

Level	Intermediate
Type	Individual assignment
Topic	Interviewing Mom or Dad
Points	100 points
Media	Video
Objective	Students will read the enclosed article about how to interview their parents, and then conduct an interview of their parents. Students should first come up with a list of questions that they desire to ask of their parents and submit it to the teacher for suggestions and review.
Directions	<p><b>Capturing mom's life story</b> By The Denver Post Article Last Updated: 05/11/2008</p> <p>"You have to learn to interview through tears," says videographer Bob Brandon. (Cyrus McCrimmon, The Denver Post)</p> <p>Emmy Award-winning Denver videographer Bob Brandon established the immediacy of Animal Planet's "Emergency Vet" and shares credit for pioneering the wide-angle-lens look of "48 Hours." But among his most affecting works is his homage to his mother, Lillie Seal Brandon, right.</p> <p>In his book, "The Complete Digital Video Guide," he devotes a chapter to explain how he shot the footage, conducted the interview and wrote the script for a documentary that is as much about the historic events his mother witnessed as it is about her challenging life. It's a blueprint for anyone interested in recording a moving legacy. <i>Claire Martin</i></p> <p><b>Q: What's the most difficult aspect when you're interviewing a parent?</b> <b>A:</b> It's the hardest part of interviewing anyone — asking a question that doesn't lead to a "yes" or "no" answer.</p> <p><b>Q: Then, what's the best way to phrase a question?</b> <b>A:</b> Ask: "What was the weather like during the Great Depression?" Or, "Describe the trip that you made in your family's old car on the roads you used before the interstates were built."</p> <p><b>Q: So, ask questions that evoke stories?</b> <b>A:</b> Right. Lead them on, when they tell you about something interesting, by asking more questions about that event: "Oh, what was it like, riding in a car with no air conditioning, when you went through Death Valley?" Use what you know to frame the question — but don't lead her too much.</p> <p><b>Q: What do you mean by that?</b> <b>A:</b> Don't say something like, "Mom, remember the trips we used to take on those winding roads?" Most people are not attuned to being descriptive in conversation. They talk in shorthand. They assume that you'll remember the details because you were there, too. Ask about events that happened before you were born. Then remind her, "Remember, I wasn't there."</p> 

**Q: Is there a difference in how people remember events from their recent past, as opposed to their youth?**

**A:** Yes. I noticed that Mom's descriptions got less concise as she progressed to the years after I was born. But her description of life on the farm during the Dust Bowl was priceless. Doctors tell me that your recent memories are not as ingrained as events that happened earlier in your life, especially in the first 20 years or so. Mom's memories of her childhood were vivid and descriptive.

**Q: For example?**

**A:** She remembered a mother hen and her chicks that got stuck in a dust storm that suddenly came up. It was a bad storm. When it ended, the hen looked exactly like a lump of dirt. They literally had to shake her to get the dust off. They found that this mother hen had spread her wings to protect her chicks. She was just solid with dust, but her chicks all lived. I can't tell that story without tearing up. My mom said, "That hen must've been some kind of mother." It was kind of comical at first, but not when I put it into perspective.

**Q: Do you have a favorite interview technique?**

**A:** Yes. I like a two-part question. First, I just say, "So . . . ?" and see where that goes, what's on her mind, what they want to talk about. That helps get them started. And second, silence; I just look at them. A lot of times, their answer to the first part of the question is what they think you want to hear. If you stay quiet, they'll tell you what they want to say. And that's where the good stories are.

**Q: In your Lillie Seal Brandon ( | ) videotape of your mother, your sister does the interviewing. What was that like?**

**A:** It was great. She asked questions I'd never have thought to ask.

**Q: What was the hardest part of making this video about your mother?**

**A:** You have to learn to interview through tears, write through tears and edit through tears. There is nothing in my life that I regret more than not doing this same project for my father.

**Q: Why?**

**A:** I'd have put him on the line. I'd ask why he never told me he loved me. Why he never told me he was proud of me. I'd ask, "What could I have done to be a better son?" I'd have asked, "What were the transformative moments in your life?" "What was it like when the first bill came due, after your first child was born?"



---

### Interviewing Mom: Techniques for doing it yourself

Interviewing Mom (or Dad) isn't as easy as it first seems.

Do a little homework. What historic events did she witness in her life? What was she doing when she learned that the United States declared war on Japan? Where was she when she found out that Martin Luther King Jr. had been assassinated? When Richard Nixon resigned?

	<p>Is there an object she's had throughout her life that's sentimentally significant to her? Find it so you can ask her to hold the object and talk about it on-camera.</p> <p>Look into family history workshops, which often are offered at community centers, libraries and other venues. One example: The Aurora Central Library is hosting the Family Legacy Writing Workshop from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. on May 21 at the library, 14949 E. Alameda Parkway.</p> <p>Do some reading. Bob Brandon's "Complete Digital Video Guide" (Readers Digest) includes examples of interview questions and a script. Here's some advice from Brandon:</p> <p>Start with simple, chronological questions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What's your first memory? Where were you? Was it warm? Cold? Quiet? Noisy? Calming? Scary? Why?</li><li>• Did you have a childhood pet? What was its name? Did you get along with your pet? Did your pet ever get in trouble?</li><li>• What's your first memory of Christmas (or Hanukkah or Ramadan)? Do you remember the way your home looked? What song did you like then? What was your favorite food? What did you like least about the holiday?</li><li>• What did you do as a child that surprised yourself?</li></ul> <p>Listen for a theme that begins to emerge in the answers. Was life easy? A struggle? Was she a tomboy? A bookworm? Did she begin planning her wedding before she learned to read?</p>
Format	Video & Typed Interview Questions