Welcome to Podcasting 101: Delivering Content with Audio Podcasts. In this course we will be exploring how to create audio podcasts and how to distribute podcasts from an MPS Architeck website. However, before we can dig into the creation process, it is important that we understand what a podcast is, because a podcast is much more than just an online audio clip. A podcast is a system for distributing content, typically content devoted to a specific topic. Let’s start our discussion by thinking about how most people find content online.

In most cases, when we go searching the Internet for content on a specific topic, it can be difficult to know where to start. If only there were a better way.

Podcasts are one way of better distributing specialized content. Let’s start by making clear that podcasts are content, specifically audio or video content. What makes a podcast special is the manner in which it is distributed and the impact that distribution model has on how we consume the audio and video content. There are many places we can go online and search for a piece of audio or video, but we have to do all of the work seeking out that content, digging through the virtual bins in search of the quality content, never quite sure if what we have found will prove useful, and when the time comes to find something new on a given topic, we have to start all over from the beginning searching and sorting through the massive collections online. Podcasts, on the other hand, package up relevant audio and video and delivering it to you.

One can think of podcasts as being similar to a newspaper. You could go out and find your own news. You could stand down on the corner, watching and waiting for something of interest to occur. Sirens a couple of streets over? Let’s head over there and find out what is going on. Perhaps we can ask the police officer who they have arrested and what crime they think the person has committed. Look’s like smoke a few blocks away. Let’s get over there quick to see what’s burning. Along the way, we’ll stop in at the Capitol building and see what the legislature is cooking up today. Obviously, this would not be an efficient system for consuming news, and even if we wanted to spend all of our time seeking out the news we want to consume, our scope would be limited to our immediate surroundings, because of course, we can’t be
everywhere at once. Instead, we rely on newspapers to aggregate this content into a single discrete package which is then delivered to us.

And once delivered, that news content is ours to consume whenever, wherever, and however we want. We can consume that news content at home in our easy chair, or take it on the road. Didn’t get to it today? Don’t worry, it’ll still be there tomorrow. And if we never get around to it, no need to worry still, because the next newspaper delivery is only a day away.

Like a newspaper, you elect to have podcasts delivered to you by subscribing to the podcasts that cover topics that you are interested in. Some podcasts are updated on a regular schedule, perhaps daily or weekly, and some podcasts are updated whenever the creator wants, but either way, once subscribed, you don’t have to go out in search of the next podcast episode. It just arrives on your computer or device.

And unlike newspapers, podcasts are generally free. There are a very small number of podcasts that are only available through a service or paid subscription, but the overwhelming majority of podcasts are completely free.

At this point, we should pause to clarify some nomenclature. A big part of what makes a podcast special is that it is syndicated content, to say, it is not a single, one-time piece of audio or video content, but rather an on-going production. Again, thinking of our newspaper analogy, each day a new newspaper arrives with brand-new news stories. A podcast is a series of individual episodes, usually produced on a fairly regular basis, whether daily, weekly, or at a different interval. The singular term podcast is used interchangeably to refer to a podcast series and an individual podcast episode. As we work through this course we will try to specify a podcast series or a podcast episode as necessary. Also, for many people, the term podcast creates the mistaken impression that podcasts are restricted to use on Apple’s iPod devices. The term podcast is a combination of the words iPod and broadcast. Although the term became popular because the format was rising in popularity at the same time that iPods were rising in popularity, podcasts can be played back on just about any computer or mobile device, including tablets, MP3 players, and smartphones. Indeed, the “pod” in podcast has come to be treated as an acronym that stands for “Personal
On Demand”, specifically because the whole point of a podcast is to sidestep the traditional broadcast mediums, removing the barriers of production and transmission costs and enabling anyone to create audio and video content for everyone in the world to consume on their own schedule and on the device of their choice.

You subscribe to a podcast series and receive new podcast episodes as they become available using a piece of software called a podcatcher. Every time you start your podcatcher software, the podcatcher will check the podcast series that you have subscribed to and see if new episodes are available for download. Most podcatchers have a built-in directory of podcast series to subscribe to as well as a mechanism for adding a podcast subscription directly from a website. There are also settings to control how frequently to look for new podcast episodes and how many podcast episodes to archive.

The preferred podcatcher for Mesa Public Schools is iTunes. iTunes is not necessarily the “best” podcatcher currently available, but it is the preferred podcatcher for Mesa Public Schools for several reasons. For one thing, iTunes offers the world’s largest podcast directory through the iTunes Store. To be fair, the iTunes Store is not available through a school computer because it is blocked on our network because there is no mechanism to filter out the explicit content that the iTunes Store offers, so it does need to be accessed from outside the district if you desire to use the iTunes podcast directory for subscribing to podcasts, but iTunes also includes tools for manually subscribing to a podcast from a website. More importantly, iTunes can be used to subscribe to a podcast on an Architeck page even if the podcast is not listed in the iTunes Store. At the bottom of every Architeck podcast page there is an iTunes link and an RSS link. The RSS link is used for most podcatchers, but understanding how to make use of it does require an extra level technology sophistication. Anyone can easily subscribe to an Architeck podcast with the iTunes software by simply clicking on the iTunes link. Another advantage that iTunes offers as a podcatcher is access to iTunesU. iTunesU is a special podcast directory that Apple offers for educational institutions looking to incorporate podcast material with integrated class materials. Because iTunesU is accessed through the iTunes Store, it also needs to be accessed from outside the district network, but it does open another avenue for
teachers looking for more content to use with their students. Finally, it should be pointed out that although the iTunes software is designed to be sync content with Apple’s iOS devices, the podcasts that iTunes downloads are industry-standard file types that can be moved to and played on any computer or device.