

Ethics and Best Practices

The [Oral History Association \(OHA\)](#) sets standards for conducting oral interviews. You can explore the [OHA Principles and Best Practices](#) or reach out to your nearest university or regional historical society for local resources.

Ethical guidelines for oral history focus on **informed consent**, **respect for the narrator**, and **protect on from harm**. It is important that interviewers explain how recordings will be used and archived, respect the interviewee's boundaries, and ensure fair power dynamics throughout the entire project.

Informed Consent:

Interviewees must clearly understand the project's purpose, who is sponsoring it, how materials will be preserved, and who will have future access. This is typically formalized using a signed release form prior to the interview.

Right to Review and Restrict:

Narrators should be allowed to review their transcripts or recordings and have the right to delete, redact, or restrict sensitive portions of their interviews.

Protect on from Harm:

It is important to prioritize the well-being of interviewees, particularly those from vulnerable or marginalized communities, or those discussing sensitive subjects. Interviewing someone is a privilege that comes with responsibilities. Make adjustments to prioritize your interviewee's well-being before, during, and after the interview.

Transparency and Honesty:

Strive for intellectual honesty by avoiding stereotypes and misrepresentation. Interviewers should accurately capture the interviewee's experiences and adhere to all agreements made during the consent process.

Responsibilities of the interviewer:

- **Prepare:** Research the narrator and era; write open-ended questions.
- **Consent:** Explain how the recording will be used; get written permission; ensure the interviewee understands they may decline any question.
- **Listen:** The interviewee leads the conversation; allow there to be silences so they can continue when they are ready; never argue with a memory.
- **Care:** Wartime memories can be traumatic — interviewees control the depth.
- **Preserve accurately:** Don't edit meaning; label, transcribe, and archive what the interviewee says.
- **Corroborate honestly:** Memory is fallible; historians respectfully cross-check dates and details against documents without dismissing the narrator's truth.