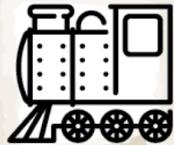


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Setting up and Executing your Oral History Interview

Module 3, Unit 2: Planning and executing your oral history interview

Setting up and Executing your Oral History Interview



Setting up your Oral History Interview

- ❑ Oral historians or others responsible for planning the oral history project should choose potential narrators based on the relevance of their experiences to the subject at hand.
- ❑ To prepare to ask informed questions, interviewers should conduct background research on the person, topic, and larger context in both primary and secondary sources.

Setting up your Oral History Interview

- When ready to contact a possible narrator, oral historians should send an email, text or an introductory letter outlining the general focus and purpose of the interview, and then follow-up with either a phone call or a return email.
- In projects involving groups in which literacy is an issue, or when other conditions make it appropriate, participation may be solicited via face-to-face meetings.

Setting up your Oral History Interview

- After securing the narrator's agreement to be interviewed, the interviewer should schedule a non-recorded meeting.
- This pre-interview session will allow an exchange of information between interviewer and narrator on:
 - possible questions/topics,
 - reasons for conducting the interview,
 - the process that will be involved,
 - the need for informed consent and legal release forms.

Setting up your Oral History Interview

- During pre-interview discussion the interviewer should make sure that the narrator understands:
 - oral history's purposes and procedures in general and of the proposed interview's aims and anticipated uses.
 - his or her rights to the interviews including editing, access restrictions, copyrights, prior use, royalties, and the expected disposition and dissemination of all forms of the record, including the distribution online.
 - that his or her recording(s) will remain confidential until he or she has given permission via a signed legal release.

Executing your Oral History Interview

- When you are executing your Oral History Interview, here are some tips to manage your communication during the interview:
 - Talk slowly - talking fast not only ruins the communication between you and the narrator, but it may add to the nervousness of the narrator.
 - Assertiveness - do not be afraid to assert yourself during the interview, if the narrator is going off-topic or is not fully answering your questions.
 - Details, Details, Details – listen to all of the details mentioned by your narrator. You may find interesting nuggets in their testimony that you want to follow-up with further questions.
 - Asking the Right Questions - asking questions gives you control of the flow of the interview, so make sure to prepare questions, as well as topics, in advance.

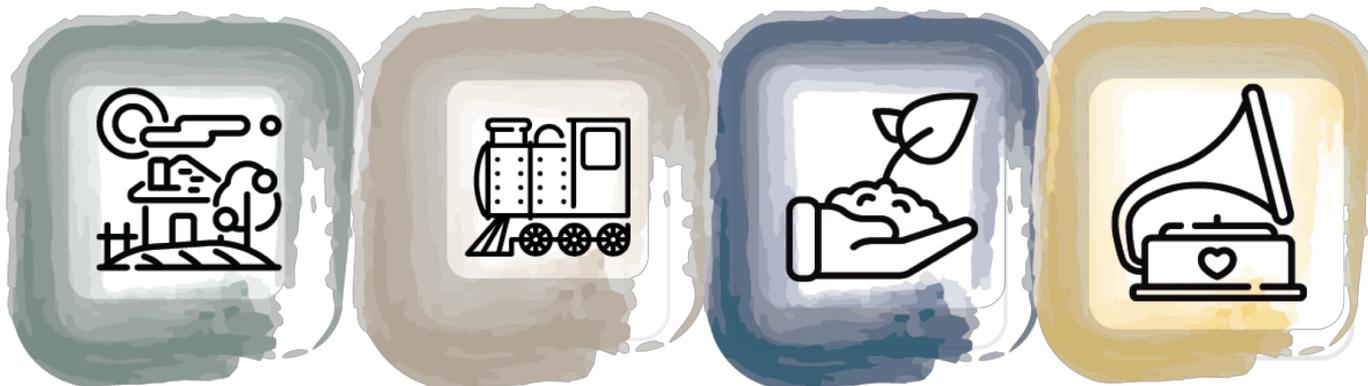
Executing your Oral History Interview

- Tips to manage your communication (cont'd):
 - Listen - communication not only involves you speaking—it's also expected that you know how to listen. Listening will enable you to ask the right questions and pick up on the finer details of your narrator's testimony.
- Communication is an integral part of the interview process.
- Remember, communication involves a lot of factors, such as how you speak, your body language, and the words you use – so be mindful of how and what you are communicating during your interview.

Interviewing Top Tips

- Once you have pressed ‘record’:
 - Listen, smile, nod, and make eye-contact. Try not to make encouraging noises like ‘uh-huh’ or ‘yes’ as these will be heard on the recording.
 - Only ask one question at a time, and wait for the person to finish speaking completely before asking any more questions. Don’t be afraid of pauses.
 - Look at the recorder occasionally to check it’s still recording.
 - Keep track of time – wear a watch. But also, turn your watch inwards on your wrist, so that it’s less obvious if you do need to check the time.
 - At the end of the interview, ask the interviewee if you think you’ve covered everything or if there’s anything they’d like to add.
 - And remember, it’s not a conversation - you are there to listen to their story.

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