



Oral History Interviewing Tips

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PRE-INTERVIEW

- 1) Be prepared.
 - Know your purpose.
 - Have some background information so you can ask more informed questions.
 - Create an outline of topics and questions.
- 2) Communicate with your subject.
 - Agree on a probable length of the interview.
 - Get a signed release form.
- 3) Practice with your equipment

INTERVIEW

- 1) Make the room as quiet as possible.
- 2) Run a test recording first to check your recording levels.
- 3) Open with a "lead" – state the names of the interviewer and interviewee, date and year, location of the interview.
- 4) Take notes – get the spelling of names, jot down new questions.
- 5) Start with easier, factual questions.
- 6) Ask open-ended questions to invite reflection and further elaboration.
- 7) Listen carefully.
- 8) Give the subject time to pause and think.
- 9) Don't be judgmental or let your own opinions show.
- 10) Be willing to go in another direction if the subject wants.
- 11) Respect the subject's right to refuse to discuss certain topics or to stop at any time.
- 12) Use photographs, clothing, jewelry, documents, etc. to help jog memories.
- 13) You are responsible for gauging if the subject is getting tired.
- 14) At the end, ask the subject if there is anything else to add that you didn't ask about.
- 15) Thank the subject

POST-INTERVIEW

- 1) If you wish, create a transcription.
- 2) If you wish, create an audio or video recording log.
- 3) If you are including photographs, get the permission of the people in the photos if you plan to donate them.
- 4) If you donate any part of the project to an institution, spell out what you are allowing the institution to do with the material.
- 5) You might want to interview others – family friends – for more information.