

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

SANKOFA: EQUIPMENT AND COLLECTION TIPS



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Oral history collection can be a strenuous time commitment; however, the gratification of documenting and chronicling stories of community members is worth the effort. The fact that you are taking on this challenge by completing this lesson and collecting oral histories is a resistance to standard history that often excludes individual stories in its narratives.

Equipment Needs

Purchasing equipment to collect oral histories can be expensive for the novice oral historian; however, with today's technology affordable methods are available. If you have a smartphone, that may be a great option; the audio/video capabilities of smartphones render quality recordings that can be uploaded to computers and cloud storage. Alternatively, you can invest in a DSLR camera to record videos, or a digital recorder for audio only.

Legality of Oral Histories

An oral history cannot be recorded without a release form being signed. Capturing the image, likeness and voice of an individual, even if they are family or close friends, should not be done without a release form. Any of the options below can serve as the language for your release form:

- I hereby transfer this work to the public domain. I fully understand that this interview will not be copyrighted by me or (insert business name here), but will be immediately placed in the public domain. This decision is intended to provide maximum usage by future researchers.
- I hereby transfer copyright to the (insert business name here), which grants me a non-exclusive license for the complete and unrestricted right to reproduce, publish, broadcast, transmit, perform or adapt the interview.

Release forms are legally binding and serve as protection from any future litigation.



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Oral History Collection Tips

Conducting an oral history can be an amazing experience, especially if you prepare before you begin. Below are some simple steps to ensure you make the best of the time with your storyteller (i.e., narrator/interviewee).

Research your topic: Whether you are looking to find out more about an event in history or want a first-hand account of what life was like in a certain place/time you should identify your topic and research it before you set up interviews. Proper research will ensure you identify narrators who can speak about the desired subjects.

Select narrators: Now that you've researched your topic, you get to select the voices that will add the most to your interview. Consider narrators who have a lived experience with your topic, were participants in major events or are experts on the topic.

Write questions: It is critical to have a few major questions on your topic before going into the interview. Ask things specific to the event or its impact to get your narrator going.

Be a listening ear: This interview is about the narrator and their story. Allow the narrator to do the majority of the talking, but feel free to ask follow-up or clarifying questions relevant to the interview. A well-placed "Tell me more" can encourage the narrator. Use non-verbal clues, such as nodding your head, to show the narrator you are listening.

Take Notes: Although you are recording the interview, it is good practice to take notes to help you see connections between your narrators' stories. Let the narrator know before you begin the interview that you may write some notes during your conversation.



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