

PAST-TIMES



How to plan your oral history project

Module 3, Unit 2: Planning and executing your oral history interview

How to plan your oral history project



The Purpose of Oral History

- Dynamic and interesting
- It can capture elements that written histories cannot, such as:
 - Feelings
 - Emotions
 - Reactions
- A collection of individual perspectives on the:
 - Social
 - Cultural
 - Political
 - Economic
 - Religious

The Purpose of Oral History

- What is important is for those involved in collecting oral history to remember that they are actually creating a valuable historical archive.
- The responsibility that accompanies the production of these potential archival treasures demands integrity of purpose, careful planning, consistency of approach, and proper documentation of the process used.

Rewards of Oral History

- Oral history, when well done, gives a sense of accomplishment to both the interviewer and the interviewee and a realisation that together the oral historian and their subject have succeeded in capturing and preserving something valuable from the receding tide of the past.



Planning Oral History Research

1. Defining your research field
2. Setting research goals
3. Determining the scope of the project
4. Defining your approach to oral history
5. Conducting background research
6. Being prepared

Planning Oral History Research

- Defining your research field
 - What is the main topic or topics that will be explored?
 - Who are the main target groups for oral history research actions?
 - What do you intend to use the information gathered for?
 - A publication?
 - An archive?
 - A broadcast?

Planning Oral History Research

- Setting research goals
 - Aims and objectives are always linked, but often confused.
 - Project aims are a statement of the overall “Why” of the project. It tells the audience what your overall goal is, what it is you want to achieve. It does not go into details or describe specific tasks.
 - Project objectives tell the “How” of the project aim. You want to achieve your goal and the objectives state how this will be done – what major tasks will be undertaken and what your major targets are.

Limits of Oral History

- Individual testimony is highly bias and often two accounts of the same event will contradict.
- Even memories shared by the same individual can be contradicting because psychology has taught us that individuals often make alterations in their memory and exceptions in their beliefs in order to make sense of them
- Oral history can be bad for dates, statistics, financial information, and the big picture
- This is why it is important to check “the facts” recorded in your oral history interviews.

Planning Oral History Research

▣ Sample Aims

- The aim of this oral history project is
 - to learn about traditions in my new community and ensure that they are available to future generations
 - to create a genealogical record of my extended family
 - to learn about life in Europe during the 1950s
 - to learn about attitudes...
 - to get an insight into working life...
 - to learn about diet...

Planning Oral History Research

- Sample Objectives
 - Community
 - To interview 20 past pupils of the local primary school which closed in 1955
 - To listen to their stories about going to school
 - How they got to school
 - What subjects they learned
 - What games they played in the schoolyard
 - To listen to their stories about their teachers

Planning Oral History Research

- ▣ Determining the scope of the project:
 - Duration of the project
 - Location & geographic range
 - Approximate number of people to be interviewed
 - Categories of people to be interviewed
 - Research topic to be addressed
 - Who will work on the project

Planning Oral History Research

- Determining the scope of the project
 - Sample Scope:
 - This is a community oral history exercise
 - This oral history project will be conducted over a period of 6 months
 - It will be located in the village of Virginia, Ireland and involve residents living within a 2 kilometre radius
 - All male and female residents over the age of 70 years – approximately 18 residents – will be interviewed
 - Interviews will focus on the experiences of people growing up in Virginia between 1940 and 1970
 - Research will be conducted by 3 researchers



Over to you!

**Outline the scope of a potential oral
history project you might conduct**

You have 10 minutes!

Planning Oral History Research

- Defining your approach to oral history
 - Pursuing an outcomes-based approach:
 - Can help make your research more person focused by identifying what works well, and what could be improved
 - Outcomes can occur in many places, enabling you to demonstrate the effects of your work at different levels
 - As a direct result of your research there may be outcomes for
 - Individuals
 - Family
 - Community
 - Environment

Planning Oral History Research

- Defining your approach to oral history
 - What are outcomes?
 - Outcomes are the changes, benefits, learning or other effects that happen as a result of your work.
 - They can be wanted or unwanted, expected or unexpected.
 - Outcomes can happen at different levels
 - Measuring outcomes can help to show the degree of effectiveness of your work

Planning Oral History Research

- ▣ Defining your approach to oral history
 - Sample Outcomes:
 - The outcomes of oral history research with older people might be:
 - for the older person:
 - improved sense of belonging
 - improved self-esteem and self-confidence
 - improved motivation
 - for the migrant or community member:
 - better understanding of the past
 - greater appreciation of traditions
 - increased social cohesion



Over to you!

**Write down 2-3 outcomes that you
would like to achieve through your
oral history project**

You have 10 minutes!

Planning Oral History Research

- Conducting Preliminary Research
 - What do you know already?
 - Has any similar research been conducted?
 - What published or unpublished material is there available to you?
 - What do you have to stimulate recollection?
 - Photographs
 - Knowledge of a special occasion/event
 - A story you once heard
 - Such knowledge will also assist you in establishing rapport with the interviewee by laying a groundwork of shared knowledge and confirming your interest in him/her.

Planning Oral History Research

- Conducting Preliminary Research
 - Sources for your research:
 - examining public records
 - census and local authority records,
 - church and school records,
 - local newspapers/publications/broadcasts
 - exploring the history of clubs, organisations, businesses, buildings
 - churches and schools,
 - factories and businesses,
 - other significant buildings,
 - community festivals or events,
 - artefacts.

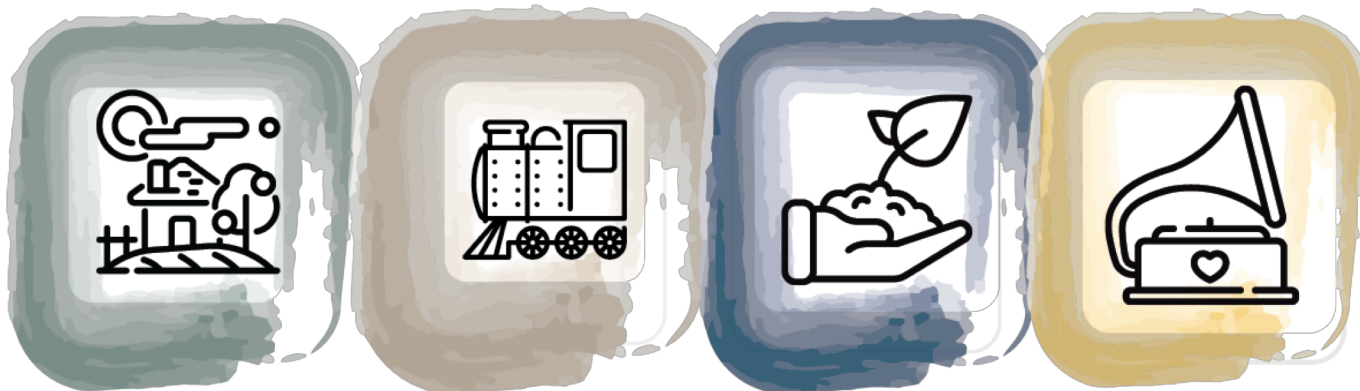


Over to you!

**Outline what source material you
might use and the topics you will
address**

You have 10 minutes!

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S V E B ■
F S E A ■



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