

Conducting an Oral History Interview

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(with some additional notes by
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Pre-Interview Preparations

1. If the interview will be part of a larger oral history project, identify the scope of the project. Think about the organizing components of the interviews you will be conducting. Limit your focus and be able to articulate a clear description of your project. Add that "mission statement" or your "elevator speech" to the KYWCRH.org web page for your group project.
2. Conduct Library/Archival research. Work with refdesk@uky.edu and ReINETTE!
3. Compile a set of core questions relevant to the scope of your project. Add these to your Group area of KYWCRH.org inviting comments from the members
4. Think about the unique questions that you will use for this particular interview. Which of the core questions will you use for this interview? Create an outline for the interview. Be careful if you use a list of questions...to often this becomes a community script.
5. Begin writing field notes—(Including personal expectations and hopes for the project/interview—this will carry on throughout the fieldwork process) in your Group area of KYWCRH.org
6. Decide who will be interviewed for your project. Make sure you include your community partners in these decisions - keep a log of what's going on and what's coming up in the KYWCRH.org group update
7. Make initial contact with interviewee/narrator. Check out the equipment from ReINETTE.
8. Create a checklist. Do you have everything?
 - Recorder + Cables
 - Microphone + Cables
 - Release forms and videocam to record where, who, and how the session goes overall
 - Paper/pencil
 - Batteries (if needed)
 - Appropriate media for recorder (Tape, Compact Flash Card, CD etc...). Do you have enough for a 4 or 5 hour interview. You probably won't need it but you may.
 - Camera (If needed)
8. Check the recording equipment before leaving home. Is it working today? Have you practiced recording on this machine? Do you have your "elevator speech"? What about a nice plant to give your interviewee as a thank you?

The Interview

1. Review your purpose of the interview. Show the interviewee the KYWCRH.org open education initiative site and
2. Arrange for an optimal recording situation. Setup: locate recorder and microphone(s) in appropriate place. invite them to join up.
3. Explain the purpose of your project, explain interviewee's relevant to you project, explain the archival donation form (to be signed at the end).
4. At the beginning of the recording, create an audible header for the interview.
5. Begin with a simple, general question: "Tell me a little bit about yourself?"
6. Ask one question at a time, keep the questions fairly simple.
7. Phrase questions in an open-ended manner, steer clear of yes-no questions. Very Important!
8. Don't interrupt; don't challenge the information being provided.
9. Write down potential questions while the narrator is talking. Take notes, but not too many notes.
10. Be an active listener.
11. Remember, this is an interview not a dialogue.
12. Don't forget your recorder, is it recording? Are the levels appropriate? Now, don't obsess about the recorder.
13. Silence during the interview is important. Why?
14. Follow up on interesting digressions. Allow yourself to be led by the interviewee to some degree. Find appropriate segues back to your topic.
15. Take note of names mentioned who could be potential interviewees for your project..
16. Close with a contemplative question such as "What one thing has affected your life down through the years? Don't be afraid to stay and chat following the interview.
17. Only one interview per medium or data file.
18. Get the release form signed.

Post-Interview Procedures

at UK

1. Label recording in accordance with the system setup by ~~you~~ or the repository ~~you~~ ~~are working with~~. ~~If you don't have a labeling system, create one.~~ ~~If you've recorded to a digital file, change the filename after you have transferred = recording to the computer.~~ It is especially important to have a naming convention if you are working with digital files.
2. Fill out your interview information sheet (~~See sample~~).
Be sure and use
3. ~~If you are using~~ a field diary, bring it up to date while the memory of the interview is fresh. Were your expectations fulfilled? How did they change over the course of the interview? How might you "better" conduct future interviews with this person or on this subject? What have you learned about basic human interaction as an oral historian? How did you feel about the interview? Summarize your diary entry in the KYwCRh.org group forum so your community partner
4. Send a thank you note expressing your appreciation for their willingness to participate in the interview. Reaffirm your intentions to fulfill all promises to the interviewee (i.e. to have copies put on CD or DVD and sent back to them promptly). can see
and reply.
5. Promptly fulfill all promises made during the interview.
6. If your interviewee would like to donate a related item to the UK Archives (e.g., personal photographs, brochures or historical items like political campaign buttons or trophies), please get the information from the potential donor and send the details to UK archivist Katie Henningsen - she will then contact the donor, get the appropriate permissions signed and pick up the item(s). Do not take the stuff home with you! Katie's contact info is katie.henningsen@uky.edu, 859-257-8371.