

# History 203

## History of the United States

### *A Service Learning Class*

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## Oral Interview Guidelines

### I BACKGROUND RESEARCH

Familiarize yourself with the topic. Consult relevant secondary and primary sources that will help you derive an interview guide for your subject. You can also use these sources in your bibliography.

### II INTERVIEW GUIDE

An interview guide contains a list of the subjects you intend to cover during your interview, and the information you hope to elicit from your subject. Although an interview guide is usually a list of questions,

#### **DO NOT:**

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- X     Read word-for-word questions from your guide during the interview.
- X     Force the interviewee to follow the sequence of your pre-arranged questions.

#### **DO:**

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- T     **Memorize the questions before your interview.** This will help you establish a better rapport with your interviewee.
- T     **Allow the interviewee to lead the exchange, as long as he/she doesn't stray too far off the topic. Flexibility results in successful interviews.** Often the interviewee will offer information you may not have known to inquire about.

### III LOCATING AN APPROPRIATE SUBJECT

Most students will be performing an interview with a resident of the Solvang Retirement Community. A good interviewee is someone knowledgeable about your topic who is willing and physically able to complete an interview. Potential subjects include:

- 1) eye-witnesses or participants in particular events or movements
- 2) those employed in a particular occupation, military branch or government agency
- 3) members of particular political parties or non-profit groups
- 4) those who lived through a particular era

### IV INFORMING THE SUBJECT & LCC ORAL HISTORY AGREEMENT FORM

You will be interviewing subjects who have volunteered with informed consent to participate in this project and are self-selecting subjects. However, before beginning the interview, explain the purpose of your interview and how the information will be used. Tell the subject what your topic generally covers and what kind of information you are seeking. If you plan to use a tape recorder-which I highly recommend-tell your interviewee this before you arrive to start the interview. Arrange a specific time and location for your interview. Most interviews will take place at the Solvang Retirement Community. See the attached map for driving directions. Finally, make sure that **you and the interviewee sign and date** the “LCC ORAL HISTORY AGREEMENT FORM” before the interview. These forms must be retained on file with the interview transcripts and tapes.

### V THE TAPE RECORDER

Unless you are adept at shorthand, you will not be able to take coherent or comprehensive notes while the interviewee responds to your questions. Also, writing feverishly during the interview detracts from your relationship with the interviewee. Moreover, an audio cassette allows you to include specific quotes from your subject in your paper. Make sure to record the date, time, place, name and age (if appropriate) of the subject and your name on the beginning of the tape. Remain aware of your recorder's limitations. Write down and describe any hand or body gestures that your subject makes-such as demonstrating the size of something with their hands. Also, explain any object your interviewee brings to the interview or points to around the room.

## **VI THE INTERVIEW**

Start the interview by asking some general questions about the subject's background. Turn on the tape recorder after a friendly environment has been established. Attempt to place the recorder in a location that will not distract or intimidate the subject. Next, ask your first substantive question that addresses your topic. Try to ask open-ended questions that will encourage an extended answer by your subject. Avoid singular questions that elicit only a "Yes" or "No" answer, or that lead your subject by putting words in their mouth. Remember this is more of a monologue than a dialogue. You should do most of the listening and little talking. Some interviewees will expect the interview to resemble a normal conversation, where both participants talk approximately half the time. Assure these subjects that you want them to talk most of the time and that you are an avid listener. Keep your comments minimal. Don't interrupt the speaker. If you think of something while your subject is talking, write it down on your note pad and ask it later. If you want the speaker to expand or clarify something, ask additional follow-up questions. Ask your subject to explain any slang, colloquialisms, or phrases that are obscure or out-dated.

## **VII THE INTERVIEWER'S ROLE**

An oral history interview is cooperative and not confrontational. You need to help facilitate your subject's recollection by appearing relaxed, supportive, and non-judgmental. Help your subject remember the best and most information possible by not forcing them to follow any sequence of questions or correcting them. Don't worry if they return to a topic or if their answers are chronologically inaccurate. You will have an opportunity to organize the material when you transcribe the cassette tape.

## **VIII THE LENGTH OF THE INTERVIEW**

A series of short interviews usually proves more fruitful than a single long one. However, travel, time, and schedule restrictions often prevent this approach. A general rule suggests ending the interview before the subject appears visibly fatigued-usually between forty-five minutes and two hours (with breaks) depending on your interviewee.

## **IX TRANSCRIBING THE AUDIO CASSETTE**

Try to transfer the words of your subject verbatim. You must maintain the integrity and accuracy of your data. Avoid arbitrarily changing or improving the comments of your subject. You can remove false starts, stutters, "ums," and pauses, but don't alter the substance of the interview. If you need to insert a clarification in the text-the description of a gesture or explanation of an obscure word-place these words inside of brackets. FOR EXAMPLE: "We lived way up in Warrenton [Oregon] and our house was only about as big as this room [about 12' X 15"] and my father was a gippo logger [an independent, family-owned business].

## X SOLVANG RETIREMENT COMMUNITY

Contact: April Fisk, Solvang Events Coordinator

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Eugene, OR 97402

### Driving Directions:

- Traveling north on HWY 99, as you approach the junction of Fairfield Avenue, Buritto Amigos will be on your right and Gilbert Center (where Putters Fun Gallery and Strike City bowling alley are located) will be on your left.  
*\* Turn left onto Fairfield Avenue and take the first right onto Jacobs Avenue. Follow the signs to Solvang.*
- Traveling south on HWY 99, as you approach the junction of Fairfield Avenue, Buritto Amigos will be on your left and Gilbert Center (where Putters Fun Gallery and Strike City bowling alley are located) will be on your right.  
*\* Turn left onto Fairfield Avenue and take the first right onto Jacobs Avenue. Follow the signs to Solvang.*

***Check in at the Lobby and ask for April.***

