Standards for Oral History Interview and Transcription

The Bronx Jewish History Project
https://research.library.fordham.edu/bjhp/

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1. Introduction

The Bronx Jewish History Project (BJHP) is an oral history project and archive created through Fordham University's Center for Jewish Studies. It joins a larger group of Bronx-based oral history projects at the university, such as the Bronx African American History Project, the Bronx Italian American History Initiative, and the Bronx Irish History Project. Joining oral history interviews with artifacts donated by Jewish Bronxites, the BJHP seeks to preserve the voices of Bronx Jews often neglected in larger histories of American Jewish life and New York City.

Given that the heyday of the Jewish Bronx took place between 1920 and 1960, the importance of recording and archiving these memories cannot be understated. As time passes, there are fewer people that can speak on their experiences in the Bronx. Conducting oral history interviews not only helps capture their memories, but also the added level of emotion that is difficult, if not impossible, to capture through artifacts alone.

All of the interviews conducted by the BJHP are recorded and their transcriptions are uploaded, along with a summary, to the Fordham library digital archive. The BJHP is committed to maintaining an open-access and cost-free archive so that anyone, whether a scholar or community member, can have access to these important stories.

The BJHP and its researchers hold themselves to the following standard set forth by the Oral History Association:

> All those who use oral history interviews should strive for intellectual honesty and the best application of the skills of their discipline. They should avoid stereotypes, misrepresentations, and manipulations of the narrator's words. This includes foremost striving to retain the integrity of the narrator's perspective, recognizing the subjectivity of the interview, and interpreting and contextualizing the narrative according to the professional standards of the applicable scholarly disciplines. Finally, if a project deals with community history, the interviewer should be sensitive to the community, taking care not to reinforce thoughtless stereotypes. Interviewers should strive to make the

> interviews accessible to the community and where appropriate to include representatives of the community in public programs or presentations of the oral history material.[1]

The purpose of this guide is to expand upon the earlier stated goal of accessibility. Not only do we want the interviews to be accessible, but we want participation in *doing* oral history to be accessible as well. The standards set forth below for interviewing and transcribing are designed so that anyone who is interested in participating in this project, regardless of their experience, should be able to do so. Not only do we hope to create an archive that shows the importance of the Jewish Bronx, but to create a whole group of new experts on the Jewish Bronx and oral history who can advocate for the importance of both. The Bronx community always needs more advocates, and those who have in-depth knowledge of its past are much more qualified to understand what improvements can be made in the present.

This guide relies primarily on the following sources to create specific standards for the needs of the BJHP while also aligning these standards with the foremost practices in the field of oral history:

https://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/43912.pdf

https://www.nypap.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/CCOHRTranscriptStyleGuide2018.pdf

https://oralhistory.org/best-practices/

https://oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices-revised-2009/

[1] https://oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices-revised-2009/

2. A Short History of the Jewish Bronx

The Bronx got its name from Jonas Bronck, a Dutch sea captain of Swedish origin, who in 1639 settled in the area then part of New Netherland. The river near Bronck's homestead became known as Bronck's River, and over time this appellation was applied to the entire area, its spelling altered to "Bronx." The Bronx was once home to a series of estates and farmland, until its southern districts x (the neighborhoods of Melrose, Morrisania, and Hunts Point) began to be developed in the middle of the 1800's. It was considered to be a suburban escape from the city, still easily accessible with the new train lines that were being built to bring workers to their jobs in Manhattan.

In 1898, the Bronx became a borough of New York City. It was around this time that the Bronx and the larger city were expanding rapidly, both in terms of population and the housing needed to accommodate the influx of people. "New" immigrants were arriving en masse to the city from the 1880's to the 1920's from Southern and Eastern Europe, primarily Italians and Jews. Between 1880 and 1924, nearly two-and-a half million Eastern European Jews immigrated to the United States and 85% of them landed in New York City.[2] Most of these Jews (75%) settled on the Lower East Side originally, but by the second decade of the twentieth century, Jewish neighborhoods had developed in upper Manhattan, Brooklyn, and, especially by the 1920s, the Bronx. The Bronx in the first half of the twentieth century was a placed that immigrants and their families aspired to: it had larger, safer housing and more parks, and maintained easy access to Manhattan through the expansion of the subway system (primarily the Third Avenue Elevated, called the "El," which no longer exists, and the Independent line, which is now the D train that runs under the Grand Concourse).

Settling in the Bronx, Jews brought with them the institutions they had created on the Lower East Side and in other parts of the city that gave Jewish enclaves of the Bronx a Jewish feel: synagogues and other communal organizations, kosher delicatessens and butchers, etc. Many Jews engaged in small businesses of various kinds, especially along the famed Bathgate Avenue where mom-and-pop shops

[2] Jewish New York, 79

lined the street. Jews also brought to the Bronx working-class political consciousness, seen through the cooperative housing (or co-ops) created by various Jewish labor unions and political groups in the Bronx.

Because of restrictive immigration laws passed in 1921 and 1924, Jewish immigration slowed down significantly until after World War II, when Holocaust survivors, and later Jews from the Soviet Union, began coming to the United States and settling in the Bronx, though still in much smaller numbers than the earlier wave of immigration. Because of this, many of the people interviewed for the Bronx Jewish History Project are third generation Americans, with the grandparents being the immigrant generation and their parents born in the United States. Like other Americans, Jews in the Bronx struggled to get through the Great Depression and many Jews served in World War II. The Bronx was seen as the place for the fulfillment of the American Dream.

The Jewish Bronx was at its height between the 1920's and 1950's, but we must remember the Bronx was and remains a series of neighborhoods. Especially then, these were largely ethnically and racially segregated neighborhoods. This means that while Jews made up nearly half of the Bronx population overall at the middle of the twentieth century, it was typical, as in other parts of New York City, that there were predominantly Jewish neighborhoods and non-Jewish neighborhoods. Because these neighborhoods were created voluntarily and not through legally enforced segregation, they changed over time and were never completely exclusive. Once, the South/East Bronx was predominantly Jewish, but as Jews began to move up to nicer areas of the North/West Bronx these neighborhoods changed to accommodate new groups. Typically, the poorer areas of the Bronx were more integrated, whether because of the financial inability of Jews and other white ethnics (Italians, Irish) to leave or because of working-class solidarity and leftist/ unionist leanings. This does not mean that the ethnic makeup of the area did not change from street to street or that Jews and other ethnic and racial groups did not go to school together, but that issues over "turf" and religious difference did exist.

The decline of the Jewish Bronx in the decades after World War II is part of larger trends in the Jewish community, in New York City, and in the United States.

Jewish upward mobility, often abetted by such government programs as the GI Bill and subsidized housing loans (both of which largely benefitted white Americans, a category in which Jews were included by this time), encouraged a move to the suburbs, as did the expansion of the national highway system. The 1960's and 1970's marked a period of instability and rapid change for the United States, with the Civil Rights Movement, the assassinations of JFK, MLK Jr., and RFK, the Vietnam War, the Cold War, Women's Liberation, and more. By the 1970s, New York City also began a period of decline, during which financial problems led to near bankruptcy for the city in 1975 and the cutting back on valuable programs like education and parks and recreation. Crime increased, and large swaths of the Bronx fell victim to waves of arson. At the same time, African Americans and Puerto Ricans began moving to the Bronx in larger numbers exacerbating Jewish fears of neighborhood decline. Bronx Jews were responding to these opportunities and crises when they began moving out of the Bronx and into the city's surrounding suburbs. Today, the Bronx is the least Jewish borough in New York City.

2.1 Important Ideas to Keep in Mind

Explained below are a few key terms/ concepts related to Jewish Bronx history that are important to keep in mind as you conduct interviews.

"The South Bronx":

Today, the term the "South Bronx" is used to refer to any area of the Bronx south of Fordham Road, but this was not always the case and it did not always carry the negative association that it does today. As many oral history interviewees may remind you, "South Bronx" was not a commonly used term before the era of arson and disinvestment in the 1970's and 1980's. Instead, the Bronx was "divided" into the East and West Bronx, demarcated by the Grand Concourse (which was the "Champs Elysee" of the Bronx, considered the nicest and highest class area of the borough). Even this gets confusing depending on who you ask, because, as stated above, the Bronx was a series of neighborhoods. For the most part, the North/ West Bronx was considered nicer, more middle-class, whereas the South/ East Bronx was considered rougher, more working-class. This was not a hard-and-fast rule (for example, the Pelham Parkway area was much nicer despite being in the East

Bronx, whereas the Highbridge area, near Yankee Stadium, was older and more overcrowded even during the height of the Jewish Bronx, despite being West of the Grand Concourse). Be conscious when talking about the South Bronx or East vs West Bronx, as well the labels themselves have changed over time they are reflective of real class-based differences that made up the Bronx and that people still have strong attitudes about today. There is also an existing sense of loss surrounding the Bronx, but particularly the South Bronx, as an area that was once more than half Jewish became the poster child for urban decay, with over 40% of South Bronx housing being burned or abandoned between 1970 and 1980, with some areas losing up to 97% of their housing. Today, much of this has been rebuilt, but negative stereotypes about poverty, crime, and the residents of the South Bronx still exist today.

“The Projects”:

Like the “South Bronx,” “the projects” has become a term synonymous with negative stereotypes of poverty, drug use, gang violence, etc. But this was not always the case. Public housing projects arose in the Bronx primarily after World War II as a way to deal with veterans coming back from the war and seeking housing for their growing families. Many of them were sought out by low- and middle-income families as safe and affordable places to raise their children. They contained diverse mixes of people from all ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds. It was not until white families started to move out like in other parts of the Bronx, and the drug epidemic worsened, that public housing projects gained their notoriety. Some prominent examples of Bronx public housing projects include the Bronx River Houses, the Marble Hill Houses, the Sedgwick Houses (home of the party that created hip hop), and the Edenwald Houses (the word “projects” can be interchangeable with “houses”).

Co-op City:

Working for the BJHP, you are more than likely to hear at some point “Co-op City destroyed the Jewish Bronx” or even just “Co-op City destroyed the Bronx.” Opened in 1968, Co-op City was built in the Northeast Bronx as the largest cooperative housing development in the world. It boasted affluence and

affordability: larger, air conditioned apartments that you were able to buy into at the fraction of the price of a suburban home. This appealed to Jewish Bronxites, especially from middle-class areas like the Grand Concourse. Did this exodus really cause the entire Bronx to enter into decline? Unlikely, as many people moving there were already citing crime and other indicators of neighborhood decline as a reason they wanted to move to the co-op. Co-op City was alternatively supposed to be the saving grace of the Jewish Bronx, a safe place at a distance from other, declining areas of the Bronx while still being in the borough and an easy train ride to Manhattan. Yet, it is undeniable that by quickening the pace of middle-class Jews and others out of their former Bronx enclaves, it did hasten the self-fulfilling prophecy of neighborhood turnover (the empty apartments were filled by the next up and coming group, predominantly African Americans and Puerto Ricans).

"The Bronx Was Changing":

This is another phrase often repeated by oral history participants to refer to both the changing of the physical landscape of the Bronx and the racial makeup of Bronx residents. Race and racism are an undeniable part of why Jews left the Bronx, even if these ideas are combined with others such as class (Black and brown people are associated with being poorer) or crime (Black and brown people are associated with increases of crime). It can both be true that the Bronx became more impoverished and increased in crime during this time period while also being true that racist motivations for leaving existed. Race is an inherently uncomfortable topic of conversation, especially for Jews who tend to see themselves as more liberal and progressive in this regard than other Americans. Jews were the first to allow African Americans to begin renting in the Bronx in the 1930's and had been living in neighborhoods with African Americans, taking public transportation with African Americans, going to school with African Americans, etc. since that time period. It was after World War II that the proportions of white ethnics like Jews, Italians, and Irish started to become less comparatively to African Americans and Puerto Ricans that these white ethnics began seeing the racial makeup of *their* neighborhoods changing and began to seek to move elsewhere (note, even if African Americans and Puerto Ricans had wanted to move out of the declining neighborhoods too, racist housing policies like redlining would have largely

prevented them from doing so). If the interviewee says "the Bronx was changing" without offering any further explanation, you can and should push them to explain what they mean by this. Oral history is a great platform for reflection, something it is far better at than establishing facts.

2.2 Further Reading

The best way to see what you can expect in conducting and transcribing interviews for the BJHP is to read through previous interview transcripts on the BJHP website. If you are interested in learning more about the Jewish Bronx or the Bronx in general, you can check out these sources:

Primary Sources:

Freedman, Samuel G. *Who She Was: My Search for My Mother's Life*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2005.

Gay, Ruth. *Unfinished People: Eastern European Jews Encounter America.* New York: W.W. Norton, 1996.

Gornick, Vivian. *Fierce Attachments*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1987.

Simon, Kate. *Bronx Primitive*. New York: Penguin Books, 1982.

Secondary Sources:

Gonzalez, Evelyn. *The Bronx*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2004.

Gurock, Jeffrey S. *Jews in Gotham: New York Jews in Changing City, 1920-2010.* New York: New York University Press, 2012.

Gurock, Jeffrey S. *Parkchester: A Bronx Tale of Race and Ethnicity.* New York, NY: New York University Press, 2019.

Jonnes, Jill. *South Bronx Rising: The Rise, Fall, and Resurrection of an American City.* New York: Fordham University Press, 2002.

Kugelmass, Jack. *The Miracle of Intervale Avenue: The Story of a Jewish Congregation in the South Bronx.* New York: Schocken, 1986.

Moore, Deborah Dash. *At Home in America: Second Generation New York Jews.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1981.

Moore, Deborah Dash, Jeffrey S. Gurock, Annie Polland, Howard B. Rock, and Daniel Soyer. *Jewish New York: The Remarkable Story of a City and a People*. New York: New York University Press, 2017.

Rosenblum, Constance. *Boulevard of Dreams:Heady Times, Heartbreak, and Hope along the Grand Concourse in the Bronx.* New York: New York University Press, 2009.

Sammartino, Annemarie. *Freedomland: Co-op City and the Story of New York*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2022.

3. Standards for Interviewing

Before anything else, establishing the interviewee's consent and comfort must be done. Without these things there is no interview.

Consent:

Getting the interviewee's consent is your legal obligation. This takes two forms, oral and written consent. Before you begin recording the interview, you must ask for their consent, such as "Do I have your permission to record this interview?" At the end of the interview, let the interviewee know that you will be sending them a written consent form for them to fill out (if the interview is in person, you can have a copy of the document ready for them to fill out and sign). The written consent form is accessible on the BJHP Google Drive and should be sent to the interviewee in a timely manner, usually within 24 hours. While you can clarify any questions you or they may have about the document, you must respect their decision and not do anything with the interview that you do not have explicit permission to do.

Note: Sending a document online can get confusing for some people, especially dealing with a predominantly elderly population with the BJHP. Expect that you may need to lend technology help or send and receive the document through the *gasp* mail.

Comfort:

While this may not be a legal obligation, comfort is equally important as consent. Interviewees are much more likely to be open to sharing about their lives if you create a welcoming environment for them first. Part of this is allowing them to get to know you a bit first: share what year you are in at Fordham, why you chose to get involved with this research, any personal connections you might have to Jewish life or the Bronx, etc. Before you begin recording, also ask them if they have any questions for you, about yourself or the project. Typically, people like to know what their interview is going to be used for. In response to that, you can stress that the interview is kept general and accessible so that any scholar (or anyone who is

interested in the Bronx, the time period, Jewish life, etc.) is able to enjoy them. If the interview is in person, you may even think about providing snacks or coffee/ tea to offer them.

Note: Many people like to hear that their families will have access to the interviews. Given the predominantly elderly population of interviewees, one way to think about this project is preservation of memories and family stories that would otherwise disappear should these people pass away. It is such important work!

Note: Answer any questions they have throughout the process fully and honestly, but, of course, you should not feel obligated to share any personal information about yourself that you do not want to. In the same way that it should feel like a safe and comfortable environment for the interviewee, it should feel the same for you, the interviewer. If you are ever in a situation where you feel unsafe or uncomfortable while doing an interview, remove yourself as soon as possible and let Dr. Soyer or someone else at the university know.

3.1 Before the Interview

Scheduling the Interview:

Prospective interviewees are in a list on a Google Sheets document with their contact information and any other important information they have shared. They will all be asked to fill out the BJHP Intake Questionnaire, but often they will not have done so. It is a helpful source of information, but do not worry if they do not fill out a form, often it seems long/ intimidating or they are too busy to fill it out. Nonetheless, you will be prepared.

Reach out to them over email, if available, and explain who you are, clarify that they are still interested in being interviewed, if they would prefer zoom, the phone,

or in person, and offer dates/ times that work for you. An example of such an email is below:

"Good morning _____,

I hope this email finds you well. My name is _____ and I am a researcher for the Bronx Jewish History Project. I am reaching out to you because you have expressed interest in being interviewed for our project. Are you still interested?

If you are, I would love to find a time to schedule the interview with you. I am available on Tuesday and Friday of next week, August 1 and 4, anytime that works for you. Please let me know at your earliest convenience.

I look forward to hearing from you.

All the best,
_____"

Note: In order to avoid confusion, add the month and date whenever you are discussing an interview, even if you are talking about "this week," "next week," etc. Also, when you are determining the specific time of a zoom call, be sure to verify that they are in the same time zone as you or what time it would be in their area. You do not want to be waiting for someone to join a call at 11am Eastern Time, only for them to join an hour later at 11am Central Time when you have already moved on with your day thinking they stood you up.

It is best practice to send the interviewee a reminder email the day before. If you want, you can choose to send the zoom link then, so that they have it readily available the next day. This could look like:

"Good morning _____,

This is just your friendly reminder about our meeting tomorrow, August 1, at 1pm EST. Find below the zoom link. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns between now and then and I will be happy to answer them!

ZOOM LINK

All the best,
_____”

Note: Something the interviewee may ask is the expected length of the interview. This is something that you will come to find as you conduct the interviews with your prepared list of questions, but the standard is typically an hour, more or less.

Note: Be prepared when scheduling interviews for them to go over time. If you believe the interview will take one hour, block out two hours of your time in case it goes over or starts late.

Preparing Your Questions:

You should have a list of questions prepared for the interview ahead of time. They may vary slightly depending on the person (especially if they have provided you with specific information to ask about in the questionnaire), but they should be in a general enough format to be adapted to each specific situation. The questions should be open ended, so that the interviewee can take it in the direction they prefer. The list of questions should be longer than you think you need, always having extra in case the person needs extra guidance in what they should share. You can refer to the previous interviews in the BJHP Google Drive for lists of standard questions, but feel free to add your own questions if you have areas of particular research interest.

Note: Some people may ask for a list of the questions ahead of time so that they can prepare. Provide it to them, and be clear that you may ask other follow up questions depending on how the conversation goes.

Note: There may be instances where you hardly get to ask any of your questions, and the interviewee just continues sharing on their own path from the beginning. That is OK! While you want to be prepared for anything, someone who is open to sharing is the ideal. You may just need to put them back on track if they stray too far from the purpose of the project, the Jewish Bronx.

Note: Do your best to make yourself as knowledgeable about the topic area as possible before coming in. Besides general knowledge about the Jewish Bronx at the time, if the person shares with you ahead of time that they were involved in cooperative housing, teachers strikes, protests against the Vietnam War, etc. you should try your best to give yourself a good background and plan some specific questions before the interview.

3.2 During the Interview

Location:

The interviews should be conducted in a quiet location with minimal background noise, whether in person or on zoom. This helps the interview be more understandable not only in the moment, so that people are not constantly repeating themselves, but also when you go to do the transcription. Also try to limit other forms of distraction, unless they are unavoidable (fire trucks, pets, etc.).

Consent:

As explained above, you should ask for the oral consent to record the interview before you begin. Then, at the end, you should let them know that you will share a written consent form with them and that they need to fill out the written consent form in order to be included in the archive.

Recording Device:

If you are on zoom, it is easy to record the interview. After asking permission, hit the record button on the bottom of the screen. The interviewee will have to click "Ok" to acknowledge the recording. If you are in person, you can use a phone with voice memos or a different voice recorder device.

Note: Make sure it is actually recording! It may be helpful to have multiple devices to record the audio, in case one stops working, especially if you are in person.

Active Listening:

While you are the interviewer, your role more than anything is active listening. Preface the interview with the fact that your questions are open-ended on purpose, so that it is up to the interviewee how they would like to answer them. You should be actively listening to their responses, taking notes when you deem it necessary and nodding along to make sure they feel like they are being heard. Ask follow up and clarification questions when you feel they are necessary, but do not interrupt them if possible. You are there to guide them when they need it, not to choose their path for them.

You should push them to deepen their responses, within reason. Oral history is most useful in asking their personal opinions and feelings about their experiences growing up, not for just establishing fact. For instance, while it is important to know what street they lived on, it is also important to ask how they felt about leaving at the time. As the interviewer, you should be objective, not using your platform to perpetuate any stereotypes or push for answers that are aligned with

your particular agenda. It is perfectly fine if the interviewee continues sharing about their life and experiences beyond the Jewish Bronx, as long as that is not the only focus of the interview.

Towards the end of the interview, you can ask them if there is anything else they would like to add that you have not touched on at that point. This is a good way to close once you have asked all your questions, and may reveal more interesting information that you would not have thought to ask about.

3.3 After the Interview

Immediately after the interview, you should upload the audio and/ or video to the BJHP Google Drive. Doing this immediately helps ensure that the interview will not be lost should anything happen to your physical device. It will also make it accessible to other members of the BJHP team, so that they can begin transcribing it.

You should follow up with the interviewee over email to thank them for their time and to send them the written release form. You should do this in a timely manner so the interview is still on their mind. The form is available on the BJHP Google Drive and you should send it as a Word document attachment so it is editable. They may send it back as a Word document, PDF, or on paper. All are fine so long as you upload a copy of the document into the BJHP Google Drive as soon as you have it, so that it is in the BJHP's records for any future reference. A follow up email could look like this:

"Hello _____,

Thank you again for taking the time to speak with me yesterday. As promised, find attached the written release form. If you could please fill it out, sign it, and return it to me, that would be greatly appreciated.

Take care,
_____"

4. Standards for Transcription

Below are the standards for transcribing oral history interviews with the BJHP. Because the people transcribing the interviews will change from semester to semester or year to year, it is important to maintain set standards for consistency throughout all of the interviews. In certain instances, the standards are very rigid, such as the document headings. This is to maintain In other instances, the standards are looser, leaving the decision to the discretion of the transcriber, like inclusion of reflexive phrases (ex: "you know"). This is because the transcriber listening to the interview will know best how to maintain the authentic voice of the interviewee. After all, our goal is twofold at the BJHP: to accurately represent the stories of the oral history participants and to make the stories as accessible as possible. Transcription is the essential bridge between these two ideas.

Note: The instructions are written for Google Docs. It may be slightly different if you are using Word.

4.1 General Formatting

Font and Size:
All transcripts should be written in Times New Roman, 12 size font with 1.15 spacing and 1 inch margins.

Headings:
All transcriptions should have the same heading on the first page, written in the header box and aligned to the right. The information should be arranged as follows:

Interviewee: *First Name Last Name*
Interviewer: *First Name Last Name*
Date: *Month Day, Year*
Page 1

Note: Before writing the heading, make sure to click the "Different first page" box on the header. This header is only for the first page. After you write out "Page," click "Options", then "Page Numbers," then "Apply." This will apply page numbers to all the pages, which is what you want.

Note: If a participant marks on their permission form that they do *not* want their name included in the transcript, you must honor their request. Clarify with them if they would like to be completely anonymous, in which case you could put "Anonymous" next to "Interviewee," or if they would prefer a nickname or other pseudonym. For example, "Thomas Sawyer" may request using "Tom" to maintain his anonymity, which you would write in quotations next to "Interviewee."

Note: If you do not know the date of the interview, you should write "Date: unknown" instead of omitting the line completely, to maintain consistency throughout all of the transcripts.

For every page after the first page, the header should just read "Page #". For example "Page 6."

The first line on the first page, after the header, should read:

"Transcriber: *First Name Last Name*"

Note: If there are multiple transcribers, interviewees, or interviewers, separate the names with a comma. For example, "Interviewers: Joe DiMaggio, Babe Ruth, Mickey Mantle"

Labeling Speakers:

The first time a speaker speaks, their name should be written out in full with their initials in parentheses next to it. After the first time, you can just use their initials. For example:

Michael Jackson (MJ): → MJ:

Note: If they asked to be identified by a nickname or pseudonym, you can use the name throughout, not a single initial. For example, "Tom:"

4.2 Editing

False Starts: False starts are sentences and/or words that are cut short before they are completed. In the case that the false start because of a correction, you can omit the false start and leave the correction. For example:

"The store was on East 182nd — 183rd street" → "The store was on East 183 street"

If the false start is interrupted by another thought, but the person returns to the false start, you can omit the false start and leave the repetition. If they do not return to the false start, you should leave the false start. A return would look like this:

"When I was in high school, I had — when I was in middle school, I hated math, but when I was in high school I met the best math teacher" → "When I was in middle school, I hated math, but when I was in high school I had the best math teacher"

Not returning would look like this:

"That year I turned — I was born in 1960, so I was 16."

These guidelines for false starts are subjective. It is up to the transcriber to include or not include false starts if they believe that they are essential to the meaning of

the oral history or the interviewee's speech. If you leave the false start in, separate with a dash "—".

Note: The same rule applies with statements inserted into others. For example: "Back then I bought — things were so different — a dozen eggs for 25 cents."

Unfinished Sentences: Like to false starts, you can mark an unfinished sentence with a dash "—".

Reflexive Phrases: Reflexive phrases do not contribute to the sentence and are typically repeated space fillers as people process their thoughts. Some examples are "so," "you know," "well," "kind of," etc. You can omit these phrases, unless they are essential to maintaining the core of the text. In the case you feel they are important, you can leave a limited number in the transcription, so long as it does not take away from the other content.

Non-Lexical Sounds: Examples of these sounds include agreement or disagreement, like "uh-huh," and fillers like "um." You generally should not include these in the transcription. If the agreement or disagreement is in response to a question, you can replace the word with "yes" or "no."

Note: Often the interviewer will make noises to indicate that they are following along with the interviewee's story. You do not need to transcribe them, as they will break up the text and make it more confusing to read.

Non-Verbal Communication: For noises or movements from the speaker that are relevant to the text, you can include them in brackets next to the speech. Some examples are:

[Laughs] , [Claps] , [Sighs] , [Gasps] , [Sings] , [Imitates Accent] , [Refers to Picture]

Note: These additions should be in the third person, not gerund.

Corrections: If what the person says is factually incorrect or a clarification is necessary when the interviewee did not correct themselves, you can insert the correction in brackets where the word would have been. This should be used rarely and only when absolutely necessary to make it clear to the reader of the transcript.

Quotation Marks: Quotation marks can be used when the speaker is directly quoting themselves or someone else. They are not necessary for internal dialogue, but can be used to the discretion of the transcriber if it is helpful for the understanding of the text. The dialogue phrases should begin with a capital letter, regardless of if there are quotations or not. Here is an example of both:

JK: And Marie Antoinette said, "Let them eat cake!"
DF: I thought to myself, No she didn't. Marie Antoinette never said that.

Note: If the speaker "quote, unquote" or motions air quotes, you can include the word or phrase in quotation marks instead of writing "quote, unquote" or "[Air quotes]".

4.3 Proper nouns and other unfamiliar words

Proper Nouns: When an interviewee uses the name of a person, place, etc. that you are unfamiliar with, there are a variety of routes to take. First, you can try looking it up online. Typically, with names of places, that is the easiest route, even if your spelling is initially slightly off. With names of people it can be more difficult, and you may want to send the transcript back to the interviewee for them to review it and correct the spelling. If there are only a few instances of this, you can ask the interviewee directly, such as "How do you spell your father's name?" or "How do you spell your maiden name?".

Note: Even if you are confident in your spelling of a place, you should look it up to verify, as somethings are not as straightforward as they seem or the person's pronunciation could cause you to write the wrong place. For example, you may write "Kew Gardens" in Queens as "Q Gardens."

Note: If you are unable to verify the spelling of a word, you can insert "[phonetic]" after it to mark that it is the phonetic spelling of the word you are attempting.

Foreign Language: Transcribing for the BJHP, people may use words or phrases in other languages; Yiddish is the most common. You should always provide a translation next to the phrase in brackets, and any phrase in a language other than English should be italicized. For languages that do not use the Latin alphabet, like Yiddish and Hebrew, you should transliterate them, i.e. write them out phonetically in latin characters. For help transcribing and translating words in foreign languages, you can use Google Translate but also should reach out to Dr. Soyer for his or another professor's help who speaks the language.

Here is an example of how Yiddish could be incorporated:

"I told him we're *mishpucha* [family] no matter what."

Indecipherable Words: When you cannot understand what the person has said even after multiple listens, you can write "[unclear]" where that word would have been in the text.

Simultaneous Speech: When multiple people are speaking at the same time and the recording becomes unclear, you can mark unknown words with "[crosstalk]", such as:

TH: I wasn't [crosstalk] —
LK: — [crosstalk] well I certainly was.

When the recording is clear enough that all the speakers can be understood even speaking at the same time, you can mark the interjections with dashes "—", such as:

TH: I wasn't —
LK: — Ready? Well I certainly —
TH: — Well you're a different person.

Vernacular and Conjunctions: When a person uses informal language like "gonna" or "wouldn't've," which they are more likely to do speaking than writing, you can replace them with the grammatically correct term(s). You can use your discretion to include these words if they add to the meaning of the transcript.

4.3.1 Significant Bronx Places

The following list is provided for an easy reference of Bronx places that transcription software may misspell or miss completely. It is not exhaustive, but made up of the most commonly repeated or commonly misspelled neighborhoods and street names.

Allerton Avenue
Bainbridge Avenue
Bathgate
Bouck Avenue
Boynton Avenue
Bruckner Boulevard
Castle Hill
Co-op City
Croes Avenue
Crotona Park
Fordham
Goulden Avenue
Grand Concourse
Highbridge
Hoe Avenue
Hunts Point
Jerome Avenue
Kingsbridge
Lydig Avenue
Mace Avenue
Melrose
Morris Avenue
Morrisania
Mosholu Parkway
Mott Haven
Ogden Avenue
Parkchester
Pelham Parkway
Riverdale
Rochambeau Avenue

Sedgwick Avenue
Tenbroeck Avenue
Thieriot Avenue
Tiebout Avenue
Tremont Avenue
Van Cortlandt Park

5. Writing Summaries

Each BJHP transcript will be uploaded to the library website with a summary. You will write the summary in a second document with the following heading aligned to the left side:

Interviewee: *First Name Last Name*
Interviewer: *First Name Last Name*
Date: *Month Date, Year*

Summarized by _____

The formatting for the summary is less important than the transcript, as the body of the summary itself will be copied and pasted directly into the library website. Nonetheless, having a standard heading is helpful for other members of the BJHP to access and edit your work.

The summary should be about 300-400 words, but it is up to the summary writer how much they want to include and what the most significant information from the oral history interview is. The summary should include major biographical information such as areas of the Bronx the person lived in, what years they were there or important events happened, and any part they played in major historical events (the Great Depression, the Vietnam War, etc.). The first time the interviewee is referred to, use their full name, and after that use their last name. Do not ever only use their first name.

The summary should also include keywords at the end that are helpful when people are searching through the archive for a specific purpose. You can refer to previous summaries on the website for common things included in the summaries and common keywords.