



Oral History Workshop



What is Oral History?

“Oral history collects memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews.” Donald Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*

“Oral history is a field of study and a method of gathering, preserving and interpreting the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events. Oral history is both the oldest type of historical inquiry, predating the written word, and one of the most modern, initiated with tape recorders in the 1940s and now using 21st-century digital technologies.” Oral History Association.

<https://oralhistory.org/about/do-oral-history/>

Oral histories seek to fill gaps in the historical record and preserve our own current histories for the future.

Oral histories are recorded, transcribed, and shared.





Why do Oral History?

Oral histories seek to preserve, document, understand and interpret the past as well as facilitating future civic action like, heritage tourism and historic preservation.

Why do you want to do an oral history project?

What benefits will come out of it? For you or your organization?

Why are oral histories important to continue?

How will oral history projects address the needs of those involved and the broader groups they represent?

<https://youtu.be/KGCD1XR0WPk> StoryCorps Video





Oral History Project End Products

Oral Histories generate Primary Sources- Firsthand accounts of past events.

Research materials

Books, articles, publications

Museum exhibits, public history projects, heritage tourism

Agency, Inclusion, Social Awareness

Education



The top right corner of the slide features a decorative graphic composed of several overlapping triangles in various shades of blue, ranging from dark navy to light sky blue.

How To Start an Oral History Project: Tips and Guidelines



Where to Start?

- Why do you want to do oral history?
- Why is it important to do oral history?



Purpose/Goals- What do you hope to accomplish? Why? Story Goals?

Scope and topic- What do you want to capture?

Start small and build the project up over time. Audio>Transcripts>Video>Archives

Think about how you will put it all together, Consider the desired end result.

Seek training and best practices.





Project Topic and Scope

Set parameters

What topics do you want to explore?

What stories are you interested in?

What do you want your interviews to do?



<https://wythecountyhistoricalsociety.org/2018/03/02/the-importance-of-oral-history/>





Initial Considerations

Funding

Location

Volunteer or Employee run

Hours of operation- if a part of an organization

Tracking correspondence, email, phone

Supplies- office equipment, computers, recording equipment





Gathering Support

Seek assistance

Contact local history organizations and other oral history projects in the area

Search for reference materials for funding, oral histories, interview documentation, etc

Seek out community members to help guide and participate in the project

Create an overhead committee or advisory board for the project

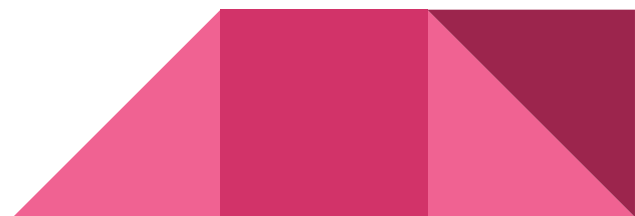
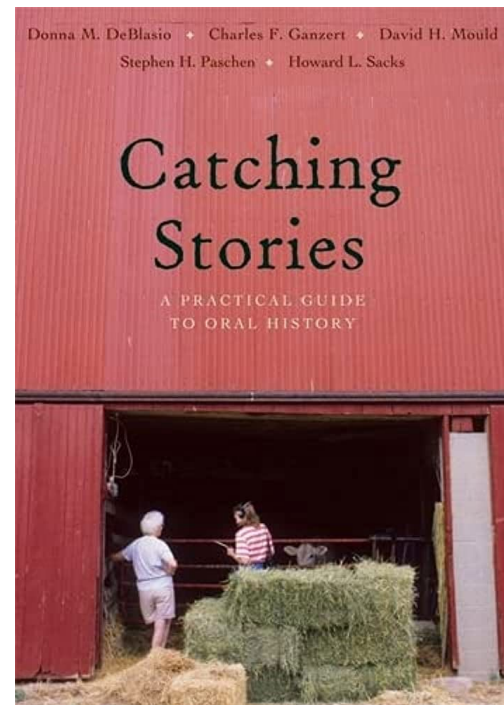
Seek funding- grants, local, community assistance





Components of an Oral History Project

- Project development- written plan describing the project
- Research
- Finding Interviewees
- Interview
- Transcription
- Repository
- End Product- what you get out of the project





Project Schedule sample

1. Research
2. Planning and Budgeting
3. Recruitment of interviewees
4. Recruitment and training of interviewers
5. Interviews
6. Transcribing and records
7. Archiving





Planning and Funding

What needs to be done for the project to be successful?

Written plan- keep project on track, setting attainable goals, project practicalities

Budgeting- How will the project be funded? Grants, local fundraising, community efforts, launch event?

Acquire and manage resources- Volunteers, equipment, work location, transportation, interviewees

Resource list- equipment on hand, computers, people, documents needed to complete the project. Should be included in the written plan

Create release forms and project documents

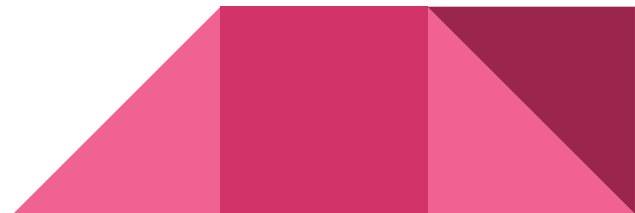




- Ohio Digitization Interest Group - <https://ohiodig.org/resources/ohio-grants>
 - Ohio History Fund, Ohio Local History Alliance, Ohio Humanities, America 250
- Ohio Humanities – Ignite Grant
- Grants.gov
- Oral History Association – 2 pages
- National Endowment for the Humanities
- Institute of Museum and Library Services

Oral History Grant Application Tips

- What now? What Later?
 - Sharing
 - Storage
- Describe technology services.
 - Enhanced Video?
- Primary vs. Secondary sources
- Reaching your Audience





Interviewee Profile

According to the topic who would you need to interview?

Background? Occupation? Veteran? Characteristics? Family members?

How to find? Recommended by the community? Family Members?

Interviewee list-

Priority? Who needs to be interviewed first, who can wait?

Contact





Interviewers and Interview Preparation

Main part of the project

Recruiting interviewers. hired or volunteer?

Develop interviewer and interviewee release forms

Develop interview checklist

Create reference materials for interviewers- topic history timeline, photos, articles

Create sample topic / question lists for interviewers





Archiving and Record Keeping

Archival Repository - Where you are going to store your records/interviews

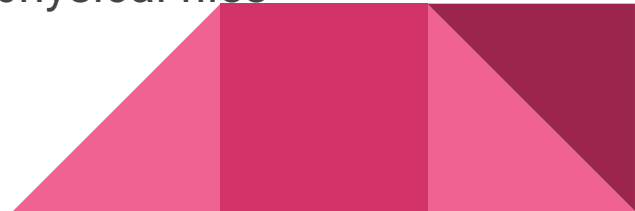
Interviewee and interviewer release forms

Correspondence

Transcriptions and translations.

Storage locations - Physical, Digital, cloud storage.

Create standardized naming conventions for digital and physical files





Final Product

What will your project be used for?

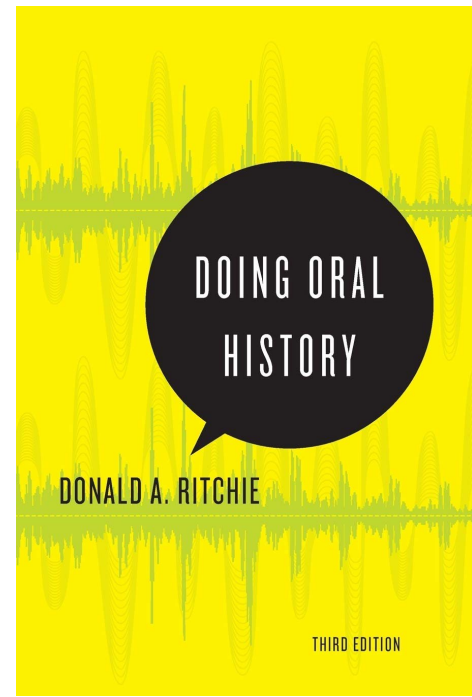
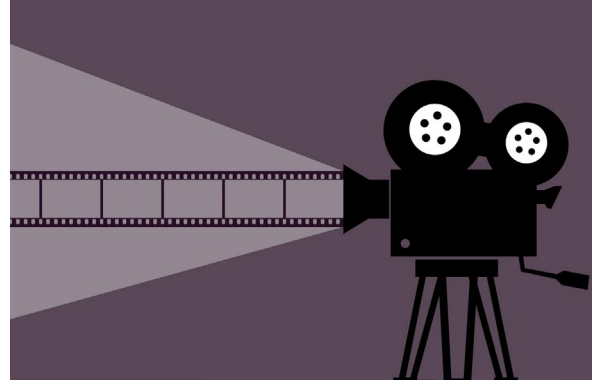
What will it accomplish?

Who will be using the project?

Consider project use/access

Specific goal

Target audience



Oral History Interviewing

Media Interviews vs. Oral History Interviews

Media Interviews...

Grab a single quote or short story.

Have either a short or long duration.

Only a small portion of the interview is aired live, depending on the program.

Capture information about a present or pressing topic.

May be confrontational.

Can be used for promotion, elicit social change, political motivations, for business purposes or for informational purposes.

Oral History Interviews...

Capture an entire narrative.

Last 1-2 hours on average.

The full interview is preserved.

Capture information in relation to a historical or present topic.

Do not have “gotcha” questions or confrontational questions.

Can be used to elicit social change, provide research, preserve memories, fill gaps in the historical record.

Interviewer First Steps

Determine approach (chronological, touchstone. etc.)

Gather research materials for project (timeline, major events, people involved, etc.)

Create a list of questions and topics

Contact interviewees

Establish rapport with interviewees





Interviewer Preparation

Research the topic and history

Refresh your training (practice interviews, review research materials, etc.)

Familiarize yourself with equipment

- Test all equipment well before the interview

Know the project-based interview questions and topics



Interviewees



Methods of recruiting interviewees: social media, newspapers, word of mouth, etc.

Contact methods: email, phone call, social media

First interaction

Provide a short, prepared description of the project

Schedule a short pre-interview over the phone or in person

Schedule the formal interview if possible



Prepping the Interviewee

Conduct a short pre-interview to...

- Establish rapport (“break the ice”)

- Gather basic information for interview

- Answer questions or concerns

After the pre-interview, provide an interview reminder via phone or email

- Information on formal interview (where to go, how to dress, etc.)

- Interview topics and possibly questions





Releases and Documentation

Interviewee/interviewer release

Why create releases?

Addresses interviewee rights

Establishes copyright

Describes potential use of interview

Oral History Release Form Capturing Our Stories Oral History Program of Retired/Retiring Librarians

I hereby donate and assign any and all rights in and to the recording, video, transcript, and photograph of the interview of the interviewee designated below (the "Work"), including all intellectual property rights therein, to the American Library Association ("ALA"). The grant of rights to the ALA includes the rights to record, edit, transcribe, use, reproduce, distribute, and/or sell the Work in any and all media now existing or later developed, throughout the world. I authorize ALA to use my name, likeness, photograph, or biographical data in connection with the use and promotion of the Work. I hereby waive any claims for right of publicity or right of privacy associated with the Work.

I understand that by assigning my rights in the Work to the ALA that the content of the Work may be used by ALA in any manner including the rights to use the Work for quotes or excerpts and publication as part of a scholarly paper or otherwise, use in media productions, exhibitions, or other nonprofit public productions. The Work may also be displayed and distributed through the Internet or other electronic means and reproduced in educational and other nonprofit public programs.

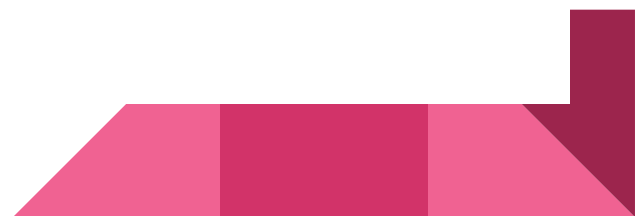
I shall retain the complete and unrestricted right to reproduce, publish, broadcast, transmit, perform or adapt the interview myself.

Interviewee/Donor

Date

Interviewer

Date





Creating Interview Questions

Good questions should be...

Topic-focused

Open-ended

Key words: why, how, who, describe, explain

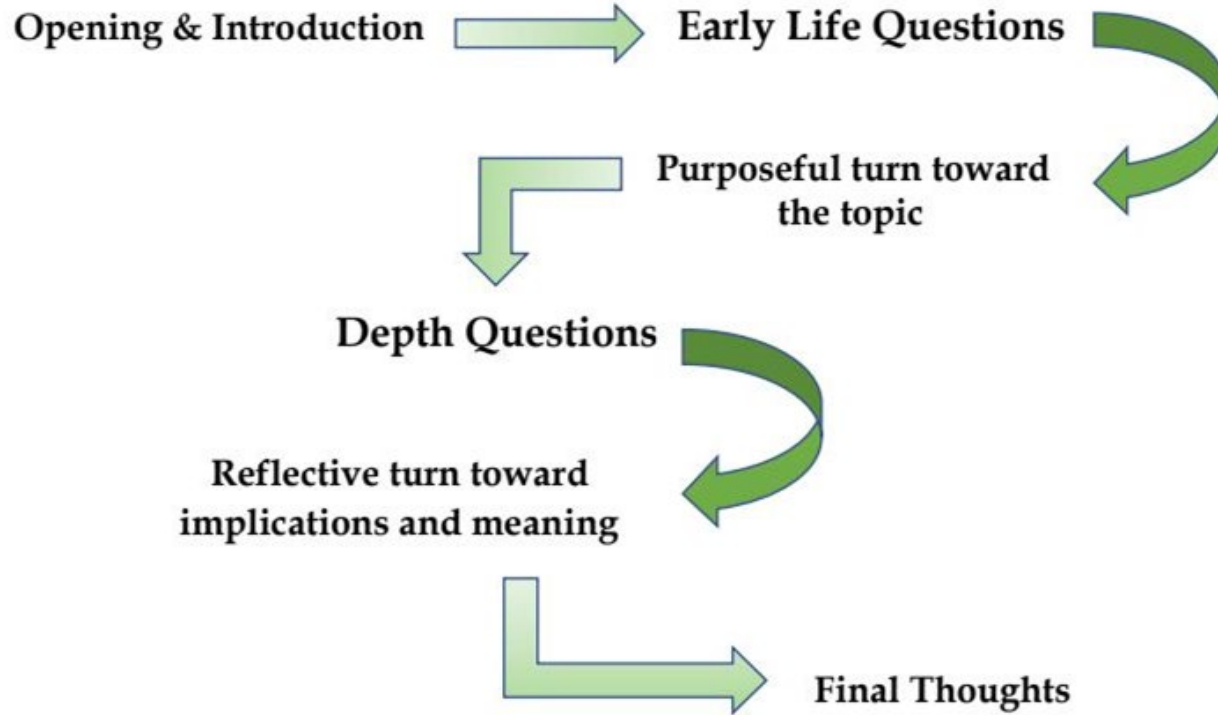
Use ice breakers or easy questions to start the interview

Be willing to deviate from your planned set of questions!





Potential Interview Structure





Setting up the Interview Space

Audio – mic and recorder

Video – camera

Location – quiet, comfortable, accessible

Avoid areas with loud HVAC systems and background noises

Avoid kitchen appliances





Interviewer Best Practices

Have a plan

Practice active listening

Use your knowledge to direct the interviewee towards the topic

Avoid talking too much – don't automatically fill the pauses

Be familiar with non-verbal cues from the interviewee

Be aware of biases



**ORAL HISTORY
ASSOCIATION**





Starting the Interview

Check in with interviewee before the interview starts

Sample introduction:

This is [NAME], and I am interviewing [NARRATOR] at [LOCATION] in [CITY, STATE] for [NAME OF PROJECT]. Accompanying us today is [OTHER PEOPLE IN THE ROOM]. Today is [DATE] and I would like to thank you for agreeing to be interviewed, [NARRATOR]. I'd like to begin by asking if you could state your name and when and where you were born.





During the Interview

Take notes appropriately, but active listening is most important

!!Don't be afraid to deviate from the standardized set of questions!!

Pay attention to what the interviewee puts importance on

Follow any interesting leads

Use “memory joggers” (photos, documents, journals) if needed

Use caution when dealing with controversial subjects

Ask interviewee to spell any difficult names, if possible



Post Interview and Follow-Up

Say “Thank you”

Have interviewer and interviewee sign donor release form

Inform the interviewee of the next steps

Ask for suggestions for future interviewees

Provide interviewee a copy or link to the recording and transcript (if available)
when finished





Transcription and Audio Editing

Types of transcription styles: verbatim, edited, intelligent, and phonetic

Keep the interviewee's voice authentic

Transcription services

Otter.ai – paid AI transcription software

Rev.com – paid transcriptionists

Simon Says – paid online transcripts

YouTube – Free but a lot of work

Audio editing helps preserve clarity

Audacity – free, open-source audio editing software





Equipment and Technology

Audio or Audio and Video

Consider what your budget can afford. Effective audio and video equipment can get expensive. While video is preferred, audio-only is still a very acceptable method of collecting oral histories.

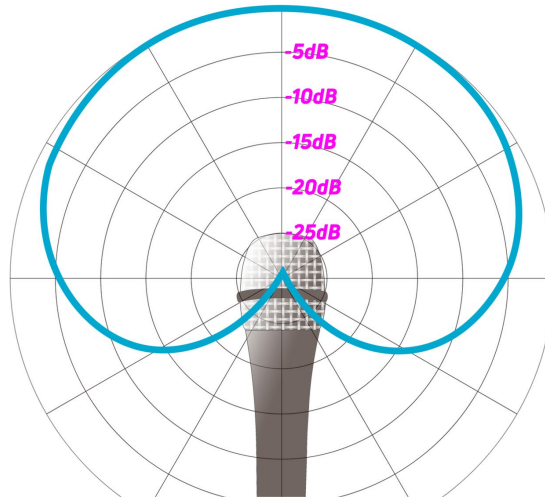
Unless you are familiar with the tech, start off simple and build up over time.



Requirements of Technology



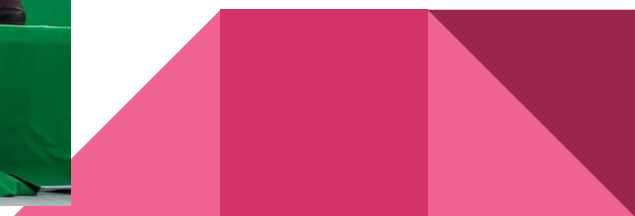
Mics - I did say audio is the most important.





Green Screen?

- What is it? Do you need it?



Recommendations

Lights - LED Neewer

Mics - Sennheiser, Audio-Technica

Audio recorder - Zoom H4 - H6

Camera - Canon EOS M50 Mark II, Panasonic Lumix G9

Stands - Whatever fits




Sharing, Online Storage

- YouTube
- Oral History Metadata Synchronizer
- If you can download, it's storage

Interview with Joseph Tyler Gayheart, June 11, 2010

Col. Arthur L. Kelly American Veterans Oral History Collection
From: Credited to Rememory
Broadcast: AW 303
by Jennings Abney, Interviewer

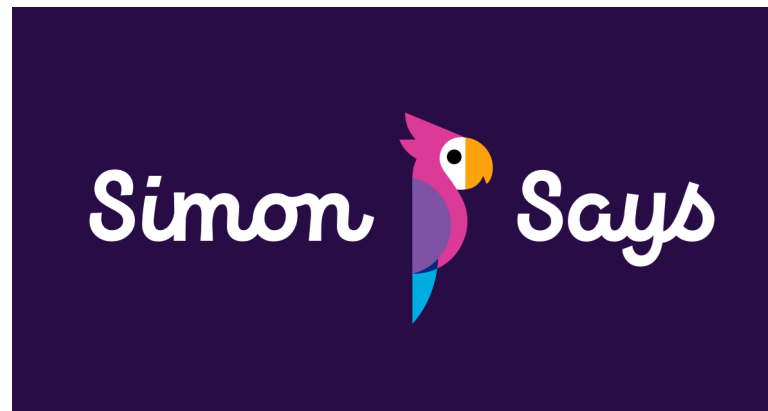
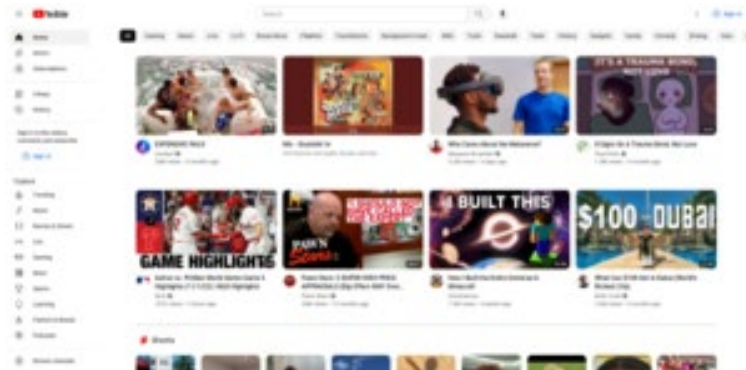


0:00 - Introduction
0:44 - Introduction
4:02 - The Commitment
18:53 - 9/11
23:34 - Bootcamp
39:48 - Training and Specialization
46:36 - Training and Specialization: Hawaii
52:32 - Deployment

TRANSCRIPT INDEX

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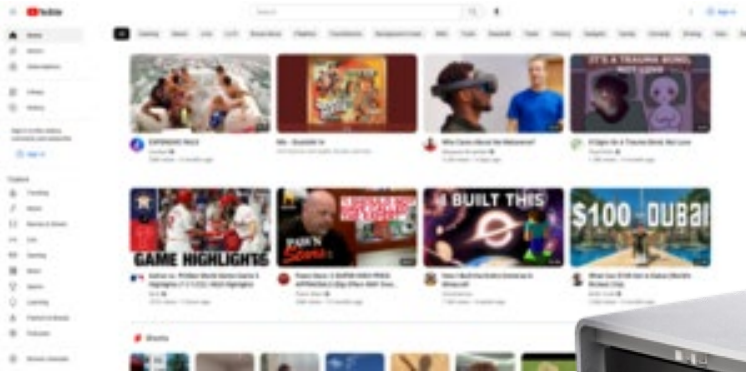
Don't forget about “legacy” oral histories

- Converting File Types
- Considering condition



Storage

- Online / Near-line / Offline



Offline Storage



Digital File Formats

“Library of Congress Recommended Formats Statement”

<https://www.loc.gov/preservation/resources/rfs/>



LIBRARY OF
CONGRESS



Questions??

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[Ohiohistory.org/oralhistory](https://ohiohistory.org/oralhistory)

