

Conducting an Interview for Oral History

Conducting an oral interview can be fun. It's like being a reporter. First you need to choose who you want to interview. It could be a friend, parent, grandparent, or even a neighbour. Follow these steps when conducting an oral history interview:

- 1) Ask yourself **“What do I really want to know from my interview subject/”**
- 2) Learn as much as you can about the person you are going to interview before you begin the session. You could conduct a pre-interview over the phone, talk to other people who know them or research certain events that they may have lived through.
- 3) Arrange a time and location to do the interview. Make sure that the person being interviewed is aware that you will be recording the conversation as a class project. You may want to get them to sign a consent form.
- 4) Write a list of questions that will allow the person being interviewed to tell their story in their own way. Ask open-ended questions that require more than just a “yes” or “no” answer. Here are some examples of open-ended questions:
 - a) What were your parent's occupations?
 - b) What do you remember about living during World War II, the Depression, the 1960s...?
 - c) Tell me a story from your childhood?
 - d) Have you heard any stories about how family members first came here?
- 5) Make sure that your equipment is functioning properly before you arrive at the interview. Also bring paper and something to write with. **“Arrive at the interview prepared and ready to go.”**
- 6) During the interview keep notes of names, places, dates, and events. (Confirm details at the end of the interview.)
- 7) Listen carefully to the interviewee:
 - a) follow leads in the conversation and don't worry about asking all of your questions. You may ask them in a different order and you may not get to ask them all. **“Go with the flow.”**
 - b) know when they are getting off topic and lead them back to the things you want to cover
 - c) be patient with your subject and respect their opinion
- 8) When you have finished make sure to thank the interviewee. Keep the interviewee up to date on the status of the project.
- 9) Clearly label the tape with topic, names, and dates.
- 10) Make notes and highlight any major themes.
- 11) Send the interviewee a copy of the finished product and a thank you note.

Write a short report about something interesting that you learned from your interview to present to the class.