

Oral History Interview Protocol

Interview #1

Interview #2

Lab School Wow

Lab School Wow

Name:

Name:

Contact Information:

Contact Information:

1. Contact interviewee via phone or email to set up a time and date for the interview. Let them know you are calling from Dr. Buchanan's Life Writing Course at Western Illinois University and that you'll be interviewing them about either Western Lab School or WOW. In addition, tell them you will send them a list of topics you want to discuss during the interview so that they have an idea of the questions you might ask. (Ask participants if they would rather have you email the topics or call them again with them.)
2. Send out the list of topics (Talking Points) at least 3-4 days in advance of the interview so that participants have a chance to think about what you want to talk with them about. If you find something interesting in your archival work, make sure you include that in your email.
3. Arrive ON TIME (or early) for your interview. Be professionally dressed and ready to talk with the participants. Make sure you have a digital recorder, extra batteries if you need them, paper, a pen, and a pencil.
4. Start introducing yourself and then reading and presenting the Consent Form. Make sure you have two copies; one for the participant to keep and one for you to turn in after your interview. Make sure that you sign and date both forms and turn one into Dr. Buchanan after you've completed the interview.
5. Check the recorder to make sure it works. If it does, begin with a general introduction.
"This is [your name]. Today is [month/day/year]. I am interviewing [full name of interviewee]. The interview is taking place at [address; may include descriptions such as home of, office of] in [town, state]. This interview is part of the Oral History project for English 482: Life Writing, Spring 2012."
6. Ask questions from your outline of topics. Be flexible.
7. Once the interview is complete, be sure to thank the participant.
8. I would suggest sending a follow-up thank you email and possibly include the interview paper you completed for the interview.

Oral History Projects Suggestions for Getting the Story

1. Begin with a general introduction that serves as an audio label.
2. Compose questions from your outline of topics. Be flexible; each interview is a unique exchange with a unique individual. Let the train of memory association run its course, even if it means ignoring your outline momentarily.
 - Ask open-ended questions first, waiting to see what unfolds.
 - Tailor follow-up questions to the interviewee's responses. Pursue in detail.
3. Maintain a pattern of concentrated listening.
 - Provide feedback with silent encouragements: nod your head to indicate you are listening or smile when appropriate. Keep your feedback quiet, being aware that your sounds can override the interviewee's voice during the recording. Keep your feedback neutral (such as, "I see" or "uh-huh"), indicating neither agreement nor disagreement.
 - Jot down a few notes as the interviewee is talking to remind you of subjects you want to cover in more detail. Rather than disrupt the interviewee's train of thought by asking for spellings of unusual words, jot down a phonetic spelling and a clue to its place in the story, then after the interview ask for the correct spelling.
 - Give the interviewee time to answer each question fully and finish her/his train of thought, then just sit quietly for a few moments. Chances are excellent that the interviewee will think of something else to add. Silence is an integral, important part of the oral history interview process.
4. Give the interviewee a chance to think through difficult subjects.
 - Challenge accounts that you think may be inaccurate, but do not question the interviewee's memory or honesty. If you feel you must, refer to other accounts or interpretations you know, asking the interviewee for a response or clarification.
 - Avoid "off the record" information or switching the recorder off and on. Assure the interviewee that sensitive information may be restricted.
5. Be aware of the interviewee's age and physical condition when deciding how long to continue an interview. Sixty to ninety minutes is a good average length for an interview. Concentration diminishes if the interview becomes lengthy.
6. Make sure that the interviewee has signed a release for the interview. The interviewer must also sign a release form in most instances.
7. Continue to demonstrate respect for the interviewee. If you rearranged the furniture, return everything back to place before you leave. Send a thank-you note following the interview. Promise only what you actually will do, such as returning to visit again or furnishing copies of recordings or transcripts.