

## ORAL HISTORY GUIDE

### Hunter (Living) History Initiative

#### Special Collections, University of Newcastle

This Oral History guide is a community resource to gather social and cultural histories of the Hunter Region through digital oral history- audio/audio-visual recordings.

The Project was inspired by a similar programme undertaken by University of Newcastle that was part of the Open Foundation Course (1986-1989) - known as the Margaret Henry Oral History Archive held at Special Collections, University of Newcastle Library. This resource aims to revive stories of Newcastle, the Hunter Valley and its surrounds by recording voices that describe the Region's cultural, intellectual and social life.

This post includes basic instructions on practice and methods of oral history, how to do an oral history interview, use of new technologies in recording historical information, as well as links to other resources. Also includes ethical practices of oral history (Guidelines, Copyright, Conditions of use). We also recommend [Oral History NSW](#) for advice and support.

The following covers some basic steps in conducting an oral history interview.

### STEP 1: WHO TO INTERVIEW

You can choose someone who has an interesting story to tell about the Hunter Region. It could be a friend, relative and someone you know. They may talk about where they used to work, a family business, or a place they grew up, people they knew. Here are some other [themes](#):-

**About place, Indigenous Stories, LGBTQ, Women's History, Local Identities, Migrant Histories, Health & Medicine, Religion, Maritime, Sport, Communications, Unions & Politics, Law & Order, Retail, Environment, Heritage, Protests, Military and Defence, Law & Order, Local Business, Social history eg. 1960s, the anti-war campaigns**

Also have a listen to some of the interviews from the 1980s- for ideas and inspiration - [Margaret Henry oral History Archive](#).

## STEP 2: RESEARCH TIPS

When you have chosen someone to interview (and they have given consent), you can be guided by your initial contact during informal conversation about a topic that could be covered in an interview, it is also a good idea to ask them to complete a written [Interviewee Information Sheet](#) before the formal interview. When you are clear about a topic, it is a good idea to do some general background research. For example, if the person worked in a particular profession or industry you may want to explore this. It is important to have some general understanding of the topic of the interview so that you can formulate suitable questions. Many sources are available on-line, or you may consider contacting [Family history and other Historical Groups](#) for support with research. Special Collection's [Living Histories repository](#) and [Hunter Living Histories](#) website, as well [Local studies](#) at the City of Newcastle Library also have historical material associated with the Hunter Region, as well as local libraries, museums and historical societies. Also look at [Trove](#).

## STEP 3: WHAT QUESTIONS TO ASK IN THE INTERVIEW

The following is a starting point in formulating questions, the more you know about a person before the interview, the more you can adapt questions to gain useful and valuable answers. Here are some [Sample Outline of Questions](#) you can use in an oral history interview. Revise these accordingly in line with a person's specific interests and life experiences.

## STEP 4: TIPS FOR CONDUCTING ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

### [How do I ask the questions?](#)

In general, have a basic idea of the themes that will be covered- for example - Work history, growing up in a particularly suburb.

- Have your first question well planned
- Open rather than closed questions
- Remember silence is good
- Positive body language and being pleasant
- Give interviewee time to respond to question, don't interrupt!
- Don't be too worried if the interview goes off track
- Ask the Interviewee for specific examples
- Ask follow-up questions and then ask some more

## STEP 5: ETHICAL PRACTICE- GRANTING PERMISSION

It is essential to liaise with the interviewee in an honest and respectful manner. Explain to them why you would like to conduct an interview and allow them to discuss with you what they are happy to talk about, and what they prefer not to discuss. The interviewee always has a right to review, correct and/or withdraw anything in the interview- or decide to grant permission at all. They must be given this opportunity after the interview has been conducted. It is important to discuss [Ethical Practices Guidelines](#) the process and granting permission with the interviewee, here is a [Sample Condition of Use Form](#)

- It is the responsibility of the interviewer to protect the rights of interviewee
- Important to ensure objectivity, honesty and integrity

See further information about permissions. Participants must follow the [Oral History Australia Guidelines of Ethical Practice 2007](#).

### WHERE CAN RECORDINGS BE KEPT IN PERPETUITY ?

Oral/audio-visual histories can be made digitally available on numerous social platforms- SoundCloud is probably the most popular and widely available. From these social platforms recordings can be embedded in blogs and other social media- new technology enhancing oral histories and digital humanities.

Special Collections at the University of Newcastle are able to house original audio or audio-visual file in perpetuity, to be archived or available on open source digital platforms (Permissions required). Audios can be made available to the community via [Living Histories repository](#).

Enquiries regarding recordings and permission can be sent to Special Collections at the University of Newcastle by our [Enquiry form](#).

## STEP 6: WHAT DEVICE(S) TO USE

Technology today enables us to easily record oral history interviews. It is up to you as to the device you want to use to record the interview. These may include:-

- Professional handheld devices are the best option and a good investment if you are serious about doing oral history recordings.
- Apps for Smartphones and devices - There are many downloadable voice recording Apps for personal devices (iPad, iPhone, androids etc.) Although these may seem simple to use, problems can occur attempting to transfer a recording from a smartphone.

- Traditional cassette audio tapes - We do not suggest the use of older style cassette tapes, the sound quality is not optimal and cassettes are more difficult to digitise - the UON's Cultural Collections can digitise cassette and analogue tapes, however is more complex process. Further information can be found [here](#).

## STEP 7: EDITING & TRANSCRIBING AUDIO RECORDINGS

Most audio digitally recorded can be edited using audio editing software, such as [Audacity](#) that is free and easy to use. It has cut, copy and paste functions, reduce noise, and convert file formats. Other professional audio editing software is Audition Adobe. Further information.

Making a summary or transcript of your recording is recommended as best practice. This will allow your interview to be more search-friendly when uploaded on the web, as well as providing clarity and better access for the hearing impaired. [oTranscribe](#) is a free online app for transcribing recorded interviews.

**For further information, send an enquiry to the [Special Collections Team](#)**

### OTHER RESOURCES

[JD Somerville Oral History Collection](#) - State Library of South Australia

[Oral History and Folklore](#) - National Library of Australia

[Australian Generations Oral History Project](#) - Monash University

[By Word or Mouth - Conducting Oral Histories](#) - A resource book for teachers and student, NSW.

[A guide for interviewing veterans past and present](#) - Australian War Memorial

[Oral History](#) - Records and Archives Office – UNSW

[Oral History and Realia](#) – National Library of Australia