

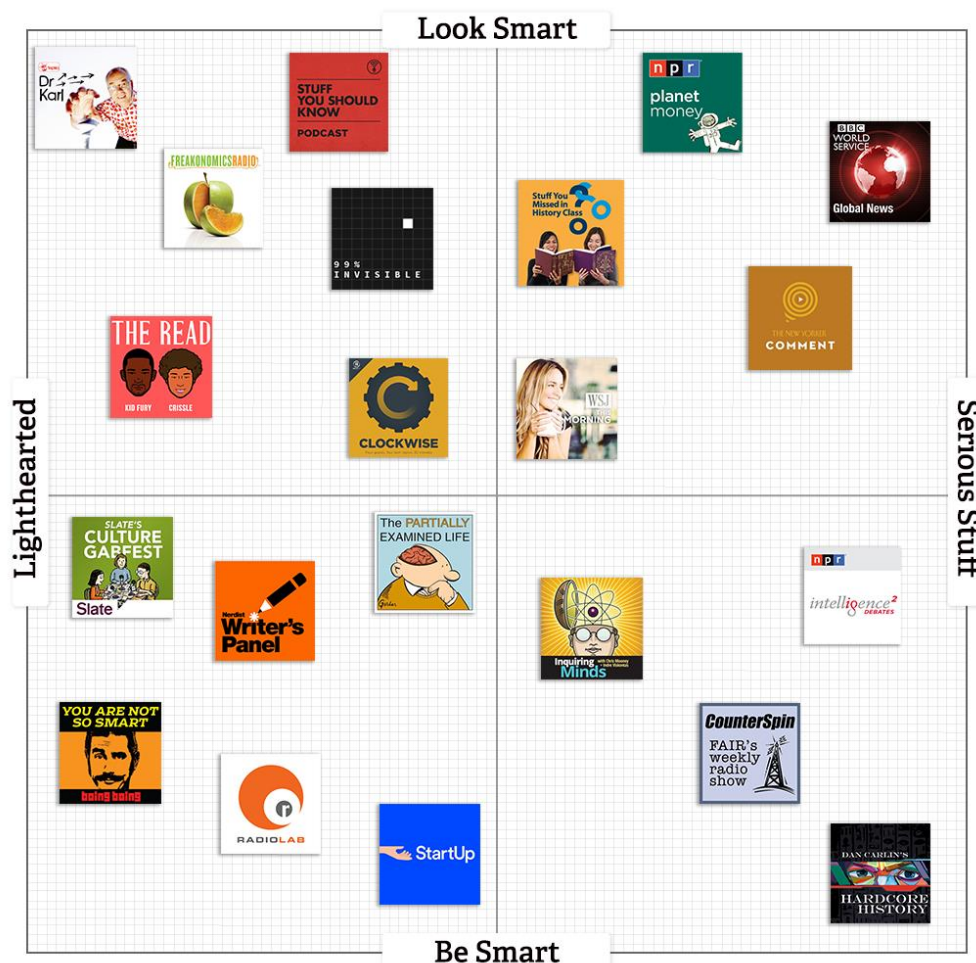
21 Podcasts to Make You Smarter

Posted by Adam Cecil

Nov 24, 2014

We know the feeling: you feel uninformed about a story in the news, or a pop culture phenomena, or just have questions about the world that have never been answered. Podcasts are here to the rescue. Podcasts are great because you can listen to them while you're at the gym, driving, on the train, mowing the lawn, hand-washing your laundry, or any other task that can be enhanced with audio knowledge.

We put together a list of our favorite podcasts that have made us smarter, separated them out into groups based on content. We also put together a 2x2, mapping each podcast across two axes: lighthearted vs. serious and looking smarter in front of friends vs. being smarter in your personal life.



CULTURE

Clockwise

<http://www.relay.fm/clockwise>

Four tech topics, five minutes each, with no episode going longer than 30 minutes. Produced weekly and hosted by Jason Snell (formerly of Macworld) and Dan Moren, Clockwise is an excellent and quick introduction into the most topical and controversial tech topics.



Slate's Culture Gabfest

<http://www.slate.com/articles/podcasts/culturegabfest.html>

If you love movies, books, TV, music, or just about any cultural artifact you can get your hands on, you'll love Slate's Culture Gabfest. It's like having a conversation with all of your super smart friends who can reference everything from Plato to Adam Sandler. Or, in other words, your own personal Gilmore Girls.



Nerdist Writer's Panel

http://www.nerdist.com/podcast_channel/nerdist-writers-panel-channel/

If you're a writer or are interested in writing, you're doing yourself a disservice by not listening to the Nerdist Writer's Panel. Not only about the process of writing, but the business of it, too, every episode brings you a conversation with a professional writer, moderated by Ben Blacker, a writer himself.



You Are Not So Smart

<http://youarenotsosmart.com/podcast/>

You are delusional. That's the contention behind this podcast, hosted by David McRaney, which seeks to explore how overconfidence and confirmation bias causes us all to do very stupid things. Listen to this podcast if you're okay with getting smarter by feeling dumb.



The Read

<http://thisistheread.com>

No one is safe from hosts Kid Fury and Crissle (unless you're Beyoncé or Blue Ivy) in this weekly podcast that skewers celebrities, b-list stars, and our ridiculous society in general. After listening to one episode, you'll want both Fury and Crissle to be your best friend.

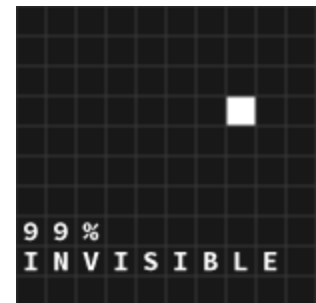


HISTORY

99% Invisible

<http://99percentinvisible.org/category/episode/>

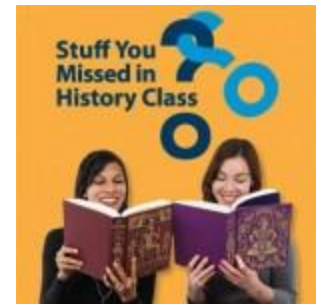
Roman Mars, host of 99% Invisible, will tell you that it's a podcast about design and architecture, but really, it's much more than that. These short shows ask the question of why things are the way they are, and with that guiding principle, they dive into the history of human civilization.



Stuff You Missed In History Class

<http://www.missedinhistory.com/podcasts/>

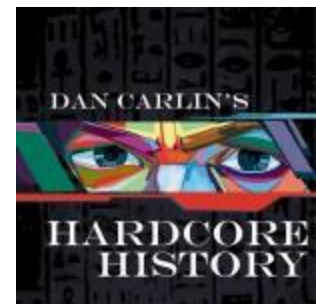
Whether it's stuff you missed or stuff you were never told, the Stuff You Missed In History Class podcast is full of weird facts, sad stories, and engaging information. Hosts Tracy V. Wilson and Holly Frey will probably go down as your two favorite history teachers of all time.



Hardcore History

<http://www.dancarlin.com/hardcore-history-series/>

Less of a podcast and more of a serialized audiobook, Dan Carlin's Hardcore History episodes come in multi-hour long sections every few months. (In fact, old episodes are sold like audiobooks on his website.) Despite the episode length and the erratic publishing schedule, Hardcore History is consistently one of the most popular podcasts in the world, no doubt thanks to Carlin's engaging style and his grasp of the subject.



ECONOMICS

Freakonomics

<http://freakonomics.com/radio/freakonomics-radio-podcast-archive/>

Freakonomics started off as a book written by journalist Stephen Dubner and economist Steven Levitt and has quickly spiraled out into a media empire. The Freakonomics podcast "examines the hidden side of everything," usually by examining problems that may not seem connected to finance with an economist's eye.



NPR: Planet Money

<http://www.npr.org/blogs/money/127413729/podcast/>

Their goal is to make talking about the economy as fun and engaging as talking to a friend about on a night out drinking. This twice-weekly podcast does the job well, leading listeners into fascinating explorations of the world around them through the lens of economics.



WSJ This Morning

<http://www.wsjradio.com/WSJAM.html>

Imagine the Wall Street Journal replacing Matt Lauer on the Today Show and you have WSJ This Morning. It's business news with a humorous, morning show twist.



StartUp Podcast

<http://hearstartup.com>

Listen to Alex Blumberg, former This American Life producer and co-creator of Planet Money, start a business in real time. This podcast goes beyond the standard business advice to give you an inside look at disastrous failures, emotional conversations, and the thrill of starting something new.

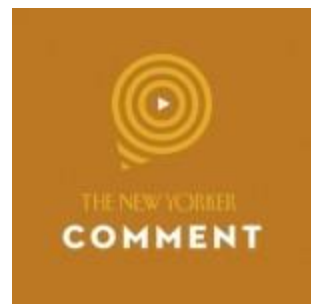


CURRENT EVENTS

New Yorker: Comment

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/new-yorker-comment/id259755059>

The New Yorker's weekly Comment podcast is a stand-out among its suite of podcasts. Offering a reading of the Comment essay from that week's issue, episodes last less than ten minutes and give you an in-depth analysis of one news issue.



Counterspin

<http://fair.org/counterspin-radio/>

Weekly episodes of this half-hour podcast examine the media and point out inaccuracies - both mistakes and outright lies. Each episode features a look back at the week's news and two interviews with experts and activists relating to a story in the headlines.



BBC Global News

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/podcasts/series/globalnews/all>

Published in the morning and evening, the BBC Global News podcast delivers more than an hour of the world's most important news stories every day. Compiled from the BBC's best news sources, Global News guarantees that you'll never miss a story.



Intelligence Squared (U.S.)

<http://www.npr.org/series/6263392/intelligence-squared-u-s>

Oxford-style debates about the most important issues affecting us today. While Intelligence Squared hosts debates all around the world, this podcast is focused specifically on American issues.



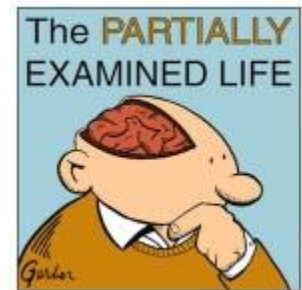
*intelligence*²
DEBATES

QUESTIONS, BIG AND SMALL

The Partially Examined Life

<http://www.partiallyexaminedlife.com/podcast-episodes/>

Four men talking about philosophy the same way they might talk about sports. Designed for people who don't know anything about philosophy, Partially Examined Life is a Philosophy 101 course in podcast form.



Radiolab

<http://www.radiolab.org/series/podcasts/>

Radiolab is a smart show about a variety of subjects, but the most interesting part of it is the sound design. Featuring a mix of ambient sound, original recordings, interviews, and commentary from hosts Jad Abumrad and Robert Krulwich, the show is unlike anything you've ever heard.



Science On Mornings

<http://www.abc.net.au/science/drkarl/scienceontriplej/>

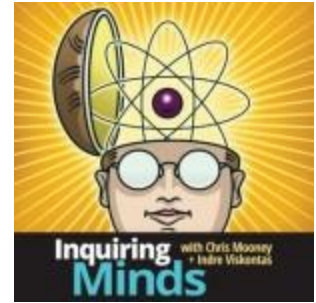
Australian radio personality Dr. Karl answers phone-in science questions from across the continent with host Zan Rowe. No question is too small for Dr. Karl as he answers everything from "Why can't you tickle yourself?" to "Why does our concept of time change?"



Inquiring Minds

<https://soundcloud.com/inquiringminds>

Exploring the intersection between science, politics, and society, author Chris Mooney and neuroscientist Indre Viskontas challenge everyday assumptions with a slew of experts and guest hosts.



Stuff You Should Know

<http://www.stuffyoushouldknow.com/podcasts/>

How does _____ work? That's the basic premise behind every episode of Stuff You Should Know, hosted by Chuck Bryant and Josh Clark of howstuffworks.com. Every week they tackle a new topic. So far, they've explored karate, trickle-down economics, amnesia, and pet psychics, just to name a few.

