

Quilters' S.O.S. - Save Our Stories Guidebook



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The Mission of Quilters' S.O.S.-Save Our Stories

Quilters' S.O.S. – Save Our Stores (QSOS) aims to eliminate the 'anonymous quiltmaker'. QSOS records, preserves and shares the stories of living quiltmakers. Volunteers conduct oral history interviews to share through an accessible online archive. Quilt Alliance curates exhibitions based on the interviews, disseminates interpretive resources, and preserves QSOS interview material in the Library of Congress.

About the Project

QSOS aims to be simple, inexpensive and inclusive; our template can be easily adopted by other organizations, (such as regional or local quilt guilds) eager to document the stories of quiltmakers in their communities. QSOS as an inclusive project conducts interviews with a wide range of quiltmakers: traditional, contemporary, modern, art quilters, teachers, novices, and members of guilds.

So, what is oral history? *Oral* - spoken word; *history* - a narrative of a remembered past. Oral history records the living memories and feelings of people and creates a more vivid picture of our past. Too many quilts of the past have undocumented makers whose stories are long gone. By interviewing quiltmakers about their quilts, QSOS aims to preserve their stories for future generations.

QSOS builds on good oral history practice to record and preserve these stories. Three working concepts guide our approach:

- **Focused Interviews**
Each QSOS interview lasts approximately forty-five minutes and serves as a recorded conversation springing from a quilt or related object. Rather than record comprehensive life histories, focused interviews target the conversation, for example, on quilt design, techniques, inspiration, and processes, along with other quilt-related topics.
- **Touchstone Object**
Each quiltmaker serving as an informant (interviewee) brings one object that she/he considers significant in her/his own quilting practice, preferably a quilt of her/his own making. The touchstone object serves as both a point of departure and reference for the interview. A touchstone serves two key purposes:
 1. framing the conversation with an object chosen by the interviewee
 2. providing a consistent point of reference throughout the interview.
- **Accessibility**
QSOS is a grassroots project, designed for anyone to easily conduct an interview. Interview equipment and techniques require minimum training. Choose any quiltmaker to interview; or find someone to interview you!

History

In the fall of 1999, Quilt Alliance (formerly known as The Alliance for American Quilts) and International Quilt Festival (IQF) introduced the *Quilters' S.O.S. – Save Our Stories* (QSOS) project. This introduction included a training followed by three days of interviewing in Houston, Texas, during the annual International Quilt Festival. QSOS volunteers conducted 127 interviews at IQF through 2002 and trained many more project volunteers.

Former Quilt Alliance board members, Bernard Herman, Marcie Cohen Ferris, Patricia Keller and Patricia Crews, developed the QSOS project. Karen Musgrave joined the group at the first training in Houston and served for many years as a dedicated volunteer, QSOS taskforce chair, and original editor of this manual. Since 1999, many additional volunteers have spearheaded regional QSOS projects around the country.

From 1999 until January 2007, Quilt Alliance partnered with the University of Delaware, Center for Material Culture Studies, under the guidance of Dr. Bernard Herman, to house QSOS records. From January 2007, the Library of Congress American Folklife Center has served as the physical archive for QSOS interview materials. Researchers, in addition to accessing interview transcripts and photographs online via the Quilt Alliance website, can access audio recordings of interviews and related materials directly from the Library of Congress.

Since its inception, QSOS has been a grassroots project with volunteer leadership. Volunteers have conducted interviews and curated exhibitions drawn from the archive. In addition, scholars have utilized the archive of interviews in their research. Quilt Alliance continues to draw on the rich resource of interviews to share the stories of quiltmakers and their quilts. QSOS continues to grow and evolve. The interviews show us the complexity and diversity of quiltmakers and their quilts. Thanks to the hard work of our volunteers, the anonymous quiltmaker has gained a voice.

Terms of Use

This manual is shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike License. It can be used, copied and shared freely, but you may not use this material for commercial purposes. If you change or adapt this manual, you must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made.

Any group or individual desiring to use the copyrighted name of “Quilters’ S.O.S. - Save Our Stories” and/or “Quilt Alliance” in conjunction with an oral history project must adhere to the policies and procedures set forth in the Manual. If you have any questions, please e-mail qsos@quiltalliance.org.

QSOS: The Basics

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

1. If possible, let the quiltmaker you plan to interview (aka your ‘informant’) know what to expect by giving her/him the “Guide for Interviewees” document found on page 16. Be sure your informant knows to bring one Touchstone Object.

2. Once you've scheduled your interview, contact Quilt Alliance (qsos@quiltalliance.org) to receive an ID number and provide your contact information.

3. Write or print the ID number on a piece of paper with black ink. Your informant will hold this number for the photograph. If you have a computer printer, printing it at a large size (150-200 point font) will work, as will writing the number with a thick black marker.

4. Gather the materials you need to conduct the interview, including items from the list below (depending on your project). The essentials are starred*.

- Digital or cassette audio recorders*
- Memory card
- Cassette Tapes
- Batteries*
- Camera*
- Pencil*
- ID number*
- Note pads for scribing/note taking
- Release forms*
- Handouts on the project
- “Quick Questions” form*
- “Interview Quadrant Questions” form*
- Clock/watch*
- Pole(s) for hanging quilts
- Backdrop for photographing quilts
- Contact details of informant
- Address of agreed location for interview

5. Familiarize yourself with your equipment.

You can record QSOS interviews digitally or on cassette tape, depending on your access to and comfort level with each technology. We recommend digital recordings because an audio file lasts longer than a cassette tape, can be edited easier for use in an exhibit or online project, and is easy to transmit over the Internet.

Digital recorders are easy to use. QSOS does not recommend a specific recorder, but we do need you to be sure you can convert your file into WAV (Waveform Audio File) format, an uncompressed, high-quality digital file. If your digital audio recorder saves files in a different format (mp3, m4a, wma), there are easy (and free) tools available to help you convert the file. You can read more about recording equipment on page 15, "Tools for Recording and Technical Guidelines".

Whatever recorder you decide to use, be sure to read the operating manual carefully, and practice recording and other functions until you become familiar with how your particular machine works. We do not recommend using the voice activation feature. It is important to record the pauses that can occur during the course of an interview. We also

recommend having a back-up recorder along to simultaneously record the interview; this way, if one recorder fails, you'll still have the interview recorded.

Cassette Tapes

If using tapes, we only accept standard-size cassette tapes rather than microcassette tapes. We recommend C90 tapes with 45 minutes on each side so that a 45 minute interview will not be interrupted by turning over the cassette.

Power Source

Your recorder will need electricity to run. This can be supplied by house current or by batteries. The advantage of using house current is that it is dependable and cheaper but you will need an AC adapter and extension cord.

If using batteries, we recommend fresh batteries for every interview so that your batteries do not die in the middle of an interview. Always take spare batteries.

5. Upon meeting your informant for the interview, have her/him fill out and sign the following:

- A permission form
- A participant and quilt information form which includes the date the quilt was made, title, where it was made and dimensions
- A "Quick Question" form about her/his quilting experience; getting these basic yes/no questions out of the way allows the interview to have more depth

6. Before beginning the interview, take a digital photograph of the quiltmaker holding the ID number and posing alongside the touchstone object they've selected.

CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW

1. Begin the interview by pressing record on your recorder and introducing yourself and the project, like this:

This is [your name]. Today's date is [date], it is [time], and I'm conducting an interview with [informant's name] for Quilters' S.O.S. - Save Our Stories project in [location and special event if applicable]. [Informant], tell me about the quilt you brought today?

2. Start with the touchstone object. Begin by asking your informant about the object she/he brought to the interview. The object will then serve as a reference point for the rest of the interview.

3. Use the list of Quadrant Questions as a guide (see page 12), but do not stick rigidly to them. Think of the questions as a loose agenda rather than a checklist. These questions will help you effectively start the interview and regain focus should the conversation veer off on a tangent. These questions are open-ended to allow informants to volunteer their own accounts, to speculate on matters, and to have enough time to include material they think is relevant. In framing an open-ended question, you can use a two-sentence format. The first sentence should state the problem; the second poses the question. "Over 50,000 people attended International Quilt Festival. How do you account for this kind of interest?"

Try to ask questions from each of the four quadrants. If it helps you structure the interview, you can devote around 10 minutes to each quadrant; otherwise, let questions and conversation flow freely between the quadrant topics.

4. When you finish the interview, thank your informant and make a closing statement, with your name and the informant's name, the time, and the project's name, before stopping your recorder.
5. We've included tips for a successful interview on page 9

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

The Transcription Process

You can transcribe your recording yourself, find another volunteer to help with this step, or hire a professional transcriber. Transcribing an interview can take anywhere from 4-10 hours (sometimes more) depending on the skill of the transcriber and the quality of the recording. We've included guidelines for transcription on page 11.

Final Steps

1. Email the file or mail a hard copy of the transcript to the informant, requesting that she/he read it and correct any errors, such as names of people and places. Sometimes informants will realize that they made an error in the interview and want a chance to straighten the facts.
2. If you email the transcript, request that the informant make any changes to the document with "track changes" turned on; that way the interviewer can tell what changes the informant makes.
3. If mailed, request that the informant make any changes to the hard copy with a colored pen so that all changes are obvious.
4. You may use the sample cover letter (page 14) explaining the process and purpose of the final reading of the transcript by the informant
5. Ask the informant to return the corrected transcript to you either by email or mail. When you receive it, note the corrections that have been made and make those corrections to your final copy. If the informant made changes electronically, save and print a version of the document showing her/his edits. If using "track changes," accept all changes to the document. The transcript is completed only when the informant has read it and checked it for errors, returned it to the interviewer, and the interviewer has made these corrections.

6. When you have completed the transcript and corrected any errors noted by the informant, you can email your final transcript to QSOS staff at qsos@quiltalliance.org. They will proof the file and get back to you with any changes that are necessary. Then you can send the following to:

Quilt Alliance
ATTN: Quilters' S.O.S. – Save Our Stories
125 S. Lexington Avenue, Suite 101
Asheville, NC 28801

1. a hard copy of the final transcript
2. the edited copy received from the informant
3. an electronic copy of the final transcript and the digital photograph burnt to a CD;
 - a. save document as: QSOSnumberLastname.doc (NC27701-002Parker.doc)
 - b. save photographs as: QSOSnumberLastnameA/B.jpg (NC27701-002ParkerA.jpg and NC27701-002ParkerB.jpg)
4. a copy of the tape or digital file from which the transcription was made;
5. the signed Release form
6. the completed Quiltmaker and Quilt Information form

Email QSOS staff at qsos@quiltalliance.org when you have mailed your interview materials to the QA office so we can be sure to expect your packet.

Tips for Successful Recorded Interviews

We've drawn on two valuable oral history guides for these tips: Edward D. Ives, *The Tape-Recorded Interview* and Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*.

1. Take your time. The goal is not to answer every question, but to have an informative conversation. Let the informant explain what they think is the most significant before you begin to narrow your question or move on to the next one. Close listening will help you develop effective follow-up questions.
2. Be yourself. Don't pretend to know more about something than you do. Never be afraid to admit that you did not understand what an informant meant. Just ask them to explain, clarify or even spell.
3. Oral history interviews are an effective means to learn stories and ideas, but not an effective way to record facts such as dates. Don't bother interrupting your informant for such clarification as it might disrupt the flow of the conversation and often informants do not have such facts on the tip of their tongues. If a date or other fact is important, tell the informant that you will follow up later regarding that information rather than belabor it during the interview.
4. Never record secretly.
5. Put a watch or clock nearby, so you gauge your time. QSOS interviews are usually around 45 minutes long.
6. During the interview, encourage your informant by paying attention. Be expressive with your face, but silent when the informant is talking. Refrain from telling your own story.
7. Try to keep your questions short and open-ended. Avoid complicated, multi-part questions.
Try to avoid asking questions that can be answered with a "yes" or a "no."
8. Don't interrupt. If you think of a question, jot it down on your note pad so you can ask later.
If your informant strays from the planned questions, it's alright. Be prepared to let your informant take the interview off in different directions. This can sometimes lead to unexpected and exciting discoveries.
9. Don't argue or refute knowledge. Keep your opinions out of the interview. Don't ask leading or "loaded" questions that suggest answers. Example, instead of asking, "Is it true that a good quilt is one with interesting design?" Ask, "What makes an interesting quilt?"

10. Keep the tape recorder running throughout the interview. Don't turn the recorder on and off except when asked to do so or when an interruption requires it. Try to avoid "off the record" information.
11. Use "probes" to elicit more detailed information. Did that happen to you more than once?
What did you think about that? What are the steps in doing that?
12. Don't fear silences. Your informant may need a moment to respond to your question. Allow the informant enough time to collect thoughts. If she/he has nothing to offer about a particular question, let them tell you so, then simply move on. Silence can also be an effective probe.

13. Take good notes. Describe any gestures and/or important actions made by the informant. Keep running notes on names, places and dates mentioned in the interview if possible.
14. Thank your informant and tell them time is just about up. Reach conclusion on any open- ended questions. Ask your informant if there are questions she/he would like to answer or additional information she/he would like to share.
15. If using a digital recorder, immediately download the file to a computer or hard drive, labeling the file with the interview ID number, informant's name, date and interviewer's name. Do the same using pencil and adhesive label if using a cassette tape.

Tips for Transcription

Transcribing a QSOS interview isn't hard, but there are just a few things to remember that will make it easier for us to archive and share your interview. If you have any questions about these guidelines, just email qsos@quiltalliance.org.

Formatting the interview:

- You can use single-spacing for the interview, but double-space between each person's turn speaking.
- No need to use:
 - Bold formatting
 - Page numbers
 - Indentation

Transcription Header (to be included in the upper left corner):

Quilt Alliance Quilters' S.O.S-Save Our Stories

Project ID Number

Interviewee Name, Interviewee

Interviewer Name, Interviewer

Your Name, Transcriber

City, State

Interview date

Time the interview started

Transcribing the interview:

- The first time each speaker makes a statement, use their full name followed by their initials in parentheses. For subsequent passages, you can just use their initials:

Emma Parker (EP): How long have you been quilting?

Jane Quilter (JQ): About 6 years.

EP: Was your mother a quilter?

JQ: She wasn't, but my grandmother was.

- If a speaker trails off or is interrupted, use two hyphens to show the break

EP: Was that when you were--

JQ: Yes, I was living in Texas at the time. I was doing a lot of applique but--

- Don't include "uh", "um", "you know" or "okay", but do your best to transcribe exactly what's on the tape. Even if a sentence doesn't make sense or doesn't finish, transcribe what you hear, not what you think the interviewee meant to say.

- Use brackets [] for any sounds or information added later. Everything inside brackets (except for names) is in lower case, underlined and has a period at the end, such as:

- [laughs.]
- [demonstrating: Joyce showed with her hands the size of the quilt's center medallion-- about 1 foot square.]
- [inaudible.]
- [speaks to her daughter who was seated at the interview table.]
- [EP and JQ speak at the same time.]
- Naperville [Illinois.]
- *QNM* [Quilter's Newsletter Magazine.]

Interview Quadrant Questions

1. Discussion of the Informant's Quilt

- Tell me about the quilt you brought in today.
- What special meaning does this quilt have for you?
- Why did you choose this quilt to bring to the interview?
- What do you think someone viewing your quilt might conclude about you?
- How do you use this quilt?
- What are your plans for this quilt?

2. Informant's Involvement in Quiltmaking

- Tell me about your interest in quiltmaking.
- At what age did you start quiltmaking?
- From whom did you learn to quilt?
- How many hours a week do you quilt?
- What is your first quilt memory?
- Are there other quiltmakers among your family or friends? Please tell me about them.
- How does quiltmaking impact your family?
- Tell me if you have ever used quilts to get through a difficult time?
- Tell me about an amusing experience that has occurred from your quiltmaking (teaching)?
- What do you find pleasing about quiltmaking?
- What aspects of quiltmaking do you not enjoy?
- What art or quilt groups do you belong to?
- Have advances in technology influenced your work? If so, how?
- What are your favorite techniques and materials?
- Describe your studio/the place that you create.
- Tell me how you balance your time.
- Do you use a design wall? If so, in what way/how does that enhance your creative process? If not, how do you go about designing your quilts?

3. The Aesthetics, Craftsmanship, and Design Aspects of Quiltmaking

- What do you think makes a great quilt?
- What makes a quilt artistically powerful?
- What makes a quilt appropriate for a museum or special collection?
- What makes a great quiltmaker?
- Whose works are you drawn to and why?
- Which artists have influenced you?
- How do you feel about machine quilting vs. hand quilting? What about long-arm quilting?

4. The Function and Meaning of Quilts in American Life

- Why is quiltmaking important to your life?
- In what ways do your quilts reflect your community or region?
- What do you think about the importance of quilts in American life?
- In what ways do you think quilts have special meaning for women's history in America?
- How do you think quilts can be used?
- How do you think quilts can be preserved for the future?
- What has happened to the quilts that you have made or those of friends and family?
- What do you think is the biggest challenge confronting quiltmakers today?

Quick Questions

(to be asked prior to the interview)

Quilters' S.O.S. - Save Our Stories

A Project of Quilt Alliance

ID# _____ **Name** _____

Thank you for participating in Quilters' S.O. S. - Save Our Stories. The goal of this interview is to record your quilt stories in a friendly, relaxed way. We want your personality to shine through so you will hear as little of the interviewer's voice as possible. In order to know how to guide the interview, we ask you answer the following questions by simply circling either yes or no.

Do you make quilts?	Yes	No
Do you make wearable art? Do you sleep under a quilt? Have you given quilts as gifts? Are you self-taught?	Yes	No
Do you have quiltmakers in your family?	Yes	No
Do you belong to a guild?	Yes	No
Have you ever been a board member or chair of a committee in a guild?	Yes	No
Do you belong to a sewing group/bee?	Yes	No
Have pictures of you, your quilts and/or patterns been published?	Yes	No
Do you collect or sell quilts?	Yes	No
Do you have a collection of quilting or sewing memorabilia?	Yes	No
Have you ever owned or worked in a quilt shop?	Yes	No
Do you teach quilting?	Yes	No
If yes, have you traveled outside your hometown?	Yes	No
Have you ever won an award?	Yes	No
Have you ever participated in quilt history preservation?	Yes	No
Do you have a design wall?	Yes	No
Do you have a studio or sewing room?	Yes	No

Sample Letter for Transcript Review

Participant ID # _____

Dear (*Name of Interviewed Individual*):

We are pleased to enclose two copies of the typed transcript of your tape-recorded interview with (*name of interviewer*) held in October, 2014. One copy is provided for your review and correction prior to QSOS archiving the final copy of your transcribed interview. The second copy is for your records.

When you were interviewed for the QSOS project, you were kind enough to give us your written permission to make the contents of your recorded interview and photographs available for scholarly or educational purposes including publications in all media and exhibitions. Among other venues, transcribed interviews will be posted on Quilt Alliance website located at <http://www.allianceforamericanquilts.org/qsos/>. For that reason, we want to be certain that the final copy of your interview's transcription is as free from error as possible.

Please take this opportunity to review the transcription for "fact and tact." This means we ask you to pay particular attention to the way the transcriber interpreted the spellings of individuals' names, cities or towns, and any technical terms. We have had interviewees comment on the way their transcription does not flow in a way they would prefer, however, do keep in mind that the interview process is much different than the standard written word. The spirit of the interview is what we are striving to capture and we are very pleased that your personality manifests itself in this interview exchange.

Mark any errors you find with a red pen (so we are sure to find them) and add a star in the left-hand margin next to the passage containing the error(s) to help us easily locate every correction.

Once you have indicated the corrections you wish made, please sign this document on the line below, indicating that you have reviewed the transcription and marked it for our attention. Please return your corrected copy in the SASE enclosed. The second copy of the transcribed interview is for you to retain for your records. You may find it helpful to mark your corrections on this second copy too.

Thank you so much for your willingness to participate in the Quilters' S.O.S. - Save Our Stories project, and to give a few minutes to making sure your tape-recorded interview is transcribed accurately.

Very truly yours,

Interviewer Name

Tools for Recording and Technical Guidelines

AUDIO RECORDING TOOLS

You don't need any special tools to record a QSOS interview. Any recorder that allows you to clearly hear the interview without overwhelming background noise will do.

Standard-size cassette tape recorders, digital voice recorders or even newer "smartphones" will produce an audio recording that's clear and audible.

In what audio format should I save my recording?

For archival purposes, the Library of Congress requests that digital recordings be saved as a high-quality WAV (.wav) file. If your recorder has the option to create a .wav file, just select that option and the highest quality your recorder will allow.

What kind of audio recorder do you recommend?

If you're interested in purchasing an audio recorder, Sony and Olympus both offer entry-level voice recorders for about 30-40 dollars. However, these recorders don't record in .wav format, so you'll need to convert your files after creating them.

For a clearer, higher-quality recording, you'll want a recorder that supports .wav files such as recorders by the Zoom brand. The current mid-level option is the ZH1 (be aware that model numbers can change), which is available for about 99 dollars.

What if my recorder doesn't create .wav files?

That's no problem! You can convert your file into a .wav file in several ways:

- Online conversion sites:
You can upload your file to an online conversion site such as www.media.io or www.zamzar.com to convert your audio recording to a .wav file.
- Free conversion programs:
If your file is too large to convert using an online service, you can download a free program called Switch Audio Converter (<http://switch.en.softonic.com>) to convert your files. Just download the program and follow instructions to convert your file to a .wav file.

If you have any questions or have any problems with your audio files, email us at qsos@quiltalliance.org and we'll be happy to help you convert your file.

PHOTOGRAPHING QUILTS

Just as a basic audio recorder is fine to record interviews, a basic digital camera is sufficient to photograph informants and their quilts. Take photographs at the highest resolution or file size that your camera will permit.

Make sure you:

- have good lighting—natural lighting is best, if possible
- include the whole quilt, top-to-bottom, in the image with the informant
- take a few close-up detail shots. Ask your informant if there are any areas he or she is particularly proud of or would like to see featured.