

Interviewing: A Virtual Lesson Outline

Introduction

Asking thoughtful questions and listening closely to the answers is key to interviewing. Start with [Local Learning Interview Basics](#), review some of the great [Interview Guides](#) we recommend, and be sure to use [Release Forms](#).

Ready to Interview?

Here are a few worksheets to choose from to start from home or in your classroom.

[Ethnography Rules](#). *Just like in school students are asked to follow rules, there are some guidelines that all students should think about before doing an interview.*

[That's a Good Question](#). *Use this worksheet to start generating questions that you will use in your interview.*

[Occupational Folklife Survey](#). *Interviews can help us understand many different aspects of our cultural lives. Here is a worksheet that can help us think about how occupations relate to the community's unique sense of place.*

Interview Basics

Interviewing people is one of the tools that folklorists use to study culture. In addition to having curiosity, a good interviewer needs to be a good listener.

Asking questions that produce interesting answers isn't always easy. Lots of questions may be answered with just a simple "yes" or "no" and don't tend to lead to detailed responses. Try to develop open-ended questions that encourage someone to talk. Here are some more tips to consider.

1. Before you ask a question of someone else, ask yourself what information you're really looking for and how you'll use the information.

- Are you looking for ways someone's life is similar to or different from your own?
- Do you want to find out how someone performs or creates something?
- Do you have a topic such as someone's childhood, hobbies, or occupation?

2. Good interviewers do some investigating in preparation for their interviews.

- Take time to study information about the interviewee and brainstorm a list of questions you'd like to ask.
- Review your questions and practice them by interviewing a friend. If you don't get the kind of answer you'd expect, revise the questions so that interviewee can better understand.

3. Perhaps the most important interviewing skill is to be polite as you ask questions and listen to answers.

- Be sure to thank the person. Send a thank-you note and, if possible, a copy of your project or presentation.
- Make sure to use a release form and that you have permission to use the interview.

Learning with Local Learning Virtual Residencies

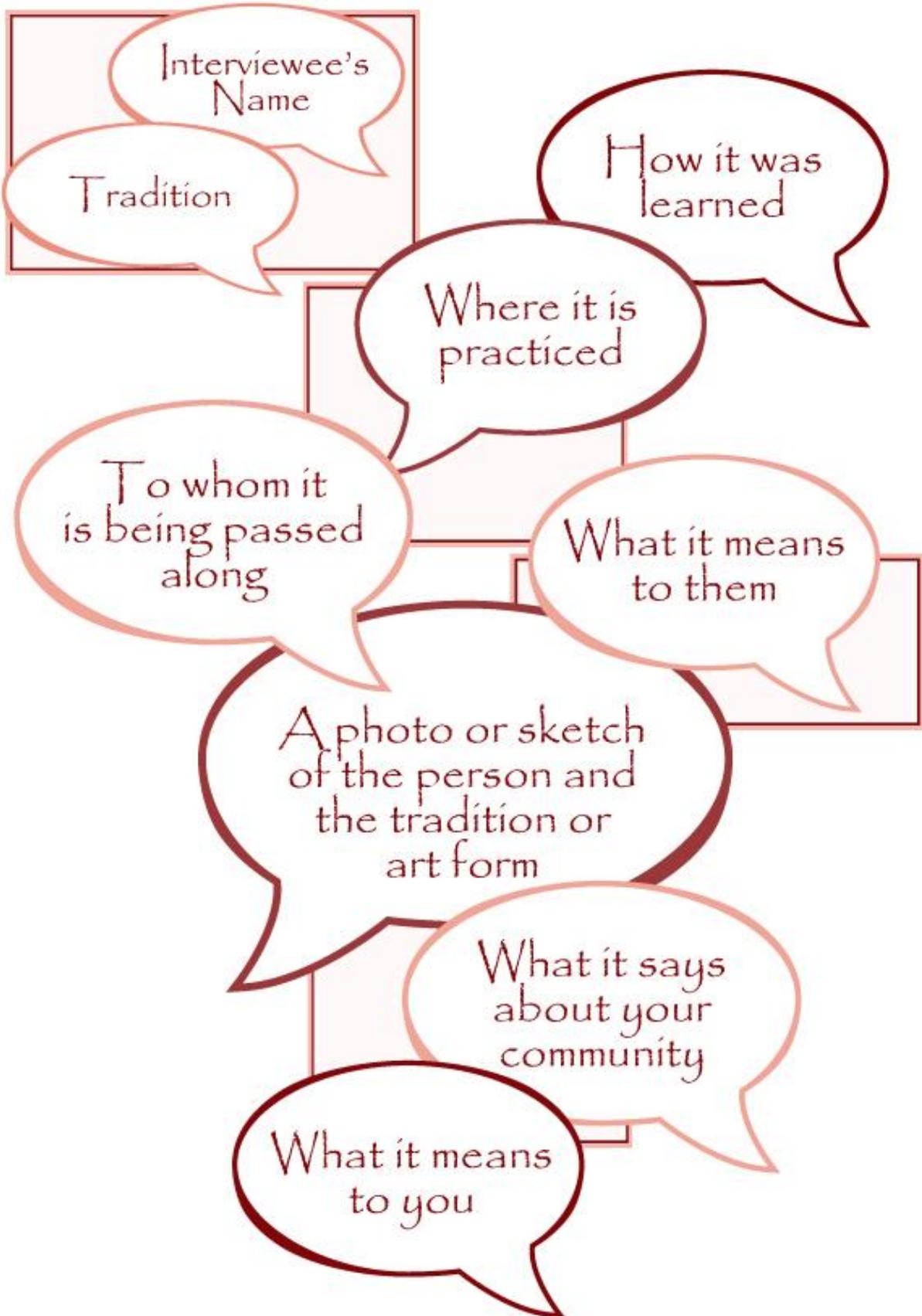
Our [Learning with Guest Artists Virtual Residencies](#) provide a jumping-off point to think about what traditions are important in your community and how to document the people who practice them to create a Local Learning Profile.

Finding local tradition bearers starts with interviewing people closest to you. You might document a friend's skate boarding trick, a parent's recipe, or the school secretary's needlework. You might also identify traditional musicians, dancers, or craftspeople from good cooks to boat builders. (Use the [Local Learning Regional Resources](#) to find information and organizations to help you learn more about regional traditions.)

Once you've completed your interview, gather all your notes, photos, sketches, and recordings and plan how to organize them. You can then create web pages, podcasts, picture books, posters, slide shows, scrapbooks, skits, or poetry to tell the story of the people you interview.

Below are basic elements to help you create your profile no matter what format you use. Making a storyboard will help you organize your research.

Be sure to share your profile. Your audience can include your classmates, grade level, or the whole school as well as libraries, newspapers, radio or TV stations, museums, historical societies, friends, and family members.



Great Interview Guides



[Download the full PDF of the Journal of Folklore and Education on the “Art of the Interview” HERE.](#)

Chief among the tools of folklorists and other ethnographers, interviewing allows us to glimpse the ways that others live, create, and believe. Careful, intentional listening rewards both the interviewer and the narrator. The connections forged, whether fleeting or long-lived, are unique to each interview. Artfulness weaves throughout the interview process, from questioning and following up to analyzing, editing, preserving, and re-presenting.

Our colleagues at City Lore share their very useful Guide in a PDF that can be easily printed.

[City Lore Interviewing Guide](#)

Updated with additional classroom connections, this comprehensive guide aids educators, especially in K-12, to employ interviewing from start to finish. ([Download PDF](#))

Interviewing as a Tool for Folklore, Oral History, and Community-Based Research

Why Use Interviews and Oral History

Preparing to Interview

Conducting the Interview

Interviewing Etiquette

After the Interview

([Download PDF](#))

Classroom Connection: Learning to Interview through Practice

Classroom Connection: Creating Art from Interviews, by Teaching Artist Karl Orozco

Classroom Connection: Sample Lesson Plan—Collaborative and Multisensory Interviewing

Classroom Connection: Sample Lesson Plan—Collaborative Storyboarding

([Download Classroom Connections for Interviews PDF](#))

The web sites below provide high-quality guides to support interview and documentation projects. In addition, find more links, articles, and support in [Local Learning Regional Resources](#). You can also always [contact Local Learning staff](#) with your questions and ideas.

[American Folklife Center](#) offers English and Spanish versions of *Folklife and Fieldwork*, which is better suited for secondary students.

[Iowa Arts Council Folklife](#) Program has produced two award-winning guides.

- Iowa Folklife: Our People, Communities, and Traditions
- Iowa Folklife Vol. II

[Louisiana Voices](#) is an extensive guide in public domain very useful for students and teachers and studying all types of folk arts. Unit II on Fieldwork provides detailed instructions for planning and carrying out documentation projects. There are many student worksheets and rubrics for many topics.

[Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage](#) provides online lesson plans, curriculum guides, and online exhibits as well as two interviewing guides.

- [Discovering Our Delta](#) Although developed for the Mississippi Delta, these student and teacher guides are useful and practical for any region.
- [Smithsonian Folklife and Oral History Interviewing Guide](#) features a general guide to conducting an interview, as well as a sample list of questions that may be adapted to your own needs and circumstances.

[Wisconsin Teachers of Local Culture](#) online resources include guides that are super easy to use for any grade level, especially elementary.

- [Teacher's Guide to Local Culture](#)
- [Kids' Guide to Local Culture](#)

Sample Release Forms

Asking permission to use a person's stories and images is not just good manners, it is ethically essential. We recommend that you learn if there is any specialized language you are required to use at your school, museum, or organization. All of the templates below require users to customize with their own information.

Simple Form

A release form that we often use because of its simplicity can be found [here](#). It is ideal for younger students.

Advanced Research Projects

A form that grants more protections to the institution and student, as well as more clearly outlines the use of participant data can be found [here](#). We have used this with our graduate students who conduct interviews and cultural documentation.

Other Templates

We draw upon a number of partner organizations to identify a release form that works for our projects. Here are a few that we would like to particularly highlight.

- Find sample release forms in the **American Folklife Center's** 4th edition of *Folklife and Fieldwork*: <https://www.loc.gov/folklife/fieldwork/index.html>
- **Louisiana Voices** offers comprehensive Interview materials, including sample release forms at http://www.louisianavoices.org/Unit2/edu_unit2_interview_folder.html
- **Drs. John S. & Betty J. Schuchman Deaf Documentary Center at Galludet University** offers video versions of both informed consent and collection release forms: <https://www.galludet.edu/drs-john-s-and-betty-j-schuchman-deaf-documentary-center/informed-consent-and-video-release>

Ethnography Rules

Name _____ Date _____

Before the Interview...

After the Interview...

Rule	What I think this means when I am doing ethnography.	A specific example of what I did to follow this rule.
Be Safe.		
Be Responsible.		
Be Respectful.		
Be Observant.		
Listen Deeply.		
Be Curious.		
Have Fun.		

That's a Good Question Worksheet

Write down a cultural topic or art form that interests you. _____

What do you know about this topic right now? _____

If you were to ask questions of someone about that topic, what would you want to find out? Write down at least three things below:

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

Now write questions beginning with these words that ask for the information you want to know.

When _____

Who _____

What _____

Where _____

Why _____

Which _____

How _____

Good! You made a great start. Now write as many more questions as you can. Remember to begin your questions with "who," "what," "where," "when," "why," "how," and "which." Now you are ready to try interviewing.

Name of Interviewer: _____ Date: _____

Name of Interviewee: _____ Age: _____

Written Release Acquired? _____ Oral Release? _____

Occupational Folklife Survey

As you observe a work situation, use this sheet to jot notes on any of these topics that arise. When you conduct an interview, ask what these topics mean to the interviewee. What's the story behind the scene? Does this occupation relate to the community's unique sense of place? How does it relate to the community's history?

Date _____ Name _____

Occupation or work observed _____

Place (address, county) _____

Circumstances (time, season, location, weather, setting)

Names and contact information for any interviewees (may substitute Release Forms to record this information)

Yes, we have signed Release Forms from interviewees _____.

Look for and ask about the following:

Relationship of the building to the environment

Overall workspace arrangement and decoration

Individual workspace arrangement and decoration

Terms or special language

Equipment, gear, clothing

Gestures, body language

Special techniques, skills, practices

Formal training required

Tricks of the trade and training learned traditionally by observation and imitation and from colleagues on the job

Lines of authority

Roles of men, women, children, age groups

Spatial relations, movement patterns (sketch on back and refine later)

Sounds

Customs

Celebrations

Jokes, humor, pranks

Stories (for example, what were some funny, hard, good, or dangerous experiences)

Beliefs, good luck charms, omens

Initiation of newcomers

Aspects interviewee considers unique

Aspects that might be unique to your community or state

Other