

# Student Guide to Conducting INTERVIEWS

Interviews are all around us— on television news shows, on the radio, and in magazines. There are two types of interviews that you can use with your History Day Project. One is considered a primary source and the other a secondary source.

## Oral History Interview

Oral history is about preserving the memories of someone who witnessed or lived through a particular event. Typically, an interviewer (you) asks questions about what the person experienced during the event and then records their responses. Since the person you are interviewing experienced the event, oral history interviews are a **primary source**.

**Example Question:** Why did you decide to become a Woman Air Force Service Pilot during World War II?

## Interview with an Expert

In this type of interview, you interview a person who is an expert on your chosen subject. Experts could be professors, authors, or historians. They can speak broadly about the topic and provide knowledgeable information due to their own research. Since an expert does not necessarily witness or live through the event, this type of interview is a **secondary source**.

**Example Questions:** In your opinion, how did this event effect the expansion of the United States?

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### *Before the Interview:*

Find background information on your topic so you can ask meaningful questions.  
Choose a person that has experience or expertise that relates to your topic.  
Prepare a list of potential questions to ask.  
Explain to the person you are interviewing why you would like to interview them so they are prepared.

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### *During the Interview:*

Record your interview by video recording, audio recording, or by writing down their response (which will take longer).  
Listen carefully to answers in order to ask follow up questions.  
Don't worry about pauses. Give the person you are interviewing plenty of time to think and fully respond to the question before moving on.

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### *After the Interview:*

Thank the person you interviewed for their time.  
Re-write any hurried notes to create a clear account of the interview.  
Show respect by **not** altering someone's words.

# WHERE? to Find People to Interview

## Oral History Interviews

If you have chosen a topic that occurred after 1940, then chances are there is someone around who can talk about it with you.

Even if your topic took place in another part of the world, it can be useful to interview someone who lives close to you about what they experienced or thought about the event or topic when it happened.

If possible, start with older family members.

You can also contact a local community organization where older people often volunteer. Libraries, historical societies, genealogy groups, and even garden clubs often have many older volunteers who may be interested in being interviewed.

A list of historical groups, by city, can be found on the Historical Society's of Michigan website:

<http://www.hsmichigan.org/resources/local-historical-organizations/>

## Interview with Experts

Finding someone to interview who is an expert on your topic doesn't need to be hard.

First, ask your teacher if they, or any other teachers in your school might know something about your topic for an interview.

Next, find out what community colleges or universities are near where you live. Visit the website and find the faculty directory for the History Department. Look to see what the professors in the department teach. Sometimes they are very specialized, which means that they spend a lot of time studying one small area of history.

Lastly, look to see what museums, libraries, and historical societies are in your area. You may be able to call or email them and ask if anyone involved with their organization has an interest in your topic. Many amateur historians are members of, or volunteer at, local historical museums and libraries.