



# Oral History Interview Guideline

## OVER THE PHONE

Step by step guideline on how to conduct an oral history interview over the phone. **Double click on the link below to view the interview checklist and print a copy to take with you to the interview.**

[Oral History Interview Checklist Over the Phone](#)

### Preparing for the interview:

- Locate an individual who has knowledge of local histories within Charlotte County and inquire if they would like to participate in an Oral History Interview.
- Decide what type of interview you need to conduct (Example: Location, Life Story, Historical Moment they witnessed, etc.)
- Set up a time and date to have the phone meeting. If possible, sit down and do research on your interviewee ahead of time. When you reach out to make the appointment try and engage in casual conversation with them which may give you leads for the interview questions.
- Create a script. **Double click on the link below for an in-depth look at formulating questions and creating a script.**

[How to Formulate Questions and Create a Script](#)

- Prepare a copy of the script along with a copy of our Oral Histories Release E-Form. Remember to fill out the top portion of the e-form first and then email a copy to your interviewee along with a copy of your script. This allows the interviewee to be prepared with responses and

possible supporting documentation and decide on what type of recordings, if any, you may obtain during the interview.

**Double click on the link below to view, fill out and/or print the Release E-Form.**

[Oral History Interview Release](#)

## **Setting up:**

- Keep in mind the interviewee is volunteering to help you with oral histories so remember to show them respect. You may even know them quite well, but it is still a formal interview, and it is important to act professionally. Prepare your station with a notebook and/or our handwritten note form along with extra pens and/or pencils. **Double click on the link below to view and print a “Handwritten Notes Form.”**

[Oral History Interview – Handwritten Notes](#)

- Place your smartphone on a flat surface in front of you and place it on speaker. Then place your audio recorder on a flat surface close to your phone’s speaker. Make sure the recorder’s microphone points in the direction of the smartphone’s speaker.
- Beware of things nearby that may spoil your recording. Make sure the person you are interviewing is in a quiet, non-echoey space. Try and schedule the interview at a quiet time of the day, so there is limited background noise from other household members (Example: cell phones, lawnmowers, fans, television, etc.) Remember to mute cell phones notifications and ringers. If possible, close windows and doors and ask the interviewee if they can do the same.

- Keep in mind the interviewee is volunteering to help you with oral histories so remember to show them respect. You may even know them quite well, but it is still a formal interview, and it is important to act professionally. Make sure to place the phone call on time, and be prepared with any information, items and/or equipment you may need. (Example: Script, notebook, audio recorder, etc.)
- Take time to engage in casual conversation with the interviewee at the beginning of the call. This will allow them to relax and become more comfortable before the actual interview begins.
- Assess the recorder and video equipment before starting the interview to ensure it is in working condition.

## **Conducting the interview:**

- Once you are both comfortable and the steps above have been completed, start your recording.
- The first step of the interview is the introduction. Clearly state your name, the interviewee's name, the location of the interview, the date, and the purpose of the interview. (Example: This is Kelly McLean interviewing Jane Doe at Charlotte County Archives in Saint Andrews, New Brunswick on January 10, 2022. The purpose of this interview is to conduct oral histories collections/research for the Canada New Horizons for Seniors Program. Providing this information at the beginning of the recording allows anyone listening in the future to understand why the interview was conducted and how dependable the information is.
- Ask the interviewee if they received the "Release E-Form" and ask them to read over it with you over the phone. It is important to make sure they understand the purpose of the interview. This is a crucial step because this helps prove that they give their permission for you to

obtain any recordings and they have agreed to how the recordings will be used in the future. Reassure the interviewee that they are in control of the process, and they do not have to talk about anything they do not want to. Once they have signed the release e-form, you can proceed with the interview.

- Begin with simple biographical questions to make the interviewee comfortable and to help get the conversation flowing. Topics like where they went to school, what they remember of the town back then, what historical events do they remember being present for and how did they feel about those events they witnessed. These questions will also help to provide context.
- Move on to more in-depth and open-ended questions. These should be who, what, when, why and how questions that encourage explanations instead of one-word answers. This technique will help you get the most information out of your interviewee including their personal feelings and experiences. Since these questions can result in long answers make sure to ask them one at a time to prevent overwhelming the Interviewee.
- Do not be afraid to go off-script. Allow the conversation to flow and direct your questions to where you feel you are getting the best feedback from the interviewee. No interview ever really goes according to plan. You must be able to question topics that come up unexpectedly and/or change the order of your questions when needed. You can always return to your script later.
- Do not interrupt the interviewee when they are speaking. You do not want to stop their train of thought and miss key information. Using your notebook, write down key points of interest, comments, and/or questions you want to revisit and wait for a natural break in the conversation to bring them up again.

- Ask for the spelling of names for people and places when needed. This will help ensure your information is accurate.
- Take the time to explain any visual clues or gestures. If they have any photographs or documents note which one, they are referring to. This will help ensure anyone listening in the future understands exactly what that interviewee is describing and stops valuable information from getting lost.
- Your job as the interviewer is to be a careful listener and observer so you should speak as little as possible when the interview is taking place. Try not to talk about yourself while the recorder is rolling and show the interviewee that you are listening using your body language. Make sure to sit up straight, maintain eye contact, smile, and nod whenever it is appropriate to do so. The interviewee is more likely to share their story with you if they feel you are interested in what they are speaking about.
- Be impartial and non-judgmental. If you disagree with the interviewee's point of view, make sure to be respectful of their opinion and do not challenge it. Allow them to finish their thoughts and if they pause to reflect or think of what they want to say next make sure to give them the time they need to collect their thoughts and then continue.
- Do not feel bad if you forget any questions you wanted to ask. It is okay to take time during the interview to look at your notes and gaze over your prepared questions.

## **Wrapping things up:**

- Always be respectful of the interviewee's time. If they asked to finish at a specific time, keep an eye on the clock. If you run out of time, check with the interviewee if they are comfortable continuing. If there is no set end time, pay attention to their body language. If they seem to be getting tired or the interview has slowed down and come to a natural

conclusion, politely bring it to an end. The interview will not be productive if either the interviewer or the interviewee is too tired. You can always schedule a follow up interview if you need to.

- Try your best to end the interview on a positive note and allow the interviewee to have the last word. A wide range of topics will have been covered during the interview and asking the interviewee if they have any questions for you before you leave allows them to pause and reflect on what they have talked about with you and gives them a chance to bring up something they may have overlooked or had not talked about yet.
- Once you are finished with the interview, thank the interviewee for their time, end the phone call, and then stop the audio recorder. Immediately upload a copy of the mp3 file (audio) from the voice recorder to your computer.
- Scan any supporting documentation including your notes and the waiver to a digital file. We also have provided a “Collections Template” you can use to upload all your information into one document before submitting.
- Submit your findings to the Charlotte County Archives.

## **Submitting Oral Histories**

There are two options for people to submit their oral histories to Charlotte County Archives:

1. Mail a USB drive (or drop it off in person) to the Charlotte County Archives at 123 Frederick Street St. Andrews E5B 1Z1 [We also accept CDs/DVDs]
2. Email – for large files uploaded to a cloud (google drive, one drive, etc.) Send link to [contact@ccarchives.ca](mailto:contact@ccarchives.ca)

## **Equipment List**

- Notebook or Handwritten Notes Form with multiple pens/pencils.
- Smartphone with Portable Cellphone Camera Tripod and charging wire.
- Audio Recorder with tripod and power cord.
- Computer/laptop
- Interview Checklist
- Script/Questions
- Release E-Form
- USB 2.0 A-Male to Micro B Cable
- Micro SD Card 128GB
- Earbuds (optional)