

The Craft of Doing Oral History

What do you think “Oral History” is?

What do you think is the difference between Oral History and Interviewing?

What do you want to learn about Oral History?

Learning Outcomes:

- 1.) Discuss basic aspects of Oral History (interviewing, archiving, researching, sharing)
- 2.) Analyze an individual in historical context
- 3.) Review best practices for contacting a narrator and scheduling interviews
- 4.) Conduct background research
- 5.) Interpret Informed Consent and best practices for ethical Oral History
- 6.) Write and review successful interview questions
- 7.) Practice interview questioning techniques
- 8.) Examine best practices for using, citing, and archiving oral history interviews

Oral History Project



What is Oral History?

Oral history in the classroom teaches context, analysis, and application of history.

- Promotes your personal and professional growth
- Promotes empathy toward others and the historical experiences of others
- Raises your sense of ethical research and relationship to others, living and in the past
- Teaches you to *do* history instead of *learn* history

You'll also be building intergenerational relationships

- Connects generations from diverse backgrounds
- Creates real-life connections and interactions among generations
- Teaches the older generation to develop meaning in their lives within historical, economic, social, political, and other contexts that are very different from your own.
- Offers older generations the opportunity to engage in meaningful reminiscences
- Allows for unspoken and forgotten histories to be reclaimed
- Offers insights into knowledge and awareness of diversity, gerontology, populations at risk, and generational ties

You're honing new communication skills through listening, interviewing, collaborating, and applying research.

You're already being challenged to

- Develop a new approach to critical analysis
- Integrate classroom material to "the field"
- Facilitate learning about the impact of biological, sociological, cultural, psychological, and spiritual factors in an individual's development across his/her lifespan
- Providing a focus that's personal to apply to (Arizona, Mexican-American, American) history
- Creating a link between your observations, thoughts, and materials covered in class

You're learning and doing history first-hand.

- Providing a greater understanding of other cultures, ethnic groups, and histories
- Heightening your respect for others
- Promoting learning about our surrounding community
- Broadening your focus to include the community and to construct meaningful histories
- Giving value to historically silenced or marginalized groups.

All of these skills are contributing to your education in ways while also influencing your own personal awareness, understanding of life span, and enhancing knowledge about older adults, as well as our surrounding community.

You Try: Historical Context

Watch the video and complete the activity.

Link: <https://youtu.be/pS-7jF56zJE>



One Person in Historical Context

Your Narrator – An individual’s life can illustrate the systems at play in his/her environment. As you research, you may find a lot of specific information on your narrator. Or, you may hit a wall. But that doesn’t mean that one interview will be better than the other. As you construct your oral history, imagine that you are telling about this person as a historical actor. Consider:

Family Origins – occupation of parents, family birth order, siblings, migration story (this can tell us about historical eras like the Great Depression, the cultural revolution, Civil Rights, urban poverty).

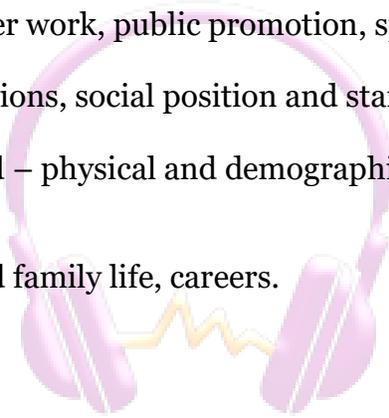
Spiritually – church affiliations, moral compass, mentors (this can tell us about the significant structures in the community, and the important people who framed this person’s life).

Political – activism, charity/volunteer work, public promotion, specific near-and-dear issues.

Social – sports/recreation, organizations, social position and standing, class, community involvement

Geographic – where has person lived – physical and demographic info (this can tell us about geography, class, education, etc).

Economic – education, marriage and family life, careers.



You Try: Using the dots as potential components of your life, draw or write some aspects of your own historical context.



Historical Context: For Example

Our goal is to concentrate on the history of South Phoenix. Your narrators have a starring role that allows them to be the central observer depicting events that they witnessed on the timeline of South Phoenix's existence.

Your historical knowledge is key to allowing them to voice their historical impact. So, for example:

When a Mexican-American narrator states that she arrived in 1953 when she was 25 years of age, you get excited because you can cover the agricultural empire in the South Basin, migration patterns through the Southwest, the Golden Gate Barrio, new housing developments in Laveen and Ahwatukee, redlining south of Van Buren, the construction of South Mountain Community College, and recent business developments in the area. Of course you can always ask about personal history of occupations, spouses, children, church, clubs, organizations, and other major forces of impact along the journey. And you always have the politics of Phoenix.



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Scheduling Appointments (This is a guide. Just be yourself)

You should know the below information to assist in initial contact:

- Who you are and your role with the project (student-researcher? Faculty sponsor?)
- Name of project
- Purpose of Project
- Who will be involved/who has already been interviewed
- How interviews will be used
- Where the interviews will be housed
- Length of time necessary for interview
- Where will interview take place/where to meet you for the interview

Some information to include:

I will ask that you to sign a form giving me the right to use your interview for educational and research purposes.

I will also be sending you a biographical questionnaire. It is meant to help me craft meaningful questions for the interview. Please send it back to me before the interview, so I can update my questions. The private information will not be shared. It is for my research purposes, and so I can follow up with you after the interview is over.

*By including you, we will acquire a more complete, detailed picture of _____
(Whatever the project is, i.e., South Phoenix history, SMCC.)*

Once your interview is scheduled, confirm:

Contacting your narrator:

- Email or call your narrator to confirm the time/date/location
- Establish a meeting location
- Share the consent form with him/her
- Include the biographical questionnaire and request a return date
- Provide your contact information

You Try (Students only):

*Send an email to your narrator, and copy Dr. C.
Submit a screen shot for your assignment*

Checklist for Interviewer

Before the interview

- Blank Consent Form
- Biographical Questionnaire
- Write meaningful questions and possible follow-up questions
- Talent Release (students only)

Upon arrival at interview location:

- GET THERE EARLY. Do not waste their time.
- Meet him/her in an arranged location
- Ask for signed forms, or provide blanks to be signed and dated
- Set up equipment as interviewee completes the biographical questionnaire
- Ground rules: Explain your role and style. Allow the narrator to stop or end the interview at any time.

Conducting the Interview:

- Begin recording and create a backup (phone apps work great!)
- Begin the session with your name, interviewee's name, locale, and the date. If you are off-campus, never give the address. State, we are at "Alfredo's home in Tempe."
- Ask questions in order, ask follow-up as necessary. Cross questions off if the narrator answers them before you ask them. (This is okay!)

Concluding the Interview:

- Ask "Is there anything you would like to add about..." (Give them lots of time. This process stirs up all kinds of memories).
- Ask for name and contact information of another narrator they would suggest
- Collect all signed forms
- Double check that you have your narrator's address and email information
- Thank them and ask if they have any questions for you
- Offer to follow up before the end of the semester
- End the recording

You Try: Print this list.
Circle or highlight the things you might forget.

Biographical Questionnaire

Thank you for agreeing to share your story! We will be creating questions meaningful to your life. In order to create relevant questions, we'd like to know a little bit about you first. Please respond to the following and return before your interview.

Name: _____

Address: _____ City: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Date (or year) of Birth: _____

Mother's name and occupation:

Father's name and occupation:

Year you arrived in Arizona:

Where you spent your childhood:

If married, name and occupation of spouse:

Date and place of marriage:

Your role at SMCC or in South Phoenix:

Years active at SMCC and/or in South Phoenix:

Your current occupation:

Anything special you'd like us to ask about you in your interview?



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South Phoenix Oral History Project
Informed Consent Form

Project Supervisor and Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Summer Cherland

- I. You are providing an interview in connection with the South Phoenix Oral History Project. You have been asked to participate because you contributed to the history of South Mountain Community College and/or the surrounding South Phoenix area.
- II. The interview will be digitally recorded, indexed, summarized, and in some cases transcribed and made available for scholarly use at South Mountain Community College. Members of the general public may have access to your interview and your words may be quoted in scholarly or popular publications, including internet sources. Excerpts may be adapted as oral stories by students and faculty.
- III. The interview will take approximately *1-2 hours*. There are no anticipated risks to participation in the interview. You may withdraw from the interview at any time without prejudice before the interview begins. You may make special provisions or restrictions during the taping of your interview. During the interview you may request to stop the recording at any time to discuss or clarify how you wish to respond to a question or topic before proceeding. In the event that you choose to withdraw during the interview, any tape made of the interview will be either given to you or destroyed, and no transcript will be made of the interview.
- IV. The recording and content of the interview belong to South Mountain Community College and the information in the interview can be used by the history program, the Storytelling Institute, or the faculty sponsor(s) in any manner it will determine, including, but not limited to, future use by researchers in presentations and publications.
- V. South Mountain Community College agrees that:
 - a. It will not use or exercise any of its rights to the information prior to your consent.
 - b. You may choose to provide consent before or after the interview.
 - c. Restrictions on use of the interview may be identified before or during your interview.
- VI. Any restrictions requested will be handled by editing those portions out of the final copy of the transcript. Raw data files and/or tapes will remain uncut. Copies may be edited for specific stories or quotes from the interview to be highlighted or edited for clarity and sound.
- VII. Upon signing this consent, the recording, photographs, and relevant materials may be kept at South Mountain Community College. A dossier of materials will be provided to the individual if requested.
- VIII. If you have questions about the research project or procedures, please contact Dr. Summer Cherland with the Division of Communication, Fine Arts, and Social Sciences at South Mountain Community College, 602-243-8018 or summer.cherland@southmountaincc.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the faculty sponsor or the Maricopa Community College District's Institutional Review Board <https://administration.maricopa.edu/institutional-review-board>.

I agree to uphold the conditions of this consent form.

Researcher/Interviewer signature

Researcher/Interviewer signature

I agree to participate in this interview.

Narrator printed name

Narrator printed name

Narrator signature

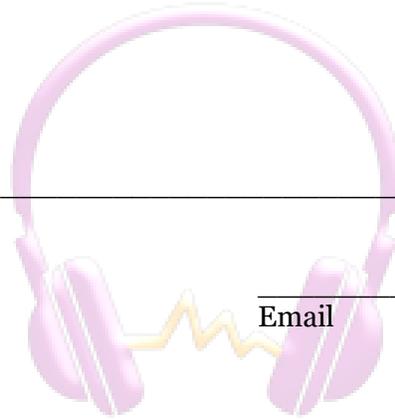
Narrator signature

Narrator Contact:

Address

Phone Number

Email



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Interview Date ___/___/___



Writing the Questions

Writing good interview questions requires skill, research, and finesse! Select a few topics that you'd like to learn about from your narrator. Try to write some questions that will get them talking about those topics. For instance, SPOH sticks to the following themes:

- Early life/childhood/hometown/family
- Education
- Career/Trajectory
- South Mountain Community College/South Phoenix
- Legacies/Future/Words of Wisdom

Here's how to write your questions:

- 1.) Use your background research
- 2.) Follow chronological order – begin with childhood or youth and move toward the future. Don't bounce around.
- 3.) Create about 15 questions for an hour long interview.
- 4.) Write **open-ended questions**, welcoming your narrator to share with you details from his/her memory about that subject.
 - a. You may create multiple questions for each topic, or write follow up questions.

Resource: Good example of a question and follow-up



I asked: What were some of the most challenging jobs you faced?

Her Answer emphasized saying “yes” to every opportunity, even if she felt unprepared.

I followed up: In terms of saying “yes” to so many opportunities, have you suffered at all on a personal level, to find balance?

Her answer emphasized the fact that she sometimes felt she didn't meet the expectations of motherhood for women.

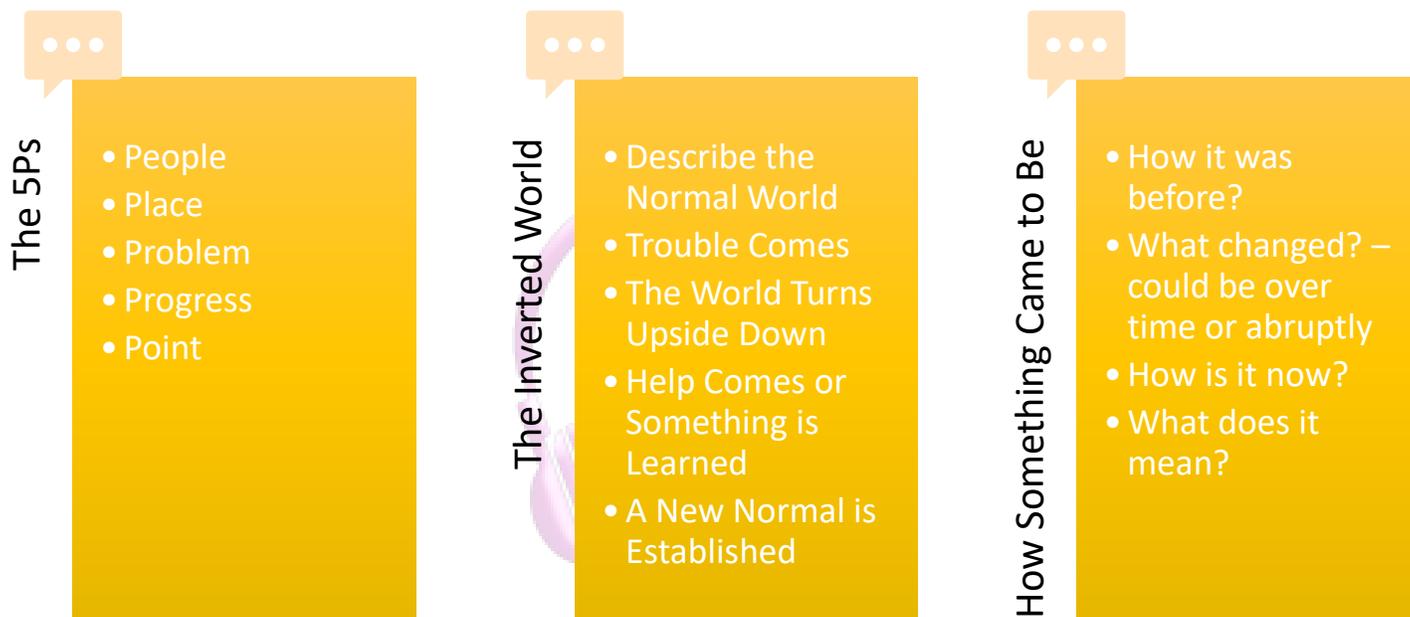
- ➔ This very personal answer from Chris Haines gave us insight to her life, her insecurities, and her struggles. It also allows historians to make historical connections to her personal story and 20th century societal pressures as faced by a career woman.

For more of Chris Haines' interview: <https://southphoenixoralhistory.com/narrators/chris-haines/>

Using Storytelling to Write Good Questions

The Storytelling Institute at South Mountain Community College specializes in story structure and theory. Some of their lessons can help oral historians to both craft meaningful questions, and analyze oral histories for scholarly research and application.

When writing your questions, consider some of the most popular story structures:



For more, see: <http://www.smccstorytellinginstitute.com/becoming-storytellers.html> or <http://storytellinginstitute.weebly.com/simple-story-structures.html>

One word of caution: Don't trap your narrator in a box by trying to get him/her to tell you a story that you are expecting. Simply use these story structures to help you brainstorm questions.

You Try: Write a Question

Try to address one or more of the 5Ps: People, place, problem, progress, and point on one of these topics:

Early life/childhood/hometown/family
Education/career trajectory
South Mountain Community College/South Phoenix
Legacies/Future/Words of Wisdom

Draft Questions for Approval

(Students only): As a group, use the storytelling resources, the research you've conducted, and the attempts you've practiced to craft **15 meaningful interview questions** and at least **one follow-up** question for each. When done, you must get approval from Dr. Cherland.

Narrator name:

Group:

Member names:

Date, time, and location of interview:

Topics for interview:

- Background
- Early life
- Family life in Phoenix
- South Phoenix history
- Education/Career Paths in Arizona
- South Mountain Community College
- Achievements
- Vision for the Future



Question 1:

Follow up:

Question 2:

Follow up:

South Phoenix

Question 3:

Follow up:

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Question 4:

Follow up:



Question 5:

Follow up:

Question 6:

Follow up:

Question 7:

Follow up:

Question 8:

Follow up:

Question 9:

Follow up:

Question 10:

Follow up:

Question 11:

Follow up:

Question 12:

Follow up:

Question 13:

Follow up:

Question 14:

Follow up:

Question 15:

Follow up:



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You Try: Draft Questions
Write 15 potential questions and follow up.
Get Dr. C's approval (students only)
Dr. Cherland approval? ___Yes ___No

During the Interview: Recording and Managing the Conversation

It's very likely that your narrator will be nervous at the beginning of the interview. It's your job to put him/her at ease and take control of the conversation. Don't be nervous!

Refer back to the checklist for the nuts and bolts. Keep in mind as you begin:

- 1.) Meet him/her in an arranged location – get there early so as to not waste his/her time
- 2.) Ask for signed forms, or provide blanks to be signed and dated
- 3.) Set up equipment as interviewee completes the biographical questionnaire
- 4.) Set ground rules: Explain your role and style. Tell the narrator that they can request to stop or end the interview at any time.

When you're ready to record:

- 1.) Begin recording and create a backup (phone apps work great!)
- 2.) The very first thing: start with a statement identifying the interview's specifics and ask for consent. Here's how we start:

Today is (day, month, year) and we are interviewing (first and last name of narrator). The interview is being conducted by (first and last name of interviewers) in (location or via Zoom.)

(First name), if you consent to being recorded, the recording will become the property of SMCC and the South Phoenix Oral History Project. Upon completion, we will share a copy of the entire unedited interview with you. Do you consent?

During the interview:

- 1.) Ask questions in order, ask follow-up as necessary. Skip questions if the narrator answers them before you ask them. (This is okay!)
- 2.) Try really hard to not interrupt or be too active while listening
- 3.) Be in the moment – allow the conversation to feel authentic!

When the interview ends:

- 1.) **Don't turn off the recording or backup yet!**
- 2.) Ask "Is there anything you would like to add about..." (Give them lots of time. This process stirs up all kinds of memories).
- 3.) Ask for name and contact information of another narrator they would suggest
- 4.) Collect all signed forms
- 5.) Double check that you have your narrator's address and email information
- 6.) Explain next steps (will the interview be archived? When will they get their copy?)
- 7.) Offer to stay in touch
- 8.) Don't end the recording until they are gone. Believe it or not – they will add something at the end and you will be happy to have it on tape!

During the Interview:
Ele Anedde's Dos and Don'ts for Interviews

Do	Don't
Make them feel comfortable	Don't interrupt them
Let them decide what they want to share	Don't insist
Thank them	Don't panic if they cry
Ask for consent	Don't stop the recording abruptly
Be in the interview	Don't ask questions about others or to generalize

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During the Interview: Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity

Subjectivity:

- 1.) the quality of being based on or influenced by personal feelings, tastes, or opinions.
Ex: "he is the first to acknowledge the subjectivity of memories"
- 2.) the quality of existing in someone's mind rather than the external world.
Ex: "the subjectivity of human perception"

Intersubjectivity:

- 1.) a short-hand description for a variety of human interactions.
Ex: "people's agreement on the shared definition of an object; people's mutual awareness of agreement or disagreement, or of understanding or misunderstanding each other; people's attribution of intentionality, feelings, and beliefs to each other; people's implicit or automatic behavioral orientations towards other people; people's interactive performance within a situation; people's shared and taken-for-granted background assumptions, whether consensual or contested; and "the variety of possible relations between people's perspectives."
- 2.) Agreement between people on a given set of meanings or a definition of a situation.
Ex: "the sharing of subjective states by two or more individuals."
- 3.) common-sense, shared meanings constructed by people in their interactions with each other and used as an everyday resource to interpret the meaning of elements of social and cultural life.
Ex: "If people share common sense, they share a definition of the situation."

Be aware of this. All that background research you did has informed you with sophisticated, scholarly, and academic knowledge about complex issues like race, gender, class, immigration, patriotism, etc. When you ask your narrator questions about his/her experiences, he/she is not coming at this topic from the same place. Perhaps you are looking at examples of racism this person faced. He/she may not have examples that satisfy you. Don't assume that you are speaking the same language.

After the Interview: Indexing

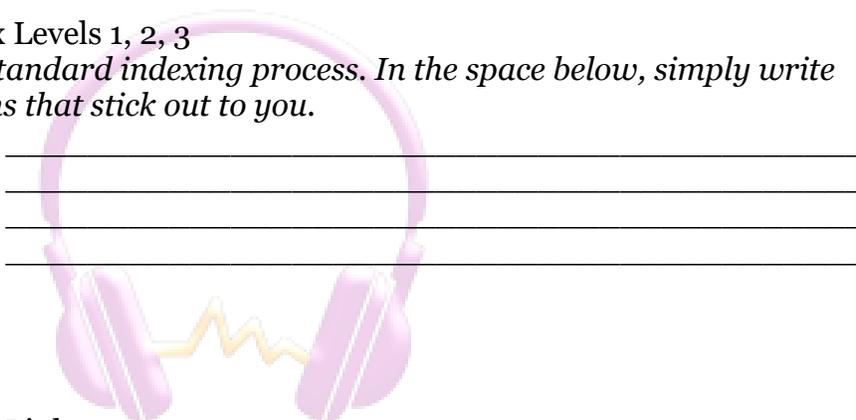
One main difference between a basic interview and a formal oral history has to do with how you research, record, and process the interview. For the South Phoenix Oral History Project, we ask interviewers and students to **index** completed interviews, instead of transcribing.

Part I: What is indexing?

Brainstorm: What is an index? How do you use it?

Part II: Louie B. Nunn Index Levels 1, 2, 3

Watch the brief tutorial about a standard indexing process. In the space below, simply write buzzwords or important key terms that stick out to you.



Link:

Indexing helps librarians, archivists, and others find important parts of your interview for their specific research. Indexes can easily be generated by researchers and students. Transcripts, on the other hand, are word-for-word accounts documenting everything said in the interview. They are useful for researchers but very time and labor-intensive to create.

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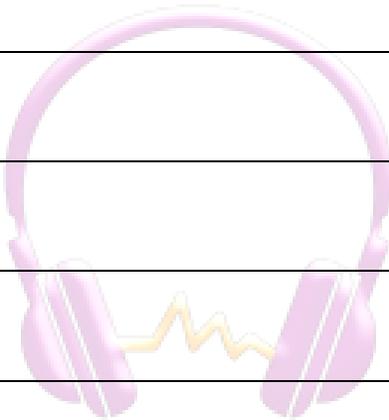


After the Interview: Indexing

Part III: Indexing Aspects

Below, fill in the table for each of the aspects of an index.

Aspect	Your Definition
<i>Title</i>	
<i>Partial transcript</i>	
<i>Keywords/Subjects</i>	
<i>Synopsis</i>	
<i>Hyperlinks</i>	
<i>GPS Coordinates</i>	



You Try

Watch and index this clip

Aspect	Your Details
<i>Title</i>	
<i>Partial transcript</i>	
<i>Keywords/Subjects</i>	
<i>Synopsis</i>	
<i>Hyperlinks</i>	
<i>GPS Coordinates</i>	



Link:
<https://www.youtube.com/embed/cCjwaxOBoRc?feature=oembed>

After the Interview: Writing Your Story

Once your interview is completed, you will create historical content for public and academic use! If you are working with the South Phoenix Oral History Project, you will archive your interview with us, and write a story about your narrator for our website.

Here is an excellent example: <https://southphoenixoralhistory.com/lorrie-shelton/>

If you are using your oral history for your own research, you'll want to make sure you properly store and cite your interviews. Take a look at this article for a good guide on how to interpret oral histories: <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/oral/interpret.html>

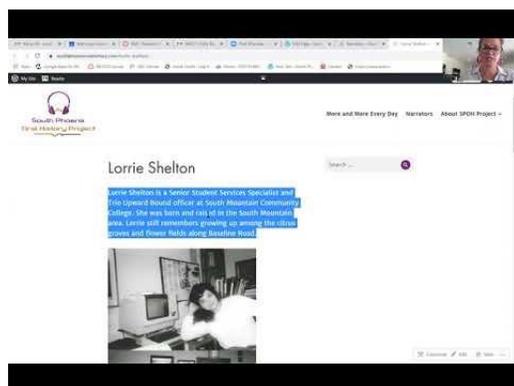
This quote from the article is very significant: *“What is needed then is an understanding of oral history not so much as an exercise in fact finding but as an interpretive event, as the narrator compresses years of living into a few hours of talk, selecting, consciously and unconsciously, what to say and how to say it.”*

The article explains some of the fallacies and complexities of studying and doing oral history.

“Each interview is a response to a particular person and set of questions, as well as to the narrator's inner need to make sense of experience. What is said also draws upon the narrator's linguistic conventions and cultural assumptions and hence is an expression of identity, consciousness, and culture. Put simply, we need to ask: who is saying what, to whom, for what purpose, and under what circumstances?”

Question: As you read this quote in preparation of writing your final story for publication, what does it make you think about? Try to explain how your writing will fit within the framework of this class (Arizona history, Mexican-American history, African-American history, American history...) or your own personal research.

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You Try: SPOH's Final Stories

Watch this clip first. Then, watch part of your interview. List all the components you think you should include for your own final story.

Link: <https://youtu.be/odsORCZV2kc>

Next Steps

Thanking Your Narrator

Keep in touch with your narrator! As you interpret and analyze their interview, you may find that you need clarification on little details like dates, names, and locations. You've also created a relationship with this person – keep that going! It's possible that he/she has shared memories or emotions with you that they have not shared elsewhere. This is precious.

When your project is complete, you should let your narrator know. We send dossiers to each narrator with the following materials, both physical and digital:

- Copy of their signed consent/release form
- Copy of their final story as published on the web
- The full unedited interview (digital only)

Each student who worked on that narrator's file signs a hand-written thank you to the narrator. This means, in some cases, he/she gets a hand-written note from more than five students!

Donating Your Materials

If you have an interview you would like archived with the South Phoenix Oral History Project, please email your inquiry to historysouthmountain@gmail.com

If you are interested in donating your oral history to a different archive, reach out directly to the project manager.

If you want to keep your interview in your own possession, save it in **THREE** places.

How to cite oral histories:

For recordings:

N 1. Albert Harry Reed, interview by Stephen Sloan, October 9, 2007, in Waco, Texas, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX.

B Reed, Albert Harry. Interview by Stephen Sloan. October 9, 2007, in Waco, Texas. Compact disc. Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX.

For online transcripts:

N 2. Lonnie Belle Hodges, interview by Vivienne Malone-Mayes, August 30, 1990, in Waco, Texas, transcript, Baylor University Institute for Oral History, Waco, TX, available online at <http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/ref/collection/buioh/id/5361>.

B Hodges, Lonnie Belle. Interview by Vivienne Malone-Mayes. August 30, 1990, in Waco, Texas. Transcript. Baylor University Institute for Oral History, Waco, TX. <http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/ref/collection/buioh/id/5361> (accessed June 10, 2014).

For print transcripts deposited in an archives:

N 3. Abner Anglin Hyden, "Oral Memoirs of Abner Anglin Hyden," interview by Lois E. Myers on January 20, 1998, in Waco, Texas (Waco, TX: Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 2001), 22.

B Hyden, Abner Anglin. "Oral Memoirs of Abner Anglin Hyden." Interviewed by Lois E. Myers on six occasions from 20 January to 19 August, 1998, in Waco, Texas. Baylor University Institute for Oral History, Waco, TX.

Closing: Keep in Touch!

Can we be of any support or assistance to you?

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More and More Every Day Podcast: <https://open.spotify.com/show/7eb2QBVtVqWTWq2pdapBKi>

Join our Seasonal Mailing List: <https://forms.gle/LdQwHbJf2n5FUw9j9>

Did these training materials help you out at all? Please consider donating to the South Phoenix Oral History Project. Every little bit helps to keep our programs going!

<https://smcc-maricopa.nbsstore.net/spoh-donations>



Best of luck!

Let us know how it goes!

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