

TRANSCRIBING QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS: SOME THOUGHTS

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Many researchers delay transcribing their interviews, resulting in valuable information being lost. Here are some strategies and tips to transcribe effectively and quickly.

- The best strategy is always to transcribe carefully and verbatim. The extent to which you transcribe every 'um' and 'ah' depends on the purpose of your research. For most research where the interview is to glean information (and not to say analyse the structure of conversation), 'ums' and 'ahs' can be skipped. Here it is for the researcher to develop a *sense* for transcription. A complete transcription should be meticulously verbatim in a way that you are confident that anything that you cite as a quote will be true to the original interview. Significant pauses, laughing, anxiety, tone of voice should be recorded as they reflect on the interviewee's words. The researcher's impressions of the entire interview (its tone, friendliness, cautiousness) should be noted. Impressions or conjectural interpretations of any incomplete interview sentences and any difficult-to-understand phrases should be noted as soon as possible. For example, some incomplete or cryptic sentences might actually make perfect sense to you if the transcription is done soon after the interview because you recall the tone of voice or context of the statement well enough. When time passes, these cryptic sentences might no longer make sense - so, transcribe sooner than later.
- Second best strategy for transcription is to re-listen to the recording, and transcribe in the following way. As you listen, transcribe almost verbatim, that is, transcribe quickly, typing verbatim but not with strict exhaustiveness, in as much detail as possible. If there are significant chunks of the interview which you think you might not use, do not omit transcription - instead, paraphrase and transcribe them in your own words (e.g. 'she talked about her weekend

plans'). Add time stamps every 5-10 minutes into your transcript. Any statement or set of statements that seems quotable in your written analysis should be transcribed verbatim following the logic of point 1 and the 'best strategy'. Having time stamps and paraphrasing allows you to go back to the recording at a later date if the new trajectory of your research requires you to re-transcribe some segments with more care. In this second best strategy then, you have transcribed in a number of ways; verbatim, almost verbatim, paraphrase. You must have a clear strategy for differentiating these in the fonts and other textual marks you use - e.g. verbatim could be put in quotes, almost verbatim in text without quotes, and paraphrase could be put in parentheses. This way you will not be confused when re-reading your transcripts about which parts are truly verbatim transcriptions.

- Other strategies; take notes while you interview so that some information about the interview also exists in your written notes, and immediate impressions are captured right after the interview or field experience. This strategy might be most effective in maintaining field-notes and jotting down unanswered questions and new leads after each interview. It might provide an effective way to keep track of the progress of fieldwork and findings.