

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

These are SAMPLE interview questions that should be modified and revised to fit the person you are interviewing. Select questions from each category that would be appropriate for your narrator.

Biographical Details

- What is your name? Date of birth (year only is OK)? Place of birth?
- If you have a hometown, can you describe it?
- Describe your childhood home.
- What were your neighbors like? Tell me more about the class background of your neighbors.
- Tell me about some of your favorite childhood memories.

Family and Kinship

- What are your parents' names? Grandparents' names?
- What do you remember most about your parents and grandparents when you were a child?
- Do your parents and/or grandparents have a different ethnicity (not Vietnamese)?
- Do you know what your grandparents and parents did/do for a living? What can you tell me about their educational levels?
- How did your grandparents meet and marry? How did your parents meet and marry?
- What important lesson(s) did you learn from your parents and/or grandparents?
- Talk about any relatives (siblings, uncles, aunts, cousins, etc.) you have a special relationship with, or anyone who stands out in your memory.
- Are there stories about famous or infamous relatives on either side of the family?
- How many siblings do you have? What are their names? What is your birth order?
- Where are your siblings living? What are their occupations?
- How were you and your siblings disciplined as a child? Did you have to discipline your siblings?
- What do you know the origin or history of your family name?
- What were your parents' rules/advice about dating, marriage, and/or relationships?
- Do you have a spouse/partner? If so, how did you meet (and marry)? What made you interested in him/her?
- What occupation does your partner/spouse hold?
- Do you have children? How many? What do they do? Do you talk to them about your history? If so, what do you tell them? If not, why not?
- Are you still in contact with family in Vietnam?

Education and Career

- What kind of schools did you attend? What level of education did you have?
- What were some memories and/or memorable events you had in school?
- Why did you choose your major?
- How were you treated by teachers? By other students?
- Are there any differences in teacher-student relationships in Vietnam versus the US?
- What were the demographics of the student body?
- Did you participate in activities outside the classroom? What were they?
- What were your plans after you graduated?

- Does your high school or college have reunions that you attend?
- What kind of career did you want to have when you were a child? Has it worked out that way? If not, why not?
- Did you work while you went to school? What did you do?
- What was your first job? What other jobs did you have? Do you have a favorite job?
- What is your current job title and what company/organization? (*For more questions on specific careers, see below.*)
- What made you choose this career?
- Describe your typical workday. What is your working condition like?
- Do you enjoy your current job/career?
- Are there any differences in employer-employee relationships in Vietnam versus the US?
- If you came to the US as an adult, how did you adjust to working in the US? What are the differences in work styles in Vietnam versus the US? What about differences in equipment or resources?
- What differences in job opportunities do you see in the US versus Vietnam, when you first arrived? What about currently?
- What languages do you speak? Do you speak a different language in different settings, such as home, school, or work?

Culture

- How did your family celebrate Tet? Birthdays? Funerals? Other special occasions?
- Do you have special family traditions, customs, songs, or foods? How has your family created its own traditions and celebrations?
- What kind of traditions or celebrations do you maintain for the ancestors? How has it changed in America?
- Did your family practice a religion when you were growing up? Are you religious now? Do you attend any religious service? What is the ethnic background of the other people who participate? What language is used in the religious service?
- What is your favorite (comfort) food? What is your favorite food-related memory? Any recipes passed down in your family?
- Are there any songs, images, or artifacts that remind you of Vietnam? Can you provide some examples?
- What family heirlooms and mementos do you possess? What is their history? How were they handed down? What are some memories or stories connected with them?
- Do you have any photo albums, scrapbooks, or home movies? Who made them? When? Describe their contents. What activities and events are documented?
- What traditions or customs have you made an effort to preserve? Are there traditions that you have given up or changed?
- How are manners different in Vietnam versus America?
- What do you do for entertainment?
- Do you have any hobbies? Why kinds?

Wartime and Postwar (in VN) Experiences

- Do you have memories of and/or experience of the war?
- How did the war(s) in Vietnam affect your family and community?
- Where did you live during the war(s)?
- What did you do during the war(s)?
- How were you or your family members involved in the war(s)?
- What do you remember most about that time period?
- Did you come in contact with or have a relationship with American soldiers during the Vietnam War? French soldiers during the First Indochina War? Japanese soldiers during WWII? Soldiers or foreigners of other ethnicities or countries? What were your opinions about them?

- Were you or anyone you know ever imprisoned? Or in a re-education camp? How long? What was that like?
- Describe any disabilities or injuries you or family members suffered as a result of the war.
- Where were you during the last days of the war? What were your memories of those final days? Describe what was happening around the time of the Fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975.
- What was life like in Vietnam after the war?
- What was it like leaving your home and country? How did you feel? Did you think you would ever return to Vietnam?
- Did you have any family members who left Vietnam before you? Why and when?
- What do you think of U.S. policy during and after the war?

Immigration & Resettlement in the US

- When did you leave Vietnam? How old were you? Did you want to leave? How long did the decision take?
- Did people around you know that you were leaving? If so, how did they treat you once they knew?
- What possessions did you bring with you and why? (*Would you like to gift any of these artifacts to preserve with your interview at the Southeast Asian Archive at UC Irvine?*)
- Did you leave anything behind that you wish you could have taken with you?
- What was the journey like? How much did it cost? Who paid for it? Describe the method and conditions. Who planned the journey? How long was it?
- Which family members came along or stayed behind? Did you lose anyone in your family during the journey? Was anyone injured?
- How was the health of everyone? Was anyone pregnant during the journey?
- Were you or your family in a refugee camp? What is the name of the camp? How long were you there? What was that experience like (conditions of the camp, meals, entertainment, educational opportunities, fellow refugees, those in charge of camps, etc.)?
- Describe all the main places you stopped by on your way to the US (e.g. Subic Bay, Guam, Philippines, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, etc.).
- What was an unforgettable experience you had leaving Vietnam to come to the US?
- How did you get to come to the United States (family sponsorship, refugee status etc.)? Would you have wanted to go to another country? If so, which one(s)?
- Did you stay at a refugee processing camp in the US (Camp Pendleton, Fort Chaffee, etc.)? If you did, describe your experiences there (how long, what did you eat, day-to-day living, classes, etc.)
- What was your feeling about America when you were living in Vietnam? How has this changed?
- Who greeted you when you first arrived in the US?
- What were some of your first impressions and early experiences in this country? What surprised you? Has any of this changed over time?
- Did you already know English? If not, how did you learn English and adjust to the new language?
- In what city and state did you first settle? Why? Did your family settle in the same place or move around? How did you come to live in Southern California? Why do you live where you live now?
- How were your finances when you first arrived? Did you receive financial support from an organization, church, individuals, or family?
- How did you find housing? Who helped you find it?
- How did you make a living after resettlement? Who helped you find these opportunities?
- What changes in lifestyle did you make once you were in the US?
- What were some of the hopes you had for yourself and/or your family when you first arrived? Have you realized these hopes?
- What were some of the challenges you experienced in starting a new life?
- How do you feel about your decision to come to the US today? Do you miss anything about your life in Vietnam?

Racial & Gender Experiences and Relations in the US:

- Have you ever encountered racism in your neighborhood, in school, or in the workplace? What was that experience like?
- What is the ethnicity/race of most of your neighbors now? How do you get along with them?
- What is the ethnicity/race of most of your co-workers now? How do you get along with them?
- What is the ethnicity/race of most of your close friends now? How did you meet them?
- Does being Vietnamese/woman/LGBTQ affect how people treat you at your workplace, your neighborhood, your educational experience, and/or your social groups?
- Does being a Vietnamese/woman/LGBTQ affect how you act in different settings such as home, school, or work?
- Did you expect America to be so racially diverse? How do you think the different groups get along?
- Are your children or grandchildren married, and if so, what is their ethnicity? What do you think about interracial dating or marriage (to non-Vietnamese)? What do you think about same-sex marriage?
- How do you identify yourself in American society? (e.g. Asian, Asian American, Vietnamese, Vietnamese American, minority, etc.)
- Do you have a funny or memorable experience of culture shock?
- Are there differences in gender roles for those living in Vietnam versus America? What do you think of these differences? How has it affected you?
- Were there different expectations for what your career would be depending on your gender?
- At what age did you begin dating? Were there different expectations depending on your gender?
- Are there differences in how society treats those who identify as LGBTQ in Vietnam versus America?

Civic Engagement:

- What is your citizenship status? Are you a US citizen? By birth or naturalization? If by naturalization, how old were you when you became a citizen? Why did you decide to become a citizen? How did you feel about this?
- Do you vote in U.S. elections? Why or why not?
- Do you feel strongly or have an opinion about the political parties?
- Do you volunteer for any political elections or campaigns?
- What do you think of the number of Vietnamese Americans who are in office or hold an elected position (school board, city council, mayor, state level, etc.)?
- How do you think they make a difference in helping the community?
- What do you think some of the most important political issues the Vietnamese American community should pay attention to?
- Do you have any thoughts about the current political climate in America?
- How do you get news and info (TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, internet)? Is it in English or in Vietnamese?
- Are you involved with any Vietnamese American organizations? If so, which ones and in what capacity?
- Are you involved in other non-Vietnamese organizations? If so, which ones and how are you involved?
- Are there any organizations you wished the Vietnamese community offered or there were more of?
- Do you help any organizations by donating money to them?

Connections to Vietnam:

- Do you keep in touch with family, relatives, or friends from Vietnam? If so, who and how?

- Do you send money (remittances) or gifts to Vietnam? If so, to whom? What do you send? What do they use the money for?
- Do you travel Vietnam? What is the purpose and for how long? If so, what was that experience like? What did you do while you were there?
- Would you want to move (back) to Vietnam to live there for the rest of your life? Why or why not?
- If you have traveled to Vietnam often, what do you think of the changes over the years?

Community Life:

- What changes have you seen in the Vietnamese population in America?
- What do you think are the differences between the first generation, 1.5 generation, and the second/younger generation?
- What the difficulties do these different generations face in communicating or getting along?
- Do you visit areas that have Vietnamese businesses or activities? What do you do there? How often do you go?
- What do you think of Little Saigon? If you go regularly, what changes have you seen?
- What are the most important things that future generations of Vietnamese Americans should remember about their heritage or history?

Final Thoughts:

- Is there anything we haven't covered that you would like to talk about?
- What would be your final words and/or advice to future generations?

Thank you very much for allowing me to interview you.

(See below for more questions on different careers.)

The following are SAMPLE questions for specific careers. You should select the relevant questions and use this as a guide to create different questions for narrators in other careers:

Veterans:

- List your branch of service and rank.
- Were you drafted or did you enlist? Why did you join? What year was this?
- Why did you pick the service branch you joined?
- Tell me more about your training experiences. What was your job/assignment? Can you provide an example of your tasks?
- Do you recall your first days in service? What did it feel like?
- Were you involved in any battles or in combat? Were you in a position to make major decisions during the war? If so, what were they?
- Were you awarded any medals or citations? How did you get them?
- What hardships did you face during the war?
- What are the positive memories you have about your time in military service?
- Did you sustain any injuries? How did you get them?
- What did you learn about yourself during the war?
- How did you stay in touch with your family?
- When did you leave military service?
- Did you have any relatives who were fighting in the war? What were their roles and what happened to them?
- If you were serving during the last days of the war, can you tell me what happened to you and your unit? How did you feel about the war ending?
- If you were not in the military as the war ended in 1975, what were you doing and can you tell me how you felt during this time?
- Were you ever captured or held by enemy forces during the war? How did you feel?
- If you were in re-education camp, tell us more about what happened when you were sent there. What year was that? What were some of your observations and experiences there?
- How long were you in the re-education camp for? When and how were you released?
- How was your experience being reunited with your family? Returning to your home?
- How did your military experience influence your thinking about the war or about the military in general?
- Do you still keep in touch with other veterans? Do you attend reunions?
- Do you belong to a veteran's organization? What kinds of activities does your group have and why?
- How did your military service affect your life?
- What do you think a lot of people don't know and should understand about the war?
- What do you think of how the US portrays the Vietnam (American) War?
- Would you want your children to go into the military?

Medical and Public Health Professionals:

- What is your specialty? Why did you choose this field?
- Who influenced your decision to go into this field?
- What school or program did you attend for your graduate degree?
- Has being Vietnamese affected your experience in the program?
- What, if anything, surprised you about the field when you first practiced?
- What are the cultural sensitivities in dealing with patients from different populations?
- Is there a difference when you interact with Vietnamese patients versus other patients?
- Have colleagues or patients treated you differently because you are Vietnamese? If so, how?
- Describe a moment when you were most proud doing your work? Any moments you would do over?

- Do you have an opinion about U.S. mental/health-care policies? Mental/health care industry? What would you change, if you could?
- What kinds of issues do you see with health insurance within the Vietnamese community?
- Is there a need to improve access to information and proper mental/health care for the Vietnamese community?
- What do you think of bilingual and bicultural services for patients?
- If you work with Vietnamese patients, how do you think that being an immigrant or refugee affects their health condition?
- What do you find most challenging working with Vietnamese patients? Are there generational, age, gender, or class differences that you see?
- Have you had to change or modify your practice to suit your patients?
- Do they have any beliefs or practices that make it more challenging to provide them medical assistance or advice?
- If you worked in Vietnam, what is the difference between practicing mental/health care in Vietnam versus the US?
- What do you think about the practice of Eastern medicine such as acupuncture, cupping, drinking herbal medicine, etc.? Do you practice any yourself?
- What do you think about patients who use home remedies? Do you use any yourself?
- What are some superstitions or myths about mental/health in the Vietnamese community that you have heard about or witnessed? Where did you hear it?
- Do you belong to any medical/health organizations? How active are you? What is your role? What is the goal of these organizations?
- Do you want your children to go into the medical field as well?

Entrepreneurs/Business Owners:

- Do you own a business? What is the name of it? When was it established?
- What is unique about your business?
- Why did you decide to start or buy this business?
- How did you start this business? How did you fund it?
- If it is co-owned, who are the other owners?
- If you are taking over a family business, tell me more about how this happened? Did you grow up working in the family business? What are the challenges working in a family business? What did you change about the business when you took it over?
- How many locations does your business have? Do you have plans to expand your business? Do you own other kinds of businesses?
- How many employees do you have? What are their demographics (ethnicity, gender, age)?
- Can you describe your first “sale” or the first day you opened your business?
- Describe your typical workday.
- Who are the people who have influenced or mentored you?
- Have your family and relatives supported you?
- Do your family members work in the business with you? Who are they?
- What are the challenges of being a business owner? What was your worst day? What was your best day?
- Does your business cater to the Vietnamese community? How?
- Have you had to change or modify your product to suit your clientele?
- What major changes do you see with Vietnamese American businesses? In Little Saigon areas and other areas with Vietnamese businesses? How has Vietnamese-owned businesses changed in the community?
- Do you find any differences working with Vietnamese clients versus non-Vietnamese clients?
- What do you wish you could have done differently regarding your business?
- What economic factors impact your business? What political factors affect your business?
- How does being a business owner in your city, county, or in California affect your business?
- What regulations would you like to change that affects your business?

- Is there a lot of competition in your business? What is the main competition? How has your business been able to survive?
- What trends do you see in the product you sell or produce?
- Who are your typical clients? Who is your target client?
- How do you advertise your business? What is most effective? Do you use social media for PR?
- Are you involved in any business/professional organizations? How and why are you involved?
- What advice would you give to other business owners who are just starting their own business?
- Who would you want to take over your business?

*Questionnaire adapted from:

The Smithsonian Folklife and Oral History Interviewing Guide

Vietnamese American Heritage Foundation's 500 Oral Histories Project

Veterans History Project