

## Handout 31: Practice Interview

*Session: Practice Interview*

**Length:** 15 minutes

**Subject:** The Lebanese Civil War(1975-1990)

The purpose of this assignment is to get a feel of the interview experience in a practice setting. We want to get a sense of the question-answer flow that is at the heart of the oral history interview. This practice interview does not require all the paperwork that is part of the pre-interview process – the informed consent, the personal background sheet, the interview rough outline – for a full-fledged oral history interview. Our purpose here is to record a conversation with someone about the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) to “get our feet wet”.

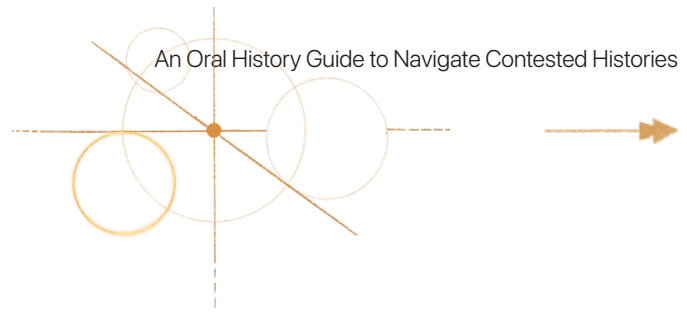
For the sake of practice, let’s imagine that our research question is: how did the war affect the everyday life of ordinary people?

At the same time, this practice interview does require:

- the **recording** of the conversation/interview.
- some form of **audio label** (today is March 23, 2021 and I am Fadi Arnaout meeting today with Dima Fadel on the subject of the Lebanese Civil War) to introduce the interview (remember the future listener is the audience).
- a logical sequence of questioning that uses different types of questions:
  - Warm-up questions
  - Specific questions
  - Open-ended questions
  - Follow up questions
- Summary question at the end: “Is there anything you’d like to add that I didn’t ask?”
- Maintaining eye-contact and full attentiveness towards your narrator.
- Your heartfelt thank you.

Don’t worry about making mistakes or “messing up.” We all make mistakes, stumble, stutter, and get nervous. But you may find that if you try to lose yourself in the visualization of your narrator’s description, your jitters might subside as the conversation picks up its own flow. If you don’t quite get the picture or understand the idea your narrator is explaining, it’s okay to ask them to repeat or clarify what they said because you didn’t really understand the context – who, and when was this, etc. There’s nothing wrong with asking for clarification, actually that is exactly what you should do. There are no such things as stupid questions; you are curious, you want to learn what your narrator experienced. In general, the more practice interviewing you do with narrators or with your peers, the better prepared you will be for your oral history interview.





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Some ideas for your first interview on this subject:

- How did the war affect the neighborhood?
- What was going to school like during the war?
- The worst and the best memories of the war.
- How did the war affect the family – visits, departures, celebrations, weddings, childbirths, funerals?
- How did the war affect playing sports, going to the beach, going out at night, going to religious services – community and social activities?
- How did the war change your life?

Feedback on your practice interview will be based on the following criteria:

- **Form and structure** (introduction, sound, clarity, overall flow)
- **Relationship between interviewer and narrator** (respect, empathy, interaction)
- **Questioning style** (the variety of questions used)
- **Overall information shared during the interview**

