

Understanding Events Through Oral History

Preparing good questions in advance is at the heart of oral histories. There are several different kinds of questions to ask during an interview: questions about the **person** being interviewed, questions about his or her **experiences with other people** and **things** during the event, question about his or her feelings about what happened, questions about the importance of the event to him or her.

Your questions should be **simply worded** and **open-ended**. This means they shouldn't be answered with a simple "yes" or "no" response. Instead of a question such as, "Were you working during the event?" ask "Explain what you were doing during the event." Use words like "explain," "describe," "tell about...," "what were you thinking about...," "when did you know...," "what are your memories of...," etc.

To prepare for conducting your oral history, write out questions in the following areas in the space provided. (Use extra paper as necessary.)

Develop questions about the person.

Name: _____ ?

Occupation or school attended: _____ ?

Location during the event: _____ ?

Activity during the event: _____ ?

Develop questions about his or her experiences with people and things during the event.

Description of the place: _____ ?

Description of people nearby: _____ ?

Description of events: _____ ?

Description of other people's reactions: _____ ?

Description of the interviewee's reaction: _____ ?

Develop questions concerning his or her feelings about the event.

What: _____ ?

Why: _____ ?

How: _____ ?

Importance of the event: _____ ?