

After the interview

Note from 2018: These notes were originally written in 2002. The information about equipment is therefore out-of-date, but the general principles still apply.

Release forms

Oral historians working on projects for museums use 'release forms'. These are forms that the narrator signs giving permission for the interview to be used or stored. If you're interviewing someone in your own family, simply for personal use, then you may feel that's unnecessary.

However, consider checking whether a local museum or archive would be interested in any aspect of the recording you're making. If so, the organisation can probably supply you with a copy of their own release form. The person you're recording may actually feel quite positive about their story being put to good use and valued in this way. Many oral historians would say it's a shame to make a good-quality recording and not have it available.

Labelling

It's worth labelling the tape as soon as possible. If you don't do this at the end of the interview, while still with the person, then label the tape the moment you're back at home. Include the name of the person, your own name and the date and the venue of the recording.

Ideally, write a written breakdown of the interview – describing its length, the number of tracks, a brief list of the topics covered, and any comments on the quality of the recording. (If you want to do any editing of the tape later, this will be very helpful to you.)

Safety copies

As soon as possible, you should make a safety copy of the recording.

Copies for interviewee

The person may want a CD or audiotape of the original recording.

You can run off copies of audiotapes by buying a cable that connects the OUT socket from your recording device to the IN sockets on the back of most hi-fis.

You will need to buy a CD-writer in order to create CDs. These have come down in price a lot over the last two years.

Editing

There are various degrees of editing that could be done:

- No editing at all
- Removing fluffed lines, false starts, hesitations, long pauses, etc
- 'Topping' and 'tailing' the recording so the person's voice is the first and last sound on the recording
- Cutting out material to shorten the recording
- Re-ordering material
- Removing the interviewer's questions

- Creating a tape of 'extracts'

If you have recorded on minidisc, you can do a certain amount of editing with the minidisk recorder itself. This includes making cuts and reordering the material.

If you want to do more extensive editing, you can digitise the sound onto a computer, and then edit the resulting sound file. You will need:

- A cable to connect the OUT socket of your recording equipment to the IN socket at the back of the desktop computer
- Software to do the sound editing (e.g. CoolEdit 2000)
- A relatively new computer (new in the last two years) with enough memory to cope with the big sound files that result

If you're familiar with using computers, you won't find sound-editing software too complicated. However, this is a fairly time-consuming process. At an estimate, you might spend 10 hours working on a 1 hour recording.

The main, but obvious, point is that you should keep a copy of the original, unedited interview.

Archiving

It would be terrible to lose your recording, or find that the quality of the sound has degraded over the years.

The general consensus among sound archivists at the moment is that good-quality conventional audiotape is a safer media for long-term archiving than CD or DAT – partly because the latter formats are relatively new and therefore are unknown qualities. For expert opinion, it would be a good idea to check the archives of the 'h-oralhist' mailing-list or ask the British Sound Archive (see the list of websites).

The standard advice of any form of archiving is to keep two copies of whatever you want to preserve, in separate locations (so if one house burns down, you've still got the other copy). It might be a good idea to keep the two copies in different media as well – for example, one on CD and one on audiotape.

As the years pass, you will need at some point to copy your original recordings onto whatever sound format is current at that distant point in the future.