



Oral History Guidelines

- Oral histories are not hard.
- Something is better than nothing.
- It is about them – not you.

Set up Interview

- Introduce yourself.
 - Mention your affiliations.
 - Name drop.
- Tell them what you are curious about.
 - “I’d like to interview you about your experiences during the Vietnam War.”
- Tell them why they and their stories are important to your project.
 - How did you hear about them?
 - What perspective will they have that others might not
- Tell them they will be recorded.
 - Ask if videotaping is OK with them. (If you want video.)
 - Tell them you will be using edited portions of their interview for whatever purpose you have in mind.
 - Tell them if/where their interview will be archived.
- Pick a safe, comfortable, quiet place for interview.
- Try to only interview one person at a time.
- If they have a lot of demands – seriously consider not doing it.
- Consider your safety.

Day Before Interview

- Confirm the interview.
- Charge recording devices.
- Gather
 - A note pad and pen.
 - Tech - charging cords - camera – batteries – SD card - tripod, batteries, etc.
 - Deed of Gift.

The Interview

Before you Turn on Recorder

- Be friendly and welcoming.
- Help them be comfortable.
 - Comfy chair.
 - Table if necessary.
 - Water.
- Control the environment.
 - Minimize background noise.
 - Phones
 - Open windows
 - Grandfather clocks
 - Minimize potential for interruptions.
 - Sign on the door
- Explain how the recorder works.
 - Decide what you will do if they ask you to turn off the recorder.
 - This happens a lot.
 - Remember to turn it back on when they are willing to go back on the record.

Turn on Recorder

- Double check that light is on, and person is properly framed.

Scripted Beginning

- Orientation
- Archive

You

This is (your name). Today's date is (date). I'm with (name of person you are interviewing) at (location) to do an oral history interview about (topic).

Them - hand them a paper with questions to get the nuts & bolts out of the way.

My name is (name.) I was born on (date) in (place). My address was (). My parents were (name of father & mother.) And possibly more facts related directly to your project. (I began working for The Providence Ice Company in 1935 when I was 15 years old.)

Open-Ended Questions

- Do not interrupt
 - Speak as little as possible
 - Let them fill the silence
 - Use facial expressions to signal approval
 - Take notes
 - Wait for natural end of story to ask follow-up questions – spelling – clarifications – dates
 - 45 minutes is often just about right
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- *Tell me about (or more about) ...*
 - *I'd really like to know more about....*
 - *What do you remember about*
 - *Can you take me step by step through the day (of the storm, etc.)*
 - *Describe a typical day (when you were in 4th grade, at the mill, etc.)*
 - *What are your earliest memories of*
 - *Tell me your favorite story (from high school, about your mom, etc.)*

Wrapping Up

- *We scheduled this interview a while ago, I wonder what stories have you been thinking about sharing with me since then?*
- *What other questions should I have asked you today?*
- *What is the most important thing you would like people to know about (topic)?*

Thank Them

Take at Least One Photograph of Them (also photograph photos or objects)

Sign Deed of Gift

Keep Recording Going Until You Say Goodbye

After the Interview

- Send a Thank You Note – Ideally Handwritten
- Make Back-up Copy
 - Labeled So Others Can Find It

Transcription – Ideal

- Transcribe Word for Word
- Time Markers
- Index
- Not Ideal
 - Just an Index. Preferably with Time Markers.
 - Just transcribe what you need
 - Preserve for another day

Using It

End Product

Editing - Text

- Remove yourself
- Move things around
- Dealing with accents
- Ensuring understanding – And then I went [back to Michigan.]
- Dealing with incorrect info
- Respectful, honest portrayal
- Interviewee Approval?

Posting Digitally

- Does it do NO HARM.
- Does it need editing?
 - Cleaner – remove rough or boring bits.
 - Length. Platform appropriate.
 - Remove harmful bits.

Archive

- (Almost) Permanent
- Can others find it and use it?
- Censorship