

## ORAL HISTORY TOOL KIT

*"Oral history collects memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews."*

- Donald Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide*, 2003

Oral history is a way to collect information about the past from observers and participants in that past. DOVE offers the resources in this kit to teachers and historians who want to document the history of school desegregation in Virginia by interviewing those who lived it. If you use this kit's process and forms, the histories you collect may be added to the historic record through the online DOVE Collection of oral histories.

If your students will conduct the interviews, lead them through mock sessions so they can practice completing required forms, using the recording equipment, and asking open-ended questions. Show them how to pose follow-up questions that help the storyteller offer details.

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### PLANNING THE INTERVIEW

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#### 1. Gather background information

- a) Learn about school desegregation in Virginia and in your local area.
- b) Learn about the people you will interview.

#### 2. Formulate questions

- a) Use open-ended questions that begin "why, how, where, what kind of" -- avoid yes/no answers.
- b) Avoid leading or prejudicial questions.
- c) Sample questions are available on the "Cue Card for Facilitator" form [[link](#)]
- d) Practice asking the questions. Plan for possible follow-up questions that will help the storyteller tell a more complete story.

#### 3. Plan interview

- a) Contact storyteller. Ask permission to conduct the interview and explain its purpose. Agree on location and time.
- b) Send confirmation letter with Intake Form and Release Form.

- c) Make sure you have the appropriate recording equipment ([see below](#)) and that it is in working order. It is best to use two means of recording with audio and/or video. This ensures that at least one recording will be complete and audible.

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## CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW

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Qualities of a good interviewer include empathy, flexibility, respect, and objectivity. Careful listening is critical.

*"In order to handle the problem of interview bias, you must explore your own assumptions, values, and attitudes. An interview does not call for an impossible neutrality. It does demand special self-awareness and self-discipline."* (UNC Southern Oral History Program, [A Practical Guide to Oral History](#), page 6)

### 1. Before Recording:

- a) Put the storyteller at ease by ensuring him or her that there are no "wrong" responses.
- b) Remind the storyteller of the purpose of the interview and the procedure you will follow.
- c) Assist the storyteller with completing the Intake Form if they haven't already done so. Be sure both storyteller and facilitator sign the Release Form.
- d) Make an effort to minimize all extraneous noise and distractions.

### 2. Recording:

- a) Once the recorder is running, read the introduction statement on the Cue Card so that the recording includes the context for the interview -- mentioning DOVE, the date and place of the interview, and your name as facilitator.
- b) During the interview, focus only on the storyteller.
- c) State your questions as directly as possible.
- d) Don't let periods of silence fluster you.
- e) Avoid interrupting the storyteller. Rather, jot down a quick note that will remind you to ask follow-up questions at an opportune moment.
- f) You may need to stimulate the storyteller's memory or supply key facts or dates learned from your background research.
- g) Be respectful of the interviewee. Use body language [rather than verbal cues] to show you are interested in what he or she has to say. Remember, the interviewee is giving you the gift of his or her memories and experiences.
- h) At the end of the interview, thank the storyteller for sharing his or her experiences.

(adapted from 10 Tips for Interviewers [UNC Southern Oral History Program](#))

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## AFTER THE INTERVIEW

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1. Send a thank-you to the storyteller.
2. Transcribe audio if possible, typing the exact words of the interview into a document.
3. Make a copy of the recording, transcription, and Intake and Release forms.
4. Send audio/video file, transcription, audio file, original Intake Form, and original Release Form/Deed of Gift to:  
Karen Vaughan  
Digital Initiatives Librarian  
Old Dominion University Libraries  
4427 Hampton Blvd.  
Norfolk, VA 23529

At the same time, send an email to [kvaughan@odu.edu](mailto:kvaughan@odu.edu) with a CC to [dove.virginia@gmail.com](mailto:dove.virginia@gmail.com), to let us know the materials are on the way.

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## FORMS

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Confirmation Letter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tailor this letter for the individual storyteller and send it as a follow-up to your initial contact. Enclose the Oral History Intake Form and the Release Form/Deed of Gift. Ask the storyteller to complete these two forms and bring them to the interview.</li></ul>
Intake Form	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Required for each storyteller. Have extra blank copy ready in case storyteller forgets to bring the completed form.</li></ul>
Release Form / Deed of Gift	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Required for each storyteller. Have extra blank copy ready in case storyteller forgets to bring the completed form.</li></ul>
Interview Checklist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This optional form will help you track all materials if you are conducting multiple interviews.</li></ul>
Cue Card for Facilitator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Includes introduction statement for facilitator to record and offers suggested interview questions. May be adjusted as appropriate for each interview. Only the facilitator needs a copy of this.</li></ul>

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## EQUIPMENT

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It is always a good idea to have an experienced technician available to record the interview. Using two means of recording with audio and/or video will ensure that at least one recording will be complete and audible. Be sure to test the interview equipment long before the interview, so that any adjustments can be made.

Make sure you have fresh, extra batteries or a place to plug in equipment.

Good sound is essential to a good listening experience and a good transcription. Minimize extraneous sounds during the interview. A good external mic can greatly improve sound quality.

**Audio interviews:**

Use a digital audio recorder with external microphone if possible

Acceptable file formats: wav, mp3, acc

**Video interviews:**

Use a digital video camera if possible

Acceptable file formats: avi, mp4, mov

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## RESOURCES

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[Principles and Best Practices](#) (Oral History Association)

[Southern Oral History Program - SOHP How To Guide](#) (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill)

[Introduction to Oral History Manual](#) (Baylor University Institute for Oral History)

[Oral History Philosophy, Procedures and Evaluation](#) (Columbia University)

[Oral History Workshop](#) (University of Florida)