

oral history ^[1]

Type of Speech:

noun ^[2]

Definition:

A method of collecting historical information through recorded interviews with individuals who are willing to share their memories of the past.

Additional Information:

Oral history interviews can provide glimpses into the lives and ideas of everyday people and offer personal perspectives not often found in traditional written sources. This methodology also affords historians the opportunity to ask highly specific questions about the past directly to the people who lived it and to work collaboratively with historical actors to construct their interpretations of history, advantages lacking in static sources written by long-dead historical actors. In the classroom, oral history allows students to make a personal connection to history and to practice a host of research, writing, and interpersonal skills. Oral history interviews can focus on the entire life story of an individual, or just on specific episodes or experiences and, with minimal equipment, a little training, and age-appropriate modifications, can be successfully conducted by students of all ages.

Oral historians face potential problems such as faulty or embellished memories and the possibility of competing versions of events told by several interviewees, but these potential challenges are more than made up for by the richness of historical insight afforded by the craft and can be accounted for through careful analysis. Oral historians have established useful guidelines for conducting successful interviews and many oral history organizations provide direct support to local schools or make explanatory materials available to teachers wishing to incorporate oral history into their lesson plans.

For further explanation:

- [The Oral History Association](#) ^[3]
- [The Southern Oral History Program](#) ^[4] at UNC-Chapel Hill

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