surprisingly noisy.[4] It may be worth waiting for the rain to stop, or looking for a house with a less resonant roof or a place further away from the beach or generator. A good wind gag (or wind screen) for the microphone is essential whenever you record outdoors. Even one made on the spot with foam or fur or other fluffy material can help. Electrical interference can also be a source of noise; we briefly address this in §§1.2.2.2(i) and 1.4.1.

Test how intrusive the background noise is by recording a sample of speech at the beginning of each session and then replaying with headphones to check it. This entails trying to understand or transcribe what is being said without visual clues (such as the speaker's face or gestures which may help one's understanding in the speech situation but which may not be available during transcription).

The type and especially the position of the microphone will make a big difference in noisy recording situations. The closer the microphone is to the speaker's mouth, the better the chance that the speech will be clear and audible. Lapel microphones can be very good in this respect. Highly directional microphones can also be helpful in that they focus on a sound source (but they can be problematic too: see the discussion in §1.2.2.2 below).

1.2.1.3 Audio levels

Balancing input levels before starting a recording should be a routine task (assuming the equipment allows for such balancing—and high quality recorders and cameras will). Such 'balancing' entails setting the
p. 19 recording level as high as possible ↳ while preventing the loudest passages reaching the upper limit and so introducing distortion or clipping: this is a subjective and challenging task. As well as making an initial check, ideally one would also continue to monitor the input levels and the degree of background noise while recording, since conditions can easily change without it being readily apparent to the naked ear, but this can be hard to manage for one person. It is wise to become familiar with the idiosyncrasies of the equipment settings before going to the field.

1.2.2 Equipment

Recording quality has to be the first criterion for choosing equipment. Other considerations are power consumption, weight/bulk, ruggedness, and expense. One further consideration is the question of who will be using the equipment. If machines will be used by the speech community, it is worth investigating what type of equipment people are already familiar with. It is also helpful to consider how easy it would be for a novice to use a particular machine. For example, some recorders have only two or three buttons to regulate a whole range of functions through various combinations. This can make it much harder to learn to use them because the commands are not linked to individual buttons. It is also good to remember that many common symbols that may appear on buttons or on a display are not particularly iconic and require some background in the history of western material culture (e.g. the camera icon which indicates the recording setting on most cameras looks nothing like modern video cameras).