



LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY

AND AGRICULTURAL AND MECHANICAL COLLEGE  
*T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History*

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## **The Cost of Doing Oral History**

Oral history is not a short cut or a cheap and easy way of doing research. Used to its full potential, done carefully and conscientiously, oral history methods let us collect unique information that can be of great value to researchers now and in the future. Done carelessly, without proper preparation and processing, it can result in evidence that is superficial, anecdotal, little better than hearsay and too often inaccessible. Doing oral history takes time and money. Each hour of tape recorded interview requires an average of twenty-five to thirty hours of preparation and processing. Our standard fee for contract projects is \$450 per hour of tape.

An explanation of the steps involved in doing oral history and a budget follows.

### **The Interviewer:**

The interviewer is expected to bring some professional expertise to the project, including a knowledge of the interviewee's career and field, the pertinent sources for further information on these subjects, and the questions that should be asked. If he is not an experienced interviewer, then he is expected to attend one of my training sessions. Prior to the interview, he conducts background research in the written records in order to determine the topics and questions that need to be covered in the interview and to ensure that the oral history will not simply duplicate the written record but will supplement it, filling gaps and adding unique material available nowhere else. Once the interview is complete, the interviewer reviews the tape, making a list of the major topics covered, and noting topics and questions to be covered in subsequent sessions. He also reviews and corrects the transcript. For every hour of tape, the interviewer will spend five to ten hours preparing for and reviewing the interview.

### **Transcribing and Processing:**

It takes an experienced transcriber six to twelve hours per hour of tape to produce a verbatim transcript. Once the transcript is complete, it is checked against the tape by someone other than the transcriber to ensure accuracy. This is an essential step since even the most conscientious transcriber will make mistakes or be unable to hear or understand some portions of the tape that may be clearer to a second listener. This process, called auditing, takes three to five hours per hour of tape; correcting the transcript adds another two to three hours. The corrected transcript is sent to the

interviewer and interviewee for their review and corrections. The interviewee is asked to make changes for accuracy and clarity only, not to edit for literary quality. Once the interviewer and interviewee have returned their copies of the transcript it receives a final editing. Punctuation and paragraphing are imposed as necessary, false starts are eliminated, and minimal editing is done to promote clarity and readability. This process, along with making the corrections suggested by the interviewer and interviewee, takes another five to eight hours per hour of tape. We then make an abstract or index of the interview and two bound copies, one for the interviewee and one to be deposited in the Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections where it will be available to researchers.

Transcribing and processing the interview thus can take fifteen to thirty hours per hour of tape. To this must be added overhead costs--equipment, supplies, phone, postage, and general supervision and coordination.

### **BUDGET FOR ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW**

	<b>Per hour of tape</b>
Interviewer	\$150
Transcribing	100
Auditing	80
Editing	70
Abstracting	50
Overhead	<u>100</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$550</b>
Preservation, if born digital	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$600</b>