

# Have That Talk Now!: Thoughts on Conducting an Effective Oral History Interview—RT1040

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## Overview:

Anyone can ask basic questions of their loved ones, but how can you make the best use of your time in an oral history interview after you hit the record button? This presentation offers strategies for preparing interview questions, encouraging more productive responses, using silence and follow-up questions, and organizing thoughts as the conversation unfolds. This discussion does not provide advice on the latest technology for recording interviews. Rather, it emphasizes that simple tools used in planned or impromptu situations can help you preserve the stories and voices of your loved ones.

### I) Why Should I Ask?

- a. Reasons for interviewing relatives about their lives
  - i. Learn new information
  - ii. Capture and preserve memories and details
  - iii. Capture and preserve voices and emotions
- b. The importance of authentic interest in another person's life and experiences

### II) What Should I Ask?

- a. How to construct open-ended questions
- b. Best words with which to start questions
- c. How to create focused and specific questions
- d. How and when to ask follow-up questions
- e. Listening well while preparing the next question
- f. Let chronology be your guide for filling in the gaps
- g. Helpful tips
  - i. Avoid two-part questions
  - ii. Start with easy-to-answer questions
  - iii. Press for details when needed
  - iv. Use visual items or heirlooms to prompt memories
  - v. Don't be afraid of a tangent
  - vi. When in doubt, don't interrupt
- h. What to ask at the end of an interview
- i. Tips for transcribing

**III) How Should I Ask?**

- a. Equipment and preparation
- b. Starting the interview—what to consider before you hit the record button
- c. How to proceed after you hit the record button
- d. Body language and silence
- e. Listening with interest and empathy

**IV) When Should I Ask?**

- a. Conduct interviews as soon as possible, even with those of younger ages

**More Examples:**

For more information about the storytelling offerings available through AncestryProGenealogists®—including family narratives, family history books, children’s books, oral history interviews, and more—visit [www.progenealogists.com/books-and-oral-histories](http://www.progenealogists.com/books-and-oral-histories).