

Student Assignment: Outline article/ chapter on Oral History

Division into groups: each member outlines different article; shares outlines with group members

Example: Ritchie, Donald. "Chapter 3: Conducting Interviews." Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide. Oxford UP, 2003.

Example of Student's Work:

Conducting Interviews:

Preparation for the Interview: Get to know about them whether it is reading general subject matter about their families, communities, jobs, success, and failures- outline their life. Read anything and everything on them. Also investigate other interviews from your project to know what it is going to be like.

Research: is necessary so you know what questions to ask- the more you know about the interviewer and the subject matter the easier it is to build up information for the interview. It helps both the interviewer and the interviewee remind them about specific events they may have forgotten during their lifetime.

How many questions should be prepared for each interview? Ask questions that will have more than a one word answer and do not address all the questions at once because most likely the interviewer will have to repeat them.

How many times should one person be interviewed? Often there should be more than one interview because the first is typically the one to break the ice, but it all depends on budget. Start off with simple questions then move to heavier in depth ones.

How long should the interview last: an interview session should be no longer than 2 hours.

Setting up for interview:

Who should be interviewed first? If there are multiple interviewees you would start with the oldest person first. Set them up according to age, significance to the theme of the project, and availability in terms of time and location.

How to locate potential interviewees: "Play detective" and hunt for for your subjects in libraries, phone directories, or Internet.

What's the best way to initiate contact with an interviewee: by letter or phone call to state what the interview is about and describe the project and to schedule it out.

Conducting the Interview:

Where should you position the recorder? Placed where the interviewer can easily see it, but out of the interviewee's direct line of vision in a quiet place away from a busy area which can be noisy. It is important to periodically check to see if it is working right. Important to become familiar with the equipment to be able to work with it.

What if the recording ends while the interviewee is still speaking? An eye on the recorder is important and some will flash when they are about to run out. As it flashes signaling it's about to run out ask the interviewee to stop after they pause for breath to change the tape. Extra tapes should be kept close by.

Should questions be arranged chronologically or typically? It depends on the subject of matter, but make sure not to jump into heavy main topics- ease your way in.

Are open-ended questions preferable to specific questions? These questions should be mixed. Open-ended questions should be used to allow the interviewees to add in their accounts voluntarily.

Can the framing of a question distort the answer? In political situations there is often manipulation, but to avoid that you should start with broad open-ended questions. By listening to their answers you can come up with other questions based on their accounts.

What if the answers are perfunctory? Sometimes answers are perfunctory simply because the interviewee's hasn't gained interest. The interviewer should try to listen to the interviewee and not jump from question to question to avoid them from answering shortly and with no interest.

How should you deal with an uncooperative interviewee? With finding research ahead of time upon the interview, the interviewer should be aware of such causes of behavior and strategies on how to deal with them. Try to ask questions in depth for them to cooperate, but if they don't you can ask for some explanation, but if none is given then the interview should be ended.

How personal should an interviewer get? The concepts of what is personal ranges from different people. The interviewer should be aware of the subject matter that will cause levels of discomfort, always treat the interviewees with dignity and compassion so they can regain their composure.

How should you bring up subjects that may be embarrassing? With this confrontation the responses can be brief meaning the interviewer should return to this topic later on in the interview allowing the interviewee to express more information.

What if the interviewee asks that the recorder be turned off? If the recorder is turned off there is little to be gained by hearing story "off the record". If there is any confusion the interviewer can further counsel them on the question for the interviewee to answer.

How can interviewers get beyond stories that have been "rehearsed" through frequent retelling? Rehearsed stories often can omit negative events or triumphs. To overcome "Rehearsed" stories is a well-prepared interviewer who can spot "inaccuracies".

How can an interviewer assist an interviewee's ability to recall? Through research about the interviewee with photo albums, newspaper clippings, and letters.

Do differences in race, gender, or age between interviewers and interviewees make any difference in the interview? Differences in race, gender, age, and ethnicity may influence the questions asked and the responses. Often older people seem younger and more animated when they recount their past with an interviewer who is engaged in listening.

Are there any differences in interviewing the famous and interviewing average individuals? The difference lies largely in the interviewee's previous experience of being interviewed by the media. Professional people can be proved difficult to interview.

Should interviewers use a questionnaire? When it comes to a group of interviewees make sure to ask the same core questions to all such as common themes and certain questions for all to ask. Oral history addresses neglected areas of knowledge.

Can follow-up questions be prepared in advance? They require both prior research and spontaneity. The important skill in asking follow-up questions is being able to listen carefully to what the interviewees are saying.

How should interviewers react to statements with which they strongly disagree? Important to listen even if you disagree.

But what if the interviewer suspects that an interviewee is lying or shading the truth? The objective should be to record the story from the interviewee's point of view even if there are some exaggerations and issues.

Should an interviewer pay attention to the interviewee's "body language"? The seating should be in close proximity. Have manners and pay attention- eye focus and good posture.

Is there a rule in oral history for what social scientists call "continuing observation"? Older interviewees often have interviews in their retired or living communities where they spent their careers to further help the interview and

play an important part in their past. Oral historians should take this advantage and bring along their recorders, cameras for the interview.

Concluding the Interview:

What's the best way to conclude an interview? A "wrap-up" question that reflects back on the interviewee's life to compare with the events that have recently happened. Toward the end the interviewee should be reminded of how the process works and sometimes a release form is necessary to complete the recording session. It is customary that the interviewee received a copy of the recording or transcript.

Should interviewees ever be paid for their interviews? It depends, but in most cases they are voluntarily or paid if a musician. Whether or not payments are made, all oral historians have a responsibility to inform interviewees of the anticipated uses of their interviews, documentaries, publications, or CD's that might be used as royalties or monetary compensation.