

Focus groups can be a wonderful way of gathering information from a small group.

ADVANTAGES

Ability to connect with participants
Rich, descriptive data
Flexible yet intentional

Time needed for transcription
Unknown group dynamics
Challenging to discuss sensitive topics

TYPES OF QUESTIONS

Open-ended questions designed to generate a detailed response
Experiences and behavior
Opinions/values
Feelings/Perceptions
Knowledge
Sensory
Background/Demographics

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Tell us about a time when...
Give us an example of...
Tell us more about that.
What was it like for you when...
Tell us a story about...
What was the best part of...
What could be improved about...

QUESTIONS TO AVOID

Find a site that will have minimal distractions. This can greatly affect the quality of the data you collect.

(Adapted from University of North Carolina-Greensboro Student Affairs Assessment)

STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH CHALLENGING PARTICIPANTS

Not everyone participates equally in a conversation, but we want to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to participate in the focus group. Here are some tips for dealing with the most common types of focus group participants.

The Conversation Hog

Try to seat dominant talkers next to the facilitator

Stop making eye contact after they talk for about 20-30 seconds

Turn body slightly away from participant and toward others

Interjecting may be necessary:

- *Thank you, Bob. Are there others of you who would like to comment on this question?*
- *Okay, that's one point of view. Does anyone feel differently?*

Remain tactful and kind, because harsh comments may inhibit sharing by others in the group

The Self-Appointed Expert

Avoid opening questions that highlight participants' levels of experience or social position

Emphasize the fact that everyone is an expert and all participants have valuable perspectives that need to be expressed

Employ the same non-verbal cues that you would with any dominant talker

The Rambler

Employ the same non-verbal cues that you would with