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## Gathering History - Oral Histories: Remembering the Stories

What is Oral History? It is the recording in interview form of the personal narrative of a person's first-hand knowledge of historical events, a topic (something or someone), and/or their own life.

### Oral histories:

- Are recorded as audio only, as video only, or as a combination.
- Consist of at least 2 people; interviewer/oral historian, the interviewee/narrator, and possibly others (spouse, recorder).
- Are usually preserved in a repository, as a / or with a transcript, or as a recording that can be maintained.

### Pre-interview preparation

- Research
  - Why research? To ask informed questions
  - What to research? The narrator, the topic, and the larger context (e.g. WWII, protest marches, events you believe the narrator witnessed, etc.)
  - How to research? Use both primary and secondary sources
- Determine
  - Project, Narrator, Interviewer, Format, List of questions, Repository, Location of interview, Time aspects of the interview (date, beginning time, length, # of sessions)
- Legalities
  - Oral histories are copyrightable
  - Narrator - owns the copyright, can specify restrictions, can transfer full/partial copyright to repository
  - Project - permissions and forms
  - Repository - permissions and forms

### How to conduct interviews

- Start with neutral "chatter" for sound levels
- Start actual interview with info about the oral history interview
- Active listening
- Take notes
- Respect narrator
- Ask open ended questions
- Don't interrupt narrator
- Be prepared to ask follow up questions to clarify information
- Use background research to clarify names, dates, places

### Preserve the interview

- Start with the best quality recording possible.
- Make copies
  - Store the master and only distribute copies

- Deposit in a repository

### Using oral histories

- Search for oral history collections; universities, large library collections, archives, history centers
- Quote from oral histories: accurately, respectfully, and with permission

### Oral histories & family history

- An oral history can add; detail, depth, color, and life to your family tree.

### Websites for more information:

Baylor Institute for Oral History (Baylor University, Waco, TX.) -- Baylor can provide you with guidance and training in oral history techniques, so that you can interview people you know whose stories and memories deserve preserving.

- Main page for institute: <http://www.baylor.edu/oralhistory/>
- Introduction to Oral History Manual: <https://library.web.baylor.edu/visit/institute-oral-history/resources>

Columbia Center for Oral History, Oral History Archives (Columbia University, New York, NY)

- <https://library.columbia.edu/libraries/ccoh.html>

Fifty Questions for Family History Interviews: What to Ask the Relatives by Kimberly Powell

- <http://genealogy.about.com/cs/oralhistory/a/interview.htm>
- If you search “family history interview questions” you will find many lists you can choose from

The Library of Congress: American Folklife Center (Washington, D.C.)

- <https://www.loc.gov/research-centers/american-folklife-center/about-this-research-center/>
- Search “oral history” on the site

Oral History Association

- <http://www.oralhistory.org>

Oral History in the Digital Age [OHDA]

- <http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/>

The Smithsonian Folklife and Oral History Interviewing Guide

- <http://www.folklife.si.edu/resources/pdf/interviewingguide.pdf>

UCLA library Center for Oral History Research

- <https://oralhistory.library.ucla.edu/>

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