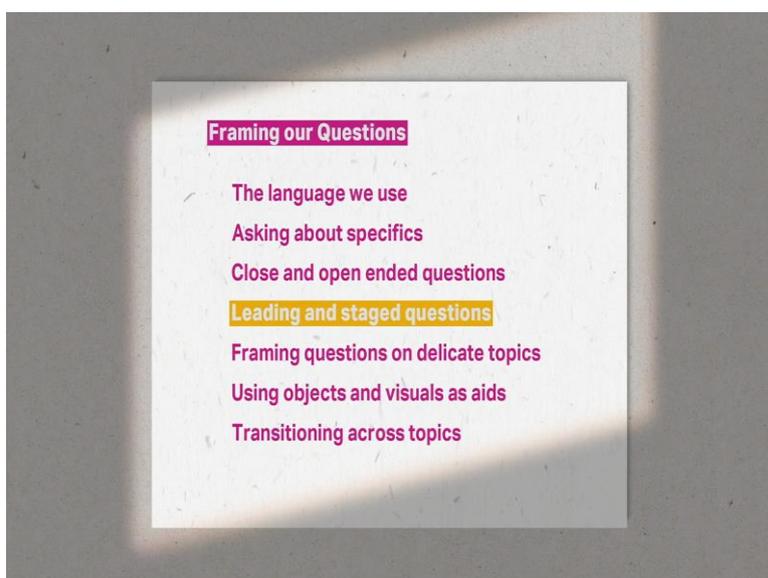


**Understanding Ethnography**  
**Module 6 Section 8**  
**Lecture No. 48**  
**Designing the core discussion 2**

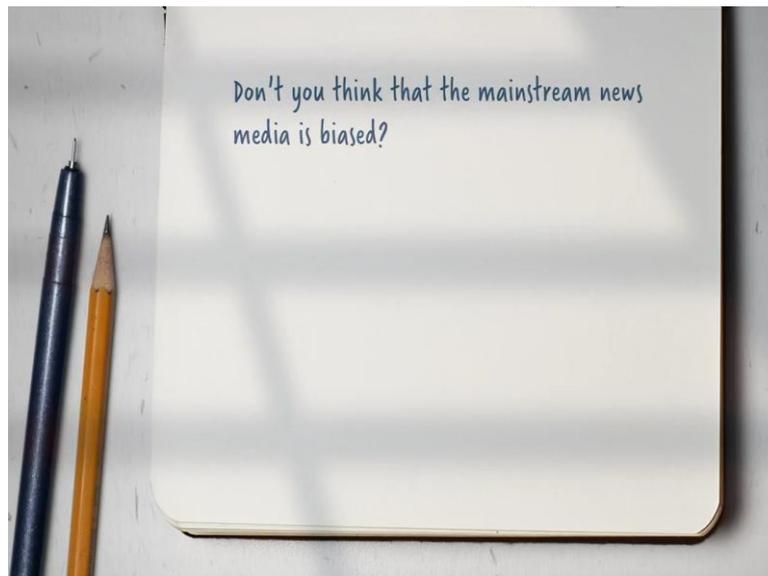
Let us continue our conversation on framing interview questions. We have spoken about how we may start a discussion and deepen it. And we have seen that the way a question is articulated plays a big role in how our interviews shape up. So, now let us look at some of the things we should avoid as we frame our interview questions.

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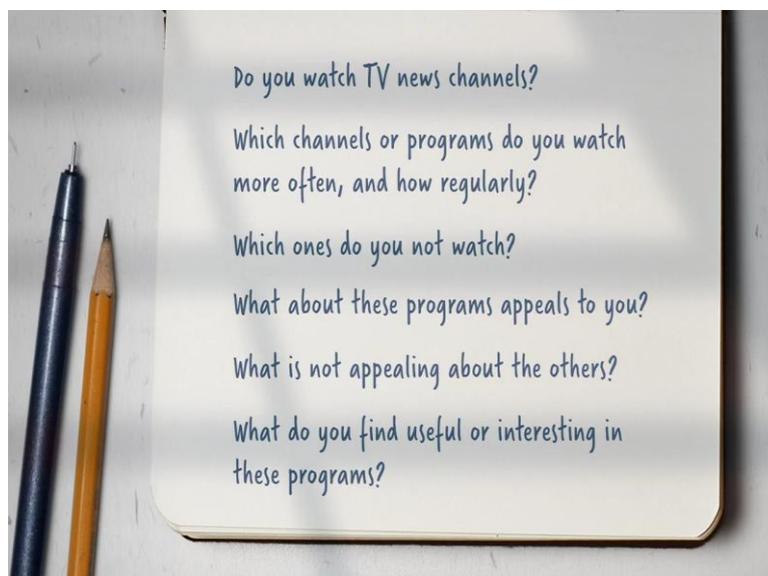
We must avoid leading questions. These are the kind of questions that suggest an answer to the participant.

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A question like, "Don't you think that the mainstream news media is biased?" it already suggest what we want to hear. Chances are the participant will agree with us and simply say "yes, instead of expressing a more nuanced or a counter opinion.

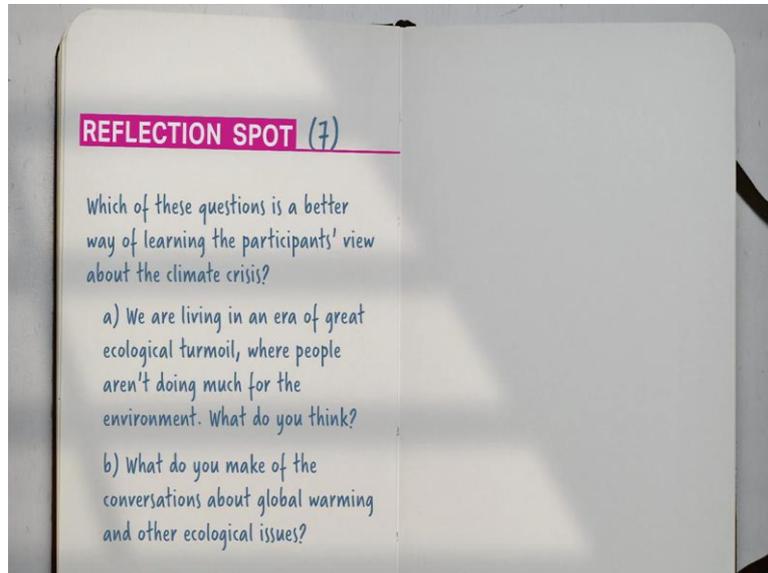
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Instead, we could ask, do you watch TV news channels?" "Which channels or programs do you watch more often, how regularly, which ones do you not? From this initial outline, we can move towards understanding why they watch the programs that they do with a question like, what about these programs appeals to you? What is not appealing about the others? Or what you find useful or interesting about these programs?"

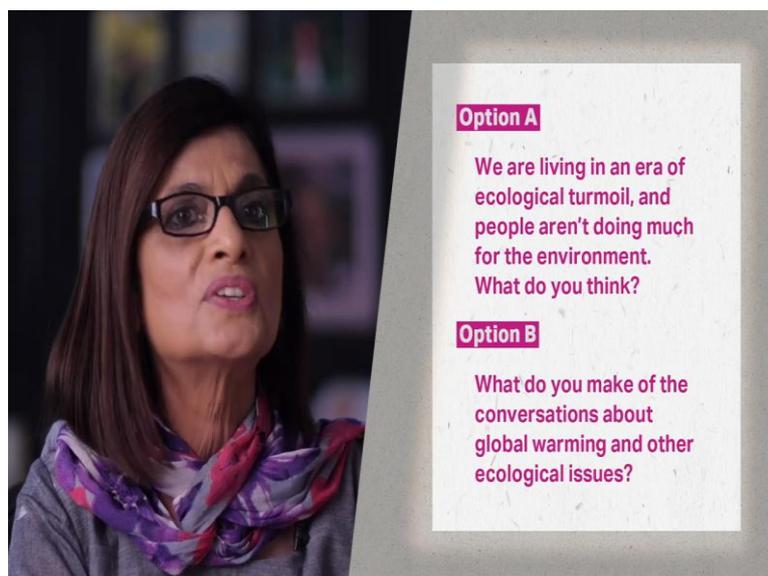
And as they describe the programs they watch and their reasons for watching them, we learn what they value as news. Let us pause for a moment.

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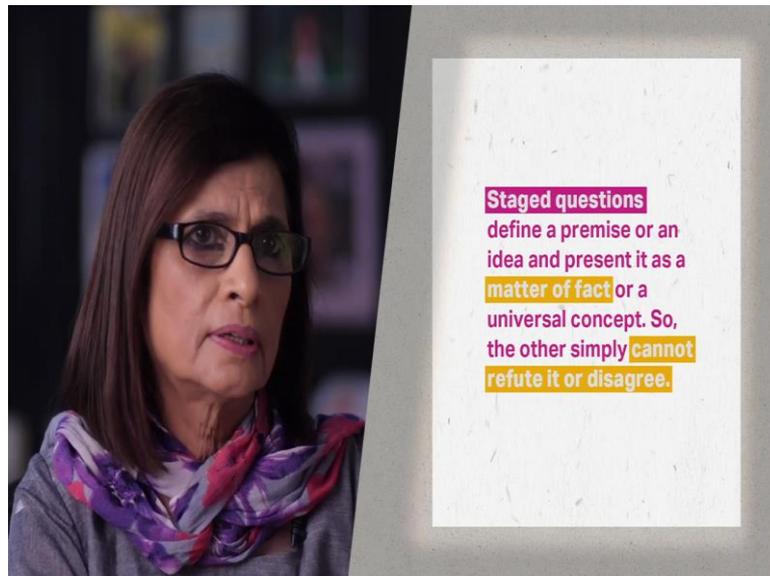
On the screen, you can see some options. Each of them is a question referring to the climate crisis. Option a; we are living in an era of great ecological turmoil, where people are not doing much for the environment. What do you think? Option b, what you make of the conversations about global warming and other ecological issues? Which of these do you think is a better way of speaking to our participants about this subject? Choose among the two options and note down the reasons for your choice.

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Did any of you select option a? I am afraid that is the incorrect answer.

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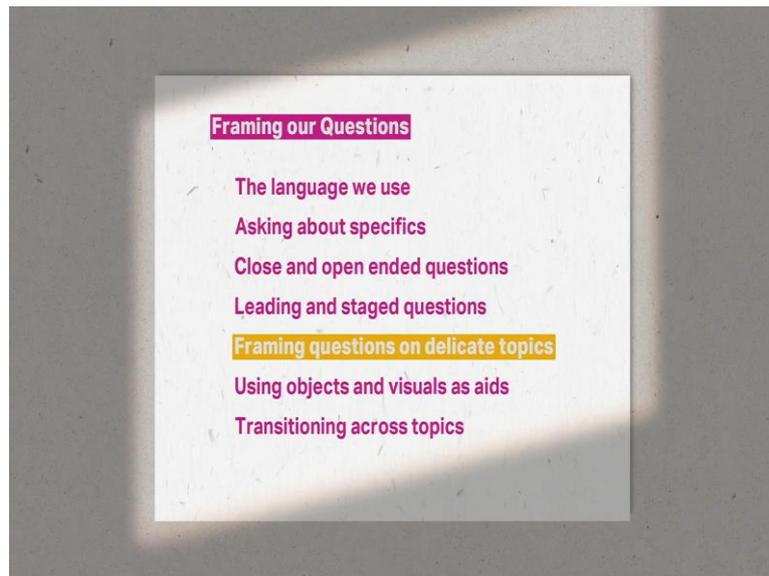


Questions like these are called staged questions. They set the stage for an expected answer. They establish an idea and ask if the participant agrees with it. Read the question carefully. The researcher has already defined that there is a great ecological turmoil and that people are not doing enough about it.

These are two very broad assumptions. And the way that the question is framed, the researcher has established these assumptions as facts. It is highly unlikely that the participant's response will be anything other than 'I agree with you'. After all, it is hard to disagree with such a broad truism. A more useful approach may be to first understand the participant's particular concerns about the environment by using a question like the one shown as option b.

What do you make of the conversations about the global warming and ecological issues? Through such a question, we can learn about our participant's views on a topic and avoid putting words in their mouth.

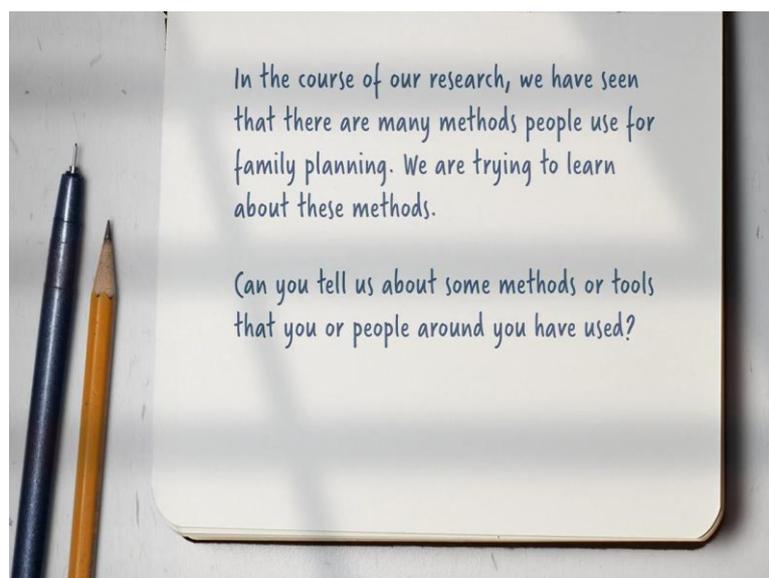
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The framing of questions becomes particularly important when we discuss intimate subjects or subjects that often evoke judgment or very sharp differences of opinion. So, we could approach these discussions by exploring the participant's individual experiences, or we could frame our question in such a manner that makes it clear why we are talking about this subject.

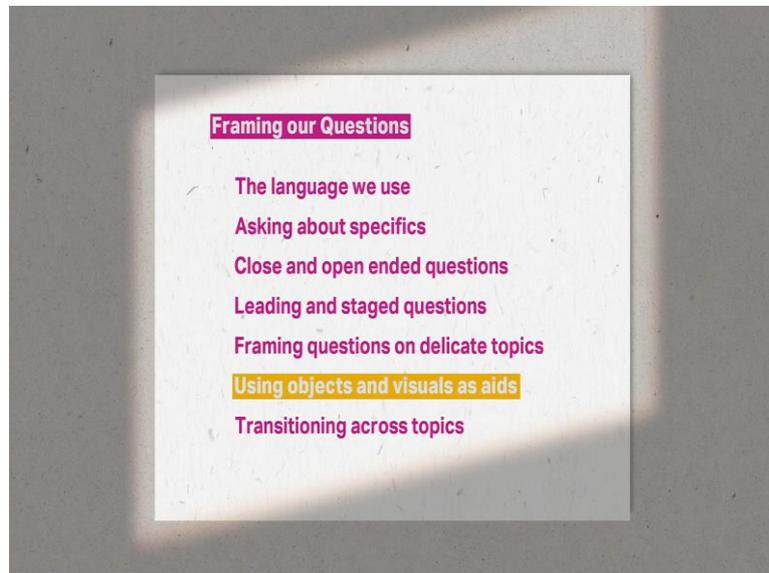
By explaining our reasons, we assure them that we are not being judgemental or patronising. So, if our question was around practices of family planning and birth control, we may approach the subject somewhat like this.

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In the course of our research, we have found that people use many methods for family planning. We are trying to learn about these methods. Can you tell us about some methods or tools that are used around here?

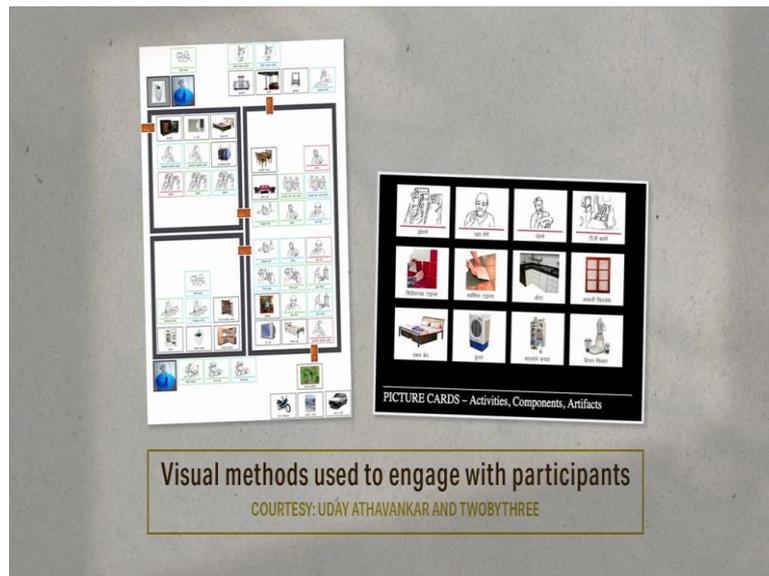
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Using objects or exercises as conversation starters can prove extremely helpful when our participant is not comfortable speaking about a topic. Objects and activities are also very helpful when the participant is unable to articulate their thoughts in words. For example, young children or when we speak to people whose language we do not know, in such cases, we can use games and other objects as base of interviewing.

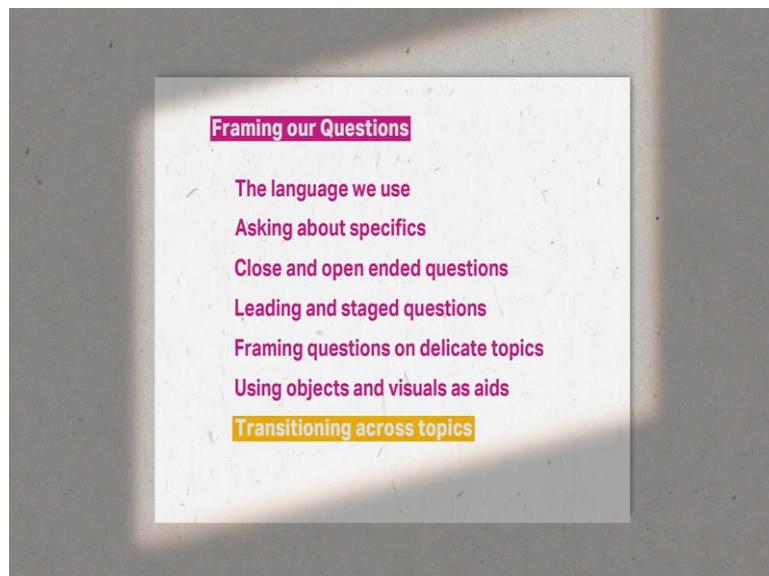
Some of this can be built into the interview guide, and some of it evolves as we speak with our participants. For instance, a team working with the IDC School of Design in IIT, Bombay wanted to learn about the housing aspirations and requirements of their participants in Gujarat and Nasik. The participants and the researcher spoke different languages.

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And so the research team developed a set of games and visual material through which they could learn from their participants. We will discuss a lot more about this practice of using objects in our later discussions.

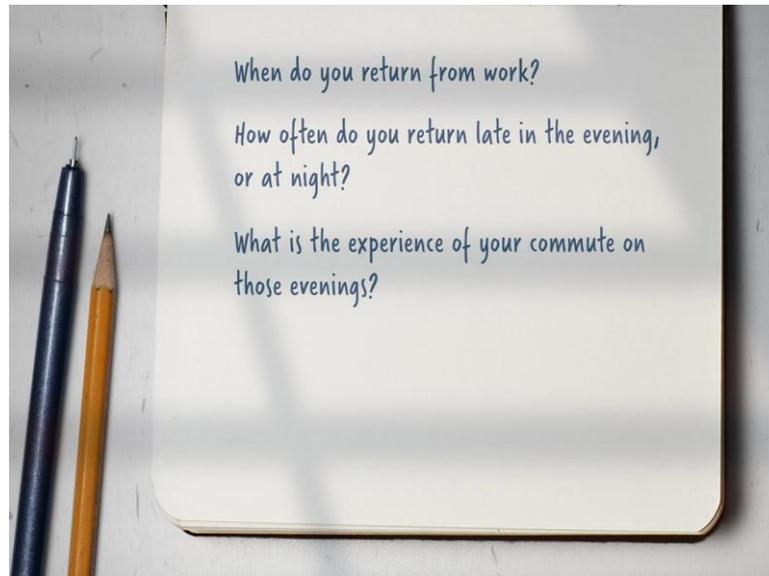
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As we move from one topic to the next, we need to maintain some logical link or flow. This makes for a smooth transition. As we arrange the topics in our interview guide, we need to think about how one topic may influence the next or lead to it. The order in which the questions are asked often determine how a question is understood. Let us take an example. Suppose we want to discuss the recent incidents of crime against women as reported in

newspapers with a woman participant. We may transition from this general discussion to something more particular.

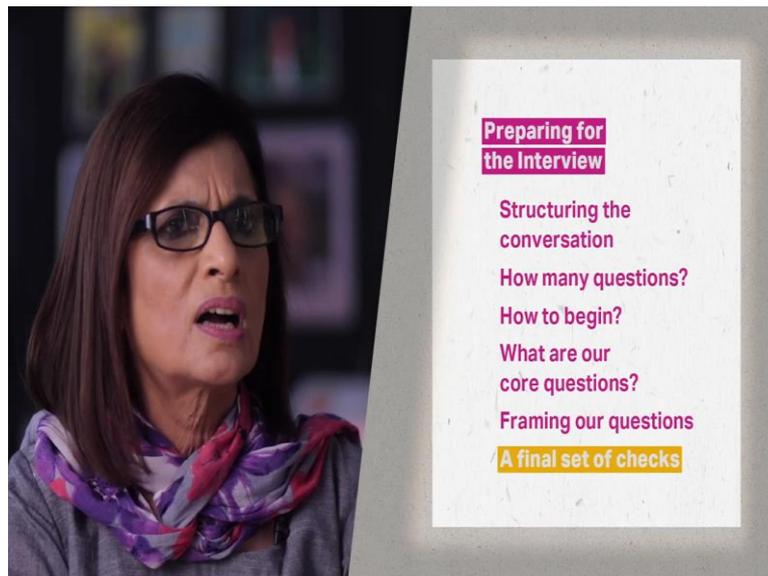
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Like when do you return from work? If she says, "sometimes quite late". Then we may ask "How often?" And then follow up with what is the experience of your commute on those evenings?" Since we were just discussing violence against women, it is quite likely that her response would be about feeling unsafe when returning late from work.

This is certainly an important part of her experience. But the structure of the conversation is such that the lack of safety becomes the most important aspect. She is likely to focus on that aspect. The points discussed here are those we pay attention to when preparing for our interview guide. As we go about interviewing, our guide evolves. New topics and questions are added, others lose priority, and we find new ways of asking the old questions. All these make the guide fluid and flexible.

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Having prepared a guide, we need to make a couple of final checks before we go for the interview.

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One of these is a pilot meeting or a preliminary meeting with the participant we want to interview. The meeting can be an opportunity to address any doubts, concerns or tentativeness that they may have. It also gives us the opportunity to learn a bit about the participant and the physical and social environment and where we are going to interview them. Besides, it can have some very practical outcomes for the interview.

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We may spot possible hindrances or interruptions of various kinds which could affect the interview. Sounds from neighbouring apartments and offices, TV or radio playing too loudly in the background, interruptions by other task or people and so on. The preliminary visit acts as a recce where potential problems can be identified for which we may seek alternatives or solutions.

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The other set of checks have to do with our equipment. Prints or electronic copies of the guide, audio and video recording equipment, notebooks, pens, etcetera. These are the standard material. It is best to have all of these ready at least a day before and to check if the

equipment is working fine, has enough memory, space and is able to clearly record in the kind of environment we are going to.

And for each of these, we must keep extras or back-ups. Always. And now our bags are packed. Our material is prepared. And we are ready to go meet our participants and engage them in an ethnographic interview.