

Adapted from:

"Oral History Evaluation Guidelines," Oral History Association Pamphlet Number 3, <http://www.baylor.edu/~OHA/EvaluationGuidelines.html#Principles and Standards>

Responsibility to Interviewees:

1. Interviewees should be informed of the purposes and procedures of oral history in general and of the aims and anticipated uses of the particular projects to which they are making their contribution.
 2. Interviewees should be informed of the mutual rights in the oral history process, such as editing, access restrictions, copyrights, prior use, royalties, and the expected disposition and dissemination of all forms of the record.
 3. Interviewees should be informed that they will be asked to sign a legal release. Interviews should remain confidential until interviewees have given permission for their use.
 4. Interviewers should guard against making promises to interviewees that they may not be able to fulfill, such as guarantees of publication and control over future uses of interviews after they have been made public.
 5. Interviews should be conducted in accord with any prior agreements made with the interviewee, and such preferences and agreements should be documented for the record.
 6. Interviewers should work to achieve a balance between the objectives of the project and the perspectives of the interviewees. They should be sensitive to the diversity of social and cultural experiences, and to the implications of race, gender, class, ethnicity, age, religion, and sexual orientation. They should encourage interviewees to respond in their own style and language, and to address issues that reflect their concerns. Interviewers should fully explore all appropriate areas of inquiry with the interviewee and not be satisfied with superficial responses.
 7. Interviewers should guard against possible exploitation of interviewees and be sensitive to the ways in which their interviews might be used. Interviewers must respect the right of the interviewee to refuse to discuss certain subjects, to restrict access to the interview, or under extreme circumstances even to choose anonymity. Interviewers should clearly explain these options to all interviewees.
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Responsibility to the Public and to the Profession:

1. Oral historians have a responsibility to maintain the highest professional standards in the conduct of their work and to uphold the standards of the various disciplines and professions with which they are affiliated.
2. In recognition of the importance of oral history to an understanding of the past and of the cost and effort involved, interviewers and interviewees should mutually strive to record candid information of lasting value and to make that information accessible.
3. Interviewees should be selected on the basis of the relevance of their experiences to the subject at hand.
4. Interviewers should possess interviewing skills as well as professional competence or experience with the subject at hand.

5. Regardless of the specific interests of the project, interviewers should attempt to extend the inquiry beyond the specific focus of the project to create as complete a record as possible for the benefit of others.
 6. Interviewers should strive to prompt informative dialogue through challenging and perceptive inquiry. They should be grounded in the background of the persons being interviewed and, when possible, should carefully research appropriate documents and secondary sources related to subjects about which the interviewees can speak.
 7. Interviewers should make every effort to record their interviews. They should provide complete documentation of their preparation and methods, including the circumstances of the interviews. Interviewers, and when possible interviewees, should review and evaluate their interviews and any transcriptions made from them.
 8. With the permission of the interviewees, interviewers should arrange to deposit their interviews in an archival repository that is capable of both preserving the interviews and eventually making them available for general use. Interviewers should provide basic information about the interviews, including project goals, sponsorship, and funding. Preferably, interviewers should work with repositories prior to the project to determine necessary legal arrangements. If interviewers arrange to retain first use of the interviews, it should be only for a reasonable time prior to public use.
 9. Interviewers should be sensitive to the communities from which they have collected their oral histories, taking care not to reinforce thoughtless stereotypes or to bring undue notoriety to the communities. They should take every effort to make the interviews accessible to the communities.
 10. Oral history interviews should be used and cited with the same care and standards applied to other historical sources. Users have a responsibility to retain the integrity of the interviewee's voice, neither misrepresenting the interviewee's words nor taking them out of context.
 11. Sources of funding or sponsorship of oral history projects should be made public in all exhibits, media presentations, or publications that result from the projects.
 12. Interviewers and oral history programs should conscientiously consider how they might share with interviewees and their communities the rewards and recognition that might result from their work.
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Interview Conduct Guidelines

Use of Other Sources

- a. Is the oral history technique the best means of acquiring the information? If not, what other sources exist? Has the interviewer used them, and has he/she sought to preserve them if necessary?
- b. Has the interviewer made an effort to consult other relevant oral histories?
- c. Is the interview technique of value in supplementing existing sources?

Interviewer Preparation

- a. Is the interviewer well informed about the subjects under discussion?

b. Are the primary and secondary sources used in preparation for the interview adequate?

Interviewee Selection and Orientation

- a. Does the interviewee seem appropriate to the subjects discussed?
- b. Does the interviewee understand and respond to the interview purposes?
- c. Has the interviewee prepared for the interview and assisted in the process?
- d. If a group interview, have composition and group dynamics been considered in selecting participants?

Interviewer-Interviewee Relations

- a. Do interviewer and interviewee motivate each other toward interview objectives?
- b. Is there a balance between empathy and analytical judgment in the interview?
- c. If videotaped, is the interviewer/interviewee relationship maintained despite the presence of a technical crew? Did the technical personnel understand the nature of a videotaped oral history interview, as opposed to a scripted production?

Technique and Adaptive Skills

- a. In what ways does the interview show that the interviewer has used skills appropriate to:
 - the interviewee's condition (health, memory, mental alertness, ability to communicate, time schedule, etc.)?
 - the interview conditions (disruptions and interruptions, equipment problems, extraneous participants, etc.)?
- b. What evidence is there that the interviewer has
 - thoroughly explored pertinent lines of thought?
 - followed up on significant clues?
 - made an effort to identify sources of information?
 - employed critical challenges when needed?
 - thoroughly explored the potential of the visual environment, if videotaped?

Perspective

- a. Do the biases of the interviewer interfere with or influence the responses of the interviewee?
- b. What information is available that may inform the users of any prior or separate relationship of the interviewer to the interviewee?

Historical Contribution

- a. Does the interviewer pursue the inquiry with historical integrity?

- b. Do other purposes being served by the interview enrich or diminish quality?
 - c. What does the interview contribute to the larger context of historical knowledge and understanding?
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Transfer of Interviews to Archival Repository

- a. Has the independent/unaffiliated researcher properly obtained the agreement of the repository prior to making representations about the disposition of the interviews?
 - b. Is the transfer consistent with agreements or understandings with interviewers? Were legal agreements obtained from interviewees?
 - c. Has the researcher provided the repository with adequate descriptions of the creation of the interviews and the project?
 - d. What is the technical quality of the recorded interviews? Are the interviews transcribed, abstracted, or indexed, and, if so, what is the quality?
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Educator and Student Guidelines

Has the educator:

- a. become familiar with the "Oral History Evaluation Guidelines" and conveyed their substance to the student?
- b. ensured that each student is properly prepared before going into the community to conduct oral history interviews?
- c. become knowledgeable of the literature, techniques, and processes of oral history, so that the best possible instruction can be presented to the student'?
- d. worked with other professionals and organizations to provide the best oral history experience for the student?
- e. considered that the project may merit preservation and worked with other professionals and repositories to preserve and disseminate these collected materials?
- f. shown willingness to share her/his expertise with other educators, associations, and organizations?

Has the student:

- a. become thoroughly familiar with the techniques and processes of oral history interviewing and the development of research using oral history interviews?
- b. explained to the interviewee the purpose of the interview and how it will be used?
- c. treated the interviewee with respect?
- d. signed a receipt for and returned any materials borrowed from the interviewee?

- e. obtained a signed legal release for the interview?
 - f. kept her/his word about oral or written promises made to the interviewees?
 - g. given proper credit (oral or written) when using oral testimony, and used material in context?
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OHA/American Historical Association Statement on Research Risks

Certain interview research may be governed by the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects (codified at 45 CFR 46). Such research may require prospective review by an Institutional Review Board (IRB) as well as written informed consent of the interviewee. Additionally, institutions engaged in biomedical and behavioral research are likely to have internal policies that also pertain to interview research. Historians should be cognizant of and comply with all laws, regulations, and institutional policies applicable to their research activities.

February 1996
