

Theatre Archive Project transcription style guide

Dr. Alec Patton (aypatton@gmail.com)

I. Transcript format

1. At the top of page one, provide the following (all centre-justified):

Name of Interviewee

Interviewed by X

Date: 4 December 2008 (for example)

It should look like this:

Laurence Olivier
Interviewed by Alec Patton
21 January 2009

2. Your 'British Library Summary' should come next on the page, before the transcript itself. British Library summary guidelines are at the end of this document (you won't be able to write the Summary until you've finished your transcription).

3. Start the transcription from your first question. There is no need to transcribe small-talk before the interview. Similarly, end the interview with your thanks to the interviewee.

This is a verbatim transcript - that means you write down everything that was said during the interview. If the interviewee requests that comments made during the interview be removed from the transcript/recording as they would prefer them to remain off the record, it is very important that you notify the project team by making a note against any such sections in the transcript. These remarks still need to be transcribed in order for the project team to edit the sound recording.

4. Denote the speaker using initials and a colon and leave a space between question and answer:

KS: So how did censorship affect you as a writer?

AW: It didn't directly... [etc.]

II. Transcribing the spoken word

1. Do not include **hesitations**, coughs or **unintentional repetition** of words. If the interviewee says, 'I first started going to the theatre... in... um... in 1950' then transcribe this as 'I first started going to the theatre in 1950'. The only exception to this would be if the interviewee paused for a significant amount of time – it is interesting to see which questions prompt more reflection.

2. You should indicate **facial expressions/laughter/changes in dialect** or accent if this brings the interview to life – indicate these in square brackets as they occur in the interview.

Example: AW: So, that was that! [laughs]

3. **'Gonna'/'wanna'** should not be transcribed. Even if the interviewee uses them, transcribe them fully as 'going to' or 'want to'. Please note, however, that we want the transcription to preserve the colloquial style that is characteristic of Oral History material. It is therefore perfectly acceptable to transcribe swear words and slang if the interviewee uses them.

4. Pauses: where indicating that an idea petered out, use dots '...' These should have a space at the end before the next letter. There should not be a space before the dots. If the next word continues the idea, use lower case. If it is a new sentence, use upper case.

Examples:

- I think his moment... it was just about the beginnings of the 'Kitchen Sink'.
- The play came to an end and that was that... Five years later we moved to Glasgow and I did not like that at all, it was too cold and wet!

5. Interruptions: where indicating that the interviewee has interrupted the flow of his or her own conversation, either with a new idea or to clarify a point, use a dash –

Examples:

Leaping forward to the present time – which was a gradual process – you would find you had a make-up artist. I went to see an agent called Gordon Harboard – all these people are dead now, it's terrible – and I said 'that's where I want to be'.

6. Quotations: Begin full-sentence quotations with a capital letter, and separate from the preceding text with a comma.

- Example: 'I told him, 'This is the ugliest theatre I've ever worked in'.

If the quotation ends a sentence, close quotation marks before the full stop.

- Example: The director told me, 'You're going to have to leave immediately'.

If the sentence is a question or exclamation, the ? or ! should come inside the final quotation marks and, where appropriate be followed with appropriate punctuation outside the quotation marks.

- Example: The director approached me and asked, 'Where on earth did you find that hat?'.

III. Titles and names

1. Titles of plays and productions should be italicised, but not the names of theatres.

- Example: I first saw *The Crucible* at The Crucible in 1983.

2. Titles of books and magazines (*Plays and Players*, *Theatre World*, *The Stage*, etc.) should be italicised.

3. There is a list of frequently-misspelled names at the end of this document. Please check all the names that you transcribe to see if they appear on the list.

4. If you cannot identify a name or title and it doesn't appear on the list, then write what you think it may be, followed by a question mark in square brackets.

- Example: In that production, I played a character called Count Hezzablachtenburgher[?].

[Top Tip: if you're not sure how to spell a name, Google it, spelling it the way you think it's spelled. Google will probably ask you 'did you mean...' and give you the proper spelling. It might give you the incorrect spelling, or someone else's name, so it's not foolproof!]

IV. Numbers and dates

1. Numbers up to ten should be written out in full. Numbers after ten should be written in figures

Example: 'He had three children, the oldest of whom was 17'.

2. References to decades should generally be written in words, not numbers (e.g. 'forties', 'fifties', 'sixties'). However if the interviewee includes 'nineteen' when they say the date, it should be written as a number with no apostrophe (e.g. 1940s, 1950s, 1960s).

3. Individual years should be written like this: '63.

Example: 'Then I moved to London in '62, or was it '63?'

4. Sums of money should be referred to in figures (e.g. £50.00).

V. Its/It's

If you commit this to memory, it will improve everything that you write:

- 'Its' is a possessive, like 'his', 'her', or 'your'.
Example: The Capricorn Theatre suffered its first major setback in '46.
- 'It's' is a contraction of 'It is'.
Example: It's difficult for me to remember where I first met my husband.

VI. British Library key words

You need to create a list of 'British Library Key Words' to accompany the interview. This is a list of keywords in alphabetical order, detailing the main areas of discussion. **Your transcript is not finished until you have written this.**

Here's an example:

Peter Rankin

Actor. Audiences; Lionel Bart; Brendan Behan; Peter Brook; Cinderella; critics; dialogue; Joan Littlewood; Ewan MacColl; Oh What a Lovely War; playwrights; Gerry Raffles; rehearsals; Royal Court Theatre; Shakespeare; theatre-going; Theatre Workshop; Kenneth Tynan.

VII. How long will it take to transcribe the interview?

This varies from interview to interview. Experienced transcribers take about seven hours per hour of interview, but if this is the first time you've transcribed, you should expect it to take longer.

There is a piece of free transcription playback software called 'Express Scribe' that you can download from www.nch.com.au/scribe. It allows you to isolate and loop particular passages from the interview, and slow down the interviewee's speech so that you can work out what is being said.

This guide was written by Alec Patton (aypatton@gmail.com) with advice from Jamie Andrews, Steve Cleary, Lada Price, Dominic Shellard, and Michelle Winslow.

Elements of these guidelines are taken from 'Oral History Interviews - Overview and Guidelines', by Dominic Shellard (2007)

For more information on the Theatre Archive Project, visit <http://www.bl.uk/theatrchive>



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 3.0 Unported License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 Second Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.

Frequently misspelled names and words

Names

Frith Banbury
Binkie Beaumont
Brendan Behan
Bertolt Brecht
Anton Chekhov
George Devine
Michael Frayn
Bamber Gascoigne
John Gielgud
Simon Gray
Alec Guinness
Harold Hobson
Frankie Howerd
Vivien Leigh
Joan Littlewood
Geraldine McEwan
Peter Nichols
Laurence Olivier
John Osborne
Joan Plowright
Peggy Ramsay
Ralph Richardson
Michel Saint-Denis
Paul Scofield
Kenneth Tynan
Mary Ure

Words

Repertory
Revue