

Oral History & Interviews

Oral history is the practice of recording first hand impressions of past events on video or audio recordings. Today, changes occur at a rapid pace. Now is the time to capture the memories of people in the community, to document those changes before those memories are lost forever.

Getting Ready

1. Set the goals of your project.

What is it you want to learn, and what ultimately do you plan to do with the information? Once you've established the focus of your project, you can then locate possible subjects to be interviewed.

2. Prepare a general list of questions to accomplish your goal.

Do not become a slave to your list, however, or be limited by them. Remember that oral history is a personal reflection of the interviewee. Keep questions short and to the point, but avoid questions that can be answered with a simple yes or no.

3. Know your topic.

Be familiar with written history and other background on your chosen topic. You may even want to do a pre-interview without equipment to get a feel for what questions would be good. Check with the person you will be interviewing to see if they have photos, scrapbooks, etc. that may help you jog memories.

4. Use good quality equipment.

Depending on what the purpose of your project is, you may opt to record video, audio or both. Consider taking photographs to go along with the interview.

5. Arrange time, date and interview place.

Pick a comfortable, quiet place. Try to pick a place without a lot of background noise like pets, children, street noise, etc.



Did you know?

Tape cassettes were used to record interviews before audio and video because a digital medium. Tape is NOT a permanent record though since it would eventually deteriorate. Sometimes a transcription (written copy) of the interview, and photographs, would be stored with the tapes.

The Interview

1. Be prepared.

Before you arrive, make sure you are familiar with your equipment. Make sure it is all in working order, including batteries. Extension cords/chargers are good to have for backup.

2. Labels!

Always label/name your files, no matter the format. Nothing is more distressing than accidentally erasing or deleting an important interview.

3. Arrive on time.

Leave time to get yourself prepared at the interview location. Don't make the interviewee wait.

4. Do on-site testing.

Do a test recording, and play-back, to make sure everything works.

5. Identify recordings.

Put an introduction on your audio or video recording before the interview. State your name, date, location of interview, and name of who's being interviewed.

6. Listen.

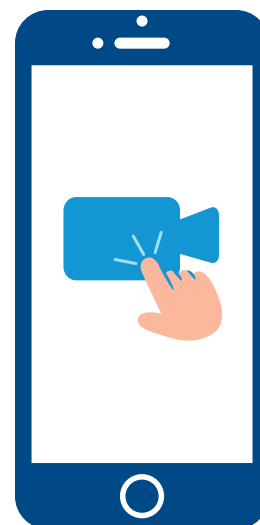
An interview is a very lop-sided conversation. Let the person you're interviewing be the star. DON'T INTERRUPT. Sometimes people pause to get their thoughts together, so give them a chance to continue. Rather than "uh-huhing" during the interview, nod your head up and down occasionally to show you are paying attention. Keep your opinions and feelings to yourself.

7. Watch the time.

Try to keep an interview to an hour or less.

8. When the interview is done, don't leave abruptly.

Give your subject some time to "come down." You may have stirred up some powerful emotions.



Note!

It is always a good idea to get a signed release from your subject. This way the interview can be used to truly preserve history - by providing a resource for researchers, etc. Without a release, you cannot use quotes from the interview!

After Interview

1. Send a thank you note!

You spent a lot of time with the interviewee. Let them know you appreciate their time.

2. Make an index of your recording.

Starting at the beginning of your recording, make a list of topics discussed and note where they are on the recording. This will make segments easier to find in the future.

3. Transcribe the interview if possible.

It is time-consuming but preserves the interview for posterity and makes the interview much easier to use by researchers.

- Change as little as possible. The interviewee's word choice (including his/her grammar) and speech patterns should be accurately represented (With the exception of ers, ums, and false starts/stutters, which can be omitted).
- You may want to let your subject read the transcript to make sure that unusual words (names of people, towns, rivers, companies, words in a foreign language, etc.) are spelled correctly. Sometimes it is hard to understand certain words when playing back the tape.

4. Let your interviewee watch/listen to the recording.

They may want see the finished product, or may not. Be sure to ask!



Did you know?

Transcribing can be a great way to ensure there is a copy of an interview. Whether you keep a digital copy of the transcription, or a printed one, it can be a back up if the recording accidentally gets deleted or the file gets corrupted.

What to Do With Your Final Product

If your interviews are Girl Scout related, consider sharing your oral histories with the Girl Scouts of NYPENN Pathways History and Archive Committee by emailing the story and release to info@gsnypenn.org. Other possibilities include sharing with the library or with a local college. Libraries and colleges can offer the temperature and humidity controlled environment needed to preserve tapes and papers.

Interview Worksheet

Use this worksheet to help decide what questions you should ask the interviewee and how to share their memories.

- Interview someone who was a Girl Scout at least 25 years ago, and consider inviting her to tea.
- Record her memories and share them with others.
- Presentation ideas include drawing a picture, making a comic, etc.

Here are some questions to ask:

- What was one of your favorite memories in Girl Scouting?
- Do you have a special memory of your Girl Scout leader?
- Tell me about a Girl Scouting experience that had a big impact on your life.
- Was there an important leadership lesson that you learned through Girl Scouting?
- What is your favorite Girl Scout Cookie?
 - How much were cookies when you sold them?
 - Did you sell door-to-door?

Write any additional questions you'd like to ask on the lines below.

Oral History Interview Release Form

Interviewee Name: _____

Interviewee Email: _____

Interviewer Name: _____

Interviewer Email: _____

I hereby grant Girl Scouts on NYPENN Pathways and its authorized agents the following rights and permissions with respect to all materials originating from the oral history interview, including, without limitation, photographs, films, or voice recordings, transcriptions, and biographical information of me, or of materials owned by me (collectively hereinafter the “Materials”):

1. To use, reproduce, edit, publish, and re-publish the Materials for any educational purpose, including, without limitation, web publication, broadcast, illustration, instruction, publicity, marketing, or training;
2. To copyright the Materials under GSNYPENN’s name or any other name designated by Girl Scouts of NYPENN Pathways and
3. To use my name and likeness in connection with the Materials at Girl Scouts of NYPENN Pathways’ discretion.

I hereby waive any right to inspect or approve the finished product or anything that may be used in connection with the Materials and any right that I may have to control the use to which said product or Materials may be applied.

In this Release, “Girl Scouts of NYPENN Pathways” means Girl Scouts of NYPENN Pathways, all past and present directors, trustees, officers, employees, agents, insurers, attorneys, and any other party associated with Girl Scouts of NYPENN Pathways. I acknowledge that this Release shall be binding upon me, my heirs, executors, administrators, trustees, personal representatives, successors, and assigns.

I certify that I have read and understand this Release, and I freely sign it, acknowledging the significance and consequences of doing so. I also acknowledge that I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction regarding the Materials and this Release.

By signing this Release, I assert that I am at least 18 years of age. If I am not yet 18 years of age, I understand that my parent or legal guardian must also sign before I may provide the Materials.

Signature of Interviewee: _____

Date: _____