

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT HANDOUT: HOW TO CONDUCT YOUR INTERVIEW

Students will be required to submit a typed transcript and 5-7 page typed oral history narrative that describes an interview with someone who lived through – and remembers – one of the episodes covered in the our course syllabus textbooks.

PREPARATION

- ✓ **PRE-INTERVIEW:** Spend some time (10-20 minutes) with your subject discovering what topics seem most interesting. This can be done in person or over the phone and should not be recorded. Just set your subject's memory in motion and get some idea of where your interview is likely to lead.
- ✓ **KNOWING YOUR BRIEF:** Carefully review sections of the textbook that cover those most promising episodes. Consult our textbook's bibliography for additional published sources and review those as well. Prepare notes if necessary to help you remember important people, dates and phrases. Try to be so familiar with the topics as you can prior to your interview. Think about questions, but only write them down if it makes you feel more comfortable.
- ✓ **NEUTRAL LOCATION:** Select the location and time of your interviews carefully. Find a place where you and your subject can meet without interruption for about two hours. Make sure the setting is comfortable and convenient. – i.e. access to bathrooms, beverages, etc. If you cannot meet in person, consider the best times for calls, or email exchanges.

CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW

- ✓ **RECORDING:** Most oral histories are recorded, either on a digital recorder, cassette, or videotape. Double-test any recording device beforehand and bring back-up equipment. If this makes you or your subject uncomfortable, then just take notes. However, remember that you will be quoting from your source in the final paper—so take notes carefully.
- ✓ **LEADING THE WITNESS:** You need to guide your subject to relevant points without shaping his or her memories. Don't read passages from the textbook looking for comments. Instead, ask thoughtful, open-ended questions based on your reading. Less is better than more, especially on the first interview, so try to keep the questions brief and the answers flowing. Stay flexible and don't panic if the interview takes unexpected turns. Remember people look for validation from their listeners, so always nod or respond in ways that signal your sincere interest.
- ✓ **TRUNKS IN THE ATTIC:** At the end of your first interview, ask about saved documents – letters, diaries, and photographs. You can use these as supplemental sources in your paper and as additional tools for your follow-up interview. Remember that these mementos are invaluable to the people who saved them-so treat them with utmost care.

THE FOLLOW-UP: Always schedule at least one follow up interview, even if by phone, to clarify details once you've begun writing. This is critical. Not even veteran interviewers can anticipate or discuss every problem in one sitting. In addition, this allows your subject time to review his or her memories and often results in even better stories on the second or third round.

GETTING THE INTERVIEW STARTED:

1. As soon as you hit the record button, state your name, the date, and the name of the person you're interviewing.
2. Then ask your interviewee to spell his/her name.

HOW TO APPROACH YOUR INTERVIEW

1. What is your goal? What do you want to accomplish during your interview?
2. Stay focused. Keep your questions within your topic. Don't jump from topic to topic.
3. Allow the interviewee to talk. Don't interrupt
4. Don't feel limited to the questions on your list.

TIPS

1. Practice your questions
2. Know your equipment / recording devices before the interview
3. LISTEN! Minimize the amount that you actually speak.
4. You need to "time stamp" the interview before you begin the interview. Before you ask your first question, state your name, the interviewee's name, the location and date of the interview. EX) "Todd Mealy interviewing Joe Smith in Lancaster, Pennsylvania on October 13, 2017.
5. Begin with closed-ended questions to get a little background
6. Take notes, but keep your eyes on the person you are interviewing. Your recorder will pick up everything he/she is saying.
7. And again, LISTEN!

RUBRIC FOR THE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Interview complete and transcript submitted as a file via email on the due date:	35 Points
Digital audio recording of the interview (submitted via Soundcloud link):	35 Points
Proper heading: (at the top of the first page)	5 Points
Pages numbered (top right of page)	5 Points
Overview of interview:	10 Points
Verbatim Questions & Answers (Transcript is formatted exactly like the example)	10 Points
Turned in late:	minus 10 points per day
Total Points:	100 points (doubled for total of 200 points)

Notes on citing your interview.

Face to face interview:

Roth, Veronica. Personal interview with the author. Lancaster, PA. March 15, 1999.

Telephone interview: (note the change of location to Roth's address)

Roth, Veronica. Telephone interview with the author. Chicago, IL. March 15, 1999.

Email Correspondence: (note the change of location to Roth's address)

Roth, Veronica. Email correspondence with the author. Chicago, IL. March 15, 1999.

(INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT EXAMPLE)

Todd Mealy
Honors: US History 2
(Date)
(Soundcloud file)

Roth, Veronica. Personal interview with the author. Lancaster, PA. March 15, 1999.

Overview by Todd Mealy:

Veronica Roth was one of more than 500 students to enter McCaskey High School in the fall of 1968. She entered McCaskey as a tenth grader with a new perspective on the world after two devastating events occurred earlier that year. Martin Luther King Jr. and presidential hopeful Robert F. Kennedy were both assassinated in the spring and summer of 1968. Racial tensions were developing in Lancaster for quite some time when, on a frigid day in late October 1968, those frictions rose beyond the breaking point. A fight broke out during a school assembly as students were gathered in the auditorium. The fight quickly escalated into the hallways and the street in front of the school's main entrance. During the fray, Roth was attack and knocked unconscious. Even though she was an unlucky victim of the violence, Roth is a proud graduate of McCaskey. She graduated in 1971. She later returned to her alma mater as a social studies teacher.

Question (Mealy): Can you describe the events in Lancaster city and McCaskey High School leading up to the racial confrontation?

Answer (Roth): As a new sophomore in a very big school, with my mind already operating in new ways, my heart thinking in new ways, I came here with an open heart and open mind. I made new friends very quickly and I loved meeting people from all over the city. The African-American students had asked the administration at the beginning of the school year if they could form an African-American history club for the first time. Permission was granted happily so from the administration. At that time, February was not African-American history month there was only African-American history week and that occurred on the last week in October. They asked the administration again if they would allow them to put on an all school assembly in October in honor of African-American history week. And again happily so the administration granted their request. At times, there would be graffiti on their posters in the hallways, there were smart remarks, and just little things here and their. I was impressed that in just a short time, two months, after school started that these individuals would be able to prepare an all school assembly. I was really looking forward to this assembly as a learning opportunity and as a point of admiration.