

Conducting Fieldwork: Some Tips of the Trade

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January 2020

1 Planning interviews

- **Keep an open mind about whom you should interview.** Your ‘target’ population may not be the only population who can provide useful information. For example, I thought I really needed to focus on interviewing my target population (activists) but I received a lot of helpful information from local scholars.
- **Scheduling interviews takes a lot of time; plan accordingly.** It may be hard to start scheduling interviews until you get to your field site. Also be mindful of national or local holidays or events that may interfere with scheduling or completing interviews.
- **Be flexible.** Interviews may get cancelled or rescheduled at the last minute. Tip contributed by Anne-Kathrin Kreft.
- **Interviews are exhausting (but rewarding).** This goes double if you are an introvert. This goes double if you are an introvert. Some last for hours, some are emotionally draining, and some may be in another language. Furthermore, as you are listening and/or taking notes, you are constantly thinking about how this fits into the rest of your research. For this reason, I recommend planning no more than 2-3 per day (though my personal limit is 2).
- **When planning your accommodations, try to pick something in a central location.** Being relatively close to your interviews eases the scheduling concerns mentioned above; being further away exacerbates them.

2 In the field

- **As you go through your fieldwork, keep a document for yourself about your research ideas.** Mine really changed the way I planned my dissertation (and strengthened it), but it is important to keep track of your thoughts as you get new information.
- **Transcribe interviews as soon as you can, whatever your interviewing method.** I recommend doing it later that day or the next day (and factoring time for transcribing in when scheduling interviews). This is so you do not forget details of your interviews and in the case of hand-written notes, do not forget what they mean (this has happened to me!). The length of time transcript takes varies widely and depends on the length of the interview/the number of notes you take; typically, it lasts me anywhere from an hour to 3 hours to transcribe my hand-written notes.
- **There may be other data sources in the field that are useful, such as archives and local libraries; do not overlook them!** They may have help resources not available over the internet or in your home country. You may be able to connect with an academic at a university who can help you get access to a university library.

- **Record other observations you may have of your field site.** Sometimes simply “soaking and poking” can yield important insights.