

## 2022 ATTS ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWING GUIDELINES

1. An oral history interview is not about the interviewer. The focus should be on the interviewee and they should do most of the talking, with occasional questions from you to guide the interview.
2. Don't start the interview off with highly personal or sensitive questions. As the interviewee becomes more relaxed with the interview situation and with you, they will invariably open up more and will often be willing to discuss issues they would not have been willing to discuss at the beginning of the interview.
3. In general, think of the various topics of your interview as being structured like an inverted pyramid: broad, general questions first, followed by follow-up questions that ask for more detail.
4. Questions that begin "Tell me about . . ." or "Can you describe . . ." are good ways of stimulating the interviewee's memory.
5. Much of your role as interviewer is to be alert to what the interviewee does not say and to help them expand their story. Once an interviewee has finished answering a question, be ready to come in with follow-up questions for greater detail, context, clarification.
6. Remember that what you are after is the story of the interviewee's experience, not just facts or opinions. Try to get the specifics of their lived experience before you ask them to evaluate that experience.
7. Once the interviewee begins talking, the general rule is don't interrupt. Interruptions disrupt the flow of their narrative, break their concentration, and you may never get to hear the rest of the story.
8. Questions should be concise and focused. Try to be as precise as possible about what you want to know and ask only one question at a time. (Like most oral history skills, this takes a good deal of practice.) •
9. Yes-or-no questions are useful when you need to clarify a specific detail but should otherwise be avoided because they do not generate the rich, full answers that open-ended questions do. Similarly, avoid questions that are leading ("Don't you think that . . .") or either/or questions that allow for only a couple of options.

**Source: The UCLA Center for Oral History Research, 2014**