



INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

Prepared by Amy Skillman for the LGBT Center Oral History Project

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

- _____ Research some basic knowledge about the topic, time period or person.
- _____ Confirm your interview with the person you have selected, make an appointment with him or her at a quiet place, confirm time, date and location.
- _____ Make sure all supplies and forms are in your **Interview Folder**.
- _____ Practice using the tape recorder, camera, or other equipment, prepare forms for collecting biographical information and practice using them. To ensure that your recording lasts and is accessible to researchers and the public, the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress recommends that you **use the highest-quality video or audio recorder and microphone(s)** available to you. All recordings should be made at standard speed (SP). Please do not use extended time speeds.
- _____ **One recording, not to exceed 90 minutes**, is a good amount for the first interview. Anything beyond that can be tiring for both the interviewer and interviewee.
- _____ Review the list of pre-identified questions and prepare any additional questions you think are relevant.
- _____ You may want to give the questions to your interviewee in advance of the interview. This will allay any fears they have of being unprepared and will help them feel more comfortable during the interview.
- _____ Beforehand, think about the things that may affect the interview. How will you accommodate for them?

DURING THE INTERVIEW

- _____ Locate a quiet place to setup and test the recorder. Chat with your interviewee while setting up the equipment. This will help him or her feel more comfortable.
- _____ Begin by recording the biographical data, the easier questions. Explain to your Interviewee exactly what will be taking place.
- _____ Start with general, biographical information and then narrow your interview to more specific questions as you get comfortable with each other. Don't begin the interview with questions about painful or controversial topics.
- _____ Pause early in the interview to check your tape recorder. **NEVER** record someone without their permission
- _____ Do more listening than talking.
- _____ Take notes or have your interview partner take notes. Ask for clarification of special language and terms. If the person sites names of people or towns, be sure to ask for the spelling to be sure we have it correct for the record.
Remember that anyone listening to the tape in the future will not necessarily have the photographs or other documents in front of them. If you can, try to give a brief description. For example, *So, in this picture of a group of students in front of a school, you are pointing to the third person from the left. And that is your grandmother?*
- _____ Keep the tape recorder or video camera running throughout the interview, unless you are asked to turn it off by the interviewee. Never record secretly.
- _____ Encourage the interviewee with nods of the head rather than audible responses such as "yes" or "uh huh" that will be recorded.
- _____ Be patient and give the interviewee time to reflect before going on to a new question. Many people take short reflective breaks in the course of answering one question. That empty space is fine. If you jump in too soon, she may lose her train of thought and you might lose a good story/memory.
- _____ Be yourself. Don't pretend to know more about a subject than you do.
- _____ Have Interviewee sign a **Release Form**.

TIPS FOR ENCOURAGING STORIES

- _____ Try to keep your questions short. Avoid complicated, multipart questions or asking two questions at the same time.
- _____ Don't ask questions that can be answered with a simple "yes" or "no," but ask "how, when, and why" questions.
- _____ Try to keep your opinions out of the interview, and don't ask leading questions that suggest answers.
- _____ Use follow-up questions to elicit more details from the interviewee.
Examples of good follow-up questions include: When did that happen? Did that happen to you? What did you think about that? What are the steps in doing that?
- _____ Consider asking the interviewee to show you photographs, objects (such as maps, bumperstickers, clothing) and personal letters as a way of enhancing the interview. Such documents and objects often encourage memories and provoke interesting stories. This is also a good strategy for getting the person's mind off the tape recorder and into telling stories.

TIPS FOR EMOTIONAL SITUATIONS

- _____ Show compassion and keep the tape running
- _____ Allow them time to collect their thoughts
- _____ Your innocence of the situation can be your best strategy
- _____ If they ask, turn the tape off. Then once they have told you the story, ask them to share it on tape if appropriate
- _____ Remember it is their story and they have final say over what is in the interview.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- _____ Write follow-up field notes about your impressions, ideas, and questions you still need to ask.
- _____ Label your tapes. Complete your **Tape Log** and **Photo or Slide Log**.
- _____ Start transcribing as soon as possible.
- _____ Analyze your findings to identify the important points. Decide if any follow-up is needed.
- _____ Send your Interviewee a thank-you note

