

# Oral History Society Ethical Guidelines

From Oral History Society Website

<http://www.ohs.org.uk>

The Oral History Society believes that, while oral history work must comply with the law, legal requirements alone do not provide an adequate framework for good practice. No UK law was designed specifically to regulate oral history work; in fact no law even mentions it. For these reasons the following ethical guidelines have been drawn up to cover responsibilities and obligations beyond legal requirements. Custodians and places of deposit (such as archives and libraries) which the Society is prepared to recommend have agreed to abide by these guidelines.

## **1. Interviewers have the following responsibilities before an interview takes place:**

1.1 To consider the purpose of the interview and the possible range of future uses to which it might be put.

1.2 To carry out research and acquire sufficient technical knowledge to conduct an interview of the best possible standard.

1.3 To inform the interviewee of the purpose for which the interview is to be carried out, with background information where appropriate, and ensure he or she has understood this.

1.4 To determine the preferences of the interviewee as to the location and conduct of the interview (for example the presence of other persons; subject matter or personal references to be avoided).

## **2. The interviewer has the following responsibilities during the conduct of an interview:**

2.1 To ensure that the interviewee's preferences as to the location and conduct of the interview are abided by.

2.2 To treat interviewees with respect and courtesy.

2.3 To observe confidentiality until a clearance form or other access agreement has been finalised.

## **3. The interviewer has the following responsibilities after an interview has taken place:**

3.1 To inform the interviewee of the arrangements to be made for the custody and preservation of the interview and accompanying material, both immediately and in the future, and to indicate any use to which the interview is likely to be put (for example research, education use, transcription, publication, broadcasting). To record in writing (and later carry out or convey to others) any restrictions which the interviewee may require.

3.2 To inform the interviewee of his or her rights under copyright law.

3.3 To ensure that the interviewee is informed (preferably in writing) when arrangements are made under 3.1-3.2 above are carried out. If these responsibilities are transferred to others (for example an archive or other place of deposit), this should be with the knowledge or consent of the interviewee and should be recorded in writing.

3.4 To inform the interviewee of any new circumstances or changes to provisions made under 3.1-3.2 above.

3.5 To ensure that the interview is documented, indexed, catalogued and made available as agreed with the interviewee, and that a copy of the recording or transcript is given to the interviewee if an undertaking to do so has been given.

3.6 To ensure that all possible measures are taken to preserve interview recordings and related material.

**4. Sponsoring institutions or places of deposit such as archives, libraries, museums or university departments have the following responsibilities:**

4.1 To select interviewers of sufficient competence and skill, and to give sufficient guidance or training to ensure that these guidelines are carried out.

4.2 To ensure that recordings and documentation are carried out to the best possible, and at least to a sufficient standard.

4.3 To ensure that information on copyright ownership and other restrictions and conditions is recorded in writing and preserved. To document fully in writing all transfers of interview recordings and related material from individuals or others and ensure that 3.3 is fully carried out.

4.4 To ensure that responsibilities under 3.4-3.6 are understood and carried out.

4.5 To avoid the acquisition of interviews which are not accompanied by documentation including provenance, availability for use, and copyright status, except where there is a realistic prospect that 4.6 can be carried out successfully.

4.6 If interviews as described in 4.5 are acquired, to ensure that all possible steps are taken to contact interviewees or their heirs in order to obtain written statements concerning copyright and access.

4.7 To restrict access to interviews (even where this has not been required by the interviewee) in appropriate cases.

4.8 To ensure that names and personal details of interviewees are not passed on to third parties (for example broadcasters) without the consent of interviewees. Institutions should not become involved in any business arrangements which may result from such contacts.

4.9 To decide whether to charge for services and to fix a standard scale of charges which will apply to all users.