



Aalto University
School of Business

23E80101 Qualitative Business Research Methods

Conducting qualitative Interviews

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Agenda

- What is qualitative interviewing?
- Group-exercise: interview do's and don'ts



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What are qualitative interviews about?

- **Qualitative research = understanding the qualities of something**
- The goal of the interview is not to "get (right) answers" or "test hypotheses"
- You want your respondents to *describe* something **in their own words** and **as detailed as possible**
- The researcher is an instrument, the goal of the interview is to co-produce a rich text for further analysis (Moisander and Valtonen 2006)

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Types of interviews

Type of interview	Characteristics and required skills
Structured interview	Neutrality ; no prompting; no improvisation; training to ensure consistency
Semi-structured interview	Flexibility ; rapport with the interviewee; understanding aims of the project; some probing
Open-ended interview	Flexibility ; rapport with interviewee; active listening
Focus group	Facilitation skills ; flexibility; ability to stand back from the discussion so that group dynamics can emerge

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THESIS TIP #:

The vast majority of Master's theses use semi-structured interviews



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Depth interviews vs. focus groups

- Focus groups are the most common methods in **business** research
 - Quick, cheap, easy
 - Useful for ad tests, sensory tests, package design etc.
 - Complicated, lack of depth
 - Not intimate, can lead to group-think, moderator bias, self-censorship

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Interview guidelines - exercise

Four breakout rooms

Room 1: How to decide **who** to interview and **how many** interviews to do?

Room 2: What kind of interview questions **should you ask**?

Room 3: What kind of questions **should be avoided**?

Room 4: How to choose **the setting** in which to conduct the interview, and what would be the do's and don't of the actual **interview setting**?

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Who are you going to interview?

- Depends on what kind of responses and information you want to obtain!
 - A group of people that can help you to generate both rich and relevant data set
 - *"Whoever seems likely to give rich data"* (Elliot & Jankel-Elliot, 2003)
 - Who are the experts?
 - Who has practical experience?
 - Who has a stake in the matter, who benefits or who suffers from it?
 - Who has power?
 - Who's concerned about it?
 - Etc.

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“What are the benefits and disadvantages of interviewing friends and acquaintances?”

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THESIS TIP #:

Be prepared to put some effort into finding the right informants rather than interviewing just anyone "conveniently" there



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How many interviews to conduct?

Depends ☺ Two basic approaches

a) The number of interviews is pre-planned:

- What is the subject matter and what are the research aims?
- What is convention?
- What data requirements do publications demand?

b) Continue interviewing until the data is "saturated"

- Regardless of conventions, you want to gain as rich data as possible
- A saturation point is achieved when the interviews do not open up any more new insights, rather, they start to "repeat themselves"

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So, how many interviews..?

"Based on our analysis, we posit that **data saturation** had for the most part occurred by the time we had analyzed **twelve interviews**. After twelve interviews, we had created 92% (100) of the total number of codes developed for all thirty of the Ghanaian transcripts (109) and 88% (114) of the total number of codes developed across two countries and sixty interviews. Moreover, four of the five new codes identified in the Nigerian data were not novel in substance but rather were variations on already existing themes. **In short, after analysis of twelve interviews, new themes emerged infrequently and progressively so as analysis continued.**"

How Many Interviews Are Enough? An Experiment with Data Saturation and Variability

GREG GUEST
ARWEN BUNCE
LAURA JOHNSON
Family Health International

Guidelines for determining nonprobabilistic sample sizes are virtually nonexistent. Purposive samples are the most commonly used form of nonprobabilistic sampling, and their size typically relies on the concept of "saturation," or the point at which no new information or themes are observed in the data. Although the idea of saturation is helpful at the conceptual level, it provides little practical guidance for estimating sample sizes, prior to data collection, necessary for conducting quality research. Using data from a study involving sixty in-depth interviews with women in two West African countries, the authors systematically document the degree of data saturation and variability over the course of thematic analysis. They operationalize saturation and make evidence-based recommendations regarding nonprobabilistic sample sizes for interviews. Based on the data set, they found that saturation occurred within the first twelve interviews, although basic elements for metathemes were present as early as six interviews. Variability within the data followed similar patterns.

Keywords: interviewing; saturation; variability; nonprobability sampling; sample size; purposive



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"Feeling in Control": Optimal Busyness and the Temporality of Organizational Controls

Ioana Lupu , Joonas Rokka

Published Online: 13 Sep 2021 | <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2021.1486>

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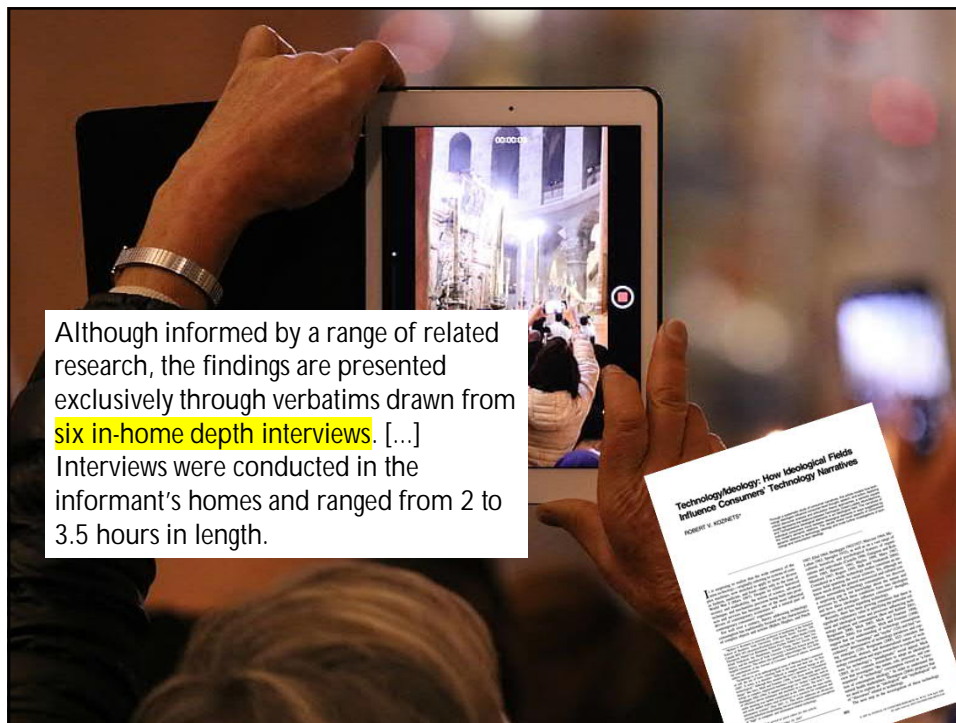
Abstract

Abstract

This study extends prior research seeking to understand the reproduction and persistence of excessive busyness in professional settings by addressing the relationship between organizational controls and temporal experiences. Drawing on 146 interviews and more than 300 weekly diaries in two professional service firms, we develop a framework centered on the emerging concept of optimal busyness, an attractive, short-lived temporal experience that people try to reproduce/prolong because it makes them feel energized and productive as well as in control of their time. Our findings show that individuals continuously navigate between different temporal experiences separated by a fine line, quiet time, optimal busyness, and excessive busyness, and that optimal busyness that they strive for is a fragile and fleeting state difficult to achieve and maintain. We show that these temporal experiences are the effect of the temporality of controls—that is, the ability of controls to shape professionals' temporal experience through structuring, rarefying, and synchronizing temporality. Moreover, we find that professionals who regularly face high temporal pressures seek to cope with these by attempting to construct/prolong optimal busyness through manipulating the pace, focus, and length of their temporal experiences, a process we call *control of temporality*. Our study contributes to a better understanding of the reproduction of busyness by explaining why professionals in their attempts to feel in control of their time routinely end up overworking.

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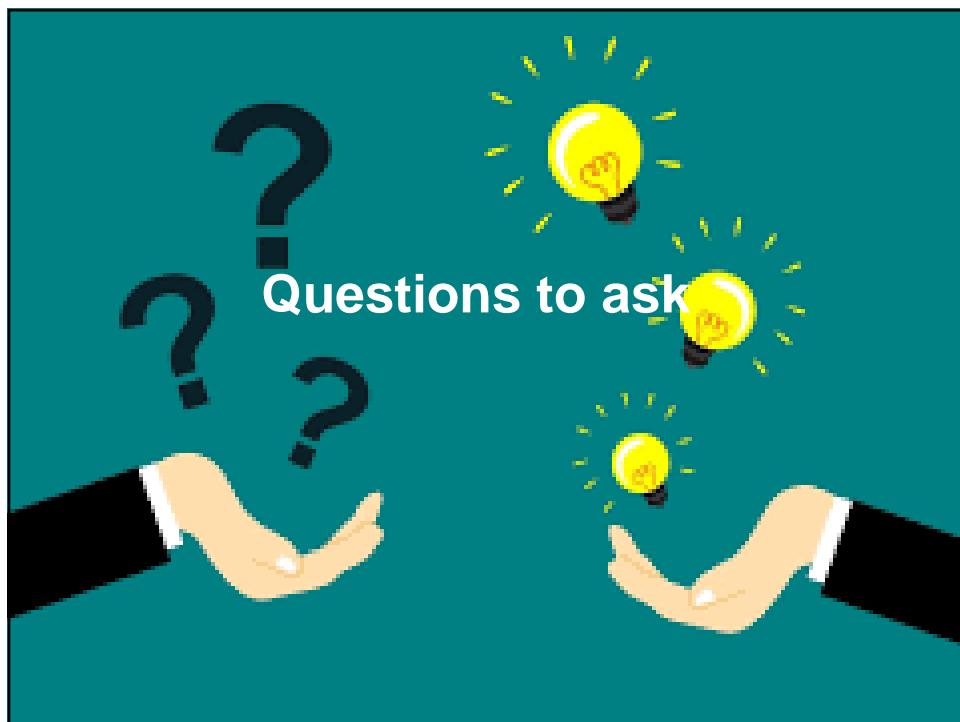
More interviews are needed when..

- The more unstructured the interviews are
- The more heterogeneous the interview sample is
- The more complex the research topic is
- The more researchers there are in a team
- The less experienced the researchers are
- If the interviews necessitate a special setting

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It is **better to say**
a lot about a little data
than
little about a lot of data
(Silverman)

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What kind of interview questions should you ask?

- "Tell me about yourself" is a **really important** question to start with → gain an understand of who this person is, their history, even values
- It also primes the informant to think back, and helps set the tone for the interview
- Really probe deep to this question, "digging as deep as you can about background, family, education, and current lifestyle" (Arsel 2017)

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What kind of interview questions should you ask?

- Open-ended questions
 - What do you think about X?; Can you tell me about X?
- Clarifying questions (usually after the open-ended)
 - When you say X what do you mean by that?; Can you elaborate on X?
- Guiding questions (bring structure to the interview)
 - Is there anything else you could to say about X?; Now, can we move on to talk about X...
- Narrating questions
 - I read in a paper that X – what are your thoughts on that?
- Summarizing questions
 - Did I understood you correctly that...

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Delving into the actual topic

- Phrase your questions so that you **get lengthy responses**
 - "What is/was X like?"
 - "How long have you been doing X?"
 - "When was the last time when you x? How was it?"
 - "How did you get into X?"
 - "How do you feel when X?"
 - "What/who is a typical X?"
 - "Who is good/bad at X?"
 - "When do you usually X?"
 - "What do you need for X?"
 - "What is a good example of X? Or a bad example of X?"


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Listen and recognize opportunities!

- Important to recognize probing opportunities →
however, absolutely no interrupting!
- Keep a notepad handy and mark down words, ideas, or moments you find intriguing

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Questions to avoid



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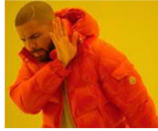
What kind of questions should be avoided?

- **Theoretical questions** – offers the respondent with “the right answers”, or uses language that is unfamiliar
 - E.g. What kind of symbolic meanings do you attach with Brand X?
 - You want your respondents to *describe* something **in their own words** → remove ALL jargon from questions
- **Too closed-off questions**
 - Rarely provide interesting new insights!

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Q: Do you find Iso Omena a fun place to shop?

A: Yes

Q: Can you find everything you need here?

A: Pretty much, sure

Q: Do you think Iso Omena is conveniently located?

A: I guess it is

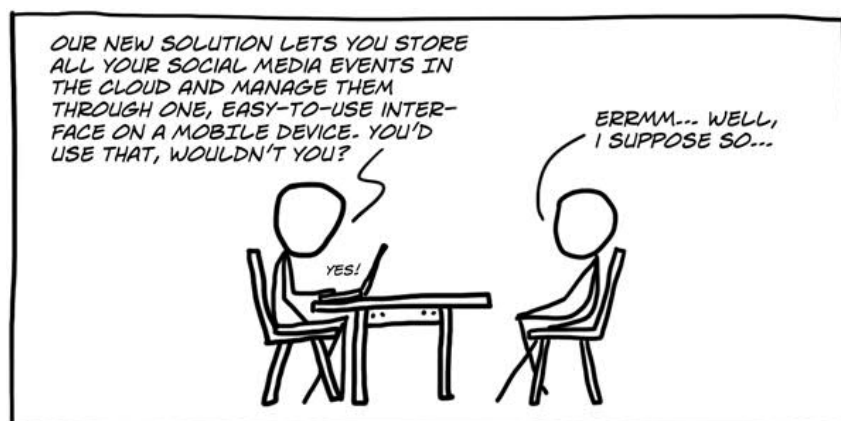


Q: How do you feel about Iso Omena?

A: Well, I actually quite like it, especially that I can go everywhere with the baby trolleys. I mean the stores, the bathrooms, the elevator... can't really do that in Itäkeskus.

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Interviewing



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THE CURSE OF "WHY?"

- Highly advisable to not ask "why" in a qualitative interview
- "Why?" questions elicit **rationalization** and **defensiveness**, and are often conceived as prejudgemental!
- Easiest way to self-sabotage your own interview



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Do not feed concepts!

Interviewer: "What did you miss most about being away from your family?"

Respondent: "The family."

*Interviewer: "**The love and warmth?**"*

Respondent: "The togetherness and that sort of thing, and being able to talk to your family, talk more intimately. In the army the talk is more or less on a lower level."

*Interviewer: "**Surface level?**"*

Respondent: "Surface level ... I guess you could call it that."

(McCracken1988, Long Interview)

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Setting and dos and don'ts

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Do's and don'ts of the actual interview setting?

- Creating an open and confidential atmosphere is extremely important!
 - Choose a quiet, relaxed place – make it easy and comfortable for your interviewees
 - Be open about yourself and your goals (broad idea of your research, but don't reveal too much)
 - Respect the respondents – they are the experts!
 - Listen!
 - Give feedback → show that you are listening with your eye contact, nodding etc.
 - Use terms and wordings they use, pay attention to the topics they mention
 - Pay attention to your own appearance – you don't want to appear sloppy or intimidating

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- You **must** record your interviews
- A good transcript is **verbatim**, every word, every utterance, break, reaction, filler words etc.
- Be prepared to spend time transcribing → **will take at least twice as long** as conducting the interview, likely longer
- Good idea to transcribe every interview as soon as possible

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Consumers researchers have extensively studied the environmental aspects of consumption (Arnould and Thompson 1998). These studies indicate that consumers often develop buying social ties with fellow consumers

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Closing the interview

- Let them talk, but be mindful of time
- The end of the interview is often an opportunity to get a lot more data and even restart the interview
 - "Is there anything else you feel that we should talk about?"
 - "How did the interview go, in your opinion?"
 - "Can you help me find the next person to interview?"
- Opportunity to describe your research interest from a more academic perspective and ask for feedback → might yield surprising insights
- If some things have been stubbornly been avoided, you can ask them point-blank → careful! this can be weak data

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USING ELICITATION MATERIALS

- Props, pictures, samples, videos, collages, websites, artifacts that are helpful in stimulating conversation
 - "Can you describe this?"
 - "What do you do with this?"
 - "Can I see you do X and tell me what you are doing?"
- The choice of interview locale can be one such!



Negotiating subcultural authenticity through interpretation of mainstream advertising

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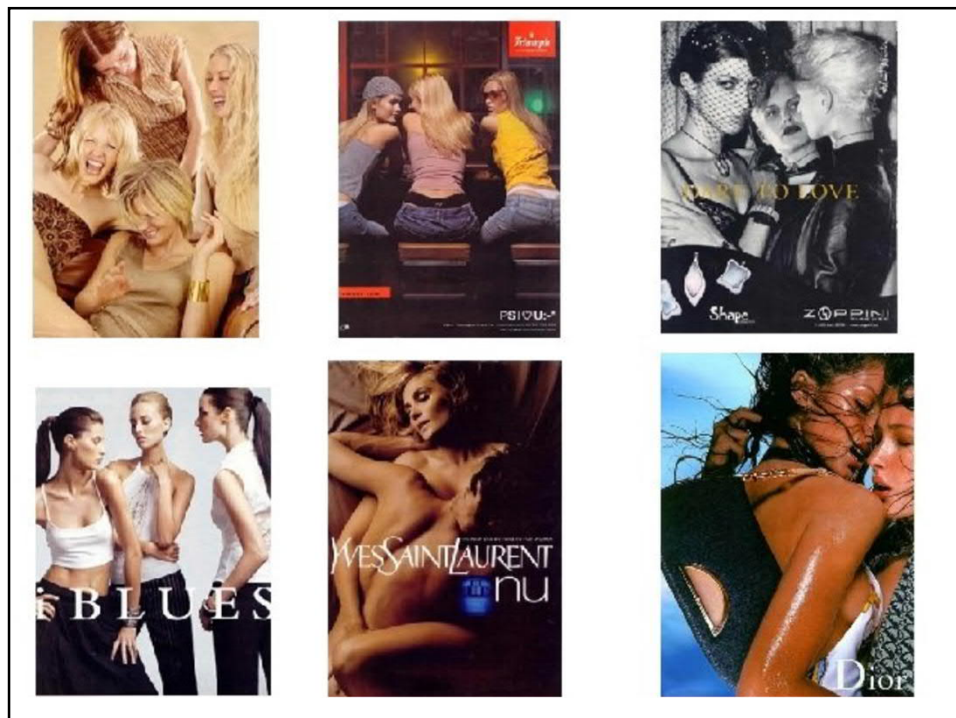
ner explores how subcultural authenticity is constructed and negotiated as mem-
ibculture interpret mainstream advertising images. A reader-response theory
e adopted, and empirical material was conducted through open-ended inter-
ual women. Four processes through which 'lesbian authenticity' are

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In the interviews and group discussions, the elicitation advertisements were presented to the respondents one at a time and they were asked to answer, in their own words, questions such as:

- What is going on in this picture? What kind of situation is this?
- Who are the people in the picture and what is their relationship to each other?
- What kind of feelings or thoughts does this picture evoke?
- Do you feel this advertisement is intended for/targeted to you? If it is not, why not and for whom do you think it is intended? If it is targeted to you, why?
- Can you relate to or identify with this situation and/or these people?

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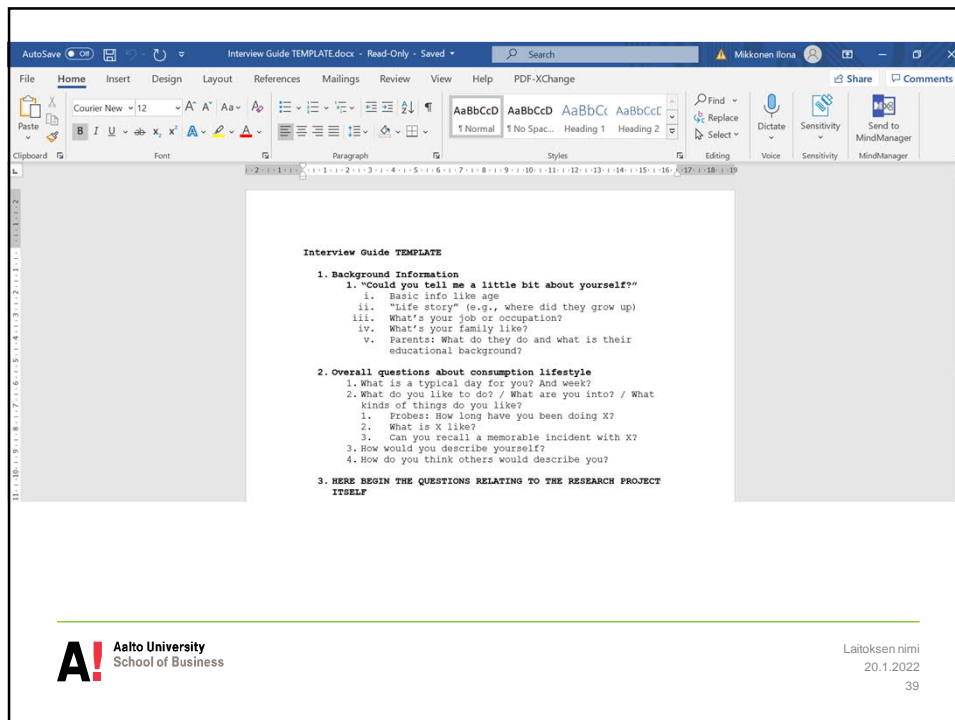


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The purpose of an interview guide

- Not just a “list of questions”; divided into topics or themes you want to cover during the interview
- An interview guide...
 - Keeps you focused on the overall process
 - Helps you keep track of what you want to cover for any particular interview
 - Helps you maintain control of the interview
 - Helps you connect “emic to etic” (Arsel 2017) → connect what they say to what it means theoretically
 - Conveniently gives something to talk about, or allows you to get “back on track” if the conversation gets sidelined

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Revising your interview guide

- The guide is a **living document**
- Some themes or ideas may turn up to be dead ends, others turn out to be gold mines
 - *"Interviews, like all data sources in interpretivist approaches, are a part of an iterative circle that continuously moves back and forth between conceptualization, data collection, data analysis, and theory building... Do a few interviews first. Analyze, revise, repeat."* (Arsel 2017)
- The interviews are "done" when you feel all the interviews are repeating the same things → data saturation

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Assignment 2

- Conduct a **semi-structured** personal interview **on your Master's thesis topic**. You can choose the person you are going to interview yourself, as well as the location.
- Construct an interview guide (there's a template in MyCourses) - be sure to incorporate your knowledge of what kinds of questions are suitable and unsuitable
- The length of the interview should be 30 to 60 minutes. You need record the interview, and **transcribe it verbatim** – remember that transcription will take you 2-4 times longer than the actual interview!

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Assignment

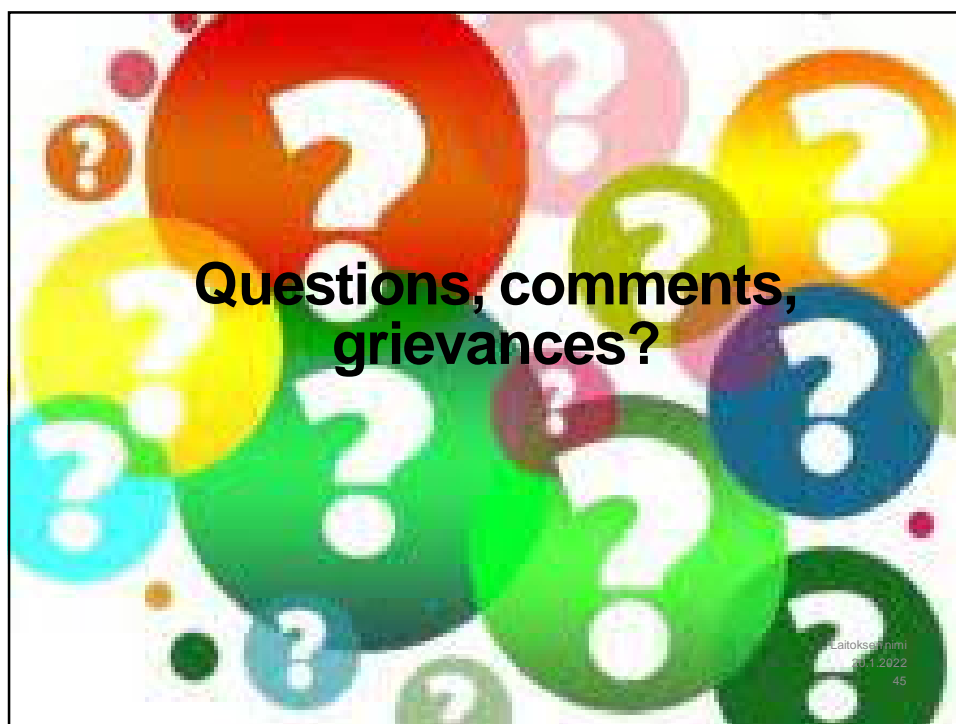
- The body of the report should be 3-6 pages in length (12 bullet point font, 1,5 line spacing), and you should:
 - Describe why you chose this particular person to be interviewed
 - Describe how the interview was organized; where it took place, how long did it take etc.
 - Include the interview outline that you constructed before the interview
 - Include **your own reflections on the interview process** (i.e. what did you learn from this process) - Did you find anything difficult? Did you feel that your question outline was useful? Would you do anything differently the next time you conduct an interview in general, or on the same topic?
- **The full verbatim transcription has to be included in the report as an appendix!**

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Assignment

- **If you do not have a topic yet**, conduct the interview on the topic of sauna and Finnish culture
 1. What does it mean to Finns to go to public sauna? In what ways does this differ from private sauna?
 2. How do Finns construct the role of sauna in general the Finnish culture? Are there differences between the discourses and meanings between private and public saunas?

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