

# **A Practical Guide to Oral History for Scouting Historians**

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**NOAC 2024 Edition**

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## Introduction

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Before we get started, it's really important to recognize that "oral history" exists as an entire field of academic study and career opportunities. If you film those interviews, you can add an entire field of documentary filmmaking. If you publish those stories, you are looking at fields like audio production, broadcasting, and more.

Oral history started with some really simple fundamentals:

1. Find people with interesting stories.
2. Ask them about their stories.
3. Record the conversation.

It wasn't long ago that this was done with primitive recording devices. Today, we have state of the art microphones and digital recorders in our pockets. You can kickstart an entire oral history program with the things that you already have ... if you know how to ask the right questions.

The most important part of any oral history program is just getting started. The next most important part is learning how to find questions that will lead to meaningful discussions and other interesting questions.

As Arromwen, we are each uniquely obligated to "observe and preserve the traditions of the Order of the Arrow." My goal for this book is to help you achieve that. My hope is that this will help you survey the potential in your oral history programs, then give you some basic knowledge and some basic tools to help you get started. From there, it will be up to you to decide how far you want to go into audio production, documentary filmmaking, or whatever else you might find to help enhance these amazing stories.

## **What is Oral History?**

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According to the Oral History Foundation, oral history is “a method of gathering, preserving, and interpreting the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events.”

The key words there are “voices” and “memories.”

It’s really simple these days to get a list of facts. You can get your lodge calendar, your list of lodge chiefs, your list of Vigil Honor recipients, the times you hosted Conclave, etc., and compile a book of facts pretty easily. If you add a collection of digital scans for all of your patches, you have a really amazing historical record.

With a robust collection of oral histories, you can go beyond when you went to Conclave and where it was held and how many people attended. You can start to share stories about what made it fun, or what made it so memorable. You can share stories about the lightning storm that blew through camp on Friday night or the amazing food that was served in the dining hall 24/7. You can collect and share individual stories from individual people, then you can share a glimpse into their individual experiences.

## Getting Started

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### Determine Your Niche

Some oral history projects are tied to a specific topic. For example, you could be collecting interviews about a specific event, a specific time period, or a specific organization. If you are organizing that type of project, identify the people and the places that are important to your subject.

### Develop an Interview Wishlist

Once you know what kind of topic you want to focus on, it's time to develop a list of potential narrators. Here are some examples to get you started:

- Eagle Scouts, Scoutmasters, and alumni from your troop.
- Trek participants to Philmont, Northern Tier, etc.
- Recipients of the District Award of Merit, Silver Beaver, Silver Antelope, Silver Buffalo, OA Distinguished Service Award, etc.
- Current and former summer camp staff.
- Current and former lodge or section officers, advisers, etc.
- Don't forget to collect histories from "ordinary" Scouts, leaders, parents, and others! One of the most seminal works in oral history is "Working" by Studs Terkel, in which he recorded conversations with "normal" people as they talked about their jobs and day-to-day life in the 1970s.

Once you identify these groups of people, places, or topics that are important to your project, you can start to identify specific names and collect their contact information (phone numbers, home addresses, email addresses, etc.). You can keep this information in a spreadsheet for easy reference.

### Get Started!

It sounds kind of simple, but the next step is to GET STARTED. The first few interviews might be a struggle, but you'll learn from them and you'll get a little better each time. Get started NOW and worry about getting better LATER.

# How to Interview Almost Anyone

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## Do Your Research

When you can, you should do as much research as possible on the person you will be interviewing. When did they join Scouts? Where did they go to summer camp? Did they ever go to Philmont? Were they active in the Order of the Arrow? Did they receive any major awards? This will help you build a list of topics to discuss, then you can quickly build questions to help build a conversation around those topics.

Just remember that these questions are guideposts, not a checklist. These interviews are an exercise in cooperative storytelling, and you might find that your conversation goes into a completely unexpected direction. If that happens, trust your listening instincts, follow the narrator's lead, and enjoy the ride!

## Conduct a Pre-Interview

Once you have established contact and scheduled a time for your interview, you should consider a pre-interview. This can be done in person, over the phone, or online. Your goal is to ensure that the narrator knows what to expect, their rights to the recording, and how you plan to use the recording. If you have never met the narrator, this is a great time to build rapport and overcome some of that initial awkwardness.

During the pre-interview, try to discuss some or all of the following:

- Who will be in attendance? How long will the interview last?
- What topics are expected to be covered? Are there any topics that should be added?
- Does the narrator have any photos, memorabilia, or other artifacts to enhance the conversation?
- What technology will be used to record the interview?
- If recording remotely, what technology will the narrator need? Does the narrator need assistance or guidance on how to use that technology effectively? This is also a good time to produce a test recording to help establish confidence for everyone.

This pre-interview conversation should be brief (maybe just 10-15 minutes) and you should be careful to avoid topics meant to be covered during the formal interview.

## **Be Courteous**

As you begin your journey into collecting oral histories, you will find that many people have never been formally interviewed. As a result, they may need some extra reassurance from you to ensure that their story is worth sharing and that they are the best person to share it.

This starts during the pre-interview process and continues throughout the interview itself and the post-interview process. Have some drinks and snacks on-hand. Make their experience as comfortable as possible. Establish rapport with the narrator by finding a shared topic to discuss before you get to the “hard” questions.

## **Use Active Listening**

The interview is about the narrator and their story, so listen attentively. Do not inject your own personal stories or anecdotes. Keep the focus on the narrator and their story.

It’s okay to make notes during the conversation, but your focus must be on the narrator and their story. Be careful to not interrupt them or cut them off before they have finished their response. Listen for follow-up questions! Don’t be afraid to dig deeper into a story, but also be sure to recognize when they’re ready to change the subject.

If you have a list of notes or questions to reference during the interview, don’t let them be a distraction. Organize your notes before the interview and reference them in between questions. When the other person is speaking, your focus should be totally on them.

If you’re recording the interview, remember to listen *quietly*. The last thing you want to hear when you listen back to the recording all of the times you said things like, “okay,” “right,” and “mhmm.” Practice giving nonverbal feedback through eye contact, gentle head nods, and other cues.

## **Don’t ask Yes-or-No Questions**

A question that can be answered with a simple yes or no will almost always be answered that way. Open-ended questions, by contrast, invite the narrator to tell a story and share more details about their experience. Here is an example of a simple yes-or-no question, then a better open-ended version of the same question.

- Yes-or-No: “Did you have fun at camp?”
- Open-Ended: “What was your favorite part of camp?”



Open-ended questions will often result in answers that lead to other questions. Sometimes, that can be really simple, but sometimes they can be direct. If they mention a favorite merit badge class, for example, you can follow up with one of these:

- Tell me more about that class.
- Why was that your favorite class?
- What made that class so fun?
- Who was in the class with you?

### **Be Curious**

You will find that a genuine curiosity about a person and their story will lead to deeper, more meaningful conversations. There are two key reasons for this.

First, if someone thinks that you are genuinely interested, they will tend to be more excited to share their story and more willing to dive into the details. If they think that you are bored or disinterested, they will usually start to look for the nearest exit from your interview.

Second, if you are genuinely interested, you will find it easier to ask open questions and follow-up questions. If you're interested in a topic, odds are that your audience will also be interested in that topic. Lean into that interest and dive into those details!

### **Don't Forget to Hit the Record Button**

The easiest way to ruin an amazing interview is to realize that you forgot to record it, so don't forget to hit the record button! If you have an assistant who can manage and monitor the recording while you focus on the interview, that would be ideal. If you have to manage and monitor the recording yourself, remember to keep your focus on the narrator!

## **Before the Interview**

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Before the interview, there are a few things you should do:

1. Visit the venue, if possible. This will help you determine how much background noise to expect, what kind of seating is available, what kind of lighting is available (if filming), and more. If you have an interview with someone who requires mobility assistance, for example, you will know to avoid a place that only has lots of stairs.
2. Test your equipment. Charge your batteries. Clear your memory cards. There's nothing worse than getting to an interview and realizing that you have a bad cable, a dead battery, or a corrupt memory card. This person is giving you the gift of their time and their memories. You can do your best to be prepared. Test your gear!
3. Silence your cell phone! Even better, turn it off or leave it in the car. Don't ruin a great interview with an unnecessary distraction.

## **After the Interview**

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### **Share Your Gratitude**

After the interview, remember "A Scout is Courteous." Send a thank you note after each interview. Try to include a copy of the interview, when possible, so they can listen to it and share any corrections they may have. They might also remember more details after listening to the interview, which is a perfect opportunity to record a follow-up interview!

### **Transcribe the Interview**

One of the most important steps in any oral history project is also one of the most time consuming. Each recording should be transcribed into a text file for future reference. This makes your interviews searchable (since you can search text faster than audio). Trust me, you'll be glad you did this part.

### **Don't forget the paperwork!**

The single most important thing to remember when recording oral histories, especially if you plan to publish them or store them in a public archive, is to collect the appropriate paperwork. Every participant in the interview has a legal right to say what can be done with their recording. Many people will be generous and allow you to do "whatever you want" with their interview. Others may want to ensure that certain sensitive parts of the conversation are not released.

Many public repositories will not accept a recording unless both parties give their consent, so this is really an important step that you must not neglect.

## Oral History Equipment & Tech

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Before we start looking at equipment, I want to be really clear about one thing: The gear you use doesn't *really* matter. Great microphones will never be able to hide bad questions! If you have reasonable control over the background noise in your room, you can use almost anything to capture an excellent recording.

It would be impossible to write a comprehensive guide to microphones, digital recorders, and all of the other tech that can be useful while recording oral history interviews. There are entire career fields dedicated to recording the human voice. The objective for this section is to give you a functional understanding of the basic principles.

At the end of this section, I will give a few recommendations for oral history “kits” at various price points.

### Microphones

When it comes to recording in more challenging situations – lots of background noise, for example – it helps to know a little bit about different types of microphones and when to use them. It is easy to be overwhelmed while trying to pick the perfect microphone when there are thousands of microphones out there. You can easily spend a lot of money and get something that doesn't work for you.

It's important to understand that there is no such thing as “the perfect mic.” Use what you have!

### Pickup Patterns

As you shop for microphones, you will see a number of different “pickup patterns”, which describe the area around the microphone that the capsule or element can “hear” sound from.

An **omnidirectional microphone** will capture sound from every direction, more or less equally. You will often find these in clip-on microphones (aka “lavalier mics”) or handheld ENG microphones. Omnidirectional microphones tend to be more forgiving in terms of technique, wind noise, proximity effect, and plosive noise, but they can be more difficult to use in exceptionally noisy environments.

A **cardioid microphone**, by contrast, will tend to pick up sounds that are directly in front of the microphone and reject sounds that are not directly in front of the microphone. This helps isolate your sound source in noisy environments, but it also increases sensitivity to wind, proximity, and plosives.

These are often used in loud or noisy environments (ex: on-stage during a rock concert). Common variants for this type of pickup pattern include subcardioid, supercardioid, and hypercardioid.

A **“shotgun” microphone**, often used on film sets and heavily used for field interviews by National Public Radio (NPR), is often a supercardioid capsule contained in a special housing to help further reject environmental noise and acoustic reflections. These tend to be expensive and can be very difficult to use without some practice and some training.

There are other types of pickup patterns (figure-8, lobar, parabolic, etc.), but they are far less common, less useful for our needs as historians, and more expensive.

### **“Dynamic” vs “Condenser” Microphones**

All microphones operate in the same basic way. They convert sound waves into voltage, which is then sent through wires and cables to a preamp. The exact method in which they achieve this conversion can be very different, and choosing the wrong microphone can cause a lot of headaches.

Dynamic microphones use tiny electromagnets to convert sound waves into electrical signals. They also do not require external power (from a battery or from the mixer/recorder), and thus they tend to be less sensitive than condenser style microphones. This makes dynamic microphones especially useful in loud environments or rooms with a lot of reflective surfaces.

Condenser microphones use variable capacitance to convert sound waves into electrical signals. This means they will require external power (from a battery or via “phantom power” from the mixer/recorder) in order to work correctly. This also allows them to be more sensitive, which results in a better quality of sound (especially for human voices), but also makes them far more susceptible to background noise and loud environments.

One is not necessarily better than the other, but condenser microphones certainly require a little bit of skill to use effectively.

### **Handheld, Lavalier, or Boom**

Another important thing to consider is how you plan to hold, attach, or mount the microphone.

Handheld microphones are exactly what they sound like. They are designed to be held in your hand. This makes them extremely easy to use, but you have to be sure to hold the microphone in about the same place for the entire interview, otherwise the quality of your sound will vary as you move the microphone.

Lavalier microphones are tiny microphones that clip onto the clothing of the person you want to hear. The biggest benefit to these is that they are virtually invisible and they always stay in the same place.

They are smaller and more delicate than the typical handheld microphone. You also have to be careful with placement, otherwise your recording might be overpowered by their clothing rubbing directly on the microphone.

A boom mic is typically mounted overhead on a “boom arm” (a term that originated on sailing ships) and pointed directly at the person you are trying to record. These mics are usually very directional (cardioid, hypercardioid, shotgun, etc.) and are usually condenser style microphones. You will see them most often on film sets, where the film crew is trying to capture the best audio possible while keeping all of the microphones out of the camera’s view. If you get a handle and a shockmount, a shotgun mic can also be a great handheld mic.

Which one is the best? Well, that depends on you. Personally, I tend to prefer a handheld microphone. For my needs, it is easier to travel with, easier to use, and the most versatile option available.

### **Understanding “Mic Technique”**

It doesn’t do much good to have a bag full of amazing equipment, a charming guest, and an incredible interview if you don’t know how to properly handle a microphone.

When it comes to good mic technique, you really just have to remember three simple guidelines:

4. **Point the mic at the sound you want to record.** This seems kind of obvious, but many microphones are “directional”, which means they only pick up sound from one direction (ex: cardioid). If you don’t aim the mic properly, it can’t do its job! Omnidirectional microphones do not have this issue.
5. **Get the mic close to the source of the sound, but not too close.** Again, this seems kind of obvious, but you probably need to be closer than you think. The typical guideline is to hold the mic about 6 inches away from the speaker’s voice. If you only have one mic, you will need to practice moving it between you and your guest while you each speak during the interview.

If you hold a directional microphone too close to the speaker’s mouth, you will introduce something called “proximity effect”, which will exaggerate the low end frequencies in the speaker’s voice. Again, omnidirectional microphones do not have this issue.

6. **Keep the mic slightly off to the side.** In other words, don’t talk directly into the microphone! Instead, keep it off to the side, but be sure to keep it pointed directly at the speaker’s mouth! This will help reduce breath noise, plosives, and sibilance in the final recording.

If you practice these basic techniques in advance, they will be second nature to you during the interview. You'll find yourself handling the mic like a pro in no time and you'll get much better results for your effort!

## **Digital Audio Recorders**

There are hundreds of options out there for digital audio recorders. Look for a recorder with high-quality microphone pre-amps, low noise floors, phantom power (if you need it), good battery life, and controls that you can understand. You also want to make sure that your recorder has enough inputs to handle the number of microphones you plan to use.

You especially want to be sure that your recorder has a headphone output so you can listen to what is being recorded during the interview. This will help you identify background noise (like an air conditioner or a fridge), plus it will let you know if you need to adjust the microphone during the recording.

Some recorders are "stereo" recorders, which means they record all of the microphones to a single file. This is the simplest and most common solution, but it makes it virtually impossible to adjust individual microphones after recording them. For example, if one microphone is a little quieter than the others, it can be very difficult to fix.

The alternative to a stereo recorder is to use a "multitrack" recorder. This will record each microphone to its own file, which means you can adjust every microphone individually once you get the files back to your computer. Many of them also record a stereo "mix-down", which creates the same single file a typical stereo recorder would create.

The big buzzword lately in digital recording is "32-bit float." There's a lot of science behind that term, but the important part to us is simple: With 32-bit float recording, you don't really have to worry about whether your recording is too quiet or too loud. You still need a good mic and good mic technique, but you make a lot of adjustments to the "gain" (or the overall volume) after you transfer that file to your computer.

If all of that is too complicated, don't worry about it. You'll save some money by getting an older recorder!

## **Accessories**

Of course, with any kind of technical equipment, there is a virtually unlimited number of accessories available. You'll probably want to get mic stands, cables, batteries, headphones, a carrying case, and

more. The best advice I can give you is to focus on what you need, avoid what you don't need, and don't let any of it get in the way of asking great questions!

## **Recording Remote Interviews**

When it comes to hosting a “remote” interview, whether it's via Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or an old-fashioned telephone call, it's important to remember that all of the fundamentals still apply. You still want both people to find a quiet room, get comfortable, use the best microphone they have, and get close to the mic!

When it comes to recording a remote interview, there are a few common strategies to consider.

1. Record the entire conversation from your end. There are a number of ways to do this, with varying degrees of complexity, and it is arguably the most reliable method of recording these interviews. The only major downside here is that you will be recording a lower quality version of your guest's voice. You might also record a lot of digital noise, glitches, or other issues that can happen with online calls.
2. The next option is to do a “double-end” recording. To do this, you record your side of the conversation, your guest records their side, and you sync them up afterward with audio software. This is a classic solution for podcasting, but it can be difficult to do effectively and it requires both of you to have the equipment and knowledge to effectively record your own voice.
3. In recent years, a number of online platforms have become available, where you both connect to a service designed to record remote interviews with multiple guests. These services will automatically record and sync the best version of each voice, then generate a single file for you to download. Some services also have automatic transcription services for an additional fee. These services often have a monthly subscription fee, but they will consistently deliver excellent results.

## **Audio Kit Recommendations**

There is a near-infinite number of options out there for recording oral history interviews. Everyone will have different preferences, but these are a few kits that I have used and can recommend for in-person interviews.

### **Budget: None**

If you're just getting started, you probably don't need to buy anything! Your phone has a great microphone built into it. Open up your favorite audio recording app (I use "Voice Memos" on my iPhone), sit it on a soft surface close to your narrator, and hit record!

### **Budget: \$100**

The best budget recorder I've found is the Zoom H1essential. This tiny recorder has built-in mics and 32-bit float technology for under \$100. The biggest issue with this recorder is that it is extremely sensitive to handling noise, so keep that in mind if you plan to hold this in your hand during your interview.

For accessories, you will want to consider a mini-tripod (ex: Manfrotto Pixi), some headphones (virtually anything will work), and a microSD memory card.

### **Budget: \$250-\$500**

If you have a little bit of extra money to spend, you might want to upgrade to the Zoom H4 or Zoom H6. These recorders feature built-in microphones and excellent audio circuits, like the H1, but they add XLR connections for all kinds of external microphones. They also include options for multi-track recording. The H4 supports up to 4 tracks, while the H6 supports up to 6 tracks.

For external microphones, I usually go for the trusty Shure SM58, but you can pick the best microphone to suit your needs.

If you plan to record remote interviews frequently, you might want to swap the H4 or H6 out for something like a Zoom PodTrak P4. This device doesn't have built-in microphones, but it will let you connect your cell phone and record your phone call directly to the SD card as a multi-track audio file.

### **Budget: \$250-\$500 (Wireless)**

If you want to go an entirely different route, you could get the Zoom H1 and something like the Rode Wireless Pro microphone kit. This will give you two wireless lavalier microphones with dedicated 32-bit float recording built into each microphone, then you can plug the wireless receiver into the H1 and record a backup stereo track.



You can also plug the wireless receiver from the Rode Wireless Pro into your phone, your favorite video camera, or your computer. If you know that you're going to be filming your interviews, this can be a really attractive solution.

If you want an alternative to the Rode unit, check out the DJI Mic 2.

## **Adding Video**

If you want to record video of your interview, you're treading into the field of documentary filmmaking. This can take decades to master, so I'll give you the basics.

1. Use the best camera you have. This is probably your phone. You might be able to connect your microphones directly to your camera, otherwise you will have to manually sync the audio to your video in your favorite video editing software.
2. Lighting is the single most important part of video production. Again, there are entire careers dedicated to lighting a subject and a scene for film, so let's keep it simple. Use a "key light" in front of the on-camera person, then a "backlight" behind them to brighten the background and fill in some shadows. You want your speaker to be the brightest thing in the scene, so try to avoid shooting into open windows or in direct sunlight.
3. You'll be surprised what you can do with some simple clamp lights and a shower curtain from Home Depot. If you don't believe me, check out all of the DIY and budget lighting tutorials on YouTube!
4. Learn some basic rules of composition. Especially the "Rule of Thirds." Keep an eye out for background distractions.

Adding video can get extremely complicated, but it doesn't have to be. Remember, we're filming oral history interviews for future generations. You're not trying to film an award-winning documentary! Don't let the video production get in the way of asking great questions.

## **Data Management**

### **File Organization**

The term "file organization" is used to describe the way you organize the files and digital artifacts that you collect during your oral history interviews. To borrow a quote from Benjamin Franklin, you want "a place for everything and everything in its place."

You want to build a folder structure that is easy to understand, easy to navigate, and easy to expand. A common approach (and one that I use myself), is to have a folder for each year, which contains a folder for each month, which contains a folder for each day, which contains a folder for the interview that you did on that day.

Example: **2024 / 07 / 31 / Johnny Arrowman**

In this example, you have a folder that contains all of your files from 2024. Inside that folder, you would have 12 smaller folders (one for each month). Inside each “month” folder, you would have a folder for each day that you created a file, and then inside each individual day, you would have a folder for each interview. This way, if you did multiple interviews in one day, they would be all sorted closely together but also easily separated.

You can use whatever structure works best for you, but you should work to build and maintain a structure that helps keep your files organized.

### **Backup & Archives**

Now that you have recorded an interview, you have a responsibility to keep it safe. There are two easy ways to ensure that your interview will be kept safe for many years.

You need to have a plan to backup your data and recover it in the event of hardware failure. This most common approach here is the “3-2-1 Rule”, which advocates that you have 3 copies of your data, on two different devices, plus one copy off-site. For example, I keep a copy of my laptop’s internal hard drive, I keep a copy on an external backup drive, and I keep a copy in an online backup service.

You may also consider adding your interview to a larger archive or collection. Many local libraries have a cultural heritage program, for example, or you could submit your interview to your council’s local history committee. If your interview is of national interest, you can submit it to the OA Archives. If your interview has any Scouting interest, you can submit it to the Scouting Memories Project.

### **Metadata**

If you really want to take your project to the next level, you can collect “metadata” – data about your data – and keep it in a centralized spreadsheet for quick and easy reference. This might not be helpful if you have just a few interviews, but if you have a few hundred, it might be really helpful.

## 101 Great Questions

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This section is a series of 101 great questions to help you get started on your journey into the tradition of oral history. You will never use all of these questions in a single interview, but my hope is that you will find enough to help you get started, then find your own way from there.

### General/Personal/Family History

- Where are you from?
- Tell me about your family. Parents, grandparents, siblings, etc.
- For adults: Did you go to college?
  - If so, where?
  - What did you study?
  - How did you become interested in that?
- For youth: Do you know what you want to do after high school?
  - How did you get into that?
  - Do you plan to go to college? If so, where?
- What do you do outside of Scouting?
  - How did you get into that? (Was it a merit badge? Camp activity?)

### General Scouting Questions 2

- How did you get involved in Scouting?
- Was anyone else in your family involved in Scouting?

### If they were in a troop as a youth: 12

These questions are directed toward a troop, but you can easily adapt them to fit a Venture Crew, a Sea Scout Ship, or any other Scouting unit.

- What troop were you in?
- Tell me about your Scoutmaster.
- Who was in your patrol?
- What was it like to camp with your patrol?
- How many merit badges did you earn?
  - Which badge was the most fun?
  - Which badge was the most difficult?
  - Which merit badge surprised you the most?

- Have any of your merit badges led to career ideas?

### **Summer Camp Questions**

- Where did you go to summer camp?
  - If multiple:
    - Which was your favorite?
    - Why was that your favorite?
  - What was your favorite experience at camp?
  - What was your favorite place in camp?
  - What was the best meal you ever had at camp?
  - What was the worst meal you ever had at camp?

### **General Scouting Questions (cont'd):**

- What is your favorite Scouting memory?
- Where was your favorite place to camp with your troop or patrol?
- Tell me about that one really miserable camping trip.
- Tell me about a friend you met through Scouting.
- Tell me about a hobby you found through Scouting.
- How has Scouting affected your life?
- Who has been one of your biggest influences in Scouting?
- What are the most important lessons you learned from Scouting?
- How has Scouting prepared you for life?

### **Order of the Arrow**

- What is your earliest memory of the Order of the Arrow?
- How did you learn that you were elected (as a youth) or nominated (as an adult)?
  - How did that make you feel?
- What do you remember from your Ordeal?
- What is your favorite OA-related memory so far?
- Who has been your best friend or your biggest influence in the OA?
- How do you think the Order of the Arrow has affected your life?

### **Questions for Brotherhood members:**

- What made you want to achieve Brotherhood?

- How did the journey to Brotherhood change your perspective on the Order of the Arrow?

### Questions for Vigil Honor Recipients:

- Do you remember when you were called out for Vigil?
- Are you willing to share any memories from that night?
- Do you find yourself revisiting that night, even many years later?
- Do you remember your Vigil name and/or translation?
- Why is that name meaningful to you?

### National Order of the Arrow Conference

- Is this your first NOAC?
  - If YES:
    - What made you decide to attend your first NOAC?
  - If NO:
    - How many conferences have you attended?
    - When was your first?
    - What made you decide to come back?
- Tell me about a memorable moment from any of the NOACs you have attended.
- How has NOAC affected your Scouting experience?

### Noteworthy Awards

As you do your research, you may find that the narrator has received one or more noteworthy awards. These could be professional awards, Scouting awards, religious awards, community awards, or other volunteer awards. If they are relevant to the topic of your project, don't be afraid to ask questions about those awards!

For Scouting-related awards, you will often find a Scouter's resume on their uniform shirt. It helps to be familiar with various award knots and what they represent.

- While I was preparing for this interview, I noticed that you received [INSERT AWARD HERE] in [YEAR AWARDED]. What can you tell me about that?
- How did it feel to learn that you had been selected for this award?
- Was there an awards ceremony? Tell me about it.
- Has that award led to any other opportunities that you'd like to share?

## High Adventure

- Have you ever been ...
  - ... a trek participant at Philmont, Sea Base, Northern Tier, or the Summit?
  - ... an OA High Adventure participant?
- If YES:
  - Tell me about your experience. Were you nervous? Excited?
  - How did you prepare for the trip?
  - Tell me about the people you were with.
  - What was the highlight of your experience?
  - What was the hardest part of your experience?
  - Are you looking forward to your next adventure?

## Easy Hooks and Follow-Up Questions

- “Take us back to the beginning ...”
- Tell me about a time when \_\_\_\_\_.
- “Go on.” or “Tell me more about that.”
- Why?
  - Why was that so difficult?
  - Why was that so memorable?
  - Why was that person such an influence?
- What happened next?
- How did that make you feel?

## Closing Questions

- Is there anything you want to add?
- Is there anything we missed?
- Is there anyone you think we should talk to?
- Is there anything you want to know about me?

## Other Questions

Don't be afraid to throw in some “silly” questions. These can help lighten the mood if necessary, but they might also

- What is the best sandwich?

- What's the one thing you own that you really should throw out?
- What is the scariest animal?
- Pineapple on pizza – Yes or no?
- Have you ever asked someone for their autograph?
- What do you think happens when we die?
- Favorite movie?
- Favorite album?
- Favorite smell?
- Least favorite smell?
- Cats or dogs?
- You only get to listen to one song for the rest of your life. What is it?
- What number am I thinking of?
- Describe the rest of your life in five words.

## Appendix

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### Further Reading

- Lodge History Resource Guide: <https://oa-bsa.org/uploads/publications/LHRG-202311.pdf>
- <https://oralhistory.lib.uci.edu/interview-day>
- <https://siarchives.si.edu/history/how-do-oral-history>
- <https://storycorps.org/participate/tips-for-a-great-conversation/>
- <https://storycorps.org/discover/education/lesson-tips-for-effective-interviews/>

### About the Author

Chris Brightwell is an Eagle Scout, visual storyteller, and Scouting historian from Huntsville, Alabama. He has served on the national leadership team for the Scouting Memories Project since 2018, where he hopes to help every historian develop a working knowledge in collecting and preserving oral histories. He believes that everyone has a story to share; you just have to know which questions to ask.



## **SAMPLE: Oral History Interview – Talent Release & Deed of Gift**

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I, \_\_\_\_\_ **[name of interviewee]**, a participant in an oral history interview recorded on \_\_\_\_\_ **[date]**, herein permanently give, convey, and assign to Boy Scouts of America (“BSA”), its agents, and successors any audio/visual recordings of the interview and any transcript made of it. In so doing so, I understand that the interview and transcripts made from the interview will be made available for research, educational, and historical purposes; and may be cited, quoted from, published in original or edited form, or broadcast in any medium that BSA shall deem appropriate, including but not limited to electronic with placement on the Internet, with the exception of any restrictions noted below. Typical uses may include scholarly and other publications, audio/visual presentations (including production of CDs or DVDs), exhibits, and websites. In addition, I give to BSA the right to distribute the recordings and/or transcripts to any other libraries and educational institutions for scholarly uses and purposes.

In making this gift, I voluntarily convey to BSA all legal title and literary property rights that I have or may be deemed to have in my interview, as well as all my rights, title and interest in any copyright that may be secured under the laws now or later in force and effect in the United States of America. My conveyance of copyright encompasses the exclusive rights of reproduction, distribution, preparation of derivative works, public performance, and public display as well as all renewals and extensions.

I am aware of the following:

- Participation in this project is completely voluntary.
- I may stop the interview at any time.
- I can refuse to answer any question I do not want to answer.

Restrictions (if any): \_\_\_\_\_

Full Name of Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Interviewee or Proxy: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

The interviewer affirms that she/he has explained the nature and purpose of this oral history project and answered any questions about this release agreement.

Full Name of Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_