

IRENE BOSTON TRANSCRIPTION SERVICES

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MARKET RESEARCH INTERVIEWS / VOX POPS FACILITATION GUIDELINES & RECORDING TIPS

We have a wealth of experience in what works and what doesn't work when conducting and recording market research interviews and vox pops recordings. These guidelines are divided into **facilitation advice** and more **technical recording tips**, as well as addressing any specific **market research transcription issues**. We hope that this will help our clients to make recordings of the highest quality which will, in turn, cut down on transcription times and costs.

Please see our [market research and vox pop transcription services](#) page for details of the services we offer and our [Equipment](#) pages for further advice.

FACILITATION GUIDELINES - PLEASE DO...

Obtain necessary permissions from your interviewee(s) beforehand. This may be obvious if you're approaching people on the street but may still be a factor with pre-arranged indoor interviews. Ensure that they're aware they'll be recorded and that the recording will be transcribed. If it's important to capture on the recording that the interview is non-attributable and that the interviewee gives their verbal permission, do so at the beginning. This will protect you from any conflicts in the future and show clearly that you have addressed these issues.

Brief the transcriber on exactly what you need to be transcribed - see our [Definitions](#) page for clarification on the **type of transcript**. Do you need any housekeeping issues or background about your research included? After the interview, provide the transcriber with a **list of questions** if the interviews follow a semi-structured format. This will cut down on transcription time or reduce any issues over unclear sections of the recording. Decide if you want your questions to be typed in shortened format and only the interviewee's responses in full.

Think about the **location**. Recording in a quiet, indoor environment is ideal to ensure the best quality of sound recording. However, we realise that a lot of vox pop recordings are, of necessity, made outdoors. If possible, choose a fairly **quiet location** as background noise such as traffic, roadworks or other people's voices etc can seriously impact on your recording.

If indoors, **consider the acoustics** of the room itself. A large room with a high ceiling ('church' like conditions!) produces significant echo which will result in a 'booming' on the recording which could make the interview difficult to hear, especially if the interviewee has a quiet voice. We have a separate guidelines section on teleconferences which covers [telephone interview](#) situations.

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FACILITATION GUIDELINES - PLEASE DO... cont/d.

Brief the interviewee beforehand. If it proves impossible to select the interview location yourself, it would be advisable to try and gently steer people towards choosing a **quiet room** with the **minimum background noise**. Or, if it's being held in their house, just spend a few minutes before the interview asking for things such as the television or radio to be switched off, or noisy children and animals to be 'removed'. We realise this is a delicate situation and you don't want to be seen to 'take over' their home but if you want to stand a chance of capturing what they're saying, you may have to be diplomatic but firm!

It may sound obvious but make sure that the **recorder is running** before you start! I've heard horror stories from clients who've spent time conducting an interview only to find the recorder wasn't switched on.

Turn off all mobile phones. Text messages or voice mails emit a radio frequency which is inaudible to the human ear but your recording equipment will pick it up, and the resulting buzzing noise will drown out whatever is being said at the time. Turning mobile phones to 'silent' or 'vibrate' mode is not enough - they need to be turned off. We realise that on a busy street, it's not possible to get everyone to turn their phone off, but turning your phone and the interviewee's off will help.

Ensure that the interviewee can be heard. A speaker with a quiet voice or who mumbles will not be picked up by the recorder, however sophisticated it might be. If you can't hear what they're saying, then the chances are we can't either on the finished recording. **Ask interviewees to speak up or repeat anything you don't hear clearly.** Invariably, people don't realise they're speaking softly - we rarely 'hear' our own voices. If they regard taking part as important enough to set aside time, the chances are they'll want their contribution heard. Most are happy to speak up if asked to do so.

Be firm with the interviewee during the interview itself. Although it may be difficult to interrupt for fear of putting them off, if they begin to go off at a tangent, you may have to.

Assist with clarification. If materials are being shown as part of the interview, **identify them on the recording.** If you just say, 'which one do you like best?' that doesn't make great radio! You may remember what 'that' is at the time but will you later on when it comes to analysing the transcript? And if they just nod or shake their heads, either ask them to say yes or no, or confirm verbally what they've done.

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FACILITATION GUIDELINES - PLEASE DO NOT...

Record in a noisy environment such as restaurants, open spaces, airports, pubs, trains, cafes if it can be avoided. We realise that a lot of vox pop interviews are inevitably carried out on the street, but please be aware that background noise is often more intrusive on recordings than we realise at the time. **Voices can easily be swamped by extraneous noise**, especially when interviewees are softly spoken. We recognise that with some vox pop interviews, a certain amount of background noise may be deliberately included to indicate that your interview has been recorded on location - just try to strike a balance between too much 'background colour' and audibility of the interview!

Leave windows open - if you're recording indoors, please try and keep windows shut, however hot the day may be. Noise from traffic, roadworks and aeroplanes will all impact on your recording. Unless using a noise cancelling microphone, most mics are not as selective as the human ear and can't filter out extraneous noise in the same way we can. They record everything they hear and the loudest noise will dominate.

Sit or stand near noisy machinery both indoors and outside, such as air conditioning, photocopiers, car engines - even radios in the background can dominate a recording and make it impossible to hear.

Have crockery near the microphone. If you're recording indoors or outside in a cafe, it's tempting to have refreshments to relax the interviewee and to have this on the table where the recorder also sits. If you do, the clattering of the crockery will be the loudest sound on the recording.

Speak over your interviewee. In a more conversational type interview, it can be tempting to interject comments during the interview. In normal conversation, we tend to say 'yeah' or 'right' or 'okay' on a regular basis, if only to indicate to the other person that we're actually listening to them. It may be hard but try and break yourself of this habit because **your interjections may drown out what the interviewee is saying**. What's more important - that you capture what they're saying or your ramblings?!

Shuffle papers near the microphone. As this may be the source of the nearest noise, that is what the microphone will hear and it will drown out whatever is being said by either you or the interviewee. If you need to refer to a list of questions, it may be worthwhile either having them on one side of A4, if possible, or on cards for ease of reference.

Write near the microphone if you can avoid it. We have often heard recordings where the scribbling of a pen is the loudest sound we hear throughout the recording! Keep the microphone near your interviewee not near you.

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RECORDING TIPS - PLEASE DO...

Use recording equipment that is fit for purpose - we would urge all clients to **use digital recordings**. They produce an excellent sound quality which will cut down on transcription time, minimise the number of inaudibles and reduce costs. Please read our [comparison](#) between digital and analogue recordings.

Choose an uncompressed digital setting - most digital recorders offer recording settings ranging from SHQ (stereo high quality) down to LP (long play). SHQ produces the largest file size but the best quality. HQ is a good compromise but LP produces the poorest quality. Don't compromise on quality just to save memory space.

Use the **highest uncompressed quality level your recorder offers** - issues over file size and length of time to transmit the digital files are trivial compared to the production of a good quality recording. You can probably get away with a lower quality for dictation, but will need the highest quality for multiple participant interviews, conferences or focus groups or meetings.

Decide on a suitable digital audio level and file type - 8,000kHz should be suitable for dictation. 44,100kHz is the highest end of the range and produces exceptional recordings but there is a trade off in larger file sizes. Ensure you choose a digital file type which is compatible with transcription software. We discuss the pros and cons of the more common file types such as wav, dss, mp3 and wma [here](#).

Test your equipment before any interview - record something before you set off for the interview to check there are no technical problems with your equipment. If you can't plug your recorder into the mains and are reliant on batteries, ensure you have a spare set with you, or your charger for rechargeables, and sufficient memory cards for digital recorders.

Test the sound levels - use headphones to check the recording levels at the beginning of the interview. What you hear through the headphones is a fair indication of what the transcriber will hear. If it's too faint, move the microphone nearer the interviewee - this is especially relevant if the interviewee has a quiet voice. Once you can hear their voice clearly, we probably can too. Most digital recorders will set the recording level automatically, although on some, you can change this setting. This can be useful if you have a speaker with a quiet voice or dominant background noise.

Use an external microphone - most built-in microphones are of poor quality with limited control over volume levels. Using a good quality, external microphone will greatly enhance the quality of the recording leading to a subsequent reduction in transcription time. This is essential if you're recording outdoors - in-built microphones are useless in such circumstances. **Handheld directional microphones** pick up voices very clearly and are ideal for an 'on the road' situation. Hold the microphone firmly and close enough to your subject so they can be heard. In noisy situations, this may need to be very close to the mouth.

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RECORDING TIPS - PLEASE DO... cont/d.

Another option may be to use a **noise cancelling microphone** which will cut down on background ambient noise to record the interview, while a colleague records the ambient background noise on another recording. The recording minus ambient noise can then be sent to the transcriber and you can mix the two sound recordings later for your broadcast. If you choose instead to try and edit out the background noise on editing software, you should be aware that ambient noise tends to be in the same 'range' as the human voice - so you may end up editing out both! We discuss the differences between external and internal microphones in more detail on our [Equipment](#) pages.

Place the microphone near the speaker or speakers. This is not usually an issue with a handheld directional mic, but if you're recording indoors in a more 'conventional' interview setting, ensure the interviewee is close enough to the microphone to be picked up clearly, especially if they have a quiet voice.

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RECORDING TIPS - PLEASE DO NOT...

Use the time-stamp bleep. Some recorders come with an option to insert a bleep at intervals. Please turn this off! Each time the recorder inserts a bleep, it drowns out any voices and will result in an incomplete transcript. Our transcribers are experienced in inserting time stamps where required without electronic help.

Use mini tapes or micro-cassettes for anything other than dictation. These are designed for one voice using a dictaphone held very close to the mouth, as they only have an internal microphone. If that same equipment is used on a table between speakers or outdoors, the recording will be very poor and with background noise, virtually inaudible.

Use a slow recording speed - some analogue recorders can be used at slower speeds. This extends recording time and saves on the number of tapes used. However, there is a consequential loss in recording quality and an increase in the amount of background hiss. We would recommend using only the **fastest speed setting** on your recording equipment. Tapes are comparatively cheap, so why save on tape costs when any savings will be swallowed up by the extra transcribing time and costs?

Use voice activation. If you use recorders with a voice activation feature and the speaker is too far away from the microphone or speaks softly, this may not be picked up by the equipment. We've found that some recorders are not very sensitive and will sometimes switch off in mid-sentence if the sound level goes below the minimum pick up threshold, especially with softly spoken speakers. There is also a slight time delay between someone speaking and the recorder starting up again, so beginnings of sentences are often chopped off.

Send copies of audio tapes - original audio tapes will always be clearer than copies, regardless of the quality of the copying equipment. To ensure greater accuracy, please ensure that **only** original tapes are sent. Transcribing from a copy tape will increase transcription time and costs. Digital files do not degrade when copied - all analogue media does.

These guidelines relate to **market research interviews or vox pops interviews**. Please use the above links for guidelines designed for any other recording situation.

If you have any questions relating to market research interview transcription and recording not covered on this page, please contact us on 01485 543746 or Boston@ibss.fsnet.co.uk and we would be happy to help.