

## How to Do Oral History Podcast Series: Podcast #2: Getting Started on your Oral History Project



Hi, I'm Bekka.

And I'm Joe.

I'm Jenni.

And I'm Monica. And we're here to tell you about getting started on your oral history project.

There are five important things that you need to do to prepare for doing an oral history project:

1. Learn about the oral history process.
2. Determine the purpose of your oral history project.
3. Establish who you will interview.
4. Do some general study on the topic or time period of your project.
5. Find and learn how to use the right recording equipment.

### **Learn about the oral history process.**

It is important that you understand what oral history is before you embark on this project. What is it that makes oral history more than just an interview? You will need to know what your role will be as the interviewer, and what steps you will need to take to prepare for the interview, conduct the interview, and process the information after the interview. Watching this series of podcasts will walk you through the basics of the oral history process, but you may also want to do some additional reading.

### **Determine the purpose of your oral history project.**

It is difficult to have any sort of focus for your project, or to determine who you should interview, until you know exactly what the purpose of your interview is. Are you interviewing family members to create genealogical records? Do you intend to interview someone who has first-hand accounts of a certain historical event? Are you trying to learn as much as you can about local history—for which there are few written records?

You also need to consider how you intend to use this oral history. What will be the final destination for this information? Are you going to create a documentary? Will this person's story be compiled with other stories and donated to the county historical society?

Once you decide on a specific purpose, then you can move on to the next step of choosing who you will interview.

### **Establish who you will interview.**

You will need to identify who you will be focusing on for your oral history project. Are you going to interview someone you know? Or someone who you have never met before? There are advantages and disadvantages to both. Family members and friends are usually more comfortable with one another from the very beginning, so it's sometimes easier to keep the dialogue going between the two. However, family members or friends may also assume that you already know about certain things, so they may not tell stories with the same level of detail.

Contact the person who you would like to interview, and ask if they would be willing to participate. Be up-front about the time commitment and what your intentions are for the video or audio footage that you record in the interview.

### **Do general research.**

If you are doing this as part of a class project, you will first begin by spending some time studying the topic or time period together with your teacher.

“So what questions would you have to ask a narrator about the 1930s?”

Teachers should be aware of the interview content that might be difficult for narrators to discuss, and prepare students for this.

If you are doing this project independently, take some time to read about the topic and become more familiar with it. Once you have some general knowledge about the topic, it will be easier to narrow the focus of your interview.

### **Become familiar with your equipment.**

Many people are intimidated by the equipment needed to record an interview, but there are a few simple things that you can do that will make a huge difference in the quality of your final audio or video tape. The better your recording, the more options you have for what you can do with the footage. In addition, a high-quality recording maximizes the life of the oral history for future researchers.

First, use the best quality recording equipment that you can find. You can find lavaliers, the clip-on microphones, or even a stand-alone microphone, for less than \$100.

“I’m going to put this lavalier mic on you. Is that OK?”

“Yes.”

Having a microphone directed at the narrator will help eliminate any distracting noises in the room. It also may be possible to borrow equipment from a local TV or radio station, historical society, or school.

Second, learn how to run your equipment and practice using the equipment BEFORE the day of your interview. When you arrive at the interview site, you do not want to waste valuable time trying to figure out how to run the camera or voice recorder.

In addition, you should always test your recorder and sound level before you begin the interview. There is nothing worse than starting the camera rolling and doing a full interview only to find out that the volume was set too low and you can hardly hear anything!

In our next podcast we'll talk to you about preparing for the interview and doing individual research. Goodbye!