



South Shore Estuary Cultural Survey

- A Project of Long Island Traditions -

TIPS FOR DOCUMENTATION

Recording Interviews

By Jill Breit & Eric Bebernitz

Courtesy of Traditional Arts of Upstate New York

(<http://northcountryfolklore.org/rvsp/recordinginterviews.pdf>)

Recording interviews is a lot like driving a car. When you're learning either activity there's an overwhelming number of things to be aware of, but once you're practiced, it seems like second nature. Beginners usually have trouble dividing their attention between the equipment and the narrator or individual being interviewed. To avoid this conflict **it is important to become comfortable with your equipment prior to any interview situation**. You may want to record yourself or a family member to test the equipment, sound levels, adjusting to background noise, and so forth. Listed below are a few tips for getting started and some advice for producing a good quality recording.

Equipment Checklist. A few items are more important than others. If you are going to record an interview these are the essential items you should bring:

- Tape recorder, mini disc recorder, or any other recording device
- Extra digital cards, blank tapes, cassettes or mini discs
- Microphones, microphone stands, and windscreens (optional)
- Headphones or ear piece (optional)
- Cables, extension cords, etc
- Equipment manual(s)
- Extra batteries

Check the recording device to guarantee it is receiving sound. You can test this by plugging in the ear piece or head phones and recording your own voice or simply recording a sound and then playing it back.

Check for distracting background noises. After you set up your recording equipment and conduct a sound check, listen in your ear piece or headphone for any distracting sounds such as: refrigerators, washers, dryers, furnaces, clocks, pets, traffic, lawn mowers, etc. In many cases you can explain the situation and ask politely to change rooms, turn off the distracting appliance, or send the rowdy pet to another room.

Hard surfaces in a room will affect the quality of the sound. In a room with many hard surfaces, such as hardwood floors, the sound on tape echoes a bit. Pad the table and recording equipment by setting them on a towel or bring in pillows or other softening agents. Given different situations, like outdoor interviews, this may be impossible, however repositioning the narrator may help with this problem.

Microphone placement is critical. Listen for the popping sounds. Try positioning the mike a little below the mouth so the person speaks over the top of it instead of directly into it. Listen for other mouth noises, especially dry mouth. Sometimes the narrator just needs to take a drink. Encourage speakers to pause and sip often.

All interviews should have an introduction recorded at the beginning. State who the interviewer is, who the narrator is, the date, the location, and the subject of the interview.

Listen through headphones as the interview proceeds. Your ear hears differently than the recording equipment and the final tape will reflect sound as heard through the microphone.

Keep an eye on your equipment as the interview proceeds to be sure all is working correctly. Check the levels often. It's a good idea to record the introduction to your interview, then play it back to be sure it recorded properly. Be sure you set the equipment back on "Record" when you resume the interview.

Very soon after completing an interview, **make a duplicate copy** for safety sake.