

December 15 2015
Oral History Workshop

Part 1: Defining and Understanding Oral History

- [:05 min] Speaker introduction: Mission and purpose of Queens Memory, Natalie shares her background and current oral history projects
 - Objective of this session: teach interviewing techniques and procedures to produce materials eligible for inclusion in Queens Memory (why this is important)
 - Send around sign in list
- [:15 min] Participant introductions
- [:20 min] Overview:
 - What IS oral history?... not journalism, not conversation, not a survey
 - Introduce concept of shared authority
 - Who uses oral histories? How do we anticipate their needs?
 - Informed consent: review the form
 - Purpose of informed consent
 - The many ways these materials might be used in the future
 - The traditional life history model for oral history interviews (Voice of the Past)
 - Structuring an oral history project around a theme or topic
 - Finding a great source (narrator) for that information
 - Listen clip from a Queens Memory Project interview (Gladys Weaver, “Impact of Public Housing Developments”
http://www.queensmemory.org/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/1279)
 - What larger social/historical themes were contained in this clip? (Red lining, urban development, public housing, demographic shifts, race relations, GI Housing Bill)
 - Doing a pre-interview (review the form) and other preparatory research
- [:35 min] Listening exercise: Group gathers in a circle. A volunteer sits at the center. Workshop participants take turns asking questions and then follow-up questions based on the answers. Natalie gives one positive comment and one note for improvement after each question. Points of discussion:
 - Setting up for your interview
 - Ideal room: small, cluttered, comfy chairs, water, eliminate avoidable noise, listen through headphones to sound
 - Ideal recorder/chair set-up
 - Getting the person alone if possible – otherwise, introducing the other people in the room
 - Information to include EVERY time: Your name, Interviewee’s name, the date, the location of the interview
 - Conducting interviews (Ritchie’s Chap. 3):
 - Mix of set questions and things you’ve learned in pre-interview
 - Ways to structure an open-ended question
 - Importance of staying quiet and encouraging your interviewee non-verbally to tell you more
 - Flowing, logical sequence of questions

- When closed, or clarifying questions are good
- When summarizing questions are good, recognizing and discussing themes in interviewee's life
- Steering clear of judgment and assumptions that have more to do with your own values than with the values of the interviewee
- Use of photos and other mementos
- Taking a portrait of your interviewee
 - Going outside for natural light if possible
 - Taking a few pictures
 - Waiting until end of interview

Part 2: Equipment and Processing

- Completing a submission package for each interview:
 - Audio file
 - Consent form
 - Portrait of interviewee
 - Timecode outline
 - Any photos or other items on loan for digitization
- Hand-off to catalogers and sound editors
- Follow-up after the interview: Sending interviewees a thank-you note, CD of interview, and scans of visual materials they loaned for digitization (plus the materials themselves)

Part 3: Practice (optional)

- [:30 min] Listening exercise: Participants use the "Suggested Topics for Interviews" document to guide them through a 10 minute interview with a partner. Everyone switches roles so everyone gets a turn being an interviewer and interviewee.
 - Round everyone up for reflection on these points of discussion:
 - Which questions worked, which ones didn't?
 - How many categories did you cover?
 - What did you do to help yourself remember what your interviewee was telling you?
 - Following the topic met with enthusiasm and emotion – not letting the topic outline take over
 - Importance of body language, careful listening for good follow-ups, leaving silence