

Beadle Scholar Best Practices for Oral Histories and their Transcription

Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to serve as a starting point for individuals interested in transcribing oral histories. Individual projects will likely want to develop more specific guidelines. Whatever guidelines are used for a project, it is important to document the choices made so there can be as much internal consistency as possible.

Transcripts should reflect the original interviews as much as possible. While projects may differ in terms of the degree to which interviews are transcribed verbatim, it is important to keep in mind that future researchers may not always consult the original source of the interview (audio or video). As such, transcripts should, as much as is possible, stand on their own.

The guidelines that follow can certainly be modified as appropriate for individual project needs. The most likely area for modification is stylistic decisions such as punctuation, use of brackets, how to transcribe interruptions, and so on. The resources listed at the end of this guide have more detailed information about stylistic decisions and offer multiple options for how to represent transcribed speech. Much of the material in this guide is based on information in those resources.

General Information

The first page of the interview should contain at least the following information:

- names of interviewer(s) and interviewee(s);
- date of the interview;
- location of the interview.

If abbreviations for interviewers and interviewees will be used in the transcript, indicate those in parentheses. Each page should be numbered. It is also helpful to include the duration of the interview in hours, minutes, and seconds.

- Example: This interview was conducted with Diana Lett (DL) on July 9, 2010 at Eyrie Vineyards in McMinnville, Oregon. The primary interviewer was Jeff D. Peterson (JDP). Additional support was provided by videographers Mark Pederson and Barrett Dahl. The duration of the interview is 49 minutes, 18 seconds.

A change in speaker is reflected by a new paragraph and a time stamp in brackets to mark the corresponding time on the video or audio recording. (Doing so clearly separates who is speaking and makes the document more helpful when used in conjunction with the recording.) Follow the time stamp with the speaker's initials and a colon before beginning the transcription.

- Example: [48:14] JDP: Are there any others that you—

Proofreading

Proofreading is essential in the transcription process. Transcripts benefit from being reviewed multiple times by multiple people. To ensure accuracy, review transcripts while listening to the audio from the interview; to ensure readability and to catch spelling or other errors, proofread transcripts as individual documents, much as you would the final draft of a paper. Be aware that spell-check will not catch all errors.

Style Guide

The style used in oral history transcripts can vary widely. This section is intended to serve as a starting point regarding questions of style. It offers generally accepted conventions for any common situations. Individual projects may choose to deviate from these guidelines and/or develop a more robust set of stylistic guidelines. For examples of more detailed guidelines, see *Transcript Conventions and Examples for Audio and Video Stories*, or refer to *Style Guide: A Quick Reference for Editing Oral Memoirs* from the Baylor University Institute for Oral History.

Abbreviations

Do not use unless they are spoken by the people on the recording.

Brackets

Use brackets [] for the following:

- to add information not included in the recording which may be necessary for researchers (for instance, a first or last name if only one is mentioned and the other is not included elsewhere in the transcript);
- to mention nonverbal elements or activity, such as laughter;
- to indicate an inaudible passage;
- to indicate overlapping dialogue;
- for time stamps.

Capitalize the first word in the bracket, as well as all proper names.

- Example: So why don't you start by telling me a little bit about yourself, and about how you came, wound up coming to Oregon with David [Lett]?
- Example: And they always say, "Is this Eerie Vineyards?" [Laughing] Just at Halloween.
- Example: His boat barn is over on [Inaudible] Street.
- Example: ALBERT: Do we belong? [Laughs, overlapping Noel]
NOEL: Do we belong here?

Contractions

Use only if the interviewer/interviewee uses them when speaking.

Ellipses

Do not use, as researchers may think that material has been omitted.

Em dashes

Use an em dash for the following:

- a hanging phrase resulting in an incomplete sentence;
- a parenthetical statement within a sentence;
- an interruption by another speaker;
- resumption of a statement after an interruption;
- a self-interruption by the speaker (see *False starts, stumbles, and self-interruptions* below).

Do not use a space before or after the em dash.

- Example: So, what are some of—you talk about this sense of community, and it sounds like you've got Charles Coury, and David—

False starts, stumbles, and self-interruptions

These elements often represent changes in thought and individual speech patterns of the speakers. Remain as accurate to transcribing verbatim as is possible within the defined scope of the project. Transcribe these elements with an em dash without spaces on either side.

- Example: We got a—I'm trying to remember that first one.

Filler words (um, uh, ah, etc.)

Some guides suggest omitting these elements, while others opt to retain them. As a rule, we recommend retaining filler words. Regional variations in pronunciation may influence whether speakers use *uh* or *ah*. *Uh* is usually considered to be the standard, with *ah* as a variation. Some speakers may use both.

Inaudible/unintelligible words

Occasionally, it may be impossible to discern what a speaker is saying. If you can make an educated guess as to what is being said, record what you hear. Underline the word or phrase and add two question marks in parentheses immediately following. If you cannot make an educated guess, use brackets to indicate something is inaudible.

- Example: His boat barn is over on Philomath(??) Street.
- Example: His boat barn is over on [Inaudible] Street.

Interruptions

Interruptions should be noted with em dashes.

Parentheses

Use parentheses with two question marks to indicate there may be some doubt about the accuracy of a transcribed word or phrase. See *Inaudible/unintelligible words* above.

Quotation Marks

Use double quotation marks to indicate quoted dialogue. Place a comma before the quoted passage and capitalize the first word in the quotation.

- Example: So he said, "Okay, I'm just going to buy it and we'll deal with the development issue if we have to."