

Preserving A Legacy

How to Interview

Interviewing a family member can be a unique experience, especially if you already have a personal relationship with them. However, there can be some pros and cons that you should be aware of:

Pros:

- You'll likely hear more personal information.
- You'll likely gain insight into the family's history and background.
- You might feel like you are connecting on a deeper level when you are speaking to them.
- You can act as a support system for them to process through their grief of loss or setbacks.

Cons:

- You may feel uncomfortable asking probing questions during the interview.
- The same information that is helpful for building a story might be too personal or private for them to share without hesitation.
- They might not feel their legacy is important enough to document.
- You may glaze over stories you've heard of before, without realizing other members of your family aren't as familiar with them as you are.

Here are some tips to help you conduct a successful family member interview:

1. **Get their consent:** Before conducting the interview, make sure the family member is comfortable with the idea and has given their consent to be recorded through whichever medium you've chosen. Explain the purpose of the interview and ensure that they understand how the information will be used.
2. **Identify your purpose:** Before conducting the interview, determine what you want to learn and the information you hope to gain. This will help you focus your questions and ensure that the interview is productive. Do you want to inform,

inspire, reminisce, or pay tribute? This is important to know before structuring your questions because they will vary significantly depending on the purpose you choose. (Who, what, when, where, why).

3. **Prepare questions:** Prepare a list of questions that are specific to the individual and their experiences. Consider their unique perspectives and experiences, and try to avoid generic questions (See our [25 Questions](#) for some ideas to get you started).
4. **Create a comfortable environment:** Choose a location where the family member feels comfortable, and make sure your equipment is set up properly to avoid distracting your interviewee. People do become a bit nervous when being recorded, but you can comfort them by letting them know it's for the family and anything they don't want in the final edit can be cut out. So, encourage them to relax and speak freely; you are family so have fun with it! Crack some jokes and make it a memorable experience.
5. **Listen actively:** Pay close attention to the family member's answers and respond with follow-up questions. Listen to their tone of voice, body language, and facial expressions, as these can provide valuable insight into their perspective. Continue the conversation by prompting them with the last few things they mentioned.
 - a. For example, "I remember having to stay late nights at work and would get home when the kids were already tucked into bed. I'd leave for work before they even woke up. It was a very demanding job."

Here is a situation where you can go into multiple avenues: "How did you feel working so much without being able to spend time with your family?" or "Though it was demanding, do you believe that was the best option at the time?" Both questions are completely different as the first leans on an emotional family tie, hinting at regret. The second leans into the mindset of work and sacrifice to achieve a goal, hinting at perseverance. It goes back to the purpose of the project: who is this for, what is it about, why is it important?

6. **Be respectful:** It's important to respect the family member's time and comfort level. Avoid asking questions that are too personal or that they may not be comfortable answering. Nobody likes awkward moments, to help avoid this we encourage you to keep away from any gossip, drama, or bad-mouthing topics. Not all family members treat each other right, but we can learn from their mistakes

which is the point of documenting these lessons. Simply reframe your questions if you seek further clarification.

7. **Close the interview:** When you are finished with the interview, ask one last question. “Is there anything that I might have missed that you would like to speak about?” And allow them to think for a moment. Sometimes you asked everything they could think of, other times they’ll want to repeat something they already said for clarity. Let them speak... then when they finish you’re done right? **NO!**
8. **We’re all done:** This is a completely optional step but a rewarding one at times. Often we find that people will forget to mention something all the way up to the end when we say “Okay I think we’ve got everything.” where they proceed to tell us a funny joke or make a comment. Our suggestion is to keep your recording device running for a little while longer as you “finish” the interview. They’ll be more comfortable believing they are no longer being recorded. You may walk away with that one story that brings everything together. If they ask if the device is still recording, allow your moral compass to answer if the device is still on. If you answer truthfully, you can remind them that anything they say/said can be edited out!

By following these tips, you can conduct a successful and meaningful interview that provides valuable insight and helps preserve family history. We hope this helps get you comfortable with performing an interview. Now the next step is to find the medium you are most comfortable recording with:

[Written Method](#)

[Audio Method](#)

[Video Method](#)

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