

# Focus Groups

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# Overview

- What is it?
- Principles of Focus Groups
- How to do it

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# What is a Focus Group?

Recall that an **interview** is ...

*A way to understand and gather data relating to a specific context; a one-on-one question and answer session.*

A **focus group** is a **group interview**, usually involving 6-8 participants. The goal of the focus group is to understand attitudes.

**What is an attitude?**

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# What is a Focus Group?

Contextual Inquiry	Traditional Interviews	Questionnaires	Focus Groups
Develop a partnership with real users to observe focused work in its actual context	User provides verbal responses to a series of pre-determined questions focusing around an area of work	Distribute materials to a small sample of a target population in order to understand the whole population	Gather 6-8 appropriate participants in a room and attempt to understand their attitudes about a specific topic
We gather "concrete", detailed data about what occurs in the context of a user's work	We gather "once-removed", detailed anecdotes about what occurs in the context of a user's work	We gather brief but quantitative data that, hopefully, can be generalized	We gather information about <b>attitudes</b> and <b>opinions</b>
Perform a Contextual Inquiry when you have access to work that can be readily interrupted. CI will present the richest data	Use Interviews when you cannot interrupt the work to ask questions, or the work is intermittent, or you cannot visit the work site in person	Use Questionnaires when you want to make definitive statements or "prove" your findings to a skeptical audience	Use a Focus Group to understand what people think they want or to best understand how users view vocabulary within a topic

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# Principles of A Successful Focus Group

proper composition of participants

probing, personal moderator

open and supportive environment

in-depth analysis

Adapted from Frank Luntz's The Making of a Good Focus Group

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# Principles of A Successful Focus Group | Participants

proper composition of participants

probing, personal moderator

open and supportive environment

in-depth analysis

- 6-8 participants
- Participants should *match your target audience*
- Participants should be *homogeneous*

Your goal is to include people that will feel comfortable talking to each other in a frank and honest manner.

This is no easy task!

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### Principles of A Successful Focus Group | Moderator

proper composition of participants

probing, personal moderator

open and supportive environment

in-depth analysis

- A good moderator has **all** of the following characteristics:
  - a creative mind
  - analytical skills
  - verbal skills
  - intellectual ability
  - an eye for detail
  - a tolerance for disorder
  - listening skills
  - a capacity for empathy
- A good moderator **does not just listen**.

**Why is this true?**

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### Principles of A Successful Focus Group | Environment

proper composition of participants

probing, personal moderator

open and supportive environment

in-depth analysis

- People must feel comfortable with each other.**
- People must feel comfortable with the moderator.**
- Conference table
- Paper, pencil and water provided for each participant
- No food in the conference room
- No distractions on the walls (no artwork, no posters, etc)
- No cell phones!  
(provide a place for individuals to leave their phones outside of the room, if possible)

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### Principles of A Successful Focus Group | Analysis

proper composition of participants

probing, personal moderator

open and supportive environment

in-depth analysis

Similar to the interpretation phase of Contextual Inquiry:  
We attempt to understand *why* people said the things they said.

Transcribe, analyze, understand.

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### How to Do It: Before

proper composition of participants

probing, personal moderator

open and supportive environment

in-depth analysis

- Select participants that match your target audience; contact them well in advance.
- Identify a location for the focus group.
- Create a set of **five** open ended questions related to your focus.
 

**Your questions are the most important part of your focus group!**
- Organize your equipment (tape recorder, note pads, batteries, etc).

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### How to Do It: During

proper composition of participants

probing, personal moderator

open and supportive environment

in-depth analysis

- Introduce yourself and your focus
- Introduce each participant, asking them to say something about themselves
- Ask your first question – an **ice breaker** question.
- Encourage expansion of the question, and the answers, by other participants
- Work your way through your question list

*Never say anything definitive about an opinion.*

**What does this mean?**

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### How to Do It: After

proper composition of participants

probing, personal moderator

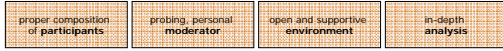
open and supportive environment

in-depth analysis

- Directly after the focus group**, in your team, meet and regroup; discuss the session, and document key takeaways
- As soon as possible, transcribe your focus group. A full transcription is best, but is tedious. Partial transcription may be adequate.
- Send a thank-you note to your participants, and confirm that you may contact them again in the future.

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Let's Try It ..



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Summary

- What is it?
- Principles of Focus Groups
- How to do it

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