

Interview Tips

Taking the time to do an interview with a loved one, family member, or friend is a unique opportunity to remember someone or something important in someone else's life. As a general guideline, we believe that allocating 40 minutes for each interview represents a good amount of time to capture a person's story. It may seem like a long time, but it can go faster than you think! Here are some tips for Storytellers, Interviewers, and Facilitators to keep in mind when preparing for an interview.

Before the interview, **ask your participants** if there's anything they do or don't want to talk about. This is a great opportunity to remind Participants that they are in control of their own stories and that you're there to listen.

Choose about 10 main questions for your interview. This will give you a broad outline of what you hope to cover in your interview and the directions in which you might want your interview to go.

From this list, **choose the first question** to get you started. You may want to begin at the beginning, with "Where were you born?" or jump to a specific time or topic in that person's life that most interests you, such as military service or parenthood.

Start with open-ended questions without yes or no answers, letting the Storyteller steer you toward what is most important to him or her. These questions should start with phrases like, "Tell me about..." or "What was it like..." or "How did you feel when..."

Be aware of your **body language** throughout the interview. Showing Participants that you're genuinely interested helps them open up and makes them feel confident enough to indulge in the details.

Keep in mind that future listeners may not be familiar with specific people and places you mention. **Set up context** and background for the interview where needed with questions such as "How did you get there?" "Who was Uncle Bill?" and/or "Why was he such an influence on you?"

Questions that **encourage vivid details** can be surprising and make the interview special. Good examples include questions like, "Can you paint a picture in words of your childhood neighborhood?" "What did Uncle Bill look like?" or "What are some images that stand out when you think about your grandfather?"

Be prepared to ask **follow-up questions** or veer from your planned question list if you're curious about something. A memory about work could be followed up with a question such as, "What are you most proud of in your career?" You may hear stories you've never heard before.

Think of your interview as a conversation. While rehearsing or writing out your answers may help in preparing for your interview, we also recommend thinking of this as a time to have a meaningful conversation. Relax and let your words come naturally.

Don't hesitate to **contribute a favorite story** about the Storyteller or memories you share together as you go along. This interview can be a time to tell your interview partner how much he or she means to you, or share something you've always wanted to tell your partner.

As you near the end of your interview, **think of some reflective questions as time wraps up.** Examples might include, "Is there anything you want to talk about that I didn't ask you?" "Looking back, what were your happiest times?" "What advice would you give to me about being a parent?" or "What are your hopes for the future?"

Remember that **the Storyteller and Interviewer model is a fluid model**, and both Participants can take turns asking each other questions.

Most of all, **relax and have fun.** Enjoy the opportunity to share the stories, thoughts, and the closeness that can come with this experience.