

# Interview Guidelines

## Select the Interviewee

- Decide what period of history (the lifetime of a living person) the project will cover — childhood, early adulthood, a period in the history of a town, etc.
- List several people that would fit into the identified era.
- Narrow the choice to one or two.
- Contact the chosen person and ask him or her to sign a permission form to interview him on tape for the specified project, explaining what the interview is for and how it will be used.

## Pre-interview Research

- Get as much information about the topic and the person as you can (from family members, library sources on the community), in order to become familiar with the general timeline of events during the specified time period or place.
- Prepare a general list of specific questions and topics that you would like to cover in the interview. Use open-ended questions more than Yes/No questions to avoid getting very short answers. (The interviewee, in the course of the interview, may also introduce new topics that you will want to pursue, so this is not a rigid script of questions).

## Practice

- Practice using your equipment so the technology during the interview will go smoothly.
- Practice an interview with a friend, family member, or classmate as a trial run. The interviewer should do less talking than the person being interviewed.
- Pack pens and paper in case technology fails.

## Conduct the Interview

- Select a quiet place to use for the interview (no TV, phones, radios, barking dogs, etc.)
- Put the interviewee at ease because people are often nervous about being taped; they are afraid their memory may fail or that they will be boring.
- Ask one question at a time.
- Do not interrupt the interviewee. (If there is a memory lapse, you can provide a suggestion or reassure him/her that you can fill in the information later.)
- If the interviewee strays from the question, bring him/her back with a comment or question.
- Take notes! But don't try to write down every word they say, just ideas you may want to revisit during the interview.
- If the interviewee gets tired or fidgety, you can close the interview and reschedule more time later if needed.

## Process the Information

- For a written report, the interviewer will want to take written notes or make a verbatim transcript of the audiotape. (This depends on the age and skills of the interviewer.) The interviewer can then compose a report about the events and people on the tape in his/her own words.
- For a digital audio history, the interviewer can digitize the oral interview by connecting the tape player to the computer and using the appropriate software.