

**AMST 101 - INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN CULTURE STUDIES
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ORAL HISTORY NARRATIVE ASSIGNMENT

This assignment will require you to practice the skills of the oral historian. You will select an interview subject, research an historical event, conduct and transcribe an interview, and then write their “story” or narrative. The goal is to view historical events from one person’s perspective.

SELECT A SUBJECT: Find someone over the age of 40 and ask them to talk to you about an historical event that was important to them (that they were old enough to witness) during the twentieth century (1900-1999). They do not have to have been a direct eyewitness to the event, but they should be knowledgeable enough about it to be able to talk about it in a personal way.

Find someone who you think might be a good storyteller. Ask them in advance about what topic they would like to talk about so you can do some research before you meet for the interview.

You may interview someone you know or who you are related to if you like, but it may be easier to come up with questions for (and ask questions of) a person you don’t know so well.

RESEARCH THEIR CHOSEN TOPIC: You will need to provide some basic facts to both create a good list of questions as well as provide a little context for their story, so do some research on dates and events. Use trusted academic sources (reference texts, academic books, academic journals) not Wikipedia, newspapers, magazines, or blogs. You will be citing your sources in a bibliography.

CREATE A LIST OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: After learning about the topic the interviewee would like to discuss, create a list of about 15-20 questions. Aim for a few simple questions, with the majority being open-ended questions.

CREATE AN INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT FOR YOUR INTERVIEWEE TO SIGN: Your interviewee must be willing to have their interview transcribed and published. They can specify if they would like to be anonymous. You can find a blank form in the “Resources” section of the “Assignments” block on Titanium. This must be submitted with your assignment.

CONDUCT - AND RECORD - THE INTERVIEW: Aim for 20-30 minutes. Less and you may not have much to work with, more and you may have too much. Too much is good, not enough is bad. Bring a backup method for recording just in case your first one fails.

TRANSCRIBE THE INTERVIEW: Type up both your questions and the interviewee’s answers word-for-word. It is tedious. It is time consuming. It is also necessary!

POST-INTERVIEW RESEARCH & FACT FINDING: After the interview, you may have some questions about events discussed or perhaps need to corroborate some details made by your interviewee. Do research to verify their claims.

WRITE THE “STORY” OR NARRATIVE: Provide a short introduction, explaining briefly who was interviewed and specific details about the topic. This isn't the story of their life, just of one experience, so focus on the important details. Then, using your interview transcription, tell the story as completely as you can in the interviewee’s own words. Your goal is to craft a narrative that is mostly about the interviewee and their experience, so use a lot of direct quotes from the interview. You should also

place their story in a historical context, so think about where their personal story is connected to stories of others in similar situations.

At the end of the narrative, write one paragraph (max) of reflective summary:

- How did the interview affect you?
- What silences did you encounter during this process?
- Did you have to leave some things out of the final story?
- Do you think your interviewee may have silenced aspects of their story? Misremembered? Why or why not?
- How would you do things differently if you were to do this assignment again?

SUBMIT THE FOLLOWING:

- 1) The Narrative (About 4 pages, double-spaced, 12 point font, standard margins).
- 2) A bibliography of sources you used to research the topic (Consult the Bibliography Guide in the Assignments block on Titanium for details).
- 3) The transcript of the entire interview.
- 4) Scans or very clear photos of notes, if you took any, during the interview.
- 5) Your interviewee's signed Informed Consent document.

Please submit the above 5 components as ONE file in PDF or MICROSOFT WORD format. You will not be allowed to submit more than one document.

Some Tips:

- 1 Let your interviewee do most of the talking, and allow for silence, giving them time to think and remember.
- 2 Ask easy questions at the beginning of the interview, to get things going, and return to easy questions at the end, to tie things up.
- 3 Come up with open-ended questions that allow for long answers rather than specific questions that result in short answers. Instead of "Did you work at the Sunkist Factory?" try "What was it like working at a factory?"
- 4 Your interviewee may get emotional about their experience, which is normal. If they seem overwhelmed, take a pause. Ask if they need a tissue or a glass of water. When they regain composure, ask if they are OK and if they would like to continue the interview.
- 5 Your interviewee is one unique voice on the topic, but their perspective is also probably helpful to other people like them. Think about how their story fits into the larger historical/cultural experience when writing your narrative.

WAYS TO CONTRIBUTE YOUR ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT AND/OR NARRATIVE:

This is not required, but if you think your interviewee's story is an important one, consider donating your interview and transcript. Make sure to get your interviewee's permission.

- Donate to CSU Fullerton's **Lawrence DeGraff Center for Oral & Public History** collection. <http://coph.fullerton.edu/studentinformation/>. Call the phone number to inquire about donating and use the "Deed of Gift" form to prepare your submission. Digital audio and transcript are preferred.
- Donate to the US **Library of Congress & Storycorp**. Download the app here: <https://archive.storycorps.org/about/>, set up your account, and upload your digital interview (Max file size is 500MB)