Audio recording essential points

- Before you go out recording, check that your equipment is working and that your batteries are full.

- At the location, look for a quiet place if possible. All kinds of noises (traffic, animals, kids, air conditioner, etc.) will perhaps not be very noticeable to your ears at the time but will become much more prominent when listening back to your recordings through loudspeakers or headphones. A large room with hard walls, a hard floor and/or a hard ceiling will cause echoes on your recordings, a room with carpet, curtains, soft furniture, etc. is better suited.

- Turn off mobile phones before starting your recording session (your own and that of anyone else who is close by). They can cause disturbing noises on the recording, also if they are just switched on and not being used to call.

- Use the right microphone for the situation. Recording sound all around is best done with an omnidirectional microphone, recording sound mostly from one direction is done with a cardioid microphone or shotgun microphone. The latter is very directional, i.e. you need to point it exactly at the person you are recording. A stereo microphone is often a good all-round solution but could lead to undesired surrounding sounds being recorded as well.

- When recording outside, use a windshield on your microphone at all times. The slightest amount of wind can cause a disturbing noise on your recordings.

- Put the microphone close to the person speaking if possible; about 20 cm. from the mouth is ideal. Don't let them speak directly into the microphone but slightly over it. Of course you have to adapt to the comfort level of your speakers and may need to make compromises.

- Don't hold the microphone in your hands if possible but use a microphone stand. Holding the microphone in your hands may cause noises on the recordings.

- Put your recorder in PCM mode (WAV, uncompressed, 16 bit, 44.1 or 48 kHz).

- Adjust the record level properly using the manual record level control. Don't use automatic record level/gain control. Look at the level meters and make sure you have some "headroom" left for unexpected loud peaks. About 12 dB is usually OK, if your speaker is talking in a very dynamic way maybe a bit more.

- Make a small test recording before starting your actual recording and listen back through headphones if the recording is OK.

- If you use an external microphone, don't forget to switch it off after you've finished recording, otherwise the battery will probably be empty at your next recording session.

- When done recording, make backups of your recordings as soon as you have the opportunity.

Paul Trilsbeek - The Language Archive, MPI for Psycholinguistics - July 2011