

20 Questions for Interviewing Relatives from Family Tree Magazine.

Added Note: With family reunions coming up this summer, be sure to have a few ready questions for the wise elders of your group! Or for a relative you see infrequently, here's some ideas of what you can talk about.

The best tactic for oral history interviews is to ask open-ended questions (rather than ones with yes or no answers), and to focus on people's memories and experiences. It's much more interesting-for you and the interviewee-to talk about the stories and emotions behind the events in your family's past. Use these questions as a springboard for planning your interview:

1. What's your first memory?
2. Who's the oldest relative you remember (and what do you remember about him or her)?
3. How did your parents meet?
4. Tell me about your childhood home.
5. How did your family celebrate holidays when you were a child?
6. How did you meet your spouse?
7. Tell me about your wedding day.
8. Tell me about the day your first child was born.
9. What were your favorite school subjects?
10. Tell me about your favorite teacher.
11. Tell me about some of your friends.
12. Describe your first job.
13. What did you do with your first paycheck?
14. What was your favorite job and why?
15. Who are some of your heroes?
16. Where were you when you heard that President Kennedy was shot? (Add or substitute other important historical events.)
17. What is your experience with or opinion of computers? (Add or substitute other modern conveniences, such as television, microwaves and cell phones.)
18. Tell me about some of your favorite songs (also books, movies and television shows).
19. Tell me about some of the places where you've been happiest.
20. What haven't we talked about that you'd like to discuss in the time we have left? (This is a good way to begin wrapping up the interview.)