

TRANSCRIBING THE SPOKEN WORD

INTRODUCTION

A transcript is a written account of the oral history interview. Transcriptions are created by listening to the audio file and typing what you hear. Written transcriptions create a readable document that researchers and the public can easily access when it is not possible or practical to listen to an extended audio file. On average, the transcription process takes 4-6 hours per hour of recorded interview.

When transcribing, only use the Detroit 1967 Oral History Project transcript template. Only complete sections that you have information for; leave others, like Accession Number, blank.

BASIC TIPS

- Plan your time carefully. Transcribing is a long, painful process (six hours or more for one hour of recorded material).
- Use a media player with slow playback speed, such as Express Scribe (free download)
- Use comfortable headphones (or speakers where you won't disturb anyone)
- Compile list of key terms as you are transcribing
- Some mistakes are inevitable, but the draft transcript should be as clean as possible.
- Look up terms, words, addresses and names you don't know via the Internet.

EDITORIAL GUIDELINES

- Remove umms, ahhs, uhhs (specific details below)
- Correct grammatical errors unless absolutely essential to convey speaker's meaning
- Eliminate repetition and false starts
- Insert missing/inaudible words in brackets
- Include vocalizations in brackets (e.g. [laughter] [coughing] [humming]) if they are meaningful. However, you do not need to include all vocalizations.

TRANSCRIPTION STYLE GUIDE

ABBREVIATIONS

In general, avoid abbreviation in oral history transcripts. One exception is that a civil or military title appearing before a surname only should be spelled out, but it should be abbreviated before a given name and/or initial(s) plus surname, e.g. not Governor Perry, but “Gov. Rick Perry”

ABBREVIATE:

- The following when they precede a given name and/or initial(s) plus surname¹: Bro. M.; Mme; Ms.; Sr.; Dr.; Messrs.; Mmes; Rev.; Sra.; Fr. Mlle; Mr.; Rt.; Rev.; Srta.; Hon.; MM; Mrs.; Msgr.; Very Rev.
- The word and, when the ampersand is part of the official name or title: Seventh & James Baptist Church
- Jr. or Sr. after given name and/or initial(s) plus surname: John H. Smith Jr. (note that the comma is no longer required before Jr. and Sr.)
- NE, NW, SE, SW in addresses given in text
- Points of the compass: N, E, S, W, NE, SE, NNW, WSW, et cetera
- Era designations: AD 70, 753 BC
- Time designations: a.m., p.m.
- Initials only, initialisms, acronyms, reverse acronyms
- Celebrated persons are often referred to by a full set of initials, often without periods, that represent the full name: JFK, LBJ, FDR
- Agencies and various types of organizations in government, industry, and education often are referred to by acronyms or initialisms: AFL-CIO or AF of L-CIO, AMA, IOOF, NATO, UN, USMC, USAF, USN, FDIC, SEC, SMU, Texas A&M

DO NOT ABBREVIATE:

- Okay
- Et cetera
- Names of countries, territories, provinces, states, or counties
- Doctor, when used without an accompanying name

¹ Note the presence or absence of the period. For further guidance on French social titles, see Chicago Manual of Style, 16th edition, section 10.17, p. 493-4.

- Senator, Judge, Bishop, General, Professor, Brother, or any other political, academic, civic, judicial, religious, or military title when it is used alone or when it precedes a surname alone; e.g., Professor Sloan.
- The Reverend or the Honorable, when it is part of the title preceding the name; e.g., the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.
- Books of the Bible
- Names of the months and days
- Terms of dimension, measurement, weight, degree, depth, et cetera: inch, foot, mile
- Parts of a book: Chapter 3, Section A, Table 7
- Word elements of addresses used in text: Avenue, Building, North, South, except NW, NE, SE, and SW
- Portions of company names, unless the actual company name uses an abbreviation: Brother, Brothers, Company, Corporation, Incorporated, Limited, Railroad
- Senior or Junior when following partial names: Mr. Miller, Junior, Mr. Toland, Senior (See below for times when the abbreviation should be used.)

Chicago Manual of Style, 16th edition, page 489, Section 10.4, rule 3 provides a good rule of thumb: Use no periods with abbreviations that appear in full capitals, whether two letters or more and even if lowercase letters appear within the abbreviation: VP, CEO, MA, MD, PhD, UK, US, RN, LA.

Note: To safeguard against any confusion on the part of the future reader, the first time any type of abbreviation appears in a transcript, put the full spelled-out version in brackets (see next section): “I never expected to find myself in a swamp in LA [Los Angeles].”

CAPITALIZATION

See also NAMES

As a rule of thumb, when in doubt, do not capitalize. When the Chicago Manual of Style or the dictionary allows for discretion or says that a class of words may be or usually is lowercased, the Society uses the lowercase form.

Proper names of institutions, organizations, persons, places and things follow the forms of standard English practice. When in doubt, consult the dictionary or the Chicago Manual of Style chapter on names and terms for specific cases and examples. If still in doubt, don't

capitalize. Partial names of institutions, organizations, or places are usually written in lowercase.

CAPITALIZE:

- Names of particular persons, places, organizations, historical time periods, historical events, biblical events and concepts, movements, calendar terms referring to specific days, months, and oriental years
- Titles of creative works
- References to athletic, national, political, regional, religious, and social groups: Baylor Bears, Congress, Democrats, Daughters of the American Revolution, the Masons
- World Wide Web and Internet (but not web, website, or the net): “She suggested that he search the Internet for more information.”

DO NOT CAPITALIZE:

- Web, website, or the net Can you recommend a website where I can learn more about making quilts?
- Oh, except at the beginning of a sentence or response
- Incomplete titles of persons
- Seasons
- Fall semester, spring of 2000, winter solstice
- Names of dances, but do capitalize names of dancing events: They danced the jitterbug all night long. He invited her to the Cattle Baron’s Ball.
- Pronouns referring to deities

COMMAS

Commas are tricky in oral history because speech patterns vary and differ greatly from written English. The following are some examples of situations where comma use may be unclear:

- No sir.
- Oh yes.
- Thanks, Mrs. Pool.
- Yeah, that’s right. (Note correct spelling of yeah.)

- Well, I'm from California originally, see.
- Well now, that just doesn't make any sense.
- I was born, let's see, in Dallas, Texas, in 1904.
- I mean, what are you going to do about it?
- So we, you know, went back home.
- And, of course, we were pretty angry.
- She was, like, my best friend.
- Every, say, twice a month he would come by the store.
- But, I don't know, it was just a really hard time for everyone.
- They considered me a, quote, conservative.
- Now, that was a pretty stupid thing to do.
- After all this time, why are you saying that now?
- But, in my opinion, the lamp looked better on the end table.
- And in the evening the skies darkened.

CRUTCH WORDS

Crutch words are words, syllables, or phrases of interjection designating hesitation and are characteristically used instead of pauses to allow thinking time for the speaker. They also may be used to elicit supportive feedback or simple response from the listener, such as: you know, see? or, understand?

Unless a word is used to affirm or negate something (such as “uh-huh” for yes or “nah” no) omit it. If you must, spell common crutch words as follows: uh, uh-huh, um-hm, unh-uh

DASHES

- Use a dash or long hyphen (—) in the following cases:
- A hanging phrase resulting in an incomplete sentence (do not use ellipses) “There was this teacher who told me I'd never amount to—told me I wasn't ever going to succeed.”
- A parenthetic expression or statement: “I guess I was always rambunctious—a troublemaker, really—as a child.”
- An interruption: “It was dark, and suddenly this big thing jumped out—”
- A meaningful pause on the part of the speaker: “I really miss her—her sweet disposition. And it's—hard to think she's gone.”

DATES

See also *NUMBERS*

- In the heading on the first page of a transcript, type the date in month, day, year form:
January 1, 2003
- Elsewhere in the transcript, the form of dates conforms to the rules for numbers:
 - Use numerals for years (1996) except when a sentence begins with a year:
Nineteen sixty-two was an important year for me.
 - Use numerals for days when they follow the name of the month and precede the year; follow this form even when the speaker says: “Today is August the fifth, nineteen eighty-seven,” you should write: “Today is August 5, 1987.”
 - Spell out the words for the day when the year is not expressed and the speaker uses the ordinal number: My birthday is August fifth, My birthday is August the fifth.
 - Spell out the word for the day when the day precedes the month: the fifth of August
 - Other examples: 1930s; the thirties; 1989 or '90; midsixties; mid-1960
 - When spelling out 1906, use Nineteen o-six or Nineteen aught-six.
 - When a date is said as a string of numbers, use numerals: He died 12/18/1973.

DIVISION OF WORDS AND NUMBERS

Take care that automatic wrapping of text lines does not separate initials from a surname, parts of an acronym or abbreviation, or divisional marks such as a), (1), (i), from material to which they pertain.

If necessary to keep these elements together, replace a normal space with a non-breaking space.

DO NOT USE ELLIPSES in transcribing oral history recordings because they may suggest to readers that material has been left out.

DO NOT INCLUDE FALSE STARTS. In general, delete false starts from a transcript. A false start may be anything from a syllable to a sentence fragment. Repeated words, phrases or syllables are at times indicative of a person's thought patterns, speech patterns, or personality traits, or of a speaker's effort to emphasize an element of communication. Sometimes an

interviewee may be deliberately ambiguous or turgid for reasons of his or her own. Where to draw the line in deleting false-start material from the transcript is a difficult decision. We strive to follow a middle course, leaving in enough to indicate individual speech patterns. If repetition is for emphasis as reflected in the voice of the interviewee, the repetition is always retained. Do not try to indicate stuttering unless it is intentional.

HYPHENS

- Vice-president is now vice president
- Post-doctoral is now postdoctoral
- When the second element is capitalized, retain the hyphen: post-World War II, post-Civil War

HYPHENATE

- to indicate division or separation in the following:
 - Division of words into syllables, as in syl-la-ble
 - Spelling out a name or words, as in H-o-r-a-c-e. Capitalize only where appropriate.
- To indicate unification or combination as follows:
 - Nouns made up of two or more nouns which imply the combination or unification of two or more linked things, functions, or characteristics, as in astronaut-scientist, AFL-CIO
 - Modifiers and adjectival compounds when used before the noun being modified, not after, including those formed with numbers: “a one-of-a-kind student”
 - To indicate an infrequent pronunciation or meaning of a word: re-creation, recreation re-cover, recover, re-form, reform
 - To indicate different pronunciations: “Her name at that time was Plasek, P-I-a-s-e-k.” “Plah-shik” or “Pla-sik.”
 - To indicate clear meaning when possible confusion could result from adding a prefix to a word starting with a vowel, as in co-op. Most often this convention operates with doubled vowels.

DO NOT HYPHENATE

- A noun compound of a spelled-out number and prefix, as in mideighties (but do hyphenate prefix plus numerals, as in “mid-1980s”).

- Chemical terms, as in sodium nitrate, sodium silicate, bismuth oxychloride
- A compound modifier that follows the noun it modifies unless hyphenated in the dictionary: “She was well liked by everyone in her class.” “Her argument was well-balanced.”
- A compound modifier that includes an adverb ending in –ly: wholly fictitious
- A hyphenated word at the end of a line other than at the hyphen
- A proper noun except when absolutely unavoidable
- Contractions, such as: can’t, wouldn’t, don’t, didn’t, wasn’t, he’ll, they’re, she’d

INCOMPLETE SENTENCES

Incomplete sentences are familiar occurrences in oral history because of its conversational nature. End incomplete sentences with a long hyphen or dash (—).

ITALICS

See *QUOTATION MARKS* for titles not in italics

ITALICIZE

- Titles of whole published works,
- Titles of books, bulletins, periodicals, pamphlets
- Titles of long poems
- Titles of plays and motion pictures
- Titles of long musical compositions: operas, operettas, musical comedies, oratorios, ballets, tone poems, concertos, sonatas, concerti grossi, symphonies, and suites, but not descriptive titles or attributed titles.
- Titles—actual titles, rather than descriptive or attributed titles—of paintings, sculptures, drawings, mobiles:
- Names of spacecraft, aircraft, and ships, except for abbreviations preceding the names, such as designations of class or manufacturer, as follows: *HMS Queen Elizabeth*, *USS Lexington*, *Friendship 7*
- Foreign words and phrases that are not in common currency; when in doubt, don’t italicize. Consult the dictionary; don’t italicize a quotation in a foreign language.

- A foreign word or phrase when followed by a translation; enclose translation in quotation marks and precede translation by a comma: *J'ai mal à la tête*, "I have a headache."
- References to letters as letters: "That word should have two *r*'s and only one *e*."
- In indexes, the cross-reference terms *See* and *See also*
- Titles of legal cases, except in footnotes where only *ex parte*, *ex rel.*, and *in re* are italicized along with other Latin words
- Enumeration letters referring to subdivisions within a sentence or within a paragraph as well as those appearing in lists, when such letters are in lowercase, such as *a*, *b*, or *c*
- Newspaper names and the city names that accompany them: *New York Times*
- Italicize titles of legal cases, with *v.* for versus: *Brown v. Board of Education*

NAMES

The spelling of proper names of persons or locations is one of the transcriber's most difficult tasks. Ask for help if unsure of spellings.

NUMBERS

In general, spell out whole numbers, whether cardinal or ordinal, from one to ten. Use numerals for 11 and higher.

SPELL OUT:

- Always spell out the number if it is the **first word** in a sentence: When were you born? "Nineteen sixty-five," versus When were you born? "In 1965."
- Spell out the number if it is the name of a street and under one hundred: 454 Fourth Street
- Spell out decades such as fifties, sixties, but 1960s, 1970s.

DO NOT SPELL OUT:

- Stats: "And then that year we wound up going 34 and 2."
- Percentages or angles: "Only 45 percent of board members approved of the measure," "Her foot was turned at a 45-degree angle."
- Street address numbers, intrabuilding numbers, highway numbers: 10 Downing Street, 304 Carroll Library, IH35
- Telephone numbers: Our phone number was Plaza, which is 75—it was Plaza 36293.

- Fractional sums of money above one dollar: \$2.98
- Dates: See also DATES above
 - 735 BC; mid-1950s; AD 1066; the midfifties; 1990s; 24 February 1997; July 1997
- Time of day—Spell out even, half, and quarter hours. Use numerals for other fractions of time, or when a.m. or p.m. follows:
 - 8:20; four o'clock; three forty-five;
 - 6:30 p.m.; seven thirty; six in the morning
- Number elements in names of government bodies and subdivisions of 100th and higher, all union locals and lodges: Thirty-Sixth Infantry; 139th Tactical Wing
- Parts of a book, such as chapter numbers, verse numbers

EXCEPTIONS:

- The sentence begins with a number: Seven out of 265 students voted.
- Numbers representing different categories: In the past ten years five new buildings of over 125 stories were erected in the city.
- Numbers as numbers: When spoken of or referred to as numbers, they may be enclosed in quotation marks or italicized; either is acceptable, but be consistent throughout the transcript.
- Plurals of numbers: Spelled-out numbers form plurals like any other noun: the twenties and thirties
- Numerals form plurals by adding s alone, with no apostrophe: 1920s and 1930s
- When connecting figures with a prefix or suffix, add the hyphen in the appropriate place if the compound word is adjectival. Connect numbers expressed in words to a prefix or suffix with a hyphen: twenty-odd
- The suffix fold is an exception: threefold

PARAGRAPHS

Press the [ENTER] key to start a new paragraph wherever topics change, where subtopics are introduced, or where other dialogue is introduced. This may be very difficult to judge as you are transcribing from the recording and is often left up to the final editor.

POSSESSIVES

- Follow the standard rules for possessives.

- For proper nouns, add “s” to most, even those ending with an s: Charlie’s, Frances’s
 - However: Jesus’ and Moses’
- For plural possessives, the apostrophe goes at the end: The Smiths’ and Reynoldses’ fortunes were lost in the Depression. We’re planning on going to the boys’ basketball game tonight.
- Collective nouns are exceptions: children’s toys, women’s clothes

QUOTATION MARKS

ENCLOSE IN QUOTATION MARKS:

- When a direct expression is spoken by one person (I, he, she), set apart the expression with commas, use opening and closing quotation marks, and capitalize the first letter of the first word quoted. She said, “I am going to graduate in May.”
- When a direct expression is spoken by more than one person (we, they), do not use quotation marks, but do set apart the expression with commas and do capitalize the first letter of the first word quoted. “They said, What are you doing here?”
- When a thought is quoted, do not use quotation marks, but do set the thought apart by commas and capitalize the first letter of the first word quoted. “I thought, Where am I?”
- Note: When a person repeatedly breaks up recreated dialogue, whether internal or external, with phrases such as I said, she said, I told him, I thought, etc., it is permissible to leave some of them out. Compare these two versions of the same passage: I said, “No.” I said, “I’m done.” I said, “I’m just waiting to retire.” I said, “No, I’m done. I’m just waiting to retire.”
- When a specific word or phrase said during the interview is referred to, enclose it in quotation marks, unless doing so adds confusion or unintended meaning to the passage: When did you retire? I shouldn’t say “retire,” but when did you stop full-time pastoring?

DO NOT ENCLOSE IN QUOTATION MARKS:

- Thoughts or paraphrases: I thought to myself, Who does she think she is?
- The word yes or the word no other than in a sentence which includes other direct discourse: He couldn’t say no, yet he didn’t really want to say yes. She said, “No,” when asked, “Do you care to join us?”

- Names used in conjunction with the words called, named, or words with similar meanings: We named the dog Bowser. My father never called me Junior. He had a nickname, Rabbit, and called me Rabbit or Rab.
- Words following the phrase so-called, whether meant in irony or not, unless they're not found in the dictionary or are used in nontraditional ways: That person will get the benefit of the so-called law first. We found out we had been transferred from being so-called combat troops to service troops.
- Words following the word called or named, unless they're not found in the dictionary: Before refrigerators we had something called an icebox. At that time they called it "hand-searching." Now they call it noodling.
- Words and phrases following quote and unquote, unless they're in reference to discourse or are not found in the dictionary: I was a, quote, moderate. She said, quote, unquote, "Well, I respect your opinion, but I think you're wrong."

PUNCTUATION WITH QUOTATION MARKS:

- The period and the comma always stay inside the quotation marks: "I'm ready for lunch," she said, "but it's only ten o'clock."
- The semicolon and the colon always stay outside the quotations. With trepidation, she scanned "The Raven"; it was too eerie for her tastes.
- The em dash, exclamation mark, and question mark are within the quotation marks when they apply only to the quotation. She began to say, "In the spring of 1920—" and then remembered it was a year later. She began by saying, "In the spring of 1920,"—I think it was really 1921—"I graduated from Baylor and began teaching school."

RECORDING TRANSITIONS

- Recording breaks: Track 1 ends; track 2 begins.
- A pause in recording, when recorder is turned off and then on again, when sound fades out, et cetera: pause in recording
- The end of the interview: end of interview

SLANG

Spellings for slang and certain words and expressions pronounced in regional dialect are available in dictionaries or reference works in the office. Words of informal language, such as

yeah and yep, may be transcribed verbatim. Words commonly pronounced together in spoken English—such as gonna (going to), wanna (want to), shoulda (should have), coulda (could have), woulda (would have), sorta (sort of), and kinda (kind of)—are in the unabridged dictionary, but we prefer to spell these out.

Interviewees occasionally coin words, either humorously or to convey a meaning for which they cannot find an existing word. If you cannot find a word in any dictionary but can hear it clearly and can devise a reasonable spelling for it, transcribe it and place it in quotation marks the first time it occurs. Do not use quotation marks for every occurrence of the coined word, however, as it makes for tedious reading.

SOUNDS IN RECORDING OTHER THAN TALKING—BRACKETS

Nonverbal sounds or events which occur in the recording are noted and enclosed in brackets especially if they intrude significantly or affect the intelligibility of the recording and certainly if they provoke a response from those present. For such notations, use no capital letters, unless for proper nouns or proper adjectives, and no ending punctuation. When these occur at the end of a sentence or a clause, position them after the punctuation. Reserve the use of parentheses for such activity notes.

Descriptive terms:

- [laughter] when speaker laughs
- [Jones laughs] when person other than speaker laughs
- [unintelligible]
- [telephone rings]
- [knock at the door]
- Avoid editorializing. Use [both talking at once] or [speaking at same time]—NOT [interrupts]

SPACING

- One space after a period and after a colon
- One space between words and before and after parentheses in the middle of a sentence
- No space before or after dash or long hyphen (—)
- One space between initials in a name (e.g. J. F. Kennedy)

- When something has been italicized, it may look as though there is no space before or after the italicized text. To verify spaces, click on the Show/Hide button in Word under the Home tab. The button looks like a paragraph mark and will turn on formatting markings.

UNINTELLIGIBLE SPOTS IN RECORDING

- When speech on a recording is unintelligible, first play it at a higher volume and/or slower speed. Next, ask someone else to listen.
- If you can make an educated guess, type the closest possible approximation of what you hear, underline the questionable portion, and add two question marks in parentheses. I went to school in Maryville(??) or Maryfield(??).
- If you and those you consult cannot make a guess as to what is said, leave a blank line of the approximate length of the unknown portion and two question marks in parentheses: We'd take our cotton to Mr. _____(??)'s gin in Cameron. At every city council meeting, she always asked _____(??).

PROOFREAD

Proofread your transcript. Use the following checklist to ensure your proofreading is thorough:

- ☐ Look for words that the spell-checker may have missed.
- ☐ Check the format.
- ☐ Make sure that spacing and punctuation are correct.
- ☐ Make sure that apostrophes in front of dates go the right way (e.g. '76) and that all quotations and parentheses are closed.
- ☐ Check for consistency.

If you make a decision on a matter of style in cases where the rules provide no clear guidance or allow for discretion, make sure you follow that decision throughout the transcript and make a note about any decisions when you submit the transcript. If you verify and correct the spelling of a name, be sure to correct every occurrence.

Sources Cited

Baylor University Institute for Oral History Style Guide: A Quick Reference for Editing Oral History Transcripts. 2015.
www.baylor.edu/oralhistory/doc.php/14142.pdf