

Community Readiness Interview: Recording Tips

The following are some brief tips on how to obtain the highest clarity and quality recordings and facilitate the process of transcription, resulting in more accurate transcripts.

THE EQUIPMENT

- Use quality voice recording equipment and familiarize yourself with it. Digital voice recorders are preferable for ease of distribution and superior quality.
- Test the equipment before any interview to make sure it is in working order.
- If you are reliant on batteries, ensure you have a spare set with you, or a charger.
- Set the speed control to “fast,” as this produces significantly better quality voice recordings. Recording on a slow recording speed results in substantial loss in recording quality and an increase in the amount of background hiss.
- Do a sound check before recording (record a few words, and then listen to make sure the voice recording is clear).
- Be sure that the **recorder is running** before you start the interview.
- If interviewing in person, place the microphone close to the interviewee, or at least central between the interviewer and interviewee. Use an external microphone. Most built-in microphones are of poor quality with limited control over volume levels.
- At the end of the interview session, check that the interview has recorded.

INTERVIEW LOCATION and BACKGROUND NOISES

- Recording in a quiet, indoor environment ensures the best quality sound recording. The windows should be closed.
- Consider the acoustics of where you’ll be recording. A large room with a high ceiling (assembly hall, gym) will produce significant echo, making the recording difficult to hear, especially if the interviewee has a quiet voice.
- Try to minimize background noise. Some common sources of background noise include:
 - Traffic, construction and other street noise coming through open (or even closed) windows.
 - Machinery running in the background, e.g. fans, air conditioners, photocopiers, heaters or computers.
 - TV sets and radios.
 - People and pets making noise in the background.
 - Clocks that chime.
 - Doors shutting or slamming.
- Turn off all mobile phones. Voice mails emit a radio frequency which is inaudible to the human ear but your recording equipment will pick it up, and the resulting buzzing noise will drown out whatever is being said at the time. Turning mobile phones to “silent” or “vibrate” is not enough – they need to be turned off.

- Avoid shuffling papers near the microphone, which will drown out whatever is being said.
- Avoid writing near the microphone if possible, as the scribbling of a pen will come in loud and clear over the interviewee's voice.

INTERVIEWER and INTERVIEWEE

- Remind the interviewee to speak clearly and not too fast.
- Ensure the interviewee can be heard. A speaker who has a quiet voice or who mumbles will not be picked up by the recording equipment. If you can't hear what they're saying, the chances are we can't either on the finished recording.
- Ask the interviewee to speak up or to repeat anything you don't hear clearly.
- If it's important to get down references to people, places, Web sites, organizations, etc. that the transcriber might not know or be able to easily distinguish, it's ideal to repeat them clearly or even spell them out.
- Avoid speaking over your subject. Especially in a more conversational type interview, it can be tempting to interject comments during the interview. In normal conversation, we tend to say words like "yeah" or "right" on a regular basis, if only to indicate to the other person that we're actually listening to them. It may be hard, but try to break yourself of this habit because your interjections may drown out what the interviewee is saying.