

# Capturing the Living Past: An Oral History Primer

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The Nebraska State Historical Society's collections contain hundreds of oral history interviews, some conducted by Society staff over the years. Do you want to conduct an oral history interview yourself or participate in a larger oral history project? The following pages will give you the basic background you need and will help guide you through the steps of practicing oral history.

You can navigate forward or backward through the sections of *Capturing the Living Past: An Oral History Primer*. You can also click on any of its links to move to other places in the primer or to useful resources outside the Nebraska State Historical Society's Website.

The primer's contents are divided into twelve sections:

1. [Introduction](#)
2. [Glossary](#)
3. [Legal and Ethical Issues: First Things First](#)
4. [Planning: The Key to Successful Oral History](#)
5. Thoughts on [Equipment and Media](#)
6. [Getting Ready to Interview: Preliminary Steps](#)
7. [Setting Up the Interview](#)
8. [Conducting the Interview: Techniques that Work](#)
9. [After the Interview: Wrapping Up the Details](#)
10. [Processing: Making Oral History Materials Accessible](#)
11. [Additional Resources](#)
12. [Appendix](#)

This primer was written by Barbara W. Sommer and Mary Kay Quinlan, based in part on their works, [The Oral History Manual](#) and *The Native American Veterans Oral History Manual*, a 2005 project funded by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. It is also derived from the authors' extensive experience in presenting oral history workshops around the country. It uses a question-and-answer format which many oral historians have adopted when developing teaching materials and other publications and Websites such as this. *Capturing the Living Past; An Oral History Primer* was funded by a grant from the [Nebraska Humanities Council](#).

# 1. Introduction

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## *Who should use this oral history primer?*

Anyone who wants to learn the basics of planning and carrying out a single oral history interview or a larger oral history project will find this primer useful. It will help you with oral history work for your family, for a museum or archives, for a school, or for any other purpose you have in mind.

But keep in mind: This primer only scratches the surface of the information available for learning about oral history. See the resources listed in [Section 11](#) for more information.

## *So what exactly IS oral history?*

Oral historians define "oral history" as a process that includes these elements:

- A planned, well-researched **topic**.
- An **interview** based on a prepared guide or outline and recorded in a format that likely will last into the future.
- Probing **follow-up questions** that seek depth and detail.
- Standard techniques for **processing** the recorded interview.
- Arrangements for making the interview and related documents **available** to researchers, generally by depositing them in a public repository.
- Adherence to recognized professional ethical and legal **standards**.

## *You mean just reminiscing with Grandma about the old days isn't oral history?*

Not strictly speaking, no. Neither is reading aloud from an old diary, or turning on a tape recorder at your family reunion and asking people to recall past experiences. All of those things might be interesting, but they lack the systematic, planned interview that will yield in-depth information historians and others will find useful in the future.

Besides, many repositories that collect, preserve, and catalog oral histories and make them accessible to others - like libraries and historical societies - generally will not want to add recordings to their holdings that do not meet the characteristics listed above. Recordings that don't meet those criteria may be rejected as incomplete, of limited historical value, of limited use, and difficult to preserve.

# 2. Glossary

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## **Oral historians use a variety of terms to describe their work.**

The following list will introduce you to some of the words and terms used frequently in the subsequent sections of this primer.

**Copyright:** The exclusive legal right of the creator to reproduce, publish, distribute, and sell literary, musical, and artistic works. To see how copyright relates to oral history, see [Section 3](#).

**Informant:** See [narrator](#).

**Interviewee:** See [narrator](#).

**Life interview:** An oral history interview that focuses on one person, usually in a series of interviews. This process results in detailed documentation of the person's life experiences. In contrast, see [project interview](#).

**Narrator** (also called **interviewee** or **informant**): The person being interviewed. The narrator is chosen because of his or her knowledge and ability to communicate that information.

**Oral history:** A [primary source](#) document created in an interview setting with a [narrator](#) for the purpose of collecting and preserving that person's firsthand information about an event, period of time or way of life and making it available to researchers. The term *oral history* also refers to the information collected in such an interview. Oral historians believe oral histories result from a process that must contain certain [elements](#).

**Primary source:** First-hand information communicated by a witness to or a participant in an event or way of life. See also [secondary source](#).

**Project interview:** An oral history interview that focuses on a specific topic. Interviews for the Library of Congress' Veterans History Project, for example, focus on one subject or one part of a narrator's life. In contrast, see [life interview](#).

**Recording abstract** (also called a **tape log**): A list of subjects covered in the interview in the order in which they were discussed, usually done at two- to five-minute intervals and identified with a recording time count. It does not include the questions asked and does not have to be in complete sentences, but should be descriptive enough for a user to find specific information on the recording. It is more accurate to use a stopwatch to time the count than the counter on the recorder when developing a recording abstract, because calibrations on different recorders may vary greatly. See also [transcript](#). For more information, see [Section 10](#).

**Recording equipment:** The equipment used to record an interview. It may be in analog or digital format and is either audio or video. The use of broadcast-quality equipment and an external microphone are highly recommended. For a more detailed discussion, see [Section 5](#).

**Recording media:** The physical materials onto which the recordings are made and kept. They may be analog or digital, magnetic or optical. For more information, see [Section 5](#).

**Release form:** A document that transfers copyright in an interview to a designated owner, and may outline restrictions on use of the interview material. The form is signed by the interviewer and the narrator and by any other people whose voices are heard on the recording. This is done as soon as the interview ends, even if more interview sessions are planned. For more information, see [Section 3](#), and for an example, see the [Appendix](#).

**Repository:** A museum, archives, library, cultural center or other institution where materials of historical or cultural importance are collected, housed, preserved and made available for use.

**Secondary source:** A publication or other document created using various types of historical information, including [primary sources](#).

**Transcript:** A word-for-word printed copy of the interview. See also [recording abstract](#). For more information, see [Section 10](#).

# 3. Legal and Ethical Issues: First Things First

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## *Who owns your words?*

You do. And your narrator or interviewee - the person you interview - owns his or her own words, too.

## *Why does it matter?*

The content of an oral history interview is an original document created by two people: the interviewer and the narrator. As such, it is subject to [copyright](#) law and may not be used unless both people give their permission. When spoken words are recorded in tangible form, they are protected by copyright, and copyright belongs to the speaker of those words.

## *How do I get permission to use an interview?*

Organizations that sponsor oral history projects want the materials their projects generate to be as useable as possible. Consequently, they ask the narrator and interviewer to sign a [release form](#) giving the sponsoring organization their copyright interest and, thus, their permission to use the interview information for publication, public programming or other public dissemination. Without this agreement, interview participants would retain their copyrights, and anyone who wanted to use the materials would have to obtain individual permission from each interview participant.

Individuals and family historians who want to conduct one or more oral history interviews should consider [donating their materials](#) to a local library, museum or other historical organization, too. Family history can yield interesting and important insights into the history of a particular time and place, which can be useful to present and future historians. Therefore, these interviewers should also use release forms for their interviews.

## *I realize this primer can't provide legal advice, but what legal and ethical issues should I know about?*

Guidelines published by the Oral History Association, the national professional organization of oral history practitioners, outline legal and ethical standards for oral historians to follow, whether they plan one interview or many. Here is a brief summary of those guidelines:

- Narrators must be informed in detail about the purposes of the interview or project and what you plan to do with the materials it generates. Be especially aware of ethical considerations associated with putting interviews on Websites or creating commercial products based on oral history interviews.
- Interviewers and narrators must sign a legal [release form](#) as soon as the interview is completed. It need not be long or complex, but it should indicate clearly final ownership of the materials, transfer of copyright, and expected uses of the materials. It should say specifically whether the interviewer and narrator give their permission to use their words on the World Wide Web. It also should include any restrictions the narrator wants to place on use of the materials.
- Interviewers should be well trained. They need to conduct background research so they can conduct an informed interview, not just ask superficial questions. Well-trained interviewers can gather new information of lasting value; poorly trained ones cannot.
- Interviewers are expected to provide thorough documentation of how they prepared for the interview and a description of the circumstances of the interview. Future users of the oral history materials will want to know the context in which the interview took place.

- If your oral history work brings rewards and public recognition, they should be shared with the narrators.
- Whatever organization or person owns the interviews should be committed to maintaining the highest professional and ethical standards for preserving and using the oral history interviews.

***But I just want to interview my Grandma about her childhood. Does all this legal and ethical stuff apply to me, too?***

Yes. No matter how close or casual an interviewer's relationship to the narrator, their rights relating to their spoken words and their understanding and wishes for the resulting recording must be respected. The legal and ethical parameters laid out by oral historians assure this respect.

***Where can I get more information about legal and ethical issues in oral history?***

Detailed information about legal and ethical issues is available in the Oral History Association's publications, *Oral History and the Law* and *Oral History Evaluation Guidelines*, (Carlisle, Pa.: Oral History Association, 2002).

## **4. Planning: The Key to Successful Oral History**

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**Whether you want to conduct one or two interviews with family members or dozens of interviews for a community or organization, take some time to think through what you want to accomplish.**

Even small projects can grow, so don't rush out with your recorder. Think it through first. It will pay off in the end.

Here are some questions to ask yourself at the very beginning:

***What am I trying to accomplish?***

Why do you want to do an oral history interview - or a big project with many interviews? The answer usually involves your belief that an individual or a group of people has a lot of firsthand knowledge about something that hasn't ever been written down. Your desire to record this information for posterity may well drive your motivations.

***How can I make sure I don't lose sight of what I'm trying to accomplish?***

Give your project a name and write a simple mission statement. A mission statement defines and focuses an oral history project. It provides a tool to keep the project manageable and the interviews on target.

Mission statements generally cover. . .

- The topics or purpose of the interviews;
- The study area, if the project is limited to a specific geographic location;
- The time period to be covered;
- The scope of the work;
- What will become of the interviews after you are done;

- The importance of conducting work to the standards of the Oral History Association, the national professional organization of oral history practitioners.

Here's an example:

***The Ace School Oral History Project will be conducted by the Douglas County Historical Society during the summer and fall of 2005. It will cover the school's closing in 2004 due to consolidation. The focus will be on the stories of students, teachers, administrators, service personnel, community leaders and school board members. The project has a goal of 20 fully-processed interviews. Interview materials will become part of the collections of the Douglas County Historical Society. The project will follow the standards of the Oral History Association.***

### ***Who is going to do the work?***

Oral history projects succeed when volunteer or paid leaders take responsibility for them. Project directors should be able to . . .

- Make the necessary time commitment;
- Understand the purpose of the project and keep it focused on that purpose;
- Represent the project to the public;
- Help with fund raising, finding equipment, and other project needs.

### ***Where will we put our interviews when we're through?***

Oral history projects generate recordings, transcripts, and record-keeping materials. They also can bring to light photographs, letters, diaries, artifacts and other materials that narrators may want to donate with the interviews.

Finding a repository for the results of your interviews is an important planning step. Institutions such as libraries, archives, museums, and other historical organizations can properly house the interviews and other materials, and see that they are useable to future researchers.

### ***How should I go about finding a repository?***

Here are some guidelines to help you identify and work with a repository:

- Look for a repository whose collecting mission includes the kind of information your interviews will collect.
- Make sure it has long-term researcher-access policies that match your needs and interests.
- Contact the repository as soon as possible before you do any interviews.
- Don't assume the repository automatically will take your project materials; if it can't, ask for references for other places that might be interested.
- If the repository agrees to take your interviews, it may already have a release form for you and your narrators to sign, transferring full ownership, including copyright, of all interview materials to the repository. If the repository does not have such forms already, you can develop them together.

### ***How can I get advice along the way as I get ready to do oral history interviews?***

Selecting an advisory board is a useful option.

Although you probably don't need an advisory board for one- or two-family interviews, much oral history work can benefit from a board. Advisory board members should be people who can help with topical background information, selection of narrators, finding a repository, representing the project to the community, and finding support as needed.

An advisory board need not be large and it need not meet regularly, if at all. Its members should agree to have their names listed in all project materials and to help the project with specific tasks when asked.

### ***How long will all this take?***

It all depends. That's why it makes sense to think this through before you start. Oral history projects can tend to take on a life of their own -- each interview may suggest others to conduct. The more interviews you do, the longer it will take. The more help you have, the more efficiently the work can get done.

Many experienced oral historians say it makes more sense to do a handful of interviews well rather than aim to interview dozens - or hundreds - of people if you can't be sure you have the resources to support a huge project.

Be realistic when you think about how long you are willing to work on your oral history efforts and how many interviews you can collect. Both decisions help keep the project focused and on track. A mission statement can reflect this project scope and time frame.

### ***How can I keep track of what I'm doing?***

All oral history projects, whether individual family interviews or multi-interview projects, need standard record-keeping forms. This list briefly describes forms you will need. Click on each one to see an example.

- [Release Form](#). This is a legal document that covers copyright interests and restrictions of all interview participants.
- [Biographical Information Form](#). This provides background on the narrator and should be kept with the interview records.
- [Interview Information Form](#). This provides information about the interview itself and is the first step in processing.
- [Potential Narrator Information Form](#). This helps follow leads and keep track of names of possible project narrators.
- [Interviewer Agreement Form](#). This is suggested for use with volunteer projects and helps define the role and responsibilities of the volunteer interviewer.
- [Transcriber Agreement Form](#). This is suggested for use with all transcribers, whether volunteer or paid, as it helps define the role and responsibilities of the transcriber.
- [Equipment Check-Out Sheet](#). This is necessary if interviewers are not using their own recording equipment
- [Staff Time Log](#) and [Volunteer Time Log](#).
- [Oral History Project Status Log](#). This is used to keep track of the status of each project interview and the work of each interviewer.
- [Artifact and Photograph Inventory Form](#). This helps keep track of additional materials that narrators (and perhaps interviewers) may want to donate with the interviews

### ***How much will all this cost?***

Again, it all depends. How many interviews do you plan to conduct? Do you have volunteers or will staff be paid? Do you already have access to equipment or will you need to buy it or rent it?

Your friends, acquaintances or advisory board members may know of or have access to funds or in-kind contributions, grants or donations that will help cover the expenses of your oral history efforts. Some of your costs will be one-time expenses while others may be ongoing.

### ***What do you mean by one-time expenses?***

One-time expenses cover a lot of the basic oral history needs. They include. . .

- Recorders;
- Microphones and accessories;
- Duplication equipment;
- Transcription equipment;
- Interviewer training.

See [Section 5](#) for more details.

### ***How about ongoing expenses?***

The ongoing expenses of oral history are your overhead costs. They include. . .

- Continuing interviewer training;
- Research and photocopying, as part of the interviewer preparation process;
- Printing letterhead or brochures, if desired;
- Postage;
- Office equipment, depending on the size and duration of the project;
- Telephone and fax.

A one-interview family oral history may not incur the costs of printing letterhead and brochures. And you already might have a computer, telephone or fax machine to use. But they still represent costs associated with carrying out an oral history interview.

### ***Are there more costs I should budget for?***

Yes. Each interview will incur costs, in both time and money. Some are as follows:

- Interviewer research and preparation time
- Arranging and doing the interview
- Interviewer transportation costs
- Recording media
- Payment to interviewers, as needed
- Payment to sound technicians or videographers, as needed
- Transcribing, usually computed by the interview hour or by the page (Transcribers generally should not be paid by the hour)

Many of these costs may be met by in-kind contributions of an interviewer's time. You might even be able to find volunteer transcribers. But be forewarned: Transcribing is a tough job and even the most willing volunteer might get discouraged.

At the very least, you almost certainly will have to purchase - or seek the donation of - recording media on which to record the interviews, even if everything else is donated or comes out of your own pocket.

## ***I'm eager to start interviewing. Are there any other plans I need to make?***

Yes. Before you start those interviews, think about how you'll process them after you turn off the recorder.

## ***What do you mean by processing?***

**Processing** refers to what you do with the interview materials after the interview is over. The purpose is to assure ongoing preservation of and access to the information the interview captures, essentially by preparing the interview and its associated materials for deposit in the chosen repository. For details on processing, see [Section 10](#).

## ***How do I process an interview?***

Besides producing a brief [synopsis](#) of the contents of the interview, processing an oral history interview can take either of these basic forms:

- An [abstract](#) or outline listing the topics discussed in the order in which they were discussed.
- A *verbatim*, or word-for-word, [transcript](#) of the interview.

An abstract summarizes what the narrator said at intervals in the recording (usually three- to five-minute intervals, or when the subject substantially changes in the course of the interview). An abstract requires the researcher to listen to the actual interview to access the specific information it contains.

A transcript, on the other hand, is time consuming. It can take an average of eight hours to transcribe one hour of recorded interview. However, transcripts provide long-term access to interview information even without use of the actual recording.

More information on processing is available in [Section 10](#).

## ***Can I start interviewing now?***

Not quite yet. You need to make arrangements to train interviewers - or get some training yourself, if you are the sole interviewer.

## ***What kind of training is important?***

Well-trained interviewers are critical to the success of an oral history project. Many experienced oral historians suggest scheduling a one-day training session before beginning the interviews. This session should focus on the following:

- Record-keeping procedures
- Interview research and preparation
- Interview setting
- Use of the equipment
- Interviewing techniques

Most interviewing workshops last at least half a day. Contact the [Nebraska Humanities Council](#) for information on workshop funding options for oral history project training.

## ***Is there anything else to plan?***

Just one more thing, especially if you are working on a multi-interview project: Plan to publicize what you do after you are finished.

Oral history projects can be a source of pride to an organization, a school, a neighborhood or a community. When projects are completed, project directors should send out press releases with information about the project and what it accomplished. They may also want to put on a public event or sponsor a celebration for everyone involved in the project.

### ***Why should I wait until the project is finished to brag about it?***

Project publicity is good, with one exception: Don't advertise in the news media for possible narrators. Such an announcement can overwhelm a project with names of people who may or may not be good interview sources. Placing a notice in the local media may also imply the promise of an interview, which may not always best serve the project.

## **5. Thoughts on Equipment and Media**

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### **People have been collecting and learning from oral information for thousands of years.**

Saved either in written form or handed down orally, this information contributes to our understanding of history and culture. In the late 1940s, as voice recorders became more commercially available, historians at Columbia University, followed by the University of California at Berkeley and UCLA, started to realize the potential for recording firsthand knowledge as a way of collecting and preserving it. Although the term "oral history" actually was coined earlier, this was the formal beginning of oral history as a process or tool for collecting primary source information.

**Oral history is technology-based, and equipment choice is regularly discussed.** Whether you are doing one interview or a multi-interview project, good equipment is a necessity. What are some of the key factors to consider? Good sound quality is one of the most important. And while many people also look for immediate access to the recorded information, preserving it for future users is another important issue.

**Rapid changes in technology complicate the equipment choice.** While some types of recording equipment are easy to use and have great sound, information recorded on them may not be accessible in a few years, much less in ten or twenty years, because of the rapid pace of format obsolescence. Repositories charged with caring for recordings and making them accessible to future users are usually not equipped to collect and provide ongoing access for every type of media on the market today. So the choice of equipment is an important one that involves thinking through not just the immediate need of capturing the interview itself, but also the long-term issues related to helping keep the information as accessible as possible in the future. Meeting these needs is not easy. The following information will help you sort out some of the basics.

### ***Analog or Digital?***

How does recording equipment work? Recorders convert sound and light into audio and optical signals that are then stored on the media (such as a tape or disk). The equipment, signals, and media all come in either analog or digital formats.

- **Analog** machines use electronic signals to record sounds and images as wave forms (analogous to the way sound and light exist in nature, thus the term "analog"), which are saved generally on magnetic media in a linear, continuous fashion.

- **Digital** machines record sound and images by taking samples of the signal and then storing it on the media as bits of data, just as computers store information.

Your first decision is which type to use when recording the interview (making the interview **master**). The following table provides additional background to help you think this through:

ANALOG	DIGITAL
Equipment is generally universal. It does not use software to record and access information. Some equipment and media are increasingly difficult to find.	Equipment uses software and hardware to record and access information. This software and hardware may be proprietary; that is, their compatibility may not be universal. Sound and images are stored as bits of data.
Recording has a lower signal-to-noise ratio (relationship of strength of signal to unwanted noise).	Recording has higher signal-to-noise ratio, giving it better sound. Recording media include CDs, DVDs, DATs, computer chips and hard drives.
Media can deteriorate over time, but can last from 20-40 years if stored and used properly.	CDs can experience physical degradation, and the stability of other digital media is as yet unknown. Transfer processes, such as refreshing, reformatting and migrating to current media, are recommended on a five-year cycle to help preserve access to the sound files.
Copies (dubs) deteriorate in quality with each generation made.	Copies (clones) may be made without degradation for many generations.
Signals are not compressed.	Depending on media and formats, the signal may be compressed. If so, access must be obtained through a CODEC, a program that compresses digital files to save storage space.
If the media is damaged, it may be spliced and repaired without full loss of information.	All information is usually lost if the media is damaged.
Less easy to manipulate for programming	Easily edited, indexed or manipulated for programming.
Some equipment and media record broadcast-quality sound.	Most equipment and media record broadcast-quality sound.
Reel-to-reel tape is considered an archival standard, though players and media are increasingly difficult to find.	Does not yet meet archival standards.

With changes in technology occurring so rapidly, archivists and sound technicians often recommend using both analog and digital -- recording in one, copying to another, and storing in both. But this requires extra equipment, funds, time, personnel, and storage. Interviewers and project leaders often talk with representatives of the repository that will ultimately house the interview materials to find out what they recommend before making a decision.

### ***Audio or Video?***

Besides deciding on analog or digital formats, the interviewer or project manager also has to decide on the exact format of equipment and media. Do you want to record in audio or video, or are you interested in using both? Once again, a review of the basic issues can help you think this through.

## ***Audio***

Audio is the most-used oral history recording format and is the least complicated to use and arrange for. It is the least invasive or disruptive and the interviewer can generally run the equipment. It is readily available in both analog and digital versions.

## ***Video***

Video, of course, includes an audio signal but adds the visual component. While it offers the opportunity to increase the amount of information collected, its use needn't be automatic. Interviewers and project leaders generally use video to record scenes, settings, photographs, and other types of information that can't be picked up with an audio recorder. Consider the use of video if the interview will likely include visual triggers or enhancements to the narrator's stories (like showing photographs or objects, or moving around a building or other place), or when planning exhibits or programs based on the interviews after they are completed. You can also consider recording the interview in audio and then adding needed visual components later.

**Planning for video takes additional time.** Here are some factors to consider:

- Check on the need for extra sound and lighting equipment.
- Make sure you have access to a trained videographer. Unless you have a highly skilled interviewer and specialized video equipment, the interviewer should not also try to run the camera.
- Carefully organize the visual aspects of the recording, including the interview setting and the correct and respectful framing of the narrator on camera.
- Check in advance to make sure the narrator agrees to being recorded on video.
- Always make sure the video camera or recorder adequately picks up the audio signal. This may mean having a simultaneous audio recording to assure good audio information.

Like audio formats, video formats are also readily available in both analog and digital versions. And again, when choosing a format interviewers and project leaders often talk with representatives of the repository that will ultimately house the interview materials to find out what they recommend before making a final decision.

## ***Are there some basic equipment recommendations?***

Yes. Although the choice of recording equipment depends a great deal on budget, project-planning needs, ease of use by the interviewers, and the capability of the repository to care for the types of recordings you make, there are some standard factors that you always should consider. They are:

### ***When using audio equipment. . .***

- Use the best quality equipment you can manage. The type currently used by broadcasters is often best -- check with your local radio or TV station for help with this. The better the quality of your recording, the more the you will maximize the sound quality and extend the life and usability of the interview. While adding to the initial cost of the interview or project, it is one of the most important decisions you will make.
- Use equipment that takes standard size (not mini) cassettes or CDs (see information on recording media below)
- Do not use a voice-activated recorder. Their sound quality is poor, and the automatic start-stop feature disrupts the interview.

In general, it is best if your recorder has these features:

- A connecting jack for plugging in an external microphone, to assure proper placement and so you will not pick up the sound of the recorder's motor on the interview.
- A connecting jack for a set of headphones. This is useful to make sure the sound of both the interviewer and the narrator are being picked up by the recorder.
- A counter.
- A meter or meters that indicate if sound is being recorded and at what level. These are often called "volume units" (VU) meters.
- An AC adapter so that you will not need to depend on batteries.

### ***When using video equipment. . .***

- Use the best quality equipment you can manage. The type currently used by broadcasters is often best -- check with your local radio or TV station for help with this. The better the quality of your recording, the more the you will maximize the image and sound quality and extend the life and usability of the interview.
- Determine whether the equipment has progressive scan or interlaced format. This refers to the way the recorder captures the information. Images in interlaced formats may not always retain maximum quality.
- Be very careful about using home video equipment, especially if it utilizes a miniature version of a popular format or is more than just a few years old. The quality of the recorded materials may not last and future access could be hindered by changes in technology.

In general, it is best if your video camera or recorder has these features:

- A connecting jack for plugging in an external microphone, to assure proper placement and so you will not pick up the sound of the recorder's motor on the interview.
- A connecting jack for a set of headphones. This is useful to make sure the sound of both the interviewer and the narrator are being picked up by the recorder.
- A time code display showing hours, minutes and seconds
- An AC adapter so that you will not need to depend on batteries.
- A zoom lens if you want variety in the shots

### ***What should I know about recording media?***

The recording media are the physical materials on which the recordings are captured and kept. Some of the more familiar media are audio and videotapes, digital audiotapes (DATs), compact discs (CDs), digital video discs (DVDs) and computer hard drives. The choice of a recording medium is critical for recording quality, information accessibility, and long-term preservation. As with the choice of equipment, it is helpful to check with representatives of the interview or project repository when choosing media. They can talk with you about specific storage and long-term accessibility issues -- important factors to consider when choosing a recording medium.

#### ***Audio media***

Audio media come in both analog and digital formats. The choice of equipment is a major factor in determining the type of recording media you will use, but within that decision, you will still find a range of options. The following guidelines can help:

Features to look for in analog audio media (magnetic tapes) are the following:

- Standard size (not mini) cassettes. The long-term stability and accessibility of mini-cassettes is very poor.

- Sixty-minute cassettes (30 minutes on a side). The longer a tape is (running 90 or 120 minutes), the thinner it is and the greater the possibility it has of tangling, breaking, and sound bleeding.
- High bias, which has better sound than standard bias. "Metal" tapes cannot be played in all machines and are not recommended.
- Cassette casings that are screwed together (rather than permanently glued) so the tapes inside can be accessed and repaired if needed.

There are a variety of types of digital audio media. In general, features to look for, listed by type, are the following:

- **Digital audiotapes (DATs)**. These are magnetic tape cassettes that store information digitally. They have open standards and have the fewest proprietary concerns of all digital audio media.
- Standard **compact discs (CDs)**. While mini-CDs may have good sound quality, information on them is often compressed at high rates causing restrictive playback options. CDs should conform to the recording industry's "Red Book" standards of size, physical composition, and formatting; Among other things, this means they should be able to store up to 74 minutes of audio in an uncompressed 16 bit, 44.1kilohertz, 2 track format. Always check on long-term equipment and software access needs. Writeable digital videodiscs (DVD-Rs and DVD+Rs) hold many times more information than CDs and can also be used to hold audio files.
- Removable or external **computer hard drives** can be acceptable audio recording media if the audio sample rate is 32 KHz or higher and at a bit rate of 16 or higher. Always check on long-term equipment and software access needs.

### *Video media*

As with audio, video media come in a variety of analog or digital formats. A general guide includes the following:

- **Analog videotapes (VHS)**. These come in different grades: super high grade, high grade, standard grade, etc. Use the best grade you can find. And as with analog audiotapes, the longer the recording time, the thinner the tape. Always record in standard play (SP) speed and to NTSC recording standards.
- **Digital videotapes (DV)** and **digital videodiscs (DVDs)**. These hold the binary code that represent points of brightness and color in the original subject. Both store them information in compressed form. Always check on long-term equipment and software access needs.

### *How important is an external microphone?*

It is *very* important. Using an external microphone assures proper placement and avoids picking up the sound of the recorder's motor.

Microphones are defined by how they pick up sound. Here are some of the more common types:

- **Dynamic**. Good, durable, all-around devices that operate without power.
- **Condenser**. Commonly smaller, more sensitive and require an external source of power (often powered through the recorder), but give high-quality sound. They are often used in broadcast situations.

Microphones pick up sound in a variety of patterns. Here are some of the more common types:

- **PZM (pressure zone microphones)** are generally flat on one side so they can lie on a horizontal surface, like a table, and often are used to record meetings.

- **Omni-directional microphones** can pick up sound from all directions at once. They can be used for audio and video work and often are used for oral history interviews.
- **Unidirectional microphones** pick up sound best from only one direction. These are not recommended for use in oral history interviews because they will pick up the narrator's voice, but not always that of the interviewer.
- **Lavaliers** or **lapel microphones**, individual and often unidirectional, are fastened one each to the interviewer and narrator and often are used for oral history interviews.

### *What about other equipment?*

Here are some additional items oral historians typically use, especially in the context of audio-only interviews:

- Good quality **headphones**, to make sure the voices of both the interviewer and the narrator are being picked up by the recorder.
- An **extension cord** for the recorder, to assure it can be placed in a handy spot for the interviewer.
- A **microphone stand**, **foam mat** or **folded towel** to cushion and protect the microphone from vibration and noise.
- The best-quality **cable** you can afford to connect the microphone to the recorder.
- **Extra media**. Always have twice as many on hand as you think you'll need.
- **Batteries** for the recorder to be used as backup in case electrical power is unreliable or not available at the recording location.

### *The "Oral History Kit"*

If audio-only is your choice (and most oral historians make this choice), you can assemble an "Oral History Kit" after you have made your equipment and media decisions. This kit will contain all the equipment and supplies you need to conduct an interview. An audio-only Oral History Kit generally includes the following:

- Recorder
- Recording media (always include extras)
- Microphone
- Microphone stand (or foam mat or towel)
- Headphones
- Cables and connectors
- Power cord
- Extension cord
- Batteries
- Manuals for all included equipment
- Inventory of kit items
- [Equipment Check-Out Log](#)
- Stenographer's notebook
- Sharpened pencils

When you finish an interview, make sure all equipment is put back the way you found it.

Running a larger project may necessitate having more than one Oral History Kit. In this case, mark each item in a particular kit as belonging to that kit.

### *What equipment might I need after the interview is over?*

Completing the interview isn't the end of the oral history process. The next steps involve *processing*; that is, preparing the interview and associated materials for deposit in the repository and to assure its future usability. The equipment options for this step include the following:

### ***Duplicating Machines***

You'll want to make several copies of each recorded interview. The versions may be in different formats, depending on the needs or preferences of the user. You should have at least four copies, defined in this way:

- The master (original recording), from which the use copies are made. It will reside in the repository.
- One use copy for processing tasks, including transcribing.
- One use copy for researcher access, to be given to the repository along with the master.
- One copy to the narrator or the narrator's family.

Duplicating machines need not be specialized equipment made specifically for creating multiple copies of your masters. Even though such equipment does exist, if you need to make use of any of it, it may be more cost-effective to hire services that have such equipment than to acquire it yourself. More often, you can just hook up more than one machine (one for playback of the master and one for recording the copy) and make your copies one at a time. Here are some tips for making copies of the master:

- Copy audiocassette tapes at regular speed to maximize transfer of sound quality.
- CDs may be copied on a computer equipped with a CD "burner" and the proper software; it is even better if the computer also has a second CD drive for playback. Take care to use CD-Rs (writable) rather than CD-RWs (re-writable) for your copies, and to format them to the ISO 9660 standard (so that they can be read on any standard CD-ROM drive). Likewise, DVDs can be copied on computers with the proper burner and software.
- For audio or videotapes, use the same length of tape as the master.

### ***Transcribing Machines***

Transcribing machines are playback devices used for creating a [transcript](#) (a written *verbatim*, or word-for-word, representation of the contents of the interview). While you can type a transcript by listening to the recording on any machine that will play it, a transcribing machine makes the job considerably easier. Choose the machine that fits your media. If you used video to capture the interview, you may prefer to dub the soundtrack onto an audio medium to make transcribing easier.

For best results, an audio transcription machine should include these features:

- Volume control
- Tone control
- Tape speed control
- Headphones
- Foot pedal with forward and reverse controls

### ***Some final thoughts on equipment:***

- Before you choose equipment for a project, do some research. Check reviews on the Web, recommendations by broadcasters and technicians, and stay current on changes in formats.
- If you think oral history will be a long-term or frequent enterprise for you, it helps to have more than one of any piece of equipment, including recorders, as backup.

- If you need help finding equipment, check with community organizations, continuing education programs, extension programs, schools, community colleges, and libraries. They sometimes have equipment you can check out.
- Always go over the equipment when you first receive it to check settings and to make sure it is in working order. Practice with new equipment before each interview to become familiar with it. And, whether you are using it for the first time or the eighty-first time, always test it before each interview.
- Keep your equipment clean and properly adjusted. The manufacturer may recommend appropriate time intervals and available services.
- If you plan to house the masters yourself, find out about proper storage and preservation techniques. Also, have an on-going media migration plan in place. Keep the interview master intact in the originally recorded format and make copies in newer formats as technology evolves.
- The best advice for choosing oral history equipment is this: Prepare yourself and your project for on-going technology changes through careful and continued research and planning.

## 6. Getting Ready to Interview: Preliminary Steps

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*Now that I've made my plans and have my equipment, how do I get ready for the interview?*

First, do **background research**.

Successful oral history interviews depend on a well-prepared interviewer. This begins with a review of existing sources of information about your chosen interview topics. Remember that your interviews are intended to uncover new information, something that is *not* already known about your topic. Background research will help you find out what is already known. Here are some of the more common places to find such information:

- Written histories in books or newspapers
- Newspaper accounts
- Diaries
- Letters
- Photographs
- Maps

What is already on the record and where? Who said what and why? Oral history interviews can collect new information to fill in gaps in existing knowledge and to correct misinterpretations or false information. Knowing what is on the record helps interviewers and project directors determine themes to focus on in the interviews so you will use the interview time to the best advantage.

*What's a good strategy for keeping track of all that I learn?*

Develop a **bibliography**. As with any project that involves ongoing reading and research, keep track of the materials you use. When the interview or project is completed, this bibliography will become part of the background material documenting its development.

Also, create a list of **dates**, **places** and **names** related to the interview topics. Everyone involved in an oral history interview can benefit from a master list of dates, place names and proper names associated with the interview topics. That helps everyone involved keep things straight. When the interview or project is completed, this list will become part of the material documenting its development.

### ***What should I do with the background research?***

The background research is the best way to find out what's already known about your subject, as well as what is *not* already on the record.

Using the background research, you can develop a list of possible topics or themes to cover with the interviewee. This becomes the structure for the oral history question outline that will guide the interview.

The topics or themes can be focused as needed. They should stem from what the project is after, identifying areas where more information is needed and areas where contradictions in the existing record could be clarified. Some questions may be asked to all narrators, and others may be limited to just one or two narrators.

For example, using the *Acme School Oral History Project* as an illustration, questions covering general memories about closing the school will be common to all narrators. Specific questions about how it affected the students will be asked of the students, while school board members will be asked questions related to how they made their decision. In other words, narrators are asked to provide information from their own specific backgrounds and knowledge.

In another example, if you already know you are going to interview your grandmother and you know she grew up on a ranch in the Sandhills of Nebraska during the Great Depression, your background research might include some general reading about that era on the Great Plains. Maybe you'll want to look up some census figures about population trends in that time and place. If a local history book or pamphlet ever was published, that would be a good source, too.

### ***What if I don't have a particular person in mind to interview?***

Doing the research and listing the specific interview topics also helps to identify potential narrators. Thinking about the types of information you want often leads to people most knowledgeable about these subjects. They may be the best choices for narrators.

Choose narrators with a variety of backgrounds who reflect all aspects of your interview topic. In the *Acme School Oral History Project* example, project directors could choose to interview people who both supported and opposed the school closing. They also would want to interview students, teachers, school administrators, community leaders (the mayor or someone from the city council), school board members and the like. Each brings a perspective that helps fill in the whole picture.

### ***What if the research leads me to dozens of potential narrators but I don't want to conduct that many interviews?***

Interviewers and project directors sometimes make the mistake of planning for too many interviews. Preparing for, conducting, and following up an interview takes about three working days spread over about three weeks total time. Directors of larger oral history projects often ask each interviewer to take on two or three interviews and do them thoroughly beginning to end.

The number of interviews you can do depends on how much time and resources are at your disposal, and the number of interviewers available. Using a rule of thumb of two or three interviews per interviewer, and factoring in the time it takes to complete an interview, the time available, and the number of interviewers, you should be able to arrive at a good estimate of how many interviews you can realistically complete.

### ***How should I assign interviewers to potential narrators? Does it matter?***

If you have more than one interviewer at your disposal, pairing interviewers and narrators is an important decision. Both narrator and interviewer bring a unique perspective and personality to the interview. The combination will affect the outcome, making each interview a one-of-a-kind product. Project directors should put careful thought into interviewer-narrator pairs. Here are some of the issues involved with pairing decisions:

- Pairing younger interviewers with older narrators may work extremely well, but may instead cause the narrator to withhold information that he or she thinks the younger person wouldn't understand.
- Pairing men with women could have the same effect.
- Some people are known to dislike or be uncomfortable with one another, making an effective interview unlikely.
- Some people are so close they would talk in shorthand, making brief, casual references to people, places and events, and leaving future listeners in the dark.

## 7. Setting Up the Interview

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***Once I have a list of potential narrators, what's the best approach for getting in touch with a narrator?***

First contact with the narrator should be by letter, from the sole interviewer or the project director. In this initial contact, the interviewer or project director explains the goals of the interview or project, briefly describes the reasons for asking the narrator to participate, and (in the case of a project) gives the narrator the name of the person who will be doing the interview. In a project, the director also lets the narrator know that the interviewer will contact him or her within a week to discuss the project further. Click here for a sample [initial contact letter](#).

The interviewer then often follows up by telephone. This conversation covers the following:

- Asking the narrator if he or she has any questions about the interview or project and is willing to participate in it.
- Explaining the use of the [release form](#), the need for it, potential uses of the results of the interview, and that both interviewer and narrator will sign the form immediately after the interview.
- Telling the narrator where the interview repository is.
- Explaining how the interview will be conducted.
- Setting a date, time, and place for the interview, usually about two weeks ahead, to allow for preparation time.

The interviewer then sends a letter confirming the interview and identifying the general points to be covered in it. Click here for a sample [interview confirmation letter](#).

***Should I send the narrator a list of questions?***

No. Giving the narrator the general interview subjects allows him or her to prepare for the interview by thinking about the general points to be covered. But sharing specific questions often results in narrow, rehearsed responses rather than the full, spontaneous accounts oral historians seek.

***If I'm just going to interview Grandma, why can't I just call her up and find out when I can come over to talk to her about her growing-up years?***

Certainly, you can do that. But you probably won't get as good an interview as you would if you treated her the way you'd treat a stranger. Explaining the process, describing the release form you'll ask her to sign, doing some background research, outlining the general topics you want to cover - these are all signs of professionalism and of respect for the narrator and for the information she has to share.

### ***Would it help if I have some specific information about the narrator, not just the general information about the time and subject we're going to cover?***

Absolutely. Narrator-specific research is as important as the general background research you conducted earlier. This can be recorded on a [Biographical Information Form](#). Take the list of interview topics and read up as much as possible on the narrator, and talk to the narrator by telephone to fill in the biographical data. A conversation with the narrator might even give you more leads for additional background research.

But be careful: If you contact the narrator before the interview, make sure not to let him or her launch into the interview prematurely.

### ***How do I make sure I cover all the topics in my preparations?***

Using the interview topics and background information about the narrator as a guide, you can prepare an outline of questions or themes to cover in the interview.

These guidelines will help you prepare questions:

- Begin with questions common to the goals of the interview or project as a whole before moving into questions unique to the narrator.
- Go in chronological order, starting at the beginning of each subject to be covered and moving through them one by one.
- Do not write out the questions in complete sentences; key words and phrases are all you need. The interview will seem more spontaneous and conversational, which is what you're after from your narrator.
- Begin with information easiest for the narrator to talk about. Save difficult questions for later in the interview.
- Ask for full names when proper names are mentioned and for clarification when place names, businesses and the like are mentioned.
- Ask questions at the end designed to encourage the narrator to reflect on the experiences he or she has been discussing.
- Develop enough questions to last about one to one and a half hours.

### ***I know I shouldn't be late or cut short an interview, but how much time should this interview take?***

When using audio equipment alone, it will take at least 15 to 20 minutes to set up the equipment and get the narrator settled and ready to begin (setup for a videotaped interview will take longer). The interviewer should also use this time to do the following:

- Show the narrator the legal release form.
- Answer any questions about the form or about the interview and the project.
- Do the necessary sound check on the equipment.

Altogether, a single one- to one-and-one-half-hour audio interview can take up to three hours.

### ***OK, I'm at the narrator's home. Now what?***

The best interview setting is usually one in which the narrator is most comfortable. It should be as quiet as possible to maximize sound quality. If video is used, lighting and a good view of any items the narrator wants to show are important. The interviewer should do as much as possible to control extra sounds, such as barking dogs, ringing phones, and ticking clocks. Some sounds, such as furnaces or air conditioners, cannot be changed.

Follow these guidelines to set up an audio-only interview:

- The interviewer should sit across from the narrator at a distance of about six feet.
- The recorder should be next to the interviewer where it can be seen easily.
- Extra tapes or CDs (recording media) should be near the recorder and within easy reach of the interviewer.
- The microphone should be pointed at the narrator at a distance of about two feet, depending on its sound collection pattern.

Other points to remember for an audio-only interview:

- Use headphones to monitor the sound during the interview.
- Keep a close eye on the equipment, making sure everything is running smoothly.
- Watch the recording media for signs of ending, and change it in a timely manner. Using a timer to alert you to when a tape has reached its recording limit is a good idea.
- Do not re-use an already recorded tape or CD.

## 8. Conducting the Interview: Techniques that Work

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**NOTE: For simplicity, the following guidelines relate to conducting audio-only interviews**

### *How do I start the actual interview?*

Begin with a recorded introduction that follows a standard format. Here's an example:

*"This interview is being conducted for the Acme School Oral History Project, sponsored by the River County Historical Society. The interviewer is Mary Jones. The narrator is Jane Smith. The interview is taking place at Mrs. Smith's farm in rural River County on November 20, 2004."*

### *How can I ask effective questions?*

Here are some tips for asking effective questions, using your question format as a guide:

- Rely on open-ended questions that require more than a one-word answer. Examples: *Tell me about your high school education. How did you celebrate Christmas? Describe your first home.*
- Use neutral, not leading, questions or statements. Example: *"Tell me about living here" rather than "Why don't you like living here?"*
- Questions that start with *how, what, when, why, where, and who* can introduce a new subject or follow up on an initial statement. Examples: *How did you first learn that the Acme School would be closed? Tell me more about that.*
- Ask only one question at a time.
- Keep your opinions to yourself.

- Listen carefully without interrupting. Oral historians are looking for details and insights, not sound bites like you might hear on television or radio.
- Use body language, eye contact and silence to encourage a narrator to keep going. Avoid repeated "uh-huh" or "I see." Such interruptions by the interviewer make it difficult to use audio excerpts from an interview in public programming.
- Ask follow-up questions to draw out details and clarify information.
- Ask only questions your narrator can answer from firsthand knowledge. Stay away from questions beyond the narrator's area of expertise.
- If a narrator uses jargon or acronyms, ask for explanations. Twenty years from now, someone reading a transcript of your interview might have a tough time understanding that verbal shorthand.
- Jot down proper names or place names the narrator mentions so you can ask for correct spellings at the end of the interview. The person who transcribes the interview will thank you.
- Keep track of the time. Oral history interviews usually don't last more than one or one and one half hours. Elderly narrators, in particular, often have limited energy, so try not to tax them unnecessarily. If you need more time, schedule another session.

## 9. After the Interview: Wrapping up the Details

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### *What am I supposed to do after the interview is over?*

An oral historian's job doesn't end when the interview is over. This checklist will help you after the recorder is turned off. Most of these steps begin the task of preparing the interview for others to have access to it.

- Sign the [release form](#) as soon as the interview is over. It's a good idea to take a photograph of the narrator in the interview setting for the master file. Remember that black-and-white photos have a longer archival life than color photos.
- Thank the narrator.
- Pack the equipment so it will be ready for another interview.
- Label the recording media (CDs or tapes) with the name of the narrator and the date of the interview. Be sure to mark sides A and B of analog cassette tapes, and number the media if more than one was used.
- If you used analog cassettes, pop out the two tabs on the back edge of the cassette housing to prevent them from being mistakenly recorded over.
- Make the use copies from the masters and label them.
- Write the narrator a [thank you letter](#). Include a copy of the interview.
- Fill out the [Interview Information Form](#) documenting the names of the narrator and interviewer, the number of tapes or CDs used, the signing of the release form, and a brief list of the information covered in the interview.
- [Process](#) the interview to prepare it and its accompanying materials for deposit in the repository and so others will have access to the information (for details, see [Section 10](#)).
- If part of a project, turn all materials over to the project director.

When the entire project is complete, . . .

- Deposit the materials in the repository;
- Prepare news releases or any other publicity related to the project;
- Arrange and execute any post-project events or presentations;
- Throw a party for everyone involved!

# 10. Processing: Making Oral History Materials Accessible

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**Processing** is a term encompassing all the tasks associated with assembling all the materials that relate to an interview and preparing it and its accompanying materials for deposit in the repository. These steps ensure that the results of your efforts will be both accessible and useful to anyone who uses it in the future.

These steps are particularly important in the context of depositing the materials in the repository because a library archives, museum or other such institution is unlikely to be able or willing to take on the tasks, and would prefer to acquire a resource that is ready to use. This will likely become evident when you first approach a repository. Besides, these steps are a part of the responsibility of practicing oral history. It's not *really* done until these tasks are completed.

## *What's the first step in making an interview available to others?*

Make copies. And as mentioned previously, you may want to make several. The original recording (the master) should be kept in a safe place and should *not* be used for transcribing or for any purpose other than to make the copies and to give to the repository. Make enough copies to give one each to the narrator and transcriber and an additional use copy for the repository.

## *What about the research notes, release forms and other materials?*

All the materials you created or gathered to support the interview should be kept and associated (usually by the name of the narrator and the date of the interview) with the interview. These eventually will accompany the master recordings when they are turned over to the repository. In the case of a project, these materials go to the project director first, along with the master and copy recordings. The director will see that they all reach the repository.

## *What other processing is necessary to make the interviews accessible?*

The most common ways to make oral history interviews fully accessible are to create an interview [abstract](#) or a [transcript](#).

An **abstract** is a timed outline of the interview contents, describing the subjects being discussed and the times in the interview at which they appear. It usually summarizes the content at three- to five-minute intervals, or when the subject substantially changes in the course of the interview. Click here for a [sample abstract](#).

A **transcript** is a word-for-word printed copy of the interview. This provides the most complete access to the interview information and is the recommended approach to provide permanent access. Click here for a [sample transcript](#).

In addition to an abstract or a transcript, the repository will appreciate (even *require*) a **synopsis** of the interview. This is usually a single paragraph summary of the interview -- the main issues, topics, people, places and events covered by the narrator's words. In addition to this summary paragraph, the synopsis should include the name of the narrator, the name of the interviewer, and the date and place of the interview. Click here for a [sample synopsis](#).

## ***Tell me more about transcribing.***

Transcribing is a time-consuming process, usually taking about eight hours one of transcription time for each hour of recorded interview. But the result is worth the effort. These guidelines can help:

- Use a copy of the interview; never use the master media.
- Use a [transcribing machine](#), if available.
- Type a word-for-word draft. Either the interviewer or a transcriber can do this task.
- Follow standard punctuation and grammar guidelines. For detailed style information, see [Baylor University Institute for Oral History's \*Oral History Transcribing Style Guide\*](#).
- The interviewer then checks the draft transcript against the copy of the recorded interview. The interviewer may be able to fill in missing words that the transcriber couldn't decipher.
- Check unclear facts and spellings of all proper and place names. The narrator is usually, but not always, a good source for these corrections.
- Make final corrections to the transcript and print it out on acid-free paper.
- Keep the original transcript with the narrator's file. Make a copy for the narrator and additional copies as needed.
- Give all materials, including a computer disk or CD containing the transcript, to the repository.

Some interviewers send a draft copy of the transcript to the narrator for review. Narrators, however, can find it difficult to read their spoken words and may try to edit the transcript too heavily, which should be avoided.

## ***It seems like practicing and processing oral histories involves a lot of important steps. How can I keep track of it all?***

Doing oral history well - so that you create resources of lasting value - does indeed involve a lot of important steps. The following checklist will help you prepare to deposit your interview and all related materials in the repository. That way, future generations will be able to learn from your narrator's story and benefit from all your efforts. Make sure you have . . .

- Determined that the subject of the interview or project falls within the scope of the repository's collection guidelines;
- Included signed [release forms](#) that meet the repository's requirements;
- Used recording media that meet the repository's specifications;
- Properly labeled all recording media with the full name of the narrator, interviewer and date of the interview;
- Included all accompanying support materials;
- Included a short [synopsis](#) of the interview contents as well as a timed [abstract](#) or [transcript](#) of the recording.

# **11. Additional Resources**

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**Many books and articles are available to help novice and experienced oral historians improve their skills.**

If you want more details than this primer can offer, these books can help.

*The Oral History Manual*, by Barbara W. Sommer and Mary Kay Quinlan (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002). Detailed, step-by-step instructions to help beginners get started on an oral history project. While many

publications focus solely on interviewing, this book also helps project directors or committees understand the importance of planning. It describes in detail the steps involved in planning and carrying out an oral history project.

***Native American Veterans Oral History Manual***, by Barbara W. Sommer and Mary Kay Quinlan (Lincoln, NE: Nebraska Foundation for the Preservation of Oral History, 2005).

***Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide***, 2nd edition, by Donald A. Ritchie (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2003). Widely regarded as a "must-read" for novice and experienced oral historians, this book uses a question-and-answer format to address a wide variety of concerns oral historians face. Many examples of oral historians and their work enliven this detailed resource.

***Oral History Evaluation Guidelines*** (Carlisle, PA: Oral History Association, 2002). Part of the Oral History Association's pamphlet series, this publication sets forth ethical considerations oral historians should follow. It describes ethical standards for collecting, processing, archiving and using oral history materials.

***Oral History and the Law***, 3rd edition, by John A. Neuenschwander (Carlisle, PA: Oral History Association, 2002). This publication from the OHA pamphlet series is required reading for anyone embarking on an oral history project. The author draws on his experiences as an oral historian, history professor, lawyer and municipal judge to review in detail the legal issues relating to oral history. Copyright, defamation, libel and other key terms are explained thoroughly along with a discussion of significant court cases.

***Oral History Projects in Your Classroom***, by Linda P. Wood (Carlisle, PA: Oral History Association, 2001). One of offerings in the OHA pamphlet series, this loose-leaf publication by a former high school librarian contains interesting examples and reproducible forms teachers may find useful in classroom oral history projects.

***Dialog with the Past: Engaging Students & Meeting Standards through Oral History***, by Glenn Whitman (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004). This new book gives teachers who want to incorporate oral history in their classrooms a practical guide with a wealth of information. An experienced social studies teacher, Whitman shows teachers how oral history work fulfills various state and national performance standards in various curriculum areas.

***Recording Oral History: A Practical Guide for Social Scientists***, 2nd edition, by Valerie Raleigh Yow (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2005). Written primarily as a college text for interviewers in the social sciences, this book examines in detail some of the complexities of conducting oral history interviews. Yow describes challenging situations interviewers may encounter and suggests how to handle them; the new edition includes a chapter on memory. She also includes extensive footnotes and suggested readings for those interested in delving more deeply into interviewing.

You may also find these Web-based resources helpful:

### **[Oral History Association](#)**

P.O. Box 1773

Carlisle, PA 17013

717-245-1036

E-mail: [OHA@dickinson.edu](mailto:OHA@dickinson.edu)

[www.dickinson.edu/oha](http://www.dickinson.edu/oha)

### **[Baylor University Institute for Oral History](#)**

"Oral History Workshop on the Web"

[www.baylor.edu/oral%5Fhistory](http://www.baylor.edu/oral%5Fhistory)

## [History Matters](#)

"Making Sense of Oral History"

[historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/oral](http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/oral)

The [Oral History Listserv](#) (no dues or fees required) is a good resource for current information. To subscribe to or search previous message on this listserv, see [www2.h-net.msu.edu/~oralhist](http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/~oralhist).

# 12. Appendix

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The following forms and samples are referred to throughout the primer text. They are in HTML format.

- [Release Form](#)
- [Biographical Information Form](#)
- [Interview Information Form](#)
- [Potential Narrator Information Form](#)
- [Interviewer Agreement Form](#)
- [Transcriber Agreement Form](#)
- [Equipment Check-Out Sheet](#)
- [Staff Time Log](#)
- [Volunteer Time Log](#)
- [Oral History Project Status Log](#)
- [Artifact and Photograph Inventory Form](#)
- [Initial Contact Letter](#)
- [Interview Confirmation Letter](#)
- [Thank You Letter](#)
- [Abstract](#)
- [Transcript](#)
- [Synopsis](#)
- [Donor](#)