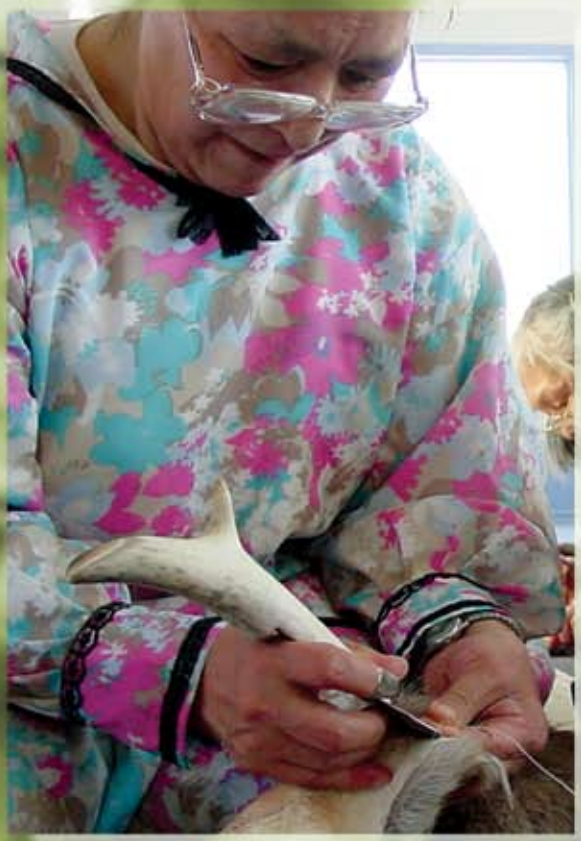
The Process of Collecting Oral Histories



"The simplest way to keep a language alive is to ensure that the children speak it, and the simplest way to accomplish this is to teach them when they are infants." This statement by Bauman (1980, p. 4) could be termed the First Law of Language Retention. Applying this principle to real life, however, is far from simple, because children learn their language from adults. Language loss in fact begins when parents no longer teach their own language to their children, usually because they themselves have come to see it as of little value or importance. Reversing this trend is difficult. Parents will need much encouragement, training and support in order for such efforts to be successful. Nonetheless, if the community has chosen as its goal any type of full or reduced bilingualism, or true language revival, it must place the family at the centre of its strategy.

Mark Fettes – A Guide to Language Strategies for First Nations Communities, Assembly of First Nations Language and Literacy Secretariat, December 1992

Choosing a Theme or Topic

The people in the literacy group should direct the oral history project. People learn best when they work on ideas that interest them. The planning and organizing is an essential part of the learning experience.

- To choose the theme of your project, the group can start by brainstorming all the possible areas that interest them.
- There is a list of possible themes in the next section of the manual. But usually it works best to have the group come up with their own ideas first.
- Narrow the first list you brainstormed. One way to narrow ideas is for everyone to put sticky dots or check marks beside their three top choices.
- Spend time discussing the top choices – even several days. Discussions are a valuable critical thinking tool and help focus people's ideas for writing.
- You could create charts to help the group make an informed decision on the themes or topics for the project.

  Example 1:

Theme	What we already know	What we want to know

  Example 2:

Theme	Why this theme is interesting

- If there is lack of agreement on your topic, you may find that people can work on related topics within one theme.
- Before you make a final decision about your theme, check out the available resources in the community. Are there Elders that are experts in the topic and who want to be involved in your project? Is there other information – books, videos, newspaper articles, radio or TV shows that has been recorded? If you find that you don't have enough resources, you may want to rethink your theme.

Oral History Themes

Here are some ideas for oral history themes:

- Special celebrations: Christmas or Easter, the first kill, qaggiit, feasts, seasonal transitions. How did people celebrate in the past?
- Stories of survival: surviving a difficult or dangerous situation, great acts of bravery.
- Memorable stories: memorable hunting trips, times of great joy.
- Life stories: Elders' stories of what they feel is important or significant about their lives.
- Skills: detailed information about hunting techniques, how to create a tool, a dwelling, a means of transportation or prepare skins and sew an article of clothing.
- Information from Elders about what they believe are the most important values or insights that they can pass on to the next generations.
- Saviours, heroes or leaders – memories of special people
- Memories from a specific place or time:
  - ☑ People who lived in a particular area.
  - ☑ People who worked for the Hudson Bay Company, the Anglican or Roman Catholic Church or the RCMP.
  - ☑ People who were involved with whaling.
  - ☑ People who spent time in hospitals for TB.
- Transitions:
  - ☑ Moving from the land into a town.
  - ☑ From a traditional lifestyle to a community-based lifestyle.
  - ☑ From a small community to a large one.
- Community Mapping: Make a map of your community now; create a map of your community as it was in 1965. Then compare the two.
- Firsts:
  - ☑ First time to see a qallunaq, a plane, an orange, ice cream, movies
  - ☑ First time to go to school.
  - ☑ First hunting trip.
  - ☑ First time to make something – sew a piece of clothing, make an iglu.
  - ☑ First time to live in a southern-style house.

- Childrearing:
  - ☑ What values were important traditionally?
  - ☑ How did children learn to be part of society?
  - ☑ How were children molded into responsible adults?
  - ☑ How were roles defined – mothers, fathers, grandparents, children, other relatives?
  - ☑ How did families deal with difficult issues?
- Weather:
  - ☑ Reading the weather.
  - ☑ Changes in weather from the past to the present.
- How Elders have overcome difficult times and dark forces in their past history:
  - ☑ The effects of colonialism.
  - ☑ Famine.
  - ☑ Deaths of family members and friends.
- Legends and myths
- Traditional spiritual beliefs

Doing the Research

Do your research first – before you start looking for people to interview! Through background research you can find out what is already known about your topic. Then you can ask questions to fill in the gaps.

There may already be resources about the theme your group is interested in. Check the library, CBC, resource centres, heritage centres, archives, schools, churches – for audio recordings, written material or videos on your topic. Your group may be able to get a lot of information from existing resources. Then you will be much better informed when you do interview Elders. You will be able to prepare better questions for Elders. You could call on Elders to fill in the knowledge gaps or demonstrate a skill. The more you already know, the more you will be able to learn from an Elder.

Steps in Doing Research

Involve the whole group in the process of looking for resources.

Doing the research is an important learning opportunity. It is easier to understand and remember information that you actually discover yourself. Discussing the theme in different ways will increase people's background knowledge. Also, in the future when they are looking for information or working on another project, people in the group will have knowledge about where to find resources.

One place to start the research is at home!

Group members can talk to parents, grandparents, relatives and friends informally about the topic and bring back information to share with the group. Private people may have audio tapes that relatives recorded years ago. Your group could go on the radio and ask if people in the community have recorded stories or other information, such as audio letters, songs or pisiit. If you borrow recordings, copy them immediately and return them to the owners. You might offer to make additional copies for the owners as well.

Brainstorm different ways to get information.

Your group may come up with some of these resources... and more:

- ☑ Video tapes
- ☑ Audio tapes
- ☑ Written material kept by people in the community
- ☑ Tools, clothing or other objects
- ☑ Personal interviews
- ☑ Books
- ☑ Radio phone-in shows
- ☑ Photographs
- ☑ Newspapers and magazines
- ☑ Statistics and records – like baptisms and marriages, births and deaths, work logs or records
- ☑ Personal letters, journals or diaries
- ☑ Web sites

Brainstorm different places where you can find resources.

People in your group may already know about some of the sources listed below or you may have other ideas of your own. Post your brainstormed list where everyone can see it.

Resources in the community:

- ☑ Library – books, newspapers, videos, subject or vertical files, oral history videos and audiotapes
- ☑ Schools – teachers know a lot about resources
- ☑ Churches – for records of births, baptisms, marriages, deaths, the writings of priests and missionaries'
- ☑ Elders' centres and groups
- ☑ People – Ask on the local radio. Some people may have audio tapes, pictures, tools, clothing, books, etc. made by or about relatives. It's better not to borrow these items; instead look at them at the person's home or copy them. These may be precious items that could be easily damaged.

Resources outside the community:

- ☑ Nunavut Research Institute
- ☑ Archives – government, church, Hudson Bay Company, RCMP
- ☑ Education Resource Centres and Teaching and Learning Centres (there's one in each region)
- ☑ Heritage Centres
- ☑ CBC – they have many recordings, but they may not be available for borrowing because many are not catalogued and copied.
- ☑ Newspapers – some newspapers offer internet searches of back issues
- ☑ Colleges and universities

(See the *Useful Resources* section.)

Go and check out the local resources.

Literacy group members could go in pairs or small groups to look at the different resources in the community. Make sure everyone is familiar with the theme first. Your discussions and brainstorming will have helped develop people's ideas on the theme. If group members are shy, or will have to communicate in a language in which they are not very comfortable, you could role-play the scenario of asking for the resources. People can gain confidence from practicing the necessary phrases and possible responses. Make a list of the questions you will ask the resource people:

- ☑ Can we borrow materials – if so, for how long?
- ☑ Can we copy material?
- ☑ Do you have a catalogue?
- ☑ Do you know of any other sources of material on this theme?

When you go to look at the resources, stronger readers and writers can pair up with those with weaker literacy skills. It may be helpful to take along a written description of the theme. Group members may need to make notes or lists of resources that they can't take out that day, so take a notebook and pen. When each group has finished looking for resources, make an oral report about the resources you have found. Keep a group list of resources and add to it as the project progresses.

Check out other resources.

☑ *Internet Research:* if you have access to a computer lab, the whole group could check web sites. (You will find some web sites in the *Useful Resources* section.) Again, stronger readers can be paired with less strong ones to explore web sites.

☑ *Phone Research:* You may have to phone resource centres, museums or archives for catalogues or to order material. Again, write down the questions you want to ask and practice role-playing the phone conversation before the call.

Study 'firsthand sources' or physical items that relate to your topic.

Collect tools, pieces of clothing, games, photographs, carvings, drawings, drums, musical instruments, rocks, plants, animals or animal parts – skins, bones, or other objects. Use these to stimulate discussion on your theme. You can talk about the uses of objects and what it must have been like to live in 'those days'. (See *History Workshop* in the *Building Language and Literacy Skills Through Oral History Projects* section.)

Ideas for working with the research material.

One way of dealing with the research is to make a chart like this:

Topic	What we already know	What we want to know

As your group watches videos, reads different materials, looks at tools and other objects, talks to people or listens to recordings, you will add more information to the 'What We Already Know' section and maybe you will add more questions to the 'What We Want to Know' section. Keep updating the chart. You can work as individuals or in small groups and bring the information to the whole group

when all research sources have been explored. Or you can keep one big chart on the wall and the group as a whole can add new points that you find in the various resources.

Try different ways to explore the resources.

As you go through the research materials – whether books, videos, recorded interviews or objects – try different ways of working: whole group, individually, in pairs or small groups. This is an opportunity for people to see which working style they prefer. If several different formats are tried throughout the project, people will also learn that different methods work better for different tasks. They will learn to be flexible in their approach. But people who are new to group work and formal learning may take some time to feel confident and comfortable and may not be ready to try new approaches right away.

Here's an example of exploring a resource: You may choose to watch a video as a whole group. First, review the points on your list, 'What we want to know'. Add to the list if people can think of more questions. Have the list visible while watching the video. Everyone can look for information that answers your questions. You may choose to watch the video all the way through once first, then watch it again, stopping the video when people want to record information and make notes. Take the opportunity to discuss issues as they come up. Group discussions help build people's knowledge and confidence.

Record information from the resources.

Each person in your group may have different ways they prefer to record information. Here are some examples of ways to record information from Dawn Loney's book, *Research in the Community*:

- ☑ Index cards
- ☑ Post-it notes
- ☑ Experience charts
- ☑ File folders

(For info about Dawn Loney's book see *Oral History Resources* in the *Useful Resources* section.)

The important thing is to show people different methods and let them try for themselves. People may already have learned strategies for organizing themselves. If you have recording equipment available, some people may prefer to record their information orally.

Store the information where the group can access it.
Create a filing cabinet drawer, bankers' box, an information wall, index card box or another method that can hold all the information you collect. Store the information where people can access it as the project continues. You may want to choose one person or a small group to be responsible for the files.

Donald Ritchie, a professional historian with 20 years of experience as an oral history interviewer, says that you should count on 10 hours of research for every hour of interview.[1]

"Change is full of both sadness and opportunity."

Unknown

[1] *Doing Oral History,* by Donald A. Ritchie, published by Twayne Publishers, New York, NY, 1995

Tape TV and Radio Interviews.
Tape TV and radio interviews from CBC North Radio or TV or APTN and use them with the literacy group to develop awareness of interviewing techniques. Talk about the different types of questions you hear and the responses those questions get. Discuss which style of interviewing people like best and why.

Listen to previously recorded oral history interviews.
If you can't find any in your community library, you may be able to borrow recorded interviews from the Nunavut Research Institute, CBC, educational resource centres, museums or archives. Talk about the style of interviewing in these interviews. How is it different from the TV and radio interviews? Who does most of the talking? Talk about the kinds of questions you hear in different interviews and different ways of asking them. What kinds of responses come from different ways of asking questions?

Identify the people you plan to interview.
Find out something about their backgrounds and what they are interested in talking about. Write this information on index cards or type it on the computer, so the interview teams have access to it. People that you interview might suggest other people in the community that are knowledgeable about your theme.

Plan how you want to conduct the interview.
Will oral history teams do the interviews, with each team responsible for interviewing one person? Or will you conduct the interviews in front of the whole literacy group, with one interview team doing the work and the rest of the group as the audience?

Consider a suitable location for the interview.
Quiet is very important in getting a good quality recorded interview. Choose places where the interview won't be interrupted by phones, TV or radio, children or other family members, noisy appliances or noise from the road. Think about electrical outlets for recording equipment and light if you are videotaping. Think about where the storyteller will be most comfortable. If you decide to have the whole literacy group watching and listening to the interview, everyone will have to agree to be very still and quiet throughout the interview.

Plan questions to guide the interview.

The process of planning the questions is valuable for the literacy group. It gives them a chance to bring together all their knowledge so far and to think critically about the theme.

Become very familiar with the recording equipment.

You may be working in oral history teams, with one person responsible for the recording equipment, but everyone should know how to work equipment in case the equipment person is away unexpectedly.

Practice interviewing before you actually go out to do a real interview.

- ☑ Make up questions in small groups and literacy group members can interview each other.
- ☑ Practice interviewing in small groups: one pair can be the interviewer and the storyteller, and the rest of the small group can listen and discuss what worked best. Change roles so everyone has a chance to try interviewing.
- ☑ Use this opportunity to practice using the recording equipment.
- ☑ Listen to, analyze and critique the interviews and discuss changes you would make for future interviews.
- ☑ You could invite someone to be interviewed before the whole class in a practice session: a friend, another literacy worker, a priest or minister, a teacher, an adult educator.
- ☑ Literacy group members can practice interviewing friends and family members. They can take the recording equipment home to practice with, bring the recordings back to the literacy group and meet in small groups to listen to the recordings and critique them.

Plan a visit between the storyteller and the interviewers.
Use this as an informal time to get to know each other, to arrange the time and place for the formal interview, to discuss the theme of the interview, to explain your ethical guidelines and to sign consent forms. Since this session sets the pace for future meetings, try to be relaxed and calm and allow plenty of time, so as not to rush the conversation. Reassure the storyteller that you will work together and that they can have input and can set the pace. Encourage them to make their needs known throughout the interview process. Assume that no recording will take place at this meeting, but have the recording equipment along and ready to use – just in case the interviewee begins to tell his story.[1]

Plan how you will record the answers to the questions you listed.
Although you may not ask direct questions during the interview, you will want to check regularly that you are collecting information that answers your questions. At the end of each interview, go back to your questions and check off the ones that were answered. Each interview might generate more questions as well as answers. Perhaps two people from each oral history team – those who are not the interviewers – could take on the responsibility of recording answers to the group's questions

Each oral history team should plan how to organize the material they collect.
Each team could prepare filing cabinet drawers or bankers' boxes to store their information. The team should plan how to organize their files and be very aware of the value of their notes and recordings. Establish a system for getting materials directly to the file after the interview, so there's no chance of losing important research.

Plan to immediately copy all interview recordings.
Make copies of interviews and store them in a different location from the original. This is in case of fire or other disasters.

[1] Adapted from *Voices: A Guide to Oral History*, by Derek Reimer, published by Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Victoria, BC, 1984

Plan how you will review and analyze your interviews.
Depending on your working format, the oral history teams or whole group should plan to meet after each interview to look at how the interview went, which questions were answered, what new questions or knowledge gaps came up and what changes you would make for next interview. Use this opportunity to encourage the group to think critically about their work.

Schedule the first interview at a convenient time for the storyteller.
Prepare the equipment for the interview.

- ☑ Test the equipment before you go to the interview.
- ☑ Make sure you have extra batteries – for both the recorder and the microphone, more tape or disks than you plan to use, extension cords and all the necessary cables and adapter.

"Live as if you are to die tomorrow.
Learn as if you were to live forever."

Mahatma Gandhi

The Oral History Team

An oral history project is an opportunity to develop the skills needed to work as a team. Team skills are necessary in the job market, as well as valuable in day-to-day life. The number of people on a team depends on the total size of your group and the scope of their work. But four can be a productive number for a working team. Small groups often need some practice working together before they start work as a project team.

Small groups can decide on roles or tasks for their members to carry out. Some people may be good at certain tasks and want to focus on those tasks only. But it's important to encourage people to stretch themselves and try things that don't come so easily to them – start small and encourage people to gradually increase their responsibilities. It is also important to keep the group members' literacy skills and needs in mind. People with stronger literacy skills shouldn't expect to do all the reading and writing tasks; they can work with those with weaker literacy skills to build the capacity of the whole group. Everyone in the group should be familiar with all the tasks: looking after the files, operating the equipment, contacting the storyteller, and so on. That way the interviews can still take place if one group member is unexpectedly absent.

Definitions

Interviewer: The person who asks the questions to the interviewee or storyteller.
Interviewee or storyteller: The person who tells the stories and shares the knowledge.
Transcriptions: A written word-for-word copy of an interview.
Transcribe: The act of listening to a recording in order to write out every word of an interview.

Roles and Tasks for Oral History Team Members

- ☑ Finding resources and resource people
- ☑ Getting information from the resources and organizing the information
- ☑ Researching, preparing for interviews, creating questions (a whole group task)
- ☑ Contacting storyteller, setting schedules
- ☑ Operating and maintaining equipment
- ☑ Being the interviewer
- ☑ Taking notes
- ☑ Taking photographs
- ☑ Keeping track of questions – which have been answered, which new ones need to be added?
- ☑ Organizing files – being responsible for keeping material orderly and accounted for, recordings copied and labeled, etc.
- ☑ Writing a short biography of the storyteller
- ☑ Writing an interview summary
- ☑ Transcribing interviews (if your group chooses to do that task)

Working with Elders

Do your research first – before you start looking for people to interview! Through background research you can find out what is already known about the topic. You will be better informed when you interview the Elders and you will be able to learn more from their knowledge and skills.

There may be an Elders' group in your community. Your group could work with them to find experts to interview on specific themes. Different people are experts on different topics. And not everyone is comfortable being interviewed. You could attend an Elders' meeting or write a letter to explain the purpose and theme of your study. Ask for suggestions about who would be the best people to interview on different topics.

Elders may have several reasons why they want to participate in an interview:

- They may want to pass along a sense of dignity and cultural pride to future generations.
- They may want to talk about the struggles their generation went through to achieve things that the younger generation just take for granted.
- They may think of themselves as 'stores of information and history' and want to pass this information along to future generations.
- They may believe that they have interesting and important stories to tell; they want to show their sense of their place in history.

Find out if work has already been done on your theme.

Check with other groups in the community to make sure they are not planning to work on a similar project or have already worked on a similar project.

Elders' knowledge and time is valuable and the years are passing quickly. You don't want to repeat projects that have already been completed. If interviews have already been done on the topic you are interested in, you could request completed recordings and transcripts to use in your project.

Talk about your project and ask for Elder volunteers.
You could go on the local radio and ask for Elders who are interested in being involved in an oral history project.

Sometimes the same people are asked over and over again and people who are interested are never asked. Keep lists of people who are experts in different areas.

Respect the roles of Elders.
The oral history team should understand and respect the relationship between Elders and youth. Your group might have an agenda, a project with particular goals, but at times you may have to patiently put aside your goals and let the Elders take the lead. The interviewers should be sensitive to when it is appropriate to ask direct questions or to ask for more details or clarification.

Invite Elders into the process from the beginning.
Consider inviting some interested Elders to speak to your group near the beginning of your project to discuss social relationships between Elders and younger people. Talk to them about traditional relationships and interactions, and about issues related to interviewing. Ask them to help you decide on the best approach to your project.

Choose suitable interviewers.
There will be plenty of jobs for everyone in your project. Some people will be interested in being an interviewer and some will not. Interviewers should understand their role and be sensitive to the Elders' needs.

Choose interviewers who will be able to:
- ☑ feel comfortable and relaxed;
- ☑ visit with the Elder for a while before the formal interview starts;
- ☑ be a good listener;
- ☑ be patient and be able to read Elders' body language;
- ☑ be sensitive to the storytellers' needs;
- ☑ allow for pauses and silences;
- ☑ avoid interrupting when the Elder is speaking;
- ☑ speak Inuktitut or Inuinnaqtun fluently;

- ☑ look interested, pay attention and get involved in the stories;
- ☑ be sympathetic and respectful;
- ☑ be responsive, but quietly – so the interviewer's comments don't dominate the recording;
- ☑ be prepared and organized with equipment, notebooks, etc.;
- ☑ ask for clarifications in a tactful manner, if necessary;
- ☑ notice when the Elder is getting tired and suggest taking a break or continuing another day; and
- ☑ wind down after the interview by chatting with the Elder.

Talk about whether you can pay the storyteller.
If you have funding for your project which includes honoraria for Elders, you will be able to give the storyteller some money for participating in your project. If you don't have this option, your group may want to discuss other forms of compensation: gifts of meat or other country food, store-bought food or helpful services for the Elders in their homes or in the community.

Plan a project that matches your group's skills and resources.
Elders' knowledge is treasured, so any information collected from them should be treated with care. Not all students enjoy, or are interested in, the tasks involved with collecting oral histories. Interviewing, recording, transcribing and cataloguing are jobs that take a lot of time and care. A lot of patience and attention to detail are important.

You may consider budgeting for a professional to do the transcribing. Or think about partnering with another group of adults or older students who are highly literate in Inuktitut or Inuinnaqtun.

If your time is limited or you don't have the necessary equipment, consider working with existing oral history recordings and transcriptions – instead of doing your own interviews. Everyone will still benefit from hearing the Elders' knowledge. Your group can do a project based on the information, but you won't have to be responsible for interviewing, recording, transcribing and cataloguing.

Keep Elders informed about the progress of the project.
Ask for their advice and give them updates about your project. When the project is complete, invite them to tea and to view your display, presentation, artwork, play or video. Give them a copy of your writing or other productions.

"In the oral tradition words are sacred;
they are intrinsically powerful
and beautiful... Nothing exists
beyond the influence of words.
Words are the names of Creation...
Every word spoken, every word heard,
is the utterance of prayer.
Thus, in the oral tradition, language bears
the burden of the sacred,
the burden of belief.
In a written tradition,
the place of language is not so certain."

N. Scott Momaday, Kiowa American First Nations author

From *Spoken Here* by Mark Abley, published by Random House Canada, 2003

Types of Interviews[1]

Life Story Interviews

Life story interviews are stories of one person's life. It is best to break the interview into three or four sessions; this takes the pressure off a single interview and gives the storyteller time to remember and reflect on his or her life. It may be best if someone of the same gender is the interviewer – a male interviews a male storyteller and a female interviews a female. For most people, telling their story is a positive experience which gives them a chance to think back on the path their life has taken. But it could also be an emotional experience, so the listener should always make sure that the storyteller is comfortable at the end of each interview and has the support of family or friends.

Family Tree Interviews

Family tree interviews explore the lives of members of one family, whether past or present generations. The storytellers offer second-hand stories of what they know about their relatives' lives. This type of interview won't give you the details and personal experience of a life story interview, but it will let you see the nature of a family or the change over time in one family. This may be an interesting approach for literacy group members who want to record their own family histories. Cousins, siblings or other family members could work together in groups on their own histories. Two generations of one family could be interviewed about family members to show different perspectives. (*Saqiyuq*[2] is a wonderful book based on interviews with three generations of women in one family.)

Single-issue Testimony

Single-issue testimony focuses on a specific theme or event in the storyteller's life. It may be shorter than a life story, but more detailed. Your group may have a specific topic you want to explore such as traditional parenting, the famines of the 1950s or qajaq building. You could interview several people who have interest in or knowledge of your topic. Interviewees may have a great deal of technical knowledge to share.

[1] Adapted from *The Oral History Reader*, edited by Perks and Thomson, published by Routledge, New York, 1998

[2] *Saqiyuq: Stories from the Lives of Three Inuit Women* by Nancy Wachowich, published by University of Toronto Press, 1999, ISBN: 0773518878

Group Interviews

Group interviews focus on a specific topic or event. Experts suggest bringing together between five and twelve people. The discussion could last from one to two hours. There are advantages and disadvantages to a group interview. The recording quality may not be as clear – due to noise in the room, two people talking at once, or the position of the microphone being too far from some speakers. People who are less confident or who feel they have less power than others in the group or community might not speak up. The group may subtly pressure people to tell a form of the story that is accepted by the community. This could result in a 'safe' version of the past. The advantages are that some people may feel less shy to speak out in a group and one person's story can trigger memories in other people in the group. You may choose to do a group interview at the beginning of your project and then ask for volunteers for individual interviews.

Diary Interviewing

Diary interviewing involves participants who agree to write or orally record a regular journal or diary. It could be daily, weekly or less often. You may choose a specific topic such as childhood memories or hopes for future generations and ask people to write or record their memories or ideas as they think of them. A long-term project about remembering past activities in certain seasons or months could work well. Your literacy group will have to be prepared for the challenge of reading Inuktitut syllabics or Inuinnaqtun roman orthography that is not written in the current standardized form. If some people want to record their memories rather than write them, you may need access to several pieces of recording equipment.

Preparing for the Interviews

Recorded interviews preserve a living conversation between two people – for present and future use. Your group will have plans to use the oral histories that you record in a particular way. But the recorded interview will be available for many generations to use in the future; everyone who listens to these interviews will have different purposes and will see new insights in your conversation with the Elder.

When you do an oral history interview, you are changing the course of history – because you are offering the people of the future a chance to understand life as the Elders see it now. Without this opportunity, future generations may make decisions that are not based on past wisdom.

An oral history interview is a powerful process of interaction between the interviewer and the storyteller or interviewee. But an interviewer must be a good listener; it is the interviewees' show, their story.

Interviewers should understand and respect the relationship between Elders and youth. Your group may need to seek a fine balance between respect and the urgency of recording Elders' knowledge. Your group may have an agenda, a project with particular goals, but it is best to be patient and let the Elders take the lead. Your group should be flexible and open to information that the storyteller offers but which may not have been expected or planned for. You may have to interview several Elders to get the information that you want. Or your group may consider changing the focus of your project to fit the information the storyteller gives you.

Interviewers play an important role:

- Putting the storyteller at ease about sharing memories and knowledge.
- Being respectful and sensitive to social roles of Elders and younger people.
- Thinking of the interviewer and the storyteller as partners.
- Being prepared to let the storyteller take the lead.
- Giving the storyteller time to reflect, to avoid rushing through the process.
- Being a good listener – avoiding interrupting the storyteller.
- Using his or her intuition instead of relying on a set of rigid questions.

- Knowing how to bring out detailed information, being aware of appropriate ways and times to ask for examples and illustrations of the points interviewees make.
- Being aware that the storyteller may be struggling with difficult memories or emotions – being understanding and caring.

Points to think of when choosing interviewers and preparing for the interview.

- The more research your group does, the more they may realize how much they don't know. Allow enough time for research and to develop background knowledge. The research phase is a valuable time to increase awareness and literacy skills; don't rush ahead to the interview phase of the project. The group members will need time to gain enough knowledge to develop meaningful questions, respond intelligently during an interview and to understand the storyteller.
- People might feel more comfortable and supported conducting interviews in pairs; one person could look after the recording equipment and make notes during the interview; the other person could act as the interviewer. If you are operating in oral history teams, the whole team could go along for the interview. Ask first, does the storyteller feel comfortable with a small group of listeners? Decide on roles ahead of time.
- It may be more effective and more comfortable for the storyteller if the same person acts as the interviewer each session. It takes time to build a relationship between the storyteller and interviewer. But if more than one interviewer shares the task, you need a plan so you won't interrupt each other or repeat questions.
- Be aware that the storyteller or the interviewer might get tired. Depending on energy levels, an interview may be as short as 45 minutes, with the ideal being between one and a half hours and two hours. Sometimes everyone is so involved in the story that they want to continue, but it's best to gently wrap up the interview after two hours maximum and reschedule for another day. At the beginning of the next interview, you can replay the last few minutes of the previous interview so the storyteller remembers where he left off.

- Take a notepad to an interview – to write down points you would like clarified or expanded, spellings of names and places and so on. Instead of interrupting the storyteller, you can ask for clarification during a pause or at the end of the interview. If you go to an interview as an oral history team, you may have two or more note-takers. This could be useful in comparing ideas and reviewing or critiquing your interview.
- The interviewer should let the storyteller set his or her own pace.
- You can use prompts such as documents, maps, tools, clothing, timelines or photographs to inspire the storyteller to remember the past.
- Feelings, attitudes and values give meaning to past activities and events and make an interview interesting. The interviewer needs to encourage the storyteller to go beyond facts.
- Some experiences 'defy words' – words sometimes cannot adequately explain a traumatic or amazing experience from the past.
- The interviewer should try to understand the person's story from their point of view – to really listen!
- Pay attention to what is missing in a story. What gaps are there – and why? Maybe the interviewee finds some aspects of the story too painful to talk about.
- You may get conflicting information from different sources. Sometimes memory fails people; sometimes two people are looking at the event from different perspectives. If your project involves getting correct factual information, you may want to check other resources and then go back to the interviewees for clarification.

Should we make up a list of questions for the interview?

- You will plan a list of questions, but the interviewer should think of those questions as a guideline only, not a rigid list that must be followed. Often the storyteller will answer your questions without you ever asking them. Take time at the end of each interview to check off all your questions that were covered in that session.

- Sometimes the interview will be like a monologue, with the storyteller doing most of the talking and the interviewer just listening and responding quietly. Other times an interviewee may be quiet and shy and the interviewer will need to encourage him or her to share information.
- You may have prepared tough questions about emotional issues, but you won't be able to ask those questions unless the interviewee seems comfortable and ready to share this information. It may be the third or fourth meeting before he or she volunteers sensitive information.
- You will need to respect silences or pauses, to give the storyteller time to think.
- Remember that people who know very little about the topic may be listening to the recorded interview years later, so you will need to ask obvious questions and ask for detailed descriptions. Imagine that your grandchildren will be listening to the interview – in 25 years. Maybe they will have never had the opportunity to speak to a unilingual Elder and some of them may have never seen certain tools, clothing or other objects from the past.
- If the interviewee doesn't offer much information on a topic, the interviewer can use the 'five W's' to encourage more detail – who, what, where, when, how, why.
- Ask open-ended, neutral questions that don't limit or lead the response. (See *Planning Interview Questions*, on the next page.)

Planning Interview Questions

Here's One Way to Start Creating Questions

Write down ten reasons why you chose this person to interview. What is it that interests you about this person? Use your list of reasons to develop questions to ask.[1]

Example:

She has lived a long time and seen many changes in her lifetime.

Q: What do you see as the most positive changes from the time of your childhood until now?

Q: What do you see as the negative changes?

He worked with the Hudson Bay in the 1940s and 1950s.

Q: What do you remember about the fur prices in the 1940s?

Q: What were the most popular trade goods at that time?

Q: What role did Inuit see for HBC at that time?

- You may already have your list of questions created during your research phase in the 'What We Want to Know' section of the chart. (See *Doing the Research*, the first chapter in this section.) This list can guide the questions you plan for your interview.
- You might not actually ask any of these questions during the interview, for several reasons:
  - ☑ The storyteller may lead the interview in a particular direction.
  - ☑ The storyteller may be very talkative and not need any prompting from the interviewer.
  - ☑ Or the group may feel it isn't appropriate to lead an Elder by asking lots of direct questions.

  However, the questions are still valuable because they guide your research – they remind you of what you still want to know to fill in the knowledge gaps.

[1] *Like It Was* by Cynthia Stokes Brown, published by Teachers and Writers Collaborative, New York, 1988, page 35

- You could create the questions as a whole group, using your research chart as a guide. Or you could break into oral history teams. When you make up your questions, be sure to keep the background and interests of the storyteller in mind.
- Create open-ended questions, not questions that would elicit a 'yes' or 'no' answer or a short answer. See the next page for examples of open-ended and closed questions.
- Create questions that are neutral, that don't lead the storyteller. The interviewees shouldn't be influenced because they think you expect a certain response. The interviewer should not show his or her opinions, biases, attitudes or expectations. See examples of neutral and leading questions two pages ahead.

Examples of Open-ended and Closed Questions[2]

People answer closed questions with one-word answers 'yes' or 'no' or short answers. Open-ended questions encourage the storyteller to tell more, to remember and talk about details and feelings.

Closed	*Open-ended*
Where were you born?	What do you remember about the place you were born?
Where were your parents born?	What did your parents tell you about their lives in... ?
Who did you marry?	How was life for you when you first got married?
Was religion important to your family?	Tell me about how your family followed religious customs.
Did you and your friends play games as children?	Describe some games you played as a child.

[2] Adapted from *Voices: A Guide to Oral History*, by Derek Reimer, published by Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Victoria, BC, 1984

Examples of Leading and Neutral Questions[3]

Leading questions make the interviewee think you expect a certain answer. Leading questions show the interviewer's opinions, biases, attitudes or expectations. Neutral questions allow the interviewee to speak his or her own words and thoughts.

Leading	*Neutral*
You must certainly have been happy when your first child was born.	How did you feel when your first child was born?
Did you move to Iglulik then?	What did you do then?
You didn't like Uqi, did you?	Tell me about Uqi.
What did you think of Napajuq's terrible behaviour?	What did Napajuq do then?

Some questions encourage the storyteller to use the senses to describe a scene:

- ☑ What did you see... hear... feel... taste... or smell?
- ☑ Tell me about...
- ☑ Describe...
- ☑ Explain...
- ☑ Compare...
- ☑ Take me on an imaginary walk around your camp when you were a little girl."
- ☑ What would I have seen and done if I had spent a day out hunting with you when you were a young man?

[3] Also adapted from *Voices: A Guide to Oral History*

- Here are some questions that encourage storytellers to reflect on their lives and offer values, beliefs, opinions and feelings rather than just facts and events:
  - ☑ What was the hardest thing you ever had to do?
  - ☑ What turning points do you see in your life?
  - ☑ What do you see as the happiest time of your life? What do you see as the worst time?
  - ☑ If you had your life to live over again, what would you do differently?
  - ☑ Do you feel that you missed any great opportunities?
  - ☑ Did your life turn out the way you thought it would?
  - ☑ How are you different from your children? How do you think your way of life compares to your children's?
- Now review and analyze the questions you have created. If you created your questions in small groups, the groups can exchange questions and critique another group's list. You can use the critique on the next page. Add your own points to the list.

Critique of Interview Questions

- ☑ Are the questions related to the storyteller's area of knowledge?
- ☑ Are there any 'leading questions' – ones that make the storyteller think you want a specific answer?
- ☑ Will the questions bring out interesting answers?
- ☑ Are there any questions that might bring out boring answers? How would you change them?
- ☑ Do any of the questions show the interviewer's attitudes or opinions?
- ☑ Are the questions open-ended, not closed?

Issues for Discussion

There are some issues about interviewing that may mean different approaches work best in different settings. Here are some questions that your group may want to discuss before you begin the interview process. You may have other issues that you want to debate as you decide how to proceed with your project.

- Do interviews go better when a woman is interviewed by another woman and a man by another man? Do people of the same gender share more common understanding about issues and skills?
- Is it better when Elders are interviewed by older people rather than younger – because older people have more knowledge and similar backgrounds and forms of spoken Inuktitut? Or are Elders happy to talk to young people because they are able to pass on important knowledge that youth might not otherwise hear about?
- How does the relationship between young and old affect the interview? What about the social rules about communicating with Elders:
  - ☑ Questioning Elders
  - ☑ Initiating topics
  - ☑ Disagreeing
- How do strict time-schedules and deadlines affect the quality of an interview?
- How do the values of modern social institutions, such as churches, legal systems and education systems, affect people's view of the past?
- How do issues of power and status affect an interview? Are the interviewees able to be open and honest if they are interviewed by someone they see as being in a position of power? Or is the interview more meaningful if the interviewer is seen as a peer and an equal? Would you, as literacy group members, be able to get a more honest and open interview than a professional interviewer from the south?

Pre-interview Checklist

- ☑ Phone the storyteller to confirm that the planned time is still OK.
- ☑ Test recording equipment, charge batteries and check batteries in microphone.
- ☑ Pack batteries, extra disks or tapes, an extension cord, cables and adapters.
- ☑ Pack notebook and pencils/pens.
- ☑ Take the list of questions.
- ☑ Decide on roles for each interview team member.
- ☑ Provide water, tea or other drinks for the storyteller and interview team.
- ☑ Find a good place to do the interview – quiet, with no interruptions, electrical outlets handy, enough light for filming if you are using a video camera.

"Everyone listens only to what he understands."

Johan Wolfgang Goethe

At the Interview

The best interview is almost a monologue (one person talking) which is encouraged by approving nods, appreciative smiles, and enraptured listening and stimulated by understanding comments and intelligent questions.[1]

The Eight Commandments of Oral History Interviewing

1. Do your homework.
2. Be prepared.
3. Be ready with meaningful but open-ended questions.
4. Do not interrupt responses.
5. Follow up on what you have heard.
6. Know your equipment thoroughly.
7. Promptly process your recordings.
8. Always keep in mind and practice the ethics of interviewing.

From 'Doing Oral History' by Donald A. Ritchie, Twayne Publishers, New York, 1995, page 57.

- Plan for a session of one and a half to two hours, but be prepared to stop sooner if either the interviewer or the storyteller is tired.
- Although you have interview teams, it may be best to keep the same interviewer for the whole interview process, once the storyteller is relaxed with that person. If you feel that the storyteller will be comfortable with more than one interviewer, you need to plan which person asks which questions. You need to make a plan that will help the two interviewers to avoid interrupting each other.
- Check your interview schedule and be sure to arrive on time. Phone first to make sure that the storyteller is expecting you.
- Take along a notebook. One person on the interview team could be in charge of taking notes – you may want to write down a point that you want clarified later, a name or place you need the spelling for, or an issue for the next interview.

[1] From *What's So Special About Women? Women's Oral History* by Sherna Gluck, in *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, edited by Dunaway and Baum, published by American Association for State and Local History, Nashville, 1984

- When you arrive at the interview, take time to visit in a relaxed way before the interview to put both the storyteller and the interviewer at ease. After you have visited for a while, say that you need a few moments to set up your equipment before the formal interview begins.
- Find an electrical outlet for your recording equipment. In case the outlet isn't near the interview area, be prepared with batteries and an extension cord.
- After you get set up for the interview, do a test to make sure that both you and the interviewee can be heard clearly.
- Before starting the interview, listen through earphones so you can see how much background noise the microphone is picking up and how well your voice is coming through. If background noise is a problem, try moving the mic closer to you and turning down the volume.
  - ☑ If you hear pops or thumps when you pronounce a 'P' sound, move the mic a little to the side so your breath won't go straight into the microphone.
  - ☑ If you are recording outside, you may need to put the mic closer. The wind and your breath might be a problem.
  - ☑ It's better to try to prevent these problems by finding a good recording location, than to try to remove the noise on the recording later in the studio.
- Put the microphone between the interviewer and the storyteller. The recording equipment should be near the interview team member who is monitoring it. This person should watch that the recording equipment is working well and the disk or tape does not run out. If the disk or tape is getting near the end, she should alert the interviewer at a suitable pause in the interview and change the tape or disk before it runs out. You can put the recording equipment off to the side, but don't hide it from the storyteller since this goes against the principle of trust in an interviewing relationship.
- Make sure the storyteller is comfortable. Have water or tea on hand.
- Quiet is very important in getting a good quality taped interview. Ensure that the interview won't be interrupted by phones, TV, radio, children or other relatives, noisy appliances or noise from the road.

- Set an atmosphere of trust. Remind the storyteller once again of your group's oral history principles. Assure him that he can set the pace, take a break or stop the interview at any point. Advise him that you may need to come back for more sessions.
- At the beginning of the recording, identify the storyteller – with her full name and date and place of birth, the interviewer, and the date and place of the interview. Also record the names of the storyteller's parents, her brothers or sisters and children and when and where they were born. This will help identify the interviewee in the future when people are listening to the recording.
- The storyteller may be ready to launch directly into his life story or information about the theme you are researching. If he needs some prompting or you have decided that direct questions are acceptable, start with general open-ended questions: "Tell me about your childhood." or "What is the first thing to think about when planning to build a qajaq?" You can move to more specific questions as you get more information.
- As the storyteller speaks, either the interviewer or one of the interview team members makes notes on additional questions or clarifications you would like to ask for when he is finished speaking on a specific subject.
- Don't speak immediately after the storyteller stops talking; he may just be pausing for a breath of air or to gather his thoughts together.
- If it helps the interview team or the storyteller keep facts and dates straight, print up a timeline or sheet with dates and names of important players in the stories. Take this sheet to the interview in order to refer to it.
- Use prompts such as photos, tools, clothing or maps to encourage people to remember and talk about a topic.
- You may have brought along a camera to take pictures of the storyteller or interesting items he shows you. Ask if he minds if you take a photograph. Keep notes about what each photograph is about, when and where it was taken, and any technical information.

- As you conduct the interview, try to keep in mind the people who will listen to the recorded interview in the future – ask for information which seems to be obvious or common knowledge. It will help outsiders to the culture or people of future generations picture the details of the story.
- The interviewer should let the storyteller take the lead, but keep the questions prepared by the group in mind throughout the interview. The interviewer should be prepared to respond to and follow-up on unexpected information.
- You don't have to agree with the words or opinions of the storyteller. But try to listen and understand the situation from his point of view. It is not the place of an interviewer to express his or her opinion.
- It is important to respond to the words of the storyteller, to smile and use body language to show you understand – or to look confused to show you don't understand. But too much verbal interruption from the interviewer will make the recording difficult to listen to and transcribe. The words of the storyteller are what you are trying to capture. One oral historian says that everyone should try transcribing at least part of an interview – in order to understand the importance of getting a good quality sound recording.
- The interview team should be sensitive to the storyteller getting tired. Two hours is the maximum time for an interview. You may all be enjoying yourselves and want to continue, but it is better to reschedule another interview.
- Look for a natural 'wrap up' question that causes the storyteller to think about her life, to compare early years to the present, to come to conclusions about events or to look ahead to the future.
  - ☑ How would you compare your childhood with the childhood of your grandchildren?
  - ☑ What advice could you give young people which would help them lead better lives? What experiences have you had that they could benefit from?
  - ☑ What advice do you have for people who want to build a traditional qajaq?
- Ask the storyteller if there are any other issues which should be discussed in the next interview.

- Wind up the interview with an informal visit after the recording equipment has been turned off. Make sure that the storyteller is comfortable, especially if remembering the past has been an emotional experience. You can't just run off and leave the person to deal with the thoughts that have been stirred up by the interview. Ensure that she or he has the support of friends or family.
- As soon as the interview is finished, label the recording with the full name of the storyteller, the interviewer, the date and place of the interview.
- If you are coming back for another interview, schedule the date and time.

After the Interview

As soon as possible after the interview, the oral history team should do these tasks:

- Make copies of the recordings and take them directly to another location. Label all the recordings with project, interviewer, interviewee, date and recording number. Use a permanent colourfast marker.
- If possible, send the master copy or original to an archive, museum or cultural centre that has the facilities to store recordings safely.
- Develop or download any photographs.
- Label the interview notes and photographic information and put them safely in the file.
- Write a short biography of the storyteller.
- Write a short summary of the content of the interview.
- Listen to the complete recording and review how the interview went. What do you like and what could you improve next time you do an interview?
- Look at your question list and check off the questions that were answered in the last interview. Add to your list any new questions that came up during the interview.
- As you listen to the recording and review the questions, write the answers to the questions. Add them to your file.
- Make a plan for the next interview or next phase of your project.

Documenting the Interview

If your project is doing several interviews, a records manager could be chosen to keep a project log. The records manager should keep the following information about each interview:

☑ Who was interviewed.
☑ Who was the interviewer.
☑ How long was the interview.
☑ What was the date and time of the interview.
☑ How many tapes or disks were used.
☑ Whether the interview has been transcribed.

Make a file for each interview which includes this information:

- ☑ Name, address, phone number of the interviewee.
- ☑ Time and date of the interview.
- ☑ A short biography of the interviewee.
- ☑ Letters or notes about arranging the interview.
- ☑ A summary of the interview, the subjects that were talked about and the names of the people discussed.
- ☑ The consent or release form.
- ☑ Explanation of restrictions on the use of the interview.
- ☑ Other libraries or archives where a copy of the interview can be found.
- ☑ Name, address, phone numbers of the interviewer.

Transcribing Interviews

Transcribing is writing word for word what you hear when you play back a recorded interview. Spoken language is very different from written language. Spoken language is less formal; it is looser with more rambling and run-on sentences. So a transcript of an oral interview is not at all like formal written language.

Transcribing: listening to a recording of an interview and writing it out exactly as it was spoken
Transcript: all the pages of the written word-for-word copy of the interview

You and your literacy group may be thinking only of your project which will be done in a few months or a year. But the information you have collected through recorded interviews is valuable original research. With a little more work you can create material that will be of use to future literacy groups and to other researchers as well.

Why Transcribe an Interview?

- You can get information more easily from a written transcript than from a recording. You can quickly skim a written transcript to look for specific information, but you can't do that with a recording.
- Recordings are sometimes difficult to hear clearly. The quality of the recording may be lost over time and interviewees sometimes speak quietly or with a dialect that not everyone can understand.
- Transcripts can easily be kept in libraries and other public places where people will have access to them in the future.
- Listening and transcribing gives the transcriber a chance to explore the miracle and complexity of language. When you transcribe, you really pay attention to language and how people use it. Transcribers become more aware of the structure of their language: vocabulary, morphology (the different small parts that make up one word), sentence structure and pronunciation. If the interviews are with Elders, younger people will have the chance to hear more traditional and complex Inuktitut or Inuinnaqtun.
- Transcribing gives interviewers a chance to critique their interview style and to make changes for future interviews.

Issues to Think About Before Transcribing

- Transcribing is just plain hard work. It is slow, tedious and very detailed. Professionals estimate six to twelve hours of transcriptions for each hour of taped recording.[1]
- If your group includes very young people or those with weaker language and literacy skills, you may want to hire a professional transcriber to ensure accurate transcripts. You need to plan and budget for this from the beginning of your project.
- However, the people who do the interviews may be the best ones to do the transcriptions because they know the storyteller and were present for the actual interview. If your group plans to transcribe, do the transcriptions as soon as possible after the interview while everything is still fresh in the interviewers' minds.
- Even if you hire a professional to do the transcribing, people in the oral history group should transcribe a few passages that are of interest to them. It will give them valuable exposure to language in all its complexities.
- When people speak in non-standard dialects, how will you transcribe their words? Professionals agree that you should be faithful to the exact words of the speaker. Don't change their grammar or vocabulary if it is different from the standard form. Each speaker's unique way of speaking is part of their life story. However, use standard spelling. Do not try to spell a word in a way that reflects the storyteller's accent or pronunciation. For example, if someone says in English, "I hadded 't go home." write "I had to go home." Or if someone says in Inuktitut "pijaqtuq", write "ai and iq".

Tips for Transcribing

- To practise transcribing, group members could interview each other and then transcribe the interviews. This practice session will help to demonstrate the importance of transcribing carefully in order to preserve the exact meaning of the interviewee's words.

[1] From *Like It Was, A Complete Guide to Writing Oral History* by Cynthia Stokes Brown, published by Teachers and Writers Collaborative, New York, 1988

- When you are ready to transcribe interviews use only copies of the recordings. The master copy should never be used for transcriptions or research because every time a recording is replayed, its sound quality is lowered.
- Discuss and agree upon a 'transcription format guide' which shows the format and style your group chooses for transcribing. Then all your transcripts will be consistent. Because oral speech is so different from formal written language, you will have many questions about what to do with pauses, interruptions or asides and where to put periods to indicate the end of sentences. Here are some examples from a transcription format guide:
  - ☑ Use last names (or use initials) to indicate when the interviewer and interviewee are speaking. Underline the initials or name.
  - ☑ Use ellipsis points (...) for pauses.
  - ☑ Use square brackets when the transcriber adds comments or information to explain meaning in a passage: ITK [Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami].
  - ☑ Put non-verbal information in brackets: [laughs], [smiles], [pauses], [holds ulu in her hand], [uses hand to suggest height].
  - ☑ If you can't understand a word after listening to it several times, put a question mark in brackets in place of the word: Johnny left town in (?) – and leave a space where the word can be added later.
  - ☑ If a track or tape ends in the middle of a sentence, write that in brackets: Then we moved to... (continued on track 1, tape 2).

  These examples are not official standards. You can agree upon your own transcription guide or you can borrow a guide from an established oral history program and adapt it. The goal is to create consistent transcripts.
- Transcribe both the interviewer's questions and the interviewee's responses.
- If your recorder has a counter, insert counter numbers in brackets in bold every 2 pages or at the beginning of a new topic. **[85]**
- Transcribe everything. Even transcribe filler words such as *well*, *um* or *you know* in English and *ilaa*, *ingna-aa*, *aam* and *pii* in Inuktitut.
- Double-space your transcripts – so you can easily edit them later with a partner. To edit, take turns reading the transcript to each other, with the other partner making corrections.

- If it is appropriate, ask the interviewee to review the transcript.
- A storyteller may use words that are only familiar in her own region or community – words that others might not know. You could ask her to explain them during the interview. Or you could add a glossary or word list to your transcript.
- If the storyteller speaks for a while about something unrelated to your interview, you could leave it out of the transcript. But show in the transcript that you have not transcribed this portion. Others may be interested in it and may choose to listen to that section of the recording. Example: [Last 10 minutes of side 2 was not transcribed. In that part Anulik tells about her stay in the hospital in Winnipeg.]

Transcript Format

- The heading at the beginning of the transcript and of each session should include the following information:
  Project Name:
  Tape #:
  Interviewee:
  Interviewer:
  Date:
  Location:
  Transcriber:
- Tape and session changes should be indicated in the body of the transcript in bold: **Begin tape 4, side A. Begin Session 2**
- Write out the interviewer's and interviewee's names in full at the beginning of each session. After that use initials or last names to indicate who is talking.

Here is an example of an interview done by the Kitikmeot Heritage Society:

Tape 1 Page Two
Kuukyuak Phase II August 6 – 13, 1997
Interviewer: Kim Crockatt
Translator: Emily Angulalik
Original tapes held by Kitikmeot Heritage Society
Interview with James Taipana – Elder, Baker Lake

Q: What did you remember about Perry River and coming back here?
A: This is the land where I have grown up, taught by my parents how to survive and I have been thinking quite often in returning back to the land where I was raised.

Q: Did you remember anything?
A: It brought a lot of memories.

Q: Did your family have a camp?
A: We would set up spring camp in little islands around this area. I would camp with Angulalik and his family. I would come to Perry River to trade.

Q: Where did you spend your seasons?
A: We would spend our spring camps along the river side and up to the rapids in Ittimnigigut.

Q: Did you spend your spring camp along the Baker Lake area?
A: I have not been to Baker Lake at that time.

Q: From Perry River did you move to Cambridge Bay?
A: Yes. Angulalik and his family remained here at Perry River, from Perry River to Cambridge Bay and from Cambridge Bay we moved to Baker Lake via aeroplane, that's where we remained since.

Q: Were there a lot of people from Baker Lake to trade at Perry River, did you remember some people?
A: People from the Garry Lake (Hanninngayuk) area came here to trade.

Q: Was there any kind of trade or would other people come to visit?

A: Yes. I remember people coming from the Garry Lake area when Ekvana and Angulalik were newlyweds, people started coming. Tapatai came with a missionary by dog team along with Otak and Ugyuk. Their clothing was different from ours – their trousers were long, I started thinking 'maybe their trousers are wide enough to ---- and also their stockings were so much longer than ours'.

Tape 1 – Page Three
Interview with Taipana

Q: Who are your parents?

A: My father's name was Utugauk, my mother's name was Tikkikluk. My siblings were Panaktannoak, I was second, a sister name Aulayuk, Mingilgak and Okalitana is the youngest.

Q: Were your parents from this area?

A: Yes, this area, Ellice River and Kulgayuk. My birthplace was in Ellice River. Kuunayuk is where I learned to hunt and survive, where I became a young man and where I was chosen a bride.

Q: Where was your wife from?

A: My wife was from the Perry River area, her name was Unnguk. My eldest brother Panaktannoak came to Perry River along with myself to pick her up. This is where we remained and raised a family.

Q: How many children did you have with your first wife?

A: Eldest child was Kolaohok a female; second to her was Amegainek; younger than Amegainek is Tikkiklok wife of Jimmy Wingnek, these were the children with his first wife. There was a fourth child born the same day as Amegainek, his twin brother. He was adopted out but did not live, he was adopted to Hovak and Kanayuk. He suffocated while asleep, and another child suffocated just shortly after being born. We had had five children, me and my first wife.

Q: Did you trade with Angulalik and what did you do around this area as a young man?

A: Yes. When his first trading post was located at Flagstaff Island that's the time Angulalik was with one of his first wives. Ekvana commented that's when both of Angulalik's wives were still alive. From there Angulalik would take in kabloonaks to and from the area. In the spring time when I first became employed by Angulalik. I started work with Angulalik by trading foxes.

Q: Did you help him trade furs?

A: Yes. That's when his first wife was still alive I have never left him but in his early retirement when he was married to Ekvana I left him. I remember travelling by ship with Angulalik and his family to Cambridge Bay. I would still have been employed if it weren't for my illness, tuberculosis. From there I left work all together.

Translation

You may want to translate your transcript into English. If so, it is easier to translate from a transcript than from a recording.

What If You Don't Have Time to Do a Transcript?

If your project is a short one, you may not have time to do transcripts. Or you may not have the money to hire professionals. Here are two other ways to document your interview.

Indexing

Indexing involves listening to the recorded interview and listing all the topics that were discussed, with the counter or track number.

Example:

James Taipana
By Kim Crockatt
08/08/97

Tape 1 Side A

004 Returning to Perry River
018 Spring camp
050 Moving to Baker Lake

Interview Summary

Write a summary for each interview, whether it is transcribed or not. Interview summaries will quickly show people about the topic of the interview. Writing summaries is an important literacy skill for your group members to acquire. But it takes practice to be able to identify main points and write a summary.

Here are some suggestions for how to teach learners to do summaries:[2]

What is a summary?

A summary is a shorter, concise version of an original text. It includes the main idea of the original text and some important supporting information or details.

[2] Adapted from *Teaching the Language Arts* by Cathy Collins Block, published by Allyn and Bacon, in 2001. Also from *Reading Instruction that Makes Sense* by Mary Tarasoff, published by Active Learning Institute, 2001, available through Grass Roots Press.

- Model the summarizing process more than once, thinking out loud as you demonstrate it.
- Provide guided practice with the learners.
- Go through the process several times as a group with different materials.
- Provide feedback.
- Break into smaller chunks – don't start with a summary of a complete interview. Begin with summarizing a short conversation, a small section of an interview, short radio or TV interviews or written paragraphs.
- Identify good summaries from a variety of examples.
- Practise evaluating summaries – including the learners' own summaries after they have some experience.

Here are some guidelines you could give to the learners:

☑ Underline or highlight important words in the original text.
☑ Find the main idea of the text and a few important details that support it.
☑ Write in complete sentences.
☑ Delete repeated information.
☑ Delete unimportant information.
☑ Combine ideas with the same subject.
☑ Think of a category to replace lists of details eg. Sea mammals for a list including seals, belugas and narwhales.
☑ Remove details that are not about the main subject.
☑ Restate in fewer words.
☑ Do not include personal opinions.

The following web sites contain information on writing summaries:

- http://www.turnerfenton.com/departme/english/strategies.htm
- http://www.eqao.com/eqao/home_page/pdf_e/02/02p018e.pdf
- http://www.masters.ab.ca/bdyck/justice/web%20page/summary/

Writing and Publishing

How to Write and Publish Oral Histories

Recorded interviews and transcripts are interesting to researchers. But let's face it, transcripts are too long and rambling for most readers. The conversation usually drifts back and forth from topic to topic and repeats itself.

But your group can create absorbing articles, short stories or books from the raw material of the transcripts.

How Do We Start the Writing Process?[1]

Start by analyzing the interview.

Here are some ways to do that:

- Organize the interview in order of time. When you do an interview, the storytelling often jumps back and forth in time. You ask the storyteller to clarify something that she spoke about earlier. Or she remembers a point about the early years that she forgot to tell you in the last interview. Read the transcript or listen to the interview and put all the events in a sequence from the earliest to the most recent.
- Look for themes. What are the issues, events and meanings that run through the interviews? [2]
- Look at patterns, key phrases and speech patterns. Look not only at *what* is said, but *how* it is said.[2]
- Together the group might brainstorm some questions that help guide your analysis:[2]
  - ☑ What are the most important points in the interview?
  - ☑ What do these stories tell us about history?
  - ☑ How do the different interviews compare to each other?
- Listen to the interviews looking for categories: life events and stories, how to do a skill, child rearing, hunting stories, beliefs, family relationships, etc. Label different parts of the interview according to the categories.

[1] Most of the ideas in this section are adapted from *Like It Was* by Cynthia Stokes Brown, published by Teachers and Writers Collaborative, 1988

[2] From *Talking Gumbo: A Teacher's Guide to Using Oral History in the Classroom* by Dean, Daspit and Munro, published by the T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History, 1998

- Make a list of 'memorable phrases' spoken by the storyteller in the interview. You might use these words of wisdom to inspire you in your writing. You could type them up in a large font and create posters for your work area. Later you can use these memorable phrases in your writing as titles, subtitles or captions under photographs.[2]

Writing Short Pieces from an Interview

- Choose a *focus* for your piece of writing. Look at the themes and categories that you identified in the interview. You won't write about everything that the storyteller spoke about. Which theme or category interests you?
- Decide who you are writing for. Who is your *audience*? Nunavummiut in general, community residents, group members, children? How you write will depend on who your audience is.
- *Choose* the parts of the interview that fit into your theme or category. You have to try to keep your story moving along fast enough to keep your readers engaged. So you may not be able to put in everything that interests you.
- Decide if you are going to be in your story or not. There are a few different ways to approach this:
  - ☑ Keep the interview format, with your questions and the storyteller's responses. Magazine articles are sometimes done in this way.
  - ☑ Remove yourself from the story altogether. Use only the storyteller's words, making the story flow along from one part to the next. You might need to invent a few sentences that reflect your questions. You might use your own words in the beginning where you introduce the storyteller and the process you went through together.
  - ☑ Let the storyteller speak in the first person (I or we) and you write connecting passages in the third person (he, she or they). Weave the two styles together to create a balanced story.
- You will likely have to write your own *transitions* to make one part of the story flow along to the next part. These might be a few sentences that help your reader understand the story better.

[2] From *Talking Gumbo: A Teacher's Guide to Using Oral History in the Classroom* by Dean, Daspit and Munro, published by the T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History, 1998

- Then you will have to write a *beginning* and an *end* to your story.
  The beginning could be:
  - ☑ the storyteller's own words for a paragraph or two;
  - ☑ a short biography of the storyteller's life;
  - ☑ a description of the setting where you interviewed the storyteller; or
  - ☑ or you could start with the reason you wanted to interview the storyteller.

  The ending could be:
  - ☑ the storyteller's own words to wrap up the story;
  - ☑ a summary written by you, explaining why the story is important; or
  - ☑ your feelings and opinions about the interview process as you experienced it.
- Choose photographs to go in the story and captions for them.
- Write a title and subtitles if you want to use them.
- Edit your piece of writing. Give it to other people and get their comments. Then edit it with a partner looking for sequence – is everything in the best order? Look at how you organized your paragraphs. In the final edit look at sentence structure, grammar and spelling.

Four Examples of Writing from Interviews

1. ***Writing in interview style with questions and responses***

   This example of writing in the interview style is from *Travelling and Surviving on Our Land* by George Agiaq Kappianaq and Cornelius Nutaraq.[3] The editors have chosen specific selections from the interviews and organized them into topics within chapters. An introduction gives background information, but the rest of the book is written in question and response format.

   Agiaq: Recollections of the Past

   Can you tell us more about your first catch?
   Agiaq: My first real catch was important to me, and I will always remember it. It was a large bull caribou. My father helped me get it. It was so close to me that I could see it chewing. I could see its eyes moving. It was no surprise that I killed it.

   What was your second kill?
   Agiaq: It was a nurraq, a caribou calf.

   Do you remember when you got your first seal?
   Agiaq: Yes, I was still a boy then. Although I was very proud of it, I cannot remember if it was male or female. Perhaps, because it was not my first kill, I didn't take note of this.

   So these were your first kills?
   Agiaq: Yes, my first kill was a big bull caribou. We were living in an area where there were no caribou then. I was a little bit older when we moved to where the caribou were.

   Was it only after you had your first catch that you were able to get a wife?
   Agiaq: It was long after my first kill that I got married. I did not get married when I wanted to get married. I had a prearranged marriage, and my wife started living with us. She was an orphan. My mother looked after her.

[3] From the *Inuit Perspectives on the 20th Century* series published by Nunavut Arctic College in Iqaluit in 2001.

2. ***Writing an introduction and using only the interviewee's words to tell the story***

In this excerpt from an article in *Inuktitut* magazine, January 1983, the editor uses the words of the interviewee, Ekaksak Amagoalik, taken from an interview with Moses Nowkawalk, a reporter for the magazine. The editor chooses certain passages from the interview. He uses Ekaksak's words directly in first person (I, we) without quotation marks. He writes an introduction which explains the story that follows.

Journey to the North Pole

On March 4th, 1982, three Norwegian adventurers, Ragner Thorseth, Trygve Berge and Eldar Fortun departed from Resolute Bay in a Twin Otter, for Eureka, on Ellesmere Island, bound for the North Pole. With them was the man they had chosen as their guide, Ekaksak Amagoalik of Resolute Bay, who, according to Thorseth, was the most qualified guide around, even though Ekaksak had frozen a thumb in the week previous to the trip. Ragner wrote in a recent article: "Since I had been with Ekaksak on sledge trips in the Northwest Territories in Canada, I knew he kept his promises, and even with a right hand out of commission, he was worth more to the expedition than any one hundred percent sound man I knew or could have enlisted in time."

Driving three Bombardier Nordic skidoos, pulling Norwegian sleds, the party, eager to be on its way, set out immediately from Ellesmere Island, bound for the North Pole and Spitzbergen. So began the arduous trip to the North Pole, a trip that had been attempted about one hundred times before, and had rarely been successfully completed.

The following is Ekaksak Amagoalik's own account of this historic adventure, taken from an interview with Moses Nowkawalk, an *Inuktitut* magazine staff reporter.

Ekaksak presently works as a night watchman on the alert for polar bears that might roam into the mining settlement on Little Cornwallis Island.

Starting Out

When we left Ellesmere Island the ice was comparatively smooth - and no wonder, we were travelling along a bay where the ice is landfast. Further away from the land the shifting ice was somewhat rough and some parts were impassable. I was not apprehensive about the rough ice. I was more concerned about crossing over broken shifting ice, sometimes having to skim over open water where one would sink should he stop. This is what I was most afraid of.

On our way to the pole, we passed not too far from Greenland. Unfortunately, as Robeson Channel has very strong currents, we could not travel very near Greenland. Instead we headed directly to the North Pole. It took us several weeks to reach our destination.

3. ***The writer lets the storyteller speak in first person (I, we) and writes connecting passages in third person (he, she, they)***
This example is an excerpt from an article in *Inuktitut* magazine, Winter 1985. The author, William Belsey, starts by introducing the storyteller, David Serkoak, in third person (he). Throughout the article he quotes from the storyteller, using first person (I) and putting those passages between quotation marks. The author writes connecting passages to help weave together the parts of the interview he has chosen for his article.

A Home and Native Land
by William Belsey

David Serkoak was born at Ennadai Lake in the early 1950s. He was only four or five years old when his family was forced to move from their traditional camping area at Ennadai Lake. David was too young to remember much from those times, but his late father Miki, his mother Kaho, as well as other family members have contributed much to his knowledge of that early time in his life.

"From what I have gathered from various sources," he says, "starvation was approaching us, although some of the people at Ennadai Lake were living quite well. Hard times came once in a while, but nothing very drastic. I don't believe that many people had much advance warning that they would have to move. Some of them found out the same day they were to be moved. When we returned to Ennadai recently, we stopped at a traditional camping spot where, the Elders told us, a vehicle came to pick us up one day – we were told we had to move. The people had to pack so quickly that many articles were left behind.

"We were moved to the Henik Lake area. That was when the real trouble hit us. I guess it was new for some of the people. The hardest time for them was between Ennadai Lake and the coast. I think the idea behind the move had something to do with a change in caribou migration patterns, which meant that the caribou were farther away from the Ennadai Lake area. I think the government wanted the Ihalmiut to move to the coast so that we might become fishermen and make ourselves useful."

Serkoak also recalls the way his mother and father spoke of their contact with Gabriel Gely in those days. "I don't remember anyone directly. I only learned about Gabe after talking to my mother and father. They believed him to be a good man. I know that my father talked of him as a good friend who helped to give us a hand when we needed it in Ennadai Lake."

4. ***Using only the words of the interviewee to tell the story***

Look at the example of an interview transcript towards the end of the previous section, *Transcribing Interviews*. You will see the transcript of an interview with James Taipana. Compare the transcript with the story called, *My Life* (Autobiography) by James Taipana in the *Stories* section. The transcript has been adapted to the style of a story.

Publishing Your Stories

Here are some possibilities:

- Ask the local newspaper if they would be interested in running a series of oral history stories written by your group.
- Approach magazines such as the inflight magazines, *Up Here* or *Above and Beyond*.
- Look for funding at the beginning of the project to get your final stories published.
- Create a web site and post your stories there. This is a great way to get Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun reading material onto the internet. You could also post audio portions of the actual interview. This is another place where the 'memorable phrases' that you found in the interview could be used.
- Ask the Department of Education, Teaching and Learning Centres if they are interested in publishing your work.
- Create your own photocopied books to give out to the community, to sell or to keep in the library or Community Learning Centre. You will need to make a cover, decide on photographs or illustrations and decide how to bind the books.

You can find more suggestions for writing oral histories in the *Project Ideas* section of this manual under *Writing Projects*.

Preservation and Accessibility

Preserving the Interviews and Making Them Accessible to the Public

When your group completes your interviews, you will feel a sense of satisfaction. You will be proud of your important work – preserving the valuable knowledge of Elders before it is too late. But you may not be aware of the long-term impact of your work. Your efforts will have influence well beyond your own time and place. The recordings you have created will be a valuable resource far into the future and to people from other communities, regions and even other countries.

Your recordings must be carefully preserved for the use of future generations. The best way to do this is to send the master copies or originals of your recordings to an archive or museum that can store them in ideal conditions.

Otherwise you need to consult with others in your community and agree on a safe place to keep your recordings. Get professional advice on storing the recordings. Always keep a second set of copies of the interviews in another location – in case of fire, water damage or other problems.

Here are some suggestions for storage of recordings:

- Make at least two copies of the recording for your group to work with and to keep in the community before you send the master copies to an archive.
- Store recordings vertically, not stacked on their sides.
- Store recordings away from heat sources such as radiators and electrical equipment.
- Label all recordings with waterproof colourfast markers.
- Cassette tapes are not the best way to store interviews for the long term. Cassettes must be rewound regularly. If they are left unplayed, the sound on one layer of the tape is imprinted on the next layer. This causes an 'echo' on the tape. The tapes must be played at 'play' speed once a year to prevent this problem.

How Will People in Your Community Have Access to Your Interviews?

- When you are finished working with the interviews, store the recordings with your written summaries of the interviews. You might package them in zip-lock bags or special library storage bags.
- See if your local library would agree to keep and catalogue the interviews. They could lend them out to people in the community in the same way that they lend books and other resources.
- If the library in your community is not able to keep the interviews, you may be able to find another group such as an Elders' group or the Community Learning Centre to look after the recordings. If no group is able to safely store your recordings right now, it may be best just to keep them in a safe place until a community group is ready to act as an oral history lending library.

Source for Plastic Library Bags

Bro-dart
109 Roy Blvd., Braneida Industrial Park
Brantford, Ontario N3R 7K1
Telephone: 519-759-4350

The Process Flow Chart

For the Oral History Project with Interviewing