

Soft Skills
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Lecture – 34
Strategies for Report Writing Part II

Welcome back friends, in the previous lecture, we talked about the various strategies of report writing. And there we also discussed two methods of data collection, because data collection is an important ingredient in the writing of reports. As you remember while talking about data collection, we discussed two methods of data collection - one was through observation, and the other was through telephonic interviews.

But then as you might have witnessed, these two methods have certain limitations, and they cannot stand through two data collection because of certain difficulties. But then as a writer of reports, since you understand the importance of data you also would like to know other methods of data collection which can be more authentic. Because when you makes observation you have certain limitations; when you want to collect data through telephones, again there are certain challenges, but then what actually are the remedies. Since in telephonic interviews, you can hear the voice of the other party; and the answers that he provides may also not be representative. The need then is to verify the data, which you have collected either through observation or telephonic interview.

So, for that, we need to know some other methods. The first being is a personal interview, while discussing communication we had discussed that face-to-face communication is better than other forms of communication. Why, because when you communicate face to face it is not only the words that matter rather the non words also matter. And the non words, we consider the non verbal behavior of the person right from his dress, to his bearing, to the sort of gestures, postures and also through use of silence and pauses in and between the words. Hence, face-to-face communication provides you with an opportunity where you are not only communicating with the person, you are also verifying the answer of the person.

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Personal Interview

Process of seeking information directly through a conversation with an individual.

- Conversation with a purpose
- Direct exchange of information
- Voice, Facial Expression and general behaviour overt.



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So, personal interview can be defined as a process of seeking information directly through a conversation with the individual. Now, it has so many benefits. Even though it has some regards also, because suppose you want to collect data on a particular problem where you need to interview so many people of course, you will have to undertake journeys. And when you undertake journeys in order to interview people based at different locations, the trouble of course cannot be written off, but then you are going to use personal interview as a sort of conversation with a purpose.

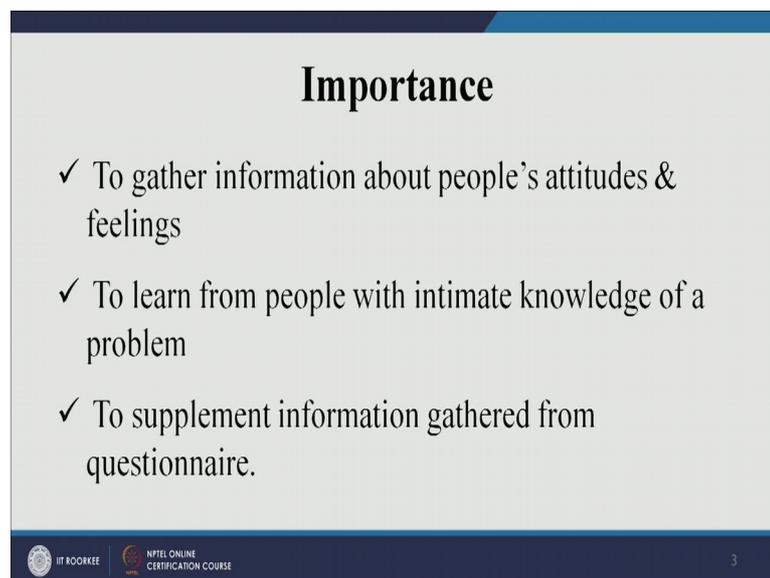
It is here that while you start the conversation much care has to be taken as how to initiate, how to frame questions, and how to frame questions in such a subtle manner that you elicit the response which is required. As it is direct exchange of information, you are not only watching the person's movements, but then at times when you want to have crucial information the ambition also matters a lot. So, not only that his voice speak or give clue is facial expressions, but then you have to be an expert one as regards reading peoples facial behavior.

And of course, the general behavior also becomes very explicit because I am reminded of one quote by Freight where he says he who has eyes to see and ears to hear can convince that no mortal can keep a secret. If his lips are silent, he is chatting with his fingertips betrayal seems to whose out of him at every pore. My dear friends the essence is that in a face-to-face communication, however, hard you try, your internal emotions are written

largely on your face. Your face is the index of the mind, of course, it is only with experienced people who can manipulate their expressions; and also at times, manipulate their facial behaviors, but then it cannot continue for a long time, you can easily understand. In case, there is something going to be hid by the other person.

So, when you are going to conduct a personal interview there are certain precautions and there are also certain advantages, it is actually with an aim to gather information about people s attitudes and feelings. As I have said earlier, the feelings of every individual are written on their faces they cannot hide it. And it also allows to an opportunity to learn from people with intimate knowledge of a problem, which cannot be possible over telephone.

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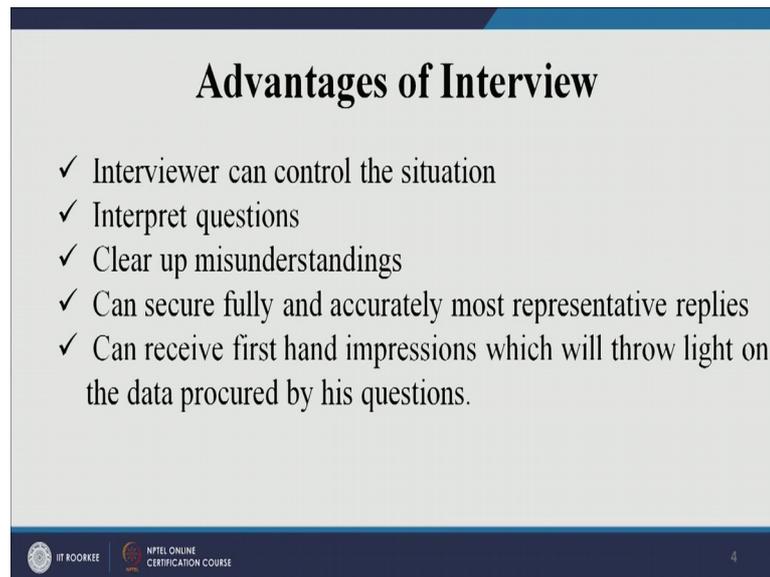
Importance

- ✓ To gather information about people's attitudes & feelings
- ✓ To learn from people with intimate knowledge of a problem
- ✓ To supplement information gathered from questionnaire.

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Because you know every person if he is at a lofty position an responsible position, he has certain limitations of time, he has also a certain restrictions regarding that is closer of certain pieces of information as well. So, in order we have to conduct a personal interview. Moreover, if you have made your own observations about a person. So, in such a case, you can verify and you can supplement the information which you have gathered from either from questionnaire or from observation, or from telephones. But then in such a situation you need to practice your own cleverness, and you need to practice your own experience as how to frame questions, so that you may get the requisite answer.

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Advantages of Interview

- ✓ Interviewer can control the situation
- ✓ Interpret questions
- ✓ Clear up misunderstandings
- ✓ Can secure fully and accurately most representative replies
- ✓ Can receive first hand impressions which will throw light on the data procured by his questions.

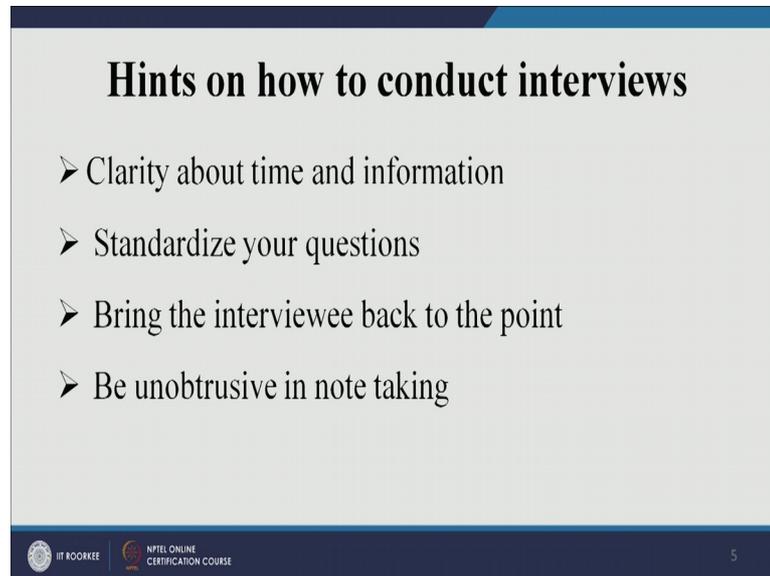
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What actually are the advantages as an interviewer if you are going to conduct the interview with an aim to have data collection, and also it is an interview in a physical setting where two people are together, the real control lies with you. I mean the interviewer has the full facility of controlling the situation. You see you might have framed the question very carefully, but do not underestimate the other person who is going to answer your questions. So, at times, he may create such a situation or he may deviate you in such a manner that is why you need to have a proper control with you, and a proper intelligence so that you may bring the interviewee, back to the question

Moreover, questions need to be interpreted in a face-to-face conversation, you have all sorts of facility you may ask all sorts of questions. And when you ask questions, suppose the other party is not ready to answer, but then you have that caution and you have that care you can at your best with your experience elicit the proper responses. Sometimes there are certain ambiguities and this can be cleared this misunderstandings can be cleared in a face-to-face interview. Moreover you can also secure accurately representative replies because people may lie over telephone, but they may not lie when you are having a personal interview. Sometimes, it maybe that if you have shorten appointment and you have also told him the nature of the interview, there may be some amount of manipulation, but as a careful and intelligent interviewer you will be able to interpret the answers. You can also firsthand impressions which will throe light on the

data procured by the questions. So, the need here is to be extra vigilante when you are having a sort of interview.

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Hints on how to conduct interviews

- Clarity about time and information
- Standardize your questions
- Bring the interviewee back to the point
- Be unobtrusive in note taking

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Let us try to understand certain tips that can be utilized when you are conducting interviews for data collection. You need to understand that you are clear not only about the nature of the questions, but also about the time and information. An interview cannot go for a longer time you have and the people you are going to interview they maybe PG professionals. So, you are to frame your questions in such a manner that not only does it save time, but it also allows you to get the requisite responses. Meaning thereby make your questions as standard that any attempt by the interviewee to deviate you may not work you can always because you have the control with you can always bring the interviewee back to the point by using your own communication skills. It is not that only the interviewee is very communicative, you have to be extra communicative meaning thereby you have to go an extra mile to get the requisite response.

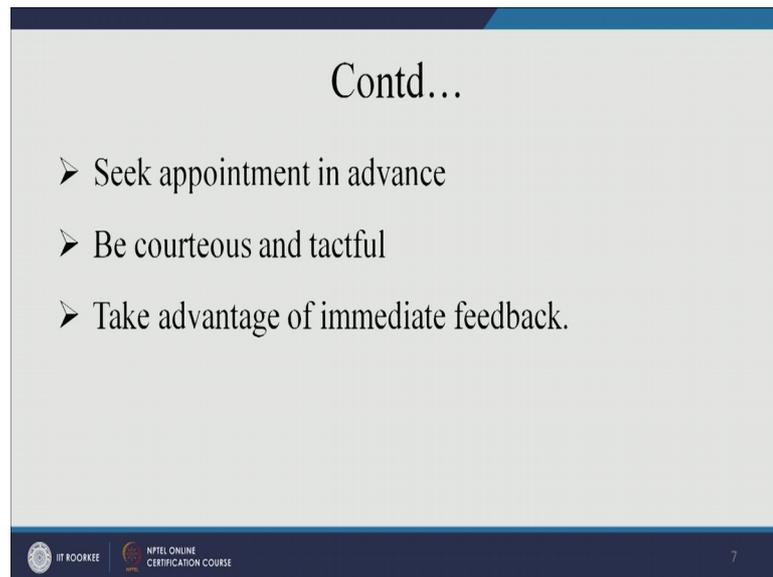
If you feel that certain things have to be jotted down you can jot down, but many people would not allow that is why this another facility that certain interviews are also recorded. In a digital age of today, you have all facilities, but then depending upon the nature of the person, depending upon the need of the situation, you need to frame your questions in such a manner that you can derive or you can have proper answers. Remember personal interview can be one of the authentic methods of data collection, because whatever you

are asking, you are not only being answered, but you are also being answered not only verbally you are also being answered non-verbally that is why it has an advantage over other methods of data collection.

Suppose, the interview starts and there is a question where you feel that the other person starts giving arguments. Remember, it is always better to allow more room to the other party, to allow more room to the interviewee. And from your point of view, restrict yourself from our wing, there is no need of much argument, let the other parties speak. You simply have to derive the facts, you simply have to derive the right answers. Allow more room, and by doing that you will assume a subordinate role, meaning thereby you will give a dominant role to the other party. You know sometimes if you allow some more space to the other party, you will find that you get benefited by getting more answers.

Moreover as a careful communicator you have to listen very carefully, very attentively every word that the person speaks may give you some clue, may give you some symbolic hint. And then it is always better not to put certain embarrassing questions. Of course, the main focus of your interview is to collect the data, but please do remember that if you put a very straight question, which some way or the other is going to affect his image you will not be able to get answers, that is why you need to frame your questions in such a subtle manner that the other party does not get affected, moreover you get answered that is very important.

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- Seek appointment in advance
- Be courteous and tactful
- Take advantage of immediate feedback.

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Especially since you have to travel to a distant place in order to get an interview it is always better to seek the appointment in advance; people may be busy, people may have some other commitments, some other appointments. So, tell him why you want to meet him, and what is the purpose of this interview, and also be courteous and tactful throughout. The less you speak the better, allow the other person to speak more. And please keep your eyes and ears open, because you have to take immediate feedback which will work wonders in terms of providing data with the help of personal interviews. But please do remember that personal interview as it is a costly affair, and it also has lots of regards of journey, it is advisable to go for another method which is questionnaire.

Now, in order to get data from questionnaires, let us try to understand what are questionnaires, and how it can be helpful in getting data through questionnaires. One advantage that questionnaire has got is it saves you from the regards of travel. If you frame one questionnaire, but then much depends upon how you frame the questionnaire with one questionnaire, you can distribute or you can send the questionnaire to different people spread out in different locations.

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Questionnaires

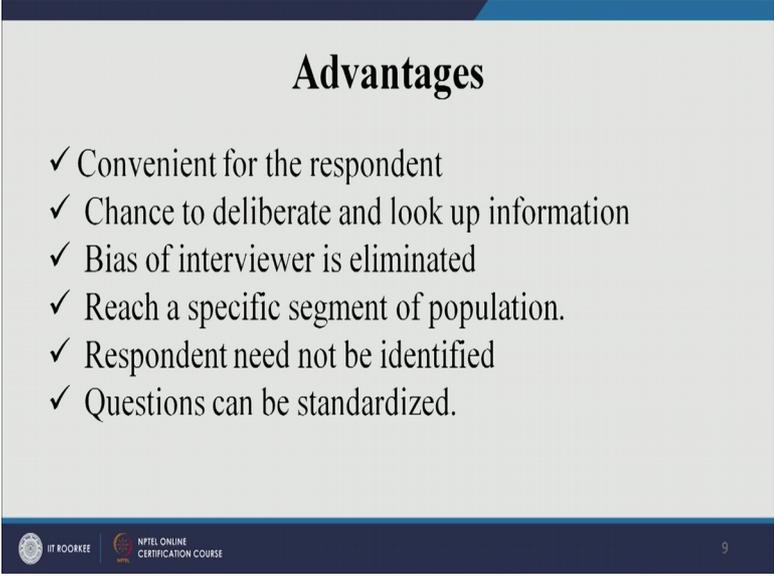
- To survey large number of people
- Mail a questionnaire to all members
- Save time
- Seek clarifications

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You have to mail questionnaire to all members, but then you have to decide which people or which segment of people are important in providing you the representative data. So, you have to do a lot of exercise while you are going to frame a questionnaire to elicit proper response. Moreover, it saves time because it saves you from the hazards of journey; and people are also you know BG people at times they may not give you much time to answer when you seek even an interview then if you send a questionnaire maybe the questionnaire is sent back. But sometimes you may also have to pay for the extra postage, so that the other party may not feel any pain of spending anything on questionnaire.

You can frame questionnaire in such a way that every question if it is a question which is closed, but then for that you have another way and that is follow up question, which can be also situated just after the closed questions. Now, since it is a convenient method for the respondent, you have a deliberate chance to look up information.

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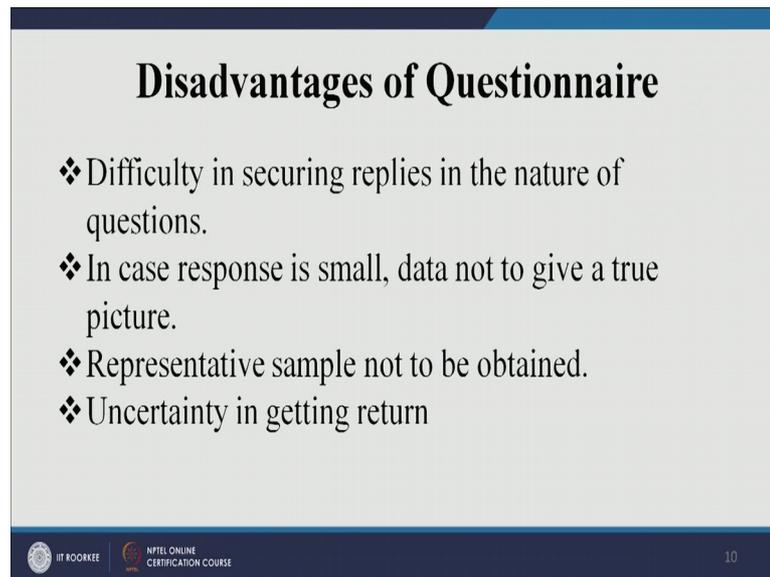
Advantages

- ✓ Convenient for the respondent
- ✓ Chance to deliberate and look up information
- ✓ Bias of interviewer is eliminated
- ✓ Reach a specific segment of population.
- ✓ Respondent need not be identified
- ✓ Questions can be standardized.

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Especially, if you are working on a very complex problem and you send questionnaire because questionnaire allows other people to answer it at their liberty at their laser, so that is why it is convenient. Moreover as in personal interview, you can have the control here. There is nothing like control and the bias of the interviewer is eliminated. There is no interviewer who can control the situation, so the respondent is fearless; it has also been seen that people who do not want to write their names or disclose their names that also can be allowed they can keep their names secret. Moreover, there is no need of interviewee to be identified your main concern is to get the data, and not the name of the person. If you standardize the question, I think that will work wonders for you.

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Disadvantages of Questionnaire

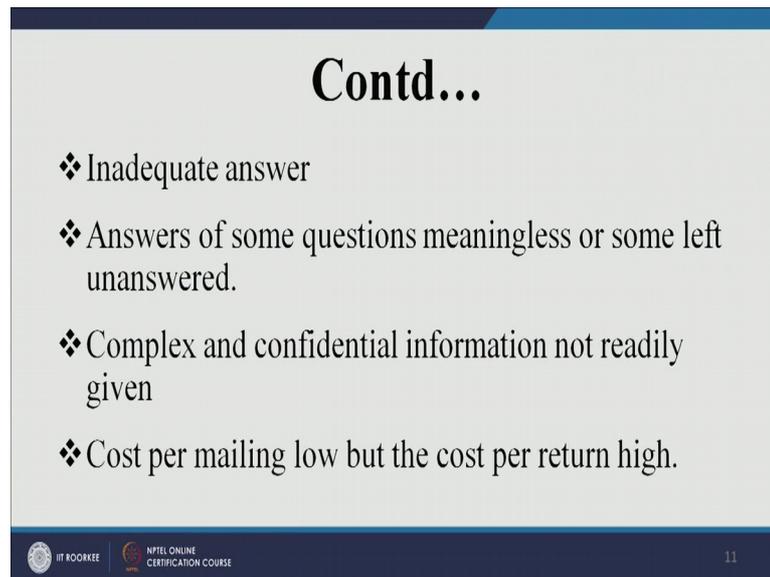
- ❖ Difficulty in securing replies in the nature of questions.
- ❖ In case response is small, data not to give a true picture.
- ❖ Representative sample not to be obtained.
- ❖ Uncertainty in getting return

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But then there are certain disadvantages also every coin has got two sides my dear friend. Even though it may be distributed to large number of people, it is it at times becomes quite difficult in securing replies in the nature of questions. There are some questions which many people would not like to answer people decide to answer based on their likes and dislikes. Sometimes the number of questionnaires, you have sent is often not the number of questionnaires that you receive because many people take it very casually and that is where the need of personal interview arises.

So, in case the response is a small, the data that you get through these questionnaires may not be representative. So, representative sample cannot be obtained that is one danger in this method of data collection. And another impediment is that there always is a sort of uncertainty. Nowadays, you will find that people have started sending questionnaires even through mails, you as a respondent you will at times feel that you do not want to respond to such a questionnaire, because you think it is a sort of additional burden. But then depending upon the nature and the need of data collection, intelligent people see to it that they send questionnaire by post, and also pay for the return post, so that by courtesy people may respond.

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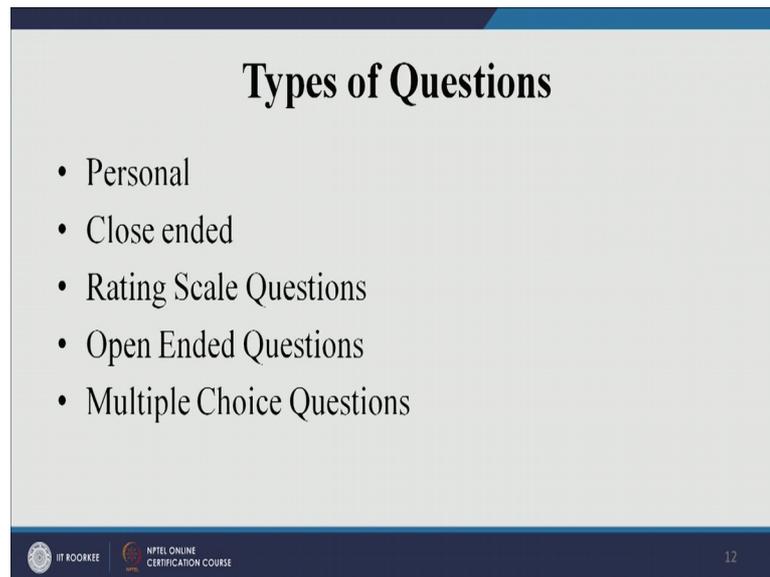
- ❖ Inadequate answer
- ❖ Answers of some questions meaningless or some left unanswered.
- ❖ Complex and confidential information not readily given
- ❖ Cost per mailing low but the cost per return high.

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Moreover, sometimes people of course, they written the questionnaire, but the question is inadequately answered it is not answered up to your expectations answers of some questions may appear very meaningless fine. So, hence the person who is going to frame the question need to be extra vigilante, some questions are also left unanswered. Moreover, this another danger that is there is a lighting fear that complex and confidential information, people do not want to share nor do they want to respond. Cost of per mailing is low, but the cost of per return is high so that is another disadvantage, but since your main aim is to collect data, price or cost does not matter much provided the respondents send you back the questionnaires answered.

Now, when you are framing a questionnaire you have to be very careful. You know since it is it goes to people who are separated by geographical distances, and time and all you need to make your questions questionnaire very attractive. How to do that that is why and you can also have a long questionnaire, but see too long questionnaire often becomes unresponded. So, it is better to keep your questionnaire short, and make it very specific. You can also divide your questionnaire into two parts.

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In the first part you may provide a sort of personal information, where people will be very tempted to answer; and after the personal details you may go to the required section where you have your desired questions. The nature of questions can also be close ended. I mean suppose if I if you are going to carry out a research on the smoking trends. It is always better to ask the question very directly rather than asking what is your reaction to smoking. So, in such a case it is better to ask, do you smoke fine. And such a question will be closed question the answer will be either yes or no.

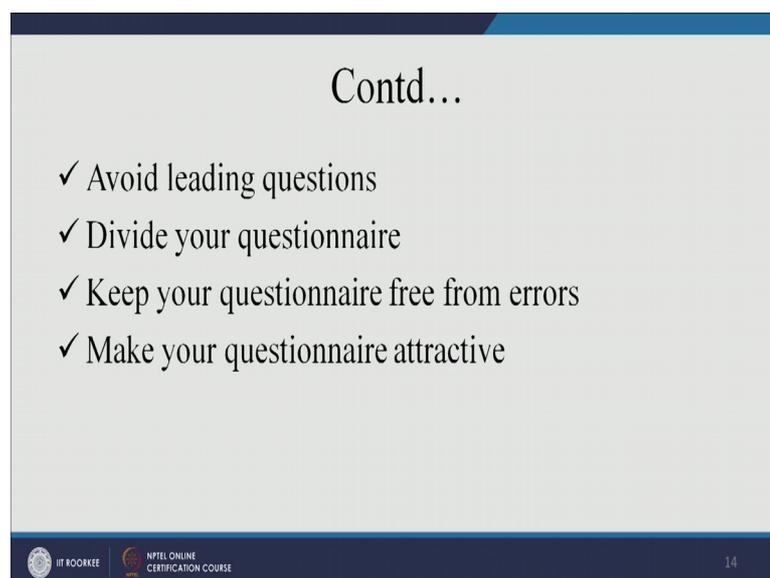
Sometimes you also may have to provide a question based on the rating system, the rating maybe 1 to 10, 1 to 20 like that, and you will provide the question where you expect your respondent to answer, how to they rate it. And then there are open ended questions. Here you are actually giving a choice to your respondents to express their own opinion and when they express their own opinion, I mean you have to leave some more space because many people feel tempted to give you a proper response. And here you can also understand people s attitudes and based on so many questionnaires in general you can come out with the trend of attitudes people have to a certain matter to a certain aspect.

And then you also have multiple choice questions, here you provide four multiple answers, and the answers are provided in such a manner that the requisite answer is given by the respondent. So, these are the types of question. And when you are going to

frame the questionnaires, please see the language plays a very crucial role. Make your questions straight and simple as possible. You know if the wording of a questionnaire or the phrasing of a questionnaire is difficult or it is linguistically cumbersome, people may not respond. So, what you need to do is you need to make questions as simple as possible.

And then arrange your questions very logically, if you arrange your questions logically, people feel tempted to answer them. It should not appear that you are asking one question suddenly you jump, you know there has to be a coherence not only in the questionnaire, but in all sorts of communication especially written communication. People love coherence better and then try to keep your questionnaires short, now even if you are working on a very complex problem, but let your questionnaire be short. Sometimes because you know your basic aim for a questionnaire is to get the response and you have certain tricky questions, sometimes you have leading questions know. So, if there is a tricky question let this question be put either in the middle or towards the end not in the beginning. And even not towards the end, otherwise it will be very difficult to understand, it will very difficult to get the answer. So, please put tricky questions at a particular place, so that the respondents may not feel offended.

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- ✓ Avoid leading questions
- ✓ Divide your questionnaire
- ✓ Keep your questionnaire free from errors
- ✓ Make your questionnaire attractive

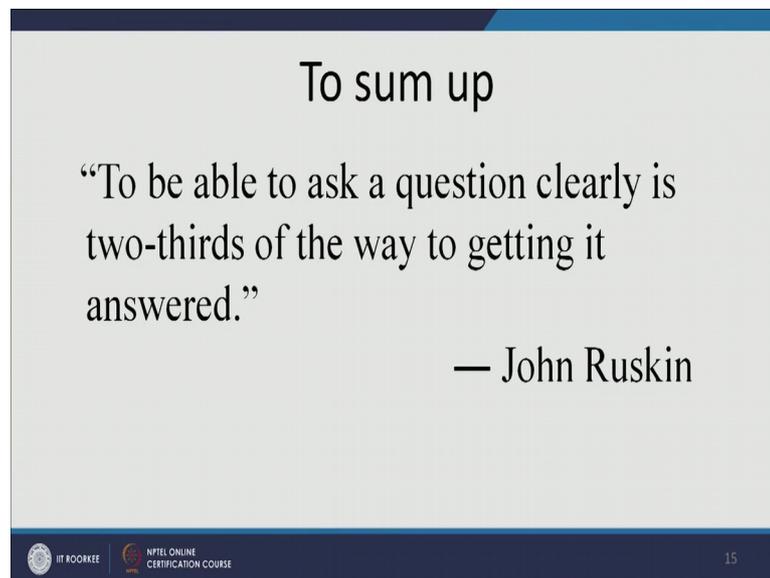
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Moreover you have to avoid leading questions, there are certain questions which people would not like to answer. For example, if a person is asked do you drink alcohol or

which brand of alcohol do you take or sometimes if you ask do you I mean if a leading if you ask which movies do you like fine or sometimes you mention do you read the Times of India. I mean it maybe a leading question. Sometimes people also ask some personal questions which are embarrassing, so it is an advise that let such questions be dropped.

Please divide your questionnaire and let your questionnaire be free from errors you know if there are grammatical errors people would not like to answer to such a questionnaire because it some way or the other it tells them about your background. So, you need to make your questionnaire free from errors and see that your questionnaire is attractive. Moreover, every questionnaire should have a covering letter, because it is the covering letter that tells people why they need to answer this question; and through covering letter you as an interviewer also are going to assure them that this questionnaire or this response will be kept secret. You know people can answer you only when they know that it is of some use to you as well as it is not going to do any harm to them. Questionnaire is one of the best methods of data collection, but remember in order to get the proper response you need to ask the right questions. It is only the right questions that may bring out the right response.

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To sum up

“To be able to ask a question clearly is two-thirds of the way to getting it answered.”

— John Ruskin

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Dear friends let me close this lecture by quoting from John Ruskin who says, to be able to ask a question clearly is two-thirds of the way to getting it answered. The meaning is much of the answer of a question lies in the question itself provided it has been framed

very meticulously, very carefully and very advantageously. I do understand that with these lectures, you have understood how to collect the data for a report. And once you have collected the data, all you need to do is you need to analyze the data, organize the data, write the outline, so that you may start writing the report.

Thank you very much, I wish you all a very good day ahead.