

TRANSCRIBING GUIDELINES

Transcribing the interview is the most tedious part of the oral history process, but in many ways one of the most important. A transcript provides future researchers a useful format to access information of historical interest covered in an interview. Typically it takes between 3-5 hours to transcribe each hour of speech.

Please follow the **format sample below** and the Transcribing Style Guide available here:
http://www.baylor.edu/oral_history/index.php?id=23607

Reference Guidelines

- Proofread your transcript for grammar and spelling.
- Check the format and make sure spacing, punctuation, and capitalization are correct – additional tips starting on page 2.
- Check for consistency.

Brackets [] are to indicate notes and words not present on the recording and added to the transcript. *Example: I never expected to find myself in a swamp in LA [Los Angeles].* If you are using a translator, or cannot transcribe certain words in Vietnamese, please use brackets to indicate this and then **HIGHLIGHT it in yellow so that someone else can follow up + add TIMESTAMP**. *Example: I always drank sua dau nanh [soy bean milk OR needs translation – 01:17:04] after school.*

The **em dash (—)** indicates a hanging phrase resulting in an incomplete sentence, a parenthetical expression or statement, an interruption by another speaker, resumption of a statement after an interruption, or a meaningful pause on the part of the speaker.

Do not use **ellipses (...)** in transcribing oral history recordings because they give the impression that material has been left out.

In the case of repeated words, phrases or syllables follow a middle course in transcribing these **false starts**, leaving enough to indicate individual speech patterns, or emphasis, but not stuttering unless it's intentional.

Do not type **uh** if the person repeatedly enunciate words with a hard consonant with an added, “uh,” as in *and-uh, at-uh, did-uh* and so forth. Also delete all repetitive “ah,” “um,” “like,” and “you know.”

Nonverbal sounds or events should be recorded in parenthesis and italicized such as (*laughs*), (*cries*), or (*knocks at the door*).

When **speech is unintelligible**, you can make an educated guess and add two question marks in parenthesis, for example: *Maryville (??) or Mayfield (??) [00:38:16]*. If you cannot understand, type (**unintelligible – 00:59:31**). **HIGHLIGHT in yellow + include the TIMESTAMP** so that someone else can follow up.

If you are using a digital audio device, **record the time** about every five minutes. If you are using media disks record: *Track 1 ends; Tracks 2 begins*. If there is a pause, type *pause in recording*. If you are **transcribing more than one track**, combine them into one document. At the beginning of the first interview, type, “*Audio [Track 1]*,” and in between the two interviews, type, “*Audio [Track 2]*.” At the end of the interview, type “**--End of Interview--**”

If the interview contains a few Vietnamese words and/or phrases, use either **footnotes** to translate these words and/or describe their meanings or in brackets described above. If the interview contains a **significant mix of Vietnamese and English**, transcribe it as is, then translate the entire interview into English.

Please refer to the [Transcribing Style Guide](#) link above in cases not covered here.

HELPFUL FORMATTING AND GRAMMAR TIPS

Formatting and Punctuation

Below are style definitions and tips for appropriateness and use.

Abbreviations

Use periods for abbreviations, such as D.C. and U.S. The times “A.M.” and “P.M.” should be in small caps (e.g. 8 A.M.).

Acronyms

Acronyms have no periods. They should be spelled out in the first instance, using brackets to set off the full name.

Example: "I worked for ODOT [Oregon Department of Transportation] from 1990 to 2009."

Brackets

In transcriptions, and quotations, brackets are typically used to include information not specifically mentioned (such as a full acronym name, a non-verbal occurrence, a proper name, to signify an inaudible passage, or to add clarification).

Example: "She [my sister] was the one who practically raised me."

Commas

According to the *Chicago Manual of Style*, commas are used to indicate small interruptions in continuity of thought or sentence structure. Your ear is the best judge for determining comma placement.

Contractions

Contractions are more common in speech than text, but are equally valid. They add informality and help reproduce “real speech” (e.g. "it's" is less formal than "it is"). When contractions are used in the interview, they should be transcribed as such.

Dashes

The em-dash (—) is used to signify an interruption.

Example:

AP: Did you read the transcript? I feel it's—

JS: Sorry to interrupt.

Also use a dash to indicate a change of course mid-sentence, and enclose the thought in dashes if the sentence veers again or goes back to its original course.

Dates

No apostrophe is needed when indicating plural years (e.g. 1980s, or '80s).

Ellipses

An ellipsis is three dots, each separated by a space (. . .). Ellipses are used to express an omission. But note that an em-dash (—) should be used for interruptions and/or for trailing off (see under DASHES).

In the middle of a sentence use a space before and after the ellipsis. At the end of a sentence use four dots total. The first is the period (without a preceding space), followed by three dots. Each of the four dots is followed by a space.

Money

For specific amounts, use the dollar sign instead of the word "dollars."

Example: The budget is \$10 million.

When approximate range amounts are specified, spell out the words.

Example: Our total budget was two or three thousand dollars last year.

When currencies but no amounts are specified, or currencies other than dollars are specified, spell out the words.

Example: Before leaving, I exchanged my remaining euros back to dollars.

Numbers

Spell out numbers one through nine, above that, use the number.

Proper Names

If only the last or first name is used, add the other name in brackets when it first appears. This applies to all names, even those that are well known.

Example: My paternal grandfather, James [Ponte], built this house.

Example: For a brief time, I served on [former Oregon Governor, John] Kitzhaber's advisory committee.

Publication and Media Names

Italicize the title of books, newspapers, magazines, movies, and TV shows.

Example: They ran a story about the business in the *New York Times*.

Note that in the example, "the" is not italicized or capitalized.

Quotes

For quoted dialogue, always use full quotes (“ ”), and put a comma before the quoted passage, which should begin with a capital letter.

Example: My wife said to me, "When you retire, I want to move back to Oregon."

Never use quotes for interior monologue, which is by definition thought, not said. Instead, indicate the thought with italics if it's a short passage.

Example: I thought, *What kind of a question was that?*

Tips for Dealing with Dialect, False Starts, Inaudible Passages, Non-Verbals, and Profanity

Dialect

Avoid using phonetic spellings to indicate dialect. For example, use "going to" for "gonna," "got to" for "gotta," "want to" for "wanna," etc. In general, try to use "yes" for "yeah."

In some instances use of ungrammatical language, such as "Betcha" and "Ain't," is okay to transcribe. Slang such as "y'all" is acceptable—very occasionally—if that's what was spoken, although it should not be used extensively for regional approximations à la Mark Twain.

False Start

A false start is a thought that is begun but never finished. In general, false starts should be removed from transcripts. An example of a false start is shown below in *italics*.

Example:

JS: *"My friend Mark and I would often go—* When I was a teenager, my favorite thing to do was fish. I'd fish all over this county. Me and my buddies fished a lot. It was fishing that I met my wife."

Inaudible and Indecipherable Passages

First, try to make out the words by listening to the audio file multiple times. If the section is still indecipherable, indicate so in the text by placing brackets around the word "inaudible," HIGHLIGHT in yellow, and add the TIMESTAMP in brackets.

Example: Our first home was in east Portland on [inaudible – 27:03] Street.

Non-Verbals

Use a bracket and *italicized* text to indicate non-verbal communication such as laughter, gestures, etc.

Example: My grandfather is buried there [*pointing out the window*], under that large oak tree.

Example: I hitchhiked all the way from Missouri to Oregon, [*laughing*] my mom was so worried.

For pauses in the recording for a meal or other occurrence, place the word "break" (all caps) in brackets to indicate the pause.

Example: [BREAK]

Profanity

The rule for including or excluding profanity depends on the publication type and audience. In general, these words are important to the transcription because they communicate the force with which a particular point is made. For the HCRH Oral History Project, profanity should not be included, but should be noted by ellipses (. . .) and asterisks (**).

Example: I told him, "No, I'm not going to ...**... do it, it's too dangerous!"

Text Format

Spacing

Use one space after the speaker's name and before his/her words. Use one space between sentences. If necessary, eliminate extra spaces with a global search and replace.

Font and Margins: Typeface should be Times New Roman, 12 point, regular kerning. No hyphenation or widow/orphan control. Margins: 1" right and left, top and bottom. Use rag right justification for all text.

* Tips adapted from the Historic Columbia River Highway Oral History Project