

TRANSCRIPTION ASSIGNMENT

15 grade points

The pros and cons of transcription are actively debated among oral historians. For our purposes, we'll define the transcript as an accurate rendering of the *intellectual content* of the interview, and the ultimate preservation format, not a substitute for the recorded voice. The interview is always considered the primary document and the most accurate representation of the narrator's intent. With this in mind, transcribe every meaningful word, but not necessarily "uhms," repetitions, false starts, and other extraneous sounds.

I want you to experience transcribing your entire interview so you can better judge the cost/benefit of this important but labor intensive step. Some students come out of the experience convinced of the value of the transcript; other students feel just the opposite.

In this assignment you will transcribe the interview, submit the transcript to the narrator for final approval, then turn in the completed transcript for grading.

PT 1. TRANSCRIPT

Create a verbatim transcript of your interview, following the instructions below, the Transcription Style Guide, and the Example as guides.

Transcription Tools

You can create a good transcript using the MS Office Suite, and most students have done so. The additional software tools mentioned below are available for you to try out, or to use in later other transcription projects.

- *Audio Software.* You need software to play the audio so you can transcribe it. Most computers come with an audio package, or you may use a more sophisticated program such as [Audacity](#), [Garage Band](#), or any other software. Most students find the software on their computers sufficient for transcribing.

- *Transcription software* (optional). Transcription software exists and is generally used by professional transcriptionists. Most students have transcribed interviews successfully simply using the start/stop/rerun buttons on the audio programs or function keys on their computer. The most popular transcribing software is [ExpressScribe](#), which is free. An alternative is [StartStop Transcription](#), for about \$169.00.
- *Formatting Guide*. Format your document using the Transcription Style Guide included in these instructions. You do not need to follow the guide exactly, but use a format that is clear and consistent.

BOTTOM LINE: Be accurate. Readers should be able to follow the recording and read the text at the same time. Make the document neat, clean, consistent, and accurate - one you will be proud to present to the narrator or the repository for archiving.

PT 2. NARRATOR APPROVAL

Narrators are wildly different in their response to seeing their conversation transferred to text. At one extreme are those who are horrified at the way they sound and want to make major edits to clean up their conversation. At the other extreme are those who ignore the transcript and will not bother to read through it. You should be prepared for either response. Because our class interviews will not be available to the public, this step is a courtesy to the narrator and practice for real life projects. You can also take this opportunity to present a copy of the transcript to the narrator as a thank you.

We follow a workflow that complies with the oral history best practices, whereby the narrator has the opportunity to make corrections, restrictions or approve the transcript as is. We add a clause in our request to “approve by default,” so that if the narrator doesn’t give written approval within two weeks, you can consider it approved by default. Follow these steps:

1. Send the narrator a paper or electronic copy of the transcript,
2. On a separate page, include a list of problem words, names, or sections within the transcript for narrator to verify. Not all interviews have problem areas, so if you have nothing to verify skip this step.
3. Using words from the sample letter below, give the narrator two weeks to either notify you of changes or consider it approved by default.

Dear [narrator],

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for my student project. Your interview was [fun, enlightening, great contribution to our class project ...]

Enclosed/[attached] is a transcript of the interview, along

with a list of names and words that need your attention. Please look at the list and correct if necessary, then return it to me by [date two weeks from time sent].

The transcript is your copy for final review and to keep. If I don't hear from you within two weeks, then I will assume everything is correct and you have approved by default.

Again I thank you very much for participating in our class project.

WORKFLOW

1. Make a *copy* of the sound file and transcribe from it, not from the original.
2. Familiarize yourself with the audio editing program and/or transcribing software before you begin. Practice using the control buttons.
3. Before beginning the transcription, listen to about ten minutes of the interview to identify special issues. Are there problems with the sound or clarity of the recording? Does the narrator speak unusually fast or slow? Are there extraneous sounds on the recording? Are some sections inaudible?
4. Format your document in a word processing program, according to the sample and your own specifications.
5. Transcribe the interview. **It takes about six hours to transcribe every recorded hour.**
6. As you transcribe identify and problem areas: inaudible sections or proper names and foreign words that you must verify. I usually change these to **red**, for easy identification. This way you can find them quickly in order to correct these sections.
7. On a separate page keep a running list of proper names, foreign words, or any other content you especially want the narrator to review. After you have made an initial attempt at verification, you can send this list to the narrator for final spelling verification.
8. When you are finished put the transcript aside for a while to clear your mind.
9. **Audit check** the interview. This is a kind of proofreading for audio files. Listen to the interview while reading the transcript. You may catch errors in transcription, spelling, or want to change some punctuation or paragraph organization.
10. Run spell check. After you make corrections using spellcheck, proofread the transcript once again. (Spell check often guesses wrong for conversational text like an interview). Best to read the transcript out loud. Make final corrections in the text.
11. When you are satisfied with the final version, send the transcript and the list of problem words to the narrator along with a note such as the sample above. Since we are not archiving these interviews the main reason for this step is to provide the narrator with a copy of the interview as a gift and to bring closure to the project. Because of the time timeframe of this assignment you do not need to wait for the narrator's response to submit the transcript to me.
12. Be sure to save a copy on your computer until the end of the semester.

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13. Upload the finished transcript to the Transcription assignment dropbox.