

SO, YOU WANT TO CONDUCT AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW?

Video Two: Components of an Oral History Interview, presented by Jean Hardy

This transcription part two of the four-part video series ***SO YOU WANT TO CONDUCT AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW?*** by Jean Hardy, is provided courtesy of Benzonia Public Library when you check out the Oral History Backpack from the [Library of Things collection](#) at BPL.

Be sure to watch all four videos in the ***SO YOU WANT TO CONDUCT AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW?*** series at www.benzonialibrary.org/remembering-benzie or the [Benzonia Public Library YouTube channel](#).

WHAT IS THIS VIDEO SERIES?

This series was prepared and is presented by Jean Hardy, Assistant Professor at Michigan State University, as part of the Remembering Benzie Project for the Benzonia Public Library.

The goal of this series is to familiarize you with oral histories and prepare you to conduct them yourself.

- There are four videos in this series, including:
 - Video One: What is oral history?
 - Video Two: Components of an oral history interview
 - Video Three: Preparing for an oral history interview
 - Video Four: Conducting an oral history interview

If you are using the Benzonia Public Library's equipment available for checkout, there is a complementary video by photographer and videographer Jeff Smith on our [YouTube channel](#) that also walks you through how to use that equipment to record oral histories.

TAKEN TOGETHER, ALL OF THESE THINGS WILL HELP YOU CONDUCT A SUCCESSFUL ORAL HISTORY!

OTHER RESOURCES

- Oral History Association: www.oralhistory.org
 - Offers lots of resources on conducting oral histories, including best principles and practices, which parts of this series is based on
- The Michigan Oral History Association michiganoha.org

Check Benzonia Public Library's own Remembering Benzie Page at www.benzonialibrary.org/remembering-benzie and the Remembering Benzie oral history videos at the [Remembering Benzie YouTube Channel](#).

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VIDEO TWO: COMPONENTS OF AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

OBJECTIVES FOR THIS VIDEO

- You will use your own experiences to understand the overall purpose of an interview.
- You will learn about the various components of an oral history interview and why they are important.

WHAT IS AN INTERVIEW?

An interview is a structured conversation where someone asks questions, and someone else answers them. Interviews appear in many parts of our lives:

- Job interviews
- Media and journalism
- Research and psychiatry

ALL INTERVIEWS HAVE ONE THING IN COMMON – THEY ARE ABOUT GATHERING INFORMATION FROM SOMEONE.

PIECES OF AN INTERVIEW

- Two people are usually involved: the interviewer and interviewee.
- Interviews generally have four components:
 - An introduction and framing
 - The interviewee and interviewer introduce themselves and the interviewer explains the expectations and what they are going to ask in the interview.
 - A question portion
 - The interviewer asks a series of questions about job history, how the interviewee works under pressure, and the various skills they have relevant to the job.
 - Follow-up questions
 - The interviewee asks follow-up questions about things said in response to initial questions
 - Closure
 - The interview concludes, the interviewer explains what next steps are.

WHAT DO INTERVIEWS ALLOW THAT OTHER FORMS OF INFORMATION COLLECTION DO NOT

We know that there are many ways to gather information about people: interviews, surveys, observation.

I think interviews are important for three reasons:

- They allow people to share information about themselves in their own words.
- Allow for depth and breadth of information
- Are personalized and tailored to the individual

HOW DOES ORAL HISTORY DIFFER FROM OTHER TYPES OF INTERVIEWS?

As a reminder: Oral history is a “method of gathering, preserving, and interpreting the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events”.

- The difference is primarily in their purpose. While oral histories are a form of an interview, their purpose is to gather and preserve a specific person or group of people’s history.

PARTS OF AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

Similar to the components of an interview, oral history includes:

- **INTRODUCTION AND FRAMING**
 - The introduction is where you’re going to introduce yourself and the goal of conducting this oral history.

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- You should go over what the interview will be about and have them sign disclosure paperwork if you are using it (something you'll learn more about in Video 3)
- **WARM-UP**
 - A few warm-up questions are essential for conducting oral histories.
 - Gets people comfortable talking about themselves.
 - This could be something as simple as where they live, what their hobbies are, or who their favorite Ninja Turtle is.
- **PREPARED QUESTIONS**
 - Prepared questions are questions that you wrote down to ask beforehand. We'll talk more about preparing questions in Video 3 as well.
 - During your prepared questions you should be:
 - listening intently
 - reflecting on the answers that you are receiving and their quality
 - noting opportunities for follow-up questions that ask for further explanation and depth
- **FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS**
 - Follow-up questions can happen at any point in the interview and the goal is to get better information from the interviewee.
 - For example, you might have asked where someone grew up and what it was like growing up there. Their response could answer your question but be lackluster.
 - What was it like growing up in Traverse City?
 - What were your favorite things about growing up in Traverse City?
- **CLOSING THE INTERVIEW**
 - Close on a positive note: If you've talked about sad topics, it might be useful to make sure you pivot to / return to a more positive topic before you end.
 - You should also ask the person you're interviewing if they have any questions for you.

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS CAN HAVE A FORMULA, BUT YOU CAN ALSO GET CREATIVE AND MAKE THEM YOUR OWN – THIS IS JUST ONE OF MANY WAYS!

BEFORE THE NEXT VIDEO...

In the next video we are going to be learning about how to prepare for an oral history interview. While it is not necessary to have someone already picked out who you want to conduct an oral history with, the video will be more helpful if you have someone in mind.

- What kind of people do you want to interview?
- What do you want to learn from conducting the oral history?