

Transcribing Guidelines

Overwhelmingly, researchers prefer using transcripts over listening to recorded interviews. Therefore, the transcription and editing process of interviews should be a priority in designing and completing an oral history project. The industry standard is it takes approximately one hour to transcribe fifteen minutes of audio. This should be kept in mind throughout the Oral History process. Many people often use a transcription or secretarial service to save time, but interviewers can choose to complete this process themselves. If you would like a list of secretarial services contact the Oral History Department at the Minnesota Historical Society.

Before transcription work begins, the transcriber should discuss the details and logistics with the project editor. It should be established what software program will be used throughout the project. The transcription process may require several drafts which will be edited by the interviewer and project editor, as well as audited by the narrator. The original draft of the transcript should be double-spaced and nearly verbatim for proper editing. Depending on the recording format, notations on file changes need to be included in the transcript, which will be eliminated later after auditing the transcripts.

The following guide provides standards and guidelines on the transcription process for those who choose to do it themselves. See the Editing Guidelines page for what to do after the initial transcript is finished.

Page Formatting

Margins: All margins are set at 1 inch.

Page numbering: For page numbers in the final transcript, use automatic page-numbering, set for bottom-center.

Typeface: The font size and style should be clear and readable to a variety of readers. Appropriate fonts are Times New Roman, or Courier set at 12 point.

Undecipherable words: When a word or phrase is undecipherable, leave a space and type [unclear]. This can be filled in during the auditing and editing process.

Headings and text: Begin the transcript with a centered heading in boldface type. In the heading, identify the narrator, interviewer, date and location of the interview. After the heading, the interview text should begin three spaces below, flush left, right justified. In the interview text, initials appear flush left, followed by a colon. See the following example.

Donald N. Hanson
Narrator

James E. Fogerty
Minnesota Historical Society
Interviewer

February 8, 1988
At the James J. Hill House
St. Paul, Minnesota

JF: Mr. Hanson, would you tell me a little bit about yourself? Where were you born?

DH: I was born on a farm near Stanchfield, Minnesota. That's about eight miles north of Cambridge, on November 6, 1906.

Multiple Speakers: If more than one person is involved in the interview, identify each person in the heading. Then also identify each by full name and initials after the heading, but before the interview text. This identification should be flush left.

If a speaker is involved only through a few comments during the interview, use the with "with comments by" format in the heading, instead of listing each speaker as a full participant.

Jane Hanson
Narrator,
with comments by John Smith

James E. Fogerty
Minnesota Historical Society
Interviewer

February 8, 1988
At the James J. Hill House
St. Paul, Minnesota

Jane N. Hanson -JH

John Smith -JS

James E. Fogerty -JF

Interviews conducted on multiple dates: Indicate the dates in the heading and the text. For example, in the heading:

Interviewed on February 8, 12, and 18, 1988

In the text:

February 12, 1988

JF: Ms. Hanson, last week you told us about your...