



What to Expect at a Voices of Princeton Interview

Thank you for taking part in the Voices of Princeton Project!
This guide will explain the interview process and help you prepare.

A Voices of Princeton interview is 90 minutes (including preparation, interview, and wrap-up) for a conversation with a friend or family member. Please arrive on time to your scheduled interview.

A facilitator will be present in the interview. The facilitator will:

- Explain the interview process overall
- Walk through the consent paperwork
- Operate and monitor the recording equipment
- Prompt the interviewer if needed to keep the conversation flowing
- Photograph the participants after the interview

Remember! The facilitator is in the room to worry about the little things so you can focus on the conversation. The facilitator is not correcting or judging the conversation; they are a partner helping you to have the best conversation possible.

The Basic Steps of an Interview

STEP 1 WELCOME AND PREPARATION

20-30 minutes

Facilitator will provide background information on the project, explain the process of the interview and how to keep the interview flowing, and answer any questions. Facilitator will explain and review the interview, recording, and photo release and consent form (attached at end of packet) to be signed or declined at the end of the interview process. Facilitator will set up the recording equipment to begin the recording process.

STEP 2 INTERVIEW

60 minutes

Facilitator and interview pair will record a short introduction. Interview pair uses their prepared questions list to have a conversation, though deviation from prepared questions is no problem. Facilitators are not meant to be interviewers, but may offer non-verbal prompts using a cue card during the recording. Facilitator will ask to take photos of the pair.

STEP 3 POST-INTERVIEW

1-2 weeks

The Voices of Princeton team will generate a transcription using voice recognition technology (Otter.ai or Sonix.ai) and provide a copy to the interviewer and interviewee for their review, along with consent paperwork to be signed and returned by the interviewer and the interviewee.



Thanks to StoryCorps for the interview structure.

Preparing for Your Voices of Princeton Interview

The interview pair should come prepared with a handful of questions to start the conversation, but the conversation should flow freely through different topics depending on the interests of the interviewee and interviewer. In general, the project aims to collect stories about Princeton from Princetonians. When thinking about the content of the interview, keep in mind what might be interesting to the public and to researchers in the future when listening to the interviews.

Topics can include, but are not limited to:

- Early life and growing up
- Schooling
- Job and Career
- Hobbies
- Parents, Family, and Heritage
- Recollections of major historical events that happened during your lifetime

Some general questions to get the conversation started could include:

- When and where were you born?
- Where did you grow up? What was your childhood like?
- Where is your mom's family from? Where is your dad's family from?
- Have you ever been there? What was that experience like?
- Who has been the most important person in your life? Can you tell me about him or her?
- What was the happiest moment of your life? The saddest?
- Who has been the biggest influence on your life? What lessons did that person teach you?
- What is your favorite memory of living in Princeton? Least favorite?
- Describe your neighborhood. Where is/was it? What is/was the community like?
- What community institutions or businesses (restaurants, grocery stores, etc.) do you patronize? Why?
- What are you proudest of?
- Do you have any regrets?
- What are your hopes for your future? Princeton's future?

If you are interested in exploring more suggested topics and questions, please visit the [Great Questions - StoryCorps Guide](https://storycorps.org/participate/great-questions/). (<https://storycorps.org/participate/great-questions/>)



Tips for Having a Successful Oral History Interview

Short, simple questions are always best. Avoid complicated words or abstract concepts.

Ask “open-ended” questions that don’t have a yes or no answer. This will encourage interviewees to give longer, more specific answers.

Good example: “What did you do after high school?”

Bad example: “Did you go to college?”

Especially at the beginning, ask more general questions that help the interviewee.

Good example: “What do you remember about your family’s kitchen?”

Bad Example: “Was your family’s kitchen nice?”

Avoid “leading” questions that push an interviewee in a certain direction.

Good example: How did you feel when you started your first job?”

Bad Example: “You must have been excited to to start your first job, right?”

Ask follow-up questions to clarify unclear details, points of confusion, or terms/words you’re not familiar with, but wait until the interview has finished their thought.

Good example: “Before we move on, I want to go back for a second to what you said about playing basketball. Were you on the high school basketball team?”

Bad Example: “Wait-hold on. I’m sorry. You said you ‘playing basketball.’ Were you on the high school basketball team?”

Trust your instincts. When you hear something that moves you, ask more questions. Sometimes you can simply say “Tell me more.”

Good oral history interviews combine detail and self reflection.

Detail means something specific or poignant that roots a story in a time or place.

Example: *“I attended a one-room schoolhouse in kindergarten, and I remember in the cloakroom there would be a row of yellow raincoats all alike because our town only had one clothing store.”*

- This one detail paints a clear picture of life for young children in a Midwest farm town in the 1950s.

Self-reflection means that the interviewee describes their emotions or motivations during an event from the past.

Example: *“I came back to college from Thanksgiving break in 1969, and somebody had cut out the military draft notice from the newspaper. All the guys in my dorm stood there reading it. I had had such a great weekend back home, but this felt like a funeral. We knew that somebody in the group would probably go to Vietnam.”*

- This memory is powerful because the interviewee recalls the fear he and his friends felt at a very specific moment.



Six Key Questions

These questions are designed to encourage a discussion of Princeton-specific topics.

Please address the first or second questions, and then at least one of the bottom four during the interview.

How did you come to Princeton? Was it what you expected? What was different?

How long have you lived in Princeton? How has Princeton changed over that period of time?

Tell me about your formative experiences in Princeton.

How would you describe Princeton to someone who has never been here? What places or events would be important for you to mention?

What are your best memories of Princeton? What was your most difficult time in Princeton? Has Princeton ever frustrated or disappointed you?

What's the biggest event you remember happening in Princeton?

Please do not complete this form in advance and bring it to the interview. It is provided in advance only to inform potential interviewees about the consent process. A signed copy will be required only after a transcript has been produced. Please do not hesitate to ask questions about this form or informed consent at any stage of the interview process.

Interview, Recording, and Photo Release and Consent Form

Participant's full name _____

Mailing address _____

Phone number _____ Email _____

Gender _____ Age _____ Race/ethnicity (optional) _____

Interview Date _____ Interview Location _____

The Voices of Princeton project is a community-based oral history initiative that collects, shares, and archives the stories of people connected to Princeton, New Jersey. Voices of Princeton is co-sponsored by the Princeton Public Library, the Historical Society of Princeton, the Arts Council of Princeton, and the Witherspoon-Jackson Historical and Cultural Society.

Please initial the following:

_____ I voluntarily consent to be interviewed and recorded for the Voices of Princeton project.

_____ I do / do not (circle one) voluntarily give my permission for photographs to be taken following the Voices of Princeton interview to be used by researchers and the public including but not limited to publications, exhibitions, presentations, and for internet access.

_____ I have been made aware of my right to refuse to discuss certain subjects, to restrict access to the interview, to be publicly identified by a pseudonym, and to end the interview at any time. I understand that I will have the opportunity to review and edit my interview before it is made publicly available.

_____ I understand that my contact details, signed consent form, and original records will be retained in a secure digital archive. The contact information above will only be used to communicate about the interview, editing procedure, transcript, and potential questions, should the need arise.

_____ I agree to freely share this interview under the terms of a [Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial Share Alike 4.0 Unported License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/). This means that I, the interviewee, retain the copyright but that the public may freely copy, modify, and share these items for non-commercial purposes under the same terms, if they include the original source information. I will be provided a digital copy of my interview for my personal use.

_____ I understand that the resulting audio recording and transcript may be used for research, educational, exhibition, and programming purposes by Voices of Princeton, its sponsors, or the public.

_____ I agree that my name, voice and/or likeness may be used to promote future programs and publications of Voices of Princeton.

(TURN OVER)

_____ I consent to the resulting audio recording and transcript being archived at the Historical Society of Princeton, where they will be publicly accessible in perpetuity.

_____ I consent to the publication and distribution of this interview and, if applicable, related photographs, in all its formats, via the Voices of Princeton website. I understand this makes the interview searchable and discoverable on the Internet in perpetuity.

_____ I hereby release Voices of Princeton, sponsors, trustees, officers, agents, assignees and designees, from any and all claims and demands arising out of any broadcast, exhibition, publication, or promotion of this material, including but not limited to any claims for copyright infringement, defamation, or invasion of privacy.

Interview Transcript and Recording: Access Restrictions

Please check one:

_____ I place no access restrictions on the transcript and recording of my interview.

_____ I wish to be publicly identified by a pseudonym. I understand that my voice cannot be disguised and that Voices of Princeton cannot guarantee absolute anonymity.

_____ I wish to restrict access of ONLY the recording of my interview to on-site users at the Historical Society of Princeton until _____. An approved transcript can be made available online before this date. After this date, both the recording and the transcript will be made available online.

_____ I wish to restrict access of ONLY the recording of my interview to on-site users at the Historical Society of Princeton in perpetuity. An approved transcript can be made available online.

_____ I wish to restrict access of BOTH the transcript and the recording of my interview to on-site users at the Historical Society of Princeton until _____. After this date, my interview will be made available online.

_____ I wish to restrict access of BOTH the transcript and the recording of my interview to on-site users at HSP in perpetuity. Neither the transcript nor the recording will be made available online.

_____ I wish to temporarily close my interview (both the transcript and the recording) to all users until _____. It will not be available on-site or online before this date.

Voices of Princeton agrees to take all reasonable steps to honor my restrictions. I understand, however, that Voices of Princeton may not be able to uphold my restrictions against either a Open Public Records Act request or a subpoena.

I have read this document and am fully aware of its contents. I understand that this document is binding on me, my heirs, executors and assigns. I represent that I am at least 18 years of age.

AGREED AND ACCEPTED:

Participant signature and date

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact: voices@princetonlibrary.org

If the interviewee is under 18 years of age, the following is applicable:

I hereby grant permission for my child _____ (insert name of child) to be interviewed, recorded and photographed for the Voices of Princeton pursuant to the terms and conditions set forth in this document. I represent that I am least 18 years of age.

Signature of Parent or Guardian

Date: _____