

# Collecting Oral Histories

## Advantages to Oral History

Straight from the source  
Reveals personality - more than names  
Captures tone - of person, of era, of family  
Prevents loss at death (3 generations)  
Finds hidden information (houses, cars, even people)

## Recording

Make the person feel cozy

- Choose a comfortable location.
- seating arrangements - facing or side-by-side?
- artifacts (pictures, heirlooms) as memory boosters
- Arrange for people present depending on personality of interviewee.

Equipment - #1 rule: Always test before you go and after you get there! Double-up if possible.

- audio
- video

## Interview questions

Start with closed questions (name, date born, etc.)

Focus most of the interview on open-ended questions

- Tell me about growing up.
- What was your mom like?
- What was school like for you?
- Can you tell me the background behind this photograph?
- How would you describe...
- I remember... Can you tell me more about...

Encourage them to talk with non-verbal cues and short follow-up questions. However, you should talk as little as possible! You want it to be their interview, not yours.

Expect it to take a long time - hours and hours. Divide it into one-hour sessions.

## Preserving your History

No plastic! Use paper/cardboard instead (best time to buy - tax season).

Keep it off the floor.

Use a pencil instead of a pen when working with historical documents. Never eat & look!

Many copies prevents loss. Transcriptions are also very valuable.

Keep the originals where they are accessible to the greatest number of interested people.