

Interviewing for Genealogical Research

by

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List of some items to take to the interview:

- ▶ Video camera, extra batteries and film or digital media
- ▶ Still camera, extra batteries and film or digital media
- ▶ Tripod
- ▶ Voice recorder, extra batteries and tape or digital media
- ▶ Question list
- ▶ Notepads, multiple mechanical lead pencils full of lead
- ▶ Your contact information to give the interviewee.

Question for the Interview:

The proper questions can lead you farther down your family tree and put some meat on the bones of those you know. The following are a sampling of questions to ask these relatives, neighbors and friends. They have been compiled from several sources and sorted under general subjects. They are not all the questions that can be asked, only a starting point. The two cardinal rules for formulating questions are:

- ▶ Ask simple, one-part questions, one at a time
- ▶ Never ask a question that can be answered with "yes" or "no". Instead, phrase it in terms of attitudes and feelings toward an event, person, etc. Ask questions that will provoke specific responses. The more historical detail you can get, the more valuable the interview will be. Ask questions that begin with "who," "what," "when," "where," "how" and "why"?

The Interviewee:

- ▶ What is your full name and spell it for me? Is that your maiden name?
- ▶ Is there a naming tradition in your family, such as always giving the firstborn son the name of his paternal grandfather?
- ▶ What do you know about your family surname?
- ▶ Why did your parents select the name for you?
- ▶ Did you have a nickname? How did this nickname come about?
- ▶ When and where were you born?

Childhood of Interviewee:

- ▶ What is your earliest childhood memory?
- ▶ What kind of games did you play growing up?
- ▶ What was your favorite toy? And why?
- ▶ What was your favorite thing to do for fun (movies, beach, etc.)?
- ▶ Did you have family chores? What were they? Which was your least favorite?
- ▶ Did you receive an allowance? How much? Did you save your money or spend it?
- ▶ What was school like for you as a child? What were your best and worst subjects? Where did you attend grade school? High school? College? Are there school pictures or school year books?

- ▶ Who were your childhood heroes?
- ▶ Did you have any pets? If so, what kind and what were their names?
- ▶ How did your family come to live where you were born?
- ▶ What was the house (apartment, farm, etc.) like? How many rooms? Bathrooms? Did it have electricity? Indoor plumbing? Telephones?
- ▶ Were there any special items in the house that you remember?
- ▶ Who was the oldest relative you remember as a child? What do you remember about them?
- ▶ Were there other family members in the area? Who were they?

Interviewee's Youth:

- ▶ What school activities and sports did you participate in?
- ▶ What were your favorite songs and music?
- ▶ Were you ever mentioned in a newspaper? (Scan newspaper article)
- ▶ Who were your friends when you were growing up?
- ▶ Do you remember any fads from your youth? Popular hairstyles? Clothes?
- ▶ Did you have a religion growing up? What church, if any, did you attend?
- ▶ Describe the personalities of your family members.
- ▶ Describe a typical family dinner? Did you all eat together as a family? Who did the cooking? What were your favorite foods?
- ▶ How were holidays (birthdays, Christmas, etc.) celebrated in your family? Did your family have special traditions?
- ▶ What world events had the most impact on you while you were growing up? Did any of them personally affect your family?
- ▶ How is the world today different from what it was like when you were young?
- ▶ What was school like for you as a child? What were your best and worst subjects? Where did you attend grade school? High school? College?
- ▶ What school activities and sports did you participate in?
- ▶ Do you remember any fads from your youth? Popular hairstyles? Clothes?
- ▶ What world events had the most impact on you while you were growing up? Did any of them personally affect your family?
- ▶ What were the holidays like in your family? Which were your favorites and why?
- ▶ Did you attend family reunions? What do you remember about them?

Family of the Interviewee:

- ▶ What is your mother's name? When and where was she born? Is she still alive? When and where did she die?
- ▶ What is your father's name? When and where was he born? Is he still alive? When and where did he die?
- ▶ What are the most vivid images of your mother and father?
- ▶ How did they meet? When and where did they get married?
- ▶ What were their siblings' names?
- ▶ What were the names of your grandparents/great-grandparents?
- ▶ When and where were they born and live as children and adults?
- ▶ What did your parents/grandparents/great-grandparents do for a living?
- ▶ What stories were you told about their childhoods?

- ▶ From what part of the world did your family emigrate? Are there any stories told in your family about the crossing? Did they become US citizens? Do you have any relatives in foreign countries?
- ▶ Do you have any relatives who were famous? Or who took part in well known historical events?
- ▶ Have you any genealogical information or know a relative that has collected genealogical information on your family?

Interviewee's Adulthood:

- ▶ What was your profession and how did you choose it?
- ▶ If you could have had any other profession what would it have been? Why wasn't it your first choice?
- ▶ Did you travel abroad? To where? For how long?
- ▶ What is the full name of your spouse? His siblings? His parents? Was it a first marriage for each of you?
- ▶ When and how did you meet your spouse? What did you do on dates?
- ▶ What was it like when you proposed (or were proposed to)? Where and when did it happen? How did you feel?
- ▶ Where and when did you get married? When did your husband die? Where? What caused his death?
- ▶ What memory stand out the most from your wedding day?
- ▶ How would you describe your spouse? What do (did) you admire most about them?
- ▶ What do you believe is the key to a successful marriage?
- ▶ What was your profession and how did you choose it? If you could have had any other profession what would it have been? Why wasn't it your first choice?
- ▶ How did you find out you were going to be a parent for the first time?
- ▶ What was your proudest moment as a parent?
- ▶ What did your family enjoy doing together?
- ▶ Are your children all still living? Where? Do you remember their spouses' names? Would you tell me who they are, in order of birth? And when and where they were born? Why did you choose your children's names?
- ▶ Were you ever in a war or serve in the military? What do you remember most? Where did you enlist? Why did you enlist? Where did you serve? What were your responsibilities? What was your rank? Were you awarded any medals? (Take photos)

Family Heritage/Legacy

- ▶ Have any recipes been passed down to you from family members?
- ▶ What stories have come down to you about your parents?
- ▶ Are there any stories about famous or infamous relatives in your family?
- ▶ Are there any physical characteristics that run in your family?
- ▶ Are there any special heirlooms, photos, bibles, or other memorabilia that have been passed down in your family?
- ▶ Of all the things you learned from your parents, which do you feel was the most valuable?
- ▶ What accomplishments are you most proud of?
- ▶ What is the one thing you most want people to remember about you?

For more information on interviewing review these websites.

Conducting a Genealogy Interview

www.suite101.com/content/conducting-a-genealogy-interview-a19626

What to Ask the Relatives

<http://genealogy.about.com/cs/oralhistory/a/interview.htm>

Oral History & Interviews

www.cyndislist.com/oral.htm

Ideas for interviewing relatives

www.searchforancestors.com/scrapbook/interview.html

Basic Genealogy Interview Questions

<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~thecohens/interviewing.html>

Interviewing Older Relatives

[www.genealogy-abc.com/Interviewing Older Relatives about your Family History.html](http://www.genealogy-abc.com/Interviewing_Older_Relatives_about_your_Family_History.html)

Interviewing Family Members

www.etherton.net/geneques.htm

Interview Questions

<http://knol.google.com/k/genealogy-related-interview-questions#>

Conducting Effective Interviews

www.genealogy.com/tip11.html

How to Conduct a Genealogy Research Interview

www.ehow.com/how_5265041_conduct-genealogy-research-interview.html

How To Interview a Relative

<http://genealogy.about.com/cs/oralhistory/ht/interview.htm>

How to Conduct a Successful Genealogy Interview

<http://ezinearticles.com/?How-to-Conduct-a-Successful-Genealogy-Interview&id=1908018>

How to Interview family for Genealogy

www.ehow.com/how_4739266_interview-family-genealogy.html

How to Structure an Interview for Genealogy Research

www.ehow.com/how_5258016_structure-interview-genealogy-research.html

Interviewing Relatives

<http://ncmuseumofhistory.org/workshops/genealogy/lesson3.htm>

Interviewing Relatives

<http://genealogy.about.com/library/authors/ucbishop3a.htm>