Oral History Workshop

Cultivating Stories through the Practice of Listening
War Resisters League at 100

- Connecting past and present
- Events in NYC, North Carolina, and New England, and online exhibits and programming
- Linda Thurston Archival Internship
- Collecting & sharing stories about WRL
  - Oral histories
  - Blog series

Contact us:
wrl100historyproj@warresisters.org
Foundations

What’s your project?
Why oral history? What is it?

- A recorded story created through collaboration and partnership
- A historical primary source
- A vehicle for sharing histories excluded from mainstream and institutional archives
- A starting point for a community/public history project or archive
- An ethical practice of stewarding someone’s story
- NOT an informal conversation or journalistic interview
Planning Your Oral History Project: Important Questions

- What story are you hoping to tell? (Consider scope)
- Who might you approach to tell this story? (Recruit narrators)
- Are you the right person to be leading this project? (Consider positionality and build trust)
- How will you reach potential narrators? (Plan outreach)
- How many oral history interviews will you record? (Consider time and resources)
Consent and ethical considerations

- Be aware of your own identity/positionality as an interviewer and power dynamics at play.
- Walk narrators/interviewees through their right to their story (legally called copyright) and how their interview will be used (use).
- Help narrators get clear on what they are agreeing to and their ability to control the interview process before they sign anything.
- Remember to thank them; it is an honor to hear their story.
Preparing for an interview
Preparing for your interview

- Creating an interview guide
- Coming up with good questions
- Getting to know your equipment
Creating an interview guide/Drafting questions

- There are two general types of oral history interviews: life histories and topical interviews (*they are usually a combo). Which is yours?
- Based on your project scope and your narrators, what questions are your narrators best suited to answer? (Requires research)
- Create a general interview guide and use it as a starting point for questions.
- Conduct a pre-interview with your narrator before the date of your actual interview.
CONSIDERATIONS FOR DRAFTING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Consider how long you and your narrator will have and prioritize (interviews are often between 1-2 hours per session).
- Keep your questions open-ended.
- Generally move through your narrator’s life chronologically.
- Start general and get more specific per topic/time period you’re covering.
- Use your interview guide as a support but consider it a starting point.
Getting to know your equipment/technology

- Zoom recorders are great - H1n handy recorder - practice in advance of your interview
- If you do video, do an audio recording, too.
- Do a back-up audio recording, if possible. (e.g. smartphone)
- Zoom conference works & creates a separate audio recording.

**Remember:** Download your interview recording right away.
**Remember:** When scheduling an interview, make sure you find somewhere to record that is quiet (e.g. no pet noises, kitchen sounds, traffic, wind, etc.).
During the interview
Introduce to the recording
Center your narrator
Listen actively - How do you actively listen?
Try your best to keep the recording clear of sound outside of the narrator’s voice (including your own)
Keep thinking about follow-up questions
Be present for any difficult moments
Know when to take a beat and check in
Sample clips and practice exercise: What do you hear?

Clip 1:  **Fredda Davis**
https://sohp.org/

Clip 2:  **Julius Douglas**
http://growingchangehistoryproject.org
After the interview
Processing your interview & Accountability practices

- Transcribe your interview or pay to have a professional transcriber do it.
  - Express Scribe Transcription software
  - Scribie
- Go back and audio edit your interview before sharing it with your narrator.
- Get narrator feedback and update your transcript; share all finalized files with your narrator in a format that works for them.
- Create an abstract and notes for future researchers as part of your final transcript.
Questions to Consider: Access & Preservation

- Where will the story you recorded live?
  - Is long-term preservation important to your narrator and to your project?
- How will you share your oral history project with your intended audiences (provide access?)
  - Consider creative formats like exhibitions, podcasts, listening parties, art projects
  - Plan for project promotion and outreach
- What did you agree on with your narrator?
  - Possibilities for collaboration
- Connecting with WRL 100
Thank you & Questions?

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