

Oral History Interview Guide and Worksheet

What is an Oral History?

An oral history is an interview that records a person's recollection of experiences, thoughts, and feelings about a specific event or a period of time. Oral history is both the oldest type of historical inquiry, predating the written word, and one of the most modern, initiated with tape recorders in the 1940s and now using 21st-century digital technologies.

Who can Conduct an oral history?

ANYONE! Kids, parents, grandparent can all conduct an oral history.

Who should I interview?

Members of your family and community all have a wealth of information and insights into major events of our times. These are all great people to interview.

What do you need for an oral history?

All you really need to conduct an oral history is an interviewer, interviewee, prepared questions, pen and paper. If you choose you can also video or tape record the oral history interview.

Steps to conducting a good Oral History

1. Decide who you want to interview and what event you would like to talk about.
2. Inform your interviewee
3. Perform background research
4. Prepare your questions
5. Be an active listener
6. Take good notes
7. If possible, record your interview
8. Set a time and place to hold the interview
9. Thank your interviewee
10. HAVE FUN!



Steps to asking effective questions

1. Prepare a list of questions before hand
2. Ask one question at a time
3. Ask easy questions at first
4. Ask for specific examples if the interviewee makes a general statement
5. Do not ask yes or no questions, open ended questions are best
6. Ask for definitions and explanations of words
7. Ask follow up question, further explanation
8. Be Flexible and enjoy!



Sources: https://www.genealogy.com/articles/research/70_tipsoral.html
<https://www.oralhistory.org/about/do-oral-history/>
http://dohistory.org/on_your_own/toolkit/oralHistory.html



Suggested topics and questions



Childhood:

- What do you recall about your childhood?
- Where did you live and go to school?
- What do you remember best about your parent?
- What did you and your siblings do in your spare time?

Family Traditions:

- Did your family have any special traditions, such as things that they did on holidays or birthdays?
- What about family heirlooms? Is there anything that has been handed down from generation to generation?

Growing Up:

- When did you leave home?
- Why did you leave and where did you go?
- How did your life change? Did you feel grown up?

Historical Events:

- Which significant historical events have taken place during your lifetime?
- Were there wars, natural disasters, or political changes?
- How did these events affect you?

Hometown:

- What was the name of the place where you grew up?
- Was it a big city or small town?
- Were there any special activities or festivals where you grew up?

Work

- What did your parents do for a living when you were growing up?
- Was your family financially comfortable?
- What was your first job? How old were you at the time?
- What different jobs have you had during your life?

Previous Generations:

- Did you know your grandparents or great-grandparents?
- What were their names?
- Where did they live?
- What stories can you tell about them?

Religion

- What part did religion play in your family?
- Were you very religious?

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Interviewee Information



Interviewer: _____

Interviewee: _____

Date: _____

Time: _____

Method of Recording: _____

Interviewee DOB: _____ Place of Birth: _____

Current Residence: _____ Number of years: _____

Occupation: _____

Highest Education: _____ Graduation Year: _____

Marriage Year: _____ Divorce Year: _____

Spouses Name: _____ Spouses DOB: _____

Child 1 DOB: _____ Child 2 DOB: _____

Child 3 DOB: _____ Child 4 DOB: _____

Interests: _____

Hobbies: _____

Places Lived: _____

Places Traveled: _____

Skills: _____

Cultural Background: _____

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