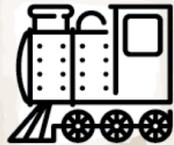


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Principles for Conducting an Oral History Interview

Module 3, Unit 5: Evaluating and safe-guarding the quality of the oral history project

Principles for Conducting an Oral History Interview

Every interviewing experience is unique; this is part of the charm of oral history.

While there is some validity to the phrase:

“The only way to learn how to do it is to do it”,

the following principles can be applied to oral history to safeguard the quality of your project and to make every interview more successful.



Principles in Oral History Interviewing

- Oral historians inform narrators about the nature and purpose of oral history interviewing in general and of their interview specifically.
- Oral historians insure that narrators voluntarily give their consent to be interviewed and understand that they can withdraw from the interview or refuse to answer a question at any time.
- Narrators may give this consent by signing a consent form or by recording an oral statement of consent prior to the interview.
- All interviews are conducted in accord with the stated aims and within the parameters of the consent.

Principles in Oral History Interviewing

- Interviewers must take care to avoid making promises that cannot be met, such as:
 - guarantees of control over interpretation and presentation of the interviews beyond the scope of restrictions stated in informed consent/release forms,
 - suggestions of material benefit outside the control of the interviewer,
 - assurances of an open ended relationship between the narrator and oral historian.

Respect in Oral History Interviewing

- ❑ Oral historians respect the narrators as well as the integrity of the research.
- ❑ Interviewers are obliged to ask historically significant questions, reflecting careful preparation for the interview and understanding of the issues to be addressed.
- ❑ Interviewers must also respect the narrators' equal authority in the interviews and honour their right to respond to questions in their own style and language.
- ❑ In the use of interviews, oral historians strive for intellectual honesty, while avoiding stereotypes, misrepresentations, or manipulations of the narrators' words.

Copyright in Oral History Interviewing

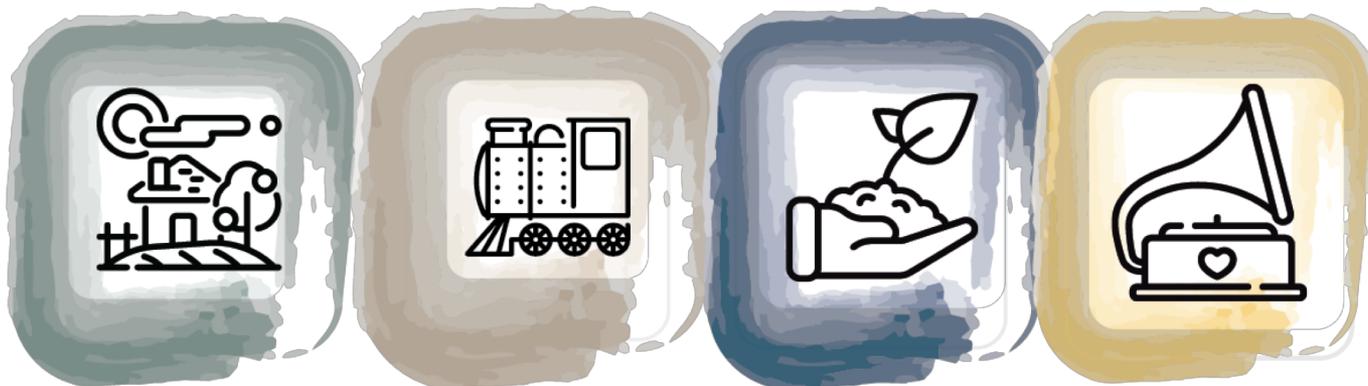
- ❑ Interviewees hold the copyright to their interviews until and unless they transfer those rights to an individual or institution.
- ❑ This is done by the interviewee signing a release form or in some circumstances recording an oral statement to the same effect.
- ❑ Interviewers must insure that narrators understand the extent of their rights to the interview and their right to put restrictions on the use of the material.
- ❑ All use and dissemination of the interview content must follow any restrictions the narrator places upon it.

Anonymity in Oral History Interviewing

- Because of the importance of context and identity in shaping the content of an oral history narrative, it is the practice in oral history for narrators to be identified by name.
- There may be some exceptional circumstances when anonymity is appropriate, and this should be negotiated in advance with the narrator as part of the informed consent process.



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