Jess Batychenko's Oral histories and Interviews to resist AI

(excerpt from The Norton Guide to AI Aware Teaching)

Students can learn more about their communities, families, or causes they care about by conducting interviews. Annette Vee at University of Pittsburgh asked her first-year composition students to interview family members about a family artifact and connect it to larger history, as modeled in course texts. At Georgetown University, Jess Batychenko has her composition students perform narrative interviews with each other as a means of inviting deeper inquiry into how they understand themselves, each other, and the world around them. By inviting students to listen like oral historians, this assignment is designed to help students see their own stories and histories—and the stories and histories of their peers— as a type of research, while emphasizing how dialogue can spark memory, different perspectives, and research directions.

These narrative interviews can also serve as preparation for collecting oral histories related to local history. This assignment leans into learning goals that AI can't fulfill: interpersonal communication, relationship building, deep listening, and empathy. Plus, it fits the meaningful writing framework (Chapter 11) in that it promotes classroom community, draws on local resources, and allows students to personalize their work for the course. In online asynchronous courses, you can pair them up with others in the class to practice interviewing and then ask students to find people in their local context to interview. Batychenko observes that the Narrative Interviews she asks students to do with each other—the assignment excerpted below—positively impact later work in the class, frequently adding depth and complexity to the stories students tell.

Narrative Interview and Reflection Assignment

As part of your personal narrative development, one of your peers will interview you about the story you're planning to tell. The goal of this exercise is to uncover details, stories, or perspectives that may not be immediately obvious through solo writing. Think of this as a collaborative research exercise into your own archive of stories - dialogue can often spark memory, emotion, and insight. It is also intended to teach you how to listen to other people's stories with intention and empathy. We'll spend class time preparing strong, open-ended questions and conducting the interviews. Your final submission will include both the interview itself and a reflection on what emerged from the conversation.

Submission:

(1) Interview Recording: Submit the audio recording of you as narrator in mp3 format, 15-18 min. (2) Written (300-500 words) or recorded (3-5 minutes) reflection considering the following questions:

- *What new details, directions or ideas surfaced during the interview?*
- *Did your understanding of your story shift in any way? How?*
- *What questions or insights from your interviewer were especially helpful, surprising, or challenging?*
- *What do you now feel more confident writing about?*
- *What's still uncertain or unclear in your story? What do you plan to do about it?*

- *Did interviewing someone else spark any thoughts, ideas, or new directions?*

Narrative Interview: In-class Instructions and Guide

(In-class instruction sheet. Provided to students on the day of the interview.)

Task: Conduct a 15-18- minute interview that explores your partner's story or stories. In your three- person group, each person will take a turn as Narrator, Primary Interviewer, and Timekeeper. During each interview, oOpen with some version of: "This is [your name] interviewing [interviewee's name] for the narrative interview assignment. Do I have your consent to record?" Ask more questions. Be sure to wrap it up in about 15 min. and thank the narrator for sharing their story and their time! (It's somewhat performative here, but showing gratitude is a good habit to develop.).

While Batychenko does not ask students to use AI in this oral history unit, AI can be helpful for students as they hone questions, practice interviewing techniques, and transcribe their interviews. On the AI Pedagogy Project website hosted by MetaLabab at Harvard University, Katharine Welsh offers instructions for how to **engage AI** by having students practice interviews with an AI chatbot.[1] After identifying a person to interview, students prompt an AI chatbot with known details about the interviewee and then ask the chatbot to respond as if they are that person. Students can then ask the chatbot to provide feedback to improve their interview skills. This practice helps students to gain confidence about interviewing and also improve their questions and skills in a low-stakes setting.

[1]Katharine Welsh, ". Rehearsal to a Real Life Interview," . AI Pedagogy Project, MmetaLab (at) Harvard,. https://aipedagogy.org/assignment/rehearsal-to-real-life-interview/. Licensed under Creative Commons BY-NC-SA 4.0. https://aipedagogy.org/assignment/rehearsal-to-real-life-interview/