

“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.

