

How to record an interview

Pick a quiet, "dead" spot to record. You don't need to use a professional recording studio or another space that's designed to capture sounds perfectly. However, there are a few things to consider:

- Pick a spot with as little background noise as possible. Keep in mind that planes, cars, lawnmowers, and other distant sounds can be picked up by audio recording devices even if they don't sound loud to the human ear.
- Only record indoors. Outdoor areas seldom lack background noises.
- Pick a spot that's "dead". This means a room without an echo. Rooms with lots of hard, flat surfaces tend to have the worst echoes. By contrast, rooms with rugs, carpets, soft furniture, and blankets tend to lack echoes.

Perform a "dry run" before you begin. You don't want to find out that your mic is broken after you finish an interview. To ensure your equipment is working perfectly, record a brief practice clip before you start the interview proper. 30 seconds or so should be plenty of time. Below is a brief checklist you may want to consult:

- Make sure you can start and stop the recorder easily.
- Make sure your mic is picking up your interviewee's voice. If you will be talking, make sure it can pick up yours as well.
- Make sure that both your voice and your interviewee's are being picked up at a reasonable volume. Move the mic(s) closer or farther away from each person or adjust their recording levels as needed.
- Make sure you can save and listen to the test file you create.

Practice good interview etiquette. Now that you're all ready to record, learn a few easy tricks for ensuring that you get the best possible content for your recording:

- Make sure your interviewee understands that s/he is being recorded and consents to the process.
- Make sure you and your interviewee are both comfortable (especially if the interview will be a long one). Have some water handy in case either of you gets thirsty.
- Let your interviewee talk. Try to let your subject express his or her thoughts fully. Silent cues like nods can be good for getting the interviewee to elaborate without losing the thread of the conversation. If you're running short on time, wait for your interviewee to finish a sentence or idea before interrupting.
- Tend towards open-ended questions. Asking something like "How did you feel when this happened to you?" as opposed to "What happened next?" will usually lead to a longer, deeper conversation.

Try use peripheral mics to pick up audio, if possible. These mics offer better sound quality than the built-in mics in cameras and smartphones. Find a mic that clips onto the interviewee's shirt (called a lavalier or "lav" mic) for a hands-free solution.

Don't record your research interviews in a noisy location. This is one tip that's sure to

improve the sound quality of your recorded research interviews. You'll get a better audio recording if you choose a quiet location to conduct your interview(s).

Try and reduce the noise in your location. For instance, if you are recording in a café, choose a table that's far away from the barrister, not directly below a speaker blaring the latest top 40 hit (or Alanis Morissette's "Ironic"). You can also choose to record the interview when the café is less busy.

Try to think of ways of reducing environmental noise at your interview location. No amount of preparation, equipment, post editing, [or tips](#) will make the noise magically disappear. So, try to **be creative in looking for ways to reduce background noise**

- 1) Know your equipment. Your first interview shouldn't be the first time you switch on your recorder or attach a clip on mic. Find a willing "guinea pig" and do a test interview recording.
- 2) Visit the location. This is a must do. Visit the restaurant/café and get to know the waiters/management – they might be willing to lower the background music, switch off the fan that's next to your table, and divert boisterous teens to a table further away from your interview. Regardless of the location, knowing what to expect will allow you to record better audio.

Those are the top 2 tips on recording interviews in noisy locations,

Keep in mind that the reason for conducting the interview is to **gather information from the respondent.**

Place the microphone closer to the interviewee. Their answers are more important than your questions. You already have some form of an interview guide, with your questions written down, that you can use as reference if your questions are not captured in the recording. So don't worry too much about capturing your questions, but be very concerned about accurately capturing the interviewees responses.

Let your interviewee talk. A lot of researchers tend to cloud out their respondents with questions and interruptions.

Let them talk. Don't jump in with questions.

Silence is golden: use the silent probe. Often, truths follow silence. Use non verbal probes: nod, smile, tilt your head, raise your eyebrows, et. al. All these are great ways to enlist more information without interrupting the conversation. When you need to ask a question, wait until the interviewee has finished talking, count to five and then ask the question.