



Interviewing

Easy steps to an oral history

A Mini Course

This course will walk you through the basics of conducting a great interview. Let's begin!

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It's Nice to Meet You!

We are Rachel and Rhonda, authors at Evalogue.Life, and we are your guides for this course. Rachel brings 20 years of newspaper reporting experience, family history writing and interviewing. Rhonda has 20 years in corporate storytelling, book writing and family history too.

Telling people's stories is our passion, and we are committed to providing you free tools and tips so you can do it without paying us (although we're available for hire too!) We think interviewing is one of the most fun and rewarding parts of the process, but have realized it can be a little intimidating. This course breaks it into easy steps so you can be done in less than a week, with minimal effort. Trust us, it's not complicated when you know how.

Please ask questions and engage with us on our Facebook page @Evalogue.Life. We wish you all the best in this important work.

We've got you covered.



Rachel J. Trotter, Writer/Editor



Rhonda Lauritzen, Founder/Writer

A Leap of Faith

This course is organized in seven lessons that focuses on doing one straightforward task per day, but you can do most of it at once if you prefer. We walk you through the process of preparing for and conducting an interview. Your very first assignment will be to schedule the interview. We know you might not feel confident yet, but we believe in the power of committing, and we believe in you. Once it is on the calendar, you will be more likely to follow through, and we have confidence that you will be ready. Our purpose in life is to help you actually COMPLETE this work. With that in mind, trust us and take the leap of faith. We will help you get ready.

7-Day Course Overview:

- Day 1: Scheduling the interview
- Day 2: Choose a recording method
- Day 3: Choose interview questions
- Day 4: Prepare for the interview
- Day 5: Conduct the interview
- Day 6: Save audio files
- Day 7: Consider next steps

“We believe in the
power of
committing,
and we believe
in you.”



10 Reasons You Rock Right Now (A Little Pep Talk)

p.4

1. Downloading this course indicates that you care about someone.
2. You took the first step. That's awesome.
3. Listening to someone's story is one of the truest gifts you can give them.
4. When someone shares their wisdom, it is one of the truest gifts they can give you.
5. Interviewing will strengthen your relationship.
6. You will be delighted with insights.
7. Stories bind people together, and you are making it happen.
8. You are preserving stories for future generations, remembering a life well-lived.
9. You will feel great after accomplishing this. "Done is better than perfect!"
10. You are learning a new skill!



We are here to help

Watch for the first lesson in your email today and reach out if you run into any snags.

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Interviewing Day 1: Scheduling It

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Day 1 will help you schedule an interview.

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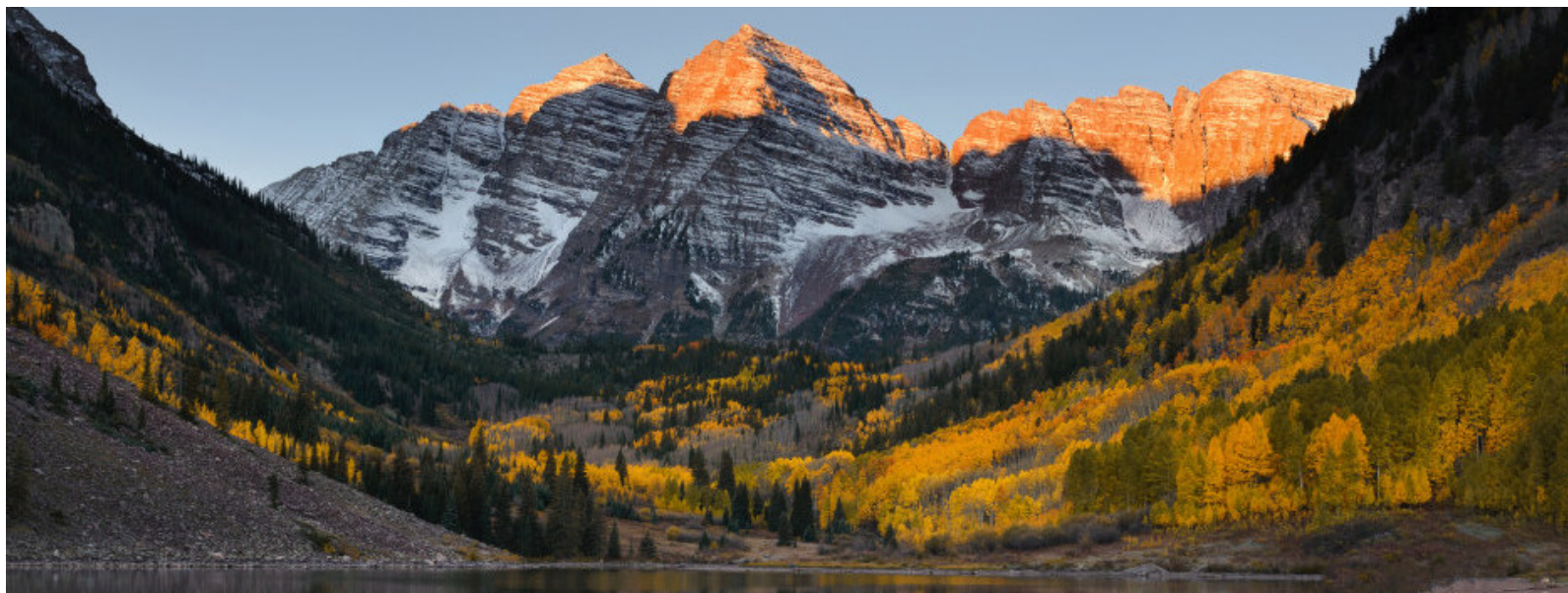
Day 1 Overview: Taking the Plunge

Today you will commit and in the fifth lesson you will actually conduct the interview. To make that happen, it has to be scheduled. Since Day 5 of this course is the interview itself, an ideal time to calendar it might be 6 days from now, giving you time to read the Day 5 lesson and do some background work.

Your assignment today is to think about someone you want to interview and reach out. We give some considerations in scheduling that you can address up-front with your subject too.

Yes, the first step is often the scariest, but we believe this will be a great experience for you and your subject.

Also, we do understand that schedules and logistics are always a factor in timing. The main objective today is getting in touch with the person you want to interview, even if it can't take place right away. Everything else will flow from there.



Reaching out and Arranging Details:

The first step to a good interview is arranging a comfortable location for your subject. This can be in their home, at a place outside their home where they feel relaxed, over the phone or even by email. The last two aren't ideal, but can work. Be flexible. The most important goal is to help your subject feel at ease and valued. When you call your subject, talk about the length of the interview. You don't want it to go too long or too short. A first interview of 60 to 90 minutes is ideal. But keep in mind, if things are flowing nicely going overtime is okay. Don't book another appointment right after that make you feel rushed. Checking the time can be off-putting.

“The most important goal is to help your subject feel valued and at ease.”

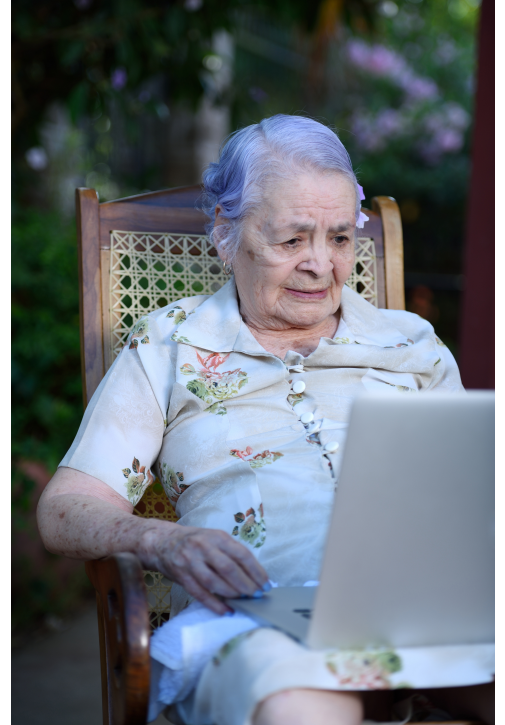
When you reach out, consider sharing your feelings about why you want to hear this person's story and what it would mean to you.

Let them know you will send some “food for thought” questions in advance. You may also want to cover how you intend to use the interview, and how you will respect their privacy.



Tips and Pointers:

- Let your subject pick the location, although ideally somewhere quiet, indoors, interruption-free, and with carpeting for softer sound.
- Set a length of time for the interview beforehand, but don't let it bind you.
- 60 to 90 minutes is ideal for a first interview.
- Some family history centers sponsored by the LDS Church have state-of-the-art recording studios for free use. Locations can be found here: <https://familysearch.org/locations/>
- StoryCorps has sound booths you can schedule in Atlanta, Chicago and San Francisco, and their mobile booth travels the country in an Airstream trailer. Cool! Here's a link: <https://storycorps.org/participate/mobile-tour/>



Day 1 Tips:

- Call or email your subject.
- Let your subject pick the best spot.
- Set the length of time beforehand.
- Put it on your calendar and get ready for Day 2 of this course.

Good job!

We hope you have enjoyed this first day. Day 2 will cover how to record audio.

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Interviewing Day 2: Choosing a Recording Method

A Mini Course

Day 2 will walk you through selecting a recording device or app for your interview.

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Day 2 Overview: The Power of Audio

The voice is very intimate. Hearing a familiar voice can transport you back in time and trigger powerful memories. A person's inflection and accent convey personality and will even invoke a particular time and place in history. Recording the interview not only preserves the conversation, but allows you to give your undivided attention, knowing you can listen to it again later. Another note is that recorders on the table tend to be unobtrusive, allowing them to warm up quickly.

We promise that if you record a loved one's voice now, someday you and others will cherish the audio.

Keep in mind that we are tackling this meaty topic on day 2 so you have time to make arrangements and test your recording method. Also, we want you to overcome what might seem like a hurdle up front. Won't it feel great when this step is done?

This lesson assumes an intermediate level of comfort with technology. It might be too basic for some or a little intimidating for others. At the end of today's worksheet is a link to more resources and ways to get help, both for beginners and more in-depth information for those wanting advanced features.



Audio Notes:

Audio files can be large and you need to plan for saving and sharing them. Note that Day 6 of this course will walk you through what to do with files after the interview, so it might be helpful to skim that today as well.

We highly recommend using a backup recorder, so you might need to learn two different devices. We have relied upon a backup when things have gone wrong, so trust us.

Using smartphone/tablet apps:

Most smartphones and tablets come with decent built-in microphones. The iPhone and the iPad are particularly good. With this, it may be unnecessary to buy anything. Just decide which app to use. There are free apps, and options for under \$5. For example, the Easy Voice Recorder for Android or Voice RecordPro on the iPhone/iPad are easy-to-use and free. Here is link to our review of free apps: <http://evalogue.life/free-recorder-apps> and our review of paid apps: <http://evalogue.life/paid-recorder-apps>

“If you record a loved one’s voice now, someday you will cherish the audio.”

Look for unlimited recording time and ability to select file format (WAV format gives best quality, but MP3 files are smaller). Test it by recording and saving a file in advance. Ideally let it record for an hour to see what happens when your phone goes to sleep, or how to save a big file. Five seconds of you saying “testing 1-2-3” is one thing, but dealing with a longer audio clip might require different settings. These are lessons we have learned the hard way.



Digital Recorders:

We are fans of digital recorders and our website reviews models we routinely use, costing under \$50. These units are smaller than a candy bar and have a USB connection to transfer files onto a computer. Some budget models do not have a USB connection, so be aware. They run on AAA batteries and have ample built-in memory. You can add a micro SD card if you wish. If you'd like more detail about audio recorders, file formats and settings, read:

<http://evalogue.life/record-voice>.



Ways to Get Help:

- Ask someone to help or bring a backup recorder.
- We do professional interviews if you'd like help.
- Many Family History Centers by the LDS church have free recording rooms.
- StoryCorps has recording studios, their mobile booth travels around, and they have a free mobile app.

Day 2 Tips:

- Remove other files from your recording device to ensure ample memory, ensure fresh battery life.
- If using a lapel microphone, make sure it is plugged into the correct jack! (Any guesses how we learned this?) Do the interview indoors because wind makes for bad sound. If you must record outdoors (such as at a family reunion or picnic), consider using for a lapel (lavalier) microphone with a fuzzy windscreen.

You have completed a critical step!

If you have a question, post it on our Facebook page @Evalogue.Life. Maybe others would want to know too!

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Interviewing Day 3: Selecting Questions to Ask

A Mini Course

Great interviews start with great questions. Day 3 will give you some ideas for what to ask. We think today's lesson is pretty fun, so enjoy!

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Day 3 Overview: Questions are the Meat and Potatoes

Sometimes we let questions be a stumbling block, but don't overthink it! It is wise to have a list of questions prepared before your interview and to share some questions with your subject in advance so they can be thinking - especially if you are seeking special stories you would like to hear.

If you are writing up a story, you probably already know some questions you need answered. If you are writing a life sketch, you will want to ask about specific details and to let chronological order guide you. If you are covering a specific event, then your questions only need to be steered toward that. On the day of, the key is to not get too caught up in your questions, but to let the interview flow naturally. Things may get off-track, but that may be when you get the best information. You can bring it back at the end, making sure you get any vital information. Ask follow-ups like, "What happened after that?" "What led up to this event?" Letting the course of a person's life flow naturally can guide you.

Tips and Pointers:

- Be prepared with conversation starter questions ahead of time.
- Don't let your prepared questions bind the interview.
- If you forget questions at the interview, it's okay to call or email later.



Categories of Questions:

You might focus parts of the interview on a theme, or do several interviews on:

- Childhood, school and hometown
- Relationships and marriage
- Family life as an adult
- Work and profession
- Spirituality, religion and values
- Military or other service. By the way, You might want to check out the Library of Congress Veteran History Project:
 - <http://evalogue.life/veteran-history-project>
- Ask follow up-questions: Who, what, when, where and why.

Sample Questions are here: <http://evalogue.life/questions>

Memory Evoking Question Book:

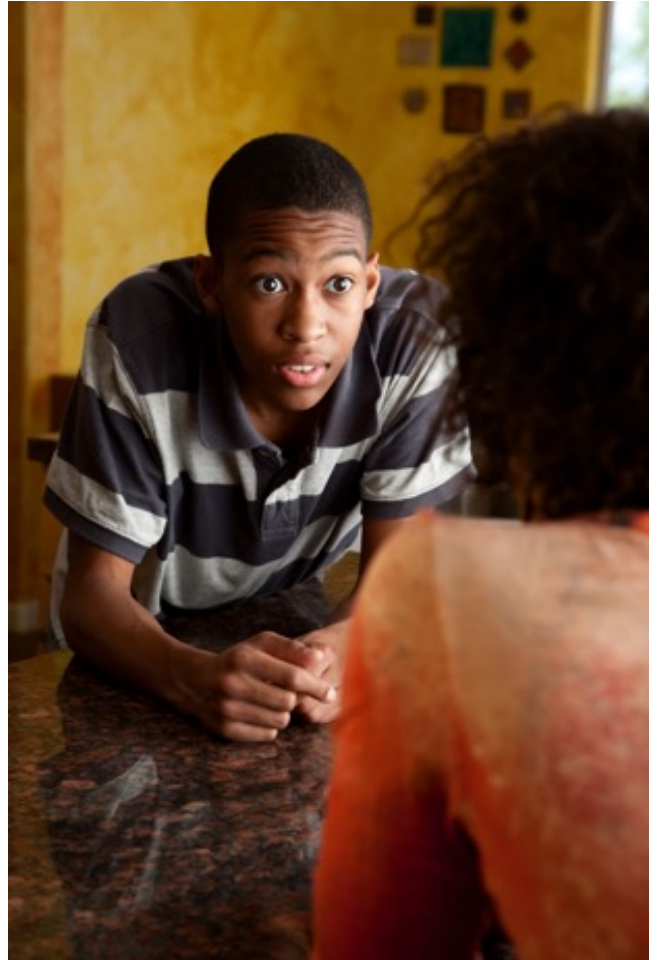
We put together a free printable of memory-evoking questions to tell your life story, or interview someone else. Get it by downloading here:

<http://evalogue.life/question-book>



Day 3 Tips:

- Write down about 10 questions now.
- Email or call your subject with some questions so they can be thinking.
- Let your subject know the questions are simply food for thought, and the interview will be fluid. Perhaps invite this person to think of topics important to him or her too.
- Decide what type of story you are writing, or if you would like to focus on an overall theme for the interview and base your questions on that.



Final Thoughts:

Consider focusing parts of the interview on various aspects of a person's life or use chronological order to guide you. If you plan a series of interviews with the same person, it works well to have each interview cover the themes outlined earlier in this article.

Remember, our website has interview question ideas organized by category at: <http://evalogue.life/questions>

Remember, you only need a few good questions!

Have some fun with this, and keep in mind that it is rare for an interview to follow the questions exactly. Tomorrow's lesson will help you put supplies together so you are prepared on the big day.

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Interviewing Day 4: Preparing for the Interview

A Mini Course

Day 4 will help you make final preparations so you can relax and enjoy yourself during the actual interview.

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Day 4 Overview: Luck Favors the Prepared

There is a balance when it comes to getting ready for an interview. It is important to prepare both physically and mentally, but don't do too much footwork because you may not ask the best questions if you think you already know the answers. You may know your subject fairly well, but don't assume you know everything.

Do spend some time in advance, though. It is okay to ask obvious questions like, "Where were you born?" because where it leads may surprise you. If you know that your subject fought in a war find out a few facts about it so you can ask relevant questions. If your subject loves to crochet, look up some details about this hobby so you can be conversational.

Pack your supplies today, know where you will be going, and plan to arrive early. We hate to admit that we have forgotten supplies or missed an important question because we were pressed for time in getting ready. Such is the life of a reporter, but

In short, today's lesson is a straightforward guide to help you set everything in order, remember what you need, and relax in in your interview.



Prepare Mentally, Over-Prepare Physically

You really can't be too prepared physically. Make sure you have plenty of paper for notetaking or that your computer or tablet is fully charged, if that's what you're using. Pack the power cord too.

Have two or three pens (we can't tell you how many times pens have gone out on us.) Also, when it comes to recording devices, take a back-up and make sure the batteries are fresh. Test your recording devices a few times now so the steps come naturally on the actual day. Fumbling with your recorder can start you out on a stressful note, so practicing now will reduce distractions on the day of the interview.

“The more you prepare now, the less nervous will you will be and the better the interview will turn out.”

Be hydrated because it affects mental clarity (we like to take water bottles to share) and allow time so you and your interviewee can use the restroom. It may seem obvious, but if you are feeling a bit nervous, you may forget.

The more you prepare now, the more confident you will feel and the better the interview will turn out.



Day 4 Tips:

- Do a bit of research on your subject, but not too much.
- If you are writing a story, think about what type of story it will be. This will help with your questions. It's okay for the interview to be fluid, but a rough idea is good.
- Pack all your supplies the night before: charge computers and recorders, install fresh batteries, get paper and pens, print or write down your questions, and arrange for a back-up recording device.
- Pack tissues. Interviews often get emotional.
- Envision an amazing interview!
- Right before the interview, eat a snack, stay hydrated and use the restroom.
- Arrive early and collect yourself for a minute before going into the interview. Do an audio test with your recorder. Silence your phone and ask your subject to do the same.
- All this talk of preparation aside, take easy opportunities when they arise! Pull out your phone and hit record when a loved-one begins telling stories.



You are ready!

Tomorrow is the big day, so get some sleep and look forward to how rewarding the interview will be.

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Interviewing Day 5: Conducting the Interview

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Day 5 is the most rewarding part of this course: actually conducting the interview!

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Day 5 Overview: Today is the big day!

Relax, this is meant to be enjoyable for both you and your subject. Your most important job is to be an earnest listener. The rest doesn't matter nearly so much. The time will likely go quickly, so get as much as you can and have a good time.

Before you begin, make sure you have everything lined up like your recording devices, note taking supplies, etc. That will get rid of some nervous energy too.

Before you dig in, ask your subject to state and spell his/her full name, then state your name, the date, and where you are recording. You might begin with some ice breaker conversation like why you both are doing the interview. Small talk at first can help everyone forget the recorder is going.

You also want to reassure your subject what your goal is: to tell their story. Because of that, you won't make them sound silly or stupid, a very common concern for interview subjects. We often tell our subjects that we can't make them sound stupid, because they aren't! It is a true statement and it builds trust.

If at any point your subject becomes tense or wants you to stop, shut the recorder off and put down your pen. It is their right to keep any part of their life "off the record." You can follow up later, but don't pressure.



Build Trust and Embrace Silence

The key is to build trust with your subject because that trust yields great stories! If there is silence, that's okay. Let it be. Don't feel like you need to fill the silence with commentary. Having said that, if your subject gets off track, it's fine. You can get great "off-track" information that often yields promising vignettes for your story. Just make sure you're not the one going off topic. It's also okay to bring a meandering story back around.

Another tip is when it's time to wrap things up, don't turn off the recorder until you leave. Some of the best stuff may come when your hand is on the door. We have noticed this common phenomenon.

Tips and Pointers:

- Be an active listener – make eye contact, smile and put all distractions away.
- Ask follow up questions – don't be afraid to ask, "How did that make you feel?" after a great statement or thought.
- Embrace silence. Let your subject think about responses. Don't jump in with your own stories or commentary! We like saying "mmm" to validate the speaker without interrupting.

"If your subject gets off track, it's fine. You can get great 'off-track' information that yields promising vignettes for your story."



Day 5 Tips:

- Double check your tools – your recording device and your note taking items before you start. It will calm your nerves to set everything up well.
- Arrive early, use the restroom, and offer your subject a beverage.
- Ask some break-the-ice questions and chat about why you are doing the interview. Make a little small talk.
- When you begin, reassure your subject that you will take good care of them and will tell a great story. They can read anything you write before sharing it if they want.
- Stay relaxed and put your subject at ease. Assure them you won't make them sound dumb and they can trust you with the information.
- Thank your subject for being generous with their time and stories.
- Afterward, allow yourself some quiet time to process what you learned about this person, and any insights they shared.



You did it! We hope your interview was amazing

Tomorrow we will help you save your files. For now, just give yourself a pat on the back!

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Interviewing Day 6: Saving the Files

A Mini Course

Day 6 will help you with the technical aspects of saving and sharing your files.

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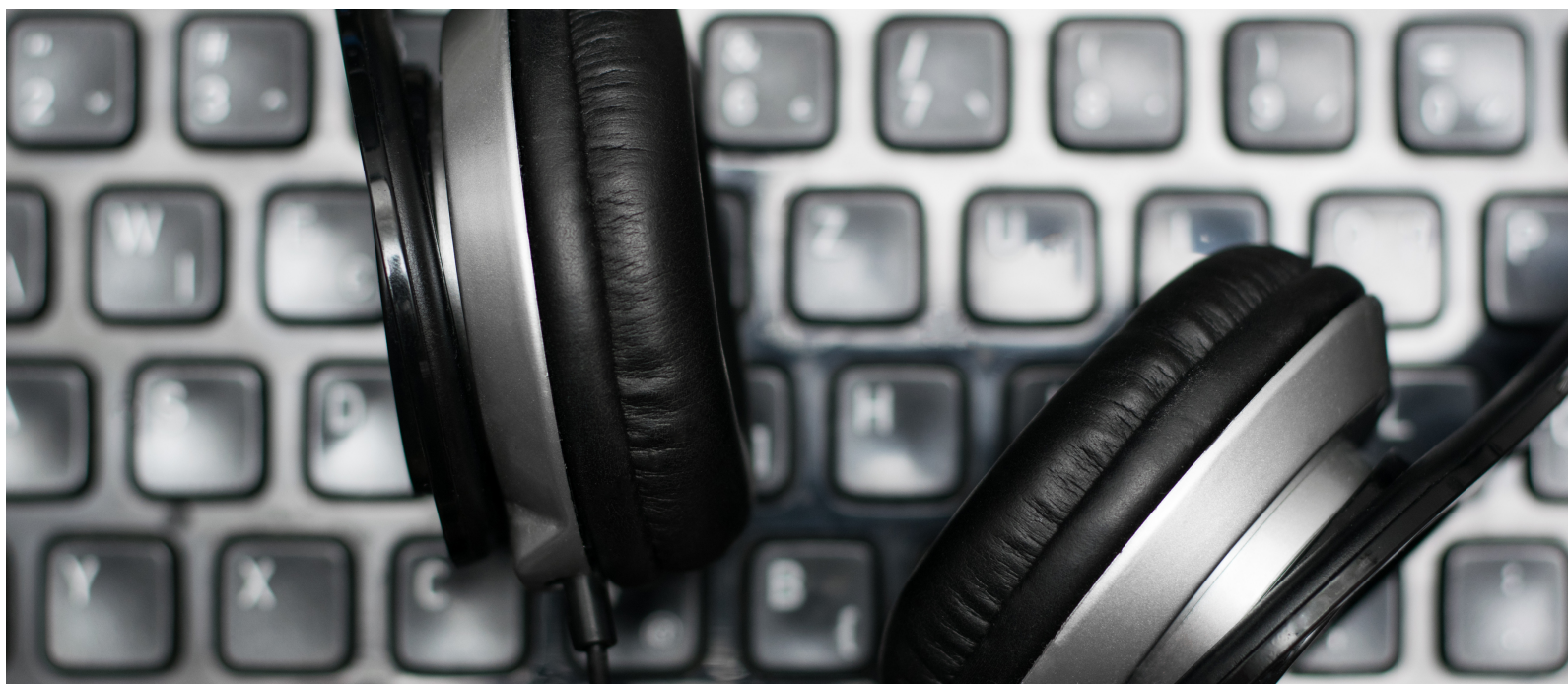
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Day 6 Overview: Great Job with your Interview!

Take a moment to congratulate yourself. You did it! Even with just one interview, you have preserved more than most humans ever have. Even with all the technology available today, most folks still never get around to it. Just think about your accomplishment for a moment. What would you give to hear someone's voice one more time, or to listen to an ancestor speak?

You still have some work to do, though. Your interview is not safe until it is properly saved. Get right on it because files buried on a recorder or phone are in peril until they are backed up.

We will cover two steps today: pulling the files off your device and sharing them. This technology might be super-basic for some, yet a bit complex for others. If this feels daunting, consider asking for. Note that these instructions are high-level because there are so many variables with devices and services. It's always a nice touch to send a thank-you note afterward too.



Safe and Sound!

From a phone or tablet, you have 2 main options to save files:

Option 1: Upload to a service like DropBox, Google or iCloud:

This requires that you link up the app on your phone or tablet with whatever file saving service you use (e.g., DropBox). If your phone/tablet automatically backs up photos/files to the cloud, this means you already have a service set up. You should be able to use that (as long as you know where files are saved and how to log in to retrieve them). You also need to connect to the internet. Ideally, be on WiFi because these files can take a while to save and will use data. To save, open the recorder app, go to the save function and select the service you use. While it might be easier to email it, the file size is probably too big.

“What would you give to hear someone’s voice one more time, or to listen to an ancestor speak?”

Option 2: Pull the file off the phone/tablet/digital recorder using a USB cord:

Connect the recording device to a computer using a USB cord or Apple Lightning Cord. Then select the file and save it to a computer.



Sharing with Others:

Be sure to save a backup somewhere! Here are some options for doing that:

- **Thumb drives:** This is one of the easiest, most inexpensive ways to share.
- **Burning a CD:** If you burn a CD, know that there are two file types: audio and data. To listen with an older CD player, it needs to be saved in an audio format. If you just want to share or save a backup of the file, burn the CD in a data format.
- **Share/Save using DropBox, Google, iCloud or similar service:** Most cloud file services like DropBox allow you to share a link to the file by email, even if the person does not have an account with that service. The person will receive an email and can click on the link, then open or download the file with their own device or computer.
- **Upload to FamilySearch or another genealogy site:** Audio files smaller than 15 MB may be uploaded. If bigger, they must be converted to a smaller format (like MP3 or MPEG-4) or edited into shorter audio chunks. Editing audio files is a bit more involved than this article permits. For help, consider visiting a family history center or reaching out to us for guidance:
<http://evalogue.life/contact-us/>

Day 6 Tips:

- Save file from phone or recorder onto a computer or file service.
- Make a backup of the file for yourself onto a thumb drive, CD, or file service.
- Share the file with your subject or others. Consider uploading it to Family Search or another genealogy site.

You are doing great work!

If you completed today's worksheet, you deserve congratulations. If you are still working, we offer encouragement. This is important, so keep after it until those files are safe. Did we mention, you are awesome??!!!

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Interviewing Day 7: Considering Next Steps

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Day 7 will give ideas for what to do with this interview, or ways to follow up with your subject.

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Day 7 Overview: What Now?

First, take a moment to be proud of what you have accomplished. If all you do is save the file for future listening, that is wonderful and priceless! That said, while audio is incredibly intimate and powerful, the printed word is the safest way to preserve a life story. Think of how books have survived for centuries, while file formats become archaic in a decade. (Floppy disk, anyone?) Many of us have spent money converting digital files or have lost some forever to crashed computers or defunct services. Years later, a hard copy might prevail.

Writing an engaging story can be a very rewarding process that paints a person's life in even richer hues. Life stories can be as involved as a full memoir, as simple as a single vignette, or a series. We advise getting to these tasks while you are still feeling it, otherwise it can feel like a chore. This lesson guides you through several options:

- Transcribing
- Writing a story
- Doing a series of interviews



Transcribe, Write, Repeat

Transcribing: Today there are many tools and services that make transcriptions easier, including speech-to-text, paid services that use machines or people to transcribe interviews—or a combination of both—and free apps that make it easier to type interviews yourself. Check out more detailed information with links to resources in our article at:

<http://evalogue.life/transcription>.

Writing an Engaging Story: Using material from an interview to write an engaging story will help future generations connect. Keep in mind a few pointers: First, people are most interested in your subject's personality, triumphs, heartbreaks, and lessons learned. Keep writer's block at bay by focusing on short vignettes. In other words, think in terms of moments without worrying about writing an epic saga. Remember that even short vignettes are best told with a beginning, middle and an end and something should *happen*. Descriptive details create vivid imagery, but they are not the main point. You can write a story that teaches without being preachy by sharing what your subject learned from it.

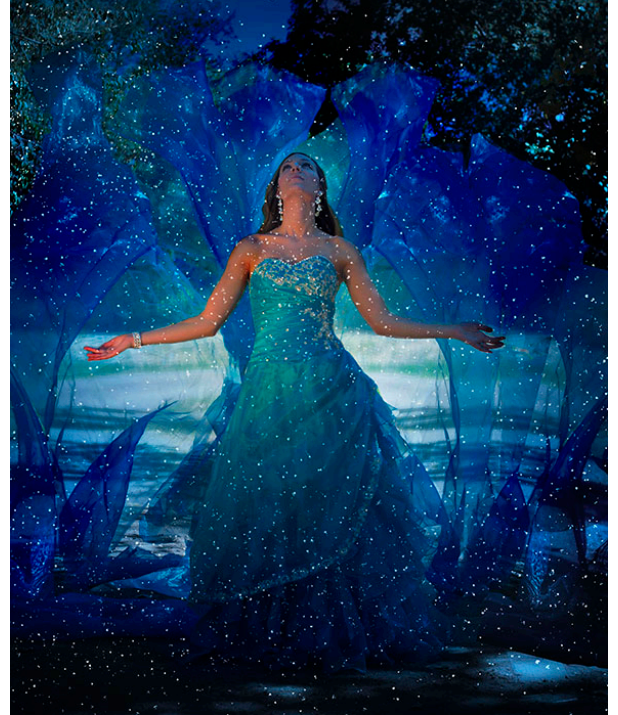
Repeat: After the fact many subjects will think, “I wish I had said...” Why not give him/her the chance to share more thoughts in a follow-up interview? Now that you know how, you can honor others by helping them tell their story.

“Writing Tip:
Every great
story is about
transformation.”



Seven Tips for Writing a Great Story:

1. Every great story is about transformation.
2. Start small: A story is told in moments.
3. Describe senses: smell, taste and music.
4. Emotion carries a tale.
5. Avoid being preachy by letting readers decide what the story means to them.
6. Tell the truth.
7. Stories follow patterns that follow life. Learn and use patterns to hook readers



Day 7 Tips:

- Transcribe or write the interview to more readily share and preserve it. Do it yourself, or have a service take care of this for you.
- Check out our website for articles, and resources. We are adding new topics all the time. In addition to providing free tips, this is also our life work. If you would like help with transcribing, writing, editing, making video, or one-on-one coaching to write a story, we would love to help.
- Think about who else you want to interview, and don't overlook doing your own story. Also consider interviewing children and young people. Someday you may want to hear the little voice again. You can now give this gift to others...and future generations.

Congratulations! You did it.

We would love feedback or ideas for future tutorials from you. Drop us an email. Ask questions on our Facebook page. Follow us on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram for more inspiration [@Evalogue.Life](#). We are adding new topics all the time, including on writing.

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