



FOR VISUAL HISTORY
AND EDUCATION

VIDEOGRAPHER GUIDELINES

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For more information, please visit: <http://www.usc.edu/vhi>

University of Southern California College of Letters, Arts & Sciences

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INTRODUCTION

Each oral history project is unique. Those who initiate an oral history project should take into account its particular objectives and identify the specific knowledge and background needed for conducting interviews. Learning how to conduct and videotape an oral history interview takes time and practice. Although this is not an instructional guide, it is a detailed description of the Shoah Foundation Institute's procedures for videotaping an interview. We hope that it will be useful to anyone engaged in an oral history project.

The Shoah Foundation Institute, with nearly 52,000 videotaped testimonies from Holocaust survivors and other witnesses, is the largest visual history archive in the world. The mission of the Institute is to overcome prejudice, intolerance, and bigotry—and the suffering they cause—through the educational use of the Institute's visual history testimonies.

More than 1,000 videographers in 24 countries were trained by the Shoah Foundation Institute to collect testimonies.

Videographers were provided with all pertinent information including the date, location, and time of the interview, as well as the names of the interviewer and the survivor. This information was coordinated by a Regional Coordinator.

THE VIDEOGRAPHER AGREEMENT

Before you can be scheduled to videotape an interview, you must complete and sign an Independent Contract. This agreement will be kept on file at the USC Shoah Foundation Institute and will authorize you, as an agent of the Institute, to videotape interviews as scheduled by the Regional Coordinators or Institute staff. Until this form is completed and authorized, you will not be scheduled for any interviews.

EQUIPMENT REQUIREMENTS

Following are the basic equipment requirements necessary to tape the interviews:

- Professional Broadcast Camera w/ Betacam SP deck
- Zoom Lens
- Tripod w/Head
- Monitor
- Lowell Light Kit or equivalent
- Soft Box or ability to create look of soft box
- Batteries
- Lavalier
- Boom Mic

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Meet the interviewer (and, when available, the volunteer assistant) outside the survivor's home at the time assigned by the Regional Coordinator. This will give you an opportunity to coordinate and share information with the interviewer and assistant without having to talk about technicalities in front of the survivor.

This is the time to work out any details with the rest of your team. For example:

- The interviewer will be able to tell you what has been discussed with the survivor during the pre-interview conducted earlier. The interviewer will know if the survivor will be joined by family members at the end of the interview and if he/she will have any photographs or artifacts to show in the last part of the interview.
- This is your opportunity to work out the signals you will use with the interviewer when a tape is ready to be changed (for example, a tap on the shoulder five minutes before the end of each tape).
- The volunteer assistant assigned to you may have a lot of technical expertise, a limited amount, or no experience at all. He/She is involved in this process to be helpful, but will need your guidance. Let the volunteer know exactly what his/her role will be so he/she is an asset and not a "third wheel." He/She can label tapes, write production reports, help set up and wrap equipment, sit in for lighting, meet family members so that taping is not disturbed, etc.
- If for some reason the interviewer is late, you may enter the survivor's home to begin setting up your equipment.

Note: In most cases you will be shooting the video in the survivor's home. Please be sensitive to the fact that he or she may not be accustomed to having strangers come into his/her living rooms with camera and lighting equipment. Remember to ask permission before moving furniture or any other items.

TECHNICAL GUIDELINES

LIGHTING

The goal of these guidelines is to establish a consistent look to all interviews. Basically, we are expecting a very soft 3/4 key look. Although we have made suggestions for ways to approach lighting, you may have your own way of achieving the desired look. If so, you may exercise your professional judgment.

SET UP

Please review the following points:

- We have found that it often helps to explain to the survivor in advance in simple terms the type of equipment you will be bringing into his/her home and how you plan to set up.
- Work with the interviewer and survivor to find the best place for the interview to be taped.
- Always choose a location that allows for depth, with a glimpse of the survivor's home in the background. **NEVER** position a survivor against a flat wall.
- A window in the background can often be a nice touch if it is diffused by soft drapes. However, avoid blazing, overexposed windows.
- While you are setting up, the interviewer and survivor will select photographs and documents to be videotaped during the last moments of the interview.
- The Shoah Foundation Institute will provide you with blank 30 minute Beta SP stock. Although most interviews use only four pieces of stock, you should be prepared to use as many as six or seven. **Remember that interview length is ultimately the responsibility of the interviewer.**
- Set Time Code at hour 0 for tape 1 and let it **run continuously** while taping the interview (i.e., tape 1 will start at 0:00:00:00, tape 2 will start at approximately 0:30:00:00, tape 3 at 1:00:00:00, etc.)
- Put the survivor on channel 1 with either a boom or lav mic.
- Put the interviewer on channel 2 with either a boom or lav mic.
- Create a very soft 3/4 key light with a backlight as a kick for good separation from the background.
- Set camera for NON-DROP frame (this applies only to NTSC equipment).
- Whenever possible, use a power supply instead of batteries.
- To achieve a more "portrait" look, use a longer lens at a wide open F-stop, softening the background.
- The interviewer should be asked to sit on the same side of the camera as the key light.
- Be sure there is adequate light in the survivor's eyes.

- If a survivor wears glasses or if the clothing he or she is wearing is a problem, ask the interviewer if he/she could gently ask the survivor if he/she would feel comfortable changing clothes or removing his/her glasses. However, keep in mind that the final decision always rests with the survivor.
- While setting your lights and frame, keep in mind that after giving his or her testimony, the survivor may invite other family members to appear on camera (e.g., children, grandchildren, husband, wife).
- Remember to white balance your camera after setting up your lights.

TAPING THE INTERVIEW

Your primary responsibility is to make sure the interview looks and sounds good. The interviewer, who may be new or lacking technical experience, is ultimately responsible for the content, direction and length of the interview.

At the beginning of the first tape, it is your responsibility to make sure that the interviewer or assistant reads the head slate while you shoot. Please remember to check with the interviewer that the names are spelled correctly on the slate.

After the slating is over, the interviewer will appear on camera with the survivor. The interviewer, with the camera rolling, should clearly state the following:

- INTERVIEWER'S OWN NAME (& SPELLING)
- DATE
- "I AM CONDUCTING AN INTERVIEW WITH ... [SURVIVOR'S NAME]"
- CITY, STATE, AND COUNTRY OF THE INTERVIEW

The interviewer will then move off camera and begin the interview by asking the survivor to say:

- NAME (& SPELLING)
- NAME AT BIRTH (& SPELLING)
- ANY OTHER NAMES (& SPELLINGS)
- NICKNAME(S)
- BIRTHDATE
- AGE
- CITY (& SPELLING) and COUNTRY OF BIRTH

PLEASE REVIEW THE FOLLOWING POINTS

- When rolling color bars at the beginning of your first tape you will also be rolling sound and, in many cases, picking up the off-camera conversations. **Please note: color bars should be laid down on the first tape of each interview only.** Because we transfer every tape from frame-one until you cut the camera, these off-camera conversations are unfortunately being laid down onto all of our copies, including the digital submaster, catalogue copy, survivor copy and the digitized version. Therefore, if you are unable to lay down tone over the bars or pod down the record sound level, then be sure to ask for quiet in the room while laying down the bars.
- At the beginning of the interview, start with a shot that is wider than you might prefer. We want to show a glimpse of the surroundings, especially if it's in the survivor's home. Once the interview has begun you should very slowly zoom in to a comfortable close shot. Be sure to avoid extreme close-ups. Once the close shot has been established, do not zoom in or out. Such camera moves would add editorial comment to the testimony, thereby compromising its historical validity. Excess camera movement also affects the digitizing process by taking up more computer memory. See example in the appendix.
- The second tape and each consecutive tape should be voice slated by the interviewer with: NAME OF SURVIVOR and DATE.
- When starting a new tape, have the interviewer wait six to seven seconds before continuing with the interview. Otherwise, the first sentence or question on the tape may be cut off.
- While speaking, the survivor should look at the interviewer, not at the camera.
- The interviewer should sit as close to the lens as possible, at eye level with the camera. Occasionally, even an experienced interviewer will need to be reminded of this.
- During the interview do not lean over the interviewer's shoulder and suggest questions. The videographer should never intrude on the relationship between interviewer and survivor.
- Remember to work out the logistics for tape changes with the interviewer.
- While the interview is in progress do not cut the camera. There may be periods of long pauses or emotional breakdowns. Under no circumstances (other than an emergency or if the survivor needs to leave their chair) should the camera be cut. These are historical testimonies, raw archival footage, the content of which is considered valuable material to scholars, researchers, academicians, etc. Do not misconstrue this to mean that there should be no cuts between the slate and the introduction by the interviewer, between the introduction and the actual testimony or between photographs in the photo session. It is only during the actual testimony of the survivor that the camera should not be cut.

- **It is very important that you avoid breaking the time code once you've started recording.** Our transfer system is automated and computer-driven; the system reads a break in time code as the end of the tape and automatically rewinds it, along with the digital Betacam submaster, the catalogue copy, and the survivor copy. When this happens, our transfer technicians have to manually line the all the tapes back to the correct spot in order to continue the transfer.
- **Please do not shoot more than 30 minutes of any tape. Over 30 minutes disrupts our transfer system.**
- Let the interviewer know when you have begun roll four so that they can try and time the wrap-up of the interview within that half-hour of tape. You must leave time for the taping of photos, documents and family members. Again, the length of the interview is determined by the interviewer. If necessary, the interviewer can and will use more than four tapes, so be prepared for interviews to take longer than two hours.

FAMILY MEMBERS

During the final moments of the interview the survivor may invite members of his or her family (especially children and grandchildren) to appear on camera for a few casual moments. Although your angle and lighting may be relatively simple to adjust, your sound considerations might present more of a challenge. Don't be afraid to ask your subjects to speak up, or to take a few moments to adjust your boom or camera mic. Do not assume the survivor's lav mic will clearly pick up family members. If you find that the only way to clearly record everyone's voice is for a handheld or lav mic to be passed around by the family, please remind them not to allow it to rub against clothing and not to move it when speaking.

If the family is running late, call your Regional Coordinator to determine if you should stay or move on to your next interview. **Do not pressure the survivor or family into rushing so you can make the next interview.** Your Regional Coordinator will be able to address any scheduling conflicts and issues.

THE PHOTO SESSION

Finally, the survivor will be asked to present photographs, documents, or artifacts which may be of interest. Set up a copy-stand situation with the survivor, off-camera, describing the photos or documents. Photos should be chosen before the interview begins (while you're setting up) so the interviewer will know what questions to ask about the items. PHOTOS SHOULD NOT BE HELD BY THE SURVIVOR OR INTERVIEWER.

Be sure to shoot beyond all four edges of the photograph and then move in if necessary for details. Since the photographs will also be part of the archive, they must be established as being complete, unedited, untrimmed documents. See example in the appendix.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- Please be sure to punch the safety catch on the Beta tapes.
- Label each tape and tape case per sample in the Appendix.
- If possible, bundle tapes from each interview together. Please use rubber bands. **Never use adhesive tape to bind the interview tapes together.**
- While you are wrapping out your equipment, the interviewer will be gathering some final information from the interviewee. If the interviewer requires additional time to complete the paperwork, please be patient.
- Collect the Interviewee Release Form and Pre-Interview Questionnaire from the interviewer. If the interviewee has expressed a reluctance to sign the Release, the interviewer has been instructed not to apply pressure but rather to leave without the signature and contact the Regional Coordinator. (Should this occur, please note it on the Production Report.)
- Complete the Production Report per sample in the Appendix, making sure that everything is filled out completely and legibly.
- At the end of each day's work, phone the Regional Office with a verbal status report regarding the interviews and the number of tapes used. In many cases, you will leave this information on the office message machine. Example: "Hi. This is John Doe. Both interviews went well today and I shot nine tapes."
- On your last scheduled shoot day of the week, complete the Invoice per sample in the Appendix.
- Return tapes and paperwork (Invoice, Production Reports, Pre-Interview Questionnaires and Survivor Release forms) to your Regional Coordinator as soon as possible. Please do not fax your invoices to the Institute. Mail them or give them to your Regional Coordinator.
- Please make sure your camera tape heads are cleaned on a weekly basis.

YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE INTERVIEWER

Your relationship with the interviewers is very important and can make the difference between a good interview and a bad one. Following are several points to keep in mind regarding your interaction with the interviewers:

- Please bear in mind that each interviewer you work with will have a different level of experience. You may be working with someone who has conducted 100 interviews and is quite comfortable with lights, microphones, etc., or you may be working with an interviewer conducting his/her first interview for the Institute, who may look to you for support.

- Regardless of the interviewer's level of experience, he or she is ultimately responsible for the content and length of the interview. If you sense that an interviewer is not performing adequately, do not confront him/her with this directly unless he/she is actively seeking your advice. Instead, inform your Regional Coordinator that you sense a problem.
- Although all of our interviewers have gone through an intensive 25-hour training session and have been taught skills to help gather the entire testimony within a two-hour period, this will not always be the case. Be prepared to go longer if the interviewer indicates that it is necessary (this means you should have enough tape stock on hand in case the interview runs long).
- Also, remember that while the interviewer is responsible for the content and length of the testimony, you are the final authority for the look and sound. For example, if the interviewer takes a seat too far away from the camera and this causes the survivor's eyeline to veer towards a sharp 3/4 view, it is YOUR responsibility to direct the interviewer to sit closer to the camera.
- Remember that you and the interviewer, along with your volunteer assistant, have to think of yourselves as a team whose goal is to make the survivor feel as comfortable as possible while getting the best interview you can.
- Finally, always remember that the comfort and well being of the survivor is our number one priority.

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

To do the best possible job as a videographer, it is essential that you take good care of yourself. This means arriving on location fully rested, being conscious of keeping some "distance" between you and the stories you will be documenting, and taking time after your long day in the field to relax.

The histories you are exposed to may emotionally affect you. But be aware that most people that do this type of work have developed workable ways of separating themselves from the stories they are taping. This is not a matter of insensitivity but a necessity that will prevent burn-out.

Just as therapists maintain a "professional distance" between themselves and their clients, you must avoid becoming over-involved in the emotional aspects of the stories you will hear. This does not mean to tune out, but merely to be aware of your reactions and adjust yourself accordingly. You can do this through a mixture of empathy, curiosity and objectivity. Some helpful tips:

- Stay in the present moment; don't get swept up in the traumatic stories you may hear.
- Remind yourself that what you are hearing happened long ago, and the person recounting these horrors has survived.
- If you feel anxious, take a few slow, deep breaths.

- Keep focused on the technical aspects of your job. This will help calm you.

Taping interviews can be intense and exhausting, especially in the beginning, so it's a good idea to think ahead to how you can recharge after a day's work. Some people find writing in a journal about feelings, reactions or lingering thoughts from the day to be useful. Some prefer to talk with friends, family or colleagues about this work and their reaction to it. Still others find participating in unrelated activities, such as exercise, classes, etc., provides a great distraction from the day. Whatever you prefer, please make sure to continue to do it. Remember, you are a key part of this monumental endeavor. Taking good care of yourself is essential to doing the best job possible.

VIDEOTAPE CARE

Our tape supplier, Studio Film and Tape, has provided a list of suggestions for taking the best care possible of Beta SP tape. Keep in mind these are suggestions not mandatory procedures:

- If possible, keep the camcorder and tapes together in same temperature environment to prevent condensation. For example, avoid a cold camera and warm tape or vice-versa.
- Tapes are best used in 59-77°F (15-25°C) temperatures. In heat, tape expands then contracts; in humidity, tape sticks together.
- Tapes should always be wound completely forward or back after the shoot, and more importantly prior to storing and shipping. Partially wound tape can develop picture distortion, usually a rippling effect. This can happen in just a few hours.
- Keep tapes away from TVs, electric motors, speakers, refrigerators, air compressors, air conditioners, induction motors, etc.
- If shooting with a camera which normally uses Sony Beta SP tapes, or if a Sony tape was used in the camera just prior to Maxell tapes, (if you have time): A) clean the heads; B) run three Maxell tapes forward and back one time each. This procedure is supposed to prevent head clogs.
- Keep tapes vertical. Avoid laying tapes on their sides for several days or more. Gravity will eventually pull the spool of tape down and the edge of the tape will bend. When this happens, the tape control track which keeps the picture stable can become damaged, causing the picture to jiggle or roll.
- Tape damage can be caused by removing the battery pack or disconnecting another power supply unit before shutting off the camera.
- When flying, if you carry tapes on board, store them in the overhead racks BETWEEN the reading lights and jam in blankets or coats so tapes don't get thrown around during turbulence.
- X-rays and metal detectors do NOT harm tapes.

Beta Tape Label

BETA TAPE LABEL

Date of Interview _____
Interviewee _____
Interviewer _____
Language _____
Videographer _____
City _____ Region _____
Roll ____ of _____ NTSC PAL