

Managing Sound

What kind of sounds are you collecting?

- Interviews/ life stories
- Group conversations
- Vox pops (opinions)
- Music/ songs
- Poems
- Recipes

Why collect sound?

- To preserve the past
- To record change over time
- To create soundscapes/ trails
- To share on social media
- To include in publications/exhibitions
- For future research

How do we collect it?

Recording

Often projects use Zoom H or Tascam DR recorders. Both of these have internal microphones, and can use external microphones if required. Whatever you are using, make sure it records in .wav format – this is an uncompressed file format suitable for archiving. Make sure you are recording settings are at least 44.1kHz and 16 bit. The peaks of sound waves (loudest sections) should be between -6dB and -12dB on your recorder. How to set up a recorder: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pc6T2Amqvxc&feature=youtu.be>. How to set your recording level: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WAw9F1HLjql>.

Transfer

Once you have pressed STOP on the recorder, the audio file will save onto the memory card. Take the card out and copy the file onto your PC. Compare its size (Right click > Properties) on the card and on the PC to make sure it has copied correctly. Keep a backup on a hard disc. Rename your file so that other people will know what it is.

Permissions

Think carefully about what you will be doing with the sounds you record. It's really important that you ask whether participants are happy for any re-use or access you have planned, and that you ask them to transfer their copyright to your project if appropriate. It is important that your participants do not feel misrepresented by your project. Make sure they get an information sheet before recording and a recording agreement afterwards. Read the Oral History Society's advice: <http://www.ohs.org.uk/advice/data-protection/>.

Describing

Project log (essential)

Use a spreadsheet to keep track of your project. Each recording should have one row. Make sure you have columns for: name of interviewee/performer, brief biography, name of

interviewer, date of recording, date of birth, number of tracks, whether the index is complete, whether the recording agreement is signed, copyright, what re-use is allowed, etc. The more information you capture in one place, the better.

Index (essential)

A summary is a quick description of each track to help people work out whether they want to listen to it. Start each new question or section with a new line and a time-code to help listeners to jump to the bit of the interview they are most interested in [eg. 01:45 means 1 hour 45 minutes into the track]. Writing an index for an hour's recording can take an hour and a half. Make sure you budget time to do this for all your interviews!

Transcription (optional)

A transcription is a verbatim record of the interview – every words and um and ah that is spoken. It takes a professional transcriber at least six hours to type up each hour of audio so it is very expensive. Most projects do not use full transcripts – or choose only to transcribe the small segments of interviews being used in exhibitions.

For more on describing oral history and on other aspects of interviewing see the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Education Trust's oral history toolkit: <http://www.racearchive.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/oral-history-toolkit.pdf>

Sharing

You will probably want to create extracts from your full-length interviews for exhibition or online use. It is important to describe these extracts, and explain their context, in a responsible way so that you do not misrepresent the people on the recording.

Short extracts are really good for publicising your project, and for engaging people with it online. However you should only place audio on third-party websites like Soundcloud or AudioBoom if you have permission to do so. Audacity is a free, open-source piece of software which can be used to edit sound files: <https://www.audacityteam.org/>.

Listen online

- Recordings from the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre: <http://www.racearchive.org.uk/community/audio/>
- British Library sound archive (music, wildlife, soundscapes, oral history): <https://sounds.bl.uk/Oral-history>
- Working Class Movement Library's Invisible Histories: <https://invisiblehistoriesproject.wordpress.com/>
- Yemeni Community Association: <http://www.yemeni-community-manchester.org.uk/yemeni-roots-salford-lives/life-stories>
- Belle Vue oral history: <http://bellevue.manchesterhistories.co.uk/oral-history>
- Archivesplus Soundcloud: <https://soundcloud.com/archivesplus/sets>