

ORAL HISTORY TOOL KIT

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1. Interviewing

- 1.1 In selecting interviewees for your project it's a good idea to check what already exists in local archives so that you don't duplicate what has already been done. It's not a good response to have somebody say 'i've already been interviewed about this'.
- 1.2 Interviewees will include those who **are linked by specific spheres of activity**. Others may be individuals found through personal contacts or from media coverage.
- 1.3 **The content of interviews will vary**, but even those with a narrow primary focus should also seek to place this in context by discussing matters such as childhood experience, education, occupation, leisure, and views of political and social questions.
- 1.4 All interviewers should undertake a **short course of training** in techniques, technologies and outcomes for the material collected. This should cover good interviewing technique, the recording equipment, and (in brief) the strengths and weaknesses of oral history. Training sessions in other areas of the field may be appropriate later within the project.
- 1.5 Generally speaking, interviewers are encouraged to **let lines of questioning develop naturally** from the interview itself, although they may wish to write down some ideas in advance. However, a selection of general, open and adaptable questions is below, along with web addresses for some sample questionnaires which may give you some ideas.
- 1.6 It is important to ensure that **basic information about the interviewee** is retained. It may be desirable to contact them in the future and essential to make sure that all interviews are correctly attributed. All interviewers should therefore fill in a biographical information form for each interviewee, and an interview information form for each interview (see below).
- 1.7 **Consent form and copyright issues.** The words spoken within sound recordings, and any transcription made from this, belong to speaker unless permission is granted for other uses, or copyright is assigned. Without this, only a very limited use can be made of a recording. It is important, therefore, that all interviewees be asked to sign the two forms below. The first gives permission for your organisation to make use of their material within your project's outputs, for instance on a web page or in a book or exhibition. The second is a broader assignation of copyright, jointly and severally, to your organisation and to whichever archival repository/ies are thought most suitable for that particular interview. This allows use to be made of the recordings by both bodies in the future, after your project is over, and allows the archive to make back-up copies as necessary. The interviewee retains the right to use their own memories (for instance to write an autobiography), and also the moral right to not use their words in a derogatory way. For more information, see <http://www.ohs.org.uk/ethics/index.php>

- 1.8 The aim is that **all recordings should be transcribed**, preferably by the person who has recorded the interview. A written set of guidelines is provided below, along with hints on software to make the task easier. However, this is a time consuming activity and it must be acknowledged that some people will not be able to transcribe all that they record. Equally however, some people may be more, or solely, interested in transcription work.
- 1.9 **All transcriptions, and audio files, should be held centrally by your organisation**, with a back-up system in place. If allowed by the interviewee, copies will also be donated to a suitable local repository.
- 1.10 **Oral history interview material can be used within a range of project outputs**, for instance on your website, in books or exhibitions. Interviewers are therefore encouraged to think about possible ways to present their material.
- 1.11 **Interviewees may hold archive material which would complement the recording**. Its existence could (with the consent of the interviewee) be noted for future reference.
- 1.12 It is good practice to give the interviewee **a copy of their recording**.

2. Surveying and cataloguing

- 1.1 There are many **oral history collections held in the region**, in archives, libraries, museums and elsewhere. Many of these are likely to contain some relevant material. These include Darlington Library, Gateshead Library, Beamish Museum, Living History North East, and the archives of Northumberland, Teesside and Tyne and Wear, although other smaller collections may also hold gems and are worth investigating.
- 1.2 Use the forms in the Archive Mapping and Research Pack for Volunteers to record the information.
- 1.3 Some existing recordings of activists may be the hands of private individuals in the form of **cassette or even reel to reel tapes**. Given the short life span of all audio carriers, it is important to encourage such individuals to get this material digitised. They may also choose to deposit a copy at a suitable institution.

INTERVIEWEE BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

FULL NAME
MAIDEN NAME
ADDRESS
TELEPHONE NUMBER
EMAIL
DATE OF BIRTH
PLACE OF BIRTH
BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION
INTERVIEW CODE NUMBER(S)
COMPLETED BY
DATE

INTERVIEW INFORMATION FORM

INTERVIEW CODE NUMBER:
DATE OF INTERVIEW:
PLACE OF INTERVIEW:
LENGTH OF INTERVIEW:
RESTRICTIONS PLACED OF USE OF INTERVIEW:
BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF AREAS COVERED:
OTHER COMMENTS CONCERNING THE INTERVIEW:
COMPLETED BY:

CONSENT TO BE INTERVIEWED

Statement of consent:

I agree to participate in this oral history interview and to the use of this interview within the _____ project, as explained to me by the researcher.

My preference regarding the use of my name is as follows:

I agree to be identified by name in any reference to the information contained within this interview:

*yes / no

Participant's signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's signature: _____

Date: _____

Copyright assignment and consent form

The purpose of this assignment of copyright is to enable _____
(*your organisation*) to continue to make use of your interview after the
_____ project is over. We also wish to ensure that a copy is kept
for future generations, and therefore wish to deposit your interview in
_____ (*Archives*) who may also wish to use material from your
interview in a variety of ways. These could include:

- use in educational establishments
- public reference purposes
- public performance
- use in publications including print and audio
- broadcast on radio or television
- publication through the internet
- any methods of access developed in future technology

As present owner of the copyright in the contributor content (ie, the words spoken
by the interviewee), I hereby assign such copyright to (*your organisation*)
_____ and (*assigned archive*) _____

I am aware that I retain my moral rights, and also the right to use the information I
have supplied for my own purposes.

Name:

Interviewee signed:

Date:

Interview code:

Researcher signed:

Generic forms of question

Obviously what questions you ask will depend upon what you have been told, and what you want to know about. However, there are a few lines of approach which can be useful in dealing with many situations (usually if you already have the bare facts of what was going on, for which more narrow - but still open if possible - questions would be used). These include...

Can you tell me more about...

What memories do you have of...

Can you give me an example/illustration of... (can also be reworded to aim for a typical example or an extreme one)

What sort of a place/person etc was...

How did you feel about... Why?

Can you describe... to me?* What sounds/smells do you associate with...

What effect did that have on you? What effect did that have on your relationship with...

Why did you/whoever....

What was the worst thing about...

What was the best thing about...

How do you feel about... looking back on it now?

What did you learn from.../ how did... change you?

How typical was...

How did you become involved with...

What were your first impressions of...

How did... compare to your expectations?

What were the consequences of...

*one approach here if you are dealing with a particular space is to have them imagine they are walking into and around it, looking at each bit of it in turn.

Transcription Guidelines

Transcription is a time consuming business. It depends how fast the person speaks and how intelligible their accent is (and how fast you can type!) but you could reckon on 5-10 hours per hour of sound.

You are aiming to capture every spoken word, with the exception of false starts, hesitation sounds (for instance, “er...”) and verbal tics (for instance, “you know”, “like”), which should be included to a certain extent to capture a flavour of the person’s speech, but do not need to be included with rigorous accuracy.

You will need a computer with either headphones or speakers. While you can play the sound file through several programmes on the computer, a very useful tool is Express Scribe, which you can download free and without strings from

<http://www.nch.com.au/scribe/>

If you open the sound file in this, it allows you (after pressing the F lock key on those keyboards which have one) to use the F keys - 4 to stop, 7 to rewind, 9 to play, are the ones you are likely to want - to avoid having to take your hands off the keyboard in the middle of typing. You can also slightly slow down the speech, though if you do this too far the distortion becomes a problem.

If there is a demand for it, training sessions could be arranged on various aspects of dealing with digital sound files, and editing sound.

It is important to be consistent with any symbols you use. There is no recognised standard for this, but for consistency, listed below are a set of conventions which you should follow within this project.

Transcription Conventions

1. Your editorial voice should be written in italics. This will include things like *inaudible section*, *unclear section*, *break for phone call*. Also use this when you are summarising content because it is repetition or very much off topic, eg. *Discusses modern morality. Talks about her children. Repeats information about the boiler*. Another use would be if you know are absolutely sure the speaker is factually incorrect, eg. *This was in 1951. She later corrected this name to Johnson*.
2. Distinguish between speakers - initials at the start of each speaker's part - JB: how did that feel?
3. Words or short phrases you can't make out at all - use <>. If you can hear the initial letter, at least, or are unsure of the spelling, use eg <B ?>, <Whitfield?> - EK: we went all over the villages, Sacriston, Stanley, <>.
4. Space things out enough for easy reading; use one and a half line spacing.
5. Place the number of the interview - which you will have been allocated from a central list - in the header of each page along with the name of the interviewee.
6. Use quotation marks for reported speech - SD: So I said to him “I have to go now”.

7. Another important thing to do is note timings within the interview. Every time the interview comes to a natural pause, or every five minutes or so in any case, make a note of the time through the interview on the page. If you use Express Scribe (see below) this is made easier to see.

You may also find <http://www.le.ac.uk/emoha/training/no15.pdf> useful in its information about oral history transcriptions.

Some useful web addresses:

<http://www.ohs.org.uk/advice/index.php> and <http://www.ohs.org.uk/ethics/index.php> (the latter for more information on copyright and ethics)

<http://www.le.ac.uk/emoha/training.html> - straightforward fact sheets on different areas from the East Midlands Oral History Archive

<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/oral/> - "Making Sense of Oral History", an American course which mixes the practical and the theory, with some interesting exercises to get you thinking about different aspects.

http://www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/oral_history.html - well-written set of pages on the different types of oral history, different theoretical perspectives and how it has changed over time, with links to many other interesting pages

http://www.lib.lsu.edu/special/williams/interview_qs.pdf - list of sample questions relating to all areas of life with an emphasis on customs.

<http://www.ket.org/civilrights/questions.htm> - list of sample questions relating to the American Civil Rights Movement.