

# HOW <sup>TO</sup> MAKE <sup>AN</sup> ORAL HISTORY PODCAST

A MEMORY PROJECT RESOURCE KIT



## Introduction

This toolkit has been created to help you through the steps of creating an oral history podcast: how to conduct research, how to interview subjects, and how to incorporate an interview into a script that tells a story. It introduces activities, in-person or virtual, that guide students in planning their own podcast episodes. The toolkit focuses on interviewing a Memory Project speaker and incorporating their story into a podcast, and provides opportunities to showcase oral history as a valuable primary source.

This kit was produced by the Memory Project and Historica Canada with the generous support of the Government of Canada. Historica Canada is the country's largest organization dedicated to enhancing awareness of Canada's history, culture, and citizenship. The organization offers programs that you can use to explore, learn, and reflect on our history, and what it means to be Canadian. Find us online at [HistoricaCanada.ca](http://HistoricaCanada.ca). An initiative of Historica Canada, the Memory Project is a volunteer speakers bureau that arranges for veteran and active members of the Canadian Forces to share their stories of military service at schools and community events across the country. Book a speaker at [thememoryproject.com/book-a-speaker](http://thememoryproject.com/book-a-speaker).

## Message to Teachers

This toolkit offers classroom activities that promote research and analysis, build critical thinking and communication skills, and explore Canada's history. This resource is designed to align with current Canadian curricula and has been produced for use in middle and high school classrooms.

Teachers may wish to address topics not covered in this kit to provide a more complete understanding of Canada's recent military history. Please be aware that the experiences of one group or veteran are not representative of everyone, and many stories remain unexplored. The additional resources linked throughout this toolkit provide snapshots of the lives of veterans and service people rather than complete stories. We hope these resources will help you work with primary sources to teach Canadian military history and oral history in your classroom and provide a structure for your class or your school to host its own podcast.

*Note: Students come from many different backgrounds. Be sensitive to students who have connections to those who served in military conflicts, who are refugees or immigrants from war-torn countries or refugee camps, or who may have experienced war trauma.*

## Note on Accessibility

Certain activities in this resource kit require advanced listening comprehension skills. When viewing the video resources with language learners, consider enabling subtitles or downloading interview transcripts from the Memory Project's website at [www.thememoryproject.com/educational-resources/video/#main-wrap](http://www.thememoryproject.com/educational-resources/video/#main-wrap).



## Online Resources

The following is a list of bilingual research resources to support educators and students. You may want to seek out supplementary resources.



A database showcasing thematic learning tools for educators.



A collection of firsthand accounts and photographs of veterans.



An online resource for exploring a wide range of topics in Canadian history. Search for articles by title or keyword.



A collection of bilingual vignettes, each depicting a significant person, event, or story in Canadian history.



A volunteer speakers bureau that arranges for veterans and Canadian Forces members to share their stories of military service across the country.

## What is Oral History?

Oral history is a method of gathering, preserving, and interpreting historical information from the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants about past events of significance. Through recorded conversations, this method of interviewing can be used to preserve the recollections and perspectives of people, particularly those who have been overlooked or undervalued in traditional written histories, for future generations. These accounts can document the stories of minorities, survivors of tragedies, recollections of war veterans, and stories from the average citizen. Oral history is an account of the past transmitted by word of mouth, and the information shared has long made important contributions to the ways we understand and interpret the past. Oral history comes in many forms, from folklore to songs to poetry to storytelling, and in its dominant modern form, interviews.

However, good oral history does require more than a microphone and a willing subject: during interviews, questions must be presented deftly and fairly. If the results are to be presented with the utmost accuracy, the interviews need to be subjected to careful editing, which allows the subject's story to be told in their own words with minimum distortion. Read the [Oral History](#) article on *The Canadian Encyclopedia* to learn more.

## Introductory Activity

### Considering Oral History

Oral history relies on the memories of people who participated in or observed events. For example, Second World War veterans talk about events they experienced more than 70 years ago, while those who served in Afghanistan recall more recent incidents. Many of Canada's academic historians tend to be suspicious of oral history; they argue that people's memories can be distorted by time. But oral history can also be a useful means of understanding how individuals experienced important historical events, conveying thoughts, feelings, and emotions not always easily captured by other primary and secondary sources. Oral history can provide a different lens for viewing history by drawing on memories formed during both a significant moment in history, and during the speaker's life. As a class, discuss how the passage of time affects firsthand accounts, and how oral history can be useful in interpreting historical events.

- 1** Working in small groups, discuss and make a point-form list of how oral sources are useful in historical research.
- 2** In your group, develop a list of the pros and cons of oral history, and the pros and cons of archival sources. What are the benefits and what are the drawbacks of oral testimony as a source? What are the benefits and limitations of using archival or written sources?
- 3** Many historians insist that a subject's memories must be checked, whenever possible, against documentary sources. In your group, make a list of sources (other than oral testimony) that you can use to research Canada's role in global conflicts. How would you use these sources to corroborate an oral testimony? How can students and researchers use oral history in combination with archival sources to understand history?
- 4** If oral testimony cannot be verified, how might it still be useful? In addition to history, what kinds of knowledge can oral histories convey?

## For Teachers: Plan Your Classroom's Podcast

Before you have your students begin working on their podcast episodes, it will be your responsibility to plan the classroom's podcast. We recommend involving your students in the decision-making process. Here are some tips to get started:

- Determine a theme for your classroom's podcast that aligns with the curriculum. Ensure that all students' episodes will fit cohesively together. For example, the theme could be general Canadian military history told via themed episodes, like episodes on POWs, women in the military, codebreaking, etc., or all episodes could cover the same conflict, like the War in Afghanistan, while featuring episodes dedicated to different aspects of the same conflict, like deployment, active service, returning home, and PTSD.
- Choose your classroom's podcast name. Ask students to get creative and choose a name that reflects the theme while piquing interest from new listeners.
- Create your podcast cover art. We recommend using [Canva](#)'s free templates.
- Create a template for your students to follow on the platform they will use for their own episodes. Before your class starts preparing for their interviews, create a template that can be used across all episodes. If your school does not have access to audio editing software, students can use [Audacity](#) or [GarageBand](#) for free to edit their podcasts.

### Teacher Tip

Be sure to determine the intended length of the episodes so students can prepare an appropriate number of questions for their interview(s).

## Recommended Order for Episodes

### 1. Intro Music

- There are many websites with royalty-free music that you can use to create your podcast introduction, such as [bensounds.com](https://bensounds.com).

### 2. Welcome Greeting

- Write a short greeting to welcome listeners to your podcast. Introduce the podcast's name, introduce the class and purpose of the podcast, and mention what themes the podcast will explore. This should be summed up into a statement of intent, which will be repeated at the beginning of each episode, and which will form the guiding objective of each episode.
- Record the greeting yourself or select a student from the class to be the host of the podcast. This greeting should be used across all episodes.

### 3. Interview Introduction

- Students will be responsible for writing and recording their own interview introductions. They will introduce their speaker, a bit about their background, and the conflicts they have served in.

### 4. Interview and Context

- Students will be responsible for choosing excerpts from the interview to include in their episode and add commentary where more context is required.

### 5. Episode Closing

- Students will close the episode by reflecting on the overall themes discussed and provide their final thoughts and takeaways.

### 6. Call to Action (“Thank you for listening. Next time on [podcast name], [speaker name] sits down with [interviewer name] to discuss [theme]...”)

- The person who did the welcome greeting (the host) should also record the call to action.
- The host should record separate calls to action for all episodes, so they can let the listeners know who conducts the next episode, who will be featured in it, and what they will be speaking about.

### 7. Outro Music

- This can be the same as the intro music, a different section of the intro music, or a royalty-free song that is relevant to the episode.

We recommend transcribing all podcast episodes for accessibility. If you choose to transcribe your podcast, be sure to transcribe the Welcome Greeting and Call to Action so students are only responsible for transcribing and arranging their interview contribution to the episode template.

Arrange the interviews for your students in advance. Request speakers through the Memory Project website: [thememoryproject.com/book-a-speaker](https://thememoryproject.com/book-a-speaker).



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Once you have secured the requested speakers, reach out to them yourself or introduce your students to the speaker they will be working with via phone or email to discuss the details of the interview.

- Decide which recording platform you will be using. If the interview is to take place remotely, ensure they are sent any meeting links for Zoom, Skype, etc.
- Ask them for any additional information about themselves or their service, so students can prepare appropriately for the interview(s).
- Set expectations for the time and duration of the visit. We recommend allowing 2 hours for the interview, which will allow students time to circle back to questions if needed.
- Discuss whether the attendees will be on video and/or audio (if conducted remotely).

Assign speakers to your students and provide them with the speaker's general information and their service details. Students will research aspects of service related to their assigned speaker in order to enter the interview with a strong understanding of their speaker and their service.

### Note

If you are unable to interview a Memory Project speaker, have students choose a testimony from a veteran in the [Memory Project archive](#) to feature in their podcast episodes, or use one of the following recommended testimonies. We recommend you read all testimonies before assigning them to students.



Lewis Chow



Francis William Godon



Roland Gravel



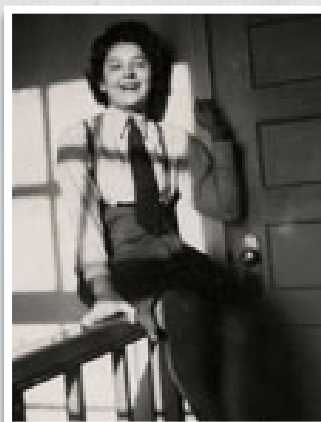
Samuel Hearn



Randolph George Hope



Peggy Lee



Marguerite Plante



Sandra Perron



### Activity 1: Conducting Research

**1** Split into small groups to work collaboratively, or work individually on your own podcast episode. Once you have been assigned a speaker, do some research to learn about their experience (if available, read their Memory Project profile) and the subjects they will likely speak about. Read the articles listed on the left side of this page that apply to your speaker's service. You may need to search to find another article that covers your speaker's experience.

#### Second World War (1939-1945)

- [D-Day and the Battle of Normandy](#)
- [Italian Campaign](#)
- [Chinese Canadians of Force 136](#)
- [Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service](#)

#### Korean War (1950-1953)

- [Battle of Kapyong](#)
- [Battle of Hill 355](#)

#### Gulf War (1990-91)

#### Peacekeeping Missions

- [Balkans](#)
- [Rwanda \(1993-1995\)](#)
- [Haiti](#)

#### Afghanistan (2001-2014)

**2** Continue your research by reading further – explore articles connected to your speaker's service experience by searching [The Canadian Encyclopedia](#) for related resources, by clicking on links within the article(s) you read, or by using supplementary resources.

- Take notes while researching to help determine what questions you want to ask your speaker.

**3** Using the information in your speaker's Memory Project profile, develop a timeline of important events in your assigned speaker's life and service. If you don't know specifics, look at important events that occurred during the time they served and create a broad overview. You can also reach out to your speaker at this stage to confirm the basic details of their service.

- Note any terms related to the speaker's life and service, such as geographic names of where they served, names of bases or ships where they served, their rank at the time of service and now, etc.
- If there are any holes in the timeline, you can turn these into questions for the interview to help fill in the gaps of their service.
- Add important historical information from your research to the timeline that connects to the speaker's service.

**4** Examine the timeline you created and determine what story you want to tell in your podcast episode. For example, if the speaker spent time in a POW camp, they might want to tell a story of overcoming hardship; if the speaker is a parent they might want to talk about their transition from active duty to civilian life and the effects on their family.

- Submit your episode intentions for your teacher's approval so they can ensure it fits the theme of the podcast.

## **Activity 2: Developing Interview Questions**

When brainstorming interview questions, keep in mind the podcast's intro, or statement of intent. Your episode should tie into the podcast's overall theme to ensure a cohesive finished product.

It is important to develop questions that are clear, concise, and open-ended. Developing open-ended questions will prompt your speaker to share stories and details that they might not otherwise recall. If your question can be answered in one word, or with a yes or no, reformulate it so that it prompts a fuller answer. A great interview question leads to even more questions.

You are probably familiar with the 5Ws: who, what, when, where, why (and how). When it comes to developing strong interview questions, the "why" and "how" will help you encourage your interviewee to expand and analyze a fact or an event in a way either of you might not have thought to do and can reveal a deeper answer to the kind of information you are interested in learning from them. As a starting exercise, try creating questions related to your interview topic that begin with "Why/how was...", "Why/how did...", and "Why/how might...".

After you have asked some questions, try to provide space for the speaker to share stories they might have thought of during the course of the interview. These questions could start with a prompt to share, for example, "Do you remember a time when..." or "What was it like when...".

### **Interview Tips**

- When preparing interview questions, split your questions into chronological segments, which will allow for the interviewee to recall the events as they transpired.
- Avoid closed-ended questions that can end with a simple yes or no answer. If you receive a short answer, follow up with questions to get the speaker to expand on their answer.
- When asking your questions, make sure to leave enough time for the interviewee to answer before asking your next question. Leaving silence between their answer and your next question may feel awkward, but this can encourage the speaker to share more with you on the subject.
- Try to keep the interview to two hours or under as both you and the interviewee can get tired and begin to lose concentration.
- Ask a friend or family member to practise your interview questions with you. Read your questions in advance to ensure that the interview flows well, and so you can practise pronouncing any difficult terminology.



## Sample Interview Structure

### Note

The questions below are basic examples – use these to build your interview and be sure to include more specific questions tailored to delve into your speaker's service.

- 1.** Start with an introductory statement at the beginning of the interview. Note the date and time of the interview, and state the name of the interviewee, their birthdate, location, current rank, etc.
- 2.** Ask the interviewee to state their branch of service, what their rank was at the time of service, their current rank, where they served, and in which conflicts.
- 3.** Ask open-ended questions about the details of their service, such as:
  - Why did you enlist?
  - Where were you living at the time of your enlistment/drafting?
  - Why did you decide to join the Canadian Armed Forces?
  - What do you remember about your first days in service? What were your attitudes then about serving?
- 4.** Ask specific questions based on what you know about their service and about the conflicts they served in from your research. Tailor your questions to their specific service: what can they tell you that you can't read in a history textbook?
  - Tell me about your service: what was the most important part of your service?
  - Were you deployed overseas? How were you told and what was your reaction?
  - What was your role?
  - Tell me about a notable story or experience you had while serving.
  - Tell me about your experiences as a POW.
  - What was the transition like when you were released?
- 5.** Ask about their everyday life during service.
  - Was it difficult to maintain relationships with family and friends back home when you were serving? How did you stay in touch with loved ones?
  - What type of food did you eat while serving?
  - What did you and your fellow servicepeople do to entertain yourselves and keep morale up?
  - Do you have any humorous or memorable moments from your service you'd like to share?
  - What was your relationship like with the place and the local people where you served?
- 6.** If retired, ask questions about their transition to civilian life.
  - What do you remember about your service ending?
  - What was your feeling towards your service ending?
  - Did you pursue another career after your service ended? Tell me about that.
- 7.** Close the interview. This is where you can go back to questions you asked but did not receive enough information on.
  - Is there anything we did not cover in this interview that you would like to add?
  - What do you want people to know about military service and take away from this interview/podcast episode?
- 8.** Thank the speaker for sharing their story. Finish recording the interview, discuss next steps with the speaker, and let them know when they can expect to hear the podcast.

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### Activity 3: Recording the Interview

- 1.** Make sure your device is fully charged before beginning the interview.
- 2.** There are many options to record interview audio. In-person interviews can be conducted using a tape recorder or smartphone with downloaded recording software. If you are conducting the interview remotely, platforms like Zoom can record audio and save it to your computer after the interview is completed. Learn how to record a Zoom interview [here](#).
- 3.** Use external microphones for better audio quality, if possible.
- 4.** Aim to create a comfortable environment, free from background noise and distractions, in which the interviewee can recall and reflect on events of their service with minimal interruption.
  - Ensure that the room you are recording in is free from distractions or background noises such as pets, fans, traffic, family members, etc.
  - Test your equipment for volume of the interviewer and interviewee and confirm that there isn't any feedback, static, or background noise being picked up.
- 5.** Confirm with the speaker that you have permission to record the interview.
- 6.** Remember to mute yourself when the interviewee is speaking so you do not compromise their audio by speaking over them.
- 7.** When the interview is complete, stop recording and save the audio file to your computer. Check the file to make sure it plays properly.
- 8.** Do not erase files from your recording device or computer until duplicates have been made.
- 9.** Transcribe the interview using free online transcription software, for accessibility.



## **Activity 4: Compiling the Episode**

Once the interview is complete, you will review the full audio and pull sections you would like to include in your episode. You'll also need to create the episode script: include the goal of the episode, explain who your speaker is, link to the larger series, and fill in any context or information that listeners will need. Include the host's greeting and any other repeated parts that are in all episodes.

As you create your script, keep in mind the statement of intent that introduces each of your podcast episodes. Your episode script must align with this statement. To make sure that your episode – and the podcast as a whole – is cohesive, you should develop a research question that the episode will explore, which ties together the interview you performed and the podcast's statement of intent. The question should be answerable with your interview material, but the interview does not need to provide a definitive answer – though it should provide an answer, or a new point of view from which to look at the question.

- 1.** Create an interview transcript. This will make it easier to work with your interview to create your script. You can use free online software to easily generate a transcript from your audio file, which will require minimal manual editing.
- 2.** Gather all sound bites from your interview that are relevant to your episode's research question. Keep track of the timestamps of the audio you select so you can easily find it in the file later.
- 3.** If there are any gaps in the interview, add explanations and clarifications in your own words where necessary.
  - Start by writing these clarifications and place them between the transcribed portions of testimony.
  - Ensure that you are writing in a way that will flow well when spoken out loud.
- 4.** Once you have written, reviewed, and revised your script, record your portion of the podcast. You should be able to record straight into your audio editing software.
- 5.** Add your recordings and interview excerpts in the template in the audio editing platform your teacher has approved.
- 6.** Listen to the entire episode, including the intro music and host's welcome greeting, to ensure that everything flows well.
  - If adjustments are needed, rerecord your lines or replace testimony as needed.
- 7.** Once you feel the episode is complete, share it with a friend or family member for feedback. Make changes based on their feedback that you believe will improve the episode.



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### Activity 5: Thank Your Speaker

Begin by discussing your favourite aspects from the Memory Project speakers' interview(s) as a class.

1. Have a class discussion where you and your classmates can share personal reflections on the interviews you conducted with your assigned veteran(s).
2. On your own, consider the following:
  - How has the speaker changed your view of military service and Canadian military history?
  - Did you learn anything new from the speaker?
  - Do you want to thank them for something specific they did during their service?
3. Individually, write your speaker a letter to thank them for participating in the interview, and share with them what you learned, what you appreciate about their story or service, or what lessons you've taken away from the interview.
4. Feel free to share your letters and emails with the Memory Project! We will forward them to the speaker. Contact us at:

Historica Canada  
Attn: The Memory Project  
10 Adelaide St East, Suite 400  
Toronto, ON M5C 1J3  
Canada  
[memory@historicacanada.ca](mailto:memory@historicacanada.ca)

#### Teacher Tip:

Don't forget to share the final podcast episodes with the speakers!