

## THE ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

- I. Choose an interviewee who is interesting, "a good talker".
- II. Arrange an appointment, a time and place that is comfortable and convenient to them. Remember, they are doing you a favor.
- III. Write questions before the interview
  - A. Fact Questions: 5W & H
  - B. Story Questions: Tell me about \_\_\_\_\_ .
- IV. Double check equipment
  - A. Pen and Paper
  - B. Tapes, batteries, and recorder
  - C. Camera
- V. Be prompt and courteous. Relax; the more relaxed and at ease you are the more relaxed they will be.
- VI. Start with Fact Questions to get a little basic information and to warm them up, then ask story questions to get the His-story or Her-story of their life. Follow-up with a few fact questions to clarify the details.
- VII. Take good notes, occasionally ask for spelling and further clarification, but do not ask them to repeat themselves too often. This can be seen as rude.
- VIII. Make up questions as you go: Tell me more about \_\_\_\_\_ .
- IX. Thank them graciously.
- X. Review your notes and take more notes *immediately* after the interview.
- XI. Piece together a story: (See Other Side.)
  - A. Characters-allow readers to get to know 3 dimensional people.
  - B. Setting - Create a clear picture in a distinct time period.
  - C. Plot - Build the sequence of events around one key happening.
- XII. You may need to do a follow-up interview to clarify a few details.
- XIII. Send them a copy of your story with your thank you note.



## TURNING NOTES INTO A STORY

- I. What is the key event?  
Choose one key event, climactic happening and build the story around it.
- II. Who is telling the story?  
Choose a point of view: 1st, 2nd, or 3rd person?  
Find a voice, a distinct persona.
- III. Who is in the story?  
Write at least two sentences defining each character:
  - A. Description - You can tell a lot about a person by what they wear, what they look like, their make-up, hair cut, eye color. Focus on details.
  - B. Action - You can tell a lot about a person by what they do. How do they treat others? Don't tell me they are nice or mean, show me. Action speaks louder than words.
  - C. Dialogue - You can tell a lot about a person by what they say and how they say it. What is their vocabulary? Tone of Voice? Use quotation marks: He said, "Oh, Please don't ...."
- IV. Where does the story take place?  
Write three sentences about the setting.
  - A. Place - in the world, in the country, in the house. Be specific. Not just any apartment, but the third floor of an old brownstone building with a spiral staircase that squeaked about every fourth step so you always knew when someone was coming.
  - B. Time - of day, of year, in history. Midnight when the wind howled and the sky was glowing with strange lights behind the clouds is very different from a sunny spring morning with bird songs and the fragrance of wildflowers mingling in the air.
  - C. Use all of your senses - sounds, smells tastes, textures and sights are what bring the setting to life!
- V. What happens in this story? Outline your plot:
  1. Beginning Introduction
  2. Problem Clues, but don't give it away
  3. Middle Climax
  4. Solution Twists and turns
  5. End Resolution(Introduce concepts of Foreshadowing, Suspense and Irony.)
- VI. What did / could you / we learn from this story?  
Make the personal universal. Put the story into historical perspective. Look at the big picture. Don't teach us something, write the story in a way that allows us to discover something. Create hooks that we as readers/listeners can relate to ... an "Ah, yes, I know" experience.
- VII. Use the sentences you have written in response to these questions as the outline of your story. Rewrite your notes into a historically accurate, adventurous tale! Send me a copy and I may use it on my web page!