



REEL NIKKEI STORIES: Nikkei Family Legacy Project

A project of the Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California

INTERVIEWING TIPS and SAMPLE QUESTIONS

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The art of interviewing involves making your interview subject as comfortable as possible so that you can have a conversation in which he/she forgets the camera is present.

1. Have your **interviewee seated in a comfortable chair** and seat yourself across from him or her at the same eye level and as close to the camera as you can. Your interviewee will want to have eye contact with you, but **if you're seated close to the camera, he or she will still be facing and addressing you in the direction of the camera lens.**
2. Once you have your shot set, **minimize any further fiddling with the camera.** The best interviews happen when you and your interview subject get into a "groove" and forget the camera is even there. That won't happen if you break eye contact and fiddle with the camera.
3. Go into the interview with a list of written questions, but don't become so tied to your list that you forget to **listen and pay attention to what your interviewee is saying** and neglect an opportunity for a good spontaneous follow-up question.
4. If you know you have access to **visual images, view them before your interview so you can ask your interviewee specific questions that pertain to the images.** For example, a person standing at a bus station may trigger a question such as "tell me about the photo I saw where Auntie was standing at the bus station."
5. **Decide ahead of time if your final product will have a narrative/host style or whether the interviewee(s) will tell the story themselves.** Having the interviewees tell the stories themselves without the support of a narrator is more challenging. You'll have to ask more questions and ask that your interviewees respond in complete sentences. For example, when asking Uncle Tad what year he was born, it's best if he answers, "I was born in 1924" instead of just "1924."
6. Retain eye contact with your interview subject as much as you can and **give a lot of non-verbal signs that you're paying attention** (nodding, cocking your head) instead of verbal cues that the microphone will pick



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up. In your final product, you won't want to hear yourself say "hmmm" or "uh-huh."

7. **Frame your questions** so that your interviewees will have to give responses that are more than "yes" or "no" answers. Use opening phrases such as "tell me about the time..." or "explain why..." or "paint me a picture when..." or "what was it like when..." or "re-live for me how it felt when..."

SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR PEOPLE WHO'VE BEEN IN INTERNMENT CAMPS

1. What do you remember about the day Pearl Harbor was bombed? How old were you and what were you and your family doing that day?
2. What happened when you and your family had to pack up all your belongings and get ready to go to Camp?
3. What kinds of things did you pack to take with you to Camp?
4. What was it like to go to the Assembly Centers? How did you get there and what were your first impressions?
5. What did you miss the most about your life before Camp?

SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE NOT BEEN IN INTERNMENT CAMP

1. When did you first find out that members of your family had been in internment camp and what was your first reaction?
2. What stories do you most remember about your family's internment experience?
3. What do you think your family's life would have been like if internment hadn't happened?
4. How has your family's internment affected the person you are today?
5. What would your reaction be if for some reason you and your family were going to be put into relocation centers today?