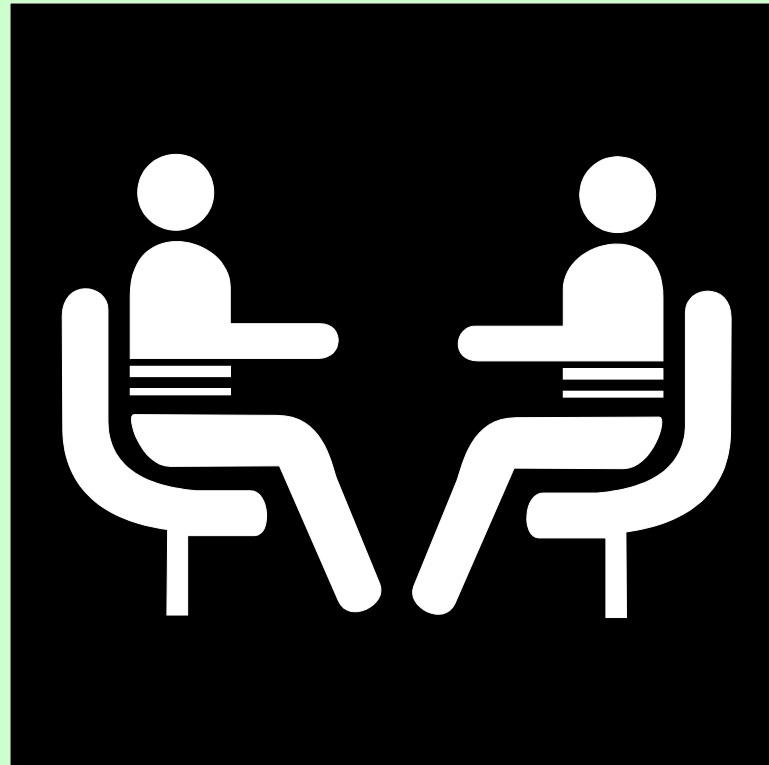




ORAL HISTORY...





Oral history is...what?



- Oral history is the gathering of personal memories through recorded interviews.
- The memories related are experienced firsthand.
- Oral history is not hearsay, not folklore, and not necessary all interviews.
- Oral histories are the collection of eyewitness recollections about the lifetime of the interviewee.



During an oral history interview, the interviewee...

- Explains what he or she saw, did, felt, and thought before, during and after the events, circumstances and...
- situations he or she experienced at one time in his or her life and...
- Provides opinion as to what other people did, thought, and felt.





The interviewer's role...

- The interviewer's job is to listen and learn from these interviews or human pieces of insight.
- One important concept of oral history, is that history is assembled from these pieces and no one piece is any less important than any other piece.
- Each piece is as unique as the person who is telling the history.
- Interviewers have a role and a responsibility in making sure that these pieces are not lost.

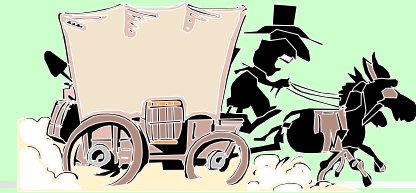


A little history...

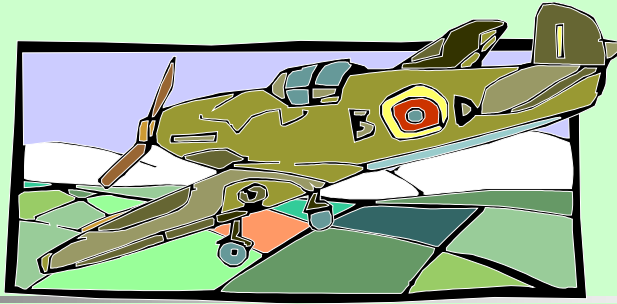
- The practice of oral history, in some form or another, goes back a long, long time.
- Societies have passed along stories about each other from generation to generation.
- Three thousand years ago, for example, scribes of the Zhou dynasty in China collected the sayings of the people for the use of court historians.



In the U.S....



- The earliest organized oral history activity in the U.S. dates back to the mid-19th century, when California and Wisconsin historians and librarians began a concerted effort to collect interviews with early settlers of the West and Midwest.



- When the U.S. entered WWII, President Franklin Roosevelt ordered all military branches and civilian agencies of the government to prepare records of their wartime experience.



What makes a good interview?

- PREPARATION! Think about...
- What is your objective or focus or topic for the project?
- Who will be interviewed and why? What do you know about this person already? What do you need to know?





Think about...

- Will you be able to obtain the information that you need for the project in an hour and a half?
- How will you make contact with your interviewee?

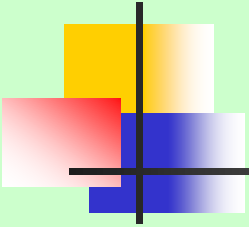




Arranging the interview...



- Make contact with the interviewee immediately (preferably by phone)!
- In contacting (telephoning or e-mailing) the person whom you wish to interview, make clear to him or her:
 - How his or her name was obtained by you;

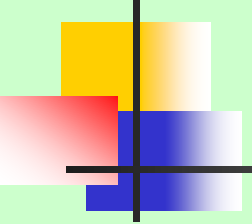


-
- Who you are and where you are calling from (CSUCI);
 - Why you are calling (to conduct an interview for your history class); and



You will want to say...

- Why you feel that his or her life and experiences are important to your project and...
- The time limit – one hour and a half.
- Also, mention that you will be taking a short biography of your interviewee.

- 
-
- Decide mutually where you will conduct the interview.
 - Decide mutually when you will conduct the interview.





You will also want to mention...



- The need for the interviewee's permission to record and make available to researchers, the tape recording and transcript.
- This is done with the consent form and/or donor agreement.



- The signing of these gives the university the right to retain the original and the copyright.
- You cannot legally use or keep the tape, unless the forms are signed!
- The return of the transcript to the interviewee for corrections and signing.



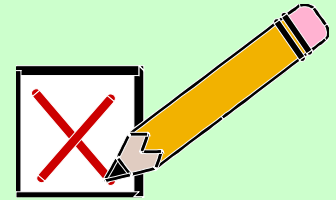
Tips for contact...



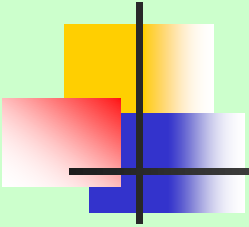
- Make contact early with your interviewee.
- Don't allow yourself to run out of time.
- If no immediate response from the interviewee, find another interviewee.



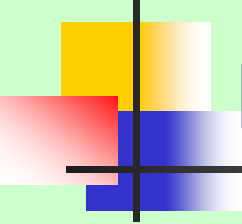

A checklist...



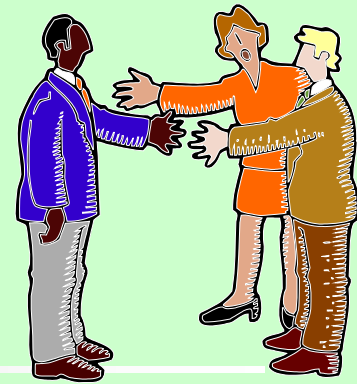
- Confirm the meeting time and date IN WRITING, twice – once 2 weeks before and again, by phone 1 week before.
- Get your consent and donor forms ready.
- Prepare your outline of questions.
- Check the recording equipment and become familiar and comfortable with it. Check your batteries!!!



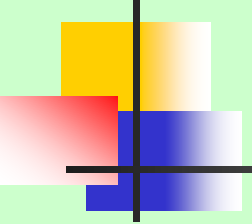
-
- Locate resources, such as articles, books, or other documents re: the topic that you can discuss with the interviewee.
 - Find a notepad to bring with you.



At the beginning of your meeting...



- Chat briefly with your interviewee:
- Introduce yourself,
- explain again the purpose of the project,
- review what you want to specifically discuss, and...
- mention the need for the signing of the donor agreement.

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- Be aware of potentially sensitive or delicate issues.
 - Know the physical or time limitations of the interviewee and accommodate them.





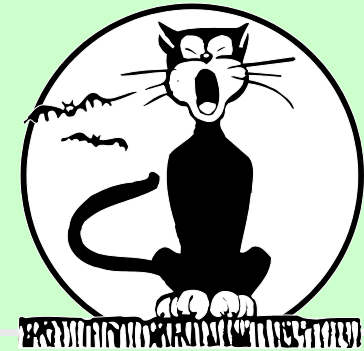
What makes a good interviewer? Part I

- LISTENING!
- An interview is not a dialogue.
- The whole point is to get the interviewee to tell his or her story.
- Readers and interviewees don't really care about your knowledge, opinions, or your experiences.





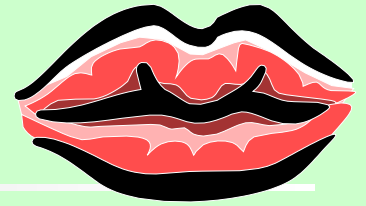
Silence is okay...



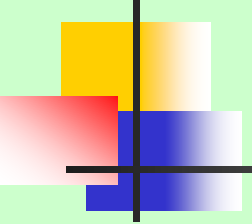
- Listen for cues and leads and material that you aren't familiar with.
- Be alert and ready to follow up with additional questions.
- Give your interviewee a chance to think of what he or she wants to say.
- Keep quiet and wait - count to ten slowly before asking another question.



Give feedback but don't interrupt!



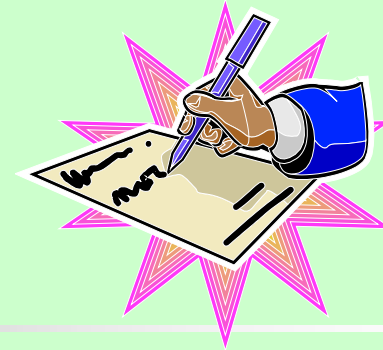
- Don't let your mind or your mouth race ahead to the next question. You will make your interviewee nervous.
- Let the interviewee know that you are listening – use little sounds or phrases such as, “uh-huh”, “I see”, or “wow”.
- Nodding is also an option.
- Look interested!

- 
-
- If the interviewee digresses off the topic, let him or her finish talking and then, guide him/her back as POLITELY as you can.
 - Ex: “That’s very interesting, but what do you think of this...?” or “I have a question about...”

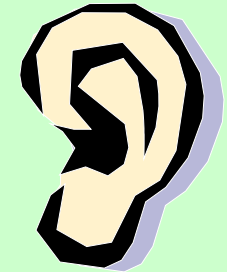




Take notes...

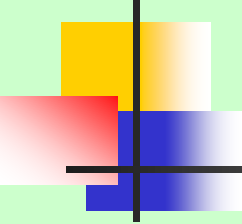


- Additional information may be useful later, so take notes if the interviewee says something that's not on your outline. You can come back to it later.
- During or after the interview, note any usual names and ask the interviewee for the correct spelling.

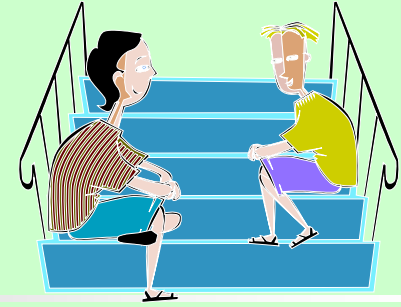
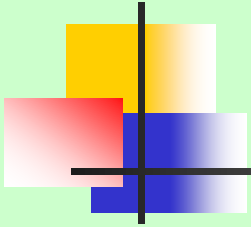


Just listen...


- Never argue, challenge, or contradict the interviewee.
- Never put the interviewee on the defensive.
- You are there to collect as much information as possible.

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- If you suspect that the interviewee is misremembering or has, in fact, contradicted him/herself, very politely state that YOU'VE misunderstood and can he/she clarify this issue for you...

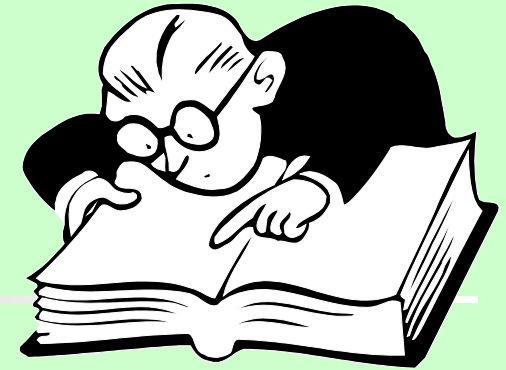
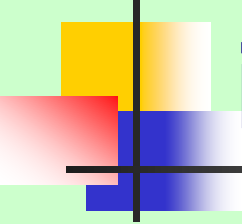




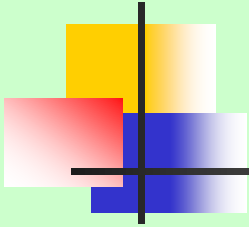
- Interviewers need to spend some time establishing rapport, building up to the central issue, and understanding its context in the life of the interviewee.
- Interviewers need to be sensitive to the feelings of the interviewee and...
- to not dismiss other areas of his/her life that the interviewee may consider relevant to the interviewer's questions.



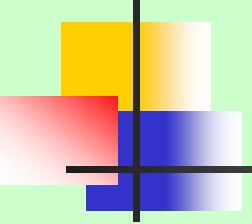
What makes a good interviewer? Part II



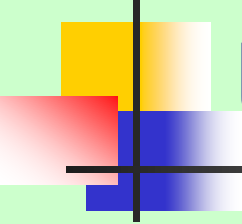
- RESEARCHING!
- Learn as much about the person and/or topic(s) as you can, so that you can ask intelligent questions.
- This includes noting unusual circumstances and events or people that the interviewee may have come into contact with.



- Let the interviewee know that you haven't just picked his or her name out of the phonebook by asking thoughtful questions.
- This will make him or her feel special as a unique contributor to your project.

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- Your investigation and preparation will enable you to guide the interviewee, if he or she strays off subject and...
 - help refresh his or her memory in the recall of historical events – dates, people, locations.





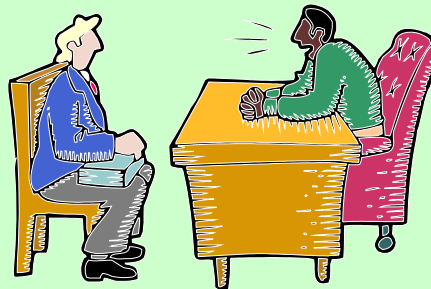
Use an outline...

- Be prepared with an outline, instead of a set of formal questions. This will allow you more flexibility (and more eye contact).
- But - be careful not to guide too much – so that you are not inserting your own biases or recollections into the interviewee's version of history.



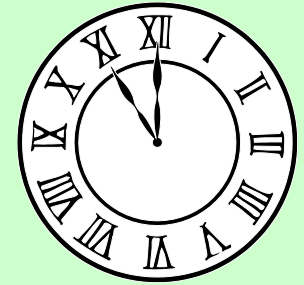
What makes a good interviewer? Part III

- ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS!
- Ask open-ended questions, which require more of an answer than “yes” or “no”.
- Start many of your sentences with “Why” “When” “How” “Where” and “What”.
- Try not to require long, complicated answers.





Take your time and no opinions, please!

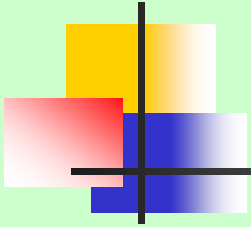


- Don't state your opinions in the leading questions. This tactic puts the interviewee in the position of having to agree or disagree with you.
- Ex: "I THINK Tom Jones was a real jerk." Instead use: "I heard that Tom Jones was difficult to work with or for."
- Ask one question at a time. Be silent - and - wait for the answer.



Begin with the familiar...

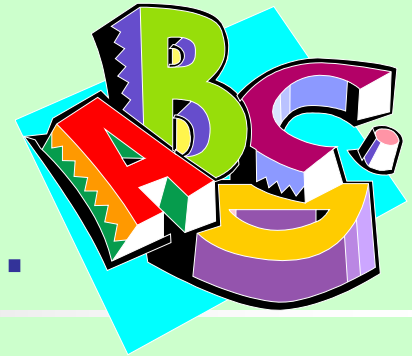
- Begin by asking brief questions and start with questions that are not controversial.
- A good place to begin is brief family history, such as the interviewee's youth and background.
- "What is your father/mother's name...?" "How many siblings do you have?" "Where were you born?"
- "How did you get to where you are living today?" "What jobs have you worked at?"
- "Do you have children?"



- It is sometimes difficult for an interviewee to describe a person.
- Ask about the person's appearance. From there, the interviewee is more likely to move into a character or relationship description (friend or foe).



Don't hesitate to ask...



- Be curious – ask the interviewee to explain things to you when he or she is finished with a thought.
- Ask for spellings on unusual names.
- Get a definition on words and phrases you aren't familiar with – or that you don't think the readers will be familiar with.
- Ask the interviewee to describe people and places, and physical things, if not a common item.

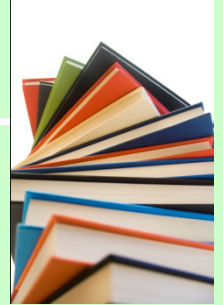
What is the focus of your interview?



- Depending on the focus of your interview (military experience, community member experience, socio-economic experiences, employee of specific entity, etc.), **begin with general questions and then, move onto the particular topic that you want to discuss.**



An oral history should be...



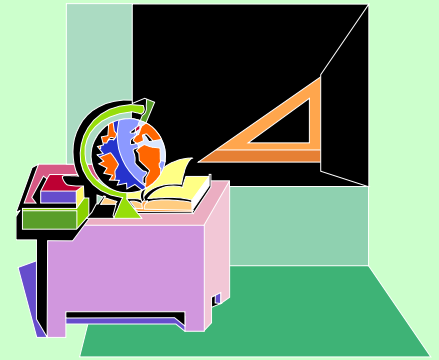
■ Like a book –

- **Introduction:** Use your initial questions to introduce the interviewee to the patron (reader) by providing general background information.
- **Middle:** This is the heart of the interview. You should explore the main topic or subject by centering questions around your interviewee's experiences within that particular environment – ask questions that you think the patron would want to know the answer.
- **Conclusion:** Talk with the interviewee about his or her “tomorrows” – what is going on today and what he or she hopes for or plans for the future.

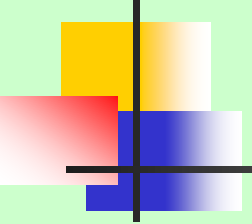


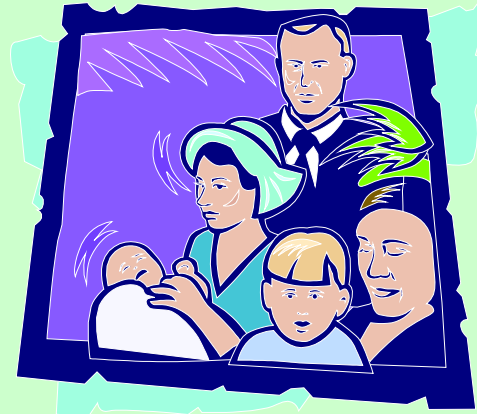


A list of possibilities...



- Childhood days – parents, siblings, children.
- Schooling.
- Occupations and work life.
- Religious experiences.
- Community events and involvement.
- Political involvement.
- Military or government service.
- Special hobbies: arts, music, sports, etc.

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- Travel experiences.
 - Memorable characters and/or incidents.
 - Marital experiences: first date, wedding plans, children, etc.

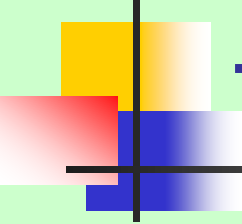




Think about your questions...

- Approach questions with “I understand/heard/read that” or “I’ve been told that...”
- Lead the interviewee into the event or person who you want to focus on, with a chronological time passage.
- Move from childhood to teen years, to early adulthood, and so on.



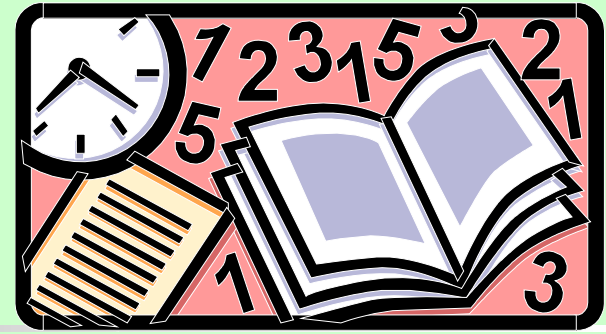


Questions can center around the following:

- the Great Depression,
- the First or Second World War,
- the Cold War,
- the Civil Rights/Women's Rights Movement,
- other socio, historical, economic periods experienced.



Establish data...

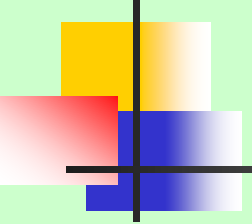


- Try to establish where the interviewee was or what his or her role was in the event.
- “Where were you at the time of the San Francisco earthquake?”
- “What did you do immediately after the earthquake?”
- “What are the most vivid memories that you have about that time?”
- “How did it affect the people who you knew?”



For non-specific events:

- Ask for descriptions and examples (scenarios) of how things were in the past -- ethnic cultures, religious practices, gender roles, children's roles, work places, and general everyday life in the home....
- Ask how things were politically, socially, or economically....

- 
-
- Don't worry if your questions aren't as beautifully phrased as you would like them to be.
 - BUT, don't be too informal – use proper grammar, above all!



What makes a good interviewer? Part IV



- CONCLUDING WITH A “THANK-YOU!”
- How you end an interview is just as important as how you begin it.
- Look for a natural wrap-up question – something that causes your interviewee to reflect on his or her life, to compare recent events with the past, and to draw conclusions overall.



A good time to remind...

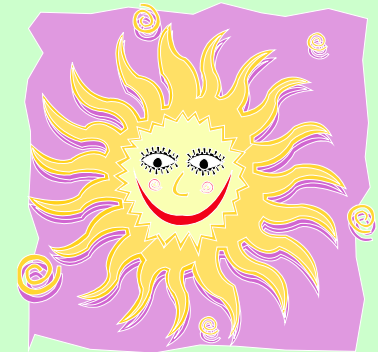


- Ask if there is anything else the interviewee would like to share.
- Let the interviewee know how important he or she is to your project and how much you appreciate the contribution and help.
- Ask if he or she would please sign the donor agreement (if not already done).
- Remind once again, that a transcript will be sent for editing. The interviewee will receive a final transcript for his or her records.



It's all about conduct. (Really)

- Remember that the interviewee is doing you a favor, so:
- Dress appropriately.
- Show up on time.
- Mind your manners.
- Always be polite.
- Send a thank-you letter afterwards.





The interviewer's ethics



- What are your ethical and legal responsibilities as an interviewer?
- **You must:**
- Explain the project and what topics/events/people you want to discuss.
- Explain the donor agreement and/or consent form thoroughly.
- Explain the right to edit the transcript.
- Be courteous and polite.

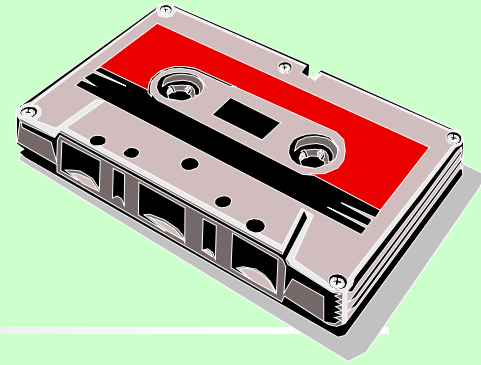


More ethics...

- Conduct your interview with sensitivity.
- Conduct your research with sensitivity.
- Remember to obtain specific permission before conducting interviews with people who knew/know the interviewee.
- Keep in mind that the interviewee is a person, with feelings and thoughts and there are some things that she/he may not want to discuss or have published.
- Not commit any crime relating to the oral history experience.



Use a recorder...

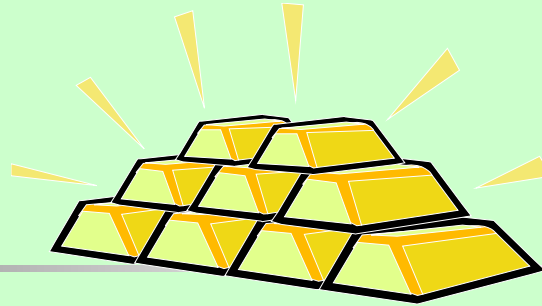


- Recording is the researcher's best means of self-protection against objections from an interviewee of how he/she was misquoted.
- Some interviewees may insist that a recorder be used to guard against being misquoted.
- An interviewee may decline to be recorded out of fear or vanity.

A little advice....



- (a) Be professional and conscious of your ethical and legal obligations,
- (b) Remember that the interviewee will believe that you know what you are doing, if you act accordingly (translation: don't be nervous and take the lead), and
- (c) Always remember that your interviewee is doing you a favor by conducting the interview.



- Perhaps it is here that the Golden Rule should most apply. Treat your interviewee as you would want to be treated. Your reputation and that of the institution that you represent, depends on it.

Now, What About The Transcript??



- “A transcript or transcription is a word-for-word written copy of a taped interview.”
- See the Library of Congress Veteran’s History Project at:
<http://www.loc.gov/vets/transcribe.html>
for information on transcribing and editing your work.



SOOOO LET'S TALK!!

- Any questions or comments?
- Who are you planning on interviewing?
- What kinds of questions could you ask?

