

# Introduction to Oral History

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Overview, timeline, benefits and pitfalls

# Oral History Timeline

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**1773**

Samuel Johnston: belief that “an impartial history could not be written in the lifetime of those who had experienced the events” (Ritchie, 2015, p. 2)

# Oral History Timeline

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## Late 1880s

Promotion of science and documentary research (Leopold von Ranke) (Ritchie, 2015, p. 3) over oral history, which was seen as too subjective. This was happening just as other professions, such as journalists, were “embracing the interview” (Ritchie, 2015, p. 3).

# Oral History Timeline

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## 1940s

United States in the Second World War—“live history” and “live historians”, as well as others aiming to create oral history archives (Ritchie, 2015, p. 4, 5) But still criticisms.

# Oral History Timeline

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## 1970s

History Workshop movement and the notion of “history from down below”—“oral history as a tool for incorporating the less powerful into the historical narrative” (Ritchie, 2015, p. 5).

Examples of some of these projects can be found on pp. 6 and 7 of Ritchie.

# Oral History Timeline

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## **Last part of 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

realisation that archival documentation was inadequate (Ritchie, 2015, p. 6)

# Objectivity and Subjectivity in Oral History

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“Liking or not liking, feeling repelled by difference in ideology or attracted by a shared world-view, sensing difference in gender or age or social class or ethnicity, all influence the ways we ask questions and respond to narrators and interpret and evaluate what they say...we must view our difficulties (and I would add pleasures as well) as important data in their own right.”

Yow, V. (1997). Do I like them too much? Effects of the oral history interview on the interviewer and vice-versa. *The Oral History Review*, 24(1), 78.)

# Coming Up: Week 3

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- Ethical and legal considerations
- Permission information forms
- Consent forms
- Storage/usage forms
- Student research agreement (Sheridan)

# Homework: Week 3

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- Readings
- Journal Entry #2
- Post tutorial questions night before class