

### *Oral History Question Formats*

The purpose of this page is to provide help in generating questions for your oral history interview. You know the narrator best. It is up to you to spend time before the interview thinking of intelligent and insightful questions. Organize the questions in a linear order or in a way that makes the most sense. The goal is to trigger memories that are relevant to why you are interviewing the narrator.

### Question Formats

The way you word a question will affect the answer you receive. Ask **open-ended** questions that require **more** than a one-word answer. If you must ask a closed question, follow it with a question that has the narrator expand on the subject.

#### Start questions with:

- Tell me about...
- Describe...
- What do you remember about...
- Explain...
- Expand...

#### Closed Questions

- Did you go to college?

#### Open-Ended Questions

- What do you remember about attending college?

Avoid leading questions. These are questions which suggest a particular answer, or which influence the narrator to answer in a certain way.

#### Leading Question

I understand Professor Snail was a great lecturer. What do you think?

#### Non-Leading Question

What can you tell me about Professor Snail?

Consider outlining the topics you wish the narrator to discuss, and build your questions around those. The following is an example of how your interview questions can be organized. You may have several topics you wish to cover in your interview, but flip-flopping between topics may disrupt the flow of your interview.

Keep in mind there is no such thing as a perfect interview, and your narrator may jump back and forth because that is how they recall things. Do not get frustrated when this occurs, and be prepared with a pen and paper to note follow up questions. Your questions are not a set script during the interview.

### **Classes**

Describe the lecture halls? Where did you sit? Tell me about your favorite class? Describe the way the Professor lectured? How did other students think about that class? How did you hear if class was cancelled? Explain how you did your homework? How many classes did you take in a semester?

### **Campus**

Describe the size of campus? Was there a library? How long did it take to get across campus? Where was the cafeteria? Describe the campus at night? What services did the University provide for the students?

### **Housing**

Where did you live while attending the University? Describe your living situation? How did you get to campus? Do you recall where other students lived? When did you move to campus? How often did you return home? Who was your neighbor?

### **Finances**

How did you pay for school? How much did books cost? Were you working while attending the University? Expand? How did other students pay for school? What other supplies did you need for class? Where did you buy your clothes?

### **Social Life**

Where did students go in their free time? Describe a typical Friday night? What music did you listen to? What event do you remember most while attending the University? Describe the atmosphere of off-campus events? What do you remember about sporting events?