

The only way to discover stories and details of events and relationships in your ancestors' lives might be through an interview. As you conduct an interview, it is important that you are prepared and well organized. Your success depends on how well you listen, how sensitive you are to the feelings of the person you interview, and how well you use follow-up questions to draw out information you want.

Do This . . .

1. Plan and Prepare for the Interview

- Write questions about your family that you want answered.
- Organize the questions in the order you want to ask them.
- Choose a method to record your interview, such as written notes or an audio or video recording device.
- Contact the person in advance:
 - Set a date, time, and place for the interview.
 - Explain the purpose of the interview.
 - Discuss the questions you would like to ask.
 - Ask him or her to show you photos, records, documents, and other mementos during the interview.

2. Conduct the Interview

- Minimize or eliminate distractions, such as a phone, a computer, a TV, a radio, pets, or other family members.
- Allow for pauses to let the person finish his or her answer.
- Manage tangents. Direct the person back to the subject or question with a rephrased question or a follow-up question.
- Ask the person where he or she learned the information.
- Towards the end of the interview, ask for clarifications in spelling, dates, and names.



Sample Interview Questions

- What is your full name? When and where were you born? Who, when, and where did you marry?
- Who is your father? mother? When and where were they born? married? buried? When and where did they die?
- What memories can you share about your father? your mother? their siblings?
- What can you tell me about your father's relatives? your mother's relatives? Do you know their full names? When and where were they born? married? buried? When and where did they die?
- What are the names of your brothers and sisters? When and where were they born? Who, when, and where did they marry?
- Do you have photos, records, or other memorabilia that we could look at?
- Are there any stories or special memories that stand out in your mind?