



# How to have a great interview

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Information for Storytellers

You are about to participate in a Commemorate interview—a meaningful and uninterrupted conversation with someone you know and care about. This conversation is designed for sharing the stories of your life and is a great opportunity to talk about the things you love and remember the best.

StoryCorps is a national nonprofit oral history project whose mission is to provide Americans of all backgrounds and beliefs with the opportunity to record, share, and preserve the stories of our lives. Our interview method is now being employed by organizations across the country, providing you with the opportunity to have this conversation now.

This packet provides more information about the Commemorate interview process, including helpful tips about how to get the most out of the experience.

## OUR METHOD

### Conversations are 40 minutes long.

You will have 40 minutes of uninterrupted time to talk openly about anything you'd like, from favorite memories to important life questions. The conversation will be recorded by a trained staff person called a Facilitator, who will also guide you through the interview process.

### Conversations are about stories, not just facts.

Sometimes it's about telling jokes and recalling humorous stories. There's no right or wrong way to have a Commemorate interview, but we have found that the more personal the interview gets, the more people enjoy it and have fun.

The way we experience life isn't through facts, but through feelings. Consider the difference between questions such as, "What year did you get married to Dad?" and "How did you feel on your wedding day?"

The first question focuses on the date, while the second question evokes emotions behind the story. Being asked about how you felt validates your experience as an individual.

### Each interview contains different roles.

To ensure that you and the Interviewer get the most out of the interview experience, different roles will be assigned to everyone involved in the recording process. This helps provide structure and allows everyone to prepare in advance.

**THE STORYTELLER** is the person being interviewed.

**THE INTERVIEWER** will ask you questions about your life. He or she will create a list of questions in advance and will be prepared to take the interview wherever you would like it to go.

**THE FACILITATOR** is responsible for making the Storyteller and Interviewer feel comfortable, operating the recording equipment, and keeping track of time. He or she may also take notes and ask questions if appropriate.

## BENEFITS OF AN INTERVIEW

### Collecting memories

A recording of an interview documents important pieces of your life. The stories and the voice who told it will be preserved for years to come and can be shared with friends and family.

### Fostering Bonds

The simple act of sitting down and sharing personal stories is a powerful way to bring people together over a shared, meaningful experience.

### Affirming Value of a Person

The simple act of listening to someone is one of the greatest gifts we can give, and reminds us that our lives matter.

### An Enjoyable Experience

Though the interview experience can take many forms, and can be filled with laughter, tears, or close moments, it is an enjoyable experience for those involved.

## STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

### 01 STEP

**Welcome** – The Facilitator will provide some background information about the Commemorate interview, explain his or her role in the interview process, and answer any questions you might have.



### 02 STEP

**Sound check** – Once you and your interview partner are ready to proceed, the Facilitator will make sure you are positioned well for recording, check the audio levels, and ensure that you are comfortable in the recording space.



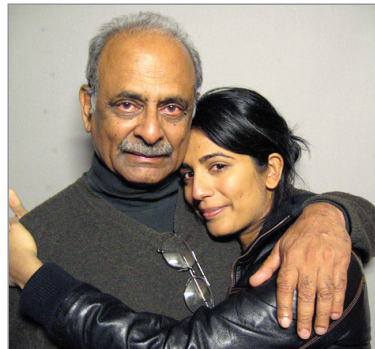
### 03 STEP

**The interview** – While you and your partner are talking, the Facilitator will take notes, keep time, and monitor audio. Facilitators are not interviewers, though they may ask a question during the interview.



### 04 STEP

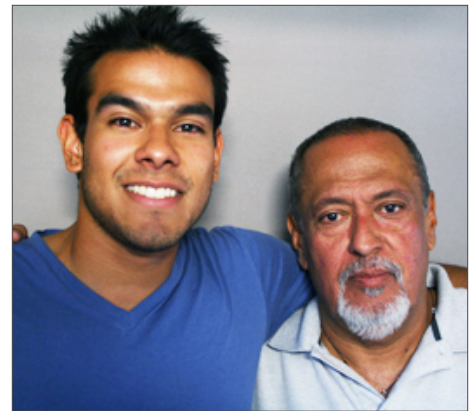
**After the interview** – Once the conversation is complete, the Facilitator may ask to take your photo, fill out paperwork, or reflect on your experience. You may receive a copy of your interview to share with family and friends.



## PREPARATION

### Tips to consider when preparing for the interview.

- Think about the kind of conversation you'd like to have during your recording session. You may find it helpful to write down a list of topics you'd like to cover and bring it with you to the interview.
- It's helpful to bring photographs, memorabilia, or other objects to your interview that refer to stories or events you want to talk about.
- Consider telling some of your favorite stories, even if your interview partner has heard them before.
- Spend some time before the interview thinking about what you'd like to talk about. You can talk about recent events or stories from a long time ago. Remember that you are not giving your life history—you are spending an hour sharing some stories and experiences with someone you care about.
- Feel free to ask your interview partner to share his or her own stories. Ask the person to share some memories of time spent with you.
- Be prepared for the possibility that this will be an emotional experience for both you and your interview partner.
- Remember that you can talk about anything you'd like. You can choose whether or not you would like to talk about your memory loss.





## DURING YOUR INTERVIEW

Here are a few things you can do to make sure you have the best experience.

- If you have trouble remembering certain events or stories, ask your interview partner to help. Often he or she can provide context to spark your memory.
- Remember this is not a test of your memory. If you cannot remember exactly what year something happened, or the order of certain events, don't worry about it. The important thing is to talk about what you can remember and how you felt.
- Take your time. There is no rush in this conversation. If you need a minute to remember things, tell your interview partner and take it slow.
- Feel free to deviate from the topics your interview partner provides. If one story leads to another, go with it. You are not required to answer all the questions. Go with the stories you know and love the most.
- Remember to take a few minutes at the end of your conversation to tell your interview partner how much you care about him or her, and thank the person for the conversation you just had.



Photo: Vermont Addison County