Arranging the Interview

1. In contacting the interviewees, make clear the purpose of the project and why his or her name was selected. Be prepared to explain any future uses of the names. If the recording is to be placed in a repository, the interviewees should be aware of that fact.

2. Select a time of day and location that is best for the interviewee.

3. Become familiar with your recorder, be sure it is fully charged. Have equipment organized: digital recorder, laptop or tablet, cords, batteries, note pad, pen, and list of questions.

Setting Up

1. Be flexible enough with your equipment that the interviewee can sit wherever he or she is most comfortable.

2. Choose as quiet a spot as possible. Be aware of the noise that will be picked up by the microphone—chiming clocks, phone, etc.

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

4. Have the recorder conveniently located near you so that you can easily and without fuss turn over or change tapes. Best results are obtained when the microphone is placed between the interviewer and the respondent and turned to face a point midway between them.

The Interview Process

1. Always state at the beginning of the interview the name of the interviewer, interviewee, date and where the interview is taking place. This can be done before arriving at the interview.

2. Always identify as fully as possible any other persons who make comments during the interview. If this is not done at the beginning of the recording, add it when the person comments.

3. Ask open-ended questions, waiting to see where they lead. Tailor your reactions and follow-up questions to the responses of your interview.

4. Avoid questions that can be answered with a yes or a no.

5. Ask only one question at a time.
6. Avoid too much "preordering" of the material you wish to include in the interview. Be prepared to let the train of memory association to run its course, even if it means ignoring your outline to follow new avenues of inquiry.

7. Make notation of any unusual names or places. At the end of the interview, ask for correct spellings.

8. Describe gestures when appropriate-i.e., when the interviewee refers to length, distance, size, directions, etc.

9. Be constantly curious. Listen carefully for key points that need clarification and elaboration.

10. Do not neglect to question the interviewee about information that may be familiar to you.

11. Do not feel compelled to interrupt silences. Give the interviewee time to fully answer each question or finish a train of thought.

12. The interview is not the time to air your personal views on international politics or to tell your life story. Participate in the interview by means of silent encouragement, nods, smiles, etc.

13. Try to avoid "off the record" information or switching the recorder off and on.

*Courtesy*

Be aware that you are not only taking the interviewee's time but the interview can have emotional overtones. This is especially true of older people. Take a few minutes at the beginning of the interview to establish rapport and take time after the interview to thank the interviewee. It is not unusual for interviews to create emotional responses and the interviewee may need to spend a few minutes of general talk (after the recorder has been turned off) to come back to the present.