

SUGGESTED SKILLSETS & ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR LIFE STORY PROFESSIONALS

In 2002, with the help of several colleagues, I drew up the following document, *Suggested Skills Sets for Professional Personal Historians*. Our intention is to help delineate guidelines, which will enable us as personal historians to describe our work, assess our skills, and pursue continuing education. The document is intended to encourage professional growth rather than establish any hard rules or definitions for a personal historian.

Anita Hecht, 2020

SPECIALIZED SKILL SETS

WRITING SKILLS

- Command of English grammar, spelling
- Transcription and indexing techniques
- Ability to organize narrated materials
- Editing skills

PRINTING/PUBLISHING SKILLS

- Computer skills: knowledge of appropriate soft and hardware needed for project
- Book design and layout
- Graphic arts
- Photo scanning, reproduction and restoration
- Knowledge of printing and binding options and archival considerations
- Knowledge of publicity and distribution methods for commercial endeavors (e.g. ISBN numbers, Library of Congress, e-publishing, etc.)

VIDEO AND AUDIO PRODUCTION SKILLS

- General knowledge of various video and audio formats and equipment
- General knowledge and/or skills in production: lighting, audio mixing, and shooting
- General knowledge and/or skills in video and/or audio editing
- General knowledge of digital preservation (e.g. of existing audio, print, photographic or videotaped materials)
- Knowledge of transfer, duplication, archiving and storage options
- Ability to work with subcontractors (e.g. camera operators, sound technicians, editors).

LIFE WRITING WORKSHOPS AND PRESENTATIONS

- Teaching skills
- Knowledge of subject matter
- Public speaking skills
- Professional demeanor

ORGANIZATIONAL PROJECTS: NON-PROFIT, BUSINESSES, ETC.

- Grant writing
- Fundraising
- Developing volunteer project steering committee
- Record keeping
- Archival methods
- Exhibition design
- Curatorial techniques
- Publicity

GENERAL SKILL SETS

INFORMATION GATHERING AND INTERVIEWING SKILLS

- Oral history techniques (thematic vs. chronological, historical research, development of project scope and format)
- Commitment to accurate representation of the narrator's "voice," story or objectives
- Active listening techniques (e.g. body language, clarification, probing, paraphrasing, follow-up)
- Attention to detail and historical accuracy
- General knowledge of documentation methods (audio, video, print options)
- General knowledge in the field of aging, gerontology, life review and reminiscence
- Knowledge of local resources: libraries, archives, historical societies, and ability to use them

COMMUNICATION/ PEOPLE SKILLS

- Ability to assess needs and abilities of client
- Willingness to learn and ask questions
- Interest in the narrator's life
- Cultural appreciation and sensitivity
- Awareness of own biases, differences and limitations

- Non-judgmental attitude
- Adherence to confidentiality requirements

GENERAL KNOWLEDGE OF 20TH CENTURY HISTORY

- World War I and II; the Great Depression; Korean War; Vietnam; the Cold War
- National origins and immigration experiences
- Social movements (e.g. women's movement, Civil Rights)
- Technological changes
- Historical events relating to narrator's life
- Current events

PROJECT MANAGEMENT SKILLS

- Scheduling
- Preparation: tested equipment, advance research
- Time management
- Timely project completion
- Coordination of subcontractors and/or employee services
- Anticipate and communicate overall costs and time commitment for total process
- Commitment to stay current with state-of-the-art technology

BUSINESS SKILLS

- Basic marketing and sales (e.g. development of accurate and informative marketing materials)
- Networking
- Knowledge of pricing, budgeting, contracting and billing techniques
- Small business administration

LEGAL KNOWLEDGE

- Copyrights
- Libel and liability
- Releases and confidentiality
- Donation of copies to third parties
- Royalty agreements

ETHICS

- Knowledge of and commitment to APH Code of Ethics

BOUNDARIES

- Ability to assess appropriate vs. inappropriate clients
- Commitment to seek outside help/consultation when family dynamics or psychological issues impede professional delivery of services or completion of project
- Ability to say "No" when unable to deliver what a client wants (because of desired budget, knowledge base, ethics, legal issues, etc.)

AWARENESS OF COMMUNITY RESOURCES

- Area Agencies on Aging
- Adult Protective Services
- County Medical Association Referral Service
- Department of Elder Affairs
- Health Department
- Legal Affairs Department of the State Attorney General
- Veteran's Hospital

INTANGIBLES

- Passion for preserving life stories
- Common Sense
- Flexibility
- Sense of Humor
- Love of People