

Soft Skills
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Lecture - 33
Strategies for Report Writing Part I

Welcome back to lectures on Soft Skills. And, as we are dealing with the writing section in which we have been discussing Report Writing. In the in the previous lectures we discussed reports their definitions, importance, objectives, and types. It is time now we understood the various strategies that can help us write a report, now suppose you have got the task of writing the report.

We will start thinking as to how should we go ahead, now here the 2 lectures that follow will tell you the various strategies when you have been assigned the task of writing a report there are certain things that you should know.

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Preparatory Steps

- ✓ Identify your purpose & scope
- ✓ Determine your audience
- ✓ Choose the right method of data collection
- ✓ Organize the material
- ✓ Make an outline

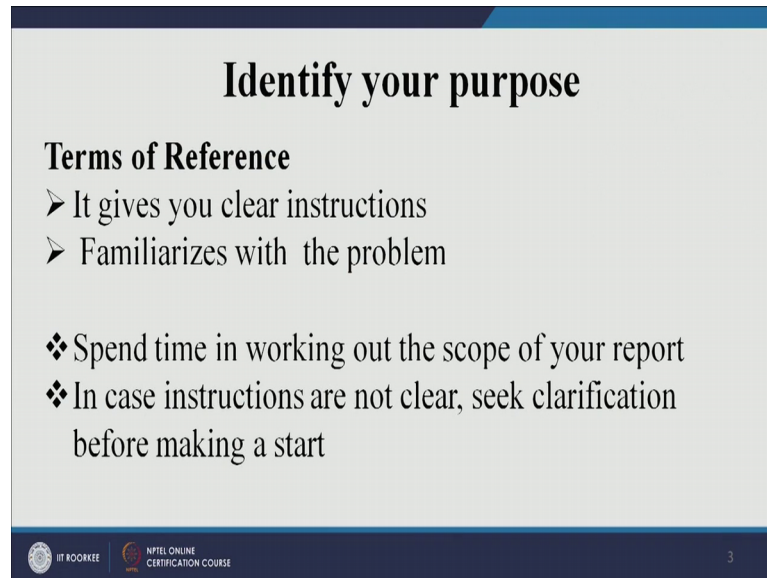
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The first is Identify your purpose and scope, and then determine your audience, choose the right method of data collection, organize the material, and then make an outline.

Now, what actually do we mean by identifying our purpose and scope let us ask ourselves why you are writing this report. So, when you ask yourself this question first

you would like to know who give you this task of writing the report because the person who assigns you this task also provides you with a term of reference.

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Identify your purpose

Terms of Reference

- It gives you clear instructions
- Familiarizes with the problem

- ❖ Spend time in working out the scope of your report
- ❖ In case instructions are not clear, seek clarification before making a start

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Which in short is called TOR; this TOR or Terms of Reference it actually gives you an instruction, where it is mentioned very talks about the problem and it also tells you the scope.

Meaning thereby who will read this report, what actually is to be done in the report? So, once you get to know about the problem the task becomes easier as I have said earlier know your readers who are your readers because when you know your readers you will be able to orient your report in terms of the language use in terms of understanding the problem. Hence it is quite significant let every report writer should spend some time in understanding the scope of ones report.

Imagine as a student when you were a Mess Secretary your Chief Warden assigned you the task of writing a report on the functioning of the messes, because he has of late received certain complaints and then he wants to bring in certain changes, but for that you have been assigned the task of writing a report now you understand the problem the problem is to write a report on the functioning of the message.

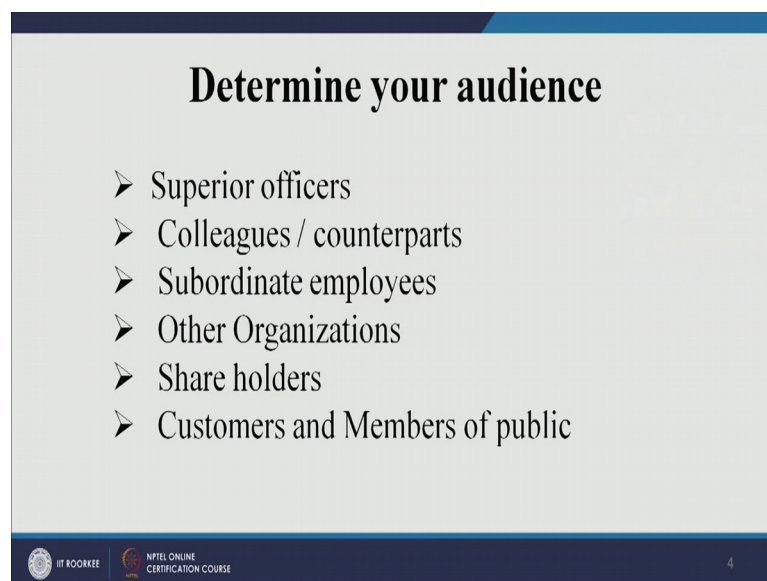
Now, you understand your topic once you understand your topic you would also like to know what sort of changes your Chief Warden wants of course, he may simply give you

an idea say about timing, say about the food quality, say about the frequency of vegetarian meals, or about the sweet dishes or what is ever now in such a situation you are actually aware of the problem and that is mentioned in the terms of reference.

Once you have the terms of reference ready with you now you can proceed and when you proceed you also know that the audience, I mean the readers of your report you at times can ask who will read the report because the task has been given to you by the Chief Warden. Now once you know the audience who can read your reports maybe not only the Chief Warden, but then dean students welfare, then the deputy director, maybe the director so you have to understand.

And this is simply an example, but there can be other problems also where you have been assigned the task of writing a report, and then you need to understand who your readers can be your readers can be your Superior Officers if you are in an organization and you have been given the task of writing a report.

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Determine your audience

- Superior officers
- Colleagues / counterparts
- Subordinate employees
- Other Organizations
- Share holders
- Customers and Members of public

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So, your report may be read by your Superior Officers then sometimes it may be read by your colleagues counter parts, It may also be read by Subordinate employees, it may also be read by people of other Organizations, Shareholders, Customers and Members of public.

Now knowing the audience or the reader of your report how does it help and you will be able to understand not only their background, but you will also understand your relationship with them, your relationship with your superior boss or officer may be very good.

But then your relationship with other people whom you do not know may not be that good. Now, it actually gives you a sort of liberty to use language in such a manner that it suits everyone of course; we will have a separate lecture as I said on report language, but then relationship works a lot when it comes to taking decisions. Now somebody in an organization where he has to report or submit the report to his immediate boss may at times also be harsh with the employee.

In such a situation because on the basis of your report some decision needs to be taken, now if the boss is not favorable you know you have to understand the attitude of your readers because your readers may have at times very good attitude towards you, but it is not true that every reader of yours will have the same attitude may be your reader is favorable and your reader has the same background as yours so the report will be understand better.

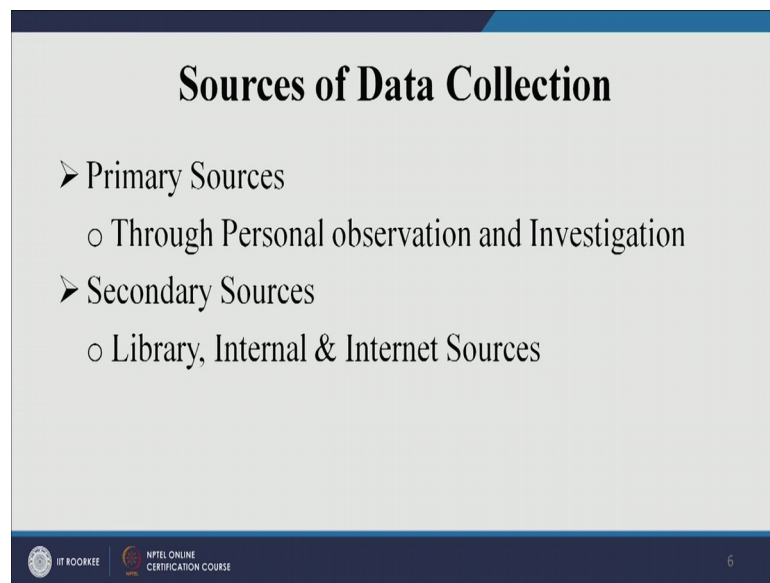
But if the reader is antagonistic meaning thereby if the reader is hostile, reader is inimical, reader is not favorable. So, naturally he will not be able to understand the implications of the report that you have submitted and any decision that is going to be taken on the basis of this result may not be that good. So, much depends upon the familiarity of the reader and also upon the attitude of the reader. So, by knowing your reader you actually your task becomes easier and you know careful report writers they actually not only analyze it in a very intelligent manner, but they also present it in such an intelligent manner that even if a decision is going to be taken on the basis of such a result it is not going to harm people, it is not going to harm other departments, that is why every organization actually needs some intelligent people to write reports.

Now, having understood your readers or your audience now is the time, because you know initially we had said that you need to identify the problem, you need to identify the scope, how much it will affect and then you also need to understand the background of your reader. So, once you understand the background of your reader now your task

becomes easier. So, you have now to collect the data as we have said that a report is based on the analysis of the data the data is to be analyzed and interpreted.

But then where should be get the exact data that is the question sometimes you are provided with the data, sometimes you do not have the data, you have to invent the data, you have to work out the data, you have to find out the data, but then sources are available.

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The slide is titled "Sources of Data Collection" and lists two main categories: Primary Sources and Secondary Sources. Primary Sources include "Through Personal observation and Investigation". Secondary Sources include "Library, Internal & Internet Sources". The slide also features logos for IIT ROORKEE and NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE at the bottom, along with the number 6.

- Primary Sources
 - Through Personal observation and Investigation
- Secondary Sources
 - Library, Internal & Internet Sources

Now what are the various sources from which you can have the data, you can have data either through personal observation I mean there are various ways of data collection.

But initially the first step that you can take is to have the primary source and primary source can be no better than yourself you know as an individual you have your eyes open, you have your mind open, and you can make certain observations. So, personal observation is one very important ingredient which can help in data collection we shall discuss what is personal observation and then investigation.

There are 2 sources of data collection the first is primary source and in primary source we have personal observation and investigation. Now suppose you come across certain things and that maybe your own observation, but then you actually need to authenticate it you need to verify it. So, how will you do that for that you require a secondary method and the secondary method can be library.

Suppose we are writing a report on air pollution you are writing a report on waste disposal fine now for that the secondary sources are the library, nowadays people even you know they do not have the time to visit librarys what they do is they simply Google they actually make Internet searches, but you know as intelligent guys and as intelligent individuals especially the younger ones when they start making use of search engines.

Sometimes or the other they actually get deviated I mean the basic aim of data collection for a particular problem goes deviated, because while he is making use of search engines he also starts visiting some other engines and sometimes he is actually led to some other engines where he may not find the relevant the authentic data. So, and then you can also have the internal records as we have said that every organization will have certain reports. Especially in educational institutions suppose you are working on a particular problem if you visit the library also is an internal source of an academic institution where you will find there are several reports available fine.

So, you have to find out how helpful these reports are and of course, internet is easily available from where you can make searches, but remember you have to be very careful while you are collecting data either through internet or through internal sources.

You know at times people get lost and they get deviated when they are collecting data there are several ways of data collection.

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Data Collection: Methods

- Personal observation
- Telephonic Interviews
- Personal Interviews
- Questionnaires

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And the first of them is Personal observation; Personal observation, then Telephonic Interviews, Personal Interviews and Questionnaires these are some of the ways through which you can collect data for a report.

Now let us discuss what actually is Personal observation the word observation is actually a blend of 2 words observation. So, the observation in it is origin can be understood as seeing with a purpose, suppose you want to know the flow of traffic on Sunday and for that you want to have a personal observation you know people can tell you something if you ask people you want to collect data from people they can ask you something, but then since you want to have a personal observation or you want to see it with your own eyes what you are going to do is you actually want to see how your own observation works.

But before that let us also try to understand what exactly what sort of your readers are and once you know the readers then you start personal observation. Now in personal observation what you will do is you may yourself go and make some observations because you will see it with your own eyes, but remember it has certain limitations as well while we will discuss personal observation in details but before that let us also try to understand how the readers knowledge can help us in data collection

I mean there can be different categories of readers first is a Primary reader; Primary reader naturally will be your boss who has assigned you the task of report writing.

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How to assess reader's knowledge?

- Primary reader
- Secondary Reader
- Business relationship
- His knowledge on the particular topic
- Expectations about report

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Second reader may be somebody else then there may be readers outside the organization with whom you have got a business relationship and how they have a particular or they have an expertise or they have some amount of knowledge on that aspect, because you know any person who is unaware of a particular problem his reactions to your report may be different and not only the reactions, but the expectations also vary.

Many people when they assign you the task of writing the report they have their own expectations also, but remember as a report writer you should go your own way and you should work on the data, but you should never be influenced you know once you are influenced the report will tend to be biased. So, it is time you put all your biases aside and you start working on your own data that is why personal observation comes into picture. Now since observation is to see with the purpose and when you go to collect the data no be careful, it is not only observation rather you need to understand that you are making an observation with a purpose and the purpose is to collect the data.

Of course when you are making an observation there are certain external factors also that may at times affect you fine sometimes you may get deviated also, sometimes as it can be said what you see may not be true is not it to see with your own eyes you believe that it is true, but may be sometimes you are seeing what you actually want naturally that way you will be biased is not it.

So, what you should do is you should actually first fix in your own mind what you are going to gather the data from this observation.

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Observation

- To study people's Non-verbal behavior
- First hand knowledge
- Investigate behavior
- Observation can be controlled/ uncontrolled

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Because your main aim through observation is to investigate behavior you may at times also look at a person and if you observe at a person, you may also come across, you may even imagine by some of his say facial expressions, some of his non verbal cues you may arrive at certain conclusions.

But remember whatever you come across may not be true also you look at a speaker when he comes to the classroom or when he comes to the hall to deliver the lecture and the very first glance that you cast at him it actually suggested that he was in a very tired you know way or his face showed some symbols of tiredness or a physical you know element to something like that or some sort of frustration, but when the man started then you realized oh god perhaps my observations about that person were wrong.

Same is the case when you are making observation you are collecting data you know it can only when you are so what is the mental state of the person that is very important. Moreover if you are observing a particular incident you know you are observing it only then you perhaps do not understand background also in the background also there may be certain things. So, observation can be controlled it can be uncontrolled if you ask a person that I will meet you tomorrow to discuss a particular problem now what will happen?

So, this person will be more than ready he will also think of so many questions that you can put him or he can actually dress in such a manner in order to hide a certain things.

So, when you are going to observe please see if it is a controlled observation or uncontrolled observation, but if you suddenly meet a person and you make observation. So, the person does not know that you are observing because you know when a person knows that he or she is being observed they may tend to bring certain changes.

Hence the need for the observer or for the person who is collecting the data is to ensure that he is observing a person without his I mean without the other parties understanding that he is being observed. Moreover you should also understand how observation as a method is going to help in data collection of course, it is the first hand knowledge that you get through observation, but then will the first hand knowledge work as a representative data because it is only the first step in the data collection that may be verified later also.

But if you observe a person for 3 days or if you observe at an incident if you observe at the traffic flow for 3 days regularly of course, you may have some idea, but remember when you are observing you should also ask yourself who is the person who, whom you want to observe, and why you are observing him. Moreover also be clear about what you want to gather through this observation a particular habit, a particular trend, a particular quality of the person, that also are to be taken into consideration.

Careful people may decide it in such a manner that they may take notes, but remember while making an observation while making an observation of a person and if you take notes that may once again affect the entire observation process. That is why I said when you are making observation let others not understand that they are being observed, otherwise they will get more prepared and the basic purpose of your observation will be defeated.

Moreover you should also be aware of your own biases please do not see what you only want to see sometimes you are deviated as I said earlier you are deviated because while you are making an observation you start observing something else and that will actually defeat the basic purpose of making observation.

Now, one needs to take certain precautions when observation is being done say for example, you are making observation and you feel that there are certain things which obstruct is not it certain things which obstruct for example, you are observing a person

we will suddenly change his posture, he will change his gesture, he will change his expression so you have to be very particular about all these please ignore that.

But then while ignoring this also concentrate on what you are observing, because you are going to make observation as a process of data collection. Another thing that you must be very particular about avoid being prejudice sometimes we ourselves get prejudice and we see what exactly is not there I mean here the advice is use your minds eye, sometimes your physical eyes actually deceit you in a number of ways because all of us are human beings and we are obsessed with certain emotions at times.

So, the need at this hour is not only to keep your obsessions aside, but to see it from your mind s eye when you see it from your mind s eye perhaps you will be in a better position to understand observation as a method of data collection. At times you may also record observations you know nowadays you have several facilities of course, these facilities have not only facilitated, but at times they are irritated also suppose you are recording a persons behavior fine, but if you are recording it in a very hidden manner and you later disclose it that may once again create a lot of problems.

So, while you are recording certain things please see you are to be very specific there is nothing called overall recording.

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Cautions during observation

- Ignore obstructions
- Avoid being prejudiced
- Be specific while recording
- Keep pen and paper ready

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I mean as an observer or as a person who is going to collect the data he has to be very specific of course, if certain things specially if the data is of very crucial nature, if you are going to report, if you are going to calculate if you are going to have a data on a particular say incident or something like that say as I said traffic flow nobody is going to harm you here nobody is going to affect even if you are writing.

But remember if you are simply watching a person and then writing maybe that can result in a very negative manner of course, one should always keep the pen and paper ready intelligent people what they do is they actually have a very good memory, and while they make observation once they come from that incident or from that place or from that person they write it, but remember the display of pen and paper during observation either of a person or of a particular incident where you never know because you know any momentary changes may affect your data collection. Hence the need is that you need to be very particular you need to be very careful and cautious while you are collecting data through observation.

Now, there are other ways also as I said it is not only the primary one primary source is observation and then investigation the secondary sources are as I said internet internal sources and then library.

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How to gather data from secondary sources

- Use search engines carefully
- Avoid visiting other search engines
- Use specific words and phrases
- Verify from other channels for accuracy

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So, when you are going to make use of internal sources you need to be very specific once again, because your main aim is to collect data suppose you want to collect data on air

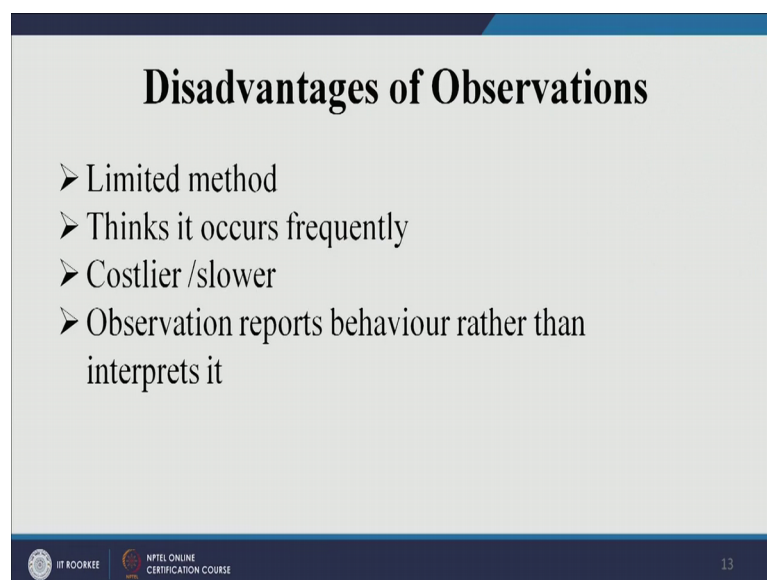
pollution and while you go to the library suddenly you are taken to a different you know zone where you get books on air of course, but it is of different nature.

So, naturally it will help you sorry it will misguide you and allow you to waste your time hence if you are making use either of a library or search engine please use them very carefully, it is always advisable not to visit other search engines, but then when you have gathered data on a particular topic for data collection in order to verify you can visit some other engines, but remember there should not be too much of say differences. Sometimes there may be data which are available on other engines, but then your topic there has no there has got no relevance at all do not allow yourself to visit other search engines because a particular word or a particular phrase only entices you or tempts you

It is always better to use a specific words and phrases in order to get the right information. Of course, in order to have veracity and in order to have authenticity as regards your data collection you may verify from other channels or from other search engines, but it is advised not to misuse your time and energy by unnecessarily visiting other search engines just for nothing.

Now what are actually the disadvantages?

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Disadvantages of Observations

- Limited method
- Thinks it occurs frequently
- Costlier /slower
- Observation reports behaviour rather than interprets it

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Of course observation as a primary source is very beneficial because it gives us the first hand knowledge, but remember you should not confine or you should not end up using

observation as the only method to data collection because observation has got certain limitations sometimes people feel that such an incident happens frequently no and that is that is the bias that we carry.

May be on a Sunday you want to watch the traffic flow on a particular road, if you feel that on all other Sundays this may happen perhaps you are in the wrong impression because some other Sunday the weather may not be that sound it may be very stormy, it may be a rainy day, the traffic may not be there. So, please see that observation as a method has certain limitations moreover time is very important observation is very fast.

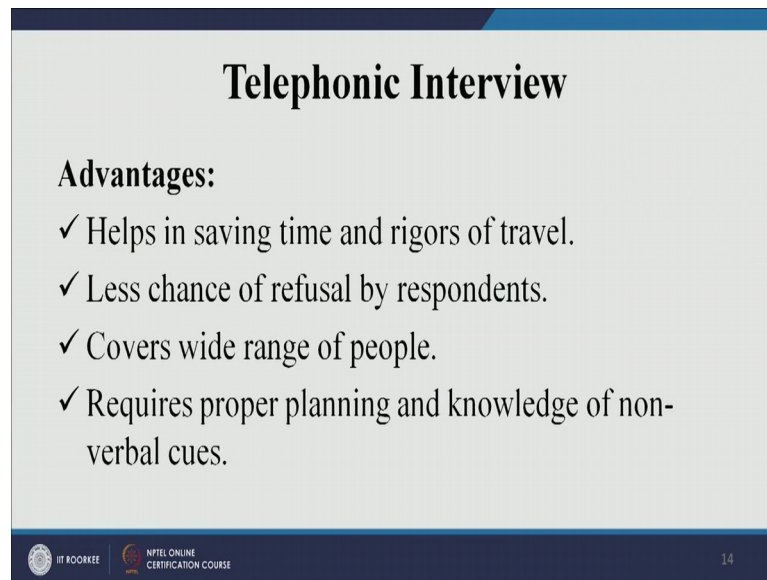
But if you want to use observation as method of data collection it may actually be very slow and sometimes depending upon the nature of your data collection you have to wait for a particular thing to happen and maybe that does not happen. So, as a method of data collection it is costlier also because you cannot go and observe each and people when in terms of having a data collection on the behavior aspect of people. Moreover if you want to have a particular person for observation as a method of data collection maybe he is not available also maybe there are certain other obstructions also.

So, it is always advisable that you should not end up using observation as the only method of data collection, but rather understand that it is the first hand knowledge that you get from observation. Observation can report behavior rather it cannot interpret it because you know there are different regions for a person to behave in such a manner and for that you cannot for that again you have to have another observation. So, it is an unending process.

Hence the information that you have curled from observation serves only as a firsthand knowledge or information. Since you cannot confine yourself to using observation as the only method for data collection there are other ways also for data collection and one of them is through telephonic interview, in an age governed by technology contacting people on telephones has become very easy.

But then using it for data for the purpose of data collection there are of course, certain advantages as well as certain disadvantages.

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Telephonic Interview

Advantages:

- ✓ Helps in saving time and rigors of travel.
- ✓ Less chance of refusal by respondents.
- ✓ Covers wide range of people.
- ✓ Requires proper planning and knowledge of non-verbal cues.

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What are they the advantages are that of course, if you want to collect data about a person or about so many people on a particular aspect you know people are spread out in different locations of the world, in different states, in different geographical regions, and it is very difficult to contact them physically.

I mean going to meet them and understanding their nature trying to get the answer of a particular question or on a particular aspect. In such a situation telephone helps in saving time and also it also helps from the regards of the journey, it is very difficult going to so, many people you know people are spread out as I said. So, it is here that telephone comes into being and we can collect data.

But remember when you are eager to collect data on telephone through telephonic interviews of course, the advantages are that people are accessible thanks to the mobile technology, whatever part of the world people are in, or whatever part of the country they are in you can reach them telephonically, because and on telephones there is less chance of refusal you may you may call a person and because he does not know.

So, the refusal rate is very less. So, people may be contacted very easily through telephones. Moreover lot of people can be reached you know telephone can cover wide range of people spread out in different geographical locations of the world, but remember talking of a telephone in a casual manner, and talking on a telephone with the purpose of

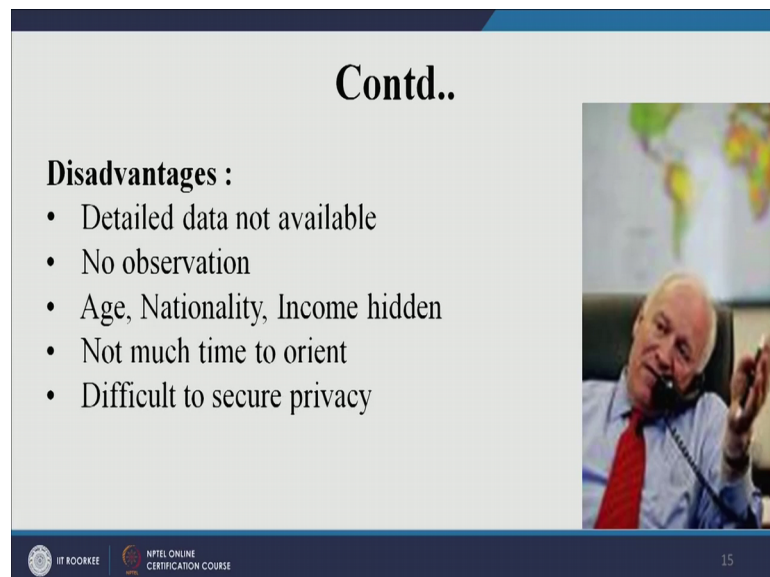
data collection or for a specific purpose these are 2 things there is a lot of difference is not it.

In order to elicit information through telephonic interview you require proper planning and for that you have to meticulously plan your questions as to which questions, you will ask you are not as clever as professional interviewers or professional people who know, but then of course, you can also plan and when you plan you have to frame the questions, but remember frame only specific questions through which you can elicit answers and that is a difficult, but then it is a challenging task.

So, proper planning also there are certain difficulties even though there are certain advantages, you know you have to require here you are not going to see the person. Nowadays with the video calling facility you can see the person also, but remember when you are going to Elicit certain responses from the people it is not only that you attach importance to their words rather you have also to attach importance to their non words that is their non verbal behavior.

Moreover we cannot always say that telephonic interview only has got advantages.

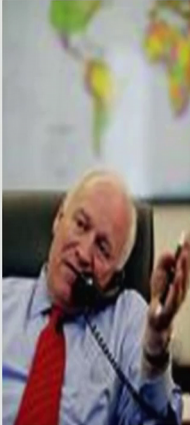
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Disadvantages :

- Detailed data not available
- No observation
- Age, Nationality, Income hidden
- Not much time to orient
- Difficult to secure privacy



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One should also be ready for the disadvantages because when you understand both the advantages and disadvantages that will actually help you frame the questions in a very meaningful and in a very subtle manner how? If you are contacting a person over

telephone you may ask questions, but then you cannot allow the other party or the other party may not allow you to provide you with the detailed data; detailed data is not available even if the person I mean even if as an interviewer you want to throw all sorts of questions and you are not going to pay for it thanks to (Refer Time: 36:47) you actually nowadays people can contact people even without paying something, but even in such a condition there are people who may not reveal all sorts of data over telephone.

Moreover even if you try to make an observation through visuals and all it is in a way limited there are certain limitations of course, when we did not have this video calling facility, moreover can everybody has this video calling facility I do not think so when a person who actually wants to collect data based on telephonic interviews there are at times disturbances and there are at times difficulties as you may not know a person whom you are not able to see on the voice call, you may not understand his age, you may not understand his nationality, you may not understand whether he is trying to hide or whether he is trying to orient the information.

So, moreover from the interviewer point of view he does not have much time you also do not have much time, because if in the midst of your question answer session if he puts in a different sort of answer you are not prepared to create a sort of orientation for further questions. Hence there are certain disadvantages when you are going to have a data collected through telephonic interviews.

But then sometimes there are people also if you know in the olden times when we used to contact people on their landlines may be people out of fear may give you some wrong information or may tell somebody else to respond on his behalf saying that he is not available. So, there are so many limitations in this type of in this method of data collection through telephonic interviews. Hence as a keen observer and as an intelligent interviewer you need if you know if you want to have information which is of immediate need for that you can contact the persons on telephone.

But specially for interview or for data collection there are certain limitations, but then you are free to use your own mind as how to frame questions in order to get the required response you know interviewing somebody either over telephone or face to face is a very challenging job, but remember even if it is challenging there are rewards associated with it of course, this method of gathering information through telephonic interview has got

certain limitations. We shall also talk about some other methods of data collection in our next lecture.

Thank you very much.