

## Composing questions

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Compose questions on the spot from your topic list, adapting the questions to the interviewee's individual experience with the topic.

◆ *Ask open-ended questions.*

Tell me about . . .

Why . . . ? Why not . . . ? How . . . ?

◆ *Probe for details.*

Describe . . . Explain . . .

How often . . .

Tell me more about . . .



◆ *Avoid leading questions* that reveal your biases and suggest you have already formed an opinion of what the answer might be.

Not: That neighborhood was a hard place to grow up in, I'll bet.

*But:* Tell me how you felt about the place where you grew up.

Not: Sandtown was settled in the early 1900s, so let's start your story there.

*But:* Why did your family come to live in Sandtown?

Not: I guess your family, being Mexican, was always Catholic.

*But:* Tell me about the role of religion in your family life.

◆ *Restate or summarize.*

You said . . . Tell me more about that.

Let me say that back to you and see if I understand. You said . . .

◆ *Ask for definitions and clarifications.*

Tell me what . . . means.

What is . . . ?

I know what . . . is, but future generations may not. Please tell me what a . . . was and how it was used.

◆ *Follow up.*

What else . . . ? Who else . . . ? What other reasons . . . ?

◆ *Turn things around.*

Some people say . . . What do you think about that?

Also,

*Ask one question at a time.*

*Be prepared to get off the topic, then gently bring the narrator back to the subject.*

*Use the silent question. Keep quiet and wait.*

*Close with a thought question.*

*End with an expression of appreciation.*