

Oral History Tips and Tricks

Once you have an interview set up and a meeting organized with your narrator. You may want look professional depending on your narrator. You have your equipment/tools/notes ready, you may test everything the day before, to make sure that it works. Here are some tips and tricks for navigating the interview itself

- If you are recording, make sure the device is in plain sight.
- If you are recording, test out the sound first.
- Be clear with your intentions with the interview.
- Breathe! If you are calm and confident this can help to make your interviewee feel more at ease and think that you know what you are doing.
- Have an idea of topics and general questions that you will follow so that you don't end up silent due to a lack of questions. Make note of potential follow-up questions as your narrator talks.
- Start the interview with basic questions to ease into the interview and make your interviewee comfortable before asking more involved questions.
- The long replies usually come from questions that require more than a simple "yes" or "no" answer.
- Keep questions short and not multi-part.
- One question at a time!
- Don't be afraid of narrator silence. Don't feel like you have to fill it. They may be reflecting on their memory before responding. Silence can also convey emotions.
- Pay attention to your body language and your replies. Be encouraging, but do not talk over the interviewee.
- If there is a term or something you don't understand, ask them to clarify. This is the time to ask and find out. In these, if you are able, gently interject, to clarify meaning in the moment.
- If there is something that you want to know and the interviewee isn't understanding? Try rephrasing the question.
- Be flexible if the interviewee talks about things that you weren't expecting. This may be information that could be useful, interesting, or just nice to let the interviewee talk a bit longer.

Signs that the interview is over

Be aware of the interviewee. If they start fidgeting, yawning, giving short answers, or need a break it might be time to end the interview and/or reschedule for a later time.