by their families, and they revel in an audience. Take care to be sensitive to the needs of older interviewees, but remember that you are not a psychiatrist offering free and unlimited therapy sessions.

**How long should an average interview last?**

Unless you are traveling and have a tight schedule that requires lengthier, even full-day sessions, plan each interview session for no longer than two hours. Longer sessions often have a "narcotic" effect on the interviewee, who can become fatigued and distracted. The interviewer will also have trouble listening to what is being said. If prolonged sessions are necessary, arrange for several short breaks to give both parties a rest.⁴

**SETTING UP THE INTERVIEW**

**Who should be interviewed first?**

Logically, you should start with the oldest and the most significant players in the events or community that you are pursuing. For any number of reasons, some people develop more influence, respect, and standing with an organization, profession, or community. A significant player may have been the one who held a critical post, had a warm and caring personality, or served as the institution's unofficial historian and record-keeper. If interviewed early in the process, they can help identify and locate other potential interviewees and help persuade them to be interviewed. Called the "gatekeepers" by oral historians, their assistance is often indispensable. The gatekeeper may have been a longtime employee who still communicates with former colleagues, or a surviving spouse, other relative, or close friend of a key figure in the events. Others often wait until the gatekeeper has sanctioned the interviews. While trying to interview Benjamin V. Cohen and Thomas G. Corcoran, the "Gold Dust Twins" who shaped much New Deal legislation, I received no response to my letters and phone calls to Corcoran. But the day after I interviewed Cohen, Corcoran's secretary scheduled an appointment, indicating that I had passed inspection.

Always keep actuarial realities in mind. Planning an oral history project can be so time-consuming that when a project is ready to begin interviewing the best prospective interviewees may either have died or become too ill to give a useful interview. Potential interviewees should be grouped according to age, significance to the theme of the project, and availability in terms of time and location. Save for a later stage of the project those who are younger, more peripheral, and further away. Travel constraints, however, frequently require that interviewees
living in a particular location be bunched together. Remember also the practical journalism advice of starting with those “who are most likely to cooperate.” Less cooperative subjects require repeated invitations and patient persistence. In the end, they may agree to be interviewed only to keep others whom they opposed, distrusted, or held in contempt from monopolizing the historical record.⁵

**How do you locate potential interviewees?**

The oral historian has to play detective. Word-of-mouth referrals will unearth many potential interviewees, but quite often oral historians have to hunt for their subjects. If interviewing for a biography, the interviewer who has read the subject's papers will know which people corresponded with the subject and may have their return addresses on their correspondence. Online phone directories can help locate interviewees. When searching the Internet for information on specific people, start by checking their names in a general Web search engine. Government agencies place a wide variety of public records databases on the Internet regarding licensed occupations, from doctors to contractors. Databases like the Martindale-Hubbell Lawyer Locator provide information on attorneys, while Dunn & Bradstreet identifies business leaders.⁶

Certain individuals within a family, or an organization make a point of keeping in contact with other family members, neighbors, and colleagues and can provide current addresses and telephone numbers. Associations and corporations publish newsletters that reach current and retired employees and can carry stories and advertisements about an oral history project. Newspaper advertisements may also locate potential interviewees, but indiscriminate calls for volunteers may inundate the interviewer with an unmanageable number of willing interviewees and not necessarily identify those who can make the most valuable contributions.⁷

**What's the best way to initiate contact with an interviewee?**

By letter or phone call, state the purpose of the interview and the nature of the project. Explain what will happen to the recordings and transcripts, and describe the legal release the interviewee will be asked to sign. Follow up any phone conversation with a letter to establish a record for your own files. It is especially important for older interviewees to have your name, address, phone number, the purposes of the interview and the scheduled date, in writing.

Sometimes the interviewer plans a preliminary meeting, perhaps over lunch, to get acquainted with the interviewee and to get a better idea of the major subjects that will be discussed during the actual interviews. Being able to have preliminary meetings clearly depends on the time available, for both the interviewer
and interviewee, and the project’s budget. In some projects, pre-interview sessions are discouraged to avoid losing the spontaneity and candidness of unrehearsed questioning. The television interviewer Brian Lamb complains of having “ruined” some of his interviews by asking questions before the cameras were turned on, since a question asked the second time rarely elicits as fully satisfying a response as it did the first time.

Schedule the interview at the interviewee’s convenience, and make sure you arrive on time. With more prominent interviewees, scheduling can pose problems, especially if the interviewer must travel any distance to the interview. Reiterate to the interviewee the purpose of the project, and be sure to mention the difficulty and expense in arranging it. When planning to go to the interviewee’s home or office, ask directions on how to get there. Nothing starts an interview more disagreeably than for an interviewer to arrive late and tense after a frantic search for the right address. Interviewers are guests and should act accordingly. Interviews can easily go awry if the interviewer arrives late, smokes, chews gum, dresses inappropriately, or otherwise offends the interviewee’s sensibilities.

**CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW**

**Where should you position the recorder?**
Place the recorder where the interviewer can easily see it and periodically check its functioning, but where it is out of the interviewee’s direct line of vision, to keep it from becoming a distraction. Equipment sometimes makes people nervous, but after a few minutes most will begin to ignore the recorder if it is not right in front of them. The microphone should be situated near the interviewee, preferably pinned on as a lavalier microphone. Electrical outlets, or their absence, may also determine the position of the recorder. Either use rechargeable battery packs or bring batteries in case there are no convenient outlets or the original batteries wear down. Recorders should never be completely concealed, however, since hidden recording is antithetical to the trust and confidence on which oral history depends. Surreptitious recording is unethical, and in most states illegal.

Become familiar with your equipment, both the recorder and the microphones. Failure to test equipment may cause the entire interview to be lost or so poorly recorded that it is difficult to transcribe. Every interviewer should try transcribing an interview at least once to grasp the critical necessity of good sound quality.

Most interviewers try to set up their equipment in a quiet place where the interview will not be interrupted by children, inquiring spouses, secretaries, ringing
phones, open windows, street traffic, air conditioners, loud clocks, and the like. Interviewees will want to be good hosts, but clinking coffee cups and plates, ice twirling in drinks, and other extraneous noises will all be picked up on the recording. The interviewee may be unperturbed by this everyday commotion, but it will distract the interviewer and make the recording more difficult to use for transcribing, editing, and research purposes.

By contrast, folklorists, linguists, and anthropologists will often try to capture the "sound environment" of the interview, including ambient sounds, from church bells to ocean waves. Some noises are undesirable for any purposes. An interviewer once recorded at a table under a bird cage, not noticing the sound until he played back the tape and found that "noises of the parakeet scratching in his cage all but drowned out the interviewee."9

What if the recording ends while the interviewee is still speaking?

Keep an eye on the recorder. Some tape recorders have signal lights that flash when the tape is about to run out. As the tape comes close to the end, take advantage of the interviewee's next pause and ask to stop while you change the tape. Always keep a new tape nearby, and remember that there is no third side to a tape! When turning the tape over, let it run a few seconds, long enough to get past the "leader." With a tape recorder, ninety minutes is the longest tape that is safe to use for oral history recording. Mini-disks allow for 148 minutes of recording time in mono, half that time in stereo.

Make a mental note of the subject that was being discussed at the time the recording stopped. Interviewees sometimes have trouble picking up the thread, even after just a short pause, and will need some prompting from the interviewer: "You were saying that..."  

Should questions be arranged chronologically or topically?

The scheme of interviewing depends on the goals of the project. For some projects the entire life story of the interviewee will be relevant; for other projects, the focus will be on the events in which the interviewee participated. For instance, Andrew Young might be interviewed for his entire life, for his tenure as United Nations ambassador, or for his role in the civil rights movement. Biographical interviews usually proceed chronologically. If the focus of a project is on an event, then the questions will be more topical.

Jumping right into the main question is not the best approach. Avoid making the first question too abrupt and confrontational; instead, build up to the climactic questions by establishing the historical setting and making the interviewee more
comfortable with the process. People tend to recall things chronologically. Set
the stage with general questions and then follow with more specific, pointed ques-
tions. Strictly topical questions may elicit responses that lack depth and context.
Topical questions, however, can follow quite appropriately within a chronological
framework.

Are open-ended questions preferable to specific questions?
Ideally, interviewers should mix the two types of question. Your first questions
should be open-ended, such as "Please tell me about your childhood." Specific
questions can follow: "What schools did you attend?" Starting with too specific a question gives the interviewer too much control of the interview.
Interviewers should let interviewees explain what they think is most significant
before beginning to narrow the questions. "The best oral history is a
quasi-monologue on the part of the interviewee," the oral historian Sherna
Gluck has observed, "which is encouraged by approving nods, appreciative
smiles, and enraptured listening and stimulated by understanding comments
and intelligent questions."9

Use open-ended questions to allow interviewees to volunteer their own
accounts, to speculate on matters, and to have enough time to include all of
the material they think relevant to the subject. Use more specific questions to
elicit factual information, often in response to something the interviewee has
mentioned while answering an open-ended question. Political reporters and
courtroom attorneys use this type of mixed questioning in an approach that
has been called "funnel interviewing." Their search begins with general ques-
tions and then constantly narrows until the subject has difficulty not answer-
ing the final, more specific questions. Oral history is a much less adversarial
means of interviewing, but the funnel approach remains useful when the sub-
ject is controversial.10

In framing an open-ended question, the oral historian Charles Morrissey
postulates that the two-sentence format often works best. The first sentence
should state the problem; the second poses the question: "The records show you
were a leader in establishing the zoning laws that shaped this town. Why were
zoning laws your objectives?" There are a number of possible follow-up ques-
tions: "How did these laws specifically affect your neighborhood?" "What com-
plaints were raised about these laws?" "How effective would you judge these laws
to have been?" "Looking back from today, what would you have done differently?"
Questions also might relate to specific zoning incidents drawn from newspaper
clippings. For such a topic, a map might serve as a good visual prompter dur-
ing the interview and as appendix material for the transcript.11
Keep in mind that interviewers are not restricted to just asking questions. Statements of fact, concise restatements of what the interviewee has said, brief observations and comments can also stimulate responses from the interviewee as well as inject more spontaneity into the discussion. Mixing occasional comments among the questions provides some relief and can prevent the interview from sounding too much like a cross-examination. But interviewers should always use such injections in moderation to avoid skewing the contents of the interview with their own opinions.

The use of open-ended questions has also been cited as a means of “empowering” interviewees, that is, by encouraging interviewees to relate and to interpret their own stories, such questions shift the balance of power from the interviewer to the interviewee. Those who talk of empowerment view the interviewee as an “informant” and the interviewer as a “reporter.” The interviewer may be asking the questions, but the interviewee is actively shaping the course of the interview rather than responding passively. These notions have raised the consciousness especially of those sociologists, anthropologists, and linguists who generally do not identify or create fictional identities for their oral sources, and of interviewers who work outside their own cultures and struggle not to impose their cultural assumptions on the people they observe and interview.¹²

**Can the framing of a question distort the answer?**

Pollsters say that if you can tell from what position a question is being asked, then the question is loaded. “Do you support a balanced budget amendment to end waste and fraud in the government?” is loaded. “Do you support a balanced budget amendment?” is neutral. Journalists will often ask leading and manipulative questions; the preface “Wouldn’t you say . . . .” is designed to produce a response that fits a particular hypothesis. Many politicians have regretted letting a reporter put words into their mouths with such questions. Researchers working on a specific book or article similarly ask questions to fill holes in their evidence, usually having in mind the answer that they hope to hear. The danger of this approach is that interviewees want to please and will pick up the clues, from the type of question asked to the tone of voice used, as to what type of an answer they think the interviewer wants to hear. The result is the opposite of the way an oral history should proceed.¹³

Start with broad, open-ended questions, allow the interviewee to talk broadly, ranging as far and wide as possible. Listen and make notes as the interviewee speaks, but do not interrupt. When it is clear that the person has exhausted the subject and stopped, go back and ask specific follow-up questions, clarify points of confusion or contradiction, and pursue details.
What if the answers are perfunctory?

Short answers may be a sign that an interviewer is asking too many specific questions and not enough open-ended "how" and "why" questions. Interviewees are not always sure of how much detail interviewers want. They may give answers that are to the point, but are short, unrevealing, and unreflective. Never be satisfied with brief answers and follow up with more detailed questions to draw the interviewee out.

Short answers may also indicate that the interviewer has been too quick to jump in with the next question. It requires some discipline to remain silent after asking a question, and to remain so until absolutely certain that the interviewee has finished answering. Try not to speak immediately after the interviewee stops, since it may just be a pause for a breath of air or for gathering additional thoughts. Silence indicates that an interviewer expects more. Ten seconds can seem excruciatingly long if neither party is speaking, but can encourage the interviewee to give a more detailed response.14

Sometimes answers are perfunctory simply because the interviewer has not engaged the interviewee’s interest. Try varying the types of questions and the subjects they cover. Studs Terkel has described his interview with the ninety-year-old philosopher Bertrand Russell. Allotted only half an hour, Terkel knew he would be escorted out promptly when his time was up. His first theoretical question elicited only a short reply. He switched to more provocative questions and noted that as Russell became engaged, his answers grew longer. With time running out, Terkel sought “the home run question.” “Lord Russell,” he asked, “what is the world you envision?” Russell’s response summarized his hopes and frustrations, ending with a touch of weariness. Although he might have ended there, Terkel tried for “a parting shot.” “You liked Shelley when you were young, in your formative years,” he said. “Do you still feel the same way?” That charming, personal question showed that the interviewer knew his subject, and had come well prepared (although it might have been more effective if he had asked it earlier in the interview). The interview succeeded because the fully engaged interviewer was constantly evaluating his interviewee’s responses and changed gears to provoke more stimulating responses. Terkel reminds us that every interviewer ought to be looking for the “home run question.”15

How should you deal with an uncooperative interviewee?

Former Secretary of State Edmund Muskie once greeted an interviewer by pointing out that he had given his papers to an archives so that historians would not bother him. Anyone who expected him to remember and comment on events that happened years ago “must live in the realm of the ridiculous.” The interviewer
was well aware of his subject’s reputed temperament, and had come prepared with a plan. He knew Muskie retained a strong attachment to his home state of Maine, and although the interview dealt with foreign policy, the interviewer asked about the foreign policy concerns of people in this town or that. The questions appealed to the secretary’s interests, and he began to speak at length, continuing well beyond the mandated time for the interview.\(^\text{16}\)

For many personal reasons, ranging from their state of health to their unhappiness over the way their lives and careers developed, some people will be uncooperative witnesses. Perhaps they disliked or resented the individual whom the interviewer is researching. They may not like “dredging up the past.” By preparing as thoroughly as possible for an interview in advance, interviewers should be able to anticipate some of the causes of such behavior and to develop strategies for dealing with them. If one line of questioning elicits bitterness, shift to another approach. Seek areas that the interviewee enjoys talking about before raising the disagreeable questions. Be prepared to justify the need to “stir up those old ashes” after so many years and to explain why scholars are seeking answers to these questions.

Some interviewees will answer evasively. They may be testing the interviewer’s knowledge. If the interviewer allows them to respond incompletely or evasively, they will continue to do so. Following up with more specific questions on the same subject, thereby indicating that the answers were insufficient, may elicit more complete or informative responses. If this tack does not work, then clearly and respectfully point out that the interviewee seems to be less than forthcoming. Perhaps the interviewee will make some explanation or finally give a fuller response. If not, the interview should be ended.

**How personal should an interviewer get?**

The degree to which an interview explores personal matters is something that each interviewer and interviewee will have to work out between themselves. Like the media, historians increasingly want to know about the personal and private side of public figures. The feminist notion that “the personal is political” has also contributed to the merging of the public and personal spheres in historical analysis. Whether individual interviewees will answer personal questions is another matter.

Different people have different concepts of what is personal. When Ronald Steel was interviewing Walter Lippmann for his biography, Lippmann volunteered to cooperate fully, so long as Steel did not ask anything personal. Steel soon learned that Lippmann defined the word quite broadly. Once when Steel asked him what his father had done for a living, Lippmann stared at him silently and then replied,
"I wouldn’t want you to make a novel out of this." (Lippmann was not proud that his family’s fortune rested on rents from tenement houses.) In fact, Lippmann’s lawyer, Louis Auchincloss, did turn a major turning point of Lippmann’s private life into a novel, *The House of the Prophet* (1980) in which the protagonist complains: “Biography is a whole new ball game. It is possible now, even in the lifetimes of our very greatest men, to persuade their friends and acquaintances to record on tape their most intimate impressions of these individuals. All you have to do is wave in their faces the sacred banner of history.”

The painfulness of recounting highly personal experiences can make an interview uncomfortable for both interviewer and interviewee. Elizabeth Norman, who interviewed American nurses trapped on Bataan by the Japanese during World War II, found it troublesome when the women cried. “I didn’t think you could cry over memories that were fifty-five years old,” she commented. “That was very difficult for me to watch, because of their sense of loss and they lost a lot in the war. They lost their youth, many, many friends, their physical health, in some cases their emotional health, and they would cry about it. As a human being, that was hard to watch.” Interviewers need to measure the level of discomfort they are likely to cause against the relevance of the subject matter and the importance of preserving the story, treat interviewees with dignity and compassion, and pause sufficiently while interviewees regain their composure.

**How should you bring up subjects that may be embarrassing?**

Having gone to great lengths to put interviewees at ease and to establish rapport, it is often hard to confront them with embarrassing questions. The sociologist John Gwaltney, author of *Drylongso* (1993), an oral history of Newark’s inner-city blacks, once chided members of the Oral History Association for being too polite and discreet to “ask the embarrassing question.” He argued that with some gentle and persistent prodding, interviewees will talk about difficult subjects. Playing tapes to demonstrate his point, Gwaltney showed that his questions were humorous and playful, but unrelenting. Being blind, Gwaltney also had the advantage of his interviewees wanting him to understand them; they would go on at great length and punctuate their responses with, “Don’t you see?”

One way for interviewers to bring up difficult or embarrassing issues is to quote someone else. During the Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter administrations, the National Archives maintained an office near the White House where they interviewed officials as they left the administration, many of them involuntarily and under some cloud. The interviewees were often agitated and unnerved over their experience and not happy to talk about it. Conducting preliminary interviews for the Ford and Carter presidential libraries, the Archives interviewer had
to ask some embarrassing questions but tried to connect them with published sources: "The Washington Post reported that you left office because of such and such. Was this a fair assessment?" Since the matter was part of the public record, and the interviewees were being asked to give their own side of the story, they invariably offered their own defense. Having made the focus the newspaper versus the interviewee (rather than the interviewer versus the interviewee), the interviewer needed to be sure to follow up with questions about the subject’s self-defense, its inconsistencies, and its contradictions with other accounts.

That was the approach that New York journalist William Inglis used when he interviewed the notoriously secretive oil magnate, John D. Rockefeller, Sr., while preparing an unauthorized biography. The elderly Rockefeller had agreed to be interviewed only to please his son, who desperately wanted to rescue the family name from the images drawn by the muckrakers. Between 1917 and 1920 Inglis conducted a string of interviews that produced 1,700 pages of transcripts. Although the planned book was never published, decades later another biographer, Ron Chernow, came across the interviews at the Rockefeller Archives. Struck by their extraordinary insights, he made them the core of his own book. As Chernow explained, "Inglis would read passages from Rockefeller’s two chief antagonists, Henry Lloyd and Ida Tarbell . . . and Rockefeller would refute them, paragraph by paragraph." For years, Rockefeller had refused to read what his critics had written about him, but given the opportunity to confront the most embarrassing and questionable aspects of his rise to power in the petroleum industry he admitted, "now that I’ve gotten into it I find it interesting."

When confronted with difficult or embarrassing subjects, the interviewee’s first response may be brief, defensive, inconclusive. The interviewer should return to the topic later in the interview. The more the interviewee attempts to explain, offers more details, and strains to make the interviewer understand, the more candid and less canned the responses will become. This approach takes time; once again, multiple interview sessions are important.

Some interviewees will stipulate before an interview that there are certain subjects that they will not discuss. Although it is possible to allude to such topics during the course of the interview, the interviewees may break their own rules and venture into the forbidden topic themselves. Ultimately oral historians must accede to an interviewee’s request. It is legitimate, however, to note the interviewee’s demand in the files for that interview, thereby explaining to future users why certain subjects were not addressed.

Potentially confrontational topics should be deferred until later in the interview, after the interviewer has established some rapport. While working on a history of an abortive plan to use nuclear weapons to dredge a harbor in Alaska,
an oral historian arranged to interview the crusty nuclear physicist Edward Teller. Time was limited, and Teller arrived late. Rather than ask his "warm up" questions, the interviewer decided to jump right in with an opening question about the most controversial part of Teller's involvement with the project. "This interview is over," snapped Teller as he got up and left.

To appear interested and sympathetic, an interviewer does not have to act obsequiously. If a point of disagreement is reached with an interviewee, one solution is to try to restate the interviewee's point of view. The interviewee will usually respond by further defining the position, and the dialogue is thus extended rather than terminated. Finally, keep in mind Oscar Wilde's observation that "questions are never indiscreet. Answers sometimes are."²¹

What if the interviewee asks that the recorder be turned off?
An oral history is not a journalistic interview, so there is little to be gained by hearing a story "off the record." Politely but firmly, interviewers should decline to interrupt the interview. Explain that the recording can remain closed until the interviewee is ready to release it, and that the transcripts can be edited. At times, however, interviewees may want to stop the recording to explain their hesitancy about answering a question or to ask the interviewer's advice about the propriety of discussing a person or issue. Interviewers can halt the recording to hear their problems, counsel them, and offer some reassurance before resuming the interview.

How can interviewers get beyond stories that have been "rehearsed" through frequent retelling?
Oral historians are frequently encouraged to interview the favorite storyteller and unofficial local historian. These individuals often have wonderful stories that may have folklore value, and they will tell their stories regardless of how relevant they are to the interviewer's questions. To a lesser degree, everyone tells stories about past experiences, to relive glory days, celebrate shared experiences, or make comparisons with the present. Each telling of the story embeds it firmer in the mind. Columbia has an interview with Ferdinand Pecora about the highly publicized investigation he conducted during the 1930s of Wall Street banking and stock market malpractice. Although he gave the interview forty years after the investigation, his memory was remarkable for its detail and precision. But Pecora's family pointed out that he had been telling these stories for years, and even after the interview was still telling them on his deathbed to the hospital nurses.²²

Although important for memory retention, rehearsal can create stumbling blocks for interviewers. Every telling of a story embellishes it, thereby moving
it further away from reality. Events are telescoped, chronology tightened, order rearranged and edited, drama or humor heightened. Rehearsed stories tend to omit negative events and concentrate on triumphs. Interviewees have not necessarily forgotten old wounds and mistakes. When questioned, they can recall past defeats, even if they do not always feel comfortable talking about them. By the time the oral historian asks the question, the answer may simply be the oft-told story.

The best defense against a well-rehearsed story is a well-prepared interviewer who can spot inaccuracies and gently challenge inconsistencies. But interviewees may have told their stories so often that they cannot remember it any other way. Some interviewees prime themselves for the interview, and others have stories that they will tell anyone under any circumstances. If the interviewer tries to cut them off, they may become confused or, more likely, will simply wait for another occasion to insert the stories in the dialogue. Since these stories have special meaning for the interviewee, it is usually worth giving them the time to tell their set speeches (you will probably find it impossible to stop them). After the supply is exhausted, try to ask questions that will lead down less familiar paths. ²³

Rehearsing a story, through its retelling over the years, also serves as a form of self-interpretation. People not only remember their past but try to make sense out of it, rationalizing it so they can live with it. An interview with a divorced couple will probably elicit two very different versions of the marriage and why it ended. Defeated politicians have similarly reconstructed their pasts. Interviewers need to ask these interviewees to stop and think about what they have said.

Not all stories have been rehearsed mentally or anecdotally. Questions may cause interviewees to recall events long buried in their memories. They often express amazement at their recall of seemingly forgotten memories, then recount them in explicit detail and at surprising length.

**How can an interviewer assist an interviewee’s ability to recall?**

An interviewee once commented that he felt as if his memory was on trial. Recognizing that most people do not readily remember names and dates, interviewers attempt to become familiar with the major players in the interviewee’s life and with its basic chronology, not only to keep the interviews moving but to put the interviewee’s mind at ease. Oral historians have similarly explored the use of photographs and familiar artifacts to trigger recall. Family photo albums, newspaper clippings, and letters have all served as tools for unearthing otherwise forgotten information. Some interviewers have even experimented with the sense of smell, to see what memories different smells elicit. ²⁴
Looking through family photographs not only prompts commentary from the interviewee but can provide illustrations for the interviewer's publications. The historian Pete Daniel traveled down the Mississippi River to interview people in the towns along the way, recording their recollections of the great flood of 1927 fifty years after the event. The photograph albums that many interviewees brought out helped sharpen their memories and provided stunning illustrations for his book, *Deep'n as It Come* (1977). By contrast, Andrea Hammer began her research with a set of the New Deal's Farm Security Agency photographs taken in southern Maryland between 1935 and 1943. Decades later, Hammer located many of the subjects who still lived in that region and who could talk about the people and places in the photos. Her object was to reconstruct the social context of the photographs, an exercise that demonstrated again that photographs can be misleading, and misinterpreted, without help from those who were there.25

Interviewees who demur in advance that they remember very little can often be put at ease with questions about normal routines of everyday life in the past, in their households or at work. "See, there was a lot more that you remembered," an interviewer for the Center for Oral History at the University of Hawaii commented to Lucy Robello after her interview about life as a plantation homemaker. "Well, you asked me for it, so I had to talk about," said Robello. "Otherwise I don't think that was important at all. . . . It was just normal living." Capturing on tape a way of life that no longer existed was precisely what the project wanted, and information that the interviewee could easily provide, once she gleaned the interviewer's objectives.26

**Do differences in race, gender, or age between interviewers and interviewees make any difference in the interview?**

Interviewers take the measure of interviewers, make assumptions about what they want to ask, and to some degree try to please them by telling what they want to hear. A study of the Federal Writers Project interviews with former slaves, conducted in the 1930s, discovered that an elderly black woman was interviewed twice, once by a white woman and again by a black man. She gave starkly different accounts of her memories of slavery, painting a relatively benign account for the white woman and a much harsher account for the black man. She may well have spoken even more differently to another black woman.27

Differences in age, race, gender, and ethnicity may influence both the questions asked and the responses elicited. There are no set prescriptions to overcome such differences. Some may want to match interviewers closely with interviewees, but men and women of different races and ethnicity should be able
to interview each other. In seeking to make interviewees feel comfortable, interviewers might reveal a little of themselves—where they live, where they went to school, where they work, what their families do—to establish points of commonality that might cut across some of the barriers between them.

Even without any common reference, the interviewer can compensate by having thoroughly researched the subject and being familiar with names, dates, and events long past. A well-prepared interviewer becomes, for the duration of the interview, the contemporary of the interviewee, “Oh, do you know about him?” the interviewee will say. Or “I haven’t thought about that in years.” During the interview, older people seem younger and more animated as they relive the past with a sympathetic listener. The Oral History Association’s *Principles and Standards* encourages interviewers to

work to achieve a balance between the objectives of the project and the perspectives of the interviewees. They should be sensitive to the diversity of social and cultural experiences, and to the implications of race, gender, class, ethnicity, age, religion, and sexual orientation. They should encourage interviewees to respond in their own style and language, and to address issues that reflect their concerns. Interviewers should fully explore all appropriate areas of inquiry with the interviewee and not be satisfied with superficial responses. 28

**Are there any differences in interviewing the famous and interviewing average individuals?**

The difference lies largely in the interviewee’s previous experience of being interviewed by the media. The average person has not been interviewed and may initially feel intimidated by the recorder and microphone. For the more prominent interviewee, the interviewer’s problem will be to draw a distinction between an oral history and a newspaper interview. Interviewees must recognize that what they say will not appear on the front page of tomorrow’s newspaper or on the evening news, a revelation that may actually disappoint some of them but that for the most part enables them to speak candidly. They can leave a complete record, but keep it confidential so that it will not damage their careers.

Professional people can also prove difficult to interview. Lawyers, for instance, have been trained not to volunteer information. Even worse are law professors, who seem to be judging questions to see how much the interviewer already knows. If prepared and able to ask probing follow-up questions, interviewers can
earn their respect and perhaps a little more of their cooperation. Business executives may need some coaxing to think of the interview as something other than a promotional device. Most professional people and all politicians have been interviewed before as part of their jobs. They are used to responding to questions, and they have developed certain patterns of response. As a result, their answers may be superficial and packaged, and it can be hard to break through their veneer. Some oral histories with politicians sound more like radio scripts than candid interviews.

During the Vietnam War, National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger complained to reporters that “interviewing GIs is the worst way to find out what’s going on. . . . The people in the middle of it have the least idea of what is happening.” But historians later concluded that the GIs gave the press more accurate accounts of what was happening than did Dr. Kissinger.39 When interviewing in an organization or among those who participated in a common event, it is just as important to interview the “little fish” as the “big fish.” Those on the middle or lower tiers of any hierarchy usually have more time to do interviews, a broader perspective on events, and less ego invested in the operation. Those at the top may be too preoccupied and perhaps too self-centered to provide much new information. If they are still in power, those at the top are often more cautious in responding and may give little more than a press release. Interviewing at the periphery provides information that makes it easier to interview those at the center. Conversely, interviewing the top people early in the project reassures anxious subordinates that management sanctions the project. Interviewers have to take advantage of whatever scheduling opportunities they encounter and develop their own tactics in determining which individuals in any group to interview, how many, and in what order.30

**Should interviewers use a questionnaire?**

When dealing with a group that has a common identity or was involved in a common event or organization, be sure to ask the same core questions to everyone. Especially if different interviewers are working for the same project, you should agree on a common list of themes and certain questions for all to ask. But individual interviewees have their own unique experiences that no questionnaire can anticipate. You must be willing to deviate from the prepared questions whenever something unexpected and interesting develops. Oral history, after all, addresses neglected areas of knowledge. The best items uncovered are often subjects that you were not prepared to ask questions about and perhaps had read nothing about in your research. A good interviewer hears an unexpected statement and follows up with additional questions.
Can follow-up questions be prepared in advance?
Follow-up questions require both prior research and spontaneity. A thoroughly prepared interviewer will sense when the interviewee is being incomplete and will press for a fuller discussion. Research also helps you spot some new information or information that conflicts with other accounts. “I didn’t know that, can you tell me more about it?” can often be the best follow-up question, since it encourages the interviewee to devote more attention to the issue and provide more details. Interviewees are often surprised when an interviewer seems to care about a particular subject that they would have mentioned only in passing if interest had not been expressed.

The most important skill in asking follow-up questions is being able to listen carefully to what interviewees are saying. Those who study listening have concluded that people generally hear only a small portion of what is said to them, a phenomenon that every parent and teacher can confirm. Even in an interview situation that is more focused than a normal conversation, the interviewer is keeping an eye on the recorder, concentrating on choosing the next question to be asked, and growing fatigued and distracted as time elapses. Listening to a tape of one of his interviews, Theodore Rosengarten, the author of All God’s Dangers: The Life of Nate Shaw (1974), realized that he had “set out to question, not to listen.” Thinking ahead from question to question, he had allowed the tape recorder to listen for him. “Let the machine record,” he admonished, “and you listen!”

Training themselves to remain alert saves interviewers from the embarrassing position of asking a question that the interviewee has already answered—a clear signal that the interviewer has not been paying attention—and helps flag the unexpected revelations that deserve to be followed up. In listening to the tapes after their interviews, even the most experienced interviewers will hear things that eluded them during the interview. These areas can be pursued in subsequent interviews, but not as spontaneously as when they first arose.

How should interviewers react to statements with which they strongly disagree?
The hardest part of listening is having to pay attention to ideas and information with which you may differ. You may be inclined to interrupt and argue, but you need to hear the interviewee out before confronting areas of disagreement. Challenge answers that seem misleading, and pursue responses that seem mistaken. Interviewees may mislead or poorly express themselves; sometimes they are misinformed or just wrong. But they also may possess a more accurate version of events than the interviewer has seen in other sources and, given the opportunity, may be able to present their version convincingly.
Oral historians deal with individual memory and perception, which are hard to squeeze into a structured format. By contrast, behaviorists have generally preferred to collect data that could be coded and quantified. They dismissed oral history interviews for not being as objective (or true) as questionnaire-based interviewing. But in recent years, many of the social sciences have been rethinking the concept of an objective reality and have confronted the subjective (or biased) nature of all sources of information. Psychologists, sociologists, and other social scientists have reexamined the forms and motivations of verbal expression. As they have embraced their subjectivity, they moved closer to oral history methodology, putting aside their quantitative questionnaires in favor of more qualitative interviewing.

Psychological interviews traditionally required the interviewer to maintain an observational posture that discouraged personal interactions, in order to collect impartial empirical data. Breaking with this pattern, some psychologists have adopted a more interactive manner to stimulate more communication and provide more depth to their interviews. For a project on “Women, Motivation and Success,” Joseph T. Chirban discarded his initial questionnaire as an obstacle and wove his previously formulated questions into something that more resembled a conversation. This led interviewees—all nationally prominent women—to move beyond their celebrity status to speak more candidly and offer more self-reflection. Chirban found that his open-ended questions encouraged the comedienne Lucille Ball to elaborate on herself in ways not evident in her previous interviews. “She experienced my openness, respect, and nurturance, qualities that she valued, and that I recognized in her,” he wrote. “She responded in kind, which continually deepened the interview.” More interactive interviewing, he concluded, would help therapists (as well as other interviewers) to move beyond simple information gathering to a better understanding of interviewees’ feelings, values, and concerns.³¹

Nor do all social scientists favor the use of highly-structured, standardized, quantitative questionnaires with anonymous interviewees. Sociologists James Holstein and Jaber Gubrium have argued that by collecting data so impersonally, social scientists have failed to question where their informants’ knowledge was coming from and how it was derived. More active, open-ended, qualitative interviewing would transform their “subjects” into collaborators with the interviewer. The interviewer’s objective should not be to dictate interpretation through a predetermined agenda but to provide a conducive environment for a conversation that addresses relevant issues. Mary Jo Festle reached the same conclusions when she directed a project to interview lung transplant patients: “When people talk, they can provide clearer, subtler, and fuller explanations than quantitative data permits.”³²
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Oral history collects the interviewee’s recollections and opinions, not the interviewer’s. Interviewers are not responsible for converting interviewees to any true faith, nor do they need to demonstrate that they are purer than the people they are interviewing. A true test of both the interviewer and the oral history project is whether they conducted interviews with representatives of all sides of an issue, including those whom they considered less than admirable.

But what if the interviewer suspects that an interviewee is lying or shading the truth?

Never be too quick to presume that an interviewee is wrong or is lying. Your objective is to record the story from the interviewee’s point of view, even if that includes some exaggerated claims or boasting. You need not embrace totally whatever the interviewee is saying. Try to draw interviewees out further on any dubious assertions. Return to troublesome issues at different points during the interview, as a means of prodding interviewees into defending or refuting their previous statements. Do not hesitate to cite contrary evidence in newspaper accounts and other sources. Conflicting information can be attached as an appendix to the transcripts for future researchers to consider. (First, however, be sure to alert the interviewee to the added material.)

Eyewitnesses to memorable events who change their testimony and contradict themselves may be reflecting their initial confusion or the array of other viewpoints they subsequently encountered. It was no conspiracy that individuals in the crowd at Dealey Plaza the day John F. Kennedy was assassinated heard differing numbers of shots and disagreed over the direction from which those shots came. Having gone abruptly from cheering a presidential motorcade to running for cover, their fear and bewilderment contributed to inconsistencies in observations and memories. Their recollections were further shaped by news coverage, conversation, speculation, books, and motion pictures. “I have read and heard so many things, it mixes together,” said Danny Arce, who worked at the Texas Book Depository. “You don’t know if it’s your own memory or it’s somebody else’s. We all read a lot of things, and sometimes inadvertently adopt things we heard from others. It’s hard to separate the two, and can get real confusing trying to figure out what you remember without having your memory colored by everything that has come out.”

There is also the possibility that people are lying to themselves. Some people dramatically change their positions but convince themselves of their consistency and correctness. Some may have consciously or subconsciously distorted memories of an unpleasant past. Australian oral historians encountered “organized structures of forgetting” regarding their country’s Aboriginal population,
for years largely omitted from the white society’s collective memory and recorded history. In Germany and Italy, oral historians have encountered mass amnesia about fascism and the Holocaust. In France, interviewers have faced a reluctance to recall collaboration with German authorities during military occupation. “Better to let the dead rest in peace and the living live in peace,” commented one of those who declined to be interviewed.38

As an oral history interview usually takes place years after the events occurred, it can have a cathartic effect by allowing interviewees to confront long-buried memories. In such cases, the interview serves as therapy as well as to set the record straight. But even a psychiatrist would have trouble getting some interviewees to confront the past honestly. The lie sometimes takes on a mythic significance of its own, and the interview may become valuable not for the story’s accuracy but as a means of analyzing the roots of its distortion and measuring an idealized self against less favorable perceptions.

Should an interviewer pay attention to the interviewee’s “body language”? 

Even interviews that are not being videoed have a visual component. Sitting in close proximity, interviewers and interviewees communicate nonverbally through facial expressions and body movement. Always focus your gaze fully on the interviewee. Looking around the room, staring into space, examining your nails, suggests that you are not paying attention, just as frowning suggests disagreement or disbelief. Interviewees will either interpret such behavior as rudeness or, fearing that they are boring you, begin abbreviating their answers. Except for glancing periodically at the recorder or looking at photographs and other items relating to the interview, maintain eye contact diligently throughout the interview. A smile or a nod signals that you got the point and will encourage the interviewee to keep talking. Quiet signals are preferable to verbal interruptions (“oh, yes,” “uh-hmmm,” “you don’t say”), which sound foolish on the recording and clutter the transcript.

Good journalists have learned to be “people watchers.” Understanding that interviewees also send non-verbal cues, they ask themselves what a gesture might mean or why someone looked down while speaking. A person leaning toward the interviewer and pointing a finger projects an aggressive, take-charge attitude; sitting back with crossed legs and arms and leaning away suggests a closed, self-protected attitude. Body language may indicate nervousness about the interview, and topics that make interviewees particularly uncomfortable may cause them to shift in their seats, drum their fingers on a table, and engage in other such noticeable behavior. Some interviewees glance at the interviewer to see how an
answer has registered. Amelia Fry reported that when she interviewed former California senator William F. Knowland for a life history, he never looked at her but stared fixedly at the ceiling, “as if he was answering to a higher authority.” It later became evident that Knowland was undergoing a crisis in his personal life and found it distressing to reflect on his past. This crisis caused him to commit suicide before she could conduct another interview. In another extreme but still instructive case, an oral historian who conducted a series of interviews with prisoners at the state penitentiary detected that the inmates had “a great deal of practice at perfecting their intentionally deceptive statements.” He identified such nonverbal cues as tapping a cigarette and loss of eye contact during specific replies as signals that a statement might be deceptive.

Sounds also play a part in nonverbal communication. Voice pitch, hesitation, emphasis, sarcasm, and muttering of asides provide indications of attitude. When people become emotional, they tend to talk faster and raise their voices. Interviewers need to catch these nonverbal clues, since they are almost impossible to transcribe. A sarcastic inflection, for instance, can completely change the meaning of a sentence. The interviewer might point out a sarcastic response and ask the interviewee to explain the sarcasm.

Is there a role in oral history for what social scientists call “continuing observation?”
Oral historians have rarely shared the interest of social scientists in observation as part of the interviewing process. Historians tend to isolate interviewees from their environment and to put them in a quiet place where they will not be interrupted during the interview, whereas in other disciplines subjects are examined in their natural setting. Anthropologists, for instance, live in communities to record their day-to-day observations along with their subjects’ testimony.

Richard Fenno has encouraged political scientists to collect data by “interactive observation,” by which he means “following politicians around and talking with them as they go about their work.” Fenno accompanied politicians through their home districts, through elections, and through their legislative service:

Much of what you see, therefore, is dictated by what they do and say. If something is important to them, it becomes important to you. Their view of the world is important as your view of the world. You impose some research questions on them; they impose some research questions on you. That interaction has its costs most notably in a considerable loss of control over the research process. It also has benefits. It brings you extremely close to your data.
Fenno's prescription describes what many social sciences consider effective fieldwork. Although oral historians often travel to the area where their interviewees live and are interested in their environment, participatory observation has not been a major component of the oral history interview. Oral historians frequently interview those who have retired and live in different communities from where they spent their careers. Observing current daily routines would not offer many clues about the past that oral historians seek to capture on tape. Sometimes, however, interviewees want to show interviewers buildings and other sites that played an important part in their past. Oral historians should take advantage of such offers and visit the sites, bringing along their recorders, cameras, and possibly video cameras to supplement the interviews.⁴²

**CONCLUDING THE INTERVIEW**

**What's the best way to conclude an interview?**

Look for a natural "wrap-up" question, something that causes interviewees to reflect back on their lives, to compare recent events with their earlier years, to draw conclusions about major events, or to look ahead toward the future. Ask the interviewee whether there are any other issues that could be discussed. Occasionally, an interviewee has anticipated a question that the interviewer did not raise. The interview itself may have triggered memories of long-forgotten people and events that the interviewer had not researched. Encourage interviewees to put whatever they consider important into the record.

At the conclusion of the interview, remind the interviewee of how the recordings will be processed and where they will be deposited. Explain what their role will be in editing the transcript and in signing the deed of gift. Sometimes the interviewee is asked to sign a release immediately after completing the recording session and another release later approving the transcript; other times no release is signed until the interviewee has reviewed the transcript. The timing depends on how quickly a transcript can be produced and on whether the interviewee is likely to request that the interview be restricted.

It is customary to present copies of the recording or transcript to the interviewee and to sometimes make additional copies for family members. If the object of the interview is an article or book, try to give a copy to the interviewee. Plan to invite interviewees to exhibit openings or other public presentations based on the interviews.

You cannot simply walk out the door with someone's life story, their candid reflections, and sometimes extremely personal observations. Interviews can be
difficult, emotional experiences, and sometimes you need to spend some time to talk with the interviewee after the interview, without the recorder running. Let interviewees know how important their interviews will be to the oral history project, and reassure them that they were helpful. Give them some idea of how long it will take to process the interview, when they can expect to receive copies of the recording or transcript, when they will sign the deed of gift, how you expect the material to be used, and where the interview will be deposited and opened for research.

Should interviewees ever be paid for their interviews?
Most oral history projects work on such limited budgets sometimes depending on volunteer staff that they rarely can afford to pay interviewees. They operate on the valid principle that having one's life story recorded for the future is reward in itself. A very few projects, however, especially those in which the interviews are with musicians and others commonly paid to perform, have recognized some financial obligation to the participants. Blues and jazz projects have further justified their decision to pay on the potential profitability of the interviews. “Since blues is a marketable form of oral history,” wrote Walter Liniger of the Blues Archives at the University of Mississippi, “we felt morally obliged to secure the rights of the informants and to pay them a fee for their contributions.”

Obviously, any financial arrangement depends on the resources of the sponsoring project or institution. Some projects have written stipends for interviewees into their grant proposals, similar to the honoraria paid to their advisory committee members. But whether or not payments are made, all oral historians have a responsibility to inform interviewees of the anticipated uses of their interviews, whether in publication, radio or video documentaries, the Internet, CD-ROM, or other means of public presentation that might generate royalties or other monetary compensation.
Principles and Standards of the Oral History Association

The Oral History Association promotes oral history as a method of gathering and preserving historical information through recorded interviews with participants in past events and ways of life. It encourages those who produce and use oral history to recognize certain principles, rights, technical standards, and obligations for the creation and preservation of source material that is authentic, useful, and reliable. These include obligations to the interviewee, to the profession, and to the public, as well as mutual obligations between sponsoring organizations and interviewers.

People with a range of affiliations and sponsors conduct oral history interviews for a variety of purposes: to create archival records, for individual research, for community and institutional projects, and for publications and media productions. While these principles and standards provide a general framework for guiding professional conduct, their application may vary according to the nature of specific oral history projects. Regardless of the purpose of the interviews, oral history should be conducted in the spirit of critical inquiry and social responsibility and with a recognition of the interactive and subjective nature of the enterprise.

Responsibility to Interviewees:

1. Interviewees should be informed of the purposes and procedures of oral history in general and of the aims and anticipated uses of the particular projects to which they are making their contributions.

2. Interviewees should be informed of the mutual rights in the oral history process, such as editing, access restrictions, copyrights, prior use, royalties, and the expected disposition and dissemination of all forms of the record, including the potential for electronic distribution.

3. Interviewees should be informed that they will be asked to sign a legal release. Interviews should remain confidential until interviewees have given permission for their use.
Wers should guard against making promises to interviewees that the wers may not be able to fulfill, such as guarantees of publication and over the use of interviews after they have been made public. In all es, however, good faith efforts should be made to honor the spirit of the interviewee’s agreement.

Wers should be conducted in accord with any prior agreements made with aviewee, and such agreements should be documented for the record.

Wers should work to achieve a balance between the objectives of the nd the perspectives of the interviewees. They should be sensitive to sity of social and cultural experiences and to the implications of race, dass, ethnicity, age, religion, and sexual orientation. They should eviewees to respond in their own style and language and to ssues that reflect their concerns. Interviewers should fully explore priate areas of inquiry with the interviewee and not be satisfied erficial responses.

Wers should guard against possible exploitation of interviewees and ve to the ways in which their interviews might be used. Interviewers ect the rights of interviewees to refuse to discuss certain subjects, t access to the interview, or, under Guidelines extreme circumven to choose anonymity. Interviewers should clearly explain these o all interviewees.

Wers should use the best recording equipment within their means to reproduce the interviewee’s voice and, if appropriate, other sounds visual images.

The rapid development of new technologies, interviewees should be of the wide range of potential uses of their interviews.

Efforts should be made to ensure that the uses of recordings and tranply with both the letter and spirit of the interviewee’s agreement.

Life to the Public and to the Profession:

rians have a responsibility to maintain the highest professional in the conduct of their work and to uphold the standards of the sciplines and professions with which they are affiliated.

tion of the importance of oral history to an understanding of the est and effort involved, interviewers and interviewees should strive to record candid information of lasting value and to make nation accessible.

ees should be selected based on the relevance of their experiences wart at hand.
4. Interviewers should possess interviewing skills as well as professional competence and knowledge of the subject at hand.

5. Regardless of the specific interests of the project, interviewers should attempt to extend the inquiry beyond the specific focus of the project to create as complete a record as possible for the benefit of others.

6. Interviewers should strive to prompt informative dialogue through challenging and perceptive inquiry. They should be grounded in the background of the persons being interviewed and, when possible, should carefully research appropriate documents and secondary sources related to subjects about which the interviewees can speak.

7. Interviewers should make every effort to record their interviews using the best recording equipment within their means to reproduce accurately the interviewee’s voice and, if appropriate, image. They also should collect and record other historical documentation the interviewee may possess, including still photographs, print materials, and other sound and moving image recordings, if appropriate.

8. Interviewers should provide complete documentation of their preparation and methods, including the circumstances of the interviews.

9. Interviewers and, when possible, interviewees should review and evaluate their interviews, including any summaries or transcriptions made from them.

10. With the permission of the interviewees, interviewers should arrange to deposit their interviews in an archival repository that is capable of both preserving the interviews and eventually making them available for general use. Interviewers should provide basic information about the interviews, including project goals, sponsorship, and funding. Preferably, interviewers should work with repositories before conducting the interviews to determine necessary legal guidelines arrangements. If interviewers arrange to retain first use of the interviews, it should be only for a reasonable time before public use.

11. Interviewers should be sensitive to the communities from which they have collected oral histories, taking care not to reinforce thoughtless stereotypes nor to bring undue notoriety to them. Interviewers should take every effort to make the interviews accessible to the communities.

12. Oral history interviews should be used and cited with the same care and standards applied to other historical sources. Users have a responsibility to retain the integrity of the interviewee's voice, neither misrepresenting the interviewee's words nor taking them out of context.

13. Sources of funding or sponsorship of oral history projects should be made public in all exhibits, media presentations, or publications that result from the projects.
14. Interviewers and oral history programs should conscientiously consider how they might share with interviewees and their communities the rewards and recognition that might result from their work.

**Responsibility for Sponsoring and Archival Institutions:**

1. Institutions sponsoring and maintaining oral history archives have a responsibility to interviewees, interviewers, the profession, and the public to maintain the highest technical, professional, and ethical standards in the creation and archival preservation of oral history interviews and related materials.

2. Subject to conditions that interviewees set, sponsoring institutions (or individual collectors) have an obligation to: prepare and preserve easily usable records; keep abreast of rapidly developing technologies for preservation and dissemination; keep accurate records of the creation and processing of each interview; and identify, index, and catalog interviews.

3. Sponsoring institutions and archives should make known through a variety of means, including electronic modes of distribution, the existence of interviews open for research.

4. Within the parameters of their missions and resources, archival institutions should collect interviews generated by independent researchers and assist interviewers with the necessary legal agreements.

5. Sponsoring institutions should train interviewers. Such training should: provide them basic instruction in how to record high fidelity interviews and, if appropriate, other sound and moving image recordings; explain the objectives of the program to them; inform them of all ethical and legal considerations governing an interview; and make clear to interviewers what their obligations are to the program and to the interviewees.

6. Interviewers and interviewees should receive appropriate acknowledgment for their work in all forms of citation or usage.

7. Archives should make good faith efforts to ensure that uses of recordings and transcripts, especially those that employ new technologies, comply with both the letter and spirit of the interviewee's agreement.
SAMPLE DEED OF GIFT
[From John Neuenschwander, Oral History and the Law (2003)]

I, [name of interviewee] of [address], herein permanently give, convey, and assign to [name of archive, program or individual], which is currently in possession of my interview (or oral memoir) consisting of [description]. In so doing I understand that my interview (or oral memoir) will be made available to researchers and may be quoted from, published or broadcast in any medium that the [archive, program or individual] shall deem appropriate.

In making this gift I fully understand that I am conveying all legal title and literary property rights which I have or may be deemed to have in my interview (or oral memoir) as well as my rights, titles and interest in any copyright which may be secured under the laws now or later in force and effect in the United States of America. My conveyance of copyright encompasses the exclusive rights of reproduction, distribution, preparation of derivative works, public performance, public display as well as all renewals and extensions.

I, [agent for the duly appointed representative of] accept the interview (or oral memoir) of [name of interviewee] for inclusion into the [archive or program].

[signature of donor] [signature of agent/representative]

[date]
Provisions for Control of Access and/or Sealing of Interview
No researcher shall be allowed access to my oral history without my written permission.

No researcher will be permitted to quote from my interview unless he or she has submitted the quotes to me and received my written approval.

My oral history interview will remain closed to all researchers until [date] or my death, whichever occurs first.

My oral history interview cannot be made available to researchers unless all references from which my identity could be known are edited out and a pseudonym is assigned. After my death, all portions of my oral history interview which were held back, as well as my true identity, shall be made available.

DEED OF GIFT FOR HEIR OR HEIRS OF INTERVIEWEE
[From John Neuenschwander, Oral History and the Law (2003)]

In accordance with the willing participation of [name of interviewee] in the [name of oral history project or program] on [date], in which he/she voluntarily gave to the [name of receiving group or individual] an interview (or oral memoir) in the form of [number of tapes or transcripts], I/we, [names] as legal heir or heirs, herein do permanently give, convey and assign same to [name of archive, program, or interviewer]. In doing so, I/we understand that [name of interviewee]'s interview (or oral memoir) will be made available to researchers and may be quoted from, published and broadcast in any medium that [the archive, program or individual] shall deem appropriate.

I/we further acknowledge in making this gift that I/we are conveying all legal title and literary property rights which I/we as heir/heirs to [name of interviewee]'s interview (or oral memoir) as well as all rights, title, and interest in any copyright which may be secured now or under the laws later in force and effect in the United States of America. My/our conveyance of copyright encompasses the exclusive rights of reproduction, distribution, preparation of derivative works, public performances, public display as well as all renewals and extensions.

I, [name], agent for or duly appointed representative of [the archive, program or individual], accept the interview (or oral memoir) with [name of interviewee] for inclusion into the [archive or program].

[signature of agent/representative] [signature of heir/heirs]
[date]
DEED OF GIFT RELEASE FOR INTERVIEWER
[From John Neuenschwander, Oral History and the Law (2003)]

I, [name of interviewer], who served as an interviewer for the [name of project or sponsoring program or archive] and who conducted an interview or interviews with [name of interviewee] on or about [date] for which no legal releases were executed, do herein permanently give, convey and assign to [name of program or archive]. In doing so I understand that the interview (or oral memoir) with [name of interviewee] will be made available to researchers and may be quoted from, published or broadcast in any medium that the [name of program or archive] shall deem appropriate.

In making this gift I fully understand that I am conveying all legal title and literary property rights which I have or may be deemed to have in this interview or interviews (or oral memoir) as well as all my right, title and interest as joint author in any copyright which may be secured under the laws now or later in force and effect in the United States of America. My conveyance of copyright encompasses the exclusive rights of reproduction, distribution, preparation of derivative works, public performance, public display as well as all renewals and extensions.

I, [name], agent for or duly appointed representative of [the archive or program], accept the interview (or oral memoir) with [name of interviewee] for inclusion into [the archive or program].

[signature of interviewer]  [signature of agent/representative]
[signature of interviewer]
[date]
DEED OF GIFT TO THE PUBLIC DOMAIN
[Senate Historical Office]

I, [name of interviewee], do hereby give to the [archives or organization] the recordings and transcripts of my interviews conducted on [dates]. I authorize the [archives or organization] to use the recordings and transcripts in such a manner as may best serve the educational and historical objectives of their oral history program. In making this gift, I voluntarily convey ownership of the recordings and transcripts to the public domain.

Agent of Receiving Organization

Donor

Date

INTERVIEWEE RELEASE FORM
[St. Andrew's Episcopal School, Potomac, Maryland]

I, [name of interviewee], do hereby give to the Saint Andrew's Episcopal School all right, title or interest in the tape-recorded interviews conducted by [name of interviewer] on [dates]. I understand that these interviews will be protected by copyright and deposited in Saint Andrew's Library and Archives for the use of future scholars. I also understand that the tapes and transcripts may be used in public presentations including but not limited to audio and visual documentaries, slide-tape presentations, exhibits or articles. This gift does not preclude any use that I myself want to make of the information in these recordings.

CHECK ONE:

__ Tapes and transcripts may be used without restriction
__ Tapes and transcripts are subject to the attached restriction

Signature of Interviewee

Date

Address

Telephone Number