

HOW TO INTERVIEW A RELATIVE

(Adapted from <http://genealogy.about.com/cs/oralhistory/ht/interview.htm>)

1. Always call a few days ahead to make sure your relative is available. Decide together where and when you will conduct the interview.
2. Give your relative a copy of your interview questions in advance. This will allow him or her time to think and prepare a few answers.
3. While you will need notebook paper and pens or pencils, you may also want to think about recording the interview with a tape recorder or video camera. Ask permission before you set up a camera though! Some people are shy about being taped. Bring at least one completely empty notebook with you. Mark the date each time you start a new interview session.
4. Ask questions that need more than simple “yes” or “no” answers. You are seeking facts, feelings, stories, and descriptions.
5. Don’t push for answers if your relative is unwilling to share. Move on to another question.
6. Use your questions as a guide, but don’t be afraid to let your relative tell a story that doesn’t seem related to your questions. (You want to make sure you get the basic information you need for the assignment, however.) Don’t interrupt your relative to get back to your interview questions—wait until he or she is finished the story.
7. Try not to schedule the interview for more than two hours and remember to take breaks while you are talking. Offer refreshments if you are conducting the interview at your house.
8. When you are done, be sure to thank your relative for his or her time. Sharing a final copy of the narrative with your relative would also be a nice gesture.