



Oral History Guide

Learn about oral histories and how to record your own by using this guide.

Table of Contents

Definitions and Resources	1
Recording Checklist	2
Sample Recording Release Form	3
Sample Family History Questions	4
Quick Start Guide: Zoom H1n Audio Recorder	6

Check out an Audio Recorder Kit at Ela Area Public Library

Audio recorder kits are available as part of our Library of Things collection. The kit includes everything you need to record an oral history: a Zoom H1n audio recorder, a tripod, a microphone windscreen, and more—all in a handy carrying case!



275 Mohawk Trail
Lake Zurich, Illinois 60047
(847) 438-3433

Find more genealogy services,
programs, and resources at
www.eapl.org.

Definitions and Resources

Definitions

- Oral history – a recording of a person’s memories of the past and historical events
- Narrator – the “storyteller” or the person who is recounting their memories
- Interviewer – the person who sets up the oral history and asks the narrator questions
- Lead – the first part of the oral history, which includes the names of the narrator(s) and interviewer; the date, time, and location of the recording; and the major topics or themes
- Transcript – the written record of the oral history recording; avoid editing the narrator’s words to maintain the integrity of the transcript
- Index – a time-stamped guide to the major topics covered in the recording

Oral history guides at Ela Area Public Library

- The Oral History Manual by Barbara W. Sommer
- Doing Oral History by Donald A. Ritchie
- Recording Oral History by Valerie Yow
- Say It Forward: A Guide to Social Justice Storytelling by Cliff Mayotte

Online oral history resources

- Oral History Association (<https://www.oralhistory.org/>)
- Oral History in the Digital Age (<http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/>)
- Baylor Institute for Oral History (<https://www.baylor.edu/library/index.php?id=974108>)

Recording Checklist

Before the recording

- Decide on your topic and research it in advance.
- Choose who you would like to speak to. Ask them if they would be willing to participate and let them know why you want to record their story. Set a date and time to meet. (about 1-1.5 hours)
- Create a list of topics and questions to use as a guide during the oral history.
- Practice using the digital recorder.

During the recording

- Pick a quiet room to record in with no distractions.
- Ask the narrator sign a release form and explain the recording process to them.
- Record a “lead” at the beginning of the recording: your name and the narrator’s name; the time, date, and location of the recording; and the main topics your narrator will talk about.
- Ask open-ended questions to encourage the narrator to share stories. Leave room for silence.
- Let the narrator lead the session. Stay quiet except when you ask questions and use body language to show your interest and attentiveness (nodding, leaning forward, smiling).
- Take a photo of the narrator (with their permission) to keep with the recording.

After the recording

- Write a short description of what the narrator spoke about.
- Download the recording to one or more places, like the cloud or your hard drive.
- Save the release form, the photograph, and any other materials connected to the oral history.
- Transcribe or index the recording to make it easier for you and others to use.
- Send a thank you letter and a copy of the recording to the narrator.
- Share the oral history (with the narrator’s permission).

Recording Release Form

Includes: Audio, Video, and Still Images

Interviewer name:

Interviewer phone number:

Interviewer email address:

Agreement

I, the interviewee, _____, will be or have been recorded and/or filmed by _____ (interviewer) on or about _____ (date) concerning _____

_____ and related subjects. These recordings and/or images contain material to which I hold copyright. By signing below, I license that material to _____ (interviewer) under the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#). This means others can share and adapt the material, even commercially, as long as they credit me for the original creation.

By signing below, I authorize _____ (interviewer) to share the recording with the public and to use my name, image, and voice, as well as my story. This includes permission to transfer the recording to future technological mediums. I understand that one copy of the recording will be given to me, and that _____ (interviewer) will retain a copy.

I have had a chance to discuss this form with _____ (interviewer) and have received answers to all of my questions.

ACCEPTED and AGREED:

Date: _____ Interviewee Signature _____

Interviewee's name as he/she wishes it to be used: _____

Address: _____
(street or p.o. box) (city) (state) (zip code)

Telephone number: (____) _____ - _____

Email address: _____

If the interviewee is a minor (under the age of 18):

Date: _____

Signature of Parent or Guardian _____

Printed name of Parent or Guardian _____

Family History Questions

Basics & childhood

- What's your full name? Do you know why your parents gave you that name?
- When and where were you born?
- What was your first home like? Who lived in the home with you?
- What did your childhood bedroom look like?
- What did you do for fun? Where was your favorite place to play?
- What was your most prized possession as a child? What was special about it?

School years

- Where did you attend grade school/high school/college? What were your schools like?
- What were your favorite/least favorite subjects? Why?
- Who was your favorite teacher? Why?
- What is your favorite memory of school?
- What clubs/sports/activities did you participate in?
- How did you spend your time outside of school?

Career

- What was your first job? How did you get it?
- What did you do with your first paycheck?
- What did you think you would be when you grew up?
- How did you decide on a career?
- What are you most proud of doing during your career?
- If you served in the military, when and where did you serve? Did you have to go to war?

Social life

- Who have been your closest friends? What is your favorite memory of them?
- How old were you when you started dating? Do you remember your first date?
- How did you meet your spouse(s)? How would you describe your spouse(s)?
- What is your favorite memory of married life?
- What are your favorite family traditions? What makes you/your family unique?
- Who have been the most important people in your life?

Hobbies & travel

- What did you do for fun as a young adult? What do you do for fun now?
- What organizations or groups have you belonged to? What did you do as a member?
- What's something you always wanted to try but haven't yet?
- What's your favorite place you've ever visited? Why?
- Have you had pets in your life? What were they like? Favorites?
- What is your favorite holiday? Why?

Looking back

- What's the most memorable moment of your life?
- What major national/international events have happened during your life? (Wars, social movements, pandemics, depressions/recessions, etc.) How did those events affect you?
- How has the world changed since you've been young?
- What have been some of the best inventions/advances you've seen in your lifetime?
- Who are some of your heroes?
- What haven't we talked about that you'd like to share?

Quick Start Guide: Zoom H1n Audio Recorder

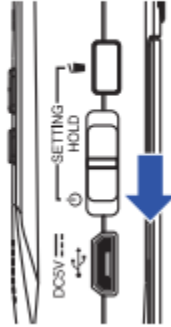


Download the full operation manual at www.zoom.co.jp or scan the QR code below.



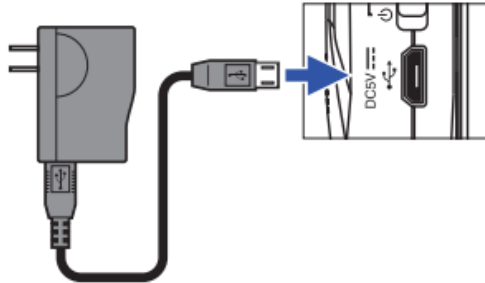
Turning the power on/off

Slide  toward .

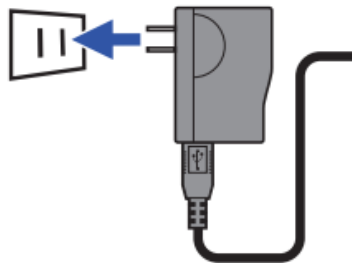


Using an AC adapter

1. Connect the cable of an AD-17 AC adapter to the USB port.

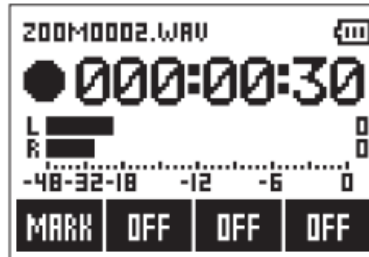
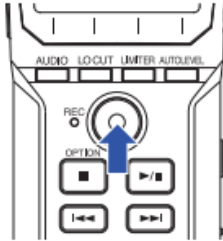


2. Plug the AC adapter into an outlet.



Recording



1. Press .



The following operations are possible during recording.

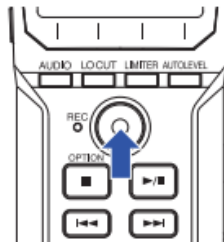
Pause/resume	Press 
Add a mark	Press 

NOTE

- Marks are used as cue points. During playback, press  or  to jump to a mark position.
- When recording is paused, a mark will be added automatically at that point.
- Up to 99 marks can be added to each recording.
- If the file size exceeds 2 GB during recording, a new file will be created automatically and recording will continue without pause.

2. Press .

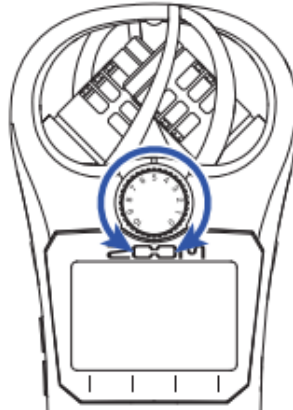
This ends recording.



Adjusting input levels

Adjusting levels manually

1. Turn the input volume dial.



HINT

- Adjust so that the peak level stays around -12dB .
- If the sound distorts even when you lower the input level, try changing mic positions and adjusting the output levels of connected devices.
- To cut noise from wind and other sources during recording, see ["Reducing noise"](#).
- To stop input signal clipping, see ["Setting the limiter"](#).

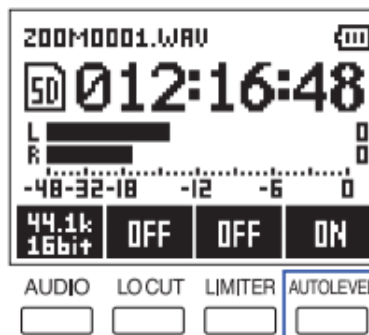
NOTE

If the REC LED is blinking, the sound could be distorted, so lower the input level.

Using automatic level adjustment

This function automatically adjusts the input level according to the input signal.

1. Press ^{AUTOLEVEL} to select ON.



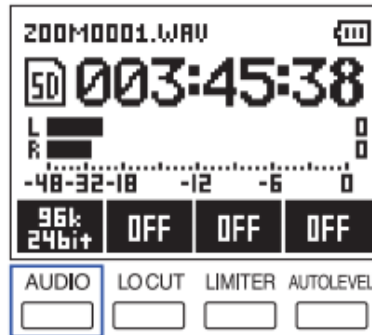
NOTE

When automatic level adjustment is ON, turning the input volume dial has no effect.

Selecting the recording format

The recording format can be selected in consideration of audio quality and file size.

1. Press to select the recording format.



The display shows the selected recording format and the remaining possible recording time.

The following recording formats can be set.

Setting	Recording format	Audio quality	File size
96k 24bit	96 kHz/24-bit WAV	High ↑	Large ↑
48k 24bit	48 kHz/24-bit WAV		
48k 16bit	48 kHz/16-bit WAV		
44.1k 16bit	44.1 kHz/16-bit WAV		
MP3 320k	320 kbps MP3	↓ Low	↓ Small
MP3 256k	256 kbps MP3		
MP3 192k	192 kbps MP3		
MP3 128k	128 kbps MP3		
MP3 48k	48 kbps MP3		

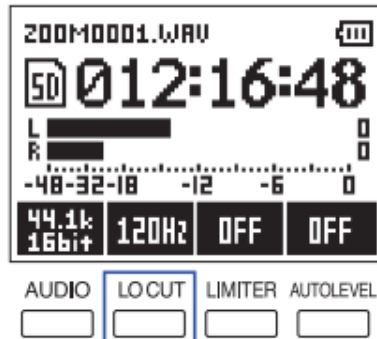
NOTE

- WAV format is better for recording when audio quality is important.
- Since the MP3 format uses compression, the audio quality is reduced, but the file size is smaller. This is convenient when you want to save large amounts of recordings and use less space on the microSD card, for example.

Reducing noise

This function can reduce low-frequency noise, including wind and vocal pops.

1. Press ^{LO CUT} to set the cutoff frequency.



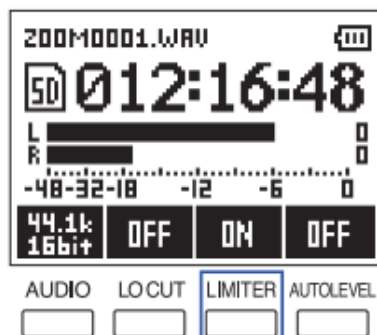
HINT

Select OFF, 80Hz, 120Hz or 160Hz as the frequency.

Setting the limiter

The limiter can prevent distortion by controlling input signals that have excessively high levels.



1. Press ^{LIMITER} to select ON.

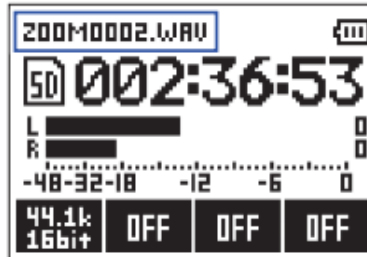


NOTE

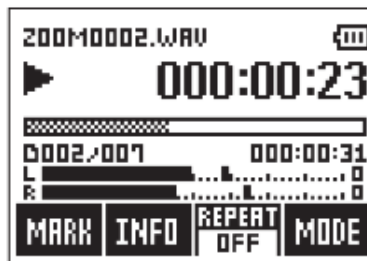
When the input sensitivity is high (input volume dial is set to a large value), noise will be more noticeable when the signal level is low.

Playing recordings






1. Press  and  to select the file for playback.




2. Press .




The following operations are possible during playback.

Pause/resume	Press 
Search forward	Press and hold 
Search backward	Press and hold 
Add a mark	Press MARK during playback
Jump to the next mark (if one exists) Play the next file (if no mark exists)	Press 
Jump to the previous mark (if one exists) Play the previous file (if no mark exists)	Press 

HINT

- Marks are used as cue points.
- If you press  after the last mark during playback, the next file will be played.

If you press  before the first mark during playback, the previous file will be played.

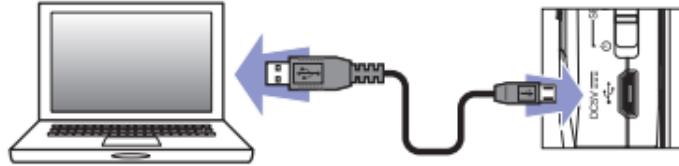
3. Press .

Playback stops and the Recording Screen opens.

Connecting with other devices

The **H1n** can be used as a card reader or audio interface when the **H1n** is connected to a computer, iOS device or other equipment.

1. When the Recording Screen is open, use a USB cable to connect the **H1n** and the other equipment.



The USB screen will open.

NOTE

A Lightning to USB Camera Adapter is necessary to connect an iOS device.

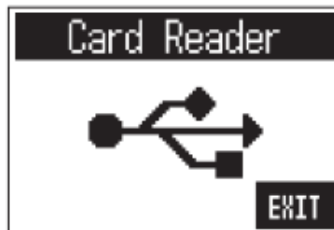
Using as a card reader

You can use a computer to check the files saved on the microSD card and copy those files to the computer.

1. Press **▲** or **▼** on the USB screen to select "Card Reader", and press **▶**.



2. Use the computer to work with the files saved on the microSD card.



3. When you want to disconnect, use the computer to end the USB connection with the **H1n**.
Windows: Select **H1n** from "Safely Remove Hardware".
Mac OS: Drag the **H1n** icon to the Trash and drop it.

NOTE

Always conduct computer disconnection procedures before removing the USB cable.

4. Press **EXIT**.
5. Use **▲** and **▼** to select "Exit", and press **✓**.



This ends card reader operation and reopens the Recording Screen.

6. Disconnect the USB cable from the **H1n** and the other equipment.