

“8 Steps to Doing Oral History” Developed by Dr. Paul Ortiz

Starting an oral history project:

1. Decide on Scope, Scale and Themes.
2. Who do you want to interview?
3. What kinds of community groups can you work with?
4. What will be the **outcome** of your project?
5. Who will have access to your interviews?
6. What are your goals, hopes, etc.?

Personal and/or Institutional Motivations

1. Why do you want to do this?
2. Who will actually **benefit** from your project?
3. Learn to answer, “Why do you want to interview me?”
4. Get it all together so that you can start.

Laying the Groundwork for an Oral History Project

1. Brainstorm about various contacts you can make.
2. **Make contacts** with community groups
3. What does this individual or community have to gain?
4. Talk with potential interviewees and others about your project.

Interview Preparation and Background Research

1. **Background research** is important!
2. Come up with places to go and people to talk to who have the answers.
3. Make a list of questions—what you should ask the interviewee.
4. Schedule and prepare for your interviews.

Equipment You Are Going to Use

1. It is important to **record** the interview (but still bring a notepad to the interview).
2. Video and audio recording can be used in documenting oral history; use digital technology if possible.

3. Selecting equipment is vital to the oral history process— there is a cost associated with cutting corners.
4. Make sure you have plenty of tapes and batteries. These are your preservation and power!
5. Practice microphone placement and learn to work with your recorder.

Conducting the Interview!

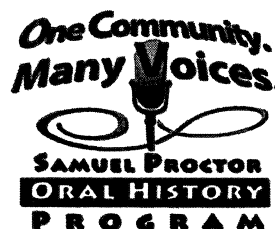
1. Master your arrival, introduction and setup.
2. Discuss release forms with interviewee.
3. Ask good questions to start out with in order to help stimulate memories.
4. **Listen**, listen some more, and be flexible!
5. Let interviewee responses help guide you in asking new questions.
6. Take notes about further questions you have.
7. Respect **privacy** and **confidentiality**.
8. Show empathy and gratitude.
9. Remember biographical paperwork.

Thinking about the “Final” Project

1. Make **transcribing** and **indexing** your interview a priority!
2. Encourage ongoing community involvement in your project by “getting the story straight.”
3. Tell this new and wonderful story through different outlets (i.e. public radio, community presentations, articles, exhibits, performance arts, etc.)
4. Receive interviewee input on the final product.

Permanent Access for Future Generations and Communities

1. Who gets your recordings and why?
2. Good notes and biographical paperwork are essential.
3. Know when a project is truly finished.



IF IT DOES NOT COME TO THE PROCESSING AREA IT DOES NOT EXIST IN THE ARCHIVES of the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program

The Basics

- 1--Acquisition for archiving
- 2--Processing for archiving
- 3--Preparing for final archiving

Acquisition for Archiving

Central location for ingest of all materials
Knowing how files will be processed so you know what you need to do for success
UFDC, have to have Deed of Gift (release) or will remain in limbo forever
Always be sure to give Deed of Gift to Deborah
Proper resolution

Processing for Archiving (audio)

Three files generated---original (raw) WAV processed Access (MP3)

ONLY MP3 IS PUBLIC

Not editing content except for direct omissions

Cleaning up slight ambient hiss

Keep original file

Create access mp3 file for transcript and for access file on share drive

Even from video

Preparing for final archiving

Prepare package for narrator—they get DVD data disc of all three types of files: mp3, WAV, and the original raw WAV files for their records.

Media will go back to narrator for review---6 month interval minimum

Mailing of audio CD with thanks and message of what will happen to interview

Add all the files above in a folder to special interim repository share drive

Preparing spread sheet for audio ingest to UFDC

Gear use for field collection

Audio

Check out recorder from processing area, log in clip board.

Make sure it is on preset 1, the processing area will also check every time.

Make sure there are NO recordings on recorder.

Fill out completion and contact info card and put in narrator's hands after interview.

Make sure you take responsibility for return of Deed of Gift, best practice is to leave this form in the recorder case.

Make sure there is a mailing address for return of their package. If they do NOT want the audio CD, please indicate an email address and we will return the interview in MP3 format.

Make sure you notify processing area of return of recorder so interview can be properly retrieved and recorder properly stored and prepared for next use.

I really implore you to never put a recorder with an interview back in the archive room drawers yourself. It must go through processing first or the possibility of losing track of the interview is high.

Common recording problems

- cell phone in vicinity
- proximity effect
- out of control environment

For best results video interviews should always have a team of two.

- one to interview and engage narrator
- one to monitor continuous video acquisition to prevent problems from ruining recording

Other Procedures

BE SURE YOU HAVE THREE ITEMS IN EVERY NARRATIVE: YOUR NAME, DATE, AND THEIR NAME(S), AND BEST FOR accurate documentation IF SPELLING IS ALSO INCLUDED!

After this you can read an intro, bio, or whatever you wish, just make sure you have these three items as a minimum.

Do not use record/pause, instead just use a cycle of record + stop. Because I cannot see the stops, and also increases chance of mistake upon resuming recording.

Make sure your narrator knows we are recording for a public archive and their information is intended for all public access.

If the narrator reconsiders what he or she said, immediately stop to create a new track upon resuming. I will know to listen to the reason for the stop and can redact easily at this point (rare occurrence, but can happen).

Handles---when ending, or (beginning) the interview wait several seconds before pressing "stop."

You can begin at any time or end at any time, the final track will only have the recorded material that includes the introduction and closing thank you's.

Special Instances

Bulk short interview situations

These are not oral histories and are short. Names are listed on a line item sheet with contact information. Try to encourage legibility, and we will always email these audio files in the form of MP3 audio files back to the narrators. We will not send audio CD packages for these.

Dark Archiving VS Anonymous

Dark Archiving is collecting and processing the interview as usual, but it will not be publically available/accessible until a time specified by the narrator. The name may or may not be associated with the audio file after release, but generally will be.

Anonymous is collecting and processing the interview as usual, but will be immediately (that is to say, relative to UFDC upload process) publically available without name attribution. We will have names in the archives, but that is never public. The narrator may

specify a time to release the name, but I would call that problematic and I would not even encourage it.

In a bulk interview situation, if the narrator wants to remain anonymous due to sensitive information then there is a check box to indicate this.

In an oral history if the narrator wishes to remain anonymous, please try to determine the length of time for dark archiving and write this on the Deed of Gift. The Deed of Gift will have correct names, and as always, Deeds of Gift are never public.

Veterans Interviews

Standard SPOHP Deed of Gift plus extra forms for the LOC must be filled out or they will not accept.

All US veterans are eligible

Must be more than 30 minutes

No phone interviews

No Group interviews