

Oral History Kits

You can check out an oral history kit that contains a guide with recommended questions, a recorder, and other materials to help you conduct and record an interview. To use the kits you need a plan for what to do with the interview and understand the legalities involved, such as getting permission to use the recording. Once you've completed the interview you can use the recordings to create a written story, a digital project or donate them to the library's collection for preservation.

Details

- The kits are located at the Topeka Room desk.
- It is best to check the online catalog for availability and reserve a kit, but a reservation isn't required.
- The kit includes a guide with questions to help you get started and advice on preparing for the interview, including doing preliminary research on your topic and the interviewee.
- [Learn more about the library's oral history kits](#) and how to use them.

Interview Preparation

The key to a good interview is asking **open-ended questions** (e.g., "Tell me about..." or "What was it like...") to encourage detailed narratives rather than simple yes/no answers.

Example interview questions

- What is your earliest memory?
- What was it like growing up in Topeka? (or wherever they are from)
- What are some of the biggest changes you've seen in our community over the years?
- What are some of your proudest moments?

Interview Themes

Themes for oral history questions can range from individual life experiences to significant historical events, allowing for a rich and personalized narrative. Here are some examples.

Personal & Family History

- Childhood memories: Early recollections, favorite toys, games and friends
- Family background: Stories about ancestors, immigration experiences, family traditions and heirlooms
- Significant relationships: Stories about meeting a spouse, raising children or mentors
- Personal milestones: Major life decisions, proudest achievements, greatest challenges or lessons learned

Community & Neighborhood

- Local environment: Descriptions of the neighborhood, community changes over time, favorite local spots and community events or traditions
- Community figures: Stories about notable local people or leaders

Education & Career

- School experiences: Memories of teachers, favorite subjects and extracurricular activities
- Work life: First jobs, career paths and the impact of work on their life

Historical & Societal Events

- Major life events: How large-scale events like wars, natural disasters or pandemics affected their lives
- Social change: Experiences with civil rights movements, gender roles or other societal shifts
- Technology changes: Memories of the first time seeing a radio, television or computer and how technology has changed their life
- Local history (e.g., Topeka specific): Experiences with significant local history, such as the Brown v. Board of Education

General Reflection

- Wisdom and legacy: Advice for future generations or how they would like to be remembered
- Hopes and dreams: What they wanted to be when they grew up versus how their life turned out

What can I do with my interview?

- You can use your interview to create written stories, audio projects or digital content.
- You can also donate your completed interview to the library's collection for long-term preservation and access (once this option becomes available).

What legalities are involved in collecting and using oral histories?

- Before you start recording, make sure you get permission from the interviewee to record their story.
- You will also need to sign a release form, which is included in the kit. All forms are available in the Oral History Kit Forms section of [Popular Tools](#).

Can I get writing and publishing help?

- The library offers a variety of resources that will help with writing and publishing your story.
- This includes workshops, one-on-one consultations and online resources.
- Contact the Topeka Room directly for more information on how to get started.