



Oral History Interview Guideline

YOUR LOCATION

Step by step guideline on how to conduct an oral history interview at home or at your place of work. Also, see "Interview Checklist" and print a copy to take with you to the interview. **Double click on the link "Interview Checklist" below for a summary of the steps outlined below.**

[Oral History Interview Checklist Your Location](#)

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, date to meet. 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](#)

- Send a copy of the script along with a copy of the “Oral History Interview Release” form to the subject via mail or email. This allows the interviewee to be prepared with responses and possible supporting documentation and helps them decide on what type of recordings, if any, they may agree to for the interview. **Double click on the link below to view, fill out and/or print our release form.**

[Oral History Interview Release](#)

Setting up:

- Prepare a comfortable space for you and the interviewee to sit before they arrive. Make sure to leave a comfortable distance between you and the interviewee, however, stay two meters of each other. Sitting too far apart may cause you to raise your voice, lose eye contact and/or affect the quality of your recording, but you must also keep a safe physical distance from each other.
- Place your audio recorder on a flat surface in between you and where the interviewee will sit. If you are recording video, mount the camera on a tripod and set it up to one side to make it less conspicuous while still capturing as much of the interviewees face as possible. You also want to tape them against a plain backdrop in a well-lit room. Make sure the light shines at them from the front (**Do Not** record the interviewee with their back to a window). Evaluate all the equipment beforehand to ensure it is working and make sure you have any power cords, extra batteries, and SD cards/memory sticks you may need on hand.
- Beware of things nearby that may spoil your recording. (Example: background noise, cell phones, lawnmowers, fans, etc.) Remember to turn off cell phones and make sure to close all windows and doors.

- 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](#)

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 greet them on time and dress appropriately.

- Once they arrive, offer the interviewee coffee/tea or water and if possible, sit back and engage in casual conversation with them first. This will allow the interviewee to relax and become more comfortable before the actual interview begins. It may also help lead you towards questions that will help with the actual interview.
- Before beginning the formal interview ask the interviewee if they have any questions. It is important to make sure they understand the purpose of the interview. They must give you permission to obtain any recordings and they must agree to how the recordings will be used in the future by signing the release form mentioned above. Reassure the interviewee that they are in control of the process and do not have to talk about anything they do not want to.

Conducting the interview:

- Once you are both comfortable and the steps above have been completed, start your recording, and begin the interview.
- 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 history 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.

- Begin the interview 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, turn off the recorder/video camera and put it away safely. Make sure you have collected the signed release form from the interviewee and thank the interviewee for their time. Offer to send them a digital copy of the interview after you have uploaded it to your computer and help them out of the building or to their vehicle if needed.
- 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. **Double click on the links below to view and/or fill out the Collections Template and for instructions on submitting mp3/mp4 files.**

[How to Transfer Sound from a Voice Recorder to the Computer](#)

[How to Transfer Video from a Camcorder to the Computer and a USB Memory Stick](#)

- 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 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

Equipment List

- Notebook or Handwritten Notes Form with multiple pens/pencils
- Script/Questions
- Release Form
- Computer/laptop
- USB 2.0 A-Male to Micro B Cable
- Micro SD Card 128GB

With Permission from Interviewee

- Audio Recorder with tripod and power cord.
- Video Recorder with tripod and power cord.
- Smartphone with Portable Cellphone Camera Tripod and charging wire.