

Hints for Creating Usable Field Notes and Tape Logs

Field Notes:

- Should be written immediately after the interview.
- Include: names of narrator and interviewer, date, time, location interview took place, language in which interview was conducted, and a list of ephemera materials.
- Describe how and why narrator was selected.
- Include a description of interview itself:
 - Describe the setting. Were there other people present? Were there any important events that happened prior to, during, and/or after the interview?
 - Please include your honest reflections on whatever dynamics occurred during the interview.
 - Share as much of your own feelings/thoughts as possible.
 - Talk about the interview environment, that is, describe the room, where you sat, where the narrator sat, what was on the walls, tables, etc.
 - Was there anything discussed that didn't make it on tape that might be of further use to a researcher? (BEWARE of potential slander and libel here and the right of privacy!)
- Included in the important events should be any technical issues, e.g., phone calls, interruptions, odd tape noises, etc.

These should be useful AND reflective.

Tape Log:

There are two purposes: 1) to provide an outline of the interview and 2) to hit the important topics that were discussed.

- The topic paragraph should provide an overview of the person AND the topics of the interview itself.
- Make the log as useful as possible. A researcher should be able to read the tape log and know precisely what was discussed and where in the interview to FIND a particular topic.
- You should also think of it as a partial transcript. As you're writing the log and highlighting topics, use this time to excerpt the most important and telling parts of the interview. You can put any of these verbatim quotes in the log as well.
 - It's not necessary, but when you feel it's important, include the question you asked the narrator.
- Create "time stamp" to indicate when oral history changes subject(s).