**Resource 8: Preparing an interview or focus group schedule**

When preparing your questions keep your central research question or problem in mind. What is your human geography dissertation seeking to find out? Ensure your interview or focus group questions allow you the best chance possible of gather the information necessary. Most schedules will be divided into 3 sections, with questions for the beginning, middle and end of an interview. Read on for advice on completing these sections.

*The beginning*

Start your schedule with so-called ‘throw away’ questionsto establish a comfortable dialogue. You might ask ‘How are you today’, or pose an introductory question relevant to your topic: ‘When did you first start working for the aid organisation?’ These questions help to develop the flow of the conversation (and enable you and your participant to overcome any nerves). It is also an opportunity to build rapport with respondents. For example, during introductory questions you could provide some information about yourself, which often helps to build trust and respect between the researcher and researched.

*The middle*

Prepare a set of core or main questions which relate to what you want to know in order to answer your research question. However, be sure to listen. Sometimes the interviewee may say something that answers another question on your semi-structured script. Don’t ask the question again as it will appear that you haven’t been paying attention. Prepare prompts in case the conversation dries-up. For example, you might ask interviewees: ‘how?’, ‘can you explain why that happened?’, ‘what impact did that have?’ and so on.

*The end*

Always ask the interviewee if they have anything further they would like to add, or if there is anything you can answer for them as a researcher (although don’t be afraid to say if you don’t know the answer, you can always state you will find out and get back to them at a later time).

Top tip!

Always have a pen and paper with you, even if you are taking a Dictaphone to record the interview. This can be useful if your Dictaphone fails, but importantly, it allows you to jot down anything of interest that might be mentioned mid-conversation that you want to follow up on later.