## Website References for Oral History Techniques and Best Practices

**Transom: A showcase for new public radio:**
➢ http://www.transom.org
> An an extremely valuable and essential resource. It has a huge amount of useful information:
> • **Tools:** In-depth reviews of digital recorders, microphones, editing software, field gear, and more.
> • **Techniques:** Practical how-to's on all sorts of subjects and best practices.
> • **Ideas:** Tips from new and seasoned reporters and producers.
> • **Howsound:** Bi-weekly podcasts on radio storytelling.

**Oral History Association:**
➢ http://www.oralhistory.org
> This is another essential resource that provides a portal into a variety of websites and portals. Of particular interest is an article on Institutional Review Boards (IRBs which regulate oral history research), principles, and best practices.

**Oral History in the Digital Age:**
➢ http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/
> Includes best practices, plus excellent interactive questionnaire for selecting recorders, and microphones according to project need and budget.

**Editing an Oral History Manuscript:**
➢ http://sites.mnhs.org/library/sites/sites.mnhs.org.library/files/Editing%20an%20Oral%20History%20Transcript_0.pdf

**What is Oral History:**
➢ http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/oral/   and   http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/oral/what.html

**Example of Oral History Project:**   http://www.bushmedicine.org\

**Interesting National Public Radio articles about Terry Gross interview technique:**
➢ http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/25/magazine/terry-gross-and-the-art-of-opening-up.html?_r=0
➢ http://www.thisamericanlife.org/blog/2015/10/what%E2%80%99s-so-great-about-terry-gross

## Recommended Software Programs for Audio and Video Editing

I have used a large number of software programs for video and audio editing, including paid, free for non-commercial use, and open source (free) programs. When possible, I prefer are programs which are GNU General Public License (GNU GPL or GPL). GPL is a widely used, free software license, which guarantees end users (individuals, organizations, companies) the freedom to run, study, share (copy), and modify the software. If you are not familiar with how to use these software programs, there are a lot of useful YouTube videos that will walk you through the basic features. When downloading and installing some of the free programs, especially those available from SourceForge.net, *be very careful during the installation to opt-out of additional add-ons* (software programs, that are not essential to the installation). The programs I generally recommend are as follows.

**Audio Editing**
- **Audacity** (http://www.audacityteam.org)   This is a very versatile and comprehensive audio editing program which is a mainstay program.  [free, GPL]
- **Express Scribe Transcription Software** (http://www.nch.com.au/scribe/)   This is the best, by far, of 8 transcription programs I have tried. It is easy to use. What is especially valuable about this program is the ability to change the transcription speed while retaining the voice pitch. Also has different pitch options which is very useful when transcribing dialect or difficult to understand speech.  [free version, for non-commercial use by NCH software]

**Video Editing**
- **Avidemux** (http://www.avidemux.org)   This open-source program is excellent and doesn't take much computer memory because it uses the most commonly used video processing features. No bloatware. Though there isn't much in the way of help files, there are YouTube videos that will help you learn to use it.  [free, GPL]
- **VirtualDub** (http://www.virtualdub.org)   An open-source video editing program with many features. [free, GPL]
- **VideoPad Video Editor**  (http://www.nchsoftware.com/videopad/)   Of various video programs I've tried, I prefer this one because it is simple, relatively easy to use, and has all the basic features you'd need without a lot of bloat. Don't expect much from tech support, but lots of tutorials available.   [free version, for non-commercial use by NCH software]

# Equipment and Supplies

**Smart Phones and Tablets**

You can use the StoryCorps app for uploading very short oral histories without the need to purchase audio equipment. If you are going to upload the recording, wait at least 24 hours to review the recording to make sure the recording follows best practices, otherwise editing may be necessary. Headphones are essential for monitoring the audio recording levels, whether your mic is on or off, and for monitoring extraneous sounds like wind, traffic, and equipment. Generally the audio quality is poor. *Many smart-phone companies are now eliminating the 3.5mm headphone jack, replacing them with one of two types of USB- type jack.* You would need to purchase an adapter for $20 to $30, but not cross-compatible. Bluetooth quality is currently poor. Wireless headphones *need their own power and you don't want the noise cancellation feature.*

**Audio Recorders**

There are many options available depending on your budget and intended use. See Transom.org (above) for other possibilities. The equipment listed below are what I currently use.

- **USB voice recorder:** This is a thumb drive with an on/off switch and integrated microphone. I use the aLLreli brand. It has 8GB of flash memory, measures 2.5" x 1". It lasts about 13 hours on a full charge, takes 2 to 3 hours to recharge, and holds 36 hours of audio. Prices for similar brands range from about $15 to $50. This is an essential piece of equipment when traveling lightly, or for backup of my regular recorder, and especially for hands-free recording when taking photographs. I suspend it around my neck from a lanyard, or as a pendant, so it is less intrusive than a larger recorder.
- **Zoom (brand) Digital Recorder:** This brand of digital recorder was recommended to me a few years ago by an NPR reporter, as a relatively low cost, professional quality recorder. Also recommended by oral history associations. There are various models of Zoom recorders, ranging from the H1 to H6 model. Prices range from about $100 to $200. I have an older model, the Zoom H2. The new digital Zoom H1 is a good choice for about $100. It has 4 internal mics (front, rear, cardioid, polar). Be sure to purchase wind screen.
- **Brands:** Other than Zoom recorders, other good brands are Sony, Erdriol and Maranz.
- **Recorder features:** **ALC** – Automatic Level Control. Check to see how easily ALC is accessed – through a menu or through a wheel or some other means. **Limiter –** Check to see if there is a limiter on the volume control (it acts like a governor), preventing the volume from spiking and causing distortion. **Number of microphone inputs** – It is good to have two microphone inputs, one for a lavalier microphone and another for a clip-on, or to record in two channels. **Pre-amplifier** – Beware, cheap recorders may have cheap pre-amps. When the volume is turned higher you get more hiss.

**Microphones:** Microphone types, brands, and features:

- **Lavalier or Clip-on** – A hands-free or clip-on microphone often worn on a lapel, or as a pendant. There are typically two types (1) dynamic, and (2) condenser. The condenser mic produces less hiss, picks up more detail, but may cause feedback.
- **Condenser microphone** – Best used for places where there is background noise. Good ones can be pointed in a noisy setting. It can pick up the sound 10 to 15 feet away while leaving distracting noises behind. It can be held a further distance from the subject, about two to three feet away. For best results in the field it must be pointed at the subject's mouth or the audio will fade out. Condenser microphones are more sensitive to wind and handling noises.
- **Shotgun (type of condenser) microphone –** Recommended for field work. Highly directional to the front. Buy a windscreen.
- **Dynamic omni-directional microphone** – These have a limited range, about 6 inches from the mouth and thus are not as good for reproducing softer audio. These are less wind sensitive.
- **Brands: [Best brands:** Tascam, Ars Technica, Sony, and Beyer.] [**Better:** Tram, Audiotechnica, Rode, and Electrawire.]

**Video Recorders:**

There are many options available depending on your budget and intended use. Of course you can use the video function on a camera, and also a smart phone. See Transom.org (above) for other recommendations. The equipment listed below is what I currently use.

- **Brands:** Sony Handycam SR85, and Canon Power Shot series (A60, S1 IS S5 IS, ELPH 170 IS) IS = image stabilization
- **Important features and accessories:**
  - **Hard disk:** This is important in field situations, especially when traveling and you don't have much opportunity to download or transfer videos. I use a Sony Handycam with a 60 GB hard drive, plus a memory stick, and extra batteries.
  - **Wide-angle lens:** This is really important for keeping the subject(s) in the frame especially while moving around.
  - **Shotgun and zoom microphone (Sony ECM-HGZ1):**
    - Synchronizes the microphone's pickup pattern with the camcorder's zoom.
    - Powered by a camcorder. There is no need for a separate battery and it mounts on camcorder's interface shoe.
    - Includes 3 settings for use in a variety of video shooting situations (zoom, gun, off). It rotates and locks.
    - Captures a cardioid pattern in front microphone (versus omni-directional) in telephoto and wide-angle mode.
    - A foam windscreen recommended – check eBay (about $19) which is less expensive than a fake-fur windscreen ($40).

**Tripod (mini-tripod), monopod, or improvised string monopod:**

- A tripod can be used to mount a Zoom audio recorder, video recorder, or camera. The Pedco brand ultra-lightweight (4 oz) tripod can be attached to a tree, railing or other support so you can get the photo or video. A monopod can be useful for stabilizing video without the hassle of setting up a tripod. If you don't have a monopod you can use a piece of 6-foot string. Attach one end of the string to the camera or video recorder. Then stand on the bottom of the string to keep it taught.