

STORYTELLING

How to Interview for Narrative

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STORYTELLING PERSPECTIVE

Storytelling is as old as human history and for this project you are being asked to help people to tell their stories. This slide deck will guide you through the best way to do that.

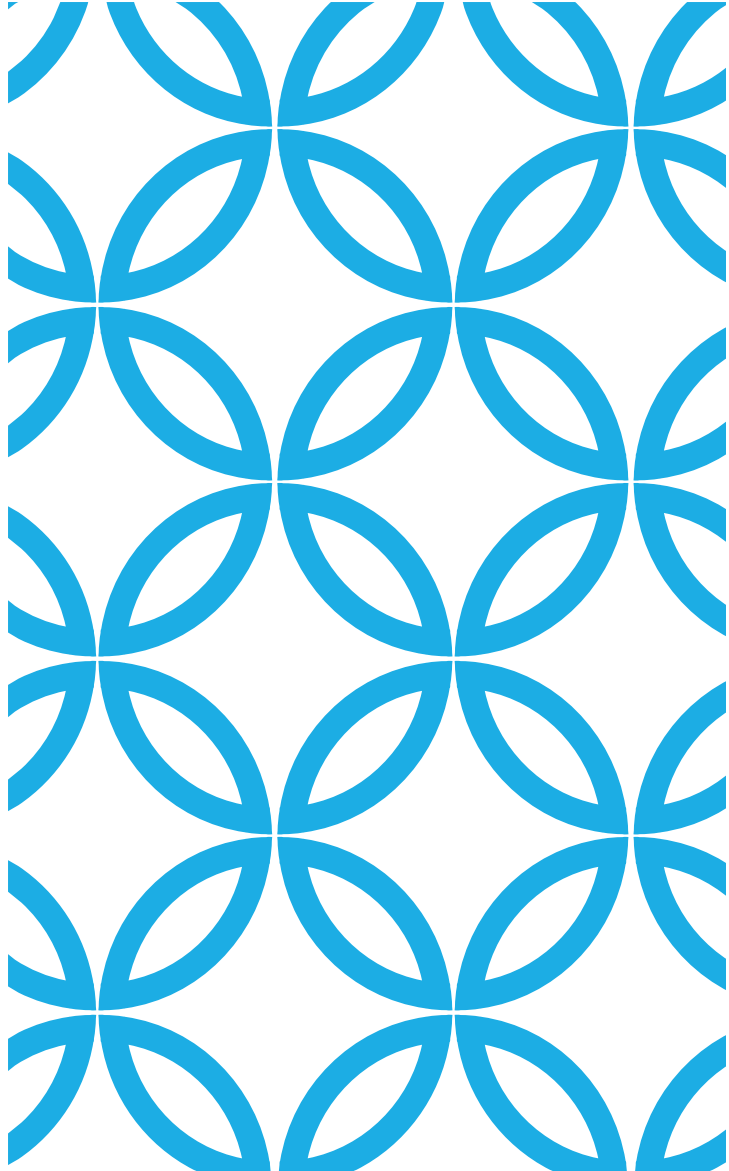
Storytelling is different from interviewing because it is a conversation. Unlike an interview, storytelling is a technique with a goal of allowing the subject to have maximum range to express themselves and communicate their narrative.



CONTEMPORARY STORYTELLING

Storytelling can take many forms. Different questions guide a storyteller on their journey. Below are the different types of questions to ask. For this opportunity we will focus on semi-structured and structured questions.

1. Unstructured Questions – These are questions designed to be an open conversation. Start with a topic and then discuss as if you are friends.
2. Semi-structured Questions – There is a series of pre-designed questions with lots of space for follow-up. This allows the storyteller to have a direction while leaving room for tangents.
3. Structured Questions – There will be certain story elements you will need to get. These questions are designed to be more directed and specific to learn time, place, manner, etc.



STORYTELLING TRADITIONS

This kind of storytelling is called an ethnographic form of study. An ethnographic study is designed to allow you, the facilitator, to immerse yourself in the story of the storyteller by becoming connected to them. It also reduces bias because it allows the storyteller to control the direction of the narrative.

The best way to approach an ethnographic interview is to pretend you are a good friend of the storyteller and you want to learn all about the details of their story. Good friends will listen without judgement.

STORYTELLING AND EFFECTIVE QUESTIONS

In order to learn the most from your interactions remember these simple Storytelling rules.

1. Make sure your questions are not set so they illicit a YES or NO response. Use questions like “In what ways ...?” or “How did you ...?”.
2. Summarize the storyteller’s statements at the end of a section of questions.
3. Avoid asking multiple questions at once. It can be confusing.
4. Avoid leading questions that tend to send the storyteller into a certain direction like “why don’t you like ...” and instead ask them to “describe your feelings about ...”.
5. Avoid “why” questions. They tend to sound judgmental and just assume the storyteller knows why.
6. Lastly, allow the storyteller to ask their own questions of you to establish trust.

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

While these sessions will be online over zoom or another online format it is important you create the right environment.

1. Your interview space should be calming and free of distractions, including people, pets, background noise, or cluttered backgrounds.
2. Test your camera and mic before logging on to make sure it does not get awkward.
3. Introduce yourself and take time to engage in friendly banter. Ask how their day is, be willing to introduce yourself in an informal way.
4. During the interview the number one thing you can do to avoid bias and make the subject comfortable is to express interest.

CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW

It is important to maintain a relaxed, professional demeanor always. This means, for in person meetings:

1. Record the interview and avoid taking too many notes. It allows you to pay attention.
2. Make notes on answers the subject seems to have an emotional response to.
3. Try to maintain proper eye contact and smile when appropriate.
4. It is okay to feel emotions but try to have that match the subject and not overshadow the subject.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Once the session is over, make sure you close the interview with a review of what the storyteller can expect next. This includes:

1. Thank them for their time and talent and ask if they have any last comments.
2. Let them know the recording will be uploaded to StoryCorps and will be on a community page for Volunteers for Community Impact.
3. Make sure you stop the recording and save the file.
4. Follow-up with a thank you note via email.



THANKS!

