Margaret Walker Center Oral History Transcription Style Guide

Alissa Rae Funderburk
October 13, 2022
Revised October 8, 2024

Again and again scholars of slavery face absences in the archives as we attempt to find “the agents buried beneath” (Spillers 2003b) the accumulated erasures, projections, fabulations, and misnamings. There are, I think, specific ways that Black scholars of slavery get wedged in the partial truths of the archives while trying to make sense of their silences, absences, and modes of dis/appearance. The methods most readily available to us sometimes, oftentimes, force us into positions that run counter to what we know. That is, our knowledge, of slavery and Black being in slavery, is gained from our studies, yes, but also in excess of those studies; it is gained through the kinds of knowledge from and of the everyday, from what Dionne Brand calls “sitting in the room with history.” We are expected to discard, discount, disregard, jettison, abandon, and measure those ways of knowing and to enact epistemic violence that we know to be violence against others and ourselves. In other words, for Black academics to produce legible work in the academy often means adhering to research methods that are “drafted into the service of a larger destructive force” (Saunders 2008a, 67), thereby doing violence to our own capacities to read, think, and imagine otherwise. Despite knowing otherwise, we are often disciplined into thinking through and along lines that reinscribe our own annihilation, reinforcing and reproducing what Sylvia Wynter (1994, 70) has called our “narratively condemned status.” **We must become undisciplined**. The work we do requires new modes and methods of research and teaching; new ways of entering and leaving the archives of slavery, of undoing the “racial calculus and. . . political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago” (Hartman 2008, 6) and that live into the present.”

-Christina Sharpe*, In the Wake*

Table of Contents

Introduction

This transcription style guide contains the preferred styling for our oral history transcripts and is as comprehensive a manual for transcribing oral histories as the MWC has ever produced. We edit as lightly as possible unless specifically instructed by the narrator and base any changes from automated/verbatim transcriptions mainly on the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 17th edition. However, oral histories provide unique situations that call for flexibility, often including deviations from the *Chicago Manual* or other scholarly traditions. We aim for clarity and consistency within the overall program and within individual transcripts. We are open to changes in language and culture, and welcome suggestions to update this document.

The Margaret Walker Center will aim to produce a transcript that is "intelligent" or "clean" verbatim (reflecting as many of the words and sounds on the recording as possible) while remaining readable and preserving the narrator's tone and spirit. The role of a transcript is to represent what the narrator intended to say, as clearly as possible, in the text. This style guide places literary content and spirit of speech at the center of all summary, indexing, and transcription work. When possible, some of the qualities of the spoken word can be translated to text through syntax and punctuation, but we do not transcribe all speech phonetically. Future readers seeking specific aural details from the interview are encouraged to reference the actual interview recordings whenever possible. The characteristics of how individual narrators speak—in terms of syntax, grammar, and diction—are welcome in the transcript as long as they do not completely obstruct the clarity of what they are communicating. It should be as accurate a reflection of the recording as possible.

Brief Chronology of Black Speech and Transcription

1936-38. John Lomax, white folklorist and the National Advisor on Folklore and Folkways for the Federal Writers Project (FWP), focuses FWP on collecting formerly enslaved Americans' life histories, resulting in the Library of Congress collection, "Born in Slavery." Transcriptions are done by white editors with Lomax's guidelines: ***"I recommend that truth to idiom be paramount, and exact truth to pronunciation secondary,' writes Lomax, in a letter to interviewers. Yet he also urges that 'words that definitely have a notably different pronunciation from the usual should be recorded as heard, evidently assuming that 'the usual' was self-evident."*** Today, the LoC contemplates this use of dialect, saying, **"*the situation was far more problematic than the instructions from project leaders recognized. All the informants were of course Black, most interviewers were white, and by the 1930s, when the interviews took place, white representations of Black speech already had an ugly history of entrenched stereotype dating back at least to the early nineteenth century. What most interviewers assumed to be 'the usual' patterns of their informants' speech was unavoidably influenced by preconceptions and stereotypes."***

1939. Director of the Southeast Region of FWP and UNC Press head William Couch, another white scholar, creates the "Southern Life Histories Project" at UNC-Chapel Hill. Couch centers previously ignored voices due to his distress over how white intellectuals and authors, like Erskine Caldwell, portray the Southeast. He thinks the people's authentic words would give the public a better understanding of Southerners living in the Great Depression. Couch employs 6,000 writers to produce 10,000 interviews, a recent analysis of which by digital humanities scholars Lauren Tilton, Courtney Rivard, and Taylor Arnold reveals the relationship between race and dialect in transcription. Because the 90% white FWP workers wanted to portray "realistic" life histories to their audience (white readers), they created rules around documenting speech patterns through writing practices which included written dialect. This rule should have been employed for all narrators but was mostly applied to African Americans, which is why Toni Morrison called this speech ***"eye dialect."*** She argues that this writing practice ***"relies on phonetic spellings and apostrophes to make visible to the eye sounds that cannot be heard in the medium of print," thereby rendering "the speech of black characters' as an alien, estranging dialect made deliberately unintelligible by spellings contrived to defamiliarize it."*** The majority of SLHP transcribers were white women: <u>they transcribed dialect for 45% of white narrators but 85% of Black narrators.</u>

1954. Sociolinguist Einar Haugen creates the term “Code Switching” though the practice has existed since the early 20th century. Since being brought to the Americas through the Transatlantic slave trade, Black people have created individual practices, cultures, and languages. With the advancement of such identity also comes a sense of cultural isolation. Code-switching serves as a survival instinct or method of assimilation spanning across all demographics of the Black community as the linear relationship between general success and the use of standard English remains. This trajectory of events also applies to BASL or Black American Sign Language. Because of varying educational levels received by white vs Black Deaf children, the different dialects of ASL began to develop and flourish separately, presenting a need for code-switching for non-hearing members of the Black community as well.

1962-64. SNCC creatives like Charlie Cobb, Denise Nicholas, Kathleen Collins, and Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael) create written pieces, theater, and freedom school lessons that highlight the power, poetry, and descriptive brilliance of a wide range of Black vernacular English. Some of these pieces are discussed in Sharon Monteith’s *SNCC’s Stories: the African American Freedom Movement in the Civil Rights South* (2020). Ture asks his young students to compare and contrast the descriptive power of each column of language. Students conclude that Black English is equally if not more powerfully descriptive than Standard American English, but that speaking Standard American English has more social, economic, and political power in white communities. They also examine the practices of code-switching.

1970s. In part as a reaction against the racist use of “eye dialect” by the FWP in the 1930s, historians at UNC-CH’s Southern Oral History Project and Columbia University’s Center for Oral History Research advocate transcribing in Standard American English. Other oral history centers follow this lead.

1973. Founding member of the Association of Black Psychologists, Dr. Robert Lee Williams coins the term Ebonics at a conference on the topic of the "cognitive and language development of the African American child." Two years later he publishes *Ebonics: The True Language of Black Folks* defining the term as the ***"linguistic and para-linguistic features which on a concentric continuum represent the communicative competence of the West African, Caribbean, and United States slave descendants of African origin".*** AAVE has since been defined as a dialect with written and oral consistent conventions, meaning it has a rule-based syntax, conventions, grammatical features, and style.

Section One: Transcription Process

Step 1. In-processing.

Every interview recording must have an interviewee agreement form signed by the narrator permitting the Center to process, archive, disseminate, and make use of the interview for educational purposes. Interview recordings will be uploaded to the server and labeled with the narrator's name, and date of the interview. After an MP3 (and/or M4A, WAV, etc) copy is saved on the server, a copy should also be uploaded to the cloud and portable hard drive. After being triple-saved, the interview will be ready for transcription. The interviewee agreement form, biography sheet, word list, and any other collateral materials received from the interviewer/depositor will be scanned and saved to Google Drive for all to refer to during transcription.

Summarizing
Interviewers should complete narrative summaries after each interview session. This summary does not have to be long but should include obscure terms or difficult-to-spell proper names that may pose challenges during any future transcription. More importantly, these summaries should include an analytical section on what has been learned and that identifies relevant connections to other interview sessions in the project.

Indexing
An interview index can be as simple or detailed as you would like but should include a timestamp of each question asked or major subject discussed. Indexing goes a long way towards providing the necessary metadata to make your interview more searchable on the internet. According to Elinor A. Mazé metadata

"consists of all of the sets of terms used in the curating processes and all of the lexical and semantic systems by which these records are kept in a readily usable form with widely understood words and symbols."

Step 2. Transcription.

An initial first draft of a transcript will be made in Microsoft Word from the original recording or from the original transcripts when recordings are not available. Accuracy in creating the first draft of a transcript is important to the final edited outcome, but in instances when speech is deemed unintelligible, the transcriptionist may use the word "unclear" in brackets. Using a dictionary, The Chicago Manual of Style, online resources, and any word list, recording log, or data sheet provided by the interviewer, the transcriptionist's research and accuracy in the first draft stage will ease and speed up each succeeding step. Transcriptionists should refer to later sections of this Oral History Transcription Style Guide for specific questions on things like abbreviations, acronyms, brackets, capitalization, commas, em-dashes, numbers, quotation marks, and the like.

There is some variability in transcription time depending on the speed of conversation, audio clarity, microphone placement, and familiarity with dialect and content. During transcription, established spellings of additional words and names should be added to the word list for future reference. The first draft transcript will be typed double-spaced for the narrator, when possible, to make corrections or insert additional information to be bracketed later in the editing process. Time stamps are inserted in the transcript every few minutes (at least once per page), or each time a new topic is introduced. Upon completion of the first draft, the transcriptionist will proofread for words the spell-checker may have missed, proper formatting, and consistency in style throughout the transcript before turning it over to the audit editor. The transcript will be saved on the servers as a "draft".

Step 3. Audit editing.

The audit editor simultaneously will listen to the recording while proofreading the transcript and correcting errors in spoken word, spelling, punctuation, and formatting, and filling in any recognizable portions of dialogue deemed unclear by the transcriptionist. Converting speech to written language requires careful, thoughtful proofreading with consideration of subject and historical context. The goal of the audit editor is to ensure that all words in the transcript are on the recording, that none were misunderstood or mistyped, and that they are in the order spoken. Punctuation will be checked to ensure it conveys the speaker's intended meaning. Upon completion, the transcript will be saved on the server as an "AE draft" and printed for mailing to the narrator when possible. Finally, the date of audit editing will be noted on the tracking sheet and database.

Step 4. Review by narrator.

The audit edited draft of the transcript will be mailed (or emailed) to the narrator, when possible, with a copy of the audio recording for them to keep and listen to while reading the transcript for any needed corrections. A letter of instruction, guidelines for review, and a postage-paid envelope for ease of return will be included with the transcript. The narrator will be given four weeks to return any corrections before the transcript advances to the final editing stage. Additional review time will be provided upon request. The date of mailing and expected receipt will be noted on the tracking sheet and database. In cases where the narrator is deceased or incapacitated, this review will not be possible but annotations by family members may be permitted when deemed appropriate or necessary.

Step 5. Corrections entered.

If corrections are received from a narrator, the date the transcript is received will be noted on the tracking sheet and in the database. Corrections will then be entered, and the transcript will be saved on the server as a "transcript." Corrections entered may be spelling corrections, and unintelligible words may be filled in. Any additional information not on the recording but provided for clarification purposes will be bracketed. The returned, corrected transcript will be preserved and archived with the final transcript.

Step 6. Final edit.

In the final edit, the transcript will be changed to single-line spacing, and the Margaret Walker Center's Oral Historian will proofread for proper formatting and page numbering before composing and adding a brief biography and title pages. Any appendix material will be added at this time such as copies of photographs, documents, news clippings, etc. The Oral Historian will assign an accession number to the interview, renaming and saving the transcript on the server according to the accession number, and will complete the tracking sheet, adding pertinent tracking sheet and biographical/demographic data to the database. The final Word transcript will be saved in PDF format. Duplicate copies of the final transcript will be deposited in the Center's online and physical archives. Duplicate transcript copies on regular paper will be mailed to the narrator (or their family) when possible.

Section Two: Format of Interview Transcript

Title Page

- Text on the title page of the transcript is centered.
- Transcript titles consist of "Oral History Interview with," then the narrator's full name.
- The title of the transcript document falls just below the title of the project.
- The name of the organization responsible for the oral history project follows.
- Below that is the year the interview was completed.
- At the bottom of the page should be the preface in italics.

Preface

The preface gives readers valuable information about the document before they begin and should:

- Include narrator(s) and interviewer(s) full names as well as anyone else in attendance (along with the role they played).
- List the dates of all the interview sessions.
- Give the name of the oral history project and its origins.
- Mention narrator approval.
- Specify that the document is a nearly verbatim transcript of an oral history interview.
    - Interviews conducted via sign language, an interpreter, or written correspondence should be described as such.

Ex: The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Jane A. Doe conducted by Dr. John B. Smith and interpreted by Michael Williams. This interview was conducted in two sessions on January 1, 2021, and January 2, 2021, and is part of the Margaret Walker Center's Civil Rights Movement Oral History Project. Readers should keep in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose and are encouraged to refer directly to the original audio if possible. The following transcript has been reviewed, edited, and approved by the narrator. Readers should also bear in mind that the beliefs, opinions, and/or any offensive language expressed by the narrator do not represent the Margaret Walker Center or those it employs.

Metadata Header

Each interview session (if there is more than one per transcript) begins on a new page with a table of two columns and three to four rows at the top of that page. This table should contain the following metadata:

- Transcriptionist: Name of the person or organization responsible for transcription.
- Narrator: Narrator's full name.
- Interviewer: Interviewer's full name.
- Session Number: The interview sessions represented.
- Location(s): Where the interview session took place.
    - Name of city and abbreviation for state, region, or country.
    - Remote interviews should list the location of each person followed by their initials.
- Date: When the interview session took place.
- Interpreter(s): Name of the person(s) or organization responsible for interpreting.
- Videographer(s): Name of the person(s) or organization responsible for recording.
- Translator: Name of person or organization responsible for translation

If any participants in the session provide preferred pronouns these should be added in parentheses after their names in the metadata header.

Main Document

- Font: 12 point, Arial.
- One-inch margins all around.
- Left justified. No indentations for speakers.
- Page numbers, bottom right. No number on the title page.
- Timestamps periodically (at least once per page) at transcriptionist's discretion
    - Can be helpful at any notable change in topic
    - Can be applied at intervals such as approximately every five minutes
    - For use as closed captioning or synched videos, every minute is standard
- Speakers' last name or initials in all caps, followed by a colon and a space
- For changes in tape or disc:
    - [END OF RECORDING full track name] – Transcribers, please note that the tracks are named correctly. Please include the full track name, Example: [END OF RECORDING AAA_almara86_532.]
    - [END OF INTERVIEW] – At the end of an interview there will be an [END OF RECORDING] and an [END OF INTERVIEW] in separate instances.
- Each page of the transcript body, except for the first page of each session, has a header containing the narrator's name and interview date.
- Paragraphing
    - Double carriage return between each paragraph break
    - Paragraph breaks in a transcript are not always intuitive but should occur at changes of subject or transitions in the speaker's train of thought
    - Avoid overly long paragraphs that are difficult for readers to clearly understand
    - If a speaker's words span multiple pages try for two paragraph breaks per page

Section Three: Treatment of Text

Refer to Part II of the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 17th ed., and the *Merriam-Webster 11th Collegiate Dictionary*, (and when available/applicable the *Oxford Dictionary of African American English*) though we do not adhere strictly to them in all instances.

Descriptive Indicators

Agreeing and disagreeing

- Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Period after bracket if stands alone
- uh-huh [affirmative] No period inside the brackets if within a sentence.
- Mm-mm [negative].
- Okay, not OK
- All versions of yes or no are acceptable: yeah, yea, nah, nope, etc.

Laughter

- [Laughs.] Period inside the bracket if outside the sentence.
- [laughs] No period inside the brackets if within a sentence.
- [Laughter.] or [laughter] If unclear who specifically is laughing.
- No "chuckles," or other variations.

Interruptions/breaks in thought/pauses

- Significant pauses in speech that last longer than a few seconds entered as [pause]
- Use "—" (em dash), not "…" (see below for ellipses), and not "--" (double dashes)
- No spaces around em dash (…yellow—the color—not blue…)
- To make an em dash (—): ctrl-Alt-minus key (PC) or shift-option-dash (Mac)
- If one speaker finishes another's sentence:

SPEAKER A: So then I—

SPEAKER B: —ran outside?

- Try to keep expressions of interruptions to these:
    - [Audio break]
    - [Crosstalk]
    - [Side conversation]
    - [Recording stops, restarts]

False starts

False starts are sentences or words that are cut short before completion. They most frequently occur when a person realizes they have misspoken, in which case they often stop and correct themselves. Sometimes people start talking before they know exactly what they want to say and wind up with words that don't necessarily go together to form a coherent sentence. False starts that contribute some meaning to the text, regardless of whether subsequently corrected or completed, should never be omitted from the transcript. Instead, punctuate the break in the sentence with an em-dash. A common phrase that often shows up as a false start in this way without necessarily being completed is "I think that…" but regardless of what the false start is, it more than likely should be transcribed as uttered.

However, some false starts occur when one thought is interrupted by another while a person is already speaking. In these cases, once the interrupting thought is finished, the speaker often repeats and/or completes their initial thought. If repeated after the interrupting thought, the initial false start can be omitted. Otherwise, if the speaker does not return to the initial thought, the false start is transcribed as uttered.

- Ex:
    - Recording: “Dad smoked the worst—mom didn’t mind, but Dad smoked the worst-smelling cigars.”
    - Transcript: “Mom didn’t mind, but Dad smoked the worst-smelling cigars.”
    - Or, if not completed: “Dad smoked the worst—Mom didn’t mind, though.”

Filler words

Filler words are words, sounds, or phrases people use to “fill in” empty spaces in communication. They are fairly common and often go unnoticed in typical spoken conversation but can be extremely distracting when translated to print. Filler words are used for a variety of reasons: to hesitate or pause; indicate mood or tone; seem less direct as a form of politeness; express doubt; or emphasize ideas. It is up to the best judgment of the transcriber to decide when and where something is being used as a filler and whether it adds or detracts from what is being said. Sounds of encouragement or agreement (uh-huh, mmm-hmm, yup), disagreement (uh-uh), and questioning (hmm?) are often used reflexively in conversation. When used by an interviewer while an interviewee speaks, these sounds, especially when they appear as interruptions, would unnecessarily lengthen or clutter a transcript and should be omitted in most cases if they don’t add meaning to the transcript. A general rule of thumb is to also always omit the ums and uhs but some other common examples of filler words include:

Actually	I mean	So
Ah	Just	Well
And	Like	Yeah
Basically	Oh	You know
I don’t know	Or something	
I guess	Right	

Unspoken gestures

- Bracket in text like [points to painting] or [claps].

Information

Brackets

- Use brackets for information added or deleted after the interview is recorded.
    - Format: [additional information or ellipses + space + en dash + initials of narrator or interviewer]
    - Bracket without initials if a small (one- or two-word) change differs from the recorded version unless it is important to indicate that the speaker made the change.
- Correction of simple tense, gender, article, etc., that would not be audibly discernable need not be bracketed.
- [Inaudible.] or [inaudible], as with laughter section
    - No need to bracket if "[inaudible]" is replaced with the originally spoken word(s)

Details added

- Add only if essential to understanding context and not easily available to search.
- [ph], not (ph); use [sp?] to indicate correction may be needed (particularly for names).
- States should be abbreviated if inside brackets [Cranbrook, MI].
- New York (the city) can be [New York, NY] or [New York City]; the latter is especially useful if the discussion is clearly in the city.
- Add full names of persons, places, or titles of exhibitions, works, or publications wherever necessary, i.e., obscure, needed to distinguish from a similar one, wouldn't make sense, or would be unsearchable without it.
- Book citation: only as needed for the reader to search, usually just author or title or year of publication; at most: [Author. *Title.* City of publication: publisher, year of publication], but usually [*Title,* year].
- Spell out acronyms only in the first instance (especially, if unclear in context).
    - NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People]
    - HBCU [Historically Black College/University]

Ellipses

- Never use for pauses
- Use ellipses to indicate portions of the audio that have been deleted from the transcript.
- Bracket ellipses
    - Type three dots, with spaces between dots: #[.#.#.]# (or end-sentence punctuation if within a sentence).
    - If the sentence ends before the ellipses, the period goes in the normal place, then begin #[.#.#.]#
- No need for ellipses if deletions are filler words (see page 10), brief false starts, or self-corrections. (Our general rule of thumb for when instances of these words seem overpowering to the greater narrative is to remove a quarter to half of them in the audit-editing process)
- Identify bracketed ellipses as described below.

Titles

- **Italics:** Book, movie, television or radio show (series), play, opera, major musical composition, long poem published as a single work, blog title, computer game, ship (USS *Enterprise*), newspaper ("the" is lowercase, roman), exhibition, work of art (including installation, performance)
- **Quotes:** Poem, song, lecture, a single episode of television/radio show, individual blog entry or section, web page entry or section, (academic course—only if context calls for it)
- **Uppercase:** No quotes or italics: art movements (generally uppercase; see list), computer program, building of architectural significance, series (related group of artworks or regularly recurring exhibition or event), poster, T-shirt title, study or cultural program, regular column (in magazine, journal, newspaper, or website), historical event, lecture series, conference, formal academic department/position/course title (lean to lowercase)
- **Lowercase:** Teaching or administrative position; museum or academic department, committee, or course; prize [capitalize if proper name (Pulitzer Prize); lowercase if generic (gold medal)]. These can be uppercase if critical to clarity of narrative or used in a formal title, especially when appearing as part of or prior to a name.
    - Ex: American University Distinguished Professor of History Allan Lichtman

Word Treatment

Acronyms

- See Information, Details added.
    - Ex: CEO [Chief Executive Officer]; GOAT [greatest of all time]; YOLO [you only live once]

Letters used as words

- Capitalize, no italics, no quotes
    - Ex: “She’s a real G”; “S shape”; “X number of turns”
- Spelling out names/terms in the narrative use caps with dashes: Smith, S-M-I-T-H

Onomatopoeias

- Flexible, depending on context, but often italics to set apart: *Boom!*
- Not necessary for more casual speech such as "blah, blah, blah"

Numbers

Spelling out vs. numerals

- Spell out numbers under 10, including ordinals and street names and numbers (One Fifth Avenue). The same rule applies for first through ninth and 10th and higher.
    - Don't include "th" (11th) in dates that include a year.
    - If the speaker says, "3 or 400," then use "3[00] or 400" for clarity.
- Use 9/11 (terrorist attacks) and 9-1-1 (emergency call).
- Spell out numbers that begin a sentence, unless it is a year. "1934 was the year I went to Spain."
- Hyphenate (non-year) numbers such as "Thirty-four" when beginning a sentence.

Age

- "in his 30s," "in his mid-30s," "He was 30-something."
- "She was two years old," but "She acted like a two-year-old."

Fractions, dimensions, and percentages

- Spell out the words for "inches" or "feet," etc.
- Use hyphens for exact fractions ("one-half"), but not inexact fractions ("a third")
- Numerals for numbers using decimals, "1.5 inches" (as spoken)
- While we would normally use "eight by 10 inches," if a transcript uses dimensions frequently, it could work better to use all numerals, even "8x10."
- Only add dimensional units ("[inches]") if necessary for clarity, and not in every instance.
- Hyphenate fractions when adjectives: "a four-and-a-half-year project," or used as a noun (see age section), but not when an adverb: "She was four and a half years old."
- Spell out the word "percent."

Money

- If spelling out a number (whole, under 10), spell out the symbol: four dollars (but $7.50).
- If using numerals, use the symbol: $5,000, $8 million ("[$]8 million" or "eight million" if "dollars" is not spoken).

Time and temperature

- Spell out whole numbers under 10 (one o'clock) unless an exact time:
    - two o'clock or 2 a.m. (as spoken), 2:15.
- Spell out the word "degrees" for temperatures.

Years

- 1950s, or '50s
- 19th century (hyphenate when an adjective: 19th-century painting).
- early '50s, mid-'50s, late '50s, '72–74 (use en dash for year spans, unless "through" is spoken; no apostrophe needed after the dash for ending the year in a span).
- 1972 or ['7]3 (if they just say "three"); 2004 or ['0]5 instead of spelling out the number

Punctuation and Syntax

And vs. Ampersand

- Almost always write out the word
- Leave ampersand in if considered the proper name:
    - Victoria and Albert Museum, the V&A (exceptions can occur).

Brackets

- If bracketed material is a simple addition of information, such as name, date, location, translation, etc., do not add a comma, semicolon, or colon with the brackets; okay to use within if needed.
    - Ex: September 7 [1935] (no commas around the year) or [September 7, 1935] (no comma after the year).
    - Then it would be: "He moved to [Cranston] Rhode Island for the sea air."— Even though, if there were no brackets, it would be "He moved to Cranston, Rhode Island, for the sea air."
- If the material is added as part of the speaker's own words and requires punctuation to correctly form the sentence, then punctuation may be added as needed.
    - Ex: "[Dear Jacob,] It's been…"
    - But if only inserting the name "Jacob," it would be: "Dear [Jacob], it's been…" (comma outside the bracket)
    - or "… in the old days [flying by the seat of our pants –RPW]." Even though, if the final phrase were unbracketed, it would be preceded by a comma. In this instance, the insertion is treated as a parenthetical phrase.
- A question mark, exclamation point, or close quotes precedes a closing bracket only if it belongs solely to the added material; they follow it if they belong to the hosting sentence.

    - Ex: I told him, "You come back [here]!"
- Similarly, a period precedes the closing bracket only if the entire sentence stands alone inside brackets; otherwise, it follows.
    - Ex: I met Joe Jonas at the end [of the day]. He was on his way to LA.

Capitalization

- In English, a capital letter is used for the first word of a sentence. In some cases, capitalization is required for the first word in a quotation and the first word after a colon.
- When a person's title directly precedes their name, capitalize it.
- All proper nouns (words that name a specific person, place, organization, or thing) including specific events, dates, and periods of time are capitalized
    - Capitalize Days, Months, and Holidays, but not seasons.
        - The Great Depression should be capitalized because it refers to a specific period of economic failure that began with 1929's stock market collapse.
        - Likewise, the term "civil rights movement" is capitalized when used at the beginning of a sentence, as the first word after a quote, in a title, or as a proper noun. When linked to a specific movement like that of African Americans in the 1950s and '60s the phrase is considered a proper noun and should be capitalized. Ex: "The 1950's Civil Rights Movement took a long time before the protesters achieved the intended results, in the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964." Vs. "The passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was the result of a massive civil rights movement that involved many years and thousands of protesters."

Colon

- Only one space after a colon.
- Capitalize after a colon only when for a direct question, introducing more than one sentence or question, for speech or dialogue.

Commas

- Two complete sentences separated by a conjunction require a comma.
- Short compound sentences with closely related meanings, especially if simultaneous or sequential actions, can go without a comma unless a comma would aid in understanding.
- When there is one subject with two verbs ("She raised animals and drove a tractor"), which wouldn't require a comma, if there are multiple objects that need to be separated for clarity, add a comma: "She raised cats, dogs, and hamsters, and drove a tractor."
- Use the serial comma when listing items: a, b, and c.
    - "et cetera" is no longer considered an appositive and need not be contained in commas. It should be treated as any other list item and spelled out (don't use abbreviation).
- Comma after question mark or exclamation point only when following a title or quote containing a question mark/exclamation point, but not with dialogue ("Are you here?" she asked).
- The thing is, I never went there. (Comma stands in for a missing "that").
- Interjections should be contained within commas.
    - Oh, my God,
    - "He is, like, a very relaxed person." (Though we may omit "like" a few times if overused.)
        - When "like" is used to estimate an amount, it should never be removed and does not need commas: "There were like 50 people there."

- In general, after an introductory word or phrase, a comma is best. "So" at the beginning of a sentence is usually used conversationally as a simple conjunction and does not always require a comma but if used as an interjection or parenthetical (usually to change the subject), then add it.
- The year of a given full date should be enclosed in commas.
    - “On Tuesday, January 1, 2021, we started the new year.”
- A state listed after the town should be enclosed in commas.
    - “He lived in Decatur, Alabama, for thirty years.”
- "Jr." or "Sr." after a name no longer requires enclosing commas.

Compound words or expressions

- Generally, do not hyphenate for adverbs—never for adverbs ending in "ly."
- Hyphenate expressions such as "day to day," “off and on,” “one of a kind,” when used as adjectives.

Homophones

ail		ale
air		heir
aisle		isle
ante-		anti-
ate		eight
eye	I	aye
bare		bear
be		bee
berth		birth
brake		break
buy	by	bye
cell		sell
cent	scent	sent
cereal		serial
chased		chaste
coarse		course
complement		compliment
council		counsel
dam		damn
dear		deer
decent		dissent
die		dye
fair		fare
fir		fur
flour		flower
for		four
hair		hare
heal		heel
hear		here
him		hymn
hole		whole
hour		our
idle		idol
in		inn
knight		night
knot		not
know		no
made		maid
mail		male
mat		matte
meat		meet
morning		mourning
none		nun
oar	or	ore
one		won
pair	pear	pare
palate	palette	pallet
peace		piece
plain		plane
poor	pour	pore
pray		prey
principal		principle
profit		prophet
real		reel
right		write
root		route
sail		sale
sea		see
seam		seem
sight		site
sew		so
shore		sure
sole		soul
some		sum
son		sun
stair		stare
stationary		stationery
steal		steel
suite		sweet
tail		tale
their	there	they're
time		thyme
to	too	two
toe		tow
vain		vein
waist		waste
wait		weight
way	weigh	whey
weak		week
wear		where
witch		which
whine		wine

Plural names and plural possessives

- "They had so many Giottos"—no apostrophe
- Prince Charles's, singular possessive ('s)
- The James' children, plural possessive (')

Recalled or paraphrased dialogue

- Set in quotation marks only when the narrator is recalling something exactly not if internal dialogue, generalized, or only casually recalled.
    - Quotation marks are of two types: single (‘ ’) and double (“ ”).
    - Quotation marks may be used to enclose an unfamiliar or newly coined word or phrase, or one to be used in a technical sense: ‘hermeneutics’ is the usual term for such interpretation
        - the birth or ‘calving’ of an iceberg
        - the weird and wonderful world of fan fiction, or ‘fanfic’
    - They are often used as a way of distancing oneself from a view or claim, or of apologizing for a colloquial or vulgar expression but such quotation marks should be used only at the first occurrence of the word or phrase in a work.
        - Authorities claim to have organized ‘voluntary’ transfers of population
        - I must resort to a ‘seat of the pants’ approach
        - Kelvin and Danny are ‘dead chuffed’ with its success
- The terminology “quote, unquote” can be eliminated in favor of simple quotation marks
- Set off paraphrased dialogue with a comma and capitalize the first word even if not using quotes.
- Adaptable to individual cases.

Repetition and stuttering

Intentional repetition of phrases for emphasis should be preserved. Stuttering on the other hand, the repetition of a single word, few words, or sounds, does not necessarily need to be included in the transcript. This is up to the transcriptionist’s and/or narrators’ discretion.

Slashes

- Typically used between two words that convey different meanings, yet only one of them will apply.
- Should only be added if the speaker says "slash” unless part of common usage such as “and/or”; “she/her”; “he/him”; “they/them”; love/hate”; “writer/author”; etc.
- See Numbers for cases like “24/7”; “9/11”; and other dates or fractions.

Vernacular

In most cases, spoken language does not strictly adhere to formal written standards of grammar, usage, or syntax. Faithful translation of the spoken word to text requires some artistic license. How, and whether, to apply rules of standard written English will depend on the specific goals of each project and the preferences of each narrator.

The diversity of English vernacular is only growing, and the challenge of oral history transcription is to portray this diversity without imposing biases on the text. Here are two important tools that will help:

- Maintain a consistent approach. Be as transparent as possible about the methods of that approach so that future readers may clearly interpret the source.
- Do not resort to phonetic spellings of any dialect's characteristic pronunciations. While a fluent American English speaker from the Midwest might pronounce a word "pärk," which a person from New England pronounces "pʰaːk,"they would both spell the word as "park." Use standard spellings of words available in the English dictionary.

In MWC's approach, a transcript's first priority is fidelity to the narrator, portraying the key characteristics of their individual speech and thought. Clearly communicating what speakers intended to say is a secondary matter of editing and, whenever possible, should be done with the narrator's participation and/or approval. Sometimes changes from the recording may be necessary when a statement becomes especially unclear, misleading, or detrimental to the speaker's intended meaning (e.g., if the speaker clearly misspoke, or if the meaning is lost or distorted outside of its original spoken context).

Transcriptionists and audit-editors should rely on their experience and best judgment when deciding how to depart from the recording for clarity. Any significant departures from the recording, or editorial insertions, are marked in brackets. When unsure how to proceed, consult with interviewers and principal investigators. Narrators can make the final decision if/when they review the transcript.

There are a few common ways for spoken words to become unclear in text, which should be given special scrutiny by audit-editors:

- Singular / plural, tense, or subject / verb disagreements.
- Omitted definite or indefinite articles, such as "a," "an," and "the."

In most cases, the surest way to consistently make decisions, without imposing biases on the text, is to adhere to grammatical rules described in the Chicago Manual of Style. Consult with project leads when unsure how to proceed.

AAVE [African American Vernacular English]

African American Vernacular English is the "proper" title for how English is most often generally spoken within Black communities throughout America (most typically to/with other African American people). One could say that AAVE is mostly a more relaxed and expedient version of standard American English, but its roots go deeper than that. On first being brought to the United States, enslaved Africans tended not to fully learn English. Their children, like all future second-generation immigrants, became native English speakers who also developed an in-group way of speaking that retained some of the traits of how the people who had raised them spoke.

In coining the term Ebonics at the 1973 conference he organized on the topic of the "cognitive and language development of the African American child," Dr. Robert Lee Williams, set a course of normalizing Back English. Two years later he published the book Ebonics: The True Language of Black Folks defining the term as the "linguistic and para-linguistic features which on a concentric continuum represent the communicative competence of the West African, Caribbean, and United States slave descendants of African origin". AAVE has since been defined as a dialect with written and oral consistent conventions, meaning it, while not yet codified, has a rule-based syntax, conventions, grammatical features, and style that can be transcribed.

Though clearly different, transcription has much in common with writing in general and as such many of the same rules and considerations should apply. Some great advice on the use of colloquialisms, regionalisms and slang come for The Elements of Style, such as typing a slang word or phrase without drawing attention to it by enclosing it in quotation marks or italics. Differentiating a narrator's language and/or word choice "is to put on airs, as though you were inviting the reader to join you in a select society of those who know better."

A transcript should reflect the way a narrator speaks naturally even though this particular approach to style is not without its flaws. Such flaws, in the case of using "orthodox" spellings are to be expected, however, as Strunk says, "the spelling of English words is not fixed and invariable, nor does it depend on any other

authority than general agreement...from time-to-time new forms, mostly simplifications, are introduced by innovators, and either win their place or die of neglect." It is our job as transcriptionists to ensure the innovative word choice of our narrator makes it to the annals of history rather than allow them to be erased by the sanitization of academic language.

That being said, one shouldn't push themselves to transcribe a dialect that they are not personally familiar with or able to understand. For those who are comfortable, familiar, or devoted to this work, consistency and transparency are key. Refer to the word lists in this style guide and those developed for individual projects to ensure spellings are true to either a local or larger Black community.

Colloquialisms, Regionalisms & Slang

Slang and regionalisms are words or phrases commonly used within socially or geographically bounded groups of people. Some slang consists of compound words that result when words, often spoken in pairs, merge into one (kinda, *gotta). While most academics would suggest transcribing such slang as their full distinct words in what is considered 'standard' written English (kind of, got to) this style guide affirms the known spellings of those slang words and that they should be typed as spoken. If the speaker changes between pronunciations, perhaps making the effort to enunciate in one section and not in another, transcribe those changes accurately.

Most American slang comes from repurposing existing words already found in the dictionary; however, every so often, some words are more or less entirely new creations whose spellings and even definitions have not been fully canonized. Spell these as they appear in the dictionary but words not in the dictionary should be recorded as they sound or as they are commonly spelled in their place of origin. These words may be unclear to people outside the common social or geographical groups of their origin. Still, clarification should only be provided in brackets the first time each word appears in the interview transcript. Use one consistent spelling for all interview transcriptions in the same oral history project and rely on the word list as needed. Below are some examples of newer words from the last twenty or so years that have yet to be added to official American English dictionaries and thus are still considered slang.

betcha	gimme	popo
bruh	gotcha	skrrt
buss down	gonna	sus
bussin'	gucci	thot
cheugy	hooptie	til
Cussin	kinda	turnt
dunno	lil	wanna
fam	lemme	yeet
finna	lotta	
fleek	periodt	

*A note on "gotta" vs "got to" - though these can sound nearly identical depending on the speaker, the meanings of these two do differ and thus should be transcribed differently for clarification. In AAVE "got" may mean "had" as in "had the chance to" rather than the more common "have to" or "had to". Special care must be given to the fuller context of the sentence to differentiate these two when the narrator is discussing past events.

Contractions

Spoken words can have a tendency to run together leaving some letters unpronounced. This style guide recognizes any common contractions, especially those found in AAVE (like leaving the G off of words like comin' and goin'). Therefore, contractions not found in the dictionary (which would otherwise be described as nonstandard contractions such as "coulda, woulda, shoulda" and "mighta") should be transcribed as they are unless otherwise requested by the narrator. Examples of common contractions are listed below:

ain't
aren't – are not
can't – cannot
comin'
couldn't – could not
didn't – did not
doesn't – does not
don't – do not
goin', gon
hadn't – had not
hasn't – has not
haven't – have not
he'd – he had; would
he'll – he will; shall
he's – he is; has
I'd – I had; would
I'll – I will; shall
I'm – I am
I'mma
I've – I have
isn't – is not
let's – let us
she'd – she had; would
she'll – she will; shall
she's – she is; has
shouldn't – should not
that's – that is; has
there's – there is; has
they'd – they had; would
they'll – they will; shall
they're – they are
they've – they have
we'd – we had; would
we're – we are
we've – we have
weren't – were not
what'll – what will
what're – what are
what's – what is; has
what've – what have
where's – where is; has
who'd – who had; would
who'll – who will; shall
who're – who are
who's – who is; has
who've – who have
won't – will not
wouldn't – would not
would've – would have
y'all – you all
you'd – you had; would
you'll – you will; you shall
you're – you are
you've – you have

Foreign words and phrases

Commonly known as a country of immigrants, America has accumulated many words of foreign origins into its lexicon. As such, many otherwise foreign words may appear in American English dictionaries and those should always be transcribed the same as any other word, with special attention paid to any necessary accent marks. For foreign words that are not found in the dictionary, determine their language of origin and spell out and/or capitalize appropriately according to available references, being sure to add them to the project word list. If the meaning is not obvious, translated in the context of the interview, or otherwise explained, provide any necessary definition in brackets immediately following the word. Other style guides may suggest that these foreign words be italicized, however, this practice of denoting difference can cause ostracization and, in some cases, suggest unnecessary xenophobia.

British English

Many members of the Black community, in particular more recent immigrants, have been educated according to the British standard established during colonization and as such may use accents and spellings that differ from those more common in America. As members of the Black community, fidelity to their way of speaking should be honored as well. Below are some examples of British words with spellings that differ from those you may be familiar with in America.

analogue
analyse
apologise
catalogue
cheque
colour
defence
dialogue
flavour

humour	neighbour	paralyse
judgement	offence	pretence
labour	organise	recognise
manoeuvre	paediatric	travelled

Neologisms

Neologisms are another form of words considered to be “nonstandard,” in many cases invented by the speaker. They are not commonly shared among a collective group. Neologisms will not be found in the dictionary; however their spelling is typically easy to guess, and their meaning clear and intentional in context. Mark a neologism with [sic] the first time it appears in the interview’s transcript.

EX: I think my dad was more of a Republocrat [sic].

Section Four: Fact Checking

Censoring

This style guide strives for verbatim accuracy and fidelity to the narrator and as such does not advocate for the censorship of historical records. To that end, all transcriptionists are encouraged to include any otherwise harmful or offensive language with the understanding that the goals of these inclusions are the accurate representation and preservation of different cultures and time periods in the historical record. The interviews (and subsequent transcripts) created by the Margaret Walker Center document the time period when they were created and the view of their creator/narrator. As a result, some may demonstrate racist and offensive views that do not reflect the values of Jackson State, the Margaret Walker Center, or its volunteers and employees.

The “N” word

Not to be confused with “Negro” or “Niger,” which (in English) refer to race and an African nation respectively, the “N” word refers to the racial slur “Nigger” and/or the more common, casual, and fraternal slang “Nigga.” Though spelling and pronunciation has changed and varied over time, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the first derogatory usage of the term “Nigger” was recorded in 1775. Because it is still often considered to be racist and extremely offensive, it is typically instead referred to as “the ‘N’ word” in the majority of contexts. Oftentimes, respectability politics are challenged by reclaiming negative stereotypes associated with minority communities, rather than disassociating from them. As such, some Black Americans continue to use the word “Nigga,” without irony, either to neutralize the word's impact or as a sign of solidarity. In the context of an interview, the word may be used in any of these ways and should always be transcribed as heard and intended. In the event that the word appears in an interview, because it could be deemed offensive to readers, an extra disclaimer might be applied to the transcript.

Complete Names & Terms

Review the interview transcript to ensure that names and other proper nouns have all been spelled correctly. Partial names and terms are completed, in brackets, the first time they appear in the interview. Complete names and terms are extremely helpful to future readers of the transcript. While a partial name may seem intuitive in the current context, readers from other contexts—such as international readers or readers fifty years in the future—may have difficulty recognizing it. For example, “Clinton” in the US in the 1990s may have clearly meant William “Bill” J. Clinton, but by the 2010s Hillary Rodham Clinton was far

more prominent, and the abbreviated name would commonly be used to refer to either one of them. Rely on the word list for help, and add to it any words that have not already been included. When the proper spelling or complete name cannot be verified, mark the word in the transcript as [phonetic].

Full Names

A person's full name includes all the elements of their name that will help future readers to identify the person. Full names do not include titles or honorifics. For the purposes of a transcript, a full name may be as it appears in Library of Congress subject headings, on the person's government-issued ID, in credits of publications, or other trusted sources. If a person's specific wishes regarding their full name are known—either because they are someone connected to the project, such as a narrator or interviewer, or because their preference is publicly known—those wishes should be honored. Consult with the principal investigator when unsure and strive for internal consistency within the project. Important elements of a full name to include, where applicable:

- given or chosen name — A personal name, as distinct from a family name, This is also a formal name, as distinct from a nickname.
- nickname — Enclosed by quotation marks. Used only when a nickname is more commonly known than the given/chosen name.
- middle initial or middle name — According to cultural naming conventions and personal preferences, if known, either abbreviate a middle name or include it in full.
- surname — Also known as a family name. Include family names before marriage (i.e. maiden names), according to personal preference, if known.
- suffix — Generational suffixes used to distinguish family members with the same name.
- a.k.a. — Stage names, noms de plume, and other commonly known aliases.

EX: Sally K. Ride
Stevland H. Morris, a.k.a Stevie Wonder
Martin Luther King Jr.
Jacqueline "Jackie" Kennedy Onassis

Citations

Citations may be specifically requested by speakers during the interview, or by the narrator during their review of the transcript. Include citations as footnotes on the same page as the content they are associated with.

Clarifications

Clarifications are inserted when the speaker's words, or intended meaning, would otherwise be unclear in the text. Such moments may include confusing use of pronouns, regional turns of phrase, abbreviated references to complex concepts, and many others. Clarifications that require only a few short words are entered in line with the text as editorial insertions in brackets, to the immediate right of the phrase they modify. Clarifications longer than a few words can be inserted as annotations.

EX: Bill swore to Tim that he [Bill] hadn't taken his [Tim's] money.
It didn't go as he said, so he had egg on his face [looked foolish].

Corrections

Corrections are entered when a speaker clearly misspoke but did not correct themselves, and when an incorrect statement is especially significant to the purpose of the interview, misleading to readers, or

otherwise detrimental to the speaker's intent. Corrections should be used sparingly. Bear in mind that statements that are false in one way may offer valuable evidence in another. For this reason, corrections may be added by an editor, but a speaker's incorrect statement should not be removed unless specifically requested by that speaker. Brief corrections are entered in line with the text. In brackets, include the word "read" followed by a colon and the correction.

EX: The pan wasn't [read: was] hot, so it burned her hand.
Alfred Hitchcock was born in 1999 [read: 1899], at the end of the century.

Corrections longer than a few words require a combination of [sic] and an annotation. When a correction would require extensive notation in the transcript, consult with the principal investigator on how best to proceed, and highlight the relevant passages for the narrator to review.

Sic

Sic is short for "sic erat scriptum" which is Latin for "thus it was written," and commonly indicates when a quoted statement is shown exactly as it was in the original document, even if it seems incorrect or out of place when quoted. In oral history transcription it signifies when a phrase or term is transcribed as it was spoken during the interview, regardless of whether it is an incorrect statement or simply misphrased.

If a speaker makes an incorrect statement, but the correct information is not known, place [sic] directly to the right of the statement it modifies. If the correct information is known but requires more than one or two short words in line with the text, mark the passage using [sic] and include an annotation with the full correction.

Annotations

Annotations to the transcript are included as footnotes on the same page as the content they refer to. Annotations can be used to include a narrator's commentary on the transcript, contributed during the review process after the interview was completed. They are also used for editorial notes such as clarifications and corrections. Any annotations that require more than five lines of text can be inserted after the body of the transcript as endnotes. Place brief instructions, in a footnote on the content's page, to see supplemental information in the endnotes. Other supplemental materials—such as copies of pictures and documents referred to during the interview—may also be appended to the transcript and referenced in the content as other endnotes are.

Word List

Create a word list like the one in the next section that contains full proper spellings for names and terms that are either especially common in or relevant to the project, and important to spell consistently and correctly. This list may be added to and updated over the course of the project, and shared among transcriptionists and audit editors, in order to save time during fact-checking and to ensure consistent spelling throughout the project's transcripts. Organizations, publications, and court cases referenced in the word list should have full titles. Acronym entries should show their complete names. Names of people on the list should not include their titles or honorifics but should include their full names. See Full Names.

Preferred Spellings for Frequently Used Words and Terms

Numbers

8 mm (film type)
16 mm (film type)
3-D, three-dimensional
Super 8 (film type)

Jump to: A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J | K | L | M | N | O | P | Q | R | S | T | U | V | W | X

A-H

a while (2 words: obj. of preposition); awhile (1 wd: adverb)
aesthetic
African American (no hyphen)
antebellum
archaeology
armed forces (Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, Coast Guard)
art-making
artwork
Ashanti
Avant-garde
Award titles commonly encountered:
-Fulbright Program
-Guggenheim Fellowship
-MacArthur Fellowship
-NEA grant (certain specific grants are capped)
-Rhodes Scholar/Scholarship

B

back and forth (adv); back-and-forth (n, adj)
backtrack (1 word)
Ballroom scene
bicentennial
Black C.A.R.E. (Black Community AIDS Research and Education)
Boy Scouts; scouting, scout leader;
brand-new
brush plate
buttonhole (1 word)

C

cabinetmaker (1 word)
camel hair (or camel's hair)
candleholder
candlestick
catalog
chain saw
chest of drawers
civil rights movement (lowercase)
copy editor / copyedit
counterculture
craftsman
crosshatch (v, n)
cross-hatching (n)
cufflinks
custom-made
cut out (v, 2 words)
cutout (n, adj)

D

da Vinci
Dahomey
decision making (n, 2 words)
Depression
die-in
dinnerware
disc (for recording)
drywall

E

East Coast (but going east, eastern)
Ecstasy (capitalized; recreational drug)
email
eye-opener

F

Fahrenheit
feminist movement
fiberglass
fine-tune
firsthand
flatware
free-form
freelance
freestanding (1 word)
full time (n)(rarely encountered), usually full-time (adj/adv)
fundraising
furniture maker

G

gay-bashing
gemstone
GI Bill (no periods)
glassblower
glassmaker
GMAD (Gay Men of African Descent)
GMHC (Gay Men's Health Crisis)
God, goddam (n,v), goddamed (adj, adv)
gold leaf (n, 2 words.)
gold medal (lowercase)
gray (not grey)
GRID (Gay-Related Immune Deficiency)

H

hairpin (1 word)
handcrafted (1 word)
hand-forging
handmade
hand-quilted
handsaw
hands-on
hand-spun
handwoven
hardwood (1 word)
high chair (2 words)
high tech

high-rise
HIV-positive

I-W

internet (lowercase)
ironwork, glasswork, etc.

J

jacquard (fabric)
Jacquard loom (named after inventor)
jewelry maker (2 words.)
jigsaw (1 word)

K

karat
Kente
Kickback (n) kick back (v)

L

LA (not L.A.) (with exceptions)
lengthwise
Lesbian Herstory Archives
LGBT Center (cap C, NYC)
life-size(d)
lifetime
long-range
long-standing
long-term
longtime
lowkey (highkey)
low-tech

M

MacArthur Fellowship
man-made
mass-produced, mass production
metalsmith, metalworker
mid-'70s
Midwest, but midwestern
mock-up
MoMA
MSM (Men having Sex with Men or Men Seeking Men) (also WSW)

N

NEA grant, fellowship (unless titled)
NYC

O

okay (not OK or ok)
open-minded
Oriental

P

part-time (adj)
Ph.D., B.A.
Plexiglas
postwar
pottery-making
Prescription drug names (especially if obscure) add "[prescription drug]"
Printmaking

Q

quilt maker, quilt making (2 words)

R

ready-made
redwood
rolltop (1 word)

S

S/M, S and M if "and" is spoken (S-and-M if adjective)
sawmill
Scotch tape
semiprecious
setup (n, 1 word)
short-lived
short-term (unless n)
sketchbook
SoHo (with exceptions like an organization that doesn't capitalize the "H")
South, but southern
spell-check
still life (2 words.; hyphenate for adj.)
stoneware
Styrofoam

T

tabletop (1 word)
tape recorder (n, 2 words)
tape-record (v)
T-cells
theater, not theatre
tie-dye
time frame (2 words)
time-consuming
time-out
tinfoil
toolmaker, toolmaking (1 word)
T-shirt
TV

U

underpainting
university-educated (adj)
USA, DC, LA, Washington, D.C., U.S., U.K., the States

V

van Gogh

W

website, web, but World Wide Web
well known (adv) well-known (adj)
West Coast (but west, western)
widespread
wide-spreading
women's movement
wood carving
woodworking, woodwork, woodshop
workshop
wrought iron

X-Z

xerox (lowercase), but Xerox machine
X-ray (n)
x-ray (v)

Bibliography

- Baker-Bell, April. *Linguistic Justice: Black Language, Literacy, Identity, and Pedagogy.* Rutledge 2020
- Bahnemann, Greta. “Oral History & Audio Collections Transcription Style Guide | Minnesota Digital Library.” *Home | Minnesota Digital Library*, 1 June 2019, https://mndigital.org/standards-best-practices/oral-history-audio-collections-transcription-style-guide.
- “Baylor University Institute for Oral History Style Guide: A Quick Reference for Editing Oral History Transcripts .” *University Libraries | Baylor University*, 2018, https://www.baylor.edu/library/index.php?id=974464.
- Berger Gluck, Sherna, et al. “OHA Principles and Best Practices | Oral History Association.” *Oral History Association*, Oct. 2018, https://oralhistory.org/principles-and-best-practices-revised-2018/.
- Fuhrmann, Henry, and Karen Yin. “Drop the Hyphen in ‘Asian American’ - Conscious Style Guide.” *Conscious Style Guide*, Conscious Style Guide, 24 Jan. 2018, https://consciousstyleguide.com/drop-hyphen-asian-american/.
- Funderburk, Alissa Rae. “‘Talking White’ An Anti-Oppression View Towards Transcribing and Archiving Black Narrators.” Building Representative Community Archives: Inclusive Strategies in Practice, ALA Neal-Schuman, 2024, pp. 1–22.
- Harris, Frederick. “The Rise of Respectability Politics - Dissent Magazine.” *Dissent Magazine*, https://www.facebook.com/dissentmag, 10 Aug. 2016, http://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/the-rise-of-respectability-politics.
- Harris, Ida. “Code-Switching Is Not Trying to Fit in to White Culture, It’s Surviving It - YES! Magazine.” *YES! Magazine*, 17 Dec. 2019, https://www.yesmagazine.org/opinion/2019/12/17/culture-code-switching.
- Hurston, Zora Neale. *Barracoon*. HarperCollins, 2018.
- Marshall, Brenda DeVore, and Kathleen Spring. “‘Transcript Conventions and Examples for Audio and Video Stories’ by Brenda DeVore Marshall and Kathleen Spring.” *DigitalCommons@Linfield*, 2015, https://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/dory_scholar/1.
- McWhorter, John. “Multiethnolects: How Immigrants Invent New Ways of Speaking a Language - The Atlantic.” *The Atlantic*, https://www.facebook.com/TheAtlantic/, 14 Dec. 2015, http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/12/language-immigrants-multiethnolect/420285/.
- Merriam-Webster. *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary*. 2016.
- Snyder, Jennifer. “Oral History Program Style Guide.” *Archives of American Art | Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution*, 3 Apr. 2019, https://www.aaa.si.edu/book/export/html/46573.
- Strong, Liz, et al. “Oral History Transcription Style Guide Columbia University Center for Oral History Research.” *Columbia Center for Oral History Research*, 2022, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/575a10ba27d4bd5d7300a207/t/621cf621281bcd63d23a3dde/1646065186028/CCOHR+Transcript+Style+Guide+2022.pdf.
- University of Chicago. Press. *The Chicago Manual of Style*. 2003.
- White, E. B., and William Strunk. *The Elements of Style, Fourth Edition*. 2021.
- [Unpublished] “Our Story, Our Terms (OSOT) Transcription Protocol, 2022-2024 | Draft 8.20.22 from Duke University

Appendix

Transcription Checklist

MARGARET WALKER CENTER

Transcription Process Checklist

Step 1. In-processing.
- ☐ Check for interview agreement
- ☐ Index interview (use interviewer notes if provided)
- ☐ Create biography, interview summary and word list
- ☐ Scan any and all documents related to interview

Step 2. Transcription.
- ☐ Begin first draft of transcription in Microsoft Word with double spacing
- ☐ Use double carriage returns between speakers
- ☐ Save transcript as draft with narrator name and date (e.g. luckett010123_draft.docx)
- ☐ Note date of transcript and name of transcriber at top of document
- ☐ Bracket additional information as needed that is not a verbatim part of recording
- ☐ Mark unintelligible moments with [unclear]
- ☐ Add to biography and word list as appropriate
- ☐ Insert timestamp at start of every page or with each new topic
- ☐ Proofread

Step 3. Audit editing.
- ☐ Turn on "Track Changes" under "Review"
- ☐ Proofread transcript while listening to the recording
- ☐ Correct grammatical errors without changing the spoken words
- ☐ Insert unintelligible words when possible
- ☐ Save new draft of transcript with ae_draft (e.g. luckett010123_ae_draft.docx)
- ☐ Note date of editing and name of editor at top of document

Step 4. Review by interviewee (when possible).
- ☐ Mail and/or email instructions, transcript and copy of audio to narrator for corrections
- ☐ Note the date of the mailing at start of document along with transcript disclaimer
- ☐ Include postage-paid envelope for return in 4 weeks

Step 5. Corrections entered (when possible).
- ☐ Note the date corrections are received from narrator at top of document
- ☐ Turn on "Track Changes"
- ☐ Enter corrections
- ☐ Bracket additional information from narrator that is not a verbatim part of recording
- ☐ Save the transcript as narrator edit (e.g. luckett010123_ie_draft.docx)

Step 6. Final edit.
- ☐ Review and accept all changes
- ☐ Change to single line spacing
- ☐ Submit to the MWC oral historian for final approval
- ☐ Oral historian will proof for proper formatting and page numbering
- ☐ Oral historian will add a table of contents, biography, copyright and title pages
- ☐ Add appendix material such as copies of photographs, documents, and news clippings
- ☐ Assign interview a volume number, rename/save transcript according to volume number
- ☐ Save the final transcript as a PDF according to volume number
- ☐ Mail and/or email copy of final transcript to narrator
- ☐ Upload to website

Transcript Editing Instructions for Narrators

Transcript Editing Instructions for Narrators

The transcript you are about to read is an audit edited draft of the interview you participated in for the Margaret Walker Center at Jackson State University. This means that sometime after your interview was conducted the audio/video recording was both transcribed by one person and then reviewed for accuracy by another. This transcript represents in print the words and sounds present in the recorded interview to the best of our ability, the goal being to render as close a replica to the actual event as we can. While some repetition and filler words may have been omitted for the sake of clarity, we have tried to change as little as possible in terms of slang and regional pronunciations as we recognize these as part of your personal identity and as adding value to the integrity of the project. The end result of this transcription, however, is entirely up to you.

At this stage in the process, it is common practice to have the transcript approved by the narrator before the final transcript is archived. To give your approval of the transcript, we ask that you take the time to not only read it but, if possible, review it while listening to the recording. Should you find any errors, please use a pen (colored ink is preferred) to make your edits to the enclosed transcript. Check to see that the names of people and places are spelled correctly and that nothing is missing. If you find words or even a sentence or two that you would like removed, this may also be done. However, more than two sentences would require that you provide a signed statement that includes the reason for the removal. In this instance, a note would be made to the transcript indicating where something has been removed for the reader's convenience

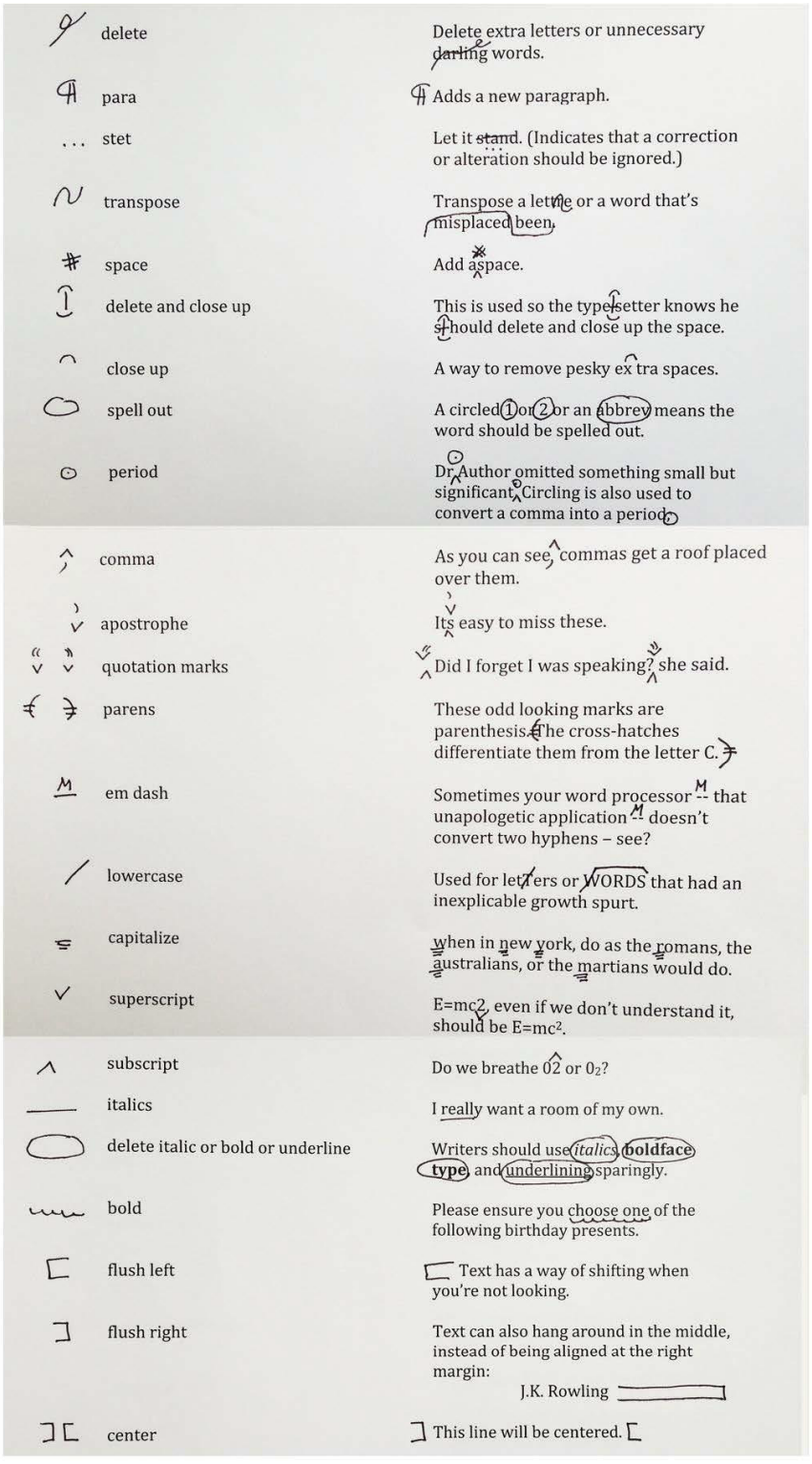
The back of this sheet includes a list of useful copyediting marks that you may use to indicate any changes you wish to make. Should you have any questions about the process or wish to discuss your transcript, you may feel free to email or call the Center. Once you have finished making edits to your transcript, you may return it using the enclosed pre-addressed and stamped envelope. If instead, you find the transcript satisfactory as is, you may keep this copy for your records and note your approval of the transcript by signing the bottom of this page and returning it using the enclosed envelope or via email.

The Margaret Walker Center thanks you again for your part in this project and your generosity in making these recollections a part of our Oral History collection.

I, _____, give my approval of the transcript provided for the _____
(Print Name) *(Date of Interview)*

interview conducted for the Margaret Walker Center. _____
(Signature and Date)

P.O. Box 17008, Jackson, MS 39217 **601-979-3935** **mwa@jsums.edu**



delete	Delete extra letters or unnecessary darling words.
para	Adds a new paragraph.
stet	Let it stand. (Indicates that a correction or alteration should be ignored.)
transpose	Transpose a letter or a word that's misplaced been.
space	Add a space.
delete and close up	This is used so the typesetter knows he should delete and close up the space.
close up	A way to remove pesky ex tra spaces.
spell out	A circled 1 or 2 or an abbrev means the word should be spelled out.
period	Dr Author omitted something small but significant. Circling is also used to convert a comma into a period
comma	As you can see, commas get a roof placed over them.
apostrophe	Its easy to miss these.
quotation marks	Did I forget I was speaking? she said.
parens	These odd looking marks are parenthesis. The cross-hatches differentiate them from the letter C.
em dash	Sometimes your word processor -- that unapologetic application -- doesn't convert two hyphens – see?
lowercase	Used for letters or WORDS that had an inexplicable growth spurt.
capitalize	when in new york, do as the romans, the australians, or the martians would do.
superscript	E=mc2, even if we don't understand it, should be E=mc².
subscript	Do we breathe 02 or 0_2?
italics	I really want a room of my own.
delete italic or bold or underline	Writers should use *italics*, **boldface type**, and underlining sparingly.
bold	Please ensure you choose one of the following birthday presents.
flush left	Text has a way of shifting when you're not looking.
flush right	Text can also hang around in the middle, instead of being aligned at the right margin: J.K. Rowling
center	This line will be centered.

Image courtesy of NY Book Editors