

Oral History Transcription Guidelines

File Names

Create transcriptions using Microsoft Word.

Name the transcription files according to the following guidelines:

Narrator's last name, first name_transcription.doc

Ex: Smith,Jane_transcription.doc

File Formatting

- One inch (1 in.) margins
- Times New Roman 12 pt. font
- Insert page numbers in the bottom right-hand corner of each page, starting with the first page of text
- Left justify text with one inch (1 in.) margins and no indents

File Heading Identification Information

Begin each transcription with the following information:

- Interviewer
- Interviewee
- Date of Interview: (Month Day, Year)
- Location of Interview
- Transcriber
- Interpreter (if applicable)
- Translated from (if applicable)

Abstract

After reading the full transcript, write an abstract or summary of the interview's content. This abstract should appear after the heading on the first page to give readers/researchers an overview of what they may come across in the full transcript.

Guidelines for abstracts:

- Between 150 and 200 words
- Use the interviewee's full name in the first sentence and then just his or her first name thereafter
- Written in present tense

Suggested formula for abstracts:

- Begin with a sentence that introduces the interviewee, her birth place/year.
- Move on to describe defining characteristics, achievements, or progression
- Transition to a direct discussion of the interview content: 'In this interview Jane discusses...'
- Describe the more prominent or general themes of the interview

Body of the Interview

- Identify speakers with first and last initials in bold (e.g.: Jane Smith = JS)
- Single-space the transcription with a double return between speakers

Interpretation of Speech

- A transcript should be as accurate a representation of the interview as possible. It should include false starts (which can indicate thought process), Freudian slips, abrupt changes in subject, and grammatical errors.
- Transcribe every word in the order spoken by the narrator, leaving out only the "ums" and "ahs."
- Even a well-done interview can sometimes yield indecipherable words. In these cases, after working as carefully as possible to figure out the words (rewinding and listening to the spot several times), the transcriber should mark the spot with (_____???) to indicate the need to fill in a word or phrase.
- Questions about spelling should also be noted with (?). Mark phonetic spellings with (ph).

Grammar

- Abbreviations should never be used except for common titles (e.g., Mrs., Dr.).

- Never use the ampersand (&); spell out the word “and”.
- Numbers one through nine should be spelled out, while 10 and higher should be represented with numerals. The same rule applies for first through ninth and 10th and higher.

Explanatory Notes

- Use brackets to insert explanatory information. For instance, abbreviations and acronyms should be spelled out the first time the term is mentioned. Examples: USGS [United States Geological Survey], SAC [Strategic Air Command].
- Describe actions and background noise in brackets, such as [laughs], [pounds table], [phone rings] and nonverbal spoken sounds [pffft] should be indicated.
- The transcript should note any time the recorder was turned off and any mechanical failings with a brief statement. Example: [noise from a nearby airport interrupted interview].
- Include the full name of a person when mentioned for the first time. If the narrator mentions only a first or last name, the transcriber should fill in the full name: (e.g.: [John] Doe).
- When a community is mentioned, the name of the state should be included in brackets, such as Worthington [Minnesota].

Punctuation

- Narrators often quote others during an interview. Enclose all quotes in quotation marks.
- Transcribers will have to determine punctuation needs, such as where to insert commas, ellipses, and dashes. Transcribers may be tempted to insert commas whenever a person pauses, but commas should be used only when called for under customary rules of grammar and punctuation.
- Generally, ellipses are used to indicate an incomplete sentence (Then we went...), while dashes indicate a change in thought in mid-sentence (Then we went—he went—we all went to the theater).
- Often, when people begin speaking after pausing, their voices pick up as they would at the beginning of a new sentence. Transcribers should be aware of such situations and know how to listen to determine when to continue a sentence and when to start a new one.

TRANSCRIPT FORMAT SAMPLE

Interviewee: Wendy Wheeler
Interviewer: Erin R. Anderson
Date: October 23, 2006
Place: Leicester, Massachusetts
Transcriber: Erin R. Anderson

Abstract:

Wendy Wheeler was born in Worcester's Great Brook Valley in 1954 and attended Burncoat High School. After having two children and getting a job at Sprague Electric, Wendy met her second husband and moved to the Main South neighborhood. In 1982, they bought a Main Street restaurant, which Wendy ran with the support of family for two years. Wendy is still well-known in the Main South neighborhood as "Wendy from Wendy's Clark Brunch" (now Annie's Clark Brunch). In this interview, Wendy discusses the struggles and joys of her experience in the restaurant business. Growing up in a large family, Wendy learned to cook at a young age—taught by her father who had professional experience as a short-order cook—and carried this skill with her throughout her life. She discusses the challenges she faced in building up a successful business and the relationships she made as a surrogate mother to Clark University students who frequented the restaurant. Wendy elaborates upon the importance of family businesses in her life and gives advice to future women entrepreneurs. In this interview, Wendy also touches on her experiences as a young working mother and the changes that she witnessed in the Main South neighborhood over the years.

EA: My name is Erin Anderson and I'm here with Wendy Wheeler...in Leicester and it is October 24th, 2006. We are completing a citywide oral history of the lives of Worcester women, aiming to collect stories about a broad range of experiences. Based on the goals of the 1850 National Women's Rights Convention in Worcester, we are focusing on the areas of women's health education, work, and politics and community involvement. We want to focus today on your experiences with your work. Thank you for your help in this important project.

WW: You're welcome.

EA: Is it ok to record your oral history today?

WW: Yes. **EA:** What is your full maiden name and, if applicable your married name.

WW: My full maiden name is Wendy Denise Devault D-E-V-A-U-L-T. And my married name is Wendy Denise Wheeler.

EA: Ok. And where were you born?

WW: I was born in Worcester, Massachusetts.