

A SHORT GUIDE TO TRANSCRIBING INTERVIEWS

Once you have recorded an interview, it must be transcribed—that is, the spoken words need to be typed up. Plan to spend 2-3 hours transcribing per hour of recorded interview.

How do I transcribe my taped interview?

First, include the name(s) of the interviewer(s), interviewee(s), and the date and location of the interview on the first page.

For now, you might want to set up the document in Q and A format. That is:

Q: How old are you?

A: I am sixty-two.

Play a small section (a few sentences) and type the words as you hear them. Replay a section one or more times to get all the words down correctly. Then you move to the next couple of sentences and repeat the process. Be sure to include your questions as well as the interviewee's answers.

What do I type?

Type every word spoken in the interview, unless it is really off-topic chatting. Since an interviewee's descriptions and phrasing shows a lot about who they are, try to transcribe the interview word-for-word (verbatim). Leave in their slang. Do, however, leave out the "ums" and "uhs." Feel free to eliminate most verbal tics such as excessive "You know's" or "I mean's."

Do I insert paragraph breaks?

Definitely. While you will think more about paragraphs during the editing stage, it is helpful to insert paragraph breaks into the transcription rather than typing long blocks of text. In general, using more rather than fewer paragraphs will help your reader follow the story. **Begin a new paragraph whenever your interviewee introduces a new idea.**

- Tip: Save each of the stages of your typed interview as a separate file so that you can refer back to earlier, less edited versions if necessary.

What is the difference between transcripts and the Final First Persons Essay that will go in the book?

The Essays will be edited: that is, they will read like an intriguing one to two page story, a monologue spoken by an individual person. It should be double-spaced and broken into short paragraphs.

What do I do with my questions and comments?

Edit them out. You are trying to craft a story, not a question-and-answer session. If transitions in the interviewee's story are not clear without your questions, put them in brackets as if they were words spoken by the interviewee.

How do I come up with a title?

Sometimes a good idea will come to you right away. Think about what the central issue or idea is, or a great phrase spoken by the interviewee. What might catch a reader's interest?