

So you want to interview Grandma on Skype...

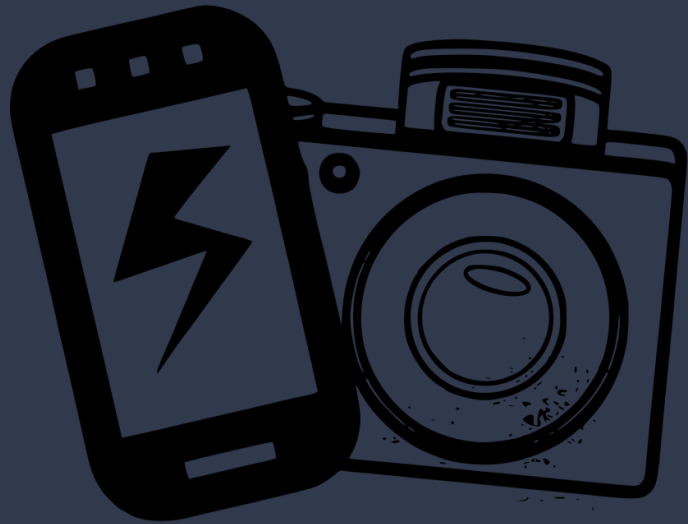
Guidelines and suggestions by Anne Kelly
Oral Historian & Digital Testimony Researcher
anne.kelly.10@gmail.com

What is oral history?

“Oral History collects memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews. An oral history interview generally consists of a well-prepared interviewer questioning an interviewee and recording their exchange in audio or video format. Recordings of the interview are transcribed, summarized, or indexed and then placed in a library or archives.”

~Donald Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*

Steps to Record a Longform Interview



Step 1: the Research

Step 2: the Technology

Step 3: the Interview

The Research

1. Conduct background research: ask relatives, do some primary source research, *know the broad strokes of their story ahead of time.*
2. Secure your grandparent's agreement to be interviewed, and if possible schedule a non-recorded meeting beforehand to get them used to being asked questions.
As in life, Consent is Key.
3. Create an outline or list of questions to guide yourself through the interview.

The Technology

1. Choose your interview technology wisely:
 - a. Zoom allows 40 minutes of free recording, Google Hangouts has cloud-based options, screen recording apps also work
2. Have a plan for storage--will you download it onto your computer? Upload it to YouTube?
3. Make sure the format you download is playable on your computer (mpeg4 and .wmv are standard)
4. Test your tech beforehand!

The Interview

1. Focus on asking open-ended questions with as little bias as possible. Ask questions that invite detail and context.
2. Do not attempt to trap or trick your grandparent- there is no “surprise” moment in oral history (and it’s rude, too!)
3. If using the Suggested Questions, choose 10-20 and add your own. (Plan for ~2 minutes per answer.)
4. Don’t interrupt! Sometimes the most interesting conversations come when minds are allowed to wander.
5. Have fun!

Further Reading...

10 Tips for Interviewing Family Members <https://blog.myheritage.com/2013/06/10-tips-for-interviewing-family-members-2/>

Conducting Oral History with Family members

<https://www.library.ucla.edu/destination/center-oral-history-research/resources/conducting-oral-histories-family-members>

Oral History in the Digital Age <http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/>

50 Questions to Ask Relatives About Family History

<https://www.thoughtco.com/fifty-questions-for-family-history-interviews-1420705>

Cloud recording – Zoom Help Center <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/203741855-Cloud-recording>

How to Record Google Hangout Video Calls <https://www.techsmith.com/blog/skype-google-hangout-video-calls/>

Record Your Screen With Snagit <https://www.techsmith.com/tutorial-snagit-13-intro-to-video.html>