Oral Histories Seminar

This lesson and its associated learning resources can be used to prepare a three- to four-hour seminar about preparing, recording, processing, and submitting oral histories. You may follow this lesson plan or create your own. The lesson plan uses all of the resources listed below. If you choose to create your own lesson plan, you may choose which resources to use.

Objective
By the end of this seminar, participants should be able to demonstrate understanding of the four steps in the oral history process: 1) prepare, 2) record, 3) process, and 4) submit.

Resources for Oral Histories
All of the resources below are available at lds.org/callings/church-history-adviser. On the home page, click Training and then Oral Histories Guide.

- Church History Guides: Oral Histories
- Oral Histories Seminar with Lesson Plan
- Oral Histories Seminar PowerPoint
- Oral Histories Seminar Activity Workbook (includes additional information and activities)
- Oral History Cataloging Worksheet and Index
- Cataloging Style Guide
- Practice Choosing Oral History Interview Candidates (for teacher and for student)
- Donation Agreement form

Teaching Suggestions
- Consider the background knowledge of seminar participants. Briefly discuss what they already know so you can adapt the lesson to fit their needs.
- Consider how much information they can receive in the time you have available and according to their level of understanding.
- Provide multiple opportunities for class members to interact. Participation helps them remember the content of the lesson. Several activities are included in the lesson plan. You may use them, adapt them, or create your own.
- Stop frequently to check for understanding. Give participants enough time to think, and then to answer. If appropriate, encourage participation by calling on individuals.
Oral Histories: Lesson Plan

This lesson plan uses the materials found in the “Oral Histories” section of the Church History Adviser website: lds.org/callings/church-history-adviser. Some of the practice activities have both an online version and a print version. The print version was designed for classroom use. However, you may use whichever version you like when teaching.

You may choose to follow this lesson plan or adapt it to fit the needs of the group you will teach. The column on the right shows the PowerPoint slide that corresponds to that section of the lesson. Most activities correspond to the Oral Histories Seminar Activity Workbook. Additional instructions for the teacher are shown in red. This lesson should take between three and four hours to complete, including breaks and answering questions.

Materials Needed

- Laptop computer with VGA cable, projector, screen, and speakers to plug into the laptop computer.
- Copies of Church History Guides: Oral Histories for each participant.
- Copies of Oral Histories Seminar Activity Workbook for each participant.
- Copies of the Cataloging Style Guide for each participant.
- Copies of the Donation Agreement form and the example for each participant.
- Printed copy of the Oral History Cataloging Worksheet and Index.
- Printed copy of For Students: Practice Choosing Oral History Interview Candidates.
- Participants should bring the audio recorder they plan on using for recording oral history interviews and a pair of headphones so they can listen to a practice recording.

Overview of Oral Histories (15 minutes)

If possible, invite participants to read the oral histories guide a few days before the seminar.
Before you begin, welcome the participants, and ask them to introduce themselves. Ensure that they are comfortable, and help them understand that they will be asked to learn, share their thoughts, and complete activities. Explain that the seminar will last approximately four hours and that you will take breaks periodically. Ask participants to share a summary of what they may already know so you can adapt the lesson to fit their needs.

An oral history is a way for people to record their knowledge and memories. Because it is a spoken history, it must be recorded as the person speaks. Conducting oral history interviews can be an effective way to collect Church history.

**Video—Oral Histories Introduction**

Discuss the video. Invite class members to share what they learned.

Often, rich history is lost because people don’t write it down. If you know of a person who has memories and information regarding the history of the Church but who has not written it, this person may be a great candidate for an oral history.

**Completing an Oral History**

There are four steps to completing an oral history: prepare, record, process, and submit.

**Workbook Activity 1—Overview Questions**

Have participants review the Oral History Overview and do activity 1 in the workbook.

**Step 1: Prepare** (60 minutes)
Oral History Projects
You may desire to record oral histories with many people, but time and resources will only allow you to record oral histories for some. To help you decide which oral histories to record, focus on a project. An oral history project should focus on a topic. Sample topics include:

- Families who have been pioneers in a given locality.
- Area Seventies and released mission presidents, along with their wives.
- Current and former bishops, Relief Society presidents, and other leaders.
- People who have been involved with significant events, such as a temple dedication or a humanitarian project.

Choose People to Interview
Once you have selected a topic, you will be able to prioritize a list of people you want to record. Start with the top four or five people. Complete your first oral history, and submit it as soon as possible. The Church History Department will send you feedback and suggestions. Incorporate this learning into your next interview.

Workbook Activity 2—Prioritize
Have participants do activity 2 in the workbook.

Workbook Activity 3—Choosing People to Interview
Have participants do activity 3 in the workbook. Use the cards you printed from For Students: Practice Choosing Oral History Interview Candidates (Print version). See For Teachers: Practice Choosing Oral History Interview Candidates (Print version) for instructions and answers for this activity.

Purpose and Background
As you prepare for an interview, decide on its purpose, and do a little research on the topic.

Practice Activity—Research before an Oral History Interview
Do practice activity Research before an Oral History Interview (Online version, titled “John Performs Research to Prepare for Six Oral History Interviews.”)

Pre-Interview
Using the Pre-Interview Questionnaire (found at the back of the oral histories guide), gather some background information from the interviewee. This pre-interview can be done days or weeks ahead of the actual interview recording. This information gathering can be done over the phone, in person, or by email. The information you obtain will help you write a good interview outline. Follow these practices as you conduct the pre-interview.

Workbook Activity 4—Pre-Interview

Have participants view the Pre-Interview Questionnaire in the oral histories guide and do activity 4 in the workbook.

Interview Outline
Write an outline of questions you would like to ask in the interview. This outline will help you ask good questions and cover all the topics you desire. Grouping your questions around larger topics will help you keep the interview focused and will make processing the recording later much easier.

Let’s look at how John composes questions for his interview outline.

Workbook Activity 5 and Practice Activity—Asking Open-Ended Questions

Have participants do activity 5 in the workbook as you go through the practice activity Asking Open-Ended Questions (Online version).

Workbook Activity 6—Write an Interview Outline

Review some of the sample interview outlines in the guide. Then do activity 6 in the workbook.
Recorder
It is important to learn how to use the audio recorder. Practice with someone. Often, the recorder will make the interviewee nervous. If you know how to use it well, you can minimize its presence in the actual interview. Be sure that:

- The quality level is at the highest setting available on the recorder (usually a stereo setting).
- The recorder has sufficient power to last the entire interview; bring backup batteries.
- The recorder has sufficient storage capacity.
- You have identified the optimal distance from which your equipment is capable of recording.
- You are familiar with how to turn on, pause, and stop the recorder.

Video — Using an Audio Recorder
Discuss the video. Invite class members to share what they learned. Point out the instructions in the oral histories guide for the Tascam DR-052 recorder. If participants do not have the Tascam DR-052 recorder, skip the video.

Workbook Activity 7 — Practice Using Your Recorder
Have participants do activity 7 in the workbook and practice with the recorder they brought.

Invitation
Once you have decided whom you would like to interview, it is time to extend an invitation. When extending an invitation, explain why, when, and where you would like to meet. Inform the interviewee how long the interview may last. Invite the person to bring relevant photographs, documents, or small artifacts that may trigger memories that will enrich the interview.

Have participants view the sample invitation letter included at the back of the oral histories guide.
**Location**
Find a location that is free from distractions, including noise and visual distractions. Make sure that it will be comfortable for an interview and that there will be a place to set the recorder a proper distance from you and the interviewee.

**Timing**
It is best to record an interview when memories are fresh, because the interviewees will generally share more detail. Be sensitive to a person’s schedule and to the time of day. When possible, be sure the person you are interviewing is feeling good and is alert.

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**Practice Activity — Selecting a Location**

Do the practice activity Selecting a Location (the online version is titled “Selecting a Location for John’s Oral History Project”).

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**Step 2: Record** *(60 minutes)*

**Pre-Interview Instructions**
There are several steps to perform in an oral history interview. With a little practice, you will find these steps easy to remember. Begin by setting the interviewee at ease by explaining some of the things you will do during the interview.

**Oral History Donation Agreement**
Before the interview or right after you are finished, ask the interviewee to sign a donation agreement. This agreement gives the Church legal rights to preserve and use the recording.

Hand out copies of the donation agreement and the example, and point out the instructions in the guide for filling out this form. They will use this form in workbook activity 9.

**Opening Statement**
As recording begins, the interviewer gives an opening statement that includes:

- Who is at the interview.
- The date and location of the interview.
- The purpose of the interview.
For example: “My name is Felix Nash, and I am the Samoa Church history adviser. Today is May 27, 2010. I am interviewing Tasi Sosene in his home in Apia, Samoa. Tasi is the manager of the Service Center in Samoa, and today we will be discussing his experiences with the tsunami that hit Samoa in 2009.”

**Ask Open-Ended Questions**
Referring to the interview outline, ask open-ended questions that can be responded to at length. Ask follow-up questions to get more clarification and details where needed.

**Word List**
Write a list of important names and locations that may have unique spellings. When the interview is finished, review this word list with the interviewee for accuracy.

**Length**
In general, an interview should not last more than two hours. An interview may be less than two hours, depending on the circumstances and purpose of the interview. If you have reached two hours and there is still more that should be recorded, consider scheduling another appointment to continue. Multiple sessions are covered under the original donation agreement.

**Collecting Other Records**
Sometimes a photograph or an object is referred to during the interview. When this happens, ask if you may scan or photograph the item to include it with the oral history. For larger record collections, such as correspondence, journals, or photographs, ask the interviewee if he or she would be willing to donate the records to the Church or allow digital copying. If the person agrees, follow the instructions contained in *Church History Guides: Collecting Records*.

Let’s watch an example of conducting an oral history interview.

**Workbook Activity 8 and Video—Steps to an Oral History Interview**

Have the participants do activity 8 in the workbook as they watch the video. Discuss the video. Invite class members to share what they learned and answer any questions.
Workbook Activity 9—Practice Oral History Recording

Have the participants do activity 9 in the workbook. When finished, ask them to reflect on their interview recording experience. How did it go? What did they learn? What was easy? What was challenging? Did they have any problems filling out the donation agreement form?

Now that class members have recorded their interview, they are ready to process it.

**Step 3: Process** (60 minutes)

**Video—Processing an Oral History Interview**

Discuss the video. Invite class members to share what they learned.

**Interview Folders**

Be sure to keep all physical documents organized. In an actual physical folder, place the following:

1. The original signed donation agreement (without this signed agreement, the oral history cannot be used and is of little value to the Church).
2. A printout of the completed cataloging worksheet and index.
3. The word list.
4. Any other documents associated with the interview, such as the interview outline, research notes, and pre-interview questionnaire.

Once processing is over, save the physical folder in a safe location. These folders will be passed on to the area Church history adviser.

Using a computer, create an electronic folder, and place these three necessary components in it:

1. The digital audio recording.
2. A scanned copy of the signed donation agreement.
3. An electronic version of the cataloging worksheet and index.

You may include in this electronic folder other relevant documents, such as a digital photograph or the word list.
Name the electronic folder and files according to the Standards for Naming Electronic Folders and Files in the guide.

**Cataloging Worksheet and Index**

Complete a cataloging worksheet, available electronically at lds.org/callings/church-history-adviser. Included in the cataloging worksheet is an indexing template. An index of the interview helps make the information more accessible. To create the index, break the interview into sections, with each section covering a particular topic. Using the interview outline is a good way to divide the interview into sections. Each section should cover a topic. If that topic is discussed for longer than 15 to 20 minutes, divide it into smaller sections.

It is best for the interviewer to complete the cataloging worksheet soon after the interview, when memories are fresh. Generally, the time to complete the cataloging worksheet and index should not take more than the time for the actual interview.

**Style Guide**

Any time you fill out a worksheet or an online form that will be submitted to the Church History Department, you should follow the principles outlined in the Cataloging Style Guide. This style guide can be downloaded at lds.org/callings/church-history-adviser.

Distribute copies of the Cataloging Style Guide. Have the participants review the example of the cataloging worksheet in the guide.

**Workbook Activity 10—Process Your Practice Recording**

Have the participants do activity 10 in the workbook. They can use the copy of the Oral History Cataloging Worksheet found in the workbook. Have them refer to the instructions in the guide and the Cataloging Style Guide as they fill out the worksheet.

**Step 4: Submit (5 minutes)**

FileSend is an application sponsored by the Church. If this option does not work for you, please contact your representative at the Church History Department, Global Support and Acquisitions Division for further assistance.
Give a demonstration of FileSend so the participants understand how to use it, or review the instructions in the guide.

**Oral History Evaluation**
After sending in your oral history files, a member of the Global Support and Acquisitions team will review them. He or she will:

- Listen to segments of the interview to access the sound quality and types of questions asked.
- Review the cataloging worksheet to make sure it contains sufficient detail and follows the style guide.

He or she will fill out an Oral History Evaluation form and send it back to you with any suggestions for improvements in future projects.

Have class members review the feedback criteria and oral history evaluation example in the oral histories guide.

**Conclusion**

Take time to review the major portions of this lesson, and invite the class to ask questions if necessary. Invite class members to visit the website when they get home and review the materials found in the “Oral Histories” section of the website. This page on the website contains the learning resources that individuals can review and use to practice the content of this lesson.