

RECORDING YOUR STORY: COLLECTING ORAL HISTORIES

Oral history helps museums to ‘people’ their collections and the past in general, in a very personal and immediate way that traditional historical records often don’t encompass.

WHAT IS ORAL HISTORY?

Oral history is the creation and analysis of a planned recorded interview with one or more people for the purpose of preservation, research, interpretation and dissemination in multiple forms.

WHY COLLECT ORAL HISTORIES?

Museums and other organisations collect and utilise a wide range of historical material in order to learn about, and talk about, histories. Oral histories are an important collection type. Stories, knowledge, experiences and relayed cultural practices of people contribute to a more complete picture of the historical and contemporary experiences which shape our society. Oral histories, along with objects, film, archival material, photographs and other historical sources, help museums to represent diverse voices and perspectives.

HOW DO MUSEUMS USE ORAL HISTORIES?

Museums use these recorded interviews in a number of ways – to be edited and presented in exhibitions; to publish excerpts in publications and online; and to be made available to researchers wherever relevant and appropriate. Consequently, all interviewees must sign a consent form which releases the recording for the museum’s use; if this is not possible interviewees are requested to have their verbal consent recorded as part of their interview. Either way, interviewees will be asked to select the ways in which they wish their interview to be used – or not be used. Where possible, interviewees will also be acknowledged (or not) whenever an interview is used in a public forum such as an exhibition or publication, according to the terms of the oral history agreement.

WHERE DO MUSEUMS KEEP ORAL HISTORIES?

In order to preserve these recollections, interviews should be recorded using preservation quality equipment and formats, and catalogued as part of the museum’s collection.

The recordings and/or transcripts should be stored safely and backed up as part of the museum’s collection, designed to preserve the originals in their best possible condition. It is important to not only preserve the words, but the sound of individual voices, the particular language of the storyteller, the emotion and

emphases that come through and the very personal and unique nature of a person talking about themselves, their experiences and/or their cultural knowledge.

ORAL HISTORY TEMPLATE INTRODUCTION

The following resource was developed in collaboration between Museums Australia (Victoria) and Museum Victoria, and is based on Museum Victoria's Oral History Kit (2014).

Due to the changing nature of technology, it is recommended that this resource be reviewed every five years. Any digital recording or storage technology mentioned in this resource should be reviewed and if necessary upgraded every five years.

You can use the following template as a reference, either to compare with an existing document, or as background reading for preparing a new document.

You can also use this template to create your own document by following the steps below.

1. Insert the name of your museum on the first page of the document and change the title of the document and the footer at the bottom of the document (to the name you want to call the document, and the date or version of the document).
2. Enter the name of your organisation into the 'Guiding Principles' section (highlighted in red), and any other places you feel necessary.
3. Print a hard copy and/or save the retitled document to your computer.

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GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR COLLECTING ORAL HISTORIES

Note: Throughout this document (**enter name of organisation**
_____) will be referred to as **the organisation**.

1. **The organisation** recognises the significance of the act of imparting a personal story or sharing cultural knowledge, and the value of the human voice – its unique nuances and idiosyncrasies in the preservation, representation and interpretation of personal stories.
2. **The organisation** also recognises the innate integrity of oral histories and the unique opportunity offered by oral histories in the preservation and interpretation of a variety of histories.
3. **The organisation's** staff/volunteers and its representatives will always conduct interviews with objectivity, honesty, respect and integrity.
4. **The organisation's** staff/volunteers will always explain the purpose of each interview, how it will be conducted and recorded, how it will be managed, possible future uses, and what interviewees will receive after the interview.
5. **The organisation** adheres strictly to the principle of informed consent and will request and document that consent in written and/or oral recorded form.
6. **The organisation** will ensure that interviewees are given the opportunity to review, correct and/or withdraw material, as well as receive a copy recording of the interview.
7. Where possible, **The organisation** will provide documentation and forms in the interviewee's first language, as well as conduct the interview in that language.
8. **The organisation** will respect and uphold the original intent of interviews conducted, particularly in relation to future uses.
9. **The organisation** is committed to making oral histories accessible to the public in a variety of ways (e.g. through exhibitions, availability, promotion of the collection and other public activities).
10. **The organisation** will preserve and manage the audiovisual tapes, digital recordings and transcripts of oral histories as part of **the organisation's** collection.

CONDUCTING & MANAGING ORAL HISTORIES: PRACTICAL TIPS

PRIOR TO INTERVIEW

Provide interviewee with:

- A verbal explanation and copy of [Guiding Principles for Collecting Oral Histories](#) A written and verbal project outline (objectives, outcomes, parameters, time frame, purpose of interview, how it will be organised and recorded, where interview will be accessible and what interviewees will receive).
- A written description of interview subject areas and/or sample questions.
- A verbal discussion about any emotional issues or support that may be required and no-go areas for the interview.
- [Oral History Interview Agreement](#) The option of conducting the interview in the interviewee's first language, where feasible.
- Confirmation of date, time and location of interview prior to the day.
- All documents should be provided in participant's first language where possible, in particular the consent form. This should be organised on a case-by-case basis.

BEFORE, DURING OR AFTER INTERVIEW

- Explain [Oral History Interview Agreement](#) form before the interview, reiterating the rights of interviewees to place restrictions on current and future use of their interview.
- Record consent at the commencement or conclusion of the interview using the Agreement or in verbal form.
- At commencement of the Recording, the Interviewer should introduce the Interview with the following information: name of Interviewer, name of Interviewee, date and location of interview (**not street address for privacy reasons**), topic of interview and name of project if applicable.
- It is best to plug recording device into a power point rather than rely on batteries.
- Take a photograph of Interviewee if required/appropriate and sign two copies of the relevant licence agreement. Provide one copy to Interviewee and retain the other.
- Sign two copies of the [Oral History Interview Agreement](#) and provide a copy to Interviewee and retain the other.

AFTER INTERVIEW

- Send thank-you letter to interviewee.
- Organise transcription or translation if required.
- Correct any errors in spelling or names etc. in the transcription when transcript and/or timed summary are received back. If possible also proof-read the transcription by playing back the recording while reading the transcript to check they match, and make any further spelling corrections and editing required.
- Create a copy of the **recording** and send it, with a letter, to the interviewee for review, approval, and correction of factual material and/or withdrawal of selected sensitive and/or libellous information.
- If any amendments are requested to the recording by the interviewee, ensure you amend and save a **revised transcript** based on the requested amendments, and either delete all other transcript versions or keep an annotated original transcript to show the amendments.
- If any amendments are made, or material is deemed sensitive, ensure a Restrictions flag is attached to catalogue records. This is to ensure that only the authorised parts of the interview are made available to interpretation projects and researchers.
- If any restrictions on use noted on the [Oral History Interview Agreement](#) ensure a Restrictions flag is attached to catalogue records.
- If there are conditions set out in the [Oral History Interview Agreement](#) about the future use of the interview, the organisation must undertake future consultation with the interviewee as indicated.
- Broadcast/publication of recordings will only be permitted if it is allowed according to Section 4 of the particular [Oral History Interview Agreement](#) (Restrictions on Use) for that recording, as well as taking other ethical considerations into account, as guided by Staff members'/Volunteers' advice. Be aware that even when permitted by the Agreement, the Staff Members'/Volunteers' advice may be to not publish, for particular ethical or legal reasons.
- If a recording is authorised to be published, for example as an edited audio/video excerpt or full version of the recording, you may use *Audacity* or other software application for digital editing yourself, if trained and competent. **Do not edit the original recording – make an access copy before any editing.**
- Original digital files should not be edited or changed in any way, as this will affect the integrity of the digital artefact. An access copy should be made for use such as listening, and an additional copy made for editing. To aid preservation, only authorised staff should access the master copy.

ORAL HISTORY CREATION, ACQUISITION AND PRESERVATION WORKFLOW

PREPARATION
Staff member/volunteer
<input type="checkbox"/> Undertake training in conducting oral history interviews, if required <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Ethics; techniques; standards; setting-up
<input type="checkbox"/> Undertake training in using recording equipment, if required

INTERVIEW
Staff member/volunteer
<input type="checkbox"/> Advise interviewee of mutual rights [access, editing, copyright]
<input type="checkbox"/> Complete and sign Oral History Interview Agreement and record consent in verbal form
<input type="checkbox"/> Record the interview as 'born digital' audio or video file
<input type="checkbox"/> Ensure digital file format is preservation quality: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ audio: uncompressed WAV or AIFF▪ video: camera dependent: MPEG2
<input type="checkbox"/> Ensure digital file resolution is to preservation quality: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ audio: 96kHz, 24 bit [PREFERRED] / 48 kHz, 24 bit [minimum]▪ video: camera dependent [set to highest resolution]

FILE & DATA MANAGEMENT
Staff member/volunteer
<input type="checkbox"/> Download digital file[s] from recorder memory card
<input type="checkbox"/> Make access copy and master copy
<input type="checkbox"/> Rename data files with name, date and file number
<input type="checkbox"/> Ensure downloaded file[s] playback fully before deleting from memory card – i.e. play the recording through, testing parts at the beginning,

PRIVACY STATEMENT

The organisation will store your name and contact details in electronic format. The organisation is committed to protecting your personal privacy

FILE & DATA MANAGEMENT

middle and end, as sometimes the downloaded file is corrupted and you can't play it.

- Send thank-you letter to interviewee
- Send digital copy of interview (**not original**) for transcribing or translation. MP3 format is useful for transferring files via email.

ACQUISITION

- Register the file into the collection
- Assess for significance of content, intrinsic historical value
- Send copy of interview recording to interviewee for approval and/or amendment
- Document any requested changes to interview in the transcript

PRESERVATION

- Manage access to interviews according to copyright restrictions
- Manage access restrictions according to copyright agreement
- Ensure interview is used and cited appropriately

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RECORDING FORMATS & STANDARDS FOR ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

The recommended recording formats, resolutions, equipment and recording environments for creating oral history interviews are listed below. These meet current industry practice in 2014.

- ❑ Preservation quality digital file format:
 - Audio: uncompressed WAV or AIFF.
 - Video: camera dependent: MPEG2.
- ❑ Preservation quality digital file resolution:
 - Audio: 96 kHz, 24 bit [**PREFERRED**] – available on the Zoom. [This is broadcast preservation quality.]
 - Audio: 48 kHz, 24 bit [**MINIMUM**] – available on the Zoom.
 - Video: camera dependent [set to highest resolution].
- ❑ Recommended recording equipment:
 - Zoom portable recorder – this is the Museums Australia capable of 96 kHz and 24 bit resolution.
 - The Zoom recorder is the preferred equipment as of 2014. It is recommended that this equipment choice is reviewed in three years.
- ❑ Recording environment:
 - If interviewing in the field, aim to record the interview somewhere where as much background noise can be reduced as possible, and where disruptions can be avoided.
 - It is advised to record ten seconds of background ambient noise in the environment where the interview is taking place, before beginning the interview. This loop of ambient noise can be inserted back into any excerpts and multimedia presentations that might be made featuring the interview, and will help make editing cuts less obvious.

TRANSCRIBING GUIDELINES FOR STAFF/VOLUNTEERS

Staff members/Volunteers should check spelling of names and technical terms at the end of their interview, and this information should be passed to the transcriber, to assist them and avoid unnecessary corrections later. Staff/Volunteers can take notes during interviews and consult with the interviewee about any words that need a spelling check at end of the interview or in a follow up conversation later. If a full transcription is not possible, a timed summary can be produced. This is a contents breakdown that lists the various topics discussed during the interview and the times at which they are discussed. Without a transcription or a timed summary, oral histories are difficult to use for research purposes.

Don't send original files to the transcriber.

If changing file formats for the transcriber, e.g. wav to mp3, **do not** change the original file format or the access copy– make a third copy & change the format of the copy.

Don't forget to label your USB stick or CD with your name and organisation.

Remember that the transcript reflects the written interpretation of the interview. To fully appreciate the intonation, volume, rhythm, emotion, expression, voice and language unique to the interview, and to avoid any misinterpretations of the content, the original recording should be referred back to and listened to for research purposes.

ORAL HISTORY CHECKLIST

TASK	PLEASE TICK	DATE COMPLETED
Pre-Interview arrangements made		
Equipment ready, batteries charged, cables, Extension cord packed		
Oral history interview Agreement form signed		
Photo of interviewee taken (if relevant)		
Image licence form signed (if relevant)		
Digital files downloaded after interview & re-named		
Thank-you letter sent		
Files sent for transcription		
Transcription returned		
Timed summary returned		
Transcript audited		
Accession into collection – catalogue recording in database		
CD sent to interviewee		
Interview authorised or amendments requested & made		

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW RECORD SHEET

Project	
Collection Name	

INTERVIEWEE DETAILS

Name			
Role (relevant to the interview e.g. historic role & organisation)			
Address			
Email Address			
Telephone		Date of Birth	
Personal Profile			

INTERVIEW DETAILS

Interviewer Name	
Date of interview	
Place	
Length of interview	
Theme(s)	
Access Conditions	
Other Contributor(s)	
Related Collection item(s)	
Digital Files	

PRIVACY STATEMENT

The organisation will store your name and contact details in electronic format. The organisation is committed to protecting your personal privacy.

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW AGREEMENT

In this agreement, the interviewee assigns copyright to **the organisation**. Your recorded interview will become part of **the organisation's** Collection where it will be preserved for future researchers. **The organisation** is grateful for your participation in this oral history project.

This is an agreement between the **INTERVIEWEE** and **THE ORGANISATION** (*please fill in your details*):

INTERVIEWEE

Name:

Parent/guardian:

(if applicable):

Address:

Postcode:

Telephone:

Fax:

Email:

I have been asked and have agreed to be interviewed by **the organisation**, subject to this agreement and as part of **the organisation's** programs. **The organisation** has advised me that it wishes to preserve the Interview as part of **the organisation's** Collection. Once the interview is preserved at **the organisation**, I understand that it can be used by **the organisation** for a variety of purposes including, but not limited to, exhibition, research, education material, public presentations, publication, website, broadcast and transmission unless I place restrictions hereunder on any of those uses.

And **the organisation**

Name of Interviewer:

Name of organisation:

Contact:

Address:

Postcode:

Telephone:

+61 3

Fax:

+61 3

Email:

PRIVACY STATEMENT

The organisation will store your name and contact details in electronic format. **The organisation** is committed to protecting your personal privacy.

DETAILS OF THE ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

Place of Interview:	Date of Interview:
Interviewer(s):	Position:
Description of Interview:	
.....	
.....	
.....	

SCHEDULE

1. Copy of the Interview

1.1 The Interview may consist of any or all of the following components: audio and/or video recording and/or translation and/or transcript and is hereafter referred to as the Interview.

1.2 **The organisation** will provide me with a copy of the Interview if I so request.

1.3 Within 90 days of the signing of this agreement, I may request changes to factual errors or issues of a sensitive nature to be made to the Interview by **the organisation**.

2. Copyright

2.1 Under the Copyright Act 1968 **the organisation** will be the owner of the copyright in the Interview. This means that it can reproduce, publish, broadcast, transmit, perform and adapt the Interview, unless I place restrictions on it doing so.

2.2 I acknowledge that I am able to utilise the Interview for personal non-commercial purposes.

3. Storage and Use

3.1 **The organisation** will preserve the Interview in its collection. The Interview will be available for use by **the organisation's** staff/volunteers and members of the public for the purposes of future research, publication, broadcast or transmission, subject to any restrictions which I impose in this agreement.

PRIVACY STATEMENT

The organisation will store your name and contact details in electronic format. **The organisation** is committed to protecting your personal privacy.

4. Restrictions on Use

4.1 The Interview will be preserved in **the organisation's** collection and made available to **the organisation's** staff/volunteers and members of the public subject to the following conditions (*please select one*):

- General Access with no restrictions on use of the Interview or the material in the Interview other than those normally imposed by **the organisation** on its users.
- Restricted Access with **the organisation** to impose a restriction that the Interview or any part of the Interview will not be copied or published without my prior written consent.
- Other Restrictions and Conditions. **The organisation** will use its best endeavours to ensure that the following restrictions are observed in any use of the Interview (*attach appendix if insufficient space below*):

.....
.....
.....

4.2 If I impose any restrictions on the use of the Interview then I will keep **the organisation** notified at all times of any change to my address.

4.3 If after making reasonable attempts **the organisation** is unable to contact me at the last address that I gave, it then may, at its discretion, make the Interview available for the purposes outlined in schedule 3.1 above without the requirement to observe the restrictions which I have imposed.

5. Acknowledgement

5.1 If **the organisation** reproduces, publishes, broadcasts, transmits, performs or in any way at all makes the Interview available to the public then I will receive the following acknowledgement, where possible (*please select one*):

- My full name as set out above
- No acknowledgement or disclosure of my name
- Acknowledgement as follows:

.....
.....

PRIVACY STATEMENT

The organisation will store your name and contact details in electronic format. **The organisation** is committed to protecting your personal privacy.

INTERVIEWEE OR PARENT/GUARDIAN *(if applicable)*

Signature

.....
Name *(print)*

.....
Date

On behalf of **NAME OF
ORGANISATION** _____

Signature

.....
Name *(print)*

.....
Date

NOTES

Fair Dealing

The Copyright Act 1968 allows certain material, including written material such as the transcript and audiovisual material such as sound recordings and videos, to be used for certain purposes without infringing the copyright in the material. These are called “fair dealing” uses and they include use for the purpose of research or study, criticism and review, reporting the news and judicial proceedings.

The organisation is not able to control such “fair dealing” uses of material. This means that parts of the material could be used and quoted in academic or other writing resulting from research and study. If you do not want this to occur you should use the enclosed agreement to place a Restricted Access condition on its use. This restriction means that **the organisation** will not allow the Interview to be copied or published without your prior written consent.

PRIVACY STATEMENT

The organisation will store your name and contact details in electronic format. **The organisation** is committed to protecting your personal privacy.

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT TEMPLATE

Name of organisation _____

Interview Title: _____

Collection Name: _____

DETAILS OF INTERVIEW	
Interviewer	
Interviewee/s	
Interview Date	
Interview Location	
Length of interview	
Transcriber	
Transcription Date	
Number of Digital Files	
Digital File Names	
Transcript Audited	

REFERENCE WORDS (for correct spelling of technical words & names)

KEY TO NAMES

TRANSCRIBER QUERIES	
Page number	Query or comment

¹ TRANSCRIPT	
File Name	
Recording Length	
Initials of Speakers & Time-Code	

¹ Repeat Transcript table for subsequent digital files of recording. No need to repeat the other tables in this template for subsequent files.

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW TIMED SUMMARY TEMPLATE

INTERVIEW TITLE	
COLLECTION NAME	

INTERVIEW DETAILS (Staff member/Volunteer to fill out)	
Interviewer	
Interviewee(s)	
Interview Date	
Interview Location	
Transcriber	
Transcription Date	

KEY INFORMATION	
Key Places Mentioned	
Key People Mentioned	
Keywords/Subjects/ Topics	

TIMECODE	SUMMARY TEXT
HH:MM:SS	