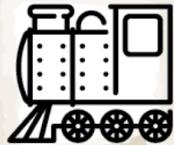


PAST-TIMES



Introduction to Conducting an Oral History Interview

Module 3, Unit 1: How to conduct an interview – forming open questions

Introduction to Conducting an Oral History Interview



Introduction to Oral History Interviewing

- Oral history is distinguished from other forms of interviews by its content.
- Oral history interviews seek an in-depth account of personal experience and reflections, with sufficient time allowed for the narrators to give their story the fullness they desire.
- The content of oral history interviews is grounded in reflections on the past as opposed to commentary on current or contemporary events.

“

Oral history interviews are historical documents that are preserved and made accessible to future researchers and members of the public.

4

Defining Oral History

- How, what, and why people remember and narrate the past is the primary business of oral historians
- In the context of this project we are perhaps more interested in:
 - Writing history from the bottom up
 - Gaining an insight into past events and ways of life
 - Understanding the structure of society in the past
 - Introducing the idea of new perspectives on past events
 - Documenting personal experiences which tend to be missing from written sources
 - Documenting and understanding culture and traditions
 - Preserving traditions
 - Recording the history of our community, our family, our local area

Planning an Oral History Project

- Sequence for Oral History Research:
 - Formulate a central question or issue.
 - Plan the project. Consider such things as end products, evaluation, personnel, equipment, and time frames.
 - Conduct background research.
 - Interview.
 - Process interviews.
 - Evaluate research and interviews.
 - Organize and present results.
 - Store materials archivally.

Source: Judith Moyer 1993, Revised 1999



Preparing for an Oral History Interview

- The key to ensuring that your oral history interview is informative, engaging and accurate is to prepare your research in advance and to ask good questions.
- Once you have an idea of the subject you would like to cover in your oral history interview, you can conduct online research into the topic to identify the key points you should address in your interview with your narrator.
- Then your next task is to prepare a set of questions that will help you to collect an interesting, accurate and engaging oral history account from your narrator.

Forming Questions for an Oral History Interview

- There are two main types of questions applied to oral history interviews:
 1. Closed Questions
 1. Open Questions



Forming Questions for an Oral History Interview

- Closed questions can be used to find out factual information from your narrator, such as names of places, people, specific dates, etc.
 - While this type of question can be used to begin the interview, only using this format of question in your interview will not yield a very interesting or rich oral history account.

- Asking open questions will allow you to elicit more qualitative answers from your narrator.
 - With this type of question you can draw out details of your narrator's memories, experiences and points of view.
 - These questions make the narrator's story interesting and engaging for the audience.

Forming Questions for an Oral History Interview

▣ Examples of Closed Questions:

- What country were you born in?
- Where did you go to school?
- Which city did you live in as a child?
- What year were you born in?
- What year did you move to.....in?
- What year did you finish school in?
- What are/were your parents' names?

Forming Questions for an Oral History Interview

▣ Examples of Open Questions:

- Can you describe...?
- How did you feel when...?
- What was it like when...?
- Tell me about...
- What were your expectations at that time?
- Can you describe some of the obstacles you faced?
- Can you describe how you overcame these obstacles?
- What was a typical day like in...?

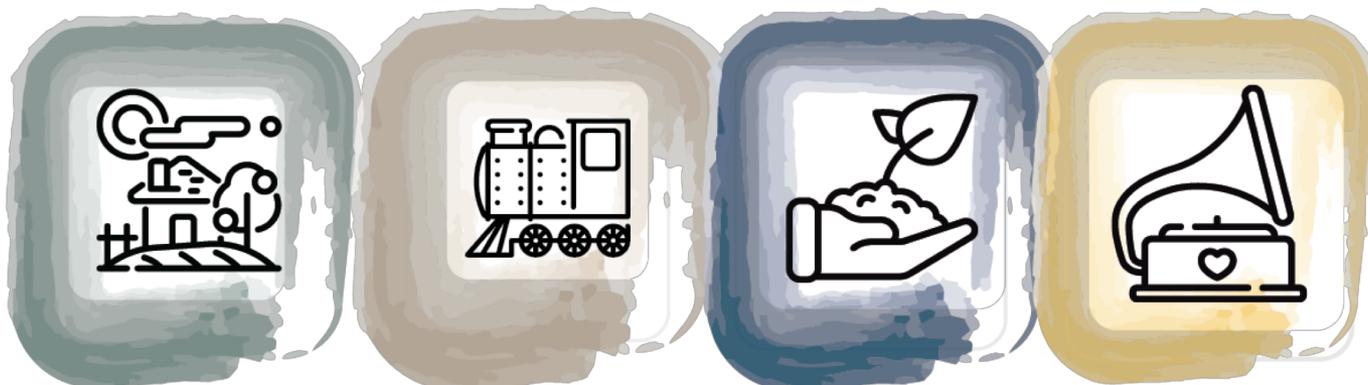


Over to you!

**What type of questions will you ask
when conducting your oral history
interview?**

Let's get some practice!

PAST-TIMES



S V E B ■
F S E A ■



The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.