
Focus Groups

— The Basics —

Assessment

1. Recognize some standard elements and benefits of conducting focus groups
2. Compare and contrast the use of focus groups and other data collection methods
3. Analyze results of focus group data

A Focus Group is...

A special type of group in terms of

- **Purpose:** to understand how people think or feel about an issue, product, service or idea
- **Size/Composition:** 6-8 people that have something in common
- **Procedures:** skilled moderator, comfortable environment, relaxed conversation where group members influence each other by responding to each other

"The intent of a focus group is to promote self-disclosure among participants. We want to know what people really think and feel." (Krueger & Casey, 2000)

Focus groups are different

Surveys = designer leads

Open-ended survey questions =
designer leads

Interviews = questioner leads

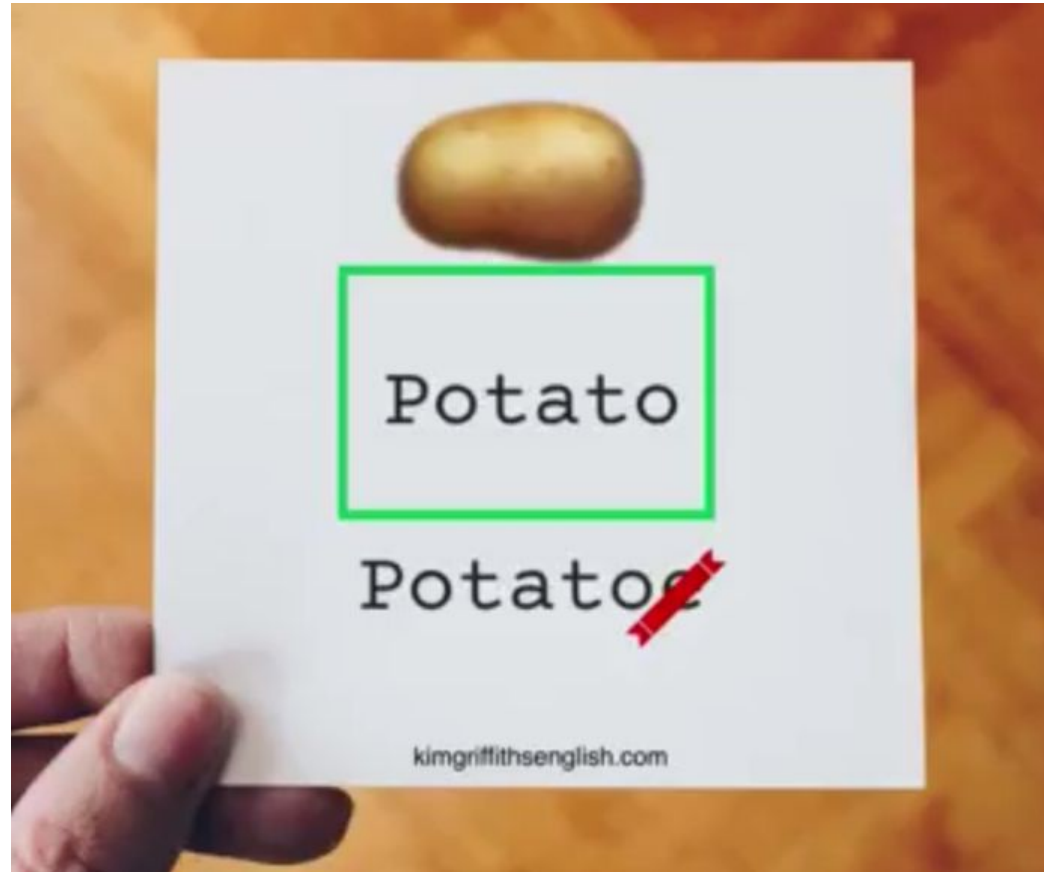
Focus groups = respondents lead in
“nondirective interviewing” with
others like them



Image by Maddy Price © The Balance 2019

Why focus groups?

- Build (on) other data
- Interaction = the unexpected
- Non-verbals = more data
- Quick and easy and cheap
- “Face validity” = shared terms
- When you want:
 - A range of ideas or feelings
 - To understand perspectives
 - Ideas to emerge from a group
 - To test ideas



Do NOT use focus groups if...

- You want people to come to consensus
- You want to educate people
- You don't intend to use the results
- You are asking sensitive information people don't want to share in a group
- You need statistics or projections
- The environment is emotionally charged
- The researcher has lost control of participant selection, question development, analysis
- Other methods produce higher quality info
- You can't ensure confidentiality



Tips from the field

Less than ten

Prepare questions and bias check

Participants are designers, not subjects of the study

Good questions are simple, short, open-ended (simple questions do not yield simple answers) and avoid “why”

Start low-risk and build ...then reflective

Avoid examples if you can

Someone else runs it

Neutral space

Call it a small group discussion

At least 3 groups

Avoid power imbalances

Setting up

Clear goals / use of responses

Clear record taking methods

Clear anonymity and security measures



setting up focus groups



All

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About 585,000,000 results (0.51 seconds)

Follow our simple 7 step guide to running a successful focus group event.

1. Write down your goals.
2. Define your target audience.
3. Find a venue.
4. Recruit participants.
5. Design the questions.
6. Moderate the **group**.
7. Analyze.

Jun 18, 2019

[www.eventbrite.co.uk](#) > [blog](#) > [how-to-run-a-successful-focus-group-ev...](#)

[How to Run a Successful Focus Group \(7 Steps\) | Eventbrite UK](#)



About Featured Snippets

Feedback

During

Active Listening

Less is more

Let them build off one another

Summative QUESTIONS

Focus Group Question	Member 1	Member 2	Member 3	Member 4	Member 5	Member 6
1						
2						
3						
.....						

Wrapping up

What didn't we ask?

Clear next steps

Repeat anonymity and security measures



Analysis

Dependent to goal

Trends (obvious agreement)

Gems (summative comments)

Coding / making distinctions

Conversation analysis = higher inference

Table 1. Matrix for documenting proxemic, chronemic, kinesic, and paralinguistic information

Focus Group Question	Member 1	Member 2	Member 3	Member 4	Member 5	Member 6
1						
2						
3						
.....						

Symbols such as the following could be inserted into the cells by the assistant moderator, as appropriate:

hhh	The letter "h" is used to indicate hearable aspirations, its length being approximately proportional to the number of 'h's. If preceded by a dot, the aspiration denotes an in-breath.
>	Talk is faster than the surrounding talk.
<	Talk is slower than the surrounding talk.
(0.6)	Numbers in parentheses indicate periods of silence, in tenths of a second—a dot inside parentheses indicates a pause of less than 0.2 seconds.
:::	Colons indicate a lengthening of the sound just preceding them, proportional to the number of colons.
toda-	A hyphen indicates an abrupt cut-off or self-interruption of the utterance in progress indicated by the preceding letter(s) (the example here represents a self-interrupted 'today').
_____	Underlining indicates stress or emphasis.
gr^eat	A "hat" circumflex accent symbol indicates a marked increase in pitch.
=	Equal signs indicate no silence between consecutive clauses or sentences.

Note: The above symbols were adapted from Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) and Silverman (2004). Printed with kind permission by *Language* journal, Rochester University, Dr. Greg Carlson, Editor.

LLL	The letter "L" is used to represent laughter.
SSS	The letter "S" is used to represent sighing.
FFF	The letter "F" is used to represent frowning.
PPP	The letter "P" is used to represent passion.
L ↑	Speaker leans forward while talking, the length of the arrow being approximately proportional to how far the speaker leans.
L ↓	Speaker leans backward while talking.
L ←	Speaker leans to the left while talking.
L →	Speaker leans to the right while talking.

Limitations

Small sample

Distractions

Peer pressure

Moderator training

Environment

Logistics



Example: setup

Questions for Senior Focus Groups 2-6-19

Setup: goal is to learn from you and improve the experience. Qualitative data collected today will be coded for strategy recommendations. No names or identifiers will be used. There are no right or wrongs or things you are supposed to say - the point of today is honesty for the benefit of future students in this program.

Introductions: Name and a lesson learned from college.

Discussion - start with pair-share, move to group

1. How define college success? What measures matter to you now that you look back?
2. Wish you knew?
3. What do you need now?
4. Previous groups expressed an interest in giving back to the PS program in some way. How would you like to give back?
5. A year from now, what do you think you will say you wanted or needed in your senior year?
6. If you were the chancellor, what would you do to improve this program?
7. How has this experience changed how you relate to or fit into your family?

Active Listening and themes to summarize and thank them

Example - trends

Lessons learned from college?

- Time management very helpful
- Try things out (doesn't hurt to try/ask)
- “Mentors are huge--mentor others too”
- “Be independent, go after it”
- Dealing with stress; how to not let stress take over

Example - trends

What do you wish you knew sooner?

- Talking to professors (networking/mentoring)
- Biased information the more classes you take, getting into upper divs (“I’ve learned to ask ‘what’s your source?’”)
- Asking for help
- Being open instead of closed
 - “To put myself out there...great to have a group of people that share your values...you gotta apply, show up, meet people...everyone is a connection”

What do you need now?

- Information on how to graduate
- Professional networking/making connections
- Advice and informational review of recent grads (taxes, networking, living on own, etc)
- Mindfulness/life balancing skills

Example - trends

How has this experience changed how you relate to or fit into your family?

- They are more supportive...but they still don't get it; hard to relate to family
- I'm surprisingly independent
- I'm the oldest of 4 with 3 young brothers...they are constantly asking me about FAFSA and applications now...I'm on them about being lazy and not giving up
- This has been a huge stress reliever for my family, they don't worry about me
 - Not having to ask for \$, not being an expense on them is a huge relief
 - "This scholarship saved my family in so many ways...my parents feel bad if they can't take care of me, this has added years to their lives...now they can focus on other things too"
- I help them, give them \$
- I would have gone to CC or state school if it wasn't for this scholarship
 - I would not be here without the scholarship
- This scholarship changed my family dynamics and role
 - I was able to be educated
 - Taking finances off the table means they can't hold things over me anymore and I can share my thoughts openly

Example - gems

How has this experience changed how you relate to or fit into your family?

"I'm the oldest of 4 with 3 young brothers...they are constantly asking me about FAFSA and applications now...I'm on them about being lazy and not giving up"

PROMISE SCHOLAR CLASS OF 2019

Q: What do you wish you knew sooner?

A: "To put myself out there...great to have a group of people that share your values...you gotta apply, show up, meet people...everyone is a connection"

PROMISE SCHOLAR CLASS
OF 2019

“

PROMISE SCHOLAR CLASS OF
2019:

"This scholarship saved my family in so many ways...my parents feel bad if they can't take care of me, this has added years to their lives...now they can focus on other things too"

”

Example - gems

How do you define College Success?

"Not being afraid to fail,
knowing I'll be okay."

PROMISE SCHOLAR CLASS OF 2019

"THIS HAS
BEEN A HUGE
STRESS
RELIEVER
FOR MY
FAMILY,
**THEY DON'T
WORRY
ABOUT ME"**

"This scholarship saved my family in so many ways...my parents feel bad if they can't take care of me, this has added years to their lives...now they can focus on other things too"

(never) The End

Focus groups rarely lead to a strong sense of closure or answer, they generally lead to more questions.

Goals

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Resources

