

# UC San Diego

## Presentations and Posters

### Title

Transcribing Oral Histories for Race and Oral History, Spring 19

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# Transcribing Oral Histories for Race and Oral History, Spring 19

*with*

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# Oral History

“A verbal record of a living person’s experiences related to a specific event--generally an interview, monologue or conversation that is systematically recorded, verified, analyzed and stored.”

-Indian Scribes.com



# Transcription

- The process of taking an sound/audio (or video) file and translating it into text; it creates a written copy of an oral conversation.
- Reflects, as closely as possible, the words, speech pattern, and thought pattern of the interview subject.



# Why is it important to transcribe?

- Gives the reader/listener a sense of the conversation, and provides more information and richness to the oral history.
- For research: improves search & discovery in an online environment.
- Encodes data to achieve a more detailed analysis of the text, e.g. tei encoding to study speech patterns, work use, etc.
- Saves time for end user: easier to read a transcript (flip back and forth) than listen to an audio recording
- Omitting a transcript diminishes the accuracy of the record and can result in misquotation.



# For community oral histories

- Accessibility:
  - not dependent on a machine or internet access
  - can provide access for users with a hearing issue
- Sharing: easily passed around at a meeting or event
- Ownership: sharing a transcript to clarify information, gives a sense of “ownership” to the interviewee
- Verification: a consistent record of spelling of names and places
- Prevents misinformation: can be read while listening to prevent misunderstandings and misinformation from being disseminated into the historical record.



# Basics: to ensure a clear audio file

- BEFORE beginning the interview, test all equipment and make sure you are familiar with the ins and outs of the technology
- Bring extra batteries
- Ensure you have a quiet, isolated, space--private or semi-private if possible (make a sign if needed) with little background noise.
- Start recording with the names of the interviewer, interviewee, where and when the recording is taking place



# Overview of Best Practices

- **Copy** audio recording and transcribe from the copy so as not to accidentally impact the original.
- **Transcribe** the audio recording.
- **Audit-check** transcript against recording (listen to the recording while reading the finished transcript--this is proofreading to make sure they match)
- **Share** transcript with interviewee for final review and approval.
- **Final proofreading.**
- **Save** document.



# Demo

Slab City: Reel 3, June, 1989.  
Slab City. UC San Diego Library  
Digital Collections,  
[https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/  
object/bb46432636](https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb46432636)



Salvation Mountain. Photo by Cristela Garcia-Spitz, 2018.

# Densho Digital Archives

Mary Hirata Interview,  
Densho Visual History Collection,  
Seattle, Washington, March 27, 1998

<http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-100022/>





# Free-way of transcribing

This is just one road to transcription.

Other paths include mobile apps with voice recognition, YouTube, professional software.



# What to include in your transcript

Narrator name:

Interviewer: Your name

Date:

Location:

Collection:

Race and Oral History Course,  
Spring 2019

Length of interview: 00:00:00

## **Vietnamese American Oral History Project, UC Irvine**

Narrator: CHARLIE VAN LE

Interviewer: Pham Quang Tuan

Date: November 5, 2010

Location: Westminster, California

Sub-collection: Vietnamese American Experience Course, Spring 2017

Length of Interview: 00:12:13

PQT: This is Pham Quang Tuan with Viet Stories: Vietnamese American Oral History Project at UC Irvine. Today is Thursday, November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2010. I will be interviewing Mr. Charlie Van Le at the Nguoi Viet Daily News office in Westminster, California.

PQT: I'd like to ask you if you can state your name, age, and where do you live currently.

CVL: My name is Charlie Van Le. I'm currently am 25; currently I reside in Houston, Texas.

PQT: Okay, and what do you do now, Charlie?

CVL: Right now, I just graduated from the University of Texas in 2009—the summer. I was a major in Asian Studies, with a minor in Asian-American Studies. I'm currently pursuing a career in Contract Management. Currently I am enrolled in the UCLA Contract Management Program, so I'll be, will be, moving into Los Angeles soon. And for now, I'm currently waiting for



# Using Google Voice Typing

- Open Google Docs > Tools > Voice Typing
- Play the audio file (Let it run continuously)
  - Transcribe the interview.
  - Include the information at the top about the interview.

## Tips:

- Google Voice Typing works on a Chrome browser.
- Check your microphone settings if Voice Typing is grayed out in Google Docs; the computer mic might not be enable.

Narrator name:  
Interviewer: Your name  
Date:  
Location:  
Sub-Collection:  
Race and Oral History Course,  
Spring 2018  
Length of interview: 00:00:00



# Using a critical lens

- Be sensitive to cultural differences that may impact the transfer of voice to print
- Are there ethics to “cleaning up” and editing an interview?
  - do edits make the transcript more readable?
  - or do edits tamper with the voice and intention of the interviewee?
- Other concerns?



# Overall Goals

## 1. Focus on content.

- a. Identify who is speaking
- b. Specify/confirm proper nouns (people, places, things)

## 2. **Do not paraphrase:** transcribe verbatim with an exact word for word account, including word choice, grammar and ideas



# Speech Patterns and Language

1. **Connecting words:** leave in words “and,” “but,” “so”
2. **Dialects and accents:** it is not necessary to reproduce these
3. **Crutch words:** leave in words “you know,” “you see,” and “like”
4. **Fillers:** leave out fillers like “ah,” “um,” “uh,” etc.
5. **False Starts:** include because they are often indicative of thought and speech patterns.
6. **Unfinished thoughts:** use dashes to show falters or incomplete thoughts
  - Example: “Well I--We didn’t hear anything about the event.”
7. **Indecipherable words:** use a question mark to show uncertainty, or if you cannot understand a word or phrase, use [unclear]
  - Example: “My friend Kai Saito (?) talked a lot about [the internment camp in California?]”





# Interruptions and Off Topic Remarks

- 1. Potentially Offensive or Embarrassing:** Check with your professor to see if it should be left out
  - Example: [conversation about TR's first boyfriend redacted]
- 2. Interviewer Remarks:** leave in, if direct response to interviewee
  - Example: "yes," "I see," "sure"
- 3. Non Verbal Sounds:** include and note with square brackets, helps to capture emotion
  - Example: [laughed] [sighed]



# Style

- 1. Abbreviations:** avoid them.
- 2. Acronyms:** provide full name of acronym if known, use square brackets to provide the full title
  - Example: “I began working at the JCC [Jewish Community Center] in 1982.”
- 3. Non Verbal Sounds:** include and note with square brackets, helps to capture emotion
  - Example: [laughed] [sighed]



# Examples

- Background research: references to people, places, things --do your research to get the spellings right
  - Middlebury or Middleberry
- Type phonetically while doing first draft, go back and clean it up
  - Words you are unfamiliar with or from a different language
    - lah-nai (lanai--porch or veranda)
  - Words with different pronunciations
    - Kernel (or Colonel?)
- Words that may be easily misunderstood (use context and research)
  - Tree (or Three) or Hat (or Hot)



# Transcribing Process

- Can be time consuming and a little tedious--make sure to build in the time to do the transcription.
- Typically takes between 3-5 hours per 1 hour of speech
- You may have to listen to the entire interview more than one time in order to fill in all the holes in information or to make corrections.



# Post-transcription

- It is common practice to return the transcript to the interviewee for editing. They may make changes or corrections to dates, names or places, especially with words you may be unfamiliar with
  - Ha-now-mah Bay (Hanauma Bay)
  - Ehh-va (Ewa)
- Remind them that they have the option to withdraw from the project if they are unhappy with the interviews for any reason
- Audio file and transcripts are sent to the UC San Diego Library Digital Library Development Program for processing and added to the Library Digital Collections website



Thank you! Questions?