How to Do Oral History Podcast Series:
Printable Guide

Getting Started on Your Oral History Project

- Learn about the oral history process.
- Determine the purpose of your oral history project.
- Establish who you will interview
- Do general research
- Become familiar with your equipment

Preparing for the Interview & Doing Individual Research

Give your narrator information about the project.

- Mail the biography form or do an initial interview.
- Introduce yourself and the project timeline.
- Schedule the interview.
- Describe the interview format.

Gather information about your narrator.

- Complete the biography form.
- Collect memory clues.
- Treat the narrator with respect.

Review what you know about your narrator.

- Review the biography form.
- Write a list of topics.
- Send narrator list of questions.

Learn Where to go for information

- Use different types of sources

Begin your research!

- Research the time period.
- Research the narrator’s story.
Writing Interview Questions and a Script for the Interview

Write interview questions.
- Brainstorm questions
- Ask brief questions.
- Ask open-ended questions.
- Ask neutral questions.
- Ask non-controversial questions.
- Ask questions that establish the narrator’s connection to important events in history.
- Ask for specific names, dates, and places.
- Organize the questions into categories.

Send the interview questions to your narrator.

Assemble your questions into a script.
- Write an introduction to the interview.
- Start with simple questions about the narrator.
- Use memory clues in necessary.
- Ask questions in chronological order.
- Ask questions related to topic.
- Allow space to write in follow-up questions.
- End with “thought questions.”
Conducting the Interview

Set up the interview environment.
• Light the narrator from the front.
• Eliminate background noises.
• Sit about 6 feet apart.
• Sit by camera to run equipment and ask questions.
• Have narrator repeat questions.

Respect the narrator.
• Be on time.
• Dress appropriately.
• Do not talk about yourself.
• Inform narrator of possible uses of their oral history.

Tips for the interview.
• Ask one question at a time.
• Maintain eye contact.
• Listen quietly and actively to the answer.
• Don’t interrupt.
• Don’t let periods of silence or emotion fluster you.
• Don’t worry if you stumble over your words.
• Don’t stereotype your narrator
• Tactfully redirect your narrator if necessary.
• Don’t challenge your narrator.

Follow a structured, well-researched interview format.

Beginning:
• Record an introduction.
• Record purpose for interview.
• Begin with simple questions about the narrator.

Middle:
• Ask deeper questions.
• Ask follow up questions.
• Avoid “off-the-record” information.

End:
• Ask thought questions.
• End on time.
• Wrap-up after interview.

Wrap-up after the interview.
• Review the spelling of names and places.
• Ask the narrator to sign the legal release form.
• Send a thank-you to the narrator.
• Transcribe the interview, if desired.