



Oral History Technical Tips

Equipment-The Basics

You probably already have everything you need to conduct a basic oral history. They can be recorded on something as simple as your smartphone or tablet. You can use your iPhone's built-in Voice Memos app or other voice recording app already installed on your smartphone.

There are certainly many ways to improve the sound and image quality (if you are using a video camera), but the most important part of an oral history is the content of your discussion. If you plan to do multiple oral histories to share with your family, you may want to invest in more specialized equipment than just a smartphone. Digital audio recorders, tripods, and external microphones are just a few things that can help make the sound and video quality of your recordings even better.

Before You Begin

- Test your equipment! Make sure the sound and/or image is adequate for your purposes. Practice recording with the equipment until you are comfortable using it.
- If using a smartphone, be sure to
 - Turn off Wi-fi to help prevent background noise/feedback.
 - Turn on Airplane Mode to prevent calls during a recording session.
 - Fully charge your phone or make sure it is plugged in to a power source.
 - Make sure you have some memory on your phone or in your cloud to save your oral history.
- Be sure your interview environment is quiet and free of distraction. Try to avoid places with lots of background noise or other people in the room. See StoryCorps' hints for creating a recording studio at home: <https://storycorpsorg-staging.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/Improve-Sound-Quality.pdf>

- Have proper lighting in your recording space if you are videotaping.
- Make a test recording with the interviewee and play it back to make sure equipment is working properly and there is not too much echoing or distracting background noise. You should also practice saving your test recording and decide where you will be saving your interview.

During the Interview

- Start the interview by identifying yourself, the person being interviewed, location, date, and a short reason why you are doing your oral history.
- Keep a notepad handy to write down follow-up questions or interesting details.
- Don't turn the recording on and off.
- Don't worry about pauses in the conversation. These can be edited out later.

After the Interview

- Back up your recordings! Make sure you have multiple copies that are secure and backed-up.
- Carefully name your files so they can be easily identified later. Including the name of the person being interviewed, the date, and even a subject keyword are helpful information to include in a file name. For example, an interview of Frank Lanterman about organ music recorded May 21, 1984 might have a file name like this: 1984.05.21_Frank_Lanterman_Organs.wav
- Whenever possible, save your files in a recognized archival format. For audio files, uncompressed .WAV and for video files, uncompressed .MOV. These types of files are easier to read by more kinds of applications and will be more accessible over time.