

Critiquing & citing oral histories

Analyze the content of an interview.

Like any other primary document, an oral history must be explored for validity and accuracy. Listen to the sound recording or read the transcript and ask yourself:

- ◆ What are the most important points made in this interview?
- ◆ What patterns, key phrases, themes emerge from the stories told?
- ◆ How does the interviewee express his/her feelings about the topic? Listen not only to what is said but how it is said.
- ◆ What do these stories teach me about the topic?
- ◆ How are the interviewee's stories like and different from other versions of the topic? Why? What does this interview tell me that the other sources left out?
- ◆ What other questions might this interviewee be able to answer about the topic?
- ◆ Based on what this interview uncovers, what additional research do I need to do to learn more about the topic or verify these stories?

Evaluate your recording and interviewing techniques.

Listen to your recording and ask yourself:

- *Is the technical quality good?*
- *Is the audio clear? volume strong?*
- *Is there background noise?*
- *Is there internal machine noise?*

Listen to your recording and ask yourself:

- *Did I ask open-ended questions? leading questions? good follow-up questions?*
- *What did I learn about doing interviews from this experience?*
- *What should I do differently next time?*

Cite use of oral history sources.

Oral histories are usually considered unpublished primary materials. Bound, paginated transcripts deposited in an archives may be considered limited publications and such citations may include page numbers. In citing oral histories, provide sufficient information to lead the interested reader to the physical location of the cited source: interviewee name (as author); interviewer name; date and place of interview; type of interview material (i.e., audio cassette; open reel tape; compact disc, CD-ROM, DVD, transcript, etc.); and physical location of materials.

Examples of notes (N) and bibliographic forms (B):

For recordings:

N 1. Albert Harry Reed, interview by Stephen Sloan, October 9, 2007, in Waco, Texas, compact disc, Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX.

B Reed, Albert Harry. Interview by Stephen Sloan. October 9, 2007, in Waco, Texas. Compact disc. Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX.

For online transcripts:

N 2. Lonnie Belle Hodges, interview by Vivienne Malone-Mayes, August 30, 1990, in Waco, Texas, transcript, Baylor University Institute for Oral History, Waco, TX, available online at <http://www.baylor.edu/transcripts/HodgesLB>.

B Hodges, Lonnie Belle. Interview by Vivienne Malone-Mayes. August 30, 1990, in Waco, Texas. Transcript. Baylor University Institute for Oral History, Waco, TX. <http://www.baylor.edu/transcripts/HodgesLB> (accessed June 10, 2007).

For print transcripts deposited in an archives:

N 3. Abner Anglin Hyden, "Oral Memoirs of Abner Anglin Hyden," interview by Lois E. Myers on January 20, 1998, in Waco, Texas (Waco, TX: Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 2001), 22.

B Hyden, Abner Anglin. "Oral Memoirs of Abner Anglin Hyden." Interviewed by Lois E. Myers on six occasions from 20 January to 19 August, 1998, in Waco, Texas. Baylor University Institute for Oral History, Waco, TX.