

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:

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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

DURING THE INTERVIEW - ORAL HISTORY AS PRAXIS

- 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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