



Recording Data through Modes Other Than Writing

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AUDIO AND VIDEO



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Learning objectives

By the end of this lecture, you should be able to :

- Identify the advantages and disadvantages of using other modes of recording field events, besides note taking.
- Discuss permissions to record and permissions to show recordings, when using other modes of recording.
- Identify types of qualitative studies using other modes of recording as their main data collection technique.



Introduction

- ▶ Field events can be recorded through multiple modes, not just in what is written down.
- ▶ The prominent modes primarily make use of recording devices and include audiotaping, videotaping, and taking pictures.
- ▶ These devices can create invaluable by-products because they represent literal replicas of field events, given the obvious caveat regarding the selectivity in deciding when, where, and what to record.
- ▶ At the same time, using these devices can entail major complications that can outweigh the value of the products.



Introduction

- ▶ Every researcher needs to make her or his own decision about the appropriate balance between the complications and the added value.
- ▶ One possible practice, followed by many experienced researchers, is to rely mainly on written notes and only to use recording devices under special circumstances. Thus, rather than audiotaping every interview, these researchers might consider audiotaping only a specific interview that is likely to be lengthy or critical.
- ▶ However, in other situations, such as the videotaping of classroom behaviour using a recording device is intrinsic to the entire data collection process.



Potential complications-Obtaining Permission to Record

- ▶ Using recording devices of any sort requires you to obtain the permission of those who are to be recorded.
- ▶ The simplest request might occur when audiotaping.
- ▶ Just before an interview starts, many researchers note that they say something like, “do you mind if I record this conversation?”
- ▶ If the participant has no objection and the researcher is adept at using the recording device, it is placed at an appropriate spot and turned on.
- ▶ The interview proceeds, and the intrusiveness of the device can be minimal.
- ▶ Making visual recordings, either with a videotape or a camera, presents a slightly different situation.
- ▶ Even if the recording does not focus on any particular participant or conversation—as in recording people at work or school children at play—some sort of permission is still required.
- ▶ A person in authority needs to approve, and in some situations the approval may have to be obtained in writing.



Potential complications-Obtaining Permission to Record

- ▶ A golden rule is to understand that, regardless of the situation, all researchers should make sure that they have secured permission from some relevant person to make any specific recording. Without gaining such permission, trouble is bound to arise later.
- ▶ The topic also should have been part of the human subjects approval procedure



Potential complications- Mastering Recording Devices before Using Them

- ▶ Nothing is more distracting than the interruption caused when a recording device malfunctions while in use. For instance, such malfunctions of an audio recorder can potentially offset the cherished rapport you might have established with a participant.
- ▶ The participant may even (silently) question whether you know what you are doing—
- ▶ possibly extending this doubt into your substantive questions (the logic is as follows: If you didn't prepare sufficiently to know how your own recording device functions or might malfunction, how much preparation went into the questions you are posing?).
- ▶ Everyone is aware of the typical embarrassments suffered when travellers report being at a historic scene or experiencing a precious moment—and a recording device malfunctioned, often for want of a charged battery.
- ▶ Beyond such malfunctions, sloppy handling of recording devices can call undesirable attention to use of the device, diverting attention away from the substance of a discussion or observation.



Potential complications- Mastering Recording Devices before Using Them

- ▶ The essential familiarity with a device also means knowing that it will work properly and produce the expected output.
- ▶ In too many instances researchers have thought they had successfully made audio- or videotapes, only to find later that the quality of the tapes was too poor, making the tapes unusable. Typically, an audiotape's recording may turn out to be too faint, or pertinent conversations are later found to have been drowned out by some unnoticed background noise.
- ▶ Similarly, videotapes and photos may later be discovered to be out of focus, to have insufficient lighting, or to suffer from some backlight that was ignored during the photo opportunity.
- ▶ A final point about using recording devices pertains to those devices that are not part of your study. Be sure that these other devices, such as a cell phone, are turned off when you are doing your fieldwork. At least one field researcher has reported how his beeper buzzed just at a critical point in a field interview, thereby changing the mood of the entire interview



Potential complications- Sharing the Recordings and Maintaining Their Security

- ▶ Once a recording device has been successfully used, the resulting tape or photo arises new questions. Displaying any of this material publicly again requires written permission from the persons or owners of the properties that were in the tape or photo.
- ▶ Participants also may ask to have their own copy of your material, and you will have to decide the conditions for granting or denying them your permission.
- ▶ Beyond deciding how the materials are to be shared is the question of how they will be stored and how their security will be maintained.
- ▶ Given the desired protection of human subjects, a major threat would result from any improper divulgence of the identities of the people or places in your fieldwork. As a result, you may have to have a plan for deleting such information before storing your records.
- ▶ This task is made more difficult by the information automatically stored as part of today's digital photos and records.



Potential complications-Being Prepared to Spend Time Reviewing and Editing the Recordings

- ▶ The successful recordings will help you to increase the precision of your fieldwork.
- ▶ They even may stimulate your own reminiscences of other happenings in the field that did not become part of the record, such as the facial expression or body language of an interviewee who had only been audiotaped.
- ▶ Taking full advantage of these recordings will require their dedicated and systematic review. Such review may take a lot of time because recordings produce massive amounts of information.
- ▶ Moreover, unless you are skilled at randomly accessing various portions of audio- or videotapes, you will need to conduct your review linearly, potentially making the process a tedious rather than stimulating one.
- ▶ Investing the needed time in this review process can have valuable payoffs. Make sure, however, that you intelligently anticipate the needed time before finally deciding whether to use any recording device in the first place.



When Electronic Recordings Are the Main Data Collection Technique

- ▶ Notwithstanding all of the preceding complications, some qualitative research depends heavily on the use of recording devices.
- ▶ Major examples are studies of classroom behaviour or work situations, where videotaping is the primary mode of data collection.
- ▶ The tapes capture both the actions and sounds of the classroom or work environments, enabling researchers to study instructional practices (in the classroom) or workers' actions and interactions (in the workplace).
- ▶ As another example, a qualitative study might deal with the interactions between physicians and patients.



Keeping a Personal Journal

- ▶ All the energy and attention devoted to note taking and other recordings may deplete your remaining capacity for any further writing.
- ▶ However, there is one other writing activity that parallels the data collection (and other) processes in a research study.
- ▶ The activity involves keeping a personal journal or diary, capturing your own feelings and reflections on your research work.
- ▶ The entries in such a journal do not need to be lengthy or even contain complete sentences. As with your field notes, the entries also can use your own personal abbreviations and acronyms—as long as you will later know what they mean.
- ▶ In qualitative research, such a journal can play more than a private role. Because you the researcher are likely to be the main research instrument, any introspections and insights into your own reactions or feelings about ongoing fieldwork (or the study as a whole) may later reveal unwanted biases.
- ▶ Keeping a journal also can surface your own methodological or personal tendencies over time. You may not have been aware of such tendencies, but acknowledging them may lead to useful thoughts about how to approach your later analysis.



Practices Pertinent to Data Collection in Qualitative Research

1. Being a good “listener.”

- ▶ the term listening refers to its figurative, not literal, meaning, and therefore to a desired way of attending to your surroundings. Thus, when observing, an equivalent trait would be your ability to be observant.
- ▶ Being a good listener ranges from letting others do more of the talking to being able to “listen between the lines” during a conversation.
- ▶ You also might have to “read between the lines” When interpreting a document or written message.
- ▶ When collecting qualitative data, you would not be exhibiting a desirable trait if you had what people call a “deaf ear” or were totally unaware of the possibility of sub-textual meanings.



Practices Pertinent to Data Collection in Qualitative Research

2. Being inquisitive

- ▶ Being a good “listener” but also being inquisitive at the same time may at first appear to be conflicting postures.
- ▶ The apparent conflict only arises if you associate being “inquisitive” with taking over a conversation and leading it—thereby diminishing the opportunity to “listen.”
- ▶ Instead, think of “being inquisitive” as a state of your mind. As you listen or observe, you also should be thinking about the meaning of what you hear or see, and this should lead to additional questions.
- ▶ You do not need to verbalize those questions at that very moment but can keep a mental note to make some later inquiry, even outside of the immediate interview or observational situation.



Practices Pertinent to Data Collection in Qualitative Research

3. Being sensitive in managing others' time—and yours, too.
 - ▶ If you are interviewing others, you are spending others' time and not just yours.
 - ▶ Participants have their own priorities and needs, and they do not have an endless amount of time to devote to your research inquiries.
 - ▶ Find ways of learning about others' time restrictions or preferences.
 - ▶ Respecting these time restrictions or preferences will further reinforce a healthy relationship between you and the participants who are part of your study.
 - ▶ Similarly, be sensitive to your own time restrictions or preferences.
 - ▶ Respecting them will make you happier with yourself—not a low-priority outcome either.



Practices Pertinent to Data Collection in Qualitative Research

4. Distinguishing between firsthand, secondhand, and thirdhand evidence.

- ▶ What you hear with your own ears or see with your own eyes are examples of firsthand evidence..
- ▶ The potential filtering by others begins with secondhand evidence.
- ▶ A historian's writing about events would be secondary evidence about those events.
- ▶ Similarly, what a participant tells you about something that has happened also is "secondhand" evidence about what happened (although the fact that you heard directly from a participant is still the firsthand evidence of what the participant said).
- ▶ "Thirdhand" evidence is the most remote and occurs when there are two filters: Someone tells you (first filter) what she or he has heard another person say (second filter) about some event (the actual behaviour you are wanting to learn about).
- ▶ If you cite a news article that is quoting another person speaking about an event, you are using thirdhand evidence (the journalist's writing being the first filter and the quoted person being the second filter).
- ▶ Distinguishing among these three types of evidence does not mean you should ignore secondhand or thirdhand evidence. You are not likely to be able to complete a qualitative study by collecting only first-hand evidence.
- ▶ The main point is that you should not rely solely on second- and thirdhand evidence without trying to obtain corroborating information from some other source—which leads to the next practice- triangulation.



Practices Pertinent to Data Collection in Qualitative Research

5. Triangulating evidence from multiple sources

- an important way of strengthening the validity of a study.
- to determine whether data from two or more sources converge or lead to the same finding.
- One example of convergence occurs when you observe an event or hear a person say something in a conversation, and your field colleague who is present also observes or hears the same thing, and you both draw the same conclusion after checking with each other. (The typical conversation between you, after leaving the event or conversation with the other person, begins with one of you saying “Did you see what I saw?” or “Did you hear what I heard?”)
- The more that you can show such convergence, especially on key findings, the stronger your evidence.
- education research often focuses on the instructional practices that occur in a classroom. Separate evidence might result from your own observation inside the classroom (firsthand), your interviewing the teacher but not seeing the practice yourself (secondhand), or your interviewing the principal about what she or he thought was going on in a classroom without having been in it, either (thirdhand).
- You would feel better about your evidence if all three sources dealt with the same classroom events and agreed.
- You would be on thin ice if you relied solely on what the principal said, to define your rendition of the instructional practice that had taken place.



THANK YOU

