

# Oral History and Memory Book Projects

## A COMPARISON

	ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS	MEMORY BOOK PROJECTS
HISTORICAL ACCURACY	More accurate, if a skilled oral historian is able to ask further questions to clarify and probe for more information “on the spot.”	Depends on the memory and desire of the individual to report incidents accurately.  Contributors can take the time to reflect and look up names, dates, etc.
ACCESSIBILITY	Researchers often must wait until tapes are transcribed or indexed. For many organizations, this can be a lengthy and daunting process—especially when done by volunteers.	The workbook can be read immediately, if necessary, before being transcribed. It is reasonably easy to thumb through workbooks to find relevant data. Transcriptions are usually accomplished sooner (see “Transcription” below).  It is easier to copy pages than tapes.
TRANSCRIPTION	Transcription of tapes requires special equipment and transcribing skills.	Transcription requires the ability to read handwritten material and use a word processor. The number of volunteers available to do this type of transcription is usually higher than for oral transcription.
NUMBER OF CONTRIBUTORS	Limited by the number of trained oral historians available.	Mostly limited by funds. The organization can distribute as many workbooks as they can afford to print. With good follow-up, 40–60% of the workbooks will be returned.
USEFULNESS FOR RESEARCH	In either case, the transcripts should be thoroughly indexed and searchable so relevant information can be easily found by researchers.	
COMPREHENSION	The listener can hear inflections, which add emphasis and provide a better understanding of the interviews.  In some instances, the narrator cannot be easily understood (because of accent, difficulty talking, etc.).	Sometimes handwriting can be difficult to read.  If the story is not punctuated correctly, the author’s meaning may be misunderstood.
FINANCIAL IMPACT	More costly (per contributor) in terms of manpower and funding.	Less costly (per contributor).
COLLECTING STORIES	Interviews must be conducted one-on-one.  Some people are reluctant to write, but enjoy telling their stories to an interviewer.	Stories can be collected in a group setting, with several participants writing together, inspiring one another, and helping each other recall incidents.  Some people are more comfortable writing their stories, rather than telling them, especially with painful memories.  You can easily reach those who do not live locally, increasing your range for collecting material.