Cross-Cultural Interviews

Preparation
❖ Research the culture and the history of the interviewee
❖ Plan a list of topics to discuss
❖ Select a location that will ensure quiet and privacy
❖ Examine your own biases about the culture of the interviewee

Introductions
❖ Take the time to explain your objective, methods, and outcomes
❖ Set clear expectations regarding sample topics and the time commitment involved
❖ Recognize that oral histories might invite suspicion, and address those concerns directly
❖ Foster the atmosphere of a conversation, not an interrogation
❖ Allow a space for the interviewee to ask questions

Conducting the interview
❖ Use active listening to show respect and interest in your interviewee’s story
❖ Show the person you are engaged with their story through your body language and tone
❖ Ask engaged follow up questions
❖ Recognize that conversation styles vary and follow the lead of the interviewee
❖ Pay attention to the context, the interviewee’s tone, and body language
❖ Take cues about which topics might be sensitive

Negotiating difference
❖ Check your own assumptions about ideas like culture, family, and money
❖ Avoid judgments about the interviewee’s story, situation, and choices
❖ People are hybrid and complicated, and no one perfectly encompasses another culture
❖ Be aware of different experiences of oppression and injustice
❖ Build a rapport through shared interests, such as food, children, hobbies, Ithaca
❖ Acknowledge difference directly through your questions
   ➢ “How do you define your culture? How do you define family?”
   ➢ “What are your goals? What are your values?”
   ➢ “What are moments where you felt different from the majority?”
   ➢ “How do you cultivate a sense of belonging in Ithaca/America?”

Working with translators
❖ People best express themselves in their native language
❖ Make sure the interviewee is comfortable with the translator- consider gender and age
❖ Avoid situations in which the translator answers your questions instead of the interviewee
❖ Keep questions succinct and avoid complicated multi-part questions
❖ Slow down and take it one idea at a time