



Writing Effective Interview Questions

Great interviews begin with great questions! Before your oral history interview, prepare a list of questions to ask your narrator. It is important to write a variety of questions to help you gather basic information, specific details, and unforgettable stories. Read about the different types of oral history interview questions below:

| THREE LEVELS OF QUESTIONS | | |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| Level | Description | Examples |
| 1 | General questions that have a specific factual answer. These tend to be “safer” warm-up questions that require a short answer. | Where did you grow up? How long have you been living in San Francisco? What is your occupation? Where did you go to school? |
| 2 | More specific questions that are also more open-ended. These tend to be the heart of the interview and will draw out the stories/details you want to capture. | How have you been affected by gentrification? What effects of gentrification do you see in your community? Describe the work you have done in the community around gentrification. Can you tell me about a specific time when you saw the effects of gentrification? |
| 3 | Very specific questions that narrow the focus to a particular instance or event. You may build off prior knowledge of your narrator to form these questions. | Can you tell me more about when you ____? How did _____ make you feel? Why did you _____? Can you give me an example of _____? |

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

Sometimes the most powerful questions you can ask during an interview are the ones you didn't prepare in advance. As you listen to your narrator during the interview, you may hear something you would really like to go back or hear more about. Not only will your narrator appreciate hearing details of their story reflected back to them, but this also creates an opportunity for students to “go deeper” with their questions. For example:

“You have mentioned your experiences with _____ a few minutes ago. Could you describe the details of that experience?”

More Follow-Up Question Starters

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <i>Can you say more about...?</i> | <i>Can give an example of...?</i> | <i>What did you mean by...?</i> |
| <i>How did you feel about...?</i> | <i>Why do you think...?</i> | <i>What happened when...?</i> |



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Now it's your turn to generate questions for your oral history interview! In the left column, add four topics you know you'd like to discuss with your narrator. For each topic, practice writing a Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3 question. You may use the examples on the previous page to help you, but remember that there are endless ways of asking questions. Follow your curiosity and use your imagination!

| | Level 1 Question | Level 2 Question | Level 3 Question |
|---------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|---|
| Topic: Hometown | Where did you grow up? | Can you describe your hometown? | Can you give an example of a memorable day growing up in your hometown? |
| Topic: | | | |
| Topic: | | | |
| Topic: | | | |
| Topic: | | | |