TRANSCRIBING, EDITING AND PROCESSING GUIDELINES

MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

ORAL HISTORY OFFICE

INTRODUCTION

Transcribing and editing an oral history interview is a matter of personal style, but there are some important guidelines for basic transcript production. Some oral historians instruct their transcribers to record the interview word for word, while others allow for greater latitude. Similarly, there is great debate as to how much editing is appropriate. Some feel that the desire to edit a transcript should be curbed as much as possible to retain the freshness and spontaneity of the interview. They also point out that since each person edits somewhat differently, the textual context regarded by an editor as unimportant might be seen by a researcher as extremely valuable. Others feel that a transcript should read as smoothly as possible and advocate almost a cut-and-paste style of editing. [See Susan E. Allen, "Resisting the Editorial Ego," in Oral History Review 10 (1982): 33-45, and Willa K. Baum, Transcribing and Editing Oral History. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1977, for two approaches to this issue.]

At the Minnesota Historical Society, we recognize that variations in transcribing and editing styles will always exist. However, these differences can remain while falling within the parameters suggested in this guide. One rule of thumb is that the initial draft of the transcript should be a nearly verbatim copy of the recorded interview. This allows the editor to make his or her own decisions as to how the text can best be edited. This is especially true in instances where the editor is also the interviewer. It is this person, not the transcriber, who is the most appropriate individual to make editing decisions.

As for editing, several common sense rules apply.

1. Above all, the edited transcript should reflect the text of the interview as clearly as possible.

2. Secondly, the transcript should not embarrass the narrator or make him or her look foolish. In conversation, people often drop words or use incorrect grammar. When editing such a transcript, verb tenses should be made consistent, and noun subjects and verbs should agree. Personal pronouns and articles omitted in hurried speech should also be included. In addition, during a lengthy oral history interview, a narrator often repeats a story. The narrator would appear forgetful if the story was included verbatim, but to eliminate the repetition entirely would mean discarding the important details that often come from a second telling. To resolve this problem, it is appropriate to include the repetition and add, "As I told you before..."

3. A transcript should also capture the flavor of a narrator's speech. One narrator, describing his amazement at a scene, said, "The cars just kept a-coming and a-coming." This is not exactly standard usage, but it conveys the narrator's feelings. Another narrator pounded his desk and exclaimed, "Those goddamned environmentalists!" Because it was a restricted interview and the narrator did not object, the remark was not edited. Clearly, his anger would not be conveyed by the edited, "Those goshdarned environmentalists!"

4. Finally, it should be remembered that these oral history transcripts may be used by researchers across the country, some of whom may be unfamiliar with expressions and proper names that are common in Minnesota. Therefore, it is important to clarify a narrator's comments, where unclear, with the use of brackets and footnotes as explained in the section on editing guidelines.

It should be noted that researchers overwhelmingly prefer using transcripts over listening to interview tapes. Therefore, the transcription and editing of interviews should be a priority in designing and completing an oral history project. All original transcripts should be "audited" by the interviewer—that is, reading the transcript while listening to the interview tape to make sure that the transcript accurately reflects the narrator's words and meaning. Generally, a series of interviews done in conjunction with a particular project should be edited by a single individual to ensure a consistent editorial style. If possible, a second person should then proof the final edited version to make certain that it is error-free. Most importantly, each interview should be tracked through the process, from the original interview to the transfer to the audio-visual collections. Interviews should not languish in a vacuum because a release form was never signed or the original transcript was never edited. If the project is not fully completed, that narrator's voice in the historical record remains unheard.

TRANSCRIBING GUIDELINES

Before transcription work begins, the transcriber should discuss with the project editor which software package will be used. If possible, both the original transcript and the final version should be in the identical program. If that is not possible, then the most compatible program should be used. In addition, the original draft of the transcript should be double-spaced and include the notation of tape changes (i.e., "end of tape 1, side 1"). This will enable the interviewer to follow along while auditing the transcript. These notations will be eliminated later in the editing process.

Margins: Top and bottom margins are set at 1.25 inches. As a general rule, the left and right margins are also set at 1.25 inches. This may change, depending on how the copy is to be bound.

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

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.

<div align="center">

Donald N. Hanson
Narrator

James E. Fogerty
Minnesota Historical Society
Interviewer

February 8, 1988
at the James J. Hill House
Saint Paul, Minnesota

</div>

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.

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

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 comments by" format in the heading, instead of listing each speaker as a full participant.

<div style="text-align:center">

Jane N. Hanson
Narrator,
with comments by John Smith

James E. Fogerty
Minnesota Historical Society
Interviewer

February 8, 1988
at the James J. Hill House
Saint Paul, Minnesota

</div>

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:

<div style="text-align:center">

Interviewed on February 8, 12, and 18, 1988

</div>

In the text:

February 12, 1988

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

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.

Reassuring remarks or monosyllables: These are generally made by the interviewer while the narrator is telling a story. They should be eliminated. Examples include "yes," "sure," and "I see."

EDITING GUIDELINES

Reference for editing: The Chicago Manual of Style (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982, 13th Edition) is the authority used for editing oral history transcripts at the Minnesota Historical Society.

False starts: If the narrator begins with several words and then reorganizes his or her thoughts and resumes, delete the false start. For example,

EB: Ernie wasn't…he didn't,…well…I'll tell you a story about Ernie.

should read,

EB: I'll tell you a story about Ernie.

Stumbles: If the narrator has trouble organizing his or her thoughts, delete the stumbles. For example,

WW: If you start to think, well, if you were to start to think, to think of the courses of interest, of current interest, to the business community...

should read,

WW: If you were to start to think of courses of current interest to the business community...

Extraneous remarks: Conversation made while setting up or turning off the equipment that is not part of the interview can be eliminated. For example,

MM: Okay. As I was telling you, what I would like to do is to—is to start. Oops, the mike is pointing the wrong way. Okay, there, now you can start now. Are you a native of Minnesota?

EB: Yes, I was born in Appleton, Minnesota. Dear, you can just put down that tea tray while we are talking. Where were we? Yes, my parents were farmers...

should read,

MM: Are you a native of Minnesota?

EB: Yes, I was born in Appleton, Minnesota. My parents were farmers...

Tape changes: Eliminate any notations in the final transcript regarding tape changes, such as (tape 1, side 1) or (end of tape 2, side 2).

Spacing: Final transcripts should be single-spaced.

Paragraphing: Paragraphs should be used to break up long passages. A good rule to follow is to insert paragraphing when a passage is longer than a screen or page of text. Paragraphs are flush left, with no indentation, and are indicated with a double space.

Simultaneous speech: If one speaker interrupts the other in mid-sentence, but the first speaker completes his or her thought, finish that sentence in the transcript first. For example,

MM: They couldn't afford it in Iowa, and they could get it cheaply here. If they irrigate...

EB: ...John Cairns was sitting with Tom today. I think he has five of those big irrigators...

MM: ...or practice good farming, they would be productive...

EB: ...out there.

should read,

MM: They couldn't afford it in Iowa, and they could get it cheaply here. If they irrigate or practice good farming, they would be productive.

EB: John Cairns was sitting with Tom today. I think he has five of those big irrigators out there.

Ellipsis points: Ellipsis points should be used when a statement is unfinished (trailing off), faltering or fragmented and it appears that the narrator is confused or uncertain.

EB: Phil, you know . . . turned . . . I think it was . . .

MM: I . . . I . . . think he was . . . conservative.

EM dashes: Dashes should be used to offset parenthetical expressions, such as an aside or remark interjected by the speaker. Do not insert spaces between the dashes and the text.

CK: He was just as afraid of the Foreign Service in Ottawa—I think maybe even more so—than he was afraid of anything that the United States might do.

Dashes should also be used for showing an interruption of one speaker by another.

CK: It gave him a sense of independence and—

VF: Independence, yes, and that would give him confidence as well.

Word division: Avoid dividing proper names with a hyphen. Correct non-standard word division. For further guidance, consult The Chicago Manual of Style.

Tape interruptions: Interruptions should be indicated only if an interview is affected by them. For example, if a phone rings during the interview and the interruption causes the narrator to begin a new train of thought, indicate by

[Phone rings] or [Tape interruption]

DH: That was John Olson who just called. He reminded me to tell you about the time that...

Habitual qualifiers: Eliminate most qualifiers (for example, "I think" and "I guess"), but do not eliminate all of them. This is a judgment call. For example,

WM: I guess it depends on who is in the legislature to fight for it. I think it depends on how active your environmental groups are going to be. I think the chances of stopping it in the future are fairly good.

could read,

WM: It depends on who is in the legislature to fight for it. It depends on how active your environmental groups are going to be. I think the chances of stopping it in the future are fairly good.

Habitual connectives: Eliminate most connectives that occur between sentences ("and," "so," "but," "well"), but do not eliminate all of them. This is a judgment call. For example:

WM: And if a polluter is polluting an area, it allows the state to come in and clean it up. And if the state cleans it up, they can put a lien on the property. So eventually probably the state will be reimbursed for the clean-up. And I think that is a step in the right direction.

should read,

WM: If a polluter is polluting an area, it allows the state to come in and clean it up. If the state cleans it up, they can put a lien on the property. Eventually, the state probably will be reimbursed for the clean-up. I think that is a step in the right direction.

Crutch words: If the narrator has a habit of saying such things as "yeah," "you see," "you know," or "like," eliminate some, but not all of these, as appropriate. This is a judgment call. For example:

WM: Those days are over, you know. But that policy did linger on for quite a few decades, see? That's the kind of thing that you had to overcome, see? That's an exploitation philosophy, you know, with, like, no concern for the future.

should read,

WM: Those days are over, but that policy lingered on for quite a few decades. That's the kind of thing you had to overcome, see? That's an exploitation philosophy with no concern for the future.

Numbers: Whole numbers from one through ninety-nine are spelled out in ordinary text, as are any of these numbers followed by the words "hundred," "thousand," and "million." For all other numbers, figures are used. For example,
-- Twenty-four candidates from eighteen different institutions applied for the three positions.
-- The new libraries will house more than eighty thousand books.
-- The central library alone will contain 42,824 volumes.

When using percentages, follow similar rules. For example,
-- twelve percent and 178 percent

For further reference, consult The Chicago Manual of Style.

Brackets: Brackets should be used to complete a name or to supply information which is not on the tape but which is necessary for clarity. Brackets are also used to describe the way something is said or the reaction of the listener, such as [Laughing]. The first letter of the word is capitalized, and there are spaces before and after the brackets. If possible, and if appropriate, avoid interrupting the text until after the speaker's sentence is complete. For example:

CK: I had been able to do enough work on the farm, [Laughter] so I didn't need that.

should read,

CK: I had been able to do enough work on the farm, so I didn't need that. [Laughter]

If both the narrator and the interviewer are laughing, indicate by [Both laugh] Use these types of indications very sparingly. Also, use [Pause] only for lengthy pauses. Similar notations can be employed as stage directions to make a narrator's actions in relation to his or her speech more clear.

RL: [Shows map] Well, if we did this, this would be the project land use with current zoning.

Footnotes: Use footnotes for information necessary for clarity but not brief enough to be put in brackets. Footnotes are numbered sequentially through the text, rather than re-numbered for each page. They are indented from the left margin.

WKB: No, I represented everyone else in that merger. The Dorsey[1] firm represented United, and they were more oriented to that side of the industry.

Underlining and exclamation points: These markings should only be used to indicate very emphatic words or sentences.

Slurred words: Use proper spelling of slurred words ("yeah" is "yes," "gonna" is "going to"). The word "yes" should be used for variants such as "uh-huh." Generally, contractions should be used as spoken.

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[1]Dorsey & Whitney, a Minneapolis law firm.

Proper names: If a name does not appear in full the first time it is mentioned, use brackets—for example, "[Representative Willard] Munger and I thought so." Do this only the first time that a name is mentioned. However, when the full name is clearly understood in the context of the interview, brackets are not necessary. For example, when someone is discussing "the Reagan legacy," it is not necessary to add, "the [President Ronald] Reagan legacy."

Similarly, when an acronym is used for the name of an organization, write out that name using brackets. Only do this the first time the name is mentioned. For example, ". . . in following the activities of the PCA [Pollution Control Agency]."

When initals are part of an person's commonly used name, do not space between the initials (E.B. White, A.A. Milne).

Book titles: Underscore book titles, such as <u>Timber and Men</u>. Do not underline the spaces between the words (<u>A Land Set Apart</u>, not <u>A Land Set Apart</u>). For other bibliographic citations, follow the rules set in <u>The Chicago Manual of Style</u>.

Concluding the interview: Interview transcripts end with the narrator's final comments and the interviewer's thanks.

RL: However, not all townships are like that. Some of them are pretty adept at dealing with permits, too.

MR: Thank you, Mr. Lappegaard.

Biography: Where possible, the transcript should include a brief biography of the narrator before the text of the interview. The full name of the narrator should be used in the first citation; honorifics should not be used in other references (Dr. Miron L. "Bud" Heinselman; then Heinselman, not Dr. Heinselman). Set margins and spacing in the same manner as the interview text.

Allow space for a photograph, if available. If the photograph is to be credited, allow a double space between credit line and text. The credit should be flush left:

(Photo courtesy of the Minneapolis <u>Star Tribune</u>)

PROCESSING OF ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS

Documentation: A copy of the original transcript and any copy corrected by the narrator should be retained in the interview file, along with the original release signed by the narrator and other documents created or copied during research for the interview. Intermediate transcripts that are generated for proofing between the original transcript and the final version should be kept until all work is completed. After completion, the intermediate copies may be destroyed.

If an oral history project comprises interviews with several narrators, a file for each narrator should be maintained, and all files for the project should be stored together.

Handling of tapes: The original recording of an interview is duplicated, and the duplicate tape is used in transcribing the interview and for general listening. The original, or master, copy is kept in storage and not used except when needed for producing another copy.

All tapes should be "exercised"—wound and rewound before recording. This includes new tapes being used for the original recording of the interview, as well as tapes being used in making copies.

Each tape should have a typed label affixed to its face and another label on the spine of the tape case. The face label (and the case's spine label, if possible within space limitations) should supply the following information:

--**Name of the narrator (and the project's name, if any)**

--**Date of the interview**

--**Origin of the tape**. In most cases the choice will be either "original" or "duplicate." If the original has been lost, the best available duplicate should be labeled "master duplicate" and treated as the original.

Duplicates that are created at standard tape speed should be noted as real-time duplicates, using the abbreviation RT. Duplicate tapes created on high-speed duplicating machines should be labeled as such; for example, a duplicate created at double speed should be labeled 2x.

--**Number of tapes used in the interview**. For example, for a single interview that spans two tapes, the tapes should be labeled "Tape 1 (of 2)" and "Tape 2 (of 2)."

SAMPLE ORAL HISTORY AGREEMENT FORM

I, **[name of narrator]**, a participant in an interview recorded on **[date],** hereby give and deliver to **[name of institution]** all the incidents of ownership in that interview, including copyright, from this time forward.

Signed (donor):

_____

Address:

_____

Date:

_____

Signed (interviewer):

_____

SAMPLE RESTRICTED ORAL HISTORY AGREEMENT FORM

I, **[name of narrator]**, a participant in an interview recorded on **[date],** hereby give and deliver to **[name of institution]** all the incidents of ownership in that interview, including copyright, from this time forward, with the single exception that access should be given until **[date]** only to those persons having the written permission of **[name of narrator]**, his or her heir(s), or his or her designee(s), as specified below.

Signed (donor):

_____

Address:

_____

Date:

_____

Signed (interviewer):

_____

Specified heir(s) or designee(s):

_____

SAMPLE TAPE-LABEL FORMATS

for interviews cataloged within larger projects:

       Minnesota Artists Oral History Project
       Borreson, Elaine Scott

       1994 2 (of 2)
       Original AV 1995.205

for interviews cataloged individually:

       Heffelfinger, Elizabeth
       Interview

       1978-79 6 (of 10)
       Duplicate (RT) AV 1993.162

SAMPLE DESCRIPTION SHEET

INTERVIEW: Tepfer, Gloria
YEAR: 1989

MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

NAME: Gloria Tepfer
DATE: April 11, 1989
PLACE: Tepfer home, rural Danube, Minnesota
INTERVIEWER: Margaret Robertson

PROJECT SERIES: Minnesota Farm Economy Oral History Project

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION: Gloria Tepfer spent her childhood years in Appleton, Minnesota. Her family moved to Danube, when she was a senior in high school, and she was graduated from there. She married Wayne Tepfer in l955. Following her husband's two-year tour of duty in the armed services in l958, they moved to a farm near Danube and started a dairy/farming operation. Gloria Tepfer has been a full-time partner with her husband, sharing both the physical and financial responsibilities for their business. She has been involved in school, 4-H, and community affairs, and during the farm crisis, played an active role in the Groundswell organization, the Renville County Farm Bureau, and political rallies and protests in support of the farmers. Since l985, following economic reversals in their dairy business as a result of the rural crisis, she has been employed outside the farm. The Tepfer farm is now owned and operated by Wendy and Ron Kluver, their daughter and son-in-law. Wayne Tepfer works for the local sugarbeet co-operative, and the Tepfers now live in Renville.

SUBJECTS DISCUSSED: Information on family life and a family dairy farm operation, farm management and record keeping; loans, foreclosure and auction sales; negotiations with the Farm Home Administration, the Federal Land Bank, and American State Bank; mediation procedures; the Groundswell organization, Renville County Farm Bureau, and the Renville County extension program; farm protest activities; reaction to the farm crisis by the media, the Twin Cities area, and small-town businesses; the future of family farming; environmental issues including groundwater contamination and herbicides; the status of women in farming; corporate farming and the farm activist movement.

COMMENTS ON INTERVIEW: Wendy Tepfer Kluver offers an occasional comment.

VIDEO TAPE: **Beta:**   5 20-minute ½" videos with time code
                                 3/4":   2 ¾" duplicate videos with time code
                                             4 ¾" sub-master videos
                                  VHS : 1 user copy

SOUND RECORDINGS: **User copy:**   2 60-minute audio cassettes
                                 Original: 2 60-minute audio cassettes

LENGTH OF INTERVIEW: 2 hours

RESTRICTIONS ON USE: none

TRANSCRIPT: 43 pages

ACCESSION NUMBER: AV 1988.167.07 (audio)
                                 AV 1992.145 (video)