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AUTHOR Mehaffy, George L.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

The booklet is designed to help social studies teachers initiate oral history projects. Preceding the two major sections of the document, the authors specify that oral history is more than a person with a tape recorder; need not be transcribed to be useful; need not be a big project; and is not the final product of history. The next section describes projects that have proven to be successful: the life history, the family history, special oral history projects such as exploring topics in community social history, and field research into community political life and community folklore. Possibilities for end products of these projects include curriculum materials, community oral history archives, or a publication of a student journal. The final section provides suggestions for equipment, planning, and procedures. The questions of legality, responsibilities, obligations, record keeping and storage, transcription, and preparing students to conduct interviews are examined. A sample release form for the interviewee, an oral history data sheet, and a selected bibliography are included. (KC)

How To Do It Series

Oral History in the Classroom

George L. Mehaffy
Assistant Director, Oral History Program
The University of Texas at Austin

Thad Sitton
Assistant Professor
St. Mary's Dominican College, New Orleans

O.L. Davis, Jr.
Professor and Director,
Oral History Program, College of Education
The University of Texas at Austin

The goal of oral history, one authentic procedure of historians-at-work, is to create documents which otherwise would not be available. Oral history is more than a research tool, however. It is also a productive and interesting procedure for classroom teachers.

Across the nation, increasing numbers of teachers and their students are using oral history techniques during portions of the school year. The oral history process has been used, in fact, in classrooms at every school level--elementary, secondary, college, and university. While some schools have developed full-blown projects including publications, most classroom efforts are smaller in scale. This "How-To-Do-It" booklet is designed to help social studies teachers make practical decisions about using oral history with students. It is based on an understanding of the real constraints of real classrooms.

Two major commitments about oral history and classroom teaching are explicit in this guide. First, student learning is more productive *and more fun* when students are active rather than passive. Oral history is useful in helping students find that "the stuff" of history is everywhere around them. Engaging in a search for explanations and descriptions relating to important local matters is satisfying and increases personal meanings. Some of these meanings relate to substantive historical knowledge; for example, construction of a highway (and transportation system), communication of national election results before and after the development of television, and the effects of wartime on a particular family. Other meanings relate to the essential methodology of history; for example, the necessity of using incomplete data and

the hazards of generalization. Of particular importance is that oral history can be stimulating, exciting, and fun for students. Their active participation takes them "into the field." They meet people they do not know. Their work "counts"; it is not just "checked."

Second, students can create useful documents as they learn about their past. Classroom oral history efforts continue to produce important, even impressive, documentation; for example, eyewitness accounts of a strike or of events during a presidential inauguration. These oral histories make available recollections, insights, and perceptions that others may use. Classroom oral history is not restricted to the individual classroom or a particular set of students. The accumulated oral histories ("memoirs") constitute an invaluable archival source about local communities and institutions, and they may well be useful in settings beyond the local scene. Documents produced by students, therefore, may be seen as legitimate historical documents. Classroom oral history involves students in the larger historical enterprise.

A few practical suggestions are presented here. They may serve as reminders as teachers plan to use oral history in their own classrooms.

- *Oral history is not just a person with a tape recorder.* A tape recorder and tape are important, but oral history emphasizes planning prior to interviewing. What is the purpose of this interview? Which person is likely to be an important informant? How reliable is memory and, especially, the memory of a specific individual? How can we secure the information the individual possesses? What questions will tap into memory and sustain reminiscences? Into what local or national (or international) context does the projected interview fit? The actual interview needs a tape recorder controlled by a knowledgeable interviewer.
- *Oral history need not be transcribed to be useful.* Ours is mainly a print culture. Consequently, most people will be most comfortable with oral histories transferred from tape to transcript. Transcription can be expensive and time-consuming. Trade-offs obviously must be anticipated when transcription is considered, whether as an entire recording or only as sections. One crucial advantage of the oral history record is that *it is oral*. It is part of the oral, not print, tradition; and reduction to print destroys much of the value, and accuracy, of the original recording. Many oral history programs, particularly those in Canada and the United Kingdom, do not transcribe. Clearly, oral history documents need not be transcribed to be useful.
- *Classroom oral history need not be a BIG project.* Several school projects in oral history or cultural journalism, particularly the widely published ones such as *Foxfire*, have been large-scale endeavors. Some have incorporated oral history into classwork throughout the year and have involved many, if not all, students enrolled. Most successful classroom oral history efforts have not been as large. Some emphasize oral history for only a short time, perhaps for only one period or several periods during the year. Some use oral history components for a special emphasis. Realistically, we recommend that teachers should consider gaining experience with oral history in a rather highly focused study extending over a relatively short time. With teachers who have experience, longer and/or more comprehensive projects may be undertaken with confidence.
- *Oral history is not the final product of history.* The oral history document (whether tape or manuscript) is a *source* for history, typically not history itself. Oral history is subject to the same historiographic canons as are other documents. For example, how reliable is the information? To what extent does it have external and internal validity? How can this information be related to other information available through oral history and other procedures? The oral history document is "raw," albeit personal and quite valuable. It is likely that it will be a major source of historical inquiry in the classroom.

Getting Started and Continuing in Oral History

The next two sections contain numerous practical suggestions for beginning and continuing classroom oral history projects. The first section concentrates on *ideas* or *focus*. It describes examples of program elements that teachers have found to work. Further, it relates these to categories of oral history emphases. The second section attends to specific questions about equipment, planning, and procedures.

Where Do I Begin?

By the late 1970s, the popular success of the *Foxfire* books, the oral histories of Studs Terkel *(Working)*, and the book and television special "Roots" had stimulated a wave of oral history projects in public schools in the United States. This development seems a true grass-roots phenomenon in social studies education. Existing projects vary enormously in scope, ranging from minor student assignments in family biography to such ambitious endeavors as the student oral history journals *Foxfire* (Rabun Gap, Georgia), *Salt* (Kennebunk, Maine), and *Bittersweet* (Lebanon, Missouri). From modest origins, these journals have grown to explore new and innovative relationships between school and community and to reach ultimately a national audience in the form of book compilations by commercial publishers. *Foxfire*, *Salt*, and *Bittersweet* may be likened to the oak tree that is potentially foreshadowed in the single acorn of the individual classroom project.

Modest or ambitious, large or small, existing classroom oral history projects have certain common denominators, factors that are implicit in the program suggestions summarized below. In virtually every case, the projects involve students in fieldwork within their families, ethnic groups, and home communities. Utilizing the field research strategies of participant observation and the structured or unstructured interview, students are introduced to the research procedures which underlie several of the "fieldwork" social sciences—including sociology, anthropology, folklore, and political science, as well as oral history.

Study of the local community involves students in the exploration of a social world that is seen rather than unseen, close rather than far, personal rather than impersonal. As such, the classroom oral history projects offer a useful alternative to the usual textbook approaches to teaching social studies. After all, "local history" is the history in which students are directly involved and with which they have direct experience. Classroom projects in oral history can develop a personal motivation for studying the past. As Carl Becker suggested long ago in *Everyman His Own Historian*, the most compelling motivation for the pursuit of history is to answer a basic personal question: "Who *am* I?" These projects involve students in working out an answer to this question—particularly in the personal quest for a "personal past" within the general areas of family, ethnic group, and community history. It is hoped that these projects can awaken students to the realization that history is all around them and as close as their own grandparents. This is what William Faulkner meant when he wrote: "The past is not 'dead'; it's not even *past*."

(1) *The Life History*. Students might interview (and record) relatives or non-relatives about their lives, and transcribe these recordings. Many variations are possible here. These life histories might be focused chronologically (a grandmother's memories of her childhood, a grandfather's experi-

ences in World War II), or topically (a grandmother's or a grandfather's life as a farmer, from earliest experiences to the present day). The raw field-recordings could be submitted in their original state, or selectively edited tape-to-tape in a re-recording process utilizing a second tape recorder. The interviews could be fully or selectively transcribed, and the transcription could be edited into a coherent story by the student historian. In its most ambitious form, the life history might expand to incorporate documentary and photographic sources about the informant's life, and might imbed the transcribed materials in a larger interpretive framework derived from a general study of United States history during that life span.

The life history has several advantages for an introductory student project. It has a natural focus in its concentration upon the individual life, and (as suggested above) it may be approached at a variety of levels of sophistication. If the student begins, as will most often be the case, with a relative or some other person well known to her, she eases her way through the initial anxieties that plague most would-be fieldworkers.

(2) *The Family History*. As in the case of the individual relative, the student's family is a natural focus for his or her field research, and again a wide range of projects is possible.

As their introduction to a larger family history assignment, or as a component in such an assignment, students might talk to the oldest members of their families and collect historical traditions of the greatest possible "time depth." This would be a sort of "Roots" assignment.

Materials collected would be the oldest obtainable traditions about the family and where it came from—the stories told to students' grandparents by *their* grandparents. The idea would be to explore the ultimate limits of each family's knowledge of its own oral histories—stories, personal anecdotes, songs, traditions. For Alex Haley, the author of *Roots*, these were words and phrases from a West African language and traditions about "an African."

Another possibility would be a limited family history that explored the family fortunes of *one* side of the student's family for two generations, and related this family experience to larger national developments during the period. Limiting himself or herself to one parent and that set of grandparents, the student might follow a sequence involving: (a) a review of general national developments over the decades covered, (b) a study of family documents and photographs derived from that period, (c) interviews with the parents, grandparents (and other relatives—aunts, uncles, etc.), (d) transcription of the interviews, and (e) use of all these primary source materials for the compilation of a coherent family history covering these two generations.

There are, of course, many other possibilities for the classroom family history project. In a more unstructured assignment, the student might become the "family archivist," and create a historical inventory of family documents and photographs; then the student could go on to tape-record older family members for other data to include in the archives.

(3) *Special Oral History Projects*. Beyond the life history and the family history, there is a wide range of options for the classroom oral history project; some of these are briefly suggested below.

• *Examining the local effects of national and international events (hypotheses testing).* Students might generate testable hypotheses from their textbook study of national or international events and then go out into the local community to test the fit between that "big picture" history and the perceptions and experiences of local folks. In terms of the larger historical framework, the Great Depression was an era of hard times and social disorder, but what was the experience of *this* community? Such testing can assist students to determine the validity of descriptions of events.

• *Chronicling local events from oral sources.* Students might embark on the study of a variety of "significant events" in community history. Every community experiences its share of these historical turning points—events that most older persons remember as meaningful, vivid, and important. These might be a famous murder or murder trial, the day the community first voted "dry" (or "wet"), a natural (flood, tornado) or an economic disaster (the failure of cotton agriculture, the closing of the steel mill, etc.). Students would choose one of these events for study, interview older family members and others about it, and then attempt to reconcile the conflicting testimonies to arrive at an interpretation of "what really happened." Since, for most communities, community history still remains to be written, such research by students should be regarded (and conducted) with some seriousness. The findings may help the members of a community to understand better their own attitudes and their actions.

In a variation of the above, students might collect oral testimonies on a variety of recent events in the community, and compose from those taped materials the formal histories of these events. Student activities would thus merge the roles of historian and newspaper reporter.

• *Compiling histories of local institutions/organizations.* Using both documentary and oral sources, students might compile the history or histories of a variety of local institutions. These might include churches, schools, voluntary organizations, and neighborhoods. Such institutions form a natural focus for student fieldwork, and students might interview both past and present participants in them.

• *Exploring topics in community social history.* Students might choose to research any of an almost limitless number of topical alternatives in community social/cultural history. The various *Foxfire* books illustrate the range of possible options here: hunting stories, farming practices, technologies (skills, trades, occupations, processes), beliefs about ghosts, birth/coming-of-age/marriage/burial customs, recipes, food preservation, folk remedies, and "how to do it" subjects of many kinds. This is the "past culture of the community" in the anthropologist's sense; it is social history to a historian.

Again, many variations are possible. A single student could collect a variety of oral testimonies on a given topic (folk remedies), or the whole class could become involved in collecting materials on that topic. Telephone interviews can also be useful. Students might work on "then/now" essays ("courtship and marriage, then and now" or "roles of women and men, then and now"), which would take advantage of students' knowledge of how such things are presently being done, and then go on to explore how the same matters were handled in their parents' and grandparents' day. The students develop skills of research and "learn by doing," and their final products are of value to the community.

Finally, in the multicultural communities, such topical studies could focus upon ethnic variations in the patterns studied—ethnic differences in child-rearing practices, celebrations, burials, folk medicine, and others. In a multicultural community, the study of topics in local social history is also, by necessity, "ethnic studies," and a classroom project may choose to capitalize upon that fact. Students who live in more homogeneous communities should also be given opportunities to participate in projects in multicultural communities.

(4) *Field Research in Community Political Life.* As previously noted, the field research methodology of oral history is applicable to community study projects outside the area of traditional history. Just as community history is the most accessible history for study via the classroom oral history project, so are the forms and processes of community political life most accessible to field study by the political science class.

There are many possible projects for getting the political science class out of the classroom and into the political "field," among which we suggest the following:

- *Study of local campaigns and elections.* Students might combine interviewing and participant observation in the study of a local election campaign *in process*; that is, as it happens. Students who collected materials in the field might then be debriefed in class on a weekly basis. Materials collected could be used as basic data for a class analysis of the campaign.

- *Life history studies of local politicians.* Students might do life history studies of the active participants in local political life, including both incumbents and persons presently "on the outside."

- *Structure of local politics.* In a research project concerned with determining the principal actors in the local political scene, students might conduct interviews designed to map a rough outline of the persons and groups actively and recurrently involved in local political life. Such a study could focus on the formal outline, the political parties, and other formal political organizations; and/or could delve into *de facto* political groups -- informal cliques, lobbies, etc.

- *Study of public political meetings.* Here students might analyze the process and substance of local political decisionmaking as revealed in local, open-to-the public political meetings (city council meetings, meetings of the county commissioners, etc.). The meetings could be field-recorded and then debriefed in class.

- *Political folklore.* Students might record materials for a collection of folklore of community political life. These might include political jokes, stories about local and national political figures, and political songs and sayings.

- *Local political controversies.* Students might interview a variety of parties on various sides of present-day local political issues. Students could try to integrate these conflicting and often emotional testimonies and arrive at some balanced view of the issue.

- *Local political roles.* Students might interview present and past political officeholders to gather data about how they view their office, its purpose, powers, limitations, responsibilities, and problems. Such a study might focus on "role variation" (i.e., the different ways present county commissioners view their role), or on "role change" (i.e., the difference between how a sheriff of the 1930s and the present sheriff see their office).

(5) *Field Research in Community Folklore.* In an enterprise closely linked to the study of community social history, students in social studies or English classes might locate, record, transcribe, and analyze a variety of folkloric materials (stories, songs, sayings, jokes, riddles, legends, superstitions, etc.) from their peers, families, ethnic groups, and the community at large.

Folklore is the "verbal folk art" of the community, which is transmitted orally, person-to-person, and is not written down. It varies from ethnic group to ethnic group and from generation to generation (students, for example, have their own folklore). Students and teacher decide what kind of folklore project they wish to embark upon—the target group from which the materials will be collected, and the kinds of materials they wish to collect. The materials are then field-recorded, brought to class, and compiled.

Some general categories of folklore are: ghost stories, tall tales, riddles, jokes, skip-rope rhymes, weather signs, old sayings, folk remedies, "luck" superstitions, graffitti, songs, and animal lore. Project possibilities include: (a) students' research among their families to collect folklore from older (and younger) family members, especially the grandparents—a "family folklore" project; (b) an emphasis upon collecting folkloric materials from older (or younger) members of the different ethnic communities (for example, an examination of the differences and similarities in Black, Anglo and Mexican-American folklore); (c) students' collection of children's folklore (skip-rope rhymes, riddles, etc.) from their younger brothers or sisters; and (d) students' collection of the current folklore of the students' peer groups within the school. This might begin with what students in the class already know. For example, do students know the story about the "dude who grew claws" (on a date, no less), or the "devil's appearance in the roadhouse"? (These are common stories in the Texas public schools.) And this makes another point. Folklore is not just "old stuff"; living folklore is (at least) halfway believed in.

What Are the Products of Classroom Oral History?

At the beginning of this exploration of "program suggestions," several common denominators of the classroom oral history projects were examined. Common factors were identified which lay beneath the surface diversity of these real and suggested projects. Nearly all of the projects involve students in field research enterprises within the local community, and, in so doing, involve these students in a "personalized history," a quest for personal roots in family, ethnic group, and community. A final common element of these projects—and, we believe, a critically important one—is that such projects are, in effect, "real." They actually do something. They can produce a tangible and socially valuable product, and this explains their unique potential for stimulating student enthusiasm and excitement.

In many communities, there is insufficient information about local history, folklore, and political life. Classroom oral history projects may be designed to do their part to remedy this situation, and thereby generate a product that is socially useful. Again, there are several possibilities.

(1) *Curriculum Materials.* One reason that "local history" is so often missing from the secondary school curriculum is the nearly complete lack of curriculum materials about local history. Many of the project ideas outlined above can produce materials of great usefulness to the teacher of social studies, materials that may serve to link textbook social studies to the face-to-face reality of community social life, as students themselves know and experience it.

(2) *Community Oral History Archives.* Perhaps even more important, the classroom oral history projects could result in tapes, transcripts, photo archives, and other materials of great interest and usefulness to persons in the local community. In so doing, the classroom project would function within the area of "public history" to create a "usable past" for the local community. There is evidently a widespread need at the community level for materials relating to community history, and there is usually no one to supply those materials. Indeed, this thirst for "local history" is one of the explanations for the general success of the many student "Foxfire" publications (see below). Even in the case of communities which are fortunate enough to possess a body of local historiography, this is often a highly selective and "lily-white" history that

neglects the historical contributions of Blacks, Mexican-Americans, and other minorities. The student project may generate materials that help to fill this historical gap. This local history collection could be based in the community library or at a local college or university, and it might serve as a tangible reminder to successive generations of students that their labors, and the products of those labors, were not just "for drill" but "for real."

(3) *A Foxfire-Concept Journal.* Finally, student oral history projects might culminate in the publication of a student journal of oral history, folklore, and folklife patterned upon the journal *Foxfire*. Some seventy of these student publications are now in production within secondary schools in the United States. Despite the obvious difficulties of researching and producing such a journal within the real world of the public school, the Foxfire-pattern has spread far and wide across the United States, and even abroad. Most of these journals are self-supporting (by way of over-the-counter and subscription sales); and some, like *Salt* and *Bittersweet*, are joining *Foxfire* itself in the pleasant position of extreme fiscal solvency. *Foxfire's* annual book royalties now are a considerable sum.

Launching an Oral History Project

Launching a classroom oral history project requires careful planning. Inevitably, questions of "how" become very important. How do I get started? What kind of equipment is needed? How do I conduct the interview? What have others done?

The following section builds upon the accumulated experience of working oral historians and classroom teachers. Its suggestions have worked for many people. Local circumstances and individual interviewees and interviewers should be expected to yield local variations. Nevertheless, the categories of suggestions below constitute a good initial point for teachers who want to get started in history.

What Equipment Do I Need?

Many oral history programs use reel-to-reel tape recorders to ensure the best possible recording. School programs, on the other hand, often find cassette tape recorders easier to use. A cassette tape recorder can be used with great success if a few simple rules are observed.

1. Use the best equipment available. Poor quality recording equipment produces poor quality recordings.
2. Use a high-quality, thirty-minute cassette tape. The forty-five minute per side cassette tape may be too thin, depending on the brand used.
3. Use an external microphone, preferably dual lavalier microphones, to get the microphone as close to the speaker as possible. (Built-in microphones, in contrast, often pick up recorder noises.)
4. Try to arrange an interview setting which is as quiet as possible.

Do I Need a Legal Release?

A legal release is necessary to clarify the conditions under which a tape-recorded interview is made. Generally, individuals who agree to an interview are willing to give the school the contents of that interview. However, some people are legitimately concerned about being quoted out of context, or about being made to appear foolish or uneducated. A legal release can help avoid such misunderstandings. While a sample release form is included, the final form should be cleared with a school district legal officer. The release form should include a place for restrictions or special conditions attached to a particular interview. Some interviewees may wish to review the tape prior to release. Some interviewees may wish to read the transcript. Others may simply want to see any material which is placed in the public domain.

Sample Release Form

Date: _____

I hereby give to (Name or School) _____, for whatever scholarly or educational purposes may be determined, the tape recordings, transcriptions, and contents of this oral history interview.

_____ _____
Signature of Interviewee *Signature of Interviewer*

_____ _____
Name *Name*

_____
Address

Special Restrictions:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

What Are My Responsibilities and Obligations?

Anyone participating in an oral history project invariably deals with human beings talking about themselves, their frailties and triumphs. There is an obligation to be sensitive to that person's need to not be embarrassed, and to trust both the interviewer and the aims of the project. Oral history is a very personal experience, one that affects both interviewee and interviewer. The Oral History Association has a set of guidelines which provide direction for any oral history project. Those guidelines may be obtained from the Association (see address on p. 7) or from the authors of this booklet.

What About Record-keeping and Storage?

As an oral history project gets underway, tapes begin to accumulate faster than one can keep track of them. Record-keeping, thus, is an important part of any oral history project. The best recording in the world is of little value if it is lost.

The interviewer should do two things. First, clearly label each tape with the name of the interviewee, date, name of the interviewer, and tape number if there is more than one tape. Second, each interviewer should fill out an interview data sheet in order to preserve details about interviewee and the interview itself. A sample data sheet is reproduced on the next page.

Once tapes are brought back to the classroom from the field, they should be logged in some master file. The tapes may then be stored. Ideal storage conditions of constant temperature and humidity are generally not possible for most school projects. However, tapes should be protected from extreme temperature variation.

Oral History Data Sheet

Interviewee _____

Address _____ (zip)

Phone _____

Date of Birth _____

Place of Birth _____

Date of Interview _____

Place of Interview _____

Interviewer _____

Number of Tapes _____ Interview Status: Completed ☐ In Progress ☐

What About Transcription?

Transcription is not a necessary requirement for a successful oral history program. However, some programs need a transcribed copy for publication or other purposes.

Transcription is often the most difficult dimension of oral history projects. Collecting interviews is relatively easy compared to the problems surrounding transcription. Many school programs use students to transcribe. The best transcriber is the interviewer himself. The interviewer not only understands the context of remarks; he or she also can learn about his or her interviewing style from reviewing previous interviews. Another way to provide transcriptions at small cost is through some cooperative arrangement with a typing teacher who desires transcription practice for his or her students. Commercial transcription is also available but usually at prohibitive cost.

Transcriptions, while laborious and expensive, can reveal inadequacies in the interview technique. If more than two people are involved in an interview, transcription is made more difficult. The quality of a recording affects the ability to transcribe it successfully. Most importantly, a transcription points out poor questioning technique. Did the interviewer phrase the question clearly? Was the interviewee asked to expand on his or her remarks? Did the interview wander back and forth, without apparent direction?

Once transcription is accomplished, the transcript may be used in a Foxfire-type publication. The material might simply be put in the library resource material. Copies of the original tape might also be used in the library as a local resource for other students. Other teachers, whom the teacher of the oral history class has alerted to the existence of the material, might wish to use transcriptions or tape segments in their classrooms.

How Do Students Learn To Interview?

The interview situation provides one of the greatest single opportunities for student learning. Interviewing must be approached carefully if valuable interviews are to result. The most important key to successful interviewing is training.

Training for interviewing begins by ensuring that students understand the goals of the project. If students are involved in the selection of a project, they will be better acquainted with the kind of material which they need to collect in their interviews. Are life histories the focus, for example? Or are the project participants seeking only specific experiences during World War II?

In addition to understanding the projects, students should also have some historical framework in which to ask questions. An interview with a woman who was a housewife during World War II is greatly enhanced if the interviewer knows something about rationing for civilians during the war.

Once the interviewer understands the goals of the project and the historical framework, the real training begins. The teacher might start by asking the class to generate a list of possible interview questions. These questions should be open-ended, allowing the interviewee to respond fully. This interview guide must not be used mechanically. The guide is not a list of questions to be worked through, after which the interview is over; it is only a listing of the areas to be covered. However, sometimes some preplanned questions used with follow-up questions make students more comfortable in initial interview situations.

Students should have opportunities to practice before the interviews begin. Students could begin by interviewing one another or a family member. Role-playing might be used to help students avoid difficulties, such as initial shyness. Any student who interviews should also be asked to listen to early interviews to help improve later interviews. Sample interviews could be brought to class as a review activity.

Often, students feel more comfortable in an interview situation if someone else is along. Some teachers send out interviewing teams, usually composed of two persons. The advantage to having two persons at an interview is that one, as principal interviewer, can focus on the substance of the interview; while the second student keeps track of tapes, takes photographs, or tries to ensure optimum conditions for the interview.

Each tape should begin with an introduction identifying interviewee, interviewer, date, location, and subject of the interview. A checklist for each interviewer helps standardize the introduction. The introduction might appear as follows:

This is an oral history interview with _____ (interviewee)

conducted by _____ (interviewer) on _____ (date) at _____ (location)

The subject of this interview is _____.

The checklist might also remind the interviewer about the legal agreement, recording level, or other easily forgotten matters.

When the interviewer begins the interview, she or he should test the equipment with a short recording in the presence of the interviewee. Such a procedure eliminates the horror story of a beautiful interview which is somehow inadvertently never recorded because the tape recorder was not working. In addition, testing seems to relax some interviewees.

Interviewing, as your students will find out, is interesting and difficult work. The interviewer must be attentive to what is being said, listening for clues to follow-up questions or hearing omissions which can be filled in later. The interviewer must also indicate by eye contact, nodding, and making appropriate comments to keep the speaker talking — that she or he is listening. At the same time that the interviewer is listening carefully and showing that she or he is doing so, the interviewer is also formulating new questions and ensuring that the interview is progressing well. Interviewing is like performing in all three rings of a circus at the same time!

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3. One rich source of information on both techniques and projects is the Oral History Association. For more information, write to Ronald Marcello, Secretary/Treasurer, North Texas State University, P.O. Box 13734. NTSU Station, Denton, Texas 76203.

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