

Module 4

Conducting an Oral History

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Supporting Questions

What support do you need to record an oral history?

What do you do during the interview to ensure it goes well?

How do you get the narrator's permission to share the oral history?

1. Can collecting community histories confront the silencing of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders?

There are many things that need to be done during an oral history to make sure the interview runs smoothly. If you are recording a video, you should try to find someone to help you conduct the interview and discuss the role your helper will play during the interview. Finally, at the end of the interview, you must get written permission from the narrator to use the oral history.

If you are recording the interview on video, you should make sure to bring a second person with you to handle the equipment, even if the equipment is just your phone. During the oral history, you should focus on your narrator, not on your phone or camera. It is your helper's job to record the video and to choose the best location for the interview and to set up the camera. Your job is to talk with the narrator and make sure they feel comfortable.

2. How Do You Begin an Interview?

Right before you begin your interview, remind the narrator that they can skip any questions they don't want to answer. They can also request to stop or end the interview at any time.

When you begin recording, the first thing you should do is record an interview lead that contains your name, their name, the date, the location, and the name/topic of your project.

The following is an example of an interview lead:

"This is (name of the interviewer) and I am here with (name of the narrator). Today is [date] and we are at [location]. We are conducting this interview for [Name of Instructor] at [Name of Course], [Semester]."

3. What Do You Do During the Interview to Ensure It Goes Well?

As you begin your interview make sure you are listening carefully to the answers your narrator provides. Keep your interview guide topics in mind, but don't become overly concerned with asking every question on the guide. Remember, an oral history interview is a recorded conversation.

Narrators will often share interesting elements of their life that you didn't know they were going to share. When they share these new stories, it is not the time to move on and ask the next question on your list. Don't get so focused on the questions in your guide that you miss the opportunity to ask a follow-up question about an interesting story.

If you are not listening carefully, or if you are focusing more on your interview guide than your narrator, you might miss the opportunity to document a compelling piece of their personal history.

To facilitate careful listening, you should consider taking notes using a pen and paper as the narrator talks. Because you are recording the interview, your notes don't need to be comprehensive. You are not a news reporter. Instead, your notes should be used as a way to facilitate careful, active listening. Use your notes to jot down key topics and follow up

questions that you would like to ask. Being an active listener is much more important than taking copious notes. Your notes should facilitate active listening, not impede it.

Always end your interview by asking if there are any questions or topics that they would like to discuss about their life that they did not have a chance to share.

4. What You Should Do During the Interview

- At the beginning of the interview, remind your narrator that they are allowed to skip questions and may request to stop the interview at any time.
- Record a lead stating your name, their name, the date, your location and the topic of your project.
- As you speak with your narrator during the interview, remember that this is a collaboration. If the narrator brings up an interesting aspect of their life that you were unaware of before the interview, feel free to ask a follow-up question.
- Listen carefully during the interview. You can only be collaborative if you are truly listening to the answers that your narrator is giving. Asking thoughtful follow-up interview questions is one way to show that you're listening.
- Your interview guide is just that: a guide. The goal is not to complete every question or topic. Rather, the goal of the guide is to provide a general path that you and your narrator agree to follow for the interview.
- As you reach the end of the interview, ask the narrator if they have any photos from the period that they would like to share with you. If so, discuss the photos with them. Make sure to record your discussion of their photos.
- End the interview by asking the narrator if there are any topics that they didn't get a chance to discuss that they would like to.
- Scan or take photos of any photos or other documents that your narrator shares with you.
- Have the narrator sign a written **release form** agreeing that the interview can be shared with their community and the larger public.