

Week 4 Activities Video Transcript

Hi everyone, this week, we've got two different activities for you to do. The first task that we're asking you to do is to record an oral history interview with someone. The second is to an arts organisation.

We'll start with the oral history. Listen to some of the examples in the links on this page to get a feel for the types of things that people usually ask or talk about in oral histories: So in our examples, we have people speaking about what it was like to be a student during the time of the first World War or to be the first art curator at the University of Stirling. However, oral histories are also used to record information about the present that might be useful to someone in the future, as we can see from the example from the University of St Andrews, where they interview someone about what its like to arrive in Scotland to start a new life there without knowing anyone.

At Edinburgh, we have recently been carrying out an oral history project with people who used to work in the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh. The hospital no longer exists and has been bought by the University so they are keen to record the memories of people who used to work there, ranging from janitors all the way up to surgeons. My colleague, Louise Neilson, has been carrying out many of these oral history interviews, and here she is with some advice:

Hello, my name is Louise Neilson and I'm the Access Officer for Lothian Health Services Archive. In this video, I'm going to give you a brief introduction to conducting oral histories.

To start with I'm going to discuss getting prepared for your interview. You should provide participants with a project information sheet which details the background and aims of your project and provides information about what people can expect from participating in an oral history interview.

There are some questions you might want to consider when preparing ahead of your interview such as who do I want to interview and why. What do I want to use the oral history for and what information do I want to collect?

While preparing for your interview, you should think about what questions you want to ask or what themes and topics you might wish to cover and note these down.

When considering what you are going to ask, its important to avoid leading questions such as questions beginning with 'don't you think that?' or closed questions which prompt a yes or no answer.

Try to keep your questions open to allow for the interviewee's own interpretation and response. You should also ensure that you're prepared to follow up with additional questions as you engage with the information provided by the interviewee.

Before beginning the interview, you should take some time to set up your equipment. It's important to make sure you have enough battery left on your recording device as you do not want the interview to get cut short.

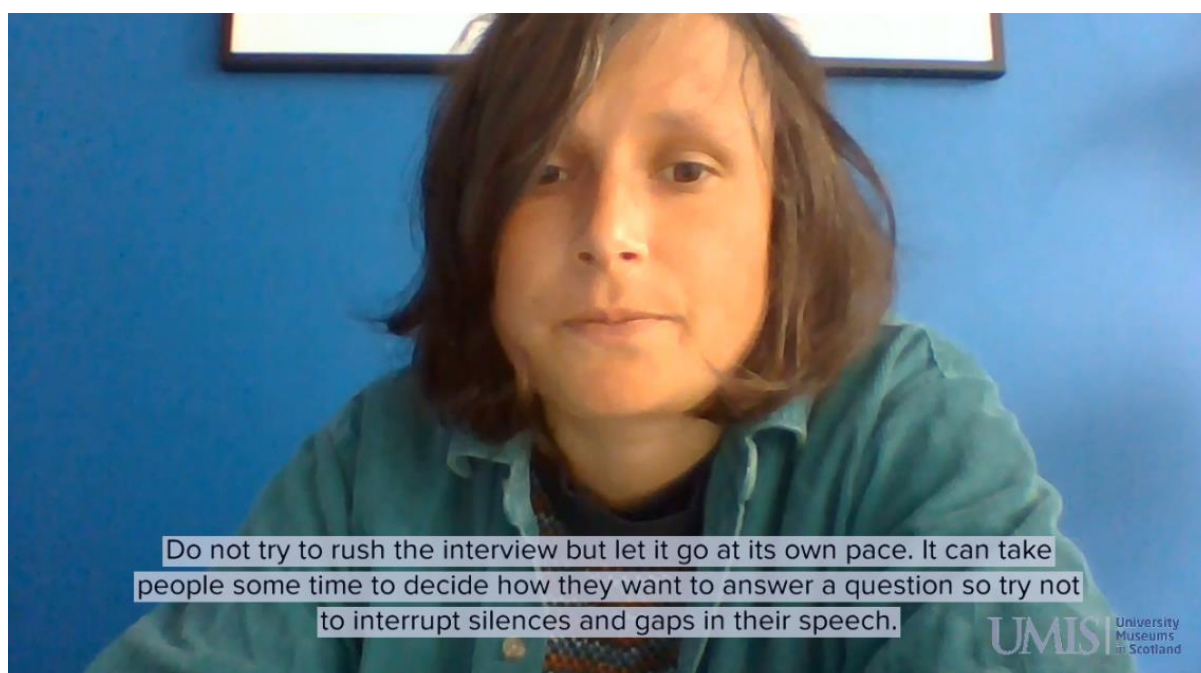
Check your sound levels before beginning the interview to make sure you and your interviewees can be heard clearly. It is also important to try and find the quietest room possible and check for any noises that might get picked up on the recording such as clocks or fans.

When you're ready to begin its important to make the interviewee aware that you're about to start the recording. Begin each interview with a short introduction, for example, 'This is Louise Neilson

and I'm the Access Officer for Lothian Health Services Archive. It is 2pm on Wednesday 1st July 2020 and I'm with Dr Joe Bloggs who is going to discuss his experience of working in the Royal Infirmary.

You can then ask your interviews to introduce themselves before introducing your first question or topic. During the interview you should try to maintain eye contact and show that you are listening and that you are interested.

Do not try to rush the interview but let it go at its own pace. It can take people some time to decide how they want to answer a question so try not to interrupt silences and gaps in their speech.



It's important to remember not to inject your own opinion but to listen non-judgmentally and not to contradict the interviewee, even if you believe what they are saying to be historically and factually incorrect.

Make sure you end the interview with a show of appreciation for the interviewee's time and input. After the recording, make sure you make some time to informally speak to the interviewee before parting.

Remembering the past can be difficult and it's important to make sure your interviewee is okay before leaving them. You should confirm to the interview what the next steps are which should include how you intend to use the recording.

It is essential that you receive written consent from each interviewee before the recording is used in any way and an agreement form which covers copyright and access conditions should be discussed and completed after the interview is finished.

I hope this brief introduction has been useful. There are some excellent resources out there if you would like to do some further reading on oral histories and if you're interested in doing training then I would highly recommend the Scottish Oral History Centre based at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow. Thank you for watching.

Now its time to try carrying out your own oral history!

Firstly, decide who you want to interview and what you want to interview them about. This could be a friend or family member or, if you prefer, you could even record yourself speaking about a topic that's important to you. Here are some topics that you might want to focus on in your oral history:

- Memories of school. If you are just about to move to high school, why not interview one of your friends about their memories of primary school?
- Memories of starting work
- Memories of living in Scotland in the past – what did Glasgow used to be like when it was still a shipyard building centre?
- Memories of important historical events or changes that have happened.
- Reflections on more recent events, for example life in 2020
- Change in societies approach to issues such as LGBTQI+ rights, Black Lives Matter, gender equality etc.

Once you've decided on a topic, think about what questions you want to ask your interviewee. For example, my grandma lived through the Second World War and was evacuated during this time, to live in the countryside. So if I was going to interview her about the experiences of the Second World War, some questions I might ask are:

- What was the biggest change about the war time from normal times?
- What do you remember most about the place you were evacuated to?
- How did you feel when it was announced the war had ended?

Or if I were going to interview my parents or one of my siblings, I might ask them what do they remember about life before the internet, because we didn't have internet in our house until we were ten or eleven which is probably hard for all of you to imagine!

Remember what Louise told us about using open-ended questions. It's probably a good idea to have three or four questions prepared before hand. Be prepared that the interviewee might want to take the interview in a different direction than expected.

Before carrying out the interview, show the participant the Information and Consent form sheet, which you can download below. If they don't want their interview to be heard by anyone else, that's okay, you can keep it for yourself, we'll just ask you to answer some questions about it on the activity sheet.

Test your recording equipment before you start – most phones have a voice recording feature that you can use. If you don't have something to record on, you can just write down some notes as the person is talking.

The interview doesn't have to be too long, aim for somewhere around ten minutes but longer or shorter is fine too.

Once you've completed the interview, consider whether you learnt something new about the person that you didn't know before. What do you think the most interesting thing they said was? What do you think would be interesting to other people about the interview?