

Creating Oral History Interview Questions

Digital Stories of Our Heroes

Conducting a successful interview is not difficult as long as you have prepared for it in advance. Good interview questions will guide the interviewee, encouraging the telling of stories about the hero's experiences as well as information on how those experiences influenced the hero's life.

1. Research the background of the interviewee and the events the hero experienced.
2. When interviewing veterans, remember that they may not necessarily know famous battles or locations by the names used in history books or websites; to jog their memories, be prepared to rephrase your questions or to provide further explanations.
3. Send the interviewee a letter explaining your reason for the interview and what he/she can expect during the interview; include a biographical data form to gain basic information about the individual and any other forms that may be needed.
4. Consider providing the interviewee with a list of questions in advance. This can help the hero to prepare his/her thoughts, ideas, and stories.
5. Create questions that will require detailed answers and avoid questions that require only *Yes* or *No* responses.
6. Be sure that the questions cover the *five Ws and the H* (who, what, when, where, why and how).
7. Make sure the first few questions are easy, to help "warm up" the interviewee as well as the interviewer(s) and make everyone more comfortable.
8. Break your questions up into topics, which will help the interviewee to remember experiences; a scattered approach to questioning can confuse both the interviewee and the interviewer(s).
9. Hold a practice interview to practice asking follow-up questions when appropriate.