INTERVIEW VS. ORAL HISTORY?
A question of scope and focus. An interview is a guided question and answer session. An oral history allows the subject to tell their story on their own terms, with very little interruption or direction from the researcher.

PRESERVATION
Find a repository to preserve your research.

CHOOSE SUBJECTS CAREFULLY
Does this person have something of lasting value to contribute? Facts? Perspective?

PRE-INTERVIEW RESEARCH
Have notes or be prepared to take them.

GET CONSENT
Agree on a basic time-frame, and make sure to get some kind of consent (audio, written, etc.).

RELAX
If possible, try to have a couple conversations before the interview to break the ice.

LISTEN
Good oral history is the art of listening. Conducting an OH is not an opportunity to show the subject or listeners how much you know. Do not interrupt the subject, even if they are trailing off. Let them complete their statements and prompt them for more.

The best form of training is listening to your interviews and/or transcribing them.

INTRODUCTION
Begin with an introduction: Introduce your guest interviewee, yourself, state the date, and where you are recording: location, city and state. Ex: “Good morning. My name is Andrew Huse, I’m here with Mr. John Smith. It is April 15, 2018 and we are at the Smith home in Tampa, Florida.”

CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER
Chronology helps as a structure. Be sure to get plenty of information on basic dates during the interview, especially if subject jumps around in time.

BE CONCISE
Ask concise, discrete questions. Do not lead or qualify questions with your opinion or assumptions. Start with asking about facts, then ask about feelings.

QUESTIONS
Ask descriptive questions. You are prompting your subject to tell their story. Ask open questions that will lead to further narrative: “Tell me about this...” or “Describe your time with...”

CHANGING TOPICS?
If you are changing the topic, announce it to the subject and ask if

STAY ON TARGET
Be prepared to improvise to explore interesting diversions. Be prepared to politely redirect your subject back to the focus of the oral history. Don’t be afraid of taboo subjects, but respect the wishes of your subject.

Avoid taking information off the record. Record it if possible.