

Suggestions for Family History Interviews:

1. Schedule a time in advance. This gives everyone a chance to prepare.
2. Prepare a list of questions beforehand and either share them with your relative, or give them an idea of what you want to cover.
3. Bring several notepads and pens to the interview. If you plan to make a recording, be sure to have a tape player, microphone, extra tapes and batteries.
4. Take good notes and make sure you record your name, the date, the place the interview is being conducted, and the interviewee.
5. Start with a question or topic that you know will elicit a reply, such as a story you have heard her tell in the past.
6. Ask questions that encourage more than simple "yes" or "no" answers. Try to elicit facts, feelings, stories, and descriptions.
7. Show interest. Take an active part in the dialogue without dominating it. Learn to be a creative listener.
8. Use props whenever possible Old photographs, favorite old songs, and treasured items may bring memories flooding back.
9. Don't push for answers. Your relative may not wish to speak ill of the dead or have other reasons for not wanting to share. Move on to something else.
10. Use your prepared questions as a guideline, but don't be afraid to let your relative go off on a tangent. They may have many things to say that you never thought to ask!
11. Interrupting or correcting your relative can end an interview in a hurry. But do not hesitate to ask for clarifications. If you cannot get a clarification, or if you get conflicting answers, make note of them to possibly clarify in some other manner.
12. When you are done, be sure to thank your relative for her time.

Interview Suggestions

- Use a video camera on a tripod or solid surface to film the interview.
- Start the camera before the interview begins for a more natural, less self-conscious conversation. If the person being interviewed feels self-conscious, the camera doesn't have to be focused on the interviewee.
- Before interview, state date and location on tape.
- Ease into the interview by asking person how long they have lived at their house.
- Begin with the family shoe box of old photographs, certificates, and documents to be used as a memory jogger.
- Pass one photograph at a time in front of camera lens and ask about each.
- "Label" each photo by asking the 5 W's (who, what, where, when, and why) of the photo.
- Try to keep the questions going. Ad-lib questions to keep the train of thought going.
- After photographs, begin interview questions
- Use as *few* or as *many* interview questions as desired. In some cases, it may be best to conduct several short interviews rather than one very long session. And not all suggested interview questions will apply.
- If the person being interviewed can't remember an answer, move on to the next question and come back to the unanswered question later. Try rephrasing the question to see if that helps better trigger memory. If the person being interviewed chooses not to answer, move on.
- Sometimes a telephone interview is the only option. Be sure to call in advance to set a convenient time. Take notes during the conversation, and transcribe immediately after the interview.
- Sometimes, an interview by correspondence is the only option. It is usually best to just send a few questions at a time and leave space for the answers. Send a large self-addressed stamped envelope and always send a follow-up thank you note. If the person seems willing, it may be possible to set up a correspondence where you can ask additional interview questions.
- When the interview is over, immediately remove the tab from the tape so that it can not be written over. Interview tapes are priceless and irreplaceable, so make a duplicate copy of the tape and keep it in a separate place. While everything is fresh in your memory, transcribe the interview and be sure to mark the written transcription with the name of interviewee, date and location. As you are transcribing, make notes of what you would like to ask at a second interview. Keep your notes organized by using a genealogy program and/or charts to display what you found out.
- After interviewing family members, consider visiting some of the places that are important to their story and that had special meaning to your family. Take pictures of the places they lived, schools and churches that they attended, and other important places in the family history which can later be added to your heritage album.
- In addition to interviewing older family members for special family history memories, children and grandchildren can be interviewed for their memories of an older family member. Ask children and grandchildren what they remembered best about times spent with their grandparents. Weave these stories into the heritage album.