

Women and War Oral History Interviewing Techniques

Before the interview, lay the ground rules while you are NOT recording:

1. "Let them know that if there is something they don't want to talk about, they don't need to talk about it.
2. Let them know that if there is something they want to talk about, they should pipe up.
3. Let them know that this will be available for their family and loved ones and the public will view it.
4. Let them know if they need to stop, to get a drink of water, or go to the bathroom, we can stop the recording." (Dr. Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, Voces Oral History Project)

Keep these things in mind during the interview.

1. "Understand that periods of silence will occur. These are useful periods of reflection and recollection for your interviewee.
2. Avoid interrupting the interviewee. But you can again, "gently" bring them back on track. If the interviewee strays away from the topic in which you are interested, don't panic. Sometimes the best parts of the interview come about this way. If you feel the digression has gone too far afield, gently steer the interviewee back to the topic with your next question.
3. Be respectful of the interviewee. Don't argue or talk over the narrator. Use body language to show you are interested in what he or she has to say. Remember, the interviewee is giving you the gift of his or her memories, experiences, and time.
4. That being said, do avoid "hmm...huh...ah...uh-huh..." and no laughing!! Smile instead ☺ you can also let the narrator know before the interview that you will refrain from laughing and talking that will disrupt the interview. Be careful with "too-enthusiastic head nodding."
5. Always be an attentive listener paying attention to inconsistencies and windows to ask more probing questions.
6. Don't use the interview to show off your knowledge, charm, or other attributes. Remember, "good interviewers never shine--only their interviews do.
7. Remember: It is the interview subject's story... but you need to steer the interview
 - a. "Bringing them back to the point
 - b. Making sure they finish a story
 - c. Interrupting gently..." (Dr. Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, Voces Oral History Project)

Press record and begin the interview this preamble:

Today is Month ____, 202X. My name is _____ and I'm interviewing (Title) _____ for the _____ Project. (EX: NEH sponsored and funded Military City, USA: An Oral History Project Dedicated to Women and War)

(Depending on where you are)

- We're at _____ in San Antonio, Texas. Thank you _____ for agreeing to the interview.
--OR--
- I am conducting this interview remotely through _____ (Zoom) due to the COVID-19 pandemic. _____ is located in _____ and I am located in _____. Thank you _____ for agreeing to the interview.