

Oral histories

These guidelines for conducting an oral history project should be fully explained to students before their meetings with potential interviewees. Once students demonstrate their understanding of these issues, it becomes their responsibility to discuss with the interviewee the scope of the interview and procedures.

It is also important to be sensitive to the other commitments of potential interviewees, who are often very busy.

It is imperative that students realise that the interviewee should have control over where the information is going and what it is used for. Specific permission from the interviewee is needed for whatever the interviewer wants to do with the information.

Students need to cover the following areas:

- why the oral history is being conducted (e.g. for a local area studies program)
- who it is for (e.g. the family, the Aboriginal community, the Torres Strait Islander community, the school, the general public)
- how the oral history will be used (e.g. essay, research project, visual and/or verbal presentation, computer presentation)
- what form the approval will take (e.g. verbal or written agreement, legal release forms)
- where the interview will be conducted (e.g. at the interviewee's home, an outside or community venue, school, classroom)
- hospitality issues (e.g. correct titles and other protocols, dietary requirements, welcome and farewell)
- what the preferred recording instrument is for the interview (e.g. tape recorder, written notes, video recording)
- how the interviewee wants the final transcript to read (e.g. in the original language as shared, or translated)
- when the information will be used (e.g. this year, for a number of years)
- whether the interviewee will be given access to a copy of the final study.

Stages of oral history

1. Inspiration and motivation
2. Preparation
 - ethics
 - ownership of information
 - topic



- nature of memory
 - questionnaires
 - interview skills
 - selecting interviewees
 - preliminary meetings
 - equipment
 - supervision
 - duty of care
 - school policies
3. Interviews
- location
 - other sources
 - ongoing contact
 - evaluation
 - processing interview data
 - transcripts
 - correct acknowledgments
4. Final product
- table of contents

Useful publications

- Barwick, D, Mace, M, & Stannage, R (eds) 1979, *Handbook for Aboriginal & Islander History*, Australian National University Press, Canberra.
- Carmody, K 1988, "Aboriginal oral history: Some problems in methodology", in N Loos, and H McDonald (eds) *Black Voices*, vol. 3, no. 1, James Cook University, Townsville (pp. 1–22).
This publication documents in detail the technical skills and legal responsibilities required when conducting an oral history.
- Course #1: *Oral History: Interview and Writing Techniques* 1986. Course notes prepared by Janis Wilton, lecturer, Armidale College of Advanced Education.
This publication explains the do's and don'ts of conducting an oral history. It outlines technical skills, interview skills and ethical responsibilities.

Sample consent form for interview

The following interview consent form may be changed as necessary. It is important for all students and classes to develop a process that is suitable for their project and the community with which they are working.

Interview and copyright consent form

I agree to the use of material and information that I provide, as outlined in this consent form.

1. I have been provided with information about the nature and purpose of the research/interview project.
2. I understand that this consent form applies for the duration of the research and that I have the right to withdraw at any time during the course of study.
3. I realise that the content of what I say during interviews, and other information I provide, is not intended to be confidential.

I want my anonymity to be maintained.

or

I do not want my anonymity to be maintained.

4. I agree to clearly indicate to the researcher any matters about which I wish confidentiality to be respected and to be treated as "off the record".
5. I am aware that I may ask to examine the interview notes and transcripts, if made, to ensure they are an accurate reflection of my statements.
6. I understand that I can obtain a copy of the research task if I wish to.
7. I am aware that I may request feedback on the research task.

Name of respondent

Signature of respondent

Date

