

Oral History Interview Guide

Step 1: Ask. Lovingly approach your family member and ask them if they would be willing to help you out with your family research. Let them know how important their information means to you. Don't procrastinate or the opportunity could pass you by. Set a date and identify a place that is convenient and comfortable for your family member.

Step 2: Prepare a Family Group Worksheet. Before conducting the interview, fill out a *Family Group Worksheet*. Enter everything you know from your prior research. That way you can spend less time completing the form and more time enjoying the conversation. **Tip:** Use a pencil so that you can make any necessary corrections during your interview.

Step 3: Bring a Pedigree Chart. Use the chart during your interview to help gather information about your relative's parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. While they may not be able to provide you with detailed information, they may be able to offer names. Doing the chart together will help get your family member more engaged in the research. **Tips:** This is a good time to ask if they have a family Bible, which can be helpful in supplying generational information. Again, use a pencil so you can make changes as needed throughout your conversation.

Step 4: Bring a tote bag with supplies. Bring a fully-charged smartphone and charger; pencils, erasers and pencil sharpener; ink pens; magnifying lens; Family Group Worksheet (and a few blanks); Pedigree Chart (and a blank); and a sturdy notebook with plenty of blank pages.

Step 5: Bring photos. Locate and bring any unidentified photographs that you have, which you think your family member might be able to help identify.

Step 6: Download a free voice recorder app onto your smartphone. If your family member consents to taping the conversation, you can spend more time just having a conversation and less time taking notes. **Tip:** Certain paid recording apps will also transcribe the conversation.

Step 7: Snap, Snap, Snap. Be prepared to take plenty of photos using your smartphone or a digital camera. Obviously, you want to capture a photo of your interview subject. But, if other family members are present, take photos of them as well. Take photos of anything that is shared with you during the interview (e.g, Family Bible pages, obituaries, letters, memorabilia, photographs).

Step 8: Have a conversation, but the interviewee should do most of the talking. A rigid firing off of one question after another will be exhausting for both parties. And, you'll miss out on all the memories that can be recalled and shared if you use a conversational style. Use the outline in this guide as conversation starters, rather than a list that you must adhere to closely. An open dialogue creates a more comfortable atmosphere and can lead to much more interesting storytelling.

Step 9: Build toward and then work through any sensitive topics. Before diving in the deep end, start in the wading pool. If you run into a sensitive area, ask how they feel about discussing it. Always respect their wishes.

Step 10: Be respectful of time and other commitments. Two hours is usually about the right amount of time for an interview session. But if that's not enough time to encapsulate their life experience and the session was positive, ask if you can come back again to finish.

Step 11: Say Thanks! Bring a thank-you gift, a gift card, flowers, or baked goods to express your appreciation for their time. Follow-up with a note or card telling them how meaningful their stories are to you.

Oral History Conversational Outline

Credit for this oral history outline goes to Shirley Gray, who, in 1966, wrote it down in her treasured genealogy notebook. Shirley continued to use the same chronological-style outline, along with some handwritten notes, throughout her lifetime of family research. The outline essentially represents a set of prompts or memory triggers to help interviewees recall experiences in their life. In comparison, if you look at Shirley's pre-1966 interviews, you'll see she relied on a list of questions, very similar to those still being published today. She stopped using a list because it created an awkward and uncomfortable atmosphere. While it was a good fact-finding tool, it prevented her from having genuine conversations, the type where your family members can reflect, recall, reminisce, and openly share their stories.

Now, this outline is **available to you as a free gift**, so you can collect and preserve the oral histories from your family, and pass the stories down to future generations.

<p>Childhood Years</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Favorite nursery rhyme or bedtime story ● Toys and games played ● Where lived (place, city or country) ● Neighbors and neighborhood ● School/favorite subjects ● Friendships ● Holidays and celebrations ● Brothers and sisters (close?) ● Family meals, special foods enjoyed ● Childhood diseases or injuries ● Poor, middle class, wealthy ● Time spent with grandparents 	<p>Having Children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● First child ● Attending school activities ● Hardest part about raising children ● Family vacations ● Illnesses and injuries ● Happy times ● What you did for fun ● Lean times
<p>Teen Years</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Family trips ● Religious activities (where?) ● Sports played ● Musical instrument played ● Other extracurricular activities or clubs ● Subjects enjoyed in school ● Influential teachers ● Learning to drive/Getting a car ● Entertainment/Favorite music ● High school graduation 	<p>Middle-Age Years</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● First home ● Hobbies and interests ● Trips or vacations ● Work ● Weather-related events (snow storms, tornadoes, hurricanes) ● Memberships in groups or clubs ● Favorite movie or book
<p>Early Adulthood</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Military (branch, where, rank) ● College ● First job ● Influential events (wars, death, hard times) 	<p>Growing older</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What did you want to be when you grew up? ● Life lessons learned/best advice to others ● Favorite memory ● Moment in life most proud/greatest accomplishment ● How the world has changed
<p>Marriage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Where did you meet; what was the attraction ● Dating ● Getting engaged ● Wedding & honeymoon (wedding photo?) 	<p>Wrap-up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Check spellings ● Any topics we didn't already cover