

7. Interview Transcription Guidelines

1. Change as little as possible. Accurately represent each speaker's words, conversational quality, and speech patterns. Type contractions as spoken ("I'll", not "I will"). Exceptions: disregard filler/ crutch words like "er," "um," "and then," "you know," and leave out redundant false starts (see Moss, p. 83; see p. 87-88 for punctuation to describe unfinished sentences and interruptions). Also leave out comments like "how interesting" or "really?" or "wow!" which the interviewer made only to show that he/she was listening.
2. Make it easy to read and understand. Use our adopted standards: Follow Bill Moss's transcribing manual. Use correct (not phonetic) spelling of words, even if they have not been pronounced quite that way (but do not try to improve on the sentence structure and grammar). Use your interview session notes for correct spellings and for ideas of explanatory footnotes. Use square brackets [] to enter any necessary explanatory text that was not on the tape (see Moss, p. 84-86).
3. Be complete. Be careful to transcribe all the words and transcribable sounds (including guttural sounds like ah, but with the exceptions noted in 1. above), and in their order of occurrence. Include all of the elements of the Center's Oral History Interview Transcript Checklist. Use parentheses () with discretion to note audible expressions of emotion such as (laughs) when one speaker does, (laughter) when both do, or (pounds fist on table), or (tape turned off and on again), and to describe what is happening (reading from newspaper) or (sometimes) how words are spoken (with tears in his eyes).
4. Work with the tape. Note changes in the tape, for example: End of Tape 1, Side B; Begin Tape 2, Side A. Use a transcribing machine rather than the recorder (which wears out the tape), and set the numbers counter at 0000 when starting the tape and note those numbers on your transcription at significant breaks, to make it easier for you to locate sections of the tape subsequently.
5. Allow the interviewee to review the transcript before it is made available for public use. Inform the interviewee that their role is to check the accuracy of the transcription, not to re-work the text into a publishable format. "Improving" on the choice of words or word order is not an option after the fact of the interview. For your part, realize that spoken words may look much different in print and there are tactful little things you can do to make the transcript acceptable through your choice of explanatory phrases and your selective deletion of false starts and other extraneous sounds mentioned above.
6. Maintain a log (to be placed with the oral history project records at the Center) of each step in processing the transcript. This information includes: who transcribed, audited, edited, corrected, and proofread the transcript final copy. Collection documentation (which includes correspondence with the interviewee) should make known the nature and extent of changes in the transcript from the original tape.