

Part One: Getting Started with the Recorder

- 1) Begin by a) connecting headphones to front of machine and b) connecting the microphone cord to the microphone and to the right jack (the one labeled mono) on the rear of the machine. **The machine is pre-set to record interviews with a hand-held microphone—you need not worry about any of the settings.**
- 2) With headphones on, test the equipment by hitting record (red button on left) and talking into the microphone. When you look at the display on the front of the machine, you'll see a couple numbers. The number on the top left hand side is the track number (you're always recording sound on to a *track*—think of it like a song on a record or tape). The number on the bottom right hand side is the time remaining on the flash card—in other words, how much time you can record.
- 3) Use knob on the front right side to adjust the recording level of the machine. Ideally, you want to record at about -6db. You want to see a little bit of orange in the front lights on the machine—you don't want to see red.
- 4) If the sound in the headphones sounds too loud or soft, try adjusting the headphone level on the left side of the machine—adjusting the headphones does not alter your recording.
- 5) You have just made your first recording! If the flash card (the device capturing your sound) was new, track one will be your test recording. Go back and give it a listen? Does it sound ok? If so, you're now ready to sit down with the person you're interviewing and begin recording stories. The tips below will help you record a great interview.

Part Two: Ten General Tips for Conducting Audio Interviews

- 1) **Select a quiet, comfortable setting** (Get away from phones, loud hums, TVs, other people chatting in background, etc.—turn off things like loud clocks, the Refrigerator, etc. as these can really damage your sound)
- 2) **Test your equipment on person being interviewed** (Ask a question like “what did you have for breakfast this morning?” You want to be sure their voice is being recorded at about -6db—again looking on the front of the machine at those lights. Given the mics you are using, you often have to turn the knob pretty far to get the person's voice to -6 db—look out for red lights, those are bad. Once you've tested their voice, you're ready to begin the real interview.)
- 3) **Start the recording with some kind of clear ID** (“Hi...I'm so and so here with so and so on a cold and rainy November 1st 2008—we're sitting in the living room...”whatever you're comfortable saying, but get the key details in.)
- 4) **Avoid verbal feedback while person is speaking** (Instead of “uh huh,” nod attentively, etc. Some interaction is often just fine, but don't interrupt with verbal feedback that doesn't add to recording)
- 5) **Feel free to re-record, ask question again, etc.** (If, for example, the phone rings or a loud noise comes upon the scene just re-record. You may end up editing the recording at some point)

- 6) **Be the best listener possible** (Look at the person, not the microphone, **ask follow-up questions**, like “tell me more” or “do you have an example of that?”) Also give nonverbal feedback—smiles, nods, etc.)
- 7) **Don’t be afraid to interact in the interview and to do things in the interview** (Genuine interaction including laughter, hugs, and light moments makes for great recordings. Great recordings also often come from the person standing up and describing a picture on the wall, or walking out to the tractor to talk about it. Don’t be afraid to let the person being interviewed do something thing...you might, for example, ask “can you describe that trophy on the table?”)
- 8) **Have a typed list of interview questions (an interview schedule) but be flexible** (In general, have questions to guide your interview while at the same time being willing to “go with the good stuff.”)
- 9) **Close the interview in some way** (Often a good idea so simply ask “is there anything else you’d like to say?” or something along those lines. Also record the last little bit where you thank the person, etc.—this is fun stuff to have on tape)
- 10) **Record two minutes of room sound** (With everybody quiet, stick microphone in air and record two minutes of the room’s ambient sound; this may be something used later should the recording be edited)

Part Three: Using the Recording Equipment During Interview

- 1) **Always wear headphones** (Headphones are to the audio person what the viewfinder is to the photographer—don’t skip because they look funny.)
- 2) **Hold the microphone close and slightly to the side** (Hold about 5-7 inches away—no more than a hand’s length—you should look a bit like a TV reporter. Get close and then closer with the microphone; **don’t hold right under mouth but off to the side** to avoid “pop” sounds.)
- 3) **Be careful of microphone and cord noise** (Microphones can make noise if you hold them too firmly, move them around in your hand too much, etc. The cord can also cause problems. Do your best to get situated in a way where the cord is not, for example, bouncing into a table, etc.)
- 4) **Never let the person being interviewed hold the microphone** (You want to control the positioning of the mic, the cords, etc. People often ask to hold the mic, and you have to gently get them comfortable with not doing so.)
- 5) **Set recording level to roughly -6 db** (nearly all “good” recording devices will let you set the recording level—setting it too low makes it hard to hear, too high and things get distorted. Set the level by asking some practice questions before you start the actual interview. If the recorder has only low, medium, high settings—high is usually best)

****After recording interview, somehow indicate for your records the track or tracks on which the recording can be found—you’ll need this for transferring to computer—something covered in another handout.**

**Several of the insights above come from www.storycorps.net

