



How to Teach Oral History in a Public Library

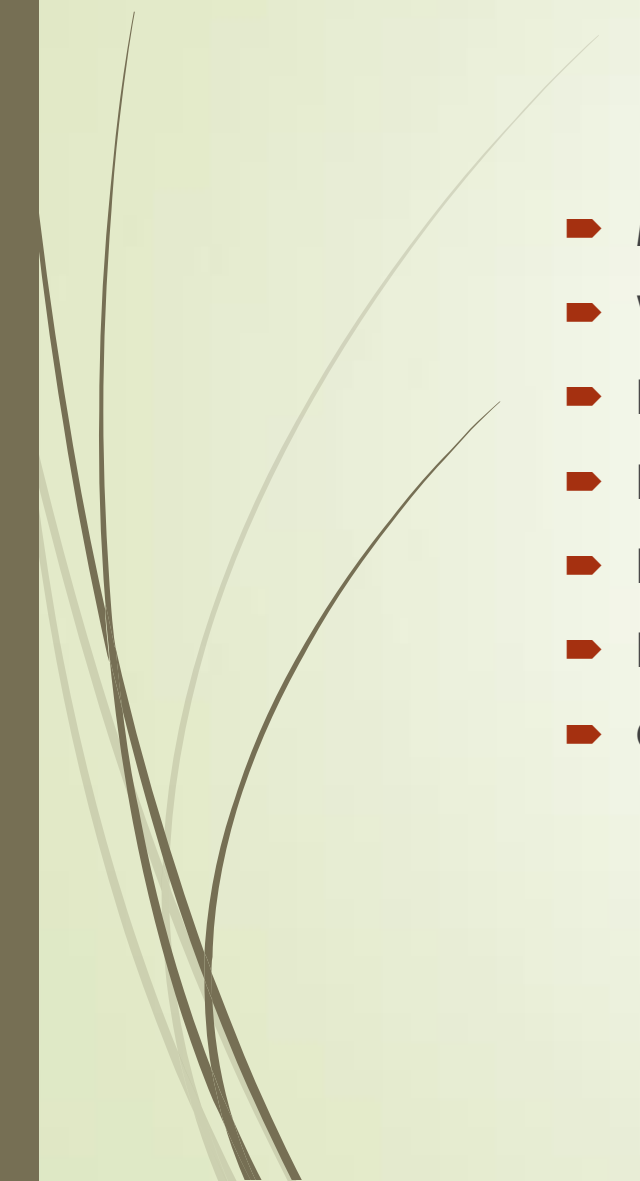


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What we are going to cover?

- ▶ My Background
 - ▶ What should you call the class?
 - ▶ How can you encourage discussion?
 - ▶ How long should the class be?
 - ▶ How much publicity do you need?
 - ▶ How can this class fit into a community oral history project?
 - ▶ Oral history resources
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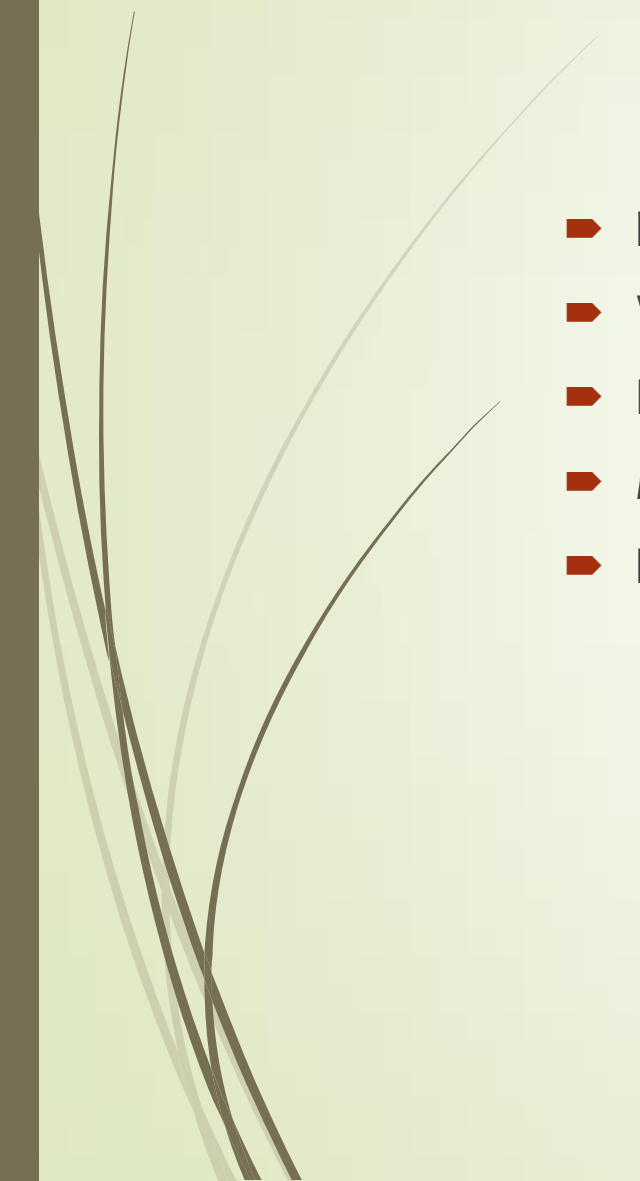
My Background



- ▶ I completed an oral history on my grandfather as part of a graduate level course in the subject
- ▶ I am currently working on a project to document the history of my church and have completed three oral histories as part of that effort. I am working on my fourth.
- ▶ I work as a reference librarian at the Roanoke County Library headquarters building and teaching classes including a class on oral history




What Should You Call the Class?

- ▶ I named mine Preserve Your Family Stories
 - ▶ Why not call it “oral history”?
 - ▶ Potential problems with my title
 - ▶ Make sure students are clear about what you are going to teach
 - ▶ Issues with students who really aren't doing an oral history project
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How Can You Encourage Discussion?

- Meet in a room that fits the size of the group (You don't want to be in a large room with only a few people)
 - Sit around a single table
 - Use name tags
 - Tell them at the beginning that you encourage questions and discussion
 - Don't force people to talk
 - Avoid being critical when people do talk if possible
 - If you want them to answer a particular question, give your answer first
- 



How Long Should the Class Be?

- ▶ Each session was two hours long
- ▶ My original class was three sessions spaced a month apart.

In the first session, we covered choosing a subject, creating questions, and transcribing the interview.


In the second session, we covered proofreading, printing, distributing, and sharing.

In the third session, we read from what we had done so far discussing challenges and discoveries.

- ▶ The problem was that people were not able to finish the project



How Long Should the Class Be?

- ▶ For my future class, I scheduled one session in November where we will cover choosing a subject, preparing for, conducting and transcribing the interview
 - ▶ We will do a second session in February where we will cover editing
 - ▶ The third session will be in April where we will cover printing and distributing and read from excerpts of our work
 - ▶ This will provide more time to get things done
- 



How Much Publicity Do You Need?

- ▶ The first time I planned to teach the class I only publicized the program in the library, and few people signed up (2 people)
- ▶ For the next time, I put the class in our Parks and Recreation Magazine that reaches 60,000 people, and I had 15 people register. After I called everyone who had registered, eight people ended up actually taking the class



Community Oral History Project

- ▶ The Roanoke Public Library did a community oral history project in collaboration with the Library of Congress
- ▶ The librarian taught a class to train the volunteers to interview and record. The librarian set up the oral history interviews at a library
- ▶ Volunteers returned the recordings and supporting documents such as clippings or pictures to the library
- ▶ A different set of volunteers transcribed the interviews
- ▶ You can contact Alicia Sell at arsell58@gmail.com for more information. She coordinated the project for the Roanoke Public Library



Oral History Resources Websites

Loc.gov/folklife

- ▶ Click on Civil Rights History Project
- ▶ Click on Collection items

[http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.48504/transcript?ID=m
v0001](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.48504/transcript?ID=m
v0001)

- ▶ This gives a good way to start an interview

Interview with Norman Wesley Achen [12/07/2005]

Carl Raymond Cox:

Hello, and welcome to the Veterans History Project. My name is Carl Cox and we are here with the Voluntary Resource Management Service of the VA San Diego Healthcare System at the VA Medical Center in San Diego, California. I am a volunteer at this facility. I am the producer, and I will be the cameraman and your host conducting today's interview. Today's date is December the 7th, 2005. And today's guest is a veteran of World War II. Please welcome, Norman Achen.

Carl Raymond Cox:

Please state your full name.

Norman Wesley Achen:

Norman Wesley Achen.

Carl Raymond Cox:

Please state your date of birth.

Norman Wesley Achen:

July 11, 1921.

Carl Raymond Cox:

Please state your current address.

Norman Wesley Achen:

2842 Luciernaga, Carlsbad, California.

Carl Raymond Cox:

Which war did you serve in?

Norman Wesley Achen:

World War II.



Oral History Resources Websites

- ▶ Interview with Oliver Hill, Jr, son of Brown vs. Board of Education lawyer Oliver Hill. Text and audio. Gives a good example of the interviewer laying out the ground rules, how long it might take. The first link is the entire project. The second link is just the text.

http://www.loc.gov/item/afc2010039_crhp0102/

http://cdn.loc.gov/service/afc/afc2010039/afc2010039_crhp0102_Hill_transcript/afc2010039_crhp0102_Hill_transcript.pdf

*Civil Rights History Project
Interview completed by the Southern Oral History Program
under contract to the
Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History & Culture
and the Library of Congress, 2013*

Interviewee: Oliver W. Hill, Jr.
Interview Date: August 17, 2013
Location: Richmond, Virginia
Interviewer: David Cline
Videographer: John Bishop
Length: 01:13:30

Unidentified Announcer: From the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

David Cline: The way that I like to work, if it's okay with you, is I work pretty chronologically. I mean, I always think that the work that people end up doing in their lives is always shaped by their families and where they come from and the communities in which they're raised and all of that. So, I take a pretty, you know, sort of traditional family history approach, at least to where we start.

Oliver Hill: That sounds good.

David Cline: Great. And then, and certainly, in your case, I know there will be a lot of rich relevant memories pertinent to the Civil Rights Movement, but we'll talk about other things,



Oral History Resources Websites

- ▶ How to choose a digital recorder:


<http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/2012/06/ask-doug-choosing-a-digital-audio-recorder/>

This site has a short video and a form to fill out that outputs a recommendation for a recorder.

- ▶ How to transcribe your digital recording:

<http://www.empmuseum.org/programs-plus-education/for-educators/educational-resources/oral-history-resources/equipment-resources/>

There are two free transcription programs described here from the Experience Music Project Museum website



Oral History Resources

Books

The Oral History Workshop: Collect and Celebrate the Life Stories of Your Family and Friends by Cynthia Hart and Lisa Samson, 2009

- Includes forms that allow the material to be used by the interviewer
- Tips on how to take the interview and turn it into an article or a book
- One of the authors is an archivist so she should know what she is talking about
- Easy to read. Conversational. Lots of pictures

Doing Oral History by Donald A. Ritchie.. 3rd Edition, 2015. Also available as an eBook

- Written for the professional more than the amateur although useful to an amateur
- Includes a chapter on doing a community oral history project and a chapter on how to manage an oral history collection
- The author is the historian of the United States Senate with a doctorate in history



For More Information

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