



LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY

AND AGRICULTURAL AND MECHANICAL COLLEGE

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History
A Division of LSU Libraries

THE COSTS OF DOING ORAL HISTORY

Oral history is not a short cut or a cheap and easy way of doing research. Used to its full potential, done carefully and conscientiously, oral history methods let us collect unique information that can be of great value to researchers now and in the future. Done carelessly, without proper preparation and processing, it can result in evidence that is superficial, anecdotal, little better than hearsay and too often inaccessible. Doing oral history takes time and money. Each hour of recorded interview requires an average of forty hours of preparation and processing. Our standard fee for contract projects is \$500-650 per hour of source recording, depending upon whether interviews are transcribed or thoroughly indexed. An explanation of the steps involved in doing oral history and a budget follows.

THE INTERVIEWER

The interviewer is expected to bring some professional expertise to the project, including an understanding of best practices, experience in qualitative research, knowledge of the interviewee's career and field, the pertinent sources for further information on these subjects, and the questions that should be asked. If the interviewer is not an experienced, then he or she is expected to complete a training session. Prior to the interview, the interviewer will conduct background research in the written records and other primary resources in order to determine the topics and questions that need to be covered in the interview and to ensure that the oral history will not simply duplicate the written record but will supplement it, filling gaps and adding unique material available nowhere else. Once the interview is complete, the interviewer reviews the recording, makes a list of the major topics covered, and notes topics and questions to be covered in subsequent sessions. The interviewer may also review and correct any resulting transcription. **For every hour of tape, the interviewer will spend five to ten hours preparing for and reviewing the interview.**

TRANSCRIPTION, INDEXING, & PROCESSING

It takes an experienced transcriber six to twelve hours per hour of tape to produce a verbatim transcript. Once the transcription is complete, it is checked against the tape by someone other than the transcriber to ensure accuracy. This is an essential step since even the most conscientious transcriber will make mistakes or be unable to hear or understand some portions of the tape that may be clearer to a second listener. This process, called **auditing, takes two hours per hour of tape**; correcting the transcript adds another two to three hours. The corrected transcript is sent to the interviewer and interviewee for their review and corrections. The interviewee is asked to make changes for accuracy and clarity only, not to edit for literary quality. Once the interviewer and interviewee have returned their copies of the transcript it receives a final editing. Punctuation and paragraphing are imposed as necessary, false starts are eliminated, and minimal editing is done to promote clarity and readability. **Editing takes another five to eight hours** per hour of tape and includes making the corrections suggested by the interviewer and interviewee. If funding is not available for the creation of a transcription, the interview is thoroughly indexed with time-stamped calibrations of significant topics and content. **Every hour of recording takes 2-3 hours to thoroughly index.**

A manuscript processor then creates a finding aid for the interview collection, which includes a review of the legal paperwork, the creation of a summary or an abstract of the collection that is uploaded to the Center’s website, the extrapolation of pre-catalog metadata including subject terms and biographical notes, and the maintenance of complete database records for each collection. The interviews are then catalogued and deposited in the Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections where they are available to researchers. Eventually, all available collections are uploaded to the LOUISiana Digital Library. **The creation of a finding aid, or processing, usually takes anywhere from 10-12 hours per hour of recording.**

Transcribing and processing the interview up to 30 hours per hour of recording. Indexing and processing can take up from 15-20 hours per hour of recording.

AUDIO ENGINEERING, PRESERVATION, & OVERHEAD

If a recording is analog (cassette or reel to reel), it must be converted to an uncompressed digital audio file. The Center is equipped to transfer from analog tape sources, DAT, and reel-to-reel, in real-time, fully-monitored by a trained audio technician. Semi-monitored digital transfer can be provided for large – and largely problem-free cassette, DAT and reel-to-reel – transfer projects. The audio engineer must record basic technical metadata in a spreadsheet form and furnish digital files as full-resolution 24/96, 24/48, 24/44.1, or 16/44.1 .wav files.

For all digital files, both converted and born, the Center stores master copies on LSU servers, backed-up by a magnetic tape system. For access copies, we create 256 or larger kbps mp3 files, and we provide user copies, as requested by patrons or partners. All audio files, both master and user-copies are preserved in perpetuity. Both converted and born-digital audio files sometimes require digital optimization, which is a cost-effective way to enhance the listening experience of scholars by applying noise-reduction and equalization processes across entire audio files. To all of this must be added overhead costs that includes equipment--hardware and software, phone, server storage costs, and general project management that includes supervision and coordination.

TASK	COST PER HOUR OF SOURCE RECORDING
Interviewer	\$150
Transcription	125
Index	50
Auditing	25
Editing	50
Finding Aid (Manuscript Processing)	125
Analog-to-Digital Audio Conversion, if necessary	(50)
Audio Engineering & Preservation	50
Overhead	125
TOTAL	500-700