
Template for Crim 321 Oral History Project

The final product you will be producing at the end of semester is an oral history report. Recall from the course syllabus that the body of your paper (i.e., excluding appendices, references, title page) is to be no more than 5000 words, which is about 15 double-spaced pages in 12-point font. Also, remember it is due by no later than 11:59 PM on the night of our last class, i.e., 7 December 2026. Late papers will be penalized 5% per day.

Your report will take the form of an academic article with an Introduction followed by sections entitled Methods, Results or Findings, Discussion and Conclusions. When preparing your final paper, remember that this is a methods course, which means we are especially interested in the methodological decisions you make and why you made them. This means that you will have a much smaller Literature Review and much larger Methods section than would be the case in an article you were trying to publish. The following describe what you should include in each section of your paper and show the relative weight each section will have in the grading scheme:

Title and Abstract: (5%)

Create a separate title page. Your title should be no more than 15 words and convey something about the nature of your project. Do not call it anything like "Crim 321 Project" (this gives no information about content), or "Racism and Discrimination" (not specific enough). A title like "'They Didn't Teach Us That at Depot': A Former RCMP Officer Reflects on Her Career" or "Learning the Ropes: A Recent Immigrant's Experience at Adapting to Canadian Culture" is much better: right away, the reader can see what it's about. Your name, student number, tutorial group, and name of your TA also should appear somewhere on this page.

Your abstract will be no more than 200 words; its role is to provide an overall summary of your project and its findings. Many people do this last, after finishing the main report, so that you know what you are summarizing.

Introduction: (15%)

Your introduction does exactly that -- it introduces us to your research project: what it is, why it is "interesting," what some relevant literature says on the topic, and will end with a statement about what the research question was that you set out to answer. Your literature review is not expected to be an exhaustive one for this exercise, but should give a focused review that helps contextualize or set up your project. You should include at least 6 references (preferably peer reviewed journal articles, but this will depend on topic). It should end with you stating your research question or objectives, which is the segue into your Methods section, where you explain how you went about meeting those objectives or answering that research question.

Methods: (30%)

This will be one of the largest parts of your paper. For the most part it will involve you explaining how you approached the oral history and what decisions you made. I will expect you to be citing the lecture notes and/or our text to justify your choices and articulate the principles you were trying to implement. You should include things like the following:

- That you went through an ethics review process and were approved (because if you didn't/weren't you cannot have gone ahead with the project)

- Why you chose the participant you did and how they were an appropriate choice given your research question and/or objectives.
- Anything you did before the interview(s) started to try and establish rapport and any other research decisions you made both before and during the interview?
- What location did you choose to do the interview and why?
- To what extent did you prepare questions ahead of time and why did you do it that way?
- How did you "manage" the interview to ensure that your participant was comfortable and you got what you wanted out of the session(s)?
- How many sessions did you hold, and why that many?
- Did you record? How and why?
- Did you transcribe the whole interview? How and why?
- What approach did you take to analyzing your data? How did you decide what was important?

Results: (15%)

This section will describe what you learned from your participant about the topic that led you to interview them, and will likely be one of the longer sections of your paper.

There are different ways to organize a "results" section like this depending on the specifics of your project. One way is to report the results chronologically if there was a flow to it in that way. Another possibility would be to identify different themes that emerged and report information you learned about each of those themes. Either way, explain why you chose to organize it the way you did. Were you surprised by any of the information that was shared with you?

Remember as you do this section the kind of reporting that we discuss in class, i.e., where in qualitative research, because there are often no graphs or tables, we make our points and then provide quotes that illustrate the inferences we are making.

Discussion & Conclusions: (15%)

The discussion is the place where you take your study and place it into a broader context, so this is where I expect you to reconnect your oral history into a broader literature. Begin with a statement that summarizes your main findings in relation to your research question (e.g., "I set out to determine why someone might do X, and discovered that for my participant the main reasons were ..."; or "I started this research believing that people do X because of Y, but found out that my participant did it because of Z"). In the process, you will reconnect with the literature in order to place your paper/research back into the broader context that got you interested in this topic in the first place [e.g., "This is consistent with earlier findings by X (2020), who showed..."; or "This is in marked contrast to Y's (2022) finding that ..."; or "This goes beyond the narrow range of situations addressed by Z (2023) ...". Inconsistencies call for you to speculate on why these differences might have occurred – maybe because times have changed, or because of some characteristic of your participant took them in a different direction. The discussion is also the place where you can make note of any new issues that arose that you hadn't anticipated, which might see you citing 2 or 3 studies you hadn't cited in the introduction. The bottom line here, however, is that this is where you contextualize your work – what are the processes or phenomena that your participant exemplified or was an exception to. What type of story are you telling? Usually this means going a step higher in abstraction ... so the oral history of your father

immigrating from Iran becomes “a study of the challenges involved in adapting to a completely different culture” while an oral history of your mother working as a police officer for VPD becomes “a study of a woman breaking into a traditionally male field.” It is that step that helps you identify a relevant literature to connect to.

The last thing you do in this section is to take a step back and reflect what you have done and what you found, and perhaps look to the future to the questions that arose from the current project. We always have to make choices when we do research, which always involves trade-offs and compromise. So what do you think were the strengths of your project? What do you think were some of its limitations? If you had it to do all over again, would you do anything differently? If you were going to continue this line of research, what would you do next? Who would you approach? What questions arise from this research that you would want to continue or expand in your next?

References and Appendices: (10%)

Criminology is a very interdisciplinary discipline and people with different specialties tend to publish in different journals with different citation systems (e.g., APA, ASA, legal-historical). I don't care which one you use, but pick one and be consistent in using it.

You should finish by including an Appendix that includes the following: (1) a copy of your approved proposal; and (2) a copy of whatever you went into the interview with ... a list of questions or topics. We are not asking you to provide a copy of your interview recording or transcript, but you should retain those until a final grade has been submitted and any appeals have been resolved as you will need to be able to produce it if asked.

Overall: (10%)

For this component your TA and Professor will be asking themselves questions such as the following: Was your report well-organized so that it flowed from one section to the other? Was it all “plum” so that the various sections “spoke” to one another well? Were sources from the literature and/or media cited properly? Was it a “final” draft that read well and had no typos, or one that showed little care and still needed a lot of editing?

Some Final Admonitions

When writing your paper in the often frenzied last two weeks of class, always keep an updated back-up copy on a thumb drive or in SFU Vault, and keep occasional hard copies. Being a good researcher requires you to anticipate potential problems and always have a Plan B. "I accidentally deleted my file," or "My laptop died" are not excuses that will gain you a sympathetic ear. It happens to someone every year; make sure you're not this year's victim of the computer gods.

If you want to do well, do *not* hand in a first draft. Expect to do at least two drafts [a characteristic of excellent researchers/writers is that they are compulsive about getting it "right"]. Get a friend to read it in exchange for you reading his/hers/theirs -- there's nothing like a new set of eyes looking at your paper to help you find things that are redundant, not explained clearly enough, or omitted, that will make your paper a better paper. If you use an AI program to check your work, don't just take what it says at face value; don't be a reverse centaur. If I suspect you of using AI to actually write your work, you will need to submit any documentation you have (field notes, interview recordings) and I will invite you for an oral examination of your work.