

Choosing digital recorders

Digital technologies allow listeners worldwide to access oral history recordings. A digital recording can be duplicated, transferred to other formats, and edited without noticeable loss of sound quality. Software programs are available with features designed to attach metadata to digital recordings, providing copyright, ownership, and contextual information, and software is available to aid transcribing, with either foot pedals or computer keystrokes to control audio playback.

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, the online resource, *Oral History in the Digital Age [OHDA]*, is now available with updated information on obtaining high sound quality for collecting, curating, and disseminating oral history. At OHDA, “Ask Doug” about your best choices for both audio and video recorders and microphones. Visit <http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/>.

Principles to guide your selection of a digital recorder for oral history:

- ◆ 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 flash memory cards.
- ◆ Choose solid-state recorders that create uncompressed PCM WAV or AIFF audio files 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., audio file formats exclusive to one company brand).
- ◆ Select a recorder with an output terminal such as USB which allows you to cable the recorder directly to a computer to transfer sound files. You may also want to purchase a USB card reader so that you can transfer your sound files directly from the removable flash memory card to a computer.
- ◆ Microphones appropriate for recording oral history interviews should be *condenser* types (not *dynamic* types). Condenser microphones require a power source supplied either by the recorder device (referred to as *phantom* power) 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 setup 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.

Are you considering recording your oral history in video ?

Approach video oral history armed with information to help you create the best possible video document and to enhance the interview experience for your narrator. OHDA is the place to learn about creating and preserving video oral history. Learn more at <http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/>.

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