
Visuals – using photographs and video

Photographs and video can be very useful in research. You can keep the pictures and the tapes and look at them again any time you want. You can rewind video tape and see what happens or listen to what people say as many times as you like. Other people can look at the pictures and tapes and see things for themselves – they do not have to rely on your version of the story. Photographs and video can be really helpful when you want to make presentations about your work.

Photographs and video can help to keep your research real and honest. The people you talk to can speak for themselves on video tape – they do not have to rely on you writing things down in the right words. Photographs can catch things as they really are at the time you take the photograph – you do not have to worry about remembering things properly.

But cameras are expensive – and they can get broken. Tapes and printing paper cost money too. It is easy to make mistakes when you are taking pictures and recording so you miss important things. The camera may not always pick up the sound you want. It is always good to practise using cameras, tapes, microphones and memory cards before you start your research for real. You also need to make plenty of time for looking at your photographs and video after you have made your recordings. And you need to make sure you (or someone else) knows how to store and edit the pictures and tapes you want so you can use them – for example, in a computer or for presentations.

Some people will not want to have their photographs taken or to be in videos. You need to ask people to give permission before you start filming (even if they are only going to be in the background) and you must not take pictures or video if people do not want you to.

You want people to act naturally when you are filming. Even if people are happy to be in your photographs or video, they may feel funny at first about being filmed. They may want to act up for the camera. You can plan to start filming in a few extra sessions, before the session you really want to film, so people get used to the camera being there.

It may be best to put your video camera on a stand or a tripod. This will be safer. The pictures will be less wobbly. And you can leave the camera in the corner so it can catch everything that is going on. You often record things you do not expect in photographs and video. When you have finished filming, remember to look at the pictures and tapes really carefully to make sure you have seen everything there is to see.