

# Transcribing Interview Data

By Marilyn K. Simon and Jim Goes

Includes excerpts from Simon & Goes (2013), *Dissertation and Scholarly Research: Recipes for Success*. Seattle, WA: Dissertation Success LLC

Find this and many other dissertation guides and resources at  
[www.dissertationrecipes.com](http://www.dissertationrecipes.com)

In most qualitative studies, data are obtained through personal interviews. There are many advantages of using an interview instead of a questionnaire or survey to collect data: These include:

1. The response rate is generally high.
2. It is an especially useful technique when dealing with children or an illiterate population.
3. It eliminates the misinterpretation of a question.
4. The participant is more likely to clarify any misunderstandings.
5. The interviewer can probe participant responses for further detail.
6. It can encourage a relaxed conversation during which questions can be asked in any order depending on the response of the interviewee.
7. It provides an opportunity to find out what people really think and believe about a certain topic through questioning.
8. It is more flexible and allows the interviewer to follow leads during the interview.
9. The interviewer can interpret body language and other nonverbal cues as an additional source of information (Simon & Goes, 2013).

Some disadvantages of the interview method are as follows:

1. Time and economy: Questionnaires and surveys can usually be sent through the postal mail or e-mail; thus, for the price of postage and printing the questionnaire or survey, or the time to compose an electronic document, you can reach practically anyone under

consideration. Furthermore, the expense and time involved in training interviewers and sending them to interview the respondents needs to be considered.

2. Reliability of information can be questioned because of interviewer bias.
3. Difficulties can arise in quantifying or statistically analyzing data obtained from interviews. [However, qualitative software programs like NVivo, Qualrus, and AtlasTi have made this process easier].

Interviews are social interactions, an extended conversation between the person who has lived an experience and the researcher wanting to know the rich details of that experience.

Typically, interviews conducted for research purposes are taped or video recorded. Prior to the interview, all electronic devices should be tested to ensure they are in proper working order.

To analyze data collected from an interview usually involves some type of transcription process.

Transcribing data can be a tedious process requiring several hours for each taped interview. A general rule is that the text of a 30-40 minute interview takes about 1-2 hours to type and results in about 15-20 pages of text. There are transcription services that can assist you with the task. However, some researchers prefer to do the transcribing themselves. Reviewing the tapes for transcription allows for recall of visual observations that took place during the interview and can help add meaning to the content.

When transcribing the interviewees' statements verbatim, it is acceptable to leave out fillers in speech patterns, such as *um*, *ah*, *like*, *you know*, and so forth, unless it greatly changes the context of what was stated (Adams, 2011; Jongbloed, 2011.; Thibodeaux, 2011). When a transcription is not for a legal proceeding, the editing of the transcription could be a bit lenient, and areas of omission or false starts can be excluded from the transcript (Thibodeaux, 2011). It is also acceptable to make discretionary grammatical changes. Usually a transcription is in block formatting and doubled spaced, especially when there is more than one speaker; and all observable actions of the speaker should be noted and placed in brackets.

It is customary, and a matter of courtesy, to send a transcript of the interview, to the interviewee allowing him or her to make corrections if needed. This type of “member checking”, also called informant feedback or respondent validation, helps improve the accuracy, validity, credibility, and transferability of a study.

An investment in voice dictation software like Dragon Naturally Speaking™ (<http://www.nuance.com/naturallyspeaking/>) can save you the time and the expense of transcribing your interviews. Phone interviews using tools like Skype and HotRecorder also facilitate easier transcription. It is encouraging to note that voice-activated word processing programs are getting better each day. Just ask Siri 😊

### References

Adams, C. (2011). How to transcribe data. Retrieved from [http://www.ehow.com/how\\_6530464\\_transcribe-data.html](http://www.ehow.com/how_6530464_transcribe-data.html)

Simon, M. K., & Goes, J. (2013). *Dissertation and scholarly research: Recipes for success* (2013 ed.). Seattle, WA: Dissertation Success. Retrieved from <http://dissertationrecipes.com/>

Thibodeaux, W. (2011). Guidelines for transcribing interviews. Retrieved from [http://www.ehow.com/info\\_8358119\\_guidelines-transcribing-interviews.html](http://www.ehow.com/info_8358119_guidelines-transcribing-interviews.html)