Oral Histories Seminar
Activity Workbook
Oral History Overview

1. Prepare
- Focus ideas for your oral history project.
- Research the background of your project idea, and choose someone to interview based on available resources.
- Prepare an outline of your interview.
- Learn how to use a digital recorder.
- Choose an appropriate location and time.
- Extend an invitation for the interview.

2. Record
- Provide instructions to the interviewee before the interview.
- Have the interviewee sign a Church History Department Donation Agreement.
- Ensure the recorder is running and placed properly; minimize distractions.
- Record an opening statement, including:
  - Names of people who are present
  - The date
  - Your location
  - The purpose of the interview
- Keep the interview on track, and ask follow-up questions.
- Let the interviewee do most of the talking.
- Collect other relevant records if possible.

3. Process
- Fill out the cataloging worksheet and index.
- Scan the signed donation agreement.
- Place the following electronic files in a folder:
  - Audio recording of oral history
  - Cataloging worksheet and index
  - Scanned donation agreement

4. Submit
- Use FileSend to submit the folder to oralhistories@ldschurch.org.
Activity 1—Overview Questions

Look at the oral histories overview. With a partner, review the major steps of the oral history process.

Answer these questions.

1. What is an oral history?

2. What are the four steps to an oral history?

   1) 

   2) 

   3) 

   4) 

3. When should you complete the cataloging worksheet and index?
Activity 2—Prioritize

Imagine you are working on an oral history project about pioneering members of the Church in your country. Fill in the chart below with names of people you already know to be pioneering members of the Church in your country. How will you prioritize the names for interviews? Do your resources and time allow you to interview them all right now? Discuss your answers with others in the workshop.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Do we already have their story?</th>
<th>Are they in good enough health to give an interview?</th>
<th>Are they able to contribute unique and significant experiences?</th>
<th>Priority</th>
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Activity 3—Choosing People to Interview

You have decided to complete an oral history project focused on pioneering members of the Church in your country. First, you found and compiled some information about five possible candidates. You obtained this information through phone and email conversations and using the pre-interview questionnaires. You organized each candidate’s information in a dossier.

Spread out all five dossiers on the table. With other learners, read the information in each dossier, and decide which are the best two candidates for an oral history interview based on the following criteria:

- Is the person a pioneering member of the Church?
- Has the person already recorded his or her history in some way?
- Is the person in good enough health to give an interview?
- Is the person able to contribute unique and significant experiences?
Activity 4—Pre-Interview

Choose a partner in the room. You will each record a brief oral history interview with one another. The topic of your oral history will be “Church history advisers.” To prepare for the interviews, ask each other some of the questions listed below. (These and more questions come from the pre-interview questionnaire found at the back of Church History Guides: Oral Histories). Take notes in the spaces provided.

- Interviewee’s full name:

- Date and place of birth:

- Where raised:

- Education (include institutions, degrees and majors, dates, and so on):

- Employment history (include companies, positions, dates, and so on):

- Church callings as an adult, including units and approximate dates:

- Participation in significant Church events:

Pre-Interview Best Practices

- 20 minutes or less.
- Do over the phone or email when possible.
- Add to the questions in Church History Guides: Oral Histories based on experiences you know the interviewees have had.
- Get a sense of how the interview will go. Do the interviewees talk a lot? Do they wander in their thoughts? Are they good storytellers? Based on your observations and the information you learn, adjust the interview outline accordingly.
Activity 5—Asking Open-Ended Questions

Go through the practice activity Asking Open-Ended Questions, and answer the questions below.

1. What made John’s best question effective?

2. Why were some of John’s questions not effective?

3. Write one example of a less open-ended question and one example of a focused open-ended question in the space below.

Open-ended questions allow the interviewee to use his or her own words and draw upon his or her life experiences and emotions to formulate an answer. In other words, open-ended questions can lead to rich, detailed answers. Below is a list of questions. Indicate how much information each question will likely get in response. The first one is marked already. Explain your answers to the person sitting next to you. Then turn the page to see the correct responses with some additional information.

Describe your reaction when you were called as the Primary president.

Did you like being a member of the Church when you were nine years old?

Was your decision to be baptized hard or easy to make?

Talk about your experience learning the gospel from the missionaries.

Do you like having a temple so close now?

What differences did you find between your parents’ religion and the Church?

Describe some of your experiences and feelings as a newly called Primary president.

little much x
**Activity 5—Asking Open-Ended Questions, continued**

Describe your reaction when you were called as the Primary president.  
*This question is focused and open-ended.*

Did you like being a member of the Church when you were nine years old?  
*This question can only be answered with a “yes” or “no.”*

Was your decision to be baptized hard or easy to make?  
*This question limits the interviewee’s response to just two options, but it does ask her to draw upon her emotions.*

Talk about your experience learning the gospel from the missionaries.  
*This question is specific and open-ended.*

Do you like having a temple so close now?  
*This question can only be answered with a “yes” or “no.”*

What differences did you find between your parents’ religion and the Church?  
*This question allows the interviewee to respond in his own words, but it is not very focused, and it might lead to a response that is not useful.*

Describe some of your experiences and feelings as a newly called Primary president.  
*This question is focused and open-ended.*
Activity 6—Write an Interview Outline

Based on the research you conducted with your partner in activity 4, write a short interview outline in the space below. Begin by writing down three big ideas. Then, below each idea, write one or two questions. Be sure that most of your questions are open-ended. Feel free to use the example for ideas.

EXAMPLE

Early life and experiences
1. When were you born?
2. Talk about your experiences growing up in the Church and how these experiences led you to choose a mission.

Mission, marriage, and starting a family
3. Describe one of your most memorable experiences from your mission.
4. When you married and began having children, you probably had to make some sacrifices. Talk about some of these experiences and how they strengthened your faith.

Service in the Church
5. What callings have you had?
6. Talk about one challenge you are experiencing right now in your calling.

There are sample interview outlines at the back of Church History Guides: Oral Histories. Feel free to use those outlines as you prepare this and future interview outlines.

Interview Outline:
Activity 7—Practice Using Your Recorder

With your partner, practice using the recorder you brought. Make sure you understand its basic functions, such as turning it on, recording, and playing back some of the recording. Practice enough to feel comfortable with the recorder. The information below pertains to the Tascam DR-052 recorder. More information about this recorder can be found at lds.org/callings/church-history-adviser.

**AUDIO RECORDER INSTRUCTIONS**

- Install two AA batteries in the recorder’s rear sliding compartment. An on-screen indicator will display the battery level.
- Insert a microSD card face down into the right side panel until it clicks into place.
- To turn on the recorder, press **Home** for about two seconds.
- To prepare to record, press **Record**. The recorder will enter standby mode. Write down the file name of the recording for reference.
- With the recorder in standby mode, set the input level to “auto.” From the home screen, press **Quick**, select **level control**, and then press **Play**. Press + and − to select **auto levels**, and then press **Play**. An icon in the upper-left corner of the display will indicate that the recorder is in auto level mode.
- Place the recorder as close to the subject as possible, with one microphone facing him or her and one facing you. Eliminate background noise if possible.
- Press + and − to adjust the volume.
- To begin recording, press **Record** again. The red indicator will light continuously.
- To stop recording, press **Stop/Home**. The audio file will be saved.
- To play back a file, press **Forward** and **Back** to find the file, and then press **Play**.
- To delete a file, press **Forward** and **Back** to locate the file. Then press **Quick** and **Play** to delete. Confirm the deletion, and press **Play** again.
- To turn off the recorder, hold down **Home** for about two seconds.
- To download your audio files, connect the recorder to a computer with the included USB cable.
Activity 8—Steps to an Oral History Interview

As you watch the video shown by your teacher, take notes beneath each heading below. What do you notice? What questions would you like to ask after the video is over?

See how John:

1. Organizes the interview environment.
2. Prepares Miguel before the interview.
3. Begins the recording with an introductory statement.
4. Asks questions one at a time from an interview outline.
5. Asks open-ended questions.
6. Asks follow-up questions.
7. Refers to other records.
8. Writes a word list.
9. Closes the interview.
10. Checks the information on the word list.
11. Asks about Miguel’s records.
Activity 9—Practice Oral History Recording

Using the interview outline you prepared in activity 6, record a short oral history interview with your partner as the interviewee. Then trade places, and have your partner record a short interview with you as the interviewee. You should find a place to record that will have minimal distractions. That might mean you and your partner moving to a different room for this activity. Each recording should last about five minutes. Be sure to include the elements below:

1. Pre-interview instructions. Have the person fill out and sign the oral history donation agreement.
2. Begin with an introductory statement.
3. Ask open-ended questions, and ask follow-up questions when appropriate.
4. Write a word list.
5. Check the information on the word list.
Activity 10—Process Your Practice Recording

Fill out the charts. Then, using your recording, interview outline, and word list, fill out the cataloging worksheet and index on the next two pages. Be sure to use the Cataloging Style Guide provided by your instructor. Use headphones to listen to the recording.

What goes into the physical folder?

What goes into the digital folder?
## Oral History Cataloging Worksheet

### General Information

- **Folder name:**
- **CHL call number:**
- **Date of interview:**
- **Church area:**
- **City and country where interview was recorded:**
- **Format of the recording:**
- **Principle language of the interview:**
- **Other languages:**
- **Is there a signed Donation Agreement?**

### Interview Participants

- **Interviewers (family name or surname, given names):**
  - **Birth date:**
- **Interviewees (family name or surname, given names):**
  - **Birth date:**
- **Contact information for interviewees**
  - **Phone numbers:**
  - **Email address:**
  - **Residence:**
- **Translator (family name or surname, given names):**

### Index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Brief Description</strong></th>
<th><strong>Time</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
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**Summary Paragraph**

**Instructions:** 1st sentence, “Discussion of ____ (describe the scope of the interview).” 2nd sentence, “Contains ____ (list important section from the index).” 3rd sentence, if desired, “Includes ____ (list significant stories or topics you want to bring attention to).”

Be sure to include important names, dates, and places.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sacred, Confidential, or Private Information</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the interview contain any of the following?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reports of confessions, Church disciplinary councils, or sensitive matters shared in nonpublic Church settings (such as leadership meetings).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Financial records that document the Church’s income (including tithing and other donations), expenditures, and budgets.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal financial information, including information about welfare assistance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Specific personal health information.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Information whose release would violate applicable data privacy laws (for example, addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, birth dates, criminal history, sexual history, or ethnic background).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Specific wording or details regarding a temple’s interior, temple rites or ceremonies, the garment, or other temple clothing.</td>
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**Other Useful Information (optional)**

**Worksheet Creator**

Worksheet Created By:  
Worksheet Translated By:  
Worksheet Edited By: