

# ORAL HISTORY GUIDELINES

**Oral History:** an interview that records a person's recollection of experiences, thoughts and feelings about specific events or periods of time.

**Narrator:** the person who is eager to talk about what he or she remembers

**Interviewer:** the person who conducts the interview and enjoys listening

**Goal:** to obtain and record an interesting story

## Preparation

- 1) Contact narrator (call or write)
  - a) Describe project
  - b) Arrange date and time of interview
  - c) Questions you will be asking
- 2) Background research
- 3) Check the equipment

## Interview

- 1) Quiet room
- 2) About 60 minutes
- 3) Complete paperwork
- 4) Start recording interview
  - a) Introduce the narrator and yourself
  - b) At end of interview, thank narrator

## Do's and Don'ts of Interviewing

### Do:

- 1) Be a good listener  
Show interest, smile, pay attention
- 2) Turn off cell phone
- 3) Note extra questions for later
- 4) Be careful about changing subject
- 5) Let the narrator do the talking
- 6) Use open-ended questions:  
Tell me about growing up in ...  
How did you feel about moving...  
What was it like...  
Why did you come here?
- 7) Use follow-up questions for more detail
- 8) Be polite

### Don't:

- 1) Don't be distracted, fidget, or look bored
- 2) Don't text message
- 3) Don't interrupt, unless necessary
- 4) Don't worry about short pause
- 5) Don't talk too much
- 6) Don't ask closed-ended questions requiring yes/no or short answers:  
What year did you come?  
How far was it?  
Did you like the school?
- 7) Don't go off-record often
- 8) Don't contradict

## After Interview

- 1) Write thank you note
- 2) Summarize interview

Do not alter videotape