1 Best practices in language documentation

1.1 Ideals

- **The minimum:**
  - A notebook and a pencil

- **The ideal:**
  - A notebook and a pencil
  - A way to make audio recordings

- **The deluxe ideal:**
  - A notebook and a pencil
  - A way to make audio recordings
  - A way to make video recordings

- **Working with what you have:** *it’s not necessary to have all of the latest recording gadgets or the most expensive equipment or the most complicated software!*
  - Notebooks and pencils never break down
  - If your equipment is reliable and makes decent recordings, then this is what you need

1.2 Elicitation plan

- If using the elicitation method, it’s best to have all of your questions entered into your field notebook in advance of the session – this is actually a part of planning your elicitation!

- If using the observation method, you should make a record of the topic(s) (if you know them in advance) and any other details of the setting

1.3 Audio recording

- **The minimum:**
  - A device that reliably records audio: a laptop, smartphone, personal audio recorder, iPad, tape recorder, etc.

- **The ideal:**
  - A device that makes high quality digital recordings (a laptop, most smartphones, iPad/Phone)
  - A quality microphone (in order of ideal: headset, lapel, desktop mic on a stand, internal device mic)
  - A quiet, controlled environment
• The deluxe ideal:
  – A device dedicated to making high quality digital recordings (laptop, digital recorder, DAT)
  – A headset mic

• Understanding how your recorder works
  – Do you know how to start and stop the recording?
  – Do you know where the files are on your computer/smartphone/iPad/Phone?
  – Do you know how to rename them?
  – Do you know how to copy or move them?

• Goals
  – Are you recording stories for a collection or for the language consultant’s personal use?
  – Are you recording word lists for a talking dictionary or for a pronunciation guide?
  – Are you gathering photos, audio and teachable language for use in your class?

2 Media and teachable language in the classroom

• Technology is not just a nice thing to use or add to a lesson, today’s students expect it

• Photos, video, audio, graphics (i.e. drawings), games, apps, social media, and animation are effective tools for engaging a student, but there must always must be teachable language!

3 A Direct Elicitation session

• Basic setup:
  – Recording device ideally on a stand (to prevent any knocking or vibrations in the table)
  – Check for sufficient memory (minimum two hours)
  – Test levels: the golden rule for digital audio recording: never go in the red!
  – The mic (if internal) should be pointed towards the speaker at a distance of around 3 feet (but this can vary)

• Make sure you and your language consultant is comfortable and has water

• Direct Elicitation using two methods: basic word lists – ideal if you know very little about the language
3.1 Direct Elicitation Method 1: Through recording

- The basic principles of through recording:
  - The entire session is recorded, breaks, starts, stops, and all resulting in one file for the session
  - Advantages: no details are missed – potentially interesting and spontaneous discussions, elaborations and speaker reflections are captured (also real-time corrections)
  - Possible disadvantages: recording memory intensive, and it can be hard to locate specific things later

1. Start recorder: introduce yourself, your language consultant, the date and time, and location
2. Record this same information in your field notes
3. Basic questions: How do you say X? or What do you call (a) Y?

3.2 Direct Elicitation Method 2: Rehearsed recording

- The basic principles of rehearsed recording:
  - The session is broken up into parts which are first practiced and then recorded
  - Advantages: organization, which makes for efficient memory use, retrieval, cataloging, and editing
  - Possible disadvantages: effects of rehearsed speech (it can sound clear, but unnatural)

1. Start recorder: introduce yourself, your language consultant, the date and time, and location
2. Record this same information in your field notes
3. Stop recorder and work through the following steps:
   a. Take three or four words or sentences
   b. Elicit these from the speaker and transcribe them
   c. Give the speaker a chance to practice them
   d. Restart the recorder and ask the speaker each of the words, pronouncing each one three times (the magic number in direct elicitation)
   e. Stop the recorder and repeat

4 Post-session

- Always review your recordings for quality or and malfunctions as soon as possible (i.e. the same day)
• Check your transcriptions and make the appropriate corrections and clarifications
• Fill in the timestamps for easy retrieval
• Identify questions for your next elicitation session