

Oral History Quick Start Guide

This quick start guide covers the basics for conducting personal oral histories with narrators. Steps to consider before, during, and after the interview and a handful of questions to reflect on have also been included on a separate page. Neither this guide or the source list is comprehensive, and users are encouraged to delve deeper into the topic to learn more by exploring books in section 920 at the library.

Pre-Interview

- Identify and reach out to a narrator. Outline what topics you would like to cover and for how long. Inform them of your plan to record the interview.
- Identify a date and location for the interview
 - The Fond du Lac Public library has a recording booth in the Ideas Studio.
 - The library also loans out recording devices from the circulation desk
 - Ideal locations for an interview will limit the amount of noise and distractions.
- Before meeting with your narrator, have an outline for the interview. This might include topics and questions that you as an interviewer want to cover. It should also provide you with an outline or script for opening and closing statements.
- Let your narrator know that you will be taking notes during the interview just to help with the flow of conversation.

During the Interview

- Open with a general statement outlining for the listener who you are, the date, location, and your narrator. You may also choose to use this time to visually describe both yourself and the narrator for listeners
 - You could also ask the narrator if they are willing to describe themselves for listeners.
- Ask your questions speaking slowly and clearly. As much as you are able treat it as a friendly conversation.

After the Interview

- Be sure to thank your narrator, and clearly wrap up the interview for the listener.
- Consider transcribing the interview.

Sources:

Sommer, Barbara and Mary Kay Quinlan. *The Oral History Manual* Third Edition. Rowman Littlefield, Lanham. 2018.

"Oral History Association Archives Principles and Best Practices Complete Manual" *Oral History Association*. 2019

Developing Questions for a Personal Interview

You may have specific things you want to ask your narrator. Stories you would like them to tell. Be sure to write those down. The questions below are some to help get you started thinking about topics and themes which commonly come up in personal narrative interviews.

1. Collect some basic information about the narrator. What is your name, where and when were you born, and who else was in your family (parents, siblings, grandparents, etc)
2. What did your parents do for a living?
3. Were other relatives close by?
4. What are some especially strong memories you have of your childhood life?
5. What were some of your favorite stories to hear while you were growing up?
6. Did your older relatives ever talk to you about their experiences growing up?
7. What was school like when you were there?
 - a. Did you have a favorite class
8. Can you talk to me about your friends growing up?
 - a. What did you all do for fun
 - b. Did any of them move away
9. Was there a teacher or adult figure you really looked up to as a kid?
10. What was your first job?
11. Is there anything you miss the most about the old days?
12. If you could tell future generations one thing, what would it be?

Developing Questions for Interviews about a Place