

Oral History Project: Guidelines for Recording an Interview

Oral history interviews can bring history to life. It can be a very satisfying project for both those interviewed and the interviewers. Preparation before the interview will help make your project more fun for you, the interviewer, and the person you interview.

1. Set up a time and place to meet with your interview subject.
2. Know how to use your equipment. Practice recording a conversation with a friend or family member ahead of time, so that you are comfortable with the process. Speaking clearly and precisely helps. Make sure the volume/sound level is okay.
3. Write up (or use a prepared list) of questions to ask your interview subject. Use questions that require more than a yes/no answer. For example, *What was the neighborhood like when you were growing up?* Start with general questions and then look for specific information: *How did the war affect your life?*
4. When it's time to interview the subject, make sure you are there promptly. Bring a notebook as well as a recording device. Don't forget your list of questions.
5. Always treat the person you are interviewing politely and with respect. Speak clearly. Do a practice question to make sure the recorder is working.
6. Always start the interview by stating your name, your subject's name, the time, and the date into the recorder.
7. Understand that your list of questions is merely a guide for you to follow. Sometimes the person being interviewed has a special story he or she would like to tell. Ask the person directly: *Do you have a special story you would like to have recorded? Would you share it with me?* Be prepared for the unexpected! If you slavishly stick to your prepared list, you may miss out on a fascinating story!
8. Keep your recording session to about 30-40 minutes. It can be very tiring for you and the other person you are interviewing.
9. Make sure you thank your subject when you are finished. Remember, you could not do the project without their cooperation.
10. Send a follow-up letter or note to the individual you interviewed and thank them for the experience.

Adapted from the *Hometown History Activity Booklet*,
produced by the Girl Scouts of America