

## Choosing digital recorders

Digital technologies allow listeners worldwide to access oral history recordings. A digital recording can be reproduced, duplicated, transferred to other formats, and edited without noticeable loss of quality. Software programs are available with features designed to attach metadata to digital recordings, providing copyright, ownership, and contextual information, and to aid transcribing, with foot pedals included.

- ◆ Digital technology is enhancing the work of oral historians, but the rapid development of new devices and formats requires oral historians to keep alert to changing trends. Fortunately, online resources are available that review new developments in recorders and recording formats and make suggestions for obtaining high sound quality..
  - Inquire about current technology being used at some of the major oral history centers which maintain updated technologies. A list of oral history centers is maintained on the Oral History Association Web site at [http://www.oralhistory.org/wiki/index.php/Main\\_Page](http://www.oralhistory.org/wiki/index.php/Main_Page).
  - The Oral History Association provides an excellent, detailed guide to digital audio recording for oral history on its Web site at <http://www.oralhistory.org/technology/>.
  - Another excellent Internet source for digital audio equipment reviews and how-to's is the Tools section at Transom, at <http://transom.org/>.
  - The oral history H-Net online discussion list, H-Oralhist, furnishes a searchable archive of topics, including equipment, at <http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/~oralhist/>.
- ◆ Look for the most durable, dependable recorder you can afford. Favored among the current choices are solid-state digital recorders which record to widely available, high-capacity media, such as secure digital (SD) flash memory cards.
- ◆ Choose solid-state recorders that create uncompressed WAV or AIFF audio files in PCM format of CD quality (16-bit, 44.1kHz sampling rate) or better. Avoid digital voice recorders that create highly compressed audio files in proprietary formats (i.e., those formats exclusive to one company brand).
- ◆ Select a recorder with an output terminal which allows transfer of recordings from the recorder directly to a computer with a USB cable. You may also want to purchase a USB card reader so that you can transfer your sound files directly from the memory card to a hard drive.
- ◆ Microphones appropriate for recording oral history interviews should be *condenser* types (not *dynamic* types). Condenser microphones require a power source (called *phantom power*) supplied either by the recorder device or a separate battery. For the most secure and least noisy input, select a microphone with a balanced XLR connection, not a stereo mini-plug connection. Test the microphone carefully. Compare recordings made with the internal microphone and an external microphone and choose the method that works best for your recorder in your unique interview setting. Some digital recorders have excellent internal microphones.
- ◆ Look for recorders with lights or displays that indicate that the electrical power (battery or adapter) is working, the recording function is engaged, and the recording sound level is adequate.
- ◆ Select a recorder with both battery and electrical adapter capacities. Use electricity from a wall outlet with battery backup whenever possible. Take along an extension cord.

*Before you go, practice. Before you begin, test.  
When you are done, protect your recording.*