

A Quick Fix: Utilizing the JK Audio QuickTap for Landline Interviews at Baylor University

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INTRODUCTION

In early 2018, the [Baylor University Institute for Oral History \(BUIOH\)](#) decided to purchase [JK Audio's QuickTap](#) telephone handset tap in order to test the device often touted as a long-distance solution in its online workshops. Not only was this decision serendipitous considering the widespread need for alternative recording advice in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, it also proved a reliable methodology for a number of our interviewer partners these past years. Since the Summer of 2018, three separate projects used the device for the majority of their interviews, with the largest conducting thirty-five of the thirty-eight interviews via telephone. In this case study we will analyze the choice of the QuickTap as a landline interview solution, outline the technical setup and process of recording a telephone interview, and provide general advice in conducting landline interviews.

CHOOSING THE QUICKTAP

We chose to purchase the QuickTap primarily because of its price point and simplicity of use. Retailing at around sixty dollars, it is far cheaper than many other telephone interface devices, which typically cost several hundred dollars. In addition, the QuickTap is very simple to use. Here is the basic description from JK Audio item page:

Simply unplug the handset coily cord from the base of your telephone and plug it directly into the QuickTap. Then, using the supplied cable, connect the QuickTap to the base of the telephone. Now connect your audio equipment or powered speaker to the audio output jack. This jack contains a nice mix of both sides of the conversation, as well as the tones being pressed on the keypad.

Therefore, with the Quicktap in hand, your required hardware list is simply a landline telephone and a professional audio recorder (depending on what is currently included in the QuickTap packaging, you may need to purchase an additional handset coiled cord). BUIOH uses a [Zoom H5](#) recorder in its setup due to the ease in connecting the audio output jack and the ability to easily set levels on the XY microphone capsule, which comes standard with each H5 purchase. While we would often set up the equipment in advance for our partners, they still could easily dictate when to begin/end the recording, and when to adjust the sound level when needed. In the end, this setup became a permanent resident in an empty office in our suite so that distance interviews could be conducted at a moment's notice.

RECORDING PROCESS

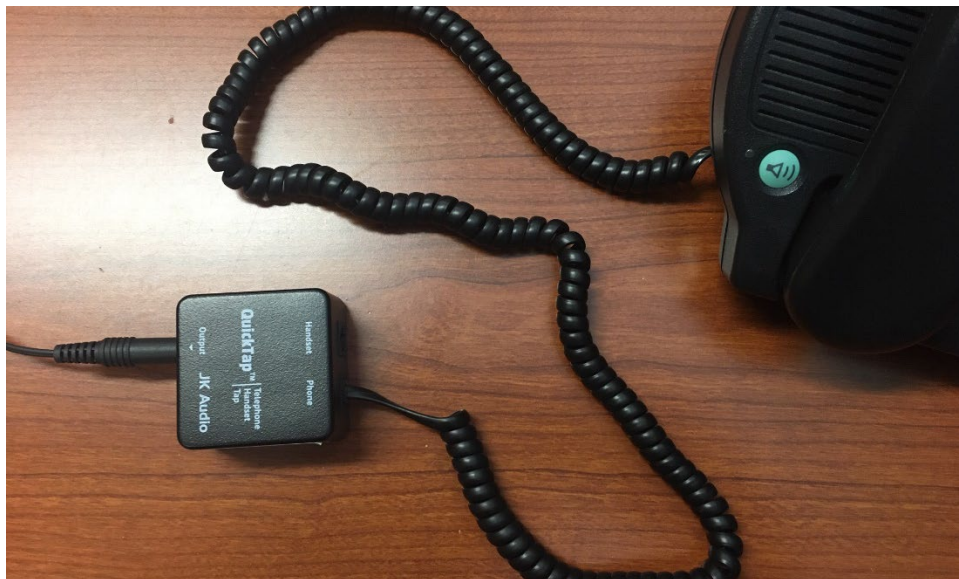
1. Find a power outlet near your landline phone and plug in your audio recorder (we used the Zoom H5).



2. For the Zoom H5, insert your SD card and power the unit on. Using the supplied XY microphone capsule, select the L/R recording option by pressing the “L” button on the face of the recorder. If selected correctly, the red lights above the “L” and “R” buttons should illuminate. Select other recording options within the Zoom H5 menus as specified by your institution, such as track length and file type. We recommend a minimum recording format of WAV 16/44.1.



3. Connect the 1/8" (3.5mm) Mono Audio cord (supplied by JK Audio) to the "Output" jack of the QuickTap and to the "Line In" jack of the Zoom H5 capsule.



4. Disconnect your landline phone's coiled cord from the handset and connect it to the "Phone" jack on the QuickTap.



5. Connect a handset coiled cord the handset, then connect the opposite end to the “Handset” jack on the QuickTap.



6. Take the phone off the hook and let the dialtone sound. Use the sound level of the dialtone dictate how to set your sound levels on Zoom H5. In general, we recommend adjusting the dialtone level to around -6 db.
7. Place your telephone call and converse with your interviewee a bit to observe the levels of the conversation, adjusting the Zoom H5 or telephone/handset volume levels as needed.



8. When ready to record, press the red dot “Record” button on the Zoom H5. The red light near it should illuminate, and a running timer should be visible at the top of the screen.
9. To stop or pause the recording, press the white square “Stop” button. We recommend stopping recordings entirely when taking a break, then restarting the process when ready to continue. Many recorders have “Pause” buttons, but these can lead to confusion as whether the device is recording or not.
10. When finished with the interview, power off the Zoom H5, then remove the SD card. The recording files should be located in the following directory: DISK NAME:\STEREO\FOLDER01. If you paused during the interview, or if you set a limit to track length, there should be multiple files located in this folder.

One aspect of this recording to keep in mind is that the QuickTap merges input from two lines into one, so that that resulting recording is monophonic. When using the Zoom H5, this is captured as a single channel in a dual-channel recording. When processing this audio, BUIOH will copy this data channel and create a dual-mono master. You could alternatively simply create a traditional monophonic master.

GENERAL ADVICE

- BUIOH always prefaces telephone interview instruction with the line “it’s hard to make a telephone interview not sound like an telephone interview.” You can listen to [this clip](#) from a recent BUIOH webinar to see what we mean. In general, we advise to err on the side of making the interviewee sound as loud and clear as possible. With the QuickTap, this means watching your sound levels, and turning your local volume down to match your interviewee’s volume level as best you can.
- Landline recordings are obviously missing the visual component to interviewing; therefore you may need to work extra hard to establish rapport with your interviewee. A pre-interview call can help this tremendously, as well as a brief chat before the recording begins. Try to pick up on speech habits and remember that you may have to provide longer pauses than usual to allow the interviewee to fully complete a thought.
- Distance interviewing means signing official paperwork at a distance as well. In general, BUIOH will email a digital copy of our deed of gift statement to interviewees to review before the interview so that any questions can be fielded before recording begins. If you have any other project-related materials to share, these can be emailed as well.
- Remember that each participant will may need to hold a handset up to their face for a long period of time in an oral history interview, so plan breaks accordingly.