

Interviewer Guidelines

These guidelines will give you a basic understanding of what is needed to conduct an interview for the U.S. Latino & Latina WWII Oral History Project. They will cover the following:

1. The pre-interview session
2. A checklist of Equipment needed to conduct the interview
3. Setting up for interview
4. Interview questions
5. How to conclude the interview session
6. A checklist of items to return to the Project

We hope you will do, or have done, some background reading on WWII in order to prepare for the interview.

After conducting or receiving the Pre-Interview Form, you will probably want to do additional background reading before



conducting the interview. You will find your interview will be far richer if you are familiar with your subject's experience.

Please make sure to review the "Suggested Reading" link on our website. It will give you a good starting place for historical perspective, as well as additional interviewing tips.

And please remember that these are guidelines, and that you'll have to be flexible to accommodate your interview subject, the time you have available and any other conditions that crop up.

Conducting the "Pre-Interview Session"

When possible, try to set up a pre-interview session. This will help you establish a relationship with the subject and gather the important details that don't really lend themselves to good audio or video interviews.

The Pre-Interview Form itself is helpful to the Project for several reasons:

1. It provides some hard details and facts about the interview subject's life, making it easier to follow up with additional questions during the interview.
2. Also, it is a good reference for researchers, as well as the students who write the vast majority of stories published in our website's "Browse Stories" section. These pieces are also condensed and published in our newsletter, "Insider Narratives," as well as in other places.

You will want to conduct the session prior to the interview, as it is a time-consuming process. Involving the interview subject's family in this process is helpful, as they may be able to add dates and other information. *Of course, if the interview subject chooses not to answer questions within the Pre-Interview Form, we respect his or her wishes and do not insist. If this is the case, please return the blank form to our office with a note explaining the situation. This is an important step, as we will otherwise re-attempt to have the form filled out.*

In some cases, the interview subject, or his or her family, has already completed the Pre-Interview Form and returned it to our office; if that is the case, we will provide you with a copy.

The pre-interview session is also an ideal time to ask the interview subject to locate war-era photographs, letters, discharge papers and other memorabilia, so we may scan and add them to the subject's digital file. The easiest way for these items to be added to their file is to allow the Project to borrow them. (We will subsequently scan and return the items via FedEx.) Otherwise, the family may scan the items themselves. Please see our "Photo Guidelines" handout, which is available on our website, for more information.

Images will NOT be accepted via email, as they will be too small for archiving purposes.

Conducting the Interview

If the interview subject is amenable, it is best to conduct the interview in his or her home. You may need to take control a bit here in order to seal off any distracting noise. For example, there is loud traffic outside, make sure the windows are closed so you

won't hear it on the recording. More commonly, if you can hear the television in the next room, you may want to ask them to turn it off or close the door. Try to have a private interview session, without an audience; unless, of course, the spouse or an adult child has a better memory than the subject.



Please keep in mind that the interview is a co-operative venture between you, the interview subject and whoever is running your equipment. Feel free to stop the camera to get a drink of water, use the restroom or let your interview subject rest. You may find it is better to continue the interview on another day if the subject is tired. These tapes will be unedited, and those viewing them, as

well as the subjects themselves, will appreciate every consideration you show.

Please call the interview subject to confirm the interview, either the night before or the morning of the meeting. This helps avoid confusion and scheduling conflicts.

Checklist of Equipment Needed to Conduct the Interview

It is best to pack these items the night before the interview to ensure everything makes it to the interview site.

1. A video camera

Because the Project is archival, we prefer to use video cameras that record to tape. Having a tape ensures that, in addition to the DVDs we create for the archive, we have a hard copy of the interview. We **CANNOT** accept footage from a Flip camera or other small “tapeless” camera (“tapeless” meaning any camera shooting to an SD card or hard drive), as the video and audio quality are generally low.

2. An external microphone

This will be used to record the responses of the interview subject. Your questions will be picked up by the video camera's built-in microphone, but when possible, we prefer better audio quality for your interview subject. However, if you don't have an external microphone, or your video camera doesn't have an input jack for an external microphone, go ahead and conduct the interview without it. The most important thing is getting the interview. Time is of the essence.

3. Headphones

Please plug these into the camera so the videographer (whether it's you or a companion) is able to monitor the sound quality of the subject. This is a really simple way for you to know what sound the camera is picking up ~~sound~~ and we are not losing the interview subject's story. When our staff does an interview, we leave the headphones on throughout the interview to make sure the audio is good at all times.

4. A video camera tripod

5. A high-quality video tape

Please use Sony, Maxell, JVC or a similar-quality tape.

Interviews generally last about two hours; however, it is best to bring additional tapes in case the interview runs long or you encounter problems with one tape.

6. Interview Agreement Forms

Please print these from our website. You can find them under the “Learn to Interview” section.

7. Still camera

This is optional, but you may want to snap photos of the interview subject. If you use a digital camera, please set it to the highest/largest resolution (file size) possible. Please send the images on disc with the other post-interview materials, and NOT via email. Also, we cannot accept images taken with a camera phone or other small-resolution device.

8. One or two large, plastic Ziploc bags to put any old photographs in, in case they let you borrow them. You may

also want a bag to put the recorded videotapes in, just to keep them organized.

The Day of the Interview

As interviewer, your most important responsibility – aside from recording properly – is to ask questions, listen intently and ask the follow-up questions that will inevitably be needed. As a result, it is crucial that you listen to the answers. If the subject uses words or refers to names or places with which you are unfamiliar, ask him or her to spell them out and, if necessary, explain. Include this information on the back page of the Pre-Interview Form.



At the very beginning, explain the purpose of the Project. Also, explain the purpose of the release form and tell them that at the end of the interview, you'll be asking ask him or her to sign it. The release form gives us the right to use the tape for

educational purposes; exhibits, books, plays, etc.; as well as in our archive.

With the tape(s) running, ask the interviewee a couple of throw-away questions – their date and place of birth, for example – while listening to the recording with the headphones.

Unfortunately, interviews have been lost due to poor recording. Please do not let this happen to your interview.

To prevent accidentally recording a silent interview, please read the following introduction at the beginning of your session, with the tape running:

This is YOURNAME, on TODAY’S DATE, interviewing YOURSUBJECT’S NAME, for the U.S. Latino and Latina World War II Oral History Project. We are sitting in WHEREVER THE INTERVIEW IS TAKING PLACE, in CITY AND STATE. Thank you, YOURSUBJECT’S NAME, for agreeing to be interviewed.

Then rewind and review the test. If you can hear yourself and your subject clearly, proceed to the interview.

Interview Questions

These questions are merely suggestions. You will want to tailor the interview to your interview subject's experiences: For example, a Mexican American who was in the South Pacific will be interviewed differently from a woman who worked at a U.S. airbase.

In general, we are looking for their stories, with as much specific detail as possible about what life was like before, during and after WWII. Please get your interview subject to talk about his or her own experiences as much as possible, and get detail as rich as he or she can recall. For example, rather than simply let your subject say he or she missed Mom's cooking, ask specifically what dishes Mom cooked, what ingredients she used, etc. Or, rather than let your subject say he or she got dressed and went to see the boss, ask if he or she wore any "special outfit," etc, to see the boss.

One little trick is to ask your subject to show you how something was done. For instance, Houston's Paul Zepeda got his brother to demonstrate how their mother made butter, which

made for great video. Another possibility is to let your subject show you his or her medals on camera and explain what he or she got them for. Or, your subject might have something else to show you. For example, San Antonio's Charlie Uranga has a wonderful display of model tanks and other WWII memorabilia he showed his interviewer. Again, let the videotape roll while your subject shows you his or her treasures.

The numbered questions in **bold type** are the recommended general questions. They should be enough to get most people started. The indented questions indicate the specific information you are looking for and may be useful as follow-up questions if the interviewee needs some prompting. You do not need to ask every question on the list, unless, of course, the interview subject is giving you one-word answers.

The most important thing is to listen and form your questions from your subject's responses.

1. Tell me about your childhood — what was your daily life like?

- Do you have any brothers or sisters?

Were you the oldest?

Did you have to help take care of your siblings?

What kinds of things would you do together?

- What did your parents do?
- What memories do you have of your parents?
- Did your family have to struggle economically?

Were you aware of The Great Depression?

How did it affect your family?

What kinds of things did you do without?

How did you make up for the things you couldn't get, like toys or clothes, etc.?

- What are your memories of your childhood?

What kinds of games did you play?

Where were your favorite places to be?

Do you have a favorite memory about a birthday or special event?

- What traditions did your mother and father maintain from their up-bringing?

Were those traditions from their country?

How old were you when your parents died?

2. Tell me about your school years?

- How many years were you in school?
- Where did you go to school?
- What were your first years in school like?
- What was your school like?
- What kinds of activities or clubs did you participate in?
- Do you have any special memories about being in school?
- What did you think about your teachers?
- What was high school like?
- What kinds of activities or clubs did you participate in?
- What do you remember most about your high school days?

- What kinds of things did you do with your friends after school?
- Did you work while you were in school?
- Was your school segregated in any way?
- Do you remember being treated any differently from other students?
- Do you remember others being treated differently?
- Was the education you received about the same as the one your brothers and sisters received?
- What do you remember about what was going on in the country and your community when you were growing up?
- Do you remember any particular historical events and experiences?
- Did you attend college?
- What did you study?
- Did you encounter difficulties there?

3. What did you do during the 1940s – work, care for family...?

- What do you recall about the time when WWII started?

What do you remember about Pearl Harbor?

How old were you when the attack occurred?

What did you think about the country's becoming involved in WWII?

- Did you serve in the Civilian Conservation Corps?

Where did you serve?

What kind of work did you do?

What do you remember most about the experience?

- What did you do for fun as a young adult during those times?

4. Did you serve in the armed forces during WWII or the Korean conflict?

- What units were you in? (Please be sure to ask for specific information like their company and regiment or ship.)
- Were you drafted or inducted?
- When you went to basic training, where did you go?

How far away from home were you?

Was that the first time on your own?

How did it make you feel?

What kinds of things do you remember learning? Did you feel prepared to go overseas?

- What was it like for you where you were stationed?

What was daily life like?

Did you get mail or packages from home?

What duty were you assigned to?

What would you do in your free time?

- How did you get along with the other men in your **unit**?

Who did you make friends with?

What do you remember about the people you met?

Was their background different from yours?

Did that cause any conflict? Any misunderstandings?

What did you learn from one another?

- What do you remember most about your service?

Do you have any stories or memories you would like to share?

What was the most difficult situation you ever confronted?

What was your most memorable encounter with enemy forces?

- What was your highest rank and what medals and badges did you earn?
- What did you do after you returned?

What did your family/friends/neighbors think about you serving? What did they think about the war in general?

How did WWII change your life?

5. What type of work did you do when you were young and what did you do later?

- What was your first full-time job after you finished school?
- How did you get started in your business or profession?

Did you face difficulties in the beginning?

What do you attribute your success to?

- Did you use the GI Bill to further your education?
- Did you use the GI Bill to obtain a home loan?

6. Did you marry?

- When?
- How and when did you meet your future spouse?
- Do you have a special memory you would like to share?
- What was his/her name? (Please make sure you ask for wives' maiden names.)

7. Did you have any children?

- How many?
- What are their names?
- How did the life of your children differ from that of your own?
- What did raising a family mean to you and those around you?

8. What was it like living as a Mexican American, Mexican, Puerto Rican or other Latino and/or a woman after WWII?

- Were there changes in the lives of Latinos in the decades following WWII?

What kinds of changes did you see?

- What difficulties remained?
- Did you face any difficulties in your

work /business/career either because you were a woman or because you were Latino? Do you remember a specific instance or event?

- Do you remember any racial conflicts in your community during the 1950s and 1960s?

Do you recall reading any newspaper or magazine articles about this?

- Did you become involved in the Civil Rights movements?

Do you remember, or were you involved in, any organizations concerned with supporting the struggle for equality of Latinos

and/or other minorities in the community during the 1950s and 1960s?

Do you think these movements had an impact?

- What obstacles did you have to overcome?

9. What languages did you speak growing up?

- If Spanish, what do you remember about learning to speak English?
- Did you listen to Spanish-language radio?

Which stations and programs?

- Did you read English or Spanish publications?

Which ones?

- If you were in the service, did you listen to any radio stations different from those back home?
- Did you read any publications different from those back home?
- Did you seek out other Spanish speakers?

- Did you raise your children to speak English and Spanish?
Why or why not?
10. What are you involved in now?
- Are you involved in any civic or community organizations?
11. What changes have you seen over the years in the lives of U.S. Latinos?
- What strides have they made?
 - What problems still need to be resolved?
 - Do you think relations between Latinos and other people living in the U.S. have improved?
12. What advice do you have for younger generations?
13. Is there anything else you would like to talk about?

After the Interview

At the conclusion of the interview, while the tape is still rolling, thank the interview subject for his or her time.

Then, right after you stop recording, **GET THE PERMISSION FORM SIGNED BY YOU AND HIM/HER.**

Let the subject know we will be sending a DVD copy of his or her interview, as well as a copy of a story most likely written by a student journalist. The subject will have a chance to read the story before it is published on our website and in our newsletter.

Checklist of Items to Return to the Project

1. **The signed release form**, signed by both you and your subject.

2. **The video recording cassette(s)**, labeled clearly with the subject's name and date of the interview.



If there is more than one, please number them 1 of 2 and 2 of 2. That way we will always know how many there were.

3. **Completed Pre-Interview Form**

4. **A 1-page summary of the interview**, including your name, the name of the person you interviewed, place and time the interview was conducted and some of the interesting and important parts of the interview. (The summary helps us write a better story about the interview subject, emphasizing what you think is important.)

5. **Any photographs or digital reproductions of photographs**, according to our specifications, or any **other paper memorabilia** your subject is willing to share with the Project.

Ideally, we would like to have at least one photograph of him or her from the war years, as well as a current photograph. We will



return the photographs. If your interview subject wants to donate his or her photographs, letters, diaries, medals, certificates, etc., ask him or her to contact Margo Gutiérrez, Mexican American & Latino Studies Librarian at the Benson

Latin American Collection (phone: 512-495-4589, fax: 512-495-4568, e-mail: mgutierrez@mail.utexas.edu). Margo is also interested in documentation relating to post-war participation in organizations such as the American GI Forum, LULAC, PASSO, Viva Kennedy Clubs, etc.

If you or your subject wishes to scan images, please see our Photo Guidelines handout, which is available on our website, for detailed information. Images will NOT be accepted via email, as they will be too small for archiving purposes.

6. If you took still pictures of the subject and/or the interview, please put them on a labeled CD, and include the date and location of the images.



What happens to the videotape and other material you send the Project?

Once we receive your videotaped interview and other material, we will immediately dub the tape to DVD. We will make several copies: one for the interview subject, one for our archives and one for future use by a student journalist who will write a story from it. We will send a DVD to your interview subject. Also, once a story has been written from your subject's account, we will mail it (most likely with a list of questions typed above the piece) and a letter inviting him or her to make corrections and revisions before we publish on the website and in our newsletter. We will send the stories by U.S. mail, along with a stamped and self-addressed envelope, to make it easier for subjects to send their stories back to us.

We also make copies of the Pre-Interview Form, which goes a long way in helping student journalists write about interview subjects. We do not allow the original copies out of our office, however, for fear of losing it.

Any photographs are promptly scanned to our specifications and returned to the interview subject through overnight mail, for security reasons.

Each interview subject will have a file folder with all additional information sent to us.

Nothing is thrown away; all is greatly valued.

We recognize what a time commitment interviewing requires. And we thank you profoundly for making a difference in ensuring that the stories of Latinos and Latinas are included in our nation's historical narrative.

