

Oral History Interview Questions

Questions for Anyone:

Life Questions

- Who has been the most important person in your life? Can you tell me about them?
- What was the happiest moment of your life? The saddest?
- Who has been the biggest influence on your life? What lessons did that person teach you?
- Who has been the kindest to you in your life?
- What are the most important lessons you've learned in life?
- What is your earliest memory?
- Are there any funny stories your family tells about you that come to mind?
- Are there any funny stories or memories or characters from your life that you want to tell me about?
- What are you proudest of?
- What was the smartest decision you ever made?
- When in life have you felt most alone?
- If you could hold on to one memory from your life forever, what would that be?
- If you could talk to anyone from your life living or dead, who would it be and why?
- Who is the most famous person you have ever met?
- How has your life been different than what you'd imagined?
- How would you like to be remembered?
- When you think about a fork in the road in your life, what was it and why did you choose that particular path?
- What happy memory will you cherish forever?
- What do you wish you made more time in your life for?
- What did you discover in the last decade or two that you wish you discovered sooner?
- What do you miss most about the 'old days'?
- Do you have any regrets?
- For your great great grandchildren reading or listening to this years from now: is there any wisdom you'd want to pass on to them? What would you want them to know?
- How would you describe yourself?
- How do you want to be remembered?

Community

- Where have you lived as a child and as an adult?
- Why are you living where you are today?
- Have you ever wished you lived somewhere else?
- How long have you lived in (current area)?
- How has it changed over those years?
- What was it like when you grew up here/first moved here?
- Do you miss anything about the way it used to be?
- Who are some of the great characters from that community?

Growing Up

- When and where were you born?
- Where did you grow up?
- What was it like?
- Who were your parents?
- What were your parents like?
- How was your relationship with your parents?
- Did you get into trouble? What was the worst thing you did?
- Do you have any siblings? What were they like growing up?
- What did you look like?
- How would you describe yourself as a child? Were you happy?
- What is your best memory of childhood? Worst?
- Did you have a nickname? How'd you get it?
- Who were your best friends? What were they like?
- How would you describe a perfect day when you were young?
- What did you think your life would be like when you were older?
- Do you have any favorite stories from your childhood?

School

- What kind of student were you?
- Did you enjoy school?
- What would you do for fun?
- How would your classmates remember you?
- Are you still friends with anyone from that time in your life?
- What are your best memories of grade school/high school/college/graduate school? Worst memories?
- Was there a teacher or teachers who had a particularly strong influence on your life? Tell me about them.
- Do you have any favorite stories from school?

Love and Relationships

- When did you first fall in love?
- What was dating like?
- Can you tell me about your first kiss?
- What was your first serious relationship?
- Do you believe in love at first sight?
- Do you ever think about previous relationships?
- What lessons have you learned from your relationships?

Marriage and Partnerships

- How did you meet your husband/wife?
- How did you know he/she was “the one”?
- How did you propose?
- What were the best times? The most difficult times?
- Did you ever think of getting divorced?
- Did you ever get divorced? Can you tell me about it?
- What advice do you have for young couples?
- Do you have any favorite stories from your marriage or about your husband/wife?

Questions about Raising Children

- When did you first find out that you’d be a parent? How did you feel?
- Can you describe the moment when you saw your child for the first time?
- How has being a parent changed you?
- What are your dreams for your children?
- Do you remember when your last child left home for good?
- Do you have any favorite stories about your kids?

Working

- What do/did you do for a living?
- Tell me about how you got into your line of work.
- Do/did you like your job?
- What did you think you were going to be when you grew up?
- What did you want to be when you grew up?
- What lessons has your work life taught you?
- If you had it to do over, what work/career would you pursue? Why?
- Do you plan on retiring? If so, when? How do you feel about it?
- For those that are retired, are you enjoying your retirement?
- What advice do you have for others on work and/or retirement?
- Do you have any favorite stories from your work life?

Questions about Family Heritage

- What do you know about your ethnic background?
- Where is your mom's family from? Where is your dad's family from?
- Have you ever traveled to your family's homeland? What was the experience like?
- What ethnic or other traditions have been passed down in your family?
- Who were your favorite relatives?
- Do you remember any of the stories they used to tell you?

Religion

- Can you tell me about how your religious/spiritual beliefs affect your life?
- Do you believe in an after-life? If so, what do you think it will be like?

Questions for Special Interviewees:

Questions for Your Grandparents/Great Grandparents

- Where did you grow up?
- What was your childhood like?
- Who were your favorite relatives?
- Do you remember any of the stories they used to tell you?
- How did you and grandma/grandpa meet?
- What was my mom/dad like growing up?
- Do you remember any songs that you used to sing to her/him? Can you sing them now?
- Was she/he well-behaved?
- What is the worst thing she/he ever did?
- What were your parents like?
- What were your grandparents like?
- How would you like to be remembered?
- Are you proud of me?
- What is your favorite memory of me?
- What are your hopes for what the future holds for me? For my children?
- If this was to be our very last conversation, is there anything you'd want to say to me
- Is there anything that you've never told me but want to tell me now?
- Is there something about me that you've always wanted to know but have never asked?

Questions for Your Parents

- Do you remember what was going through your head when you first saw me?
- How did you choose my name?
- What was I like as a baby? As a young child?
- Do you remember any of the songs you used to sing to me? Can you sing them now?
- What were my siblings like?
- What were the hardest moments you had when I was growing up?
- If you could do everything again, would you raise me differently?
- What advice would you give me about raising my own kids?
- What are your dreams for me?
- How did you meet mom/dad?
- If this was to be our very last conversation, is there anything you'd want to say to me?
- Is there anything that you've never told me but want to tell me now?
- Is there something about me that you've always wanted to know but have never asked?
- Are you proud of me?
- What is your favorite memory of me?
- What are your hopes for what the future holds for me? For my children?

Questions for Teachers

- When and why did you decide to become a teacher?
- Tell me about your first day as a teacher.
- How is teaching different from how you imagined it to be?
- Tell me about a time when teaching made you feel hopeful.
- What are the most challenging and/or funniest moments you've experienced in the classroom?
- How would you like your students to remember you?
- Was there a teacher or teachers who had a particularly strong influence on your life? What did you learn about teaching from them?
- Looking back, what advice would you give to yourself in your first year of teaching?

Questions for Military Veterans

- When were you drafted or when did you enlist?
- What do you remember about the day you enlisted?
- How did you tell your family and friends that you were joining the military? Are there any conversations that stand out from that time?
- If you enlisted, what were some of the reasons that you joined the military? How did you choose your branch of service?

- How did you imagine military life before you joined? How did your perceptions change after serving?
- What was basic training like?
- Can you describe a funny moment from boot camp?
- What are some of the things you remember about adapting to military life?
- If you served during wartime, where did you serve?
- If you deployed overseas, how did you tell your loved ones you were being deployed?
- How did you stay in touch with family and friends back home?
- What are some things you remember most about your deployment?
- If you saw multiple deployments, how did they differ from each other? How did you change?
- Can you describe how you felt coming home from combat?
- Was there anything you especially missed about civilian life?
- Is there someone you served with that you remember fondly? Can you tell me about him/her?
- What are some fun things you and your friends did together while you were deployed?
- Did any of your military friends play pranks on each other? Can you describe a funny one?
- Did you ever get caught breaking any rules? Did you ever get away with something you weren't supposed to do?
- Did you ever learn something about a fellow service member that surprised you?
- When did you leave the military? What was that process like?
- What were your first few months out of the service like?
- Was there anything or anyone that helped you during the transition from military to civilian life?
- Do you have advice for others transitioning out of the military?
- How do you think your time in the military affected you?
- What did you learn about yourself?
- What phrase or word will never be the same now that you served?
- When you were first discharged, what are some things about civilians that were difficult for you to deal with?
- Is there anything you wish civilians understood about military service?
- What are some habits you developed in the service that you like? What are some that you dislike?
- What are some things you miss about being in the service? What are some you are glad to have left behind?
- What has been difficult to communicate to family and friends about your military service?