

## Handout 34: Creating an Historical Source

### Session: Preparing for the Interview

One element of the oral history process is to contribute to the historical record by creating sources. But for sources to be useful, valuable, and reliable, they need to be contextualized. This contextualization, even in the basic terms of names and dates, is critical to both their sustainability and accessibility as sources that other researchers can use for their own future research and for posterity.

So how does an Oral History Interview become an historical source? In simple terms, it means making sure that your interview can stand on its own, so that anyone could listen to it, and understand it, understand the narrator, the time this interview was conducted, and know its purpose. It also means we have all relevant information and material accompanying the interview for it to be archived.

### I. Preservation

Preservation has to do with making sure the material is digitized and copied. As soon as you have concluded your interview and left the home or office of your narrator, review the recording to make sure it was recorded properly. Then save the recording onto your computer and keep a separate copy on a USB or a hard-drive. Better yet, as an additional precaution send a copy to a friend or a class-mate for extra safe-keeping. **Make sure to have at least two copies of the recording** following the LOCKSS principle: Lots of Copies Keep Stuff Safe.<sup>1</sup>

For the purpose of consistency, each interview should be immediately labeled and saved in the following format: lastnamefirstinitialdd/mo/yr. For example, if your narrator's name is Roula Abdallah and you interviewed her on January 17, 2018, then the label for the interview should read: AbdallahR17012018.

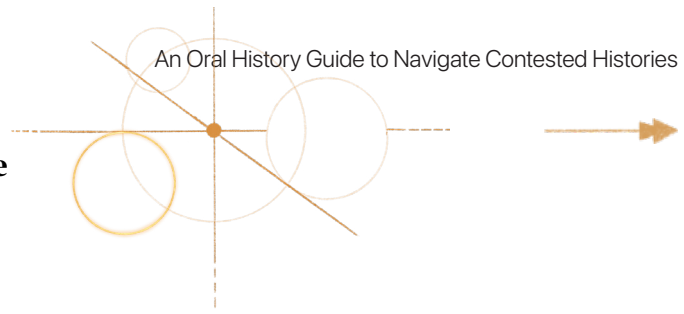
### 2. Documentation

**Documentation** means providing all the relevant information about the interview, meaning the META-DATA that is needed for archiving the interview. The more information you provide to accompany the recording (aka in the olden days: paperwork), the more useful an historical source it becomes, especially over time. The documentation to accompany the interview should include:

- Narrator personal background sheet:  
Filled in and collected during pre-interview- Handout 23
- Informed consent form:  
collected during the pre-interview - Handout 21 and 22. This form *is the most important form of documentation that must accompany the recording (of the interview) if it is to be deposited in an archive. Without this form signed, the oral history recording cannot be used or deposited in an archive thus defeating the purpose of oral history.*

<sup>1</sup> For more about preserving digital oral history, see: "[LOCKSS Program](#)"





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- Audio label:

It is the opening statement of the recorded interview. It is a verbal statement that includes the who, what, where, and why of your interview. So in this statement, the interviewer (i.e. you) states their name, the date, the place, the project's name, and the name of the narrator. Or, you may choose to ask the narrator to introduce themselves, perhaps if they agree to be interviewed, and tell them that the interview is recorded for the purposes of future research.

**Example 1:** *"Today is Aug. 1, 2021, and I am Fadi Azar meeting with Joyce Akid in her apartment in Mazra'a, Beirut, to interview her about her experience as a teacher in Ras El Metn during the Mountain War of 1983."*

**Example 2:** *"I am Rana Khayat and today is May 2, 2020. I am in Saida to talk about the memory and experience of being a soldier in the Lebanese army during the Lebanese war. Could you kindly introduce yourself by name? – My name is Elias Younis. – Do you agree to be interviewed for this project on living through the Lebanese war? – Yes. – Do you agree that this recording be shared with others for the purposes of future research? – Yes. – Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed, let's start with some basic questions about you..."*

- List of questions asked:

doesn't have to be exact, but a guide for listener or researcher.

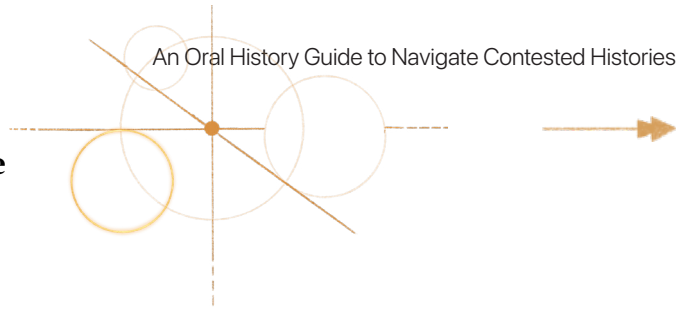
- Photographs:

if applicable and consented to.

- Post-interview log-sheet:

While your memory is still fresh from the interview, fill-out a post-interview log-sheet - see an example below. This summary includes the basic information about your narrator, where the interview was conducted, what the topics of your interview were and any important details to include about your narrator. This is the place to provide the context of the interview, so that future researchers will have some background about the narrator, the contents of the interview, and how helpful it could be to them.





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### Sample Post-Interview Log Sheet

File name (LastnameFirstInitialDate): \_\_\_\_\_

Narrator's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date and time of interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Location of interview (place, address, city, country): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Approximate length of the interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Subjects covered in interview (broadly): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Below:** Attach a *photograph* of the narrator. If the narrator does not want to be photographed, include a photograph of a symbolic object (a vase, a table, a pair of reading glasses).

