

Composing questions

Compose questions on the spot from your topic list, adapting the questions to the narrator'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 loaded and leading questions** that reveal your biases and suggest you have already formed an opinion of what the answer might be.

Not: Wasn't Sandtown a poor, hard place to grow up in?
But: Tell me how you felt about the place where you grew up.

Not: You all moved to Sandtown because it was the only place you could afford, right?
But: Why did your family come to live in Sandtown?

Not: I assume your family, being Mexican, was always Catholic, wasn't it?
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.