

Northeastern University

University Libraries

Oral History Toolkit

- Oral History Project Form, p. 2
- Oral History Project Checklists for Project Lead, p. 3
- Oral History Project Checklists for DMC Studios Staff, p. 4
- Interview Confirmation Letter, p. 5
- Consent and Release Form, p. 6
- Tips for Interviewers, p. 7-8
- Oral History Narrator Background Worksheet, p. 9
- Oral History Interview Worksheet, p. 10
- Oral History Project Recording Log, p. 11

Information and forms in this toolkit will assist you in planning and administering your oral history project. Whether part of a Northeastern University class assignment or archival research, library staff will guide you through the toolkit steps and provide technical and instructional support.

We wish you much success in your oral history project.



Oral History Project Form

Project Lead/Faculty Member: _____

Email: _____ Phone Number: _____

Course Name & Number: _____

Project Due Date: _____

Date Range of Interviews: _____

Number of Students in Class: _____

Assignments are: ___Individual ___Group-based

Interview Format: ___Audio ___Video

Library staff support needed - instruction:

- ___Video production workshop
- ___Audio production workshop
- ___Interviewing skills workshop
- ___Archives consult

Requested media output (recommended):

- ___mpeg 2, wrapped in a quicktime wrapper, in full HD
- ___Mp3 or AIFF (audio)
- Other: _____
- Will interviewee like a copy of the interview? _____

Library staff support needed - production:

- ___Pro videography assistance
- ___Equipment lending

Storage/publishing:

- Potential candidate for Digital Repository Service (DRS)? _____ If yes, contact archivist and DRS Manager. Website/exhibit space needed? _____
- Project Lead will keep original,
- Need external Hard Drive? _____

For DMC Staff:

Staff Assigned to Project: _____

Equipment Needed: _____



Oral History Project Checklists

For Project Lead
From Pre to Post Production

Complete the **Oral History Project Form** and submit to Debra Mandel, d.mandel@neu.edu. You will be contacted to meet with Debra and Thomas Bary of the DMC Studios Staff.

Before scheduling interviews, discuss project with DMC Staff:

- Review Oral History Project and discuss other forms and procedures in the OH Toolkit
- Discuss post production options and output
- Schedule and attend 60-90 min. orientation session with project interviewers to include:
 - Review of forms and procedures
 - Review of NUSSO scheduling system
 - Tips for Interviewers
 - Tour of Studio with overview of technical set-up
 - 1 or 2 mock interviews in the DMC Video Studio

For Interviewers: Scheduling Interviews

- Book Video Studio using NUSSO at least 2 weeks in advance of interview. Available hours are Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm. Make arrangements with ITS for any equipment needed for off campus use.
- Fill out Interview Worksheet
- Obtain background information from narrator and complete Oral History Narrator Background Worksheet
- Prepare interview topics and sample questions for narrator
- Email/Mail Narrator the following 2 weeks before interview and attach:
 - Interview Confirmation Letter to include directions to campus and location for meeting
 - Consent and Release Form
 - Sample Interview Questions
- Provide name of guest(s) to Access Services at Library-Access Services@neu.edu in advance for library entrance access.

Preparing for the Interview:

- Gather notes from your background information and any discussions you have had
- Have list of questions
- Organize structure of interview (such as starting with background information on the subject and their relationship to the topic.

Day of Interview

- Meet the narrator at the turnstiles 20 minutes before interview start time and accompany to Studio
- Give completed Interview Worksheet and give to DMC staff videographer. Keep copy for yourself
- Give signed Consent and Release Form to videographer
- Thank narrator (interviewee)
- Verify post production with DMC staff
- Arrange to deliver copy of interview and release form to narrator



Oral History Project Checklists

For DMC Studios Staff
From Pre to Post Production

Pre-Production Checklist for DMC Studio Staff

- Discuss project, review forms and information packet with Project Lead
- Schedule and lead 60- 90 min. orientation session with project team/interviewers. Orientation will include:
 - Introductions
 - Review Other Forms:
 - Consent and Release Form
 - Oral History Interview Worksheet
 - Interview Confirmation Letter
 - Oral History Narrator Form
 - Tips for Interviewers
 - Oral History Project Recording Log
 - Demo NUSSO scheduling system
 - Discuss interview process. Review Tips for Interviewers.
 - Ask if the interview intends to include photographs or other records to accompany the oral history. If yes, refer them to Archives to discuss.
 - Give tour of Studio with overview of technical set-up
 - Conduct 1 or 2 mock interviews in the Studio

DMC Videographer/Technical Crew Responsibilities

- When narrator and interviewer arrive, begin introductions and explain the filming process and cues
- Turn the lighting board on and light the subject for the video shoot
- White balance camera
- Mic up the narrator and interviewer
- Conduct sound check. Listen to the audio quality for interviewer and narrator through a headset
- Additional crew monitors audio and video quality in the control room
- Give signal for interview to begin
- When filming is done, ask people to wait a few minutes until they hear the all clear
- Say goodbyes
- Check footage (P2 cards) in FCPX
- Ingest the footage into FCPX

DMC Staff Post-Production

- Capture footage and output a video file onto the drive
- Wipe the card and return to inventory
- Scan the Consent and Release form and Interview Worksheet and send to Archives
- Student/Archives views recording and completes Oral History Project Recording Log



Northeastern University

University Libraries

Interview Confirmation Letter

Date:

Dear _____,

This letter confirms your oral history interview for the _____ project. It is scheduled to begin at _____ (time and place) on _____ (date).

Please meet me inside the entrance of Northeastern University Libraries near the turnstiles approximately 20 minutes before start time. Directions and information on public transportation and parking can be found at <http://library.northeastern.edu/about/maps-and-directions>.

Please do not wear black as that will be the color of the backdrop.

During the interview we will cover the following topics (List the topics you want to cover such as):

- _____ your background
- _____ your memories of the topic
- _____ memories of (List specific items)
- _____ your final thoughts

Please sign the **Consent And Release Form**, which will be submitted to Northeastern University for this project.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this project. I look forward to meeting you. I can be reached at _____ (telephone number) and _____ (e-mail) with any questions you have.

Sincerely Yours,

_____(Interviewer)

Email: _____

Phone: _____



CONSENT AND RELEASE FORM

I hereby authorize Northeastern University (Northeastern), and those acting pursuant to its authority to:

- (a) Record my likeness and voice on a video, audio, photographic, digital, electronic or any other medium.
- (b) Use my name in connection with these recordings.
- (c) Use, reproduce, exhibit or distribute in any medium (e.g. print publications, video, internet/world wide web, and/or other media formats and platforms) these recordings for any purpose that Northeastern, and those acting pursuant to its authority, deem appropriate.

I release Northeastern University and those acting pursuant to its authority from liability for any violation of any personal or proprietary right I may have in connection with such use. I understand that all such recordings, in whatever medium, shall remain the property of Northeastern. I have read and fully understand the terms of this release.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Street

City

State

Zip

Phone: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____



Tips For Interviewers

1. An interview is not a dialogue. The whole point of the interview is to get the narrator to tell her story. Limit your own remarks to a few pleasantries to break the ice, then brief questions to guide her along. It is not necessary to give her the details of your great-grandmother's trip in a covered wagon in order to get her to tell you about her grandfather's trip to California. Just say, "I understand your grandfather came around the Horn to California. What did he tell you about the trip?"
2. Ask questions that require more of an answer than "yes" or "no." Start with "why," "how," "where," "what kind of ...". Instead of "Was Henry Miller a good boss?" ask "What did the cowhands think of Henry Miller as a boss?"
3. Ask one question at a time. Sometimes interviewers ask a series of questions all at once. Probably the narrator will answer only the first or last one. You will catch this kind of questioning when you listen through the tape after the session, and you can avoid it the next time.
4. Ask brief questions. We all know the irrepressible speech-maker who, when questions are called for at the end of a lecture, gets up and asks five-minute questions. It is unlikely that the narrator is so dull that it takes more than a sentence or two for her to understand the question.
5. Start with questions that are not controversial; save the delicate questions, if there are any, until you have become better acquainted. A good place to begin is with the narrator's youth and background.
6. Don't let periods of silence fluster you. Give your narrator a chance to think of what she wants to add before you hustle her along with the next question. Relax, write a few words on your notepad. The sure sign of a beginning interviewer is a tape where every brief pause signals the next question.
7. Don't worry if your questions are not as beautifully phrased as you would like them to be for posterity. A few fumbled questions will help put your narrator at ease as she realizes that you are not perfect and she need not worry if she isn't either. It is not necessary to practice fumbling a few questions; most of us are nervous enough to do that naturally.
8. Don't interrupt a good story because you have thought of a question, or because your narrator is straying from the planned outline. If the information is pertinent, let her go on, but jot down your questions on your notepad so you will remember to ask it later.
9. If your narrator does stray into subjects that are not pertinent (the most common problems are to follow some family member's children or to get into a series of family medical problems), try to pull her back as quickly as possible. "Before we move on, I'd like to find out how the closing of the mine in 1935 affected your family's finances. Do you remember that?"
10. It is often hard for a narrator to describe people. An easy way to begin is to ask her to describe the person's appearance. From there, the narrator is more likely to move into character description.
11. Interviewing is one time when a negative approach is more effective than a positive one. Ask about the negative aspects of a situation. For example, in asking about a person, do not begin with a glowing description. "I know the mayor was a very generous and wise person. Did you find him so?" Few narrators will quarrel with a statement like that even though they may have found the mayor a disagreeable person. You will get a more lively answer if you start out in the negative. "Despite the mayor's reputation for good works, I hear he was a very difficult man for his immediate employees to get along with." If your narrator admired the mayor greatly, she will spring to his defense with an apt illustration of why your statement is wrong. If she did

find him hard to get along with, your remark has given her a chance to illustrate some of the mayor's more unpleasant characteristics.

12. Try to establish at every important point in the story where the narrator was or what her role was in this event, in order to indicate how much is eye-witness information and how much based on reports of others. "Where were you at the time of the mine disaster?" "Did you talk to any of the survivors later?" Work around these questions carefully, so that you will not appear to be doubting the accuracy of the narrator's account.

13. Do not challenge accounts you think might be inaccurate. Instead, try to develop as much information as possible that can be used by later researchers in establishing what probably happened. Your narrator may be telling you quite accurately what she saw. As Walter Lord explained when describing his interviews with survivors of the Titanic, "Every lady I interviewed had left the sinking ship in the last lifeboat. As I later found out from studying the placement of the lifeboats, no group of lifeboats was in view of another and each lady probably was in the last lifeboat she could see leaving the ship."

14. Tactfully point out to your narrator that there is a different account of what she is describing, if there is. Start out by saying, "I have heard ..." or "I have read ..." This is not to challenge her account, but rather an opportunity for her to bring up further evidence to refute the opposing view, or to explain how that view got established, or to temper what she has already said. If done skillfully, some of your best information can come from this juxtaposition of differing accounts.

15. Try to avoid "off the record" information--the times when your narrator asks you to turn off the recorder while she tells you a good story. Ask her to let you record the whole thing and promise that you will erase that portion if she asks you to after further consideration. You may have to erase it later, or she may not tell you the story at all, but once you allow "off the record" stories, she may continue with more and more, and you will end up with almost no recorded interview at all. "Off the record" information is only useful if you yourself are researching a subject and this is the only way you can get the information. It has no value if your purpose is to collect information for later use by other researchers.

16. Don't switch the recorder off and on. It is much better to waste a little tape on irrelevant material than to call attention to the tape recorder by a constant on-off operation. For this reason, I do not recommend the stop-start switches available on some mikes. If your mike has such a switch, tape it to the "on" position--then forget it. Of course you can turn off the recorder if the telephone rings or if someone interrupts your session.

17. Interviews usually work out better if there is no one present except the narrator and the interviewer. Sometimes two or more narrators can be successfully recorded, but usually each one of them would have been better alone.

18. End the interview at a reasonable time. An hour and a half is probably the maximum. First, you must protect your narrator against overfatigue; second, you will be tired even if she isn't. Some narrators tell you very frankly if they are tired, or their spouses will. Otherwise, you must plead fatigue, another appointment, or no more tape.

19. Don't use the interview to show off your knowledge, vocabulary, charm, or other abilities. Good interviewers do not shine; only their interviews do.

From Willa K. Baum's Oral History for the Local Historical Society
Copyright © 2012 The Regents of the University of California. All Rights Reserved.
Comments & Suggestions | Last Updated: 09/11/12 | Server manager: Contact
Reprinted with Permission.



Oral History Interview Worksheet

Project Title: _____

Project Lead's Name: _____

Date of Interview: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____ Length: _____

Location of Interview: _____

Format: Audio Video

Name of Interviewer: _____

Name of Narrator: _____

Other persons present: _____

Sound conditions (background noise, interruptions): _____

Key themes/points of discussion/metatags: _____



Oral History Narrator Background Worksheet

Project Title: _____

Narrator: _____

Address: _____

Tel. No. _____

Email: _____

Date of birth: _____ Place of birth: _____

Cultural background: _____

How many years living in this community? _____

Spouse and children's names (if any): _____

Occupation: _____

Skills and activities: _____

Education: _____

Hobbies, interests: _____

Other info: _____



Northeastern University

University Libraries

Oral History Project Recording Log

Project Title: _____

Name of Narrator: _____

Name of Interviewer: _____

Topic Summary: _____

Provide the Time Code and as much content information as possible:

Time Code:

Contents:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____