keep people paying attention.

Because here's the thing, those showbiz shows, they're relevant to what you're doing. They're your competition. People have a limited amount of time in their day, and they have to be choosy about how they spend it. The 30 minutes you're asking them to spend with your podcast, they could spend on an almost infinite number of other pieces of media.



(A Podcast About) Making Better Podcasts  
 Season 1, Episode 3  
 "Sections, Bits, and Callbacks"  
 Transcript

And I think this is a good time to go to "The Imagination Corner".

*(Applause, "theme" music begins)*

**Generic Announcer Guy:** Hey, that's a segment!

**David:** Sure is, guy.

I want you to think about your favorite television show. It could be broadcast TV or streaming, whichever. Not necessarily what you think is the best show, but the one you currently enjoy the most.

Got it? Okay. What do you like about it? Why do you enjoy it as much as you do?

Now, do the same thing, but think about your favorite podcast. Any podcast at all, about any subject.

Why? Why is that one your favorite?

Now, I want you to imagine there is a new episode of that TV show, and a new episode of that podcast, but you can only consume one of them. The other one will be gone, lost to you forever. Which one do you choose? Why?

It's interesting to think about what TV does that podcasting doesn't, and what podcasting does that TV does not.

*("Theme" music begins)*



(A Podcast About) Making Better Podcasts  
 Season 1, Episode 3  
 "Sections, Bits, and Callbacks"  
 Transcript

So, back to you, Oliver.

**Oliver:** Wait, I'm still here?

**David:** Sure, why not. How do we put a button on this?

I think there's a really strong connection between what we were saying earlier about initiating a conversation and what we're saying now about putting on a good show. Maybe it has to do with thinking about your audience. Putting them before yourself.

**Oliver:** I would say that the, um... as with most things in conversation, sales, and interpersonal interactions generally, it's not about you, it's about them. It's not about what you have to offer, it's not about what you have to say, it's about how they feel, how they see themselves, and how they fit into the picture.

Which is why the, the most appropriate way to begin, or, uh, if, if you will, the appropriate etiquette for those kind of interactions, is to ask about them. Talk about them, and make them feel comfortable by thinking about how they fit into the world.

**David:** What's the risk? What are the stakes? What happens if you get this wrong? If you fail to welcome someone into an interaction in the right way?

*(Music begins)*

**Oliver:** There is a pretty direct relationship between somebody's level of comfort, and their heart rate, and the way in which





(A Podcast About) Making Better Podcasts  
 Season 1, Episode 3  
 "Sections, Bits, and Callbacks"  
 Transcript

people think. Now, when your heart rate is relatively low, your thinking is more open, more discursive, more experimental. And when your heart rate is high, your thinking is more conservative, with a small "C". It's more panicky and more closed down.

And this is analogous to... imagine being in a situation where you're at ease, you're comfortable, there are no threats. It's safe to be open, to be slow, to be noticing new things. But if you're in a situation of high danger, traffic, predators, etc., you should not be particularly open to, um, new ideas and new opportunities. You need to be on lockdown in case something happens and you need to get away.

*(Music fades out)*

**David:** Right! Because if someone comes up and fails to observe this sort of social niceties and kind of ease their way into an interaction, it feels like an attack. It feels like you're being attacked.

**Oliver:** Right, right.

*(Music begins)*

And your heart rate will increase, and you will shut down. You won't be receptive to the new person. And you, you won't... Um, you'll be bad at having a conversation. If somebody rushes up to you and doesn't make you feel comfortable, you'll be... you'll be bad at that conversation because all of the ideas of things that you'll want to talk about won't come into your mind, because your heart's pumping and you don't know what to do, and you want



(A Podcast About) Making Better Podcasts  
 Season 1, Episode 3  
 "Sections, Bits, and Callbacks"  
 Transcript

to get away and you wanna run away. Which means, yeah, it's, it's very important to be cool, and by being cool to make it so that your conversational partner can feel cool. And that will put both of you in a head space where those ideas, those connections, all of that stuff will just come up naturally and the conversation will, can, run itself.

*(Music fades out)*

**David:** I think it's interesting that the job that I'm doing right now on this show is called... and that the first voice you hear on a podcast is the person called "the host". As in, you're welcoming someone in to your home, or to your... to the party you're throwing. And the job of a host is to make someone feel comfortable.

**Oliver:** Right.

*(Music begins)*

**David:** And it's remarkably easy to make someone uncomfortable, to fail to welcome them properly into your show, into your podcast, to fail to give them the signals and gestures and points of reference they need to really feel like they're invited in and a part of the conversation. And audiences have a very easy and clear way to signal that they don't feel included.

*(Music ends, is taken over by sound effect of tuning radio)*

They turn you off

*(Radio turns off)*



(A Podcast About) Making Better Podcasts  
Season 1, Episode 3  
"Sections, Bits, and Callbacks"  
Transcript

*("Theme" music begins)*

**Generic Announcer Guy:** This is a podcast about making better podcasts.

Your host, and the writer and producer of the show, is David Hoffman.

Our in-studio guest today was Oliver Cox

The role of Generic Announcer Guy was performed by Ed Kelley.

Original Music and Post-Production by Alex Brower.

Sound Design by José Miguel Baez.

Publication and Promotion by Candice Chantelou.

This series is a production of CitizenRacecar,  
citizenracecar.com

*(Music ends)*