

Group Oral History Process

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The following is heavily inspired by the structure used during Story Corp interviews. There are two people in conversation and a moderator (usually someone from the organization) is there to manage the time, technology and assist in moving the conversation along (if needed). I modified the intention, names and roles of each character in a way that made sense for my own family. The goal is to pay homage to the importance of each role in capturing stories and to give everyone a chance to sit in the seat of each role. See below for a description of each, potential interview structure and guiding questions. Feel free to modify it in a way that makes sense for your family.

Pre-work: Share your plan, description of each role and any guiding questions you may have with all participants prior to sitting down. Invite them to provide feedback on the structure and questions. Invite them to choose which roles they are excited about playing and who they would like to interview. The more insight they have in the process the more likely they are to show up open and ready.

Participant Roles:

The Moderator: The moderator will be responsible for reading the agreements at the start of the session, making sure both parties understand the process and keeping time during the interview. Moderators may also choose to take note of certain observations, non-verbal communications or questions that may come up for them while witnessing the interview. The most important role this person plays is to witness the sharing happening between the two participants. Hold what's being said (and not) as an expression of love and vulnerability.

The Curious One: This person has a set amount of uninterrupted time (30-45 mins) to ask a predetermined list of questions. It is acceptable to ask follow up questions or questions that are inspired by the conversation. The role of the curious one is to be curious about the person sitting in front of them. To ask questions that encourage a deeper understanding of the storyteller.

The Storyteller: This person will answer the questions from the Curious One as openly and fully as they see fit. Although they would have seen (or heard) the predetermined question ahead of time, they still have the right to not answer any question. The storyteller is the heart of the process. As the Storyteller, you are allowed to choose who will be the Curious One to ask about your story. If you do not have preference, see below for interview structures.

The Process:

Each person will have the opportunity to play a role. Once participant 1 has finished all of the questions (or run out of time), there will be a pause/break, afterwards the two participants will swap places.

Interview Structure: When creating your structure be mindful of relationship dynamics. Here, I thought I would be helpful if my mother, aunt and grandmother witnessed the process first before having to participate. So my sister will serve as the “curious one” as I tell my story and my partner serves as moderator.

Moderator	Curious One	Storyteller
Partner	Sister	You
Sister	You	Grandma
You	Mommy	Aunty
Mommy	Grandma	Sister
Grandma	Aunty	Mommy

Guiding Questions: I could be helpful to start with a theme or topic of discussion. For example, the following questions all focused on remembering a beloved ancestor.

1. Who was she?
2. What did she enjoy? Favorite food?
3. Smells that remind you of her?
4. Favorite memory with her?
5. First memory you have of her?
6. Last memory you have of her?
7. What would she say to you now?