

Over the last couple of decades, archival-quality audiovisual recording has become best practice for the documentation of Indigenous languages (Nathan 2009; Margetts and Margetts 2012; Seyfeddinipur 2012).

For audio recording alone, best practice is now to record in an **uncompressed format** (either .wav or .aiff) at **44.1Khz and 16-bit depth** minimally.¹ In choosing an audio recording device, the documenters should take into account whether the proposed device does in fact have the ability to make this type of recording. In addition, it is important to consider the choice of microphone to ensure that the audio captured is the best it can be. An external XLR-connected stereo microphone is the best choice here as the XLR connection minimizes crackling and the stereo quality provides valuable spatial information. However, the kind of mic you choose will depend on the recording situation,² as follows:

- For recording background sounds (e.g. music) or events with multiple people talking, consider an **omnidirectional microphone** as these capture sounds from all directions
- For recording monologic speech while avoiding other external sounds, consider a **shotgun microphone** as these focus on what is front of it
- For recording in semi-quiet spaces, consider a **cardioid microphone**
- For recording in noisy environments and if you are really interested in high-quality audio (e.g. for acoustic analysis), consider a **supercardioid microphone**

If you're considering working remotely (e.g. over Zoom), please note that not all video conferencing platforms can record uncompressed audio files and that you may want to make additional arrangements to have an on-site recording device with the speaker(s) so that an archival-quality audio recording can be made (in addition to or instead of the audio recording you capture through the remote platform you use). A recent comparison of audio quality depending on platform and device (including phones) can be found in Sanker et al. (2021).

For video recording, there is no uncompressed format but current best practice is to record in **HD (high-definition)** and in **MPEG-4/H.264/AVCHD format** (extension .mts or .m2ts). However, the files will likely be too large and working copies will need to be made by converting the AVCHD format to MPEG-4 Part 14 format if you plan on annotating the video. Seyfeddinipur and Rau (2020) discuss this in depth and have suggestions for possible cameras to buy. In most cases, a camera like the Zoom Q8 will be sufficient for language documentation purposes. This camera has the advantage of prioritizing high-quality uncompressed audio recorded via XLR microphones, which is crucial for spoken languages.³ If the proposal is to work with signed languages, consider a camera that will produce higher-quality video than the Zoom Q8.

For all recordings produced, please keep rich metadata so you can include this in your archival deposit; see Section 3.4 in Johnson (2004) for suggestions of what to capture.

Where feasible, we encourage all proposal writers to strive to obtain archival quality audio and video recordings, as the materials produced from your grant will likely become part of the record for the language(s) you are documenting and may be used in the future for other projects, including phonetic and gesture research.

¹ Higher quality recordings are possible but there is a trade-off between the quality and the size of the file.

² And on your budget.

³ Be warned that if placed far from the speaker(s), the camera lens produces an unwanted fish-eye effect. Any comparable camera with external mic and headphones inputs and manual sound control will work.

References:

- Johnson, Heidi. 2004. "Language Documentation and Archiving, or How to Build a Better Corpus." *Language Documentation and Description* 2: 140–53.
- Margetts, Anna, and Andrew Margetts. 2012. "Audio and Video Recording Techniques for Linguistic Research." In *The Oxford Handbook of Linguistic Fieldwork*, edited by Nick Thieberger, 13–53. Oxford Handbooks in Linguistics. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199571888.013.0002>.
- Nathan, David. 2009. "Audio Responsibilities in Endangered Languages Documentation and Archiving." *Language Documentation and Description* 6: 101–16.
- Sanker, Chelsea, Sarah Babinski, Roslyn Burns, Marisha Evans, Jeremy Johns, Juhyae Kim, Slater Smith, Natalie Weber, and Claire Bower. 2021. "(Don't) Try This at Home! The Effects of Recording Devices and Software on Phonetic Analysis." *Language* 97 (4): e360–82. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lan.2021.0075>.
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- Seyfeddinipur, Mandana, and Felix Rau. 2020. "Keeping It Real: Video Data in Language Documentation and Language Archiving." *Language Documentation & Conservation* 14 (September): 503–19.