## Guidance on preparing summaries

1. **The purpose of summaries**

***Summaries are to guide listeners to points in the recording that may interest them***. So the important thing is not the length, but searchable detail, such as names (e.g. Cottrell, Guiton – spelling can be checked with the interviewee after the interview), and subjects or themes that may be of interest to future researchers (e.g, library, biology, accommodation, campus, hierarchy). Abbreviations are generally avoided, apart from possibly in repeating the name of the interviewee as initials through the recording. Ideally someone browsing the summary can see the themes that are discussed and where in the recording they can hear them.

***A summary is not a word-for-word transcription, does not have to be grammatical (note form is fine, along with incomplete sentences), and is not meant as a substitute for listening to the recording but merely as a guide.***

The summaries can therefore be produced relatively quickly and efficiently. Rather than making a précis to fit a set number of words, our efforts are better spent noting the time at which the speaker begins talking about a new topic. It is probably easiest to put in the timings, and do paragraphing if feasible and appropriate, after doing the first draft of the summary. This is the most efficient way, and means you can more or less produce the first draft while listening to the recording once through.

1. **Summaries rather than transcriptions**

While short transcriptions may be made for purposes of quotation,   
summaries are preferred over full transcriptions, because a summary:

* gives priority to the voice
* avoids some problems of transcribing tone, laughter, exclamations, stumbles, pauses
* provides a more amenable guide to finding a section you may want to hear or to extract

**3. What a good summary provides**

* short guide to the contents of an oral history interview
* sufficient detail to be searchable
  + these first two factors combine to constrain the length of summary:   
    although there is no set length, 12 – 24 words a minute is a good guide
* themes that may be useful for searches/researchers:   
  summary does not have to be in the interviewees’ words (e.g. the summary may usefully refer to gender, hierarchy, Queen’s Visit; also topics that are taken-for granted between interviewee and interviewer)
* accuracy of details for searches/researchers (e.g. names)
* short guide to the contents of an oral history interview
* timing of the evolving topics in the interview

**JV/CR 9 May 2023**