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CENTRE VIRTUEL DE LA
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Interview techniques general advice

I. General advice

A. Why do we interview ?

- Interviews led with participants/witnesses allow a more 'direct' confrontation with the historical 'background'. They lead to an intense discussion.
- Contrary to other sources (primary or secondary sources, or documentaries), the interview with participants/witnesses delivers an open information : the interviewer, through his/her questions, will guide the participants to point relevant elements out of the discussion so as to arouse the debate.
- Once collected and analysed, every individual story allows to create a 'collective memory', that may correct if necessary the general version delivered by classic sources.

In this unit, the results of the stories will be linked to the general history of the European integration (unit B and C).

B. Which are the elements we have to focus on during the interviews ?

- Reported speech is **subjective**. It shows/translates a particular point of view that is determined by the situation experienced by the participant towards a particular event and his/her personal life. Some of these stories contradict the historical reality. They have to be compared to specialized literature, which sometimes allows us to realize that the participant's interpretation of his/her personal experience can be mistaken.
- Reported speech is **fragmentary**. Participants are not necessarily able to apprehend the past as it be seen taking a step backward. Their stories thus show a distorted vision of the event – but it is not intentional.
- Reported speech is **selective**. From a general point of view, the topic on which participants are interviewed goes back several decades. With time passing, the memory they keep in mind is fleeting because they forget it or repress a part of it.
- Reported speech is **intentional**. Because of their omissions or the way they see things, participants tend to influence their audience. Moreover, with time passing, they may have changed how they view the events so as to make it more believable. Indeed, this is noticeable



when they try to justify their actions, to present them in a more positive light, or to disqualify other people's behaviors.

II. How to use both the interviews and the testimonies?

- Interviews create a more intimate link with history, which is based on individual experiences.
- Results will be presented according to the terms of unit B and C.
- For other uses, participants agreement is indispensable to keep a track on their interview recording (audio or video-tape) and to make it public.

III. Use a testimony

- **Analyzing the content** : extract the main ideas and arguments. The main issue is to identify the information linked to the European history and the family memory raised by the interview.
- **Material checking** : it is indispensable to check the stories accounted and to compare them with other information sources. Are there believable and/or correct? Are there partial and/or controversial? Are there subjective or intentional?
- **Classification** : which of 'big' historical events and general evolution of the European Community, reported facts can be linked with ? Collected information have to be linked to the various chronologies and units created for this training.
- **Exploitation** : An important question to raise is what a testimony can provide to the knowledge of the History of Integration. How can it explain it? How does it stand out?



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