

RECORDING A PANDEMIC



*Your guide to documenting a
historic moment*

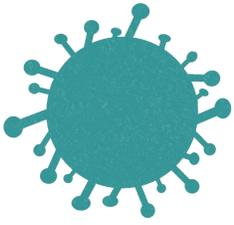


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INTRODUCTION



For many of us right now, it is hard to imagine what the next week will bring, let alone what the world will look like in the years to come. One thing is certain, though: over the next several years and beyond, people will look back at the COVID-19 pandemic, and see it as a historic time.

While the global impacts of Covid-19 will certainly be documented, analysed, dissected, and remembered, its personal and community-level impacts may be forgotten more quickly.

This is why recording first-hand accounts of life during the era of COVID-19 is so important.

Use **Recording a Pandemic** as a guide to recording your thoughts, feelings, and experiences of this pandemic, as well as those of your family and friends.

As a trained folklorist and oral historian, I have created a short guide to leading and recording oral history interviews, and have provided lists of sample questions. Divided into pre-pandemic and during-pandemic questions, with separate lists for kids and adults, these are intended to be a jumping-off point. I would strongly encourage you to develop questions of your own, too!

Good Luck and Happy Recording,
Emma (Guelph, Ontario - April, 2020)



BEFORE YOU START

Everything you need to plan and record an oral history interview

One: Someone to interview!

This can be a friend, family member, community member, or any other willing participant. You can even interview yourself!

Two: A simple recording device.

If you have an audio recorder or video camera, that's fantastic! But if not, most phones and computers have recording capabilities which will do a perfectly good job of recording your interview.

Three: A means of communication.

If you're planning to interview someone you're self-isolating with, then you're all set. But if you're planning to interview someone who does not live with you, you'll need to determine the best way to communicate with them. Don't forget, this will need to be something you can record. A phone on the speaker setting should work, as will Skype, Zoom, Facebook Call, Google Hangouts, and other similar programs.

Four: Questions to ask.

That's what this guide is for! See the questions later on in this guide for inspiration, and then add some of your own.

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWING 101

How to record a great oral history interview



The idea of asking friends or family members to sit down for a formal oral history interview can be a little intimidating. The next couple pages will present some tips and tricks for getting the most of your interviews, and for making sure that both you and the person you are interviewing have a good time.

***Tip One:* Contact your interviewee well ahead of time.**

If possible, send them a list of the questions you'll be asking, so they know what to expect. If you're new to this, try choosing your five favourite questions, rather than asking all of them.

***Tip Two:* Test out your recording equipment beforehand.**

Have a friend or family member contact you using the same technology you'll be using to contact your interviewee. See if your recording device does an adequate job of picking up their voice. Play around with your technology if need be.

ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWING 101



Tip Three: **State the facts.**

At the beginning of your interview, once you've started recording, state your full name, the date, your location, the name of the person you're recording, and your relationship to this person. This is important if you want to be able to use this interview as a historical record.

Tip Four: **Personalise your questions.**

The questions in this guide are not one-size-fits-all. Use the questions you like, but add your own, too, and phrase them however you like! You know your interviewee best. What do you think they'll want to talk about? What distinct experiences might they be able to share?

Tip Five: **Keep your interview flexible.**

Though you'll have your questions written down, oral history interviews often go in unexpected directions. Sometimes, this is where the most interesting material shows up, so don't worry too much about sticking to your script!

Tip Six: **Give your interviewee time to answer.**

Your interviewee may give a short answer to a question. If you think they might have more to say, simply stay silent for a moment, and let them compose their thoughts.

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWING 101



Tip Seven: Ask open-ended questions.

Try to avoid asking questions that can be answered with "yes" or "no," as these aren't very interesting or useful answers. Instead ask questions that require your interviewee to give a more detailed answer. This and the next tip are especially helpful when interviewing kids!

Tip Eight: Ask follow-up questions to clarify answers.

Once again, don't worry too much about sticking to your script. If your interviewee provides a short or partial answer to a question, ask further questions to encourage them to share more details. An important exception to this is when discussing difficult or painful topics. But even then, depending on your relationship with the individual, a gentle, "Do you want to talk more about..." can be an effective prompt.

Open-Ended Question Starters

How did you feel about...

Describe...

What was it like to...

What can you tell me about...

Tell me more about...

Why do you think...

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS: ADULTS

*Questions to learn a bit about
“normal,” pre-pandemic life*



The Basics:

What is your full name?

If you're comfortable sharing, what is your age?

Where do you live?

A Little More In-Depth:

What do you do for work? Describe what you do/don't like about your job.

Do you live with family, roommates, alone? Tell me about the people you live with.

Before the pandemic, what was an average day like for you?

Can you describe what you would normally do on the weekends?

Tell me about your favourite pastimes and leisure activities.

Were you planning anything for this spring or summer? If so, tell me about your plans.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS: KIDS



*Questions to learn a bit about
“normal,” pre-pandemic life*

The Basics:

What is your full name?

How old are you?

Where do you live?

A Little More In-Depth:

Do you go to school? What grade are you in?

Do you like school? What are your favourite and least favourite parts of it?

Who do you live with? What are they like?

Do the people in your family have jobs? What do they do?

Before the pandemic, what was a normal day like for you?

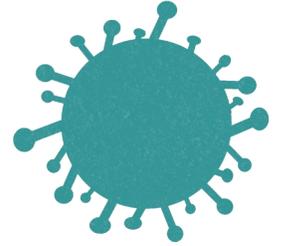
If you could do whatever you wanted for a day, what would that be like?

Tell me about your favourite things to do for fun.

Who are your friends, and what do you like to do together?

PANDEMIC QUESTIONS: ADULTS

Questions about life during the COVID-19 pandemic



The Facts:

If you're comfortable sharing, has the pandemic affected your employment status?

Are you quarantined, self-isolated, or physically distancing? How long have you been doing this?

Beginning of the Pandemic:

Was there a moment when the seriousness of this pandemic really sank in for you? Tell me about it.

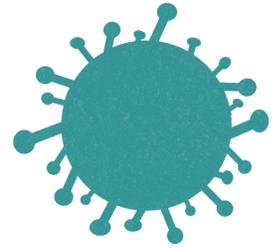
What has changed most significantly in your life because of the pandemic?

If things changed gradually, can you tell me about the series of events?

How do you feel about how the government has handled the pandemic?

PANDEMIC QUESTIONS: ADULTS

Questions about life during the COVID-19 pandemic



Reflecting on the Pandemic:

Tell me about the most difficult or worrisome part of the pandemic for you.

What and/or who do you miss most right now?

Have there been any aspects of this experience that you've enjoyed?

What has given you the most encouragement during this pandemic?

Have you ever experienced something similar to this?

People:

If you have children, how have they been handling the pandemic? How have you been keeping them busy?

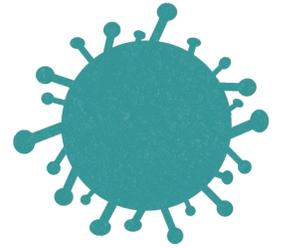
Are you caring for anyone else? What has that been like?

How has the pandemic affected the people you live with?

How are you keeping in touch with friends and family? What has that experience been like for you?

PANDEMIC QUESTIONS: ADULTS

Questions about life during the COVID-19 pandemic



Life During the Pandemic:

What does an average day look like for you right now?

What do you do for fun or leisure right now?

Have you developed any new skills or hobbies? If so, what?

Looking Forward:

When the crisis is over, do you think you will do anything differently compared to what you were doing before?

What is the first thing you want to do when social distancing measures are removed?

In the future, what memories do you think you will have of this time?

Important Final Questions:

Is there anything you wish I had asked you?

Is there anything more that you'd like to tell me about your experiences?

PANDEMIC QUESTIONS: KIDS



Questions about life during the COVID-19 pandemic

Understanding the Pandemic:

How much do you know about the COVID-19 pandemic?

Do you know why everyone has to stay home right now? Tell me about it.

Are things different than normal for you right now?

Can you tell me what is different?

What do you think about these changes? Do you like them or not?

Have you ever experienced anything like this before?

Daily Life:

If you went to school before this, do you miss school? Why or why not?

Are you doing school lessons right now? What is that like?

What do you do for fun each day?

Have you found new ways of having fun, or new things to do for fun?

Do you have siblings? If so, do you play with them? What is that like?

PANDEMIC QUESTIONS: KIDS



Questions about life during the COVID-19 pandemic

People:

Do you have friends you miss?

Are you able to keep in touch with any of your friends? If so, how?

Do you have family members you miss?

Are you able to keep in touch with them? If so, how?

Do the people you live with have jobs? If so, are things different for them?

Feelings:

Are you worried about anything? Tell me about it.

Are you sad about anything right now? Tell me about it.

Are you happy about anything right now? Tell me about it.

Is there anything you're really excited to do when you can go outside and see people again?

Important Final Question:

Is there anything else you want to tell me about your life right now?

NOW WHAT?



Good job! You've helped document life during the COVID-19 pandemic! So... What are you supposed to do next?

Option One: Nothing!

Just save your recording(s) on your computer, or an external hard drive, and you'll have a record you can access any time. Make sure to give your recording an easy-to-remember file name.

Option Two: Transcribe it!

There are many ways to turn your audio recording into text. You can use voice-to-text software, or listen carefully to your recording and type out what you hear. Having a text transcript of your recording will make it much easier to revisit in future years.

For Your Records: Fill out a record-keeping sheet!

Include a copy of the Record-Keeping sheet (on page 15) with each audio file and/or transcript. This will help you keep track of any interviews you do.

Extra Option: Donate your audio recording or transcript!

Many museums and archives are collecting records of life during COVID-19. Simply look up your community's local museum or archives, and ask them if they would like a copy of your interview. Chances are, they'll say yes!

RECORD-KEEPING

File Name:

Date:

Your Name:

Your Location:

Your Interviewee's Name:

Your Interviewee's Location:

Your Relationship to Your Interviewee:

Your Phone Number and/or Email Address:

Your Interviewee's Phone Number and/or Email Address:

Additional Notes: