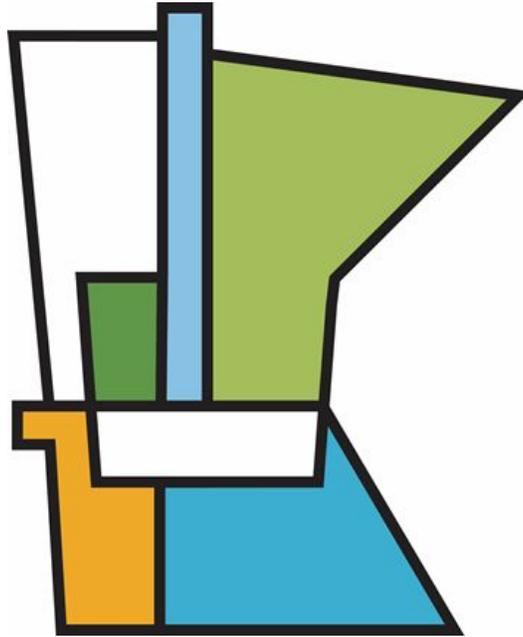# Minnesota Digital Library
Oral History & Audio Collections
Transcription Style Guide

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Introduction & Background

Oral histories and other audio files such as lectures, sermons, and speeches are becoming increasingly common additions to digital collections via digitization projects or born-digital materials. The inclusion of these materials can enhance the gender, racial, ethnic, and religious diversity of digital collections. Audio files can capture the stories and experiences of people in ways that still images and text cannot.

This analog content is often extremely fragile and prone to chemical breakdown. Many of these audio files were originally captured and stored on the magnetic tape recording format (commonly referred to as "cassette tapes"). The term "analog magnetic tape" can also refer to the seven inch reels of magnetic tape (commonly referred to as "reel to reel" tape). Magnetic tape is prone to a number of risk factors which can compromise its long term stability and usability. It is especially vulnerable to irreversible chemical instability which can result in the breakdown of the tape's chemical structure. This problem is commonly referred to as the "sticky-shed syndrome." Other risk factors include the physical breaking of the tape as well as the loss of the appropriate equipment to listen to the tapes. Digitizing analog audio files can be one way to preserve and provide continued access to the materials.

General Principles & Formatting Rules

Every Minnesota Digital Library audio digitization project should also include a plan to provide a written transcript of the content. These transcripts should record, to the best of the author's ability, a full, written record of the contents of the analog original. The inclusion of the transcript in the metadata record will ensure that this content is accessible, discoverable, and understandable to all users.

- Capture the audio as clearly and as cleanly as possible.
- Given the wide reach of digital collections, make the effort to annotate regionalisms in speech, mention of Minnesota place names, and the names of individuals which might not be familiar to a larger online audience.
- Users of digital content often prefer to read transcripts versus listening to audio files. An effort should be made to create an accurate and easily read transcription.
- General practice dictates that one person should create the transcript, and a second person should edit that material to catch inconsistencies and

inaccuracies, and to ensure that the transcript reflects the original intent of the speaker.

- Take steps to ensure that the transcript does not embarrass the person being interviewed. Everyone can make mistakes, including dropping words, using incorrect grammar, or using the incorrect word.
- Use single spacing in the block of text. Double space when the speaker changes.
- Use 1.00 inch margins on the top, bottom, right, and left of the page.
- Transcripts should be written in Arial or Calibri (or other standard sans serif font) and use a 12 point font.
- Number the pages of the transcript.

Page Footer

Each page of the transcript, except for the title page, should utilize a page header. The header should contain the name of the person being interviewed, the session number (if applicable), and the page number.

Example of Page Footer:
Interview with David Johnson, page 4 (no session number)
Interview with Amelia Johnson, Session 1, page 4 (with session number)

Introductory Page Header & Preface

Begin each transcript with an introductory page header at the top of the first page. This header should include the interviewer's name, as well as the name of the person being interviewed, the date, and location of the interview. The introductory header should be centered at the top of the first page. The preface text should follow the introductory header on the same page.

The preface should have two parts. The first part should give readers a sense of the information shared in the interview. It should include an overview of themes, ideas, and people discussed. List the names of the person being interviewed and the person conducting the interview, as well as the date and location of the interview. The second part of the preface should include a disclaimer that the transcript is as accurate as possible.

This second part should use the standard boilerplate phrase included here:

Readers are asked to accept that they are reading a written transcript of the spoken word (rather than written prose). This transcript captures, to the best of the transcriber's ability, the words of the person being interviewed and the interviewer.

The full interview transcript should begin directly below the Preface.

Example of Introductory Page Header & Preface:

<div align="center">

Interview with John Smith

Interview conducted by Martha Johnson
XYZ Oral History Project

September 1, 1967
at the Winona Public Library
Winona, Minnesota

Preface:
</div>

The following oral history is the result of the XYZ Oral History Project. The tape recorded interview with Amelia Smith was conducted by Martha Johnson on September 1, 1967. Amelia Smith discusses her childhood in Fergus Falls, Minnesota, her education in Fergus Falls, the death of her mother, and her college experiences at Hamline University in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Readers are asked to accept that they are reading a written transcript of the spoken word (rather than written prose). This transcript captures, to the best of the transcriber's ability, the words of the person being interviewed and the interviewer.

<div align="center">

Interview Transcript:
</div>

The interview transcript should begin here.

Use of Brackets for Clarifications, Corrections & Unclear Speech

Any clarifications and/or corrections should be included in the transcript using brackets. More extensive clarifications should be made using a footnote. If words are unclear or inaudible, use brackets to indicate the gap in content [unclear]. Brackets should only be used for clarifications, corrections, and unclear speech. If the person being interviewed speaks and uses an aside to share something additional, use parentheses.

Example of Signifying Unclear Content:
Jim: He said he wanted to go downtown and gamble [unclear] until the sun came up.

Example of Clarification:
Alice: He said was going to work the rest of his life at Union [Union Carbide factory in Greensburg, Louisiana].

Example of Correction:
John: That was the year they won the World Series. Yeah, the Twins won the World Series in 1990 [the Twins won in 1991].

Example of an Aside:
Mary: We all drove down to St. Paul that year to go the State Fair (that was the same year Janice got married).

Footnotes

Use footnotes to add commentary to the transcript. Footnotes can include editorial notes as well as to further explain any Clarifications or Corrections to the content. Footnotes should appear on the same page as the content it references.

Paragraph Breaks

Overly long paragraphs are difficult for users to read. Paragraph breaks should be used to help break up long blocks of text. Listen for changes in subject matter, natural pauses that lead to new questions, etc. Try to find at least two paragraph breaks per page.

Vernacular Language

In most cases, we do not speak the way we write. Many Americans use vernacular phrases, words, and syntax. Attempt to maintain consistency in the creation of the transcript. Use brackets to clarify points or create footnotes to explain any inconsistencies. Do not attempt to capture regional speech patterns in the written word. Specifically, spell words correctly. Do not drop the "g" if someone says "sayin'" vs. the correct "saying."

Spelled Out Words

Words and names spelled out by the person being interviewed are entered in all capitals and joined together with hyphens.

Example of Spelled Out Word:
John Jackson: His name was Dieter Eue. That's D-I-E-T-E-R and the last name is E-U-E.

Non-Verbal Communication

Many people being interviewed will use non-verbal communication to help convey their thoughts and memories. These should be included in the text, especially if they help to convey meaning or account for a time gap in the recording. These actions, gestures, and expressive sounds should be indicated with brackets. Note: some transcriptions are created after the oral history interview has been completed.

Examples of Non-Verbal Communication:
[Laughs]
[Laughter]
[Sighs]
[Pause]
[Snaps fingers]
[Imitates the sound of fireworks]
[Gasps]
[Gestures]

End of the Recording

The end of the recording should be indicated by the words "end of recording" in brackets.

Word List

Some oral history interviews will benefit from the creation of a Word List. This list is used to capture the full proper names of people mentioned as well as place names, local/regional expressions, as well as vernacular speech patterns associated with different ethnic groups. A Word List can help ensure the correct spelling and usage of names, places, and expressions.

Generally, the word list should be created by staff at the Contributing Organization or the Minnesota Digital Library's Metadata Librarian. The creation of this list can ensure that the transcriber spells unfamiliar words and names correctly.

Example of Word List:
Word List for a hypothetical project: "The Iron Range Oral History Project"
Taconite
Chert
Cherty
Hematite
Mesabi Range
Vermillion Range
Cuyuna Range
Gunflint Range
Hull-Rust-Mahoning Open Pit Mine
Hill Annex Mine
Pioneer Mine
Itasca County
Lake County
Cook County
Saint Louis County
Babbitt
Eveleth
Biwabik
Virginia

Ely
Hibbing
Nashwauk
Esser Steel
Duluth Ore Docks

Spelling Mistakes and Homophones

One of the most common errors is the transcription of the incorrect word (i.e. the use of a homophone). Homophones are words that sound the same or very similar, but have different meanings.

Examples of Common Homophones:

affect effect	ail ale	are our	aunt ant
aloud allowed	bear bare	berth birth	brake break
buy bye by	capital capitol	chased chaste	compliment complement
chute shoot	council counsel	decent dissent	do due dew
except accept	here hear	it's its	lie lay
pallet palate palette	principle principal	poor pour pore	rain reign rein
rye wry	son sun	some sum	stationary stationery
steal steel	suite sweet	tail tale	than then
their they're there	tied tide	to too two	your you're yours
weather whether	which witch	won one	who's whose