

Doing History:

Processing the Interview

Time

1 class period

Overview

One of the major purposes of doing oral history is to record the experience of an individual and to learn about the interviewee's life, as well as to create a record that might not exist elsewhere that can be accessed by researchers and historians. Transcriptions and tape logs enable a researcher to know quickly if the information in the oral history will add to the work he/she is doing, what topics/subjects are included in the interview, and where on the tape that information may be found. Although many may find processing interviews tedious and time consuming, the importance of this practice cannot be underestimated. Once students have completed their five-minute interviews, they are ready to process them. Simply put, in this lesson students will "historicize" their interviews.

Objectives

- Students will learn how to do various types of after-interview processing and be able to articulate the purpose of each type of processing.
- Students will choose a method of processing and use it to finish their interviews.
- Students will transcribe their five-minute interview.

Essential Question

- How does preparing for, conducting, and processing oral histories contribute to the interviewer's understanding of history, specifically the World War II experiences of Japanese Americans incarcerated at Amache, Colorado?

Guiding Question(s)

- Why is processing the interview an integral and important part of doing oral history?

Colorado Model Content Standards (2008)

- English Language Arts Standard 3: Students write and speak using conventional grammar, usage, sentence structure, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. Students know and use correct grammar in speaking and writing. Students apply correct usage in speaking and writing.

Materials

- Sets of processing hardware
 - Headphones
 - Tape recorder, cassette tapes, etc.
 - Computer with word-processing software
 - Stopwatch or watch with a second hand
- *Handout 5-1: Sample Tape Log*
- *Handouts 5-2: Transcription Examples*
 - *Handout 5-2a: Audio Interview with John Fumi*
 - *Handout 5-2b: Video Interview with Jane Ueno*
- *Handout 5-3: Tips for Transcribing an Oral History Interview*

Opening

- Begin the lesson by debriefing the oral history interview experiences of the students.
 - What went well?
 - What challenges did you face? How were those challenges overcome?
 - How would you characterize the experience?
- Explain to students that the next step in the process is to transcribe the interview. Acknowledge that it is a difficult and somewhat tedious process, but emphasize its importance, particularly for others who may want to use the oral history students have captured in a future research project.

Activities

- Distribute *Handout 5-1: Sample Tape Log* and review it with students. Ask students to produce a tape log for their interviews.

- Give students a stopwatch or draw their attention to a watch or clock with a second hand.
- Students may want to work in pairs, helping each other with timing and listening.
- Distribute *Handouts 5-2: Transcription Examples* and review them with students. Draw student attention to the similarities and differences in the transcripts, for example, the use of “Q” and “A” in lieu of “JF” and “JS” in the transcript.
- Distribute *Handout 5-3: Tips for Transcribing an Oral History Interview* and review it with students.
NOTE: Before the lesson begins, the teacher should decide how detailed he/she wants the transcript to be. Some of the tips may not be necessary for the purposes of the practice interview.
- Ask students to prepare a transcript of the interview.

Closing

- Explain to students that learning how to do oral history interviews will provide them the opportunity to participate in a project supported by historical organizations, museums, educational institutions, etc.—it gives them the chance to actually *do* history while they are *learning* history.

References

Sommer, Barbara W., and Mary Kay Quinlan. *The Oral History Manual*. Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press, 2002.

Sample Tape Log

Handout 5-1

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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH JANE UENO

Interviewed on March 12, 1998

Interviewed by John Smith

Interviewed for the Colorado Oral History Project

Time Count in Minutes	Description of Interview Content
Tape One, Side One	
0.0	Beginning of interview.
5.0	Description of living quarters at Amache. Location of family's quarters in relation to Administration Building.
10.0	Description of Camp Director M. Peterson. Recollection of an encounter with the camp director.
15.0	Description of other administrators in the camp (Mr. Jones, Mrs. Lang, and Mr. Hall). Listing of the various responsibilities belonging to each.
20.0	Description of the relationships between family and the camp administrators.
25.0	Description of the camp MPs. What they wore. How they acted in their jobs. How they acted off duty.
30.0	Description of the relationship of the guards toward "inmates" and administrators. Recollection of one guard, Sgt. Jackson.
Tape One, Side Two	
0.0	Camps run by War Relocation Authority (WRA). "We never knew where they were located, maybe in Washington, D.C." Memories about a visit by WRA employee.

Adapted from Sommer, Barbara W., and Mary Kay Quinlan. *The Oral History Manual*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002, p. 106.

Transcription

Examples

Handout 5-2a

AUDIO INTERVIEW WITH JOHN FUMI
Interviewed on October 16, 1999
Interviewed by Jane Smith
Interviewed for the Colorado Oral History Project
John Fumi–JF
Jane Smith–JS

Time Log	Tape One, Side One
0.01	<p>JS: This is Jane Smith with the Colorado Oral History Project. I am here today on October 16, 1999, in Denver, Colorado, to talk with Mr. John Fumi about his Amache experiences. I will start by asking you where you lived and what you were doing before you were sent to Amache.</p> <p>JF: I was born in Los Angeles, California. I completed grammar school and was in my first year of high school when Pearl Harbor was bombed.</p> <p>JS: Where were you when the attack on Pearl Harbor occurred [December 7, 1941]?</p>
0.03	<p>JF: My family and I had just come out of church and were visiting with other church members when someone came running up to us in an excited manner. He shouted, “Pearl Harbor just got bombed!” Those were his words. We just kind of looked at him. “Pearl Harbor got bombed? Nobody can do that. That is an American naval base—isn’t it? Nobody can get away with that.”</p> <p>It really took a full day before the American people were really aware of what had happened. As a matter of fact, [President Franklin D.] Roosevelt spoke at eleven o’clock the next morning. We had a convocation at Northeast High School. The entire student body went to the auditorium. They had several radios all over the auditorium, and as Roosevelt spoke, everybody applauded.</p>
0.05	<p>There was no school that day. We walked up and down the halls. We were making big patriotic signs on the blackboards—shaking hands with the British. Everybody was drawing on the blackboards. “We’ll show them!” There was a great deal of nationalism that just came overnight.</p>

Adapted from Sommer, Barbara W., and Mary Kay Quinlan. *The Oral History Manual*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002, p. 105.

Transcription

Examples

Handout 5-2b

VIDEO INTERVIEW WITH JANE UENO
Interviewed by John Smith
Interviewed on February 18, 1998
Interviewed for the Colorado Oral History project
Jane Ueno–JU
John Smith–JS

Time Log	Tape One, Side One
01:01:10	Q: am speaking with Mrs. Jane Ueno about her childhood and memories of Amache camp. This interview, made at her home on February 18, 1998, is a follow-up to an audio interview with Mrs. Ueno. During our earlier interview, you spoke about your travel from California to Colorado on the train. What was it like as you traveled?
01:08:15	A: e had a very trying time. There was little room as we were all crowded into the car. Every seat was taken. During the day we had to keep the blinds pulled down over the windows.
01:12:20	Q: A guard stood at the end of the car with a loaded rifle. He didn't look any happier to be there than we were. It was just as hot and dark for him as it was for us. Actually, there were several guards. They took turns guarding us. When it wasn't their turn they went to another car where I'm sure it was much more comfortable.
01:16:50	A: At noon every day the guards would come through the car with food for us to eat. It was very simple fare, sandwiches and a piece of fruit. Usually the food was picked up when we made a stop and then stored for later times. Sometimes the fruit had begun to spoil because there wasn't anywhere particularly cool to store it.
Bust Retake	
01:17:12	Q: Let's talk about your first sight of Amache.
01:17:20	A: The train came up to the railroad siding and we were instructed to get off. The landscape was unlike anything I had seen [inaudible].

Adapted from Sommer, Barbara W., and Mary Kay Quinlan. *The Oral History Manual*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002, p. 107.

Tips for Transcribing an Oral History Interview

Handout 5-3

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- A transcript should begin with a heading identifying the oral history project name, the name of the narrator, the name of the interviewer, and the date and place of the interview.
 - Below this, indicate the abbreviations that will be used to identify each speaker. This may be done using the person's initials or by using "Q" and "A" for "Question" and "Answer."
 - Each new tape or disc should be identified with an internal heading (Tape One, Side One.)
- Transcripts should be paginated and double spaced, including changes from interviewer to narrator.
- Do not indent.
- Determine a stylistic approach regarding the use of paragraphs.
 - Some oral historians prefer a person's comments be presented in one long paragraph, regardless of change in subjects.
 - Others prefer that an extremely long statement be broken into shorter blocks for ease of reading.
- A transcript should be as accurate a representation of the interview as possible.
 - It should include false starts, Freudian slips, abrupt changes in subject and grammatical errors—all help to accurately represent the interview.
- Even a well-done interview can sometimes yield indecipherable words. In these cases, after working as carefully as possible to figure out the words, the transcribers should mark the spot with (___???) to indicate the need to fill in a word or phrase.
- Abbreviations should never be used except for common titles (e.g., "Mrs.," "Dr.")
 - Never use the ampersand (&)—spell out the word "and."
 - The numbers one through nine should be spelled out, while 10 and higher may be represented with numerals. The same rule applies for "first" through "ninth" and "10th" and higher.
- Use brackets to insert explanatory information.
 - Abbreviations and acronyms should be spelled out the first time the term is mentioned. For example, JANM [Japanese American National Museum].
- Specific descriptions should be included, such as [laughs], [pounds table], [phone rings], and nonverbal spoken sounds [pffff] should be indicated.
- The transcript should note any time the recorder was turned off and any mechanical failings with a brief statement. [noise from jet landing at 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: [John] Doe.
 - When a community is mentioned, the name of the state should be included in brackets, such as Amache [Colorado].
- Use footnotes, both explanatory and reference, wherever necessary. Explanatory footnotes provide additional information about a statement.
 - If a narrator mentions a specific event that is important to the interview, additional information can be given in a short explanatory footnote to help put the statement into context.
 - References should be included for information about publications or other materials mentioned during the interview.
 - If a narrator mentions a publication, the full citation should be given in a footnote.
- 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.
 - Standard writing style guides govern the use of commas.
- Generally, ellipses are used to indicate an incomplete sentence (Then we went . . .), while dashes indicate a mid-sentence change in thought (Then we went—he went—we all went to the theater.)

Adapted from Sommer, Barbara W., and Mary Kay Quinlan. *The Oral History Manual*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002, p. 75-77.