Making contact & setting up

Arranging the interview

 mostra contact persons whom you wish to interview, make clear to them how their names were obtained and explain your interest in them. Establish at the very outset that you feel that their lives and experiences are important. Explain the specific project for which you are conducting the interviews and be prepared to answer questions.

Many oral historians introduce the project and extend the invitation first by mail and follow up with a telephone call. Then, when contact is made, the narrator will be more clear about who is calling and what is wanted, and an appointment can be made.

Accommodate the narrator’s convenience when setting a time and place for the interview. The narrator’s home or place of business may or may not furnish the privacy and quiet required for recording the interview. Have in mind a suitable alternative location.

Make clear to narrators from the start that the interview will be recorded and that they will be asked to sign a legal-release agreement form.

Setting up on location

Demonstrate respect for the narrator. Show up on time, be polite. Allow time to answer questions and engage in friendly conversation before and after the interview.

Interview only one person at a time, if at all possible.

Be very familiar with your recording equipment. The less attention you need to focus on your equipment, the more you will have to concentrate on your narrator.

Be flexible with your equipment so that the narrator can sit wherever is most comfortable. Ask permission to rearrange light furniture, if necessary, so that the microphone and recorder are well placed between you and the narrator.

Bring extension cords if you plan to use A/C current. If you must rely on battery power, have extra batteries. A small, portable battery tester can save an interview.

Arrange as quiet a spot as possible. Be aware of extraneous noises that will be picked up by the microphone—chiming clocks, humming refrigerators, clattering dishes, et cetera—and request permission to make changes to minimize background noise.

Set up your recorder so that you can easily view recording levels and, when using analog tape, so that you reach the machine to turn over or change tapes.

Place the microphone, whether internal or external, between you and the narrator. Test the microphone before beginning the interview. Record both your voices, play back the test recording, and adjust the microphone placement and recorder settings as needed.