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Recording oral histories

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Digital Collections Center

RECORDING ORAL HISTORIES

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INTERVIEW TIPS

- Have a “lead”! The lead should consist of, at least, the names of narrator and interviewer, day and year of session, interview’s location, and proposed subject of the recording.
- If interviewing a veteran, identify what war and branch of service he/she served in, what was his/her rank, and where he/she served.

INTERVIEW TIPS (Continued)

- Immediately after the interview, write down your notes. Add some context, biographical information on the interviewee, or anything that will help the audience or transcriber understand the interview. Make a quick summary. This may be used to create an abstract that can be used as a finding aid later.
- Obtain release forms! It does not need to be a complicated legal document, just one that clearly tells the interviewee what will happen to their interview. Include the interviewee's name, date, signature and make sure it includes a statement of permission. Keep copies.
- Make digital copies, and make sure copies are being preserved within accepted best practices.

VIDEO OR AUDIO?

- Best practices - video is great, but audio is the most important part.
- “Oral historians should use the best digital recording equipment within their means to reproduce the narrator’s voice accurately and if appropriate, other sounds as well as visual images.”
- Audio is the most-used oral history recording format and is less complicated to use and arrange for. It also may make your interviewee more comfortable. However, video has the added benefit of adding context and meaning to the spoken word, and can give the viewer a greater sense of the speaker.

RECORDING THE INTERVIEW

- Make sure interviewee is comfortable
- Know your equipment beforehand
- Quiet room – really be aware of ambient noise (fans, lawnmowers, traffic, cell phones)
- Agree to the length of time, and keep track. Make sure you can record that long on your device!
- Ideally, one cut
- Make sure your device is plugged in or has enough battery life
- Know how to get the audio/video file off device and on to a computer
- Make backup copies immediately

VIDEO TIPS

- Frame your shot and pay attention to lighting on the interviewee's face
- Helpful if your shot gets a sense of the person in context of their surroundings
- Continually check your shot, as people shift out of the frame
- When possible, use an external mic
- Use a tripod or make sure camera is in a secure position
- Know how to edit the settings of your video
- Practice/test before recording!

IF USING A SMARTPHONE

- Put it on airplane mode!
- Make sure you have enough internal storage for the file size
- Be careful of apps that may violate privacy of interviewee
- Make sure there are no time limits to record video/audio
- Know how to get the file off your phone

RECOMMENDED DATA FORMATS FOR AUDIO/VIDEO PRESERVATION PURPOSES

Media	High Confidence Level	Medium Confidence Level	Low Confidence Level
Audio	AIFF (PCM) (*.aif, *.aiff) WAV (PCM) (*.wav)	SUN Audio (uncompressed) (*.au) Standard MIDI (*.mid, *.midi) Ogg Vorbis (*.ogg) Free Lossless Audio Codec (*.flac) Advance Audio Coding (*.mp4, *.m4a, *.aac) MP3 (MPEG-1/2, Layer 3) (*.mp3) AES3 (LPCM) (*.aes)	AIFC (compressed) (*.aifc) NeXT SND (*.snd) RealNetworks 'Real Audio' (*.ra, *.rm, *.ram) Windows Media Audio (*.wma) Protected AAC (*.m4p) WAV (compressed) (*.wav) All other audio formats not listed here
Video	AVI (uncompressed, motion JPEG) (*.avi) MOV QuickTime Movie (uncompressed, motion JPEG) (*.mov) MPEG-4 (H.264) (*.mp4, wrapped in AVI, MOV)	Ogg Theora (*.ogg) - MPEG-1, MPEG-2 (*.mpg, *.mpeg, wrapped in AVI, MOV) Motion JPEG 2000 (ISO/IEC 15444-4) (*.mj2)	AVI (others) (*.avi) QuickTime Movie (others) (*.mov) RealNetworks 'Real Video' (*.rv) Windows Media Video (*.wmv) Flash Video (*.flv) All other video formats not listed here

RECOMMENDED DATA FORMATS FOR VIDEO PRESERVATION PURPOSES

Preferred:

- codecs: uncompressed lossless
- bit depth: 24 bits per sample
- height and width: minimum 720x486 pixels at 30 frames per second
- sampling rate: minimum sample rate of 44.1 KHz, although sampling at 96 KHz is encouraged

Not preferred:

- Files created for "streaming" broadcast (e.g. RealAudio, Windows Media) - these files sacrifice quality for file size. They are often reduced from high-resolution files by removing high and low frequency ranges and compressing the remaining signal.

Audio/Video Processing & Conversion



TRANSCRIPTION WORKSHOP

- Monday, March 27th at 2:00 pm in Digital Scholars Studio

WHY TRANSCRIBE?

- Accessibility - aiding researchers/viewers in quickly skimming and assessing the relevance of an interview
- Helping researchers/viewers comprehend voices on the recording that are difficult to hear or understand
- Providing the means for a full-text search, which may be the best ways for search engines to find the material online

HOW TO RECORD AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW



How to Record an Oral History Interview

UniversityLeicester

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17,610 views

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jTCzxWt1RQk>

References

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- <http://www.loc.gov/vets/pdf/mediaformat-fieldkit-2013.pdf>
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